

# CASO Portugal

## 'Plenty of plans

**“At the moment there are 5 persons actively involved in CASO’s work.** Although CASO aims to be a national Association but at the moment we mainly work in the North of Portugal and the city that we know best is Porto. Currently all of us do this work voluntarily. Two of us also work as peer educators in harm reduction teams, and the other two are unemployed and do occasional works. We work on a regular basis in the street, attend meetings and represent the users’ where possible.

We notice that authorities start to seriously. Recently we were invited to informally joint the committee that will be responsible to implement and monitor drug policies in Portugal. CASO’s (Associated Users Survive United) beginning was inspired by the visit from a Dutch drug user activist, Theo Van Dam to Portugal in 2007, organized by APDES, the local harm reduction organisation. We are the first Portuguese drug users and former drug users association and our formal beginning was on April 9th, 2010. One of our main goals is to fight against stigma and prejudice towards drug users. APDES is one of our main supporters, without ever interfering with our desires and opinions. Sérgio Rodrigues is the current president of CASO and usually he is the one that most often represents the Association in public events.

Portugal has two types of drug services: high threshold treatment or harm reduction. In treatment centres, people have to go to a first consult with a doctor (waiting time sometimes a month), then do a series of medicals check-



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ups and only after this process is done, it is possible to start taking methadone or buprenorphine. In harm reduction teams the access is easier, but still not perfect as most outreach services rely on the referral to the doctors of treatment centres. Recently, due to governmental changes, pharmacies had to stop with we've also lost one needle exchange programs. Nowadays we can only count on outreach teams to do this work.

One of the success of our organisation is that we were able to stop the closure in 2010 we found out that one of the main treatment centres of the North of Portugal (with approximately 300,000 habitants). We started a petition, met with policy makers to discuss this matter and were able to keep the treatment centre is open till now.

Currently we also are working on having our own space in the centre of Oporto, a kind of drop in centre) with services like needle exchange, information on services available, overdose prevention workshops, information on drugs and safe using, civil rights and so on.

Lots has been achieved and there is still plenty to do. Plenty plans for our young organisation."

## **CASO**

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