



Youth Pulse 2026: Insights From the Next Generation for a Changing World

INSIGHT REPORT
JANUARY 2026



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Preface



Natalie Pierce,
Head, Global Shapers
Community

Young people today are coming of age amid profound global transformations. Accelerating technological change, rising living costs, evolving labour markets, declining institutional trust, social fragmentation and intensifying environmental risks are reshaping societies, economies and daily life. In this context, young people are not only navigating uncertainty; they are actively reimagining systems and solutions for the future.

“Youth Pulse 2026”, the World Economic Forum’s flagship report on youth perspectives, draws on insights from nearly 4,600 young people from 489 locations worldwide, representing diverse regions and contexts. By combining quantitative data and qualitative reflections, the report identifies the priorities, perceptions and aspirations shaping the next generation’s outlook.

Structured around five dimensions – political, economic, social, technological and environmental – the analysis explores the trends young people are tracking, the pressures they face, and the leadership approaches they find credible. It also spotlights replicable youth-led initiatives implemented this year that translate insight into action, and outlines practical measures stakeholders can take to embed youth foresight into policy and practice.

Several cross-cutting themes emerge. Across contexts, young people are cultivating new forms of belonging and purpose. They are building communities that bridge divides through learning, service and collaboration. Economic pressures – from inflation to affordability – are influencing young people’s choices while driving innovation in how they work, save and participate politically. Trust is gravitating towards leaders who are proximate, accountable and effective in their communities.

Young people are quick to adopt artificial intelligence (AI), even as formal upskilling struggles to keep pace. This highlights both their willingness to experiment and the urgent need to expand access to advanced skills and meaningful work. Despite economic strain, their decisions remain values-driven, with climate change continuing to shape how they consume, invest and lead.

As societies navigate complex transitions, the insights of young people offer both a reflection of present realities and a compass for collective action. This report aims to inform dialogue and cooperation across sectors, fostering shared understanding and sustained commitment to advancing opportunity, resilience and sustainability for the next generation – and those to come.

Key findings

The world's largest generation is sending clear signals about the future.

“ This report draws insights from nearly 4,600 young people aged 18-30 in 144 countries and territories

Across every region, young people are interpreting signals of change and responding with determination and innovation. The findings of this report synthesize their perspectives across

five dimensions – economic, political, social, technological and environmental – offering a snapshot of how the next generation sees today's transformations and their role in shaping the future.



Economic outlook

1 Inequality dominates concerns, but entrepreneurship fuels optimism.

Nearly half of respondents identify deepening inequality as the leading economic trend shaping the future. Yet in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, entrepreneurship emerges as the most powerful economic force – reflecting growing confidence in innovation and self-determination as key drivers of opportunity.

2 Financial pressures weigh heavily, driving a search for resilience.

Financial strain is the foremost source of stress for young people, with half viewing

inflation and instability as the greatest threats to their lives. Many are adapting – diversifying income, upskilling and pursuing creative or entrepreneurial paths that align with their values and aspirations.

3 Purpose is reshaping career aspirations.

Across regions, young professionals prioritize purpose, flexibility and balance ahead of traditional measures of success. The next generation's economic outlook is increasingly guided by alignment between livelihood, well-being and societal impact.



Political outlook

4 Cautious about global politics, hopeful about reform.

Despite concern over geopolitical tensions and democratic erosion, nearly half of respondents highlight positive political shifts – from innovative governance models and greater civic participation to stronger international cooperation and the inclusion of under-represented groups in policy-making.

5 Trust is highest at the community level.

Local leaders receive the strongest trust ratings, while national figures score significantly lower. This reflects a generational preference for leadership that is proximate, accountable and effective in delivering tangible results.

6 Integrity and collaboration define trusted leadership.

Transparency and accountability are the most valued leadership traits. Gendered insights reveal that young men most often emphasize courage to make difficult decisions, while young women place greater weight on collaboration – underscoring the multidimensional leadership young people seek.

7 A generation ready to lead.

More than one in three respondents say they are likely to run for political office – signalling a rising interest in direct participation and confidence in their capacity to drive change.



Technological outlook

8 Young people are aware of the risks of AI-related disruptions.

Two-thirds of respondents believe AI will reduce entry-level job opportunities, underscoring awareness of disruption and the need for adaptive skills and forward-looking policies and systems.

9 Youth are early adopters of AI.

Nearly 60% of young people report using AI regularly to enhance their skills, with another third experimenting occasionally. Only a small minority have not yet engaged with AI tools.

10 Digital innovation is global and youth-led.

Regular AI use among young people is high across regions. These results challenge assumptions that digital innovation is concentrated in a few markets, revealing a generation of early adopters accelerating technological diffusion across the globe.



Social outlook

11 Purpose-built communities counter fragmentation.

In an era of polarization, 95% of respondents say that belonging to intentionally designed youth communities provides a critical space for learning, growth and dialogue. Such communities are emerging as vital infrastructures for connection and resilience.

12 Youth action takes diverse and effective forms.

While volunteering remains the leading form of youth civic participation globally, young people are shaping societies in different ways. In some regions, digital organizing and

advocacy are key channels for change; in others, social entrepreneurship, values-driven career choices and electoral participation define critical pathways for civic impact.

13 Inclusion is imperative – and must continue to evolve.

Amid both progress and backlash in diversity and inclusion efforts, young people reaffirm inclusion as essential. Sixty per cent believe current strategies should continue to evolve, while one-quarter deem them adequate, and fewer than one in 10 consider them as unimportant. Across regions, most young professionals call for inclusion policies to be maintained or strengthened.



Environmental outlook

14 Climate change is the defining global concern – demanding action at every level.

Respondents overwhelmingly identify climate change and environmental degradation as the greatest threats to the world. Young people recognize that progress depends on collective effort – with governments, businesses and communities each playing their part.

15 Environmental concerns persist.

While inflation and economic instability remain the top personal worries, climate change ranks as the greatest threat to young people's lives – showing that environmental concern persists even amid financial pressures.

16 Values and purpose are redefining consumption.

Environmental and ethical considerations now rank among the top three factors guiding youth purchasing decisions, after quality and affordability. This marks a growing generational shift towards purpose-driven consumption and green entrepreneurship.

17 Turning awareness into action.

Young people are advancing climate solutions that address urgent local challenges – from renewable energy and sustainable agriculture to nature conservation and waste reduction. Their leadership emphasizes practical, community-based responses to the climate crisis.



Policy priorities

18 Youth employment leads the policy agenda.

More than half of respondents (57%) call for the creation of quality jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people – a goal central to economic growth, innovation and social stability.

19 Bridging the education-employment divide.

Equal access to affordable, quality education is the second most-cited policy priority (46%),

reflecting recognition that inclusive education systems are essential to economic resilience and social mobility.

20 Affordability, representation and access to capital matter.

Affordable housing ranks as the third most urgent concern, followed by greater youth representation in decision-making and increased access to capital for youth-led businesses. Together, these priorities reflect a generation seeking systems that enable security, participation and innovation.

Introduction: Youth in a changing world

What can be learnt about the future by listening to the next generation?



“ The future cannot be designed for young people; it must be designed with them. Time and again, we’ve seen that sidelining youth voices widens generational divides and deepens the crisis of trust. Young people are essential stakeholders across all sectors and societies – engaging them doesn’t just improve policy; it renews the very foundations of our shared progress.

Sebastian Backup,
Managing Director, World
Economic Forum

In an era defined by persistent uncertainty and rapid transformation, *foresight* – the ability to anticipate and interpret the signals shaping our societies, economies and workplaces – is essential to building resilience and ensuring sustainable progress.

Foresight is inherently intergenerational. With young people now representing the largest demographic in many emerging economies, engaging with their perspectives is not only a matter of inclusion but of *strategy, relevance* and *effectiveness*. Their insights reveal the evolving priorities and emerging forces that will define the decades ahead. Integrating intergenerational viewpoints enables societies to navigate complexity, foster adaptability and catalyse innovation in response to the world’s most pressing challenges.

The years 2024-2025 have been marked by persistent armed conflicts – eroding trust in institutions – abrupt political transitions and the reconfiguration of global trade. At the same time, labour markets are undergoing profound transformation driven by advances in AI, while environmental degradation and resource depletion continue to accelerate.

Against this backdrop, “Youth Pulse 2026” captures the perspectives of young people across five foundational outlooks – political, economic, social, technological and environmental. These dimensions offer a holistic framework for understanding systemic transformation, recognizing that shifts in one domain inevitably ripple across others.

Beyond mapping perceptions, the report also documents more than 800 youth-led solutions advanced over the past year by members of the Global Shapers Community. These initiatives reveal where young people identify gaps and how they are addressing them – through collaboration, innovation and community leadership. By surfacing these signals and solutions, the report seeks to inform cross-sector dialogue, guide policy design and strengthen the global foresight ecosystem.

Together, these insights offer a lens into how young people interpret global trends, where they are directing their energy for change, and what their perspectives reveal about the future of shared systems.



Economic outlook

Inequality is widening within and between generations – yet young people are redefining opportunity through innovation and entrepreneurship.

Over the past 25 years, income inequality between countries has narrowed as developing economies have grown rapidly. Yet within countries, gaps have deepened: the United Nations estimates that 71% of the world's population now lives in societies where inequality is rising.¹ Increasingly, this divide is generational, as young people face higher living

costs, job precarity and limited access to affordable housing and capital compared to their parents.

Below are the economic trends that young people are tracking – the forces shaping their daily lives and informing their vision for a more inclusive and resilient global economy.



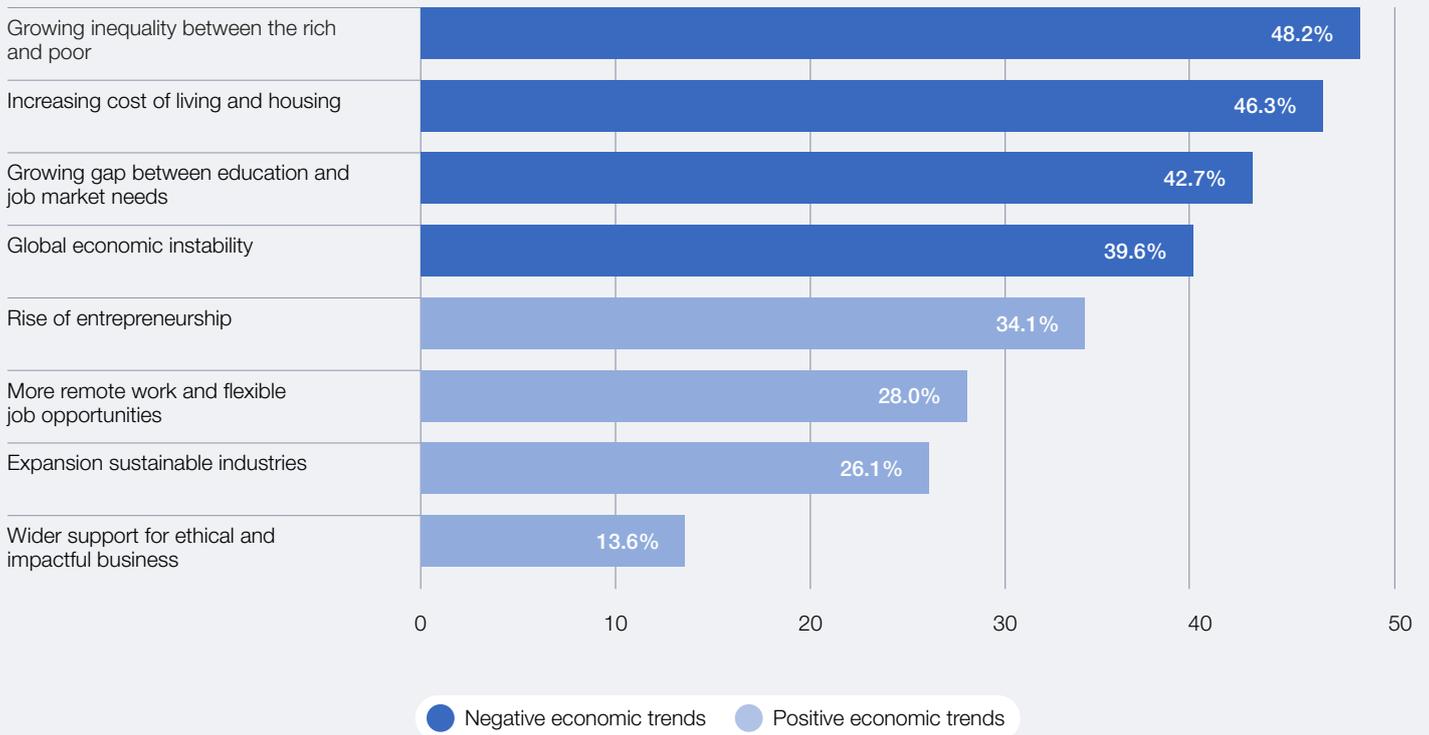
Finding agency amid widening divides

Nearly half of the respondents identify deepening inequality as the top economic trend shaping the future. Young people in Europe and North America are acutely aware of widening wealth gaps and diminishing social safety nets; last year's survey found that 64% felt worse off

than their parents.² In Sub-Saharan Africa³ and South Asia,⁴ by contrast, many point to *growing entrepreneurship* as the most powerful economic force, reflecting regional confidence in innovation and self-determination despite persistent structural constraints.

FIGURE 1 Economic trends shaping the future

Which economic trends do you think will shape the future most?*

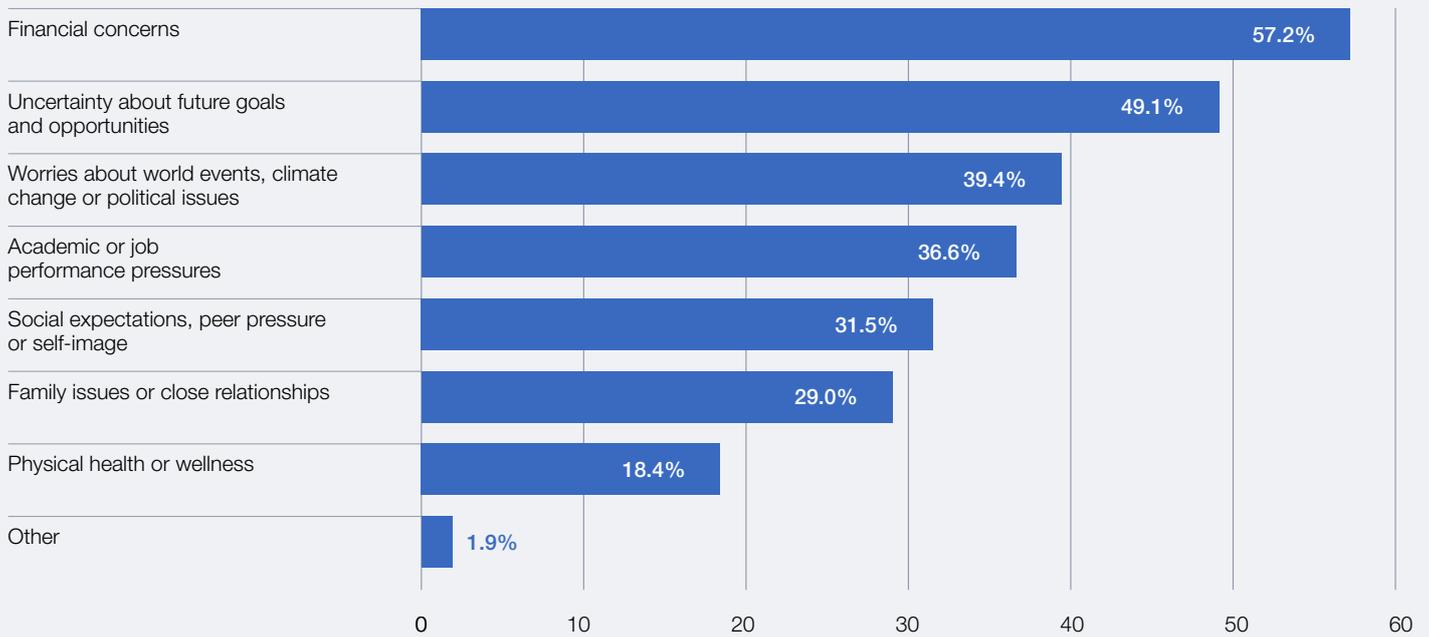


Note: *Respondents were asked to select up to three

Financial insecurity ranks as the top personal source of stress, with 57% of survey respondents citing inflation and instability as the greatest threats to their lives. These concerns mirror global patterns:

over 70% of young workers are in informal, insecure or low-wage employment,⁵ and cost-of-living pressures are identified by the "Global Risks Report 2025" as a major driver of social unrest.⁶

What are your biggest sources of stress or anxiety?*



Note: *Respondents were asked to select up to three

In response, young people are diversifying income through side hustles, freelance work and small ventures – particularly in digital and service sectors.⁷ These adaptive behaviours show resilience and innovation, but they also underline a critical truth:

individual creativity cannot compensate for systemic inequality. Ensuring that resilience translates into lasting opportunity requires inclusive and sustainable labour systems that expand access to meaningful work and economic security.

Youth employment is a cornerstone of inclusive growth

Employment remains the defining economic priority for this generation. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents identify youth employment and meaningful economic opportunity as the top policy priority for governments and institutions (see Figure 17). Their message is clear: *inclusive growth begins with work that offers purpose and progression.*

Yet, barriers persist. Young people are three times more likely than other generations to be unemployed, and nearly 70% in low- and middle-income countries work informally.⁸ Automation and AI are reshaping entry-level jobs, while progress in reskilling and apprenticeships has

lagged.⁹ Youth unemployment exceeds 25% in North Africa and Southern Europe,¹⁰ while in East and South Asia, a surge in gig-based work offers flexibility but limited security.¹¹

Expanding youth employment demands coordinated action: governments investing in inclusive labour-market policies, businesses creating equitable entry pathways, and education systems aligning skills with emerging demand. When young people are partners in designing these solutions, employment becomes not only a source of income but a foundation for dignity, trust and shared prosperity.

CASE STUDY 1. REIMAGINING ENTRY PATHWAYS – GHANA’S MY FIRST JOB INITIATIVE

Youth-led innovation is transforming national service into a launchpad for employment and skill development.

In Ghana, nearly 90% of tertiary graduates remain unemployed during their first year after graduation, reflecting a gap between academic preparation and employability.

To address this, an initiative called My First Job – conceived and led by young leaders at the Global Shapers Accra Hub, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the National Service Secretariat – reimagines the country’s mandatory national service placement scheme as a launchpad for meaningful youth employment. The scheme runs a mandatory one-year programme for tertiary graduates, providing them with practical work experience.

My First Job integrates skill development, coaching and industry mentorship into the existing service year, equipping participants with practical experience and pathways into the labour market. Following the six-month accelerator, 60% of participants secured their first job within three months of completion.

By aligning youth-led innovation with public-sector infrastructure, My First Job demonstrates how intergenerational collaboration can transform policy into impact. Its scalable model offers a blueprint for other countries seeking to enhance graduate employability, foster entrepreneurship and build systems where young people are not just beneficiaries, but *co-designers* of solutions.

