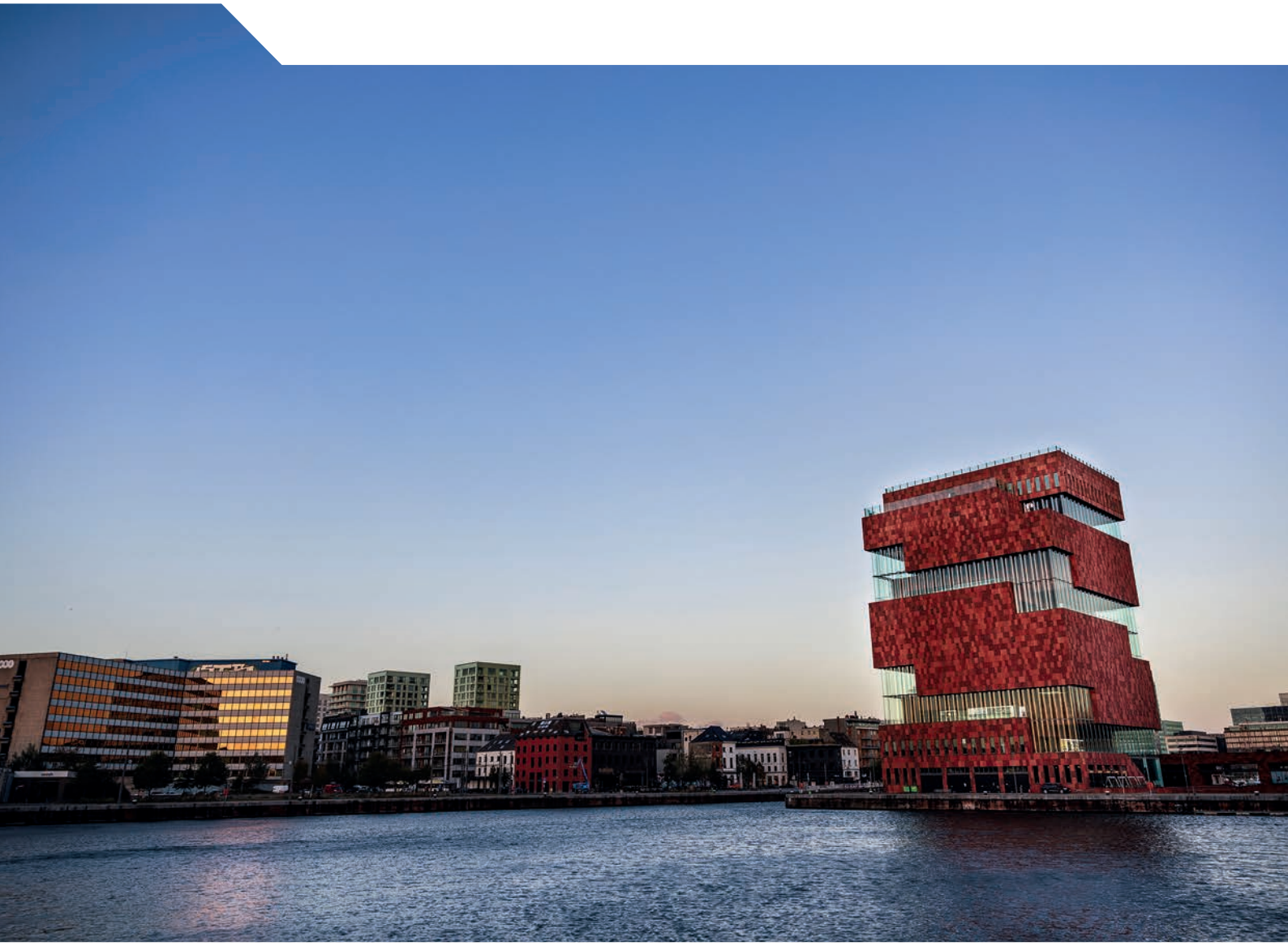
OECD Public Governance Reviews

The Strategic Foresight System of the Government of Flanders, Belgium



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Preface

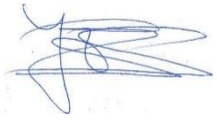
In the dynamic landscape of governance, where challenges demand innovative solutions, the Government of Flanders stands at the forefront of transformation. To address the complex interplay of global forces, from the far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to the complexities of climate change and geopolitical shifts, foresight is the compass for navigating uncertainty.

It is my privilege, as the Secretary General of Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, to introduce a report that explores our government's strategic foresight system, which has been thoroughly assessed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). By examining the current landscape, the OECD's assessment focuses on the strengths and areas for improvement in our strategic foresight initiatives. Besides being a current-state assessment, it lays the groundwork for a blueprint for the future. The recommendations outlined are not mere suggestions; they are a call to action, an opportunity to invest in our collective future. It is an invitation to envision Flanders as a leader in resilient policymaking, fostering collaboration with other governments.

In our commitment to being a governmental leader in multi-level strategic foresight, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office frequently organises initiatives, such as the Science-to-Policy Dialogue held with the Netherlands in September 2022. As part of our "Knowledge Government" project, it played a crucial role in broadening the scope of long-term transformations, especially in times of crisis. During this strategic dialogue, researchers from the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) and Flanders engaged in discussions with policymakers, focusing on a long-term perspective after recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. It served to break out of "narrow circles" and contribute to the government's strategic policy advice with scientifically grounded insights and analyses.

This dedication to multi-level strategic foresight is not just a matter of evidence for policy, but a conscious effort to shape a future with resilience, innovation, and adaptability. Understanding strategic foresight goes beyond its methods and knowledge outputs. It involves considering the systemic elements that contribute to its development, dissemination, and use as a connected ecosystem.

Let us undertake this transformative journey with strategic foresight as our guiding principle for a future-proof and resilient Europe. May this report inspire policymakers, decision makers, and all those dedicated to shaping Europe's future.



Julie Bynens

Secretary General, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office

May 7th, 2024

Foreword

In an era marked by immediate crises and enduring threats, governments find themselves under intense scrutiny. Among the numerous pressing challenges they must confront are climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, and geopolitical tension, such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Rapid advancements in artificial intelligence and unprecedented waves of migration add even more disruptive change. To meet these challenges, governments must be not only reactive, but proactive, visionary and forward-thinking.

Given the important role of strategic foresight in policymaking and resilience, the Government of Flanders has been taking steps to improve its capabilities in the area of strategic foresight. To take a more substantive leap forward, the government partnered with the OECD to make a full assessment of its strategic foresight system. The region aims to become a leader in future-oriented policymaking; it also coordinates regional multi-level partnerships in strategic foresight. Effective use of strategic foresight provides numerous advantages to governments. It enhances decision making with valuable insights into the future, expands the range of possibilities for action by challenging and reevaluating prevailing assumptions about the future and policymaking practices, and strengthens the legitimacy of policy decisions by engaging key stakeholders in an explicit exploration of expectations, biases and compromises relating to possible, plausible and desirable futures. But most of all, it makes current policies more robust and resilient in the long term. It will thus help the Government of Flanders both proactively respond to future challenges and seize opportunities in areas of strategic importance to the region, such as digitalisation, sustainable development, and industrial development.

This report outlines the main findings and recommendations of the assessment of the strategic foresight system of the Government of Flanders. The assessment relied on desktop analysis, semi-structured interviews and collaborative workshops conducted from October 2022 to June 2023. It is accompanied by a blueprint and roadmap to incorporate strategic foresight into the public administration of Flanders in the next five years.

This report is part of OECD's work on anticipatory governance that seeks to embed strategic foresight into governance processes and strategic decision making. Anticipatory governance enables diverse actors to work together to explore consequences and develop robust responses, ultimately guiding efforts to shape a more equitable and sustainable future. OECD is currently developing good practice principles in anticipatory governance to guide governments further in this work.

Acknowledgements

The report was prepared by the OECD Directorate for Public Governance (GOV) under the leadership of Elsa Pilichowski, Director for Public Governance and Carlos Santiso, Head of the Open and Innovative Government Division, and under the direction of Marco Daglio, Head, OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI). The report was written by Bruno Monteiro, Piret Tõnurist and Julia Staudt, with inputs from Joaquin Collao. Dexter Docherty, Mauricio Mejia Galvan, Joshua Polchar and Claire Karle from the OECD contributed with reviews and comments on the report.

This project would not have been possible without the co-ordination and support of the Strategic Insights and Analyses (SIA) unit at the Chancellery and Foreign Office of the government of Flanders. Special thanks go to Peter De Smedt and Flo Van den Broeck. The OECD would like to thank all those who participated in the interviews conducted and the co-creative workshops.

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Executive summary

Across OECD countries, the adoption of strategic foresight – defined as an established practice of an organisation to constantly perceive, make sense of, and act upon the future as it emerges – has become indispensable for governments seeking to anticipate and navigate complex and volatile policy landscapes. Strategic foresight guides the formulation of policies that are robust and adaptable in the face of uncertainty. It facilitates the establishment of shared objectives, the reframing of policy issues, the early detection of emerging trends, the rigorous testing of existing policies, and the fostering of innovation for better outcomes.

Recognising the importance of strategic foresight, the European Union has significantly invested in developing its capabilities and networks and enhancing the resilience and recovery efforts of regions. OECD research underscores the importance of adopting a multi-level strategic foresight approach, fostering synergies and collaboration among different governmental actors to address global challenges. This requires a departure from traditional hierarchical structures towards more adaptive, multi-level and multi-actor frameworks that can effectively navigate uncertainty.

The Government of Flanders, Belgium, is undertaking to strengthen its strategic foresight capacity to improve resilient policymaking. This report assesses the current state of strategic foresight initiatives within the Government of Flanders, examining their depth and systemic integration. The report also offers tailored recommendations to enhance the system.

To date, Flanders' strategic foresight endeavours have focused on project-based initiatives with a primarily regional scope. OECD analysis suggests that efforts to embed strategic foresight more systematically across government are still in their infancy. The report outlines key insights across five critical dimensions of strategic foresight: demand and mandate; capabilities and skills; institutional arrangements; integration into the policy cycle; and mechanisms for feedback and learning.

The main findings underscore several critical areas for improvement in strategic foresight for the Government of Flanders:

- Build a stronger case for strategic foresight. While strategic foresight is increasingly integrated into government initiatives, its potential as a core function is still unrecognised. There is opportunity to highlight its benefits by observing how the Government of Flanders has successfully used strategic foresight methods to explore and solve problems.
- Establish clear mandates for co-ordination: Horizontal co-ordination is essential to breaking down silos and addressing cross-sectoral challenges effectively. An explicit mandate for co-ordination can facilitate this process and ensure strategic foresight initiatives are aligned with overarching goals.
- Ensure leadership support and commitment: Leadership endorsement is vital for fostering a culture that values strategic foresight. Leaders should create an enabling environment for experimentation, knowledge-sharing and resource allocation, drawing upon regional and international networks for insights.

- Provide tailored training for officials: Comprehensive training programmes can enhance understanding and appreciation of strategic foresight among elected and non-elected officials. They should address biases about foresight work and promote its effective use across government.
- Develop guidelines for multi-level strategic foresight: Policymakers require clear guidance on how to incorporate multi-level strategic foresight into decision-making processes. Concrete instructions and manuals can facilitate this and ensure consistency in its application.
- Allocate dedicated resources: Adequate resources, including funding, time, and expertise, are crucial for building and sustaining strategic foresight capabilities within government. This investment is essential for internal projects, external collaboration and professionalisation efforts.
- Integrate foresight into policy priorities: Strategic foresight needs to be closely aligned with policy priorities and strategic planning processes. Demonstration cases and flagship projects can illustrate this alignment, while continuous monitoring ensures the integration of long-term perspectives into policymaking.
- Clarify the role of public administration: It should be explicitly stated that strategic foresight is a fundamental component of policymaking, ensuring that long-term challenges are adequately considered when presenting policy options to decision makers.
- Enhance engagement with stakeholders: Engaging with academia, civil society, businesses, and other stakeholders is essential for enriching long-term policy planning efforts. Collective intelligence and collaboration can enhance the effectiveness of strategic foresight initiatives.
- Develop a multi-level anticipatory intelligence system: Strengthening international partnerships and data-gathering capabilities are critical for establishing a resilient anticipatory intelligence system. The system should seamlessly integrate current indicators with evidence gathered through strategic foresight methodologies.

These findings on the Government of Flanders' strategic foresight system serve as a foundation for further development, culminating in the co-creation of a blueprint for promoting strategic foresight practices within the region.

1 Why strategic foresight?

Strategic foresight is a crucial tool for understanding and proactively engaging with the future. Governments face an increasingly intricate and uncertain landscape, requiring public policies to adapt to emerging dynamics and meet the evolving needs and expectations of society. Beyond merely enhancing policy coherence and shaping long-term strategies, strategic foresight helps foster resilience within policy-making systems. Resilience here refers to the government's capacity not only to withstand and manage challenges but to navigate transitions sustainably, equitably, and democratically.

1.1 Why strategic foresight?

Strategic foresight is a crucial tool for understanding and proactively engaging with the future. Governments face an increasingly intricate and uncertain landscape, requiring public policies to adapt to emerging dynamics and meet the evolving needs and expectations of society. Beyond merely enhancing policy coherence and shaping long-term strategies, strategic foresight helps foster **resilience within policy-making systems**. Resilience here refers to the government's capacity not only to withstand and manage challenges but to navigate transitions sustainably, equitably, and democratically (European Commission, 2020[1]).

At its core, strategic foresight enables the construction of resilient policy-making systems by anticipating developments, stress-testing existing structures, facilitating necessary adaptations, and driving innovation based on relevant megatrends and prospective crises (Tõnurist and Hanson, 2020[2]). By empowering decision-makers to navigate uncertainty and respond to emerging trends and societal shifts in a systemic manner, strategic foresight enhances the effectiveness of decision-making processes and planning activities.

Importantly, strategic foresight empowers governments to transcend conventional risk avoidance and resistance to change inherent in "business-as-usual" approaches. It encourages governments to explore future opportunities and challenges beyond the immediate horizon.

However, to realise its full potential, strategic foresight must be firmly integrated into policy-making processes. Robust methodologies must guide a structured process of concrete actions to ensure the effectiveness of strategic foresight initiatives. Despite much strategic foresight excellence in government institutions, the OECD has identified significant gaps. Capabilities are often fragmented and isolated from policy-making. There is often a disconnect in communicating foresight knowledge to senior leadership, hindering its impactful integration into decision-making processes (OECD, 2022[3]).

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach such as the OECD's Anticipatory Innovation Governance model. It emphasises that futures and foresight knowledge be incorporated into core government functions (Tõnurist and Hanson, 2020[2]). Governments must also commit to regular reviews of emerging trends to inform strategic planning cycles effectively, as exemplified by initiatives in countries like New Zealand (OECD, 2023[4]).

The government of Flanders has recognised the importance of integrating strategic foresight into its policy-making framework. It has sought OECD assistance in assessing the current status of its strategic foresight capabilities and devising a roadmap for future action. The report emphasises the necessity of multi-level strategic foresight within the policy-making system and evaluates the development and implementation of strategic foresight practices in the government of Flanders. For this report, the OECD used an analytical framework encompassing the key components of demand and mandate; capabilities and skills; institutional arrangements; integration into the policy cycle; and mechanisms for feedback and learning, The analysis identifies areas of strategic foresight excellence alongside shortcomings in long-term planning processes. Strengthening the integration of strategic foresight throughout the system is crucial to Flanders' resilience and capacity to navigate future challenges effectively.

