



 European Web  
Survey on Drugs

# **New Psychoactive Substances use in self-selected respondents of the population (EU web-survey)**

**Artur Malczewski (Reitox Focal Point Poland - National  
Bureau for Drug Prevention), Julian Vicente (EMCDDA),  
Joao Matias (EMCDDA)**

# European on-line NPS survey

- The Global Drug Survey (GDS) (65 thousand participants worldwide answered questions concerning NPS)
- I-TREND (2014) – the countries involved in the study: Poland, France, Czechia and Holland (2323 NPS users)
- NPS transnational (2016) - the countries involving in the study: Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Holland, Poland and Portugal (2210 NPS users)
- The second wave of the European Web Survey on Drugs 2017, the countries involved in the study: Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Luxembourg and Cyprus (9805 respondents reported ever using NPS)

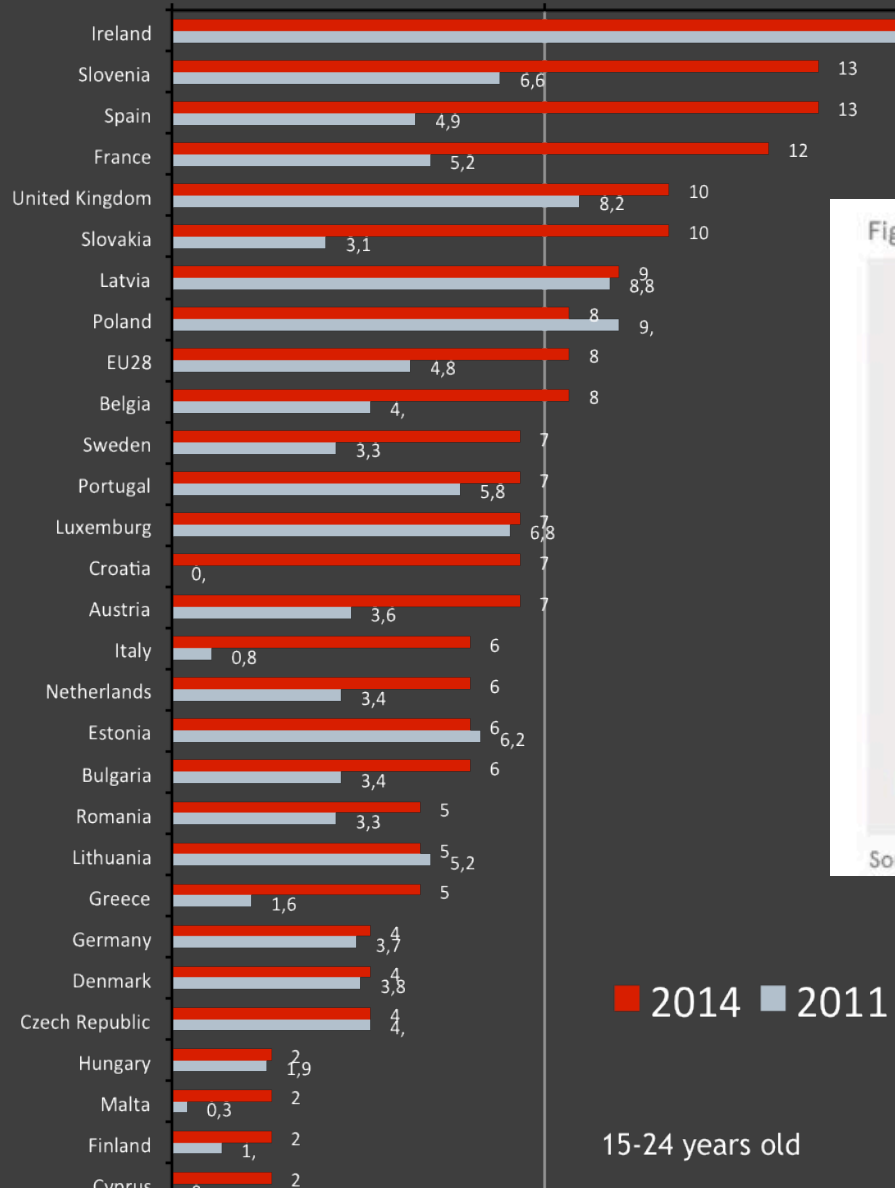
# Challenges of NPS monitoring

## Two cases

### (Ireland and Estonia)

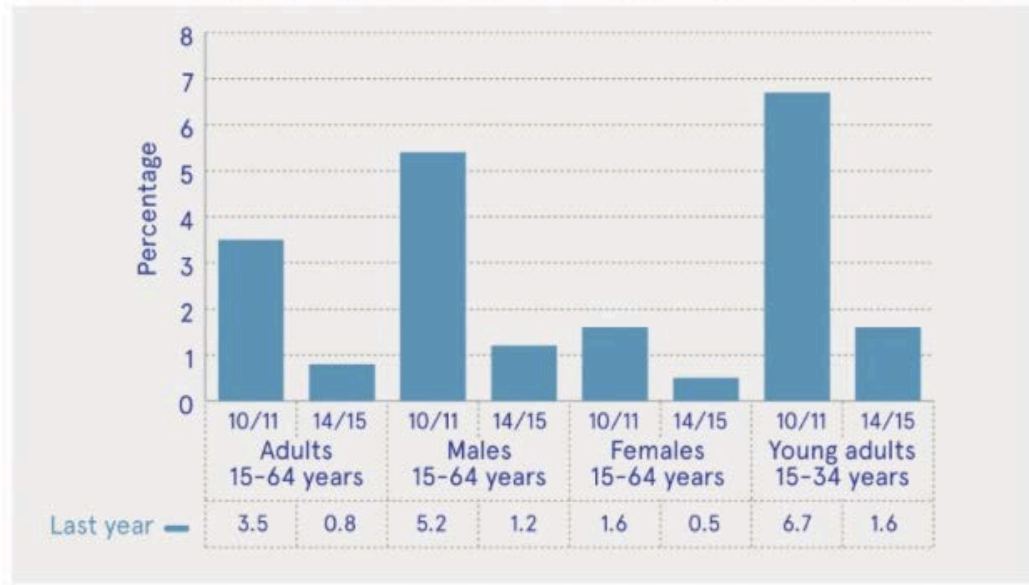


Q3. New substances that imitate the effects of illicit drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, etc. may now sometimes be available. They are sometimes called [INSERT 'local name' such as, 'legal highs', 'research chemicals'] and can come in different form, for example herbal mixtures, powders, crystals or tablets. Have you ever used such substances?



