Future-oriented policymaking: practical guidelines for central government

Version: 29/09/2025

Aim: Practical support regarding long-term effects in the Policy Compass

For: Policymakers and stakeholders

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why these guidelines?

Good policy requires a long-term perspective because the choices we make today will have repercussions for decades to come. Take for example the construction of dykes and town planning; this is not done with a single generation in mind. By thinking about the future now, we increase our options and strengthen confidence in our policy.

Nevertheless, the voice of the future is often absent in everyday practice. Psychological factors also play a role in formulating future-oriented policy. Many people, including policymakers, often find it difficult to anticipate future developments and tend to think from the perspective of the present. We prefer for things to stay as they are ('status quo bias') and are sometimes overly optimistic ('wishful thinking'). Personal circumstances, such as financial worries, also determine whether someone is able think about the long term.

The danger is that we, often unintentionally, shift burdens and risks to young people and future generations. Central government wants to prevent this and make sure we don't just pass problems on to our children and grandchildren.

These guidelines provide an ethical and strategic compass to fulfil that promise.

The aim of these guidelines is to:

- improve the quality of the policy process by taking a systematic approach to future-oriented thinking;
- provide insight into the distribution of benefits and burdens between current and future generations;
- help formulate robust and flexible policies that remain effective in the long term;
- prevent unintended adverse effects and increase the likelihood of achieving long-term goals.

1.2 How should you apply these guidelines?

The Policy Compass consists of a central, recurring question and five main questions. It requires us to make future-oriented policy. But how do you do that? These guidelines explain how you can take account of the future in the central, recurring question and in each main question in the Policy Compass.

Policy development is not a linear process. This is reflected in these guidelines.

The best way is to first use the main questions in the Policy Compass and the 'generational impact scan' to check whether the policy you are developing will have significant long-term effects before proceeding to the 'Bringing the Future to the table' approach or applying the 'generational impact assessment' method of analysis.

These guidelines will therefore first look at the generational impact scan.

Question in Policy Compass	Method	What is it?	When should you use it?
Who are the stakeholders?	Bringing the Future to the Table (see section 4)	A practical method to actively involve, safeguard and utilise the voices of different and future generations in the policy process.	Particularly effective during the development and decision-making phase on policy with significant long-term consequences.
1. What is the problem? 2. What is the intended goal? 3. What are the options for achieving the goal?	Generational impact scan (see section 2)	Questions that help you check easily, quickly and at an early stage whether policy will have long-term effects.	For all substantial policy proposals, bills and revisions to existing policy.
4. What are the impacts of these options?	Generational impact assessment (see section 3)	An in-depth and structured analysis of long-term and intergenerational effects.	Only if the generational impact scan shows that significant and potentially irreversible consequences are expected.
5. What is the preferred option?	Reporting (see section 5)	A report of the method used and the findings.	If you have used one of the methods referred to in these guidelines.

1.3 Definition of key terms

To use the guidelines properly you will need to understand the following terms.

Generations: By this we mean age cohorts that share a common social and historical context. This includes current generations (such as young people, working people and older people) as well as future generations.

Long-term effects: These are the consequences of policy that only become apparent after a longer period of time. For example, irreversible consequences, high (or indeed averted) costs in the future and the effect on choices made by future generations.

Problem shifting: The unintentional transfer of burdens and risks to people who are currently too young to have a say or who have not yet been born.

Intergenerational equity: Policy is intergenerationally fair if it meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It ensures that specific age groups are not disadvantaged, and that inequality is not passed on to future generations.

1.4 How do you use these guidelines in conjunction with the Policy Compass?

These guidelines expand on the Policy Compass, so you will always run through its five main questions. For some steps in the Compass, you can use these guidelines to consider the perspective of future generations specifically.

Steps 1-3 (problem, goals, options): The ‘Bringing the Future to the Table’ approach can help to identify values and perspectives of different generations.

Step 4 (consequences): This is where the generational impact scan comes in. It will help you to think systematically about long-term effects and potential problem shifting to younger and future generations.

Steps 4-5 (consequences and choice): For complex or far-reaching proposals, you can opt for the generational impact assessment to help you conduct an in-depth analysis.

Use of these tools should be modular: not every method is needed in all cases, but together they can provide greater power of thought, support and legitimacy. Findings should be recorded in the same format that is used in the Policy Compass to avoid duplication.

1.5 Share your experiences

These guidelines help to make government policy future-proof and more balanced and equitable across generations. The methodologies and questions allow you to look beyond the limits of one term of government and enable politicians to make choices that are sustainable for people, society and the environment.

The guidelines are also an invitation, however: to contribute consciously and thoughtfully to policy that also works for future generations. Good governance requires the courage to look beyond the here and now. These tools will allow us to shape that future-oriented governance.

To reinforce this, we would ask you to actively share your experiences of the generational impact assessment with your colleagues, for example via LinkedIn. The insights, areas for improvement and successes will be valuable to other staff and help to foster a learning government.