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2 Relevance of strategic foresight to policy priorities

Strategic foresight is a crucial tool for understanding and proactively engaging with the future. Governments face an increasingly intricate and uncertain landscape, requiring public policies to adapt to emerging dynamics and meet the evolving needs and expectations of society. Beyond merely enhancing policy coherence and shaping long-term strategies, strategic foresight helps foster **resilience within policy-making systems**. Resilience here refers to the government's capacity not only to withstand and manage challenges but to navigate transitions sustainably, equitably, and democratically.

2.1 Relevance of strategic foresight to policy priorities

In today's rapidly evolving landscape, governments must respond to emerging challenges that are more pressing than ever. Yet, policy makers are often driven by immediate events rather than guided by forward-looking strategies (Burrows and Gnad, 2018[1]). There is a continuous pressure to seek out quick wins to fulfil political agendas and manage crises rather than prepare for uncertain futures. Consequently, governments tend to defer decisive action on long-term trends such as climate change, population growth, demographic changes, urbanisation, and unsustainable consumption patterns, all of which have interconnected impacts. This highlights not only the need for more comprehensive and systemic strategic foresight analysis in government, but the importance of integrating derived insights into everyday policy-making processes.

2.2 The rising importance of multi-level strategic foresight

The European Commission has embarked on a decisive path to bolster strategic foresight capacity both internally and across Member States, aligning this approach with ongoing Resilience and Recovery Plans. From the establishment of foresight networks to the publication of annual foresight reports for the European Union, many initiatives have been set in motion that showcase key opportunities and vulnerabilities (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. European Commission's strategic direction on strategic foresight

Since 2020, the European Commission has strongly supported strategic foresight. The Commission has established an EU-wide Foresight Network that draws on Member States' public foresight capabilities. The first meeting of the EU "Ministers of the Future" took place in May 2021 after European Commission Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight – Maroš Šefčovič – announced the establishment of an EU-wide foresight network and asked each EU Member State to appoint a Minister of the Future. The Commission is also building close foresight co-operation and alliances with other EU institutions, notably in the context of the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS). Strategic foresight has become part of the Commission's Better Regulation toolbox and is included in forecasted impact assessments. Since 2020, the Commission has also produced annual strategic foresight reports.

2020 Strategic Foresight Report

The 2020 Strategic Foresight Report, "Charting the course towards a more resilient Europe" discusses the first structural lessons learnt from the COVID-19 crisis, and explains how foresight can help strengthen Europe's long-term resilience in an era of fundamental and rapid change. It does so by analysing the EU's resilience across four dimensions: social and economic; geopolitical; green; and digital. The report introduces resilience dashboards that act as monitoring tools for policy makers.

2021 Strategic Foresight Report

The 2021 Strategic Foresight Report, "The EU's capacity and freedom to act", presents a forward-looking and multidisciplinary perspective on important trends that will affect the EU towards 2050, including: climate change and other challenges, technological transformations, pressure on democracy and values, as well as shifts in the global order and demography. It also identifies 10 areas in which the EU can strengthen its capacity and freedom to act.

2022 Strategic Foresight Report

The 2022 Strategic Foresight Report, “Twinning the green and digital transitions in the new geopolitical context”, focuses on the interplay between Europe’s twin transitions. It also takes into account the disruptive and changing geopolitical landscape in which these transitions are happening. It highlights the key role played by digital technologies in Europe’s five strategic and highest greenhouse gas-emitting sectors: energy, transport, industry, construction, and agriculture. It also outlines 10 key areas of action for maximising synergies and reducing tensions between these transitions towards 2050.

2023 Strategic Foresight Report

The 2023 Strategic Foresight Report, “Sustainability and wellbeing at the heart of Europe’s Open Strategic Autonomy” sheds light on the most relevant and intertwined social and economic challenges the EU will encounter on its path towards sustainability. On this basis, it proposes 10 areas in which the EU needs to take action to successfully navigate the transition. This should ultimately bolster Europe’s open strategic autonomy and global position in the race towards net-zero economy.

Source: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-planning/strategic-foresight_en

Beyond the EU, there are a variety of national and international initiatives and networks (see Box 2.2) that share emerging strategic foresight practice and leverage collective intelligence about the future.

Box 2.2. International strategic foresight communities

The OECD Government Foresight Community (GFC)

The OECD GFC, established in 2014, brings together leading strategic foresight practitioners in the public sector from countries and international organisations around the world. The community aims to strengthen foresight capacity by drawing on collective experience and bringing futures insights to bear on key challenges of our times. The main activity of the GFC is the annual meeting, held in October of each year.

The European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS)

ESPAS is an inter-institutional EU network that builds foresight and anticipatory governance in Europe and hosts an annual meeting in November. The network is currently preparing its Global Trends Report (2024) and a new horizon-scanning project identifying 'weak signals' of change. ESPAS also hosts a “Young Talent Network” to develop foresight literacy among young professionals in the EU.

Summit of the Future

The United Nations General Assembly will host a Summit of the Future in September 2024 after the Secretary-General announced major commitments within the UN system to foresight and future generations in the “Our Common Agenda” report released in September 2021. An action-oriented Pact for the Future is expected to be agreed by Member States through intergovernmental negotiations on issues they decide to take forward.

World Futures Day

UNESCO hosts the World Futures Day in December of each year, bringing together international organisations, Member States and civil society to discuss possible visions for the future. The event aims to promote inclusive and transdisciplinary discussions on futures-building in UNESCO’s futures literacy approach.

Asia Pacific Futures Network (AFPN)

Due to the rapid growth of futures studies and strategic foresight in the Asia-Pacific region, AFPN was founded in 2015 as a platform and community for practitioners. It mainly consists of a yearly meeting for futurists to analyse, synthesise, and reflect on emerging issues and trends; create new knowledge and experiences for anticipatory action-learning education and research; and strengthen the link between futures theory and practice in Asia.

Dubai Future Forum

The Dubai Future Forum, established in 2022, is an annual event hosted by the Dubai Future Foundation. It brings the world's top futurists to Dubai to anticipate challenges, imagine opportunities, share foresight, and shape the future.

Source: OECD.

Besides gathering strategic foresight experts from around the world, **the attention to structured, long-term and robust methods to analyse megatrends has increased, with a variety of sources available** (see Box 2.3). These are increasingly used as inputs to policy-making. They identify new policy horizons, develop scenarios, and stress-test current policies. The awareness and practical use of scenario-planning has also increased substantially with COVID-19 – many countries including Finland and the Netherlands used scenarios to actively explore uncertainty beyond the immediate crises response and inform policy choices and responses accordingly.

Box 2.3. Megatrends analysis

OECD: Strategic Foresight Toolkit for Resilient Public Policy

This report by the OECD's Strategic Foresight Unit describes a methodology to support multidisciplinary strategy and public policy development and stress-testing. The five-module process enables organisations to identify their core assumptions about the future; explore how they may be challenged by possible disruptions; create scenarios; use them to stress-test their long-term strategies; and, finally, develop future-ready actions in the present day to position themselves for long-term resilience and success. The main part of the report provides an overview of the 25 disruptions that make up the core building blocks of the toolkit. These disruptions are grouped across six domains: environment, green technology, technology, social, geopolitics and economy.

United States: Global Trends 2040

Published every four years since 1997, the U.S. National Intelligence Council's Global Trends report assesses the trends and uncertainties that will shape the strategic environment for the United States. It helps prepare policy makers for an array of possible futures over the next two decades. The current report – Global Trends 2040 – analyses structural forces in demographics and human development, environment, economics and technology. It then examines how these structural forces and other factors, combined with human responses, affect emerging dynamics in societies, governments, and the international system. Finally, it identifies five plausible scenarios for 2040: renaissance of democracies; a world adrift; competitive co-existence; separate silos; and tragedy and mobilisation.

European Commission: Megatrends Hub

The European Commission's Competence Centre on Foresight has developed a Megatrends Hub. It contains 14 evidence-informed emerging disruptions in a wide range of sectors and the interlinkages between them. Among the topics covered are: diversifying inequalities; increasing significance of migration; aggravating resource scarcity; increasing influence of new governing systems; continuing

urbanisation; increasing demographic imbalances; climate change and environmental degradation; diversification of education and learning; changing nature of work; accelerating technological change and hyper-connectivity; growing consumerism; shifting health challenges; expanding influence of East and South; and the changing security paradigm.

Singapore: Driving Forces Cards

Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures, Driving Forces Cards, is an extensive collection of materials that offer alternative ways to think about what the future might look like in 2040. There are 17 driving forces cards: superpowers in motion; globalisation and growth; financial fragility; geopolitics of the energy transition; redistribution of (un)natural endowments; global demographic shifts; mind the metropolis; firms in flux; labour interrupted; families we choose; the augmented self; shifting knowledge infrastructure; data and digital connectivity; alt-networks; weapons of mass disorientation; tribal world; evolution of governance. There are five wild cards, outlining surprising events that could have transformative implications: 20,000 minerals under the sea; geological reckoning; advances in immortality; solar superstorm of the century; and biological chaos.

Sitra: Megatrends 2023

Finland's Sitra Megatrends 2023 work covers five thematic areas and where they could be going in the future: eroding nature's carrying capacity; growing well-being challenges; intensifying battle for democracy; gearing up competition for digital power; and cracking economic foundations. The megatrends report also has a section on practical tips for engaging with megatrends and integrating them into strategic thinking in different settings.

RBAP Horizon Scanning Initiative

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP) has prepared an interactive report as part of their 2022 Regional Horizon Scanning Initiative. This second edition builds on the inaugural edition of the September-December 2021 Regional Horizon Scanning Initiative. It explores signals and risks identified while scanning for additional weak signals and emerging trends in the Asia Pacific. The 2.0 Horizon Scan is grounded in collective intelligence through the crowdsourcing of signals and trends, and validation and prioritisation through AI-driven conversations with RBAP, external experts and the Horizon Scanning 2.0 Advisory Group. Signals of change are collected and analysed from a short-, medium- and long-term perspective, and assigned a risk score (likelihood and impact).

ESPAS Emerging issues for EU policy-making

In 2022 the ESPAS network (European Strategy and Policy Analysis System) launched the process which looks at "signals of change" – emerging trends and issues that may appear marginal today but could become important for the EU in the future. The process is led by the Joint Research Centre and European Parliamentary Research Service. The latest issues paper highlights three trends on BRICS+ (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates) expansion and alternatives to multilateralism, new sources of extreme inequalities and radical food production methods.

Source: OECD.

2.3 Strategic foresight in policy-making processes

To build institutional resilience and adaptability to rapidly evolving scenarios, it is crucial to strengthen the strategic foresight capacity of the civil service in policy-planning activities. Integrated strategic foresight skills can empower the public sector to anticipate challenges and analyse policy trade-offs. Strategic foresight has a variety of uses in government including:

- **Creating shared goals.** Dialogue about the future to create shared language about collective objectives, visions and aspirations. Strategic foresight can help mobilise and mediate stakeholders' participation and co-creation around plausible and desirable futures, and help them agree upon policy goals. For example, the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, Spain developed a programme entitled *Building the Future* (*Etorkizuna Eraikiz*) to promote and improve open and collaborative governance in the region. On the national-federal level, examples of Lithuania's and Spain's large-scale foresight projects demonstrate the importance of citizen and expert consultations (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]). Brazil has also used future scenarios in the project *Brasil 2035*, developed to contribute to achieving equity and social cohesion (IPEA 2017).
- **Reframing issues**. Broadening or questioning which factors are considered relevant in a decision or strategy. As such, strategic foresight can help decision makers' self-reflection, enabling them to articulate questions, debunk implicit biases and identify assumptions that sustain their daily routines. For example, in 2019, the French Ministry of Defence, through its *Agence de l'innovation de défense*, created the *Red Team.* This group of science-fiction writers and illustrators conceive and explore scenarios for the future of armed conflicts. They uncover the blind spots and invisible blockages that stand in the way of imagining situations outside those presently existing in handbook examples.
- **Early warning**. Identifying emerging risks and opportunities, how to measure them and when to respond. Foresight approaches provide useful early insights for decision makers, creating more high-quality, robust and reliable evidence to use in uncertain contexts. Many governments have built up anticipatory intelligence tools to integrate into their decision-making systems (see Box 2.4). For instance, the UK innovation agency, NESTA, has used machine-learning approaches to produce actionable intelligence for policy purposes.

Box 2.4. Anticipatory intelligence

Anticipatory intelligence is the process of gathering emergent knowledge for decision-making. It is an intelligence process that aims to broaden the understanding of possible developments and encourage adaptability and proactivity towards alternative and competing scenarios.

Anticipatory intelligence and resilience

- Resistance: Anticipatory intelligence can support resilience in policy-making by **mobilising action to proactively counteract threats** to the system. For instance, at the peak of the COVID-19 crisis Finland created Fast Expert Teams to mitigate the negative consequences of events that limit face-to-face communication. The initiative matched agile cross-border teams of experts from universities, private and public organisations, and ministries with complex problems arising from the pandemic.
- Recovery: Anticipatory intelligence can **help the system move out of its critical state** and get back to its basic level of operation after a crisis. For example, the government of Canada's Talent Reserve is a management tool that matches available talent with pressing needs across

government. Through data-tracking and central co-ordination, the tool enables qualified talent to be identified, tracked and allocated to higher priority areas in need.

- Retention: Anticipatory intelligence can ensure that the **core functions and features of the system are preserved** and sustained in the wake of stress or crisis. During the pandemic, the UK National Shielding Service provided basic support to millions of citizens that were clinically vulnerable, ensuring the delivery of care and food supplies through the use of effective data-sharing among departments.
- Resurgence: Anticipatory intelligence can help **leverage opportunities to improve the system** beyond the previously existing status quo. It does so by expanding promising or emerging features and leaving behind or replacing features that fell short during the crisis. Using digital tools and opportunities for cross-border collaborations, a series of *Hack the Crisis* initiatives held in countries such as the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, and Spain adopted crowdsource formats, including online collaborative platforms and virtual hackathons, to co-create solutions engaging with government organisations; citizens and civil society organisations; private companies and start-ups; and academia and research centres.

Source: (Monteiro, Tonurist and Staudt, 2023[3])

- **Stress-testing**. Taking an existing decision or strategy and testing how well it would fare in different future conditions. Strategic foresight can help steward ongoing policies and prepare for unpredictable changes or the long-term impacts of public policies. For example, the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (DG ECHO) and the European Civil Protection Mechanism use scenarios of critical events to help countries stress-test their risk management systems.

- **Initiating policy and service innovation**. Drawing inspiration from alternative ideas about the future to try novel policies, ways of working or alternative service models. Strategic foresight helps decision makers experiment and innovate. For example, the Social Foresight Lab in Germany allows citizens to experiment with future solutions by, for instance, introducing prototypes of potential social and technological developments on mobility, working and living into their everyday lives. The government of Finland used strategic foresight in its AuroraAI programme to explore what future life-event-based service provision in the country could look like (OECD, 2022[4]). And, Norway developed future personas for a similar programme in government (Karlsrud Haugse and Dahl, 2023[5]).

