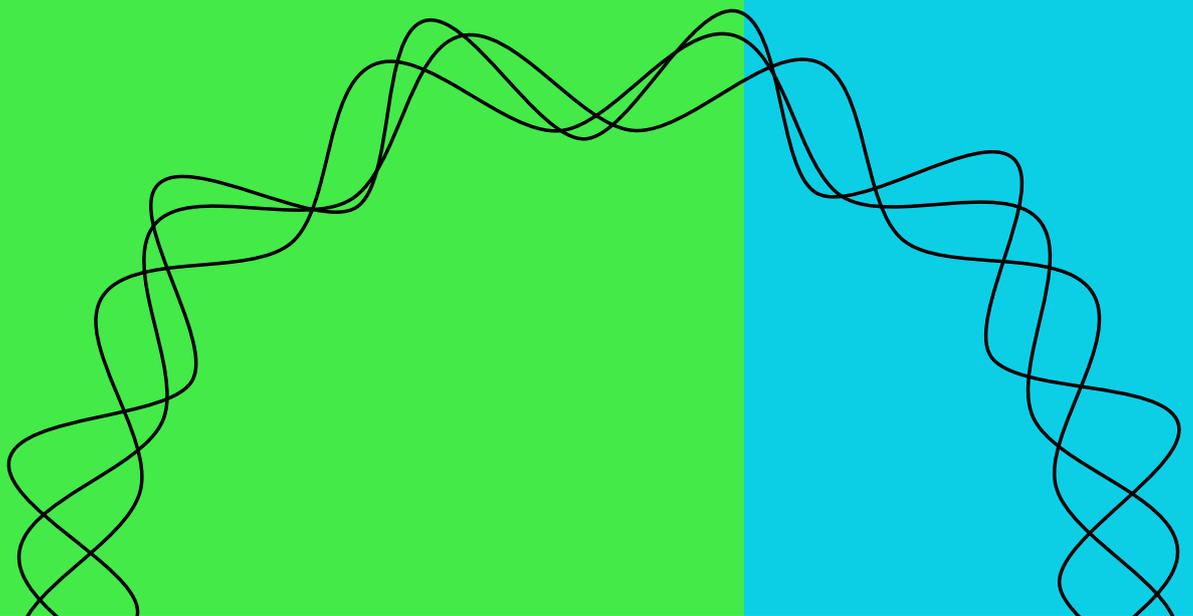


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# Charting a youth vision for a just and sustainable future

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## About us

SEI is an international non-profit research and policy organization that tackles environment and development challenges. SEI was founded in 1989 and is named after the Stockholm Declaration of 1972. We look to the Declaration as the origin of our mandate, and we fulfil that mandate through research and engagement.

CEEW is one of Asia's leading not-for-profit policy research institutions. The Council uses data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach to explain – and change – the use, reuse and misuse of resources. The Council addresses pressing global challenges through an integrated and internationally focused approach. It prides itself on the independence of its high-quality research, develops partnerships with public and private institutions, and engages with the wider public.



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# Foreword

Sustainable development has been defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. The key principle underlying this definition is that of intergenerational equity – that what we do now to meet the current challenges of poverty eradication and social and economic progress must not erode the prospects of good living for the generations to come.

This principle is seldom a determining factor in the policy, investment or technological choices made by decision makers. Their vision rarely extends beyond their term of office – next election for politicians, next year’s profits for corporate managers, immediate commercial value of innovations for technology managers. Yes, there may be some modest recognition of longer-term consequences; but not enough to sway decisions.

This needs to change. Such long-term views have been the focus of major global initiatives, including the 1972 Stockholm Conference, subsequent UN summits, and deeper negotiating processes such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as others dealing with challenges such as biodiversity protection and desertification and land degradation. Yet the reality is that the impact of these long-term initiatives on current decisions is modest.

There are many reasons for this. One reason is that the voice of the future generations who may be adversely affected by today’s decisions is not heard in conferences and even less so in decision-making processes. This is why this report, which presents the views of over 1000 young people from 91 countries, is a crucial contribution for the Stockholm+50 meeting. It analyses the past and articulates a vision that captures the aspiration and determination of young people, to realize a healthy planet for all. What matters even more is that young people have shown a greater proclivity to express solidarity with other currently vulnerable groups.

These young people are our link between today and tomorrow. They are the ones who will experience the consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss, continuing or worsening inequality long after the older decision makers are no longer around. That is why it is so important to not just listen to them but to involve them more fully in the deliberative and decision-making processes that will shape the future of our planet and of our human community.

At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 I sat on the podium and was spellbound when then-12-year-old Severn Suzuki spoke. She said: ‘In my anger, I am not blind, and in my fear, I am not afraid of telling the world how I feel.’ This well-articulated report does the same, as a thousand young people present to us their understanding of our present failures and their vision of where we need to go. Our challenge now is to move their engagement beyond dialogue to decision making.



Nitin Desai, Chair, The Energy and Resources Institute  
Former Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UN  
Delhi, April 2022

# Preface

We, the young people who have authored this report, express our determination to foster this shift in the following words:

**At the cusp** of this transition,  
We emerge,  
Envisioning a world of dignity for all  
**At the helm** of this transition,  
We stand,  
Determined to realize this united call  
**At the core** of this transition,  
We work  
to transform our world,  
Once and for all.



Photo: South\_agency / Getty

# Summary: A future for youth, a future for all

We, the authors of this report, were not yet born when nations first met in Stockholm, 50 years ago, to take responsibility for protecting and improving the environment while ensuring equity of human development.

The better world envisioned then has not come to pass. It is now our world, and the next 50 years is our future. This report articulates a vision for our shared future that captures the aspiration, determination and solidarity of young people, to realize a healthy planet for all.

We have taken into account the latest science, identified policy gaps, and studied systemic challenges to formulate a concrete vision for a

healthy planet for all by 2030. We also make policy suggestions for accelerating implementation and overcoming roadblocks in pursuit of this vision.

The report integrates findings from a global online survey conducted of more than 900 young people (18–30 years old) from 89 countries, with a focus on following a consultative process for charting a youth vision and subsequent policy suggestions.

The youth of today have inherited a world shaped by the governance systems and national policies established over the past 50 years, in which we face intertwined crises of the state of our planet and extreme inequality among people and societies. Since 1972 the human population and its total carbon emissions have more than doubled. We have entered

an era where humans have become a driving force that changes the planet, as we exceed our ecological footprint as a species.

We realize that this generation and the next ones will bear the brunt of climate change impacts. More than half of the respondents to the survey for this report said that they feel anxiety due to climate change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the vulnerability of our economies, shed light on the costs of delayed action, and clearly has had disproportionate impacts on different groups of people, both economically and socially. It taught us the importance of cooperation through global solidarity; the importance of acknowledging crises at its early states to avoid costly delays of inaction; as well as the importance of eliminating social and economic inequalities that deepen, and are deepened by, crises.

These lessons can be applied to the intertwined challenges we face, with implications for all as well as specifically for youth today.

**Our vision  
requires hearing  
the voices of  
youth in the  
decisions taken  
now that will lay  
the groundwork  
for our future.**

## Our future

Our hopes are for a better future, one perhaps similar in many ways to that envisioned half a century ago.

Our vision is four parts, based on solidarity among all people, living with nature, equality for all, and health and well-being for all. Achieving these ends requires systemic change at a massive scale; the systems in which we live need to address and remove inequality from many perspectives – including intergenerationally, geographically, related to gender, ethnicity, racism and colonialism.

Rather than economic growth, we find that community focused living, education and health are appropriate metrics of the prosperity of a country. It should further be measured by its 'natural capital' like the quality of its air, soil and water; biodiversity and integrity of ecosystems and land use, as countries with functional environmental ecosystems are more resilient to the impacts of climate change and can provide higher standards of living to their inhabitants.

Our vision also requires hearing the voices of youth in the decisions taken now that will lay the groundwork for our future. Half of the global population is under age 30. Youth currently lack adequate voice in economic and political matters, and yet they – we – have led change for equality and a better world. We can capitalize most obviously on the global youth movement against climate change – which needs to be amplified. The solutions and actions young people bring to the table can be shared and scaled up. We need actions now, in this decade, to set our course for the next 50 years.

We believe that regulatory bodies have not taken enough action during the COVID-19 pandemic, to secure economic and social security and well-being; a similar statement can be made for other crises humanity has faced. Actions taken by governments at all levels and by other sectors could bring our world closer to the youth vision of a healthy planet with dignity and equality for all.

Youth need more opportunities to engage in different forums and voice their concerns. Youth need to be involved in policy development processes, and youth voices legitimized in mainstream policymaking. Youth need greater decision-making, financial and political power to become the leaders of tomorrow that transform the status quo.

For this to happen, governance needs to be reformed to ensure better youth inclusivity, interconnectedness and accountability, with education and capacity building of youth playing a key role. Policymakers need to accelerate youth representation in major political forums, but also go beyond that to actively act on and implement youth recommendations, as well as giving youth the power to do so themselves.

We envision a world in which the development of societies centres on happiness, well-being and solidarity. Recognizing and encouraging youth as agents of change is one way to reach that world. Our youth vision requires we all work together for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

# Key messages

This report is a companion to the independent scientific report *Stockholm+50: Unlocking a Better Future* (SEI & CEEW, 2022) prepared ahead of the UN international meeting ‘Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity’, prepared by Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). This report is meant to capture the perspectives of youth, authored by a group of early-career researchers at SEI and CEEW. An online survey was conducted to further assess attitudes and views of youth, with responses from more than 900 young people around the world.

A key message that has risen to the top in the course of conducting our survey and writing this report is that youth need more opportunities to engage in different forums and voice their concerns. This report incorporates the survey’s recommendations for how to ensure adequate youth participation and involvement, including specific political representation.

▷ **We need a healthy planet for the prosperity of all, but we are harming ourselves and the planet’s systems for the prosperity of a few.** Pursuit of economic growth as the only metric of progress has opened the door for environmental degradation and rising inequality, to an extent that threatens the health and safety of young generations.

▷ **More than half of the respondents to the survey for this report said that they feel anxiety due to climate change.** This generation and the next ones will bear the brunt of climate change impacts, as extreme weather events become more frequent and severe: a child born in 2020 will experience on average twice as many wildfires, 2.6 times as many drought events, 2.8 times as many river floods, and 6.8 times more heatwaves across their lifetimes, compared to a person born in 1960.

- ▷ **The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the failures of our current economic systems and governance regimes in shielding vulnerable populations and youth from bearing the brunt of global crises.** The pandemic has shed light on the need for greater global solidarity, the importance of listening to the science, the costs of delayed action and the interdependence between humans and nature.
- ▷ **Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic can be applied to address the climate crisis and achieve sustainability more effectively** by providing more social safety nets to vulnerable populations globally, listening to the science and taking urgent action to scale up a low-carbon transition in all sectors, investing in a green economic COVID-19 recovery, and focusing on protecting and restoring nature.
- ▷ **Youth need to be involved in roundtable discussions and during policy development processes.** Furthermore, policy and scientific reports need to be shared in accessible language so that children and youth can understand them correctly and make informed decisions – and create a sense of ownership for children and youth.
- ▷ Youth have been at the forefront of advancing sustainability through calling for and acting on systemic change, through a combination of activism, litigation and on-the-ground efforts. However, **youth voices also need to be legitimized in mainstream policymaking**, with greater decision-making, financial and political power to enable youth to become the leaders of tomorrow and transform the status quo.
- ▷ **Governance needs to be reformed to ensure better youth inclusivity, interconnectedness and accountability, with education and capacity building of youth playing a key role.** Policymakers need to accelerate youth representation in major political forums, but also go beyond that to actively act on and implement youth recommendations, as well as giving youth the power to do so themselves.

# A Youth Vision

The following vision formulated by the authors of this report is for a just and sustainable future, from a youth perspective, for all. This vision calls for transformation of the trajectory we are currently following for human development, and requires prioritizing the following:

▶ **Happiness, dignity and well-being for all:** A world where growth and progress is not framed in economic terms but by values that truly matter to young people, such as health, education, happiness, solidarity, time spent with families and friends, volunteer work, etc., as opposed to economic metrics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that fuel excess consumption and production patterns. Fulfilling the SDGs by 2030 will be a key milestone for this vision.

▶ **Change the trajectory of growth:** Reach two concrete short-term goals to restore humanity's fractured relationship with nature by 2030:

**(a) Zero Loss of Nature**

A world without offsets: Current developmental projects that involve biodiversity loss are granted official clearances based on offsets. Studies have however shown that this would lead to a significant loss of nature by mid-century. Nature must be left alone.

Growth within the planetary boundaries: This requires nations to bring back growth within the planetary boundaries, based on considerations of equity and justice. In order for the planet to regain its resilience, societies must function sustainably and current economic models must be discarded.

Accounting for environmental integrity: A world that measures a country's prosperity and 'development' according to the state of its natural capital, i.e., the quality of its air, soils and water, the diversity of terrestrial and aquatic life, the integrity of its ecosystems, etc. The classification of nations as 'developed' and 'developing' based on nature-agnostic metrics is not encouraged; instead, amplify examples of nations prospering harmoniously with nature.

**(b) Limit global temperature rise to under 1.5°C**

Crossing the threshold of a 1.5°C world will eliminate species, deteriorate well-being and rupture ecosystems beyond repair. Reject the 'overshoot pathway', a growth trajectory where the world crosses 1.5°C by mid-century only to attempt a return by 2100 (Climate Analytics, 2021). Reversing the temperature is possible, but reversing its impacts is not. Halve climate-changing emissions by 2030, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 as humanity's last chance at a planet of dignity for all.

▶ **International Solidarity:** Live as one global family. Promoting global citizenship in sustainable development will allow individuals to embrace their social responsibility to act for the benefit of all societies, not just their own. Environmental challenges faced today cross all borders. The principles of solidarity and collective action serve as a basis for tackling these issues

at the personal, local, national, regional and global level. Global diplomacy must cast away the narrow idea of 'mutual advantage' synonymous with quid pro quos. Rather, people and governments must recognise that true 'mutual advantage' lies in collectively addressing and overcoming global challenges that will eventually impact every country in an interdependent world.

▶ **A world of equality for all:**

- End income inequality (more of 'traditional' inequality)
- Provide social security (covers health, disability, education, access to resources)
- End disparities thrown into harsh relief by the pandemic
- Decrease inequality in people's mobility (e.g. migration, refugees)
- Erase inequality among and within countries (the rich groups/countries and vulnerable groups/countries)
- Make social and economic opportunities equal for all (gender, youth)



Photo: Alex Treadway/Getty

**1**

**At the cusp  
of a transition**

Five decades ago, nations met in Stockholm and acknowledged their collective duty to protect and improve the environment (United Nations, 1973). In the subsequent 50 years, the human population and its carbon emissions more than doubled. As humanity has expanded, humans have altered 75% of the Earth's ice-free land and decimated wildlife populations by nearly 70%. Until the 1970s, humanity's ecological footprint fit within Earth's regenerative capacity (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2020). We have now exceeded it, and as a result, we have entered an era where humans have become a driving force that changes the planet.

Our activities have increased the 'biocapacity deficit' which is the overuse beyond the biological capacity of ecosystems. Recent research has shown that nearly three quarters of people live in countries with biocapacity deficits and lower than average income, in an 'ecological poverty trap' (Wackernagel

et al., 2021). Such a trap means that people cannot afford resources outside of their own ecological boundaries, and cannot escape poverty, increasing their biocapacity deficit. This situation underscores that the world today, 50 years after the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Conference), remains inequitable and far from prosperous, for both human and non-human life.

## **A transition is under way, from a past of human domination over nature to a future of co-existence.**

The 1972 UN conference on the Human Environment, noted two possible paths for our future: 'massive and irreversible harm' to the planet on account of the 'ignorance and indifference' of humans or 'a better life' for humans in a thriving environment 'through fuller knowledge and wiser action' (United Nations, 1973). Unfortunately, the former vision has come true.

