

INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

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Abstract. As part of the research presented in this article:

- the ideological and theoretical-methodological foundations of ensuring intergenerational justice as an economic issue were examined, along with its role, significance, and possible approaches to addressing the problem in the context of the theory of justice;
- the intergenerational justice component within the structure of the Social Justice Index and the methodology for its assessment were studied;
- based on the methodology of the Social Justice Index, the current state of intergenerational justice in Armenia was assessed through the analysis of the most comparable data and indicators, as well as their dynamics, and the main challenges arising from the issue were identified. The research applied methods of economic and statistical analysis, chronological series, scientific deduction, and abstract methods.

The study revealed that all key indicators of intergenerational justice exhibit concerning trends. Data on pension and family benefit policies point to a likely deepening of income inequality in the future, along with a continued decline in opportunities for vulnerable population groups. Should the dynamics of environmental indicators continue, the next generation is sure to inherit an ecological environment with significant negative consequences for the quality of life. Trends in R&D investment and public debt indicators warn of the prospects of reduced competitive opportunities for the economy in the future and a significant increase in the tax burden.

Timely acceptance of the challenges arising from intergenerational justice, as well as the assessment and refinement of the resulting factor priorities in public policy, will not only allow inheriting better living conditions for the next generation, but also lay a solid foundation for long-term sustainable economic development.

Key words: *intergenerational justice, social justice, social justice index, ecological footprint, pension policy, family policy, environment, public debt.*

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Introduction

Economic development, as opposed to economic growth, encompasses not only the efficient allocation of resources but also the equitable and productive redistribution of economic outcomes across the population. Sustainable and long-term economic development, in turn, cannot be achieved unless resources and economic outcomes are effectively redistributed not only among the current generation, but also among different generations (current and future). In other words, a viable vision of long-term development itself implies fairness towards future generations as well.

Since all processes of distribution and redistribution are inherently linked to the issue of social justice, a number of objective questions arise: What should be the standards of social justice in this context? How does this problem manifest itself, and how acute is it in the economy of the Republic of Armenia? To what extent should it be addressed, and are issues of intergenerational justice currently reflected in the priorities of the state's strategic policy?

Theoretical and practical analyses of contemporary problems of global economic development lead to the conclusion that whatever methods and indicators of economic development are applied - at the level of the world, regional or individual economies - they should be primarily aimed at generating new knowledge and information on the extent to which the economy and the environment mutually influence and interact today, and what potential these trends will have in the future.

The challenges facing individual economies and the world today are far beyond the goals of economic growth, and inadequate responses to them, especially in the context of environmental protection, could further exacerbate various inequalities among future generations for the near future, reducing opportunities for a life of dignity.

If this crucial component of social justice is ignored, the next generation of a country (economy) in a rapidly changing world will inevitably face unequal competitive conditions of human development. Therefore, consideration of the issue of intergenerational justice and contemporary challenges arising from it and proposing appropriate solutions are extremely important within the framework of the development and implementation of the state macroeconomic policy of any country.

Intergenerational Justice as a Key Issue. Theoretical and Methodological Aspects

The idea of intergenerational equity in the professional literature is usually summarised in the following three aspects:

- investing 'in the future',
- ensuring at least equal development opportunities for the next generation,
- transferring a favourable ecological environment to future generations.

According to John Rawls, one of the most influential theorists on the concept of justice, the issue of intergenerational justice poses a fundamental challenge to any ethical theory. He asserts that the theory of *justice as fairness*¹ would remain fundamentally incomplete without addressing this concern (Rawls J., 1971). Rawls argues that each

¹ In his famous work *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls develops the theory of 'justice as fairness', according to which the provision of justice and the social contract around it is impossible without fairness as a fundamental virtue.

