

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT TOOLKIT: A PRACTICAL SCENARIO PLANNING ACTIVITY ON IMMIGRATION



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Table of Contents

Context and Purpose	4
Key Terms	5
Foresight at the P2P 2025 National Conference	6
Findings from the Foresight Planning Exercise Conducted During the P2P 2025 National Conference	6
Using These Tools In Your Own Organization.....	16
Additional Resources	17

Context and Purpose

This is a time of major uncertainty and change in the world, as well as at home, and thus an opportune time to consider what the future may hold for the settlement sector, for researchers who study immigration, and for policy-makers who work in this area. Strategic foresight exercises assist in this endeavour.

Foresight is about preparing for more than one possible future. Instead of asking “What will happen?”, it asks “What could happen?” and “What might we need to do if it does?” The goal is not to predict the future, but to imagine a range of possibilities so that we can make resilient choices and prepare for multiple futures.

Foresight differs from other ways of looking ahead. Foresight explores several plausible, alternative futures. It helps us understand the forces shaping a system, how the system could evolve, and what surprises could arise. By considering multiple plausible futures, foresight allows us to identify challenges and opportunities and prepare for different directions change could take.

Two additional terms that are related to, but are different from, foresight are forecasting and vision building. Forecasting uses data from the past and extends it into the future, often with statistical tools, simulations, and expert judgments about assumptions. Vision building focuses on the future that we would like to happen. The current toolkit focuses on foresight, rather than forecasting and vision building, as a strategy for recognizing uncertainty and preparing for several possible futures.

The materials in the current foresight toolkit were piloted at the P2P 2025 National Conference. We provide these materials and the results of the exercise held at the conference in the hope that interested parties will use these materials within their own organizations in order to build a more resilient future in which both newcomers and more established Canadians thrive.

Key Terms

Term	Definition
Foresight	A structured way to explore plausible, alternative futures. Foresight helps identify challenges and opportunities that may emerge, and supports better choices today.
Change Driver	A driving force – social, economic, technological, environmental, or political – with the potential to cause significant change in a system (for example, “pace of AI adoption”, “labour market needs”). Drivers are worded neutrally so that different directions of change can be considered.
Trend	A sustained and observable direction of change over time, supported by multiple observations or data points. Trends can vary in direction and pace, and may be shaped by multiple underlying change drivers.
Megatrend	A long-term trend – often global in scope – that is expected to have a major impact on the future.
Weak Signal	A subtle, early indicator of a potential future development that is not yet widely recognized.
Wild Card	An unexpected or highly uncertain event or development that could significantly disrupt a situation or reshape future outcomes.
Scenario Planning	A process that develops descriptions of plausible futures to reveal challenges, opportunities, and potential strategies to prepare for the future.
2×2 Scenario Matrix	A scenario-building technique that uses two key change drivers as axes to create four quadrants. Each quadrant represents a distinct, plausible scenario or future, based on different combinations of how the two drivers could evolve.
Critical Uncertainties	Change drivers that are both highly impactful for the topic area and highly uncertain in how they may evolve. In a 2×2 scenario matrix, two critical uncertainties are selected to define the axes and generate four distinct scenarios.

Foresight at the P2P 2025 National Conference

The P2P 2025 National Conference – *Investing in Canada's Shared Future: Pathways to Possibilities* – focused on the future of immigration to Canada. In the keynote address, Greg Landry introduced how to plan for multiple futures even when the path ahead is uncertain (watch the recording [here](#)). Two plenary sessions at the Conference explored major change drivers – the big forces likely to shape the future of Canada's immigration system – including Canada's demographics and global trends, labour market needs, public attitudes toward immigration, AI and emerging technologies, and information flows (watch the recordings [here](#) and [here](#)).