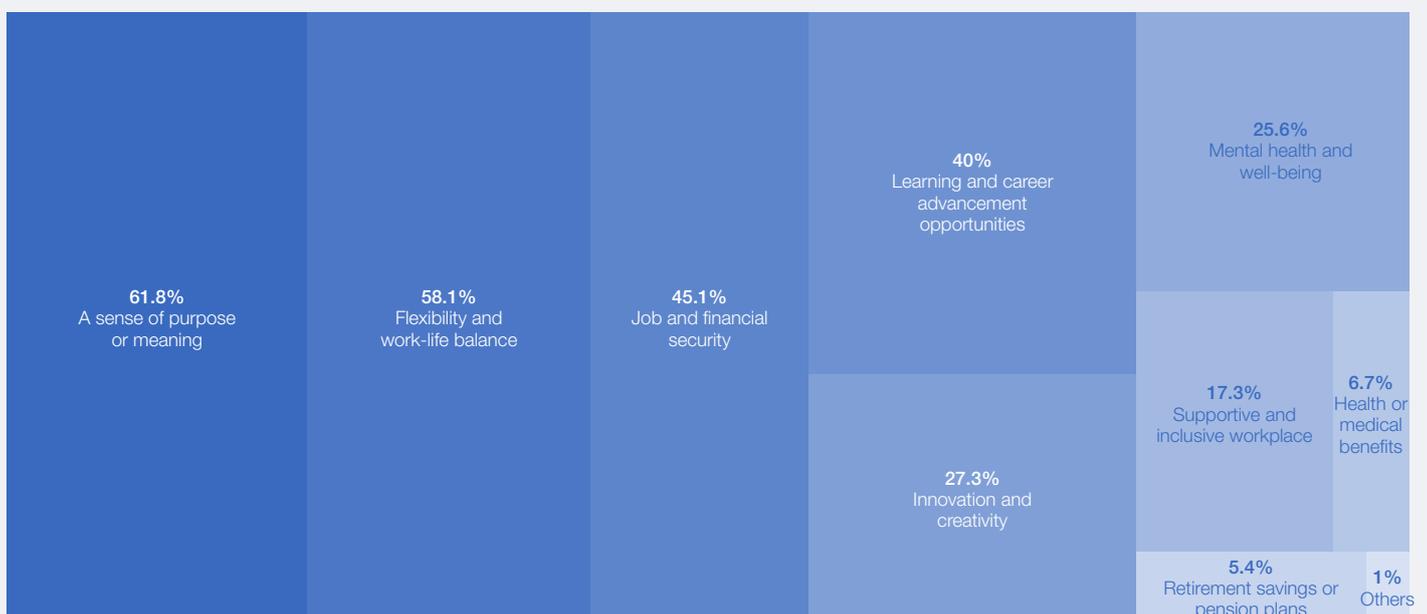
Redefining work and purpose

For the first time in history, five generations are working side by side.¹² When asked what matters most for their future, young respondents emphasized a *sense of purpose* (61%) and *balance* (50%) above traditional benefits such as medical coverage or retirement savings.

This signals a redefinition of success: while previous generations equated prosperity with stability,¹³ young people today emphasize meaning, flexibility and alignment with personal values. Work is not just a livelihood, but a means of contribution – a call for an economics that rewards meaning, well-being and collaboration alongside productivity.

FIGURE 3 Career and workplace priorities

What matters most to you when thinking about your future career?*



Note: *Respondents were asked to select up to three

Looking ahead towards inclusive and resilient economies

Young people's economic outlook blends realism with resolve. They are clear-eyed about the challenges of inequality and precarity, yet persistent in creating opportunity and purpose. Addressing these pressures – from youth employment and affordability to entrepreneurship and education – is essential to building resilient, future-ready economies.

Investing in young people's potential is not a social concession; it is a growth strategy – one that determines whether the next generation inherits systems of stagnation or renewal.



Youth-led initiatives advancing solutions for the economy

Type of projects

Of all the youth-led initiatives designed to have direct or indirect impact on the economy, Youth Pulse 2026 notes over a 100 initiatives to bring forward solutions for economic growth and opportunity.



on employment and entrepreneurship



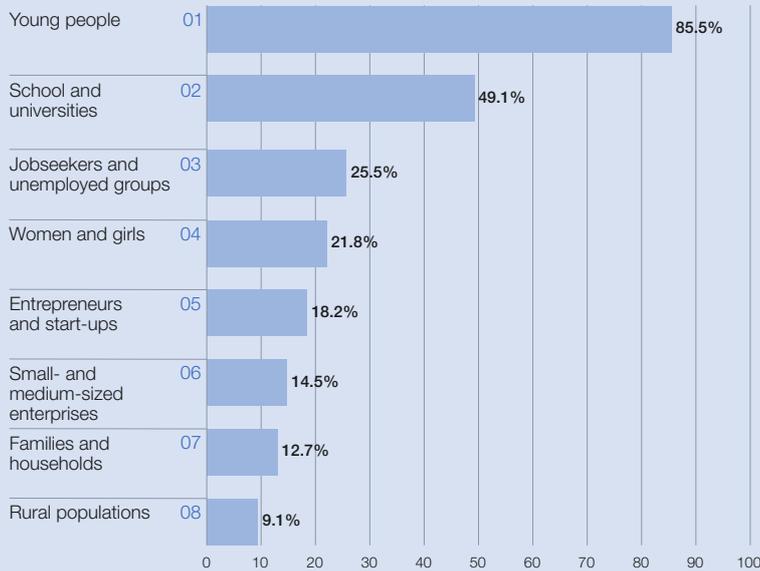
on urban transformation and innovation



on financial inclusion and resilience

Stakeholders

A majority of the initiatives involve other young people as the primary stakeholder and 60% are partnering with the private sector to deliver on these initiatives.



Partnerships

57.1% Private sector companies

51.4% Civil society organizations

43.8% Directly with citizens

41.9% Public sector

41% Academia



🗣️ Our economies are shifting faster than our systems of education and opportunity, leaving many young people rightly uncertain about their futures. The answer to this societal challenge lies not in reassurance, but in readiness: in giving young people the tools to learn, unlearn, work, build resilience and see what are the pathways to opportunity in this new economy. If business and government leaders commit to pathways of opportunity, this generation's uncertainty can become the catalyst for a new wave of growth and innovation.

Taha Bawa, CEO and Co-Founder, Goodwall; Global Innovator, World Economic Forum

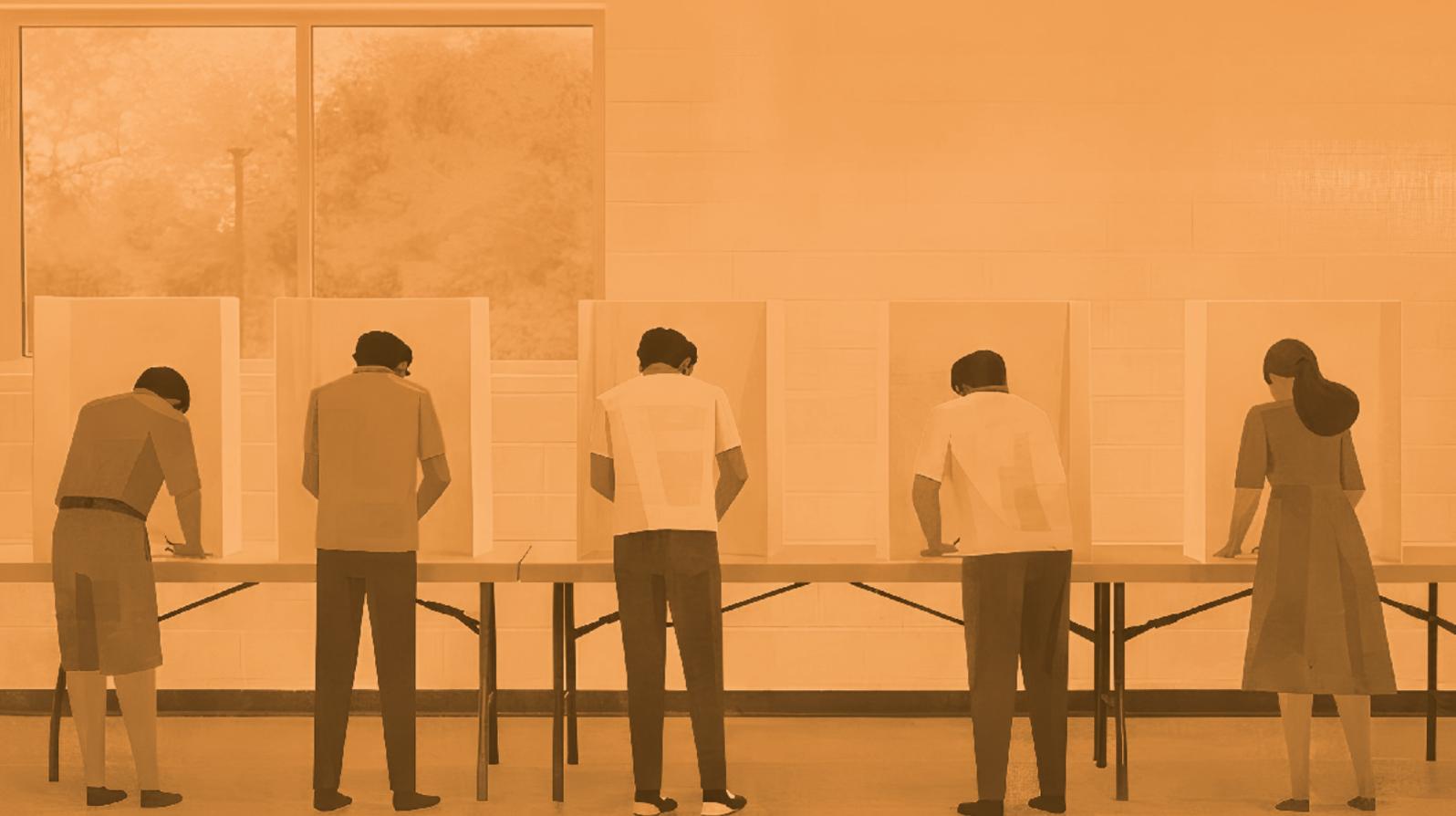


Political outlook

In a world of shifting power, young people are reimagining leadership – advancing new forms of accountability and civic action.

Political systems are undergoing rapid change worldwide – from shifting power balances and democratic backsliding to the rise of new governance models and civic movements. Amid this volatility, the findings of this report reveal a generation deeply attuned to political dynamics yet determined to renew them.

These are the political trends young people are tracking – dynamics shaping their political engagement, their confidence in leadership and their vision for the future of governance.



Geopolitical tensions feel close to home

When asked which political trends will most shape the next five years, a majority of respondents identify *rising geopolitical tension* as the defining force.

This shared concern reflects both global exposure and personal proximity: young people live in an age

of real-time information, where conflicts and power shifts reverberate instantly through digital networks and economies. Geopolitical tension was cited as the top trend in every region (Figure 6), peaking in Europe and Eurasia, where 72% of respondents rank it as the top political trend.

Cautious about global politics, hopeful about reform

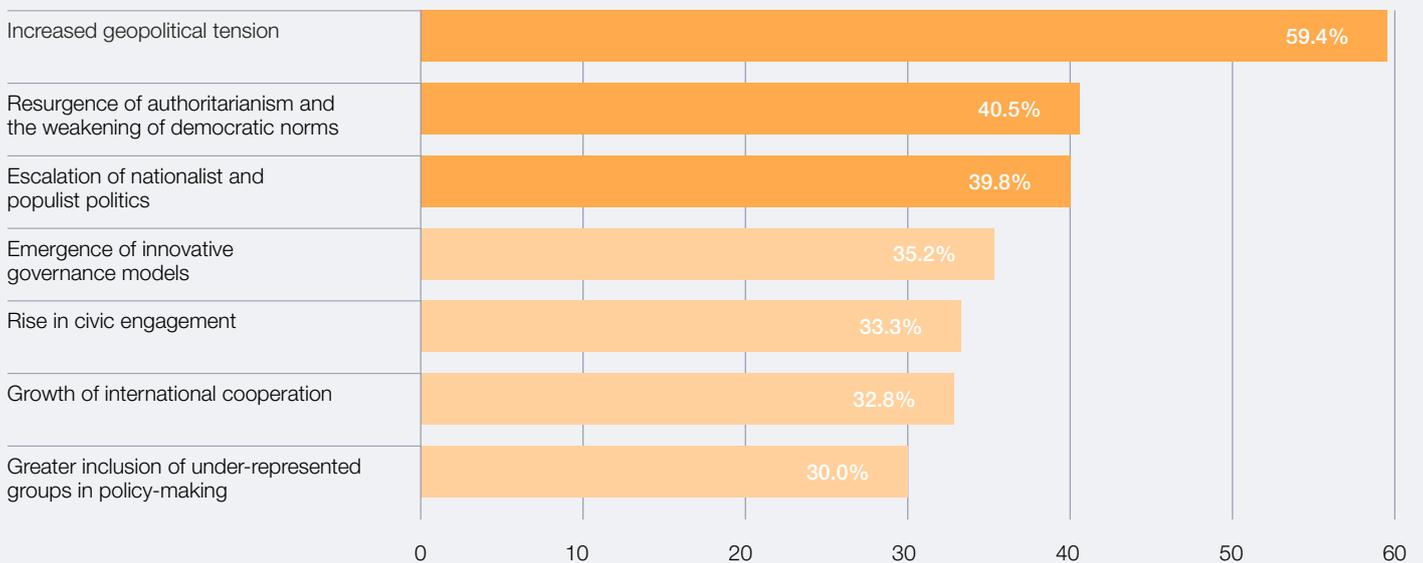
Despite concerns over polarization and democratic erosion, young people remain optimistic about the potential for political renewal. Survey findings show a near-even split between negative and positive expectations: while 51% cite risks such as authoritarianism and populism, 49% highlight opportunities including innovative governance models, expanded civic engagement, stronger

international cooperation and greater inclusion of under-represented groups in policy-making.

This balance of realism and optimism signals that young people do not reject politics – they want it to work better. They see reform as possible when leadership is transparent, participatory and focused on shared progress.

FIGURE 4 Political trends that will shape the next five years

Which political trends are likely to have the most significant impact in the next five years?*



Note: * Respondents were asked to select up to three trends

Trust is highest at the community level

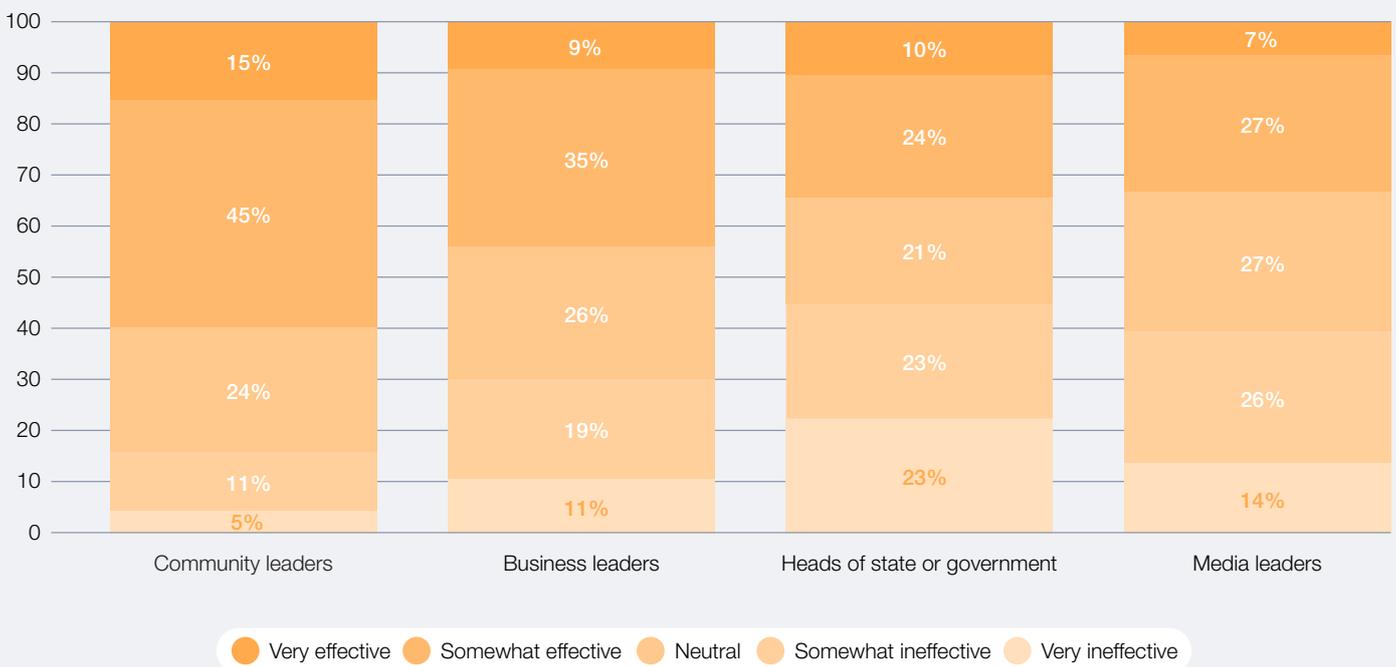
When asked which leaders are most effective in driving positive change, young people rated *community leaders* highest (60%), while *heads of state or government* ranked significantly lower.

This reflects a generational shift in how legitimacy is earned: leadership is trusted when it is

proximate and accountable, and delivers tangible improvements to daily life. Young people's trust grows when leaders act collaboratively and remain visibly connected to their communities – a dynamic that is reshaping expectations of political behaviour globally.

FIGURE 5 Perceived effectiveness of leaders in driving positive change

How effective are leaders in your country in driving positive change?*



Note: * Respondents were asked to select up to three trends

Integrity and collaboration define trusted leadership

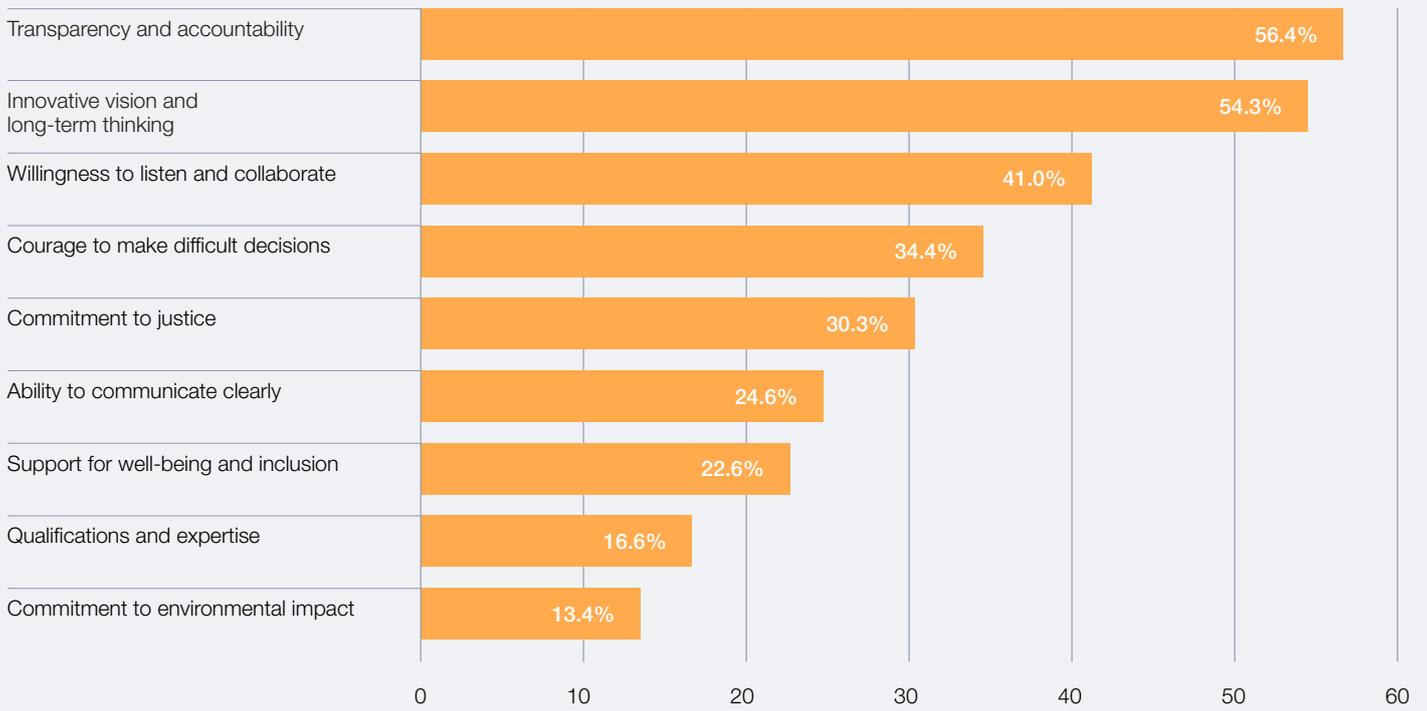
Across regions, transparency and accountability, innovative vision and long-term thinking remain the most valued leadership traits. Gendered insights reveal further nuance: young men are more likely to prioritize the courage to make difficult decisions, while young women emphasize collaboration and inclusivity.

