



# High drug-related death mortality in Finland

Special focus on young adults and teenagers

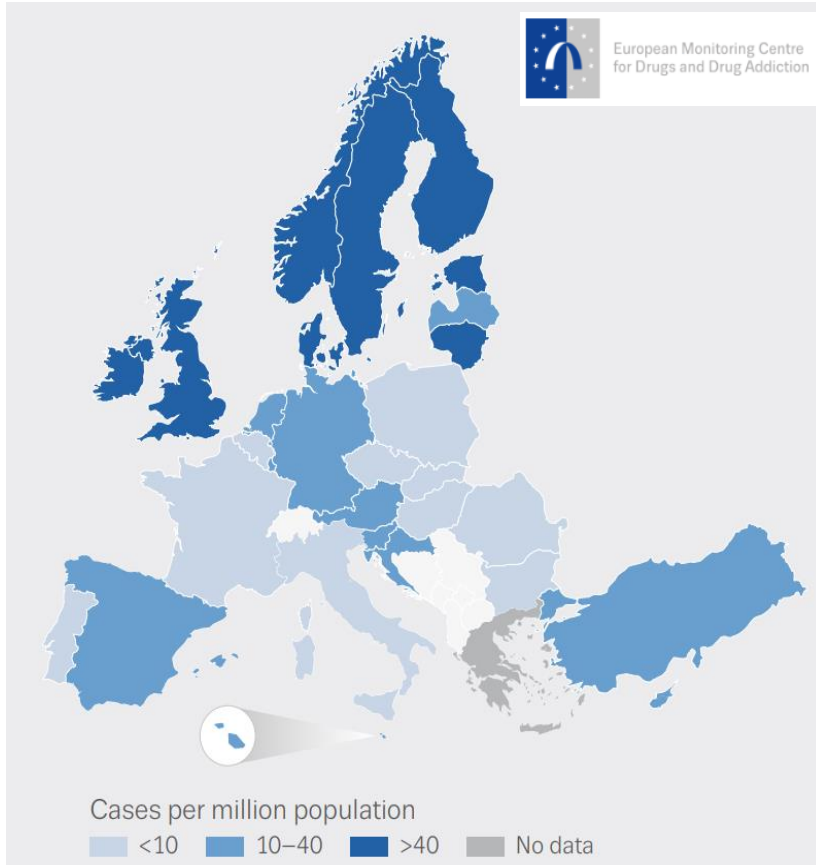
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23.11.2021

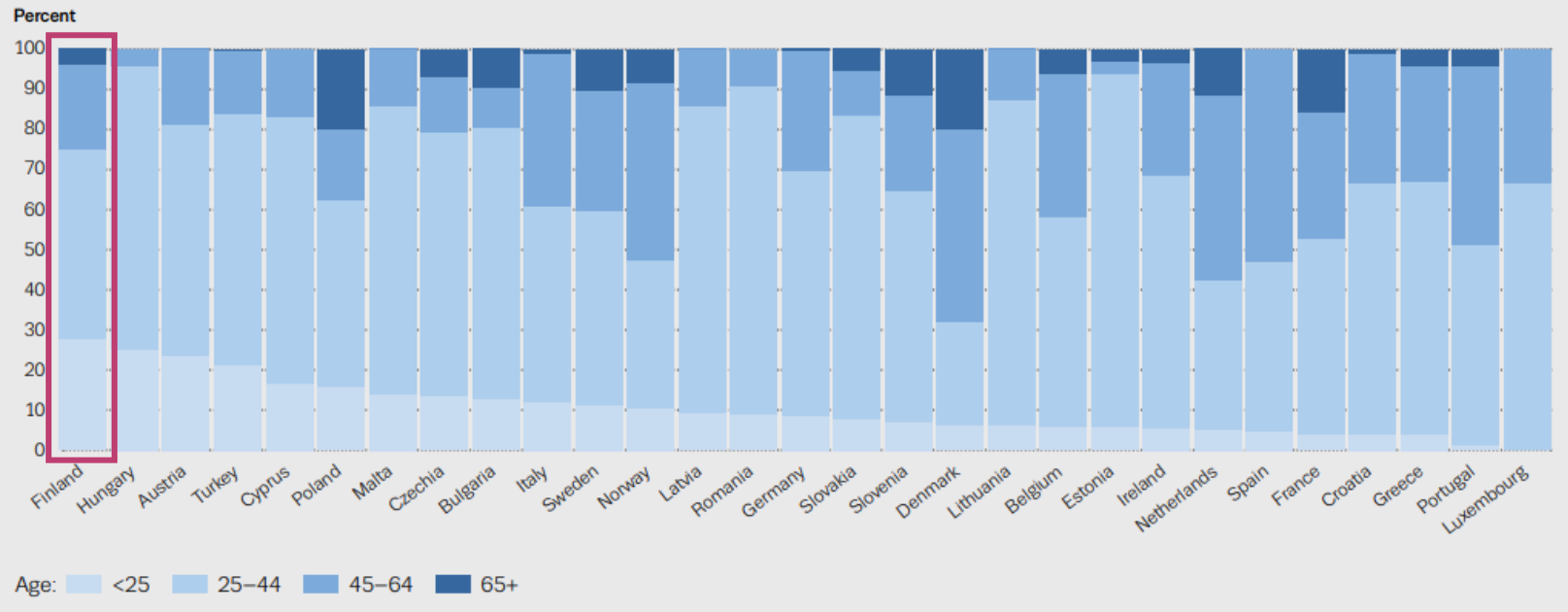
Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare

# Plenty of overdose deaths, large proportion young

Drug-induced deaths, mortality rated among adults aged 15-64



Age distribution of drug-induced deaths reported in the European Union, Norway and Turkey in 2020 or most recent year



Images from <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/>

# High-risk drug use and drug-related deaths

## HIGH-RISK DRUG USE

Estimate from 2017:

**31 000 – 44 300** high-risk users  
→ **0.91 – 1.29%** of Finns aged 15-64

Number nearly doubled from 2012

- Particular increase in 15- to 24-year-olds

## DRUG-RELATED DEATHS

Increase since 2016

- Especially among 15- to 24-year-olds

**Population:**  
5.5 million

**Overall deaths:**  
55 000

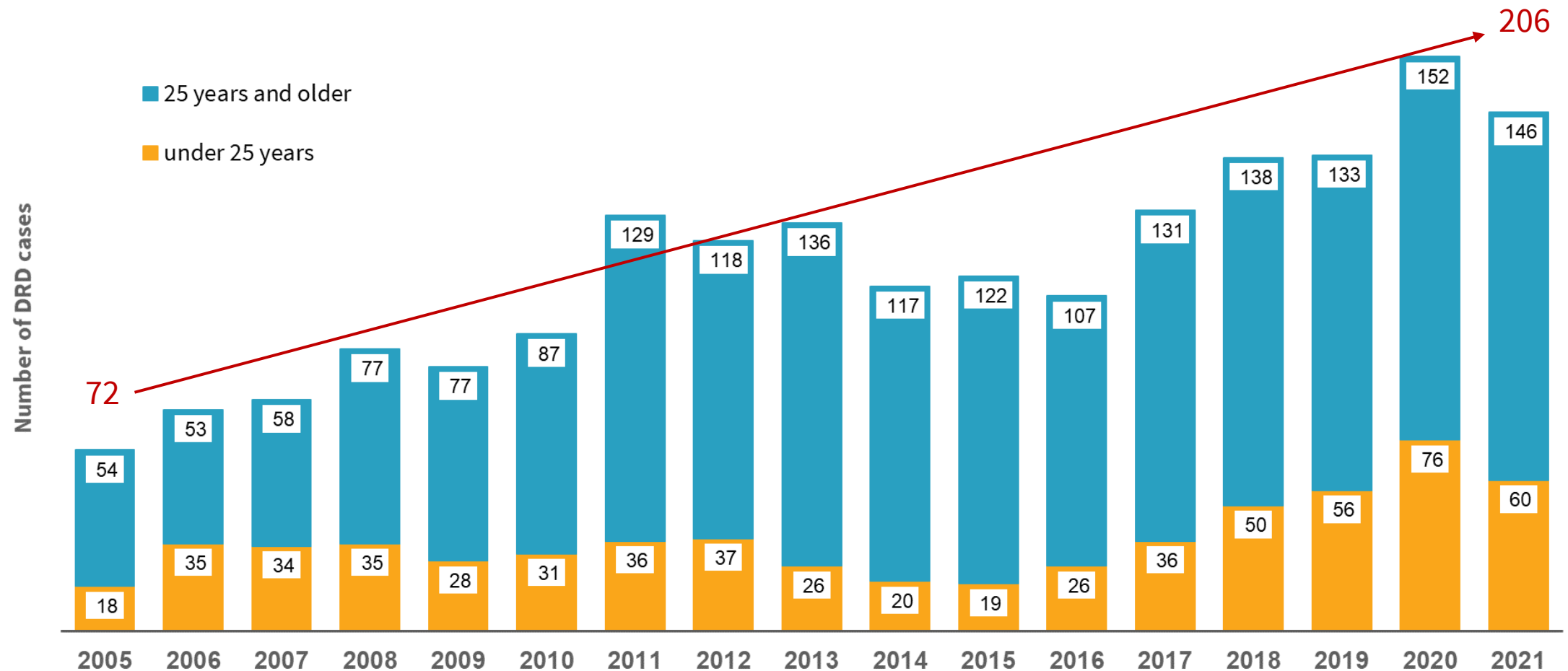
**Drug-related  
deaths in 2021:**  
206