Building on these conversations, the Interactive Activity brought participants together in small groups to imagine a variety of plausible futures, and to discuss the challenges and opportunities each could create, along with strategies that could help prepare for more than one possible future. Conference attendees worked in small groups with a facilitator to complete a structured 2 × 2 scenario planning exercise focused on the future of immigration to Canada over a 10-15-year horizon. Groups first reviewed and clarified a list of broad change drivers and added any additional change drivers that they felt were missing. They then voted on the change drivers based on two criteria – impact and uncertainty – and used these votes to identify the most impactful and unpredictable forces shaping Canada's immigration future (see [Worksheet 1](#)). Based on the highest combined vote totals, each group selected the top two change drivers to serve as the axes of a 2 × 2 scenario matrix. Next, groups defined contrasting endpoints for each axis and developed four plausible future scenarios (one in each quadrant), giving each scenario a short title and a few defining features (see [Worksheet 2](#)). Finally, groups discussed what each scenario could mean in practice – identifying potential challenges and opportunities for Canada's immigration system and for those who work to support it – and noted strategies that could help prepare for multiple possible futures (see [Worksheet 3](#)).

Findings from the Foresight Planning Exercise Conducted During the P2P 2025 National Conference

A total of 53 groups participated in the Interactive Activity, including 48 in-person groups and 5 virtual groups. To analyze the outputs, we first reviewed all change drivers identified by participants and grouped them into broader thematic categories (see Table 1). These categories were then used to summarize both the votes of impact and uncertainty provided in [Worksheet 1](#), and the change drivers that groups ultimately selected for their 2×2 scenario matrices ([Worksheet 2](#)).

Across participants, the three change driver categories that received the highest number of *impact* votes were labour market needs, public attitudes toward immigration, and demographic

changes in Canada. The three categories that received the highest number of *uncertainty* votes were AI & emerging technologies, global politics & geopolitical factors, and climate & environmental disruption. When impact and uncertainty were considered together, six change driver categories stood out as being most highly endorsed overall: labour market needs; global politics & geopolitical factors; AI & emerging technologies; climate & environmental disruption; public attitudes toward immigration; and demographic changes in Canada. Together, these results suggest that participants saw the future of immigration to Canada as being shaped by a combination of domestic economic and demographic pressures, changing public attitudes toward immigration, and broader technological, environmental, and geopolitical forces.

Table 1.

Categorized Change Drivers: Impact and Uncertainty Votes Across Individual Participants

Change Driver Category	Number of 'most impactful' votes	Number of 'most uncertain' votes	Total
Labour market needs	140	32	172
Global politics & geopolitical factors	60	112	172
AI & emerging technologies	38	127	165
Climate & environmental disruption	50	86	136
Public attitudes toward immigration	81	50	131
Demographic changes in Canada	76	17	93
Economic dynamics	47	30	77
Government policies	41	23	64
Domestic politics & institutional stability	41	23	64
Information ecosystem & access to information	8	50	58
Infrastructure to support newcomers	37	7	44
Health & well-being challenges	2	25	27
Affordability & housing	19	4	23
Attraction & retention of immigrants	9	8	17
Migration trends & humanitarian pressures	9	6	15
Skills & credential recognition	7	2	9
Education & learning resources	1	0	1
Other	8	12	20

As expected, the change drivers selected by groups for their 2×2 scenario matrices showed substantial overlap with the votes provided by participants at the individual level. Labour market needs and global politics & geopolitical factors were the two most frequently selected categories, followed by AI & emerging technologies, climate & environmental disruption,

domestic politics & institutional stability, and economic dynamics (see Table 2). Public attitudes toward immigration and demographic changes in Canada were also selected by a number of groups, although a bit less frequently. Overall, this pattern suggests considerable alignment between the change drivers participants identified as especially impactful and uncertain and the change drivers groups selected to structure their scenario matrices.

Table 2.

