

BUILDING A

RESILIENT GENERATION

IN CENTRAL ASIA AND EUROPE

**Youth views on lifelong learning,
inclusion, and the green transition**



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INTRODUCTION

EASTERN EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN YOUTH SHARE THEIR VIEWS ON KEY SOCIETAL ISSUES IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

In the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a whirlwind of changes globally, accelerating many social and economic transitions already in motion. Perhaps more than any other age group, today's young people bear the brunt of these transitions: climate change, economic uncertainty, social strife, regional conflicts, and a development model that is increasingly seen as unsustainable. On top of these issues, the sudden emergence of the global pandemic has shown us that the future is unpredictable and even volatile. Despite all these possible setbacks, young people are voicing their views about the issues confronting their generation, whether about the potential of "green jobs" or how to combat discrimination and social exclusion. They are also speaking out about the future they want for themselves and their communities. In this report, we relay a selection of views on education, inclusion, and the shift to a green economy from young people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia¹ in light of these key global issues.

Just as in most communities across the world, youth in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are attempting to navigate the shift to a green and digital economy. This transformation comes against the backdrop of growing inequality, political polarisation, mass displacement and governments that struggle to create opportunities and high-quality jobs for young people. Education and training systems need to undergo a paradigm shift if people are to acquire the new skills, values and mindsets required for this era. The aim is to make new systems truly inclusive so as not to deepen existing social divides.

Young people are central to changing these systems, which present both challenges and opportunities. They are disproportionately affected by climate change, for instance, but are also active agents in the fight against it. They come of age amid a green and digital transition, and many may face challenges, particularly the most vulnerable. However, they are also the age cohort best able to adapt to it. They will need to adjust to having multiple and longer careers — in less predefined job categories and with broader skill requirements — but they have more freedom to choose their professions than their parents. They will need to build their resilience, competence, and confidence by continually learning and gaining skills throughout their entire lives, but they will have more tools than previous generations, especially digital ones, at their disposal.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) joined forces to understand the hopes, concerns, and expectations of young people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECA) about their futures and the role of education, social inclusion, and the environment. This report brings youth voices, views, and sentiments from the ECA region as a contribution to the regional and global discussions on how to create better lifelong learning systems, more inclusive communities, and greener societies.

The three issues we cover in this report are priorities for young people themselves, but also the ECA and many regional and global partners. The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Green Deal focus on leading change towards more people-centred, inclusive,

1. The report covers 23 countries and territories in Europe and Central Asia: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (under UNSC Resolution 1244), Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

greener, and prosperous societies. The European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience (2020) highlights the primary role of skills in achieving broader economic and social objectives. The right of everyone to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning is the first principle of the European Pillar of social rights.

The first part of the report pertains to lifelong learning and includes topics such as how young people receive career advice and support and to what extent their schools prepare them for the future. In the second portion of the report, we review the responses to our questions about social inclusion and discrimination in the communities of our youth respondents. In this part of the research, we relay how much exclusion may play a role in young people's learning environments and how they might exercise their agency in reacting to discrimination and inequality. In the third section, we cover the transition to green economies, focusing on how much young people felt supported by their schools in learning about environmental issues

and how they navigate talking about and potentially advocating for a greener future.

The young people who took part in this research come from 19 countries across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It is a complex region with multiple factors affecting the situation of young people when it comes to education, jobs, social inclusion, and the green economy. As different parts of the region undergo change, young people face divergent historical, ideological, and political traditions and cultural mindsets, as well as socio-economic and governance systems that are undergoing rapid transition.

There is a great deal of variation between and within countries of the ECA region. Areas differ in terms of economic development (between countries but also within countries, for example, in urban versus remote locations), access to quality education, rates of youth unemployment or underemployment, experiences with conflict, migration, exclusion of minorities, action on green issues, and many other contextual factors. Growing up in the



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region can vary depending on location, not to mention other characteristics, such as socio-economic status, disability, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

The pandemic caused additional challenges for young people in the ECA region. For many, COVID-19 interrupted their schooling and left them jobless during a time in which it was already difficult to transition into the labour market. During consultations held by UNICEF and ETF² in July and August 2020, we found that the views of more than 15,000 adolescents and young people on their economic prospects were negative due to COVID-19. However, technological progress and wider access to knowledge and skills online were among the reasons young people remained positive and hopeful for a brighter future.

Listening to young people's views is a prerequisite for building more inclusive, equitable, and fairer societies and ensuring

that shared human rights values are supported for all people. This publication is a continuation of our previous work presented in the joint UNICEF/ETF report, 'Preventing a "Lockdown Generation" in Europe and Central Asia: Building resilient societies with young people in the era of COVID-19'. The report revealed the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on young people in the ECA region and proposed an agenda for resilience and recovery. This report shifts our focus to the future after the recovery phase has passed, towards the paradigm shifts needed to build more resilient, greener, and inclusive societies.

We engaged in further dialogue with youth to expand on some of the issues they raised previously in relation to learning, unemployment, and participation. We found in our prior work that many young people felt there are limited opportunities for influencing local, regional, and global dialogues on issues affecting their lives. With this set of polls and focus groups, we want to establish more consistent and regular consultation with youth. This

2. UNICEF and European Training Foundation, 2020, Preventing a 'Lockdown Generation' in Europe and Central Asia: Building resilient societies with young people in the era of COVID-19, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/14671/file/UNICEF ETF report.pdf>

report aims to expand the scope of our engagement to ensure that young people are recognised as full and equal partners in building and co-creating a shared future. Young people have expert opinions and views, and their ideas are needed to shape the post-recovery world. Some of the questions explored in this report include:

- **In the lifelong learning section:** What is the role of schools in preparing young people for the future? Are youth in the right environment to be motivated to learn? Are they ready to expand their knowledge and skills sets beyond curricular areas and outside of school? Do they have enough information and support to navigate school-to-work transitions?

- **In the social inclusion section:** How inclusive are the societies in which young people live? What is the role of school in promoting inclusion? What types of social exclusion do young people witness and experience? Are young people ready to assume an active role in making education more inclusive? Are they taking action already?

- **In the green economy section:** Do young people value a green society? Do they think the current green policies go far enough? What are their strategies to learn about green topics, promote a green agenda, and become agents of change for a greener future?

METHODOLOGY

This report presents the voices, views, and sentiments of young people about a range of issues that are relevant to them. While the U-Report polls and focus groups hosted for the purposes of this report were in a limited number of countries, insights and analysis from previous polls and consultations in other countries on similar topics were integrated, to give a full picture of the issues relevant for the entire region. This report is a continuation of the report 'Preventing a "Lockdown Generation" in Europe and Central Asia: Building resilient

societies with young people in the era of COVID-19'.³

The information for this report was collected through U-Report polls conducted by UNICEF in April and May 2021 with youth aged 15–24 from 6 countries in the ECA region, with an average of approximately 8,800 respondents participating in each poll.

Young people were also asked to share their thoughts and opinions in focus groups, held remotely by video conference. UNICEF hosted these focus groups in May 2021 in collaboration with their youth-led partner, the Group of European Youth for Change (GEYC), with 59 young people (37 female, 24 male) aged 14-25 from 19 countries in the ECA region. Focus groups were facilitated using a peer-to-peer method with young facilitators from GEYC. An additional Russian-speaking focus group was held with youth from vulnerable backgrounds, including those with disabilities or experience of migration. This group had 20 participants (13 female, 7 male) aged 14-25 from an additional 3 countries from the Central Asian subregion (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan).

Participants were given the opportunity to express their opinions freely and in a manner in which they felt comfortable, including through icebreakers, polls, idea clouds, and picture cards. The research was governed by a strict ethical and child safeguarding protocol. Researchers requested and obtained the informed consent of the participating youth. In the case of adolescents who had not attained the age of legal majority, informed consent was given by their parent(s) or guardian(s) while they gave informed assent.

The data collection process was fully adolescent- and youth-centred in its approach. Participatory gender- and age-appropriate activities were used in the process of formulating the U-Report questions and for the focus group discussions.

3. UNICEF and European Training Foundation, 2020.



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1

LIFELONG LEARNING: FEELING UNSUPPORTED, YOUTH FIND THEIR OWN PATHWAYS

Today, everybody is a learner: the need to 'upskill' and 're-skill' is no longer limited to a specific age. The process of gaining knowledge and learning new skills throughout one's life and in different settings, such as in formal education and training as well as informal learning environments, is known as lifelong learning. For young people, in particular, having the right skills is crucial for them to navigate the uncertainties of the digital and green transitions and reinforce their confidence, competence, and resilience, preparing them for their future paths in life.

Young people stand to benefit from engaging in lifelong learning in several ways. Gaining skills and education from various sources over time helps youth adapt to unexpected economic changes and align themselves with the expectations of new employers. Continuous learning also helps young people gain other essential qualities, like becoming more agile within the job market, enhancing one's understanding of the world, and improving one's quality of life.

