



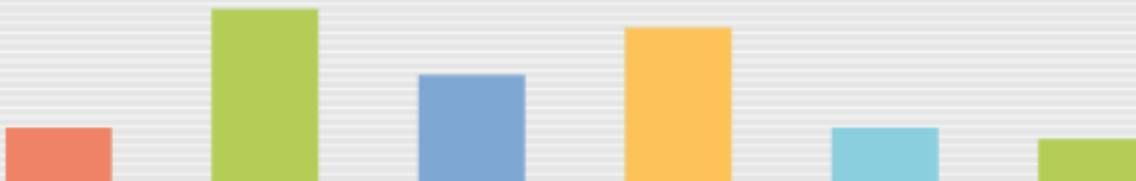
European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

Drug-related deaths and mortality among drug users

Expert meeting, 10-11/10 2023

Isabelle Giraudon, Peter Heudtlass

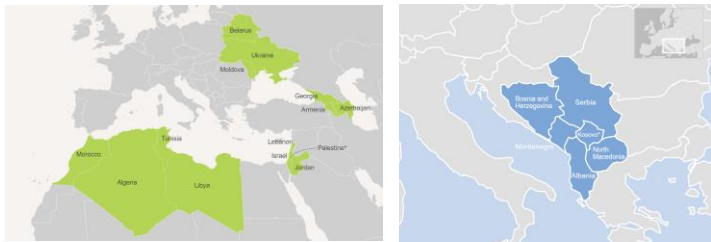
HEA Unit (Public Health) - EMCDDA



The Drug-related deaths (DRD) network

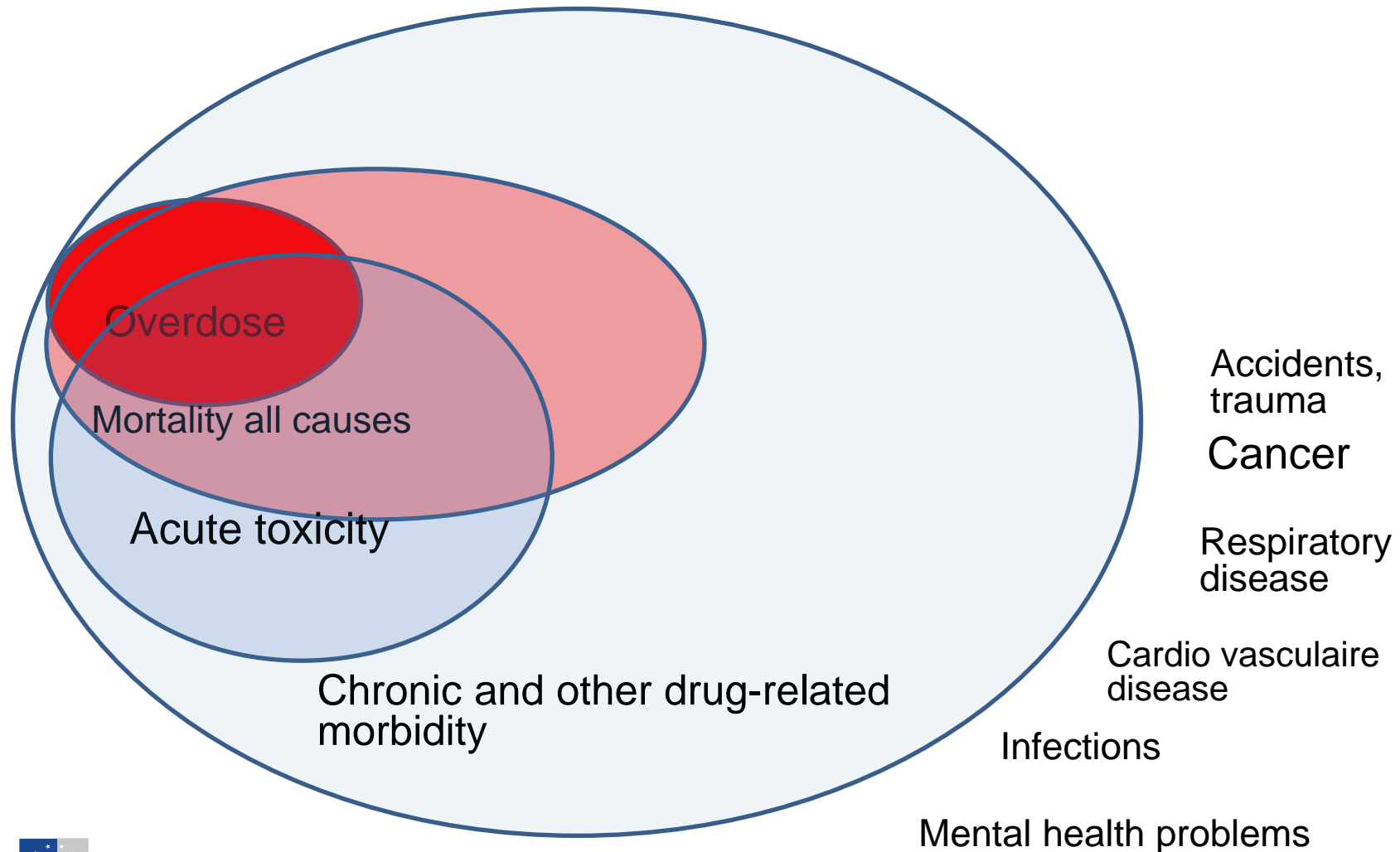
Large and multifaceted expertise

- 27 EU Members States, NO, TU
- IPA countries
- European Neighbourhood Policy partners (EU4MD) countries
- CADAP countries



- Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, IPA : Albania Bosnia and Herzegovina * Kosovo ** North Macedonia Serbia
- European Neighbourhood Policy partners: Algeria Azerbaijan Georgia Lebanon Moldova Palestine Tunisia Ukraine – all active partners of the EU4MD projects
- Invited speakers : UK, Spain, Switzerland

Drug-related harms: what matters?



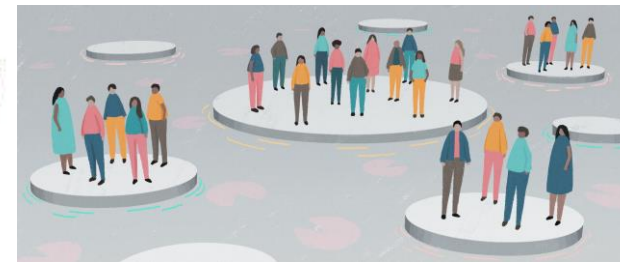
Drug-related deaths monitoring: 3 pillars



