UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH
School of Law

RESEARCH EVIDENCE INTO POLICY PROGRAMMES AND PRACTICE
YOUTH CRIME

EUDA
EUROPEAN UNION DRUGS AGENCY

SAFE FUTURES

PROMISING APPROACHES, OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS FOR INTERVENTIONS TO PREVENT YOUTH RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN DRUGS MARKETS

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NEWSLETTER

Issue 3 *June 2026*



Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) University of Limerick

A Message from the Team

Welcome to the latest edition of the Safe Futures Newsletter.

Safe Futures commenced in December 2024 with the aim of bringing together policymakers, researchers, law enforcement agencies, and practitioners from across Europe to share practice knowledge and research, and to inform and design future interventions to prevent the recruitment of young people into organised drugs networks. The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Establish a multi-disciplinary and jurisdictional Community of Practice to support and contribute to the Project activities
- Conduct a desk review of literature on promising approaches and initiatives
- Identify and review existing examples of practices and interventions
- Identify critical success factors and barriers to development and implementation of interventions
- Develop a conceptual framework and model to inform development and implementation of interventions.

It has been a busy few months of activity since our last newsletter, with new connections made, fresh insights emerging, and the project moving into its empirical data collection phase. In this newsletter, we share updates from the project over the last few months. Please feel free to reach out to us if you would like to find out more, and we would be happy to discuss our work with you.



Helen Fitzgerald
Project Lead



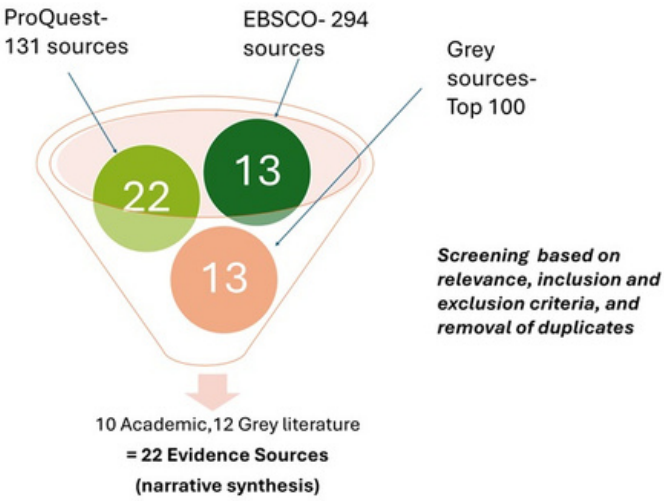
Dr Eoin O'Meara Daly
Research Fellow

Addressing the Recruitment of Young People into Criminal Drugs Networks

A Rapid Evidence Review

A Rapid Evidence Review (RER) examined international research to better understand what works to prevent and disrupt the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs markets.

Drawing on 22 academic and grey literature sources, the evidence shows that recruitment is rarely a single event. Instead, it is shaped by a mix of individual vulnerability, peer and family influence, community conditions, and increasingly, grooming, child criminal exploitation and online tasking. Because of this complexity, no single solution works.



The review identifies eight promising approaches, including family-centred and trauma-informed supports, school and community-based prevention, rapid engagement at key “reachable moments”, network-informed disruption of recruiters, and digital safety measures.



Overall, the key message is clear: effective responses must be multi-layered, timely, and relationship-focused, and how interventions are implemented matters just as much as what is delivered.

The Rapid Evidence Review Report will be published in June 2026.

Safe Futures Phase 2

Project Visits & Stakeholder Interviews

Phase 2 of the Safe Futures project has commenced with site visits to crime prevention programmes and expert interviews with key stakeholders in France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Ireland - North & South. At the end of May 2026, 21 people have been interviewed across 6 EU jurisdictions.



The aim of Phase 2 is to capture the tacit knowledge and practice wisdom from interventions and programmes across multiple European jurisdictions, and to develop an overview of approaches that are being used to address this complex intervention area. Analysis of Phase 2 data has now commenced, and findings will be disseminated later in 2026.



