ASEF Youth Report

Shaping Society 5.0:

Youth Perspectives and Leadership Development for a Human-Centered Future

ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION

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Note. The data presented in this Report is based on a survey which ASEF conducted online between May-July 2024. The analysis of the data and results presented do not reflect the views of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), or its partners.

Foreword

It is with great pride and excitement that we present this report, that stands as one of the key milestones of the ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS) Capacity Building project in 2024, encapsulating the collective voices and visions of 3,833 young leaders from 51 ASEF member countries.

Since its inception in 2016, the ASEFYLS programme has been empowering young people to take on leadership roles in their communities and societies and provided them with opportunities for capacity building and collaborative learning. Since 2023, the programme has focused on the concept of "Society 5.0", a vision for a human-centered society where technology not only drives economic growth, but also addresses societal challenges. At the heart of this vision are values such as sustainability, ethics, and inclusion, which are essential to creating a balanced and equitable future.

This report is the third ASEF perception study focusing on youth leadership, as part of the ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS) project series. It captures the diverse perspectives, experiences, and aspirations of young leaders in Asia and Europe as they navigate the opportunities and challenges of a tech-driven world. It is a reflection of their hopes, fears, and priorities for building a Society 5.0. The report also highlights the importance of empowering young leaders and preparing them with the skills and knowledge to thrive in this dynamic landscape.

We envision this report as an informational resource and inspiration for young leaders, youth organisations, and policymakers. We hope it can also serve as a starting point for evidence-based dialogues on how to address the diverse needs of young people identified in this report, and empower the next generation to lead confidently in a tech-driven world. For this purpose, the report offers concrete recommendations for Youth and Youth Organisation Leaders, and for Decision-Makers and Government, to start these discussions.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the young leaders who participated in this survey and shared their honest reflections. Your voices are the cornerstone of this report. I would also like to thank the author and the ASEFYLS team for their dedication and hard work to prepare this report.

As you explore this publication, I encourage you to reflect on the perspectives shared within these pages and join us in shaping a future where technology empowers humanity, and societal leadership is guided by inclusion, ethics, and sustainability.

Ambassador Beata STOCZYŃSKA

Acknowledgements

This Report would not have been possible without the collective efforts of a dedicated team of contributors and supporters. ASEF would like to thank everyone who contributed to this endeavour.

First and foremost, we extend our deepest gratitude to the 3,833 young leaders across Asia and Europe for their contribution to the perception survey exploring the future they would like to see, and whether they are prepared for it. Their voices are at the heart of this report. In addition, the 78 participants of the ASEFYLS Capacity Buildings 2024, whose contribution to the programme provided inspiration and qualitative input. In particular: Aldrine Anzures, Abdirakhym Asan, Fatima Aurangzeb, Solahudin Al Ayubi, Danijel Bačan, Namuun Battsengel, Jaseel CK, Chantelle Busuttil Stevens, Sara Gabrielli, Maja Kalin, Taylor Lake, Gabriel Marti, Solyka Teng, and Federico Valotto, for sharing supplemental quotes to the report.

We are also thankful for the student and youth organisations who have contributed to our outreach efforts in disseminating the perception survey: the ASEAN Youth Organization (AYO), the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), the Student Thinktank for Europe-Asia Relations (STEAR), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Students' Forum (AEGEE), and the European Law Students' Association (ELSA).

ASEF would like to thank the core team who worked on the production of this report. Our sincere appreciation goes to Dr Han-Ei Chew, UNESCO Inclusive Policy Lab and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore. Dr Chew's expertise and insights were instrumental in conceptualizing the survey questions, analysing the responses, and shaping the core of this report. Special thanks go to Mr Henry Ho, Freelance Data Analyst, for his valuable contribution in supporting Dr Chew in analysing the survey data, and providing insights that enriched this report. We also wish to thank our editors Ms Réka Tózsa, Director of ASEF's Education Department, and Ms Freya Chow-Paul, ASEF Youth Project Lead. Réka's guidance throughout the project ensured its coherence and impact, while Freya's careful editing and seamless coordination brought the report to fruition. In addition, ASEF would like to thank members of its Education Department for consultation, input, and deliberation over the direction and key messages of the report.

We acknowledge Mr Martin Vidanes and Ms Charmiene Mapili for their exceptional graphic design work, which brought the report's findings to life in a visually engaging and accessible manner.

Finally, ASEF is particularly thankful to the European Union, and the People's Republic of China for providing the funds for this publication, that contribute to a better understanding of young leaders concerns and motivation to jointly work towards a smarter and more sustainable future.

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Executive Summary

This report is the outcome of an ASEF-wide survey, conducted from May to July 2024, and encapsulates the views of nearly 4,000 young adults from across 51 ASEF member countries. It explores the future that young people envision for Society 5.0, characterised as a 'human-centered society that balances economic advancement with the resolution of social problems' (Government of Japan, White Paper on Society 5.0), and how we can prepare and train young leaders to succeed in this rapidly evolving, tech-driven world.

Society 5.0: The Future Youth Wish to See

The youth envision Society 5.0 as a human-centred future, where technology is a tool for solving societal challenges, grounded in core values such as fairness, empathy, and justice. They identified four key societal challenges: access to quality education and healthcare, poverty reduction, climate change and biodiversity conservation, and improving mental health and well-being. A majority believe that technology should be guided by ethical principles and used to improve social justice and inclusivity, ensuring it respects human dignity while fostering sustainable development.

Despite their optimism about technology, young people also express concerns about its potential drawbacks. Issues such as data privacy, security, and algorithmic bias are seen as key risks that must be managed as we integrate technology into society. While social media is recognised as a powerful tool for advocacy and raising awareness of societal issues, youth are mindful of its limitations, including its role in polarisation and the spread of misinformation.

Young people expect country leaders to prioritise human values when implementing technological solutions, but many feel that this consideration is lacking. The data highlights a gap between youth aspirations and leadership practices, underscoring the need for stronger alignment between leadership actions and ethical technological development.

Preparing Young Leaders for Society 5.0

To prepare for Society 5.0, young people recognise the need for a balanced approach to skill development, combining both soft skills and technology-related hard skills. The survey data reveals a strong consensus that digital skills are indispensable for future job success, with 93.1% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that digital proficiency is crucial. However, youth also place a high value on leadership soft skills—such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptability—acknowledging that technical expertise alone is not enough.

The findings show that young people feel confident in their digital skills, with a majority reporting moderate to high levels of self-efficacy. This confidence is built through a variety of pathways to skill acquisition, including self-directed learning, formal education, and informal networks like friends and work colleagues. The emphasis on self-learning highlights the adaptability and resourcefulness of youth as they prepare for a tech-driven future.

When asked about the specific technology-related skills they wish to develop, the majority of respondents prioritise improving leadership soft skills related to using and leading with technology, reflecting a clear desire to blend technical knowledge with leadership capabilities. This indicates that young people see leadership as a critical skill for navigating the complexities of Society 5.0.

Roles and Responsibilities in Skill Development

There are clear regional and cultural differences in how young people perceive the responsibility for developing digital and soft skills. Governments are overwhelmingly viewed as the primary agent for developing digital skills. This reflects the expectation that institutional support is crucial for building the digital competencies required for Society 5.0.

In contrast, soft skills development is viewed as a more collective responsibility, with civil society organisations taking the lead in this area. Personal networks and self-directed learning are also seen as key contributors to soft skills development, reflecting the belief that these skills are often cultivated through community engagement and informal methods.

Regional variations suggest that Europeans place more emphasis on institutional support, with a greater reliance on governments and civil society for both digital and soft skills development. Asian respondents, on the other hand, show a stronger inclination towards self-directed learning and personal responsibility, highlighting different cultural expectations around skill development and institutional roles.

Embracing Society 5.0

Young people are optimistic about the potential of Society 5.0, envisioning a future where technology and human values are seamlessly integrated to create a more empathetic, just, inclusive, and sustainable world. However, they also recognise the challenges and risks that come with technological advancement, particularly in areas like data privacy, security, and algorithmic bias.

To ensure that young people are prepared to lead in Society 5.0, a balanced approach to skill development is essential. This includes equipping future leaders with both digital proficiency and soft skills to navigate the complexities of an increasingly tech-driven society. Governments, civil society, and individuals all have roles to play in this process, with regional differences reflecting the varied expectations of institutional support across Asia and Europe.

By addressing these needs and fostering both technical expertise and leadership capabilities, we can prepare the next generation to lead in a future where technology serves the greater good, advancing both innovation and social progress.

Introduction

As we move toward Society 5.0, the need for informed leadership capable of navigating a tech-driven future is urgent. Defined as a "human-centered society that balances economic advancement with the resolution of social problems" (Government of Japan), Society 5.0 represents more than a digital shift; it is a fundamental transformation of how we live, work, and interact, where technology is deeply embedded into the fabric of our societies.

Since our last report on Youth Perspectives on Technology-Informed Societal Leadership, the explosive rise of generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has accelerated this transformation, making the questions of what kind of future youth want and how we prepare for it more pertinent than ever. The profound societal changes catalysed by AI highlight both opportunities and challenges that demand empathetic leadership, especially from the younger generation.

Today's youth are digital natives equipped to lead in Society 5.0. However, their potential remains largely untapped, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles. This Report, based on a survey of close to 4,000 young adults across ASEF member countries, addresses two crucial research questions for 2024:

→ RQ1: What is the future, or Society 5.0, that young people wish to see?
Understanding their vision is key to ensuring that societal advancements reflect their aspirations and values.

→ RQ2: How do we prepare and train young leaders for this future society?'
(including soft skills, values based, as well as technical hard skills)

The survey captures youth perspectives on technology's impact and their aspirations for the future. It provides evidence-based insights aimed at informing critical conversations among policymakers, educators, and industry leaders on how best to equip young people to succeed in Society 5.0.

This Report is a call to action for leaders across sectors to engage with and support the next generation of decision-makers. The findings underscore the importance of involving youth in shaping the future and ensuring they are equipped with the skills and opportunities needed to lead in a society increasingly defined by AI and digital innovation.

By providing a platform for youth voices, this Report seeks to bridge the gap between young people's aspirations and the support systems required to help them achieve their leadership potential in Society 5.0. The insights gathered here are intended to spark meaningful dialogue and action, ensuring a future that is not only technologically advanced but also inclusive, ethical, and sustainable.

Demographic Overview of Participants

The survey drew responses from 3,833 individuals across a diverse demographic, characterised by the following features:

Gender

53.6% Female (2,054)

45.5% Male (1,743)

0.9% Other (36)

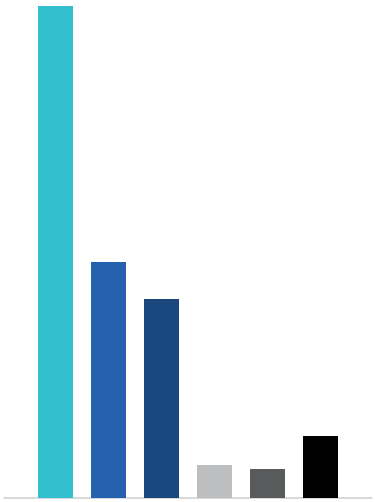
Respondents range in age from 16-37 years. Average Age:

24
YEARS OLD

Playing a leading role in a Youth Organisation or Student Association or Network:

66.1%
LEADERSHIP ACTIVITY

Occupational Status:



Undergradutes 46.9%

Professionals 22.5%

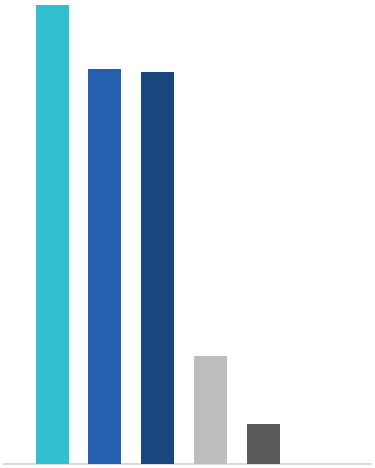
Graduate Students..... 18.9%

Jobseekers 3.1%

Doctoral Students..... 2.7%

Others 5.9%

Industry Representation (for working professionals):



Business Corporate ..32.9%

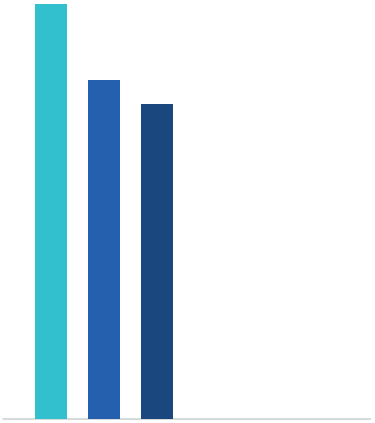
Public Sector 28.3%

NGO/ International Organisations 28.1%

Startup..... 7.7%

Freelance / Artist..... 2.8%

Most Common Academic Majors:



Social Sciences..... 25.5%

Engineering / Technology 20.8%

Business / Management 19.3%

Figure 1. The survey drew responses from 3,833 individuals across a diverse demographic, characterised by the above features

Geographical Representation:

→ Participants were from 51 ASEF member countries. The survey sample includes a higher proportion of respondents from Asian member states, which may be attributed to self-selection. All valid responses were considered after thorough data cleaning and removal of invalid entries.

ASEF Member Countries in Europe: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom

ASEF Member Countries in Asia: Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam

Key Question 1:

What is the future, or Society 5.0, that young people wish to see?

1.1. Understanding Youth Perspectives on Societal Challenges

In alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1], this survey sought to capture the societal challenges that young people across ASEF countries regard as most pressing. Survey questions were designed to reflect a broad spectrum of priorities embedded in the SDGs, inviting participants to rank key societal challenges such as poverty, education, gender equality, and climate action. These options included, but were not limited to, SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). This approach ensures that the priorities of young people are contextualised within a global development framework.

The findings reveal that access to quality education and healthcare, poverty, climate change and conservation, and mental health are viewed as the highest priorities by youth. These results demonstrate continuity with the 2023 report, where these issues were similarly highlighted, underscoring the sustained relevance of these challenges over time. This consistency reflects the enduring commitment of young people to shaping a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable Society 5.0.

1. **Access to quality education and healthcare**
2. **Poverty reduction and income inequality**
3. **Climate change and biodiversity conservation**
4. **Improving mental health and well-being**
5. Advancing gender equality and women's rights
6. Combatting racism and discrimination
7. Access to meaningful work and economic opportunities
8. Sustainable consumption and production
9. Access to clean water and sanitation
10. Promoting civil discourse and reducing polarisation
11. Addressing immigration and refugee issues
12. Combatting drug addiction and substance abuse
13. Ensuring healthcare for the elderly and an aging population

1. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Beyond the key societal challenges highlighted, young people also identified technological issues—including the digital divide, cybersecurity, and digital literacy—as critical concerns. These emerging priorities will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.

