

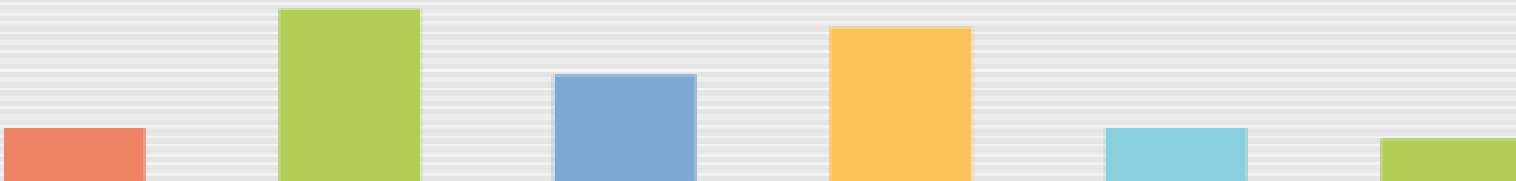


European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

Impact of COVID-19 on harm reduction services in Europe

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VHPB meeting 18.3.2021



Why it is important to focus on Harm Reduction services?

- A high proportion of new HCV and HBV cases occur among PWID
- Harm reduction services play a central role in the prevention of viral hepatitis and linkage to care for PWID
- If these essential services are negatively impacted by the pandemic, then among other things, progress towards 2030 goals likely to be at risk



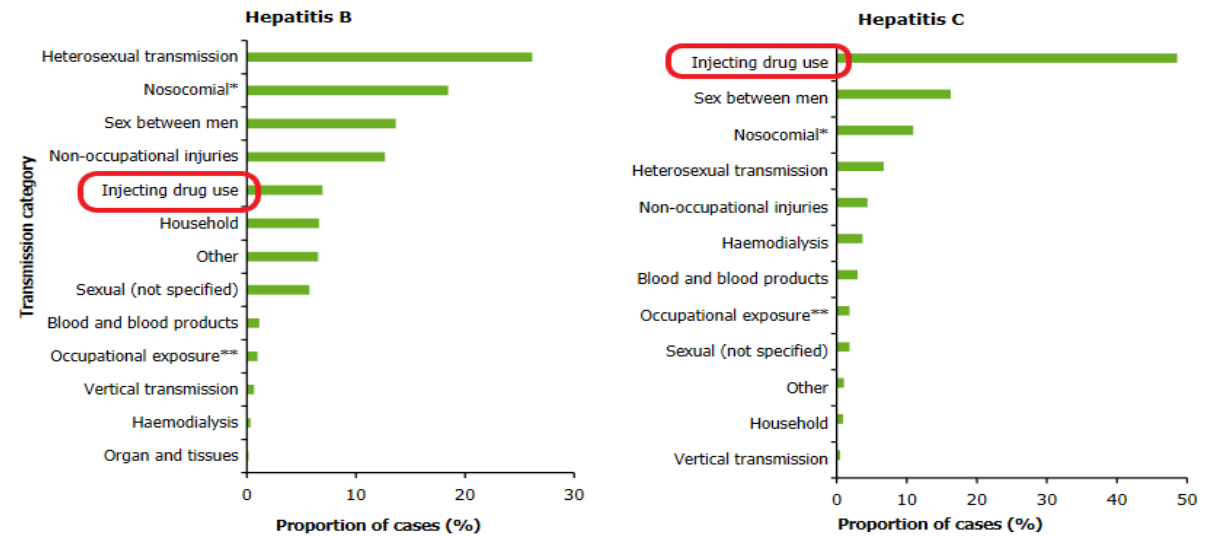
PWID: transmission and burden of viral hepatitis

A high proportion of new HCV and HBV cases (transmission) occur among PWID

The prevalence of chronic infection among PWID is very high (burden of diseases)