Drug-related deaths monitoring: 3 pillars



Toxicology

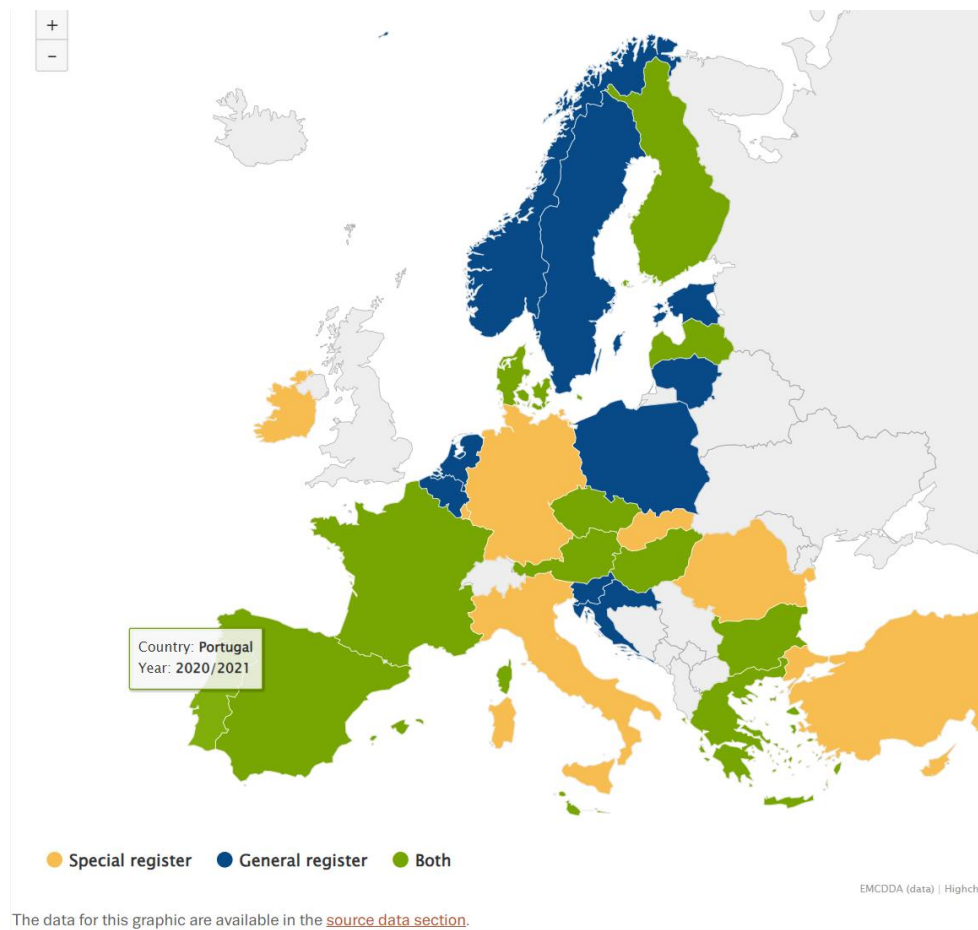


Objectives and sources

- Monitoring 'overdose' deaths
 - Pillar 1: General mortality registers (national statistics)
 - Pillar 2: Special registers (forensic toxicology, police, providing more information on the drugs involved)
- Monitoring all causes of deaths among people who use drugs
 - Pillar 3: Linkage or longitudinal cohorts studies



Sources used by the countries to monitor overdose deaths



- Most countries report data from both sources (general and special registers) → triangulation and validation
- Countries report data every year
- Many countries have set up a national working group

Source DRD Frequently asked questions (FAQ), August 2023. Drug overdose deaths in Europe, https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/topic-overviews/content/faq-drug-overdose-deaths-in-europe_en#question16

Objectives and corresponding activities

1) Quantify (how many deaths, where, when?)

- Statistical Bulletin
- FAQ DRD

2) Characterise (including age, sex, substances involved, including polydrug)

- Revised Standard Table 6 (ST6)
- →more information on drugs and medicines (fentanyl, BZD, pregabalin, tramadol, methamphetamine)

Objectives and corresponding activities

3) Validate (compare national statistics and cohort findings)

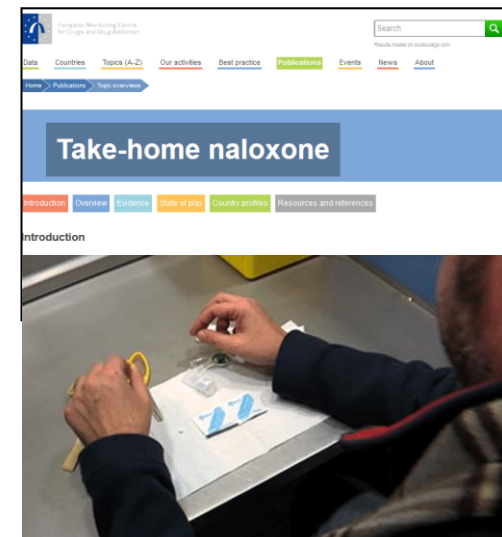
- Cohort studies mapping

Mortality cohort studies among people using drugs in Europe: countries with studies conducted within the last 10 years or earlier, July 2021 – provisional findings



