

The Release of the Study on the Perception and Treatment of Injection Drug Users by Police Officers in the Republic of Moldova



June 13, 2014, as part of a roundtable, Promo-LEX Association released the Study on the Perception and Treatment

of Injection Drug Users by Police Officers in the Republic of Moldova, developed in cooperation with Ms. Ludmila Malcoci, Dr. habil. in Sociology, on the initiative of the Public Health Program of the Soros Foundation-Moldova.

The Study aimed at providing a thorough analysis of the Moldovan legislation on the use, production and proliferation of drugs, including injection drugs, and studying the police officers' knowledge about, attitudes toward, and treatment of injection drug users both from the perspective of police officers and that of injection drug users themselves.

The Study was carried out from January through May 2014, and

included 100 interviews with police officers from Chisinau and Balti and 7 focus groups—2 with 16 sector chiefs from police inspectorates of Chisinau and Balti and employees of Antidrug Directorate 4, Chisinau, and Bureau 4 of the North Division, Balti; 4 with 40 injection drug users from Chisinau and Balti (2 with women and 2 with men); and 1 with relevant experts. The Study results are valid only for Balti and Chisinau.

The Study revealed that, despite considerable changes in the Moldovan legislation on the penalties for drug users and the prevention of their discrimination in recent years, so far there is neither efficient enforcement mechanism in place nor a mechanism for monitoring and assessing the implementation of new measures. Given these circumstances, the discrimination of injection drug users by the police persists.

Thus, some drug users in the focus groups said that whenever a crime was committed in their block or sector, they were the first to be searched and inquired and sometimes even wrongly charged with those crimes or made by police to take on the responsibility for other crimes in that area.

Female drug users said that some of them were subjected to humiliating searches, for example in their breasts or vagina, in indecent circumstances, disregarding privacy. They also said that police officers threatened them with the deprivation of parental rights or forced to have sex with them.

On the other hand, more than two in three police officers consider that injection drug users are offenders rather than victims and associate them with criminals. 50% of police officers consider that injection drug users are infected with viral hepatitis B and C, HIV or sexually transmitted diseases; and 40% consider that most crimes in their towns are connected to drug users. One in three respondent police officers considers that most female drug users are commercial sex workers.

Given low awareness about HIV transmission routes and standard HIV safety precautions, 89% of police officers consider that dealing with injection drug users is dangerous or very dangerous. The perception of danger is nurtured by the fear of contracting HIV, viral hepatitis B and C or TB.

The research revealed a number of strong stereotypes police officers have about drug users. Thus, approximately 28% of police officers associate drug users with certain ethnics (18% think that drug use is specific mostly to Gypsies and 10% think that it is specific to Russians).

The representatives of NGOs, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the General Police Inspectorate attending the event welcomed the release of the Study, which is the first of its kind in the Republic of Moldova and presents valuable statistics, findings and recommendations.

The Study recommendations are addressed to several institutions: the Ministry of Home Affairs, the General Police Inspectorate, the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and the Supreme Court of Justice. Thus, the Study will serve as a benchmark for the development of new policies and practices in this area and for streamlining those already in place.

The electronic version of the Study in Romanian is available [here](#) at the Web site of Promo-LEX Association. The electronic version in English is coming soon.

The Study on the Perception and Treatment of Injection Drug Users by Police Officers in the Republic of Moldova is part of the project "Initial Assessment of the Perception and Treatment of Injection Drug Users by Police Officers in the Republic of Moldova" implemented by Promo-LEX Association with the support of the Soros Foundation-Moldova.

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