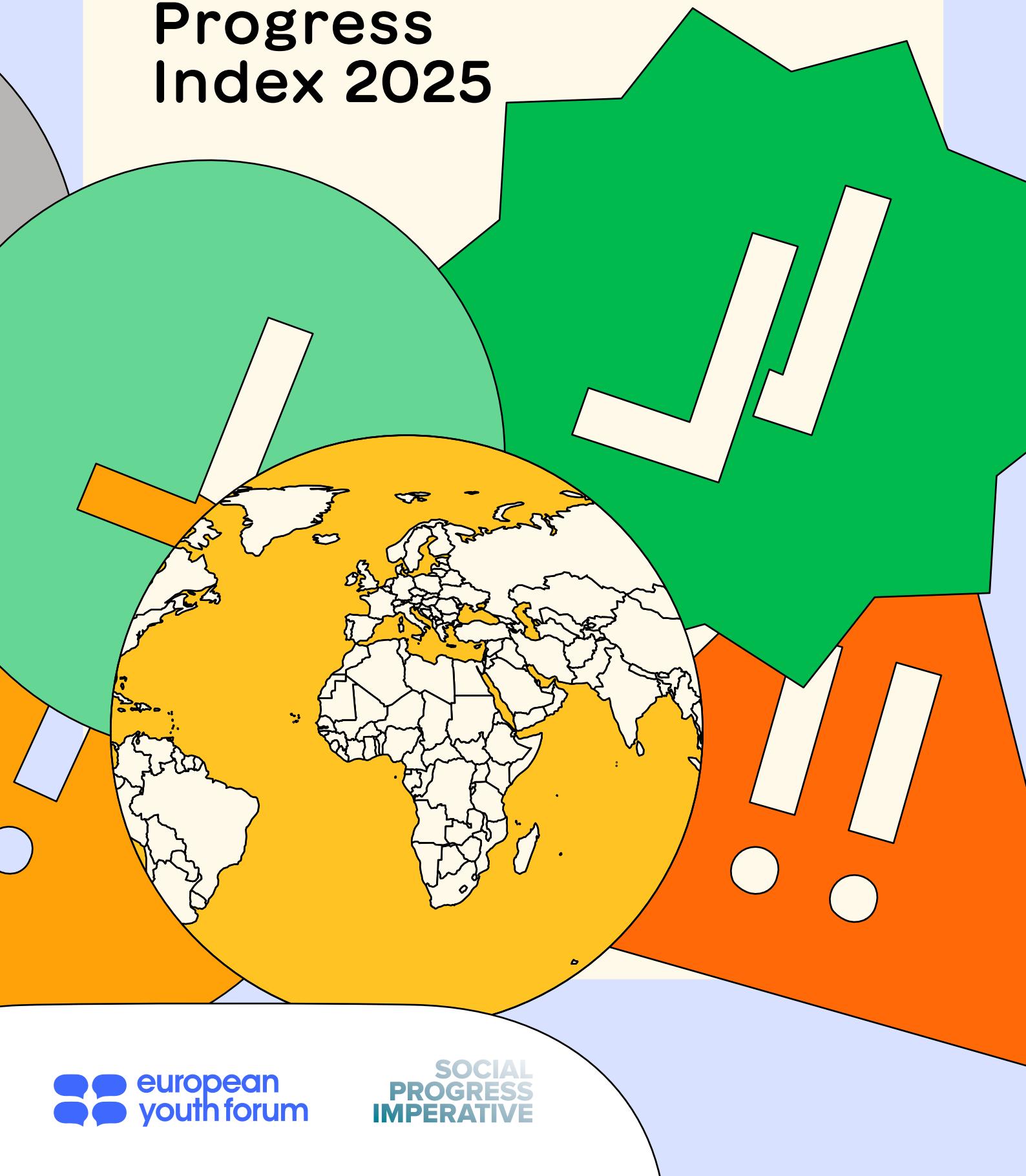


Youth Progress Index

Brussels, Belgium  
November 2025

# Youth Progress Index 2025



## Acknowledgements

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### About the European Youth Forum

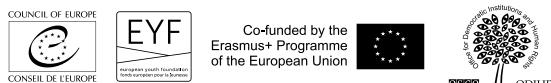
The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. We represent over 100 youth organisations, which bring together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe.

### About Social Progress Imperative

The Social Progress Imperative is a US-based nonprofit focused on redefining how the world measures success, putting the things that matter to people's lives at the top of the agenda. Established in 2012, the Social Progress Imperative strives to improve the lives of people around the world by fostering research and knowledge sharing on social progress, and using data to catalyse action.

### With the support of:

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## Foreword

Young people are a pillar of just, peaceful, and sustainable societies. In countries around the world, they play a key role in defending human rights, promoting peacebuilding, and demanding social justice. With commitment and creativity, they propose innovative solutions to global challenges, seeking action from duty-bearers to ensure a better future for people and the planet.

Today, we have the largest generation of young people in history – 1.9 billion. Yet, as the 2025 Youth Progress Index highlights, young people remain invisible in law, policy, and practice. They face challenges and barriers unique to them by virtue of their age. Too often, they are subjected to discrimination, denied their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and excluded from decision-making processes.

This report provides a snapshot of the status of youth rights worldwide. It applies a human rights lens to comprehensive data and indicators covering the majority of countries, and reveals significant gaps in the realization of youth rights globally: from access to education, healthcare and housing to civil and political rights. As a result, they are held back from participating fully and meaningfully in decisions affecting them, and from reaching their full potential. This has to change.

Based on its findings, this report identifies the root causes of discrimination and suggests pathways to address them, placing young people at the centre.

While stepped up action across a wide range of rights is crucial, there are encouraging signs. For example, there are modest improvements in young people's standard of living and small increases in youth political participation. This shows that steps to respect, protect, and fulfill youth rights can be meaningful and pave the way for deeper change. We must build on these efforts and work towards replicating and scaling them up.

This report is a call to uplift and empower young people: invest in their rights, amplify their voices, and ensure their full and meaningful participation. The time to act is now: for youth, with youth, and led by youth.

**Nada Al-Nashif**

United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

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## Structure of the Youth Progress Index

Basic Needs	Foundations of Wellbeing	Opportunity
<b>Nutrition &amp; Medical Care</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection from infectious diseases</li> <li>• Adequate nourishment</li> <li>• Maternal survival rate</li> <li>• Child survival rate</li> <li>• Youth survival rate</li> <li>• Healthy diet coverage</li> </ul>	<b>Basic Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary school attainment</li> <li>• Gender parity in secondary attainment</li> <li>• Equal access to quality education</li> <li>• Primary school enrollment</li> <li>• Reduction in women with no education</li> <li>• Children grow and learn</li> </ul>	<b>Rights &amp; Voice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young members of parliament</li> <li>• Freedom of peaceful assembly</li> <li>• Equality before the law and individual liberty index</li> <li>• Rights equality among social groups</li> <li>• Perceived corruption decline</li> <li>• Political rights</li> </ul>
<b>Water &amp; Sanitation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic sanitation services</li> <li>• Basic water services</li> <li>• Satisfaction with water quality</li> <li>• Safe water, sanitation and hygiene</li> </ul>	<b>Information &amp; Communications</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Press Freedom Index</li> <li>• Online Service Index</li> <li>• Internet users</li> <li>• Mobile telephone users</li> </ul>	<b>Freedom &amp; Choice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction of vulnerable employment</li> <li>• Civil Society freedom</li> <li>• Freedom over life choices</li> <li>• Reduction of early marriage rate</li> <li>• Satisfied demand for contraception</li> </ul>
<b>Housing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to affordable housing</li> <li>• Indoor air safety</li> <li>• Usage of clean fuels and technology for cooking</li> <li>• Access to electricity</li> </ul>	<b>Health</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental wellbeing</li> <li>• Reduction non-communicable diseases</li> <li>• Life expectancy at 30</li> <li>• Equal access to quality healthcare</li> <li>• Universal health coverage</li> </ul>	<b>Inclusive Society</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to public services in urban and rural areas</li> <li>• Equal access to power</li> <li>• Reliance on help</li> <li>• Acceptance of gays and lesbians</li> <li>• Reduction in discrimination and violence against minorities</li> <li>• Reduction in the rate of young people not in education, employment or training</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction of intimate partner violence</li> <li>• Feeling safe walking alone</li> <li>• Reduction of money theft</li> <li>• Reduction of transportation related injuries</li> <li>• Reduction of interpersonal violence</li> </ul>	<b>Environmental Quality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction of lead exposure</li> <li>• Outdoor air safety</li> <li>• Waste recovery</li> <li>• Air quality satisfaction</li> <li>• Reduction of air pollution</li> </ul>	<b>Advanced Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic freedom</li> <li>• Quality weighted universities</li> <li>• Citable documents</li> <li>• Women with advanced education</li> <li>• Expected years of tertiary schooling</li> </ul>

**169**

Countries fully ranked

**61**

Social and Environmental Indicators

**14**

Years of Youth Progress mapped

The Youth Progress Index (YPI), produced biennially by the European Youth Forum in partnership with Social Progress Imperative, is the most comprehensive measurement of young people's wellbeing around the world. It examines essential aspects of youth wellbeing, such as access to sufficient food, housing, health services, opportunities to exercise socioeconomic and political rights, sense of inclusion, freedom from discrimination and the safeguarding of their future from environmental threats.

The forth edition of the Youth Progress Index brings added value, inspiring young activists to embrace data for their advocacy. An interactive online dashboard allows for easy comparisons between countries and tracks progress over 14 years.

**The Youth Progress Index fuels young people's impactful engagement.**

Visit [www.youthprogressindex.org](http://www.youthprogressindex.org)

## Executive summary

Across every continent, young people are fighting for the recognition of their rights. Our new data from the fourth edition of the Youth Progress Index (YPI), clearly shows how **young people's rights are being routinely overlooked or violated**, and that progress is stagnating or regressing in many areas: From shrinking civic space and unaffordable housing to unequal access to education, health, and justice, they lack the necessary conditions that can empower them to fully enjoy their rights.

Despite the universality and inalienability of human rights, young people remain invisible and inconsistently accounted for in most global human rights frameworks; they are legally undefined, conflated with children's rights, politically underrepresented, and structurally excluded.

This report arrives at a critical inflection point, a time when nearly one-third of the world's population is aged 15–35 and youth are disproportionately bearing the consequences of rising authoritarianism, a widespread human rights backlash, inequality, ecological collapse, and conflict. Despite this backdrop, young people continue to drive civic and student protests, are leading global social and ecological movements, and taking on strategic litigation to change how things are done. Furthermore, there are signs of progress, with some countries strengthening young people's rights – notably their social and economic rights – even against challenging contexts.

This fourth edition of the YPI is the largest source of youth relevant data globally. It analyses trends across 3 billion young people and 169 countries, using more than 60 social and environmental indicators. Uniquely, the report applies a rights-based approach to these quantitative indicators, showing the extent to which youth rights are enjoyed globally, and showcasing areas which need urgent political commitment and change.

### Key findings

1. Over the past decade, young people's rights have been inconsistently accounted for worldwide: while progress has been made to ensure young people's basic needs are met, improvements towards their quality of life and access to opportunities has stagnated, and in some cases, completely deteriorated.
2. Young people's right to an adequate standard of living is seeing modest but steady global improvement, due to expanded access to necessities like clean water, sanitation, electricity, and basic nutrition. Social challenges still persist, however, when it comes to preventing youth mortality.
3. The deadliest declines are in conflict-driven contexts—wiping out an entire generation's prospects, particularly in Ukraine and the Occupied Palestinian Territories—but also visible in wealthy, stable countries, as are the increase of infectious diseases and persisting challenges in reducing intimate partner violence.
4. The housing crisis is spread worldwide, and is especially acute in Europe, with 50% of youth dissatisfied with the possibility of finding suitable affordable accommodation.
5. Youth mental health is under pressure all around the globe, declining or stagnating everywhere, with the exception of the South West Asia and North Africa region, despite suffering internal inequalities.
6. Global inequalities are on the rise in accessing basic education and quality healthcare, and the divide between urban and rural areas is deepening or stagnating in most of the world.
7. Young people's civil and political rights are the most under threat globally, notably when it comes to peaceful assembly, press freedom, civil society repression, meaningful youth participation and academic freedom. While the right to run for office is improving, with an increase in young parliamentarians in most regions, the total number is still low.
8. Discrimination and violence against minorities is increasing in different regions and young people's right to equality before the law and equal access to power is largely deteriorating worldwide. The protection of rights and freedoms across different social youth groups is stagnating or steeply declining worldwide.

The analysis reveals a gap in the current human rights framework, where national laws and policies do not adequately protect or promote young people's rights. A UN Convention on the Rights of Young People would accelerate the progress of young people's quality of life and opportunities, ensuring that their rights are universally recognised and enjoyed globally.

## Introduction

Today, young people between the ages of 15 and 35 make up one-third of the world's population, a figure that is projected to grow even further by 2030. They are entitled to the same civil, political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and digital rights as any other human being. Yet in practice, the full realisation of these rights is often obstructed by legal thresholds, structural inequalities, and systemic exclusion. From a marred economic system that contributes to today's severe wealth inequalities, debt burdens, crippled basic services and ecological deterioration; to societies, cultures and economies that are either recovering from, or enduring, the impacts of colonialism, war or humanitarian crises; to our systems, structures, institutions and communities that are entrenched in intersecting forms of oppression.

Against this backdrop, it remains unclear to what extent young people are truly able to enjoy their human rights, or whether their quality of life and access to opportunities are meaningfully improving. This fourth edition of the Youth Progress Index (YPI) seeks to address this gap by offering a comprehensive overview of the global state of youth progress, and by extension, youth rights.

This report is designed to bridge two essential perspectives: firstly, it looks at the measurable dimensions of wellbeing of nearly 3 billion young people worldwide; secondly, it analyses what this data reveals about the full enjoyment of their rights. Drawing on the YPI's three core dimensions—Basic Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity—it analyses trends across 8 regions and 169 countries, using more than 60 social and environmental indicators.<sup>1</sup> Rather than treating these dimensions as purely technical, this edition deliberately grounds them in a rights-based framework, ensuring that each indicator reveals how young people's human rights are progressing, declining, or being overlooked.

The report opens with a global overview of youth progress over the last decade, looking at the best and worst performers since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. It shows how progress has been deeply uneven, both geographically and across different dimensions of the Youth Progress Index. This section also highlights a troubling trend: while some social outcomes have improved, many countries have seen a decline in political rights, making this a decade of uneven gains shadowed by democratic erosion.

Following this, we briefly detail two approaches that have been linked to the report. First, in embracing the "beyond GDP" approach, the report explores the relationship between economic possibilities and youth progress. By examining how each dimension of the Index correlates—or fails to correlate—with GDP, it reinforces a key message: it's not only about money, youth needs must be prioritised, and countries with similar levels of income often achieve very different outcomes, depending on political choices and rights-based investments. Second, the report gives an overview as to how a rights-based approach is applied to the YPI, detailing what youth rights are as per the existing international human rights framework, barriers preventing them from being fully realised, and examples of persisting inequalities and forms of discrimination. It emphasises that young people are not a homogenous group; they experience forms of discrimination as a result of their age, during the period of their youth, as well as when turning 18 and transitioning from childhood to adulthood.

Following this, the report then dives into the heart of the analysis where each chapter unpacks one of the YPI's core dimensions—Basic Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity—pairing each indicator with a corresponding human right, many of which have been discussed in our paper: *The Universal Recognition of the Rights of Young People*.<sup>2</sup>

1 Consult the Youth Progress Index 2025 *Methodology Summary* for a detailed explanation on how we define regions, the group of a country's economic peers, and the social and environmental indicators.

2 European Youth Forum, *The Universal Recognition of The Rights of Young People* (2024), [www.youthforum.org/policy-library/the-universal-recognition-of-the-rights-of-young-people](http://www.youthforum.org/policy-library/the-universal-recognition-of-the-rights-of-young-people)

In the Basic Needs chapter, the YPI indicators showcase fragmented progress when it comes to the right to life, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and gender equality. Linked to the right to life, a case study is given around the right to conscientious objection to military service and how this directly impacts young people.

In the Foundations of Wellbeing chapter, the YPI indicators reveal the varying degrees of progress with regards to the right to primary and secondary education, the right to freedom of expression, including access to information, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

In the Opportunity chapter, the YPI indicators detail the concerning deterioration of numerous rights, including the right to freedom of assembly and association, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to meaningful youth participation, the right to vote and the right to be elected, the right to live equally before the law, the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, the right to quality employment, the right to continued education, and the right to sexual and reproductive health. Several case studies have been provided to highlight the fight of young people to achieve change, in particular Serbian students exercising their right to protest.

The final section of the report lays out a forward-looking agenda towards the universal legal recognition of youth rights, calling for reform, redistribution, and participation at every level of governance. It also underscores the urgent need to close the global youth data gap, advocating for a coordinated international effort to build a dedicated data infrastructure that ensures youth are visible, counted, and empowered through evidence-informed policy.

The findings of this report indicate that youth progress shows signs of regression and uneven delivery across both regions and policy areas, and the objectives laid out in global documents such as the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the World Programme of Action for Youth, the UN Youth Strategy, and the UN's Pact for the Future and Declaration on Future Generations,<sup>3</sup> are nowhere close to being achieved. In linking all YPI indicators with the relevant human rights, it spotlights an issue that we have known for too long: it reveals a **critical gap in the global human rights architecture** whereby young people continue to fall between the cracks of policy- and law-making, **due to the absence of a universal framework** on the rights of young people.

These findings underscore the need for young people's rights to be universally recognised as human rights, and the need therefore for a **UN Convention on the Rights of Young People**: a robust, legally binding instrument that affirms the universal human rights of all young people as full rights-holders, and provides governments with a clear accountability framework to promote, protect, and fulfil these rights.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Summit of the Future Outcome Documents* (2024), [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soff-pact\\_for\\_the\\_future\\_adopted.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soff-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf)

## How does your country perform?

Figure 1: Global map of relative performances – YPI overall score

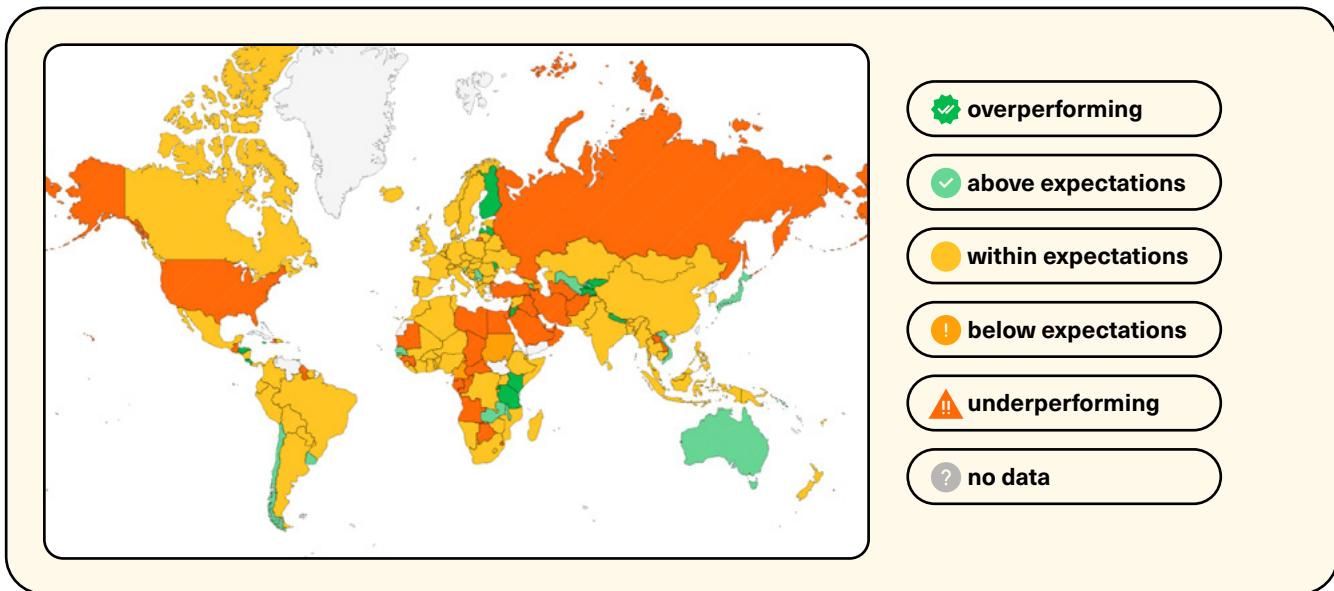


Figure 1 shows how countries perform on youth progress relative to the average of 15 economic peers, countries with similar GDP per capita (PPP). It highlights which countries are over- or under-performing in translating economic capacity into youth progress.

Figure 2: Best 5 performers globally

Rank	Country	YPI score
1	Norway	91.7
2	Denmark	91.4
3	Finland	90.3
4	Iceland	90.1
5	Switzerland	89.9

Figure 3: Worst 5 performers globally

Rank	Country	YPI score
165	Somalia	39.6
166	Afghanistan	33.9
167	Chad	32.5
168	Central African Republic	31.8
169	South Sudan	30.2

Figures 2 and 3 show the absolute ranking of the five best and worst performers (visit [www.youthprogressindex.org](http://www.youthprogressindex.org) for the full ranking).

An analysis of countries' performances over the past decade reveals both encouraging momentum and concerning stagnation. Since 2015, **25 countries have recorded significant improvements** in youth progress, gaining more than five points in their YPI score. An additional **110 countries have made moderate gains**, indicating widespread, if uneven, progress in key areas of youth wellbeing and inclusion. At the same time, **29 countries have remained stagnant**, with YPI scores shifting less than one point in either direction. **Five countries have experienced a decline**, signalling a rollback in certain aspects of youth rights and wellbeing.

**Figure 4: Best improvements and worst declines (2015–2024)**

↗ Largest score gains	Δ score	↘ Largest score drops	Δ score
Tanzania	+7.4	Afghanistan	-6.1
Zambia	+6.7	United States	-2.1
Vietnam	+6.6	Comoros	-1.6
The Gambia	+6.3	Lebanon	-1.6
Eswatini	+6.3	Canada	-1.4

Figure 4 shows the countries with the five larger score gains and drops between 2024–2015.

## Analysis of the gainers and droppers

Several countries (Tanzania, Zambia, Vietnam, The Gambia, and Eswatini) stand out as top improvers in youth well-being and progress over the past decade. Starting from lower baselines, they have advanced notably in internet access, electricity, and life expectancy. Tanzania improved housing and political representation; Zambia expanded digital access; Vietnam improved the acceptance of young people's sexual orientation and the quality of universities; The Gambia saw gains in political rights; and Eswatini progressed in health and connectivity.

Yet, these gains are tempered by rising challenges: civic repression in Zambia, Vietnam and Eswatini, declining press freedom in Tanzania, and worsening conditions for young people not in training or employment in The Gambia. These cases show that while material conditions can improve, lasting youth progress depends on rights protections.

By contrast, five countries saw significant declines. Afghanistan faced a sharp deterioration in civil society space, press freedom, and freedom of expression. Young people face growing inequality, with limited freedom to learn, grow, or participate. Lebanon follows a similar path: setbacks in equality before the law, freedom of the press, and access to quality healthcare and education have combined with falling scores in freedom over life choices.

In Comoros, the decline spans academic freedom, mental wellbeing, and basic guarantees of legal equality, a worrying signal for youth inclusion and empowerment.

The United States and Canada also face regression; in the USA, it is driven by growing housing unaffordability, weakened academic freedom, rising violence against minorities, and worsening mental health. In Canada, falling trust in the integrity of public institutions and reduced freedom over life choices are eroding young people's confidence in the future.

These downward trends must be urgently addressed. Without a strong push to protect civic space, ensure young people's enjoyment of their rights, and tackle structural inequalities, the progress of the past decade risks being undone.

## The uneven geography of progress

Global youth progress has been uneven over the past decade, with stark contrasts across regions. South Asia and Central Asia & the Caucasus recorded some of the strongest gains, particularly in Basic Needs and Wellbeing, though Opportunity remained stagnant in South Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa made major strides in Basic Needs but continues to trail the world in Opportunity. East Asia and Latin America showed broad improvements, but these have yet to unlock meaningful gains in youth employment or civic participation. The South West Asia & North Africa followed a similar pattern, with moderate progress damped by ongoing restrictions on youth agency. Europe, despite starting from a high baseline, saw minimal improvement and no gain in Opportunity, risking complacency. North America, alarmingly, is the only region to regress overall, with significant declines in Opportunity and mounting youth disillusionment.

**Figure 5: YPI overall scores per region 2015–2024**

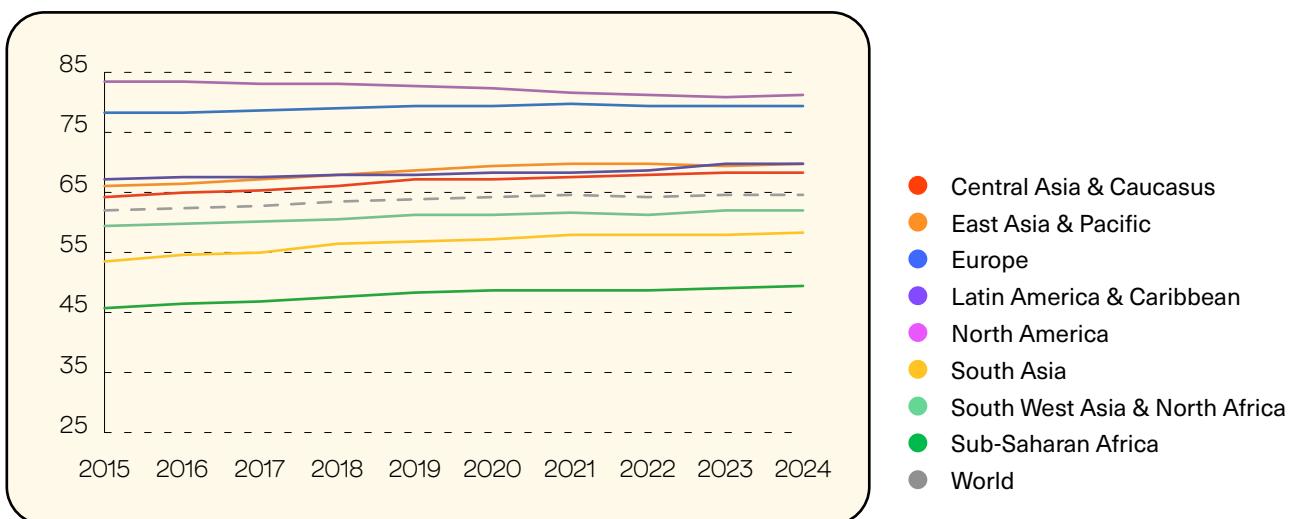
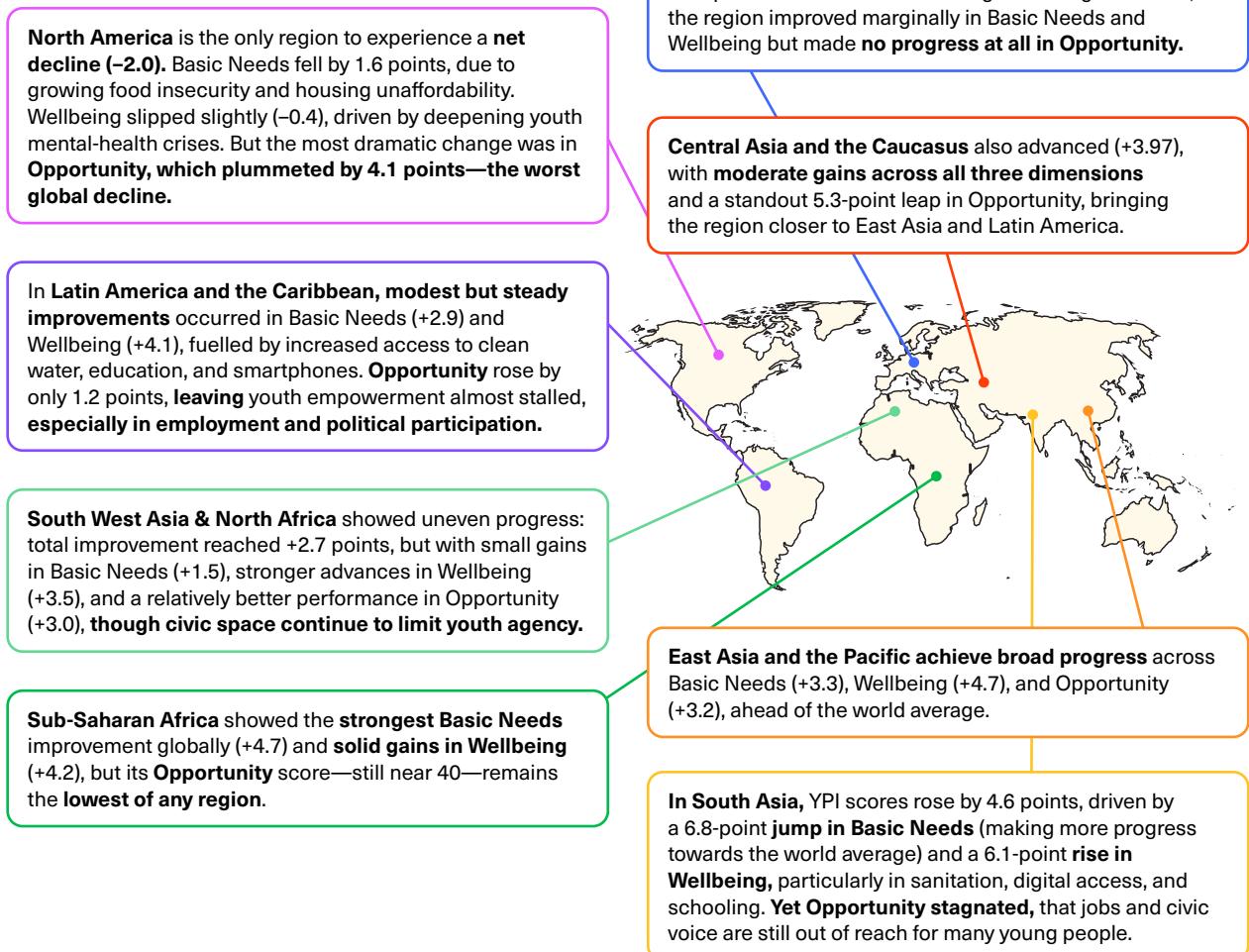


Figure 5 shows a line chart displaying regional Youth Progress Index (YPI) scores over the past decade, alongside the global average, showing how scores evolved between 2015 and 2024.

