

Click for Support – REALized

[HOME/2015/JDRU/AG/DRUG/8857]

Results of national Focus Groups

[ROUND II APRIL - MAY 2018]



This report describes the outcomes of national Focus Group sessions conducted for the 'Click for Support - REALized' EU-project in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia from late April until late May 2018. The aim of these focus groups has been to receive feedback from the target group (users of News Psychoactive Substances (NPS) between 14 and 25 years of age) on the pilot version of the web-based intervention programme 'Mind Your Trip'.



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Contents

Introduction.....	2
Recruiting Focus Group participants.....	3
Results of the Focus Groups.....	4
Conclusions.....	8
Next Steps.....	9

Introduction

During the ‘Click for Support – REALized’ EU-project (2017-2018), two rounds of national focus groups with the target group (users of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) between 14 and 25 years of age) have been conducted by 12 project partner organisations in 12 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Unfortunately in 13th partner country Finland, no young drug users willing to participate in the Focus Group rounds could be found within the time frames.

This report describes the 2nd round of these Focus Groups, which have taken place in April and May 2018 as part of the project’s ‘Bèta Phase’ for testing the pilot version of the web-based intervention programme ‘Mind Your Trip’. The purpose (in line with the project’s ‘Description of Action’ as well as the guidelines for web-based selective drug intervention of the preceding ‘Click for Support’ project of 2014-2015) was to directly involve and receive feedback from the target group for whom this intervention programme was developed.

The exercise was explained in detail during the 2nd project Workshop in Italy, April 2018. Preceding this workshop, all partners have received a Field Manual, describing how exactly the focus groups should be conducted and which aim the Bèta phase has. Additionally, the partners have received a Feedback Form, to be filled out by the focus group participants in response to the website, and a reporting template, to be delivered to the project coordination. The target, as for the 1st round of focus groups, was set to 20 young NPS- or drug users per country.

As the time frame for the Bèta phase was too narrow to allow for participants to follow a full 30-day Bèta intervention programme, as it was initially planned, the alternative was given to hold one-time focus group meetings in the form of group discussions, in which feedback could be given on the website (contents, design / layout, images, etc.) and the promotional materials and strategy by the target group. Furthermore, feedback was given on the contents, wording and tone of the intervention programme (consisting of a self-assessment test, stand-alone diary, and three intervention modules). The additional application for mobile Android and Apple devices was not yet available for testing / feedback during the project’s Bèta Phase.



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Recruiting Focus Group participants

As with the first round of national Focus Groups, the strategies used for finding participants were mainly based on partners using their 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- or other drug users willing to participate in a focus group meeting, or provide individual feedback as an alternative.

These institutions 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.. Furthermore, the previous participants of the first round of focus groups have been contacted again where possible with the request to participate again and give feedback on the developed website. This last strategy has usually, however, not resulted in recruitment of participants for the second round of Focus Groups. The project coordinator has assisted the partners by posting a request for focus group participants on the international drug-user forum 'Bluelight.org', yet this has also not resulted in direct recruitment of participants.