This report comes at a point in history that could potentially determine the fate of life on the planet. A transition is under way, from a past of human domination over nature to a future of co-existence.

In order to accelerate the changes necessary at this historic moment, we, the young authors from around the world who have written this report, articulate a vision that captures the aspiration, determination and solidarity of young people, to realize a healthy planet for all. The following report integrates the latest science, identifies policy gaps, and studies systemic challenges to formulate a concrete vision for a healthy planet for all by 2030. We also make policy suggestions for accelerating implementation and overcoming roadblocks in pursuit of this vision.

This report integrates findings from a global online survey of more than 900 young people from 89 countries, with a focus on following a consultative process for charting a youth vision and subsequent policy suggestions. For this survey, youth were defined as people between 18 and 30 years old.

We have drafted this report with the following shared convictions:

- The Stockholm Conference was a momentous opportunity to shift global trajectories towards a healthy planet for all by 2030. Half a century later, the international environmental meeting ‘Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity’, to be held in Stockholm 2 and 3 June 2022, gives us a significant opportunity to accelerate the existing efforts toward more inclusive development.
- Our vision for a healthy planet, framed with feedback from youth around the world, is a shared aspiration of the authors and survey respondents, who both demand and seek to make real this vision through actions.
- This report is envisioned to serve as a basis for current and future open youth dialogues and for creating global solidarity among youth, for a healthy planet with dignity for all.

In 2019, about half the global population consisted of people below the age of 30, according to the UN Population Division. Children and youth, therefore, are the single largest demographic group in the world. Because of individuals’ expected life spans, children and youth today can be considered the most vulnerable to climate change and its prolonged impacts. At the same time, given the large share of children and youth in the total population, they have the potential to have the largest collective power to shape consumption patterns, as well as local, national and global decisions through solidarity.

Given that social media is prevalent in many young people’s lives, youth may have better access to information than their elders in some cases. This makes them well-placed to promote environmental awareness and knowledge exchange. Also, youth could introduce new ideas and outlooks that go beyond ‘anti-ecological’ ways of thinking (UN, 2003).

## **Mainstreaming the voices of today’s youth is key to realizing a healthy future on the planet for all.**

Building the capacity and mainstreaming the voices of today’s youth are key to realizing a healthy future on the planet for all. Today’s youth have the potential to make the transition from intent and promises to decisive and genuine action.

We, the young authors of this report, propose that at the crux of our current planetary-scale problems lies a fundamental lack of certain foundational values that individuals in particular and societies at large have failed to internalize. To drive progress after the Stockholm+50 international meeting, and realize the youth vision for a healthy planet, we suggest that the following values should be mindfully integrated at all levels of decision-making:

### **(a) Interconnectedness**

An appreciation is required of the interdependence of people across national and continental boundaries, as well as the interrelationship between humans and our natural environment. Implicit in this insight is that actions cannot be taken without due consideration of their potential impacts on people and nature, both within and beyond one’s line of sight. This understanding also

underlines an unprecedented opportunity that this crisis presents: to create global solidarity in our pursuit for a better future.

### **(b) Inclusivity**

At the heart of this value are the principles of 'leaving no one behind' and 'reaching the furthest first', as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda. It embodies the empathy that should drive decision-making in a post-Stockholm+50 world, so that decision makers consider the impacts of actions on all sections of the planet, especially the most vulnerable. The most vulnerable include children, women, elders, physically handicapped of all ages, transgendered people and Indigenous peoples, as well as people living in areas of high climate vulnerability such as small island developing countries. From an intergenerational perspective, inclusivity implies having the sensitivity to factor in the impacts of decisions made in the present on generations in the future.

Another aspect of inclusivity is its application. It should extend to all people, both in the sense of being factored into the decisions being made, as well as participating in the decision-making process on an equal footing.

Inclusivity across sectors requires considering biodiversity in all its forms, from the gene level to populations to entire species, and the ecosystems where they live. Land use, the health of oceans and more are included in the 2030 Agenda; the environment also requires our consideration and representation (see the forthcoming report, *Stockholm+50: Unlocking a Better Future*, SEI and CEEW, 2022).

### **(c) Accountability**

This foundational principle seeks to eliminate harmful environmental impacts across the planet, leading to declining health and well-being for the planet's systems and people. Far too many people and conglomerates have evaded punishment for environmental wrongdoings, due to reasons such as lack of political will and lobbying (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2019). Such inaction further exacerbates the problem of non-compliance with regulations and the ignorance of principles central to coexistence of people and nature on the planet. It also touches the need to address inequity in historical carbon emissions, to translate them into ambitious climate action in the present via greater technological and financial exchange between the Global North and Global South.

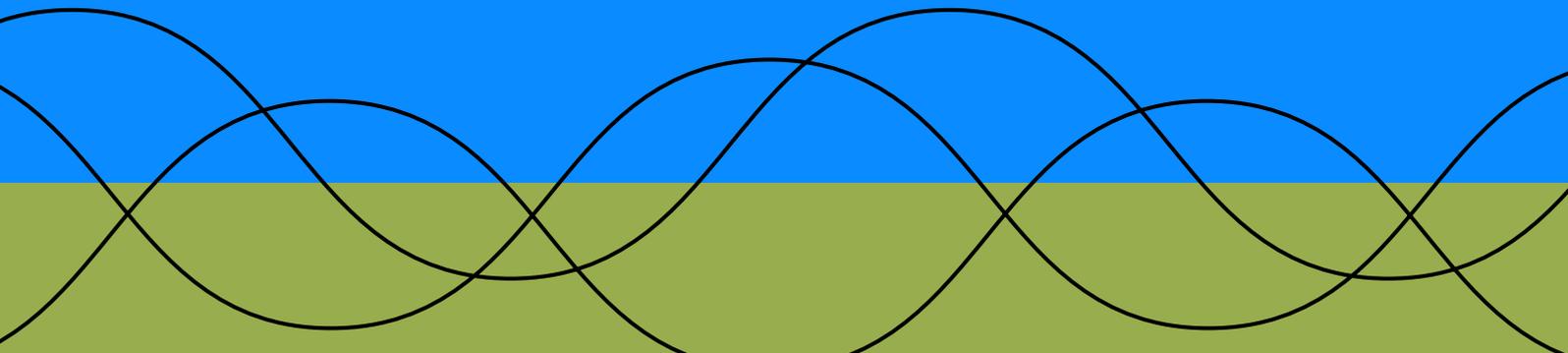
The following report integrates the above-mentioned foundational values and convictions, while being cognisant of the key themes of the Stockholm+50 meeting, to suggest actionable recommendations based on science to create a concrete vision for a healthy planet for all.



Photo: Grandriver / Getty

**2**

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A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, wavy black lines that span across the width of the page, separating the blue upper section from the green lower section.

**A healthy  
planet for  
the prosperity  
of all**

Humanity has long prioritized economic growth as the key metric of progress; this well-entrenched objective has opened the door for environmental degradation and rising inequalities, to an extent that threatens the health and safety of younger and future generations. We examine the extent of human impact on the planet, to justify the ambition and urgency behind the vision we present here.

Humans are currently damaging the planet at an unprecedented rate. Throughout the Anthropocene (an age where human activity has a dominant impact on the planet and its systems), human impact on the Earth's biogeochemical systems has dramatically increased. Our soaring demands for energy, food and other resources have been met at high cost to the planet's natural processes including rising temperatures; air, soil and water pollution; depletion of natural resources; and destruction of biodiversity.

Earth's temperature has risen by 0.08°C per decade since 1880, and the rate of warming over the past 40 years is more than twice that, at 0.18°C per decade since 1981 (IPCC, 2021). To date, human activities have significantly altered three-quarters of the land-based environment and approximately two-thirds of the marine environment (IPBES, 2019). These two factors, among others, are responsible for the 60% decline in animal populations witnessed between 1970 and 2014 (WWF & ZSL, 2018).

## 2.1 Pushing the planet beyond its limits

Climate and environmental disruptions pose a major threat to human health and safety, and young people will live with the consequences of activities of the past that will push the planet outside of a 'safe operating space for

### Young people will live with the consequences of activities of the past.

humanity' or the planetary boundaries. Scientists recently proposed that humans have already crossed the fifth of nine planetary boundaries: the boundary for 'novel entities' and chemical pollution (Persson et al., 2022).

In our survey, 88% of the young people responding feel that climate change has impacted them in some way, including increased experience of natural disasters and extreme weather; physical and mental health; economic and business activities; behavioural change; and food supply and consumption (see Figure 1). The current youth generation (people below the age of 30) and future ones will bear the brunt of climate change, as extreme weather events are predicted with high confidence to become more frequent and severe, among other predicted changes. Researchers estimate that a child born in 2020 will experience an average of twice as many wildfires, 2.6 times as many drought events, 2.8 times as many river floods, and 6.8 times more heatwaves throughout

their lifetimes, as compared to a person born in 1960 (Luten et al., 2021; Perera, 2017; see Figure 2).

Not only does current and past human activity increase the likelihood of disasters in the future, but it may also lead societies to cross critical thresholds or ‘tipping points’ that would trigger major irreversible and catastrophic changes to the Earth system (IPCC, 2021). For example, thawing of permafrost due to rising temperatures could lead to harmful impacts, such as release of large amounts of greenhouse gases or potentially harmful microbes lying dormant in the ice, and would in turn accelerate global warming and further thaw of the permafrost (IPCC, 2021).

## 2.2 A world plagued by injustice

Climate change and injustice are closely intertwined. On the one hand, climate change is driven by the overconsumption of the richest: the world’s richest 10% are responsible for half of all greenhouse gas emissions (Bruckner et al., 2022; Kartha et al., 2020). On the other hand, the poorest are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and related extreme weather events (floods, storms, droughts, sea-level rise, and so forth). People in low-income countries are at least four times more likely to be displaced by extreme weather events (Oxfam, 2019).

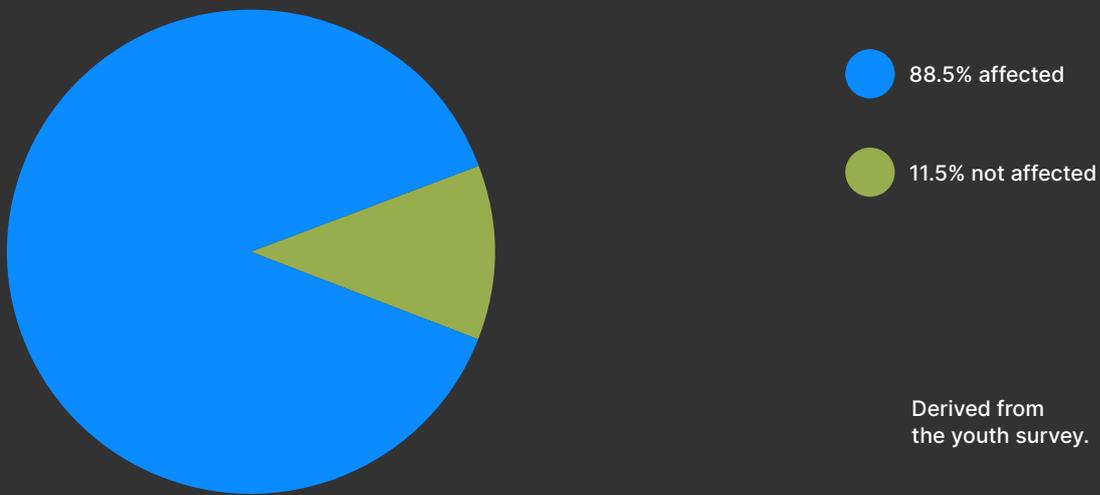
Injustice goes beyond climate change. The current economic system fuels income inequality. As of 2022, the richest 10% of the global population earns more than half of global income, whereas the poorest half earns 8.5% of the total. An average individual from the top 10% of the global income distribution

earns USD 122 100 per year; one from the poorest half, USD 3920 per year (Chancel et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic saw the 10 richest men in the world double their fortunes, while 160 million people were forced into poverty, in addition to the 3.2 billion already living in poverty (Ahmed et al., 2022).

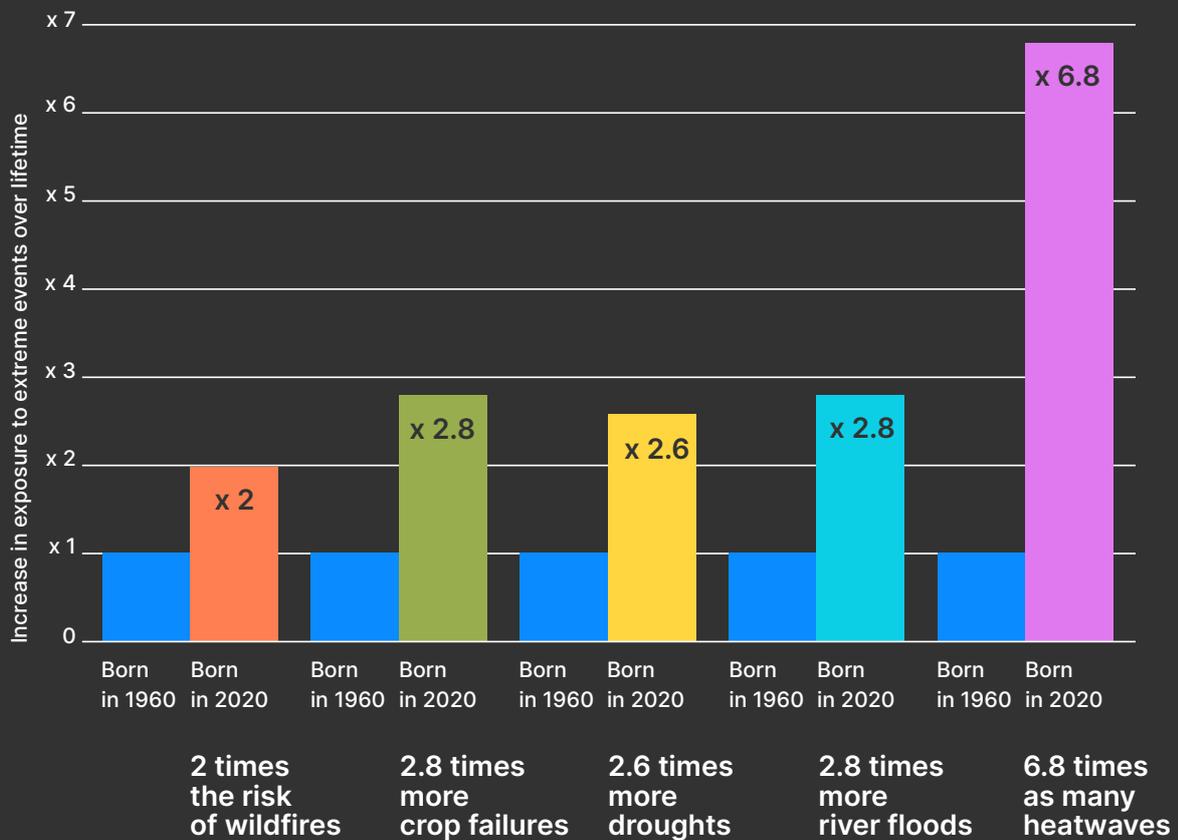
Instead of ‘an unhealthy planet for the prosperity of a few’, our vision – like the SDGs and others – is of a healthy planet for the prosperity of all.

