

Democratic Governance for the Future – an Atlas

Examples from around the world of institutional reforms to factor long-term interests and future generations into political decision-making



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Introduction

Given the confluence of social, economic, geopolitical and environmental challenges, political action increasingly lacks a strategic orientation and far-sightedness. While short-term reactions are the norm, long-term solutions are all too often absent or deferred. At the same time, the focus on election cycles and short-term interests is reinforced by a structural imbalance, as the concerns of young and future generations are under-represented in the political process – not least because of demographic change. In Germany, for example, over 40% of all eligible voters are over 60 years old, and this figure continues to rise over time. This imbalance contributes to a lack of long-term political orientation, which cuts across almost all policy areas – from dilapidated infrastructure and unsustainable pension policies to insufficient investment in education and an unequal distribution of the burdens of climate protection at the expense of future generations. According to recent studies, 7% of people in Germany believe that future generations will be better off, and 48% of young people are pessimistic about the future of society. A steady erosion of trust in political institutions is linked to manifest fears about the future, while polarized debates – especially in the digital sphere – continue to narrow the space for constructive dialogue about the future. Especially in a time of profound social transformation, there is a need for policy ideas that take future perspectives seriously and systematically integrate future justice into political decision-making processes.

It only seems logical to direct this demand directly to the government and to expect more far-sightedness from it. But that's not enough. Indeed, given the institutional framework in place, political actors have little incentive to consider the consequences of their actions beyond their term in office. On top of that, future generations cannot represent their interests themselves in discussions or elections, and both political decision-makers and voters tend to give greater weight to near-term concerns than to long-term needs. This, in combination with the short attention span of the media and deeply ingrained administrative practices, results in a system that is structurally geared more toward reaction than prevention.

Of course, Germany isn't the only democracy grappling with this problem. But attempts have been made in some other countries to bolster the political system with structures and/or processes that make it easier to take long-term interests into account. This atlas brings together international examples of such institutional responses to the short-term logic of democratic systems. The key findings from these reform processes have been compiled in short fact sheets on selected examples. However, not all of these reforms give cause for hope, as some have been abandoned after only a few years, while others have turned out to lack sufficient funding or mandates. Nevertheless, they do offer valuable insights into which instruments, procedures and mandates are suitable for counteracting the structural short-sightedness of democratic systems, which

ones fall short, which ones fail – and why. The examples show that democracies are entirely capable of reinventing themselves and creating structures that give greater weight to the future. They prove that, rather than necessarily being a utopian ideal, greater future justice can be achieved through institutional change.

Institutions pursuing similar goals already exist in Germany, such as the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development and Future-Related Matters, and the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development and Future-Related Matters (PBnEZ) – the latter two of which were explicitly expanded to include future matters during the current legislative period (2025–2029). Since 2024, there has also been a European Commissioner at the EU level for the first time who works on issues such as youth and intergenerational fairness, thereby raising the profile of long-term responsibility at the supranational level as well. Although these institutions are important building blocks of a long-term policy, they face structural limitations. For example, their mandates are sometimes narrowly defined, access to key decision-making processes is limited, and resources are often scarce. As a result, the German landscape resembles a patchwork quilt rather than a coherent architecture that reliably anchors future perspectives in the political process.

As illustrated by the cases described in this atlas, democracies definitely can find ways to strengthen long-term perspectives within institutions. While some models have proven to be particularly effective and stable, others have at least temporarily provided important impetus or enabled valuable learning gains. At the same time, it is clear that such reforms remain politically challenging and that their design must take the political context into account. It is precisely this mixture of successful approaches and challenging experiences that makes the examples so instructive. They provide valuable insights into which design principles can foster a future-oriented approach and which conditions are crucial for long-term success.

When considering what this kind of architecture could look like, it is worth taking a look at four criteria that are repeatedly identified as decisive in the international debate: effectiveness, feasibility, moral legitimacy and institutional sustainability. These criteria highlight the tensions inherent in institutional design. An institution can only strengthen future-oriented action if it genuinely influences decision-making processes. At the same time, it must also be realistically feasible within the framework conditions, which tend to be too short-term; provide convincing justification for its actions on behalf of future generations; and be designed in such a way that it can survive political changes. The examples presented in the atlas illustrate how challenging this balancing act is – and how strongly the political context determines whether forward-looking institutions remain sustainable and effective.

This atlas aims to contribute to enriching the debate on the future viability of democracy in Germany. Rather than a reform proposal, it is meant to be a guide: a collection of international experiences from which inspiration, cautionary notes and scope for action can be derived. The fact sheets are deliberately concise and follow a uniform structure that clearly presents the contexts in which the institutions were founded, their mandates, their working methods, their organizational anchoring, and their successes and challenges. They can naturally be read individually. But, together, they paint a broad picture of what democracies around the world are doing to make the interests of future generations more visible and impactful.

The selection of cases does not claim to be exhaustive and will be supplemented by further examples of reform in the coming years. Instead, the decisive factor in the selection process was to reflect various institutional logics, political levels and development paths – from ambitious ombudsman offices and comprehensive “foresight” systems to more symbolic or under-resourced institutions. What they share in common is that they represent an attempt to counteract the structural short-sightedness of democratic systems and to strengthen long-term thinking at the institutional level.

With this atlas, we would like to invite you to think about suitable models for Germany and beyond – and about how existing institutions could be further developed or new structures created. Rather than being an abstract ideal, future justice is a concrete challenge that needs to be tackled. The examples collected here show that democracies can find ways to effectively anchor consideration of the future in their processes and structures.

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Israel: Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations



An innovative institution with a very broad mandate that ultimately fell victim to its own strength.

2001–2006

Foundation & development

The office of the Commissioner for Future Generations was established by a legal amendment passed in 2001 in Israel's parliament, the Knesset, to counteract the short-sightedness of democratic decision-making and to represent future generations before the legislative branch. Although the amendment was only championed by a single member of parliament from a small liberal party, it enjoyed broad support in the Knesset. At the time, Israel was going through a rough patch economically and was being led by a center-right government.