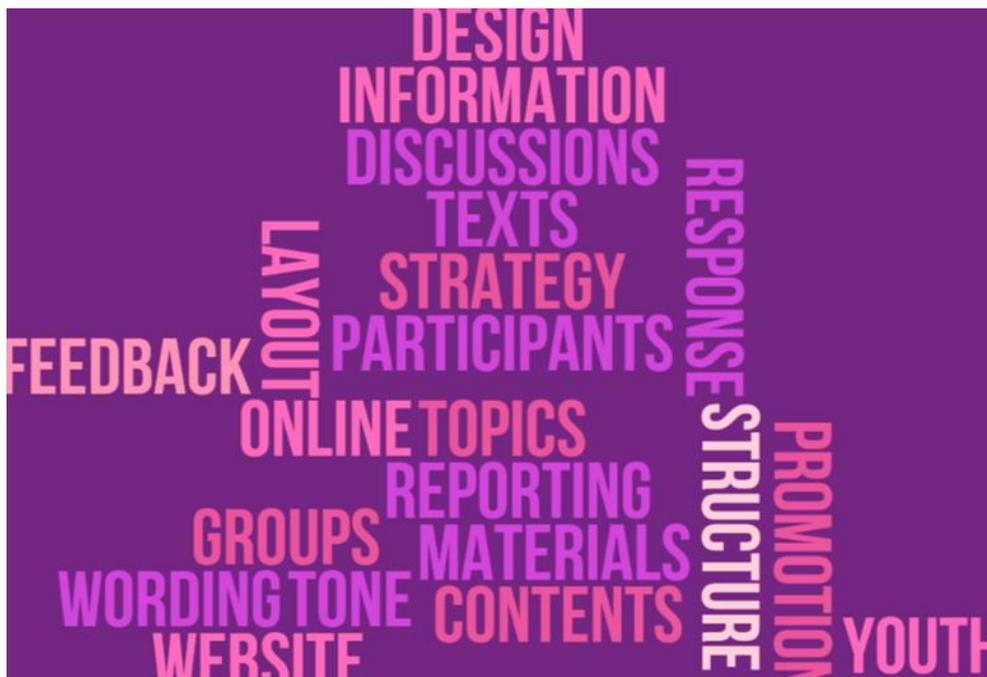
The recruitment process for the first round of focus groups in 2017 has shown that the partners struggled to find 'NPS users' specifically, among other because they are often poly-drug users, and because in some countries, the NPS phenomenon has already become less significant in the past years. The decision was made by the coordination to also have young drug users who do not necessarily (also) use NPS involved in the national focus groups. Most importantly for this second round of focus groups, the feedback needed to come from a young target group within the age range of 14 to 25 years, and the participants should be familiar with drug use.



Results of the Focus Groups

12 out of 13 project partner organisations were able to arrange at least one group discussion with young NPS- and/or other drug users. A total of 183 young European drug- / NPS users have provided feedback to the Mind Your Trip website and the intervention programme in this 2nd round of Focus Groups. Together with the 194 participants in the 1st round of Focus Groups of 2017, the overall target of 260 participants in 13 countries has thereby been exceeded.

Focus groups were mostly conducted in the form of small group discussions, in which the participants went through the website and read texts for the website and intervention programme contents. By using the website and providing the promotion materials and translated texts, participants were able to give feedback on the website's design, structure, and provided information. Furthermore, feedback was generated as to the wording and tone of the website and the intervention programme, and as to the attractiveness of the promotional materials (small printed hand-out cards) and the promotion strategy (i.e. use of social media).



In support of conducting the Focus Groups, partners had previously received a Feedback Form for participants, developed by the coordination. This form allowed participants to give quick, simple and comparable feedback, mostly through multiple-choice questions with answer options along a 4-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The questionnaire was divided in three topics: 'Design & Structure', 'Contents & Wording', and 'Intervention Programme' (5 questions per topic). The project partners handed in a Reporting Template based on the compiled results from the Feedback Forms to the project coordination. The quantitative results of all national focus group sessions combined can be found in the table below.

country	# participants	average age	% male	% female
Austria	13	21	85	15
Belgium	24	21	66	34
Cyprus	9	22	87	13
Germany	14	19	86	14
Greece	17	22	65	35
Italy	7	24	14	86
Latvia	22	18	59	41
Luxembourg	8	16	88	12
Netherlands	21	19	70	30
Portugal	14	17	78	21
Slovakia	19	18	68	32
Slovenia	15	27	70	30
Total	183	20 years	70%	30%

Quantitative results second round of national Focus Groups - numbers rounded off.

GENERAL RATING

Overall, the target group of young European drug users has responded positively to the general looks, design, structure, information and contents of the Mind Your Trip website and the accompanying promotional materials and -strategy. Most importantly, it was appreciated that it is an anonymous and low-threshold offer for support, which is user-friendly and flexible since it can be used online through both a website and a mobile application. The name 'Mind Your Trip' was also rated particularly attractive, attention-catching, and appealing to youth.

