



How to run a trends workshop

An EMCDDA foresight toolkit for the drugs field



What will you find in this toolkit?

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

What is foresight? Why work with foresight and trend analysis approaches, and general principles of how both can be applied effectively.

How to organise a trends workshop: Templates, tips and tricks. Step 1: Preparing a trends workshop. Step 2: Mapping and prioritising trends. Step 3: Analysing implications.

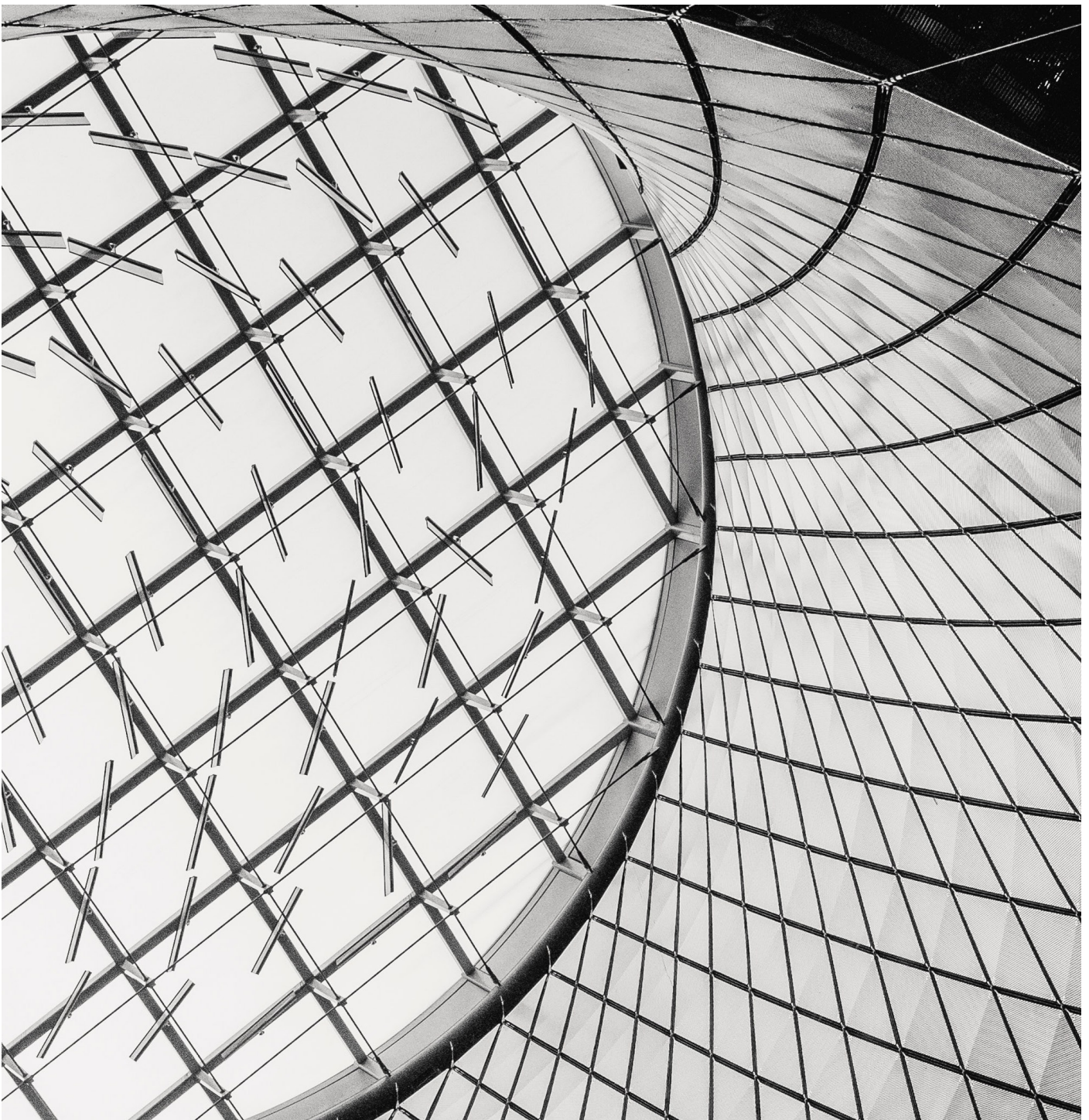
Appendix: References and more tools and resources.

