EUDA
EUROPEAN UNION DRUGS AGENCY

Preventing drug use and crime involvement in communities

Towards a connected approach

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Health and social responses sector

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What people say about their own neighbourhood

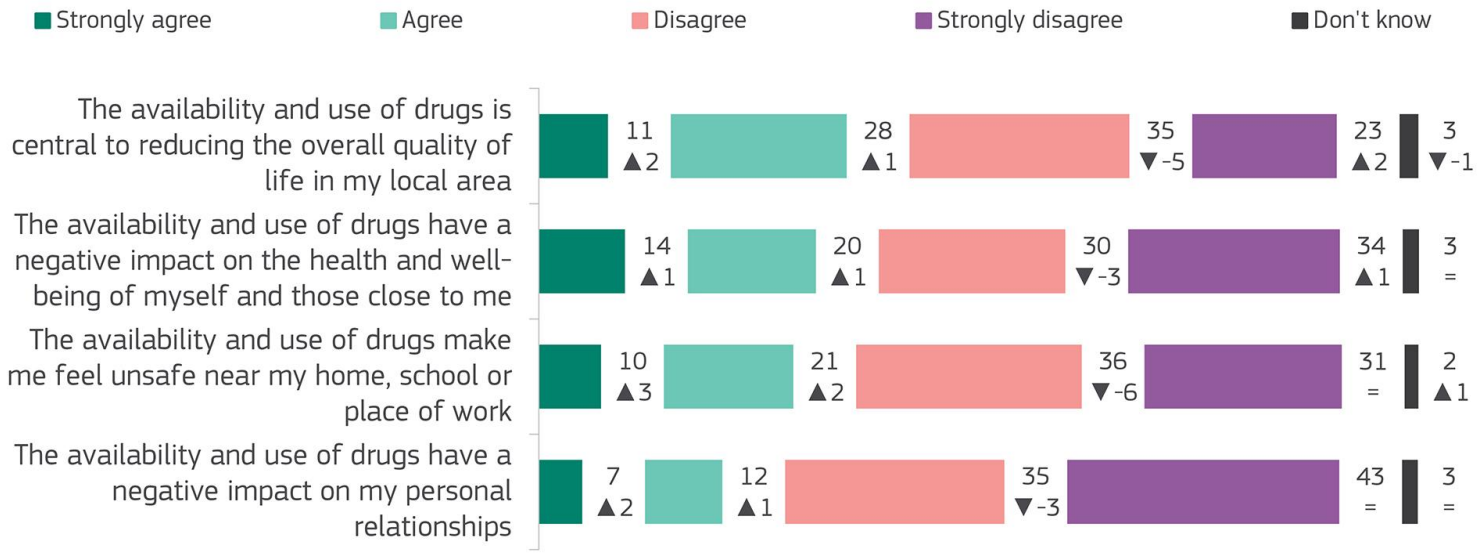
Perceived safety, public health and drug markets presence are one local reality

39%
say illicit drug use is a serious problem in their local area

41%
see that drug trafficking is serious problem in their area

34%
say problems caused by drug use and drug trafficking have increased in their local area

31%
feel unsafe near home, school or work



Flash Eurobarometer 552, Impact of drugs on local communities

The digital world as a (risk) environment

87%

use a phone to go online every day

40%

have seen violent or gory images

48%

of children say they feel safe online

2 in 3

use AI tools regularly

37%

have seen self-harm content

3/10

meet hateful messages monthly

Prevention works by strengthening protective factors across all the places where young people live, learn and connect, by creating safer and healthier environments by design

