



The higher education we want:

Youth voices on the futures of higher education



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Editorial team	Emma Sabzalieva, Dana Abdrasheva, Eglis Chacón, Luz Gamarra Caballero, and Bosen Lily Liu
Copyeditor	Annette Insanally
Graphic design	Cesar Vercher
Cover photos	Andrés Manner and Tao
Caption	Photos of the Local Youth Workshops carried out in Caracas, Venezuela (above), and in Shenzhen, China (below).

UNESCO IESALC expresses its gratitude to:

Peer reviewers: Mauricio Escribens, UNESCO IESALC; Daniela Gallegos, UNESCO IESALC; Mpine Makoe, University of Johannesburg, South Africa; Eréndira Rodríguez de León, Tecnológico de Monterrey, México and youth representative.

Partners: Simon Wanda Makokha, UNESCO Section for Education for Sustainable Development; UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet); International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (UNESCO-ICHEI), Shenzhen, China.

Workshop organizers and trainers: Bosen Lily Liu, Emma Sabzalieva, Luz Gamarra Caballero, Simon Wanda Makokha, and Marijana Bogojevic.

Workshop facilitators: Dana Abdrasheva, Eglis Chacón, Leanne Davey, Claudia Delgado Barrios, Xiaotong Duan, Mauricio Escribens, Daniela Gallegos, Luz Gamarra Caballero, Sara Maneiro, Xavier Metzger, Iman Mohammad, Boya Qin, Débora Ramos Torres, Jaime Félix Roser Chinchilla, Joséphine Simonian, and Mingshun Xu.

Workshop support: Neus Pasamonte, Edward Betancourt, and Andrés Manner.

Schools in Venezuela that participated in the local workshops: Centro Educativo Andy Aparicio Fe y Alegría, Unidad Educativa Andy Aparicio Fe y Alegría, and Liceo Bolivariano Julio Bustamante; and their directors and teachers.

For more information, please contact:

info-IESALC@unesco.org

www.iesalc.unesco.org

+58 212 2861020

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Foreword

It is commonly said that the youth of today are the hope of tomorrow. Equally forward-thinking and hopeful are the words of Nelson Mandela who said that 'the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow.' But what are the hopes of these youth, these future leaders? What are their concerns? And what is the role for higher education as we think ahead to tomorrow?

Over the past decades, UNESCO has been paying increasing attention to youth empowerment. In many UNESCO Conferences, including the Third World Higher Education Conference and the United Nations Summit on Transforming Education, particular attention has been given to the voice of youth. Listening carefully to and engaging with youth is conducive to greater transformation in higher education because youth can be a bridge between higher education and changes in society. When we listen to the youth, everyone benefits.

In the youth consultation on the futures of higher education coordinated by UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO IESALC), it was clear that the youth have ideas and are forward-looking when describing different scenarios for the future.

Young people emphasized their concerns about sustainability and sustainable development while their hopes focused on creating a better world for the generations to come. Provided supportive systems are in place, youth commit to serving society by increasing their knowledge and deepening their skills. A key role for higher education is to support students through learning and the broader educational experience, to fine-tune their visions and equip the young for our multiple possible future pathways.

Without idealizing the futures, these young people are building their understanding of future challenges and are getting prepared to find ways to tackle them. In their view, the futures *need* to look brighter and better.

It is up to all of us – youth and adults, higher education institutions, governments, and others engaged in the educational process – to work together to create the spaces, the plans, and the mutual respect to make sure that the higher education of tomorrow is a horizon to which we can all look forward.



Francesc Pedró
Director, UNESCO IESALC

Executive Summary

This report is inspired by the voices of youth from around the world who generously shared their thoughts and perspectives on the futures of higher education. It was developed following a youth consultation process coordinated by UNESCO IESALC in partnership with UNESCO Associated Schools Network and the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO. The consultation was held between December 2021 and May 2022.

In this process, over 100 young persons mainly between the ages of 15 and 17 from 43 countries in all world regions shared their hopes and concerns for the years ahead, thinking forward to 2050. Through a series of global and local workshops, they also discussed the role of education as part of this horizon, in particular their visions for higher education as part of a world that is better for all.

Key findings

- Young people's hopes and concerns for 2050 are remarkably similar worldwide. The resolution or persistence of global issues such as poverty and war coupled with climate change and sustainability represent the main areas of both optimism and fear.
- Youth participants also share strong hopes and concerns about research, technology, and innovation as well as the realization of their personal aspirations.
- Over 90% of the youth participants plan to attend higher education, a significantly higher proportion than the current global enrolment rate of 40%.
- Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and social sciences are the two most popular areas for future study.
- More than 60% identified the opportunity to acquire knowledge as the main benefit of higher education, countering the assumption that students seek higher education to improve their job prospects.
- Youth believe that higher education should be more accessible, innovative, high quality, sustainable, developmental, and equal.

Summary of recommendations

Based on the youth consultation, four sets of recommendations for higher education are offered:

- 1) Raise educational expectations by supporting youth to connect their personal and societal visions and be more responsive to global and local societal needs.
- 2) Provide students and societies with tools for life by blending support services into pedagogical design and creating/expanding mentoring programmes.
- 3) Call attention to global and local issues by opening new avenues for futures thinking and promoting service to the community.
- 4) Engage for better futures together by developing youth engagement strategies and consulting with youth from more diverse backgrounds.

1 Introduction

Today's youth are the participants of tomorrow's higher education, and yet their voices are often neglected in the decision-making process. Young people have their own understandings, perceptions, and dreams for the futures. They believe that they can make their own futures and trust that they can decide on what they need.

It is for this reason that UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO IESALC), in partnership with UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) and the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (UNESCO ICHEI), organized the youth consultation 'The Futures of Higher Education: Youth Voices', to incorporate youths' voices into the conversation of futures of higher education – *their* futures of higher education.

The consultation aimed to support youths to express their understanding, ownership and accountability with regard to their futures and the futures of society. It combined questionnaires and in-depth guided discussions in workshops that spanned global and local levels. The workshops within the Global Student Forum (online, December 2021)¹ provided international and comparative aspects that were complemented by focused Local Youth Workshops held in two cities in China and Venezuela (April-May 2022), which helped to contextualize the discussions in a more focused manner.

The youth consultation engaged over 100 young people from a total of 43 countries mostly between the ages of 15 to 17. While UNESCO defines 'youth' as persons aged between 15 and 24, which is 16% of the global population², this con-

sultation focused on those at the younger end of this scale. This enabled a focus on youth at the point in their education at which they typically start choosing their next steps in education or their broader life journey.

This report offers a first look into the perspectives of these youths on the futures of higher education. Participants expressed their understanding of the current education system including higher education, shared their thoughts on the role of higher education in their futures and identified challenges, improvements, and opportunities for the futures of higher education in broader societal settings.

Almost all the participants in this youth consultation expressed their hope to participate in higher education. A significant finding from this consultation is that two thirds of the participants see the main benefit of higher education as providing them with the opportunity to improve their knowledge. This provides a powerful counterbalance to the widely held perception that young people are motivated to pursue higher education only to improve their job prospects.

Another significant conclusion from the youth consultation was the importance placed by participants on environmental and societal sustainability. This was reflected in their concerns about climate change and sustainability, and their readiness to contribute to society after completing higher education. At the same time, for higher education in the future to meet the needs of today's youth, it should be accessible and affordable, more innovative, of high quality, address sustainability issues, be centred on students' self-development, and be equal and inclusive.

This youth consultation was undertaken as part of UNESCO IESALC's work on the futures of high-

1 <https://aspnet.unesco.org/en-us/Pages/first-Global-Student-Forum-.aspx>

2 <https://www.unesco.org/en/youth>

er education³ which has been developed within the framework of UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative⁴. The upcoming sections of the report give the rationale for engaging youth, the methodology used for the global and local workshops, and provide information about the youth participants.

The report then summarizes the main hopes and concerns for 2050 expressed by the youth participants, following which it contextualizes the ways that youth see themselves in higher education. This includes their future visions for higher education and leads to a series of recommendations both for continuing to engage youth as well as for transforming higher education to support better futures for all.

3 <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/futures-of-higher-education>

4 <https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/>

2 The futures of higher education

This youth consultation represented the third phase of UNESCO IESALC's Futures of Higher Education project, which was launched in late 2020 within the broader UNESCO Futures of Education initiative. Each phase of the UNESCO IESALC project was carefully designed to showcase the perspectives and ideas of different groups of stakeholders in relation to higher education.

The aim of the Futures of Higher Education project is to stimulate creative and imaginative thinking and ideas about the futures of higher education leading up to year 2050. The project takes on a global perspective, nurturing discussions regarding the role of higher education as part of UNESCO's work on the futures of education.

In the first phase of the project, UNESCO IESALC collaborated with 25 higher education experts⁵ from every world region, highly distinguished professionals with extensive and diverse experience in higher education. This phase culminated in the launch of the report 'Thinking Higher and Beyond: Perspectives on the futures of higher education to 2050' in May 2021, and the publication of the experts' concept notes in three languages.

