

An EU Agenda for Youth and Future Generations

Building our common future

The choices we make today will define our shared future: they can perpetuate and exacerbate current crises, or else secure the underlying conditions for our youth and future generations to live in peace and prosperity on a healthy planet. Despite this, current EU policy making barely takes youth and future generations into consideration.

Jacques Delors once [asked](#): “How can we ever build Europe if young people do not see it as a collective project and a vision of their own future?”

Young people and their interests are not adequately represented in the EU. For example, despite up to 25 million young people eligible to vote for the first time in the 2024 EU elections, only [2 MEPs were under the age of 30 in the outgoing parliament](#).

[The 2022 Eurobarometer on Youth and Democracy](#) revealed that young people's most common expectation for the 2022 European Year of Youth was for decision-makers to listen more to their demands and act on them, mirrored in the call from the Conference on the Future of Europe Outcomes Report ([recommendation 47.1](#)) which calls for all policy making at EU level to be seen through a youth lens.

Some positive steps have recently been taken. In January 2024, the European Commission [committed to an EU Youth Check](#) to assess the impact of any new legislation on Europe's youth. However, it falls short from introducing provisions to force the EU to act on intergenerational fairness.

It is high time for new governance approaches to counter the short-term nature of European policy-making and create healthy systems that ensure wellbeing, equity and environmental protection both for our current youth and for the generations to come.

Is this a new approach?

Thinking on the subject of Future Generations has a long history, and European countries have played a very important role in spearheading it. In the Netherlands the [Future Generations Lab](#) provides advice to the government, in Hungary there is a [Future Generations Ombudsman](#), and in the UK, Wales has a [Future Generations Commissioner](#) leading this thinking.

In 2024 the UN launched a process that will culminate in the [Declaration on Youth and Future Generations](#). The EU has the opportunity to take lead in the process by adapting its own political agenda and structures to safeguard their interests, rights, and wellbeing.

Towards an EU youth and future generations vision

Youth and future generations governance acknowledges the interlinked economic, social and environmental benefits of crafting policies that bring into focus their long-term impacts, ensuring that they serve the interests and needs of both present and future life on this planet.

To do this, the European Commission needs an **Executive Vice-President for Youth and Future Generations**, who would lead in the establishment of mechanisms to include the perspective and interests of future generations in policy and decision-making processes. Their role would focus on the following:

1 - Include the rights of Youth and Future Generations in EU Treaties, including the recognition of an enforceable right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as well as the recognition of young people over the age of 18 as rights holders. Article 3(3) of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) states that the EU shall promote “solidarity between generations”. However, there is no specific treaty provision to make EU action or inaction illegal if the EU or its member states fail to honour their duties towards them.

2 - Develop an intergenerational solidarity policy framework that ensures fairness between generations, stating the rights of youth and future generations in certain domains, including nature, health, social inclusion, (youth) employment, regulation of emerging technologies, public services, social rights and democracy. This will create obligations for procedures to ensure coherence of current and future legislation, as well as establish procedural mechanisms for the Commission and interested parties.

3 - Introduce legal safeguards for EU long-term planning and policy formulation: The EU needs to adopt long-term planning approaches in policy formulation, so as to address the potential impacts and consequences of today’s decisions on future generations. This involves:

- Including the perspective of youth and future generations in impact assessments for all new EU policies. This should include incorporating and elaborating the ‘EU Youth Check’ into Better Regulation to recognise youth as a lifestage in its own right and young people as rights holders;
- Making the safeguarding of youth and future generations’ interests part of the mandate of the EU regulatory scrutiny board,
- Introducing indicators for the monitoring and benchmarking of current youth and future generations’ wellbeing in the European Semester framework
- Introducing a youth and future generations rule in future EU expenditure, subsidies and investments.

4 - Lead the recognition of youth and future generations’ interests and rights in relevant international fora: from the currently ongoing [UN Pact for the Future](#), to championing a UN convention on the rights of young people.

Conclusion

Facing the challenges of the next years will require a new thinking and a new approach, and we need European leaders to put forward a positive vision.

Setting an EU agenda for youth and future generations and appointing an Executive Vice-President with the power to implement it will be the first step in ensuring peace and prosperity within our planetary boundaries.