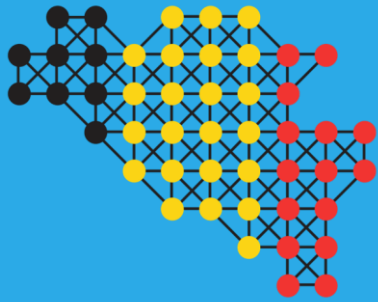




BE-PIN

The Belgian Pandemic
Intelligence Network

Strengthening advisory systems for pandemic preparedness: lessons from Belgium and beyond

18th of September, 2025

Miriam Saso, Shona Cosgrove, Eveline Cleynen - Sciensano

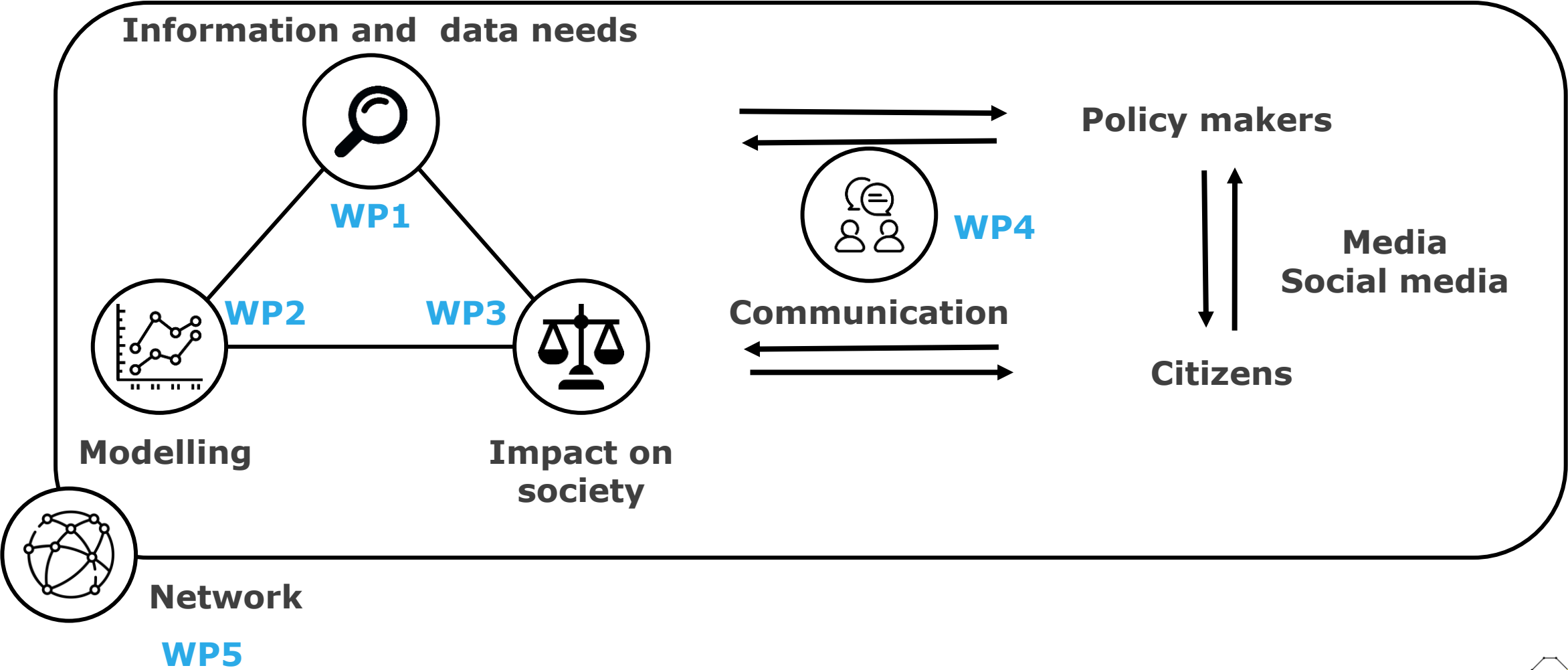
BE-PIN: The Belgian Pandemic Intelligence Network



BE-PIN website



Structure



Aim

- ▶ Develop a **theoretical framework** to assess the governance of advisory systems during crises and beyond
- ▶ Provide **evidence-based recommendations** to strengthen Belgium's advisory system, drawing lessons from the national COVID-19 experience and in other European countries.

