

CERIS Workshop: Research and Innovation against Illicit Drugs: From Foresight to Operational Impact

5-6 May 2026, Rue Félix Hap 11, 1040 Brussels, Belgium

Concept Overview and Final Agenda

1) Concept Overview

Illicit drugs and drug trafficking remain among the most complex and persistent security challenges facing the European Union. They intersect public health, organised crime, border security and social cohesion, while continuously evolving through new substances, routes, technologies and criminal methods. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, evidence-based and forward-looking approach that effectively links policy, operational needs and research and innovation.

This two-day CERIS workshop aims to bring together policymakers, practitioners, researchers, EU agencies, civil society and industry to examine how EU-funded security research and innovation can support a more effective and integrated response to drugs-related threats. The event will explore the full spectrum of the drugs phenomenon, including drug markets and foresight, organised crime, forensics, border and customs controls, and the societal dimension, with particular attention to youth.

The workshop will also reflect the evolving EU landscape, including the implementation of the EU Action Plan on drug trafficking and the reinforced role of the EU Drugs Agency (EUDA) in analysis, early warning, foresight and cooperation with the EU security research cycle. It will further highlight how research can support operational, policy priorities and coordination at EU level, including those addressed by Europol and national authorities. It will also consider how training and capacity-building activities at EU level can support the uptake of research results by law-enforcement authorities.

Building on previous CERIS events, the workshop combines policy discussions with concrete project demonstrations, allowing participants to exchange on practical results, usability and pathways from research to operational impact. By fostering dialogue across disciplines and communities, the workshop seeks to identify lessons learned, remaining gaps and priorities for future cooperation, and to strengthen the contribution of research and innovation to EU and Member State efforts against illicit drugs.

2) Agenda

DAY 1: Understanding the Threat Landscape & Research Foundations

09:00 - 09:30 Registration & Welcome Coffee

09:30 - 10:15 Opening Session: Policy, Research and the EU Drugs Landscape

- Welcome by DG HOME (CERIS/Innovation & Security Research)
- EU drugs policy & Action Plan on drug trafficking - Jo De Cock, DG HOME
- European Union Drugs Agency: evolving mandate, foresight, early warning, and research cooperation - Pedro Assares Rodrigues, EUDA

Objective: Set the strategic frame and policy pull for R&I.

Speaker rationale: Speakers in this session are invited to set the strategic and policy context for the event. Contributions shall highlight current EU priorities on drugs, the policy-research interface, and how research and innovation support the implementation of the EU Action Plan on drug trafficking. A particular focus is placed on the evolving role of EUDA in analysis, foresight and cooperation with EU-funded security research.

10:15 - 11:30 Panel 1: Drug Markets, Data and Foresight

Focus: intelligence, monitoring, early warning, emerging threats

Topics:

- *New data sources for drug markets (wastewater, darknet, open data)*
- *New psychoactive substances (NPS) & early warning systems*
- *Horizon scanning & foresight for drugs trends (incl. synthetic drugs)*

Speaker rationale: This session brings together experts working on drug markets analysis, data collection and foresight. Speakers are selected for their experience in innovative data sources, early warning systems, and analytical methods that help anticipate emerging drug-related threats, including new psychoactive substances. The panel aims to connect research approaches with policy and operational needs.

Speakers:

- Alexander Soderholm, EUDA
- Laura Smit-Rigter, Trimbos Institute, NL
- Shona Cosgrove, Sciensano, BE
- Camilla Contorni, UNODC
- Magnus Sjöberg, Europol

Moderator:

- Klaudia Palczak, EUDA

11:30 - 12:00 Coffee Break

12:00 - 13:15 Panel 2: Drugs, Youth and Society

Focus: prevention, vulnerability, exploitation by organised crime

Topics:

- *Youth as victims of drugs markets*
- *Youth recruitment and roles in organised crime*
- *Evidence-based prevention and community approaches*
- *Role of NGOs and civil society in R&I and uptake*

Practitioner angle: NGOs, youth workers, local authorities, social researchers.

Speaker rationale: Speakers are invited to reflect on the societal dimension of drugs, with a particular focus on youth. Contributions should address youth both as victims of drug use and as potential targets of exploitation by organised crime, highlighting prevention, resilience and evidence-based interventions. The panel combines research, policy and practitioner perspectives, including civil society and local-level experience.

Speakers:

- Célia Bobet, MILDECA, FR
- Sean Redmond, University of Limerick, IE
- Joella Anupol, EUDA
- Maxime Hennen, EUCPN
- Jill Jameson, University of Greenwich, UK

Moderator:

- Félix Combreau, DG HOME

13:15 - 14:15 Lunch

14:15 - 15:45 Panel 3: Drugs-related Organised Crime

Focus: criminal networks, logistics, violence, cross-border dimension

Topics:

- *Drug trafficking as a driver of organised crime and violence*
- *Links with other crime areas (weapons, corruption, money laundering)*
- *Research needs to support EMPACT priorities*

Perspective: policy, law enforcement, analytical research, technology providers.

Speaker rationale: This session focuses on the organised crime dimension of drugs trafficking. Speakers are selected for their expertise in analysing criminal networks, trafficking routes, violence and links with other crime areas. The discussion aims to show how research and innovation can support law enforcement priorities and operational responses, including analytical tools and intelligence-led approaches to organised crime related to drugs, and how these can contribute to EU-level coordination efforts led by Europol.

