

Although drug use and related infections such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis continue to present significant challenges for prisons, public health authorities, law enforcement and national governments, European epidemiological data on drug use and infections in prison and the criminal justice system is uneven. Available studies show that, compared with the general population, drug users are overrepresented in arrest figures and in prisons, that prisons provide a risky environment for drug use and the spread of infections and that the criminal justice system therefore has an important part to play in reducing problematic drug use and associated public health problems.

## The Background

High rates of re-offending among drug users bring this particular population into frequent contact with the criminal justice system. Yet, the criminal justice systems of many EU Member States often lack expertise to respond effectively to halt the cycle of re-offending which is so common amongst problematic drug users. Effective responses include harm reduction and drug treatment in prisons, aftercare services upon release and treatment alternatives to incarceration.

International recommendations and guidelines informed by available evidence and current research call for multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral responses to address and respond to the needs of offending-drug users and to prevent the spread of drug-related infections in prisons and thus to the community as a whole. The '*Connections*' project aims to facilitate the design and implementation of such responses at national and European level.



# Connections

Integrated responses to drugs and infections across European criminal justice systems

## The Project

The '*Connections*' project, launched in Autumn 2007, managed by The European Institute of Social Services (EISS) of the University of Kent and co-funded by the European Commission Public Health Programme focuses on the potential for partnerships within criminal justice systems of the EU Member States to develop joined-up responses to drugs and related-infections, particularly HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

The three year project will facilitate the introduction and promotion – at national and European level – of more effective, comprehensive, evidence-based policies and services to respond to drugs and infections in prison and within the wider context of the criminal justice system. Public health and human rights based approaches and priorities will guide the project towards the promotion of comprehensive continuity of care.

## The Opportunity

Marginalised populations, in particular problematic drug users, are at risk of blood borne infections and diseases whilst in custody. Conditions in custody and other criminal justice processes can increase the chances of cross-infection to other drug users, to criminal justice staff and the community at large. For many within these populations a police cell, a court, a prison or other criminal justice setting can represent the first opportunity to access basic health care, treatment, prevention education, counselling and testing. Intervention with drug users within the criminal justice system can assist in breaking cycles of addiction and incarceration, as well as contributing to the prevention of transmission of infections. It can further benefit the wider community through reduced medical/social welfare costs, more effective public health policies and reductions in drug-related crime.



## Networking, Communication and Information sharing (EISS)

- » Two European Conferences
- » The CONNECTIONS Newsletters
- » The Digest of Research

## Capacity Building

- » Two European Training Academies (EISS)
- » Two local Trainings (HCLU, Probacja)

## Exchange of experiences

- » Study Visits and Work Placements (Rugby House)

## Policy Development at national and EU level

- » Compilation of EU good practices and recommendations (EISS)
- » Policy development at national level through pilot projects on harm reduction and the criminal justice system in Hungary, Poland and Romania (HCLU, Probacja, ARAS)

## Research

- » Research study 'Towards a continuum of care in the EU criminal justice system – a survey of prisoners needs' (Stichting CVO – Addiction Research Centre)
- » Research study 'Race, drugs, HIV and the criminal justice systems in Europe – an evaluation across 9 EU countries' (T3E)

## The Activities

The '*Connections*' project will facilitate dialogue between civil society organisations, academics and criminal justice agencies with a view to improving cooperation among these sectors at regional, country and European level, thus facilitating the identification of good practices in policies and services in the area of HIV/AIDS and other drug related infection prevention within the criminal justice system.

The project is organised in 8 work packages, each of which are the responsibility of one project partner, with activities focusing on the presented strategies.

# The Partners

*'Connections'* collaborating partners include national prison administrations, health authorities, international organisations and NGOs in the EU.

*'Connections'* continues to work closely with the WHO Health in Prison Project, the WHO Euro Office, EMCDDA, UNODC, AFEW, IHRD/OSI, the IDPC of the Beckley Foundation, HEUNI, IHRA and the Council of Europe.

## **EISS at the University of Kent (UK)** *the project coordinator*

The European Institute of Social Services (EISS) at the University of Kent has carried out a number of studies in the field of drug treatment and crime prevention in Europe. The most recent are the QCT Europe project (a six-country evaluation of quasi-compulsory treatment of drug dependent offenders) and reviews of best practice in preventing juvenile and violent crime, carried out on behalf of the European Union Crime Prevention Network.

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## **Probacja (Poland)**

The Probacja Association provides post penitentiary support in the province of Malopolska, Poland. Currently it runs a hostel and a consultation point for ex-prisoners who experience problems like homelessness and unemployment. Probacja also organises trainings for law practitioners and probation officers. In the last three years, the trainings have focused on Polish law related to drugs possession for personal use.

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## **Hungarian Civil Liberty Union (Hungary)**

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) is a non-profit human rights watchdog NGO established in Budapest, Hungary in 1994. HCLU is a law reform and legal defence public interest NGO in Hungary, working independently of political parties, the state or any of its institutions. HCLU aim is to promote the case of fundamental rights and principles laid down by the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary and by international conventions. Its overall goals are the building and strengthening the civil society and rule of law in Hungary and the CEE region.

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## ARAS (Romania)

ARAS - The Romanian Association Against AIDS is a national, non-governmental, apolitical and humanitarian organisation whose major purpose is to stop the AIDS epidemics through programs of education, information, and through the development of psycho-social services for the people living with AIDS and their families. It was founded in Bucharest in 1992 by a group of young people, mostly students of different backgrounds, who were alarmed at the growing threat posed by AIDS in Romania and by the human, social, economic and political tragedies that can be brought about by the lack of priority given to AIDS prevention. ARAS Central Office is located in Bucharest and it has branches in Constanta, Piatra Neamt, Iasi, Craiova, Timisoara, Brasov, Cluj-Napoca and Bacau.

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## Rugby House (UK)

Established in 1986 and currently employing over 100 staff, Rugby House has developed and manages a comprehensive range of services in London, designed to support and empower individuals and communities who are affected by alcohol and drugs. These services comprise both residential treatment and community services, including partnership with criminal justice agencies and specialist services to engage minority ethnic groups.

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## The Bremen Institute of Drug Research (BISDRO)

The Bremen Institute of Drug Research (BISDRO) at the University of Bremen is conducting research on drug use, addiction and related political, economic, social and health problems since 1983. The research has a specific focus on the evaluation of health care interventions and policies (such as opioid substitution treatment, needle exchange, harm reduction in general, counseling, HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support etc.) in custodial settings (arrest houses, police detention, prisons, aftercare). Furthermore BISDRO has a long history in international joint research projects in the criminal justice and health area and has carried out several international consultancies (Islamic Republic of Iran (for UNAIDS), Azerbaijan (ICRC), Latvia (for World Bank), Estonia, Cairo, Mombassa/Kenya (all for UNODC).

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## Toxicomanie: Europe – Échanges – Études T3E (UK)

Established in 1998, T3E (UK) is a registered research, training and advocacy charity, which pioneered the first critical evaluation of drug services and their ability to meet the needs of drug users from 'visible minorities' across 7 EU countries (1995-97). It has also carried out the first mapping of social exclusion and drugs, focussing on "minorities" across 15 EU member states, for EMCDDA (1999-2001); as well as other EC supported training and consultancy. Currently it is engaged in a consultancy, leading the race-equality working party of the Democracy, Cities and Drugs programme. T3E (UK) is listed as a resource on 'diversity' by the Home Office DSD and by NTA.

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## The Partners



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