



DRUG-PRÉP

National Dialogues Report

Deliverable 5.1

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1. Introduction

The objective of DRUG-PREP's Work Package 5 (*Capacity Building for Policymakers*) was to strengthen the strategic capacity of national policymakers and relevant stakeholders, and one of its main tasks (deliverable 5.1) consisted in the organization of National Dialogues in the six participating countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, and Portugal). These multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder consultations were designed to provide a dialogue and consultation platform where government and civil society actors from different sectors could learn about the results of DRUG-PREP's national and international activities and discuss the applicability of foresight in their own country.

The aim these dialogues was to translate the Projects' overall results (mainly those resulting from DRUG-PREP WP2 and WP3) to the Member State level and to provide a follow-up to the national events, namely the horizon scanning exercise, which had been carried out earlier in all participating countries. The National Dialogues were designed not only to present results and conclusions to key national actors, but also to discuss strategies for implementing foresight activities in policymaking at local, regional, and national levels. In summary, the National Dialogues aimed to transfer the acquired knowledge and expertise in national policymaking, including the use of foresight methods, to European key stakeholders and policymakers for better prepared strategic decision making, focusing on current and future developments and responses in six different countries.

2. Participants and meeting format

The National Dialogues were designed to be multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder consultations. In accordance, each country decided who and how many stakeholders to invite to the National Dialogues meeting, and how and when it would take place. The guidelines, which were sent to all participating countries beforehand, simply stated that national stakeholders should include government and civil society actors from different sectors. The National Dialogues took place in the early months of 2024. In some countries, the meeting was organised specifically for this purpose, while in others (such as in Ireland and Finland) it occurred in the context of previously established committees or working groups.

In order to achieve a fruitful and lively discussion, it was recommended to invite a small number of participants, and consequently the number of stakeholders present at the National Dialogues ranged from 11 (in Portugal) to 27 (in Belgium). While the format of the meeting and the profile of those invited varied considerably between the participating countries, most of the stakeholders who participated in the six National Dialogues came from the health, justice, education, and social affairs sectors, but also from law enforcement and local and municipal authorities.

The National Dialogues took place in face-to-face meetings, except for Belgium (where it took place exclusively online) and Finland (where it took place in a mixed online and offline format). As each country chose its own meeting format, its length varied considerably. For example, in Finland the National Dialogue lasted 55 minutes, while in the Netherlands it lasted 240 minutes.

In all countries, the National Dialogues were facilitated by members of DRUG-PREP national teams, except in Ireland, where the facilitator was a member of an external company hired specifically for this task.

3. Methodology

In all participating countries, the National Dialogue consisted mainly in a presentation of the main results of DRUG-PREP - with particular emphasis on the lessons learnt and particularly the conclusions of the horizon scanning exercise carried out at national level in the framework of Work Package 3 - followed by a plenary / group discussion, which was shorter or longer depending on the time allocated to the event. In some countries, the work was particularly interactive and included foresight exercises (scenario building, for instance) where participants were divided into small groups. The question on how foresight can be implemented more widely and regularly was also addressed.

4. Discussion

The results of the Horizon Scanning carried out earlier were discussed in all six National Dialogues, while the Scenario Building results were discussed only in some countries.

Apart from the Project's results and conclusions, other topics were discussed with the stakeholders:

- How useful is foresight for your professional work?
- Do you plan to use foresight in your work?
- How to implement foresight more structurally at the national level?

5. Conclusions

In general, in all six countries, the stakeholders involved in the National Dialogues agree on the great added value of foresight initiatives, mainly because they provide a space to bring together the different actors in the field of drugs. Foresight tends to be seen by participants in the National Dialogues as an important tool for adapting to and anticipating the evolving landscape of drug use and support and treatment needs, and also as a valuable opportunity to bring together the different stakeholders, allowing for constructive discussion and debate. National stakeholders from countries such as Belgium or Portugal noted that there are not enough spaces for such debate between different key actors in the drug field and that such initiatives should be replicated more often.