**Drug findings in  
fatalities in 2021:**  
505

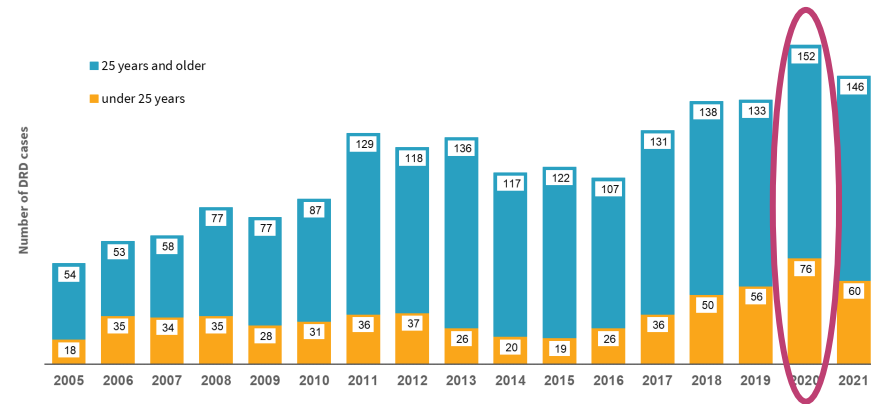
**Mean age in drug-related deaths in 2021:**  
33 years



