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'Click for Support – REALized' (HOME/2015/JDRU/AG/DRUG/8857)

Report on results of national Focus Groups

Introduction

During the 'Click for Support – REALized' project, national focus groups with members of the target group (young European NPS consumers) have been conducted during March, April and May 2017. The purpose of these focus groups, in line with the description of action as well as the guidelines for web-based selective drug intervention (preceding 'Click for Support' project, 2014-2015), is to directly involve and receive feedback from the target group for the development of the web-based intervention for New Psychoactive Substances (NPS).

The exact objectives of the focus groups have been defined as:

- Gathering feedback from the target group regarding the concept, content, and design of the to-be developed WBI;
- Asking the target group's opinion on their wishes, preferences, needs and concerns regarding a web-based intervention focused on New Psychoactive Substances;
- Finding out about national and/or cultural particularities regarding NPS consumption;
- Discussion of possible attractive names for the WBI;
- Finding out which New Psychoactive Substances are most popular among the target group;
- Which preferences the target group has regarding use of social media.

The exercise has first been introduced and explained to all project managers during the project's kick-off in Belgium, February 2017. After the kick-off, all partners have received a Field Manual¹, carefully describing how to conduct the focus groups and its objectives. To this Field Manual, a reporting template was added. The target was finding 20 participants per country for this first round of Focus Groups.

Questionnaire on NPS use

During the first steering group meeting in February 2017, it was decided to create a short, anonymous questionnaire on NPS consumption that could be disseminated online. This decision

¹ Final version of the Field Manual has been added in the attachment.



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was made as discussions during the kick-off meeting showed that there were concerns by project partners about recruiting enough focus group participants. Through the questionnaire, more awareness could be raised about national focus groups among the target group. It was considered that online tools, in this case an online questionnaire, would be an asset in finding members of the target group willing to participate in focus groups, as the Internet is increasingly becoming their main source of information and communication. At the end of the questionnaire, it was asked whether the respondent might have interest in participating in a focus group in his or her country to discuss ideas regarding a web-based intervention focused on New Psychoactive Substances. The questionnaire also served as the guideline for topics to be discussed during the focus groups, and allowed for gathering additional information on details of NPS consumption by the target group in the partner countries.

The questionnaire² has been developed in consultation with the steering group. This English questionnaire was then translated in ten additional languages (Dutch/Flemish, French, German, Italian, Slovak, Slovenian, Finnish, Portuguese, Greek and Latvian) and disseminated by all partners through a 'SurveyMonkey'-link (online questionnaire platform). To ensure response from only those countries involved in the project (for the sake of arranging the national focus groups), the first question referred to current country of residence. The questionnaire was accessible online for approximately three months between March and May 2017.

All project partners disseminated the link to the questionnaire through their institution's website (and if available, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts) and newsletters. Furthermore, partner choose a variety of options to spread the questionnaire through their institutions networks and in other ways, such as: universities and/or schools, posting in Facebook groups, youth clinics / facilities and drug counselling centres, drug-related websites / forums, outreach / peer-led drug prevention projects active in nightlife- / music scenes; and national drug-related NGOs. Many such organisations have been contacted in all project partner countries with the request to spread the questionnaire either online or offline among their clients or target groups.

Some of these methods (such as contacting drug-related websites and forums) proved more successful than others (such as contacting universities) for having the questionnaire disseminated among the target group. Several drug-related prevention projects and drug-related websites posted the link to the questionnaires on their social media accounts. The project coordinator has assisted the partner in disseminating the questionnaire by posting the links to the questionnaire on LinkedIn, in a Facebook group, and on one international drug-user forum.

² Final version of the questionnaire has been added in the attachment.



