

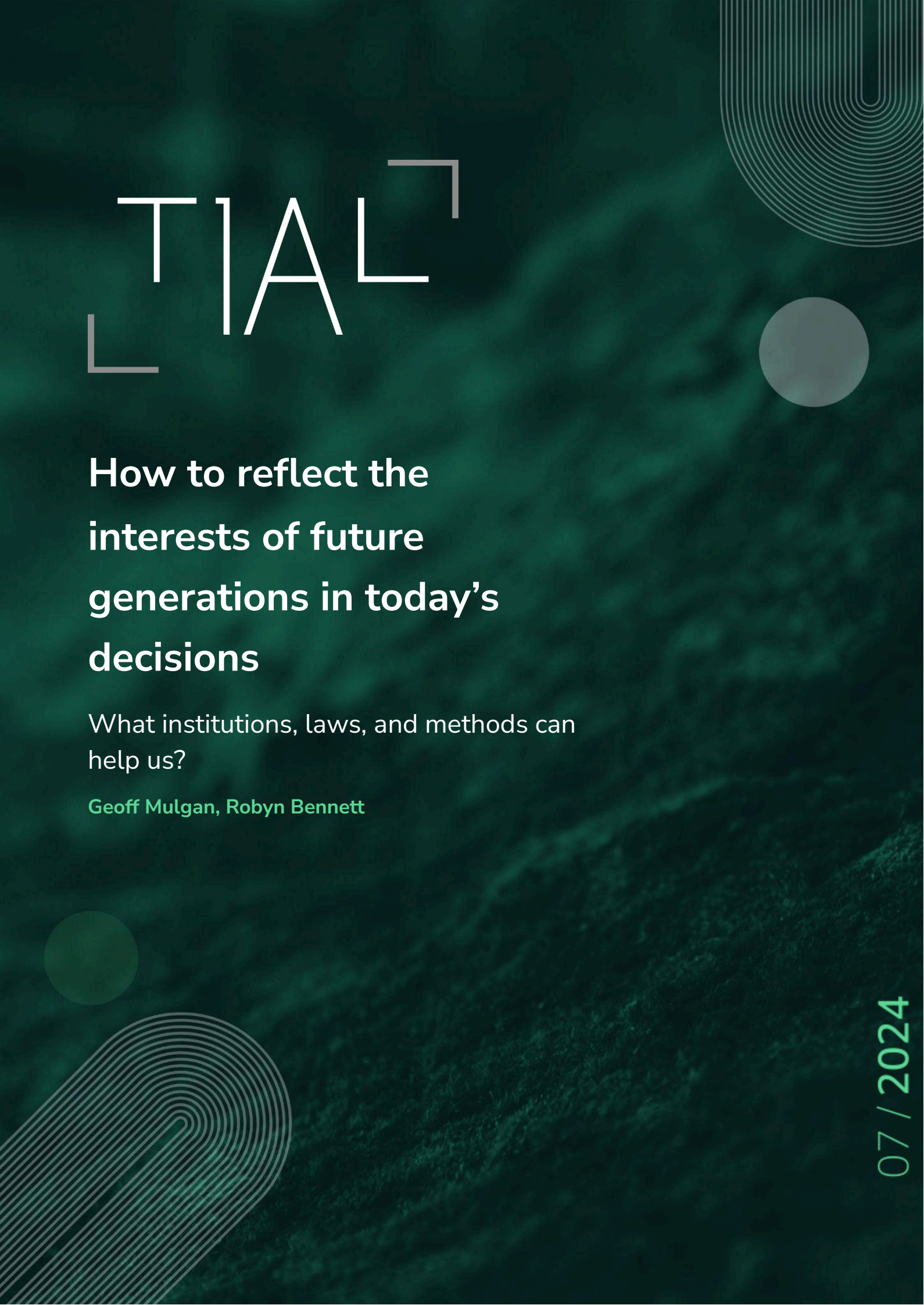


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# How to reflect the interests of future generations in today's decisions

What institutions, laws, and methods can  
help us?

Geoff Mulgan, Robyn Bennett



07 / 2024

# WHAT IS TIAL

The Institutional Architecture Lab was formed in 2023 by Sir Geoff Mulgan, Jessica Seddon and Juha Leppänen in an effort to help the institutional design community coalesce, learn together, and grow. Each of us has been involved in various stages of creating new organizations and other institutions. Like many other people, we have witnessed first-hand the absence of a formal community along the way — or a place where we can learn from past experience. We are aware that there is a lot of great work happening around the world, but nowhere to recognize it.

## Authors

**Sir Geoff Mulgan**, *Co-Founder, [TIAL](#)*

**Robyn Bennett**, *International Programme & Partnerships Lead, [Creative Bureaucracy Festival](#)*

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TIAL links practical work with reflection, synthesis, and accumulation of knowledge in its field building.

## In brief

Around the world, there is growing interest in how governments and democracies can better reflect the interests of future generations in today's decisions. The obvious prompt is concern that today's citizens are leaving a legacy of climate disaster and debt. But how to make this real? What lessons can be learned from recent experiments, like Wales' Well-being of Future Generations Act and Commissioner? And how to handle the strong counter-pressures, whether to short-termism, the tyranny of the immediate, or the hope that nations can return to past glories? This paper sets out the many steps that are being taken around the world through laws, institutions and new approaches to finance – and suggests options for the future.



# I. INTRODUCTION

## Societal myopia — and how future generations came into focus

Governments are often criticised for being short-term. Politicians naturally prioritise achievements that may have an impact before the next election. The public, too, want today's problems to be addressed first. And all societies can be myopic, unwilling or unable to see more than a few years ahead.

But there are also pressures that point in an opposite direction. In many important fields, actions have to be long-term. Education, science and research, infrastructure development, and pensions all require decades before the full impact of actions is achieved and all societies care about their legacy to the future, from leaving monuments to museums, planting forests to long-term defence spending.

Another counter-pressure is life expectancy. A child born in 2024 could live well into the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, far beyond the time horizons of most of the decisions being made by governments.

Then there are the effects of the Anthropocene, an era when human actions have profound and long-term impacts on the environment. Much of the recent pressure to rethink has come from climate change: traditional methods used by governments, including discount rates and cost-benefit analysis, make it much harder to justify action to prevent climate change. Many have argued this is unethical. The 2006 Stern review on climate change, commissioned by the UK government,<sup>1</sup> argued that we should act as if a future generation had as strong a claim to our attention as the present one.

So, perhaps it's not surprising that interest has turned to how to do this, and how to represent the interests of future generations in today's decisions. But what this means in detail is hard to pin down. Are we looking one or two generations into the future – perhaps to children born in 2050 or 2075, or much further? How do you balance the interests of

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<sup>1</sup>[http://mudancasclimaticas.cptec.inpe.br/~rmclima/pdfs/destaques/sternreview\\_report\\_complete.pdf](http://mudancasclimaticas.cptec.inpe.br/~rmclima/pdfs/destaques/sternreview_report_complete.pdf)

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the present and the future: do they really have equal claims? How do you handle the deep uncertainty about what might happen in the future, or what future generations might want?

Here our interest is in the range of institutions and wider government mechanisms that can help to address these questions, recognising how impossible it is to predict with any certainty what future people will need or want.