# Drug-related deaths in Finland (selection D)



# What happened in 2020?

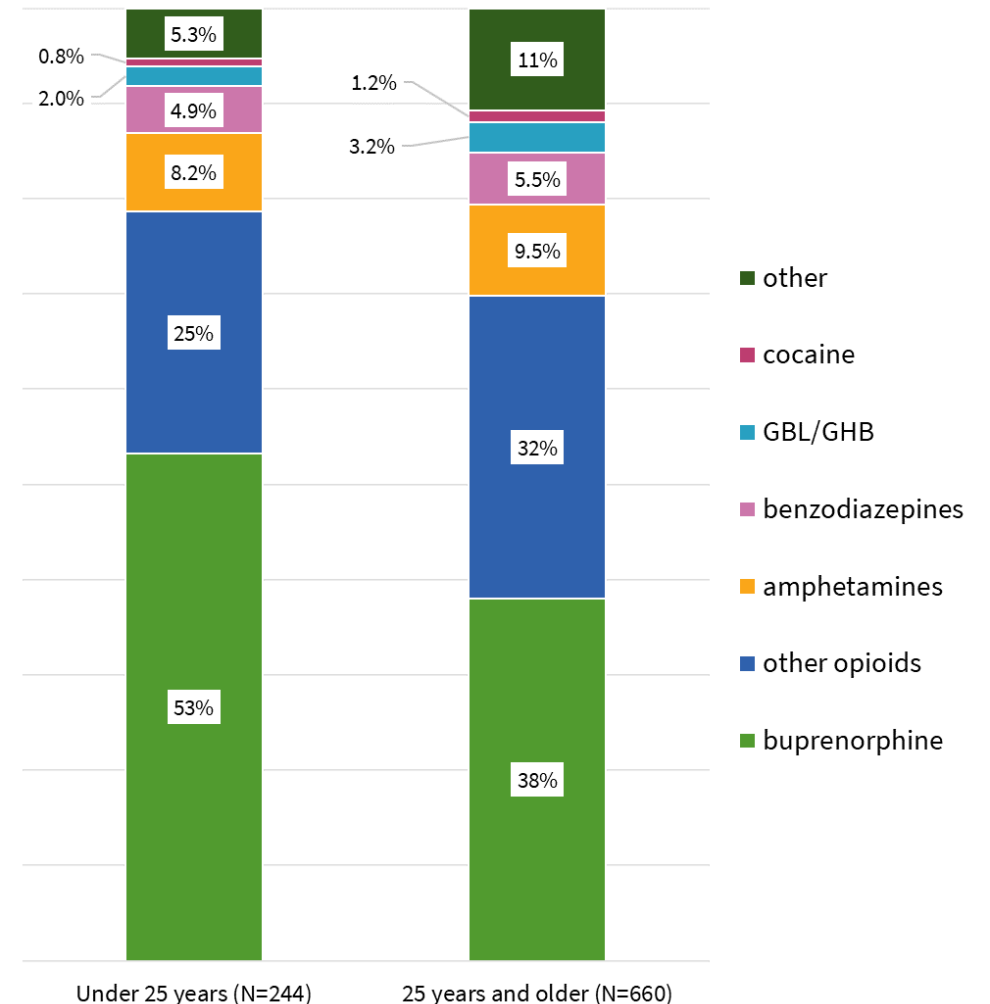


- Covid-19
  - Increase in the number of drug findings in post-mortem toxicology
  - Likely due to lock-down that reduced access to services
  - Reduced harm reduction led to increased harm and ultimately excess deaths
- Or are we seeing a beginning of a decrease in DRD in 2021?

# Study on fatal drug overdoses in 2016-2020

- 905 fatal poisonings of which 244 (27%) under 25 years
- Mean age at death decreased 34.3 → 31.7 years and the proportion of those under 25 years increased
- Number of underaged (<18 years) increased
- Among those under 25 years:
  - Number of females varied between 6 and 17
  - Percentage of females (24%) was higher than among older individuals (11%)
- Vast majority were poly-drug poisonings (in both age groups)
- Most adolescent poisonings were related to buprenorphine (with sedatives) and other opioids
- Less alcohol than among the older individuals