2. GENERATIONAL IMPACT SCAN: a practical way to check future-oriented policy

The generational impact scan will help you to check easily, quickly and at an early stage whether policy will have significant long-term effects. This will tell you whether it is important to take account of future generations in the policy development process, for instance by applying the 'Bringing the Future to the Table' approach (section 4), or whether more in-depth analysis is advisable, for example conducting a generational impact assessment (section 3). The generational impact scan is certainly useful for major policy proposals, new legislation or substantive amendments to existing policy.

The scan follows the five main questions in the Policy Compass. A number of secondary questions have been included for each main question to help you systematically take the long-term perspective into consideration.

2.1 What is the problem?

When analysing the problem, it is important to look not only at the 'here and now' but also at the future. You can do this by posing the following secondary questions when answering the questions in the Policy Compass:

- When addressing the question 'What is the scope of the problem?', you should ask: Will it be a bigger problem or less of a problem in the future?
- When addressing the question 'Who is affected by the problem and how?', you should ask: Does the problem affect certain generations (young people, working people, older people) more than others?
- When addressing the question 'What happens if the government does nothing (baseline option)?', you should ask: Does the current situation (doing nothing) involve costs, disadvantages, irreversible consequences in the future? For example: an environmental debt that we are passing on or an outdated system that limits future options.

2.2 What are the intended policy objectives?

A good policy objective looks beyond the next few years. Link the solution to the duration of the problem and the long or very long term. You can do this by always asking the following questions when considering questions about the policy's strategic objectives and the specific policy objectives:

- Are the objectives of one generation different from those of another?
- Does the period in which the problem occurs coincide with the period in which the objective needs to be achieved?

2.3 What are the options for achieving the goal?

Explore policy options that are flexible and robust so that they will continue to be effective even in an uncertain future. You can do this by asking the following secondary questions for the main questions in the Policy Compass:

- When addressing the question 'What policy approach is the best match for the problem and the policy objectives, and why?', you should ask:

  Is the policy approach flexible enough to take account of future developments and trends?

  What opportunities or risks will future developments present when it comes to solving the problem?

- When addressing the question 'What are the budgetary and other frameworks that you need to consider?', you should ask: What principles are we applying to the distribution of costs and benefits across generations, and why?

2.4 What are the impacts of the policy options?

It is important to identify the consequences of policy options for people, the environment and society, both now and in the future. The generational impact scan is a useful tool for this. It's also useful to ask the following secondary questions in relation to the questions in the Policy Compass:

- For the question 'What are the possible impacts of a policy option for people, society and the environment?', you should ask:
  - Will an option result in effects that we cannot reverse later (irreversible consequences)? For example: loss of biodiversity or building on a unique site.
  - Are there high costs or indeed major advantages (benefits) that will become apparent in the future?
- For the question 'What are the possible impacts of the policy option?', you should ask: How will the proposal affect different generations? Will certain age groups, now or in the future, benefit, or be disadvantaged in specific ways ? Does the proposal limit the options of future generations?

RECOMMENDATION

If the application of this generational impact scan shows that the policy has significant long-term consequences or intergenerational effects, it is highly recommended that the generational impact assessment be conducted for a more in-depth analysis (see section 3) or that the 'Bringing the Future to the Table' methodology be applied (see section 4).

3. GENERATIONAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

3.1.1 What is the generational impact assessment?

The generational impact assessment is an in-depth, structured analysis of the intergenerational and long-term effects of a specific proposal (or part of one) for policy or legislation. Relationships with other policy areas are given particular consideration in this process. The aim of the assessment is to provide insight into the long-term impact of policy or legislation and its distribution across generations, with a view to facilitating policy decisions, thus enhancing the quality of political choices.

The assessment provides a standardised framework so that the results of different generational impact assessments can be compared and learning capacity increased. At the same time, there is flexibility: in a number of areas, choices can be made to ensure the best fit for the policy issue under assessment. During the assessment, you may choose to spend more or less time on a particular step. This depends on the policy theme and the information requirements, as well as on the time available for the policy process. Strategic foresight, trend analyses or scenario exercises may be more important for certain policy themes than for others, for example if plenty of quantitative and qualitative data is available.

3.1.2 When to use the generational impact assessment

You only use the generational impact assessment if significant intergenerational effects are expected. That means that the assessment is always required if the expected policy impact could lead to:

- a considerable redistribution of benefits and burdens across generations;

- irreversible effects or severe restriction of the choices made by future generations because those effects will be difficult or extremely costly to reverse at a later stage; or

- major uncertainty about the long-term effects of high-impact policy.

Examples include major infrastructure projects, reforms to the pension system, far-reaching climate policy and policy with substantial repercussions for the national debt. The impact assessment requires more time and expertise than the other tools and is therefore conducted only if its use is justified by the expected policy effects and in cases where policy cannot be easily reversed.