2.4 Strategic foresight in government institutions: Overview of existing models and challenges

Most OECD countries use strategic foresight to build stronger policies in the face of an uncertain future. While the functions of strategic foresight are clear, the models and application across countries differ. For example, in Finland, the Strategic Foresight Unit at the Prime Minister's Office steers **strategic foresight from the centre of government** and conducts whole-of-government strategic foresight studies (e.g. the "Government Report of the Future" in Finland). Similar models have now been adopted in the German and Spanish[1] federal governments as well as in Portugal (PlanAPP) and Singapore

[1] In 2020, with leadership buy-in and a legal instrument (Royal Decree of the 27th of January 2020), Spain created the *Oficina Nacional de Prospectiva y Estrategia* (National Foresight and Strategy Office). This necessary structure to

(Centre for Strategic Futures). These central units also build strategic foresight capacity in public service and co-ordinate strategic foresight communities and networks. For example, the Centre for Strategic Futures in Singapore has adopted foresight as part of its strategic planning cycle, using Scenario Planning Plus (SP+) as a toolkit to cope with emergent trends or unexpected events. The Centre disseminates toolkits and develops new skills across government via workshops and courses for public officials called *FutureCraft* (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]).

Other countries, like Canada, deliberately use **strategic foresight capacity in a more decentralised and independent manner.** Policy Horizons Canada reports to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, but has an oversight body comprising experts from across and outside the policy system. Strategic foresight upskilling is a core initiative at Policy Horizons, which provides public servants introductory modules on foresight practice as well as advanced modules with innovative approaches to policy development and connected learning resources available online. Singapore also distributes foresight capabilities across the policy system. It encourages its central foresight unit staff to move among policy teams of all ministries. This mobility has led to a broad understanding of the approaches, needs and methods of strategic foresight at all levels of decision-making within government.

In many other governments, including the Netherlands, **strategic foresight capacity is more distributed,** with each ministry and agency having their own strategic foresight experts and the central unit (the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy [WRR]) providing strategic foresight expertise only on request or to specific cross-government projects (see Box 3.8). In most OECD countries, strategic foresight units tend to be sectoral and are often connected to defence or specific fields such as demographic change, sustainability or finance. For example, Sweden has a longstanding tradition of carrying out “perspectives analyses”, a type of future-oriented analysis of potential threats and vulnerabilities in their armed forces, but has not built foresight capabilities more broadly at the central level or in other policy areas. Germany has an even longer tradition of foresight work in their military as well as in departments such as the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Environmental Agency. While some of this work feeds into decision-making, most of the analysis is carried out by external consultancies and remains disconnected from internal policy-making realities.

The absence of central co-ordination of futures thinking implies that policies concentrate on the short-term. When crises and unforeseen events occur, the government does not have enough agility to think through various scenarios in emerging circumstances (this criticism has been made of the United States (Scoblic, 2021[6])). Often, strategic foresight is carried out with external expertise and in one-time initiatives. For example, the government of Slovenia and the OECD explored the future of a public-sector talent management system and developed a prototyping and innovation process to use the scenarios (OPSI, 2021[7]). However, the administration struggled to keep the practice going as limited resources had been allocated to developing internal capacity in strategic foresight itself. When this capacity exists more systematically it is possible to seize opportunities for a more transformative policy change when opportunities arise (e.g. after farmers’ protests in 2019, the German Chancellery and Ministry of Agriculture used the summit on the fitness-for-future of agriculture to create a Commission on the Future of Agriculture. This paved the way for a scenarios process and a collective vision of the future of agriculture, which was delivered in 2021 (Warnke et al., 2022[8])).

Strategic foresight capacity across government contributes to better responses to complex, cross-government challenges. In the case of climate change, Finland, Germany and the UK, among others, have used trend analysis and scenarios to identify future pathways to net-zero societies (Monteiro and Dal

Note: ensure demand and mandate was inspired by consolidated systems around the world, such as in Singapore and Finland, where strategic foresight units are at the centre of government and close to senior decision makers.

Borgo, 2023[2]) Governments also use strategic foresight from international organisations (for example, megatrend analysis from the European Commission and the OECD, world energy scenarios from the World Energy Council [WEC] or the European Commission's critical event scenarios for stress-testing policies and public services).

Whether centralised, decentralised or hybrid, strategic foresight systems are often supported by complex ecosystems with legislative, executive and audit roles for strategic foresight (SOIF, 2021[9]). For example, legislation sometimes plays an important role in integrating foresight into policy-making. It can be very effective in setting "requirements for long-term thinking" in governments. Some examples are the Public Service Act 2020 (New Zealand), and The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (Wales). Similarly, in Lithuania, the Law on Strategic Governance (2020) helped institutionalise strategic foresight in the country and develop the Lithuania 2050 project (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]).The analysis conducted by the School of International Futures (SOIF) showed how Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United States, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates systemically integrated long-term thinking for policy-making across government (SOIF, 2021[9]). Most of those countries have an effective and recurrent practice of foresight across government, though some have integrated it poorly into the policy arena; this implies an impact gap, which was mentioned earlier.

The most apparent obstacles to government adoption and use of strategic foresight are short-termism and risk aversion; scarcity of specialised skills in public administration; and organisational and sectoral silos (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]; OECD, 2021[10]). This creates systemic problems. In Germany, a study on institutionalising strategic foresight in the federal government found that the siloed thinking that hinders knowledge exchange between different units creates a barrier to the application of strategic foresight (Warnke et al., 2022[8]). This allows for "selective perception" to occur, meaning that each administrative unit is unaware of issues beyond its specialisation and responsibility. It also allows for "negative co-ordination", that is, isolated decisions are made within units that do not value continuous co-operation. For example, Italy and Finland have struggled to share their strategic foresight products in a timely manner across the system, diminishing their usefulness (OECD, 2022[4]; OECD, 2021[11]), due to siloed policy-making processes.

To address these barriers and gaps in strategic foresight use, sufficient resources, clear ownership, and strong mandates for strategic foresight are necessary across different levels of government and relevant institutions outside of government (Fuerth and Faber, 2012[12]). Foresight experts who operate transversally in government and provide policy makers with relevant and accessible guidance help implement their discipline more robustly and embed it in the policy cycle. Impact assessment exercises and regular interaction with users to gather their feedback improve strategic foresight processes. The OECD has addressed this through its anticipatory innovation governance model.

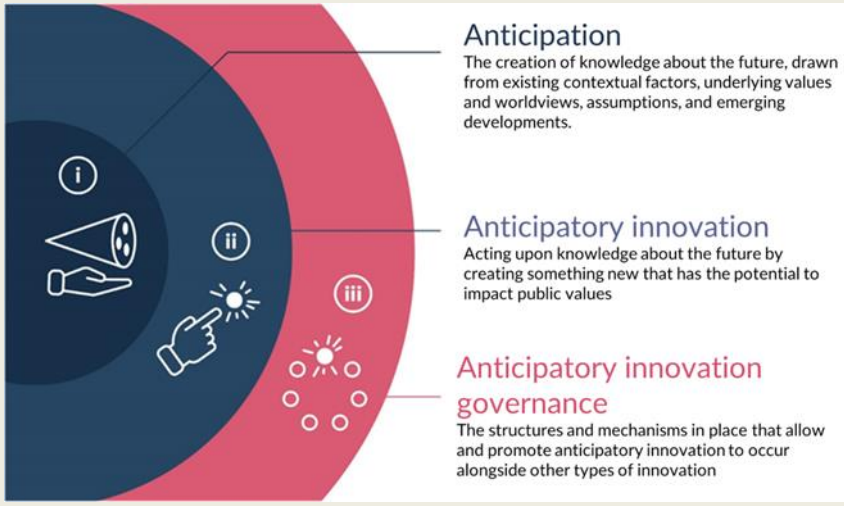
Box 2.5. Anticipatory innovation governance

Anticipatory innovation governance actively explores possibilities, experiments, and continuously learns as part of a broader governance system (Tõnurist and Hanson, 2020[13]). This means developing a governance system to continuously identify, test and disseminate innovations to innovatively shape uncertain futures.

Anticipatory innovation governance needs to be included in the everyday practices of government to influence policy reforms and structural changes. It requires governments to steward innovation processes and policy-making differently. Rather than policy determining the activities of individuals and groups within a system, policies are shaped by observations and experiments in a real-world environment with people who would be affected by government intervention. This feeds into effective policy and has a better chance of anticipating potential side-effects. Governments move towards their

ideal future not by anticipating potential outcomes and developing innovative policies in a theoretical way, but through tangible and empirically-supported policy action (OECD, 2022[4]).

Figure 2.1. Definitions



Source: (Tõnurist and Hanson, 2020[13])

2.5 Multi-level strategic foresight as an approach for resilience

Strategic foresight in a multi-level governance structure

Regional foresight is likely to be more effective across governance levels when embedded in a multi-level (e.g. regional, national, subnational) governance approach. It should also take global developments into account. Regional and national foresight can no longer operate effectively without considering, for instance, the relevance of regionally-based innovation clusters or European Science, Technology and Innovation policies, especially with regard to the EU's resilience policies (see Box 2.6).

Box 2.6. Insights from multi-level innovation governance for multi-level strategic foresight

The OECD defines **multi-level governance** as the interaction between levels of government and a broad range of stakeholders, including private actors and citizens, when designing and implementing public policies with subnational impact. This is particularly the case when it comes to regional development policy and public investment. This interaction is characterised by a mutual dependence among levels of government and runs vertically (among different levels of government), horizontally (across the same level of government) and in a networked manner with stakeholders (citizens, private actors, civil society organisations, research and development [R&D] units, etc.). Multi-level governance practices are part of every country's governance system regardless of its institutional form (federal or unitary, centralised or decentralised).

In the field of innovation, **multi-level governance is** defined as a complex process of collaboration across different government levels (supranational, national, regional, local). It also encompasses collaboration among innovation promotion agents on territorial development strategies. Its aim is to

open up regional innovation strategies – such as the European Commission's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) – to actors in production and knowledge systems, and to do so simultaneously at various scales (Larrea, Pertoldi and Estensoro, 2019[14]). In defining and developing S3 and other regional strategies, it is important to encourage the various levels of government to **collaborate with territorial actors and "be on the same page".** Interesting examples come from Belgium in **SMARTPILOTS** and the **Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant (BBEPP)** in Ghent. They show how regions can find synergies between the EU's Cohesion Policy and its key R&D funding programme, Horizon Europe, by building a research and innovation infrastructure that is attractive to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and research actors alike.

Source: (Enderlein, Walti and Zurn, 2010[15]; Michalun and Nicita, 2019[16]; Tortola, 2016[17]; OECD, 2021[18]; OECD, 2022[19])

Strategic foresight in support of resilience

The European Commission argues that strategic foresight is uniquely suited to inform decision makers in driving the green and digital transitions, and strengthening resilience in the EU (European Commission, 2020[20]). The European Commission is promoting the EU's resilience in four areas (see Box 2.7): social and economic; geopolitical; green; and digital (European Commission, 2020[20]). As such, it plays a central role in recovery of the EU of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2020[20]). First, strategic foresight helps explore diverse issues arising from alternative futures (Williams, 2021[21]). Second, explorations through scenarios, trends analysis, and stress-testing are used in devising roadmaps and contingency plans. These are constructed through strategic dialogue, feasibility assessments and targeted plan development (Ponce and Lustig, 2023[22]).

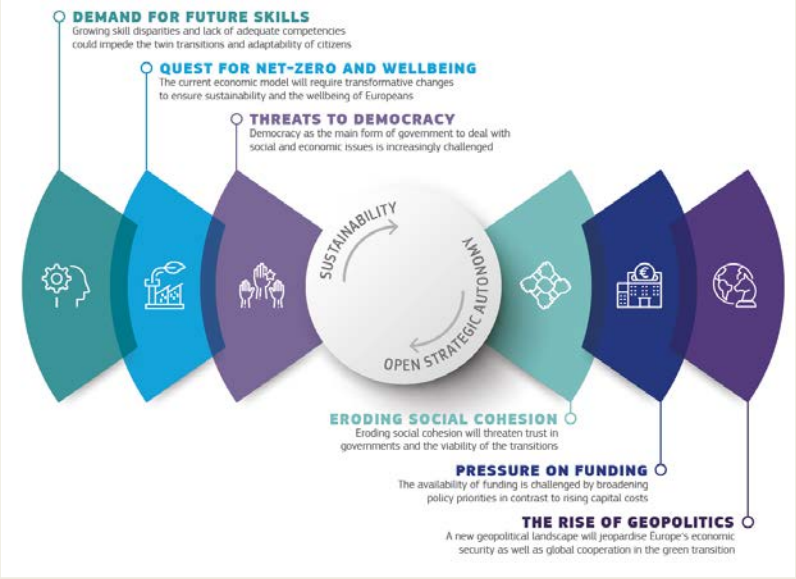
Box 2.7. Key areas of resilience in the European Union

Since the early 2020s, the European Commission has been promoting the EU's resilience in four areas: **social and economic, geopolitical, green and digital** (European Commission, 2020[20]).

- The **social and economic** dimension of resilience is the ability to tackle economic shocks and achieve long-term structural change in a fair and inclusive way. The current economic model will require transformative changes to ensure its sustainability and the well-being of Europeans. Furthermore, eroding social cohesion will threaten trust in governments and the viability of the transitions.
- **Geopolitical** resilience relates to Europe bolstering its "open strategic autonomy" and global leadership role. Turbulent geopolitics and a reconfigured globalisation are especially relevant: this is challenging international co-operation on global issues such as climate change and the energy transition.
- **Green** resilience is about reaching climate neutrality by 2050, while mitigating and adapting to climate change, reducing pollution and restoring the capacity of ecological systems to sustain our ability to live well within planetary boundaries. Specifically, it refers to the increasing pressure to ensure sufficient private and public funding for sustainability, with the availability of funding challenged by broadening strategic policy priorities, demographic change and the economic transformation.
- **Digital** resilience is about ensuring that the way we live, work, learn, interact, and think in this digital age preserves and enhances human dignity, freedom, equality, security, democracy, and other European fundamental rights and values.

The most recent strategic foresight report (European Commission, 2023[23]) also points to the importance of a growing demand for skills and competencies for a sustainable future (the availability of workers equipped with appropriate technical and soft skills will be crucial for the EU's competitiveness). It also discusses implications of the war in Ukraine for democracy and the importance of growing socio-economic issues to governance.

Figure 2.2. Key challenges for the EU's sustainable transition



Source: (European Commission, 2023[23])

The European Commission has also indicated the importance of institutions and administrations, their inclusiveness, agility and their strategic foresight skills in ensuring long-term resilience of policy-making (European Commission, 2021[24]).

Source: OECD.

The European Union has set up resilience dashboards as a new tool to monitor resilience. They have been developed and co-created in discussions with Member States and other key stakeholders. The focus of this work is on the medium-to-long-term to best enable foresight-informed policies to mitigate vulnerabilities and strengthen capacities. While they reportedly draw on strategic foresight, actual data come with a time-lag and report on current situations without future development projections (the few notable exceptions include employment in industry with high automatisation risk and projected old-age dependency). Furthermore, as regional perspectives on the dashboard are missing, regional and municipal policy-making efforts are not captured.

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3 Strategic foresight system in Flanders

Given the important role of strategic foresight in policy-making and resilience, the government of Flanders has been taking steps to systematise its capabilities in the area. In 2021, a new and dedicated unit – Strategic Insights and Analyses (SIA) – was created at the Chancellery and Foreign Office as part of the recommendations of the Economic and Social Recovery Committees. Within the Flemish Resilience and Recovery plan (RRP) and the Flemish contribution to the RRP of Belgium monitoring activities, the unit would strongly benefit from high-level technical support to develop strategic foresight capacity. In 2022, the government of Flanders began collaborating with the OECD on assessing the current strategic foresight capacity of the government of Flanders and co-creating a blueprint for the systemic integration of strategic foresight into its policy-making system.

3.1 Strategic foresight system in Flanders

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This chapter presents the assessment of the strategic foresight ecosystem in Flanders. Strategic foresight cannot be evaluated solely through its methodological approaches or knowledge-based outputs. Assessment needs to encompass the creation, circulation and application of strategic foresight as an ecosystem (OECD, 2019[1]). The OECD conducted the assessment (see Box 3.1 on methodology) between September 2022 and June 2023.