Former judge and political adviser Shlomo Shoham was appointed for a five-year term. Contrary to the law, the position then remained vacant until it was finally officially abolished in 2010. The reasons cited for this included financing problems and conflicts between elected representatives and the experts appointed by parliament over the strength of the mandate.

Mandate & instruments

The Commissioner's legal mandate covered policy areas considered particularly relevant to future generations: the environment, natural resources, science, development, education, health, the economy, demography, planning and building, quality of life, technology, law and other areas that – according to the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee –

have clear implications for future generations. Foreign and security policy were excluded from this mandate. Air pollution, genetic engineering, pension systems and technological development were cited as specific examples.

Alongside [Hungary's Ombudsman for Future Generations](#), Israel's Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations is considered the most ambitious reform in terms of the breadth and depth of the mandate of a single institution for future generations. The Commissioner's main task was to advise the Knesset on the impact of draft legislation on future generations. With this in mind, all draft legislation that was not defined by law as confidential was sent to him for review. The Commissioner notified the Knesset Speaker about those drafts that he believed would have a clear impact on future generations. The chair of the relevant parliamentary committee was then obliged to invite the Commissioner to attend debates of the relevant committees to present a written evaluation. The Commissioner could determine the time required to collect data and prepare his evaluation, which was equivalent to a suspensive veto and could be used as a means of exerting pressure in the case of time-sensitive legislation affecting the budget. However, the Commissioner avoided making aggressive use of his de facto suspensive veto so as not to unnecessarily upset any members of parliament and jeopardize his office – especially since the Knesset law that established it could be amended by a simple majority.

The Commissioner was also able to propose laws and amendments himself and participate in all (non-secret) committee debates. The Commissioner's annual report had to be debated by the Knesset. In addition, the Commissioner was entitled to request comprehensive information and documents from all bodies subject to inspection by the State Comptroller, including government ministries and state-owned enterprises. Information and documents relating to Israel's foreign relations that were relevant to national security were excluded from this.

Organizational structure

The Commissioner had up to four staff members and an annual budget of 2 million New Israeli shekels (NIS, approx. €400,000) within the regular parliamentary budget, which was viewed as being very modest. According to Knesset law, candidates for the position of Commissioner had to be Israeli citizens with an academic degree and at least five years of professional experience in a relevant field, and they could not have been active in political life in the two years prior to their appointment. A parliamentary committee meeting open to the public proposed several candidates, and the Knesset Speaker appointed one of them as Commissioner. During his term of office, the Commissioner was not allowed to be a member of any political party. In the event of misconduct, the Commissioner could be dismissed after a hearing by the Knesset House Committee and the Knesset Speaker.

Concepts & methods

The Commissioner understood future generations to mean those who had not been born yet (i.e., the baby that will be born tomorrow and all those who will be born in the future). However, he was also asked to advocate for today's children – a request that he ultimately agreed to. This commitment to children's rights mitigated the perceived conflict between current and future generations.

One of the Commissioner's main tasks was to determine what exactly was meant by "the interests of future generations" in the first place. To do so, he sought advice from experts and initially focused intensively on the Israeli pension system. At the same time, rather than seeing himself as the person tasked with defining the specific interests of future generations, he was committed to ensuring that future generations had the widest possible range of choices. Accordingly, the Commissioner saw it as his duty to thwart political decisions that would severely restrict the scope for future decision-making. For example, he advocated for the long-term preservation of drinking water resources, the basic foundations of food production, and air quality, but also for the reduction of divisions and hatred within society.

In addition, the Commissioner adopted the established concept of sustainable development, as conceptualized in the Brundtland Report, to make the interests of future generations more tangible. The Commissioner used methods such as futurology, Delphi forecasting and the backcasting method, in which a desired future is envisioned and ways to achieve this future are identified and pursued.

Activities, opportunities & challenges

The Commissioner saw the constant survival mode in which Israel's population and politics found themselves as the biggest obstacle to a sustainable and long-term policy that does not simply defer problems into the future, as had been the case up to date. Accordingly, the Commissioner pursued three objectives in his work:

- (1) to lead Israeli society out of survival mode and into actively shaping the future,
- (2) to encourage the Knesset and the Government to think about the future and long-term planning horizons, and
- (3) to consistently integrate the future dimension into legislation and regulations.

The Commissioner and his staff

- worked on 273 issues;
- launched 166 legislative initiatives (including amendments to existing laws), of which 93 were successful;
- drafted 145 position papers, and
- published three detailed reports.

One of the Commissioner's main focuses was on protecting and preserving Israel's coastline for future generations, but his activities also included initiatives on youth participation, education, a sustainable national budget, reform of the pension system, and the promotion of preventive medicine. In addition to being in direct contact with political decision-makers, he regularly collaborated with members of civil society, academia and the media. He also sent them information that he had requested through his broad right to information in order to raise societal pressure and indirectly exert political influence.

The Commissioner's many successes included an air pollution control law to improve environmental health; a campaign to prevent childhood obesity, which also resulted in new legislation; the swift passage of a law for the integration of disabled children into the regular education system (for which he informally threatened government representatives with his suspensive veto); and various successful initiatives against soil sealing.

The unusually strong and far-reaching mandate of the parliamentary Commissioner was well suited to steering Israeli policy more toward future justice, even if better access to the Government would certainly have brought with it even greater opportunities to exert influence. The mandate was geared toward consultation, oversight and initiative, and it focused on a single expert: the Commissioner. At the same time, the office, mandate and budget – and, thus, the institution's ability to resolve conflicts – were constantly threatened by Israel's volatile politics, which ultimately called into question the (actually quite modest) costs and democratic legitimacy of the institution.

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Hungary: Ombudsman for Future Generations



Once strong and with a mandate focused on the environment, the Ombudsperson lost independence following the Orbán government's 2011 reform of the constitution.