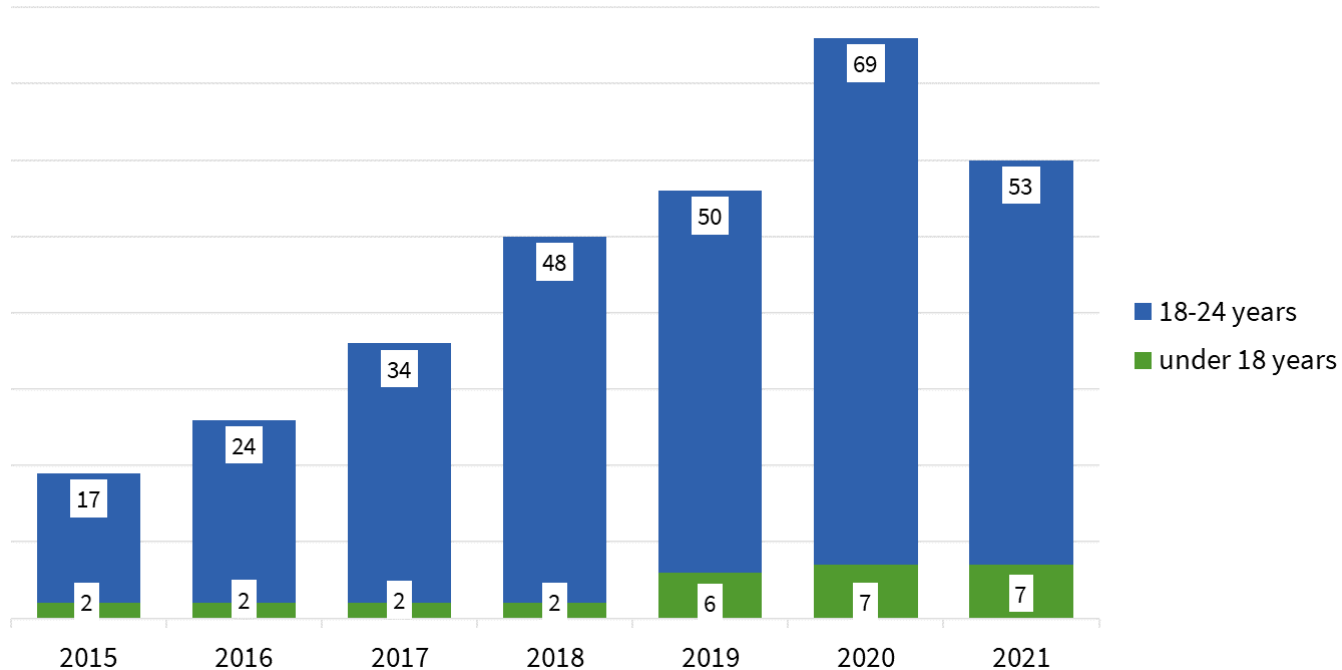
Primary finding in fatal poisonings



The results were published in the Duodecim Medical Journal (in Finnish) in June 2022

(Kriikku P, Tikkanen J, Ojanperä I. Duodecim. 2022;138(13-14):1251-6.)

# Underaged (<18 years) victims of fatal drug overdose



## Fatal poisoning by buprenorphine, amphetamine and alprazolam

15 years

- Had used various drugs for at least a year
- Evening before death drank beer and consumed Subutex at friends' house
- Seemed very intoxicated
- At some point friends found unresponsive

## Fatal poisoning by buprenorphine

17 years

- Found dead in bed
- History of alcohol use
- ADHD with prescribed medication
- Other drug findings: amphetamine and alcohol

## Fatal poisoning by ecstasy and clonazepam

15 years

- Had at least experimented with drugs
- Self-mutilation
- At friend's house complained feeling sick and eventually went unresponsive
- CPR unsuccessful

# Solitary death or death after party?

From death certificates of individuals <25 years:

*”Had spent time at friends apartment. At some point passed out/went to sleep on a bed on which was found dead the next morning.”*

*”Had used drugs with friends. At some point fell asleep. Was found dead on the same spot in the morning.”*

- Traditionally the typical overdose death in Finland: found dead at home
- However, adolescents are often in company of friends before death



# Fatal overdose in adolescents

## Risk factors - Points of intervention

- History of drug use, poly-drug use, injecting
- Drug use in the family or surrounding community
  - social services, possibilities for stronger intervention
- Psychiatric comorbidity
  - need for more comprehensive treatment approaches
- Non-fatal overdoses and witnessing an overdose
  - targeted interventions starting at the hospital



# Summary

- Increasing high-risk drug use
- Increasing drug poisoning mortality
- Low mean age at death and growing number of young fatalities
- Adolescents die often among friends
- Interventions:
  - *The Finnish expert group for the prevention of drug-related deaths*
  - *“Young Despair” –project about to start*

