

Project NPS-Prison: Measures to reduce NPS use and related dangers in prisons

Direct measures to reduce supply

Minimize smuggling by:

- Increased checks during visits.
However, this would entail the need for more staff and/or changes of work organisation.
- Increased checks on incoming personal mail.
Due to the corona pandemic, there was significantly less smuggling by visitors of 'old' drugs, but an increase of NPS on letters etc., in particular synthetic cannabinoids on paper. A solution could be to issue copies of the letters and hand these out to the recipient. Again, this would be associated with additional work for prison staff.
- Use of rapid analyses such as IONSCAN 600, enabling detection of substances in the trace range. Suspicious samples, e.g. paper or tobacco, can be quickly analysed for NPS. Database must constantly be kept up to date.
- Prevention of overthrows.
Relatively easy to accomplish by heighten prison walls or using catch nets.
- Prevent body packing more efficiently.
- Smuggling by employees.
More checks on employees and companies from outside.
- Prevention of drone overflights.
Here, electronic measures like geo-fencing could be an option.

Detection of substances:

- Training employees on the issue of NPS.
Regular training keeps employees up to date. Recognition of substances and possible effects of their use is simplified. New trends can be passed on more easily.
- Increased use of laboratory analysis.
Examination of urine samples in the laboratory as gold standard. NPS can be validly detected by this way, but the tests are more expensive and complex than rapid tests.
- Development of reliable rapid tests (e.g. based on antibodies).
Unfortunately, this strategy failed so far as it is too slow due to rapid changes in the chemical structures of substances. → Not a realistic option.

Reduction of risks from NPS use

Prevention of overdoses:

- Education of detainees.
Low-threshold information is used to educate prisoners about NPS and their specific effects and risks. This should include honest information, e.g. about the differences between the risks of synthetic cannabinoids and cannabis.

- Peer approach.
Increased credibility by involving peers, preferably people with high credibility among the detainees. This should include reports or direct involvement of people with experiences in NPS use (preferably persons with prison experience).
- Communicate safer use messages.
Users should be provided with safer drug use training, particularly with regard to NPS. This can help to minimise harm with relatively little effort.
- Information materials.
Inmates and prison staff should be provided with appropriate information. It is important that the language used is as simple as possible and that foreign languages prevalent in the respective prison are taken into account.

Dealing with substances/addiction therapy measures

- Target-open counseling/therapy work on addictions. Users should have a say in the goals and form of treatment.
- Take addiction seriously. Provide staff with training on addiction and its consequences.
- Increased possibilities for opioid substitution treatment in prison.
- Interdisciplinary treatment teams for addiction and psychiatric disorders.
- Transition management from detention to further measures such as opioid substitution or therapy.
- Introduction of consumption reduction/controlled use programs such as 'KISS' (competence in self-determined substance use).
- Use of alternative measures ('holistic medicine') such as acupuncture or homoeopathy.

Legal changes

- Set the legal basis for increased opioid substitution treatment in prison (see above)
- Decriminalization or legalisation of banned substances.
This would result in fewer people who use drugs going to prison, like in, for example, Portugal.
- Fewer imprisonment for failure to pay a fine, e.g. for fare evasion and the like.
- Sanctioning the use of NPS more severely than use of 'classical' drugs or medications.
- Discussing potentials to allow the use of certain forms of psychoactive substances in prison (e.g., low-potency formulations of substances with calming effects).