Since 2008

Foundation & development

The creation of the office of Ombudsman for Future Generations as a parliamentary commissioner in 2007 was the result of a multiyear campaign by the non-governmental organization “Védegylet” (Protect the Future), which was launched in the early 1990s. There were three parliamentary initiatives in the 2000s and although the first two failed, they nevertheless laid the foundation for the successful third attempt. At the end of 2007, during a difficult time for the country's economy, the Ombudsman Act was finally passed almost unanimously after the original draft had been amended through numerous compromises. In addition, László Sólyom – a supporter of the rights of future generations, former constitutional judge and former member of Védegylet – had been elected president in 2005. On May 26, 2008, Dr. Sándor Fülöp was elected the first Ombudsman for Future Generations.

In late 2011, during efforts to reform Hungary's constitution, the Fidesz-KDNP coalition led by Viktor Orbán – which enjoyed a two-thirds majority after its election victory in 2010 – curtailed the powers and resources of the Ombudsman. The office was placed under the authority of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, to whom the Ombudsman was now required to report, thereby losing his independence. This prompted Sándor Fülöp, who had also become embroiled in a conflict with a wealthy supporter of the Orbán government, to resign prematurely on September 1, 2012.

Today, the Office of the Ombudsman for Future Generations continues to exist as one of two deputy commissioners of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, and it is firmly anchored in the new constitution and the amended Ombudsman Act. The mandate and responsibilities have remained largely unchanged in formal terms, but they can only be exercised in agreement with the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights. The following description refers to the period from 2008 to 2011, when the Ombudsman for Future Generations was still an independent parliamentary commissioner.

Mandate & instruments

The Ombudsman's mandate was laid down in the Ombudsman Act, but it was also based on the fundamental right to a healthy environment enshrined in Hungary's constitution. The Constitutional Court had interpreted this fundamental right to mean that the state must preserve the quality of the natural habitat for future generations. With regard to the fundamental rights to life and human dignity, the state is also obliged to use its institutions to safeguard the living conditions of future generations. In line with this, the Commissioner's main task was to ensure the sustainability of living conditions and improve the state of the environment. Specific areas of work included air quality, noise pollution, traffic, municipal spatial planning, nature conservation, waters, public participation, reviewing legislation, collaborating on the new consti-

tution, representing the common good, and preserving the common heritage of humanity. However, rather than limiting himself to issues related to environmental protection, the Commissioner also dealt with economic, social and institutional issues that have some connection with the environment.

In the field of environmental policy, the Ombudsman had a very broad mandate. For example, he was able to initiate legislation, speak before parliamentary committees and the plenary, and contribute to EU environmental policy and international environmental agreements. Compliance with the latter was monitored by the Ombudsman. He was also able to comment on all government and administrative activities related to his mandate, such as long-term projects at the municipal level that could influence the quality of life of future generations. In addition, he had to be informed about all environment-related legislative initiatives at all levels of government. He was also able to have existing laws and administrative regulations reviewed by various judicial bodies, including the Constitutional Court, depending on their specific jurisdiction.

As Ombudsman, he was also responsible for receiving all petitions related to the environment. This function was linked to a comprehensive right of investigation and information, which could be used to look into any environmental irregularities that came to the Ombudsman's attention. The Ombudsman was able to recommend measures to remedy such irregularities, and the addressees had to respond to these proposed measures within 30 days. If necessary, the Commissioner was also empowered to suspend the implementation of administrative regulations that were harmful to the environment until a review of their legal compliance had been carried out. The Commissioner also had the right to be personally involved in these reviews. If the Commissioner found evidence of environmental damage, those responsible were obliged to inform the Commissioner within a short period of time about the countermeasures they had taken. In the event of a dispute, the competent authorities and courts were called in. He could request statements and information for possible investigations, including confidential

information of private individuals, businesses and the Government. When there was a risk of imminent irreversible environmental damage, the Ombudsman was authorized to enter all relevant areas and structures.

Organizational structure

The Office of the Ombudsman for Future Generations was created specifically for the Commissioner. Most of the office's staff of 35 was made up of lawyers, but there were also two economists, two biologists, an engineer, an expert on climate change, and a physician. The employees were split into three departments: the Legal Department (including legal analysis and international relations), the Coordination Department, and the Strategy & Research department (social and natural sciences). The Commissioner received a minister-level salary and was solely in charge of personnel-related decisions in his office. He had an annual budget of approximately 160 million Hungarian forints (HUF, just under €1 million) at his disposal for his tasks, which was considered sufficient. The budget allocated to the office was a separate component of the state budget.

The planned term of office for the Ombudsman was six years, which corresponds to one and a half legislative periods. When the Commissioner was nominated by the president and elected by a two-thirds majority in Parliament, the Ombudsman Act stipulated that great importance be attached to his competence and independence. Candidates had to be lawyers with outstanding theoretical knowledge or 10 years of relevant professional experience in environmental protection or nature conservation law who had not held political office in the previous four years. During his term of office, the Commissioner was not permitted to hold any other public or private office or mandate. He could only be removed from office by a two-thirds majority of Parliament and enjoyed the same immunity as members of Parliament.

Concepts & methods

In no small part due to the narrow thematic focus of the final version of the Ombudsman Act, the interests of future generations were primarily limited to environment-related living conditions. However, the Commissioner interpreted this relatively broadly. As part of a strategic project called “The Prospects for Future Generations,” the Ombudsman pursued goals in the areas of developing alternative indicators, combating climate change, promoting renewable energies and biodiversity, the future of the Danube, the relationship between the environment and health, the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, and sustainable communities.

In doing so, no conflict between current and future generations was created when it came to environmental issues. As the Office of the Ombudsman wrote, “The protection of the present generations’ environment largely overlaps the representation of future generations’ interests,” adding that it “promotes the long-term preservation of our descendants’ essential living conditions and the protection of their interests.” The Commissioner was also obliged to represent future generations in long-term decisions that could significantly affect their living conditions and to facilitate the enforcement of laws that improve the state of the environment.

