



INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN EUROPE – A PROGRESSIVE VISION

ABSTRACT

Championed by progressives, intergenerational solidarity embodies the values of social justice, sustainability and democracy. It builds on the universal character of human rights, which ensure equal dignity, wellbeing and a duty towards one community.

This policy brief analyses this concept, building on existing research and on wide consultation with academics, civil society, and key stakeholders such as the Young European Socialists and the European Seniors Organisation. It constitutes a progressive contribution to the upcoming EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness, announced by the European Commission for early 2026.

Exploring how the question of solidarity between generations is mobilised in national contexts, but also across existing EU policies, this policy brief presents building blocks for a comprehensive approach on this matter: welfare policies; democracy and participation; policy mainstreaming; and financing.

In the field of welfare policies, this policy brief addresses issues related to housing, employment and the future of work, care and healthcare, ensuring gender mainstreaming and intersectional approaches. Across all policies, the European Pillar of Social Rights remains a guiding framework for action.

When it comes to intergenerational democracy and participation, this policy brief addresses issues related to civic and citizenship education, lowering the voting age, cross-generational dialogue, youth participation, citizens assemblies and digital democracy.

Finally, the policy brief explores how to mainstream intergenerational solidarity across the EU policy-making process, via youth tests, generational checks and wellbeing indicators. It also links with negotiations for the post-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational solidarity embodies the core progressive values of social justice, sustainability and democracy. It builds on the universal character of human rights, which ensure equal dignity, wellbeing and a duty towards one community.¹ Ensuring that all generations equitably share the benefits and responsibilities of policy choices is essential for building cohesive, inclusive and sustainable societies prepared for the future.

Today, the EU is facing combined challenges that are making the societal contract between generations more fragile. It therefore jeopardises the realisation of human rights for all age groups. The EU's population is aging drastically, with the average age expected to increase by 4.5 years by 2050 compared to 2019, bringing the population above 65 to 130 million, up from 91 million.² As the population distribution takes a new shape, pension systems and care services are put under pressure, and some job openings are increasingly difficult to fill. In addition, the climate crisis threatens future generations' prospects for a healthy life, and the fast-paced digital transformation is creating a

generational divide. Last, but not least, an aging population wields growing electoral influence, which can diminish the political voice of younger cohorts, hence testing our democracies, which are already under threat.

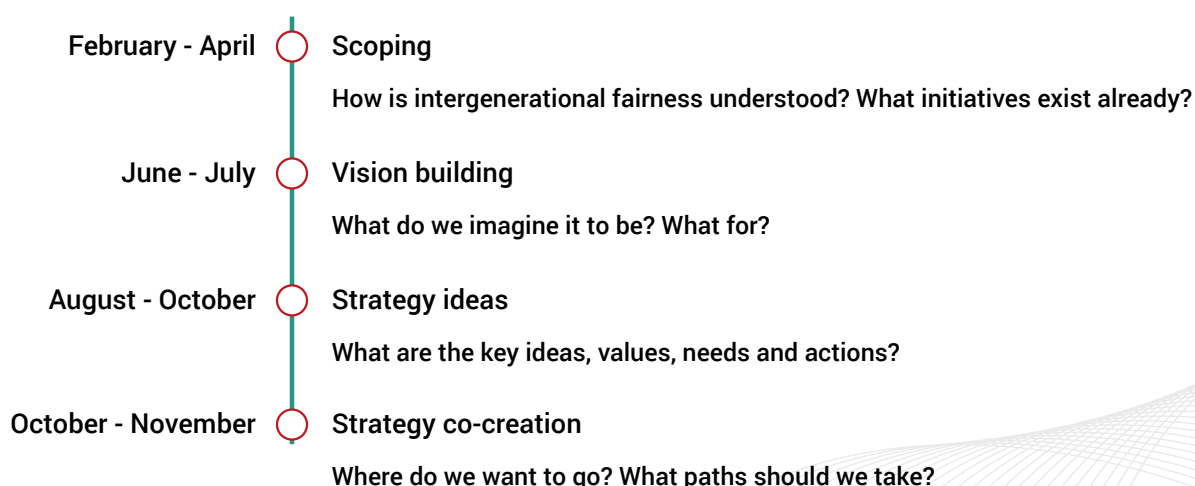
This is why the progressive forces in Europe have been calling for a real intergenerational solidarity strategy at the European level.

The European Commission made intergenerational fairness a political priority for the current legislative term (2024-2029).³ Glenn Micallef was appointed as the first-ever Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, and was entrusted to develop a comprehensive strategy on the topic. Combined with global momentum and the adoption in September 2024, at the United Nations Summit of the Future, of a non-binding declaration on future generations, committing to fairer distribution of burdens over time,⁴ this presents an opportunity for progressives to shape the debate.

The upcoming EU strategy on intergenerational fairness, expected in early 2026, is currently in its "strategy design" phase.

Timeline

From February to November 2025, we will be designing the strategy, in co-creation with you.



