



ECOS response call for evidence

Intergenerational Fairness Strategy

Brussels, 07 November 2025

Intergenerational fairness is deeply linked with environmental protection

Intergenerational fairness is a core principle of sustainability, highlighting that the needs of the current generation should be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, we welcome the European Commission's action on this topic. It is crucial to explicitly include the environment within this concept because the **health and stability of the natural world are the foundational resources upon which all human well-being, economic activity, and quality of life depend.**

Environmental degradation—climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion—imposes irreversible damage, costs and limits the opportunities available to those yet to be born, acting as an **ecological debt passed down through time.** Therefore, achieving intergenerational fairness requires as well responsible stewardship of the planet now, ensuring future generations inherit a healthy environment capable of sustaining future societies and allowing them to thrive, not just survive. This link is already recognised in some of the wording included in the call for evidence - see footnote- but should be further strengthened.ⁱ

Moreover, ECOS welcomes Intergenerational fairness figured as one of the Commission's 2023 Strategic Foresight Report's guiding principles. The Report examined the social and economic aspects of sustainability and related choices that the EU faces, calling for a **new European social contract to enact a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable Europe in 2050.**

Future generations deserve a clean, healthy, and thriving planet

Intergenerational fairness requires that we allow future generations to inherit a planet that is at least as clean and healthy as ours today, at a minimum. Ideally, we would bequeath to future generations a

ⁱ • "An intergenerationally fair Union fosters collaboration and dialogue across age groups while embedding a long-term, human-centred perspective into governance and policymaking. This includes (i) promoting intergenerational democratic participation to integrate intergenerational considerations into decision-making; (ii) addressing complex societal challenges, such as environmental justice, technological change, rising inequalities and lifelong learning, fair access to affordable, sustainable and decent housing, through the intergenerational dialogue perspective and a forward-looking lens; and (iii) empowering all generations to contribute to and benefit from social resilience and inclusion."

• "An intergenerational perspective could contribute to tackling complex, long-term challenges that our societies are already facing, including demographic change, environmental sustainability".

world that is in better shape than what we have inherited, because we are now more aware of numerous problems of pollution and degradation than 20 or more years ago. Future generations deserve to breathe clean air and drink clean water, to grow healthy food in fertile soils free of pollution, and to be surrounded by the natural world with all its biodiversity of flora and fauna. Future generations must not be burdened by the harms of substances that cause cancer, disrupt endocrine systems, or otherwise lead to long-lasting health problems. The escalating plastic crisis provides a stark example of intergenerational injustice. Mounting scientific evidence confirms the ubiquitous presence of microplastics throughout our environment—contaminating the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil that grows our food, and even permeating the human bloodstream. This alarming reality makes it profoundly unfair that infants are now being born into a world where their bodies are instantly exposed to, and sometimes already containing, microplastic particles from birth, simply due to the exploitation and lack of containment of plastic pollution by preceding generations.

Our asks

- Persistent substances, like per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and others, are phased out as soon as possible from all uses, with resources put toward their remediation wherever they are found, particularly in soil and water.
- Chemicals production, regulation, and use must be based upon the precautionary approach, with stricter assessments (utilising an efficient grouping approach), data requirements, and analyses of combination effects underpinning a truly fair regulatory regime.
- The EU must advance on significant actions reducing plastic production while addressing the plastic pollution that currently exists in all environments.
- These measures are acted upon with urgency because the exposures on today's populations will affect the generations of tomorrow.

Intergenerational fairness is deeply linked with the responsible use of resources

A central view of intergenerational fairness, particularly concerning the environment, is the imperative for the **responsible use of resources and overall sustainable consumption and production patterns that respect planetary boundaries**. This goes beyond mere conservation and environmental protection; it encompasses the **principles of efficiency, regeneration, and equitable distribution**. Responsible resource use means adopting a circular economy model, prioritizing the reduction of production and consumption, the reuse of materials, and the recycling of waste and the minimisation of the depletion of finite natural stocks. Furthermore, it demands that the use of renewable resources not exceed their natural rates of regeneration. **For non-renewable resources (like fossil fuels and minerals), responsibility entails using them only for the most essential applications**, developing sustainable alternatives, and investing the proceeds from their extraction into sustainable, long-term assets for the benefit of future generations. By shifting to a **resource and application intergenerational wise approach**, towards a non-toxic, sufficient, fair, circular model, we can take a step into the environmental requirements of intergenerational fairness: **we reduce ecological debt, preserve natural capital, and ensure that the planet's finite resources and regenerative capacities remain intact for those who come after us**.

Our asks:

- Intergenerational fairness is deeply linked with environmental protection; this link should be made self-evident and addressed appropriately in this strategy.
- Protect social and ecological commons such as biodiversity, public health, and social care, from exploitation that benefits one generation at the expense of another.

- An instrument should be established with a do-no-harm principle, to ensure that funds are not mobilised to support fossil fuel, polluting or fossil fuel-dependent industries and an intergenerational fairness principle.
- The safeguarding of youth and future generations' interests should be part of the mandate of the EU regulatory scrutiny board.
- Indicators should be introduced for the monitoring and benchmarking of current youth and future generations' wellbeing, which includes clean, thriving environment, in the European Semester framework.
- The EU should introduce a dedicated **Intergenerational Fairness Impact Assessment (IGF-IA)** process for legislation and policy. This tool should include a Future Risk Matrix (FRM): developed jointly by the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Joint Research Centre (JRC), and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the FRM would map long-term risks to fundamental rights stemming from planetary and socio-technical crises. For each legislative proposal, policymakers would assess how the proposal modifies the Future Risk Matrix—whether it mitigates long-term risks or creates new vulnerabilities.
- A framework should be established that defines the rights of future generations, ensures coherence between current and future legislation, and incorporates procedural mechanisms for oversight and stakeholder engagement. This could be achieved through the adoption of an inter-institutional declaration on future generations.