

Newsletter

Drug Policy Network South East Europe

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The Drug Policy Network in South Eastern Europe publishes this quarterly Newsletter in order to facilitate more regular communication between the Network organisations and in general inform those who are interested in developments related to the activities of NGOs active in the field of Drugs

The Newsletter is prepared and published by the Diogenis Association, Drug Policy Dialogue in South East Europe.

Members of the Drug Policy Network feed into the newsletter, focusing on the following topics:

- Criminal justice
- Social and health programmes
- Human rights
- Events of interest

Each edition of the newsletter will focus on 2 or more countries.

The newsletter is posted on the Diogenis website.

Reactions, contributions can be sent to: drugpolicy.see@diogenis.info

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Organisations of the SEE Drug Policy Network

- Aksion Plus, Albania
- Association Margina, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- NGO Victorija, Banja Luka, Bosnia Herzegovina
- Initiative for Health Foundation (IHF), Bulgaria
- Udruga Terra Association, Croatia
- Healthy Options Project Skopje (HOPS), Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Udruga Terra Association, Croatia
- NGO Kentro Zois, Greece
- Association DIOGENIS, Drug Policy Dialogue in SEE, Greece
- Juventas, Montenegro
- Romanian Harm Reduction Network (RHRN), Romania
- NGO Veza, Serbia
- Association Prevent, Novi Sad, Serbia
- The "South Eastern European and Adriatic Addiction Network", SEEAN
- Harm Reduction Association, Slovenia

MONTENEGRO

JUVENTAS, Podgorica

By Tijana Zegura

Drug policy developments

Since 2010 Montenegro has been a member of the Pompidou group and has been involved in ongoing activities, as well as reporting, within the EMCDDA for several years now. Over the past year the Montenegrin Government has supplemented and amended the first Law on drugs; it has made progress on the list of drugs, and supplemented existing legislation concerning the police, health and international recommendations.

In cooperation with a researcher from the University of Montenegro and Diogenis Association, Drug Policy Dialogue in SEE a country report has been written on drug policy and legislation in Montenegro. This is part of the project on Drug Law Reform in SEE.

Also, during 2012 the Montenegrin Government became an implementing partner for "UNODC Regional Program for South Eastern Europe 2012-2015". As one of the activities UNODC will support the development of a new National strategy on drugs, as the previous one was drawn up for 2008-2012. Juventas was a member of a technical working group for the development of the National Strategic Response to drugs 2008-2012 and its action plan for 2008-2010, which was adopted by the Government in 2008.

Nevertheless, the action plan for 2010-2012 was never developed; neither did the Government assign any specific budget for the implementation of the strategy. This has been a huge obstacle to activity implementation, especially regarding the activities in the field of health care and human rights protection. Nevertheless, nowadays, with the support of UNODC experts, the Government is evaluating

both the development and implementation of the national strategy. This is a very promising and positive breakthrough for future actions regarding drug policies in Montenegro. A new strategy is being drafted at the moment.

Harm Reduction Services in Montenegro



Juventas has been promoting harm reduction principles in Montenegro for eight years now. The programme of reduction of health, social and criminal harm of drug abuse within Juventas consists of several work fields: health and social service provision through outreach work, the operation of drop-in centers for drug dependant people and sex workers, psychological and social support and free legal aid, research, advocacy, lobbying, policy development and legislation reform and promotion of human rights. Juventas is one of the leading organisations in the field of harm reduction in Montenegro. As such, Juventas opened the very first Drop-in center for drug users and their families. The Drop-in center is a point of referral for state health and social care service providers.

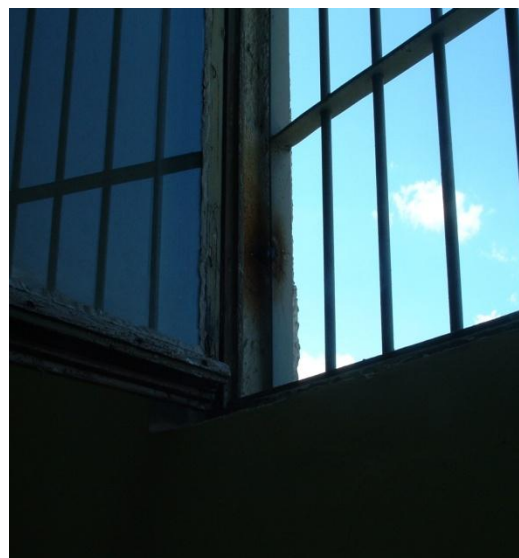
Juventas established very strong cooperation with all these services, and made the connection between drug dependant people and service providers. Due to the strong cooperation and good practices, the Institute for Public Health of Montenegro, contracted Juventas to

