Youth Foresight Workshops

Workshop in Bulgaria

by The Future Now

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Report Title/Title of a local workshop: **The Future Now Workshop**

Date of Implementation: 29-30 November 2025

Duration: 8.5 hours

Location: Bankya, nearby Sofia

Prepared by: The Future Now

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1. Executive Summary

The Future Now Workshop (29–30 November 2025, Bankya) was delivered under the For Youth Information project and brought together 21 young people (plus 2 facilitators) to explore future thinking and foresight as practical tools for understanding uncertainty, imagining alternative futures, and translating long-term visions into action. The workshop combined non-formal education methods with participatory foresight approaches, including interactive input sessions, group work, scenario development, and a backcasting-based educational game.

Key activities included an introduction to foresight concepts and methods, group creation of three contrasting future scenarios for Bulgaria (positive, negative, surprising), and development of community-focused action ideas supported using backcasting method. Participants reported strong engagement with the methodology and emphasised the value of collaboration, creative work, and practical planning tools.

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Evaluation results confirm strong learning outcomes: based on matched pre- and post-questionnaires, participants demonstrated an average individual relative improvement of 27.3%.

Overall satisfaction was very high (4.95/5). The youth-generated scenarios, reflections, and recommendations provide actionable insights for youth work and education and will be used for dissemination through project communication channels and to support the development of Policy Recommendations and practical resources for youth information and participation.

2. Workshop Objectives and Context

The two-day **The Future Now workshop** was organised within the framework of the **For Youth Information project** and aimed to introduce young people to the concepts of future thinking and foresight as practical tools for understanding and shaping the future. The workshop provided a learning space where participants could explore how different futures emerge, how uncertainty can be navigated, and how young people can actively influence future developments in their communities.

The main objectives of the workshop were to:

- introduce young people to the basic principles of future thinking and foresight;
- present and practice different foresight methods, such as scenario development and backcasting;
- support participants in developing alternative future scenarios related to their local and national context;
- strengthen young people's capacity to reflect on long-term change and translate future visions into concrete actions.

The workshop was also linked to the broader goals of the For Youth Information project, which seeks to equip young people with critical thinking skills, future-oriented competences, and a stronger sense of agency.

3. Workshop Description

The workshop took place over two days and followed a learning structure that combined introductory input, experiential learning, reflection, and planning. The methodology used was based on non-formal education, emphasising active participation by each participant, group work, discussion, and learning through practice.

On the first day, the focus was on building a shared understanding of future thinking and foresight. After arrival and an introductory session, participants took part in ice-breaking activities and were introduced to the For Youth Information and The Future Now projects, as well as the overall programme of the workshop. A pre-questionnaire was used to assess participants' initial understanding and expectations related to the topic of future thinking.

This was followed by an interactive session on what future thinking is and an overview of different methods used in foresight. The theoretical input was kept concise and was combined with discussions and examples, allowing participants to relate the concepts to their own experiences. In the afternoon, participants worked in groups on scenario development, focusing on 3 possible futures (positive, negative, and surprising) of Bulgaria. Through creative group work, they explored trends, uncertainties, and alternative future pathways, and presented their scenarios to the rest of the group.

In the evening, the learning continued in a more informal and playful setting through the educational game "Steps from the Future", based on the backcasting method. The game supported participants in working backwards from a desired future to identify concrete steps and decisions needed to reach it. Additional board games provided space for informal learning, peer exchange, and team bonding until late in the night.

The second day focused on transferring future-oriented thinking into action. After a morning reflection, participants worked on developing action plans related to their communities, identifying small but realistic steps they could take based on the future scenarios created earlier. The workshop concluded with a summary session, where

participants reflected on their learning, identified key takeaways and next steps, and completed a post-questionnaire and evaluation. The final closure session provided space for feedback and a ritual to close the learning journey together.

Detailed Agenda for the Workshop is part of the Annexes.

