



**Foundation for the Rights
of Future Generations**

Stiftung für die Rechte zukünftiger Generationen

The EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness

March 2026

*A Brief Analysis from the Perspective of the Foundation for the Rights
of Future Generations*

Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations

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With the [*Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness*](#), the European Commission has produced its first dedicated political framework paper on the fair distribution of opportunities and burdens across generations. Its ambition is to embed long-term thinking more deeply in political decision-making and to give greater weight to the interests of young people and those yet to be born.

The strategy is a *Communication* from the European Commission, addressed to the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and other EU institutions. It emerges from the newly created EU portfolio for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, headed by Commissioner Glenn Micallef – the youngest member of the current Commission. This portfolio was established under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen in 2024. The strategy is the culmination of a roughly six-month, partially participatory process that began in 2025. Its participatory dimension consisted of the [*European Citizens' Panel on Intergenerational Fairness*](#), which drew on contributions from a range of academic and political actors. The aim was to bring the perspectives of ordinary citizens of different generations and social backgrounds more meaningfully into the policymaking process ([see the FRFG blog post of 25 November 2025](#)).

As a *Communication*, the strategy has no direct legislative force. Rather, it sets out political guidelines and offers strategic direction for future initiatives. It does not, in itself, create legally binding obligations. The political weight of such strategy documents should, however, not be underestimated. In European politics, they frequently serve as springboards for subsequent legislation and new programmes. They shape discourse, set priorities, and lend structure to the political process. The EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness does not position itself as a self-contained policy field but rather as a guiding principle that cuts across multiple domains.

The strategy is also embedded within a wider international context. It builds, in particular, upon the [*UN Pact for the Future*](#) and the [*UN Declaration on Future Generations*](#), both endorsed by the EU and its Member States at the UN Summit of the Future in 2024.

In the following pages, the FRFG offers a chapter-by-chapter assessment that summarises the central arguments, identifies concrete demands, and proposes improvements.

1. Introduction: Background and Problem Statement

- The strategy opens with a foundational observation: **political decisions reverberate over long periods**, and the choices made today shape the room for manoeuvre available to future generations.
- The Commission identifies several fields of action: economic prosperity and well-being, environmental responsibility, social and territorial cohesion, fiscal sustainability, and democratic participation.
- It states the explicit goal of making young people's voices more audible in the policymaking process.
- The strategy also invokes existing European foundations. *Intergenerational solidarity* (though, notably, not intergenerational *fairness*) is already enshrined in the *Treaty on European Union* (Article 3(3)) and in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights*.
- It further notes that more than a third of EU Member States reference 'future generations' in their constitutions and/or 'have established dedicated institutional frameworks underscoring the importance of safeguarding the opportunities for future generations'.

From the FRFG's Perspective:

- The introduction contains several noteworthy advances. The Commission explicitly recognises that political decisions carry long-term consequences and that democratic systems need mechanisms to adequately account for these interests.
- The mention of constitutional provisions on 'future generations' deserved further elaboration. As the text stands, it remains unclear how many countries have adopted such language and in what precise form.
- At the European level, the policy areas most pertinent to intergenerational fairness are those where the EU wields significant competences: climate and environmental policy; single market and competition policy; regulation of digital markets and technologies; European structural and cohesion policy; and parts of labour market and equality policy.
- Climate policy, in particular, is an arena in which the EU's regulatory instruments have an immediate bearing on future generations. Decisions on emissions reductions, energy strategy, and sustainable infrastructure investment materially determine the living conditions of those who come after us. By contrast, the principal tools of intergenerational redistribution – taxation, pensions, large swathes of social policy, housing and rental regulation – remain overwhelmingly in the hands of the Member States and can be coordinated at the European level only to a limited extent. The introduction would have benefited from acknowledging this division of competence.