3.1.3 Principles for applying the generational impact assessment

The assessment should be conducted as early as possible in the policy process.

Quantitative and qualitative data should be used wherever possible. This can be supplemented with foresight methodologies.

The generational impact assessment is conducted by or under the supervision of the department leading the decision-making. The use of relevant internal and external expertise is crucial. The assessment may also be conducted with the help of an external party.

3.2 How?

The assessment comprises four steps, not necessarily in this order: scoping, baseline assessment, normative frameworks and foresight analysis, and validation and reporting.

Oversight and communication are also important aspects.

3.2.1 *Scoping*

Good scoping ensures that the assessment is focused and thus provides the greatest possible added value. It also ensures that it can be conducted within a reasonable time frame. Scoping is achieved by selecting a limited number of themes, the most relevant generational cohorts and the right time horizons. The generational impact scan forms the basis for this assessment and scoping process.

3.2.1.1 Choice of policy theme

In order to give the generational impact assessment focus and direction, a decision must first be made as to the themes to which it will be applied. This will be clear if the impact scan shows that a particular theme has a fairly isolated effect in the long term or between generations. Choosing a maximum of six themes makes the assessment focused and feasible. It is possible to work on the basis of main themes and a number of relevant sub-topics. The impact scan system should be adhered to as closely as possible. The impact scan is based on potential effects on people, the environment and society (including the economy) and specifies these by dividing them into eight 'wellbeing' themes. Each of these contains various sustainable development goals (SDGs)[1] and other sub-themes.

The eight wellbeing themes offer a good starting point for identifying the most relevant themes for the generational impact assessment. This is in line with the work of the policy analysis institutes to identify effects on wellbeing. It is also possible to select more specific or different themes if the impact scan gives cause to do so.

Impact scan Subjective wellbeing
Health • Access to good healthcare • Environmental pollution, clean living environment • Access to healthy food
Consumption and income • Poverty reduction (socioeconomic security) • Quality of work
Human capital, education and training • Access to high-quality education • Lifelong development
Spatial cohesion and quality • Access to appropriate housing • Mobility and infrastructure • Urban and rural development • Agriculture and food supply
Economic capital • Economic growth • Consumption and production • Infrastructure, knowledge and innovation • Energy supply

[1] These are the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) which were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and to which the Netherlands has committed.

Natural capital • Sustainable water system, clean drinking water and sanitation • Climate and sustainability, circularity • Biodiversity and nature (on land and under water)
Social capital • Safe and peaceful society, personal safety • Participation and access to justice • Capable and responsible institutions • Inclusion and equal opportunities, non-discrimination, sexual equality

KADER: The capitals approach

The 'capitals approach' helps to identify the long-term impact of policy decisions. In 2024, the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure advised the government to draw up budgets not only for financial capital but also for 'our economic capital (our future earning power), our social capital (the connections between citizens, between citizens and institutions and between citizens and the government) and our 'natural capital' (everything that nature offers us) [...] and thus ensure that this capital is fully taken into account in future policy choices.' The three policy analysis institutes use economic, natural, social and human capital to measure wellbeing.

For the generational impact assessment, these four types of capital could represent a logical choice of policy theme.

3.2.1.2 Time horizons

Determine the relevant time periods on which the generational impact assessment should focus. Some policy issues require us to take a long view of the future, while for others a shorter to medium-term time horizon may suffice. In some areas, it is also easier to predict effects further into the future, such as demographics or climate change. Economic or geopolitical developments are often more difficult to predict far into the future. The literature refers to three long-term perspectives: individual (regarding one's own future), generational (for the generations to come) and existential (for humanity as a whole).

The generational impact assessment is based on four time horizons:

- The past: knowledge and experience of the last 30-50 years (or longer) surrounding the policy issue.

- Short term: up to 10 years into the future, in other words beyond the current term of government. This time frame allows sufficient room to organise the practical implementation after the decision has been published or the legislation and/or policy has entered into force. It reflects the impact on the different generation groups up to 10 years ahead.

- Medium term: 10-30 years after entry into force; this means focusing on how legislation affects current generations, particularly the young and old. This time frame prompts reflection on the longer-term effects and how these relate to the goal or societal challenge that the policy and legislation aim to address.

- Long term: 30-100 years into the future, in other words focusing on the repercussions for future generations. This time frame provides the opportunity to consider effects further into the future, for example in terms of generational or existential challenges.

For many policy issues, considering three time horizons will suffice; in some cases, you can choose just two. However, in order to properly identify intergenerational effects, a window of at least 30 years ahead is required. When performing a short-term analysis (up to 10 years), it is important to avoid duplication with other tests, such as the feasibility test or the capacity-to-act test. When choosing the longest time horizon (more than 30 years), an indication can be given as to how far ahead the generational impact assessment will look. This will be determined by the key factors concerning the specific policy issue. Expectations about the future will obviously be subject to a range of uncertainties, which will often increase the further ahead we want to look. The degree of uncertainty should be indicated wherever possible.

