

# PAIN IN EUROPE XIV

COMORBIDITY OF CHRONIC PAIN AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS: BREAKING THE CYCLE



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## Reflection of SIP Portugal on the Issue of Chronic Pain: How To Put the Societal Impact of Pain on the Political Agenda

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### INTRODUCTION

In 1999, Portugal recognized chronic pain as a public health priority. Following a proposal from the Portuguese Association for the Study of Pain, the Ministry of Health established the **National Day Against Pain**

In 2001, it was launched the **First National Pain Control Program** and updated in 2008. This was the first to require all hospitals to implement **pain management teams**, adapted to the capacity of each institution.

To address national challenges, **SIP Portugal has prioritized advocacy actions** while, in parallel, it seeks to promote the **exchange of information and best practices** among European Union Member States, encouraging and supporting the development of national policy strategies to improve pain management across Europe.

### AIM

In 2024, SIP Portugal launched an **advocacy initiative** targeting the public, policymakers, and decision-makers, raising awareness of the impact of pain on individuals, families, healthcare systems, the economy, and society.

**Key objectives** included:

- Promoting the SIP PT website;
- Disseminating translated SIP Europe documents via Social Media;
- Developing a **Reflection Document** on chronic pain in Portugal, with input from members and partners, offering proposals for political, health, social, and work sectors.

### METHOD

In 2024, the SIP Portugal Executive Committee reviewed national research and analyzed key SIP Europe documents (Digital Health, ICD-11, Mental Health, and The Burden of Pain SIP Evidence Book).

Together with SIP members, the Committee developed the document "**Reflection on the Problem of Chronic Pain in Portugal**", outlining key challenges and policy proposals.

The document was disseminated via **126 emails** and used to initiate meetings with decision-makers, political parties, national and European deputies, stakeholders, sponsors, and organizations in the fields of health, work and social protection.

The proposals were focused on:

- **Healthcare Professional training,**
- **Structural changes in higher education,**
- **Public and patients education,**
- **Implementation of ICD-11,**
- **Work legislation,**
- **Dedicated working groups on priority topics.**

At least three SIP PT members prepared and attended each meeting—either face-to-face or online—ensuring consistent communication and sharing lived experiences.

### RESULTS

The project began in the last quarter of 2024 but was temporarily interrupted due to early elections. Despite the low number of meetings, those that did take place were highly valuable. There are more in agenda.

The implementation of ICD-11 was a central argument in all meetings to support SIP Portugal's proposals. While stakeholders expressed interest and openness, the process was recognized as complex and requiring sustained political and institutional commitment.

However **key constraints** were identified in three areas:

- **Health:** need to review the national program, reorganize resources, improve access, promote prevention, enhance health literacy and specialized training.
- **Work:** need for better legislation, reduced absenteeism, and effective application of the ICF.
- **Costs:** greater awareness of the economic burden of untreated pain and early retirements.

Two Strategic Projects Emerged:

- **Pilot Project Implementation of ICD-11 pain codes in the Autonomous Region of Madeira**
- **Support for a Study on the Impact of Chronic Pain in the Workplace**