4. Participants

A total of 23 participants (21 young people and 2 facilitators) took part in the two-day workshop. 21 completed the pre-questionnaire by the youngsters, which collected basic demographic information and data related to inclusion aspects. Participants were young people interested in youth information, future thinking, and active participation, coming from diverse educational and social backgrounds.

Gender distribution (N = 21):

Female: 61.9%

Male: 33.3%

Other: 4.8%

Participants with fewer opportunities (N = 21):

Yes: 28.6%

No: 66.6%

Prefer not to say: 4.8%

Although the initial target was at least 30% representation of participants with fewer opportunities, the workshop reached 28.6% of participants who self-identified as having fewer opportunities, with an additional 4.8% who preferred not to disclose their status. Taken together, this results in 33.4% of participants who either identified as having fewer opportunities or chose not to disclose, confirming that the workshop

met the project's inclusion objectives and ensured accessibility for young people from diverse backgrounds.

Participants were recruited through an open Call for participants disseminated via youth organisations, informal networks, TFN community and our online communication channels. The selection process aimed to ensure diversity in background, experience, and access to opportunities, while prioritising motivation and interest in future-oriented topics rather than prior knowledge of foresight.

5. Main Results and Outputs

The main results of the workshop were the future scenarios, action ideas, and shared reflections developed by participants. Working in small groups, participants explored possible futures and reflected on how social, technological, political, environmental, and educational changes may affect young people in the long term.

Future scenarios

Participants developed three contrasting future scenarios for Bulgaria: a positive (desired) future, a negative (challenging) future, and a surprising (unexpected) future. The scenario development process was based on discussion of the main fields/topics in plenary then visualisation and creation in small groups and finally presentation in an artistic way (theater plar) to the whole group.

Across the scenarios, participants explored key themes such as:

- the impact of technology and digitalisation on education, healthcare, and work;
- youth participation, civic engagement, and agency;
- access to opportunities and social inclusion;
- environmental sustainability and quality of life;
- the role of institutions, reforms, and policies in supporting young people.

The **positive future scenario** (2050) envisioned a society characterised by accessible and technologically advanced healthcare, valued arts and culture, and reformed, inclusive education systems. Participants highlighted reduced corruption, strong

intergenerational continuity, and a future in which young people's voices are heard and taken seriously in decision-making processes. This scenario reflected optimism, wellbeing, and social cohesion.

The **negative scenario** focused on challenges such as limited opportunities for young people, lack of systemic reform, and barriers to meaningful participation. Participants discussed how weak institutional support, insufficient resources, and exclusion from decision-making could negatively impact young people's motivation, knowledge, and active engagement in society.

The **surprising scenario** explored unexpected developments driven by rapid social and political change, positioning Bulgaria as a meeting point between East and West, North and South. In this scenario, the country emerges as a space for dialogue, cooperation, and exchange of countries from the world, hosting discussions and processes aimed at conflict resolution and the promotion of global peace.

Action plans and practical outputs

Building on the future scenarios, participants developed action plans focused on their local communities. These included concrete ideas for youth-led initiatives, awareness-raising activities, and small-scale actions that could be implemented in the short term while contributing to long-term positive change. Through the backcasting exercise, participants identified realistic steps, relevant stakeholders, and available resources needed to move from future visions to present-day action.

Common themes and learning outcomes

Across all group outputs, several common themes emerged. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of youth empowerment, adaptability, critical thinking, and active participation in navigating uncertainty. The scenario outputs supported deeper reflection and helped translate abstract future concepts into tangible and relatable ideas, demonstrating an increased awareness of multiple possible futures and a clearer understanding of how present decisions shape long-term outcomes.

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6. Proposed Future Development Scenarios

The workshop aimed to create plausible future development scenarios based on the ideas, experiences, and perspectives of young people. By actively involving participants in the scenario-building process, the results reflect authentic youth voices and real concerns, ensuring relevance to their lives and communities. The scenarios also support the broader goal of the project to foster a digital community, where young people collaboratively design practical solutions and future-oriented action plans connected to their needs and aspirations.