3.2.1.3 Generation groups

Decide which are the most logical generation groups to look at, including current generations. Future generations must always be included for periods of 10 years or longer.

It is recommended that you use three broad generational cohorts that distinguish between important life events: children and young people (up to the age of 25), the group aged between 25 and 55, and those aged 55 and older. If the policy issue requires, a more detailed classification can also be selected, for example by aligning with the age groups most commonly used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS): <15, 15-24, 25-40, 41-67 and >67.

3.2.1.4 What questions should the generational impact assessment answer?

Refine the scope of the generational impact assessment further by formulating specific questions that need to be answered. Targeted, future-oriented questions help to focus the assessment on the points that actually concern the future or the differences between generations. This helps prevent overlap or duplication with other tests.

- General questions that help to focus the assessment on intergenerational issues:
    - Are any irreversible (adverse) consequences expected in the future or in the distribution between generations on this policy theme? If so, when will they arise? What is the effect of the policy on transfer of inequality to the future?
    - Have future generations or a specific current generation been saddled with high costs? How will the policy affect the development of public finances or other capital in the future?
    - Are there significant differences in the costs and benefits across generations? Will there be an impact on highly specific stages of people’s lives?
    - Can the policy objectives be achieved in the same way by different generations and in the future?
- Questions according to theme. See sample questions in the table below.

Table: Generational impact assessment scoping

Themes and questions	Over what time frames?			For which generations?		
	Short-term	*Medium-term*	*Long-term*	*Young people*	*Older people*	*Future generations*
Subjective wellbeing: What specific aspects of the policy could contribute to or detract from the wellbeing of future generations?	Positive					
	Negative					
Health: How does policy affect access to healthcare for future generations? What effect could policy have on different generations' access to healthy food?						
Spatial quality and cohesion: How does policy affect the availability and affordability of housing for different current generations and for future generations?						
Social capital: How does the policy promote participation by different current and future generations in community/societal activities? What are the expected effects of the policy on the physical safety of future generations?						

3.2.2 *Baseline data collection*

In this step, the available information is identified and supplemented.

Make a note of what information is available and what is missing. This will also help to prevent duplication. Information may be available in or can be obtained from the following sources:

- The draft policy proposal and/or supporting documents and annexes.
- Information available from other tests conducted during the impact scan, such as the Environmental Impact Assessment (MER), a social cost-benefit analysis (MKBA), a gender assessment or a capacity-to-act test.
- Externally available qualitative and quantitative data, such as publications by CBS, policy analysis institutes, advisory councils and knowledge institutions. Specific examples include quantitative data and trend analyses by CBS and foresight and wellbeing analyses by the policy analysis institutes.[2]

Although quantitative data is often the preferred option for substantiating policy choices, it is often difficult to find in practice. Qualitative information therefore plays an important role too. This can be obtained from trend analyses (from CBS or the policy analysis institutes, for example) and scientific and other research into developments or causal links relating to the policy issue. Information should be sought from recognised sources.

Tip: treat the various mandatory tests and this analysis method as parts of a whole, and plan them in conjunction with each other. Each individual test looks at different aspects of the policy proposal, but all these aspects must ultimately be seen in relation to each other in order to ensure coherent and effective policy.[3]

➢ See the Toolbox for tips on finding relevant information.

3.2.3 *Normative frameworks and foresight analysis*

3.2.3.1 Determining normative frameworks

Examine whether international treaties or statutory frameworks contain relevant agreements on the rights of different generations that apply to the policy issue. See the Toolbox for relevant national and international frameworks.

Determine which principles of distributive justice may be relevant and take these into account when answering the questions.**[Noot AVT: ontbreekt een woord na 'voor' in deze zin?]** The distribution of benefits and burdens across generations is an important issue to consider when conducting the generational impact assessment.

When considering intergenerational effects, normative frameworks can help to apply clear assessment parameters, or provide decision-makers with options for doing so.

3.2.3.2 Identifying future trends and developments with the aid of foresight analysis methods

Quantitative and qualitative data is not always available to answer all the questions in the generational impact assessment. In such cases, instruments and methods from the science of foresight analysis could be applied. Although the future is unpredictable, analysing the future does offer useful insights. For example, foresight analysis methods

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[2] Based on the data currently available from CBS and policy analysis institutes, it is not always possible to provide quantitative supporting evidence for future developments. CBS and the policy analysis institutes are working to develop indicators that are better suited to this purpose within the framework of wellbeing.

[3] See *Meaningful government*, 2024 report by the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (page 18) [ref/link]

help to identify issues that are looming on the horizon. And there are ways to curb our tendency to see the future as an extension of the present.

