European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

2018 Expert meeting on the indicator
'Prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population (GPS)'

Summary

The 2018 annual expert meeting on the EMCDDA epidemiological indicator 'Prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population' (often referred to as the 'General population surveys indicator') took place on 15 and 16 May at the EMCDDA in Lisbon.

The meeting brought together experts from almost all EU Member States, Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries, Kyrgyzstan and Switzerland.

These regular meetings on the indicator change their focus from year to year. This year particular attention was given to methodological developments on the indicator, the way surveys can be used to measure different topics other than illicit drugs and the link between drug use surveys and other drug-related monitoring tools. In addition, targeted surveys in drug use served as a platform for discussion of drug use issues more broadly.

Meeting objectives

- Provide an overview of progress and results for 2017.
- Exchange information between countries and international projects.
- Promote methodological discussion about ways to progress measuring and describing substance use as well as ways to analyse and interpret trends.
- Explore ways to bridge the gap between surveys, policy and responses.

Specific topics for the meeting

- Moving beyond illicit drugs – how can surveys monitor other topics?
- Monitoring drug use in recreational settings: challenges and opportunities.
- Parallel sessions:
    - Estimation of high-risk cannabis use through scales in GPS
    - Implementing a general population survey on drug use: challenges and experiences
    - Monitoring drug use in recreational settings: reflections on questionnaire design and terminologies
- Cocaine use going up. What can surveys tell us?
- Drug survey methodology: recent studies and new approaches
- Local realities – targeted surveys on specific population groups

At the end of this document, the meeting agenda and abstracts for each presentation are available.

Progress of the indicator in the period 2017-18

The collection, validation and analysis of information coming from general population surveys on drug use remains the core component of this indicator.

The collection of methodological information has been improved by the mapping of core survey questions and the provision of more detailed information on response rates. This contributes to a better informed and nuanced assessment of the implementation of the key indicator than was possible in the past.

The recent EMQ modules on the use of 'new' psychoactive substances and perceived availability were made available on the EMCDDA's GPS webpage. Two sets of questions from the perceived availability module have been approved by the Reitox Focal Points and were added to Standard Table 1. The EMQ questions added were:

- EMQ Q3 - Within the last 12 months, how many times have you been offered (drug) (either free of charge or to buy)? - Low level of exposure: "once or twice" or "3-5 times" - Medium level of exposure: "6-9 times" or "10-19 times" - High level of exposure: "20-39 times" or "40 times or more"

- EMQ Q6 - How difficult or easy do you think it would be for you personally to obtain (drug) within 24 hours, if you wanted some? 1) impossible; 2) very difficult; 3) fairly difficult; 4) fairly easy; 5) very easy

A rapid information request was launched to assess the feasibility of collecting data on NPS use through Standard Table 1 in the future. 20 countries showed an interest (out of 24 with available information) and 14 countries have submitted the requested information. Results will be available in the second half of 2018.

The draft EMQ module for the misuse (non-medical) of medicines has been finalised and is ready for testing with interested countries.

A core part of the work in 2018 was the establishment of an internal coordination group for the indicator on 'Prevalence'. The main tasks for the group are:

1. Assurance of Data Quality.
    a. Collect, validate, transform, analyse, review and document the core quantitative data delivered to the EMCDDA through Fonte Standard Tables.
    b. Review the qualitative data provided through the workbooks.
    c. Identify, document and address weaknesses in the data delivered to the EMCDDA.
2. Network maintenance.
    a. Expert meeting: organise and deliver the annual 'GPS' expert meeting.
    b. Support and maintain a network of experts.
3. Assessment of the implementation of the Key Indicators.
    a. Review of existing criteria for evaluation of the key indicator.

b. Development of a simple evaluation of the availability and usefulness for analysis of the data within the area (for EMCDDA use only).
c. Review the implementation of the key indicators for the period 2015 to 2018 as an input into the Assessment for the Management Board and NFP.
d. Agree a follow-up process to address identified weaknesses in the implementation of the key indicators, to be undertaken in 2019.

