



**Misk** مسك  
مؤسسة محمد بن سلمان  
Mohammed Bin Salman  
Foundation

العالمي  
Global

# Enabling Youth-Led Positive Social Impact



A Global  
Survey 2023



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# Foreword

In January 2024, Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation “Misk” participated in the World Economic Forum, through the “Youth Majlis” pavilion at Davos, providing a platform for decision-makers and thought leaders to discuss global issues of youth concern and identify collaborative approaches to enhance youth agency towards positive social impact.

The Youth Majlis’s 2024 theme “Big Now: Exert your Influence” embodied the influence leaders can exert in the creation of opportunities and enablement of supportive ecosystems where youth voices, ideas and actions are valued and integrated into the very fabric of leader decision-making.

Through Misk’s participation at Davos, we amplified the voices of 18,000 youth between the ages of 18-35 years old from 20 countries across the global north and south. The ethos of the Youth Majlis was shaped by this research, which served as the cornerstone of the digital activations engaging global leaders and contributing to the insightful discussions on enablers for change - the research paved the way for meaningful dialogue.

The subsequent publication of the survey’s **key findings** highlighted critical areas of support necessary for youth to drive positive social impact, including access to Networks of Influence, Role Models, Capacity Building, and Technology platforms. With 51 speakers breathing life into the findings, ideas and solutions emerged; culminating in a discussion roundtable with thought leaders to catalyze actionable steps for youth enablement. The findings were presented in a subsequent paper, **“From Reels to Real Impact”**.

This report extends the conversation initiated at the WEF 2024, shedding light on concrete actions youth can take to amplify their impact, while also highlighting ways in which leaders across sectors can empower youth within their organizations and communities. Notably, the research emphasizes the pivotal role of role models, indicating that youth are significantly more likely to take action when inspired by role models addressing global causes.

Let us recognize that the future is not a passive outcome but a product of deliberate action and collaboration. Misk Foundation is committed to translating dialogue into tangible results, standing shoulder to shoulder with young leaders and partner organizations in effecting meaningful change. Together, let us forge a path towards a future where every young person is equipped to contribute meaningfully to society.

**DR BADER ALBADR — CEO  
MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN FOUNDATION “MISK”**



# 1

## Executive Summary



Misk Foundation is committed to fostering dialogue between generations to strengthen youth participation in tackling global social challenges. This is the basis of the decision to survey youth and leaders in order to improve understanding of youth-led positive social impact. Asked about personal, social, economic, political, technological and environmental issues, the importance of mental health clearly stands out as the greatest social challenge, especially for women. It was twice as important as the next most cited social causes: removing barriers to employment, improving environmental sustainability and combating bullying.

Most youth involved in social change initiatives are negatively affected by the causes that they support, demonstrating a strong personal connection between youth's causes and actions taken to address them. Another trend that emerges throughout the survey is that family and friends are a key group for youth, while they feel the least close to ethnic and religious communities.

The emotions that predominate among youth are frustration, anxiety and even anger; very few experience feelings of indifference. Fewer show a sense of purpose, motivation and hope – which the survey shows lead to a stronger ability to drive social change – although the vast majority of youth possess a sense of duty towards their chosen social causes. Youth who have been exposed to a role model – often parents – are much more likely to believe they can drive positive social change themselves.

Soft skills emerged as more important than hard skills. Youth rate themselves most highly on emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and strategic and critical thinking. Women rate themselves most highly in the soft skill known as emotional intelligence, while men rate themselves more highly in hard skills: technology skills, data analysis, and research.

Meanwhile, leaders rate strategic and critical thinking and technology literacy most highly. They see emotional intelligence and the ability to solve problems as the skills most lacking among young people. So what youth think they most possess is precisely what leaders say they most lack, highlighting a gap in youth and leader perceptions that is present throughout the survey.

In terms of mindsets, youth say they are curious, collaborative and disciplined. While leaders report that discipline and focus are the mindsets

that are most important for youth to bring about social change, it is precisely those two mindsets that leaders say youth most lack, again exposing the gap between youth and leader perceptions. The mindsets of youth that generate least concern among leaders are curiosity and proactivity. Leaders believe that youth's greatest asset is their open-mindedness and flexibility.

Most youth are proactive in building skills to tackle their chosen social causes, mostly by reading relevant literature or watching educational videos. Youth are nearly as proactive in addressing their cause: mainly through raising awareness either online or offline, followed by lifestyle changes related to their cause.

As for their confidence in their ability to achieve positive outcomes, youth are largely confident, and optimistic about the long-term impact of their actions. However, leaders are significantly more optimistic: once again the contrast between youth and leaders' opinions is evident.

Most youth use multiple networks to support themselves in driving social change, but nearly half highlight family and close friends as a strong network for enabling social change – more than any other circle of support. Next most important were online communities: the survey shows repeatedly how social media plays a fundamental role for youth aiming to create a positive social impact – using online platforms to find and connect with others is another key area.

Leaders perceive network access as by far the biggest barrier to creating social impact for youth. Meanwhile, youth say that their primary networking obstacle is finding the right people to help with advancing their social cause, more so than connecting with people or convincing them to help out. If youth cannot find the right people, the other methods become irrelevant, suggesting that the most basic networking challenges require attention.

More than a third of youth rate governments most highly compared to other institutions in their ability to achieve the greatest positive social impact. That may be because they have the highest social spending and are the biggest employers, but it is surprising given the trust gap between youth and governments. Academic institutions are the next most effective institution; international institutions, NGOs and the private sector are just a third as impactful as governments, suggesting they could do more.

Youth trust governments most to lower barriers to access to information and funding, and the creation of youth-focused policies, and the private sector most to lower barriers to access to jobs and technology. In general, youth trust the private sector more than the public sector.

Almost two-thirds of youth reported that their employer provided support for their social causes: mostly access to their organization's expertise or connections. Leaders provided almost three times more support than youth suggest, but when they do empower youth, they do so mostly in more passive ways: sharing information and expertise. Fewer leaders actively enable youth through capacity building and access to jobs – even fewer provide funding. Nevertheless, leaders are extremely optimistic about their effectiveness: almost all believe they make a significant difference to youth-led positive social impact, mostly guiding young people on their initiatives, and encouraging their network to support them.

Despite youth's reliance on technology for driving positive social impact, just a third use AI to promote social change; almost half don't at all. The extent to which youth use AI to gain access to relevant and instantaneous information or to generate network recommendations is very low compared to other methods, but more plan to use AI in the future. Youth trust governments least to lower barriers to AI tools, compared to other barriers such as access to information or funding.

While there is also scope for leaders to increase their use of AI, which is one of the weakest ways in which they currently enable youth, they recognize AI as a powerful tool for social innovation and entrepreneurship. Leaders point to its ability to help youth identify pressing social issues, analyze vast amounts of data and provide them with fast, accurate, and reliable information on social concerns in order to generate significant insights that will influence evidence-based decisions and the formation of innovative strategies and solutions for achieving positive change.

Recommendations for youth seeking to drive positive social impact include: finding a cause that affects them personally; adopting more active ways of driving change; seeking role models and mentors that inspire action; strengthening skills and mindsets more dynamically; developing broader networks both in-person and online; and engaging with technology, especially AI, from an earlier age.

Recommendations for leaders seeking to empower youth include: creating opportunities for dialogue with youth; dedicating personal time and expertise; building skills in future changemakers; enhancing network access for youth by sharing connections; fortifying institutional policy support; and empowering young innovators with AI.



## 2

## Introduction



# Enabling Youth-Led Positive Social Impact

## Youth's Contribution to Social Change is Crucial

Throughout history, youth have been at the front line of efforts to drive positive social impact. They are the natural challengers of the blind spots and outdated ideas of their times. From civil rights movements around the world to Tiananmen Square and the Arab Spring, youth have played a critical role in some of the defining moments of the last century.

Even so, the voice of youth is still too often downplayed or dismissed. The world ignores the younger generations at its peril: the "youth bulge" only continues to expand, with more than half of the global population now under the age of 25. Rarely has the contribution of youth to social change been so urgent, yet at the same time youth feel that their opinions have been neglected, as Unicef's [Voices of Change](#) initiative attempts to address.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as the world faces increasingly complex and globalized challenges, solutions are required on many fronts, in turn demanding the help of different skills and generations. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, for example, cannot be reached without the help of those for whom most is at stake.

In its commitment to fostering dialogue between generations and encouraging action, Misk Foundation conducted a survey in 2023 that aims to strengthen youth participation in tackling global social challenges. Just as the role of youth as leaders of grassroots social change must be encouraged, influential leaders and decision-makers must do more to empower youth social engagement.

## Building on the Global Youth Index

[Misk Foundation](#) has focused on empowering youth since its creation in 2011.<sup>2</sup> This latest sur-

vey builds on one of Misk's flagship initiatives, the Global Youth Index, whose most recent [2022 edition](#) follows the first [GYI published in 2018](#).<sup>3,4</sup> It set out to evaluate the drivers of youth development and access to opportunity, given that many countries struggle to implement the right frameworks and policies, with vastly differing levels of policy enforcement, monitoring, reporting and evaluation around the world. To fill this information gap, the GYI assessed the state of youth development in 30 countries across different geographies and levels of development, providing a practical tool for policy makers and youth to identify priorities for change and to track progress over time, and support policy makers in creating opportunities for youth to take the decisions that will shape their future.

In parallel with the GYI, the Misk Global Forum – the largest youth forum in the Middle East, hosted by Misk in Riyadh – aims to explore these issues further, while promoting collaboration, the exchange of ideas, and networking opportunities for young leaders from around the world. Its seventh edition in 2023, themed "The Big Now", encouraged youth to think ambitiously and act promptly in order to bring their visions to life through thoughtful planning and implementation.

In Misk Foundation's most recent initiative to enable youth-led positive social impact, the 2023 survey sought the opinions of 18,000 youth and 500 business leaders from 20 countries.

For the youth survey, participants were mostly female (64%), and were split into two age categories: 18–24 (43%) and 25–35 (57%). The highest level of education completed was distributed as follows: primary school (2%), high school (35%), vocational training (16%), bachelor's degree (37%), master's degree (9%), and PhD (2%). Most participants (64%) reported living in a city. Of the 48% of participants that reported income, 15% said they received a high income, 35% a medium income, and 50% a low income.

For the leader survey, participants were mostly male (83%), and C-Level executives working in one



of six sectors: entrepreneurship, technology, media, gaming, finance, or sustainability and energy. Participants surveyed were mostly 36–45 (31%) or 46–55 (57%). Private sector leaders represented 88% of participants, followed by government (8%), and NGOs (4%). Most participants (77%) reported living in a city.

The countries surveyed (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States) were selected to reflect global variations in demographics, level of affluence, pace of economic progress, governance models, religious diversity, technological adoption and geography.

The two surveys form the basis of this research paper, which highlights the principal findings of the surveys, and delves into some of the most striking results with supporting case studies. Ultimately, Misk Foundation seeks a deeper understanding of youth's perspectives on creating positive social impact, and their ability to bring their aspirations to life. At the same time, it taps into the insights and experience of leaders who support youth in their endeavors to improve global society.

## How the Survey was Organized



The survey is organized around three central pillars. First, it aims to identify what drives youth around the world to create social impact. It looks at what causes matter most to them, how they feel about these causes, and what motivates them to address these causes, such as emotions, a sense of duty, and role models. Second, the survey measured the capacity of young people to implement positive social change, and how youth can improve their skills and mindsets to achieve a greater impact. Third, it explored ways to amplify youth initiatives through support from networks and institutions, including governments and the private sector.

In parallel, global leaders were also surveyed within a similar framework, to shed more light on how they can support youth – both in a formal capacity through their organizations, or an informal, more personal capacity such as mentorship – to do more to help communities around the world to thrive.

The fundamental goal of the 2023 survey is to understand how to turn the intentions of the younger generation into actions. By examining the difference between their aspirations to create social impact, and their ability to deliver on those aspirations, the world will be in a better position to overcome the multiple obstacles that prevent them from achieving their full potential.

Misk identified a number of questions regarding youth's ability to drive social change that it set out to address through this survey:

- Can the gap between intention and action be narrowed through developing skills and mindsets?
- Do correlations between factors like gender, location, and socioeconomic status help to understand whether youth will engage in social action?
- Are youth more unified than previously thought in terms of their worries, experiences and motivations?
- Is there a gap between the support leaders say they provide for social initiatives, and what employees say they receive?
- Are youth using AI to create positive social impact?



In addition, Misk developed the following questions in relation to leaders:

- Are leaders doing enough to improve youth access to networks and institutions that could amplify their social initiatives?
- Despite agreement that youth are less able to create social impact than leaders, do youth and leaders agree on what skills and mindsets are most important?
- Do leaders think youth are less disciplined, resilient and results-oriented than them, but more agile and curious?
- Do leaders think young people lack trust in their organizations?

## Survey Finds Rich and Nuanced Results

The survey provides clear answers to these questions. Undoubtedly, there is a keen desire among global youth to tackle many of the most pressing issues facing society today. This is one of the clearest findings of the survey: almost nine out of ten young people report a sense of duty to their chosen social causes. These range from a rise in mental health disorders to finding steady work and the ever-growing climate crisis, with interesting geographical trends appearing. While youth show strong motivation and optimism, and experience

varying degrees of support, they encounter obstacles to achieving their full potential for driving positive social change.

This is complicated by the disconnect that often exists between global leaders and youth; they do not always see eye to eye on how youth can and should create positive social impact. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for addressing this gap, especially because of the different social contexts across countries highlighted by the contrasting national results that emerged in the survey. But greater dialogue between youth and leaders to bridge understanding is an important first step. That includes bringing the two groups together – in person – through forums, workshops, mentorship, and training programs.

The rich and nuanced results from the survey have allowed Misk to bring forward a set of detailed, concrete and realistic recommendations for both youth and leaders that will help them to convert intentions into actions.

Taken individually, these recommendations are eminently feasible, and each one could lead to significant improvements in different areas of the world of youth-led positive social impact. But we should be more ambitious. The wide-scale implementation around the world of all of these recommendations would represent a major step forward for youth and the challenges they aspire to solve. Misk Foundation will enable their implementation however it can.



## 3

# Survey Insights: Results and Implications Explored



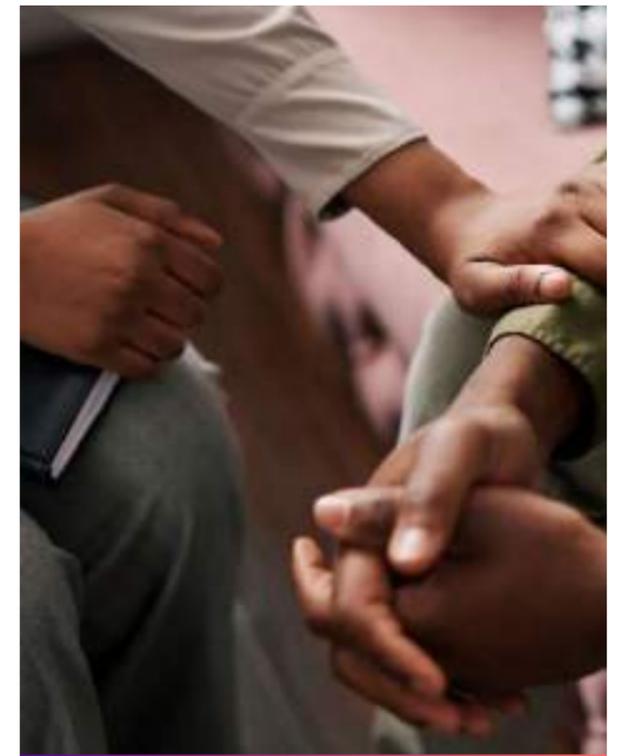
## A. MOTIVATIONS

# What Drives Youth to Create Social Impact?

This section provides an overview and analysis of the findings of the youth and leader surveys. The findings complement a growing body of research which recognizes that in order to empower youth to convert their ideas into actionable initiatives, their motivations – which are often rooted in empathy, emotions, and feeling a sense of duty – must first be understood. To enhance youth-led positive social impact, it is imperative to understand what youth care about, how they feel about the causes they care about, how they can be empowered, and the influencing factors driving their actions. Therefore, we look at some of the most basic drivers of motivation, including emotions, sense of duty, and exposure to role models.

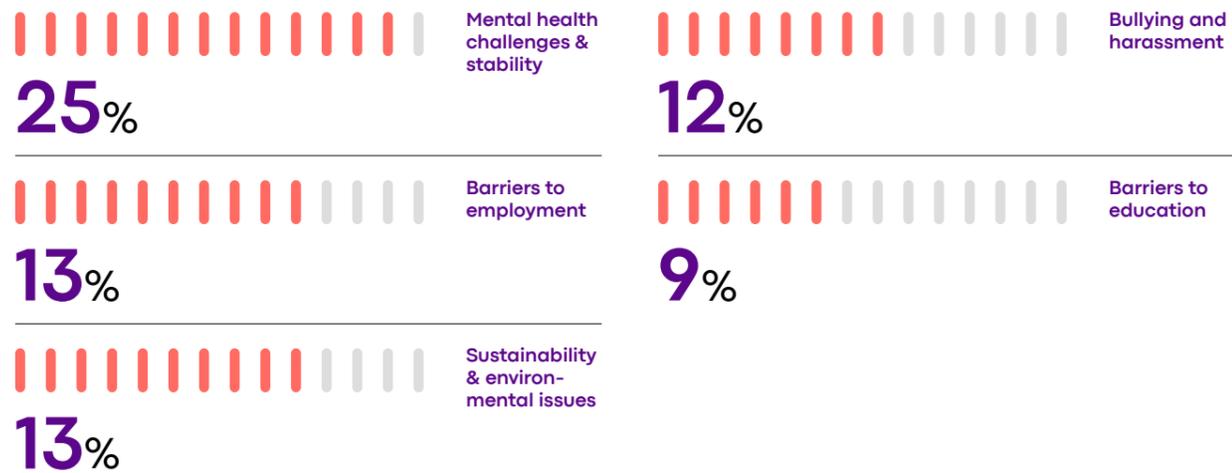
## Mental Health — Youth's Biggest Concern

Youth were asked about ten pre-identified global social challenges, which spanned personal, social, economic, political, technological and environmental issues. The responses demonstrate that their concerns are diverse. However, there is one issue that clearly stands out: a quarter of respondents prioritized mental health as the cause they are most passionate about. It is so important to youth that it was considered roughly twice as important as the next most cited social passions – removing barriers to employment (13%), increasing environmental sustainability (13%) and combating bullying (12%).



**CHART 3.1**  
**TOP 5 CAUSES YOUTH ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT\***

Youth are overwhelmingly committed to fostering mental health stability



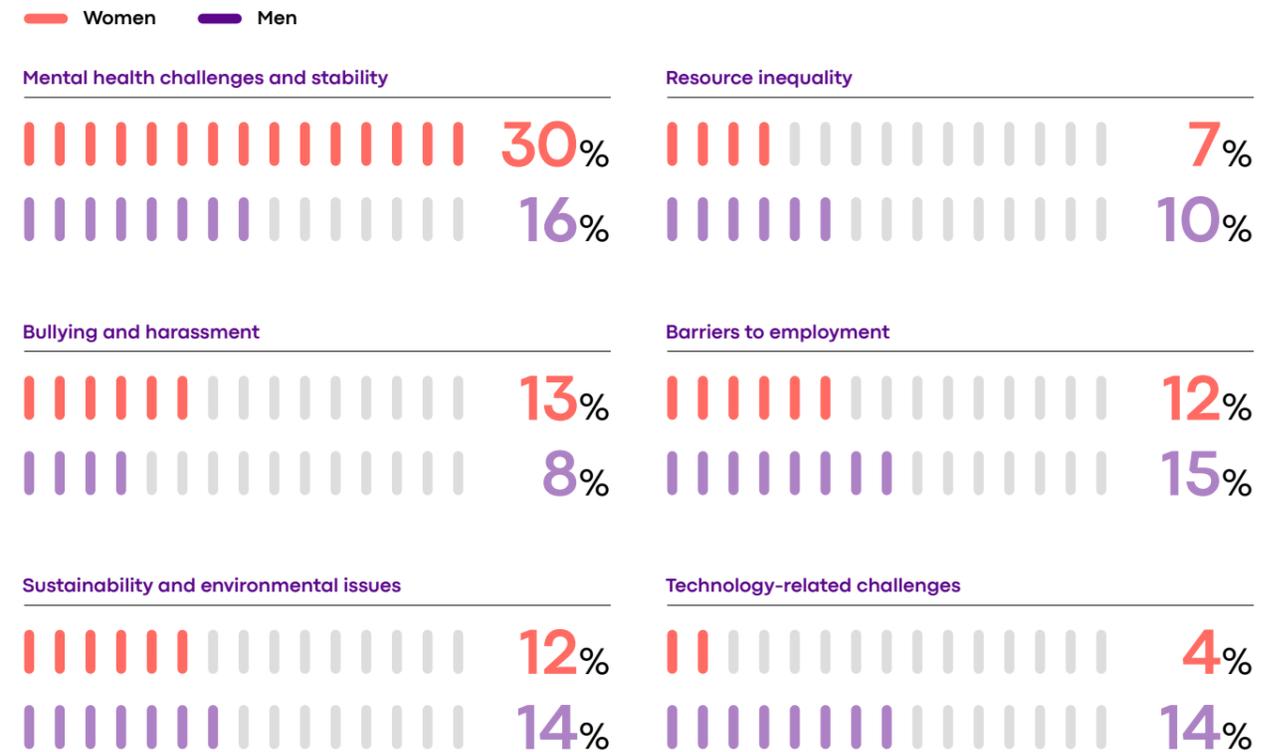
\*The other 5 causes were: Resource inequality (8%), technology-related challenges (8%), youth underrepresentation (5%), barriers to creative expression (4%), and forced displacement (3%).

The fact that mental health stands out so much should come as no surprise. The global statistics are alarming: one in seven 10 to 19-year-olds experience mental health conditions, [according to the WHO](#).<sup>1</sup> Worse, these conditions remain largely unrecognized and untreated, leading to problems like social exclusion, educational difficulties, and human rights violations.

Regarding mental health, there is a striking gender divide. Women are almost twice as interested in addressing mental health issues than men, and also care much more about bullying and harassment. This may be because women are more likely than men to be carers, live in poverty, and experience abuse. Mental health also stands out as a much bigger issue for younger respondents (aged 18-24), and in more developed regions, mostly the EU, especially Sweden (45%), as well as Australia (42%) and the US (39%).

**CHART 3.2**  
**TOP SOCIAL CAUSES FOR YOUTH: WOMEN VS. MEN**

Young women and men prioritize social causes differently



**Issues Vary by Country and Gender**

Meanwhile, as shown in graph 3.2, men are more than three times more interested than women in addressing technology-related challenges, from the digital divide to data security concerns and ethical AI. Technology is also of most interest to those with higher incomes and higher levels of education, as well as older respondents (aged 25-35). Some research suggests that [women see themselves as less capable at using technology](#), and may therefore in some cases be less interested in using it.<sup>2</sup> Another possible reason is that [young men tend to have poorer mental health knowledge than young women](#). If they do not fully understand how to manage the mental health challenges caused by tech-

nology use, this could contribute to their greater concern about technology.<sup>3</sup>

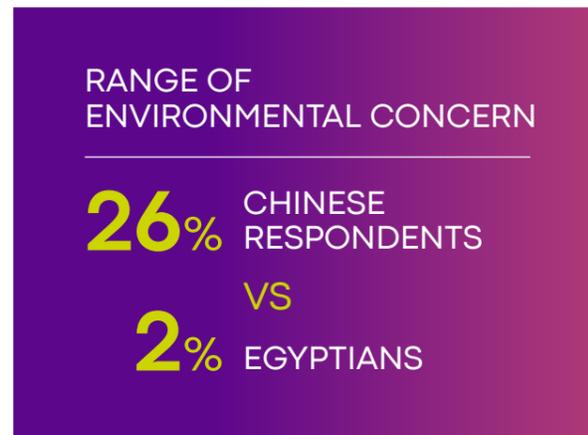
Another global challenge that produced widely varying responses is environmental sustainability, a field in which youth have been increasingly involved over the last decade, especially since Greta Thunberg shot to fame, [as research shows](#).<sup>4</sup> Older respondents and those with a higher socioeconomic status and level of education are more concerned about environmental issues. Stronger education systems and higher global awareness are likely to be beneficial in driving motivation to tackle challenges related to the environment. The same applies to those with higher incomes, since a certain degree of affluence can free up time and energy to think about global problems compared to those living in more precarious circumstances.



In general, those living in the EU, Asia and Latin America are also more concerned about sustainability, with China (26%), France (24%) and Germany (22%) standing out as the highest. At the other end of the scale, there was very limited concern for such issues in Africa and the Middle East, especially Egypt (2%), Morocco (3%) and Saudi Arabia (3%).

