

# International harm reduction indicators are still not reached

Distribution of drug paraphernalia in Germany in 2021 and changes since 2018 – second round of a cross-sectional study to assess the current progress towards achieving the WHO elimination targets for viral hepatitis

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## Background

One viral hepatitis elimination target of the World Health Organization (WHO): Distribution of 300 needles and syringes per person who injects drugs (PWID) annually by 2030

### We aimed to:

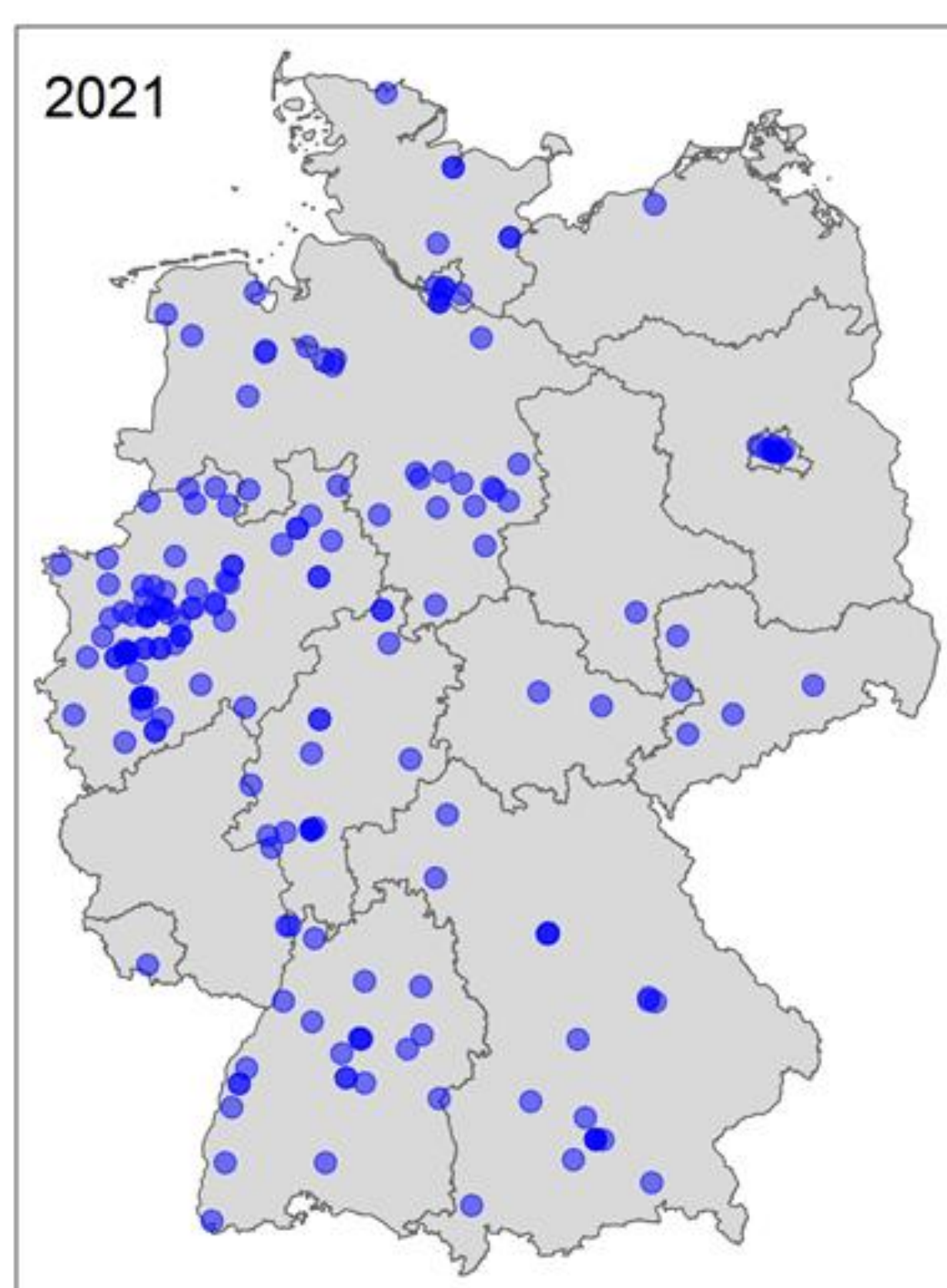
- Measure this target and the type and quantity of distributed drug paraphernalia in Germany in 2021;
- Assess changes to a previous cross-sectional study from 2018;
- Inform harm reduction programs in Germany.