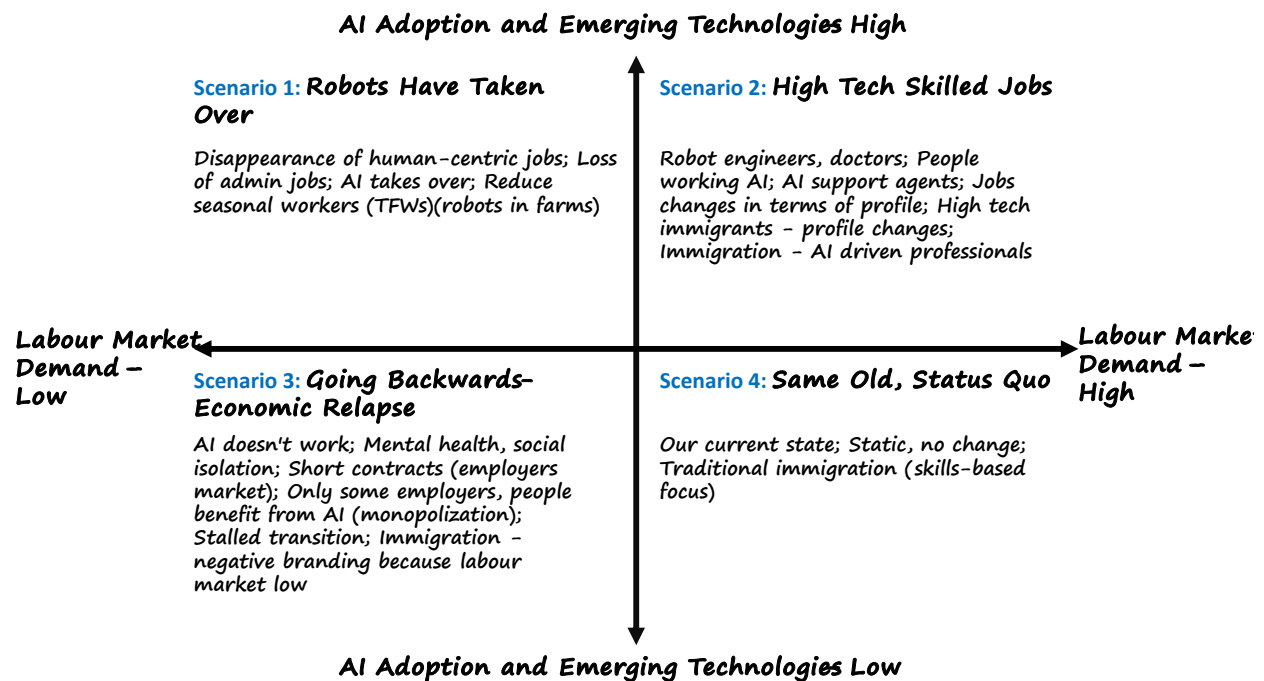
Categorized Change Drivers Selected by Groups for 2×2 Scenario Matrices

Change Driver Category	Count
Labour market needs	19
Global politics & geopolitical factors	19
AI & emerging technologies	13
Climate & environmental disruption	10
Domestic politics & institutional stability	10
Economic dynamics	9
Public attitudes toward immigration	7
Demographic changes in Canada	7
Affordability & housing	4
Government policies	4
Infrastructure to support newcomers	3
Migration trends & humanitarian pressures	1
Information ecosystem & access to information	1
Skills & credential recognition	0
Attraction & retention of immigrants	0
Health & well-being challenges	0
Education & learning resources	0
Other	9

Groups then used their selected change drivers to develop four plausible future scenarios within a 2×2 matrix. Overall, the completed matrices showed that participants were able to imagine a wide range of possible futures, and immigration futures, for Canada. While the specific focus and level of detail varied across groups, the matrices reflected thoughtful engagement with the exercise and a willingness to consider how different combinations of change drivers could shape distinct futures. Below, we include five examples of the types of matrices that were produced.

Figure 1.