Notable differences emerged in how various demographic groups prioritise societal challenges. These variations reflect the diverse experiences, needs, and perspectives of youth based on gender, age, region, and leadership roles. Understanding these distinctions is essential for developing targeted solutions that address the unique concerns of each group, ensuring that Society 5.0 is inclusive and responsive to all.

Danijel BAČAN, Croatia
President,
Youth Atlantic Treaty Association

> In 2024, it's clear why youth resonate with education, healthcare, poverty, and climate change as the biggest challenges. These issues are interconnected and directly affect our futures. Education is the foundation for addressing both poverty and climate change, while access to healthcare ensures well-being. Climate change is urgent, impacting not only our environment but also the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. My peers and I feel the weight of these challenges daily, and they shape our aspirations and actions for a more just and sustainable world.

Gender Differences

Female respondents placed a stronger emphasis on advancing gender equality and women's rights, as well as addressing immigration and refugee issues, compared to male respondents. On the other hand, males prioritised combatting racism and discrimination, access to meaningful work, and promoting civil discourse and reducing polarisation more highly than females. These differences suggest that while women are particularly focused on issues that directly impact marginalised populations and vulnerable groups, men may be more concerned with broader societal challenges and economic integration. This points to the importance of designing youth policies that cater to both gender-specific concerns, such as gender equality, and broader issues like racism and social cohesion, ensuring that the needs of all genders are addressed in a balanced and inclusive manner.

Age Group Priorities

Younger respondents, aged 16-24, placed less emphasis on access to meaningful work and economic opportunities compared to those aged 25-37, who prioritised these issues more highly. This distinction reflects the different life stages of the two groups. Younger individuals are likely more focused on education and personal development, while older youth are more concerned with economic stability and career progression.

Regional Variations

In terms of regional differences, Asian respondents ranked improving mental health, advancing gender equality, access to meaningful work, sustainable consumption, access to clean water, and combatting drug addiction more highly than their European counterparts. Meanwhile, Europeans placed greater emphasis on combatting racism, promoting civil discourse, and addressing immigration and refugee issues. These regional differences reflect the unique challenges faced by each region—Asians, dealing with the pressures of rapid economic development, may be more concerned with social well-being and sustainability, while Europeans, facing ongoing political and social tensions, prioritise issues around race relations, polarisation, and migration.

Leadership vs. Non-Leadership Perspectives:

Youth leaders gave more importance to advancing gender equality, sustainable consumption, and promoting civil discourse, while non-leaders prioritised combatting racism, accessing meaningful work, and addressing immigration issues. This divergence suggests that leaders are more focused on long-term, systemic challenges, while non-leaders are concerned with more immediate, tangible issues. Engaging both groups in dialogue is essential, as leaders must be encouraged to remain connected to the practical concerns of their peers, and non-leaders should be provided opportunities to contribute to broader, structural discussions. Bridging this gap will ensure that both visionary leadership and day-to-day realities are addressed as Society 5.0 evolves.

These insights highlight the diversity in how young people prioritise societal challenges, shaped by factors such as gender, age, regional background, and leadership experience. Understanding these nuances is crucial for addressing the unique needs and aspirations of different youth segments in the context of Society 5.0.

1.2. Human Values That Shape Youth Aspirations for Society 5.0

In their responses, young people highlighted 219 different human values they believe are essential, with the top 10 values making up about 60% of the total responses. Leading the list are empathy (20.8%), equality (11.6%), and justice (7.7%), followed by inclusivity, respect, integrity, honesty, compassion, freedom, and responsibility (See Figures 2 and 3).

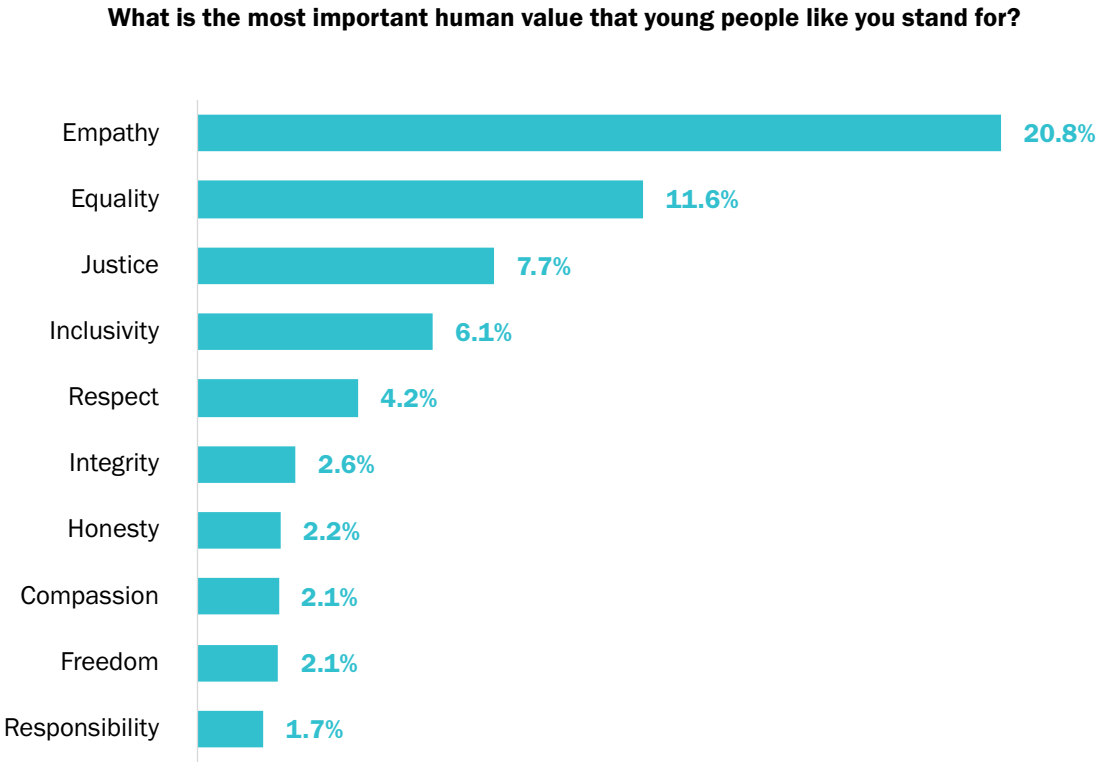


Figure 2. Most Important Human Values that Young People (Survey Participants) Stand For

Taylor LAKE, New Zealand
Youth Development Coordinator, Heart for Youth Trust

Empathy, or aroha, is the foundation of meaningful relationships here in Aotearoa. In Te Ao Māori, this concept is deeply connected to values like manaakitanga, which is about showing respect, care, and hospitality towards others. The whakataukī

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata' –

What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people' – speaks to the deep responsibility we have for one another.

When rangatahi (youth) choose empathy, they are embracing manaakitanga in action, ensuring that others feel valued, supported, and cared for.

In a diverse society like ours, empathy is what allows us to come together, celebrate our differences, and nurture a community built on understanding, respect, and shared responsibility.

Figure 3. Word Cloud of Human Values that Young People (Survey Participants) Stand For

These values highlight a clear emphasis on fairness, social justice, and ethical behaviour, closely aligning with the vision of Society 5.0, where technology is intended to address societal challenges and enhance quality of life. To gain deeper insights into why young people prioritised values such as empathy, equality, and justice, we conducted an experimental AI-enabled text analysis that used topic modelling grounded in Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values[2], to categorise and identify the reasoning behind their value choices.

The analysis highlighted three primary values in Schwartz's Theory: benevolence (caring), universalism (concern), and personal security.

→ Benevolence (Caring): Benevolence encompasses a deep concern for the welfare of close others, driven by empathy and compassion. Youth prioritised caring relationships and ethical behaviour as essential to fostering supportive communities, illustrating their commitment to interpersonal harmony and mutual support within society. Benevolence aligns closely with the youth's focus on empathy, suggesting that they view social bonds and solidarity as essential elements in Society 5.0.

→ Universalism (Concern): Universalism reflects a commitment to understanding, tolerance, and protection for all people and nature. This value captures youth's dedication to inclusivity, social justice, and environmental sustainability. By prioritising universalism, young people express a global perspective, valuing equality and justice not only for individuals but for society at large, mirroring the objectives of Society 5.0.

→ Personal Security: This value represents the importance of safety and stability at both individual and societal levels. Youth frequently associated personal security with a need for dependable structures that protect their rights and well-being, a critical foundation for thriving in Society 5.0. This focus on security reflects a desire for resilience amid rapid technological and societal change.

These findings suggest that young people envision a Society 5.0 grounded in compassion, inclusivity, and security where technology serves as a tool to enhance collective well-being, equality, and social justice. This value orientation highlights their commitment to a future where empathy and a shared responsibility for the greater good is balanced with personal and societal security.

2. Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. Online readings in Psychology and Culture, 2(1), 11.

Fatima AURANGZEB, Pakistan
Founder, Women in Computer Science

> I think we are more alike than we realise. In today's interconnected world, we meet people from many different countries and discover that our struggles are often strikingly similar. When we see people around the world being torn apart by war or dying of hunger, it makes us so angry and vocal because if we were in their shoes, we'd want someone to have our back. This feeling drives us forward with a change-the-world kind of attitude. We understand that our peace and comfort mean nothing unless everyone else has a chance to live in that same peaceful world.

1.3. The Role of Social Media in Addressing Societal Challenges

As technology continues to reshape how we tackle societal challenges, its influence spans multiple domains, from education to healthcare, governance, and communication. A key element of this technological landscape is the rise of digital platforms, particularly social media, which has become a vital space for public discourse, advocacy, and collective action. As part of the broader technological ecosystem, social media offers unique capabilities for raising awareness and engaging communities especially for young people. However, its role in addressing societal challenges is more nuanced, with both opportunities and limitations.

While technology provides solutions to complex global issues, social media's role is more specific: it amplifies voices, organises movements, and disseminates information. Yet, like other technological advances, its impact is viewed in various ways. Some see it as a powerful tool for driving positive social change, while others remain sceptical of its drawbacks, such as the potential for misinformation, polarisation, and privacy concerns. The survey findings reflect this complexity, offering insights into how young people perceive social media's role in addressing the societal challenges that matter to them.

Close to three in five young people (59.0%) view social media as a force for good. With an average score of 3.51 out of 5, respondents showed moderate confidence in its positive influence. A significant portion, 33.9%, regarded social media as a force for good, while 25.3% saw it as a significant force for good. However, 19.2% believed that social media neither hinders nor substantially contributes to progress, reflecting some uncertainty about its overall impact. A minority expressed concern, with 11.5% feeling that social media significantly impedes progress, illustrating the nuanced and sometimes contradictory views surrounding its role in societal change.

From your perspective, what role does social media play in addressing societal challenges?

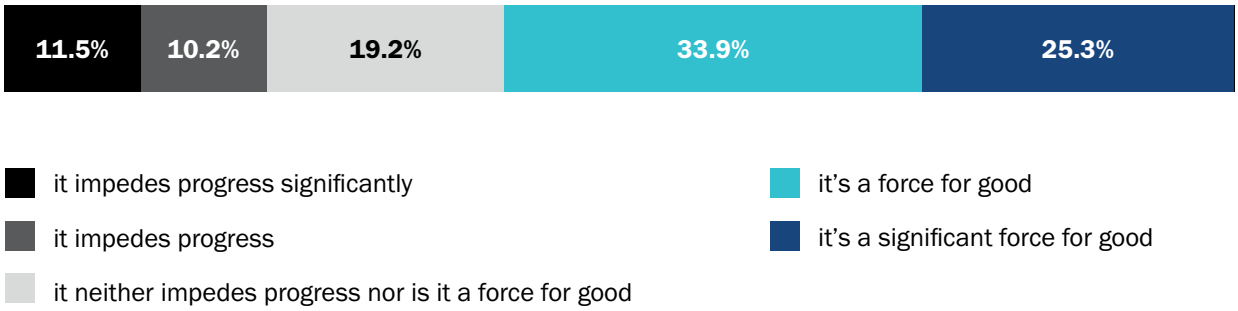


Figure 4. Overall Perspectives of the Role of Social Media in Tackling Societal Challenges

Muhamad Solahudin Al AYUBI, Indonesia
Founder, Sakola Kita

"As the founder of Sakola Kita, I genuinely believe social media can positively impact societal challenges by promoting awareness and engagement. It enables us to reach larger audiences and have greater impact, as seen through my collaborations that have reached millions, fostering community among youth across Indonesia or ASEAN. While it's a powerful tool, challenges such as misinformation and superficial engagement persist. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic that responsibility and credibility are key components that ensure social media is not just about likes or shares; it's about building a movement that empowers youth to shape their future.

Regional Variations

Notable regional differences emerged in how social media is perceived. A more favourable view was expressed by 61% of Asian respondents compared to 48% of European respondents. Asians were more likely to see social media as a force for good (33.5%) or a significant force for good (27.4%), whereas fewer Europeans viewed it positively (36.7% and 11.4%, respectively). This divergence may stem from the different ways social media is utilised across regions. In Asia, where access to traditional media is sometimes limited, social media serves as a crucial platform for activism and information-sharing, contributing to its more positive perception. In contrast, concerns about misinformation, privacy, and social division in Europe may lead to greater scepticism about its role.

Leadership vs. Non-Leadership Perspectives

Youth leaders tend to have a more optimistic view of social media's potential to address societal challenges—62% of leaders viewed social media positively compared to 49% of non-leaders. This disparity may be linked to the way leaders use social media as a tool for advocacy, mobilisation, and outreach, whereas non-leaders may be more exposed to its negative aspects, such as misinformation and the erosion of meaningful discourse.

Social media plays a distinct but nuanced role in addressing societal challenges, reflecting both optimism and scepticism among young people. While many acknowledge its potential to drive social progress, others remain cautious about its risks. Region and leadership roles shape how individuals perceive social media's impact, suggesting its effectiveness in promoting societal change is context dependent.

Gabriel MARTI, Switzerland
President, European Law Students Association (ELSA) Switzerland

> I think in general, yes, social media can have a positive impact on addressing societal challenges, but only if it is well regulated. It's important to ensure they don't become a lawless space where harmful content can spread unchecked. Social media is a powerful tool for promoting actions and defending causes, but the current structure doesn't always foster meaningful discussion or critical thinking. Often, I am only exposed to causes that I am already sympathetic to, which limits diverse perspectives. For this reason, it would be beneficial to make social media less targeted and more open to broader viewpoints.

