



UN Global Horizon Scanning: Insights from using digital tools to analyze signals, trends, and drivers of change across the UN system

7 May 2025¹, 09:00 am – 10:15 am ET, Virtual (via Zoom)

Organized by: UN Futures Lab/Global Hub and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

SUMMARY

Background of the event, including connection with the theme of the 2024 STI Forum

Horizon scanning brings together the perspectives and collective intelligence of different stakeholders to map possible changes, presenting a wealth of information on signals, trends, and drivers of change that can be harnessed to inform decision-making, planning, and programming. To this end, the [UN Futures Lab/Global Hub](#) and [UN DESA](#) are developing a digital AI tool to efficiently harness and analyze insights of horizon scanning initiatives so that they may better feed into decision-making and help further position strategic foresight as a core enabler of anticipatory action across the UN. The tool aims to help users draw on existing intelligence to deepen analysis, bridge synergies, facilitate cross-fertilization, motivate collaboration, and ultimately translate insights into action. The side event was moderated by the UN Futures Lab/Global Hub and featured preliminary insights and a live demo by UN DESA's Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government of the first prototype which draws on five horizon scanning reports published between 2022-2024 by UN DESA, FAO, UNDP, UNEP, and WHO. Following the demo, representatives from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG), UN DESA, FAO, UNDP, and UNEP engaged in a panel discussion on horizon scanning to further unpack the tool's initial insights and explore potential synergies. The side event closed with an interactive exercise with the audience to inform iteration and scaling of the tool.

¹ Due to unexpected connection issues at UN Headquarters in New York on 7 May 2025 the virtual side event was rescheduled to 15 May 2025 at 09:00 am – 10:15 am ET.

Key issues discussed

- **Systemic implications for inclusion, participation, and responsive multilateralism:** Consolidating foresight knowledge can surface interlinkages and make insights more actionable. To this end, the tool aims to foster collaboration by connecting expertise and foresight capacities across UN agencies and mandates.
- **Leveraging the responsible use of AI:** The tool was developed to process data and visualize insights efficiently and transparently, enabling feedback loops for improvement.
- **Emerging insights from the prototype:** The prototype was able to clearly distill interconnections, convergences, and divergences across the five reports, with technology, climate change, and polarization emerging as top signals.
- **Experiences, process, application, and impact of driving horizon scanning and foresight initiatives:** Panelists highlighted different perspectives to bridge joint analysis of implications, blind spots, and causal linkages to inform policy, decision-making, strategic direction, and adaptive programming.
- **Interactive discussions:** Participants surfaced different use cases for the tool, including foresight for behavioural change, use of appropriate technology, and managing biases.

Key recommendations for action

- **Incorporate consolidated feedback in project trajectory and iteration:** Outline approaches and manage biases in data generation, analysis, and interpretation.
- **Reflect proposed applications of the tool in refining personas and user journeys:** These include validation, identifying outliers, partnerships, informing portfolio/project design, policy work, directives on intergovernmental processes, and UN priority areas.
- **Test the tool to deep dive on issues of interest, including:** (i) Development finance architecture; (ii) long-term resilience, hazard mitigation, preparedness; (iii) women and technology; (iv) impact indicators; (v) scenarios/options analysis; (vi) workforce planning.
- **Map out engagement strategy and phases for outreach, including:** (i) Mobilize existing mechanisms, such as the UN Strategic Foresight Community of Practice; (ii) consider emerging champions who could represent complementary perspectives (e.g. foresight practice, strategic application, and data/technical expertise) by establishing a Steering Committee; (iii) define strategy and parameters for expansion beyond the UN system.
- **Continuously develop the user guide:** Emphasize accessible technical navigation, responsible use, and application of insights, based on emerging outcomes from testing.
- **Build processes and systems for sustainability:** Drive momentum to expand knowledge sharing and ensure foresight insights translate into anticipatory action.

Webpage with more information on the project and event recording: <https://un-futureslab.org/project/un-global-horizon-scanning/>