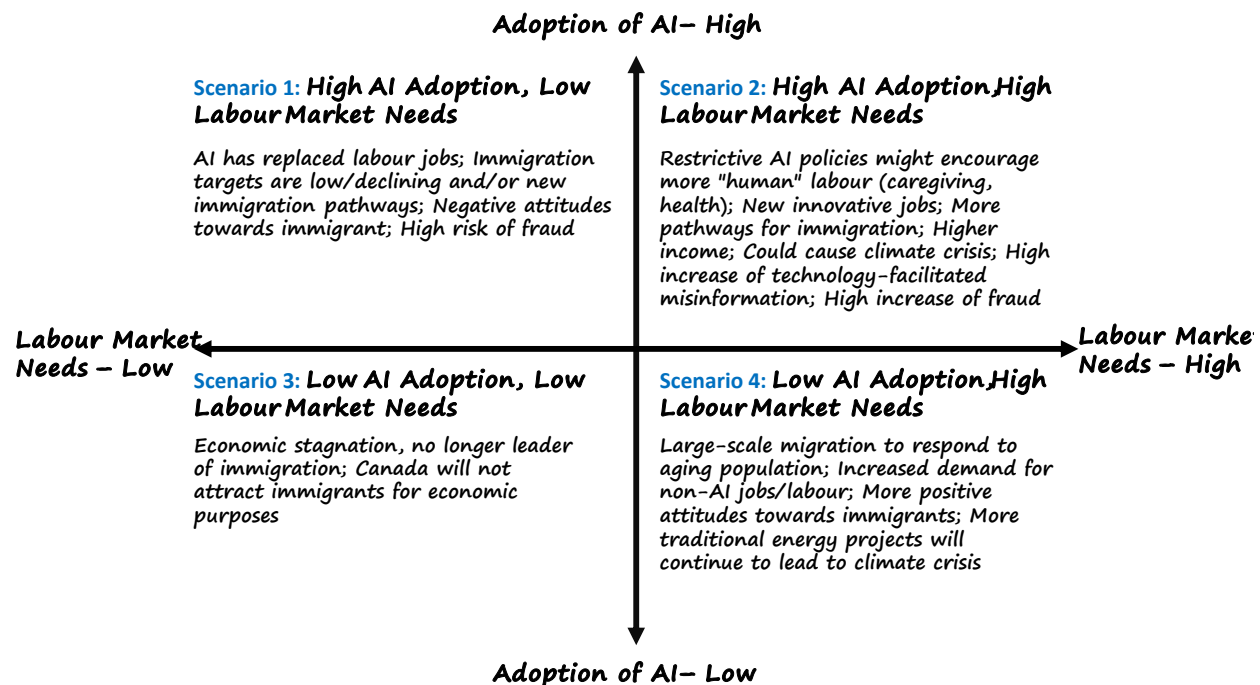
2x2 Scenario Matrix: Labour Market Needs and AI & Emerging Technologies – Example A



The first example explored how labour market demand and AI adoption & emerging technologies could interact under different future conditions (see Figure 1). In scenario 1, low labour demand combined with high AI adoption led to a disruptive future described as “Robots Have Taken Over,” marked by the loss of human-centred work, automation of routine jobs, and reduced demand for some categories of labour. In scenario 2, high labour demand combined with high AI adoption produced a future centred on new high-tech skilled jobs and changing immigrant profiles, with greater emphasis on AI-related expertise. The other scenarios imagined either a stalled technological transition alongside weak labour market conditions, or a lower-tech future with high labour market demand that was described as following more traditional skills-based immigration patterns.

Figure 2.

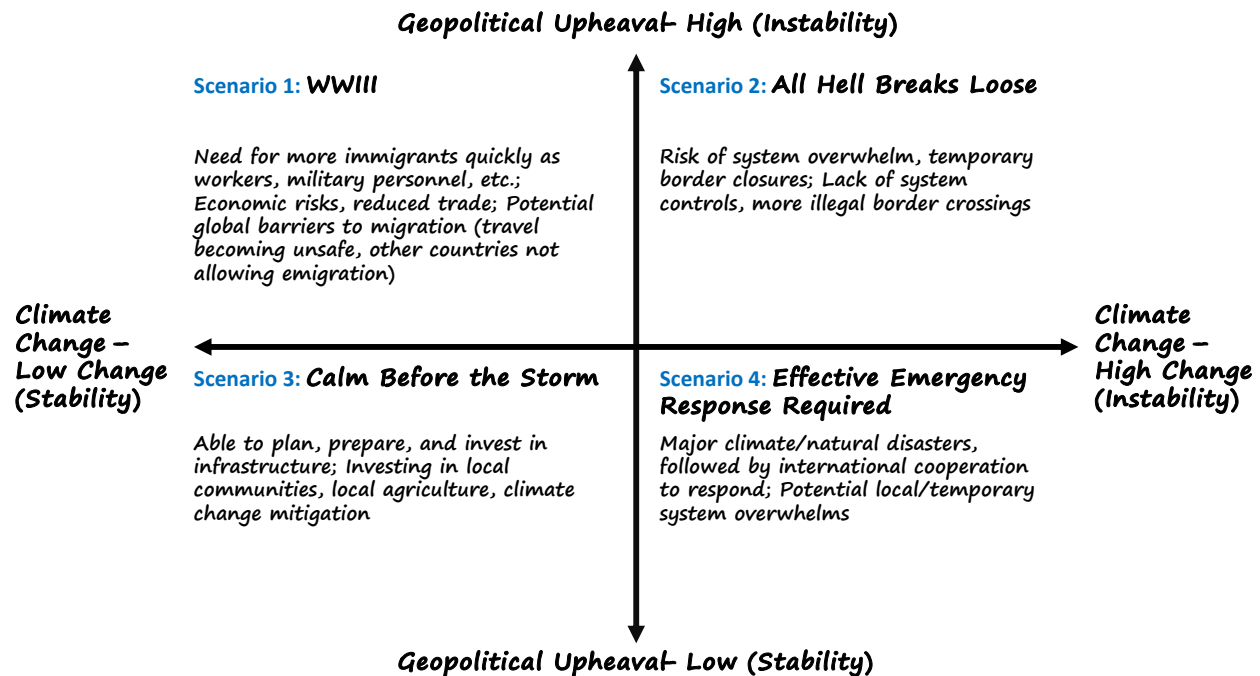
2x2 Scenario Matrix: Labour Market Needs & AI and Emerging Technologies – Example B