Content



- [Introduction](#)
- [Background](#)
- [Organising a workshop](#)
- [Appendix](#)

'Until recently, social and cultural systems were built around our belief that life generally happens as expected. In the 21st century we are seeing many of our socio-cultural and ecological systems unravelling. Today's world is complex and unreliable.' (Gidley, 2017, p. 3)

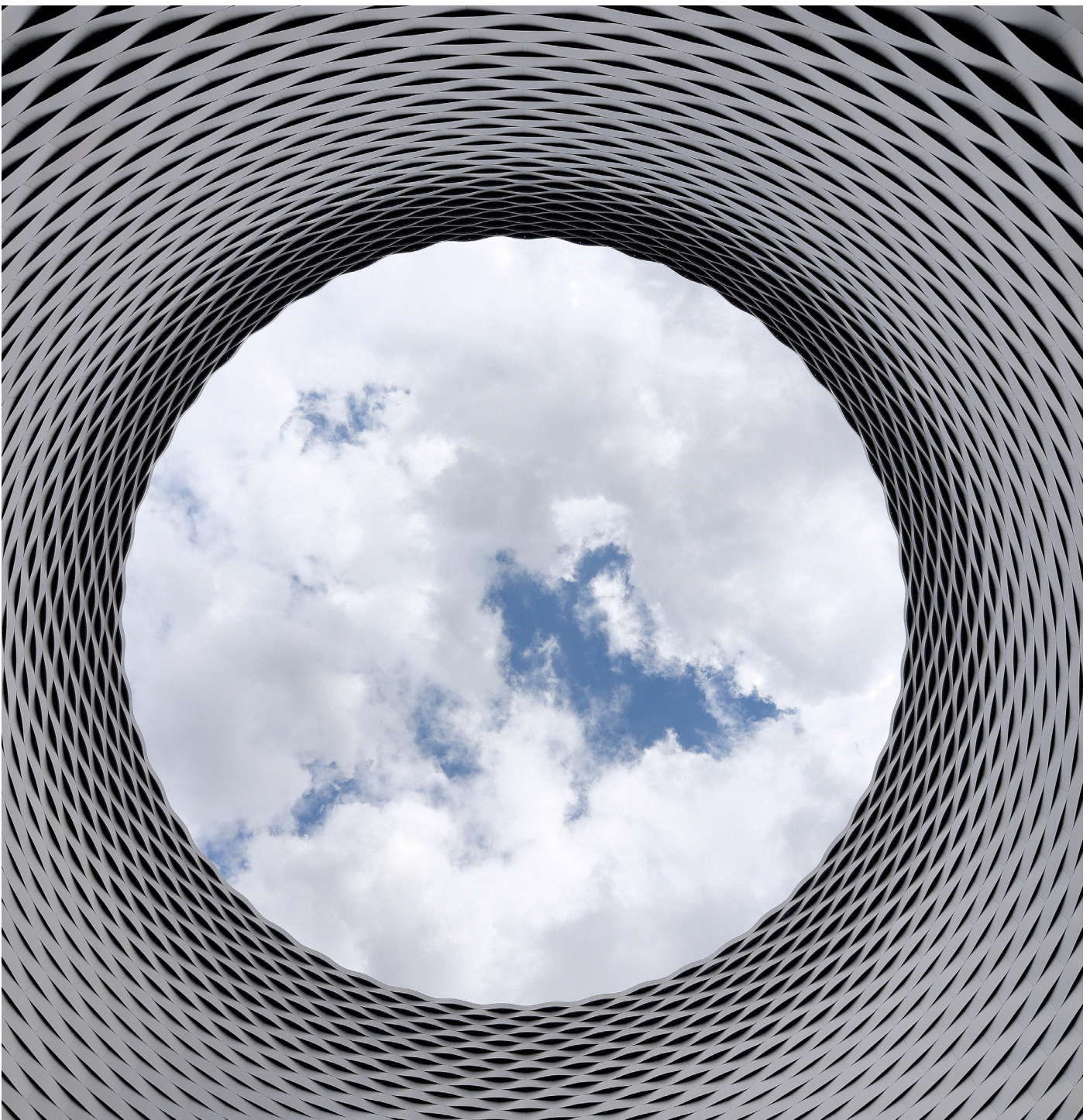


'The future is already here.

It's just unevenly distributed.'

(William Gibson)

One of the most famous quotations on the future, usually attributed to the renowned author William Gibson: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/01/24/future-has-arrived/>



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

[EMCDDA foresight toolkit for the drugs field](#)

Against the backdrop of increasingly rapid, volatile and complex change, foresight (understood here as a systematic analysis of potential futures in order to support decision-making today) is becoming more prominent and more widely used by actors in the public sector, in policymaking, in corporations and by non-governmental organisations ⁽¹⁾. **Foresight is also — and maybe especially so — increasingly being applied and implemented within the European Union (EU) system.** EU institutions, including the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC), the Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) Panel of the European Parliament, and other EU technical agencies, are **increasingly integrating foresight approaches into their work streams.** Within the public sector, foresight approaches aim to **promote systems thinking**, gain **anticipatory knowledge** and use participatory processes that deliberately **cut across the traditional boundaries of policy areas and institutional silos.**