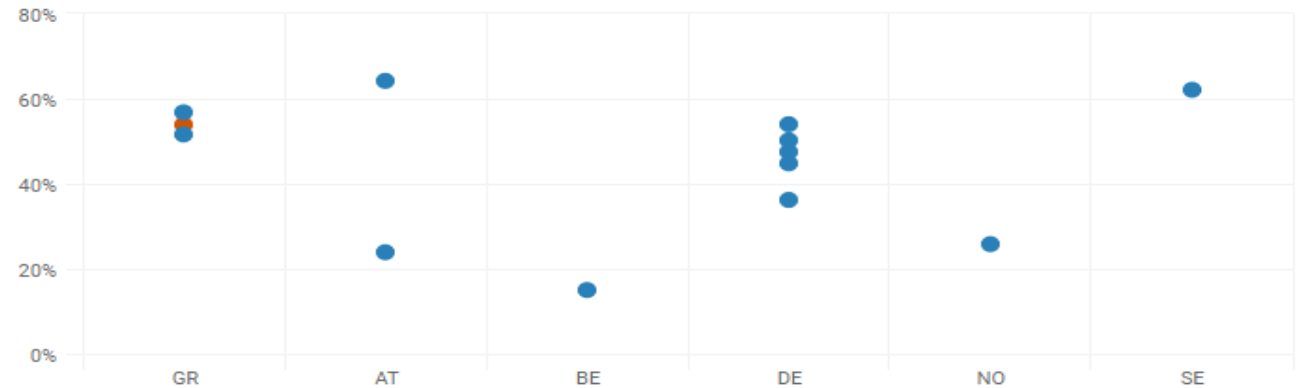
HR services a frontline response for this key group

Figure 2. Transmission category of hepatitis B and C acute cases in the EU/EEA and the UK in 2018 [3, 4]



Source: ECDC

Figure 3. Prevalence (%) of current HCV infection (HCV RNA+) among PWID, by country, 2019 or latest available data