The 2018 key-indicator assessment was initiated, having as the basis the criteria established in 2009, with slight modifications. The assessment is done using Standard Tables and workbooks sent by the NFPs in 2017 and will focus on two components:

Process (activities to support the provision of data at national level)
Data Quality (data availability, comparability, timeliness, coverage and consistency)

As a result of the continuous developmental work at national and EU level, the 'GPS' indicator has been receiving an increased profile in international initiatives and, as in 2016, will be used in the forthcoming DG SANTE/OECD '2018 Health at a glance in Europe' report as one of the core European Health indicators.

As part of a strategy to increase capacity building together with the Reitox unit, the first GPS study has been launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
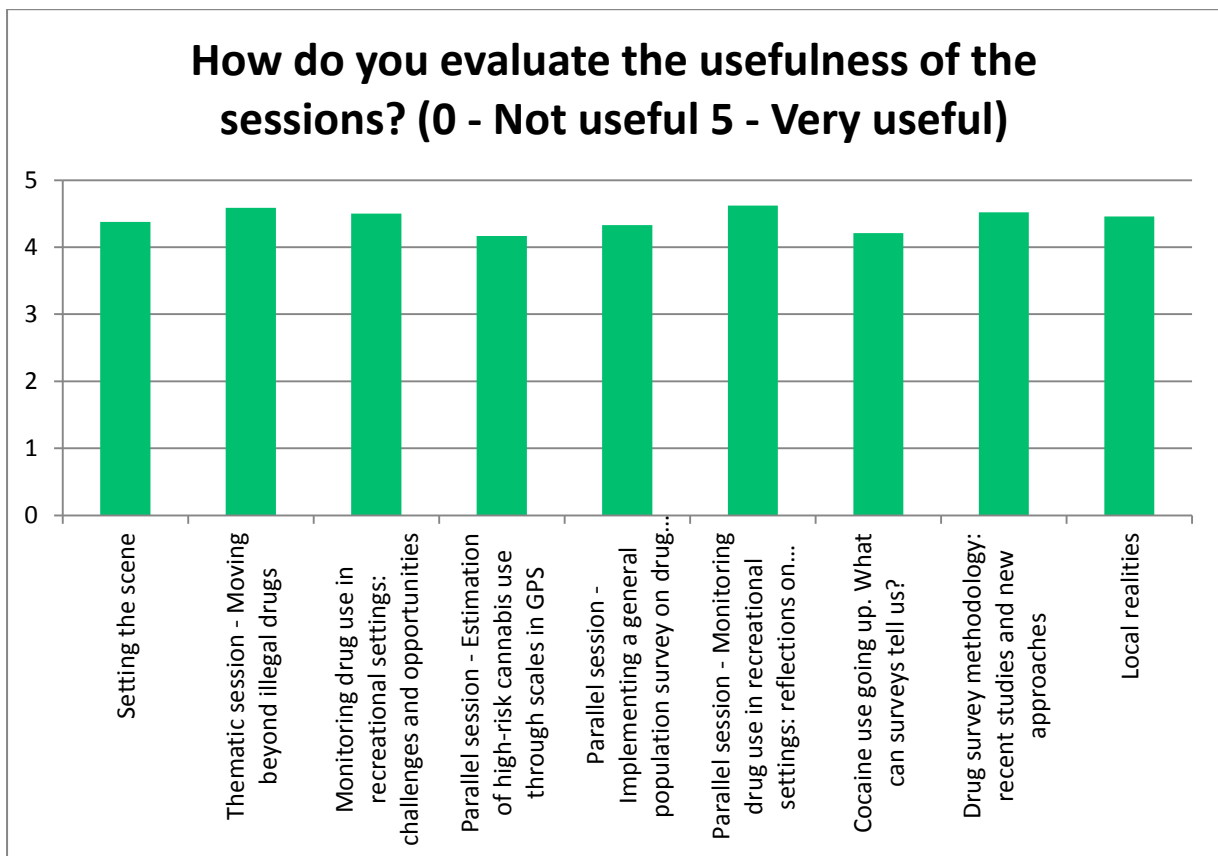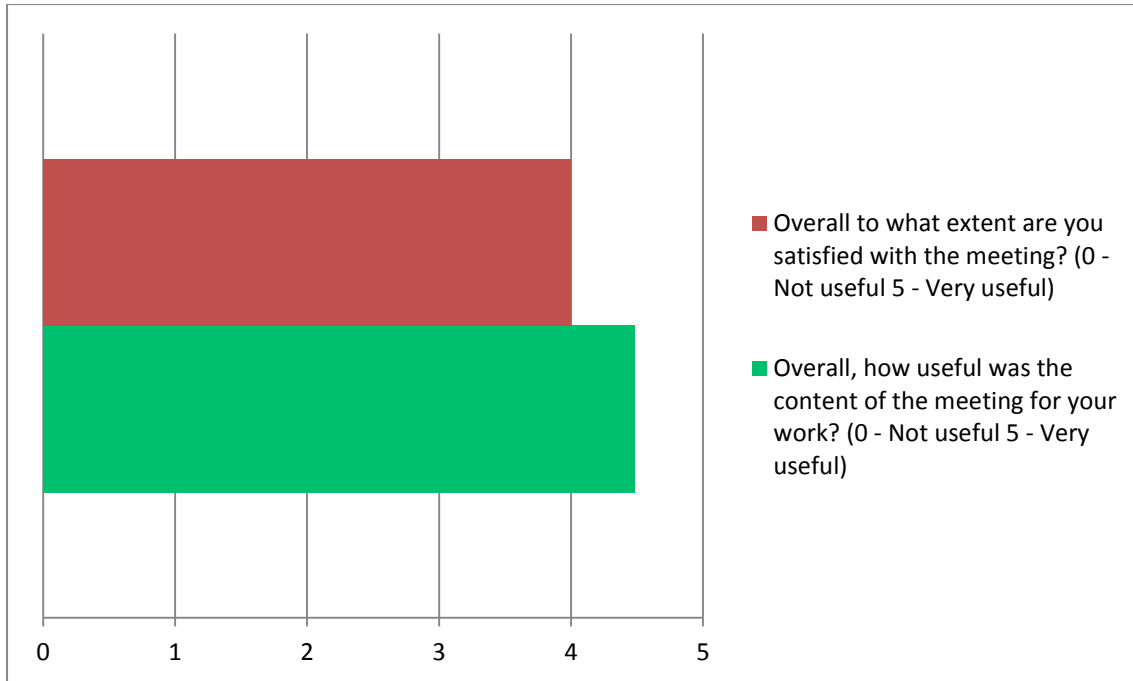
The relations with international school surveys have been strengthened, with the EMCDDA supporting coordination, the preparation of 2019 wave, of data collection in 10-12 countries and production of report in 2020.

