



YOUTH MEANINGFULNESS INDEX 2025-26

Measuring Meaningfulness among children and youth
across the globe

Voluntās



Our Dream

The **Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI)** was born in 2022 from a simple yet profound dream: to go beyond traditional perspectives of youth and children's well-being and focus on how they experience meaning in their lives, placing them rightfully at the center of this global conversation. We often speak about future generations, but the future of children is shaped today.

Foreword

This report marks an important milestone in the evolution of the Youth Meaningfulness Index.

The first years were about exploration. We wanted to understand whether meaningfulness could be measured in a way that was rigorous, practical, and globally relevant. Today, the evidence gives us confidence that it can. The next chapter is therefore not about proving the concept. It is about putting it to work.

From the very beginning, we also wanted the YMI to be built differently.

Too often, frameworks that seek to understand young people are developed by adults, for adults. We chose a different path. The YMI has been shaped through thousands of conversations with children and young people across cultures and contexts, strengthened through academic collaboration, and continuously refined with the support of our Youth Advisory Council. Young people have not simply participated in the process. They have helped define the questions, challenged our assumptions, and interpreted the findings. In many ways, the YMI has been developed by youth, for youth.

That principle also shapes where we go from here.

We have never believed that meaningfulness should be owned by a single organization. If the YMI is to fulfill its potential, it must become something larger than the project that initiated it. It must become a shared framework that governments, schools, UN agencies, researchers, civil society organizations, foundations, and young people themselves can adopt, challenge, improve, and shape together.

That is why this report is accompanied by the launch of the YMI Toolbox, an open community of practice, and new mechanisms to support organizations that want to apply the framework in their own contexts. Our ambition is no longer simply to publish research. It is to establish meaningfulness as a recognized dimension of youth development and to provide a common framework for understanding and strengthening it across countries, cultures, and generations.

The findings presented in this report are not an endpoint. They are an invitation. An invitation to measure what has too often been overlooked. An invitation to place young people's lived experiences at the center of policy, programming, and practice. And an invitation to help shape the next chapter of the Youth Meaningfulness Index.

Ultimately, the success of the YMI will not be measured by the framework itself, but by whether it helps more young people build lives they themselves experience as meaningful. If this report contributes to that ambition, then this journey has only just begun.





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INTRODUCTION

Why **Meaningfulness**?

Over the past decades, governments, international organizations, civil society, and communities have invested heavily in improving the lives of young people. Healthcare has expanded. Access to technology, information, and opportunities has increased dramatically. Globally, primary and secondary school enrolment increased by 30 per cent between 2000 and 2024, while completion rates rose across all levels of education.¹

Yet progress in access and material conditions has not necessarily translated into young people feeling well, connected, or purposeful. Today, an estimated one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 experiences a mental health condition², while around one in five adolescents reports feeling lonely³. Concerns around mental health and social isolation points to a broader challenge: meeting material needs and expanding access to services, while essential, may not by themselves be enough for young people to flourish.

Youth development therefore faces an important question:

“How do we know whether young people feel that their lives are **meaningful**?”

Most existing youth indicators tell us **what** is happening. Are young people attending school? Are they employed? Do they feel safe? Are they healthy? These indicators are essential, but they reveal relatively little about how young people experience their lives. Meaningfulness provides that missing perspective. Rather than replacing existing indicators, it complements them by helping practitioners understand how young people perceive their relationships, aspirations, engagement with learning, and ability to care for themselves. These experiences often influence how young people respond to opportunities, challenges, and interventions.

Measuring meaningfulness therefore helps shift the conversation from whether services are delivered to whether young people are genuinely flourishing.

This question sits alongside questions—not instead of—health, education, employment, and safety. A young person may be healthy, enrolled in school, and physically safe, yet still struggle to find purpose, belonging, or confidence in their future. Meaningfulness therefore represents a distinct dimension of youth development, one that deserves attention in its own right.

A growing body of evidence suggests that meaningfulness is closely associated with many of the outcomes that organizations already seek to improve. Research among adolescents has linked a stronger sense of meaning in life with greater resilience and life satisfaction, better mental health and academic adjustment, stronger social support, and greater civic and prosocial engagement.^{4 5 6}

Importantly, meaningfulness should not be viewed simply as another outcome of successful programmes. It can also act as a protective resource that enables young people to navigate difficult transitions, recover from setbacks, and continue investing in their future even when circumstances are challenging.

For practitioners, this means that strengthening meaningfulness may contribute to improvements across multiple domains simultaneously, making it both an outcome worth measuring and a pathway towards broader development goals.



FRAMEWORK

Defining YMI

The Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) is a practical framework for understanding, measuring, and strengthening meaningfulness amongst young people aged 8–25 years.

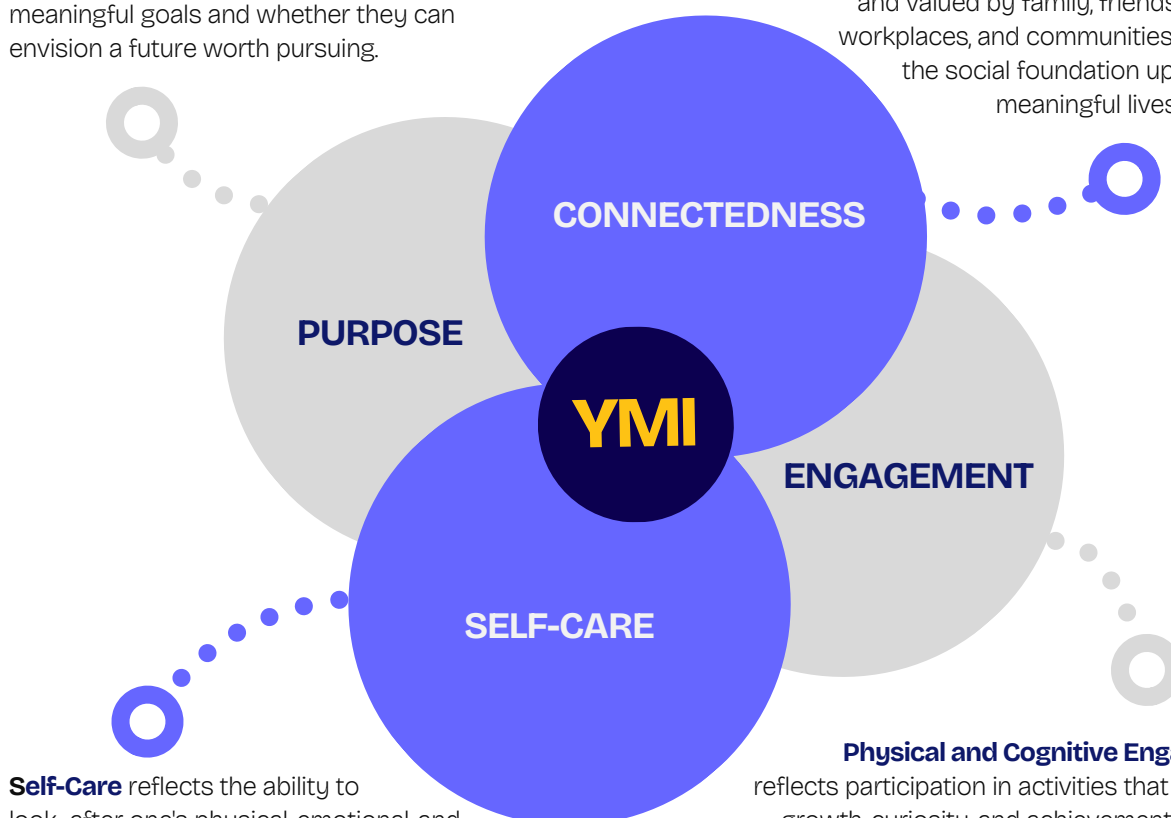
It recognises meaningfulness not as a fixed trait, but as something shaped by young people's environments, opportunities, experiences, and choices.