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Recruiting Focus Group participants

The strategies used for finding focus group participants were mainly based on partners using their national institution's network. In each country, a variety of drug- and youth-related organisations and institutions have been contacted in order to find young NPS consumers willing to participate in a face-to-face focus group. These were for instance (youth) drug counselling clinics / treatment facilities, ambulant facilities for (former) drug-users, outreach services, drug-related NGOs, youth clinics and -facilities, (peer-led) drug-prevention programmes / projects, etc.. The project coordinator has assisted the project partners by posting a request for Focus Group participants on an international drug-user forum. Although most people checked 'not interested' in the online questionnaire regarding participating in a Focus Group, a few participants were nonetheless contacted and included as a result of filling out the questionnaire.

Some countries had, more than others, difficulties finding focus group participants. This can also be seen through the number of questionnaires that were filled-out (online) per country. The reasons usually have to do with how easy it is to reach drug consumers in general: in some countries, peer- and outreach programmes for youth as well as online drug-user forums have been long installed (e.g. the Netherlands, Belgium), yet in other countries, this is not the case. A few partners also mentioned that their national experts had explained that the phenomenon of New Psychoactive Substances has already seemed to become less widespread in their country over the past few years (e.g. Luxembourg, Finland). This trend mostly has to do, it seems, with the 'bad reputation' NPS seem to have among drug users as being particularly dangerous substances.

Results of the questionnaire

A total of 135 questionnaires have been filled out online in SurveyMonkey - an average of 10,4 per country. Some questionnaire respondents have shown interest in participating in a focus group in their country. A few of those whom expressed interest, however, unfortunately turned out not to be reachable through the phone number or e-mail address they had entered.

The filled-out questionnaire and summaries thereof per country give a better view of which substances are most popular in a specific country, as the popularity of some specific substances is fairly diverse. For instance, the substance 4-FA / 4-FMP (4-fluoramphetamine / 4-fluoro-a-methylphenethylamine) was mentioned quite often for The Netherlands and Belgium, yet (almost) never for other countries as a substance of choice.

The information from the questionnaire can serve as useful background information to the project partners when developing the contents of the WBI for their country. This allows them to focus on national particularities regarding NPS consumption by youth (not only kinds of substances, but also settings and modes of consumption).



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online questionnaire respondents per country:

Austria: 2	Latvia: 0
Belgium: 18	Luxembourg: 1
Cyprus: 2	Netherlands: 19
Finland: 16	Portugal: 23
Germany: 28	Slovenia: 11
Greece: 6	Slovakia: 2
Italy: 7	

respondents total: **135**

Results of the Focus Groups

It was expected beforehand that recruiting young NPS consumers would be a great challenge. The target group is fairly small, especially in a small country like for instance Slovenia. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, in some countries the consumers will be easier to find through the well-installed systems and projects in drug counselling and drug prevention as compared to other countries. Lastly, in some countries NPS consumers may feel more safe and willing to discuss drug-related matters and participate in a focus group as an 'NPS user' than in others. Luxembourg has used the innovative option of visiting prisons, and questioning those in the age group who consume NPS and who were willing to voluntarily participate.

young Focus Group participants per country:

Austria: 4	Latvia: 20
Belgium: 31	Luxembourg: 41
Cyprus: 13	Netherlands: 10
Finland: 0	Portugal: 9
Germany: 15	Slovenia: 13
Greece: 14	Slovakia: 21
Italy: 3	

participants total: **194**



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With the exception of one country (Finland), all project partners were able to arrange at least one group discussion with the target group of young NPS users. A total of 194 young NPS consumers between the ages of 14 and 25 have voluntarily provided feedback to the WBI, with focus groups ranging from two to fifteen persons at a time. Some partners have held a few individual face-to-face conversations, in order to allow more options for feedback and ensure anonymity for the respondent. Some participants used this option (instead of participating in a group discussion) to stay more anonymous, and in most cases the option was used when a focus group with several persons could not be compiled for logistic reasons. A few individual conversations were held directly in the nightlife / music scene. The average of 14,9 participants per country lies somewhat below the target of 20 participants per country, for the reasons explained above. Including the provided information by fulfilled questionnaires an average of 25,3 members of the target group gave feedback per country.