Within this context, since early 2019 **the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) has been building foresight capacity** within the organisation and with its stakeholders, through a variety of activities centred on framing and developing their foresight skill sets and tool sets. These activities have included a series of expert workshops, trend scanning exercises and data development projects aimed at increasing preparedness in the areas of drug trends, policy and practice. Throughout this process, the EMCDDA strives to create forward-looking products by identifying future trends and risks to **better support EU preparedness and response in the ever-changing drugs landscape**, as well as communicating more directly with national and EU stakeholders. Within these activities, a variety of EMCDDA stakeholders have repeatedly expressed their interest in tools and support to enable them to implement their own respective foresight initiatives or workshops, and this first toolkit aims to answer this need.

The [toolkit](#) thus aims to support other stakeholders, actors and researchers in the drugs field to implement their own foresight exercise in the form of an introductory trend-based workshop. This approach was chosen as a result of the experiences gained through the EMCDDA's own foresight work and of the high level of interest expressed by stakeholders for these kinds of workshop. It draws heavily from, leans on

⁽¹⁾ See, for example, Gidley (2017, p. 5), for details on different connotations of the terms 'foresight', 'futures research', 'futures studies or prospective', and their history.

and works with elements of the toolkit from the JRC's foresight team, as presented in their trend assessment toolkit (JRC, 2019), and works with trends as described and analysed extensively in the JRC megatrends hub (JRC, 2017). In addition to building on the megatrends from the JRC hub and bringing in those identified within the EMCDDA's foresight process as being critical for the future of drugs, the approach and corresponding trend set supplied here also feature emerging trends that are specific to the drugs arena, and related monitoring and research, as identified within the EMCDDA's foresight activities to date. All such trends are supplied in the [trend cards set](#), which is available for download on the toolkit page and is intended to be used with the [templates](#) for running a workshop within the approach outlined in this toolkit.

The toolkit is designed to be used by many in the field and can be adapted in various ways to specific contexts. We also expect to learn from the way it is used, and we would thus be grateful to hear from you once you have put the toolkit into practice.

The following sections begin with a brief background on foresight and working with trends and then supply the tools needed to implement the workshop on mapping the future of drugs, including templates and information on how to implement each step. For those who would like to learn more and go deeper, the annex supplies additional references and information on other, more general toolkits.

The guiding questions of trend analysis:

What kind of change can we already observe? Why is that change happening, where, and at what speed?

What does that mean for our actions today? 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?

‘Clearly ... the dynamism of demographic, technological, or economic change will depend very much on the surrounding social, political, and cultural milieu, as well as on the innate characteristics of the population, technology, or economy.’

(Herman Kahn)

From: Kahn (2021; originally published in 1984). Herman Kahn was one of the most influential early foresight practitioners. We are quoting this statement here to stress that while analysing trends often starts from the perspective of looking at trends in isolation, a foresight exercise should also consider trends’ interactions and interdependencies. In addition, this short statement makes it clear that while mapping and analysing trends, it is crucial to look not just at one area of change, such as technology, but at a wider sphere of change phenomena.

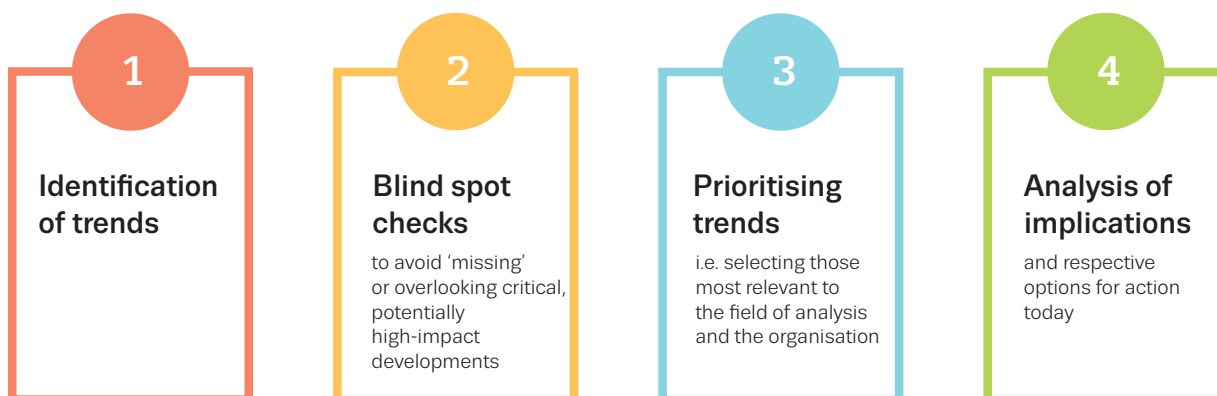


Background: Why work with foresight and trend analysis approaches, and general principles of how both can be applied effectively

Foresight or futures research has a **long-standing tradition**, becoming especially prominent in the public and research sector 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 to be prepared with options to act that shape desirable outcomes**. By not claiming to have perfect forecasts, but rather **thinking in multiple potential outcomes** (scenarios) or alternative futures, we can develop strategies that are flexible to work across many possible futures. Thus, futures-oriented activities tend to be more speculative than more conventional scientific work and are often based on specialist and sometimes less conventional novel methods.