These findings potentially echo broader research which suggests that men and women often approach leadership through complementary lenses

rather than opposing ideologies. Women tend to adopt more democratic and participative leadership styles, whereas men are slightly more likely to employ directive or task-oriented approaches.¹⁴ This distinction echoes the patterns observed in the survey data: young men prioritize decisiveness, while young women emphasize collaboration and inclusivity. Yet despite these differences, both groups converge on a shared aspiration — the need for accountable, transparent and visionary leadership that safeguards democratic integrity.

FIGURE 6 | Most valued leadership qualities

Which qualities do you respect most in leadership?*



Male

- 1 Innovative vision and long-term thinking (58%)
- 2 Transparency and accountability (56%)
- 3 Courage to make difficult decisions (39%)

Female

- 1 Transparency and accountability (57%)
- 2 Innovative vision and long-term thinking (52%)
- 3 Willingness to listen and collaborate (44%)

Non-binary/transgender/prefer to self-describe

- 1 Innovative vision and long-term thinking (52%)
- 2 Transparency and accountability (50%)
- 3 Commitment to justice (34%)

Global average

- 1 Transparency and accountability (56%)
- 2 Innovative vision and long-term thinking (54%)
- 3 Willingness to collaborate (41%)

Note: *Respondents were asked to select up to three qualities

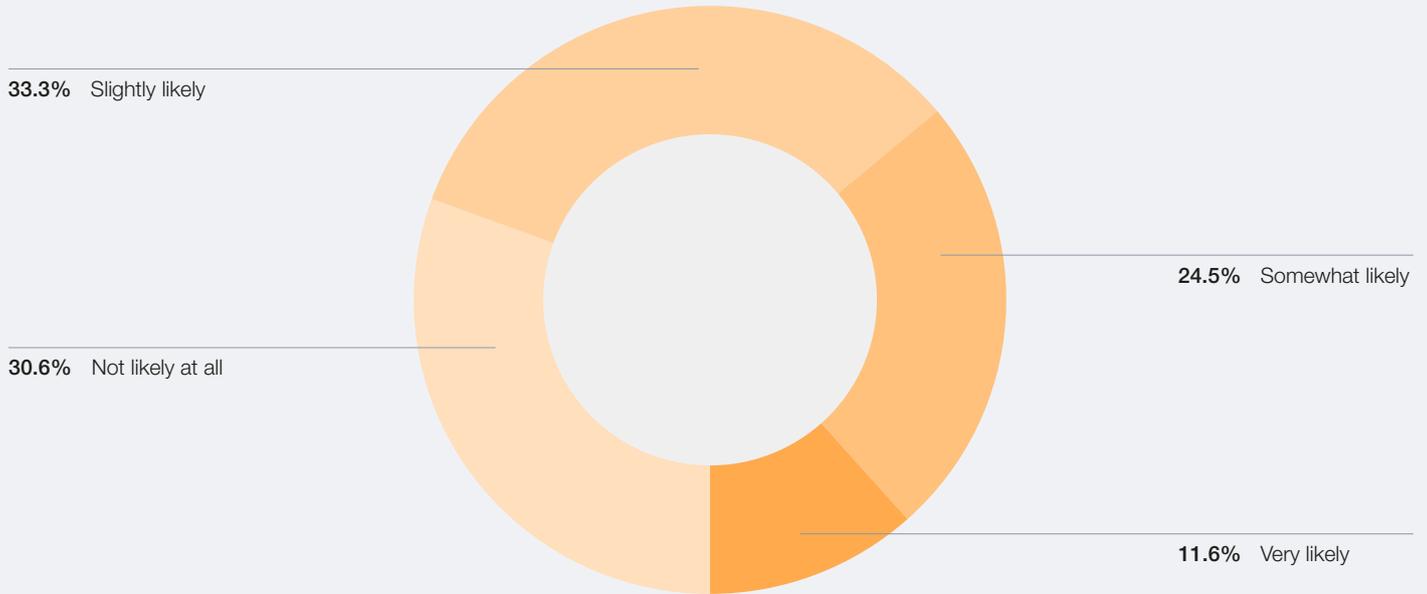
A generation ready to lead

One of the most persistent stereotypes about young people is political apathy. The survey findings

challenge this notion: 36% of respondents say they are likely to run for political office.

FIGURE 7 Likelihood of running for political leadership

How likely are you to run for political leadership?



However, opportunity gaps persist. Globally, half the world's population is under 30, yet only 2.8% of parliamentarians are aged 30 or younger.¹⁵ This

disparity underscores the urgency of institutional reforms that create space for young voices.

CASE STUDY 2. FROM PROTEST TO PARTNERSHIP – NEPAL'S SHAPING POLITICAL FUTURES INITIATIVE

Youth-led dialogue is transforming civic frustration into constructive engagement.

Across South Asia, young people are driving a new wave of civic participation – mobilizing for transparency, fair opportunity and institutional reform. From local accountability campaigns in Sri Lanka to youth-led anti-corruption efforts in Bangladesh and Nepal, a generation once seen as disengaged is redefining what democratic leadership looks like.

Amid this momentum, young leaders from the Global Shapers Kathmandu Hub launched Shaping Political Futures, a youth-led platform developed in partnership with municipal authorities. The platform channels civic energy into dialogue

and collaboration – facilitating dialogue between citizens and government, supporting post-protest heritage reconstruction, and training aspiring young candidates through a political leadership accelerator.

By coupling activism with institution-building, Shaping Political Futures demonstrates how young people can move from protest to policy – transforming dissent into dialogue and renewal. Its model shows the potential for youth-led governance innovation to strengthen democratic resilience, provided governments and civil society sustain collaboration and embed youth participation in formal decision-making.

Looking ahead towards renewed trust and participation

Young people's political outlook is both pragmatic and hopeful. They recognize democratic backsliding, geopolitical volatility and institutional fatigue – yet remain committed to reform, collaboration and participation.

Rebuilding trust will depend on shared responsibility: governments embracing transparency, institutions opening decision-making to youth, and young leaders demonstrating integrity in action. With these foundations, political renewal becomes not only possible, but inevitable.



Youth-led initiatives driving political and civic engagement

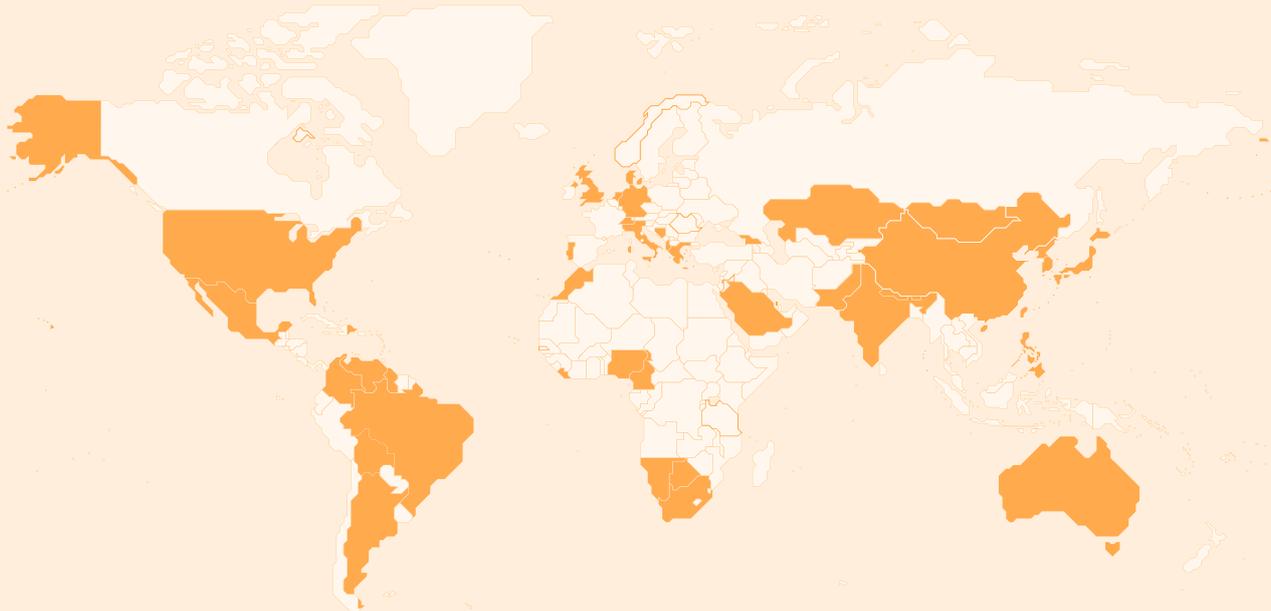
97

new initiatives promote democracy and civic engagement

Type of projects

46%	Youth empowerment
27%	Voter engagement
22%	Citizen engagement
3%	Driving policy change
2%	Supporting public sector and essential services

Global Reach



Solutions were mapped across more than 80 cities in over 40 countries and territories - including 35% capital cities, 45% mid-sized and smaller cities, 10% rural communities, and another 10% located in conflict-affected areas.



“In today’s political scenario, an intergenerational vision is not merely an ideal to consider but a sine qua non to address the current challenges of trust and information integrity. In a world where digital spaces increasingly prevail and influence more than traditional ones, young people play a central role as the main users, promoters and consumers of the narratives that shape our daily lives. Rebuilding trust and collaboration at the community level rather than the national one reflects a growing critical awareness among youth to apply a truly “glocal” mindset in everyday life.”

Humberto Rumbos, Caracas Hub; member of the Global Future Council on Information Integrity

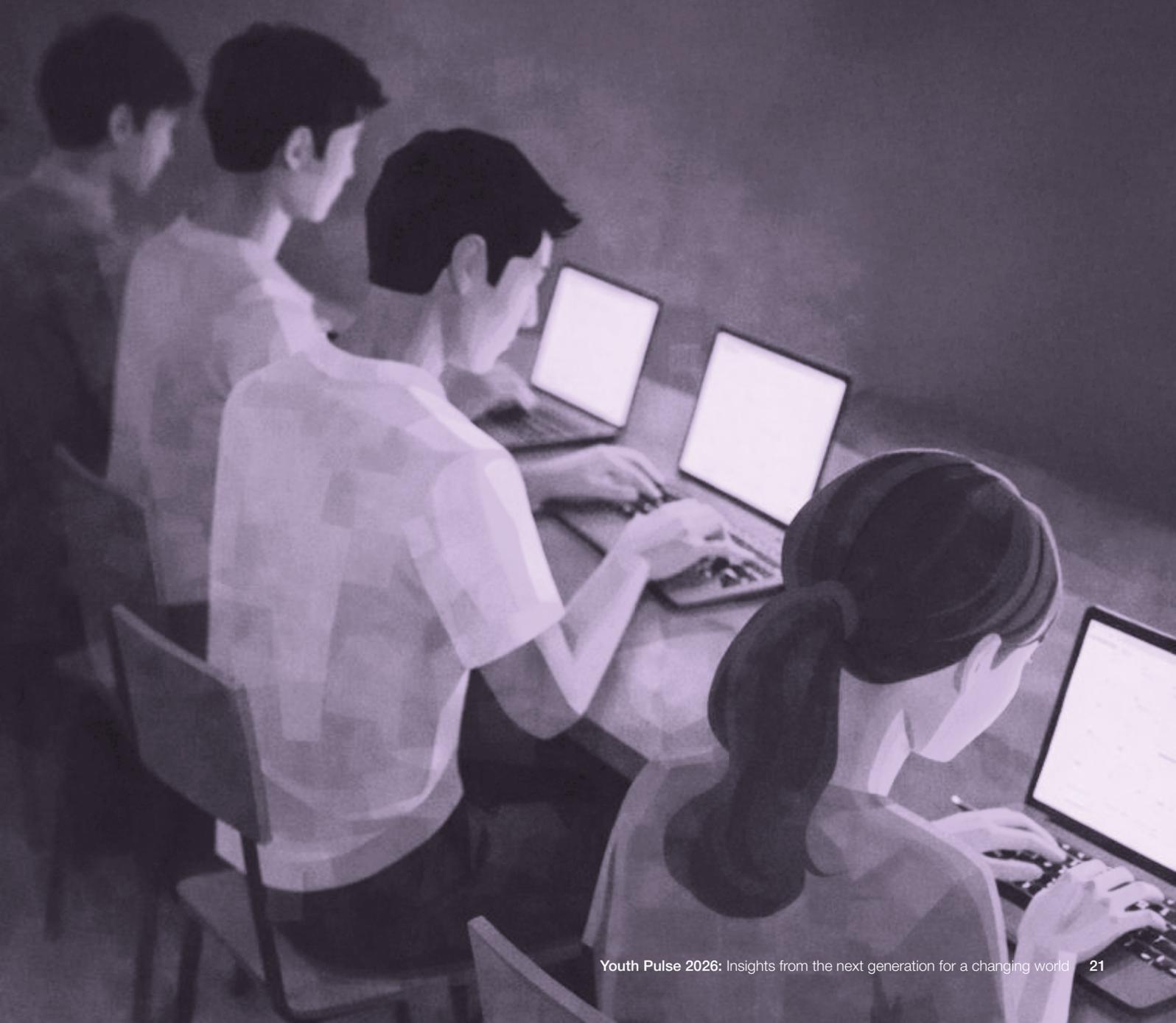


Technological outlook

Young people are embracing AI as a tool for opportunity – while calling for ethical safeguards, equitable access and future-ready skills.

Emerging technologies such as AI and advanced robotics are no longer distant innovations; they are already transforming how young people live, learn and work. Young people today are *digital natives* – curious, adaptive and creative – actively experimenting with new tools while navigating both the opportunities and the risks these technologies present.

The technological trends that young people are tracking are the forces shaping their daily experiences and future expectations across education, work and social connection.



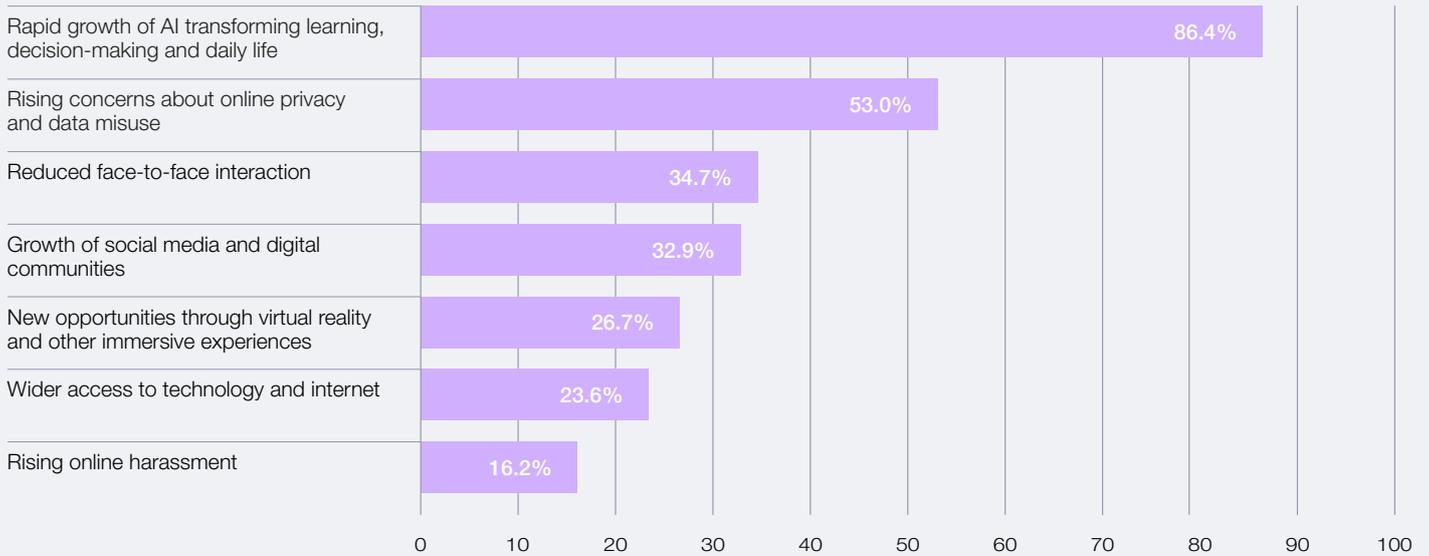
Embracing innovation, demanding guardrails

Nearly nine in 10 survey respondents identify the rapid growth of AI as the most transformative technological force of the coming years. This

consensus reflects both optimism about AI's potential and awareness of its risks.

FIGURE 8 Technological trends that will shape the next five years

Which technological trends do you think will have the biggest impact in the next five years?*



Note: *Respondents were asked to select up to three trends

Alongside innovation, young people are calling for stronger governance. Concerns about privacy, data misuse and the erosion of human interaction feature prominently across responses. They want technology that serves people – not the other way around.

Global frameworks such as the AI Principles of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development¹⁶ and the EU AI Act¹⁷ echo these priorities, emphasizing human rights-based design, clear accountability and robust oversight. For this generation, trust in technology will depend on whether these safeguards are not only written but also enforced.

Automation anxiety: Entry-level jobs at risk

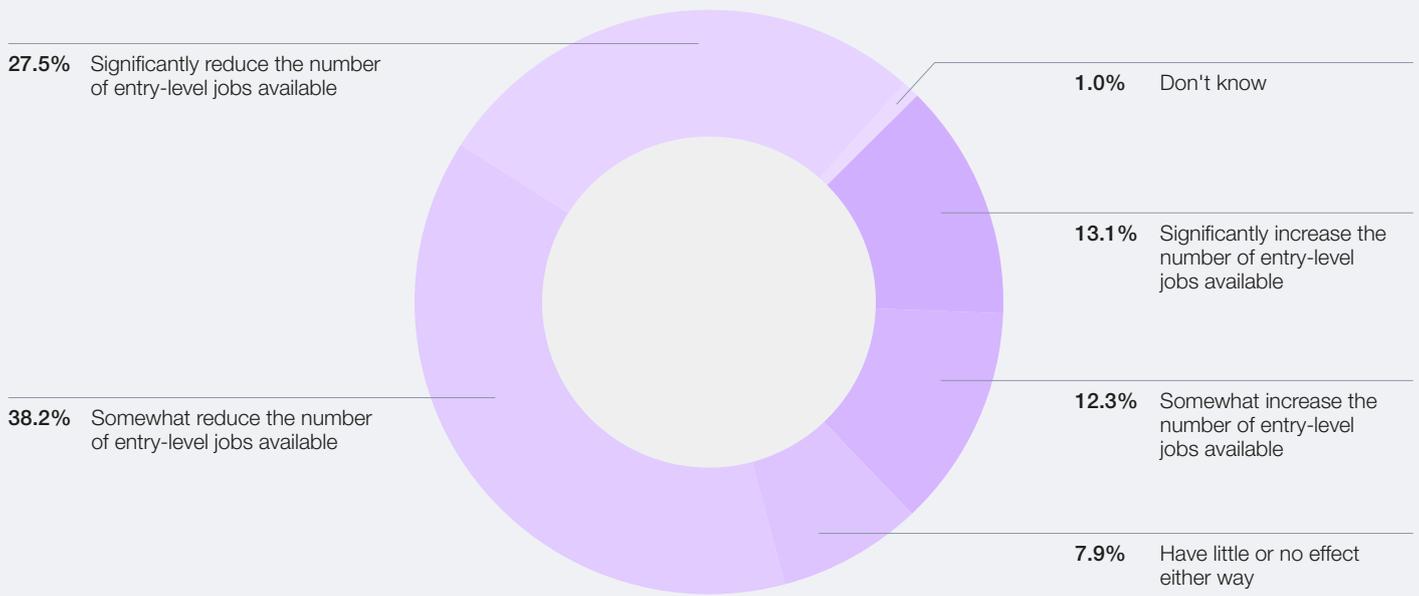
Two-thirds (66%) of respondents believe AI will reduce the number of entry-level roles available over the next three years, reflecting concern about automation's impact on early career pathways. Routine and process-driven tasks – often concentrated in junior roles – are perceived to be the most at risk.

