



REDUCING THE HARM OF DRUG USE AND DEPENDENCE

Towards safe and healthy living

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Saving lives, changing minds.

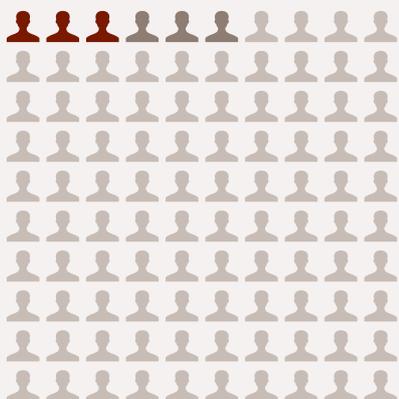


International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Harm reduction

Addressing health inequities and strengthening resilience

ISSUE



3.3% to 6.1%

of the population aged 15-64 used illicit substances at least once in the previous year

Globally, there are between

104,000 and 263,000

deaths each year that are attributable to illicit drug use

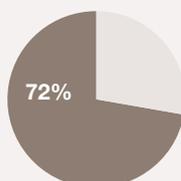
Injecting drug users are particularly vulnerable to **HIV**, with one in five being infected



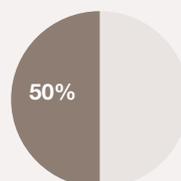
and half of injecting drug users have **hepatitis C** infections



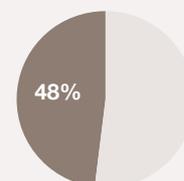
In certain countries, the HIV prevalence among injecting drug users is extremely high:



Estonia



Argentina



Brazil

Source: UNODC, World drugs report 2011

HOW WE HELP

The IFRC supports the work of member **National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** through:



technical assistance

- knowledge management, sharing and best practices documentation
- research and evaluation, and
- partnership building.



advocacy

Red Cross and Red Crescent harm reduction programmes are:



People-centred: enhance the existing strength and positive qualities of individuals, families and networks



Risk-targeted: focus on specific issues,



Adaptable to other contexts and situations

IMPACT

The effectiveness of Red Cross and Red Crescent harm reduction programmes lies in the capacity to tailor them to the local context.

National Societies are implementing harm reduction programmes in more than

20 countries



reaching out to more than **300,000 drug users annually.**



and sensitizing some **10 million people**





ISSUE

Despite increased attention to reducing drug demand in recent years, drug use continues to take a heavy toll. Globally, some 210 million people use illicit drugs each year, and almost 200,000 of them die from drugs. Injecting drug users are particularly vulnerable to blood-borne infections, with one in five being infected with HIV, and half of all injecting drug users are infected with the Hepatitis C virus, owing to risk behaviours such as sharing syringes and needles and unsafe sex practices.

Apart from the devastation such behaviour wreaks on the individual user and his or her loved ones, drug use constitutes a serious public health concern that can only be addressed through the rational application of non-moralistic public health interventions that emphasize harm reduction programmes over punishment and censure. Harm reduction adopts a morally neutral stance to drug use, neither condoning nor opposing it. It focuses on the actual harm caused by drugs and operates on the assumption that some people will continue to inject drugs despite government repression.

HOW WE HELP

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) calls on governments to improve drug users equitable access to treatment, implement effective measures to reduce exposure to HIV and hepatitis, and promote social inclusion. These actions are in keeping with the IFRC's mandate to strengthen individual and community resilience, as highlighted in *Strategy 2020*.

At the global level

We are committed to advocating for the adoption of pragmatic and evidence-based public health policies and practices aimed at reducing the negative consequences associated with drug use and other related risk factors, such as HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C. These interventions exemplify human rights in action by seeking to alleviate hazards faced by injecting drug users, where needed, without distinction and without judgment.

The IFRC supports the work of member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies through:

- constant technical assistance, in the form of mentoring, site visits, twinning, programme development and fund-raising
- knowledge management, sharing and best practices documentation
- research and evaluation of on-going harm reduction programmes to inform scaling up of initiatives, and
- partnership building, to maximize expertise and expand comprehensive approaches (see, for example, the case study page 4).



“By extending help and compassion to our most vulnerable and marginalized fellow human beings, we assist our communities and we assist ourselves.”

Bekele Geleta,
Secretary General, IFRC

At the national and community levels

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as independent auxiliaries to their governments, enjoy a unique relationship entailing mutual responsibilities. Thus, National Societies are well positioned to advocate for creating an environment conducive to the adoption and prioritization of harm reduction programmes and policies in their respective countries

Red Cross and Red Crescent harm reduction programmes are:

- *people-centred* – programmes that meet people ‘where they are’ and aim at enhancing the existing strength and positive qualities of individuals, families and networks; developing a sense of community, building confidence and participating in problem solving are examples of participatory behaviour and social change processes being supported;
- *risk-targeted* – programmes focus on specific issues, including among others, needle exchange, methadone maintenance, education on safer injection, early warnings and drug warnings to reduce the chances of overdose, poisoning and infection, and
- *adaptable to other contexts and situations*, such as road safety, promotion of healthy life styles and HIV prevention.

IMPACT

The effectiveness of Red Cross and Red Crescent harm reduction programmes lies in the capacity to tailor them to the local context. Our strength is our volunteer network and our community-based expertise. National Societies are implementing harm reduction programmes in more than 20 countries involving some 10 million people and reaching out to more than 300,000 drug users annually.

We believe that effective harm reduction programmes contribute towards:

- decreasing the social marginalization and the subsequent vulnerability of drug users
- increasing access to health care and social services, including harm reduction programmes and a comprehensive package of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support interventions, and
- Promoting a non-repressive approach based on human rights and public health principles.

We strive to give a voice to the voiceless by providing drug users living with, and at risk of, HIV with opportunities to raise their concerns with governments and donors and to participate in decision-making and policy debate.

Red Cross Red Crescent in numbers

13 million

Active volunteers worldwide

6 billion US\$

Economic value of volunteer services to the global economy

150 million

People reached through National Society programmes annually

187

Member National Societies worldwide

300,000

Drug users supported annually

10 million

Community members reached annually

1.2 million

Syringes distributed annually

1.2 million

Condoms distributed annually



Case study

Villa Maraini – Our way out of harm

The Italian Red Cross has been active in the field of drug-related problems since 1976, when it supported the foundation of the Villa Maraini Therapeutic Community in Rome. Since then, the Villa Maraini Foundation has increased its activities and services to become a leading organization in providing assistance to drug users, as well as in the fight against the related discrimination and stigma. Today the foundation provides a wide range of free therapies to approximately 800 drug users a day.

The experience gained and the results obtained by the Foundation and the Italian Red Cross over the past 36 years have shown that it is not possible to force people to follow a therapeutic process in which they do not believe. The main focus of any treatment initiative must aim at building a trusting relationship with drug users, to help them in times of need or when they are ready to be helped. Villa Maraini firmly believes that no case is impossible to handle and even the hardest can improve his or her life and reintegrate into society if properly assisted and given the right conditions.

Since 2004 the Villa Maraini Foundation, together with the Italian Red Cross and with support from the IFRC, has provided training on harm reduction and drug abuse treatment for representatives of National Societies. The training allows Villa Maraini staff to share the knowledge and experience they have gained and supports drug abuse programmes in other countries through the National Societies.

These training sessions have enabled several National Societies to improve their skills and set up programmes in support of drug addicts and people living with HIV and AIDS. They have also reinforced a network of civil society organizations with the same approach and methodology towards drug dependency treatment and prevention of infectious diseases.

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THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.