



# A policy cycle 2.0 for the European Commission

## **Imprint**

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### **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to Cristina Claeys Perez, Rachèle Chevallier, and Rachel Lancry Beaumont for their contributions to the development of this paper.

We give a special thanks also to all those who contributed to the knowledge in this paper through participation in the policy lab series and to those who reviewed this paper prior to its publication.

### **Please cite as**

Miller, C., Danilaviciute, L., Kormann da Silva, N., and Dirth, E. (2024). A policy cycle 2.0 for the European Commission. ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies: Cologne.

### **Transparency and acknowledgements**

The financial support of the Laudes Foundation is greatly appreciated to make this work possible.

### **Layout and design concept**

Drees + Riggers

### **Cover photo**

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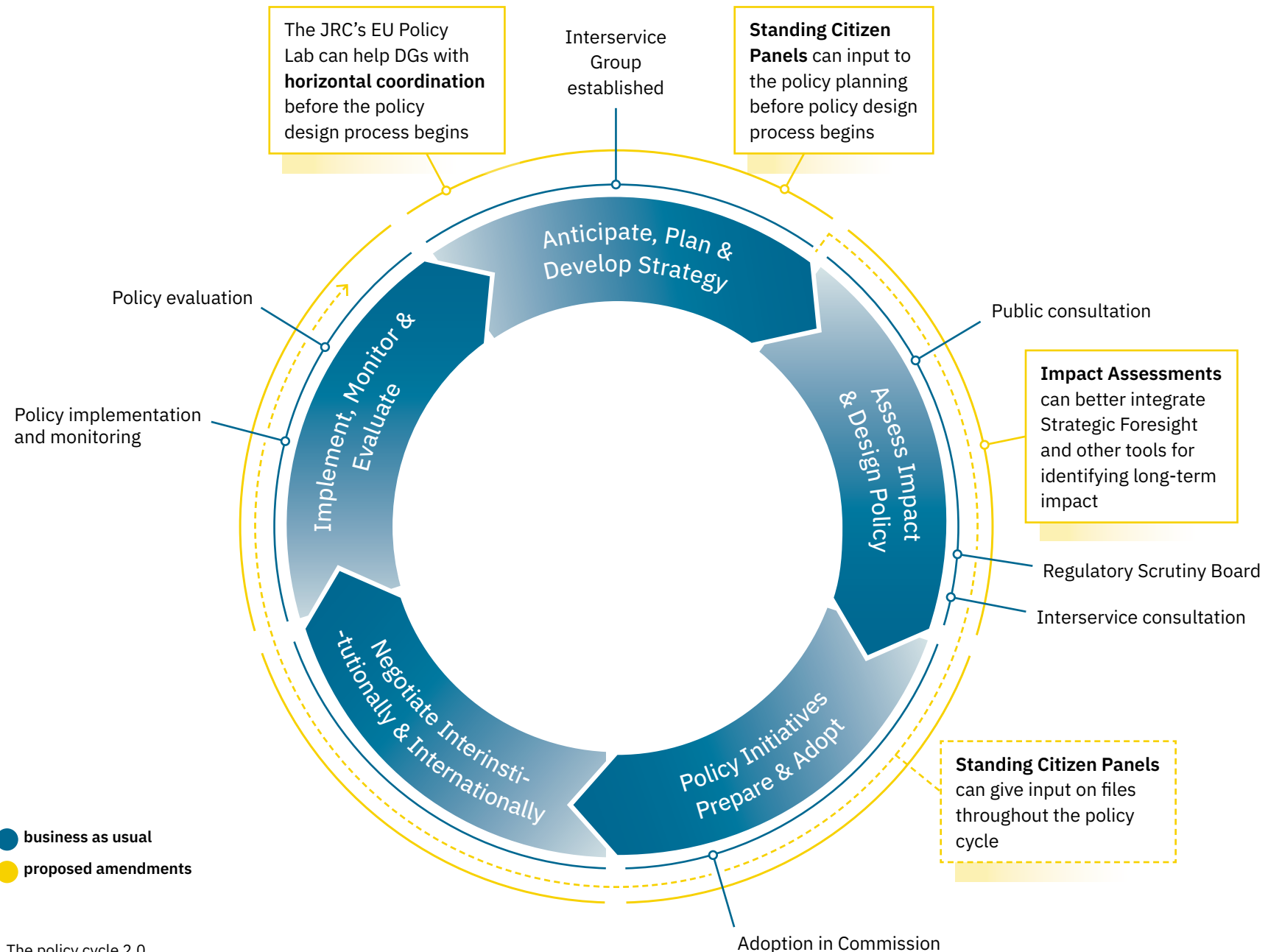


Figure 1 The policy cycle 2.0

## **Glossary**

<b>BRG</b>	Better Regulation Guidelines
<b>BRT</b>	Better Regulation Toolbox
<b>CoFoE</b>	Conference on the Future of Europe
<b>DG</b>	Directorate General
<b>ECP</b>	European Citizen Panels
<b>EESC</b>	European Economic and Social Committee
<b>IA</b>	Impact Assessment
<b>ISG</b>	Inter-service steering groups
<b>ISC</b>	Inter-service consultation
<b>JRC</b>	Joint Research Centre
<b>MS</b>	Member States
<b>SG</b>	Secretariat General
<b>SCP</b>	Standing Citizen Panels
<b>RSB</b>	Regulatory Scrutiny Body
<b>TEU</b>	Treaty on European Union

## Why a policy cycle 2.0?

*“‘Better regulation’ is [...] a means of guaranteeing that EU legislation has the broad support of EU citizens and remains fit for purpose, future-proof and open to innovative solutions in a context of ever more rapid technological, societal and environmental change.”<sup>1</sup>*

In 2024, European policymaking is facing a reality where complexity and uncertainty are now the norm; they are contexts, not just risks<sup>2</sup>. Policymakers are working to tackle the many dimensions of the societal transformation needed to achieve climate neutrality, and at the same time facing many other challenges that they must react to quickly – the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple wars, the energy crisis, and the cost-of-living crisis to name a few recent examples.

In the face of complex challenges, siloed, single-stakeholder approaches and short-term fixes are no longer sufficient. Commitment to long-term, cross-cutting goals, like the European Green Deal or the strategy for A Europe fit for the digital age, require EU policymakers to rethink ways of working and how policies are designed through a streamlined regulatory process. The scale of the challenge ahead requires us to reflect on these processes<sup>3</sup>, and there is a need to ensure that these diverse and intersecting goals do not contradict each other or create harm<sup>i</sup>.

The regular legislative cycle can take several years between preparation, negotiation, and revision, before the implementation and evaluation of a policy initiative<sup>ii</sup>. A more future-fit policy cycle that can consider the cross-cutting and long-term nature of Europe’s challenges and strategies will help the ability to respond to them. If we fail to consider the cross-cutting and long-term elements, unmitigated trade-offs could jeopardise the multiple, intersecting transitions and create social backlash<sup>4</sup>. The policy cycle also needs to be better equipped to account for long-term goals that reach beyond the 5-year political cycle.

Over the spring and autumn of 2023, we conducted a series of co-creative policy labs with policymakers from the European Commission, several EU Member State administrations, and EU consultative bodies. The policy labs created an opportunity to dive deeper and discuss together where the challenges in the policy process lie that can lead to trade-offs, and what solutions can be developed to solve them<sup>iii</sup>.

This publication illustrates what we would propose to be a policy cycle 2.0. It has been nine years since the Better Regulation Guidelines were introduced and three years since their last revision. As we enter the next political cycle, a reflection on the next version of the policy cycle is needed. This is part of the result of the recent co-creative process we have gone through with policymakers; it presents an innovative way of making policy which is adapted to our current reality and needs.

<sup>i</sup> The introduction of the [do no significant harm \(DNSH\) principle](#) is a step towards ensuring EU investments do not cause significant harm to environmental outcomes.

<sup>ii</sup> The timing of the whole cycle of different initiatives varies and depends on different factors. However, some initiatives can take around 10 years to go through all stages of the process. For example, the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive or the Product Safety Regulation.

<sup>iii</sup> Our forthcoming report will describe this process in further detail

## Proposed changes

Effective policymaking requires that policymakers have the time and resource capacities to carry out their work. With this proposal, we intend to make the process more dynamic and agile at the start so that trade-offs are found sooner in the process and more easily avoided, and to reduce the work that comes later in the cycle such as Interservice Consultations and policy revisions. With more attention paid to the cross-cutting nature and long-term impacts at the start, there should be fewer points of contention later in the process.

Many aspects of the policy cycle have been honed over the years and are designed with the best intentions. In this process, we have reflected on how to advance a step further from the current process to improve outcomes. We focus on three key elements and propose changes for these to be used in specific circumstances. These are further defined in the next pages:

- **Horizontal collaboration**

In the policy planning stage, Members of the Commission and the Director-General leading on an initiative determine whether the initiative will be politically sensitive and/or important in light of the current political context and potential impacts<sup>5</sup>.

For such files, we propose using the Joint Research Centre's EU Policy Labs<sup>6</sup> to discuss specific cross-cutting and cross-departmental issues with a wide selection of participants from a broad number of DGs. This could also help define who should be further involved in the policy preparation process.

- **Participation**

Under the same criteria as for horizontal collaboration (policies flagged as politically sensitive and/or important), we propose that such a file, early in the development phase but after the Policy Lab, goes through a consultation with a Standing Citizen Panel (SCP). This panel would form a group that is representative of European society by the same logic as the composition of the European Citizen Panels (ECP)<sup>7</sup>, and its members would serve one-year terms in which they act as resources for public input on these sensitive files.

- **Impact assessments**

As outlined in the Better Regulation Guidelines (BRG), an impact assessment (IA) is intended to gather and analyse evidence to support policymaking and decision-making. An IA is needed when there is expected to be a significant economic, environmental, or social impact, when significant spending is foreseen, or where the Commission has a choice of policy options<sup>8</sup>.

Here we propose that in the scenarios in which the Commission carries out an IA, this process better incorporates long-term impacts by better defining the concept of long term, with a flexible framework which guides the timeframe for IAs and in-depth operational guidelines for integrating foresight methods in assessment.

