

EUDA Scenario workshop toolkit

How to run a scenario workshop using the EUDA framework scenarios for the future of drugs and the addiction field in the EU by 2040

Contents

What you will find in this toolkit

Introduction

Page 4

Why this toolkit was created, and how it can be used

Background

Page 7

Why work with foresight and scenario-planning approaches:
general principles of how both can be applied based on existing scenarios

How to organise a scenario workshop: templates and useful hints

Page 11

1

Step 1: Preparing a scenario workshop

2

Step 2: Immersion into scenarios and analysing implications

3

Step 3: Identifying action needs

References and more tools and resources

Page 17

**‘The future cannot be predicted
because “the future” does not
exist.’**

(Jim Dator, 2019, *A Noticer in Time*)

Introduction: Why this toolkit was created, and how it can be used

Against the backdrop of increasingly rapid, volatile and complex change, foresight¹ is becoming more prominent and more widely used by actors in the public sector and policymaking as well as corporations and non-governmental organisations ⁽²⁾. **Foresight is also being applied and implemented more and more within the EU system.** EU institutions ⁽³⁾are **increasingly integrating foresight approaches into their work streams.** Within the public sector, foresight approaches aim at **promoting systems thinking**, gaining **anticipatory knowledge**, **enhancing preparedness** and using participatory processes that deliberately **cut across the traditional boundaries of policy areas and institutional silos.**

It is within this context that, since early 2019, the **European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA)** ⁽⁴⁾ **has been building foresight capacity** both within the organisation and with its stakeholders, through a variety of activities centred on framing and developing foresight skill sets and toolkits. These initiatives have included a series of foresight scanning and trends workshops, the [EUDA trends workshop toolkit](#) and the development of [EUDA framework scenarios](#). The overall goal is to increase EU preparedness to the ever-changing drugs landscape, for both policy and practice. During these activities, a variety of EUDA stakeholders repeatedly expressed their interest in tools and support to enable them to realise their own respective foresight initiatives or workshops — and this second toolkit aims to address the need of scenario planning.

The toolkit is designed to explain how to use existing scenarios to understand the uncertainties of changing framework conditions, analyse the respective challenges and implications, and formulate the necessary actions. This approach was chosen due to the positive experiences gained in the EUDA's own foresight work and the high interest expressed by stakeholders in tools specifically designed for these kinds of workshops.

The approach used is well connected with strategic foresight activities in other European institutions. For example, the European Commission Joint Research Centre's foresight team is working with foresight scenarios for stress testing EU policies (EC JRC, 2023a). This undertaking is part of the policy development process and supports the EU's Better Regulation Agenda and its toolbox (European Commission, 2021; European

⁽¹⁾ Foresight is understood here as a systematic analysis of potential futures to support decision-making today

⁽²⁾ See, e.g., Gidley (2017, p. 5) for details on different connotations of the terms 'foresight', 'futures research', 'futures studies or prospective', and their history.

⁽³⁾ Institutions including the European Commission (with its former Vice-President for Strategic Foresight and two current Commissioners for Preparedness, supported by its Joint Research Centre (JRC)), the European Parliament (with the Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) Panel and its Research Service's Policy Foresight Unit), and the inter-institutional EU process (ESPAS) (), as well as several EU agencies

⁽⁴⁾ On 2 July 2024, the EMCDDA officially became the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), with a revised mandate. While the foresight activities undertaken between 2019 and 2024 took place when the organisation was still called the EMCDDA, in this paper we refer to the agency by its new name, the EUDA.

Commission, 2023).

The toolkit at hand is designed to be used by a range of actors in the field and can be adapted in various respects to the specific use context. We also hope to learn from how the toolkit is utilised and would thus be grateful to hear about your experiences of putting it into practice.

The following sections give a small introduction on foresight and working with scenarios, as well as presenting the EUDA scenarios as a practical resource. It will then provide the tools needed to conduct the workshop on mapping the futures of drugs, including templates and information on how to carry out each step. For those who would like to learn more and go deeper, the Appendix supplies additional references and information on other, more general toolkits as well as on scenario planning approaches both more broadly and in relation to EU institutions' foresight work.

What this toolkit is not...