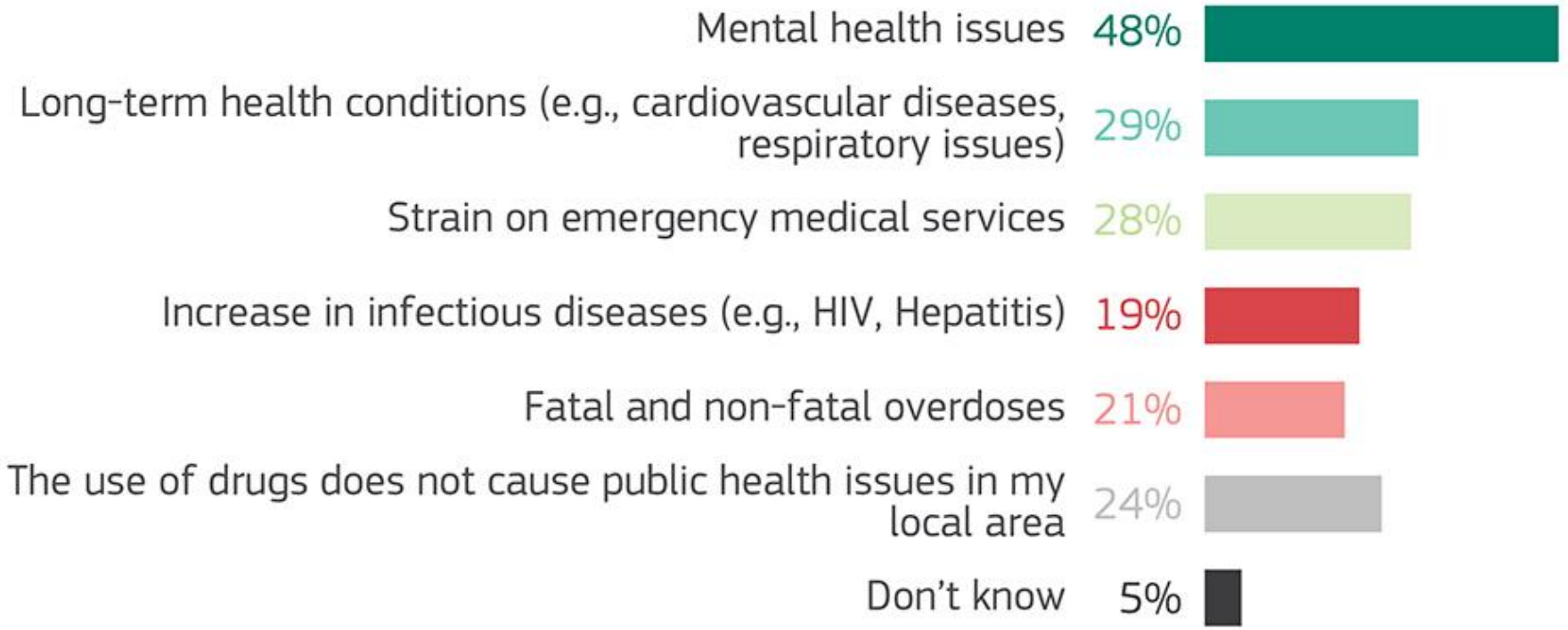
Staksrud, Elisabeth, Helsper, Ellen, Livingstone, Sonia, Lobe, Bojana, Mascheroni, Giovanna, Stoilova, Mariya, Olafsson, Kjartan (2026) The EU Kids Online 2026 comparative study: children's views, experiences, opportunities and risks in a digital world: full findings from the EU Kids Online representative survey of 10- to 16-year-olds across 19 countries. Technical Report. Universitetet i Oslo, institutt for medier og kommunikasjon and London School of Economics and Political Science.

The internet is an environment with its own dynamics

The environment	What changes	What prevention can target
Social	Peer content is visible, shareable and persistent (Liu et al., 2025)	**Peer influence and social learning (digital level)**
Informational	Substance-related narratives, advice and misinformation circulate together (Liu et al., 2025)	**Norms and risk perceptions**
Commercial	Influencer marketing and unsolicited advertising can reach young people (Engel et al., 2024)	**Promotion and potential access**
Algorithmic	Content is personalised and repeatedly recommended (Regehr et al, 2025)	**Selective exposure and amplification**

Digital environments should be seen not as a new prevention field, **but as another setting in which evidence-based environmental, developmental and community prevention can be applied**

Public health issues related to drugs



Flash Eurobarometer 552, Impact of drugs on local communities

Mental well-being is now a major concern (ESPAD)

Nearly 40 % of students fall below the critical threshold of good **mental well-being**

The findings suggest **declining well-being** among young people, **reduced perceived social support**, and growing concerns about psychological distress among adolescents

ESPAD Group (2025), Key findings from the 2024 ESPAD survey, EUDA

Risk factors are shared: offline and digital worlds

Risk factors accumulate and no single factor predicts potential involvement in criminal networks

FIGURE 5

Risk factors that can be addressed by prevention interventions

Macro-level influences	Micro-level influences	Personal characteristics	Primary outcomes
Income and resources - Poverty - Homeless, refugee status - Child labour - Lack of access to healthcare	**Family influences** - Lack of involvement and monitoring - Harsh, abusive or neglectful parenting - Negative role modelling - Neglect for physical condition - Stressful, chaotic environment - Parental substance use	**Genetic susceptibilities**	**Substance abuse and related problems** - Academic failure - Poor social competency skills - Poor self-regulation - Mental health problems - Poor physical health
Social environment - Antisocial norms, poor informal social controls - Lack of social cohesion, disconnectedness, lack of social capital - Conflict/war - Social exclusion, inequality, discrimination	**School influences** - Poor-quality early education - Negative school climate - Poor school attendance - Lack of health education and prevention programmes - Lack of after-school activities	**Mental health and personal traits** - Sensation seeking - Aggressive - Inattentive - Impulsive - Mental health problems	
Physical environment - Decay, abandoned buildings, substandard housing - Neighbourhood disorder - Access to alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, firearms - Lack of access to nutritious foods - Toxic exposures - Media	**Peer influences** - Antisocial peers, role models - Exposure to alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, violence, crime - Lack of parental monitoring of peer relationships - Social networking technology	**Neurological development** - Language delays - Cognitive deficits - Poor decision-making and problem-solving	
		Stress reactivity - Deficits in emotion regulation and perception - Dysregulated physiological responses - Poor coping	

Source: Based on UNODC, 2013

DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT TOO

Recruitment offers, online and offline

The protective factors are built through meaningful relationships, skills, participation and healthier, safer, environments