**The richest 10% of the global population earns more than half of global income, whereas the poorest half earns 8.5% of the total.**

**Figure 1**  
Impact of climate change on youth

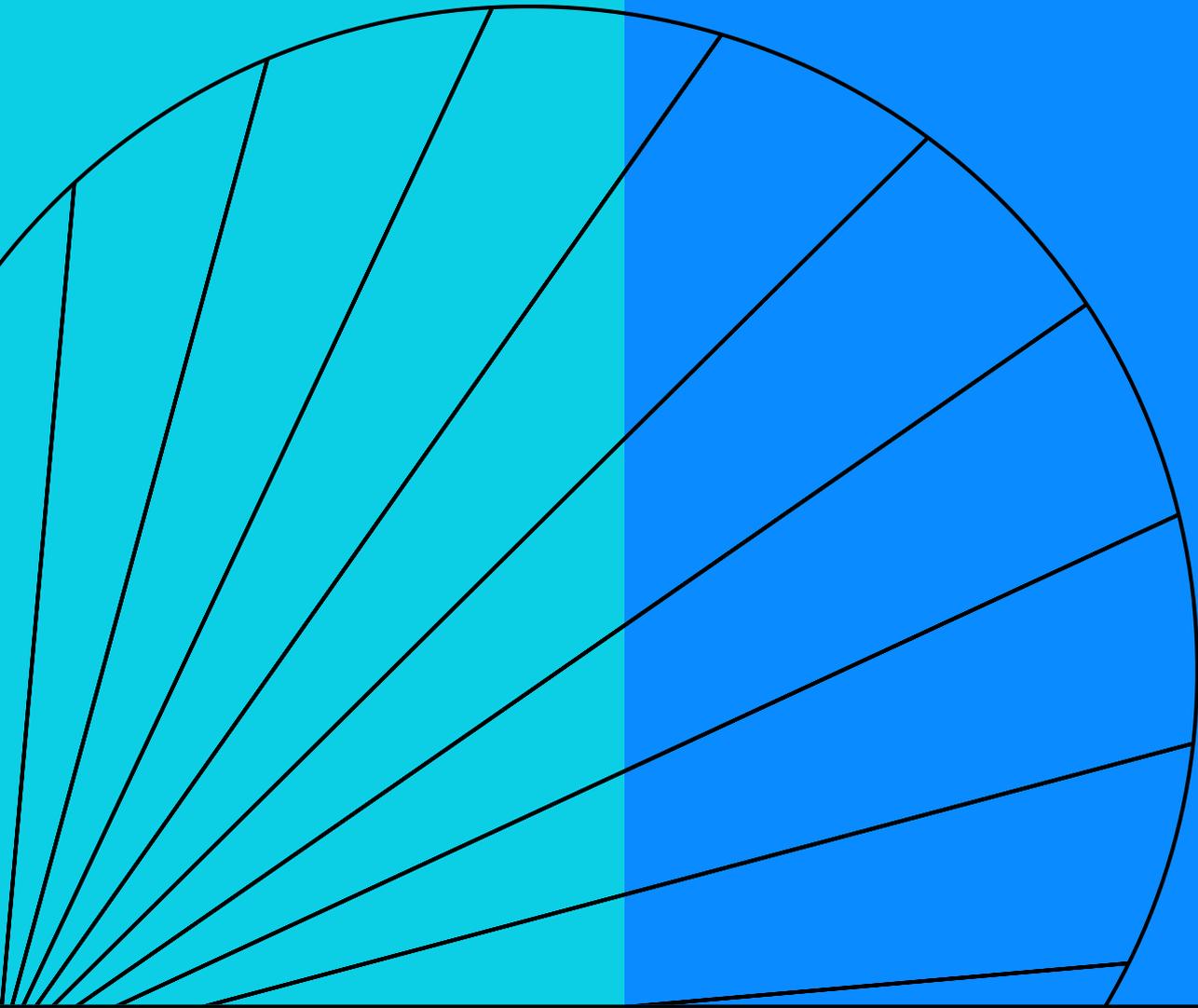


**Figure 2**  
Lifetime exposure to extreme events under Paris Agreement pledges for children born in 2020 compared that of a person born in 1960



Source: (Luten et al., 2021; Thiery et al., 2021)

**3**

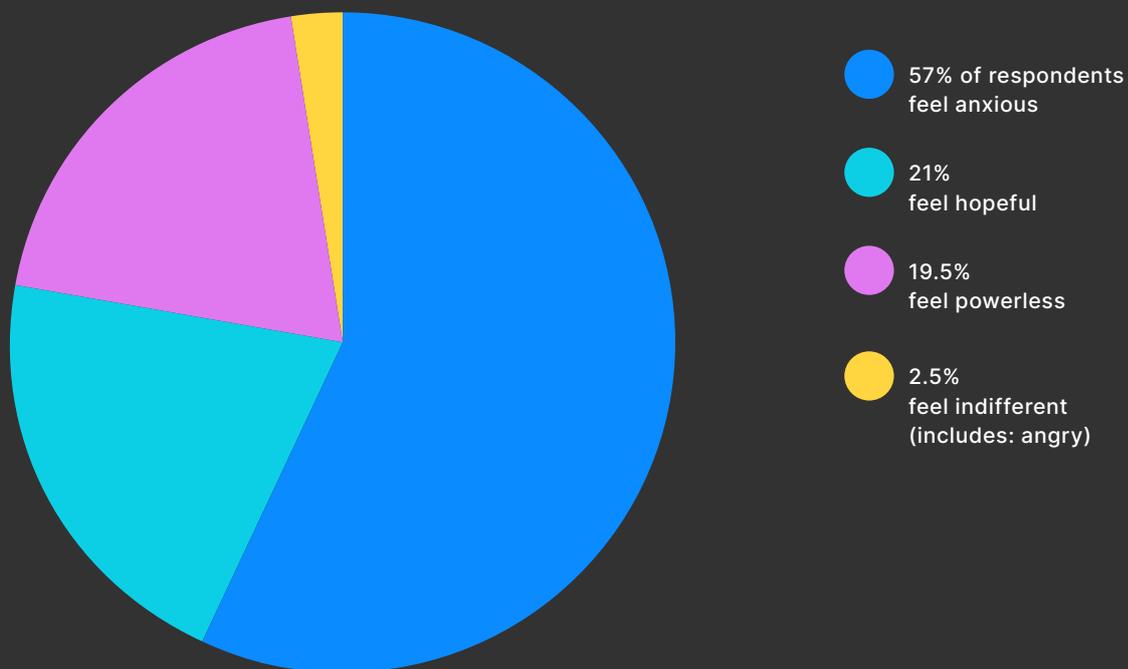


**A youth vision  
for the planet's  
future**

Environmental and climate disruptions combined with the inaction of governments is threatening the present and the future of young people worldwide. This has significant repercussions on young people's mental health (S. Basu & Banarjee, 2020). According to the survey carried out for this report, more than half of the young people participating reported that they feel anxious about climate change, and almost 20% feel powerless (Figure 3).

This sobering response requires urgent and radical reconfiguration of the systems in place that will dictate the future of half the people alive now. Below, we outline aspirations and our 'youth vision' for the future, based on scientific research and our survey of young people, aged 18 to 30, from 89 countries, in both the Global North and South. The survey was carried out online via Google Forms and consisted of both multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey was distributed by youth organizations working in collaboration with SEI and CEEW as well as other youth organizations participating in the Stockholm+50 international meeting.

**Figure 3**  
What do youth feel regarding climate change?

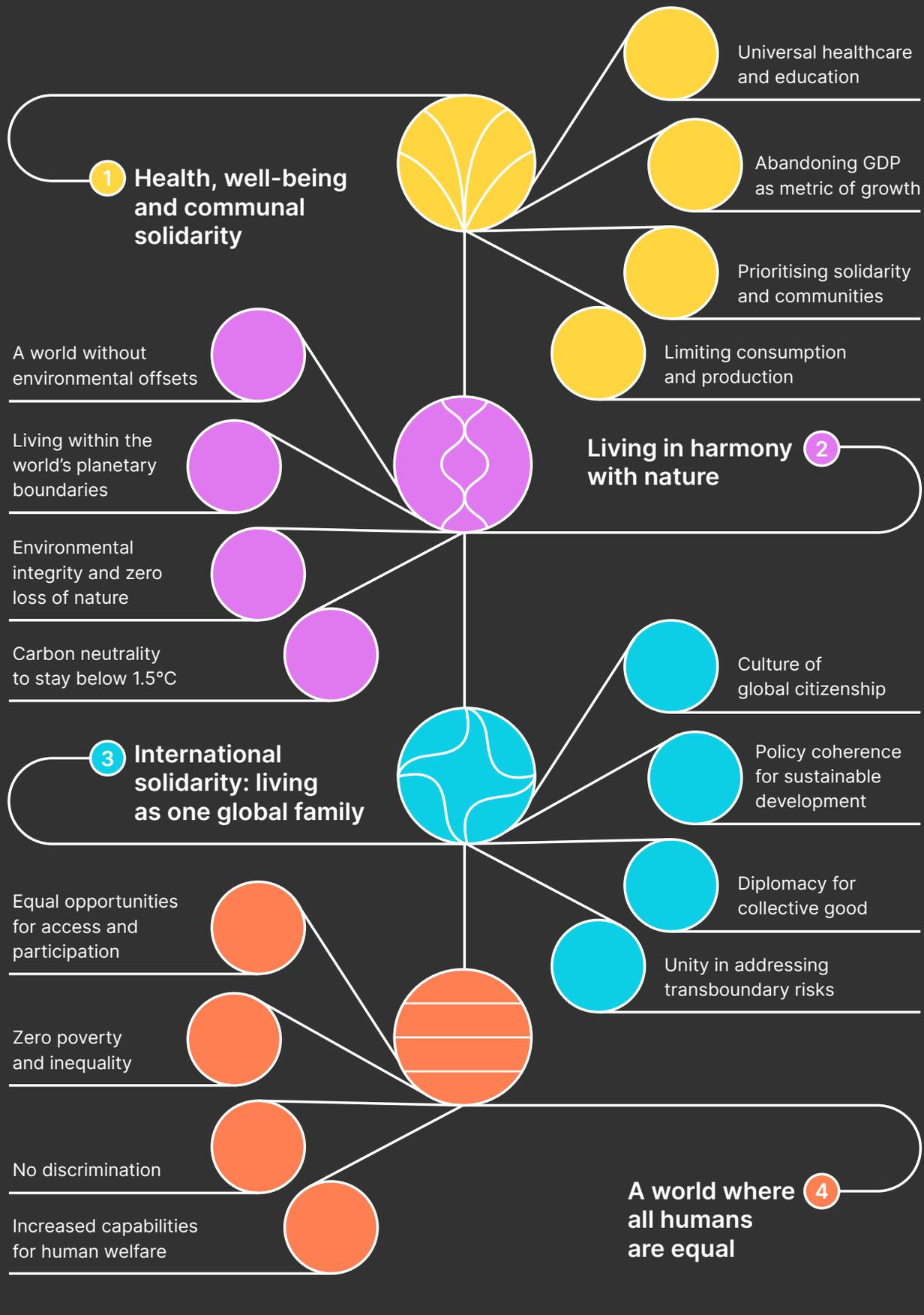


Note: Some respondents gave more than one answer. The 4 pre-selected answers were Anxious, Hopeful, Powerless, Indifferent. Respondents could add other emotions, Angry is the one that came up most often (2% of the respondents).

Derived from the youth survey.

Figure 4

## Youth vision for a just and sustainable future



# 3.1 Health, well-being and communal solidarity

The vision that we have built here (Figure 4) includes living in a world that embraces health, happiness and solidarity as societal goals rather than economic growth. There is a pressing need to move away from the current definition of progress and growth, as it increases materialism.

While there is no doubt that economic growth was a driver for increased standards of living for many people around the world, it also undermines the quality of lives in multiple ways, such as through ecosystem degradation and pollution.

Humans need to change the compass that drives collective progress so that it truly reflects humanity's needs and aspirations. **Young people surveyed for this report consider education and health as the two most important metrics to assess the prosperity of a country.** Of more than 900 young respondents, 94% think that education is very important and 91% think health is very important.

In practice, this means that actions taken by all stakeholders in society, both on the local and global level, would be assessed against these metrics. A world that puts education and health at the core of its societies is crucial to creating

**A world that puts education and health at the core of its societies is crucial to creating a future in which young people can thrive.**

a future in which young people can thrive. On the one hand, large-scale access to quality education would enhance young people's capacity to make decisions and drive change. On the other hand, establishing health as the new collective compass would prevent policymakers and businesses from taking actions that harm the planet and health. Bhutan and New Zealand have adopted Gross National Happiness and Wellbeing Indicators, respectively, among the governments that have added similar alternatives, beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

A world that is focused on health, well-being and solidarity would also give greater recognition to non-economic activities that are essential to lives.

The respondents to the survey conducted for this report were asked what they considered as the most important measure in assessing the prosperity of a country. A majority mentioned they envision a world that creates room for engaging in activities that benefit communities. This may mean better work-life balance through reduced working hours, to allow time for volunteer work and leisure time with family. Building and cultivating social bonds is the key to improving mental health and strengthening communities, eventually leading to greater happiness and solidarity.



## 3.2 Living in harmony with nature

This vision calls for transformative change of humanity's trajectory of growth. One way to support this would be to pursue two concrete short-term goals that should be accomplished by 2030, in order to restore humanity's fractured relationship with nature: limiting both loss of nature and climate change.

At the core of this vision lies the humility to acknowledge that this planet is not the property of humans, but an embodiment of every life's equal right to dignity. With the rate of extinction reaching up to 100 000 species annually (WWF, 2022), the planet's ecosystems are collapsing rapidly and the sixth mass extinction is under way (Ceballos et al., 2020). It is in this context that the following vision offers hope and should be acted upon.

The youth vision is of a world in which no more ecosystems are lost, where humans learn to live within Earth's 'biocapacity'. It envisions the decoupling of economic growth and ecosystem destruction, while ensuring that human aspirations and actions, both as societies and individuals, remain within the confines of global planetary boundaries. It is a world without

**This planet is not the property of humans, but an embodiment of every life's equal right to dignity.**

'greenwashing' (providing misleading information about the sustainability of a product, policy or other environment-harming activity), where the focus is on protecting existing ecosystems, rather than deferring preservation. This vision includes:

A world without biodiversity offsets: Many ecologically sensitive developmental projects around the globe are granted environmental clearance based on offsets. Biodiversity offsets are measurable conservation outcomes that result from actions designed to compensate for significant residual biodiversity loss that arise through development projects

(IPBES, 2022). Studies have shown, however, that even if such offsets were perfectly equivalent to the amount of biodiversity destroyed, a significant loss of nature would be incurred by mid-century (Buschke & Brownlie, 2020). Additionally, some scientists are now calling for the need to earmark just over 50% of terrestrial ecosystems for preservation, for a goal of no significant loss of nature (Robbins, 2020); others have noted such conservation proposals would impact over a billion people, and would need to be done equitably and justly (Schleicher et al., 2019). This call coincides with the UN declaration of 2021–2030 UN as the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, as well as the pledge of world leaders at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) to halt deforestation by 2030 (UN News, 2021).

Growth within the planetary boundaries: This requires nations to limit growth within the planetary boundaries, based on considerations of equity and justice (Hayha et al., 2016). As mentioned above, five out of nine planetary boundaries have already been transgressed. In order for the planet to regain its resilience, societies should function sustainably, and economic models that are fuelled by unending production and consumption should be discarded.

Accounting for environmental integrity: The vision reported here calls for a world where a country's prosperity and 'development' are measured, inter alia, in terms of the state and abundance of its natural capital, i.e., the quality of its air, soil and water, biodiversity, integrity of ecosystems, etc. Countries with functional environmental ecosystems are more resilient to the impacts of climate change (Lo, 2016) and provide higher standards of living to their people (UNEP et al., 2015). Therefore, it is time to stop encouraging classification of nations as 'developed' and 'developing' based merely on nature-agnostic metrics and instead amplify examples of nations prospering harmoniously with nature (Khokhar & Serajuddin, 2015).

