

Five EU countries establish local multi-stakeholder partnerships to assess and address the needs for methamphetamine prevention strategies

The rise of methamphetamine use in the European countries raises the need to implement more effective prevention and harm reduction measures tailored to the stimulant using populations. In order to develop prevention strategies that best suit the local context, five countries participating in the IMPRESA project, have established local multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP). Although slightly different within each country, these MSPs include representatives from local administration and public health, drug policy makers, addiction treatment coordinators, social service providers, harm reduction facilitators, researchers, recreational setting representatives and end-users. The key objective for the MSP is to provide expertise and guidance to ensure that the intervention packages to be developed within the IMPRESA project are tailored to the local context and the needs of the target groups. In order to support the MSPs an assessment of the local context has been conducted to identify the local needs of the methamphetamine and stimulant users in general. The assessment was based on the three components: a desk review of the secondary data, an online survey amongst relevant local stakeholders and an online survey of people who use stimulants. More details on the assessment methods are presented below.

Local context assessment methodology – what was done?

1. Secondary data assessment

The aim of the secondary data assessment was to collect statistical and other relevant information to achieve an in-depth understanding of the local context within each IMPRESA partner country. Data was collected based on the guidelines presented in the European drug prevention quality standards and in accordance to the indicators used by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDAs) REITOX national focal points. The key findings are presented on the next page.

2. An online survey amongst local stakeholders

The aim of the online survey was to assess the perceptions of the local experts on the topics related to stimulant and specifically methamphetamine use as well as harms and needs within the city. Stakeholder and expert organizations received an invitation to take part in the survey with one personalized link – so only one response per organization was recorded. The survey included questions about the local methamphetamine users: the perceived size of the population, gender distribution, age groups, and social needs; about the perceived harms of methamphetamine use; the availability and effectiveness of prevention interventions etc. The online questionnaire was set up using the LimeSurvey tool and was open from July to November 2021. Key findings are presented in the next page.

3. An online survey amongst people who use stimulants

The aim of the online survey amongst people who use stimulants was to assess the perceptions and the prevention and/ or harm reduction needs of the potential target population. The invitation to take part in the survey was distributed through various organizational contacts, using social media, flyers, through health services etc. The survey included questions about illicit drug use patterns, the need for various support services, and the perceived availability and importance of support services and interventions. The questionnaire was also set up using the LimeSurvey tool and was open from the end of July to the end of December 2021 to anyone above 18 years old. Key findings are presented in the section below.

What is next?

Based on the analysis of the results of the local context assessment a prevention and/ or harm reduction strategy will be set up by the MSPs within the five IMPRESA project partner countries. The strategy will provide a framework for further IMPRESA project activities, such as, putting together a tailored city-level intervention package, and implementing and evaluating a pilot intervention.

KEY FINDINGS CHEMNITZ (GERMANY)

Secondary data assessment:

- Chemnitz' population is slightly older, unemployment rate is somewhat higher and gross domestic product per capita is slightly lower than the national average.
- EMCDDA waste water analysis showed Chemnitz to have the fourth highest amount of urinary biomarkers of methamphetamine among all participating European cities in 2020 and the highest amount among all German cities included in this analysis.
- While there are no methamphetamine prevalence data for the city of Chemnitz, lifetime prevalence as well as 12-month prevalence in the federal state of Saxony (2015) is above the national average.
- Saxony has a below-average number of drug-related offences in 2020, while in turn methamphetamine-related offences (mostly related to drug possession) are more than five times higher in Saxony than in the rest of Germany.
- Some selective and indicated prevention services are provided in Chemnitz, whereas the availability of harm reduction measures is limited.
- Around every 10th client seeking for support in one of the four outpatient drug counselling/treatment services in Chemnitz in 2020 did so because of methamphetamine related problems.

An online survey amongst the local stakeholders:

- 25 local stakeholders from local administration, the drug care system, prevention and social services, night life venues and the criminal justice system participated in the survey.
- Methamphetamine users in Chemnitz are described as predominantly male, rather young, and as having a rather low income or being unemployed.
- Most reported perceived needs of the users to be addressed are psychological needs, family support needs, health needs, and harm reduction needs.
- Most reported methamphetamine-related services are prevention education based on personal and social skills, brief interventions, and early intervention counseling all of which are perceived by most stakeholders as (very) effective.

An online survey amongst the people who use stimulants:

- 414 persons who use stimulants participated in the survey (25 from Chemnitz, 81 from remaining Saxony and 308 from outside of Saxony).
- Participants were predominantly male and of younger age.
- The stimulants most frequently used by participants from Chemnitz were amphetamine as well as MDMA/Ecstasy, followed by methamphetamine; this is true for lifetime, past year's and past month's prevalence.
- Current stimulant users (past year/past month) in Chemnitz and Saxony reported using methamphetamine more often than respondents from other federal states.

- When asked about their needs regarding harm reduction services, stimulant users from Chemnitz most frequently mentioned drug checking, help and support in nightlife settings and information on controlled substance use to reduce use-related harms.

Conclusions:

- Chemnitz is evidently affected by methamphetamine use.
- Most users are male, of younger age and often in a difficult economic situation.
- Most important harm reduction needs of users refer to drug checking, help and support in nightlife settings and information on controlled substance use to reduce use-related harms.