Phase two of the project was a multilingual public consultation⁶ which concluded in November 2021 with the launch of the report 'Pathways to 2050 and beyond: Findings from a public consultation on the futures of higher education'. This reflected the results of a survey of close to 1,200 participants from almost 100 countries.

During the public consultation, it was noted that youth participation was quite modest, representing about 20% of total responses. Yet, today's youths are the present and the future of

societies, making it critical to incorporate youths' voices into discussions on the futures. To this end, a specific consultation with youth became the third phase of the project.

The youth consultation ran from December 2021 to May 2022 and was organized in collaboration with the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) and the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation, under the auspices of UNESCO (UNESCO ICHEI) in Shenzhen, China. More than 100 young persons participated in the futures of higher education consultation process from over 40 countries.

5 <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/futures-of-higher-education/expert-consultation/>

6 <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/futures-of-higher-education/public-consultation/>

3 Methodology

The youth consultation was conducted in two phases that spanned both global and local levels: first, a Global Student Forum held in December 2021 and second, Local Youth Workshops held in Shenzhen, China and Caracas, Venezuela in April and May 2022. Shenzhen and Caracas were selected as the locations for the Local Youth Workshops, as they are the home bases for UNESCO ICHEI and UNESCO IESALC. In both phases, participants completed an online pre-workshop questionnaire and participated in a workshop that was online for the Global Student Forum and in person for the Local Youth Workshops.

A pre-workshop questionnaire was completed by 120 young persons, 84 of whom had been selected for participation at the Global Student Forum and 36 who participated in a Local Youth Workshop (14 in China and 22 in Venezuela). A total of 109 youths⁷ from 43 countries completed both a workshop and a questionnaire.

3.1 Pre-workshop questionnaire

The aim of the pre-workshop questionnaire, which was distributed to participants one week before their workshop, was to create a space for youth to start brainstorming their ideas on higher education and the future, and to enable youth to be prepared for the deeper dive into the topics that were discussed during the workshop.

The questionnaire was available in three languages: English, French, and Spanish (see table 1). It was set up in Microsoft Forms as an online tool that was accessible in all locations.

Participation in both the questionnaire and the workshop was voluntary. Responses to the questionnaire were anonymous and confidential; some demographic data was collected (including country, age, gender identity) but not matched to individual responses during the workshops.

3.2 Global Student Forum

The Global Student Forum was held in December 2021, the first to be held virtually. Organized jointly by ASPnet and the International Centre for UNESCO ASPnet (ICUA), a total of 130 students aged 14 to 18 and 16 youth leaders aged 18 to 30 from over 55 countries came together to actively participate in the three-day online event.

To empower youth, the Global Student Forum was co-designed by selected youth leaders and students. The theme selected for the Forum, which was opened by UNESCO Assistant Director General for Education Stefania Giannini, was education for sustainable development: taking action for people and the planet. Simultaneous interpretation in all six official UN languages (Arabic, English, French, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish) was available during the Forum's plenary sessions.

Table 1. Pre-workshop questionnaire completion rates by language

Language	Global Student Forum	Local Youth Workshops
English	58	14
French	15	0
Spanish	11	22
Total	84	36

⁷ The difference between the number of youths who completed the questionnaire (120) and the number that completed a workshop (109) can be explained by some youth either not being available to join a workshop after confirming their participation and filling in the questionnaire, or not being able to stay for the duration of the workshop due to prior commitments.

3.2.1 Selection process

The selection of respondents for the Global Student Forum involved two separate processes.

The first process targeted students (14-18 years old) recruited from ASPnet schools. This process involved an invitation to each of the 182 UNESCO ASPnet national coordinators to nominate two students from their country, respecting gender balance. Participants were selected by ASPnet based on their engagement with bringing about positive changes in their schools and communities as part of Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development.

The second process targeted youth leaders between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. They were nominated by youth networks affiliated to UNESCO, among them the Education for Sustainable Development Youth network, UNESCO Youth, and the UNESCO Climate Action Network (YoUCAN). The criteria for the selection of youth leaders by ASPnet included:

- Being an active youth leader at local, national, regional and/or the global level to bring about positive transformations for Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development.
- Experience working with young people.
- Knowledge of the SDGs; good communication skills; team oriented; think critically and creatively; value multiculturalism.
- Being willing and able to devote sufficient time to the organization, implementation, and follow-up activities of the Global Student Forum.

3.2.2 Workshop information

As part of the Global Student Forum, UNESCO IESALC organized 10 parallel 1.5-hour workshops on the futures of higher education. Eight workshops were moderated in English, one in French and one in Spanish. Participants in the Global Student Forum were allocated to workshops

based on language preference and there were between three and nine students in each room.

Participants or their parents/caregivers (for those under 18 years of age) completed consent forms two weeks before the activities (questionnaire and workshop). Participants' permission to use pictures and/or videos from the workshops was obtained through the consent process.

Each workshop was led by a facilitator who had been trained by UNESCO IESALC and who followed a pre-designed structure intended to encourage active contributions from each participant. Students shared their perspectives on the future and the role of higher education in achieving their future aspirations.

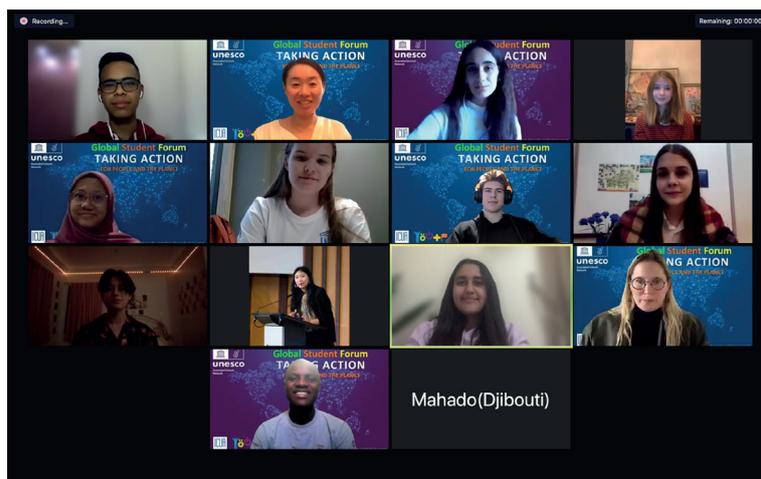


Photo from Room 1 (English). Facilitator: Qin Boya. Student participants from Denmark, Finland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland.



Photo from Room 9 (Spanish). Facilitators: Sara Maneiro and Luz Gamarra Caballero. Student participants from Argentina, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Spain.

Overall, 61 students completed a futures of higher education workshop. At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to summarize what they hoped their next steps in education would be and how they thought higher education could support future changes for people and the planet. A short video featuring a selection of the students' responses was presented by UNESCO IESALC to mark International Day of Education 2022⁸.

3.3 Local Youth Workshops

To complement the international coverage of the Global Student Forum, five in-person Local Youth Workshops were organized in April and May 2022. Three workshops were held in Caracas, Venezuela and two workshops were organized in Shenzhen, China. Workshop facilitators received training and guidance from UNESCO IESALC.

3.3.1 Selection process

Local Youth Workshop participants were selected from local high schools using the following criteria:

- Age: Approximately 16 years old, that is, at or nearly at the school level at which students typically choose their next steps whether in education or the labour force.
- Gender: Balance between male and female participation.
- Representing diverse socio-economic and academic backgrounds.

- Youth from the following equity deserving groups were encouraged to participate in the consultation:
 - With disability status
 - From ethnic minority groups
 - Identifying as refugees
 - With special needs

The ethics process for the Local Youth Workshops was the same as for the Global Student Forum. Given that all the participants were under 18, the consent forms distributed two weeks prior to activities were reviewed and signed by the participants' parents or caregivers. Participants' permission to use pictures and/or videos from the workshops was obtained through the consent process.

3.3.2 Workshop information

A total of 48 students, 17 from China and 31 from Venezuela participated in a two-hour long workshop (see table 2). Youth had a choice of speaking the language of their preference, either English or Spanish (Venezuela) and English or Mandarin (China). Facilitators were fluent in both languages.

During the workshop, students shared their thoughts on the future and the ways in which higher education could help them to further their personal and professional development. Short videos (with English subtitles) featuring

Table 2. Local Youth Workshop participants

Participants	China	Venezuela
Male	10 (60%)	14 (45%)
Female	7 (40%)	17 (55%)
Total number of participants	17	31

⁸ <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2022/01/23/transforming-the-futures-of-higher-education-with-and-for-youths/>

some of the youth speaking about what higher education means to them⁹ and their hopes for the futures of higher education¹⁰ were prepared by UNESCO IESALC and premiered at the World Higher Education Conference in May 2022.

3.4 Limitations

The selection process at both the global and local levels presented some limitations in terms of the range of youth that could be included. Participants in the Global Student Forum are already established changemakers or youth leaders already engaged actively in networks, demonstrating a predisposition to championing youth issues and greater willingness to be involved than might be expected of the general population.

The profile of the participants in the Local Youth Workshops – slightly younger and concentrated in two locations – made it more challenging to directly compare the responses at the global and local levels. It is also important to remember that all the participants had formal education experience and had completed schooling until at least the age of 14, which puts them in a more privileged position than the 200 million children and youth that UNESCO estimates are out of secondary school¹¹.