These trends highlight a global divide: while some regions are catching up in essentials and wellbeing, far fewer are creating the enabling environments youth need to thrive politically and economically.

**Figure 6: Main trends per region 2015–2024**



North America's descent is a cautionary tale that wealth and infrastructure alone do not guarantee youth progress. The combination of slipping social protections, widening mental-health gaps and a sense of civic disillusionment has undercut the region's once-solid performance. Urgent policy actions, such as expanding affordable housing, strengthening mental-health services, and strengthening youth participatory channels, are essential to halt and reverse this troubling trend.

Across regions, one pattern stands out: the world has become better at delivering basic services, but continues to fall short in guaranteeing youth opportunities. Gains in infrastructure and digital connectivity have not yet translated into economic stability, meaningful participation, or full protection from discrimination.

The **next decade must be opportunity-led**. Having raised the floor on survival, governments now need to **widen the ceiling, ensuring young people can shape the systems** that affect their futures. Otherwise, today's stagnation could become tomorrow's crisis of democracies.

To truly measure progress, we must view these trends through a rights-based lens. The YPI's dimensions do more than track development, they reflect the realisation of young people's universal rights: education, health, safety, participation, and equality. While existing international human rights frameworks provide a legal baseline, Member States fall short of transcribing these rights to meet the distinct realities of youth, as noted in the 1% of youth-specific recommendations made to each respective Treaty Body.<sup>4</sup> This is the gap a universal youth rights framework must fill.

<sup>4</sup> European Youth Forum, *Mainstreaming Youth Rights in the UN Human Rights Mechanisms* (2022), <https://www.youthforum.org/policy-library/mainstreaming-youth-rights-in-the-un-human-rights-mechanisms>

## A decade of uneven progress shadowed by political rights erosion

If the world were a single country, its 2024 Youth Progress Index score would stand at 64.59, placing it 98th, between Lebanon (65.01) and Guyana (63.56). A decade ago, the average global score was 61.92, bracketed by Bhutan and Cabo Verde. This symbolic ranking paints a picture of advancement because of its increased score. Yet, looking at the data, the world's average score increased by less than three points, and while there are signs of progress, there is also clear evidence of stagnation and regression in key aspects of youth wellbeing, freedoms, and rights.

If we take a closer look into the changes in dimensions and components of the index, it is clear that the advancement is not even across policy-areas.

**Figure 7: Average change in YPI global score by dimension (2015–2024)**

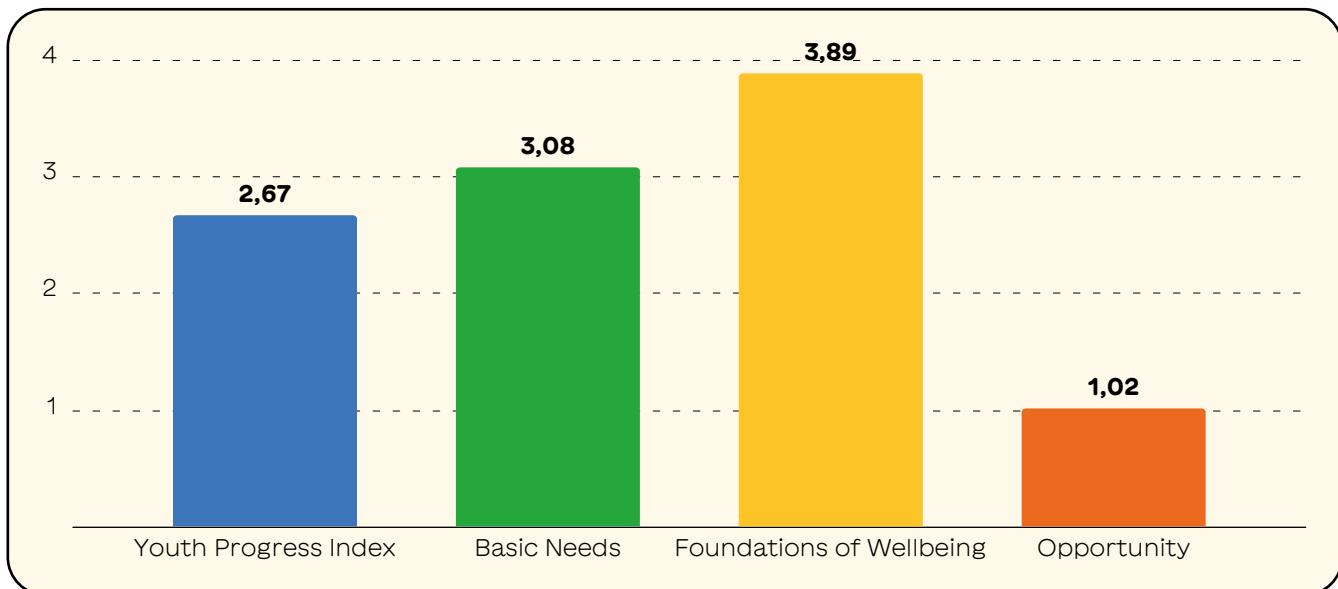


Figure 7 shows the average change in the YPI overall score and each dimension's score (Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity) over the last decade (2015–2024).

**Figure 8: Average change in YPI global score by component (2015–2024)**

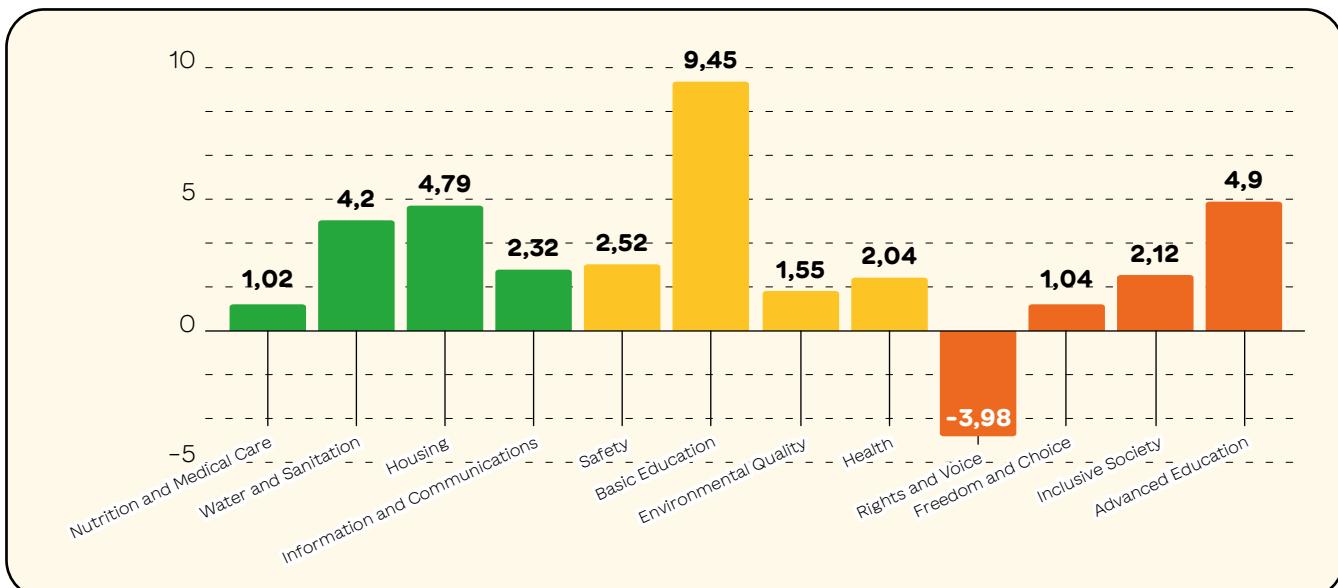


Figure 8 shows the average change in each YPI component over the last decade (2015–2024). The components are colour-coded following the colour of their dimension in the previous graph.

Today, the typical young person faces a mixed set of realities. On the one hand, their Basic Needs score of 75.5 (roughly on par with countries like Chile or Jordan) suggests that access to clean water, decent housing and nutrition has inched forward over the past decade. Yet these gains remain fragile, and in many communities the promise of a secure home and nutrition can still evaporate in the face of social, economic or climate shocks. Personal safety, for example, edged up by only 2.3 points, meaning that in too many places, young lives remain vulnerable to violence, crime or unsafe living conditions.

When it comes to Foundations of Wellbeing, the global average of 71.8 (comparable to Croatia or Colombia) reflects progress: the component that races ahead fastest is Information & Communications, up 9.4 points. More young people are online, more finish secondary school, and information flows as never before. Still, that headline masks a widening mental-health gap, where anxiety and isolation are on the rise, even as connectivity climbs. Improvements in Environmental Quality were modest (+3.0 points), signalling that despite growing awareness of climate and pollution challenges, youth continue to breathe unhealthy air and face ecological risks.

But the starker concern lies in Opportunity, where the world's youth register just 56.9 points (a level seen in countries such as Peru or Thailand). This middling score shows that job prospects remain slim, political voice is muted, and anti-discrimination protections lag. In practical terms, this means millions of young people cannot find stable work, feel shut out of decision-making, or fear prejudice because of their background. Most troubling of all is the slide in Rights and Voices, which fell by 3.98 points. This component tracks essentials like young people's freedom of speech and assembly, representation in parliaments, access to justice, and equality. A drop of this size suggests that, in far too many countries, the very protections that allow young voices to be heard and to hold their leaders to account, are eroding.

These uneven advances, lagging in social, economic, cultural, civic, and political empowerment, send a clear message: building essential foundations that allow young people to survive is only the first step. Much more is needed to create an enabling environment where young people's wellbeing is supported, and they can equitably access opportunities, in order to truly thrive, participate, and shape their societies.

Unless policymakers commit to bold action to support youth, the most important transformations of the last ten years will stall before translating into real opportunity and empowerment. Urgent, targeted action is needed to close this gap and ensure young people everywhere can live as active rights-holders in society.

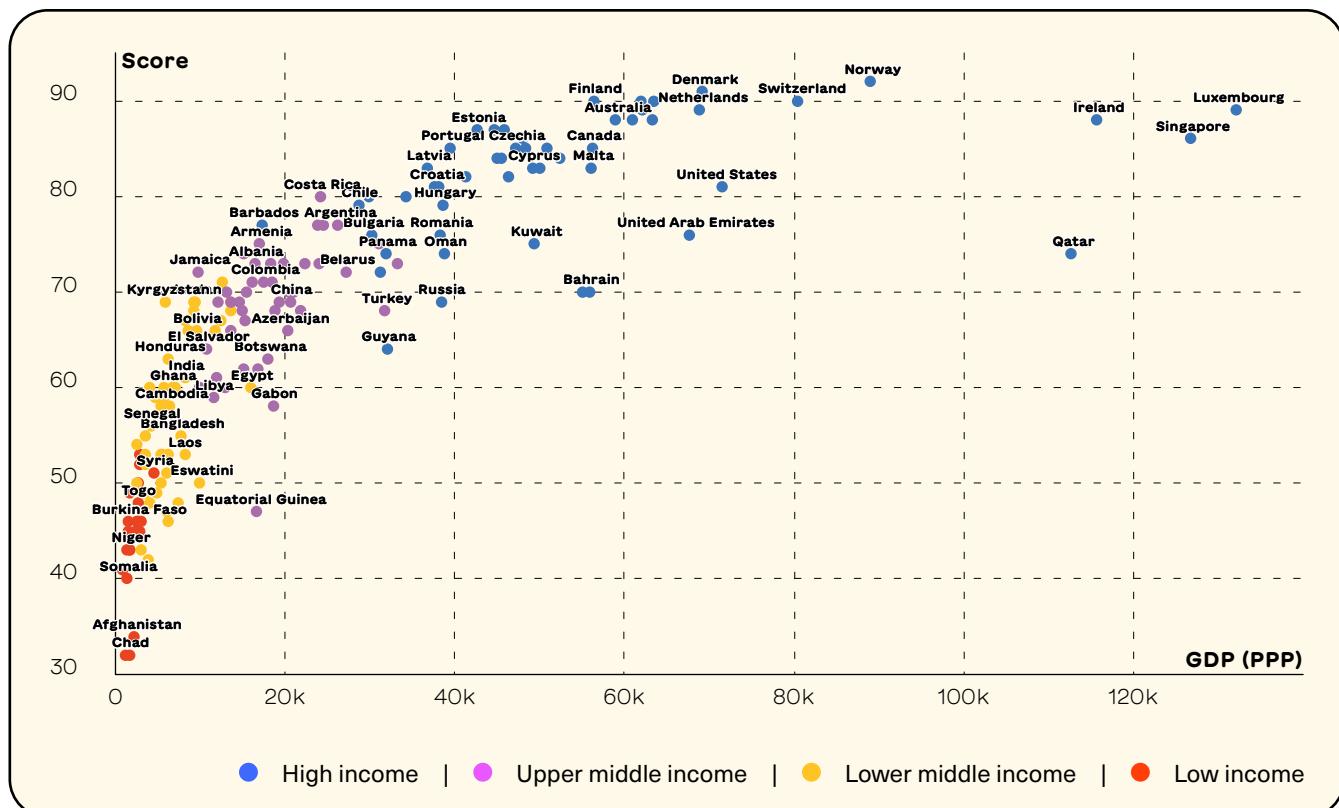
## Beyond GDP: Progress requires youth-centred policies, not just economic growth

The uneven progress and its geographical injustices become even clearer when we look at how different aspects of youth wellbeing and progress relate to each country's economic possibilities. In the YPI's absolute ranking, it's no surprise that wealthier countries tend to cluster at the top. What if we look beyond GDP and ask: how well do countries actually convert their economic power into progress for young people?

By excluding economic indicators and focusing instead on social and environmental outcomes, and comparing each country's performance with fifteen economic peers, the YPI offers an independent lens to assess countries' real performance. Crucially, this approach helps us identify outliers, countries that exceed expectations given their income, and others that underperform despite their wealth. These cases offer valuable lessons: they show how youth-focused, rights-based policies can drive youth progress, and where gaps are rooted not in limited resources, but in political choices and priorities.

While higher GDP certainly helps countries provide basic services like clean water or electricity, the data shows that GDP alone does not explain why some countries do better than others, especially when it comes to rights and opportunities. The connection between economic strength and youth progress is robust for Basic Human Needs, yet notably weaker regarding Opportunity. In fact, a simple glance at the data—such as the scatterplots below—shows that countries with similar income levels often achieve very different results.

**Figure 9: Relationship between GDP based on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and YPI scores**



**Figure 10: Relationship between GDP PPP and Basic Needs scores**

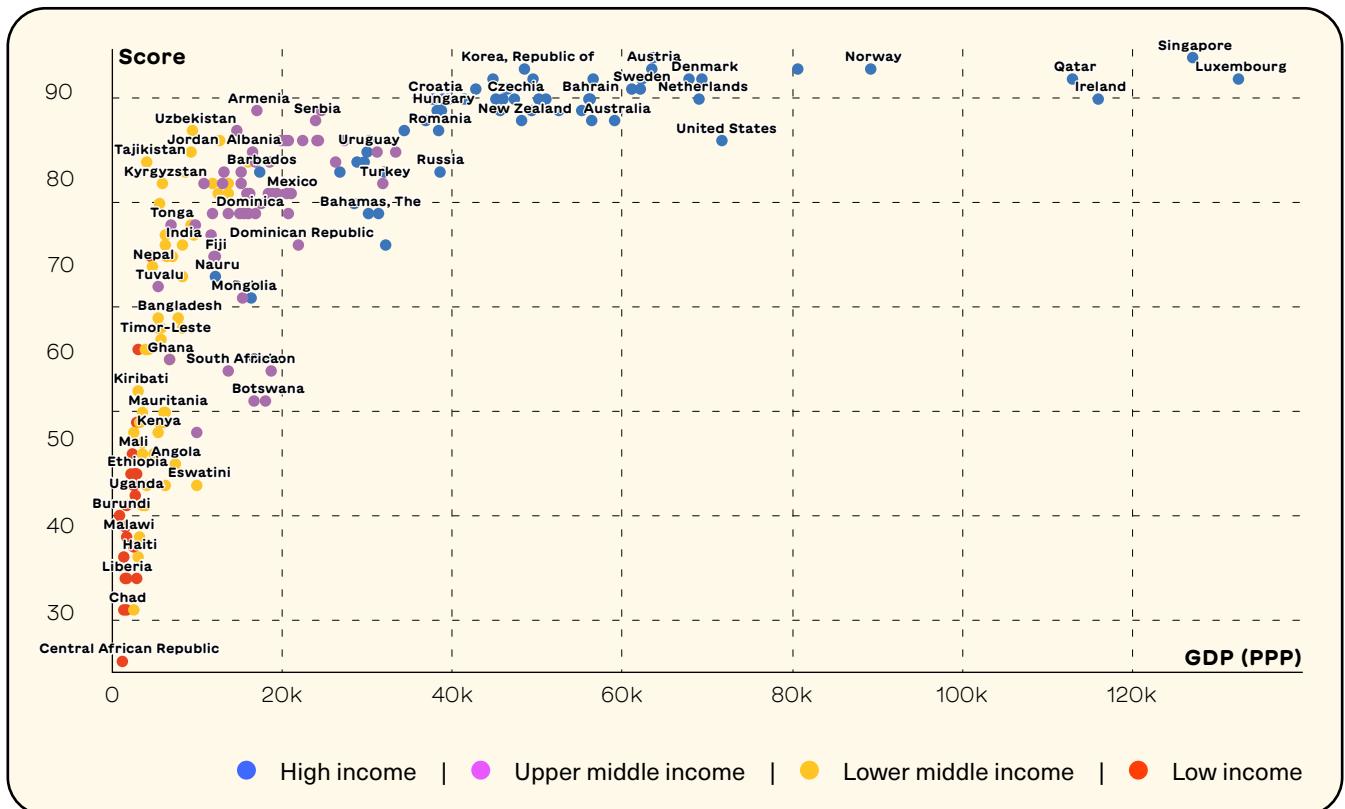


Figure 10 shows the correlation between GDP PPP per capita (x-axis) and Basic Needs score (y-axis).

**Figure 11: Relationship between GDP PPP and Foundations of Wellbeing scores**

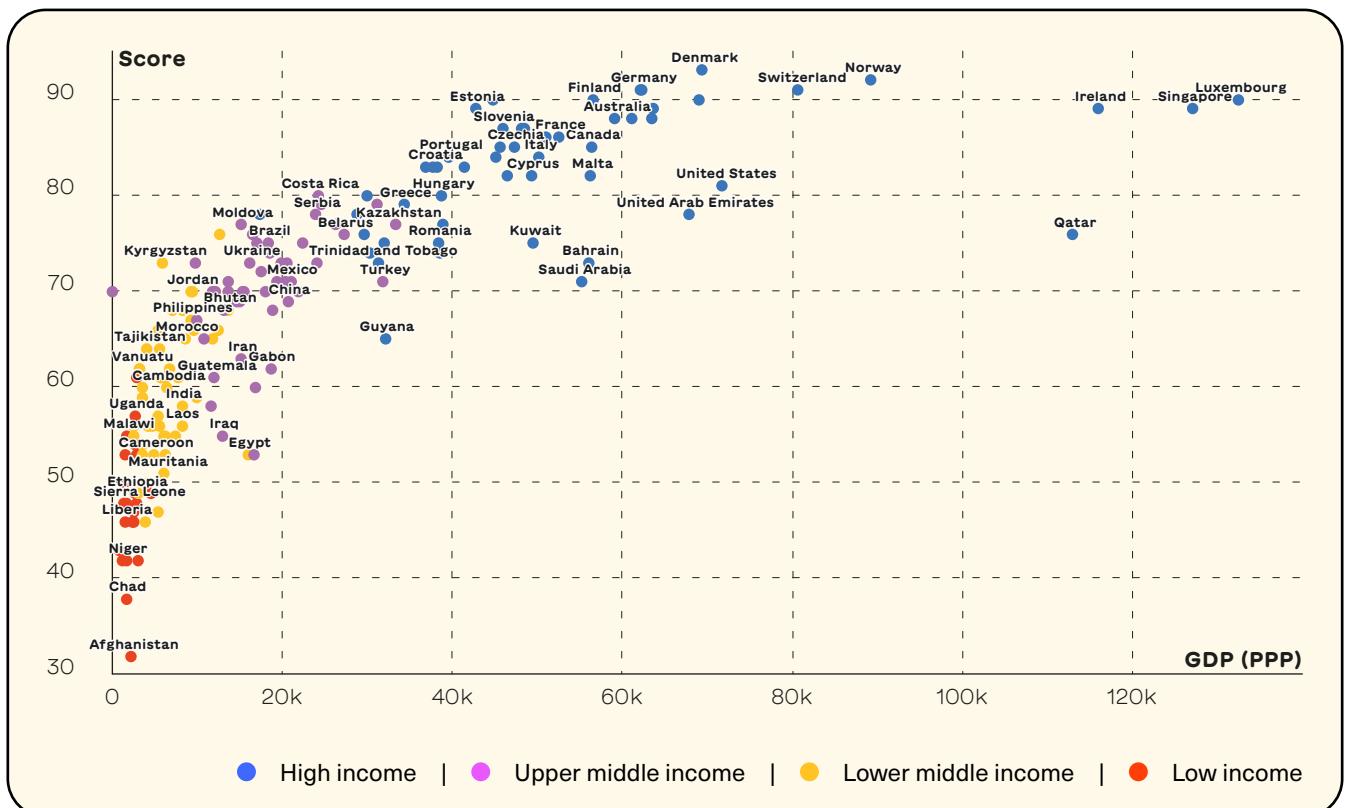


Figure 11 shows the correlation between GDP PPP per capita (x-axis) and Foundations of Wellbeing score (y-axis).

Figure 12: Relationship between GDP PPP and Opportunity scores

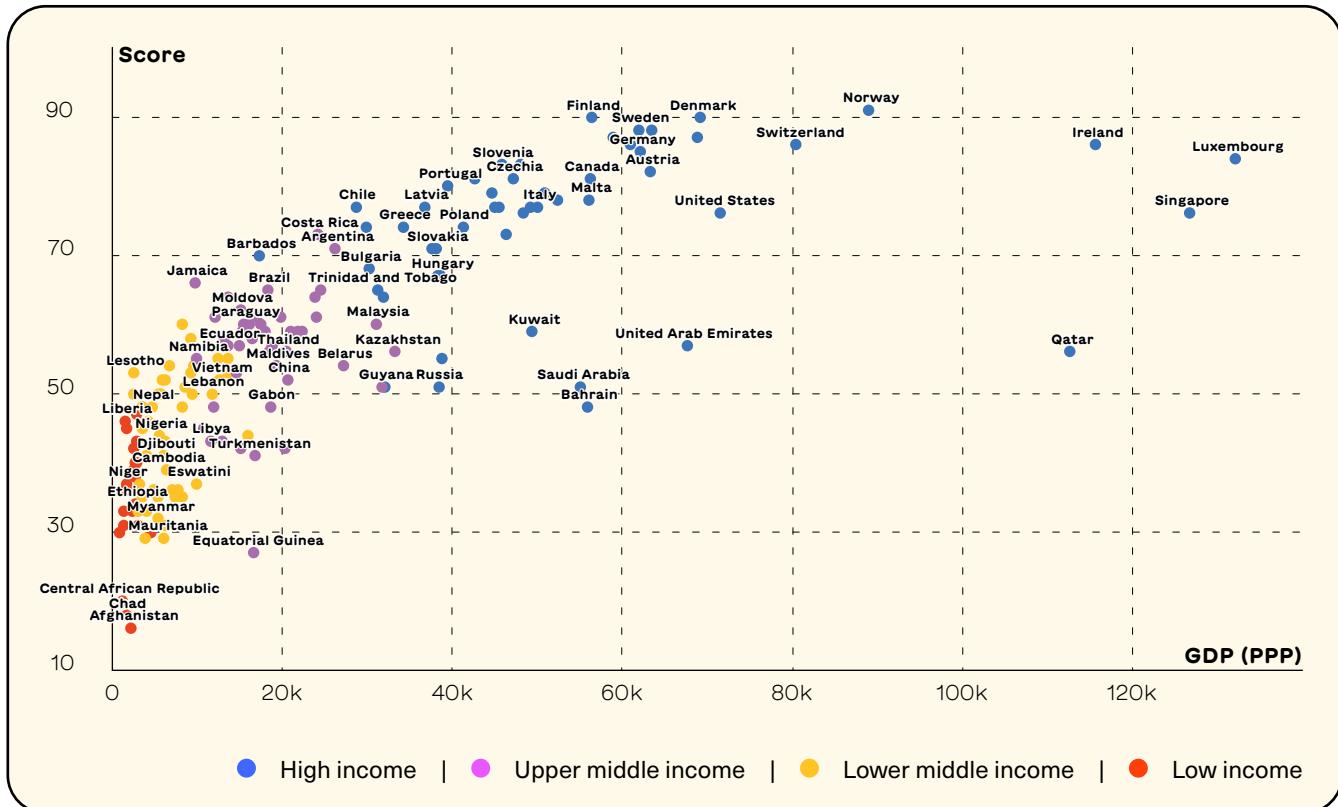


Figure 12 shows the correlation between GDP PPP per capita (x-axis) and Opportunity score (y-axis).

Countries with higher GDP per capita tend to score higher in **Basic Needs** and **Foundations of Wellbeing**. This reflects the expected impact of financial resources on infrastructure, public health systems, and education access. This relationship weakens significantly when we turn to **Opportunity**, which measures access to rights and the civic space. Here, the scatterplot becomes noisier and the correlation weaker. Even modest increases in social spending are linked to measurable improvements in this dimension.<sup>5</sup> The implication is clear: **economic growth alone does not deliver civic inclusion or empowerment**. Rights must be intentionally protected through political and legal systems, not assumed as a byproduct of prosperity.

The difference in R-squared values between the dimensions further confirms this. The **Foundations of Wellbeing** plot shows a very high  $R^2$  (0.83), meaning most of the variation in scores can be explained by GDP. For **Opportunity**, the  $R^2$  drops to 0.69, and the outliers become far more visible, highlighting that **rights, freedoms, and equity are shaped by political will, not just economic wealth**.

However, this investment alone is not enough. It must be matched by bold, structural reform that shifts systems, not just budgets, toward fairness, access, and accountability. Without sustained investment in youth rights and inclusion, today's gaps risk **deepening into crises of frustration and disempowerment**. Failing to ensure access to decent work, meaningful civic voice, and protection from discrimination will limit individual potential and it will **erode stability, trust, and the foundations of social cohesion**.