2. Megatrends and Changing Intergenerational Dynamics

- The second chapter turns to the broad **societal transformations** that are reshaping the relationship between generations.
- It foregrounds a number of **long-term** developments: demographic change, ecological pressures (above all climate change), technological innovation, economic restructuring, and shifting patterns in education, employment, and social security. Together, these trends are altering the conditions under which people live, work, and grow old.
- The Commission is careful to present these dynamics as both **risks** and **opportunities**. Technological progress, for instance, can unlock new economic potential and drive productivity gains; at the same time, it may precipitate structural upheaval in labour markets and deepen pre-existing insecurities.
- **Demographic change** occupies a central place in the analysis. Across much of Europe, rising life expectancy is coinciding with falling birth rates, shifting the balance between the working-age population and retirees. This trajectory poses particular challenges for pension systems, healthcare, and long-term care. The strategy, however, also strikes a constructive note: 'With investment in lifelong learning, flexible work and age-friendly communities, demographic change can become an opportunity for all generations.'
- **Education and the labour market receive sustained attention**. Today's young people are, on average, more highly educated than any preceding generation, yet their career paths tend to be less stable. Fixed-term contracts, uncertain transitions from education to employment, and rapid structural change are becoming defining features of early adulthood for many.
- **Housing emerges as another pressing concern**. In many European cities, the cost of housing has risen sharply in recent years, erecting barriers for young people seeking to establish independent households and, in some cases, delaying the transition to autonomy.
- The strategy also addresses the **psychological and social dimensions**. Research suggests that elevated levels of stress, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future are increasingly prevalent among young people – dynamics that have been compounded by the aftermath of the pandemic and by persistent economic volatility.
- **Challenges confronting older people** are also acknowledged, particularly in relation to care, old-age poverty, and social participation in later life. The same passage notes that women face a disproportionately high risk of poverty in old age.
- Throughout the chapter, the Commission underscores that these shifts represent both challenge and opportunity, and that the outcome depends on the choices societies make.

From the FRFG's Perspective:

- The analysis of megatrends and structural change is thoughtful and wide-ranging, engaging with many of the defining challenges of contemporary societies.
- That said, a stronger emphasis on the political roots of intergenerational imbalance would have been welcome. Many of the problems identified do not arise purely from structural forces; they are also the product of deliberate policy choices across a variety of domains.

3. The Cost of Non-Action

- The third chapter considers what happens **when political decision-making fails to reckon with the long term**.
- The Commission contends that political systems are structurally **predisposed** towards **short-termism**. Electoral cycles, political incentive structures, and the rhythms of public attention tend to privilege measures whose payoffs are immediately visible, while long-term risks and costs are more readily deferred.
- This **short-term bias**, the Commission argues, can generate **substantial economic, ecological, and societal costs**. The case is starkest in climate policy: delayed action compounds both the eventual economic damage and the expense of necessary adaptation.
- The strategy also draws attention to the uneven **distribution of opportunity, not only across generations, but across regions and social groups**. Gender, disability, social origin, and place of residence can all significantly affect the life chances of different generations. Women, for instance, continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care work and are more exposed to pension poverty in old age. People with disabilities frequently encounter structural barriers in education, employment, and civic life.
- Beyond environmental risks, the strategy highlights the economic and social toll of short-sighted policymaking. Underinvestment in education, infrastructure, and innovation can erode long-term growth potential, narrowing the economic possibilities available to those who come after.
- There are **political ramifications**, too. When citizens feel isolated and inadequately represented, trust in political institutions and democratic processes can atrophy. Survey evidence suggests that many people already harbour doubts about the fairness of the structures that shape their opportunities.
- Intergenerational fairness, the strategy argues, is far more than a moral imperative: it is a **precondition for economic stability, social cohesion, and the enduring legitimacy of democratic governance**.

From the FRFG's Perspective:

- This section offers a **clear-eyed diagnosis of a fundamental structural problem in modern democracies**. The Commission forthrightly acknowledges that **political**

inaction generates long-term costs which disproportionately burden future generations.

- Particularly persuasive is the way in which **environmental, economic, and democratic concerns are woven together**. Intergenerational fairness (and the redress of within-generation inequities) is framed here not merely as a matter of moral aspiration, but as a structural precondition for lasting economic stability and social cohesion.
- Taken as a whole, the chapter makes a compelling case for the need to be more firmly embedded in long-term perspectives in political decision-making.

