

GENERATION | squeeze

Generation Squeeze

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Chapeau

Securing the wellbeing of current and future generations requires governments and global multilateral institutions to design policies that are generationally fair. [Generational fairness](#) means young and old alike have the chance to thrive, while being good ancestors to those who follow in their footsteps. Within families, generations care for one another and strive to create a better future for their kids and grandkids. We are calling for the same intergenerational solidarity and long-term stewardship from our elected and global leaders. This commitment should be reflected in the Summit for the Future, the UN Common Agenda, and associated initiatives.

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

The concept of generational fairness is aligned with principles of sustainable development at the heart of the global SDGs. Both recognize our interdependence, and affirm that we collectively hold both rights and responsibilities to achieve social equity and wellbeing for all. Sustainable development and generational fairness also both prescribe the need for long-term planning to ensure that today's decisions and actions are not made at the cost of extracting too many of the diverse natural, economic and other resources younger and future generations need to secure their health and wellbeing. Our recent podcast with Canada's Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainable Development on [how we can make governments stop mortgaging the future](#) further explores these interconnections.

Bringing a generational fairness lens to dialogue on sustainable development encourages consideration not just of generations still to come, but also of growing inequalities that are (unevenly) affecting generations alive today – and the urgency of beginning with getting things right for the children, grandchildren and young people we love. The reason this is important is about both principles and tactics.

At the level of principles, in Canada we know that generational unfairness is the disease underlying many of our biggest problems: unaffordable housing, the high cost of raising a family, a deteriorating climate, age imbalances in government spending and debt, and rising medical care investments that are not making Canadians healthier. Focusing on generational unfairness is a way to tackle a key root cause of today's polycrisis – not just its symptoms. To this end, Generation Squeeze has developed [comprehensive policy solutions frameworks](#) to provide specific guidance to governments and citizens on necessary actions to address these crises.

At the level of tactics, the immediacy of asking people to think about how decisions we are collectively making today are *already* harming our immediate descendants is a powerful lever for action. Asking people to care about their kids, grandkids or other young people they love taps into immediate worries many already have. Similarly, quantifying the harms these younger people are facing right now is something concrete that often can be more easily understood – and mobilized around – than the potential for abstract future harms. The prescriptions that Gen Squeeze offers in order to get things right for younger people alive today are consistent with the practices and actions needed to create global and national governance that embraces the wellbeing of still-unknown generations to come.

Chapter II. International peace and security

(Add your organization's concise, concrete, and action-oriented recommendations for Chapter 2)

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

(Add your organization's concise, concrete, and action-oriented recommendations for Chapter 3)

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

Championing generational fairness means asking governments and global institutions to:

1. Be good stewards: Preserve what we hold sacred for those who follow: a healthy childhood, home, and planet.
2. Follow the intergenerational golden rule: Treat all generations as you would want your own generation to be treated.
3. Plan for all ages: Use our public resources wisely to meet the need of people of all ages, from the early years onwards.

This definition should be enshrined in international governance for younger and future generations.

While there is certainly value in engaging young people in correctly identifying problems and designing solutions, generational fairness should not be understood as a 'youth' issue. When the challenges facing younger people are described as youth issues, it [distracts](#) from the urgent need to draw attention to the root causes of today's polycrisis – and these root causes have less to do with the actions or attitudes of younger generations than their treatment by older ones as a result of past policy and governance decisions.

Here in Canada, younger people are struggling to afford housing, raise families, and cope with an increasingly unpredictable climate. The reasons for these obstacles can be traced back through several decades of short-sighted government policy decisions that are now eroding Canada's promise to younger and future generations. This harm wasn't intentional, yet Canada – like many other countries – failed to change course once the risks became clear and predictable.

The urgent need to reverse the deteriorating well-being of younger and future generations was embraced by an international coalition that came together in 2023 to launch a [worldwide day of action on intergenerational fairness](#). Voices from Canada, the US, Germany, UK, Netherlands, Japan, Nigeria, Australia and United Nations Foundation Next Generation Fellows joined together to call on

governments around the world to preserve what we all hold sacred – healthy childhoods, healthy homes, and a healthy planet – so that we can all be proud of the legacy we leave for those who follow.

International partners agree that governments around the world focus on solving short-term problems with little regard for long-term wellbeing or sustainability. Embedding generational fairness into national and international governance requires that we stop mortgaging the future to pay for things that are convenient in the present. Among other things, this includes extracting too much of the atmosphere's scarce capacity to absorb carbon, because we don't want to pay for our pollution or change our lifestyle and consumer habits. And it includes propping up unsustainable fiscal policies that grow spending on today's older demographics by shrinking what's left over to support the wellbeing of younger and future generations.

Fortunately, there is a remedy. Now is the time to explicitly enshrine responsibility for generational fairness in principles and the functions of national and global governance. This includes adopting an (appropriately framed) envoy position, a clear definition and commitment to intergenerational fairness, and formally marking a global day for intergenerational fairness. Such an ambitious upgrade to the intergenerational social contract will mean that national and global institutions will be better equipped to plan better for all age groups, invest urgently in well-being from the early years onward, and protect our aging loved ones while renewing their opportunity to leave a proud legacy.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

Generation Squeeze supports appointing a UN Special Envoy for Future Generations as a focal point for efforts to secure greater consideration of the long-term consequences of today's decisions for the wellbeing of those who follow. This position should be created in advance of the Summit for the Future. However, we do recommend two shifts in the way in which this Envoy position currently is being conceptualized.

First, the Future Generations Envoy is proposed in conjunction with a 'Youth Office'. We fear this conflation will perpetuate the misconception that pressing need to better account for the long-term consequences of today's decision is primarily a 'youth' issue or responsibility. As observed above, today's environmental, fiscal, wealth inequality and other pressing challenges are the product of past policy decisions that were not made by youth. Labelling these challenges as youth issues diminishes the responsibility of older generations for the current polycrisis – and without feelings of responsibility, there also may be less of a sense of obligation to actively contribute to solutions.

Second, a focus on future generations should be complemented by a focus on intergenerational tensions and unfairness in today's policies and institutions. The wellbeing of too many young people is already deteriorating. While a focus on fixing things for future generations will contribute to redressing this trend, it risks eroding the urgency and feasibility of taking action right now, for those alive today. A *Special Envoy for Intergenerational Fairness Today and in the Future* would make clearer the scope of the issues that need to be addressed (including current intergenerational tensions), and timelines under which we need to act (on behalf of today's younger demographics).