4) Link with responses

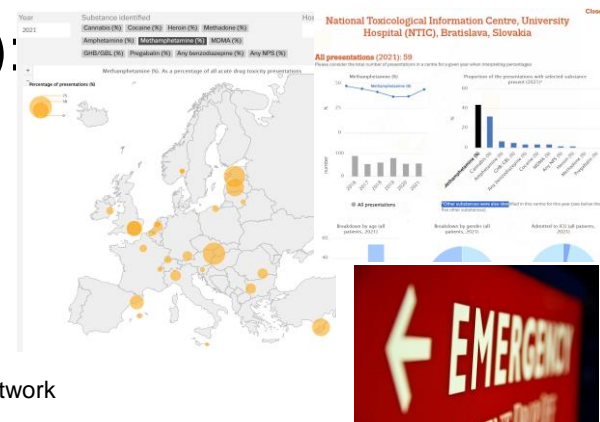
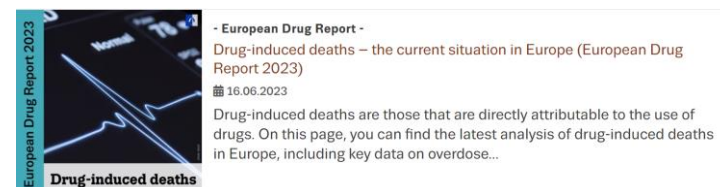
- Updates from the network
- Miniguides - prevention of opioid-related deaths



Objectives and corresponding activities

5) Assess health threats

- Enhanced analysis of synthetic opioids deaths in the EDR
- Baltic countries DRD technical meeting in June in Riga
- Cannabis-related harm core indicators: working group with five countries preparing policy changes
- Hospital sentinel network (Euro-DEN): new centres recruited; data explorer launched; presentations and publications – towards a quicker reporting



Agenda of the meeting – 7 sessions

1. Introduction
2. Outbreaks and concerns
3. Outbreaks and concerns (continued)
4. Polydrug use and post mortem toxicology findings
5. All causes of deaths (cohorts and linkages)
6. Responses
7. EUDA and the DRD network – Discussion with the EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel

‘Country updates’ throughout the meeting

Festivals and DRD : findings from the survey October 2023

In your country, what is/are the source(s) of information about DRD and drug-related harms at big festivals? How many of these deaths have occurred over the last 2 years?



56 answers of which

- 44 with no/don't know/no information in the general mortality register/blank
- 12 with information available and data

Belgium	At Tomorrowland we collaborate with prevention teams, police, justice, festival authorities. This year, 2 deaths (one is not confirmed to be DRD). Since 2012, 6 deaths . For other festivals, no such collaboration
Bulgaria	Last event related was in March, 2023 (Sofia elrow - kaos Garden). More than 10 hospitalizations (alcohol; alcohol + SCs) and 1 death (methcathinone overdose) .
Cyprus	None of the deaths occurred at big festivals.
Czech Republic	No information on where the death occurred. We do have information from the annual final reports of the outreach harm reduction services that are present at these festival. From this, no report of fatal overdoses at festivals
Estonia	Source: GMR, Estonian Forensic Science Institute, Police and Border Guard Board and National Institute for Health Development. In 2023, one 20 year old died in the biggest beach music festival (MDMA)
Finland	Would come up in the routine Special register data. Not aware of any such deaths over the last 2 years.

Latvia	From police, doctors. Not received information regarding big festivals and occurred deaths in them.
Lithuania	No death in big festivals reported over the last 2 years. There was one case in 2015 with a lot of media attention.
Slovenia	Source General mortality register, Early warning system, field work and NGOs and their reports. No death reported in the last 2 years.
The Netherlands	In 2022, one accidental overdose at a festival was reported to the MDI. This most probably reflects underreporting - MDI and DIMS, Just a few deaths, not all deaths are drug-related.
Lebanon	Data from treatment centres received annually by the MOPH and data from internal security forces
Palestine	From the forensic Institutions

Festivals and DRD : findings from the survey

October 2023

- A range of sources can be used including forensic services, police, NGOs
- However, most countries report that their DRD information system could not flag these cases, if any
- Under-reporting an issue. But also a non-issue for some countries
- Rare reports of these deaths when system in place
 - (6 deaths in 12 years at Tomorrowland in Belgium (~400 000 attendees in 2023))



Post mortem toxicology practices for suspected drug-related deaths cases

Question: Is there an update for your country in the national guidelines and protocols in place?