## Horizontal coordination

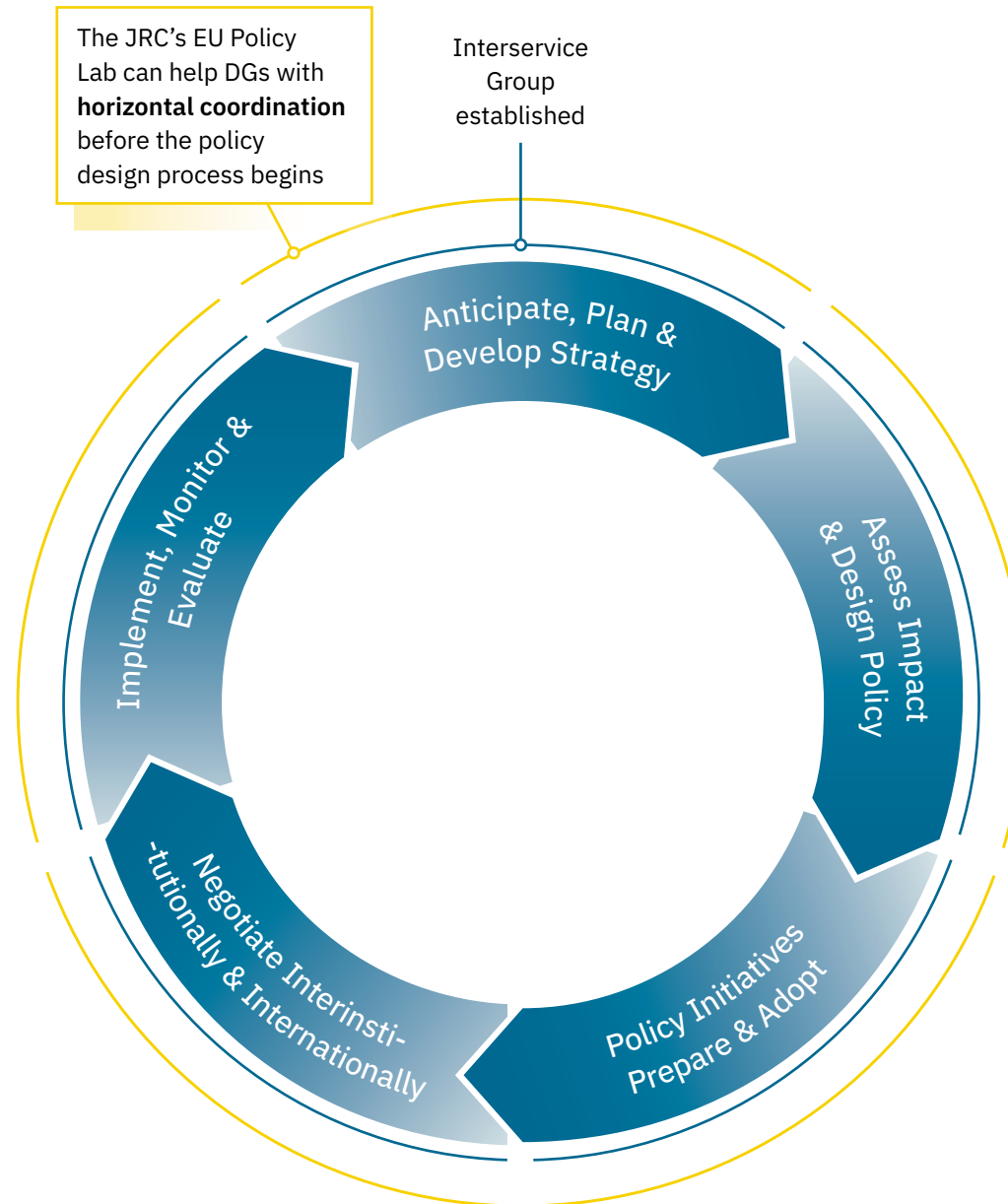


Figure 2 Horizontal coordination in the policy cycle 2.0

## The institutional basis for horizontal coordination

The formal basis for the horizontal coordination is set out in these main documents: The Working Methods of the von der Leyen Commission<sup>iv</sup>, Responsibilities, structure and organisation of the Commission (2019-2024)<sup>9</sup>, Rules of procedure of the European Commission<sup>10</sup> and Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox<sup>11,12</sup>. However, the practical application of these rules varies greatly from one policy to another. This indicates that there is a certain degree of flexibility to accommodate different needs and circumstances.

The Working Methods set out that the close cooperation and efficient coordination between the Directorates-General and equivalent departments are essential to ensure the effectiveness of the Commission's action. There are **two main formal ways of horizontal coordination** for the department responsible for preparing an initiative or developing a policy to consult other departments concerned by the envisaged initiative in the legislative policy cycle<sup>v</sup>.

- **Inter-service steering groups (ISG).** For many issues, permanent Interservice Groups exist, which bring together officials from different DGs on a regular basis. Inter-service steering groups (ISG) are set up in agreement with the SG for all politically sensitive and/or important initiatives to steer both the IA and policy preparation<sup>13</sup>. The Better Regulation Guidelines outline different ways to set up an inter-service steering group for the IA preparation.
- **Inter-service consultation (ISC)** is an internal consultation process that is a central arrangement for the formal coordination of policies. The ISC can be launched after the political validation of a Commissioner and the relevant Executive Vice-President, the High Representative/Vice President or Vice-President and the agreement of the President. The

positive Regulatory Scrutiny Board opinion on the impact assessment of the given proposal is also a pre-condition of the ISC. The ISC is a formalised procedure in which a Directorate General (DG) overseeing the development a given Commission proposal (the 'lead DG') receives input from other DGs which have a legitimate interest in the proposal.

Depending on the subject matter of the ISC, certain departments must be consulted. For example, the Commission's Legal Service must be consulted on all drafts and proposals for legislation and on all documents that may have legal implications. The Secretariat General (SG) must be consulted on the initiatives that are of political importance, are part of the working programme, subject to impact assessment and public consultation etc.

The DGs typically have two or three weeks in an ISC to comment on the proposal and approve it (or not). After the lead DG has considered any comments received, it will finalise the proposal. After an ISC has taken place, draft proposals are discussed among the cabinets of commissioners and eventually in the College of Commissioners.

**JRC's EU Policy Lab** – This is also another platform for Commission services to come together to discuss the preparation of a policy initiative. Currently it is organised on an ad hoc or need basis and is not part of the formal decision-making process as set out in the documents defining the formal horizontal coordination mechanisms. The EU Policy Lab is a space for cross-disciplinary exploration and innovation in policymaking. It applies collaborative, systemic, and forward-looking approaches to help bringing the scientific knowledge of the JRC into EU policymaking. The Policy Lab can help approach complex policy issues through combining stories and data, anticipation and analysis, imagination, and action in a collaborative way.

<sup>iv</sup> the new Commission President after the elections will most likely be reviewing and adapting this document to their own needs and priorities.

<sup>v</sup> The legal basis for ISC is Article 23 of the Commission Rules of Procedure (consolidated)

The EU Policy labs bring different groups of policy-makers together. There is a core Directorate General (DG) group and other DGs as well as stakeholders, experts and others are included at different stages. EU Policy Labs are created with the intent of stimulating innovation in public policy design. They are focused on policy problems; for example, the future of food and farming, implications of human oversight for fairness, and discrimination in AI-supported human decision-making.

## Our proposal

If further institutionalised into the policy cycle, EU Policy Labs organised by the JRC have a great potential to embed long-term thinking and increase horizontal coordination between different services within the European Commission. They provide an opportunity to collaborate earlier in the policy proposal preparation.

Therefore, our recommendation is to institutionalise the Policy Labs by setting the timing and scope of the policy labs early in the policymaking process.

There are different possible options for the timing of such policy labs:

- At the strategic planning phase of an initiative.
- At the start of the new institutional cycle after the priorities for the new Commission administration are set up by the Commission President.
- When the Annual Commission Working programme is published.

All three options indicate the earlier start of the coordination process than the currently institutionalised options (ISG and ISC) for the horizontal coordination between different departments. To demonstrate how this would work in practice, we have proceeded with a description of the EU policy labs in use at the strategic planning phase of an initiative.

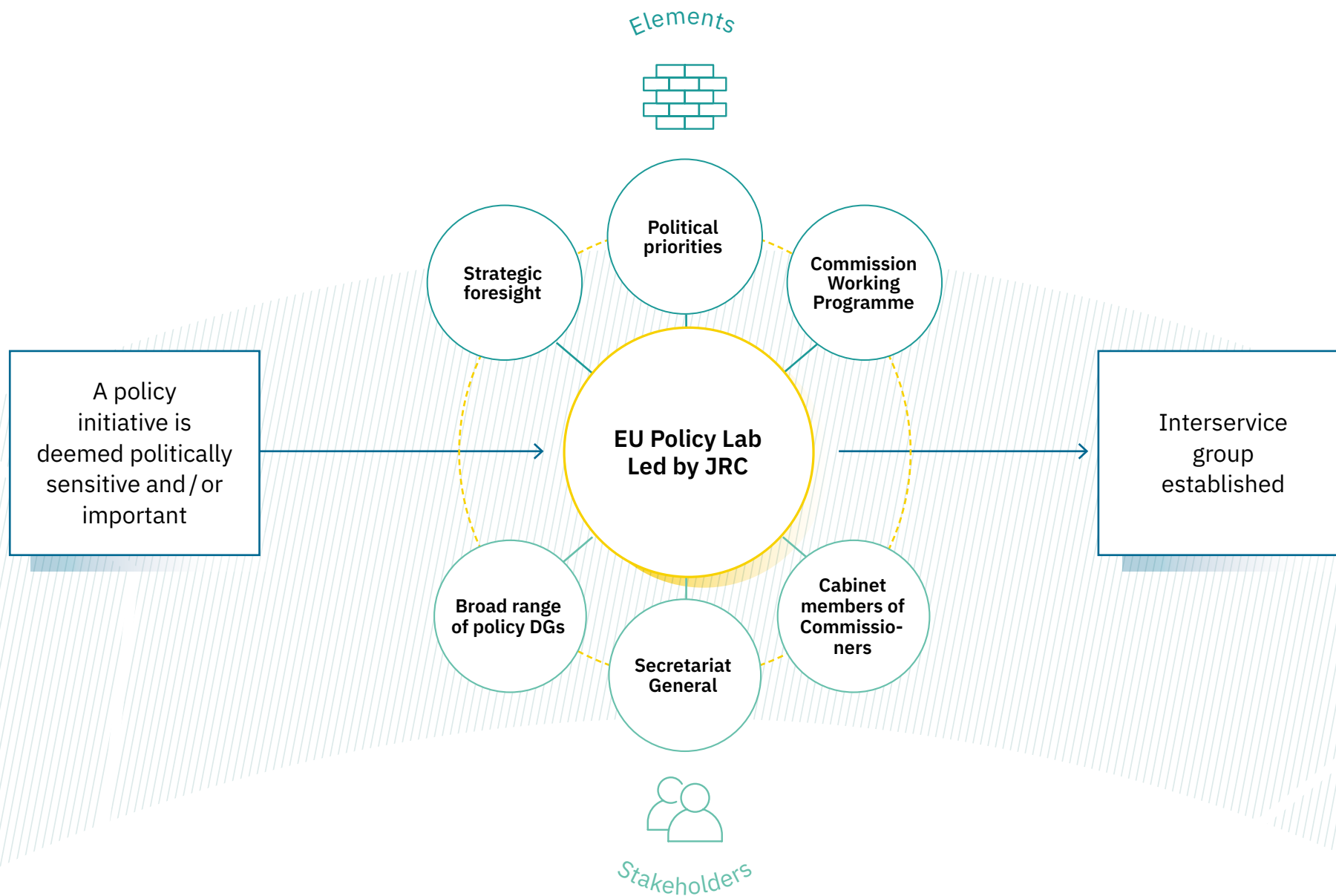
Due to the limited resources available and the proportionality principle, the EU Policy Labs would need to be established for **politically sensitive and/or important initiatives**<sup>vi</sup>. Such decision would be carefully considered by the lead DG together with the Secretariat General at a stage where the proposal would benefit from such a high-level discussion. The selection of such initiatives/policies should take into consideration the political priorities and the Commission Working Programme. Clear long-term implications, strategic foresight analysis results and the timing of the policy cycle of the specific policy could be also part of such assessment.

