

FUTURING VISIONING



The terms *futuring*, *visioning* and *strategic foresight* represent three complementary approaches to exploring or designing possible futures to inform present-day decisions and design policies that are resilient, adaptive and future-proof.

More specifically, *futuring* refers to the systematic exploration of alternative futures to challenge assumptions and broaden perspectives. In policymaking, *futuring* can help governments test how policies might perform under different long-term conditions, rather than relying only on forecasting. It emphasises creativity, trend analysis, and scenario development to anticipate potential future disruptions and opportunities.

Visioning usually involves participatory processes to create shared, desirable images of the future. In policy contexts, *visioning* is often used in stakeholder workshops to align diverse actors around a common long-term goal (e.g., “a carbon-neutral city by 2050”). It is less about prediction and more about mobilising action through shared aspirations, to guide strategy and policymaking.

Strategic foresight is defined as the systematic practice of anticipating future trends, disruptions, and scenarios to strengthen decision-making. It transforms policymaking from reactive to proactive by embedding tools like horizon scanning, scenario planning, and policy stress-testing into the policy cycle. Strategic foresight also helps to ensure policy coherence as it deals with broad cross-cutting policy themes.



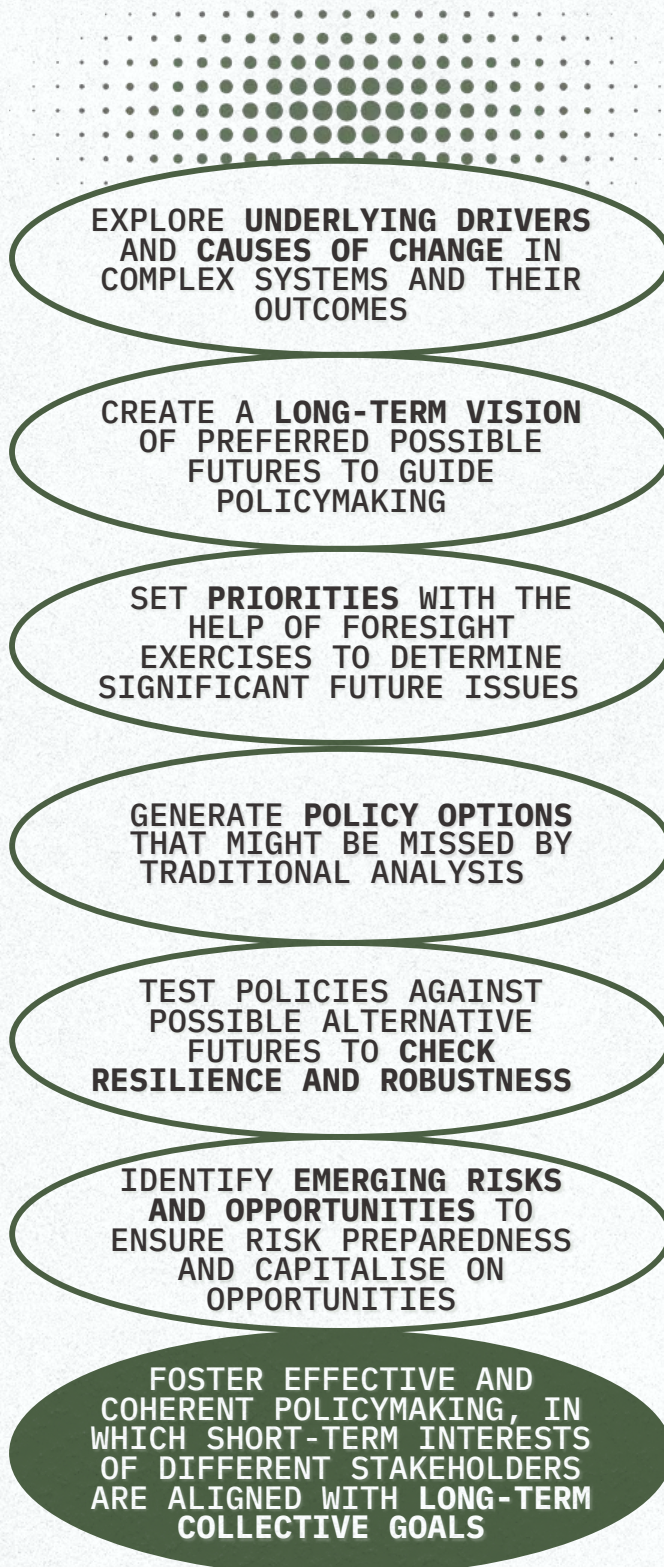
FORESIGHT

The three concepts could complement each other, with *futuring* as the broad, creative exploration of what could happen. Followed by *visioning*, as the normative step of deciding what should happen. And concluding with *strategic foresight*, as the structured, institutionalised practice that ensures policies are robust against uncertainty and aligned with long-term goals. Both *futuring* and *visioning* are used within the EU’s broader strategic foresight agenda, to guide anticipatory policymaking.