A second example also paired labour market needs with AI adoption (see Figure 2). In scenario 1, the combination of high AI adoption and low labour market needs was associated with declining immigration targets, fewer economic opportunities, and more negative attitudes toward immigrants. In scenario 2, high AI adoption combined with high labour market needs pointed to new forms of work and new immigration pathways, while also raising concerns about the broader consequences of technological change. The two remaining scenarios reflected different possibilities. Scenario 3 combined low AI adoption with low labour market needs and was associated with economic stagnation and a decline in Canada's attractiveness as an immigration destination for economic purposes. Scenario 4 combined high labour market needs with low AI adoption and produced a future marked by large-scale migration in response to an aging population and continued demand for more traditional forms of labour.

Figure 3.

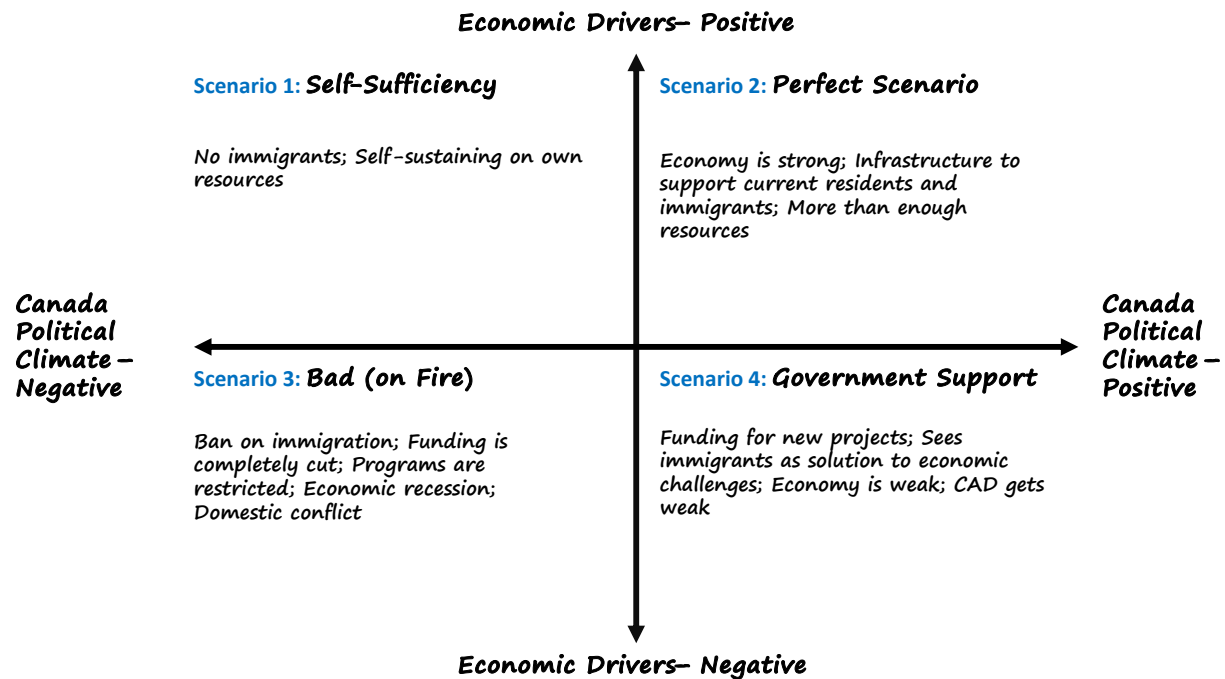
2x2 Scenario Matrix: Climate & Environmental Disruption and Global Politics & Geopolitical Factors