56.1% of respondents said that school has prepared them for future studies or employment 'a little' or 'not at all'

The international community agrees that removing barriers to participation and widening access to learning opportunities are necessary steps to ensure equity and inclusion in society. Global leaders commit to providing inclusive and equitable

quality education and life-long learning opportunities in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal. The European Commission aims to put skills at the heart of the European policy agenda and make the right to lifelong learning a reality for all.¹ However, making lifelong learning a reality requires political commitment and a system supported by a variety of actors, including public authorities, civil society, sectoral or occupational organisations, and businesses. Education and training systems have a crucial role in supporting individual learners and empowering them to act independently and make their own informed choices. While there is much speculation about exactly what the future of work will look like, it is clear that preparing young people to be adaptable and able to manage their own learning pathways is essential.

Youth say they can't rely on schools to prepare them for the future

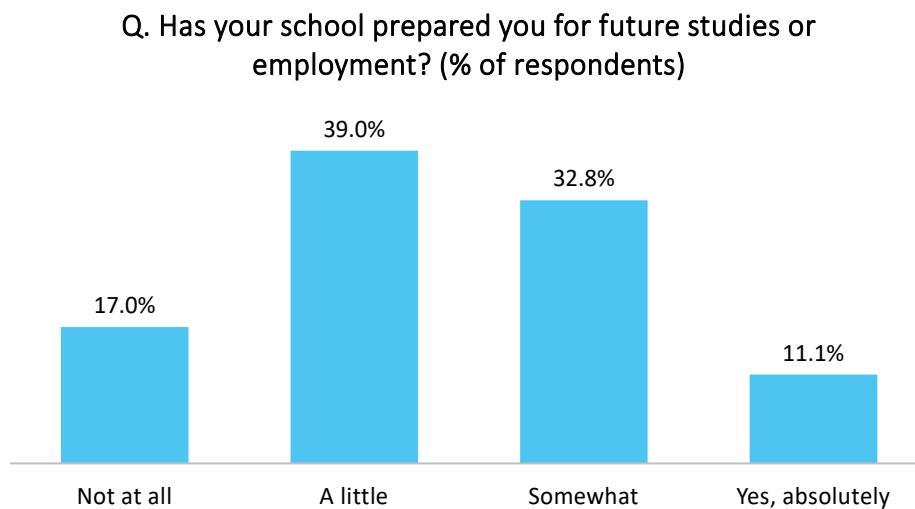
U-Report polls conducted in three ECA countries² asked young people about the support they get from their schools in preparing them for their future careers. The majority of respondents (56.1%) said they feel their schools have prepared them only 'a little' or 'not at all' for such opportunities. 43.9% said they feel their schools have 'somewhat' or 'absolutely' prepared them for the future. However, the in-depth focus group discussions³ with young people from

1. European Commission, 2020, Communication on a European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, COM (2020) 274 final, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0274>

2. U-Report poll – Lifelong Learning: Croatia, Serbia and Ukraine.

3. Lifelong learning focus group: 15 participants (11 females, 6 males) ages 15-24 years. Participating countries: Belarus, Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Ukraine.

Figure 1. Schools preparing young people for the future



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,792.

seven countries paint a somewhat different picture.

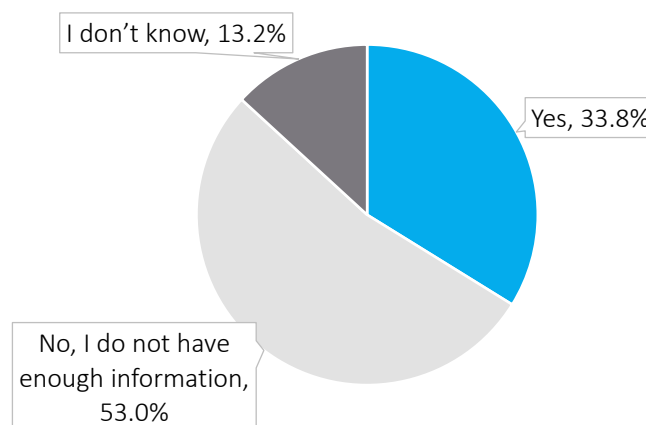
Participants in focus groups were nearly unanimous that schools were not preparing them for the future. They said learning is focused on memorisation and not critical thinking, which they think is fundamental in modern society. Others mentioned little correlation between theory and practice in their schools and how they wished they learned more practical skills with real-world relevance. Participants said that both

high schools and universities should be more closely linked with businesses so that students can learn more about what jobs are out there and even gain some experience. They wished that schools would inform them about different types of jobs and what people do in them.

Career guidance and orientation are important for young people to transition from school to working life. However, only a third (33.8%) of the U-Report respondents said they feel like they have

Figure 2. Information on choosing one's future studies or career

Q. Do you feel like you have enough information to choose your future studies or career? (% of respondents)



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,569.

enough information to choose their future studies or careers. In the focus group, not a single participant felt like they had enough information. They felt that they had no awareness of what kinds of jobs are possible, what kind of skills are required to get various jobs, or what kind of income is usually expected from these jobs. Some said they had done career or personality assessment tests (e.g. online or in school), but many felt that they only revealed their likes and dislikes and did not provide practical guidance. Tests did not tell them if there is demand for a certain job, for example, or give them information about other market factors. Other participants mentioned that in some regions, the availability of employment is so low that one does not have much choice in what job one can have.

directly with other people or institutions, such as people who had a job they were interested in, or universities that could answer questions about their programmes.

There was no one to guide me, to help me understand what kind of job would be a good fit for me. So instead, I researched jobs on the internet. Now I know I want to be a social worker, but I didn't even know this kind of job existed. I only found out about it on Reddit, where there were a lot of students talking about it. I thought, 'this might be a good fit for me.' (Sebastian, 24, Romania)

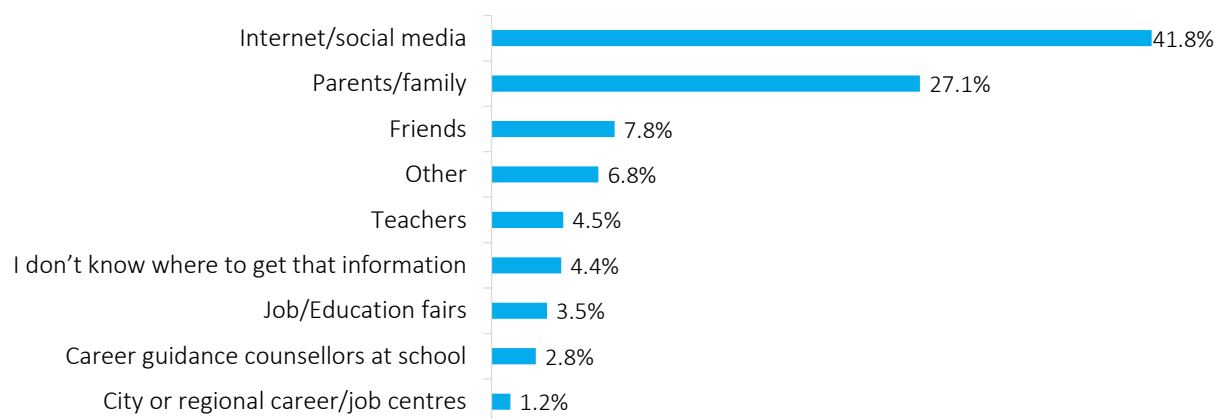
Since most participants did not have access to information about future career options through their school, they turned to the internet. This is reflected in the poll, as the internet and social media were the most popular information source (41.8%), followed by parents/family (27.1%). Only 4.5% of respondents said that they get this information from their teachers.

Parents and caregivers can sometimes help guide young people towards a future career, but it often does not match what young people might want. Very few participants had a career counsellor in their school, and while school psychologists were more common, they did not provide much career counselling. Many mentioned that they never considered going to a job centre or public employment agency, as they think they are old-fashioned.

Social media, including Reddit and TikTok, were valuable sources of information for focus group participants. They could interact

Figure 3. Sources of information for future studies or career

Q. Where do you get information to help you choose your future studies or career? (% of respondents) Choose only one:



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,370.