Most stakeholders felt that the National Dialogues were too short and that the meeting should be extended by a few hours or even more, given the interesting discussions that took place.

While recognising the usefulness of foresight, some stakeholders stressed the need to take into account the objectives of what is to be anticipated and studied. Foresight is one of many useful tools and methods, depending on the purpose and the problem to be addressed.

Overall, foresight exercises were considered useful in providing new insights for participants' professional work and in being better prepared when change/disruption occurs. In all six countries, there was a consensus on the need for proactive strategies to address the challenges posed by the evolving drug use landscape and market dynamics. A participatory approach to exploring the dynamics of future uncertainties and changes in the drug field and their impact on national scenarios is most likely to contribute to better preparation to anticipate emerging problems.

6. Recommendations

Participants in all six National Dialogues agreed that foresight exercises should be conducted on a regular basis. Foresight exercises should be replicated at different levels (local, regional, national), with the frequency based on a well-supported decision (e.g. in line with the policy cycle).

Involving decision-makers throughout the foresight process can increase buy-in and translation into policy. Practical guidance and support on foresight methodology should also be provided to those wishing to undertake a foresight exercise in their field, organisation or local community.

Foresight exercises should involve stakeholders from different fields with relevant academic expertise, field expertise and lived experience (e.g. PWUD). Citizen participation could also be considered.

Foresight exercises should always take into account fundamental principles (such as equity) and existing evidence. Adding references to strengthen the recommendations from foresight exercises is recommended.

In summary, foresight needs to be understood as a potential toolkit with different methodologies to choose from in order to carry out a form of horizon scanning and scenario building. Choices have to be made and foresight is not an academic discipline in itself. The application of foresight in the field of drug (policy) could be a valuable asset, but the objectives would need to be clarified and specified. Foresight could inform strategies on specific drug-related issues.

Other recommendations include:

- Enhance digital literacy programs to combat the influence of social media on drug use.
- Improve international cooperation on drug policy.
- Improve resource allocation for law enforcement.

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- Innovate law enforcement techniques to better adapt to the digital age.
 - Enhance public education.
 - Expand treatment options.
 - Invest in monitoring and surveillance tools that can quickly detect signals of change (real-time monitoring, tools for monitoring websites and discussion forums, etc.).
 - Connect data on dependencies from different information systems (e.g., using new technologies).
 - Strengthen periodic quantitative and qualitative surveys aimed at recognizing signals, threats, and trends.
 - Support studies aimed at obtaining information about trends in specific environments and target groups (e.g., assessment of trends in the nightlife environment).
 - Use expert foresight approaches to the preparation and evaluation of strategic documents in the field of addiction.

National Dialogues in Ireland and Portugal

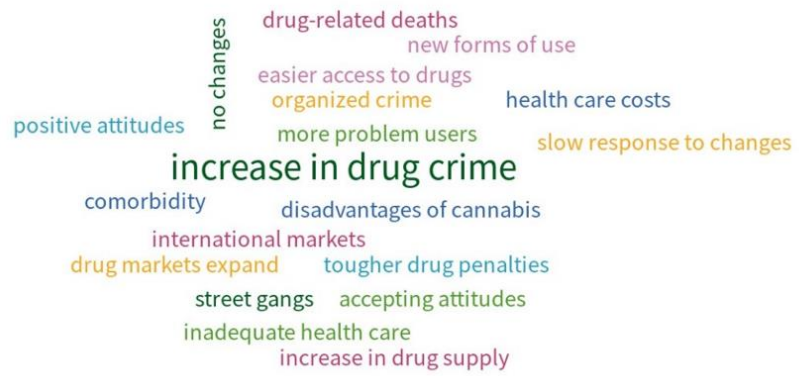


Foresight exercise in Finland



What is the primary concern in Finland's drug policy in 2034?

20 responses



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