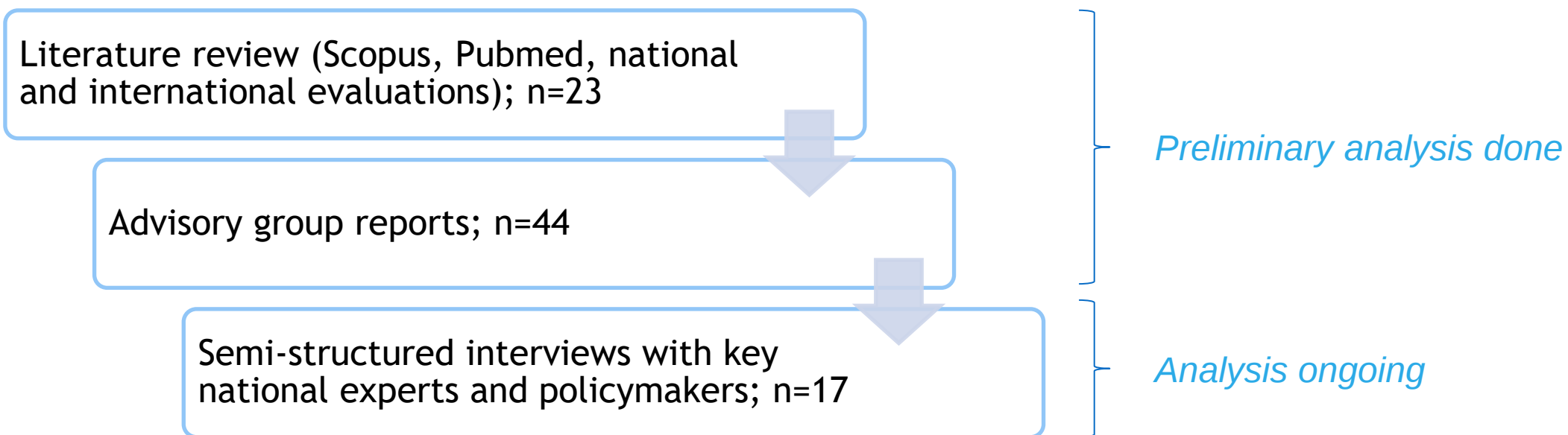
Advisory systems in crisis' time

Advisory systems in crisis: why they matter

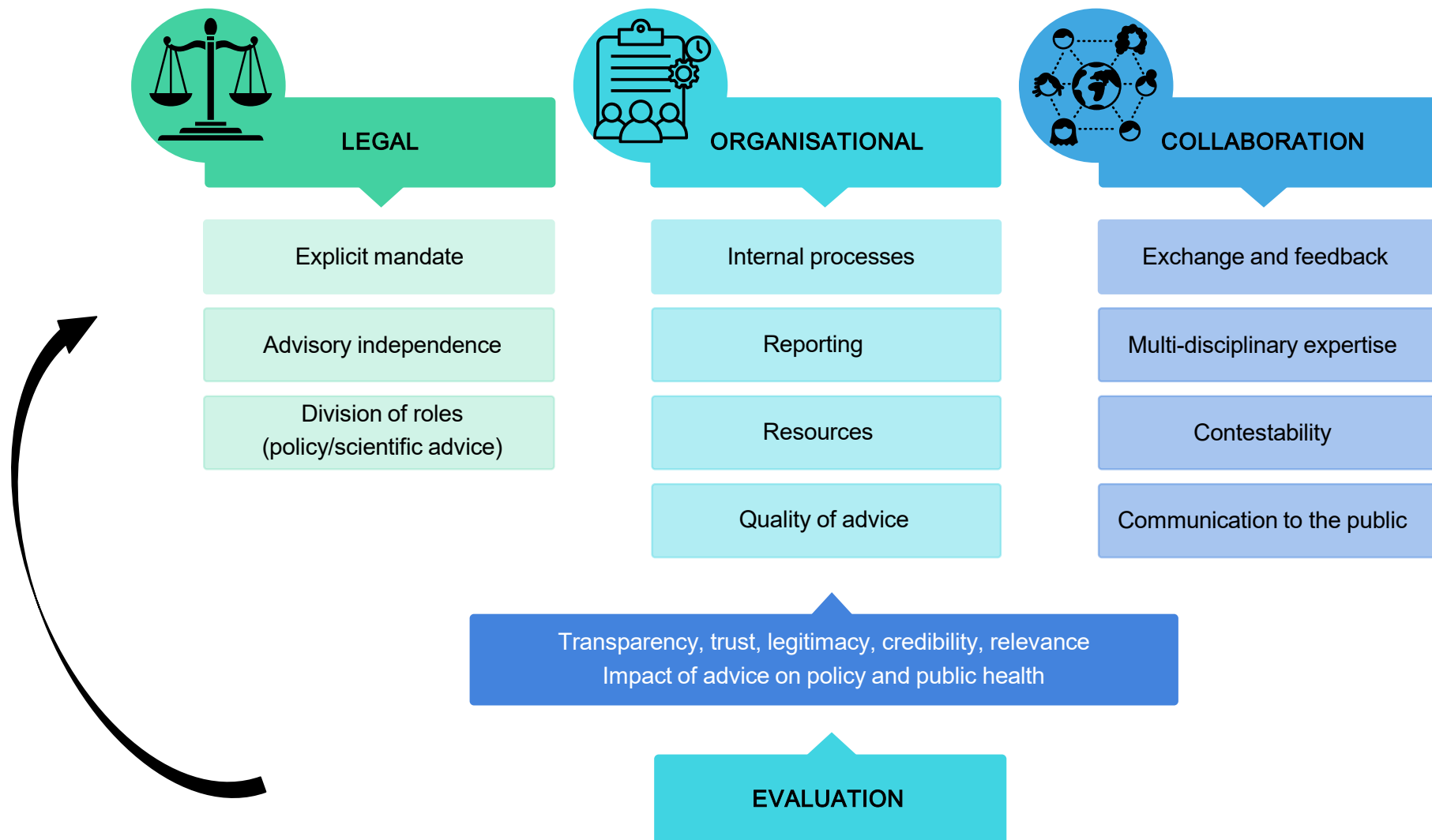
- **Anticipate future risks:** Effective advisory mechanisms can identify emerging threats early, shaping proactive rather than reactive strategies
- **Guide decision-making under uncertainty:** They should provide governments with timely, evidence-based guidance
- **Maintain public trust:** Transparent advisory processes help citizens understand why certain decisions are made, reinforcing legitimacy and compliance
- **Foster collaboration:** They can help avoid fragmented, duplicated, or delayed actions