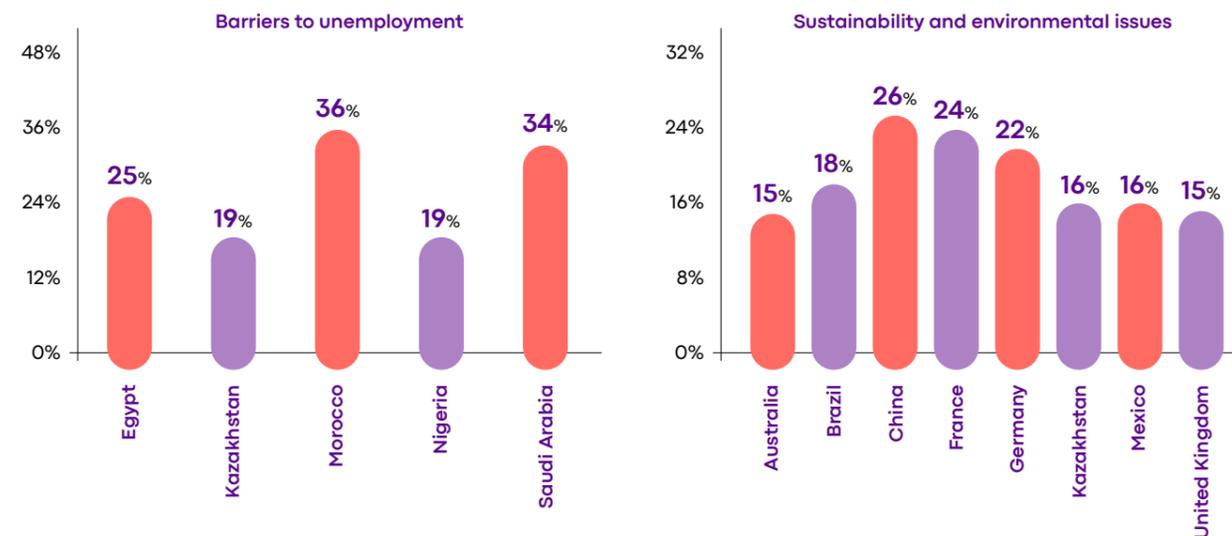
In many developing countries – especially in Africa – respondents are far more worried about immediate economic problems, especially barriers to employment, than less immediate obstacles to survival like mental health or the environment.

This makes sense: [research by the ILO](#) shows that [youth unemployment in the developing world](#) is a far greater problem than it is in more advanced countries, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5,6</sup> In low-income nations with poor environmental conditions specifically, [research suggests](#) that immediate socioeconomic challenges are likely to overshadow the capacity of individuals to address environmental concerns.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, [statistics published by the World Population Review](#) confirm that the most environmentally-friendly countries are also some of the most affluent, with European countries dominating the top of the list.<sup>8</sup>



**CHART 3.3**  
**YOUTHS MOST CONCERNED ABOUT JOBS AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY BY COUNTRY**

Youth in developing countries prioritize economic over environmental concerns



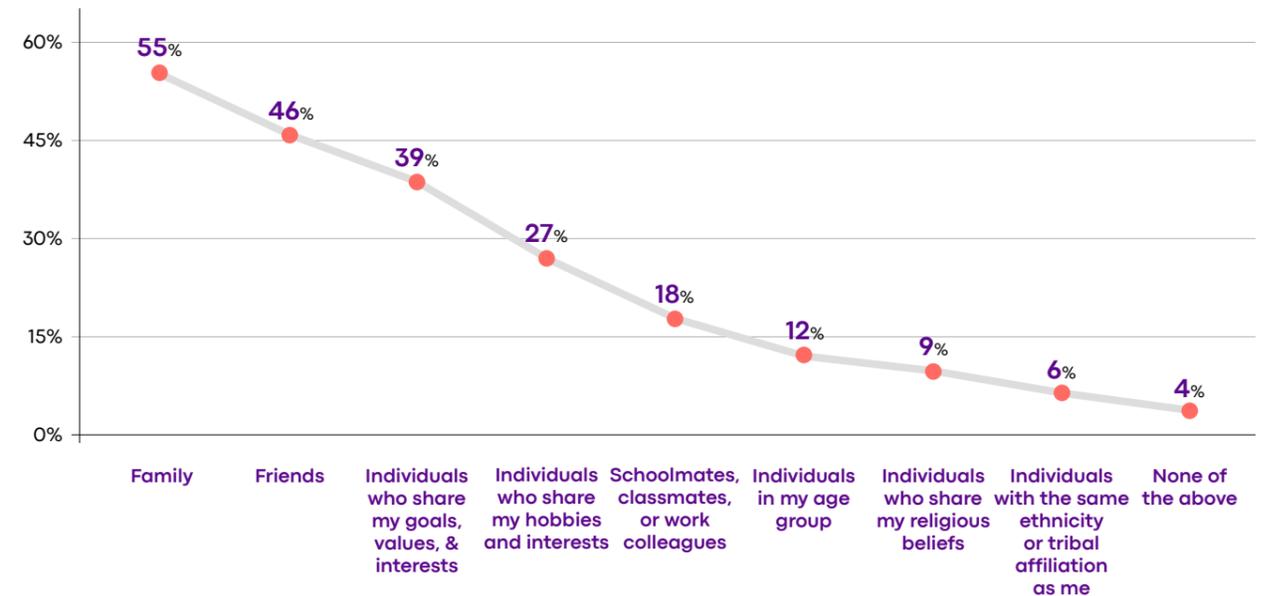
## The Importance of Family and Friends

Although [research shows](#) that [individualism is on the rise among today's youth](#), immediate family members and close friends remain fundamental to them, as showcased by the survey results.<sup>9,10</sup> In addition to their chosen social cause, respondents were also asked which community they are most connected to, in order to get a clearer idea of how they relate to the outside world. Overwhelmingly,

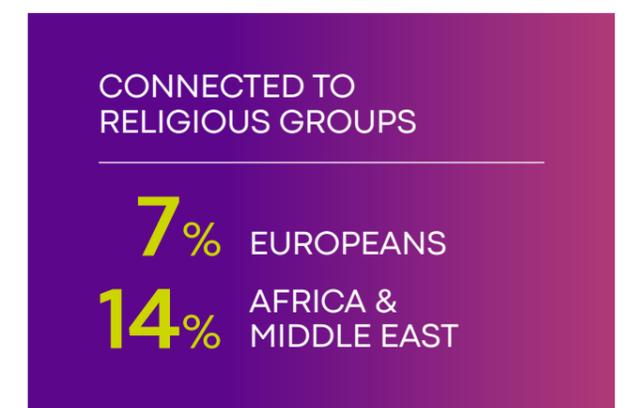
it emerged that family and friends are the important groups that youth feel most connected to, with 55% pointing to family as their closest connections, followed by friends at 46%. In contrast, youth feel the least close to ethnic and religious communities. How can we ensure this fundamental community is empowered to provide the right level of support required to enable youth-led positive change? One example is a [case in New Zealand that showed](#) the impact of family and community empowerment through bilingual education.<sup>11</sup>

**CHART 3.4**  
**COMMUNITIES YOUTH ARE MOST CONNECTED TO**

Youth are most connected to family and friends



While closeness to friends and family may seem intuitive, there are some nuances: respondents in developed regions – specifically Europe, the US and Australia – feel closest to their families and friends, and to a lesser extent individuals with shared interests. This may partly be because [society has become more fragmented and atomized due to globalization](#), but the absence of socially-binding religious groups that youth can look to for support in some countries may be a factor in the more secular states.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, respondents in Africa and the Middle East feel twice as connected to others from their religious group than Europeans (14% vs 7%).





Although youth in more developed regions report stronger family bonds in general, it is noteworthy that the higher the level of education of youth, and also the higher the level of their income, the more they feel connected with others who share their goals, values and interests, and also their work colleagues. Therefore, it can be deduced that the more professionally advanced that youth are, the less they rely on family and friends.

Finally, those who worked at NGOs stand out for the importance that they attach to others with the same ethnicity or tribal affiliation, reflecting the depth of the work that NGOs carry out with those groups. Overall, the survey results show that youth affiliate with different types of communities that can reflect either the social landscape of their culture, exposure to their community, or the extent to which globalization and the spread of technology has impacted their surroundings.

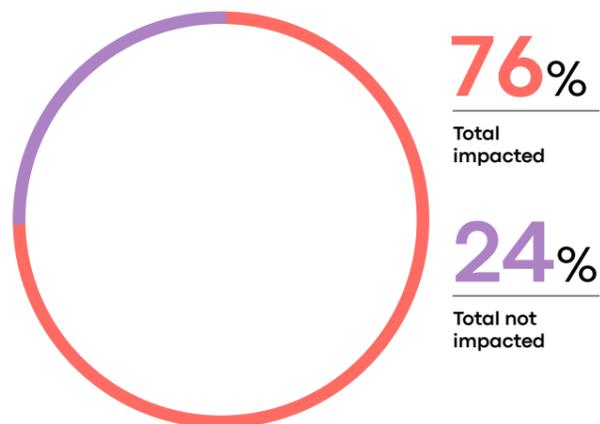
### Motivation: Personal and Community Impact

Empathy is a potent element when explaining youth motivation. Most youth involved in social change initiatives report being negatively affected by the causes that they support – both as individuals (76%) and as members of communities (78%). This suggests a strong personal connection between their chosen social causes and the

actions that they are taking to solve them. These actions range from relatively simple ones like raising awareness, signing petitions and boycotting, to more complex and time-consuming ones such as volunteering, fundraising or even starting an organization to tackle their cause.

### CHART 3.5 RESPONDENTS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES ARE PERSONALLY AFFECTED BY CHOSEN SOCIAL CAUSES

More than three quarters of respondents are negatively affected by their chosen cause



At a personal level, connections to social causes are stronger in women than men (77% vs 73%), in low-income workers than high-income workers (79% vs 72%), and in those working in NGOs compared to those in the public and private sectors (82% vs 73%). This suggests that youth in low-income countries experiencing the adverse effects of global issues like climate change feel significantly closer to their cause. While overall 32% of respondents said they are “extremely” negatively affected by their social causes personally, that number rose to 44% for Africa and 40% for the Middle East. In some countries it is even higher: 65% in Turkey, 53% in Egypt and 47% in Nigeria. This helps to explain the high level of youth social engagement in those areas.

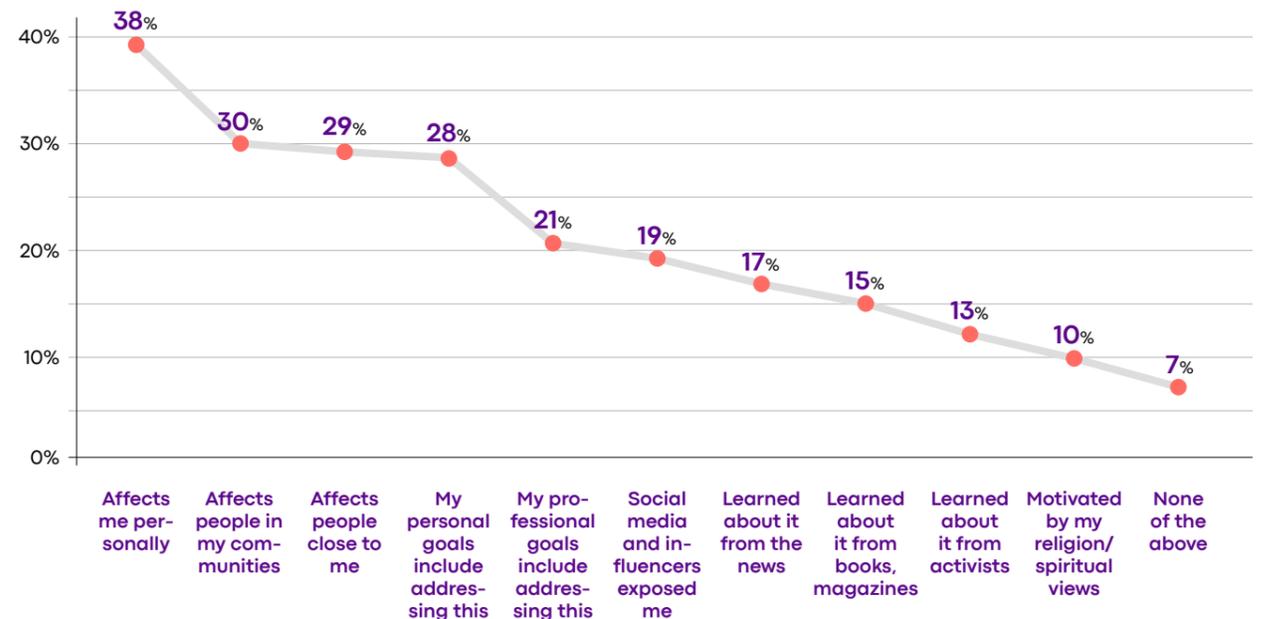
The importance of youth’s personal connection with their causes was underlined when most (38%) reported that they took action because they are personally affected (more so women than men,

**Those affected personally by their cause are significantly more optimistic about their ability to drive change.**

at 40% vs 34%; and low-income respondents than high-income ones, at 41% vs 33%). That was followed by 30% answering that they do so because the cause affects their communities (or people close to them, at 29%).

### CHART 3.6 REASONS FOR ADOPTION OF CAUSES

Youth are most motivated by personal and community connection to social causes



The least important motivating factor is religion (10%), although respondents in the Middle East give religion significantly greater importance (17%). Personal connections to a cause were less important for higher educated respondents, who

were much more influenced by their professional goals (32% for those with PhDs vs 13% for those educated only up to primary level), as is the case for those with higher incomes compared to low earners.



### Leaders' perspective on youth motivation

From the leaders' perspective, while overall only 30% of leaders saw motivation as something that youth lacked, this percentage rose for leaders in the public sector (42%). In contrast, public sector leaders saw empathy as something that very few youths lacked – just 8%, far lower than the 26% from the private sector (although not a single leader of NGOs saw youth as lacking empathy). In the private sector, empathy was seen as most lacking in the tech sector (33%), compared to just 19% in the sustainability sector. In summary, youth employed in the public sector are seen by the surveyed leaders as less motivated but more empathetic.



## Emotions and Sense of Duty: Youth are Committed to Social Change

It is clear that youth harbor strong feelings about their chosen social causes. According to youth, commitment is primarily driven by the following emotions: a sense of purpose, motivation and hope. However, more generally, the emotions that predominate are frustration (38%), anxiety (37%), and even anger (27%). Unfortunately, commitment is not as strong among youth feeling these emotions, possibly as they are often more transient emotions. Nevertheless, very few (just 3%) experience feelings of indifference.

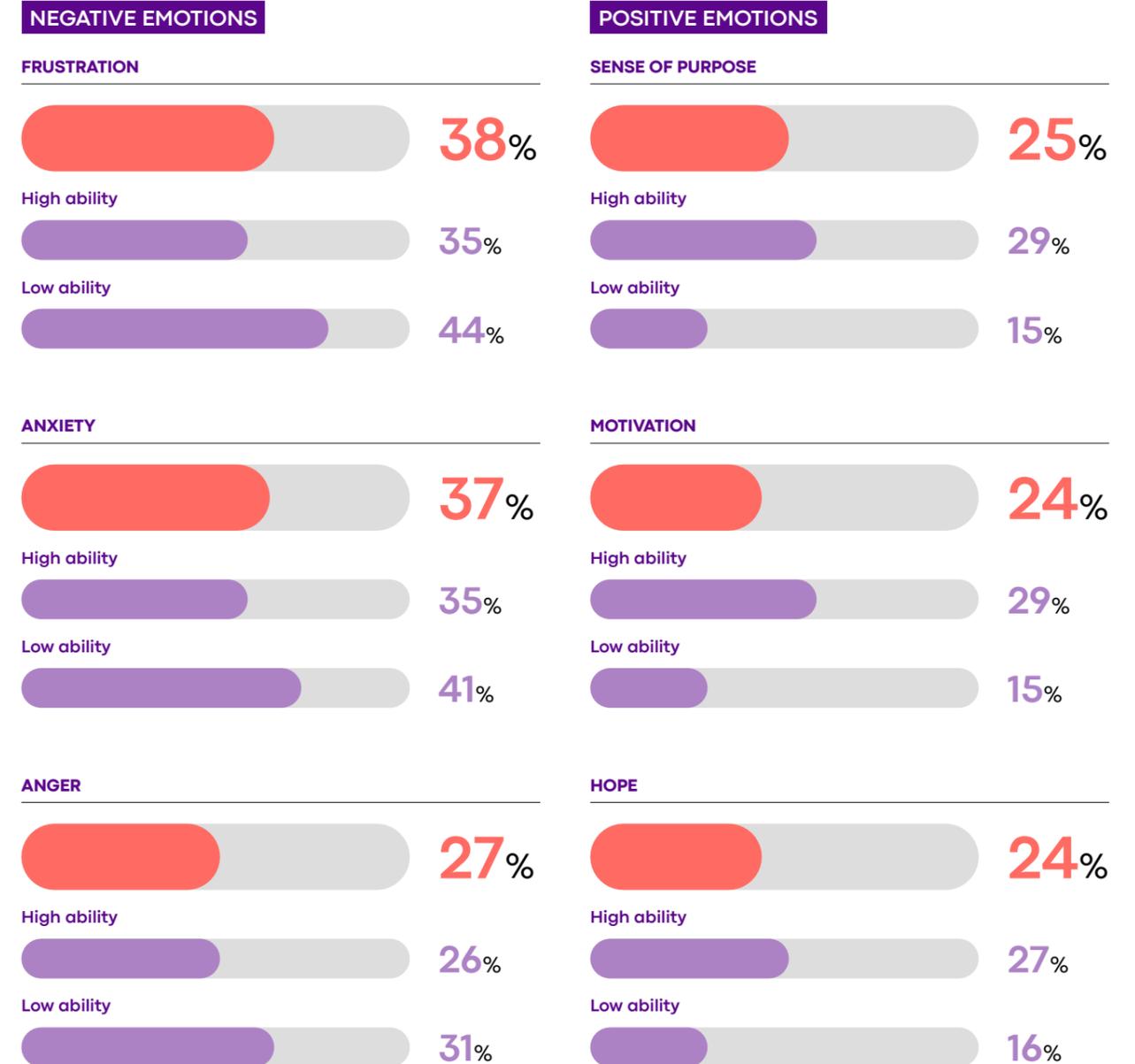
Emotions are important to consider since they are at the core of all human thought and activity, and particularly relevant to social change initiatives, which are ultimately about people. It is noteworthy that the more negative feelings of frustration, anxiety and anger are prevalent among those with lower confidence in their ability to drive change, the younger age group of 18–24, women, and those without a role model. Research on this subject is inconclusive, suggesting that frustration, for example, can trigger either withdrawal or increased engagement in social causes, depending on the individual's coping mechanisms and support systems. Nevertheless, the more positive emotions of a sense of purpose, motivation and hope were stronger among those with a higher confidence in their ability to drive change. These are the older age group of 25–35, men, those working in the private sector, those with higher incomes and higher levels of education, and those with a role model.

**Positive emotions towards social causes are stronger among those with role models, higher levels of education, those aged between 25 and 35, and men.**



### CHART 3.7 HOW YOUTH FEEL ABOUT THEIR SOCIAL CAUSES

Youth with negative emotions around their causes feel they have a lower ability to drive change; youth with positive emotions feel a higher ability to drive change



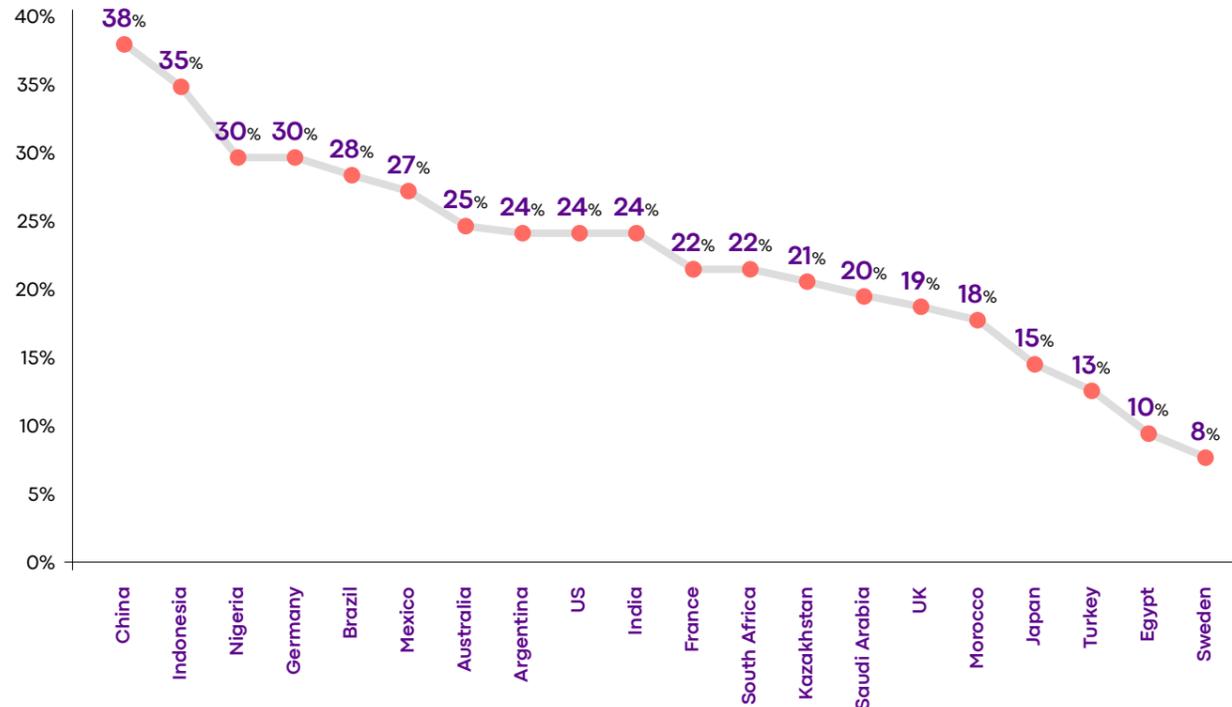
A **growing body** of **research** emphasizes the importance of emotions with regard to taking social action, and stimulating it in others, since they play a key motivational role in translating values and concerns into action. This research shows that

emotions influence and drive thoughts and actions at multiple levels, and can be a crucial – if underexploited – instrument for promoting action to drive positive social impact.<sup>13, 14, 15</sup>



**CHART 3.8**  
**YOUTH'S OPTIMISM AROUND CAUSES VARIES BY REGION**

Youth in Asia and the Americas are more hopeful than those in Europe



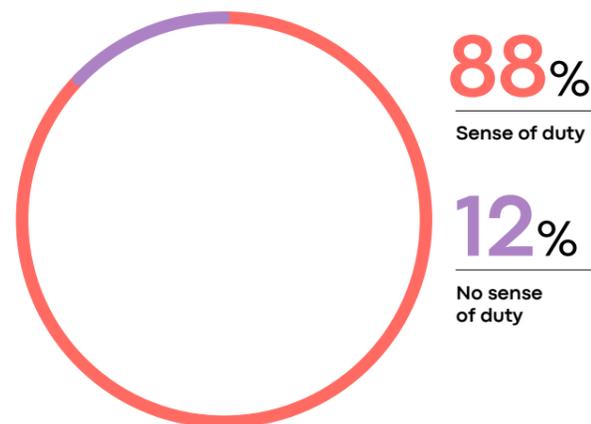
**A Sense of Duty Prevails**

Another powerful motivating factor for driving social change is the extent to which youth have a sense of duty. Unlike emotions, which can fluctuate over time, a sense of duty is more durable, and as such is another extremely valuable characteristic. One of the most positive findings of the survey is that the vast majority of youth do possess a sense of duty towards their chosen social causes, according to 88% of respondents.

This sense of duty is relatively evenly distributed across all ages, genders, regions and income groups. Nevertheless, those exposed to role models during their childhood, and those who are better educated, tend to have a stronger sense of duty to fight for their social causes. As to which groups youth feel a sense of duty towards, their answers reinforced earlier responses: most young people feel the greatest sense of duty towards anyone affected by their chosen social cause (61%) and their family (58%).

**CHART 3.9**  
**HIGH SENSE OF DUTY TO CHOSEN SOCIAL CAUSES**

A high percentage of youth feel a sense of duty towards their social cause



A positive finding of the survey is that the vast majority of youth possess a sense of duty towards their chosen social causes.



Although the passion among youth to drive social change is not a new phenomenon, the way they do so is being transformed by Gen Z – mainly because technology has given them a louder voice than ever before. This has meant that youth engagement in social causes has been gathering force over the past decade, especially in the Global South. Some **70% of Gen Z** say they participate in a social or political cause. Meanwhile, those engaging are getting younger and younger. Today, all youth need is a smartphone to be able to speak up.<sup>16</sup>

In particular, youth involvement in social causes **has been affected by the rise of social media**, which is by far the most important way youth find out about how people feel about their chosen cause, according to the survey.<sup>17</sup> Social media has not only raised awareness of local causes, but made global causes more visible too – especially to the young. That awareness tends to inspire conscientious youth to action.

Certainly, those young people who feel a sense of duty to their cause are significantly more likely: first, to believe they have a greater ability to drive change; second, to intend to drive more change in the future; and third, to have confidence in the long-term positive impact of their actions. The reverse is the case for those who do not feel a sense of duty. A close connection between motivation and action clearly emerges.