YMI complements traditional measures of education, employment, safety, health, and

participation by exploring whether these experiences contribute to lives young people themselves perceive as meaningful. Rather than prescribing what makes life meaningful, the YMI and its drivers were shaped through an iterative, youth-centred process across diverse contexts. The framework's origins and development are documented in the YMI Toolkit and previous YMI report, available through the [YMI website](#).⁷

Purpose reflects a young person's sense of direction and aspiration. It captures whether they feel their actions contribute to meaningful goals and whether they can envision a future worth pursuing.

Social Connectedness reflects the quality of relationships and a sense of belonging. Feeling accepted, supported, and valued by family, friends, schools, workplaces, and communities provides the social foundation upon which meaningful lives are built.



Self-Care reflects the ability to look after one's physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Young people are better able to pursue their aspirations and navigate life's challenges when they possess the habits and resources that sustain their health and resilience.

Physical and Cognitive Engagement reflects participation in activities that stimulate growth, curiosity, and achievement. Whether through learning, creative pursuits, work, sport, volunteering, or problem-solving, meaningful engagements help youth develop competence, confidence, and a sense of contribution.

Together, these four drivers provide a holistic understanding of meaningfulness. They are mutually reinforcing rather than independent; strengths in one area often support growth in others, while challenges in one domain may affect overall meaningfulness.

The YMI framework is designed to move beyond measurement towards action. Organizations can use it to identify areas where youth are thriving and where additional support is needed, design programmes that strengthen

meaningfulness, monitor changes over time, evaluate the impact of interventions, and meaningfully involve young people in shaping decisions that affect their lives.

YMI is therefore more than a survey instrument or an index. It is a practical decision-making framework that helps governments, schools, NGOs, researchers, foundations, and international organizations place young people's lived experiences at the centre of programme design, policy, and evaluation.

Advocate for systemic change

The YMI's uses extend well beyond any single programme cycle. YMI data aggregated at the city, national, or global level gives civil society organizations, researchers, and policymakers a credible basis for advocacy.

Data showing that engagement scores drop sharply as young people transition to adulthood, or that girls consistently report lower self-care scores than boys, becomes an argument for policy change that is grounded in young people's own experience.

At the level of educational design, YMI findings can directly inform what gets taught and how: shaping curricula, teacher training, and school environments to better reflect what actually drives meaning for young people.

And within organizations, the four drivers give teams a shared language for talking about youth well-being across different programmes, geographies, and partners, replacing each team's own vocabulary with a common framework grounded in evidence.



Examples of How YMI Can Be Used

Measuring meaningfulness is only the starting point. What makes the YMI useful is what happens next: organizations and communities taking the data and turning it into something concrete.

1 Diagnose Challenges

Examples of How YMI Can Be Used

Driver scores pinpoint where gaps are greatest: is it a lack of purpose, weak social bonds, poor self-care, or limited opportunities for engagement? A school in Morocco used the YMI to discover that self-care was the lowest-performing driver among adolescents (age 13-17), with particular gaps in mental health and introspection. That finding shaped what came next. The YMI replaces guesswork with data that comes directly from young people's own words.

3 Monitor Outcomes

Regularly track youth wellbeing across four drivers

Run the YMI at regular intervals, for e.g. monthly or at the start of each term, to track how young people are doing across the four drivers as your programme unfolds. This creates an ongoing monitoring system grounded in well-being rather than attendance rates or test scores alone. Over time you can see which groups are improving, which are not, and where you may need to adjust. The YMI gives your monitoring a consistent structure that holds across different activities and different groups.

5 Track changes over time

Better understanding of youth needs over time

Repeated use of the YMI across years builds a longitudinal picture of how meaningfulness evolves. You can observe whether scores shift as young people move through age groups, how the arrival of a new programme changes things, or how external events, such as conflict, economic pressure, or health crises, affect youth well-being across the four drivers. For organizations with multi-year programmes or those working in fast-changing environments, this is one of the most powerful uses of the YMI: a consistent measure across time.

The six examples below illustrate what applying the YMI actually looks like in practice. Each one corresponds to a real challenge that practitioners face, and shows how the four drivers give you a structured lens to act on.

2 Design Programmes

Use findings to shape activities that address what matters most.

Driver scores pinpoint where gaps are greatest: is it a lack of purpose, weak social bonds, poor self-care, or limited opportunities for engagement? A school in Morocco used the YMI to discover that self-care was the lowest-performing driver among adolescents (age 13-17), with particular gaps in mental health and introspection. That finding shaped what came next. The YMI replaces guesswork with data that comes directly from young people's own words.

4 Evaluate Impact

YMI as an intervention tool

Use the YMI as a pre- and post-intervention tool to assess whether your programme made a measurable difference. Compare baseline and endline scores across all four drivers, and for specific sub-groups by age or gender. In Peru, partners used the YMI before and after their school-based intervention to evaluate the effect of the educational environment on student well-being. The result is evidence of impact that speaks directly to the experience of young people, and that can be shared credibly with funders, government partners, or your own community.

