

Overview of the situation with coronavirus COVID-19 in South East Europe

1. What is the coronavirus situation in SEE countries regarding drug policy (especially how the officials treat our key populations)?

The situation varies from country to country. In general, key populations are side-lined and not enough covered by health care except OST which is provided for three days in some up to three weeks in other countries.

It is very critical in Albania (stock of methadone is not enough to cover the needs and procurement can be done only at the end of June), Bosnia Herzegovina (the only organisation providing material Margina has stock until June and then will most probably close), Bulgaria (services closed), Romania (where the "ghetto" in Bucharest is an extremely critical) and Montenegro (also in a closed suburb of Podgorica with majority Roma population).

Some countries took measures in time, like Slovenia where OST has been prepared before the outbreak (thanks to good work of Kastelic and his teams) and Croatia where the whole medical system and governmental institutions coordinate well. In North Macedonia, the [Foundation Open Society - Macedonia](#) have donated more than 10.000 humanitarian packages (food and hygienic materials) to the most vulnerable Roma families, including people who use drugs and sex workers.

A very specific problem, present all around the region, is lack of food for key populations. For many of them, their traditional income (begging, sexual work, collecting secondary materials for recycling) is cut. Starving, malnutrition and lack of basic hygienic materials can be additional dangers in this situation.

It would be good to undertake a quick survey to collect epidemiological data, a quick screening, to learn about how sensitive and endangered the vulnerable populations are. That could be a strong advocacy tool.

2. What happened with the treatment of the key populations and which are their most important problems

Some countries simply issues orders to close the drop in centres: Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Serbia. In other, centres are operating either with reduced working times (usually three hours, at least three days a week), distributing materials through windows or at the door, or distribution is organised by outreach teams. Several organisations provide psychiatric support on-line or by phone, some also counselling, case management of users and social services handling.

Wherever possible, other services are still provided, including HIV testing in North Macedonia and Serbia.

All organisations have done a good job on informing users about the epidemic and on protective measures they should exercise. Throughout the region information from international organisations and especially INPUD was translated into local language and shared, mainly electronically.

In general, except for some cases in Albania and Slovenia, users are behaving well and respecting all advice from organisations and general medical authorities. An interesting case is in Split, Croatia, where users took initiative and helped organising distribution on self-service model in specific neighbourhoods.

As far as we know, situation with coronavirus in prisons is under control.

We heard proposals for regional purchase and storing harm reduction materials for emergency and solidarity purpose.

3. What is new with the drug supply and how the people who use drugs are dealing with it?

Around the region, there are no major disturbance on the drug market. The price of marihuana has raised. Some old and almost forgotten substances appeared again. In some countries, lack of Benzodiazepines is observed.

A solution can be to offer subscribing to OST, but this is not allowed.

We expect that the situation can change but not very soon.

4. How are your organisations dealing with the situations, your staff and their protection and other problems?

The organisations have seriously taken the situation and do their best to protect their staff. Unfortunately, there are not enough protection materials, especially masks and disinfectors. Organisations have introduced shorter working times and organised shifts. There are problems with those who live far from the job due to lack of public transport. Managers are under high pressure and pretty exhausted.

Organisations expect that project budgets planned for regular services will be cut for at least 20 - 30% while some may be cancelled.

In agreement with the staff, some organisations have lowered salaries, either because of cuts of donations or to ensure that at least lower salaries will be paid until the end of the year.

Geographic distribution of COVID-19

Official data from the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#)
Situation at 26 May 2020

	Cases	Deaths
Albania	1004	32
Bosnia Herzegovina	2406	146
Bulgaria	2433	130
Croatia	2244	100
Greece	2882	172
Kosovo	1038	30
Montenegro	324	9
North Macedonia	1999	113
Romania	18283	1197
Serbia	11193	239
Slovenia	1469	106

Annexes:

- Annex 1 - Information received from countries of South East Europe
- Annex 2 - DPNSEE activities during the coronavirus outbreak