1.4. Managing the Drawbacks of Technology in Addressing Societal Challenges

As technology, such as social media, becomes more integrated into efforts to tackle societal challenges, its potential drawbacks must be carefully considered. While youth generally see technology as a key tool for solving issues like healthcare, education, and inequality and social media as a force for good, there are significant concerns about its unintended consequences. Of the 1,911 respondents who chose to identify a key societal challenge outside of the provided list, one in three (31.4%) highlighted digital challenges such as the digital divide and cybersecurity, underscoring their relevance in discussions about Society 5.0.

When asked to identify the potential drawbacks of using technology to address societal challenges, the youth's prioritisation of these concerns reveals a strong awareness of the risks that come with technological advancement:

1. **Data privacy and security issues**
2. **Reduced human interaction and empathy**
3. **Dependence on technology**
4. Ethical concerns
5. Bias and discrimination in algorithms and data
6. Lack of transparency and accountability
7. Unintended negative consequences
8. Cost and access barriers
9. Exacerbation of societal inequalities
10. Undermining human agency and autonomy

Data privacy and security are the foremost concerns, reflecting the growing anxiety over how personal data is handled in increasingly digital societies. At the same time, concerns over reduced human interaction and an over-dependence on technology indicate that youth are concerned that technology may erode essential aspects of human connection and autonomy. These issues were also prominently highlighted in the 2023 report, demonstrating the consistency of these concerns over time.

These concerns suggest a deep recognition that while technology can be a powerful tool, its implementation must be thoughtful and cautious to avoid exacerbating existing societal issues. Addressing these concerns requires ensuring robust protections for data privacy, promoting balanced integration of technology, and fostering environments that prioritise meaningful human interactions alongside digital advancements.

Gender Differences

Female respondents expressed greater concern about dependence on technology, data privacy and security, and the exacerbation of societal inequalities. This suggests that women may approach technology's role in society with more caution, particularly in areas where it could deepen existing inequalities or compromise privacy. This gender gap highlights the importance of ensuring that discussions about technology's drawbacks include gender-sensitive perspectives, especially in areas like privacy and equity, where women appear to see greater risk.

What do you think are the potential drawbacks of using technology to address societal challenges? (by gender; top three only; multiple choice)

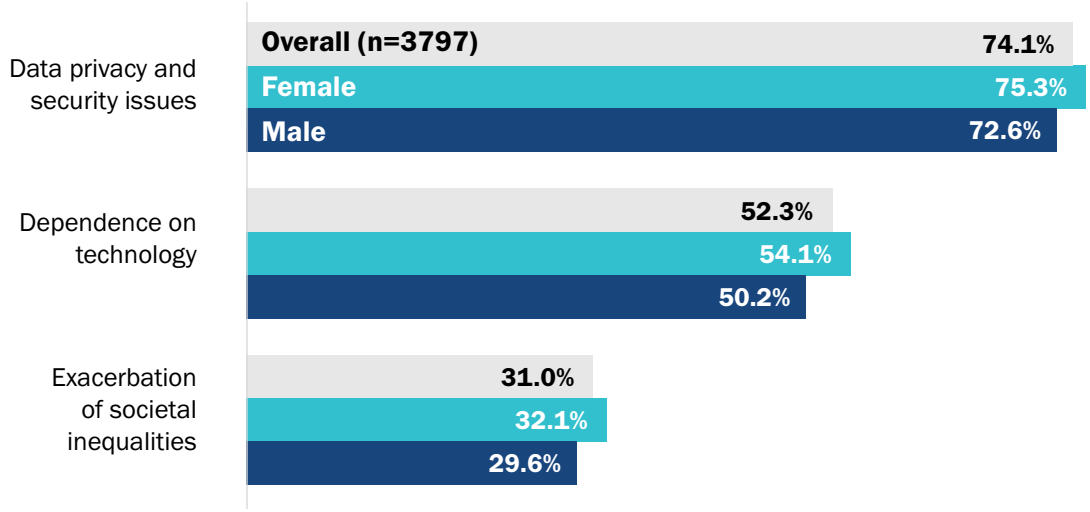


Figure 5. Top Three Potential Drawbacks of Using Technology to Address Societal Challenges

Age Group Priorities

Younger respondents (aged 16-24) placed more emphasis on concerns like dependence on technology, lack of transparency, and unintended negative consequences compared to older respondents (aged 25-37), who prioritised ethical concerns, and bias and discrimination in algorithms. This suggests that younger individuals, being more immersed in digital environments, are more attuned to immediate, practical risks, such as the over-reliance on technology and its unforeseen impacts. In contrast, older respondents may be more focused on broader systemic issues, like ethics and discrimination, as they engage more with leadership roles and policymaking.

Regional Variations

Regional variations in perceptions of technology's drawbacks further underscore the complexity of these issues. Asians were more concerned with data privacy, security, unintended negative consequences, and cost and access barriers, reflecting the rapid technological growth in many Asian countries and the associated risks. Europeans, on the other hand, emphasised reduced human interaction, bias and discrimination, and the exacerbation of societal inequalities, which may stem from Europe's ongoing focus on human rights and equality. Digital security and social equity concerns appear to have different weights in the two regions.

What do you think are the potential drawbacks of using technology to address societal challenges? (by region; multiple choice)

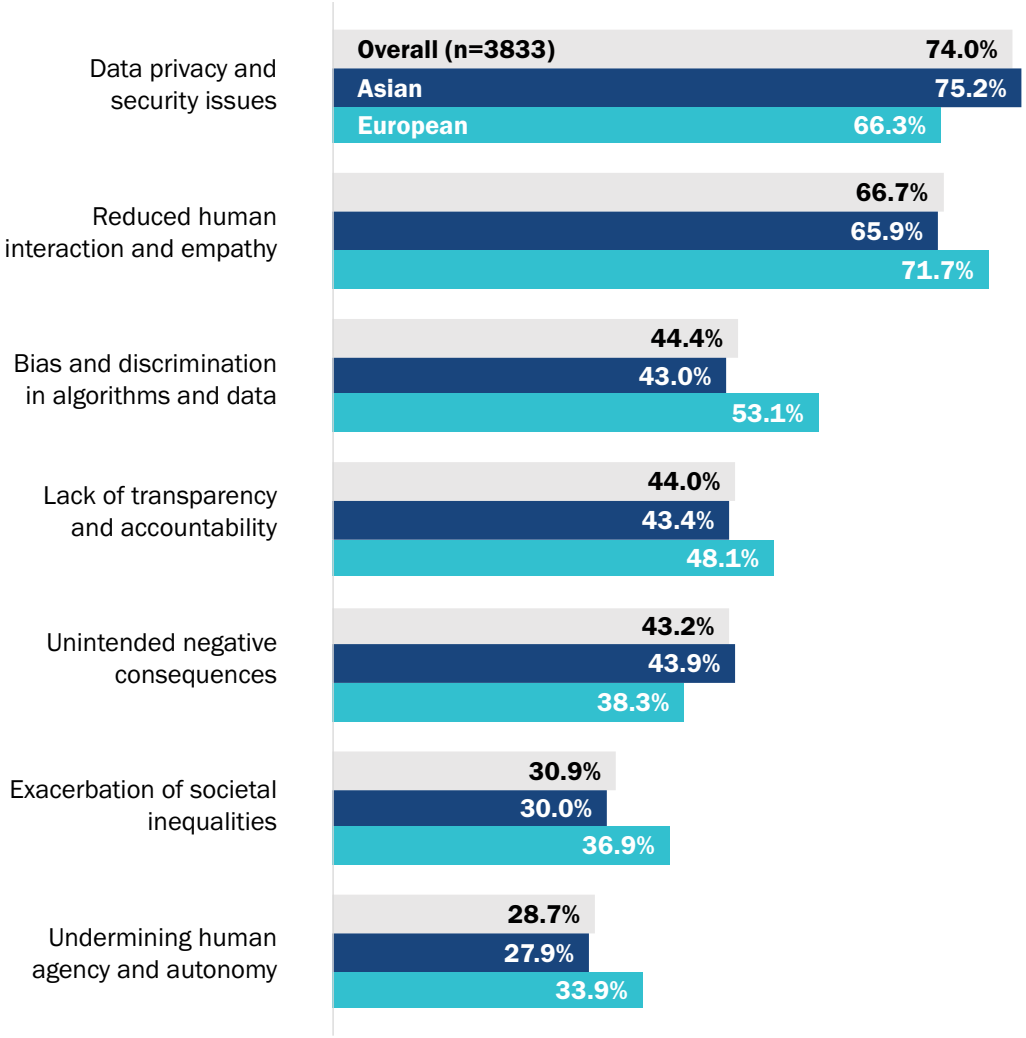


Figure 6. Potential Drawbacks of Using Technology to Address Societal Challenges (by Region)

Note that data privacy and security, reduced human interactions, and over-dependence on technology are the top three concerns, consistent with the 2023 report. The chart above shows only the regional variations that are statistically different.

Leadership vs. Non-Leadership Perspectives

Youth leaders showed greater concern for ethical issues, bias and discrimination in algorithms, and the exacerbation of societal inequalities compared to non-leaders, who were more focused on dependence on technology, lack of transparency, and unintended negative consequences. This divide reflects the different roles these groups play in society: leaders are more focused on systemic, long-term risks, while non-leaders are concerned with the immediate, tangible effects of technology in their daily lives. Engaging both leaders and non-leaders in discussions about technology's drawbacks is crucial for developing policies that are both visionary and responsive to practical challenges.

The overall insights reflect the varying concerns young people have about technology's role in addressing societal challenges. While there is broad recognition of the risks, there are differences in gender, age, region, and leadership roles.

1.5. The Integration of Human Values in Technological Solutions

The drawbacks of technology use remind us that innovation must be approached thoughtfully and underscore the importance of ensuring that technological progress aligns with ethical principles and human-centred values.

This brings us to the critical question: How do we integrate human values into technological solutions? A substantial majority of participants (77.4%) believe that human values should be integrated to a very large extent (37.1%) or a large extent (40.2%), highlighting broad support for embedding these principles in technological development (see Figure 7).

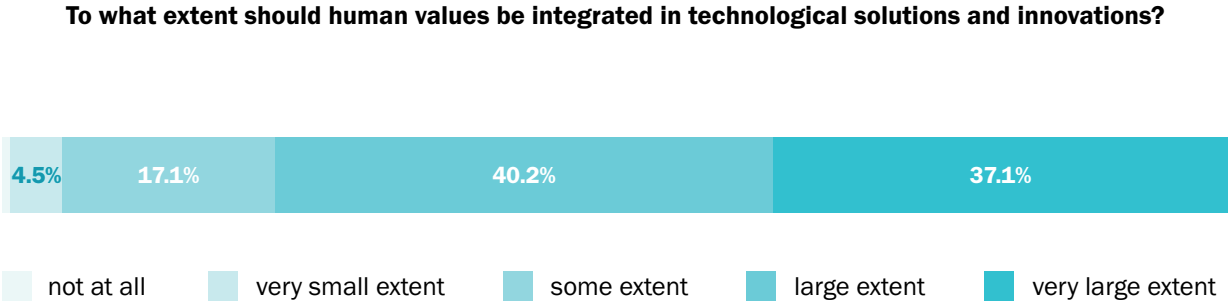


Figure 7. Extent to which Human Values should be Integrated in Technological Solutions and Innovations

Regional Variations

There are notable regional differences in how respondents view the integration of human values into technological solutions. European respondents have a higher average score (4.24 out of 5) compared to their Asian counterparts (4.06), indicating that Europeans place slightly more importance on this integration. A greater proportion of Europeans favour integration to a very large extent (43.3%) compared to Asians (36.2%). Nevertheless, both regions show strong support for embedding human values in technological innovation, with 40.1% of Asians and 40.9% of Europeans favouring integration to a large extent. These findings suggest that, while Europeans may be somewhat more inclined to prioritise humancentric considerations, there is a broad consensus across both regions on the importance of integrating human values into technology.

Leadership vs. Non-Leadership Perspectives

The data also reveals significant differences between youth leaders and non-leaders in their views on the integration of human values into technological solutions. Leaders reported a higher average score (4.16 out of 5) compared to non-leaders (3.93), indicating that leaders generally place greater emphasis on this integration. A larger proportion of youth leaders believe that human values should be integrated to a very large extent (41.2%) compared to 29.3% of non-leaders. Conversely, non-leaders believe that that human values should be integrated to a large extent (42.2%) compared to 39.2% of leaders.

In summary, leaders demonstrate a stronger belief in the need to embed human values in technology, while non-leaders lean towards more moderate levels of integration, indicating a potential gap in perception that could inform targeted leadership training on ethical technology development.

Aldrine ANZURES, Philippines
Director for Policy and Advocacy,
FPJ Youth

> Youth should aspire to occupy positions of power in legislative bodies and at the decision-making tables of private firms. Once they gain representation, they must focus on issue-based platforms and demonstrate how certain technological advancements, if left unchecked, can result in unemployment, and further disenfranchisement, particularly due to the existing digital divide. If young people want to shape future policies, it is imperative to place more youth who truly understand these issues in every policy-making institution, ensuring they can effectively influence leaders—regardless of their background or priorities—to address these critical concerns.

1.6. Country Leaders' Consideration of Human Values

Only one in five (20%) of the respondents believe that their country's leaders consider human values to a large or very large extent when implementing technological solutions. The majority, however, feel that human values are taken into account to some extent. A small percentage of respondents (4.1%) believe that human values are considered to a very large extent, suggesting that a minority acknowledge strong leadership in integrating human values into technology.

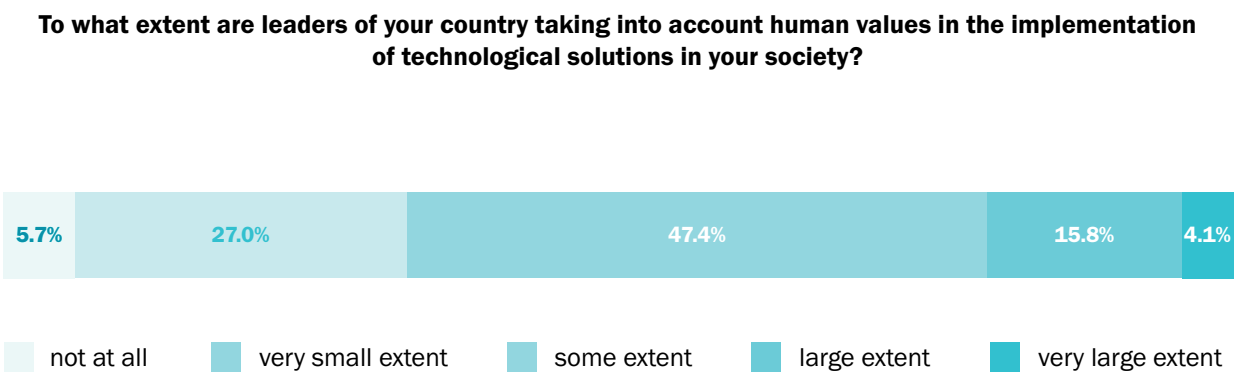


Figure 8. Extent to which Leaders are Taking into Account Human Values in the Implementation of Technological Solutions

At the other end of the spectrum, one in three believe that human values are considered to a very small extent (27.0%) or not at all (5.7%). These responses highlight a perceived disconnect between technological solutions and ethical considerations, suggesting opportunities for leaders to more closely integrate ethical frameworks into technological initiatives, aligning them with youth expectations.