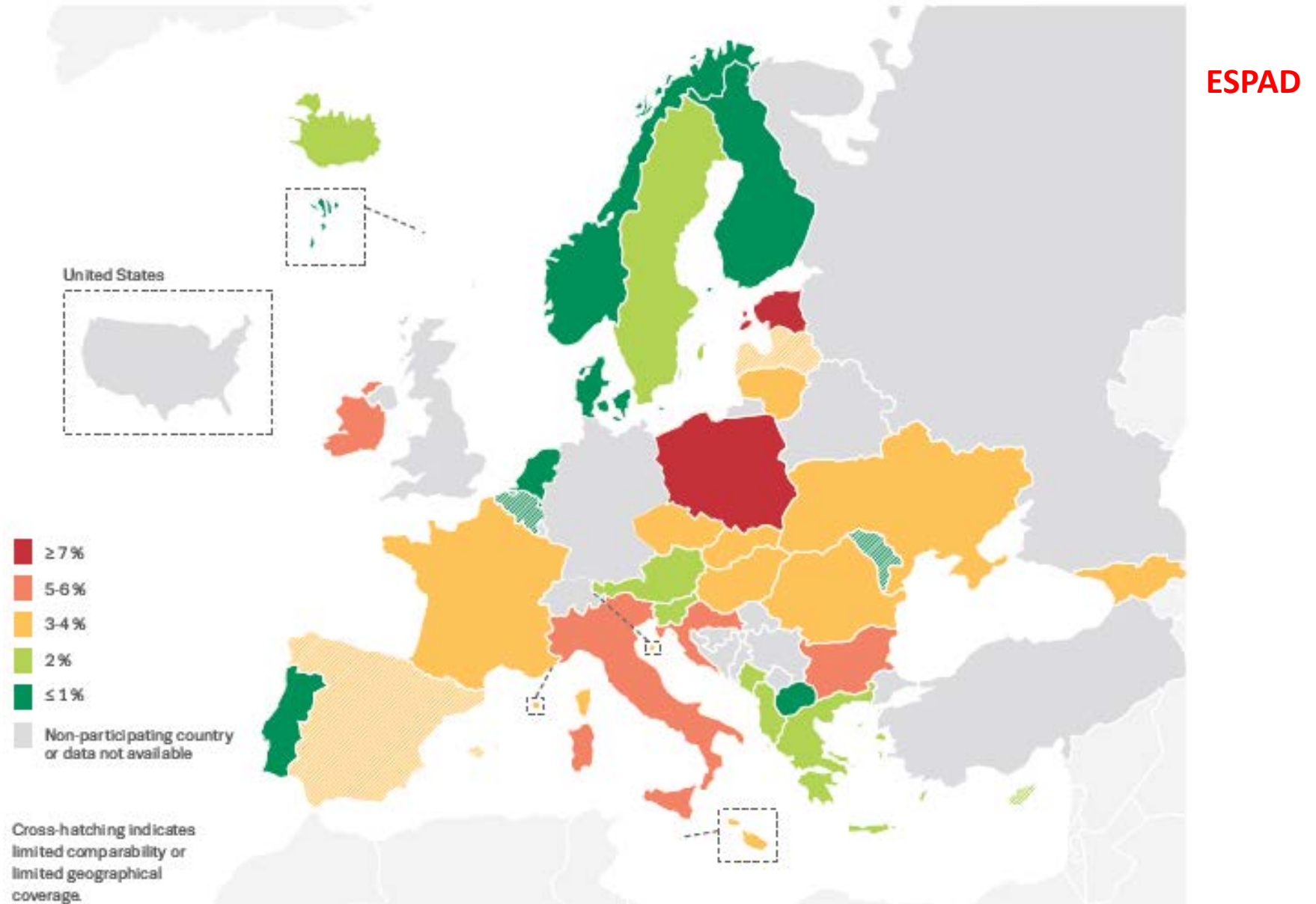
LTP

Figure 5: Last year prevalence of NPS use among adults in Ireland, 2010/11 and 2014/15



Source: NACDA, 2016

Figure 9a. Prevalence of new psychoactive substance use in the last 12 months (percentage)



# Challenges of NPS monitoring with using survey

- The variety of substances causes that it is extremely difficult to monitor the prevalence of NPS use by means of quantitative research.
- The main challenge is how to place NPS items in a survey questionnaire. NPS keep evolving. The chemical composition then often varies from year to year. Not easy to follow a trend in NPS using
- NPS users do not refer to the substances they use as NPS, which has been corroborated in I-TREND and NPS transnational projects
- Despite the NPS term being defined in the online questionnaire, it still remains possible that some substances reported in the NPS battery cannot be regarded as NPS.

# The Web Survey:

- At the end of 2017, the EMCDDA in collaboration with Reitox Focal Points from 10 EU countries undertook the Web Survey. More than 31 000 participants took part in the second wave. 9805 respondents reported ever using NPS (mean age 24, median 22, 64% male) out of whom 5436 respondents had used in the last 12 months (17%).
- The Web survey in question did not cover data from all countries.



# How we ask about NPS? (1)

- Survey participants of Web Survey answered questions about the use of drugs (like e.g. amphetamines, methamphetamines, cannabis) and also new psychoactive substances (NPS). The NPS questions were placed in several sections of the online questionnaire.





# How we ask about NPS? (2)

- 1) At the beginning, the respondents were asked about using NPS in a lifetime, in the last 12 months and the last 30 days
- 2) In the next step, the respondents were asked complete a prevalence table in relation to synthetic cathinones, synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids and other NPS
- 3) separate battery of questions dedicated to NPS where they were asked specific questions about NPS form of the substance: herbal mixtures; powders, crystals, tablets; fluids and blotters.



# Limitation of EU web-survey

- Findings of the survey by individual countries should be interpreted whilst keeping in mind that first of all, it covered a diversified and mainly a non-representative sample
- Despite the NPS term being defined in the online questionnaire, it still remains possible that some substances reported in the NPS battery cannot be regarded as NPS