Work done so far

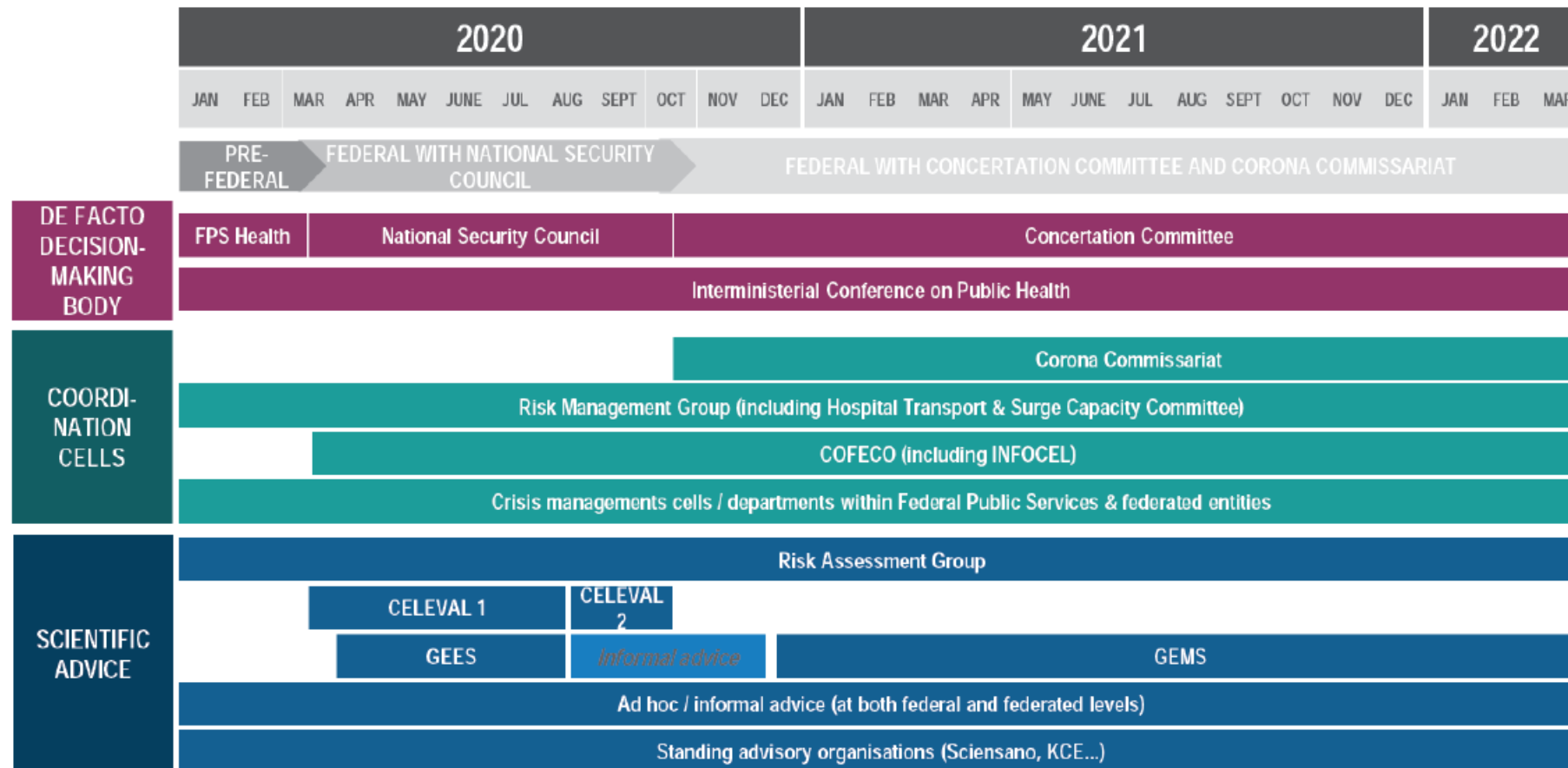
Needs and gaps of the advisory system in Belgium during COVID-19