Our recommendation is to start the discussions with the wide selection of policy DGs to encourage the policy teams to tackle issues from a cross-cutting and cross-departmental perspective. One of the outcomes of the Policy Lab could also indicate who needs to be further involved in the preparation process, including stakeholders, experts, and others. The legitimate interest in the policy could be defined wider to be in line with the systemic and whole government approach.

### Example

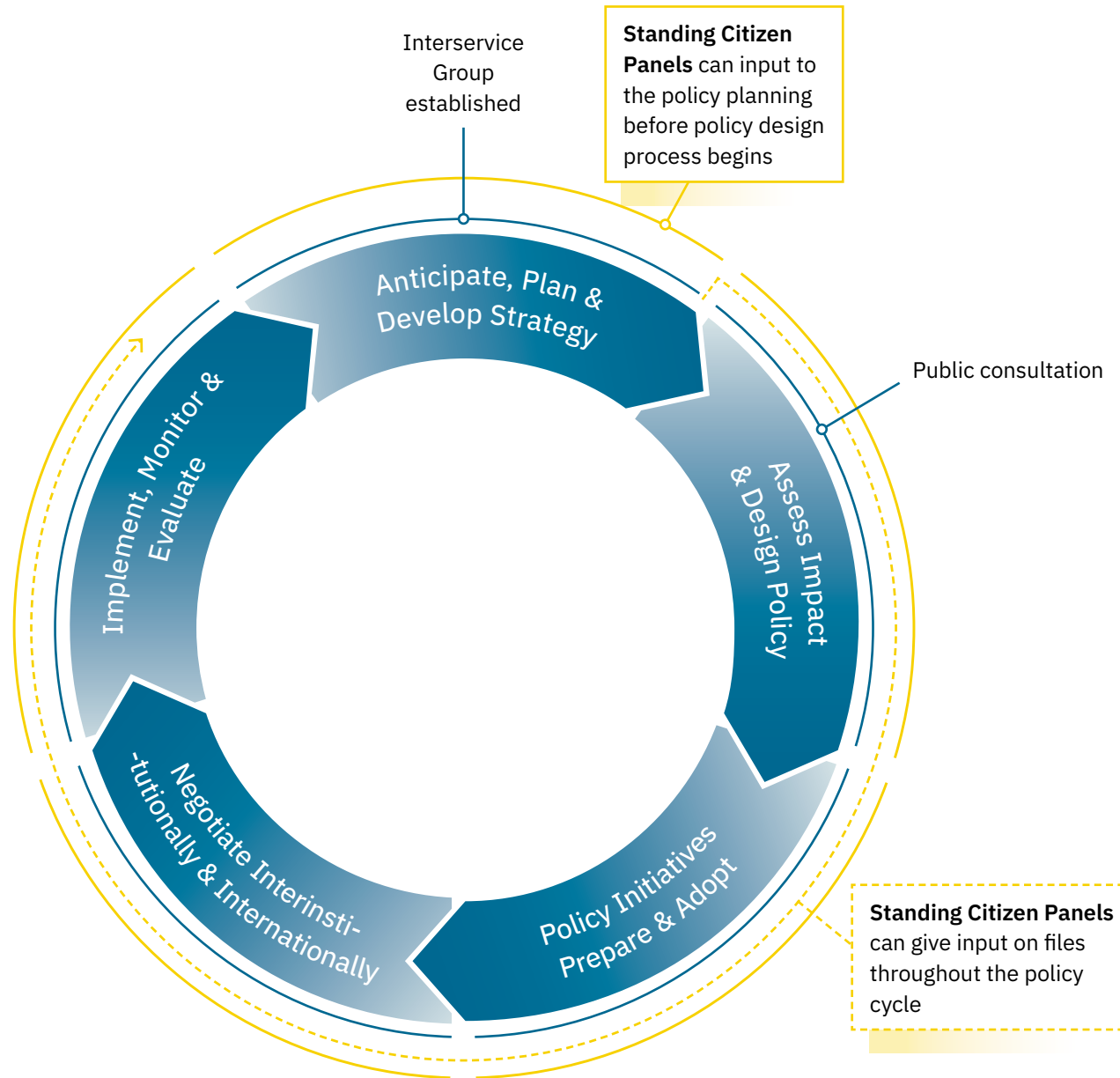
The European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions have begun using foresight workshops within the process of drafting some of their opinions, led by the EU Policy Lab within the Commission's Joint Research Centre. This is still being piloted but involves bringing together diverse stakeholders to work through complex issues using foresight tools which help them look at policy challenges from broader range of perspectives and with a long-term view. This model could be institutionalised in the policy design process between DGs in the Commission.

<sup>vi</sup> It should be noted that at present, the way this is decided is not very transparent. Additionally, files that begin as not politically sensitive can become so if, for example, a sudden crisis arises. However, this will not be explored more deeply in this paper.



**Figure 2** The process of horizontal coordination

## Participation



**Figure 3** Participation in the policy cycle 2.0

## The institutional basis for participation

Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) lays out that “the institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action”<sup>14</sup>. Different types of stakeholder consultation are carried out according to four principles outlined in the Better Regulation Guidelines<sup>15</sup>:

1. **Participation** — with an inclusive and wide approach
2. **Openness and accountability** — transparency for how the process affected policymaking
3. **Effectiveness** — to ensure the views of stakeholders can make a difference
4. **Coherence** — for consistency across services and processes

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE)<sup>16</sup> set out to create a forum for debate with citizens from all around Europe to have an open and inclusive debate on a key priorities and challenges for Europe<sup>17</sup>. From this, The Commission outlined in its Communication<sup>18</sup> to use European Citizens’ Panels (ECP) to enable randomly selected citizens to participate in debates on key policy topics. It specified that participants should reflect the ‘diversity and demography’ of Europe, with young people forming one third of the group and that they could be pan-European or targeted for specific policy issues.

Currently, ECPs are designed to bring together 150 randomly selected citizens from all Member States. The first three of these focused on food waste, virtual worlds, and learning mobility. As of writing (April 2024), there is currently a panel ongoing on energy efficiency and recruitment is underway for a new panel on the question of hate within society<sup>19</sup>.

## Our proposal

The ECPs are a great way to get input on policies or topics from a diverse group of society. However, they are very large and time-consuming<sup>vii</sup> and focus on broader themes, rather than specific policies. On the other hand, the Have Your Say portal often reaches stakeholders more involved in the topics, such as businesses and civil society organisations, rather than the general public.

Building on the CoFoE and the structure of the ECPs, we suggest adding another process that allows for direct input on files. These could be an offshoot of the ECP, called **Standing Citizen Panels (SCPs)**. These SCPs would be comprised of 50 people, following the same criteria and geographical considerations as the ECPs but on a more condensed scale. These panels would be assembled for a term of one year, with a stipend paid for their time and clear limits set for their time commitment, suggested to cap at 50 hours per person within the year.

In addition to current methods of stakeholder participation, such as the Have Your Say online consultations<sup>20</sup>, these panels would be a source of public input for policymakers to understand the needs and fears of a range of the European public.

At the start of the planning phase of a file flagged as politically sensitive and/or important, the policymakers working on the file in the lead DG would convene the SCP to discuss the different dimensions of the policy and find ways to design it to uncover and mitigate trade-offs. Then, as the drafting of the policy continues, policymakers can reach out to the members of the SCP as a resource for further input on specific questions that arise on specific elements of the policy.

vii The [ECPs on food waste](#) and [virtual worlds](#) were each carried out over six working days in a two-month period.

After the drafting is complete, the Commission should communicate how they used inputs from the SCP to adjust the policy as well as what changes they did not take up and why.