In terms of methods, the Commissioner primarily relied on legal investigations and analyses. He also built up a network of environmental and social scientists to promote development models aimed at achieving economic, social and ecological sustainability in Hungary. In its external communications, the concepts of ecological sustainability, protection of cultural heritage, and preservation of opportunities for future generations to flourish played a prominent role.

Activities, opportunities & challenges

In general terms, the Commissioner saw himself as an advocate for environmental sustainability and related institutional, cultural and financial dimensions both inside and outside of Parliament, and he worked to forge national and international networks in science, media, politics and society. In addition to legislative initiatives, investigations and the processing of incoming petitions, he wrote a detailed annual report that was submitted to the Parliament.

In the first 18 months of his term alone, the Commissioner’s Office handled 422 citizen complaints, launched 271 investigations, participated in 81 consultation procedures on legislative proposals, encouraged the adoption or amendment of 17 legislative proposals, actively participated in 130 conferences, and organized three conferences itself on the topics of greening the state budget, sustainability indicators and the Copenhagen Climate Summit. In addition, the work of the Ombudsman was covered in 353 press articles as well as 258 radio and television broadcasts. At the same time, the Commissioner leveraged all this media publicity to lend greater weight to his recommendations in his efforts to influence public authorities and companies.

As an example of his work, the Commissioner prepared a statement on the draft state budget in which he assessed sustainability impacts, including in the areas of transport, energy and agricultural subsidies. Together with Hungary’s National Council for Sustainable Development, he advocated for more environmental education. He also assumed responsibility for responding to complaints related to the administrative reform of the public water supply.

Among the Ombudsman’s early successes were: the prevention of a change to the spatial development plan for the 15th district of Budapest, which would have increased soil sealing and environmental pollution; the implementation of noise-protection requirements at a factory; the indirect initiation and direct participation in the law on the implementation of the World Heri-

tage Convention; securing state funding for agricultural gene databases; and helping to enact laws that bolstered the status of nature-conservation efforts vis-à-vis the forestry industry.

The Ombudsman was provided with sufficient powers and resources to assertively advocate for the right to a healthy environment for future generations. Indeed, his efforts reportedly did encounter resistance – and required a great deal of persuasion – in cases of conflicting economic interests. In addition, there were claims that the ministries occasionally failed to provide sufficient support when it came to the timely submission of draft legislation to the Ombudsman’s office. In the course of reaching a compromise to secure a qualified parliamentary majority for the Ombudsman Act, the mandate was narrowed from a broad focus on intergenerational justice to a narrower focus on the environment, even though this was interpreted broadly in practice. This significantly limited the Commissioner’s scope of activity compared to what had been envisioned in previous draft legislation, but it did make it possible to reach a broad agreement on giving the office a robust mandate. Ultimately, however, the broad majority enjoyed in 2007 was useless against the two-thirds majority of the Orbán government, which reformed the institution in 2011 in a way that compromised its independence.

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Wales: Future Generations Commissioner for Wales



Internationally recognized and stable institution at the subnational level that focuses on public administration bodies.

Since 2016

Foundation & development

The office of Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, which is enshrined in the 2015 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (WFG Act), was filled for the first time by Sophie Howe in February 2016. After completing her seven-year term in 2023, Howe was replaced by Derek Walker, who has held the office ever since.

As part of its devolution process, Wales has been given more and more legislative powers by the central government in London since 1998. At that point, it had already been written into law that the Welsh National Assembly was required to formulate a sustainability plan and review it annually. Following a change of government in London, the central government ended funding for the UK's exemplary Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), which was also responsible for Wales. In response, the Government of Wales promptly appointed Peter Davies, a former Welsh commissioner on the SDC, to serve as the Sustainable Futures Commissioner for Wales, tasked with guiding the transition toward greater (legally mandated) institutional anchoring of sustainable development in the country. During this period, it was Davies and, above all, Welsh Environment Minister Jane Davidson who actively moved the process forward. In 2012, the Welsh government published a white paper that already recognized the need for an independent institution that would work on behalf of future generations and be based on international best practices. This

document served as the basis for a comprehensive participatory consultation process, which culminated three years later in the passage of the WFG Act.

Mandate & instruments

According to Article 18 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, it is the Commissioner's duty "(a) to promote the sustainable development principle, in particular to – (i) act as a guardian of the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and (ii) encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things they do – and (b) for that purpose to monitor and assess the extent to which the well-being objectives set by public bodies are being met." Given Wales' subnational status, the Commissioner's focus on public administration makes sense.

Article 3 of the act stipulates that most public bodies in Wales, including Government departments, must set and publish their own "well-being objectives" that are "designed to maximise its contribution to achieving each of the well-being goals" of the given sustainable development framework in addition to taking "all reasonable steps" to meet the objectives to benefit future generations. At present, this includes 56 public bodies as well as numerous city and municipal councils, all of which are required to develop local well-being plans. The Commissioner advises and monitors public bodies and local councils in these processes, helps to network them, and encourage best practices among them.

As part of these efforts, the Commissioner may also develop recommendations on how a particular body (e.g., a ministry) can safeguard the ability of future generations to meet their needs and better consider the long-term impact of its actions. The Commissioner's recommendations are forwarded to the Welsh Government and published. The Commissioner may also request internal information from public bodies in order to prepare recommendations. If the recommendations relate to measures for achieving well-being objectives in accordance with the principle of sustainability, there is a (limited) obligation to comply with them. Specifically, a public body is obliged to implement the recommendations or to refuse implementation in whole or in part if it is "satisfied that there is a good reason" to do so or if it chooses "an alternative course of action." In all cases, the public body must respond to the Commissioner and provide reasons if it decides not to follow a recommendation. The responses are published.