Eliminating weapons of mass destruction: Principle 26 of the Stockholm Declaration recognizes the need for eliminating weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, that could wipe out habitats if deployed. Planetary well-being and nuclear weapons cannot co-exist.



Photo: PRASANNAPIX/Getty

Limiting warming to less than 1.5°C by 2030: Crossing the threshold of a 1.5°C world will eliminate species, deteriorate well-being and rupture ecosystems beyond repair, with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities and biodiversity (IPCC, 2022). The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as heat waves, cyclones, droughts, floods, etc., are predicted to increase (IPCC, 2022).

This vision therefore requires an assertive rejection of the ‘overshoot pathway’ advocated by various groups, i.e. a growth trajectory where the world crosses 1.5°C by mid-century, only to attempt a return by 2100 (Climate Analytics, 2021). While reversing the temperature may be possible, the impacts of this ‘temporary’ transgression will be permanent. Such a strategy also questions the adequacy of global carbon neutrality by 2050, in view of scientific calls for a 7.4% annual reduction in emissions till 2030, in order to stay on a 1.5°C trajectory (UNEP, 2019a).

The IPCC has estimated a carbon budget of 300 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalents (GtCO<sub>2</sub>e) to maintain this trajectory (IPCC, 2021). In today’s world of global interdependence, striving together to realize this vision will be absolutely necessary. Such collaboration could facilitate a transformative systemic change based on carbon neutrality, accelerate financial and technological cooperation between the Global North and South, and mainstream sustainability at all levels.

### 3.3 International solidarity: living as one global family

The authors of this report and the survey respondents envisage a future where countries and citizens truly live in one global community, sharing the core value of international solidarity. The youth vision promotes the idea of global citizenship in further advancing sustainable development by calling for collective efforts and shared responsibility to act for the benefit of all. The belief that all citizens are connected as part of a global community is more relevant than ever in the interconnected world today.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development articulates global citizenship in one of its youth-relevant goals. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), *ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*, includes Target 4.7, which highlights the importance of global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, through which learners acquire skills, knowledge and motivation to be engaged citizens in promoting the values and conditions that lead to sustainable development.

One crucial premise of the SDGs is the interconnectedness between the goals; no single goal can independently be achieved without efforts on other areas. This is particularly true when it comes to a role that global citizenship,

or in other words international solidarity, can play in promoting sustainable development, as this often underlies solutions for various social and environmental challenges.

Environmental challenges the world faces today are largely transboundary in nature. The principle of solidarity and collective action as represented in the global citizens concept serves as a basis to tackle these issues at every level, including at the local, national, regional and global scale. An individual's effort to protect the planet would be jeopardized if others don't do the same. Our youth vision calls urgently for all of us to collectively envisage and work towards a more inclusive and sustainable society.

It is important to recognize that solidarity is not only relevant to the individual level but also to policy and country levels. In light of our increasingly interconnected societies, the world today should achieve inclusiveness in the policy dimension to foster mutual efforts and knowledge sharing. Global

diplomacy in a post-Stockholm+50 world should cast away the narrow idea of 'mutual advantage' (Ikeda, 2022) synonymous with *quid pro quos*. Rather, it should recognize that true 'mutual advantage' lies in collectively addressing and overcoming global challenges that will eventually impact every country in an interdependent world.

**Our youth vision calls urgently for all of us to collectively envisage and work towards a more inclusive and sustainable society.**

Globally, youth embrace international solidarity as a key driving force for advancing sustainable development. Solidarity means that everyone is part of a larger community and should take active ownership over planetary issues as challenges that need to be solved together. Nearly 98% of the young people surveyed for this report responded that it is necessary to change their individual behaviours to reduce impacts of climate change. Our survey results also showed that youth

are keen to contribute to a better planet and share responsibility by adopting various changes, including reducing waste and using recycled products; voicing their opinions and engaging with peers on environment-related matters; using public transport more frequently; changing dietary habits and making other commitments. What this tells us is that youth are ready to take actions as socially responsible actors – if they are not already doing so.



Photo: Hadynyah/Getty

## 3.4 A world where all humans are equal

The youth authors advocate for a world that puts economic, social and political equality at the core, where every individual enjoys the equal rights and opportunities. Equality should be a fundamental principle that is woven throughout all aspects of human activities (UN, 2017).

Youth are committed to achieve societies that better distribute wealth between the rich and the poor, and the more powerful and the less powerful. Evidence shows improvements in narrowing income disparity between countries over recent decades; however, income disparity within countries has worsened, so that 71% of the world's population today are residents of countries with growing

inequality (World Inequality Database, 2022). This has significant implications for inequality people experience in everyday life, as disparity within countries and communities where they live become much more visible than disparities that exist internationally.

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly had disproportionate impacts on different groups of people, both economically and non-economically. While people in all income groups had economic losses during the pandemic, the most dramatic occurred among the poorest 20% (World Bank, 2021). The economically disadvantaged are also slow to achieve recovery from their losses compared with richer people.

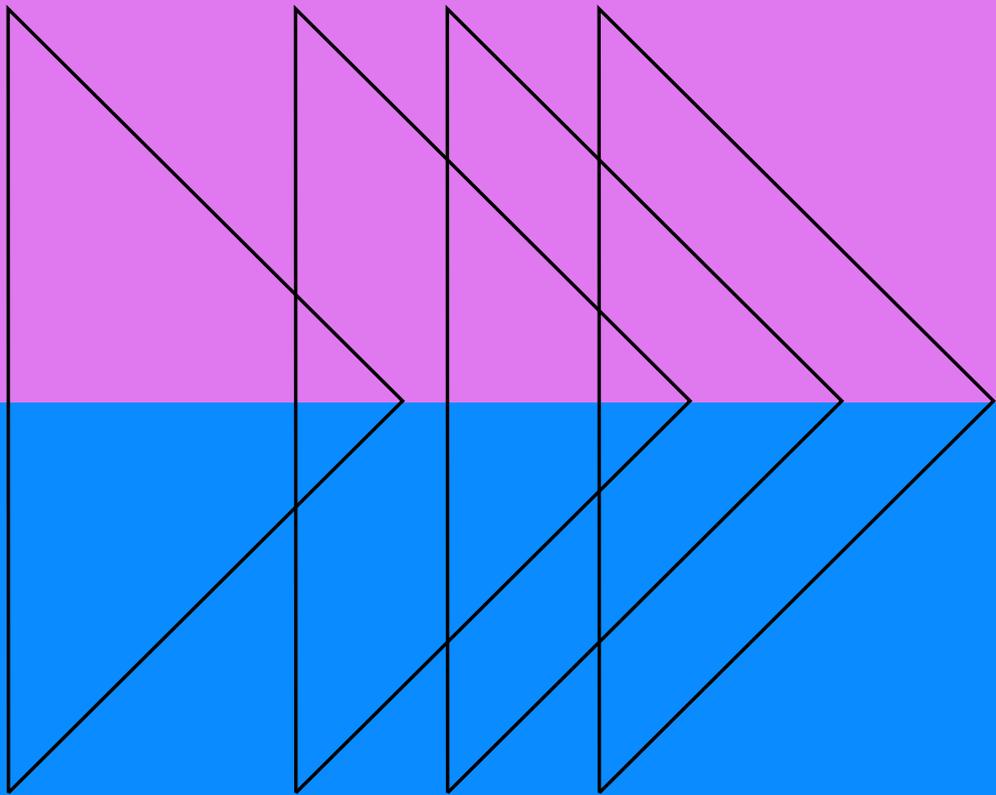
Moreover, equality is not just about income; ensuring equal access to social security and support systems is essential. The pandemic revealed the existing unequal access to necessary health services, including vaccines. Approximately 7% of people in low-income countries were vaccinated with at least one dose, compared to over 75% in high-income countries by 2021 (Gopalakrishnan et al., 2021).

Globally, women have fewer opportunities for political participation and empowerment. The World Economic Forum, in its *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, reported that women's representation in parliaments of 156 countries accounted for only 26%, and just 22% of 3400 ministers worldwide are women (World Economic Forum, 2021). Economically, a gender gap also persists: up to 30% of income inequality is caused by inequality within households, and women and girls continue to play a predominant role in delivering unpaid care work every day (UN News, 2022).

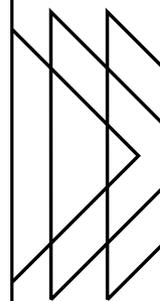
The vision presented here of 'a world where all humans are equal' is about overcoming all forms of inequality that exist within and among countries, as well as achieving a future in which all citizens are given a safe space to play active roles in various life activities. It has zero tolerance for discrimination and envisages the economic, social and political inclusion of all. We, the youth authors of this report, envision a world in which the development of societies centres on happiness, well-being and solidarity, and is contained within the limits of the planet.

**We envision  
a world in which  
the development  
of societies  
centres  
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well-being  
and solidarity.**

**4**



**Sustainable  
and inclusive  
recovery**



A wide gap exists between the state of the planet today and the prosperous, sustainable future which youth envision, as illustrated above. The COVID-19 pandemic has widened this gap while clearly exposing the systemic vulnerabilities and inequalities underlying societies: inequitable access to quality healthcare, education and water; insecurity of employment and income; fragility of economies and supply chains; and humans' fractured relationship with nature and with each other (Rahman et al., 2021).

The impact has been particularly devastating on youth, with respect to education, jobs and mental health. Nearly 826 million students had no computer access to participate in digital learning during the first wave of the pandemic; nearly

706 million had no internet connectivity at home (O'Hagan, 2020). The international aid organization Save the Children predicted that nearly 10 million children may never return to school after the pandemic, with girls being more affected than boys (Warren & Wagner, 2020).

## **COVID-19 recovery can be a stepping stone towards the sustainable, healthy and prosperous future envisioned by youth worldwide.**

Youth entering the workforce are facing difficulty in finding employment. A study by the International Labour Organization indicates that one in six young people have stopped working since the beginning of the pandemic (Barford et al., 2021).

Vulnerable youth have lost access to social support systems as a result of social distancing measures put in place during the pandemic (Gabriel et al., 2021).

A recent survey carried out among youth in the UK, aged 13–25 years old, showed that a majority believed that COVID-19 will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health (YoungMinds, 2021).

Key lessons emerge from the anguish the world has faced during the pandemic. Reflecting and building on these lessons, this section aims to show how COVID-19 recovery can be a stepping stone towards the sustainable, healthy and prosperous future envisioned by youth worldwide. We start by stating these key lessons that can inform decision-making going forward, then describe policy measures that internalize these lessons and can help fulfil the vision that we report here, in this 'Decade of Action' until 2030.

# **4.1 Lessons from COVID-19**

The following lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic could pave the way forward for a sustainable and resilient planetary recovery.

- 1 Global cooperation is key for collective well-being:** The pandemic has highlighted the interdependence of nations, nature and economies, emphasizing that what occurs in one corner of the planet can have an impact thousands of miles away. Lack of global solidarity, however, was also exposed during the

pandemic. Only half of the 194 WHO member states could fully vaccinate 40% or more of their population, while some covered merely 8% due to inequities in distribution (United Nations, 2021). Not only are individualistic responses unethical, but also ineffective. A key lesson is that global problems, be they pandemics or climate change, require global cooperation.

- 2 **Acknowledge the emergency:** When COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic, it was recognized by all for what it was: a global emergency. No lobbies or vested interests could refute the science, and governments switched to 'crisis-management' and took radical measures to uphold the common welfare of people above all. Policymakers put economies at a standstill, implemented major restrictions and mobilized enormous amounts of funding. Some citizens transformed their lifestyles overnight by consuming less, travelling less, working from home if they could, and more, to prioritize what truly mattered to them: health and well-being. Likewise, climate change should be treated as an existential threat and radical and urgent actions should be implemented (Gemenne & Depoux, 2020).
- 3 **Delay is costly:** Governments could not afford to 'sit tight and assess' and had to prioritize timely action to prevent further deaths from the rampant spread of the virus. Any delay or lapse in enforcement multiplied the loss of lives and human suffering (Kompas et al., 2021). The risk of irreversible loss of nature also heightens with further delays in rapid emissions reductions. In economic terms, the peak costs of climate change are greater when mitigation is delayed. Additional costs due to delayed mitigation rise by USD 600 billion annually since 2020 (Sanderson & O'Neill, 2020).
- 4 **Inequalities exacerbate the crisis and vice-versa:** The COVID-19 pandemic showed that individuals and communities suffering from underlying vulnerabilities and inequalities are the most affected in crises. Parts of the world, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, lacked water to wash hands (UNICEF, 2020b). Other parts, such as Tigray in Ethiopia, couldn't access basic essentials provided by the international aid organizations, such as the World Food Programme, due to internal conflict (United Nations News, 2022). As a result, the pandemic further widened pre-existing inequalities in society, resulting in poor people becoming even poorer and marginalized. Likewise, climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, hence the need to centre climate action on the principles of 'reaching the furthest first' and 'leave no one behind' (United Nations, 2015).
- 5 **The health of humans is closely linked to the health of the planet:** Climate change and environmental degradation caused by human activities are directly threatening humans. Diseases such as Ebola and COVID-19 are zoonotic, which account for over 60% of known infectious diseases and 75% of emerging infectious diseases (Salayer et al., 2017). A recent review showed climate change drives zoonotic epidemics by changing interactions between pathogens and their hosts, including people, by warming temperatures and shifts in weather patterns, among other impacts (Rupasinghe et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a stark reminder that humans are not autonomous entities disconnected from the natural world. This became

particularly clear during the pandemic, even in a positive way, when reduction in human activity or the 'Anthropause' had positive effects on ecosystems (Rutz et al., 2020).

- 6 Science and technology provide key solutions:** During the global pandemic, nations around the world gathered experts with different backgrounds to collaborate and develop vaccines in record time. At the same time, the industrial sector repurposed and prioritized production and innovation in healthcare to meet pressing demands.

Likewise, there is a need for stakeholders in the public and private sectors to increase cooperation and resources targeted toward the development and scaling-up of innovative technologies that can contribute to mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts. While technology alone cannot deliver the transformation we need, it can assist (Dutt et al., forthcoming). A fundamental transformation of people, societies and nations is indispensable (Ghosh et al., forthcoming).

Each of these lessons can help the reader better address the climate crisis. Humanity, however, has paid a huge cost for this realization, and its last chance at redemption lies in a rapid course correction which secures the future and restores humankind's relationship with nature.



Photo: Freemixer/Getty

## 4.2 Policy pathways for an inclusive planetary recovery

The survey conducted for this report showed that 68% of the young respondents think their government is not doing enough to support environmentally sustainable recovery from the pandemic. In the context of COVID-19 recovery, young people have a crucial role in ensuring that plans and policies to build back economies and societies will pave the way for a healthy planet that provides prosperity for all.

In line with this role of youth, and drawing on the results from our global youth survey, the following are the main policy actions that could pave the way for a more sustainable, just and prosperous world.

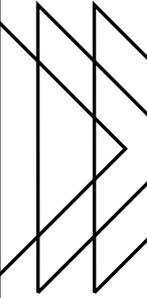
Below we explain two policies and related recommended actions to enact them, as well as their relevance to youth and contributions to the youth vision outlined above.

- 1 Guaranteeing the right to social security:** In low-income countries, only one in five of the poorest people are covered by social safety nets. In addition to exposing the fragilities of humankind's relationship with nature, the pandemic has pushed more people into poverty and nearly half the global workforce (1.6 billion) has suffered a hit on their capacity to earn.

**Recommendations:** Create a **Global Resilience Mechanism**, i.e. a social security system for collective action aimed at supporting the most vulnerable sections of society, and triggered by sudden shocks which may be due to reasons of climate change, persecution, internal conflict, war, disease, economic collapse, etc. It should specifically support women, children, transgender/lesbian/gay/bisexual people, elderly and people with disabilities, who often are the worst-affected during disasters. This scheme should also include the world's more than 26 million refugees, who are often denied social security benefits in their host countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Asia Pacific, 2021). Social security should also be leveraged to achieve universal and uninterrupted access to education, which was adversely impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to lack of infrastructure for virtual learning.