**Role Models Have a Big Impact**

Youth who have been exposed to a role model – from a family or community member to a sporting or entertainment icon that set a good example by actively addressing social issues during their childhood – are 46% more likely to believe they can drive positive social change themselves.

These findings are backed up by **research** that demonstrates how role models can play a central role in motivating youth to take action.<sup>18</sup> By providing a visible template for success, they help youth to visualize their goals. One **study identifies** three distinct functions of role models: acting as behavioral models, representing the possible, and being inspirational.<sup>19</sup> Their power can be harnessed to boost motivation, reinforce existing goals, and facilitate the adoption of new goals.

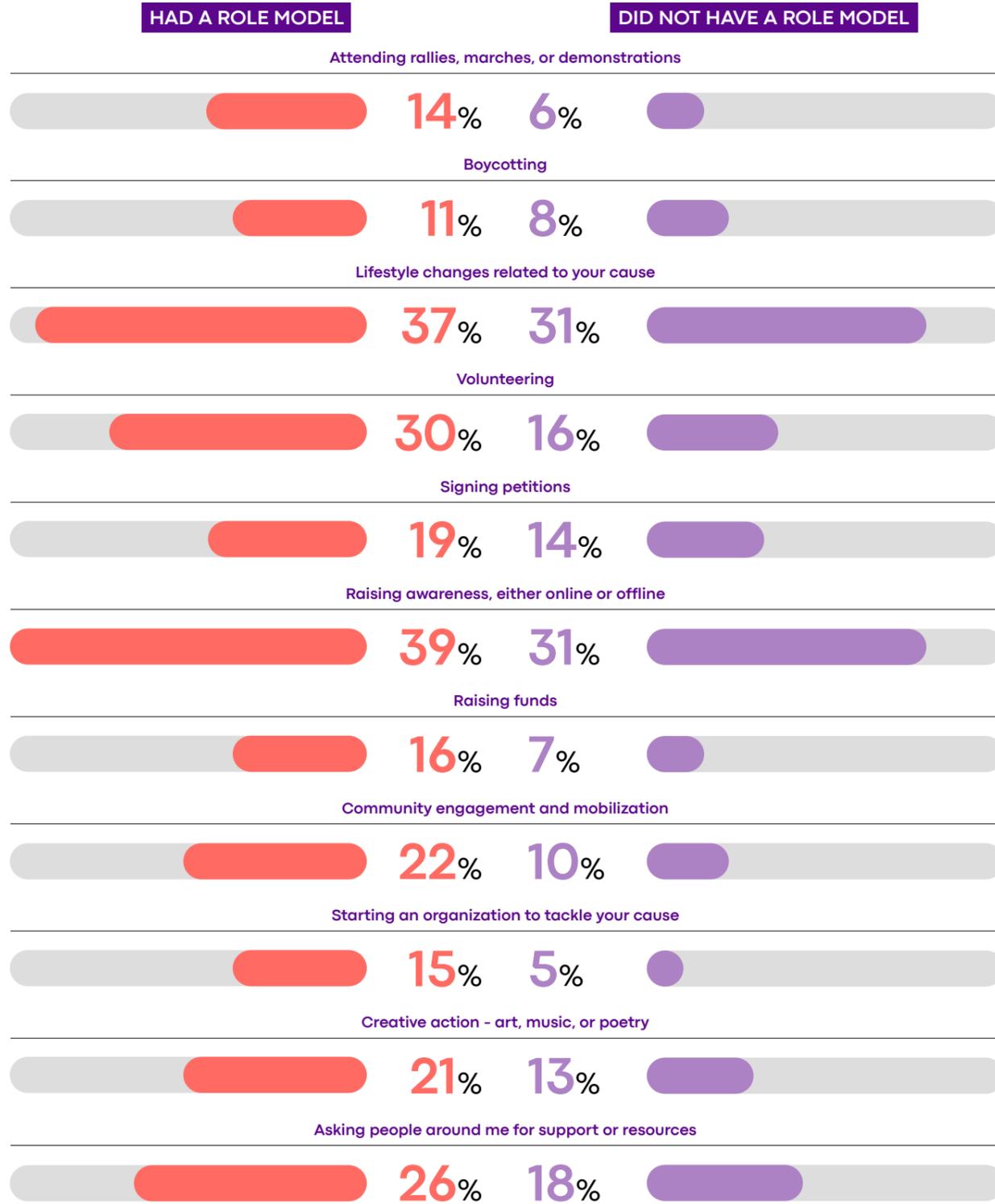
This survey shows that being exposed to a role model at a young age has a very positive impact in several areas. Those who have been exposed to role models feel a stronger sense of duty, and are more active in building their skills and in addressing a social cause. One out of three are volunteering, changing their lifestyle, and raising awareness. Youth with higher incomes and more education are more likely to have had social change role models during their childhood.

Exposure to changemakers in childhood almost doubles the belief in the ability to drive positive social change.



**CHART 3.10**  
**HOW ROLE MODELS INFLUENCE YOUTH EFFORTS TO DRIVE SOCIAL CHANGE**

Early exposure to role models active in addressing social issues increases youth's social change efforts



Overall, people who were exposed to change role models are also more active: more likely to engage in conversations about a cause (40% vs 29%), and inquire about and talk to people affected by a cause. Young people who were exposed to change early are more likely to learn about a cause through activists (17% vs 9%), suggesting that they are more engaged in the topic.

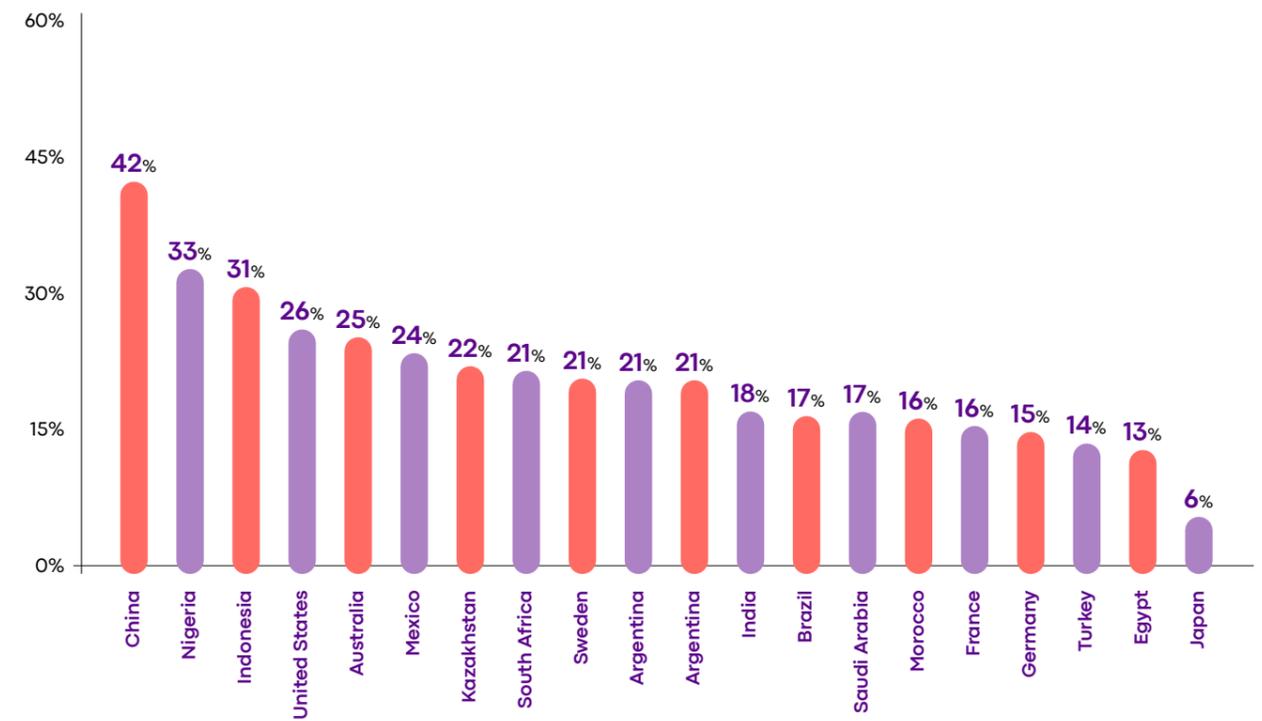
**Exposure to role models varies widely between regions**

Youth in Asia and North America are most exposed to social change role models, with 56% re-

porting they had role models – especially from their close family and communities – compared to just 43% in Europe. In Asia, however, there was a wide variance: 84% of youth in China were exposed to social change role models (more than any other country), compared to just 22% in Japan. This sharp contrast between neighboring countries may be partly explained by their very different cultural and historical contexts. China's rapid economic growth in recent years may have generated a wave of high-profile individuals during a period in which Japan's economy has stagnated. Also, Japan's cultural emphasis on humility, conformity and social harmony may lead to fewer public role models standing out.

**CHART 3.11**  
**EXPOSURE TO ROLE MODELS BY COUNTRY**

Exposure to role models varies by country



With regard to role models in communities specifically, again China stands out. Community role models have such an impact in China that youth were almost twice as likely to have one than any other country: 43% of youth in China had role mod-

els specifically in their community, followed by 22% in the US and Nigeria (Egypt, Japan and Morocco came last with just 8%). [Research by Ashoka](#) suggests that geographical differences may point to cultural norms around parenting and education





systems in different countries that may require different strategies and approaches to shift cultures towards embracing early changemaking.<sup>20</sup>

The most common type of role model was parents or siblings (reported by 21%), followed by teachers or mentors (20%); the least prevalent was sports, music or other idols (12%). This corresponds with the Ashoka survey that found that parents were the most influential group in their development as a person who creates social change.

### Leaders and youth disagree about mentoring efforts

Leaders can also be role models for young employees they interact with. One way can be through mentorship, an area in which they rate themselves highly. 78% said that they mentor their young employees, while just 8% said that young employees mentor them – the vast majority of leaders mentored by youth were in the NGO sector (43% compared to none in the public sector). This may reflect a feeling among some leaders that they “know better” than their younger employees – even if this is not necessarily the case. Of those that see themselves as mentors, the proportion is also much higher in the NGO sector (86%), compared to just 65% of those who work in the public sector.

Evidently, mentorship is far stronger in the NGO sector, while awareness of the value of mentorship needs to be strengthened among leaders in the public sector. This conclusion is enhanced by the finding that 55% of leaders in the NGO sector believe that their mentoring strengthens young people’s ability to create social change, compared to just 14% in the public sector, and 34% in the private sector. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that 88% of leaders in the public sector say they offer mentorship opportunities during working hours to young employees for developing their social impact skills, compared to 71% at NGOs, and just 67% in the private sector. This was highest in Mexico (92%) and the US (86%), and lowest in France (41%) and Nigeria (43%).



### CASE STUDY: ROLE MODELS IN CHINA

Ever since the teachings of the philosopher Confucius encouraged youth more than 2,000 years ago to look up to “junzi” – a noble person who embodies the ideal moral character – role models have been deeply embedded in Chinese culture. But Chinese role models have multiplied and developed greatly in recent decades, to the extent that this survey found that youth in China were more exposed to social change role models than any other country, especially community role models.

This phenomenon has been fueled by China’s emergence as a global economic and political power, which has magnified the visibility of Chinese role models. Major advances in areas like science, technology and industry have increasingly put Chinese leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators and celebrities in the spotlight – not only within China but also on the world stage.

But youth’s perception of role models has been influenced by the spread of market-based reforms in the 1980s, moving to more consumer-style celebrities. This demonstrates China’s ability to reinvent the past to serve present and future needs, **according to one study**.<sup>21</sup> As the state-backed Chinese website called “Evolution of the Idol” puts it:

“The power of examples is infinite; each generation of youths has their own idols.”

The importance of role models in China is reflected by a **survey** carried out in 2019 by Xinhuanet, China’s state news agency, showing that more than 81% of the university students polled identified their role models as “heroes, successful businessmen, scientists and ordinary people who did great things”.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, research carried out last year by the Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences found that scientists, actors and doctors were ranked as the top three categories of idols by primary and secondary school students.

Today, it is no longer just the Chinese Communist Party promoting role models. For example, Unicef, the UN agency that supports children, has partnered with a range of celebrities who it believes are in a unique position to help and influence children. They include Wang Shuang, a female professional footballer dedicated to the empowerment of children through sports; Wang Yuan, a Chinese pop singer and actor who became one of Time Magazine’s global top 30 influential teens as well as the first Chinese artist to attend the UN Youth Forum; and Yang Lan, a popular broadcast journalist rated as one of China’s “Top Ten Women Entrepreneurs”, and one of ten “National Women Pacesetters”.



## B. BUILDING SOCIAL IMPACT Skills and Mindsets

The right skills and mindsets are essential for youth seeking to drive positive social impact. This part of the survey looks at the most important skills and mindsets, from both a youth and leader perspective. It then proceeds to look more closely at how youth strengthen their capacity to drive change, as well as their perceived ability to put their skills and mindsets to good use by achieving positive social outcomes.

It is useful to distinguish between skills and mindsets. Skills can broadly be defined as an ability or activity that can be learned through practice and training and are often important for specific tasks. Within skills, it is important to differentiate between hard skills and soft skills: hard skills are functional or technical abilities, like using software or operating machinery, while soft skills refer to behaviors, such as teamwork, communication and adaptability. While the usefulness of hard skills has long been recognized, there is a growing body of research showing the importance of soft skills in various areas, such as positive long-term **employment** outcomes.<sup>23</sup>

Mindsets, on the other hand, refer to attitudes and approach to life, and are shaped by personality, beliefs, experiences and circumstances – such as education, economic status and social environment. In at least one sense, they are even more important than skills: in a **global survey by Reed**, the recruitment company, 96% of employers are more interested in mindsets than skills in their employees because, unlike skills, they are much harder to learn.<sup>24</sup>

### Top Skills for Creating Social Impact

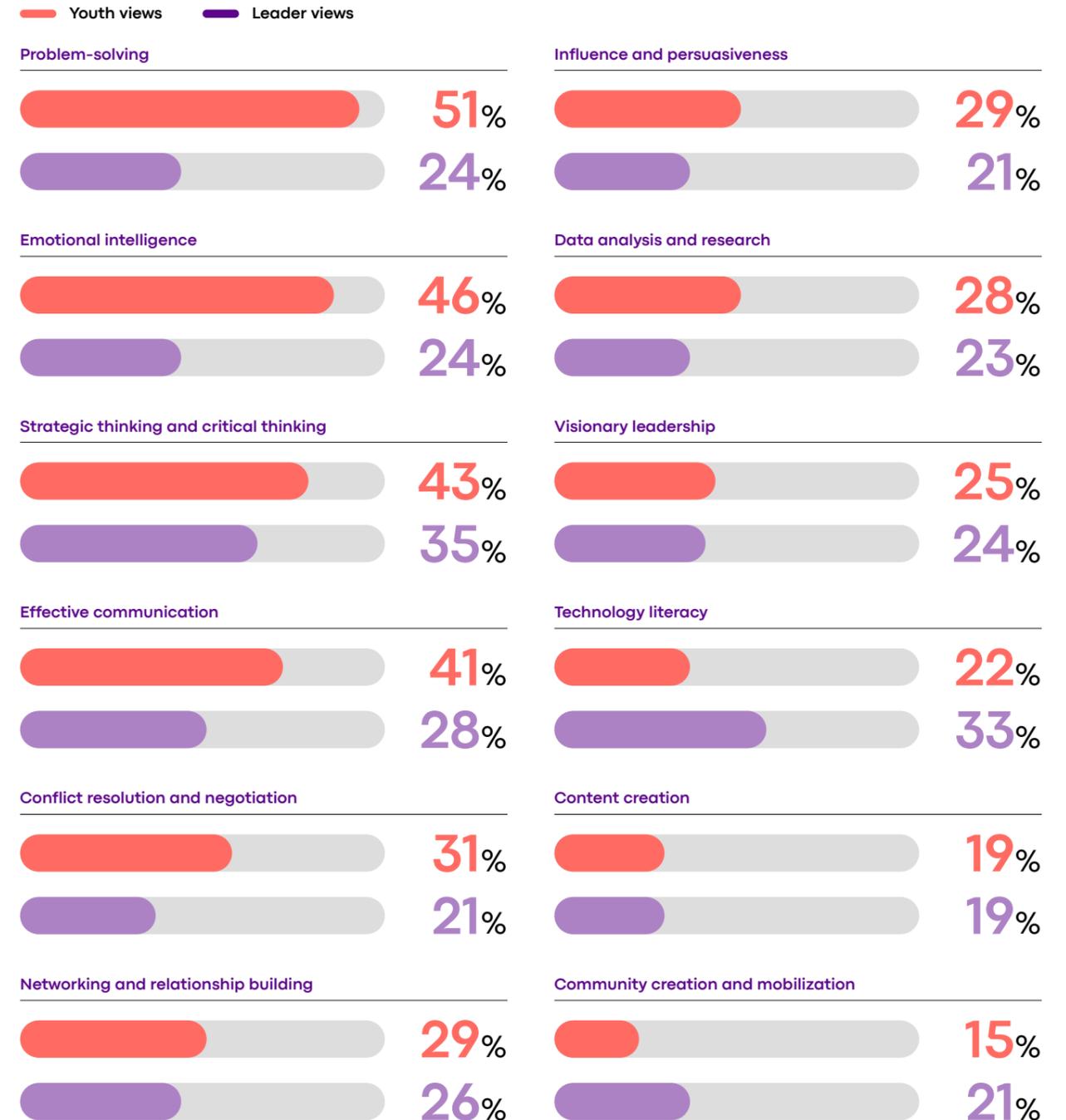
Out of a range of skills needed to create social change, youth rate themselves most highly on problem-solving (51%), emotional intelligence (46%), and strategic and critical thinking (43%). Women rate themselves most highly in the soft skill emotional intelligence (50% vs. 37% of men).

Meanwhile, men rate themselves more highly in hard skills: technology skills (30% vs. 18% of women), and data analysis and research (32% vs. 26% of women), showcasing the gender gap in digital literacy.

CHART 3.12

### TOP SKILLS FOR CREATING SOCIAL IMPACT: LEADER AND YOUTH VIEWS

Youth and leaders highlight different skills to bring about social change



### Leaders point to a lack of skills

Leaders believe that a lack of overall skills is relevant when considering what youth need to improve in order to drive change. After a lack of access to networks and institutions (according to 58% of leaders), a lack of skills was the second most important factor lacking in youth, according to 33% of leaders. Leaders in the US were almost twice as concerned about this issue as the average leader, with 60% citing it as a problem, followed by South Africa (52%). *“It often takes time to develop new skills while gaining knowledge from experiences,”* commented one South African private sector leader surveyed.

While youth highlight problem-solving and emotional intelligence, leaders listed strategic and critical thinking (35%) and technology literacy (33%) most highly when asked what skills they felt youth needed to bring about positive social impact. Interestingly, leaders see emotional intelligence and the ability to solve problems as among the principal skills that are most lacking among young people. This was especially notable among leaders in the NGO sector, who were far more critical than public and private sector leaders in terms of their views on what youth lacked to drive change. In other words, what youth think they most possess is precisely what leaders say they most lack.



Research clearly indicates that emotional intelligence and soft skills generally, are of fundamental importance. A [study carried out by YouthPower](#), identifies three key soft skills in particular for furthering youth development: positive self-concept

*“It often takes time to develop new skills while gaining knowledge from experiences.”*

South African business leader



(or a realistic appreciation of one’s strengths and potential), self-control and social skills.<sup>25</sup>

It is also clear that if attempts to drive social change are to be successful, capacity building is a crucial part of the puzzle. The [United Nations Population Fund](#) underlines self-awareness – a soft skill that can be honed – as a prerequisite for implementing a youth social change initiative, as well as working with others and planning appropriately.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the [Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University](#) argues that youth social engagement and capacity building can strengthen each other.<sup>27</sup> While it is clear how skills can amplify social impact, it is also true that participating in creating positive social impact can benefit youth by encouraging them to improve skills and

**38%** LEADERS SAY DISCIPLINE AND FOCUS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT MINDSETS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

**58%** OF LEADERS CITE A LACK OF ACCESS TO NETWORKS LIMITS YOUTH

networks that are valued in the workplace, therefore representing a source of economic mobility, according to Tufts. Clearly, it’s never too early for youth to start gaining experience by participating in social initiatives.

### Important Mindsets For Changemakers

In terms of mindsets associated with creating social change, youth report that they are most curious (41%), collaborative (36%), and disciplined (34%). In contrast, leaders report that discipline and focus (both 38%) are the mindsets that are most important for youth to bring about social change. However, it is precisely those two mindsets that leaders say youth most lack (34% said discipline, 29% said focus), reflecting a gap between the outlook of youth and leaders which must be bridged.

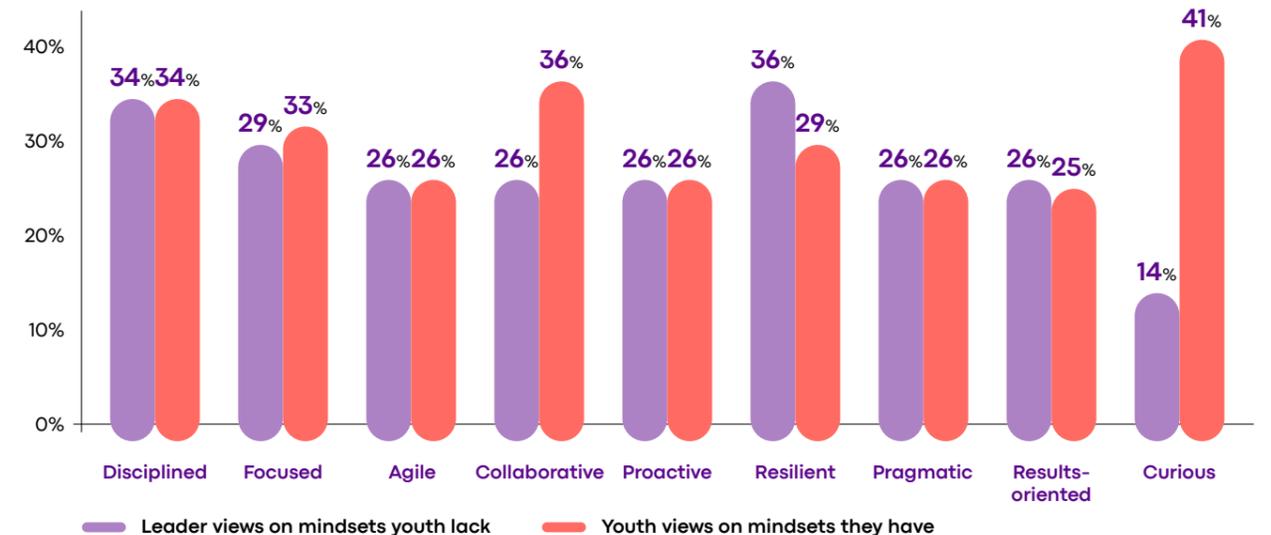
The regional differences in opinion, however, are quite striking. Of those leaders who ranked discipline as the most important mindset, these included 80% of German leaders at one extreme, and just 17% of Brazilian leaders at the other. Meanwhile, when looking at which countries thought discipline was most lacking, 60% of Indian leaders did



(followed by leaders in the US, UK and Japan), while just 8% did in Turkey (followed closely by Nigeria and Egypt). This likely reflects differences in cultural norms, but raises important questions about which countries may have a greater potential to experience the most effective social change initiatives – if discipline is as important as leaders believe.