DESIGN & STRUCTURE

It was agreed among most Focus Group participants that the website has a clear structure, is user-friendly, and the provided information can be found easily. Also, the website was generally deemed as having an attractive design and layout. The currently added images and photos in the website were most often judged as the least attractive feature, yet the majority of participants did not think any feature was particularly less / unattractive. For the images, pictures and colour schemes, some judged these positively, whereas others judged them not very attractive - these issues may mostly be a matter of taste.

Feedback was given by many participants that the website could use even more visuals (pictures, photos, images, videos graphs, etc.) to present and structure the information visually as much as possible in order to appeal to youth. Videos with experiences of NPS users were requested by some specifically. The partners were enabled to change any pictures or images in their national website if they prefer to do so. Lastly, it was recommended to add a search bar in the website, to make it even easier for users to quickly find the information they are looking for.

PROMOTIONAL METHODS

Generally, participants were positive about the look of the printed card, which was judged to look interesting and make one curious to look up what Mind Your Trip is about, as the card itself does not give away too much information yet does attract attention. It was recommended by some to more clearly link the promotional materials (logo's, style, etc.) to the look and design of the website by adding the images and banners on the Mind Your Trip webpages. Instagram and especially Facebook ads were deemed appealing methods to reach the young target group.

CONTENTS & WORDING

Although most regarded the informative texts on the website understandable and clear ("short and sweet"), there was also some feedback on the length of the text on the webpages being too long. Furthermore, some regarded the wording in English somewhat too formal, whereas others found that this enhanced the impression that this is a professional support offer (which in turn was judged as positive, showing expertise and reliability). In the translations to national languages, partners have rephrased wording in their translations as they see fitting to their national target group. Further adaptations of English texts by partners may also be necessary.

Regarding the tone, Mind Your Trip was mostly rated as neutral, friendly, positive, accepting, non-moralising, and motivating. The tone of the WBI is thereby in line with the recommendations for youth in the 'Click for Support' guidelines for selective online drug prevention (2015). Only the tone of the 'DUDIT' as self-assessment test was said to focus on 'quitting-language', and the texts in general could use more humour according to some.

The provided links and references, although currently still mostly linking to English-language websites, were seen as trustworthy, except for links to Wikipedia. Participants were also still missing more references to national information (regarding legislative- and drug-checking issues / options) and/or references to websites in national language. Other recommendations by focus group participants have been to add a dictionary or glossary of technical 'drug scene'- and NPS-related terms, and to provide a list with warning signs for problematic drug use, dependence, or addiction for those wary of taking the self-test.

INTERVENTION PROGRAMME

It was recommended to put more emphasis on the intervention option by putting clearly visible links or buttons to the modules and the self-test on top of the home pages. Importantly, the target group greatly appreciates that Mind Your Trip is an anonymous support offer (no names, addresses, or e-mails required), which lowers the threshold for signing up significantly, as does the fact that the programme is free of charge. Some participants, however, were still sceptic about uploading personal information with regard to drug use online, concerned about possible law enforcement involvement. The tone and wording were found to be motivating and accepting.

The target group would like to see more detailed information on the intervention modules: what exactly do they entail, what does the actual programme look like, and what is the difference between the modules? It is much appreciated among the target group that there are options for different interventions which have clearly differentiated goals, and most importantly, they are not solely focused on reducing or quitting use. Background information on who the online counsellors are was also requested. Lastly, it was requested to provide more detailed information on risks and dangers of NPS use, risk variations per age, gender, etc., and to clearly state the target group for Mind Your Trip on the homepage.

Regarding the self-assessment test, stand-alone diary, and intervention modules, the target group was generally interested to try these out out of curiosity, but also to gain insight into and reflect onto their personal use, possibly getting motivated to reduce or quit use through a module, become aware of certain patterns and possible problematic use, and to receive feedback from a professional. It was appreciated that the self-test is scientifically-based and quick to fill out. The sign-up process of the intervention modules was seen as too long and complicated, therefore off-putting, by some, and others thought the self-test and diary might be too confrontational to fill out. Some claimed that a simplistic algorithm such as the self-test could not provide genuine personalised feedback.