6 Youth Participation

Better youth participation

The YMI can be more than something done to young people, it can be done with them. Share findings with your youth group and invite them to interpret what the data means in their own context. Let them prioritise which gaps matter most and co-design activities in response. In Ukraine, young people were actively involved in reading their YMI results and shaping initiatives based on what they found. This turns data collection into a genuine participation process and gives young people ownership over the decisions that shape their lives.

ABOUT YMI

YMI Survey **2025-26**

The Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) 2025 draws on responses from **3,421 youth** across six countries: **Algeria, Denmark, Kenya, Mexico, Senegal, and Ukraine**. The sample reflects a diverse range of geographic, social, and cultural contexts, enabling a comparative understanding of meaningfulness across different environments.

Data collection was carried out using a **mixed approach**, combining both online and in-person methods depending on the context. In **Mexico, Denmark, and Senegal**, responses were collected through an online survey administered in partnership with a data collection agency. This approach enabled broad outreach and participation across different regions within these countries.

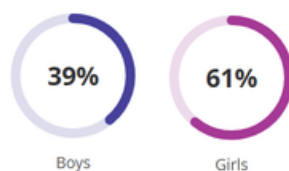
In contrast, data collection in **Algeria, Kenya, and Ukraine** was conducted in person, in collaboration with civil society organizations and academic partners. This approach allowed for deeper engagement with young people, particularly in contexts where access to digital platforms may be limited or where in-person facilitation supports better participation.

The sample is predominantly composed of **adolescents, aged 13-17 (61%)**, followed by **young adults, aged 18-25 (32%)**, and a smaller proportion of **children, aged 8-12 (7%)**. In terms of gender distribution, **61%** of respondents identify as **girls** and **39%** as **boys**.

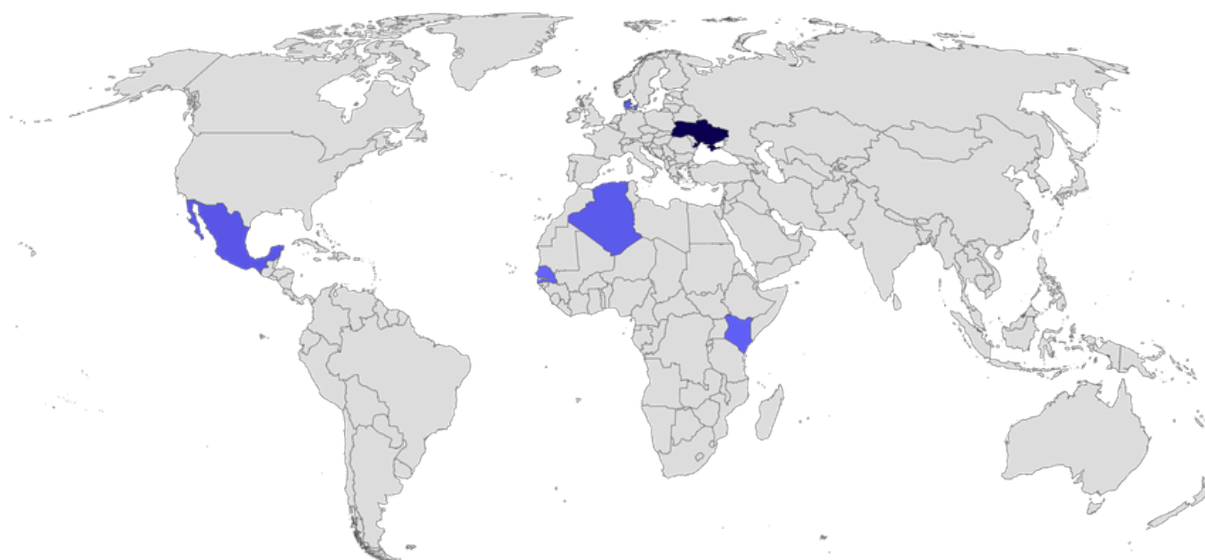
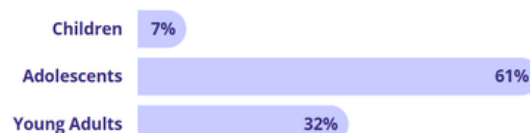
RESPONDENTS

3421

GENDER



AGE DISTRIBUTION

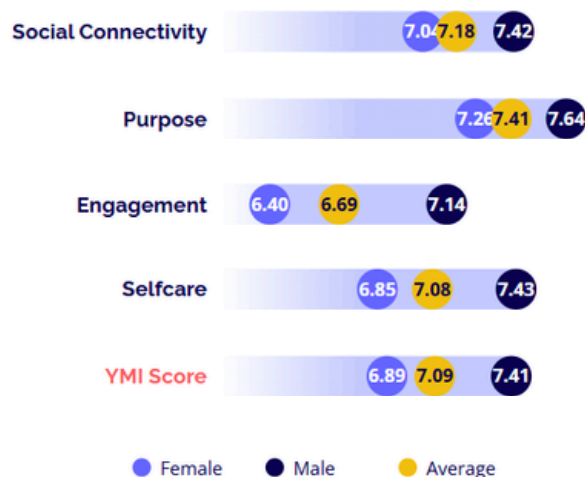


Across age groups, adolescents (age 13-17) consistently report the highest scores across all drivers, with an overall YMI score of **7.47**, compared to **7.08** among children (age 8-12) and **6.36** among young adults (age 18-25). This pattern is visible across all four drivers. For instance, **Purpose** scores **7.75** among adolescents, compared to **7.42** among children and **6.75** among young adults, while **Engagement** shows a sharper decline from **7.20** among adolescents to **5.68** among youth.

