

Building bridges: Empowering G20 youth to be leaders

A collaborative effort
between Y20 and the
Center for Creative Leadership



Center for
Creative
Leadership



Y20
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YOUTH



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Building bridges and breaking down barriers:

Youth's insights on the state of youth empowerment in G20 countries and beyond

A collaborative effort between Y20 and the Center for Creative Leadership

What would it look like if youth around the globe had opportunities to develop the skills, beliefs, and connections they need to become lifelong, empowered leaders?



How can those in positions of power help youth begin that journey?

Building bridges and breaking down barriers:

The world is battling two public health crises in 2020. COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc on our daily lives, economic prospects, and social interactions on local, national, and international levels. At the same time, civil rights movements such as Black Lives Matter have brought renewed attention and scrutiny to the more insidious crisis of social injustice permeating all aspects of society. Both COVID-19 and the spotlight on social injustice have shaped global attitudes and actions in profound, and often intersecting, ways. Both crises have also been met with varying levels of support and resistance from citizens, leaders, and governments worldwide.

ew youth (defined here as 18-35 years of age) have experienced events with such pervasive global impact in their lifetime. In such tumultuous times, can they reasonably be expected to navigate everyday challenges in the “new normal” and meaningfully engage in formal or informal leadership roles? By the same token, unprecedented challenges afford opportunities for unprecedented change. The time is ripe to change beliefs about what leadership looks like and who can become a leader. This paper provides insights into youth’s current beliefs and hopes for the future. Drawing from the perspectives of over 10,000 youth in 20 countries, we asked:

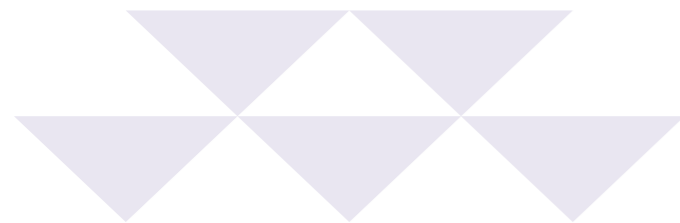


1 What is youth empowerment, and why is it important?

2 What is the current state of youth leadership and empowerment?

3 Why do youth choose to engage (or not engage) in formal leadership?

4 How can those in positions of power enable youth empowerment?





10,386

youth who responded
to the survey

“Leadership is a social process that enables individuals to work together to achieve results.”

Center for Creative Leadership

The following pages highlight what we learned from youth participating in surveys, interviews, and interactive working sessions. These youth provided a broad view on the state of youth leadership, and represented different backgrounds, geographic locations, and experiences with formal and informal leadership. Some were first-time leaders, and others held top leadership positions. Some aspired to be formal leaders someday but had not yet stepped into that role. Still, other youth did not intend to pursue formal leadership at all.

We conclude with promising starting points for change. These starting points were identified based on survey responses from 10,386 youth. Recommendations for how to address these starting points were drawn from both interviews and working sessions, and were informed by foundational knowledge in leadership development.

Ultimately, our recommended approach to enact meaningful change is grounded in the Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL) definition of leadership: “a social process that enables individuals to work together to achieve results.” Youth and those in positions of power both have meaningful roles to play in supporting youth empowerment. By hearing perspectives from others around the globe, youth themselves can generate frame-breaking ideas to alter the state of youth leadership. By listening to why youth may (or may not) choose to pursue formal leadership roles, those in positions of power can evolve their approaches to youth leadership through systems that support their meaningful involvement. Only by working together hand-in-hand can we achieve our ultimate goal: setting the stage to develop young leaders who, regardless of their background, recognize their potential impact on local, national, and international levels.

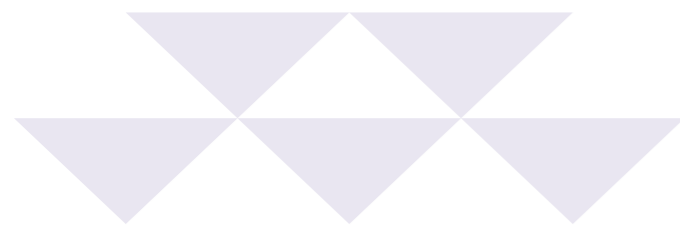


What is youth empowerment, and why is it important?

What is a good leader, and why would youth choose to be a leader?

Leadership is a field that has garnered enormous attention, with more than 26,000 academic articles published on leadership at the turn of the century. Leadership can involve many different tasks and responsibilities depending on whether it is formal or informal and whether it is a solitary or joint pursuit. Ideas about who can be a leader and what a good leader looks like may differ based on the person, field, or context. What does a leader look like in 2020 and what does effective leadership entail? We asked youth to answer these questions in their own words.

In general, youth view leaders in a positive light and recognize a leader's potential to empower others. In the survey, youth across G20 countries identified the top five characteristics of a good leader as intelligent, hard-working, disciplined, understanding, and competent. These responses indicate that it is important for leaders to be prepared (competent, intelligent), dedicated (hard-working, disciplined), and attuned to collective needs (understanding). The least frequently selected characteristics suggest that youth do not believe some past stereotypes associated with being a good leader, including gender (masculine, male), physical appearance (tall), or questionable tactics (power-hungry, manipulative).



Interviews with current youth leaders reinforced the same themes, particularly with respect to empowering others. Many responses about how to describe a leader (see word cloud) involved themes related to helping others (e.g., empathy, inspires) and bringing people together (e.g., common vision, create culture). Often, this work took the form of enabling others to reach their full potential. As one leader shared, "A leader is someone who can inspire others and help them realize their strengths and maximize their contributions to society." Several interviewees also emphasized the importance of empathy and deep understanding of community to truly empower others. For example, one current leader highlighted the benefit of listening to empower others:

"A leader is someone who can inspire others and help them realize their strengths and maximize their contributions to society."

"A leader is a role, an intention, an attitude of listening to others, of understanding what is needed—what are the pains, which are the opportunities, and bringing what people have inside (their power and strength) to accomplish that opportunity or to solve that issue." Another current leader reinforced this message, stating,

"a leader today should be someone with a great deal of empathy, a great deal of dedication, and someone with a deep knowledge about the community and issues that pertain to that community they hope to lead."



more than
26,000
academic articles
published

What is youth empowerment, and why is it important?