Box 3.1. Assessment methodology

The assessment was produced based on desktop analysis, qualitative research in the form of individual interviews with stakeholders inside and outside the Flemish government, and a co-creation exercise with stakeholders.

Interview partners were selected based on their previous or present involvement in strategic foresight work, expertise on the topic and participation in collaborative foresight efforts. A total of 17 interviews took place, comprising 10 public officials, 3 academic researchers and 4 private-sector experts. The interviews lasted 60 minutes each and were mainly conducted online. They followed a semi-structured approach based on an interview script organised along relevant themes and issues to be covered in each conversation.

The qualitative data generated through interviews were analysed in a deductive manner, making use of the interview script's themes. These were adapted from elements of a foresight system identified in previous OECD research (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]; OECD, 2019[1])) and further refined to suit the project context.

Project partners in the Strategic Insights and Analyses Unit in the Flemish Chancellery and Foreign Office provided input. Stakeholders in the Flemish strategic foresight ecosystem further developed the analysis in an in-person workshop on the future of the Flemish strategic foresight system.

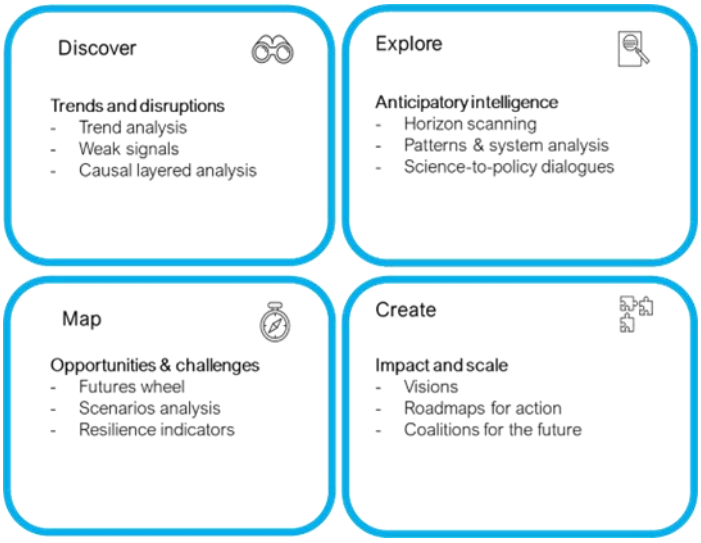
Source: OECD.

The strategic foresight system in the government of Flanders at a glance

The government of Flanders frequently uses strategic foresight to contribute to evidence-informed and future-proof policy-making. By deploying foresight, it considers future eventualities, scenarios and outcomes. Flanders' strategic foresight work is built on four fundamental functions (see Figure 3.1). Each plays a critical role in shaping policy, fostering resilience, and responding to emerging challenges. These

functions form the cornerstone of how foresight in the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office is employed to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world.

Figure 3.1. Strategic foresight functions in the Government of Flanders



Source: SIA, the Government of Flanders.

Discover: Understanding trends and disruptions

The first pillar of Flanders' strategic foresight work is to discover. This involves identifying and comprehending emerging trends and disruptions that have the potential to impact society and governance. This is typically done through extensive research, data analysis, environmental scanning, expert interviews, and horizon-scanning. Flanders leverages international data platforms to facilitate this, bringing together input from diverse international data platforms to inform its strategic outlook and scenario analyses.

Explore: Generating intelligence for informed decision-making

Following the discovery phase, Flanders' foresight work focuses on exploring the gathered information and intelligence to gain a comprehensive understanding of the changes taking place. This involves scenario analysis, systems thinking, and simulations to explore various possible futures. Exploration helps decision makers gain deeper insights into the consequences of different trends and events, enabling more informed decision-making.

Government representatives have continuously participated in European, international, national and scientific strategic foresight networks. These include ForLearn and Mutual Learning Exercise (MLE) on R&I Foresight (European Commission); CostActionA22; Forward-Looking Information and Services (European Environmental Agency); the OECD Government Foresight Network (international); and the Egmont Foresight Network (national).

Within the Chancellery and Foreign Office, the Strategic Insights and Analyses (SIA) unit serves as a knowledge broker, connecting with academia, business, and regional partners. SIA operates within the government, working closely with the minister-president of Flanders to provide evidence-based insights. SIA is currently also expanding this effort beyond Flanders to other regions to promote shared learning and collaborative responses to change.

Map: Making complex information more understandable

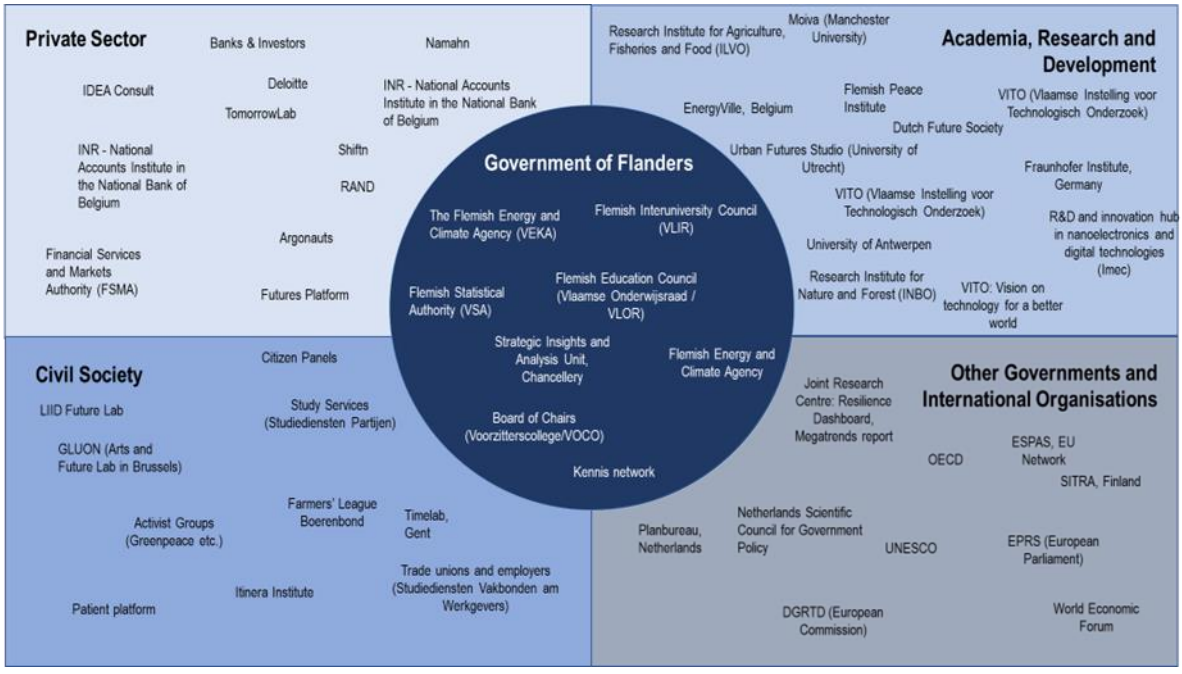
Mapping is the third pillar, which creates more understandable visual representations of potential future scenarios and their interrelationships. To visualise the future landscape, Flanders uses various mapping techniques such as causal loop diagrams, trend impact analysis, and scenario-mapping. This helps communication and consensus-building within organisations and among stakeholders. Mapping is a valuable tool for identifying key leverage points for effective intervention. An example of this concept is the Flemish Resilience Dashboard, which monitors the recovery and resilience of Flanders in the framework of Flanders' Recovery and Resilience Plan. This proactive tool ensures heightened readiness to tackle emerging disruptions and confront evolving challenges head-on.

Create: Shaping the desired future

The fourth and most pivotal function in Flanders' foresight work is the creation of strategies and visions based on insights from earlier phases. This includes strategic planning, policy development, and the implementation of concrete actions to steer towards the preferred future.

In summary, Flanders' strategic foresight work follows a systemic and comprehensive approach, starting with discovery and trend analysis, progressing to intelligence generation, policy translation, and, ultimately, the creation of actionable strategies and coalitions for a resilient and adaptive future. There is a variety of actors within the system who conduct or use strategic foresight (see Figure 3.2), yet systematising strategic foresight efforts is only starting and has been either concentrated around the activities of the recently created Strategic Insights and Analyses (SIA) unit or large-scale visioning exercises (e.g. Vision 2050 – see Box 3.3 below).

Figure 3.2. Strategic foresight actor map (prototype)



Note: This map was co-created with experts from the government of Flanders at a workshop in April 2022.
Source: OECD.

SIA has been systematically analysing challenges for the region and has launched a process for Flanders Outlook 2030 (Box 3.2). Since autumn 2023, the unit has also been co-ordinating strategic foresight

dialogue sessions on future scenarios with a focus on regional solutions for global challenges. These have followed the themes of the EU resilience and recovery approach (see Box 2.5). The government of Flanders has a history of long-term outlooks and visions (see Box 3.3 below) albeit their timeframes and roles in the policy-making system differ and lack regular updates. Furthermore, they seem to be very sensitive to political cycles, e.g. tend to lose importance over different political coalitions.

Box 3.2. Flanders Outlook 2030

In autumn 2022, the government of Flanders started the Flanders Outlook 2030 process to look at long-term policy trends and how they impact the resilience of the regions. The starting point for Flanders' outlook was a matrix based on the four resilience dimensions of the European Commission (socio-economic, geopolitical, green and digital) and the four clusters of core indicators that showcase the evolving context within which the projects of the Flemish Resilience Programme are advancing.

An 'outside in' approach was used in the design of the analysis. After mapping relevant external developments (Megatrends, EC), the 'as is' position of Flanders today was outlined. These two elements were then brought together around the four European resilience dimensions, with a fifth societal resilience dimension added. This formed the basis on which to look for challenges and opportunities with the EU's research and innovation programme, Horizon 2030.

During a working session with representatives from various policy areas of the Flemish government, 17 challenges and opportunities were identified. A document with a set of 'what if' questions served as inspiration for this session. This 'what if' approach is inspired by the Finnish SITRA report "Weak Signals", which departs from societal trends to create an out-of-the-box vision of the future through provocative, hypothetical questions.

The working session showed that the challenges and opportunities are not unrelated. Table 3.1 outlines the global drivers of change, and challenges and opportunities for Flanders in the four European resilience dimensions.

Table 3.1. European resilience dimensions, and challenges and opportunities for Flanders

European resilience dimensions	Challenges and opportunities for Flanders	Drivers of global change
Socio-economic	• Strengthening the economic and industrial fabric and competitiveness of Flanders • Labour market in transition • Quality, accessible, secure, and affordable living	• Changing nature of work • Widening inequalities • Increasing demographic imbalances
Sustainable	• European environmental, climate and energy goals • Climate resilience and adaptation • Support for and affordability of transitions towards more sustainability in societal systems	• Deepening resource scarcity: scarcity, availability and affordability of resources • Climate change and environmental degradation • Growing consumption
Digital	• Data and digitalisation as economic drivers • Ethical and security issues • Inclusivity within the digital transition • Dynamic regulations in line with the EU's digitalisation policy	• Accelerating technological change and hyperconnectivity
Geopolitics	• Changing geopolitical order and fragmentation causing geo-economic tensions	• Changing security paradigm

	• Strategic dependencies and economic protectionism • Integration of migration flows	• Expanding influence of global East and South • Increasing demographic imbalances • Increasing significance of migration • Continuing urbanisation • Changing governance systems • Increasing demographic imbalances

Source: Flanders Outlook Summary document.

Box 3.3. Vision 2050

In March 2016, the government of Flanders presented a new strategic outlook for the future based on megatrend analysis: "Vision 2050: a long-term strategy for Flanders". This policy document sets out a vision for an inclusive, open, resilient, and internationally connected region that creates prosperity and well-being for its citizens in a smart, innovative and sustainable manner.

Vision 2050 outlines several key areas of action initiated by the government of Flanders, i.e. the seven transition priorities. These include: circular economy; smart living; industry 4.0; lifelong learning and dynamic professional career; healthcare and welfare; transport and mobility; and energy. Transition managers, responsible ministries, and transitions spaces (collaboration areas to connect and work together with stakeholders) were assigned to each topic.

To implement the strategy, a new governance model was proposed, inspired by transition management principles: focus on system innovation; take into account a long-term perspective; involve stakeholders in the transition process; and learn from experiments and innovative initiatives.

The vision was updated in 2018 for 2019-2024.

Source: (Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Affairs, 2018[3])

In addition, science-to-policy initiatives (Box 3.2) using strategic foresight have been set up to support evidence-informed policy-making using a long-term perspective. Researchers and policy makers work across five topics: artificial intelligence; labour market and its integration mechanisms; health care; climate policy and food systems; and strategic interests and international security. The outcomes of the dialogues were published in the Flemish Journal for Government Management (VTOM).

Box 3.4. Initiative: Science-to-policy dialogues

Inspired by the Netherlands' Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR; see Box 3.10) and leveraging the support of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), the Flemish Government launched the Science for Policy dialogues in 2021 to explore long-term trends in priority policy areas for Flanders. With contributions from researchers across Flemish universities, the insights were discussed in September 2022 at a joint seminar with policy makers and academics.

The strategic foresight dialogues are part of Flanders' "Knowledge Government" project with which the government invests in research, data and policy analysis for recovery and resilience. During this event, scientists and researchers from the Netherlands and Flanders engaged in dialogue with policy makers on a long-term perspective after recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. The aim was to support the strategic policy advice of the Flemish government with scientifically-based insights and analyses.

Based on a previously published report by the WRR ("COVID-19: Expert visions on the consequences for society and policy"), five topics for the dialogues were jointly chosen:

- Artificial intelligence
- Labour market and integration
- Health care
- Climate policy and food
- Strategic interests and international security

The researchers wrote scientific contributions as outcomes for the dialogues (Lauwerier et al., 2022[4]; Smolders et al., 2022[5]; De Moor et al., 2022[6]; Marx et al., 2022[7]; Van Den Broeck et al., 2022[8]). These were discussed at the plenary event in September, giving voice to all participants. The reflections were collected by a team of visual harvesters. Video testimonials were created in which participants could highlight their main conclusions.

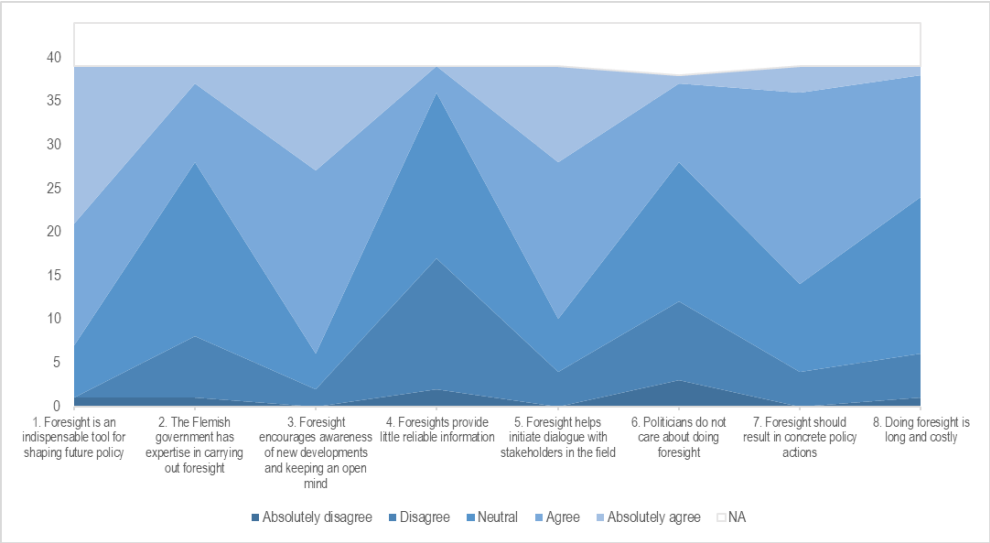
The Flemish government will launch similar pilot projects with other regions over 2023. The aim will be to reflect upon and discuss strategic challenges and foresight practices.