Such a security system could consist of a **Global Safety Net** to provide immediate stimulus support to people in times of crisis. Funding could come through a **Global Social Security Fund**, which would be based on a system of 'progressive contribution', where the percentage of a country's contribution would be determined by its paying capacity.

It is estimated that natural disasters, pandemics and other catastrophes would cost the world billions of dollars annually. This projected cost is dwarfed by global military expenditures of USD 1981 billion in 2020, an increase from previous years despite the pandemic (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2021). Clearly, the capacity exists. Collective will is all that is needed.



**Relevance to youth:** The OECD conducted a survey during the pandemic that showed that more than half of the young people who responded think that their national government should be doing more to ensure economic and social security and well-being (OECD, 2021).

**How can a Global Safety Net contribute to achieving the youth vision?**

In the face of compounding insecurities/anxieties created by climate change, the pandemic and rising socio-economic uncertainties, a social protection system for the world's most affected is a prerequisite for well-being.

- 2 More inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):** The spread of COVID-19 and subsequent containment measures can be considered as disaster and DRR, respectively (IFRC, 2022; UNISDR, 2015). The response to the pandemic shows the need to design DRR plans and strategies that addresses rather than exacerbates inequalities by considering pre-existing vulnerabilities.

While the World Health Organization recommended handwashing with soap as one of the best ways to prevent the spread and defend ourselves against COVID-19, 771 million people do not have access to safe water and 3 in 10 people lacked of soap and/or water to follow such recommendations (UNICEF, 2021; WHO, 2021). Adding to this, in 2020 alone, around 313 major disasters were triggered by natural hazards at the same time that the pandemic itself took around 2 million lives worldwide (International Federation of Red Cross & and Red Crescent Societies, 2021). Disasters, whether they are caused by weather related or biological hazards, exacerbate many of the existing gender, economic, geographic and other inequalities in society.

**The focus on nature-based solutions to increase resilience can yield co-benefits of jobs, growth, sustainability, and human well-being.**

**Recommendations:** More effective and inclusive DRR measures are crucial to ensuring that societies become more resilient, more just, and healthier. A **multi-hazard approach**, together with **exposure and vulnerability assessments** that consider disaggregated and

evidence-based data on gender, safe water access, socioeconomic status, age, education level, language and disabilities, should be carried out to ensure leaving no one behind in the disaster risk management process.

Moreover, the focus on nature-based solutions as disaster risk reduction measures and to increase resilience can yield co-benefits of jobs, growth, sustainability, and human well-being. A recent report estimates that every one dollar spent on restoration could yield up to USD 30 in economic benefits (UNCCD, 2021). The Great Green Wall project in Africa, for example, aims to plant trees across 8000 kilometres to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land, sequester 250 million tons of carbon, create 10 million green jobs in rural areas, and provide food security to many millions in the area by 2030 (UNCCD, 2022).

**Relevance to youth:** More than half of the population in the world is younger than 30 years old, and the most worrying impacts of disasters for this age

group are on physical and mental health (UNDRR, 2020). In addition, as noted by Mami Mizutori, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, 'The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015, calls for governments and other decision makers to include children and youth in designing and implementing policies, plans and standards' (UNISDR, 2015).

**Recognize and encourage youth as agents of change:** A plethora of examples show youth to be actively involved in political, economic, social and climate decisions. They have led communities and events, resulting in positive on-the-ground impacts, or started social enterprises as young as age 15 (WEF, 2021). One such example is Louise Mabulo from the Philippines, who at the age of 20 was one of UNEP's Young Champions of the Earth for 2019. Mabulo is the founder of the Cacao Project, through which she trained over 200 farmers in agroforestry techniques and helped plant more than 70 000 trees across 70 hectares of land (UNEP, 2019b). In order to make change, youth need to be in policymaking roles – or at least have their visions integrated in policy. Nonetheless, less than 6% of young dialogue participants have run for office (WEF, 2021).

**How can it contribute to achieving the youth vision?** Though different summits, forums and high-level events have been involving youth as attendees, panellists, moderators and so on, usually youth act as token icons of representation and lack involvement in actual roundtable discussions. The youth vision can be achieved by putting into practice what is agreed on in youth forums, briefs prepared by young professionals, policy engagements, etc. Two examples of young people's calls to action are the *Davos Lab: Youth Recovery Plan* (WEF, 2021) and *Words into action: A companion for implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* (UNDRR, 2020; WEF, 2021).

## Policy actions for a sustainable future

In order to limit global warming below 1.5°C, a child born in 2020 should emit 10 times less carbon dioxide than her grandparents did (Cozzi et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2022). This calls for urgent and radical transformations to ensure the ability to deliver low-carbon products and services; these include the following actions, with our recommendations and their relevance to youth and significance for our youth vision outlined above. Figure 5 maps these and policy suggestions together with lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**Scale up low-carbon transition in all sectors:** The trillions of US dollars that are being injected into the economy in the form of COVID-19 recovery packages should be directed to the decarbonisation of economies. These investments will shape economies for decades, which requires avoiding carbon lock-in. As of January 2022, only 37% of public money for energy spent by G20 countries went to clean energy, while 41% was invested in the fossil fuel sector (Energy Policy Tracker, 2022). Fossil fuel subsidies remain high (USD 468 billion as of 2019).

Figure 5

# Pandemic lessons, a youth vision and policy suggestions

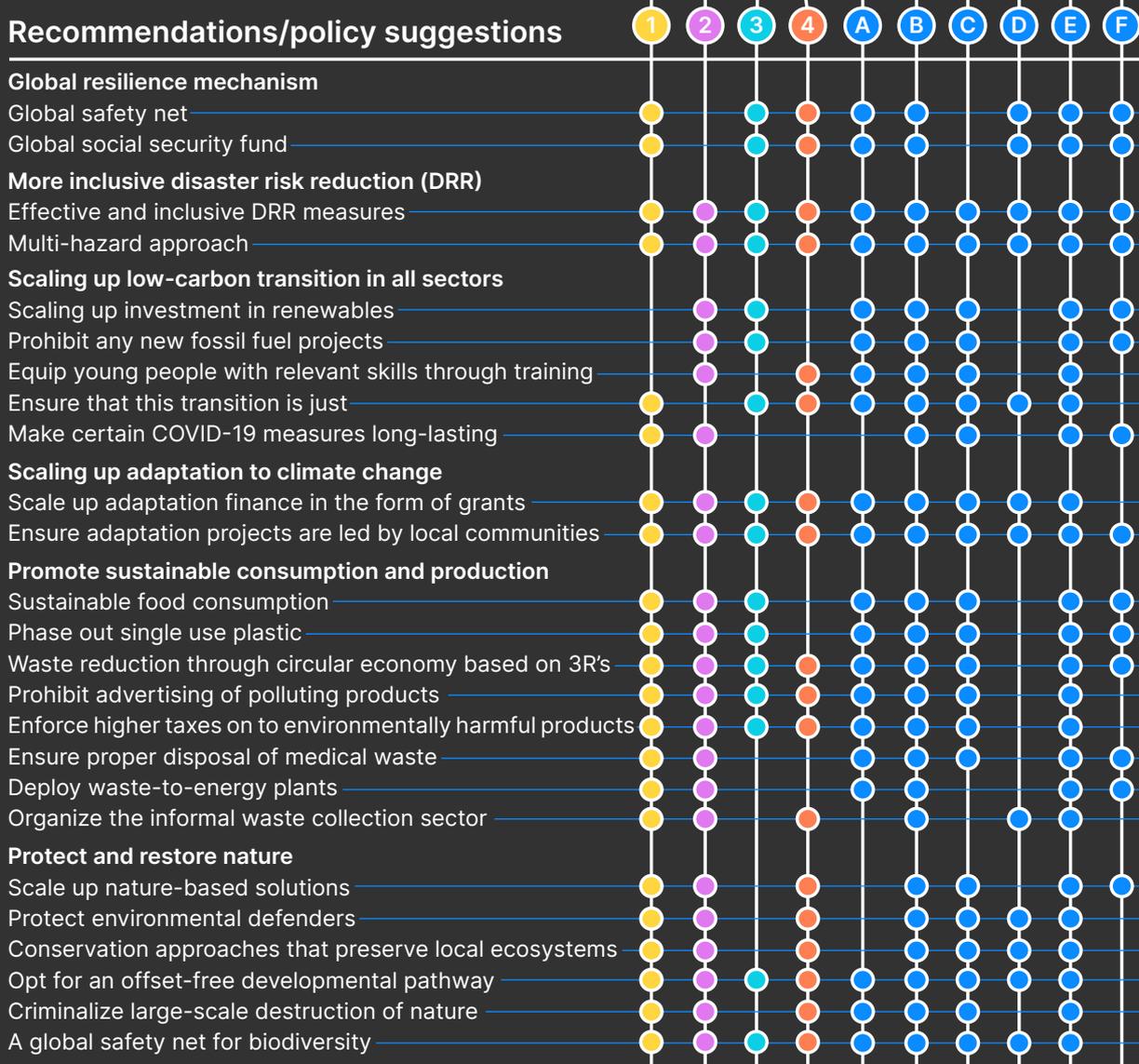
## Lessons from COVID-19

- A** Global cooperation is key for collective well-being
- B** Acknowledge the emergency
- C** Delay is costly
- D** Inequalities exacerbate the crisis and vice versa
- E** The health of humans is closely linked to the health of the planet
- F** Science and technology provide key solutions

## Youth vision

- 1** Health, well-being and solidarity
- 2** Living in harmony with nature
- 3** International solidarity
- 4** A world where all humans are equal

## Recommendations/policy suggestions



## Green recovery plans that leave no one behind would lay the groundwork for a just transition toward low-carbon, resilient economies in the future.

**Recommendations:** scale up investment in renewables; increase research and development for renewable alternatives; phase out fossil fuel subsidies; prohibit new fossil fuel projects; equip young people with relevant skills through training and education; ensure that this transition is just, by providing support for affected communities; put local communities at the centre (Xu, 2021). Some measures taken in the context of mobility restrictions and fear of COVID-19 infections should be made durable, such as bike lanes and working from work, to reduce emissions from the transport sector.

**Relevance to youth:** The energy transition could generate 42 million jobs by 2050 (International Renewable Energy Agency, 2020). As more young people will enter the job market now and in the future, the energy industry, especially sustainable energy, has high employment potential.

**Youth as agents of change:** Of the young people we surveyed, 55% rank using public transport more frequently as one of their three top priority changes to reduce their carbon footprint.

Initiatives such as the Student Energy Solutions Movement directly fund and support the launch of 10 000 youth-led clean energy projects around the world by 2030 (Student Energy, N.D.). Youth leaders have a key role to play in building partnerships with local and diverse communities (Tresise & Watts, 2021).

**How can it contribute to achieving the youth vision?** Green recovery plans that leave no one behind would lay the groundwork for a just transition toward low-carbon, resilient economies in the future. Changes, for example, to the transportation sector would have additional benefits too: Ditching cars for metros, busses and trams would reduce air pollution, while cycling would improve health and well-being.

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**Scale up adaptation to climate change:** In addition to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, it is crucial that more resources are being devoted to increasing the resilience of the populations that are already being harshly affected by climate change, especially in developing countries. Currently, the costs for adaptation in the poorest countries are 5 to 10 times greater than public adaptation funding (UNEP, 2021).

**Recommendations:** Scale up adaptation finance in the form of grants; ensure that adaptation projects are led by local communities; and reach the most vulnerable and marginalized people first.

**Youth as agents of change:** Kimplanter Seedlings and Nurseries is a youth- and woman-led organization in Kenya that supports farmers

in adapting to changing weather patterns through drought-resistant seedlings (Kimplanter, n.d.).

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**Promote sustainable consumption and production:** Consumption and production needs to be done within the planet's limits. This means shifting toward more sustainable ways of producing and consuming but also reducing consumption of non-essential products.

As an example, globally, humans dump the equivalent of one garbage truck of plastic into the ocean every minute (UNEP, n.d.). Every 6 seconds in 2019, an area of rainforest the size of a football pitch was cleared (Global Forest Watch, 2019).

**Recommendations:** Encourage more sustainable food consumption (plant-based diets, agroecology); phase out single use plastic; sharply reduce waste through circular economy based on recycling, reuse and reduction (3Rs); prohibit advertising of polluting products; introduce taxes on activities and products based on their impact on the environment; criminalize large-scale destruction of nature through the creation of the legal concept of 'ecocide' (Nordic Council of Ministers, n.d.); ensure proper disposal of medical waste (personal protection equipment, masks, swabs, syringes, etc.); deploy waste-to-energy plants; organize the largely informal waste collection sector to ensure greater inclusivity.

## Almost three-quarters of young people surveyed rank 'reducing waste and using recycled products' as one of their three behaviour changes to address climate change.

**Relevance to youth:** Many young people surveyed emphasized the need for more sustainable products and consumption. Almost three-quarters of young people surveyed rank 'reducing waste and using recycled products' as one of their three behaviour changes to address climate change.

**Youth as agents of change:** On a Sunday in October 2015, Afroz Shah, a young Indian lawyer living in Mumbai, started picking up trash on Versova Beach with the help of his 84-year-old neighbour. What started as an individual initiative quickly grew into a massive movement that brought together 200 000 volunteers. By 2018, the last pieces of plastic were removed, and Versova Beach witnessed its first turtle hatching in decades (Milam, 2019; Toner, 2019). A beautiful symbol, and a strong signal to political authorities that they should implement policies to drastically cut down the production and use of plastic.

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**Protect and restore nature:** The period of 2011–2020, dubbed 'the Decade of Biodiversity' by the UN General Assembly, ironically witnessed an accelerated decline in biodiversity (Brondizio et al., 2019). This decade,

## Seeing nature reclaim space during the pandemic helped me see that there is so much we can do to accommodate nature.

2021–2030, of 'Ecosystem Restoration' should reverse this trend. Also, greater emphasis on oceans is needed (Laffoley et al., 2021). When nature is 'left alone', it recuperates (e.g. 'healing' of the ozone hole).

**Recommendations:** A global safety net, for biodiversity has been identified, as the minimum amount of protected terrestrial land that should be maintained to reverse further biodiversity loss, offset carbon dioxide emissions from land conversions, and enhance natural carbon dioxide removal (Dinerstein et al., 2020). It is believed that in addition to the existing 15% of the land area currently protected, 35% of additional conservation sites of particular biodiversity significance need to be earmarked to reach a stable climate.

The role of Indigenous people as 'guardians' for protecting these areas should be formalized, as they safeguard 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity (The World Bank, 2021). This will encourage conservation approaches that preserve local ecosystems as well as the livelihoods of local communities.

Active discussion seems to be leading to a growing consensus among the scientific community for attaining a minimum of 50% of land protected by 2030 (IISD, 2019). 'At least 30%' should be incorporated in the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework as a global goal towards 2030, according to the IUCN, as a minimum. A goal to protect and restore nature needs to translate into a global and local policy mandate, while also considering the urgency to limit global warming to less than 1.5°C by 2030.

It will be key to opt for an offset-free developmental pathway that focuses on protection rather than compensation. Ecosystems and biodiversity loss have non-linear and local climatic implications that can neither be mitigated by regrowing forests elsewhere, nor assessed accurately for timely and perfect compensation (Rojas, 2021).

**Relevance to youth:** Identify minimum natural capital that the youth of today will need in future for a healthy planet.

**Youth as agents of change:** In 2018, 25 children and young people successfully sued the Colombian government for failing to protect the Amazon (Mila, 2019).