CONNECTED

Trusted adults
Positive peers
School belonging

CAPABLE

Social and emotional skills
Self-regulation
Digital capability

INCLUDED

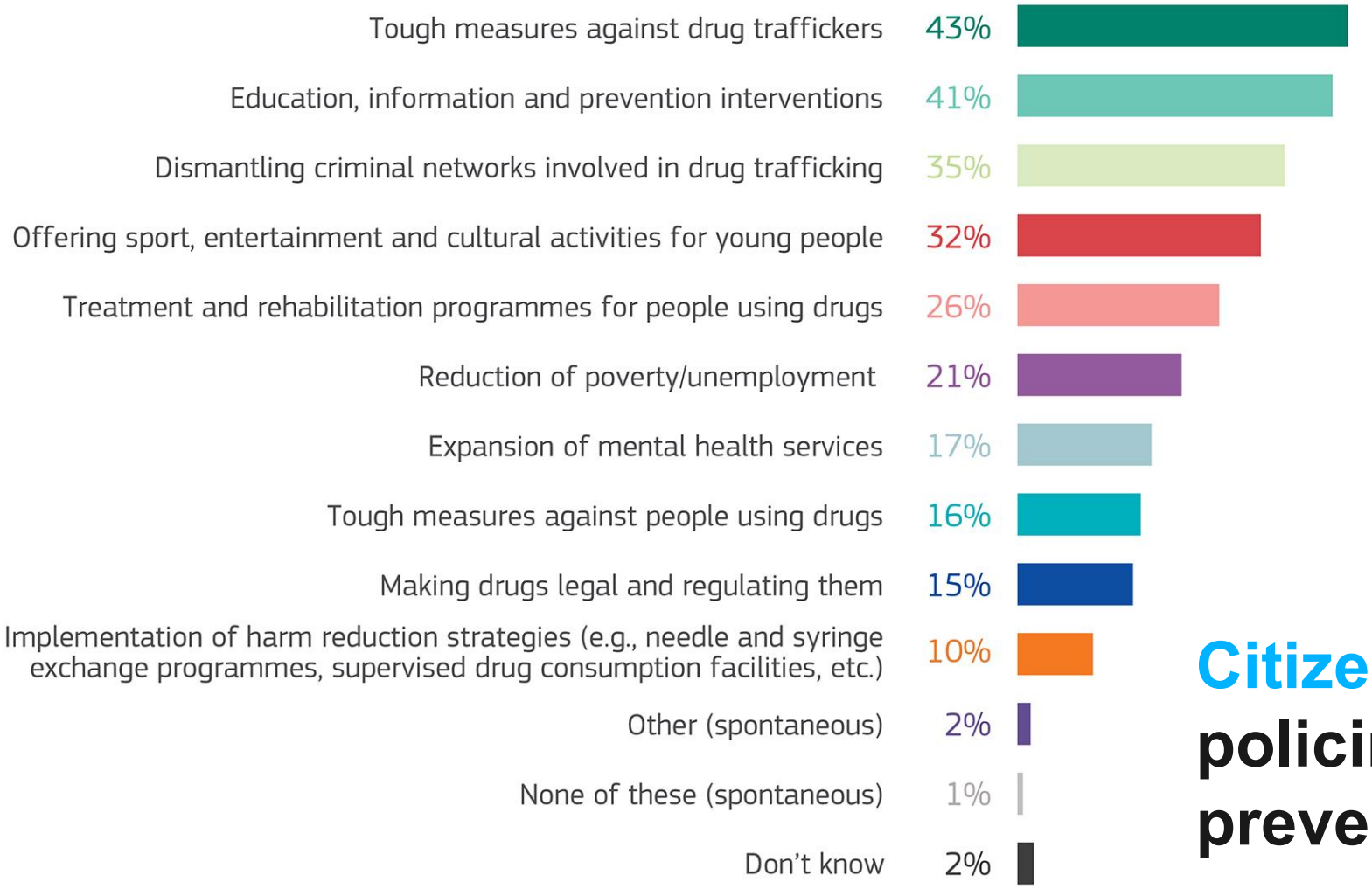
Meaningful participation
Positive roles
Recognition and contribution

