

A Call to Action for Future Generations

Taking Irish Leadership on
Intergenerational Equity Forward



Coalition 2030 is an alliance of over 70 civil society organisations working together to ensure that Ireland reaches the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Coalition comprises four ‘pillars’ representing four sectors of Irish civil society: International Development, Domestic Anti-Poverty and Equality, Environmental, and Trade Union. Coalition 2030 receives academic expertise from academics across Ireland.

Acknowledgements

Coalition 2030 wishes to acknowledge the following for their contribution to this Call to Action:

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Foreword



The United Nations Summit of the Future, which meets this month in New York, is an important opportunity to translate long-established commitments to future generations into reality. A Declaration on Future Generations, which will be part of the Summit outcome, will emphasize that policy-making and decision-making today must take far greater account of the needs and interests of future generations. A number of detailed commitments are expected, including possible new institutions.

Irish advocacy and leadership have helped to get the world to this point. Mary Robison has been a tireless champion for many years of the principle of intergenerational equity. This means ensuring that the needs of present generations are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. The Mary Robison Foundation – Climate Justice proposed in 2017 that “Global Guardians for Future Generations” be appointed by the Secretary General of the United Nations to provide a voice for future generations and to help achieve fairness between generations in the context of sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agreed in 2015 after UN negotiations led by Ireland and Kenya, reflected a recognition by all UN member States that bold and transformative actions were required across the three dimensions of sustainable development in order to “support the needs of present and future generations”. The Agenda, world leaders declared, would be implemented “for the full benefit of all, for today’s generation and for future generations”.

While the details of the Declaration on Future Generations are still being finalised, it is clear that it will vindicate Mary Robison’s vision and initiative. There is an opportunity for Ire-

land to build on the profile she has given to the issue of intergenerational equity, alongside the prominence given to the latter in the 2030 Agenda.

I welcome, therefore, Coalition 2030’s proposal for the establishment of a national Future Generations Commission in Ireland. This would flow naturally from the deliberations at the Summit of the Future and their expected outcome. It would align well with existing instruments in Ireland such as the National Planning Framework and the Well-Being Framework. Coalition 2030’s research, furthermore, suggests that there would be cross-sectoral support in this country for such a step. It would be a tangible demonstration of commitment in Irish policy and practice to the principle of intergenerational equity, an overwhelming moral imperative for our time.

In a foreword to the Second Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals, the then Taoiseach, Micheal Martin T.D., wrote:

“The only way the world can deal effectively with the challenges the world faces, the only way to deliver a more secure, sustainable and fair global community for future generations, is to rally ourselves to work together”.

This Call to Action is an opportunity for Ireland to act in the interests of future generations. This is the right time to do the right thing, to act on promises and commitments given and to help to build a better future for all.

David Donoghue

Former Irish diplomat, co-facilitator of UN negotiations on the 2030 Agenda

Time to Act for Future Generations

Coalition 2030 calls on the Taoiseach and the Irish Government to strongly consider a Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) for Ireland in line with the emphasis on intergenerational equity at the United Nations Summit of the Future in September 2024. This call to action suggests how to proceed, citing relevant precedents and case studies to support Government decisions and actions.

Since its inception, Coalition 2030 has championed intergenerational equity in its work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Acknowledging Ireland’s leadership and influence heretofore, Coalition 2030 believes a FGC is a logical progression as we enter the Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations.

Many world leaders, declarations, policies, and pacts now champion action for future generations:

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, acknowledges evidence is abundant that we are simply running out of time to take concrete measures to safeguard the well-being of future generations

Echoing Barack Obama, Derek Walker, Future Generations Commission for Wales May 2024 said, “We’re the first generation to understand the challenge and the last to be able to fix it”.

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, July 2024, stressed the importance of intergenerational fairness and the well-being of future generations.

Closer to home, the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action Report on the examination of recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly report on biodiversity loss (December 2023) recommends:

.. the establishment of a new Ombudsman for Future Generations with the resources of an office, or a Future Generations Commission to protect the long-term interests of human and ecological well-being for current and future generations. (pg. 44)

Coalition 2030 calls on the Taoiseach and Government to ensure such calls to action extend beyond good intentions and rhetoric by establishing a FGC to oversee and safeguard cross-government action to protect the rights and well-being of future generations. We established widespread urgency, interest, and positivity around an FGC, which is summed up in the quotes: ‘protecting our future generations starts with us, starts here, it’s up to us’ and ‘just do it’.