generation holds the responsibility not only to preserve the cultural and civilizational heritage and the foundational institutions of a just society but also to contribute from its accumulated capital for the benefit of future generations. In this context, the social contract theory necessitates that the contracting parties agree to a principle of accumulation². Rawls references Alexander Herzen's remark that human development is essentially a form of chronological injustice, wherein future generations enjoy the achievements of their predecessors at a relatively lower cost. He further cites Immanuel Kant, who observed that earlier generations bear their burdens for the sake of those who come after, while only the latter will have the opportunity to live in the fully constructed edifice of society. This development, according to Rawls, may seem unfair to some, but one must accept the natural fact that over time the boundaries between generations blur and economic benefits shift in the same direction³. Regarding the level of accumulation, varying stages of development and income levels should naturally imply differing accumulation rates. However, once just institutions are firmly established and basic freedoms are effectively realized, the net accumulation should ideally approach zero⁴. Thus, Rawls does not challenge the approach according to which the starting opportunities of each subsequent generation are qualitatively superior to those of the previous one, and endeavours to show that such a development is also fully within the logic of justice. However, current trends in global socio-economic development paint a markedly different picture.

In this context, Nobel Prize-winning economist J. Stiglitz notes: "There is one dimension of fairness to which politicians often pay lip service, but little more than that: the well-being of future generations.... Millions are saddled with burdensome student debt, which impedes their ability to choose a career freely – they're constantly thinking of the payments due – or even start a family or own a home. Meanwhile, house prices, relative to incomes, have soared as a result of easy money, a poorly designed tax code, and financial deregulation. Our generation got the capital gains. The next generation has to figure out how to get affordable housing. This divide in well-being across generations is one of the most troubling. Parents who made a killing in real estate may share that wealth with their children, who, in turn, may hand it down to their children. But parents who don't own any real estate have little or nothing to pass on to their children and grandchildren, and that leaves their descendants scrambling. Inequalities in this generation may thus be amplified in the next" (Stiglitz J. E., 2019).

Stiglitz sees the solution to the problem of ensuring fair intergenerational opportunities in tax and credit policies⁵, which should not only aim to maximise government revenues and the profits of financial institutions, but should indeed be consistent with a concept of social justice aimed at preventing and neutralising income polarisation today and in the future.

Within the intergenerational justice issue, Stiglitz agrees with Rawls' view that a certain portion of accumulated capital should be invested for the benefit of the welfare of the future generation. However, the two authors have different motivations. Unlike Rawls, who was convinced that economic benefits for the next generations tend to grow, so she considered reinvestment of capital as a kind of compromise option until a perfectly

² Ibid pp. 254-256.

³ Ibid p.256.

⁴ Ibid p.257.

⁵ Ibid pp. 193-195.

just institutional system is formed, according to Stiglitz, in today's realities it is simply necessary and can be a lifeline for the next generation, which is on the verge of a significant loss of wealth.

“What really burdens future generations is a lack of investment, both public and private. Best estimates suggest that America’s capital stock hasn’t even been keeping up with the growth of income. If we don’t provide our young with adequate education, they won’t be able to live up to their potential. And if we don’t invest in infrastructure and technology, the world that they inherit will not be able to sustain the kinds of living standards that we have had.”⁶ – states Stiglitz.

This thesis is also developed in the work “Justice” by one of the prominent theorists of justice, O. Höffe.

“Within the gross domestic product the role of present tasks has increased: social obligations, expenditures on health care, pensions and repayment of public debt, and on the contrary, the role of future tasks has decreased: investments in education and other areas of social and material infrastructure - this shift from the share of investment to the share of consumption in the broad sense means injustice to future generations... The present is sustained at the expense of the future” (Höffe O., 2007) – notices Höffe.

According to Höffe, each generation is obliged to strive for savings in three dimensions, not just in the economic sense:

- ‘conservation saving’ preservation of institutions and resources,
- ‘investment saving’ (capital, infrastructure, promising technologies...) and
- ‘preventive conservation’: avoiding wars, environmental disasters, economic and social collapse⁷.

The cornerstone of the problem of intergenerational justice today is undoubtedly the ecological component, which, in particular, is absent within the framework of Rawls's theory of justice. This can be explained by the lower acuteness of environmental issues in the world in the seventies of the last century as compared to the present time. Perhaps it is the desire to avoid such issues that determines Rawls's pronounced optimism about the well-being of future generations. However, since the early 2000s, this issue has become fundamental to all development and justice studies.