To fulfill his advisory duties, the Commissioner conducts research on topics related to sustainable development and well-being. For example, the Commissioner can examine how national well-being objectives and indicators are consistent with the principle of sustainability or how the goal of sustainable development can be achieved in different areas. Research findings, work programs and recommendations are incorporated into annual reports submitted to the National Assembly. Approximately every five years, in consultation with an advisory panel, the Commissioner writes a Future Generations report that summarizes important findings from the annual reports while also taking into account the future trend reports to be submitted by the Government within one year of the national elections as well as relevant reports from the Auditor General for Wales. The Government drafts a response to this report.

Organizational structure

The Commissioner is appointed by the Prime Minister for a term of seven years and may hire staff to provide assistance. In legal terms, the Commissioner is treated as an independent individual entity ("corporate sole")

and "is not regarded as a servant or agent of the Crown," which means, for example, that the office does not come with immunity from prosecution. Candidates for the office of Commissioner may not hold political office. While the Commissioner is responsible for selecting his or her own staff, the number of positions, salaries and employment contracts require government approval. One of the staff members acts as Deputy Commissioner. In addition, the Commissioner is supported by an advisory panel consisting of relevant officials. In the event of conflicts of interest, the Commissioner is obliged to delegate the functions in question. The annual budget is controlled by the Government and the Auditor General. The Commissioner may be dismissed prematurely by the Welsh Government if he or she proves unfit for the office or unable or unwilling to perform his or her functions.

The Commissioner currently has an annual budget of approximately £1.6 million (roughly €1.9 million), which is primarily used to pay the 27 staff members (23 FTEs). On top of this, there is project funding currently (for the period from April 2024 to March 2025) amounting to roughly £430,000 (approx. €514,000).

Concepts & methods

The WFG Act and the Commissioner work with the Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development from 1987, according to which it means "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." At the same time, in terms of how it presents itself and communicates, the focus is less on the concept of "sustainable development" and more on "well-being," which in this context can be understood as essentially having the same meaning. The law sets out the following overarching well-being goals: (1) a prosperous Wales, (2) a resilient Wales, (3) a healthier Wales, (4) a more equal Wales, (5) a Wales of cohesive communities, (6) a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and (7) a globally responsible Wales. The objectives are operationalized with indicators. Focusing on well-being is thought to be more effective in terms of communication than focusing on the concept of sustainable development.

Although future generations are defined in Wales as people who are not yet born, it can be seen in the Future Generations reports that this definition is not applied systematically. The younger generation (of today) and the future selves of people living today also play a prominent role in the Commissioner's work.

The WFG Act also includes five sustainability-related "ways of working" that public bodies are required to integrate into their daily work: (1) balancing short-term needs with safeguarding the ability to meet long-term needs, (2) taking an integrated approach by factoring in how well-being objectives may impact each other or the objectives of other public bodies, (3) involving others in a manner that reflects the diversity of the population, (4) acknowledging how collaboration can help achieve objectives, and (5) deploying resources to prevent problems from occurring or worsening. The Commissioner supports public bodies in operationalizing and implementing these ways of working.

In terms of methodology, the Commissioner's work mainly involves assessments, policy analyses, various workshop and training formats, and advising. In doing so, the Commissioner's office clearly makes an effort to achieve broad impact through attractive and creative visual presentation and accessible language.

Activities, opportunities & challenges

The current Commissioner, Derek Walker, has set five focus areas for his term of office in his "Cymru Can" strategy: (1) implementation and impact, (2) climate and nature, (3) health and well-being, (4) culture and Welsh language, and (5) a well-being economy.

In the last reporting year (April 2024 to March 2025), the Commissioner and his team published a Future Generations report with 50 recommendations, provided advice and support 540 times, held 39 training sessions and events reaching 2,400 people, submitted nine written policy recommendations, wrote 29 media statements, had more than 100 speaking engagements, attended 10 ministerial meetings, and analyzed 238 well-being objectives and 2,155 individual measures ("steps") from 33 public bodies.

In its annual report, the Commissioner's Office states that 100% of the 2,400 participants in its training sessions and events on implementing the WFG Act reported "improved knowledge." A tool (the "Ways of Working Progress Checker") was also developed and widely used to enable public bodies to evaluate their progress in implementing the five ways of working in their organizational culture. In addition, the Commissioner has helped the government to "reboot" and expand its approach to river pollution and to make the government's food strategy more sustainable. As a direct result of the Commissioner's advice, planning requirements for health departments have been strengthened to focus on prevention. Businesses were also taken into account with a "Business Toolkit" and, on the international level, the Commissioner's team helped shape the United Nations Declaration on Future Generations.

Other activities have included: establishing a national center for long-term and futures thinking and a Future Generations Leadership Academy; developing and promoting prevention-focused and sustainability-oriented public budgets; reviewing national and regional economic strategies for their consistency with the objectives of the WFG Act; conducting collaborative research on climate change and cultural risks; and commissioning a project to strengthen deliberative democracy. The Commissioner also works with a wide range of societal stakeholders, such as students, artists, media professionals, trade unions and businesses.

To date, the Commissioner's track record has been mixed. On the positive side, it can be said that the Commissioner's Office has successfully entered its second term and is very active, even though its budget and staffing levels have slightly decreased. In addition, the office enjoys high international recognition among experts, as is reflected, for example, by the fact that Derek Walker is a member of the executive team of the Network of Institutions and Leaders for Future Generations.

On the other hand, when measuring by welfare indicators, it must be said that Wales has only partially succeeded in achieving its well-being objectives. According to the Auditor General for Wales, the law and the work of the Commissioner is admittedly “changing conversations, influencing longer-term planning, and impacting day-to-day decision-making and working practices across Welsh public services.” However, it continues, “the Act is not driving the system-wide change that was intended.” For example, there are individual public bodies that have “given little or no explicit consideration to the Act” as well as individual areas (e.g., financial planning and healthcare) that have not yet sufficiently implemented the five ways of working, in particular the prevention principle.

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Malta: Guardian of Future Generations and Sustainable Development Act



A symbolic sustainability institution that is barely able to fulfill its demanding legal mandate given its lack of resources.