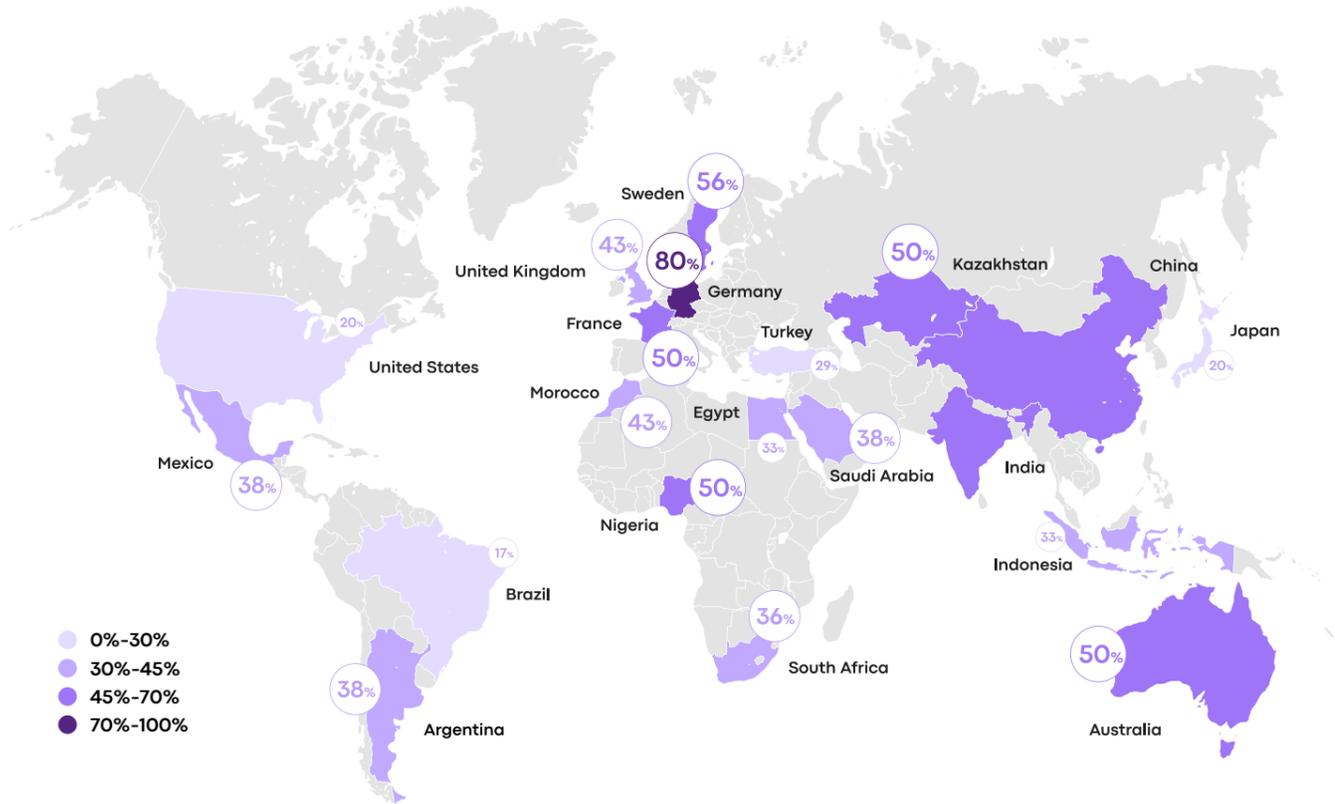
**CHART 3.13**  
**YOUTH VS. LEADER MINDSET PERCEPTION**

This graph illustrates which mindsets youth believe they possess in contrast to the mindsets that leaders observe as missing



**CHART 3.14**  
**THE PERCENTAGE OF LEADERS WHO VALUE DISCIPLINE HIGHLY VARIES WIDELY BY COUNTRY**

Global leaders believe discipline is the top youth mindset needed to create positive social impact



There are widespread concerns that this lack of discipline and focus may be related to the rise of social media. A recent study of the general public in the UK by [King's College London](#) showed that 66% believe that youth's attention spans have deteriorated in recent years, while 47% say that deep thinking has become a thing of the past.<sup>28</sup> More than half of UK adults blame tech companies and social media for this, and urge governments to step in by creating an environment that fosters more mindful use of technology. Possible approaches include education programs, stronger regulation, and raising awareness of the pitfalls of excessive use of social media.

In contrast, the mindsets of youth that generate least concern among leaders are curiosity and proactivity. Indeed, 55% of leaders confessed that

youth were actually more curious than them, while 43% said they were more proactive. The abundance of curiosity and energy in youth may be one of their greatest assets, but it remains to be seen whether this can counterbalance their perceived lack of discipline and focus.

In fact, leaders believed that youth's greatest asset in terms of their ability to drive change is the fact that they are more open-minded and flexible, with 29% saying this. "Youth have the mindset to adapt to situations and this approach allows them to address issues in a fast-paced environment," said a UK private sector leader surveyed. One Nigerian leader praised youth's "agility and perseverance to first understand the things happening around them and then to make plans accordingly." A third stated: "Young people are better able to respond to

**" Young people are better able to respond to changing societal concerns and trends because they are generally more flexible and open to change, while their familiarity with new technologies and level of digital skill can also be helpful in maximizing the potential of digital tools for social impact. "**

**Nigerian business leader**

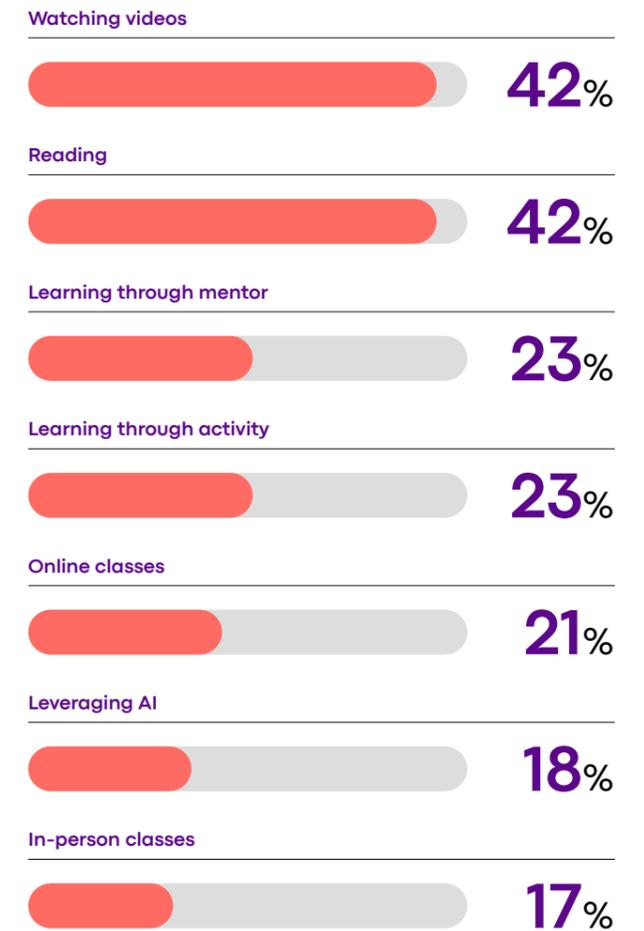
changing societal concerns and trends because they are generally more flexible and open to change, while their familiarity with new technologies and level of digital skill can also be helpful in maximizing the potential of digital tools for social impact."

**Strengthening Skills and Mindsets**

Most youth are proactive in building skills to tackle the social cause they care about most, with 83% saying they do so. However, the most favored methods tend to require the least effort, suggesting a preference for more passive methods of skills accumulation: 42% prefer either to read the relevant literature and articles, or watch educational videos and tutorials. Learning from a mentor or peer was the next most cited method, together with learning by engaging in a relevant activity (such as volunteering), according to 23% of respondents in both cases. These favored methods do not vary significantly by gender, age, country, and other variables.

**CHART 3.15**  
**EFFORTS YOUTH MAKE TOWARDS SKILLS ACQUISITION**

Most prefer more passive methods like reading and watching videos



Youth with a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to be active in building their skills: just 11% of high earners did nothing to build their skills compared to almost twice as many (20%) low earners. Similarly, youth who had a role model in some cases were as much as twice as likely to be building their skills, especially learning from a mentor or peer, or learning by engaging in a relevant activity.

Without a doubt, youth's confidence in their ability to drive positive social impact benefits hugely from making an effort to build up their skills. Those



who did not make an effort were more than three times more likely to rate themselves as having a low ability to drive change, compared to those who rate themselves highly (33% vs 10%).

### Organizations are key to building skills

Organizations can play an important role in helping employees to enhance their skills to create change. Half of leaders overall say they provide youth with access to capacity building, compared to more than two thirds of those in the NGO sector. With regard to youth internship programs more specifically, 61% of leaders' organizations say they offer them – considerably more in the US than in Europe (leaders from the US report about three times more internship programs than Sweden). NGOs offer the most internship programs, at 71%, compared to just 53% of governments.

Meanwhile 64% of leaders' organizations have dedicated training and development programs for young employees, most of all in the Middle East. Again, NGOs do this significantly more than governments (71% vs 59%). Clearly, governments – and to a lesser extent the private sector – could contribute more to positive social impact by catching up with NGOs when it comes to skills development. One survey respondent, who is involved with youth NGOs and community service projects in a personal capacity, said they did the following to enable youth: *“Encourage them to be curious and observant. Always challenge them. Encourage them to always think, telling them both sides of the same coin.”*



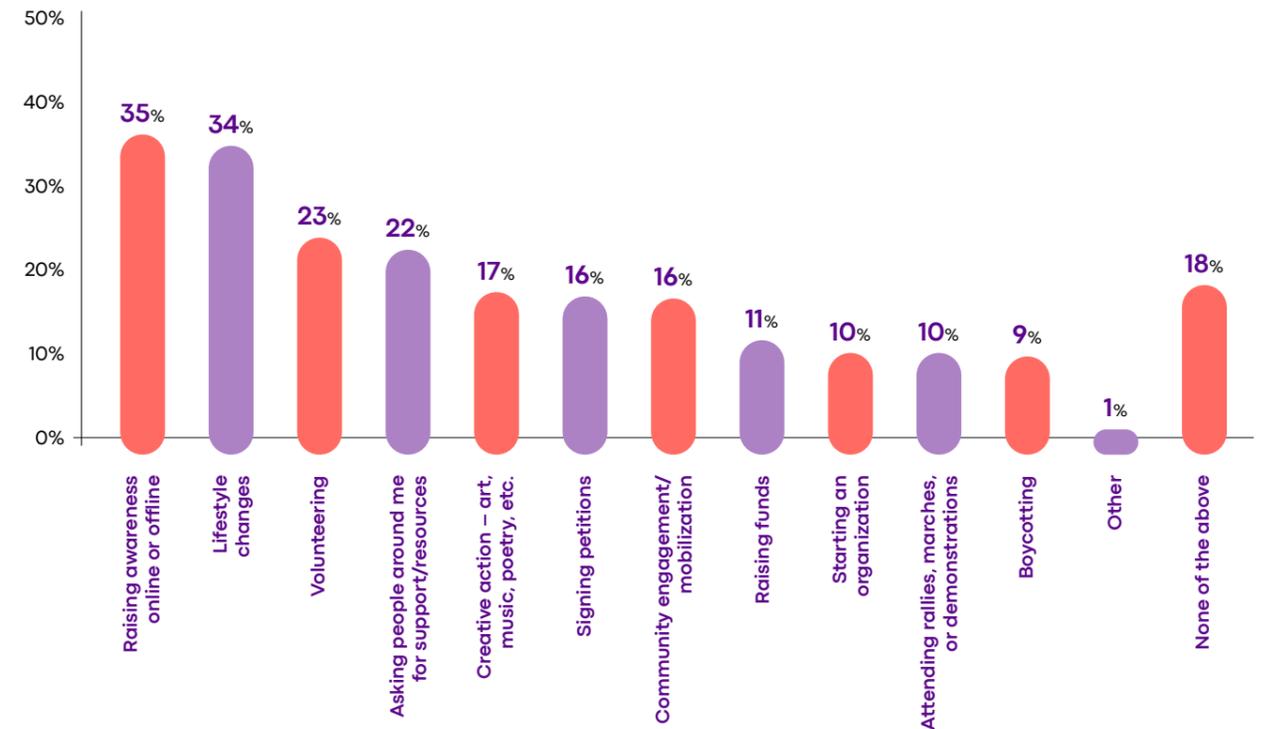
## Efforts Made to Address Causes

Youth are very nearly as proactive in addressing their cause as they are in building the skills needed to do so, with 82% saying they address their cause through the actions mentioned in the survey – from raising awareness, signing petitions and attending rallies to fundraising and community engagement. However, the most common action taken to address their cause is raising awareness either online or offline, with 35% saying they do this. This is more common among higher earners and more educated respondents.



**CHART 3.16**  
**YOUTH EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THEIR CAUSES**

Awareness raising and lifestyle changes are most reported ways to address social causes



The fact that many respondents are likely to be raising awareness through online channels may lead to concerns that the youth are engaging in “clicktivism”. Despite criticisms that online activism is lazy and ineffective, experts increasingly argue that **this is not the case**, and have produced research proving that clicktivism – when credible and properly harnessed – can in fact be highly effective in providing an alternative way of raising public awareness of otherwise little-known ideas, and then encouraging people to take action.<sup>29</sup>

The second most common action that respondents took to address their cause was lifestyle changes related to their cause, with 34% of respondents choosing to do this. Here, by far the largest group that opted for this tactic were those whose cause was sustainability and the environment, at 57% (environmentalists were also two times more likely than the average respondent to sign petitions), followed by those interested in mental health (43%). Other actions were unusually highly favored by particular groups, such as crea-

tive action by 40% of those concerned about barriers to expression – compared to 17% overall.

Clearly, certain forms of action lend themselves better to particular causes: an environmentalist can advance their cause through lifestyle changes by abstaining from eating meat, for example. Therefore, many different forms of social action are valid; there is no silver bullet.

In general terms, some of the most demanding forms of action, such as starting an organization or raising funding, were the least popular – both chosen by just one in ten respondents. However, those activities attracted youth who were in general much more confident about their ability to drive change (especially starting an organization – youth who do this are more than four times more likely to consider themselves capable of creating positive change). In contrast, easier options, like signing petitions or boycotting, are carried out by roughly equal numbers of youth who consider themselves as having a high or low ability to enact



change. In conclusion, some actions may have a greater impact than others, but not all actions suit everyone. The actions that youth choose will often be determined by their particular skills and mindsets at the time.

### Optimism About Ability to Enact Social Change Varies

Even though youth report some negative feelings around the causes they are passionate about, when looking forward, more youth are broadly optimistic about their ability to create social change, providing a strong motivating impulse behind their activism. Most (68%) feel that they have a strong ability to achieve positive outcomes and are generally optimistic (77%) about the long-term impact of their actions.

However, there are nuances. Men are slightly more confident in their ability to drive change than women, and those who were exposed to role models are much more confident than those who were not. The same applies to youth with a higher level of income and education. Most youth also display considerable humility: more than twice as many young people (38%) think people with more experience in dealing with their cause have a greater impact than them, compared to youth that think they have a greater ability to make a positive impact than more experienced people (16%). To a lesser extent, the same is the case when comparing themselves with senior business leaders, and only slightly more youth think that politicians and public officials are more capable than them, compared to those that don't. In other words, their confidence in politicians is relatively low. This corresponds with [research](#) showing the increasing [disenchantment and disengagement](#) with traditional politics among today's youth.<sup>30, 31</sup>

It is still undeniable that youth are broadly confident in their ability to drive social change. This youthful optimism corresponds with research by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) that has

**68%** YOUTH RESPONDENTS SAY THEY HAVE A STRONG ABILITY TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

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**71%** MALES vs **66%** WOMEN

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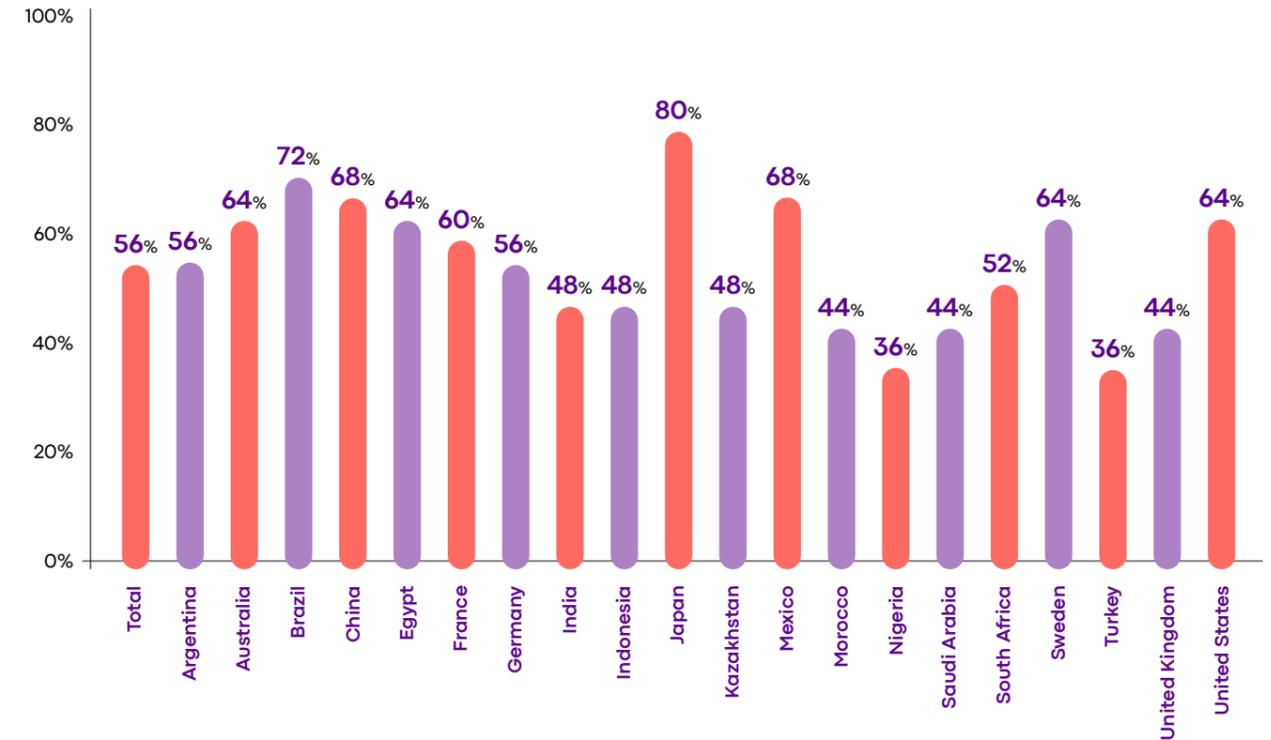
**80%** EXPOSED TO CHANGE MAKERS IN CHILDHOOD vs **56%** NOT EXPOSED TO CHANGE MAKERS IN CHILDHOOD

shown that the youth of today believe that the world is becoming a better place – especially those living in low-income countries.<sup>32</sup> Despite very real concerns among youth about growing social anxiety or the climate crisis (as shown in this survey), nearly three out of five young people believe that the world is in fact improving, according to [UNICEF](#).<sup>33</sup>

Even so, this study found that optimism varied greatly from country to country. At one extreme, 89% of youth in China, 84% in Mexico and 83% in Nigeria believed that they were capable of making a difference. That contrasts sharply with just 34% in Japan (where NGOs report that many youths are suffering a [very distinctive mental health crisis](#)), and 50% in France, the next lowest.<sup>34</sup> Variances were less pronounced in terms of socioeconomic status and gender, although men and those with higher incomes tended to be more optimistic.

**CHART 3.17**  
LEADERS WHO SAY YOUTH HAVE A "RATHER HIGH" CAPACITY TO DRIVE SOCIAL CHANGE BY COUNTRY

Japan has the highest confidence in youth capacity to drive social change



### Leaders are more optimistic than youth about youth's capacity to drive social change

Overall, they were far more optimistic than youth, with an average of around 90% rating the capacity of youth to drive positive social change as high (either very high or quite high). But between countries there were interesting differences.

For example, Nigerian leaders, like their youth, remained very positive, with the highest proportion of leaders rating youth's capacity to drive change as "very high" (56%). But Japanese leaders – in

strong contrast with Japanese youth – were extremely positive, with 100% of them rating their youth's ability to drive change positively ("very high" and "quite high" combined). The gap in optimism between Japanese youth and leaders may be for very specific reasons, with economic and social challenges that disproportionately affect younger generations, such as the country's aging society, declining rural population, and rising income inequality. The least enthusiastic leaders were from the UK, with just 72% rating youth's ability to drive change positively ("very high" and "quite high" combined).





## CASE STUDY: UNICEF'S UPSHIFT PROGRAM COLLABORATES TO BUILD SKILLS

After the COVID-19 pandemic wiped out almost two decades of progress towards making education more inclusive and equitable, initiatives to transform education systems are more urgent than ever. The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) is making a valuable contribution at a global level through its [Upshift program](#), a social innovator accelerator that aims to build skills using best practices in non-formal, experiential, and enterprise education.<sup>35</sup>

Founded in Kosovo in 2014, Upshift now operates in nearly 50 countries, providing young people aged 10 to 24 with a holistic education through mentorship, workshops and entrepreneurial training in order to build solutions to local problems. It is expected to reach as many as 5 million children and young people (more than half of whom are female) annually by 2026.

Growing interest in Upshift has even led to its integration into national education systems in Bhutan, India, Italy, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uganda, and Vietnam. Another 15 countries are exploring how to follow their example.

By enriching youth with skills like problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, leadership, communication, presentation, time management and planning, Upshift helps youth develop profes-

sional and transferable skills to become successful drivers of positive social impact.

Over about 25 learning hours, Upshift can be delivered in different formats, from in-person boot camps to interactive online courses. Youth explore how to solve community challenges they care about by building innovative products or services that address them. As part of an entrepreneurial challenge, teams then pitch locally driven solutions, with seed funding and further mentoring provided to the most promising.

For Sejnur Veshall, an Upshift alumni who became Deputy Minister of Youth, Culture and Sports for Kosovo, the course was transformational: "When I participated in Upshift, it was the first time someone entrusted me with project management. I realized I could do even more because I had been trusted. The project lasted three months but changed my life forever."

Although many youths want to address environmental issues, other projects supported by Upshift include working with young people with disabilities in Ghana, migrants and refugees in Egypt, young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) in Kyrgyzstan, girls and young women in Bolivia, ethnic minorities in Montenegro, remote communities in the Maldives, and conflict-affected groups in Ukraine.

Crucially, Upshift provides an opportunity for global, regional, and local collaboration between the private sector, government, and civil society, either by supporting training courses and the individual initiatives taken by pupils, or Upshift's integration into national education systems.

## C. EMPOWERING YOUTH How Networks and Institutions Enable Social Impact

There is no doubt that youth are passionate about social issues (see section 3a), and striving hard at an individual level to have a positive impact on them (see section 3b). But how can their efforts be amplified so that they can have an even greater impact? In this section, we focus on the potential for networks, institutions, and leaders as individuals to enable the youth-led positive social impact initiatives of young people, and find that in each case – when harnessed properly – they can be a powerful force for good.

### Strong Networks: Family First

**Social network theory** explains that various types of relationships – such as family connections, friendships, work associations, or other social interactions – heavily influence human behavior, including our approach to social change.<sup>36</sup> These connections play a crucial role in driving change and can influence the spread of innovation and the imitation of successful practices. They can also limit potential resistance to change due to established norms. The theory emphasizes the importance of leveraging influential nodes within a network to facilitate change, understanding the impact of network positions on organizations' behaviors and opportunities, and recognizing both formal and informal networks in effectively navigating and implementing change initiatives.

As many as 94% of youth use multiple networks to support themselves in driving social change, according to the survey. In line with earlier findings, which identify family as the group that youth feel

**44%** YOUTH SAY FAMILY  
AND FRIENDS ARE AN  
IMPORTANT NETWORK TO  
SUPPORT THEM IN DRIVING  
CHANGE

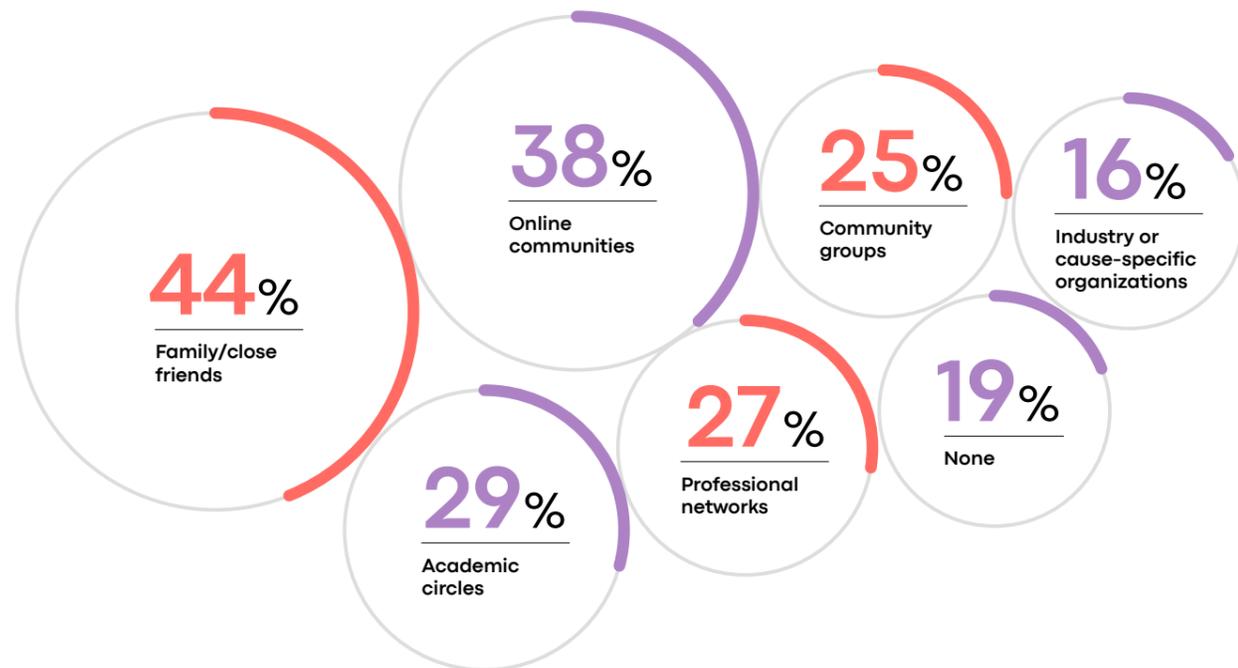
most connected to and have the strongest sense of duty towards, once again the importance of family to youth wanting to create social impact stands out. It emerges that 44% of youth also highlight family and close friends as a strong network for enabling them to actually engage effectively with their chosen social causes – standing out more than any other circle of support.

