

My name is Nuria Calzada and I am the coordinator of Energy Control, of the Spanish NGO *Asociación Bienestar y Desarrollo*.

Energy Control is a **harm reduction project** aimed at people who **use drugs, mainly in nightlife settings**. One of the services we have offered since 1998 is **drug checking**, which seeks to inform people about the composition of the drugs they are going to take, as well as to advise them for lower risk consumptions.

Currently we have three types of drug checking services: **Onsite**, at parties and festivals; **stationary** services in four Spanish cities; and by post, both national and international.

We also coordinate the **Trans-European Drug Information Project**, a network of European Drug Checking services that share their expertise and data.

Only in the past 10 years, our national drug checking service has tested nearly forty thousand samples, voluntarily submitted by users. Also, since 2014, our International Drug Checking service, has analysed more than five thousand samples, mainly from the cryptomarkets, being cocaine, NPS and MDMA the three most analysed categories.

So, we can confirm that drug markets are dynamic and currently include the **widest range of substances** known to date.

In addition, for some drugs such as cocaine or MDMA, **purity levels have increased. NPS continue to pose a major threat to Public Health, especially synthetic cannabinoids and opioids derive from fentanyl. At the same time, new forms of drug distribution through the Internet have increased** the access to all drugs, both through the visible network and cryptomarkets. **And this is another trend that we clearly see in our users.**

We are convinced that drug checking can help to address this phenomenon in two ways: **harm reduction**, that allows people to discard products they don't really want to take, and **monitoring**, which allows us to understand the reality of drug markets and offer quick responses.

Drug Checking Services are market monitoring tools, that are complementary to other sources of information. Their added value lies in the fact that:

- They allow **contact with hard-to-reach populations**.
- They not only provide information on the composition, but also on other aspects, such as: **acquisition routes, prices, forms of use, experienced problems**, and so on.
- They also allow the **early detection of emerging phenomena**, thus reducing the period of time of reaction. In the case of NPS, drug checking has made important contributions to **European Early Warning Systems**.
- They enjoy credibility among drug users and therefore allow early warning to be more effective than official institutions.
- And finally, they have contributed to the improvement of our knowledge through publications and scientific papers.

These added-value elements have allowed information from drug checking to be considered by public institutions such as the **European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)** or the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**.

However, we know drug checking **can be controversial**, like other harm reduction interventions such as supervised consumption rooms, naloxone distribution or syringe exchange programmes. This may be difficult for those countries that, despite seeing the relevance of these services, may not want to face a heated debate around them.

In any case, our accumulated experience during the last two decades allows us to recommend to other countries: **the incorporation of drug checking** to their monitoring tools, with **appropriate financing**, their **integration in the national health systems** and the encouragement of **scientific research to evaluate** their impact.

To conclude, we would like to make a global call for self-critical reflection. We all agree that never before in our history have we had so much quantity, quality and diversity of available substances and so easy access to them. It is clear that we are doing something wrong and yet we continue to insist on the same approaches. So, it's time for political courage to take action and apply innovative strategies without fear of being judged as crazy because, as someone once said,

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting for different results".

Thanks for your attention.

Núria Calzada – Energy Control Coordinator (ABD)