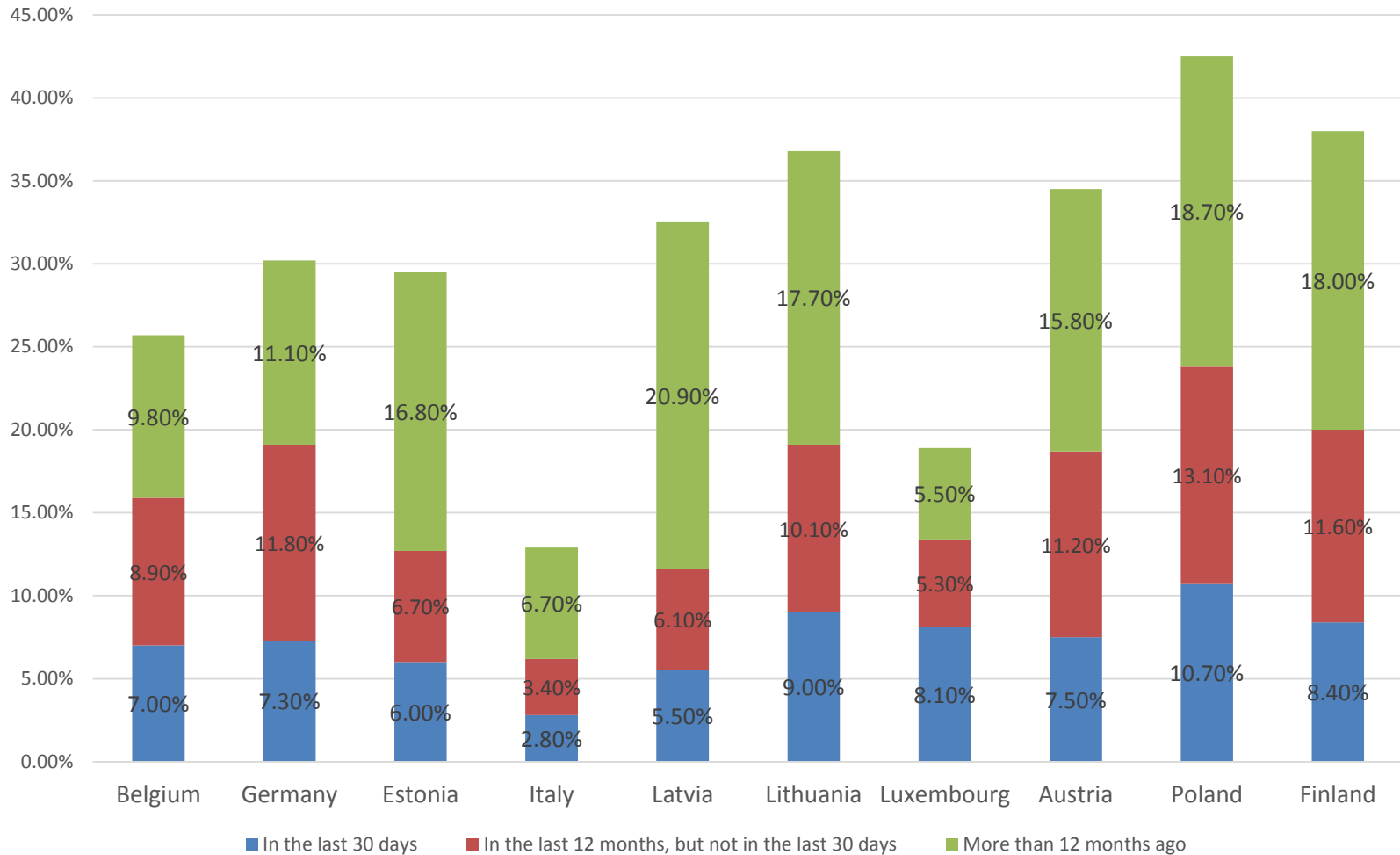
# NPS users

According to the first NPS question in Web survey 9805 respondents reported ever using NPS (mean age 24, median 22, 64% male) out of whom 5436 respondents had used in the last 12 months (8.5% of individuals who answered positively to the question about using NPS).