Family is important for the development and empowerment of younger generations and act as a



**CHART 3.18**  
**NETWORKS YOUTH USE TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES**

Family and friends are the most important networks, with online communities close behind

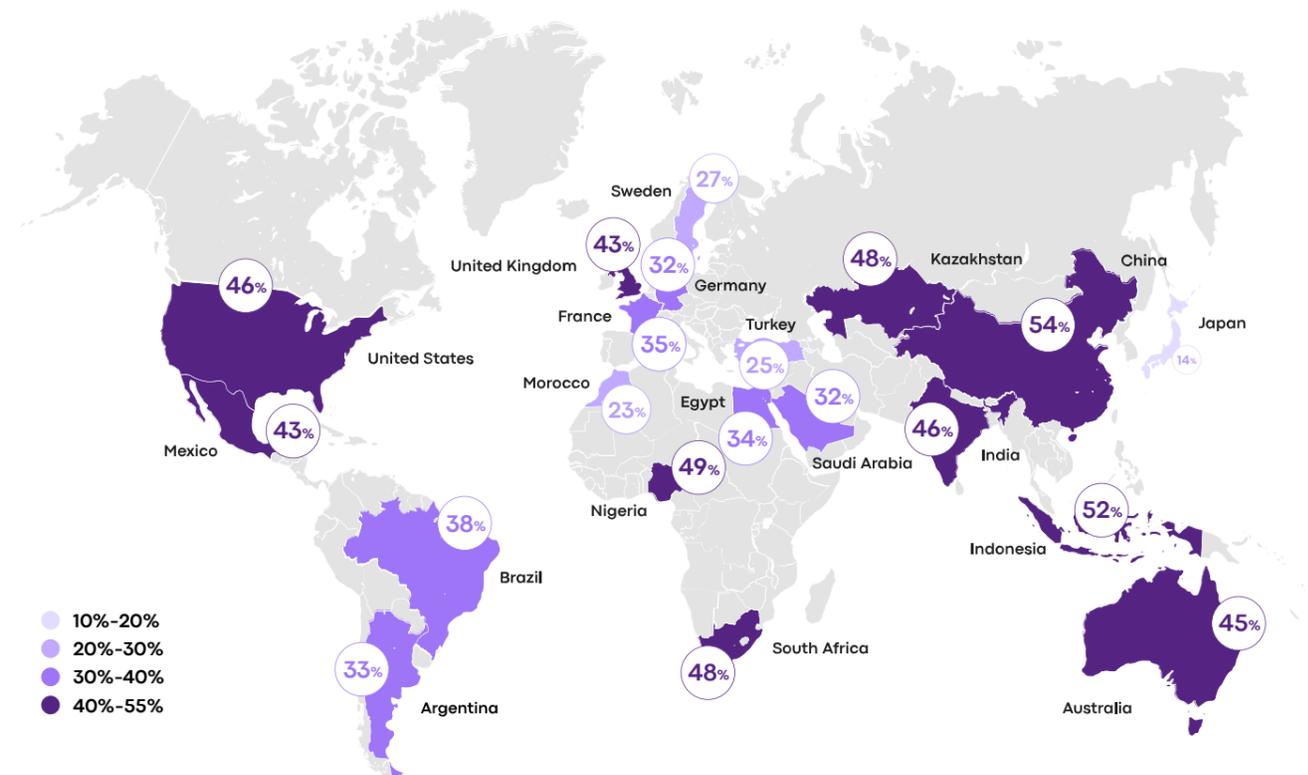


source of both emotional and practical support. More specifically, [recent research shows](#) that family relationships – especially with mothers and grandparents – have a much more important impact in developing an interest in engaging in civil society than is commonly understood.<sup>37</sup> This is not surprising, when we see the impact of role models on driving youth towards social action. Despite the importance of family relationships for youth networks, other research [studying the case in Ethiopia](#) argues that family ties have suffered as a result of the growth of global online networking, which offers virtual connection sometimes at the expense of physical togetherness.<sup>38</sup>

### Virtual Networks Have Real Influence

Certainly, social media plays a fundamental role for youth aiming to create a positive social impact, so it is no surprise that online communities (like TikTok, Reddit and Instagram) are ranked as the second most impactful network by youth, highlighted by 38% of respondents. However, usage trends are not necessarily affected by country proximity. The survey shows that Chinese youth are the most enthusiastic about leveraging online communities, with 54% doing so. At the other extreme, just 14% do so in Japan, once again exposing the sharp contrasts between the neighboring countries, where youth use different sets of platforms (in China, WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin dominate; while in Japan, LINE, X and YouTube are more popular).

**CHART 3.19**  
**YOUTH PREFERENCES FOR ONLINE NETWORKS BY COUNTRY**



ONLY **16%** OF YOUTH SAY INDUSTRY AND CAUSE-SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS ARE IMPORTANT NETWORKS

What comes as more of a surprise – but which also represents an opportunity – is the limited importance that youth attribute to industry organizations, including those devoted to specific social causes, with just 16% of respondents saying that they find support there. Academic, professional and community circles scored slightly better, but still significantly less than online communities, suggesting that there is scope to provide more support

through all of these networks, and perhaps a need for a more effective communication strategy towards youth. (See section 4 for more about this.)

### Expanding Networks: The Importance of Online Platforms

When looking at how youth grow their networks, once again the importance of the Internet to youth's social change efforts stands out. The Internet is youth's principal source for finding out about the issues that they care about most, and nearly half use social media to do this, which explains why so many journalists use platforms like Instagram or X to engage with their audiences. But youth also rely on the Internet to build their social change skills (either watching videos or reading about relevant issues) and value online communities very highly.



### Leaders perceive access to networks as a barrier for youth

Network access emerges as the biggest barrier to creating social impact for youth from the perspective of leaders: 58% of surveyed leaders believe youth lack access to networks and institutions that could amplify their efforts towards positive social impact – roughly twice as many as those who believe that youth lack skills (33%), motivation (30%) or empathy (24%) to drive change.

There is a wide variance between opinions in different countries, however: Australian leaders (84%) are the most concerned about a lack of access to networks, followed by those in Japan (72%); at the other end of the scale just 32% of leaders in Kazakhstan are worried about this, and 36% in Turkey. As one leader from Australia commented, many young people experience “restricted access to networks that can motivate them in making a difference in their communities.”

Although network access is a major barrier, many leaders still try to remedy this problem – even if not enough – with 51% of leaders saying they provide youth with access to networks of influence. But while Australian leaders appear to be acting on their concerns, with 60% saying they provide access, Japanese leaders do not, with just 32% saying they provide access. Kazakh leaders, however, are neither very concerned nor taking much action, with just 36% saying they do so.

Overall, leaders in the US score most highly (68%), while Saudi Arabian leaders score lowest (28%). Given that two-thirds of the Saudi population are below the age of 35, with a prominent number of them in key positions across the country, this comes as a surprise. As one Saudi leader put it: “Youth networks and movements serve as platforms for collective action [and are] what activates teamwork.”



**TABLE 3.20**  
**YOUTH PREFERENCES FOR EXPANDING THEIR NETWORKS**

Connecting online and joining organizations are the most popular way to expand networks, but a full quarter say they don't try to expand their networks

Connecting online	42%
Joining organizations	31%
Attending events	29%
Asking for introductions	23%
Using AI recommendations	17%
None. I don't try to increase the size of my network	25%

On top of this, youth's preferred method for expanding their networks is using online platforms to find and connect with others. This is an important finding, not least because there are multiple benefits to be gained by using online networking, as [research clearly demonstrates](#).<sup>39</sup> As many as 42% choose this method, given that the Internet allows fast and cost-effective access to large groups of people, saving both time and money and allowing a more efficient allocation of resources. Those who do this tend to be more highly educated: 45% with university degrees do so compared to just 35% who only finished primary school. This trend is especially evident in Africa, where 52% grow networks online, compared to 34% in Europe. “In my experience young people are frequently more skilled at utilizing new technology and digital platforms, which allows them to reach larger audiences and have important opinions on pressing societal issues,” said one leader from India.

**42% YOUTH CHOOSE ONLINE PLATFORMS TO EXPAND THEIR NETWORKS**

### Traditional networks remain irreplaceable

While purely online networking is hugely important, youth still rely heavily on more traditional networking methods that do not necessarily take place online. Taken together, joining relevant organizations (31%), attending an event where youth are speaking (29%), and asking people in their network for introductions (23%) are more widely used than exclusively online networks. As valuable a networking tool as the Internet may be, nothing can replace in-person methods – an issue that became especially evident in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which often made in-person networking impossible. Ultimately, a mix of in-person interactions augmented by virtual tools is likely to be the way forward.

**“... young people are frequently more skilled at utilizing new technology and digital platforms, which allows them to reach larger audiences and have important opinions on pressing societal issues.”**

**Business leader from India**



However, as many as a quarter of youth make no effort whatsoever to grow their networks. More should make an effort: those who don't expand their network are almost three times more likely to lack confidence in their ability to drive change; they are also most likely to be unemployed, and less educated, according to the survey.

### Unlocking Connections: The Challenge of Network Barriers

Finding the right people to help with advancing their social cause is the main networking obstacle for youth. This may be partly because older generations may fail to appreciate the importance of engaging with youth, consequently isolating them from larger political structures and restricting their opportunities to engage with society in meaningful ways, [as one study argues](#).<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere it has

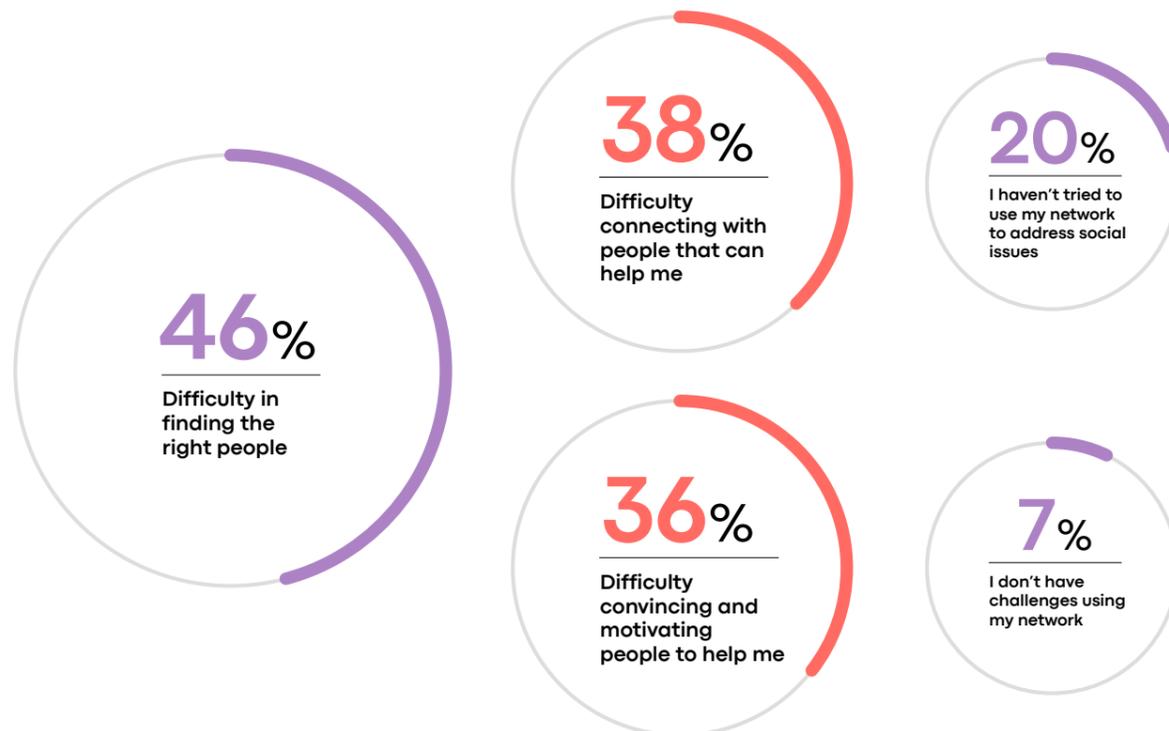
**“If I get any opportunity to share my networks with young entrepreneurs for funding, I usually share those with them.”**

Business leader, Nigeria



been suggested that young people may prefer to use their own youth networks and do not have enough information on, or connection to, other more formal adult-led networks.<sup>41</sup>

**CHART 3.21**  
**YOUTH'S BARRIERS TO BUILDING NETWORKS**



**A primary networking obstacle is finding the right people to help with advancing social causes.**



Finding the right people poses the biggest challenge (according to 46% of respondents), rather than subsequently connecting with people (38%) or after that, convincing them to help out (36%). If youth cannot find the right people, then whether or not they can connect with them or persuade them to help becomes irrelevant. This suggests that there are fundamental problems that need to be overcome at the most basic level: how should youth go about finding the right people? Overcoming this challenge will require comprehensive solutions involving both in-person and virtual approaches. A [2022 study](#) underscores the significance of young adults forming robust social networks by actively participating in community events, joining interest-based groups, and using social media platforms to connect with peers and mentors.<sup>42</sup>

When attempting to identify who faces the biggest barriers, youth in Africa (51%) see finding the right people as bigger than the other barriers. In terms of the top causes that youth care about, youth concerned about the environment are the only ones who say that it is easier to find people to help than it is to convince them to help (43% vs 45%). Those concerned about mental health say it is harder to find people, but much easier to convince them (47% vs 30%), as do those concerned about barriers to employment (50% vs 35%). This could be interpreted in two ways: it could be that at least the first stage of networking in the sustainability sector is more effective than in most other sectors, raising questions about what can be learned from their networking methods. But it could also be that once the initial barrier of finding people has been overcome, in other sectors youth find it easier to take networking to the next level.

**51% AFRICAN YOUTH**  
SEE FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE AS THE BIGGEST BARRIER

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**28% MIDDLE EASTERN YOUTH**  
DO NOT ENGAGE IN NETWORKING

**THE MOST EFFECTIVE NETWORKING TAKES PLACE AROUND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

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**43% FIND PEOPLE TO HELP WITH ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**





## CASE STUDY: NETWORKS AND INSTITUTIONS - UNLEASH

**Unleash** is a growing global community that attempts to bring together talented young changemakers focused on developing innovative solutions to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>43</sup>

Founded in 2016 in Copenhagen, Denmark, the non-profit organization has grown rapidly by mobilizing thousands of young people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds around the world to solve a wide range of social and environmental problems.

Unleash aims to amplify the efforts of its growing community as a network that brings together youth from more than 170 countries. The organization forms an incubator that provides mentoring and business support for young entrepreneurs to implement and scale up impactful solutions, and organizes capacity-building programs through hackathons. Unleash promotes community leadership through its Ambassador program by training youth representatives to make a positive local impact.

Every year, Unleash gathers together 1000 young people (many more apply to attend) in

a different location – including Shenzhen in China in 2019, and Karnataka in India in 2022 – to bring fresh perspectives and come up with disruptive ideas to design programs that can create a positive social impact. Last year, its Innovation Lab was held in Kigali, Rwanda, where youth came up with some 200 solutions aimed at addressing the planet's most pressing challenges, as well as piloting a partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to promote inclusivity by integrating 100 refugees.

The winning ideas included a solar drying project that buys surplus crops at peak season and then sells them in off-season to local and international buyers at a premium; a project based on using Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) code that helps people take action before developing symptoms or complications of diabetes; a program that tackles transportation challenges encountered by pregnant and post-natal women in remote areas of Zambia; and a project that provides education to rural women in Sudan so that they can sell products online and earn a sustainable salary.

Partners include a global fashion company that supports solutions for a circular future; an international development consulting firm; and one of the largest foundations in the world.

## Institutional Impact on Youth Efforts

Whether in the public, private or non-profit sector, institutions play a key role in amplifying young people's efforts to create a positive social impact. This section looks at the significant support that institutions can provide and the range of challenges that prevent them from doing so, such as youth's trust in institutions. We discuss areas where institutions can do more to help, already aware that funding is one of the most important.

### Governments and academic institutions

Although youth seek support from a range of institutions, with more than a third rating governments most highly in their ability to drive positive social impact compared to other institutions. This may seem logical, since governments command the biggest social budgets, and in many countries are the biggest employers. But it may also be surprising, given how differently youth and governments often see the world – especially those from racial minorities or lower income groups, as [a recent survey conducted in the US shows](#).<sup>44</sup>

Academic institutions are considered to be the next most effective institution, by 18% of respondents, perhaps because of their role in educating social changemakers, or their traditional role in promoting free speech, especially in Europe and some Latin American countries, although [this is in decline, as research shows](#).<sup>45</sup> However, international institutions, NGOs and the private sector are considered to be roughly just a third as impactful as governments (11–13%). Given the unlimited aspirations youth have towards resolving social challenges, youth believe institutions across the board have an obligation to provide more support – but they also plainly believe that international institutions, NGOs and the private sector can do more.

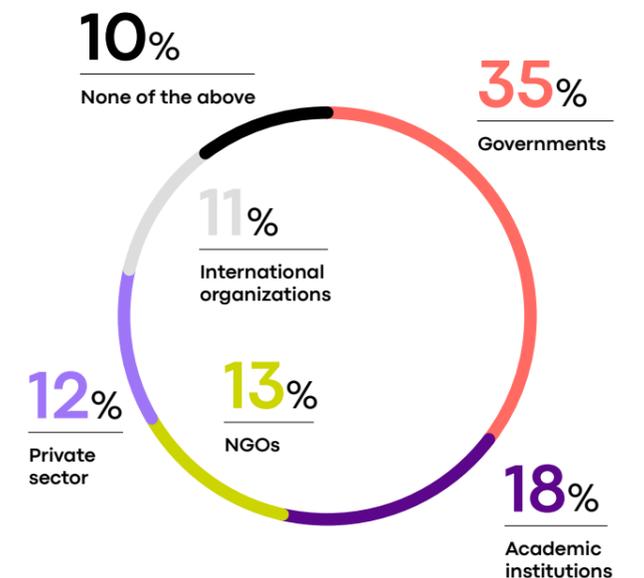
### Opinions on government effectiveness vary by country

Opinions on the effectiveness of governments in driving social change varied significantly from country to country. In the UK, 45% of youth say governments have the biggest impact on their social causes, followed by Brazil (43%), while just 22% feel this way in Japan. In general, there were no discernable similarities between governments

CHART 3.22

### INSTITUTIONS THAT SUPPORT SOCIAL CHANGE MOST, ACCORDING TO YOUTH

Governments and academic institutions are the primary institutions where youth seek support



that were rated better or worse, suggesting that positive social impact transcends geographical or political boundaries. Opinions on this issue are more likely to be influenced by policy effectiveness or wider cultural factors.

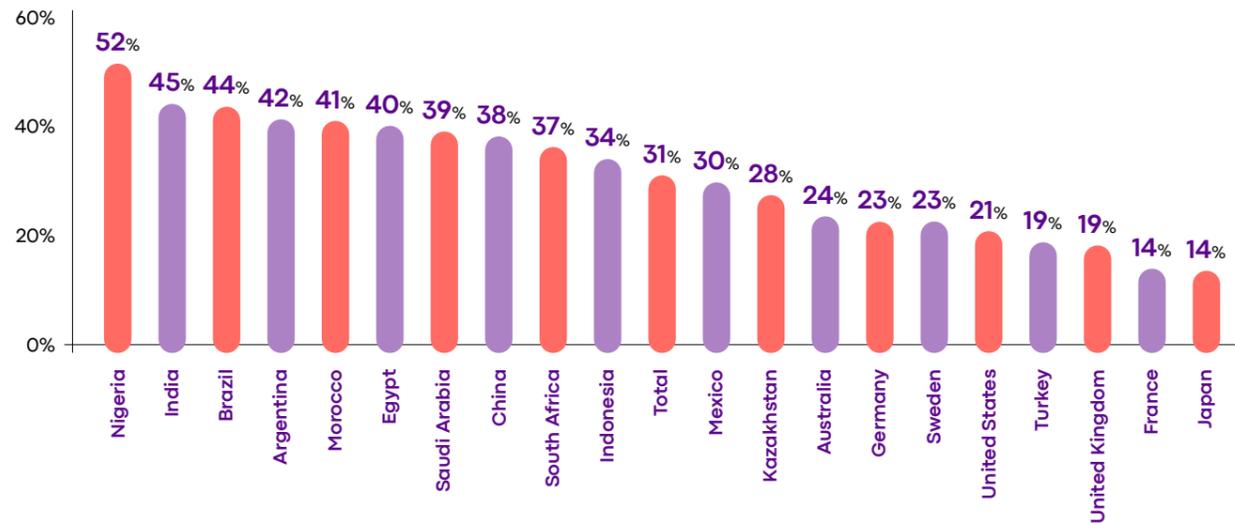
Governments have the strongest impact when addressing resource inequality and environmental issues, as well as removing barriers to education and employment. They were deemed least helpful with barriers to creative expression and technology-related challenges, issues which are perhaps often better attended by academia or the private sector.

Mostly, the more highly educated the respondent, the more they think governments can have an impact. Meanwhile, those with high incomes were 50% more likely to say NGOs and the private sector had the biggest impact, while they were 50% less likely to rate international organizations highly – this may be due to perceptions of their effectiveness caused by either direct or indirect experiences. There was mutual appreciation between those working in the public sector and NGOs, with each ranking the other more highly than all other groups. This points to an interesting synergy between the two sectors which could possibly be leveraged further, through greater cooperation.



**CHART 3.23**  
**TRUST IN GOVERNMENTS TO CREATE YOUTH-ORIENTED POLICIES, BY COUNTRY**

Nigerian youth report the most trust in government to create youth-oriented policies. Japan and France report the least trust

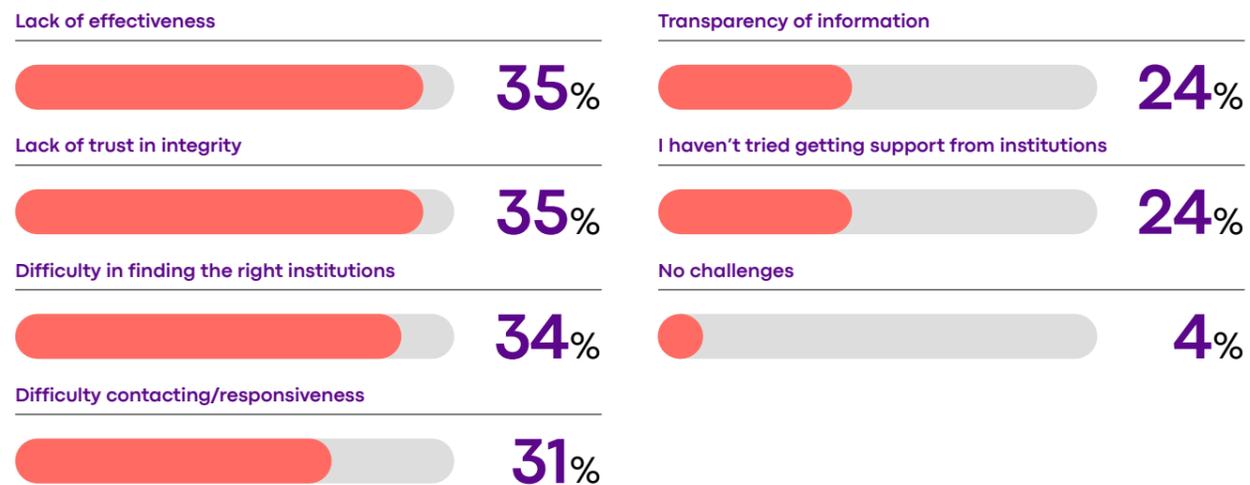


### Barriers to Institutional Support

Youth rate the challenges they face in getting support from institutions fairly equally. The lack

of effectiveness of institutions, their lack of trust in the integrity of institutions, and their difficulty in finding, contacting, and getting a response from the right institutions to help them, were each highlighted as concerns by roughly a third of respondents.

**CHART 3.24**  
**YOUTH CHALLENGES IN GETTING SUPPORT FROM INSTITUTIONS**



Interestingly, the results show that the more that institutional support is sought, the greater the concerns are about institutional effectiveness. So, the more that youth engage with institutions, the more they are aware of their flaws (it is not that lack of engagement is explained by concerns about a lack of effectiveness). This relationship is clearest when comparing individual countries: to take an extreme example, in China, where almost all (97%) respondents have sought institutional support, half are concerned by the lack of effectiveness of institutions; in Japan, where just over half (53%) have sought institutional support, far fewer (17%) are bothered about institutional effectiveness. As a result, depending on the country, there is often potential for institutions to extend more support to youth – the challenge will be to identify those who are most motivated and have the strongest sense of duty to their cause.

