National Action Plan
Italy
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More information via: www.csidp.eu

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OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL SITUATION

The lack of both political support and HR national guidelines still represents a crucial problem for HR in Italy. HR interventions have been provided since 1995, but intermittently. During the years, positive steps in the right direction have inevitably been reversed by conservative governments’ prohibitionist drug policies; HR interventions have been penalized by an ideological political approach.

Italy has a universal National Health System; its 20 Regional governments decide their own investments and budgets, provided that they comply with national LEA (Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza or basic assistance levels, i.e. standard, guaranteed and totally or partially free treatments and services). Drug treatments are guaranteed by both the National and Regional Public Health Systems; services can be provided by non-profit organizations, financed by the public health budget. This system guarantees PWUDs’ access to free drug services and treatments.

While OST is not considered as a HR measure but as a treatment and it is therefore not included in the national LEA, it is free of charge and accessible to all (including migrants in an irregular status). HR interventions (NSP, naloxone distribution, drug checking, outreach interventions, drop in centres) are not included in the LEA and therefore it is not mandatory for the Regions to implement them. As a consequence, HR interventions are carried out in 12 Regions only and lack homogeneous HR guidelines/standards and monitoring systems; PUDs’ right to health on the Italian territory is unequal and fortuitous. Lastly, no clear political support means no routine monitoring.

Lately, two positive changes occurred: in 2017, the introduction of HR in the LEA at national level - it is now necessary to develop and articulate LEA at regional level in order to implement them; the inclusion by the DPA (Drug Policy Agency) in the Annual Report to the Parliament 2016 of a chapter focused on Harm Reduction development, which was written by CS organizations. This CS contribution included a suggested roadmap on HR, which could be used as the basis for our national action plan and advocacy actions.

In such changing context, the possibility to take part to the European project CSI – Civil Society Involvement in Drug Policies – represented a great chance for Italian CS to bring back policy makers’ attention to drug policies in general and more specifically to HR.

In the spring of 2017, the two Italian partners Forum Droghe and Fondazione LILA Milano, in collaboration with the national partnership, launched an online survey addressed to CS networks and associations on the priorities in the Harm Reduction dialogue between CS and policy makers in Italy.

The survey was online for 32 days, from March 27 to April 28; 73 valid questionnaires were collected.
It gave some interesting indications, which guided the definition of the Italian roadmap for development of a dialogue on HR between CS and policy makers. Following are the main results:

**Harm Reduction:**
HR was represented in its complexity of both approach/strategy transversal to numerous areas and operational programs. Participatory processes tend to combine different contexts (political, technical/political and technical) and to value the different components present within CS (competences of experts and professionals and stakeholders’ competences). The questionnaire gave a clear picture of such a complexity by highlighting HR legal and social communication dimensions beside the health and social ones.

**Dialogue CS-policy makers:**
Unsurprisingly, the concordant opinion/judgement on the state of the art of participatory processes and dialogue between CS and policymakers was definitely negative and described an under-developed, stuffy and stuck situation, especially when compared to European strategies and guidelines on drugs. Such negative picture called for urgent changes; HR must be recognized as a fundamental pillar of national policies, based on scientific evidences.

**Guidelines, LEA (Essential Assistance Levels) and political clarity:**
The survey emphasized the need to ensure that HR is implemented throughout the entire country with continuity, eliminating regional differences and giving clear political support to interventions through two fundamental tools: national guidelines and LEA on HR. These two objectives call for participated processes, which attribute a crucial role to different stakeholders such as DPA, Regions and the Conference of Regions, including also Ministries and the Government. The Italian system is multilevel; national, regional and municipal stakeholders all play a crucial role. The identification of contexts and processes facilitating and guaranteeing dialogue is indicated as a priority.

**Agenda of priorities for a Roadmap on Harm Reduction:**

**The role of research and monitoring:**
Great attention was devoted also to the topic of academic and independent research on patterns of drug use, impact of drug policies and consideration/evaluation of possible alternatives (i.e. legalization), as well as on program monitoring. Research development calls for a plurality of institutional and independent stakeholders, who from a dialogue...
with CS can derive indications for new research objectives and different, enriching perspectives.