A lot of universities are really popular with students because they have their social media accounts. I have found several on Tik Tok and I think it's really important because children spend a lot of time on the internet and I wish that more and more universities and schools could do this because it's a way to know about them. (Nina, 16, Ukraine)

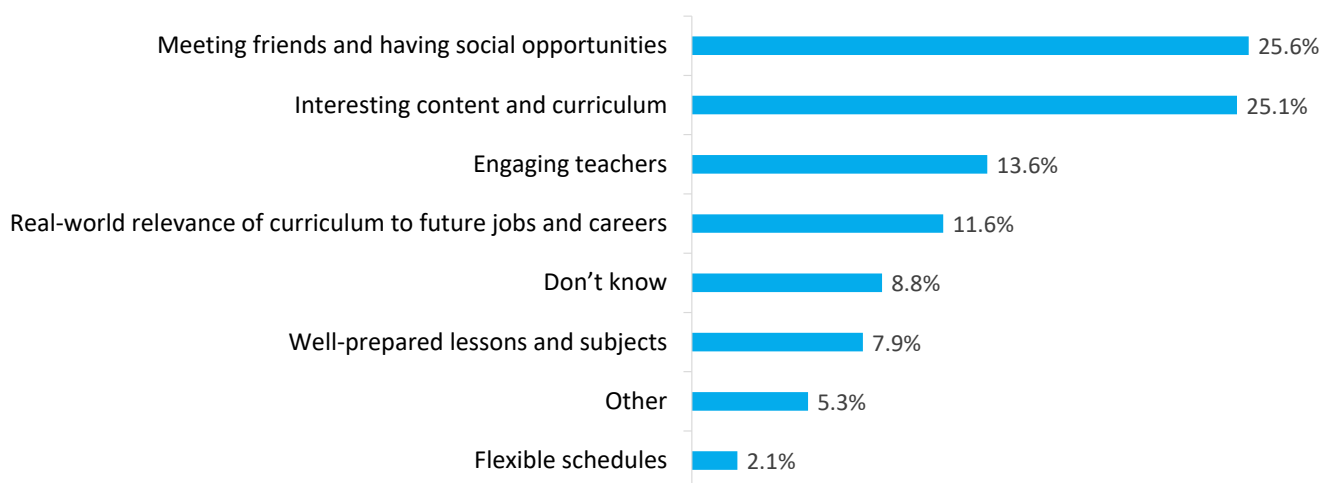
Participants identified getting their first job as the biggest hurdle to starting a career in the focus groups. Most jobs require practical experience, and even though volunteering can be a way to gain this experience, this does not apply to all types of jobs, such as technical jobs, nor can everyone afford to work without pay. Participants also flagged a shortage of jobs as a significant issue in the ECA region, where there are more young people graduating from university than there are

jobs available. As a result, getting a job depends on personal or family connections, to which not everyone has access. Creating counselling centres where people can meet with others, network, exchange ideas, and learn from one another was one suggestion by participants on how governments could help young people. Such places could act as improved job centres where people could make the personal connections needed for a job and receive career advice.

For disabled people, discrimination and accessibility is a barrier. In Bulgaria, we are not seen as a valuable part of the workforce. It is very difficult to find positions where you are able to improve your skills without extra difficulty because of your disability. I am struggling to find solutions to that. (Viktoria, 20, Bulgaria)

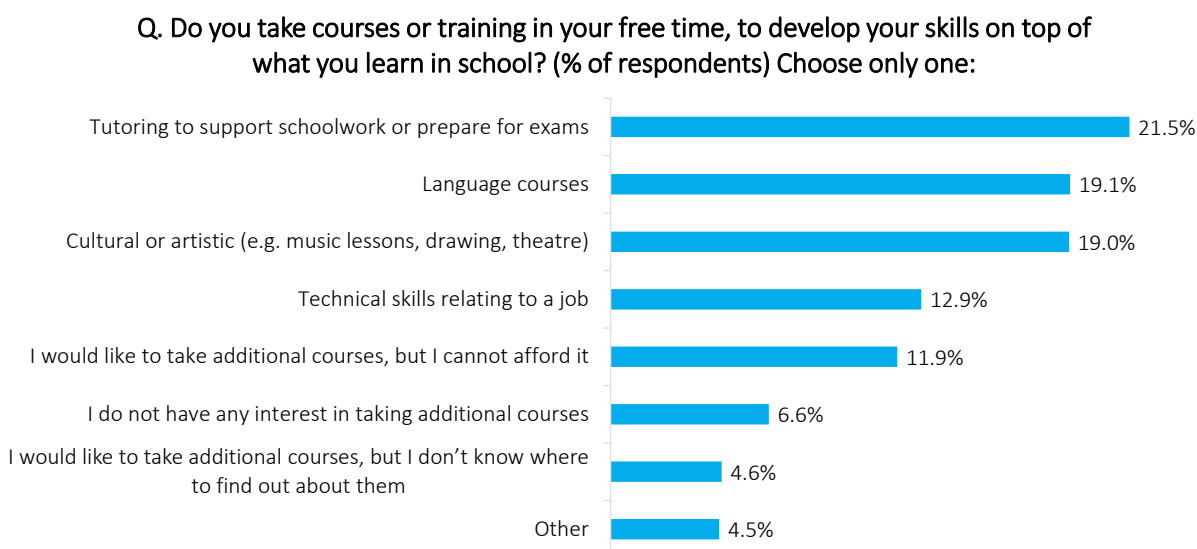
Figure 4. Motivations for in-school learning

Q. What motivates you most in school or another educational environment? (% of respondents) Choose only one:



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,062.

Figure 5. Investing time in learning through extracurricular courses or training



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,680.

The value of critical thinking, soft skills and learning outside of school

Non-technical skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity, teamwork, and entrepreneurship, are vital for the workplace and everyday life. Young people can acquire these skills at school, as well as through other learning opportunities outside of school throughout one's life.

I think the problem here is that there is not really a connection between universities and businesses, which would be a great way to integrate the students into the work field and gain experience. (Nikos, 23, Greece)

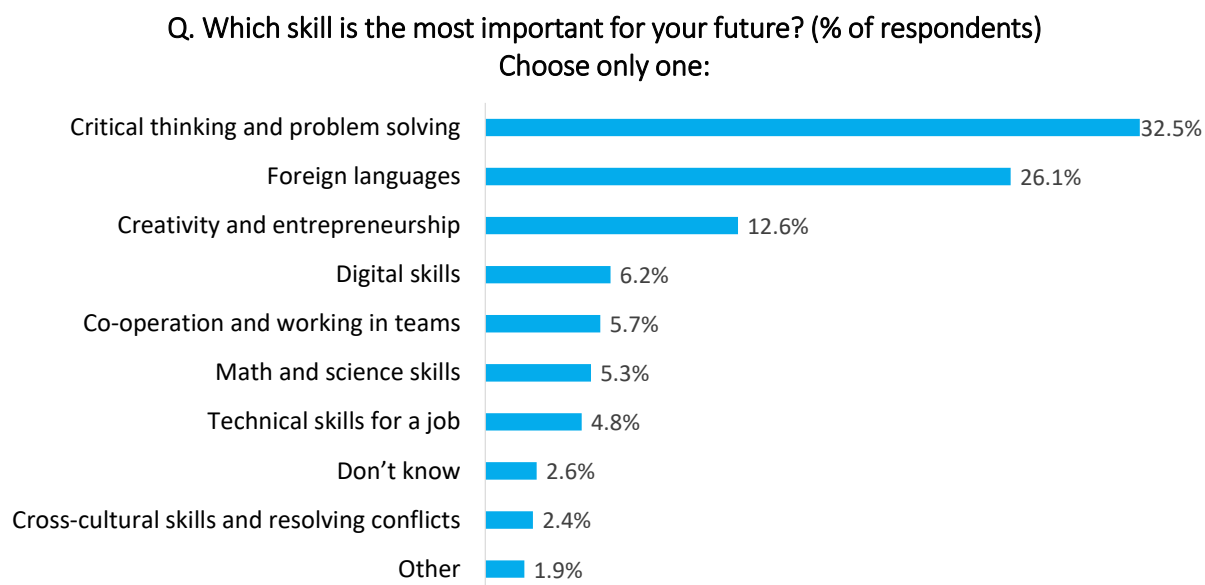
When asked about their main motivation for school attendance, respondents of the U-Report poll said that meeting friends and social opportunities were their top motivations for going to school (25.6%). In comparison, almost the same percentage chose interesting content and curriculum

(25.1%). Only 11.6% of respondents selected 'real-world relevance to future jobs and careers' as their main motivation for school attendance. This is unsurprising, as many in the focus groups said that their schools often lack connection to the real world.

When it comes to extra learning outside of school, one in five respondents (21.5%) reported that they receive tutoring to support schoolwork or prepare for exams. Focus group participants said that extra tutoring helps them achieve higher grades because the quality of their education in school is poor. One example was foreign language instruction, the second most popular option (19.1%) in the U-Report poll. Participants said that learning a foreign language is a critical skill for success in the future. Still, many schools do not offer high-quality instruction, so families must pay for private lessons. 11.9% of respondents to the U-Report poll would like to take extra courses but cannot afford them.

Critical thinking and problem-solving were seen as the most important skills for the future by poll respondents (32.5%). Young people in the focus groups agreed. Many

Figure 6. Skills for the future



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,558.

considered critical thinking more essential than digital, math, science, or any other technical skill. Participants felt that not only was critical thinking necessary for a future job, it was also needed for living in a peaceful and democratic society. Critical thinking is essential for detecting misinformation in the news or on the internet and being open-minded and inclusive towards others in society.

As time is passing by, and technology is developing at a high speed, we somehow need to have critical thinking skills to cope with our everyday challenges. (Valeria, 16, Moldova)

Several participants also highlighted socio-emotional skills. The ability to cope with stress, have empathy, be adaptable and self-aware were all mentioned as essential skills to live a healthy life. Cooperation and teamwork were critical to any workplace, as identified by participants, whether as leaders or team members.