Source: [European Commission](#)

The strategy “*should ensure that the interests of both citizens of today and tomorrow are woven into EU policy and law-making*”,⁵ setting the policy agenda; offering guidance for member states, stakeholders and EU institutions; and informing forthcoming legislative proposals and funding frameworks.

When it comes to intergenerational relationships, the concepts of justice, fairness and solidarity are often mobilised and intertwined. Though related, they offer different lenses for analysis. While justice represents a broader moral and legal framework, fairness lays the foundation for equal and unbiased treatment. Solidarity, however, calls for further responsibilities going hand in hand with a sense of collective ownership of society.

This policy brief takes the stance of referring to intergenerational solidarity, while the European Commission refers to fairness. Indeed, it is meaningful, not merely semantic, to emphasise solidarity rather than just fairness as the guiding principle for Europe’s approach. Solidarity captures the progressive vision of collective responsibility and mutual support among generations, going beyond transactional fairness to foster stronger societal bonds, enhance social cohesion, and create policies that genuinely empower current and future generations. Intergenerational solidarity not only links the youngest with the oldest, but it brings together all generations.

This policy brief provides a structured exploration of progressive perspectives on intergenerational solidarity broadly and specifically on the Commission’s emerging strategy. In addition to academic and policy literature on the topic, it integrates insights and priorities from essential progressive stakeholders, such as the Young European Socialists (YES) and the European Seniors Organisation (ESO). Additionally, it incorporates input and recommendations from S&D Members of the European Parliament, who will play a crucial legislative role in shaping the strategy once it reaches parliament.

While the knowledge base and policy expertise on intergenerational fairness remains relatively limited, particularly at the EU institutional level⁶ – neither the EU institutions nor progressive

stakeholders are starting from scratch when it comes to framing intergenerational solidarity more broadly or shaping a strategy for intergenerational fairness more specifically. Section 2 briefly reviews existing EU initiatives addressing solidarity between generations, which connect with the rationale of the Commission to make intergenerational fairness a priority.

Section 3 outlines in greater detail the progressive approach across key building blocks: conceptualisation; welfare; democratic participation; policy making; and funding. This section builds on academic research; policy literature; and FEPS’ extensive work on socio-economic governance, equality, democratic participation and youth-focused studies. It also integrates strategic insights from the aforementioned progressive stakeholders, as well as selected best practices from member states.

2. NOT A COMPLETE NOVELTY FOR EUROPE

As is often the case in the field of social policy and policy addressing specific age groups, the distribution of competences leaves most room for manoeuvre in the hands of the member states, particularly in areas such as pension systems and other forms of social security. This limits the scope for concrete policy shifts towards greater intergenerational solidarity at the EU level. However, a range of pressing challenges facing the EU today – including the climate crisis, the lack of affordable housing and rising socio-economic inequalities, all further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – underscore the growing need for stronger intervention at the European level, alongside national efforts. Rather than citing limited competences as a constraint, the EU should build on the Commission's prioritisation of intergenerational fairness to advance the concept, using its powers to legislate where possible, and otherwise to guide, support and coordinate member state efforts.

While social progress has been embedded in European treaties since 1957, it was not until 2000 that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU formally recognised a responsibility toward future generations. The Charter explicitly prohibits age discrimination under Article 2.1, while recognising older persons' rights to lead lives of dignity. A similar intention also resonates with the 2000 Employment Framework Directive, prohibiting age discrimination in employment and occupation, establishing minimum standards throughout Europe, and introducing age discrimination laws in many EU member states for the first time, although implementation continues to lag behind to date.⁷ Recognition of a responsibility towards generations was further reinforced in 2007, when the Treaty of Lisbon enshrined the promotion of solidarity between generations as an objective of the EU (TEU Article 3). In various constitutional documents in EU member states, the notion of solidarity between generations or with future generations is also referenced (such as in Belgium,⁸ France,⁹ Germany¹⁰ or Poland¹¹).

The austerity measures adopted in response to the global financial and eurozone crises of the 2010s triggered significant social unrest across Europe.

Youth unemployment soared, exceeding 50% in some member states, such as Greece and Spain, between 2012 and 2014. In response, progressive political forces advocated for the creation of a Youth Guarantee, which was eventually launched in 2013, with the aim of swiftly integrating young people into employment, training or education. In the realm of social policy, this initiative marked an early and tangible step toward fostering intergenerational solidarity.

Subsequently, the strengthening of the "Social Europe" dimension during the Juncker and first von der Leyen Commissions further advanced an intergenerational approach. This was accompanied by increasingly proactive efforts to consult underrepresented age groups in EU policy making, notably through mechanisms such as the EU Youth Dialogue. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 operationalises this via three pillars – engage, connect, empower – directly implementing 11 European Youth Goals developed through participatory dialogues, which identify cross-sectoral challenges affecting young people's lives.