This anxiety is backed by new data: the Stanford Digital Economy Lab reports a 13% *relative employment*

decline among young workers in the most exposed occupations.¹⁸ Researchers suggest that AI models are replacing book learning more than tacit knowledge – displacing those still early in their careers while not affecting more experienced employees.

As AI reshapes labour markets, young people are calling for adaptive skill systems and public-private partnerships to ensure technological disruption does not deepen inequality.

What impact do you think AI will have on entry-level roles over the next 3 years?*



Note: *Respondents were asked to select up to three trends

Early adopters and informal learners

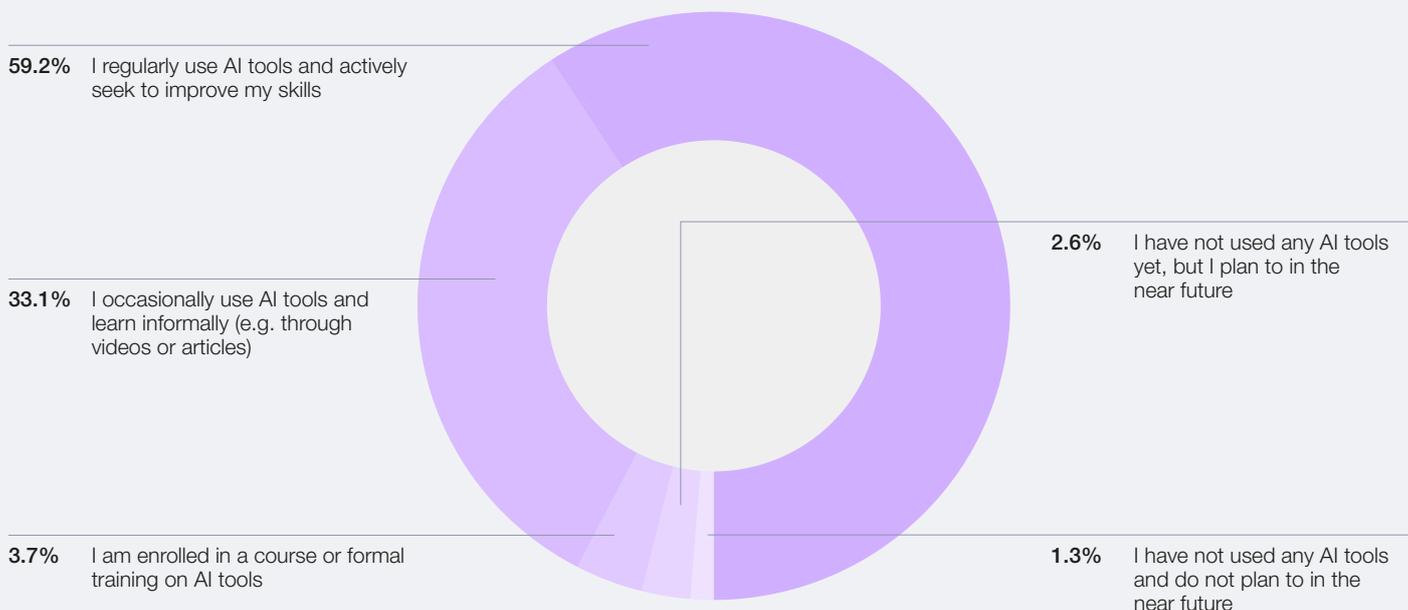
Despite their concerns, young people are leading AI adoption. Nearly 60% report using AI regularly, and another third experimenting occasionally. By contrast, 68% of people aged 50 and older report they have never used AI tools,¹⁹ underscoring the generational divide in AI literacy.

However, familiarity does not necessarily translate into formal expertise. Many young people have yet to participate in structured AI training,²⁰ revealing a gap between experimentation and certified skills. This skill divide within the AI generation

is compounded by the slow pace of change in education systems, where curricula often lag behind technological realities.

Experts at advisory firm Gartner note that those who can translate AI familiarly into certified, high-value skills will be best positioned to seize emerging economic opportunities²¹ – a shift that will increasingly define competitiveness across genders, generations and industries. Bridging this divide will be essential to ensure that early adoption translates into inclusive, long-term opportunity.

How are you currently engaging with AI tools?



AI adoption spreading across all regions and genders

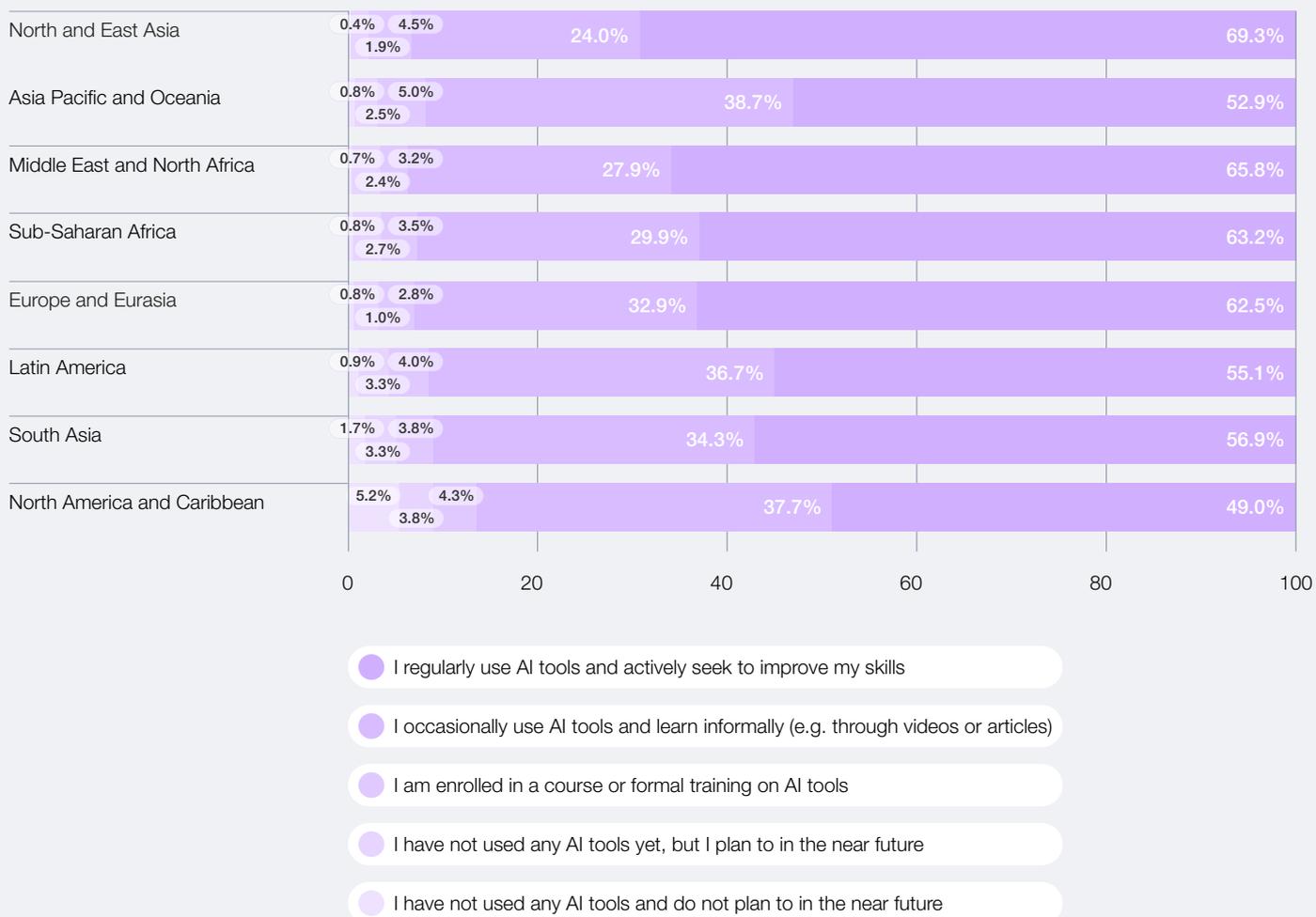
Across all regions and genders, AI engagement among young professionals is high – signalling that this generation is driving a truly global wave of technological adoption. Regular use is most widespread in North and East Asia (69%), the Middle East and North Africa (66%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (63%), while rates in North America and the Caribbean, though slightly lower, continue to grow rapidly.

This narrowing regional gap highlights a promising trend: young people everywhere are becoming active participants in the AI economy, even in places where access to digital infrastructure has historically lagged.

Survey findings show minimal gender disparity in AI adoption: young women and men are engaging with AI tools at nearly equal rates, reflecting a generation-wide embrace of digital innovation.

FIGURE 11 | Regional overview of AI adoption

How are you currently engaging with AI tools?



CASE STUDY 3. SHAPING DIGITAL FUTURES

Youth-led collaboration is bridging the global AI skills gap through innovation and inclusion

Across the Global Shapers Community – active in over 150 countries and territories – young leaders are reimagining how societies prepare for the digital age. Shaping Digital Futures is a youth-led initiative bridging the global AI skills gap by defining the competencies that matter most for the future of work – and building the partnerships to deliver them.

What makes the initiative distinctive is its *multistakeholder approach*. Young leaders co-design cutting-edge curricula with partners such as Google and Amazon, ensuring that learning reflects real-world needs while remaining accessible and inclusive. Participants gain not only technical literacy

but also the problem-solving and ethical reasoning skills essential for navigating AI responsibly. Already scaling to reach 15,000 learners worldwide, the initiative prioritizes gender equity and open access, ensuring that the benefits of digital transformation are shared broadly.

By uniting youth leadership, business expertise and public-sector collaboration, Shaping Digital Futures demonstrates how young people are not waiting to adapt to the digital economy – they are actively shaping it, transforming the AI transition into a pathway for shared prosperity and human-centred innovation.

Looking ahead towards inclusive and ethical digital futures

Young people's relationship with technology blends curiosity, caution and conviction. They are not merely adapting to disruption – they are shaping it. Their expectations are clear: innovation must be ethical, education must evolve and opportunity must be shared.

Investing in digital inclusion, transparent governance and youth-driven skilling is not just preparation for the future of work; it is the foundation of a more human-centred digital age.



Youth-led initiatives on technology



Of youth-led initiatives on technology are actively partnering with private companies to deliver impact



Nearly half of the initiatives are partnering with civil society organizations



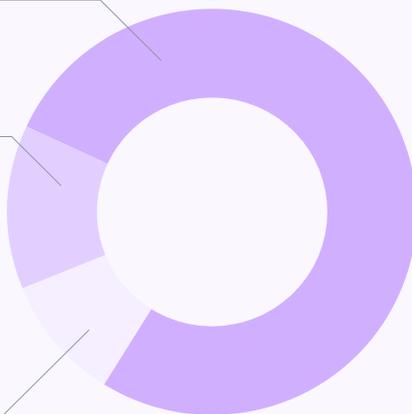
Projects are on digital inclusion and technology

Themes covered

77% of the projects are on upskilling for tech/tech education, focusing on digital literacy, capacity building and the development of technological skills

13% are on AI, advancing the use of AI in education and fostering awareness of its societal impact

10% pertain to equitable access to technology, expanding inclusive opportunities for technological



Impacted Groups



85.5%
Young people



21.1%
Women and girls



49.1%
Schools and universities



18.2%
Entrepreneurs and start-ups



49.1%
Jobseekers and unemployed groups



“As AI reshapes industries, the global priority must shift from access to agency. Today’s youth are early adopters but only a small fraction have access to formal AI education, even in Western Europe. Formal AI skilling including critical thinking must become as universal as digital access once was. Only when every young person can not only use AI but also understand how it works, think critically about each output and build relevant, reliable and responsible solutions, will this technological wave become truly inclusive.”

Benedikt Gieger, Strategic Project Manager, AI and Manufacturing, SAP



“From a youth standpoint, urgency arises not only from the scale of adoption but also from the opportunity to reimagine governance itself. AI is arriving in public systems just as younger generations are demanding transparency, inclusivity and measurable, positive impact.”

Valeria Tafoya, Fellow at Stanford University’s McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society; member of the Global Future Council on GovTech and Digital Public Infrastructure



Social outlook

Young people are rebuilding community and belonging in an age of fragmentation – redefining connection, inclusion and civic purpose.

Around the world, young people are growing up in a paradox: *more connected than ever yet often feeling alone*. Digital technologies have made interaction instant and borderless, but they have also blurred the boundaries between work and rest, self and society. Nearly half of survey respondents (48%) believe the normalization of digital lifestyles will define the decade ahead, and almost as many expect rising social fragmentation (47.8%) and loneliness (44%) to be the defining features of life.

These findings echo global research: the “World Happiness Report 2025” identifies young people as the group most affected by social isolation and declining mental health,²² while the “ILO Youth

Employment Trends 2025” links financial insecurity to heightened anxiety.²³ Together, these pressures are reshaping how young people relate to one another – and to society itself.

Despite these strains, young people are not withdrawing. They are reimagining community. Across regions, they are building new forms of belonging – digital and in-person – that blend connection with purpose, and care with civic action. These are the societal trends that young people are tracking – social dynamics shaping their sense of identity, connection and participation in an increasingly complex world.



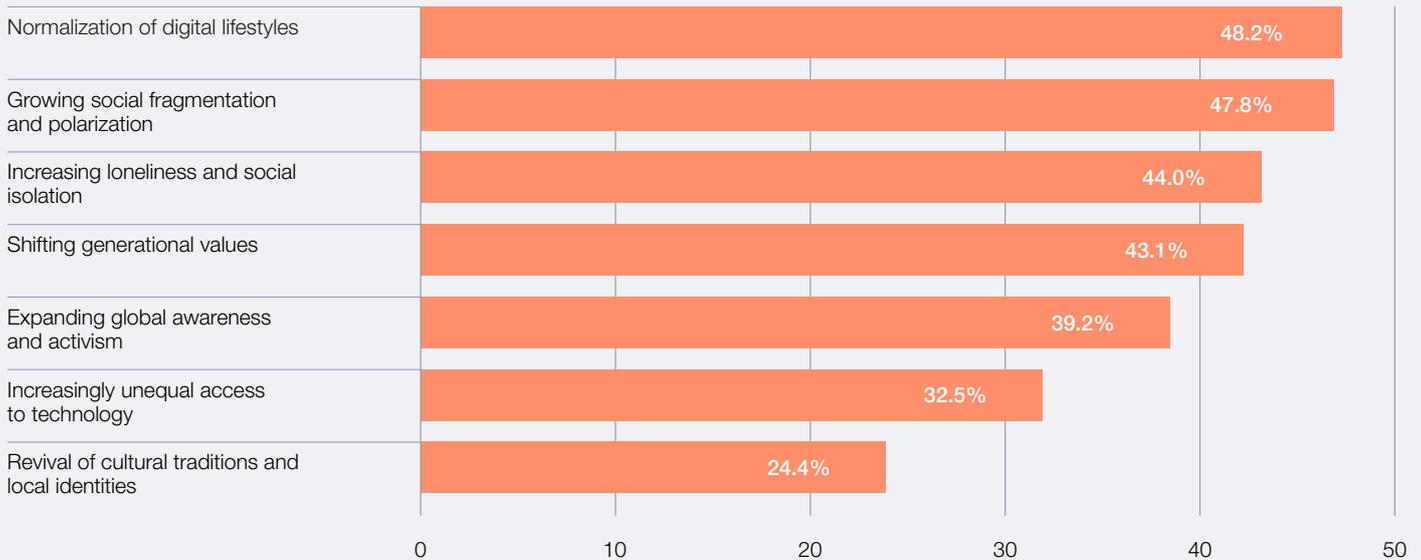
Digital lifestyles redefine connection

Digital life is no longer separate from social life – it shapes how young people learn, work, form relationships and express identity. Across platforms and tools, their engagement is near constant: 73%

of young people use YouTube daily, while 60% use TikTok and Instagram almost continuously.²⁴ Meanwhile, 60% of survey respondents use generative AI regularly (Figure 10).

FIGURE 12 Social trends that will shape the next five years

Which social trends are likely to have the most significant impact in the next five years?*



Note: * Respondents were asked to select up to three trends

Purpose-built communities counter fragmentation

Even amid rising individualism and fragmentation, young people are building intentional spaces of connection. Over 95% of survey respondents say that being part of a youth community has provided them with a critical space for learning, growth and dialogue. Against a backdrop where fewer than 30% of people globally believe most others can be trusted,²⁵ this finding signals how community design can rebuild social trust from the ground up.

Intentionally designed youth networks with clear mandates are emerging as powerful spaces for

connection and purpose. Seventy-two per cent of respondents said being part of local youth communities has helped them gain confidence to identify opportunities and take action; 67% said they have been able to mobilize actions to solve local challenges; and 67% that they have been able to forge meaningful connections with local actors. Purpose-built youth networks have become incubators of resilience, civic leadership and collective problem-solving, equipping young people to address both personal and societal challenges.

CASE STUDY 4. SHRED THE DEBT

Youth-led action for health equity and financial justice.

Across the United States (US), young people are confronting one of the country's most pervasive barriers to well-being: medical debt. Through Shred the Debt, a youth-led initiative spreading across the Global Shapers Community, local hubs in cities including Chicago, Sacramento and Oakland are partnering with Undue Medical Debt, a non-profit that purchases debt from collection agencies for pennies on the dollar.

By leveraging this model, young people are buying and forgiving medical debt for individuals and families at a fraction of its original cost, restoring dignity and financial freedom to

those affected. To date, the initiative has erased over \$1.7 million in medical debt, offering immediate relief while sparking a national conversation on the link between health, inequality and systemic reform.

More than a financial intervention, Shred the Debt is a civic movement – uniting young people around a shared mission of solidarity and social justice. With a goal to expand to 50 US cities, the initiative demonstrates how youth networks can translate empathy into collective action, create scalable impact, and strengthen community trust.