However, participants felt that schools do little to cultivate these skills in their students and wish academic programmes would integrate them.







2

SOCIAL EXCLUSION: YOUNG PEOPLE REACT TO DISCRIMINATION AND ITS IMPACT ON LEARNING

Social exclusion at early stages in life has long-lasting effects on individuals. It affects their learning experiences, career prospects, and ability to integrate and play an active role in society. Exclusion in the context of education takes many forms: segregated schools or classrooms, discrimination between children of different social backgrounds, uneven quality of education delivery (particularly in rural and remote areas), or an insufficient level or lack of support for children with special education needs, such as those with learning difficulties or at risk of poverty.

Over 168 million children and young people have experienced school closures and disruptions in their education during the pandemic crisis.¹ Remote learning heavily affected teaching and skills acquisition, particularly in vocational education and training.² The risk of falling behind is highest with the most vulnerable. Lockdowns also had a severe impact on young people's mental health. Before the pandemic, young people carried the burden of mental health risks, with half of all mental health disorders developing before 15. Self-harm is one of the leading causes of death for young people, especially among adolescent girls.

These trends are sure to be exacerbated by the pandemic.³

Inclusive education and training have been high on the policy agenda due to the global drive to promote long term sustainable development goals. The European Union prioritises equal access and enhanced quality of education through its policy recommendations to Member States and financial support to EU neighbouring and other countries. Multiple actors play a role in supporting inclusive education: policymakers and public administrations, teachers and other school staff, students and parents, and local community, business, and civil society organisations.

However, progress is slow and uneven, particularly in the medium- and low-income countries. The impact of the pandemic has worsened chances to close the gaps in education, as it exposed and deepened existing inequalities in learning and opportunity. Quality and inclusive education programmes, covering both technical and transversal skills, are crucial to prepare young people for adult life, and to help them cope with sudden and unpredictable shocks in the future.

1. UNICEF, 2021, COVID-19 and school closures: On year of education disruption, available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/one-year-of-covid-19-and-school-closures/>
2. ETF, 2020, COVID-19 impact in education and policy measures (ETF periodical reviews)

3. UNICEF, 2021, "At least 1 in 7 children and young people has lived under stay-at-home policies for most of the last year, putting mental health and well-being at risk", Press release, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/least-1-7-children-and-young-people-has-lived-under-stay-home-policies-most-last>

Someone’s sexual orientation is not the first thing you learn about a person. They will hide this from you until you seem like a safe person. In general, people do not come out because of discrimination. If and when you come out, you will hear a lot of hate speech against you. (Raluca, 18, Romania)

Young people feel they live in intolerant and excluding societies

Young people polled in six ECA countries⁴ are split on the question of whether their countries are inclusive. Only 3.7% said that people in their countries support the inclusion of all people ‘very much’, regardless of background or personal characteristics. On the other hand, 40.2% said people support inclusion only ‘to some extent’, while 31.0% said ‘only a little’.

The most common reason for discrimination, harassment or exclusion was sexual orientation (23.6%), followed

4. U-Report poll - Inclusion: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine.

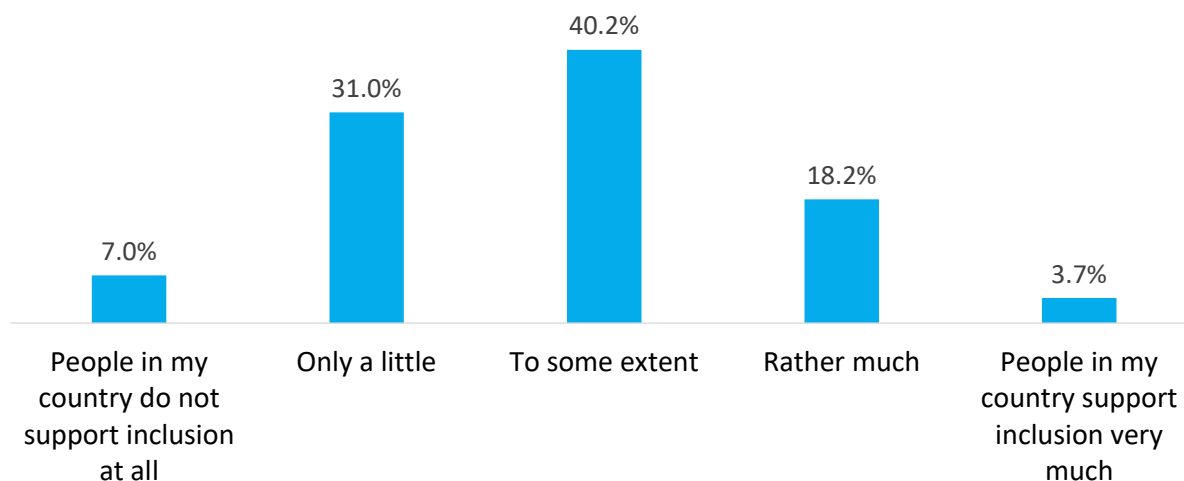
by disability (19.6%) and ethnic or religious background (18.0%).

Focus groups in 11 ECA countries⁵, including one comprised of young people from vulnerable backgrounds, spoke about various types of discrimination in the ECA. Many agreed that discrimination due to sexual orientation or sexual identity was commonplace. Some talked about how the word ‘gay’ is used as a slur or swear word in their country. Many young people do not disclose their sexual orientation because

5. Two sets of focus groups for inclusion were held: one in English and one in Russian. The English-speaking focus group had 13 participants (10 females, 3 males) ages 15-24 years from Romania, Greece, Kosovo, Georgia, Serbia, Croatia, Tajikistan, Republic of North Macedonia. The Russian-speaking focus group had youth from vulnerable backgrounds, including those with disabilities or experience of migration. This group had 20 participants (13 female, 7 male) ages 14-25 from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Figure 7. Support for inclusion

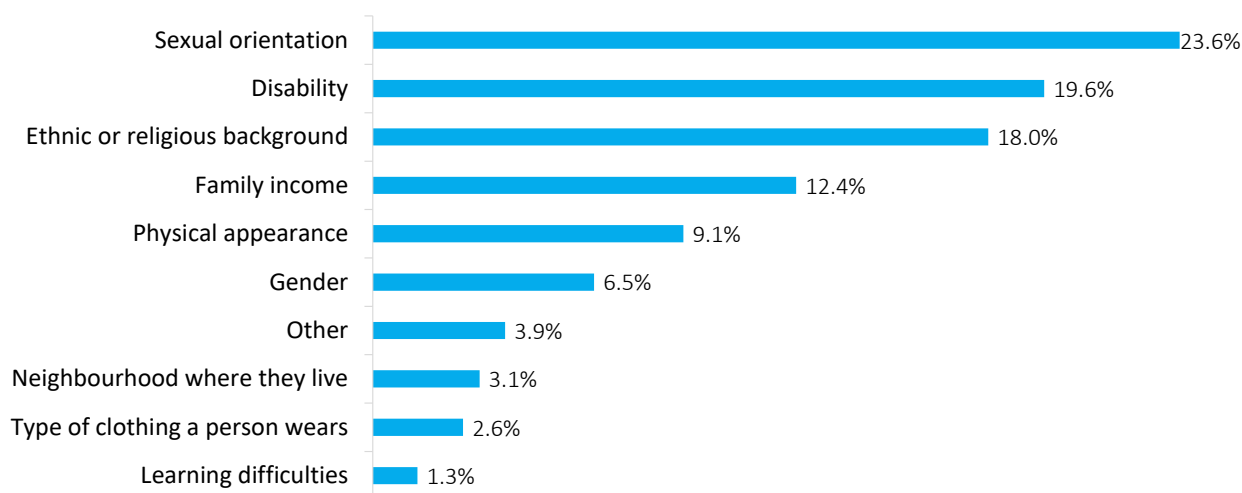
Q. How much do you think people in your country support the inclusion of all people, regardless of their background/characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, race, gender, family income)? (% of respondents)



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,561.

Figure 8. Reasons for discrimination, harassment or exclusion

Q. In your opinion, what is the most common reason for discrimination, harassment, or exclusion in your country? (% of respondents) Choose only one:



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,685.

of their fear of discrimination. Participants in the Russian-speaking focus group (consisting of youth from three Central Asian countries) remarked that the extent of discrimination due to sexual orientation is often underestimated in their contexts.

Participants said that the treatment of ethnic minorities is a big political issue, where people do not believe in co-existence with other groups, such as the Roma or refugees. For participants in the Russian-speaking group, discrimination against ethnic minorities was cited as the most common. Religion also plays a very powerful role in their communities, and some are discriminated against if they don't practice the dominant religion. Participants observed that people make assumptions about one's values based on the type of religion they observe.

