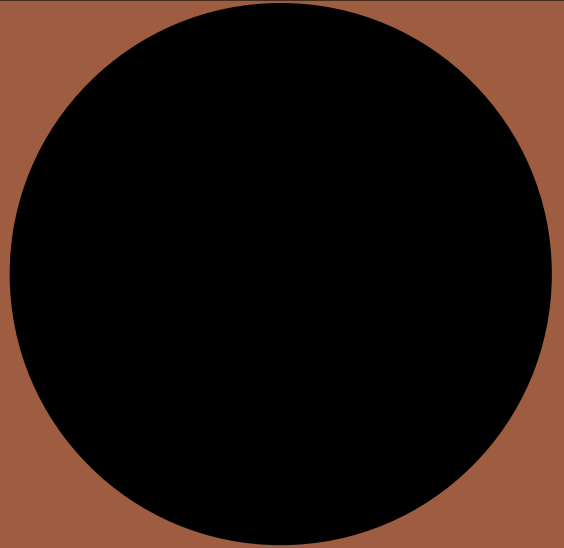
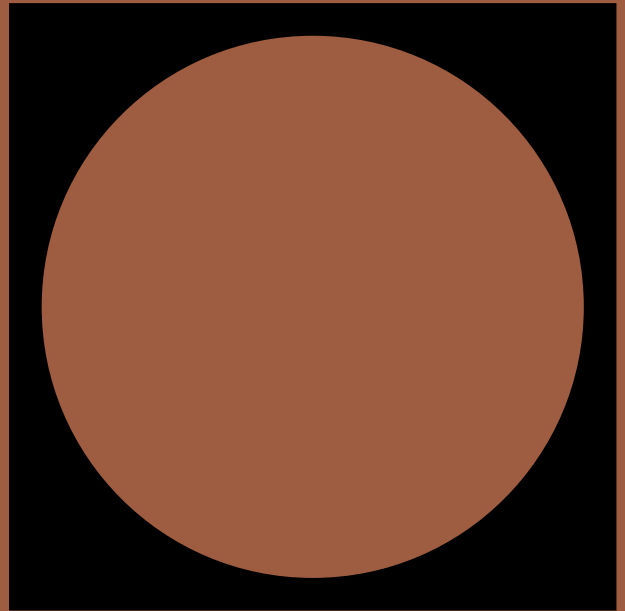


REGIONAL OVERVIEW: EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA



AUTHOR OF EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW: **Wangari Kimemia**



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TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Angola	nd ^f	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Botswana	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Comoros	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Eritrea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Eswatini	1,279	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Ethiopia	4,068	39.5	3.4	5.1	×	×	×	×	×
Kenya	27,056	11.3	20	3.9	✓ 10	✓ M B	✓	×	×
Lesotho	2,600	nd	nd	nd	×	×	nd	nd	nd
Madagascar	18,500	35.5	5.6	5.3	×	×	nd	nd	nd
Malawi	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Mauritius	12,000	32.3	90	3.5	✓ 1	✓ M B N	×	×	×
Mozambique	33,000	35.5	43.6	24.2	✓ 1	✓ M	×	×	×
Namibia	930	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Rwanda	2,000	9.5	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Seychelles	2,000	12.6	79.1	0.3	✓ 2	✓ M	×	×	×
South Africa	75,701	21	55	5	✓ 11	✓ M B N	×	×	✓
South Sudan	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Uganda	9,500	17	2	8.4	✓ 1	✓ M B N	×	×	×
United Republic of Tanzania	30,000	14	23.1	6.9	✓ 9	✓ M	×	×	×
Zambia	26,840	24	nd	3.2	×	×	×	×	×
Zimbabwe	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone

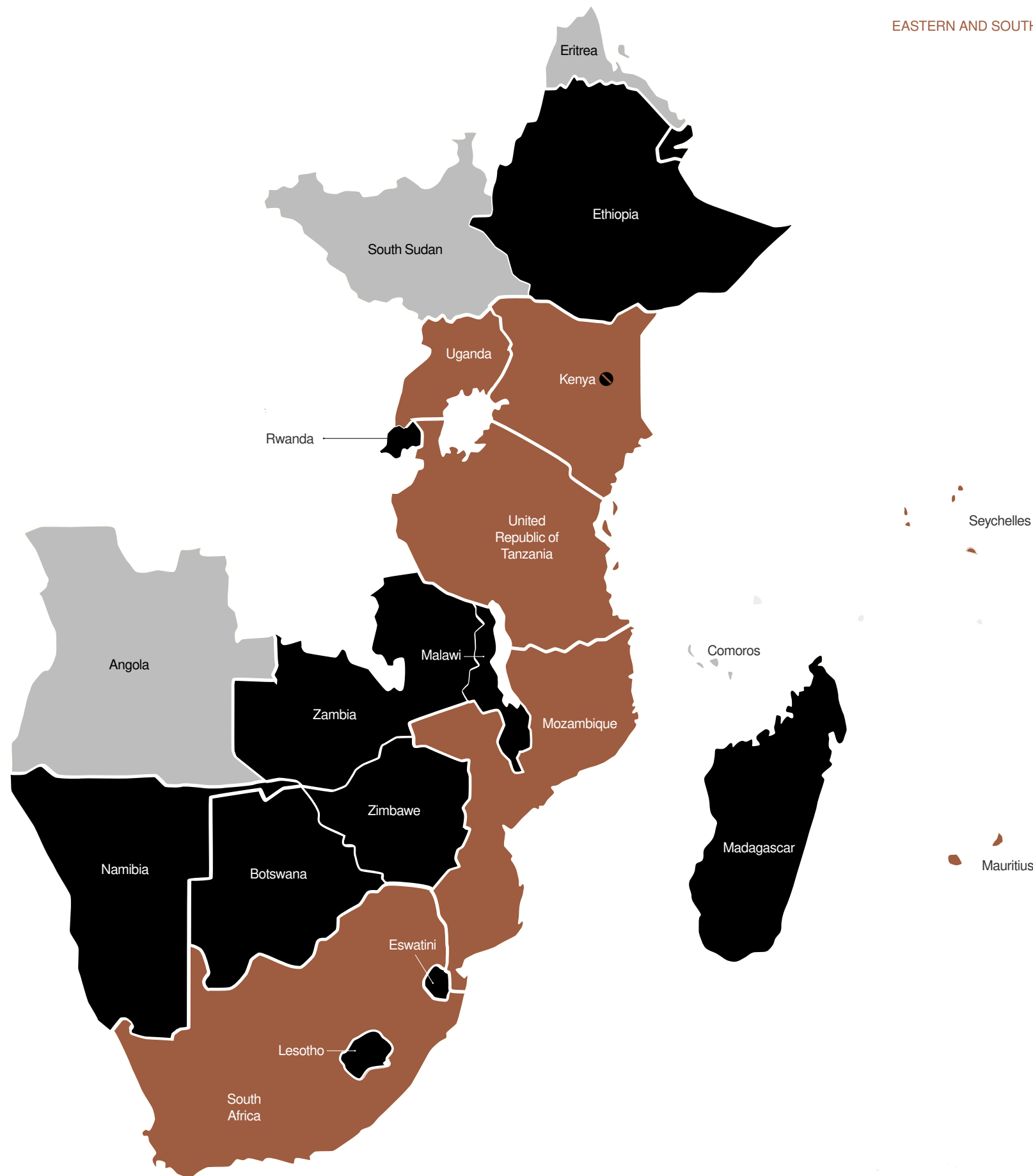
c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data

AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

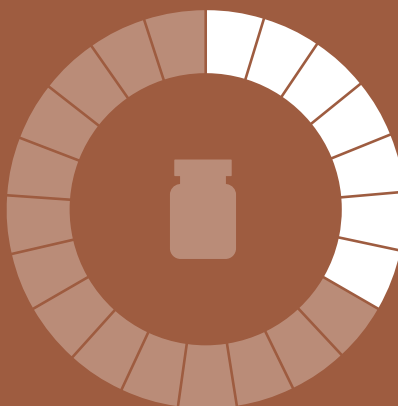


- Both NSP and OAT available
- OAT only
- NSP only
- Neither available
- Not known
- Peer-distribution of naloxone

NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



7 countries (33%) in Eastern and Southern Africa provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



7 countries (33%) in Eastern and Southern Africa provide **opioid agonist therapy** (no change from 2022)

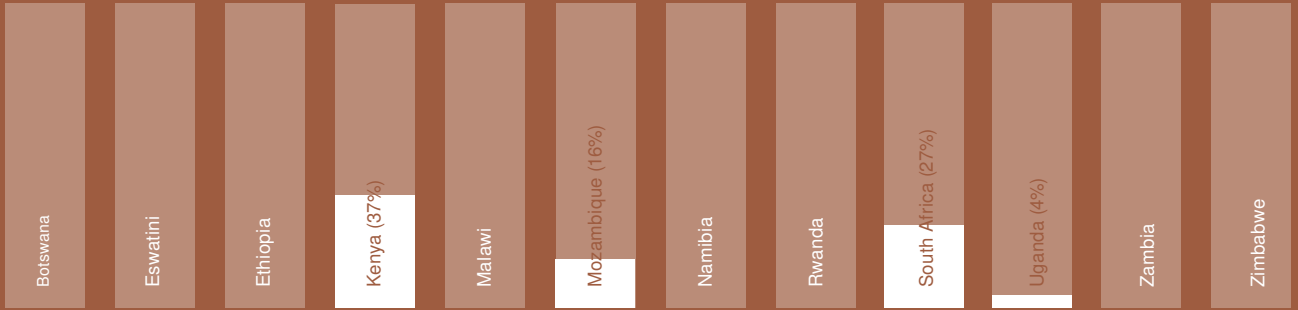


No country in Eastern and Southern Africa provides **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



South Africa is the only country in Eastern and Southern Africa to provide **safer smoking kits** (+1 from 2022)

AVERAGE HARM REDUCTION COVERAGE



HIV PREVALENCE AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS



KEY ISSUE

SUPPORTIVE POLICIES, PUNITIVE PRACTICES

Eastern and Southern Africa has the highest HIV prevalence in the world with more than 20 million (5.9%) people living with HIV.¹ HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs in the region stands at a high of 21.8% – almost four times that of the general population – yet all Eastern and Southern African countries continue to criminalise drug use. This prevents people who use drugs from receiving equitable HIV services compared to the general population.² Repressive drug law enforcement contributes to the barriers people who use drugs face when accessing health services, heightening their HIV risk.^{3,4,5} But progress is being made in the region as there continues to be a shift towards the implementation of some harm reduction services.

Since 2022, three more countries (Botswana, Mozambique and Namibia) produced national policy documents that explicitly support harm reduction. Botswana's *HIV Prevention Road Map 2023-2025* refers to the need to introduce harm reduction interventions, although this is yet to be actualised.⁶ Namibia has included harm reduction, specifically opioid agonist therapy (OAT), in its HIV strategic framework.⁷ Mozambique has included harm reduction in its national HIV plan.⁸ Only two countries in the region are now without supportive policies (Eswatini and Rwanda).

However, there is a lag between policy and practice, as no additional country has initiated OAT or a needle and syringe programme (NSP) since 2022. Although Zimbabwe's *National Drug Master Plan (2020-2025)* outlines harm reduction interventions, including NSP, OAT and naloxone, these are yet to be implemented

despite funds being available through a grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.⁹ In 2022, Mauritius legalised medical cannabis and decriminalised possession of small amounts for personal consumption. Yet, medical cannabis is still not accessible, and people are still being arrested for possessing small amounts of the drug.^{10,11,12} In Rwanda, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Health Development Initiative Rwanda is implementing an advocacy and health service project for people who use drugs. However, this does not include NSP, OAT or naloxone.^{13,14}

