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# Georgian Drug Policy



# Drug Situation in Georgia

# Current Trends in Substance Abuse

- Cannabis (marijuana) is on top of the list of non-injection drugs
- Traditionally, the most frequently used injecting drugs have been opioids (subutex/suboxone, heroin)
- Self-made amphetamine-type stimulants - “needles” (“Ephedra vint”, self-made drug chemically manufactured from needle-like leaves of evergreen shrubs of Ephedra, containing alkaloid ephedrine) is on the rise in Georgia

# Drug Abuse: Alarming Increase

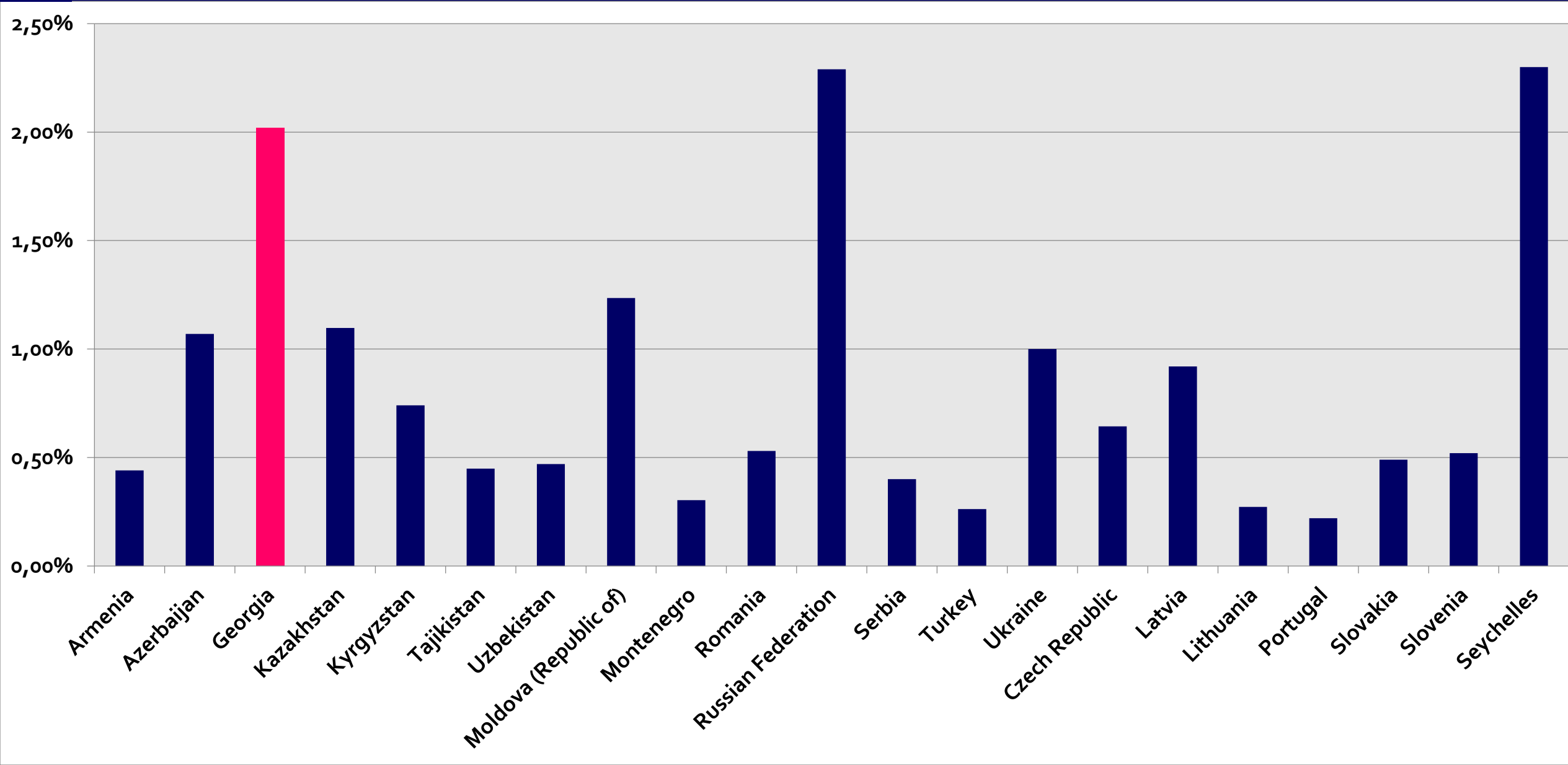
- “Pharmacy abuse”
- New Psychoactive substances