Within foresight, trend analysis is one of the key methodologies ⁽²⁾. It is used to detect relevant **new developments** in the external environment early and to **understand** where **fundamental change** may be under way, and what it means for oneself or one's organisation. Within the drugs arena, trend analysis enables a deeper understanding of future trends so that drug research and monitoring remains relevant and becomes increasingly proactive. This enables appropriate support to be given to the policy side, following the paradigm of 'anticipatory governance'.

Example of the typical steps of trend analysis:



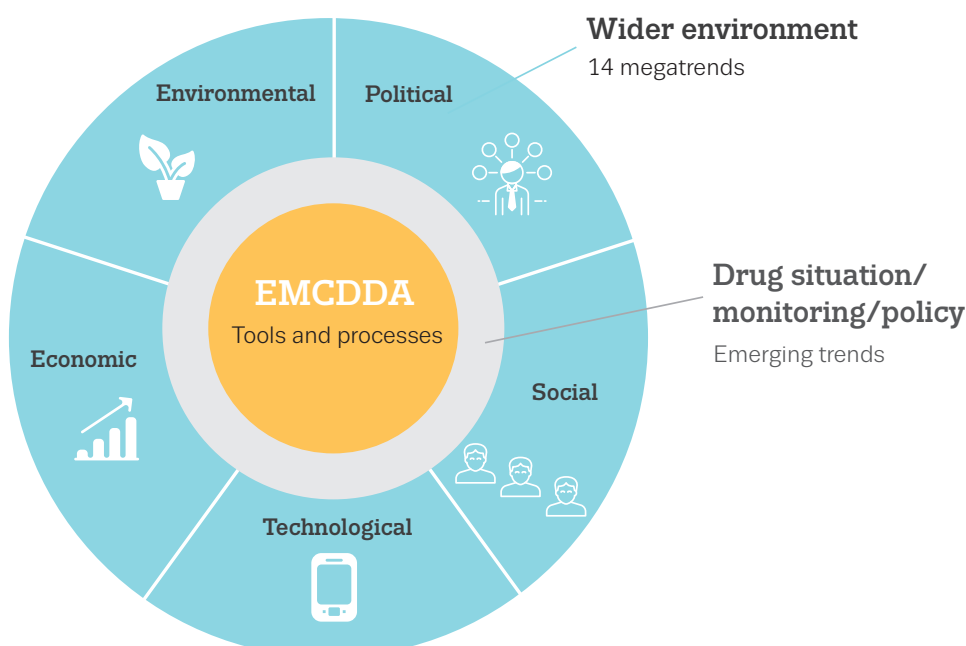
⁽²⁾ Trend analysis is often also referred to as environmental monitoring, or scanning. For details on definitions, see, for example, EFP (2010a, 2010b).

The **toolkit** presented here introduces only a fraction of the activities and perspectives utilised in a fully-fledged trend analysis, and would ideally be complemented by additional research and analysis steps. However, even if used as a stand-alone 'taster' of the approach of working with trends, it does cover a variety of elements from the steps above. While it focuses in particular on the prioritisation of trends and the analysis of their implications, it also offers the option of identifying and adding additional trends to those already provided in the trend card set.

To summarise briefly, a variety of principles have proved widely beneficial in the analysis of trends within a foresight practice. First and foremost is the principle of a '**360-degree view**', i.e. applying scanning in a variety of areas of change, not just those close to the area in which one's organisation is active. This can, for example, be enabled via analytical tools such as STEEP (social, technological, economic, environmental, political), a principle for organising change phenomena (see the diagram below for the approach, as applied by the EMCDDA).

Finally, we would like to stress that while trend analysis is a common starting point and a major building block of any foresight practice, it is not the only foresight approach. There are a variety of complementary methodological approaches that should ideally be combined wisely. Among the most well-known approaches in addition to trend scanning are scenario development, Delphi surveys, approaches that map potential disruptions or wild cards, those working with serious (foresight) gaming, and those at the intersection of design, art and foresight that aim to enable a deeper immersion with different perspectives and imaginings of possible alternative futures.

The STEEP approach (covering social, technological, economic, environmental and political) is used to identify blind spots in terms of what might drive change.



