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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OF
CROSS NATIONAL REPORT
WP5

**DESCRIPTIONS OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES INCLUDING PROFESSIONALS' AND YOUNG PEOPLES'
PERCEPTIONS AND NARRATIVES**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of this report is to sum up some general experiences with interventions aimed at young people who use drugs/have a recent history of drug use and who are in touch with the CJS. The report focuses in particular on professionals' and young peoples' perceptions of the 'problem' related to drug use and offending behavior and the challenges and solutions to providing these services.

METHOD

The report is based on 6 national reports where 11 interventions aimed at this target group are described based on written material and qualitative interviews with professionals and young people. Across the 6 countries 63 professionals and 68 young people were interviewed. Some interventions were offered in secure settings, others were offered in the community. In several of the partner countries it was more difficult to access and interview young people than anticipated particularly those in community based interventions. Future reports will provide more detailed analyses of young people's perspectives and experiences with interventions. Full details of the data collected and methods used can be found on the project website www.eppic-project.eu.

INTERVENTIONS

A total of 11 interventions were chosen across 6 partner countries. Of these 3 were based in secure settings and most (6) were delivered by public organisations or local authorities. It is important to underline that 'prevention interventions' do not necessarily mean the same thing in each of the partner countries. For the purposes of this project, we have taken a broad definition to include primary prevention aiming to prevent or delay onset of use, through to preventing the development of more harmful patterns of use, treatment, and harm reduction.

TERMINOLOGY USED

Throughout the report some terms have been agreed on by partner countries that do not always have explicit definition within the interventions included.

- Drug use: includes the use of any drug including alcohol and also the use of combinations of drugs.
- In touch with the CJS: this could be through prison/remand prisons, those ordered to undertake treatment as part of a court order, those under supervision (e.g. electronic tag), a warning, caution or conviction of a recordable offence.
- Young people: how young people were defined varied across countries, partly due to different ages of criminal responsibility and could be from 10 years (UK) or 14 years (Italy) and in some interventions also included young adults up to age 25.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROBLEM

The first section points towards different factors emphasized by professionals in their understanding of the problem(s). The highlighted factors are not necessarily mutually exclusive and some are emphasized more than others by the professionals in the interventions; equally, not all interventions focus on all factors. The similarities and differences between countries and interventions are emphasized in the report. The main factors included;

- Deprivation: social and economic deprivation is emphasised in many of the interventions as an important factor in both drug and criminal problems. Deprivation can also refer to restricted access to education, healthcare and employment.
- Addiction/problematic drug use/misuse: many interventions recognised this as the main problem young people presented with, although it was not always perceived as being the primary problem that needed to be addressed.
- Social media/peers/social networks: in the UK report in particular the influence of peers and social media was thought to be a contributing factor in problematic drug use amongst young people accessing interventions
- Mental health problems: in some interventions mental health problems were perceived to be a consequence of drug use. In others, it was thought that young people were using drugs to 'self-medicate' for existing mental health problems. In the Polish report it was noted that involvement in the CJS was a source of anxiety and emotional distress.

CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING INTERVENTIONS

The other section focuses on challenges of delivering the intervention. It is especially, but not exclusively, important to consider whether the interventions are offered in secure settings or in the community. Again, not all interventions focus on all factors. The similarities and differences between countries and interventions are emphasized in the report. The main challenges identified included;

- Funding: many of the interventions included were funded only on a project basis (3-4 years) and some identified for the WP4 reports had already ended. The fact that no other interventions have developed means that there is a lack of interventions targeting this particular population.
- Secure settings: in the 3 interventions delivered in secure settings particular challenges were noted including; uncertainty of how long a young person will remain in one settings (especially those on remand); short sentences reducing impact of interventions; reluctance to admit drug use in prison settings; motivation of young people
- Non-voluntary participation: in some reports it was highlighted that young people may come to a treatment intervention as a means to avoid a prison sentence (e.g. Austria and Germany) which reduced motivation to change behaviour.
- Transition to adult services: in all partner countries people are considered adults at age 18 although in most countries those receiving interventions when they turn 18 will continue to do so for some time.
- Language: young people from different ethnic backgrounds were noted to have particular difficulties both accessing and benefiting from interventions
- Young person's involvement: interventions were unlikely to involve young people in the design or implementation of the interventions, although many thought it was something to aim for in the future.

DISCUSSION

The report analyses and discusses different perceptions of the problems related to drug use and offending behaviour and their solutions. These perceptions do not necessarily mutually exclude each other. The report emphasizes that the overall problem understanding in an intervention also influences the actual measures offered. Therefore, it is important to investigate and understand professionals' perceptions of problems and their solutions.

The report also discusses how most of the partner countries operate with 'intersectorial' / 'interdisciplinary' / 'partnership' ideas, i.e. that different sectors (social, health, CJS, etc.) should work together in order to 'solve' or 'manage' problems for the young people that is EPPIC's target group. However, this also proves difficult to do in everyday institutional practices. This is one aspect that we will follow up on in future writings from EPPIC.

Lastly, the report discusses the different difficulties in delivering the interventions. Here funding is a major factor in relation to the stability of the interventions. But also young people's motivation to be in the interventions, including motivation to enter interventions in secure settings, language, and transitions between youth and adult services, are challenges that many interventions face.

PERSPECTIVES

The report is the first of two cross-national reports coming out of WP5. The next cross-national report will focus on young people's narratives of their trajectories in and out of drug use and in and out of being in touch with the CJS. What would be important to keep in mind for the next phase of the WP5 is:

- The interplay between individual and contextual factors as well as legal provisions in the young people's narratives about their trajectories. How do they understand and represent their 'problems'?
- The young people's experiences with and narratives about different kinds of services and possible frictions between these (e.g. friction between health care services and the CJS).
- Young people's narratives related to their motivation for entering, staying or leaving services.
- The interplay between drug use and drug supply in their narratives.
- Focus on diversity – what are similarities and differences in young people's narratives if they are male/female, ethnic minorities or not, illegal immigrants, etc.
- The young people's perceptions of risk and risk assessment in their narratives.