Regional differences in social engagement

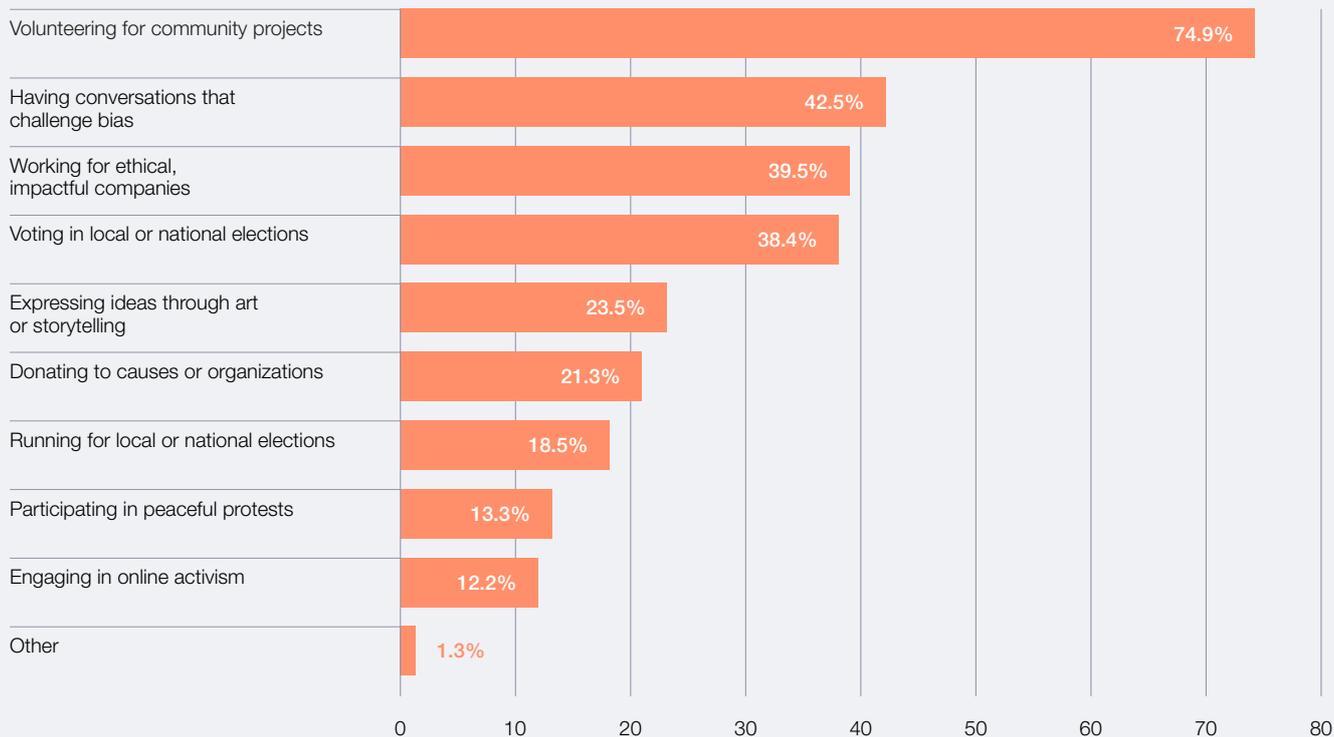
Youth action takes many effective forms worldwide. While volunteering remains the most common form of civic participation, the ways young people contribute vary sharply by region. In Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa, volunteering and community service are powerful expressions of solidarity. Across North and East Asia, digital organizing and online advocacy are increasingly viewed as effective tools of influence.

In Latin America and Europe, voting and civic campaigns drive participation, while in South Asia, social entrepreneurship and values-driven career choices are emerging as central pathways to impact.

Across contexts, young people are redefining civic engagement – moving fluidly between activism, enterprise and everyday acts of leadership to build fairer, more resilient societies.



What forms of social engagement do you think contribute most to creating positive change?*



Asia Pacific and Oceania



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Working for ethical, impactful companies
- 3 Having conversations that challenge bias

Middle East and North Africa



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Having conversations that challenge bias
- 3 Working for ethical, impactful companies

Europe and Eurasia



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Voting in local or national elections
- 3 Working for ethical, impactful companies

North America and Caribbean



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Voting in local or national elections
- 3 Having conversations that challenge bias

North and East Asia



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Working for ethical, impactful companies
- 3 Having conversations that challenge bias

South Asia



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Having conversations that challenge bias
- 3 Working for ethical, impactful companies

Latin America



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Working for ethical, impactful companies
- 3 Having conversations that challenge bias

Sub-Saharan Africa



- 1 Volunteering for community projects
- 2 Having conversations that challenge bias
- 3 Voting in local or national elections

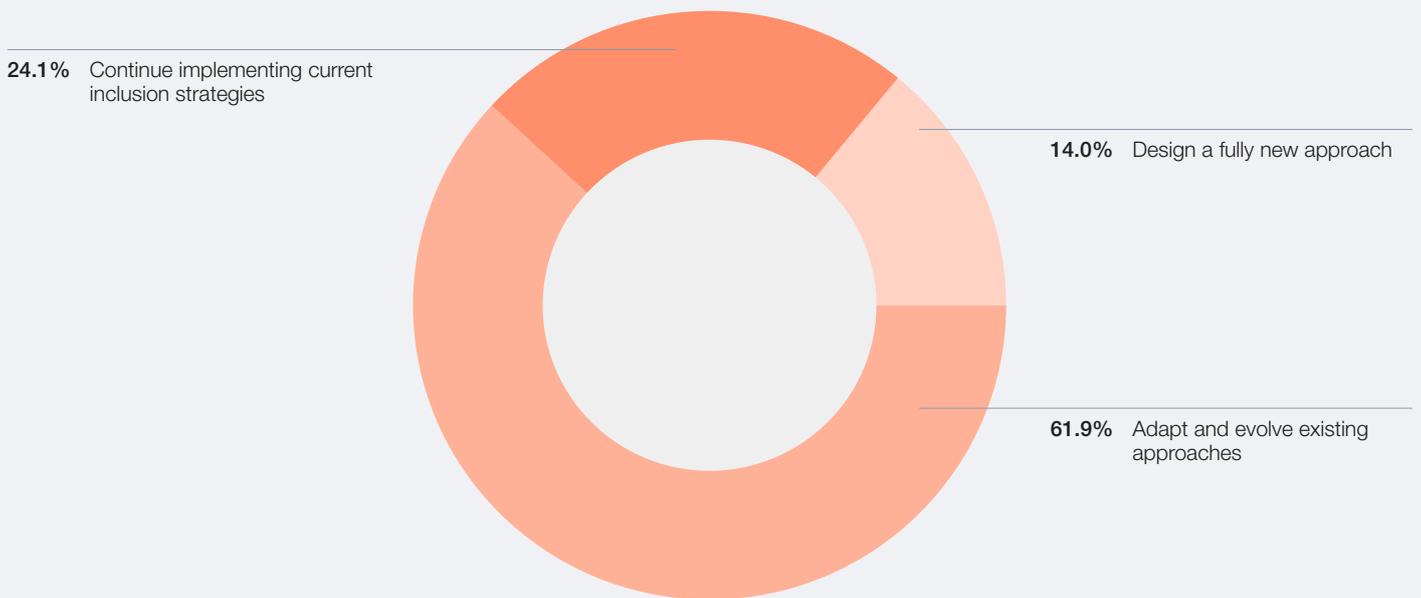
Inclusion is imperative – and must continue to evolve

When asked how the future of inclusion should be shaped, most young people expressed confidence in existing frameworks but called for evolution, not replacement. Sixty per cent

believe current strategies should adapt and evolve, while 23% are satisfied to continue them as they are. Fewer than one in 10 consider inclusion policies unimportant.

FIGURE 14 **Future of inclusion**

In building a future of inclusion, it will be most impactful to...



Through 2,200 open-text responses, young people have described inclusion as a continuous process of transformation – integrating values into structures, and empathy into systemic change. By clustering and analysing recurring themes across responses, four key priorities emerged as the most frequently cited pathways to advance equity and inclusion:

- **Education and equitable access**, especially access to quality learning and technology.
- **Empathy, respect and collaboration**, emphasizing dialogue across difference.

- **Representation in leadership**, ensuring diverse voices shape decision-making.
- **Adaptation and innovation**, reimagining systems to remain relevant and fair.

In a period where inclusion efforts face both scrutiny and retrenchment, young people reaffirm their commitment to building societies that are fair, participatory and open – not as an endpoint, but as an ongoing collective pursuit.

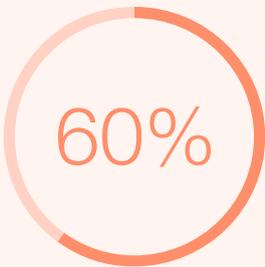
Looking ahead towards renewed connection and belonging

Young people's social outlook reflects both vulnerability and vision. They are aware of the forces fragmenting societies, yet are actively rebuilding the bonds that hold them together. Through digital creativity, volunteerism and inclusion-driven leadership, they are designing communities rooted in empathy, purpose and participation.

In a world of growing isolation, their message is clear: belonging is not something to be found – it is something to be built together.

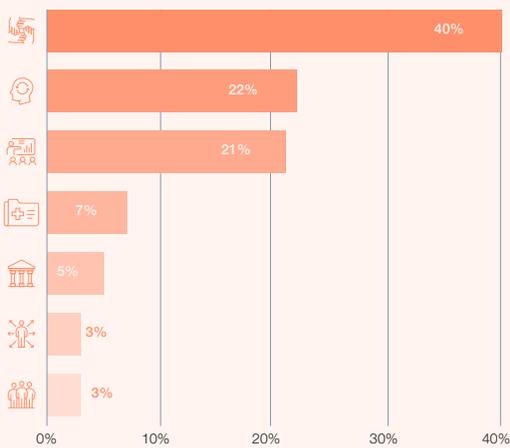


Youth-led initiatives delivering social outcomes



Of youth-led initiatives have partnered with civil society

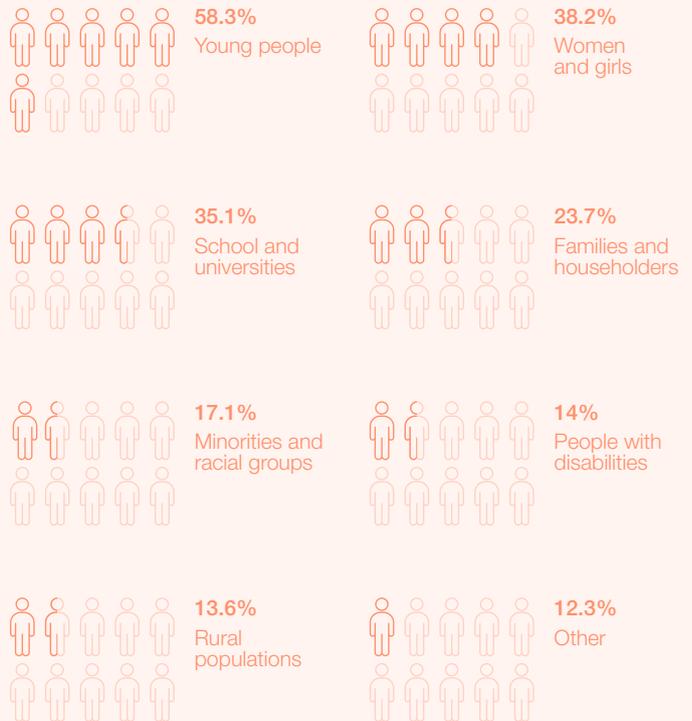
Types of projects



- 1 Equitable and inclusive societies | 2 Mental health and well-being | 3 Education and skills development | 4 Health equity and healthcare access | 5 Arts, culture and the creative economy | 6 Humanitarian action and response | 7 Migration and displacement

Stakeholders

Solutions mapped across more than 150 cities in 66 countries and territories, reaching diverse groups such as young people (58%), women and girls (38%), schools and universities (35%), families and households (24%), minorities and racial groups (17%), people with disabilities (14%), rural populations (14%), and more.



“Humanity is built on community: families, neighbourhoods, nationalities, shared beliefs and values. If these communities are not built on curiosity and care, they clash. This is why creating safe spaces is so important to break siloes and build together the future we are all striving for. It’s through conversation, purpose and connection that we will not only go further, but go better too.”

Inés Yábar, Expert: Young Leaders for the SGDs, UN Youth Office



“During the devastating ethnic conflict in Manipur [India] two years ago, our local Global Shapers Youth Hub became a haven of comfort, solidarity and safety. Years of working together on local issues had built a deep foundation of trust, which allowed us to lean on one another and help our community recover. Today, we continue rebuilding together, by running libraries and learning centres for children in relief camps in our city.”

Ningthoujam Asharani, Policy Consultant, Antarang Foundation



Environmental outlook

Young people are leading a generation-wide movement for climate resilience – turning awareness into action, and values into systems change.

Across every region, young people identify the environment as both the greatest collective challenge and the ultimate test of global cooperation. They see the climate crisis not as a distant threat but as a defining force shaping their lives, economies and futures.

These are the environmental trends that young people are tracking – the issues driving their sense of urgency, leadership and innovation in the face of a changing planet.



Climate change remains the defining global concern

When asked about the greatest threats to the world, 56% of survey respondents identified climate change and environmental degradation as the top global risk – well ahead of armed conflict (44%) and governance failures (29%). This aligns with global analysis from the “Global Risks Report 2025”, which places extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse at the top of the decade’s threats.²⁶

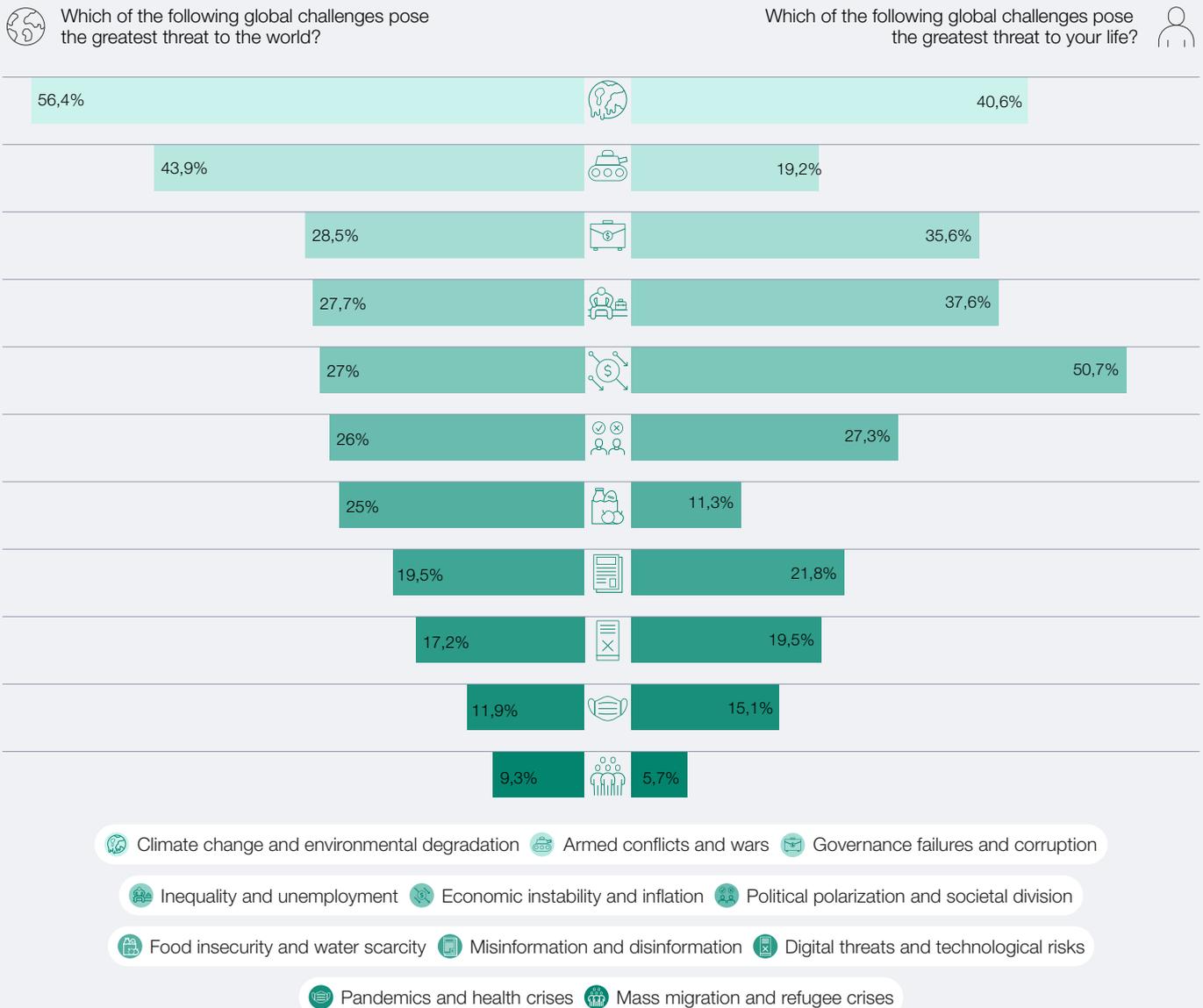
UNICEF and UNDP’s “Emerging Horizons” report also shows that young people across 170 countries

consistently rank climate change and justice among their highest priorities.²⁷ The consensus is clear: for this generation, climate change is not just an environmental issue but a political, economic and moral one – the defining challenge of this time and the current generations.

Young people recognize that progress depends on collective action: governments implementing ambitious climate policies, businesses driving sustainable innovation, and communities mobilizing local resilience.

FIGURE 15 Greatest challenges to the world and to individuals

Which of the following global challenges pose the greatest threat to the world?



Environmental concerns persist

Even amid economic volatility, environmental concern remains steadfast. While 51% of respondents cite inflation and instability as their greatest personal worries, 41% identify climate change as the second most significant threat to their own lives, underscoring the dual reality of the crisis as both a planetary emergency and a personal challenge shaping their futures.

This dual focus also highlights a pragmatic generation that connects economic resilience with environmental sustainability. For young people, climate action is not a luxury to be postponed in hard times – it is central to building a secure, prosperous future.

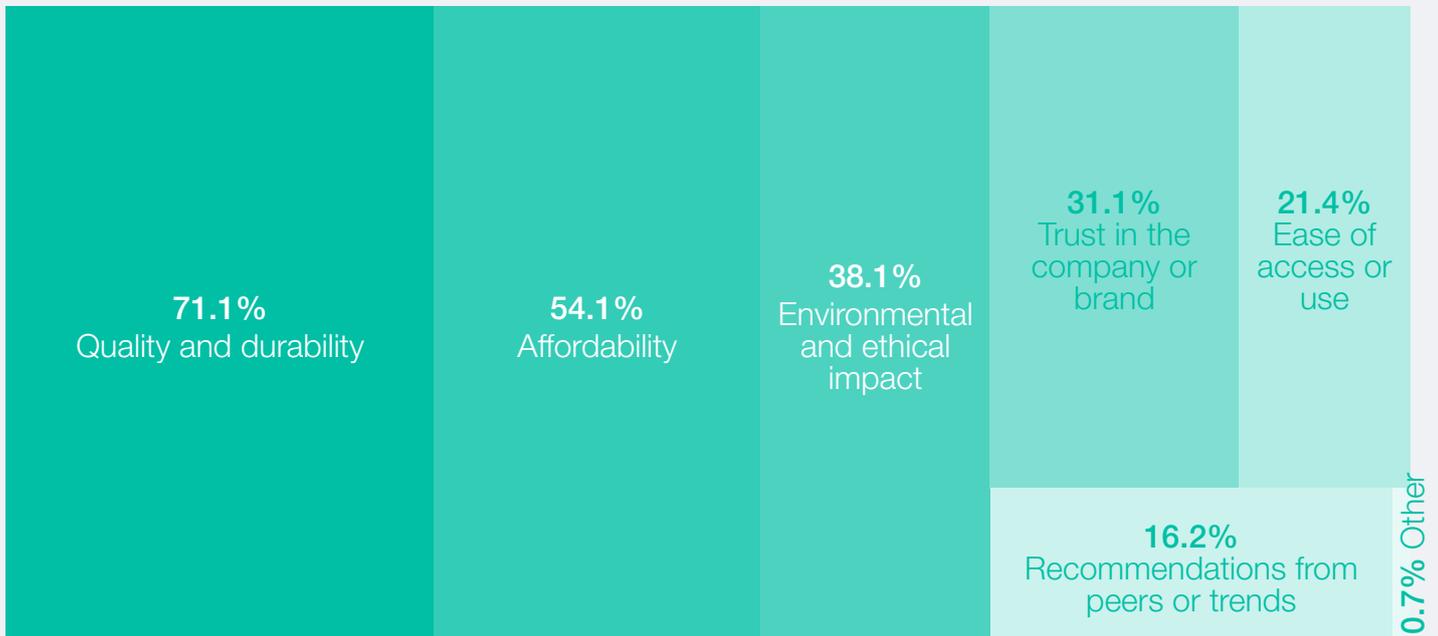
Green values driving consumption and investment trends

Despite facing significant financial pressures, young people are aligning their consumption and investment choices with their values. When asked about the most influential factors in purchasing decisions,

respondents place environmental and ethical impact (38%) among their top three priorities – after quality (71%) and affordability (54%) – signalling a decisive shift towards purpose-driven consumption.

