

Drugs and addictions: The case of Athens

"Holistic interventions for
homeless users of
psychoactive substances: the
example of the IONIS Hostel"



ΔΗΜΟΣ ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ



European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction



**LISBON
ADDICTIONS
2022**

The Strategy of Municipality of Athens

The strategy of Municipality of Athens, regarding drugs and addiction:

- 1) puts the drug user at the center
- 2) respects his rights
- 3) doesn't turn a blind eye to the problem
- 4) advocates and promotes necessary institutional reforms
- 5) claims jurisdictions in order to provide solutions and solve problems

New Approach to cover the needs

In Athens we apply a new “Holistic” approach, which:

Emphasize harm reduction approach while planning prevention and integration/re-integration interventions

Adopting practices that contribute to destigmatizing the P.W.U.D. community

Seeks collaboration with competent public and private sector agencies and organizations (ministries, therapeutic programs, NGOs, local partners, and groups)

Establish international collaborations, and participate in relevant international networks (Fast Track Cities, Healthy Cities, etc.)

Monitoring scientific developments in the field of drugs and addictions

Background

- ✓ Extensive drug use in public areas - at least 5 spots with "open drug scenes"
- ✓ Complete lack of drug consumption rooms and shelters in the center of Athens
- ✓ Homeless drug users, alcoholics, and mentally ill - about 500 people
- ✓ Lack of shelter structures for women drug users, who are also a high-risk group of people for possible abuse (physically or sexually). Estimated number: 70-100 people
- ✓ Inadequate services on the street (streetwork teams) - lack of coordination between them. Most of the street worker teams work from Monday to Friday in the morning hours. Therefore, there is a gap in these services, which should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ✓ Inadequate coverage of drug users' needs
- ✓ Lack of specialized staff



Challenges before the achievement...

April 2019

Plus, we had also to face:

- Almost no escort services for drug users (like peer navigation), to help them access services (hospitals, municipal clinics, other public services, etc.).
- Insufficient access of drug users to the health system and other social services.
- Deaths due to overdose. Impossibility to record the exact number of drug-related deaths, total absence of programs for distribution of naloxone (antidote for opioid overdose, e.g. heroin), "hostile" institutional/legal framework for the administration of naloxone by professionals working in the field, resulting in deaths due to non-direct intervention.
- "Hostile" institutional/legal framework - limitation of municipality's jurisdictions.
- Stigma and prejudice against the P.W.U.D community.
- Covid19 pandemic

Progress has been made in the last 3 years...

Despite the Covid 19 pandemic and the particular conditions and difficulties it brought, Municipality of Athens, in collaboration with other organizations and agencies, has planned, organized and implemented or is currently implementing actions:

In the area of prevention:

Prevention centers in each municipal district (we have already established a new one), extroversion of Prevention Centers to the Community, Utilization of technology.

In the area of harm reduction

- ✓ Hostel for homeless drug users (a collaboration between Municipality of Athens and KYADA, OKANA, KETHEA)
- ✓ Mobile DCR units (a collaboration between Municipality of Athens and OKANA). We are in the final phase. In a few months the units will be on the streets.
- ✓ Streetwork reinforcement (KYADA). We increased the staff (we doubled it) and also increased the number of interventions.
- ✓ Intervention of diagnostic controls and linkage with the health system (Municipality of Athens in collaboration with the Hellenic Scientific Society for AIDS & Sexually Transmitted & Emerging Diseases research, Prometheus and Positive Voice)
- ✓ Overdose Treatment - Naloxone Programme. (The City of Athens collaborates with the Hellenic Scientific Society for AIDS & Sexually Transmitted & Emerging Diseases research, Prometheus and Positive Voice and receives financial and technical support from Bloomberg Philanthropies and Vital Strategies).

Progress has been made in the last 3 years...

Legislative Regulations/Changes

- ✓ Legislative regulations/changes for DCRs (expanding jurisdiction to city government. Operation of mobile DCR units),
- ✓ Allowing more than 20 active drug users to be housed per residential facility
- ✓ Changing the conditions for the use and administration of naloxone in case of overdose
- ✓ Granting social assistance also to persons living in homeless shelters for drug addicts.

Next steps forward...