**Transparency and assurance of processes:**
Survey results gave a negative picture of participative processes, which are described as poor, marked by opacity and perpetual uncertainty. According to respondents, only few CS stakeholders succeed in interacting with policy makers; in addition, critical remarks were made about difficulties in the dialogue CS-policy makers, which is not clearly formalized. It is therefore urgent to start a process based on transparent processes guaranteeing recognition and formal assurance.

**Challenges for CS:**
The survey also highlighted limits and weaknesses in CS, suggesting internal problems that need to be addressed; a roadmap on HR needed to take care also of such challenges. Improved cohesion capacity, effective negotiation of common goals, extension of alliances within CS, increased mobilization, advocacy and communication activities, support and inclusion of stakeholders’ associations and networks appear to be transversal goals that need to be kept in the background of a participative development process.

**KEY OUTCOMES**

- Active participation of CSOs involved in HR (Cartello di Genova) in designing, implementing and co-organizing the action plan activities; further strengthening of new and old alliances and networks; relaunch of the Cartello and its propulsive action; CSOs’ commitment in to the continuation of advocacy actions after the project conclusion; endorsement of a common statement on HR development and promotion (Napoli Declaration 2017, during the Naples CSO Conference)

- An open dialogue with some Regions and with the National Conference of Regions - Health /
Drug Departments has been established with regard to the implementation of HR LEA in all Regions. A process in this direction has started thanks to CSOs and the project actions: the Coordinator of the National Conference of Regions - Health Department committed to include in the Commission’s agenda the implementation of HR LEA in all Regions just after the summer; some Regional coordinators have been involved in the process of innovating / developing local HR systems.

• No effective goal has been achieved among those which implied a relationship with the DPA (HR guidelines and research on drug issues) because of changes which occurred both in DPA staff and in the Italian Government.

STAKEHOLDERS

The Italian collaborating partners in the CSI DP project are two national organizations:

**Forum Droghe**, an organization active on policy reform, advocacy, research, communication and training activities in the drug field

**Fondazione LILA Milano**, the Milanese unit of the Italian League for Fighting AIDS, which has been active for 30 years in the HIV, hepatitis and other STI field through a group of activists, social workers and people living with HIV

The following associated partners committed to support the project:

**CNCA** (Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza) a large third sector network of service providers

**ITARDD**, the Italian Harm Reduction Network including associations, service providers, workers in the drug field and users

**DPA** (Dipartimento Politiche Antidroga), the Department for Anti-Drug Policies which is responsible for the strategic and operational coordination of Italian drug policy; it is a department of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers
Many other different organizations were involved in the project activities, among which trade unions (FP-CGIL), NGOs working on prisons and legal issues, Social Cooperatives, ‘Cartello di Genova’, as well as individuals covering key roles in the development of Italian drug policies, such as the institutional representatives for drug issues of some Italian Regions. Last, but not least, the project sought the active involvement of PUDs.

**PROCESS**

1. The following Italian CSOs were consulted for the design and implementation of the National Action Plan:
   - ‘Cartello di Genova’ a network that in previous 3 years (2014-2016) constituted a national CSO network platform for advocacy on drugs and drug reform
   - CNCA, a third sector organization consortium
   - ITARDD, a HR network of professionals and users who engaged in bilateral consultations
   - Professionals, trade unions, NGOs working on prisons and legal issues, PUDs, social cooperatives; they engaged in new partnerships during bilateral and collective meetings supported by online dissemination of info about the CSI project

2. An online survey was conducted in the following areas:
   - Harm Reduction in Italy

3. Dialogue between CS and policy-makers

4. A seminar of ‘Cartello di Genova’ involving CSI-DP partners

This seminar was held in Rome on 26 Jun 2017: Drugs. The Crossing of the Desert, in order to discuss future perspectives for reforming drug policies, from the persisting parliamentary deadlock to the political elections of 2018.