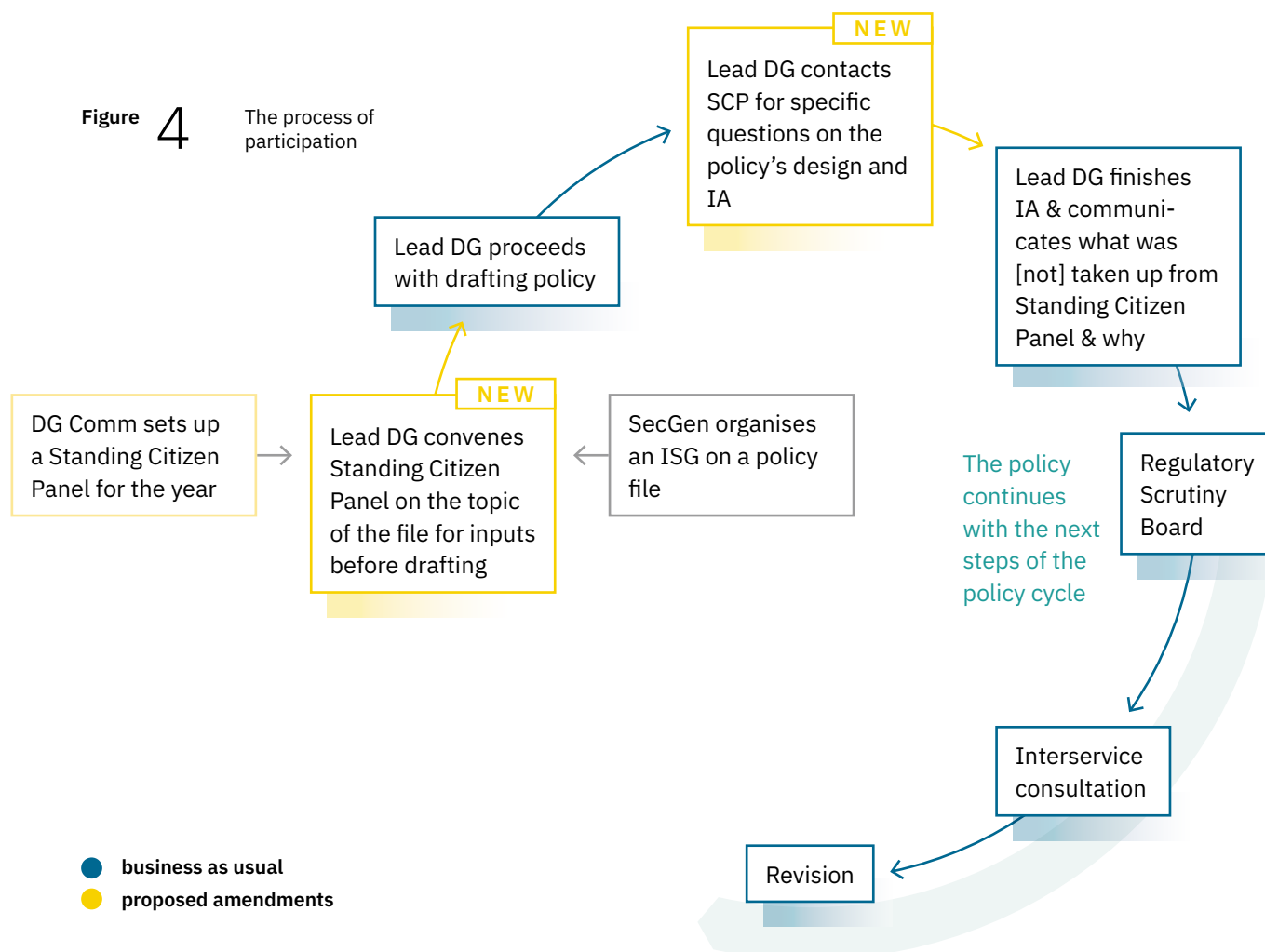
This follows the principles of stakeholder consultation from the Better Regulation Guidelines:

1. **Participation:** the way the SCPs are assembled are representative of society
2. **Openness and accountability:** this will make citizens more aware of policies and the process behind them, as well as how their own inputs affected the policy
3. **Effectiveness:** doing this early enough in the policy cycle to be able to still design a policy around it is crucial
4. **Coherence:** This would provide a consistent level of citizen participation across files and services

### Example

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Standing Citizens' Panel was established in the Australian local government area in 2022, following a first successful experience in 2021. The panel provides advice to the council on predetermined issues throughout the year. Around 40 citizens are selected using random stratified sampling from a group of volunteers. Members participate in eight sessions of three hours over the course of the year. The overall success of the project motivated the Council's decision to continue the initiative for the following years<sup>46,47</sup>.

Figure 4 The process of participation



## Impact assessments

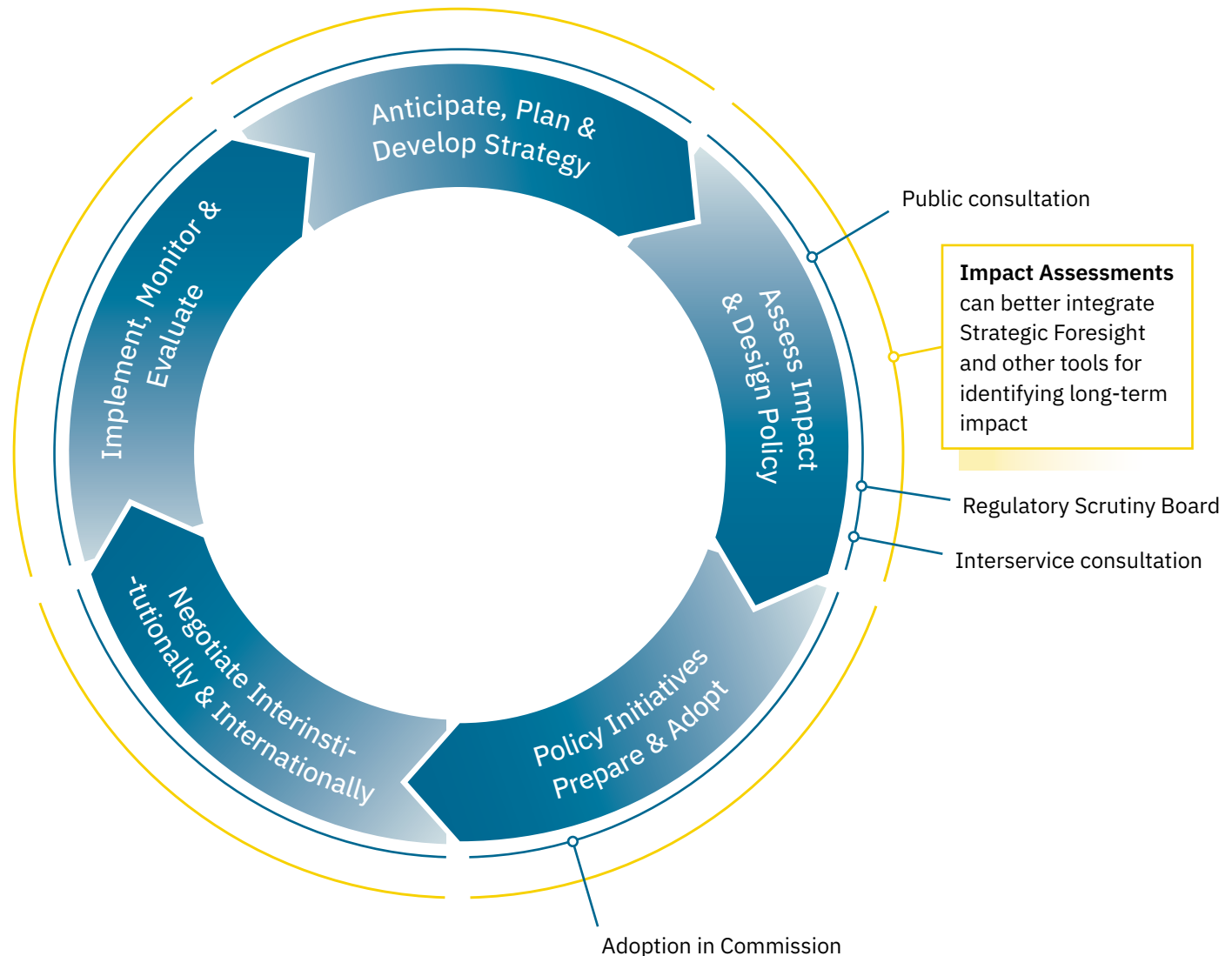


Figure 5 The process of impact assessments

## The institutional basis for impact assessments

The Better Regulation Guidelines state that “an impact assessment is required for Commission initiatives that are likely to have significant economic, environmental or social impacts or which entail significant spending, and where the Commission has a choice of policy options”<sup>21</sup>. The Better Regulation Toolbox elaborates that this means the impacts should be reasonably identifiable based on the policy proposal, and that the economic, environmental, and social dimensions are consistent with Article 3.3 of the Treaty of the European Union<sup>viii</sup>. The decision of whether an impact assessment is necessary is taken by the leading DG, more information on how an impact assessment can be derogated can be found in the [next section](#).

The BRG calls for the integration of strategic foresight into policy processes. Amongst the questions an impact assessment must answer is how the different policy options considered compare considering several elements including how future-proof they are in light of long-term challenges<sup>22</sup>. Tool #20 in the Better Regulation Toolbox sets out how to use strategic foresight for impact assessments, evaluations and fitness checks, outlining the use of megatrends and future scenarios<sup>23</sup>. When foresight is not used in IA, evaluations or fitness checks, the lead DG should present arguments why it was not used<sup>24</sup>. In 2020, the mandate of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB), who must approve an impact assessment for a policy initiative to move forward, was expanded to include a foresight dimension.

## Our proposal

A study done by the European Parliamentary Research Service showed that a quarter of impact assessments (IAs) mentioned foresight between 2020 and 2022, whereas almost half did so in 2023<sup>25</sup>. While this indicates progress, there are still challenges around embedding long-term thinking into IA processes. For instance, the same study also pointed out that foresight was most often used in assessing climate, environment, and energy policy. Moreover, the concept of “long-term” varies across different DGs. While climate and environment policy also tend to look longer into the future, with policy frameworks targeting 2040 and 2050, socio-economic topics usually follow shorter timeframes, such as fiscal years or Country Specific Recommendation cycles.

We propose developing a time framework to assess impact and further embedding foresight into the process, as explained below:

### Timeline of impact

We suggest better defining the concept of long term within the Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox. In this regard, setting a time framework of how many years ahead impact assessments should look can be helpful. This should be flexible to accommodate different policy files and areas but at the same time allow for a cross-sectoral assessment of future impacts.