Source: (Nuyts et al., 2022[9])

Overall, awareness of the importance of strategic foresight has been quite high in the civil service of Flanders. In 2010 the government of Flanders in partnership with the European Commission conducted research about the awareness and use of strategic foresight by the civil service leadership in the government (Verlet and De Smedt, 2010[10]). The results showed that foresight was seen as indispensable in outlining new policy among the respondents. Three-quarters of the opinion is that foresight helps to look at future possible developments with an open mind (see Figure 3.3 below). The research also showed a wide diversity in staff being deployed to strategic foresight activities, with foresight having a mainly policy support role – OECD's current research indicates this has not changed over the last 10 years. Notably, there was also scepticism in the civil service about the importance politicians assigned to strategic foresight.

Figure 3.3. Statements about strategic foresight

Survey carried out among senior leaders in the government of Flanders in 2009 (N=44)



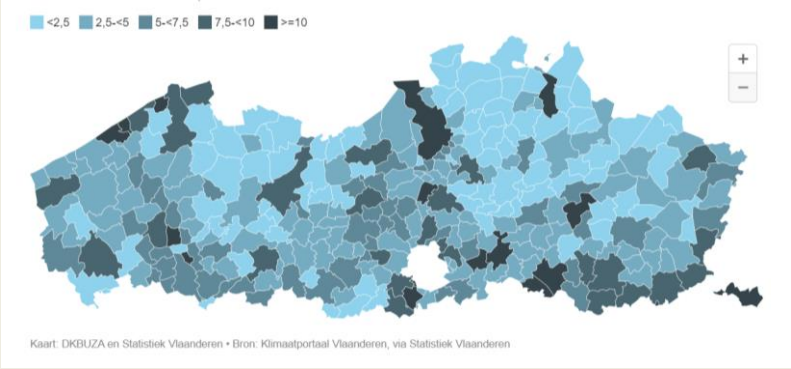
Source: (Verlet and De Smedt, 2010[10])

In the area of intelligence, SIA has been advancing on the government of Flanders resilience dashboard (Box 3.5). In addition to reporting on current developments, the dashboard also presents data over three different time horizons. The statistics closely monitor recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic and the overall crisis resilience of Flanders. This is done through a set of core indicators such as real economic growth, population in poverty or social exclusion, waterlogging and flood risks, and life satisfaction.

Box 3.5. Government of Flanders resilience dashboard

In line with the direction set by the European Commission, the government of Flanders monitors the fulfilment of its resilience and recovery plan, which includes 7 flagship initiatives, 35 clusters and 181 projects. Presented on a dashboard, a comprehensive set of core indicators showcases the evolving context within which these projects advance. These indicators can be divided into two groups: a first set describes the macroeconomic and budgetary context in which the implementation of the Flemish Resilience Plan unfolds; a second set is made up of indicators on which the recovery plan aims to have a direct or indirect impact (sustainable, inclusive and healthy growth). Together, the indicators provide a snapshot of the evolving economic and social situation in Flanders (e.g. Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Share of buildings with possible flooding in the current climate (% of municipalities in Flanders)



Sources: Wateroverlast en overstromingsgevaar | Vlaanderen.be, https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/vlaamse-veerkracht/dashboard-vlaamse-veerkracht

3.3 Strategic foresight system: Actors, needs and opportunities

Having devised an analytical framework on strengthening capacity for strategic foresight (OECD, 2019[1]; Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]), this OECD report puts forward observations about the five key systemic elements that help embed strategic foresight in policy-making in the government of Flanders. These elements include (1) demand and mandate; (2) capabilities and skills; (3) institutional arrangements; (4) embeddedness in policy cycle; and (5) feedback and learning loops. The summary findings are presented in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2. Main assessment findings based on strategic foresight systemic elements

The needs are addressed in clusters in the following section of the report.

Demand and mandate	Capabilities and skills	Institutional arrangements	Embeddedness in the policy cycle	Feedback and learning loops
• Need for high-level sponsorship of strategic foresight • Need for explicit mandate and cross-sectoral anticipatory work • Need to address biases in understanding and using strategic foresight • Need for resources • Need to address silos and encroached expert-based communities • Need to capture international	• Need to invest in strategic foresight skills • Need to address the influence of outsourcing of strategic foresight capacity • Need to make clear the connection of strategic foresight with long-term policy planning • Need for resources for strategic foresight • Need to share strategic foresight learnings • Need to connect small pockets of in-	• Need to increase co-ordination in the strategic foresight network model • Need for managerial-level support • Need for frameworks and guidelines for multi-level strategic foresight • Need for strategic direction for strategic foresight • Need for systemic action and going beyond one-off interactions and disconnection from policy priorities	• Need to integrate strategic foresight with the political cycle and invest in continuous development of strategic foresight • Need for clear strategic guidance • Need to balance joint visioning with thematic strategic conversations	• Need to increase learning on strategic foresight including data availability and usability for reviewing and monitoring policies • Need for knowledge-sharing • Need for continuous community-building • Need for joined-up learning

incentives for futures work	house competences and isolated practitioners • Need to address barriers to acquiring skills • Need to increase engagement with strategic foresight practice			

Source: OECD.

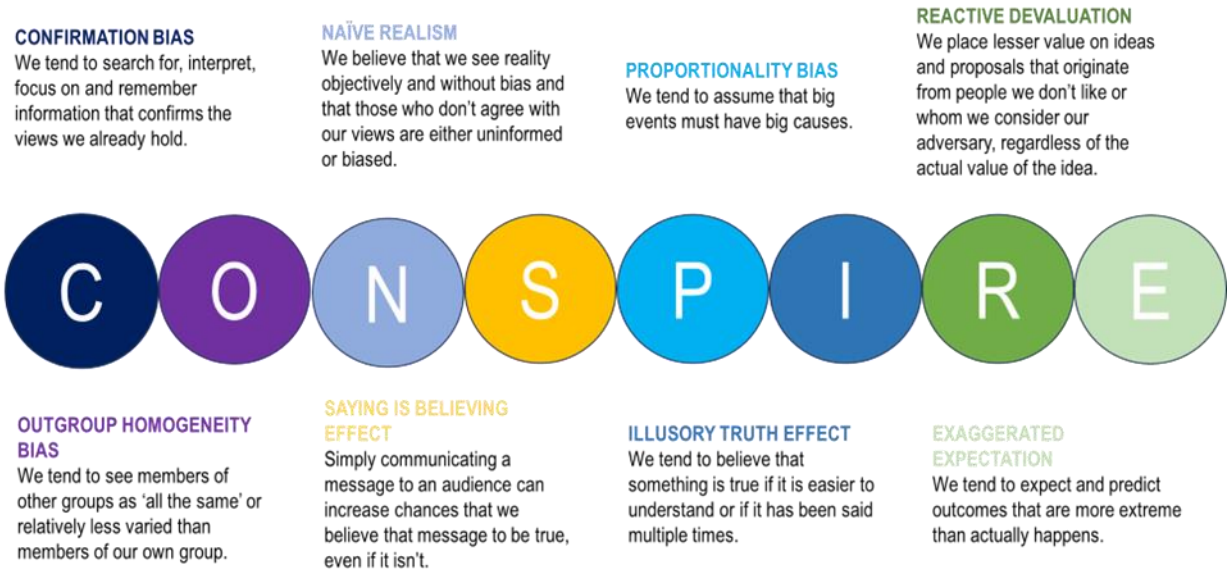
Demand and mandate

The adoption of foresight in government requires continued demand and strong mandates. While Flemish public administration is still perceived as reactive to, rather than proactive on, challenges, the financial crisis in 2008 and 2020-2021 pandemic bear out the need for strategic foresight in policy-making.

The demand for strategic foresight is characterised by specific shortcomings and gaps:

- **Prevalence of short-term thinking over strategic planning.** Policy makers are often pressured to make "pragmatic" decisions on a short-term (Interview K), "day-to-day" basis (Interview P). This contributes to an overreliance on ready-made solutions and simplistic performance indicators, and excludes the value that strategic foresight brings to decision-making. Strategic foresight is perceived as an "academic" exercise or "advisory" practice rather than something embedded in the policy cycle. It can often lack immediate and actual applications for policy-making purposes (Interview O). This requires the government of Flanders to clearly state the role and importance of strategic foresight in the policy-making process and create the mandate for public administration to integrate it into their everyday work.
- **Biases in understanding and using strategic foresight.** Policy makers in Flanders seem to perceive strategic foresight with specific biases. Misconceptions about strategic foresight and a reluctance to try it have prevented buy-in. Many policy makers do not have any direct, conceptual or practical understanding of strategic foresight. This complicates how they use it (foresight is prone to confirmation bias, for example; see Figure 3.5 below). Since policy makers are held accountable for their insights about the future, they are hesitant to produce foresight outputs that may be perceived as "binding" assertions (Interview E) and act as yardsticks for later assessments and criticisms in the public space and media (Interview N).

Figure 3.5. Most prevalent biases in strategic foresight



Source: OECD Strategic Foresight Unit (OECD, Forthcoming[11])

Strategic foresight creates a safe space for policy makers to test ideas, and explore different scenarios and potentially cascading effects. The role of public administration is to explore different options and the evidence base for different scenarios to support political decision-making in the best way possible. However, in the Flemish government there is a misconception that exploring the future only belongs to the political domain. While this is not the case in all OECD countries (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]), public administrations need to be more knowledgeable about the role and usefulness of strategic foresight, and have clear licence to design and test policy options in a safe environment. This may involve better collaboration between the cabinet, strategic advisory boards and the administration. In other countries, such as Finland (see Box 3.6), the strategic foresight function has been addressed in innovative ways such as dialogues between public servants and politicians.

Box 3.6. Finland timeout dialogues: Defining the roles of administrators and politicians in an anticipatory governance system

The Government of Finland has a history of participatory methodologies as part of their policy-making structures. For example, the government promoted the Lockdown Dialogues together with the Dialogue Academy, Timeout Foundation and Ministry of Finance to monitor COVID-19 and capture people's feelings, opinions and expectations about the pandemic.

More generally, the Prime Minister's Office has been producing a Government Report on the Future since 1993. /in co-operation with the Timeout Foundation for the 2023 report, it organised 50 citizen dialogues on the future of Finland. Citizens from various backgrounds were invited to share their thoughts, hopes and dreams about the future of Finland in four two-hour sessions.

Timeout dialogues between politicians and public servants

Finland aims to better incorporate anticipatory innovation in its governance structure. In dialogue together in September 2021 – April 2022, public servants and politicians outlined their roles in the anticipatory innovation governance system. Acknowledging the mutual roles, functions, processes and challenges connected to anticipation is also vital for a new governance system. These topics were discussed in different groups of six to ten individuals, equally divided between politicians and public servants.

This work informed the following suggestions for the Finnish governance model: appointing an objective facilitator for dialogues who enjoys trust from both sides; establishing a dedicated process for politicians and public officials to get to know each other at the beginning of a new term; and embedding anticipation into existing future-seeking moments, such as the development of the Government Programme.

Source: (OECD, 2022[12]).

- **Dispersed initiatives**: Strategic foresight initiatives have been established, but they are dispersed and inconsistent across the public sector. Overall, there is limited knowledge and use of strategic foresight approaches, methods and tools in the Flemish public administration (Interview F).

> *"If you look at the trajectory of the past two decades, it's a very chequered path, so to speak, with ups and downs, a very haphazard development and investment in foresight capacity, with no sustained efforts, and no high levels of support and endorsement of these instruments and supports and capabilities inside of the government." (Interview N).*

Here, three areas of improvement can be highlighted: (i) investing more in *co-ordination* and sharing the results of strategic foresight conducted in distinct sectors and agencies; (ii) ensuring the *continuity* of strategic foresight results and creating regular discussion points to reflect on the findings (e.g. yearly meetings), and (iii) *consolidating* strategic foresight efforts across government to demonstrate the role and usefulness of the approach. There is a variety of ways these bridges can be built, some of which are highlighted in Box 3.7 below.

Box 3.7. Examples of strategic foresight structures and mandates

Government Report of the Future (Finland)

The Prime Minister's Office in Finland is formally responsible for co-ordinating the preparation of the Government Report on the Future, which traditionally precedes national elections and discusses long-term future prospects for the country.

Komet Committee (Sweden)

The Committee for Technological Innovation and Ethics (Komet) was established by the Swedish government on 14 August 2018 and operated until 2022. Its mission was to help the government identify policy challenges, reduce uncertainty about existing regulations, and accelerate policy development linked to fourth industrial revolution technologies.

Civil Service Renewal 2030 (CSR2030) (Ireland)

The CSR2030 is an ambitious 10-year strategy of reform for the civil service that formally sets as one of its main goals to equip the civil service with the capacity to prepare for the future and integrate future-thinking into policy development.

Regulatory Horizons Council (RHC) (UK)

The RHC is an independent expert committee that identifies the implications of technological innovation and provides government with impartial, expert advice on the regulatory reform required to support its rapid and safe introduction. It scans the horizon for technological innovation and trends, building on existing work and data across departments and regulators.

Strategic Analysis Center (STRATA) (Lithuania)

In Lithuania, the Strategic Analysis Centre (STRATA) aims to strengthen evidence-based policy-making with foresight activities at the centre of government and to link it with national strategic planning initiatives such as the *State Progress Strategy 2050* and the *National Progress Plan 2030* (OECD 2021).

National Foresight and Strategy Office (Spain)

The Office has been mandated to ensure that long-term analysis is regularly undertaken across the government and that its work is seen as a credible and relevant source of knowledge across ministries. Placed in the Cabinet of the Presidency of the Government of Spain, the National Foresight and Strategy Office benefits from leadership buy-in and support from a specific legal instrument. In 2021, the Office published the report *España 2050: Fundamentos y propuestas para una Estrategia Nacional de Largo Plazo.*

Source: OECD.

- **International collaboration is a strong driver of strategic foresight:** With Brussels as the capital city of its region, the Flemish government naturally derives many of its ideas for policy initiatives from the European Commission, European Parliament and other international organisations. The international dimension of policy-making is built into how the government of Flanders tackles policy challenges. International initiatives could be coupled with alternative future scenarios. In some areas, such as regarding Brexit, this has already been happening. More can be done to insert strategic foresight into the government's international collaboration to advance its economic interest and prepare for future crises (the potential has already been shown through the regional dialogues the Flemish government is spearheading with new future-oriented collaborations between initiatives emerging).
- **Siloed culture**: Cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary, strategic foresight goes against siloed traditions in public administration (Interview H). Entrenched administrative routines and ways of thinking resist ready adoption of strategic foresight. This is especially so for the government of Flanders, which has a tradition of structural policy research whose funding is used to finance external scientific institutions for long periods of time.

> *Most often, the foresight work is done at the project level. People come together, cross-fertilisation initiatives are taken, and analysis is done. Foresight [products] are being produced, communicated, used, and then it stops. There are some people who can work in the long-term. A little bit beyond that. But [..] you don't have foresight practitioners full-time.*

Nevertheless, the Flemish ecosystem has important enablers of strategic foresight processes and practices. These elements support the ongoing creation, circulation and application of strategic foresight in the region:

- **Outstanding champions**: Strategic foresight initiatives, especially at the organisational level, have been supported by internal and external champions.