The European Pillar of Social Rights, adopted in 2017, sets out 20 principles that introduce a more comprehensive approach to intergenerational solidarity. It reaffirmed rights to equal opportunities, regardless of age, and included commitments to active support for youth employment, access to childcare, adequate old-age income and pensions, long-term care, and lifelong learning. Building on this momentum, a series of complementary initiatives followed, including the reinforcement of the Youth Guarantee,¹² the publication of the Green Paper on Ageing,¹³ the adoption of the European Child Guarantee¹⁴ and the launch of the European Care Strategy.¹⁵

The Erasmus programme, as a historical flagship programme of the EU, is another stream of work directly supporting key goals of intergenerational solidarity. As a cornerstone of EU youth policy, its Key Action 1 in the current Erasmus+ programme promotes individual mobility and cross-border exchanges within the EU and beyond. The programme also integrates the updated Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, including multilingualism, digital literacy, civic engagement and entrepreneurship –

skills that are essential for empowering young people and fostering social cohesion across generations.¹⁶

The appointment of the first-ever Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness under the von der Leyen II Commission marks a significant step toward promoting a shared vision for all generations. To make this mandate effective, we believe that a specific understanding of intergenerational solidarity must be applied as a cross-cutting principle across all policy areas. This is essential not only to uphold the commitments of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, but also to ensure that today's decisions do not compromise the rights and wellbeing of future generations. Finally, it is also important to highlight that EU institutions are not alone in their emerging focus on intergenerational solidarity. Several EU member states have experimented, or are currently experimenting, with institutionalised bodies dedicated to promoting intergenerational dialogue and fairness. Examples include the Future Generations Commissioner in Wales, tasked with acting as a guardian of future generations' interests;¹⁷ pre-Orbán Hungary, which established an Ombudsman for Future Generations within its national parliament;¹⁸ and Finland's Committee for the Future, a parliamentary think tank designed to ensure that lawmakers regularly consider long-term scenarios and the implications for future generations before making decisions.¹⁹ Not least, it will also be crucial to connect to existing initiatives at EU level itself, such as the Minister of the Future network, which involves government officials appointed by each EU member state meeting informally at least once a year to discuss and strategise on issues critical to Europe's long-term future.²⁰

3. THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Solidarity between generations

While different generations face distinct challenges – from youth unemployment to ageing in poverty, and the mounting climate and economic burdens shaping future generations – these are not zero-sum struggles, but interconnected issues demanding solutions built on solidarity and forward-looking policies. Europe's children today contend with deepening poverty, persistent educational inequalities, and growing mental health pressures amplified by socio-economic instability and digital divides. Generation Z struggles with youth unemployment, insecure and precarious jobs, soaring housing costs, and mental health strains intensified by digital pressures and climate anxiety. Meanwhile, older working-age populations face wage stagnation amid rising living costs, increased caregiving responsibilities for both children and older parents, and the constant demand to reskill amidst rapid technological shifts. Pensioners frequently confront financial vulnerability due to inadequate pension provisions, loneliness, and limited access to essential healthcare and social support networks. Addressing these challenges with the attention they deserve is essential, but equally important is preventing intergenerational conflict by avoiding policies that pit age groups against one another. While a generational and age-based lens is important, analysis and resulting policy must also consider other systemic factors – such as the socio-economic situation and geography – which may have an equal or even greater influence on the life outcomes of individuals, even within the same generation, affected by that policy. Instead, integrated, intersectional and holistic approaches are needed to promote solidarity across generations.

At the same time, societal challenges such as the climate crisis or persistent and rising inequalities affect all generations. Solidarity between generations must be envisioned as a society where each age group not only receives adequate support but also actively contributes to collective wellbeing,

fostering empathy, mutual respect, cooperation and sustainable development. The initiative of the European Commission could offer an important opportunity to adopt such a collaborative approach in addressing the interconnected challenges faced by different age groups. It must also be used as a guide across policies and funding mechanisms as the foundation of a new social contract in Europe, rooted in the realisation of fundamental rights for all.

Welfare policies for all generations

Ensuring equality among all generations requires that the EU's upcoming intergenerational fairness strategy serves as a guide for all EU policies, particularly those impacting living and working conditions, such as employment or housing. At the same time, one must also ensure that generations are not seen as a monolithic bloc or homogenous groups.²¹ Therefore, gender mainstreaming and intersectional approaches must also be applied.

For the current legislative term (2024-2029), a series of upcoming initiatives, as well as already existing ones, should be brought under the intergenerational solidarity umbrella. Age-specific aspects should be taken on board, either in their design or in their rollout.

European Commissioner for Energy and Housing Dan Jørgensen is expected to present a European Affordable Housing Plan by early 2026. Ensuring intergenerational solidarity in this field would mean providing policy proposals – either through direct EU action where possible or recommendations to member states – regarding adapted housing, assisted living and care homes, community-led housing, student housing, as well as support for first-time ownership or rent capping. The housing crisis is largely documented and quantified across Europe.²² In several member states, examples can be found when it comes to successful intergenerational housing initiatives, such as with the CALICO Co-housing project in Belgium,²³ multigenerational houses in Germany, the Savoy Village community housing in Ireland²⁴ or the SällBo project in Sweden.²⁵ In times of extreme individualism and polarisation, initiatives bringing communities together are

crucial. In addition, renovation and construction of sustainable housing units should also be encouraged as a priority for all current and future generations.