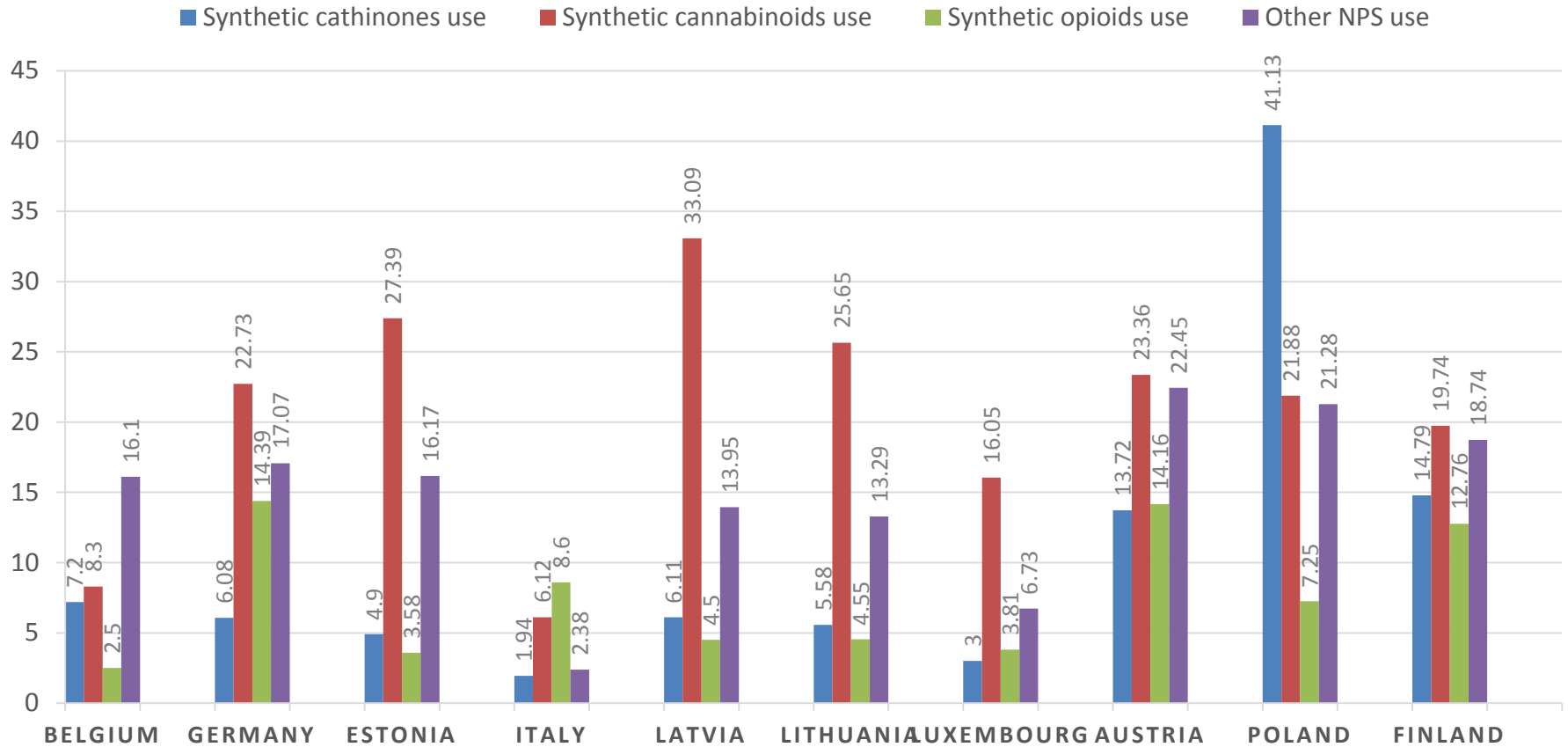
Among the respondents who reported using NPS in the last 12 months, 57% were male whereas 1.9% transgender. Mean age was 22 while median 20.



**New substances that imitate the effects of illicit drugs (such as cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, etc.) may sometimes be available. They are called 'designer drugs', 'new psychoactive substances', 'NPS', 'legal highs', 'research chemicals' number and % of respondents**