conduct three National Bio- behavioral studies with sex workers (2008, 2010, 2012), two with injecting drug users (2009,2011) and one with prisoners (2012). Alongside this, Juventas is collecting data on social and health care on a daily and yearly basis. Regarding drug policies, Juventas was a member of the technical working group for the development of the National Drug response 2008-2013 and the Action plan 2008-2010, as well as being a member of the National Aids Commission, since its inception. Juventas was also actively involved in advocacy and lobbying for drug dependant users at an individual as well as at a national level. In the past years, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, the Institute for Public Health and the Clinic for Infectious diseases, several protocols have been developed. Last, but not least, Juventas is providing numerous health and social care services to drug dependant people on a daily basis, such as: provision of sterile injecting materials, provision of free of charge condoms and lubricants, psychological and social care support, free legal aid, self-support groups for drug dependant users living with HIV and/or hepatitis C infection, etc... Nevertheless, the harm reduction program is still not recognized by Montenegrin law. Even though the Law on prevention of drug abuse is recognizing it as one of the methodologies used in work with drug dependants, the Law is invoking guidelines of the Ministry of Health on harm reduction programs, which still do not exist. This is why all harm reduction services, as well as harm reduction service providers have to have special permission from the Police Department of Montenegro.

Prisons- health care as equal as in the community?

After eight years since the implementation of the project Open with prisoners, Juventas was contracted by the Institute for Public Health to conduct,

in cooperation with them, the very first Bio- behavioural study with inmates in the State Prison of Montenegro focusing on HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. The Study was conducted by the Institute for Public Health, in partnership with the State Prison and NGO Juventas. The results showed that the data collected by the State prison management, as well as leading opinion at that time were not in line with the facts that emerged from the study. That is why we pressed for several meetings on the issue with the State prison, the Ministry of Health, the Institute for Public Health and the Health Fund of Montenegro.



NGO Juventas called on the relevant institutions and ministries to reach an agreement in the shortest time possible, regarding covering the costs of diagnosis and treatment of Hepatitis C in convicted persons who are serving their sentence at the Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions of Montenegro, in accordance with the legislation of Montenegro and international conventions.

During March 2012, the Institute for Public Health of Montenegro, in partnership with the Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions and in cooperation with the NGO Juventas, conducted the first bio-behavioural study with persons that were serving their sentences in the Institute. The study was conducted with the aim of

presenting the current situation in this institution and was comprised of two segments: a questionnaire examination of behaviour and the sampling of blood of the target population, with the aim of determining HIV prevalence, as well as HCV and hepatitis B virus infections.

The study was implemented within the framework of the national project "Support for the implementation of a National Strategy for AIDS", financed by the Global Fund for Tuberculosis, AIDS and malaria, via the UNDP office in Montenegro. Although the study did not examine the health condition of the entire prison population, the number of registered cases of people who have contracted Hepatitis C has demanded the implementation of urgent measures regarding treating patients and suppressing further outbreaks of the infection.

For many years now, a significant number of convicted persons, carriers of HCV, expressed the need and desire for diagnosis and treatment. However, the Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions of Montenegro was not able to comply with such requests, due to the lack of relevant protocols. In addition to legal and administrative obstacles, there are numerous issues related to enforcement, mostly due to the lack of agreement between the competent institutions: Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The main reason for the lack of a comprehensive approach between these institutions, regarding this issue, is related to the budget, i.e. there has not yet been a written agreement on who should be providing these services, although the treatment and process of diagnosis has already started for some of the prisoners.

The provision of medical services to imprisoned persons, on a national level is regulated by the Law on Healthcare, the Law on Health Insurance and the Law on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions.

