



**Flanders**  
State of the Art



# **BUILDING A RESILIENT EUROPE**

**Insights from the Strategic Foresight for Regions  
event on 29th May 2024 in Vilvoorde, Flanders**

**FLANDERS  
CHANCELLERY &  
FOREIGN OFFICE**

# 1. HIGHLIGHTS

- Collective intelligence, mutual learning and joint exercises regarding strategic foresight are necessary to navigate long term changes effectively. At the SF4Regions event, strides were already made in this direction with participants engaging in diverse workshops and sharing good practices. There was a clear recognition that governments should not tackle global challenges alone.
- Engaging in strategic foresight from a multi-level perspective including the subnational level is crucial for identifying specific needs, challenges and catalysts of change that impact each territory uniquely.
- Collaborating with international organisations and advisory bodies such as the OECD and the European Committee of the Regions provides a powerful synergy in facilitating foresight networks and securing political support to implement foresight insights.
- Collaboration with innovative private organisations like Tomorrowlab and Futures Platform is useful, as they offer advanced foresight support and tools that enhance regional foresight efforts. Additionally, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission provides valuable foresight material, further supporting collaborative initiatives.



## 2. Event SF4Regions

This report presents insights from the Strategic Foresight for Regions event held on May 29, 2024. Organised by Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, the event brought together foresight experts and futures enthusiasts from nine European regions (Flanders, Helsinki-Uusimaa, Lombardy, Catalonia, Basque Country, Hauts-de-France, Lower Saxony, Upper Austria, Scotland), alongside representatives from international organisations (Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, European Committee of the Regions, OECD) and private companies (Tomorrowlab, Futures Platform). The objective was to share knowledge, exchange best practices, and enhance capacities in strategic foresight.

This gathering represented a significant step in Flanders' ambition to foster multi-level dialogues about the future. In an era of constant change, disruptions, and uncertainties, Flanders' mission is to act as a strategic knowledge broker, delivering systemic, inclusive, and evidence-informed insights.

As many societal challenges transcend boundaries and require coordinated solutions, cross-border collaboration is crucial, both at national and subnational level. One key topic of discussion was the potential creation of an informal Regional Foresight Network to enhance such cooperation.

The event also marked the end of Flanders' strategic foresight project with the OECD. Over the past 1,5 year, the Government of Flanders received support from the OECD to strengthen its foresight capabilities.

During the event, a [blueprint](#) for future-proof policymaking was presented by Piret Tõnurist (Innovation Lead at the OECD) and Peter De Smedt (Director Strategic Insights and Analyses at Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office). This blueprint was developed in collaboration with the OECD after a thorough analysis of the current situation. It provides valuable insights into the direction and commitment needed to improve the Flemish strategic foresight system.



### 3. Regional Foresight Network

A panel discussion on the potential for a Regional Foresight Network brought together key insights from various experts who emphasised the necessity and benefits of such a network. The panel included Julie Bynens (Secretary General of Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office), Adam Lazarski (administrator at the European Committee of the Regions), Piret Tõnurist (Innovation Lead at the OECD), and Juha Mattsson (CEO of Futures Platform).

The discussion highlighted the importance of strategic foresight for governments, given the complexity of modern challenges involving numerous actors and factors. The panellists concurred that addressing this complexity demands a fundamental shift from short-term to long-term policymaking. They emphasised the necessity of adopting evidence-based strategies to effectively anticipate and respond to future uncertainties and opportunities.

Given the unique characteristics of each region, it is furthermore vital to conduct multi-level foresight with a regional focus. This is essential to identify the specific needs, challenges, and drivers of change that affect each territory differently, and to enable decision-makers to tailor policies and strategies to their particular context.

Governments do not have to and should not explore global challenges and opportunities alone. Global challenges necessitate collaborative efforts and shared information across regions.

A Regional Foresight Network could facilitate this collaboration by pooling resources and knowledge, reducing duplication, and helping secure the necessary budget and political commitment for long-term initiatives.