These methods also provide tools for dealing with uncertainty. Uncertainty usually increases the further ahead we want or need to look. With the help of these methods, we can nevertheless weigh up important opportunities and risks. Using these tools can also help determine the level of uncertainty and the specific questions/themes in which uncertainty is present. This can be useful for building flexibility for the future into policy choices.

• Analyse possible trends and developments that could significantly impact the policy issue in the future. For example, use tools from strategic foresight and futures thinking, such as trend analysis and horizon scanning.

• Consider whether it would be useful to conduct a scenario-based exercise to clarify policy choices – and the differences between them – on the basis of different future developments.

• Study relevant foresight analyses (which often include scenarios) by the policy analysis institutes.

3.2.4 *Validation and reporting*

3.2.4.1 Validation: the generational consultation

When conducting the generational impact assessment, it is crucial that relevant generation groups be consulted and hypothetical future generations considered. This can take place at various stages in the process: at a very early stage in the manner described later in Section 4 ('Bringing the Future to the Table'), or in the form of a consultation at a later stage, when a proposed policy direction has already been formulated. It may also be useful to conduct the consultation early in the process so you can obtain input from stakeholders on the potential impact of the proposed policy. This could even help you determine beforehand whether a generational impact assessment is required and, if so, for which themes. Consultation will often take place once an initial analysis has been made.

• Conduct an intergenerational stakeholder analysis to determine which generations should be at the table.

• Involve young people in the consultation. They have the greatest interest in future-proof policy and in many cases also represent the generational group at risk of an accumulation of adverse effects. See the toolbox for tips on involving young people. Ensure that young people and other stakeholders receive proper feedback on how their input has been used.

• Think about how to ensure that the voice of future generations is heard in the consultation.

• Consider inviting experts (including those with practical experience), policy analysis institutes, CBS, the Future Generations Lab and other relevant specialists. Ensure that they can provide specific input on intergenerational and long-term aspects of the issues. This will ensure that the focus of the generational consultation genuinely differs from that of the generic consultation of stakeholders earlier in the policy process.

• Use the consultation to complete any missing information, discuss scoping and refine the application of the generational impact assessment. Consultation can help to identify effects that are not (yet) on the policymaker's radar.

• The use of foresight analysis methods is also useful when consulting with stakeholders on aspects that go beyond current knowledge and assumptions.

3.2.4.2 Reporting

The analysis is developed on the basis of the aforementioned steps. This means that the expected impact on the various policy themes is identified for the relevant generations over the selected time periods. The conclusions are substantiated with the information and insights gathered from foresight analysis methods and tested against the insights of stakeholders. Normative frameworks can serve as a touchstone or assessment framework when developing conclusions or recommendations.

• Draw summary conclusions on the basis of the collected data and analyses. If necessary, use the table to create a clear overview of the main findings.

• The expected effects should be substantiated for each policy theme, and the impact across different generations (positive and negative) presented.

• Look at the effects for each policy theme and at the correlation of effects between them (comprehensive approach).

• The expected impact can be expressed in specific financial or other effects, but also in terms such as: (health) improvement or deterioration compared with others, etc. Supplementation of financial costs and benefits with costs and benefits for human, social and natural capital.

• The 'averted costs' of particular policy options can also be addressed by taking into account the long-term and intergenerational effects.

• Where relevant, indicate the degree of uncertainty in respect of certain conclusions.

• Make recommendations for policy options on the basis of the conclusions. Specify the normative frameworks that have been used.

• Where possible, use anecdotes to explain why the long term and generational equity have been included in the preferred option.

Tip: avoid confusion between model and reality: hard figures do not always give a clearer picture of intergenerational trade-offs than qualitative insights.

3.2.5 Oversight

It is important to have the assessment monitored by an independent party. If the assessment is conducted externally, that could be the policy officer. If it is conducted by the policy officer, that could be an independent expert or policy officer from another department or ministry, for example the Policy Compass team. In the case of legislation, the findings from the generational impact assessment can also be incorporated in the legislative check by the Ministry of Justice and Security.

3.2.6 Communication

The outcome of the generational impact assessment is communicated to stakeholders and to the decision-making body (minister, cabinet, House of Representatives), which incorporates the findings in the further decision-making process. This is in line with the practice of transparent government, under which decision-making is communicated openly. This provides stakeholders with insight into deliberations resulting from the consultation process.

- Prepare a brief summary of the main conclusions that can be used in communications with the minister, the cabinet and parliament. This summary will also be annexed to the decision note.

- Attach the generational impact assessment report as an annexe to bills and letters to parliament, and summarise the findings in the explanatory memorandum or the letter to parliament as applicable.

4. BRINGING THE FUTURE TO THE TABLE

The above-mentioned steps are being implemented in various places by means of the ‘Bringing the Future to the Table’ methodology. This approach was set up by the Delta Programme Commissioner’s executive team, Rijkswaterstaat and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. It helps to provide insight into and facilitate discussion about the extent to which current choices will impact the future, and whether that is acceptable. In this way, we can develop plans that will last for generations to come. It is one of the few methods already being effectively applied within central government to ensure we take account of the long term and of future generations in the projects of the here and now.

