

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 creates the need to implement more effective prevention and harm reduction measures tailored to the stimulant using populations. To develop prevention strategies that best suit the local context, five EU countries participating in the IMPRESA project, have established local multistakeholder partnerships (MSP). Although slightly different within each country, MSPs include representatives from the local administration, public health and drug policy makers, addiction treatment coordinators, social service providers, harm reduction facilitators, researchers, and recreational setting representatives. The key MSP objective is to provide an expertise knowledge 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. 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 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 have 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 with the indicators used by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) REITOX national focal points. The key findings for each country are presented in the following pages.

2. An online survey amongst the local stakeholders

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

3. An online survey amongst the people who use stimulants

The aim of an 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 and etc. The survey included questions about the illicit drug use patterns, the need for various support services, the perceived availability and the effectiveness of prevention 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 following pages.

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.

KEY FINDINGS VILNIUS (LITHUANIA)

Secondary data assessment:

- Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, has a population of 560 thousand inhabitants. The majority of the population are Lithuanian (63,2%), Polish (16,5%) and Russian (11,9%). 15-64 year olds comprise 66.7% of the population.
- According to the wastewater analysis the use of methamphetamine in Vilnius is quite regular during the weekdays and weekends. In 2021 daily methamphetamine use was 29.25 mg/1000p/day, amphetamine use 70.02 mg/1000p/day.
- Drug seizures (from drug trafficking & possession) 2019 methamphetamine – 112 kg.
- Harm reduction services are being provided by 13 low-threshold cabinets and one mobile clinic around the country. No stimulant use specific prevention or harm reduction activities presently exist.

An online survey amongst the local stakeholders:

- The online survey was completed by 15 local experts (response rate 53.6%). The majority of the respondents where from harm reduction, treatment and drug prevention type of organizations.
- Perceived methamphetamine population characteristics according to the experts: population size ~ 6000 users in Vilnius, 74% male, 18-35 year olds, with problematic drug use, lacking coping skills. Perceived use locations: nightclubs, bars, specific areas in the city.
- Top 3 perceived methamphetamine using population needs: job seeking, accommodation and social security issues.
- Top 5 perceived most effective methamphetamine-related services: needle and syringe exchange programs, free HIV, HCV testing and consultations, drug checking services, psychological help, outreach (street work).

An online survey amongst the people who use stimulants:

- A total of 84 stimulant users from Vilnius filled in the online questionnaire. The majority were between ages 25-49 (83.3%), 58.3% were men, 45.6% unemployed.
- Out of 84 stimulant users, 62% had lifetime methamphetamine use, 38% used it in the last year, 24% in the last 30 days. Stimulant in general and methamphetamine use was most common at home – 77.1% and 72% respectively, and at parties and festivals – 72.3% and 44%.
- Top 3 most important needs according to the respondents: health services, free HIV/HCV testing and consulting and legal services. Most used services were health services, free testing, social support counseling, drug treatment and harm reduction services.

Conclusions: There is a lack of data on the stimulant type users in Vilnius. There is a discrepancy between what the experts perceived to be effective services for methamphetamine users and the services stimulant users identified themselves. Prevention and harm reduction activities should focus on education and information about the availability of services and harm reduction practices.

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 wastewater 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 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. The 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.

KEY FINDINGS PRAGUE (CZECH REPUBLIC)

Secondary data assessment:

- Prague is the largest city in Czech Republic, the capital and at the same time one of the regions.

- The estimate of high-risk drug users' population is higher for Prague than the average for the rest of the Czech Republic. The situation is similar in the treatment-demand and the number of drug-related deaths.
- An indicator that enables a suitable comparison between Prague and the national level is primary drug crime per 1,000 inhabitants aged 15 to 64, which is higher in Prague than the national average.
- Available services: primary prevention, low-threshold centers and outreach programs, outpatient treatment, substitution treatment, outpatient aftercare and housing. Two or fewer services are an in category of day care center, detoxification and an inpatient healthcare facility.
- There are 10 educational and psychological counseling centers and 6 educational care centers, 14 general prevention programs, 6 selective prevention programs and 1 indicated prevention program in Prague.

An online survey amongst the local stakeholders:

- The sample included experts from addiction services (6), prevention programs (1), social and health services (2), education (4), research and administration (14).
- The median estimate number of all illicit substance users – 12 250, methamphetamine users – 11 000, the proportion of men among users is higher (between 60 and 70%) and they are mostly in the lower age categories.
- The perceived specific risk groups include injecting users, recreational users and people stimulating themselves at work.
- Stakeholders considered the most important needs to be in the areas of social support, family support, health needs and harm/risk reduction needs.

An online survey amongst the people who use stimulants:

- A total of 99 respondents completed the online survey. Of these, 59 were methamphetamine users who live in Prague or the Central Bohemian Region and who were included in the further analysis.
- In terms of gender, there were slightly more women in the sample. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 35, 39% of the respondents had an education higher than secondary school. 17% of respondents were unemployed. The survey reached a sample of less risky and more socially integrated users.
- A total of 97% of respondents had lifetime experience with methamphetamine. 45% of the respondents used methamphetamine in the last 12 months and 34% of users in the last thirty days. A total of 53% of the respondents have used an injection drug, 46% of respondents injected methamphetamine.
- Over 70% of the respondents mentioned the following areas of needs as significant: health care, psychological counseling and treatment, free sterile injection equipment and free counseling and testing for HIV and hepatitis C.
- Over 50% of the respondents rate the application rooms and drug testing as unavailable.