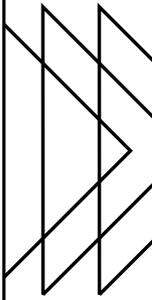
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Above we propose a range policy pathways with relevance to youth and our youth vision, where young people have already acted for a better future. Taking further action on these by governments at all levels and by other sectors could bring our world closer to the youth vision of a healthy planet with dignity and equality for all.

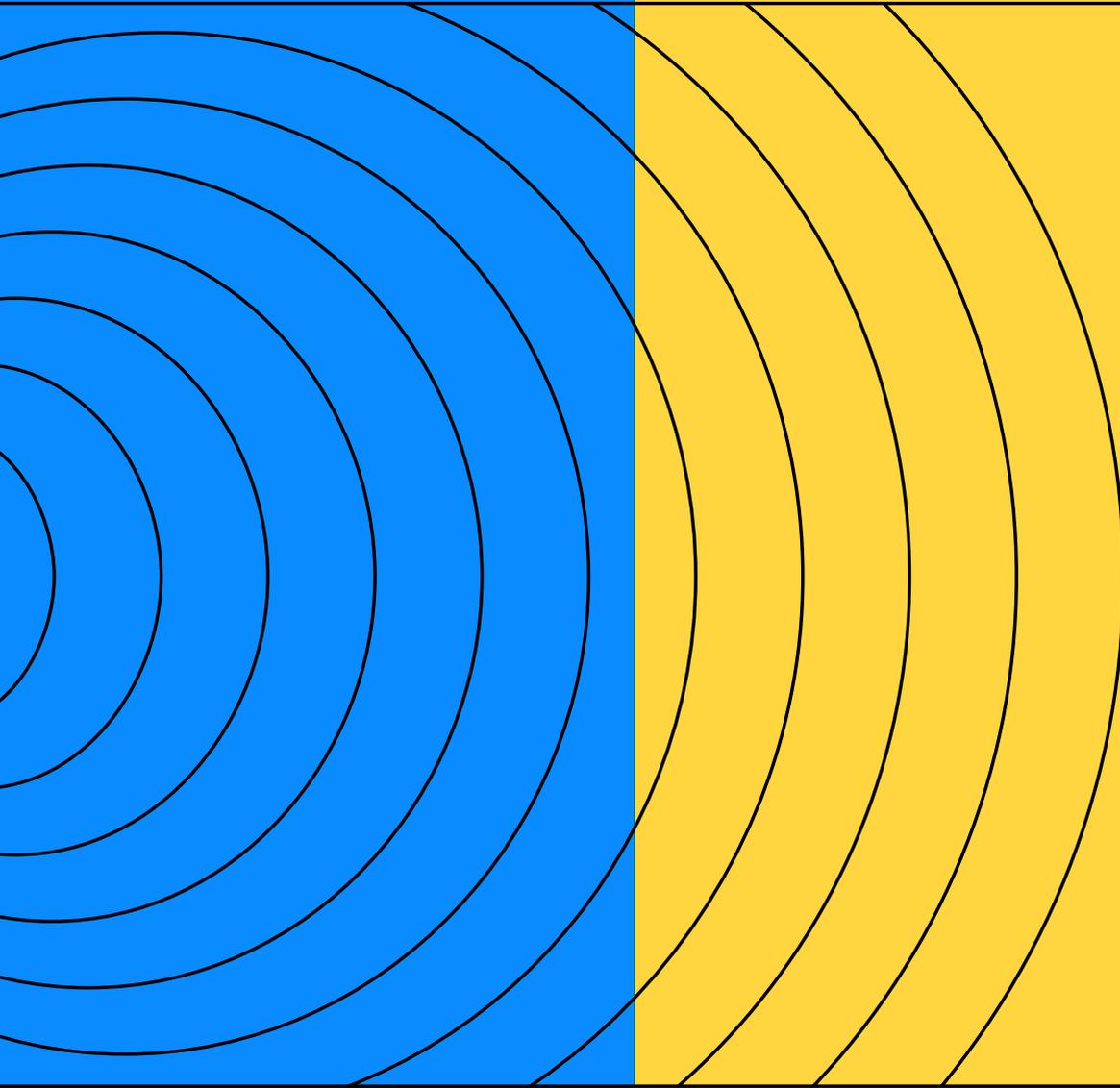
To underscore our statements above, we present the thoughts of respondents to our survey regarding the key learnings from COVID-19 pandemic that could help in the fight against climate change, below.

## 4.3 Selected survey responses

- ” WE ARE ALL CONNECTED. This is a global world and we cannot ignore our neighbours if we want to solve any problem.
- ” Rich countries handled the pandemic extremely poorly in terms of global equity and justice and if we are to cooperate on climate change things need to be done differently.
- ” Seeing nature reclaim space during the pandemic helped me see that there is so much we can do to accommodate nature, prioritize a change in that particular relationship and lean towards a symbiotic rather than a parasitic relationship with nature.
- ” We are able to fight global crises if there is enough political will, there is enough money around to support certain industries if wanted and we are all able of more and faster lifestyle changes than we thought.
- ” Countries have always said that they cannot do anything at the expense of economic growth. Yet, in the face of a global public health threat, many countries, for a time, stopped entire industries. While this in and of itself had consequences that must be reckoned with, it demonstrates that if governments are serious about an existential threat, they have the means to act. The political will to fight against climate change is simply not there yet.
- ” Media can play a larger role in portraying climate change as an immediate threat like the pandemic and encourage climate friendly behaviour.
- ” People don't understand scientifically how their actions contribute to others or simply don't believe in solutions to these crises.
- ” Quick mobilization is possible when people believe that we are in a crisis, which clearly demonstrates that climate change is not treated as such.
- ” We must generate interest about sustainable development in an effort to educate and engage young people with the SDGs and to encourage them to prioritize the goals in their lifestyles, behaviours, education and professional careers as these goals provide a framework for a better world that children could live in the future.
- ” COVID-19 and climate change are two very different challenges, but they do have some common match that's like a key. They both are global and also, they do not obey the national boundaries.
- ” Our main problem is in education. Communities first need to be aware of their problems and challenges and then they can fight it.
- ” Citizens should start from making little sustainable changes in life and should encourage such actions on community level so that everyone can follow.



**5**



**Magnifying  
youth-led action:  
climate change  
and beyond**

The discussion so far makes it evident that fulfilling a youth vision for a healthy and just planet requires a reconfiguration of humanity's relationship with nature, socio-economic priorities, consumption and production patterns, and the social contracts that govern day-to-day lives. Achieving these ends goes beyond tackling climate change and the need to reduce emissions.

Many young activists have challenged business-as-usual strategies to economic growth and capitalist exploitation – pointing out these 'neutral' processes and structures are interlinked with a history of colonialism, racism, gender inequality and other forms of systemic oppression (Specia & Castle, 2021). In building a youth vision, we take an intersectional view of environmental challenges, expressing the need to acknowledge and address the wider systemic issues intricately linked with climate change, including poverty, inequality, racism, sexism and marginalization and exclusion.

Youth activists engaged in international climate negotiations, for example, have stressed not only the vulnerability of youth and future generations to climate impacts, but have also expressed solidarity with other particularly vulnerable groups, such as women, Indigenous peoples and marginalized communities globally (Thew et al., 2020). Youth activists have called for a systemic shift in how societies are structured, away from the current distribution of political and economic power, much of which lies with polluting industries (O'Brien et al., 2018). Youth have raised their voices in support of solutions that tackle both structural inequality and climate change simultaneously.

However, young people's calls to action do not always translate to action on the ground. Youth across the world often find their agency cramped by lack of financial or political power (Thew, 2018). This denies them the participatory mechanisms available to other better established non-state actors – for example, organizing high profile side events at climate negotiations (Thew, 2018). The spokespeople for international youth are often volunteers –

which means they often come from privileged backgrounds and there is often a high turnover rate among youth climate activists (Thew, 2018). Youth from the Global South face particular challenges in obtaining the necessary funding and visas to contribute effectively to global climate conversations (Thew, 2018). This was highlighted by some respondents, including one who said that 'an adequate youth participation should be INCLUSIVE and consider inequalities in and between countries, and the gap global North/South.'

All this suggests that there is a need to ensure that there is adequate support within the climate and other governance systems to empower youth voices –

through financial support and/or political agency- especially youth voices from marginalized or vulnerable communities. The high turnover rate among youth also points to the need for systemic change to allow youth to keep engaging and acting. Systems such as adequate environmental education and skills training need to be put in place that can support the youth of today

**There is a need to ensure adequate support within the climate governance systems to empower youth voices.**

in becoming leaders of tomorrow – not trap them in systems within which it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve change.

Since human agency informs how vulnerability to climate threats is distributed among populations (Wisner & Kelman, 2012; Raju et al., 2022), agency that is distorted by biases will naturally result in unequal distribution of vulnerability. Exercise of agency and distribution of power through governance is one of the key factors determining the climate vulnerability of social groups (Thomas et al., 2019). Global governance includes ‘the totality of institutions, policies, norms, procedures and initiatives through which States and their citizens try to bring more predictability, stability and order to their responses to transnational challenges’ (United Nations, 2014, p. vi). Thus, global governance is a critical lever for action across nations, economic sectors, and social groups to achieve a just and sustainable future.

The existing global governance framework has fallen woefully short of translating stated commitments into actual outcomes. For example, half of all cumulative carbon dioxide emissions have happened since the first IPCC assessment report in 1990, while annual emissions in 2018 were 60% higher than in 1990 (Stoddard et al., 2021).

Two important questions arise: Are youth participating adequately in governance, and thereby exercising their agency to bring their vision of systemic change to reality? And if not, what needs to change?

We argue that aligning global governance with certain core values is central to fulfilling a youth vision for a healthy planet and a sustainable and inclusive planetary recovery. These values are inclusivity through representation and meaningful participation in politics and decision-making, interconnectedness of institutions and cross-sectoral policies, accountability through litigation, and empowerment through education.

## 5.1 Inclusivity of youth through representation in governance

Representation is one of the two critical components of governance that determines how governance structures’ outcomes are distributed (Thomas et al., 2019). Several dedicated organizations represent the youth constituency in international environmental governance. For example, YOUNGO is the youth constituency to the UNFCCC; Global Youth for Environment is the youth engagement mechanism for UNEP (YOUNGO, 2021). Despite the organized platforms for youth representation at international fora, representation in actual negotiations remains tokenistic, and its tangible outcomes are limited (Lubben, 2019). Global climate governance needs clear goals and metrics to ensure global youth representation, especially of youth from marginalized communities. The goals should include quantifiable targets and mechanisms to collect data and evidence on progress indicators towards those targets.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides a concrete example of such a framework, requiring public bodies to measure and report progress towards seven predefined goals (Welsh Government, 2022).

More than half (57%) of the respondents surveyed for this report feel that youth are inadequately represented in global climate governance. The survey results were segregated according to the UNFCCC categorization of Annex I and non-Annex I parties. Overall, Annex 1 Parties to the Convention include industrialized countries plus economies in transition (the EIT) parties. Non-Annex I Parties are mostly developing countries recognized by the Convention as vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. The survey conducted for this report finds 53% of youth from non-Annex I countries feel inadequately represented in global climate governance compared to 47% of youth from Annex I countries.



Photo: UN Photo/Laura Jarriel

On the other hand, 62% of young people from these non-Annex I countries are not aware if representation is adequate or not, in comparison to 38% of youth from Annex 1 countries. The relevance of these negotiations is important, as one respondent expressed, to ‘improve awareness about “What is a conference?”, “what can we achieve by participating?”, “How can it impact at a globe space?” to all the youth. For me I was not aware of such meetings (and its purpose) till I got graduated.’

To highlight a practical solution proposed by one respondent, to address this,

*governments should always bring official youth delegates with them to COP negotiations that they fund fully their transportation, accommodation, and meals. Second, the most direct impact will be if young people run for elected positions. In the US, you must be 25 years to run for Congress, but in many states, you only have to be 18 to run for local or state government. But these young people need training and money for their campaigns. Third, governments should create special Climate Negotiation Fellowships that are 2–3 years long as entry level jobs into the government. For example, in the US this would be at the State Department or Department of Energy.*

Characteristics unique to youth, such as limited ability to exercise traditional methods of non-state actor agency and form professional networks due to financial constraints, impede youth representation in global governance (Thew, 2018). Other systemic issues such as immigration and inequitable access to COVID-19 vaccines further compounded poor youth representation

## **Youth have limited power to directly implement changes in governments and corporations due to an absence of qualifications.**

in the recent past (Aziz, 2019; Barford, 2021; Lawson, 2021). Youth have limited power to directly implement changes in governments and corporations due to an absence of qualifications (Han & Ahn, 2020). This was also elaborated by a respondent, ‘I think that while there is an argument to be made that we are increasingly being represented, I would rather posit that we are being talked about more. The opportunity to get involved in these contexts is something that is a somewhat hidden opportunity to many.’

The Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN) brings the conversation of the LGBTQIA+ living within intersections of discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation and expression to go together with climate justice conversations. According to CYGEN, LGBTQIA+ people are particularly vulnerable to climate change and experience its effects disproportionately because of their social roles, further leading to partial or incomplete integration in societal issues. The injustices experienced include discrimination, gender-based violence and lack of access to information. This was also echoed by the International Student Environmental Coalition (ISEC) Trinidad and Tobago representative, noting the discrimination around racial identity and sexual orientation are some hindrances to using their platforms to

voice issues on disaster risk reduction at the community level. For example, one respondent mentioned that *'if the representation in the rooms is inclined to a certain type of people (orientation of their skin colour and geographic balance) then the process has started on the wrong note. Policy needs to put the most vulnerable at the forefront.'*

Despite consistent calls from youth for increased inclusivity in international climate governance (Hunt, 2021; YOUNGO, 2021; Youth4Climate, 2021), there are limited examples of youth's direct participation in climate governance. For instance, Nigeria's youth were mobilized under the National Youth Climate Consultation to provide inputs to the country's 2021 Nationally Determined

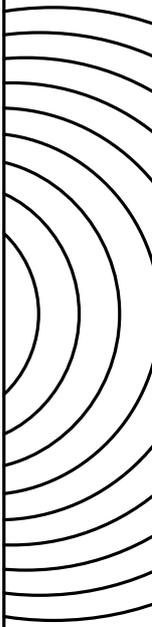
Contributions (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2020). The European Citizens' Initiative's 'Fridays For Future' team submitted demands for increased ambition on climate action, including stronger legislation and free educational materials for member states to the European Commission in July 2019. However, evaluation of the actual impact of such inputs remains elusive.

**Youth representation should be systematically encouraged, legally guaranteed and financially supported.**

While meaningful representation at international negotiations is essential, official non-state actor representatives' accountability to the constituencies they claim to represent may sometimes be inadequate, or some groups may not be represented at all (Kuyper & Bäckstrand, 2016). Thus, local institutions need to take responsibility for youth representation to ensure

that issues concerning youth are discussed and addressed at the lowest level capable of doing so. An example is local COVID-19 recovery efforts. Only about 30% of the youth surveyed said they were part of COVID-19 recovery efforts. At the local level, experience in Cambodia showed that young people may get excluded from community-level engagement due to frequent migration for better economic opportunities or due to parents' desire for young people to spend their time earning a living (Heng et al., 2014). Youth participation in decentralized governance needs legal definition in such contexts. Similar efforts in Mzuzu City, Malawi, showed that attracting youth participation in decentralized decision-making requires systematic capacity building (Zimba et al., 2021). Further, experience in urban-peripheral areas in Brazil showed that mainstream discourse on climate change might be disconnected from young people's everyday experience, leading to a perception of disinterest among students (Börner et al., 2021).