The OECD's experience with networks was presented as a model to demonstrate the benefits of economies of scale, collective intelligence, joint exercises and mutual learning.

Drawing on this model, the proposed network could begin by focusing on capacity building, involving external experts to raise ambitions, and by identifying common purposes and areas of cooperation that appeal to politicians. Participants suggested that demonstrating quick, tangible benefits through initial pilot projects could effectively build momentum and secure support for the network by showcasing its potential value early on.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) was recognised for its role in supporting and initiating strategic foresight exchanges between regions. The CoR is able to showcase best practices, organise events for mutual learning, link administrative work to the political level, and connect strategic partners, providing valuable background material and facilitating effective partnerships.

The discussion also touched on the role of private sector organisations such as Futures Platform in supporting the network. By providing analysis, tools, methods and consulting, these organisations can help regions harmonise foresight knowledge and practices in order to ensure they operate with high-quality information and focus on long term goals.

Audience participation during the discussion also underscored the importance of anticipating the future in fostering resilience, adaptation, preparedness, informed decision-making, and sustaining peace. The highlighted benefits of a possible Regional Foresight Network for most regions included knowledge sharing, learning new methods, identifying patterns faster, generating awareness, and fostering regional cooperation to tackle global challenges.

To advance these efforts, Flanders remains committed in championing the use of strategic foresight in its initiatives, encouraging others to do the same and exchanging good practice. Embracing a forward-thinking mindset is crucial for effective anticipatory governance. By continuing and strengthening our collaboration, regions can achieve remarkable outcomes and build a more resilient and adaptable future together.

### Key takeaways:

- Local and regional government strategies should be rigorously stress-tested through strategic foresight to ensure they are robust, resilient, and capable of withstanding future uncertainties and challenges
- Systematic future planning leads to more prosperous and resilient regions
- Flanders can serve as a model for other regions and countries, as it demonstrated significant progress in strategic foresight
- The pooling of resources and exchange of good practice between regions and other foresight professionals is a practical approach, given the often limited administrative capacity and the potential to stimulate innovation.



## 4. Foresight recommendations by the OECD

Integrating strategic foresight into governmental strategies offers significant benefits such as the proactive anticipation of challenges and the ability to seize emerging opportunities. Nonetheless, conducting foresight presents regions with various challenges, notably the lack of buy-in from political leadership and the limited use of foresight reports.

To address these issues, regions can collaborate by exchanging best practices, methodologies and insights, facilitating peer learning, building capacity, and ensuring buy-in through visibility in high-level events and workshops and connections with organisations such as the OECD.

Translating foresight insights into tangible implementation can also be challenging. To overcome this, it is essential to engage decision-makers from the project's inception and seek advice from experts early on rather than issuing directives later. Initiating projects at the end of a political term often proves ineffective due to the short-term focus inherent in legislative structures. Instead, collaborating with decision-makers before initiating projects and diagnosing a few primary challenges leads to more practical outcomes.

Additionally, tailoring efforts to government's priorities is crucial. Ultimately, effective strategic foresight requires proactive engagement with leadership, targeted problem-solving, and a commitment to long-term thinking. These factors will ensure that initiatives resonate with policymakers and lead to meaningful outcomes for a region.



## 5. Good practices



**Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office** spearheaded a strategic foresight process involving 12 European regions ahead of a high-level political summit during the Belgian EU presidency. **Four contrasting scenarios** were developed, drawing from the European Commission's resilience dimensions and [megatrends](#). These scenarios delved into the EU's evolving functioning and its consequential global economic role, and technological development and its implementation within the EU. Collaborative scenario workshops enabled regions to pinpoint shared challenges and propose regional solutions, which contributed to a [comprehensive report](#) for the exchange among regional government leaders.

**The Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council** employs foresight and scenarios to shape a robust strategic vision for the future. Collaborating with various stakeholders, including municipalities, higher and vocational education institutions, and chambers of commerce, the Council aims to enhance regional programming and planning. It provides decision-makers with strategic insights and enables the anticipation of long-term labour and skills demand. Using various methodologies such as horizon scanning, scenario building and strategic planning, Helsinki-Uusimaa actively shapes its future trajectory.