SAFE

Supportive families
Safe schools and neighbourhoods
Safer digital environments

Use positive youth development as a design principle

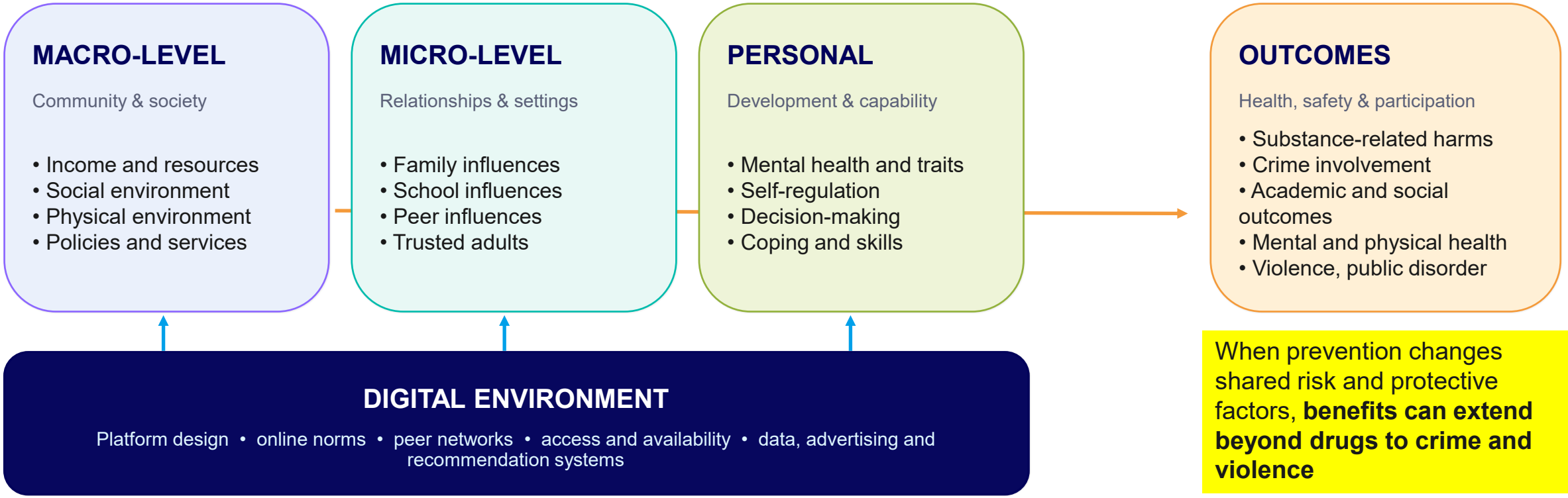
Public policies to reduce drug-related issues



Citizens ask for both policing and prevention

Flash Eurobarometer 552, Impact of drugs on local communities

Towards creating healthy and safer environments



When prevention changes shared risk and protective factors, **benefits can extend beyond drugs to crime and violence**

PREVENTION RESPONSE **Build capabilities + strengthen relationships and services + shape physical and digital conditions**

Prevention: mapping adolescent engagement across Europe

- **More than half** of the students reported having participated in at least one awareness or training prevention intervention in the two years prior to the survey
- Content, quality and format of these interventions seem to vary widely by country
- The most common formats remain **informational or awareness-raising events**
- **More limited**, however, is the dissemination of interactive training interventions centred on the **development of socio-emotional skills, media literacy and emotional regulation with evidence of being beneficial**

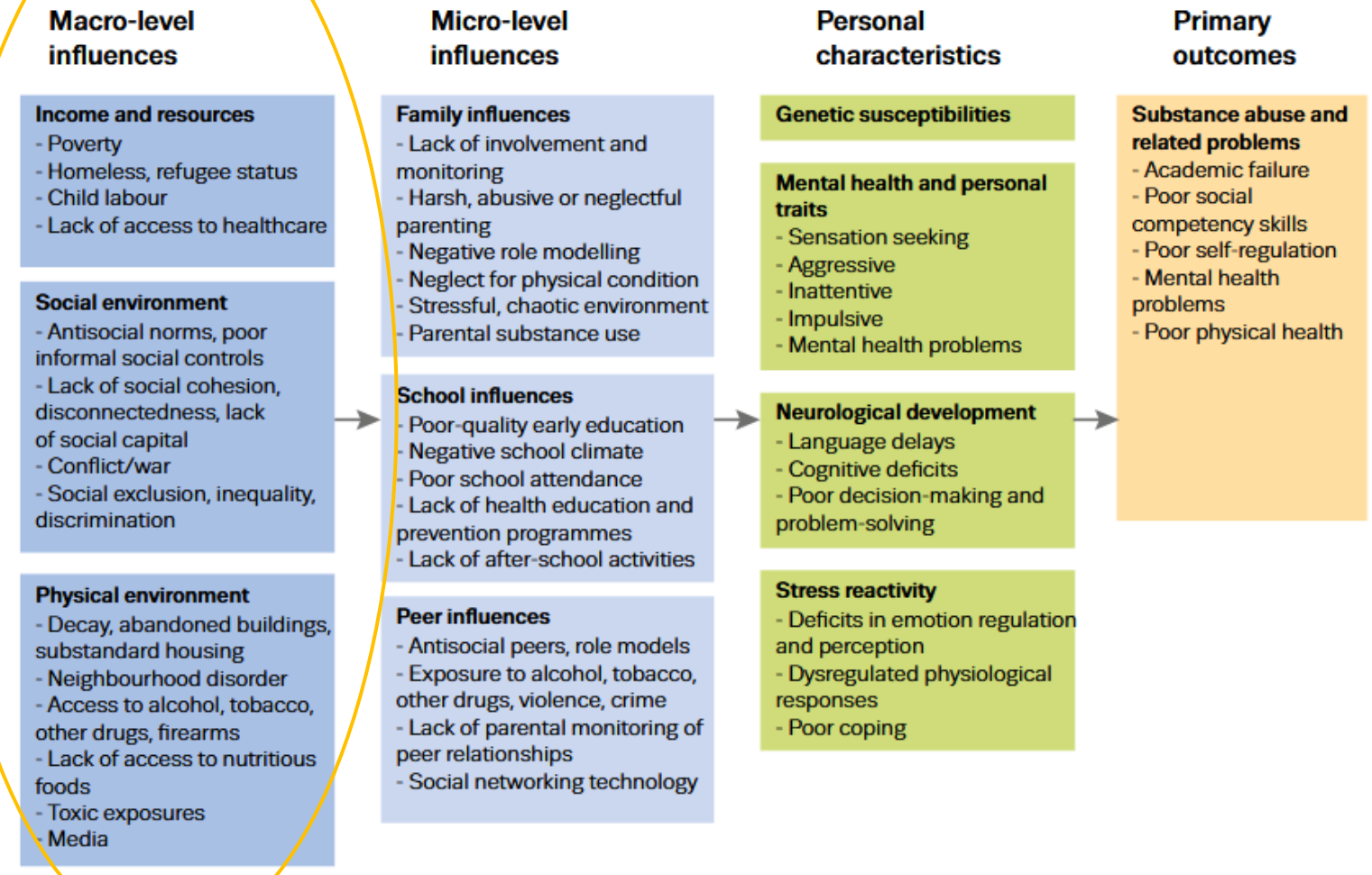
Prevention remains widespread (not the same as effective)