The toolkit does not focus on the approach to building foresight scenarios. Instead, it emphasises how to use these scenarios as tools for discussing and reflecting on possible future developments. The toolkit supports anticipatory thinking, preparedness, decision-making, and governance.

What if... the future unfolds in a different way than expected? What would the world then look like?

The guiding questions of scenario planning

What does this mean in terms of challenges and opportunities for our domain?

Which changes should we be prepared for? What kind of changes would we like to avoid or make less probable and which should we foster?

Which actions are needed, which are robust and will enhance preparedness?

Background: Why work with foresight and scenario planning approaches, and general principles of how both can be applied effectively

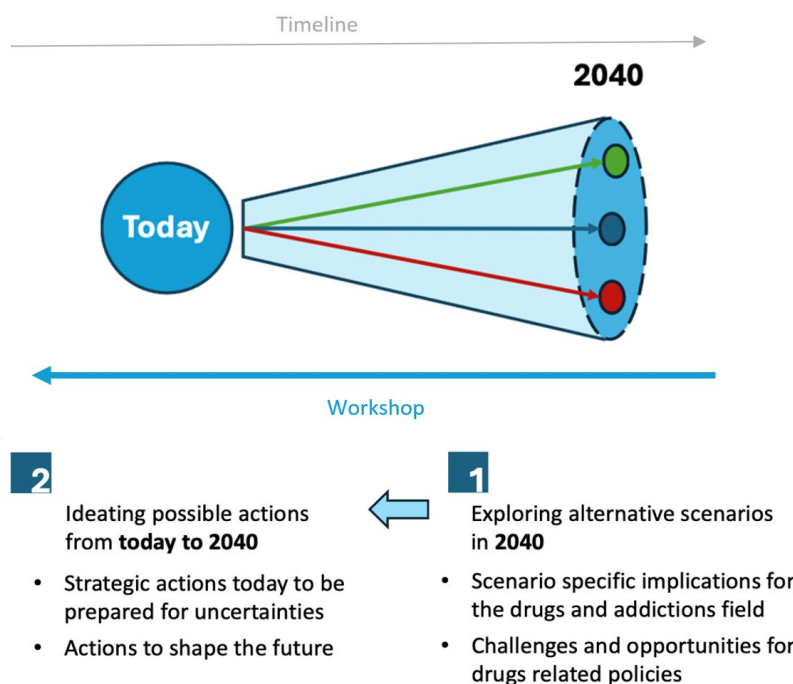
Foresight or futures research has a **long-standing tradition** and became especially prominent in the public and research sectors in the post-war period and within the private sector from the 1970s. The intrinsic idea in foresight is to become proactive rather than reactive, **to identify and anticipate change, and be prepared with options capable of shaping outcomes towards desirable futures**. By considering multiple potential outcomes (scenarios) rather than claiming to have perfect forecasts, strategies can be developed that are flexible enough to work across many possible futures: in this way, strategies can be made ‘future-proof’ ⁽⁵⁾. Thus, futures-orientated activities tend to be more speculative than more conventional scientific work and are often based on specialist and sometimes less conventional methods.

Scenario planning is one of the key methodologies within foresight. Scenarios provide **alternative narratives of how the future might unfold**, based on explicit coherent, internally consistent and **plausible assumptions on future developments** and their systemic interplay. Hence, scenarios challenge assumptions about the continuation of the current state of affairs: rather than predicting a specific, most probable future, scenarios map out possible alternative developments. Scenarios are widely used in corporate foresight and have a strong tradition in the foresight activities of EU institutions and their technical agencies ⁽⁶⁾. **Scenario planning** offers a strategic approach to **prepare for a wide range of futures**, following the paradigm of ‘anticipatory governance’. Within the drugs field, scenarios can play a major role in anticipating future drug-related challenges and their potential consequences. They can play a crucial role in developing strategies that promise the best possible outcomes in the drug area, highlighting ways to achieve desirable outcomes and avoid non-desirable pathways.

⁽⁵⁾ Future-proof policies and/or strategies are intended as resilient to future changes and that will not become ineffective or unsuitable over time.