Consultation

Coalition 2030 (see membership in Appendix 2) in advancing its commitment to intergenerational equity, appointed Deane Consulting to support a study on the establishment of a Future Generations Commissioner for Ireland. In July/ August 2024, a desk review and interviews were conducted involving twenty-nine people identified through purposive sampling to ensure a balanced range of insights on the concept and operation of this office in the Irish context (see Appendix 1).

Coalition 2030's Steering Committee considered and consolidated the research and offers this document to call on and assist the Government in this critically important decision for future generations.

A Way Forward

The overwhelming response from those interviewed for this report was that the Government should establish a Future Generations Commissioner immediately. Below, we offer a suggested pathway for the Government to consider in establishing a FGC for Ireland.

- The Taoiseach to commit to establishing a FGC at the Summit of the Future 2024.
 - Government prioritise the FGC championed by the Taoiseach and select the most appropriate approach to advance.
 - Establish a Taskforce to accelerate and drive the process as an administrative order before legislation.
 - Undertake a scoping study to determine the breadth, scope, and terms of reference using an authentic and inclusive consultation process with diverse stakeholders.
 - Advocate cross-party political support parties calling for a commitment to establishing a FGC in the Programme for Government and in all election manifestos.
 - Ring-fenced funding for a FGC in the upcoming and subsequent budgets and create a new subheading within the Department of the Taoiseach to ensure protected multi-annual funding.
- Government to commit to bringing forward primary legislation to underpin the role and to ensure that the role/office reports directly to the Oireachtas

Coalition 2030 recognises the importance of an authentic and inclusive consultation with politicians, citizens, and civil service officials to ensure that people understand the role and can contribute their views. We believe a multi-pronged creative approach from the Government, carried out by engagement specialists, will be needed to raise awareness of, interest in, and ownership of the FGC. We suggest the following prioritised approaches:

1. Capacity building within the political sphere to ensure that all local and national political representatives understand the importance of the need for a FGC
2. Quality public information and engagement with rights holders and the civil service, in particular Government departments
3. Meaningful consultation with key stakeholders across the public at large, including harder to reach groups, representing all ages and population groups.

Case Study and Precedents

Relevant precedents exist and could guide work in establishing an FGC in Ireland. They capture what is suitable, feasible, and within scope in an Irish context. Coalition 2030 hopes that the material will be of value in assisting

the Government in initiating action. The Coalition also wishes to acknowledge and signpost the important contribution of Deputy Marc O Cathasaigh and his team with his Commission for Future Generations Bill 2023.

Welsh Future Generations Commissioner – case study

“What Wales is doing today, the world will do tomorrow.”

Wales is the only country in the world that has legislated for future generations and sustainable development. This forms a legal link between future generations, sustainable development and domestic legislation, translating it into country-level goals shaped and owned by Welsh citizens. This followed a two-year national conversation with the people of Wales, during which they described what ‘The Wales we want’ would look like.

In 2015, Wales passed ‘The Well-being of Future Generations Act’, requiring public institutions and government to meet current needs without compromising future generations. The Act established an independent, statutory Commissioner. The Commissioner helps public bodies and those who make policy in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions. The first Future

Generations Commissioner, Sophie Howe, worked closely with Civil Society, getting backing for legislation to support the agenda. Current Future Generations Commissioner of Wales, Derek Walker said:

“This process helped translate the SDGs into something that the Welsh people could identify with...it gave power to the people of Wales.” The Act demands long-term solutions and requires public services to collaborate and involve communities in decisions that affect their social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being. The Commissioner has had a significant impact in Wales. Two-thirds of the Welsh transport budget is now allocated to public transport, whereas previously, this quantum went to road expenditure. A progressive school curriculum emphasising skills and attributes for the future was developed, and a new way to define prosperity was embraced - valuing green, low-carbon, fair work over a rise in GDP. The current Welsh Future Generations Commissioner is clear that the office acts as a mentor to public bodies, encouraging them to do better:

“The office uses the carrot more than the stick approach as this is where most collaboration and positive change happens”

Just Transition Taskforce – mechanism precedent

In Ireland, the Environment, Climate, and Communications Minister convened the Just Transition Taskforce in September 2023, in line with CAP23 commitments. The Taskforce aimed to agree on an approach for establishing a Just Transition Commission and advise the Minister and Government on its mandate. The Taskforce delivered its Report in May 2024, and its recommendation to establish a Just Transition Commission is currently in train.

