

The “Red Umbrella Athens” Initiative: Presentation of the first Street Sex Workers Drop-In Centre in Athens, Greece

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Background

According to WHO (2013), Sex Workers (SW) are 12 times more likely to be exposed to HIV, while at the same time their exposure to other risks such as social exclusion and violence is also higher. Due to the rigid Greek legal framework, the majority of them are working illegally, something that excludes them from social benefits and welfare. “Red Umbrella Athens” (RUA), is a primary health care drop center for street sex workers, located in the center of Athens, founded in March 2016. Its establishment was an addition to the activities benefiting the population of SW in Athens, which until then were receiving services through the outreach programme of the Greek Association of People Living With HIV/AIDS “Positive Voice” and the Greek Liver Patients Association “Prometheus”. This is an outreach effort of a population whose hardships are indicative of the contemporary social exclusion and welfare state’s failures. Its targets are summarized as:

- Empowerment and psychological first aid services
- Awareness-raising and prevention promotion regarding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
- Harm reduction
- Advocacy
- Research

Services

- Counseling on STIs and psychoactive substances
- Testing (HIV, HBV, HCV)
- Free condoms and syringes dispensing
- Linkage to care
- Referrals in other services
- Empowerment/ Crisis intervention – Individual sessions
- Social network strengthening
- Relief items dispensing
- Violence incidences recording
- Creative activities - safe space provision
- Cosmetic care

Data Collection Methods

- Sex working questionnaires (emphasis on safer practices) (Abel, Fitzerland & Brunton, 2007; AIDS information & support centre, 2002)
- Health diaries (beneficiaries’ responses and identity codification, emphasis on risk factors) (WHO, 2013)

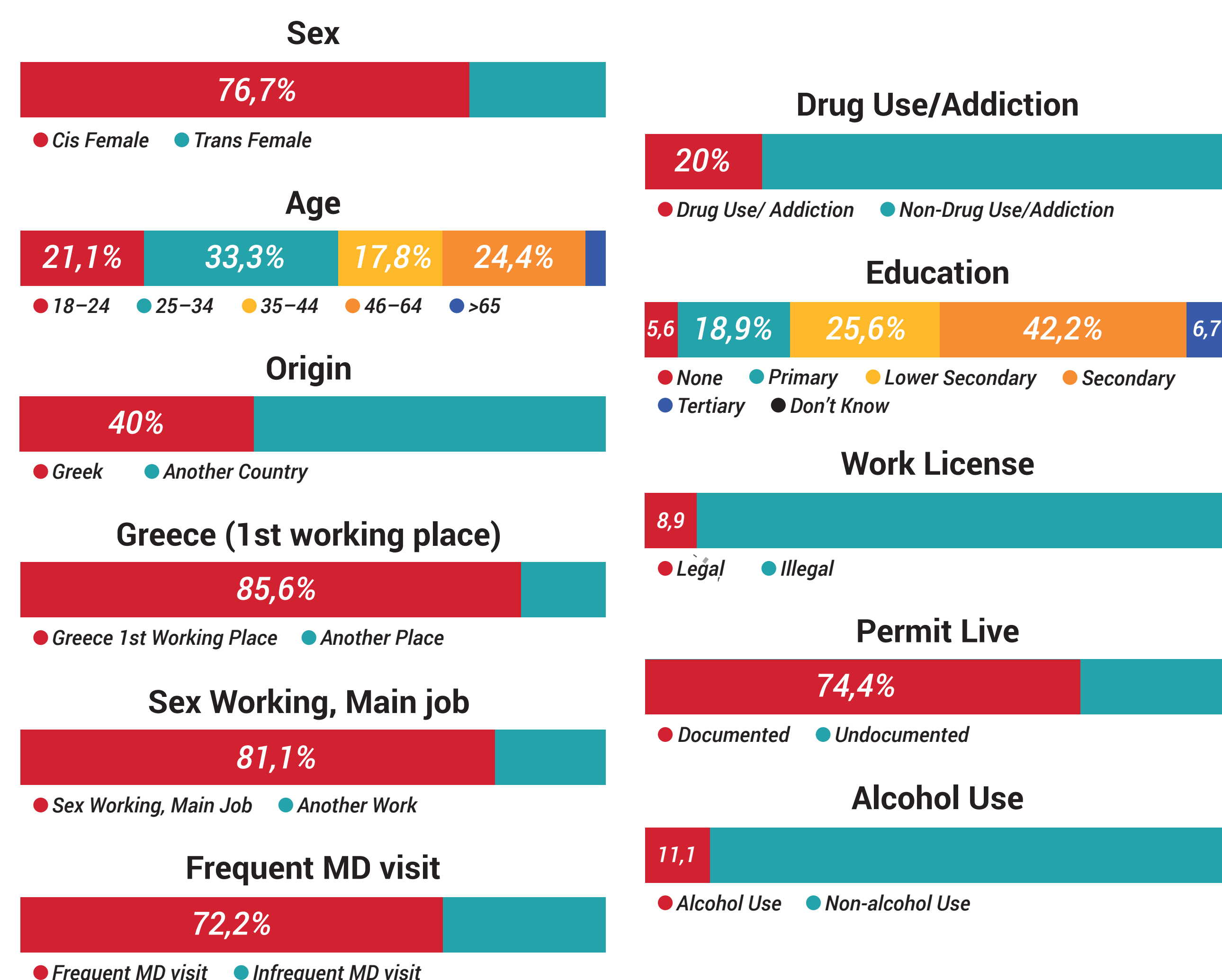
Operation

- Operating hours: 3 hrs, once a week
- Personnel: 3 Ψ, 1 MD, 1 Sexual Health Counselor, 1 Social Worker, 3 SW Community members, 23 Volunteers
- Supervision: 2 hrs, once a week