Prevention:

- ✓ the two branches of the Prevention Center "Athina-Ygeia" will be working, in order to cover all 7 municipal districts of Athens with this kind of services.
- ✓ Reinforcement of the staff with the necessary new recruitments,
- ✓ Increasing the extroversion of Prevention Centers by implementing more interventions in the community,
- ✓ Using social media to inform citizens and targeting prevention activities in populations where the risk of drug use is considered high.
- ✓ Improving the logistical infrastructure with the aim of improving both the working conditions of the staff in the prevention centers and the services offered.

Next steps forward...

Harm Reduction:

- ✓ Ensure seamless operation of the Hostel for homeless drug users by taking all necessary steps to hire additional staff and renew the contracts of existing Hostel staff.
- ✓ Implement a program of holistic intervention for intravenous drug users in collaboration with specialized agencies to eliminate hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS in Athens, which could include the operation of a day care center.
- ✓ Implementation of a program to study the mortality of intravenous drug users in collaboration with the Hellenic Scientific Society of AIDS & Sexually Transmitted & Emerging Diseases, Prometheus and the Positive Voice and the economic and technical support of Bloomberg Philanthropies/Vital Strategies.
- ✓ Establish a day care center and Hostel for homeless women drug users.
- ✓ Forging ahead, in collaboration with all agencies involved, to a better coordination of streetwork interventions for homeless people/drug users
- ✓ Continue the efforts to expand access to naloxone by drug users and their families members and implementation of Take Home Naloxone programs

Hostel “IONIS” – an innovative achievement

The first hostel in the center of Athens for drug users

- ✓ Operated in the center of Athens (41 Chalkokondyli st.) from April 2020 to December 2021.
- ✓ Cooperation of the Municipality of Athens with the Reception and Solidarity Center of the Municipality of Athens (KYADA), the Organization Against Drugs (OKANA) and the Treatment Center for Dependent People (KETHEA).
- ✓ Max capacity: 70 people.
- ✓ Hosts homeless active drug users, for up to 6 months. In some cases, this period may be expanded.
- ✓ Provisions: Housing, food (3 meals per day), personal hygiene, clothing, primary health care, psychosocial care, referral to addiction treatment programs, and connection with social services.
- ✓ Staff: Nurses, Social workers, Psychologists, Specialist therapists

Since January 2022, the Hostel has been relocated in another building, in the center of Athens, also.

(3 Kerameikou st., Hotel my Athens).



Data (21 months of operation)

The Hostel hosted a total of 220 people

175 men (79.5%)

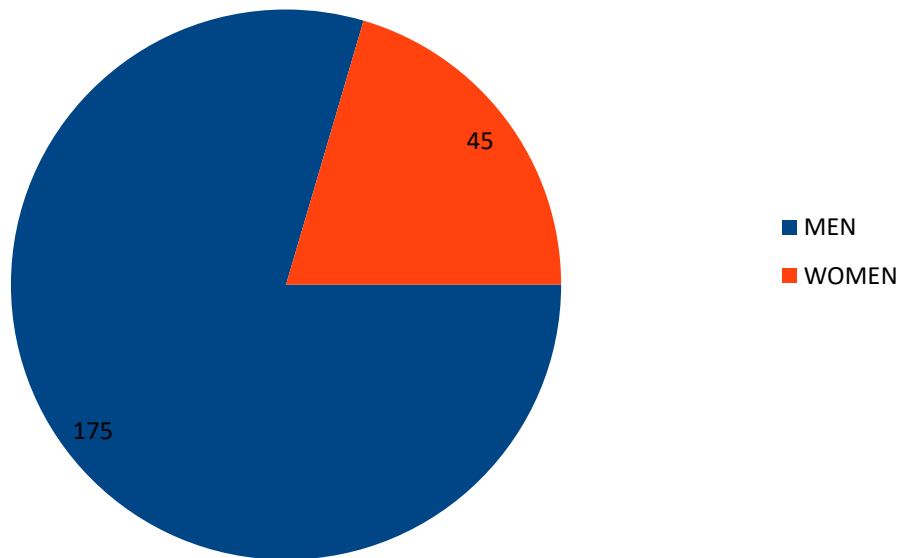
45 women (20.5%).