Nobel Prize-winning economist and equity theorist Amartya Sen suggests looking at the problem in the context of the impact of the environment on quality of life and human-nature interactions: “it is assumed that this pre-existing nature will stay intact unless we add impurities and pollutants to it, it might, therefore, appear superficially plausible that the environment is best protected if we interfere with it as little as possible. This understanding is, however, deeply defective for two important reasons. First, the value of the environment cannot be just a matter of what there is, but must also consist of the opportunities it offers to people... Second, the environment is not only a matter of passive preservation, but also one of active pursuit.” – he states and continues, - Our power to intervene with effectiveness and reasoning can be substantially enhanced by the process

⁶ Ibid p. 192.

⁷ Ibid p. 133.

of development itself. For example, greater female education and women's employment can help to reduce fertility rates, which in the long run can reduce the pressure on global warming and the increasing destruction of natural habitats" (Sen A., 2009).

Sen believes that qualitative improvement of the environment is also directly dependent on the creative impact of human beings. For example, water purification, elimination of pandemics simultaneously contribute not only to development, but also to environmental health.

Sen focuses on a comprehensive definition of the content of sustainable development in the context of intergenerational justice. As defined in the Brundtland Report⁸, sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. In Sen's view, this definition is not comprehensive enough because, apart from needs, it does not reflect the value side of human nature. In this context, Sen sees Robert Solow's definition in his work 'An almost Practical Step towards Sustainability' (Solow R., 1992) as a step forward. Solow's formulation sees sustainability as the requirement that the next generation must be left with whatever it takes to achieve a standard of living at least as good as our own and to look after their next generation similarly.

However, according to Sen, while needs and living standards are fundamental factors, the concept of sustainable development cannot be complete without the inclusion of fundamental freedoms. Thus, Sen argues, equitable sustainable development, beyond the definitions of Brundtland and Solow, must also include the preservation and possible expansion of real freedoms and opportunities for the next generation (Sen A., 2009).

All of the above components, from meeting needs to capabilities, cannot be fully realised without transferring the necessary quantitative and qualitative natural resource base. While the current ruthless misuse of resources only works in favour of pessimistic scenarios.

Issues related to the environmental dimension of intergenerational justice, according to J. Stiglitz, should be approached from the perspective of what benefits today's environmental transformations will lead to in the future.

With regard to the Fair Exploitation of Natural Resources indicator, Höffe notes that the extraction of non-renewable energy sources may be deemed fair only if it does not outpace the rate at which new, alternative sources are discovered (Höffe O., 2006).

According to the modern well-known theorists dealing with the problem of intergenerational justice D. Birnbacher, more and more aspects of existence are entering the sphere of human control, and we have a growing possibility to detect future dangers and risks early enough. These factors lead to an extension of our responsibility for future generations. How to fulfil this task must be based on fundamental ethics and must be well defined regarding different scopes. At any rate, according to Birnbacher we have to take the entire foreseeable future into account. Regarding the content of our responsibility for future generations, we have to care for a sustained preservation of the resources needed for human survival (Tremmel J. C., 2006).

From the point of view of the comprehensiveness of the scientific approaches on the issue, it should be noted that there are scientific approaches, according to which the idea

⁸ World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

of intergenerational justice is impractical and useless. Such an opinion develops professor of economics at Oxford University and University College London Dr. Wilfred Beckerman. He outlines his arguments by the following syllogism:

1. Future generations – of unborn people – cannot be said to have any rights.
2. Any coherent theory of justice implies conferring rights on people, therefore
3. the interests of future generations cannot be protected or promoted within the framework of any theory of justice⁹.

The crux of the argument that future generations cannot have rights to anything is that properties, such as being green or wealthy or having rights, can be predicated only of some subjects that exist. However, Beckerman emphasizes that rights and justice do not exhaust the whole of morality, and that we still have moral obligations to take account of the welfare of future generations. Our main obligation is to bequeath to future generations a society in which there is greater respect for basic human rights than is the case today.

