

## NPS POLICY – MOVING FORWARD

### Reporting the Seminar

Leading European experts, including researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, met at a seminar in Lisbon on 26th November (9 a.m.–5.30 p.m.) to discuss the latest developments in the field of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS).

The event was hosted by APDES (Portugal) in collaboration with the Department of Addictology, Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic), the Regenboog Groep

(Netherlands), Praksis (Greece), Carusel (Romania), Sananim (Czech Republic), and Monar (Poland), within the framework of the European project NPS in Europe.

The seminar included keynote speakers presenting the European situation regarding NPS and innovative interventions in the area and discussed the challenges, obstacles, and successes in relation to the legal regulation of this phenomenon.

The welcoming session was facilitated by José Queiroz (Executive Director of APDES) and

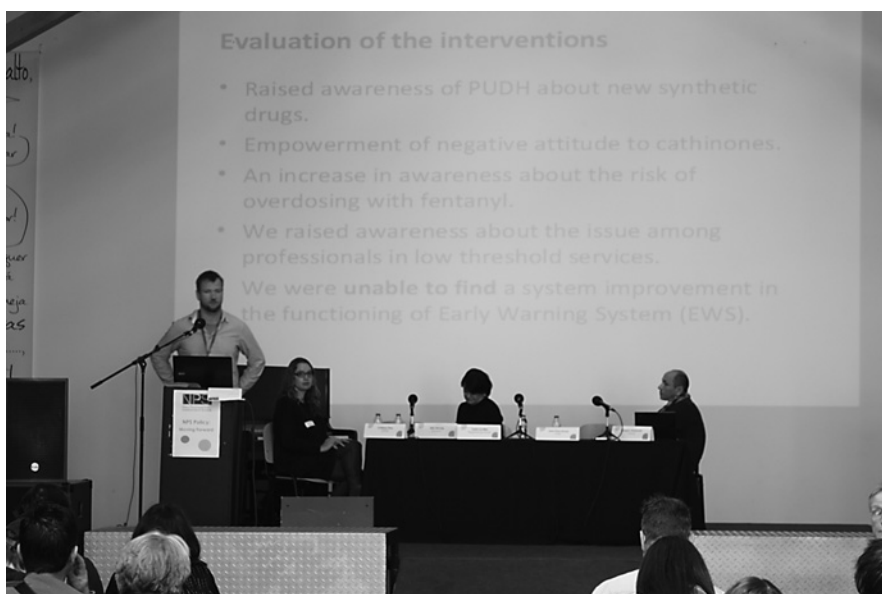
Joaquim Fonseca (Director of the Division for Intervention on Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies from the Regional Health Administration), who welcomed the participants and explained the overall objectives of this seminar and its plan.

The seminar included four sessions. During the morning there were two different sessions which were very well attended in terms of areas of expertise and nationalities. These sessions were focused on the latest developments in research and interventions concerning NPS and provided data for the later discussion of the NPS policy.

The first session was dedicated to the presentation of the “NPS in Europe” project (by Cristiana Pires, APDES) and the Rapid Assessment & Response (RAR) methodology (by Jean-Paul Grund, CUNI, & Katrin Schiffer, Rainbow Group), and the presentation of three of the pilot interventions planned and implemented under the project. Cristiana Pires (APDES), Alez Herzog (Sanamin), and Grzegorz Wodowski (Monar) presented the main processes and results of their tailored pilot interventions. This session was very effective in explaining the implementation dimensions of the “NPS in Europe” project and also in demonstrating the diversity that exists in terms of the local expressions of the NPS phenomenon and ways to respond to it.

