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From:	Presidency
To:	Horizontal Working Party on Drugs
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Subject:	The new EU drugs strategic framework: Thematic discussion on strategic priorities and actions relating to research, innovation and foresight: - Discussion paper

Delegations will find enclosed the discussion paper for the thematic discussion on strategic priorities and actions of the future EU Drugs Strategy relating to research, innovation and foresight, elaborated by the Danish Presidency in coordination with its trio partners – the outgoing Polish Presidency and the incoming Cyprus Presidency, as well as the Commission.

**Thematic discussion on strategic priorities and actions
relating to research, innovation and foresight:
Discussion paper**

Introduction

According to the European Drug Report 2025, the European drug market is evolving, with a growing availability of substances that are often highly potent and pure, which are posing new risks to public health¹.

Foresight based on updated findings is key to anticipate risks and threats to health and security posed by illicit drugs. Robust scientific evidences are essential for sound policymaking at local, national, and EU level. Research plays a critical role in addressing policy-related questions by identifying the most suitable interventions or combinations thereof to mitigate drug-related challenges. It also enables the evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of diverse intervention alternatives and proposes innovative strategies to enhance their overall effectiveness. This is particularly pertinent in light of rapidly developing new psychoactive substances associated with severe patterns of toxicity resulting in significant morbidity and mortality and to ensure the EU's preparedness for such new challenges.

The European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) has been accumulating unique knowledge and advanced data collection systems. Following the recommendations included in the Council conclusions on strengthening EU research capacity on illicit drugs², an annual dialogue on drug-related research has been organised since 2010 within the framework of the HDG, with the assistance of the EUDA, advised by its Scientific Committee. This dialogue aims to “strengthen policy–research links and collaboration at EU level and reflect on the progress made”³.

¹ Understanding Europe's drug situation in 2025 – key developments (European Drug Report 2025) | www.euda.europa.eu.

² ST 17177/09.

³ Ibid.

As part of its expanded mandate, the EUDA actively contributes to EU framework programmes for research and innovation, while identifying knowledge gaps and prioritising research needs in the drugs area. Foresight and anticipation are central to the EUDA's new responsibilities, ensuring the EU and its Member States are equipped to address emerging threats and adapt to the evolving drug landscape through strategic, evidence-based policymaking.

State of play

One of the cross-cutting themes of the current EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 is **research, innovation and foresight**. One strategic priority is currently related to this topic:

Strategic priority 10 : Building synergies to provide the EU and its Member States with the comprehensive research evidence base and foresight capacities necessary to enable a more effective, innovative and agile approach to the growing complexity of the drugs phenomenon, and to increase the preparedness of the EU and its Member States to respond to future challenges and crises.

Priority areas to address:	
10.1	Strengthen and broaden research capacities and encourage the greater sharing and use of results.
10.2.	Foster innovation, so that policy and actions shift from a reactive to a proactive mode.
10.3.	Develop strategic foresight and a future-oriented approach.
10.4.	Strengthen coordination and synergies, and support the central role of the EMCDDA, Europol and the Reitox network of national focal points in research, innovation and foresight.
10.5.	Ensure adequate financing for drug-related research, innovation and foresight.

According to the **EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025**, the scope of the cross-cutting area of research, innovation and foresight covers both the health and security aspects of the drugs phenomenon, and recognises their intrinsic linkage. Its objective is to foster a better understanding of all aspects of the drugs phenomenon and of what constitute effective interventions, so as to provide a sound evidence base for necessary policy development and practice. It will ensure that maximum value is derived from investment in this area by fostering synergies and the efficient allocation of resources.

The EU's and Member States' actions in the area of research, innovation and foresight have been assessed in the **evaluation** of the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan⁴. The findings of the evaluation showed that since 2021, the EU has made some efforts in enhancing research, innovation and foresight with improved systems and methods to collect and analyse data as well as predict trends related to drug policies. It was mentioned that most Member States made some progress in broadening research capacities such as by identifying knowledge gaps and testing capacities, coordinating and creating synergies within the European research community and taking into account gender-sensitive approaches. It was also mentioned that progress was demonstrated in developing detection technologies, and innovative methods, including forensic and toxicological analysis and statistical modelling, or the use of Big Data and open-source information.

It was also mentioned that the expanded mandate of the EUDA has reinforced its capacity for research and data collection, drug monitoring, prevention and anticipation. Furthermore, it was mentioned that the agency is developing a European Drug Alert System for all types of drug-related threats, including NPS and complementing the existing Early Warning System.

It was further mentioned that EU funding to drug-related research, innovation and foresight has been allocated via the Horizon Europe programme since 2021. The EU has also supported research projects to generate knowledge about the biological mechanisms of drug dependence and addiction.

However, the evaluation also found persistent gaps in data collection for key indicators, which are often not harmonised across the EU. Further, data reporting by Member States remains long and hampers swift policy responses to emerging needs and trends on the drug market. The evaluation also highlighted that progress is limited at national level due to lack of resources and funding.

⁴ ST 11320/25 + ADD1 + ADD2

It is important to bear these challenges in mind when reflecting on the future EU drugs strategy, its strategic priorities and targeted actions in the area of research, innovation and foresight.

Questions for discussion:

In light of the above, delegations are kindly invited to address the following questions when it comes to research, innovation and foresight:

- What are the **main challenges and issues** identified by Member States in relation to the research, innovation and foresight part of the Strategy, in particular related to data collection and resource allocation, and how can a research, innovation and foresight part of the future EU drugs strategy be improved?
 - Which **strategic priorities** should be defined in this area? Should research, innovation and foresight continue as a cross-cutting theme or be integrated into the other strategic priorities?
 - What are the main targeted, specific and measurable **actions** to be pursued in relation to a research, innovation and foresight part of the strategy? Which **indicators** should be used to measure the success of such actions and who should be **responsible** for implementing them?
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