



European prisons and drug use

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Background

- People in prison are more likely to have experience of drug use and drug-related problems than their peers in the community.
- Understanding the prevalence and patterns of drug use among people in prison is a key policy requirement.
- Provision of drug-related interventions in prison, compared with that in the community, should adhere to two key principles:
 - equivalence of care*,
 - continuity of care*.
- These principles are underlined in the 2013-20 EU drugs strategy (1).

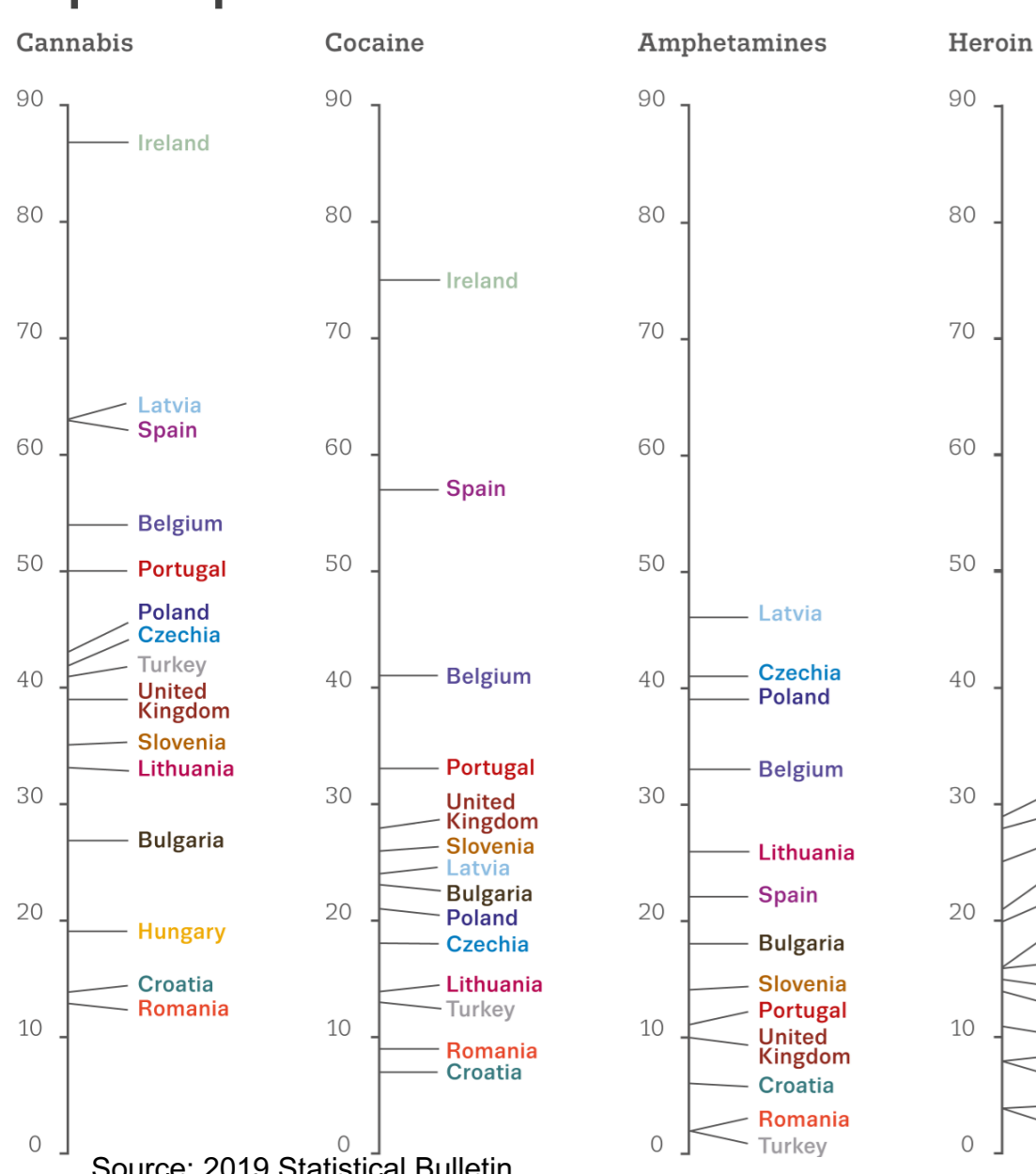
Methods

- Monitoring:** countries provide routine data on drug use prevalence and drug-related interventions in prison.
- Integration of findings from literature.**
- Surveys:** data are collected in six European countries using the European Questionnaire on Drug Use among People in Prison (EQDP).

Drug use and prison

- People in prison report higher lifetime prevalence of drug use and drug injecting than the general population.
- Lifetime prevalence of drug use varies by country and drug, with experience of heroin use ranging from 4 to 29 % whereas cannabis use ranges from 12 to 88 % (Figure 1) (2,3,4,5).