Source: EMCDDA, preliminary data

● National ● Subnational
Source: EMCDDA



Sources for C-19 impact on HR services in EU

3 Covid-19 Trendspotter studies

April to June 2020

- Impact on drug services
- Impact on use and harms

January to April 2021

- Impact on markets, use, harms and services



Trendspotter approach

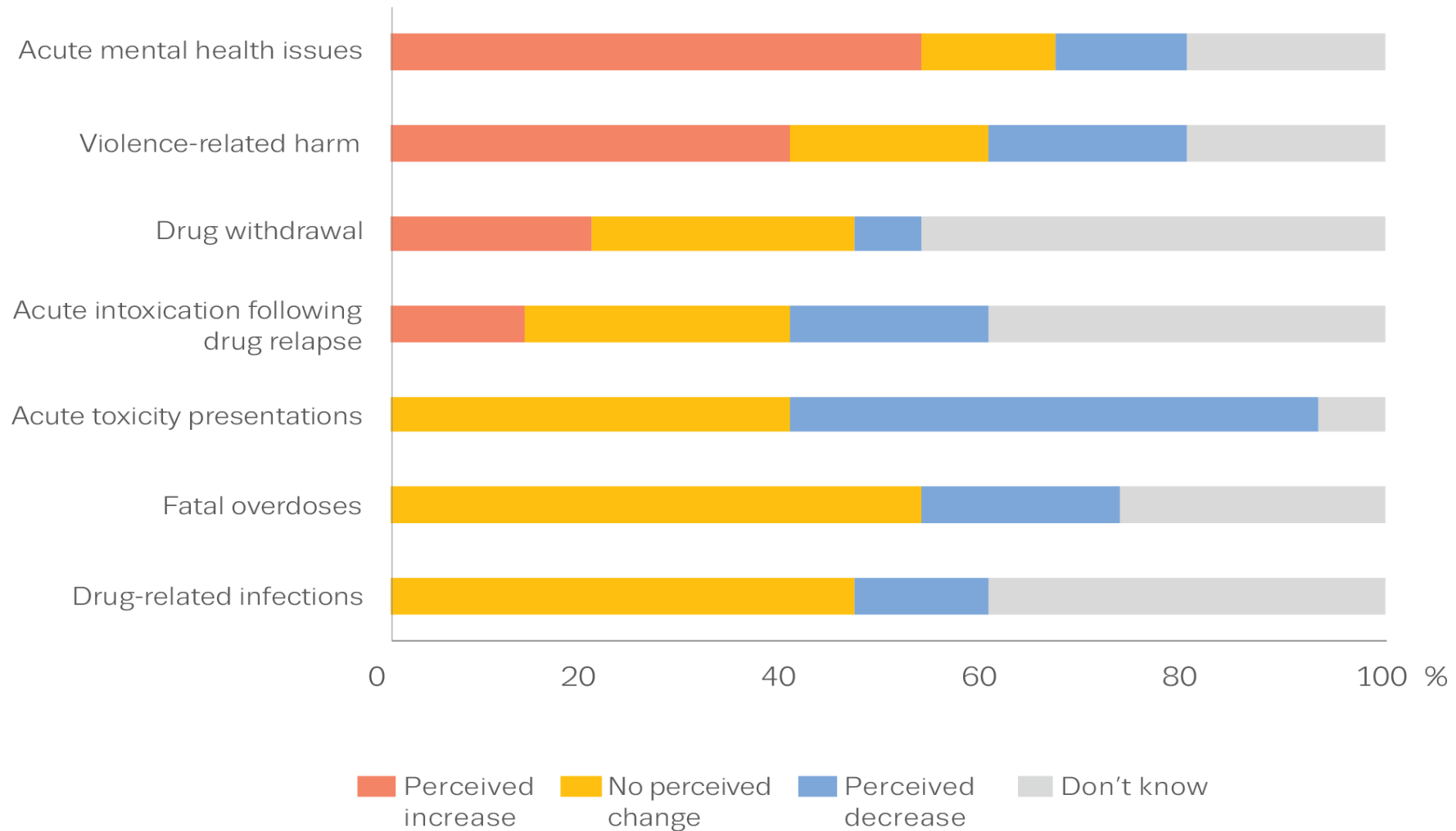
Adapted trendspotter methodology



What have been the main changes and challenges for European drug services since the emergence of COVID-19?

Perceived impact on drug-related harms

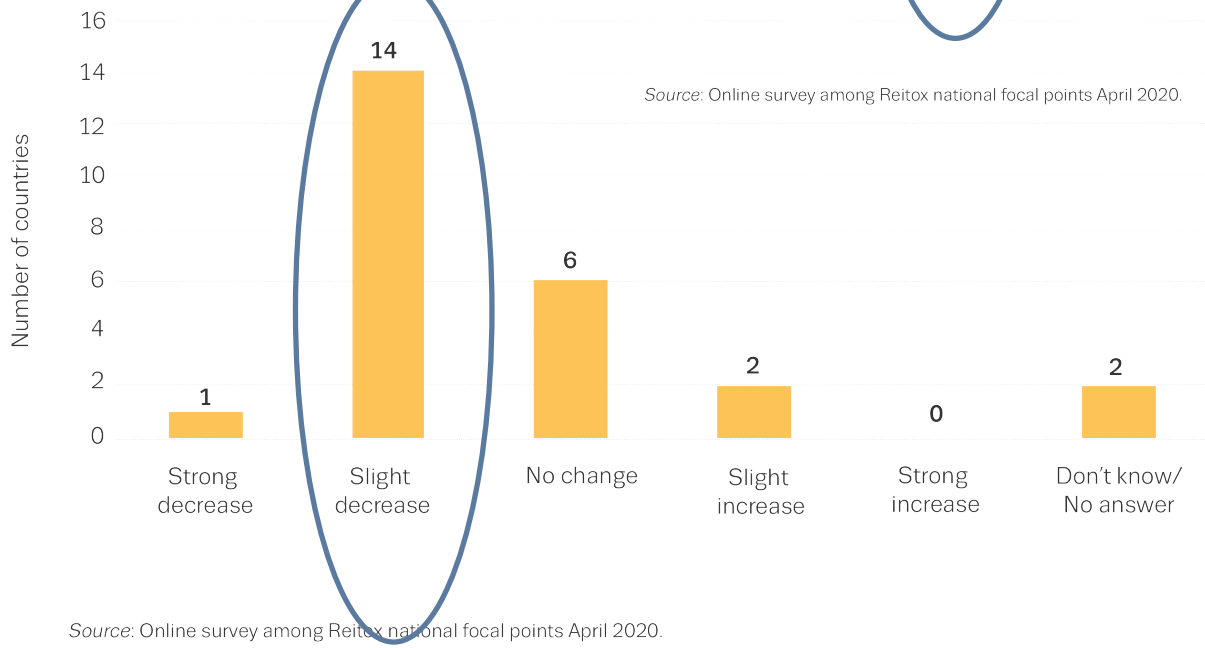
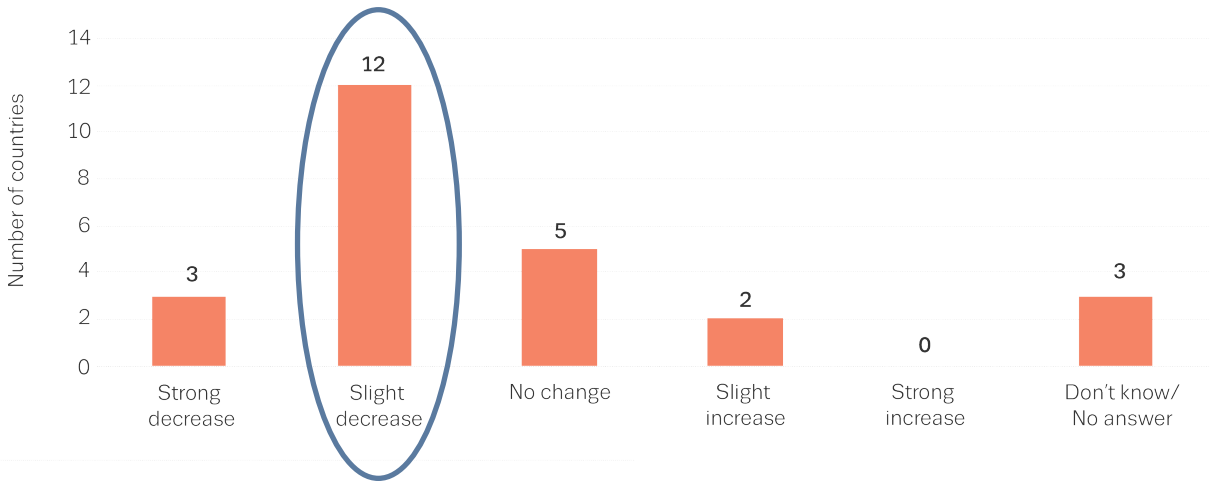
(clinical experts in 15 EURO-DEN hospital emergency sentinel sites)