Notwithstanding these limitations and the overall limited sample size, youth participants were drawn from diverse backgrounds, including urban and rural areas, small island countries, and all UNESCO regions.

3.5 Data analysis

Following each set of workshops, a debriefing session was held with the facilitators and their feedback and observations were recorded. Further observational analysis was conducted as part of the data analysis and during the process of creating short video excerpts featuring some of the participants.

The data from the questionnaires was coded, categorized and analysed according to the themes emerging from the responses. Coding was conducted in stages and included peer review to ensure consistency and readability of the codes. Each coder worked separately on one set of questions allocating codes to responses and after its completion the coders exchanged sets of questions to either agree on the peer's code or add additional code. When both rounds of coding were completed, the coders categorized them to reduce the number of codes. The categories were further merged into themes to indicate the topics identified by the youth.

The following sections on youths' hopes and concerns for 2050, the way they see higher education and their future visions are drawn primarily from the questionnaire data and are also informed by the participant observation analysis. The report includes participants' responses to the questionnaire and are identified by their gender, age and country.

Quotes used in this report come from the free text responses provided by participants in the questionnaires. They have not been edited or modified but have been translated where applicable.

9 Higher education and me: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYG8actd93c>

10 My hopes for the futures of higher education: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npdJGba_4j0

11 <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/out-school-children-and-youth>

4 About the youth

This section provides information about the 120 youths who completed a questionnaire ahead of the Global Student Forum or one of the Local Youth Workshops.

4.1 Location

Youth participants came from 43 countries. With the Local Youth Workshops concentrated in two locations, most respondents were from Venezuela (18% of the total) and China (14%). New Zealand had 4% of the respondents, and Peru and Canada had just over 3% represented by four youths from each country. Eight countries were represented by three participants, 14 countries had two participants, and 16 countries had one participant (see figure 1).

All UNESCO world regions were well represented in the youth consultation process. As shown in figure 2, 28% (33 participants) were from Latin

America and the Caribbean, 26% (31 participants) from Europe and North America, 25% (30 participants) from Asia and the Pacific, 12% (15 participants) from Africa and 9% (11 participants) from the Arab States.

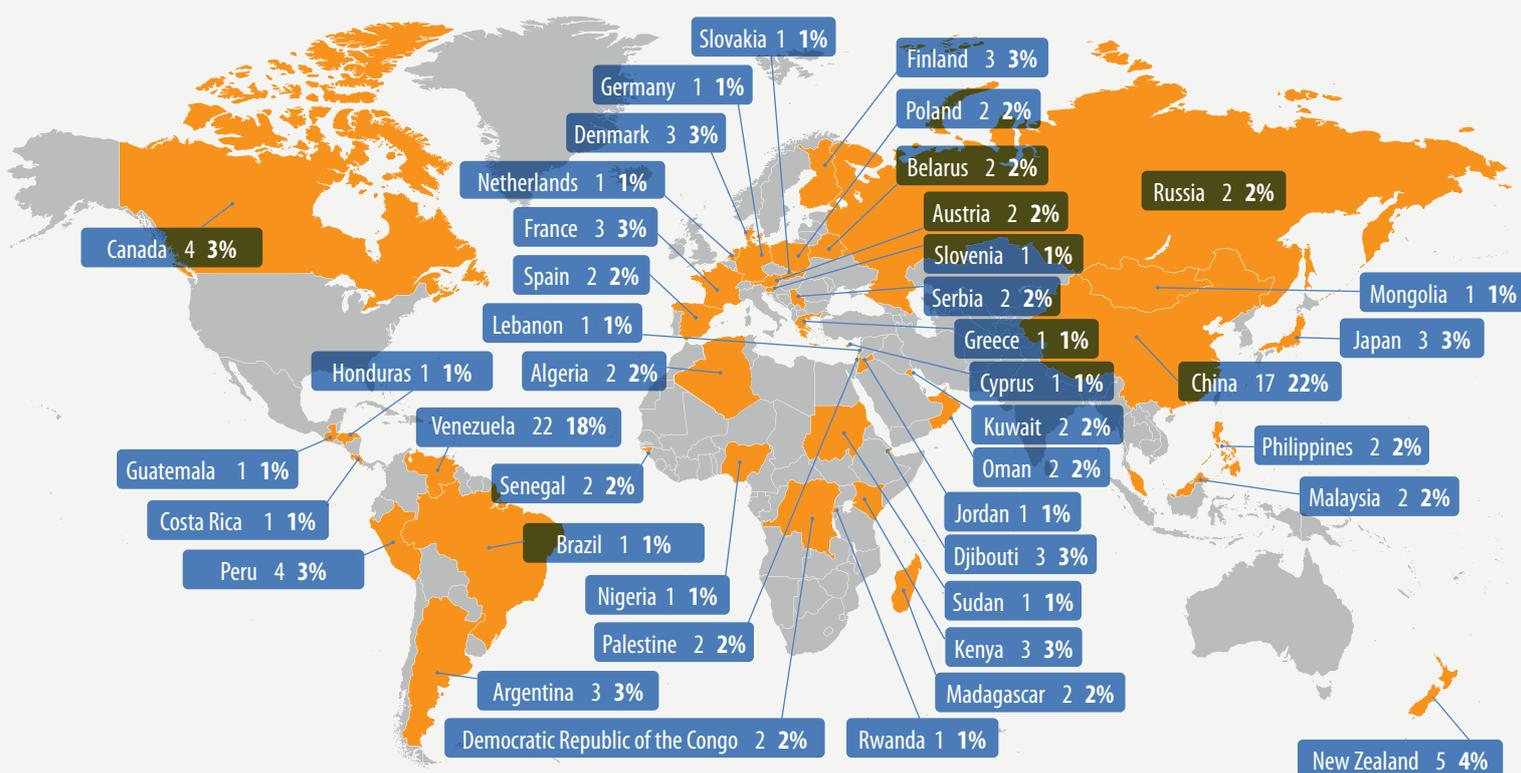
4.2 Gender

As seen in figure 3, more youth identified as female (55%) than male (42%). A further three per cent of respondents identified with a different gender identity. This could include, for example, identifying as non-binary or gender-fluid.

4.3 Age

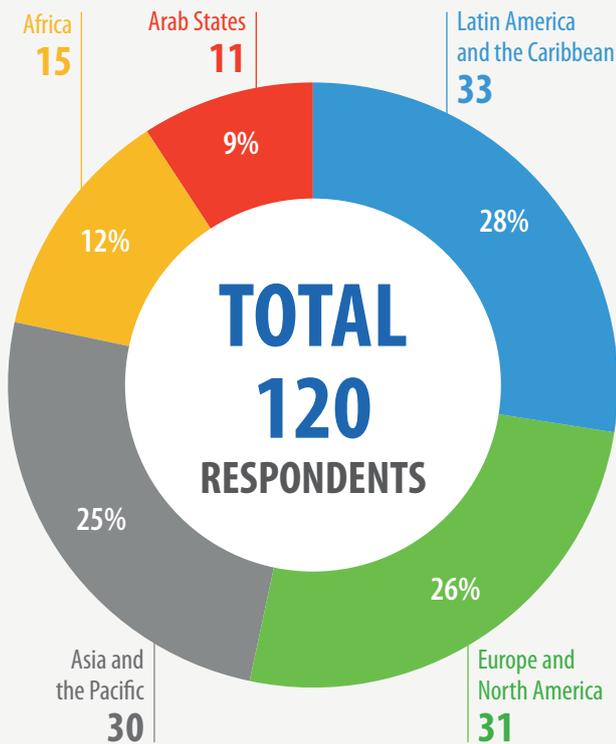
Most participants (71%) were aged 15-17, with 31% (37 participants) aged 16 at the time of completing the questionnaire, 22% (27 participants) aged 17 and 18% (21 participants) aged 15. The age of almost all participants (92%) was between 14 and 18, with the remaining 8% reporting their age as under 14 or 19 and over (see figure 4).

Figure 1. Respondents' location by country



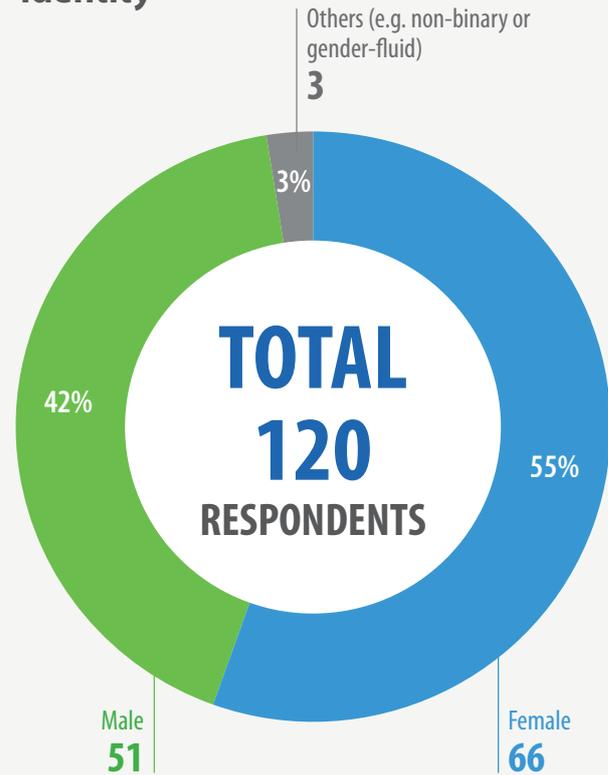
Source: UNESCO IESALC based on United Nations map.