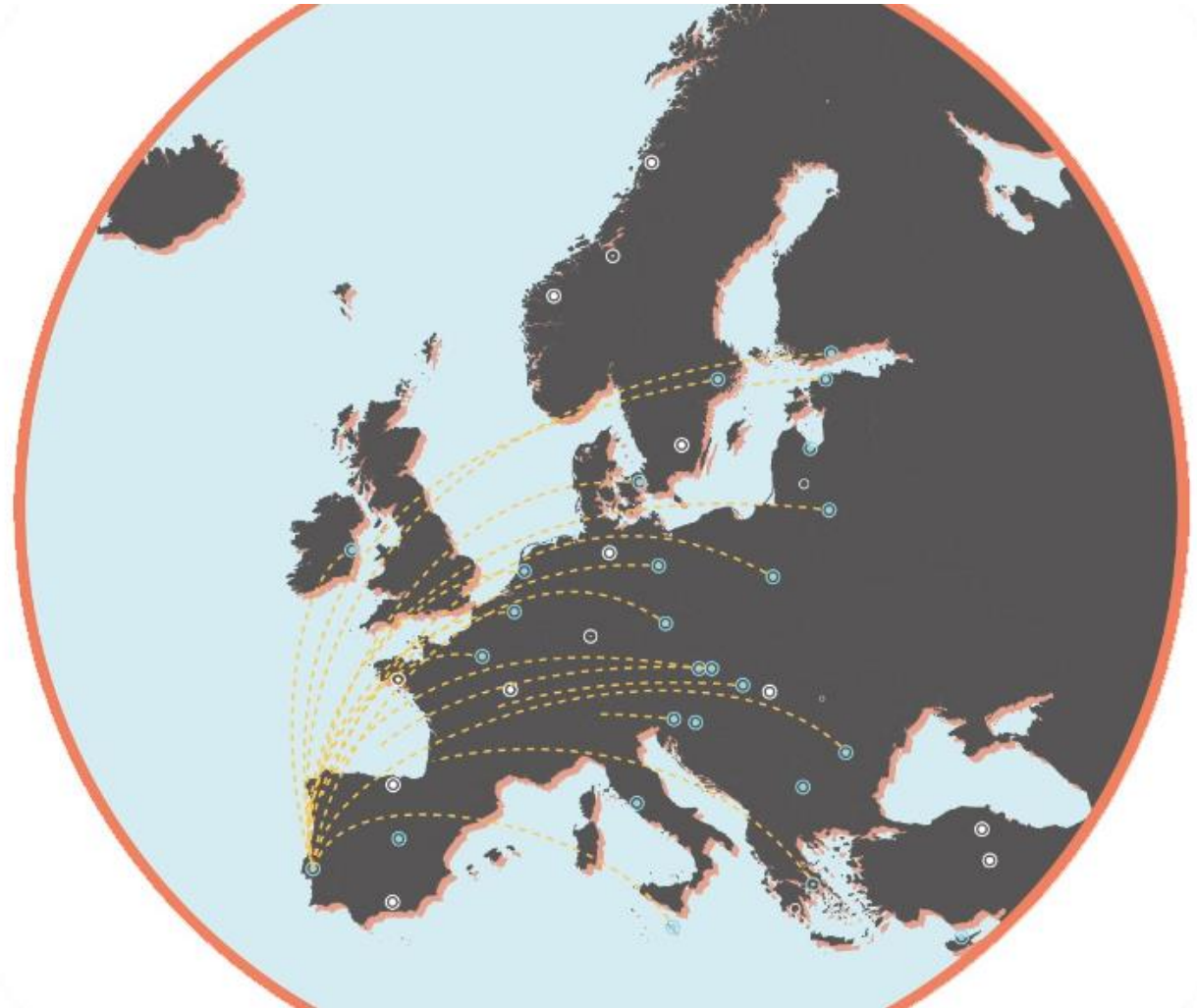
*Have a look!*

***POSTER by Claudia Mariottini on Thursday:***  
*Opioid agonist treatment status preceding buprenorphine-related death in Finland*

# REITOX member

**Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) is the Finnish focal point for the EMCDDA.**

THL is a member of the European Information Network on Drugs and Drug Addiction (REITOX).



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