Youth also emphasized the importance of youth empowerment in their leadership roles, whether formal or informal. In a Y20 working session, delegates defined youth empowerment as “understanding, learning, and enabling youth to take part in shaping the future.” Based on these insights and informed by research, we define youth empowerment as those who are:

- **Confident that their voice is heard**
- **Involved in important decision-making conversations**
- **Able to make decisions, either on their own or jointly with others**
- **Able to make a positive impact on their group, community, or organization (90%)**

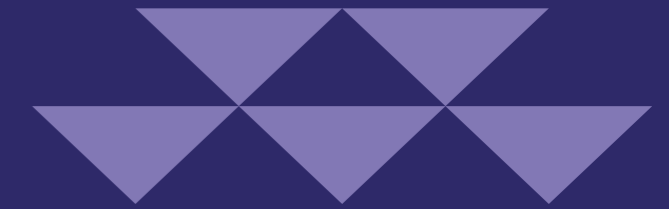
When youth are empowered, they can contribute unique perspectives, knowledge, and ideas to important conversations. In particular, youth delegates identified involvement in policymaking and design as promising opportunities to have widespread impact.

Spotlight: Recognizing equity, diversity, and inclusion

When discussing youth empowerment, many youth emphasized the importance of equitable participation and engaging a diverse cross-section of youth in leadership to provide a broad perspective. During a working session, youth to select an image that reflected youth empowerment. One Y20 delegate selected this image and offered the following insight:



“Youth empowerment should be intersectional and for the diversity of youths. In this image, I see Georgette Seabrooke, as a young, black, woman, artist, empowered by doing what she loves — painting.”



In the same image, I see how her age, race and gender put obstacles on her path to being recognized and respected for her work. She was the youngest and only women artist to be chosen to paint a mural for a hospital in Harlem, NY.

Her mural, titled ‘Recreation in Harlem’ showed images of the Harlem community, dancing to a choir and enjoying life. Complaints about the mural being “too black” led to the Hospital administration and City of New York asking her to change her painting by adding more white people on the mural. Yet, she raised her voice along with other muralists to protest against this injustice and racism, and in 1937 won, when her original mural was placed in the Children’s Pavilion. She reminds us that youth empowerment will occur differently depending on the structural barriers that affect each person from their race, class and gender, and thus, we must address injustices from the roots to reach empowerment for all. “

Eri Kimura Meguro, Y20 Mexico Delegate

Other youth recognized the potential of empowering those with diverse social identities and life experiences to be leaders. Many highlighted systemic and structural barriers that might prevent youth from traditionally marginalized backgrounds from pursuing leadership, and acknowledged the difficulties they face in finding empowerment within systems and structures built by others.

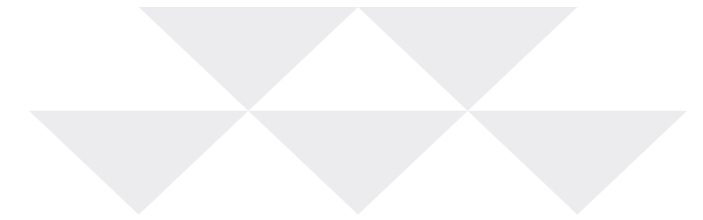
What is the current state of youth leadership and empowerment?

How youth leadership changed in the face of the current pandemic? To provide a broad picture, we surveyed 10,386 youth in G20 countries from different perspectives and backgrounds.



47%

of current leaders held leadership positions in entrepreneur or for-profit sectors

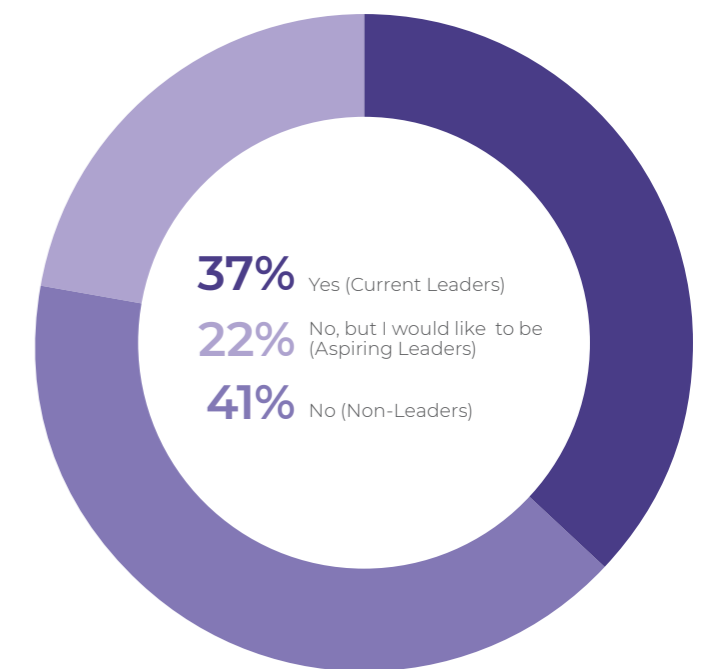


Are youth currently engaged in formal and informal leadership roles?

We began by asking youth whether they were currently engaged in a leadership role. Rather than providing a formal definition, we let youth determine what qualified as a leadership role; their roles could include appointed, compensated positions or informal, volunteer responsibilities.

Overall, responses suggested that most youth are currently involved in a leadership role or aspire to lead in the future. More than one-third of youth surveyed reported currently holding a leadership role. Nearly half of these current leaders held leadership positions in entrepreneur or for-profit sectors (47%), but a sizable percentage also held leadership roles in education (23%) and non-profit (21%). Fewer served as leaders in government (7%) or political activist domains (3%). Current leaders held positions mostly in middle (32%) and upper-middle management (19%), but also held positions at hourly or first-level (30%) and executive and top-level (19%).

Are you currently engaged in a leadership role?