This, the future generations agenda, seeks to ensure that current needs are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. This simple idea has gained momentum in recent years, bolstered by the United Nations and leading human rights experts advocating for these principles.<sup>2</sup> The **constitutional recognition of future generations** has spread rapidly, with 81 of 196 national constitutions now containing explicit references to the rights or interests of future generations.<sup>3</sup> **Experiments in institutional reform in the interest of future generations** at a national level can be seen from countries including Finland, Germany, Scotland, Israel, Hungary, Singapore, Malta, Wales, New Zealand, and Gibraltar.

Wales's approach with the **Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)** and accompanying **Future Generations Commissioner** role has prompted interest around the world as a pioneer in creating **new national institutions and roles with a formal remit of representing future generations**. While Wales is currently the only country with such a law, several other national governments and global institutions are actively exploring how to emulate this model, and a handful also already have legally mandated spokespeople for the rights of future generations.

The past few years have also seen the spread of **global networks**<sup>4</sup> and the creation of many **learning resources**<sup>5</sup> to support this work. Many of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rightsoffuturegenerations.org/home>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Amicus-Brief-ICJ-Defining-States-Climate-Obligations-Rights-Future-Generations.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Network of Institutions and Leaders for Future Generations has become the key community of practice for countries and other key actors active in the future generations governance space <https://ourfuturegenerations.com/>

<sup>5</sup> The Future Generations Policy Leader Toolkit (2023) commissioned by the Commissioner for Future Generations for Wales and created by Foundations for Tomorrow is a comprehensive guide for this governance space

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these will be visible at the UN's first **Summit of the Future** in September 2024, where the Pact for the Future and Declaration on Future Generations are set to be adopted, and where issues such as the role of “future majority countries” in the Global South,<sup>6</sup> and non-Western and indigenous ideas about thinking long-term will be addressed.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A 2021 UN Foundation report divided the world into “Future Majority” countries, in which more people will be born by 2100 than are currently alive today, and “Living Majority” countries, where the reverse is true <https://unfoundation.org/our-common-agenda/population-futures-report/>

<sup>7</sup> This point is covered in depth in section 4 of the Future Generations Policy Leaders Toolkit (2023), commissioned by Commissioner for Future Generations for Wales and created by Foundations for Tomorrow



# II. A menu of options for future-oriented governance

In the following section, we explore examples of more future-oriented governance.

1. Future generations laws
2. Parliaments
3. Other institutions and governmental entities
4. Youth engagement
5. Wider public engagement
6. Finance
7. City and the future
8. Nature and more-than-human governance
9. Methods, mindsets and myths

## 1 Future generations laws

Laws and constitutions can constrain short-termism by giving legal weight to the interests of future generations. In this section we examine what future generations legislation looks like in practice and how it plays out in the courts.

### Case study: Wales

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act**, passed in 2015, is one of the most comprehensive legislative frameworks globally,

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serving as an inspiration for other nations.<sup>8</sup> This legislation mandates that public bodies in Wales consider the long-term impact of their decisions, promoting sustainable development across all sectors. The Act prescribes specific well-being goals and statutory duties for public bodies, ensuring adherence to sustainable practices. Central to this framework is the **Future Generations Commissioner**, a role designed to guide public bodies and hold them accountable for their commitments to future generations.<sup>9</sup> The Commissioner's position serves as a focal point for campaigning, as well as for supporting public bodies and monitoring and assessing their progress on the seven well-being goals in close collaboration with the Auditor General.

The first Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, Sophie Howe, served from 2016 to 2023, playing a pivotal role in establishing Wales as a leader in the future generations space. One of her notable successes was opposing, and blocking, the Welsh government's plan to spend £1.4 billion on extending the M4 motorway. This led to a comprehensive reform of the transport strategy, significantly increasing investment in active travel and reducing the budget allocated to roads. Another significant achievement was the reform of the Welsh curriculum, shifting a focus from rote learning of out-dated subjects to skills such as creativity, empathy, and interpersonal skills.

The Commissioner's office also influenced administrative reform, with user-friendly impact assessment and monitoring tools for public servants to use to track progress on the Act's seven well-being goals, such as the **Ways of Working Progress Checker**.<sup>10</sup> Other initiatives included the **Future Generations Leadership Academy** for Welsh youth,<sup>11</sup> and the **Future Generations Policy Leader Toolkit** for policy leaders in other countries.<sup>12</sup> Sophie also chaired the **Network of**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/>

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<https://www.futuregenerations.wales/work/ways-of-working-progress-checker/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/leadership-academy-2/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/news/future-generations-policy-leader-toolkkit-placing-future-generations-at-the-heart-of-global-policy-and-practice/>

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**Institutions and Leaders for Future Generations** for several years.<sup>13</sup> Sophie Howe's successor since 2023 has been Derek Walker.

### Future Generations Acts and Commissioners in other countries

Following Wales's lead, the appetite for laws to protect current and future generations is growing. The Balearic Islands passed equivalent legislation in 2023,<sup>14</sup> and Scotland is also advanced in equivalent planning.<sup>15</sup> Internationally the United Nations is set to formalise the protection of future generations through the upcoming **Declaration on Future Generations**.<sup>16</sup> This declaration, expected to be announced at the **Summit of the Future** in September 2024,<sup>17</sup> intends to set a global standard for considering the long-term impacts of decisions and will likely include the appointment of a **UN Special Envoy for Future Generations**. Similar plans are afoot at a European level through the **#FitForFutureGenerations** campaign. This cross-party initiative seeks an interinstitutional declaration, the nomination of an EU Future Generations Commissioner, and the establishment of a Future Generations' Impact Assessment.<sup>18</sup>

Several other nations have **legally mandated spokespeople for the rights of future generations**, including Hungary's Ombudsman for Future Generations (2007), Malta's Guardian of Future Generations (2012) and Gibraltar's Commissioner for Sustainable Development and Future Generations (2018). Israel was the first to experiment with a Commissioner for Future Generations role in 2001, but it was abolished after just one term of office in 2006, with opposition focused on the cost and feelings that the Commission had too much

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<sup>13</sup> <https://ourfuturegenerations.com/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://weall.org/the-voice-of-future-generations-matters-the-balearic-islands-have-passed-laws-to-ensure-that-government-decisions-do-not-have-a-negative-impact-on-future-generations>

<sup>15</sup> <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2024/4/19/c9c7f428-dd50-4ad5-842b-8e14e9886406>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/declaration-on-future-generations>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>

<sup>18</sup> <https://fitforfuturegenerations.eu/>

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authority to interfere.<sup>19</sup> Some other nations have similar roles, but without the “future generations” label – such as Canada’s Commissioner on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

### The role of the courts

The courts can play a critical role in this space, ensuring legislation is acted on and carving out a broader role, mainly holding governments and companies accountable for climate (in)action. At least 230 new climate change cases were filed in 2023 alone, and such cases are spreading, often driven by citizen-led initiatives.<sup>20</sup> These are a few influential cases:

- **Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands:**<sup>21</sup> In line with the Oslo Principles on Global Climate Change Obligations, in 2015 the Dutch court ruled that the government must reduce greenhouse gas emissions more aggressively to protect its citizens from climate change. This decision, based on the government’s duty to protect the rights to life and well-being, emphasised the disproportionate impact of climate change on future generations. The Urgenda ruling has inspired similar legal actions worldwide.
- **Future Generations v. Colombian Ministry of Environment:**<sup>22</sup> In 2018 the Colombian Supreme Court recognised the rights of future generations in environmental protection. Young claimants argued that Amazon deforestation threatened their constitutional rights. The court ordered the government to create an action plan to combat deforestation.

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<sup>19</sup><https://www.fdsd.org/ideas/knesset-commission-future-generations/>

<sup>20</sup><https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/publication/global-trends-in-climate-change-litigation-2024-snapshot/>

<sup>21</sup><https://climatecasechart.com/non-us-case/urgenda-foundation-v-kingdom-of-the-netherlands/>

<sup>22</sup><https://climatecasechart.com/non-us-case/future-generation-v-ministry-environment-others/>

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- **German Constitutional Court Climate Action Law Ruling:**<sup>23</sup> A landmark case from 2023 was the declaration from the German Federal Constitutional Court that parts of the Climate Protection Act are unconstitutional due to their insufficient measures to protect future generations post-2030. The ruling emphasised the need for concrete emission reduction steps to meet long-term climate goals.
- **KlimaSeniorinnen and Others v. Switzerland:**<sup>24</sup> In April 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that the Swiss government's climate policies violated human rights. The judgement said that the right to a private and family life meant that states are obliged to protect their citizens from the "serious adverse effects" of climate change. The legal team representing Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz which initiated the case used research that attributes climate impacts to human actions, such as a study showing that deaths from heatwaves resulted from human-induced climate change. However, in June 2024 the Swiss Parliament voted to ignore the judgement.

These cases highlight the influential role the judiciary can play in safeguarding environmental and intergenerational justice and embedding long-termism in the system. However, they also raise questions about the balance of power between the judiciary and the legislature, and the legitimacy of courts making decisions with significant political implications. Critics argue that making such cases standard would overextend judicial power relative to democratically elected politicians.

## 2 Parliaments

Many countries have created national parliamentary committees supported by constitutional mandates to directly infuse parliamentary debate with insights on long-term challenges and opportunities and ensure future generations have a voice. In some countries "in-house

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<sup>23</sup><https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/germanys-climate-action-law-begins-take-shape>

<sup>24</sup><https://verfassungsblog.de/separation-of-powers-and-klimaseniorinnen/>

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think tanks” have also emerged as an alternative model with a similar intention.

### Parliamentary committees

Examples of parliamentary committees include:

- **Finland | Committee for the Future.** In 1993, the Finnish parliament established the Committee for the Future to serve as an advisory body that evaluates government policies and legislation through a future-oriented lens, with a strong focus on technological and societal trends. It operates within the Parliament – 17 Members of the Finnish Parliament sit on the committee and work to generate dialogue with the government on major future problems and opportunities. The committee also responds to the ‘Government Report on the Future’ produced by the civil service each term.
- Inspired by this original Finnish model, there’s now a global trend towards incorporating future-oriented thinking directly into parliamentary processes through similar committees. Such countries include **Chile (2012), Iceland (2010), Paraguay (2014), Austria (2017), Lithuania (2019), the Philippines (2019), and Uruguay (2021)**. The specifics are tailored to each unique context, with two key areas of distinction being topical leaning (e.g. in Uruguay they place an emphasis on the impact of emerging technologies like AI on democracy and society, in others wider societal trends and regional development issues are in focus) and approach (some committees are more research-oriented; others lean towards public engagement and fostering dialogue). Since 2022 these entities have convened once a year in the **World Summit of the Committees of the Future** to share best practices, learnings, and encourage other countries.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The first took place in Helsinki 12-13 October 2022, and the second in Montevideo 25-27 September 2023  
<https://www.ipu.org/event/second-world-summit-committees-future>



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- Informal parliamentary groups have also emerged with a focus on combatting short-termism and integrating future considerations into policymaking. One example is the **UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Future Generations (APPG for Future Generations)**, an informal cross-party group within the UK Parliament set up in 2017 with the support of the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at Cambridge University. It hosts dialogues with parliamentarians, academics, industry experts, and other stakeholders on catastrophic risks and potential policy solutions.

### Parliamentary in-house think tanks

A further interesting model in this realm is parliamentary in-house think tanks designed to provide strategic foresight and evidence-based research directly to legislatures:

- **Scotland | Futures Forum** – Scotland's Futures Forum is the Scottish Parliament's think tank. Established in 2005, it was set up by parliament as an advisory body to explore long-term challenges and opportunities facing the nation. The Forum conducts research, organises events, and facilitates discussions on key issues such as sustainability, economic development, and social change. It serves as an incubator for innovative ideas and approaches, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and public engagement to shape Scotland's future. Reporting directly to Parliament, the Forum's work informs parliamentary debates and policymaking to ensure that Scotland is well-prepared for future challenges and opportunities. Its initiatives often lead to significant discussions and actions aimed at enhancing the nation's resilience and prosperity.
- **Estonia | Foresight Centre**. The Estonia Foresight Act (2016) mandated the creation of the Foresight Centre as an independent think tank within the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu). It maintains a high degree of autonomy in its research and analysis while being positioned within the parliamentary framework. The Foresight Centre's primary mission is to explore long-term societal trends and

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develop future scenarios that can guide policymakers, employing foresight methodologies to provide strategic insights tailored specifically for legislative use. It collaborates extensively with experts, stakeholders, and the public to gather diverse perspectives and ensure comprehensive and robust future-oriented research. Its work is instrumental in supporting evidence-based policy-making and strategic planning in Estonia.

### 3 Other institutions and governmental entities

Many other institutions have been created inside governments or with close connections to them. We've clustered these further examples by function.

#### Strategic foresight entities

Many governments now have strategic foresight units or equivalent teams, typically integrated within central government offices like the Prime Minister's Office or key ministries, which play a critical role in embedding long-term strategic planning, risk anticipation, and evidence-based decision-making. Such teams deploy foresight methodologies like scenario planning, horizon scanning, systems mapping and other foresight tools, and many have specific domains of subject expertise. Many are also responsible for coordinating efforts across public and non-governmental sectors, promoting dialogue and mutual interests.

- **Singapore | Centre for Strategic Futures and Strategic Foresight Unit.** In Singapore, the Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) and Strategic Foresight Unit (SFU) were set up almost concurrently, in 2009 and 2010 respectively. The CSF is a futures think tank within the Prime Minister's Office with a remit to coordinate foresight efforts across public and non-governmental sectors to promote dialogue and the pursuit of mutual interests. It works on the supply side, generating products, tools, training and assets for Singapore and runs the **Strategic Foresight Network** to bring together different units. The SFU, meanwhile was

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established as an advisory body under the Ministry of Finance with a mandate to ensure that government futures work is built into the ministries' budgeting processes, allowing each department to pursue its own foresight activities.

