



## 2<sup>ND</sup> GLOBAL CONGRESS ON FOOD AND NUTRITION



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### Exploring Athlete Perceptions and Nutritional Supplement Marketing: Preliminary Insights from the IRIS Project

**Abstract:** Nutritional supplement use has become ubiquitous among athletes at all levels of competition, driven by aggressive marketing campaigns and the promise of enhanced performance. The present research, integrated on the project “Improving athletes’ risk appraisal and informed decision-making towards nutritional supplement use in recreational and competitive sport – IRIS”, funded by the European Union through ERASMUS+ Call on Sport Programme, investigates the widespread use of nutritional supplements among athletes across six European countries, highlighting consumption patterns, risk awareness, and regulatory effectiveness amid rising doping violations and health concerns. A mixed-methods approach was used, including surveys of 468 athletes, and interviews with 22 competitors. Findings revealed significant national differences in supplement use, with over 60% of athletes in Finland and Portugal using supplements regularly, while only 45% did so in Greece. The study found a gender disparity, with male athletes showing 23% higher usage rates. Despite high usage, awareness of contamination risks was variable, with only 28% of athletes consistently verifying supplement quality. Misleading marketing was prevalent, with 73% of athletes encountering exaggerated claims. Regulatory challenges were evident, as only 12% of athletes could identify relevant regulatory bodies, and 68% of national markets lacked standardized contamination testing. The study emphasizes the need for enhanced regulation, including mandatory testing, standardized risk disclosures, and clear labelling. It also advocates for consumer protection measures and educational initiatives to raise awareness about supplement risks. The conclusions call for coordinated action among regulators, sports organizations, and public health authorities to safeguard athlete health and uphold competitive integrity.

**Keywords:** IRIS project, Nutritional supplement, Risk perception, Marketing

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**Biography:** Dr Ana Sofia Tavares, Full Professor at the Department of Diagnostic, Therapeutic and Public Health Sciences and an integrated Member at H&TRC – Health and Technology Research Center of Lisbon School of Health Technology, Polytechnic University of Lisbon. Teacher of several curricular units in the degree in Biomedical Laboratory Sciences, and in the master's in Clinical Laboratory Technologies. As main research interests, the areas of Clinical Chemistry, Epidemiology, Doping, Behaviors, and additions with direct impact in terms of Public Health stand out, highlighting the investigation of attitudes and motivations that lead the individual to consume performance-enhancing substances in the practice of physical activity. She integrates several national and international funded projects and holds several publications as author and co-author. Member of the Human Enhancement Drugs Network.