Further work has been done in better integrating the data from drug surveys with other existing monitoring tools in the Centre, mainly wastewater-based epidemiology and trendspotter study on cocaine.

As a complement, in 2017-18 we continued focusing on non-probabilistic surveys as a way to complement national drug surveys. A second wave of the European Web Survey on Drugs was launched, and we are in the process of finalising a report on the challenges and opportunities to monitor drug use in recreational settings.

Meeting assessment

An online survey was set up to evaluate the GPS experts' opinion on the 2018 expert meeting. The questionnaire was filled in by 31 of the meeting's participants, and the overall opinion was very positive towards the content of the meeting, its usefulness and the possibilities for networking.

Legend:
- Overall to what extent are you satisfied with the meeting? (0 - Not useful 5 - Very useful)
- Overall, how useful was the content of the meeting for your work? (0 - Not useful 5 - Very useful)

How do you evaluate the usefulness of the sessions? (0 - Not useful 5 - Very useful)

Session labels:
- Setting the scene
- Thematic session - Moving beyond illegal drugs
- Monitoring drug use in recreational settings: challenges and opportunities
- Parallel session – Estimation of high-risk cannabis use through scales in GPS
- Parallel session – Implementing a general population survey on drug...
- Parallel session - Monitoring drug use in recreational settings: reflections on...
- Cocaine use going up. What can surveys tell us?
- Drug survey methodology: recent studies and new approaches
- Local realities

Participants acknowledged the fact that it was very useful to have the abstracts for each presentation in advance and that non-European experts contributed significantly for having a wider perspective on drug use.