During the workshop the participants developed three future development scenarios for Bulgaria: a positive (desired) scenario, a negative (challenging) scenario, and a surprising (alternative) scenario. Each scenario includes key characteristics and strategic steps proposed by young people to either achieve or avoid these futures.

Positive Future Development Scenario (2050)

The positive scenario envisioned a society characterised by accessible and technologically advanced healthcare, valued arts and culture, and reformed, inclusive education systems that respond to the needs of young people. Participants highlighted reduced corruption, strong intergenerational continuity, and transparent institutions as key conditions for long-term social wellbeing.

In this future, young people's voices are actively heard and taken seriously in decision-making processes at local, national, and European levels. Youth participation is embedded in policy development, education, and community life. Strategic steps proposed by participants to move toward this scenario included strengthening youth participation mechanisms, investing in education reform, supporting cultural initiatives, and ensuring equal access to opportunities through inclusive policies and digital tools.

Negative Future Development Scenario (2050)

The negative scenario focused on challenges that could arise if systemic issues remain unaddressed. Participants described a future marked by limited opportunities for young people, lack of systemic reform, and persistent barriers to meaningful participation. Weak institutional support, insufficient resources, and exclusion from decision-making processes were identified as key risks.

In this scenario, young people experience declining motivation, limited access to quality education and employment, and reduced trust in institutions. Strategic steps discussed by participants focused on preventing this future, including the need to strengthen accountability, invest in youth services, support youth-led initiatives, and create inclusive spaces where young people can actively contribute to social and political processes.

Surprising Future Development Scenario (2050)

The surprising scenario explored unexpected developments driven by rapid social and political change, positioning Bulgaria as a meeting point between East and West, North and South. In this future, the country emerges as a hub for dialogue, cooperation, and exchange, hosting international discussions aimed at conflict resolution and the promotion of global peace.

Participants envisioned young people playing an active role as facilitators, mediators, and innovators within this context. Strategic steps proposed included investing in intercultural education, supporting youth-led peace-building initiatives, strengthening international partnerships, and using digital platforms to connect young people across borders. This scenario emphasised adaptability, openness, and the role of youth in shaping peaceful and cooperative futures.

7. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The future scenarios developed by young people during the workshop provide valuable insights into how policies and institutional approaches can better respond to young people's needs, expectations, and visions for the future. By applying

participatory foresight methods in the youth field, the workshop generated authentic, forward-looking policy implications that can support youth work, education systems, and inclusive decision-making processes.

Future literacy and education

Participants clearly expressed the need for stronger support in developing skills related to future thinking, critical reflection, and long-term planning. The scenarios demonstrated that young people are capable of engaging with complex societal challenges when provided with appropriate tools, trust, and learning spaces. Participants also emphasised the urgency of education reforms that better reflect contemporary realities, including digital transformation, environmental challenges, and social change.

Policy implication

Education systems and youth programmes should integrate future literacy and foresight approaches into both formal and non-formal education. This includes providing structured opportunities for young people to explore future scenarios, reflect on uncertainty, and develop strategic, creative, and critical thinking skills. Non-formal education initiatives and foresight-based trainings should be recognised and supported as valuable complements to formal education.

Responsible digital and technological development

Across the scenarios, young people highlighted the growing influence of technology on education, work, healthcare, and civic participation. While recognising the benefits of digitalisation and innovation, participants expressed concerns about unequal access, over-reliance on technology, and the risk of excluding certain groups.

Policy implication

Policies should promote digital literacy and responsible technology use, ensuring that technological development supports inclusion, well-being, and human-centred participation. Access to information, digital skills training, and safeguards against

digital exclusion should be prioritised, especially for young people with fewer opportunities.

Youth participation and agency

A strong and consistent message across all scenarios was the importance of youth participation and agency. Participants repeatedly stressed the need to be heard, trusted, and involved as equal partners in shaping decisions that affect their lives. They highlighted that young people should not be treated only as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of policies, strategies, and solutions.

Policy implication

Youth participation mechanisms should be strengthened at local, national, and European levels. Decision-makers should actively involve young people in policy development, strategic planning, and future-oriented processes, including through participatory and digital tools. Policies should ensure that youth voices are not only consulted but meaningfully integrated into decision-making outcomes.