Please provide the Organisation, Author/editor, Title, Last edition, Scope as indicated in the table



TABLE 1
Relevant international and national guidance/reference documents

No	Country/organisation (alphabetical order)	Author/editor	Title (reference)	Last edition	Scope: post-mortem applications (PA)/general recommendations (GR)
1	Czechia	Czech Society for Legal Medicine and Forensic Toxicology	(in Czech) Metodický pokyn pro postup při toxikologickém vyšetření speci kovaných návykových látek v krvi a nebo v moči. [Methodical guidance for the process of toxicological testing of specified substances of the substance or in the blood] Czech Society for Legal Medicine and Forensic Toxicology, expert personal communication 2012)	2012	GR: analysis, interpretation, quality assurance, documentation
2	France	Société Française de Toxicologie Analytique (SFTA)	Recommandations pour la réalisation des analyses toxicologiques dans les cas de décès impliquant des NPS (SFTA, 2017)	2017	PA: sample collection, analysis, minimum list of NPS to be included
3	Germany	Gesellschaft für Toxikologische und Forensische Chemie Arbeitskreis Qualitätsmanagement	(in German) Anhang D zur Richtlinie der GTFCh zur Qualitätssicherung bei forensischen	Version 1 2004	PA: sample collection GR: container type, labelling, logging, shipping, storage (see specific DRD)

Following up on the report and survey by the DRD national experts
Axel Heinemann and Pirkko Kriikku

Country	Source	Scope
Bugaria	Military Medical Academy, Vasil Atanasov, Forensic Toxicology: Basic principles and practice (2020).	Sample collection, container type, labelling, storage, analysis, interpretation
Italy	<p>Scientific Association Gruppo Tossicologi Forensi Italiani-GTFI (2023).</p> <p>"Linea guida per la determinazione di sostanze stupefacenti e psicotrope su campioni biologici con finalità tossicologico-forensi e medico-legali"</p> <p>https://www.gtfi.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/LineeGuidaGTFI-MaterialeBiologico-rev06-08giu2022.pdf</p>	<p>Laboratory requirements and procedures;</p> <p>Analysis requirements;</p> <p>Sample acceptance, collection, moving and handling;</p> <p>Analytical methods;</p> <p>Analysis report;</p> <p>Quality assurance</p>

Country	Source	Scope
Portugal	The UK and Ireland association of forensic toxicologists forensic toxicology laboratory guidelines (2018).	Sample collection, chain of custody, quality assurance, analytical methods, data review, result interpretation

- Several experts report that there might have been some changes in practices in their countries (the questions in the report included the proportion of full scale autopsies or needle autopsies; the screening strategies; the equipments used; the list of drug routinely searched and of drugs that can be searched on request: whether an other laboratory can be asked to help for some specific analysis...)
- While we asked at the time about several fentanyl analogues, there was no question about e.g. nitazenes → to be followed up and updated

2023 reporting of drug-related deaths

Country	Data (ST6) submitted in 2023	Toxicology data submitted in 2023	Most recent DRD data available
Belgium	Yes	Yes	2020
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	2022
Cyprus	Yes	Yes	2022
Denmark	Yes	Yes	2022
Estonia	Yes	Yes	2022
Finland	Yes	Yes	2022
Germany	Yes	Yes	2022
Ireland	Yes	No	2020
Italy	Yes	Yes	2022
Latvia	Yes	Yes	2022
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	2022
Malta	Yes	Yes	2022
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	2022
Norway	Yes	Yes	2022
Poland	Yes	No	2021
Portugal	Yes	Yes	2022
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	2022
Spain	Yes	Yes	2021
Sweden	Yes	Yes	2022
Türkiye	Yes	Yes	2022
Austria	No		2021
Croatia	No		2021
Czechia	No		2021
France	No		2020
Greece	No		2021
Hungary	No		2021
Luxembourg	No		2021
Romania	No		2021
Slovakia	No		2021

Year of submission	Countries with submissions
2023	20
Total	20



European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

PROGRAMME

Expert meeting on Drug-Related Deaths (DRD)