5 European Youth Forum, *Fiscal Policies and Youth Progress* (2023), <https://www.youthforum.org/files/Fiscal-Policies-and-Youth-Progress-2023.pdf>

## A rights-based approach to the Youth Progress Index

Youth rights sit at the intersection of universal human rights, while also encompassing age-specific experiences. While young people are entitled to the full range of human rights, the enjoyment and protection of those rights during their **transition from childhood to adulthood is far from guaranteed, and are not systematically recognised at the global level.**

With regard to the current international human rights framework and the extent to which young people's human rights are enjoyed and accounted for, only 1% of the total recommendations made to UN Member States by the UN Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review process, or special procedure mandates are youth-related.<sup>6</sup>

This disproportionate representation of recommendations, for what should account for 3 billion of the world's population, points to one of the reasons why young people are unaccounted for in laws and policies at all levels. It also reflects difficulties for young people and youth organisations to engage with processes that are not explicitly designed for youth rights, placing the onus on them to have their rights upheld through other mechanisms.

This lack of accountability is linked to several issues. Oftentimes, young people's rights are conflated with children's rights – even though the rights and realities of both cohorts are distinct and require different approaches to ensure empowerment and meaningful participation. There is a general lack of understanding of the barriers faced during this transition period, notably those transitioning from the rights of the child to the rights in adulthood upon turning 18. Furthermore, there are discrepancies in defining the age bracket of 'youth' or 'young people', with no single global definition.

As a result, young people face day-to-day practices that are inherently discriminatory and structural, yet in many cases, socially acceptable. This manifests in formal constraints, such as when there are limitations around legal voting ages, candidate eligibility requirements, or restrictions tied to guardianship and contract law. They earn less due to national youth minimum wage schemes, or are not 'old enough' to meet age-restricted social security services in their adulthood.

Others are embedded in the lived realities and perceptions of young people: young people are more likely to see their right to peaceful assembly limited, and often face stricter institutional restrictions, heightened scrutiny, profiling (both gender and racial), and violence by authorities, while also having fewer resources, weaker legal representation, and limited protections to assert their rights.

To ensure that no young person is left unaccounted for, we therefore take on a rights-based approach to the YPI as a proxy to assess how youth rights are realised in practice across the world, looking at issues such as education, health, safety, participation, and equality. Building on this approach, we have mapped key youth rights to the most relevant dimensions of the YPI. For each right, we identified the closest available indicators within the YPI dataset, using them as entry points to analyse rights-related outcomes from a youth perspective.

This is not a comprehensive measurement of youth rights, nor can it capture their full complexity. Some rights lack clear data coverage, others are only partially reflected through indirect indicators. Nonetheless, this approach offers a useful framework to explore patterns, surface disparities, and make visible the structural neglect that many young people face. It highlights the opportunity to have a cohesive overview of the global state of youth rights and progress that is backed up by clear data. Each section of this chapter examines global and regional trends, zooms in on specific rights, and highlights national cases, revealing how deeply uneven youth rights remain in both geography and substance.

Ultimately, to truly measure progress, we must view these trends through a rights-based lens. This is just one step needed towards assessing the effectiveness of laws and policies, as well as data collection. What is needed further to accelerate change is to ensure that there is a standardised framework in which young people's universal rights are globally understood and accounted for. We therefore propose an ambitious UN Convention on the Rights of Young People to achieve this.

<sup>6</sup> European Youth Forum, *Mainstreaming Youth Rights in the UN Human Rights Mechanisms* (2022), <https://www.youthforum.org/files/220930-PP-UN-youth-rights.pdf>

## Basic Needs: Marginal gains, millions still left without the essentials

Over the past decade, the Basic Needs dimension of the Youth Progress Index has seen modest but steady global improvement, rising from 73.99 to 77.07. Gains have been driven largely by expanded access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, and basic nutrition; especially in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, which saw the largest increase, albeit from a lower starting point.

**Figure 13: Basic Needs scores per region (2015–2024)**

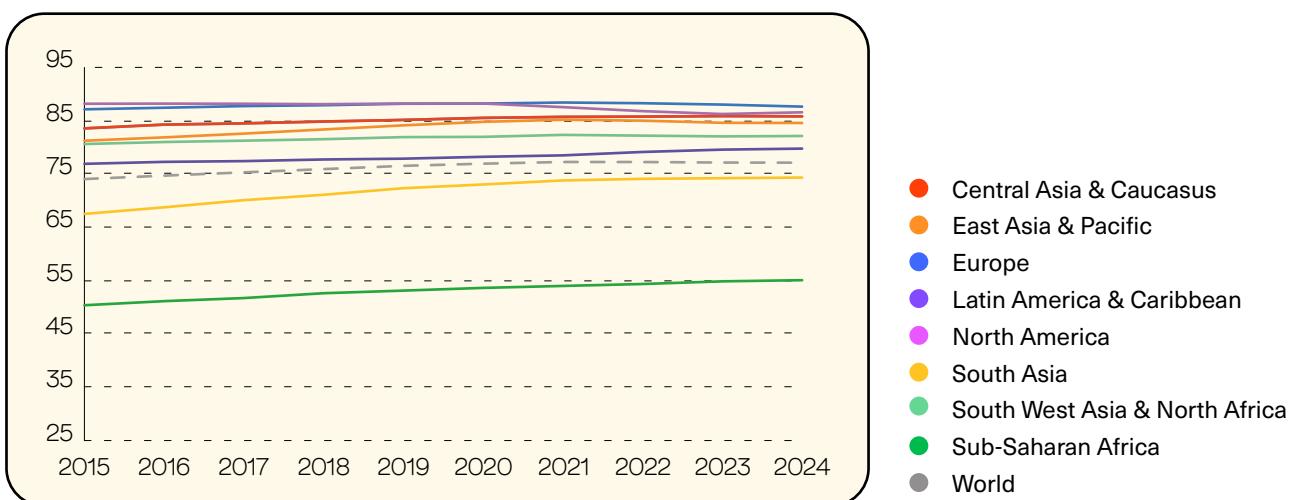


Figure 13 shows a line chart displaying regional Basic Needs dimension scores over the past decade, alongside the global average, showing how scores have evolved between 2015 and 2024.

This trend reflects the impact of long-term policies, including infrastructure investments, food security programs, and global health initiatives. However, even as global scores inch upward, major disparities persist, and many young people continue to live without the most fundamental protections. In too many cases, legal frameworks and policies fail to reach youth specifically, leaving them excluded from public services, housing schemes, or nutrition programs designed without age-responsive measures.

Today's gains remain fragile: as global crises intensify and support for rights-based progress faces mounting political and financial pressures, the risk of reversal is real. Without sustained, youth-focused investment and protection, the progress of the last decade may stall or backslide.

**Figure 14: Global map of Basic Needs dimension in 2024 – absolute scores**

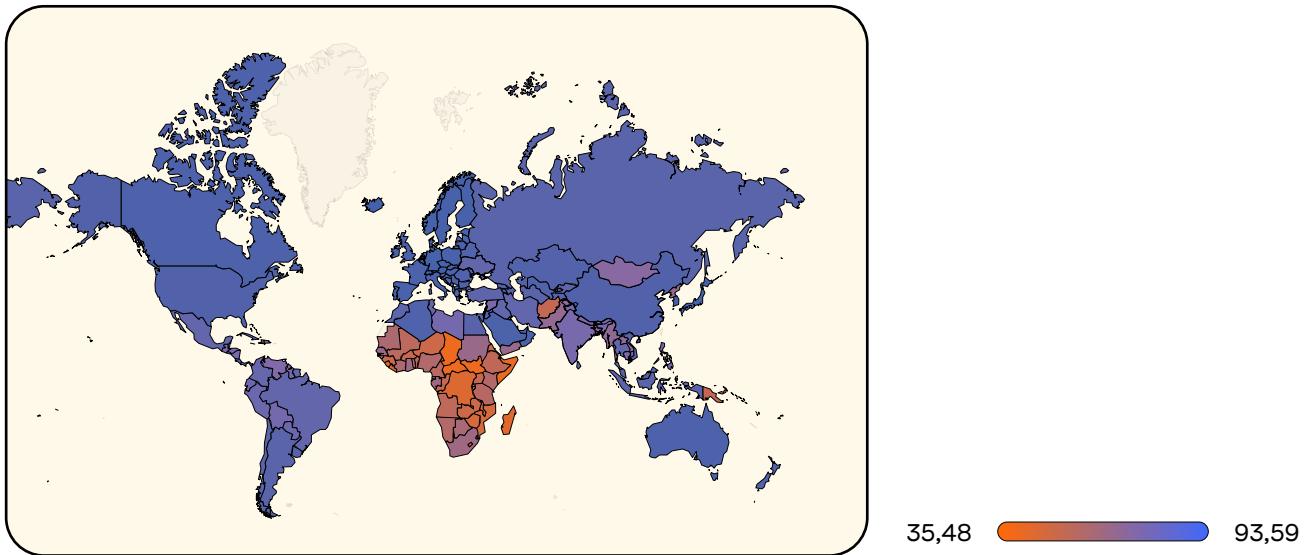


Figure 14 displays cross-country disparities in the Basic Needs dimension of the Youth Progress Index. The scores are on a scale of 0–100. Higher scores indicate strong access to essential services like nutrition, water, shelter, and safety. In contrast, lower scores highlight persistent structural inequalities in meeting young people's fundamental needs.

**Figure 15: Basic Needs – Best and worst absolute and relative performance per region**

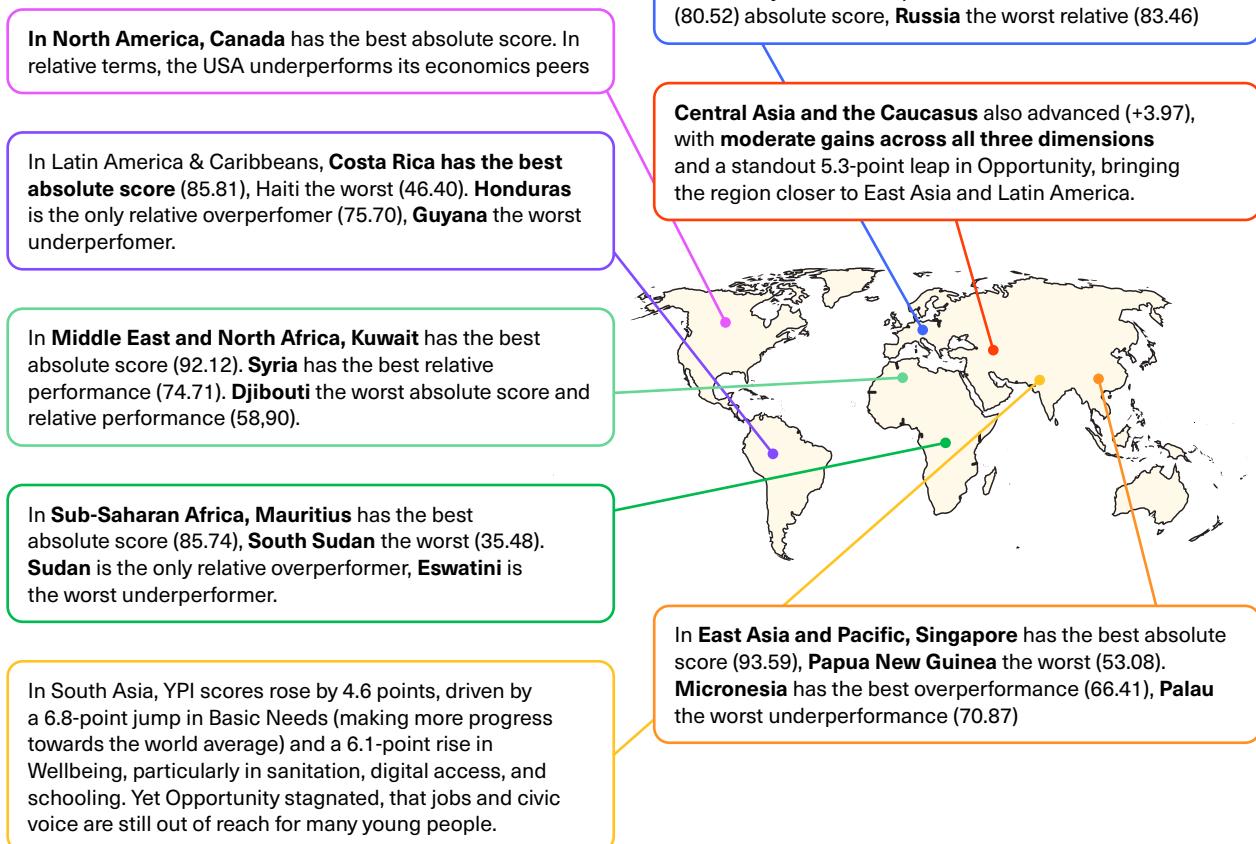


Figure 15 highlights the highest- and lowest-performing countries within each region on the Basic Needs dimension, both in terms of absolute scores and performance relative to economic peers. It allows for quick comparison of progress and challenges across the globe.

In tracking the state of youth rights and progress, the Basic Needs dimension covers various human rights, including but not limited to:

- **Right to life<sup>7</sup>**
- **Right to an adequate standard of living<sup>8</sup>**
- **Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health<sup>9</sup>**

The state of youth rights can be linked with the results of the YPI and presents an opportunity to identify immediate areas to remedy. Below we set out more details on how these rights are performing across the Basic Needs dimension.

## Right to life

The right to life encompasses more than the simple protection of existence: it demands the recognition, preservation, and dignity of all human lives across every stage and sphere of life, and is enshrined in international law.

Within the Youth Progress Index, a number of indicators speak directly to this right, while also intersecting with others, including with regards to gender equality and children's rights, such as the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including conscientious objection to military service,<sup>10</sup> and the right to non-discrimination and gender equality, including to live freely from gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup> Many of these are analysed below.

In this section, the right to life is explored through regional trends that reflect both direct threats to survival and broader conditions necessary for young people to live in safety and dignity. These include preventable mortality (child, maternal, and youth survival rate), exposure to violence (including interpersonal and intimate partner violence, and early marriage), and access to safe environments (whether walking alone, travelling, or simply storing personal belongings).

7 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), New York, 10 December 1948, Art. 3; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), New York, 16 December 1966, Art. 6.

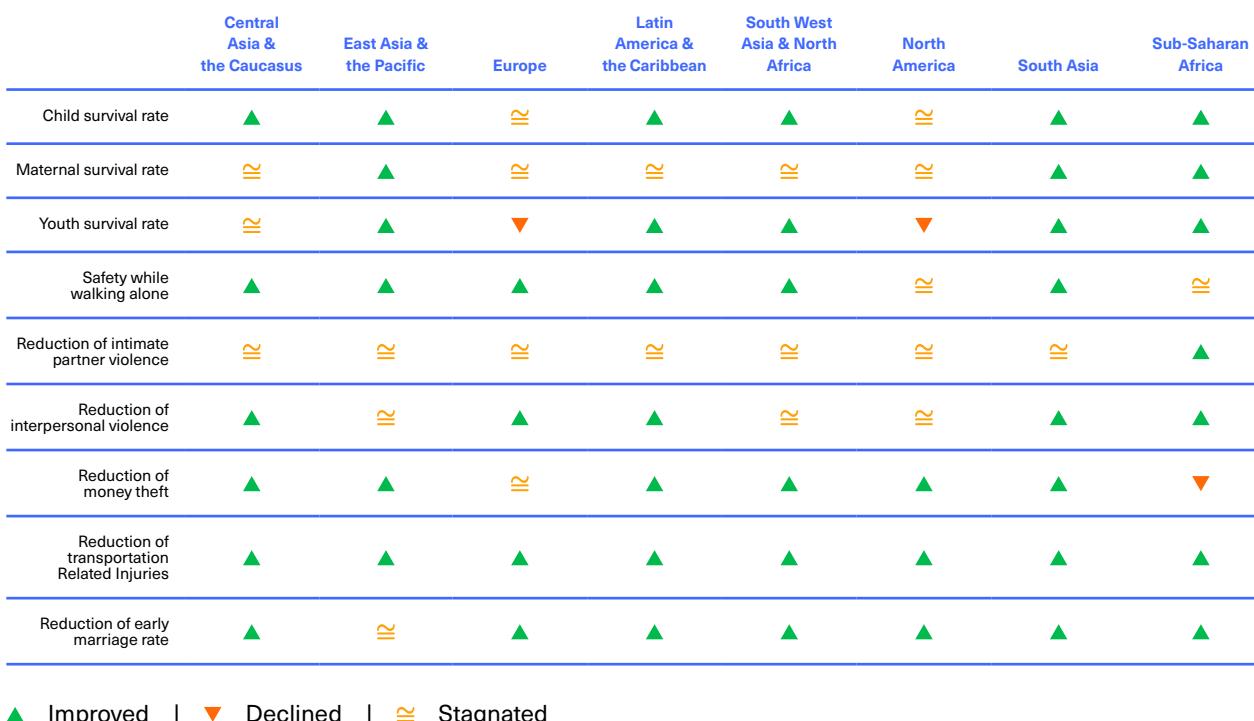
8 UDHR, Art. 25; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), New York, 16 December 1966, Art. 11.

9 UDHR, Art. 25; ICESCR, Art. 12.

10 ICCPR, Art. 18; Committee on Civil and Political Rights, General comment No. 22 (1993) on Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion), 30 July 1993.

11 UDHR, Arts. 2 & 7; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), New York, 18 December 1979, Art. 1; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General comment No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, 26 July 2017.

**Figure 16: Regional trends in the right to life – progress across indicators**



▲ Improved | ▼ Declined | ≈ Stagnated

Figure 16 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to life have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

The number of children dying before the age of five has continued to decline across most regions. In Europe and North America, however, progress has largely plateaued, not due to regression, but because these regions already have relatively low mortality rates.

Sub-Saharan Africa shows the fastest progress, but still falls below the global average, and reveals stark internal disparities. Libya marks the most significant deterioration worldwide. Niger remains at the bottom of the global scale, with more than one child dying before their fifth birthday for every 10 live births. Many countries continue to underperform relative to their economic capacity. This includes Nigeria, Guinea, and Sierra Leone in Sub-Saharan Africa; Türkiye in Europe; and the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Kuwait, and Bahrain in the other regions. Notably, Kuwait and Bahrain achieve results comparable to the Western Balkans—regions with far fewer economic resources—highlighting that wealth alone does not guarantee progress.

In terms of maternal survival rate, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa show positive momentum, although both remain below the global average. In other regions, stagnation has set in: while this may occur at generally higher levels of performance compared to child survival rate, reflecting broader historical success, it still signals a worrying lack of ongoing improvement. In some countries, the trend is reversing altogether. Venezuela stands out with a sharp 12-point decline, one of the worst setbacks recorded.

**Youth mortality** is now **rising in both Europe and North America**, regions where such reversals were once considered implausible. The **impact of armed conflict** on youth mortality is stark and deeply alarming. Around the world, war is erasing entire generations. **Ukraine**, amid the ongoing full-scale invasion by Russia, now ranks below Burkina Faso on this indicator. Even more devastating is the **73-point drop in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**, the most severe decline globally, illustrating the deadly cost of siege conditions, brutal violence, and the destruction of basic infrastructure. These figures reveal the deeply personal and profound impact of conflict on the lives and futures of young people.

Figure 17: Change in youth mortality scores by region (2015–2024)

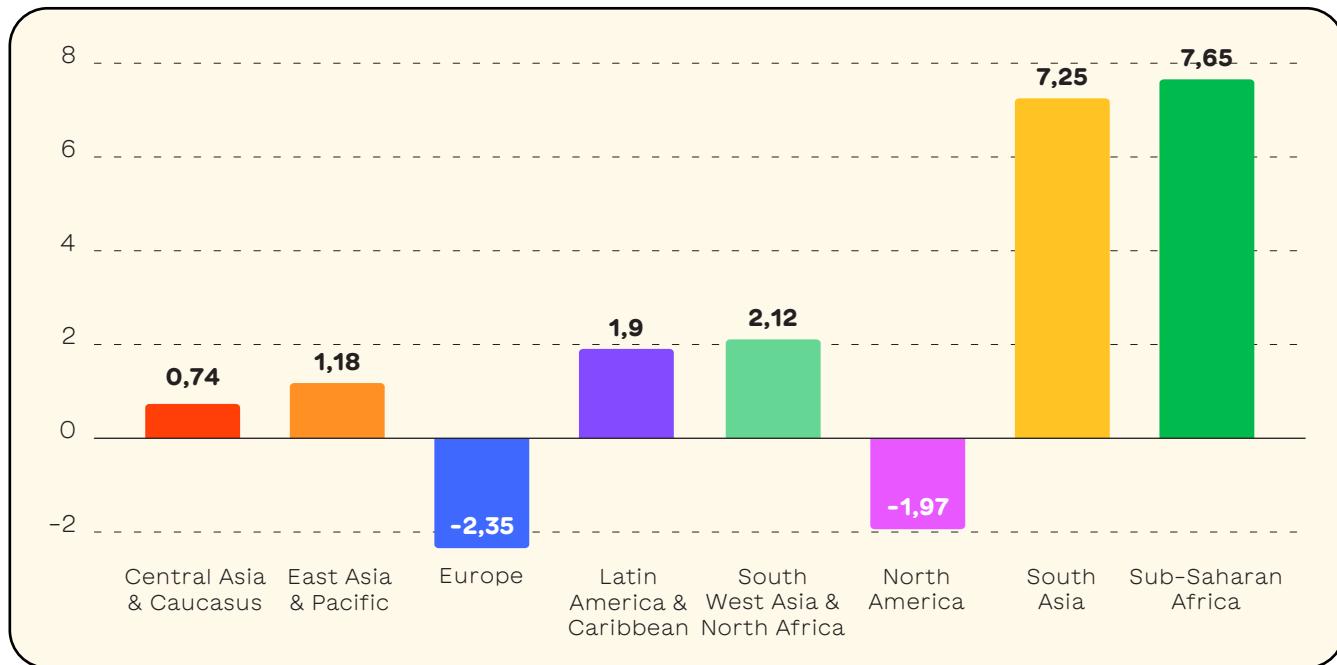


Figure 17 shows the change in youth survival rate scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent an improvement in the form of declining mortality, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

#### Right to conscientious objection

Conscientious objection refers to the refusal to perform military service on grounds of deeply held moral, religious, humanitarian or ethical beliefs. While recognised under international human rights law as part of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, implementation remains inconsistent. The consequences of not having this right realised in full places huge detriments on a young person's ability to exercise their right to life.

Many countries offer legal provisions for conscientious objection, including alternative civilian service. However, significant challenges persist: in some states, the right is not recognised, alternative service can be punitive, and objectors may face imprisonment or forms of "civil death", such as loss of employment, voting rights, or access to services.

Young people, often conscripted at age 18, are particularly vulnerable due to a lack of rights awareness and intense social or institutional pressure. Civil society and international organisations play a key role in advocating for full recognition of this right, including protection and asylum for objectors fleeing persecution.

Across Europe, the 2024 report by the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection<sup>12</sup> documents ongoing violations as well as new challenges to the right to refuse military service on grounds of conscience.

The report issues clear recommendations to governments, calling for the unconditional recognition of this right in all contexts—whether in times of war or peace, under conscription or voluntary enlistment—and for the guarantee of a genuinely civilian, non-punitive alternative service. It also stresses the need for legal reforms that are aligned with international human rights obligations, particularly those set out by the UN Human Rights Committee and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

<sup>12</sup> European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, *Annual Report Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe* (2024), [https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2025-06-05-EBCO\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2024.pdf](https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2025-06-05-EBCO_Annual_Report_2024.pdf)

Progress in reducing early marriage has been notable over the past decade, with improvements observed across all world regions. The most significant progress has occurred in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, which historically had the highest rates of child marriage.

South Asia, in particular, recorded the sharpest improvement in scores, yet continues to display extreme national disparities. Bangladesh stands out as the region's most underperforming country, with levels of early marriage far exceeding the peer average. In contrast, Rwanda emerges as Sub-Saharan Africa's top overperformer, with scores surpassing 95.

Across Latin America, while progress is more modest, Haiti is a notable positive outlier. In South West Asia & North Africa, Djibouti stands out with strong gains, while Iran lags significantly behind. Europe maintains high scores overall, but Finland, Estonia, Denmark, Norway and Moldova underperform relative to their economic peers. These patterns highlight both the global momentum to curb early marriage and the need for more targeted interventions in lagging countries, particularly where legal protections or enforcement remain weak.

Perceptions of safety while walking alone have improved in most regions, but North America and Sub-Saharan Africa show stagnation. In fact, youth in the United States and Canada now report feeling as unsafe as their peers in Bangladesh, a sobering reminder that high income does not guarantee security. East Asia & the Pacific, as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, show the widest spread between countries, pointing to deep inequalities within regions. Meanwhile, South Asia and South West Asia & North Africa remain concentrated in the mid-to-low score range, underscoring persistent public safety concerns for youth.

When it comes to reduction of intimate partner violence, no region shows significant progress except Sub-Saharan Africa. While the region still scores below the global average, it is the only one where improvements are visible. Central Asia & the Caucasus currently lead in performance, followed by East Asia & the Pacific. The lack of movement elsewhere points to a global failure to tackle one of the most widespread and harmful forms of violence facing young people, particularly young women.

**Figure 18: Change in intimate partner violence scores by region (2015–2024)**

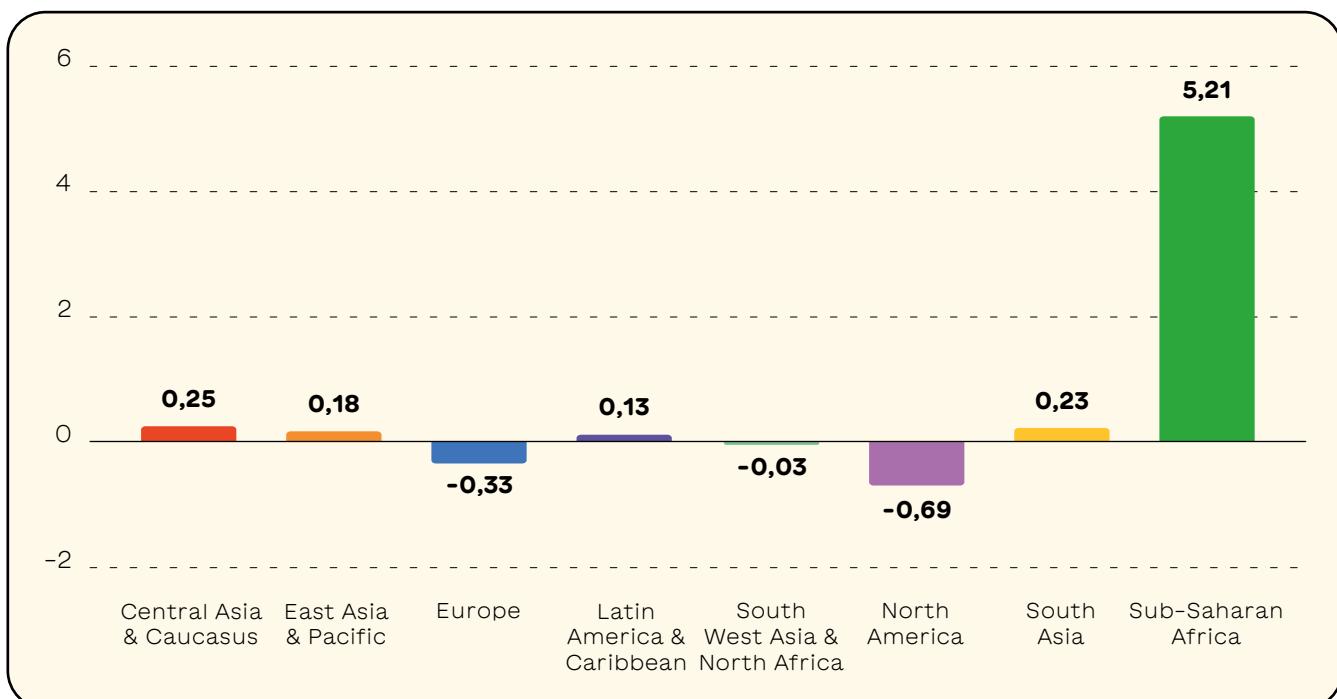


Figure 18 shows the change in reduction of intimate partner violence scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent an improvement in the form of declining mortality, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

The indicator 'reduction of interpersonal violence' shows a similarly troubling pattern. Most regions are stagnating, with only modest improvements seen in Latin America (+3.4), Europe (+3.0), and Central Asia & the Caucasus (+2.7). Despite these gains, the overall global picture remains bleak. Countries like Venezuela and El Salvador are among the worst performers, likely reflecting the impact of organized crime, gang violence, and weakened institutions. These low scores highlight not only the persistence of violence, but also the broader absence of safety, justice, and accountability, especially for youth growing up in affected communities.