Having parallel sessions was very welcome and this should be repeated in the coming meetings. The focused groups that took place in the session "Cocaine use going up. What can surveys tell us?" were highly valued and encouraged to be repeated in more sessions.

It was suggested to allow more time for discussion between presentations and, possibly, to have more parallel sessions instead of only plenary sessions. A discussant could be nominated beforehand and that this person could prepare himself/herself for one first comment or question. This would increase interaction or alternatively 1-2 straightforward questions upon which participants could reflect and prepare beforehand, so that contributions during the discussion time increase.

Moreover it was stressed the importance to discuss more methodological aspects, including data comparability, decreasing response rates and examples of good practice in terms of dissemination of the data obtained through GPS (i.e. how data helped in advocating for some specific action).

Next steps in 2018-19

- Rationalise and improve web-based information on the drug situation, by revising the methodological information provided in the Statistical Bulletin.
- Publish the report on the challenges and opportunities to monitor drug use in recreational settings.
- Assess the available data on the prevalence of new psychoactive substance use sent as part of the Rapid Information Request.
- Promote and more regularly update the area regarding the GPS indicator in the Reitox Forum as a web platform for the GPS expert network.
- Update the meeting page, and ask for agreement for uploading of presentations (done).
- Follow-up on the parallel sessions
- Develop a medium term plan for the development of the information on the prevalence of drug use in the general population

We invite you to check our GPS indicator page and our Statistical Bulletin website where we present the detailed methodological information about national surveys and on which you can find the most recent data.

Meeting page: http://emcdda.europa.eu/meetings/2018/gps

2018 Expert meeting on the indicator
'Prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population (GPS)'

15–16 May 2018, EMCDDA (Lisbon), Conference Centre

Book of abstracts (please note that the abstracts have not been edited)

Tuesday 15 May 2018

9.00	**Setting the scene** Chair: André Noor, EMCDDA

- Overview of the meeting, update on main developments and progress in the key indicator — João Matias, EMCDDA

Thematic session — Moving beyond illegal drugs
Chair: João Matias, EMCDDA

- Moving beyond illegal drugs. Development of a new indicator "addiction without substances" using surveys — Elena Alvarez, Spain

Spain is developing a new indicator in "addiction without substances" using surveys (among other sources of information). We collect some data in GPS and in student surveys related to internet use, gambling and gaming. We use a scale (CIUS- Compulsive Internet Use Scale) in order to determine the "internet addiction".

- Mental health and substance use — Pavla Chomynova, Czech Republic

In the general population aged 15–64, about 10.1% of the population show signs of worsened mental health conditions (based on the MHI-5 screening tool included in the National Survey on Substance Use 2016), among them 3.8% fell into a category of high probability of mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression (3.4% of males and 4.1% of females). The presence of mental health disorders is significantly higher among groups of regular tobacco smokers, as well as problem alcohol consumers categorized by CAGE screening instrument (about 2 times higher), high-risk cannabis users categorized by CAST scale (3 times higher) and problem gamblers categorized by Lie/bet and PGSI screening instruments (3-4.5 times higher) showing a close correlation between substance use, and problem gambling for money, and worsened mental health conditions.

- Misuse of medicines: revision of the EMQ module — Karoliina Karjalainen, Finland

During 2017 a project aiming to develop the methodology in monitoring misuse of medicine through general population surveys was conducted. It included e.g. a GPS mapping exercise, which showed that one third of the European countries had included questions concerning the misuse of medicines in their previous general population surveys. A module on misuse of medicines to be included in the European Model Questionnaire (EMQ) was developed during the project. The proposed module includes core questions covering last year prevalence (LYP), last month prevalence (LMP), frequency of use, motivation for use and supply; and voluntary questions covering lifetime prevalence (LTP), age of onset, supply, diversion, perceived availability, risk perceptions.