Reports by partners that focus groups tend to run a bit more smoothly and participants are more easily willing to speak openly when they are already familiar with each other. As the project partners will try to involve the same focus group participants in the second round of focus groups in April and May 2018, it may be an asset that some participants have now met in the first round of focus groups.

Results according to objectives

Wishes, needs, concerns, and preferences

Regarding the target group's opinion on the WBI for NPS (wishes, preferences, needs and concerns), it is clear that the group is concerned about their privacy, anonymousness, and data protection. This will be very important to already take into account during the development phase of the WBI. Users' personal data need to be well secured according to national and European legislation (for instance according to the 'General Data Protection Regulation', taking effect in May 2018). Some target group members seem to have the view that drug-related prevention- or intervention projects may have a connection to police forces, in that judicial authorities could have access to their personal data, revealing them as a 'drug user'. Some are concerned that using drug-related services could get you into trouble, and may even get you prosecuted. This issue seems to worry the target group, at least in a few of the project countries (Belgium, Germany, Latvia). These worries may also explain reluctance of young NPS consumers to participate in focus groups as an 'NPS user'.

As a result of the above-mentioned issues, the target group requests that the WBI should be transparent in several ways: firstly, users want to have a clear view on who they are speaking with when getting involved in an intervention programme (i.e. background information on the prevention expert will be necessary), and they wish to be consulted by a professional who



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can give swift personalised feedback. Transparency is also requested in the matter of who exactly runs and finances the WBI, and how personal data is saved and used.

Linked to this, the target group wishes to see the WBI linked to credible organisations. As one project partner has explained, sometimes youth does not deem national organisations 'credible' or 'reliable', as the view is that these organisations have less expertise and experience than international organisations. Lastly, they wish to know where the content / information given on the WBI come from (for instance, whether it comes from scientific research, and whether content was written or at least reviewed by experts).

Regarding the WBI's content, the provided information needs to be reliable, accurate, and objective. However, the writing should not be 'too dry', i.e. content should not be written too scientifically. The target group prefers short, understandable language that is tailored to them while not 'trying to be cool' (i.e. try to use language that youth uses amongst each other).

It was mentioned several times that information may also be spread by using video materials; this way, information can also be more easily spread online through social media, and it's an attractive way to get the attention from the target group. The use of social media in itself is vital to reach the young target group, as nearly every focus group participant and questionnaire respondent has declared to at least use Facebook. A majority also have accounts for Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. Youtube is regularly used to look up information, or for entertainment. Lastly, an important point in creating an attractive offer that catches youngster's attention and makes them remain on a website or app is to use interesting visuals, a professional but not too 'scientific' design to display reliability, and to include interactive elements (such as the mentioned video materials, as well as for instance quizzes and tests).

When further discussing the content of the WBI, it became apparent that the target group mainly wishes to receive information on specific substances and their effects, side-effects, possible risks and (health) harms. Next to this, the target group would like to see harm-reduction and safer-use advice (some mentioned dosage information), preferably personalised. The tone of voice should be non-judgemental and non-condescending, and there should be support for abstinence for those who pursue this. Information on first-aid and how to handle an emergency is regarded helpful by the target group, as well as referral information for drug- and/or mental health facilities in their living area. Also, there is some request for national legal and judicial issues regarding NPS. Lastly, an important preference that was mentioned many times was the inclusion of user-experiences of (former) NPS-users, and the ability to exchange information with other NPS-consumers. (The concept of the WBI, however, does not allow the addition of an interactive user-forum, due to the lack of manpower within the project partner organisations to continuously and carefully monitor such a forum.)