Furthermore, the provision of medical care for convicted persons is established as a minimum standard, by the document "Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners", which was adopted at the United Nations Congress in 1995, as well as the "European Prison Rules", from 2006, adopted in the form of recommendations by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Juventas is also constantly advocating for: adequate health care in prison, introduction of the methadone treatment in prisons, not only for those prisoners who have started with this therapy in the community, introduction of adequate detoxification treatment in prison, introduction of adequate treatment of drug abuse in prison, introduction of anti discrimination practices in prison concerning drug users, establishment of adequate work therapy in prison and introduction of adequate re-socialization measures in prison. Juventas has also pressed for an adequate employment strategy and approach for ex- drug users and ex- prisoners, and has pushed for a cohesive approach from the National employment agency, Centres for social care and the State prison in order to achieve better results in the re-socialization and reintegration of ex prisoners.

Juventas has been implementing education sessions for prisoners on blood transmitted diseases and harm reduction practices for eight years now.

Documentation of human rights violations of drug users within the justice system in Montenegro

With the support of the Open Society Institute, Budapest, Juventas started in 2011, the very first of this kind of project on documenting human rights violations within the justice system in Montenegro. The main goal of the Project is to detect and document examples of discrimination

and harassment of drug users within the justice system. In order to achieve this goal, the project will strive to assess existing judicial practices with respect to the implementation of national criminal legislation and international fair trial standards, as well as to provide recommendations for improving the current situation.



By the end of 2012 Juventas was working on: documentation of discrimination and stigmatization of drug users during the period of provisional confinement or pre-trial detention in Montenegro, through media monitoring, and collection of police and medical reports, as well as collecting data from the target population; documentation of discrimination and stigmatization of drug users during trial detention, through media monitoring, and collection of police and medical reports, as well as collecting data from the State Prison and target population; monitoring of the implementation of national legislation and international fair trial standards in criminal proceedings in cases where defendants are drug users or in "drug offences" cases; documentation of discrimination and stigmatization of drug users during incarceration and after release through media monitoring, and collection of data from the State Prison, relevant NGOs, and the State Bureau for employment and target population. The report based on research findings contains numerous recommendations for

improvements of practice, policies and laws.

The final implementation phase that will end in March 2013 includes lobbying for recommended reforms.

Juventas has implemented successful lobby meetings with numerous state institutions, notably: Ministry of Justice, Ministry for Human rights and minorities, Ministry of Health, State prison, Special Clinics for mental diseases, Clinics for infectious diseases, Police directorate, Institute for treatment of drug users, Public Institution for accommodation and social rehabilitation of drug dependant people, etc.

ALBANIA

By Genci Muçollari

AKSION PLUS

OST treatment in Albania by Aksion Plus

Last year the Albanian Parliament approved the NATIONAL DRUGS STRATEGY 2012-2016. The mission of the strategy is to protect public safety, the life and health of individuals and communities through minimizing the risks and of other damage derived from drugs via national coordinated action. The Albanian state recognizes and accepts the serious nature of this issue both at a national level and at an international one.



The fight against drugs remains one of the key priorities of the Albanian state, as drugs pose a high risk to our citizens and have the potential to negatively impact Albania's integration process into the EU. Also, this strategy accepts the fact that the fight against drugs can be successful only if we coordinate the efforts of the government, civil society and international partners.

The total number of adults (15-64 years of age) in Albania who have tried illicit drugs in their lives is estimated to be between 40 000 and 60 000 individuals. The number of problematic drug users (addicted users and the ones having serious problems from the drug use) in the country ranges from 4800 to 8600 individuals.

For the first time it has been accepted that the demand reduction component has remained fragmented and been covered by insufficient funding, while the reduction of drug supply and law enforcement issues are an integral part of the priorities of the Albanian government. For this reason, it is vital to give the same importance to drug demand reduction, so that it gets the same priority as drug supply reduction.

Another important element which is strongly highlighted in the Strategy is related to the Social re-integration of drug users in society by:

1. The encouragement of private individuals and of businesses to social service funds for improving such services and supporting this category of people.
2. Coordination and cooperation through public and non-public bodies offering social services through periodical meetings, working meetings, etc.
3. Encouragement of local government structures and of municipalities, in particular, to provide financial support for this category of beneficiaries, depending on available funds.

Aksion Plus intervention with IDUs

In 2000 Aksion Plus opened the first Harm Reduction/needle exchange service for drug users in Tirana – supported by Soros and IHRD.

In January 2005 we organized the first conference on the Methadone Maintenance Therapy MMT for drug users with the support and participation of the Tirana Municipality, Ministry of Health, foreign consultants and other main stakeholders. We are involved in improving the drug policy and legislation in Albania – supported by regional and international networks.

