Foresight menu

Foresight[1] seems to be on everyone's lips these days – but what is it really and, more importantly, how can you use it in your own work? This "menu" is designed to help policymakers understand and leverage foresight for more effective strategy-building and decision-making.

Foresight is about **thinking long-term** to make smarter choices now. It is a collective effort to look beyond the present and consider what could happen in the future. Foresight isn't about gazing into a crystal ball, but a way to methodically broaden our perspective and prepare for different possible futures scenarios.

There are many reasons and ways to engage in long-term thinking for policymaking. This menu showcases the various **goals and approaches** of foresight in policy contexts, featuring tools and processes that the EU Policy Lab can offer. Because looking into the future actually means looking into:

Change today

GOAL Identify and map drivers of change, trends, emerging issues, values, actions, actors, narratives and perspectives in the present that could impact the future.

TOOLS (Mega)trend analysis; Horizon scanning; Delphi survey; Futures triangle; STEEPL; System mapping

Change over time

GOAL Discover and understand possible developments and changes over time, consider their impacts and think about possible transitions.

TOOLS Emerging Issue Analysis; Futures wheels; X-curves; Backcasting; Three horizons; Megatrends engagement tool; Dialectical analysis; Polycrisis exploration tool

Assumptions & worldviews

GOAL Deepen understanding of our images of the future by uncovering underlying assumptions and worldviews.

TOOLS Causal layered analysis (CLA)

Alternative futures

GOAL Create, explore and experience alternative future possibilities and narratives.

TOOLS Scenario building; Scenario exploration system (SES); Futures triangle; Snapshots of the future; Experiential futures; Speculative design; Reference foresight scenarios

Preferences & priorities

GOAL Identify preferable futures or select priorities, and build a future vision to aspire to.

TOOLS Visioning; Prioritization matrices

Options, actions & strategies

GOAL Explore and develop options, actions and strategies in the present to move towards envisioned futures, and test their resilience and adaptability.

TOOLS Backcasting; Roadmapping; Stress-testing; Wind-tunnelling

[1] *Foresight - the discipline of exploring, anticipating, and shaping the future in a participatory way - seeks to systematically and rigorously navigate uncertainty and explore possible and preferable futures. Not with the purpose to predict the future, but with the intent to generate a wide variety of views on the future, and understand emerging change and future possibilities.*

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Foresight processes for policymaking

Foresight tools and approaches can be tailored and used in flexible and adaptable ways to address your policy needs optimally. Below you can find recommended foresight processes (sequences of methodological steps) to serve different policy needs. These proposed sequences are indicative; they can be adapted to specific circumstances and complemented by other tools and methods:

Legend: ● not needed ● advisable ● required

POLICY NEED / GOAL	DESCRIPTION	PROCESS OUTCOMES
Explore and understand change in complex systems	Uncover underlying drivers and causes of change in complex systems related to policy issues, and discover possible outcomes of change dynamics.	Improved understanding of systemic change and a better capacity to deal with complexity and uncertainty.

Steps: **Change today** (required), **Change over time** (required), Assumptions & worldviews (not needed), Alternative futures (not needed), Preferences & priorities (not needed), Options, actions & strategies (not needed)

POLICY NEED / GOAL	DESCRIPTION	PROCESS OUTCOMES
Create a shared long-term vision	Develop a clear and compelling vision of a preferred future that can guide policy making. This vision serves as an aspirational goal for where a society or organisation wants to be in the long term.	A common understanding of a long-term vision; alignment between stakeholders on preferred transition and a sense of ownership and co-creation.

Steps: **Change today** (required), **Change over time** (advisable), **Assumptions & worldviews** (advisable), **Alternative futures** (required), **Preferences & priorities** (required), Options, actions & strategies (not needed)

POLICY NEED / GOAL	DESCRIPTION	PROCESS OUTCOMES
Set priorities	Foresight exercises can help to determine which issues are likely to be significant in the future or could be significant across possible alternative futures, and thus should be prioritized in the present.	A common understanding of priorities.

Steps: **Change today** (required), **Change over time** (advisable), **Assumptions & worldviews** (advisable), **Alternative futures** (required), **Preferences & priorities** (required), Options, actions & strategies (not needed)