‘We are likely to see two to three major pandemics start in regions with limited public healthcare and rapidly spread globally and so demand fast response.’ (Future Agenda, 2011)

While it is critical to understand that working with trends and identifying and analysing them is just one piece of the puzzle in the foresight toolkit, and that it is crucial not to get too caught up in the predictive stance that often comes with working with trends, this statement from 2011 underlines that in some cases, it is very helpful to learn from what is quite probable, and to take appropriate precautions and actions. The statement from a Future Agenda publication is just one of several relevant foresight resources that stressed the high likelihood of a global pandemic. From Future Agenda (2011); see also, for example, The Millennium Project (2017).



How to organise a trends workshop:

Templates, tips and tricks

The trends workshop presented here aims to be highly usable by a wide variety of actors in the drugs arena, and is thus also open to adaptation. In the following section, we describe all the steps needed in preparing, implementing and documenting such a workshop. We provide tips and tricks for each step, focusing in particular on the delivery of the workshop. The [templates](#) needed for the workshop are presented on the following pages and available for download together with a separate document providing [trend cards](#). While in the following, we assume an organisational context, i.e. that the workshop will be implemented by a team of experts within a research or policy-side organisation, the workshop can also be implemented by any group of interested individuals or be used by an individual for an analytical exercise.

1 Phase 1 constitutes the preparation of the workshop. A number of issues are critical, including, first and foremost, the **definition and communication of a clear and realistic aim** (i.e. answering the question ‘What do we want, and what can we realistically achieve, with this workshop?’).

For example, ‘designing a future-proof strategy for our organisation’ within a trends workshop implemented for the first time by an organisation is probably not a realistic aim. However, arriving at a collection of first insights around key trends that could impact the drugs field and thereby the organisation’ is more feasible.

Furthermore, **identifying and inviting potential participants** is key for gaining useful insights. A widespread recommendation and established practice in foresight for workshops is to have — 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, e.g. drug monitoring experts, epidemiologists and practitioners, but also human resources and communication experts, among others. Ideally, the group of participants will also include decision-makers within the respective organisation who are interested in and could use the results, e.g. in planning, strategy, policymaking or innovation processes. The agenda supplied on the following page 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 practical set-up. In addition to the usual requirements of organising and setting up appropriate rooms, etc., this will include:

- printing a set of group session templates (one of each per break-out group);
- printing sets of trend cards (one set per break-out group);
- ideally, printing one set of trend cards in A3 format to be displayed on the wall of the main workshop room to 'set the scene'.

2 **Phase 2** starts from the set of trends supplied in the trend card set, with participants encouraged to bring in additional trends (either from existing trend analysis at EU, national or local level, or their own personal trends). Using a set of two criteria, participants then identify the trends that are particularly critical, and prioritise those trends for further analysis in phase 3 ⁽³⁾.

3 **In phase 3**, all prioritised trends are analysed in terms of their implications for and impacts on the EU, national or local drugs field, as well as the organisation itself. The output of the workshop is thus a set of trends, together with an overview of the corresponding implications for the drugs field and the organisation.

***** **Optional phase** For a longer workshop format, participants can dive deeper into the analysis in an additional phase exploring action needs emerging from the implications previously identified. Resulting action needs can be grouped according to stakeholder groups or by their urgency, for example.

Following the workshop, timely documentation summarising the results is key to keeping participants involved and putting the results to good use. The workshop outputs to be summarised, apart from the details of discussions, are the trends that were prioritised in phase 2 and a summary of key issues and possible cross-cutting or prominent themes that emerged from phase 3, i.e. the analysis of the trends' implications. Ideally, a pathway to incorporate results into strategy or innovation processes within the organisation will have already been devised ahead of the workshop, so that respective decision-makers are part of the processes.



Finally, please note that the toolkit here is set up for a **workshop of 4 hours' duration**, but this could be scaled up or down. A shorter version would just provide a glimpse into 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

⁽³⁾ The criteria suggested in template 1 can be adapted depending on the specific context, as can the differentiation of implications in template 2.

a half days. If a longer workshop is favoured, additional steps can be added (e.g. prioritising implications or identifying action needs), or the existing steps can be further enriched by increasing the duration of sensemaking within the group.

A note on a potential virtual realisation: This workshop can be and has been successfully conducted virtually (using online video conferencing tools and online collaborative office tools). Depending on the organisational context, the options for technologies and the interactive tools available, the templates supplied would ideally be transferred into a virtual format, so that groups can work directly and collaboratively into them. Concerning length, as a rule of thumb a slightly shortened duration of 3 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, if following 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 to participants who experience any technological issues.

How to organise a trends workshop:

Workshop framing

The agenda and further information given below are model versions: they can and might need to be adapted to the specific case and organisational context. This will depend on, for example, the audience and their specific needs, including their previous level of experience with foresight, their role and functions within an organisation, and the intended use of the results.