Figure 2. Representation of world regions in the youth consultation



Source: UNESCO IESALC

Figure 3. Respondents' gender identity



Source: UNESCO IESALC

4.4 Level of schooling

Youth were also asked to indicate their current grade or level in their country's education system. This data helped situate the participants' responses against their prior experience of formal education. This data was also useful to better understand the range of ways that schooling is organized around the world.

Almost two thirds (64%) of the youth were in their fourth, fifth or sixth year of secondary school, which corresponds to ISCED Level 3, upper secondary education¹². 21% of participants reported being in the first, second or third year of secondary school and 9% in their seventh

year of secondary school or in post-secondary education. 6% of respondents did not specify their current level of schooling (see figure 5).

4.5 Level of education obtained by caregiver

The level of education obtained by respondents' caregiver (e.g., parent, relative, or carer) is a commonly used indicator to understand more about the socioeconomic circumstances in which young people are raised as well as to measure educational equity. It can act as a proxy for wealth¹³ and for young people's ability to benefit from formal learning¹⁴. In some countries, when one or both

¹² ISCED is the International Standard Classification of Education. Level 3, classified as upper secondary education, begins after 8 to 11 years of education from the beginning of Level 1, and usually ends 12 or 13 years after the start of Level 1. Students are typically aged between 14 and 16 when they enter Level 3. See also <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced>.

¹³ <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/monitoring-equity-socioeconomic-status-learning-assessments>

¹⁴ <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/issue-briefs/improve-learning/socioeconomic-inequalities-and-learning>

parents have tertiary education, the child is more likely also to complete tertiary education¹⁵.

Respondents in the futures of higher education youth consultation were equally split between those whose caregiver had obtained a university-level qualification (Bachelor's, Master's or PhD degree) and those whose caregiver had achieved a lower education level (primary/secondary education, certificate or non-university degree).

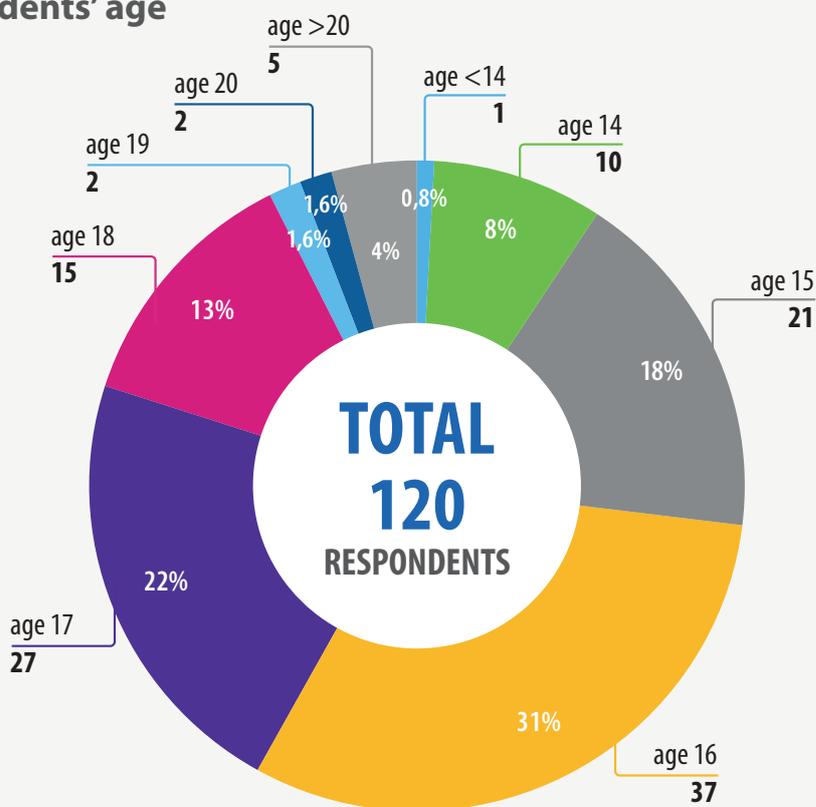
The most common level of education obtained was secondary education (32% of caregivers). More respondents had a caregiver with a Master's degree (23%) than a Bachelor's degree (18%), and 8% had a caregiver who had a doctoral degree. Compared to global average education attainment levels (which vary greatly by region), participants in this consultation come from relatively well-educated backgrounds (see figure 6).

4.6 Equity deserving groups

When we consider the terminology of equity deserving groups¹⁶ in education, it emphasizes the need for structures and systems to change to better support students, rather than discriminating against them in visible and invisible ways. In this consultation, respondents were asked to share whether they identified with one or more equity deserving groups. These are groups based on factors known to impact access to and successful completion of higher education¹⁷.

- Living or previously lived in a rural area.
- Ethnic, religious or linguistic minority.
- Disabled or with special needs.
- Migrant, refugee or internally displaced.
- First generation student.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA+).

Figure 4. Respondents' age



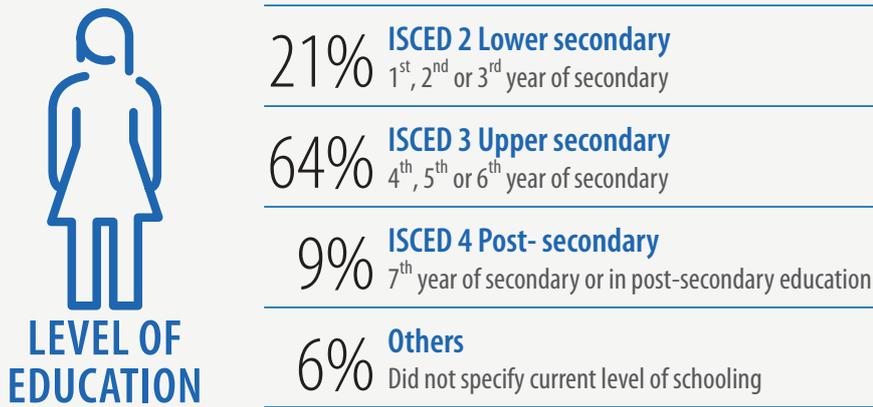
Source: UNESCO IESALC

15 See for example <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/eag-2017-10-en.pdf?expires=1660690159&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9B521EEDE02E33155C51CE4DEF9FC556>. Note that studies usually focus on parents rather than all types of caregivers.

16 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381750>

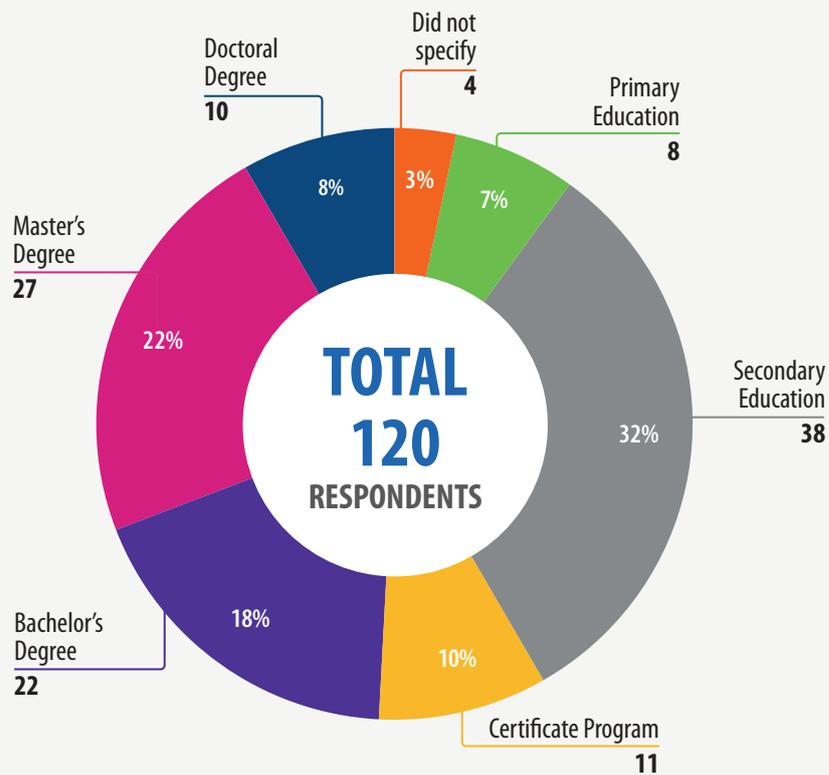
17 Ibid.