Solyka TENG, Cambodia
Deputy Country Representative for Cambodia, OSG Youth Alliance Alumni

> Young people lose confidence when they sense that technological solutions prioritise efficiency over humanity. They worry that leaders focus on quick fixes rather than long-term wellbeing. Leaders can bridge this gap by actively engaging young voices in decision-making, ensuring technology serves people, not just systems. To build hope, leaders must demonstrate transparency, prioritise ethics, and show a genuine commitment to addressing societal challenges with compassion. Genuine collaboration with the younger generation will turn doubt into belief, inspiring a future driven by shared human values.

Age Group Differences

The data reveals notable differences between age groups. Younger respondents aged 16-24 reported a higher average score (2.90 out of 5) compared to those aged 25-37 (2.79), indicating that younger individuals are generally more optimistic about leaders' incorporation of human values in technological solutions. Both groups predominantly believe that human values are considered to some extent, but a higher proportion of the older age group (25-37) believe that human values are considered to a very small extent. Younger respondents, often still in formative stages of their education or early careers, may possess a more idealistic view, shaped by aspirational narratives surrounding technology's potential to address societal challenges. Older respondents, having spent more time navigating real-world professional and societal contexts, may have encountered challenges such as unequal access, ethical lapses, or unintended consequences of technology, leading to a more reserved perspective.

Regional Variations

The data also reveals regional differences in perceptions of how much leaders take human values into account when implementing technological solutions. Asian respondents reported a higher average score (2.87 out of 5) compared to European respondents (2.74), indicating that Asians are slightly more optimistic about their leaders' efforts to integrate human values. Europeans are more likely to believe that human values are considered to a very small extent or not at all (37.5%) compared to Asians (32.0%). Asian youths are slightly more confident in their leaders' ethical considerations.

Chantelle BUSUTTIL STEVENS, Malta
Director for Outreach, National Youth Council of Malta

> Leaders need to take a more proactive, holistic and long-term approach when ushering in technology and innovation addressing societal challenges. Only recently have we seen governments discuss issues that arise from the use of technology, such as the exploitation of personal data and the environmental impact of tech waste. Technology has been designed for profit, excluding the voices of youth who are most impacted by it. There is currently a lack of transparency in how technology frameworks are constructed. There needs to be clarity as to the values leaders want to imbue in future technologies used to resolve community challenges. Youth need to be educated on how technological policies are created, included in the decision-making process, and have the ability to hold leaders accountable for the ethical and sustainable use of technology.

These regional differences in perceptions may be due to cultural variations in trust. In many Asian contexts, trust is often shaped by collective progress and strong institutional leadership, which may foster greater optimism among youth on their leaders' efforts. In Europe, where there is a strong emphasis on transparency and accountability, perceptions may lean towards a more measured assessment of leaders' ethical considerations.

1.7. Summary of Findings: Society 5.0 as Envisioned by Youth in 2024

Youth envision Society 5.0 as a future where technology is used not just for progress but to address societal challenges with a foundation in human values such as fairness, empathy, and justice. They see social media as a powerful tool for driving change, though they are mindful of technological risks, including ethical and privacy concerns. For the youth, integrating human values into technological solutions is essential, with the majority believing that ethical principles should guide technological development to ensure accountability and transparency.

However, there is a gap in how youth perceive country leaders' efforts to incorporate these values into their technology policies. Many feel that leaders are not fully aligned with the ethical vision they hold for Society 5.0, pointing to a need for stronger leadership in embedding values into technological advancements.

In short, the youth envision a human-centered Society 5.0, where technology serves the greater good, enhancing empathy, social justice and inclusivity. With this vision in mind, the next question becomes: How do we prepare and train young leaders to realise this future?

Key Question 2:

How do we prepare and train young leaders for this future society?

2.1. Preparing Youth for Leadership in Society 5.0

As we move from understanding the aspirations of young people for Society 5.0, it becomes clear that the vision they hold for the future must be matched with adequate preparation to take on leadership roles in this evolving landscape. Youth across Asia and Europe today aspire to a future grounded in human values such as empathy, equality, and justice, supported by innovative technological solutions. However, realising this vision requires more than just a desire for change—it necessitates the development of a robust set of skills and competencies that will enable young leaders to navigate and shape this future society.

In this next section, we shift the focus from what young people want to see in Society 5.0 to how we can effectively equip them with the tools needed to lead in such a future. This involves a critical examination of the skills—both soft and hard—required to manage the complexities of a technology-driven world, as well as the training methods and support structures necessary to foster these skills. Preparing young leaders is not just about acquiring technical knowledge; it also involves developing adaptive leadership abilities, digital literacy, and ethical awareness, ensuring that young people are empowered to lead Society 5.0 with confidence and foresight.

When youths were asked to reflect on the time horizon for achieving Society 5.0—opinions varied significantly. The survey results show that a majority (43.7%) believe Society 5.0 will materialise in the medium term, within the next 5 to 10 years (see Figure 9). Nearly a quarter (24.2%) expect its arrival even sooner, within the next 5 years, and 16.4% feel that Society 5.0 is already upon us. However, 15.7% of respondents are more sceptical, projecting a timeline of 10 years or more for its realisation. A larger proportion of Asian youth (42.7%) believe that Society 5.0 is already upon us or will be realised within the next 5 years compared to 26.0% of European youths (see Figure 11).

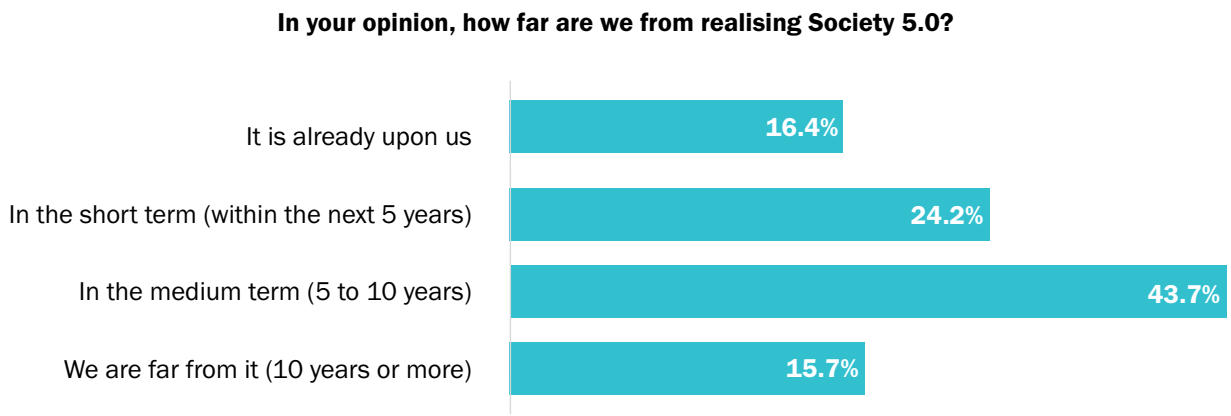


Figure 9. Horizon for Realising Society 5.0

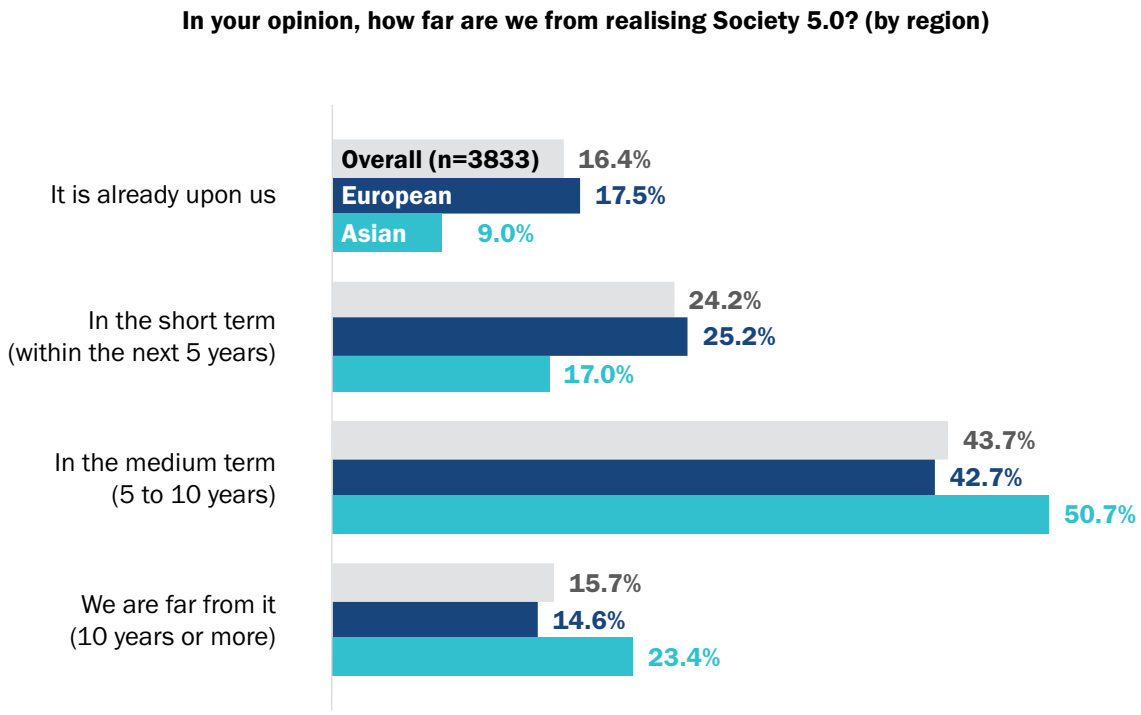


Figure 10. Horizon for Realising Society 5.0 (by Region)

2.2. Anticipating Future Skill Needs: Expected Changes in Core Work Skills

As young people look ahead to the realisation of Society 5.0, they understand that preparing for the future requires more than just technological development; it demands continuous adaptation of skills. The data shows that there is strong consensus among respondents about the need for ongoing skill development to meet the evolving demands of the workforce over the next 5-10 years. With an average score of 3.92 out of 5, the majority of respondents (77.9%) agree or strongly agree that core job skills will change significantly during this period, driven by rapid technological advancements and shifting job requirements. This recognition highlights the importance of preparing young leaders to be flexible and adaptable, equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in a dynamic, tech-driven environment. Only a minority (9.2%) disagrees or strongly disagrees and remains sceptical about the scale of future skill shifts (see Figure 11).

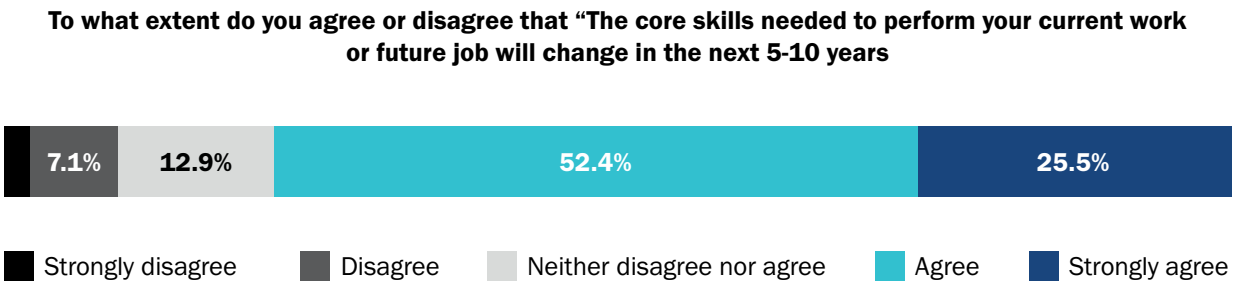


Figure 11. Evolution of Core Skills Needed to Perform Work or Future Job in the next 5-10 Years

Regional Variations

Asian respondents are more likely to anticipate rapid changes in skill requirements, with 78.6% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that core job skills will change significantly in the near future, compared to 73.3% in Europe. This aligns with their belief that Society 5.0 is on a shorter horizon, with a larger proportion of Asian youth expecting its arrival within the next five years or that it is already upon us. These perspectives suggest that Asians are perhaps more attuned to the urgency of preparing for the technological and societal transformations associated with Society 5.0.

2.3. Balancing Soft Skills and Hard Skills for Future Leadership

In reflecting on the skills needed for success, young people highlight the dual importance of digital skills and soft skills, emphasising that a balance between these is essential for thriving in Society 5.0. The data reveals a strong consensus, with 76.9% of respondents agreeing that success in Society 5.0 requires a combination of technology-related hard skills (like coding and programming) and soft skills (like communication and problem solving). This perspective highlights a nuanced understanding among youth: while technological proficiency forms a cornerstone of success in a rapidly evolving landscape, it is the integration of human-centred skills that ensures these technologies are harnessed effectively, ethically, and inclusively.

Interestingly, 20.2% of respondents prioritise soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving, over technical skills, reflecting their perceived importance in fostering collaboration, leadership, and adaptability—traits increasingly vital in a rapidly changing, team-based work environment. On the other hand, a much smaller portion (2.9%) emphasise technology-related hard skills, such as coding and programming, compared to soft skills.

Namuun BATTSENGEL, Mongolia
CEO, Faro Foundation Mongolia NGO

> At Faro Foundation, we teach people how to navigate this digital world safely and responsibly. Based on my experience, technological skills and soft skills are a powerful duo and the perfect balance in this tech-driven world, especially in the workplace. Technological skills can help people achieve goals, from simple tasks to big projects. But it's soft skills like communication, empathy, and problem-solving that truly help amplify the impact. For me, there are human connections and nuances that technology simply can't replace.

Regional Variations

While young people across regions recognise the need for a balance between soft skills and technology-related hard skills, regional differences highlight varying emphases. European respondents are more likely to prioritise soft skills along with 35.3% highlighting soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving (see Figure 12). In contrast, only 18.0% of Asian respondents share this perspective.