Social cohesion, inclusion, and systemic reform

The positive and negative scenarios highlighted the role of inclusive institutions, systemic reform, and social trust in shaping future outcomes. Participants identified corruption, unequal access to opportunities, and weak institutional support as key risks if left unaddressed. They also emphasised the importance of safe, accessible spaces and strong community networks.

Policy implication

Youth-related policies should prioritise social inclusion, transparency, and systemic reform. Targeted support should be provided for young people with fewer opportunities, alongside measures that strengthen trust between institutions and young citizens. Increased support for civil society organisations, youth initiatives, and community spaces is essential to foster belonging and active engagement.

Dialogue, cooperation, and peace-building

The surprising scenario positioned Bulgaria as a meeting point between East and West, North and South, highlighting the potential role of young people in dialogue, cooperation, and peace-building. Participants envisioned youth acting as facilitators of dialogue, intercultural exchange, and conflict-sensitive cooperation.

Policy implication

Policies should support intercultural dialogue, international youth cooperation, and peace-building initiatives. This includes investing in youth-led projects, exchange programmes, and digital platforms that enable cross-border learning, collaboration, and mutual understanding.

Foresight as a policy tool

The workshop demonstrated that foresight methods are effective in engaging young people in long-term thinking and constructive problem-solving. Participants expressed strong motivation to contribute to future-oriented discussions when provided with recognition, support, and meaningful participation.

Policy implication

Foresight-based youth engagement should be further developed and institutionalised as a tool for inclusive, forward-looking policy design in youth work, education, and community development. Methods such as scenario building, backcasting, future wheels, and horizon scanning can support more adaptive, responsive, and youth-informed policymaking.

The policy implications emerging from the workshop demonstrate that youth-informed foresight offers a powerful foundation for developing responsive, inclusive, and future-oriented policies. By recognising young people as knowledgeable partners and co-creators of the future, policymakers can ensure that strategies remain relevant, sustainable, and aligned with the real needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

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8. Evaluation of the workshop

8.1 Learning Outcomes and Competences Developed

Here we summarised the key learning outcomes and competences developed during the workshop.

The evaluation is based on matched responses from 18 participants who completed both the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires. Participants self-assessed their knowledge, skills, and confidence on the topic of foresight and future thinning using a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high).

Baseline data showed a moderate initial familiarity with future thinking and foresight concepts, with an average pre-workshop score of 3.48/5 across the assessed competence areas. Following the workshop, participants reported a significant increase in understanding and confidence, with an average post-workshop score of 4.43/5.

Participants demonstrated an average individual relative improvement of 27.3%, based on matched pre- and post-workshop self-assessment scores. This exceeds the project target of at least 20% improvement.

Key skills, knowledge, and attitudes developed

Comparison of pre- and post-questionnaire results indicates clear improvement in the following areas:

- understanding of future thinking and foresight concepts;
- ability to identify trends and signals of change affecting society, technology, and communities;
- confidence in imagining and describing multiple future scenarios, including positive, negative, and surprising futures;
- skills in planning concrete actions and steps toward desired futures (backcasting);

- strengthened collaboration and co-creation skills through group-based work;
- increased awareness of personal and collective agency in shaping future developments.

The strongest gains were observed in participants' overall understanding of future thinking and their confidence in planning actions toward desired futures, reflecting the practical, participatory, and experiential methodology of the workshop.

In addition to knowledge and skills development, participants reported increased motivation to engage with long-term thinking, greater openness to uncertainty, and higher confidence in expressing ideas within a group. The interactive methods, scenario development, and backcasting exercises were highlighted as particularly effective in supporting learning and engagement.

8.2 Key Insights and Lessons Learned, Youth Reflections and Testimonials

Participants' reflections highlight that the workshop successfully combined practical foresight methods with a safer, engaging, and participatory learning environment. Young people consistently identified future thinking methods, especially backcasting, scenario development, and vision-building, as the most interesting and useful elements of the programme.