⁽⁶⁾ See, e.g., the reference scenarios for 2040 published by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) (EC JRC, 2023a), the EEA’s scenarios for its sustainable Europe in 2050 project (EEA, 2024), the EUAA’s use of scenarios in its 2023 report on the future of international protection in Europe (EUAA, 2023), or Eurofound’s mapping of different possible socioeconomic outcomes of the Just Transition in four scenarios (Eurofound, 2023).

Example of typical steps of scenario planning



The toolkit does not focus on the approach to building foresight scenarios. Instead, it emphasizes how to use these scenarios as tools for discussing and reflecting on possible future developments. Promoting anticipatory thinking and identifying avenues to influence and shape the future are at the core of this scenario workshop toolkit.

The term ‘scenarios’ can be used in multiple ways. It can refer to different policy options or strategies, or different use cases. However, in foresight, scenarios are understood as consistent and plausible states of the future that cover **the framework conditions of the issue at stake**, in this case the drugs and addiction field. The framework conditions take a **360-degree perspective** on contextual factors and different analytical tools are available, most common is the PESTLE approach covering topics such as

- policy (e.g., geopolitical volatility),
- economy (e.g., implications of the global economy),
- society (e.g., population change, diversifying inequalities and shifting health challenges),
- technology (e.g., the rise of AI, innovation and new tools),
- legal (e.g., new regulatory frameworks)
- and environment (e.g., climate change, environmental degradation and pollution).

In addition to the principle of the 360-degree perspective on contextual factors, the second key principle in foresight is to **think of alternatives**. This implies not only picking one scenario but reflecting on different futures, covering the thinkable, probable, possible, desirable and non-desirable scenarios to understand the scope of uncertainty and to prepare for alternative futures. With several futures, current planning can be stress tested to ensure that they are resilient to the emergence of different scenarios (i.e. wind-tunnelling

and stress testing approaches, see EC JRC (2023b)). The third principle is to envision a **desirable future world** – having a positive vision means being able **to direct your action and identify levers to shape the future** in the direction of the desired world (i.e. road mapping approach).

Currently, there are only a few scenario-based foresight studies in the drugs and addictions domain available for Europe or for European countries ⁽⁷⁾. In a multiple-step process, the EUDA developed a set of three **drugs and addictions framework scenarios** based on a systematic literature review and a series of future workshops (between 2019 and 2024) with input from about 180 participants. [The scenarios of drugs and the addiction field in the EU by 2040](#) differ markedly to show a wide range of possible developments:



‘EU Harmony’ describes a world in which the EU, based on strong multilateral cooperation, has seen considerably advanced cohesion in all respects, and society — with much greater emphasis on well-being and thanks to well-balanced drug policies and prevention and treatment programmes — experiences much lower rates of drug use.



‘Barely Managing’, on the other hand, depicts a world where international crises have not stopped, and economic pressures have deepened societal divides within the EU. Access to healthcare has become uneven and complexities in drug and medicine abuse continue to rise, while remaining just about manageable.



‘House of Cards’, finally, portrays a world in which the breakdown of international relations is mirrored by a breakdown in trade, leading to a rise in nationalism and fragmentation of the EU. Population health has suffered, while health systems are overwhelmed, and drug use is a popular means of escape.

These scenarios can play a major role in **anticipating future drug-related challenges and their potential consequences**. They can also be **instrumental in the development of strategies** which ensure the best possible outcomes in the drug field.

The EUDA scenarios can be used seamlessly as a basis for work in this area, and templates and materials provided with this toolkit incorporate everything needed to set up a workshop in the drugs and addictions domain. This toolkit can be also used to discuss different scenarios than the EUDA's, and open templates are provided whereby the content and questions can be adapted to the specific topic and aims of the planned workshop.

⁽⁷⁾ See examples in the Appendix.

‘As the impacts of multiple crises intensify, now is the time to get ahead of the curve and protect ourselves from emerging challenges.’

(Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, 2024)

Source: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/07/1152136>

How to organise a scenario workshop: templates and useful hints

The scenario workshop presented here is designed to be extremely practical for a wide variety of actors in the drugs area and is adaptable to different needs. It is designed for a typical use case in an organizational context, i.e., **a half-day workshop conducted by a team of experts within a research or policy organization**, however it can also be implemented by any group of interested individuals or used by a single person as an analytical exercise. Below we describe all the steps necessary for preparing, implementing and documenting such a workshop. We provide helpful hints for each step, focusing on the delivery of the workshop. The templates needed for the workshop are freely available for download, together with a separate document outlining the EUDA framework scenarios [‘The Future\(s\) of drugs and the addiction field in the EU by 2040’](#)

1

Phase 1 constitutes the preparation of the workshop. Several issues are critical, including, first and foremost, the **definition and communication of a clear and realistic aim**.

A typical example of realistic aims for a scenario workshop is to collect insights and foster a shared reflection on the scenarios and their implications for the drugs and addictions field in the future. It might also be set up as an exercise to gather ideas for actions to address future challenges and opportunities. In contrast, developing a fully-fledged strategy for a future-proof organisation would be too ambitious an aim for a half-day workshop — raising unrealistically high expectations and hence likely leading to frustrated participants. To set up a draft strategy would require more analysis, further considerations and participative exercises within a longer process.

Furthermore, **identifying and inviting potential participants** is key to gaining useful insights. A common recommendation and established practice in planning foresight workshops is to create — as far as possible — a group with a mix of backgrounds, genders, ages, etc. This variety of perspectives can partly be achieved by also involving external experts, for example drug monitoring experts, epidemiologists and practitioners, as well as human resources and communication experts, among others. Ideally, the group of participants will also include decision-makers within the organisation who are interested in and could potentially use the results, for example in planning, strategy, policymaking or innovation processes. The agenda supplied below includes standard wording around aims as well as further information on possible group sizes, etc., that should work well in most contexts.

On the **practical side**, and not specific to foresight, preparation encompasses the actual organisation of the workshop. In addition to the usual requirements of finding and preparing appropriate rooms, this will include:

- printing a set of group session templates (one of each per break-out group);
- printing sets of scenario cards (one for each participant); and

- ideally, printing one set of scenario cards in A3 format to be displayed on the wall of the main workshop room to 'set the scene'.

2

Phase 2 starts by providing the participants with a short **introduction** to what **foresight** is, what the aims and expected output of the workshop are, and an overview of the scenario set. The core task of this phase is **immersion in and understanding of a specific scenario world** as well as **recognising the implications of the changed conditions** on drugs and addictions and for respective stakeholder groups. This allows participants to understand scenario-specific **challenges and opportunities** for the drugs and addictions field.

3

In phase 3, participants reflect on **possible future-oriented actions** to address upcoming challenges and opportunities **for the organisation and for other stakeholders in the drugs and addictions field**.

The **output of the workshop is a shared reflection** on the scenarios and the potential implications for drugs and addictions, as well as an initial collection of ideas on what this might mean for the organisation and possible action needs.

Following the workshop, producing timely **documentation summarising the results** is key to keeping participants involved and putting the results to good use. The **workshop outputs** to be summarised are

- the **scenario-specific implications and affected stakeholders** identified in phase 2
- the resulting **challenges and opportunities** for the drugs and addictions domain and
- the **proposals for actions**, including follow-up activities, for the organisation and other stakeholders that emerged from phase 3. Ideally, a **pathway to incorporate results into strategy or innovation processes** within the organisation will have been devised ahead of the workshop so that respective decision-makers are included in these processes.

Finally, please note that this toolkit is set up for **a workshop of half-day/four hours' duration**, but this could be scaled up or down. A shorter version would provide just a glimpse of the approach. Depending on the number of participants and other contextual factors, a workshop could last anywhere between an hour and a half and one and a half days. If a **longer workshop** is envisaged, additional steps can be added (e.g., stress testing action needs, see EC JRC (2023b) for guidance), or the existing steps can be further enriched, for example with each group working with more than one scenario.

A note on a potential online implementation of the workshop: This workshop can be, and indeed has been, successfully conducted virtually (using online video conferencing tools and online collaborative office tools). Depending on the organisational context, the technology options and the interactive tools available, the templates supplied would ideally be transferred into a virtual format, so that groups can work directly and

collaboratively with them. About length, a slightly shortened duration of three hours has proved beneficial and doable. Group sizes for break-out groups should ideally be limited to a maximum of five participants, and more frequent breaks should be scheduled. Finally, when using a virtual format, organisers should ensure that all project team members and facilitators are very familiar with the tools being used. A delegated tech-support representative should be on hand to provide one-to-one assistance for participants who experience any technological issues.