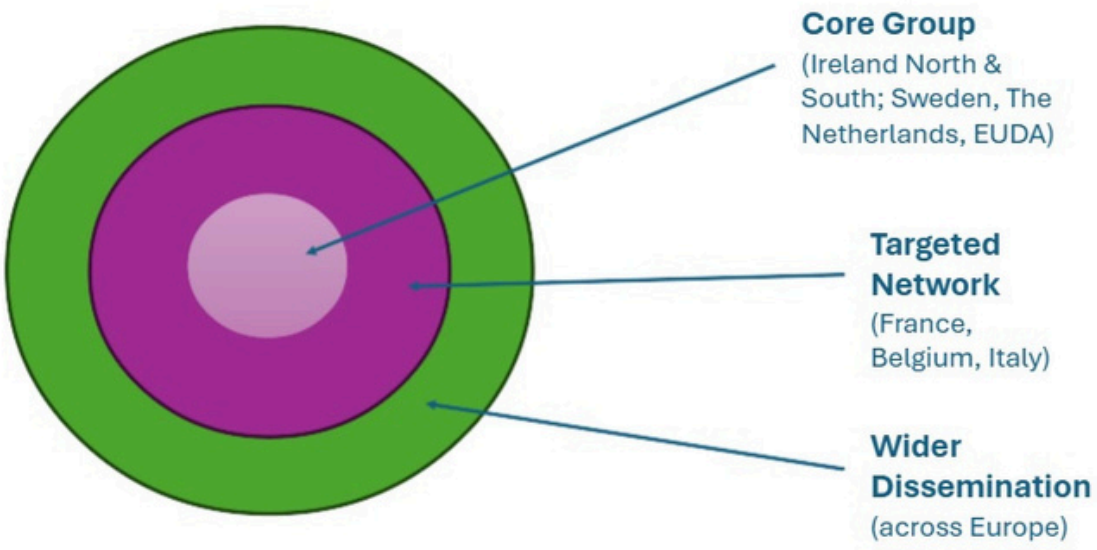


Building a Community of Practice

A core objective of the Safe Futures project is to build a Community of Practice of policy makers, practitioners, and researchers who all share common concerns about addressing the complex issue of young people's recruitment into drugs markets.

The Safe Futures Community of Practice aims to build connections. share knowledge, and support future collaborations among members. The Community of Practice comprises of 3 layers:

1) A Core Group of partners from Ireland (North and South), Sweden, The Netherlands and the EUDA. The role of the Core Group is to guide and support the implementation of the project.
2) A network of stakeholders who engage with the project through participating in Community of Practice events, facilitating site visits, or participating in stakeholder interviews.
3) A wider community of interested policy makers, practitioners and researchers from across Europe.



Building a Community of Practice

Roundtable Discussion at the European Society of Criminology Annual Conference, Athens,



On September 4th 2025, as part of the European Society of Criminology Annual Conference in Athens, Greece, the Safe Futures Team hosted a Roundtable discussion with policymakers and researchers from across Europe.

Facilitated in the structure of a 'fireside chat', panellists presented and discussed the challenge of, and responses to, the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Sweden, France and from the perspective of the EUDA.

Key takeaways from the discussion included:

1. Recruitment of young people into organised crime is a major concern across Europe

2. Vulnerable young people are disproportionately involved

3. The nature of youth involvement in crime is changing

4. Context is central to understanding the problem

5. Promising approaches are emerging, but no "off-the-shelf" solutions

6. Evidence gaps exist with a need for better knowledge exchange

7. Inter-agency collaboration is critical

8. Timing is crucial: effective responses need to identify at-risk youth early, and intervene during short windows of opportunity

