

# **Working First: An Experience of Reintegration of Drug Users as Peer Workers in Portugal**

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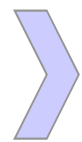
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**In Portugal, the main strategy of social reintegration of people who use drugs is mediation with public/private services to promote employment for abstinent drug users.**

Considering...

- The difficulties in integrating socially-excluded individuals in the labor market
- The vulnerable conditions of those people using drugs and who are served by Harm Reduction interventions
- The crisis context

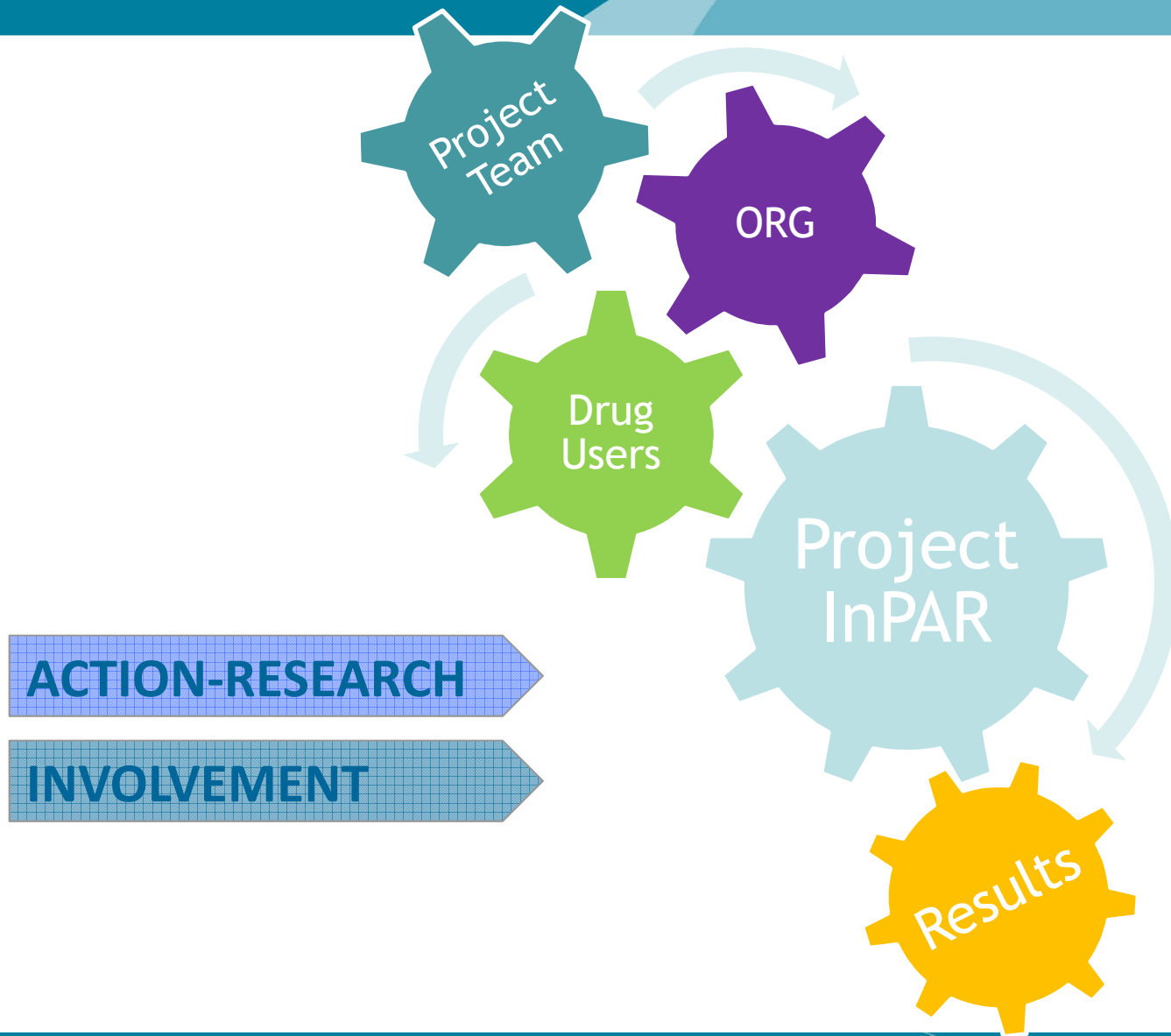
Becomes necessary to develop innovative interventions for labor inclusion of people who use drugs.



**How to work the employment with active drug users from Harm Reduction interventions?**

**InPAR** was an **Experimental Project at national level in the area of Social Reintegration** aimed at **employment/training reintegration of people who use drugs**, with close cooperation between Harm Reduction and Social Reintegration.

This 2 year Project began in August 2009 and ended in July 2011. The result of a **public-private partnership**, co-funded by the Portuguese State, the Institute for Drugs and Drug Addiction (IDT. IP) and APDES.