Of those not in a leader role, 65% reported they would like to lead in the future (41% of overall sample). Most of these aspiring leaders planned to pursue a leadership role in the next five years. In contrast, 35% of those not in a leadership role did not intend to pursue one in the future (22% of overall sample). These non-leaders may have been uninterested in a formal position or perceive leadership as an opportunity that was unavailable to them, a point explored later.

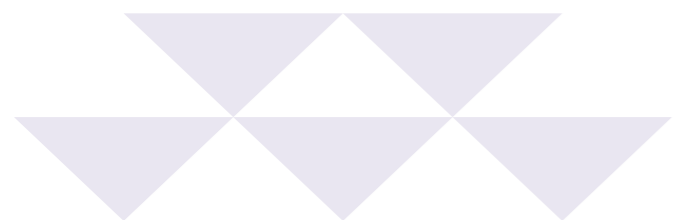
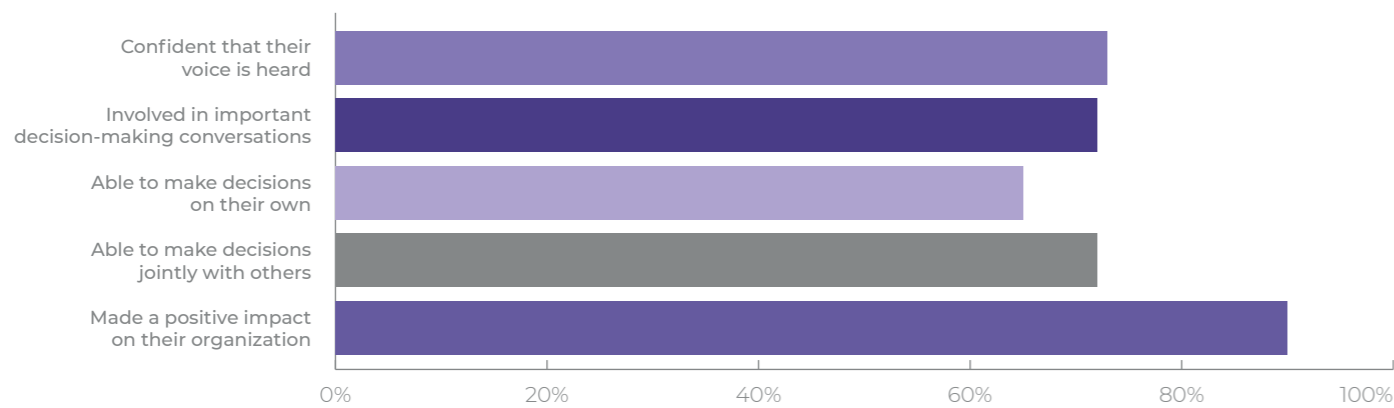
41%

of youth would like to lead in the future

Do current youth leaders feel empowered in their leadership roles?

Securing a leadership role does not guarantee that youth feel empowered. We asked current leaders to share more about experiences in their current role. Responses suggested that most leaders engage in activities that make them feel empowered frequently or almost all of the time. When asked how often they experienced the following, current leaders reported that they were:

- Confident that their voice is heard (73%)
- Involved in important decision-making conversations (72%)
- Able to make decisions on their own (65%) or jointly with others (72%)
- Made a positive impact on their organization (90%)



When we interviewed current leaders about their own experiences, they shared that feeling empowered enabled them to experience both personal growth and broader societal impact. Some youth emphasized that being a leader allowed them to take agency over their personal development. To illustrate, one leader shared that “being a leader made me take ownership of my life, of my actions, and be able to start change.” Others described how feeling empowered shifted their focus toward how to positively impact others, rather than focusing solely on their own development. For example, one leader stated that “once you are responsible, not only for yourself, but also for others, it puts you on a completely different path.”

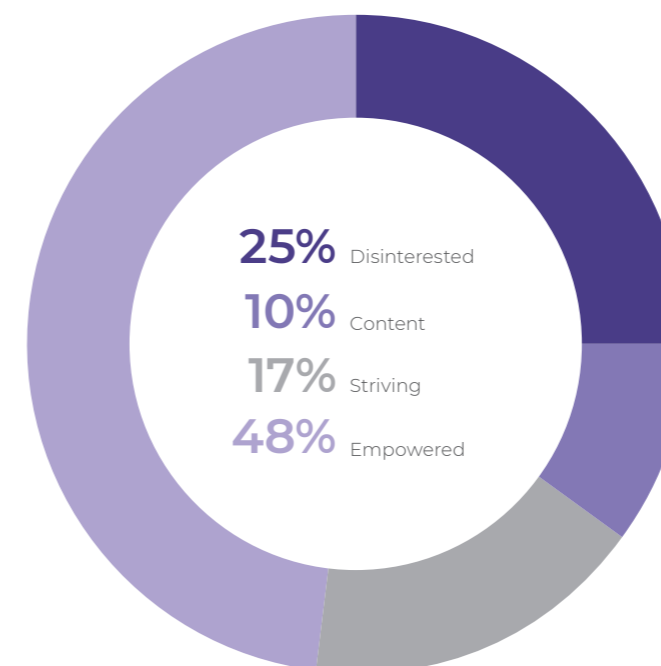


Is youth involvement in leadership perceived as normative?

The state of youth leadership also involves understanding what role youth do and should play in leadership on local, national, and international levels. We asked two questions about youth’s role in leadership in their country: their current role (“youth play an important role in leadership in my country”) and potential role (“my country would benefit from more youth leadership”).

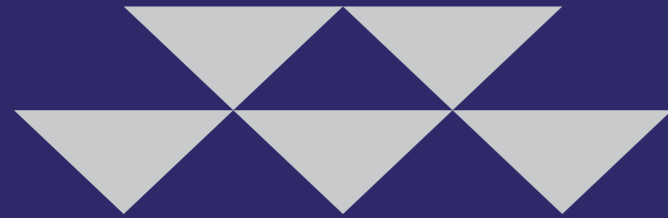
Current Role: “Youth play an important role in leadership in my country.”