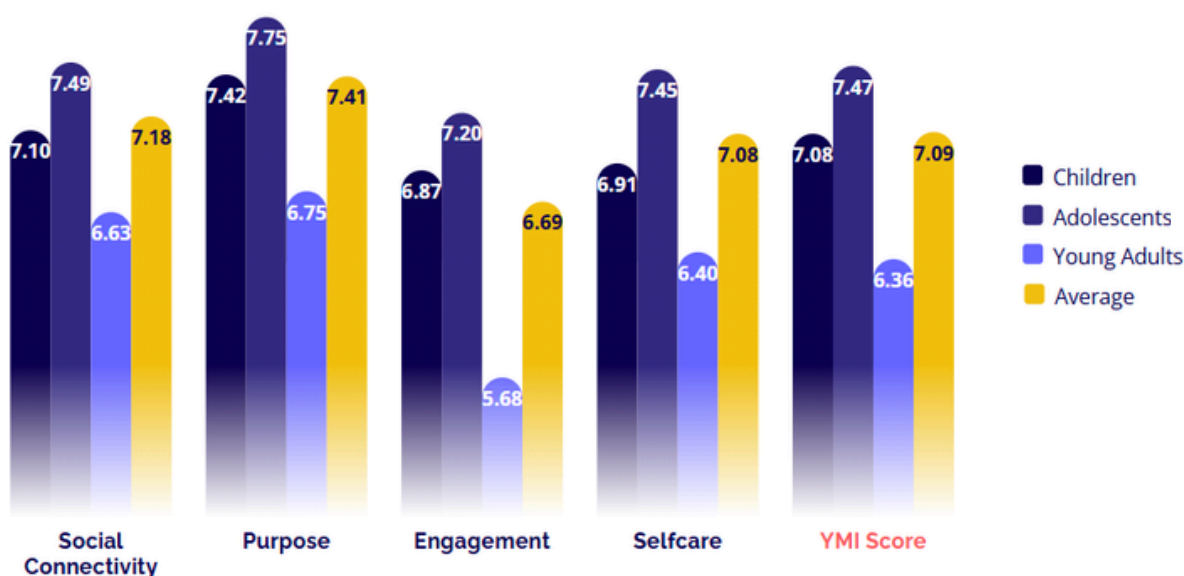
Overall, **Purpose** scores the highest (**7.41**), followed by **Social Connectivity** (**7.18**) and **Self-Care** (**7.08**), while **Engagement** is notably lower at **6.69**. While young people report strong aspirations and relationships, their levels of active participation, creativity, and physical engagement are comparatively weaker, highlighting Engagement as the key area of difference within the index.

Across gender, the differences are more moderate but still consistent. Boys report higher scores than girls across all drivers, with an overall score of **7.41** compared to **6.89** among girls. The largest gaps appear in Self-Care (**7.43** for boys vs. **6.85** for girls) and Engagement (**7.14** vs. **6.40**), suggesting that boys report greater participation in activities and slightly stronger well-being practices.

This trend suggests that while meaningfulness remains strong during adolescence (age 13-17), it declines as young people transition into adulthood. The drop is particularly pronounced in Engagement and Self-Care, indicating potential pressures or constraints that emerge during this life stage.



Despite these differences, **Social Connectivity** and **Purpose** remain relatively strong across both genders, indicating that relationships and aspirations continue to be central to one's sense of meaningfulness regardless of gender or age.



INSIGHT

Key Insights

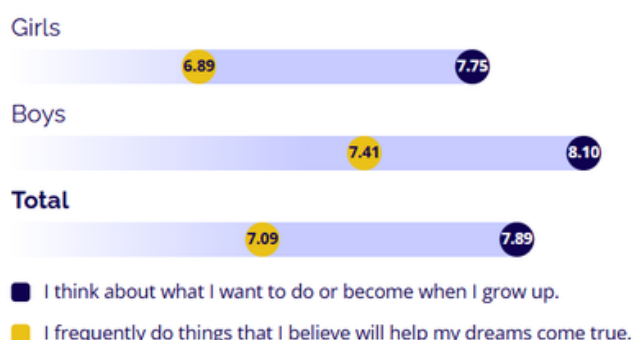
Youth development has an aspiration problem, not a dreaming problem.

Purpose emerges as the strongest driver of meaningfulness among youth. Yet a closer look at the individual statements within this driver reveals an important gap between aspiration and action.

Across the sample, young people report high agreement with the statement “I think about what I want to do or become when I grow up,” which receives an average score of 7.89. By contrast, the statement “I frequently do things that I believe will help my dreams come true” scores significantly lower at 7.09.

This pattern appears consistently across demographic groups. Boys report slightly higher scores than girls on both statements, with boys scoring 8.10 compared to 7.75 among girls for thinking about their future, and 7.41 compared to 6.89 for taking actions toward their dreams. While the differences are not dramatic, they point to a persistent gender gap in both aspirations and perceived agency. This pattern is also visible across all ages, indicating that the gap between imagining a future and actively working toward it is not confined to a particular stage of youth.

Responses to the open-ended question “What helps you feel that your life has purpose or meaning?” offers insight into how young people understand this pathway from aspiration to action. Many respondents point to education and learning as the means through which they can pursue their dreams, sharing reflections such as “Learning new skills makes me feel like I’m growing,” “Studying will help me achieve my future dream,” and “Studying builds a bright future.”



For many youth, particularly those from economically and socially vulnerable communities, education is not only a personal aspiration but also a pathway toward stability, opportunity, and the ability to support their families.

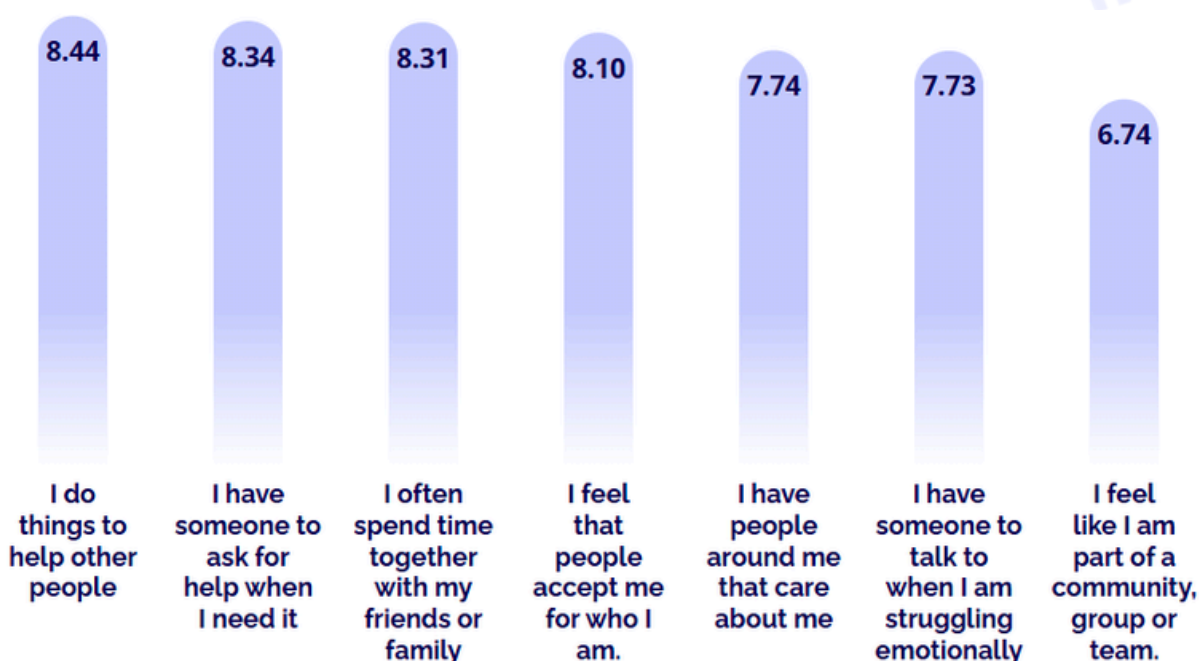
The global challenge is belonging, not relationships.