Security issues are also mirrored in the analysis of the indicator 'reduction of money theft', measuring whether young people have had money or property stolen in the past year. While most regions recorded slight improvements since 2015, only North America (+11 points), Latin America & the Caribbean (+7.1), and Central Asia & the Caucasus (+4.6) show substantial positive change. Europe saw stagnation and, within the region, disparities remain. In contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced a sharp deterioration (-6.3), suggesting a worrying increase in theft or weakening protections for youth. Overall, these patterns reflect deep disparities in safety and vulnerability that continue to shape young people's daily realities.

Transportation-related injuries remain a critical concern for youth globally, with significant regional disparities. While most regions have seen modest progress over the last decade in reducing transport-related harm among young people, improvements have been uneven. Higher-income regions such as Europe and East Asia show stronger overall performance, while countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia continue to lag. At the national level, some countries—including Azerbaijan, Japan, Jamaica and several in the Western Balkans—stand out as overperformers relative to their economic peers. As transport-related injuries are a leading cause of youth mortality and disability, ensuring safe mobility is fundamental to the Right to Life as guaranteed under international human rights law.

Finally, justice and equality are essential components of the Right to Life, shaping whether this right is truly protected or merely promised. These issues will be explored in more depth under the Opportunity dimension.

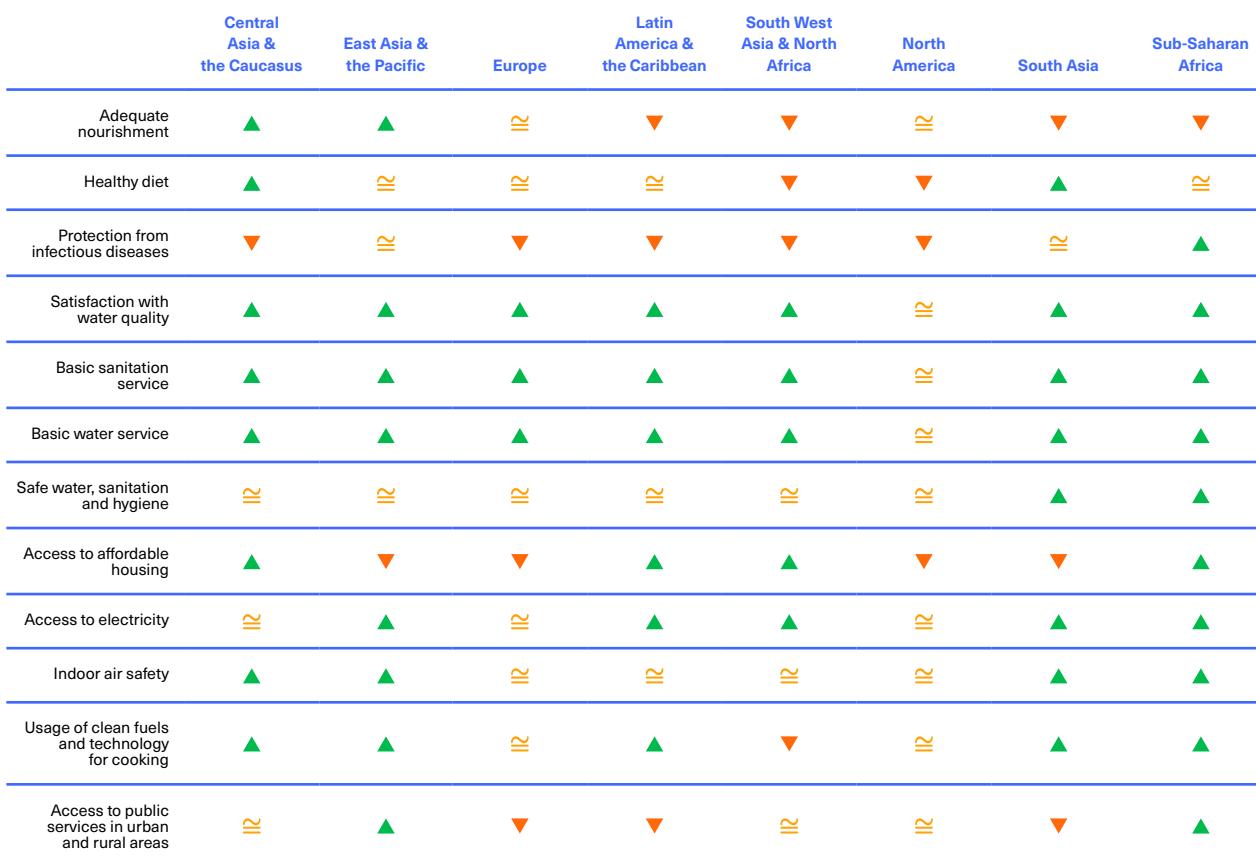
## Right to an adequate standard of living

The right to an adequate standard of living—including access to food, water, housing, and essential services—is enshrined in international law and forms the basis of a life of dignity. Yet in practice, young people's lived experiences often fall through the cracks. Either overlooked when it comes to accessing child protection, or not yet economically independent or politically empowered, many find themselves in a legal and policy grey zone. As a result, their access to basic and life saving services is either inadequate or neglected altogether.

The Youth Progress Index helps shine a light on these gaps. It assesses how this right is realised in practice, using indicators like adequate nourishment, access to clean energy and sanitation, access to affordable housing, and the use of clean fuels to paint a fuller picture of what young people are experiencing globally.

While the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is analysed in detail in the Foundations of Wellbeing section, some of its related indicators are also relevant here, as they intersect with young people's access to an adequate standard of living. This highlights the interconnected nature of rights across dimensions.

**Figure 19: Regional trends in the right to adequate standards of living – progress across indicators**



▲ Improved | ▼ Declined | ≈ Stagnated

Figure 19 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to adequate standards of living have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

Protection from infectious disease remains a global challenge, with Sub-Saharan Africa remaining the most severely affected region. Significant variation exists within regions. For example, Lesotho, where youth represent nearly 40% of the population, scores among the lowest globally. While Europe remains one of the top-performing regions, its scores are now in decline, and East Asia has overtaken it as the leading region for managing infectious disease risks.

Access to water and sanitation has improved globally over the past decade, but deep disparities persist. Countries like Haiti, Yemen, and Moldova continue to score well below the global average. These low scores reflect both ongoing humanitarian crises and chronic underinvestment in infrastructure.

While satisfaction with water quality has improved in many regions, progress has stalled in Europe and North America, and Africa remains disproportionately affected. Even within Europe, several countries—including Albania, Serbia, Ukraine, and North Macedonia—underperform relative to their economic capacity. In the Central Asia & the Caucasus region, Azerbaijan also falls short of expectations, pointing to broader governance and investment challenges.

These disparities are particularly visible in the ‘basic water services’ indicator, where South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa remain far behind. The inequality is even more striking in basic sanitation services, where most Sub-Saharan African countries score below 50 points, reflecting a severe and persistent lack of access. Once again, Azerbaijan underperforms in this domain.

When assessing access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, most regions now perform in the upper tier. Yet South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa continue to lag, reinforcing the urgent need for targeted investments and rights-based approaches to ensure safe and equitable access.

Access to electricity paints a more complex picture. The access is capped at 100 in Central Asia & the Caucasus, Europe, and North America, reflecting near-universal coverage. However, deep disparities persist in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where many countries fall far below the global average. In Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, countries like Namibia, Equatorial Guinea, and Angola are significantly underperforming relative to their economic capacity. These gaps signal persistent infrastructure and governance challenges that directly impact young people.

Indoor air safety, measuring the pollution within the household, remains a major concern, especially in countries still reliant on solid fuels. While similar to access to electricity in terms of regional trends, this indicator is less capped and more scattered. While most countries in Central Asia & the Caucasus, Europe, South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA)<sup>13</sup>, and North America score above 80—indicating relatively low exposure—regional disparities persist. In East Asia & Pacific, scores range from as low as 20 (Kiribati) to 100 (Australia). Sub-Saharan Africa is similarly scattered: Madagascar sits at 27, while Gabon and Mauritius are near 99. This disparity reflects uneven progress in the transition away from polluting fuels and highlights the heavy health burden placed on youth in lower-income contexts.

Access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking remains one of the most unevenly distributed indicators in the entire Index. Even in high-income regions, significant gaps persist—Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, scores just 12 points, placing it on par with Nicaragua and Kenya, despite its higher income level. Yet progress is not absent: South Asia (+29 points) and East Asia & Pacific (+21) have seen the greatest improvements over the past decade, with smaller but notable gains in Latin America (+7.4) and Sub-Saharan Africa (+3.39). Still, millions of young people, particularly in rural or low-income households, remain reliant on polluting fuels, exposing them to preventable health risks.

**Figure 20: Distribution of clean cooking fuel usage across regions in 2024**

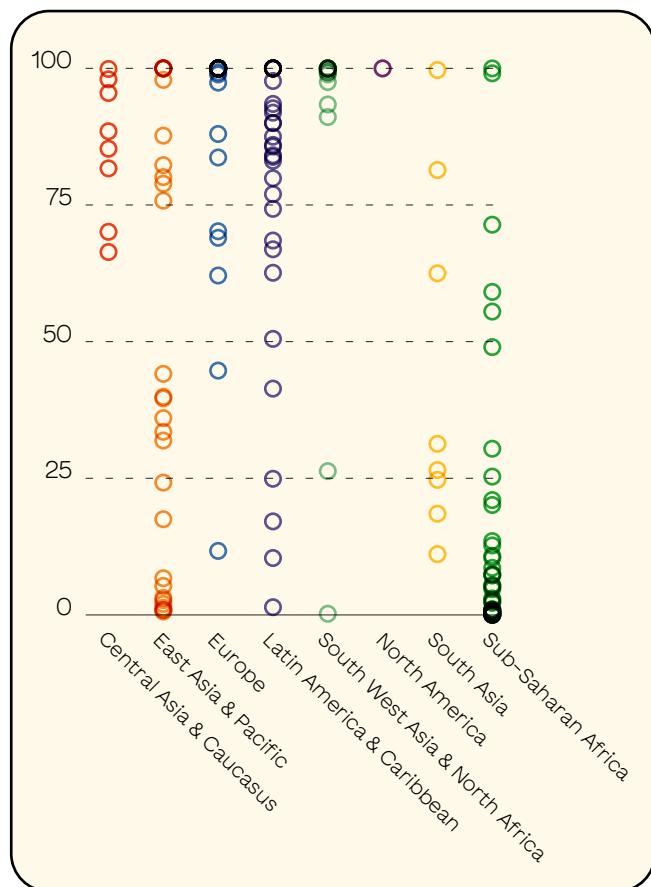


Figure 20 shows the 2024 country-level scores for access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking, grouped by region. Each circle represents a country within a region, illustrating the wide variation in access both across and within regions.

Importantly, even where access to basic services—such as electricity or clean fuels—appears nearly universal, internal inequalities remain evident, especially along geographic, economic, and social lines.

The indicator ‘equal access to services in urban and rural areas’, although classified under a different YPI dimension, is highly relevant here. It shows a clear downward trend in regions like Europe, Latin America, and South Asia, and is among the most unevenly distributed indicators at the country level. The steepest decline is seen in Hungary (-14 points), with further setbacks in Russia, Latvia, Türkiye, Belgium, and Serbia. Outside of Europe, regressions are also evident in Azerbaijan, Suriname, Cuba, Lebanon, and Sri Lanka. These figures reveal that national averages often obscure major internal divides, particularly between rural and urban youth.

13 Formerly referred to in the previous YPI edition as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Figure 21: Change in access to public services in urban and rural areas scores by region (2015–2024)

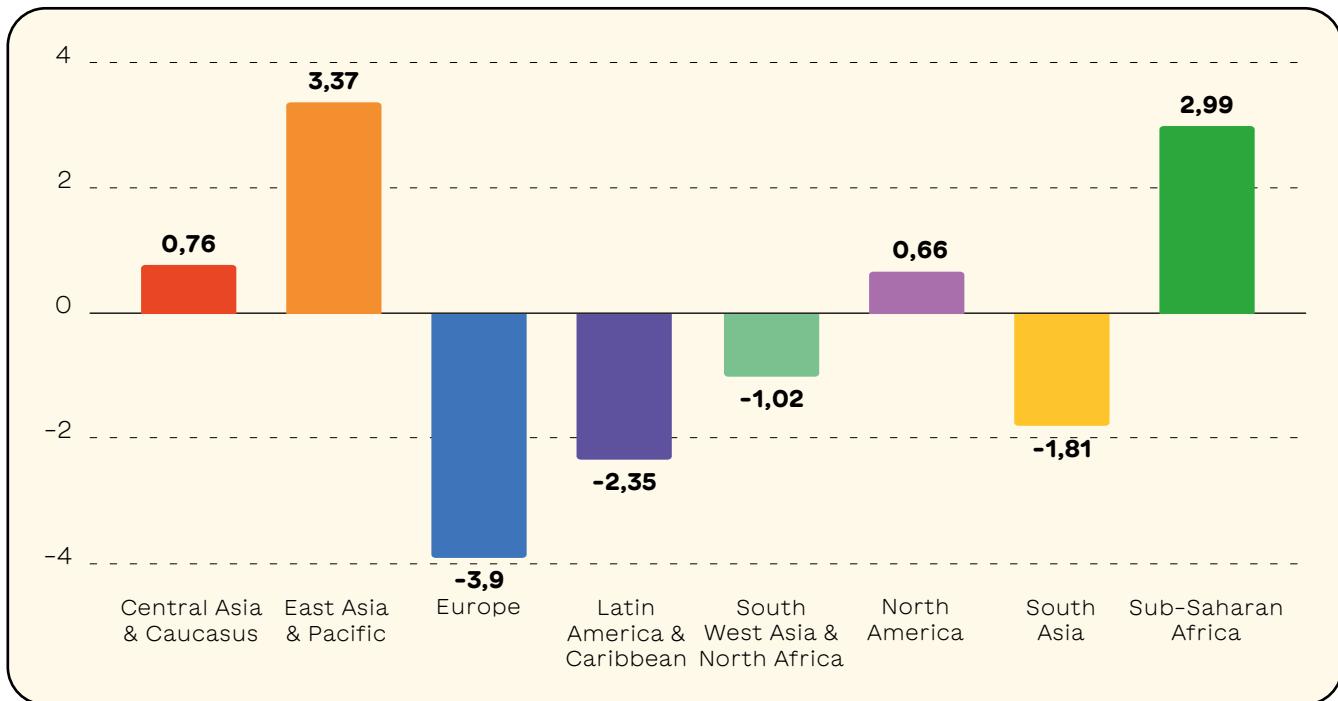


Figure 21 shows the change in 'access to public services in urban and rural areas' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

These territorial and socio-economic divides extend beyond basic services and are increasingly visible in young people's access to affordable housing, which is emerging as a crisis for youth across much of the world. Over the past ten years, North America recorded a dramatic 35-point decline, and Europe also experienced a significant drop (–9 points). Discontent is growing in East and South Asia. Globally, young people are finding it increasingly difficult to access quality, affordable housing. Soaring housing costs, stagnant incomes, limited public housing, and restrictive land-use policies are pushing independence, social mobility, and family formation further out of reach.

## Access to affordable housing

For young people, access to safe and affordable housing is a precondition for exercising a wide range of rights, from education and work to health, community engagement, leisure and democratic participation.

Across Europe, the **housing crisis has escalated into a systemic denial of this right**. Between 2010 and 2024, house prices rose by nearly 50%, while rents climbed 24%, far outpacing stagnant youth wages. The result is that young people are forced to devote an unsustainable share of their income to rent—often more than 40%—or to delay milestones such as leaving the parental home.<sup>14</sup> For many, **homeownership is completely out of reach**, with mortgages averaging more than ten times the annual salary of a young worker.

The crisis extends beyond affordability. In 2024, **26% of young people** in the EU were **living in overcrowded conditions**. Meanwhile, social housing, which makes up only 8% of the total housing stock in the EU, has been eroded in nearly every Member State, with waiting lists stretching years or even decades. At its most severe, the crisis leaves over **1.28 million people homeless** or in emergency accommodation every night, and a growing share of these are aged 15–29.

The **European Youth Forum's report 'More than a Roof'**<sup>15</sup> calls for urgent action to reverse these trends. It urges governments to reinvest in social and affordable housing, not only by building new units but also by renovating vacant and underused properties. Housing must be reclaimed as a social good, which means placing firm limits on financial speculation, regulating large corporate landlords, and curbing the conversion of homes into short-term tourist rentals. **Stronger protections for tenants** are essential, including enforceable minimum quality standards, security of tenure, and safeguards against arbitrary rent hikes. Governments must also ensure that **vacant housing is brought back into use**, through taxation, requisition, or renovation schemes, so that empty buildings are turned into homes for those who need them.

At the European level, the Youth Forum calls for a **European Affordable Housing Plan** that not only expands the supply of social and affordable homes but also addresses the structural factors that make housing inaccessible for young people. This plan should include binding public investment targets for social and affordable housing at the national level, stricter regulation of speculative investment and short-term rentals, a revision of EU state-aid rules to allow for wider access to social housing, and a stronger EU role in combating homelessness.

Adequate housing must be **recognised and enforced as a fundamental right for young people**, not a privilege for the few. Without urgent action, we risk a generation denied the basic security of a home, undermining not only individual wellbeing but also democratic participation, social cohesion, and intergenerational justice.

Finally, when assessing the right to an adequate standard of living, additional indicators also become relevant, many of which intersect with the right to a healthy environment. These will be explored further under the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension.

Taken together, these trends highlight a pressing need for **renewed investment in youth-centred policies**. While the global community has made strides in infrastructure, **young people continue to face specific risks and exclusions**. Recognising their legal entitlement to an adequate standard of living must be matched by **deliberate, youth-responsive policies**, from housing to access to services and social protection.

14 Eurostat, *Youth People Housing Condition* (2024), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Young\\_people\\_-\\_housing\\_conditions](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Young_people_-_housing_conditions)

15 European Youth Forum, *More Than a Roof: The European Youth Forum's Position on Housing* (2025), <https://www.youthforum.org/files/250414-PP-Housing-A5.pdf>

### **Protecting the essentials: A rights-based foundation for Basic Human Needs**

The evidence from the Youth Progress Index makes one thing clear: **young people's most basic needs are not being met consistently or fairly across the world.** Despite global commitments, access to food, housing, clean water, sanitation and basic healthcare remains deeply unequal, and these gaps are often invisible in national policy. A rights-based approach must therefore be provided to all policy areas, in consultation with youth organisations, to make youth progress a living reality.

A global **UN Convention on the Rights of Young People** would change that. It would establish that **these rights are not discretionary, but legally guaranteed for all young people.** It would close gaps in protections by requiring states to recognise the unique vulnerabilities of youth in areas such as housing insecurity, food access, and public health. **It would establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that progress is not only achieved, but maintained.**

## Foundations of Wellbeing: Rising digital access, deepening inequalities in education, health, and environment

In the past decade, the **Foundations of Wellbeing** dimension—encompassing education, health, and environmental quality—has shown the **strongest overall improvement** of any YPI dimension, rising from 60.2 in 2015 to 64.1 in 2024. Much of this progress stems from gains in **digital connectivity**, school enrolment, and a few health indicators, yet **these advances remain uneven across regions** and groups.

While countries in **Europe** and parts of the **Global North** continue to score well, the **Global South shows more patchy outcomes**, particularly in higher education access, mental health, and environmental safety. Still, several countries in **Latin America and Southeast Asia** outperform expectations based on economic status, proving that political will, not just wealth, shapes youth wellbeing.

Figure 22: Foundations of Wellbeing scores per region (2015–2024)

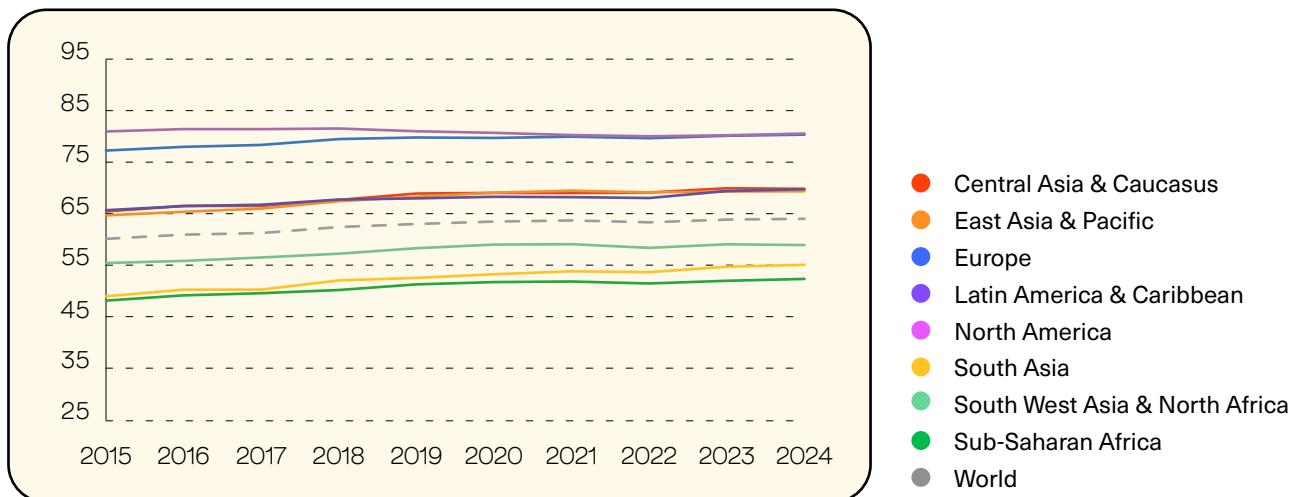


Figure 22 shows a line chart displaying regional Foundations of Wellbeing dimension scores over the past decade, alongside the global average, showing how scores have evolved between 2015 and 2024.

Figure 23: Global map of the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension in 2024 – absolute scores

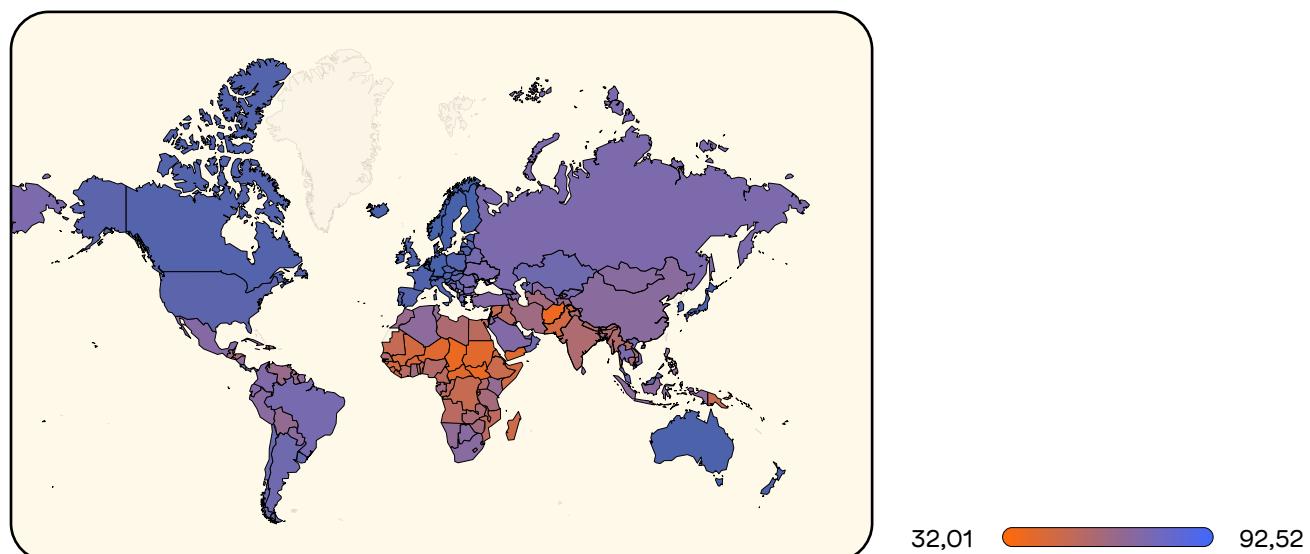


Figure 23 displays cross-country disparities in the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension of the Youth Progress Index. The scores are on the scale 0–100. Higher scores indicate better results.

**Figure 24: Foundations of Wellbeing – best and worst absolute and relative performance per region**

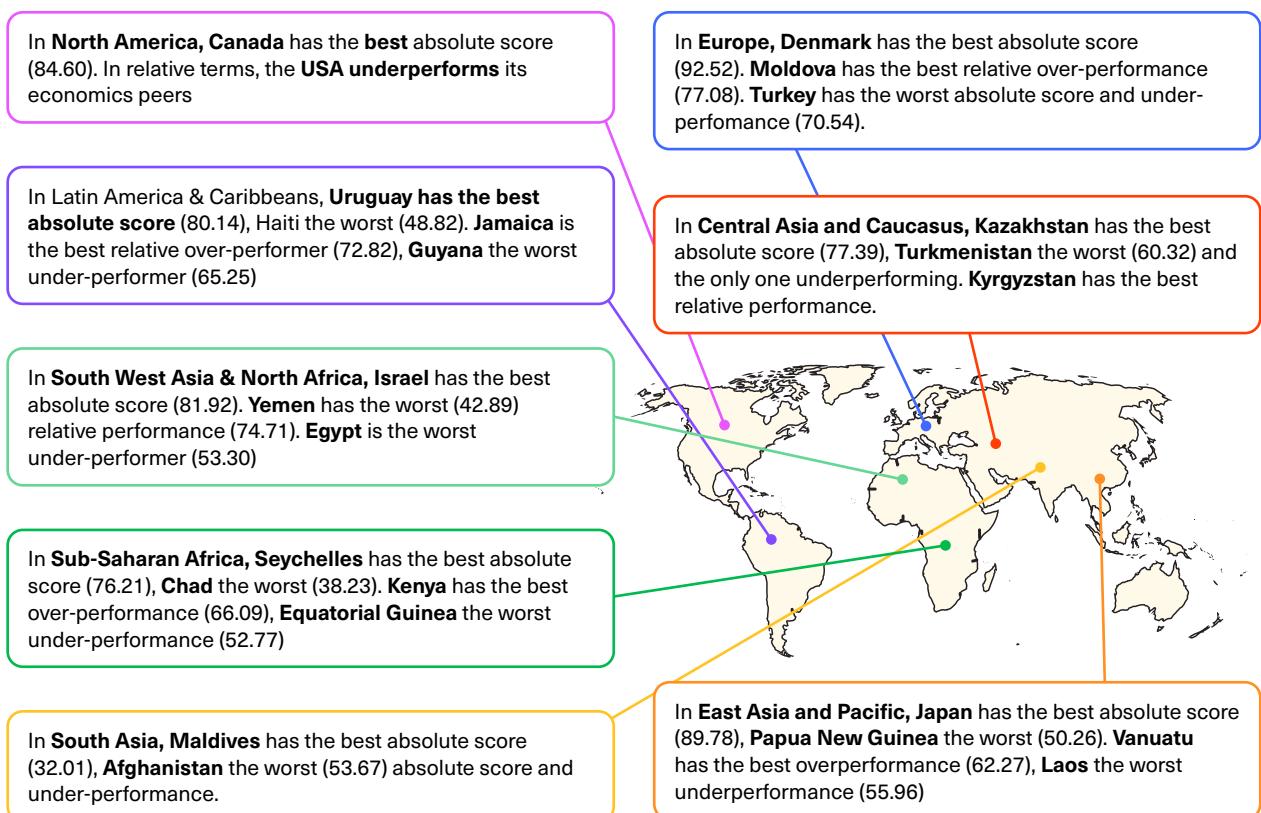


Figure 24 highlights the highest- and lowest-performing countries within each region on the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension, both in terms of absolute scores and performance relative to economic peers. It allows for quick comparison of progress and challenges across the globe.