Potential Role: “My country would benefit from more youth leadership”



Responses suggested that youth are not a monolith, but hold different perspectives on youth’s current and potential roles in leadership. Their perspectives align with four general views:

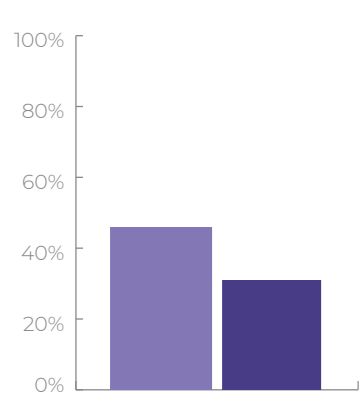
- **Disinterested:** do not think youth play an important role in their country’s leadership and do not see any benefit from more youth involvement. One-fourth of youth held this view and were most likely to be non-leaders (those who do not intend to lead in the future).
- **Content:** think youth are important to their country’s leadership, and do not think their country would benefit from more youth leadership. Only 10% of youth held this view.
- **Striving:** do not think youth currently play an important role in their country’s leadership, but see the potential benefit of more involvement. As one interview participant described, youth are often “left out of the conversation.” About 17% of youth held this view and were most likely to be aspiring leaders (those who do not lead but plan to in the future).
- **Empowered:** think youth are important to their country’s leadership and recognize the potential for even greater involvement. One interview participant described this important and untapped potential: “young people are the key because they have this energy, motivation, innovative knowledge. We should use it in leadership because [youth] are the ones who are the future and who should take the responsibility for the world we live in.” Nearly half (48%) of youth held this view and were most likely to be current leaders..



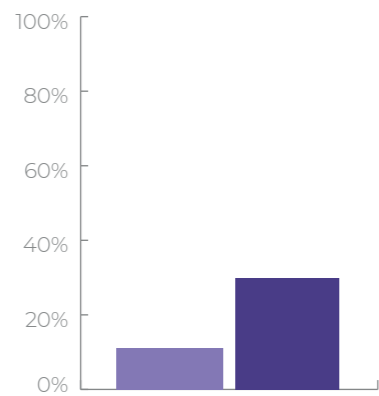
Taken together, the current state of youth leadership indicates a strong starting point for youth leadership and empowerment, as well as momentum for even greater empowerment. Most youth we heard from were either involved in leadership or plan to lead in the future, and most current leaders felt empowered in their roles. Over half of youth recognized the important role of youth in their country's leadership currently, and more than half highlighted potential for even greater future impact of youth leadership in their country.

Spotlight: Does youth leadership and empowerment vary across countries?

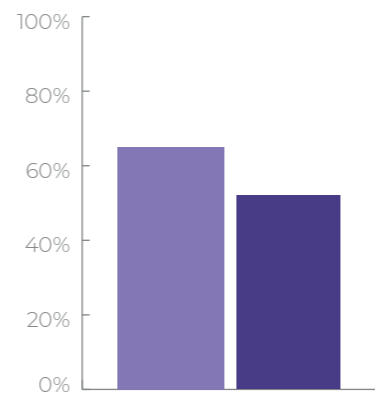
One benefit of hearing from youth in 20 different countries is to explore geographic differences. When comparing responses from youth in emerging and advanced countries (according to the International Monetary Fund ranking), we found that youth in emerging countries lead more often and feel more empowered. Based on responses to our survey, emerging countries ha



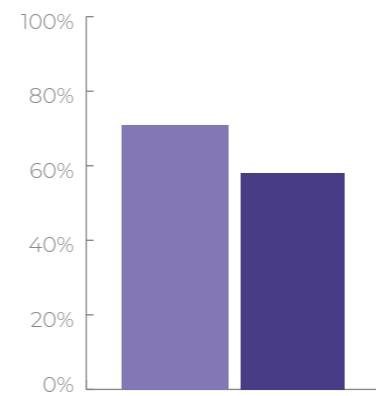
More current leaders
46% vs. 31% in advanced.



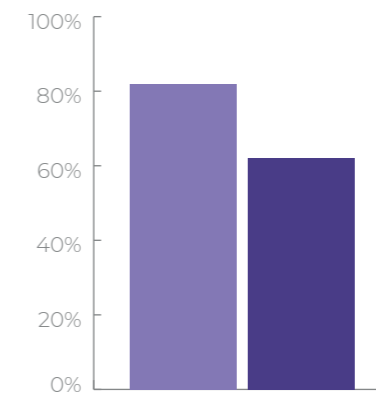
Fewer non-interested leaders who do not plan to pursue a leadership role;
11% vs. 30% in advanced.



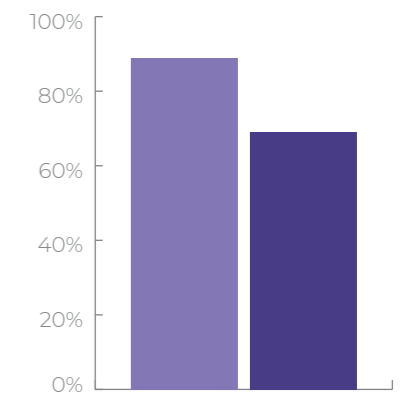
More youth who believe that youth play an important role in their country's leadership 65% vs 52%.



More empowered current leaders, who can make decisions on their own 71% vs. 58%,



are confident that their voice is heard 82% vs. 62%,



made a positive impact on their organization 89% vs. 69%.

Youth in emerging countries also reported more positive supports for leadership, including more leadership opportunities, greater motivation to be a leader, and more support from their family, adults, and country overall. We explore these reasons to engage in a leadership role next.

■ Youth from Emerging Countries
■ Youth from Advanced Countries

Why do youth choose to engage (or not engage) in leadership roles?

In attempts to empower and encourage young leaders, world leaders, experts, and organizations have devoted significant time to understanding underlying reasons that might drive or prevent youth from pursuing leadership. In the face of unprecedented global crises, what reasons do youth report as most salient for choosing (or deciding not) to lead?

We asked a comprehensive range of questions to learn more. These questions centered around three basic motivational questions identified by researchers:

- **Can I be a leader?**
Do youth have opportunities, support, and role models they need to be successful leaders?
- **Do I want to be a leader?**
Why is being a leader important or useful to youth?
- **What is preventing me from being a leader?**
What are barriers—either personal, structural, or cultural—that might discourage youth from engaging in leadership?