POLICY NEED / GOAL	DESCRIPTION	PROCESS OUTCOMES
Inspire policy options	By exploring possible change and developing alternative futures, foresight can help identify policy options that might not be apparent through traditional analysis.	Generation of new ideas and identification of future possibilities to inspire policy options.
	Change today · Change over time · Assumptions & worldviews · Alternative futures · Preferences & priorities · Options, actions & strategies	
Test policies for long-term resilience and robustness	Foresight allows for the testing of policy options against possible alternative futures (foresight scenarios). This helps to uncover the various pros and cons of different policy options and to adapt accordingly to ensure that policies are resilient, robust and adaptable to different possible future contexts.	Better resilience, robustness and preparedness and increased capacity to deal with complexity and uncertainty.
	Change today · Change over time · Assumptions & worldviews · Alternative futures · Preferences & priorities · Options, actions & strategies	
Spot & assess risks and opportunities – early warning	Identifying emerging risks and opportunities is a key goal of foresight, enabling very early preparedness for possible risks and allowing us to capitalise on opportunities.	Increased capacity to deal with uncertainty or surprises.
	Change today · Change over time · Assumptions & worldviews · Alternative futures · Preferences & priorities · Options, actions & strategies	
Foster coherent long-term policymaking	Foresight exercises can help to ensure that short-term interests of different stakeholder groups are aligned with collective long-term goals, creating coherence between immediate decisions and objectives for the future.	Better stakeholder engagement and a more robust decision-making process.
	Change today · Change over time · Assumptions & worldviews · Alternative futures · Preferences & priorities · Options, actions & strategies	

Use cases | EXAMPLES OF FORESIGHT PROCESSES

European Commission

EXAMPLE	STEPS IN PROCESS	OUTPUTS / INSIGHTS

Explore and understand change in complex systems

Change today · **Change over time** · Assumptions & worldviews · Alternative futures · Preferences & priorities · Options, actions & stategies

CHANGE TODAY This step put forth a set of 14 megatrends to explore farming in the future.

CHANGE OVER TIME This work entails crafting future profiles of farmers to collectively imagine potential consequences of the 2040 landscape of farmers and possible policy implications.

OUTPUTS Report, Farmer Profiles 2040, Engagement tool

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INSIGHTS Identification of possible future diversity in farming and related emerging issues to be considered by policymakers.

Create a shared long-term vision
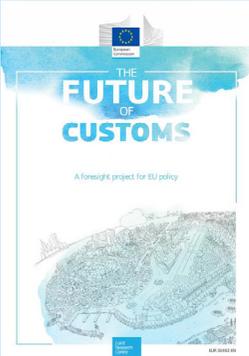
Change today · **Change over time** · **Assumptions & worldviews** · **Alternative futures** · **Preferences & priorities** · Options, actions & stategies

CHANGE TODAY & CHANGE OVER TIME A horizon scan and Delphi survey are conducted to assess the current situation, stakeholder views, and emerging trends, capturing both present realities and anticipated changes over time.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES A set of four alternative futures scenarios is developed to explore diverse potential outcomes and pathways, providing a structured framework for analyzing future possibilities.

PREFERENCES & PRIORITIES A shared vision is adopted at the policy level, reflecting collective preferences and priorities to guide decision-making and align actions toward common sustainability goals.

OUTPUTS Report

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INSIGHTS This foresight study built a shared vision for the future of the EU Customs Union that underpinned the Customs Union Action Plan and further customs policy. Its aim was to reinforce the relevance and effectiveness of EU customs policy over the long-term.

EXAMPLE	STEPS IN PROCESS	OUTPUTS / INSIGHTS

Set priorities

EYES ON THE FUTURE

Signals from recent reports on emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations to support European Innovation Council strategic intelligence

VOLUME 3

EU Policy Lab

JRC SCIENCE FOR POLICY REPORT
EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES
DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION
STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Change today — **Change over time** — **Assumptions & worldviews** — **Alternative futures** — **Preferences & priorities** — Options, actions & stategies

CHANGE TODAY The process involves identifying trends and signals on emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations across diverse technology or policy fields and undertake a systematic assessment supported by expert judgment.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES The process involves evaluating and ranking diverse and potentially alternative emerging technologies and breakthrough innovations within specific fields by assessing their novelty and potential impact, in order to guide strategic decision-making.

PREFERENCES & PRIORITIES This step in the process helps identify priority areas to support the European Innovation Council Strategic Intelligence, including informing future funding topics.

OUTPUTS Reports, Policy Briefs, Dashboards

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INSIGHTS This technology foresight process informs possible future funding topics for the European Innovation Council, the European Commission's flagship program for deep tech and supported their feedback to policy workstream.

Inspire policy options

DIGITAL TRANSITION: LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS FOR EU FARMERS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

EU Policy Lab

JRC SCIENCE FOR POLICY REPORT
FORESIGHT
DIGITALISATION
TRANSFORMATION

Change today — **Change over time** — **Assumptions & worldviews** — **Alternative futures** — **Preferences & priorities** — **Options, actions & stategies**

CHANGE TODAY & CHANGE OVER TIME To understand change today and change over time, trends were sourced and analysed related to digital technologies.