<sup>viii</sup> “The Union [...] shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aimed at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment”. Official Journal of the European Union C 326 of 26 October 2012. Consolidated Version of The Treaty on European Union. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf-140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf-140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

## Foresight

To ensure consistency on foresight application across different domains, we suggest the introduction of a minimum standard to all policy areas.

There are different foresight methodologies that could be employed to establish a minimum standard. An idea of what this can be in practice is using megatrends<sup>ix</sup> as a checklist to assess the future-fitness of policy options—use of the megatrends is also one of the suggestions in the Better Regulation Toolbox for using strategic foresight in IAs<sup>x</sup>. Following the impact analysis, and particularly based on the answer to the question *‘What are their economic, social and environmental impacts and who will be affected?’* as stated in the BRG<sup>xi</sup>, impacts can be assessed against megatrends. This would be rather a reflection exercise to not further burden the process.

**Table 1** below provides an illustration of what such a checklist could look like, using megatrends and engagement tools for using them which can be extracted from the JRC’s Megatrends Hub<sup>26</sup>, combined with the guidance on using foresight in IAs from the BRT. The JRC suggests several workshop formats for working through the megatrends, but here we provide a brief example of how using the megatrends could look in an IA, in a workshop with the drafting team or without a workshop, as a checklist for assessment.

<sup>ix</sup> ‘Megatrends are long-term driving forces that are observable now and will most likely have significant influence on the future’. European Commission. (2022, November 28). The Megatrends Hub. Knowledge for policy. [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/tool/megatrends-hub\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/tool/megatrends-hub_en)

<sup>x</sup> The other is the use of future (long-term scenarios)

<sup>xi</sup> Question 5 in the list of ‘the questions that an impact assessment should answer’, p. 32. SWD (2021) 305 final. Commission Staff Working Document. *Better Regulation Guidelines*. European Commission. [https://commission.europa.eu/document/d0bbd77f-bee5-4ee5-b5c4-6110c7605476\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/document/d0bbd77f-bee5-4ee5-b5c4-6110c7605476_en) [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/d0bbd77f-bee5-4ee5-b5c4-6110c7605476\\_en?filename=swd2021\\_305\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/d0bbd77f-bee5-4ee5-b5c4-6110c7605476_en?filename=swd2021_305_en.pdf)

A.

Questions for assessment	Megatrends <sup>xii</sup>
<b>Identify the relevant megatrends/scenario that should be used</b> To assure a systematic, future-oriented analysis of the problem drivers and their future evolution.	
<b>A.1 Relevance axis</b>	In the figure below, map the megatrend on the horizontal axis of a matrix for how relevant this megatrend is for the policy issue.  Placement should be based on the guiding questions:  → How relevant or important is this megatrend for your issue? → How large will its effects be?
<b>A.2 Awareness and knowledge axis</b>	In the same matrix below, map the megatrend on the vertical axis for how relevant this megatrend is for the policy issue.  Placement should be based on the guiding questions:  → What is the level of understanding of different aspects of the issue among decision makers (EU or national)? → What is the level of understanding of different aspects of the issue among the general public? → Is there enough attention paid to the issue in the media? Is there enough scientific knowledge on the issue?
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"> <p>Awareness &amp; knowledge ↑</p> </div> <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <p><b>Megatrends</b></p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: right; margin-right: 100px;">Relevance →</p>	

B.

<b>Analyse the impact of the relevant megatrends/scenario and define policy objectives</b> To understand the effect of the relevant megatrends/scenarios on the policy problem and adapt policy objectives accordingly.	
<b>B.1 Consequences</b>	<p><b>What are the most relevant trends?</b>            Use the matrix to guide assessment of most relevant trends, especially looking at megatrends placed high on the horizontal relevance axis and low or medium on the vertical awareness and knowledge axis. Make a list of trends and focus on them for the answers below.</p> <p><b>What could happen if this trend is ignored or underestimated in future decisions?</b>            Once most relevant megatrends are identified, analyse what are their potential impacts and who will be affected. This assessment should inform policymakers to what extent this trend can influence policy impacts and policy objectives.</p> <p><b>What could be achieved if this trend is carefully assessed and integrated into future decisions?</b>            The analysis should then assess how can this trend be better integrated into policymaking and what benefits this brings.</p> <p><b>What are the linkages between the trends in the context of the policy?</b>            Identify linkages between the megatrends in the context of the policy issue and based on the analysis above. List the connections between trends and, if feasible, how the development of one trend impacts another trend.</p>

<sup>xii</sup> Axes and guiding questions taken from the Working with Megatrends materials from the [JRC Competence Centre on Foresight](#)

C.

Questions for assessment	Megatrends <sup>xii</sup>
B.2 Wild cards	<b>What would it take for this trend to become highly or cause major disruption?</b> For megatrends not explored in the exercise above, especially those placed low on the horizontal relevance axis and low on the vertical awareness and knowledge axis, analyse what situations could move them along the axis from less to highly relevant.
B.3 Summary	Summarise the key findings into key challenges that need to be addressed by the policy options.
<b>Design policy options to achieve future-proof policy objectives</b> To future-proof the policy options to be resilient to changing boundary conditions.	
C.1 Conclusions	Develop policy options that address the key challenges from the summary in B.3 which can be resilient to the evolution of the problem over time.
C.2 Conclusions	<b>What are the main impacts of trends and their relation to policy objectives? What are the weak points?</b> Based on the assessment above, consider the potential short- and long-term consequences of the various megatrends on the policy options to support decision-making. Reflect on how the policy option holds up to the trends. Similarly, identify the weak points of the policy that should be improved. Where appropriate, suggest what next steps should be.
C.3 Conclusions	<b>How can the policy options impact the megatrends?</b> Conversely, consider how the policy options could impact the megatrend and whether this could influence reaching policy objectives.

**Table 1:** Example for megatrends assessment

Having a minimum standard would offer a streamlined approach to embedding foresight, and this way, enable a longer view with less complexity. Still, different ranges of foresight methodologies should be considered. The choice of whether to do a more thorough foresight exercise should be taken in line with the proportionality principle. The depth of analysis would also vary depending on type of file, the complexity, or political sensitivity of it.

The [Competence Centre on Foresight](#)<sup>27</sup> offers various tools that can be employed for a more comprehensive foresight practice. One such tool is horizon scanning, which supports anticipatory planning by identifying and making sense of early-stage risks and opportunities related to a policy or issue. This process can include workshops and conversations between different EU institutions and bodies. Another approach involves future scenarios, i.e. the creation of different possible scenarios of how the future

can look like and then assessing policy options in relation to them.

To guide this choice and support implementation, DGs conducting IAs can benefit from more in-depth guidance on when and how to use foresight methodologies. The BRT could be updated to include:

- Further clarification on when to integrate foresight into IA and how to identify what types of methods are best fit-for-purpose.
- Provision of clear operational guidelines on how to employ each of the different methods and better understand their interactions and complementarity.

Finally, this effort should be pursued in alignment with the Regulatory Scrutiny Board mandate to ensure scrutiny of foresight quality and of its use in IA analysis.

### Example

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill in the UK introduces ‘Future generations impact assessments’ to be conducted when suggesting changes in public expenditure, taxation, or policy. The Bill establishes a long-term framework spanning at least 25 years to look ahead at possible impacts of proposals. If the assessment finds that the proposed change would have an adverse impact on the public body’s wellbeing objectives, the body must publish a statement detailing how it intends to mitigate this impact<sup>48</sup>. This is an example of where setting a specific timeline has helped to improve practice.

These new and improved ways of working can help to improve coordination between policy areas, include meaningful public participation, and ensure the long-term impacts of policies are considered. Together, these can reduce the risk of unexpected trade-offs arising, creating harm and potential backlash to policies. The success of the green transition hinges on having society on board.

## Political leadership

The policy cycle elaborated above details process innovations on the steps of the cycle itself. However, this process exists within a broader context. The policy cycle 2.0 would benefit from political leadership that ensures these innovations are developed and provides the strategic vision behind their implementation. [An Executive Vice President for Future Generations](#) could offer such leadership. While this proposal is not elaborated in this paper, the remit of such a role would be an important safeguard for the processes described here.