Social connectivity significantly enhances the sense of meaning in young people's lives, evidenced by strong personal support networks. Meaningfulness emerges from two types of connection: Close relationships which includes friends, family and trusted people individual, and Collective belonging to a community and shared identity. Data suggests that the former is strong but the latter is weaker.

Youth report particularly strong agreement with statements related to mutual support and everyday social interaction. The statement "I do things to help other people" receives the highest score at 8.44, followed by "I have someone to ask for help when I need it" (8.34) and "I often spend time together with my friends or family" (8.31). Similarly, a large proportion of youth report feeling accepted for who they are, with the statement "I feel that people accept me for who I am" scoring 8.10. These scores suggest strong interpersonal bonds and reciprocal relationships.

At the same time, the depth this relationship moves around practical support rather than emotional support. Indicators related to emotional support show slightly lower scores. While many young people report having someone to talk to during emotional struggles (7.73) and people around them who care about them (7.74), these scores suggest that emotional openness and deeper support may be somewhat less consistent than everyday social interaction.

The most notable gap emerges in the statement "I feel like I am part of a community, group or team," which receives the lowest score in this driver at 6.74. This suggests that while youth often feel connected to individuals in their lives, fewer feel strongly embedded within broader communities or collective groups. It could also point to the youth social life being relational rather than institutional. They feel supported by individual relationships, but many may not feel strongly connected to larger communities or collective identities.



Young adulthood is where aspirations meet reality.

In theory, as young people move into young adulthood, we might expect stronger community participation, greater agency toward goals, more autonomy in lifestyle and deeper societal integration. Our data, however, suggests that young adults (age 18-25) report lower engagement with several meaningful activities and social experiences. It is not a decline in meaningfulness but a transformation in how it is experienced. While several indicators related to engagement and belonging decline during this life stage, measures linked to learning, reflection, and personal values become significantly stronger.



Young adults report comparatively lower scores on several statements that capture external engagement and lifestyle activities. For example, the statement “I feel like I am part of a community, group or team” scores 6.09 among young adults compared to an overall average of 6.74. Similarly, “I frequently do things that I believe will help my dreams come true” scores 6.39, lower than the overall average of 7.09.

Other indicators related to everyday engagement also drop, including doing creative activities (5.90 compared to 6.82) and choosing physical activities (5.35 compared to 6.45). Even indicators on rest and leisure show similar patterns, with young adults (age 18-25) reporting lower scores for taking time to rest (6.30) and doing fun things (6.51), suggesting that as young people move into adulthood, opportunities for exploration, recreation, and community participation may become more limited.



At the same time, young adults report very high scores on statements related to learning, reflection, and value formation, indicating a growing emphasis on internal development. The statement “I often look for opportunities to learn new things” scores 8.86, while “I think about why I make certain choices” scores 8.32. Similarly, “I am learning what is important to me, like my values” receives a score of 8.18, suggesting that youth adults are actively engaging in processes of self-awareness and personal decision-making at this stage of life.

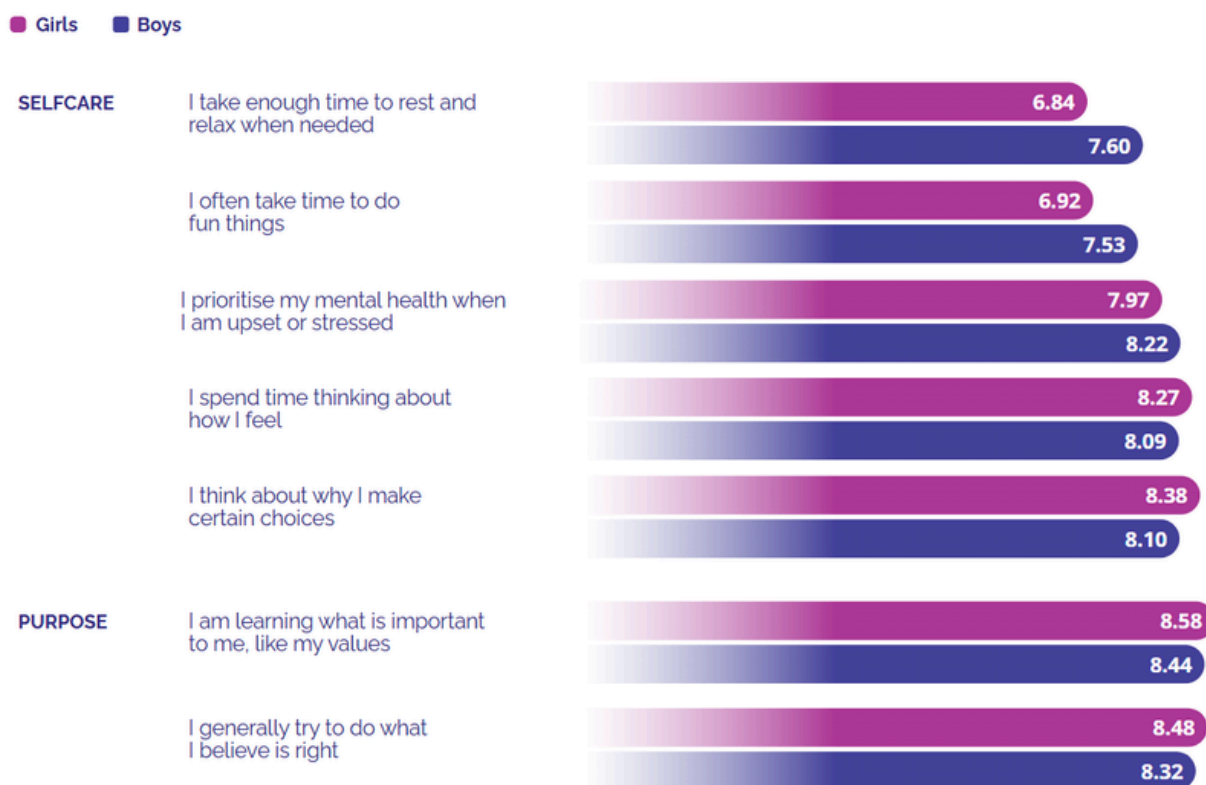
Girls and boys follow different pathways to meaningfulness