Notably, Asian respondents (79.2%) are more likely to view both soft skills and hard skills as equally important, reflecting a balanced approach where technical expertise is seen as complementary to interpersonal skills. In contrast, Europeans are less inclined toward this perspective, with 61.3% expressing similar views.

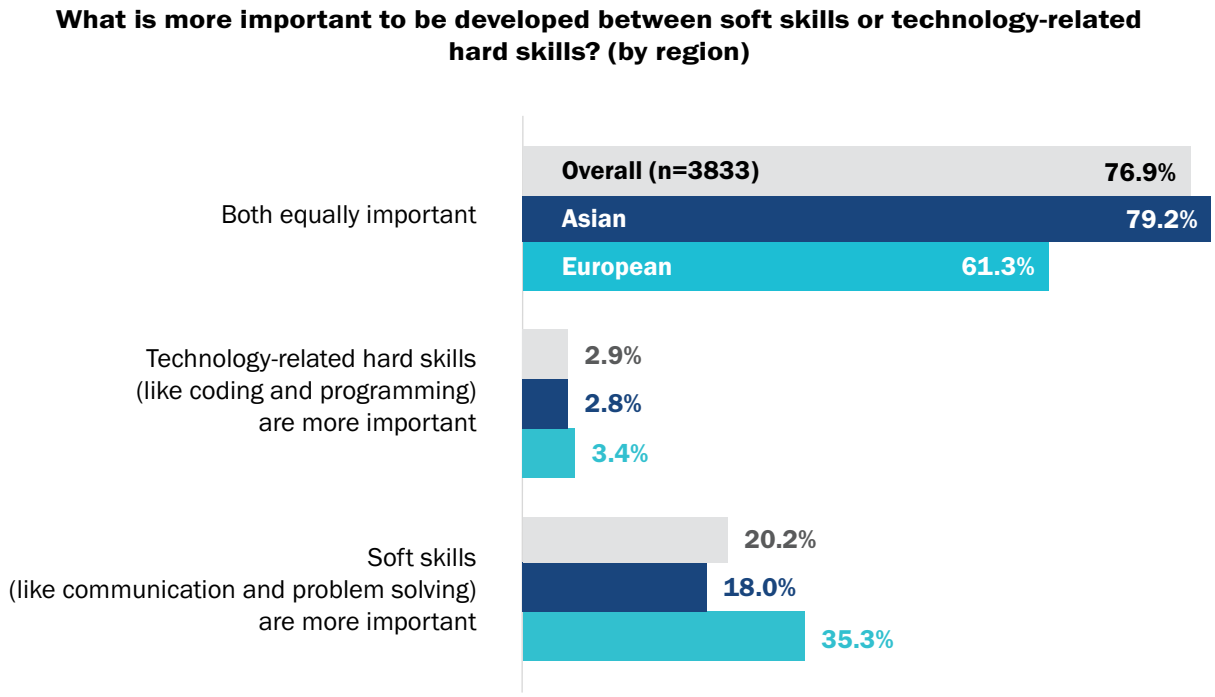


Figure 12. Importance of Developing Soft Skills vs. Technology-related Hard Skills (by Region)

Sara GABRIELLI, Luxembourg
Youth Delegate for Luxembourg to the EU,
National Youth Council

> As the world grows increasingly digital, technological skills are essential to navigate and innovate within modern systems. However, it is soft skills like communication, critical thinking, and adaptability that enable individuals to collaborate effectively, solve complex problems, and drive meaningful change. These two skillsets complement each other: technology empowers us to act, while soft skills guide how we interact and lead. Striking a balance between these skills is crucial to addressing both current challenges and future opportunities.

2.4. The Role of Digital Skills in Society 5.0

While young people recognise the need for a balance between soft skills and technology-related hard skills, they also place a strong emphasis on digital proficiency. The data shows that an overwhelming majority (93.1%) either agree (26.1%) or strongly agree (67.0%) that digital skills are critical for success in the future job market of Society 5.0. Youth recognise that digital expertise remains indispensable in a world increasingly driven by technology (see Figure 13).

To what extent do you agree or disagree that "Digital skills are essential for future jobs/careers in Society 5.0"?

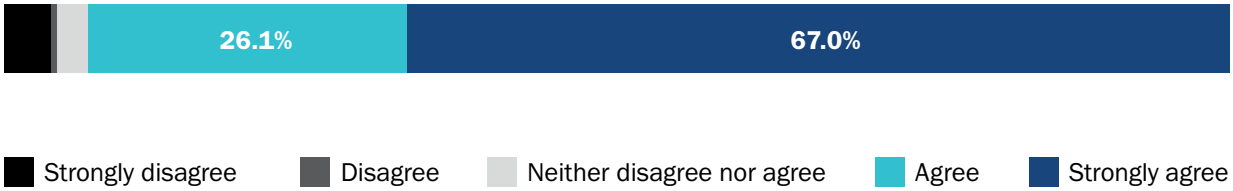


Figure 13. Importance of Digital Skills of Digital Skills for Future Jobs/Careers in Society 5.0

Jaseel CHARUVIL KUNNUMMAL, India
Co-Founder, Khoj India

"As technology evolves and new tools emerge, with the old being replaced by disruptive innovations at the core, the need for digital skills to upgrade becomes evident, highlighting the necessity to continuously learn, unlearn, and relearn. The demands of future jobs and careers will keep evolving. Those who lack either the willingness or the privilege to continue the learning process may suffer from a knowledge gap and the technological divide. It is time to consider how we can promote continuing and extension education beyond educational institutions.

2.5. Youth Confidence in Digital Skills

While young people overwhelmingly recognise the importance of digital skills for success in Society 5.0, their level of confidence in these abilities also plays a crucial role in their preparedness for the future. The data reveals that, on average, respondents feel moderately to very confident in their digital skills, with a majority expressing high levels of self-efficacy. This strong sense of digital readiness is evident, as 41.4% of participants describe themselves as very confident, and 14.5% as extremely confident in their digital capabilities. A smaller portion of respondents—around 7.1%—report feeling only slightly confident or not confident at all.

Overall, the data reflects a predominantly positive outlook regarding digital readiness for Society 5.0, with a clear majority feeling confident or very confident, though efforts to address gaps in confidence will be important for ensuring broad-based digital competency in the future.

Maja KALIN, Slovenia
Board Member,
European Students' Union (ESU)

> Digital literacy has significantly improved in the past years, especially among younger generations, who use technology in daily life and even in education. While many of us feel confident in our basic digital skills, the demands of Society 5.0 go beyond what we are taught in our formal education. Many countries have made progress in integrating digital education, but there is still room for improvement, especially when it comes to specialised digital training programmes. It's important to understand that advanced skills like data analytics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital ethics are becoming crucial for future jobs, and we need to stay up-to-date with these trends.

Gender Differences

Males tend to exhibit stronger self-efficacy. They reported a higher average confidence score (3.74 out of 5) compared to females (3.53), indicating that men generally feel more assured in their digital abilities (see Figure 14). A larger proportion of males describe themselves as very confident (44.5%) or extremely confident (18.1%) in their digital skills, compared to females (very confident: 38.9%, extremely confident 11.5%).

These findings point to a potential gap in digital confidence that could be addressed through targeted support and training to further empower female respondents, ensuring progress towards the achievement of SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

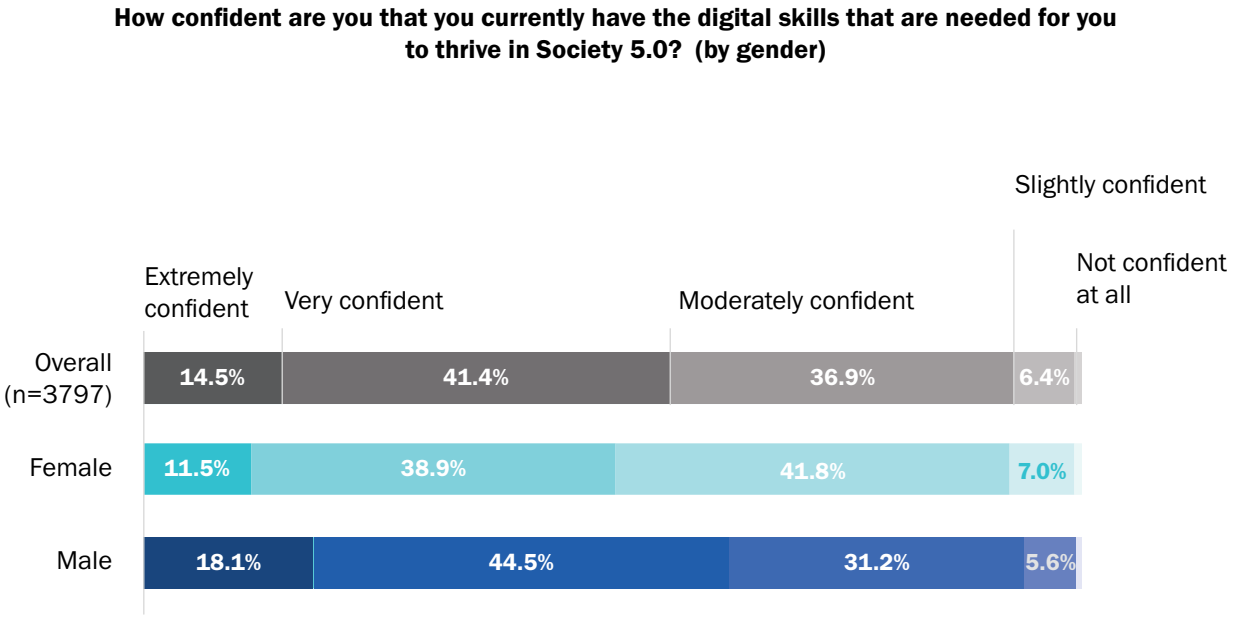


Figure 14. Confidence in Digital Skills for Thriving in Society 5.0 (by Gender)

Regional Variations

When comparing confidence in digital skills between regions, there are some differences in how youth from Asia and Europe perceive their digital proficiency. Asian respondents reported a slightly higher average confidence score (3.64 out of 5) compared to European respondents (3.50).

A higher proportion of Asians described themselves as very confident (42.0%) or extremely confident (15.0%) in their digital skills compared to Europeans, where very confident respondents made up 37.7%, and extremely confident accounted for 11.2% (see Figure 15).

While overall confidence levels are strong across both regions, the slight differences suggest that European respondents may perceive their skills as adequate but perhaps not at the same level of self-assurance as their Asian counterparts.

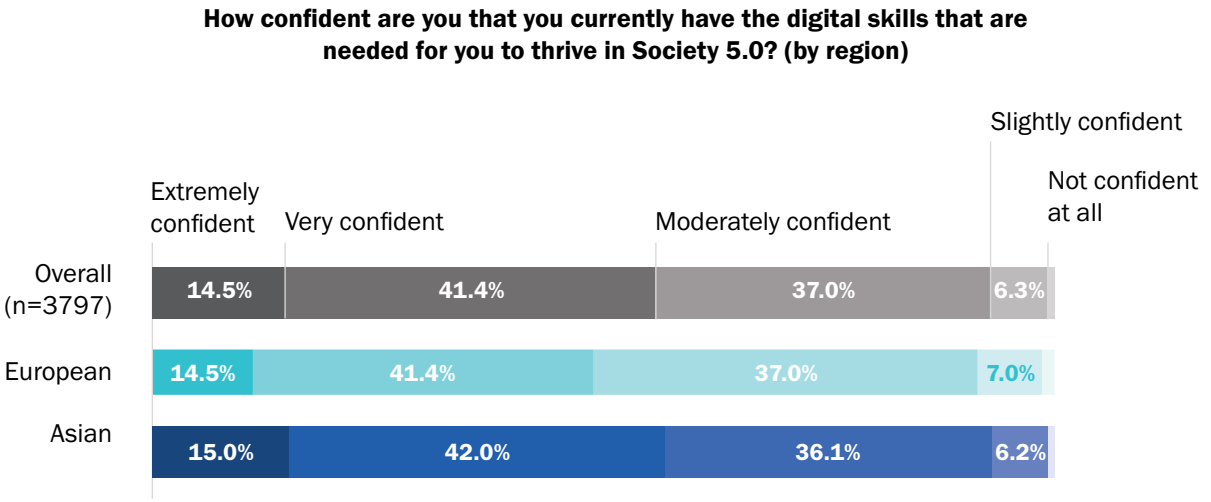


Figure 15. Confidence in Digital Skills for Thriving in Society 5.0 (by Region)

2.6. Pathways to Digital Skills: How Youth Acquire Competences

While a majority of young people feel confident in their digital skills, this self-efficacy is closely tied to how they have acquired these competences. The various pathways to learning reflect the diverse approaches young people take to build the digital proficiency needed for Society 5.0.

The data shows that self-directed learning is the most common method, with 75.6% of respondents indicating they have acquired digital skills on their own (see Figure 16). Formal education also plays a significant role, with 67.9% citing university or tertiary education as a key avenue for digital skill development. Beyond formal education, training courses or boot camps are popular, used by 44.4% of respondents, alongside informal learning from friends and work colleagues, which underscores the importance of personal networks in skill acquisition.