In tracking the state of youth rights and progress, the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension covers various human rights, including but not limited to:

- **Right to primary and secondary education**<sup>16</sup>
- **Right to access information**<sup>17</sup>
- **Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health**<sup>18</sup>
- **Right to reproductive and sexual health**<sup>19</sup>
- **Right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**<sup>20</sup>

The state of these youth rights can be linked with the results of the YPI and presents an opportunity to identify immediate areas to remedy. Below we set out more details as to how these rights are performing across the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension.

16 UDHR, Art. 26; ICESCR, Art. 13(2)(a)-13(2)(b); Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), New York, 20 November 1989, Art. 28.

17 UDHR, Art. 19; ICCPR, Art. 19(2); Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34: Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression, CCPR/C/GC/34, 12 September 2011.

18 UDHR, Art. 25; ICESCR, Art. 12; CEDAW, Art. 12.

19 CEDAW, Arts. 12, 16; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment no. 22 (2016) on the Right to sexual and reproductive health (article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), E/C.12/GC/22, 2 May 2016;

20 UN General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 28 July 2022: The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, A/RES/76/300, 1 August 2022.

## Right to primary and secondary education

The right to primary and secondary education is a key driver for young people to be able to enjoy their human rights and freedoms in full, and is a stepping stone ensuring their access to equal opportunities. This right recognises that primary education should be made compulsory and free. Steps are also being taken now to make public secondary education free.<sup>21</sup> However, equitable access to quality education varies, including practices of school segregation, and continues to affect enrolment and completion rates for young people.

In this section, we focus on the universal right to primary and secondary education—based on equal access to, and completion of, primary and secondary schooling—as well as the gender dimension of educational attainment. Advanced education, such as tertiary and vocational training, will be addressed separately under the Opportunity dimension, where pathways to higher learning and skills development are more directly explored.

**Figure 25: Regional trends in the right to primary and secondary education – progress across indicators**

	Central Asia & the Caucasus	East Asia & the Pacific	Europe	Latin America & the Caribbean	South West Asia & North Africa	North America	South Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa
Primary school enrollment	▲	≈	≈	≈	▲	▼	▲	▲
Equal access to quality education	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	≈	▲	≈
Gender parity in secondary attainment	≈	▲	▲	▲	▲	≈	▲	▲
Reduction in women with no education	≈	▲	≈	▲	▲	≈	▲	▲
Children can grow and learn	▼	▼	≈	▲	▼	▼	▲	▲

Figure 25 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to primary and secondary education have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

**Figure 26: Change in access to basic education scores by region (2015–2024)**

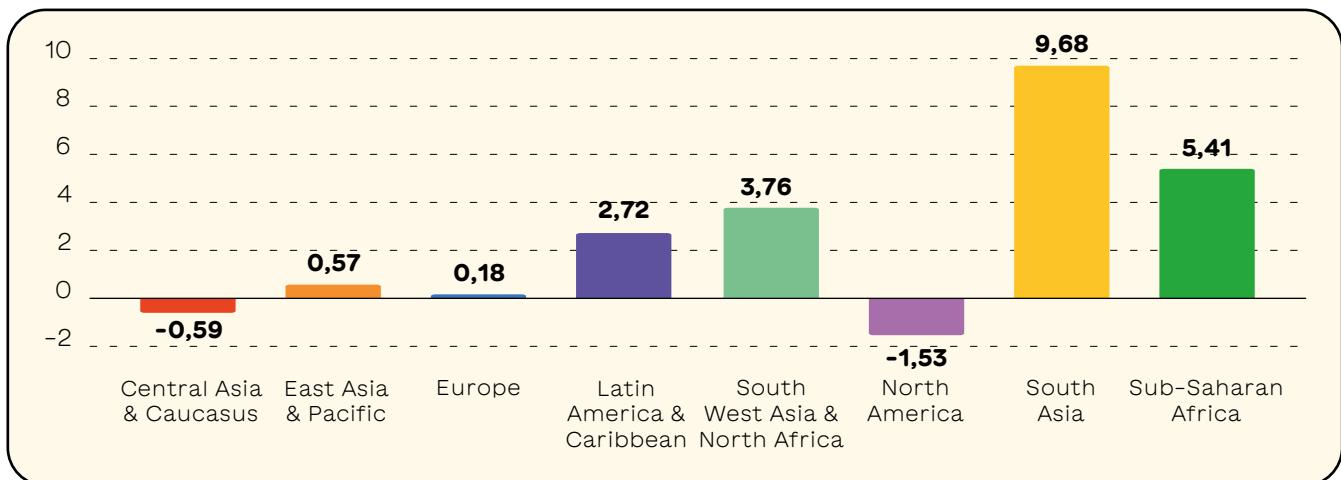


Figure 26 shows the change in 'access to basic education' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 10 July 2024: Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education, A/HRC/RES/56/5, 12 July 2024.

While global scores in the component '**access to basic education**'—aggregating results for relevant indicators—remain relatively high, regional trends over the past decade reveal a fragmented and uneven story. Some regions, like South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, have made steady progress, with South Asia showing the largest improvement (+9.7 points).

In contrast, **North America has declined** by over 1.5 points, and Central Asia has seen slight regression. **Europe and East Asia show stagnation**, with a minimal change despite already strong baseline scores. This suggests that while access may be broadly established, **issues of quality, equity, and inclusivity persist**. The stagnation or reversal in high-income regions and the continued disparity in others point to a global education system that is failing to evolve fast enough.

Indeed, despite global commitments, millions of young people remain out of school or excluded from the educational opportunities they need. **Persistent inequalities—shaped by poverty, gender, geography, disability, and conflict—continue to define who gets to learn and for how long**. Infrastructure gaps, policy stagnation, and economic pressures further limit access and continuity. Even where access exists, quality and outcomes vary widely across and within countries.

This concerning picture is detailed by the analysis of the components' indicators. Over the past decade, **equal access to quality education has either stagnated or declined in all regions except South Asia**. While countries like **Timor-Leste and Moldova improved** by more than 10 points, the **global trend is overwhelmingly negative**. **Europe** stands out as the region with the **most severe regressions**, with **Finland** dropping **27.5 points** and the **Netherlands** declining by **20 points**. Similar downward trends are seen in **Portugal, France**, and several other EU members. Outside Europe, countries like **Ecuador** experienced **dramatic setbacks**, with a drop of **33 points**, underscoring the global erosion of equitable access to quality education.

**Figure 27: Change in equal access to quality education scores by region (2015–2024)**

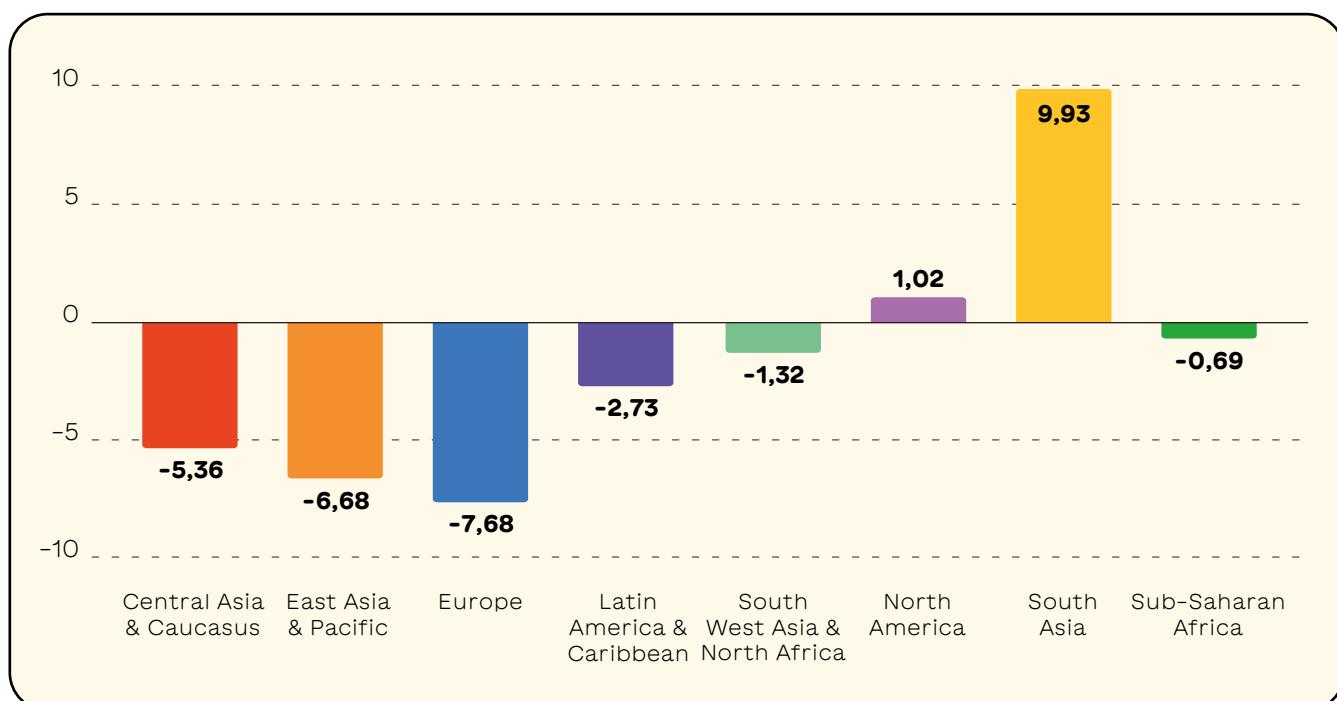


Figure 27 shows the change in 'equal access to quality education' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

**In some high-income regions, progress in primary school enrolment has not only stalled but reversed: In North America, it is declining.** Canada has lost nearly eight points over the past decade, and the United States has also slipped by nearly four. Other countries show even sharper drops, including the Solomon Islands (-45 points), Liberia (-34), Albania (-16), and Romania (-11). Yet there are signs of resilience and recovery. Bosnia and Herzegovina has improved by nine points, while Syria, despite ongoing conflict, registered a nearly 20-point gain, underscoring the importance of sustained commitment even under extreme circumstances.

Between 2015 and 2024, global progress in **secondary school attainment has been positive across all regions**, but uneven in scale and speed. Most regions registered improvements, with **Latin America & the Caribbean (+10.4)** and **South Asia (+9.9)** showing the most substantial increases. These improvements signal the impact of long-term investment in access to education. However, some regions remain behind in overall attainment levels despite progress. In particular, **Sub-Saharan Africa**, despite a significant improvement of **+4.3 points**, still exhibits the lowest average attainment scores globally, reflecting persistent barriers.

**Gender parity in secondary school attainment** is gradually improving, particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, both regions still lag behind global averages, and **national disparities remain acute**. For example, Türkiye consistently scores well below the European average in completion of secondary education.

Examining the **reduction in the number of women aged 25–29 with no formal education** adds a critical gender lens to existing educational inequalities, particularly in **South West Asia & North Africa (SWANA), Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia**. While these regions continue to score below global averages, they are making gradual progress. Still, **inequalities within regions remain stark**; this is especially visible in Sub-Saharan Africa, where scores range from just **14 in Niger** to nearly **99 in South Africa**, with countries like **Congo (98.5)** also performing strongly. Encouraging gains are visible in several countries: **Yemen (+35 points), Morocco and Djibouti (+25 each), Bhutan (+32), Nepal (+25), The Gambia (+31), and Sierra Leone (+25)**. However, despite these improvements, **many countries in these three regions continue to underperform relative to their economic capacity**, suggesting that the challenge is not merely one of resources, but also of political will, accessibility, and the enforcement of rights.

Survey data adds further insight. When young people were asked whether most **children in their country have the opportunity to learn and grow** each day, optimism was highest in East Asia & the Pacific. However, even here, positive responses have declined over the past decade, now resting at 82 points. In **SWANA**, the outlook is more concerning: **more than half of respondents believe children do not have these opportunities**, and this trend is worsening.

These findings reveal more than gaps in provision. They reflect a growing **crisis of education systems**, and a loss of faith in the promise that education can be a pathway to dignity, opportunity, and participation for younger generations. Upholding the right to education requires removing structural barriers, supporting mental health, and inclusion.

## Right to access information

The **right to access information** is a **foundational element of the right to freedom of expression**. It guarantees that individuals, including young people, can obtain information of public relevance from diverse sources and hold authorities accountable. This right also protects the ability of media actors to gather and report information without undue restrictions. In the context of the Youth Progress Index, we focus on the material conditions that shape access—particularly digital access—by analysing internet and mobile phone usage as well as the Online Service Index. The latter assesses how effectively governments use digital tools to deliver public services and engage citizens.

**Figure 28: Regional trends in the right to access information – progress across indicators**



Figure 28 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to access information have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

The past decade has brought remarkable gains in **digital connectivity for young people**, with the Youth Progress Index showing sharp increases in internet and mobile access across nearly all regions. Scores for the ‘**information and communications**’ component rose globally from **58.0 in 2015 to 70.1 in 2024**, with especially large leaps in **South Asia, Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa**. Some countries—such as **Japan, Israel, and Afghanistan**—are exceptions, with stagnation or decline.

**Looking at the indicator level, access to the internet has improved significantly across all regions**, with especially strong progress in South Asia, Central Asia & the Caucasus, and Latin America & the Caribbean. These regions have made the largest gains despite starting from lower baselines, reflecting expanding infrastructure and broader digital inclusion efforts. However, inequalities remain stark, particularly within regions like **South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa**, where **many countries still lag far behind in internet connectivity**. While high-income regions such as Europe show smaller gains due to already high coverage, global digital equity remains a critical challenge that demands sustained investments.

Similarly, **mobile telephone access has improved in nearly all world regions**, with particularly strong gains in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America & the Caribbean. Europe, East Asia, and North America maintained already high levels of access, while regions like South Asia and the South West Asia & North Africa registered modest but steady increases. Only Central Asia & the Caucasus experienced stagnation over the past decade, though average scores remain in line with global averages.

Overall, this rapid expansion in connectivity has not been matched by similar progress in **digital rights and protections**. In fact, access to **alternative sources of information**<sup>22</sup> has declined in numerous countries. **Afghanistan, Myanmar, Algeria, and Ukraine** have seen increasing restrictions on online civic expression and dissent. Worryingly, even **high-income democracies** like the **United States** and EU member states such as **Romania** show visible declines, challenging the assumption that digital freedoms are secure in more developed contexts.

The regional performance on the **Online Service Index**, an important proxy for the right to access public information, shows considerable global progress, albeit with **significant variation**. The index measures how effectively governments deploy digital technologies to provide public services and engage citizens.

**East Asia & Pacific and South Asia** emerged as the two most improved regions, each with a **nearly 29-point increase**. Central Asia & the Caucasus also advanced substantially, with a 26-point rise. These trends point to an acceleration of digital transformation efforts, particularly in middle-income countries that have invested in e-governance as a means to improve state-citizen interactions and transparency.

**Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America & the Caribbean** also experienced improvements, although their average progress was more moderate. In contrast, **North America stands out for being the only region with a decline over this period**, suggesting stagnation or possibly back-sliding in federal-level digital service provision despite high starting levels. In Europe, the score remains high, but **many EU countries underperform their economic possibilities**, including Belgium, Luxembourg, Romania, and Italy.

As such, while the global trajectory is positive, the data reveals a **growing digital divide overall, not only between regions but also within them**. The right to access public information increasingly depends on governments' commitment to e-governance, and these disparities highlight the need for international support and accountability mechanisms to bridge the gap.

Looking ahead, **we strongly emphasize the need for youth-specific data** on digital privacy and online safety to ensure that young people's rights and freedoms online are consistently monitored and contribute to shaping appropriate regulatory practices. These issues are not only fundamental rights but are also **critical enablers of freedom of expression**, especially in digital environments. They will be further explored under the **Opportunity** dimension, where we will assess how the online space either enables or limits the voice, agency, and safe participation of young people.

<sup>22</sup> Access to alternative sources of information is not currently part of the Youth Progress Index framework. However, we include it in this analysis by drawing on complementary datasets, such as those from the V-Dem Institute, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of young people's access to diverse and independent information.

## Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Recognised under international law, this right ensures that every individual can **access timely, acceptable, and affordable healthcare services** of appropriate quality. For **young people**, this includes not only treatment for illness, but also access to **preventive services, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and support for mental wellbeing**.

In the Youth Progress Index, this right is assessed through indicators such as universal health coverage, equal access to quality healthcare, and life expectancy at age 30, capturing early adult health trajectories. It also considers the burden of non-communicable diseases, and mental wellbeing, reflecting the urgent need to address both physical and psychological health conditions that disproportionately affect youth.

For young people, this right is foundational: it shapes their ability to learn, work, form relationships, and navigate the transitions of adolescence and early adulthood. Yet across much of the world, health systems are failing them: **slow to adapt to modern challenges** and **blind to deepening disparities** in access, quality, and outcomes.

**Figure 29: Regional trends in the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and right to reproductive and sexual health – progress across indicators**



Figure 29 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health scores have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

**Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** has shown **consistent progress across all regions** over the past decade, indicating a positive global trend in expanding access to essential health services. The greatest improvement was recorded in **South Asia**, with a **+10.9-point increase** between 2015 and 2024, highlighting significant efforts to close long-standing gaps. **East Asia & Pacific** also saw strong progress (**+9.0**), followed by **South West Asia & North Africa (+6.7)** and **Central Asia & the Caucasus (+5.9)**. Even regions starting from a lower baseline, such as **Sub-Saharan Africa**, experienced modest gains (**+2.4**), though they remain at the bottom of the global ranking.

**Europe** recorded more limited increases (**+4.7**), suggesting maturity but also a potential plateau in system improvement. **North America**, despite its high baseline, only registered a **+5.97-point gain**, which contrasts sharply with the sharp declines seen in other health-related indicators in the region (e.g., non-communicable diseases and equal access to care), raising questions about equity and quality beneath the surface of coverage.

Overall, while **UHC is improving**, progress is uneven in **both pace and scale**, and significant disparities persist. Addressing these inequalities requires not only expanding coverage, but also **ensuring fair distribution, affordability, and youth-specific health services**, particularly in lower-income and underserved settings.

Indeed, equal access to quality healthcare has declined in **nearly every region** since 2015. The most severe deterioration occurred in **North America** (-15.47 points), followed by **Europe** (-10.12), long considered a model of accessible care. Other regions, such as **Latin America, East Asia, and the South West Asia & North Africa**, also recorded moderate declines, pointing to widening internal inequalities. Only **Sub-Saharan Africa** avoided regression, but with just a **+0.62-point stagnation from a very low baseline**. At the national level, striking declines were observed in **Armenia, Russia, Ecuador, Eritrea, and Gaza**. The global distribution is alarmingly scattered, reflecting **inequalities within the inequalities**: where young people face not only disparities between countries, but also within them, depending on income, identity, and location.

**Figure 30: Change in equal access to quality healthcare scores by region (2015–2024)**

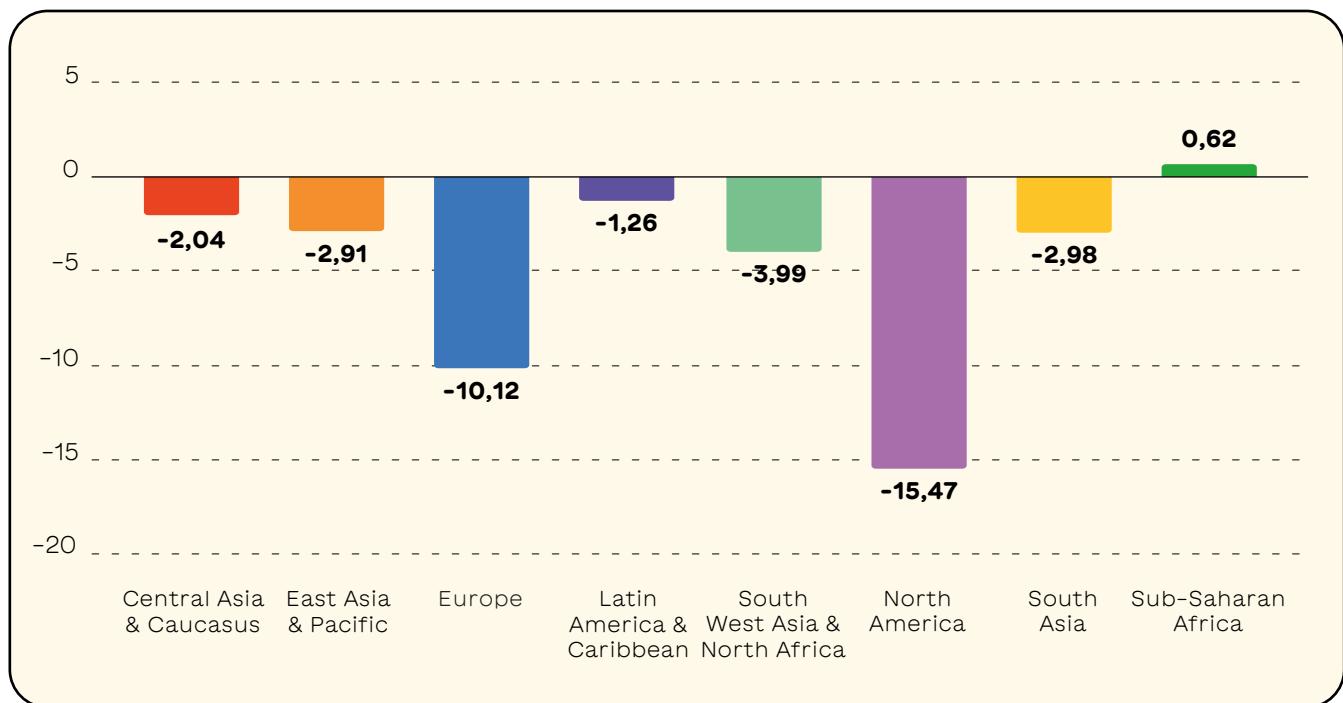


Figure 30 shows the change in 'equal access to quality healthcare' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

**Life expectancy at age 30**—which measures the average number of additional years a person aged 30 can expect to live—has resumed an upward trajectory across all regions after the COVID-19-related setbacks. This marks a **positive long-term trend** in youth and adult health over the past decade. The **only notable exception** is the **Occupied Palestinian Territories**, where life expectancy has declined, reflecting the broader humanitarian crisis.

In contrast, the analysis of the indicator '**Reduction in non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)**' presents a more nuanced and troubling picture. While progress in tackling NCDs has **stagnated in Latin America & the Caribbean and East Asia & Pacific**, it has **abruptly declined in North America**, where preventable chronic conditions continue to rise among younger populations. Alarmingly, many countries, particularly in **East Asia & Pacific**, are still **underperforming relative to their economic capacity**, indicating that available resources are not being effectively translated into healthier outcomes. This underscores the need for stronger prevention systems and more equitable access to quality care.

**Figure 31: Change in mental wellbeing scores by region (2015–2024)**

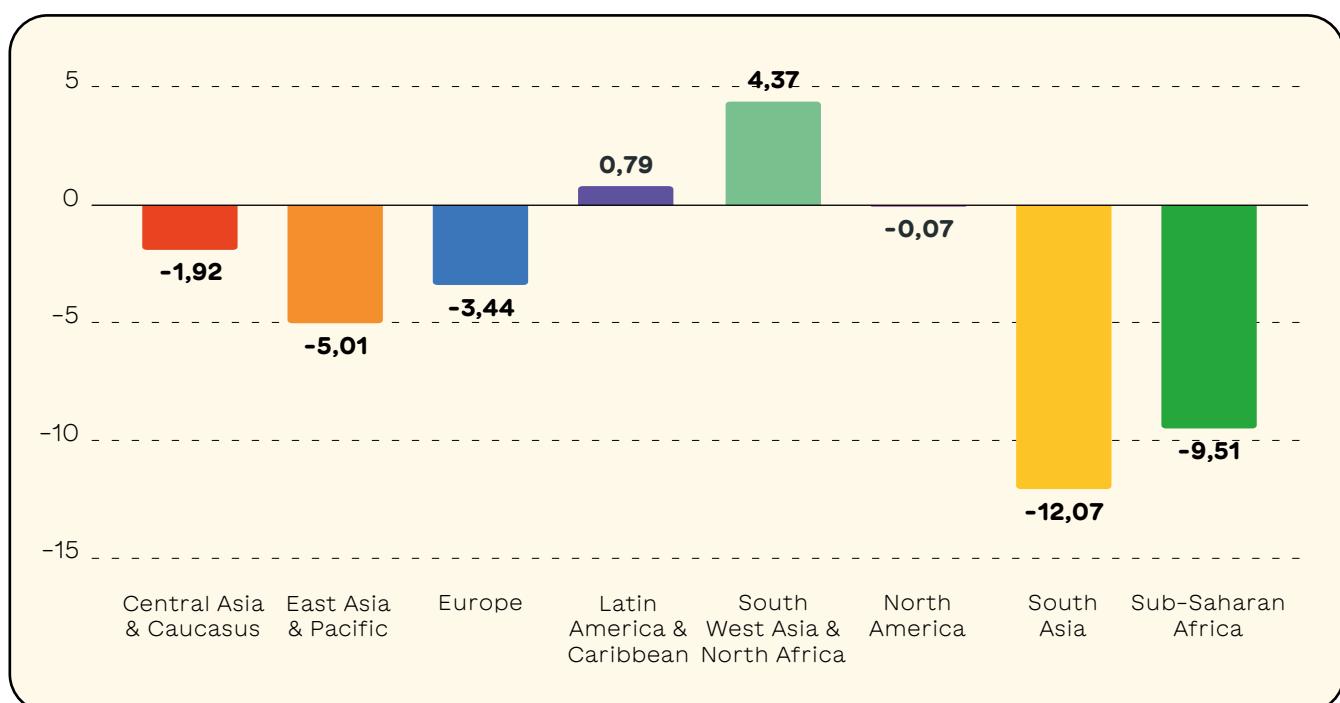


Figure 31 shows the change in 'mental wellbeing' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

When it comes to young people's mental wellbeing, youth are reporting higher levels of **anxiety, depression, distress, and social isolation**. The indicator on mental wellbeing,<sup>23</sup> measured through young people reporting feelings of anger, sadness, worry or stress over the previous day, remains chronically overlooked.

The South West Asia & North Africa region shows the most improvement, with an increased score of 4.37. Latin America & Caribbean stagnated; in the other regions, progress has dropped, and quite severely for some of them, with South Asia dropping the most by -12.07 points, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (-9.51), East Asia & Pacific (-5.01), Europe (-3.44), and Central Asia & the Caucasus (-1.92).

<sup>23</sup> The mental wellbeing indicator has been updated since the previous edition of the *Youth Progress Index 2023 and its 'Exploring Social Factors in Youth Mental Wellbeing'* research. See methodological note for further information. There is still an extraordinary lack of age-disaggregated data on mental health at the global level, making it difficult to capture the specific challenges young people face.

Mental wellbeing services are **underfunded, stigmatised, and structurally sidelined**. Even where services exist, they are often not designed for young people, and rarely with them. Legal and cultural taboos continue to block access, while confidentiality, accessibility, and youth participation remain far from guaranteed. A rights-based approach requires that systems not only treat illness, but **prevent exclusion**, including through youth-sensitive policy, tailored services, and meaningful engagement.

## Right to reproductive and sexual health

The **right to reproductive and sexual health** is an extension of the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and is recognised under international law.

From the YPI, **satisfied demand for contraception** tracks how many married or partnered women (15-49) who *want* to avoid pregnancy actually have access to a modern method. Although the indicator falls under the Opportunity dimension, it is included here as it is consistent with the right to health. The indicator is blunt as it ignores unmarried women and counts only “modern” methods. Without additional data collection, this is the best proxy we have to see whether family-planning promises are reaching the ground.

Since 2015 the sharpest progress has come from **Sub-Saharan Africa**, which has lifted the share of women whose family-planning needs are met by modern methods by roughly seven points—an encouraging jump even if overall coverage still hovers near the halfway mark.

**South Asia** is next, up about five points thanks to large public-health drives in many countries. Gains in the **South West Asia & North Africa** have been steadier, adding almost three points, while **Central Asia & the Caucasus, Europe and North America** have inched forward by around two points apiece; these regions were already satisfying most demand in 2015, so additional progress is naturally slower. In parts of the Western Balkans, for instance, access to contraception for young women mirrors the levels found in some of the world’s lowest-income countries, a stark indicator of neglect in both policy and provision. **East Asia & the Pacific** has moved less than a single point, but that is largely because coverage there was already close to universal, hovering near 90 percent, leaving little room for dramatic improvement.