Best Practice Portal, EUDA

Effective prevention interventions address risk factors *before* the onset of risky behaviour

FIGURE 5

Risk factors that can be addressed by prevention interventions



Source: Based on UNODC, 2013

Main drug use prevention frameworks

Comprehensive interventions within a specific community targeting shared risk factors (substance abuse, violence, crime) through community structures and participation

Community prevention

Changes the physical, economic, social or regulatory context; makes healthy decisions structurally easier; secondarily changes norms and attitudes

Environmental prevention

Targets individuals at key life stages (early childhood, adolescence) before problems emerge. It works on the personal and social risk factors that predict later substance use or violence.

Developmental prevention

act before onset, and act at three levels.

They require **cross-sectoral, multi-agency action**

Best practice portal – evidence database

Subscribe for updates about best practice by e-mail

This database gives you access to the latest evidence on drug-related interventions. The information is based on systematic searches is updated regularly. To get started use the search boxes below.

Click here for more information about the Evidence database (including methods)

PDF Excel CSV

Title	Area	Description	Evidence rating	Substance	Desired outcome(s)	Name of response option	Target group(s)	Main subject	Last update
Search	Prevention		Beneficial	All	reduce drug-related crimes		communities		From To
Multicomponent programme based on community mobilisation to reduce crimes and irresponsible use of alcohol in recreational premises	Prevention	The project STAD (Stockholm Prevents Alcohol and Drug Problems), a multicomponent programme that has been active for ten years based on community	Beneficial	alcohol	reduce drug-related crimes, reduce public disorders, reduce risk behaviours	Multi-component prevention interventions	communities, partygoers/nightlife	best practice	14.11.2019
Multicomponent programmes combining community mobilisation, Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) training, house policies and stricter enforcement of licensing laws to reduce accidents and alcohol consumption	Prevention	The Sacramento Neighbourhood Alcohol Prevention Project was found effective in a narrative review (EMCDDA, 2012) and in two systematic reviews (Jones et al., 2010; Bolier et al 2011)	Beneficial	alcohol	reduce drug-related crimes, reduce harms, reduce risk behaviours, reduce substance use	Multi-component prevention interventions	communities, partygoers/nightlife	best practice	20.05.2019
Street-level drug policing to reduce drug offences and drug-related calls for service	Prevention	Street-level law enforcement approaches (including community-wide policing, problem-oriented policing, hot spots policing and standard model of policing) were found in	Beneficial	not-drug specific	reduce drug-related crimes	Police interventions	communities, law enforcement	best practice	03.12.2019