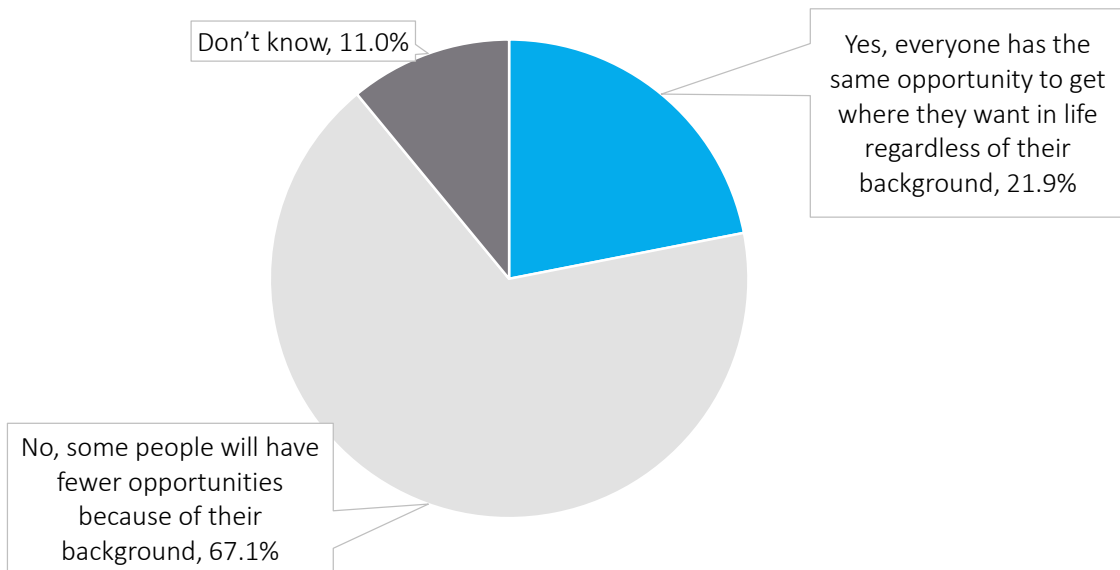
Very rich children make fun of others from poor families. This is very unpleasant. (Aila, 16, Uzbekistan)



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Figure 9. Views on equal opportunities

Q. Do all people in your country today have equal opportunities regardless of their background? (% of respondents)



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,333.

Some participants shared their own experiences of discrimination because of their disability or illness and physical appearance. Gender discrimination was also identified as a widespread problem in their countries, which they felt are very patriarchal, despite only 6.5% of poll respondents selecting this. Participants in the Russian-speaking group said that people from regions outside the capital and rural areas are face discrimination.

I was discriminated against by teachers and students. There were attacks on my appearance by teachers, while students simply bullied me. (Aigul, 20, Kazakhstan)

A majority (67.1%) of respondents to the poll said that people in their countries have fewer opportunities because of their background. Participants in the focus

groups felt that discrimination due to family income is systemic. For example, some said that the state does not support low-income families, which sustains a cycle of poverty that people blame on themselves. Participants in the Russian-speaking group observed that students are treated differently at school due to their parents' financial situation.

We don't talk about it. We are in constant silence about the problems that are happening. Kids are scared to say that they've been bullied or harassed because they will be judged by their parents or their teachers, who will say it is their fault that they are getting discriminated against. (Lana, 19, Croatia)

Almost two-thirds (61.2%) of respondents said that they have experienced or

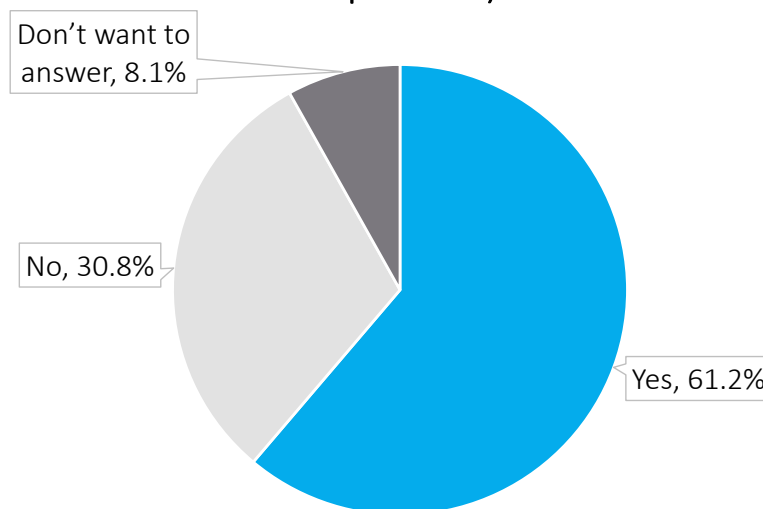
witnessed discrimination, harassment, or exclusion in school. Participants in the focus group believe that almost every young person has experienced this at school at least once in their lives, and if not experienced it themselves, then witnessed it. Bullying and harassment are commonplace, and most young people are afraid to tell their teachers or parents for fear of getting in trouble. Most harassment is written off as humour or jokes. Sometimes discrimination is indirect, where students are excluded or ignored, for example, if they have a disability. Participants felt that discrimination and exclusion are the main reasons for teen suicide in their countries.

61.2% of respondents have experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment, or exclusion against students in their schools

Teachers also discriminate against students. Participants described how teachers have their own biases and treat students differently because of their ethnic background. Teachers also have a preference for the 'smart' students, leaving other students behind. Even when teachers are not acting in a discriminatory way, participants said they do nothing when they see bullying or discrimination between students. Participants noted that teachers lack the skills to handle discrimination in the classroom. They also lack an appropriate understanding of mental health issues and empathy towards students' emotional wellbeing. For example, teachers tend to focus primarily on academic performance and school grades, participants said. They explained that teachers have a limited level of understanding or capacity to handle situations that require support for young people's emotional wellbeing, especially in cases of bullying or violence, including cyber-bullying. This is something participants would like to see changed.

Figure 10. Discrimination in schools

Q. Have you experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment, or exclusion against students in your school? (% of respondents)



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,034.

Young people feel that schools should do more to create inclusive learning environments

When asked what should be done to support vulnerable students, respondents said extra learning supports, such as materials or tutoring (28.5%) and counselling and coaching (26.8%), would make the most difference.

In school, people always say: 'Girls can do this, girls can't do that. Girls aren't good at doing things with their hands, like mechanics. I experienced this firsthand.' (Maria, 16, Ukraine)

On the contrary, participants in both focus groups identified better training for teachers as most important. They said training would help increase their skills for handling discrimination in the classroom and change their attitudes. In the Russian-speaking group, participants noted that teachers are role models, and students will mimic their

behaviour. Participants were in favour of removing teachers who discriminate against their students.

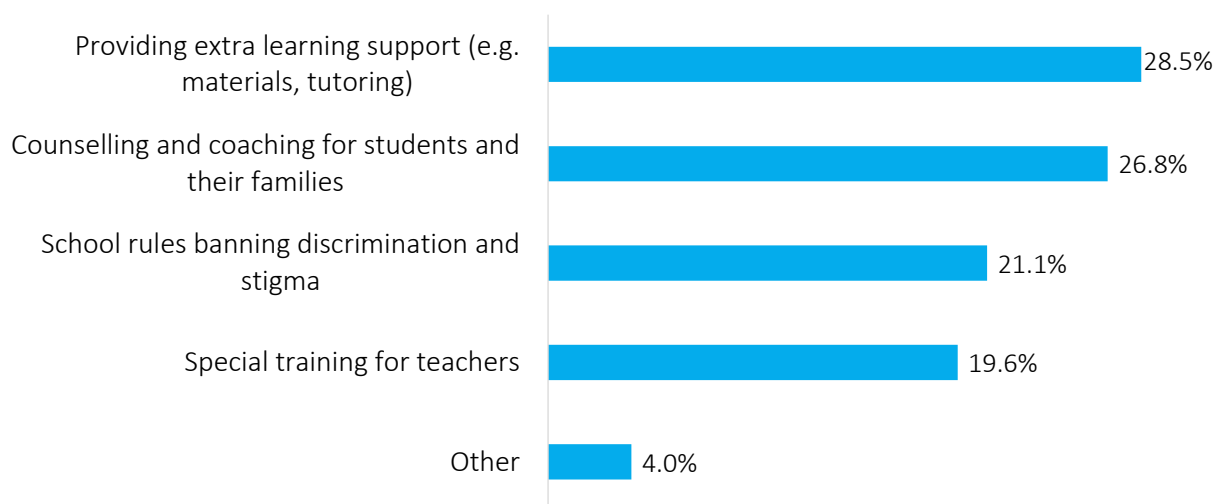
Some participants also suggested creating an 'inclusive curriculum' that celebrates difference and includes several perspectives and histories, such as Roma history. Participants also would like to see educational workshops and activities with community organisations or NGOs that work with minority groups.