The partners and involved stakeholders decided to focus the Italian National Plan on the relaunch of Harm Reduction strategies, because of the following critical issues:

- in 2017, only 12 Regions out of 20 were in the condition to offer HR services (NSP, drop-ins, outreach, THN) but only 6 offered them in a stable way; 6 Regions had no HR services and 2 Regions did not provide any data from 2012 to 2014
- the number of NSP decreased from 106 to 72; coverage decreased from 24% to 15% (denominator: number of opioid PUDs)
- 4 Regions only had one service for 500 PWUD; 3 Regions had 1 service for 2,000 PUD; 2 Regions 1 for 5,000 and, finally, 3 Regions had 1 service for over 5,000 PUD.
- 29% of all HR services were stable, 22% had a 2 years term, 38% 1-2 years term, 11% less than 11 months term
• neither the National Strategy nor the National Action Plan (both written in 2010 and never updated) included HR as a “pillar”; HR was not supported by drug policies and consequently no national HR guidelines had been adopted
• every Region adopting a HR policy did so in a different way with regard to standards
• in a period of continuous cuts to health and social budgets, HR services (which are funded by public budget) were the first victims, being inadequately guaranteed notwithstanding their effectiveness
• drug issues were addressed by policy makers with a self-referential attitude and without the involvement of CS
• in early 2014, a shift took place in drug legislation and policy thanks to a wide civil society advocacy movement (the network ‘Cartello di Genova’); the punitive law (n.49/06) was abrogated by the High Court; this opened different perspectives in drug policies
• the Head of DPA (National Drug Agency) was replaced, with a significant, positive discontinuity with the past
• legislative proposals on decriminalization of use and possession for personal use and on cannabis legalization were developed, both by NGOs and by an Inter-Parliamentary group (300 members)
• HR interventions have been included in the National AIDS Plan at the end of 2016 as a fundamental pillar of HIV prevention
• in 2017 HR was introduced in the LEAs (basic and guaranteed services all over the Country, binding for regional healthcare and budgeting); it is necessary to develop and articulate HR LEAs at regional level, in order to implement them in the most effective and coherent way in response to actual needs

**FINAL NATIONAL PLAN**

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<td>Improved cohesion and efficacy of CS</td>
<td>Networking and meetings with CS stakeholders</td>
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<td>Open and establish a political dialogue on HR</td>
<td>CS as facilitator of the process for the constitution of a WG within the DPA; participation in the drafting of the guidelines; CS inclusion in the re-design and constitution of the National Observatory on Drugs; inclusion of these goals in the HR campaign</td>
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<td>focused on a) Drafting and publication of National guidelines on HR</td>
<td>Participation, in some Regions, to the definition and implementation of HR LEAs; subsequent meeting with the Conference of Regions to promote good practices introduced in the “virtuous” Regions</td>
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<td>National Observatory on Drugs within the DPA</td>
<td>New national Action Plan on Drugs; National Conference on Drugs organized in the near future</td>
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<td>which is currently under revision; adoption of a specific HR approach and dedicated WG</td>
<td>Seminar between CS and policy makers on June 14; advocacy campaign for a new National Conference and a new Action Plan on Drugs</td>
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OVERVIEW

In order to achieve the ambitious objectives of the Italian National Plan the partners, together with the other stakeholders supporting the project, in addition to regularly exchanging via emails, social medias and periodic T/Cs, organized and held various meetings and events to gather consensus and advocate for the proposed changes.

The following initiatives took place during the implementation of the plan:

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| Jan 20, 2017 | Partners meeting at Forum Droghe, Florence                             | - To identify stakeholders to be interviewed
|              |                                                                        | - To discuss the objective of the Italian National Action Plan (structure or process) |
|              |                                                                        | - To evaluate the issues which could be most likely addressed and measured in terms of results and effectiveness |
|              |                                                                        | - To consider possible contributions and bonds given by collaborating partners (CNCA and DPA) and possible collaboration of other stakeholders |
| Mar 22, 2017 | Partners meeting with the DPA officers, Rome                          | - To illustrate the objectives of the CSI project and ask for the DPA involvement in the implementation of the Italian road map / national plan |
| Mar 23, 2017 | Partner meeting with CNCA representatives, Florence                    | - To share the objectives of the Italian road map / national plan and seek their involvement |
| Mar 28 / Apr 28, 2017 | Launch of an online survey on the state of Harm reduction in Italy1 | - To collect from stakeholders insight and opinions in the following areas:        |
|              |                                                                        | - Harm Reduction in Italy
|              |                                                                        | - Processes, discussion & decision-making contexts
|              |                                                                        | - Priorities in Harm Reduction policies
|              |                                                                        | - Dialogue between CS and policy-makers |
| June 26, 2017 | Participation at Droghe – La Traversata del Deserto Seminar in the Senate Parliament2 | To discuss future perspectives for reforming drug policies, from the persisting parliamentary deadlock to the political elections of 2018 |
| Sep 21, 2017 | Partners meeting at LILA Milano in Milan                              | - To discuss the steps of the Italian road map
|              |                                                                        | - To outline and organize the first Italian project event on HR, to be hosted in Naples on Nov 17-18 |
|              |                                                                        | - To discuss a social media campaign to relaunch HR policies and the CSI DP project |
| Nov 13, 2017 | Partners meeting with the DPA officers, Rome                          | - To receive from the DPA confirmation of their involvement in the achievement of the objectives set in the National Action Plan
|              |                                                                        | - To offer additional information and explanations about the CSI DP project |
| Nov 17-18, 2017 | Workshop/Event on HR in Naples for CS groups: La Riduzione del Danno Funzionale: Facciamola funzionare!3 | - To launch an advocacy strategy, to relaunch the promotion, development and progress of HR in Italy together with all relevant Italian stakeholders |
|              |                                                                        | - To share and promote the objectives of the Italian road map |
|              |                                                                        | - To issue a Naples Declaration on Harm Reduction policies in Italy |
|              |                                                                        | - To inform and sensitize mass media (a Session on media communication involved 5 journalist and bloggers) |
| Feb 8, 2018  | Partners meeting in Bologna with the Coordinator of Regions National Conference representatives on drug issues | - To discuss the possibility of involving the Regional representatives on drug issues in the Italian National event for promoting the implementation of LEA in all Italian Regions |

1 Report: https://rdd.fuoriluogo.it/progetto
2 Program and video registration: https://ungass2016.fuoriluogo.it/2017/06/20/droghe-la-traversata-del-deserto
3 Programme: https://rdd.fuoriluogo.it/programma/
Napoli Declaration, press release, audiorecording: https://rdd.fuoriluogo.it/documentazione/
CHALLENGES

The main challenge during the implementation of our National Plan was the ‘absence’ of our main interlocutor, the DPA. There have been changes in DPA staff and leadership since 2016, and the new direction did not demonstrate its availability in collaborating with CSOs and with the Project, differently from the previous one that had ensured its partnership. We had two meetings with the DPA officers and continued to keep them informed and involved in our activities, also by inviting them to the two CSI-DP national events of Naples and Turin and by sending them the declaration that followed as an outcome of the Naples event. No feedback was given on the first proposal (a Working Group for the preparation of HR Guidelines, in view of the inclusion of HR in the LEA): the DPA officers were very cautious about the possibility to issue new guidelines on drug policies.

As agreed during the second meeting with the DPA, we presented them a detailed proposal dealing with the second point of our action plan, i.e. the implementation of research on drug use patterns and on the impact of drug policies based on innovative approaches and civil society contribution. We did not receive any feedback to our work.

During the second meeting, we also received some reassurance about the constitution of a renewed National Observatory on Drugs, since we were asking for the adoption of a specific thematic stream on HR and dedicated Working Group. At the end of 2017, an official document announced the Constitution of an ‘Osservatorio Nazionale
Permanente sulle Tossicodipendenze’, which does not foresee CS representatives with a fixed seat. CS representatives with proven experience will be consulted whenever needed. A procedure for the identification of those CS representatives with proven experience shall be established in the future.

As we had feared at the beginning of the project, the political elections that took place in March 2018 blocked any changes in the months preceding the elections. The results of the elections had and will have a negative impact on Harm Reduction policies, since a right-wing populist coalition is now in place and the Minister in charge of drug issues has already made declarations about the adoption of a ‘zero tolerance’ approach. It is very likely that the next years will be difficult for the implementation of HR strategies and services in Italy.

Given this negative political context, considering that the DPA is a direct emanation of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, we decided to strengthen the dialogue with the Regional representatives on drug issues, already provided in the action plan; we focused our efforts much more on this second streaming, involving Regions in the implementation of the LEA on HR, in order to achieve at least one of our objectives.

**ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS**

First of all, the roadmap and National Action Plan succeeded in the objective of bringing CS back together to discuss common goals for the two year period and establish priorities for HR in Italy.

The final Italian event, which took place in Turin in June 2018, was a big success and had the participation of over 200 stakeholders, both from CS and the national/regional institutions. We had also the participation of one of the key representatives of EMCDDA, who gave a presentation on the impact of HR in Europe.