The ‘Bringing the Future to the Table’ approach has three key steps: 1) involve the future by means of an intergenerational stakeholder analysis, 2) safeguard the interests of the future through a generational impact assessment and intergenerational dialogue, and 3) utilise the insights gained by means of a future impact report. The methodology is based on scientific, societal and practical insights, and was developed with partners in and outside government and with active participation by different generations. Young people contributed ideas on behalf of organisations such as the National Youth Council and the Youth Climate Movement, and through young civil servants from organisations such as the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and the Ministries of Education, Culture and Science and of Health, Welfare and Sport. The focus group included researchers and social sector experts who contributed their knowledge and experience, providing insight as to how we can best involve, safeguard and utilise different generations, and future generations in particular, in the development of future-oriented policy. We want to create a culture in which future-oriented policy is the norm, not the exception. A culture in which the future is not an abstract concept, but is firmly anchored in each phase of policy development and decision-making. The ‘Bringing the Future to the Table’ approach and its three steps require organisation-wide commitment and continuity, not one-off actions. This does not happen automatically. It requires drivers, people who can make a difference and facilitate the steps that need to be taken.

That is why a new role has been introduced to support the Bringing the Future to the Table approach: the Future Ambassador. This is a builder of bridges between policy and society and between now and later, who promotes and embeds the methodology and the importance of futures thinking in the workplace. The first Future Ambassador officially started on 1 May 2025 in the Water and Climate Adaptation sector. The ambassador is more than just a driver; she is a figurehead and a catalyst, with one foot in practice and the other in society. Other ministries are invited to join this approach.

4.1 Involving current and future generations

The central, recurring question in the Policy Compass is ‘Who are the stakeholders?’ This means that you go through the Policy Compass’s five main questions with stakeholders. If the policy you are developing could have substantial long-term consequences, it is important to involve different generations, safeguard their interests and use this information in policy development and decision-making. This is particularly true of complex policy issues with a long time horizon, where different perspectives and social values are indispensable for sustainable decision-making. By involving different generations in the policy process, you can pick up on values, concerns and ideas that cannot be captured by quantitative analysis alone.

4.2 How?

‘Bringing the Future to the Table’ is a practical approach that uses specific working methods to give future generations a say in policymaking itself – not just as an abstract target group, but as an engaged party in dialogue with policymakers and stakeholders.

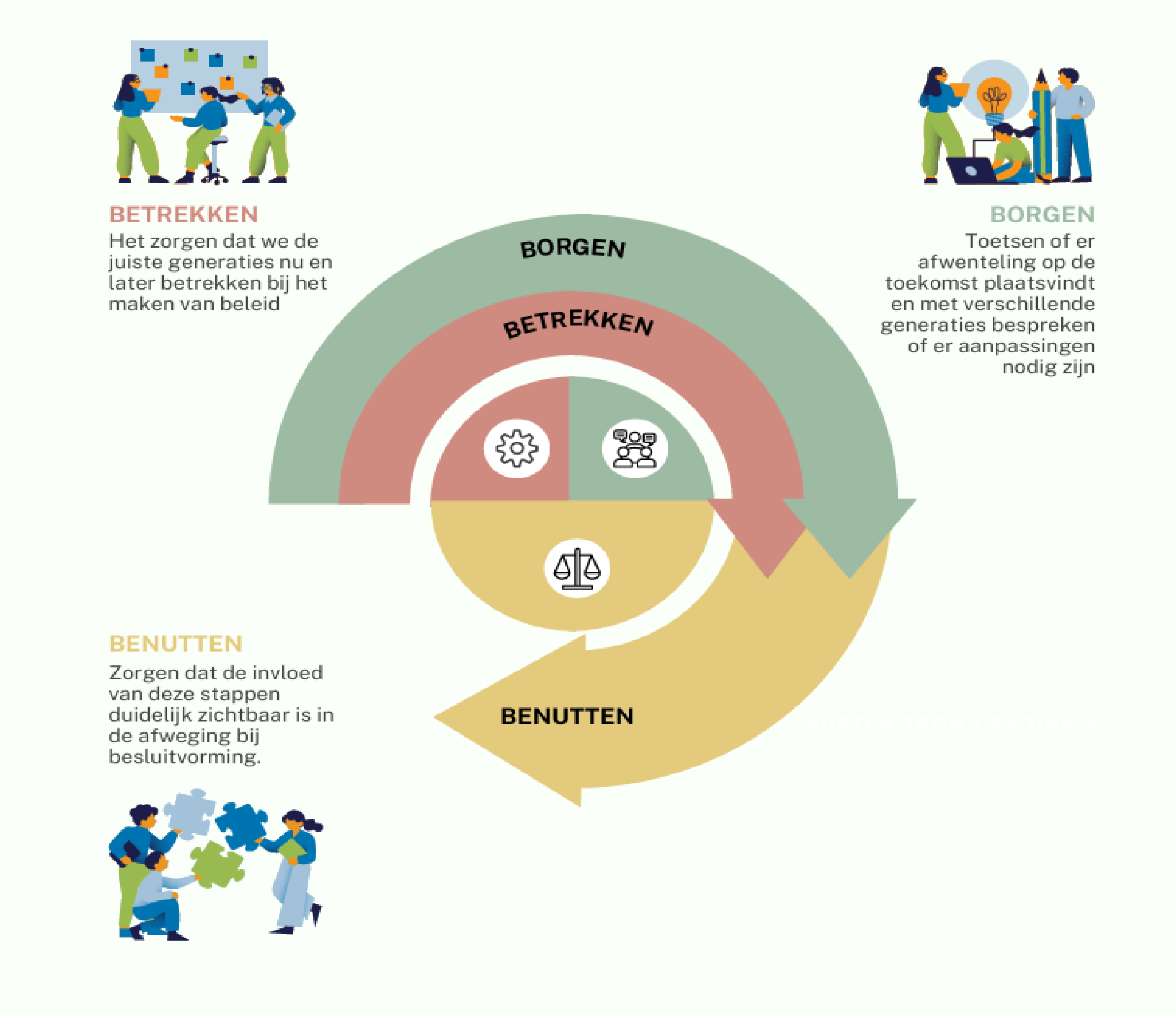
The approach consists of three elements: involve, safeguard and utilise. A tool has been developed for each element.

