



THINK 2030

Paper summary

Future generations and intergenerational equity

Europe is at the tipping point of no return when it comes to climate change, biodiversity loss, resources depletion, reaching the planetary limits. Europeans are currently dealing with these multiple crises, including the economic and social ones. What is at risk is nothing less than the future of civilisation as we know it.

The five-year mandate of Ursula von der Leyen's Commission will have a crucial role in shaping the lives of the current young generation and future generations. The ecological debt that will be forced on them, if additional significant actions are not taken now, will have unimaginable consequences for the generations to come. Therefore, the measures provisioned within the European Green Deal and the recovery plans must thoroughly consider their imminent and potential long-term impacts and reflect on the stakes of the future generations.

The European Green Deal presents an opportunity for EU wide action to ensure intergenerational equity is sufficiently embedded within the recovery process following the pandemic, with regards to social, economic and environmental aspects. Furthermore, EGD has the potential to play a critical role within the recovery strategy by providing an opportunity to catalyse a shift away from Europe's previously unsustainable fossil fuel economy. If the former unsustainable recovery pathway persists, Europe's youth and future generations will be locked into a destructive high-carbon and unsustainable pathway.

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Full paper



Before the current crisis, the rise in climate change youth activism meant that issues of intergenerational justice and solidarity rose to the top of the political agenda, in the EU and UN. International campaigns led by climate activist groups and movements such as #FridaysForFuture inspired by Greta Thunberg have engaged and alerted younger generations of the scale and urgency of ambitious climate action. The inclusion of equity, fairness and justice within climate policy/discussions is essential for amplifying the voices of future generations. Institutional change can mitigate the lack of democratic representation for future generations.

Intergeneration equity being a cross-cutting issue pertinent horizontally to all the sustainable development goals, it is instrumental to be considered across the goals' implementation to safeguard the rights of future generations to natural resources, a clean environment and a healthy planet for all.

Key policy recommendations

- The European Commission should provide long-term impact assessments of current public policy plans, programmes, proposals and subsequent investments. **'Future-proofing'** needs to be backed by the precautionary principle and latest scientific evidence that does not rely heavily (or at all) on speculative negative emissions technologies (e.g. the only IPCC scenario without NETs is Grubler et al 2018)¹. The goal of which should be to provide detailed estimates of the social, economic and environmental costs passed onto young and future generations depending on the levels of current climate action. This should be achieved through modelling various policy interactions under a variety of sustainability narratives (i.e. BAU, Green Growth², EU Green Deal, Post-Growth) to identify synergies, trade-offs and co-dependencies (direct or implied).
- As part of the reform of the European Semester, the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy process should be complemented by a 2050 Strategy for Sustainable Prosperity, with long-term economic indicators, but also relevant indicators on well-being, sustainability and intergenerational equity, upon which progress from the Member States would be assessed.
- Additional attention should be paid to issues concerning inter- and intra-generational social equity. The impact assessments must be co-created by a wide range of stakeholders, with EU youth playing a leading role given their recent momentum in attempting to catalyse change. The results should be integrated into the European Commission's Zero Emission Action Plan (Q2

¹ Grubler et al. (2018) A low energy demand scenario for meeting the 1.5 C target and sustainable development goals without negative emission technologies. *Nature energy*, 3(6), pp.515-527.

² D'Alessandro, S., Cieplinski, A., Distefano, T. and Dittmer, K., 2020. Feasible alternatives to green growth. *Nature Sustainability*, 3(4), pp.329-335.

2021) and the implementation of the biodiversity, chemicals strategies, EU climate law and EU Green Deal and related instruments. Farm to Fork strategy and the CAP reform should have an explicit objective to protect the right of future generations to have access to healthy ecosystems and sustainable food systems, which will be capable of sustaining their nutrition needs.

- The European Commission should continue to structurally integrate youth in the policy- and decision-making processes. This must continue to build on the foundations of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the EU Rights of the Child Strategy concerning engagement, connection and empowerment of youth in civic and democratic life. Whilst this is proposed in other funding mechanisms (e.g. Erasmus Programme 2021-2027 Proposal), further structural integration and trust in youth are recommended. This could take the form of youth advisory bodies or citizen assemblies by coordinating with youth [climate/environmental] networks from each member state (i.e. an extension of the European Commission Youth Dialogue held in early 2020). Such meaningful and continuous youth participation is in line with strengthening trust and democratic values within the EU and ensuring youth engagement in decision-making.
- The European Commission should endorse and act in solidarity with the proposal for a Conference on the Future of Europe. This will enable citizens, especially youth, to engage in a wide-ranging debate on Europe's future directions and public policy. Grounded in the ideals of inter- and intra-generational equity, the conference acts as a springboard and forum for deliberation to consider the rights and needs of future generations moving forward.
- The European Commission should explore the long-term implications on member states regarding the recent Covid-19 (and any subsequent) recovery packages. This should pay particular attention to the issue of long-term debt to ensure it falls in line with the principles of a Just Transition and leaving no one behind. To reduce the debt burden for future generations, progressive tax reform should focus on resource extraction and taxing wealth and extreme incomes more heavily.

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