Changes in service availability and provision

Expert ratings, Online survey among 25 national Focal Points

Drug treatment services



Harm reduction services

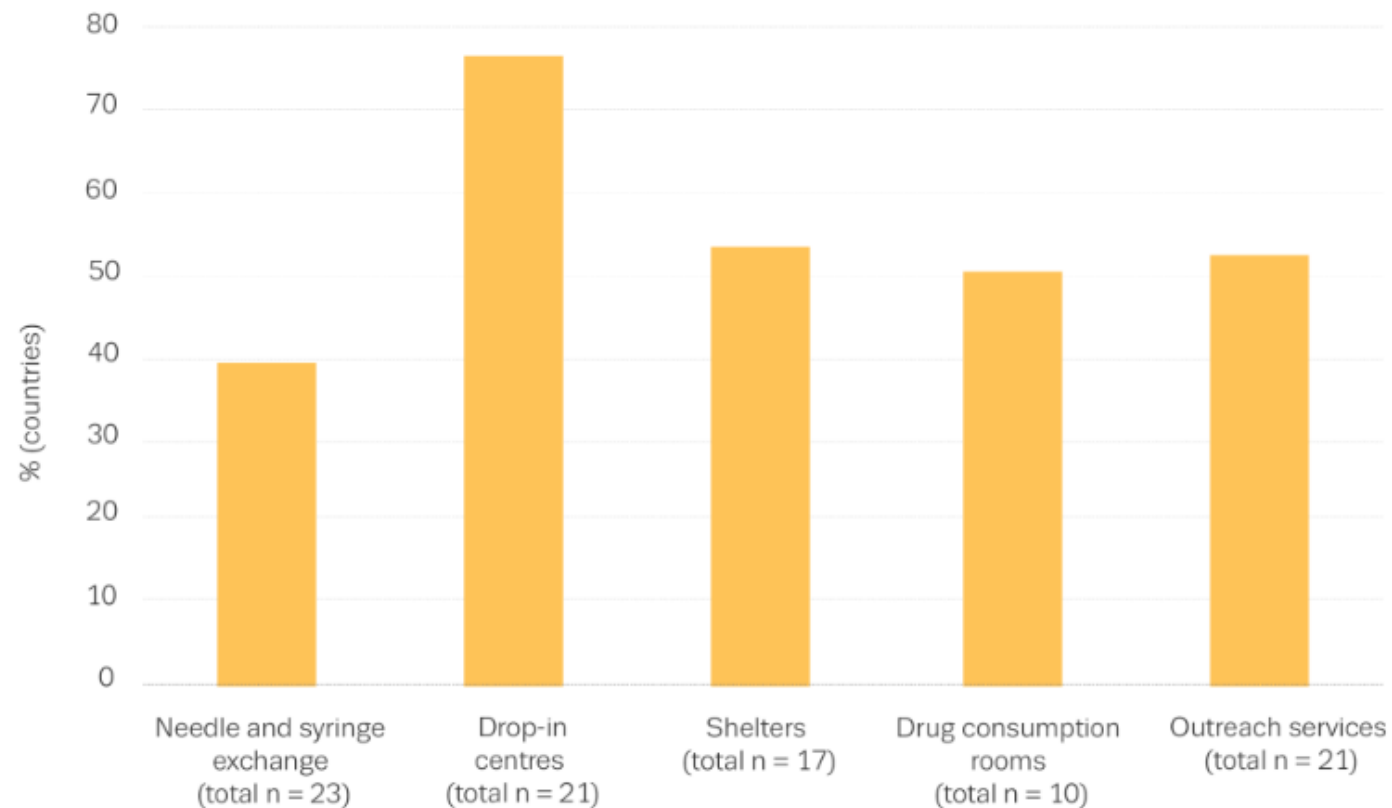
Source: Online survey among Reitox national focal points April 2020.