Gender pattern shows two different ways of realization of meaningfulness amongst youth. Girls score higher on statements related to introspection, emotional awareness, and values. Thinking about how they feel: 8.27 (girls) vs 8.09 (boys), Thinking about why they make certain choices: 8.38 vs 8.10, Learning what is important to them (values): 8.58 vs 8.44, Trying to do what they believe is right: 8.48 vs 8.32. These differences are not huge, but they are consistent across several statements. This suggests that girls may engage more in reflective meaning-making, where meaningfulness comes from understanding emotions, values, and choices.

At the same time, boys report higher scores on several statements related to practical aspects of well-being and leisure. The statement "I take enough time to rest and relax when needed" scores 7.60 among boys compared to 6.84 among girls, representing one of the largest gender gaps in this set of statements.

Similarly, "I often take time to do fun things" scores 7.53 among boys compared to 6.92 among girls. Boys also report slightly higher agreement with "I prioritise my mental health when I am upset or stressed," scoring 8.22 compared to 7.97 among girls.

Data suggests that girls are highly aware of their emotions, as reflected in their higher reflection scores, but this does not necessarily translate into more time for rest or recovery. Girls' lower scores on rest and leisure may reflect a range of factors beyond personal preferences. One possible explanation is that social expectations, household responsibilities, or restrictions on mobility may limit the time and space available for rest, recreation, and self-care. Further research would be needed to understand the factors underlying this pattern.



For many youth, the internet is both a social space and a coping mechanism

The findings from this year's survey shows the growing role of digital spaces in how youth experience connection and manage their emotional well-being. For many respondents, online platforms are not only for entertainment but also means for social interaction.

For many young people, the internet is both a social space and a coping mechanism

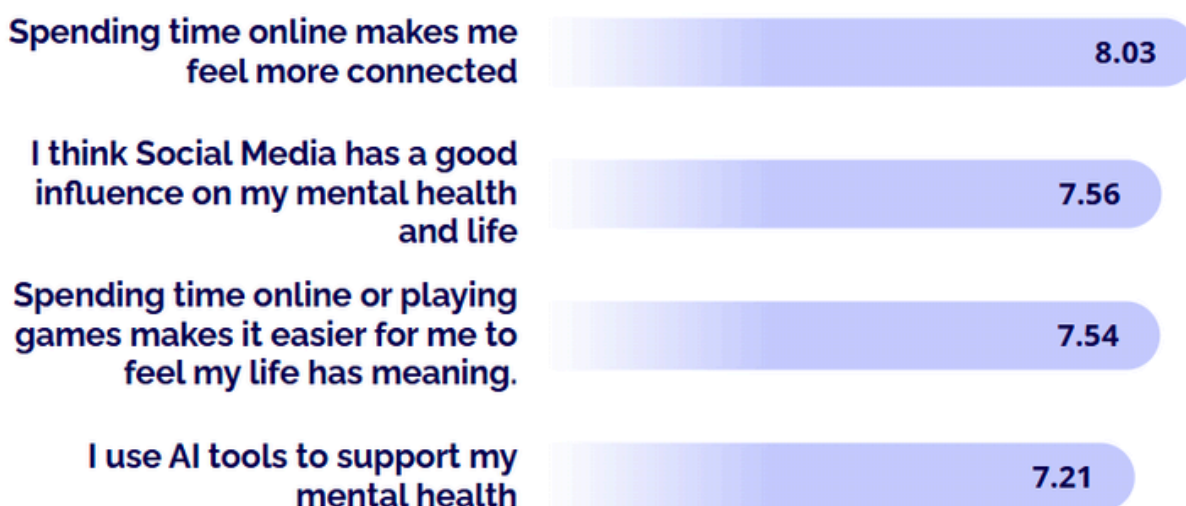
The findings from this year's survey highlight the growing role of digital spaces in shaping how young people experience connection and manage their emotional well-being. For many respondents, online platforms are not only spaces for entertainment but also means for social interaction.

The statement "Spending time online makes me feel more connected" scores 8.03, which is relatively high, showing that for some young people, digital relationships may compensate for limited offline connections. The sentiment is also echoed in qualitative responses where a twelve-year-old boy from Algeria says, "What matters to me is my phone and the internet because I have online relationships." The statement "I use AI tools to support my mental health" scores 7.21, which is notable given how new these technologies are. This aligns with global trends where youth increasingly use technology-mediated support systems.

The statement "I think social media has a good influence on my mental health" scores 7.56. This

suggests that young people do not necessarily view digital spaces as harmful by default; many perceive them as supportive or beneficial. In response to the question "What do you do to feel better when you're tired, sad, or stressed?", several participants mentioned turning to the internet or their phones. One respondent noted, "I often resort to the internet or sleep." These responses indicate that digital spaces may serve as a readily accessible coping strategy when young people experience stress or emotional distress.

The findings suggest that digital environments are becoming deeply embedded in how young people navigate both connection and emotional regulation. Rather than viewing digital engagement solely through the lens of screen time, it may be more useful to recognize the ways in which digital environments are increasingly intertwined with how young people build relationships, seek support, and manage their emotional experiences.



CASE STUDY

From Insight to **Action**

The findings presented in this report highlight that meaningfulness is shaped not only by individual characteristics, but also by the environments, opportunities, and relationships that surround young people. While many young people report strong aspirations and supportive personal relationships, the findings also reveal recurring gaps in translating aspirations into action, fostering a sense of community belonging, maintaining engagement during the transition to adulthood, and creating equitable opportunities for self-care and participation.

These patterns suggest that strengthening meaningfulness requires moving beyond programmes that focus solely on outcomes such as education, employment, or health. Policies and interventions should also create conditions that enable young people to act on their aspirations, participate meaningfully in their communities, maintain supportive relationships, and develop the capabilities needed to navigate life transitions. As digital environments become increasingly important spaces for connection and emotional support, they too should be recognised as part of the ecosystem in which meaningfulness is experienced.