These questions align with primary youth-identified factors that support or hinder youth leaders. They also provide promising starting points for how to support youth empowerment.

Can I be a leader? Leadership development opportunities, role models, and support

Many sources emphasize the need for leadership development experiences through school and in the early stages of young leaders' careers. However, youth delegates named lack of opportunities and experiences as key challenges to youth empowerment in their working session. Our survey suggested that most youth have participated in leadership development activities (78%). These experiences were both formal (e.g., apprenticeship) and informal (e.g., volunteer). Interviewed youth shared experiences ranging from informal summer programs to formal leadership courses. However, most youth perceived opportunities to lead in their country as inequitable (65%).

In line with the interviews, surveys suggested that most youth had an adult who encouraged them or told them they could become a leader (70%). Many adults were family, but also included formal supervisors or informal mentors from youth activities. In contrast, only half (49%) of youth received support to be leaders from their family or country. One interviewed youth voiced this as too few leaders "tell us youth have the power to make change and to be the change."

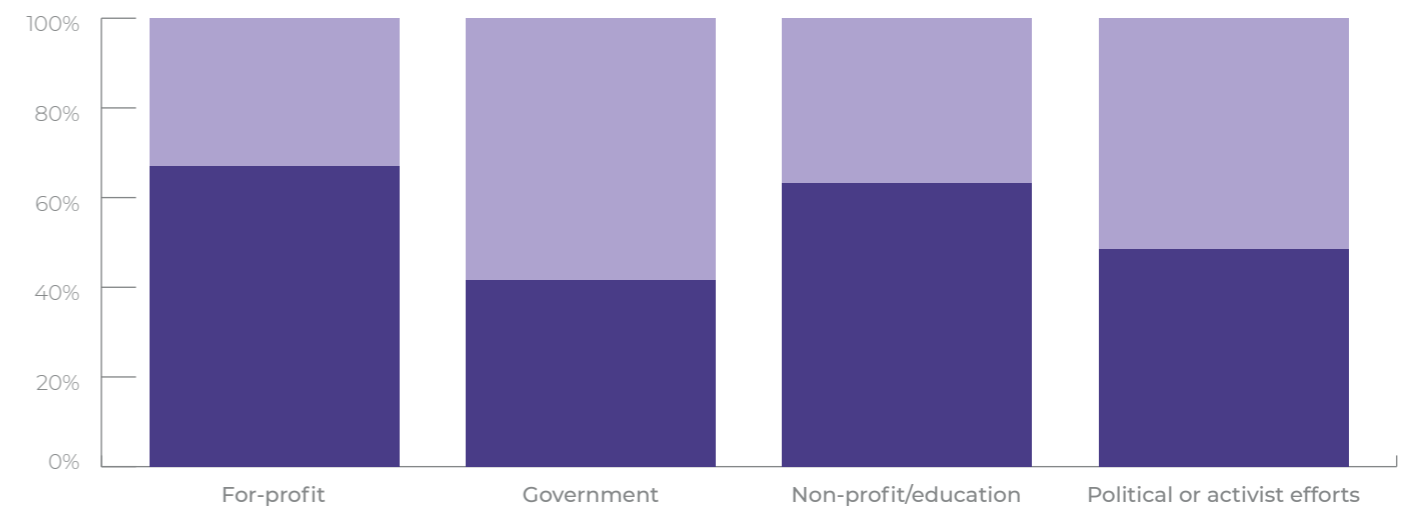
78%

of youth surveyed have participated in leadership development activities

70%

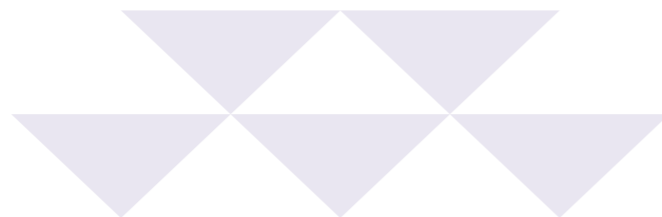
of youth surveyed encouraged or told they could become a leader

Aside from adult support, youth may be more encouraged to pursue leadership themselves if they have a role model. We asked youth who they know who lead in different domains. Responses suggested that youth know at least one other youth leader, especially in for-profit and non-profit/ education. However, less than half know a youth leader from their country in government or politics. This response aligns with the reality that, despite representing over half of the world's population, youth only hold 2% of government positions.



■ None
■ At least 1 person





Do I want to be a leader? Perceived value and reasons to lead

Youth are more likely to engage in formal leadership (and feel empowered in that leadership role) if they perceive it as important, relevant, and worthwhile. When we asked youth why they are a leader (for current leaders) or might consider being a leader (for aspiring and non-leaders), youth emphasized potential for personal development and helping others. Regardless of their current involvement in leadership, youth identified their top five reasons to engage in leadership as (1) make a contribution to society, (2) support myself financially, (3) learn things that will help me make a positive impact in the world, (4) gain skills that I can use in a job that helps others, and (5) prepare for a future career. These reasons echo sentiments from interviews and working sessions on the dual emphasis on growing as an individual and contributing to society. As additional support, most youth agreed that being a leader was important to their current life and future career. Fewer youth agreed that being a leader was an important part of their identity.



What is preventing me from being a leader? Barriers to formal leadership

Both youth and those in positions of power have given considerable attention to the reasons that youth may opt to not engage in formal leadership. Challenges identified in working sessions and interviews included lack of intergenerational trust, lack of confidence, ageism and stigma against youth, generational or situational poverty, and lack of initiative from youth. From surveys, most youth named psychological safety, followed by stress/worry associated with being a leader, as personal barriers. Many did not think it was safe to take risks or make mistakes in leadership, two factors associated with psychological safety. About one-third of youth surveyed also agreed that being a leader would stress them out or make them worry too much. Fewer youth were concerned with the amount of time involved in being a leader or having to give up other pursuits.



How do current, aspiring, and non-leaders differ?