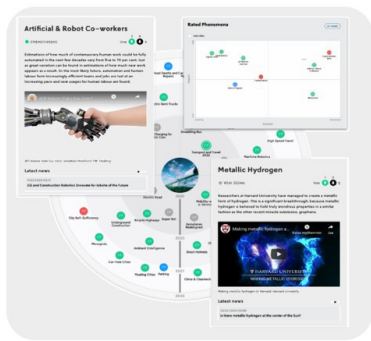


[The Euskadi Vision 2040 project](#) aimed to identify and address the evolving competitiveness challenges of the **Basque Country** to build a sustainable and inclusive competitiveness model for future generations. The Basque government collaborated on this initiative with **Orkestra**, the Basque Institute of Competitiveness, by undertaking a multi-level, inter-departmental and multi-actor process in the territory to agree on a shared vision for 2040. As the shared vision progressed and new challenges

emerged, it became necessary to involve new actors, including young people, through innovative participation methods. Other key learnings included the importance of clearly defining the vision's scope and perspective, combining core and distributed leadership, and focusing on collective capacity building.

**Tomorrowlab** developed a **Digital Scenario Tool** for the Government of Flanders to facilitate dialogue on common challenges and to help identify opportunities for collaboration. This tool features engaging narratives, which are presented through immersive videos across four scenarios. It includes several personas aimed at broadening perspectives to encourage policymakers to consider diverse societal groups when formulating policies.





**Futures Platform** has developed an all-in-one Software-as-a-Service solution for strategic foresight. The platform offers a range of functionalities that support effective future intelligence, including horizon scanning, trend and innovation scouting, and in-depth research. One of its featured tools is the **foresight radar**, which is beneficial for mapping out alternative future scenarios and enriching them with data and signals that shape these futures. The Platform also promotes collaboration, enabling users to vote, rate, and discuss trends, facilitating informed decisions on signals and their impacts. Another tool of Futures Platform is

the **AI futurist**, which is an advanced generative AI chatbot that provides an interactive exploration of the platform's foresight database. The tool not only uses the platform's database (produced by human futurists) in its analyses, but also any kind of self-created content, documents etc. uploaded by users, which results in unique and highly relevant responses.

The **Flanders Department of Mobility and Public Works** developed the Flemish [Mobility Vision 2040](#) in response to numerous challenges and changes in mobility. This inclusive initiative involved a scenario building exercise where citizens and various stakeholders were invited to contribute their perspectives through an interactive platform. Subsequently, these inputs were carefully analysed and deliberated upon internally. A comprehensive promotional campaign attracted over 3000 citizens, which resulted in the sharing of more than 700 ideas or responses. Citizen participation was primarily driven by the opportunity for individuals to share their personal stories in a public forum and experience a sense of acknowledgment and validation.



The **EU Policy Lab** of the European Commission uses participatory foresight methods to engage citizens in shaping the future. Through initiatives like #OurFutures and the Futures Garden, it facilitates citizen-visioning. The story collector **#OurFutures** invites citizens across the EU to share their ideas about their desired future. The Government of Flanders, along with regional partners, promotes [this collector](#) to gather citizen stories from regions. These stories are stored in a database to inspire European policymakers. Additionally, the Futures Garden project explores innovative approaches to inspire policymaking by integrating speculative design, creativity, and analytical insight. This experimental endeavor aims to empower policymakers to shape a dynamic and diverse future for Europe by considering citizens' hopes and dreams that emerge from imagined futures.

The **European Committee of the Regions** organises strategic foresight workshops with regional representatives at the EU Regions Week to discuss how local and regional authorities can build greater anticipatory capacity for the benefit of the citizens. It also holds **foresight exercises** for its members (local and regional politicians) in specific thematic areas such as the future of the Green Deal. The institution is a member of the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (**ESPAS**), an EU interinstitutional network promoting foresight and anticipatory governance.