Speakers:

- Kim Moeller, Malmö University, SE
- Evi Franco, Belgian Federal Prosecutor's Office
- Jenny Davidsson, SE Prosecution Authority
- Remco Mulder, NL Police
- Babak Akhgar, CENTRIC, UK

Moderator:

- Monika Maglione, The European Commission Coordinator for the Fight Against Drug Trafficking

15:45 - 16:00 Coffee Break**16:00 - 17:15 Project Demos: Organised Crime & Markets**

Format: short, dynamic pitches (8-10 min each + Q&A)

Goal: show how research translates into operational insight.

Demonstration rationale: Demo speakers are invited to showcase concrete results from EU-funded projects addressing drugs markets and organised crime. Presentations should focus on practical use cases, maturity of solutions and lessons learned from cooperation with end-users. The session is designed to foster direct exchange between researchers and practitioners and to illustrate pathways from research to operational impact.

Projects:

- REWIRE-D
- SAUST
- ARIEN
- PENTION
- METEOR

17:15 - 17:30 Day 1 Wrap-up

Key messages, open questions feeding Day 2.

17:30 - 19:00 Cocktail Reception

DAY 2 – Tools, Forensics and Operational Uptake

09:00 - 09:15 Welcome Back & Day 2 Orientation

09:15 - 10:30 Panel 4: Drugs Forensics and Evidence

Focus: laboratories, methods, legal robustness

Topics:

- *Forensic identification of illicit drug substances (incl. NPS)*
- *Chain of custody, admissibility, standardisation*
- *Role of forensic institutes, ENFSI and CLEN communities*

Speaker rationale: Speakers in this panel are selected for their expertise in drugs-related forensics and scientific evidence. Contributions will cover innovative analytical methods, identification of substances (including NPS), and challenges related to standardisation, quality, admissibility and ensuring chain of custody of evidence. The session aims to strengthen links between forensic science, research and judicial needs.

Speakers:

- Maria João Caldeira, Forensic Science Laboratory of Policia Judiciária, PT
- Anna Czyż, Central Forensic Laboratory of the Police, PL
- Giuliano Iacobellis, Carabinieri Scientific Investigation Group/NARCOSIS, IT
- Inge Vinckier, Customs Laboratory, BE
- Tomasz Olszewski, Forensic Laboratory, of the Provincial Police Headquarters in Radom, PL

Moderator:

- Nada Milisavljevic, DG HOME, European Commission

10:30 - 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 - 12:30 Panel 5: Borders, Customs and Supply Chains

Focus: detection, controls, trade-based trafficking

Topics:

- *Drugs in cargo, parcels and passengers*
- *Sensors, AI, risk analysis at borders*
- *Cooperation between customs, border guards and police and cross-border collaboration (incl. with third countries)*
- *Research gaps for next-generation controls*

Speaker rationale: This session brings together experts working on detection of drugs in cargo, parcels and on persons. Speakers are invited for their experience in border control, customs risk analysis and technological solutions supporting controls at external borders. The panel highlights how research and innovation can enhance operational effectiveness and cross-border cooperation.

The panel will also reflect on training and skills needs for law enforcement and border authorities, and how research outputs can be effectively integrated into operational training frameworks.

Speakers:

- Esther Salmoral Olaya, National CCEI Coordinator, ES
- Jeroen Engelberts, EUCAB
- Ana Boix Sanfeliu, JRC
- Maria Joao Guia, CEPOL
- Luis Raposo, El PACcTO

Moderator:

- Denis Destrebecq, FRONTEX

12:30 - 13:30 Lunch

13:30 - 14:30 Project Demos: Forensics, Borders & Detection

Format: short, dynamic pitches (8-10 min each + Q&A)

Objective: concrete exchange on usability, maturity and deployment.

Demonstration rationale: Demo speakers are invited to present applied research and innovation solutions in the areas of forensics, border control and detection technologies. Presentations will emphasise operational testing, user feedback and deployment potential. The session aims to encourage dialogue between project teams and practitioners responsible for implementation.

Projects:

- ARMADILLO
- NARCOSIS
- OBLIVION
- BorderForce

14:45 - 15:45 Closing Panel: From Research to Impact

Theme: strengthening the EU drugs R&I ecosystem

Discussion points:

- *How EUDA, Europol and MS authorities can support uptake*
- *Bridging research, operations and policy cycles*
- *Priorities for the next programming period*
- *Role of EU-level training and capacity building in supporting the uptake of research results*

Speaker rationale: Speakers in the closing panel are invited to reflect on how drugs-related research and innovation can better support policy and operational needs. Contributions should focus on lessons learned, remaining gaps and priorities for future cooperation between EU agencies, policymakers, practitioners and the research community. The panel aims to identify key messages and orientations for future CERIS activities.

Speakers:

- Klaudia Palczak, EUDA
- Valentina Zuri, Europol
- Tom Snels, DG HOME
- Maria Joao Guia, CEPOL

Moderator:

- Alex Costache, DG HOME

15:45 - 16:15 Conclusions & Way Forward

- *Key takeaways*
- *Signals for future CERIS work*
- *Next steps for cooperation*

16:15 - 16:45 Farewell Coffee