## IDU size estimation:

(Multiplier-benchmark Method, network Scale-up Method)

- 2009 – **40,000**
- 2012 – **45,000**
- 2014 – **49,700** (*National prevalence estimates equals 2,02% per 18-64 years old population and 1,33% per general population*)

# Prevalence of the High Risk Drug Use (UNODC World Drug Report 2016)



# IDUs in Georgia

- Is extremely hidden population due to the stigma and strict law
- No street drug users
- No gathering places
- IDUs create small structured groups mostly in their neighborhoods
- Most common place for injection - flat
- Strong links between different networks

# Characteristics of PWID (BSS 2014)

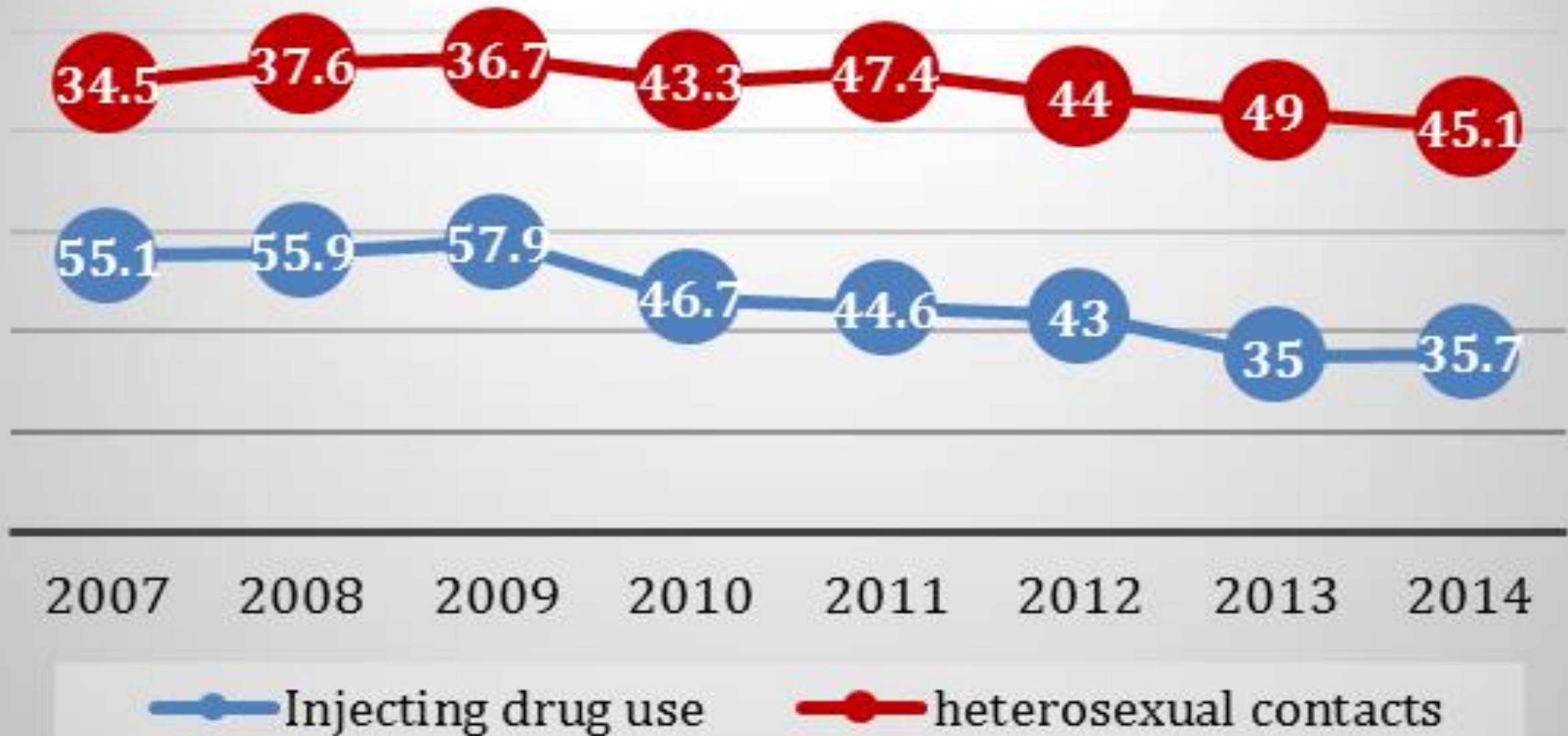
- The vast majority of study participants are unemployed and 51% of PWIDs mentioned having a monthly income of less than 300 GEL.
- The median age of initiating non-injection drug consumption and injection drug use equals 15-16 years and 18-20 years, respectively.
- Forty percent of the survey participants are opioid-dependent.
- Injection in other countries has dramatically grown across all survey locations and this trend is notable since 2009. Almost every second user has experienced injection abroad