Out of 220 people

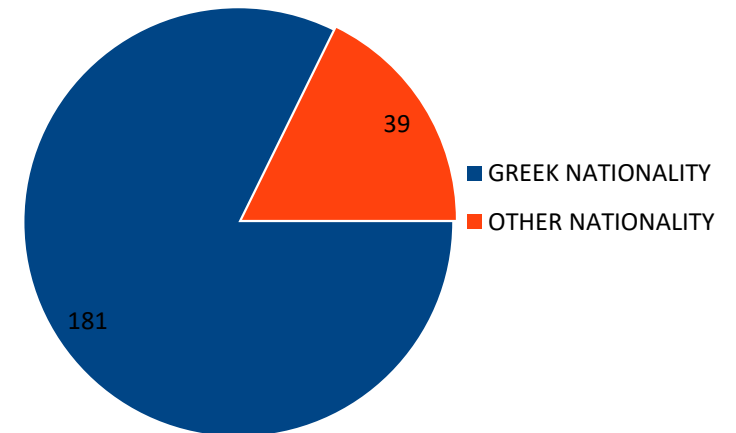
181 Greeks (82.3%)

39 other nationalities (17.7%)

GENDER OF BENEFICIARIES



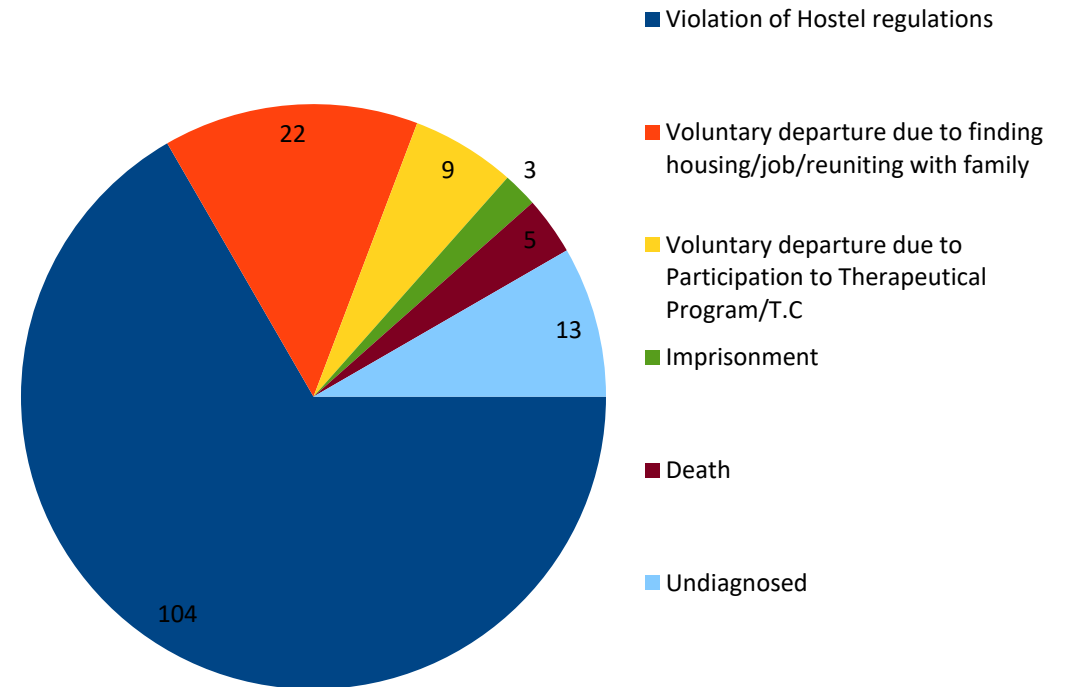
NATIONALITY OF BENEFICIARIES



Data – Hostel IONIS

- From 22/04/2020 to 31/12/2021, a total of 156 people left/departed from the Hostel. 123 men (78.8%) and 33 women (21.2%).
- Causes of leaving:
 - Violation of Hostel regulations (104 persons, 66.67%)
 - Voluntary departure due to finding housing/job/reuniting with family (22 persons, 14.1%)
 - Voluntary departure due to participation in Therapeutical Program (9 persons, 5.8%)
 - Imprisonment/incarceration (3 persons, 1.9%)
 - Deaths (5 persons, 3.2%)
 - Undiagnosed (13 persons, 8.3%)