While ensuring access to affordable and sustainable housing for all is key for wellbeing across generations, meaningful employment opportunities throughout life are equally essential, the upcoming Quality Jobs Roadmap, under the leadership of Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness Roxana Minzatu, will also have to apply the intergenerational lens. In this regard, the initiative should cover aspects such as a reinforcement of the EU Youth Guarantee (with a particular focus on regions with higher rates of youth unemployment, or taking inspiration from national initiatives such as the “Contract-Generation” in Portugal,²⁶ which serves as financial support to employers when they hire first-time job seekers or long-term-unemployed people aged over 45 years old); a ban of all forms of unpaid traineeships, internships or apprenticeships as well as quality standards for them; labour mobility (notably through youth programmes); the fight against age-based discrimination in recruitments (young and senior); intergenerational mentorship, lifelong learning and training (e.g., green and digital-related skills); adapted working facilities; and parental leave.

Beyond the practical aspects of working conditions, intergenerational dialogue on the meaning of “work” should be considered, as perceptions about jobs, management relationships, working hours and many other factors tend to differ between generations or shift rapidly (notably due to the introduction of new digital technologies).

In addition to employment-related measures, broader income support systems are critical. While the Council recommendation on adequate minimum income, ensuring active inclusion,²⁷ briefly echoes the importance of the financing of social security systems for intergenerational solidarity, member states should see minimum income, as enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, as an important tool to support solidarity between generations and ensure decent living conditions. As wealth inequalities are also built through generations, the question of universal inheritance, as proposed by Thomas Piketty,²⁸ could be also explored, as already

being discussed in Germany for example.²⁹ Built thanks to a more progressive and fair taxation system, such an unconditional and universal capital contribution could help to fix the distortion in generations of accumulation of capital and help give a fairer chance to the most vulnerable. The renewed Action Plan for the Social Pillar's implementation, foreseen by the end of 2025, should also align with the future EU intergenerational fairness strategy. While current targets focus on employment rate, training and poverty reduction, they should not only ensure that age-specific situations are taken on board, but the Action Plan could also encourage further action from member states in the field of safe, sustainable pension systems, as per principle 15 (old age income and pensions).

As raising the retirement age is either discussed or implemented in many member states due to changes in life expectancy and improvement of living conditions, particular attention must be given to careers with particularly physical or psychologically challenging conditions. At the same time, ensuring that entry-level jobs or jobs overwhelmingly occupied by young people are covered by social protection (hence banning all forms of unpaid internships or zero-hour contracts and regulating platform work). This would ensure contributions to social security systems and the sustainability of the pension system for all future generations.

Pensions should not only consider the diversity of career paths and life choices, but it should also prevent falling into poverty. Especially when it comes to women, as they suffer from a gender pay gap from 25.4%.³⁰

Just as pension systems ensure financial security, care policies must also be considered for physical and psychological support across generations. The implementation of the European Care Strategy must also be part of this broader endeavour. One could further explore the establishment of a European Care Guarantee,³¹ as part of a broader European Senior Strategy,³² supporting member states, as well as local and regional authorities in care policies and investment in care services and facilities, building on the model of the European Child Guarantee, championed by progressives under the previous term (one should note that a European Senior Strategy

would be a welcome addition to complement the already existing EU frameworks dedicated to children and young people). Measures should ensure that providing care is not overburdening either one generation or the other (either informal care for older people or senior support of family duties due to a lack of sufficient childcare facilities). Particular attention must also be given to the question of availability of care staff across member states, as there is a risk of shortages of staff ("care drain") in eastern parts of Europe with professionals attracted to better working conditions in western member states.³³

Linked to care provision, the necessity to establish a concrete European Health Union,³⁴ rooted in the principles of promotion and prevention, remains an important way to also contribute to intergenerational solidarity, by ensuring minimum standards for healthcare and accessibility for quality services; investing in disease prevention and advanced medical research; or developing long-term thinking, anticipating threats and new diseases. A life-cycle approach should be applied when it comes to the development of a comprehensive EU strategy on mental health, often seen as a "young people's issue", underestimating its widespread distribution among all age groups.³⁵

Building on the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights, we can therefore make intergenerational solidarity the common thread across a wide range of social policies and provide meaningful and fair answers to people's challenges.

Intergenerational democracy and participation

Political representation

One of the critical challenges facing European democracies today is their deeply intergenerational character, and within that, one of the key questions is, are all generations adequately represented in democratic institutions?