- **Need for long-term strategies**: There is a general consensus among public-sector actors, academics, civil society organisations and economic interest associations (e.g. trade unions) in favour of adopting strategic thinking (Interview O).
- **Expressed interest among policy makers**: In a survey distributed to public-sector managers in 2009, 41% agreed that strategic foresight is needed in government (Verlet and De Smedt, 2010[10]). The current project finds the same. This interest is a base for building consensus on integrating a strategic foresight function into public-sector organisations.
- **Influence from international organisations**: The promotion of strategic foresight at international organisations like the European Union and the OECD can incentivise its use in Flanders. Foresight funding opportunities, and calls for collaboration and peer exchanges with other regions (e.g. Basque Country) and countries like Finland and the Netherlands on foresight initiatives can strengthen foresight capacity in the Flemish public administration.

Capabilities and skills

Strategic foresight capabilities and skills can be perceived in different ways: systemic, organisational, individual, and "social imaginaries" (sets of values, institutions, laws, and symbols through which people imagine their social whole) (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[5]) (OECD, 2019[1]).

Regarding systemic strategic foresight skills and capabilities in the Flemish context, this assessment has identified a set of characteristics:

- **Strategic foresight capabilities and skills are scarce and dispersed.** There is a widespread sense that strategic foresight skills are lacking in the public administration of the government of Flanders. Futures and foresight capabilities have been developed haphazardly and the process has not been sustainable. As a result, the shortage of skills and capabilities makes it difficult to start and maintain strategic foresight interventions. Investing in training and acquiring needed skills system-wide is necessary (see Box 3.8 below).

> *There are within the Flemish government tiny pockets of people and individuals with foresight competency. And who, I wouldn't say, do it daily, but have it in the forefront of their minds. And regularly applying it, they are only individuals and they are completely dispersed in the system. (Interview F)*

Box 3.8. Strategic foresight capacity-building programme in Ireland

Currently, the government of Ireland is upgrading policy development and strategic foresight across the whole public service. This work will increase the ability of the public service to address complex policy in areas such as climate change, digitalisation, demographic changes, and long-term healthcare, and to contribute to future-proofing such policies. Having a model of strategic foresight and anticipation to steward public policies is important for building more effective, legitimate, and proactive institutions suited to a changing context, and evolving and emerging needs. Building capacity for strategic foresight is essential as assessments revealed a fragmented skill-set and limited awareness about it.

With the support of the OECD, the government of Ireland piloted a strategic foresight training programme aimed at senior executives and policy makers in spring 2023. For policy makers, the training concentrated on strategic foresight specific competences (learning, framing, scanning, futuring, visioning, designing and adapting) and equipping them with the ability to scan their environment, connect different futuring techniques to their policy issues and selecting strategic foresight tools and methods to specific needs in policy-making. For senior decision makers, the OECD ran the training concentrated primarily on understanding strategic foresight, visioning, decision making with uncertainty,

and creating the right organisational culture for the use of strategic foresight methods. The training was well received and perceived as impactful by participants. The developed modules have been integrated into ongoing training offers across the public service.

Training was accompanied by practical demonstration cases to showcase the application of strategic foresight across different policy areas. In the latter, a total of nine scenarios in demographics, data flows and enterprise mix were co-created together with the public service of Ireland.

Source: OECD.

- **Foresight capabilities are associated with external rather than internal collaborators.** Given the limited level of internal foresight capabilities, skills and opportunities, recourse has been to external consultancy. This creates an ambivalent situation. Having external consultants carry out foresight analysis has advantages: it is a faster, expert process, allowing for specialised feedback, and promotes relationships with the foresight ecosystem. However, using external consultants undermines the government investing in its own anticipatory skills.

> *Most often there's a co-operation with external advocacy. If you don't have the capacity within your organisation, you need to collaborate. And then of course, it's beneficial to make use of the opportunity and move fast. If you work with consultants or with external people, you can buy in the expertise and it can go fast. But the drawback is that when the initiatives are over, you also lose the expertise. (Interview M).*

- The reliance on external consulting also limits analysis to the methodologies consultants offer. Some policy development processes, such as the response to Brexit and mobility initiatives, have applied foresight and future literacy internally. This has reinforced internal capabilities through concrete practice. However, further skill development in strategic foresight and stakeholder management is needed to develop more systematic futures work that is integrated with policy action. To avoid siloeing, this should be extended across policy teams and not allocated to specific groups. Reliance on external analysis has the risk of being disconnected from internal decision-making, limiting the potential impact of foresight analysis the day-to-day setting of priorities.
- Relationships with foresight ecosystem stakeholders: Outside of private-sector consultants, relationships with ecosystem partners can ensure access to high-quality and robust knowledge (namely, in collaborating with universities and research centres) and the capacity to provide democratic legitimacy and political visibility (through the engagement of citizens and civil society partners). From the perspective of academic experts and civil society representatives, “the voice of the advice can be stronger” when it comes to long-term policy issues (Interview B). Flanders has a “Steunpunt” network (network of knowledge centres in universities for providing advice, policy monitoring and evaluation to government), but the ability of academia to respond to specific government interests in policy and policy timelines is often limited. The “disconnection” between knowledge centres and policy-making (Interview E) requires a stronger stakeholder engagement process.
- **Foresight methods, mainly participatory scenario-building, have been applied to policy-making processes in Flanders in thematic areas** (e.g. arts, culture, sports, media, youth, labour market, digitalisation, sustainability, and mobility), but these learnings are not captured or shared systematically. Methods are applied flexibly and mixed with various tools from other disciplines, such as systems thinking. Methodological knowledge comes from external sourcing that supports foresight work with scenario-building and futures games, among other methods, which is seen as positive due to the variety of novel tools. Foresight methods are participatory. Foresight experts can deepen and/or fine-tune methodological approaches while involving different stakeholders in the process prevents “tunnel vision” (Interview I). However, interviewees feared that involving

stakeholders laid the foresight process open to perceptions of being potentially manipulated by lobby groups. The complexity of scenario-building requires much stakeholder time and involvement in carrying out these exercises. This is exacerbated when stakeholders put pressure on scenario development because of inadequate resources and short timeframes.

Box 3.9. Outsourcing strategic foresight analysis: Germany

Some ministries in the German government have a long tradition of carrying out futures analysis. In the Federal Chancellery's assessment of how much foresight practice has been institutionalised, 6 out of 15 federal ministries (including the Chancellery) are described to have highly institutionalised foresight work in place. This includes a wide range of policy fields ranging from foreign affairs and defence to science and education, and the centre of government.

The study also finds that futures insights are not well embedded in policy decision-making. Interviewees say that there is not so much a shortage of anticipatory intelligence within the system as problems in putting that intelligence to real use in decision-making and developing policy options (Warnke, Priebe and Veit, 2021[13]).This can partly be explained by the fact that foresight analysis is most often outsourced to external providers.

For example, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research has been doing futures analysis for many years. It started with the commissioning of Delphi studies in the 1990s that examined global developments in science and technology through regular interviews with experts. In the 2000s, the ministry launched the initiative "Forschungsdialog Futur" (Research Dialogue Future) that developed visions on relevant futures issues through workshops, events and virtual dialogue with 1 500 experts. From 2007 to 2009, the first "foresight cycle" was launched where international experts examined technological trends to identify seven future areas discussed with thought leaders in politics and society. The second cycle took place from 2012 to 2014 and focused on societal shifts and how these connect to technological developments. This work eventually fed into the drafting of "stories from the future" for 2030. In 2019, the ministry created a futures office tasked with the bi-annual identification of futures issues to be discussed with a wider group of stakeholders.

While the anticipatory intelligence produced in these various foresight processes is diverse and of high-quality, this knowledge does not necessarily feed into the policy-making cycle as most analysis is carried out externally. Providers with foresight capabilities (such as the research institute Fraunhofer and foresight consultancies Z_punkt and Prognos AG) are tasked with conducting research, carrying out workshops and drafting reports. Significant budgets were allocated for this purpose, not only in the Ministry of Education and Science, but also others. But, there is limited to no connection of these studies to policy-planning processes or the development of policy priorities. They remain optional inputs and recommendations. The Chancellery's study concludes that futures work often contrasts with the dominant work and leadership culture in the German administration leading to limited demand for their insights from decision-makers (Warnke, Priebe and Veit, 2021[13]).

While the impact gap of strategic foresight work in Germany cannot solely be explained by the degree to which futures analysis is externalised, this remains an important factor. Given the significant budgets spent on producing anticipatory intelligence, limited resources are invested into building the right structures, practices and governance mechanisms to ensure this intelligence is absorbed in effective ways.

Source: OECD.

- **Building capabilities through continuous strategic foresight initiatives and avoiding one-off initiatives**. Similar to other OECD countries, policy makers in Flanders face significant time constraints in their work and continuous strategic foresight work is lacking. High-level mandates and demand for strategic foresight are ad hoc and strategic foresight capacities are not developed systematically in the government of Flanders. Strategic foresight is currently conducted in very specific areas or sporadically across the system. With an outlook process only every five years it is difficult for foresight to be relevant and specific enough to be useful across different policy fields and policy cycles. Because strategic foresight provides different value at different policy-making stages, it needs to be consistent and diffused to be fully exploited. At the minimum, base-level internal foresight capacities have to be permanently retained so that policy teams can use them in times of accelerated need. Continued exchanges between internal foresight analysts and decision makers in government is also helpful.

In terms of organisation, capabilities and skills are embedded in public-sector organisations and add value to the processes of design and execution of strategic foresight interventions (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]). For Flanders, this assessment reports:

- **Small pockets of in-house competencies and isolated practitioners in public organisations**: In the Flemish public administration, there are just "very small pockets of people with competency" in strategic foresight who "have it in the forefront of their minds" (Interview F). Among those "regularly applying it [foresight]", there "are only individuals [who do it] and they are completely dispersed" (Interview F).

In terms of individuals, strategic foresight capabilities and skills are related to public servants' attitudes and behaviours, as well as their workplace attributes (Monteiro and Dal Borgo, 2023[2]). For Flanders, some points figure prominently in the assessment:

- **Brokerage and intrapreneurship**: The existence of active practitioners in public organisations, who are "not necessarily at the senior level" (Interview N), nevertheless, demonstrates the viability of strategic foresight. They are proof of this new skill set and "open thinking" that strategic foresight represents to the public sector. With their "persistence", skilfulness and "savvy", and their capacity to be "outside the conventional to experiment, to take a bit of risks", these practitioners (informally) support public servants and managers willing to engage with strategic foresight.
- **There is a baseline of futures literacy that needs to be better connected**: While there is an uneven distribution of futures literacy levels across public administration, this can be built upon. Most public servants and managers struggle to find the time, skills and opportunity to improve their understanding and use of strategic foresight.
- **Public perception and communication of strategic foresight:** There are challenges associated with the communication of strategic foresight methods and practices to a wider audience. Raising public awareness on specific projects can improve recognition of strategic foresight as a legitimate and valuable policy-making support.

Institutional arrangements

"Institutionalisation is considered to be a process of creating 'appropriate' routines that become habitualised or internalized as legitimate behaviour, and institutional arrangements provide instruments that governments can use to facilitate this (policy) process within and/or between organisations or programs" (UN-GGIM, 2017[14]). Strategic foresight relies on institutional arrangements to provide framing, support, stewardship and sustainability to its processes and practices. Although institutional arrangements can assume different levels of formalisation and take on different formats, their ultimate goal is to embed and sustain "the capacity to both detect and critically to act on signals about the future" in governments (SOIF, 2021[15]).

This report assesses the institutional arrangements that shape the creation, circulation and application of strategic foresight (though strategic foresight in the government of Flanders currently does not rely on formalised processes and practices). Institutional features that characterise the Flemish public administration as a whole, such as the lack of co-ordination between federal and regional levels, and sectoral siloeing (Interview K), have implications for strategic foresight.

The most noted gaps and blockages in Flanders are summarised in these points:

- **Lack of co-ordination between departments and organisation on strategic foresight initiatives**: The strategic foresight system in the government of Flanders acts in a network manner with strong pockets of excellence here and there. However, co-ordination is necessary for sharing cross-government strategic foresight needs and wicked problems that come up against organisational silos. Shared learning and systemic capacity building also require co-ordination. These responsibilities and functions need to be better defined in the government of Flanders, with clear roles for different actors assigned.

  Co-ordination across silos is necessary to allow for exchanges and interventions to happen "not just vertically within the sectors, but also in a horizontal way" (Interview B). Co-ordination would also allow foresight "capacity" that is currently scattered across the foresight ecosystem to "join forces together" to raise the profile of future-oriented approaches among policy agendas (Interview C). Many interviewees referenced the Netherlands' WRR-model (see Box 3.10) – an independent advisory body for government policy – as a good system. There are, however, some signals that this alone would not work in the Flemish context. Already existing advisory boards in Flanders are seen as administrative overseers of Flanders' future-oriented work, but they are perceived to be isolated and lacking in strong strategic foresight competence and could benefit from working more horizontally among policy topics. Current administrative architecture sporadically addresses anticipatory work in sectoral policies such as foreign affairs and migration. These systems provide anticipatory intelligence to Flanders' administration on sensitive issues and crisis management, but need to be created from scratch when new types of crises emerge.

> *There should be more consultation between existing advisory boards. Not only with the vertical but also in a horizontal way. And I think integrating with them a kind of reflection room, advisor room of academics, or think tank or something like that would not be a bad idea. (Interview C)*
>
> *Either you compartmentalise the capacity for foresight within policy areas, or you build a capacity which goes across the silos. And I think there's something to be said for both approaches. When you build a capacity that goes across policy domains, it risks becoming some enclave or an isolated body that has no traction in any policy domain because nobody is, so to speak, championing it. And, of course, the opposite risk exists when you do it compartmentalised. Then the challenge is to connect all these different practitioners across administrations and policy areas into a kind of a community of practice that can, too, learn and deepen its craft. (Interview N)*

Box 3.10. The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR)

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) is an independent advisory body for government policy. Its position is governed by the Establishing a Scientific Council on Government Policy act of 30 June 1976 (Instellingswet WRR). The task of the WRR is to provide the Dutch government and parliament with science-based strategic advice on strategic issues that are likely to have important political and societal consequences.

The research projects and publications of the WRR do not focus on specific policy areas, but on cross-cutting themes that require co-ordinated policy-making across domains. The work is meant to sharpen

the focus on the long-term aspects of public policy to complement day-to-day policy-making, which often focuses on immediate problems that dominate the agenda of the day. The reports of WRR seek to open new perspectives and directions for public policy by questioning assumptions and problem definitions that are often taken for granted, by analysing the problems and unintended consequences of existing policies, as well as by drawing on expertise from across scientific disciplines and stakeholder communities to inform and enrich the public debate.

In addition, WRR is often seen as an "honest broker" in the system between politicians, citizens, research community and other stakeholders (Kremer, 2019[16])

Source: https://english.wrr.nl/

- **Lack of frameworks and guidelines for multi-level strategic foresight:** Strategic foresight has remained without strong and clear legal and regulatory instruments that define its role in decision-making processes and policy planning in Flanders. Consequently, it has limited or no funding at the central level (exception made to single projects or specific units). Foresight has not been incorporated into the systems of rewards and incentives (e.g. performance evaluation of public servants or organisations). Lastly, there is no specialised training among public servants in this area. Regulations limit the capacity to hire internal resources for strategic foresight, leading to outsourcing (Interview D). Any drive to increase the role of strategic foresight in policy-making (both in terms of regulation and resources) should be coupled with adequate support to develop strategic foresight capacity internally.
- **Need for a network and co-creation model.** Strategic foresight sharing is often based on one-off interactions. The circulation of knowledge is mostly restricted to informal exchanges in the absence of an established network connecting all sectors and agencies' strategic foresight practitioners. A network can create a sense of continuity and maintain momentum between events and projects: its absence means that any new initiative has to start practically from scratch and devote exceptional amounts of energy to re-connect and revamp stakeholders and collaborators.

