

# Strategic foresight

Learning to navigate uncertainty



## FORESIGHT CAN HELP TO CHART PATHS TO CLIMATE RESILIENCE

For example, many **coastal communities** are facing the threat of rising sea levels in the years ahead. Supported by United Nations experts, Member States can model different **climate scenarios and anticipate areas prone to flooding and extreme weather events**. Equipped with foresight tools, national partners can plan **infrastructure adaptations**, such as raised housing and coastal defences – **proactively adapting to climate change while minimizing disaster risks**.

## WHAT BUILDING FORESIGHT CAPACITY MEANS

Fostering strategic foresight capacity means **cultivating structured methods that help to navigate uncertainty, imagine better futures and chart new paths forward already today**. It is about nurturing proactive mindsets and exploring possible futures, with tools such as horizon-scanning, trend analysis and scenario development, desired futures approaches to make better choices today – in the face of an uncertain tomorrow.

## WAYS IN WHICH FORESIGHT EXPERTISE CAN IMPROVE THE UNITED NATIONS...

- Planning for shifts in staff **expertise** in United Nations entities, informed by global skills **horizon scans**.
- Developing “next-generation” **cooperation frameworks**, informed by climate **scenario planning**.
- Gaining insights on **global demographics** with **cross-impact analysis** for stronger policy advice.

## AND SUPPORT MEMBER STATES IN...

- Helping vulnerable countries to **adapt to climate change with system dynamics modelling**.
- Anticipating demand for **safe water with trend analysis**, including to reach the 2.2 billion people worldwide who lack access.<sup>30</sup>
- Preparing for **natural disasters**, including droughts, floods or fires, through **predictive analytics**.
- Enable **early action** around **risks of social tensions** or conflicts with forward-looking situational analysis of systemic shifts.



Learn more about United Nations system foresight initiatives

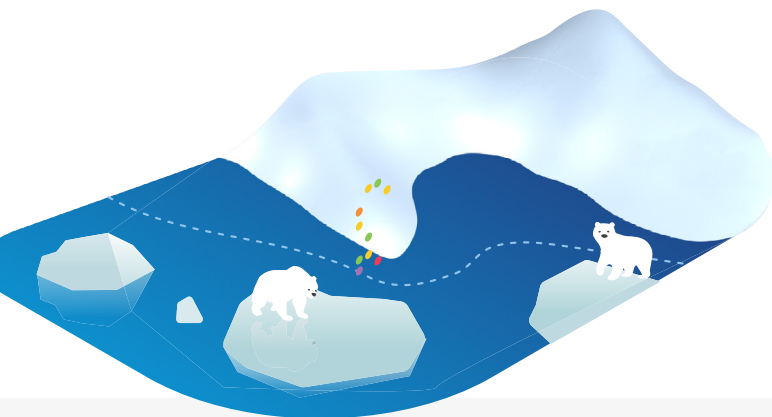
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## WHY WE NEED TO SHIFT

### NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

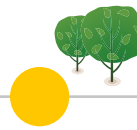
Recent crises demonstrate that the future will not necessarily mirror the past. With escalating climate extremes, rapid technological advances and uncertain societal dynamics – including inequalities, growing divisions and polarization – we **face a multitude of possible, probable and preferable futures that we need to anticipate, imagine and work towards**. If United Nations entities amplify their foresight abilities, we can help Member States to navigate rising uncertainty, seize emerging opportunities and enhance support for the Sustainable Development Goals and future generations.



## WHERE WE ARE NOW

### EMERGING EXPERTISE

Although the United Nations system is making progress, the integration of foresight approaches into our everyday work is **only beginning: 34 per cent of United Nations entities have designed a strategy for enhancing and using strategic foresight. Fewer than one third of United Nations entities believe that they have advanced foresight capabilities**. On a global scale, only a fraction of development assistance incorporate foresight methodologies to mitigate risks or seize new opportunities.



## OUR GOAL

### BECOMING MORE FUTURE-FOCUSED

Our vision is a United Nations system **adept at understanding, navigating and shaping futures**. We aim to foster sophisticated futures thinking to empower **improved planning and cultivate better decisions amid uncertainty**. Our ambition is not just to respond to change but to help Member States to envision and work towards better, greener and safer futures – aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations values and human rights.

Our approach revolves around **embedding foresight into everything we do** – by building an ecosystem of capacities across the United Nations system. Embracing a “learning-by-doing” ethos, we focus on real-life scenarios to cultivate foresight abilities. Through step-by-step learning, we make better sense of change, imagine possible futures and guide action. Recognizing the value of diversity, we harness broader perspectives for expanded input, thinking and approaches. With a **hub-and-spoke model**, a new network will connect the United Nations system to accelerate shifts in training, mindsets, partnerships and methods.

### State of play: United Nations system entities with...

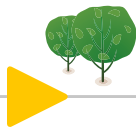


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of \$350 billion in official development assistance is allocated to foresight annually<sup>31</sup>

56%

women in foresight community of practice<sup>32</sup>



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## HOW WE AIM TO CHANGE

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### ADAPTING CULTURES AND CAPABILITIES

#### IMPROVE OUR OFFER TO MEMBER STATES

- Support **foresight-informed decision-making** on global priorities and agendas.
- Leverage **United Nations foresight laboratories and networks** to help Member States in using foresight for their strategies.
- Incorporate **foresight into the development** of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.
- Inform **global analysis of and debates on potential and desired futures** and paths forward.

### NURTURE FORESIGHT CAPABILITIES

- Curate **use cases that create value for beneficiaries**, Member States and United Nations entities.
- Master **foresight methods**, from helping stakeholders to scan the present for trends to developing future scenarios and linking them to necessary changes in policies and programmes today.
- Leverage **practical tools to support foresight**, including applications that support trend analysis, scenario development and the visualization of desired futures.
- Integrate **diverse perspectives into foresight methods** for stronger strategic planning, decision-making, policy development, programme design, resource allocation and risk management, including to understand and mitigate biases.



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### SHIFT FOUNDATIONS AND CULTURES

- **Leadership.** Leaders to work to embed foresight into cultures, plans and strategies.
- **Training.** Foster strategic foresight literacy with learning initiatives and knowledge communities.
- **Job profiles.** Integrate foresight expertise into relevant job descriptions.
- **Processes.** Equip teams with user-friendly foresight tools, with access to help from shared expert teams.
- **Partnerships.** Build geographically diverse partnerships with foresight researchers and experts.
- **Networks.** Link United Nations foresight capacities in a system-wide network, using a hub-and-spoke model.
- **Technology.** Introduce software to enable the efficient processing and interpretation of trends and scenarios.
- **Culture.** Develop metrics to track foresight integration across entities.





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