FIGURE 1. Lifetime prevalence (%) of drug use among people in prison



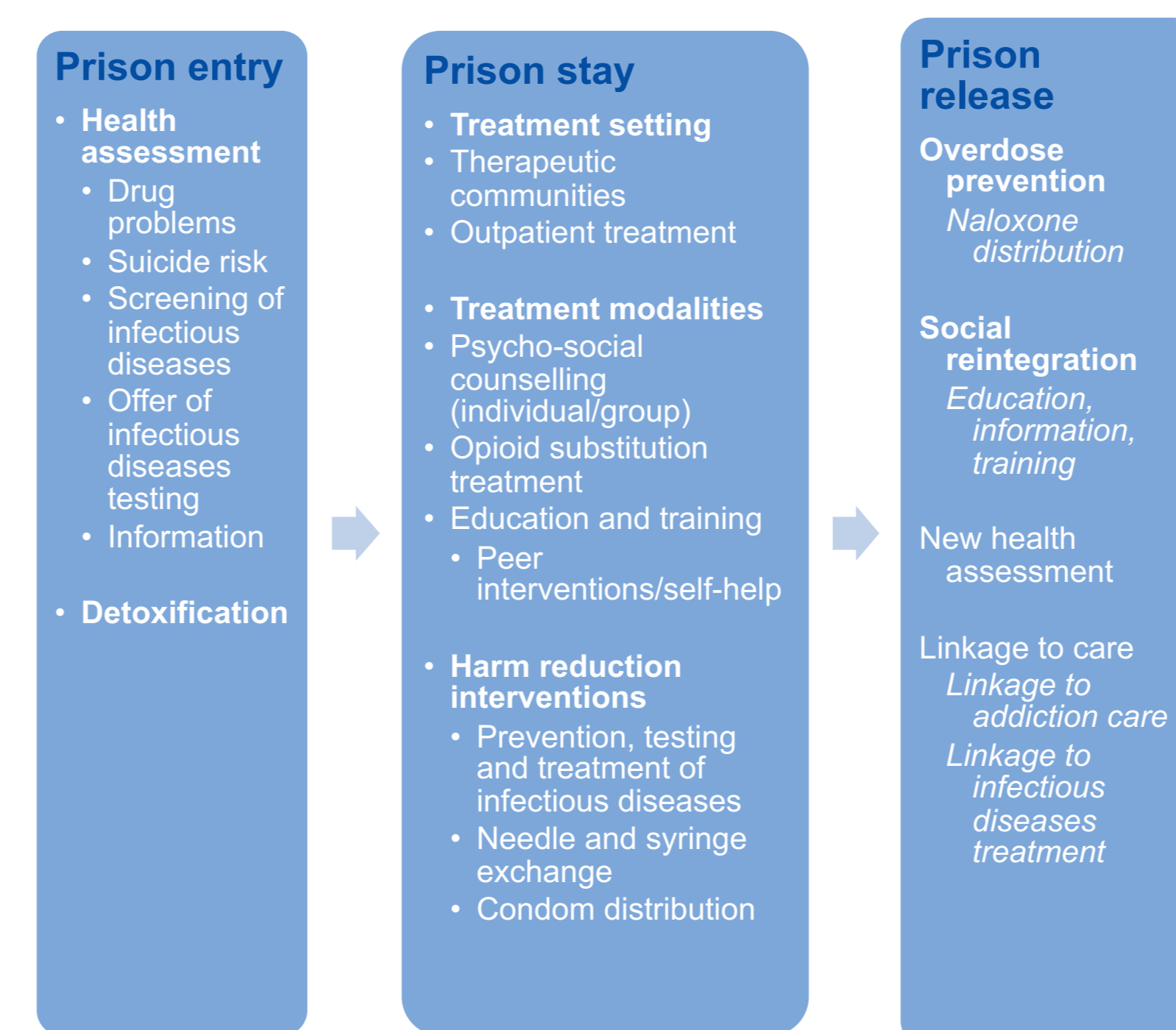
Drug use inside prison

- Many people stop using drugs when they enter prison, while some continue, some start or some change their drug-using patterns.
- In Europe lifetime prevalence of drug use within prison is reported to be up to 70 % for cannabis, 30 % for heroin, 20 % for cocaine and 18 % for amphetamines.
- Compared to outside, injection equipment in prison is shared more often, thus increasing the risk of blood-borne infectious diseases.
- The use of synthetic cannabinoids in prison is reported since 2015 in most European countries (6).

Drug-related interventions in prison

Prison is a core setting to target hard-to-reach populations. Interventions are organised around three imprisonment phases (Figure 2). They have a significant public health impact as people re-enter the community after prison release.

