

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.

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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.



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