4. The New Intergenerational ‘Contract’

- The fourth chapter develops the strategy’s **conceptual architecture**. The Commission speaks of a renewed **intergenerational ‘contract’**, the central idea of which is to **redefine the foundations on which the coexistence of different generations rests**.
- This contract is built upon three pillars:
 - (1) **Fair policymaking → embedding long-term thinking and the youth perspective in decision-making;**
 - (2) **Fair opportunities → uniting generations around shared goals for a better future;**
 - (3) **Fair places → ensuring intergenerational fairness across territories.**
- Section 4(1) aims to ensure that the long-term consequences of political decisions are considered more systematically. Six concrete initiatives are announced, which fall within the Commission’s direct competence – among them the publication of an **intergenerational fairness strategy progress report** by early 2028. Additional measures include programmes to foster **futures literacy** in public administrations; the continuation and refinement of the **Youth Check**; the preparation of a **Longevity Roadmap** to identify strategic opportunities for longer, healthier, and financially more secure lives across all age groups; and a report on **Fair Digital Futures**. The strategy also invokes established instruments of European governance – **strategic foresight, impact assessments, and public consultations** – as well as newer tools such as the **Futures Balance Tool**, an AI-enabled instrument for forward-looking policy analysis.
- The same section highlights exemplary institutions for long-term thinking: the *Committee for the Future in Finland*, the *National Office of Foresight and Strategy in Spain*, and the *Guardian of Future Generations in Malta*.
- It also draws on numerous positive examples from Member States in support of its call for a dedicated Youth Check in EU legislation.
- The second pillar, section 4(2), addresses the dismantling of structural barriers and the safeguarding of fair opportunities across the life course. Equality of opportunity is foregrounded, with particular attention to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups

regardless of age. Wealth distribution is also placed on the table: 'Intergenerational fairness can only exist when there is a fair distribution of the wealth created by society.' The section is principally concerned with the intergenerational transmission of structural disadvantage – including, notably, through large inheritances.

- The strategy underscores that conditions in the early stages of life are often decisive for later outcomes. Inequalities that take root in childhood tend to compound over the life course, which is why the strategy accords particular importance to **education, social security, civic participation, and the political engagement of young people**.
- Section 4(2) announces six further concrete measures, chief among them the development of an **Intergenerational Fairness Index**. Citizens' engagement – especially among younger cohorts – is to be strengthened through (a) intergenerational dialogues, (b) a European Youth Week dedicated to solidarity and fairness in 2026, and (c) the Intergenerational Fairness Day (discussed further below).
- Positive examples from Member States are again cited, including the *Promising Start programme* in the Netherlands and the *CALICO project* in Belgium.
- Sub-section 4(3) opens with a striking observation: 'Intergenerational fairness is shaped not only by age, gender and socio-economic background, but also by location.' It contends that one's place of birth within the EU can materially affect one's starting conditions, and that a territorial dimension must therefore be integral to any strategy on intergenerational fairness.
- Regional disparities bear upon **access to education, infrastructure, jobs, healthcare, and cultural provision**. Across many parts of Europe, pronounced differences persist between urban and rural areas and between economically strong and structurally disadvantaged regions.
- The strategy argues that these disparities carry significant consequences for intergenerational fairness. When young people are compelled to leave their home regions for want of opportunity, the result is not only individual disadvantage but also **structural imbalance** between territories.
- To address this, the strategy proposes a range of measures: **initiatives to promote regional development, programmes to strengthen local communities, and projects to foster intergenerational encounters within cultural and social institutions**.
- In this sub-section, the Commission also announces concrete actions – some in partnership with the Committee of the Regions – and cites further Member State best practice, including the *European Heritage Volunteers programme* and the *project Phōnē*.

From the FRFG's Perspective:

- This section moves further than its predecessors towards **concrete action**. Implicitly, the Commission follows the FRFG's own distinction between two dimensions of intergenerational fairness: **fairness between present and future people**, and

fairness between the currently young and the currently old. Measures are proposed along both axes.