Many participants emphasised that the workshop helped them understand that the future is not something fixed or intimidating, but a space that can be explored, shaped, and influenced through structured thinking, collaboration, and conscious action. The idea of working "from the future back to the present" was frequently mentioned as a key insight that changed how participants approach planning and decision-making.

In addition to learning, participants strongly valued the group dynamics, sharing, and peer interaction. Informal moments, games, and creative activities (such as role-playing scenarios, dances, and board games) were repeatedly highlighted as important success factors that supported openness, trust, and learning.

Most valued methods and activities

Across responses, the following elements stood out as particularly impactful:

- Backcasting as a practical tool for turning future visions into concrete steps;
- Scenario development (positive, negative, and surprising futures), especially the Future of Bulgaria activity;
- Interactive and game-based learning, including educational games and quizzes;
- Collaborative group work, discussion, and peer learning;
- Exploration of multiple methods (e.g. 2×2 matrix, Future wheels, Delphi method, Horizon scanning).

Participants highlighted that working with multiple methods helped them realise that there is no single "correct" future, but many possible futures depending on choices made today.

Challenges and suggestions for improvement

While overall feedback was very positive, several recurring suggestions emerged:

- More time for the workshop and for certain activities, discussions, and reflection;
- Shorter or more frequent breaks during longer sessions;
- Slightly shorter daily programmes or spreading activities across more days;
- Clearer instructions for some more complex games (the backcasting edu game).

Youth reflections on change and personal impact

Many participants reported a shift in how they think about the future. Reflections show increased confidence, calmness, and intentionality when planning ahead. Participants described becoming more structured, more optimistic, and more aware of their own agency in shaping long-term outcomes.

Participants' quotes

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“I learned that strength lies in the group, and how to use the futures wheel and the 2×2 matrix to better understand what might happen in the future and to realise that there are many possible future visions.”

“First, to break out of my usual way of thinking and start thinking from the future backwards; second, to be prepared for unexpected changes, whether thinking backwards or forwards.”

“I re-evaluated, put into words, and better understood approaches that I had previously applied intuitively, but had not fully understood.”

“I learned new methods for defining my goals; the future can be much more predictable than I thought, as long as you use the right approach.”

“I will feel calmer knowing that the future can also be positive, and that our actions and way of thinking have the strongest influence on it.”

“I will change my previous approach, which was negative and unfocused, to a more positive and responsible one.”

“I will use the methods I have learned and believe even more that ‘the best way to predict the future is to create it.’”

Success factors

The key success factors identified by participants include:

- a non-formal, participatory learning approach;
- a combination of structure and playfulness;
- space for reflection, sharing, and informal interaction;
- practical methods directly linked to participants’ real lives and communities.

The answer to the “Overall, how satisfied are you with the workshop?” we received 20 answers **5** [on the scale 1(very low) - 5 (very high)] and 1 answer **4**, that makes the overall satisfaction 4.95/5.

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Participants' reflections confirm that the workshop created a meaningful learning experience that not only built skills and knowledge, but also strengthened motivation, confidence, and a sense of agency toward the future.

9. Conclusions and Next Steps

The two-day workshop demonstrated that future thinking and foresight are highly relevant and valuable approaches for working with young people. Participants showed significant progress in their understanding of future-oriented concepts, methods, and personal agency, while also expressing strong motivation to apply the acquired skills in their own lives and communities. The combination of participatory methods, practical exercises, and reflective spaces proved effective in fostering engagement, learning, and collaboration.

The results and learning outcomes of the workshop will be disseminated through multiple channels to ensure broader impact, including preparation of a vlog from the workshop and sharing relevant information in social media channels. The results will be also shared with youth organisations, educators, and stakeholders involved in youth work and non-formal education.

The developed scenarios, participant reflections, and evaluation results will also contribute to Policy Recommendations creation.

Overall, the workshop confirmed that creating structured yet creative spaces for future thinking empowers young people to better navigate uncertainty, imagine alternatives, and take active roles in shaping the futures they want to live in.

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