FIGURE 16 **Factors influencing purchasing choices**

When purchasing a product or a service, which of the following factors most influence your choice?



According to Morgan Stanley's investor research, 68% of Gen Z have more than one-fifth of their portfolios invested in companies that aim to create positive environmental or social impact – nearly double the rate of previous generations – and 99%

express an interest in sustainable investing.²⁸ These findings underscore that sustainability is not a niche preference but a defining economic value for the next generation of consumers and investors alike.

Turning awareness into action

Young people are advancing climate solutions that confront urgent local challenges – from renewable energy and sustainable agriculture to nature conservation and waste reduction. Their actions reveal a powerful truth: youth-led innovation works because it is rooted in lived experience, powered by creativity, and strengthened through partnership.

Over the past 12 months, the World Economic Forum has tracked more than 800 youth-led initiatives directly reaching over 2.2 million people worldwide – 120 of which focused specifically on climate action, nature restoration, energy transition, water security and food systems.

In Peshawar, Pakistan, the ClimaSynth initiative is using AI to close the climate knowledge gap through a chatbot, a carbon calculator and digital learning tools. By integrating local languages, data and business needs, it equips schools and small enterprises to anticipate and adapt to climate risks.

In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, the Youths in Aquaponics Project combines solar-powered fish farming

and crop cultivation in a circular, water-efficient system that recycles 90% of its water. Embedded in schools, it strengthens both food security and climate education.

In Riohacha, Colombia, Water Ambassadors tackles La Guajira's water crisis – a challenge intensified by drought and changing climate patterns. The initiative combines low-cost filtration technology and community education to secure safe, reliable water access. By placing local participation at its centre, the initiative reduces waterborne illnesses by 30% and has scaled to 20 cities with support from Waves for Water. The project demonstrates how inclusive, climate-resilient design can transform basic infrastructure into a platform for long-term resilience.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate that young people are not just raising awareness – they are redefining climate leadership itself. By embedding sustainability in education, enterprise and community systems, they are turning vision into action and building the foundations of a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable world.

CASE STUDY 5. FIND US AT THE PARK

Young people are bringing back green spaces to cope with climate change.

Find Us at the Park is a youth-led initiative by the Global Shapers Budaiya Hub in Bahrain, revitalizing urban green spaces as vital community assets for climate resilience and well-being. The project raises awareness of the critical role parks play as accessible, multi-use environments that balance urban development with ecological health, while collecting valuable data on the state of public green spaces across Bahrain.

Its success in fostering grassroots engagement and data-driven advocacy has led to a formal collaboration with UN-Habitat on the National Afforestation Assessment Plan. Volunteers, trained and certified by UN-Habitat as

data collection facilitators, now contribute to national data-gathering efforts that inform evidence-based policies for public spaces. The ongoing partnership also includes a temperature study demonstrating the cooling and adaptation benefits of afforestation – further shaping Bahrain's approach to sustainable urban planning.

This initiative shows how youth-led action can transform local environmental stewardship into national climate strategy – using data, design and community engagement to build greener, cooler and more resilient cities.

Looking ahead to match urgency with agency

Climate change dominates global concerns – but for young people, it is more than an emergency; it is a call to action. Even as inflation and instability weigh on daily life, environmental responsibility remains central to their choices. Values are reshaping consumption, with sustainability now

among the top three factors guiding purchasing decisions. Across regions, youth-led climate initiatives show how a generation is transforming awareness into tangible solutions. Together, young people are building a future where thriving societies and a healthy planet are inseparable.

Youth-led initiatives responding to environmental challenges

Type of projects

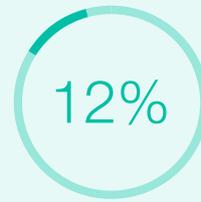
Fifty three per cent of youth-led environmental initiatives are prioritizing climate action.



on climate action and education



on nature restoration and protection



on food security and agripreneurship



on employment and entrepreneurship

Partnerships



- 1 Civil society organization/non-profit | 2 Directly with citizens
- 3 Public sector actor | 4 Private sector company | 5 Academia

Only 5% of projects on climate didn't engage with any partners.

Intervention types

35% through direct action, such as tree planting, clean-ups and other on-the-ground initiatives.

32% through awareness and advocacy campaigns, including digital platforms, reports and events.

20% through skill development, such as training sessions and mentorships.

7% through innovation and policy change, resulting in new public or private policies, pledges or commitments.

6% through urgent mobilization in response to immediate community or environmental needs.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Climate education | Environment |
| Circular economy | Reforestation and conservation |
| Food systems | Climates justice |
| Clean air | Clean water |
| Emission reduction | Biodiversity |
| Sustainable consumption | Oceans |
| And more | |



“We stand at a crossroads of multiple possible futures bearing the consequences of our choices today. Foresight allows us to make sense of this responsibility and decide which future to cultivate. Here, intergenerational insights from the next generation are essential because they remind us that protecting the planet is both an act of environmental stewardship and a promise to every generation that follows.”

Enkhuun Byambadorj, Co-Founder of Breathe Mongolia; member of the Global Future Council on Clean Air



Policy priorities

A generation's call for action

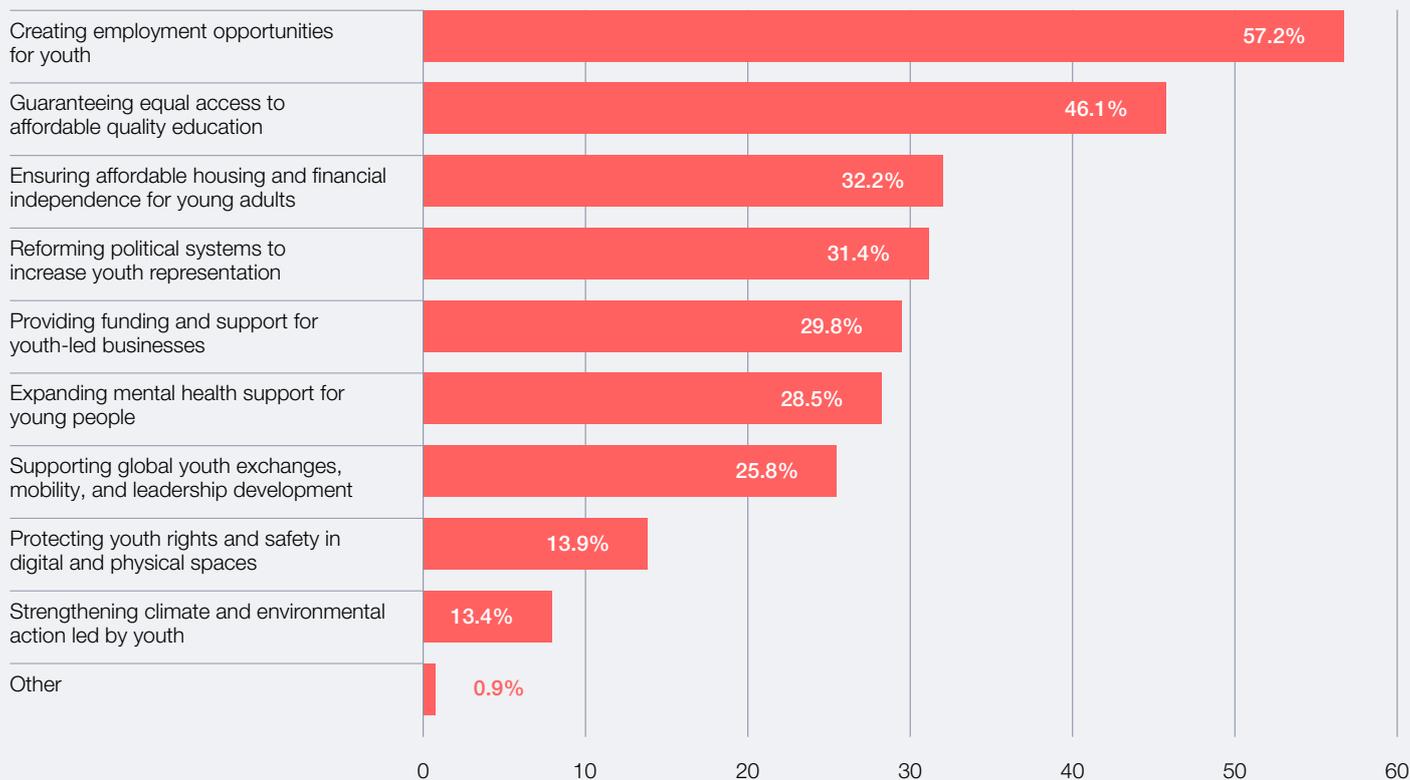
Having explored young people's perspectives across the economy, politics, society, technology and environment, respondents were asked one final question: "Which policies would most empower

you in your own country?" Their responses reveal a clear and urgent set of priorities centred on opportunity, equity and participation.



FIGURE 17 | Policies that would most empower young people

Which policies would empower young people most in your country?*



Note: *Respondents were asked to select up to three

Youth employment is the top policy priority

Employment stands as the foremost priority, with 57% of respondents calling for the creation of meaningful economic opportunities for young people. This is a clear call to action: early career employment pathways – including apprenticeships, internships and entrepreneurial support – are essential to unlocking potential and sustaining growth.

Young people also emphasize the need for economic empowerment mechanisms and

stronger partnerships with the private sector to ensure that employment is not only accessible but also fair, sustainable and aligned with rising living costs. This pattern holds true across regions. In Europe, the “Eurobarometer Youth Survey” found that young people view addressing rising prices and the cost of living as the European Union’s top policy priority for the next five years – reinforcing that economic opportunity and stability are universal youth concerns.²⁹

Fixing the education-employment mismatch

The second most-cited policy recommendation is equal access to affordable, quality education – with 46% of respondents identifying it as a critical enabler of their future. Young people point to a persistent mismatch between education and labour market needs and are calling for reform: aligning curricula with emerging job markets, and prioritizing digital literacy, critical thinking and adaptability.

They also highlight the importance of stronger partnerships between educational institutions, businesses and governments to bridge the education-to-employment gap.

Youth-led initiatives such as Technovation in Kenya and Career Counselling for All (CC4ALL) in Pakistan

illustrate this transformation in action. Technovation empowers young women through a 12-week technology and innovation programme, building digital skills and confidence while bridging the gender gap in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers. CC4ALL connects students to real career pathways through school-based counselling, skills awareness and government collaboration, helping them navigate emerging industries such as AI and green entrepreneurship.

Together, these initiatives show that when education systems integrate mentorship, digital fluency and private-sector collaboration, they create a direct bridge from the classroom to meaningful, future-ready work.

CASE STUDY 6. GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH

Scaling apprenticeships and employment through global collaboration

Launched at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos in 2014, the Global Alliance for YOUth unites 23 leading companies – including Accenture, Adecco, Cargill, dsm-firmenich, EY, HCL Tech, Meta, Microsoft, Nestle, Zurich Insurance and others – to collectively tackle youth employment challenges. Through shared commitments and coordinated action, the alliance integrates young people into the labour market by expanding access to apprenticeships, internships, training and capital for youth-led initiatives.

Since its inception, alliance members have created more than 40 million career and development opportunities for people aged 18 to 30 worldwide. Beyond job creation, the alliance supports youth-led innovation through the Innovation Prize, promoting entrepreneurship and skills development as key drivers of opportunity.

Working in close partnership with the Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN), the alliance advances apprenticeship and work-based learning models inspired by Switzerland's dual-track system. This approach, which combines classroom learning with paid, hands-on training, is being adapted through GAN's international network of companies and business federations to connect young people to quality jobs and evolving industries across regions.

The Global Alliance for YOUth demonstrates how the private sector can move from commitment to collaboration – scaling proven approaches like the Swiss apprenticeship model into a coordinated global effort that equips young people with the skills, experience and networks to thrive in the future of work.



Preparing young people for the future of work requires more than opportunity – it demands collaboration across sectors to align education, innovation and employability. The Global Alliance for YOUth is committed to turning this shared responsibility into action, ensuring that young people everywhere can shape and thrive in the economies of tomorrow.

Martha Uribe, Chair, Global Alliance for YOUth

Affordability, representation and access to capital

While not always at the top of global policy agendas, access to affordable housing remains a major priority for young people – a foundation for independence, stability and security. This is followed by demands for greater political representation and participation, including lowering barriers to candidacy, institutionalizing youth engagement in decision-making, and ensuring diverse voices in governance.

Young entrepreneurs also emphasize the importance of access to capital for youth-

led ventures – enabling innovation and self-determination in economies that too often limit entry points for first-time founders.

Regional analysis reveals variation in emphasis: in Europe and North America, affordability dominates youth policy priorities; in Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, employment and entrepreneurship top the list; and across Latin America and the Asia-Pacific, representation, inclusion and equitable access are gaining momentum as catalysts for reform.

FIGURE 18 Regional overview of policy priorities

Which policies would empower young people the most in your country?

Asia Pacific and Oceania



- 1 Guaranteeing equal access to affordable quality educations
- 2 Creating employment opportunities for youth
- 3 Ensuring affordable housing and financial independence for young adults

Middle East and North Africa



- 1 Creating employment opportunities for youth
- 2 Providing funding and support for youth-led busuinesses
- 3 Guarantee equal access to affordable quality education

Europe and Eurasia



- 1 Ensuring affordable housing and financial independence for young adults
- 2 Creating employment opportunities for youth
- 3 Guaranteeing equal access to affordable quality education

North America and Caribbean



- 1 Ensuring affordable housing and financial independence for young adults
- 2 Guaranteeing equal access to affordable quality education
- 3 Creating employment opportunities for youth

North and East Asia



- 1 Creating employment opportunities for youth
- 2 Guaranteeing equal access to affordable quality education
- 3 Supporting global youth exchanges and leadership development

South Asia



- 1 Creating employment opportunities for youth
- 2 Guaranteeing equal access to affordable quality education
- 3 Providing funding and support for youth-led businesses

Latin America



- 1 Guaranteeing equal access to affordable quality education
- 2 Creating employment opportunities for youth
- 3 Expanding mental health support for young people

Sub-Saharan Africa



- 1 Creating employment opportunities for youth
- 2 Guaranteeing equal access to affordable quality education
- 3 Providing funding and support for youth-led businesses

Building on these findings, the next chapter identifies practical measures that governments, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders can adopt to

respond to young people's expressed concerns and priorities, ensuring that their perspectives inform future strategies and decision-making.

Looking ahead towards a blueprint for action

Across regions, young people are calling for policies that match their ambition – policies that deliver opportunity, fairness and a voice in shaping the future. Their priorities reveal a coherent vision: education that leads to employment, work that sustains dignity, housing that provides stability and institutions that reflect and empower young generations.

This is not just a collection of priorities – it is a call to action. By embedding youth perspectives into decision-making, governments, businesses and communities can build systems that enable security, participation and innovation – ensuring that the promise of the next generation becomes the foundation of shared progress.



Strategies to future-proof society

The imperative to future-proof both society and the livelihoods of young people is not a distant challenge, but an immediate and shared responsibility. The findings of this report underscore that young people are not only signalling the need for change, they are actively engaging with new approaches to leadership, work, technology and environmental stewardship. A critical demographic force, especially in emerging economies, youth priorities are already influencing institutions and markets, demanding that today's leaders adapt with agility and foresight.

To secure sustainable economic growth and societal resilience, youth perspectives must be

systematically embedded across sectors and decision-making levels. Institutions must also strengthen mechanisms to listen, interpret and act upon the priorities identified by young people.

The following table outlines actionable measures for key stakeholders, including governments, the private sector and civil society, to meaningfully engage with the next generation and future-proof society and economy. While not exhaustive, these recommendations highlight practical and innovative approaches to strategic youth integration, directly addressing the trends and concerns raised by young people in this report.

TABLE 1 **Actionable measures for strategic youth integration by key stakeholders**

Economic opportunity: Building security and shared prosperity	
Governments	Implement portable benefit systems and adaptive social protection models such as transferable health, pension and training credits, which support long-term planning even as young people move through flexible or short-term roles.
	Provide targeted seed funding, tax incentives and mentorship for youth-led enterprises – particularly in green, digital and social innovation sectors.
	Embed youth-driven foresight in national economic strategies, ensuring that policy and budget cycles reflect the next generation's priorities and lived realities.
Private sector	Create inclusive early-career pathways – through apprenticeships, paid internships and skill-based hiring – to expand equitable access to opportunity.
	Integrate continuous learning frameworks into workplace design, supporting reskilling and career progression as technology evolves.
	Commit to transparent wage practices and impact reporting, building credibility and trust with a generation that values accountability.
Civil society	Champion youth participation in economic policy-making, including roles in trade unions, chambers of commerce and policy councils.
	Advocate for housing and intergenerational wealth reforms to reduce structural inequality.
Governance and leadership: Restoring trust through shared power	
Governments	Establish intergenerational foresight and youth advisory councils within ministries to embed long-term thinking in governance.
	Institutionalize structured mentorship pipelines connecting current and emerging leaders to ensure leadership renewal and knowledge transfer.
	Promote transparency and open data initiatives that allow citizens, especially youth, to monitor progress and hold institutions accountable.
Private sector	Partner with youth organizations to co-create leadership programmes focused on ethical innovation and sustainability.
	Introduce reciprocal mentoring schemes where young professionals and senior executives exchange insights on emerging social, technological and organizational trends.
	Adopt intergenerational decision-making models that integrate youth perspectives into strategy, product design and public affairs.

Civil society	Support youth-led governance innovations – such as civic tech, participatory budgeting and local accountability networks.
	Train young advocates in systems thinking and foresight methodologies, enabling them to contribute to policy design.
	Facilitate intergenerational dialogues that bridge ideological divides and build democratic resilience.
Technology and skills: Equipping a generation for the AI economy	
Governments	Develop youth-inclusive AI ethics and data governance frameworks that safeguard privacy, fairness and transparency.
	Expand access to reskilling and certification programmes in emerging sectors such as AI, green tech and cybersecurity.
	Build equitable digital infrastructure to close the connectivity and skills gap across rural and low-income communities.
Educational institutions	Embed digital fluency, entrepreneurship and foresight literacy into national curricula across all disciplines.
	Establish youth-industry partnerships through tech labs and innovation hubs, offering hands-on experience in applied AI and robotics.
	Encourage peer-led and intergenerational learning models that strengthen collaboration and adaptability.
Private sector	Launch AI apprenticeships and youth-led innovation labs that provide pathways into emerging tech careers.
	Publish transparent AI impact audits to demonstrate ethical implementation and responsible governance.
	Fund open-access digital learning platforms to extend fairer opportunities for underserved groups.
Social cohesion and well-being: Restoring connection and credibility through care	
Governments	Establish youth-centred mental health services, make them accessible and affordable, and embed well-being metrics in policy design.
	Support dedicated youth networks that promote open dialogue, build leadership capacity, and drive community initiatives.
	Foster intergenerational spaces and programmes that encourage connection, co-creation and knowledge transfer.
Civil society	Create peer-support networks and safe spaces for youth to navigate digital and real-world pressures collaboratively.
	Organize civic dialogues and campaigns to counter polarization and reinforce social trust.
	Promote cross-community volunteering to bridge divides and strengthen collective resilience.
Private sector	Centre well-being in workplace cultures, offering flexibility and mental health support as standard practice.
	Partner with youth organizations to promote responsible digital engagement and inclusive communication.
Environmental action: Turning foresight to stewardship	
Governments	Set youth-inclusive climate targets and formally recognize youth expertise in national environmental councils.
	Co-design climate adaptation and resilience programmes with local youth communities, councils and networks.
	Use scenario planning to anticipate climate risks, make option-preserving decisions and guide investment priorities.
Private sector	Direct investment towards sustainable and impact-driven environmental solutions in clean energy, circular design and regenerative agriculture.
	Integrate climate accountability metrics into operations, supply chains and reporting.
	Offer green career pathways through apprenticeships and sustainability fellowships.
Civil society	Amplify youth-led climate solutions and provide technical and financial support for scale.
	Strengthen civic environmental literacy by educating communities on nature-based solutions and environmental justice.