DEPARTURES/REASONS



Data IONIS – Therapeutic programs

During the 1st year of operation of the Hostel, out of 182 people who were hosted in the facilities, 62 were already following a therapeutic program before they entered the Hostel

84 people followed a therapeutic program during their stay at the Hostel

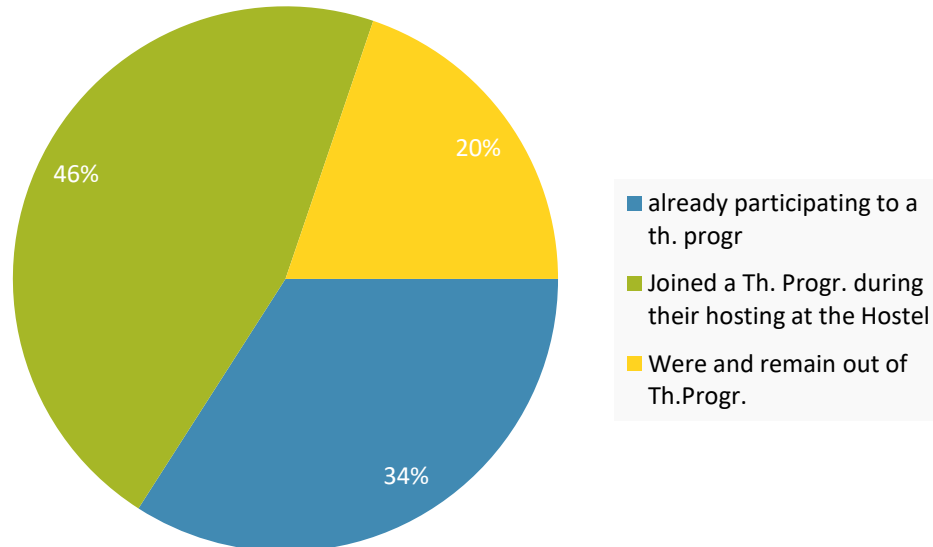
70 joined an OKANA OST treatment program

5 joined a KETHEA program

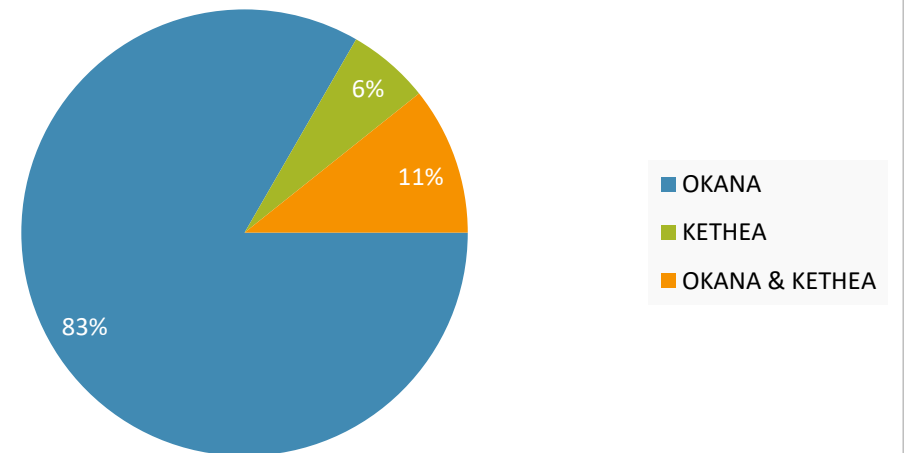
9 were connected with programs of both Organizations

36 did not connect with any therapeutic program

LINK TO THER. PROGRAMS



THERAP. PROGRAMS



Data IONIS – Health Care

During the 1st year of operation of the Hostel, among all the people receiving medication:

63.8% started receiving psychiatric therapy while they were in the Hostel

11.8% started receiving pathological care while they were in the Hostel

MEDICATION FOR PSYCH. REASONS



TOTAL PSYC MEDICATION

PSYC MEDICATION STARTED AT HOSTEL

MEDICATION FOR PATHOLOGICAL REASONS



TOTAL PATHOL MEDICATION

PATHOL MEDICATION STARTED AT HOSTEL

Data IONIS - referrals

MEMORANDUM OF COOPERATION ON LINK TO HEALTHCARE FOR HOMELESS AND INTRAVENOUS DRUG USERS WITH HCV AND HIV, LIVING IN ATHENS MUNICIPALITY FACILITIES DURING LOCKDOWNS DUE TO COVID 19"

Competent Partners: The Municipality of Athens, The Reception & Solidarity Center of the Municipality of Athens (KY.A.D.A.), The Hellenic Scientific Society for Research on AIDS & Sexually Transmitted & Emerging Diseases, The Association of Liver Patients "O PROMITHEAS", The HIV Positive Association of Greece "POSITIVE VOICE"

SHORT REPORT

- **51 BENEFICIARIES**, HOSTED AT "HOSTEL IONIS", PARTICIPATED IN THE RAPID HIV/HBV/HCV TESTS OF THE PROGRAM.
- **7 HIV POSITIVE CASES WERE RECORDED**, of which: Six (6) positive cases were already receiving treatment in various Hospital's Special Infections Units. One (1) new positive case has been linked through the Program and has started treatment. **21 HCV POSITIVE CASES (MONO-INFECTIONS) WERE RECORDED**, of which 13 were linked to a hepatologist for blood tests, through the Program. Four of them have started treatment or are undergoing treatment.
- The Program began its activity at the "IONIS" Hostel on 16/06/2021 and by its end had offered to 51 beneficiaries: FREE nursing care, diagnosis materials, interconnection support, and incentives to participate in diagnosis and treatment.



Data IONIS – covid19

- The spread rate of coronavirus in the hostel was low.
- Specifically, until September 2021, only five (5) cases of covid19 infections were noticed. Three (3) of them had to be hospitalized in a hospital's covid unit, while two were quarantined in their rooms, within the hostel.
- 100's of RAPID TESTS and/or molecular tests were carried out inside the Hostel (by EODY mobile units or by our nursing staff) as well as at the 5th Municipal Clinic of the Municipality of Athens and the Friendship Club of the 1st Municipal Community of Athens.
- There was a continuous supply of sanitary material (masks, gloves, disinfectants, etc.) to prevent the spread of the covid19 pandemic inside the hostel
- There was continuous surveillance and prompting for adherence to precautionary measures.
- Moreover, there was a daily temperature measurement on the beneficiaries and staff.

Important!!! **VACCINATIONS**: Over 70% of our beneficiaries had been vaccinated, **voluntarily!**



Data IONIS – referrals to social services

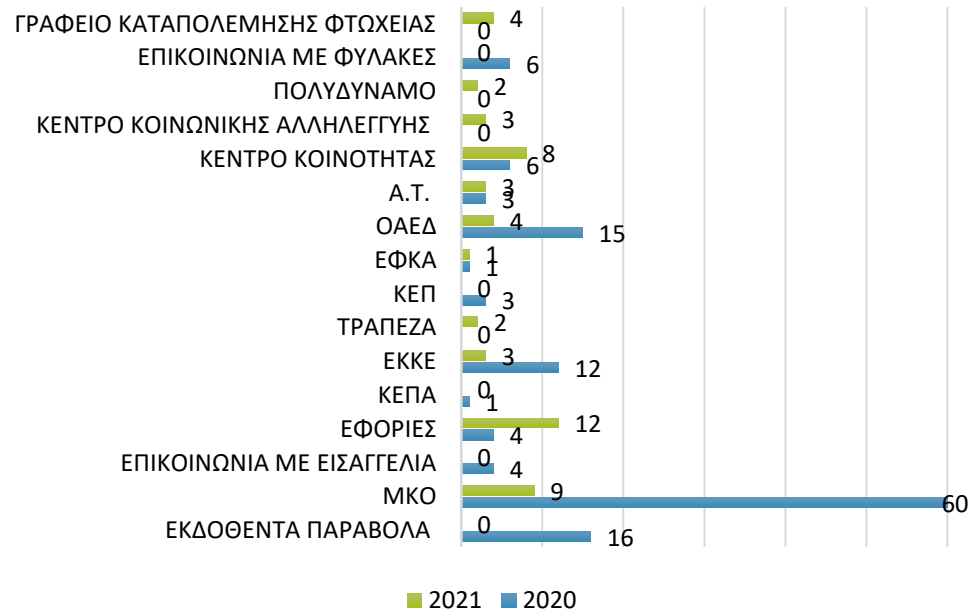
The majority of Hostel’s referrals are for medical/diagnostic tests. The figures refer to the 1st year of operation of Hostel IONIS (April 2020 to April 2021).

