

COMMUNITY-BASED SCREENING FOR HBV AND HCV AMONG MIGRANTS WHO USE DRUGS IN GREECE, ITALY AND SPAIN: RESULTS FROM THE VH-COMSAVAC PROJECT

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Background:

Migrants and refugees from countries with intermediate/high prevalence of HBV and HCV have an overlap of risk factors for HBV and HCV acquisition. Upon arrival to Europe, migrants generally show lower rates of drug use compared to host populations, however, factors such as trauma, poverty, and social exclusion may increase vulnerability to substance use over time, thereby heightening their risk for viral hepatitis acquisition.

Methods:

From 11/2022-02/2025, the VH-COMSAVAC study was implemented in Greece, Italy and Spain. Decentralised screening for HBV and HCV was offered in community spaces, non-governmental organisations, and prisons. Simplified diagnostic tools, including HBsAg and anti-HCV rapid diagnostic tests were used, and expedited referral pathways were established to refer positive participants to collaborating tertiary hospitals.

Results:

Among 2,043 participants screened across the three countries, 380 (18.6%) reported drug use in the last six months. Most of them were men (96.1%), with a median age of 34 years (IQR: 30-43), and half (50.3%) arrived to Europe ≤ 5 years ago. The majority were screened in Greece (87.9%). Among these, anti-HCV+ prevalence was significantly higher in comparison to those who did not report recent drug use (9.5% versus 1.3%; $p < 0.001$). HBsAg positivity was lower among those reporting recent drug use, but not significant (2.4% versus 3.8%; $p = 0.186$). 58.3% of anti-HCV+ participants reporting recent drug use were screened for HCV RNA, of which 61.9%, had detectable HCV-RNA. Most HBsAg+ (55.6%) and anti-HCV+ (58.3%) participants were born in Eastern European countries. Among participants with an active HBV or HCV infection, 63.6% were successfully linked to specialist care.

Conclusion:

Migrants who use drugs in Europe are disproportionately affected by HCV but not HBV. Delivering decentralized and culturally adapted screening programmes that enhance their access to essential healthcare services is essential to reduce the burden in this population.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *See example below:*

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