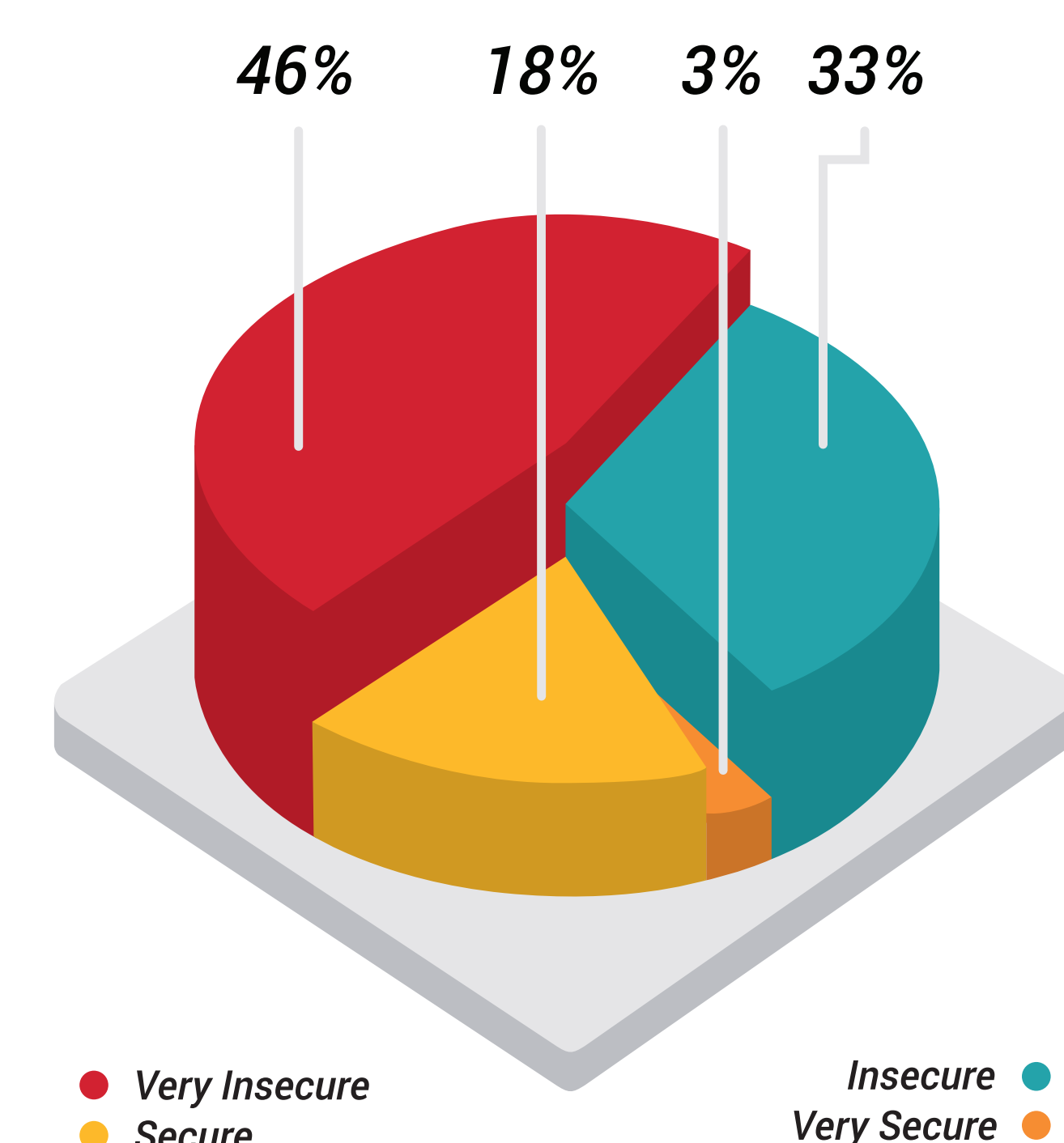
Operating Principles

- Psychological first aid (RAPID-PFA) (Everly, McCabe, Thomson&Links, 2014; WHO, 2011)
- Harm reduction (Gazgalides, 2005)
- Sexual health counseling (Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention - HCDCP)
- Beneficiaries’ engagement into the project (Chondros, Stylianidis, Lavdas, 2016)
- Assertive community outreach – Streetwork (HCDCP, National Organization Against Drug Use – OKANA, KETHEA Harm Reduction Centre)
- Case management (Moxley, 1989)
- Psychoanalytic thinking (Fink, 1997; Moncayo, 2008; Navrides, 2005; Petrou, 2016)

Beneficiaries Demographics (N=89)



Self-Reported Security Issues



Conclusion – Future Objectives

RUA attempts to fill a gap in primary health care facilities. Team work and collaboration is crucial for its smooth and unhindered operation. Moreover, it is rapidly accepted by the target population, something which is also indicated by the systematic increase of the received requests, the expansion of the referrals network and its therapeutic interventions.

Some Further Aims

- Advocacy, suggestions on the legal framework regarding sex work
- Interventions’ effectiveness documentation
- Data collection on the target population and its needs
- Further engagement of the community

Figures

- Beneficiaries: 125
- Beneficiaries’ visits: 842
- Sessions: 412
- Tests (HIV, HCV, HBV): 210
- Referrals: 131
- Questionnaires: 89
- Health diaries: 704
- Recorded violence incidences: 12
- Condoms: 22900
- Syringes: 215
- Collaborations: National Center for Social Solidarity, National & Kapodestrian University of Athens, Klimaka, OKANA, KETHEA, 18ANO, Praksis

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PositiveVoice
people+HIV

CHECKPOINT
prevention and testing centers

PROMETHEUS
HELLENIC LIVER PATIENT ASSOCIATION

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