To summaries, within the framework of any coherent conception of justice, the issue of intergenerational justice is inescapable, as it is intrinsically linked to the challenges of sustainable development policy. In any economy, it is the responsibility of the government to integrate this dimension of social justice into its broader socio-economic strategy. Failure to do so, particularly in the context of a rapidly evolving global landscape, risks leaving future generations to confront overwhelming challenges and deeply unequal starting conditions.

Intergenerational Justice in the Context of Social Justice

Based on the multilevel dimensions of social justice, as well as its cornerstone importance in the concept of sustainable development, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has developed an internationally recognized methodology through which the Social Justice Index (SJI) is calculated. The latter is an aggregate indicator that includes six groups of components, which in turn include 38 quantitative and 8 qualitative indicators (see figure 1):

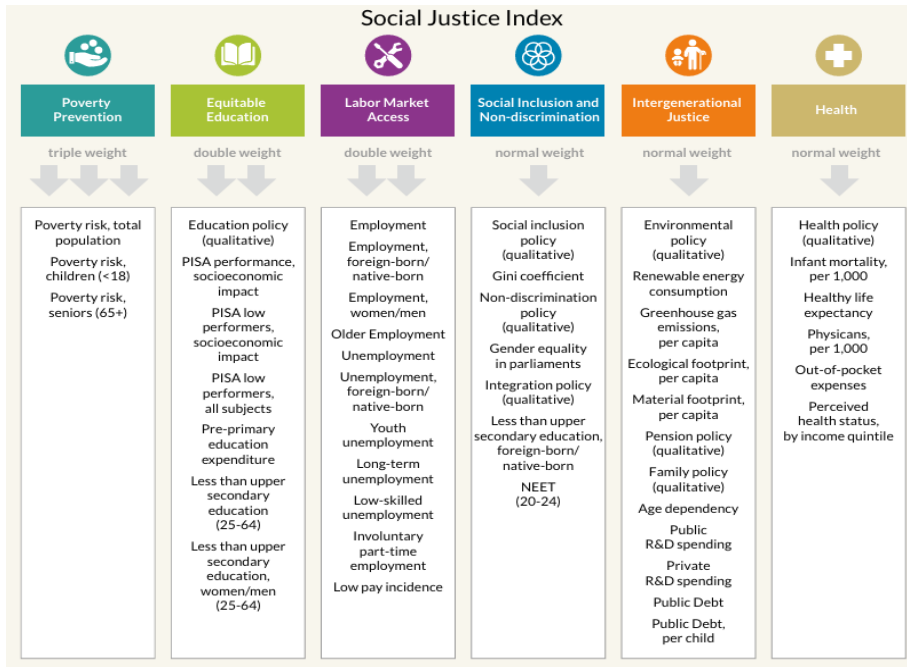
The concept of the Social Justice Index (hereinafter referred to as SJI) is methodologically based on the research of W. Merkel and H. Giebler (Merkel W., Giebler H., 2009), which gives the greatest weight in measuring social justice to poverty reduction indicators, followed by access to education and labour market participation. Within the SJI calculation, these three components are also prioritised the first one being triple weighted, while the other two are double weighted.

The fifth dimension of the SJI assesses the severity of intergenerational justice, a key component of sustainable development, across economies. It includes three types of indicators. The first group of them relates to the assessment of public policies targeting vulnerable age groups as well as families, and also includes the so-called old-age dependency ratio, which shows the number of elderly people per 100 people of working age. The second group is related to the environment and includes a qualitative assessment of environmental policies and four other quantitative indicators: renewable energy con-

⁹ Ibid, p. 9.

sumption (share of renewable energy consumption in total energy consumption), greenhouse gas emissions (share of CO₂ per capita), and material footprint¹⁰ and ecological footprint¹¹ per capita. The third group of intergenerational justice indicators, which concerns economic and fiscal sustainability, consists of four quantitative indicators. The first two show the share of public and private R&D expenditure as an investment in future well-being. The next indicator is the weight of public debt in GDP, and the third is the amount of public debt per child.