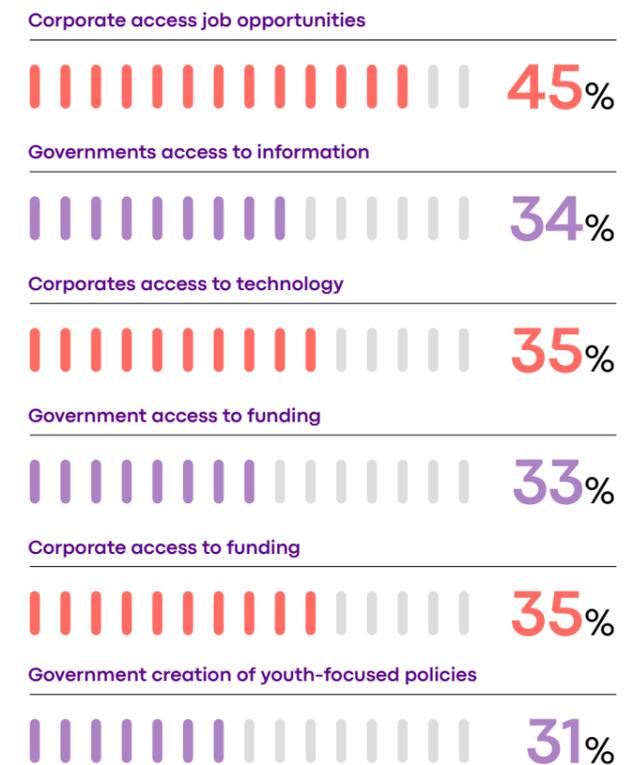
### Trust in Governments vs Corporations

Without trust in institutions, youth are less likely to seek their support; trust is a cornerstone of a well-functioning institutional framework. Greater trust will help youth to channel the support that institutions are willing and able to provide to the maximum extent.

While a lack of trust in institutions did not stand out in comparison to other barriers, there are

**CHART 3.25**  
**TRUST LEVELS IN CORPORATES AND GOVERNMENTS FOR LOWERING ACCESS BARRIERS**

Youth trust corporates and government to be effective in different domains



significant differences between youth's trust in governments compared to corporations. They trust governments most to lower barriers to access to information and funding, and the creation of youth-focused policies in the context for driving social impact. Meanwhile, they trust corporate leaders most to lower barriers to access to jobs and technology. In general, [research by Edelman](#) shows that businesses are significantly more trusted than governments in most countries.<sup>46</sup> [According to an OECD poll](#), less than half of young people expressed confidence in their national government in OECD countries in 2019.<sup>47</sup> But there are even more striking differences in perceptions of trust between youth and leaders.

### A trust disconnect in leader and youth opinions

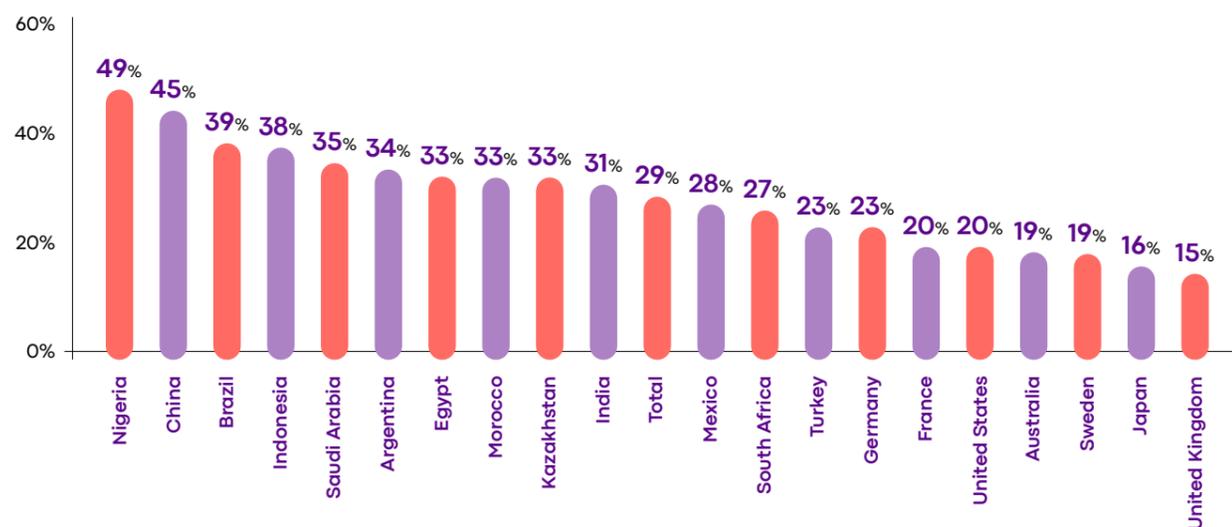
Similar to other findings from this study, leaders are excessively optimistic about how much they are trusted by youth. This highlights a disconnect between the two groups, and the need for dialogue between them, which this report aims to stimulate. As already noted, about a third of young people say that trust in the integrity of



institutions is an issue; but almost all leaders (99%) believe that young people trust both leaders and their sectors more broadly to enable them to create social change. Showcasing this gap, only 29% of youth say they trust leaders to lower barriers to capacity building (the outliers were Indonesia, at 52%, and Japan, at 8%), while as many as half of leaders say they build youth capacity to do this (72% in the US vs 24% in Turkey).

**CHART 3.26**  
**YOUTH TRUST IN CORPORATE LEADERS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING IN SELECTED COUNTRIES**

Whilst 99% of leaders in all countries believe in they build youth capacity, trust in this varies widely in countries



[Research suggests](#) that the discrepancy between leaders' perceptions of trust and support and the actual experiences of youth can be attributed to differences in perception, communication gaps, evaluation challenges, and the complex nature of trust and support in youth-leader relationships.<sup>48</sup> [Elsewhere, it is argued](#) that cultural differences, including language barriers and social norms, as well as generational differences in values and communication styles, can widen the communication gap.<sup>49</sup> This can result in youth feeling misunderstood or disregarded by leaders who may not be aware of or sensitive to these differences.

### Building Blocks of Youth Support: The Role of Institutions

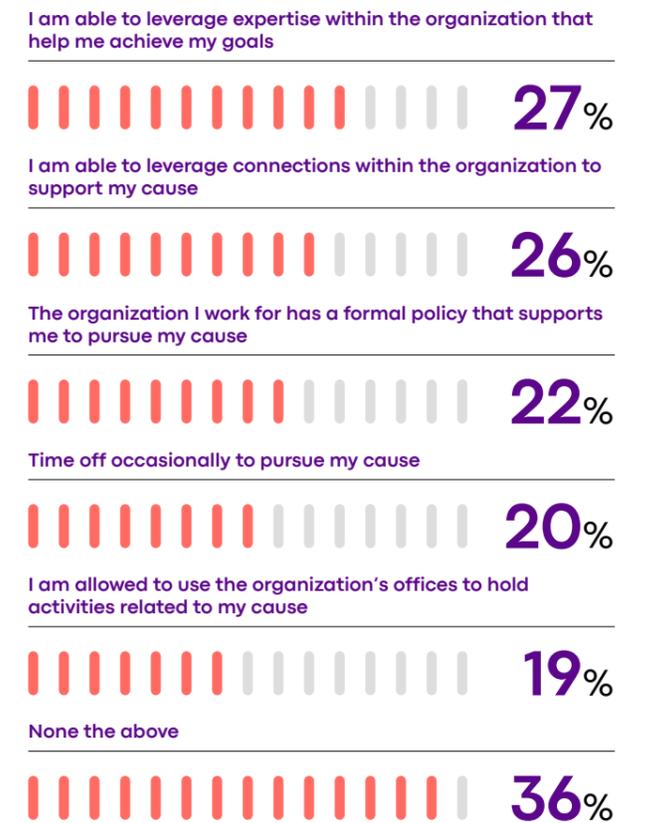
Institutional support can come in many shapes and sizes. For example, access to an organization's expertise or connections, having formal policies supporting a cause, and allowing time off or the use of office space to support it. When barriers are overcome and organizations succeed in supporting their young employees in driving social change, their initiatives are far more likely to have a greater impact. Almost two-thirds of youth reported that their employer provided one of several types of support for their social causes – mostly access to an organization's expertise or connections. As a rule, the higher the income earned, the more support is received – or the more valued an employee is, the more likely an employer is to invest in their social impact initiatives. While it may be that employers are more willing to invest in employees they consider to be more skilled or competent (explaining their higher pay), it could also be that the higher pay is a reflection of the greater financial resources of the organization in question, and therefore the greater their ability to invest in social change projects.

### Leaders report more support than youth say they receive

However, when leaders were asked the same questions, they said they provided almost three times more support than youth suggest. For example, where 27% of youth say they are able to leverage expertise within their organization to achieve their goals, 73% of leaders say their organization provides support in this way; and where 26% of youth

**CHART 3.27**  
**HOW YOUTH ACCESS SUPPORT IN THEIR ORGANIZATIONS**

Youth find institutional support in a variety of ways



say they are able to leverage connections within their organization to achieve their goals, 70% of leaders say their organization provides support in this way.

Once again, we see the disconnect between youth and leaders, which must be addressed. Youth today make career decisions based on their values and want their organizations to empower them to drive change, [according to research by Deloitte](#).<sup>50</sup> About a third say they have turned down employers that do not align with their values, while slightly more have rejected assignments due to ethical concerns.

One leader from Egypt reflects the optimism seen in leaders: *"The resources we have provided are very beneficial to [youth] as they expand their knowledge and networks, which leads them to create a greater positive impact on the community."*



**27%** YOUTH SAY THEY LEVERAGE EXPERTISE IN THEIR ORGANIZATION

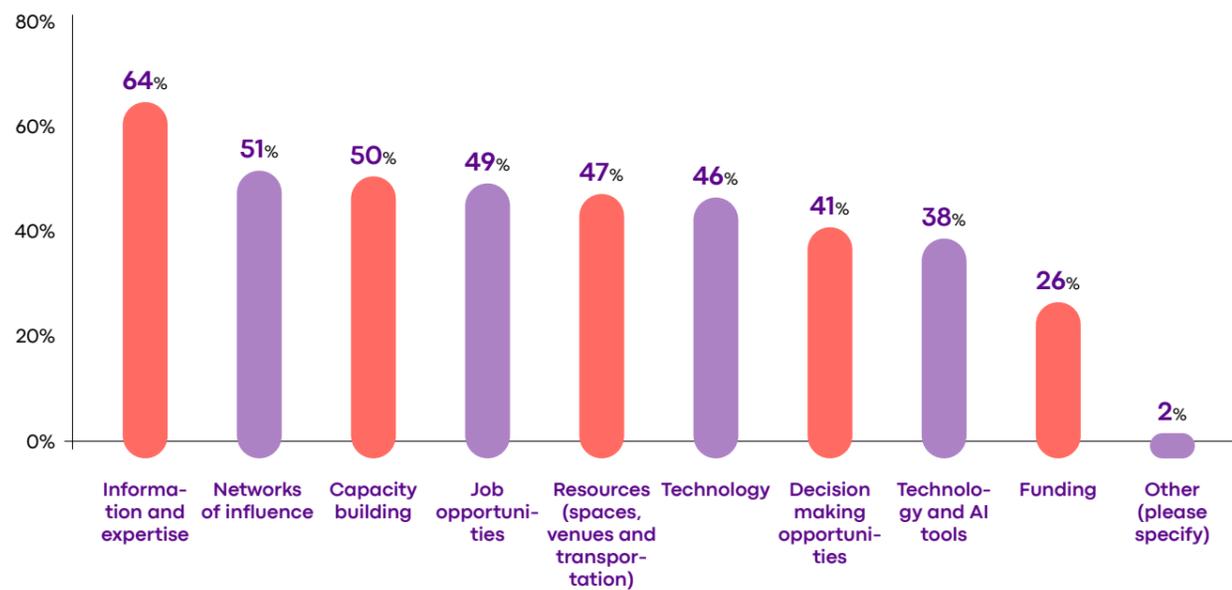
**BUT**

**73%** OF LEADERS SAY THEY SUPPORT WITH EXPERTISE

*“The resources we have provided are very beneficial to [youth] as they expand their knowledge and networks, which leads them to create a greater positive impact on the community.”*

Egyptian business leader

**CHART 3.28**  
**HOW LEADERS PROVIDE SUPPORT TO YOUTH**



Although nearly two-thirds of youth did report that their employer provided some kind of support overall, that still leaves just over a third who say their organization is doing little or nothing to support them in advocating for social change. In certain countries, youth receive remarkably little support from their employers. In Japan, 60% of youth say their organization doesn't support them; in France, it's 57%. At the other end of the scale is China, where only 5% say they don't receive support – possibly a reflection of the

powerful economic growth that China has seen in recent decades.

Overall, there is a clear positive relationship between institutional support and youth's confidence in their ability to drive change: those who receive support are about twice as likely to believe they have a high ability to achieve positive outcomes in their social change initiatives; those who do not receive support are twice as likely to believe that they have a low ability.

When their employers do empower them to enact social change, they do so mostly in more passive ways, for example, by sharing information and expertise (64%). Somewhat fewer leaders – roughly half – feel that they enable youth in more active ways by providing capacity building (especially NGOs) and access to jobs (mostly in the private sector). But little more than a quarter say that they go as far as providing funding, while twice as many NGOs (50%) do this, compared to just 18% of public sector leaders.

The vast majority of leaders (95%) rate the impact of their organization's support of young change-makers positively (most of all in Nigeria and Egypt), yet again reflecting a degree of optimism in leaders that is not apparent to the same extent among youth.

A leader from India summed up the importance of institutions for their young employees, since they represent *“the only environment you join after your home once you start working, so if that environment is supportive... automatically you will function towards social and personal growth and social engagements. That can only happen once you have a conducive environment, so the company environment is highly important as it helps in your growth.”*

**How Leaders Provide Support in a Personal Capacity**

It is helpful to distinguish between the support provided by organizations, and the leaders that run them. Leaders can provide support to youth not only as part of larger organizations, but also on a more personal level. Once again, leaders are extremely optimistic about how effective their personal contributions are: almost all of them (99%) believe they make a significant difference, with just over half (51%) believing they make a “big” difference – in this group, leaders in governments are significantly more confident in their support towards youth than NGO leaders (62% vs 36%), while women were more optimistic than men (62% vs 48%).

The most popular methods that leaders choose to provide support are in the most obvious ways: guiding young people on their initiatives, and encouraging their network to support them – about a quarter say they do this. Somewhat fewer (about a fifth) go further, and use their leverage

**PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WHO REPORT LOW EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

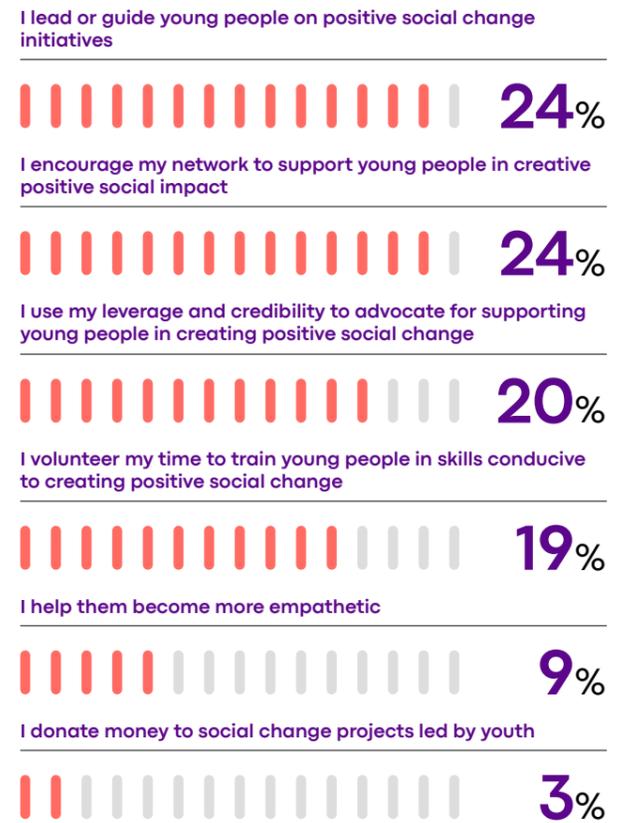
**60%** JAPAN

**57%** FRANCE

**5%** CHINA

**CHART 3.29**  
**PERSONAL SUPPORT FROM LEADERS FOR YOUTH**

Guidance, network support and advocacy are the most often reported forms of personal support



and credibility to advocate for supporting young people, or volunteer their time to train young people in the appropriate skills. But very few (3%) actually donate money to youth-led social change projects.

Beyond the specific methods they choose, leaders say their support enhances youth's ability to create positive social impact mostly in three ways: mentoring or networking (33%), skills development (31%), and opening up more opportunities (27%).

One private sector leader from Kazakhstan commented on mentoring: *"I dedicate myself to giving them my experience and time and teaching them to be a better version of themselves."* Another private sector leader from Egypt said: *"Sometimes, they lack proper guidance or a leader, and I help them by showing them the right path and practices to do better in these situations."*

On skills development, one private sector UK leader said they *"assist young people in developing strong techniques for monitoring the impact of their initiatives, such as identifying key performance indicators and evaluating data to determine the efficacy of social change programs."*

Others see creating opportunities as valuable, as another leader from the NGO sector in Nigeria explained: *"Giving young people meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making and giving them access to a variety of resources to further engage them in informative activities can help them develop positive social changes."*

Although relatively few leaders highlighted emotional support (just 13%), some do provide it. As a private sector leader from Turkey said: *"We provide access to counseling, support groups and resources to help them cope with challenges, build resilience and maintain their overall well-being, so they gain a wealth of knowledge they can share with others to create social change."*



**"I dedicate myself to giving them my experience and time and teaching them to be a better version of themselves."**

**Business leader from Kazakhstan**

## D. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

# How Youth Harness AI

The fast arrival of AI has made it essential to consider it as an enabler towards positive social impact. Low AI literacy skills mean that its benefits are still under-exploited, and there is much that both youth and leaders can do to harness its potential more effectively – for example in expanding skills and networks. This section looks at issues including the use of AI to drive social change, which countries are in the lead, and trust in governments to improve access to AI tools.

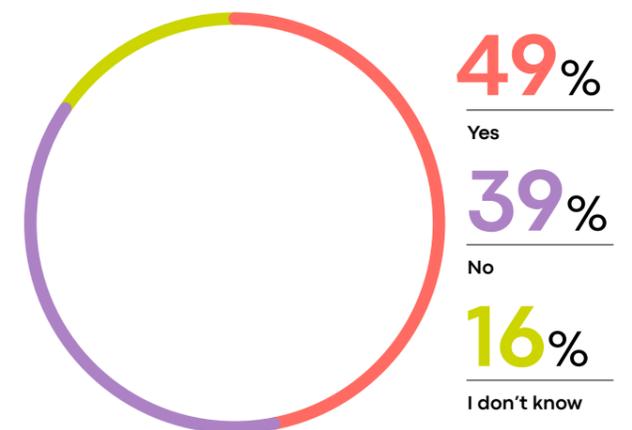
### Adoption of AI To Promote Social Change

Despite youth's reliance on technology for driving positive social impact, just 35% of youth use AI to promote this, while almost half don't at all. This corresponds with the low ranking of technology literacy in the skills that youth identified as most applicable to them. It also contrasts with broader use of AI among youth, with a [recent UN survey](#) reporting that 80% of youth (aged 10–24) say they interact with AI multiple times a day, while 93% have a positive perception of AI.<sup>51</sup>

Those more likely to use AI tend to be male (40% vs 33% female); they are also more likely to have a better education and a higher income, and be exposed to social change in their childhood. 40% of respondents with university degrees use AI, compared to 29% of those who went to high school; 44% with a high income use AI, compared to 29% with a low income. Youth with high confidence in their ability to drive change are almost three times more likely to use AI than those with low confidence (44% vs 16%), and they are much more likely to use AI if technology-related challenges are their chosen cause (60%) compared to all other youth. Evidently, there are opportunities to boost awareness, capacity and access to AI for those groups that are under-represented.

**CHART 3.30**  
**LEVERAGING AI FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

Whilst AI is in wide use generally, its use to promote social change has not yet been widely adopted



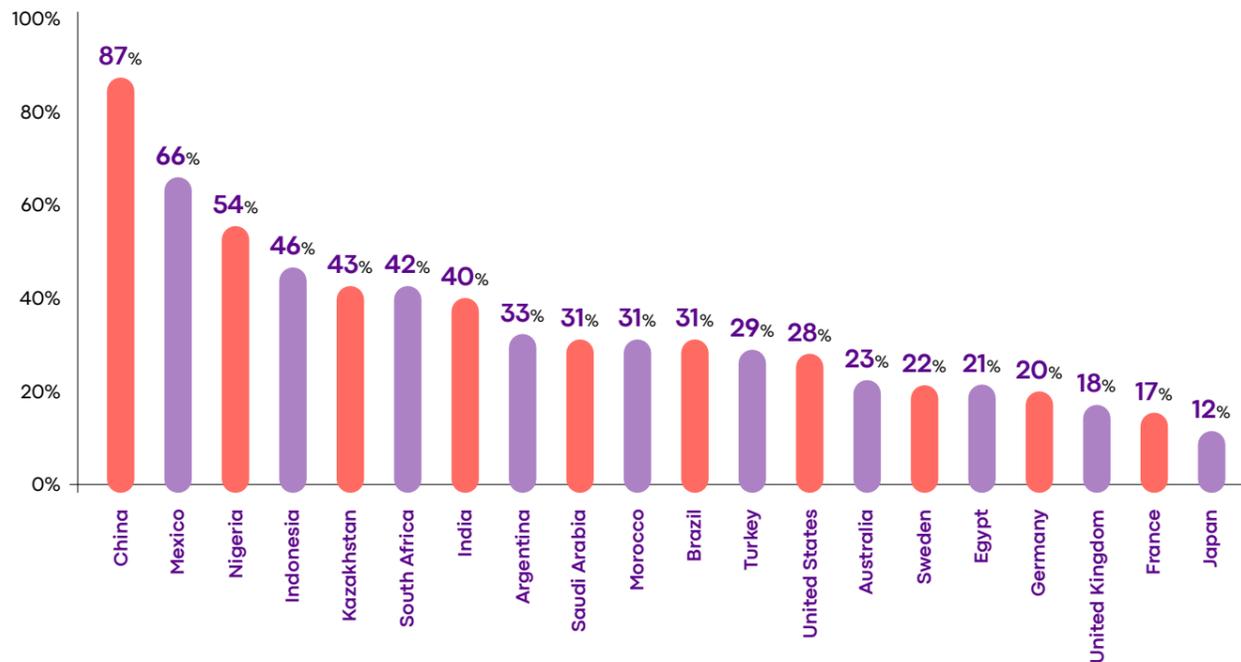
### Where is use of AI to drive social change highest?

The use of AI is most prevalent in Asia: 47% of Asians (and 44% of Latin Americans) use AI to drive social change, compared to just 21% of Europeans and 25% of North Americans. Nationally, 87% in China and 66% in Mexico use AI, compared to just 12% in Japan, 17% in France, and 18% in the UK.



**CHART 3.31**  
**AI USE: COUNTRY DIFFERENCES**

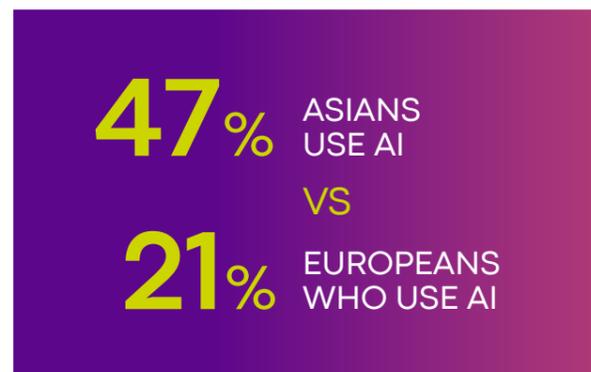
Asia and Latin America use AI more than other regions



China's apparent leadership in AI – certainly where usage among youth involved in social impact is concerned – can be explained by a big push by the country to invest in AI. **According to IBM's Global AI Adoption Index**, China is in the lead globally in AI adoption (together with other Asian economies, notably India and Singapore), with 58% of Chinese companies deploying AI, compared to a global average of 38%.<sup>52</sup>

Most European countries surveyed, including the UK (25%) and France (31%), were below the global average – as was the US, at 25%. The weakness of European countries is due to competitive disadvantages and an inability to match the amount of money, data, and computational resources it requires to develop these systems that countries like China are able to provide, **according to the Future of Life Institute**.<sup>53</sup> Stronger data protection regulation in Europe is also considered a contributor to slower growth of its AI sector.

While Japan was not included in the IBM index, the country is ranked 32nd out of 64 countries in the



**IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking**.<sup>54</sup> This is due to a combination of factors, including relatively low investment in research and a shortage of software engineers and large-scale supercomputers in the private sector. Japan also has a conservative approach to AI adoption due to ethical and social concerns.

**AI's potential for boosting skills and networks**

When it comes to strengthening skills or growing networks, the extent to which youth use AI to gain access to relevant and instantaneous information (in terms of skills) or to generate network recommendations (in terms of networks) is very similar, and also very low compared to their preferred methods. In terms of growing networks specifically, which most (42%) youth choose to do by finding and connecting with people online, only 17% use AI, which helps to make better and faster decisions, and can allow processes to be automated.

