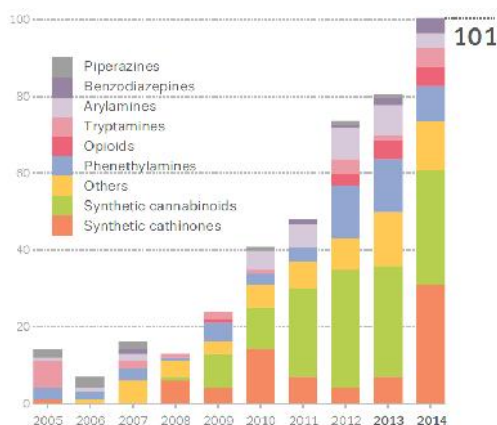


EUROPEAN PROJECT “I-SEE” for strengthening information exchange between Italy and South East Europe neighboring countries on New Psychoactive Substances

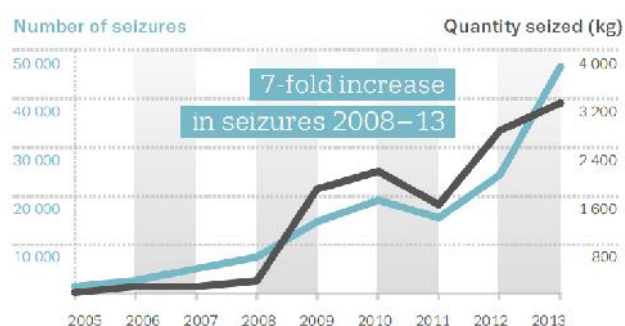
As reported by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) (<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/2015/new-psychoactive-substances>), over the past 5 years there has been an unprecedented increase in the number, type and availability of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) in Europe. Continuing this trend, during 2014, 101 new substances were reported for the first time to the EU Early Warning System: 31 cathinones, 30 cannabinoids, 9 phenethylamines, 5 opioids, 5 tryptamines, 4 benzodiazepines, 4 arylalkylamines and 13 substances that do not conform to the aforementioned groups. This brings the total number of substances being monitored by the EMCDDA to more than 450, with more than half of these being reported in the last three years alone (Figure 1).

European data on seizure from law enforcement also confirm the growth and importance of this drug market. Between 2008 and 2013 there was a seven-fold increase in the number of seizures reported across Europe. In 2013, almost 47.000 seizures weighing more than 3.1 tonnes were reported to the EU Early Warning System. Synthetic cannabinoids, which are sold as legal replacements for cannabis, accounted for the majority of these figures, with over 21.000 seizures weighing almost 1.6 tonnes. Synthetic cathinones, which are sold as legal replacements for stimulants (i.e. amphetamine and MDMA), were the second largest group, with almost 11.000 seizures weighing more than 1.1 tonnes. Together, synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones accounted for almost 70% of the total number of seizures and over 85% of the weight seized during 2013 (Figure 2).

Number of NPS reported to the EU EWS (2005-2014).
Source: EMCDDA, 2015



Number of seizures of NPS and quantity seized (2005-2014).
Source: EMCDDA, 2015



Note: 2009 data exclude six tonnes of ketamine seized by one country, due to a lack of contextual information.

As the market has grown in recent years, the EMCDDA has also had to deal with a **growing number of reports of serious harms**, often related to **acute toxicity leading to hospitalization and deaths**. Since 2005, **117 public health alerts were issued at EU level**, with more than 70% of these issued in the last five years. During 2014, 16 alerts were issued.

Key data

101 NPS reported for the first time in 2014

More than 450 NPS currently being monitored by the EMCDDA

46.730 seizures of NPS amounting to **more than 3.1 tonnes** in 2013

21.495 seizures of synthetic cannabinoids amounting to **almost 1.6 tonnes** in 2013

10.657 seizures of synthetic cathinones amounting to **more than 1.1 tonnes** in 2013

7-fold increase in reported seizures of NPS between 2008 and 2013

299 different new psychoactive substances detected across Europe in 2013

16 public health alerts issued in 2014

Critically, strong national and regional Early Warning Systems has to continue to play a central role in the early detection of harms and help to ensure timely public health responses. Therefore, considering the geographical proximity of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia and their being at the crossroads of European Eastern-Western routes for NPS trafficking, a project on NPS involving the three Early Warning Systems (EWS) was presented to the European Commission in 2014. Approved and co-funded by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union, the project "I-SEE" aims at strengthening information exchange between Italy and South East Europe neighbouring countries on NPS, in line also with the last indications coming from the last Commission on Narcotic Drugs, recently held in Wien.