Figure 1



Source: *Social Justice in the EU and OECD, Index Report 2019, p.12*

The top three in terms of weighted intergenerational justice are Sweden (7.59), Denmark (6.92) and Norway (6.87), while Cyprus (4.21), Italy (3.95) and Greece (3.81) complete the list¹².

¹⁰ The material footprint is an indicator of resource consumption that shows the final distribution of extracted raw materials based on actual demand for them. It does not reflect the actual physical movement of raw materials within and between countries, but shows the link between the beginning of the production chain (where raw materials are extracted from the environment) and the end (where the product or service is consumed). (Wiedmann et al, The Material Footprint of nations, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, September 2013)

¹¹ The ecological footprint shows how much of the biosphere's reproductive potential is involved in human activity (consumption).

¹² Social Justice in the EU and OECD, Index Report 2019, p.94

Indicators of Intergenerational Justice in Armenia: Status and Challenges

The assessment of the Social Justice Index is limited to the OECD countries. A comprehensive assessment of the social justice index for the RA economy as such has not been carried out, and the number of possible comparable studies (Gyozalyan V., 2022) is limited. Table 1 summarises and combines the indicators of the social justice index in the RA economy and the intergenerational justice component while preserving the methodological comparability¹³ as far as possible.

An analysis of the data presented in Table 1 reveals alarming trends and dynamics across all examined indicators of intergenerational equity in the Armenian economy.

Table 1

Dynamics of Intergenerational Justice Indicators in Armenia (2016-2023)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Age Dependency								
Number of the retired (thousand people)	394,4	405,2	419,2	434,6	446	458,4	551,5	598
Working-age population (thousand people)	1962,9	1934,6	1910,4	1889,5	1881,8	1868,3	1787,7	1788,2
Number of the retired/working age population (in per cent)	20,1	20,9	21,9	23,0	23,7	24,5	30,8	33,4
Pension Policy								
Average monthly pension granted (drams)	40397	40634	40478	40424	43983	43677	46629	49605
Average monthly nominal salary (AMD)	-	166004	172727	182673	189716	204048	235576	269994
Pension/ average salary (in per cent)	-	24,5	23,4	22,1	23,2	21,4	19,8	18,4
Family Policy								
Average amount of benefit per family receiving family and social allowance (drams)	31350	31350	31350	31350	31350	31350	31350	31350
Family allowance/ average nominal wage (in per cent)	-	18,9	18,2	17,2	16,5	15,4	13,3	11,6

¹³ The indicators presented in the table may not be methodologically fully identical and/or comparable to the Intergenerational Justice Component subindexators. The data were collected and calculated on the basis of possible comparable statistical indicators available in NSS RA reports and publications.

Environment								
Harmful substances emitted into the atmosphere, (1000 tons)	276,7	291,1	263,4	267,9	295,4	308,9	317,4	316,1
Water withdrawal from millions of sources. (cubic metres)	3181,9	2865,4	2714,4	2865,4	2829,8	2966,5	3071,8	2917,6
Total deforestation (including sanitary and liquidation deforestation) (ha)	1940	2010	2015	2240	36317	39119	28931	3128
Reforestation	0,5	9	17,2	126,3	0,8	3,3	6,1	-
Number of illegally felled trees	513	30720	12821	7228	12978	18674	17193	13973
Scorched forest area, (ha)	37	1111,8	239	1880,8	342,4	890	1099	179
R&D Sphere								
Gross expenditure on research and development, million drams	-	-	-	12145	13717	14683	17814	16888
of which: internal expenses	11074,4	11867,6	10532,2	11683	12933	14373	16710	16759
Public Debt								
Public debt as a percentage of GDP (calculated in dollar terms)	56,3	58,8	55,6	53,8	63	66,5	54,5	49,2
External public debt (as a percentage of GDP (calculated in US dollar terms)	45,5	47,8	44,4	42,5	47,9	47,9	33	27
Public debt stock (million, US Dollars)	5942,1	6774,6	6922,5	7321,3	7968,5	9225,6	10637,7	11845,4
Public debt per child (in US dollars)	9449,9	10704,1	10889,6	11518,7	12538,9	14535,4	17779,9	19579,2

Source: NSS RA statistical yearbooks and publications data, author's calculations (data missing in the table are due to the fact that they are not presented in the relevant publications of the NSS RA).

