

A photograph of a modern glass skyscraper, viewed from a low angle looking up. The building's facade is composed of a grid of dark frames and reflective glass panels. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The building is partially obscured by a large yellow rectangular overlay that contains the title and subtitle.

# Building Our Common Future

The role of the Network of Institutions for  
Future Generations in safeguarding the future

## **Imprint**

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## **Executive Summary**

As clearly articulated 40 years ago in the publication of Our Common Future, our current way of living has transformed our planet in a way that will have long-term and permanent impacts for future generations. Because of this, a growing number of initiatives and institutions are advancing intergenerational justice and long-term thinking into the political agenda. This report aims to shed light on these developments, of which the Network of Institutions for Future Generations (NIFG) is a crucial component. In the first section, we explore the global landscape and institutions related to protecting future generations interests, rights, and wellbeing. Within this context, we consider both governmental and non-governmental structures, as well as a variety of governance processes and options. The second part pays special attention to the NIFG. The network has been an important actor and enabler in the process of bringing concerns for future generations to the fore. Finally, the report considers the future for the network and presents four different scenarios for the future strategy. As the global landscape changes, NIFG can play a crucial role in bringing together key stakeholders to build momentum towards protecting the rights of future generations.

## 1. Introduction

*We act as we do because we can get away with it: future generations do not vote; they have no political or financial power; they cannot challenge our decisions. But the results of the present... are rapidly closing the options for future generations.* Brundtland Report, Our Common Future, 1987.

The future is something we create every day through our actions, choices, and policies: our current way of living has long-term and permanent impacts for future generations. This is evident today in the irreversible environmental damages we are witnessing such as climate change and biodiversity loss. However, this is not something new; it has also been widely understood and written about for the last forty years, beginning with Our Common Future<sup>1</sup>. As the recent IPCC report has shown<sup>2</sup>, action is needed now on climate change to secure wellbeing for future generations, but climate change is only one of many issues which have long-term consequences. While public support, as well as scientific evidence, continues to grow around action being needed on long-term challenges such as climate change and health care infrastructure, many have explored why it is that we continue to discount the future. One key root cause is the short-termism deeply embedded in governance institutions<sup>3</sup>.

From election cycles to budgeting to policy impact analysis, accounting for future generations in a way that ensures their rights and options is often missing from governance landscapes and policy processes around the world. Governance aimed at providing intergenerational justice is crucial for addressing this challenge. The UN Secretary General and UN Foundation are already playing a part in setting this agenda, with recent initiatives such as the Next Generation Fellows. The UN has the potential to be a key actor in encouraging future-just policymaking and supporting countries to bridge the gap between current and next generations.

Numerous other institutions and non-governmental stakeholders have also been building momentum towards solutions. The Network for Institutions for Future Generations (NIFG) is one such example. The NIFG is a worldwide, independent, non-formal network of different national institutions working together to protect the interest of future generations. The NIFG promotes the sharing of knowledge and advances best practices in respect of long-term governance through different measures and across various disciplines.

This report explores current global developments on governance for future generations. It first discusses key aspects of the movement and maps out key institutions. Momentum and urgency are growing for just future-making, of which the NIFG is a key player. Second, it analyses a broader set of practices and processes for future generations governance. Third, it presents the NIFG network, its current structure, and its key achievements. The last section explores future scenarios and reflects on the next steps and future role of the network<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Review of global landscape for future generations governance

### 2.1 Contextual background

In the last decades, discussions about integrating protection for future generations into governance has advanced considerably. In this section, we present an overview of the context of future generations governance centred around four key aspects: activism & young people; the legal landscape; multi-level governance; and non-governmental actors.

#### **Activism & young people**

Youth activism has played a crucial role in placing the topic of intergenerational justice on the agenda. Severn Suzuki gave a first breakthrough speech on the future for children and next generations in the Rio summit 1992<sup>4</sup>. In recent years, the Fridays for Future movement helped the climate crisis rise to

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<sup>1</sup> This work was commissioned by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales on behalf of the NIFG.

the top of the political agenda. In its wake, demonstrations have spread to over 1,000 cities around the world, with a growing number of people attending the weekly protest marches since 2018.

The growing importance of young voices has translated into formal and informal roles for young people in institutional settings. Many governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international bodies understand intergenerational justice as providing avenues for participation of young people. Some examples include: the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change; a proliferation of temporary youth councils or committees across the UN and at a national level; national-level youth parliaments. However, most of the work facilitating this youth participation is being done by NGOs or is restrained to informal engagement, which reduces youth voices to tokenistic campaigns and constrains their potential influence on policymaking. Just as with any other kind of institution, a specific structure, process, and mechanism for influence is necessary for change to be created. The value of youth participation is growing but its potential is still underutilised.

### **The Legal Landscape**

The judicial system can play a crucial role in embedding intergenerational justice into governance processes. While there is at present no binding international instrument to grant future generations enforceable rights<sup>5</sup>, the UN General Assembly has recently approved a resolution recognising the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right, providing a solid foundation to catalyse transformative changes. Overall, using the law and judicial systems to enforce rights for future generations is a growing trend at the national level, and international bodies are responding to this momentum.

Two national-level examples include Bolivia and Ecuador. The protection of future generations is part of the norms and values of Indigenous cultures in both Bolivia and Ecuador and was later embedded in their respective national constitutions<sup>6,7</sup>. Many Indigenous peoples around the world work towards guaranteeing the interests of future generations, for example by "preserving the capacity for natural resources or systems to maintain diversity and health, and by increasing their contribution towards sustainable management of natural resources"<sup>8</sup>. Supporting these Indigenous groups and giving them the space to prosper again represents great potential for long-lasting intergenerational equity.

In addition to traditional norms and legal doctrines, there are also many judicial decisions that seek to implement the concept of intergenerational equity at a national or state level. One of the most high-profile examples took place in 2019 when the Dutch Supreme Court passed a landmark decision on the climate agenda<sup>9</sup>. The Court upheld a 2015 judgement that greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by a minimum of 25% before 2020 compared to 1990 levels because of their serious impact on the rights to life and wellbeing.

This development also faces some backlashes. For example, in 2022, the Australian Federal Court overturned a ruling that found that Australia's environment ministry had a duty to protect young people from the effects of climate change in light of fossil fuel projects<sup>10</sup>. This showcases how legal institutions can be used to enforce rights for future generations, while also demonstrating that they alone may not be enough to guarantee their safe future.

Finally, an important recent development has been the establishment of a Commission of Small Island States (CSIS) on Climate Change and International Law by Tuvalu (in the Pacific), Antigua, and Barbuda (in the Caribbean), at COP26<sup>11</sup>. These countries demand climate compensation from the Global North for loss and damage caused by the ecological crisis. The creation of CSIS has the potential to become a significant milestone in international law, holding countries accountable for practices that contribute to climate change. CSIS aims at getting other countries on board, especially with instrumental support from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). This example portrays how legal claims for future rights between States is an emerging area for legal action.

### **Multi-level governance**

The ‘Intergenerational solidarity and the needs of future generations’ report, published by the UN Secretary-General in 2013<sup>12</sup>, recommended the creation of a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations. They proposed that the ombudsperson would advocate for the interests and needs of future generations as an international entity within the UN system. Although yet unrealised, this idea has recently come to life again and is being actively discussed with national-level institutions and policy-makers, expert groups, and international bodies. Just recently the UN set out guidelines for ensuring that future generations are part of decision-making processes around the world in its publication of ‘Our Common Agenda’ in September 2021<sup>13</sup>. Throughout the agenda, the UN foresees major developments:

- UN 2023 Summit of the Future
- United Nations Futures Lab
- Representation of succeeding generations, including:
  - A repurposed Trusteeship Council,
  - A Declaration on Future Generations, and
  - A United Nations Special Envoy for Future Generations

Overall, the report proposes the expansion of the UN’s capacity and mandate to govern future generations. The creation of a Future Lab could ensure that policies are future-oriented and that the impact of policies is assessed over time. The Trusteeship Council is expected to be repurposed as an inter-governmental platform for the interests of coming generations. Negotiating a Declaration on Future Generations could give future people a legal standing. Most of all, the UN support for the establishment of an UN Special Envoy for Future Generations is a landmark on global governance and a crucial step in creating momentum for the Future Generations movement.

In addition, there are already existing UN institutions whose goals indirectly support intergenerational justice and long-term sustainability and could support the creation of the Special Envoy, such as the UN Climate Change Envoy, UN Environment Programme, UN Women, and the Office of the UN Secretary General’s Envoy for Youth.

Furthermore, in consultation with the Group of Friends of Future Generations, the ‘Global Guardians: A Voice for Future Generations’ group was created in 2017<sup>14</sup>. The group is comprised of an informal Governmental group of over 20 New York-based Permanent Representatives to the UN. The objective was to ensure a future perspective when making decisions and to encourage the UN to play a bigger role in intergenerational equity. One outcome of the group was a meeting hosted by the office of the UN Deputy Secretary General in which different tracks to integrate intergenerational justice into work were set, e.g., the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) committed to reflecting on how the concept could be operationalised at the country level. Bodies such as this send signals to political leaders about the momentum building on the topic.

While climate change and other topics concerning future generations remain global issues, solutions sit at all levels of governance to address these challenges. A trend in governance towards increasing localisation of action, participatory and inclusive approaches, and self-governance is also important to acknowledge and consider in this sphere. This trend is seen in both climate change governance and mitigation literature and in the current international climate change regime’s commitment to a ‘bottom-up’ approach<sup>15</sup>. As an illustration of this, some of the leading governments on embedding concerns for future generations in their governance processes are sub-national or devolved governments, such as Wales, Scotland, and Goa, as illustrated in the coming sections. The role of the sub-national level is also crucial.

The first Hungarian Ombudsperson for future generations also pointed out that “due the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms under international law, the efforts of the national institutions in promoting sustainability and implementing international norms on the domestic level gain outstanding significance”<sup>16</sup>. The opportunity and potential for the role of an UN-level institutions at present is immense and needed.

## Non-government actors

There are many non-governmental actors who also play a key role in advocating for future generations. One important example is the Mary Robinson Foundation, founded by Mary Robinson. Robinson, a leading voice on climate change, is chair of The Elders, an independent group of global leaders advocating in favour of human rights and social justice. The Mary Robinson Foundation was active from 2010 to 2019, scaling down in 2019 after having successfully met its aspirations to place climate justice on the political agenda<sup>17</sup>. The Foundation was one of many voices advocating for the establishment of an institution for future generations at the UN level.

A second example is the Goa Foundation, an organisation working to protect environment and people in Goa. The foundation has filed more than 200 litigation cases, as well as guiding key movements, like the Goenchi Mati Movement<sup>18</sup>. Their advocacy promotes the principle of intergenerational equity and raises awareness on the need for fairer mining practices with a long-term perspective. They have posed a series of demands to reform unsustainable mining in the region. Their work led to a decision by the Supreme Court to implement intergenerational equity in Goa's mining practices.

## 2.2 Mapping current institutions for future generations

Institutions come in a variety of forms with varying remits and functions<sup>19, 20</sup>. They refer to both government bodies and committees and groups that exist within the broader context of parliamentary processes. When talking about institutions for future generations, specialised institutions are most referred to. Examples are ombudsperson, commissions, or institutionalised councils. Two common features of specialised institutions exist: institutions which are designed to have a specific remit for future generations or intergenerational justice, and those with a broader sustainable development remit. While these concepts are linked, institutions which focus explicitly and specifically on the future tend to use the opportunity to focus on longer-term dynamics rather than needing to balance them with short-term needs<sup>21</sup>. They are also often designed to be more separate or independent from government than other institutions, meaning they can interact differently in the governance landscape. The effectiveness of these institutions depends crucially on contextual factors, their design, and their embeddedness within the existing institutional and legal landscape<sup>22</sup>.

Many countries have sustainable development councils and committees supporting governments in putting forward Sustainable Development Goals. However, given their diversity and broad scope, many do not have clear remits specific to future generations governance. Those without clear remit are not captured here. However, while there is not yet a direct 'Commissioner/Ombudsman for Future Generations' in any country in Africa for example, there are more than 100 distinct committees, departments, and agencies established across various levels of governance in the continent, with mandates to preserve the environment, cultural heritage, and natural resources for present and next generations<sup>23</sup>. To cite a few examples: Kenya's National Environment Council; South Africa's Department of Environment Affairs; the Nigerian National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency<sup>24</sup>. Including future generations in the remit of these institutions has significant potential for impact. The table below presents the institutions that direct or indirectly advocate for safeguarding the interests, rights, and wellbeing of future generations:



**Table 1** Institutions for Future Generations

Country	Institution		Type	Position with respect to executive and legislature	Functions and Powers
	Direct priority	Indirect priority			
Australia (ACT)		Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment	Commissioner	Within the Minister for the Environment	Research/advisory; Complaints, Investigation
Canada		Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development	Commissioner	Within the Auditor General's office	Research/advisory; Audit
Finland	Committee for Future		Committee	Standing Committee of Parliament	Research/advisory; Education
Germany		Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Sustainable Development	Committee	Standing Committee of Parliament	Research/advisory; Monitoring/scrutiny
Gibraltar	Commissioner for Sustainable Development and Future Generations		Commissioner	Structurally independent from Government	Research/advisory; Agenda setting
Goa (India)	Expert Committee on a Cap (ECOC) - Intergenerational Equity		Committee	Constituted by Supreme Court	Research/advisory; Legal enforcement
Hungary	Ombudsperson for Future Generation		Ombudsperson	Structurally independent from Government	Research/advisory; Complaints; Investigation; Shaping constitutional jurisprudence
Israel	Commission for Future Generations		Commissioner	Parliamentary committee	Research/advisory; Initiate/veto legislation
Malta	Guardian of Future Generations		Committee/Board	Connected to Ministry for Sustainable Development, and appointed	Research/advisory; Observer
Netherlands	Self-Appointed Ombudsperson for Future Generations		(Informal) Ombudsperson	Informal	Campaigning; Education
New Zealand		Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment	Commissioner	Structurally independent from government	Research/advisory; Education; Investigation

Scotland	Scotland's Futures Forum		Advisory body	Structurally independent from government	Research/advisory; Education
Singapore	Centre for Strategic Futures		Advisory body	Within the Prime Minister's Office	Research/advisory; Education
Wales	Future Generations Commissioner		Commissioner	Structurally independent from government	Research/advisory; Recommendations are binding
United Kingdom	All-party parliamentary group on Future Generations		Committee	Parliamentary Committee	Research/advisory; Space for debate
Uruguay	Comisión Especial del Futuro		Committee	Parliamentary Committee	Research/advisory; Dialogue

Institutions follow many different concepts and models. Some are governed by statute, whereas others are more dependent on political decisions. The latter is the case of the **German** Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Sustainable Development (PACSD), in which the parliament decides in every electoral period how to define its goals, composition, and function<sup>25</sup>. The PACSD's explicit mandate for implementing intergenerational equity can be understood by the institution's use of intergenerational equity as a factor to assess the sustainability efforts in the government's progress. However, since the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, intergenerational equity is no longer used and has been replaced by the SDGs.

It is also notable that few institutions explicitly focus on future generations or intergenerational equity such as **Wales, Gibraltar, and Hungary**. There is a difference between institutions or processes where intergenerational justice is one aspect of their remit, or has become a part of their remit, and those for which it is the core tenet. In the parliamentary context, the tasks of the committee in Finland expand well beyond environmental norms and options. The **Finnish** Parliamentary Committee deliberates factors that influence the development of the future, future research, and the impacts of technological development rather than having a significant legal or policy role<sup>26</sup>.

Institutions can also be fragile, or become fragile over time, such as in the case of the Israeli Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations<sup>27</sup>. The Commission began operating in late 2001 with specific focus on the creation of 'a dimension of the future that would be included in the primary and secondary legislation of the State of **Israel**'. After some time, the Commissioner and his group of experts developed real influence across a wide policy spectrum. However, in 2006, with the conclusion of the Commissioner's term, no new commissioner was appointed and in 2010 the Commission's work ceased.

In 2021, **Uruguay** launched the Comisión Especial del Futuro. The Committee's focus relies on imagining the post-pandemic stage, with a leading role for technology, innovation, and social issues<sup>28</sup>. As with the Finnish case, it also expands beyond environmental sustainability.

Institutions also work in different levels of influence. The Commissioner in **New Zealand** reports to the Parliament through the Speaker of the House and the officers of Parliament Committee, being a separated entity from any Ministry<sup>29</sup>. In the case of **Goa, India**, a group of six experts of environmental areas were put together by the Supreme Court to form an Expert Committee on a cap on mining on the grounds of intergenerational equity and sustainable development<sup>30</sup>. More specifically, it was the outcome of the "Goa Foundation versus Union of India" case which began in 2012 when the local campaigning group filed the public interest litigation because of the continuation of illegal mining in Goa. The ECOC had clear demands to meet, and its final proposal was the institution of a Permanent Fund to allow for intergenerational equity to be implemented. The Centre for Strategic Futures in **Singapore** is an in-government, futures think tank particularly focused on the public sector and how to implement and support governmental, cross-departmental strategic thinking on risk and the future<sup>31</sup>.

The case of the **Dutch** institution is a unique example of an informal institution trying to exert influence beyond its formal power. The self-appointed Ombudsperson is not backed by any government mandate, but rather part of the Lab Future Generations foundation. They work on methods and instruments that can be used to include the welfare of future generations in decision making. This approach is more movement and momentum building than a formal authority.

In **Scotland**, the Scotland's Futures Forum works with key partners in academia and think tanks to create resources that support the Parliament to look towards the future. Recently, the Scottish Government has also announced that the country aims to establish a Future Generations Act and appoint a special Commissioner to ensure that future generations interests and concerns are considered in policymaking<sup>32</sup>.

In addition to these specific institutions, in numerous countries there is growing momentum towards new institutions. On such example is in Costa Rica. The country has received the ‘UN Champion of the Earth’ award in 2019, for its role in protecting the environment and combating climate change<sup>33</sup>. Costa Rica has also launched an ambitious National Decarbonization Plan by 2050, embedding long-term thinking into its governance strategy, and this is paired with other non-governmental movements. Another example is Jamaica; the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation (MEGJC)<sup>34</sup> and the Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (SEZ)<sup>35</sup>, a Governmental Agency for promoting development, have embraced the commitment to preserve the environment for this and future generations as one of their core values.

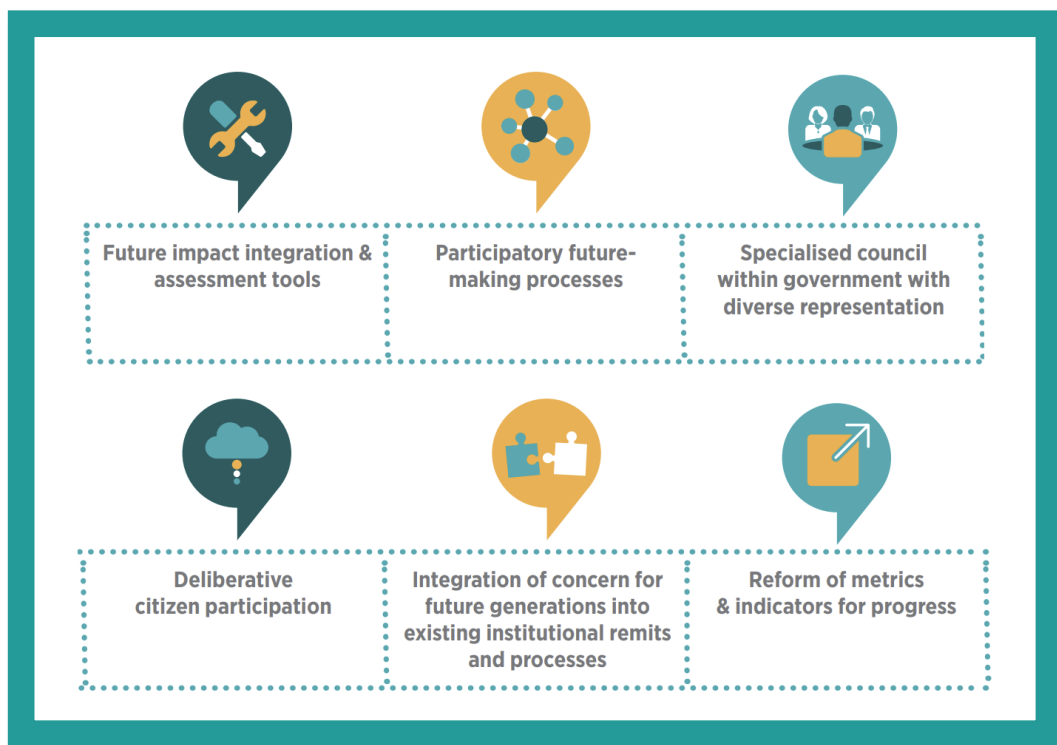
## 2.3 Processes for future generations governance beyond institutions

In addition to bringing future generations into decision making through formal institutions, there are also a broader set of mechanisms and processes that governments can use that may be more relevant for their national context and circumstances. Specialised institutions like the ones mapped above are just one form of governance mechanism in the large toolbox from which we can draw to identify ways to address short-termism in policymaking and ensure rights and wellbeing for future generations.

However, there are three common principles core to future generations governance that are often neglected in exchange for structural or legal discussions<sup>36</sup>. The principles are:

- **Integration:** we need to look beyond individual policies, and instead adopt processes and practices that enable us to pursue an integrated approach.
- **Participation:** governance needs to be approach not just as something that is done to people but *with* people.
- **Imagination:** to think about the future, we need to develop and nurture new socio-cultural imaginations about the future.

Following these principles, there is a spectrum of possibilities for governance processes and mechanisms to protect future generations. The graphic below outlines six different methods for future generations governance, looking beyond institutions. A full description of the characteristics of these processes and their examples can be found in The Futuring Tool<sup>37</sup>.



**Figure 1** Processes for Just Future-making

### **3. Review of the current NIFG**

This section will share a reflection on the NIFG, reflecting on key aspects of its structure and on its impacts. It will then go on to discuss a particularly relevant topic – the membership – before reflecting on the next steps in the future of the network.

NIFG is an independent, non-formal, international network encompassing national institutions advocating for future generations. The vision, mission, goals, and membership of the NIFG has been developed and honed by the membership between 2016 and 2018. During this period, various documents formalised these approaches, including a mission statement, annual reports, and terms of reference, among others. These outline some core aspects of the Network, as can be found on the NIFG's [webpage](#). This is an important step in setting up the network and forms a solid foundation on which to build moving forward.

**Vision:** The Network of Institutions for Future Generations “NIFG” envisions a world where the interests, rights, and wellbeing of future generations are valued, protected and promoted.

**Mission:** The main mission of NIFG is:

- a) To **ensure the interests**, rights and wellbeing of future generations are endorsed and realised by decisionmakers in all sectors of society, in national, regional, and international policymaking and practice;
- b) To **encourage the establishment of institutions** worldwide whose mandate includes safeguarding the interests, rights, and wellbeing of future generations.

**Goals:**

- a) To **share institutional best practices** and encourage learning among members;
- b) To **encourage the establishment of institutions** worldwide whose mandate includes safeguarding the interests, rights and wellbeing of future generations;
- c) To **raise awareness in the local, national, regional, and global arena** (throughout both public and private sectors) and promote the concept and means of safeguarding the interests, rights, and wellbeing of future generations (in all areas of policymaking and public discourse);
- d) To **work with the United Nations and other key international organisations and stakeholders** as well as with member states of the UN towards better safeguarding and manifestation of the interests, rights, and wellbeing of future generations.

### 3.1 Impact of the Network

The network has played an important role in increasing momentum at the global level for institutions for future generations. National developments as well as international engagements of the membership have contributed to this momentum. Some of these activities include:

- Network Chair Sophie Howe speaking at global events i.e., UN Environment Youth Summit, World Government Summit, High-Level Political Forum, COP26 etc.
- Publication of the SDG and future generations policy paper at the UN HLPF<sup>38</sup>
- Bilateral meetings undertaken by the current and former Hungarian Ombudsperson for Future Generations, notably with UK government and Normandy Chair for Peace on establishing similar institutions

Impact and achievements NIFG members:

- The **Israeli Commission for Future Generations'** efforts on the institutionalisation of the concept of future generations in all levels of governance seem to especially have taken shape in the Sustainable Development Strategy published two years after the creation of the Commission, which includes tasks allocated to each Ministry (and to be delivered by their budget)<sup>39</sup>
- The office of the **Australian Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (ACT)** has published a series of special reports, such as the State of the Environment Report 2019<sup>40</sup>
- The **Canadian Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development** was instrumental in the development of the Federal Sustainable Development Act<sup>41</sup>
- The **Finnish Committee for the Future** and the European Commission have had exchanges on the development of strategic foresight. Enhancing cooperation with the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS) continues the dialogue on the topic<sup>42</sup>
- **In New Zealand**, the Commissioner reported that around 60% of its recommendations have been adopted or partially adopted from 2009 to 2014<sup>43</sup>

- **The Hungarian Ombudsperson for Future Generations** is working with the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and the Environment in developing thematic reports, the practice of Hungarian Ombudsman for Future Generations is often referenced as best practice
- The **Hungarian Ombudsperson for Future Generations** is working with the UN in their two human rights-focused networks: Global Association of National Human Rights Institution (GANHRI) and the European Network of Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI)
- The **German Parliamentary Advisory Council for Sustainable Development** included inter-generational equity in their monitoring framework. The implementation of a new monitoring framework, using the Sustainable Development Goals, may allow for a more holistic framework for the government and more clear indicators
- The **Commissioner in Gibraltar** worked closely with the Department of Education as well as other stakeholders in the country to embed sustainability principles in the design and development of new school buildings, as well as to carry out awareness campaigns about sustainability
- The **Dutch Ombudsperson for Future Generations** together with the Lab Future Generations are developing a series of instruments for businesses and governments which aim to embed long-term thinking into decisions, such as The Futures Councils<sup>44</sup> and the Future Thinking Toolkit<sup>45</sup>
- **Wales'** Well-being of Future Generations Act is a world-leading piece of legislation which puts a legal obligation on public bodies in Wales to act today for a better tomorrow, and has, for instance, reflected on a framework for how public services work together to respond to the challenges of COVID-19

Through these impacts, the network has also made steps towards realising their goals.

### 3.2 Overview of membership and potential members

The membership and composition of the membership and type of members has varied throughout the network's existence and provides a diverse list of institutions of countries, states and regions established to be advocates for safeguarding the interests, rights, and wellbeing of future generations. An overview is presented in Table 2, below.

**Table 2** NIFG Membership

Members & potential members	Type of Institution	Focus & Reflections
Wales – Future Generations Commissioner	Commissioner (Chair)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: sustainable development; long-term perspective on policy</li> <li>Approach: policy framework of collective responsibility and accountability; legal foundations and strong remit</li> <li>Internationally active, supporting UN developments</li> </ul>
Hungary – Ombudsperson for Future Generation	Ombudsperson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: environmental protection; nature conservation; cultural heritage protection</li> <li>Holistic approach: lawyers, economists, biologists</li> <li>Important pillar of the Hungarian system, contributes to developing constitutional jurisprudence by working closely with the Constitutional Court</li> </ul>
Israel – Commission for Future Generations	Commissioner – Disbanded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: advance a ‘dimension of the future’ into primary and secondary legislation</li> <li>Comprised of a variety of legal fields: the environment, development, education, health, the economy, technology, etc.</li> <li>Reasons for dissolution: 1 – costs; 2 – feeling the Commission received too much authority to interfere in the concerned areas</li> </ul>
Gibraltar – Commissioner for Sustainable Development and Future Generations	Commissioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: bringing the agenda forward, education and capacity building; dialogue and multi-stakeholder engagement</li> <li>Internationally active, supporting UN developments</li> </ul>
Netherlands – Informal Ombudsperson for Future Generations	Ombudsperson – Informal / Self-Appointed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: public, business, and political buy-in, collaborative approach</li> <li>Pushing for the position of Ombudsperson Future Generations to be officially recognised by the Dutch government</li> </ul>
Canada – Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development	Commissioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: audit government departments’ progress/lack of progress toward sustainable development</li> <li>Commissioner as a credible voice in Canadian environmental landscape</li> </ul>
New Zealand – Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment	Commissioner (Inactive Member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: the environment and natural resources; ecosystems restoration</li> <li>Body has devoted most of its resources to environmental policy and regulatory issues, and as a discretionary investigator of serious environmental risks</li> </ul>
Finland – Committee for the Future	Committee (Inactive Member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus: alternative futures; factors that influence the development of the future, e.g., technology</li> </ul>



Australia (ACT) – Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment	Commissioner – Disbanded (Inactive Member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus: the environment; territorial management; sustainability</li> <li>• Acting on a regional level rather than national</li> </ul>
Germany – Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Sustainable Development	Committee (Inactive Member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus: sustainability policy and institutionalisation</li> <li>• Legal basis valid only for the respective electoral period &amp; part of a complex landscape</li> </ul>

There is some divergence across the current members and other stakeholders around what the future of the membership should look like, however there is unanimity that it should be expanded and diversified to include the full diversity of regions, institutions, and broader movement working on this topic.

As is clear in the sections above, a broader movement exists that is pushing for long-term thinking and future generations rights and options in governance and policy processes. Connecting to this movement of additional organisations and institutions strengthens the network, helps to build the momentum of the agenda, and supports the network in reaching its goals.

## **4. Future scenarios**

This section will outline some of the possible future scenarios for the network in consideration of its current trends.

### **4.1 Future Trends**

#### **Demographic change**

While many countries are seeing their population ageing, the scale, pace, and type of demographic change varies greatly across regions. Over the next decades we will see significant shifts in where and how people are living. Specifically, this includes growing urban populations, and growing populations in Africa and Asia, with 85% of the population anticipated to live in the two continents by the end of the century<sup>46</sup>. This makes it particularly important that the future of the Network of Institutions for Future Generations should increase focus on representation of the Global South.

#### **Socioeconomic and Ecological Inequalities**

Growing inequality risks disrupting the socioeconomic and ecological systems of many places and countries. We cannot build intergenerational equity without decreasing social, ecological, and regional inequalities which exacerbate the former in the first place. An expanded network will have to open dialogues on the perceived trade-off between present needs and future needs and work towards solutions which build hope for both.

#### **Future of work**

Digitalisation presents both new opportunities as well as challenges to next generations<sup>47</sup>. The restructuring of global value chains also has the potential to affect labour markets around the world, especially in the Global South. This also increasingly connects the world and makes a global network and global peer-learning more possible. However, it also means that our sense of place, home, and how we live and work will change.

#### **Risk and Uncertainty**

It has become apparent in the context of a sudden global pandemic, that uncertainty is a central feature of the geopolitical system. Climate change is already a key cause for sudden change and uncertainty in many regions around the world. Structural capacities need to be built to work with uncertainty, complexity, and future thinking in order to cope with our current turbulence. This is a skill needed both for the future and in the future.

#### **Opportunities**

As a backdrop to this review, there are many international opportunities to move the agenda of institutions for future generations forward. The first of which is the **Stockholm+50** summit, where key actors recently gathered to discuss the past and future of international work on environment and sustainability. In addition, further multilateral opportunities for agenda setting, peer learning, and momentum building will also take place at the **UN's Annual High Level Political Forum** and at the anticipated **UN Summit of the Future**. The latter presents an opportunity to bring the discussion about

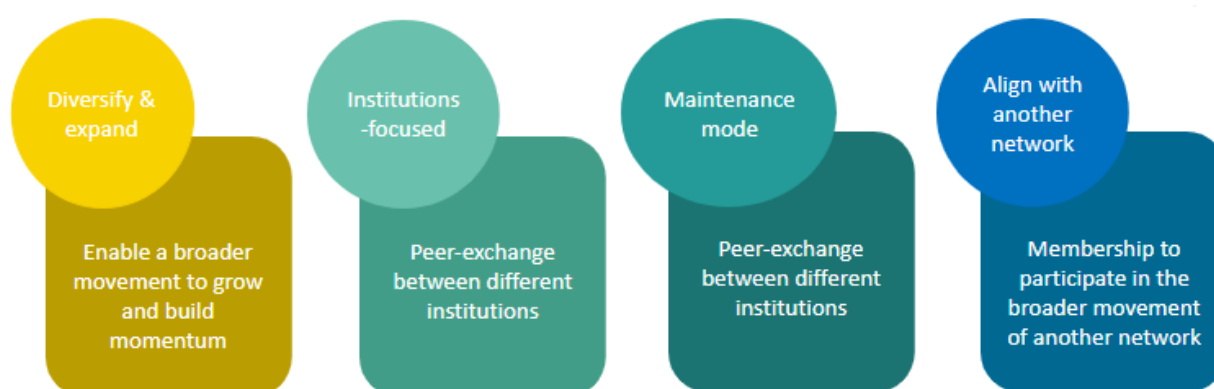
institutions for future generations to the fore, and announce a reinvigorated network strategy, plan, and organisational setup and mandate.

Looking further into the future, the original deadline of the **SDGs** is fast approaching in 2030 and a renewed political commitment to meeting them is needed, as well as a discussion on what follows. There is also potential to connect the agenda of future generations and long-term thinking to the renewed or updated sustainable development agenda.

## 4.2 Overview of future scenarios

Looking at the future of the network, four scenarios are developed as possible pathways forward:

Image 2. Future scenarios' Strategies



### **Diversify & expand**

This pathway includes expansion and diversification of the membership, focusing on growth of impact, presence, and outreach. It would require a strategy and plan of action and a team dedicated to delivering that. It would seek to grow a bigger movement and momentum. This specifically also needs to include greater representation and engagement in the Global South.

### **Institutions-focused**

This pathway would see a focus on government institutions or other government bodies and focus on building connections between these and peer learning and support. It would require a small support resource that functions mostly as a coordination point.

### **Maintenance mode**

This pathway would acknowledge that the work associated with keeping up such a network is not feasible and would downscale the network to remain an informal group which gathers on an informal basis. In this scenario there would be no work plan and it would exist based on relations between individuals.

### **Align with another network**

This pathway would see the NIFG merge with or shift to come under the umbrella of another network which works on similar topic, for example a network working on the SDGs or as a part of the UN architecture. For example, the UN Foundation, working in collaboration with the UN Secretary-General's Office, is seeking to identify whether UN Member States have an appetite to create a Group of Friends for Future Generations, following the UN General Assembly's discussion of the UN Secretary-General's proposals for Future Generations.

## **5. Conclusion**

Stockholm+50 was both a landmark moment and a cause for reflection. For 50 years, the international community has come together to build momentum and act for sustainable development. This has resulted in a number of important steps: from increasing national environmental regulation, to an international climate agreement, to improved data, growing education and skills development programmes, and business engagement. However, it is clear that to truly ensure the needs and rights of future generations, more action is needed. Facing the challenges of the next 50 years will require an increase in ambition and commitments: the moment is ripe for a new kind of institution to deliver on the commitment to future generations.

NIFG plays an instrumental role in supporting the expansion of such institutions globally to ensure our governance systems rise to the challenges we face. Looking forward, the network aspires to increase the geographic scope of the membership, support other institutions to develop and participate, and increase the impacts national and international bodies have in protecting the interests of future generations.

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