On one hand, Europe's aging population is shifting the electoral balance in favour of older generations. This demographic trend increases the likelihood

that the specific interests of older voters are better represented than those of younger citizens, both due to sheer numbers and higher electoral participation. This imbalance is further compounded by persistent disparities in voter turnout by age. Young people, particularly those under 30, consistently vote at lower rates than their older counterparts. Turnout tends to rise in the late 20s before declining again at a very old age.³⁶ Alarmingly, this trend worsened in the most recent European Parliament elections in 2024: turnout among under 25s fell to just 36%, down from 42% in 2019. Meanwhile, overall turnout remained stable at around 51%, indicating that older age groups either maintained or increased their participation.³⁷ At the same time, there is a marked underrepresentation of younger generations in political institutions. In the current European Parliament, only 18 out of 719 members (2.5%) are aged 30 or younger, underscoring a significant generational representation gap, with the median age of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) standing at 50 years.³⁸

Together, these trends pose serious risks to the legitimacy and inclusiveness of European democracy. When a substantial portion of the population, particularly young people, is underrepresented both at the ballot box and within institutions, the credibility of democratic governance is undermined. The questions the strategy must therefore answer through an intergenerational lens are how can institutions better reflect the interests of all generations currently alive, including younger ones, and, crucially, those of future generations? When answering this question, one thing must be made clear: when it comes to shaping the future of Europe – particularly through decisions that will have long-lasting consequences – young people and future generations must be given an outsized voice. These choices will impact them more deeply and for much longer than they will older generations.

Lowering the voting age to 16 is a central EU reform proposal, widely supported by experts as a way to increase youth participation in elections. Academic and policy studies highlight two main benefits: (1) it gives young people a direct voice in decisions that affect them, and (2) it helps establish lifelong voting habits by allowing first-time voting experiences while

many are still living at home and engaged in civic education.³⁹ Evidence from countries like Austria, Germany and Malta – where 16 and 17 year olds can already vote in European elections – shows that early enfranchisement can positively impact turnout and long-term engagement.⁴⁰

The European Parliament adopted the Electoral Act reform package in May 2022. Part of this package, among many other elements, is the objective to harmonise the voting age to 16 across the EU, aiming to address disparities in youth representation and strengthen democratic legitimacy.⁴¹ However, the proposal has stalled in the Council of the EU, where unanimous agreement is required and has not yet been reached. Revitalising this debate and achieving consensus would be a significant step toward improving the representation and engagement of young voters in European democracy.

A more ambitious – and potentially provocative – proposal to stimulate debate is for the European Parliament to commit to a flexible target for the share of MEPs under the age of 35. This target would aim to better reflect the proportion of under 35s in the EU population at the time of the election. While this idea could take various forms, one concrete approach would be to incorporate it into how political parties structure their electoral lists for European elections – encouraging them to place more young candidates in electable positions. Beyond voluntary encouragement, there is also a case to be made for embedding such a measure in the ongoing discussions around reforming the European Electoral Act, as proposed by youth advocates.⁴² Beyond institutional reform, a key priority should be the strengthening of civic and citizenship education from secondary school onwards. This should include practical training on political systems, voting processes and critical thinking, with a clear European dimension embedded in national curricula. Enhanced teacher training and coordinated EU-wide initiatives are essential to this effort. Existing EU resources – such as the Civic Education Package and the extensive materials developed around the recent European elections – offer valuable tools that should be more systematically integrated and streamlined across member states where appropriate.⁴³

Non-electoral democratic participation

Beyond voting, meaningful democracy involves processes such as citizen assemblies, consultations and participatory budgeting. However, younger and older generations often face distinct barriers – digital divides, time constraints and a lack of trust or interest – that can prevent effective participation. A comprehensive strategy for intergenerational solidarity must address these obstacles explicitly to ensure inclusive representation and active engagement across age groups.

The current Commission under Ursula von der Leyen (VDL 2) has notably prioritised youth engagement, recognising the risk of underrepresentation inherent in traditional representative channels. Three initiatives stand out in this regard. Firstly, the president's Youth Advisory Board institutionalises youth participation by advising senior EU officials directly. Secondly, the annual Youth Dialogues mandated in the mission letters create regular interactions between commissioners and youth stakeholders, fostering consistent dialogue and mutual understanding.⁴⁴ Thirdly, these initiatives complement the established (structured) European Youth Dialogue, which facilitates policy input from youth organisations and national youth councils.⁴⁵

While these bodies and new initiatives represent a commitment to participation, crucial past lessons must guide their future development. Advisory formats must offer genuine influence rather than symbolic inclusion, translating youth engagement into tangible policy outcomes, thereby effectively mobilising a generation increasingly sceptical about traditional politics. This is critical, as disillusionment with mainstream politics has already driven some young voters toward anti-system movements.⁴⁶