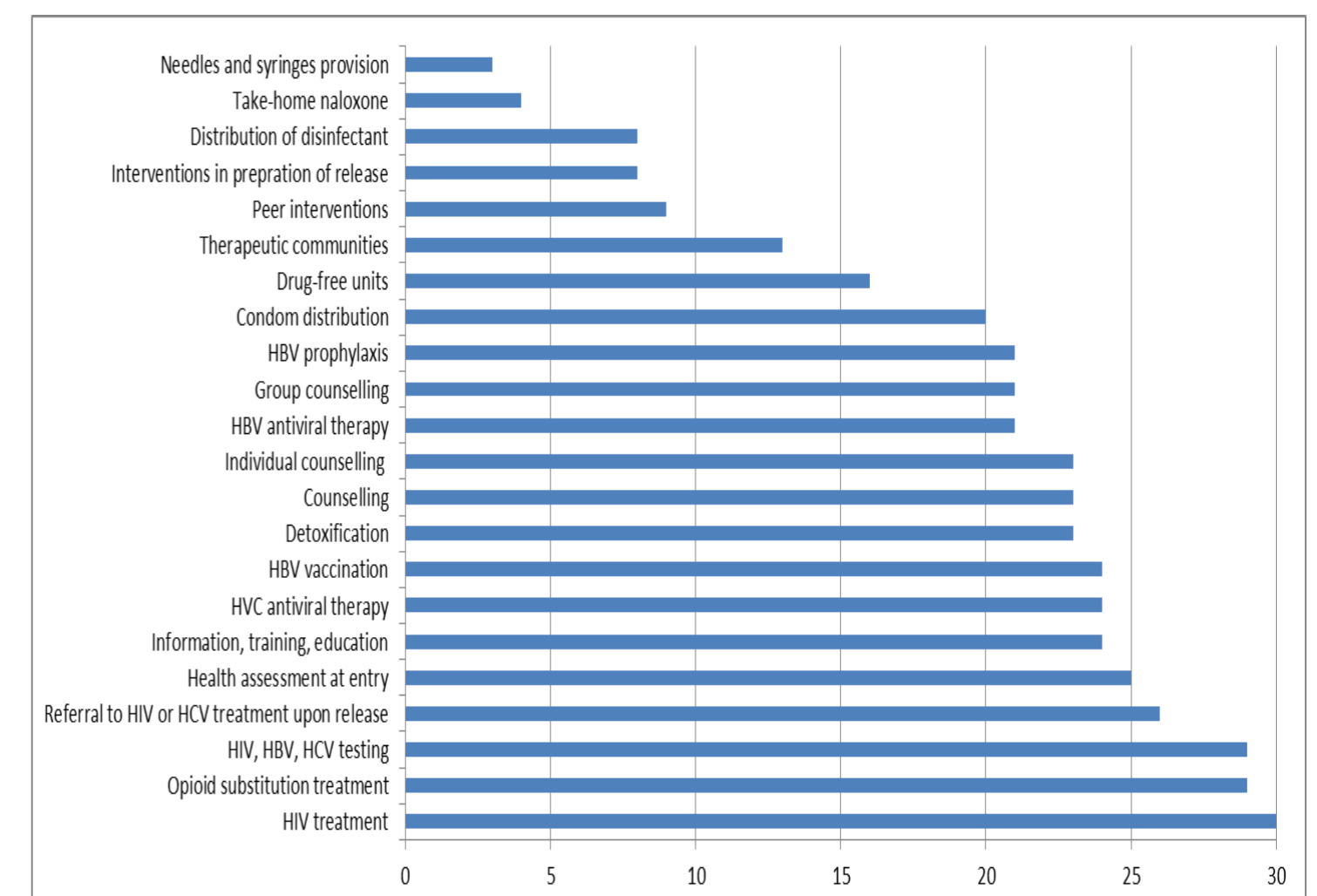
FIGURE 2. Drug-related interventions in prison, by phase of imprisonment



Drug-related interventions are available in European prisons to varying degrees (Figure 3).

- A medical examination at prison entry is among the few standardised interventions in European prisons.
- Drug-related treatment services include detoxification, group and individual counselling, peer to peer interventions and intramural therapeutic communities (2,4).

FIGURE 3. Availability of drug-related healthcare interventions in 30 European countries



Source: 2018 prison workbooks - RTX national focal points - preliminary data.

- Opioid substitution treatment is available in prison in all EU countries except Slovakia. However, this intervention was introduced much later in prison than in the community, and coverage remains limited.
- Most interventions to prevent and control infectious diseases are commonly provided, but needle and syringe provision in prison is rare.
- Measures to prepare for prison release are widely available, but programmes to prevent drug overdose on release are less common.

Conclusions

- People who use drugs make up a substantial proportion of the prison population in most European countries.
- Compared to the early 2000s, the availability and levels of provision of drug-related interventions in prison have improved.
- Much remains to be done to enable prison health services in Europe to provide treatment and care in conditions comparable to those pertaining in the community (7).
- More evidence and research is needed.

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