The workshop aims to:

- introduce the approach of foresight to participants;
- identify and reflect on key changes, i.e. trends in the wider environment;
- analyse implications from those trends.

The workshop outcomes encompass:

- a set of prioritised trends that are regarded as critical for the EU drugs field (national or local setting) and the organisation;
- a first overview of potential implications of the prioritised trends;
- on the 'softer' side, participants gaining initial experience with foresight approaches and arriving at a shared view of what is critical in terms of changes in the wider environment.

The participants will be:

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

The facilitators:

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



How to organise a trends workshop:

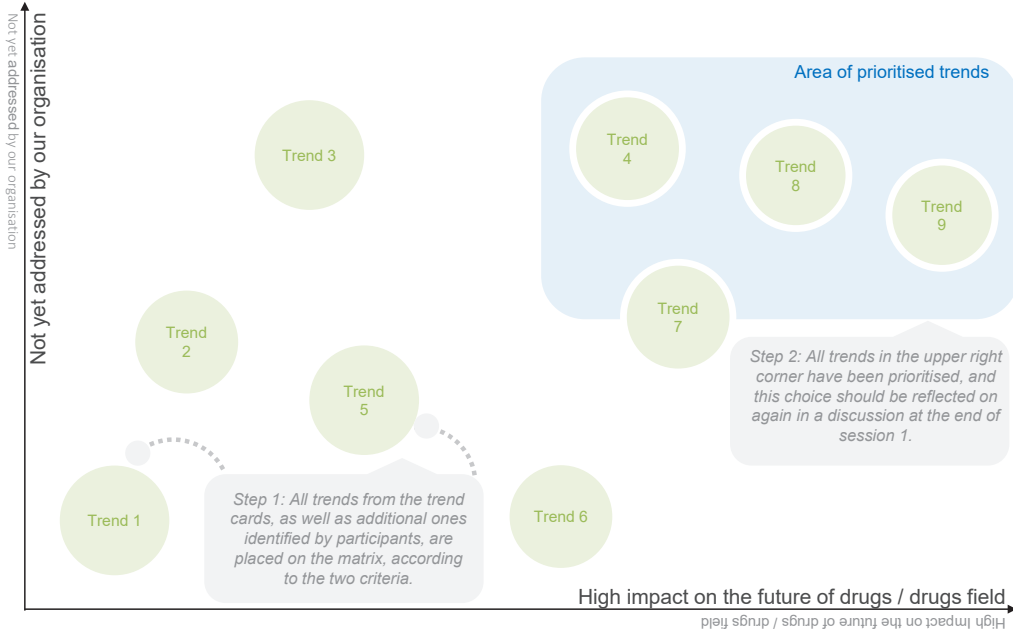
Workshop agenda

Agenda item	Duration in minutes	Details
Introduction	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of the aims and approach, and of the participants and facilitators Presentation (optional) First discussion and Q&A <p><i>This is conducted in plenary style with all workshop participants.</i></p>
Session 1: Mapping and prioritising trends	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants prioritise trends, working with template 1 (add link) They start from and use the set of trend cards Participants can also identify additional trends (on top of those covered within the set of trend cards) <p><i>This is conducted in small working groups working on the same tasks in parallel.</i></p>
Break	15	
Session 2: Analysing the trends' implications	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the trends prioritised in session 1, participants identify implications, working with template 2 (add link) <p><i>This is conducted in small working groups working on the same tasks in parallel.</i></p>
Results and recap	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All groups share key insights from their results (selection only) Key themes and additional information Information on concrete next steps is shared and agreed on <p><i>This part is conducted in plenary style with all workshop participants.</i></p>

Templates

Templates presented below can be downloaded from the [toolkit website](#).