YES's recent declaration on intergenerational solidarity highlights essential criteria for such advisory bodies. They argue for structures enabling real-time input into all relevant legislative proposals. These bodies must be democratically selected, ensuring geographical and socio-economic diversity.⁴⁷ Most importantly, any new initiatives must work in synergy with established collective mechanisms, such as the (structured) European Youth Dialogue, thereby reinforcing – rather

than fragmenting – youth representation. This is particularly important, as the creation of parallel structures that rely on individual participation rather than organised, representative bodies at the Commission level risks being perceived as undermining existing mechanisms. Such a move could inadvertently shift control away from young people's collective voices to the detriment of their meaningful representation. Learning and exchanges on lessons learned with other actors like the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), which have similar bodies already, would be critical here.⁴⁸

Furthermore, inclusive democracy must equally address older citizens, who frequently confront stereotypes undermining their political participation. Effective intergenerational solidarity involves empowering older individuals, recognising their active contributions to society and the economy. According to the EU Green Paper on Ageing (2021), one fifth of individuals aged 65-74 participate in formal volunteering, with continued engagement among older cohorts as health permits.⁴⁹ Participation is thus both a democratic imperative and a matter of human rights, affirmed by Article 25 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, guaranteeing older citizens dignity, independence and active social participation.⁵⁰ Concretely, the EU could take three key actions to strengthen non-electoral democratic participation through an intergenerational lens.

Firstly, it could institutionalise cross-generational dialogue, by establishing a structured EU-level forum to regularly engage youth, working professionals and senior representatives with policymakers, hence fostering mutual understanding and accountability on intergenerational fairness. As a first step, existing Director-General-level youth dialogues could be complemented by an intergenerational dimension where relevant.

Secondly, a permanent intergenerational citizens' assembly could be created. It would be established as a standing EU citizens' panel with randomly selected participants, including a youth quota, to deliberate on policy issues. It should not repeat shortcomings of the Conference on the Future of Europe (low visibility, unclear uptake of proposals, too little involvement of collective civil society

voices, beyond the Brussels bubble)⁵¹ and could help monitor objectives on intergenerational fairness, as set out in the forthcoming strategy. One way to include the voice of future generations is to appoint a dedicated representative who ensures decisions consider long-term impacts. A more creative approach draws on “future design” methods, where citizens adopt the perspective of future generations – “imagining life in, say, 2050” – and develop recommendations accordingly. This has proved to be effective at countering short-termism and fostering more future-oriented decisions, while it may also strengthen intergenerational dialogue.⁵²

Thirdly, the EU will need to continue funding intergenerational civic engagement, by allocating resources to support civic initiatives, such as democracy festivals and projects like MEET⁵³ – that bring together young and older citizens for deliberation, volunteering and civic education, reinforcing participatory democracy across age groups.

Digital democracy

In an era of digital transformation, younger citizens engage primarily online, while seniors often find themselves challenged by rapidly evolving digital technologies. Addressing this digital divide must therefore be central to the EU’s new strategy on intergenerational fairness. Young Europeans have advocated strongly for digital democracy. For example, in their recent declaration, YES proposed establishing a Youth-led Digital Democracy Platform, enabling direct online interaction between young people and policymakers through consultations, e-voting and digital forums.⁵⁴ Such platforms promise to significantly enhance youth engagement, ensuring policies reflect younger generations’ values and priorities. The EU has already made progress in this direction. Digital participation tools such as the European Commission’s “Have Your Say” portal and the Citizens’ Panels platform allow citizens of all ages to contribute online.⁵⁵ The Intergenerational Fairness Strategy should amplify and promote these initiatives, making certain they are accessible and inclusive for everyone.

However, digital participation must not lead to exclusion. ESO highlights that digitalisation, without careful management, risks further marginalising vulnerable groups. ESO advocates for a fundamental rethinking of digitalisation strategies and warns against an overreliance on digital-only solutions, calling instead for legally binding obligations on public authorities and service providers to maintain face-to-face services. Digital solutions should enhance rather than replace personal interactions, ensuring all citizens retain access to essential services.⁵⁶ Promising practices already exist. For example, the commune of Cascais, in Portugal, successfully addressed senior citizens’ digital participation challenges by training volunteers to assist seniors in using civic apps and e-governance platforms.⁵⁷ The EU could replicate this, or similar initiatives at scale, potentially through Erasmus+ exchanges dedicated to senior citizens’ digital skills or by supporting local tech workshops.

Finally, efforts to embed democracy within the EU’s intergenerational fairness agenda should align with the forthcoming Democracy Shield, the EU’s most ambitious initiative on democracy in the current institutional mandate. This initiative will focus strongly on disinformation – one of the pressing threats to democratic resilience in Europe today.⁵⁸ To be effective, synergies between these two initiatives are essential. The strategy could point out that an intergenerational lens is particularly valuable in understanding how disinformation affects different age groups. While older adults are often targeted through traditional, trust-based media exploiting fear, younger people are reached via peer-driven digital content that leverages emotional engagement.⁵⁹ Policy responses must reflect these dynamics. Cross-generational cooperation should be encouraged, drawing on the digital fluency of younger generations and the critical thinking skills of older citizens to develop robust, inclusive and adaptive strategies against disinformation.