Current, aspiring, and non-leaders vary based on actual and intended leadership engagement. How might they differ in their reasons to lead? We compared responses across these groups:

| % agree/strongly agree | Current Leaders | Aspiring Leaders | Non-Leaders |
|---|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Can I be a leader? | | | |
| My country offers opportunities to lead | Mod (52%) | Low (36%) | Low (30%) |
| Know 1+ youth leader (across sectors) | High (61-81%) | Mod (32-64%) | Low (26-42%) |
| Supported/encouraged by 1+ adult to lead | High (85%) | High (71%) | Mod (42%) |
| Family supports me leading | Mod (61%) | Mod (42%) | Low (22%) |
| My country supports youth leadership | Mod (61%) | Mod (47%) | Low (31%) |
| My country has equitable opportunities to lead | Mod (50%) | Mod (36%) | Low (31%) |
| Do I want to be a leader? | | | |
| Useful to my everyday life | High (74%) | Mod (63%) | Low (31%) |
| Useful for my future career | High (78%) | High (73%) | Low (39%) |
| Important part of who I am | High (69%) | Mod (57%) | Low (28%) |
| What is preventing me from being a leader? | | | |
| Takes too much time | Low (19%) | Low (21%) | Low (15%) |
| Have to give up too much | Low (29%) | Mod (35%) | Low (23%) |
| Stresses me out too much | Mod (36%) | Mod (37%) | Low (17%) |
| Worry too much about it | Mod (34%) | Mod (40%) | Mod (32%) |
| Not safe to make mistakes (psych. safety) | Mod (52%) | Mod (46%) | Low (30%) |



Examining common trends across all groups highlights existing strengths (i.e., areas where all groups responded positively) to build from. It also shows opportunities to improve (i.e., areas where all groups responded somewhat negatively). For existing strengths, most youth report being encouraged by an adult to be a leader and participating in leadership development opportunities. When considering opportunities to improve, many youth did not perceive opportunities for youth to lead in their country, nor did they view those opportunities as equitable. They also reported high worry and low psychological safety in leadership.

Separating the groups also allows us to pinpoint opportunities to support leadership engagement and empowerment for current, aspiring, and non-leaders differently. The two factors that most differentiated groups were knowing another youth leader and perceiving leadership as useful (to their everyday life and identity). Current leaders knew more youth leaders and perceived greater value to leading than aspiring leaders, who knew more youth and perceived



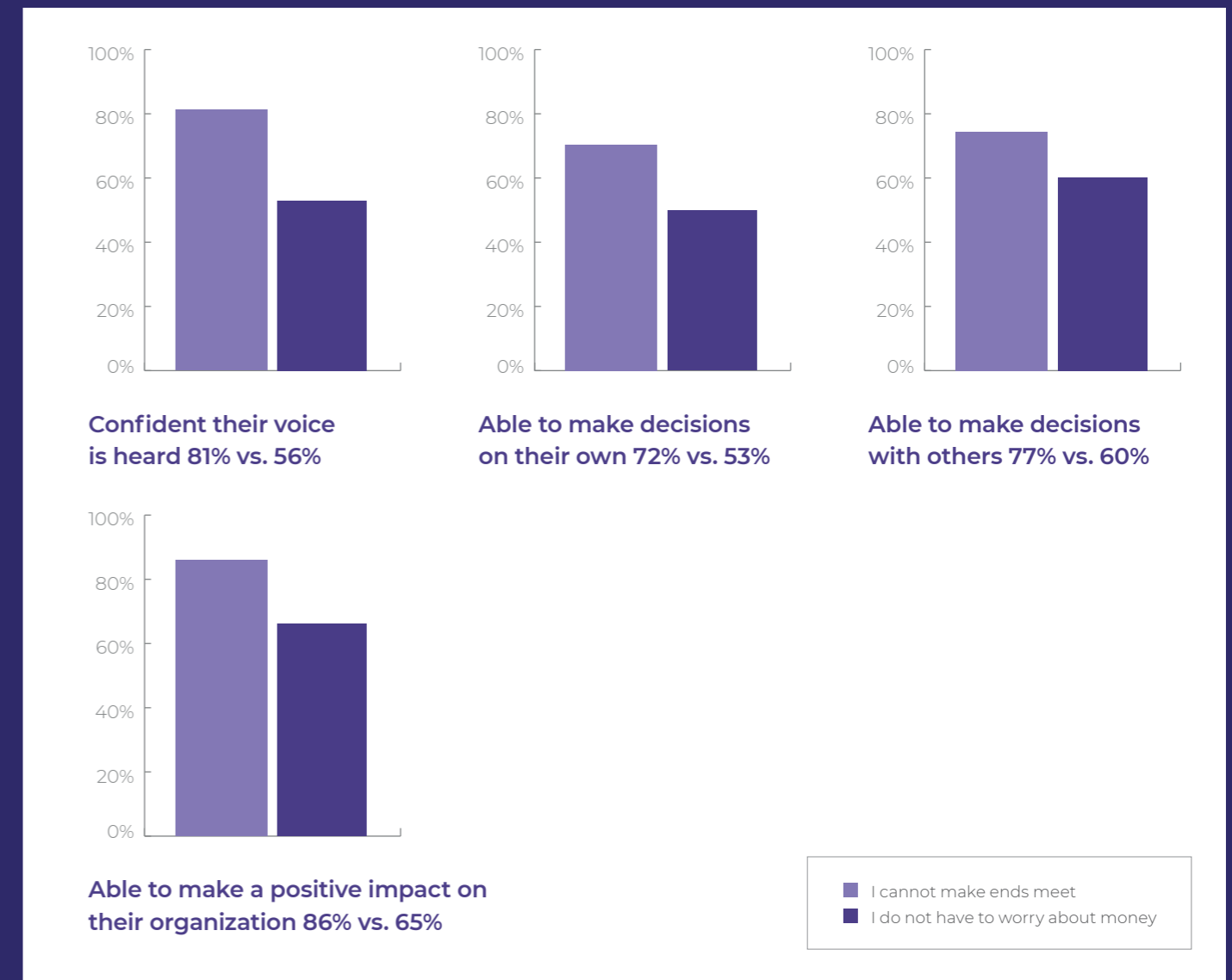
greater value to leading than non-leaders. Aside from these factors, one additional difference between current and aspiring leaders was that aspiring leaders perceived having to give up more to be a leader. One Y20 delegate illustrated the importance of both role models and persisting through barriers for youth empowerment

“I see youth empowerment as a process that takes time and can be achieved through different paths, just like climbing a mountain. It takes a lot of preparation, determination and strength. Sometimes you meet obstacles and you can’t always see the summit. At the same time, you usually walk paths that have been traced by others before you, so this makes it easier. When you get to the top of the mountain, however, the view is amazing and you forget about the tiredness and the struggles of the climb.”