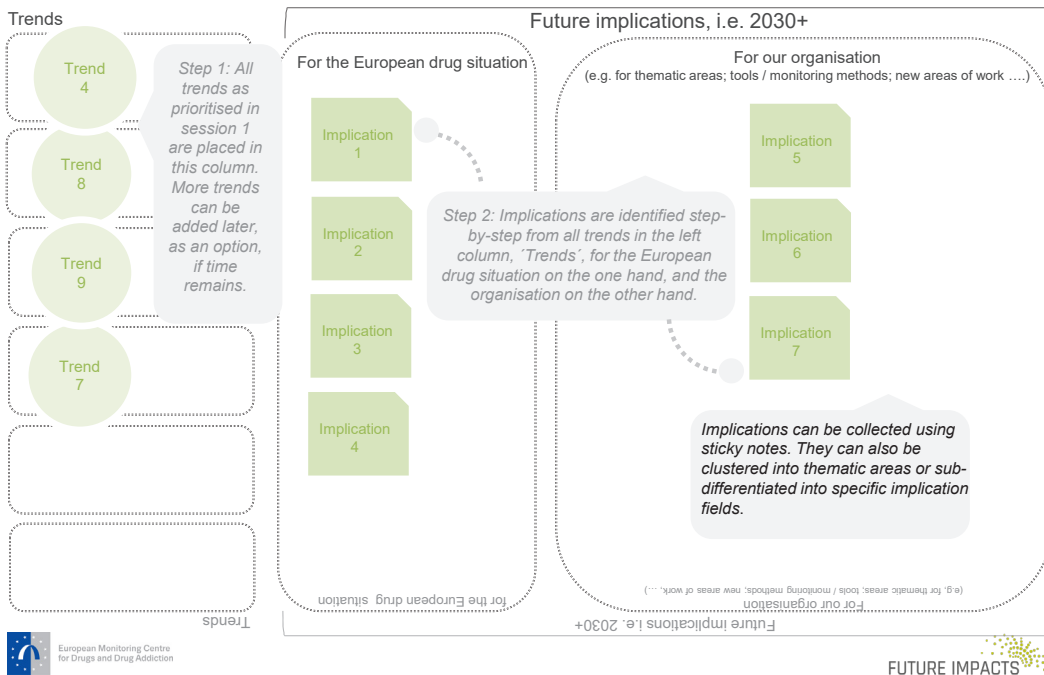
Template 1 from the EMCDDA Trend mapping foresight toolkit: mapping and prioritising trends
(Variant with examples and instructions; see also the empty printable on the next page)



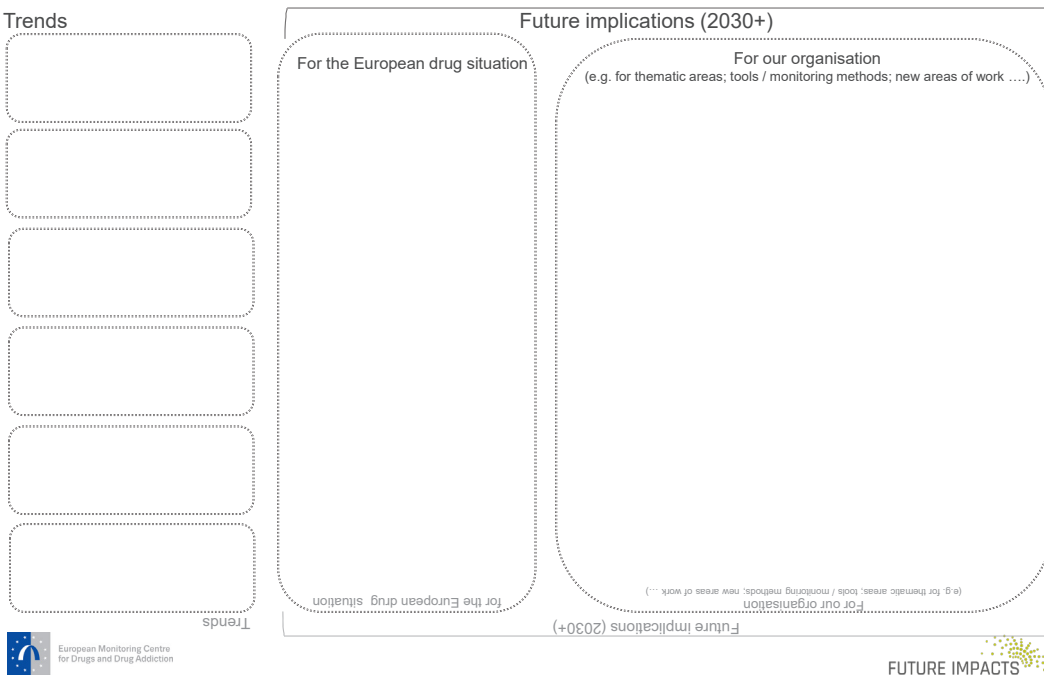
Template 1 from the EMCDDA Trend mapping foresight toolkit: mapping and prioritising trends



Template 2 from the EMCDDA Trend mapping foresight toolkit: analysing the trends' implications
(Variant with examples and instructions; see also the empty printable on the next page)



Template 2 from the EMCDDA Trend mapping foresight toolkit: analysing the trends' implications



Appendix: References and more tools and resources

Exemplary references on foresight and trend analysis:

For detailed information on all 14 JRC megatrends:

Joint Research Centre (JRC) (2017), *The megatrends hub*, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/tool/megatrends-hub_en

For a short introduction to environmental scanning:

European Foresight Platform (EFP) (2010a), *Environmental scanning*, <http://www.foresight-platform.eu/community/forlearn/how-to-do-foresight/methods/analysis/environmental-scanning/>