- The initiatives outlined under section 4(1) point broadly in the right direction, insofar as they address the well-documented tendency of political processes to privilege the short term. Their efficacy, however, will hinge on whether they are meaningfully integrated into actual decision-making. **Strategic foresight and impact assessment instruments already exist at the European level**, yet their practical influence has remained limited.
- Simultaneously, the strategy does not meet the Citizens' Panel's expectations. [The Panel had called for the establishment of an independent Council for Intergenerational Fairness at the EU level, comprising two chambers](#). The FRFG supports this demand, but it is not reflected in the strategy.
- Of particular significance to the FRFG is the sentence in section 4(2)(c) announcing that the Commission will **'raise awareness particularly around November 16 as a day marking Intergenerational Fairness.'** With this, the Intergenerational Fairness Day – long championed by the FRFG – receives recognition, albeit couched in cautious language and tucked into a relatively inconspicuous position. The acknowledgement is nonetheless noteworthy. [The Intergenerational Fairness Day was established by the FRFG to focus public attention on long-term responsibility between generations and towards those not yet born](#). Its adoption within a European strategy paper marks a genuine success.
- The idea of an **Intergenerational Fairness Index** is welcome, though far from novel; various prototypes already exist in the literature. Much will depend on the Commission's choice of indicators. If well designed, the Index could become a valuable instrument for political debate. Intergenerational fairness is too often discussed in purely abstract terms; a robust set of indicators would allow long-term trends to be observed and quantified systematically. It is important to note, however, that many of the most relevant policy domains – education, pensions, and much of social policy – lie within the **competence of the Member States**. The Index cannot, therefore, serve as a yardstick for evaluating EU policy as such.
- The territorial dimension in section 4(3) is thought-provoking but conceptually debatable. Intergenerational fairness concerns the distribution of opportunities and resources over time; regional inequality, by contrast, pertains primarily to differences between geographical spaces. Regional disparities can certainly influence intergenerational outcomes, but they should not be conflated with intergenerational fairness in analytical terms. In Germany, for instance, the historical divide between the former West German states and the former GDR remains pronounced, yet the FRFG has never framed calls for enhanced inter-state fiscal equalisation as a matter of intergenerational fairness. One may therefore ask whether the EU strategy somewhat overextends the concept by blending inter- and intra-generational

dimensions of justice. In the scholarly literature, these dimensions are kept analytically distinct.

- The measures proposed under section 4(3) are concentrated largely on dialogue formats and exchange programmes. For the long-term development of structurally disadvantaged regions, however, sustained economic and infrastructural investment is indispensable. The EU already possesses relevant instruments in its Cohesion and Structural Funds.
- Finally, the three components of the *renewed intergenerational 'contract'* implicate different levels of political competence. In practice, many of the levers for improving social opportunity or stimulating regional development reside primarily with Member States or regional authorities. The EU's room for manoeuvre in these areas is limited, though the Commission signals its intention to make the fullest possible use of it.

5. Mainstreaming across EU-Policy

- The strategy goes on to insist **that intergenerational fairness ought not to constitute a standalone policy field**, but must instead be woven as a **guiding principle into every area of existing policy**.
- The Commission highlights several priority domains: **economic and industrial development; social and labour market policy; education and research; climate and environmental policy; and digitalisation and technological innovation**.
- **Economic development and competitiveness** receive particular emphasis. The strategy contends that sustained prosperity is an essential precondition for intergenerational fairness: an innovative and competitive economy generates stable employment and enables investment in the industries of the future. At the same time, growth must be pursued in ways that do not deplete the natural resources upon which future generations depend.
- **Social security systems** are presented as a cornerstone of long-term societal resilience. Well-designed education and welfare systems can help to equalise opportunities across the life course and foster upward social mobility. The strategy is equally clear, however, that social provision must be fiscally sustainable over time.
- **Climate and environmental policy** occupy a central position. Decisions on emissions reductions, energy strategy, and the stewardship of natural resources have direct consequences for those who will inherit the results. Measures to limit climate change and ensure the sustainable use of resources are accordingly framed as core elements of intergenerational responsibility.
- The strategy also underlines the importance of the **digital transformation**. Technological innovation can create economic opportunity and boost productivity, but it can equally generate new forms of inequality – in access to digital skills, for example, or to technological infrastructure.

From the FRFG's Perspective:

- The ambition to treat **intergenerational fairness as a cross-cutting principle** (analogous to gender mainstreaming) is well-suited to the reality that the long-term ramifications of political decisions manifest across a wide range of policy domains. In areas such as climate and environmental policy, innovation and industrial strategy, and digital regulation, the EU possesses substantial capacity to shape the opportunity structures of the future.
- The mainstreaming approach, however, places **heavy demands** on institutional coordination. When a guiding principle is to be embedded across a multitude of policy fields, there is a tangible risk that responsibilities become **diffuse** and that the agenda, whilst rhetorically prominent, achieves only limited traction in practice.
- **The effectiveness of the approach will ultimately be determined by whether intergenerational fairness is systematically built into existing decision-making and evaluation processes – not merely invoked as a rhetorical aspiration.**