Spotlight: Do reasons to lead vary based on social identities?

Individuals’ reasons to lead are influenced by their unique life experiences and social identities. When we looked at surveys across individuals from different backgrounds, there were virtually no differences between Gen Z and Millennials. The only differences by gender were that men were more likely to know youth in leadership, receive support, and perceive leadership opportunities as equitable in their country than women or those who identified as non-binary.

However, we saw consistent differences based on youth’s perceived financial security. Youth reported their financial status from “I cannot make ends meet” to “I do not have to worry about money.” The higher youth rated their financial security, the more likely they were to perceive opportunities to lead, perceive those leadership opportunities as equitable, and receive support from adults and family. They also felt more empowered. Compared to current leaders who “cannot make ends meet,” those who “do not have to worry about money” were more:



How can those in positions of power enable youth empowerment?

From government-funded youth programs to professional development, there is significant investment in developing youth's leadership skills and confidence. However, these efforts do not always equate to results. At a point when time and resources are scarce, supporting high-leverage efforts is more critical than ever. What are the most impactful ways to empower youth now and set the stage for sustained, meaningful engagement? How can these efforts be informed by youth's lived experiences and developed by youth themselves?

We provide ten starting points for considering how to empower youth, inspired by youth and informed by research. Some recommendations are directed at all youth, while others are tailored to current leaders, aspiring leaders, and youth who do not plan to pursue a formal leadership role. They focus on unique areas where youth voiced a need for additional support or incentives.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, as there are dozens of different approaches to address each point, and no solution is likely to be effective across contexts. The list is, however, intended to provide a starting point for youth-centered (and youth-led) conversations. What do they have to say about how to address these challenges? Where do established leaders see greatest opportunities for change? How can these groups work together to empower tomorrow's leaders?

For all youth:

1

Systematically develop opportunities that invite and increase youth representation in decision-making processes.

Many youth reported not being aware of opportunities for leadership in their country. To address this concern, youth may benefit from access to meaningful leadership opportunities. These opportunities are likely to be most effective if they are offered early (so youth can develop and practice leadership skills), frequently (so youth can have a consistent impact on decisions), consistently (so youth voices are represented in all sectors and on all issues), and sincerely (so youth feel genuinely invited to participate). To move beyond tokenism, opportunities should empower youth to actively participate and impact outcomes. One youth leader suggested that governments create a framework clearly outlining roles and responsibilities for young people and those in power. Another suggested federal and foundation funding to support developing young innovators.

2

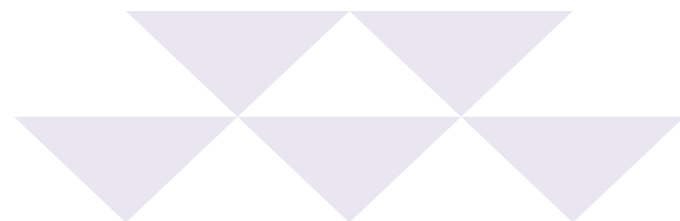
Commit to and emphasize equitable access to leadership and leadership development.

One of youth's most consistent comments was around inequitable representation in opportunities for leadership roles and leadership development. Efforts to create inclusive environments are most likely to be effective if they address equity and diversity broadly. This includes considering salient identities beyond gender and race, such as financial security or urban versus rural locations. It might also involve examining leadership representation, recruiting diverse voices, and developing culturally relevant development opportunities. One young leader advocated for governments investing in rural-based development programs.

3

Spotlight current youth leaders and develop infrastructure for youth networks.

One key differentiator between current, aspiring, and non-leaders was whether they knew another youth leader in their country. Providing a high-visibility platform for young leaders to share their experience and leadership journey could be a powerful means to change beliefs around who can be a leader. Young leaders could share how being a leader has shared their personal development and allowed them to give back to their community, two themes we heard from surveys, sessions, and interviews. Developing infrastructure for youth to connect with one another in meaningful ways may also be powerful. One youth leader suggested creating hubs in every village nationwide to encourage youth to exchange ideas and local resources. As another example, Y20 has provided formal platforms for youth to collectively address challenges and share their recommendations directly with policy makers.

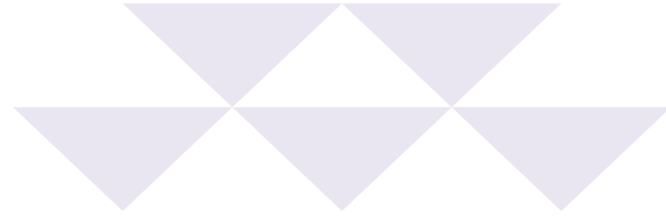


one

youth leader suggested creating hubs in every village

one

leader advocated for mindfulness to be added to primary schools



For current leaders:

4

Normalize risk-taking and mistakes as an important part of leadership.

Many youth may consider failure as unacceptable in leadership, preventing them from trying innovative approaches or pursuing leadership roles altogether. Changing the narrative around the role of risk-taking and mistakes in leadership could reduce a salient barrier to youth empowerment. Youth may benefit from scaffolded development experiences that are supportive and challenging. Having established leaders share their own challenges can also normalize failure. One innovative example from academia is an established researcher who published an article in Nature on his CV of failures. By recording and sharing rejections, leaders can make their mistakes visible and help younger leaders not equate setbacks with failure.

5

Provide opportunities to acknowledge, process, and explore sources of stress.