> *Every time, when we organise a foresight project and a foresight exercise, there's always recognition that this is really interesting. And that we should do that more. Especially with the people you involve, but then what happens? When it's over, people go to their day-to-day and then it fades over time. And then sometimes, when there's a new incentive coming in, you can try to get some of the old people that have been immersed in foresight in the past, and you can bring them in. (Interview M)*

Next to the challenges outlined above, there are important enablers already in place at the institutional level. The most relevant insights can be organised around three points:

- **Partnerships with foresight ecosystem partners:** The existence of stable and trusted relationships with ecosystem partners has become an enduring characteristic of strategic foresight in Flanders. These external partners can provide high-quality research and advice. These players can also assume a neutral role that helps facilitate dialogue, especially when there are political sensitivities.

> *It makes it easier to discuss certain things because if there is an external facilitator there, it opens the discussion much easier than when we would do that because we are seen as part of the politics. So, we noticed that that works better, there was a more open discussion. (Interview K)*

  This "external voice" can also add an additional support to initiatives, especially from the academic sector (Interview L).

- **Engaged managers create demand for strategic foresight**: High-level public-sector managers can make room for specific interventions in their organisations and commission project-based strategic foresight approaches. In doing so, they inscribe these initiatives in their internal agendas and encourage their teams to embrace futures methods and tools. These managers have "the capacity to convince others" that effects a shift in the "willingness" of others to adopt strategic foresight (Interview I).
- **Potential of international networking**: There is promise in the ongoing development of a specific regional multi-level network for strategic foresight, which is being promoted by the Strategic Insights and Analyses unit. Among other potential advantages, this international network can provide (i) a platform for interactions and exchanges of information and knowledge (e.g. social media page); (ii) a shared space for collaboration around common challenges and interests across government areas and agencies; and (iii) a structure that ensures continuity to the discussions among partners, including its curation and transmission across time (e.g. proceedings of the sessions).

Box 3.11. Developing an anticipatory innovation governance system in Finland

The Finnish government has acted as the pilot case for the anticipatory innovation governance model co-developed with the OECD and the European Commission (OECD, 2022[12]). Finland has a highly developed strategic foresight systems (see Figure 3.6), which comprises various institutions with formal and informal roles fostering anticipatory governance. Yet, there are still issues with strategic foresight impacting policies and innovations across the government.

Figure 3.6. Futures and foresight activities in the government of Finland on the national level

Source: (OECD, 2022[12])

In 2020-2021, the OECD carried out an assessment of the governance system in Finland, specifically focused on assets, preconditions, and gaps within the wider public-sector policy-making and steering system in Finland that may stand in the way or help implement an anticipatory innovation approach.

The work outlined the need for changes in the regulative, legislative, strategic, budgetary, and procurement functions of government and defined new functions connected to government planning and transition management. Other actions involved:

- Systematising the government transition process to improve the continuity of long-term reforms and institutional memory
- Developing new methods and governance approaches to plan responses to emerging issues
- Establishing structures for regular collective sense-making, visioning and exploration of alternatives
- Testing new approaches to allocate budgetary resources to emerging phenomena
- Reforming regulatory approaches to enable experimentation
- Designing training, teams, and roles to increase the understanding and application of anticipatory approaches
- Institutionalising dialogue and deliberation to build trust between citizens, public officials, and politicians in order to enable greater engagement with uncertainty
- Connecting the futures and foresight system to policy-making
- Tracking and assessing the use of anticipatory approaches.

Source: (OECD, 2022[12])

Embeddedness in (multi-level) decision-making

The use of strategic foresight in decision-making in the government is Flanders is influenced by four different areas:

- First, the **turning point of the political cycle** and the creation of the memorandum for government formation can signal the importance of strategic foresight in decision-making.

  > *The administration has the responsibility and the task to start to prepare the contribution from the administration [note: part of the Flanders Outlook contribution], which we present and put forward to the political parties that will negotiate the coalition of the next government. In that context, there is a contextual analysis being performed at this point in time. So, the assignment for doing a foresight initiative can also be institutionalised. And in that sense, comes from top-down. (Interview F).*

  This is a significant window of opportunity to put both strategic foresight at the centre of government action and use its inputs in setting new government priorities.
- Second, the **provision of long-term visions and strategic guidance** for policy makers. The creation of a Vision 2050 for Flanders (see Box 3.3) is an important signal regarding long-term insights in policy-making. There is, however, serious scepticism about its actual influence on policy-making or policy implementation (Interview F). Nevertheless, it is a mechanism that can frame, orientate and steward policies regarding the future. It can also contribute to decision-making that "rises above politics" by stating societal challenges and objectives "without knowing who our government will be" (Interview K). The ongoing Flanders Outlook 2030 process (Box 3.2) has a similar role to play.
- Third, the **sectoral conversations** occurring at the level of advisory boards and working groups in specific policy areas of government gather stakeholders around the discussion of future contingencies and opportunities.

- Fourth, the **consultations** started by parliament to get advice on specific topics (e.g. digital transformation) create room for strategic foresight. Policy makers also often require specialised advice about new legislation, visionary notes or strategic papers from advisory boards.

> *"In the beginning, we were only asked for advice at the end of the process. Now it is during the process. So, our impact is increasing. (Interview B).*

This marks a positive development in comparison with previous times, since now this advice is provided during the process, not just ad hoc, builds on interactions, and increases the impact on policy issues.

The existence of these dimensions is especially important given the *impact gap* between strategic foresight and policy-making (Tõnurist and Hanson, 2020[17]). Through different ways to drive demand and supply for strategic foresight (see Box 3.12 below), it can be embedded into decision-making in Flanders.

Box 3.12. Driving demand and supply of strategic foresight in Singapore

The Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) works inside the prime minister's office. It supports the strategic needs of whole-of-government and guarantees the Singapore government's foresight capabilities.

The CSF is built around three main pillars: (i) Scout (trend analysis and horizon scanning); (ii) Challenge (stress-testing strategies and policies); and (iii) Grow (building governmental strategic foresight capacity). Supported by these pillars, it produces national scenarios and a variety of publications to elicit strategic conversations such as on key forces of change and future preparedness of its current operational environment.

Conducting foresight projects can be time-consuming and the CSF recognises that it is not capable of pursuing this work on its own throughout government. For this, it enables and shares foresight capacity and capabilities across governmental agencies and departments. It aims to make foresight a sustainable practice and promotes a culture of collective sense-making. CSF uses a variety of methods to this aim: (i) the rotation and mobility of strategic foresight experts inside government; (ii) building and sustaining networks and partnerships with communities of practice; and (iii) facilitating a senior formal Strategic Foresight Network (SFN), which includes deputy secretaries and has the mandate to commission strategic foresight studies inside government.

Source: OECD.

Feedback and learning loops

Among public-sector organisations, the introduction of feedback mechanisms and learning loops enables the identification of discrepancies between expected and actual consequences. Given that public policies are guided by purposes and oriented by values, these feedback mechanisms are not innocuous accounting exercises (Richardson, 1991[18]). The application of evaluation procedures based on indicators and/or impact; identification and selection of good practices; and detection and correction of "errors" or "failures" can improve processes. The idea of *double-loop learning* extends this approach to also submit "the deeper-lying norms, values and core beliefs that make consequences important to attain" to inquiry, reflection, and, if necessary, adjustment (Visser and Van der Togt, 2016[19]). The continuous improvement of strategic foresight calls for learning loops that uncover pain points and barriers so that reflection is undertaken in government and the foresight ecosystem.

For the specific context of strategic foresight in Flanders, four points deserve special attention:

- **Data availability and useability for reviewing and monitoring policies**: Strong reviewing processes to evaluate public policies are in place in the government of Flanders (Interview O), but there is a need for the use of intelligence tools that adopt a prospective and anticipatory attitude beyond an ad-hoc and post-mortem approach. The existence of user-friendly data – the Flemish Resilience Dashboard – can improve access to relevant information and the monitoring of policy initiatives. The latter would be guided by strategic foresight approaches and tools such as the three horizons method. Open data is critical for the continuous improvement of intelligence tools. However, the relevant data is not always available or useable due to blockages in the circulation and integration of data between platforms and agencies, and limited resources for data treatment (Interview M). An important caveat is that not all relevant policy dimensions fit the format of existing indicators and indicator data are not always captured in the way they should.

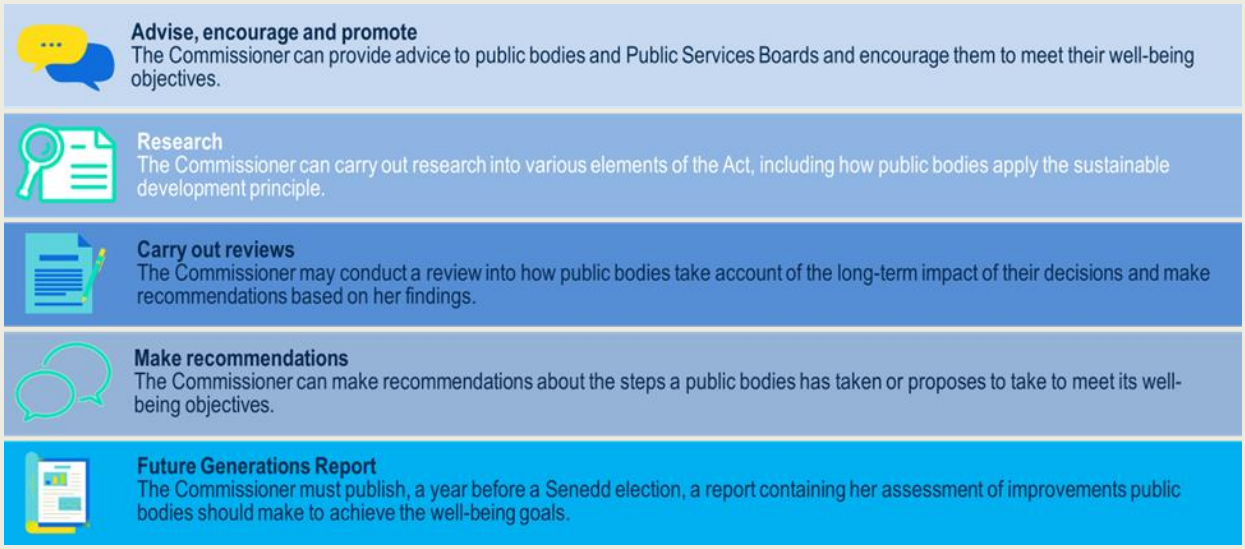
> *I think a lot of resilience is not in this dashboard. Growth and resilience is for me very, very different. I think if you try to only match up in the matrix, then you lose all the important things for resilience that have nothing to do with growth (Interview K).*

Alternative approaches, such as storytelling and participative methodologies (pioneered already by SIA), should be discussed and used for the creation of user-centred and actionable data. Furthermore, the use of strategic foresight itself in policies deserves to be systematically monitored (see Box 3.14).

Box 3.13. Long-term policy-making in Wales

The government of Wales has adopted the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The act introduces a vision for Wales in 2050 in the form of the seven national well-being goals and obliges policy makers to consider long-term perspectives in all new policies developed. To ensure compliance with the act, a Future Generations Commissioner has been put in place to monitor and evaluate steps or policies to meet well-being objectives (see Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7. Role of the Commissioner



Source: (Brousseau- Navarro, Malcheva and Hashi, 2022[20])

- **Sharing knowledge on strategic foresight**: The circulation of knowledge takes place across boundaries in the strategic foresight ecosystem. Despite the noted limitations, strategic foresight connects academic institutions, public administration, consultancy firms and international organisations. For knowledge to continue circulating, an informal chain of influencers and amplifiers who inspire colleagues and serve as contact points for debates about strategic foresight is important.
- **Adapted communication strategies with/about strategic foresight**: Storytelling, visual outputs (e.g. word clouds), short formats to summarise takeaways, and simple language are ways to communicate about the importance of strategic foresight to potential users who not familiar with this discipline. (Interview I).
- **Disconnected and neglected archiving:** There is a fragmented track record of previous strategic initiatives, with lessons learned and accumulated experience dispersed among stakeholders and, often, digitally lost. Archives of initiatives and their consequences are mostly neglected with no repositories to host them or means of curation. This impedes learning within the system. The government of Flanders has invested in peer learning with other regions (Box 3.14) to increase political appetite for strategic foresight, but similar initiatives could also be developed internally.

Box 3.14. Co-creation session: The road ahead for strategic foresight in Flanders

In May 2023 a diverse group of internal and external Flemish stakeholders came together for a virtual collaborative exercise on the future direction for Flanders' foresight system. This exercise built on the insights from the previous system's mapping exercise, conducted during the in-person workshop that took place in Brussels in April 2023. The session was designed to gather inputs and ideas for a blueprint of the Flemish strategic foresight ecosystem. Concretely, it was aimed at reaching three objectives:

- Status quo assessment: Identify challenges, gaps, and shortcomings in the strategic foresight ecosystem.
- "To be" visioning exercise: Outline a desired future state of the Flemish strategic foresight ecosystem in 2029.
- Timeline for action: Devise the required actions to put in place today to attain the envisaged situation in 2029.

Main elements of a strategic foresight system

The session started with a presentation on the main elements of the strategic foresight system devised from action research and best practices in government, as outlined in this chapter:

1. Data, capabilities, and skills
2. Institutional arrangements
3. Embeddedness in policy cycle
4. Feedback and learning loops
5. Demand and use

Status quo assessment

In the status-quo analysis, participants identified a range of shortcomings and gaps in the current system. These mainly pointed to missing capabilities and skills; a lack of senior-level awareness of the

purpose of foresight; a disconnect between futures analysis and decision-making; a lack of knowledge management across initiatives; and a lack of senior demand and mandate for foresight.

"To be" Visioning Exercise for 2029*

In the visioning exercise on what an ideal system in six years' time could look like, participants identified a range of ambitions for Flanders. These included consistent training opportunities; dedicated foresight teams across the system; regular futures dialogues across siloes; and a consistent mandate and demand for futures analysis from decision-makers:

1. Data, capabilities and skills: Targeted training opportunities at university and in the public service; shared portfolio of methods and tools; shared database of anticipatory intelligence; continuous collaboration with external foresight experts; shared horizon-scanning; broad awareness of foresight capabilities and support mechanisms
2. Institutional arrangements: Dedicated strategic foresight teams across the public service; interdisciplinary work on futures issues; foresight network among regions; foresight embedded in policy evaluations; futures debates in parliament; demand for anticipatory intelligence from political decision-makers
3. Embeddedness in policy cycle: Requirement for interdisciplinary foresight analysis; regular futures dialogue across siloes; broad awareness of the value of foresight among politicians; foresight experts at different levels of policy-making
4. Feedback and learning loops: Regular monitoring and impact assessment; annual foresight week to gather learnings; structured knowledge exchange among practitioners; established feedback channels; ad hoc feedback systems
5. Demand and use: Targeted communication of futures insights for decision makers; consistent mandate and legitimacy of foresight; public interest in future-oriented analysis; leading role of Flanders in collaboration with international partners

*2029 was selected as the time horizon to cover several government terms as well as the EU framework programme period to encourage participants to look beyond these specific policy cycles.