While the aim of this report is to offer a comprehensive set of relevant and achievable measures, it is important to recognize that there is no single blueprint for strategic youth integration. Each institution and initiative can identify unique gaps in their own domains where youth perspectives can add significant value.

At the World Economic Forum, flagship programmes such as the Future50 Initiative by the Global Foresight Network, are equipping emerging leaders with the skills, networks and influence necessary to embed long-term, intergenerational perspectives into decision-making.

In addition, the Forum's Network of Global Future Councils (GFCs), which serves as a leading multistakeholder and interdisciplinary knowledge platform, has onboarded 15 young experts and youth advocates for the 2025-2026 term.

These initiatives are not designed out of tokenistic inclusion goals; they are designed to ensure that intergenerational insights are embedded in the Forum's approach towards future-proofing.



The core premise underpinning Future50 is the concept of intergenerational foresight, an idea that we developed to challenge the status quo of who gets to design the future.

Intergenerational foresight refuses the comfort of tokenism. It expands authorship across generations and geographies, dismantling inherited monopolies on imagination to replace representation with co-creation, and prediction with plurality.

Fatima-Zahra Ma-el-ainin, Co-Lead, Future50 Initiative

Feature: Making the case for intergenerational foresight

- 1 Our digital economy reveals a simple truth: without intergenerational foresight, innovation loses balance, and we build systems that exhaust the young and exclude the old.

Valentina Vellinho Nardin, Future50 Regional Coordinator, Porto, Portugal

- 2 With foresight tools such as reinforcing and balancing loops and leverage points, we explored the future of education in Chile and the outlook for watershed governance across Latin America.

Benjamin Sánchez Adam, Future50 Leader, Valparaíso, Chile

- 3 If conflict, frontier technology, or climate and market shocks arrive first in your region, you cannot afford to wait for evidence of damage, you have to see around corners.

Zainab Azizi, Future50 Leader, Kabul, Afghanistan

- 4 The future depends on how we communicate across time. Intergenerational foresight turns communication from storytelling into stewardship – ensuring that meaning, not noise, travels forward.

Markus Kirchschrager, Future50 Leader, Munich, Germany

- 5 In Latin America, we're learning that legitimacy is rebuilt when governance listens to the wisdom of elders, the innovation of youth, and the voice of nature itself.

Jaime Aguilera, Future50 Leader, Bogota, Colombia

- 6 Living in Turkey, where you don't know if you can afford shoes next week because prices shift overnight, planning for 2075 seems absurd. But intergenerational foresight taught me something liberating: the future isn't predetermined. We're making it right now.

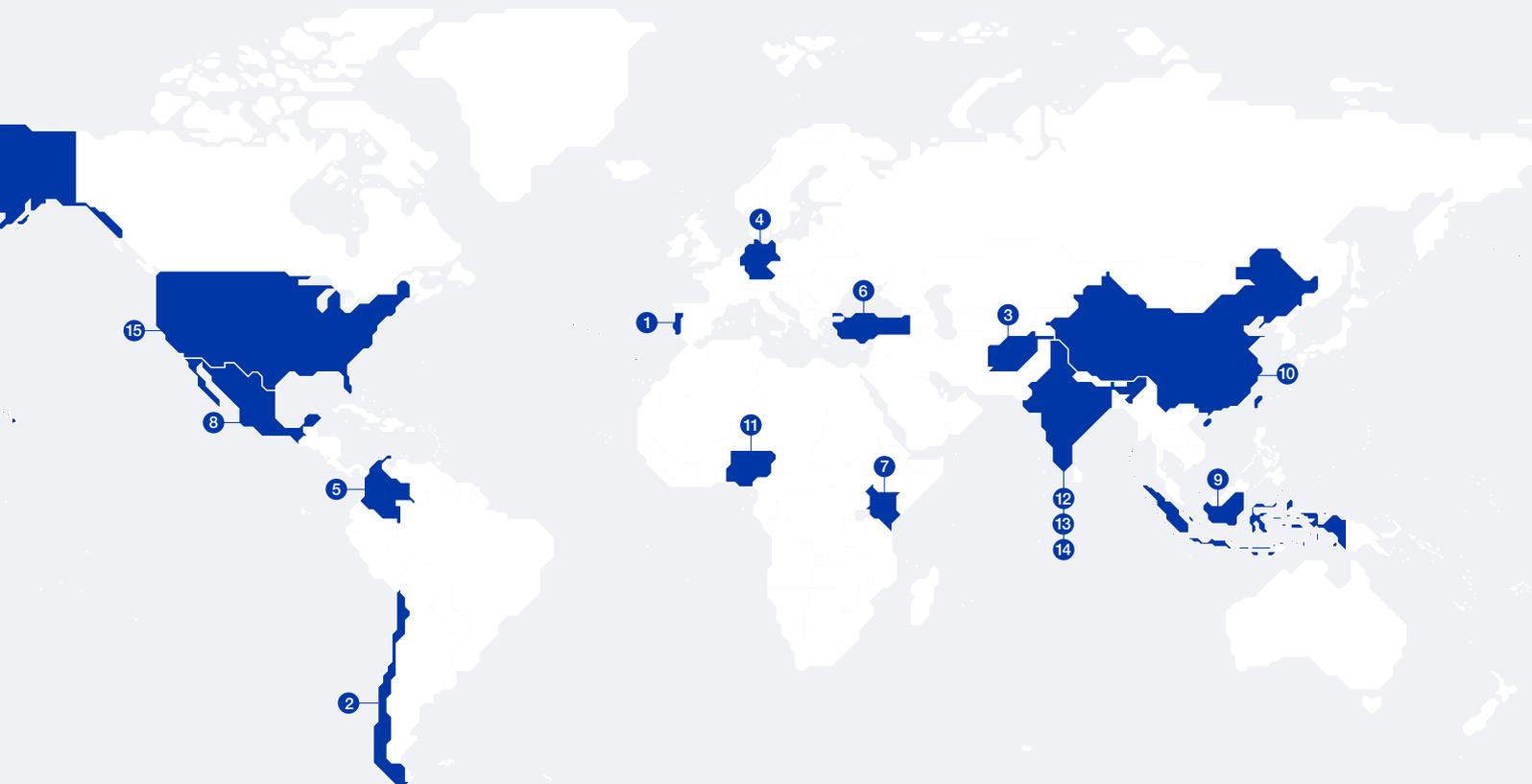
Irem Bilir, Future50 Leader, Istanbul, Turkey

- 7 We do not inherit the future, we co-craft it. When generations listen to each other, foresight becomes leadership.

Stephen Gudha, Future50 Leader, Kisumu, Kenya

- 8 Intergenerational foresight is our compass to nurture a talent economy that roots future generations in their own communities.

Kassandra Muro, Future50 Leader, Guadalajara, Mexico



- 9 Intergenerational fairness is key to climate action: foresight allows us to illuminate (known and previously unknown) pathways, while simultaneously building in the necessary conditions and milestones we need to ensure an equitable future.

Pok Wei Heng, Future50 Leader, Auckland, New Zealand

- 10 Growing up between different worlds taught me that no generation holds the full truth and no culture holds the only answer. Intergenerational foresight is the ability to design futures that every generation can belong to.

Yujing Jin, Future50 Leader, Tianjin, China

- 11 Intergenerational foresight practice connects the past, present and future, ensuring that the wisdom of yesterday informs the actions of today and safeguards the well-being of tomorrow.

Andrew Banigo, Future50 Leader, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

- 12 Intergenerational foresight asks us to redesign the systems that shape decisions and determine whose interests they serve. In South Asia, our task is to rewire incentives so that governance rewards long-term accountability instead of short-term endurance.

Manpreet Dash, Future50 Leader, Bhubaneswar, India

- 13 When generations collaborate, the past informs the future, and the present paves the way.

Shradha Pandey, Future50 Leader, Bengaluru, India

- 14 Each generation inherits both a planet and a possibility. Intergenerational foresight is about ensuring that our choices today expand, not exhaust, the choices of those who follow.

Gaurav Sharma, Future50 Leader, Jaipur, India

- 15 Intergenerational foresight is not simply collaboration; it is the courageous, intentional transfer of stewardship.

Tia Clay, Future50 Leader, Chicago, United States

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Acknowledgements

The team behind this report thank Global Shapers around the world, without whose commitment and dedication, this report would not be possible.

The team are sincerely grateful to the nearly 4,600 Global Shapers who contributed to this year's report and continue to work tirelessly to create a more inclusive, peaceful and sustainable world. Thank you for being an essential part of this journey and for your relentless pursuit of a better future for all.

The team are incredibly grateful to the **Global Shapers Team** for their support, especially Albina

Giordano, Paniz Jamali, Raissa Kanku, Abi Liu, Kenza M'Haimdat, Sophia Simmons and Miao Sun. They also thank Francois Bonnici, Sebastian Buckup and Jill Rademacher for their insights and collaboration.

This report has also benefited greatly from the inspiring mobilization efforts of the **Community Champions**.

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Appendices

A.1 Methodology

The “Youth Pulse 2026” report draws on unique insights from nearly 4,600 young people from 489 diverse locations, including capital cities, rural areas, islands and refugee camps – spanning 144 countries and territories. The target population is aged 18-30. This breadth of perspectives makes it one of the most diverse datasets available on the global youth agenda. (See Appendix 2 for more information on demography.)

Grounded in both quantitative and qualitative data, this report aims to achieve two objectives: i) capture the perspectives of young people as they navigate the world; ii) assess the scale and outcomes of their collective action.

A keyword frequency mapping analysis was used to identify patterns in the open-text responses, helping to surface recurring concepts and shared vocabulary. Beyond individual terms, a semantic clustering process was used to group related keywords based on their contextual co-occurrence and semantic proximity in responses, using a topic modelling approach (TF-IDF vectorization combined with Non-negative Matrix Factorization, NMF) to detect recurring semantic patterns. For example, terms such as *education*, *access* and *technology* often appeared together, while words like *listening*, *collaboration* and *respect* clustered around human-centric values.

Data sources

1. Annual survey

The survey was made available in four languages and received 4,574 responses from young people across 489 locations in 144 countries and territories. Three tailored versions of the survey were deployed from July-August 2025:

- The youth outlook survey covering views on political, social, economic, technological and environmental issues, as well as demographic information.

- A survey with the leadership section including additional questions for “Curators” who are elected Hub leaders, to gather feedback on their leadership journey.
- Survey with impact section for “Impact Officers”, who are responsible for gathering and reporting impact; focused on community-level impact, collecting data on the number and type of youth-led initiatives executed, beneficiaries reached and systemic outcomes achieved.

2. Internal reporting

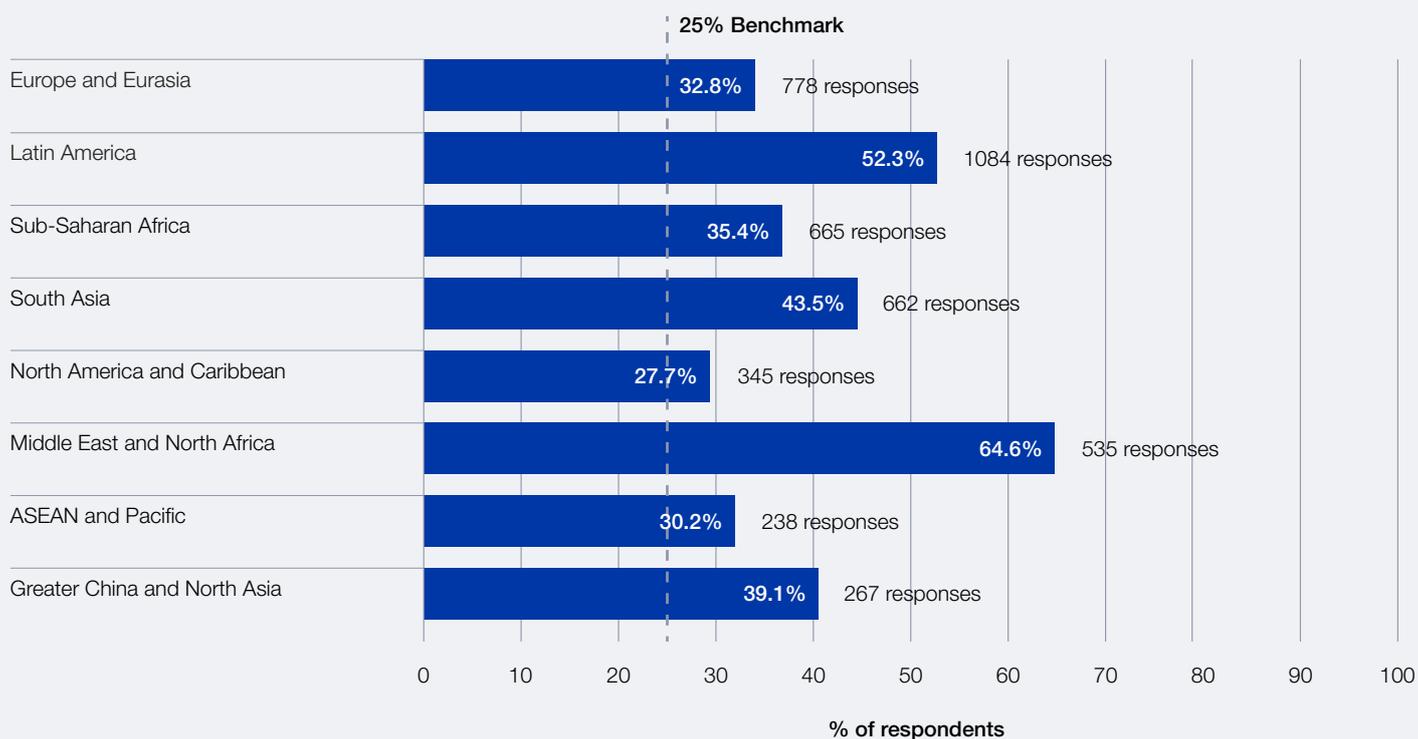
Additional data was sourced from the Global Shapers Community’s internal reporting systems, covering the period from July 2024 to June 2025, to include:

- Quantitative indicators such as impact areas, number of beneficiaries reached and systemic outcomes.
- Qualitative narratives detailing project descriptions, Hub activities and partnerships.
- Demographic information (e.g. age and gender), and data on members’ participation in other Forum initiatives, providing a comprehensive view of community activity and impact.

Robustness of findings

This report is based on a robust survey that captured the views and experiences of 40% (4,574 out of 11,400) of the members of the Global Shapers Community, a large and diverse segment representing young people worldwide. The strong participation rate ensures that the findings reflect a globally distributed and demographically diverse sample of youth – spanning regions, languages and socio-economic contexts. To further strengthen the reliability of the results, the data underwent careful internal checks and follow-up reviews, helping to ensure that the information presented is both consistent and trustworthy.

FIGURE 19 | Regional overview of responses



Limitations of the data

As in previous years, all data presented in this report is based on self-reported information from members of the Global Shapers Community. While internal validation measures were applied, the figures have not

been independently audited. Secondly, response rates to the survey vary by regional engagement levels.

Despite these limitations, the consistency of responses across regions and the breadth of participation provide a strong insight into how young people perceive the world around them.

A.2 Demography

This section presents the demographic profile of survey respondents, covering regional distribution, age, gender identity and financial situation, complemented by indicators of education, employment, sector and industry.

distribution, the dataset highlights the diversity of perspectives that define the community. The target group of the survey is 18-30 years; a majority of respondents are in their mid-20s and nearly half are 26-29 years old.

Age and regional representation

The survey covers the following regions: North America and the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe and Eurasia, North and East Asia, South Asia, Asia Pacific and Oceania, Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond extensive regional

Education and employment pathways

Educational and professional trajectories are equally varied. Nearly 7 in 10 respondents are university graduates, while 1 in 5 are current students. Employment patterns range from full-time roles to

part-time work, apprenticeships and entrepreneurial ventures. More than 55% of the respondents report only just meeting their basic needs, having just a little left over, or in some cases, barely or not meeting basic needs at all.

Institutions and industries

Respondents work across a wide spectrum of institutions – from global Fortune 500 companies to multilateral and non-profit organizations like the United Nations. Others are active in public service and government, including local municipalities, national ministries and international delegations. Many are also entrepreneurs and founders driving start-ups in fields such as fintech, climate tech, education technology and AI.

Cross-sectoral presence

Sectorally, the respondents represent civil society, government, academia, the private sector and emerging industries, spanning fields such as technology and software, sustainability and environment, healthcare, finance, media and the creative economy. This cross-sectoral presence has ensured a broad diversity of insights captured in the survey.

Gaps in demography

Certain dimensions of diversity were not systematically captured, such as rural versus urban residence, ethnicity, disability status, sexual orientation or socio-economic backgrounds based on financial situations. These factors may influence how young people experience opportunities or challenges and should be considered when interpreting results.