It is noteworthy that 25% of youth from Asia adopt this strategy, almost three times as many as the 9% from Europe. Once again, Chinese youth are a striking exception here, with 57% of them saying they do this, more than twice as many as any other country in the world. Indonesia (26%), Mexico (26%) and Nigeria (23%) follow, but almost all other countries are at or below the 17% average. As elsewhere, the higher the level of education and income, the more likely youth are to leverage AI for

strengthening networks and skills; they are also significantly more likely to do so if they are male.

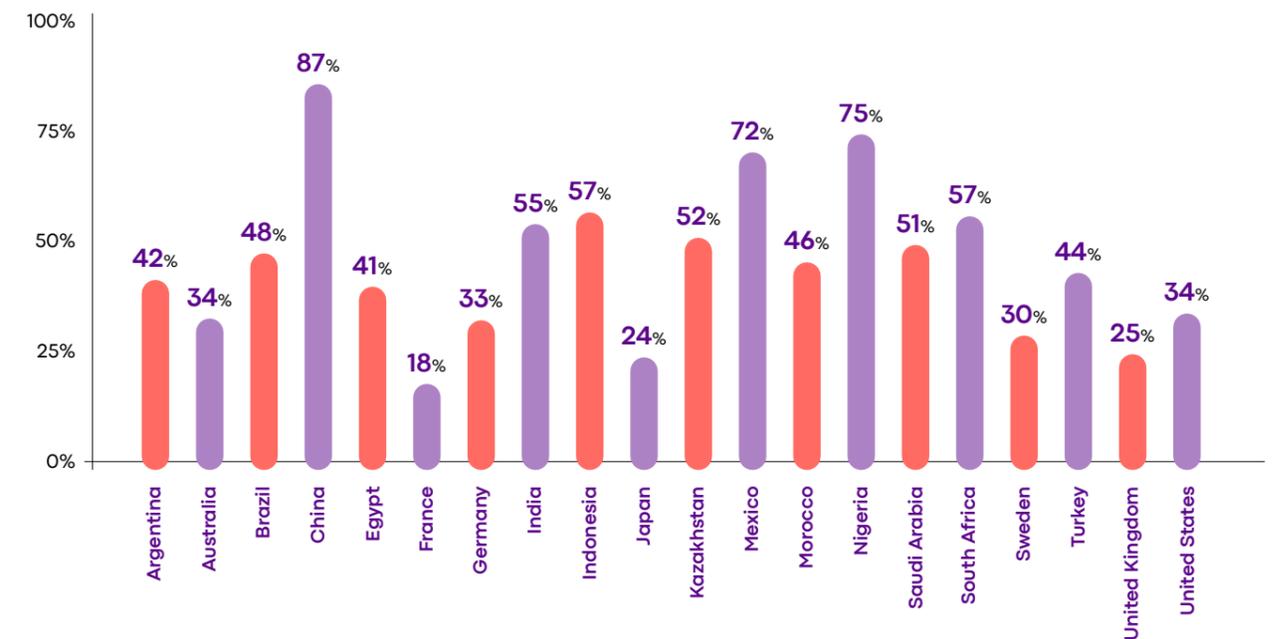
**Youth turning to AI for social impact**

On the bright side, more youth plan to use AI in the future to address their cause. The proportion rises from just over a third using it today to almost half (47%), however 29% still say that they have no plans to, while almost a quarter of participants don't know – possibly reflecting low AI literacy, although it is also unsurprising that uncertainty is higher regarding the future. As usual, China stands out, with 87% of Chinese youth saying they will use AI in the future; Nigeria (75%) and Mexico (72%) too. And again, many European countries are behind – especially France at the bottom at just 18%.

Not all youth using AI today say that they will use it in the future. Of those who are using AI today, 7% of them say they have no plans to use AI in the future. This may be connected with a lack of trust in AI.

**CHART 3.32**  
**YOUTH EXPECTATIONS OF FUTURE AI USE, BY COUNTRY**

More youth plan to use AI in the future to address their cause



## Navigating Trust: Governments and AI Access

Governments are moving to shape AI policies to foster innovation while safeguarding human rights and well-being. The EU's AI Act is a big step in this direction, emphasizing ethics and regulation. The fact that government policies regarding AI are still being shaped may help to explain why, of all the ways that global youth trust governments to lower barriers, they trust them least to do so in the nascent field of AI.

Just 16% of youth trust governments to improve access to AI tools – much less than most other areas, with youth trusting governments to improve access to information and funding more than twice as much.

However, trust was much higher in China (40%) and Nigeria (29%), while it was lowest in some of the most developed countries: Japan (7%), the UK (8%), Sweden (9%), France (10%), Germany (11%),

and Australia (12%), possibly a reflection of the tighter regulation in Europe. Trust was three times higher in those with PhDs (30%) than those with only a primary school education (10%), and slightly higher in those with higher incomes, and those who had been exposed to role models.

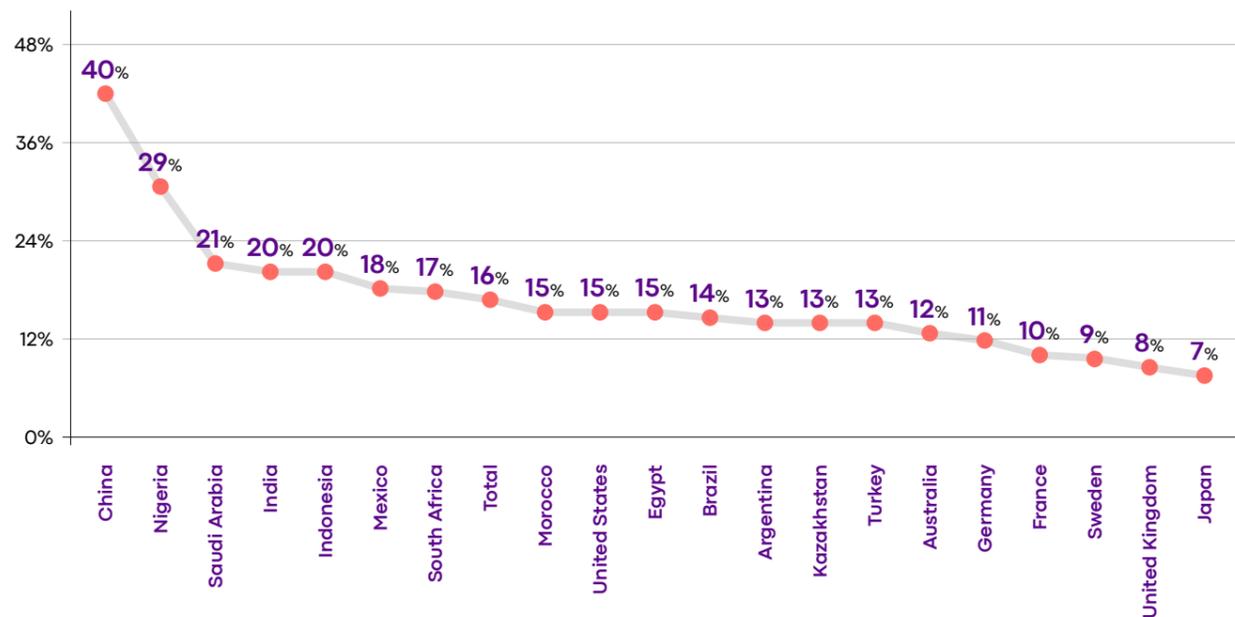
Trust in governments regarding AI was also much higher in those youth concerned about technology-related challenges. Given that those concerned about technology are more likely to have specialist knowledge about AI, their optimism may be well placed.

It is worth noting that when separating the responses of just Chinese respondents (who show a far higher usage of AI than the global average) by their adopted causes, the optimism about governments and AI of those concerned by technology-related challenges does not stand out as clearly as it does globally. Perhaps optimism in China is not just generated by a specialist knowledge of the sector, but an inherent confidence among most Chinese in their government's commitment to AI.

CHART 3.33

### YOUTH TRUST IN GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO AI TOOLS, BY COUNTRY

Trust in governments to access AI tools is highest in China and lowest in Japan and the UK



## CASE STUDY: YOUTH FUTURE LAB

**Youth Future Lab** (YFLab), an organization committed to empowering Kenya's youth through cutting-edge technology, is tapping into the growing potential of AI, which it believes can be a gamechanger for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>55</sup>

By supporting youth in the Mathare and Kibera communities, poor neighborhoods in the capital city of Nairobi held back by limited access to quality education and jobs, YFLab aims to harness Kenya's rapid growth in internet connectivity and smartphone adoption, with over 85% of its population now able to access the internet.

Since 2018, YFLab has been supporting youth by equipping them with the skills, voice, connections, and resources they need to bring about positive change in their local communities. It is now encouraging youth to venture into the realm of AI, offering mentorship programs, training workshops, and access to AI resources in order to bridge the gap between the potential of AI and its practical application in various sectors, including agriculture, healthcare, finance, and education.

AI-powered tools allow Kenyan youth to address pressing challenges and bring about transformative solutions, such as enhancing crop yield, improving diagnosis accuracy, facilitating access to financial services, and personalizing educational experiences.

YFLab believes this convergence of technology and human ingenuity promises a future where young individuals from Kenya's marginalized communities can overcome obstacles and thrive. As new job opportunities emerge, YFLab is harnessing the demand for AI specialists and data scientists to make it possible for youth to secure quality employment and exit poverty.

One beneficiary of YFLab's work is Sarah Wanjiku. A young coder from Mathare, she honed her programming skills through AI-focused courses and mentorship provided by YFLab. She then developed an AI-powered chatbot that helps farmers in rural areas access crucial information on weather patterns, crop management, and market prices, demonstrating the potential of AI to address real-world challenges and empower communities.

Another is Francis Otieno, a young entrepreneur from Kibera. He tapped into the power of AI to revolutionize healthcare access, bringing affordable and reliable healthcare to underserved communities. With AI-driven algorithms, he developed a mobile application that uses image recognition technology to diagnose common ailments and provide relevant treatment suggestions.

By working with local partners including youth groups, educational institutions, religious groups, and local and national governments, YFLab reaches local communities by establishing local and regional centers to localize service provision.



## How Leaders Help Youth Harness AI

There is much more scope for leaders to increase their use of AI, as well as youth. When enabling young people to create positive social impact by providing them access to a range of different tools, the only area to which they provide less access than AI is funding, at 26%. Some 38% say they provide access to AI tools, but that is still less than all other areas, with information and expertise the highest.

Reflecting the lower interest in technology in young women, fewer female leaders provide access to AI; and almost twice as many leaders in the private sector (40%) do so than in NGOs (22%). Intriguingly, Chinese leaders score slightly below average (36%), while the leaders from India (60%) provide the most access, followed by leaders in Australia, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia (all 56%). Those that scored lowest (all at 24%) were Argentina, Brazil, Japan and Kazakhstan.

### Leaders on AI's potential benefits and pitfalls

The leaders surveyed gave a wide variety of opinions with regard to the role that AI can play in helping young people create positive social impact by boosting their productivity and efficiency, optimizing the allocation of limited resources, and automating repetitive tasks to free up time for youth to focus on more strategic areas where they can have a more beneficial impact.

**“ AI has the potential to be a game changer by assisting young people in recognizing and analyzing societal concerns, coming up with creative solutions and reaching larger audiences through targeted content and communication tactics.”**

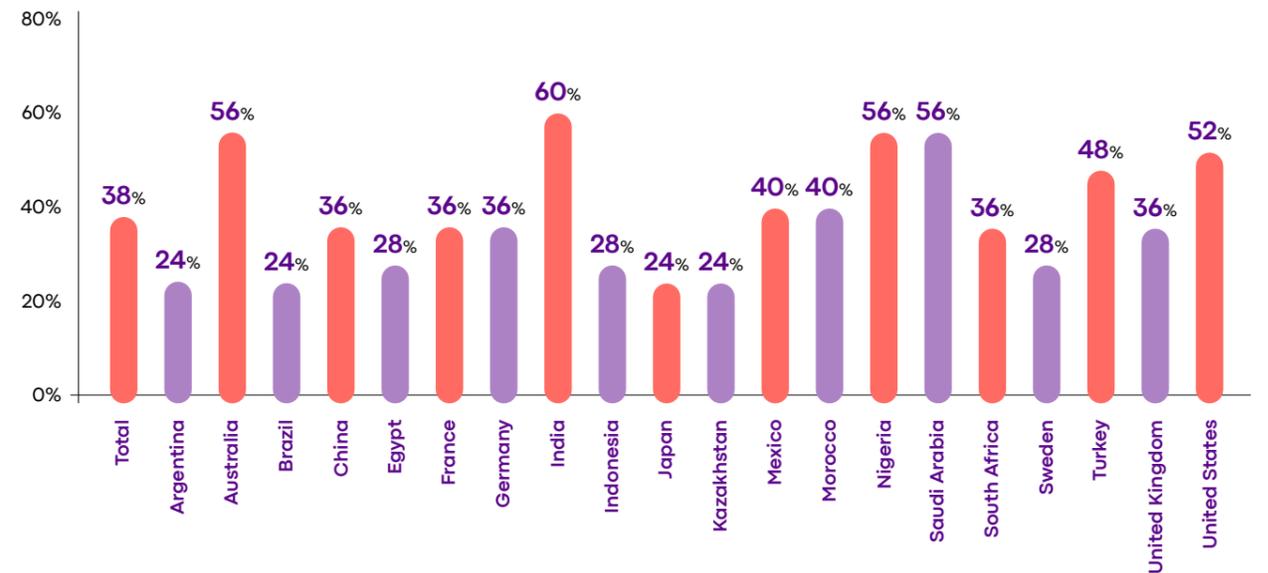
**Business leader from India**



In general, most leaders highlighted the advantages of AI, such as learning platforms that can enable youth to increase knowledge, understanding and skills that relate to social initiatives, while helping to raise awareness about social issues not only among youth but also beyond. AI-driven awareness campaigns, educational AI apps and chatbots for assistance were all mentioned as positive uses of AI.

**CHART 3.34**  
**LEADERS PROVIDING ACCESS TO AI BY COUNTRY**

Leaders in India report providing the most access to AI. Lowest reported provision of access is in Japan and Kazakhstan



Leaders recognize AI as a powerful tool for social innovation and entrepreneurship that enables young people to identify pressing social issues, analyze vast amounts of data and provide them with fast, accurate, and reliable information on social concerns. This can generate significant insights that will influence evidence-based decisions and the formation of innovative strategies and solutions for achieving positive change.

*“AI has the potential to be a game changer by assisting young people in recognizing and analyzing societal concerns, coming up with creative solutions, and reaching larger audiences through targeted content and communication tactics,”* said one leader from India. *“Through the use of AI-powered data analysis, youth can better understand the needs of their beneficiaries and communities by identifying opportunities for outreach and innovation which will ultimately improve decision-making,”* said another from India.

The fact that AI can be tailored to solve particular societal issues and create AI-driven solutions that address the particular requirements and difficulties of each community is particularly valued by leaders. *“AI is capable of analyzing socioeconomic data to pinpoint problem regions and create fo-*

*cusd solutions to reduce poverty,”* said one leader from Australia.

Leaders also highlight AI's ability to forecast future social issues and trends, allowing youth to address emerging challenges more proactively and allocate resources more effectively: *“Based on historical data, AI models can forecast future patterns and outcomes and young people can use these projections to anticipate social concerns and handle prospective challenges head on,”* said one leader from Australia.

### AI as a bridge for youth collaboration

AI also has the potential to connect more youth, by improving cross-platform connectivity, simplifying data sharing, and strengthening people's ability to connect and collaborate across various channels. *“AI-powered platforms have the potential to link up young activists with global groups and individuals who share their values, promoting cooperation and information exchange for greater social good,”* said one leader from the UK. *“AI-powered platforms and social media algorithms can assist like-minded young activists and organizations, making it easier for young people to collaborate*



and mobilize for social change," said another from the UK. AI-powered language translation technologies can also help young people connect with one another across cultural gaps by breaking down language barriers.

"There are many other aspects of AI that can be harnessed for the greater good. In order to protect customers and financial institutions, young enthusiasts can create AI solutions for fraud detection, risk management, and identity verification," observed one leader. Another from the US pointed out that "young people may ensure that AI technologies respect people's rights and privacy by advocating for the development of AI with strong ethical and data privacy considerations."

Others highlighted how AI should be leveraged in areas like mental health, inclusivity and human rights, by tracking abuses of human rights and supplying proof for advocacy campaigns.

The environment was another particular area of interest for several leaders: "AI-driven solutions can be used by youth to monitor climate change, preserve natural resources and safeguard ecosystems which will support environmental sustainability," said one from the US. Another from the UK pointed out that AI can be used "to control energy storage, forecast the generation of renewable energy, and enhance grid stability, which will speed up the switch to clean energy."

Similarly, "its capacity to evaluate large datasets improves reaction, recovery, and preparedness for disasters, highlighting its powerful but little-known role in reducing environmental concerns," according to an Australian leader. It can also be used to solve urban challenges and build smart, more sustainable cities, according to another Australian leader. "By optimizing public areas and dynamically managing traffic patterns, artificial intelligence algorithms in urban planning successfully mitigate noise pollution."

### AI's double-edged sword

However, several leaders cautioned against the dangers of AI. While it can help to validate or in-

**"AI is capable of analyzing socioeconomic data to pinpoint problem regions and create focused solutions to reduce poverty."**

**Business leader  
from Australia**



validate some of youth's ideas more quickly, there is also a risk that AI can provide false information. "It's not mature enough to be relied upon," warned one leader from the US.

Another US leader suggested that access to AI should be given "only to some extent" and that it should be regulated more, to prevent its use in hacking, for example. While full access to AI should be given in areas like education, or increasing productivity in manufacturing, "youth should be well trained before giving them full access," according to an Australian leader.

Other leaders were more pessimistic with one from India, arguing that AI could even "degrade and hamper" youth opportunities in the future rather than increasing them, as they become increasingly dependent on AI and lose skills that were normal for previous generations.

"Entrepreneurs might unintentionally contribute to a society in which people become less capable of doing important tasks without the assistance of AI, which could have an adverse effect on creativity and problem-solving skills," said one leader from Indonesia.



## CASE STUDY: MIDDLE EAST AI ADOPTION

Students in the Middle East are setting a global example with their rapid adoption of AI in the fast-evolving field of higher education, opening up new avenues for youth to boost their potential for creating positive social impact.

A [recent study by Anthology](#), which provides EdTech solutions to more than 150 million users in 80 countries, shows that students in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are among the most enthusiastic users of AI, according to the survey carried out in 11 countries around the world.<sup>56</sup> Almost a third of students in both countries use AI at least weekly, which is over three times more than students in the UK and the US.

AI is poised to revolutionize EdTech by fostering personalized learning experiences through AI-powered virtual tutors and supporting idea generation. This will enhance student engagement, improve teaching practices and create dynamic and interactive content, also creating more equitable educational opportunities that can help to close the skills gap and bridge the digital divide through targeted interventions.

Middle Eastern students clearly recognize and accept AI's revolutionary potential for the world of EdTech, and in general are much more op-

timistic than their peers elsewhere: 56% of students in the UAE and 49% of students in Saudi Arabia believe AI will revolutionize teaching and learning methods (contrasting with their more cautious peers in the UK and the US, at 30% and 38%, respectively).

Students in Saudi Arabia are particularly keen, with 49% reporting they will use significantly more generative AI tools in the next six months – more than any other country surveyed except Brazil. Students in Saudi Arabia are also well ahead of other countries when it comes to chatbots: 47% are very comfortable with using them to get quick answers to questions, compared to just 13% in the UK.

It should be noted that despite their overall enthusiasm, more than a quarter of students in both Middle Eastern countries believe AI is unethical and should not be allowed in higher education due to the risk of cheating and plagiarism – more than the global average.

Although university leaders have been slower to incorporate AI than students – as might be expected – Saudi Arabia in particular has been busy preparing for the onset of AI, and was the most advanced country in developing and rolling out university-wide policies for generative AI writing tools like ChatGPT, with 77% of university leaders surveyed there doing so (the UAE was close behind, at 69%).



## 4

## Taking Action



# Catalysts for Youth-Led Positive Social Impact

## Empowerment in Action: Practical Steps for Changemakers

The following recommendations mark a clear way forward through concrete actions for **youth and leaders** striving to create positive social impact. Each one is based on specific findings generated by the survey, with recommendations addressing all of the major areas covered in the report, from motivations, skills and mindsets, to networks, institutions and technology. Individually, these recommendations are intended to be realistic, and are linked to real-world examples. However, if they are all implemented simultaneously, the impact could be profound.

### Empowering Youth Action

AI also has the potential to connect more youth by improving cross-platform connectivity, simplifying data sharing, and strengthening people's ability to connect.

- 1. Find a cause that affects you personally.** A personal or community connection to a cause leads to stronger engagement, which helps to cultivate a greater sense of purpose, motivation and hope. This in turn drives more positive and impactful actions, the survey shows. Whether the chosen cause affects youth personally, or their community, it is important to learn and understand more about them by speaking to those affected, visiting impacted places and contacting relevant organizations. By generating more online content about their causes, youth can create peer-to-peer learning and action opportunities, for example, which can help other youth that struggle to find out about their cause.
- 2. Adopt more active ways of driving change.** While more passive methods, such as signing online petitions, are popular, focusing on more

committed actions such as organizing and participating in youth-led campaigns, or collaborating with like-minded organizations and individuals can have a greater impact. Given that youth identify online communities as powerful network enablers, they can use their voice to raise awareness by harnessing social media and digital platforms to mobilize other youth towards their causes and crowdsource solutions. They can also make the case for social support for youth-led initiatives, lobby for policy changes, and advocate for solutions.

- 3. Develop broader networks both in-person and online.** While an alarming proportion of youth do not tap into this resource at all, given that youth continue to rely on family and friends it is possible that using a wider range of sources of support could help to achieve deeper change. It can be highly rewarding for young people to participate in youth forums (for example, see Case Study on Unleash on [page 46](#)) and engage in discussions with policymakers. In particular, they can look for more support in expanding their networks at cause-specific organizations. The survey clearly shows they are underexploited by youth, despite their value because of their ability to provide more focused assistance. However, academic, professional and community circles also have ample scope to provide more support.
- 4. Seek role models and mentors that inspire action.** Given that networks are underused by youth, there is an opportunity for youth to leverage them to locate and adopt role models who address their chosen cause. This yields multiple and diverse benefits, from becoming more active in addressing social causes, to increasing confidence and giving a greater sense of duty. Role models for social impact include both people seen on a regular basis (such as family members, teachers, or community leaders who inspire social action), and more generally people who are successfully influencing social change. [Mentor International](#) is an example





of an international non-profit development organization that provides evidence-based mentoring programs which steer young people towards strong role models that can set them on a path to a promising future.<sup>1</sup> The survey casts light on the importance of mentors as well as role models. In the workplace, youth can seek mentorship from experienced professionals who share their passion and champion positive change. They can also apply for mentorship programs in their community or organization to engage with experienced individuals to learn about social change. If mentorship programs are not readily available at work or in communities, youth can also seek support from NGOs and international organizations – one example is [Global Changemakers](#).<sup>2</sup>

**5. Strengthen skills and mindsets more dynamically.** Given the emphasis placed by youth and leaders alike on soft skills such as emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and strategic and critical thinking, multiple online and offline

resources can offer development in this area. Beyond reading and viewing videos online, youth can adopt more dynamic methods of building skills such as volunteering, or applying for training and/or internship programs with prospective or current employers. This will lead to higher levels of confidence when seeking to drive positive social impact. [Upshift program](#) (see Case Study on [page 38](#)) provides an array of opportunities globally.<sup>3</sup> Misk also offers a range of programs aimed at strengthening skills, such as its [NPO Essential Masterclasses](#).<sup>4</sup> While focusing on building the required skills, obtaining the right mindset is equally important. Leaders recommend that youth should develop a greater sense of discipline and focus in particular.

**6. Engage with technology, especially AI, from an earlier age.** There is an opportunity for youth to do much more to harness developments in technology, especially AI, to drive social change. Choosing STEM subjects at school and

signing up to immersive summer programs at local tech companies for hands-on experience can provide youth with a valuable start. Coding bootcamps, workshops, and online courses can enhance technical skills and build confidence – especially for young women, who need to concentrate on sharpening their technology skills as early as possible. In terms of applying their skills, developing apps, websites, or social media campaigns that address social issues are all interesting possibilities. In particular, there is huge potential to make more use of AI, which helps to make better and faster decisions, improve knowledge and understanding of their chosen social cause, and grow skills by gaining access to relevant and instantaneous information (see AI Case Studies on [pages 59 and 63](#)).