## Access to and coverage of treatment and harm reduction interventions (BSS 2014)

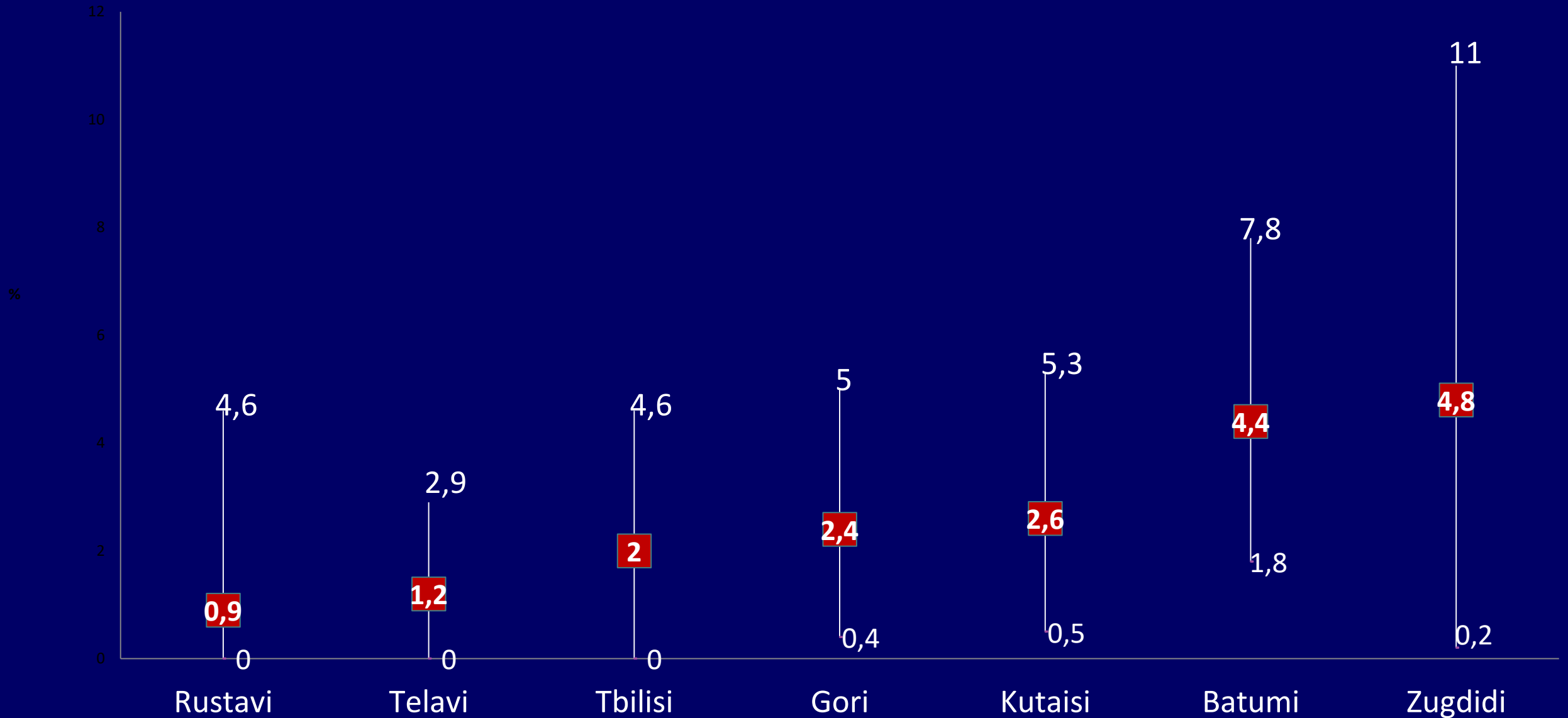
- The majority of PWIDs have never accessed drug treatment facilities. Only 6% underwent or was still under any kind of treatment.
- Coverage of preventive programs (minimal coverage) has increased from 24% to 32.4% since 2012. While awareness about syringe exchange programs has improved in Telavi, Batumi, and Zugdidi, in general, knowledge about the program remains low and needs to be improved.
- Substitution therapy programs are much more well-known among PWID.