Platte tekst voor plaatje:

INVOLVE
Ensure that we involve the right generations now and later in policymaking

SAFEGUARD
Assess whether there is any burden shifting to the future and discuss with different generations whether adjustments are needed

UTILISE
Ensure that the effect of these steps is clearly visible in the decision-making process



1. *Involve:*

   Aim: Clearly indicate the expiry date of a plan, who will be affected by it in the future and how you can involve them in the process.

   Tool: Intergenerational stakeholder analysis: who is affected, now and in the future? This allows us to identify which generations are affected by a policy decision. What is the expiry date of this plan? Who will be alive then, and what will their interests be? Using methods such as Future Design, participants step into the shoes of a resident from, say, 2075 and engage in dialogue with policymakers. This is how we bring the voice of the future to the forefront.

2. *Safeguard*:

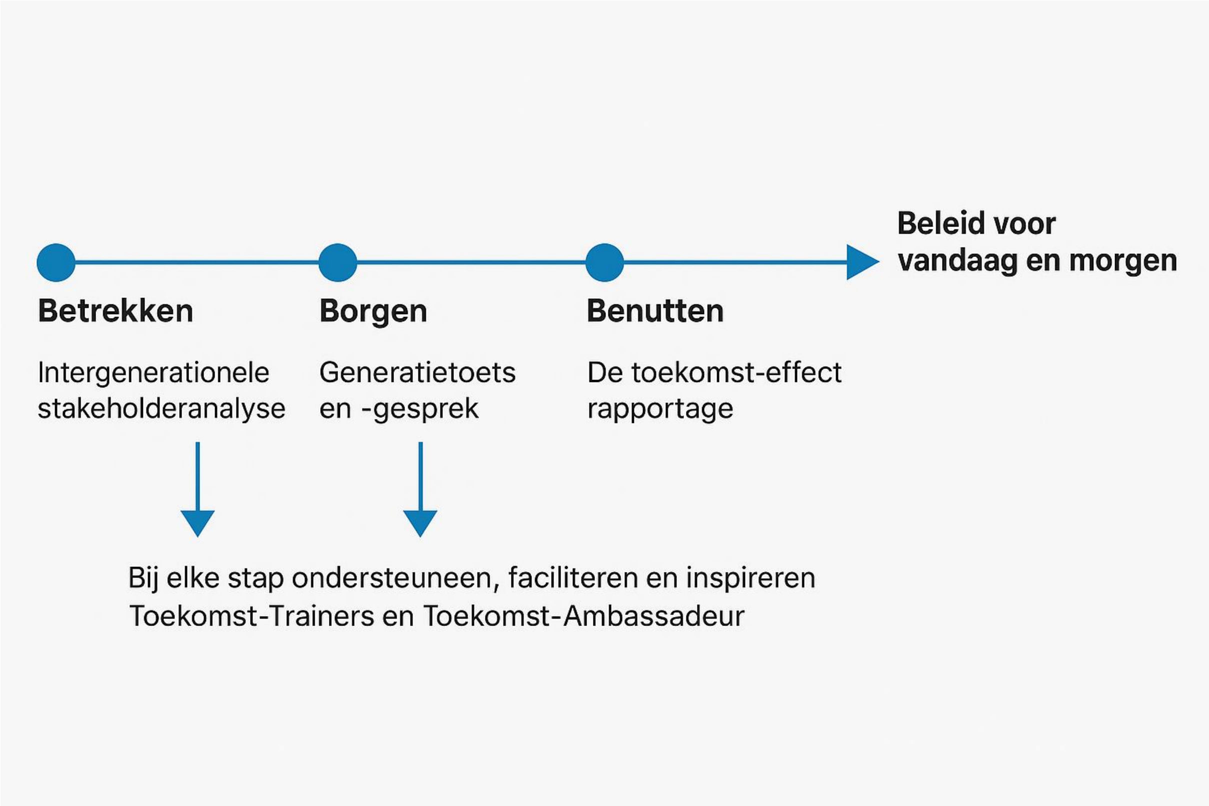
   Aim: Provide insight into whether the burden or problem is being shifted onto future generations and open up a public debate on whether this is considered acceptable. If not, what is the alternative?