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Impact on harm reduction services

Closure or significant reduction of harm reduction services since COVID-19 measures were implemented in the EU countries and Norway, based on reporting from Reitox national focal points



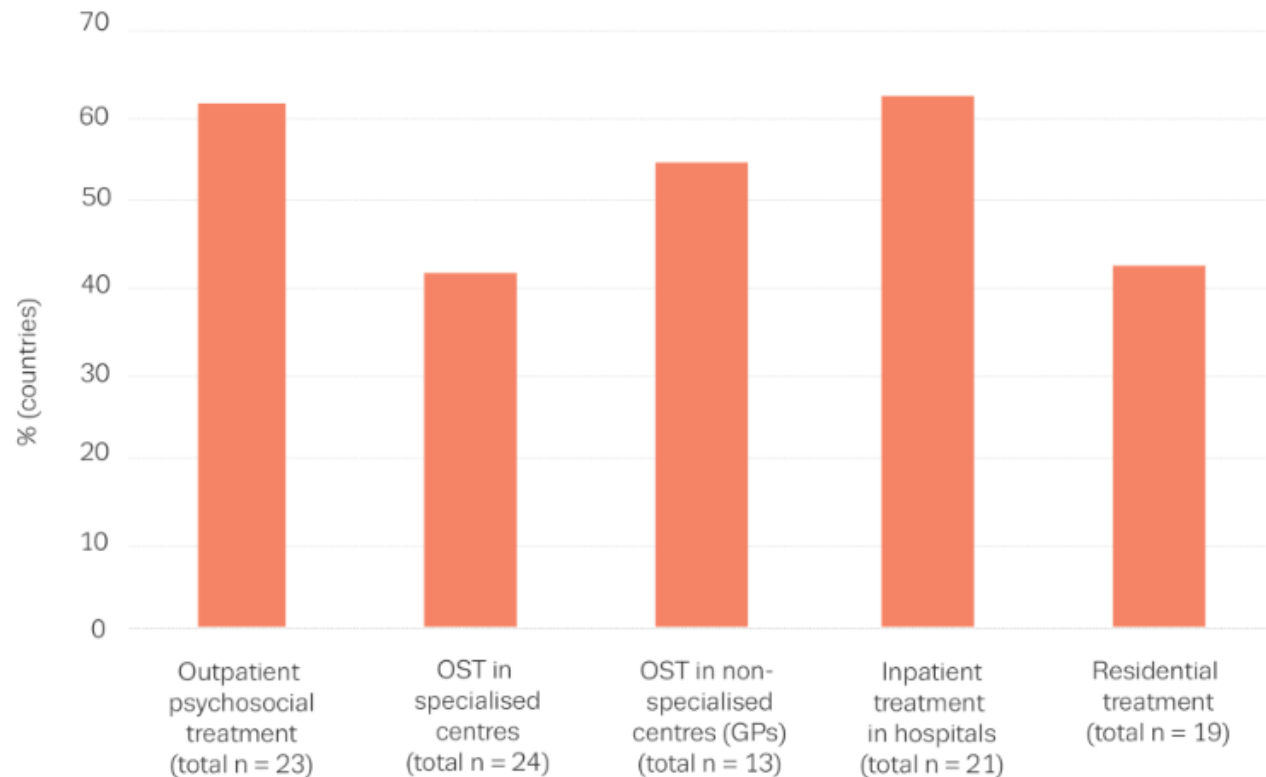
Note: Services are not available in all countries. The percentage represents the number of countries reporting some service closures or reductions as a proportion of the total number of countries reporting that this intervention is nationally available.