10-11 October 2023 - Hybrid

Microsoft Teams meeting

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Tuesday, 10 October 2023	
08:40–09:00	Registration at the EMCDDA (Lisbon time)
09:00–10:30	Session 1 - Introduction Chair: Isabelle Giraudon Welcome - Jane Mountney, EMCDDA Introduction and preliminary findings - Isabelle Giraudon and Peter Heudtlass, EMCDDA The role of NPS benzodiazepines (etizolam) in DRD – and increase in cocaine related deaths - Suzi Lyons, Ireland Correlation between opioid drug prescription and opioid-related mortality in Spain as a surveillance tool: ecological study - Luis Sordo, Spain Country updates: Cyprus, Germany, Norway, Ukraine
10.30–11.00	Coffee-break
11.00–12.30	Session 2 - Outbreaks Chair: Isabelle Giraudon Synthetic opioids in Europe: update from the EWS - Joanna de Moraes, EMCDDA Sharp increase in the number of deaths due to synthetic opioids in 2023 - Gleb Denisov, Estonia Nitazene related deaths and hospitalisations, in prison and in the community, La Réunion Island, 2023 - Sabrina Cherki, France Fentanyl (patches) related deaths among heroin users, 2023 - Chara Spiliopoulou, Greece Fentanyl (or analogues)-related overdose, Varna region, June 2023 - Snezha Zlateva, Bulgaria
12.30–13.30	Lunch Break
13.30–15.00	Session 3 - Outbreaks (continued) and national updates Chair: Suzi Lyons and Alessandro Pirona Madeira and Azores regions, cluster of a-PHP and a-PHIP related deaths - Antonio Castañera, Portugal Drug-related deaths in 2023 – Cathinones, Małgorzata Dalmata, Poland Increases in deaths related to synthetic opioids – emergence of d cathinones - Ruta Gedminiene, Lithuania Nitazenes overdose deaths in 2022-2023 - Diāna Vanaga-Arāja, Latvia Country updates: France, Denmark, Malta, Spain, Albania, Palestine
15.00–15.30	Coffee-break
15.30–17.00	Session 4 - Polydrug use and post mortem toxicology Chair: Peter Heudtlass and Pirkko Kriikku Polydrug working group with the Focal Points - Liesbeth Vandam, EMCDDA and Anna Péterfi, Hungary Fatal buprenorphine poisonings with extremely low femoral blood drug concentration – increase in the number of oxycodone-related deaths - Pirkko Kriikku, Finland PM toxicology – higher concentrations – and place of cocaine - Antonio Castañera, Portugal

Experimental survey with data on the cause of death and on the substances involved - Sabina Strano Rossi Italy
Update on the German situation - Heiko Bergmann, Germany
Discussion (morphine metabolites interpretation; and role of cathinones in DRD)
Country updates: Ireland, The Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Türkiye

Wednesday, 11 October 2023	
08.45–10.15	Session 5 - Overall mortality among people who use drugs Chair: Martin Busch Mortality among individuals prescribed opioid-agonist therapy in Scotland, UK, 2011–20: a national retrospective cohort study - Andrew McAuley, Scotland, UK Cause-specific mortality among patients in treatment for opioid use disorder in multiple settings: a prospective comparative cohort study - Thomas Clausen, Norway Country updates: Austria, Finland, Luxemburg, Slovenia (including overdoses with suicidal intent), Sweden, Georgia, Moldova
10.15–10.40	Coffee-break
10.40–12.10	Session 6 - Drug-related harms: toward a whole system response? Chair: Linda Montanari and Iciar Indave New synthetic opioids responses: preliminary findings from an ongoing scoping review - Iciar Indave, EMCDDA Harm reduction interventions in prison - Linda Montanari, EMCDDA Country updates (incl. Response items) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Austria (New THN in Tyrol and drug testing) Belgium (Resolution on THN) Croatia (Planning pilot of THN project, introduction of home doses) Czechia, (New harm reduction approaches) The Netherlands (Municipal level targeting of public nuisance, Amsterdam and Utrecht) Norway (Updates from the THN Summit, Oslo, August 2023) Slovenia (Plans for SCR in 2 cities) Lebanon (THN in hospital and in the community)
12.10–13.20	Session 7 - Discussion with the EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel Exchange of views with the national experts on the EUDA: opportunities, priorities and needs
13.20	Wrap up and closing of the meeting