WG
Climate
& Energy/
WG
Sustainable
Development

EEAC
Network

The Joint Research Centre's EU Policy Lab outlines the following foresight processes to guide policymaking:



A number of methods have been developed to assist with all stages of the foresight process, for use in participatory workshops or internal analysis. These include, but are not limited to:



Horizon Scanning

Systematically reviewing sources to detect signs of potentially important developments before they evolve into emerging issues. Incorporating information from beyond mainstream areas such as the arts, pop culture, and non-expert communities, as well as more traditional sources.



Mega-trends analysis

Analysing important global trends and drivers of change, their consequences, and how they impact specific policy areas. This helps with strategic planning, proactive policy development, risk preparedness, and opportunity awareness. Understanding mega-trends is necessary to imagine possible alternative futures.




Scenario development & exploration

An interactive and iterative process, involving interviews, analysis and modelling, the output of which is scenarios that describe alternative possible futures. These scenarios do not claim to project what the future may look like but serve as a compass for policymakers navigating under increasingly uncertain circumstances.



Participatory foresight

Actively involving different stakeholders, to build consensus on shared visions of the future that are fair, representative, and inclusive.



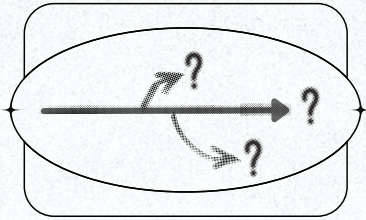
Backcasting

Working back from a preferred imagined future scenario to identify the steps to achieve it from the present.



Wind-tunnelling

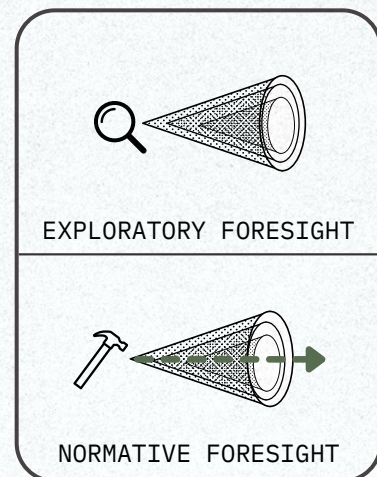
Stress-testing potential policies against possible trajectories and plausible disruptions to test their resilience and robustness in different alternative futures.



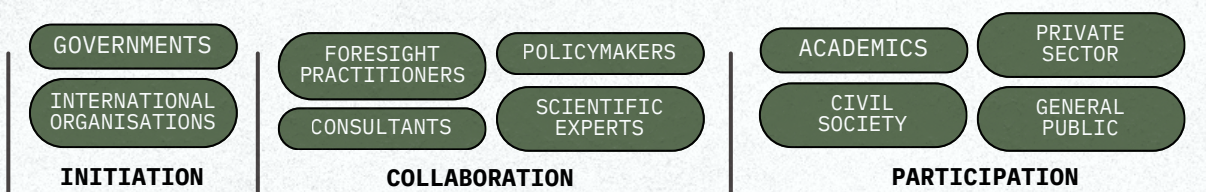
The foundation of futuring is the assumption that the future is **uncertain** and **plural**, but also **influenceable**. Rather than deterministic forecasting, a range of probable, possible, and preferable futures are imagined.

Exploratory foresight focusses on identifying the most plausible of these futures in an evidence-based, systematic, normatively neutral way to inform decision-making, using tools from futures studies. However, complete normative neutrality is nearly impossible due to implicit biases in the choice of topics, stakeholders, and scenarios, and policymaking is inherently normative in of itself. Therefore, foresight can also be explicitly normative, using techniques such as visioning and backcasting to strive towards preferable futures based on values such as sustainability. Participatory foresight is one way to collaborate with stakeholders to define desirable values and outcomes collectively. Exploratory foresight is about anticipating and understanding the range of plausible futures to prepare for uncertainty, whereas normative foresight is about shaping futures to achieve a desirable outcome.

Analytical Basis	Creating qualitative projections from the analysis of data and trends.
Scenario Basis	Understanding alternative pathways.
Systems Basis	Anticipating the consequences of policy.
Participatory Basis	Ensuring that policy reflects societal preferences.