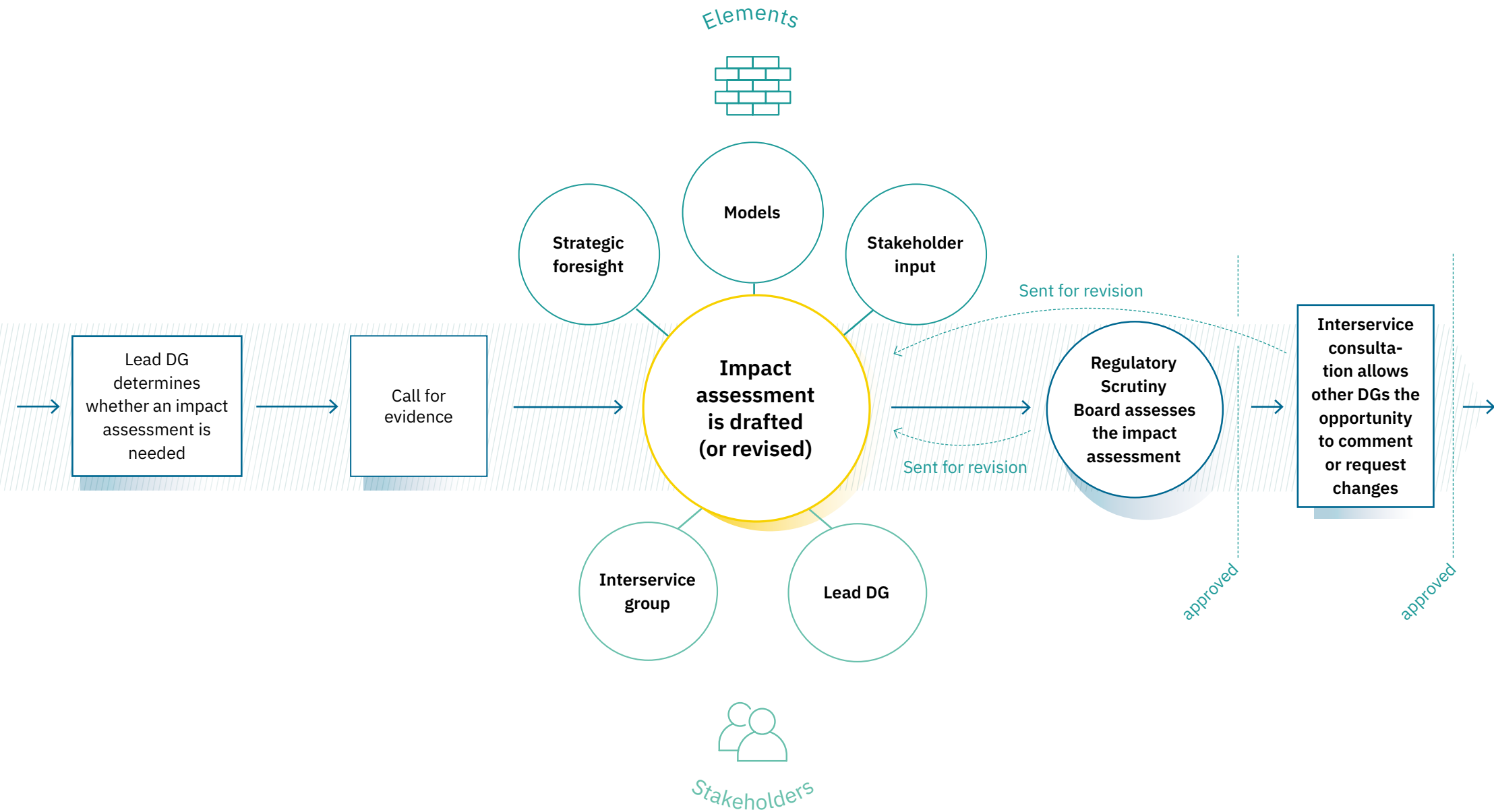


Figure 5 Impact assessments in the policy cycle 2.0

## Policy cycle in a crisis

“The world has changed dramatically. We saw three years of crisis after crisis”<sup>28</sup>. This is how Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented the decisions made by the College of Commissioners in 2023. “Global disruptions are the ‘new normal’”. “We must and can prepare better for this new world”<sup>29</sup> the President said again in a speech in 2024.

Normal EU policymaking processes are time-consuming, and policymakers need tools which can help them respond quickly while also adhering to the principles for effective governance for the green and just transition<sup>30</sup>. Crisis decision-making is changing governance structures and affecting policy processes.

There is a need for an adaptive, responsive, flexible, fast-track policy cycle that can be used in a polycrisis and that can respond to the fast development of the external environment scenarios, but at the same time allow integration of long-term goals into near-term decision-making.

### Crisis

Crises are typically “wicked problems” with a high level of uncertainty, unpredictability, complexity, and intertwinement, straddling different levels, sectors, and organisations<sup>31</sup>.

In marked contrast to normal, routine operations, crisis response often requires the swift coordination of multiple institutions. Decisions need to be made quickly, and policy responses may be improvised due to limited time for deliberation and planning. Existing policies and procedures may be bypassed or adapted to meet the immediate needs of the crisis. Decision-making authority may be concentrated at higher levels of government or within specialised crisis management structures. Policies enacted dur-

ing a crisis may be temporary emergency measures to address the immediate situation.

The EU has well-developed crisis response processes and structures<sup>xiii</sup>:

- **The integrated political crisis response (IPCR)** arrangements support rapid and coordinated decision-making at EU political level for major and complex crises such as the escalation of conflict in the middle east in March 2024, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine 2022, earthquake in Turkey and Syria 2023, and others. This is a sectoral crisis response mechanism to deliver aid and resolve the situation<sup>32</sup>. The crisis response mechanism can be triggered by either the country that holds the rotating presidency of the EU Council, or by any Member State invoking the solidarity clause (Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). It has three operational modes- monitoring, information sharing and full mode with EU proposals for action.
- **Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)** – an exceptional legal provision sets the legal basis and can be activated for accelerated decision-making. The Council can adopt measures on a Commission proposal, including regulations, by qualified majority voting without the participation of Parliament as co-legislator.
- **The Crisis Coordination Committee** – the specific operational crisis management structure that is activated by the Secretariat General, under the authority of the President or the Member of the Commission to whom the responsibility was assigned.

<sup>xiii</sup> the EU has established several crisis response mechanisms, including: the civil protection mechanism; the health emergency preparedness and response; the protection of network and information systems; and the protection of critical infrastructure response mechanism. European Council & Council of the European Union. (2024, March 22) *How the Council coordinates the EU response to crises*. Retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ipcr-response-to-crises/#The%20Integrated%20Political%20Crisis%20Response>

The overall existing crisis response structures in the EU set out arrangements to share information, ensure coordination and enable collective decision-making in an emergency.

However, a disproportionate use of emergency mechanisms, such as Article 122 of the TFEU, raises concerns about a democratic deficit, notably due to the lack of democratic support and the possible contravention to the principle of non-regression<sup>33</sup>.

There is a need to better understand whether the EU has reacted to crises by abandoning its normal procedures and accountability standards, as highlighted by the European Ombudsman O'Reilly in 2023<sup>34</sup> and what impact such suspension of governance principles has in the long run.

## Polycrisis

The current policy landscape is punctuated by multiple crises which occur simultaneously and in quick succession – polycrisis. Policy processes in crisis and polycrisis situations both involve responding to urgent and complex challenges and both overwhelm the capacity of institutions and governance processes to respond effectively.

Polycrisis poses significant additional challenges for governance and policy design as these crises require simultaneous attention and resource allocation across multiple fronts.

The existing crisis mechanisms in the EU are mostly fit to address more narrowly defined situations with an immediate focus on resolving the primary crisis within a specific area. However, polycrisis presents unique complexities, requiring more comprehensive and integrated approaches to policymaking and governance.

In summary, different environments — normal policy making or business as usual, emergency, crisis, and polycrisis differ in general characteristics, policy processes and complexity of decision-making. The descriptions in Table 2 provide a general and simplified overview of different environments in the EU and how they affect the policy process, complexity, horizontal coordination, participation and impact assessments in the EU governance context. This is done for comparison purposes, acknowledging that in practice these processes are more complex and interlinked.

Environment	General characteristics	Policy process	Complexity and interconnect-edness	Horizontal coordination	Participation	Impact assess-ment
<b>Business as usual</b>	A mostly continous policy cycle with the main interruption being elections.  Policy changes mostly through incremental policy adjustments	Relatively stable and predictable policy cycle.	Complexity varies from low to high depending on the area.	Vertical and sectoral approach in certain circum-stances leading to siloes, sporadic coordination and policy coherence	Preparation of legislative proposals uses limited participa-tory approaches for gathering stakeholder input	IAs prepared for politically relevant and important proposals
<b>Emergency</b>	Sudden and acute events that pose immediate threats to life, property, or the environment	Limited time available to assess the situation, develop policies and deploy resources Decision-making authority is centralised within the emergency management bodies. Focused on resource mobilisation	The complexity of the impacts is not visible immediately and interconnected implications on different sectors are deprioritised	Ensuring a unified and coordinated response to the immediate event. Mainly for immediately-affected parties.	None	Only immediate impacts considered
<b>Crisis</b>	Singular events, limited scope, response focus. May unfold over a longer period and involve multiple dimensions	Urgency, adhoc decision-making, flexibility, centralisation of authority, tempo-rary measures	Crises may have spill-over effects and secondary impacts	More focus on immediate sectoral response efforts. Central-ised decision-making for rapid action. Horizontal coordination can be deprioritised over speed	Direct consultation with selected, most influential stakeholders	IA derogation may be granted. Justification and a note after 3 months required
Environment	General characteristics	Policy process	Complexity and interconnect-edness	Horizontal coordination	Participation	Impact assess-ment
<b>Polycrisis</b>	Overlapping and interconnected events Broader and long-term impacts Complexity and uncertainty Resilience and adaptation	Requires holistic, long-term plan-ning, and adaptive approach. Build-ing resilience in the face of uncertainty	Synergistic nature. Actions taken in one area have consequences for others. Each crisis cannot be addressed in isolation	Coordination is critical due to multiple institutions being involved in addressing multiple crises. Polycrisis situa-tions may involve competing priori-ties and resource demands across different sectors, making coord-ination more challenging.	Standing Citizen Panels would ensure public participation is included and meaningful	Impact assess-ment process would benefit from adding a fast-track procedure such as a Rapid Impact Assessment process

Table 2: Policymaking in the EU under different conditions

The polycrisis policy cycle requires agility and integration of long-term goals. To help ensure that effective governance principles are upheld, these are suggested potential safeguards and improvements that can be built into the crisis policy cycle and process:

- **The standards of scrutiny are maintained acknowledging the timescale constraints.** Outlining clear efforts to ensure the amount of time made available for scrutiny and affected internal and external parties' input.
- **A robust, transparent analysis and the necessity assessment.** Clear reasoning, justification, and logic behind the use of the crisis policy cycle. An assessment of whether existing policies are sufficient to deal with any or all of the issues in question.
- **Limits on crisis cycle.** A sunset clause (as well as any appropriate renewal procedure of the proposed policy) providing a time limit for the introduced emergency or crisis policies. Such revision of decisions made in a crisis mode allows evaluation and assessment of impacts in due course.

In the following sections we dive deeper into areas where we think safeguards are most needed. We examine examples of the internal and external stakeholder scrutiny through horizontal coordination, participation, and maintaining robust analysis through fast-tracked impact assessments.