In total, in the 1st year of operation of the Hostel IONIS, more than 1000 referrals have been made to other agencies, organizations or services,

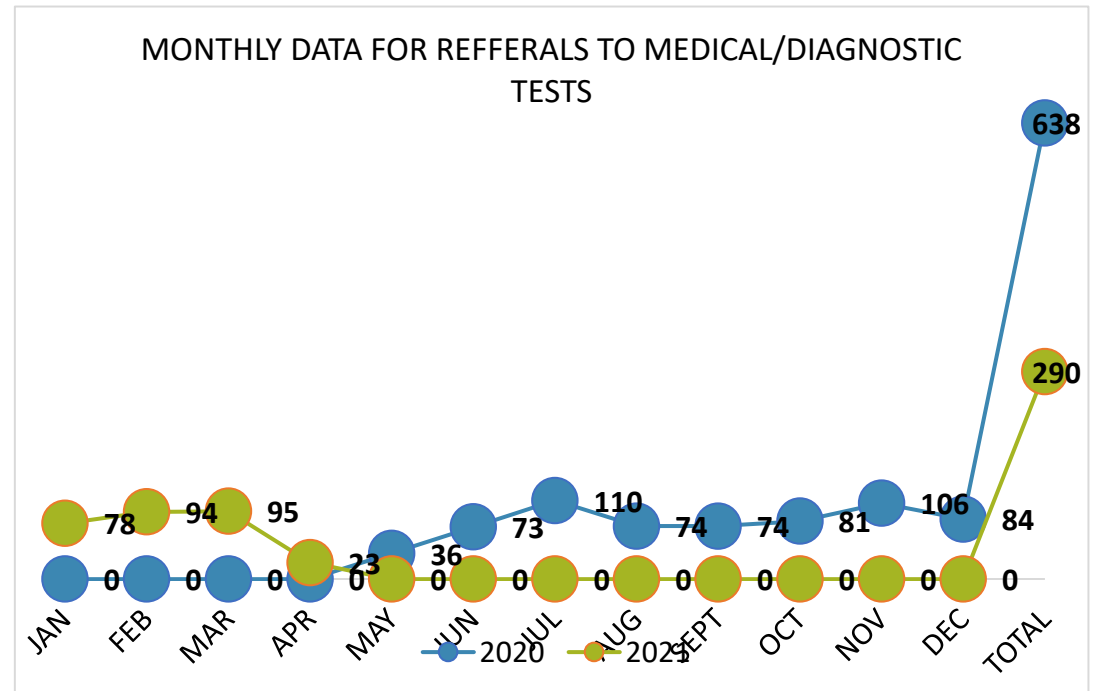
For the coverage of medical and nursing needs (n=930)

For the provision of social welfare services (n=182)

DATA FOR REFERRALS TO SOCIAL/WELFARE SERVICES



MONTHLY DATA FOR REFFERALS TO MEDICAL/DIAGNOSTIC TESTS



In the Municipality of Athens we will continue to work organized, methodically, efficiently, with persistence, patience and consistency of words and actions!
Our greatest reward and strength are cases like Dimitris's and his words...



ΔΗΜΟΣ ΑΘΗΝΑΙΩΝ

«IONIS, AN IDEA THAT DIDN'T COPY OTHER EUROPEAN STRUCTURES
NOR HAS NOTHING TO ENVY.
IONIS, A PIONEER IDEA, AN EXAMPLE TO IMITATE, AN EXAMPLE OF HUMANITY»
D. TH



**LISBON
ADDICTIONS
2022**

*Thank you!!!
Foteini Leobilla*