The event was dedicated to the promotion and future implementation of HR LEA and was organized with the collaboration of Regione Piemonte Health Department and the active involvement of the National Conference of Regions - Health / Drug Departments, and the coordinators of some Regional drug policy departments.

The dialogue with the National Conference of Regions and Regional representatives is constructive and promising. At the Torino Conference in June 2018, the national coordinator of the Regions National Conference Health Commission – which includes drug policies and intervention systems – assumed the commitment of putting on the Commission agenda the implementation of HR LEA in all Regions in the following months.

The Conference offered also the opportunity to
meet some members of the Health Ministry staff involved in LEA monitoring and evaluation: the possibility of a cooperation between these MoH officials and CSOs is now open.

The process for the implementation of LEA on HR has started and the work is in progress. The CSI project action plan did play an effective role in Italian CSO actions; CSO networks will continue the agreed advocacy actions after the project. We hope to push also for the definition of national guidelines on drug policies, with the regional stakeholders as allies in this instance.

**LEARNING**

1. **CSOs must improve their intention and capacity of networking and act as a more united body.** Some of the difficulties we had in negotiating within the network deal with: a) differences in nature, mission and interests of the different organizations involved in HR networks (Third sector organizations, PUDs, Drug policy reform associations, trade unions, HIV organizations, organizations working on prison issues etc.) - the great variety and extent of HR networks is a strength but also a critical factor to be considered; b) conflict and difficulties in sharing and negotiating leadership in a balanced and democratic way; c) the weak role of PUDs organizations in their role of potential “authoritative“ mediators, a weak role when compared to the powerful role of other CS stakeholders, and more in general the difficulties of PUDs in self-organizing; d) different approaches to HR, sometimes limited HR to ‘a system of interventions’ (the so called "4th pillar"), while other actors have a wider perspective (HR as a policy and a paradigm).

2. **In a HR perspective, Regions are the most effective and available interlocutors and partners.** both for their role and competences on drug policies and systems, as well as for being in constant dialogue with local stakeholders, CSOs and citizens and much closer to civil society actors – much more than the national bodies and institutions.

3. The National Drug Agency (DPA) is so deeply, directly interconnected with the Government, that it is extremely exposed to political changes. This situation creates discontinuity and is also affected by the elevated turnover in management and staff. Such uncertainty with regard to DPA interlocutors has so far not been counterbalanced by the institution of a body foreseeing the participation of civil society, which could guarantee the continuity of political dialogue and exchange, despite the frequent changes. In general, the DPA does not seem to give attention to structured participative processes, even if it demonstrated to be willing to meet and interface with some CSOs that had requested a meeting.
The CSI- DP project has highlighted that, in order to create an evidence-based and effective drug policy at national, regional and local level, it is important that governments involve civil society organisations in policy and decision-making processes in the most structured and sustainable way possible (e.g. mandatory inclusion of CSOs and their representatives in the inter-ministerial bodies and/or multidisciplinary working groups in the field of drug policy).

In the last 12 months, the implementation of the national plan made clear that in Italy civil society organizations and networks have succeeded in establishing and maintaining productive and meaningful relationships at local and regional level, even though with many differences between the regions. The establishment of a positive dialogue with the National Conference of Regions / Health Commission and Interregional Drug Group will probably facilitate, in the next months, some improvement of the situation also in the regions that currently do not engage CSOs in the discussion of drug policies. The process that will lead to the implementation of LEA (Basic Assistance Levels) on Harm Reduction will surely give a propulsive thrust for the strengthening of the relationships between regional/local institutions and civil society.

At the same time, the implementation of the plan highlighted once again that, at national level and, more in detail, at the DPA level, there is lack of processes and participative contexts that include civil society. This is a shortfall that needs to be urgently overcome, also to comply with the European Action Plan which states that CSOs must take part to decision-making processes concerning policies and their monitoring and evaluation. The DPA is a political-scientific agency that has the scope of providing policy makers with the knowledge and competences needed to evaluate and innovate national policies; therefore, it is crucial to establish a proper organism that allows the inclusion of civil society.

Italian civil society will continue to advocate to establish a dialogue based on evidence and on the evaluation of effectiveness of current drug policies. The project action plan itself had in fact been laid-out in this direction, with a proposal addressed to the DPA to invest in research and its functionality in the elaboration of adequate and effective drug policies.