   Tool: Examine whether the impact of the policy is positive or negative on generations of the future, and in what areas. The need for any adjustments should also be discussed. This is done by means of two tools: the generational impact assessment and intergenerational dialogue. The former is used to analyse positive or negative effects of policy on future generations on the basis of wellbeing indicators. The findings are discussed in an intergenerational dialogue, conducted in the form of a citizens' assembly. Future generations will also be represented in this dialogue through Future Design. Together with different generations, we consider the specific findings of the impact assessment and discuss whether we find them acceptable or whether alternatives are required.

3. *Utilise*:

   Aim: To be able to justify the impact of policy and decision-making on future generations.

   Tool: The voice of the future should not be ignored, but should be evident in decision-making. We make this possible by recording insights in a **future impact report**, in which we clarify whether – and if so, how – the burden or problem is being shifted to future generations. We justify our choices and show how the insights gleaned from the generational impact assessment and the intergenerational dialogue have been taken into account in the decision-making process, in accordance with the principle of 'comply or explain'.



Platte tekst voor plaatje:

Involve	**Safeguard**	**Utilise**	**Policy for today and tomorrow**
Intergenerational stakeholder analysis	Generational impact assessment and intergenerational dialogue	Future impact report	

Support, facilitate and inspire Future Trainers and Future Ambassador at every stage

5. REPORTING

In response to the fifth main question in the Policy Compass, 'What is the preferred option?', you will need to explain clearly to stakeholders, members of the government or parliament how you have taken account of the long term and the effects on different generations. This is not just a box-ticking exercise, but an essential part of the decision-making process. This applies to situations in which a generational impact scan or generational impact assessment has been carried out, or in which the 'Bringing the Future to the Table' methodology has been applied.

Your supporting arguments should address the following:

Long-term effects: describe the main long-term effects and the consequences for different generations.

Costs and benefits: specify long-term costs and benefits. Also mention the 'averted costs': the disadvantages that will be avoided by acting now.

Future-proofing: explain why the selected option is robust. Is the policy also effective in the long term and flexible enough to adapt to new developments?

Decision-making: include the long-term repercussions when explaining the considerations in the decision note.

Reporting on the generational impact assessment: if a generational impact assessment has been conducted, summarise the findings and include them in the explanatory notes to the policy proposal, and add the conclusions to the decision note (see 3.2.6).

Toolbox

Want to know more or get started? The sources and networks below offer practical methodologies, training options and examples you can use straight away.

- Pre-mortem technique – Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-mortem.
- Mindtools – Decision-making techniques: https://www.mindtools.com.
- Harvard Business Review – Articles on bias in decision-making: https://hbr.org (search for 'bias').
- Behavioural Insights Network Netherlands – Network of government behavioural experts: https://www.binnl.nl/home+-+en/default.aspx (search for 'bias').
- Futures Thinking Guide by the Board of Government Advisors, which looks at methods for futures thinking. The methods are explained step by step so that you can get started. See https://www.collegevanrijksadviseurs.nl/adviezen-publicaties/publicatie/2023/12/07/handleiding-toekomstdenken (in Dutch).
- *De Handreiking bij toekomstverkenningen* (Guide to forecast analysis) (2011) (in Dutch). See https://www.kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/documenten/2011/09/01/toekomsten-en-zo.
- Trend assessments such as those for the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning. See https://www.kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/documenten/2024/11/14/trendscan-ministeries-van-bzk-en-vro (in Dutch).
- *De Toekomstverkenning Publieke Dienstverlening 2035* (Public Services Forecast Analysis 2035). See https://staatvandeuitvoering.nl/onderzoek/toekomst-verkenning-publieke-dienstverlening-2035/ (in Dutch).
- **An immersion exercise** can help shift our focus from the here and now to our connection with generations before and after us. An exercise like this can help to stimulate thinking and inspiration among policymakers and stakeholders, both at the start of and during a generational impact assessment. See for example: https://labtoekomstigegeneraties.nl/inleefmethoden/ (in Dutch).
- Future Design - United Nations University: https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/future-design-innovative-approach-decision-making