Within policymaking, foresight tends to be commissioned, typically by government bodies or international organisations. It can be led by policymakers or policy advisors, sometimes with external assistance and the participation of stakeholders. Environment and sustainable development advisory councils act as intermediaries between science and policy, and are therefore uniquely placed to work with foresight, which straddles the two domains.



Various institutions are starting to incorporate strategic foresight into their work and encourage its use at the national level. Some of these practices include:

European Commission

Foresight methods and processes are being used by the European Commission to enhance resilience by being proactive in response to global challenges and crisis. Foresight is used not just as an analytical exercise, but as a governance tool: embedding long-term thinking into short-term decisions, stress-testing policies against uncertainty, and mobilising collective intelligence. European Union Strategic Foresight Reports have been produced annually since 2020.

European Environment Agency

The EEA is actively commissioning research on futures literacy to implement it in its working methods. For instance, it used foresight to identify areas of transformative potential within European production and consumption systems, determine capacities to improve resilience and guide change, and stress-test them against imagined plausible future disruptions. The EEA has developed extensive imagined futures for a more sustainable Europe, addressing a variety of economic, social, environmental, and technological factors

Joint Research Centre

The JRC have a department dedicated to foresight studies, the EU Policy Lab, which produces materials to assist policymakers at the EU level with using strategic foresight. It also uses foresight methods to provide policy recommendations and decision-making advice, identifying preferred futures and the transition pathways needed to reach them.

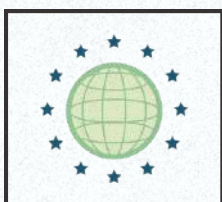
EEAC Network National Councils

Within the EEAC Network, member councils have started incorporating foresight tools into their work.

The Finnish Expert Panel for Sustainable Development (FEPD) created positive images of potential futures after the sustainability transformation based on a comprehensive analysis of scientific publications, policy reports, and fiction. These images of futures were then concretised in a public installation in Helsinki.

The Netherlands Scientific Climate Council (WKR) has explored the potential of futuring for climate policy, proposing the creation of a vision of a climate-neutral and resilient Netherlands using participatory futuring processes to guide climate policy.

The Irish National Economic and Social Council (NESC) has used futuring tools as part of a project on energy, exploring pathways to different energy futures.



- European Commission. (2024). *What are megatrends and how to use them?* https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/tool/megatrends-hub_en
- European Commission. (2025). *2025 Strategic Foresight Report*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-foresight/2025-strategic-foresight-report_en
- European Commission. (n.d.). *Strategic Foresight*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategic-foresight_en
- European Commission (DG INTPA). (2025). *Tool Visioning*. Capacity4dev. https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/search_en?keywords=resources%20INTPA%20Foresight%20info%20tool%205%20visioning%20en
- European Commission (JRC). (2025a). *Foresight Menu*. <https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/FORESIGHT-MENU.pdf>
- European Commission (JRC). (2025b). *Foresight: Our new guide to how it could work for you - EU Policy Lab*. https://policy-lab.ec.europa.eu/news/foresight-our-new-guide-how-it-could-work-you-2025-02-21_en
- European Environment Agency. (2023). *Horizon scanning tips and tricks: A practical guide*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2800/360744>
- European Environment Agency. (2025). *Imagining a sustainable Europe in 2050: Exploring implications for core production and consumption systems*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/imagining-a-sustainable-europe-in-2050>
- Government of the UK. (2024). *The Futures Toolkit*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/futures-toolkit-for-policy-makers-and-analysts/the-futures-toolkit-html>
- Matti, C., Jensen, K., Bontoux, L., Goran, P., Pistocchi, A., & Salvi, M. (2023). *Towards a fair and sustainable Europe 2050: Social and economic choices in sustainability transitions: strategic foresight sustainability systemic change - EU Policy Lab*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5d3fe069-1b1e-11ee-806b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- Petrakis, P. E., & Konstantakopoulou, D. P. (2015). Futuring and visioning as strategic instruments for predicting the future. In P. E. Petrakis & D. P. Konstantakopoulou, *Uncertainty in Entrepreneurial Decision Making* (pp. 129-140). Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137460790_9
- UNDP. (2022). *UNDP RBAP: Foresight Playbook*. <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/publications/undp-rbap-foresight-playbook>
- van Dorsser, C., Walker, W. E., Taneja, P., & Marchau, V. A. W. J. (2018). *Improving the link between the futures field and policymaking*. *Futures*, 104, 75-84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2018.05.004>
- Vesnic-Alujevic, L., & Störmer, E. (2024). *Stress-testing of policy options using foresight scenarios: A pilot case*. Publications Office of the European Union.