Self-assessment and consumption diary

The very concept of the WBI, i.e. the inclusion of a self-assessment test and a consumption diary aside from the informational part on substances, was generally met with positive reactions by



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the target group. The main response was that both a self-assessment and a consumption diary could be very helpful in becoming aware of one's consumption and possible problems with it, evaluation and reflection on NPS consumption, and possibly increase motivation to change the consumption pattern. The target group largely agreed that feedback should absolutely be personalised, and overall be person- instead of substance-focused. The consumption diary in particular has the advantage of being able to understand the own consumption (when and why do I consume, when and why do I have cravings, for instance), as well as allow the user to closely monitor their consumption. A critical note was that a consumption-diary and even a self-assessment test may be too confrontational for some, and make them reluctant to follow the intervention programme or use the WBI at all.

Popular New Psychoactive Substances

The substances most popular among the target group differ among countries. What does become clear is that the substance groups of synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones are most widely used. After these, phenethylamines and tryptamines were quite regularly mentioned. Countries also differ in their understanding of what is and what is not a 'new psychoactive substance' according to the target group. For instance, whereas Ketamine and GHB are regarded NPS in Belgium, just across the border in The Netherlands, reactions are very surprised to these substances being listed as 'NPS'. For The Netherlands and Belgium in particular, 4-FA / 4-FMP was mentioned quite often as a substance of choice. For other countries, Spice, 2-CP (2,5-dimethoxy-4-propylphenethylamin) and mephedrone were mentioned most often.

National and cultural particularities

There was very little mention of national legal and/or cultural particularities regarding New Psychoactive Substances. Mostly, the participants said they were unaware of such matters. As mentioned, it could be seen from the questionnaires that there is diversity in preference for specific substances, and some substances are usually consumed differently. Luxembourg and Italy in particular mentioned poly-drug use (including NPS) as a phenomenon in their country. Popularity of NPS in a particular country may exist for reasons ranging from their cheapness (Latvia), to giving the user a better 'status' over traditional drug users (Greece). (This last phenomenon is remarkable, as NPS increasingly seem to be having a 'bad reputation' in other countries.)

Possible names for the WBI

A few suggestions for a possible name for the WBI have been made, some including reference to NPS or drugs, and/or reference to support or intervention. Some, however, were of the opinion that the name should not imply anything drug- or at least counselling-related, for the sake of anonymousness when anyone else sees you are visiting the website or using the WBI.



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The target group warned that it should be a short name that is easy to find through Google Search.



Possible names for the WBI as suggested by target group members.

Social Media use and preferences

Regarding preferences for social media, which are used daily, Youtube is mentioned often as a source for looking up information as well as for entertainment. Furthermore, nearly everyone uses Facebook. Besides Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are mentioned most often, and some but not the majority of the participants uses Twitter. Regarding the WBI and its connection to social media in particular, it was mentioned by participants that using or following the WBI through Facebook might make you less anonymous. It was a concern of some that others may say you are following this drug-related WBI, and therefore show you are a drug user (who is possibly in need of support).

Next Steps

Following the conclusion of the Focus Groups (and additionally the national studies on Good Practice examples of NPS prevention), the project's first Workshop will be held in June 2017 in Riga, Latvia. During this workshop, all national results will be discussed among the project partners, and the feedback from the target group (as well as from the invited external experts) will inform the decisions on the exact contents of the WBI. Starting July 2017, the development-phase of the web-based intervention will begin. A second Workshop for all project partners will follow at the end of the development phase, in April 2018, where all prevention experts will be trained in handling the WBI and providing counselling for NPS users.



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Country	questionnaire respondents	Focus Group participants	average age	% male	% female
Austria	2	4	23	75	25
Belgium	18	31	22,6	67	33
Cyprus	2	13	21	70	30
Finland	16	0	> 25	53	47
Germany	28	15	19,3	79	21
Greece	6	14	21,4	79	21
Italy	7	3	23,6	67	33
Latvia	0	20	---	85	15
Luxembourg	1	41	19	80	20
Netherlands	19	10	21,5	100	0
Portugal	23	9	21,3	40	60
Slovakia	2	21	21	52	48
Slovenia	11	13	16,7	92	8
Total:	135 (10,4 / country)	194 (14,9/ country)	21	72 %	28 %

Quantitative Focus Group- and questionnaire data.