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Title	Area	Description	Evidence rating	Substance	Desired outcome(s)	Name of response option	Target group(s)	Main subject	Last update
community	Prevention		Beneficial	All	All		All		From To
Comprehensive community-based programmes targeting high-risk youth	Prevention	Comprehensive approaches involving community and school, were found effective in a systematic review (Jones et al., 2006, 222 studies - 14 systematic reviews; 103 RCTs; 52 Controlled non-randomized studies; 18 CBA; 35 BA) at	Beneficial	alcohol, not-drug specific, cannabis, tobacco	reduce substance use	Community-based prevention programmes	communities, school, young people	best practice	03.12.2019
Multicomponent programme based on community mobilisation to reduce crimes and irresponsible use of alcohol in recreational premises	Prevention	The project STAD (Stockholm Prevents Alcohol and Drug Problems), a multicomponent programme that has been active for ten years based on community mobilisation, training in RBS for servers and stricter enforcement of existing alcohol laws, was	Beneficial	alcohol	reduce drug-related crimes, reduce public disorders, reduce risk behaviours	Multi-component prevention interventions	communities, partygoers/nightlife	best practice	14.11.2019
Multicomponent programme based on community mobilisation to reduce night time traffic injuries	Prevention	The Community Trials project including community mobilisation, media advocacy, RBS training, and enhanced enforcement efforts against drink-driving and under-age drinking was found to be effective in two narrative reviews (Calafat, 2010; Calafat,	Beneficial	alcohol	reduce injuries and harms	Multi-component prevention interventions	communities, partygoers/nightlife	best practice	14.11.2019
Multicomponent programmes combining community mobilisation, Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) training, house policies and stricter enforcement of licensing laws to reduce accidents and alcohol consumption	Prevention	The Sacramento Neighbourhood Alcohol Prevention Project was found effective in a narrative review (EMCDDA, 2012) and in two systematic reviews (Jones et al., 2010; Bolier et al 2011) in: • significantly reducing	Beneficial	alcohol	reduce drug-related crimes, reduce harms, reduce risk behaviours, reduce substance use	Multi-component prevention interventions	communities, partygoers/nightlife	best practice	20.05.2019

Local communities and drugs: health and social responses

Communities are not just where the harm lands: they are where the **solutions** are

- Existing evidence demonstrates that **coalition approaches, alongside best practice health promotion planning and evaluation**, influence community outcomes (Nagorcka-Smith et al., 2022)
- **Community and city-level drug plans translate strategy into local needs**, with residents and people who use drugs at the table, which also reduces stigma
- **Community mobilisation, assessment of risk and protective factors, promotion of evidence-based interventions and co-creation of solutions**: Communities That Care model
- **Environmental prevention and youth diversion**: safer spaces, activities and alternatives that build protective factors for young people at risk of use or recruitment
- **Tackle community harms directly**: development of drug policies and interventions addressing nuisance and harms experienced by communities
- In some areas the provision of drug consumption rooms, needle and syringe programmes or other harm reduction measures might be considered in order to reduce nuisance from open drug scenes

EMCDDA PAPERS

Communities That Care (CTC): a comprehensive prevention approach for communities

Best practice portal main page

Communities That Care (CTC) approach to prevent use and reduce youth problematic behaviours

Summary of the evidence

Rating: Likely to be beneficial

The Communities That Care (CTC) approach (i.e. community

Details

Note: this evidence summary is only valid for

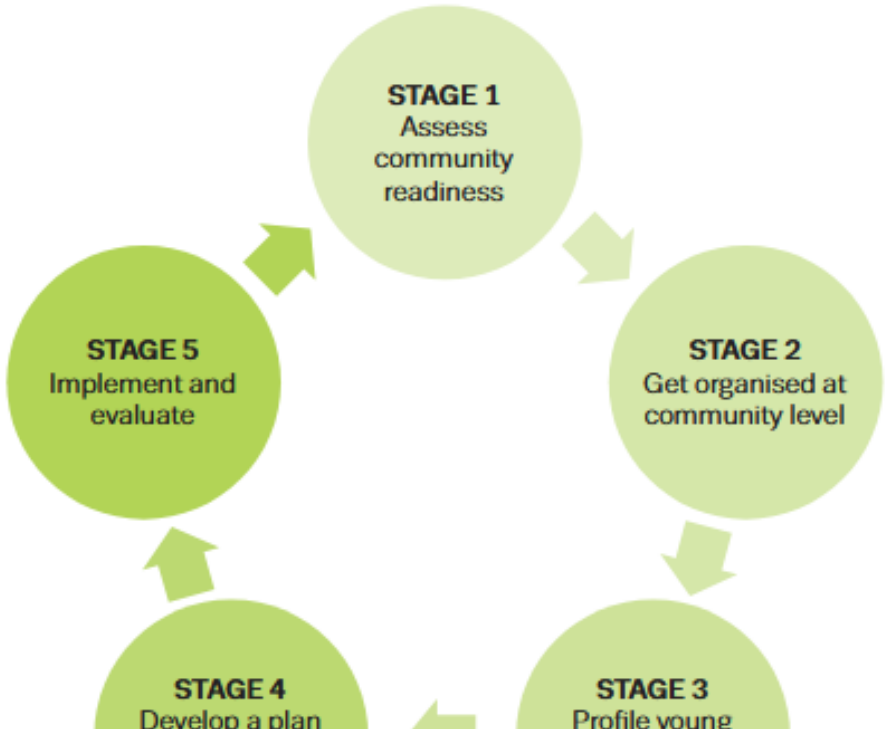
Description of a CTC

CTC approaches aim to bring all the stakeholders in a community together; these include elected officials, young people and parents, those involved in law enforcement, schools, public health officials, agencies and organisations serving local young people and families, the faith community, the business community and the residents.

All stakeholders set the priorities on the basis of factual data to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their

addressed at individual and social levels. The targets of the interventions are the families, the group of peers, the schools and the individual young people.