Figure 5. Respondents' experience of formal education based on current level of schooling



Source: UNESCO IESALC

Figure 6. Highest level of education obtained by respondents' caregiver



Source: UNESCO IESALC

71% of the youth (85 participants) identified with one equity deserving group, of whom 47% were female, 40% were male and 13% had a different gender identity. The three most common equity deserving groups were: living or previously lived in a rural area (34 participants), ethnic, religious or linguistic regional minority (11 participants), and LGBTQIA+ (10 participants)

10% of respondents identified themselves with two equity deserving groups and 7% with three or more equity deserving groups, highlighting the intersectionality of different factors affecting youth respondents.

5 Youths' hopes and concerns for 2050

Youth participants provided free text responses to two questions addressing what they are most hopeful about and what they are most concerned about when they think ahead to 2050. On average, the analysis of 120 questionnaire responses listed 1.6 hopes per person compared to 1.3 concerns, suggesting a slightly more optimistic than pessimistic overall outlook.

A striking finding from these free text responses was the similarity in respondents' hopes and concerns for 2050. After the coding process, the subjects of their hopes and concerns were found to be identical, although prioritized differently. These are: global issues, climate change and sustainability, research, technology and innovation, and personal aspirations (see table 3).

5.1 Climate change and sustainability

Climate change and sustainability came top of the group of concerns mentioned by participants. This also ranked as the third most frequently occurring hope for 2050.

Young people hope that in the future, humanity can overcome the onslaught of climate change by promoting solutions that substantially reduce environmental damage. To this end, participants emphasized the significance of awareness and a societal shift to enable the transition to thinking sustainability.

'Hopefully, humanity would have woken up. Rather than focusing on just the present, I hope that by 2050 they will have prepared for their future by investing in renewable energy, farming sustainably, consuming responsibly, and stopping deforestation'
(16, Female, Kuwait)

When asked about their concerns, 57% of respondents mentioned climate change in some form, citing its severe global impact such as rising temperatures, desertification, and famine, rising sea levels, and polluting energy. Participants also expressed concerns about the lack of capacity to take measures to avert the dangers posed by climate change.

'The loss of various resources, natural areas and animals, the fact that pollution has not been controlled, the near loss of the ozone layer, the increase in temperature and the disappearance of glaciers'
(15, Female, Peru)

'I am most concerned about crude oil and non-renewable energy running out while we still did not develop the required technology to fully rely on renewable energy sources throughout the globe'
(16, Male, Oman)

'The rate at which global warming is happening is alarming and raises the question can we make a big enough difference to stop it before it reaches a critical temperature'
(18, Female, Finland)

5.2 Global issues

Put simply, youth participants wish for a better world in the future. In the respondents' words, this entails a far more equal, disease-free, and peaceful society. Future orientation entails the ability to solve problems and provide solutions to such issues. In this sense, the youth emphasized the importance of education as a tool to achieve or fail to achieve this objective.

'A world with high education levels activates problem solving of real-world issues'
(18, Male, Rwanda)

‘1 no poverty/ 2 no wars / 3 children being saved from everything that hurts them (so yes just peace that’s all of my hopes)’

(15, Female, Palestine)

‘I am most hopeful about a future whereby equality is exercised to its fullest in accordance to humanity and for the betterment of the world and her people’

(17, Male, Kenya)

In addition to stressing their optimism regarding these diverse global issues and the capacity to bring solutions, participants expressed their doubts over the likelihood of resolving these problems due to wars or climate change, and the enormous repercussions of these challenges for humanity.

‘I’m concerned of our society problems, about migrants, poverty and inequality’

(16, Male, Russia)

‘The inequality and ambition will take place and the world will suffer from climate changes and extreme poverty’

(16, Male, Brazil)

Participants also expressed optimism that we will soon live in a pandemic-free world, empha-

sizing the significance of working more collaboratively and citing the efforts undertaken during the pandemic to develop COVID-19 vaccines.

‘The fact that all the countries of the world have put themselves together and found a vaccine in such a short time. This shows that by helping, we can achieve great things’

(16, Female, Canada)

However, concerns about the ability to overcome political tensions to solve this and other problems of humanity were also raised.

‘Political tensions, superpower rule the world, disregard for principles, morals and humanity’

(Over 20, Male, Jordan)

5.3 Research, technology, and innovation

Youth participants also spoke of being both hopeful and concerned about research, technology, and innovation in 2050. They expressed optimism about the development of knowledge, the use of technology for the welfare of humanity, and providing solutions to global issues.

‘That technology works together with the care of the environment, that the components that damage the environment at present have

Table 3. Respondents’ hopes and concerns for 2050 by theme

Hopes	Number of times mentioned	Concerns	Number of times mentioned
Global issues	93	Climate change and sustainability	82
Personal aspirations	40	Global issues	57
Climate change and sustainability	30	Personal aspirations	9
Research, technology and innovation	23	Research, technology and innovation	5

decreased by 70% or 80%, that future generations are interested and participate in order to take care of natural resources'

(15, Female, Peru)

'I am most hopeful about the knowledge that we will gain in the next 28 years. As research, science, and policies are constantly adapting, so are humans; I personally look forward to the advances we as a collective population make' (17, Female, Canada)

In contrast, a smaller percentage of participants expressed their concern about **'Technology and misuse'** (17, Female, Honduras) and technology-intensive advances: **'Automation, the meta-verse and climate change'** (18, Female, Finland).

5.4 Personal aspirations

At the individual level, personal aspirations refer to the participants' visions of achieving goals in different areas of their lives. In this area, participants are hopeful about their ability to solve problems and fulfil their dreams and purposes.

'I am most hopeful about the things that we have solved. The people we save by taking this initiative and the species we save by doing so and so. The history of a global action that we can proudly show our kids'

(18, Female, Denmark)

Simultaneously, youth are fearful of not being able to meet their objectives, expressed by one participant as a **'failure to achieve personal goals'** (16, Male, Venezuela).

Although this was a general question about their hopes and concerns for 2050, some participants mentioned education. They are hopeful that they will be able to access education, including universities or another form of higher education, and that they will be able to gain knowledge and master their areas of study.

'[I hope that] All students can have the opportunity to choose to go [to] higher education themselves'

(16, Male, China)

Youth also commented on their concerns about entering the labour market and the risks to their future salaries as automation progresses and technology continues to advance.

'[I am concerned] That people do not get work due to the great technological advances that can replace the human'

(16, Male, Venezuela)

5.5 Section summary

Based on their hopes and concerns for 2050, young people are far from being naïve. While their hopes may be optimistic, they also add a healthy grain of salt in the form of their concerns. Today's young people do not look at the world through rose-tinted glasses. They observe and critically analyse political, environmental, and social issues within their immediate communities and globally.

Youth do not transfer the responsibility of solving these issues to someone else: they want to take it into their own hands and help find solutions. To do so, they mentioned their hopes specifically on education because they believe that it can and will equip them with the necessary tools to make their contributions real and substantial.

6 Youth and higher education

After describing their overall vision for 2050, youth consultation participants then situated themselves in these futures full of hopes and concerns. This section explores the participants' ideas about higher education and the role it might play in their next steps. An analysis based on the location of participants by region and by gender is also included, taking into account that this consultation was limited to 120 young persons and that the regional distribution was according to the selection criteria for the global and local level workshops.

6.1 What does higher education mean to the youth?

The concept of higher education should not be seen as fixed or rooted in an adult understanding of it. With regard to the forward-thinking element targeted in this consultation, youth were asked to define their understanding of higher education. Based on their free text answers, the top five definitions that emerged were:

- 1) A next or future step in a person's education experiences (25%).
- 2) A way of obtaining and enriching one's knowledge (17%).
- 3) A means of building and becoming equipped with skills (10%).
- 4) An opportunity to acquire complex understanding in one or more fields (8%).
- 5) An occasion for personal growth and development (7%).

Some respondents expressed the view that higher education will enable them to acquire **'a complex understanding of the world around me on all planes of my person alongside with knowledge and intelligence that allows me to surpass in practice every more complicated**

challenge anywhere and anyhow' (18, Other gender identity, Poland).

In all cases, the youth were of the view that higher education would enable them to obtain something. Whether in the form of a degree, knowledge, skills, complex understanding or personal growth, this is an opportunity for higher education institutions to consider how they can best equip students for future endeavours.

Based on their location according to UNESCO world region, youth from Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and North America and Africa were more likely to visualize higher education as their next educational step, whereas those from the Arab States were most likely to define higher education as a space where they can build skills, and youth in Asia and the Pacific see higher education as a way of obtaining and enriching one's knowledge.

Although the responses were largely the same by region, participants in the African region placed more emphasis than other regions on higher education as a means of entering the labour market. On the other hand, they ranked higher education as a space for personal growth the lowest while the other regions placed it among their top five.

For both female and male participants, the two principal interpretations of higher education are similar and are reflected in the five main definitions identified above. The small number of participants who identified with other genders prioritized higher education as an opportunity to acquire complex understanding, whereas for both female and male participants this concept was at the bottom of their top five.

Female participants ranked higher education as an occasion for personal growth and development in third place. Male participants placed access to the labour market in their top five.

6.2 Do youth plan to participate in higher education?

Almost all respondents (112 participants, representing 93% of the total) said that they plan to go on to higher education: 90% of the females (60 participants), 96% of the males (49 participants) and all of those who identify with other genders (3 participants).