**Globally we're closing the gap, but two worlds remain:** most women in Europe, East Asia and North America can choose modern contraception whenever they need it (scores in the 80s and 90s), while about half of women in Sub-Saharan Africa and a third in the lowest-performing countries still cannot. Despite the encouraging regional gains, the global picture remains uneven: a sizable group of countries in all regions is still falling short of what their economies could realistically deliver. The bottleneck is no longer a lack of resources; it is the failure to translate existing capacity into accessible, culturally sensitive family-planning services that reach every woman who wants them.

## Right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

With the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment now formally recognised as a human right, governments have an urgent obligation to safeguard environmental wellbeing for both today's youth and future generations. This recognition affirms that climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation are not only ecological threats, but also direct violations of fundamental human rights.

The environmental conditions shaping young people's lives are improving in some areas, but not nearly fast enough, and not for everyone. According to the Youth Progress Index, global performance on environmental quality has increased only slightly over the last decade, and many countries continue to expose young people to unsafe levels of pollution, waste, and environmental risk.

**Figure 32: Regional trends in the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment – progress across indicators**



Figure 32 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment scores have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

On **outdoor air safety**, the global average score increased modestly, suggesting some progress in reducing exposure. Yet youth in regions like SWANA, South Asia, and East Asia still face serious risks. (the last two clearly declining by 5.6 and 4.8 respectively). For example, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Thailand and Libya report some of the lowest scores on this indicator, indicating high levels of illness and early death caused by air pollution among young people. By contrast, countries like Finland, Norway, and New Zealand report scores above 90, reflecting lower exposure and better air quality.

**Reduction of air pollution**, measured through population-weighted levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) follows a similar pattern. These microscopic particles—less than 2.5 microns in diameter—are the result of fossil fuel combustion, household burning of solid fuels, industrial activity, and agriculture. They can penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream, contributing to respiratory disease, cardiovascular illness, and premature death. While some improvements are visible, many countries in **East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa** remain below 50 on the 0–100 scale, showing continued exposure to dangerous pollution. Scores below 30 are common in **low-income contexts**, where industrial emissions, transport, and residential fuels go unregulated.

The **reduction of lead exposure shows global improvement**, with Europe and North America scoring highest—often above 80—thanks to long-standing bans. In contrast, countries such as **Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Nigeria** score below 50, reflecting ongoing risks from informal industries and contaminated water.

Youth satisfaction with **air quality** has improved just modestly, when not stagnating, over the past decade. While in **North America**, the satisfaction has increased by **2.6 points between 2015 and 2024**, in several countries satisfaction scores remain low, reflecting ongoing exposure to dangerous pollution and weak enforcement of environmental protections. For example, the positive trend is not echoed in parts of **Europe** and **East Asia**, where scores remained unchanged, with Bulgaria dramatically below the global average.

Progress in **waste recovery** has been sharply unequal. **Europe leads**, with countries like **Finland, Austria, and Belgium** scoring near or above 80, thanks to mature recycling systems. Most regions, particularly **SWANA, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa**, remain below 40, with little change since 2015.

Together, these indicators confirm that **while some countries are improving**, global environmental progress remains **fragile, slow, and deeply unequal**. Young people in low- and middle-income countries continue to bear the brunt of environmental injustice, despite contributing least to the problem. Even in high-income regions, perceived environmental quality is reflecting disillusionment with how environmental crises are being handled.

The right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is not aspirational, it is a legal obligation grounded in the principles of intergenerational justice. The Youth Progress Index shows that we are falling short. Without enforceable standards, meaningful investment, and youth inclusion in climate and environmental governance, today's uneven gains will not hold. Governments must act now to close these gaps, because **clean air, safe water, and healthy ecosystems are among the foundations of every other right**.

It is important to note that several Basic Needs indicators discussed earlier—such as access to electricity, clean water, and clean cooking fuels—are highly relevant in the context of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. These indicators reflect both the quality of life today and the environmental pressures shaping the future. For a comprehensive understanding of sustainable youth progress, these dimensions must be considered jointly.

## Youth progress must also be sustainable

### A sustainability-adjusted version of the youth progress index

While many high-income countries lead in youth outcomes, this success often comes at an unsustainable environmental cost. The sustainability-adjusted Youth Progress Index shows that top-performing countries in the standard YPI rankings—such as Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, and Canada—experience some of the steepest drops when environmental sustainability is factored in. Their models of progress are based on high consumption and emissions, undermining the very future young people will inherit.

Conversely, countries in lower tiers of the YPI, especially in the Global South, often see their scores improve when sustainability is included. These countries have lower environmental footprints, yet suffer more from the impacts of the climate crisis, despite contributing the least to its causes. This underscores a fundamental justice issue: those most affected by environmental breakdown are not those responsible for it.

Some countries—like Costa Rica, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria—offer promising examples of more balanced progress, combining relatively strong youth outcomes with lower environmental impact. But overall, the data shows that no country has yet achieved both high youth progress and sustainability.

If youth rights are to be protected long-term, progress must be redefined, beyond economic growth and towards models that are both socially inclusive and ecologically sound. Continuing to chase GDP growth in already developed nations risks closing off the space for sustainable development in others. A global paradigm shift is needed, prioritizing regenerative, redistributive models that secure rights today, without costing the future.

This call for a paradigm shift has now received legal reinforcement. In **July 2025, the International Court of Justice (ICJ)** issued a landmark advisory opinion recognising that high-emitting countries may bear legal responsibility for climate-related harm to vulnerable nations. This includes potential reparations for the damage caused by emissions that undermine environmental and human rights. Notably, this legal breakthrough was initiated by a group of **Pacific Island youth**, many of them students from countries like Tuvalu and Vanuatu, who brought international attention to the disproportionate risks they face. Their advocacy exemplifies **the power of young people to reshape global norms** and demand accountability on behalf of both current and future generations.

## Prioritising wellbeing: A rights-based framework for education, health and the environment

The evidence from the Youth Progress Index makes one thing clear: young people's wellbeing is rapidly **progressing when it comes to digital access and school enrolment**. However, **more needs to be done to ensure sustained and equitable access to primary and secondary education, mental health support, and environmental safety**. A rights-based approach must therefore be provided to all policy areas, in consultation with youth organisations, to make youth progress a living reality. These development challenges are failures to realise legally enshrined rights.

A global UN Convention on the Rights of Young People would change that. It would affirm that **those rights are not optional or mere developmental goals, but they are legal rights owed to all young people**. It would close gaps in protections by requiring states to recognise the intersecting barriers that young people face in completing primary and secondary school—particularly gender-related barriers—accessing quality mental health care, and being able to thrive in a world where wellbeing and environmental care are at the centre.

## Opportunity: A decade of stagnation calls for a binding Youth Rights framework

Over the past decade, the world has made only minimal progress in securing opportunities for young people. The global average in the Opportunity dimension edged up from **51.58 to just 52.60**, a marginal rise that leaves this pillar far behind Basic Needs and Foundations of Wellbeing. While access to university has broadened in some countries, persistent gaps in youth employment, political participation, and representation mean that too many young people remain locked out of shaping their own futures. Economic autonomy and voice, cornerstones of youth empowerment, have improved only slightly, and in many regions, they are stagnating or declining.

**Figure 33: Opportunity scores per region (2015–2024)**

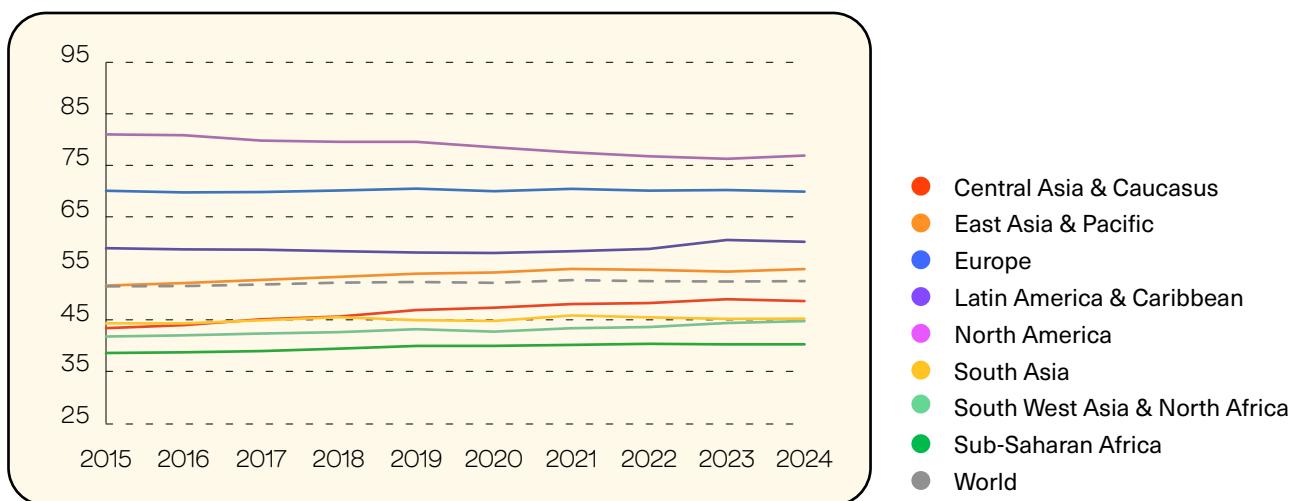


Figure 33 shows a line chart displaying regional Opportunity dimension scores over the past decade, alongside the global average, showing how scores have evolved between 2015 and 2024.

The dimension score analysis spotlights regional and national disparities, painting a more nuanced picture.

**Norway (90.72), Denmark (89.79), and Finland (89.76)** lead globally, alongside strong performers in East Asia and Pacific like **Australia (86.63)** and **New Zealand (82.51)**. Elsewhere, the pattern is grim: South Sudan (15.63), **Afghanistan (15.83)**, **Chad (18.45)**, and the **Central African Republic (19.55)** sit at the bottom, with many others—including **Myanmar, Syria, and Haiti**—failing to cross even the 35-point threshold. These low scores reveal not just poor outcomes, but systemic exclusion from work, political life, and protection against discrimination.

**Figure 34: Global map of Opportunity dimension in 2024 – absolute scores**

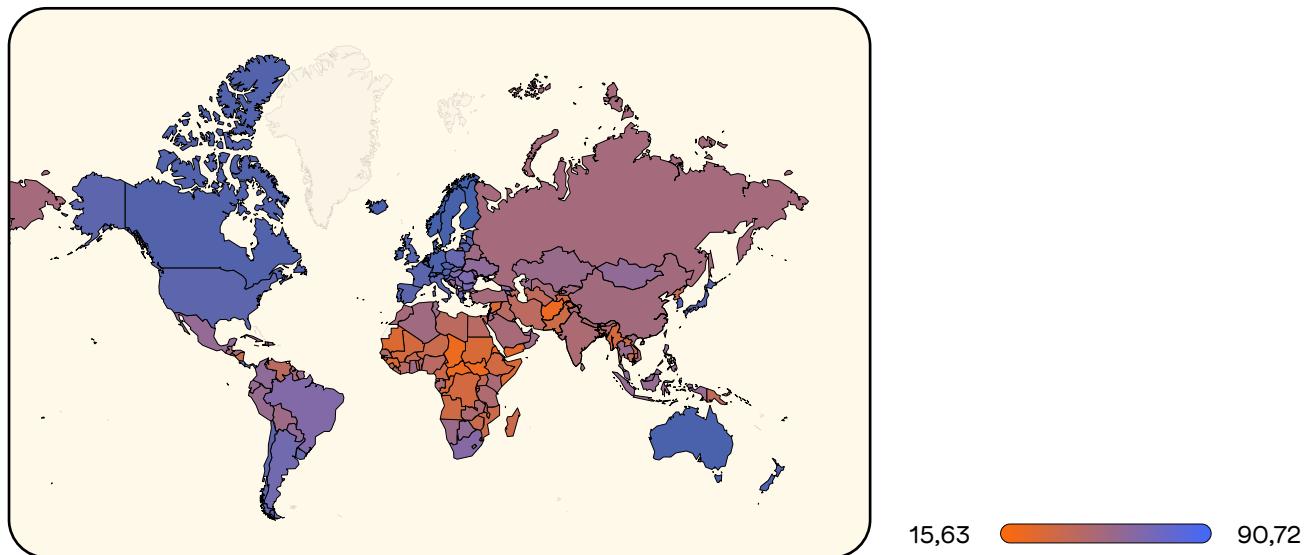


Figure 34 displays cross-country disparities in the Opportunity dimension of the Youth Progress Index. The scores are on the scale 0–100. Higher scores indicate better results.

This slow progress signals a deeper problem. Without addressing the structural and legal barriers that prevent young people from participating fully in economic and civic life, no policy reform will be enough. Locking in the gains made in basic services will require a bold shift in priorities: from infrastructure alone to institutions, from consultation alone to agency. And that means anchoring youth opportunity in enforceable rights, starting with the universal recognition of young people as full right-holders under international law.

**Figure 35: Opportunity – best and worst absolute and relative performance per region**

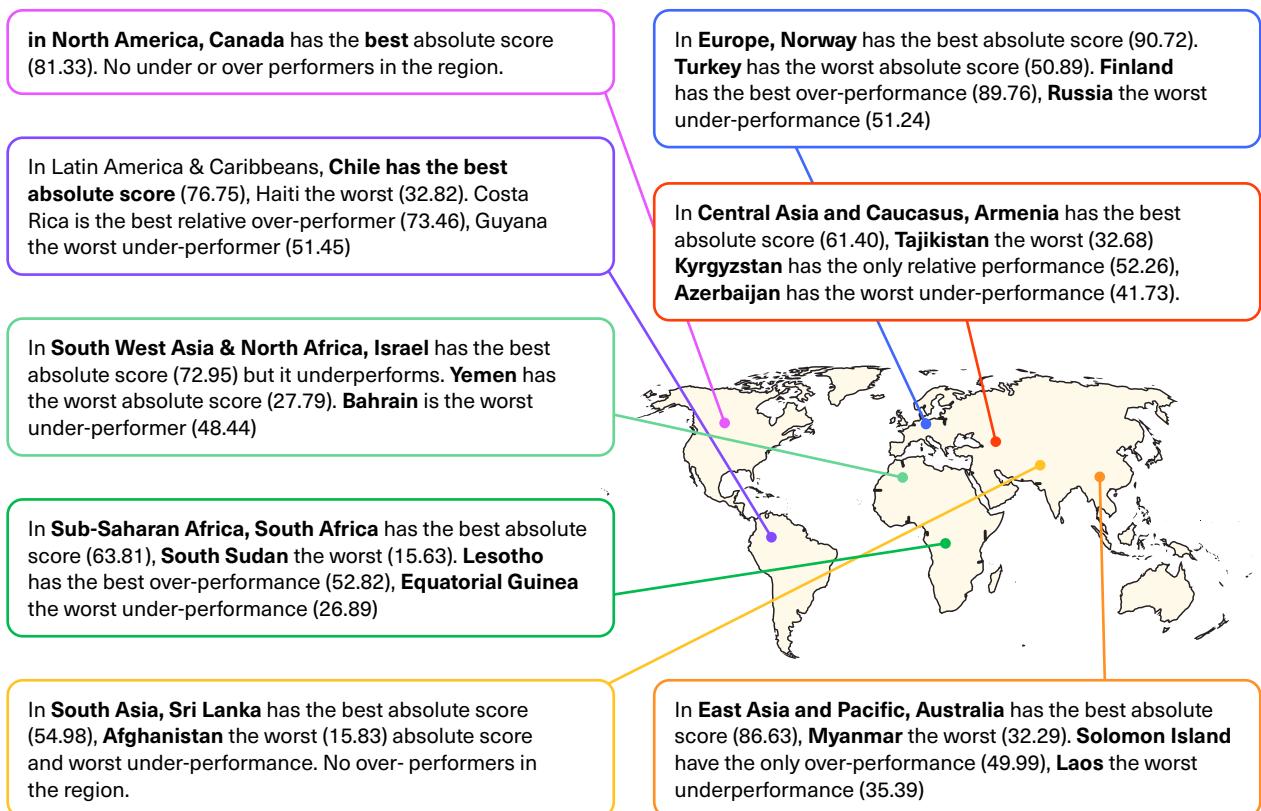


Figure 35 highlights the highest- and lowest-performing countries within each region on the Opportunity dimension, both in terms of absolute scores and performance relative to economic peers. It allows for quick comparison of progress and challenges across the globe.

In tracking the state of youth rights and progress, the Opportunity dimension covers various human rights, including but not limited to:

- **Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association<sup>24</sup>**
- **Right to free press<sup>25</sup>**
- **Right to meaningful youth participation<sup>26</sup>**
- **Right to vote and be elected<sup>27</sup>**
- **Right to equality before the law<sup>28</sup>**
- **Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities<sup>29</sup>**
- **Rights of LGBTIQ+ persons<sup>30</sup>**
- **Right to quality working conditions<sup>31</sup>**
- **Right to continued education<sup>32</sup>**

The state of youth rights can be linked with the results of the YPI and presents an opportunity to identify immediate areas to remedy. Below we set out more details as to how these rights are performing across the Opportunity dimension.

24 UDHR, Art. 20; ICCPR, Arts. 21–22.

25 UDHR, Art. 19; ICCPR, Art. 19(2).

26 While not explicitly defined in international human rights law, the right to meaningful youth participation would come as an extension to other intersecting rights such as the right to self-determination (ICCPR, Art. 1(1)), the right to vote and be elected, as elaborated below.

27 UDHR, Art. 21; ICCPR, Art. 25.

28 UDHR, Art. 7; ICCPR, Art. 14.

29 ICCPR, Art. 27; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 18 December 1992.

30 UDHR, Arts. 1-2; ICCPR, Art. 2; and noting the mandate-holder of the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

31 UDHR, Art. 23; ICESCR, Art. 6-7.

32 UDHR, Art. 26; ICESCR, Art. 13(c).

## Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association

The right to peaceful assembly and the right to associate are a cornerstone of democratic governance and a vital mechanism for civic engagement, particularly for young people worldwide; for many of them **peaceful assembly is their only political voice**. Barred from voting or ignored in formal institutions, youth often turn to the streets, campuses, and digital platforms to express their dissent, demand rights, and propose alternatives, which frequently contribute to higher impact and **positive societal outcomes**.

For young people, this right is not only about voicing personal opinions and organising, but about **holding governments to account**, and **contributing to social and political discourse**. Yet in many countries, their protests are met not with dialogue, but repression.

Governments are more likely to pre-emptively and violently repress protests when they involve young people. In Iran, peaceful demonstrations led by girls and young women in 2022 after the killing of **Mahsa Amini** were brutally suppressed, with **hundreds of adolescents detained, injured, or killed**, according to UNICEF.

**In Kenya**, the repression of youth-led protests has escalated to alarming levels. In 2024–2025, young activists faced deadly force, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances. Despite organising peacefully, **young protestors were met with live ammunition, mass arrests, and targeted abductions**. Reports also point to a pattern of intimidation, including nighttime raids and harassment of youth organisers and rights defenders. These violent crackdowns have taken place in a country long seen as a democratic anchor in the region, highlighting how quickly civic space can deteriorate when youth voices challenge entrenched power. The Kenyan case shows that for many governments, youth dissent is not just ignored, it is criminalised, despite its critical role in democratic renewal and accountability.

A similar pattern holds globally: authorities increasingly respond to youth protests with militarised policing, digital surveillance, and excessive force, targeting the very actors working to advance democracy.<sup>33</sup> These actions have resulted in severe injuries and deaths, even among children and bystanders. The militarization of police forces and the deployment of military personnel to police civilian protests are noted as increasing the likelihood of human rights violations. Mass arbitrary arrests and detention, including of children as young as 14, are common, often without due process, in inhumane conditions, and with denial of critical medical care.<sup>34</sup>

Even beyond overt violence, young people encounter legal, administrative, and psychological barriers: burdensome authorisation requirements, fear of retaliation, or criminalisation of peaceful dissent. These invisible restrictions shrink civic space, especially in countries that profess to guarantee these freedoms.

**Figure 36: Regional trends in the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association**



Figure 36 tracks whether the indicator related to the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association has improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

33 UNICEF, *Youth, Protests and the Polycrisis* (2024), <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/7761/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Youth-Protests-and-the-Polycrisis-%20report.pdf>

34 Amnesty International, *Human Rights Violations During Mozambique's Post-2024 Election Crackdown* (2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2025/04/mozambique-police-protest-crackdown/>

The Youth Progress Index confirms this global deterioration. While **North America (95.5)** and the **EU (94.9)** score high, both have seen significant declines since 2015: **-12.7 and -4.9 points**, respectively. Europe overall dropped by **-9.7 points**, with worrying regressions in **Serbia (-20)**, **Russia**, and **Ukraine**. The **United States** plummeted 14 points, falling from a global ranking of 19th to 62nd, particularly amid crackdowns on campus protests. These declines highlight that even established democracies are struggling to protect this right.

**Figure 37: Change in freedom of peaceful assembly scores by region (2015–2024)**

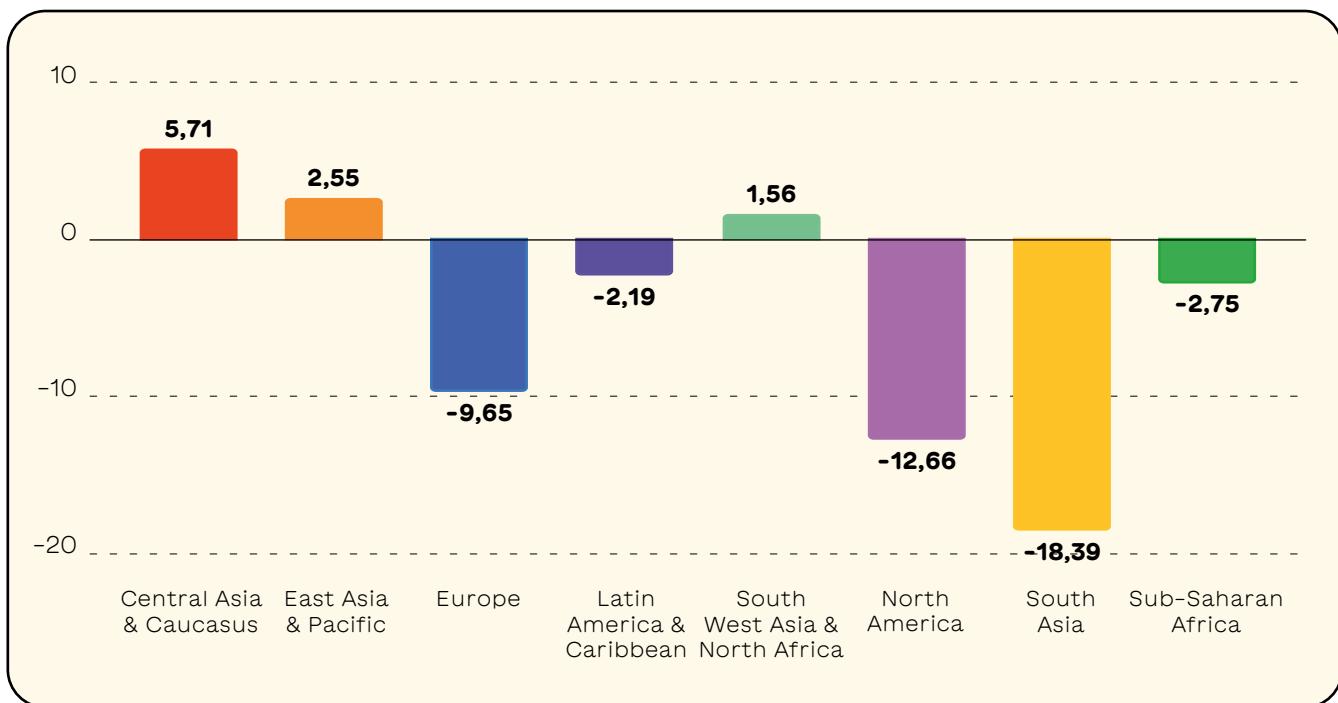


Figure 37 shows the change in 'freedom of peaceful assembly' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

In Europe, Moldova is the best improver, gaining almost 12 points in the last decade, now offering better protection than most EU countries. North Macedonia also improved by 5 points, reaching the average of the European Union. Deterioration continues in Belarus (-34.6), followed by Russia and Ukraine. Serbia also shows concerning results, declining by almost 20 points. Generally, the entire region, with very few exceptions, has lost guarantees.

## How Serbia's students are rewriting protest

The ongoing student-led protests in Serbia, ignited by the tragic Novi Sad railway station canopy collapse in November 2024, quickly evolved from demands for accountability into a broader movement addressing deep-seated systemic grievances. Led primarily by university and high school students, these demonstrations have expanded across hundreds of cities and towns, calling for an end to government corruption, media censorship, and authoritarian practices, alongside demands for improved higher education funding and better labour market conditions for young people. The Serbian youth have employed innovative and largely non-violent tactics, including academic blockades, daily traffic stoppages symbolizing the lives lost, and long-distance solidarity actions like a biking race to Strasbourg, showcasing their strategic resilience and rejection of traditional political structures.

However, the Serbian government's response mirrors a concerning global trend of disproportionate state reactions to youth-led assemblies. Despite the peaceful nature of most protests, authorities have been reported to engage in raids, verbal attacks, harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and smear campaigns against activists and media workers. Concerns have also been raised about unlawful digital surveillance and the use of lawsuits to silence dissent, creating a "chilling effect" on civic space. This aligns with the broader decline in assembly freedoms observed in Serbia, which has seen its score drop by almost 20 points in the last decade, underscoring the persistent gap between international human rights norms and national practices in protecting the right to peaceful assembly.

Elsewhere, the landscape is even more fragmented. **South Asia** dropped 18.4 points on average, with **Afghanistan (-67)**, **Pakistan (-26)**, and **India (-18)** leading regional backsliding. The Maldives is a notable exception, gaining 58 points and now leading the region with 86 points, surpassing even the United States. Nepal also gained 4 points.

**SWANA (34.5)** and **East Asia & Pacific (34.2)** remain among the lowest scoring regions. The SWANA region in particular shows considerable variation. Egypt recorded the highest increase in points, but its score remains very low at 28 points, comparable to countries like Togo and Mozambique. In East Asia & Pacific, Thailand is the best improver, increasing its score by 55.6 points, but still far from Indonesia (82.9) or Taiwan (97.5). Myanmar experienced the worst decline, plummeting by 55 points.

**Latin America & the Caribbean** maintain relatively high scores (**82.9**), but this stability conceals growing restrictions. While the overall regional result remains solid, declines at the country level outnumber increases. Guyana, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic show the best increases (around 9-10 points each). However, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Peru experienced significant losses of 49, 48, and 35 points respectively.

**Sub-Saharan Africa**, averaging 50.9, reveals extreme divergence: countries like **The Gambia (+56)** and **Zambia** made strides, while others such as **Togo, Madagascar**, and **Burkina Faso** declined sharply.

**Central Asia & the Caucasus** is notable for reversing a downward trend, rising 5.7 points to 25.3. Uzbekistan stands out as the best improver, gaining 30.9 points over the last decade. Conversely, **Kyrgyzstan experienced the worst decline**, losing 34 points, reflecting an "unprecedented crackdown on civil society".<sup>35</sup> While Armenia and Georgia score highly in the region, they have also seen significant declines in the last decade, indicating a concerning trend where high-scoring nations are losing guarantees, and lower-scoring ones remain far from full protection.

These regional trajectories collectively demonstrate that the **right to peaceful assembly is under renewed pressure globally** and thrives only where legal safeguards, administrative practices, and cultural norms align to protect the ability of young people to gather, protest, and be heard.

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International, *Kyrgyzstan: Unprecedented Crackdown on Civil Society Threatens Human Rights and Country's International Standing* (2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/kyrgyzstan-unprecedented-crackdown-on-civil-society-threatens-human-rights-and-countrys-international-standing/>

**Figure 38: Regional trends in the right to free press – progress across indicators**



The **right to free press** is a fundamental pillar of democratic societies, enabling individuals to participate fully in public life, challenge injustice, and advocate for change.

Strongly linked to the **right to freedom of opinion and expression**, it includes the right to **seek, receive, and impart information through any media**, making it foundational for youth activism, journalism and advocacy. The degree to which young people enjoy this right reflects the **broader enabling environment for youth civil society and youth-led organisations**. Restrictive speech laws, media censorship, and disproportionate government retaliation—including surveillance, criminalisation, and harassment—frequently target youth voices, especially when they critique power structures.

