

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.



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