### CONCLUSIONS

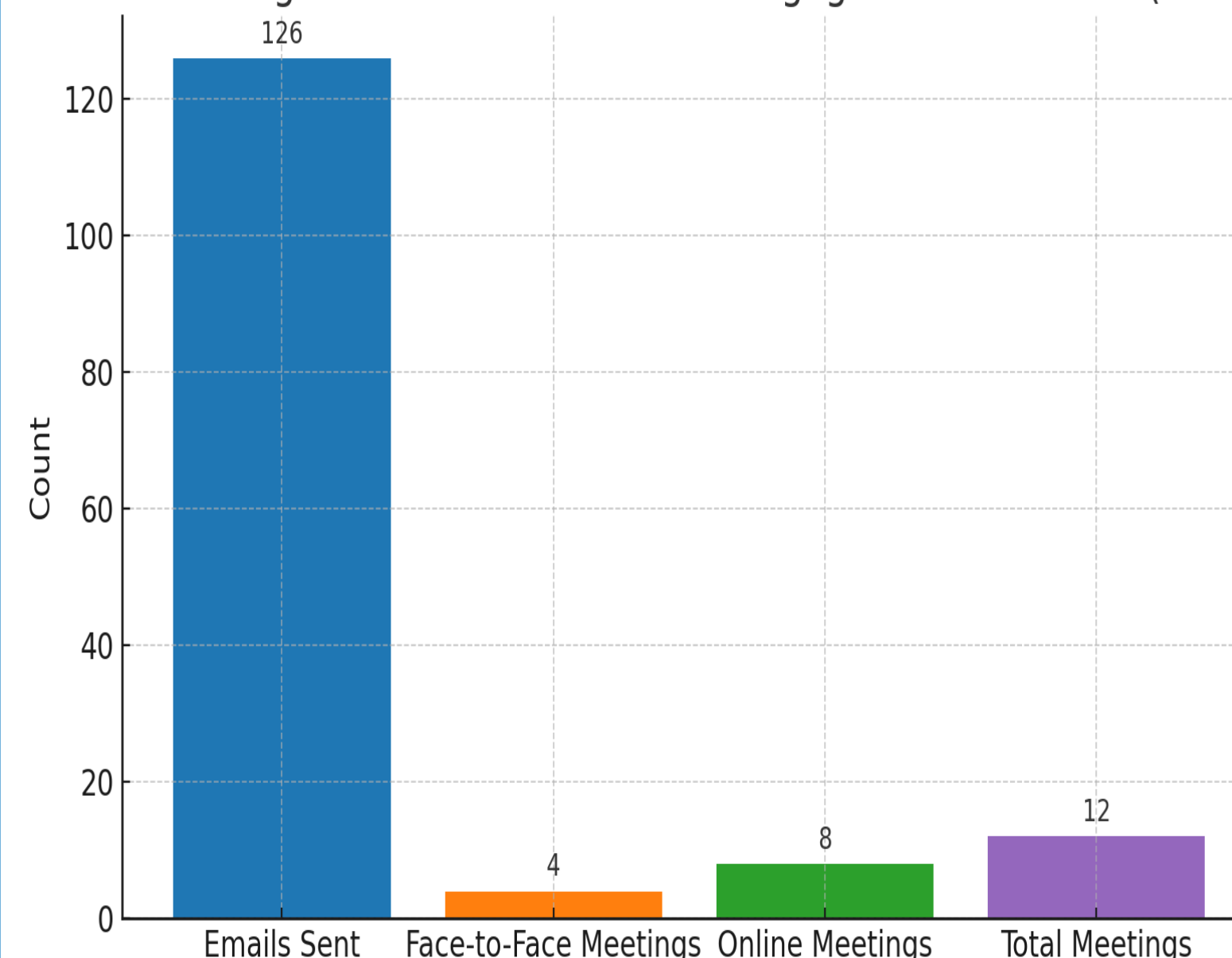
At this time, the low number of meetings underscores the difficulty in securing engagement from decision-makers. We maintain a sustained and strategic advocacy to ensure that chronic pain remains on the political agenda.

SIP Portugal noted an increasing receptiveness among stakeholders to recognize the societal impact of pain and to collaborate on common objectives, including:

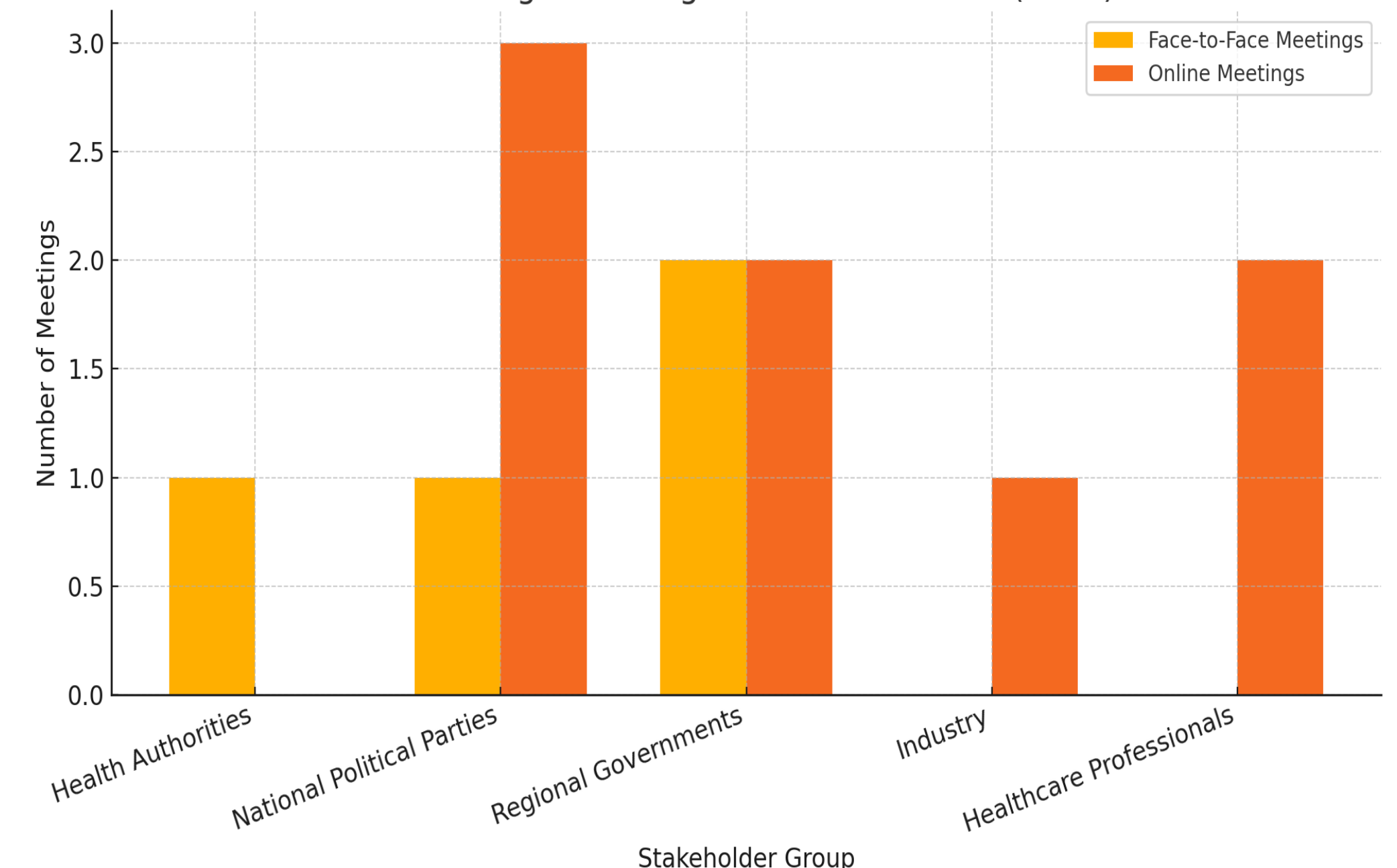
- Enhancing pain management strategies;
- Implementing ICD-11 pain classification codes;
- specialized training in pain management for healthcare professionals;
- Advancing health literacy on pain among patients and the general public.

➤ Chronic pain must be recognized as a health systems challenge and addressed as a political priority.

SIP Portugal - Communication and Engagement Activities (2024)



SIP Portugal Meetings with Stakeholders (2024)



### REFERENCES

- In <https://sip-pt.pt/recursos-categoria/documentos-sip-eu/>  
SIP Position on Digital Health: Pain Assessment and Quality Indicators 2022  
SIP Position Paper on the International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision 2023  
SIP Joint Statement on Pain and Mental Health 2023  
The Burden of Pain: a SIP Book of Evidence 2024

- In <https://sip-pt.pt/comite-executivo/>  
Reflection on the Problem of Chronic Pain in Portugal: The need for new Health Policies (in Portuguese)

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To SIP Europe Team  
To SIP PT Executive Committee Members

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