The third example explored how different combinations of climate change and geopolitical upheaval could shape plausible future scenarios (see Figure 3). The most stable scenario (scenario 3), “Calm Before the Storm,” combined low levels of both climate change and geopolitical instability and emphasized planning, infrastructure investment, local resilience, and climate mitigation. Scenario 1 combined low climate change with high geopolitical instability and described a future marked by war, economic risk, and barriers to migration. Scenario 2, combining high levels of both climate change and geopolitical instability envisioned multiple crises unfolding at once, with border pressures and risks of system overwhelm. Finally, scenario 4 combining high climate instability with low geopolitical instability featured major climate-related emergencies requiring cooperation to respond effectively.

Figure 4.

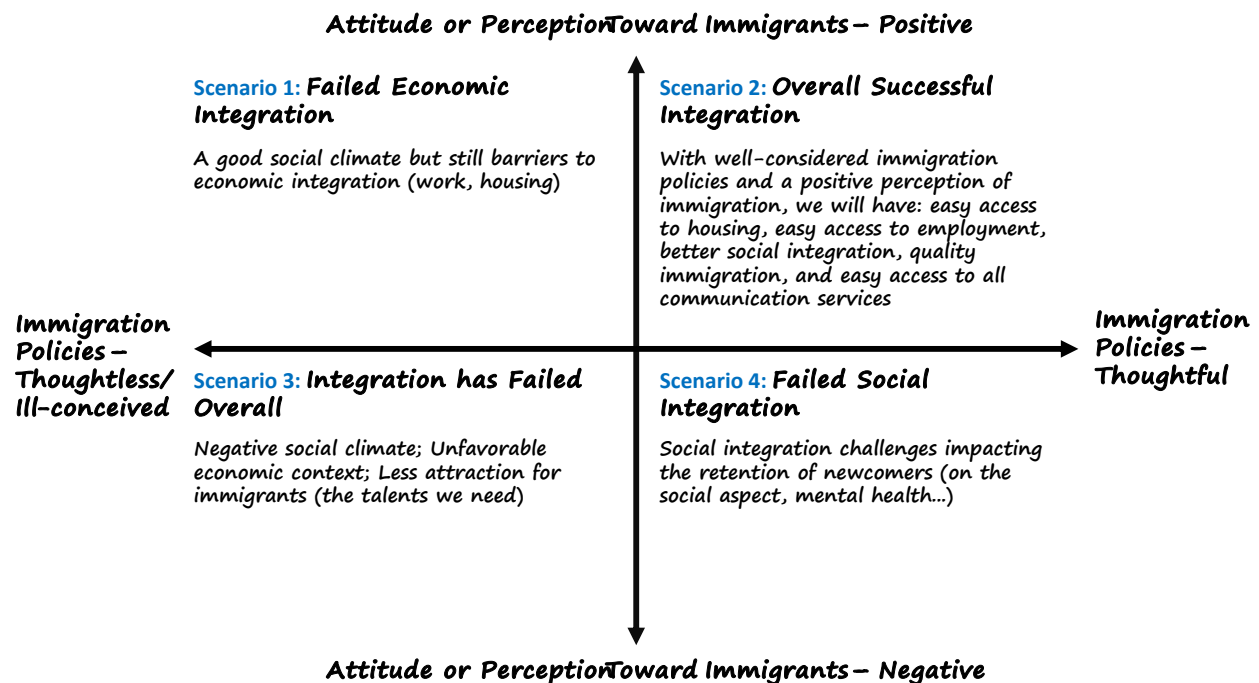
2x2 Scenario Matrix: Domestic Politics & Institutional Stability and Economic Dynamics