Enablers identified as contributing to the success of this Taskforce include strong leadership, a hands-on role from the Minister, committed support from his Department, an experienced Chair, specific expertise

provided by the National Economic and Social Council and the commitment and authenticity given to the process by the Taskforce members.

Coalition 2030 suggests an expanded version of this model covering all areas of sustainable development to kick-start the FGC as a Taskforce can be set up without legislation or administrative order and deliver a robust scoping study/initial examination of the topic within a relatively short period. This model would enable the Government to act with the urgency needed and respect due diligence while beginning to produce primary legislation. Senior civil servants consulted observed:

“Get the right people into a room and give them a timeframe to report back.”

“A high functioning Taskforce can tease it through collaboration and consultation.”

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission- governance and reporting precedent

Coalition 2030 believes that the FGC role/office should be apolitical, reporting and advising the Oireachtas directly. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) provides an appropriate example of a state-funded independent body reporting directly to the Oireachtas. IHREC was established in 2014, with a mandate under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

Section 9 of the IHREC Act 2014 specifies that the Commission independently performs its

functions. The Commission does not receive any instruction from the Government, nor does the Commission report or account to the Government on its activities. Instead, the Commission is directly accountable to the Oireachtas and lays its annual report before each House of the Oireachtas. As a public servant observed:

“The FGC role needs to be independent, shining a light on Departments’ decisions and actions, to do this effectively it needs to be fully independent.”

The level of independence conferred by this reporting arrangement offers the FGC role/office the appropriate quantum of power and authority, eliminating tensions that could arise when the FGC examines Departmental decisions.

The Ombudsman for Children Act- legislative precedent

The discretionary powers granted in Section 7 of the Ombudsman For Children Act, 2002, whereby officeholders can inspect and advise the government on any policy affecting children, are offered as an appropriate precedent. This would need primary legislation provided by statute. This approach would confer autonomy on the FGC and result in accountability from government departments and agencies, as they would be held accountable for decision-making, resource use, and adherence to the legislation.

The Well-Being Framework- coherence example

The Well-Being framework is a strong example of an existing framework that could complement the FGC. Coherence between the Well-Being framework and the FGC makes sense; co-produced indicators could streamline efficiency between offices.



Establishment and Remit of the FGC

Vision

A consultative process is needed to decide specific areas of focus of a FGC in Ireland. Ireland can look to the Welsh example to accelerate our own actions and to the work of the Commission for Future Generations Bill 2023 introduced by Deputy Marc Ó Cathasaigh TD. The 2023 Bill Commission outlines its functions as having regard to the Well-being Framework and any relevant inter-generational issues, including, the climate and biodiversity emergencies, the impact of Covid-19 and potential future pandemics, ageing demographics, provision of care to children and older persons, and inter-generational income and wealth distribution.

Wales has identified five key missions; a broader range of priorities would likely emerge in Ireland, given the Irish Government's wider responsibility. Each Mission identifies the need, activities, outcomes and impact.

- Mission 1: Effective implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act
- Mission 2: Climate and Nature Emergencies
- Mission 3: Health and Well-being Long-term thinking
- Mission 4: Culture and Welsh language
- Mission 5: A Well-being Economy

The Welsh Well-being of Future Generations Act has seven well-being goals which public bodies must work to achieve. Coalition 2030 believes following a similar path in Ireland could help deliver:

- A Prosperous Ireland
- A Resilient Ireland
- A More Equal Ireland
- A Healthier Ireland
- An Ireland of Cohesive Communities
- An Ireland of Vibrant Culture & Thriving Irish Language
- A Globally Responsible Ireland

Policy Coherence

Policy coherence for long-term intergenerational sustainable planning and development requires oversight, capacity and intentionality. The FGC will use this capacity to design, implement, and monitor coherent and integrated policies, intentionally protecting and preventing spillovers on future generations. Coalition 2030 believes this will demonstrate value, avoid duplication, and ensure clear boundaries with existing bodies whose remits may overlap.