- Update on alcohol research — Janusz Sieroslawski, Poland

11.00	**Coffee break**

11.30	**Monitoring drug use in recreational settings: challenges and opportunities** Chair: João Matias, EMCDDA

- From ecstasy to MDMA: recreational drug use, symbolic boundaries, and drug trends — Marit Edland-Gryt, Norway

Background: Ecstasy pills with MDMA as the main ingredient were introduced in many European countries in the 1980s. However, use gradually levelled off. Extensive use of MDMA now seems to be re-emerging in many countries. In this study, we investigated the cultural and social meaning associated with MDMA use in Oslo, Norway, with an emphasis on how users distinguish MDMA crystals and powder from "old ecstasy pills".
Methods: Qualitative in-depth interviews (n=31, 61,3% males) were conducted with recreational MDMA/ecstasy users.
Results: Research participants emphasised three important perceived differences between the MDMA crystals and ecstasy pills: (i) The effects of MDMA were described as better than ecstasy; (ii) MDMA was regarded as a safer drug; (iii) Users of MDMA crystals were described as more distinct from and less anchored in out-of-fashion rave culture than those using ecstasy. These differences were an important part of the symbolic boundary work MDMA users engaged in when justifying their drug use.
Conclusion: One important reason for re-emergence of MDMA seems to be its perceived differentiation from ecstasy pills, even though the active ingredient in both drugs is MDMA. This perceived distinction between MDMA and ecstasy reveals the importance of social and symbolic meanings in relation to psychoactive substance use.

- Main findings of a survey on drug use among attendees of nightlife settings in Lithuania — Lina Jurgelaitiene, Lithuania

A nightlife settings survey was implemented in 2018 and was performed for the third time in Lithuania. 500 respondents in the four largest towns in Lithuania have participated in the survey. The results of the survey showed that 69 perc. of nightlife settings visitors were going out twice a month and more often. The consumption of drugs have increased by 20 perc. since the last survey in 2013. The LMP indicator varies from 49 perc. in Vilnius to 7 perc. in Šiauliai (the fourth biggest town in Lithuania). The results showed that cannabis was the most popular drug. The LMP indicator of cannabis consumption grew more than 3 times comparing to the survey performed in 2013. 71 perc. of respondents stated that they have never used two or more drugs at the same time. 57 perc. of respondents told that they were using drugs while attending friends and known people parties. 41 perc. of respondents told that they have received drugs from friends. Respondents were asked about the measures, which they would like to be implemented in nightlife settings. 60 perc. of them would like to have a possibility to perform rapid HIV testing.

- Drug use surveys in music festivals in Portugal — Elsa Lavado and Vasco Calado, Portugal

SICAD has been conducting social research in recreational settings in general, and music festivals in particular, since 2003. We will briefly present the main results of some of these studies, namely prevalence and frequency of illicit drug use, but also perceptions and social representations. We can conclude that, among

young people, illicit drug consumption is higher in recreational settings and that partygoers use drugs (and cannabis in particular) mostly to increase the fun and the leisure experiences. Also, drug use varies fairly according to music preferences, and consequently is different from music festival to music festival

- Targeting drug users in nightlife settings: (meta)reflection on questionnaire and current terminologies — Lies Gremeaux, Belgium

Internationally, music festival attendees report particularly high levels of illicit drug use compared with the general population. The events bring with them a host of risky activities associated with festival culture, certainly when it comes to drug use. For a relatively small country, Belgium punches above its weight when it comes to festivals, often appealing to a broad, international audience that hence clearly presents an interesting target audience for exploring recreational drug use.

In the light of the setup of a web survey that mainly focuses on patterns of use as well as the related experienced (adverse) effects during a single specific event, the GPS expert meeting creates an excellent setting for an interactive session to reflect on the following issues:

i. Recent web survey results lead to the believe that difficulties on the terminology of NPS might stand in the way of the (self-reporting) data collection, therefore putting questions to the use of the current EMQ module for monitoring NPS use in this survey setup.

ii. Next to supporting the mapping of current EU survey activities and developments in nightlife settings, the recommendations and interaction on the presented questionnaire will pave the way for future cross-country collaboration on this topic.