Timeline for action

In a discussion about the concrete actions required for Flanders' foresight system to advance in a desired direction, participants identified necessary steps. These start with growing awareness and building capacity followed by ensuring budget for foresight, growing a system-wide network of foresight focal points and a community of practice, carrying out an as-is analysis to identify further needs for improvement and finally putting learnings into practice.

1. 2024: Disseminate action plan; include need for foresight into coalition agreement; create and grow community of practice; offer foresight training for academics; upgrade and expand foresight network; kick-off annual event
2. 2025: Establish regular training for public servants; initiate megatrends discussion among policy makers; complement strategic intelligence with anticipatory intelligence; carry out interdisciplinary horizon-scanning; secure budget for foresight centre of excellence; set up 'red team' exercises
3. 2026: Include foresight as a default practice across departments; appoint foresight focal point in each department; ensure broad awareness about the need and purpose of foresight

4. 2027: Host international conference on anticipatory intelligence; evaluate past approach to strategic foresight to deduct learnings and define areas for further improvement
5. 2028: Make foresight a strategic component of policy advice; implement improvements along the defined areas for further improvement

Source: OECD

Box 3.15. Future seen from the regions: Regional peer-learning sessions

Besides the COVID-19 pandemic, many other disruptions in recent times have shown the essential role of resilience in regions. Anything from crisis response to recovery efforts and the development of innovative solutions are taking place where impacts are felt most directly – which is most often at regional level. Not only are European regions closely connected to disruptions, but they also have the capabilities to identify emerging change, connect to evolving needs and spot both opportunities and challenges early on. Therefore, strategic foresight not only needs to be an essential capacity at national level, but regions equally need to invest in their anticipatory governance structures. The government of Flanders has identified this need and takes important steps to connecting foresight work across regions in Europe.

As part of the upgrade of its strategic foresight system, Flanders is fostering peer exchange on topics of anticipatory governance across regions. The intention is to elevate the importance of futures thinking at regional level by enabling conversations about its purpose and how existing experience and capabilities can be leveraged collectively. Flanders will be organising virtual and in-person peer exchange meetings and study visits with various partners in Europe. These will build on the recent and ongoing work on the Flemish strategic foresight system and open the space for mutual learning. Concretely, Flanders plans to:

- Gather feedback and input on analysis developed in collaboration with the OECD (this assessment report and a blueprint)
- Bring together practitioners who work on similar topics and use similar methods (e.g. horizon-scanning) to exchange on best practices, learnings and ideas
- Explore common needs and challenges among stakeholders to identify areas to build collaboration in specific policy areas or methods
- Create momentum, raise the profile of regional foresight, and identify opportunities for foresight work at regional level

The OECD will be supporting these peer-learning exchanges by providing materials and inputs to create a strategic foresight network at regional level.

Source: OECD

3.4 Proposals for action

By identifying barriers and enablers for systemic strategic foresight efforts in the government of Flanders, the OECD points to areas for further development. The goal is to move from the descriptive approach used in this assessment to an action-oriented set of directions. These serve as starting points for the

development of a strategic foresight blueprint for the government of Flanders. This report covers the five systemic elements used for this assessment to generate specific recommendations.

Taking into consideration the assessment, there is a set of measures that can be adopted to improve **demand and mandate** for strategic foresight in Flanders:

1. **Define a concrete value proposition for strategic foresight in the Flemish policy-making system and assign clear responsibilities for the government's network model of strategic foresight.** The role and value of strategic foresight should be established by clarifying the demand for strategic foresight products across the policy-making cycle. This will require thematic policy areas to invest in strategic foresight activities. There also needs to be co-ordination of the network model to consistently promote learning, capacity-building and cross-government strategic foresight efforts.

2. **Invest in strategic foresight in government.** Assign resources, boost the development of strategic foresight capacity across the policy-making system and highlight key foresight challenges in line with Vision 2050 transition priorities. This can be organised around socially relevant challenges or policy problems to appeal to high-level decision makers. Flanders can also raise the profile of strategic foresight for policy-making at the European level. Flanders can promote future-oriented approaches in inter-regional dialogue to implement and assess the EU's Recovery and Resilience Plans.

Regarding strategic foresight **capabilities and skills**, Flanders can explore a series of initiatives to increase their creation, retention and growth:

3. **Tailored and context-specific capacity-building**: Define formats and contents of for public servants and managers around strategic foresight approaches, methods and tools. Formats can be adapted to working contexts with self-paced training and content that ideally incorporates real-life situations and concrete challenges. Make strategic foresight training available to policy makers across the spectrum and tailor content to executive leadership to raise their awareness of strategic foresight.

4. **Safe spaces to ensure practical engagement**: Explore the organisation of temporary or stable safe spaces to enable experiencing, simulating and testing futures approaches (e.g. Futures Literacy Labs).

5. **Create incentives and rewards**: Explore incentives for public servants to engage with strategic foresight activities (e.g. dedicated time at the individual or team level). Rewards can also be provided, for instance, publicising and celebrating initiatives promoted by specific individuals and teams.

This report has explored **institutional arrangements** dedicated to strategic foresight in Flanders. There is a number of actions that can respond to identified gaps and needs:

6. **Define a governance model across sectors:** Clarify roles and responsibilities in carrying out multi-level strategic foresight throughout the public administration in Flanders. Gathered evidence shows the Strategic Insights and Analyses unit at the Chancellery and Foreign Office has the qualifications and advantages to convene, curate and facilitate a whole-of-government strategic foresight approach. Formalise the role of the co-ordinator and resource the capacity accordingly.

7. **Draw in stakeholders through a community of practice**: To widen the foresight ecosystem and nurture continuous exchanges, create a community of practice open to all individual stakeholders (public administration, academic institutions, private sector, civil society). Facilitate joint horizon-scanning and other value-added exercises in the community.

As a way to strengthen **embeddedness in the policy cycle**, Flanders can consider:

8. **Using existing touchpoints as leverage**: Ensure that strategic foresight is coupled with existing mechanisms and processes for decision-making. This includes transition phases of government from one government term to the next. Inject strategic foresight approaches and methods into existing procedures and use them to tangibly demonstrate value.

9. **Demonstrate value through concrete and tailored interventions**: Ensure that strategic foresight approaches, practices and products are more than just generalist versions – that they express specific and concrete interventions. This option can highlight the societal purpose and value creation potential of strategic foresight for government. Select and run demonstration cases on policy priority areas to showcase the value of strategic foresight.

For improving its **learning loops**, Flanders can take advantage of a series of measures:

10. **Improve the resilience indicator dashboard**: This platform can become the point of reference for decision makers. It can not only monitor and assess the recovery and resilience process, but adopt evidence-based and futures-explorations approaches in doing so. Collection, treatment and display of data should be made more user-friendly. The data should be useful and useable; that is, fit for purpose and to be used in practice. Finally, the platform can be adapted to enable the exchange and upload of learnings, and the creation of relationships among users (e.g. allowing matchmaking around use cases).

11. **Improve communication to wider audiences**: Focus communication strategy on debunking biases about foresight. Promote the relevance of strategic foresight and futures approaches to wider, non-expert audiences with accessible language and visualisation.

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4 Towards a multi-level strategic foresight model in Flanders

Global challenges require international networks to produce and use strategic foresight (Bos, Brown and Farrelly, 2015[1]). This is important not only on the national, but also regional and local levels. Global trends need to be contextualised, and specific effects and challenges identified. There is also a great deal of mutual learning that can happen between regions, with exploring and mapping emerging change, and learning from novel policy and service innovations.

4.1 Towards a multi-level strategic foresight model in Flanders

Global challenges require international networks to produce and use strategic foresight (Bos, Brown and Farrelly, 2015[1]). This is important not only on the national, but also regional and local levels. Global trends need to be contextualised, and specific effects and challenges identified. There is also a great deal of mutual learning that can happen between regions, with exploring and mapping emerging change, and learning from novel policy and service innovations.

To build this collaboration and anticipate change effectively, public-sector organisations need to strengthen their strategic foresight capabilities and link them with policy-making. Based on regional dialogues and the assessment the government of Flanders has carried out with the OECD, a multi-level model for strategic foresight is taking shape (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Building a strategic foresight system in a multi-level setting

Foundational elements

Vision & Mission

SIA's **vision** for policymaking in Flanders ensures that public administration is able to **future proof** policies and services with the purpose of improving their **resilience** by adopting **evidence-based**, **inclusive** and **systemic** approaches. The **mission** is to empower policy makers with actionable approaches that mobilise activities and tools.

Enabling environment

The existence of a proper authorizing environment for strategic foresight lies on three basic elements:

I. **Mandate**: strategic foresight needs to be endorsed and legitimized by high-level sponsors.
II. **Capacity-building**: strategic foresight needs to have sustained initiatives to spread and improve skills among public servants and managers.
III. **Communication**: strategic foresight has to be communicated in accessible ways and its value made visible to target audiences.

Strategic drivers

Blueprint

This blueprint sets a strategic direction for strategic foresight in Flanders through the prioritisation of its **usefulness for policy making.** These **seven roles** that Strategic Foresight plays define its potential for value-creation Flanders:

1. Promoting the **engagement of stakeholders**;
2. Supporting **proactiveness and prospective** in Government;
3. Adopting **evidence-informed and data-driven** approaches;
4. Designing **robust and resilient** policies;
5. Enhancing **agility, flexibility and innovation**;
6. Encouraging **learning cycles**;
7. Spearheading the **inter-regional dialogue** on futures.

Driven by these roles, Flanders can put in motion the roadmap that was collaboratively drafted with Strategic Foresight ecosystem stakeholders.

The **roadmap** associated with the Blueprint suggests concrete actions, year by year, to improve the situation of Strategic Foresight in Flanders in order to achieve the desired scenario in 4 years time.

Practical guidance

Functions

Strategic foresight can be adopted through an incremental process that kick-starts its adoption and use at the level of organisations and/or teams.

SIA has defined **four functions** to enable organisations and/or teams to engage in practice with strategic foresight. These functions answer to their challenges and needs and increase the quality in the design and delivery of their activities and outputs.

Future @ Regions

Flanders can play a leading role in the promotion of an inter-regional dialogue on futures, ensuring that the regional perspective is embedded in policymaking.

For that purpose, specific actions appear as especially relevant at this stage:

- Shared scans
- Scenario approaches
- Opportunity spotting

Source: OECD.

First, it is important to build a shared vision of how multi-level strategic foresight can be used for policy purposes. This vision will underpin a mission that articulates the objectives and actions required to make foresight practice reality.

Second, on the systems level there are three key components to address: mandate, capacity-building and communication. The use of strategic foresight in policy-making can be systematic only when clear mandate is given to the public administration to engage with uncertainty surrounding policy problems. This expectation and responsibility should be made clear. Once put in place, the mandate's success relies on robust systemic capacity-building – developing the necessary strategic foresight skills and capabilities for public administrators and managers to draw upon in their day-to-day work. Furthermore, open communication about these aims is essential.

Third, key foresight goals need to be defined. These could include: engagement with stakeholders; a proactive, agile, flexible and innovative government; evidence-informed approaches; robust and resilient approaches, and; shared learning and dialogue in the foresight ecosystem. These help to design fit-for-

purpose strategic foresight systems for regions. They also help emphasise the interconnectedness of practices and connections to futures work.

Fourth, individual teams can start integrating multi-level strategic foresight into their work based on these foresight functions: discover, explore, map and create. Much of the strategic foresight work in organisations is underpinned by a structured intelligence/horizon-scanning process that collects signals and analyses drivers of change. Establishing these practices to continuously discover, explore and map drivers and signals of change relevant to regions is the first step towards systemic strategic foresight work.

Lastly, governments do not have to explore the future alone. Countries and regions are often impacted by the same events and challenges. While their context and realities may differ, much can be gleaned from pooling resources, sharing intelligence, developing scenarios, and doing strategic foresight together. Regional results and outputs could be further contextualised for regional needs (as was the case during the regional dialogues piloted by the government of Flanders). Ongoing and structured learning will greatly enhance the resilience of regions, spurring more collective transformative innovations between regions in the future.

References

Bos, J., R. Brown and M. Farrelly (2015), “Building networks and coalitions to promote transformational change: Insights from an Australian urban water planning case study”, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, Vol. 15, pp. 11-25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2014.10.002. [1]

5 Conclusion

Flanders has taken an ambitious stance in building up resilience in its policy-making system. The government has invested in long-term policies in key EU resilience areas, and started upgrading towards a more resilient governance system. Without systemic use of strategic foresight this will be impossible. Strategic foresight serves multiple purposes that build towards preparedness, effective communication with stakeholders and better implementation of policies in the long-term. Collaborative and participatory foresight tools help structure discussions and encourage collective thinking about future challenges. They also foster openness and transparency about complex issues.

5.1 Conclusions

Flanders has taken an ambitious stance in building up resilience in its policy-making system. The government has invested in long-term policies in key EU resilience areas, and started upgrading towards a more resilient governance system.

Without systemic use of strategic foresight this will be impossible. Strategic foresight serves multiple purposes that build towards preparedness, effective communication with stakeholders and better implementation of policies in the long-term. Collaborative and participatory foresight tools help structure discussions and encourage collective thinking about future challenges. They also foster openness and transparency about complex issues.

Until now, the Flemish government has primarily associated strategic foresight with crisis management. Foresight as a more pluralistic approach to envisioning futures in policy-making and building up resilience has been less of a focus. Building foresight capacity has been a stop-and-go process marked by progress and setbacks. Flanders' Chancellery and Foreign Office has established a role for strategic foresight which is going in the right direction. But, more efforts could be made to mobilise foresight networks and build up foresight capabilities across government.

For the government of Flanders to embrace strategic foresight, its roles and responsibilities need to be more clearly defined. Decision makers need to be educated about the value of connecting policy decisions with foresight. By highlighting the usefulness of strategic foresight through selective application (e.g. aligning actions with long-term policy priorities) a more compelling argument can be made to allocate more resources to the discipline. It is crucial for the government to create an environment for understanding future trends and implementing foresight in practice, with simulations, future scenarios, and data analysis as important training tools. With the importance of the international dimension in Flemish policy-making, it is important to engage internationally and craft narratives that enhance the relevance and credibility of government futures initiatives. With its sophisticated intelligence frameworks (e.g. the resilience dashboard), Flanders can also lead a more future-focused resilience and recovery regional agenda.

To achieve this, strategic foresight should be institutionalised in the government of Flanders. It should have clear structures and responsibilities, stakeholder consultations, and integrated workflows among different policy areas. As the government of Flanders already has many foresight champions across the system, integrating this network could be practical and useful. This requires co-ordinating dispersed capabilities and experts across government and externally. Shifting towards a demand-driven approach that is connected to current and upcoming policy challenges, where foresight is driven by political awareness and intention, should be also emphasised. This approach encourages engagement with internal and external organisations (e.g. academic circles) to foster collaboration and generate diverse knowledge exchanges.

Following this assessment, the OECD has developed an action-oriented blueprint for embedding multi-level strategic foresight into the government of Flanders.

OECD Public Governance Reviews

The Strategic Foresight System of the Government of Flanders, Belgium

Given the important role of strategic foresight in policymaking and resilience, the Government of Flanders has been taking steps to improve its capabilities in this area. This report outlines the main findings and recommendations of the OECD assessment of the strategic foresight system of the Government of Flanders. It includes a blueprint and roadmap for incorporating strategic foresight into the public administration of Flanders over the next five years.

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