

# **New Psychoactive Substances among Problem Drug Users - Towards Effective and Comprehensive Health Responses in Europe**

**The situation in Greece**

**PRAKSIS**

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# PRAKSIS

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- **PRAKSIS is an independent NGO, aiming to provide humanitarian focused support in a wide span of fields (such as medical, legal, social welfare, psychological and financial) to socially vulnerable groups in need, regardless of :color, race, religion, age, nationality, ideology, sexual orientation or political beliefs through an array of problems.**
- **With its two Polyclinics in Athens and Thessaloniki, its Day Centers for the homeless in Athens and Piraeus its Drop-in Center for unaccompanied minors in Patras and the new accommodation shelter for unaccompanied minors in Athens , PRAKSIS is active all across Greece and especially in the two major urban centers of Athens and Thessaloniki the island of Lesbos and in the area of Patras.**

# PRAKSIS

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- **Simultaneously, our mobile medical units travel to the Northern Aegean islands, to the Dodecanese, as well as to Northern Greece.**
- **PRAKSIS Medical Mobile Units enables access in information to anyone who wishes to get tested free, fast, anonymously for HIV and Hepatitis C. Additionally, Prevention Helpline and Information, 800 11 11 600, is opened daily by answering questions about Hepatitis B and HIV.**
- **Implements awareness campaigns on various issues such as Hepatitis and STIs.**

# NPS Current situation in Greece\*

\*source Greek REITOX Focal Point

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- **Epidemiology**

Epidemiology for NPS is very poor in Greece as the phenomenon is recent. The number of individuals demanding treatment who reported methamphetamine use as primary or secondary substance, increased in 2011 (N=20) and 2012 (N=44) compared to the previous three years (i.e. 2008: 3, 2009: 4, 2010:5 individuals) - *As reported in treatment demand indicator 2008-2012*

- **Type of drugs / Drug Use:**

SISHA (CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE): for the first time Greece has produced a NPS called Sisha / Heroin users (Open air drug scenes of Athens).

Synthetic cannabinoids (AM-2201, JWH-018, JWH-210, JWH-122): young drug users mainly from Northern Greece.

Cathinones (MEPHEDRONE, 4-methylethcathinone (4-MEC), MDPV, METHYLONE, BUTYLONE) : young drug users.

- **Patterns of use:**

SISA: mainly smoking, to a smaller degree injecting.