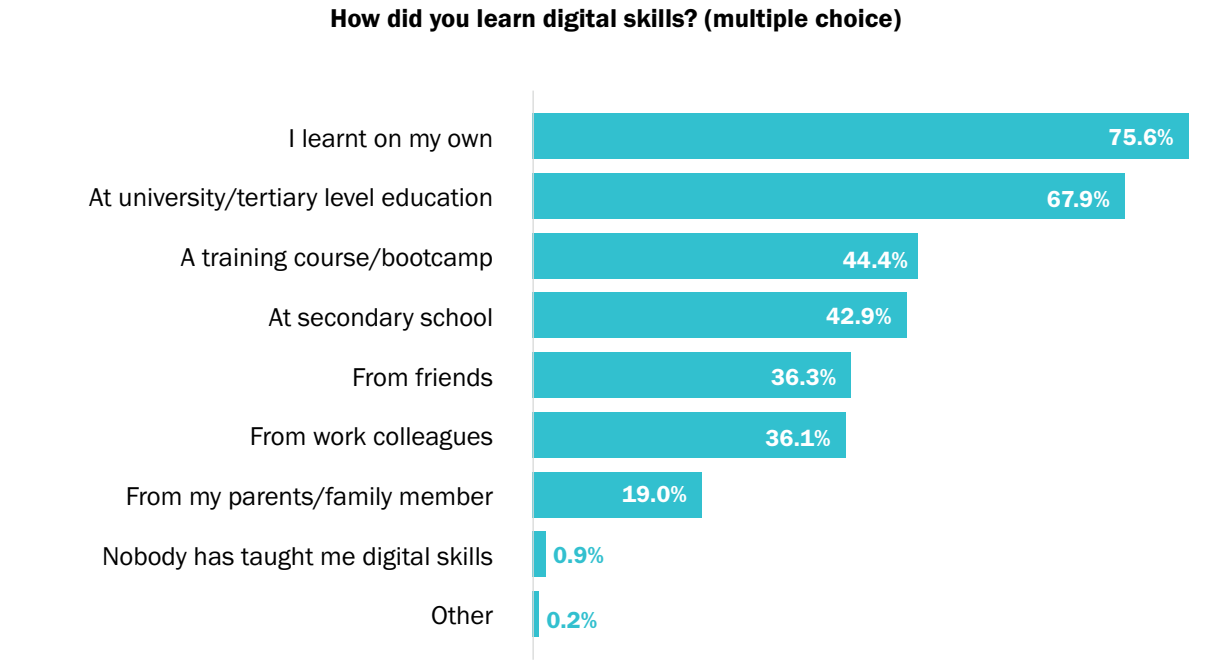


Figure 16. How Youth Acquire Digital Skills

Abdirakhym ASAN, Kazakhstan
Ambassador,
QAZAQ IT Community

> I acquired my digital skills primarily through self-directed learning and hands-on experience, which have been crucial for adapting to the rapid pace of technological advancements. The speed of my skill development was significantly enhanced by the guidance and support of mentors and senior managers who assisted me during the early stages of my journey. While formal education and training courses provide a solid foundation, I believe there is a pressing need for more opportunities that focus on practical, real-world projects, research, and internships. These experiences offer invaluable insights and hands-on skills that are essential for thriving in today's dynamic digital landscape.

These findings emphasise the multifaceted nature of digital skill development, where a combination of self-directed learning, formal education, structured training, and informal networks all play critical roles in shaping digital competencies. The results highlight the need to blend both formal and informal learning methods to build a well-rounded foundation in digital skills, especially as individuals navigate increasingly tech-driven environments.

Gender Differences

The data highlights notable gender differences in how digital skills are acquired. Females reported higher proportions of learning digital skills through secondary school (46.2%) and from parents or family members (21.2%) compared to males, who reported 39.1% and 16.5% respectively in these categories (see Figure 17). This suggests that women may rely more on formal education and family support in their digital skills development.

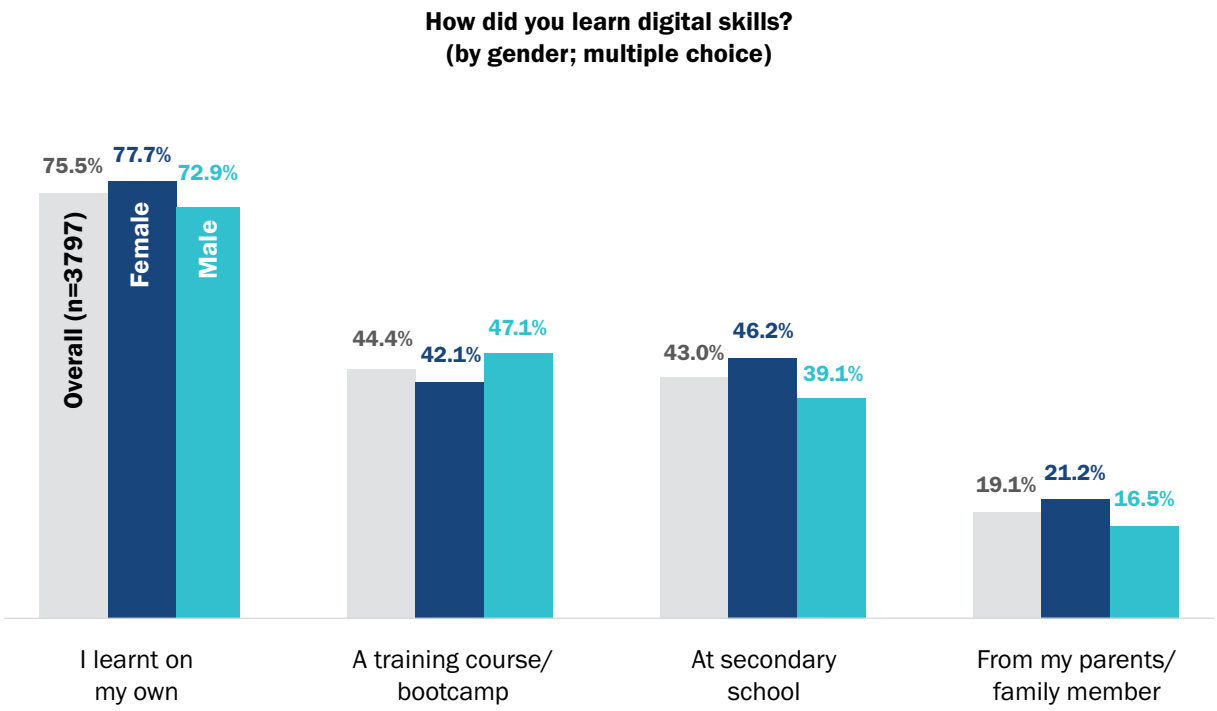


Figure 17. How Youth Acquire Digital Skills (by Gender)

On the other hand, males are more likely to have participated in training courses or boot camps (47.1%), while females reported a lower percentage (42.1%). Despite these differences, both genders engage heavily in self-directed learning, with females showing a slightly higher preference for this method (77.7%) compared to males (72.9%).

Regional Variations

Europeans are more likely to rely on formal education and self-directed learning, with 61.1% reporting that they learned digital skills at secondary schools compared to 40.2% of Asians. Similarly, self-directed learning was more prevalent among Europeans (81.0%) than Asians (74.8%), reflecting a slightly stronger inclination for independent skill acquisition in Europe (see Figure 18).

In contrast, Asian respondents showed a greater tendency to engage in training courses or boot camps, with 45.7% reporting participation in these structured programmes compared to 35.5% of Europeans.

Learning digital skills from parents or family members was reported by both regions but was slightly more common among Europeans (22.6%) than Asians (18.5%).

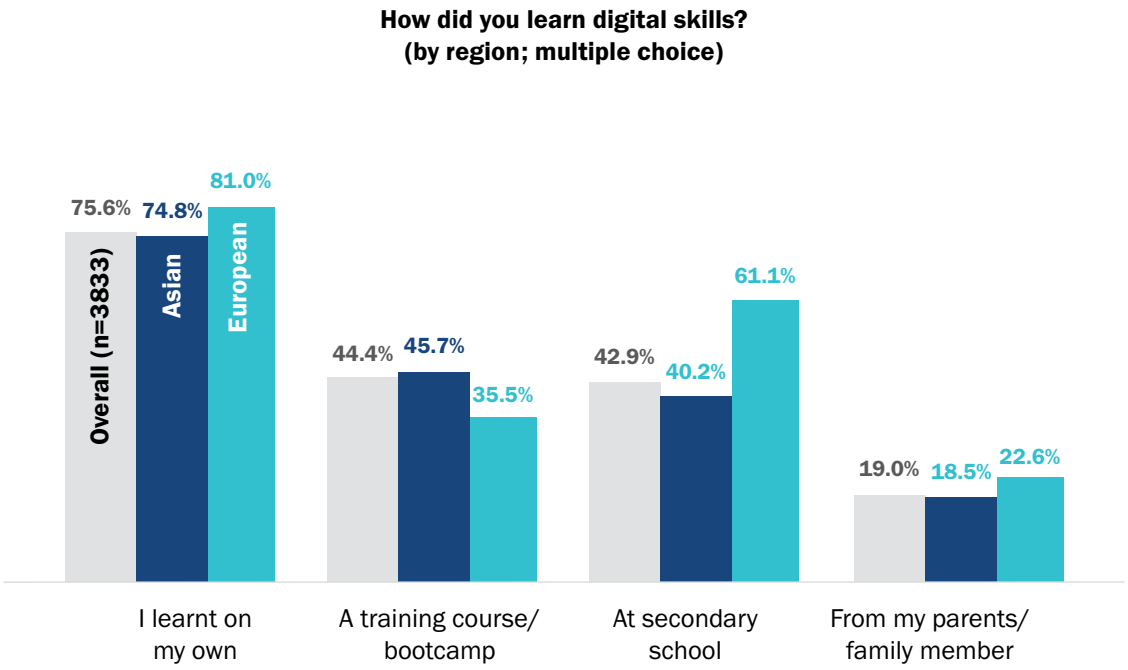


Figure 18. How Youth Acquire Digital Skills (by Region)

2.7. Targeting Technology-related Skills

As young people acquire digital skills through various pathways, their attention turns to which specific technology-related skills they want to develop for the future. The survey highlights a significant preference for combining technical expertise with leadership abilities: 51.6% of respondents prioritise improving leadership soft skills related to using or leading with technology, reflecting the importance they place on leadership as a critical skill in a technology-driven world (see Figure 19).

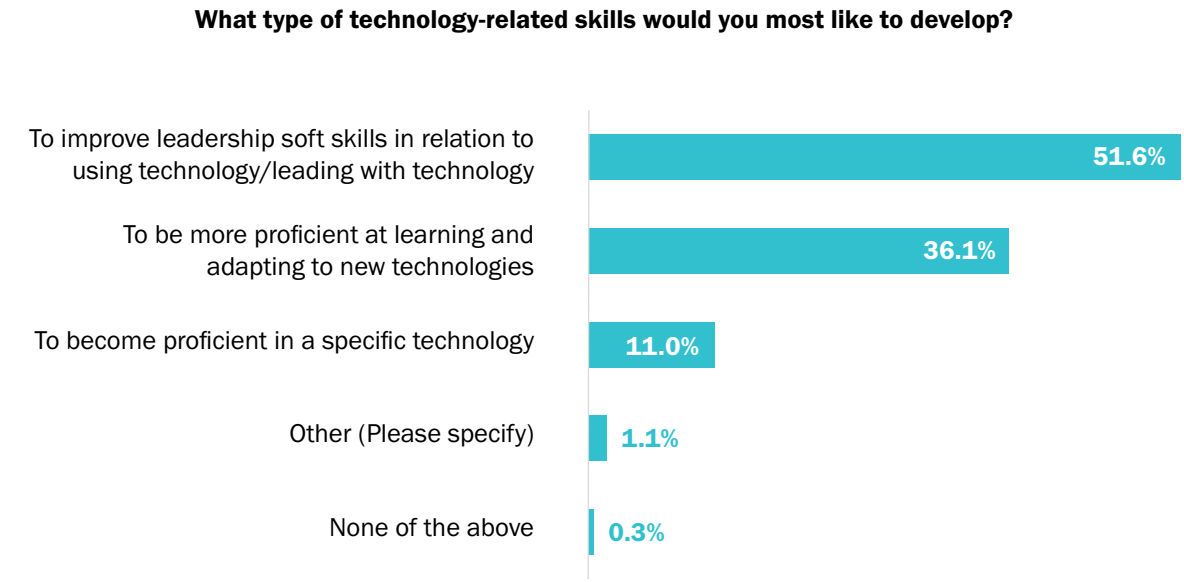


Figure 19. Youth Preferences in Technology-related Skills for Future Development

A notable 36.1% expressed a desire to become more proficient in learning and adapting to new technologies, underscoring the need to stay current with technological advancements. Additionally, 11.0% of respondents are focused on mastering a specific technology, highlighting the niche appeal of specialised expertise in particular tools or platforms.

These findings suggest that while technical proficiency is key, there is a clear emphasis on leadership and adaptability. Youth recognise the need not only to understand technology but also to lead and innovate effectively in tech-driven environments.

2.8. Enhancing Preparedness to Use Technology for Societal Challenges

As young people focus on developing technical proficiency and leadership skills, their readiness to use technology to address societal challenges becomes paramount. Beyond acquiring specific skills, they recognise the broader need for support systems that enable them to fully leverage technology for positive social impact.

The data reveals a strong demand for education and training as the most critical factor, with 83.3% of respondents emphasising the importance of building the necessary skills to engage effectively with technology (see Figure 20). This is closely followed by calls for more resources and support (65.3%), pointing to the need for proper infrastructure and assistance to empower individuals in technological endeavours.

Beyond skill development, youth also recognise the need for improved access to technology and connectivity (64.0%) and awareness of successful solutions (57.5%), illustrating the importance of knowledge-sharing and access to digital tools. These priorities reflect the human-centered values explored earlier, reaffirming the need for technology-driven solutions to be both inclusive and responsible.

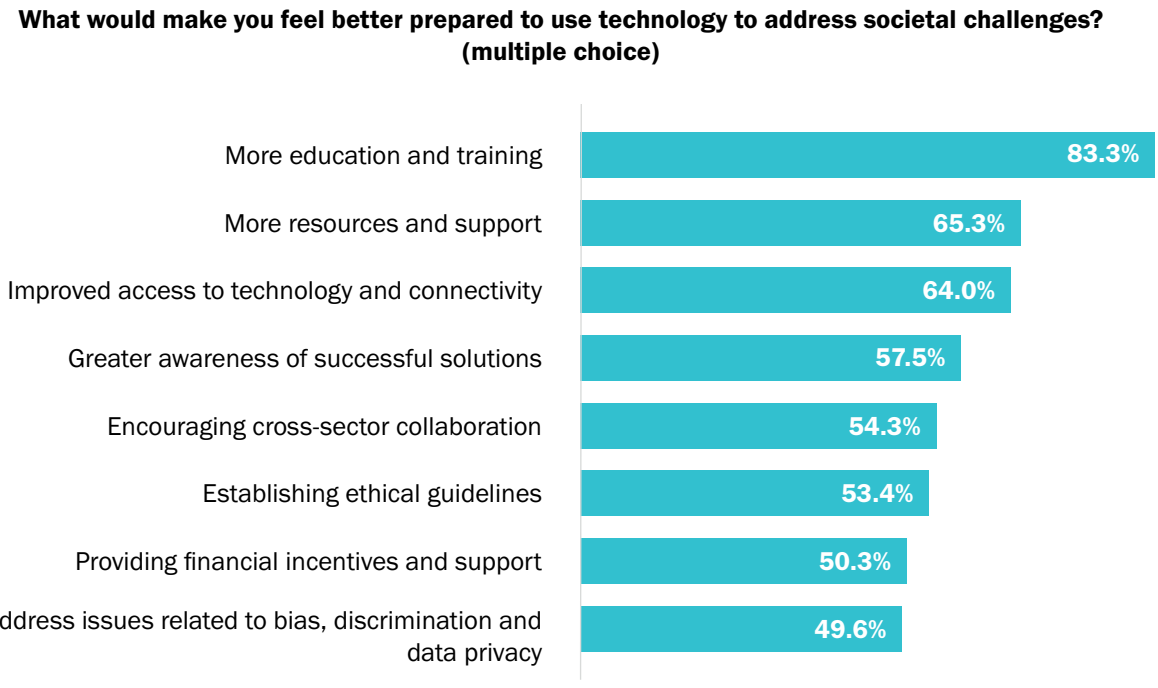


Figure 20. Factors for Better Preparedness in Using Technology to Address Societal Challenges

Regional Variations

Regional disaggregation suggests that Asian respondents consistently feel a greater need for comprehensive support systems, possibly due to regional gaps in education, infrastructure, and financial resources. This is evident in their higher prioritisation of key factors such as more education and training (83.8% vs. 80.0%), resources and support (66.6% vs. 56.9%), and access to technology and connectivity (66.9% vs. 44.3%) compared to Europeans. Asians also highlight the importance of financial incentives slightly more than Europeans (51.1% vs. 44.7%). European respondents, with their slightly lower emphasis, may have more established systems in place in preparing to use technology for societal good.