Importantly, these findings do not point towards a single universal solution. Rather, they demonstrate the value of measuring meaningfulness as a way of understanding how young people experience their lives within different contexts. By identifying where meaningfulness is strengthened or constrained, organisations can design more responsive programmes, monitor change over time, and make more informed decisions that place young people's lived experiences at the centre of policy and practice.

The following section shows this approach through a case study, demonstrating how the YMI framework can be applied to move from measurement to action.

ILLUSTRATED EXAMPLE

YMI in Action

The case study below is a simulated instance, designed to show what the full YMI cycle from baseline to endline could look like in practice: how an organization might use the YMI to identify gaps, design a response, and measure what changed.

TURNING YMI DATA INTO ACTION

The Story of Amal

organization: Amal Youth Centre
Location: North Africa
Duration: 8 Months

Target Group: Adolescents aged 13-17 attending a community youth centre

Amal Youth Centre has been running after-school activities for youth in their neighbourhood for six years. Staff felt something was missing as attendance was decent, but young people seemed disengaged and activities felt routine. Staff could not pinpoint the problem, and they did not have

data to back up their instinct that something needed to change.

A partner organization connected Amal to the YMI, helping them develop a clear understanding of the situation and a targeted response plan within a few months.

Step 1: Running the Survey

Amal administered the YMI to 74 young people aged 13-17 attending the centre regularly. The survey was completed in Arabic during a regular session, with three YMI staff members available to clarify questions. It took around 30 minutes.

The YMI team provided a simple guidance document and a short briefing call. No specialist research skills were required. Results were shared back with Amal within two weeks, broken down by driver and by gender.

What the data showed

Overall meaningfulness scores were in the mid-range. Purpose was the highest-scoring driver (7.6), with young people reporting clear aspirations for their futures. Social Connectedness was moderate (7.2), sustained mainly by close friendships rather than any deeper sense of community belonging.

Three gaps were flagged clearly

- 1 Self-Care** was the weakest driver, scoring 6.1. Rest, relaxation, and mental health all fell below 6.0.
- 2 Physical and Cognitive Engagement** scored 6.4. Creative and physical activities had dropped sharply among older adolescents aged 15-17.
- 3 Girls scored notably lower** than boys on both drivers.

Step 2: Making Sense of the Data with Young People

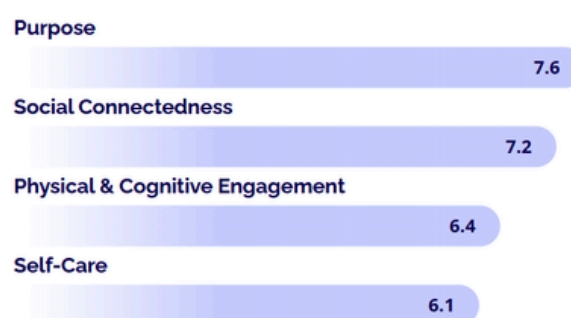
Amal and YMI staff presented findings to three groups of young people in separate sessions, organised by age. Rather than explaining the results, they asked open questions: Does this feel true to you? What is missing in your week? When did you last do something that felt genuinely energising?

The conversations were striking. Young people were not surprised by the self-care gap and described being constantly busy, under pressure from school, with little time that felt truly their own. Several girls said they could not remember the last time they had done something just for themselves. The engagement findings resonated too: older adolescents said the activities on offer felt designed for younger children, and they had quietly stopped attending some of them.

"I come here because it is better than being at home alone. But I do not really feel like anything here is for me anymore."

- Girl, 16, Amal Youth Centre

By the end of the sessions, a clear picture had emerged. The centre's programme had not kept pace with its older members. And the mental load many young people were carrying was invisible to staff



Step 3: Designing a Response

In response to the findings and discussions, Amal did not fully redesign their entire programme. Instead, they made two focused, low-cost changes that addressed the two lowest-scoring drivers directly.

Neither intervention required external expertise or significant funding. Any youth centre could have done them. The reason they hadn't done them before was not a lack of resources. It was that they did not know precisely enough what was missing in young people's experience. Once the YMI gave them that clarity, the response was obvious.

A weekly rest and reflection space addressing Self-Care

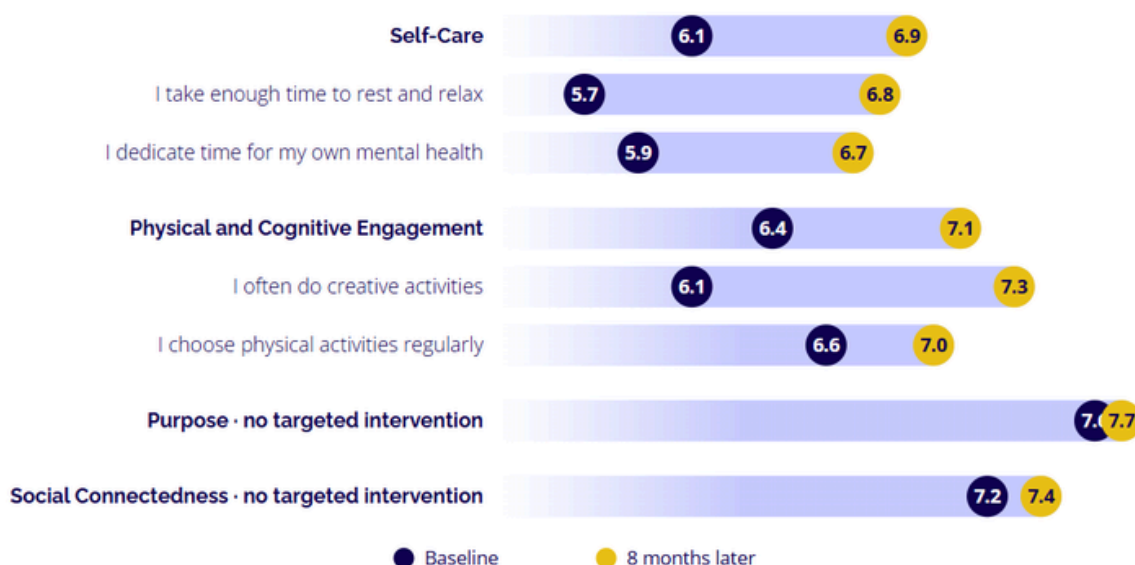
Every Wednesday, a quiet room was set aside for one hour, with no activities, phones or pressure. Young people could rest, journal, draw, or simply sit. A staff member was present but did not lead. Within a month it was one of the most popular sessions at the centre, particularly among girls aged 15 and over.