6. Conclusion/Next Steps

- The strategy positions itself explicitly as the beginning of a **long-term political process**. The Commission emphasises that the integration of intergenerational perspectives into policymaking is to proceed **incrementally**. Various initiatives are to be **developed** and tested over the coming years, and a **progress report in early 2028** is to provide an **initial stocktaking** of implementation.
- **Institutional cooperation is highlighted as indispensable**. Many of the policy areas most relevant to intergenerational fairness do not lie exclusively within EU competence; effective implementation will therefore require close coordination among European institutions, Member States, regional actors, and civil society.
- The strategy also underscores the **role of civil society engagement**. Contributions from academia, the political sphere, and the broader civic domain are expected to help embed long-term thinking more firmly in the policymaking process.
- The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council of the EU to consider, within their respective mandates, how intergenerational dimensions can be more thoroughly incorporated into policymaking. Member States are encouraged to continue embedding long-term thinking in public decision-making, in line with national contexts and competences, and to foster greater awareness of the various facets of intergenerational fairness.

Overall Assessment from the FRFG's Perspective:

- The strategy marks a significant milestone. For the first time, **intergenerational fairness is articulated systematically as a guiding political principle at the European level**. It is especially welcome that long-term perspectives are not siloed within individual policy areas but conceived as a cross-cutting obligation.

- The strategy also takes up **several central recommendations that emerged from the European Citizens' Panel on Intergenerational Fairness**. Among the most important are:
 - Greater consideration of the long-term consequences of political decisions
 - The development of an ***Intergenerational Fairness Index*** for tracking long-term trends
 - **New participatory formats to draw citizens** (especially younger generations) into political deliberation
 - Enhanced public visibility for intergenerational fairness, notably through initiatives associated with the ***Intergenerational Fairness Day***
- At the same time, **several of the Citizens' Panel's most consequential recommendations go unaddressed**. Particularly striking is the absence of institutional reform proposals for the systematic representation of future generations within political decision-making.
 - Chief among the Panel's proposals was the establishment of an **independent Council for Intergenerational Fairness at the EU level**. As envisaged by the citizens, this body would have comprised two components: **a scientific expert panel and an assembly of randomly selected members of the public**. Its purpose would have been to give permanent institutional expression to the interests of future generations and to orient political decisions more consistently towards their long-term effects. No equivalent mechanism appears in the strategy.
 - Other recommendations aimed at strengthening the democratic representation of younger generations were likewise not adopted. This includes, notably, **the discussion of lowering the voting age to 16** – considered by the Panel as a means of enhancing the political voice of the young.
- This omission is surprising, given that questions of institutional representation are central to the durable anchoring of intergenerational fairness in political life.
- The strategy opts instead for **a gradualist approach, integrating long-term perspectives into existing processes while exercising notable caution in creating new institutions**.
- One policy domain that receives only marginal attention is fiscal policy. This area was also accorded relatively little prominence by the Citizens' Panel, which made only 24 recommendations. From the FRFG's standpoint, however, it deserved a substantially larger role in the strategy. Long before the environmental and climate crisis entered the discourse on intergenerational fairness, debate was already underway about the **intergenerationally just level of public debt**. The strategy confines itself to footnote references to several reports expected in 2027 and 2028. Yet the EU might have permitted itself a measure of pride on this count: the Treaties require the EU budget to balance revenue and expenditure, and EU spending is directed overwhelmingly

towards investment. In this supranational entity, we thus find something approaching **the ideal of a balanced budget combined with a high investment ratio.**

Conclusion

With the Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness, the European Commission sends an important political signal. It recognises that long-term responsibility must be a central tenet of modern governance. At the same time, the strategy remains institutionally cautious: it articulates guiding principles and proposes new analytical instruments, but largely stops short of structural reform to political decision-making. From the FRFG's perspective, the strategy therefore represents a commendable and significant step forward. What will ultimately prove decisive, however, is whether these principles can be translated into binding policy. Whether Europe assumes a genuinely pioneering role in the institutional anchoring of intergenerational fairness will depend, in the final reckoning, on whether long-term thinking is durably embedded within the processes by which political decisions are made.