On August 2005, as part of our harm reduction strategy, Aksion Plus introduced the Methadone Maintenance Treatment for injecting drug users – licensed by the MOH. This intervention is extended to offenders who are drug users in prisons, in pre-trial settings and Police Stations (agreement with the Ministry of Justice and Probation Service).

The Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT)

Aksion Plus dispenses methadone to about 200 patients daily in Tirana, and has opened 5 satellite clinics in main cities across the country. In almost all the centers the space is provided free of charge from local government or health authorities.

The Ministry of Health through GFATM is supporting Aksion Plus in this important initiative by assisting drug users and their families to cope with the devastating effects of drug abuse.

All the MMTs offer friendly spaces for clients, psycho-social support, group and family therapy, referral to other services, vocational courses (in cooperation with the state vocational centers), testing for

HIV, hepatitis, syphilis and other blood-transmitted infections.



Aksion Plus operates an accessible, non-judgemental programme using a target maintenance dose of 80mg/day of methadone, performing regular urine tests, with almost all doses supervised. The service has a commitment to supportive relationships with clients, and involvement of families. Total: 490 clients benefiting daily.

In agreement with the Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of Prisons (MOU signed in 2006) the MMT is also provided in Prisons and Police Stations so that patients can continue treatment after incarceration. In general, imprisoned patients are gradually taken off methadone, although in the case of some prisoners with serious mental health problems, Aksion recommends to prison authorities that methadone be continued indefinitely.

When people are first arrested, they are held in pre-detention or in police custody for up to 72 hours before their transfer to the prison system. Aksion Plus also provides some methadone to arrested patients in pre-detention.

Ongoing training on Harm Reduction, MMT and human rights is delivered to health practitioners, social workers and other service providers.

The achievement of Aksion Plus in bringing methadone treatment to Albania has been recognised and admired by all respondents interviewed. Aksion Plus has good premises, in a good location, and has a good therapeutic ethos. Patient and staff interaction appears professional, warm and courteous. The director has provided impressive leadership and commitment.

Final Report – UNODC assessment of drug abuse treatment services in Albania
16/07/2012 - James Bell

Albania Global Fund for two years

Albania will benefit from the Transitional Funds of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) for two more years. From the Round 5 that was allocated to Albania only two the most important components are supported:

- 1-MMT for drug users implemented by Aksion Plus
- 2- Antiretroviral (ARV) components for people living with HIV/AIDS.

During these two years we will strive to ensure the sustainability of the MMT project by approaching central and local government. Our strategies include: benefiting from the local municipalities funds for social services (so far we have been able to raise some funds from Vlora municipality, a small city in the south where A+ has opened a MMT center). With the central government we are working to benefit from funds confiscated from illicit narcotics trafficking and other money laundering activities. In the meantime we are collecting small fees from MMT clients in order to sustain the project. Until now the project is considered to be successful, and this progress is due to the close collaboration with several active participants in the government, in civil society, among parents and other care givers. Aksion Plus was able to build a new facility where the services are

significantly improved and other types of services have been introduced such as art and drama against drugs.



Sustainability

The issue confronting Aksion Plus concerns sustainability. In response to insecurity over funding Aksion Plus has adopted strategies to secure support. After two years of funding from GF, Aksion Plus sees the way forward through obtaining funding from local councils. We are encouraging people and especially our clients and their siblings to make demands for their rights. We are asking patients and parents to advocate having meetings with local officials, trying to argue the case for MT. This is how, despite limited funding, we have been able to establish a number of satellite centres.

The first necessary condition for sustaining access to methadone treatment is funding from the Albanian Ministry of Health to purchase methadone supplies. Whether regulatory or legislative change is necessary, this is required to ensure that methadone is a reimbursable medication, and that the government will supply medication for treatment programs.

The Albanian Drug Strategy envisages allocation of resources to expand drug treatment capacity. It will be critical to ensure that funding for drug treatment is clearly identified, that the broad objectives

of funding are agreed, and that services in receipt of funding are accountable. Whatever funding is allocated to the development of services for drug users, there needs to be transparency and accountability to ensure that funding goes to providing the most useful services.

ROMANIA

Developing local answers to emerging HIV threat among legal high users in Romania

By Valentin Simionov, RHRN

Legal highs or new psychoactive substances (NPS) entered Romania sometime during 2007-2008. First they were sold online, as products for an "ethnobotanical" study. As time passed, the plant-based products (unclassified psychoactive plants, such as amanita muscaria or salvia divinorum) were replaced by cannabis and amphetamine analogues, which soon became extremely popular among young people, including adolescents. The products became available in open shops called dream-shops or smart-shops. None of them was recommended for human consumption. Officially, they were sold as fertilizers, aromatics or bath salts. The buyers were actually using them as drugs.