A youth-led activities programme addressing Engagement

Older adolescents were invited to propose and lead one activity per month. The first month produced a photography walk and a debate on local issues. Staff stepped back. Young people stepped forward. The activity budget was small; the shift in ownership was significant.

Step 4: Measuring What Changed

Eight months after the baseline, Amal ran the YMI again with the same group. Results showed consistent improvement across the two target drivers, with the largest shifts in the specific statements that had flagged most clearly at baseline.



What Amal Took Away

1

The survey surfaced what conversation alone had not

Staff had sensed disengagement for months but could not locate it. The YMI gave them a specific, structured picture, not just that something was wrong, but what was wrong, for whom, and in which part of young people's experience.

2

Young people knew the answer - they just needed to be asked

The data opened the door. The conversations with young people walked through it. Both were necessary. The YMI works best not as a tool that produces answers, but as a tool that produces better questions, and the conditions for young people to answer them.

3

Small changes, clearly targeted, produced real shifts

Amal did not redesign their programme. They added a quiet room and gave older adolescents ownership of one session per month. Those two changes, aimed at the low-scoring drivers, moved the needle more than a full programme redesign might have.

4

The before-and-after comparison gave them something to build on

Having a baseline and an endline meant Amal could make the case internally for continuing and expanding both interventions. The data gave them a language for talking about impact that went beyond attendance numbers or staff impressions.

Amal's story is not exceptional. It is what the YMI cycle is designed to produce: a clearer picture, a more deliberate response, and evidence of change that belongs to the organization and the young people it works with. If your organization is ready to start its own version of this cycle, the YMI Grant mechanism described on the YMI website is designed to support you.

REFLECTION

The Future of YMI

The Youth Meaningfulness Index was created with a simple ambition: to make meaningfulness a measurable, actionable, and widely used dimension of youth development. This report is another step in that journey. While the findings presented here offer valuable insights into how young people experience meaningfulness today, the greater opportunity lies in enabling organizations around the world to apply the framework within their own contexts.

Over the coming years, YMI will continue to evolve as an open and collaborative ecosystem that supports measurement, learning, innovation, and action.

The YMI Toolbox

To allow organizations to independently implement the framework, YMI is accompanied by a comprehensive toolbox of practical resources, including the survey instruments, methodological guidance, ethical and safeguarding protocols, governance guidance, reporting templates, historical datasets, and resources for integrating meaningfulness into programmes and evaluations

Together, these resources are designed to reduce barriers to implementation and help organizations adapt the framework while maintaining methodological consistency and ethical standards. Whether used in schools, youth programmes, research, humanitarian settings, or national surveys, the toolbox provides a practical foundation for measuring and strengthening meaningfulness.

Innovation through YMI Grants

Meaningfulness is strengthened through action. To encourage innovation and locally driven solutions, YMI will introduce a grants-based

mechanism for organizations, researchers, and youth-led initiatives applying the framework in diverse settings.

These grants will empower partners to test innovative methods, infuse meaningfulness into programs, gather evidence, and share insights that aid in the evolution of the framework. By fostering hands-on experimentation, YMI seeks to cultivate a robust collection of evidence regarding what enhances meaningfulness across various cultural and social contexts.

Building a Global Community of Practice

No single organization can fully grasp or enhance meaningfulness alone. Consequently, YMI's future depends on collaboration across sectors, disciplines, and nations.

We invite governments, UN agencies, schools, universities, civil society organizations, researchers, foundations, and youth-led organizations to contribute to this growing community of practice. Through shared learning, open dialogue, and collaborative research, we can deepen our understanding of meaningfulness, improve how it is measured, and strengthen the evidence that informs youth policy and practice.

Ultimately, YMI is more than an index. It is a shared commitment to ensuring that young people are not only healthier, better educated, or more economically secure, but are also able to build lives they find purposeful, connected, and meaningful. As more organizations join this effort, the framework will continue to evolve—shaped not only by research, but by the experiences, ideas, and aspirations of young people themselves.

METHODOLOGY

Limitations of YMI

The findings presented in this report provide important insights into how young people experience meaningfulness across diverse contexts. As with any cross-country study, however, the results should be interpreted with an understanding of several methodological and contextual limitations.

1

The sample was not nationally representative in each country.

Rather, it provides a diverse sample of young people across different geographic, social, and cultural contexts. Consequently, the findings are intended to identify broad patterns and generate insights, rather than estimate national prevalence or support direct comparisons between countries.

2

The data in this report reflect a single point in time.

One's sense of meaningfulness evolves throughout their lives and may be influenced by changing personal circumstances, economic conditions, conflict, education, employment, or broader societal events. Longitudinal studies will be important for understanding how meaningfulness develops over time and how it responds to different interventions.

3

Meaningfulness varies by culture, language, society, and personal circumstances.

Although effort was made to ensure that survey was appropriately translated and adapted, respondents from different cultural contexts may interpret certain concepts differently. These differences should be viewed as an inherent feature of cross-cultural research rather than as measurement error.

4

This framework captures the key drivers, not every factor that shapes a young person's life.

Meaningfulness is influenced by a complex interaction of individual experiences, family relationships, communities, institutions, and wider social and economic environments. The framework should therefore be understood as a practical tool for informing decision-making rather than a comprehensive explanation of youth well-being.

These limitations do not diminish the value of the findings. Instead, they highlight the importance of interpreting the results within their appropriate context and underscore the need for continued research, wider implementation, and ongoing refinement of this index. As more organizations adopt the framework across different settings, the evidence base will continue to grow, enabling deeper understanding of how meaningfulness can be measured and strengthened among young people.

WHO ARE WE

The People behind YMI

The Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) was established based on the foundational belief that all human beings have the right to live a meaningful life. Everyone – regardless of gender, age, religion, or race – possesses human potential. This potential can be realized through living a life filled with dignity and hope.

Voluntās

Established in 2023, the Voluntās Foundation aims to broaden our engagement and support initiatives that foster just, sustainable, and meaningful human advancement.



The ALV Foundation promotes the emotional abilities of children and young people and the development of a sustainable society.

Gleding

Gleding works to create a world full of empathy, through tools, books, courses and public speaking, allowing others to better understand themselves, connect with others and help make a positive impact in the world.



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