Since 2012

Foundation & development

The “Guardian of Future Generations” was established as part of a new governance arrangement for sustainable development with the Maltese Sustainability Act of 2012, which was last slightly amended in 2019. In addition to the Guardian (which is an interdisciplinary group of individuals rather than a single person), the law also established a Sustainable Development Directorate within the Ministry for the Environment as well as a Sustainability Network. On top of that, the permanent state secretaries of all ministries were also tasked with serving as sustainability coordinators, who in turn were to be supported by the heads of the Policy Development department as sustainable development “focal points” (i.e., contact persons).

As early as 1992, during negotiations on the Rio Declaration at the UN level, Malta had already spoken out in favor of establishing national and international guardians for future generations. The idea for the institution of the Guardian of Future Generations in Malta originated with Alternattiva Demokratika, Malta’s Green Party, and was embraced by Environment Minister Mario de Marco during consultations on the Sustainable Development Act. Even though the legal basis had already been drafted in 2007, the national-conservative government delayed passing the law until shortly before the election. In December 2012, Michael Zamit Cutajar, founder and former head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was appointed chair of the first Guardian. However, the

actual implementation of the Sustainable Development Act did not begin until 2013, under the new social democratic government.

In April 2015, all members of the Guardian resigned in protest because they felt unable to fulfill their mandate with the very limited resources available to them. Since December 2016, the Guardian’s committee has been regularly staffed again. The members, who are appointed for a term of three years, meet at least quarterly in accordance with the law.

Mandate & instruments

Malta’s Sustainable Development Act aims to “mainstream” sustainable development across the Government, to raise awareness about sustainability issues and practices in society, and to promote the adoption of these issues and practices. However, the Parliament itself is not mentioned. The Act first obliges the Office of the Prime Minister to implement this mandate by: (1) ensuring the development and implementation of Malta’s national sustainable development strategy and a system of sustainability indicators; (2) promoting greater sustainability across the public administration, the private sector and society; (3) reviewing government programs for their compatibility with the national sustainability strategy; (4) ensuring and reviewing that the ministries and line entities within the public administration factor sustainable development in their workings; (5) identifying unsustainable trends; (6) working closely with local councils and other stakeholders to

promote sustainable development at the local level; and (7) promoting education for sustainable development. To carry out these functions, the Office of the Prime Minister is permitted to: (1) develop recommendations; (2) initiate projects, studies, training programs and campaigns; (3) request information from the public administration; and (4) establish and direct subcommittees. All these functions and powers may be delegated to “any department, agency or entity” – a provision that is regularly used. For example, responsibility for implementing the Sustainable Development Act was delegated to the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Public Cleanliness (MEEC).

The public administration is required to respond to the recommendations and requirements of the authority responsible for sustainable development (currently the MEEC). In his or her capacity as sustainable development coordinator, the permanent state secretary is responsible for this. This individual is supposed to be supported by the sustainable development “focal point” at the relevant government agency. All authorities are required to state in a special section of their annual reports how they have responded to any recommendations and requests for information from the authority responsible for sustainable development, what targets they have set to achieve alignment with the national sustainable development strategy, and what activities they have undertaken to contribute to the implementation of the strategy.

The Guardian of Future Generations is tasked with “safeguarding inter-generational and intra-generational sustainable development in Malta.” To this end, it is mandated to: (1) promote sustainable development advocacy across national policymaking, legislation and practices; (2) develop a scientific research network; (3) develop area- and sector-specific sustainability audits; (4) propose sustainable development goals and measures to government agencies; (5) disseminate sustainable development concepts within the private sector; (6) encourage NGOs to participate in sustainable development advocacy; (7) request sustainable development-related information from government entities; (8) collaborate with the public and civil society organizations; and (9) direct the focus of the authority

responsible for sustainable development toward safeguarding future generations.

The legal mandate of the so-called Sustainable Development Network, which is made up of social partners and relevant interest groups, is limited to setting up “subcommittees that can promote the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.”

Organizational structure

The Guardian of Future Generations is a five-member commission that meets at least quarterly (as does the similarly composed Sustainable Development Network) and whose members are appointed by the Government. Besides the chairperson, this includes: one person from the “voluntary organizations” sector; one person from the “commerce, economy and industry” sector; one person from the “social and community affairs” sector; and one person with a background in environmental matters. The Guardian is currently headed by Rachael M. Scicluna, an anthropologist who works as a consultant and project manager for the non-governmental organization SOS Malta. The Commission is also supported by a secretary.

The Guardian has a total annual budget of just €70,000. Independently of the Guardian, the MEEC has allocated €614,060 in personnel funds for sustainable development, which is used to pay the civil servants in the ministry’s Sustainable Development Directorate. This corresponds to 2% of the MEEC’s personnel budget. In addition, €100,000 have been budgeted for the national sustainable development strategy. The eight-member Sustainable Development Network does not have its own budget line in Malta’s national budget. Maltese media sources have repeatedly stated that the Guardian does not have enough resources to fulfill its mandate, with the result that it serves more of a symbolic role.

Concepts & methods

Malta's Sustainable Development Act uses the well-known Brundtland definition of sustainable development from 1987, according to which it means "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Although an early media report described the Guardian as being a high-level commission solely tasked with representing the interests of future generations at the national level, the Sustainable Development Act actually makes the Guardian equally responsible for both the intra- and inter-generational dimensions of sustainable development. Again in line with the Brundtland definition, sustainable development is understood as development that integrates economic, social and ecological aspects.

This understanding is also reflected – with reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2015 – in Malta's Sustainable Development Vision for 2050, developed by the Sustainable Development Directorate of the MEEC and published in 2021, as well as in Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050, published in 2024. For the first time, the latter includes a comprehensive (albeit unstructured) system of sustainable development indicators, which specifies targets for 2030 but does not contain any data yet. At present, it appears that the only publicly available data is on Malta's contribution to the SDGs. Both the Vision and the Strategy address the ecological, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development, but the focus is on the path to (sustainable) economic growth.