Theoretical Framework: Governance of Advisory Systems



Federal structure of the COVID-19 crisis management in Belgium



Source: OECD authors' own elaboration based on information gathered and shared by Belgian authorities.

Preliminary results (analysis ongoing)



LEGAL

Explicit mandate

Advisory
independence

Division of roles
(policy/scientific
advice)

Quotes from interviews

“...if you look at the composition, you see a lot of names that are really involved in policy. [...] They’re responsible for policymaking, but they’re also part of the advisory committee.” - Expert



Lack of well-defined responsibilities between the participants of the advisory bodies. Experts used to justify decisions.

Preliminary results (analysis ongoing)

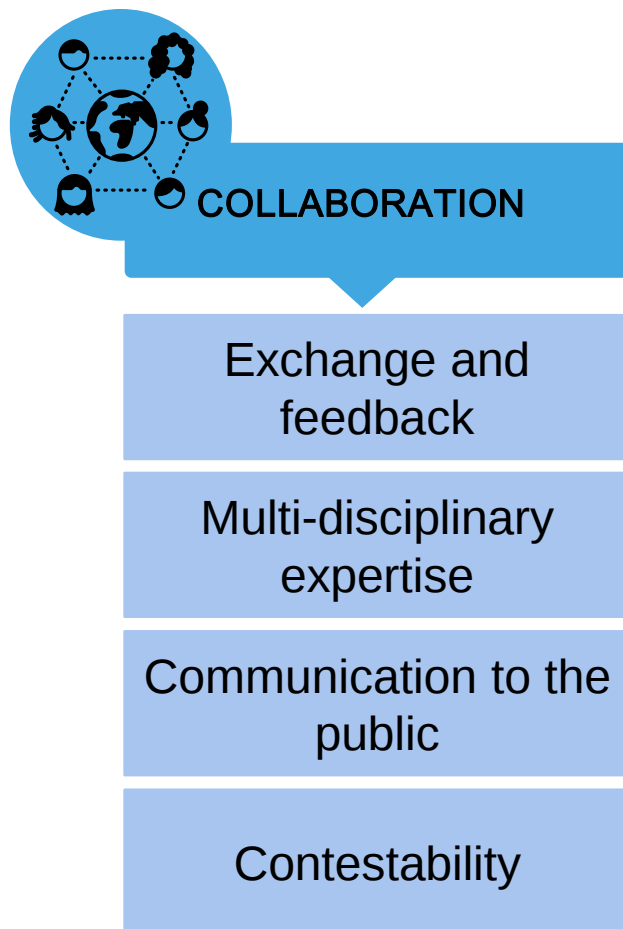


Resource constraints for advisory boards' experts
Expected to provide advice on top of usual workload

Quotes from interviews

"[the advisory work] was very interesting but very intensive and we said we need to be compensated for this, our institutions need to be compensated. That never took place" - Expert

Preliminary results (analysis ongoing)



Quotes from interviews

“informal contacts played an important role” - Policymaker

“the GEMS [...] worked quite well because it had this close connection with the policy makers.” - Expert

“...the ministers, even after two years of COVID, did not always understand the science of it or for example, the difference between quarantine and isolation. And that remained challenging from start to finish.” - Policymaker

Preliminary results (analysis ongoing)



Question for you:

Were any of you involved in giving advice during the COVID-19 crisis, even if you weren't formally part of an advisory board?"

