

## Building anticipatory capacity in a multi-level, multi-policy environment: Disruptions and scenarios to underpin EU R&I policies

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### Extended abstract

The “Foresight towards the 2nd Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe” project aims at informing the development of the 2nd Strategic Plan of Horizon Europe (HE), the European Union’s current Research and Innovation Funding Framework Programme, by employing a combination of different forward-looking approaches.

The Strategic Plans of Horizon Europe explicate how the research and innovation (R&I) initiatives funded by the Framework Programme are expected to contribute to the achievement of major EU policy goals as captured for now by the key strategic orientations of the 1st Strategic Plan of HE. However, already during the implementation of the 1st Strategic Plan, the EU is confronted with novel developments that may hamper achieving the initial ambitions of the 1st Strategic Plan that should be re-considered when devising the 2nd Strategic Plan. These novel developments can arise from the global and EU context of EU R&I policies, but equally from R&D and innovation activities. Of particular interest are those developments that may bring potentially disruptive consequences (e.g., new social confrontations or advances in general AI) – both threatening and promising ones. They will indicate areas in need of particular attention in EU R&I policies, pointing beyond those already identified in the 1st Strategic Plan, and possibly also questioning some of them. In other words, the sequence of Strategic Plans is a means to make the Framework Programme more adaptive and account explicitly for newly emerging developments, with foresight methods applied to ensure that a long-term perspective is taken.

Our project opens a new page in making use of foresight for underpinning the development and adaptation of large-scale policy initiatives in the EU policy context. We argue that it offers the possibility to promote futures thinking and anticipatory capacity building in public sector organisations by introducing new foresight infrastructures, building inter-organisational networks, and mobilising futures literacy and domain expertise around selected themes to underpin the definition and adaptation of policy strategies and actions.

The project is embedded in a regular interaction process with an intra-EU network of forward-looking thinkers, involving all European Commission Directorates with an active role or stake in R&I. The project also reaches out to EU member states’ foresight nodes to stimulate exchange on emerging future challenges and innovation opportunities in selected areas across policy levels. Further, it facilitates debates with a wide range of societal stakeholders. These interactions are organised through online workshops and an online community ([futures4europe.org](https://futures4europe.org)), launched early 2022.

The emphasis on sources of potential disruptions is reflected in the design of the project. Its first component focuses on potentially disruptive developments in the global and EU context. We explore

possible future changes in the global and EU context for EU R&I policies to identify those areas of change that might have disruptive impacts on EU's ability to achieve its overarching policy goals.

The first part of the project has reviewed a set of recent forward-looking activities with global scope. The scenarios developed by these activities have been characterised by considering a set of aspects, including

- the needs of the client commissioning the study
- the methods used
- the main features of the scenarios (organising principle/s/, the level of analysis, ...)
- the main trends, drivers, and key factors underlying the scenarios
- the key likely developments in a given future
- the actual use and influence of the report on decision-making
- critical assessment (novelty of the approach, methods or scenario architecture; if any; new or surprising elements considered; relevance for EU R&I policies).

We will consider the pros and cons of various scenario approaches, namely the types of scenario architectures used in the reviewed reports; other options used in further prospective analyses; as well as three more generic methodological approaches we experimented with in the first part of the project: multi-level scenarios; disruptions as 'starting points' (their likely impacts explored in different contexts); and narratives (short, focussed descriptions of certain developments, as opposed to scenarios offering a more comprehensive picture of a given future). We will identify methodological differences and elaborate on the particularities of multi-level context scenarios as opposed to other types of scenarios, and their added value for selecting and framing policy issues.

This first, context-oriented component will serve to test the robustness of suggested new emerging, and potentially disruptive, developments that may be possibly included in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Plan.

The second component aims at deepening our understanding of disruptive developments in selected areas or research and innovation using horizon scanning and scenario development techniques. This part was implemented in the first half of 2022. The purpose of this second component was to identify candidate areas for inclusion in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Plan. Drawing on these two components, a visionary outlook and possible suggestions for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Plan will be developed in interaction with the different communities of practice tied to the project.

The closing phase of the project will distil policy implications from prospective analyses. In other words, it aims to interpret how to tackle the disruptive factors at context and area levels, e.g., how to take advantage of the favourable ones; how to prevent or 'amend' the unfavourable ones; and how to adapt to the unstoppable ones. We will consider what processes and approaches would be appropriate for selecting and framing issues when setting R&I policies in an environment characterised by multi-level governance and interactions among policy tools set in different policy domains.

**Keywords:** Context scenarios, Disruptions, Scenario architectures, Embedding foresight in organisations, EU R&I policies