Memoranda of Understanding could help avoid duplication and provide for policy and operational cohesion and clarity between relevant bodies. Positive engagement, respectful dialogue, and effective collaboration can be leveraged strategically to deliver a sustainable future.

Power and Functions

We see the FGC as having the power to intervene, query, seek to influence and argue for evidence-based decision-making and resource allocation to protect the well-being of future generations in line with Agenda 2030 and beyond. We propose several initial suggestions for inclusion in the remit of the FGC, although we realise that a scoping study and extensive consultation are required:

Advocacy, Advisory and Watchdog function:

- Advocate, advise, and monitor Government and policymakers on future generations policy-making
- Ensure Government respects, protects and upholds the human rights of future generations in line with the Maastricht Principles
- Challenge Government actions that negatively impact future generations up to and including veto powers
- Ensure policy coherence across all Government Departments and agencies
- Make recommendations on how carbon budgets should be allocated between sectors
- Monitor and call out slippage in policy, performance and/or non-adherence to agreed policy and strategies

Promote awareness and inform debate on FGC

- Raise awareness of and celebrate the positive actions of public bodies as well as flagging those that actions that compromise the interest of future generations

Conduct research

- Conduct/commission evidence-based research on long-term policy and planning and its impact on future generations and indicators for effective practice
- Ensure existing knowledge research, data and policy are cohesively coordinated to safeguard future generations
- Investigate how current and future actions could impact future generations

A Fresh Approach

While all those consulted on a FGC for Ireland overwhelmingly agreed it should be established, there was an acknowledgement of the challenge of convincing people of the need for long-term strategic thinking within the short-term electoral cycle and the need for greater attention to the SDGs across government. Despite these concerns, respondents identified that ‘Future’ planning has a visionary, positive appeal and a fresh agenda that could positively capture the imagination.

“I have witnessed first-hand the importance of placing the needs of future generations at the heart of policy-making. By establishing a Future Generations Commissioner, Ireland can ensure its commitment to meeting the needs of people today as well as the needs of generations to come.”

Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

Conclusion & Call to Action

Today’s political decisions have a lasting impact on future generations. Coalition 2030 requests the Taoiseach, wider Government and all political parties to commit to “being good ancestors” by ensuring intergenerational equity is embedded into policy and legislative frameworks, decision-making and resourcing. Committing to a FGC will copper-fasten this Government’s legacy for generations to come. Taking this action immediately will safeguard future generations from existing, emerging and future crises across environmental, social, economic and cultural domains.

In summary, we call on the Taoiseach and the Government to embrace the sentiment of Coalition 2030 and all those consulted in the production of this report and to:

- **Commit** now to establishing a Future Generations Commissioner for Ireland as a matter of priority, signalling its intent to ensure adequate autonomy and resources.
- **Raise awareness** of the concept and its merits across government and the public through various authentic, creative and inclusive means to win hearts and minds.

- **Leverage** the precedents offered in this report as pathways to consider in fast-tracking the establishment of a FGC.
- **Embark immediately** on the due diligence, including a scoping study, with expert support to scope the remit and governance arrangements for the FGC role and office.
- **Engage key stakeholders across civil society**, including older and younger generations and marginalised groups, in designing, establishing and operating a FGC.
- **Build on Ireland’s established leadership** on intergenerational equity, the prominence given it in the 2030 Agenda, and its importance to the world.

Appendix 1

Coalition 2030 is very appreciative of the insights shared by the following experts who were spoken to in the production of this report:

Thought Leaders

- Jim Breslin, former Secretary General of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, previously Secretary General Department of Health
- Marie Broussard-Navarro Deputy Commissioner and Director for Health at The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales
- Sandra Corrigan Global Solidarity Officer INTO
- David Joyce Campaigns Officer ICTU
- Emily Logan GSOC Commissioner, former Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children, soon to be Ireland's first Police Ombudsman
- Larry O Connell Director National Economic and Social Council
- Art O'Leary, Chief Executive An Coimisiún Toghcháin/The Electoral Commission
- Michael O'Neill, Head of Legal Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Civil Society (incl Coalition 2030 members)