The upward trend in the number of retirees and their growing proportion relative to the working-age population suggests that the continuation of such dynamics may impose a significant socio-economic burden on future generations of the workforce. A shrinking pool of individuals engaged in active economic processes and the production chain, coupled with an expanding economically dependent population, risks undermining overall welfare and living standards. This issue may be further exacerbated by the persistent growth in pension levels and the widening disparity between pensions and average wages.

The average size of family and social benefits has not changed over the period under review. This means that the real incomes of families receiving benefits have decreased, which, in turn, given the growth of average wages, contributes to the deepening of income polarisation in society. Such trends reduce the already limited starting opportunities for future generations of poor families to qualitatively grow and invest in human capital (education, health care, cultural integration, etc.), creating a more worrying picture of social justice in the future.

Trends in all observed environmental indicators also indicate an unfavourable environmental situation for the future generation, hence also the preconditions for a deterioration in the quality of life.

It is important to highlight the risks associated with the accumulation of mining waste. Armenia has more than 130 types of minerals, of which 25 are metallic. Twenty-eight out of some 400 mineral mines with licenses are metallic. The existing waste rock and unconditioned ore dumps are located in the immediate vicinity of the mining facilities or at a short distance from them, on the surface of the earth and are mostly open, not subject to recultivation¹⁴. Mining poses risks and can have negative impacts on:

- Landscapes and soil
- Biodiversity
- Water resources
- Air quality
- Community safety, including increasing risks and impacts of disasters¹⁵.
-

As for the R&D sector, we can see that, although investment in R&D has increased, it has been mainly at the expense of domestic funds, which indicates that Armenia's R&D sector is still not attractive for foreign investment, which could be a serious stimulus for growth in this area.

Table 2 presents data on the R&D expenditure of countries in the region (as a percentage of GDP) and data from Israel, one of the world leaders in this indicator.

¹⁴ Mine Waste and Tailing Storage in Armenia: Disaster Risk Management, Educational Handbook, AUA Center for Responsible Mining, Yerevan, 2020, p. 54.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 58.

Table 2

Research and Development Expenditure (% of GDP)

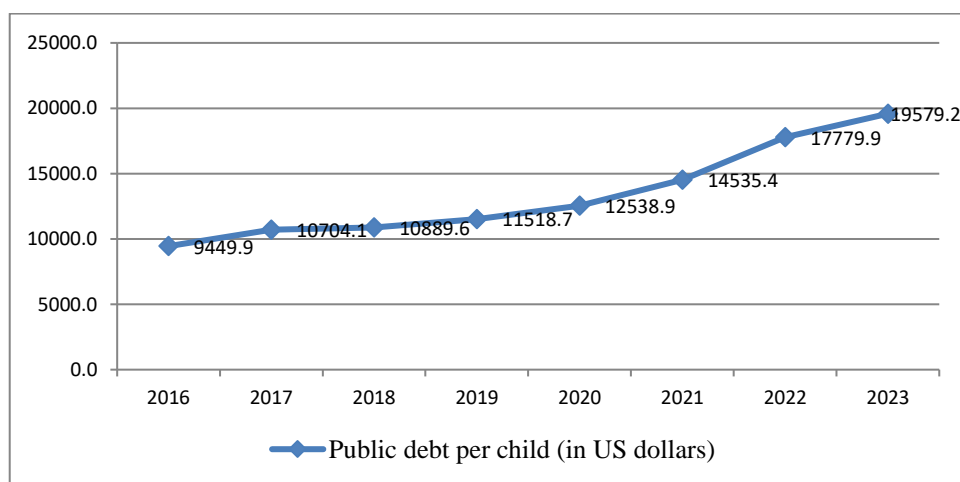
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Armenia	0.23	0.23	0.19	0.18	0.21	0.21	0.21
Azerbaijan	0.21	0.18	0.18	0.20	0.22	0.21	0.15
Georgia	0.29	0.27	0.28	0.28	0.30	0.25	0.24
Israel	4.47	4.62	4.78	5.22	5.71	5.56	...