This is significantly higher than the current global higher education gross enrolment rate of 40%¹⁸, and is probably due to the selection process for this consultation. At the regional level, the trend remains the same, with Africa standing out as the region where 100% of participants said they aspire to participate in higher education.

Six of the 120 respondents (five female, one male) said they were not sure if they wanted to continue their education. Their uncertainty, in this instance, stems from not yet knowing what they want to do or not knowing what higher education means.

Only two participants said that they do not plan to participate in higher education because of their personal situation. It is important to include their responses because they show how systems and structures affect individual decision-making. The journey to make higher education more inclusive for all students is still in progress:

- A 15-year-old Chinese male respondent said he would not continue to higher education because he identifies himself as **'a learner with special needs.'**
- A 20-year-old Venezuelan female respondent said it would not be possible for her **'because I need to work to support my family.'**

6.3 What are the main benefits of higher education for youth?

In addition to considering whether they plan to participate in higher education, respondents also chose the top three reasons from the list of response options as to why they think people would want to go to higher education.

One response stands out for having been selected twice as many times as all the other options put together: to improve knowledge. This demonstrates that the facts, information, and experiences that higher education can provide are an enormously powerful driver for youth when they think about their next steps.

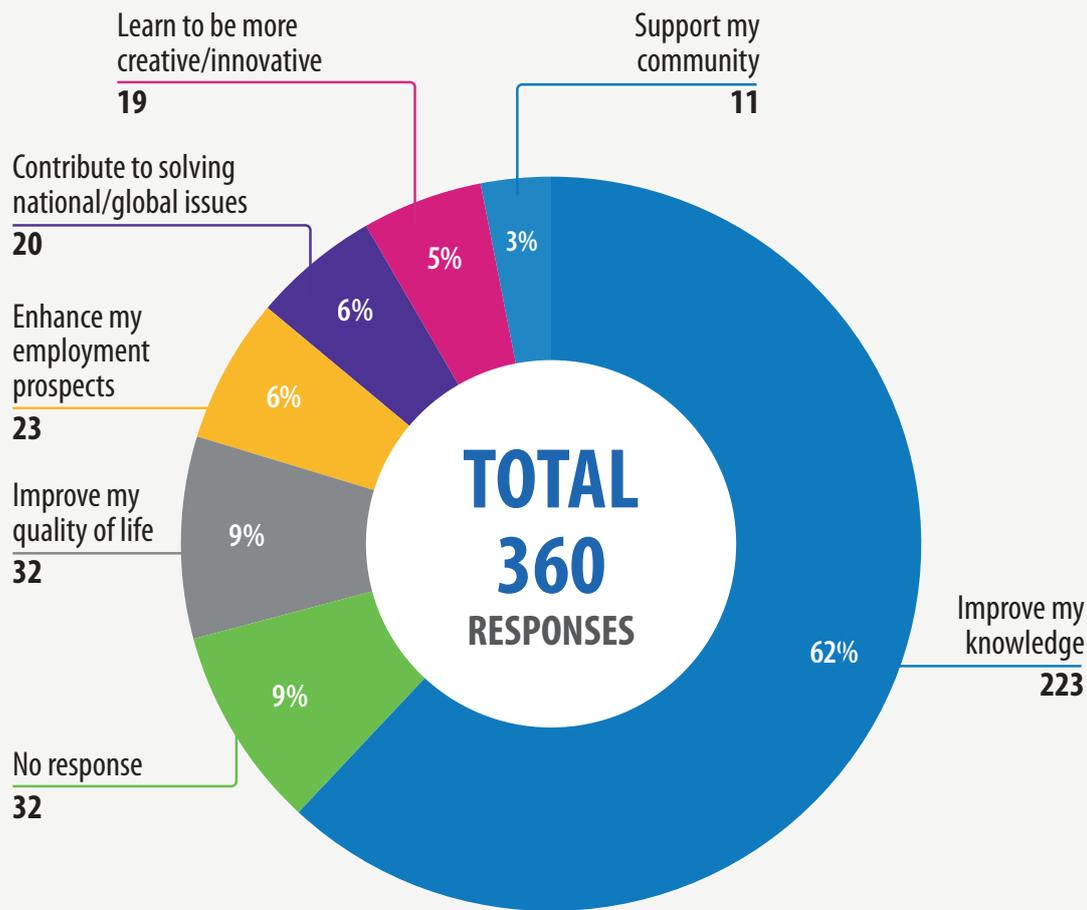
The next most chosen response was to improve quality of life and, following that, to contribute to solving national/global issues. These responses highlight not only the fact that education has individual benefits, but that youth are also thinking about how it can impact their local and global societies and communities (see figure 7).

Participants from Latin America and the Caribbean see one of the main benefits of higher education as a tool to improve their quality of life. As one youth said, **'I would study to help my parents'** (17, Female, Venezuela). Young people in other regions associate the main benefit of higher education as a way of improving their knowledge. This was the consensus for both female and male participants.

Differences in the analysis by gender show that male participants placed more emphasis on learning to be more creative/innovative than females. The three participants who identified themselves as other gender identities said that the main benefit of higher education is to contribute to solving national and global issues.

18 http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/f_unesco1015_brochure_web_en.pdf

Figure 7. The main benefits of higher education



Source: UNESCO IESALC

6.4 What would youth prefer to study and why?

Participants were asked what they would like to study if they go on to higher education (see figure 8). Of the 109 participants who provided a specific response, most chose subjects relating to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) (32%), while 26% preferred the social sciences. A further 17% of participants showed affinity to subjects related to medical sciences such as nursing, dentistry, and medicine.

A smaller proportion of participants showed preferences for the humanities (9%), public affairs and the creative arts (8% in each case). Although global statistics are not available, the consultation data contrasted strongly with cur-

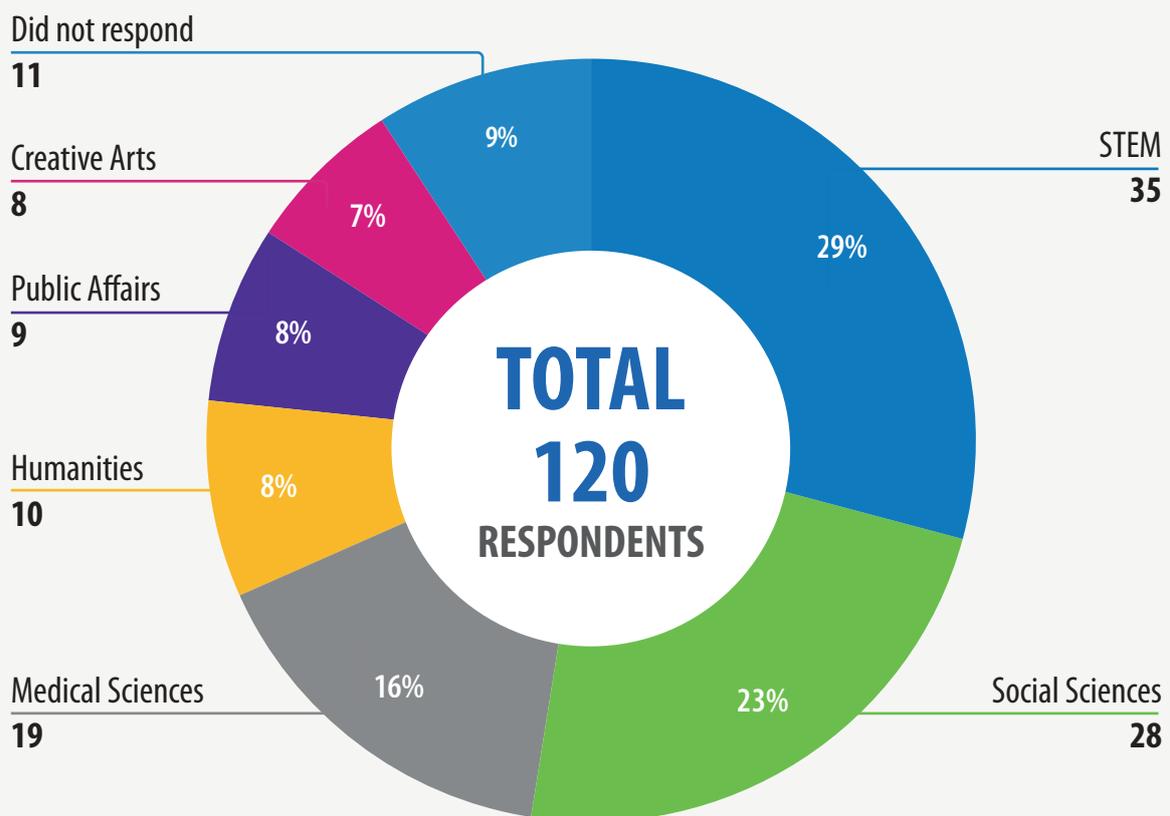
rent trends in some countries where most students graduate from social sciences programmes and very few from STEM subjects¹⁹.