Thus, all tiers of governance should ensure that youth voices and demands are legitimized within the mainstream rather than being tokenized. If participation from the youth and other marginalized groups is to be meaningful in efforts that are simultaneously global and local ('glocal') for building a healthier planet, their representation should be systematically encouraged, legally guaranteed and financially supported across all levels of administration.



## 5.2 Empowering youth through climate education

Growing environmental risks will pose the biggest existential threat, especially to the youth demographic, requiring future mitigation measures to solve ecological challenges. Youth voices are often marginalized due to the projected lack of experience and knowledge on the subject. **Nearly a fifth of the youth surveyed said they feel powerless to do something about climate change.** Climate education to provide youth with a sense of empowerment and self-agency for meaningful participation in decision making and simultaneously catalyse them to opt for safer and sustainable lifestyle choices to combat climate issues is required now more than ever (Thew, 2018). Building the right base through education is critical to mould youth to influence future generations, to forge innovative solutions and support networks needed to address and adapt to a climate-constrained world.



Photo: UN Photo/Manuel Elías

Several youth activists have highlighted a lack of discourse on climate change and its impacts within schools (Kamal, n.d.). Hence, young people educate themselves on climate change through sources outside of schools, such as online sources and networking groups (Neelima, 2018). Some of the root causes for youth's lack of climate literacy are an absence of support by community and government, lack of adequate funding and time for field visits, disinterest among students, lack of teacher training, limited access to quality content, and rigid classroom training systems resistant to curriculum revision (Anderson & Jacobson, 2018).

## It is time to reimagine education to enable fundamental transformations of the mindset and lifestyle of future generations.

Despite this, continuous efforts are being made by young people with or without resources to foster awareness, capacity building and environmental education. For instance, Somalia Greenpeace Association (SOGPA), a youth-led non-profit organization formed in 2019, disseminates awareness about extreme climatic events, such as floods, droughts, food insecurity, and locust invasions that affect Somali people; the information is spread in an easily consumable fashion at the local community level (SOGPA, n.d.).

Similarly, Youth for Climate India and Indian Youth Climate Network (IYCN) formed as a coalition of young people and youth-oriented organization in India are some telling examples. They work on generating holistic awareness and empower young people to battle climate change, at a local, state, national and international level (IYCN, n.d.).

Such youth-led activities on increasing awareness and knowledge are particularly important since **57% of respondents surveyed feel youth are inadequately represented in global climate governance; 25% of the respondents cannot tell if and how the representation is inadequate.** Of this number, more than half (53%) are students ranging from secondary, higher secondary to master's degree students, and they note a gap in alignment of climate change governance and negotiations to the current education system. This is also echoed by several respondents as quoted:

*Introduction to matters climate change at primary school level so that advocacy is cultivated early.*

*Rather than just subjective information provision practical solutions should be taught in classrooms.*

Therefore, it is time to reimagine education to enable fundamental transformations of the mindset and lifestyle of future generations.

First, **mandate the inclusion of climate education with a strong civic engagement component across educational levels.** A 2021 report by UNESCO that looks at the extent to which environmental issues are integrated in

education policies and curricula across 46 UNESCO member states indicates that 45% of national documents examined made little or no reference to environmental themes (UNESCO, 2021).

Some good examples exist of climate education led by some governments. For instance, it is now mandatory in India to include environmental education at all levels of formal education (Sharma & Menon, 2018). Italy made compulsory for all public schools from grade one to high school to teach environmental topics for at least one hour every week. Mexico has also mandated environmental education. Over 20 states in the US have adopted the Next Generation Science Standards, which include climate change as the core topic (NCSE & TFNEF, 2020). All countries should follow suit and make UNESCO's vision of making environmental education a core curriculum component by 2025 into reality.

In addition, climate education should be customized, covering local and regional case studies of climate impacts. More importantly, it should go beyond technical knowledge of climate science with additional elements on civic education and engagement to enhance students' participation now and as future citizens (Basu & Kaplan, 2015; Nisbet, 2010). Estimates suggest that over 1 million children suffered learning disruptions during California's 2018–2019 wildfire season and nearly 6000 schools are located in flood zones in the US (Kwauk & Winthrop, 2021). As children live the results of climate impacts, their curricula should incorporate practical training to allow youth to apply their knowledge in real-world settings to adapt to the harsh impacts of climate change.

Second, **invest in climate educators, educational infrastructure and training faculties.** While the evidence shows the inclusion of environmental issues in education policy and curricula has increased significantly over past decades, international studies on teacher education indicate limited proficiency of teachers in both environmental-related contents and pedagogical approaches (Brookings, 2018). Most educators are often ill-equipped to teach environment education that is included by national policy-makers (UNICEF, 2020a). Studies from around the world inform how sustained professional development workshops improve content knowledge of novice teachers (Drewes et al., 2018). Therefore, as an immediate step, governments should prioritize environmental and climate educational capacity building, teacher training, professional development workshops, mentoring, and the development of effective leadership to deliver quality climate and environmental education.

In addition to basic educational guidance, infrastructure is key: unreliable power supply and poor internet access continue to limit access to educational resources, especially for rural and socio-economically disadvantaged youth in parts of the world (MSU, 2020). A recent study by UNICEF and International Telecom Union reports that two-thirds of the world's school-age children have no internet access at home (UNICEF, 2020c).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, over 31% of schoolchildren worldwide faced the risk of learning discontinuity due to absence of technologies to support remote education, when measures like school closures were announced



Photo: arrowsmith2 / Getty

## Early exposure to innovation and problem-solving skills can foster youth in building careers and entrepreneurship in environmental issues.

(UNICEF, 2020a). Such technology and digital divides cause them to lose out on education, making the young population vulnerable in a climate-constrained world. Investment in educational infrastructure and renewable technologies to power such facilities needs to be prioritized to help youth with learning.

Finally, **support innovation in educational approaches.** While inclusion of facts in curriculum support informed civic engagement and action among students, they often find it difficult to comprehend the colossal damage from climate catastrophes. Schools are now encouraging innovations that connect the dots between curriculum and creativity. Minecraft Education Edition's Climate Futures, an online game, is one such tool that educates youth about climate crises. Schools in New South Wales, Australia, are now using Minecraft in classrooms to encourage innovative thinking and allow students to create and build solutions to face the climate change threat (NSW Department of Education, n.d.; Panecasio, 2022).

Such early exposure to innovation and problem-solving skills also can foster youth in building careers and entrepreneurship in environmental issues. Similarly, 'snackable' videos, well-made infographics, and other content featuring climate issues on social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram to target younger generations are on the rise; these could gain in importance, given that statistics indicate an average of nearly two hours daily spent on social media by internet users (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2022). The power of such innovation and new thinking should be actively unleashed to create a more environmentally literate and civically engaged global society.

## 5.3 Interconnectedness of institutions and policies

Interconnectedness in governance is relevant along several dimensions: (a) local and global administrations to scale up climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, (b) transnational governance systems for concerted action towards international goals, and (c) diverse policy issues effecting an economy-wide transition to a healthier planet.

Global governance of environmental challenges happens through treaties and agreements, which provide a legal basis for international cooperation and negotiations between sovereign states. There are nearly 2000 international environmental treaties currently in force (Ecolex, 2022). However, the example of climate change commitments shows that translation of international commitments into national legislation or strategies has largely happened in the build-up to landmark international events, such as the 2009 Copenhagen

Accord and the 2015 Paris Agreement (Iacobuta et al., 2018). While this points to the effectiveness of international political pressure in spurring national action, it may also indicate a lack of urgency or consensus on climate action within domestic boundaries – a risk to rapid mitigation and adaptation.

**As a group, youth are spatially and temporally vulnerable to environmental degradation.**

National commitments do not necessarily translate into optimal outcomes at the local level. Lessons in forest land restoration from northern Thailand show that power imbalances between national governance bodies and local communities can lead to suboptimal

outcomes (Sapkota et al., 2021). Without inclusion of affected communities in the process of forming global policies and of translating global policies into domestic policies, participation in governance may not yield positive outcomes (Gustafsson & Schilling-Vacaflor, 2022).

Thus, the multilevel interconnectedness of governance requires innovative means of giving decision-making power to youth. As a group, youth are spatially and temporally vulnerable to environmental degradation (Di Gregorio et al., 2019).

Existing global governance systems, within which environmental governance functions, are ill-equipped to manage economic interdependence; are asymmetric in scope, access and outcomes; and have led to shrinking policy space for national governments, which has impeded their ability to address domestic inequities (United Nations, 2014). Developed countries (or Annex-I countries) have failed to meet greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments made under the Kyoto Protocol (Prasad et al., 2021), leading to constrained space for developing countries to transition to sustainable economies. As countries negotiate environmental treaties based on their wider economic interests, policy coherence is increasingly forming the focus of discourse on multilateral environmental agreements.

Policy coherence can be defined as a process of policymaking that systematically considers the pursuit of multiple policy goals in a coordinated way, by minimizing trade-offs and maximizing synergies. Such coherence is widely seen as critical to channelling interconnectedness and leading to the successful implementation of global policy frameworks (Antwi-Agyei et al., 2018; Dzebo et al., 2019; Nilsson & Weitz, 2019; OECD, 2018). Multilateral environmental agreements have barely made any progress towards integrating issues beyond limited scope (Azizi et al., 2019). Policy coherence efforts that aim to jointly implement environmental, social and economic goals can be a strategy for operationalizing our youth vision for systemic change, while ensuring that action on climate change does not come at the expense of other critical development goals, such as poverty and inequality reduction.

The complexity of international governance of the environment need not hinder youth action. Globally, youth have access to contemporary communication methods such as social media, and they have connected their local experiences with mainstream climate and sustainability science (Eide & Kunelius, 2021).

This can be seen in the case of Symbios and Klimatstudenter, two university student organizations in Sweden, which organize activities and campaigns on climate change for students at Stockholm University and elsewhere. Their approach and purpose target the day-to-day lifestyle changes that students can adopt, such as shifts to sustainable fashion and vegan diets. Youth organizations such as these aid many young people in their desire 'to do their part'.

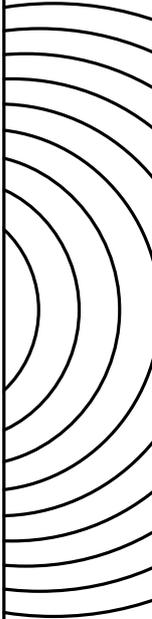
## 5.4 Accountability through litigation

While youth-led climate protests have received much attention in recent years, youth have also been targeting policymakers through more formal mechanisms, such as litigation efforts. Climate change litigation is increasingly being used as a tool to influence policy decisions and corporate behaviour.

Litigation related to climate change has been filed in over 28 countries. While most of the cases target governments, an increasing number of suits target industries that are high emitters of greenhouse gases (Setzer & Byrnes, 2020). An increasing number of these cases are being filed in low- and middle-income countries.

Another major trend is that many of these cases have young plaintiffs. Youth, especially those below legal voting age in their countries, use climate litigation as a means to raise their voices.

Youth voices holding governments and corporations responsible is not new. In 1992 the then 12-year-old Severn Cullis-Suzuki – who at age 9 had founded



the Environmental Children's Organization – raised money to attend and speak at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. Cullis-Suzuki wanted to go in order to remind policymakers that her generation would have to deal with the impacts of their decisions (Han & Ahn, 2020).

More recently, in August 2015, 21 teenagers from Oregon filed a lawsuit (*Juliana v. U.S*) against the federal government and the fossil fuel industry arguing that failing to take action against climate change violated their rights to life, liberty and property (Han & Ahn, 2020). Six young people in Portugal have filed a legal action accusing 33 countries of violating their right to life by not doing their share to tackle climate change (Lewis, 2021). And 25 young people filed a motion to stop deforestation in the Amazon in Colombia (Change, 2020).

At the UN Climate Summit in 2019, Greta Thunberg, along with 15 other children, filed a formal complaint under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, arguing that countries' failures to address the climate crisis violated the convention (Han & Ahn, 2020). In our survey results, 59% of the youth responding stated that they feel either somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the actions taken by their government to protect its citizens from the impacts of climate change.

**59% of the youth responding stated that they feel either somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the actions taken by their government to protect its citizens from the impacts of climate change.**

Similarly, youth activists in Europe collected signatures under the European Citizen's Initiative in 2019 to pressure the European Parliament into taking action on the climate crisis. They demanded that the EU adjust its Paris Agreement goals to ensure an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (Han & Ahn, 2020). And in April 2021, the Federal Constitutional Court (the highest court in Germany) sided with German youth activists who had filed a case demanding that the government expand legislation to achieve net zero targets by 2050 (Edy, 2021).

These youth-led climate litigation efforts could be instrumental in advancing progress on addressing the losses and damages that countries and communities are already facing as a result of climate impacts (Toussaint, 2021). In addition, youth have also been putting forward demands on how policymakers can address loss and damage. In the run-up to the climate change conference in Glasgow in 2021 (COP26), for instance, the Loss and Damage Youth Coalition's key demands included pledging a trillion US dollars in finance for loss and damage over the next five years; taxing big polluters, such as large industries and corporations, to pay for loss and damage; and highlighting youth voices in loss and damage negotiations (LDYC, 2021).

Litigation efforts also come with their own roadblocks. One of the major challenges is the difficulty in establishing a causal relationship between specific climate-related losses and sources of greenhouse gas emissions (Setzer & Byrnes, 2020). However, as the science linking greenhouse gas

emissions to specific climate-change outcomes improves, it will be easier to link the contributions of corporations and the lack of preparedness of governments to the losses and damages from climate change and to claim adequate compensation.

Another difficulty is assessing the long-term impacts of climate change litigation. Legislation resulting from litigation may be reversed. The outcomes are often in the form of reputational risk to corporations or governments, the impact of which is difficult to quantify (Setzer & Byrnes, 2020). Large scale climate litigation is also relatively recent and its long-term impacts are therefore unknown.

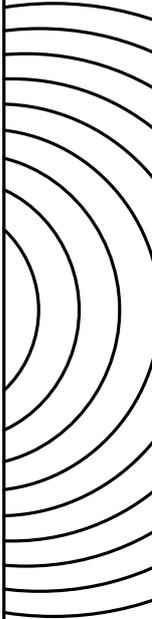
Litigation can also often be a lengthy and expensive affair and is not accessible to everyone. For citizens of non-democratic nations, holding governments and corporations responsible is simply not possible. Another roadblock is that industry representatives and climate change denying NGOs are also hopping on the litigation wagon and are bringing lawsuits that support deregulation of climate change and removal of climate protections.

## 5.5 Accelerating implementation: calls to action for policymakers

Youth have already been putting forward solutions and recommendations for addressing the climate crisis to be taken up by policymakers. In the run up to COP26, YOUNGO released a global youth statement representing the views of over 47 000 young climate leaders from across the world (YOUNGO, 2021). This included calls to action such as: aligning countries' climate policies with scientific guidance and increasing ambition; promoting an energy transition to renewable energy sources; providing climate finance to least developed countries, including finance for loss and damage; and addressing the disproportionate effects of the climate crisis borne by marginalized communities.

Some of the components to legitimize youth voices and to accelerate implementation include networking and collaboration; education, capacity building and skills development; policy and policy development such as assisting young people to engage in decision-making processes and inclusion of intergenerational equity in policy; and conceptual changes such as recognizing young people as effective participants and considering climate change in context of other developmental challenges (Benkenstein et al., 2020).

Young people want policymakers to ensure longer-term thinking, through both acknowledging that climate impacts are already occurring and recognizing that the livelihoods of future generations are severely at risk. For example, one survey respondent argued that:



*For me, at 18, I recognize that I will be living with the long-term impacts of the generations before me. I understand that there are tangible changes that can be made to avoid the large-scale impacts. I think sometimes older people lack the same kind of long-term vision, or sense that these decisions will directly impact them.*

Furthermore, youth are willing and ready to play key roles in implementing and actualizing policies for a healthy environment. It is highly important to tap into the potential of growing young experts in the field of environmental sustainability and climate change to adequately utilize their skills.

