



Summit of the Future Action Days Side Event

Futures Thinking and Strategic Foresight to Safeguard Future Generations

Saturday, 21 September 2024, 2.30 pm – 3.45 pm, Conference Room 1

Organized by: UN Futures Lab and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in partnership with the Kingdom of Spain and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Background on the event

At a moment when complex sets of risks are affecting our societies and a rapid pace of change is fundamentally challenging our governance systems, this high-level event explored how integrating futures thinking and strategic foresight into decision-making processes can enhance governance and support policymakers in building a more anticipatory multilateral system fit for future generations. Panelists included representatives from Governments and international organizations: Mr. Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General for Policy, Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ulrik Verstergaard Knudsen, Deputy Secretary-General, OECD, H.E. Ambassador Héctor Gómez Hernández, Permanent Representative of Spain to the UN, Ms. Kandya Obezo, Deputy Minister for Multilateral Affairs, Colombia, Mr. Korir Sing'Oei, Principal Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs of Kenya, Mr. Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, Ms. Gabriela Ramos, Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO, Ms. Erin Tansey, Director, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and Mr. Chris Earney, Head, UN Futures Lab/Global Hub.

Key Issues discussed

- Foresight is not about predicting the future but about exploring possible futures to guide decisions and take actions. It helps shape long-term policies and transform organizations to meet the needs of both present and future generations (using tools like scenario exercises and megatrend assessments) and challenges assumptions and biases that can at times feel uncomfortable.

- Applying foresight needs to translate from theory to action through a user-driven process, rooted in what aims to be changed. Aligning it with institutional mechanisms, such as financial cycles and development of contingency plans, can support policy integration in a meaningful way. There is much that can be done to improve how foresight is used by Governments and in the multilateral system: more diverse views can be incorporated, more meaningful engagement of people and communities from adjacent disciplines and thought frameworks, and from more diverse geographies.
- Insights included: (i) OECD's use of foresight tools to address global megatrends such as climate change and AI; (ii) the key role of Spain's National Foresight Office in the post-COVID recovery plan; (iii) IDRC's support to foresight research in countries in the Global South; (iv) Kenya's use of foresight approaches in the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture and an ongoing youth visioning project in the context of protests; (v) UNESCO's work on fostering futures literacy and coordinating the UN Strategic Foresight Community of Practice (led by the UN Futures Lab); (vi) Colombia's National Development Plan that prioritizes proactive long-term planning over reactive short-term choices, and (vii) implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Key recommendations for action

- **Prioritize inclusive foresight processes:** Make foresight more inclusive by engaging young people, local communities, indigenous groups and diverse stakeholders at local, regional and national levels so that decisions reflect broad perspectives and aspirations for the future. Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) is essential to ensuring ownership about the future and promoting intergenerational fairness. Evaluating foresight processes should include inclusiveness as an impact indicator.
- **Invest in Member States' foresight analytical capabilities:** There is insufficient investment in the analytical capacities of Governments, making it essential to provide targeted support to help Member States apply foresight effectively in policy decisions.
- **Strengthen multilateral collaboration:** Support the UN Futures Lab in its role to empower the UN system and beyond to use futures thinking and strategic foresight in planning, policymaking, and decision-making. This includes strengthening collaboration among Member States, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society to address global challenges such as climate change, AI, and geopolitical shifts through collective foresight initiatives, sharing data and tools, and translating foresight results into models and use cases for learning and scaling. This could potentially lead to establishing a Group of Friends of Strategic Foresight, coordinated by the UN Futures Lab.

Webpage to find more information: <https://un-futureslab.org/summit-of-the-future-action-days-futures-thinking-and-strategic-foresight-to-safeguard-future-generations/>