2.9. Who is Responsible for Developing Digital Skills Outside Formal Education?

As we move from understanding the diverse needs for support systems to help young people engage with technology, the focus shifts to who should take responsibility for developing these critical digital skills outside formal education. While many young people currently rely on self-directed learning to build their digital skills, they also express a clear preference for governments to take on greater responsibility. According to the survey, nearly half of respondents (48.1%) believe that governments should lead this effort through publicly funded upskilling programmes, highlighting a widespread expectation for governmental intervention in enhancing digital literacy (see Figure 20).

Youth recognise the importance of independent learning but also desire structured, government-led initiatives. Such efforts are essential for ensuring equitable access to digital skill development across diverse populations, addressing disparities and fostering inclusivity.

Outside of formal education, who should be most responsible for developing young people's digital skills?

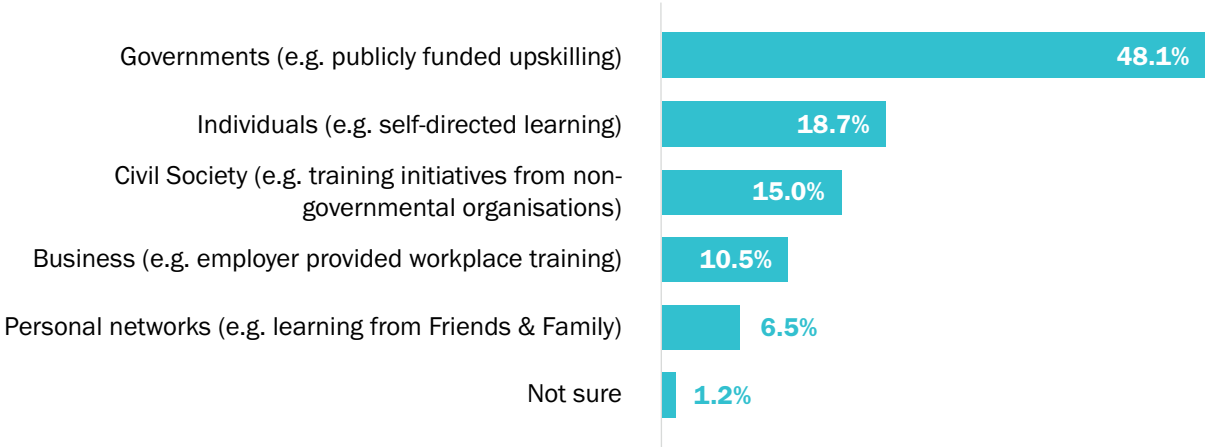


Figure 21. Key Stakeholders Responsible for Developing Young People's Digital Skills Outside Formal Education

However, self-directed learning also plays an important role, with 18.7% of respondents favouring individual responsibility, reflecting the value of personal initiative in skill development. Civil society organisations are also seen as significant contributors by 15.0%, while a smaller proportion believe the responsibility lies with businesses (10.5%) or personal networks (6.5%).

Regional Variations

The data reveals significant regional differences in opinions on who should be responsible for developing young people's digital skills outside of formal education. Asian respondents show a stronger preference for self-directed learning (20.1%) compared to European respondents (8.2%), suggesting a greater emphasis on personal responsibility for skill development in Asia (see Figure 22).

Outside of formal education, who should be most responsible for developing young people's digital skills? (by Region)

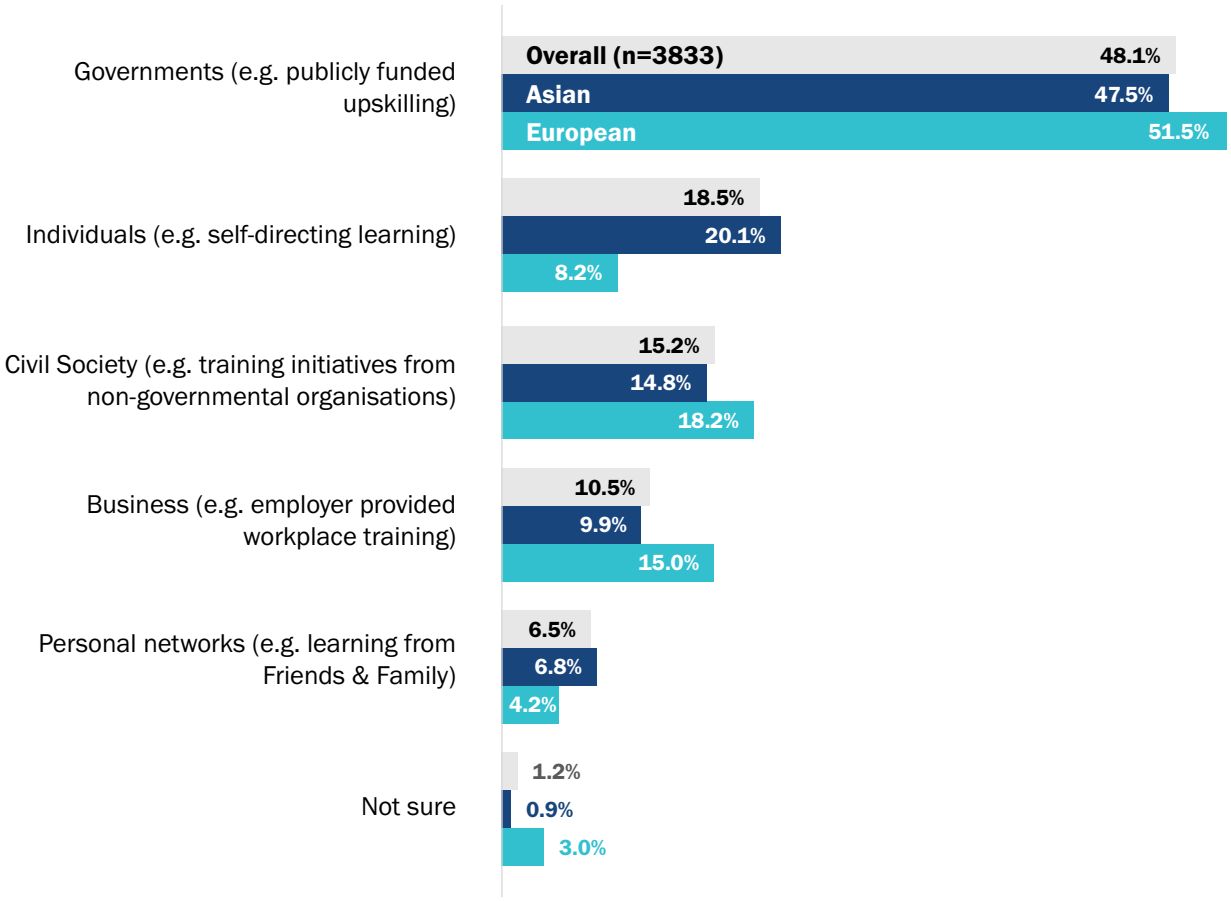


Figure 22. Key Stakeholders Responsible for Developing Young People's Digital Skills Outside Formal Education (by Region)

In contrast, European respondents place more importance on the role of governments (51.5%), businesses (15.0%), and civil society organisations (18.2%) in providing digital skills training. Asian respondents show slightly lower preferences for these institutions, with 47.5% favouring governments, 9.9% for businesses, and 14.8% for civil society.

Regional differences aside, these findings point to a clear preference for government-led initiatives, complemented by personal and societal contributions to ensure the next generation is equipped with the digital competencies necessary for Society 5.0. At the same time, the survey underscores the equal importance of soft skills, such as communication, and problem-solving, alongside digital skills. This brings us to the final element of this discussion: how should we approach the development of soft skills in preparing young people for future leadership roles?

2.10. Who is Responsible for Developing Soft Skills Outside Formal Education?

The survey reveals varied opinions on who should take responsibility for developing young people's soft skills outside formal education. The majority of respondents (26.7%) believe that civil society, including non-governmental organisations, should lead in this area, highlighting the perceived importance of community-driven initiatives (see Figure 23). Personal networks, such as friends and family, and self-directed learning are also seen as significant, with 21.2% and 21.1%, respectively, indicating that soft skills are often developed through informal means.

Governments are viewed as the key player by 20.9% of respondents, with expectations for publicly funded upskilling programmes. However, businesses are seen as less central to soft skills development, with only 9.2% believing employers should provide this training. A small proportion (1.0%) remain uncertain about who should bear this responsibility.

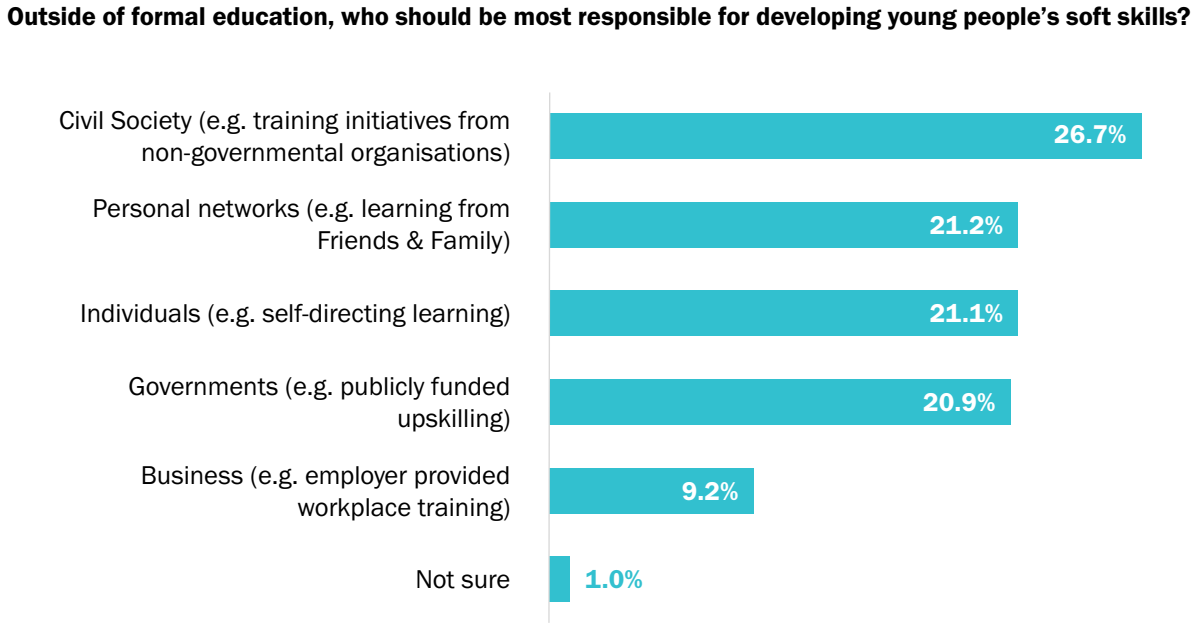


Figure 23. Key Stakeholders Responsible for Developing Young People's Soft Skills Outside Formal Education

Regional Variations

The data shows distinct regional differences in opinions on who should take responsibility for developing young people's soft skills outside formal education. Both Asian and European respondents view civil society organisations as the primary entity responsible for soft skill development, but Europeans show stronger support (32.1%) compared to Asians (25.8%) (see Figure 24).

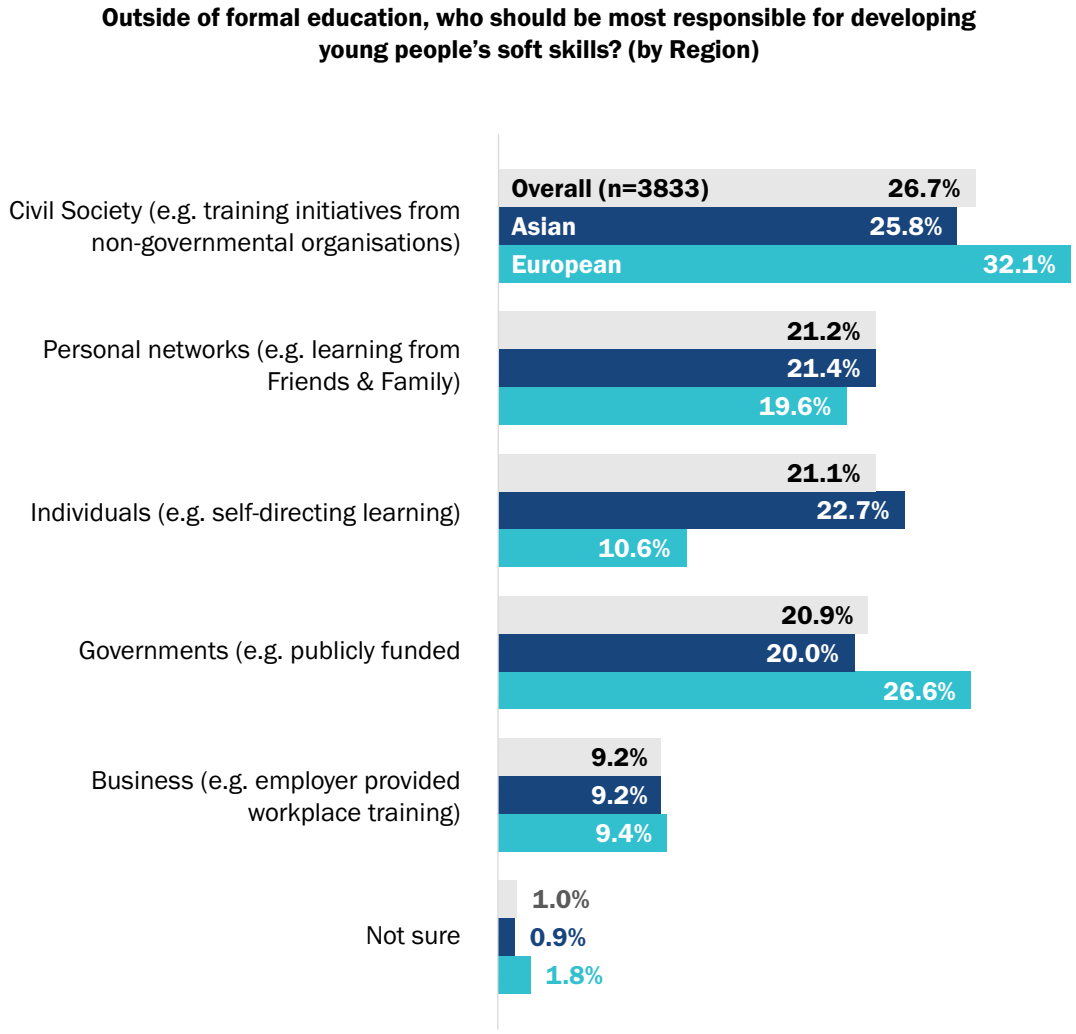


Figure 24. Key Stakeholders Responsible for Developing Young People's Soft Skills Outside Formal Education (by Region)

Governments are seen as the second most responsible by Europeans, with 26.6% favouring publicly funded upskilling programmes, compared to 20.0% of Asians. Conversely, Asians place greater emphasis on self-directed learning, with 22.7% advocating for individuals to take responsibility for their own soft skill development, compared to just 10.6% of Europeans.