New themes appearing in interviews

Institutional memory:

- ▶ *How can we support long-term learnings from the COVID-19 crisis? How can we ensure that the lived experience of experts and policy makers who played an active role in the management of the crisis will not be lost after they leave their positions?*



Safety of advisors:

- ▶ *“You need to find experts that are still willing to do this because there's a risk of harassment, of threats. You become a public figure.” Expert*

Alignment of communication to the public:

- ▶ *“Even if politicians communicate, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, federal level, and then the regional Minister Presidents. They all say something, that's the way it was. And for me, as somebody involved and knowing the area a little bit, I can understand they may be saying the same thing or different aspects of the same thing. Population hears them contradict each other.” - Expert*



Preliminary enablers and barriers (analysis ongoing)

Examples of enablers

- Clearly defined legal mandates
- Formalised roles and responsibilities between experts and policymakers
- Transparent expert selection procedure
- Institutional memory

Examples of barriers

- Fragmented coordination → duplication of work
- Limited integration of diverse disciplines (e.g., social sciences)
- Lack of structural resourcing

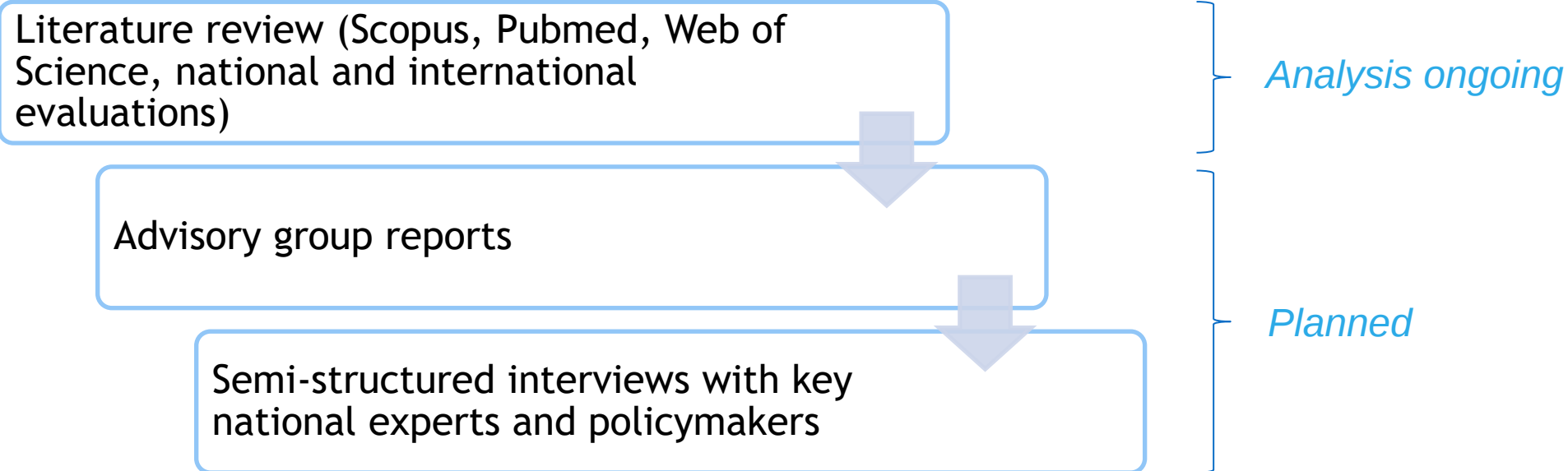


BE-PIN
The Belgian Pandemic
Intelligence Network

Lessons learnt from *(inter)national advisory
systems*

Work done so far

Identify lessons learned from other countries' advisory systems during the COVID-19 pandemic



Lessons from Germany and Austria

Master thesis from Antonia Bahr, Maastricht University student interning at Sciensano

Master Thesis	
Research question	What mechanisms facilitated or hindered effective, evidence-based decision-making during COVID-19 in Germany and Austria?
Methods	Systematic literature review using the BE-PIN methodology, supplemented by (inter)national evaluation documents and sample of national reports from advisory boards
Analysis	According to the BE-PIN Theoretical Framework
Aim for BE-PIN	Identify lessons learned, needs, and gaps from Germany and Austria to provide recommendations for the effective governance of advisory systems in Belgium and beyond



BE-PIN

The Belgian Pandemic
Intelligence Network



Thank you!

Miriam Saso, Innovation in Health Information Systems, Sciensano

Eveline Cleynen, Innovation in Health Information Systems & Strategy and External Positioning, Sciensano

Miriam.Saso@sciensano.be Eveline.Cleynen@sciensano.be