Workshop framing

The agenda and further information given below are a template: according to need, they can be adapted to the specific case and organisational context. This will depend on, for example, the audience and their specific needs, levels of experience with foresight, their roles and functions within the organisation and the intended use of the results.

The workshop aims to:

- introduce the foresight approach to participants;
- identify the spectrum of plausible futures and respective scenarios;
- highlight and reflect on key challenges and opportunities in the different future worlds;
- formulate action needs for today.

The workshop outcomes encompass:

- a set of implications from the future scenarios on the drugs fields (national or local setting) and on the organisation;
- a series of concrete actions, spanning from the present up to 2040, to address identified challenges and opportunities, aiming to shape the future towards desired pathways and avoid unwanted developments;
- on the 'softer' side, participants will gain experience with scenario approaches that allow challenging dominant mindsets, understanding possible uncertainties and answering 'what if...?' questions, while looking at the topics in a wider context and from a systemic perspective.

The participants will be:

- experts and/or stakeholders from within and potentially outside the organisation, and from a variety of backgrounds;
- a group of between six and 30 individuals, including facilitators, with the recommended group size for break-out sessions being three to six participants.

The facilitators:

- will be a group of experts from within the organisation, supported, if possible, by a specialised foresight team;
- should receive guidance and/or training from the organisers ahead of the workshop;
- it is recommended that there should be one facilitator per break-out group, plus an overarching facilitator to manage the plenary sessions;
- throughout the workshop, the role of the facilitator is to prompt participants to contribute and comment and remind them of any blind spots.

Workshop agenda

Agenda item	Duration (minutes)	Details
Introduction <i>This is conducted in plenary style with all workshop participants.</i>	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction of the aims and approach, and of the participants and facilitators - Overview presentation of the scenario set - First discussion and Q&A
Session 1: Exploring alternative additions futures for the year 2040 <i>This is conducted in small working groups, working on the same tasks (but different scenarios) in parallel.</i>	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants familiarise with the scenarios and brainstorm on the possible implications using the following guiding questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your first reactions to the scenario? (i.e., what do you find interesting, surprising, unlikely, etc.?) • What changes (i.e., challenges and opportunities) could this scenario bring about, especially regarding drugs and addiction? And which different stakeholder groups might be affected (and how)? - Participants will be working with the templates: 'scenarios cards', 'initial reactions' and 'scenario implications'.
Break	15	
Session 2: Ideating actions to (re)act to the scenario <i>This is conducted in small working groups, working on the same tasks (but different scenarios) in parallel.</i>	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants reflect on possible actions to address the scenario challenges and opportunities, working with the template 'action plan'.
Results and recap <i>This part is conducted in plenary style with all workshop participants.</i>	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All groups share a selection of key insights from their results, working with the template 'reporting back'. <p>The aims are to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarise key themes and sharing cross-cutting insights • Share and agree on information on concrete next steps

Templates

The templates can be downloaded from the [EUDA Scenarios toolkit website](#).

References and more tools and resources

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For a short introduction to foresight:

Gidley, J. M. (2017), *The future: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198735281.001.0001>).

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About us: Future Impacts and the EUDA

About Future Impacts

Future Impacts designs and implements foresight processes around questions on the future for organisations and corporations. We carry out foresight projects to identify options for future-orientated actions today. To this end, we use or combine trend analysis, scenarios and Delphi surveys, among other approaches. Aside from our focus on the development and implementation of individualised foresight games, we also focus on foresight capacity building. We support our clients to expand their foresight capabilities and skills through training, toolkits and coaching.

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About the EUDA

The European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) is a decentralised agency of the European Union. It is the leading authority on illicit drugs in Europe. Based in Lisbon, Portugal, it provides independent scientific evidence and analysis on all aspects of this constantly changing threat to individual lives and wider society. The EUDA's work contributes to EU and national policies to enhance EU preparedness and protect Europe's citizens from drug-related harms.

www.euda.europa.eu

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