Findings from the survey for this report also include suggested pathways forward for reducing the effects of and adapting to climate change. Overall, the majority of youth who responded to the survey believe that the highest impact on dealing with the climate crisis would come from political will of national governments to take action, as well as from global consensus on the scale and pace of action. Activism efforts to pressure governments into taking action is also flagged as high on the agenda. This highlights the critical role of policymakers as agents of change in the climate crisis, with youth playing a role in holding governments accountable.

The survey also suggests that a majority of youth (57%) believe that youth are not adequately represented in international climate negotiations. Of these, 66% are either female or identify as other gender minorities, and 57% are affiliated with Global South countries.

On this basis, the survey results for this report include key recommendations for how to ensure adequate youth participation and involvement. Figure 6 presents the 415 recommendations, coded and synthesized.

The top recommendation emerging from these responses is the need for more opportunities for youth to engage in different forums and voice their concerns. For example, one of the responses highlighted the need for 'more platforms on an international and global scale to raise voices and concern regarding the inability of governments to take decisive actions against climate-change inducing practices.'

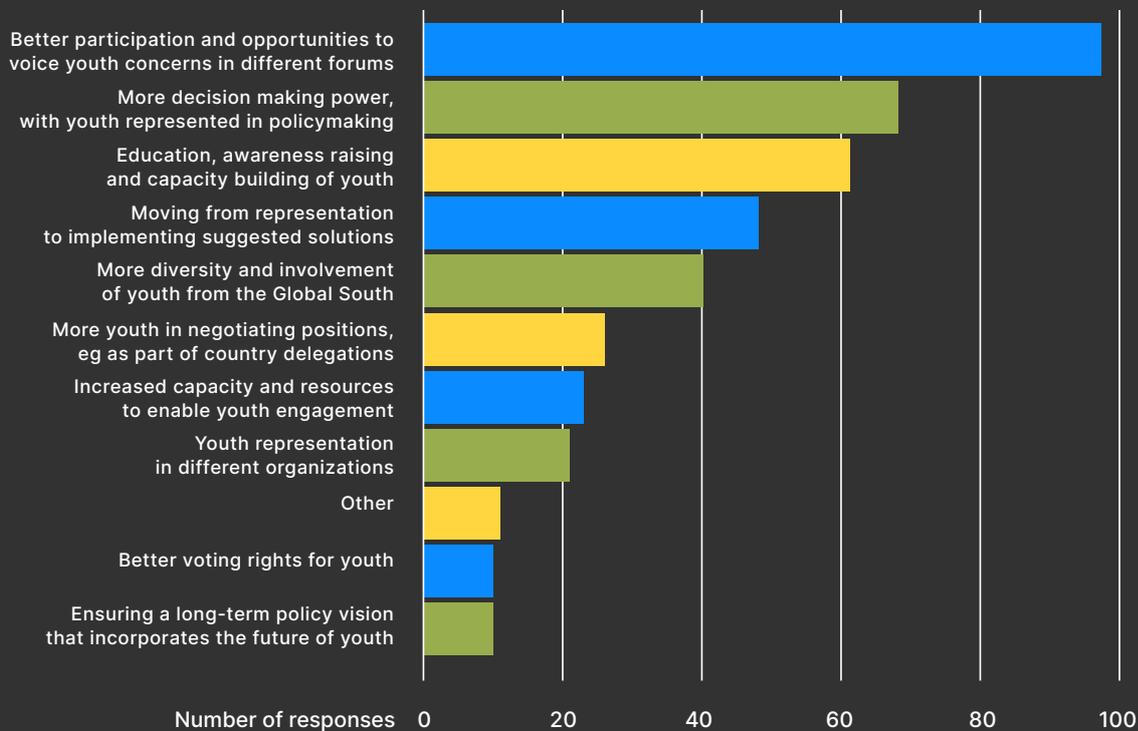
Going beyond this, however, a number of responses also highlighted challenges with existing participation efforts, and stressed the need to move beyond participation and representation. For example, 16% of responses emphasized the importance of greater decision-making power given to youth, with youth actively involved in climate policymaking. This included suggestions such as electing young candidates to government and 'legislation on empowering youth with an official representative on constructing policies towards an eco-friendly environment with a seat/power to vote/veto government's proposed laws'.

In our survey, 12% of responses stressed the need to not only listen to youth voices, but actually work towards implementing the solutions proposed by youth. For example, one respondent stated that 'oftentimes, we are tokenized. We are asked to provide a youth perspective that is lauded as ambition, but not actually considered as the appropriate pathway for action'.

Moreover, 57% of responses also emphasized that global youth are not adequately represented in the international climate negotiations. For example, one respondent stressed the need to ‘improve/increase support for the participation of young people especially those from developing countries and Small Island Developing States who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change’. In addition, 6% of responses called for increased negotiating power for youth within the climate negotiations, such as through youth being part of country delegations, quotas for youth involvement, and ‘organizations like YOUNGO [should be] given more delegates and speaking time at COP and other climate conferences’.

Another key recommendation from the survey is to increase education, awareness raising and capacity building targeting youth. Nearly a seventh of survey respondents raised the point of incorporating climate education in school curriculums, as well as educating and training youth to be policymakers leading efforts to deal with climate change. Similarly, 6% of responses also highlighted the need for capacity and resources for youth to be able to engage in participatory processes, including through financial support to attend climate negotiations.

**Figure 6**  
Recommendations for youth inclusion



Derived from the youth survey.

# Conclusion

This report highlights views from young people (ages 18–30) representing 89 countries, almost half of the total number of countries globally. The views expressed and recommendations proposed are timely, as on average, youth alive today have lived and experienced half the era since the Stockholm Conference took place in 1972.

The climatic conditions throughout this period have worsened, causing many young people anxiety from lived and predicted dangers related to climate change. The anxiety is due to compelling reasons, as reviewed in this report, where a child born in 2020 will experience on average twice as many wildfires, 2.6 times as many drought events, 2.8 times as many river floods and 6.8 times more heatwaves across their lifetime, compared to a person born in 1960.

This reality has pushed some young people beyond anxiety to action, in various capacities and often with little to no resources. Youth from diverse backgrounds are at the forefront of advancing sustainability, through a combination of activism, litigation and on-the-ground efforts. Another segment of young people may choose to pursue careers in the sciences, politics and government, economics, and diverse interlinked sectors, to better equip themselves with knowledge and skills to deliver rigorous research, as well as develop alternative innovative models and approaches that will continue to meet and sustain the needs of the current generation, without further compromising the natural and ecological environment.

With the concept of global solidarity as a basis to tackling environmental challenges in a post-Stockholm+50 world, young people are uniting. They have joined efforts and forces through global and local – or ‘glocal’ – networks, social media, and issued joint statements, among other acts. Often, youth go beyond the systemic barriers that often alienate and classify members of any society based on geographic location, race, religion and gender orientation, among others.

In the long run, legitimizing youth voices in mainstream policymaking with greater decision-making, financial and political power will accelerate current efforts towards systemic changes that will lead to a sustainable world. Reforming governance to ensure better and productive youth inclusivity, interconnectedness and accountability, with education and capacity building, will be fundamental to achieving our youth vision of a post-Stockholm+50 world.

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# Appendix

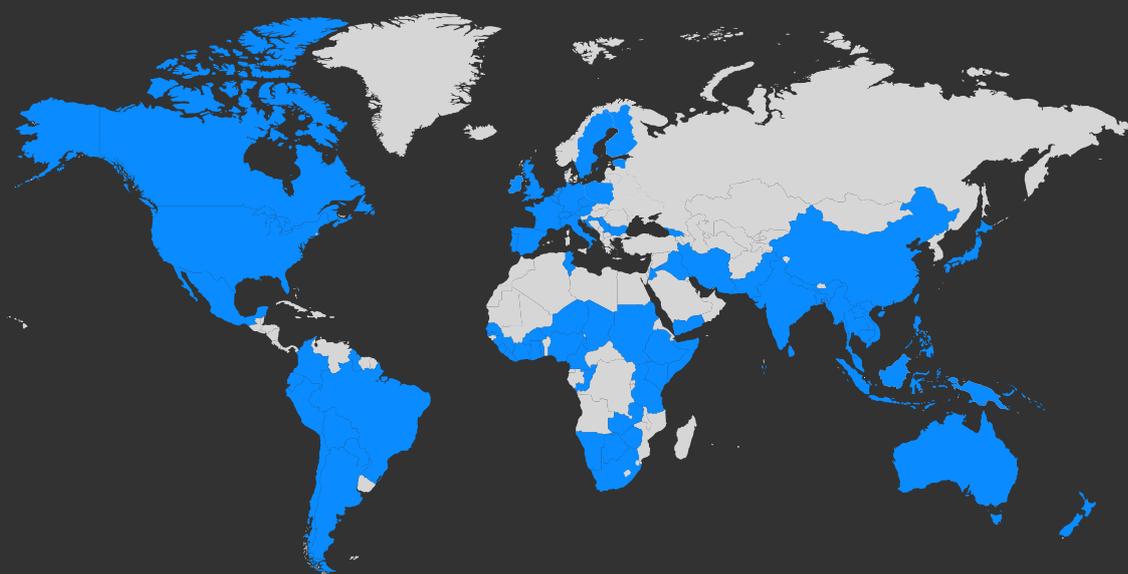
The intent of the youth survey conducted for this report was to gain an understanding and collect opinions of youth (ages 18–30) from around the world, on their perspective on key environmental issues and help solidify the key findings in the report. The survey was launched on Google Forms and youth organizations were requested to distribute the survey within their youth networks. The survey had an age minimum of 18 years old, underscored by a mandatory question about the age of the respondent being minimum 18 years.

After construction of the survey, a pilot survey was launched that was answered by the report authors and their colleagues, to ensure the functioning and clarity of the questions. After receiving the feedback, the survey was finalized and launched on 20 January 2022 and closed on 8 March 2022. The survey was emailed to youth organizations (as identified in the acknowledgements), which then helped forward the survey to their youth networks.

A total of 1050 responses from 89 countries were collected. After the youth survey closed, respondents that did not fit in the age range of 18–30 were omitted manually, to ensure only responses from those within the age range as decided for this report were considered. Additionally, the respondents who did not provide consent for the authors to present their responses (0.6%) were manually omitted, resulting in 910 responses. The data were then downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet and coded manually, as per requirements of each section of the report.

The different types of representations are presented in the graphs below.

## Countries represented in the survey



## Countries represented in the survey

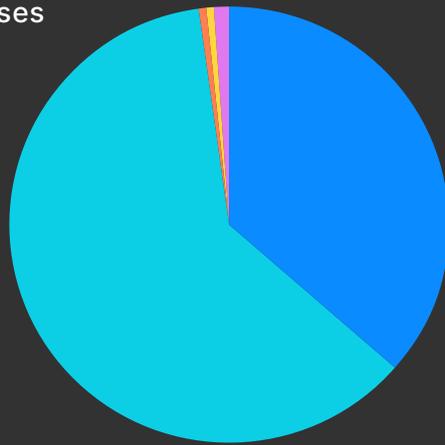
Argentina	Democratic Republic	Liberia	South Africa
Australia	of the Congo	Luxembourg	Spain
Austria	Denmark	Malaysia	Sri Lanka
Bangladesh	Dominica	Malta	Sudan
Barbados	Ecuador	Mexico	Sweden
Belgium	Estonia	Myanmar	Switzerland
Bolivia	Ethiopia	Namibia	Tanzania
Bosnia and	Fiji	Nepal	Thailand
Herzegovina	Finland	Netherlands	Timor-Leste
Botswana	France	New Zealand	Togo
Brazil	Georgia	Niger	Trinidad and Tobago
Bulgaria	Germany	Nigeria	Tunisia
Burkina Faso	Ghana	Pakistan	Uganda
Burundi	Guinea	Paraguay	United Kingdom
Cameroon	Guyana	Peru	United States
Canada	India	Philippines	Viet Nam
Chad	Indonesia	Poland	Yemen
Chile	Iran	Portugal	Zambia
China	Iraq	Rwanda	Zimbabwe
Colombia	Ireland	Senegal	
Côte d'Ivoire	Italy	Serbia	
Croatia	Japan	Sierra Leone	
Cyprus	Jordan	Singapore	
Czech Republic	Kenya	Somalia	

The survey questions revolved around the key topics in the report and are as follows:

- Do you know what is climate change?
- According to you, what are the top three causes of climate change?
- Do you feel that climate change impacted you? If yes, how has it impacted you?
- How do you feel about climate change?
- Do you think it is necessary to change our individual behaviour/habits to reduce impacts of climate change? If so, what are the top three changes you are willing to adopt?
- According to you, how important is each of the following in assessing the prosperity of a country?
- How satisfied are you with the actions taken by your government to protect its citizens from the impacts of climate change?
- How satisfied are you with the actions taken by your organization to address climate change issues?
- How big is an organization's strategy to address climate change issues a factor in your decision to be a part of it?
- To what extent do you feel that the following would have an impact on reducing the effects of, and adapting to, climate change?
- Do you think the global youth is represented adequately in the international climate negotiations/governance? If not, what do you think needs to be done to ensure adequate youth participation and involvement?
- Do you feel that youth have the capacity to create change in the current climate change efforts?
- Are you or have you been involved in efforts that address climate change?
- Do you think your government is doing enough to support environmentally sustainable recovery from the pandemic?
- Have you been or are you involved in any activity that relates to sustainable and inclusive Covid-19 recovery? If yes, what are these activities? If not, which activities do you think are essential to ensure sustainable and inclusive Covid-19 recovery?
- What do you think are the key learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic that could help in the fight against climate change?

**Gender**  
1050 responses

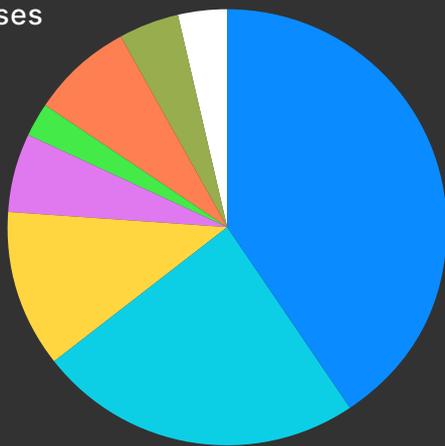
Derived from the youth survey.



- Male: 36.7%
- Female: 61.3%
- Nonbinary: 0.7%
- Gender queer: 0.5%
- Prefer not to say: 0.9%

**Affiliation**  
1050 responses

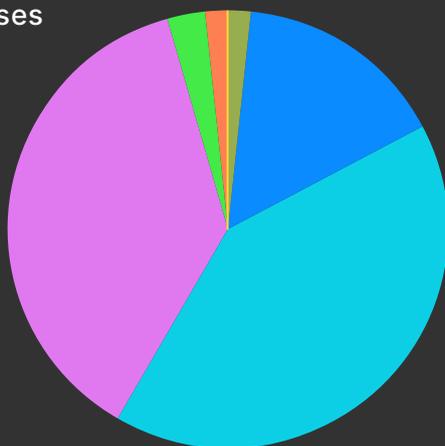
Derived from the youth survey.



- Student: 40.8%
- Non-governmental organization/civil society organization: 23.9%
- Private sector: 11.5%
- Government/public sector: 5.9%
- Inter-governmental organization: 2.5%
- Academia: 7.7%
- Self-employed/freelance: 4.3%
- No affiliation: 3.5%

**Highest education**  
1050 responses

Derived from the youth survey.



- Primary: 0.2%
- Secondary: 1.6%
- Higher secondary/high school: 15.5%
- Bachelor's degree: 41.1%
- Master's degree: 37.3%
- Doctoral: 2.8%
- Technical certification/vocational studies: 1.5%