Source: Online survey of Reitox national focal points, April 2020.



Impact on drug treatment services including OST

Closure or significant reduction of drug treatment services since COVID-19 measures were implemented in the EU countries and Norway, based on reporting from Reitox national focal points



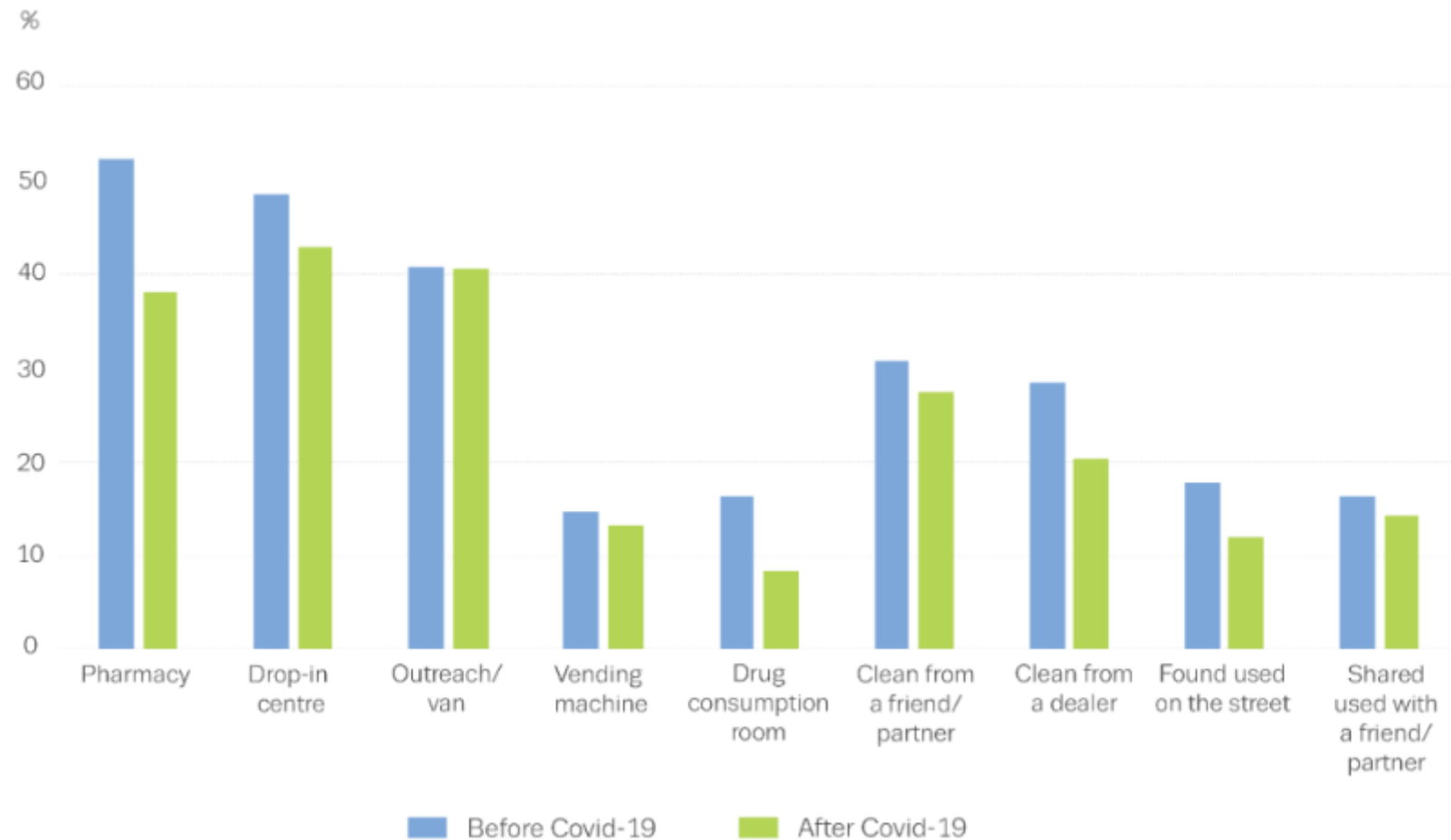
Note: Services are not available in all countries. The percentage represents the number of countries reporting some service closures or reductions as a proportion of the total number of countries reporting that this intervention is nationally available.

