



Workshop Webinar Summary: Intergenerational Fairness Strategy

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Context

This document summarises the outcomes of a participatory workshop held as part of Dublin City University's submission towards contributing to developing the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy. Through facilitated discussions, participants reflected on various topics (housing, digital access, education, environmental responsibility, economic security, and political representation), sharing their experiences, concerns, and ideas for building a fairer society for all generations.

Participants often acknowledged the complexity and systemic nature of the challenges discussed. While many concerns were identified, there is a shared recognition that no single, clear-cut solution exists. Nevertheless, participants emphasised that recognising and openly discussing these issues is essential to fostering intergenerational fairness.

The following section presents the key issues identified and participant-driven recommendations across each theme.

1. Access to Housing and Public Services

Key issues identified:

- **Housing affordability crisis:** Participants agreed that access to affordable housing has significantly worsened for younger generations compared to previous ones. While in the past, families could secure housing even with modest incomes, today, the high cost of rent and property ownership is a severe barrier. Property owners increasingly prioritise short-term tourist rentals over long-term leases, reducing the availability of rental homes for local residents.

- **Impact of limited housing construction:** Participants highlighted that past public policies, such as council-built social housing, provided stability to families, but the current lack of public investment in social housing exacerbates inequality, and it significantly impacts housing affordability for future generations.
- **Healthcare inequities:** Participants emphasised the significant difference in access to healthcare services between those with private health insurance and public patients. Public patients often face waiting lists of years for consultations and procedures, while private patients are treated promptly.

Participant recommendations:

- Governments should reinvest in building public social housing to address affordability and access issues.
- Healthcare systems should be reformed to ensure timely and equitable access to healthcare services for all citizens, regardless of whether they have private insurance.

2. Digital and Technological Divide

Key issues identified:

- **Technology as a double-edged sword:** While technology has allowed for easier communication across distances (e.g., FaceTime, Zoom), it has also contributed to social isolation, particularly for younger generations excessively immersed in devices and online platforms. Participants expressed concerns that early and excessive exposure to technology in childhood negatively affects young people's ability to develop proper communication and social skills.
- **Exclusion of older generations:** Many older adults feel excluded from the digital world and fear using it, making some older people freeze. They often lack the necessary skills and confidence to use digital technologies, and there are insufficient patient and supportive teaching initiatives.
- **Digital exploitation and addiction:** Participants expressed concerns that technology is increasingly designed to exploit addictive behaviours, leading to issues like gambling addiction and unhealthy dependency.

Participant recommendations:

- Promote intergenerational digital literacy programs where younger individuals teach older adults in accessible and familiar community settings (e.g., active retirement groups, local libraries).

3. Policy and Solutions for a Fairer Society

Key issues identified:

- **Decline of intergenerational dialogue:** Participants noted that generational groups have become increasingly isolated from one another, limiting opportunities for mutual understanding and support. They also observed that society's focus on material success and individualism has weakened traditional community bonds. Additionally, retirement is also crucial since participants report feeling dismissed.
- **Loss of listening skills:** There was a strong emphasis on the loss of true listening skills across society, particularly the ability to listen without immediately responding from one's perspective.

Participant recommendations:

- Personal and community-level actions are encouraged to foster intergenerational dialogue and connections, and the government should support these initiatives.
- Listening and empathy skills should be emphasised and developed early through education and family practices.

4. Social and Cultural Attitudes

Key issues identified:

- **Lack of a shared language between generations:** Each generation has developed its way of speaking and thinking, shaped by different contexts and experiences. This often leads to misunderstandings and communication barriers.
- **Critical thinking is not sufficiently encouraged:** Participants noted that educational and societal systems often discourage questioning and independent thought, which limits the ability to build open, curiosity-driven dialogue across generations.
- **Social spaces for intergenerational engagement are limited:** Natural opportunities for interaction across generations are rare; families, schools, and community settings often fail to sustain ongoing, meaningful relationships.

Participant recommendations:

- **Foster a culture of curiosity and openness in intergenerational dialogue:** Exchanging views and seeking mutual understanding. This was represented by the balance of two "E's": experience from older generations and enthusiasm from younger ones. It is also important to focus on belonging and not just access; older adults must feel needed and respected in these spaces, not merely included.

5. Climate and Environmental Responsibility

Key issues identified:

- **Climate discourse is polarised and confusing:** Terms like "woke" or "net zero" often create resistance or division. Political framing hinders collective understanding and action.
- **Lack of intergenerational participation in climate dialogue:** Older generations feel both guilt and responsibility, but lack clear paths for meaningful involvement in environmental action or policy.

Participant recommendations:

- **Support community-based intergenerational initiatives:** A "university without walls" that connects retired professionals with younger students in lifelong learning environments focused on sustainability could address this.
- **Incorporate older adults into climate education and dialogue:** Leveraging their practical knowledge and lived experience is important.
- **Create local "fixing spaces"** (e.g., sewing, repairing, electronics): Promote spaces where older generations teach repair and sustainability skills to younger people, a low-tech alternative to high-tech maker spaces.
- **Reframe climate responsibility as a shared legacy:** The goal is to "leave a legacy in the younger generation, not for them."

6. Education, Skills, and Lifelong Learning

Key issues identified:

- **Lifelong learning opportunities for older adults remain age-segregated:** While more learning opportunities are available, they primarily target older adults separately, missing chances for true intergenerational exchange.

