Summary of the Workshop: "Measuring Intergenerational Fairness: Indicators for Future-fit Governance in the EU"

Building economies that deliver wellbeing for all —now and in the future—requires complex tools. In this context, MERGE, a Horizon Europe-funded project, aims to connect science and policy to advance the uptake of new metrics and models that capture the multidimensional nature of wellbeing and can support sustainable and inclusive wellbeing (SIW) policies. As part of its policy stream, MERGE has convened a series of workshops to explore how SIW metrics can support the impact of high-priority EU policy files.

On October 21st, 2025, the final workshop in this series gathered policymakers from EU and international institutions who explored how to **translate "future wellbeing" into actionable indicators**. The insights from the discussion aimed to inform progress toward long-term governance and notably the **Intergenerational Fairness (IGF) Strategy**, and the design of its monitoring framework and potential index.

Key takeaways

- **Monitoring intergenerational fairness requires diverse, forward-looking and systemic long term governance indicators:** Emphasis was placed on capturing trajectories, early-warning signals, and societal capacities (e.g., social connectedness, civic engagement, time-use patterns) to inform proactive governance.
- **Clarifying what success looks like**, and setting actionable common targets, along with indicators that can demonstrate clear policy impact, is critical for prioritising the SIW indicators most useful for long-term governance.
- **Social connectedness and participation are important but also challenging indicators signalling long term wellbeing.** Beyond individual wellbeing, social cohesion, intergenerational relations and transmission, as well as trust were identified as critical, yet under-monitored drivers of future wellbeing and societal resilience. Innovation in data collection and integration of the data into monitoring framework would be crucial for guiding long-term social policy.

Participants were invited to explore how SIW metrics can help the EU understand the long-term impacts of today's decisions, so that they ensure the wellbeing of current and future generations, for example by helping anticipate future trajectories and detecting emerging risks and opportunities.

People were invited to reflect on the six building blocks of intergenerational fairness, as identified during the JRC's EU policy lab workshops for building the IGF strategy:

1. Advancing equitable prosperity and wellbeing.
2. Strengthening proactive social resilience.
3. Acting with ecological integrity.
4. Fostering inclusive, interdependent communities.
5. Creating transparent, participatory governance
6. Advancing human-centric technologies.

A variety of propositions were made by participants reflecting the breadth and multidimensionality of the topic, as well as the challenge of creating a finite framework that can be an efficient monitoring tool. The following summary recalls in three axes the main highlights from the discussions.

I. How to monitor for the future?

Monitoring for the future represents both a technical challenge and a political necessity. It requires balancing the uncertainty of long-term projections with the need for evidence to guide policies towards desirable and intergenerationally fair futures. The current measures integrated into the monitoring frameworks for policymaking usually rely on input and output metrics, or on ex-post outcomes indicators. This can create a blind spot in monitoring for emerging trends, systemic risks or the cumulative effects of today's decisions on future generations. Participants reflected on how to monitor those pathways towards different futures and the signals they could look for to assess whether we are moving towards a desirable future.

- **Monitoring basic needs and access to services today.**

Access to housing, health, employment, energy, or education, and the inequalities of this access across and within generations form the foundations for individual and societal trajectories. Tracking improvement or deterioration in these key areas can signal whether our societies are delivering progress and good living standards over time. It also matters because shortcomings today have lasting impacts on tomorrow's wellbeing: when basic needs are not met, people struggle to build and transmit economic, human and social capital. Disparities in access also risk reinforcing inequalities within and across generations, as early disadvantages tend to accumulate over time and be transmitted from parents to children. Monitoring fair and secure access to basic needs and services is therefore essential to prevent the reproduction of structural inequities and to enable future generations to thrive.

- **Monitoring for future risks and potential disruptions.**

This approach reflects the one of strategic foresight and many of the signals echoed the risks uncovered in the EU's 2025 Strategic Foresight report. Proposals included tracking individual-level risks, such as screen time or exposure to harmful online content, as well as broader societal risks, notably for cohesion, including levels of misinformation, concentration of economic and political power, or the influence of tech companies in governance. Monitoring those risks can reveal early signs of systemic weakening and by identifying them early, policymakers can take action to prevent backsliding and safeguard societal resilience. Participants also proposed monitoring protective measures against those threats (eg. consumer protection, preparedness of all age groups, voluntary civil and military protection).

- **Monitoring the ability, both in will and in action, of societies to build today the structural conditions for long-term wellbeing.**

Beyond responding to emerging risks, societies should invest today in the structures that will underpin future wellbeing, so that future generations can thrive.

This includes the development and transmission of social and human capital across the life course and across generations. This also means building our living environments around sustainable and inclusive infrastructures, tailored for social inclusion (eg. measuring social and intergenerational housing, access to sport and culture). More broadly, this means putting societies on the path of a safe operating space on our planet, by monitoring planetary boundaries to ensure the conservation of essential resources (e.g. measuring circular economy production) and ensuring ecological stability.

To be able to build these foundations, our collective objectives and priorities must align. Participants proposed several indicators that could shed light on our societal priorities: media attention to future generations and to nature preservation, people's connection with nature, development of community-building technologies for beyond profit motives.

These three points show that monitoring for the future requires understanding current conditions, anticipating emerging risks, and assessing whether we are laying the structural foundations for long-term, intergenerational wellbeing. Only this full picture can support resilient and equitable futures.

II. What types of indicators are needed?

Indicators for monitoring long-term wellbeing must capture the complex, multidimensional, and intergenerational nature of progress. They need to include not only traditional quantitative metrics but also qualitative, subjective, and emergent metrics, that can reflect lived experiences and collective capacities.

- **Forward-looking and predictive:** Beyond ex-post outcomes, data should capture trajectories, early-warning signals, and vulnerabilities that indicate potential backsliding or emerging risks. This requires time-series data, scenario modelling, and projections.
- **Granular:** To reveal inequalities, differences in experiences, and intergenerational fairness, data must be broken down by age, region, socioeconomic status, and other relevant demographics. This could help target age-specific issues, for instance youth mental health, willingness to say in their home region, preparedness across age groups, or access to basic services in rural areas.
- **"Soft" signals:** Alongside quantitative measures, qualitative and subjective data are needed, for example to measure social cohesion, intergenerational transmission, confidence in the future, trust, or sense of belonging. Progress has been made in recent years, for example, in measuring subjective wellbeing as part of the EU-SILC survey. Still, many "soft signals" (e.g. children happiness, growth mindset, shared vision, parent involvement in children's development) continue to be difficult to collect and thus remain sparse in current monitoring frameworks.

- **Time use:** Patterns of time allocation across work, care, leisure, and civic engagement helps understanding of social structures, capacities, and intergenerational resource distribution. For example, it can highlight pressures of caregiving responsibilities, or who spends time on civic participation or cultural activities.
- **Interconnected and systemic indicator frameworks and models:** Indicator frameworks and models should allow analysis of dependencies and feedback loops across dimensions. For instance, models, which have been developed within fields such as ecological economics and are currently being advanced by Horizon Europe funded projects like MAPS, MERGE, and WISE Horizons, offer promising tools. These models can explore trade-offs, simulate synergies, and identify pathways toward sustainable and inclusive wellbeing

Focus: Measuring social connectedness.

A key topic that could be the focus of future data innovation is the improved measurement of social connectedness. Social connectedness is central for intergenerational fairness but also more broadly for the health of our societies. Across most topics, participants highlighted the importance of better understanding and fostering connections between people within and across generations. This topic has been getting renewed attention in policymaking notably since the global pandemic, but also in the context of population ageing and economic crisis. This has translated into efforts to better measure both exclusion (e.g. at-risk-of-poverty-and-exclusion indicator, ad-hoc survey on loneliness) and inclusion (e.g. people's participation in activities and volunteering in the EU-SILC survey). However, these surveys are collected infrequently or ad-hoc.

Social connectedness goes beyond the issue of loneliness; it is also an issue at the societal level. It is not only about how people are doing individually but also how our societies work as a system of people who collaborate, coordinate, have solidarity with one another, and understand each other. Indicators at this level might include measures of polarisation, intergenerational trust, or collective knowledge, but these are difficult to monitor directly. Proxies could include monitoring policies that foster connections: community initiatives, democratic participation tools, migration policies, or redistribution policies (and the support for them). It could also be monitoring its risk factors: inequalities, inherited wealth disparities, and exclusion.

III. What use for policymakers and decision takers?

Indicators of sustainable and inclusive wellbeing are only useful if they inform action. Deciding what to measure requires clarifying what society values and what outcomes we want to achieve, and how we define a thriving society.

The complexity and multidimensionality of intergenerational fairness mean that it could be monitored by a multitude of SIW indicators. But to be useful, monitoring frameworks must balance comprehensiveness with practicality. What should we measure to capture real impact, and how will indicators guide decisions? For example, a key question for intergenerational fairness is the integration of young and future generations into decision-making. One could measure the existence of new participation mechanisms (e.g. youth tests, citizen panels), but how to measure that their inputs are being taken forward?

More broadly, participants discussed how to enable more long-term governance practices. For example, they mentioned monitoring for intergenerational fairness impacts in impact assessments and reflected on the use of innovative practices such as the precautionary principle, the Do No Significant Harm principle, sand box exercises, and value-based government procurement. Going further than just the IGF monitoring framework, it shows new opportunities of interest for long term governance.

Conclusion:

The workshop highlighted the complexity and richness of integrating SIW indicators into policymaking for long-term governance. While the discussion confirmed the value of multidimensional and forward-looking indicators, it also emphasised the challenges of defining objectives, setting targets, and monitoring both current outcomes and future risks. New insights emerged around the need to capture structural investments, social connectedness tools, mechanisms and outcomes, and time use, while addressing significant data gaps and the difficulty of achieving full EU coverage and disaggregation.

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