While I was in school, I also discriminated against others in some of the ways that we discussed. Then I began to study, read books. I managed to change my mind, and I am very happy about that, but it would be good I was taught how to be more accepting of others at school. (Aisara, 19, Uzbekistan)

Figure 11. School actions against discrimination

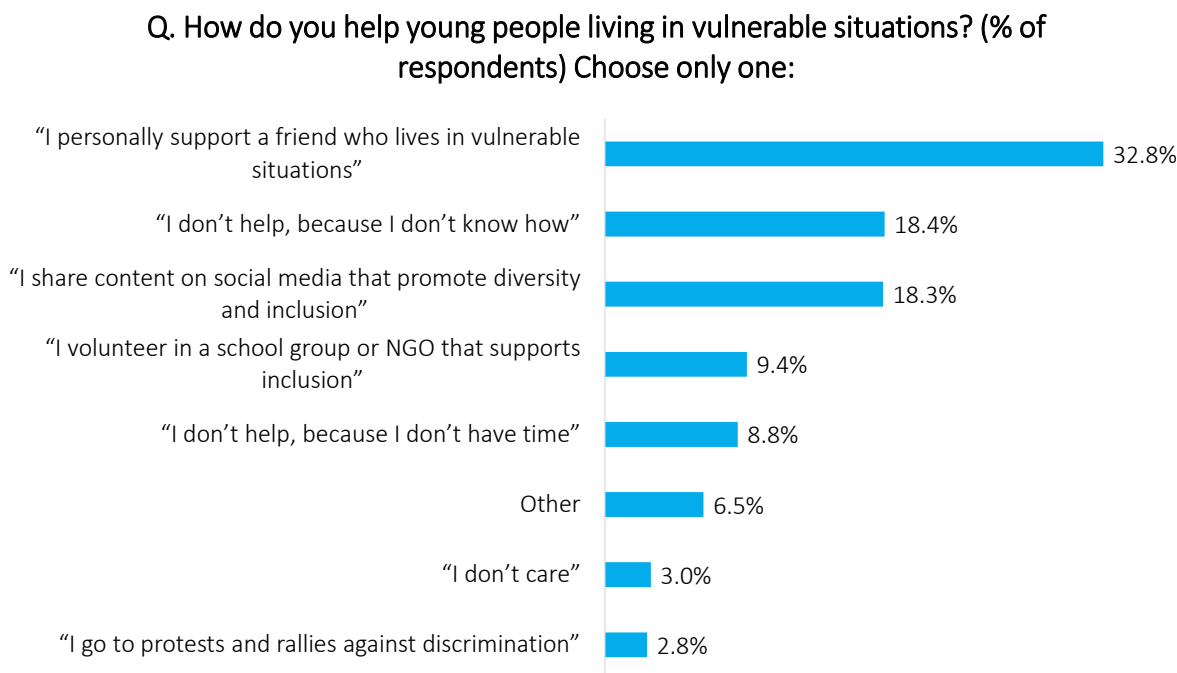
Q. If there is one thing that schools could do support vulnerable students, what would be the most important? (% of respondents)

Choose only one:



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,778.

Figure 12. Young people helping others in vulnerable situations



Source: U-Report polls, May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,620.

Providing personal support was the top way that respondents help others who live in vulnerable situations (32.8%). Interestingly, 18.4% said that they don't help at all, because they don't know how. Almost an equal percentage (18.3%) said that they help others through spreading awareness on social media.

Focus group participants recommended that their peers need to get informed, share experiences, and take action, and that they should have the courage to stand up for themselves and their friends. They said that young people should be more educated about their rights, understand mechanisms and supports that address discrimination, and create spaces to talk about this topic in different ways, such as teacher-student meetings, meetings with parents, and peers.



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3

MOST YOUTH SUPPORT A GREEN FUTURE AND WANT THEIR GOVERNMENTS TO DO MORE

Climate change, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss are among the principal global challenges of our time. They are already impacting our livelihoods and societies, and national and international actors agree that we need to make a paradigm shift towards green and environmentally-friendly societies.

The 2030 Agenda with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for action to achieve a better and more sustainable future for everyone. The Paris Agreement of 2015 highlights the need for countries to implement ambitious climate actions. The European Green Deal, announced in December 2019, aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral, economically sustainable continent by 2050, thus impacting the EU Member States' national agendas.

A successful green transition is made up of different ingredients, including a "green economy", "green jobs", and "green skills". A green economy generates increasing prosperity while maintaining the natural system that sustains us. "Green jobs" are those that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality. They include jobs that help to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, reduce energy, materials, and water consumption through high-efficiency strategies, decarbonise the economy, and minimise or altogether avoid the generation of all forms of waste and pollution.¹ Green skills are the "knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society".²


1. UNEP, 2020, Green Jobs – UNEP Factsheet, available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/32281>

2. OECD and CEDEFOP, 2014, OECD Green Growth Studies: Greener Skills

Education and training systems have a crucial role in empowering young people, who are disproportionately affected by climate change. A green transition cannot be possible, however, without a shift in mindsets. Environmental awareness will need to be present in every aspect of daily life, and all people need to be equipped with the right attitudes and skills. Young people are also the ones who will be most affected by the policies that national governments decide to implement. They are the key actors and drivers to achieve the green transition's objectives and hold policymakers accountable.

Young people are learning about green issues online and are eager to get more engaged

Nearly all young people polled in five ECA countries³ feel that it is important for them to live in a "green economy": 90.4% of respondents said that living in a green economy is either 'very important' (54.4%) or 'somewhat important' (36.0%) to them.

 **Facilitator: If mother nature could talk, what would she say?**

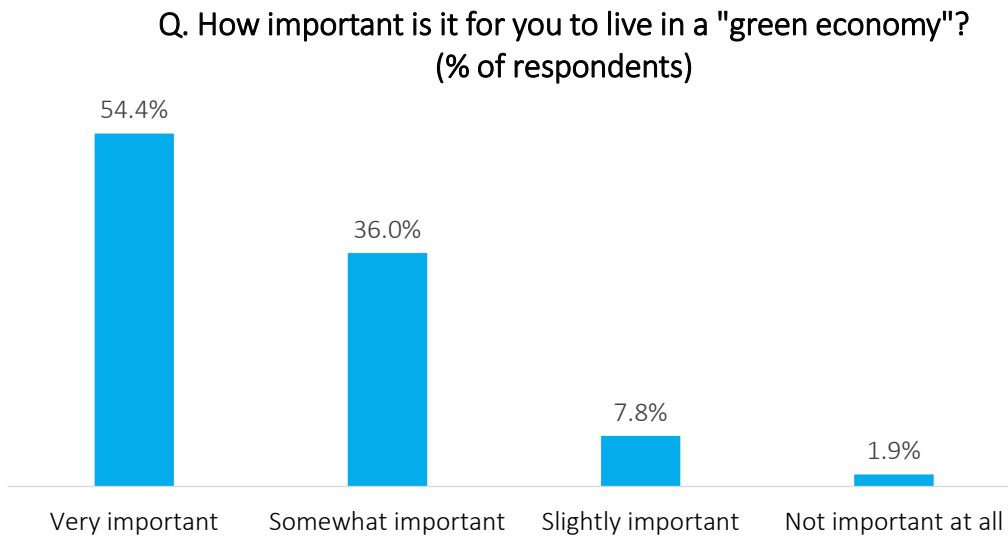
'Have mercy on me. I have enough for all your needs, but not enough for all your greed.'
(Kristijan, 17, North Macedonia)

and Jobs: Highlights, available at:

https://www.oecd.org/cfe/lead/Greener%20skills_Highlights%20WEB.pdf

3. U-Report poll - Greening: Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova.

Figure 13. The importance of a “green economy” for youth



Source: U-Report polls, April-May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,770.