13.00   Lunch break

14.00   **Parallel sessions**

Estimation of high-risk cannabis use through scales in GPS
Chair: Julián Vicente, EMCDDA

The session had as objective to assess the "state of the art" of this national work, and discuss some methodological aspects. It was found that work continues in some countries that account for a relevant share of EU population; France, Spain, Italy, possibly Germany, Portugal, Czech Republic, Poland, Netherlands. The ESPAD project will include, in 2019, as mandatory a module to obtain High-Risk Cannabis Use estimations. It was proposed an on-line restricted forum –Reitox area- to share information and advice.

Implementing a general population survey on drug use: challenges and experiences
Chair: Sandrine Sleiman and Katerina Skarupova, EMCDDA

This session served as an opportunity for countries planning to carry out the first (or a new) general population survey on drugs to share experiences and advices. One of the outcomes was for the EMCDDA to share information on issues related to ethical study approvals and the new data protection regulations.

Monitoring drug use in recreational settings: reflections on questionnaire design and terminologies
Chair: Lies Gremeaux, Belgium

The objective was this session was to discuss and share experiences in developing new methods and tools for identification and reporting of new trends and threats in recreational settings and to present the on-going work from the EMCDDA on the subject and how this can be used in the future.

15.45	**Coffee break**

16.15	**Cocaine use going up. What can surveys tell us?** Chair: Federica Mathis, EMCDDA

- Reasons to use cocaine. An empirical analysis of cocaine as part of binge drinking culture — Marit Edland-Gryt, Norway

Cocaine is, after cannabis, the most commonly used illegal drug globally. Internationally, there have been numerous pharmacological and epidemiological studies on cocaine, but few studies have focused on why people use cocaine in club settings, and what characterizes the culture surrounding its use. The aim of this article is to explore why young adults in a club setting use cocaine. Empirically, this article is based on qualitative interviews conducted with 35 young adult party-goers in Oslo, Norway. The analysis is structured into five segments to illustrate the different reasons young adults offered to explain their use of cocaine. These reasons centered around the perceptions of cocaine offering the user: (1) the distinct high (2) the feeling of unity with friends (3) the possibility to control and extend binge drinking (4) less hangover symptoms, and (5) the perception that it is easy to get and take. Several of these reasons show that cocaine use is perceived as an extension of binge drinking. To better understand the use of powder cocaine, greater research focus is needed on cocaine as an integrated part of binge drinking culture, as opposed to the use of cocaine by itself. Young adults' reasons to use cocaine may be an important factor in preventing cocaine use in club settings.

- "I have no clue why I'm doing this" — a qualitative study on crack cocaine use in Frankfurt — Lukas Sarvari, Germany

While crack cocaine nearly disappeared from the focus of social drug research after the 1990s, it has been the 'co-no. 1 drug' in the marginalized drug users' scene in the city of Frankfurt, for almost two decades. This setting is relatively unique in Germany and throughout Europe. In the last two years, there has been a growing discussion about this setting and particularly the use of crack cocaine in Frankfurt. The research presented aims to get more information about the site-specific conditions that may have favored the rise of the drug. On the other hand, we wanted to gather knowledge about the subjective motives for using crack cocaine. Remarkably, the users' craving for crack cocaine appears to be linked to their mere presence in the core area of the scene. Further results concern varying quality perceptions, different patterns of crack cocaine use, and possible substitutes of crack cocaine.

- Facilitated groups: Introduction — Alessandra Bo and João Matias, EMCDDA:

  - What's happening with cocaine use and with crack cocaine use? Stable, increasing trends?
  - Is cocaine use and/or crack cocaine use geographically limited or EU-wide? Local? Regional? Urban? Rural? Differences between cocaine and crack?
  - Which risk populations/groups are associated with cocaine use and with crack cocaine use in Europe? What are their socio-demographic characteristics?
  - How can surveys contribute to understanding current and emerging trends?

