

GOVTECH Platform – Foresight Study and Policy Recommendations

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Abstract

The “Fostering digitisation of public sector and green transition in Europe through the use of an innovative European GovTech platform” (GovTech platform) is a project proposed under the European Commission Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT). It aims to assist the development of a pilot project that seeks to support public administrations in the adoption of cost-effective and flexible digital solutions by introducing the GovTech ecosystem to the European public sector. The project is being carried out a consortium led by Intellera Consulting and comprising The Lisbon Council, Politecnico Milano, and PUBLIC.

Keywords¹: GovTech; policy foresight; policy recommendations

1. Mission and vision

The inclusion of digital technologies in government and public services has been at the front of discussions related to the modernization of the public sector, and it has been reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic². Until the pre-digital era, public agencies have been the sole responsible for designing and delivering public services, but the emergence of digital technologies are now contesting the monopoly of public agencies. Due to reasons that vary from limited financial, technical, human and information resources, many governments are struggling to harness the potential of such technologies, while failing to satisfy the growing demand for improved service delivery, accountability, transparency, and participation³. Against this backdrop, the current frontiers of the government digital transformation take shape in GovTech – an acronym for Government Technologies. The aim of the foresight research activity is to provide public administrations with future-oriented policy recommendations to improve the current policy framework by means of new GovTech strategies and roadmaps. Based on likely and desired scenarios, the foresight exercise can back-cast the policy recommendations that need to be taken now in order to address systemic bottlenecks to growth. This could entail new measures in EU strategies, new funding measures, and new ways to implement existing measures, for instance on innovative public procurement. The elaboration of recommendations to inform future policies at the European and national levels will be based on a future-scoping exercise, in order to make them more innovation-oriented and facilitate the growth of GovTech. This policy-oriented activity complements the service-oriented, bottom-up activities in the other tasks. In the policy making process of the European Commission, strategic foresight is not just an important research activity designed to feed the reflections of policy makers, but a core part of the policy analysis toolbox. The Better Regulation approach adopted by the European Commission states clearly that “insights from strategic foresight should inform the analytical process for major policy initiatives.” Ultimately, foresight is part of the problem definition – the very first phase of the impact assessment of new initiatives. The aim of

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² <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/805211612215188198-0090022021/original/GovTechGuidanceNote1TheFrontier.pdf>

³ <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/978-1-4648-1765-6>

foresight is to ensure that any policy intervention is not designed to address “old” problems that will radically change by the time the legislation is implemented. And as the last two years dramatically revealed, the problems Europe faces can radically change overnight. Nowhere this is more critical than technology policy such as GovTech, where innovation continuously changes business models, incentive systems and technological affordability. Societal, economic and technological mega-trends are deeply interrelated and can make the problems of today disappear, and unexpected problems appear. For example, the existence of a strong “delivery” sector radically increased the resilience of our societies during the Covid-19 pandemic. And the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the digitisation of all aspects of our society, including the digital transformation of government. To be effective, foresight should not be driven exclusively by desk research and data forecasting, but by a careful, well-designed interaction of such methods with stakeholders’ consultation. Particularly in areas such as digital government, the decisions and behaviour of public agencies will deeply influence the evolution of the problem and should be considered as a mega-trend in itself. Last but not least, the final policy recommendations will have more influence and attention if they are created through a collaborative process.

2. Steps of the policy foresight exercise

The task is structured in five activities: Visioning, Analysing, Designing, Testing and Assembling. They are conducted successively and continuously add content to the final report.

Activity	Time	Content	Output and tool
Visioning	June 2023	Exploring aspirations and visions through a Foresight Expert Group	Output: “Identification of a preferred direction, specifically a shared understanding and explicit description of the preferred future and a medium-term roadmap detailing specific actions for making progress towards the vision.” Tool: Consultation of a Foresight Expert Group
Analysing	November 2023	Megatrend Elicitation; Tech Horizon Scanning and Market Scanning through various research methods	General Output: “Trends and projections, drivers of change. This includes analysis of technology, investment, and innovation trends in the public sector for EU27 and selected Member States.” Output: “overall assessment of the maturity of the European GovTech market, including a view of the key start-ups working in the space, the programmes supporting their development, the capital support available to support their growth, and the overall market sizing of the ecosystem” Tools: Desk research, focus groups, investment analysis, market sizing, interviews, horizon scanning, trend and cross impact analysis
Designing	December 2023	Developing future policy options	Output: “development of draft scenarios, as well as in their enrichment and future learning. Specifically, at the end of the phases it can be expected a set of 4-6 or more stories of plausibility-based/exploratory futures (multiple) and how these might come about.” Tools: Driver mapping and related axes of uncertainty, menus of futures options and scenario workshop
Testing	May 2024	Impact Assessment of different possible policy options	Output: “development of draft scenarios, as well as in their enrichment and future learning. Specifically, at the end of the phases it can be expected a set of 4-6 or more stories of plausibility-based/exploratory futures (multiple) and how these might come about.” Tools: Policy stress-testing, multi-criteria analysis
Assembling	October 2024	Designing a Roadmap	Output: “roadmap with recommendations designed to promote optimal cost-benefits balance