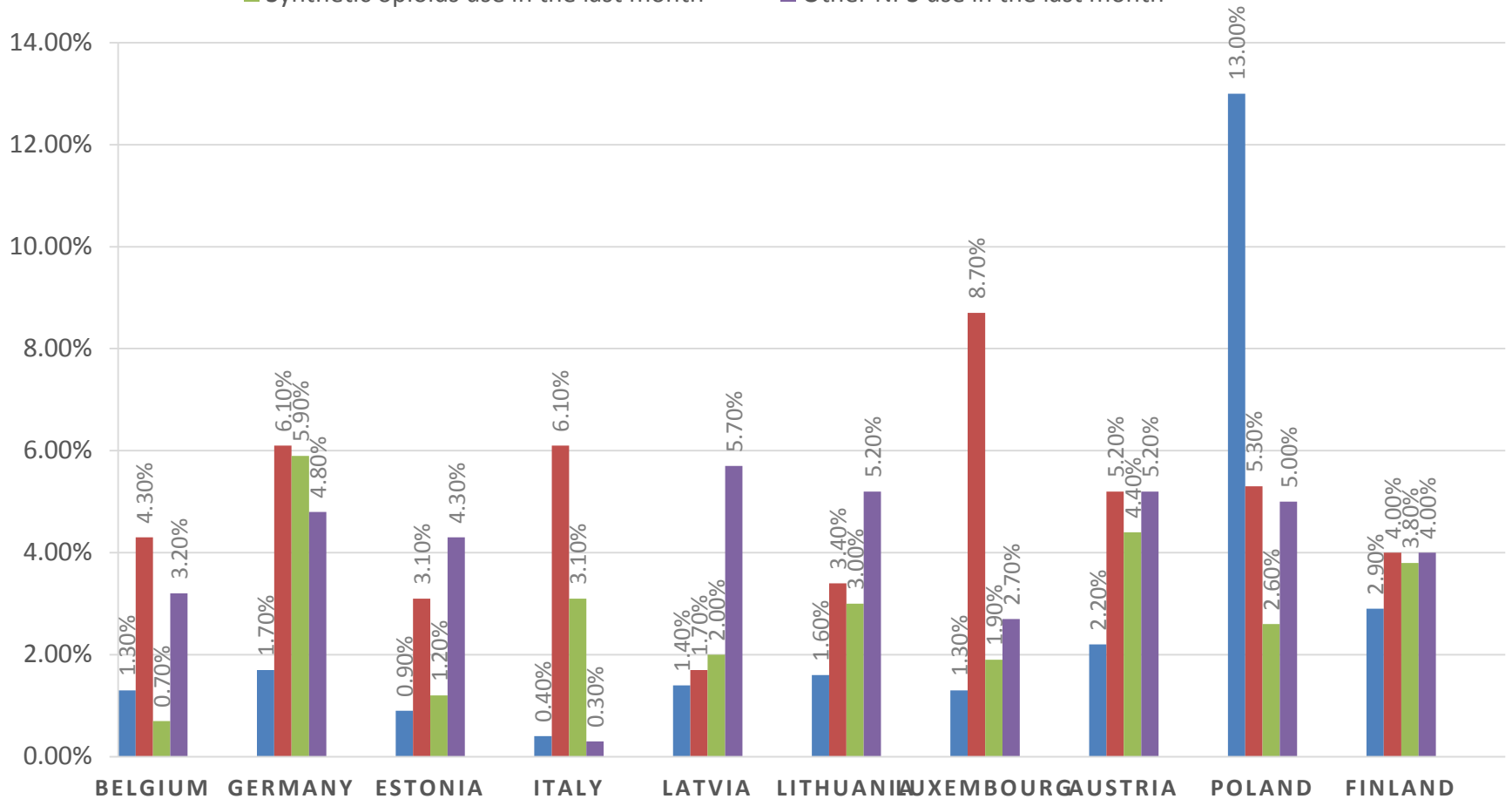


# Lifetime prevalence of NPS (%)



# Last month of prevalence of NPS (%)

■ Synthetic cathinones use in the last month   ■ Synthetic cannabinoids use in the last month  
■ Synthetic opioids use in the last month   ■ Other NPS use in the last month



# How popular are different NPS?

- 6.5% of all the respondents reported using synthetic cathinones (e.g. mephedrone) (last month prevalence (LMP) 1.8%; last year prevalence (LYT) 3.8%).
- 10.8% had used synthetic cannabinoids (e.g. Spice, AB-Fubinaca) (LMP 2.5%, LYP 4.1%).
- Synthetic opioids were mentioned by 4.4% of the respondents (LMP 1.7%, LYP 3.1%).
- Other NPS (e.g. 4-FA, PMMA, mCPPP, 2C-B, NBOME) were reported by 8.4% of the survey participants (LMP 2,3%, LYP 5%).



# Synthetic cathinones users (n=4137)

The mean age was 22 (median 22) with male participants in the majority (57%) and 2% of transgender individuals.

The group of synthetic cathinones users included the most respondents from Poland (n=1707) followed by Finnish participants (n=565).