The fourth example explored how Canada’s political climate and economic drivers could combine to shape different future contexts (see Figure 4). In scenario 1 where economic drivers were positive but the political climate was negative, a future based on “Self-Sufficiency” with no immigrants and reliance on domestic resources was imagined. In contrast, the “Perfect Scenario” (scenario 2) was described as having a positive political climate and a strong economy, with sufficient infrastructure to support current residents and immigrants, and more than enough resources. The scenario with both a negative political climate and negative economic drivers (scenario 3) described the future as being difficult, marked by recession, domestic conflict, funding cuts, and restrictions on immigration. Finally, scenario 4 with a positive political climate but weak economic drivers was described as a future in which funding was available for new projects and immigrants were seen as part of the response to economic challenges.

Figure 5.

2x2 Scenario Matrix: Government Policies and Public Attitudes Toward Immigration



The final example explored how immigration policies and attitudes toward immigrants could interact under different future conditions (see Figure 5). Scenario 1 combining positive attitudes with ill-conceived policies was described as “failed economic integration,” in which the social climate was favourable but barriers to work and housing remained. In the most positive scenario (scenario 2), thoughtful policies combined with positive attitudes were associated with easier access to housing and employment, stronger social integration, and better access to services. Scenario 3 – the most negative scenario – combined ill-conceived policies with negative attitudes toward immigrants and was described as a future in which integration had failed more broadly. Finally, scenario 4 combining thoughtful policies with negative attitudes toward immigrants resulted in “failed social integration,” in which social integration challenges were seen as affecting newcomers’ retention and mental health.

Across these examples, the groups identified a wide range of challenges associated with the different possible futures that they imagined. In the scenarios focused on labour market needs and AI, they pointed to concerns such as the loss of entry-level work, widening income gaps, higher unemployment, changes to education systems, and the need for service providers and workers to keep pace with rapid technological change. In the scenario focused on domestic economic and political conditions, participants identified challenges such as reduced government support, misinformation, difficulties maintaining resources and relationships, domestic disputes, homelessness, and anti-immigrant sentiment. In the example centered on climate change and geopolitical instability, they also highlighted the difficulty of responding to multiple crises at once, including system overwhelm, displacement, and the risk of complacency or lack of political agreement on how to respond. In the example focused on immigration policies and public attitudes toward immigrants, the challenges identified included high unemployment, difficulty finding employment in one's field, difficulty accessing housing, and broader negative effects on social and family life.

These groups also identified a number of opportunities across the futures they described. In the examples focused on AI and labour market needs, participants pointed to the potential for new jobs, new immigration pathways, and more specialized forms of training. In the example focused on climate change and geopolitical instability, they identified opportunities to develop new technology, improve systems after disruption, build infrastructure, advance humanitarian work, attract talent while conditions remain calm, create new collaborations and international partnerships, and build a green energy economy. In the example focused on domestic political and economic conditions, participants associated more positive conditions with ample job opportunities, greater resources, affordability, support for programs and immigrants, employer buy-in, and collaboration. In the example focused on immigration policies and public attitudes toward immigrants, participants identified opportunities such as attracting top talent on an international scale and using local data to measure impacts and guide future immigration planning, including Francophone immigration.

The strategies to prepare for the future identified by these groups were generally practical and relevant across different futures. Participants pointed to the need for adaptation and capacity-building, including training and ongoing learning within the settlement sector (e.g., training to adapt to AI). Others emphasized planning and collaboration as important forms of preparation, as well as the need for data and factual research. In addition, community awareness-building around diversity was recommended. Some participants also pointed to more concrete planning measures, such as preparing action plans and anticipating impacts over different time horizons (e.g. rate of increased housing needs for immigrants).

Taken together, the outputs from the Interactive Activity show that participants identified multiple plausible directions of change for the future of immigration to Canada and considered the different challenges and opportunities these futures could create. This is exactly the value of foresight: it encourages participants to look beyond a single expected future, to explore a range of plausible alternatives, and to reflect on how different conditions may require different responses. The exercise also helped surface strategies that may remain valuable across more than one possible future and highlighted the importance of preparedness and adaptability in relation to Canada's immigration future.