For the second session, several European professionals and researchers with expertise in the field of NPS were invited to participate. This session was chaired by Dr. Graça Vilar from SICAD (General Directorate for Intervention on Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies, Portugal) and integrated four relevant presentations:

- Dr. Adam Winstock presented the Global Drug Survey methodology, and, in a very dynamic way, highlighted the main results regarding NPS: markets, substances used, users’ profiles etc.;
- Dr. Fernando Caudevilla shared his knowledge about the dynamics of the Deep Web and also his relevant professional experience in online harm reduction, specifically in the Deep Web Marketplaces’ forums, where he works under the alias of Doctor X;
- Helena Valente (APDES) provided a presentation about the relevance of Drug Checking as an outreach frontline service to detect NPS and new drug trends. By presenting data on the APDES drug checking service – CHECK!NG – she also provided relevant data about the impact of this service in changing users’ behaviours.



Session on NPS in Europe: Project overview and results



Session on EU28 Inventory by Jean-Paul Grund



Policy Debate – EU NPS Legal Framework

Since Maria Carvalho (Kosmicare/Boom Festival) could not attend the seminar, Helena also presented Boom Festival's Kosmicare service – an emergency harm reduction service provided by a multidisciplinary team of volunteers that supports users undergoing difficult psychedelic experiences;

- Finally, Fred Bladou's (AIDES, France) presentation focused on NPS use in a sexual context, specifically among men who have sex with men. He shared data concerning chemsex and slamming in Paris, patterns of NPS use, and also specific risks such as HIV and other STI infections.

In this session different expressions and uses of NPS were addressed and at the same time good intervention practices were shared, for example drug checking and netreach work (web-based harm reduction). However, one of the main conclusions that arose from this session was that even though there is an emergence of sophisticated Deep Web Marketplaces and a growing number of new psychoactive substances, users still prefer more traditional drugs. In fact, legal frameworks seem to be the main variable that motivates users to search for legal psychoactive substances or alternative markets (mainly because of the repressive laws or the low level of quality of street drugs). All the speakers agreed that the only approach that could be effective in responding to the NPS phenomenon in a holistic manner would be to experiment with an alternative regulatory model to that for the so-called "traditional drugs".

Jean-Paul Grund (CUNI) opened the afternoon sessions by providing the main data collected under the EU28 Inventory. This presentation highlighted the diversity of NPS and NPS use among the different European countries, and provided data for the later policy discussion.

The last session was a policy debate focused on the European NPS Legal Frameworks. This debate was chaired by José Queiroz (APDES) and Eberhard Schatz (RG) was the rapporteur. This session was enriched by the presence of the national representatives of the REITOX Network focal points, namely Patrícia Pissarra, (SICAD, Portugal), Artur Malczewski (Head of the Polish Focal Point), Gerasimos Papanastasiatos (Office of the National Drug Coordinator, Greece) and Katerina Grohmannova (EWS on NPS, Czech Republic). The session focused on the functioning of the Early Warning System, communication with the national outreach teams and services, and the effectiveness of the current EU NPS-specific legal framework in facing the challenges of this phenomenon. The participants agreed that there are some gaps in the legislation and the current European

legislative frameworks cannot fully tackle the NPS-related issues, such as the online markets and the constant appearance of new substances. The audience interacted with the speakers, asking challenging questions related to the project funding, the repressiveness of the legal framework, and the lack of support for innovative intervention approaches.

Eberhard Schatz (Rainbow Group) closed the seminar by summarising the main topics discussed during the day and also inviting the audience and speakers for a closing cocktail. This seminar had almost 100 registrations. The audience was international, and the majority of the participants were professionals working in the drug field, but also researchers, peers, students, and policymakers.

The agenda of this seminar was very rich and the feedback from the audience was very positive. By presenting the most recent developments concerning the regulation of NPS, this seminar was a good opportunity for exchanging examples of good practice and fruitful discussion and provided a unique networking opportunity based on expertise from a variety of fields, including research, practice, and policymaking.

*Cristiana Vale Pires, Ana Costa,  
and Helena Valente  
APDES  
E-mail: cristiana.pires@apdes.pt*



Part of the seminar's audience