**To study and develop a social reintegration methodology and promote the social reintegration of people who use drugs in socioeducational and/or professional responses:**

- a) Social Reintegration in various professional/educational responses;
- b) Integration of eight drug users in Harm Reduction Projects as Peer workers.**

- Integrate eight Drug Users as Peer Workers in Outreach Teams and evaluate the integration process;
- Develop a social reintegration methodology, identifying facilitating factors and obstacles for the integration of Drug Users as Peer Workers;
- Contribute to the recognition of the profession of Peer Worker.

## Value of the Peer Work



Peer work as a “new” employability area that values the knowledge they have about drug use, drug users and the communities.

## 8 Harm Reduction Teams in the North of Portugal

Norte Vida

GAF

APDES

Sol do Ave

SAOM

APF

SMACTE



## BASIC PRINCIPLE

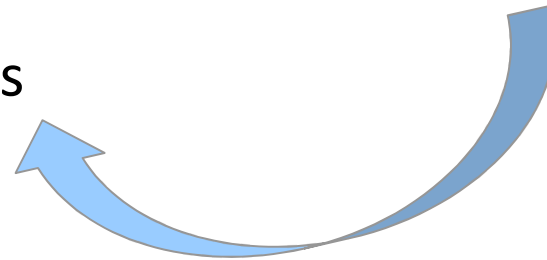
Pragmatic approach based on concrete job proposal