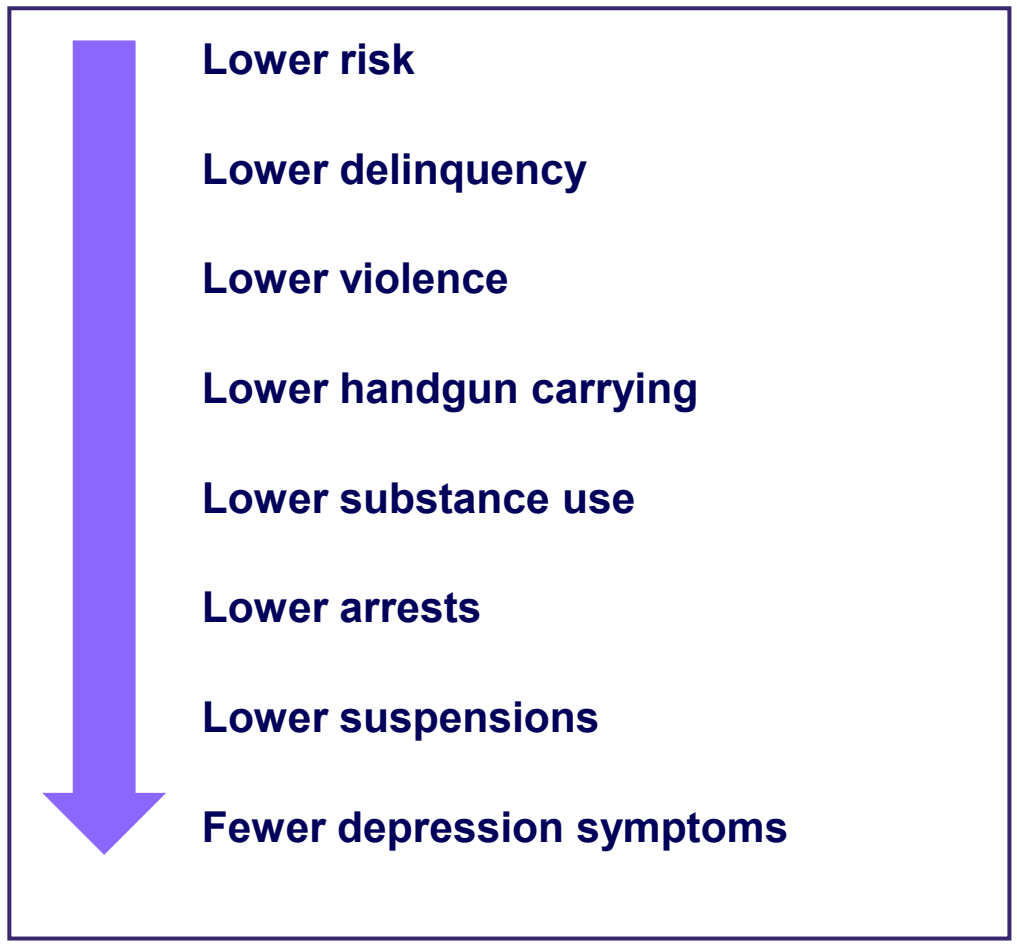
Stages of a CTC programme



priority risk and protective factors are identified. Stage 4: the community prevention coalition reviews the results of the assessment and selects tested effective policies and programmes. Stage 5: the programmes are implemented and adolescent outcomes are monitored (Haggerty and Shapiro, 2013).

Title	Area	Description	Evidence rating	Substance	Desired outcome(s)	Name of response option	Target group(s)	Main subject	Last update
Search	Prevention		Likely to be beneficial	All	reduce disruptive behaviours		All		From / To
Communities That Care (CTC) approach to prevent use and reduce youth problematic behaviours	**Prevention**	The Communities That Care (CTC) approach (i.e. community coalitions that develop a common strategy and mobilise communities in	Likely to be beneficial	not-drug specific	reduce disruptive behaviours, reduce substance use	Community-based prevention programmes	communities	best practice	03.12.2019

CTC implementation outcomes



Environmental prevention and place-based approaches

- **Environmental prevention** policies and interventions seek to limit opportunities for unhealthy or risky behaviour or promote the availability of healthier options in order to prevent problems associated with substance use. They do so by altering the environment in ways that can unconsciously influence behaviour.

Changing the environment lowers risk across the whole neighbourhood by making harm harder to reach and less socially accepted

- **Place-based approaches seek to change social and physical conditions:** investment in services, employment, physical environment and community infrastructure simultaneously addresses multiple risk factors (Kondo et al., 2018).

  Remediating infrastructures (greening, securing, restoring light) removes a physical precondition for market operation and sends the opposite signal (Rupp et al., 2025; Cozens et al., 2022). **Reclaim it by designing safer public spaces done together with residents (third-generation CPTED)** (Cozens et al., 2022).