## Shifting modes of HIV transmission by year, in %



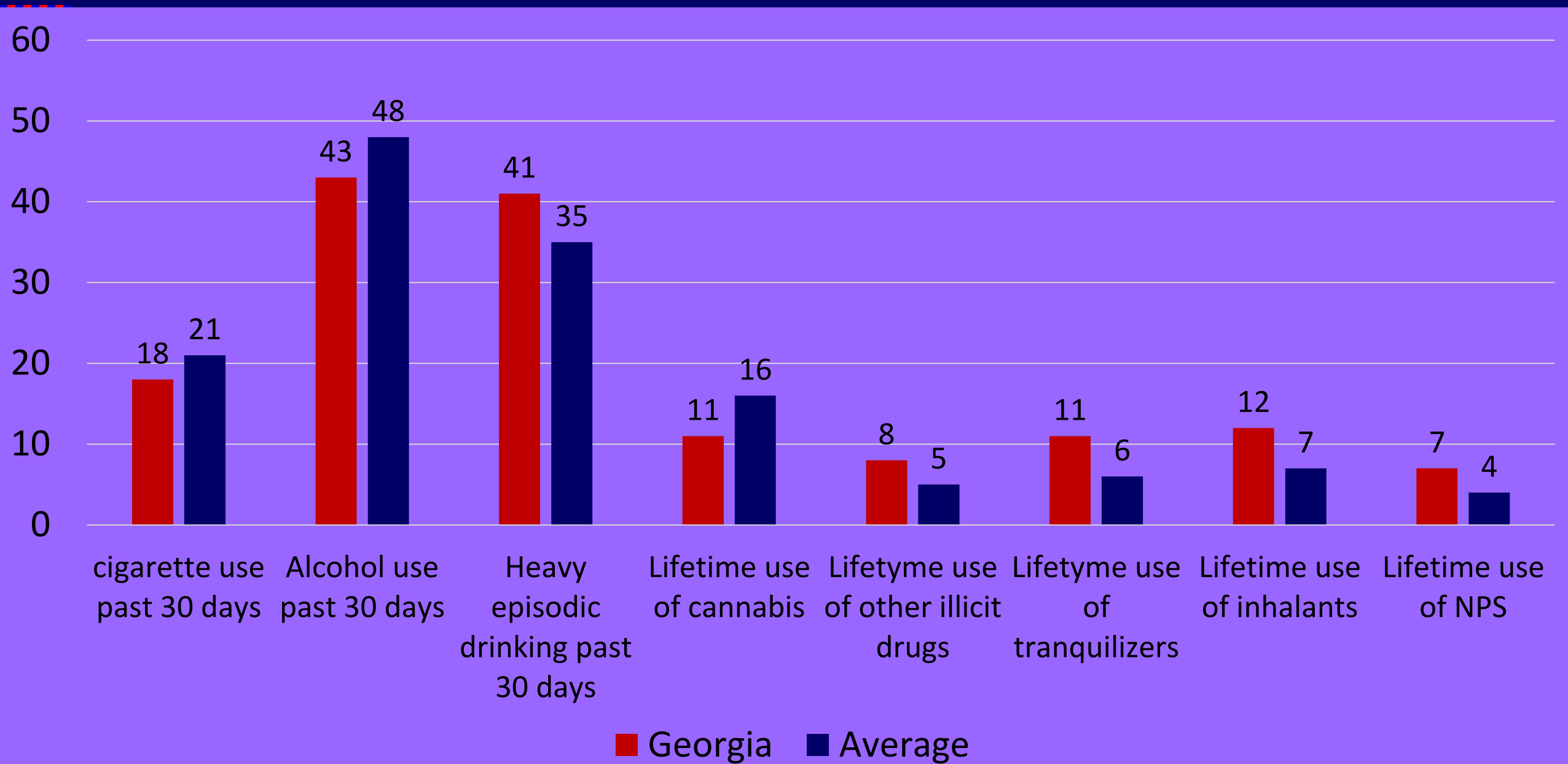
# Prevalence of HIV among PWID





## Drug Use among