ASSUMPTIONS & WORLDVIEWS Through Causal Layered Analysis, this work explores the perceptions of farmers and rural communities on digital technologies and digitalisation.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES The scope of the reference foresight scenarios are adapted for stress-testing the digital strategies for agriculture.

PREFERENCES & PRIORITIES Using the results of the earlier steps, a framework for digital transition is developed.

OPTIONS, ACTIONS & STRATEGIES Digital strategy development process based on the vision frameworks underlying principles and goals.

OUTPUTS Report, Digital Transition Toolkit, Vision Framework

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INSIGHTS The foresight process & toolkit help to develop and inform the digital strategies for agriculture and rural communities at EU, national and regional levels.

EXAMPLE	STEPS IN PROCESS	OUTPUTS / INSIGHTS

Test policies for long-term resilience and robustness

STRESS-TESTING OF POLICY OPTIONS USING FORESIGHT SCENARIOS:
A pilot case

EU Policy Lab

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT
BETTER REGULATION
FORESIGHT SCENARIOS

EUR 31150 EN

Steps: Change today · Change over time · Assumptions & worldviews · Alternative futures · Preferences & priorities · Options, actions & stategies

CHANGE TODAY & CHANGE OVER TIME This step is about gathering topic-specific trends and signals of change in relation to the policy area of Standard Essential Patents.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES This step includes enriching the reference foresight scenarios with relevant aspects, trends and signals of change related to the policy area.

OPTIONS, ACTIONS & STRATEGIES The process involves using the reference foresight scenarios for 'wind tunnelling' policy options and identifying areas for improvement.

OUTPUTS Report

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INSIGHTS This pilot case, done in the context of EU policy proposal on Standard Essential Patents, provides a guiding example for future processes of stress-testing policy options against foresight scenarios.

Spot & assess risks and opportunities - early warning

RISKS ON THE HORIZON
Insights from Horizon Scanning

EU Policy Lab

JRC SCIENCE FOR POLICY REPORT
DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT
HORIZON SCANNING
STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

EUR 31527 EN

Steps: Change today · Change over time · Assumptions & worldviews · Alternative futures · Preferences & priorities · Options, actions & stategies

CHANGE TODAY & CHANGE OVER TIME Based on signals of change from horizon scanning, use futures wheels to identify potential future risks, opportunities, and the pathways that could lead to those risks, enabling proactive strategic planning and risk mitigation.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES Snapshots of the future were used to explore their respective risks and opportunities and how to benefit from possible future developments.

OUTPUTS Report, Polycrisis Exploration Workshop Toolkit

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INSIGHTS Information for policy makers on possible future risks, and identification of blind spots, to better understand possible pathways leading to future risks and related opportunities. Explore and prevent polycrises to boost disaster preparedness and risk avoidance.

EXAMPLE	STEPS IN PROCESS	OUTPUTS / INSIGHTS

Foster coherent long-term policymaking

TOWARDS A FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE EUROPE 2050: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHOICES IN SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

EU Policy Lab

JRC SCIENCE FOR POLICY REPORT

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT
SUSTAINABILITY
SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Change today · **Change over time** · **Assumptions & worldviews** · **Alternative futures** · **Preferences & priorities** · **Options, actions & stategies**

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES Four scenarios for a sustainable EU in 2050 are developed as a starting point for backcasting.

CHANGE TODAY & CHANGE OVER TIME Identify signs of emerging developments that align with the given transition pathway, ensuring that current trends are compatible with each scenario, and develop a distinct transition pathway for each scenario to map out actionable steps toward future outcomes.

OPTIONS, ACTIONS & STRATEGIES A transition pathway analysis across scenarios identifies key domains of policy interventions required to advance the sustainability transition, ensuring alignment with future goals and systemic challenges.

OUTPUTS Report

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INSIGHTS This work explores possible ways to foster effective and coherent policymaking for sustainability transitions in the EU towards 2050. The results underpinned the Commission's Strategic Foresight Report 2023.

EU Policy Lab

The EU Policy Lab is a space for cross-disciplinary exploration and innovation in policymaking. We apply collaborative, systemic and forward-looking approaches to help bringing the scientific knowledge of the Joint Research Centre into EU policymaking.

We experiment with the new, the unprecedented and the unknown. We seek to augment our understanding of the present, challenge and reinvent the way we think about the future.

The EU Policy Lab is also a mindset and a way of working together that combines stories and data, anticipation and analysis, imagination and action. We bring new practical and radical perspectives to tackle complex problems in a collaborative way. Together, we explore, connect and ideate to create better policies.

Explore all our foresight tools and methodologies at the Competence Centre on Foresight's website:

knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight_en

Contact the EU Policy Lab

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