## Horizontal coordination

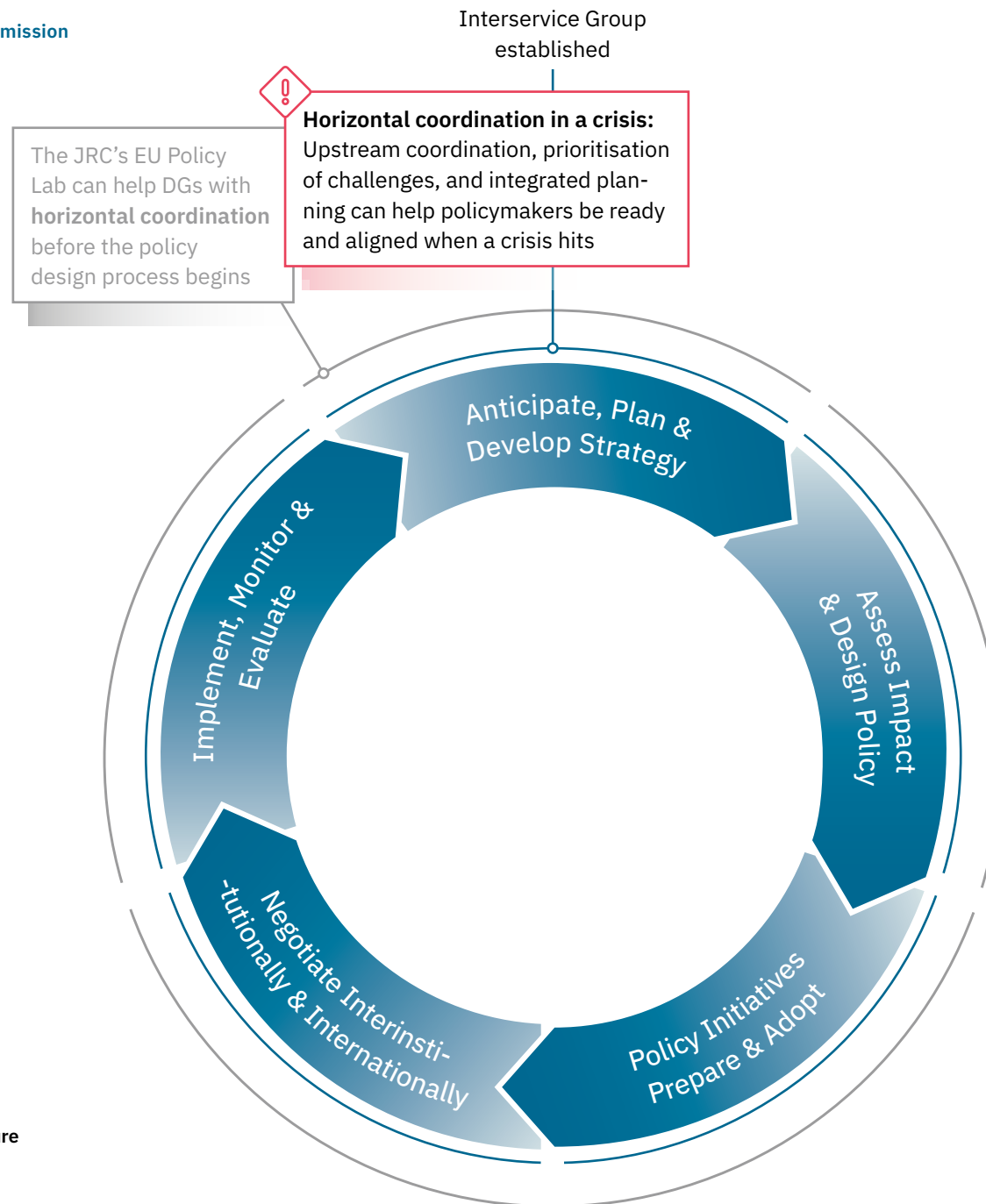


Figure 6 Horizontal coordination

## Institutional basis of horizontal coordination in a crisis

Existing crisis response mechanisms in the EU have a centralised coordination which allows a quick exchange of information between political and analytical levels. ZOE analysis in 2023<sup>35</sup> showed that in crisis, the Commission's structures maintain coordination and collaboration across hierarchical levels and through fast-tracked ISC which ensures benefitting from competencies across DGs.

The EU also uses the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) during crisis. The presidency of the Council can activate the mechanism to coordinate political response between EU institutions, Member States, and other affected stakeholders. The IPCR was activated in full mode in February 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This mode includes 24/7 contact points, a web platform to exchange information, and crisis meetings with EU ambassadors and ministers<sup>36</sup>.

Moreover, the Commission has developed a software system, Argus, for emergencies that require EU-level action. It links all DGs and Commission services for sharing information, and MS are connected through the Rapid Alert System (RAS)<sup>37</sup>. Argus aims at having a coordinated process during crisis<sup>38</sup>.

The existing crisis response mechanisms establish clear lines of authority, accountability, and decision-making processes. Such centralised crisis and emergency response systems, if used extensively, can potentially reinforce fragmentation and undermine coherent governance structures. Instead, more integration and objective alignment are needed. Institutional integration and policy coherence are crucial for addressing complexity and normative conflicts across goals and targets<sup>39</sup>. Maintaining the consistency and alignment of policies in the face of multiple crises is an important long-term strategy.

## Our proposal: upstream coordination, prioritisation, and integrated planning

Polycrisis presents unique opportunities for more integrated approaches to coordination to address the multifaceted nature of the different challenges at hand. Polycrisis may involve competing priorities and urgent resource demands across different sectors, making coordination more challenging. For effective coordination, there is a need for stronger integrative capacity than in non-polycrisis situations, even though the opposite is often assumed. Because decisions need to be made faster, collaboration and horizontal coordination in polycrisis need to go beyond information exchange and unilateral decision-making, as currently is done in a crisis and emergency response. Below we suggest some pathways for that.

Firstly, **upstream coordination**. Coordination between different government departments can happen either upstream, at the priority and agenda setting phase of the policy cycle, or downstream, when the decisions are already made. More upstream coordination builds a shared understanding of problems, collaborative framing of challenges, aligned strategies, and leveraged resources across policy areas. While this may not be possible in the precise moment of a crisis, integrating upstream coordination into a regular policy cycle can also facilitate exchange on important early warning signals and prevention and allows for a high level of preparedness to be maintained to respond to ongoing developments in real time as they occur across policy and problem areas<sup>40</sup>. Early alignment on politically sensitive topics can also make it easier to collaborate in an emergency because priorities and strategic direction are already clear.

Secondly, as intensive cross-sectoral coordination is usually only feasible for a limited number of issues<sup>41</sup>, clear **prioritisation of challenges** can facilitate focus during polycrisis. If such prioritisation is carried out at the centre of government (Secretariat General as well as Cabinets of the Commissioners in the EU) the actual coordination of response actions to crises can be done by sectoral-level departments (DGs), thus enabling non-centralised and bottom-up coordination. Horizontal coordination of policy response actions in a polycrisis scenario can be ensured not because the centre has created a policy that applies uniformly, but because different sectors converge through intentional coordination while maintaining decision-making powers.

Thirdly, the policy cycle in a polycrisis environment would also benefit from more **integrated planning** processes that consider the interdependencies and interactions between different sectors and issues. The current approach to planning with sectoral DG strategic plans can potentially create a risk of locking in policy fragmentation and a siloed approach and would benefit from establishing joined planning mechanisms and coordinated decision-making structures to align policy response actions across different sectors.

In addition, to be able to respond to the dynamic nature of polycrisis, the above-described measures of horizontal coordination need to be sustained beyond policy preparation stage. Collaboration and horizontal coordination that continues into the implementation phase can improve how lessons learned are integrated in decision making and allow for ongoing policy learning.

## Participation

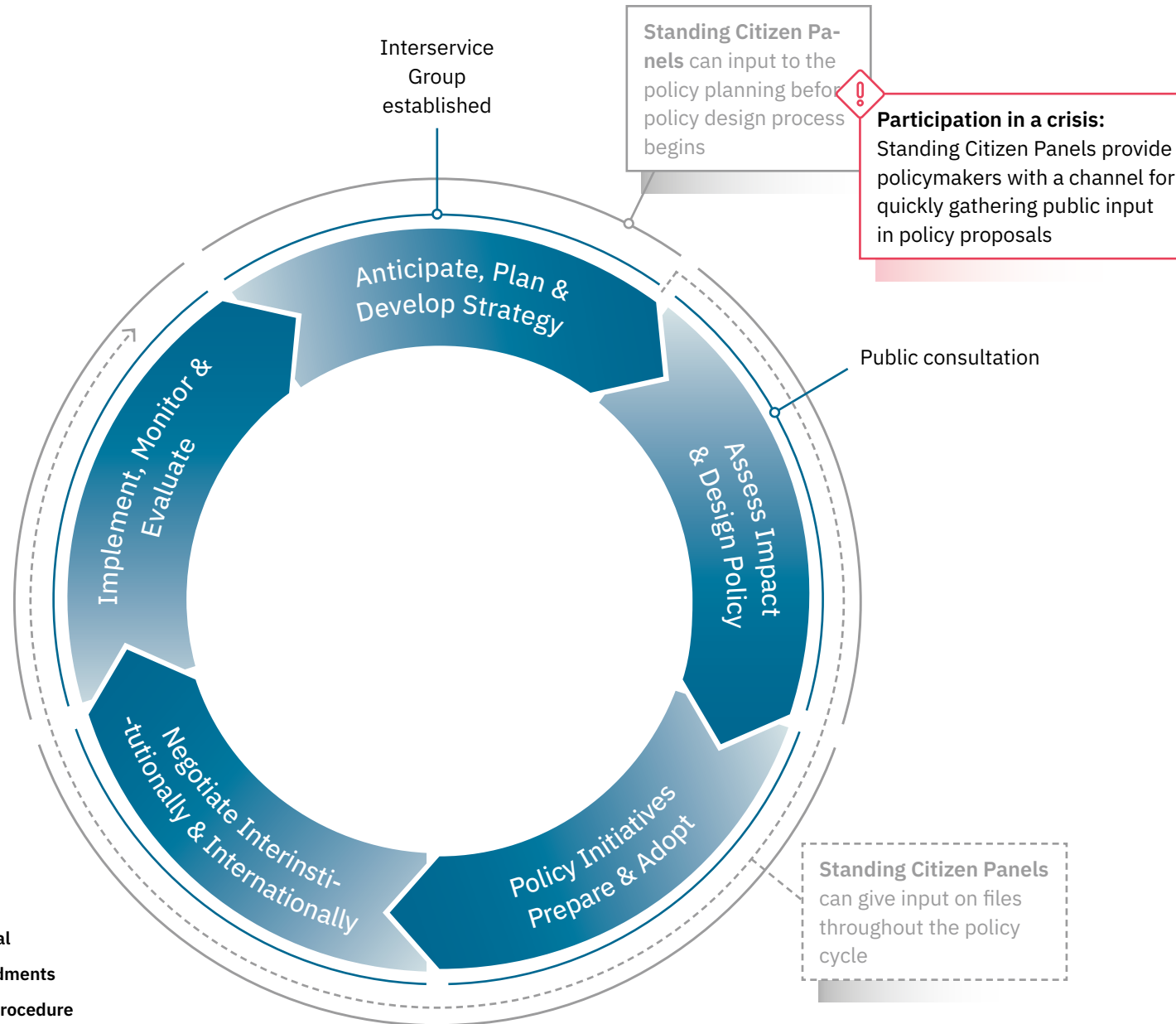


Figure 7 Participation

## Institutional basis of participation in a crisis

The Better Regulation Guidelines describe the requirements for public consultation; there is a mandatory internet-based public consultation for initiatives with impact assessments, and recommended internet-based public consultation for evaluations of broad public interest. However, the Guidelines also state that “in some cases, it may not be possible or appropriate to follow each step in the guidelines” for cases where, for example, there is a political imperative to move quickly or an emergency requiring a rapid response<sup>42</sup>.