For a short introduction to horizon scanning:

EFP (2010b), *Horizon scanning*, <http://www.foresight-platform.eu/community/forlearn/how-to-do-foresight/methods/analysis/horizon-scanning/>

For an introduction to trends and megatrends:

EFP (2016), *Megatrend / trend / driver / issue*, <http://www.foresight-platform.eu/community/forlearn/how-to-do-foresight/methods/analysis/megatrend-trend-driver-issue/>

For more on horizon scanning and research integration:

Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (2015), *Models of horizon scanning: how to integrate horizon scanning into European research and innovation policies*, Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research, Karlsruhe, <https://www.isi.fraunhofer.de/content/dam/isi/dokumente/ccv/2015/Models-of-Horizon-Scanning.pdf>

For information and resources from the Future Agenda:

Future Agenda (2011), *The World in 2020*, Oxford 2011, <https://www.futureagenda.org>

Kahn, H. (2021), *Forecasting the Future*, Hudson Institute. Originally published 13 September 1984, accessed June 2021, <https://www.hudson.org/research/2729-forecasting-the-future>

For information and resources from The Millennium Project:

The Millennium Project (2017), *State of the future 19.1*, The Millennium Project, Washington, <https://www.millennium-project.org/state-of-the-future-version-19-1/>

Rohrbeck, R. (2013), 'Trend scanning, scouting and foresight techniques', https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236897709_Trend_Scanning_Scouting_and_Foresight_Techniques

Exemplary references on other foresight toolkits:

Cranfield University (2018), *Horizon scanning toolkit*, Smarter regulation of waste in Europe: LIFE SMART waste project, <https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/367059/lsw-b4-horizon-scanning-toolkit-v10.pdf>

Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) (2019), *Megatrends engagement tools*, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/megatrends-engagement-tools_en

UK Government Office for Science (2017), *The futures toolkit: Tools for futures thinking and foresight across UK government*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674209/futures-toolkit-edition-1.pdf

Exemplary references on foresight implemented within the EU system:

European Commission (2021), *Foresight*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/foresight_en

European Political Strategy Centre of the European Commission (EPSC) (2021), *European Political Strategy Centre*, www.ec.europa.eu/epsc/

Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) (2021), *Competence centre on foresight*, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight_en

Exemplary references on foresight within the drugs area:

Science and Technology Options Assessment of the European Parliament (STOA) (2017), *Technological innovation strategies in substance use disorders*, Panel for the Future of Science and Technology, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/en/document/EPRS_STU\(2017\)581942](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/en/document/EPRS_STU(2017)581942)

Global Initiative (2021), *The global illicit economy*, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/global-organized-crime/>

Karlsen, J. E., Gual, A. and Anderson, P. (2013), 'Foresighting addiction and lifestyles in Europe 2030+', *European Journal of Futures Research* 1, 19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40309-013-0019-0>

UK Government Office for Science (2005), *Drugs Futures 2025*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drugs-futures-2025> About Future Impacts

About Future Impacts

Future Impacts designs and implements foresight processes around questions on the future of organisations and corporations. We carry out foresight projects to identify options for future-oriented actions today. For this, 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.

www.future-impacts.de

About the EMCDDA

The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) is a decentralised EU agency that provides the EU and its Member States with a factual overview of European drug problems and a solid evidence base to support the drugs debate. Today it offers policymakers the data they need for drawing up informed drug laws and strategies. It also helps professionals and practitioners working in the field to pinpoint best practice and new areas of research.

www.emcdda.europa.eu

Licence 

This toolkit, 'How to run a trends workshop. A foresight toolkit by the EMCDDA for the drugs field', is subject to the Creative Commons 4.0 International, (CC BY-SA 4.0). For more details on the licence please visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

A word of thanks to the JRC

To a considerable extent, this toolkit builds on the work of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) on megatrends. This work and the decision to make it available and usable under the Creative Commons 4.0 licence is very much appreciated.

To provide feedback contact: Klaudia.Palczak@emcdda.europa.eu

Legal notice: Neither the EMCDDA nor any person acting on behalf of the EMCDDA is responsible for the use that might be made of the preceding information.

Photos: pexels.com.

© European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022
Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.
This publication is only available in electronic format.

EMCDDA, Praça Europa 1, Cais do Sodré, 1249-289 Lisbon, Portugal
Tel. (351) 211 21 02 00 | info@emcdda.europa.eu
emcdda.europa.eu | twitter.com/emcdda | facebook.com/emcdda
linkedin.com/company/emcdda | instagram.com/emcdda | youtube.com/emcddatube



Luxembourg: Publications Office
of the European Union, 2022
doi:10.2810/372964
ISBN 978-92-9497-791-5
TD-07-22-427-EN-N