Within only 2 years, legal highs became the most popular drugs: according to a GPS, 1.9% Romanians (6% in Bucharest) aged 15-64 years old have used legal highs at least once in their lifetime . Due to their availability and their legal status, synthetic stimulants replaced heroin in the injecting-drug user community in Bucharest. This was an unfortunate overlap with the decreasing access to clean syringes. Since 2010, the international funding which allowed Romanian NGOs to supply IDUs with syringes has decreased without being taken over by national or local donors. In 2010 HIV started increasing for the first

time among IDUs. This increase became worrying in 2011, and by 2012 it became clear that we are facing a new HIV epidemic wave: 157 new HIV cases were registered by September 1st, 2012, summing a total 286 cases in only two years. In comparison, only 28 cases were registered during 2007-2010!

Information about the new synthetic drugs was scarce, the population and service professionals had limited understanding regarding drug users' behavior. Aiming to keep the population updated with regard to the rapid expansion of the use of legal highs, the mainstream media has unwittingly induced panic within the public with daily reports on emergency cases, drug-related violence and tragedies produced by the misuse of legal highs. In order to contain this situation and taking into consideration the limited resources in terms of accessibility to clean syringes, RHRN designed a training program with the aim of transferring knowledge and skills to social and medical professionals working in the biggest cities in the country.

Thus the project "Harm Reduction training on new drugs for Romanian public and private services professionals" was initiated, with financial support from Sidaction. In collaboration with Neil Hunt, an international expert on new psychoactive substances and researcher, a training curriculum was designed. Based on the curricula, Neil conducted a training session of trainers in Bucharest. 13 professionals from RHRN member organizations, the National Prison Administration and the National Anti-drug Agency learned about new synthetic drugs and adapted harm reduction interventions.

In the second phase of the project, Training of Trainers (ToT) graduates trained professionals in four of the biggest Romanian cities thought to be the most affected by legal highs. The amplitude of legal-high use and the fact that synthetic drugs were now available nationwide was confirmed by the interest

in the local training sessions. At a structural level, the activities were coordinated by RHRN, in collaboration with each local organization which organized the event. 128 participants attended training. By the end of the project, using the available funds, we had the opportunity to train police officers working in Bucharest, in cooperation with the Public Order Studies Institute. 12 police officers attended the training. This was an opportunity to exchange ideas with law enforcement officers on harm reduction, criminal law, social and medical interventions



The third phase of the project is ongoing. With financial support from Sidaction, RHRN is implementing the project "Developing local answers to emerging HIV threat among legal high users in Romania". Training has been expanded to a total of eight cities. Based on the conclusions of the previous project evaluation, Neil Hunt revised the training curricula, integrating more detailed information on interventions for synthetic-stimulant users and amphetamine injection.

The two-day training program includes plenary sessions, working groups, case studies, video and audio presentations, all combined in an interactive structure. By February 2013, 4 sessions had already been implemented, with a total of 100 professionals being trained. According to the training evaluation forms filled by the participants, one of the most appreciated assets of this training was the trainers

direct experience in working with drug users and the interactive teaching methods.



Training agenda:

Day 1

- Understanding and responding to 'Novel Psychoactive Substances' (NPS): an overview
- HIV & harm reduction: an overview
- Cathinones and other Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS): Key risks, harms & responses
- Synthetic cannabinoids, hallucinogens and other NPS: Key risks, harms & responses

Day 2

- Working with NPS users - interventions & skills
 - Advice & information
 - Managing ATS toxicity and emergencies
 - Managing ATS and other drug-induced panic
 - Responding to major mental health problems
 - Preventing HIV, Hepatitis C (HCV), Hepatitis B (HBV) & Tuberculosis (TB)
 - Vein care and injecting wounds/infections
 - Early identification and responses to drug outbreaks
 - Responding to serious physical health problems
 - Working with young people who use drugs
- Action planning and training evaluation

The Romanian Harm Reduction Network is an organization gathering harm reduction

service providers which promotes harm reduction and facilitates the implementation of effective policies and programs targeting drug users and other vulnerable groups.

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