Integrating intergenerational solidarity in EU policy making

A range of strong proposals exists for integrating intergenerational fairness into EU policy making. A common thread running through many of them is well captured in a statement from the YES Declaration on Intergenerational Solidarity, which calls for “the principle of intergenerational fairness [to] be formally recognised in the EU acquis as a guiding principle for all EU policies and legislative initiatives. This would ensure that future generations are considered in all EU decisions”.⁶⁰

Mainstreaming intergenerational solidarity

Most existing proposals advocate for mainstreaming intergenerational solidarity across all relevant EU policy areas and throughout the entire policy cycle – from inception and design to implementation, impact assessment and monitoring. Importantly, they emphasise that intergenerational fairness must include not only present but also future generations, frequently reflected in proposals for “future checks” or “future impact assessments”.⁶¹

The concept of generational checks is already in use across the EU through youth checks and can serve as a valuable model for mainstreaming intergenerational fairness more broadly. Several EU member state governments systematically assess how new legislation impacts younger generations. For example, Austria introduced a mandatory Children and Youth Impact Assessment (*Jugendcheck*) in 2013 for laws significantly affecting those up to 30 years old. Germany implemented its *Jugendcheck* in 2017, managed by an independent centre, assessing legislation across 11 dimensions of youth wellbeing.⁶² Finally, more recent efforts – such as those in Portugal – have taken a more dedicated approach to developing an “intergenerational fairness” assessment framework, aimed at systematically evaluating how policies impact present versus future generations.⁶³

These practices demonstrate the practicality of integrating generational impact assessments into lawmaking processes. By including dedicated checklists and consultations, negative effects on

younger age groups can be identified and mitigated before policy implementation. The EU’s Youth Test initiative, part of its Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and pushed for by the European Youth Forum, encourages all member states to adopt similar youth checks.⁶⁴ Like established environmental or gender impact assessments, generational impact assessments can systematically incorporate age solidarity into policy making, including considering the impact of policy making on future generations. Practically speaking, this could happen through hardwiring intergenerational considerations into the EU’s Better Regulation framework – essentially updating how the EU designs and evaluates laws.⁶⁵

The Commission’s Better Regulation guidelines already acknowledge the importance of long-term impacts. In practice, for integrating intergenerational solidarity, this would mean that every legislative proposal would be scrutinised for its long-term implications on different age cohorts and on future decades, not just its immediate effects. It has been suggested that the EU’s Regulatory Scrutiny Board (which reviews impact assessments) be given an expanded remit or new expertise to ensure “*future-fitness*” – namely, that each initiative is aligned with long-term interests and does not unduly burden tomorrow’s citizens.⁶⁶ The goal is that foresight and long-term metrics become standard in ex-ante impact assessments, rather than occasional add-ons. This would allow policymakers to see, say, the 2050 climate or pension implications of a proposal, not just the five-year outlook.⁶⁷ Importantly, introducing a “future generations check” into EU lawmaking would help operationalise the Treaty principle of solidarity between generations, establish intergenerational justice as a guiding criterion for all new legislation and counteract the tendency inherent in representative democracies to prioritise short-term gains driven by electoral cycles. In other words, it would serve as a tool to give future generations a seat at the policy-making table – even before they are born.

Finally, while existing assessments cover, for example, environmental, social and economic dimensions, economic indicators – particularly GDP – continue to dominate.⁶⁸ To align with a broader understanding of fairness across generations,

greater emphasis should be placed on wellbeing indicators, such as access to healthcare, quality of education, working conditions, housing affordability and air quality. Rebalancing the scope of impact assessments in this direction would ensure that policy decisions are evaluated not only for short-term efficiency, but also for their long-term contribution to sustainable and equitable outcomes.

Financing intergenerational solidarity

Intergenerational solidarity should be a guiding principle for the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (post 2027), as called for by the EESC.⁶⁹

First and foremost, the policy choices made in the next EU long-term budget will need to address the urgency of the climate crisis and incorporate the relevant funding mechanisms that will not only help to reach climate neutrality by 2050, but also ensure a just transition, leaving no one behind. As solidarity between generations is meaningless if our planet becomes unliveable, we need appropriate climate action and financing.

Furthermore, the wide range of policy proposals addressed in this policy brief, covering the fields of health, employment, social protection care and housing, would require sufficient funding and a proper investment capacity to contribute in a meaningful way to intergenerational solidarity. New own resources will be necessary for the EU to support related policies (such as a future European Social Fund or Horizon Europe programme), especially in times of budgetary constraints and emerging new priorities, such as security and defence.

The argument must be made that designing a long-term budget for a more secure Europe is not only a matter of weaponry and geopolitical strength, but also a matter of human security, ensuring dignity of life and wellbeing for all generations. Taxing pollution through contributions from the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) or the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, profits from large multinational companies as per the OECD Global Minimum Tax or revenues from capital from billionaires must also be understood as financial contributions to intergenerational solidarity, as

they address decades of inaction in the field of climate action or unregulated capitalism. The EU's commitment to solidarity between generations would move from pure rhetoric to concrete actions that benefit Europeans of all ages.