Using These Tools In Your Own Organization

The materials provided in this toolkit can be used by organizations to facilitate their own scenario planning exercises. They can be used as is or adapted by updating the sample change drivers and prompts to reflect a specific context or topic area. In addition to this introductory document, the toolkit includes:

- A facilitator guide and presentation deck to support the delivery and guide groups through the exercise
- Participant instructions that outline the steps and explain what participants are being asked to do
- Three worksheets to support the activity and capture group outputs across the different stages of the exercise:
 - Worksheet 1: Allows participants to list change drivers, and then vote on them based on impact (red dots) and uncertainty (blue dots)
 - Worksheet 2: Guides participants to build a 2×2 scenario matrix using their two selected change drivers and to outline the title and key features of four plausible scenarios
 - Worksheet 3: Supports participants to document the opportunities and challenges associated with each scenario and to identify strategies that could be valuable to undertake across scenarios

These materials are available for download [here](#). To run the activity, organizations will need basic supplies such as printed worksheets, pens/markers, and red and blue dot stickers (or another simple voting method).

Additional Resources

Title and Link	Authors/Organization	Description
Policy Horizons Canada – Resources Link	Policy Horizons Canada, Government of Canada	A six-module series on foresight and how to integrate it into policy-making, with modules that include HTML/PDF content, slide decks, facilitator notes, guided exercises, and tip sheets.
Scenario Planning: Processes, Tools and Examples User Manual: Developed for Organizations Facing Uncertain Times Link	Kevin Quigley & Warren McDougald, MacEachen Institute for Public Policy and Governance (MIPP), Dalhousie University	A brief, practical user manual that outlines a scenario planning process, introduces tools to support scenario work, and provides an example scenario planning exercise for organizations navigating uncertainty.
There May Be Zombies: A Field Guide to Strategic Foresight Link	CoLab, Government of Alberta	A field guide for new-to-foresight practitioners that explains strategic foresight methods (including purpose, pros/cons, and considerations) and offers guidance on building a foresight mindset and making the case for foresight in everyday work.
Beyond Strategic Planning: A Foresight Toolkit for Decision Makers Link	Peter Glenday & Karthick Ramakrishnan, California 100 and the School of International Futures (SOIF)	A practical primer that introduces strategic foresight and a simple, pragmatic approach – tools, resources, and exercises – to help leaders make better decisions and plan under conditions of deep uncertainty and rapid change.
Strategic Foresight 101: Introduction to Strategic Foresight Methodologies Link	U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), Centers of Excellence (CoE)	A starter guide that orients readers to strategic foresight and design futures methods, explains why they are used, and provides an overview of a foresight process with examples and activities.
UN Strategic Foresight Guide Link	UN Futures Lab, United Nations	A practical guide that introduces key concepts of strategic foresight, provides an overview of foresight tools, and offers tips for framing and designing a first foresight initiative or engagement.

The Futures Toolkit: A Set of Tools to Help You Develop Policies and Strategies that are Robust in the Face of an Uncertain Future Link	Government Office for Science (GO-Science), UK Government	A practical toolkit that introduces futures thinking and provides tools and pathways for applying futures methods to policy or strategy, to help develop approaches that are robust in the face of uncertainty.
Strategic Foresight Toolkit for Resilient Public Policy: A Comprehensive Foresight Methodology to Support Sustainable and Future-Ready Public Policy Link	OECD	A practical toolkit for policy makers that combines a five-step strategic foresight process with background briefs on 25 evidence-based potential disruptions (across environmental, technological, economic, social, and geopolitical domains) to support scenario development, stress-testing of strategies, and more resilient public policy for the period to 2030–2050.
UNDP RBAP Foresight Playbook Link	Aarathi Krishnan, Sophia Robele, Boukje Kistemaker, Samantha Happ, Oluwabunmi Ajilore, Sahiti Sarva, & Zainab Kakal – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP)	A playbook that outlines entry points, methods, and tools for integrating strategic foresight into UNDP work to build anticipatory capacity and support decision-making under uncertainty.
How to Implement Strategic Foresight (and Why) Link	Alberto Behar & Sandile Hlatshwayo, International Monetary Fund (IMF)	A guidance note that explains the value of strategic foresight and offers implementation advice based on the IMF’s experience – especially with scenario planning and policy gaming – to support better decision-making under uncertainty.