



## Launch of “Regulating Right, Repairing Wrongs: Exploring Equity and Social Justice Initiatives within UK Cannabis Reform” report

“Reform of cannabis laws in the UK is inevitable, we must make sure it repairs the harms of cannabis prohibition” say 15 leading political groups and charities.

LONDON (January 12, 2022) - From the US to Canada, Uruguay to Germany, we are witnessing change. Public polls show over half of the British public support legalisation of cannabis for recreational use and the reality is that cannabis reform in the UK is inevitable. The question is not when, but *how* cannabis will be regulated in the UK. It may be a few years away, but change will come - and we must use this change to repair historical injustices.

The [report](#) “*Regulating Right, Repairing Wrongs: Exploring Equity and Social Justice Initiatives within UK Cannabis Reform*”, launched today by Release, proposes 14 guiding social equity principles which should be integrated in the UK’s future legal cannabis market. This paper builds on Release’s national [research](#) on the disproportionate policing of ethnic minority individuals and other disadvantaged groups, and includes an evaluation of regulatory frameworks emerging in North America and beyond. It outlines an evidence-based roadmap to prioritise and protect those most vulnerable to the harms of prohibition in legal recreational markets.

A number of US states, in particular New York and Massachusetts, have paved the way for a social and racial justice model of cannabis reform. These 14 principles are designed to ensure that the same people who are locked *up* by punitive drug policies are not locked *out* of the legal market. This report is uniquely driven by civil society, and to date **15 organisations** have pledged their support for our principles, including support from the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats for Drug Policy Reform.

Dr. Laura Garius, Policy Lead at Release and one of the paper’s authors, said:

*“The UK Government’s new drug strategy regurgitated a ‘tough on drugs’ rhetoric, despite the Home Office’s own [research](#) concluding that the estimated £1.6 billion spend per year on drug law enforcement is not impacting levels of drug use. Change is inevitable - cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in the [UK](#) and the [world](#), and it is simply too lucrative a market for politicians to ignore. However, we must make sure that cannabis will be regulated right. The legal renaissance of cannabis is a vital opportunity to address the **harm** that cannabis prohibition has caused to Black and Brown communities and to people with lived experience of cannabis policing. Social equity models of cannabis reform are already being developed around the world while the UK is left faltering behind. We must be prepared to follow in these footsteps and recognise that cannabis reform is not progressive if the harms continue for some”.*

The full list of principles can be found attached. Some of the main principles include:

- Decriminalisation must go hand in hand with regulation by removing criminal or civil sanctions for use or possession of cannabis, regardless of its legal or illegal origin.
- Tax revenue should be invested in communities that have been over-criminalised, and support harm-reduction interventions and wider drug treatment initiatives.
- The non-commercial domestic cultivation of cannabis should be included in the same way that individuals are currently allowed to brew their own beer.
- The automatic expungement of past cannabis-related convictions.

- Schemes must be in place which actively support the integration of people who have been criminalised for cannabis-related activities into the legal industry.
- Cooperative models for the distribution of cannabis (such as social clubs) should be incorporated into any new regulatory system.

Co-author Amal Ali added:

*“The lack of progression to date in the UK means that thousands of people each year - disproportionately people from Black and other ethnic minority communities, and people living in poverty - continue to receive life-changing criminal records for cannabis-related offences. The only benefit to our lack of progression is that we are able to observe and adopt best practice from other jurisdictions that **have** pioneered social equity models of cannabis reform. We know that when these principles are not front and centre, people continue to be punished for cannabis use and the harms caused by the war on cannabis are not rectified”.*

The paper has been published alongside a sign up form (which will be available [here](#)) for any civil society organisation to endorse the 14 principles and support the creation of a just, fair, and equitable cannabis market in the UK.

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#### **Additional quotes:**

Steve Rolles, Senior Policy Analyst at Transform Drug Policy Foundation: *“The legal regulation of cannabis markets is no longer a theoretical discussion - it is being debated and implemented in jurisdictions on every continent. The inevitability of change creates a responsibility on policy makers to ensure that reforms serve the needs of the whole community, not just the profit-seeking priorities of big corporate actors. This means hardwiring a clear social justice agenda into legislation from the outset, in particular making sure that the marginalised communities who carried the greatest burden of the drug war's failure are able to share in the peace dividends.”*

Katrina Ffrench, Founder and Director of Unjust UK: *“The UK is headed towards a future where cannabis is legal and regulated, and this report by Release highlights the steps we must take to ensure that equity and social justice are at the foundation of any legalisation effort. Cannabis prohibition has disproportionately harmed Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people and communities. To repair these wrongs, any legislation should ensure that members of these communities are not just welcomed, but actively assisted and empowered in a new legal cannabis market.”*

Kefentse Dennis, Chair of Greens of Colour, Green Party: *“In the Green Party, we have always been advocates for decriminalisation and the regulation of cannabis and I believe by working alongside charities like Release we can work together to bring about a true shift in the attitudes in the way that cannabis is produced, distributed and consumed.”*

Ben Lawrie, Scottish Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Drugs Policy: *“With the growing acceptance of cannabis amongst the general public coupled with the ever-more obvious economic opportunities to be grasped, the legalisation of cannabis is slowly becoming inevitable. Prohibition has caused more harm than cannabis ever could, with marginalised communities bearing the brunt of enforcement. Cannabis must be legalised now; and the principles outlined in this paper must be included in any moves to legalise and regulate it. This would ensure that historical and ongoing injustices are addressed, and racial disparities are reduced rather than reinforced in the new regulatory landscape that emerges.”*

#### **Notes to Editors**

Release is the UK's centre of expertise on drugs and drug laws. The report's principles are already supported by: [The Beckley Foundation](#), [BlakSox](#), [DrugScience](#), European Network of People who use drugs ([EuroNPUD](#)), [Fair Trials International](#), the [Green Party](#), [Harm Reduction International](#), [Health Poverty Action](#),

International Drug Policy Consortium ([IDPC](#)), Law Enforcement Action Partnership ([LEAP UK](#)), [Liberal Democrats for Drug Policy Reform](#), [Recovering Justice](#), [StopWatch](#), [Transform Drugs Policy Foundation](#) and [Unjust UK](#).