## Methods

- Second round of a **cross-sectional survey of low-threshold drug services** in Germany (online and paper-based questionnaires) from March until August 2022.
- **Topics covered by the questionnaire:**
  - Distribution of drug paraphernalia (yes/no)
  - Type and quantity of distributed drug paraphernalia 2021
  - Available budget
  - Number of PWID who are supplied by the service
- Descriptive data analysis

## Results

### Response

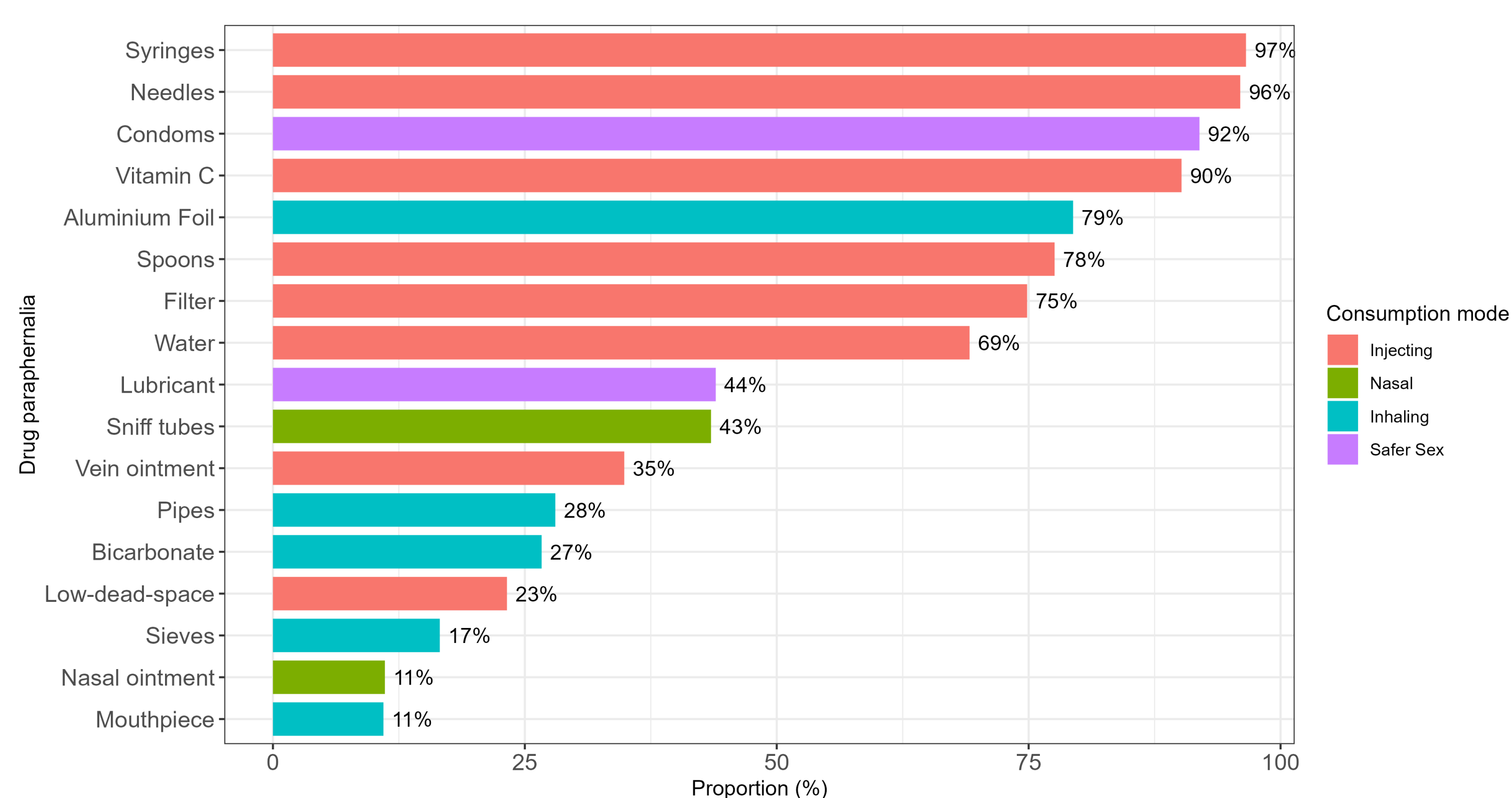


**Figure 1:** Geographical distribution of drug services confirming drug paraphernalia distribution ( $n = 204$ ) in Germany, 2021

- Estimated **response rate of 30%** (534/1760 distributed questionnaires, plus snowballing).
- **204 drug services from 15/16 federal states** confirmed drug paraphernalia distribution (**Figure 1**), accounting for 51% of Germany's urban and 20% of rural counties.
- $n = 180$  services provided detailed information on distributed paraphernalia