# **Synthetic cannabinoids users (n=6935)**

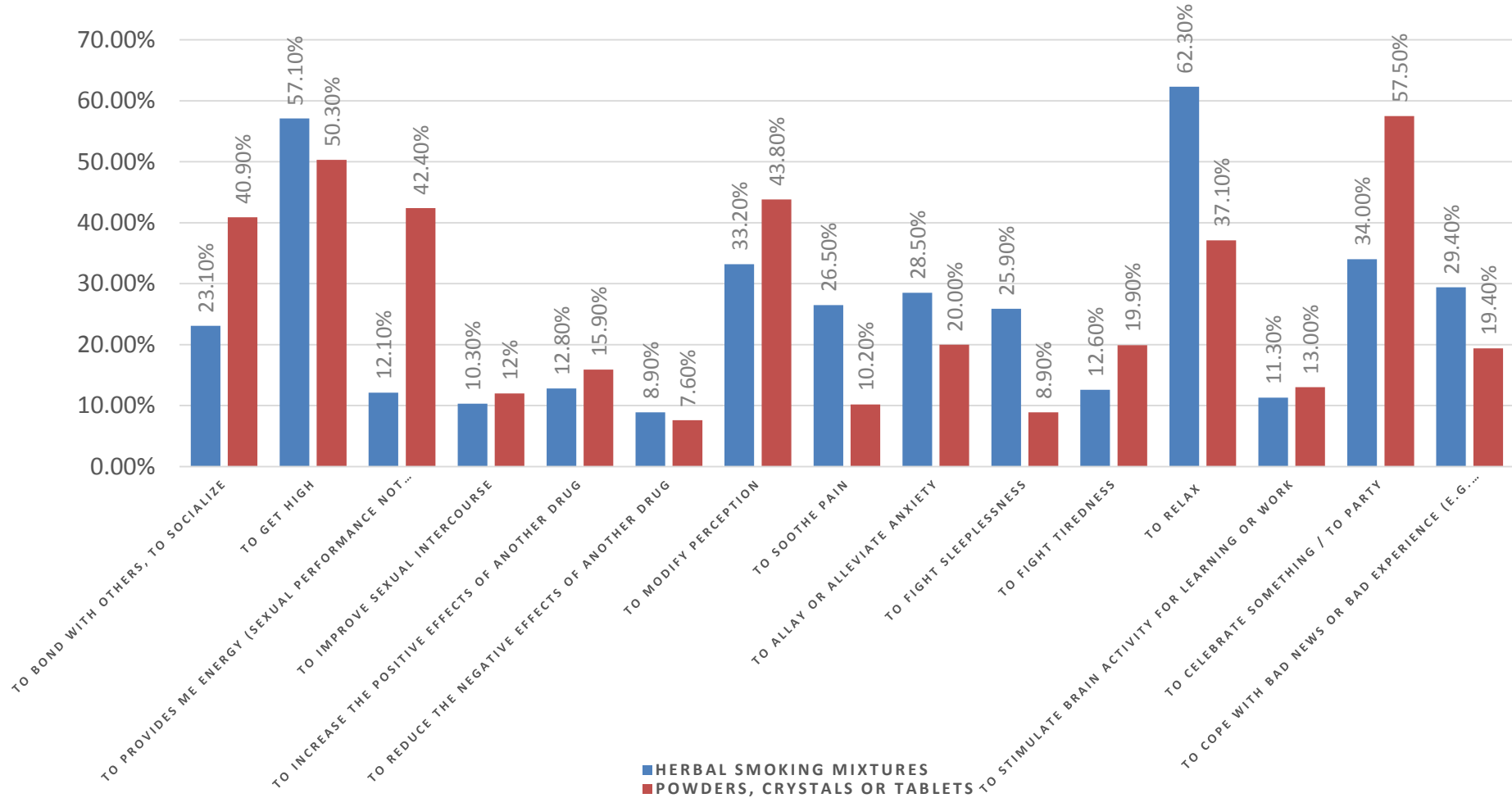
- The mean age of the participants was 21 (median 21) and more than half were male (61.2%, transgender 1.4%).
- The most respondents who had used synthetic cannabinoids came from Latvia (n=1148) and Germany (n=927).