Source: Online survey of Reitox national focal points, April 2020.



Impact on access to clean syringes

Access to syringes before and after COVID-19 among people who inject drugs — European Web Survey on Drugs: COVID-19 (n = 261)



Harm reduction services

Low threshold centres (drop-ins) experienced severe disruptions as a result of lock downs and physical distancing measures;

Less visits to services - larger quantities of drug use equipment and materials given out;

Drug checking services stopped face to face activities but increased online presence.



Challenges for service providers

Accessing personal protective equipment (PPE);

Supporting clients to access (other) essential services;

Introducing or scaling up remote and digital services;

Innovation to ensure continuity of services →



Innovation and adaptation in harm reduction services



Self-service spot providing harm reduction material, managed by clients themselves, in a low-threshold service in Split, Croatia, during the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Nevenka Mardešić, HELP Association.



Drug worker with PPE in a new mobile drug consumption room in Lisbon, Portugal

Source: Programa de Consumo Vigiado, Grupo de Ativistas em Tratamentos and Médicos do Mundo

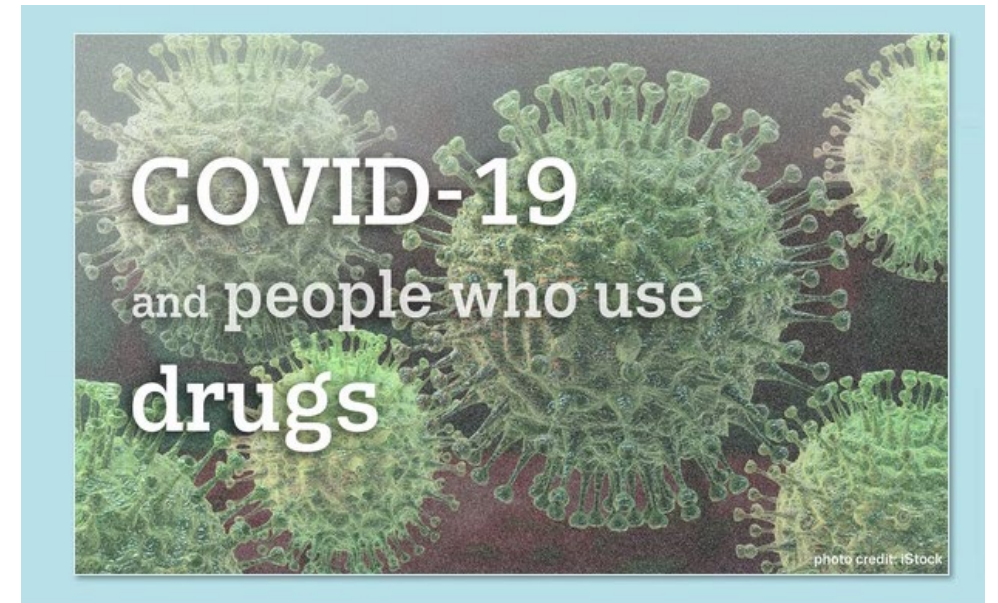
Innovation to ensure continuity of OST

- ❖ **Extending take-home regulations;**
- ❖ **Reduction of supervised intake, urine controls;**
- ❖ **Electronic prescriptions & home delivery;**
- ❖ **OST via outreach programmes;**
- ❖ **Introduction of low threshold OST.**



COVID lessons from first studies

- ❖ **Harm reduction services represent an essential part of the health system response to the pandemic; need recognition for this**
- ❖ **Need to invest in innovation, acquiring digital skills**
- ❖ **Continue to develop strong local networks to deliver an integrated, holistic and person-centred response**



Where are we now?