The **'press freedom' indicator has deteriorated** over the past decade, with sharp backslides accelerating since 2021. **South Asia registers the most dramatic regional decline**, losing over 26 points since 2015, driven by significant drops in Afghanistan, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The **South West Asia & North Africa** follow, with a 16-point fall reflecting not only the **impact of protracted conflict but also intensifying pressure on independent journalism** in countries like the UAE, Morocco, and Lebanon. **Central Asia & the Caucasus** remains one of the most restricted regions for free expression, with declines in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia; although Turkmenistan, from a very low base, saw a slight improvement.

**Figure 39: Change in press freedom scores by region (2015–2024)**

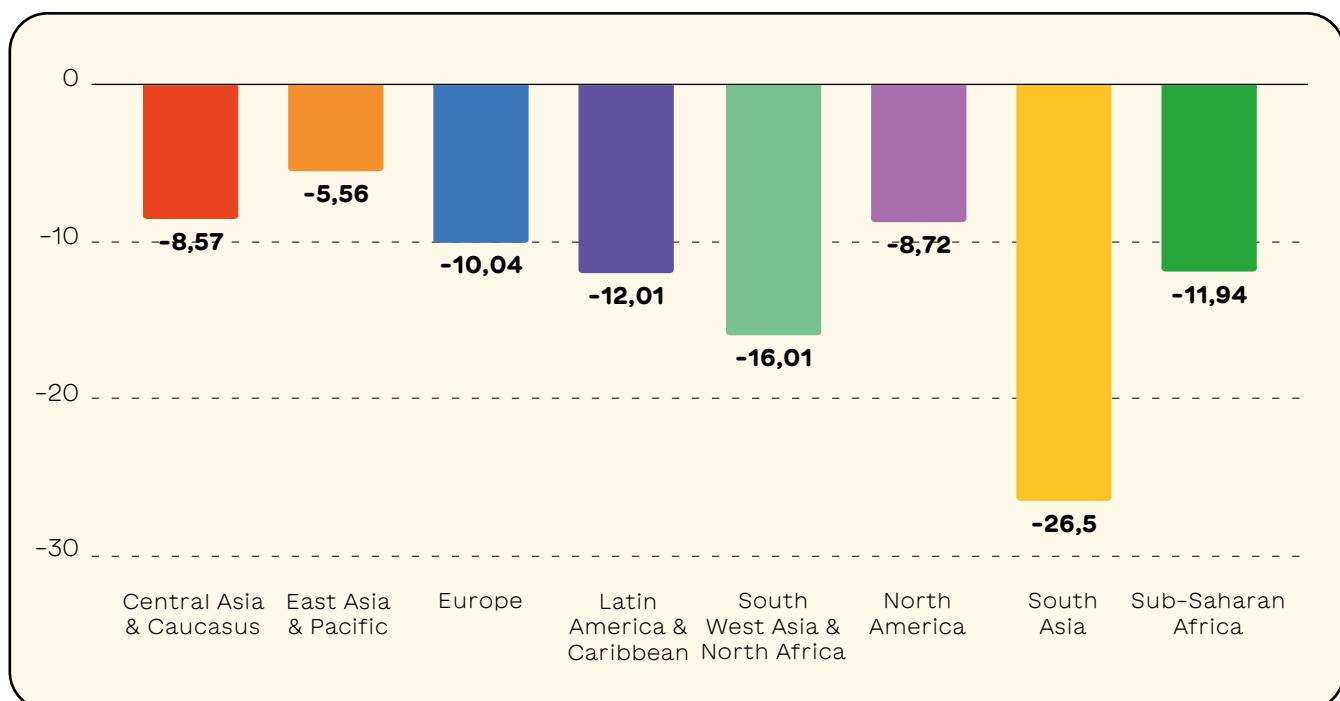


Figure 39 shows the change in 'press freedom' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

### Latin America & the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa

have also lost ground (both -12 points), with stark examples such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Uganda, and Togo.

**Europe continues to enjoy the highest regional scores, but even here, press freedom is slipping**, particularly in Belarus and Russia, but also Cyprus, Poland, Serbia, and Albania (among the most evident declines). **All the EU member states decreased or stagnated**, with the exception of Portugal, gaining 3 points. Even long-standing democracies such as Austria and Germany have slipped as newsrooms report rising online harassment and government pressure.

**North America**, often perceived as a haven for free expression, has not been immune, experiencing a 9-point fall since 2015. **East Asia & Pacific** tells a more mixed story, with significant declines in Myanmar, Mongolia and Cambodia offset by modest progress in places like Timor-Leste and Laos.

Yet, there are signs of progress: countries such as Somalia, Equatorial Guinea, and The Gambia have recorded double-digit improvements, demonstrating that reversal is possible even in challenging contexts. Still, the overall trajectory is deeply troubling. **Shrinking space for free speech weakens democracy, and disproportionately harms youth.**

### Right to meaningful youth participation, right to vote and be elected

When **young people can fully exercise their civil and political rights**—such as freedom of assembly and freedom of expression—they are empowered to **speak out, organise, and access information**. This also enables them to realise their **right to self-determination**, which underpins **meaningful youth participation** as well as the **rights to vote and to stand for election**.

By fully enjoying these rights, young people can engage in public life not as passive subjects but as **active shapers of policy and the societies they live in**. Seeking a secure future in which they—and generations to come—can realise their rights, their **meaningful, inclusive participation and representation** in decision-making spaces is essential for **building trust in democratic institutions**.

Without these freedoms, their participation becomes tokenistic at best, and silenced at worst. At the moment, the erosion of civic space and speech rights directly undermines young people's ability to claim a seat at the table, while age restrictions limit their right to vote or run for office.

**Figure 40: Regional trends in the right to meaningful youth participation and right to vote and get elected – progress across indicators**



Figure 40 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to meaningful youth participation and right to vote and get elected have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

In 2025, the European Partnership for Democracy launched the Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI), scoring 141 countries on the extent to which they respect and enable young people's civic, political, and economic participation. The report found **significant structural barriers in every country surveyed, ranging from socio-economic exclusion to civic space repression and limited electoral access**. Critically, it underlined the role of data itself as a driver of rights: without it, youth inclusion remains invisible, and accountability impossible. Addressing the existing data gaps requires the systematic collection of youth-disaggregated and youth-relevant indicators, to develop robust tools to assess the quality and impact of youth engagement in policy-making.<sup>36</sup>

While **we lack youth-specific global data on civic space**, the available evidence on overall civil society conditions offers critical insights. After all, when civic space closes for all, it closes even faster for youth. Young people, often among the most marginalised in formal political systems, are especially vulnerable to shrinking freedoms and the weakening of civic institutions. The broader trends we observe through the Civil Society freedom indicator therefore serve as a powerful proxy for the environments in which youth participation can, or cannot, flourish.

The indicator shows negative trends in nearly every region, with civic spaces narrowing worldwide. South Asia suffers the steepest drop, followed closely by East Asia & Pacific, and Europe.

**Figure 41: Change in Civil Society (CSOs) freedom by region (2015–2024)**

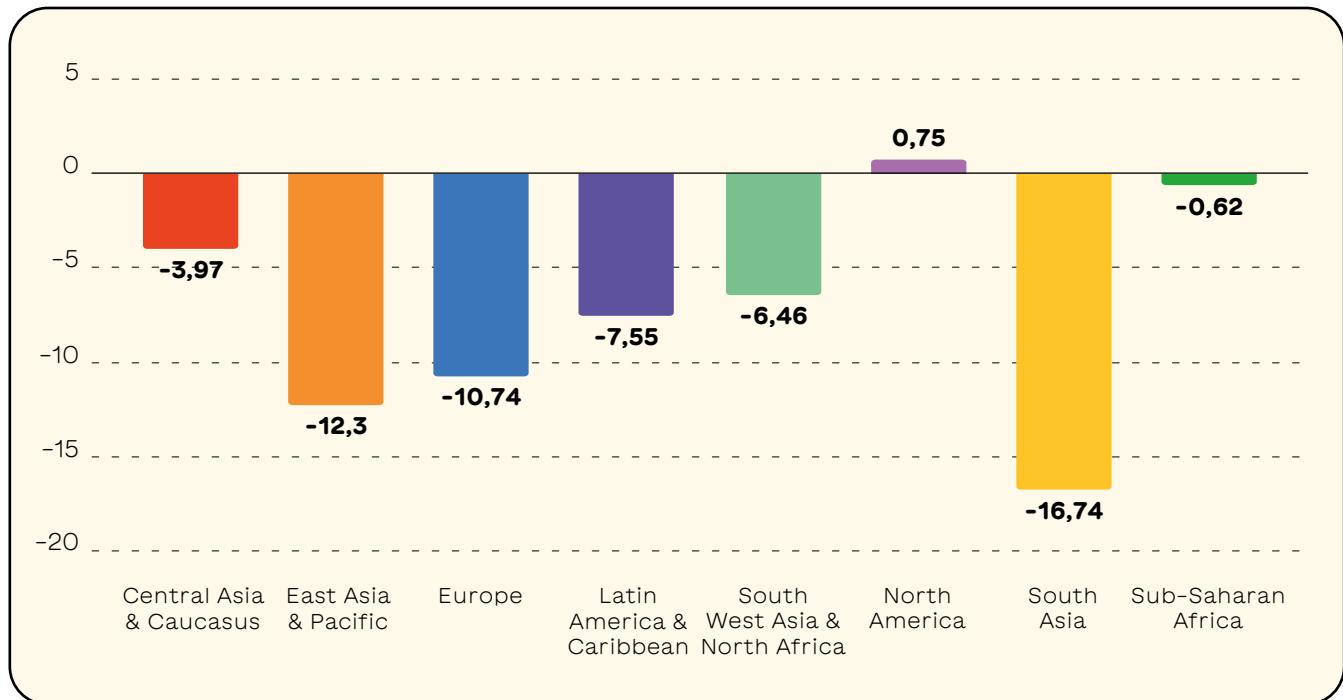


Figure 41 shows the change in 'Civil Society freedom' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

<sup>36</sup> Particularly commendable is the GYPI's effort to collect data on the existence of youth branches within political parties and the adoption of national youth policies.

In **South Asia** the contraction is the most dramatic, with the regional average plunging more than sixteen points. Afghanistan's civic implosion (-68) dominates the picture, but India (-20) and Sri Lanka (-11) confirm a growing hostile climate to independent associations. **East Asia & the Pacific** is close behind: the Philippines (-36), Vietnam (-27), and Myanmar (-22) illustrate a **hardening stance across very different political systems**, while only Timor-Leste and Thailand post clear gains (33 and 20 respectively).

**Europe** is no safe harbour: the region's average score has **dropped by about eleven points**, the third-worst decline worldwide. Belarus (-44) and Russia (-40) epitomise authoritarian free fall, but **setbacks also touch EU members**: Slovakia and Slovenia (-20), the Netherlands (-9), Poland (-8), and Greece (-12) are reminders that democratic credentials do not immunise a country against shrinking civil space. By contrast, a handful of states on the continent, most notably Spain, Norway and the Western Balkans' Montenegro and North Macedonian, inch upward, proving that positive reform remains possible even in a concerning regional climate.

In **Latin America & the Caribbean** the picture is mixed but troubling overall. Nicaragua (-33), Peru (-35), and especially El Salvador (-50) negate sizable improvements in Ecuador (+29) and Honduras (+17). **The South West Asia & North Africa** continues to tighten: Tunisia's post-revolution promise has reversed (-48), and Iraq (-15) and Libya (-13) likewise.

**Central Asia and the Caucasus** slips more modestly in aggregate, yet the spread is wide: Armenia's opening (+19) contrasts with Georgia (-36) and Kyrgyzstan (-21). **Sub-Saharan Africa** shows near-zero net change, masking extremes: the Gambia (+58), Angola (+26) and Zambia (+19) expand civic room, while Burkina Faso (-59), Mali (-33) and Senegal (-22) move sharply in the opposite direction.

**For young people, this erosion is particularly damaging:** as governments repress or co-opt civil-society organisations, the spaces where youth can organise, campaign and hold power to account shrink, undermining the very mechanisms needed to protect their broader rights. Structural barriers compound the challenge. **Safe, youth-friendly spaces, which are designed to be welcoming, safe, and supportive environments where young people can access resources, participate in activities, and build positive relationships, are rare.** Legal frameworks may be weak or ageist. Around the globe even in countries with youth councils or advisory bodies, mechanisms for meaningful impact are often lacking or tokenistic. For marginalised youth in particular, intersecting forms of discrimination create even higher walls. This lack of representation perpetuates a cycle of disengagement and marginalisation, **eroding both the legitimacy of democratic institutions and broader social cohesion.**

One powerful proxy for youth participation is the sense of agency, whether young people feel that they have control over their lives. The Youth Progress Index captures this through the '**freedom over life choices**' indicator, and the global picture is sharply divided. Latin America & the Caribbean and South Asia show strong gains, likely reflecting digital expansion and increased opportunities; while North America has seen a steep 18-point decline, and Europe remains stagnant. This divergence signals a deeper crisis: when young people no longer believe that their effort shapes their future, meaningful participation becomes even harder to realise.

Figure 42: Change in freedom over life choices by region (2015–2024)

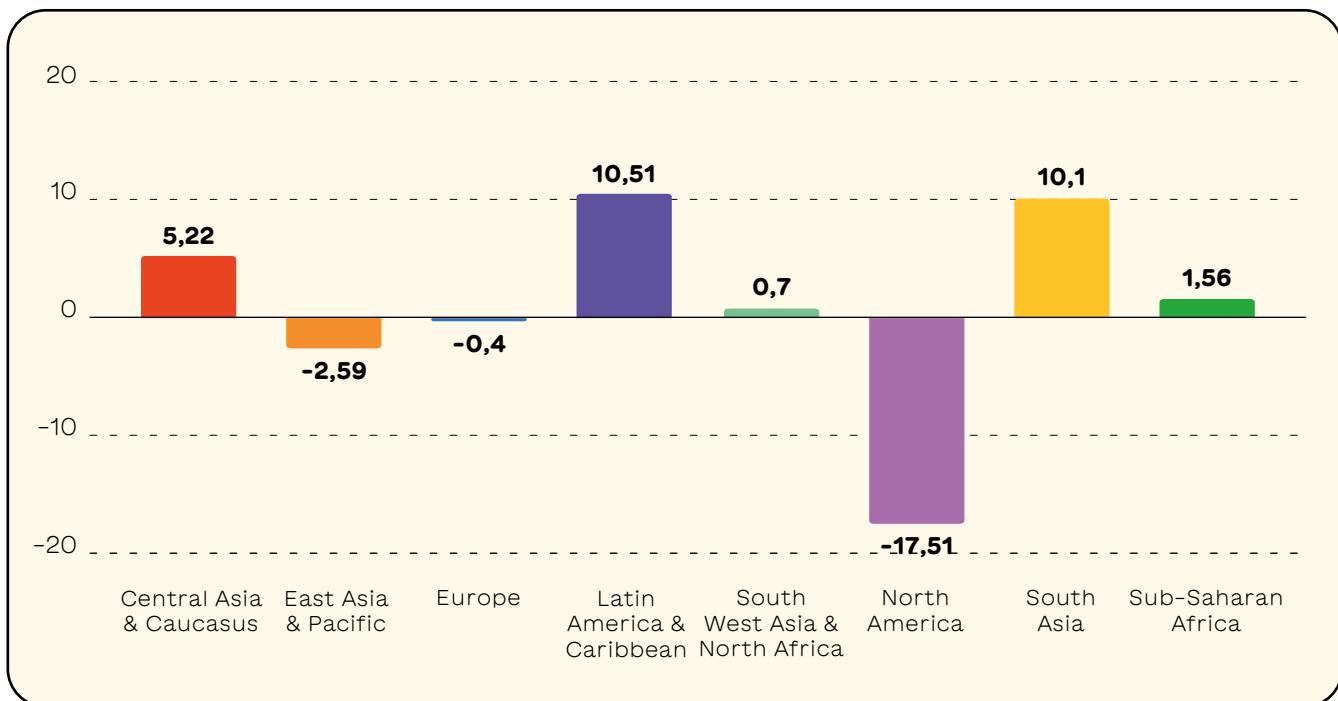


Figure 42 shows the change in 'freedom over life choices' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

The indicator Perceived corruption decline measures the perceived level of public sector corruption. It offers yet another lens through which to understand the barriers to youth participation. Trust in institutions is a vital precondition for civic and political engagement: if young people view their governments as corrupt or self-serving, they are far less likely to believe that participation can lead to real change. Unfortunately, this trust appears to be declining across most of the world.

**North America** records the **steepest decline**, with a 10-point drop in trust since 2015, **followed by Europe and Latin America**; the South West Asia & North Africa are also showing downward trends.

Figure 43: Change in perceived corruption decline by region (2015–2024)

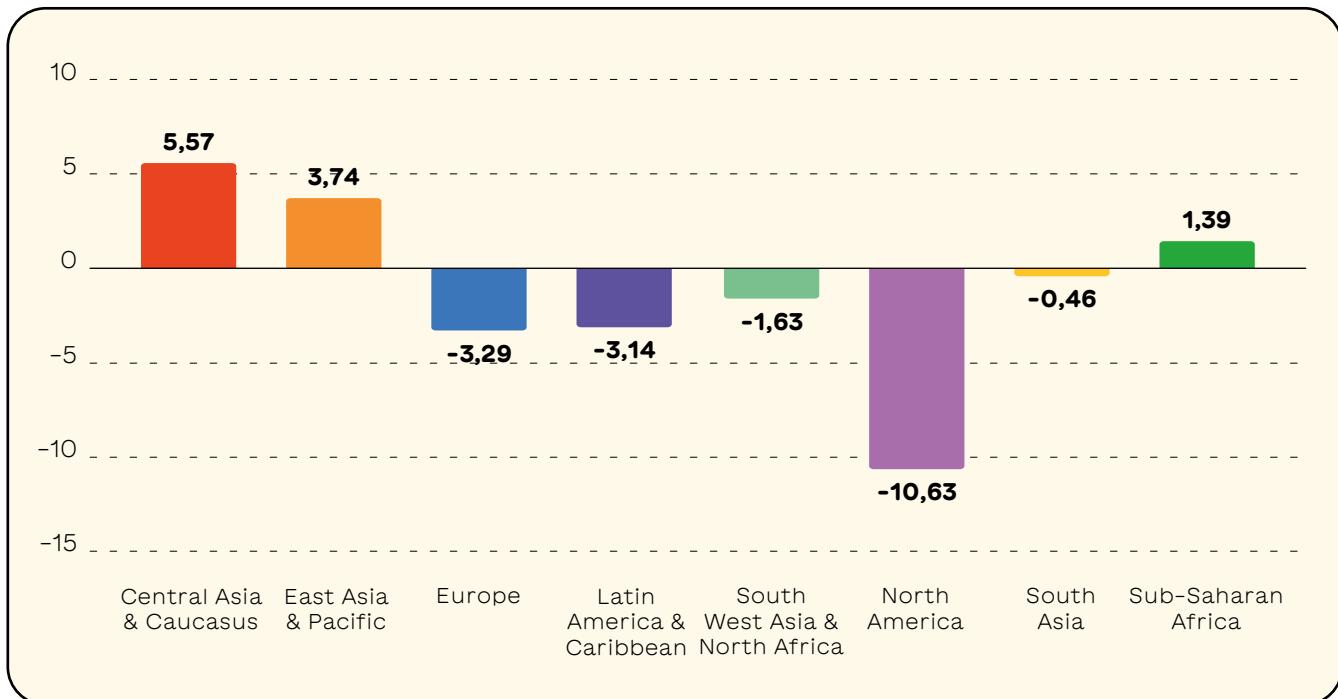


Figure 43 shows the change in 'perceived corruption decline' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

By contrast, Central Asia and the Caucasus and East Asia & Pacific have recorded moderate gains. Still, it is important to note that progress is uneven and fragile.

The data underscores a deeper concern: perceptions of corruption are not just about individual cases of wrongdoing; they reflect a **broader sense of exclusion and distrust that eats away at civic cohesion**. For youth, who are already underrepresented in formal politics and often excluded from meaningful decision-making, these perceptions can be especially disempowering. When rising feelings of disillusionment and declining trust coincide with shrinking civic space and limited personal agency, the result is a perfect storm: youth are not only excluded from public life, but discouraged from even trying to engage. Without urgent action to reverse these trends, by strengthening democratic governance, expanding inclusive civic spaces, and rebuilding public trust, youth participation risks shrinking further.

Figure 44: Change in political rights scores by region (2015–2024)

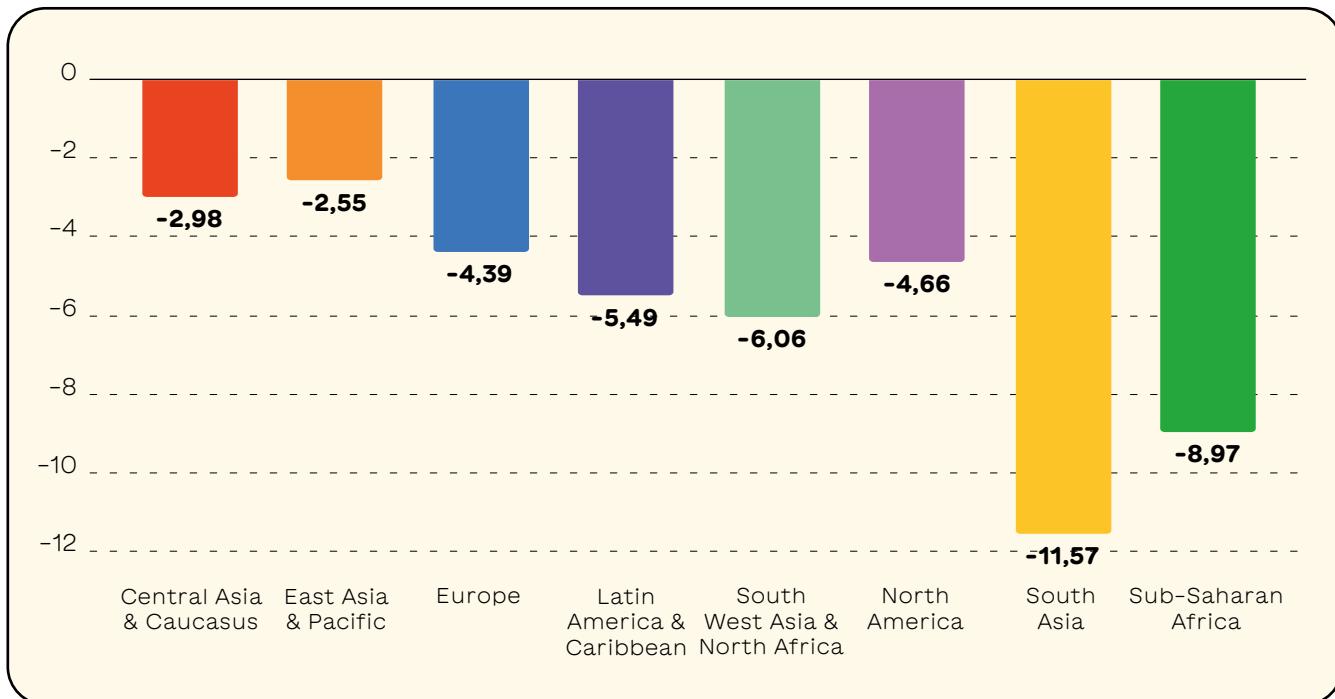


Figure 44 shows the change in Political Rights scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

Political rights<sup>37</sup> have significantly deteriorated across all world regions over the last decade, **with no area showing improvement**. This global regression reflects a shrinking space for democracy, electoral integrity, and participatory governance. The **most severe declines are seen in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa**, where restrictions on pluralism and the functioning of government have deepened. Even regions with historically stronger rights protections, such as Europe and North America, have registered notable setbacks.

In **Central Asia and the Caucasus**, Azerbaijan is the region's most severe underperformer, scoring 45 points below what would be expected given its development level. In **Europe**, both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina show lower-than-expected scores.

In **Latin America & the Caribbean**, St. Lucia and Jamaica stand out as strong overperformers, scoring well above expected values, while Haiti and Nicaragua underperform significantly. Across the **South West Asia & North Africa** region, nearly all countries score below expectations, with Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates among the worst-performing in relative terms. In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, Liberia and Cabo Verde significantly overperform, while Sudan, Eswatini, Congo, and Cameroon record large negative gaps.

**South Asia** is characterised by a regional decline, with Afghanistan notably underperforming. In **East Asia & Pacific**, countries like Micronesia and Kiribati perform above expectations, while China, Myanmar and Thailand fall well below.

<sup>37</sup> Encompassing an evaluation of three subcategories of political rights: electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of government. Some countries and territories score below zero on the questions used to compose the indicator.

The rights to vote and to be elected are core components of democratic citizenship. They are enshrined in instruments like the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, affirming every citizen's right to participate in public life without discrimination. But for **young people, these rights are often recognised in theory and restricted in practice.**

While the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) **mandates non-discrimination** in the enjoyment of its rights, the **data consistently reveals that young people are both excluded from exercising their voting rights and severely underrepresented** in formal political institutions across the globe.

Most democracies set the voting age at 18, but growing international support has emerged for lowering it to 16. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds have the civic knowledge, lived experience, and stake in long-term policies to warrant full participation. **Yet even where youth are eligible to vote, access is not guaranteed.** Rural youth, migrants, and students frequently face logistical and administrative obstacles: distant polling stations, inflexible residency requirements, and a lack of tailored education.

Such disparities underscore the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach to voting rights and highlight the **need for targeted policies that address the unique circumstances of youth.** Beyond setting a minimum age, ensuring equitable access to the ballot box requires proactive measures to facilitate registration, provide accessible polling locations, and potentially adapt rules to accommodate modern living patterns, particularly for students and young workers. By doing so, **democracies can move closer to realising the full potential of youth participation**, recognizing not just their legal right to vote, but also their practical ability to exercise it, thereby strengthening the legitimacy and representativeness of electoral outcomes for all segments of society.

When it comes to formal representation, **Central Asia and the Caucasus** led the decade gains in youth parliamentary representation with an increased number of young parliamentarians (+13.87 points), followed by the **EU (+4.85)** and **East Asia & Pacific (+4.48)**. But **South Asia** has declined (-2.7), and **North America** scores just **4.83** out of 100 in youth representation. The disparity between Latin America (which scores relatively high but is stagnating) and other regions underscores that there is no single trajectory, only common barriers.

Despite this small progress, the **persistent severe underrepresentation** of young people in elected office remains a serious concern: **less than 2% of parliamentarians worldwide are under 30**, and the global average of MPs under 45 is just 32.1%, even though individuals aged 20–39 make up 34% of the voting-age population in OECD countries. This stark disparity underscores that the existence of universal human rights instruments alone is insufficient; age-based eligibility criteria and systemic barriers continue to create *de facto* exclusion from political processes.

In many countries, a clear **disparity exists between the minimum voting age and the minimum age for candidacy.** Across OECD nations, the average age required to run for parliament is 19.9, and in many cases it is set at 21 or 25. For upper chambers, the gap is even larger—averaging **10.4 years**.<sup>38</sup> This creates a “waiting time” for political relevance: young people can vote but must wait years, even decades, to be eligible to lead. Some countries have made progress. **Türkiye** lowered its candidacy age from 30 to 18 in 2017; **South Korea** did the same in 2021. However, access on paper does not guarantee real influence. The cost of running for office remains a major hurdle. Young people are less likely to have personal wealth or access to fundraising networks. Public campaign financing has been shown to correlate with more youth-inclusive parliaments, suggesting a powerful tool for reform, which is still underused.

38 Parliaments are getting (slightly) younger according to latest IPU data, accessed on June 16, 2025, <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021-PR>

Even more **insidious** are the unwritten rules of political culture. Established parties often marginalise younger candidates, placing them in unwinnable positions or using them as symbolic tokens. In the 2024 European Elections, candidates under 35 were disproportionately placed in spots with less than a 50% chance of election, while older candidates dominated top positions<sup>39</sup>. The result is a **cycle of exclusion**: young people want to engage, but they are blocked; they become disillusioned, and turnout drops; parties then point to low youth turnout as justification for further exclusion.

Breaking this cycle requires a **fundamental shift in how political institutions see youth**: not as junior stakeholders, but as equal actors. It means investing in youth-led organisations, reforming campaign financing,<sup>40</sup> and holding parties accountable for sidelining young voices. **Age-based discrimination in politics is not just unjust: it is a barrier to legitimacy.**

## Right to equality before the law and equal access to power

The right to equality before the law and equal access to power, enshrined in international law, guarantees that all people, regardless of their identity, can live free from discrimination and access legal and political remedies when their rights are violated. In practice, this due process presents an opportunity to allow for forms of systemic inequality and oppression to be redressed and reformed. Yet, across the globe, **equality before the law, equal access to power, and the protection of individual liberties** have deteriorated over the past decade. By 2024, seven regions recorded lower average scores than in 2015, while only two showed improvement—and of these, only Central Asia and the Caucasus registered substantial gains.