9. Communities need to be part of the solution, particularly in building trust and shared understanding.

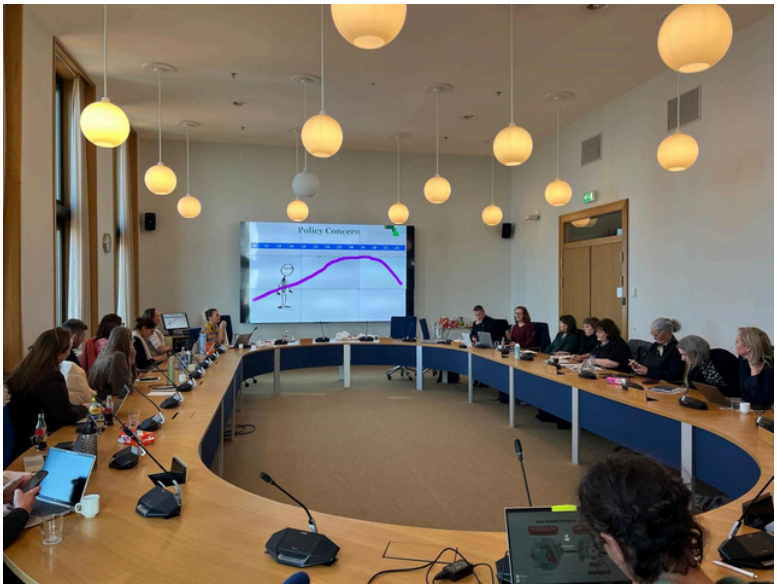


Building a Community of Practice

Knowledge Exchange Event, The Hague,

Over 2 days in March 2026, the Safe Futures team facilitated a Community of Practice knowledge exchange event, in The Hague, with partners from The Netherlands, France, Northern Ireland, and Belgium. The delegates visited Prevention with Authority projects in The Hague and Delft; while also learning about interventions and research that are happening in Ireland (Greentown Project), The Netherlands (EPIC Research Programme) and France (Mildeca Limits Programme). Learning from other EU-funded projects (Salvus) and (CHANCE Network/Prevent) was also shared.





Project Communication and Dissemination

EUDA Reference Group on Drug Markets and Crime

Eoin and Helen presented on the findings of the Rapid Evidence Review at the EUDA Reference Group on Drug Markets and Crime in Lisbon on the 5th November 2025. The event brought together leading experts to share insights and to strengthen Europe's preparedness against evolving drug market threats. Participants explored key dimensions of the drug market, from violence and global dynamics to environmental impacts and youth recruitment. This collaboration helps identify emerging trends and guide evidence-based responses to improve security across Europe.



Webinar on Novel Approaches

On December 10th 2025, the REPPP Safe Futures Team and the EUDA co-hosted a webinar on novel approaches to preventing the recruitment of young people into European Drug Markets.

Eoin presented the findings from the Rapid Evidence Review. Nour Gjaltema, Senior Policy Officer at the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, and Monica Usai, Programme Manager at Libera, an Italian anti-mafia network, presented on the experiences in Netherlands and Italy.

A recording of the webinar can be viewed here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6ITGNGHpNg

Project Communication & Dissemination

Stockholm Criminology Conference



The Safe Futures Team attended the Stockholm Criminology Symposium, June 8-10, where we participated in a Panel Discussion on:

Responding to the complex issue of youth involvement in organised crime: programme design and implementation from an Irish and EU perspective.



Hosted by the University of Limerick's REPPP team, the panel addresseed the Irish Government and the EUDA's response to the policy concern of the recruitment and management of young people into criminal networks, namely the Greentown Programme and Safe Futures.

The panel first discussed the primary research to understand the problem, and the deliberative design of Greentown - a targeted, place-based response in Ireland. This was followed by a presentation on the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Greentown Programme. The panel concluded with a presentation on Safe Futures, highlighting the work to-date to build a community of practice and share knowledge on interventions for young people involved in organised drug crime.

In the coming months, we will also be sharing our reflections and findings at:

- The European Society of Criminology Conference, Warsaw, 9-12 September
- European Crime Prevention Conference, Lisbon, 30 September - 1 October

News from our Partners

New Centre for Evidence-Based Youth Services, Queens University Belfast

The Centre for Evidence-Based Youth Services, in Queens University Belfast, is a new hub for interdisciplinary and international research, training, and practice development, focused on children and young people in youth services.

In partnership with the Education Authority for Northern Ireland, the Centre focuses on embedding the best available evidence into youth services, generating new evidence through high-quality, co-produced research, and building the capacity of youth service practitioners through advanced training and (continuous) professional development.

More information about the Centre can be found here - Centre for Evidence-Based Youth Services

New Website - EPIC

The Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR) have launched a new English language website for the EPIC (Explaining, Preventing, and Intervening in organised Crime involvement) Project.