Furthermore, funding for civil society must be secured as a core element to foster intergenerational dialogue and, in turn, strengthen democracy. The successor to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme should embed this dimension in its objectives. Doing so would help counter polarisation in European societies – not only between younger and older people but also within generations. Among young people, beyond long-standing socio-economic divides, a widening gender gap in political attitudes between young men and women is emerging. Sustained support for organisations that create spaces for dialogue and exchange is therefore essential.⁷⁰

The proposal of the European Commission states that its future long-term budget will “*create opportunities for current and future generations of Europeans*”.⁷¹ Through the proposed National and Regional Partnership Plans, European Competitiveness Fund or AgoraEU, one will need to ensure that impact on all generations, within a broader European added-value consideration, should be integrated as a central objective and performance criteria, alongside delivering on climate objectives, the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and strengthening democratic participation. The current proposal still fails to provide certainty on this.⁷² Despite broad headlines on social targets or proposed increased spending for Erasmus+, there will need to be concrete and results-oriented investments in housing, healthcare and initiatives to support democratic dialogue, backed with sufficient resources.⁷³ In the months to come, the negotiations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework will be crucial to ensure true solidarity between all generations and all places in the EU.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

For welfare policies for all generations

- Ensure **intergenerational solidarity in the upcoming EU Affordable Housing Plan**, notably through adapted housing, assisted living and care homes, community-led housing, student housing, and support for first-time ownership or rent capping.
- Develop **meaningful employment opportunities throughout life**, notably via the upcoming EU Quality Jobs Roadmap, including through the reinforcement of the EU Youth Guarantee, a ban on all forms of unpaid traineeships, internships or apprenticeships, as well as quality standards for them; labour mobility (notably through youth programmes); the fight against age-based discrimination in recruitments (young and senior); intergenerational mentorship; lifelong learning and training (e.g., green and digital-related skills); adapted working facilities; and parental leave.
- Open an **intergenerational dialogue on the meaning and purpose of “work”**.
- Develop **intergenerational targets** in the upcoming renewed Action Plan for the implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**.
- Implement the **European Care Strategy**, establishing a **European Care Guarantee**, building on the model of the European Child Guarantee.
- Enhance work on the **European Health Union**, rooted in the principles of promotion and prevention, with a specific focus on universal access to healthcare services and investments in research on critical diseases.
- Ensure **gender mainstreaming and intersectional approaches** in policy development.

For intergenerational democracy and participation

- **Revive discussions on the Electoral Act reform** to harmonise the voting age at 16 across the EU, ensuring fairer youth representation and reinforcing democratic legitimacy across the EU.
- **Strengthen civic and citizenship education** from secondary school onwards, integrating EU-level resources and training to equip young people with the knowledge and skills for meaningful democratic participation.
- **Institutionalise cross-generational dialogue** through a structured EU forum engaging youth, working professionals and senior voices in policy making.
- **Establish a permanent Intergenerational Citizens’ Assembly** to monitor intergenerational fairness and promote inclusive, transparent deliberation – ensuring the voice of future generations is also represented, either through a dedicated advocate or future design strategies.
- **Fund intergenerational civic initiatives** that promote joint participation, learning and democratic engagement across age groups.
- **Bridge the digital divide by ensuring all EU digital democracy tools are inclusive**, accessible and complemented by offline services – avoiding the exclusion of older or vulnerable citizens.
- **Promote youth-led digital participation** by supporting platforms for online engagement with policymakers and scaling best practices like digital literacy training and intergenerational tech support.
- **Align digital democracy efforts with the European Democracy Shield**, using an intergenerational lens to tackle disinformation and foster collaborative, age-inclusive responses.

- Adopt a **European Senior Strategy**, building on the EU Youth Strategy and the EU Strategy of the Rights of the Child.

For intergenerational solidarity in EU policy making

- Mainstream intergenerational solidarity across the EU policy-making process, including through **age-friendly impact assessments (building on experiments such as EU Youth Test and/or future generations check)** and through **meaningful participation of civil society organisations** representing all age groups.
- Introduce **wellbeing indicators** in the European Commission's impact assessment.
- Ensure that the next **Multiannual Financial Framework** will have intergenerational solidarity as an objective, safeguarding key environmental and social cohesion programmes, and supported by **new own resources**.

ANNEX – RELEVANT SOURCES

European Senior Organisation of the Party of European Socialists

- ESO multiannual programme, 2024

Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament

- Our Key Demands for 2024-2029, 2024

Party of European Socialists

- PES Manifesto, Intergenerational Solidarity, 2024
- PES Málaga Resolution, Intergenerational Solidarity, 2023
- PES, ESO, YES, Socialists of all ages, unite!, 2017

Young European Socialists

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