- **United States | Center for Strategic Foresight.** The Center for Strategic Foresight was set up in 2019 as a specialised unit within the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). Its mission is to enhance the federal government's capacity to anticipate and prepare for long-term challenges and opportunities. The Center conducts in-depth research and analysis on emerging trends, disruptive technologies, and global issues using foresight methodologies such as scenario planning and horizon scanning. Operating within the GAO, it provides strategic insights and recommendations to policymakers to help shape national strategies and legislative frameworks.
- **United Kingdom | Government Office for Science (GO-Science).** The UK Government Office for Science (GO-Science) is a specialised unit that plays a pivotal role in ensuring that government policies and decisions are informed by robust scientific evidence and strategic foresight. Established in its current form in 2007, GO-Science provides independent scientific advice and supports long-term planning across government departments. It reports directly to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and over the years has been associated with various departments, reflecting changes in governmental structure and priorities. GO-Science supports various governmental departments, coordinates the network of departmental Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs), and oversees the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) to provide rapid science advice during crises. The UK in the 2000s had a Strategy Unit and a network of futures teams from the main national departments, but this ended in 2010.

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- **Canada | Policy Horizons Canada.** Policy Horizons Canada, established in 1996, is a federal foresight organisation that anticipates emerging policy challenges and opportunities by exploring future trends in technology, economy, environment, and society. Operating under the Privy Council Office, a central agency in the Canadian government providing non-partisan support and advice to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, Policy Horizons conducts foresight research and provides strategic policy recommendations. It aims to enhance the foresight capabilities of public servants through training and workshops and collaborates with various domestic and international partners.
- **Finland | Government Foresight Group.** The Finnish Government Foresight Group was formed in 2014 as part of broader efforts to integrate foresight into government decision-making processes. It is an expert group that sits within the Prime Minister's Office and reports to it, serving as an advisory body in the preparation of the **Government Report on the Future** and the ministries' futures reviews and supporting the development of foresight work at the national level. The formation of the group was a strategic decision by the Prime Minister's Office, supported by the Committee for the Future, in recognition of the importance of foresight in addressing long-term challenges and opportunities. It's tasked with ensuring foresight activities are not fragmented but coordinated across government ministries and agencies.

### Ecosystem activators

Some governments and intergovernmental actors have created entities and related initiatives that act as ecosystem activators, fostering collaboration and innovation across various sectors to embed strategic foresight knowledge and practices in wider society. These entities act as catalysts, bringing together diverse stakeholders to share knowledge, teach and inspire, and co-create innovative solutions. This relational and cultural dimension of transformational change work is often neglected, and it plays a crucial role in ensuring the initial acceptance and continued success of any new idea, piece of



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legislation, or policy. Examples here include formalised networks, collaborative platforms, resource hubs, and larger events like summits.

- **Dubai | Dubai Future Foundation.** The Dubai Future Foundation (DFF) is a government think tank established in 2016 to spearhead Dubai's strategic foresight and innovation initiatives. Reporting directly to the Executive Council of Dubai, the DFF runs key public-facing projects such as the **Museum of the Future**, **Dubai Future Accelerators**, and **Dubai Future Labs**, focusing on technological advancements and future-ready policies. Additionally, the DFF oversees the **Dubai Future Academy**, which provides cross-sector training and education on future skills and foresight methodologies, and the **Dubai 10X Initiative**, launched in 2017, which aims to place Dubai ten years ahead of other cities through innovative government practices.
- **Finland | National Foresight Network.** The National Foresight Network, established in 2014, was created to provide a collaborative platform for sharing foresight knowledge and practices across different sectors in Finland. This initiative emerged from a collective recognition among governmental bodies, research institutions, and civil society of the need for enhanced foresight capabilities. Supported by key actors in the Finnish future governance ecosystem such as Sitra and the Committee for the Future, the network facilitates the exchange of foresight information and methodologies, promoting a cohesive approach to the country's futures thinking.
- **United Nations | Summit of the Future and UN Futures Lab.** At a UN level, the Summit of the Future scheduled for September 2024 in New York is intended as the key multilateral moment for global leaders to reaffirm their commitment to future generations. The summit is set to underscore the increasing global commitment to this agenda with the confirmation of a **Pact for the Future, Declaration on Future Generations** and **UN Special**

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**Envoy for Future Generations.** Alongside this the UN Futures Lab, launched in 2023, serves as a network and resource hub of tools and methodologies designed to empower the UN system and other stakeholders to incorporate futures thinking and strategic foresight into their planning and policymaking.

- **Independent | Network of Institutions and Leaders for Future Generations (NIFG).** Originally called the Roundtable of Institutions for a Sustainable Future, the NIFG was set up in 2014 as an independent peer-learning network of institutions, organisations and leaders dedicated to enhancing governance, collaboration, and decision-making to advance the rights, interests and well-being of future generations. It is a platform for dialogue and shared learning that helps members to advance their strategies and policies and promotes multilateral collaboration. Members include legally mandated spokespeople for future generations and equivalent government and advisory actors in different countries passionate about pushing the future generations agenda forwards.

### Public foundations and funds

Innovation in public funding is crucial for addressing complex societal challenges and driving mission-oriented progress. A prime example is **Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund**, established in 1967 to promote the welfare of Finnish society through innovation, foresight, and sustainability. It operates as an independent think tank and change agent, conducting research, funding pilot projects, and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration to address future societal challenges. Sitra reports to Parliament and is not responsible to any one governmental party, in a structure that ensures financial and political independence. The impact of Sitra's work is measured for Parliament but also "for the people of Finland" for whom the work was created, developed and distributed. Sitra's structure and operations serve as a model for other countries aiming to establish similar independent foundations. No other countries are yet to adopt this model, but



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suggestions have been made to this effect, including the proposal for city endowments in the UK focused on future-readiness.<sup>26</sup>

### Agile entities for rapid problem solving

More radical options aim to build imagination and creativity into government. One example, established in 2019, is the **Ministry of Possibilities in the UAE**. Reporting directly to the UAE Cabinet, this unique entity functions differently from traditional ministries—lacking a conventional physical structure or permanent ministers. Instead, it assembles time-bound, cross-ministerial teams to address specific challenges and implement innovative solutions to overcome the "systemic impossibilities of government."

## 4 Youth engagement

Engaging young people and children in decision-making is essential for creating policies that reflect the interests of future generations. Although they lack votes and certain legal rights, youth engagement ensures that the aspirations and concerns of upcoming generations are considered, especially around climate emergency issues. Various initiatives and platforms have been established to give young people a say in shaping their futures and train them with the key leadership skills needed to feel empowered to lead change in their local communities.

### National youth parliaments and councils

National youth parliaments and councils allow young people to participate in legislative processes and contribute to policymaking. They provide opportunities for young individuals to debate issues, propose policies, and influence decisions at the national level. Serving as vital training grounds for future leaders, they foster a sense of civic responsibility and empower young people to become active participants in their democracies.

- **Finland's National Youth Council Allianssi**, established in 1992, has been instrumental in advocating for youth

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/network-city-endowments/>

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interests and promoting civic engagement among young Finns.

- **New Zealand's Youth Parliament**, founded in 1994, offers young Kiwis a chance to engage with parliamentary processes and develop a deeper understanding of governance.
- **Canada's Prime Minister's Youth Council**, launched in 2016, provides a direct line for young Canadians to influence national policies and address issues that matter to them.

### Leadership development and training

Youth leadership development and training programmes can prove instrumental in preparing young people with a sense of empowerment and the skills needed to lead change in their local communities. This can involve methods like putting them through simulations to understand how to make decisions under pressure, or getting them to role-play with things like budget allocations.<sup>27</sup> The Commissioner for Future Generations for Wales offers another pioneering example here with the **Wales Future Generations Leadership Academy** established in 2019. Over a six-month period, the academy equips young leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate complex policy environments, advocate for sustainable development and long-term planning, and develop strategies that prioritise the well-being of future generations.<sup>28</sup> The trend towards establishing such leadership programmes is growing, with examples including the **Young Global Leaders Community** run by the World Economic Forum,<sup>29</sup> the UK-wide **UpRising** programme,<sup>30</sup> Kenya's **Public Service Emerging Leaders Fellowship**

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<sup>27</sup> Further reflections on this topic  
<https://www.geoffmulgan.com/post/can-democracies-afford-incompetent-leaders-the-case-for-training-politicians>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/leadership-academy-2/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.younggloballeaders.org>

<sup>30</sup> <https://uprising.org.uk>

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(PSELF),<sup>31</sup> and the **Leadership Excellence in Politics (LeiP)** spearheaded by the Apolitical Foundation,<sup>32</sup> among many others.

### Collective imagination projects

Collective imagination projects are another innovative approach to involving youth in policy development. These projects help to combat prevalent mindsets of short-termism and fatalism by encouraging young people to envision future policy scenarios and develop creative solutions. For example, the **Cities' Futures Workshop by UNESCO, UNEP and UN-Habitat** brought together young urban planners to reimagine cityscapes and address urban challenges.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, **UNICEF's Youth Foresight Fellows** programme engages young thinkers in exploring potential future challenges and opportunities, fostering a forward-thinking mindset that is essential for effective policy making.<sup>34</sup> Such programmes are a key stepping stone to shifting collective culture to one of active hope.

### Changemaker networks

Engaging youth through networks of fellow changemakers can be a powerful way to amplify their impact by nurturing their sense of community and belonging, in addition to having a platform through which their voices are heard and help to shape policymaking.

- Launched in 2021, the **UN Foundation's "Our Future Agenda"** initiative is a comprehensive youth-driven initiative designed to amplify young voices in shaping global policies.<sup>35</sup> It has three key parts: the Unlock the Future coalition, which unites organisations to advocate for youth priorities in policymaking; the Next Generation Fellows program, where young leaders collaborate directly with policymakers to co-create actionable policy

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.emergingpublicleaders.org/apply-pselfkenya>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.apolitical.foundation/leip>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.unhabitatyouth.org/en/young-people-explore-their-futures-through-interactive-theatre-workshop/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/youth-foresight-fellowship>

<sup>35</sup> <https://ourfutureagenda.org/>

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recommendations; and Intergenerational Action, which fosters dialogue between youth and elder statespersons to ensure diverse perspectives in decision-making.

- Other influential formats at an international scale include the **Global Shapers Community** by the World Economic Forum,<sup>36</sup> and the **YOUNGO** global network of children and youth activists involved in shaping intergovernmental climate change policies as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).<sup>37</sup>

## 5 Wider public engagement

Decisions about the future often benefit from public engagement. Not only is dialogue an effective means of teasing out key choices and implications, but well-designed and intentioned public engagement helps to ensure people feel more represented (or at least recognised) by subsequent policy decisions. Incorporating formats for public engagement is also crucial for fostering a society-wide culture of long-term thinking and responsibility. The following examples illustrate that when people are given a platform to discuss and imagine the future, the resulting dialogue can lead to more informed, inclusive, and forward-thinking policies.

### National conversation formats

Large-scale, structured public engagement formats can offer a powerful approach to shaping national discourse and decision-making. By involving citizens from diverse backgrounds in meaningful conversations, initiatives like the following help to ensure that policies reflect the collective hopes and concerns of all citizens.

- **Our Singapore Conversation** was run in 2012 as a national initiative to engage citizens, including young people, in a dialogue about the future of Singapore. It included 47,000 participants in 660 sessions at 75 locations and in 7 languages to include as many Singaporeans as possible from all walks of life. The

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.globalshapers.org/home>

<sup>37</sup> <https://youngoclimate.org/>

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extensive engagement process allowed participants to share their hopes and concerns, directly influencing the nation's long-term policies and strategies.

- Australia ran a big programme in 2008 called **Australia 2020**, involving the media, thousands of schools and culminating in 1000 people gathering in the national parliament with the Prime Minister to discuss issues including ageing, climate change and water management. Extensive briefing materials were produced to support discussion. It was cut short by the financial crisis later that year but was an unusually comprehensive approach to a national conversation about the future.<sup>38</sup> More recently Australia conducted a notable initiative in 2020 known as **the Australia Talks National Survey**. This survey was part of a broader ABC initiative aimed at understanding the views of Australians on a wide range of issues, including their hopes and concerns for the future. The initiative included town hall meetings and extensive media coverage, engaging Australians in a national conversation about the future. The findings from were used to inform public debate and policy development.
- A model used by participatory governance enthusiasts from all backgrounds are the **Future Search** conferences.<sup>39</sup> These conferences bring together diverse groups of stakeholders to collaboratively envision and plan for the future, facilitating meaningful dialogue to foster a sense of shared responsibility for future outcomes. The method emphasises whole-systems thinking and allows participants to explore common ground and develop action plans for their communities.

### Future-oriented museums

In recent years future-oriented museums have emerged to play a crucial role in public engagement, education, and dialogue about the

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<sup>38</sup> <https://apo.org.au/node/15061>

<sup>39</sup> <https://futuresearch.net/>

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future. These museums offer interactive and immersive experiences that help the public explore and understand complex future issues. Notable examples include the **Museum of the Future** in Dubai, the **Museum of Tomorrow** in Rio de Janeiro, **Futurium** in Berlin, and the **MOD. (Museum of Discovery)** in Adelaide. By providing spaces for the public to engage with future scenarios, technological advancements, and sustainability challenges, these museums bridge the gap between expert foresight and public understanding, making the future accessible and engaging for all.

### Citizen Assemblies

Citizen assemblies represent a growing movement towards inclusive and participatory future planning. These assemblies bring together a diverse group of citizens to deliberate on local, national and global challenges and propose solutions. By involving ordinary people in the decision-making process, these assemblies ensure that a wide range of perspectives are considered, enhancing the legitimacy and acceptance of the resulting policies. There is much debate about how to evolve the models – to ensure more impact on the wider public, to ensure that recommendations can be implemented and to bridge the gap with elected politicians. Two guiding actors in this space are the **Global Citizens' Assembly Network (GloCAN)** and **DemocracyNext**.

## 6 Finance

Money shapes how the future links to the present, and the organisation of financial resources critically determines the balance between present and future interests. Ensuring that financial decisions made today do not unfairly burden future generations is a core aspect of intergenerational equity, a principle many governments worldwide strive to uphold in their fiscal policies.

By carefully considering liabilities and benefits across generations, governments can create sustainable policies that balance immediate needs with long-term well-being. In this section we explore case studies of such progressive financial thinking in action, along with a few key topics to guide further efforts to rewire public finance for intergenerational equity.



TIAL links practical work with reflection, synthesis, and accumulation of knowledge in its field building.



## Case Study: New Zealand

A strong national case study here is New Zealand, which exemplifies this approach with a comprehensive suite of policies and frameworks designed to embed long-term thinking into financial decision-making. New Zealand's **Long-Term Fiscal Position Statements**, mandated by the Public Finance Act 1989, require the Treasury to produce comprehensive reports every four years. These statements project the economic and fiscal outlook over at least 40 years, providing a detailed analysis of the potential impacts of long-term macroeconomic trends such as demographic shifts, technological advancements, and environmental changes.<sup>40</sup> The purpose of these statements is to assess the sustainability of current fiscal policies and ensure that future generations are not burdened by today's financial decisions. By examining trends in public spending, revenue, and debt, these reports help the government make informed decisions that balance immediate needs with long-term fiscal health.

The integration of these long-term fiscal projections with New Zealand's broader policy framework highlights the country's commitment to intergenerational equity. The **Living Standards Framework (LSF)**, introduced in 2011, represents a paradigm shift in how national success is measured. Rather than focusing solely on Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the LSF emphasises intergenerational well-being through four key capitals: natural, human, social, and financial/physical. This holistic approach provides a comprehensive view of national prosperity, incorporating environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and individual well-being into economic planning. Another cornerstone of New Zealand's forward-thinking financial strategy is the **Well-being Budget**, first introduced in 2019. This prioritised the well-being of citizens over traditional economic measures and required the government to set priorities based on well-being indicators, which include mental health, child poverty, and environmental sustainability, among others (though the new government, elected in 2023, is going in a very different direction). This approach has inspired other nations,

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<sup>40</sup>

<https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/strategies-and-plans/long-term-fiscal-position>

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including Canada, which introduced its **Quality of Life Framework** in 2021.<sup>41</sup>

### Case study: Australia

Australia pioneered the intergenerational approach to finance in the early 2000s, setting a benchmark for other nations with its **Intergenerational Reports (IGRs)**.<sup>42</sup> These reports, produced every five years, project the economic and budgetary outlook up to 40 years into the future. They examine long-term sustainability of current policies, focusing on key drivers such as population aging, climate change, technological advancements, and healthcare demands. The reports aim to inform and improve public policy settings to better position Australia for future challenges and opportunities, thus ensuring that government policies are sustainable and equitable across generations. The Australian IGRs have been influential in highlighting the need for long-term fiscal planning and have set a precedent for other countries to follow.

### Case study: The International Monetary Fund

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also employs various methods to assess future fiscal sustainability. The IMF's approaches include the **Fiscal Transparency Code** and **Fiscal Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes (Fiscal ROSCs)**<sup>43</sup>. These tools help countries evaluate their fiscal policies' long-term impacts, leading to greater transparency and accountability in public finance management. The IMF also conducts **Debt Sustainability Analyses (DSAs)** to assess whether a country can meet its current and future debt obligations without requiring debt relief or accumulating arrears. Such practices are intended to support countries with developing strategies that balance immediate fiscal needs with long-term sustainability.

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<sup>41</sup><https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/services/publications/measuring-what-matters-toward-quality-life-strategy-canada.html>

<sup>42</sup> <https://treasury.gov.au/intergenerational-report>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/rosc>

## Key topic: Time patterns of impact

A key issue for governments to address when considering how to embed long-termism and equity in public finance is the question of how to evaluate spending based on the **time patterns of impact**. While most governments use investment methods for physical capital that extend over many decades, spending on people—such as education, healthcare, and research—is usually treated as an annual cost. There's growing interest in applying new methods, such as **multipliers and phenomenon-based budgeting**, and **extending balance sheets to include natural and human capital**. Developing these approaches more systematically could enable better assessment and tracking of the long-term impacts of different spending categories, promoting preventive measures.<sup>44</sup>

## Key topic: Discount rates

A key issue for governments and societies more generally is how to manage discount rates. These are a critical tool for evaluating how current investments will benefit future generations. Essentially, they help **determine the present value of future investments**, taking account of potential returns as well as uncertainty. Most of us in our own lives apply an effective discount rate: £100 now is more valuable to us than the promise of £100 in ten or twenty years time. Typically, governments use discount rates (often around 3-5%) to reflect their similar preference for immediate benefits over future gains. For instance, the UK Treasury applies a combined rate of 3.5%, taking into account both time preferences and anticipated income growth (since it's assumed that future generations will be richer thanks to economic growth, this should be reflected in spending decisions).

Strict application of high discount rates cuts the value of long-term investments. For example, at a 5% discount rate, £100 in thirty years is worth only £35.85 today, while £100 in fifty years is worth just £7.69 today. This inevitably **discourages investments in crucial areas like climate change mitigation, where benefits accrue over decades**.

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<sup>44</sup> This report from Demos Helsinki set out a new agenda for long-termism in public finance: <https://gic.mbrcgj.gov.ae/storage/post/f6bTTIppsLhLELDnEVTTRm36I3t70HP4rY722t0.pdf>

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Not surprisingly there has been heated debate about appropriate discount rates to use for climate action. Some economists, like William Nordhaus, advocate for market-based rates, while others, like Nicholas Stern, argue for lower rates to reflect the ethical imperative of safeguarding the planet for future generations. Parallel debates have happened in healthcare, where there is often a zero-discount rate applied – so that quality adjusted life years are treated in the same way for young and old. Very different again are debates about discount rates in science (they are usually ignored) or in relation to investment in early years education.

It clearly makes sense to apply some kind of discount rate given uncertainty about the future. But **the approach of orthodox economics doesn't fit well with how decisions are actually made.** So another perspective focuses on how in practice people apply discount rates to their own decisions. This shows the complexity of real as opposed to theoretical discount rates. On the one hand, people living precarious lives, or in the middle of a war, tend to apply high implicit discount rates. On the other hand, where there are strong social bonds and commitments implicit discount rates are very low – as for example when parents consider passing on inheritance to their children, or societies consider defence, education and science. One future route which is vital to the future generations agenda would be to develop a **more evidence based and differentiated approach to discount rates** rather than applying a single, market approach, or the theoretical approach adopted by economists.

## 7 Cities and the future

Cities are a good scale for futures thinking and several cities have run initiatives looking 30-50 years into the future. These cities employ diverse methods, often characterised by community engagement, sustainability, and resilience planning. Here we focus on a few current examples:

- **Detroit Future City (DFC):** Detroit's comprehensive planning framework, [Detroit Future City](#), envisions the city's development over the next 50 years. The DFC emphasises community engagement, sustainability,

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economic growth, and social equity, aiming to tackle present challenges while keeping an eye on long-term goals. The framework includes extensive public consultation to integrate community feedback into urban planning processes and ensure that the city's development aligns with residents' needs and aspirations.

- **Amsterdam's Circular Economy 2050:** Amsterdam is pioneering efforts to become a fully circular city by 2050. This ambitious strategy aims to eliminate waste, reduce carbon emissions, and create sustainable economic models. The [Amsterdam Circular Economy](#) programme, a finalist in the 2022 Earthshot prize, involves comprehensive public and private sector collaboration, focusing on areas such as construction, consumer goods, and food. The city is aiming to set an international benchmark for sustainable urban development.
- **Copenhagen's Climate Plan 2025:** Copenhagen's [Climate Plan 2025](#) is a roadmap to become the world's first carbon-neutral capital by 2025, with a long-term vision extending to 2050. The plan includes initiatives in energy efficiency, green mobility, and renewable energy – combining cutting-edge technology with community-driven initiatives. Public engagement is a core element, with the city involving residents and businesses in the transition to a sustainable future.
- **Bogotá's Green Corridor Initiative:** Bogotá is undertaking [the Green Corridor Initiative](#), which aims to transform major urban roads into green corridors by 2030, with a long-term vision extending to 2050. This project focuses on reducing pollution, enhancing public transportation, and increasing green spaces. The initiative involves collaboration with local communities and environmental groups, promoting sustainability and improving urban living conditions.
- **Future Parks Accelerator Programme:** A collaboration between the National Trust, the Heritage Fund, and the UK Government, the [Future Parks Accelerator Programme](#) was started in 2019 to secure the future of urban green

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spaces through improved management practices. The initiative supports local authorities and communities in reimagining how parks and green spaces can be managed to benefit both current and future generations. It involves pilot projects, stakeholder engagement, and the development of new funding models to ensure long-term sustainability.

- **NetZeroCities initiative:** Part of the EU's Mission "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities," the [NetZeroCities](#) initiative supports European cities in their ambitious goal to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. It provides cities with tailored support, resources, and expertise to overcome structural, institutional, and cultural barriers to decarbonisation. Through governance innovation tools like the Cities Mission Climate City Contract (CCC),<sup>45</sup> NetZeroCities is facilitating a co-creation process involving multiple stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive action plans focused on systemic changes across urban systems, including energy, transportation, and waste management.

## 8 Nature and more-than-human governance

An influential nascent domain of policy experimentation is that of "more-than-human governance". It is a movement that advocates for realigning governing systems away from beliefs on value that prioritise GDP growth at the expense of the nature world, instead ensuring sustainability and equity for all forms of life. The approach focuses on incorporating the needs, rights and representation of nature into governance models. There is growing experimentation in this space, with examples ranging from granting legal rights to nature to integrating non-human perspectives into decision-making bodies and processes.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://netzerocities.app/QR-CCC>



## The Rights of Nature Movement

The Rights of Nature movement seeks to grant legal rights to natural entities such as rivers, forests, and ecosystems. Alongside legal provisions this includes the creation of alternative strategic and budgetary mechanisms to ensure the enforcement of these rights. Here are a couple of pioneering examples:

- In 2008, **Ecuador** became the first country to **enshrine the rights of nature, or "Pachamama," in its constitution**. This groundbreaking legal framework acknowledges that nature has intrinsic rights to exist, flourish, and evolve.<sup>46</sup> These constitutional provisions enable any person or community to demand the enforcement of these rights before courts, creating a legal duty for the government to protect and restore ecosystems. This recognition has been instrumental in various legal cases where courts have ruled in favour of natural entities.
- In 2016, **Colombia's Constitutional Court granted legal personhood to the Atrato River**. The court's ruling was based on the recognition that the river and its tributaries were severely impacted by illegal mining and deforestation. The court declared that the Atrato River has rights to protection, conservation, maintenance, and restoration, obligating the state to take immediate actions to clean and protect it. This decision also included the establishment of a special commission of guardians, consisting of government officials and local indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, to oversee the river's restoration and ensure the enforcement of its rights.<sup>47</sup>
- In 2017, **New Zealand granted legal personhood to the Whanganui River** through the Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui

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<sup>46</sup>Article 71 of Ecuador's constitution explicitly states that nature has the right to "exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles"

<https://www.garn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Rights-for-Nature-Articles-in-Ecuador's-Constitution.pdf>

<sup>47</sup>

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/05/colombias-constitutional-court-grants-rights-to-the-atrato-river-and-orders-the-government-to-clean-up-its-waters/>

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River Claims Settlement) Act. This act acknowledges the river as a living entity with rights, protected by two guardians—one appointed by the Crown and the other by the Whanganui iwi (tribe). To support this governance model, New Zealand also implemented strategic and budgetary mechanisms that integrate the river's needs into national and local planning processes. This includes funding for the restoration and protection of the river, and new policies that prioritise the river's health.<sup>48</sup>

### Beyond human decision-making

An emerging set of innovative participatory approaches are embracing the practice of biomimicry and integrating non-human perspectives into governance processes. They aim to provide a voice for non-human entities by gathering and analysing environmental data and finding effective ways to integrate them into policymaking processes. This can be facilitated by people or through advanced technologies such as AI and data monitoring systems. Here it's important to ensure that the representation mechanisms are robust, transparent, and genuinely reflect the interests of the natural entities they are designed to protect.

- The Deep Green project, established in 2020 by ecoLogicStudio and the United Nations Development Program, uses **slime mould as a multispecies planning commission to inform urban development in Guatemala City**. This initiative leverages the natural network-building capabilities of *Physarum polycephalum* to optimise urban layouts and improve connectivity, especially in the city's ravines or "barrancos." The project demonstrates how integrating biological intelligence and AI simulations with environmental data into urban planning can enhance urban mobility, environmental health, and sustainability.<sup>49</sup>
- In the UK, the **Water Post 2043 project**, initiated by Defra, Policy Lab, and Moral Imaginings in 2024, is an innovative approach to reimagining decision-making for

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2024.2314532>

<sup>49</sup> <https://edge.worldgovernmentsummit.org>

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freshwater systems. This project centres on the creation of the River Roding Interspecies Council, which integrates human and non-human perspectives into governance processes. It involves a diverse array of stakeholders, including local communities, environmental experts, and representatives of the river's ecosystem, to develop more equitable water management practices that consider the long-term health of the River Roding and its surrounding environment.<sup>50</sup>

Many further practical examples and thought experiments in this blossoming space can be found in an excellent recent '**Governing with the more-than-human**' field mapping report by DemocracyNext.<sup>51</sup>

## 9 Methods, mindsets and myths

Concern for future generations reflects the golden rule: 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. This is a healthy ethical stance and, if nothing else, the future generations agenda helps to raise the question of what future people might wish we had done differently.

But this takes us to the question of how we could know what would future generations want us to have done? What would they say if they were part of today's debates?

Our predecessors a century ago in 1924 would have struggled to predict what would matter in our era, and we should assume a comparable level of ignorance today. The implication is that any attempts at precise prediction are implausible, and that we should be wary of projecting our values onto our descendants.

Recent interest in the approaches of some indigenous peoples, such as the idea of thinking **seven generations** backwards and forwards,

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<sup>50</sup><https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/07/using-experimental-methods-to-reimagine-decision-making-for-the-freshwater-system-post-2043/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.demnext.org/projects/more-than-human-governance>

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are intriguing.<sup>52</sup> But they are also problematic, since we live in societies that are far more marked by change than pre-modern ones. Our own ancestors seven generations back would have struggled to make sense of our choices, and what counted as wisdom in their times might well not look like wisdom today.

But we can nevertheless make some reasonable assumptions, many of which are about ensuring that future generations have options and freedoms that our own actions do not limit:

- **Stewardship:** Future generations would likely expect us to maintain and enhance the natural and cultural assets we inherit. This involves sustainably managing resources, protecting ecosystems, and ensuring that the benefits derived from these assets are available for the long term.
- **Knowledge growth:** Developing and preserving useful knowledge is crucial to expanding freedoms in the future. This includes investing in education, research, and technology to ensure that future generations have access to advanced understanding and tools to address their challenges.
- **Institutional care:** Building and maintaining robust institutions is vital for ensuring stability, justice, and resilience. Effective institutions can adapt to change, manage crises, and uphold the rule of law, which are essential for the well-being of future societies. Trust can be destroyed much more easily than it can be built.
- **Risk management:** Future generations would expect us to anticipate and mitigate potential risks. This includes identifying high-impact, low-probability risks such as climate change, pandemics, and technological disruptions, and developing strategies to monitor and respond to these threats.

This last point is critical and requires at a minimum:

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<sup>52</sup> A full overview of the Seventh Generation Principle  
<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/seventh-generation-principle>

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- **Mapping high-impact, low-probability risks** – from the potential AMOC, the switching of Gulf Stream currents that would have huge impacts on countries like the UK, to bio-risk – to understand what policies might be needed now to mitigate future risks. This could involve monitoring for warning signs and adopting strategies like the “**no regrets**” approach which focuses on identifying actions which will yield benefits regardless of how future conditions unfold.<sup>53</sup> The **precautionary principle**, incorporated into EU environmental law in the 1990s, is another lens for considering options – justifying preventive action in the face of potential harm, even when scientific certainty is not fully established.<sup>54</sup> This principle is complex to implement in detail, but encourages a spirit of care and caution rather than recklessness.
- These methods also complement **adaptive management** for iterative learning and decision-making to allow policies to be continuously monitored, and outcomes assessed and adjusted, based on real-world experiences and new information as some risks (from pandemics to accelerated climate impacts) materialise, and **resilience planning** to nurture the ability of communities, systems, and infrastructure to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses.

Some governments have tried to **institutionalise the idea of government as a steward**, notably New Zealand, through roles, codes of conducts and accountability mechanisms.<sup>55</sup> Others have focused on **cultivating mindsets for exploring non-obvious solutions**. And a growing body of work has focused on how to **orchestrate imagination more effectively to expand our sense of**

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<sup>53</sup><https://www.circlesofclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/No-Regrets-Charter-2015.pdf>

<sup>54</sup>

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_IDA\(2015\)573876](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_IDA(2015)573876)

<sup>55</sup> The Public Service Act (2020) is a pioneering legislative revision that intends to embed a culture of stewardship, future-oriented thinking, and adaptability within New Zealand's public service

<https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/guidance/public-service-act-2020-reforms>

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**the possible,**<sup>56</sup> including imagination infrastructures,<sup>57</sup> new ways of thinking about myths and stories,<sup>58</sup> and the development of theoretical and practical approaches to designing new institutions (in the work of TIAL).<sup>59</sup>

Some of this will also increasingly involve technology. GPT4 makes it possible to use algorithms to imagine the perspectives of specific groups including future generations, and avatars may before long become part of the representation of non-human natural entities, or at the very least will combine with human guardians and stewards. In the fairly near future we could imagine a significant role being played by AIs to prompt human decision-making groups to consider potential impacts on future generations.

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<sup>56</sup> 'The Imaginary Crisis (and how we might quicken social and public imagination)' paper (2020)

<https://demoshelsinki.fi/julkaisut/the-imaginary-crisis-and-how-we-might-quicken-social-and-public-imagination/> and 'Another World Is Possible: How to Reignite Social and Political Imagination' book (2022)

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/imagination-infrastructures>

<sup>58</sup> Six principles of experimental practice

<https://states-of-change.org/stories/exploring-the-unobvious-six-principles-to-establish-experimental-practices> and reflections on anachronistic governance myths to bust: <https://www.thefuturescentre.org/reimagining-governance-myths/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://tial.org>

# III. Conclusions: How to have a conversation with the future and stretch time horizons

Orienting governments and societies towards the medium and long-term future is difficult, but not impossible. It is **partly about mindsets, partly about institutions, and partly about processes**. At its core is, first, a willingness to have an imagined conversation with people who do not yet exist, and second, a willingness to ensure that options are left open – that our descendants have choices.

These are more likely when times are relatively stable; not dominated by threats and insecurity; in less adversarial political contexts; and where social trust is high. These conditions are not all that common, however.

Where those background conditions are in place, it then becomes possible to consider the range of ways that attention can be directed to the future, and analytic methods can be used to understand whether today's decisions close off options for the future.

The examples summarised in this report confirm **the value of creating an institutional form for the future generations agenda. If this becomes part of an entity, role or law (as in Wales) it is more likely to be taken seriously.**

That institution can then comment on specific actions and policies, but it can also help to improve the ways in which other institutions attend to the future, as part of a broader programme for embedding longer time horizons into decisions. This should be an obvious priority in an era of longer life spans, systemic challenges, and potentially catastrophic or irreversible results from human actions.

That programme of stretching time horizons needs to include:

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- methods – including **more sophisticated approaches to discount rates** that don't simply extend market logics, methods for analysis of uncertain risks of all kinds, and strategic design methods that focus on maximising options in the future rather than trying to pre-empt or solve the problems of the future.
- **assessments, generational audits and analyses of future balance sheets.**
- continuous processes of **scanning of risks and opportunities**, particularly high impact but low probability risks.
- **legal principles** that constrain actions that clearly threaten future generations.

Crucially too these need to be a prompt for conversations. Attention is the scarcest resource in modern societies, and all of these are means of redirecting attention from the urgent and immediate to the important.

A future generations commissioner or advocate can report each year to Parliament and to the public on how these different methods are working, and whether the net effects of current decisions are **future positive or future negative**, likely to shrink or expand the options open to our descendants.

Such a debate could be helped by simple metrics, for example a measure that would try to summarise whether actions in the past year are on balance net positive or negative, looking at likely impacts on balance sheets in twenty or fifty years' time and combining fiscal, natural and human dimensions. That kind of analysis wouldn't be easy, and would need to draw on many kinds of evidence and forecasting. But it could prompt a very healthy debate, as would its elements (e.g. the effects on future fiscal balance sheets, or on natural capital).

All of these, however, are bound to be refracted through the views and decisions of people in the present. Future generations do not have a voice, and they do not have rights in any meaningful sense. We cannot predict their views and values which may be as different



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from our own as our great grandparents' views and values are from ours.

Instead, ultimately all the measures described have to connect to politics in its widest sense and the judgements of today's citizens, since **ultimately it is the willingness of today's citizens to take the future seriously that will be decisive**. Some will continue to hold to Groucho Marx's view ('what's posterity ever done for me?'). But most people have some sense of themselves as part of a chain that connects the past to the present and the future.

These recommendations seek to embed that common sense in institutions – which remind us, prompt us to ask better questions, and help us to avoid actions now that damage future freedom.

## IV. Next steps

This paper is designed to prompt discussion about the practical steps that could be taken in countries, regions and cities to reflect the interests of future generations. We would be grateful for other examples to add to this paper for its next iteration, as well as specific ideas. We anticipate a follow-up paper later in the year. Please share any suggestions with [info@tial.org](mailto:info@tial.org).



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