In the context of reacting to the energy crisis caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine with REPowerEU, there was no formal public consultation. There was, however, a stakeholder consultation with the International Association of Oil & Gas Producers and the Commission was also open to some input from other external experts from civil society and think tanks<sup>43</sup>. In such a context, as in any other crisis, the public is concerned about how policy will affect them, their families, and their livelihoods. There is a need to act quickly, but there is also a need for participation to ensure transparency for the decisions made, and to assure the public that their concerns are being taken into consideration in the development of the policy challenge to the crisis.

## Our proposal: rapid response protocol with Standing Citizen Panels

The proposal described in [the section above](#), wherein Standing Citizen Panels are established for feedback on policy files, can also facilitate participation in a crisis context. By having these panels pre-established, the Commission would already have a representative public group that they can call upon quickly for feedback on the planning of the policy response, and to feedback on the proposal as it is developed.

A well-advertised and disseminated online consultation can gather inputs from civil society and businesses that feed into the process to incorporate views from a broader group of society. However, for this to be effective it is important that interested stakeholders are aware that this consultation is taking place, and that they have adequate time to respond. Engagement with stakeholders can begin as soon as preparatory work for the crisis response begins. Stakeholders can be alerted at the start of the process that the consultation is coming. This can help them to prepare to respond in a manner that is fast enough to suit the short timeline of the Commission’s crisis response.

## Impact assessments

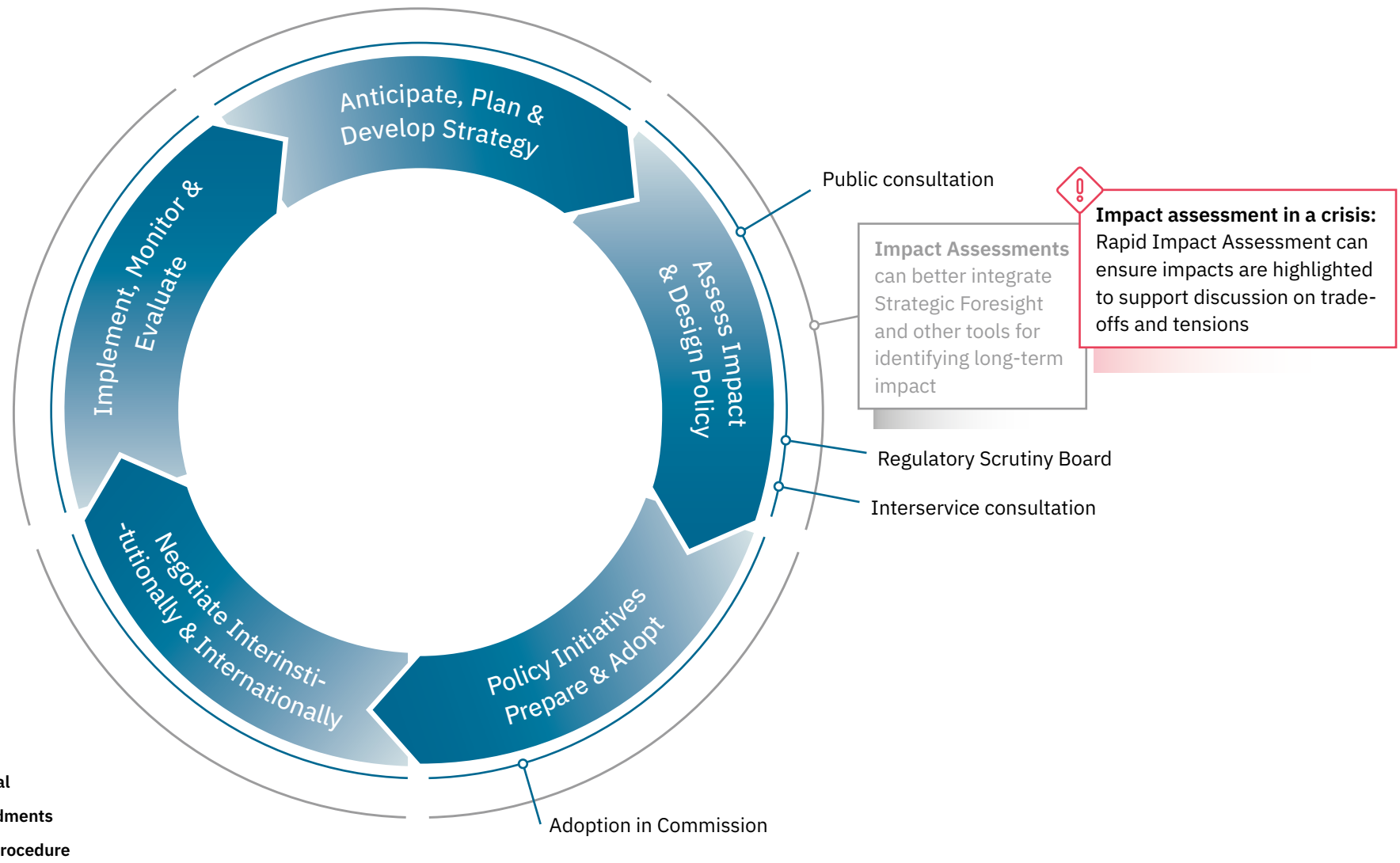


Figure 8 Impact assessments

## Institutional basis of impact assessments in a crisis

Impact assessments (IA) require quite some time to be developed, lasting on average around one year. In contrast, policymaking during a crisis demands a fast response, which ends up with IA often derogated. The Better Regulation Guidelines accommodate deviations from the standard procedure in the case of political emergencies. In such cases, a justification is required, along with the preparation of an ex-post analytical document within the first months of the initiative, presenting evidence on the proposal<sup>44</sup>.

The derogation of IAs comes with trade-offs, one of the most relevant being the risk of overlooking the full scope of social and environmental impacts. In the case of the drafting of REPowerEU, which we analysed in a past report<sup>45</sup>, the lack of IA raised concerns about the impact of new renewable energy projects on communities living close to where they would be implemented, which further risks backlash to them during implementation.

It is also essential that crisis responses focus not only on the short-term, immediate situation but that long-term consequences of policy options are made transparent. Once again, in the context of REPowerEU, the lack of a full analysis of impacts raised questions about whether new or additional coal-dependent energy path dependencies were created.

## Our proposal: Rapid Impact Assessment

A Rapid Impact Assessment process can be added to the Better Regulation Guidelines to support evidence-informed policy decisions during a crisis period. This fast-track assessment would ensure impacts are highlighted to support discussion on trade-offs and tensions associated with a certain proposal. The exact duration of the assessment would be defined based on the complexity, severity, and immediacy of the situation.

Moreover, the adoption of a Rapid IA should be accompanied by an adjusted evaluation timeline. The final Rapid IA report should include provisions to specify when decisions would need to be reviewed, considering a shorter timeframe than that of the usual policy cycle.

Having a faster version of an IA could enhance deliberations on whether to conduct a full IA or not by offering an in-between solution. A set of principles or criteria should guide the decision-making process to determine when to derogate IA, opt for a Rapid IA, or follow the standard procedure. These criteria can include, for example, a ranking according to different levels of urgency of a policy file and the level of potential spill-over effects to other policy areas. All of this should also be aligned with a stricter consideration of when emergency mechanisms are warranted to safeguard against the dilution of policy assessments.

To complement the BRG, the Better Regulation Toolbox could be updated to include a tool for Rapid Impact Assessment that defines what it is and when it is necessary. This tool would provide internal guidance to this process, and clearly outline what it entails, and what components from the usual procedure are not included in the faster version of IA.

### Example

In the UK, when urgent legislative action is required, such as during emergencies like essential public safety reforms, ministers may bypass the standard impact assessment procedures under the Better Regulation Framework (BRF) as described in the list of exclusions and exceptions for conducting Impact Assessments (IA). However, the rationale behind this exemption must be clearly explained. Even in such cases, it is expected that the analysis of impacts is presented to Parliament alongside the legislation or as soon as practical thereafter.<sup>49</sup> Such provided list of exclusions and exceptions as well as de-minimis rule aim to ensure the best use of resources and transparency in prioritisation decisions.

Given the urgency to respond quickly under crisis and polycrisis, it is crucial to maintain the elements of effective governance and to take potential trade-offs into account. The suggestions here do not propose a significantly different way of working with additional administrative load. Rather these proposals, building on the proposals for the policy cycle under “normal” or non-crisis conditions, offer tweaks to the process which can help policymakers respond to these challenges more quickly while also taking in a wider and longer spectrum of the effects of the policy response. As we are entering into a new institutional cycle for the EU, these changes can be integrated into the Commission’s new ways of working.

## **Conclusion**

Policymakers are faced with the challenge of navigating the uncertainty of the future while also dealing with the rapidly changing circumstances of the present. To address this challenge, there is a need for policy processes which are adaptable, facilitate swift action, and can allow for a broad range of inputs early in the process. Furthermore, it is essential for assessments to look into the possibilities of the future to help prepare for different outcomes.

In “normal” times and in times of crisis, process tools can support policymakers through these challenges. The tools presented in this paper offer proposals for new ways of working in these two different circumstances: crisis and non-crisis. By adopting these changes, policymakers can better ensure inclusion of the wide range of inputs needed for identifying and mitigating trade-offs early in the policy process, and that the long-term is taken into account to consider the present and future policy impacts. Mitigating any potential harmful impacts is essential to ensure the success of the green and just transition in Europe without leaving anyone behind.

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