

Impact of COVID-19 on drug services and clients (post lockdown) – focus on OST and opioids in Luxembourg

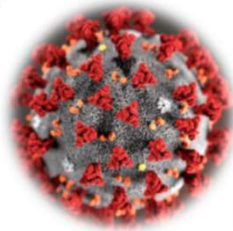
Point Focal Luxembourgeois de l'Observatoire Européen des Drogues et des Toxicomanies

Nadine Berndt, PhD

2020 TDI expert meeting, 05 November 2020



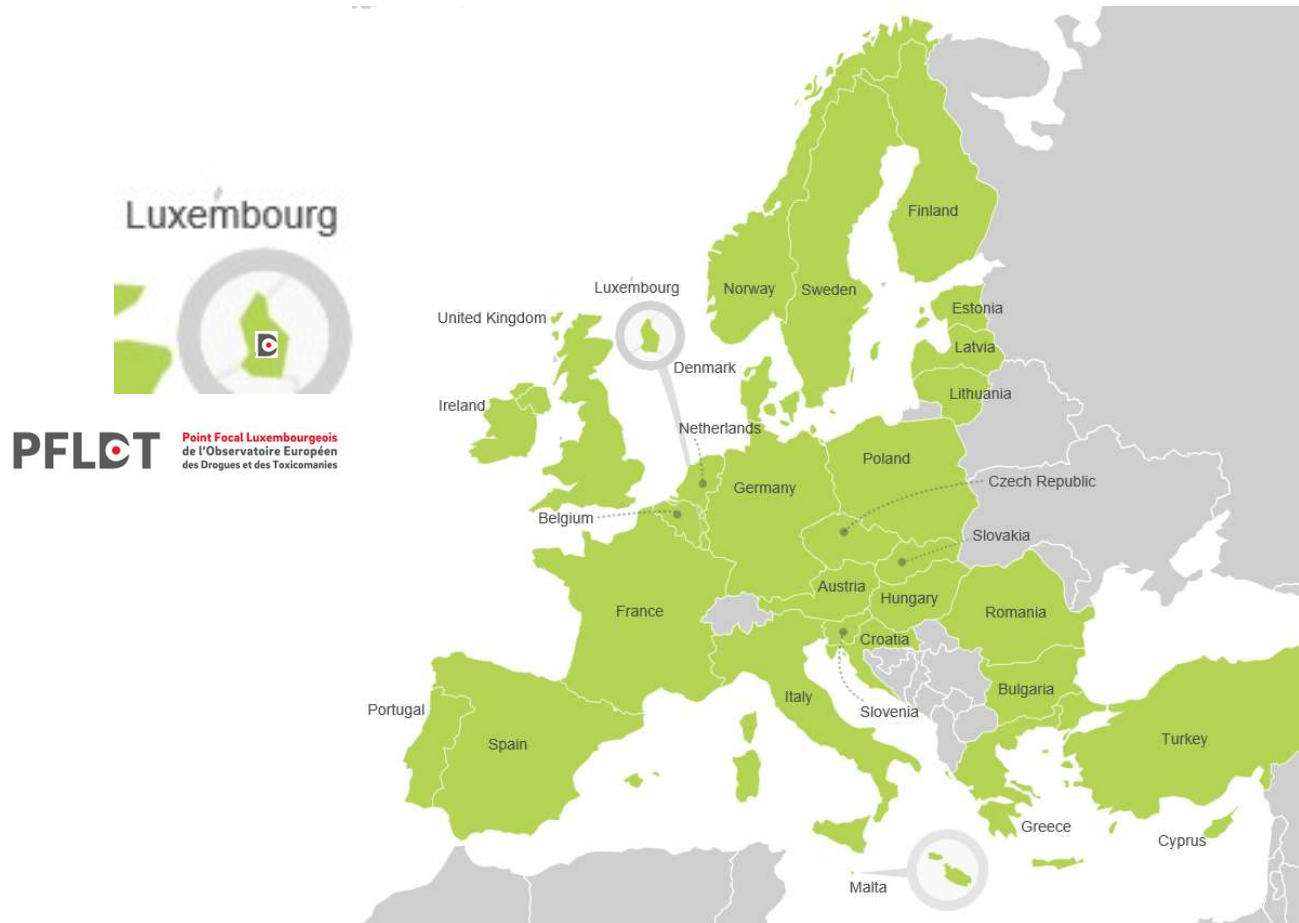
COVID-19 : LA STRATÉGIE DE TEST AU LUXEMBOURG



Agenda

- Part I: Implementation of a new low-threshold OST programme
 - Context and background
 - (Post-)lockdown solutions by harm reduction service providers
 - Rapid implementation of first low-threshold OST programme
- Part II: Quantitative study among PWUD to assess impact of COVID-19 and evaluate new low-threshold OST programme
 - Background and methods
 - Main results: demographics and drug user pattern
 - Main results: use of Abrigado/JDH services and low-threshold OST
- Part III: Questions and discussion

Luxembourg Focal Point of the EMCDDA



Context and background

- Consequences of COVID-19 restrictive measures:
 - Changes in illicit drug markets and drug supply - risk of emerging shortage of drugs (opioids) and higher prices due to closure of national borders, mobility restrictions and empty streets
 - Disruptions in harm reduction services (limitation of places at DCRs, closure of contact café, etc.)
 - Risk of lower access to OST associated with tighter controls
- This, in turn, may lead to:
 - ↑ risk of overdoses: injecting alone + the use of alternative substances (more potent, adulterated and inferior quality)
 - ↑ risk of relapse towards opioids
 - ↑ risk of violence and acute mental health problems
- PWUD more exposed to health and social risks -> particularly vulnerable to disruptions in services due to COVID-19 restrictive measures
- Widespread difficulties for PWUD to meet basic housing, food and hygiene needs due to severe economic challenges and restrictive measures