Despite notable efforts towards a harm reduction approach, law enforcement and the 'war on drugs' still dominates the region's approach to drug use. In South Africa, in spite of a recent scaling up of harm reduction, punitive responses to drugs continue.^{15,16,17}

According to the Networking HIV and AIDS Community of Southern Africa, in just three months in 2023, programme data revealed 600 human rights violations against people who use drugs, including confiscation of syringes, assaults and unlawful arrests by law enforcement.¹⁸

The NGOs TB/HIV Care and the South African Network of People Who Use Drugs reported that, due to resistance towards harm reduction, there was a three-month shutdown of the NSP in Wynberg,

Cape Town. In Zimbabwe, law enforcement is reported to be running active anti-drug campaigns, including arresting and publicly parading people arrested for drug use.^{19,20,21,22} In Uganda, there were around 4,800 people, including 137 young people, arrested for drug use in 2022.²³ In Botswana, a presidential commission of inquiry on constitutional reforms has recommended that the death penalty be imposed for drug trafficking.²⁴

Although harm reduction has grown in the region, primarily due to advocacy from community and civil society organisations, the prevailing contradiction between policy and practice poses a major barrier to progress. The Eastern and Southern African Commission on Drugs has underscored the need to review the current strategic and policy responses to drug trafficking and drug use in the region to ensure people who use drugs can access healthcare and other vital services.²⁵

KEY ISSUE

DIMINISHING HARM REDUCTION FUNDING

Eastern and Southern Africa has a high rate of poverty, with 45% of people in Southern Africa and 34% in Eastern Africa living below the poverty line.²⁶ Low domestic investment in health is common, with most governments spending less than USD 100 per person annually on healthcare.²⁷ The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) notes that high national debts are a major threat to the HIV response in low-income countries, which can spend up to four times more on debt repayments than on health.²⁸ While some countries in the region have made investments in their national HIV responses, there remains a marked reliance on international donor funding, which undermines the sustainability of a domestic HIV response. For example, Madagascar has seen a 151% increase in new HIV infections and a 279% increase in AIDS-related deaths since 2010.²⁹ In South Sudan, only half of people living with HIV know their status and less than half (47%) are on treatment.³⁰

The South African government funds 70% of its HIV response domestically, but no national funds are allocated to harm reduction; instead, the government allocates resources to ineffective abstinence-based programmes. However, the City of Tshwane funds the Community-Oriented Substance Use Programme, which takes a harm reduction approach, through social contracting.^{a,31} In Uganda, the government has not committed any budget to fund harm reduction.^{32,33} Kenya's HIV response, under which harm reduction falls, remains heavily donor-funded, with only 36.5% of the funding coming

from domestic sources.³⁴ In the financial years 2019-2022, the country's harm reduction programme, which included methadone, buprenorphine, naloxone and hepatitis B and C management, experienced a funding gap of USD 29,398,721.³⁵ Mauritius funds around 80% (approximately USD 1,271,483) of its national HIV programme and partially funds harm reduction in accordance with the *National HIV and AIDS Action Plan 2023-2027*.³⁶ Nevertheless, domestic harm reduction funding decreased from USD 261,198 in 2018 to a predicted USD 228,000 in 2023.³⁷

Community-led networks and civil society organisations across the region underscored the lack of funds as a major barrier to their efforts in relation to both advocacy and service delivery.^{38,39,40} Consequently, access to harm reduction services remains low. The Global Drug Policy Index 2021 reported average harm reduction coverage to be 37% in Kenya, 16% in Mozambique, 27% in South Africa and 4% in Uganda.⁴¹ Yet, drug use is projected to increase by 40% by 2030 in Africa, and East and Southern Africa has become a drug transit hub and destination market.^{42,43} This trend calls for an urgent increase in harm reduction coverage, yet punitive drug law enforcement remains the predominant approach to drug control in the region. The biggest funding boost for harm reduction in Eastern and Southern Africa would be for governments to stop funding punitive approaches to drugs and invest in harm reduction.

“The biggest funding boost for harm reduction in Eastern and Southern Africa would be for governments to stop funding punitive approaches to drugs and invest in harm reduction.”

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