- Colette Bennett, Director of Advocacy and Research, The Wheel
- Karen Ciesielski, CEO Irish Environmental Network and Coalition 2030 Steering Committee
- Valerie Duffy, Youth 2030 Global Youth Work Programme Manager National Youth Council of Ireland
- Liam Herrick, Executive Director Irish Council for Civil Liberties
- Michelle Murphy, Research and Policy Analyst, Social Justice Ireland
- Simon Murtagh, Interim Head of Policy and Advocacy Dóchas
- Diandra Ní Bhuachalla, Youth2030 Global Youth Work Policy, Advocacy, and UN Youth Support Project Officer, National Youth Council of Ireland
- Hans Zomer, CEO Global Action Plan, ex Head of Communications President of Ireland, ex CEO Dóchas

Political sphere

- Malcolm Byrne, Senator Fianna Fáil
- Síle Ginnane advisor Green Party
- Dónall Geoghegan Chief of Staff Green Party Leader's Office
- Peter Harper, Director of Policy Fine Gael
- Cathal McCann, Political Director Labour
- Marc Ó Cathasaigh, T.D Green Party
- Siobhan Russell, Head of Communications and Research Fianna Fáil

Coalition 2030 Steering Committee (below) also contributed insights:

- Domestic Anti-Poverty & Equality Pillar: Johnny Sheehan, Membership and Engagement Manager The Wheel (Co-Chair), & Dearbháil Lawless, CEO of AONTAS (Co-Chair)
- International Pillar: Laura O'Connor, Political Engagement and Campaigns Manager, Concern, Simon Murtagh (Dochas)
- Environmental Pillar: Karen Ciesielski (Irish Environmental Network), Bernie Connolly, Cork Environmental Forum Development Coordinator, the Environmental Network,
- Trade Union Pillar: Daniel Higgins SIPTU, Sandra Corrigan (INTO)
- Academic advisor: Catherine Carty, UNESCO Chair at Munster Technological University

Coalition 2030 Policy Working Group

- Meaghan Carmody – Former Coalition 2030 Coordinator
- Alex O'Mahony - GOAL Global
- Laura O'Connor - Concern Worldwide
- Sarah Carney - MTU
- Valerie Duffy - NYCI
- Collette McEntee - Feminist Communities for Climate Justice (NWC and CWI)
- Vaness Conroy - National Women's Council of Ireland



Appendix 2

List of Coalition 2030 members: Note members are categorised on our website: <https://coalition2030.ie/our-members/>

- 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World
- Action Aid
- Age Action
- Aidlink
- Airfield
- Akidwa
- Alcohol Forum
- An Taisce
- AONTAS the National Adult Learning Organisation
- ATD All Together in Dignity
- BFLGI Baby Feeding Law Group of Ireland
- Carrig Conservation
- CBM Christian Blind Mission
- Cork Environmental Forum
- Child Fund Ireland
- Christian Aid
- Comhlámh
- Community Work Ireland
- Concern
- Cultivate
- Development Perspectives
- Disability Federation Ireland
- Dóchas
- ECO UNESCO
- Environmental Pillar
- European Anti Poverty Network Ireland
- Fairtrade Ireland
- Friends of the Earth
- Foodcloud
- Foodture
- Fórsa
- Global Action Plan
- Global Citizenship School
- Global Schoolroom
- GOAL
- Good Energies Alliance Ireland
- Green Foundation Ireland
- ICTU Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- IDEA Irish Development Education Association
- Irish Global Health Network
- IFPA Irish Family Planning Association
- International Presentation Association
- Irish Forum for Global Education
- Irish Rural Link
- Irish Wildlife Trust
- Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice
- The Ladder
- Misean Cara
- National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
- NUI Galway
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- Pavee Point
- Rediscovery Centre
- Roscommon Environmental Network
- Self Help Africa
- Sightsavers Ireland
- SIPTU Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union
- Social Justice Ireland
- Spunout
- TCD Trinity International Development Initiative (TIDI)
- The Wheel
- Trócaire
- UNESCO-Chair Munster Technological University
- UNICEF
- Voice
- VPSJ Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice
- World Vision
- Zero Waste Alliance Ireland



A young girl with long brown hair and black-rimmed glasses is looking at a laptop screen. A woman with blonde hair is sitting next to her, also looking at the screen. The background is blurred, showing other people in a room. The image has a blue and teal geometric overlay on the left side.

“This is the right time to do the right thing, to act on promises and commitments given and to help to build a better future for all.”

David Donoghue
Former Irish diplomat, co-facilitator of UN negotiations on the 2030 Agenda



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