Stress and worry are salient themes during the pandemic and are especially relevant for leaders in times of crisis. Several youth we interviewed recommended mindfulness practice to examine sources of stress and reduce its negative side effects. One leader advocated for mindfulness to be built in to primary schools, and articles have outlined how to bring mindfulness to your company's leadership. Additionally, providing opportunities to strengthen overall resilience may help youth respond adaptively to challenges, including those that manifest from systemic barriers or inequities. Collectively examining reasons for stress can help identify the root cause of youth leaders' stress and worry, which will suggest avenues to alleviate them.

6

Facilitate meaningful cross-generational discussions and create accountability for youth involvement in decision-making.

Cross-generational discussions open the door for productive conversations about where generations' perspectives align on youth leadership and empowerment, and where they diverge. They also provide opportunities for innovation around how newer and more established leaders can collaborate to empower youth to engage in politics. Youth noted benefits for both parties to engage in discussions, with established leaders hearing new perspectives and insights and youth gaining agency to make meaningful change. Cross-generational discussions are most likely to be effective if policies provide youth a seat at the table and compensate all participants for their time and efforts. Suggestions from youth included establishing conversations between students and established organizations or including youth leaders on important boards or task forces.



one

recommended that world leaders move away from traditional views of leadership



For aspiring leaders:

7

Encourage youth to pinpoint personal relevance of leading as it relates to their current goals and sense of identity.

One main difference between current and aspiring leaders is whether they saw being a leader as important to their current lives or identity. Providing opportunities for aspiring leaders to identify their own personal reasons to be a leader may help encourage them to pursue a leadership role and feel empowered in that position. From card sorts to writing prompts, there are numerous activities developed for youth to help them explore reasons to be a leader. These activities are most likely to be effective if youth can identify their own connections (rather than being told why they should be a leader) and engage in frequent reflection (so they can reinforce reasons for pursuing a leadership position). One example from CCL is the youth Values Explorer Card Deck™, which prompts youth to reflect on different reasons to lead and discuss which are meaningful to them.

8

Reduce and reframe potential barriers to leadership and teach coping strategies.

Another difference between current and aspiring leaders is that aspiring leaders perceived more barriers to engaging in leadership. Activities that help youth reframe these barriers may help reduce worry, stress, and the perception of having to give up other valued activities. Fostering coping strategies such as how to achieve work/life balance or strengthen resilience might also benefit youth. One youth leader suggested education as an ideal means to accomplish this goal, suggesting that schools should teach children how to meditate, talk about emotions, and teach children more soft skills that would enable them to be better kids (and ultimately better leaders). Several others shared their own journeys of reframing difficulties involved with being a leader so that the struggles felt “worth it” in the end.

For youth who do not plan to pursue a formal leadership role (yet):

9

Provide informal opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful decision-making.

Other global surveys suggest that young people lack access to most of the processes through which adults can articulate their concerns. This challenge is exacerbated for youth who choose not to pursue a formal leadership role. Creating opportunities to voice concerns outside of formal leadership is critical. One interviewed leader advocated for creating a platform where youth can share their perspectives and concerns on important issues. Numerous social media platforms also provide this opportunity. Investing in such efforts and ensuring that they are shared with those in positions of power can help elevate youth voices.

10

Change the narrative around who can be a leader and what leadership looks like.

There are established ideas about who can and should be a leader. For youth who do not perceive value in leading or feel supported in pursuing a leadership role, there could be benefit in challenging cultural narratives around what a leader looks like. One youth leader we interviewed recommended that world leaders move away from traditional views of leadership that involve power and influence because they may discourage young adults from pursuing a leadership role themselves. Challenging the definition of what leadership entails could also be powerful. In this work, we asked youth to define a leadership role themselves. If some youth equate leadership with holding a formal role, it could be beneficial to expand the definition of leadership to include the rich tapestry of potential ways to lead. From informal positions to supporting important causes to contributing to the community or society more broadly, youth empowerment can take many forms.



In the survey, youth said...

To support youth empowerment, leaders in positions of power can...

For all youth

65%

Believe that youth in their country have opportunities to be a leader.

Systematically develop opportunities that invite and increase youth representation in decision-making processes.

60%

Do not agree that leadership opportunities for youth are equitable.

Commit to and emphasize equitable access to leadership and leadership development.

58%

Do not know a youth leader in government or parliament.

Spotlight current youth leaders and develop infrastructure for youth networks.

For Aspiring Leaders

37% / 43%

Do not think being a leader is useful in their everyday life/an important part of who they are.

Encourage youth to identify personal relevance of leading to their current goals and sense of identity.

21%-46%

Perceive significant barriers to being a leader, especially stress and worry.

Reduce and reframe potential barriers to leadership and teach coping strategies.

In the survey, youth said...

To support youth empowerment, leaders in positions of power can...

For Current Leaders

48%

Do not think it is safe to take risks or make mistakes in a leadership role.

Normalize risk-taking and mistakes as an important part of leadership.

36%

Believe that being a leader is too stressful for them.

Provide opportunities to acknowledge, process, and explore sources of stress.

27%

Do not feel confident that their voice is heard in their leadership role.

Facilitate cross-generational discussions and create accountability policies for youth involvement in decision making.

For Youth Who Do Not Plan to Pursue a Formal Leadership Role (Yet)

22%

Are not interested in pursuing a leadership role.

Provide informal opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful decision-making.

24%

Believe that youth in their country are treated with respect (regardless of their background).

Change the narrative around who can be a leader and what leadership looks like.



Survey sample

- Sample size: 10,386 youth
- Age: 18-30
- Race: 44% White, 25% Asian, 8% Black, 9% Hispanic/Latinx, 4% Indigenous, 4% Multiracial, 2% Other, 4% Prefer not to Say
- Gender: 49% male, 50% female
- Country: 5% sample from each country (including EU)
- Leader Level (for current leaders): Generational
- status: 52% Millennial, 48% Gen Z

Interview sample

(current youth leaders)

- Sample size: 21 youth
- Age: 18-29
- Gender: 33% male, 62% female, 5% non-binary
- Leader Level:
- Country: 1/country (including EU)
- Generational Status: 67% Millennial, 33% Gen Z