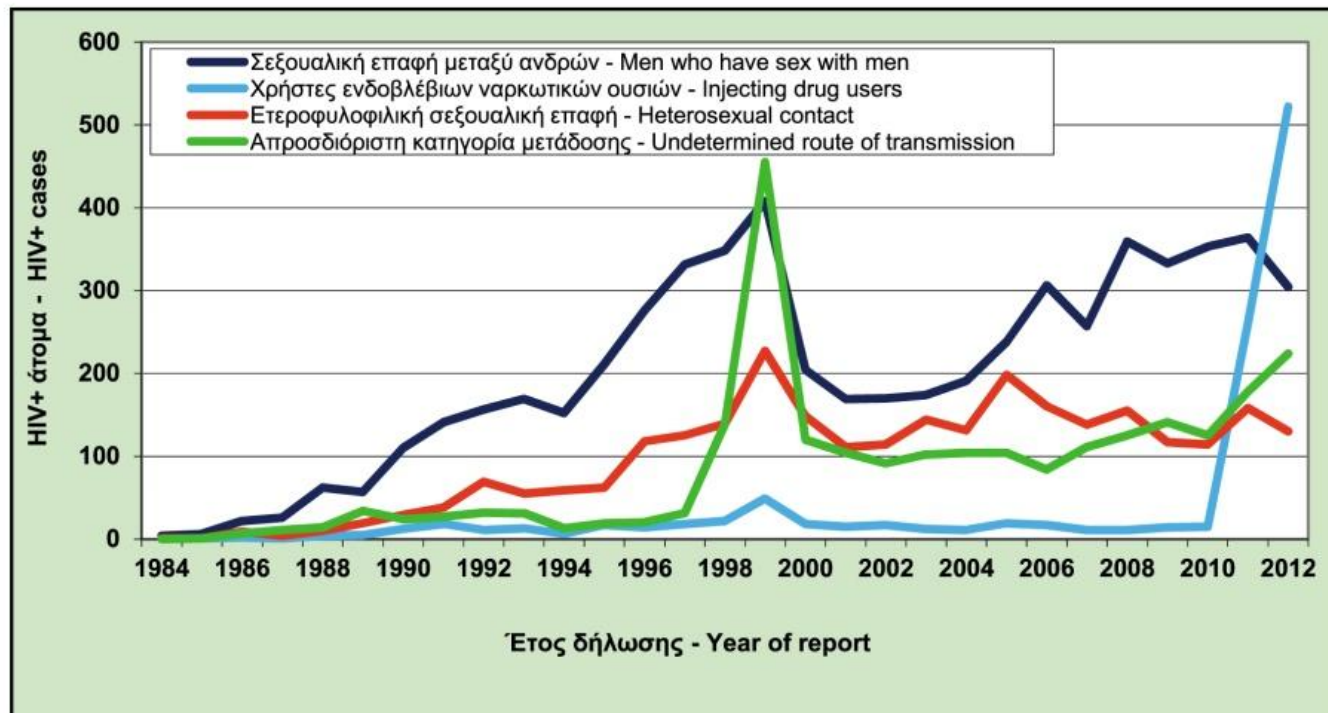
Synthetic cannabinoids: smoking

Cathinones : sniffing (in powder form), by mouth (pill)

# HIV epidemic among PWID in Athens

Since May 2011 (during the same year that Sisha was introduced in the market), a rise of new HIV diagnoses among PWID in the center of Athens was reported. Till today, though, no relation between the NP Substance and the HIV outbreak is proved.

HIV infections reported in Greece by transmission group and year of report (by 31/12/2012)



# European Experts

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- The Health Ministry has invited European experts to make a field study and give their recommendations.
- 7 harm reduction interventions were proposed by ECDC and EMCDDA.



**ΚΑΤΕΥΘΥΝΤΗΡΙΕΣ ΟΔΗΓΙΕΣ  
ΤΟΥ ECDC ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ EMCDDA**

**Πρόληψη και έλεγχος λοιμωδών νοσημάτων  
στους χρήστες ενδοφλέβιων ναρκωτικών**

# Harm reduction interventions I

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- The National Organization against Drugs (OKANA) proposed to the Greek civil society to establish a network that creates and distributes a common kit with clean material for safer use and condoms, Volunteer training in outreach work and scale up the distribution of needles, syringes and condoms per user.
- The Hellenic Center of Diseases and Prevention Control works in the same direction and KETHEA reinforces its program of needles and syringes exchange.
- From 25.000 NS distributed in 2010, we reached 120.000 in 2011 and 400.000 in 2012. In 1013 the distribution was over 500.000



# Harm reduction interventions II

- **Civil Society** was also involved in **Aristotelis** program, a snowball free testing for HIV and HCV among PWID in the center of Athens that tested about 3000 active drug users within 2 years.
- **Praksis** was part of the project offering additionally free testing for HIV and HCV through its polyclinics and mobile units.
- **Advocating** for implementing NSP and OSTs in prisons, for the reduction of the waiting list for OSTs in Athens, for the improvement of the legal framework concerning drug use/HIV (39a decree that criminalized HIV transmission) and for the installation of the first DCR in Athens was also part of PRAKSIS work.





# Outcomes / Challenges

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- First epidemiologic indicators show that there has been a significant decrease during 2013 in new HIV infections among PWID. The creation of an official commission under the MoH that includes civil society and drug users union with the mandate to coordinate interventions in the center of Athens is a big outcome at the advocacy level. The first DCR is very important.
- The legal framework still remains the same, we have still no OSTs and NSPs in prisons and although reduced, the waiting list still remains the biggest challenge.

**Working together with 4 other European countries (Portugal, The Netherlands, Poland, Czech Republic) in order to monitor NPS and adjust harm reduction interventions and policies in the realities of our countries are great challenges for our organization.**

**Thank you.**