(Post-)lockdown solutions by service providers

- As a result of the national measures that have been implemented to contain and mitigate the pandemic of the COVID-19 across Luxembourg, drug services are still facing unprecedented challenges to continue providing adequate care to PWUD
- Overall, the continuity of essential treatment and harm reduction services remained/remains guaranteed, although services still struggle with reduced staff and operation changes + reorganisation of service provision
- OST programmes continue to initiate and provide treatment:
 - extend the length of medication prescriptions, provide take-home dosages and increase availability of long-acting OST

Rapid implementation of first low-threshold OST programme

- A new low-threshold medical service and OST programme implemented shortly after the COVID-19 lockdown at the main low-threshold centre “Abrigado” in Luxembourg City
- Target group: marginalised drug users experiencing a situation of increased social exclusion, with financial shortcomings or without social security
- Aim:
 - Consultations to identify health status and needs
 - Definition, proposition and documentation of individualised treatment: prescription of essential substitution medication or reduction of "imposed" withdrawal due to the altered illicit drug market
 - Follow-up: systematic communication between medical doctors involved and regular evaluation/adaptation of the OST
- Partner institutions: Close collaboration between the Ministry of Health, the Abrigado CNDS, the “Jugend-an Drogenhëllef” Foundation, the association “Médecins du Monde” and a local pharmacy in LU



Quantitative study among PWUD to assess impact of COVID-19 and evaluate new OST programme

Background and methods

- Aim: to assess the impact of COVID-19 restrictive measures on PWUD user patterns and to evaluate the first low-threshold OST programme
- Methods:
 - In total, 120 clients from the Abrigado CNDS and 75 clients from the Foundation Youth-and Drug Aid (Jugend- an Drogenhëllef) were invited to complete a self-administered quantitative questionnaire (3 pages in French or German)
 - Study coordinated by the PFLDT – data collection between June 16, 2020 and August 28, 2020
 - In total, N=138 (74.6%) of the PWUD agreed to participate
 - Statistical analyses conducted on n=120 respondents (2 respondents completed less than 33% of the questions and n=16 identified as duplicates - eliminated for statistical analyses)

Quantitative study among PWUD to assess impact of COVID-19 and evaluate new OST programme

Main results (N=120) (1)

- **Demographics:**



- Predominantly male (76.7%); mean age of 42.65 years (min: 21 years; max: 66 years)
- Slightly more than half of the respondents (51.7%) born in Luxembourg
- Housing situation: 53.3% stable, 23.3% homeless, 13.3% living in a night shelter
- Just over half (56.7%) of the respondents reported having a housing situation that would allow them to comply with COVID-19 lockdown measures vs. 38.3% who could not comply



Drug use (main drug) before and after COVID-19 lockdown/restrictive measures:

- ↓ Opioids (heroin or a substitute): 60.8% before and 57.5% after
- ↑ Cocaine (powder and crack): 28.3% before and 30% after
- ≠ Speedball: 2.5% before and 2.5% after
- ↑ Cannabis: 5.8% before and 6.7% after
- ↓ Hypnotics and sedatives: 1.7% before and 0.8% after
- ↑ Alcohol: 0.8% before and 1.7% after



Routes of administration, frequency of use, and risk behavior (sharing of materials, overdoses) hardly changed comparing the situation before and after COVID-19 lockdown

Quantitative study among PWUD to assess impact of COVID-19 and evaluate new OST programme

Main results (N=120) (2)



Use of harm reduction services:

- The majority (80%) of respondents indicated that they currently use the supervised DCRs
- 56.7% indicated that they currently use the medical services



FURTHER RESEARCH REQUIRED

- 15.8% started OST after the COVID-19 lockdown
- The average age of PWID in OST is about 29 years



The availability of clean and sterile syringes and other injection equipment, hygiene materials, essential medication, medical care, condoms, and food and beverages mainly indicated as more than sufficient (10% - 27.5%)



The availability of OST, places for personal hygiene, availability/opening hours of DCRs, and sleeping places mostly indicated as insufficient (10.8% - 37.5%)

Luxembourg Focal Point of the EMCDDA

COVID-19 projects – “business not as usual”

MINI EUROPEAN WEB SURVEY ON DRUGS + COVID-19

COVID-19 + DRUGUES

Les drogues sont présentes dans la vie de beaucoup d'entre nous.

La drogue, le COVID-19 et moi.

Les drogues sont présentes dans la vie de beaucoup d'entre nous.
Sécurisé, rapide, anonyme.

JE PARTICIPE

EMCDDA « TRENDSPOTTER » STUDIES - IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DIFFERENT DOMAINS



IMPACT COVID-19 ON HRDU AND OST

SURVEILLANCE DE L'ÉPIDÉMIE CORONAVIRUS
(surveillance de mai 2020)

Flash-COVID N°2 : L'impact de la crise COVID-19 sur les usagers de drogues et les services d'encadrement spécialisés





PFLCOT

Point Focal Luxembourgeois
de l'Observatoire Européen
des Drogues et des Toxicomanies

Thank you for your attention and stay safe!

nadine.berndt@ms.etat.lu

rita.seixas@ms.etat.lu



LE GOUVERNEMENT
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG
Ministère de la Santé

Direction de la santé

PFLCOT

Point Focal Luxembourgeois
de l'Observatoire Européen
des Drogues et des Toxicomanies



European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction