MERGE Workshop “Measuring Intergenerational Fairness: Indicators for Future-fit Governance in the EU”

21 October 2025
Joint Research Centre Policy Lab CDMA Building,
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Building economies that deliver sustainable and inclusive wellbeing for all—now and in the future—requires complex tools. In this context, MERGE, a Horizon Europe-funded project, aims to foster science-policy exchange on developing indicators and models to strengthen sustainable and inclusive wellbeing policies.

Through its policy stream, led by ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies and the European Policy Centre (EPC), **MERGE conducts "policy deep dives" workshops** to analyse how a holistic set of metrics can enhance and monitor the implementation of key EU policies. This workshop is the last in a series of six workshops on (non-legislative and legislative) priority files for the 2024-2029 European Commission[1].

Objective:

This workshop aims to identify **how sustainable and inclusive wellbeing (SIW) indicators can be applied in a forward-looking way** to reveal the pathways the European Union (EU) is taking towards a desirable and fair future for both current and future generations. The insights can support future-oriented governance processes and inform the Intergenerational Fairness (IGF) Strategy in creating a monitoring tool and index. The workshop will focus on discussing how to measure future well-being, identifying indicators that can anticipate risks, opportunities, and long-term trajectories, to ensure equity across generations.

Focus:

This workshop will concentrate on the challenge of **translating the idea of “future well-being" into concrete recommendations of metrics** for EU policymaking. Participants will explore how SIW metrics could be used by the European Commission to anticipate what the EU’s future will look like for both current and future generations. Instead of taking stock of where we are, we want to look

[1] Past workshops covered the new Multiannual Financial Framework, the Clean Industrial Deal, Competitiveness, and Social Europe. An upcoming session will focus on the European Semester.

forward, to understand whether the EU is on the right path towards the desirable futures built during the IGF strategy visioning phase. The discussion will, for example, consider how SIW metrics could be used as **early signals of progress or emerging risks** (e.g., resilience capacities and vulnerabilities indices[i]), how their evolution could be **projected into the future through modelling methods** (e.g. inequality projections[ii]) or if other **innovative approaches** could help anticipate long-term outcomes and intergenerational impacts. In this regard, this workshop adopts a horizontal perspective following previous sector-specific sessions. It aims to support forward-looking governance practices, notably the ongoing Intergenerational Fairness Strategy process.

Agenda

09:00	Breakfast and welcome.
09:30	Introduction to MERGE
09:40	Setting the scene
10:00	First break-out group activity
10:30	Plenary
10:40	Second break-out group activity
11:20	Plenary and closing

Workshop Discussion

The context:

Faced by a changing world in polycrisis, characterised by high uncertainty, the EU has already made important efforts to strengthen its forward-looking governance in the EU. For example, it has **introduced strategic foresight** into impact assessments, developed an annual Strategic Foresight Report, and created the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) network. With the IGF Strategy process, there is now a new opportunity to embed long-term, intergenerational thinking into EU policymaking.

It is important to consider how the IGF strategy's effectiveness could be measured over time. A robust monitoring framework, potentially taking the form of an index, could accompany the strategy to track progress, signal emerging risks or opportunities, and guide actionable policy decisions where action is most needed in the EU.

In the case of the IGF strategy, because it aims to safeguard the interests of both current and future generations, the monitoring framework would ideally be able to look beyond the present. At the

same time, the framework would still provide insights that can realistically be acted upon in current policymaking cycles.

Challenges and opportunities

Existing monitoring frameworks tend to prioritise indicators which are already available, as this is high quality, easily understood data that is already monitored, available, and comparable across Member States. While this has advantages, such as limiting the creation of new administrative burden, this can also limit innovation and the integration of novel, future-oriented metrics.

Policymakers need tools to anticipate trajectories and potential future scenarios, rather than only assessing current outcomes. The European Commission already calculates medium to long-term projections of certain environmental, social and economic indicators in specific domains, for example:

- The EU's greenhouse gas emissions projections to 2050[iii],
- Projections of population ageing and its impact on future dependency ratios and public spending to 2070[iv],
- Market projections for agricultural production, consumption or land use to 2035[v].

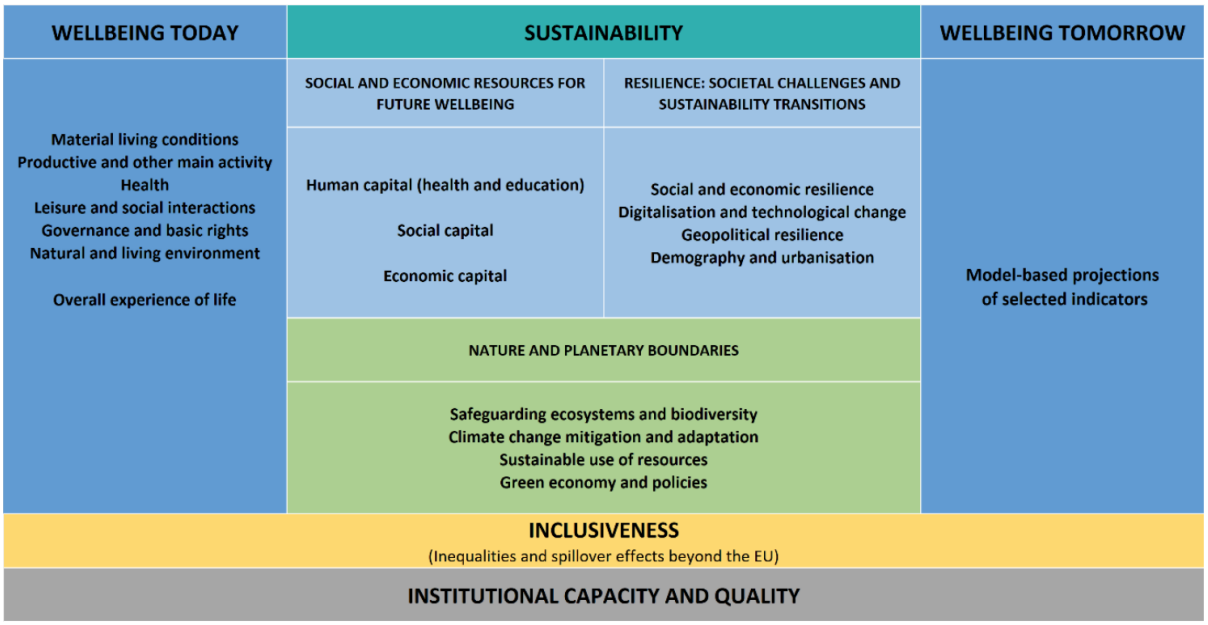
Through the Horizon Europe programme, for example, with MERGE and its siblings projects ToBe and WISE Horizons, **new and more holistic models for projections,** including monetary, biophysical and social indicators, are being developed, paving the way toward more integrated and future-oriented scenario analyses that account for intergenerational impacts.

Additionally, these EU initiatives are complemented by **modelling efforts at the international level**, for example, with the OECD's global long-run economic scenarios, the United Nations' World Population Prospects, the International Resource Panel's resource-use scenarios, and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis' population and human capital projections.

Together, these approaches provide a foundation for bringing future-oriented insights into EU policymaking. The challenge and opportunity lie in translating them into indicator frameworks to track progress on strategies and policies designed to shape long-term outcomes that are fair for current and future generations.

In this context, **the Commission's Joint Research Centre has developed the Sustainable and Inclusive Well-being dashboard.** This multidimensional dashboard is built on six pillars, including pillars dedicated to measuring social and economic resources for future well-being, resilience, and one pillar, well-being tomorrow, which would contain model-based projections of selected indicators of wellbeing and inclusiveness.

Figure 1. Main components and their dimensions of the SIWB framework (revised)



Source: by the authors, from Benczur et al. (2024).

Additionally, **the Resilience Dashboard** provides information on existing and emerging challenges for building resilient societies in the EU, while the **Strategic Foresight Report and the ESPAS Global Trends Reports** examine possible trajectories for the EU, discussing risks and opportunities. These new tools are bringing valuable new perspectives for EU policymaking, but they are not yet systematically integrated into the monitoring of specific strategies or initiatives to guide their implementation and assess their impacts.

These initiatives offer **promising opportunities to create more comprehensive and forward-looking monitoring frameworks.** To ensure feasibility and impact, the indicator selection should consider risk of administrative burden, data availability and monitoring capacities in Member States and EU institutions.

Framing questions:

- How can SIW metrics inform us about the pathways the EU is taking towards its future across all domains (economic, social, and environmental) and ensuring fairness for future generations?
- What could measuring certain SIW indicators tell us about the needs of future generations?
- How could these indicators be integrated into existing processes, such as monitoring frameworks and impact assessments, to ensure new policy initiatives better account for long-term and holistic impacts?

Further readings:

EU Policy Lab. (2025). *Intergenerational Fairness Strategy: Scoping Report.* Joint Research Centre, European Commission.

European Commission (2025). *Future snapshots for intergenerational fairness*.

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Kubiszewski, I., Costanza, R., Eastoe, J., Lu, T., Mulder, K., Hernandez, G. P., Benczúr, P. & Dixson-Declève, S. (2025). Building consensus on societal wellbeing: a semantic synthesis of indicators to move beyond GDP. *Ecological Indicators,* 178, 114076.

Liu, K., Wang, R., Schrijver, I., & Hoekstra, R. (2024). Can we project well-being? Towards integral well-being projections in climate models and beyond. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 11(1), 1-11.

Silvi, M. & Bleys, B. (2024). *Policy Brief: Public support for Beyond GDP indicators and policy frameworks in the European Union*. MERGE project Deliverable 4.2.

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[i] European Commission. (2021). *Resilience Dashboards for the social and economic, green, digital, and geopolitical dimensions.* European Commission, Joint Research Centre.

[ii] Rao, N. D., Sauer, P., Gidden, M., & Riahi, K. (2019). Income inequality projections for the shared socioeconomic pathways (SSPs). *Futures, 105*, 27-39.

[iii] European Environmental Agency. (2024). *Trends and projections in Europe 2024; EEA Report 11/2024*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

[iv] European Commission. (2024). 2024 Ageing Report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU Member States (2022-2070). Institutional Paper 279. European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs.

[v] European Commission. (2024), EU agricultural outlook, 2024-2035. European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Brussels.

MERGE

Measuring what matters – policy pathways to sustainable and inclusive wellbeing

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