Led by a consortium of researchers, policymakers and practitioners, and with support from the Dutch Research Agenda (NWA), the aim of the EPIC research project is to effectively reduce the involvement of young people in serious and organised crime. The first phase of the project is completed. With support from NWA, the second phase of EPIC kicked off in March 2024 with five different empirical work packages. Information about the project and its results todate can be found on its new English language website - EPIC

News from our Partners

European Crime Prevention Conference 2026

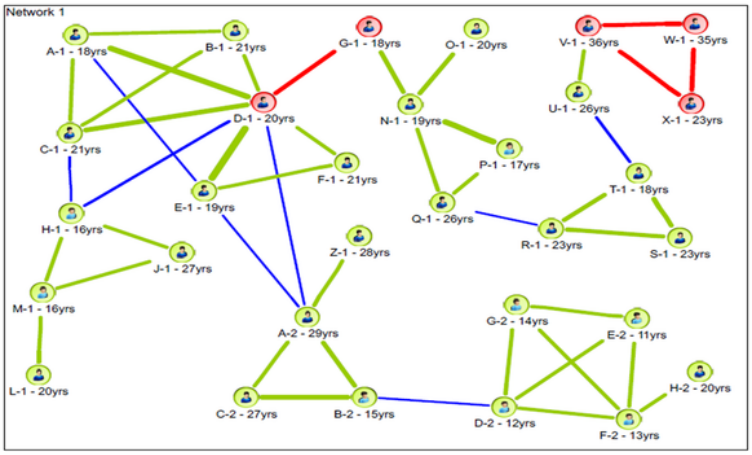
The European Crime Prevention Conference will take place this year in Lisbon from 30 September to 1 October. The European Crime Prevention Conference is a biennial event organised by the Secretariat of EUCPN-ENAA and funded by the European Commission. It provides a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences on crime prevention across the European Union. The conference brings together policymakers, practitioners and academics, while maintaining a strong focus on frontline perspectives. This year's conference is dedicated to the prevention of youth recruitment and the administrative approach.



Further information about the conference, including registration details can be found here: https://eucpn.org/events/ecpc2026

New Publications from the REPPP Team

The dream team - combining social network analysis and expert insights to disrupt Irish criminal networks



A new publication by the REPPP team has been published in Global Crime. The article, by lead author Dr Alejandro Dinkelberg, with Dr Catherine Naughton, Dr Sean Redmond, Dr Eoin O'Meara Daly, and John Reddy from REPPP, and with Dr Padraig McCarron of the UL Department of Mathematics and Statistics, combines quantitative social network analysis with qualitative expert knowledge to further understand network patterns in local organised criminal networks.

News from our Partners

New Publications from the REPPP Team



No Wrong Door: A Systematic Literature Review

This review by Aisling Reidy with Dr Catherine Naughton and Dr Sean Redmond provides the first detailed conceptual framing of the 'No Wrong Door' principle as it applies to collaborative service delivery in Ireland. The study is funded by the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA) as part of the North South Research Programme.

Better Together - Developing Relationship Practice to Effect Change in Young People's Behaviour

The Better Together report by Dr Eoin O'Meara Daly, Jackie Dwane, Caitlin Lewis, and Dr Sean Redmond and its guidance materials are the result of a 3 year action research project which examined the role of effective relationships between youth justice workers and young people in Ireland. The project developed a model of relational working for youth justice workers.

Further information about the project, and research report, can be found here:

Better Together - Developing Relationship Practice to Effect Change in Young People's Offending Behaviour



Safe Futures Core Group Members

Ireland	Helen Fitzgerald, Dr Eoin O'Meara Daly, Dr Catherine Naughton, Dr Megan Ryan; University of Limerick
EUDA	Teodora Groshkova, PhD
Sweden	Karin Svanberg; National Council for Crime Prevention
The Netherlands	Prof. Veroni Eichelsheim, Prof. Arjan Blokland; Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR)
Northern Ireland	Dr Colm Walsh; Queen's University, Belfast

Contact Us

Contact us to learn more about the project, to join our Community of Practice, or to share new literature, reports or insights about the complex area of youth recruitment and participation in European Drugs Markets.

We want to hear from you!



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