Although generally regarded as a helpful tool in reducing or quitting NPS use (through self-help or by motivating to continue to the modules), some responded that the diary might be a trigger for use, as you create a focus on it. It was also recommended to preferably refer to the diary as a 'log' or 'calendar', as the word 'diary' may give a false connotation to writing a lot of text daily, whereas it is indeed mainly a tool for logging drug use. Potential users would like to receive reminders for filling out the diary.

Last but not least, the target group has given the feedback that they would be even more motivated with regards to the intervention modules when feedback from the counsellor is received as quickly as possible (preferable within 24 hours instead of within two working days).

Conclusions

The feedback from the target group has shown that there still was work to be done by the technical developers, the intervention developers, and the project partners. This mainly concerns repairing / revising certain technical issues, inserting promotional materials into the website where possible, and thoroughly testing the intervention modules and mobile app. Furthermore, more nationally-focused information (mainly concerning referencing / adding background information on NPS, legal issues and drug checking from national sources / in national language) needs to be provided, as well as different / additional visuals. It will be the responsibility of the project partners to research and add more information with regard to their respective countries to their national websites. Also, some of the wording in English and/or the translated texts may need to be adapted by the partners to better fit the diverse national target groups of young NPS users.

A few requests of the target group are beyond the scope of possibilities within this project: for instance, the DUDIT test is regarded somewhat negatively, yet this is a standardised and validated test which cannot be adapted by the partners. Of course, it could be looked into after the evaluation whether there is a more suitable self-assessment test available elsewhere for this particular target group. Another valuable addition which could be developed for the WBI in the future would be, as requested, a glossary or dictionary with important drug-related terms, as well as a list of warning signs for problematic drug use. Concerning the speed of feedback by counsellors, the partners will make efforts to always answer as quickly as possible; yet as only one prevention expert is available per country to operate the intervention programme during the scope of this project, this is a challenge.

Aside from the comments by the focus group participants on the issues mentioned above, the overall response to Mind Your Trip and the promotion materials has been positive throughout all 12 countries. This gives a positive outlook on the extent to which Mind Your Trip might be accepted by the target group in Europe, and shows that the 1st round of focus groups with the target group has been worthwhile in terms of enabling the project group to adapt the web-based intervention to the wishes, needs and concerns of the target group. In its Bèta Phase, Mind Your Trip has generally been rated as attractive looking, with an appealing promotion strategy and an accepting, motivating and non-moralising tone. Furthermore, the intervention options (self-assessment test, consumption diary, and three intervention modules) were generally seen as positive, interesting, and low-threshold options for getting support. The development of Mind Your Trip will be an ongoing process over the coming months.



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Next Steps

The purpose of this Bèta Phase and the adaptations to Mind Your Trip is for the WBI offer to suit the target group as well as possible, as recommended in the 'Click for Support Guidelines for Effective Web-Based Interventions in Selective Drug Prevention' (2015). Following the conclusions of the second round of national Focus Groups, the final necessary adaptations to the website and app of Mind Your Trip as well as the intervention programme have been made by technical developer Wild Sea (Netherlands) and intervention developer Tactus (Netherlands) in late May and early June. Additionally, the project partners made changes to their national Mind Your Trip websites concerning wording, information, images, and references based on their national focus group results.

After the initial adaptations, Mind Your Trip was launched on Monday 11 June 2018 in 11 languages in 13 EU countries: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The website and app will be operated for approximately 5 months. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the WBI, mainly in terms of lowering NPS consumption among the WBI users and achievements in having reached the target group, will be conducted by the project coordination based on Mind Your Trip data generated over the first 19 weeks of operation. In the meantime, all project partners and the coordination will continue to make efforts to promote and disseminate Mind Your Trip as widely as possible in their respective countries and beyond through offline and online methods, based on the promotion strategy developed by Belgian partner CAD Limburg. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the further development of the national websites and the app will be an ongoing process during the 5 months of operation of Mind Your Trip.

The results of the evaluation of the WBI's effectiveness, the project process, and future plans for the continuation of Mind Your Trip in Europe through the 'euro net' drug prevention network will be presented for the project group and invited external experts during the Final Conference on Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 November 2018 in Münster, Germany.

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