These regional differences point to varying expectations of institutional support for soft skill development, reflecting the relative strength of institutions in each region. European respondents place a stronger emphasis on governments and civil society organisations to lead in developing soft skills, likely reflecting the robust institutional frameworks present in many European countries.

In contrast, Asian respondents show a greater preference for self-directed learning and personal networks, which may indicate a higher emphasis on individual responsibility to learn and maximise available resources online as well as informal community support. This could be a response to varying institutional capacities across different Asian contexts, where formal support for skill development might be less centralised or less accessible.

Taken together, these findings reveal a contrast in how respondents view the responsibility for developing soft skills versus digital skills. While governments are overwhelmingly seen as the primary agent for digital skills development, especially through publicly funded upskilling, the responsibility for soft skills is perceived to lie more with civil society organisations (26.7%). Furthermore, there is greater reliance on personal networks and self-directed learning for soft skills development (21.2% and 21.1%, respectively), compared to the stronger emphasis on government-led and formal training for digital competencies.

The regional variations add another layer of distinction. European respondents place more importance on institutional support, with both governments and civil society playing major roles in developing soft skills, while Asians are more inclined towards self-directed learning and personal networks for soft skills cultivation.

This contrast reflects youth beliefs that digital skills require structured, institutional support, while soft skills are viewed as more naturally developed through community and informal learning methods, tailored to regional educational and cultural contexts.

Federico VALOTTO, Italy
Project Manager,
Echoes

> The difference in expectations for who should lead in developing digital skills versus soft skills likely stems from how these skills are perceived in society.

Digital skills are often seen as essential for economic competitiveness and employability in the modern world, and governments are viewed as having a responsibility to equip all young people with these skills, much like literacy and numeracy. In contrast, soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence, are seen as more context-specific and tied to personal development. Civil society organisations, which often focus on community and interpersonal development, are therefore seen as better suited to foster these abilities.

As for businesses, their focus on productivity may lead them to prioritise technical competencies over investing in the holistic development of young people. However, in a world where topics are increasingly interconnected, where economic issues are intertwined with social necessities, sustainability goals, and inclusivity, soft skills are becoming essential in both civil society and the business environment. The future of work demands greater collaboration and interconnectedness.

In this evolving scenario, soft skills such as teamwork, empathy, the ability to facilitate discussions, and fostering positive relationships with colleagues will become critical assets not only for civil society but also for the business sector.

2.11. Summary of Findings: Empowering Future Leaders for Society 5.0

The findings from the survey highlight a wide ranging but nuanced understanding among youth of the evolving skills and competencies required to lead in Society 5.0. Young people are not only aware of the impending changes in core work skills, but they also emphasise the need for continuous skill adaptation to meet the demands of a rapidly advancing technological landscape. The majority anticipate that job requirements will shift significantly over the next decade, driven by technology and other factors, signalling the need for forward-thinking leadership preparation.

Central to this preparation is the ability to balance soft skills and technology-related hard skills. While digital proficiency is considered indispensable for success, young people also recognise the critical importance of soft skills—such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership abilities—in navigating the complexities of Society 5.0. This reflects a broad consensus that future leaders must be equipped with both technical expertise and strong interpersonal capabilities to effectively lead in an increasingly digital world.

Youth also express a strong confidence in their digital skills, with a majority feeling well-prepared for the future. This sense of self-efficacy is largely influenced by the diverse pathways to digital skill acquisition, with self-directed learning, formal education, and informal networks all playing significant roles. However, despite their confidence, young people recognise the need for continuous learning and development, particularly in relation to emerging technologies and leadership skills.

When it comes to targeting technology-related skills for leadership development, there is a clear emphasis on improving leadership soft skills related to using and leading with technology, as well as staying adaptable to new technological advancements. This suggests that youth are not only focused on becoming proficient in specific tools but also in leading teams and organisations through technological change.

The question of who should take responsibility for developing these essential skills reveals important regional and cultural variations. Governments are overwhelmingly viewed as the primary agent for digital skills development, reflecting expectations for institutional support in building digital literacy. However, soft skills development is seen as a more collective responsibility, with civil society playing a leading role, alongside personal networks and self-directed learning. These differences highlight the importance of a multi-faceted approach that combines institutional, community, and personal efforts to develop a new generation of leaders.

In conclusion, preparing young leaders for Society 5.0 requires a balanced focus on both technical proficiency and leadership soft skills, with strong support from governments, civil society, and personal networks. By fostering this combination of skills, we can ensure that the next generation is well-equipped to navigate the complexities of a tech-driven future while remaining grounded in human-centred values.

Recommendations

Preparing for Leadership in Society 5.0

As we envision the future of Society 5.0, it becomes evident that equipping young people with the right skills, values, and support systems will require collaborative efforts across sectors. These recommendations, tailored for youth, youth organisations, and decision-makers, address the diverse needs identified in the survey and aim to foster an inclusive and sustainable path forward. By championing human-centred technology solutions and development and building robust support systems, we can empower the next generation to lead confidently in a tech-driven world.

Government

Youth

The Future Youth Wish to See - Promotion of Human Values in Technology

01 Incorporate values such as fairness, empathy, and justice into the design and implementation of technological solutions. Develop and enforce clear ethical guidelines governing technology use to ensure transparency and accountability, addressing concerns about data privacy and algorithmic bias.

02 Engage youth and multi-stakeholder representatives in advisory panels to ensure cross-sector perspectives on value-integration in decision-making. These advisory panels should meet regularly and produce actionable reports that inform policy decisions that are taken into consideration.

03 Actively advocate for the incorporation of human values in technological developments, ensuring that ethical considerations are prioritised in innovations. Consider forming coalitions or networks amongst youth organisations to collectively advocate for these values across platforms.

Embracing Society 5.0

04 Share case studies and examples of impactful technological solutions across regions through awareness campaigns that highlight successful uses of technology in addressing societal challenges, providing models that inspire youth engagement in tech-driven innovation.

05 Expand outreach to youth who do not identify as 'leaders' and tailor the approach for promoting dialogue on societal challenges in Society 5.0 and skills development targeted for them, through workshops or community forums.

Preparing Young Leaders for Society 5.0

06 Expand publicly funded upskilling programmes, including recognition of micro-credentials, to meet the growing demand for digital proficiency among youth. Ensure that existing programmes are up-to-date and relevant, and create age-specific strategies that recognise the different life stages that youth are in.

07 Develop cross-regional strategies that integrate both soft skills (leadership adaptability) and hard skills (technical proficiency) in both formal and non-formal curricula, that recognise cultural expectations regarding education and skill development, engaging local stakeholders to ensure relevance.

08 Implement initiatives to bridge the confidence gap in digital skills between genders.

09 Encourage partnerships between civil society, businesses, and public institutions to enhance skill development initiative, sharping best practices and resources for digital literacy and leadership development.

This report underscores the significant opportunities and challenges in preparing young people for Society 5.0. While youth envision a future where technology advances human-centred values, they are keenly aware of the ethical and structural gaps that must be addressed. Achieving this vision will require targeted efforts to develop both digital and leadership skills, alongside stronger institutional support and ethical safeguards. By responding to these priorities with focused, actionable strategies, stakeholders can empower young people not just to participate in Society 5.0, but to shape it in ways that are inclusive, responsible, and sustainable.

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Annex: Survey questions

Key Question 1: What is the future, or Society 5.0, that young people wish to see?

1. What do you think are the three biggest societal challenges? *(multiple option – select 3)*
    a. Poverty reduction and income inequality
    b. Access to quality education and healthcare
    c. Combatting racism and discrimination
    d. Promoting civil discourse and reducing polarisation
    e. Improving mental health and well-being
    f. Addressing immigration and refugee issues
    g. Advancing gender equality and women's rights
    h. Combatting drug addiction and substance abuse
    i. nsuring healthcare for the elderly and an aging population
    j. Access to clean water and sanitation
    k. Sustainable consumption and production
    l. Climate change and biodiversity conservation
    m. Access to meaningful work and economic opportunities

1a. Do you think there are any other big societal challenges, not mentioned above? *(short answer text) (not required)*

2. Technology can help us address societal challenges but there are also inherent risks. What do you think are the potential drawbacks of using technology to address societal challenges? *(multiple option – select all that apply)*
    a. Dependence on technology
    b. Reduced human interaction and empathy
    c. Bias and discrimination in algorithms and data
    d. Data privacy and security issues
    e. Ethical concerns
    f. Exacerbation of societal inequalities
    g. Cost and access barriers
    h. Lack of transparency and accountability
    i. Undermining human agency and autonomy
    j. Unintended negative consequences

3. From your perspective, what role does social media play in addressing societal challenges? *(single radio)*

   → it impedes progress significantly

   → it impedes progress

   → it neither impedes progress nor is it a force for good

   → it's a force for good

   → it's a significant force for good

4. What is the most important human value that young people like you stand for? *(short answer text)*

5. Why is this human value so important? (Please provide your response in a paragraph of up to 1000 characters, about 140-150 words) *(long answer text box)*

6. From your experience, to what extent are leaders of your country taking into account human values (like the one you stand for) in the implementation of technological solutions in your society? *(single radio)*

   → not at all

   → very small extent

   → some extent

   → large extent

   → very large extent

7. To what extent should human values (like the one you stand for) be integrated in technological solutions and innovations? *(single radio)*

   → not at all

   → very small extent

   → some extent

   → large extent

   → very large extent

Key Question 2: How do we prepare and train young leaders for this future society?

8. Society 5.0 is characterised as a 'human-centered society that balances economic advancement with the resolution of social problems, through the use of technology'.

In your opinion, how far are we from realising Society 5.0? *(single radio)*

→ It is already upon us

→ In the short term (within the next 5 years)

→ In the medium term (5 to 10 years)

→ We are far from it (10 years or more)

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that "Digital skills are essential for future jobs/careers in Society 5.0"? *(single radio)*

→ Strongly disagree

→ Disagree

→ Neither disagree nor agree

→ Agree

→ Strongly Agree

10. How confident are you that you currently have the digital skills that are needed for you to thrive in Society 5.0? *(single radio)*

→ Not confident at all

→ Slightly confident

→ Moderately confident

→ Very confident

→ Extremely confident

11. What is more important to be developed between soft skills or technology-related hard skills? *(single radio)*

→ Soft skills (like communication and problem solving) are more important

→ Technology-related hard skills (like coding and programming) are more important

→ Both equally important

12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that "The core skills needed to perform your current work or future job will change in the next 5-10 years"? *(single radio)*

    → Strongly disagree

    → Disagree

    → Neither disagree nor agree

    → Agree

    → Strongly Agree

13. What would make you feel better prepared to use technology to address societal challenges? *(multiple option – select all that apply)*

    a. More education and training

    b. More resources and support

    c. Greater awareness of successful solutions

    d. Improved access to technology and connectivity

    e. Addressing issues related to bias, discrimination and data privacy

    f. Encouraging cross-sector collaboration

    g. Establishing ethical guidelines

    h. Providing financial incentives and support

14. How did you learn digital skills? *(multiple option)*

    Formal learning

    a. At Secondary School

    b. At University/Tertiary level education

    c. A training course/boot camp

    d. From work colleagues

    Informal /self-directed learning

    e. I learnt on my own

    f. From my parents/family member

    g. From friends

    h. Nobody has taught me digital skills

    i. Other

15. What type of technology-related skills would you most like to develop? *(single radio)*

    → To be more proficient at learning and adapting to new technologies

    → To become proficient in a specific technology

    → To improve leadership soft skills in relation to using technology/leading with technology

    → Other (Please specify)

    → None of the above

16. Outside of formal education, who should be most responsible for developing young people's digital skills? *(single radio)*

    → Governments (e.g. publicly funded upskilling)

    → Businesses (e.g. employer provided workplace training)

    → Civil Society (e.g. training initiatives from non-governmental organisations)

    → Personal networks (e.g. learning from Friends & Family)

    → Individuals (e.g. self-directed learning)

    → Not sure

17. Outside of formal education, who should be most responsible for developing young people's soft skills? *(single radio)*

    → Governments (e.g. publicly funded upskilling)

    → Businesses (e.g. employer provided workplace training)

    → Civil Society (e.g. training initiatives from non-governmental organisations)

    → Personal Networks (e.g. learning from Friends & Family)

    → Individuals (e.g. self-directed learning)

    → Not sure

Visual Explainer

Leadership entails determining a position, charting a course, and heading towards a destination. It means navigating around various obstacles – concrete ones like roadblocks or soft ones like different views – and sailing through weather conditions as harsh as moral dilemmas. But are the manners of and tools for leading equally important as the end goal? And what are the elements – facts, beliefs, values, and practical issues – that influence decisions in navigating towards a certain direction?

Tools such as the compass show that every leadership must come with its own acceptable and effective measures. However, one has to be constantly alert and sensitive towards possible internal and external forces that might meddle, manipulate, and mislead one's decision-making process. Only then is the leader a true navigator, able to develop a sense of direction informed by self-awareness and societal needs, and thereby standing up for their chosen course.

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