### How Leaders Can Empower Young Changemakers

- 1. Create opportunities for dialogue with youth.** There is a clear lack of dialogue between youth and leaders, who need to be more mindful of youth's problems, needs and differences. In their different capacities, whether formally through their organizations or informally through their personal capacity, leaders have the resources sought by youth that can help them to amplify the impact of their social initiatives. A greater awareness of their enabling function could help to empower youth, who perceive that leaders provide less support than they say they do. On an individual level, leaders can engage with younger people in their communities and organizations to learn about their concerns, for example by including their voice in their organizations through youth councils. On a corporate level, they can also organize more ad hoc events and forums that enable leaders and youth to come together. One organization dedicated to promoting intergenerational networking and exchange is [CIRKEL](#), a platform that connects people of all ages for reciprocal support, collaboration, learning and mentorship.<sup>5</sup>
- 2. Dedicate personal time and expertise.** While leaders are committed to devoting time to preparing youth for social impact, they could harness youth potential more efficiently by allocating a more specific – but realistic – number of hours per week to strengthen their commitment to youth. That time spent could be allo-

cated to acting as a mentor to promising youth, allowing youth to access their personal expertise and connections, and introducing them to other leaders. They can also implement in-house programs such as "Employee Resource Groups" focused on young professionals, offering networking opportunities, mentorship, and professional development resources tailored to the needs of younger employees. One successful initiative that could provide inspiration is the [Youth Leadership Council](#), a non-profit organization in Houston that shows how mentors can use their personal time and expertise to foster leadership skills and social change competencies among youth.<sup>6</sup>

- 3. Build skills in future changemakers.** Youth identify a lack of training and internship programs within their organizations to equip them with skills and mindsets that foster positive social impact. Providing financial and logistical support for educational pursuits, scholarships, or educational assistance programs to encourage continuous learning and personal growth for youth is a powerful way in which leaders can help – [Powerful Youth](#) is one such example.<sup>7</sup> They could also create workplace institutional practices and culture that empower youth to develop skills. Leaders in the public sector can look at incorporating non-formal, experiential, and enterprising educational practices into national systems (for example, UNICEF's Upshift program, featured in the Case Study on [page 38](#)).
- 4. Enhance network access for youth by sharing connections.** Leaders can increase youth access to their diverse networks and explore community and organizational youth networking needs. This will assist in implementing initiatives that will connect them to relevant people like policy makers, academics or business leaders to advance their social agenda. Leaders can also challenge other leaders to offer more of their network resources, and can invite youth to events and other in-person activities in order to increase their networking opportunities. Examples of initiatives that have been successful in stimulating networking for youth include [YouthConnekt Africa](#), bringing together youth from around Africa, and the [Opportunity Youth Network](#), based in the US.<sup>8,9</sup>
- 5. Fortify institutional policy support.** Institutions can enhance existing policies and practices to support youth changemakers, such as pro-



viding formal policies allowing time off or the use of office space for cause-related activities. Institutions can give youth more responsibility in social impact programs, for example by giving them greater decision-making powers, and encourage employees to participate in volunteer work, including providing paid volunteer time off, as well as consider creating a youth council at their organizations, incorporating young employees' voices into decision making and policy creation. Finally, institutions can develop their own community service projects, encouraging employees to contribute towards meaningful causes. Recognition programs set up by companies that celebrate and showcase positive social impact initiatives undertaken by both youth and leaders alike can inspire others to follow suit. Leader advocacy is crucial in motivating peers towards a collective effort in supporting youth.

**6. Empower young innovators with AI.** Leaders can promote basic **AI literacy** – in youth and **themselves** – ensuring enough resources are devoted to training young colleagues, especially women, to avoid this becoming another driver of the **digital divide**.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Organizations can strengthen their AI capacity, and consider the integration of AI-driven technological platforms designed to actively contribute to positive social change (such as DataRobot). NGOs in particular have not begun to use AI enough, even though it has valuable real-world applications for solving social challenges in areas like forecasting future social issues and trends; fraud detection and identity verification; protecting human rights and privacy; monitoring climate change; helping to preserve natural resources and safeguard ecosystems; evaluating large datasets to improve preparedness for disasters; and to build smart, more sustainable cities. Leaders can promote AI knowledge-sharing platforms that foster cross-generational collaboration and the exchange of ideas and experiences among individuals and organizations. AI-powered language translation technologies can also help young people connect.

# 5

## Conclusion



# Charting a Path for Youth Empowerment

## Amplifying Youth Impact

The world today faces innumerable social challenges that youth are in a unique position to solve. While they are already making a great contribution to social change through a host of innovative initiatives around the globe, there is always more to do. But what, and how?

This survey seeks to provide answers by gaining a richer understanding of what youth want to change and what motivates them to do so; the extent to which they are capable of realizing those changes; and how their efforts can be intensified with help from networks, institutions and their leaders, and technology, especially the emerging potential of AI.

The findings are a source of hope. Youth are powerfully motivated to drive change in a range of important areas, especially mental health, the environment and equality in the world of work. They are also well-equipped to advance social causes, possessing key skills and mindsets that will assist them in their journey, especially emotional intelligence – even if they may be lacking discipline and focus, according to leaders. Importantly, there are many mechanisms that can help youth to do more and better – although, again, there is much that can be done to improve them.

Among the most profound messages of this study is that for youth-led positive social impact to be sustainable, it cannot be done in isolation. Throwing light on the dynamic between youth and leaders, in particular the positive influence that leaders can have on youth, the survey shows that in areas such as creating opportunities, organizational support and expertise, leaders are central to the success of youth-led initiatives.

One of the most striking findings to emerge is the difference in opinions between youth and leaders in a wide range of issues, from their overall optimism to the skills and mindsets that contribute to driving social change. It is clear that there is a greater need for dialogue between the two groups.

The comprehensive set of recommendations provided here contain valuable insights for a wide variety of audiences – including youth, policymakers, academic institutions, the public and private sector, and non-profit organizations – so that together they can convert youth aspirations into effective actions that achieve stronger results.

Misk Foundation's report aims to promote greater knowledge and understanding of the issues at stake, and create the conditions for bringing together all those who are interested in youth-led positive social change in order to power a more profound and longer-lasting impact.

# Appendices

## A. Methodology

In our survey, we observed a higher response rate among women compared to men, a common phenomenon in survey research that aligns with documented patterns of gender differences in survey participation.

### Youth Survey

- Misk surveyed 18,000 participants across 20 countries (900 from each country) from October to November 2023.
- Participants were mostly female (64%), while 34% were male, and 2% preferred not to say.
- Participants were split into two age categories: 18-24 (43%) and 25-35 (57%).
- The highest level of education completed was distributed as follows: primary school (2%), high school (35%), vocational training (16%), bachelor's degree (37%), master's degree (9%), and PhD (2%).
- Most participants (64%) reported living in a city, while 36% lived in towns or rural areas.
- Of the 48% of participants that reported income, 15% said they received a high income, 35% a medium income, and 50% a low income.

### Leader Survey

- Misk surveyed 500 participants across 20 countries (25 from each country) from October to November 2023.
- The leader's profile was C-Level Executives working in enterprises, large foundations (private sector) and advertisers that target young generations (18 to 35 years) within their communication.
- Leaders were selected across five sectors – entrepreneurship, technology, media, gaming, sustainability, and energy and finance.
- Participants were mostly male (83%), while 17% were female.

- Participants surveyed fell into the following four age categories: 25-35 (6%), 36-45 (31%), 46-55 (57%), and 56 or older (6%).
- Private sector leaders represented 88% of participants, followed by government (8%), and NGOs (4%).
- Most participants (77%) reported living in a city, while 23% lived in towns or rural areas.

### Countries Surveyed

- Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.
- These countries were selected for inclusion in the study based on the following set of criteria:
  - Age: Countries with a variation in population demographics (e.g., some skewing old, some skewing younger).
  - Level of Affluence: Countries with varied economic profiles, including advanced economies and emerging markets.
  - Pace of Economic Progress: Both fast-growing and low-growth countries.
  - Governance Models: Countries with different political systems.
  - Religious Diversity: A variety of religious affiliations.
  - Technological Adoption: Countries with varying levels of technological development.
  - Geography: Countries were lastly selected to represent a range of continents.

### Statistical Analyses

- All statistical analyses were conducted in the general linear model framework for continuous outcomes (or the generalized linear model framework for binary/ordinal outcomes).
- All models were run with robust estimators to account for any outliers or other violations of statistical assumptions.



- Group comparisons were conducted using the expected marginal means method, with a false discovery rate (FDR) correction on all p-values to control for false positives in statistical testing. A statistical significance threshold of .05 (the standard for scientific levels of confidence) was used to determine whether a comparison was statistically significant or not.

### Supplemental research

These survey findings were supplemented and given greater context through additional desktop research, included throughout the text.

## B. Youth Survey Questions

### Q1 Hello! To begin with, tell us a bit about yourself. How old are you?

- Less than 18 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-35 years old
- 36-45 years old
- 46-55 years old
- 56 years old and older

### Q2a Which gender do you identify most with?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

### Q2b In which country do you live?

- Argentina
- Australia
- Brazil
- China
- Egypt
- France
- Germany
- India
- Indonesia

- Japan
- Kazakhstan
- Mexico
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- Sweden
- Turkey
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Other country

### Q3 What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- Primary school
- High school
- Vocational training
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD

### Q4 Which of the following best describes the place you live in?

- A city (50,000 inhabitants or more)
- A town (between 5,000 and 50,000 inhabitants)
- In the countryside (rural areas outside of towns and cities)

### Q5 Which statement best describes your primary occupation?

- I work in the private sector
- I work in the public sector
- I work for an NGO
- I'm self-employed/freelancer
- I'm unemployed
- I'm a student

### Q6 How many people, if any, are financially dependent on you?

- 0 people
- 1 person
- 2-3 people
- 4-5 people
- 6 or more people

### Q7 What is your mother's educational level?

- Primary school
- High school
- Vocational training
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD
- I'm not sure

### Q7b What is your father's educational level?

- Primary school
- High school
- Vocational training
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD
- I'm not sure

### Q8 What is your personal total annual income?

[Options provided in country currency, with US options given here.]

- Under \$30,000 a year
- Between \$30,000 and \$70,000 a year
- Over \$70,000 a year

### Q9 Which of the following causes are you most passionate about?

- Sustainability and environmental issues
- Resource inequality

- Mental health challenges and stability
- Barriers to education
- Barriers to employment
- Barriers to creative expression
- Youth underrepresentation
- Bullying and harassment
- Forced displacement
- Technology-related challenges

### Q10 Which of the following communities do you feel most connected to?

- Family
- Friends
- Schoolmates, classmates, or work colleagues
- Individuals within the same age group as me
- Individuals with the same ethnicity or tribal affiliation as me
- Individuals who share my religious beliefs
- Individuals who share my hobbies and interests
- Individuals who share my goals, values, and interests
- None of the above

### Q11 How much are you personally negatively affected by causes identified in your answer to Q9?

- Extremely impacted
- Rather impacted
- Rather not impacted
- Not impacted at all

### Q12 How much are people in your communities negatively affected by causes identified in your answer to Q9?

- Extremely impacted
- Rather impacted
- Rather not impacted
- Not impacted at all



### Q13 Which of the following best describe why you feel motivated to tackle causes identified in your answer to Q9?

- [Identified cause/causes] affect(s) me personally
- [Identified cause/causes] affect(s) people that are close to me
- [Identified cause/causes] affect(s) people in my communities
- I learned about the causes in answer Q9 from the news and was inspired to make a difference
- I learned about the causes in answer Q9 from activists and was inspired to take up their cause
- Books, magazines, and other written sources have exposed me to the causes in answer Q9 and inspired me to take action
- Social media and influencers have exposed me to the causes in answer Q9 and inspired me to take action
- I feel motivated to take action because of my religious or spiritual beliefs
- My personal goals include addressing causes in answer Q9
- My professional goals include addressing the causes in answer Q9
- None of the above

### Q14 Which of the following emotions represent your feelings when it comes to the causes in answer Q9?

- Fear
- Frustration
- Despair
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Indifference
- Hope
- Motivation
- A sense of purpose
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

### Q15 Do you feel a sense of duty to act and address causes in your answer to Q9?

- Yes, a strong sense of duty
- Yes, a light sense of duty
- No, not really
- Not at all

### Q16 Who do you feel you have a duty towards?

- Immediate family members (parents, siblings, children, and spouses)
- Extended family members (cousins or other relatives who are further removed from your immediate family)
- Friends
- Schoolmates, classmates, or work colleagues
- People in my age group or generation
- People of the same ethnic background as me
- People who share my religious beliefs
- People with shared hobbies or interests
- People with shared goals and causes
- Anyone impacted by your answer to Q9
- None of the above

### Q17 How do you find out how people in affected communities are feeling about the causes in your answer to Q9?

- I call or send them a message to inquire
- I pay them a visit
- I inquire about them through a mutual connection
- I read offline about people in similar situations
- I use social media
- I try to gain insight through NGOs that work with people impacted by those I identified in Q9
- I engage in social conversations about causes identified in Q9
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above/I don't try to find out how people are feeling about this

### Q18 During your childhood, did you have role models who were active in addressing social issues?

- Yes, my parents or siblings were active
- Yes, my sports, music or other idols were active
- Yes, extended members of my family were active
- Yes, my teachers or mentors were active
- Yes, individuals in my community were active
- No, no one I knew in childhood was particularly active
- I'm not sure

### Q19a The skills listed below are associated with creating change. Choose the skills that most apply to you:

- Visionary leadership
- Strategic thinking and critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Effective communication
- Networking and relationship building
- Conflict resolution and negotiation
- Influence and persuasiveness
- Community creation and mobilization
- Emotional intelligence
- Data analysis and research
- Technology literacy
- Content creation
- None of the above

### Q19b The mindsets listed below are associated with creating change. Choose the mindsets that most apply to you:

- Proactive
- Resilient
- Agile
- Focused
- Results-oriented
- Curious
- Disciplined
- Collaborative

- Pragmatic
- None of the above

### Q20 What are you currently doing to build the skills you need to tackle causes identified in your answer to Q9?

- Attending in-person classes or skill-building workshops
- Attending online classes or skill-building workshops
- Learning by engaging in relevant activity (such as participating in volunteer programs)
- Learning from a mentor or peer
- Reading relevant literature or articles
- Watching educational videos and tutorials
- Leveraging AI to gain access to relevant and instantaneous information
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above / I'm not actively building skills to address this cause

### Q21 What kind of action(s) have you taken or are you taking to address causes identified in your answer to Q9?

- Attending rallies, marches, or demonstrations
- Boycotting
- Lifestyle changes related to causes in answer to Q9
- Volunteering
- Signing petitions
- Raising awareness, either online or offline
- Raising funds
- Community engagement and mobilization
- Starting an organization to tackle causes in answer to Q9
- Creative action - art, music, or poetry
- Asking people around me for support or resources
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above



**Q21b Do you leverage Artificial Intelligence to support you in the actions selected above?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**Q22 How would you rate your ability to bring about positive outcomes related to causes in your answer to Q9?**

- Very high ability
- Rather high ability
- Rather low ability
- Very low ability

**Q23 How do you rate your ability to make a positive impact in relation to causes in your answer to Q9, compared to the following groups of people?**

- People with more experience dealing with causes in answer to Q9 than me
- Senior business leaders
- Politicians and public officials
- I believe my ability to make a positive impact is greater than theirs
- I believe my ability to make a positive impact is comparable to theirs
- I believe my ability to make a positive impact is not yet at their level
- I don't know

**Q24 In which of the following circles have you found the most support or resources for creating sustainable change towards causes in your answer to Q9?**

- Intimate support circle (family, close friends)
- Professional network (work colleagues, industry contacts)
- Academic circles (teachers, schoolmates)
- Community groups (local organizations, clubs)
- Online communities (social media groups, online forums)

- Industry or cause-specific organizations
- Other circle (please specify)
- None of the above - I didn't find any support from these circles
- None of the above - I didn't look for any support so far

**Q25 How do you go about increasing the size of your network of people who are relevant to your cause?**

- Finding and connecting online
- Joining relevant organizations
- Asking people in my network to introduce me
- Attending an event where they're speaking or appearing
- Using Artificial Intelligence generated network recommendations
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above/I don't try to increase the size of my network

**Q26 Based on your experiences, what challenges or barriers have you faced when trying to make use of your networks for social impact?**

- Difficulty in finding the right people that can help me
- Difficulty in connecting with people that can help me
- Difficulty in convincing and motivating people to help me
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above/I didn't face any challenges when using my network
- I haven't tried to use my network to address social issues yet

**Q27 Which institutions do you think can make the biggest impact for change towards causes identified in your answer to Q9?**

- Government
- Private sector entities

- Universities and academic institutions
- Local NGOs and charities
- International organizations
- Other institution (please specify)
- None of the above

**Q28 What challenges or barriers have you faced when trying to get support from institutions for social impact?**

- Difficulty in finding the right institutions that could help me
- Difficulty contacting institutions and getting a response
- Lack of effectiveness of institutions
- Lack of trust in the integrity of institutions
- Transparency of the information provided
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above/I didn't face any challenges getting support from institutions
- I haven't tried getting support from institutions yet

**Q29 I have trust in government to lower the barriers for positive social impact in the following areas:**

- Access to information
- Access to funding
- Access to technical expertise, training, or education for relevant skills
- Access to decision-makers and networks of influence
- Access to spaces, venues, and transportation
- Access to legal support
- Access to internet
- Access to Artificial Intelligence tools
- Creation of youth-focused policies
- None of the above

**Q29b I have trust in corporate leaders to lower the barriers for positive social impact in the following areas:**

- Access to funding
- Access to networks of influence
- Access to capacity building
- Access to technology
- Access to job opportunities
- Access to decision-making opportunities
- None of the above

**Q30 How does the organization you work for support your efforts toward tackling causes in your answer to Q9?**

- Time off occasionally to pursue my cause
- I am allowed to use the organization's offices to hold activities related to my cause
- I am able to leverage connections within the organization to support my cause
- I am able to leverage expertise within the organization that help me achieve my goals
- The organization I work for has a formal policy that supports me to pursue my cause
- None of the above

**Q31 Do you see yourself doing more or less to address causes in your answer to Q9 in the next:**

- 0 -12 months
- 13 - 36 months
- 36+ months
- More
- Less
- I don't know

**Q32 Do you expect to utilize Artificial Intelligence to address causes in your answer to Q9 in the time period you selected above?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know



### Q33 Do you think your actions will have long-term impact?

- Yes
- No

## C. Leader Survey Questions

### 1 Hello! How old are you?

- Less than 18 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55 years old and older

### 2 Which gender do you identify most with?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

### 3 In which country do you work?

- Argentina
- Australia
- Brazil
- China
- Egypt
- France
- Germany
- India
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Kazakhstan
- Mexico
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- Sweden

- Turkey
- United Kingdom
- United States of America
- Other country
- I do not work

### 4 Which of the following best describes the sector in which your organization operates?

- Government
- Private sector
- Non-governmental organization
- Other sector (please specify)

### 5 Which of the following best describes the private sector in which your organization operates?

- Entrepreneurship
- Technology
- Media
- Gaming
- Sustainability & Energy
- Finance
- Agri-food
- Automotive
- Other sector (please specify)

### 6 Which of the following best describes the NGO in which you operate?

- Non-Youth NGO
- Youth NGO
- None of the above

### 7 How many employees does your organization have?

- 1 employee only - myself
- 2—19 employees
- 20—49 employees
- 50—249 employees
- 250—499 employees

- 500—999 employees
- 1,000—5,999 employees
- 5,000—9,999 employees
- 10,000—50,000 employees
- More than 50,000 employees

### 8 What is your level of seniority within your organization?

- CEO / Founder
- Vice President / Partner / C-level
- Director
- Manager
- Senior
- Junior
- Assistant
- Intern
- Other (specify)
- Not applicable to my organization

### 9 Which of the following best describes the place you work in?

- A city (50,000 inhabitants or more)
- A town (between 5,000 and 50,000 inhabitants)
- In the countryside (rural areas outside of towns and cities)

### 10 What type of interaction do you have with young people?

- I employ youth in my organization
- I engage in mentorship of youth, independently of my organization
- I volunteer my time to support youth sports and cultural activities in my community, independently of my professional affiliations
- I advocate for and support youth entrepreneurs through workshops and access to funding, in a personal capacity
- I volunteer for youth-related issues and causes, in a personal capacity
- I am involved with youth NGOs and community service projects in a personal capacity, supporting youth or collaborating with youth
- None of the above

### 11 Does your company employ people from the following age categories?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-35 years old
- None of the above

### 12 To what extent do you interact with young people in your company?

- Every day
- Nearly every day
- Frequently
- Rarely
- Never

### 13 Based on the interactions you've had with young people, do you believe that they generally create a positive social impact?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- I don't know

### 14 From your experience dealing with young individuals, how would you rate their capacity to bring about positive social impact? Would you say their capacity is:

- Very high
- Rather high
- Average
- Rather low
- Very low

### 15 Why is their capacity to bring positive social impact as in your answer to question 14?

[Essay/long answers]



### 16 What do young people lack when it comes to creating positive social impact?

- They lack empathy
- They lack motivation
- They lack skills
- They lack access to networks and institutions that could amplify their efforts
- Other (please specify)

### 17 In your opinion, which skills are important for youth to bring about positive social impact?

- Visionary leadership
- Strategic thinking and critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Effective communication
- Networking and relationship-building
- Conflict resolution and negotiation
- Influence and persuasiveness
- Community creation and mobilization
- Emotional intelligence
- Data analysis and research
- Technology literacy
- Content creation

### 18 In your experience, which of the following skills do you think young people lack when it comes to creating positive social impact?

- Visionary leadership
- Strategic thinking and critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Effective communication
- Networking and relationship-building
- Conflict resolution and negotiation
- Influence and persuasiveness
- Community creation and mobilization
- Emotional intelligence
- Data analysis and research

- Technology literacy
- Content creation
- None of the above

### 19 In your opinion, what are the key mindsets that are conducive to positive social impact?

- Proactive
- Resilient
- Agile
- Focused
- Results-oriented
- Curious
- Disciplined
- Collaborative
- Pragmatic
- None of the above

### 20 Which of the following mindsets do you think young people might lack when it comes to creating positive social impact?

- Proactive
- Resilient
- Agile
- Focused
- Results-oriented
- Curious
- Disciplined
- Collaborative
- Pragmatic
- None of the above

### 21 How do today's youth differ from your generation in terms of the mindsets needed for positive social change?

- They are more ...
- They are less ...
- They are as ...
- Proactive

- Resilient
- Agile
- Focused
- Results-orientation
- Curious
- Disciplined
- Team players
- Pragmatic
- None of the above

### 22 Would you say that you, as an individual, bring about positive social impact?

- Yes
- I would like to be but am not currently
- No, I don't want to

### 23 How do you rate your ability to make a positive impact compared to young people?

- I believe my ability to make a positive social impact is greater than their ability
- I believe my ability to make a positive social impact is comparable to their ability
- I believe my ability to make a positive social impact is lower than their ability
- I don't know

### 24 As a leader, how do you enable young people to create positive social impact? Providing access to...

- Funding
- Networks of influence
- Capacity building
- Technology
- Job opportunities
- Decision-making opportunities
- Resources (spaces, venues, and transportation)
- Information and expertise
- Technology and AI tools
- Other (please specify)

### 25 What role do you think Artificial Intelligence will play in helping young people create positive social impact?

[Essay/long answers]

### 26 Which of the following statements describe your interaction with young people in your company?

- I manage young employees and oversee their work
- I work with young employees as colleagues
- I mentor young employees
- Young employees mentor me
- Other (please specify)

### 27 Does your company provide opportunities for young individuals to develop the skills required for positive social impact during work hours?

- We have a dedicated training and development program for our young employees
- We have an internship program for young people
- We offer mentorship opportunities to help young people build their skills
- Our company culture empowers young employees to make decisions and lead on projects
- Our company culture encourages young people to take on new challenges and develop their skills
- Other (please specify)
- My company does not provide such opportunities

### 28 To what extent does the support your organization provides enhance young people's ability to create positive social change?

- It makes a big difference
- It makes some difference
- It makes little difference
- It makes no difference
- I don't know



### 29 Can you give more detail on how the support provided by your organization enhances (or not) young people's ability to create positive social change?

[Essay/long answers]

### 30 What else does your company do to support young employees in creating social positive change?

- Occasional time off to pursue their cause
- Using company resources (offices to hold activities, transportation, licenced technology or software, etc)
- Leveraging connections within the organization to support their cause (to access funding, or networks of influence, etc)
- Leveraging expertise within the organization (legal expertise, technological expertise, marketing expertise, or financial expertise, etc)
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

### 31 Do you think young people trust the sector they identified in answer to question 6 when it comes to enabling them to create positive social change today?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

### 32 What is the age group of the youth you support?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-35 years old
- None of the above

### 33 Which of the following statements describes your role in supporting young people when it comes to creating positive social change?

- I lead or guide young people on positive social change initiatives
- I help them become more empathetic
- I encourage my network to support young people in creating positive social impact
- I use my leverage and credibility to advocate for supporting young people in creating positive social change
- I donate money to social change projects led by youth
- I volunteer my time to train young people in skills conducive to creating positive social change
- Other (please specify)

### 34 To what extent does the support you provide enhance young people's ability to create positive social change?

- It makes a big difference
- It makes some difference
- It makes little difference
- It makes no difference

### 35 Can you give more detail on how the support provided by your organization enhances (or not) young people's ability to create positive social change?

[Essay/long answers]

### 36 How can other leaders be encouraged to offer this support in their personal capacity?

[Essay/long answers]

### 37 Do you think young people trust leaders when it comes to enabling them to create positive social change today?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

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## 4. TAKING ACTION: Catalysts for Youth-Led Positive Social Impact



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