Conclusions: The information found generally corresponds to what was known about the situation in Prague and Czech Republic. Stimulants use influences the following areas: health, psychological, psycho-social and criminal. The lack of some services was mentioned – such as application rooms, needle exchange programs, substitution treatment and lower number of some prevention programs.

KEY FINDINGS KOSICE (SLOVAKIA)

Secondary data assessment:

- Kosice is the second largest city in Slovakia (population approx. 240 000) boasting three reputable national universities, socio-demographic structure, including unemployment rate, comparable to the national average.
- Methamphetamine use has been repeatedly detected in the city via wastewater analysis. Recent locally focused survey-based data are scarce. The few existing surveys suggest that methamphetamine use is highly present among young adults and has been found among the university students. Indirect indicators suggest that methamphetamine use and its popularity in the region has been recently on the rise.
- Generally, drug use prevention is provided within the main health care infrastructure, by specialized drug prevention centers, however, a systematic support especially for institutions focusing on harm reduction and field work is lacking.

An online survey amongst the local stakeholders:

- Fifteen institutions participated in the survey: drug prevention and counselling centers (7), health care centers (5), other institutions providing prevention activities (3).
- Perceived average methamphetamine user population in the city was 900 individuals, within the age group of 18 – 35 year old and the majority being male. The likely locations of use were private parties, clubs and specific sites in the city.
- Perceived main needs of users were counselling services dealing with family problems of the users, health care services, social services.
- Perceived availability of methamphetamine-related services were specific programs implemented in clubs and other similar entertainment locations, individual psychological counselling addressing individual vulnerabilities and education including a mentoring approach.
- The survey results also suggest the importance for effective inter-institutional communication and cooperation.

An online survey amongst the people who use stimulants:

- Key sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents (n=207): majority in the age group 18 – 24, 71% men, 6% unemployed.
- The majority of the stimulant users reported lifetime methamphetamine use (approx. 80%). In the last year methamphetamine use was reported by 59%, and during the last month by 41%. Amphetamine use was reported by 18%.
- Perceived methamphetamine population size in the city was estimated to be about 400 active users.
- Most important needs were availability of individual psychological counselling, crisis intervention and support regarding employment, accommodation and legal issues.

Conclusions: The results of the surveys conducted among stakeholders and users indicate that methamphetamine is mainly used by young adults. The surveys further show that a variability of factors defining the characteristics of typical local users seem to be significant and the need for an individual approach and psychological counselling is highlighted. Finally, the findings point to the relevance of the local university context which is strongly related to city nightlife and drug use among young adults.

KEY FINDINGS JELENIA GÓRA (POLAND)

Secondary data assessment:

- Jelenia Góra is a mid-size Polish town of about 80 000 inhabitants.
- There is no wastewater analysis for this region. Drug use data are available from different sources, but not on an epidemiologic level. However, an outpatient clinic reports clients with methamphetamine use.
- Universal prevention programs are available and implemented but no selective or indicated prevention programs or harm reduction interventions targeting stimulant use are in place (apart from FreD goes net). In the past there were street working initiatives as well as peer training.

An online survey amongst the local stakeholders:

- 21 stakeholders, representing inpatient, outpatient clinics, prevention facilities, municipality, entertainment venues, church, school and law enforcement took part in the survey.
- The perceived methamphetamine user population size was estimated at 3 500 individuals, with the slight majority being male, 25 – 35 year old (60%) and 18 – 24 year old (30%). Methamphetamine users can be found at entertainment venues, in factories and among truck drivers.
- Psychological counselling, harm reduction and treatment of other health issues (not addiction) could be found among the most prevalent target population needs. Stakeholders assessed harm reduction interventions to be missing.

An online survey amongst the people who use stimulants:

- 170 respondents participated in the survey, out of these 33 were from Jelenia Góra. Majority of the participants were male (75%), almost 50% were 25 – 35 years old (20% were younger (18 – 24) and 30% were older (36 – 49). Vast majority of respondents had primary, secondary or vocational education.
- Almost everyone used methamphetamine (lifetime use) as well as cannabis; majority of the respondents used amphetamines and MDMA. At the same time less than 10% of respondents used opioids.
- Perceived methamphetamine population size: 2000 methamphetamine users. Key characteristics: mainly students (minors and university level), young adults, individuals with psychological problems, including addictions and substance use disorders, low socioeconomic status, unemployed, factory workers, manual workers performing the monotonous tasks, shift workers (e.g., in three-shift days) and truck drivers.
- The most important target population needs were psychological counselling/addiction treatment, legal help and harm reduction interventions and facilities. Consequently, the same three services were perceived as the most unavailable.

Conclusions: There are at least two sub populations using methamphetamine in Jelenia Góra. One sub population uses methamphetamine as a party drug at entertainment venues, parties and at home. Another sub population is engaged in functional use, for example: factory workers, truck drivers, night shift workers etc. The latter group presents some negative consequences (work, health and relationship related) and could be targeted with indicated prevention and/or harm reduction.