- Feedback in plenary from the facilitated groups

17.30   End of the first day

20.00 Dinner

Wednesday 16 May 2018

9.00	**Drug survey methodology: recent studies and new approaches** Chair: Katerina Skarupova, EMCDDA

- Feedback from the parallel sessions

- Qualitative and quantitative pilot testing of the GPS questionnaire — Darja Lavtar, Slovenia

The Slovenian National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ) has recognised an important role of qualitative and quantitative testing in identifying problematic survey questions. Pre-field methods include cognitive interviews that focus on investigating mental processes involved in answering questions. This in-depth qualitative method was employed to thoroughly examine questions on smoking habits, use of drugs, misuse of medicines, alcohol drinking habits, use of cannabis for medical purposes, polysubstance use, etc. Cognitive interviews were implemented in two consecutive phases: 1) face-to-face cognitive interviews, 2) web cognitive interviews with more in-depth questions for most sensitive survey questions and web survey usability questions. In the next step, a pilot study was conducted using two separate samples: 1) face-to-face interviewing (CAPI) with a two stage sample of 600 inhabitants, 2) computer assisted web interviewing (CAWI) with a simple random sample (SRS) of 600 inhabitants splitted into two halves, allowing to test and compare the original and revised version of selected questions. The findings of 2017 qualitative and quantitative pre-testing improved the Slovenian GPS questionnaire (data collection started in March 2018).

- What I say is not what I mean: cognitive testing of the European Web Survey on Drugs questionnaire — Katerina Skarupova, EMCDDA

Back to basics: How different drug using patterns and different language among heterogeneous group of drug users shape their survey responses and why piloting of any questionnaire should not be neglected.

- Making sense of polydrug use: a Finnish perspective — Karoliina Karjalainen, Finland

A project called Making sense of polydrug use: Prevalence, use patterns and harms has been conducted in Finland during 2014–2018 (funded by the Academy of Finland). It aimed to produce knowledge of the polydrug use, involving licit and illicit drugs, alcohol and pharmaceuticals, and comprised three subprojects: 1) The prevalence of polydrug use in different populations, 2) the use practices and the cultural meanings of use, and 3) the harms and risks of polydrug use. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used. In the presentation, the project will be briefly described and some results based especially on the GPS data will be presented.

- NPS Euronet project: patterns of NPS use using wastewater-based epidemiology — Sara Castiglioni, Italy

The NPS Euronet project used an integrated analytical-epidemiological approach to identify the New Psycoactive Substances (NPS) mostly used in Europe. A selection was done among those frequently and recently seized by police, or identified in specimens from intoxicated subjects or in forensic specimens. The selected "priority list" included about 200 NPS and was updated during the project to include new NPS appearing in the market. Wastewater-based Epidemiology (WBE), a new approach based on the measurement of specific biomarkers in urban wastewater to assess the pattern of drug use, was employed for qualitative and quantitative screenings in several European countries. Generally, the levels of NPS were lower than those of

the classical drugs. Different spatial and temporal profiles of NPS use were found among countries and were compared with those of classical drugs. WBE was a good complementary tool to evaluate the use of NPS in the general population.

11.00	**Coffee break**

11.30	**Local realities** Chair: João Matias, EMCDDA

- Study on unaccompanied minors immigrating to Sweden and substance use — Emma Wahlstedt, Sweden

During 2017 the Public health agency of Sweden got tasked by the Swedish government to investigate the prevalence of drug use among unaccompanied minors (under 22 years old) in Sweden. The study gathered information from the social services, registries, focus groups with professionals in the field and a cross sectional comparison of unaccompanied minors and other youth that were registered at specialized treatment facilities for drug use. The study found that it was not possible to make any conclusions regarding if drug use was more common among unaccompanied minors compared to other youth but identified a worry among the profession regarding this group. The study also found that there are signals indicating that mental health is worse among the group compared to other youth and that unaccompanied minors have more risk factors for mental health issues and social exclusion than other youth.

- Unaccompanied minor refugees and substance use in Vienna — Julian Strizek, Austria

GPS data only provides very limited information on substance use among ethnic minorities. UMR are a small group but vulnerable group with respect to substance use due to several personal and environmental risk factors. Qualitative interviews were conducted with UMR and professionals working in refugee aid and drug treatment/drug counselling to identify specific features of substance use among UMR (risk factors, consumption patterns and motives, attitudes towards substance use, possibilities for support). Results indicate that substance use among UMR shows several differences to substance use among peers born in Austria and accordingly requires specific interventions that to some extend go beyond the competence of the health sector.

- Study among Roma population: substance use and gambling — Pavla Chomynova, Czech Republic