- **Lack of diverse, mixed-age educational environments:** Educational institutions rarely foster environments where older and younger students can learn together and benefit from each other's perspectives.
- **Technology and AI create barriers:** Rapid technological changes (e.g., AI, digital learning platforms) pose significant challenges for older learners, risking exclusion without tailored support.

Participant recommendations:

- **Promote and create intergenerational learning spaces:** This can occur in universities and communities where older adults can share knowledge and learn alongside younger people. (e.g., invite retired teachers to learn in classrooms).
- **Integrate intergenerational modules into higher education:** This integration includes volunteer programs in which retired staff mentor or co-learn with students. Additionally, it is important to encourage mixed-age education to foster shared learning and challenge age stereotypes, including technology-focused courses for older learners supported by younger facilitators.

7. Economic Opportunities and Challenges

Key issues identified:

- **Decline of job stability and vocational pathways:** Previous generations often accessed stable, long-term employment through skilled trades. Today's job market is more precarious, with fewer clear paths for those not pursuing higher education.
- **Overemphasis on higher education as the only valid route:** Participants expressed concern that apprenticeships and vocational training are undervalued, potentially excluding people with different strengths. Additionally, there are barriers to career progression for non-graduates, especially younger generations without academic qualifications, who face limited opportunities for advancement in many sectors.
- **Impact of the continuous need for upskilling and challenges to shift careers on both generations:** Modern work environments demand constant retraining and digital literacy, which can be financially and logistically burdensome. Furthermore, adults seeking to shift careers struggle due to time, cost, and a lack of flexible pathways.
- **Tensions around pensions and retirement age:** Raising the retirement age has proven controversial. There is recognition that long-term planning is necessary, but it clashes with public resistance.

- **Broader economic insecurity:** Child care, housing affordability, and mental health were identified as interconnected issues impacting individual well-being and generational equity.

Participant recommendations:

- **Support flexible, accessible and affordable upskilling:** Promote alternative educational and career pathways beyond traditional university degrees and develop systems that enable workers of all ages to retrain without significant financial or personal sacrifice.
- **Expand and promote apprenticeships and vocational programs,** especially in growth sectors like green energy, healthcare, and digital infrastructure.
- **Introduce equal funding incentives** for vocational training as those provided for university education.
- **Elaborate career guidance programs** in secondary schools that present both academic and non-academic routes as equally valid and viable.

Support Lifelong Learning and Mid-Career Transitions

- Subsidise retraining and upskilling programs for adults, particularly in tech and digital literacy.
- Develop flexible learning pathways (online, part-time, modular courses) to accommodate working adults and caregivers.
- Establish career transition funds or tax credits to reduce financial barriers for mid-career changes.

Reform Pension and Social Security Systems for Long-Term Equity

- Create pension policies with long-term equity in mind:
- Implement mandatory pension contributions for all workers, including gig economy and freelance workers.
- Introduce intergenerational pension equity measures, such as adjusting benefits based on demographic trends and life expectancy.
- Align pension reform with support for young families, including affordable childcare, housing access, and mental health services.

8. Political Representation and Decision-Making

Key issues identified:

- **Uneven engagement across generations:** While young people are active in issue-based movements (e.g. climate, LGBTQI+), they are often less engaged in broader institutional policymaking.

Participant recommendations:

- **Include** youth and older adult advisory councils in key public institutions and decision-making processes.
- **Establish an Intergenerational Citizens' Assembly:** Create a dedicated space for structured dialogue and policymaking input across generations.
- **Promote respectful and transparent engagement:** Design processes that value the experience of older adults and the innovation of younger voices.
- **Use digital platforms and social media** to engage younger generations in consultations, town halls, and participatory budgeting.
- **Rethink language in policy:** Avoid labels like "elderly" or "youth" and speak about people as individuals.
- **Ensure policies address shared issues through a generational lens:** Address housing access for younger people and create better support for older adults to "right-size" their homes.
- **Include mental health and end-of-life care** in national strategy planning, reflecting concerns of the young and ageing population.

9. General Perspectives on Intergenerational Fairness

Key issues identified:

- **Intergenerational fairness is rooted in inclusion and mutual benefit:** Participants described fairness as a model where all generations contribute and gain, with respect for both wisdom and innovation and aim for positive outcomes for everyone.
- **Unequal treatment towards generations:** Older adults often have more political power due to higher voting participation, while younger generations may disengage due to a lack of civic education, leading to disengagement.
- **Lack of civic education:** Education systems must better teach civic engagement, critical thinking, and media literacy from an early age.
- **Tensions around workplace dynamics and financial security:** Career progression for younger people can be limited by older workers staying longer, and economic precarity (especially housing and savings) is a growing concern.

- **Reframing Intergenerational Fairness through Economic Ambition:** Each challenge related to fairness has a cost and credibility gap. The EU must launch a generational mission to build trust, investment, and purpose.

Participant recommendations:

Embed Civic Education in Schools

- **Mandate civic engagement**, media literacy, and political education starting in primary and secondary education.
- **Involve students** in local governance projects, such as school-based councils or youth parliaments.

Reframe Intergenerational Fairness as Shared Prosperity

- Launch national campaigns that showcase mutual support benefits all generations, such as mentorship programs, housing cooperatives, or community care networks.
- Highlight cross-generational partnerships that solve shared problems like climate change or digital exclusion.

Monitor and Evaluate Fairness Over Time

- Establish generational impact assessments for all primary legislation, similar to environmental or equality impact assessments.
- Track indicators of intergenerational equity, such as income mobility, housing affordability, and civic participation, and report annually.