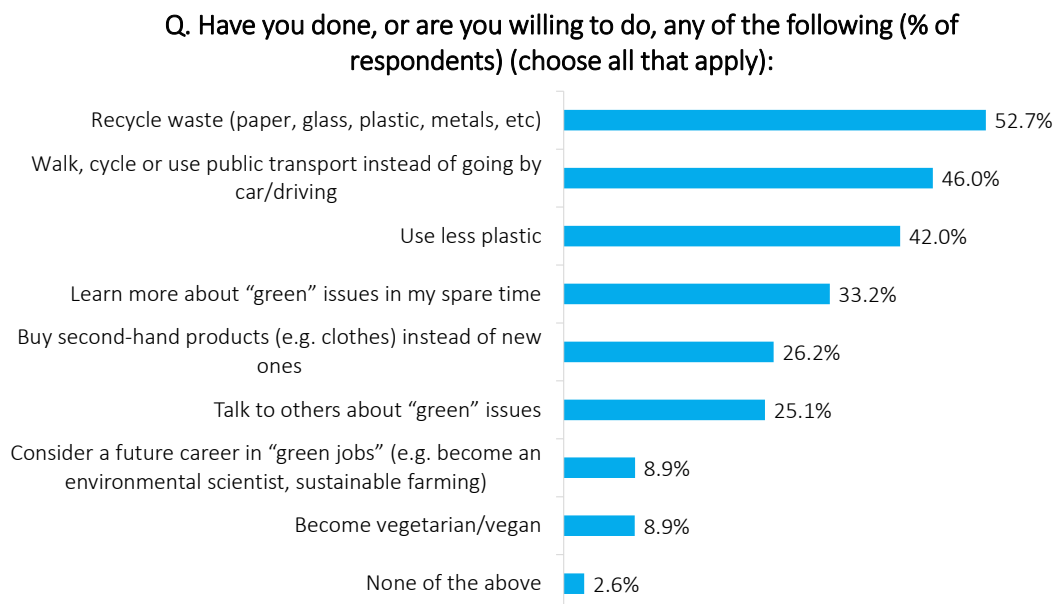
Despite this, not all young people are able to make changes in their lifestyles to be more friendly to the environment. When asked if they do, or are willing to do, a range of green practices, recycling waste (e.g. separating paper, glass, plastics, and metal) was the most popular, but only one in two respondents selected it (52.7%). In second place was walking, cycling, or using public transport (instead of a car) (46.0%),

followed by using less plastic (42.0%)

Participants in focus groups from 9 ECA countries⁴ emphasised the importance of raising awareness on green issues by learning about green issues themselves and talking to others about them. They felt that the first step towards a green economy is learning about the problems in the first place. Participants were mainly

4. Greening focus group: 11 participants (3 females, 8 males) ages 16-24 years. Participating countries: Kazakhstan, Romania, Albania, Georgia, Italy, Republic of North Macedonia, Armenia, Greece, Tajikistan.

Figure 14. Personal-level actions to support the environment



Source: U-Report polls, April-May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,737.

open to using less plastic while buying second-hand goods was seen as less favourable. They had concerns with the quality of items and the stigma attached to purchasing used items and did not feel that reducing consumer consumption would help the environment. While time limitations prevented more detailed discussion, this shows that some young people do not yet associate a circular economy with the green transition. These topics merit further exploration.

85.4% of respondents feel their government is not doing enough to create a green economy

Concerning public policies, 85.4% of respondents felt that their government is ‘not doing enough’ to create a “green economy”. Participants in the focus groups identified that the government’s critical role in supporting a green economy relates to providing incentives (e.g. rewards for businesses with green practices) and punishments (e.g. fines for pollution).

Sharing a link or post on green issues was the most popular form of civic participation among poll respondents (43.6%). However, far fewer young people have or are willing to create an environmental club (20.1%), contact their government officials (19.7%), or attend a climate protest (17.7%). Other ideas that participants had in the focus groups included having more opportunities to realise their green projects. Participants felt that green NGOs and other community organisations should cooperate more with schools to support young people’s initiatives to design green solutions.

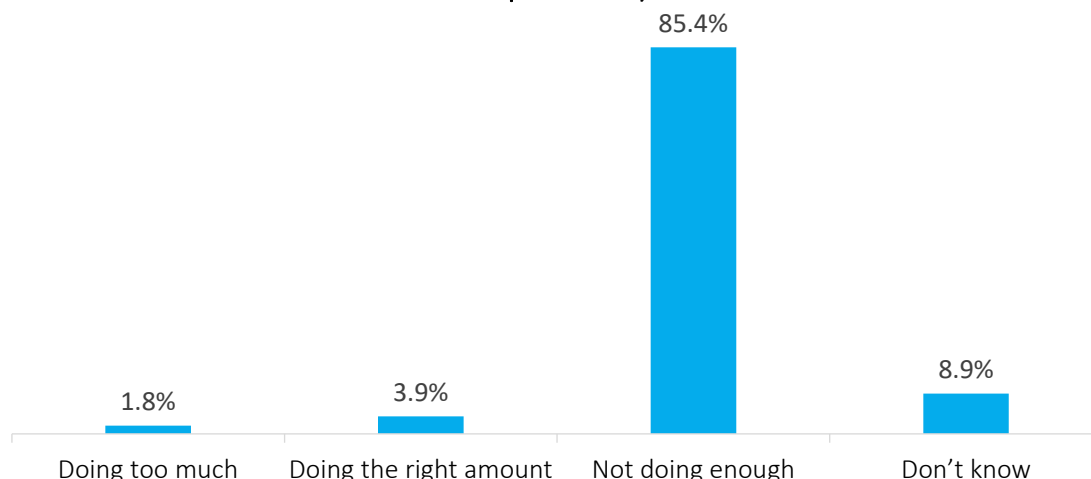
“Green jobs”: An unexplored career pathway with potential for young people

Another aspect of a “green economy” is “green jobs” aimed directly at protecting the environment or reducing the impact of that job on the health of the planet. Only 8.9% of respondents to the U-Report poll said they have or are willing to consider a future career in “green jobs”.

In the focus groups, the concept of a “green job” was relatively new to participants, but many were enthusiastic

Figure 15. Government action towards a “green economy”

Q. Do you think your government is doing too much, the right amount, or not enough to create a “green economy”? (% of respondents)



Source: U-Report polls, April-May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,510.



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about it and thought there should be more incentives for such jobs. Participants who wanted a career in science saw green jobs as very appealing. They expect that the number of green jobs will grow in the future as other jobs become outdated. Others said they would prefer to work within a company using green practices or work in a field where they can influence environmental policy (e.g. politics) or spread awareness (e.g. education). Many agreed that the government has a role to play by investing in green sectors, supporting green technology development, and helping young people gain “green skills” through the education system.

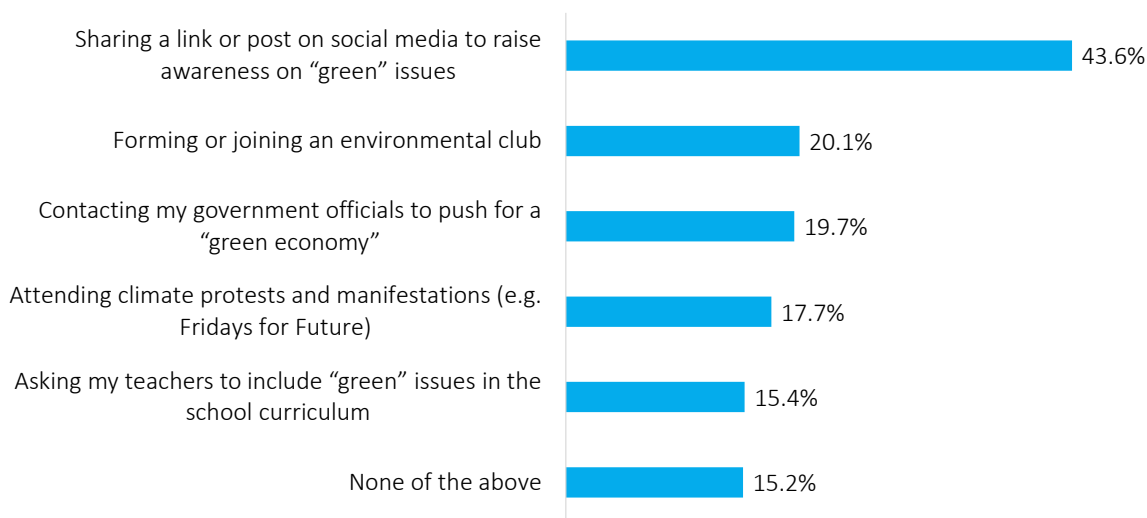
As someone from this present generation, if we don't actually want to be unemployed, I think we should be thinking about green jobs because that is the future. (John, 17, Italy)

We need to add more green issues in primary school and high school. We mostly learned about it from a textbook, but this is not enough. There should be trips, and workshops. (Dominique, 20, Romania)

Respondents to the poll were split about whether they think their school teaches them enough about green issues. 44.2% of respondents said they do not believe that

Figure 16. Civic participation on green issues

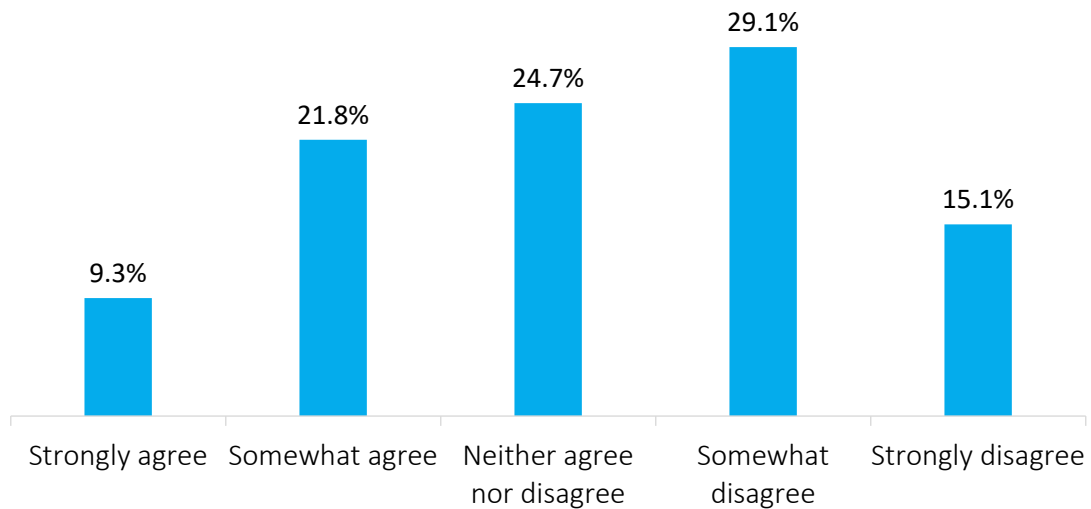
Q. Have you participated, or are willing to participate, in any of the following (% of respondents) (choose all that apply):



Source: U-Report polls, April-May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 7,526.