When analysing the subject preferences of youth by region, STEM is preferred by participants in all regions except Europe and North America. In the latter case, participants placed social sciences as their first preference and STEM as their second. Social sciences was the second preference for youth in Asia and the Pacific and third for those in Latin America and the Caribbean. Medical sciences subjects were the second preferred choice of participants in Africa, the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Broken down by gender, participants who identified as female outnumbered males in their

19 For example, a study of 12 Latin American and Caribbean countries plus Spain and Portugal found that fewer than 3% of students graduated in STEM subjects. <https://oei.int/publicaciones/educacion-superior-productividad-y-competitividad-en-iberoamerica>

Figure 8. Respondents' study preferences



Source: UNESCO IESALC

interest in most subject areas except for creative arts and STEM. In these cases, male identifying participants were in the majority (88% of those selecting creative arts and 51% of those selecting STEM). These findings counter global trends where more females than males typically enrol in arts subjects but where females are severely under-represented in some STEM areas such as computer science and engineering²⁰.

Overall, the future study plans of participants suggest important shifts in the interests of today's youth compared to previous generations of students.

Although youth are highly motivated by the personal gains to be obtained from higher education, when respondents explained why they

would prefer to study the subject area they had indicated, almost a quarter of them (24%) said that they saw it as an opportunity to later contribute to society. Youth who selected subject areas such as medicine, STEM, and political science said that they wanted to study something that is useful to the people around them. As one respondent explained:

'I would like to study law. I feel the need and commitment to contribute to a society of so many human injustices and realities, to recognize their human dignity and human rights. To make this a more just and equal country' (17, Male, Venezuela)

The next most frequent rationale for what they would like to study was related to their vocation

²⁰ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381739>

(20%). Youth described long-held interests and passions that they would like to explore further in higher education and beyond. In the words of a respondent:

‘I have been playing the flute since a very young age. I really enjoy it and want to continue educating myself in that field and, at some point, teach others how to make music and give joy to others’

(16, Female, Austria)

Personal interest (20%) was also an important rationale for respondents. This was expressed somewhat differently to that of those who saw their preferred subject as part of their vocation, where personal interest was manifested through less emotional attachment to a future profession. The following quote is a good example:

‘[I want to study STEM.] This is because of the interest I have in me in the technological and scientific side of living’

(17, Male, Kenya)

A similar proportion of respondents would select their subject area based on self-development (17%), understood as the opportunity to further develop themselves in a chosen field of studies. For instance, one respondent said:

‘[I am] Fascinated by how the scientific world works and want to learn more and contribute to improving our world in the form of applied sciences’

(17, Female, New Zealand)

6.5 Section summary

Youth see higher education as a next stage in the educational journey and a way of obtaining a degree or diploma that will equip them for their futures. Almost all respondents in this youth consultation expect higher education to be a component of their next steps and for the small number who do not, there are important

messages for higher education in terms of the improvements required in order to secure inclusiveness.

Respondents are of the view that a key role of higher education is to improve knowledge. Higher education is also a way for the youth to improve their quality of life and employment prospects. Youth are interested in many different subject areas should they continue to higher education and their preferences are influenced by how they think they can contribute to society as well as their vocational calling and personal interests.

7 Youths' visions for higher education in 2050

As with the previous phases of the UNESCO IE-SALC futures of higher education project, youth respondents were asked the same two questions linking higher education to the 2050 horizon:

- How would you like higher education to be in 2050?
- How could higher education contribute to better futures for all in 2050?

This section examines the youth respondents' visions for higher education in 2050. The 279 ideas put forward by the 120 participants have been divided into six broad areas, in which higher education would be accessible, innovative, high quality, sustainable, developmental, and equal. Overall, these areas tell a hopeful story about how higher education could be offered and what it might be like to be a student in higher education in a world that continues to grapple with serious environmental and social issues.

7.1 Accessible

The theme which resonated most and was mentioned in just over a fifth (21%) of the responses, related to higher education being accessible and affordable to all. For youth, higher education is a platform where humans learn to be more tolerant, respectful and value oriented. Therefore, the more people have access to higher education, the better will societies be as a result.

When they spoke about wider access to higher education, youth participants did not limit themselves to their immediate communities but also expressed their hope that participation would increase globally.

In the words of respondents: **'I would like all students to study in a higher education'** (16, Male, Argentina) and **'The most important thing is education, where everyone can participate'**

(15, Male, Peru). Youth said that higher education should be **'available to all'** (14, Female, Finland), **'without cost or with very low costs'** (17, Male, Kenya) and **'to be affordable to all and be accessible to all'** (15, Female, Nigeria).

This would assure student success because students would be able to finish their studies regardless of where they live or their personal situation. As noted by one student, higher education should be **'accessible to everyone [who is] passionate about their and the world's self-development no matter the financial difficulties or where they live, useful (e.g. that studying Philosophy doesn't leave graduate students without a dignifying job afterwards)'** (18, Other gender identity, Poland).

7.2 Innovative

A similar proportion of the responses (19%) indicated that by 2050, higher education should be more innovative. By this, youth refer to flexible teaching and learning modalities, use of online learning and other technology, and greater creativity. The impact would be **'that in 2050 higher education would be there to benefit the world by producing innovative, creative, and accepting people. My hope is that instead of being held back by the constraints of status and fame, in 2050 the only goal of higher education would be to better its students, who will go on to better the world'** (16, Female, Kuwait).

Participants place great belief in technology and scientific advances, making connections to multiple aspects of life and to higher education. In this way, youth see no **'boundary in getting quality [higher] education [with] global online learning'** (16, Female, Malaysia) or the **'digitization of teaching'** (16, Male, Democratic Republic of the Congo).

Youth are inspired by technological developments, demonstrating a more positive than

negative attitude towards increased adoption of technology. It is also possible that living in a reality where technological advances happen almost daily, youth see no other way except to develop it even faster. For example, one participant noted that **'AI-driven diagnostic assessments are likely to replace traditional grading, tests, and exams [and] a "virtual teacher" is likely to replace a real teacher'** (15, Female, Belarus).

Innovation also means that higher education will be **'more practical, adapted to the world of the time and not continue with the study model of past times'** (17, Male, Spain) and students **'could have more chances to practice what they have learnt in text books'** (15, Female, China). Learning for **students would be more 'globalized'** (14, Male, China).

Additionally, higher education will be **'more inclined on the innovation aspect of life'** (17, Male, Kenya) and learning **'should provide more opportunities to students to develop their own ideas and exchange them with other people'** (19, Female, Japan).

7.3 High quality

A further 16% of responses focused on the improvement of the quality of higher education. Although the majority of the youth participants had not experienced higher education directly, they were nevertheless able to express themselves on the need for improvement in education at all levels.

This was presented as a generalized ideal, for example with one respondent saying that she hoped **'that the education in all countries improves and everyone, whatever your background may be, has the same opportunities'** (17, Female, Austria). Another respondent felt that maintaining or upgrading the quality of higher education would also benefit those within higher education, making it **'of optimal**

quality where the rights of both teachers and students are fulfilled' (17, Female, Venezuela).

Youth also want to see enhancements to the content of learning by incorporating diverse forms of knowledge: those that are **'traditional, as well as [connecting to] our past'** (17, Female, Honduras) together with a **'higher education that matches the reality of their lives'** (16, Female, Germany). By increasing the quality, higher education would **'be challenging in order to test people's abilities and skills'** (17, Male, Sudan).

7.4 Sustainable

For the youth respondents, higher education in 2050 must be sustainable and related to what is happening in the world and in their own places. 16% of responses set out a glocal (global/local) view for higher education that also has an **'environmental and social perspective'** (18, Female, Argentina).

The overall concern about the damage occurring to the planet and environment was visible in youths' reflections on the need to include sustainability in the curriculum, **'raising concerns about global - health, environmental, social - issues independently of the subjects of interest of each individual'** (17, Female, Cyprus). Sustainability needs to become a lifestyle, not just a trend.

Higher education must be sustainable and encourage sustainability. The sector should lead by example and **'be powered by sustainable energy... promoting the 17 Goals for sustainable development (or the like) in all fields of study, so that everything learned is angled to promote a better future'** (18, Female, Denmark).

This includes but also goes beyond environmental concerns. For this, higher education needs to **'provide their graduates with work (maybe there be some connections with work providers and university departments)'** (17, Female, Russia).

7.5 Developmental

Another important issue for today's youth is the emphasis on self-development. One participant mentioned the need for higher education to be focused on making sure that students **'develop every social and global skills that will help them to get in touch with the people, the issues and also help the[m] to grow as a person'** (18, Male, Brazil).

Youth were keen (14% of respondents) for future higher education to focus on developing their skills and values by teaching them practical, social, and global skills and providing effective learning in an engaging environment.

Youth are of the opinion that higher education enhances all individuals' personal qualities and inspires them to become better. As one youth said, **'I would like higher education to actually teach people about values in life not just force people study to pass the exam'** (16, Female, Malaysia).

Youths' talent, skills and personal abilities become visible when they are immersed in a quality learning environment. Higher education should emphasize what could be possible, rather than insist on repeating what students have been able to do before: **'I wish that education at that time was more focused on helping students find their potential'** (17, Female, China).

To achieve this, higher education could become more personalized: **'I would like higher education in 2050 to be a more specialized or perhaps "tailored" for the student and prepare them with the skills and abilities they, as individuals, can allocate in their daily life'** (16, Male, Oman).

