EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness
Contribution of the Conference of European Churches

1. Introduction

The pursuit of fair treatment for future generations and equitable relationships between them is not a new concept within the EU. The Union has already established a strong foundation for promoting and implementing children's rights, as outlined in the Treaty on European Union,[1] which explicitly commits to safeguarding the rights of children. Likewise, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights[2] affirms that children's best interests are a primary consideration in all actions affecting them and guarantees their protection. In recent years, several initiatives promoting solidarity between generations have been launched within the EU.

The desire for a fair relationship between generations is rooted in the EU's history and ethos and the Union's foundation as a peace project with a long-term vision of coexistence not only of nations, but equally of peoples of different nations and generations—a vision based on mutual acknowledgment, respect, and shared values. This emphasis provides a solid foundation for furthering consideration of intergenerational fairness. Respect for the rights of future generations promotes conditions for a resilient society, which is equipped to face the challenges of the future.

The efforts leading to the Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness need to incorporate lessons learned particularly from the most advanced EU Member States and from civil society and expand the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child into a more comprehensive approach. Such an approach must address complex relationships between current and future generations, incorporating principles of inclusion, participation, and participatory democracy.

Religious communities, churches, and church-related organizations are vital and distinct elements of civil society. Providing spaces for intergenerational exchange has traditionally been part of the work and the long-term mission of churches. Such spaces are already now in many cases part of their structures. The unique contributions of the churches—from grassroots to international levels—place them in a position to provide valuable insights for intergenerational justice. Of particular importance are church perspectives on the relationship between short- and long-term goals and on the mediation between material and spiritual growth.

[1] Article 3(3)
[2] Article 24

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is an ecumenical fellowship of 114 member churches of Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant traditions from across the continent. Our concerns related to the Strategy reflect our perspectives on Christian anthropology and a vision of a resilient society based on the protection of human dignity and human flourishing. This vision is supported by values which underpin intergenerational care that are central to Judeo-Christian ethics and provide the foundations of the Judeo-Christian heritage.

To the core principles of work of CEC is counted the acknowledgment, respect and cooperation with youth, with ecumenical youth organisations as Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) and the European branch of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). The contribution of CEC to the Strategy has been elaborated in a close cooperation with them.

2. Churches' Concerns

Against this background the Conference of European Churches offers its contribution to the Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness. The following principles underpin CEC perspectives on:

- Respect for inclusive governance and participatory democracy
- Care for a healthy planet
- Esteem for a resilient and fair society respecting its diverse segments
- Navigating digitalization and artificial intelligence safely, harnessing opportunities while managing risks.

2.1. LONG-TERM GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY, and REPRESENTATION - *how can current governance systems address the needs of all generations?*

Today's democracies often operate within short-term horizons, with electoral cycles and immediate interests hindering long-term planning. Yet, there are ways in which existing systems can ensure the inclusion of future generations perspective. Some countries have established offices for future generations, or permanent parliamentary committees tasked with assessing the long-term impact of laws and budgets. These mechanisms demonstrate that our time and resources are a shared inheritance to be passed on to future generations.

Democracy must also represent children, young people, and marginalized people. A mature democracy respects not only the loudest voices but also the weakest, empowers those who are often overheard, and finds meaningful modes of representation in decision-making processes.

In a democratic society, the quality of policy should be evaluated not only in terms of economic performance but also environmental impact, the commitment to uphold human dignity and rights, and the removal of barriers that limit equitable participation. Such measures foster inclusive intergenerational bonds.

- **Involving future generations in decision-making**

Participatory democracy is vital for resilience. Every major policy should include a long-term impact assessment that transcends technical reports to foster spaces for deliberation. Such forums can help shift individual preferences toward the collective good, making it harder to justify choices that neglect the future.

Transparency is essential, decisions should be explained in understandable terms, acknowledging that our actions remain visible over time. Participatory processes should serve as spaces for reconciliation, involving diverse societal segments, including children, youth, and vulnerable communities. On this basis, trust is built for long-term projects.

- **The role of the European Union**

The EU is uniquely positioned to realize this vision. It can establish a common framework requiring Member States to incorporate intergenerational equity into economic and fiscal policies. For example, the European Semester could monitor not only fiscal stability but also natural resource use and long-term well-being.

Some initiatives involving youth in policy-making already exists. *The European Economic and Social Committee*, which gathers representatives from organised civil society in the Member States, established a Youth Group in 2022, which actively involved young people in the drafting of opinions.[3] The European Parliament and European Commission also host youth panels and youth conferences on a regular basis.[4] These initiatives should be strengthened and complemented further.

At the institutional level, we suggest establishing a European Office for Future Generations with a mandate to ensure that EU policies meet this responsibility. Engaged through participatory processes, such a body could become a powerful voice.

Furthermore, EU funding could be conditioned on the existence of national mechanisms for intergenerational assessment and citizen participation, making financial support a symbol of responsibility.

The EU also bears a special duty in digital innovation and peace promotion. Building a democratic future requires preventing polarization, manipulation, and conflict. Investment in secure digital infrastructure and external policies fostering resilience and reconciliation are vital alongside economic initiatives.

- **An ethical perspective**

Long-term governance goes beyond institutional arrangements; it requires a culture rooted in respect, solidarity, and hope. The present is a shared responsibility—not something to be simply consumed but to be preserved and passed on. Power exercised in service of the common good is authentic. Only thus can we hand down a future worth receiving.

[3] https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/other/eesc-youth-group
[4] https://european-youth-event.europarl.europa.eu/en

2.2. ENVIRONMENT and CLIMATE CHANGE - *how can the challenge of the triple crisis (climate change, biodiversity, pollution) be addressed through the society for current and future generations?*

The environmental crisis is not only ecological but also social, ethical, and spiritual. We believe that all creatures are interconnected with one another and with God, and we recognize that the objectification of Creation—treating it merely as a resource for exploitation—distorts this sacred relationship of communion and care. The environmental crisis reflects humanity's lost connection to the natural world and the objectification of creation and other beings. It represents a broken bond between generations, as we leave the Earth less habitable for those who follow. The loss of the Earth's habitability is an existential fear especially for many young people, that may result into eco-anxiety, isolation, and disengagement from civic and political life. Restoring the environment, preventing further degradation, and protecting biodiversity are essential conditions for intergenerational fairness.

The Conference of European Churches value the EU's efforts toward a sustainable future and its recognition of the rights of future generations to live in a clean and healthy environment, as expressed in the European Green Deal, the commitment to climate neutrality by 2050, and related policies. However, these aims must not be treated in isolation. While the economic consequences of such policies deserve careful consideration, equal attention must be given to their social, ethical, spiritual, and existential dimensions. Economic growth cannot be treated as a mantra that outweighs the rights of future generations to a clean and healthy environment.

We therefore call on the EU to address this issue with the urgency it deserves. The following areas are essential for restoring intergenerational fairness and ensuring the EU's environmental sustainability:

- **Long-term decision-making**

Economic, social, and political choices must not allow short-term self-interest to undermine long-term human well-being, the common interest, or the common good.

- **Transparency and participation**

Information-sharing and public participation, guided by the principle of subsidiarity, are vital to promoting environmental responsibility at all levels.

- **International cooperation**

Global environmental challenges require multilateral fair and respectful collaboration grounded in fair long-term shared interests.

- **Accountability**

Those responsible for environmental damage must bear the financial costs of restoration and compensation.

- **True-cost economics**

Environmental costs must be reflected in the prices of goods and services. Fair pricing is a fundamental condition for a sustainable economy, ensuring that prices reflect the toll that products and services take on the Earth. Revenues from such measures should be used to mitigate and repair environmental damage.

- **Respect for planetary boundaries**

The planet's capacity must be recognized and respected; this involves faire use of its natural resources which respects the needs of current as well as future generations. In efforts to guarantee well-being of citizens today, the EU must not ignore the needs of those yet to come. Sustainable use of natural resources must not be an unresolved problem which future generations are left to solve. Fair and just use of natural resource and respect of planetary boundaries is the most pressing issue of intergenerational fairness.

- **Highlight environmental impact and resource**

Ecological footprints must be acknowledged, measured, and acted upon at every level—national, regional, and local—to ensure the responsible use of resources.

Churches welcome the EU's progress in developing robust environmental legislation. Yet some values and processes cannot be fully governed through the lens of economics alone. Regulatory measures are needed to safeguard landscapes, biodiversity, and areas of natural significance.

The EU should therefore develop a comprehensive framework for the protection of landscapes, biodiversity, and natural heritage. Having helped to shape global sustainability policies, the EU and its Member States now bear the responsibility to apply them effectively—particularly in balancing environmental, economic, and social priorities.

Both competition and cooperation can drive progress by fostering innovation and inclusive development. At the same time, the EU and its Member States have a moral and historical duty to support developing countries in addressing environmental challenges.

Achieving climate neutrality will require both determined political action and the engagement of individuals. Political will must be matched by public commitment and appropriate narratives that inspire collective participation. Environmental justice toward future generations—and the refusal to pass today's costs onto tomorrow—are essential components of a resilient and responsible society.

2.3. SOCIAL COHESION and RESILIENCE - *how can social systems foster bonds and relationships between people of different age groups to reduce social exclusion and create a more resilient society?*

Social cohesion and resilience are essential components of intergenerational fairness. The way Europe fosters trust and solidarity between generations today will determine whether future societies are fractured and fragile, or inclusive and resilient.

For churches, social cohesion is not only a political priority but also a theological and existential calling: human dignity is realized in community, and resilience is built through justice, reconciliation, and belonging. Churches have consistently affirmed that exclusion—whether of migrants, young people, or the elderly—weakens the social fabric. Intergenerational dialogue and the active participation of young people in shaping Europe's future are therefore indispensable.

The COVID-19 pandemic, demographic change, and growing polarization have all underscored that resilience is vital for nurturing just and sustainable relationships across generations. Churches bring to this reflection their lived experience—from parishes that organize intergenerational community activities, to reconciliation initiatives in regions affected by conflict, to advocacy for social rights and inclusion at the European level.

Building a resilient Europe for future generations requires sustained commitment to four key pillars of social cohesion:

- **Intergenerational dialogue and mutual learning**

Rooted in the biblical vision that "the old shall dream dreams and the young shall see visions" (Joel 2:28) we are convinced that intergenerational dialogue is central to resilience. Churches are offering in many places across the continent places for a dialogue and are fostering such a dialogue. Based on that experience we encourage the EU to invest in intergenerational education and civic programs—such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps—that promote reciprocal mentoring, shared learning, and civic engagement across age groups.

- **Social protection and inclusion**

Social cohesion is undermined when poverty, unemployment, or inadequate housing isolate the young and the elderly. The Conference of European Churches emphasizes that equitable access to employment, healthcare, social protection, and housing are essential investments in resilience and fairness between generations.

- **Community hubs for resilience**

Churches and faith-based organizations often serve as trusted local conveners, hosting projects that bring generations together through shared service and dialogue. Building on this experience, the EU should support the creation of intergenerational community hubs and provide fair and equal access for all—spaces for learning, volunteering, and mutual care that strengthen everyday social bonds.

- **Reconciliation, inclusion, and trust-building**

True cohesion cannot exist without addressing division. Discrimination, racism, and ageism erode trust and belonging. Inclusive dialogue and mutual trust are therefore the foundation of just and resilient communities. The EU should invest in dialogue initiatives, intercultural exchange, and anti-discrimination measures that promote equal dignity and participation for all generations.

Across Europe, numerous examples illustrate how churches and faith-based organizations strengthen social cohesion and empower communities to overcome

polarization. Their work demonstrates that unity and mutual care can be cultivated even amid diversity and difference.

However, social cohesion and a resilient society cannot be built without a clear vision or adequate resources. This reality must be reflected in the EU's financial strategy. A resilient and socially cohesive Europe requires meaningful investment—resources must be committed if solidarity and inclusion are truly to flourish.

2.4. RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION and TECHNOLOGY - *how can innovation systems be beneficial to the society in the long term?*

Digital transformation is reshaping European society—impacting how we communicate, make decisions, access services, and relate to one another. As this evolution accelerates, it is vital that digital development remains aligned with the EU's core values: democracy, human dignity, equality, and the rule of law.

Churches, like other civil society actors, are both affected by and actively contributing to this transformation. With a long history of responding to societal change—from the printing press to industrialization—the churches offer a theological and ethical vocabulary through which technological advancement and its future prospects can be interpreted.

Churches do not reject digitalization; rather, they affirm humanity's responsibility for the ethical and responsible management of digitalization and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Today, churches foster digital literacy, create safer spaces for dialogue, helping to ensure that no one is left behind through promoting values of human dignity, compassion, and solidarity.

Successfully addressing the challenges of digitalization requires attention to its impact on values, norms, and social structures. Theological and ethical traditions offer valuable perspectives in discussions about AI, data ethics, and platform regulation. Churches emphasize the inherent worth of each person and resist reducing individuals to data or economic outputs.

The digital future of Europe must serve the whole human person—body, mind, and spirit. Churches bring valuable ethical insight, democratic commitment, and local engagement to support a vision of a fair, inclusive, and human rights-based digital society. Churches and other faith-based actors support EU efforts to build a digital space that is inclusive, transparent, and human rights-based. In this way, they complement key policy initiatives such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), AI ACT, AI Continent Action Plan and Digital Markets Act (DMA).

In a digital age it is more than ever important not to avoid addressing people's fears and anxieties in times of uncertainty. Among other actors in civil society, churches and other faith communities can offer safe spaces for reflection, learning, and mutual support amid rapid technological change.

- **Ethics of AI and New Innovations**

AI, digital innovation and technologies must be developed and used in a way that respects human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, respect human dignity and agency. Therefore, in the implementation of the DSA, DMA, and AI Act it is key to ensure holistic and human rights-based digital policy.

- **Privacy, Data Use, and Trust**

While large-scale data benefits innovation, it must not undermine personal privacy, including data that could harm freedom of religion and may lead to faith-based discrimination. The DSA's emphasis on transparency, accountability, and fundamental rights are important aspects to safeguard.

Technology must serve democratic values and fundamental freedoms so as to ensure individuals are protected from exploitation, manipulation, and illegal surveillance.

- **Digital Inclusion, Impact on Livelihoods, Jobs, and Social Cohesion**

Digital development must not widen social inequality. Intergenerational fairness demands attention to the vulnerabilities of younger generations, including the erosion of social skills and the growing need for community. On the other hand, while younger generations are growing up with the everchanging technological environment, the same cannot be claimed for elder generations. Intergenerational fairness means integrating the needs and concerns of all generations.

Digitalization has expanded accessibility, benefiting those in rural areas, as well as people with reduced mobility, or differing abilities. Yet it cannot replace genuine social contact and community life.

Churches promote a vision of a just and inclusive society that enables all to flourish. Digitalization must therefore be connected to democracy, equal opportunity, and social inclusion.

We call upon the EU to recognize and fund community-based initiatives that bridge the digital divide, especially amongst rural, elderly, or marginalized populations to ensure no one is left behind or without opportunities.

- **Spiritual and Existential Sustainability**

Beyond economic and ecological dimensions, digitalization affects people's identity, relationships, and sense of meaning. European churches contribute to this often-overlooked aspect of sustainability. The EU's sustainability framework should be broadened to reflect these aspects of well-being, meaning-making, and social cohesion in the context of digital change.