To that purpose, the project intends to support the development and consolidation of national Early Warning System (EWS) networks, create a joint mechanism for information exchange, mutual learning and good practice exchange among EWSs, increase information exchange towards Law Enforcement to ease and strengthen activities aimed at early identifying and intercepting NPS supply.

The project involves 6 partners: from Italy, the University of Florence, as coordinator; from Croatia, the Office for Combating Drug Abuse and the University of Split School of Medicine; from Slovenia, the National Institute of Public Health, the Ministry of Interior Police and the Association DrugArt.

I-SEE project is organized in 3 steps:

1. Building up a network with Law Enforcement, NGOs and health sector (Slovenia). A number of NGOs will be selected to collect NPS samples from drug users and transmit them anonymously to Law Enforcement to be analyzed. Analytical results will be provided, for control purposes, and to inform drug users about what they are consuming. In parallel, health professionals will be involved to share clinical information on NPS with Law Enforcement and NGOs.
2. Building up clinical network (Croatia), to develop an effective network in clinical settings, including clinical toxicology laboratories, emergency wards, departments of forensic medicine and other relevant subjects in the health sector, so as to increase scientific and professional capacities related to the identification of NPS in biological samples and effective treatment of intoxicated patients.
3. Developing tools for strengthening NPS information exchange and identification in the toxicological and forensic field (Italy), by arranging a model for information flows among the three EWSs, acquiring new technical and analytical tools enabling laboratories to identify NPS and sharing the existing Italian online database containing analytical and clinical information on NPS identified in Europe.

"The I-SEE project represents an added value for the whole European Union as it allows to strengthen information exchange on NPS among neighbouring countries and ease Law Enforcement activities and cooperation both within the country and among countries", declared Elisabetta Bertol, coordinator of the

Coordinator



Beneficiary partners



project, from the University of Florence (Italy). *“The project will take advantage of national EWS experiences and good practice exchanges and will help improve effectiveness of the European EWS for the sake of all Member States”.*

“The increasing availability of NPS in Croatia probably causes serious health related consequences, including fatalities, which are currently not possible to monitor, register nor prevent. Laboratories in the health system are unable to detect NPS in biological samples and therefore percentages of NPS-related acute intoxications and deaths are completely unknown. Moreover, health care professionals are unaware of this growing problem and there is a lack of knowledge about the health effects related to the use of NPS”, stated Marija Definis Gojanovi . *“It is therefore essential to set up an effective mechanism in clinical settings that would include creating a network of all stakeholders, with a main center for strategic development, skill building and supervision. The clinical-toxicological network of the Croatian EWS would not only serve for the purpose of detecting NPS intoxications and monitoring health consequences attributed to their use, but would also aim to improve medical care of intoxicated persons and raise awareness of policy makers regarding the proportions and adverse effects of the NPS phenomenon”.*

As Ada Hočvar Grom, responsible for the I-SEE project in Slovenia, pointed out, *“NGOs are an important partner of the Slovenian Early Warning System on NPS, as they have direct contact with users and they have their trust. Therefore, in our country, NGOs are often the first ones to detect NPS; this is also the case because in Slovenia users have the possibility of bringing to NGO operators NPSS or classical drugs with unusual effects. In collaboration with the Police, NGO workers carry out the anonymous seizure of collected NPS samples and they send them for analysis. Furthermore, the NGOs, in cooperation with public health experts, also provide feedback information about the results of analysis and about the risks associated with the use of NPS and adequate intervention. It is therefore important to strengthen the role of NGOs within the Early Warning System in the framework of the project.”*

Further documents available at <http://www.dss.unifi.it/vp-102-i-see.html>