New psychoactive substances in Europe

The market

**Legal highs**
Marketed in bright and attractive packaging. Sold openly in head/smart shops and online. Aimed at recreational users.

**Research chemicals**
Sold under the guise of being used for scientific research. Aimed at ‘psychoanauts’ who explore the effects of psychoactive substances. Sold openly online.

**Food supplements**
Sold under the guise of being food or dietary supplements. Aimed at people wanting to enhance their body and mind. Sold openly in fitness shops and online.

**Designer drugs**
Passed off as drugs such as MDMA and heroin. Produced in clandestine labs by organised crime. Sold on illicit drug market by drug dealers.

**Medicines**
Medicines that are diverted from patients or illegally imported into Europe. Sold on illicit drug market by drug dealers.

Synthetic cannabinoids
Sold as ‘legal’ replacements for cannabis

- **21 495 seizures amounting to almost 1.6 tonnes in 2013**

EU Early Warning System
Since 1997, the EMCDDA has played a central role in Europe’s response to new psychoactive substances. Its main responsibilities in this field are to operate the EU Early Warning System, with its partner Europol, and to undertake risk assessments of new substances when necessary. The EU Early Warning System works by collecting information on the appearance of new substances from the 28 EU Member States, Turkey and Norway, and then monitoring them for signals of harm, allowing the EU to respond rapidly to emerging threats.

Synthetic cannabinoids (left panel) and synthetic cathinones (right) make up the largest groups of new substances reported to the EU Early Warning System, 2005–14

- **101 NPS reported for the first time in 2014**
- **450 NPS currently monitored**
- **46 730 seizures amounting to more than 3.1 tonnes in Europe**

From synthesis to consumer

- Chemical companies based in China and India synthesize NPS in bulk quantity
- Ship by air or sea to Europe
- Processed and packaged into legal highs, research chemicals and food supplements
- Sold openly in head/smart shops and online
- 8% of young adults have used NPS in their lifetime [Eurobarometer]

Synthetic cathinones
Sold as ‘legal’ replacements for stimulants

- **10 657 seizures amounting to more than 1.1 tonnes in 2013**