7.6 Equal

Finally, with 12% of responses, youth also call for higher education to be equal for everyone, inclusive, and fair. There should be **'no inequalities between students regarding their country or origins'** (15, Female, Algeria) and higher education should be **'more accessible to minorities and are open to anyone willing to put the effort into learning'** (16, Male, China).

Respondents describe future students as global citizens because they can also exchange their experiences without borders. This is part of what it means for higher education to be inclusive. Some participants noted the homogeneity of their classrooms in comparison to the diverse society outside their educational institution, which led them to reflect on issues of equality and access to education: **'I would like the School [higher education] to be gather with students all around the world. It would be better if refugees and orphans are included.'** (15, Male, China).

This subject is closely related to that of accessibility, as noted by respondents who said that there should be **'easier access for people to receive it [higher education] equitably'** (15, Male, Venezuela).

Youth in this consultation demonstrated high empathy towards others, thinking beyond their own needs towards the needs of equity deserving groups and others currently lacking access to quality higher education. As one said, **'I would like it [higher education] to be an education with equality for all and inclusive, accessible in the different parts of the country, with quality training where new communication technologies, which is achieved [through] cultural exchange since the first year of study'** (15, Female, Peru).

7.7 How do youths' visions for higher education in 2050 vary?

The participants' socioeconomic background (based on their caregiver's highest level of education) demonstrated great similarity in youths' visions for higher education in 2050. The most common area mentioned by youth from all backgrounds was related to access and affordability.

Youth voices from the consultation were also analysed through the lens of those who identified with one or more of the three most common equity deserving groups: living or previously lived in a rural area (34 participants), ethnic, religious or linguistic minority (11 participants), and/or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual (10 participants).

For youth who live or had lived in rural areas, access to higher education and issues relating to inclusion and fairness were a top priority: **'Higher education will be for students who have goals in life even if the student is poor [and will come] with free accommodation'** (16, Male, Madagascar). This group also mentioned ways of learning that are more flexible, tailored and innovative, and the importance of being supported to develop skills and global/environmental awareness.

Access issues were also the most frequently mentioned by minority and LGBTQIA+ participants, similarly reflecting the overall findings from the consultation. In the words of one participant, **'I would like it to be inclusive of more than just one kind of people and subjects. It should not only prepare you for a job, but also the real world.'** (14, Female, Denmark). Both groups highlighted the need for higher education to be inclusive in general and inclusive in terms of knowledge. LGBTQIA+ participants also emphasized global skills and awareness in their responses.

Based on their location, youth in Africa, the Arab States, and Asia and the Pacific regions hope that higher education in their futures will see the expansion of the ways in which learning happens and also in how it reaches multiple and different audiences. Participants in Europe and North America envision more accessible futures: not only in terms of who can go to higher education but a higher education that assures student success. In this same vein, youth in Latin America and the Caribbean imagine that higher education will have high quality standards, include diverse knowledges, and be a place where people can improve their communication skills through a globalized education.

Both female and male participants agreed on the accessibility of higher education as their main vision for 2050. However, as a second priority, female participants talked about quality and diversity of knowledges whereas male participants mentioned that it should be innovative and flexible. Participants identifying with other genders mainly imagine that higher education in 2050 should be sustainable for them, people in general, and for the world, focusing on local and global needs.

7.8 Section summary

Youth around the world have a range of visions for how higher education could be in 2050 and these are largely similar for participants from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and equity deserving groups. Respondents highlighted the importance of higher education being accessible and affordable because this assures student participation and success. Higher education will offer more flexible and innovative learning that is sustainable and focused on both global and local needs. Higher education will be high quality, which for respondents also means that it will embrace diverse knowledges. It will be geared towards students' self-development, and be inclusive and equal.

8 Recommendations

Based on the youth consultation and the responses of young people to the question about how higher education can contribute to better futures for all in 2050, this section offers four sets of recommendations for higher education.

These recommendations seek to involve all stakeholders in higher education and should be heeded at this time. This is because the decisions and actions taken in higher education today are the ones that our youth will take forward with them to 2050 and beyond.

8.1 Raise educational expectations

Throughout the youth consultation, it was clear that participants expect higher education to be an even more integral part of their – and our – future paths. Youth have high expectations that higher education can create more educated people with more knowledge who use this education and knowledge to contribute to better futures for all.

RECOMMENDATION 1 Support youth to connect their personal and societal visions

Through the more student-centred approach and inclusive approach to higher education envisaged by youth respondents, higher education can support youth to ground themselves in their vision for the futures.

Youth can learn to make connections between their personal goals and the ways that they want societies to be in the futures. This can empower youth to be changemakers: taking forward values that will lead to better futures and enact societal change.

Youth also say that higher education should be free and more available, supported by a strengthened teaching force, flexible pedagogies and crossover of thinking through interdisciplinary and in-depth experience. Youth have hopes and concerns both for themselves personally, as well as for the world around them.

RECOMMENDATION 2 Be more responsive to global and local societal needs

Higher education institutions should incorporate in their learning models the local and global needs of societies and give students opportunities to tackle current challenges. This would require incorporating real life situations into the curriculum, situations that need to be structured to build knowledge, but also to be aware of global issues in the present time while creating strategies for the future.

8.2 Provide students and societies with tools for life

Youth see higher education playing a role in better futures by providing students and the societies around them with tools that they can use throughout life. Some of these tools can be seen as skill sets: supporting people to create solutions for local and global issues, enhancing critical thinking, fostering innovation, and making good use of technology.

Young people also expect skills development and value-shaping knowledge that can be transferred to other settings. Higher education should equip them with principles of pursuing what they believe. As such, the tools envisaged by youth are also conceptual, in that they consider how higher education can contribute more to wellbeing, both in the sense of living well and in terms of individual and societal happiness.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Blend support services into pedagogical design

Youths hope for free, inclusive, and flexible societies as areas that can be better addressed in the future. Attention therefore needs to be paid to global and local issues – and even beyond this, to advocating for positive change through higher education's contribution to societies. Higher education should be enabled to support youths' desires to gain knowledge in a desirable way and facilitate the transformation of knowledge to societies. At the institutional level, this could be achieved by redesigning a comprehensive teaching and learning system that increases flexibility, adaptivity, and interdisciplinarity with support services (for example, career services). By combining pedagogical design with support services, students in higher education will be better supported and links with societal actors can be enhanced.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Create/expand mentoring programmes

Mentoring programmes for students are a relevant strategy to support them with tools for life. Many HEIs already support mentoring programmes, and these could be expanded through partnerships and information sharing. This guidance helps students to create a life plan by finding their purpose based on vocational aspirations and the global context. Students should also be offered emotional support, if necessary, in their different contexts to help prepare them to develop themselves in the professional pathway.

8.3 Call attention to global and local issues

Many of the youth who participated in this consultation drew attention to the idea of a better world and the need for greater global awareness. Development challenges such as sustainability, gender equality, and social equity are expected to be addressed with the support of higher education. Better relations can be created through higher education to promote partnership and collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Unlock new grounds for futures thinking

In this consultation, youth illustrated that they are seeing futures that share similar (if not the same) challenges as the present. Higher education should provide opportunities in and out of the classroom to encourage youths' forward-thinking skills. In this way, higher education can help detach youths from being 'locked' into current societal frameworks and in doing so, also seek to transform higher education.

Youths hope for free, inclusive, and flexible societies as areas that can be better addressed in the future. Attention therefore needs to be paid to global and local issues – and even beyond this, to advocating for positive change through higher education's contribution to societies.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Promote service to the community

Higher education stakeholders can promote social participation through service to the community in the higher education systems. In the consultation, youth expressed their concerns in different areas that not only will affect the future but are also having an impact on today's society. Higher education should therefore inspire them to contribute to the solutions of these issues.

8.4 Engage for better futures together

Youth want to be part of their own future. When considering the role they see for higher education in supporting better futures for all, youth focused on social engagement and environmental engagement. Yet the world they are seeing today, based on this youth consultation, is still heavily influenced by the ongoing discussions among adults.

Youth voices must be heard. They must not only be heard, but they should be an integral part of how decisions are made at every level. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, youth and adults need to work together for a better future. Higher education has a significant role to play in creating the space for and mediating this engagement.

RECOMMENDATION 7 Develop youth engagement strategies

Educational institutions, along with a range of educational stakeholders, should develop strategies to allow youth to engage in a constructive manner that can provide value-added to both the planning and the implementation of future higher education. For example, UNESCO IESALC is developing a toolkit based on the youth consultation process which will provide a fully developed

and tested suite of open access materials for all those wishing to engage with young people about the futures of higher education.

RECOMMENDATION 8 Consult with youth from more diverse backgrounds

In this consultation, youth were recommended by schools or networks and selected through processes overseen by UNESCO. While there was commendable diversity despite this small sample, future youth consultations can commit to engaging with youth from a wider range of backgrounds. This could be through focussed consultations, for example with youth who are disabled or by bringing together a range of youth from a certain locality. It would also be important to engage with out-of-school youth, for whom higher education might seem a more distant possibility but one that should be within their sight.