Activities, opportunities & challenges

The annual sustainable development reports of the MEEC (to which the Guardian belongs in organizational terms) often do not list the Commission's activities, opportunities and challenges. This is particularly true of the most recent annual reports. There are occasional short reports on conferences organized by the Guardian on topics such as social issues and vulnerable groups (2018), demographic challenges (2021), and efforts to foster a "sustainable society" (2020).

Or there are very vague descriptions of activities, such as the one in the 2017 report saying that the Commission "met eight times during 2017 and discussed the measures that are currently in place or being considered, planned and implemented in various policy areas." In older media reports, there are indications that the Guardian engaged in activities such as speaking out in favor of a holistic environmental and land use policy strategy, against further development of the coastline, and against a high-rise construction project.

For the current term of office (2023–2026), the Guardian has set itself the goal of doing as much as possible to foster diversity and inclusion in partnership with providers, policymakers, academic institutions, community-led groups and state agencies. The focus in these efforts is on SDG 11 ("Sustainable Cities and Communities"), which encompasses: the sustainable re-use of existing buildings and sites; the development of "socially-aware designs of public spaces [...] through the use of participatory methodologies with minorities and relevant stakeholders;" community-building; and the promotion of "safety and security in the urban environment for all." The (only) specific project mentioned is focused on the "co-production of healthy, secure and playful spaces" in three Maltese cities.

On the whole, it is remarkable that Malta has framework legislation on sustainable development and, at least in name, an institution that is committed to the safeguarding the interests of future generations. At the same time, the Sustainable Development Act in general and the Guardian of Future Generations in particular appear to lack enforcement power in terms of both their competencies and their resources. Without further professionalization, a more assertive mandate, and sufficient staffing and funding, it will be hard for them to have anything more than a purely symbolic impact.

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Finland: Foresight System with Parliamentary Committee for the Future



A nationally established “foresight” system – with strong ties to Parliament, Government, academia and society – that has evolved over time and serves as a global model.

Since 1993

Foundation & development

The Finnish Society for Future Studies, founded in 1980 by Professor Pentti Malaska, is considered the pioneer of the national “foresight” system. The society sought access to decision-makers from business, politics and civil society at an early point. Beginning in the mid-1980s, there were several failed extra- and intra-parliamentary initiatives – including from individuals within these circles – to formally anchor foresight in Parliament and Government. The collapse of the Soviet Union – and the severe crisis it triggered in the Finnish economy – were ultimately seen as representing a window of opportunity to institutionalize a more strategic orientation toward the future. In 1992, a parliamentary resolution required the Government to submit a “Report on the Future” for the first time. This report was issued in 1993 and focused on Finland’s position in the international arena. To formulate a parliamentary response to the government report, the (initially non-permanent) Committee for the Future was established. The same happened in 1996 following the release of the second Report on the Future. Since 1998, formulating the Parliament’s assessment of the impacts of technology has been one of the tasks of the Committee for the Future.

In 2000, the Committee for the Future was finally made a permanent committee by a bipartisan majority vote as well as incorporated into the parliamentary rules of procedure. The so-called “Future Dialogue” – the Government’s drafting of a comprehensive Report

on the Future and the Parliament’s formulation of a response (known as a “Future Report”) – has also been an integral part of the political system ever since. Since 2017, the Government’s implementation report on the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has also been discussed in the Committee for the Future.

The Parliamentary Committee for the Future is closely linked to the Finnish Futures Research Centre (FFRC) at the University of Turku, which was founded in 1992 on the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Since the early 2000s, in addition to universities, ministries and actors at the regional and municipal levels have also started building up their own foresight capacities and institutionalizing their relationships with non-governmental sector-specific foresight actors, such as through annual “Foresight Forums,” which were converted into a National Foresight Network in 2005 and assigned to the Prime Minister’s Office in 2014. In addition to performing their traditional tasks, this led the ministerial bureaucracies to start adopting the kind of processes typically seen in a think tank, such as preparing written reports on long-term problems and potential solutions. The government’s Foresight Network, established in 2004, coordinated sector-specific future reports and cross-sector megatrend reports.

In 2014, these previously fragmented constellations of actors were given a more structured form, and the Prime Minister’s Office was put in charge of centrally coordinating them. As part of these efforts, a steer-

ing committee with a secretariat and expert advisory board was put in place, and a three-tiered information hierarchy was developed: Non-governmental actors use their own resources to research major trends, commissioned experts compile more specific information, and ministries ultimately summarize the perspectives most relevant to policymakers in strategic foresight reports. Today, the Finnish foresight system can be considered the most highly developed of its kind. Foresight information and data are systematically coordinated, compiled and consolidated at the ministerial level in a wide range of political, scientific, administrative and non-governmental organizations in order to strengthen the long-term future orientation of Finnish policy.

Mandate & instruments

As an advisory body, the Parliamentary Committee for the Future shapes the lawmaking process indirectly rather than being directly involved in it. In formal terms, the main function of the parliamentary Committee for the Future is the so-called “Future Dialogue,” which involves intensive examination of the Government’s detailed Report on the Future, which is presented once per legislative period. The announced topic of the Government’s Report on the Future therefore initially determines the Committee’s agenda and culminates in a response report (i.e. the Parliament’s Future Report). Both reports are roughly 50 to 100 pages long. In terms of content, the Committee may go beyond the thematic scope of the Government’s report and formulate specific resolutions that, if passed by Parliament, are formally binding on the Government. The Government reports annually on its activities related to the parliamentary response report, including the implementation of the parliamentary resolutions. It should be noted, however, that the influence of the parliamentary response report on the current government is limited in terms of time because it is published quite late in the legislative period.