Future trends and HR services

Not just C-19-related....

- Increase in stimulant use and injection – new challenges?
- Increased risk of outbreaks?
- From nightlife to home life
- New arenas for interventions?
- New ‘heyday’ for outreach approaches
- Street work and screen work?



Conclusions

The pandemic and restrictive control measures have had significant initial impact on HR activities, with potential adverse effect on progress towards elimination of viral hepatitis

HR services are resilient and have adapted well

HR services should be considered essential health services and receive support and resources for their key role in achieving SDGs

EMCDDA publications on COVID impact



European Drug Report 2020: Key Issues (September 2020)

This report, available in 24 languages, presents a summary of some of the main findings of the 'European Drug Report 2020: Trends and Developments' the EMCDDA's latest analysis of the drug situation in Europe. The issues selected here have been chosen for their policy relevance and general interest.



Impact of COVID-19 on patterns of drug use and harms (June 2020)

Since the start of 2020, European countries have been experiencing an unprecedented public health threat with the emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In order to investigate the effects and implications of this pandemic for people who use drugs in Europe, the EMCDDA instigated a mixed...



COVID-19 in south ENP countries (December 2020)

Since the beginning of 2020, the world has been experiencing an unprecedented public health emergency caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has led to progressive introduction of social distancing and other control measures by national governments. To investigate the effects...



Meeting report – Expert meeting on drug-related infectious diseases (DRID) 2020 (December 2020)

This meeting report provides an overview of the content of the DRID meeting that took place online on 22-23 October 2020, focusing on: the direct and indirect impact of COVID-19 on drug users and harm reduction services involved in HIV, hepatitis and STI prevention, care and treatment; an...



EU Drug Markets — Impact of COVID-19 (May 2020)

What effect is COVID-19 having on the drug market in the EU? This joint publication from the EMCDDA and Europol analyses the impact of the pandemic on the market for the main drug types (cannabis, heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, NPS), including demand, production, trafficking and availability. It...



Resources on COVID-19 and drug markets (May 2020)

This page describes the EMCDDA's ongoing work on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on drug markets in the EU. As well as showcasing EMCDDA publications on the topic, it also provides the reader with useful relevant resources from partner organisations. This resource is online only and may be...



New psychoactive substances: global markets, global threats and the COVID-19 pandemic (December 2020)

In this update from the the EU Early Warning System aims to provide insights into what is happening with new psychoactive substances in Europe, based on data from the agency's early warning and risk-assessment activities. The report covers the period until October 2020 and this year focuses on...



Reitox national focal points' activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (December 2020)

This report highlights the responses taken by the EMCDDA's Reitox network of national focal points to the COVID-19 crisis and describes the challenges met by the organisations and the strategies produced to overcome these challenges.



COVID-19 resource page (May 2020)

On this page, the EMCDDA has compiled examples of advice being issued to people who use drugs and service providers by some national bodies and different associations, networks and NGOs. This resource is online only and may be accessed here >>



Impact of COVID-19 on drug services and help-seeking in Europe (May 2020)

Since the start of 2020, European countries have been experiencing an unprecedented public health threat with the emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In order to investigate the effects and implications of this outbreak for drug services in Europe, the European Monitoring Centre for...



Impact of COVID-19 in east ENP countries (September 2020)

Since the beginning of 2020, the world has been experiencing an unprecedented public health emergency caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has led to the progressive introduction of social distancing and other control measures by national governments. To investigate the...



European Drug Report 2020: Trends and Developments (September 2020)

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of patterns emerging across Europe in the areas of drug supply, illicit drug use and associated public health problems. National data sets are also provided across these themes and on key harm-reduction interventions. The report is available in English...

<https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/topics/covid-19>



Upcoming publications of interest from EMCDDA

- **Second European Guide on health and social responses to drugs**
- **Update on ECDC\EMCDDA Guidance on prevention and control of infectious diseases among PWID**
- **Guide on drug use equipment**
- **Manual on Hepatitis testing in drug services**
- **Hepatitis C barometers for EU countries**