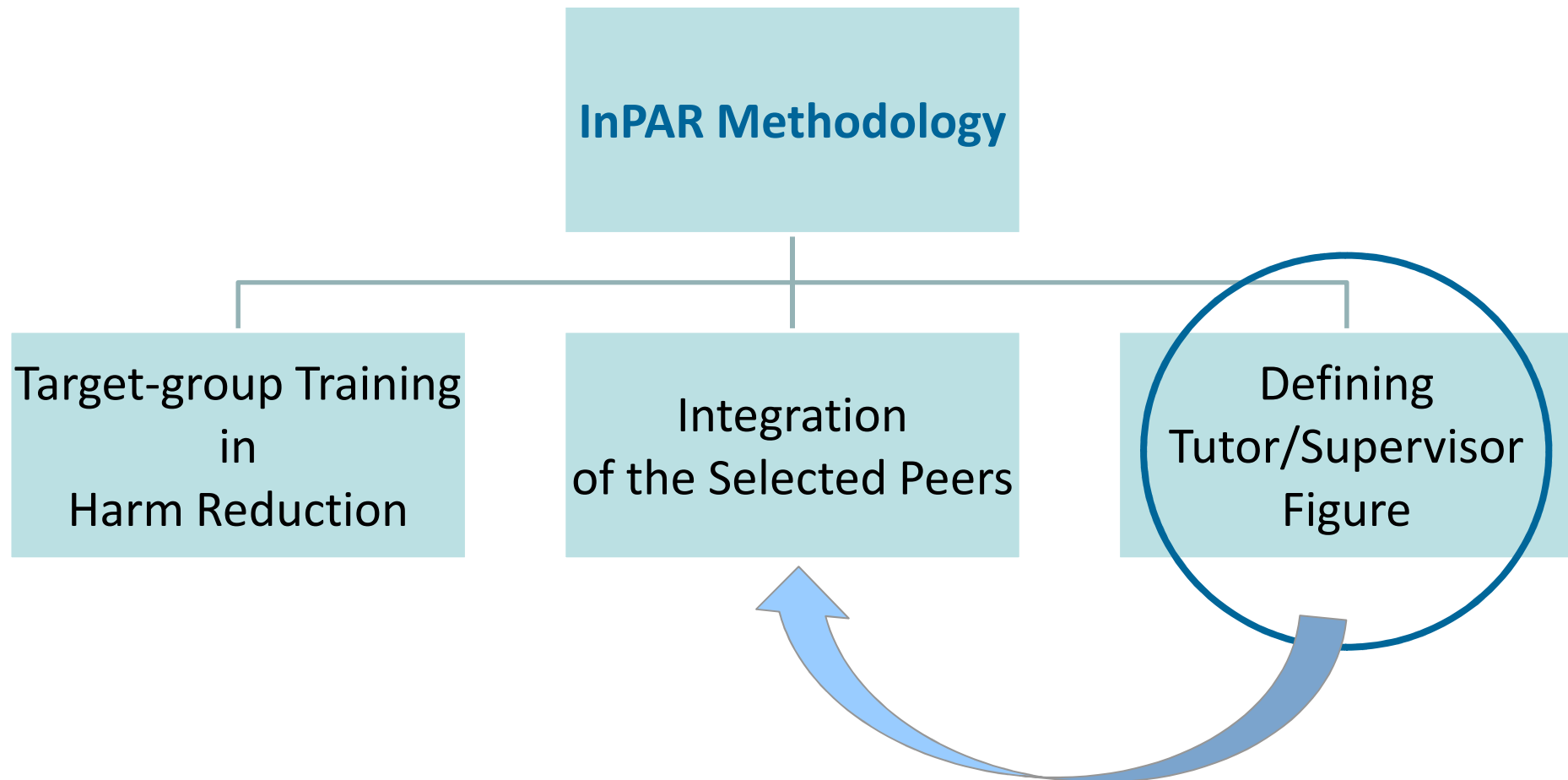
Paid work of the peers

## CONDITIONS

Need for support

Need for advocacy





## Defining

### Tutor Figure

#### Function

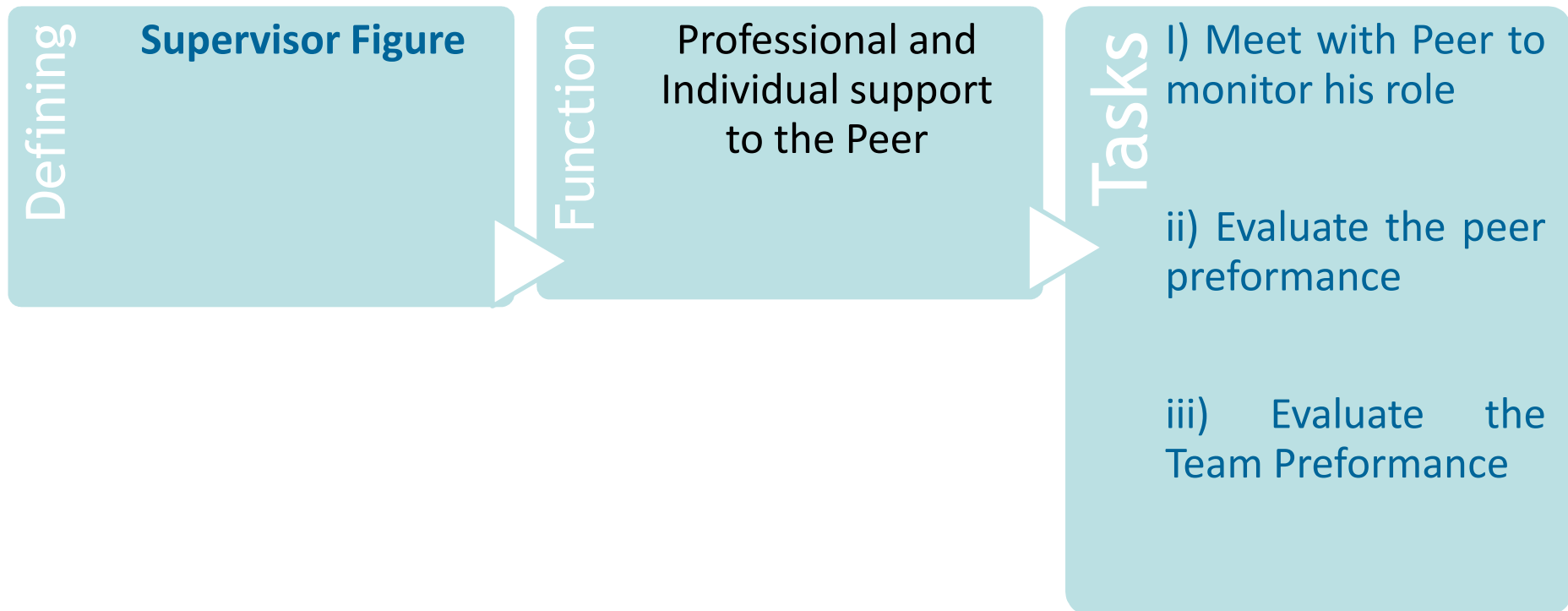
Technical and political  
follow-up of  
Harm Reduction Teams

Professional and  
Psychosocial  
follow-up  
for Peers

#### Tasks

- a) Training Workshops
- b) Consultancy
- c) Focus Groups
- d) Advocacy Actions

- a) Training Sessions
- b) Individual  
follow-up
- c) Focus Groups



## Peers

10 Peers were followed on the project;

25 Individual meetings between tutor and peers;

6 Focus groups;

41 Psycho-social support (criminal, social, health problems, etc.).

## Teams

8 Focus Groups;

36 Consultancy actions;

26 Professionals received training/support for the integration of Peers.

- **4 Peers integrated** (formally paid) after the project end;
- **Several achievements of the peer workers:**
  - 30% of new contacts made by the teams were achieved by the Peer workers;
  - 9 territories opened to the teams by the peers;
  - Also, successful in advocating for the drug users regarding police violence, adapting education messages, effective referrals of more resistant clients, informal working after hours, access to drug use scenes...

- **Firm commitment from the state funder** to study/adopt a criteria for applications evaluation where the **inclusion of a Peer Worker** in the outreach team can be valued;
- **Recommendations Methodology manual for promoting the employability of drug users**, particularly in peer work. Identification of key factors (obstacles and facilitators) for integration: profile of the peer; relationship between peers and teams; the anticipation of problems...

Other initiatives should be implemented so Peer Work can grow as an effective/efficient approach in Harm Reduction, and Peer Workers can be officially recognized as professional figures.



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