In addition to the Future Dialogue, since 1998, the Committee for the Future has also been responsible for developing its own projects based on the parliamentary technological impact assessment. The members of

the Parliamentary Committee determine the topic of these projects in addition to being closely supported by experts. In addition, the Committee on the Future drafts recommendations for other standing committees of Parliament and deals with the Government’s report on the implementation of Agenda 2030, which is submitted once per legislative period.

The Government drafts the Report on the Future, each of which has its own specific thematic focus. The report consists of an “apolitical” section, which is drafted within the ministries, and a more focused “political” section, which is drafted by the Government in collaboration with commissioned external experts. Since 2003, individual ministries have also been preparing their own assessments of the future for their respective policy areas, which are now incorporated into the first part of the Government’s Report on the Future. It describes the general direction of trends in the respective policy area, the most important future challenges, and alternative policy paths for addressing these challenges. These appear to be less open-ended and more specific than the scenarios and recommendations developed, for example, in the Parliamentary Committee for the Future.

Non-governmental actors are only politically relevant to the extent that their expertise is solicited and processed by the Parliamentary Committee for the Future or the ministerial bureaucracy. However, in general terms, (unauthorized) external actors do not appear to have a direct influence on political decision-making processes.

Organizational structure

Foresight expertise in Finland is currently concentrated in the ministerial bureaucracy, where a culture of long-term thinking and planning has taken root in many places without necessarily requiring full-time positions for dedicated foresight experts. An inter-ministerial Foresight Working Group, under the leadership of the Prime Minister’s Office, was formed to prepare the Government’s Report on the Future. The Prime Minister’s Office also coordinates the National Foresight Network of foresight data producers, which

serves as a forum for discussion and coordination in addition to organizing various events. Furthermore, there is the Government's Foresight Group, an advisory panel of experts founded in 2015 and tasked with developing and strengthening the link between all foresight activities and political decision-making processes.

The development of the ministerial future assessments is overseen by a steering committee made up of department heads, and the results are inspected and approved by the respective state secretaries. The actual work on the future assessments is carried out by a group of ministry officials consisting of the person responsible for foresight and their assistants in collaboration with all relevant departments as well as external experts and stakeholders.

The Committee for the Future in the Finnish Parliament consists of 17 members who, as in other standing committees, are nominated through negotiations within and between the parties. The Committee's work is supported by four permanent civil servants, two of whom also have positions at the Finnish Future Research Centre. In addition to personnel expenses, the Committee has an annual research budget of approximately €70,000. Many tasks are delegated to members of the Committee's extensive network of experts, who are also closely involved in the Committee's work.

Concepts & methods

Finland's national foresight system covers a wide range of topics, including sustainable development, security, climate change, demographic change and technological development. The Report on the Future and the scenarios presented by the current government look ahead to the year 2045 and examine the geopolitical, economic, ecological, social, technological and legislative changes as well as their anticipated effects, including the resulting risks, threats and opportunities. To this end, alternative scenarios are developed and the catalysts for change and uncertainties are identified. Government experts and external actors generally use science-based methods for this purpose. In addition,

40 dialogue groups are formed to assist in related preparations.

According to former office manager Paula Tiihonen, the Committee for the Future was established to discuss future problems and visions, including the rights and responsibilities of future generations. The timeframe for "visioning processes" has sometimes extended into the year 2100. As a purely advisory committee, the Committee for the Future has a working method that is rather unusual for parliamentary committees, as it is inclusive, deliberative, expert-centered and international. As a result, party politics and the usual fast pace of politics take a back seat. Accordingly, the Committee organizes not only hearings, but also workshops, open seminars, and stakeholder and citizen consultations.

The actors in the national foresight system use numerous (and sometimes overlapping) methods, including visioning processes, strategic foresight, future studies, technology impact assessments, scenario modeling, and methodologically unspecific normal political planning and policy formulation processes with planning horizons that span multiple legislative periods. Foresight experts from the Prime Minister's Office also offer foresight training for ministry officials.

Activities, opportunities & challenges

The current government's foresight activities relate to specific topics (e.g., developing a vision for research and higher education in 2040), but also to comprehensive systemic scenarios up to 2045 (i.e. "A World of Cooperation," "A World of Tech Giants," "A World of Blocs," and "A Crumbling World").

To increase the influence of the various foresight reports on political decision-making, the Government has aligned them more closely with the election cycle. The first "apolitical" part of the Government's Report on the Future is now supposed to be published approximately two years before the end of the legislative period and to be as comprehensive as possible in terms of content. The ministerial assessments of the future, with their more sector-specific scenar-

ios and recommendations, are supposed to be simultaneously published approximately six months before the elections so that they can influence the election programs of the political parties. The secretaries-general then publish a detailed list of issues that a future government will have to address so that these issues can influence the negotiations to form a coalition after the election.

The thematically open project reports of the Parliamentary Committee for the Future deal with a wide range of topics, including nanotechnology, digital ethics, grassroots democracy, genetic engineering, humanoid robots and artificial intelligence. Although the reports – which are considered to be of high quality – do not reach a wide readership, they are sometimes taken into consideration by ministries. International recognition and the consensual, expertise-driven working method make it likely that the Committee will continue to exist in the future. Its influence on concrete political decision-making and lawmaking remains rather indirect and weak, such as by setting agendas, providing advice and establishing forward-looking ways of thinking among those who are involved in the Committee's work for an extended period of time. For example, two individuals who eventually became prime minister were members of this special Parliamentary Committee for a long time. Committee resolutions that are very specific and challenge the Government are not the norm, most likely due to its consensus-oriented and non-partisan working methods. Promoting and democratically legitimizing the national foresight system as a whole is considered the Committee's greatest achievement to date.

Finland's political system and political culture are strongly characterized by expertise- and consensus-oriented decision-making as well as trust in politics. The national foresight system, which is considered an exemplary model, also bears these traits. For this reason, the electoral successes of the nationalist-populist Finns Party represent a challenge. At the same time, its strong anchoring in Parliament, the Government and the administrative apparatus prevent the national foresight system from collapsing after a change of government.

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