FIGURE 20 Regional distribution of responses

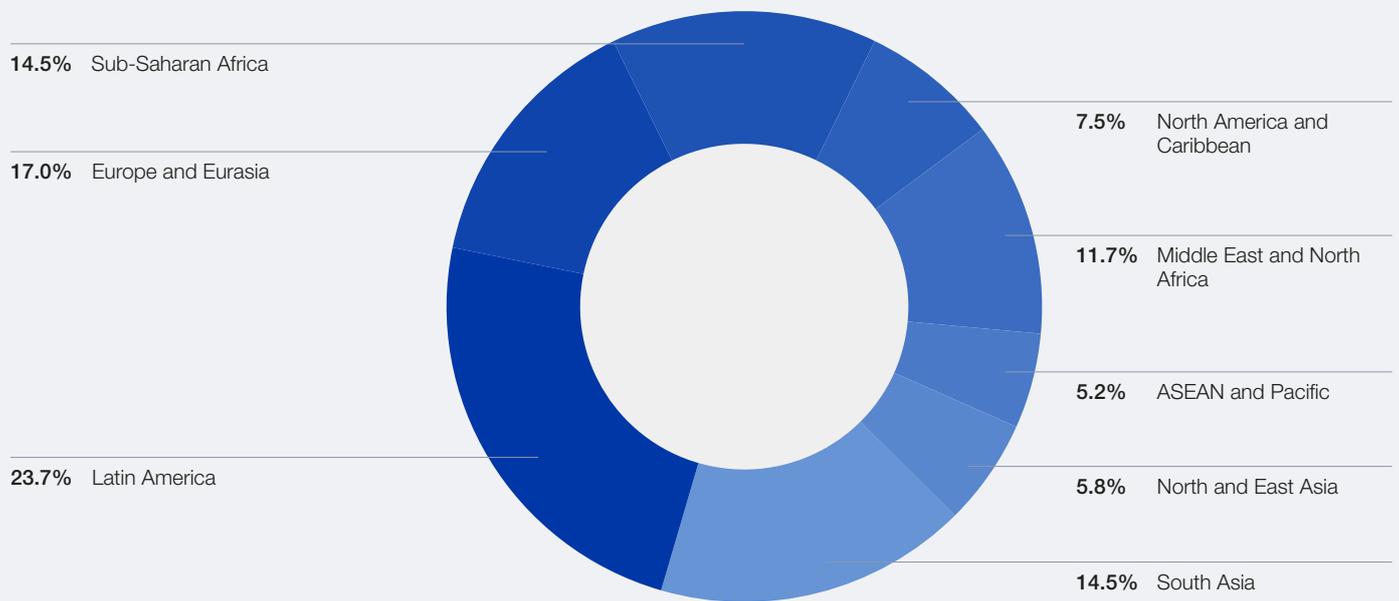


FIGURE 21 | Age distribution of responses

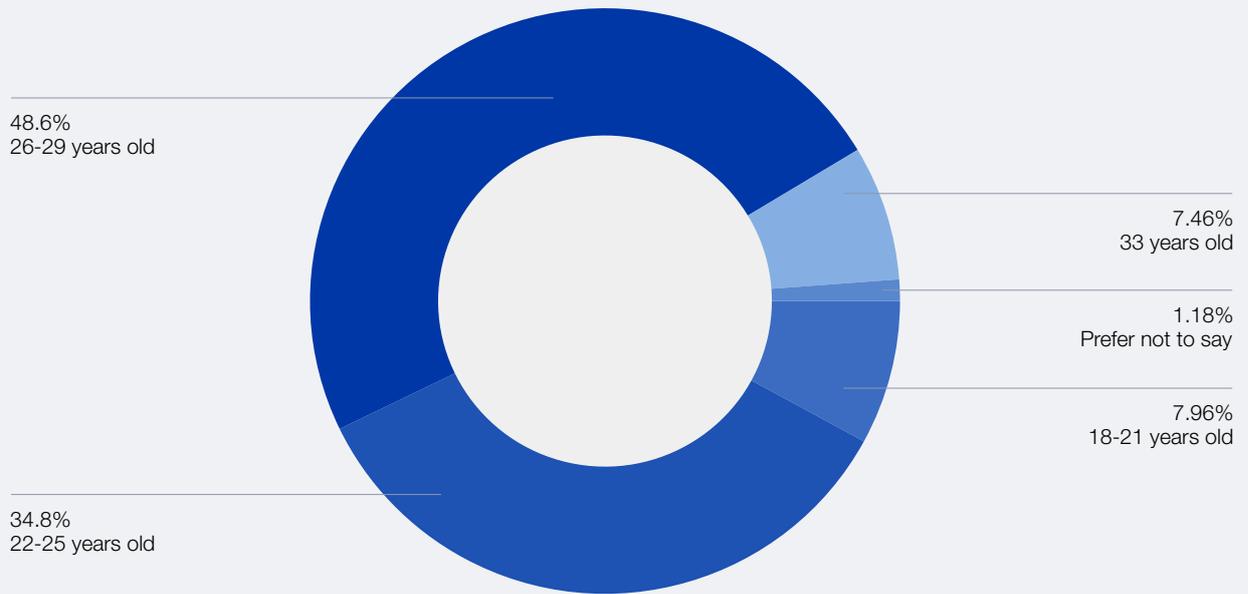


FIGURE 22 | Distribution of gender across responses

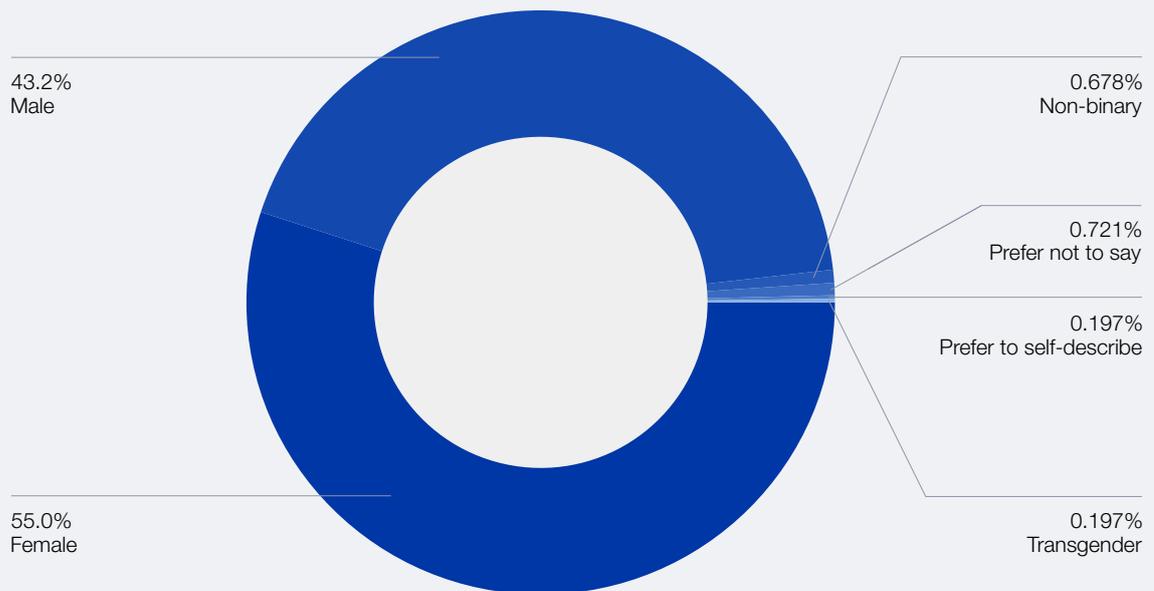


FIGURE 23 | Distribution of financial situation across responses

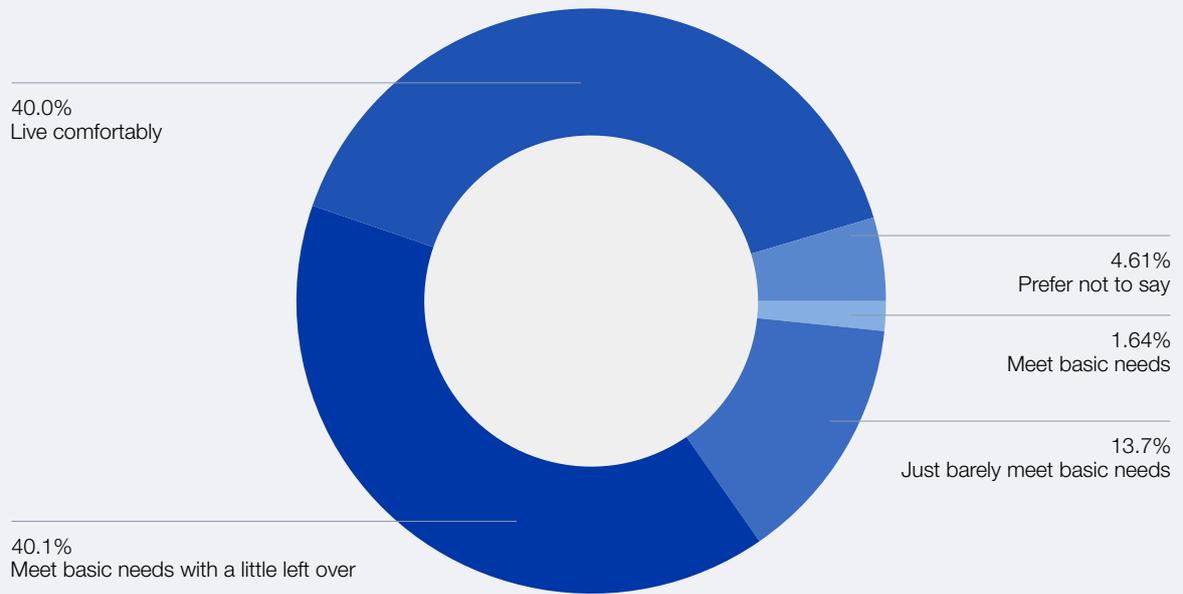


FIGURE 24 | Distribution of academic background across responses

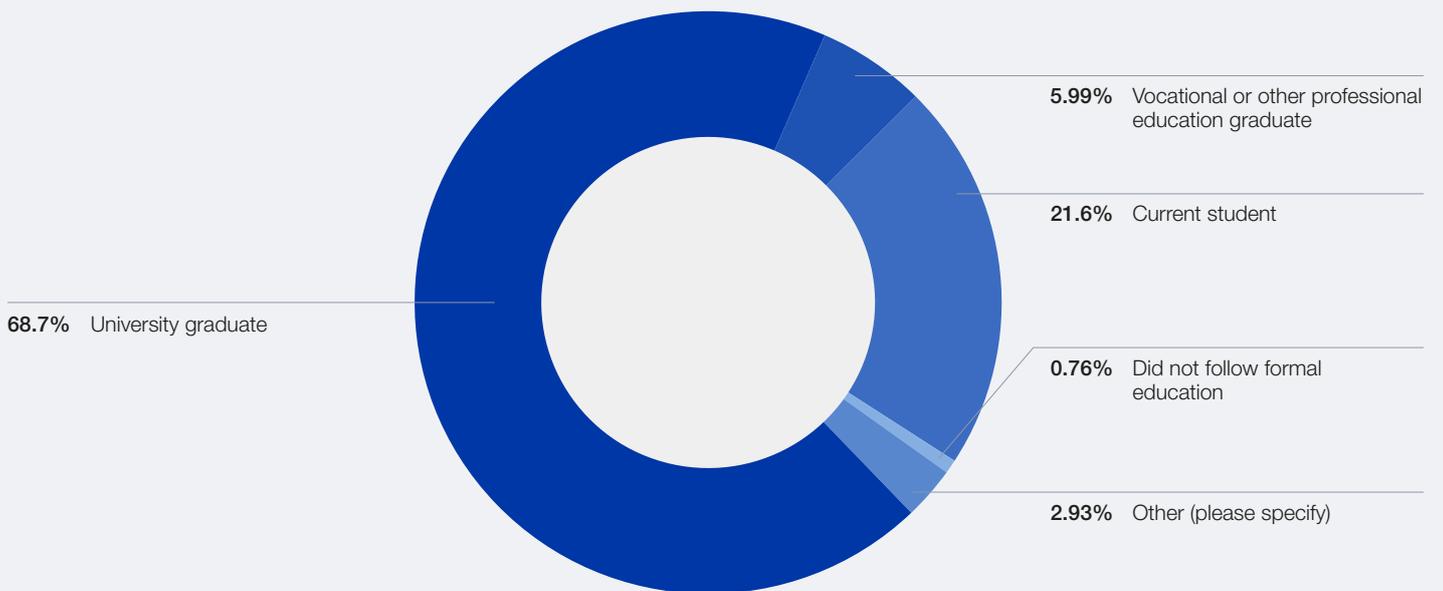


FIGURE 25 | Distribution of employment situation across responses

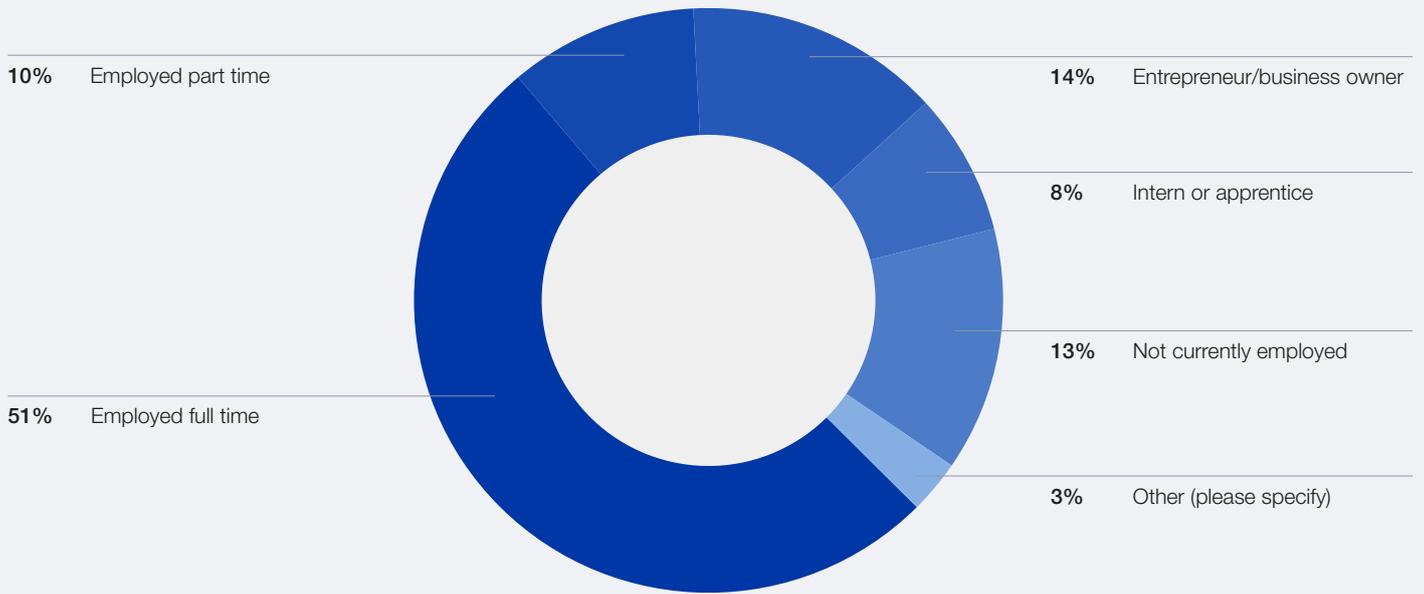


FIGURE 26 | Distribution of sector across responses

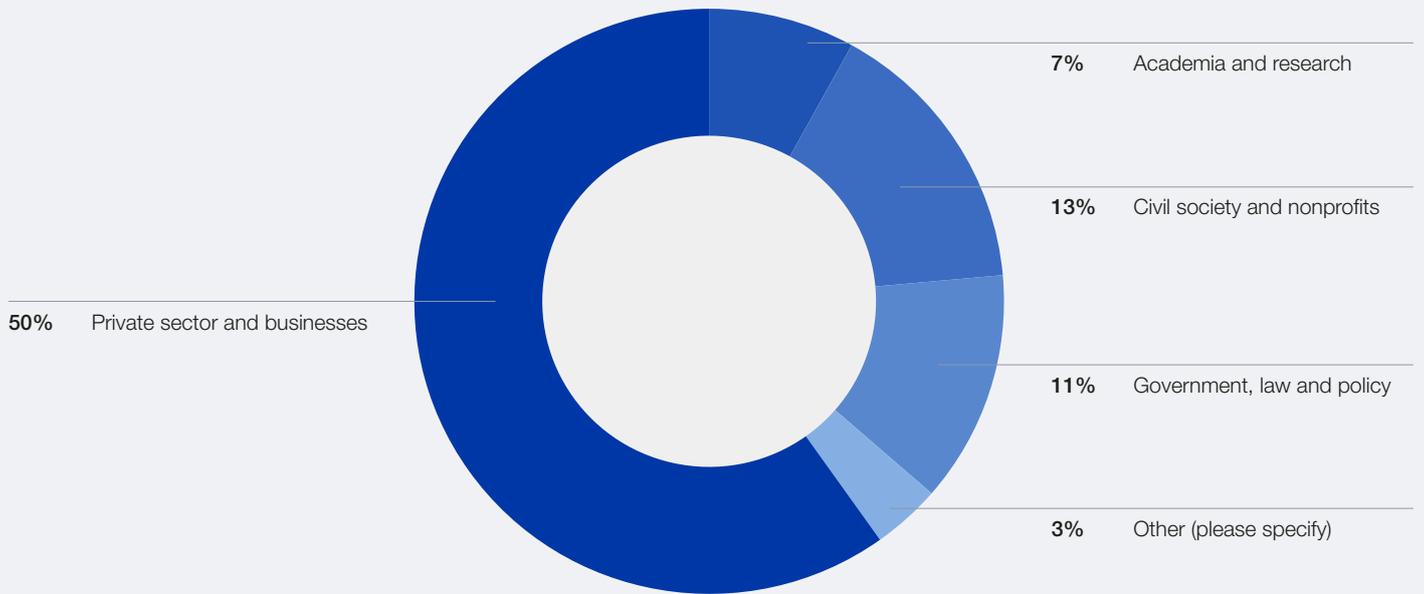
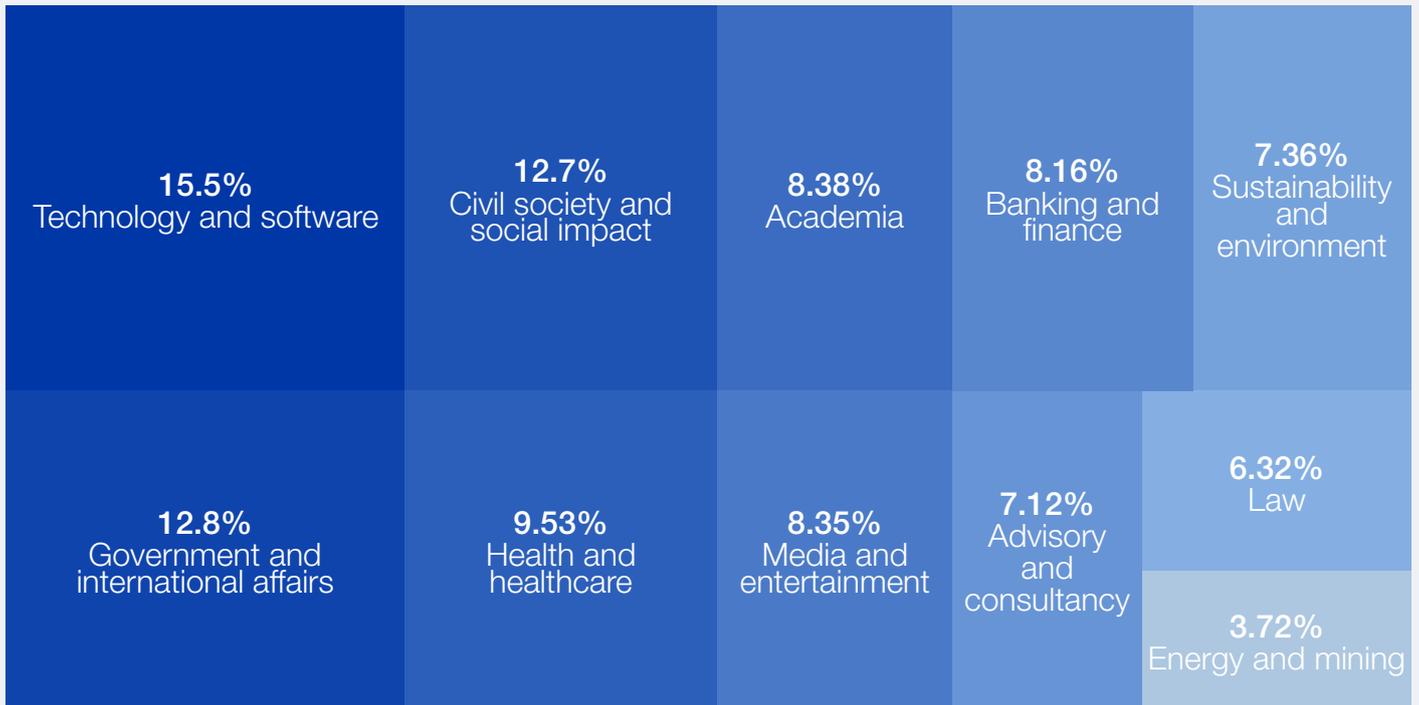


FIGURE 27 | Distribution of industries across responses



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The Global Shapers Community is a network of young people committed to driving positive change in their local communities and beyond. At the heart of the community is a belief in the power of local action supported by a global network. Independent, city-based hubs around the world identify and lead projects that reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.



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