Source: World Development Indicators Databank <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#>

In the period under review, the share of R&D expenditure in the GDP of Armenia is stable (not high), and compared to the countries of the region, the trends are generally similar. However, when compared with the corresponding indicators of Israel, it becomes evident that in a rapidly evolving global environment, Armenia's key economic sectors – those critical for ensuring future competitiveness – do not generate particularly high expectations regarding the return on existing investments.

Regarding the dynamics of public debt indicators, Table 1 shows that although public debt has increased in absolute terms (in US dollar value) in recent years, its ratio to GDP has declined during 2022–2023 – a development generally considered positive. However, from the perspective of intergenerational equity, the trend in public debt per child (Figure 2) raises significant concerns.

Figure 2

Public Debt per Child (in US dollars) in Armenia for 2016-2023

Source: NSS RA statistical yearbooks and publications data. The web was visited 20.03.2025

The public debt per child (in US dollars) has been increasing steadily over the period under review, but the rate of increase has also accelerated in recent years. In 2022, the indicator increased by 18.25 per cent compared to the previous year and in 2023 by 9.19 per cent compared to 2022. This increase is the result of an increase in the absolute value

of public debt on the one hand, and a decrease in the number of children on the other. In particular, in 2022, the number of children in Armenia (including the population below working age) was the lowest in the period under review – 598.3 thousand, compared to 634.7 thousand last year. In 2016, the number of children was 628.8 thousand, in 2023 – 605 thousand¹⁶.

The increase in public debt combined with the declining number of children is a serious concern in the context of intergenerational justice. Increasing public debt is, in fact, an alternative solution to raise the necessary funds to finance public (including social) programmes, which is applied at the expense of not increasing tax rates for today's generation, and hence the tax burden. However, all other things being equal, such a solution is not sustainable in the long term: eventually, in order to repay the accumulated public debt, an increase in the tax burden will become inevitable—one that will fall squarely on the shoulders of future generations. Given the current low growth in the number of children, this burden will be even heavier for each individual member of society in the future.

Conclusion

In the current context of economic shifts, GDP growth is not a sufficient indicator for assessing the real potential of an economy. Moreover, it can often be a warning sign that sustainable development opportunities are being exhausted. When GDP grows, but the environment suffers and resources are used sparingly, it indicates serious problems in the economy. Therefore, one of the priorities of macro policy should not be the constant expansion of the 'pie', but its possible equitable distribution not only among the present, but also among future generations.

The study of the dynamics of intergenerational justice indicators in the Republic of Armenia reveals serious signals regarding the multifaceted problems existing in the context of the issue of intergenerational justice. Alarming dynamics are observed for all indicators. Pension and family allowance policy indicators point to trends of deepening income inequality and further reducing opportunities for vulnerable groups in the future. If the trend in environmental indicators continues, the next generation is likely to inherit an ecological environment with significant negative impacts on quality of life, in particular high levels of air pollution and the extreme rarity of forested areas.

Rising public debt that is not accompanied by progressive fertility growth, in a context of low R&D expenditure, could potentially increase the tax burden on the working population, jeopardising the provision of an acceptable level of general welfare for the next generation.

Consequently, the priorities of Armenia's state macroeconomic and social policy need to be revised with a focus on the factor impacts of intergenerational justice. Such an approach is not only fundamental in terms of sustainable economic development, but also contributes significantly to the realisation of the principle of social justice among the current generation, curbing the deepening of income inequality for the future generation.

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¹⁶ Statistical Yearbook of Armenia 2024, p. 29.

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