Investment in disadvantaged places is crime and violence prevention

Environmental prevention works in both environments

IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

- Greening, lighting and securing neglected space
- Licensing, opening hours, outlet density
- Safe routes to school and school climate
- Designed together with residents (third-generation CPTED)

ON THE PLATFORM

- No addictive design: infinite scroll, reward tricks, notifications at night
- Privacy-preserving age assurance when an account is opened
- Private by default, no unsolicited contact from strangers
- AI off by default, limited from fostering emotional dependency

EU KIDS Act (17 September 2026): providers must prove their services are age-appropriate and **safe by design**

European Commission. EU KIDS Act: helping children navigate a safer online world

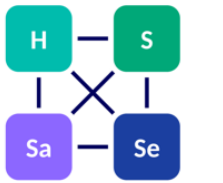
Crime reduction: a whole-of-society approach

- **Problem-oriented policing**: moderate reductions in crime and disorder (Hinkle et al., 2020)
- **Focused deterrence**: moderate reductions, strongest for gangs and drug market interventions (Braga et al., 2019)
- **Hot spots policing (targeting the specific places where crime and violence take place)**: small reductions in overall crime and disorder in areas where the strategy is implemented (Braga et al., 2019; Hinkle et al., 2020)
- **Even asset-focused interventions ("following the money") has too little firm evidence to show it reduces organised crime, though it stays popular** (Atkinson et al., 2017)

Strongest results: combining enforcement with community-oriented problem-solving. Police cannot address root causes alone: a whole-system public health approach is required (Quigg et al., 2023)

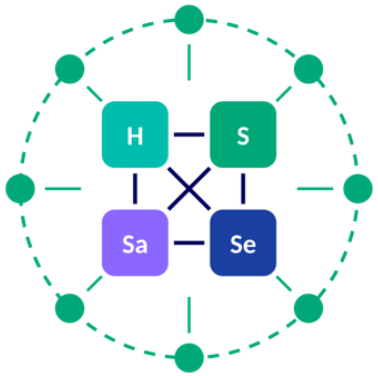
What a connected (and co-owned) approach asks of us

1	**Improved coordination**	Create local prevention coordinated systems
2	**All settings**	Socio-ecological framework. Treat the digital environment as a place we shape, not a topic we warn about
3	**Real co-creation, co-production**	Move from delivering for communities to deciding ***with*** them



CONNECTED

One system, four functions.



CO-OWNED

The system, plus society.

Towards improving integration of health, social, safety and security responses; and improve shared authority

Relevant resources

Xchange

Registry of evaluated prevention interventions

Best Practice Portal

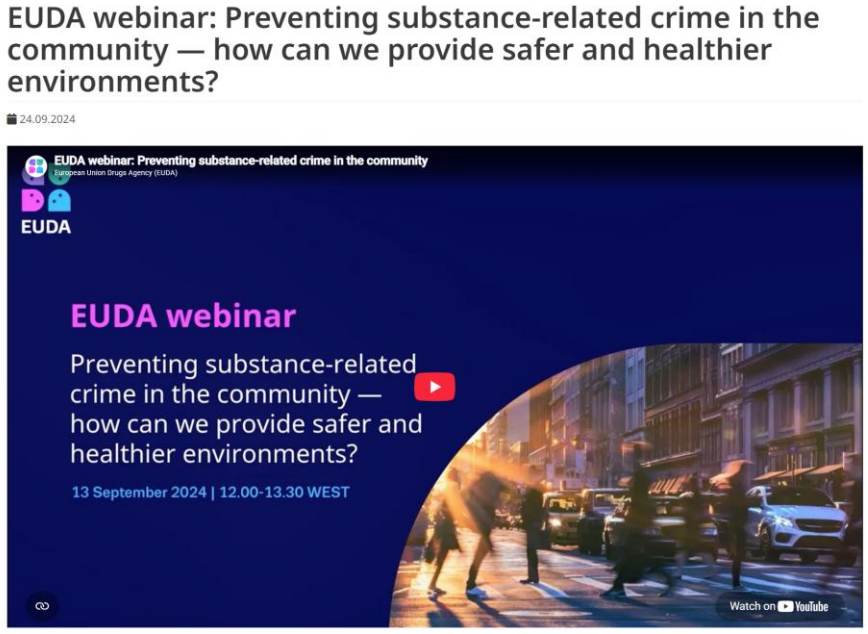
Practical and reliable information on what works (and what doesn't) in the areas of prevention, treatment, harm reduction and social reintegration

EUPC

A common language and training for the prevention workforce

Action framework: health and social responses

Local communities: responses miniguide



Recording of the EUDA webinar: Preventing substance-related crime in the community — how can we provide safer and healthier environments?

Upcoming webinar

Objective:

This webinar explores how **whole-of-society partnerships strengthen local response systems for community health and safety.** Drawing on experiences from three countries (including co-creation in monitoring approaches, community-based and municipal approaches to crime prevention, and collaborative approaches to violence prevention), the session will illustrate how local partnerships are built, coordinated and sustained. Speakers will discuss **the value of co-creation in supporting local decision-making, and the practical challenges of building effective multi-agency collaboration**. Together, the session will identify shared lessons for developing sustainable partnerships that contribute to healthier, safer and more resilient communities.

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Thank you

Acting today, anticipating tomorrow.

For more information please contact:

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