### Distributed drug paraphernalia

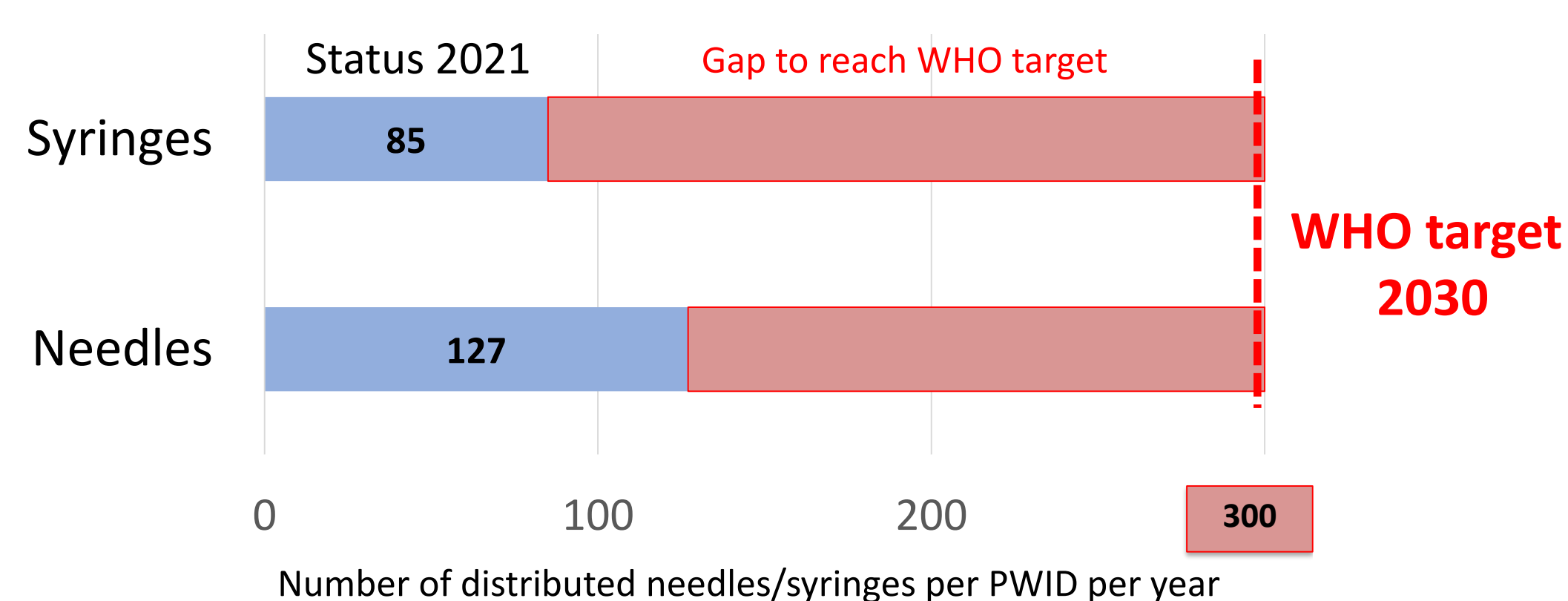
- Drug paraphernalia for injecting use were more frequently distributed than paraphernalia for inhaling or nasal use (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 2:** Types of drug paraphernalia distributed by services ( $n = 180$ ), Germany, 2021

### WHO target

- On national average, 127 needles and 85 syringes per PWID were distributed (**Figure 3**), with pronounced regional differences (range needles: 41 – 365; range syringes: 36 – 398) in 2021.



**Figure 3:** Current status of the WHO indicator on national level, Germany, 2021 ( $n = 180$ )

- Compared to 2018, we found a decrease in the median number of distributed syringes (**-18%**) and needles (**-12%**) per supplied PWID.

### Distribution mode

**Table 1:** Distribution mode of drug paraphernalia (multiple answers possible), Germany, 2021 ( $n = 188$ )

Distribution mode	Drug services
According to individual needs of clients	145/188 (77%)
In exchange with used needles/syringes	69/188 (37%)
Via vending machines	61/188 (32%)
Limited number of pieces	34/188 (18%)

### Budget

- The responding services ( $n = 105$ ) had a median budget of 2000€ in 2021 for the distribution of drug paraphernalia.
- Nearly one-third of services assessed their budget for 2021 as not sufficient (48/157; 31%).

## Conclusions

- The current national estimates for drug paraphernalia distribution in both 2018 and 2021 seem far from meeting the WHO target.
- Reasons could be insufficient budget, a change in drug consumption behaviour (injecting use ↓, inhaling ↑) and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (supply difficulties, social distancing, lockdowns, reduced opening hours of services).
- We observed pronounced regional differences in adequate supply of PWID with sterile drug paraphernalia.

## Recommendations

- Germany needs to expand drug paraphernalia distribution programmes and other harm reduction services, e.g. drug consumption rooms.
- Further investigation of determinants of adequate distribution is essential to reduce blood-borne infections in this key population.

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