Figure 17. Learning about green issues at school

Q. Do you agree with the following statement: “I think that my school teaches me enough about ‘green’ issues” (% of respondents)



Source: U-Report polls, April-May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,053.

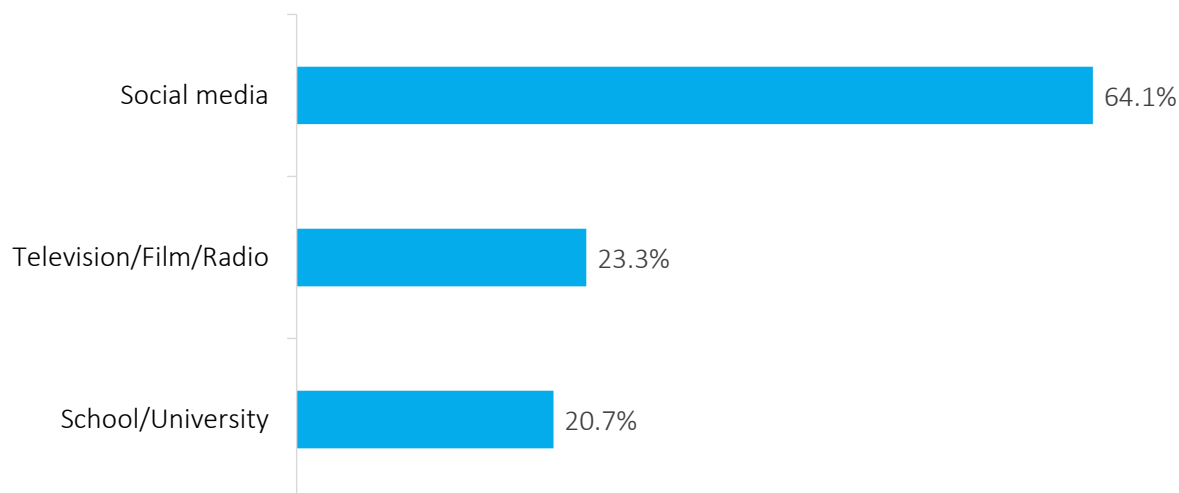
What do you think of when you hear the term “green jobs”?

Mentimeter



Figure 18. Sources of information on green issues

Q. Where do you learn about “green” issues? (e.g. climate change, pollution, conservation of nature, plants and animals) (% of respondents) (choose all that apply) (Top 3)



Source: U-Report polls, April-May 2021. Note: Number of respondents is 8,181.

schools teach enough green topics, while 31.1% believe that they do, and 24.7% neither agreed nor disagreed. Only 20.7% of respondents said that they get their information on green issues from school, whereas 64.1% said they get it from social media.

In the focus groups, participants recommended that education systems introduce more green topics and skills in the curriculum at an early age. They would prefer schools to use more experiential teaching methods, such as trips into nature or workshops. Some recognised that their teachers do not have this knowledge and could benefit from partnerships with green NGOs.





4 LOOKING AHEAD AT YOUNG PEOPLE'S HOPES AND NEEDS

Young people face extraordinary social, economic, and environmental changes, but many are unsure if they are prepared for what lies ahead.

Young people in ECA don't feel that their school prepares them for the future. They want to have more practical 'real world' experience during their studies. They feel uninformed about potential jobs or careers. They lack reliable information and career guidance to help them make decisions, and their choices are often influenced by family, social, or gender expectations. They are not accessing public employment services, which are seen as outdated or inadequate for their needs. They would like to receive guidance from their teachers or schools, but many teachers are not equipped. In the absence of other advice, they turn to the internet and social media to understand emerging trends in job markets and technologies, what skills are needed, and how to attain them. However, the information online is often too varied and unreliable, leaving many young people disoriented or lost.

They aspire to be critical thinkers in democratic societies and want to cooperate and work in teams. They want to understand themselves and develop the socio-emotional skills that help them be adaptable, cope with stress, and act in empathy. They want to learn foreign languages and have an education that celebrates difference, exposing them to different perspectives and histories. And they want to go to school to learn, and also to be social and meet their friends.

But they also told us that they experience discrimination because of sexual orientation, illness or disability, religion or ethnicity,

or because they come from rural areas. They still face gender stereotypes. Despite wishing to develop self-awareness and celebrate difference, they see bullying and harassment all around them. But they hide it. They would like their teachers to be better prepared to handle these situations, but in many cases, they are not. Sometimes teachers hold discriminatory views themselves.

They are clear: they want to live in a "green economy", but they think their governments do not do enough to support it. At the same time, their action against climate change remains limited to recycling or sharing links on social media. But they would like to know more about the environment, the problems, the solutions, and do more. They do not feel well-informed about the environment and wish their schools would





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use experiential teaching methods such as workshops, nature trips, or other creative forms of learning.

Young people are the primary beneficiaries of inclusive lifelong learning systems. They are also potential agents of change. Young learners are more inter-connected and are exposed to information and the views of youth from other parts of the world. They can bring new ideas, and question conventional norms. Young volunteers and civil activists can influence the relationships within communities, including the level of cohesiveness and social engagement. They are not only the activists of today but also the policymakers and shapers of tomorrow.

Young people cannot lead this transition alone. They also need policymakers, schools, NGOs, and other community actors to work together with them.

As heard from the U-Reports and focus group consultations, adolescents and young people care deeply about these issues, and have ideas about the world they want to live in and how to get there. They are experts on their own lives, and their voices need to be listened to if we are to build

sustainable, inclusive green societies for current and future generations. Importantly, they need to sit at the decision-making table – and have proportional representation as equal partners and key stakeholders. But young people will not wait for an invitation: they are already leading global and local movements on issues such as climate justice, against racism and discrimination, or for gender equity.

Young people are already building the future they want and are waiting for the rest of society – policymakers, but also parents, teachers, social workers, community leaders – to catch up and support them. National and local authorities must work with young people to ensure that they have the opportunities to be leaders within their communities and the skills, assets, and sense of agency needed to act on those opportunities. It is only by engaging with young people, by building on their strengths and resilience and on their ideas and capacities to co-create change, that effective transitions towards greener, digital and more equitable societies will be possible.



VIDEOS



Click [here](#) to listen to young people share their views on **lifelong learning**



Click [here](#) to listen to young people share their views on the “**green economy**”



Click [here](#) to listen to young people share their views on **inclusion**



ANNEX

If you could ask policy makers to do one thing to make it easier for you to find a future career, what would you ask them?

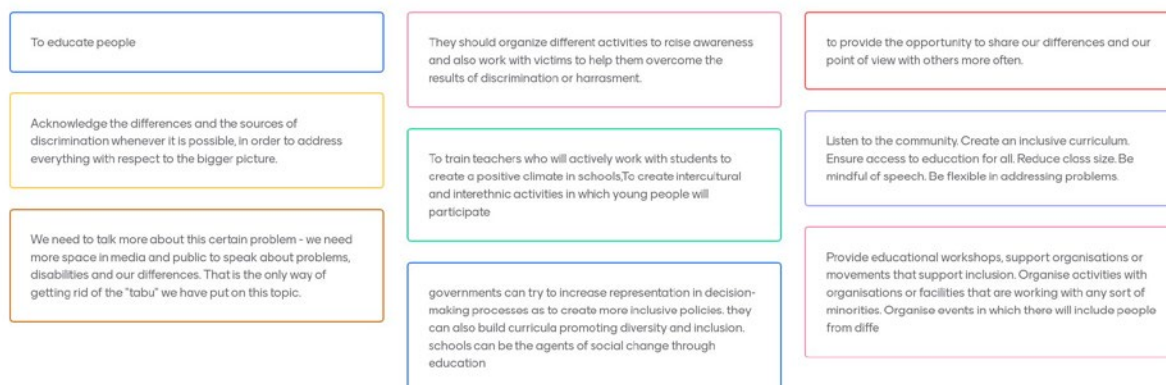
Mentimeter



WALL OF MESSAGES

How can schools, NGOs, private sector, media, governments do to help build a society that is more inclusive?

Mentimeter



If you could ask policymakers (or schools, community organisations, or others in your community) do to one thing to help the planet, what would it be?

Mentimeter