Youth

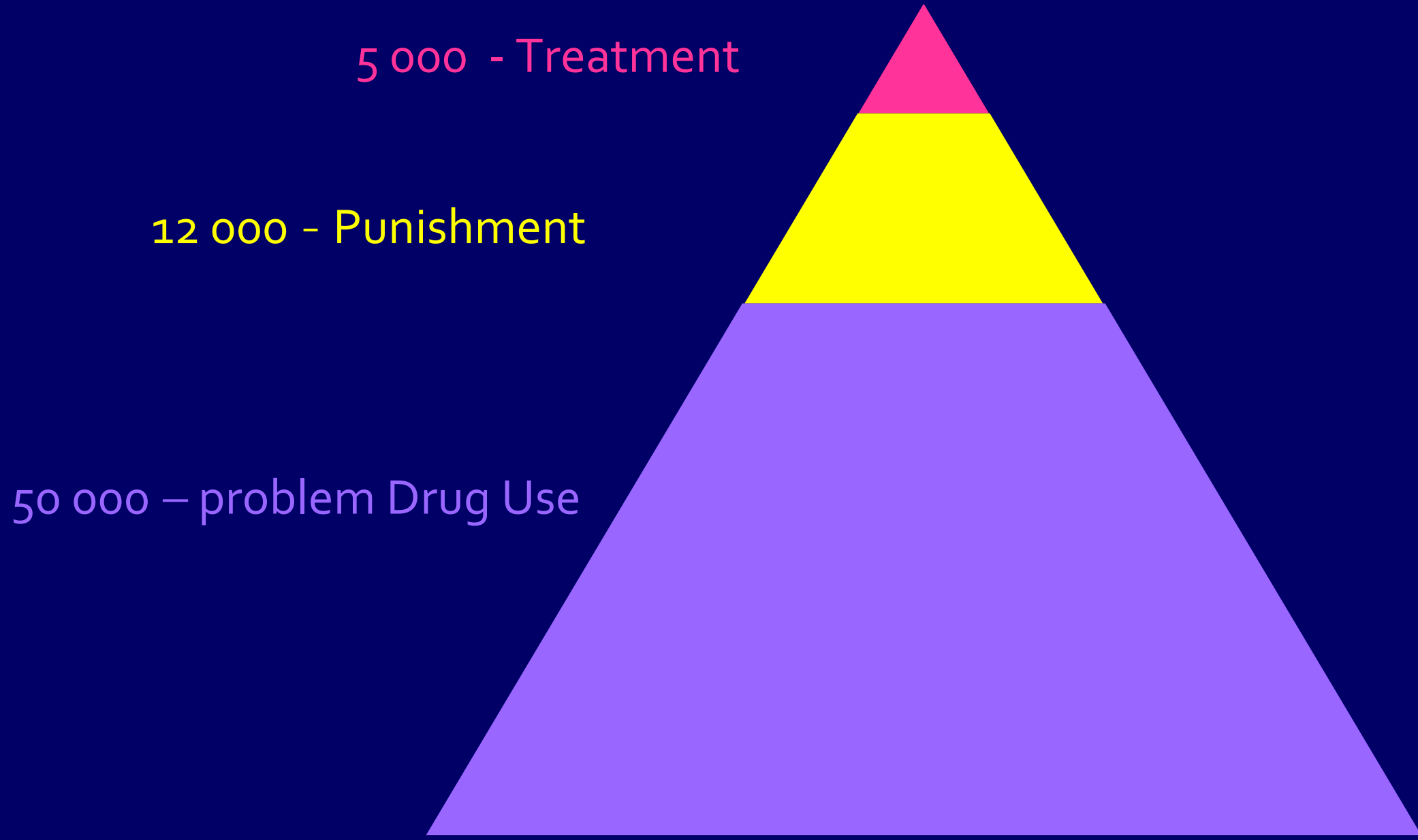
# EUROPEAN SCHOOL SURVEY PROJECT FOR ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS





# Responding to Drug Problems

# How do We Tackle the Problem



# Legal Framework

- Drug use *per se* is an offence under both administrative and criminal legislations of Georgia
- Illegal consumption of drugs without medical prescription for the first time during a year or possession of small amount of drugs without an intent to sell stipulates a fine of GEL 500 or in exceptional cases, administrative detention up to 15 days under Article 45 of the Code of Administrative Offences (CAO)
- The same act committed again during the same year will result in criminal liability (article 273 Penal Code of Georgia).
- Forced drug testing - thousands of people are subject to administrative and criminal proceedings as a consequence of positive rapid immunoassay test results. The results of these rapid tests are used as one single source of evidence in court, leading to fines or imprisonment.

# Legal Framework

- The Law on Combating drug related crime was adopted in 2007 and allows deprivation of certain rights (among others, right to drive a vehicle, right to practice medicine, right to practice law, right to work at national and/or local governmental bodies, etc.) based on the court judgment for 3 years
- In 2014 Law on “New Psychoactive Substances” was adopted
- MoLHSA removed an obligation for health care providers to report cases of suspected drug overdose to the police (2014)



- Inter-Agency Coordinating Council for Combating Drug Abuse within the *Ministry of Justice of Georgia*
- National Drug Strategy and Action Plan (2016)
- the GOG increased funding for demand reduction and treatment efforts
- Drug demand reduction measures in the country are funded mainly by international organizations
- Primary Prevention is the least developed direction amongst responses to the drug problem in Georgia
- The civic sector has become more active in the solution of the drug problem. Georgian Network of People Who Use Drugs (GeNPUD) became active during last 3 years.

# Case of the civil activism

- Beqa Tsikarishvili was arrested in 2014 for possession of 69 grams of marijuana.
- Faced with up to 14 years in prison as a first-time offender, the 28-year-old journalist and his friends started a campaign, “Beqa Is Not a Criminal” to promote drug legislation reform.
- Tsikarishvili sued against parliament in Constitutional Court.
- The Constitutional Court of Georgia announced a historic decision on October 24th, 2015 ruling that the imprisonment of individuals for purchasing and possessing up to 70 grams of marijuana for personal use will no longer be punishable with an unconstitutional 7 to 14 year prison.
- This decision has created a degree of legal uncertainty: possession rules have been eased, but it remains a crime to use marijuana.

# Advocacy for the Drug Policy Reform



**Georgian National Drug Policy  
Platform (GNDPP)**

# GNDPP

- The Georgian National Platform on Drug Policy was established in April, 2016.
- It is a network of Forty (40) active Non-Governmental Organizations and community groups.
- The Platform aims at involving CSOs, community organizations and experts in development of balanced national drug policy and advocating for effective and human drug policy.

# GNDPP

- ***Package of draft legislation amendments***
  - ☞ The changes and amendments in the Georgian Administrative and Criminal Codes
  - ☞ The new reduction of the Law of Georgia "On Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, Precursors and Narcological aid"
  - ☞ The new list of fixed quantities (small, big and very big quantities) of controlled substances
  - ☞ The new drug testing procedures
- ***Addiction Services Development Concept/ Transition plan for Georgia***
- ***The Concept of Primary Prevention***