# **Synthetic opioids**

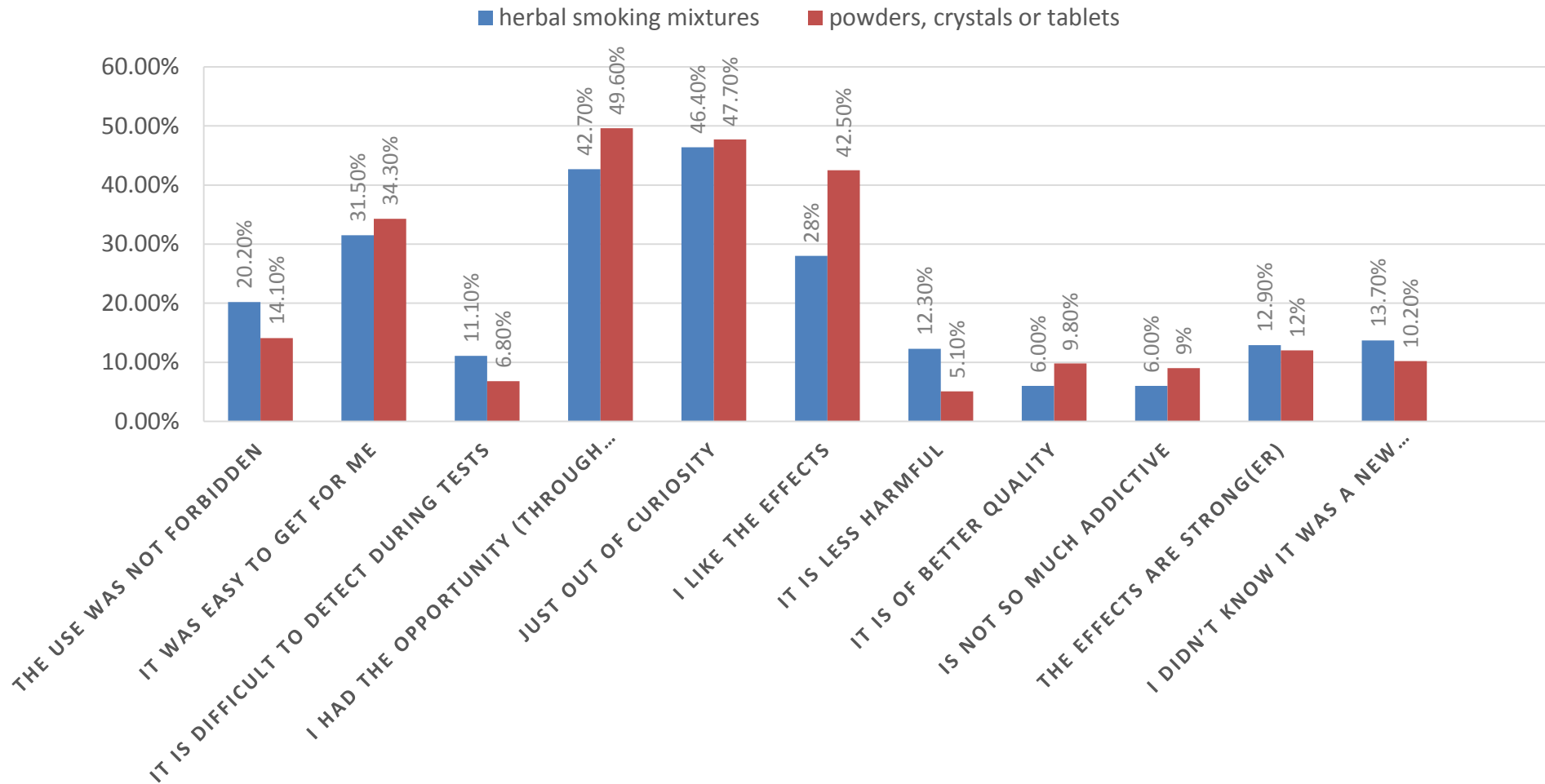
## **(n= 2784)**

- Using synthetic opioids was reported by 2784 individuals. The mean age was 21 (median 20). The cohort of such users included 57% of men and 2.8% transgender respondents.
- The highest proportion of synthetic opioids was recorded in Germany (587) and Finland (487).

# Desired effects of NPS



# Reasons for taking NPS the last time



# Conclusion

- The analysis of the results reveals that the highest numbers of respondents reported using synthetic cannabinoids, every tenth respondent had ever used such substance. The most important effect to using NPS were relaxation and getting high.
- The most important reasons for using NPS last time were curiosity, the opportunity to use.
- Taking into account that NPS prevalence is not high in general population Web Survey using on-line questionnaire seems to be a good tool to look deeply in NPS users group.

# Conclusion (2)

- On-line survey seems to be interested quantitative method
- On-line survey gives a chance to gather a much more information about new patterns of NPS use than youth or general population survey.
- Targeting non-line survey is a chance to know more about new phenomena like still is NPS.