**Figure 45: Regional trends in the right to equality before the law and to equal access to power – progress across indicators**



Figure 45 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to equality before the law and equal access to power have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

39 European Youth Forum, *European Elections 2024: Young People never had a chance* (2024), <https://www.youthforum.org/news/european-elections-2024-young-people-never-had-a-chance>

40 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Lawmakers are getting younger but not everywhere* (2025), <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2023-10/lawmakers-are-getting-younger-not-everywhere>

Figure 46: Change in equality before the law by region (2015–2024)

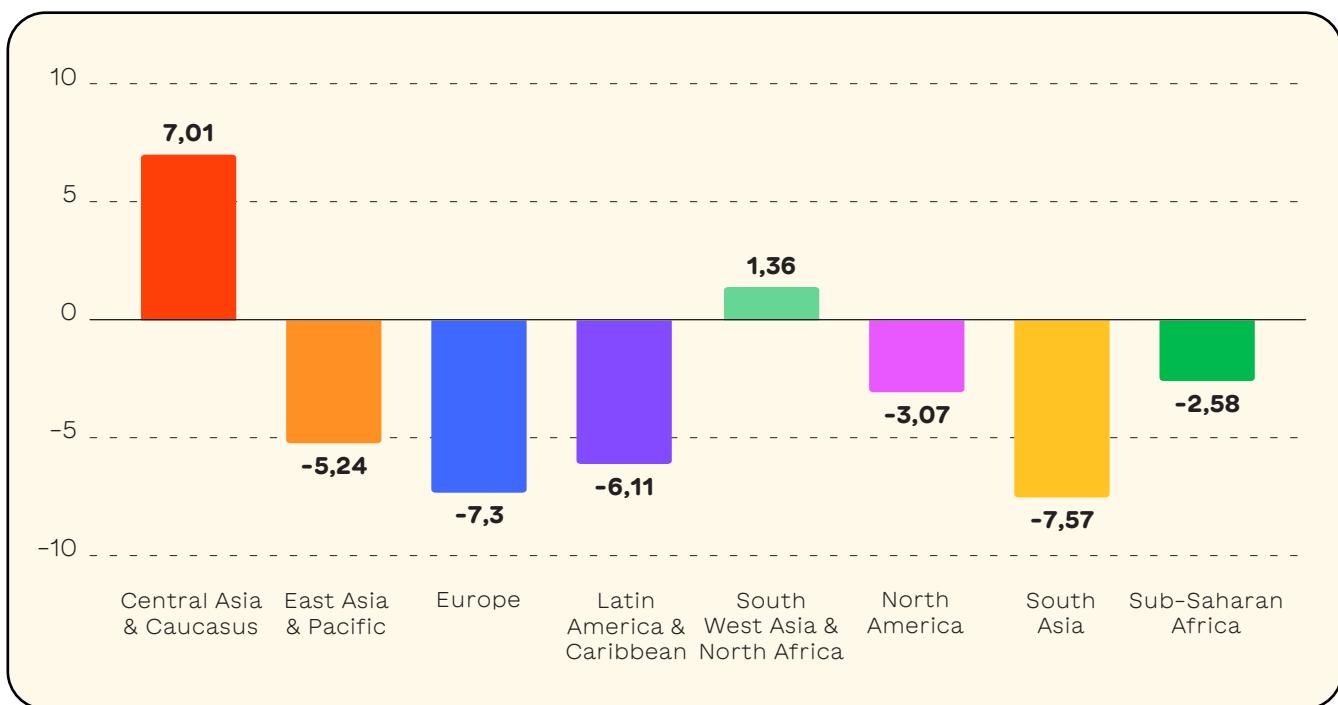


Figure 46 shows the change in 'equality before the law' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

Regarding the measurement of Equality Before the Law, **Central Asia and the Caucasus' improvement is led by Uzbekistan**, whose score jumped by roughly twenty-six points. Armenia and Turkmenistan also logged gains of more than six points, while Georgia (-8.6) and Azerbaijan (-6.1) negatively rebalanced the regional average. The result is that the region now sits **below the higher performing** cluster, but is the **only part of the world** moving noticeably **in the right direction**.

In the **South West Asia & North Africa**, a few countries gained, yet large states such as Iraq and Egypt slid further, and **Syria, Libya and Yemen remain confined near the bottom** of the global distribution.

**Europe** still boasts the highest absolute scores—many countries remain in the high 90s—but it also experienced the **second sharpest regional decline** since 2015. The down-shift is mostly visible in Belarus, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal, and Poland. In **East Asia & the Pacific**, Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines each lost between 13 and 30 points, just to name a few. The net effect is a 5-point regional decline.

In the **Americas, the downward trend is pronounced**. Latin America & the Caribbean shed more than six points on average. No country illustrates the slide more starkly than Nicaragua, whose score collapsed by over sixty points. El Salvador and Venezuela also posted double-digit drops. North America, meanwhile, slipped by three points.

**South Asia** begins from a low baseline and has fallen still further, about eight points overall. Afghanistan's collapse of legal protections following the 2021 regime change erased more than thirty-six points, and India registered a 10 point drop. **Sub-Saharan Africa continues to exhibit the widest dispersion of any region**.

Taken together, the data reveal a world in which the **formal architecture of rights and impartial administration is eroding in most places**, even where headline levels remain comparatively high. Without a reversal of these trajectories, the gap between regions that enjoy robust equality before the law and those that do not is likely to widen further in the years ahead.

The erosion of equality before the law is only part of a broader picture of declining inclusion. **Equal access to power**—whether in legal systems, institutions, or political decision-making—remains deeply **unequal across the world**. The latest data show that since 2015, this inequality **has worsened in most regions**. Despite some progress in South West Asia & North Africa, where a handful of countries have improved on this front, the global trend is one of decline. North America, South Asia, East Asia & the Pacific, and Latin America & the Caribbean all show substantial setbacks. Europe does too, despite historically high scores, highlighting that no region is immune from democratic backsliding and structural exclusion.

**Figure 47: Change in equal access to power by region (2015–2024)**

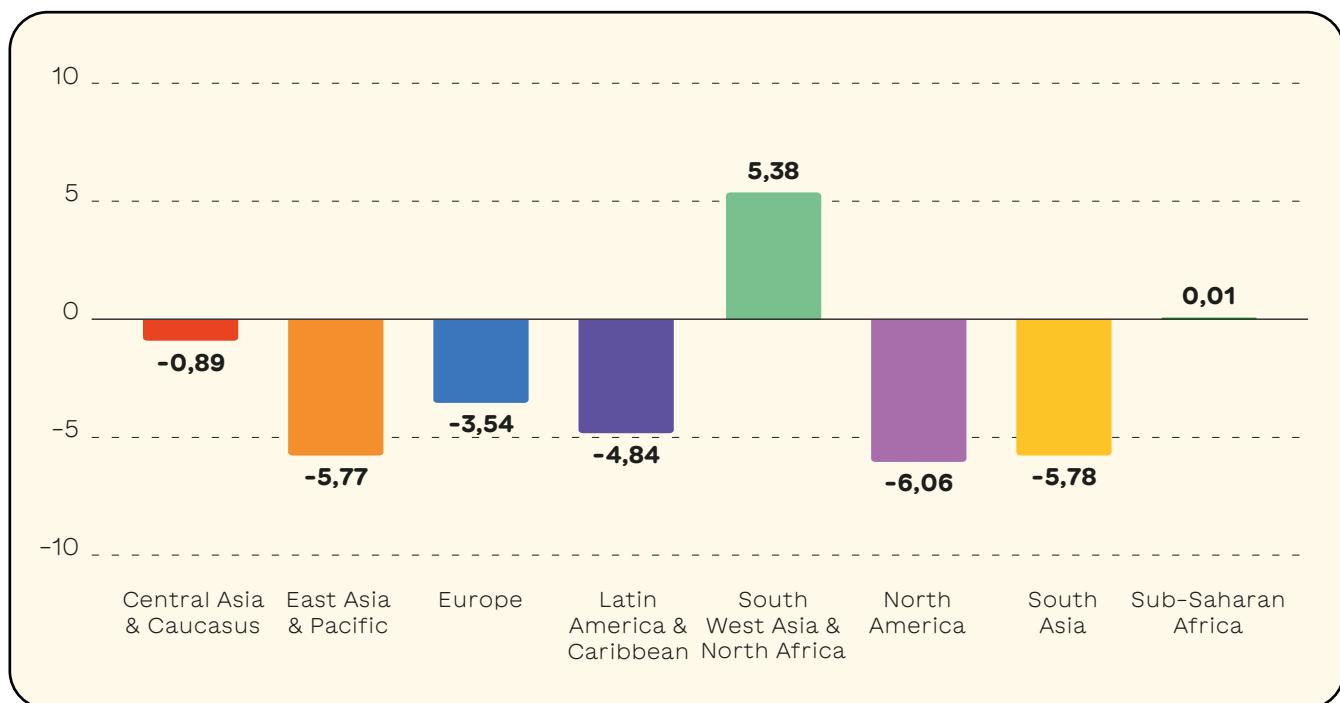


Figure 47 shows the change in equal access scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

As legal protections weaken and access to institutions narrows, young people in particular are left without credible pathways to voice concerns or challenge abuse. When power is increasingly concentrated and access stratified, the principle of equality risks becoming aspirational rather than operational. Without inclusive and accountable systems, legal guarantees are hollow.

## Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, and sexual and gender diverse persons

While all persons have the right to non-discrimination and to live equally before the law, young people in all their diversity can face intersecting forms of discrimination on multiple grounds. The **rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities** are enshrined in international human rights law and are vital for ensuring equal access to all facets of life, such as education and employment, as well as the preservation of cultural and linguistic identity, particularly for young people, who often face compounded barriers to fully enjoy their rights. Similarly, while the rights of minorities are based on self-identification, for those who may not identify as a minority, but also face discrimination on the grounds of **sexual orientation or gender identity** for example, such rights are broadly protected across numerous international instruments.

**Figure 48: Regional trends in rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities – progress across indicators**

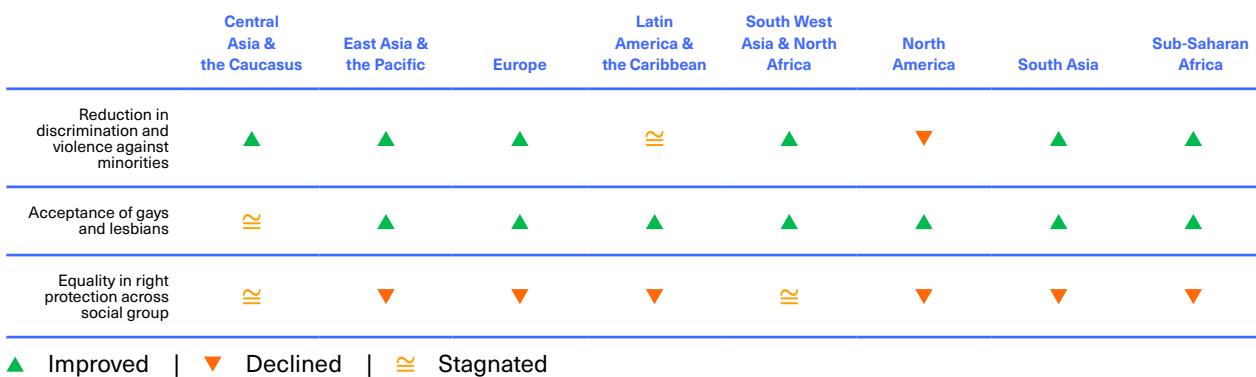


Figure 48 tracks whether key indicators related to the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

Between 2015 and 2024, overall regional scores on reduction in **discrimination and violence against minorities** **show mixed trends**, with some regions improving significantly and others experiencing worrying declines. East Asia & Pacific experienced the most marked improvement over the decade, with an increase of 20 points, followed by Central Asia and the Caucasus (11.9) and Europe (6.5). These improvements indicate efforts in addressing grievances or reducing violence in these regions. However, despite the improvement, **scores in these regions still reveal wide disparities**, suggesting uneven protection and inclusion across countries.

On the other end of the spectrum, **North America saw a notable deterioration**, with a decline of 9.2 points: the only region with such a pronounced negative trend. The sharp drop reflects increasing levels of political polarisation, and heightened racial or ethnic tensions in recent years. Latin America & the Caribbean experienced stalling, while South Asia showed only modest gains, remaining one of the lowest-performing regions overall.

Despite general upward trajectories in many parts of the world, the data distribution for 2024 underscores **persistent inequality**. All regions display a wide range of national scores, with some countries scoring above 90, while others remain below 20. This highlights deep disparities in the **lived experiences of minority groups within and between regions**. The challenge of ensuring safety and equal treatment for all young people—regardless of ethnicity, religion, or identity—remains a pressing and unevenly addressed issue globally.

The indicator on **acceptance of gays and lesbians** provides a striking lens on these dynamics. Overall, acceptance for young people's sexual orientation is increasing in almost all regions, with East Asia & Pacific having the highest increase (+26). In Europe on the other hand, the picture is mixed.

**Figure 49: Change in acceptance of gays and lesbians by region (2015–2024)**

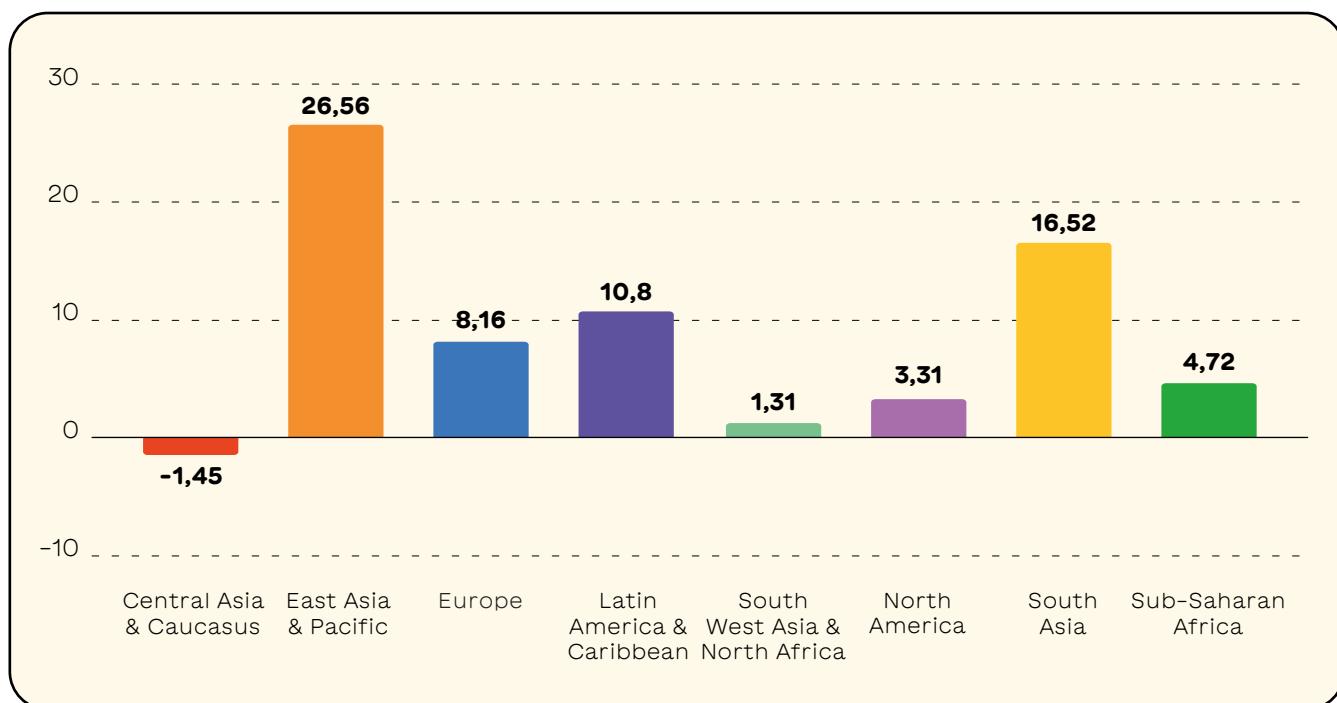


Figure 49 shows the change in 'acceptance of gays and lesbians' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

The European Union stands out as a regional leader, with overall strong legal protections and relatively high levels of inclusion. But beneath that average lies deep fragmentation. **The Balkans continue to lag behind**, showing levels of acceptance of queer youth closer to SWANA than EU norms. Most strikingly, **Croatia records the sharpest drop in acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals worldwide** over the past decade, underscoring the fragility of EU progress.

In **Central Asia and the Caucasus**, acceptance of gay and lesbian youth—already low—has deteriorated further. In **South Asia**, a region that has seen meaningful gains over the last decade, acceptance has declined by **13 points in just the past five years**, reversing positive trends.

While acceptance overall is on the rise, it is essential to note that queer youth are at a heightened risk to harmful practices such as so-called 'conversion therapy', and in countries such as Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Uganda, and Yemen, where the death penalty is imposed for same-sex sexual activity.<sup>41</sup>

41 Ilga, Database - Criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts, <https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts>

Furthermore, acceptance of gay and lesbian youth as an indicator only considers young people's sexual orientation. Discrimination on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics is not covered, and a backlash against these groups remains rife globally. This backsliding therefore threatens to deepen stigma and isolate queer youth who already face heightened risks of violence and exclusion.

Furthermore, a clear global trend of deteriorating social inclusion is further reinforced by the indicator '**equality of rights protection across social groups**', which captures expert assessments of how states protect the rights and freedoms of different social communities. While **Central Asia and the Caucasus has stagnated**, the data shows a steep decline in all regions. **North America and South Asia** have experienced the **most dramatic drops**, with average scores falling by more than 14 and 16 points respectively since 2015. **Europe and Latin America** have also seen considerable **setbacks**, with both regions slipping by more than 7 and 4 points respectively, highlighting a growing vulnerability in places that once championed equality.

**Figure 50: Change in equality of rights protection across social groups by region (2015–2024)**

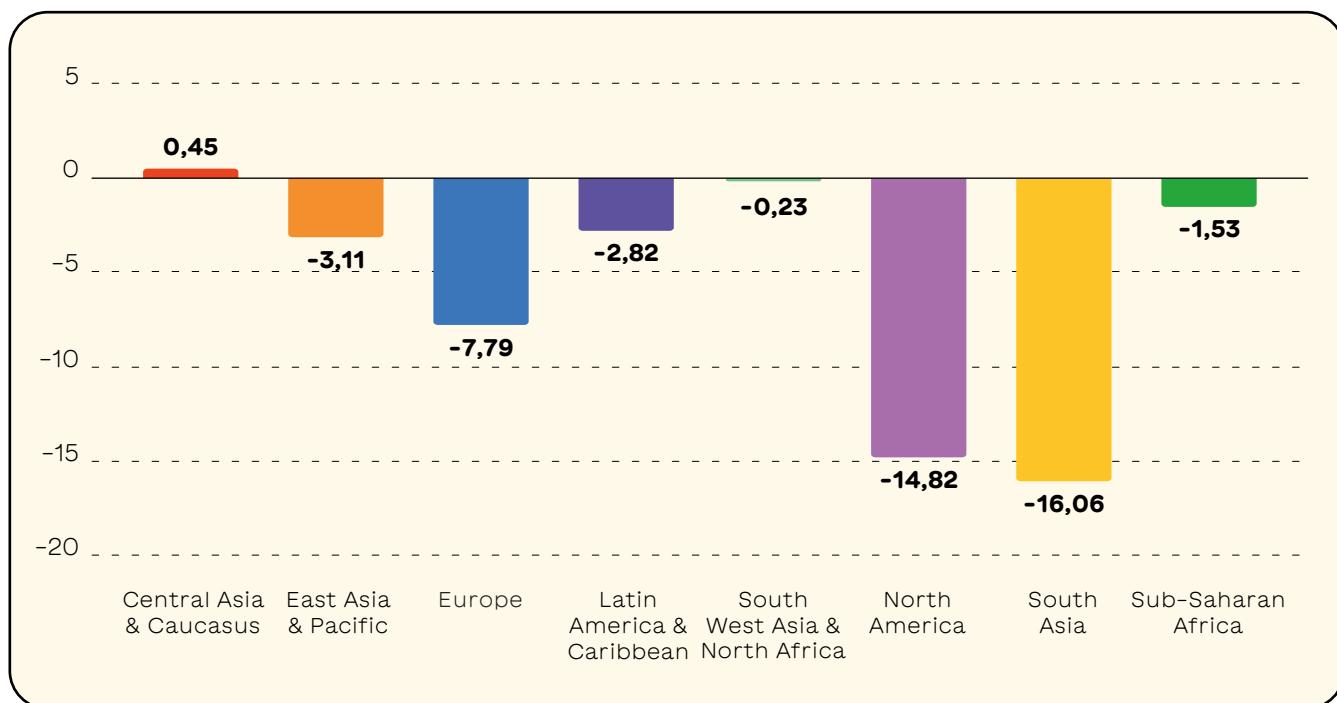


Figure 50 shows the change in 'equality of rights protection across social groups' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

These trends expose a troubling erosion in the foundational promise of enjoying the right to live equally before the law as well as for the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities. Particularly for young people from marginalised backgrounds, this decline means greater exposure to intersecting forms of discrimination, fewer protections when harmed, fewer chances to be heard or represented, and fewer opportunities for legislative reform.

Very **few countries globally outperform their economic peers on this front**, underlining that this is not a question of resources alone, but of political will and societal commitment. The regression in rights equality signals a retreat from inclusive values, and a failure to deliver on the most basic human rights for all young people.

For minority youth, these exclusionary patterns translate into real-world obstacles: less access to healthcare and housing, fewer job opportunities, unsafe and segregated school environments, and invisibility in national narratives. They also undermine social trust, polarise communities, and limit the potential of an entire generation.

To reverse these trends, governments must go beyond generic inclusion pledges. What's needed are **robust anti-discrimination laws, targeted youth inclusion strategies, and disaggregated data collection** that captures how different identities intersect and shape young people's realities.

## Right to quality working conditions

The **right to work, notably through quality working conditions**, is essential for young people's safety, dignity, and the chance to build a future. As a universal right, it includes access to technical and vocational training, and sets out conditions with regards to ensuring fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value, and other social protection measures. Despite these international labour standards, in practice, many young people remain excluded from its full benefits, given the practice of age-based discrimination and exploitative practices towards young workers.

Youth are far more likely than older adults to face precarious work, unemployment, or informal jobs with no social safety net. They often fall through the cracks: too old for child protection systems, but not yet fully covered by employment-based protections. Many face hurdles like part-time contracts, informal work arrangements, or eligibility rules that leave them without access to unemployment support or health benefits.

**Figure 51: Right to quality working conditions – progress across indicators**



Figure 51 tracks whether key indicators related to Right to quality working conditions scores have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

Measuring how well countries protect this right is not easy. There's a lack of global data that speaks specifically to young people's working conditions and access to social protection. Still, one widely used indicator offers insight: the share of youth who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET). While this doesn't capture the full picture, it offers a useful signal of how well societies are supporting young people to find decent, stable opportunities.

Globally, NEET rates have improved since 2015, but the progress is uneven. Some regions are making strides, while others are moving in the wrong direction. Central Asia and the Caucasus saw the biggest gains, with a sharp drop in NEET rates. South Asia, Europe, North America, and South West Asia & North Africa also improved, though more modestly. By contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where the situation has worsened overall, highlighting the continued challenges faced by young people in accessing both education and decent work.

**Figure 52: Change in reduction in the rate of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) by region (2015–2024)**

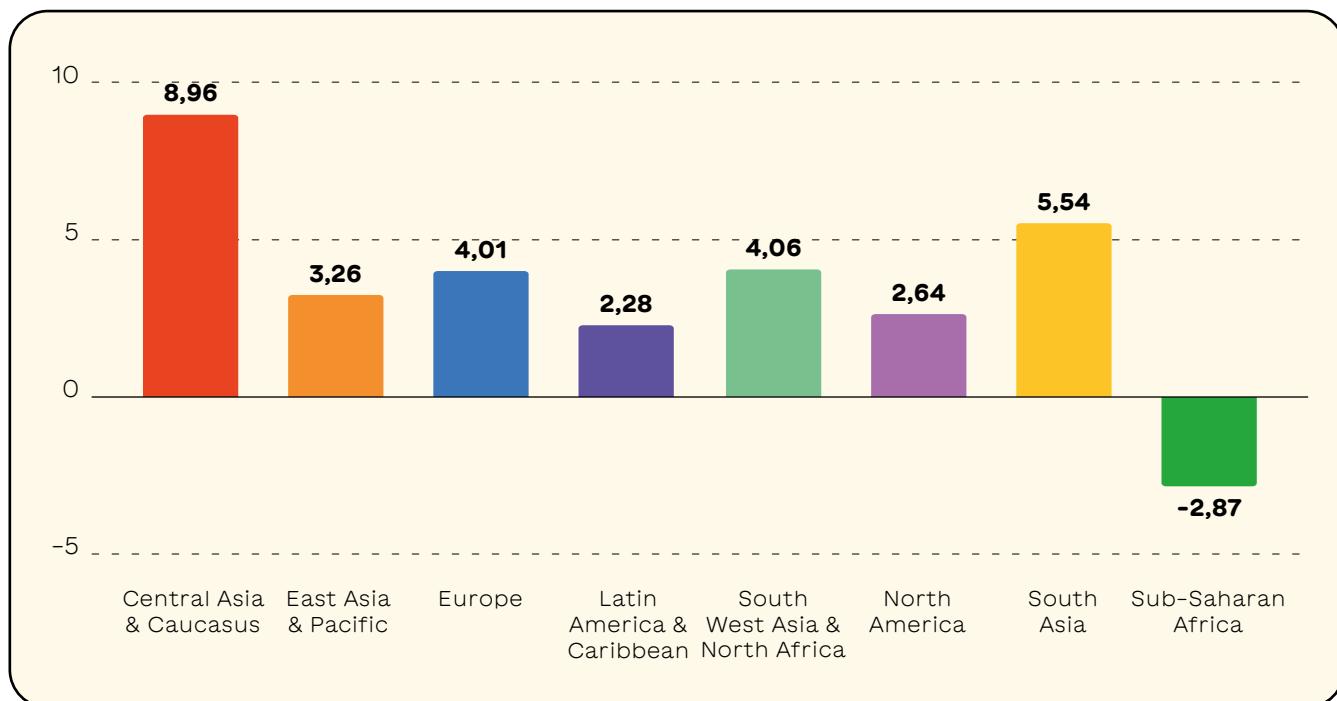


Figure 52 shows the change in 'young people not in education, employment or training' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

Even where the numbers are moving in the right direction, progress is fragile. In many regions, the **COVID-19 pandemic caused major setbacks**, and although recovery is underway, not all countries are bouncing back at the same pace. Some middle-income countries have made major improvements by investing in vocational training or rural job schemes. Others, grappling with conflict or economic instability, have seen youth employment rates fall further.

The Sub-Saharan Africa 2.9-point drop is largely driven by steep setbacks in countries like Zimbabwe (-22 points), Congo (-21), and Sudan (-18), although declines were observed more broadly across the region.

### **Kenya's youth right to quality working condition: Between opportunity and exploitation**

In Kenya, youth employment shows a troubling trajectory. The Youth Progress Index indicates that the country's reduction in the rate of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) score has fallen by 9.5 points, signalling a worsening situation.

Every year, more than a million new graduates enter the job market, yet only 5% of youth find stable work in the formal sector. The overwhelming majority, a staggering 95%, are forced into the unpredictable world of the informal economy.<sup>42</sup>

These imbalances have pushed young people into precarious and low-quality employment, whether in agriculture, the digital space, or their own business. Despite their determination to build something, 57% of young people are struggling to access start-up capital.<sup>43</sup> Without the capital to start or grow an enterprise, and lacking the collateral or credit history to secure a proper loan, many become trapped relying on small, unsecured mobile loans with crushing interest rates.

On the other hand, only 10% of young people participate in the agricultural labour force out of the 60% that constitute the overall youth labour force.<sup>44</sup> Systemic barriers, such as land ownership favoring older generations, continues to disengage young people. This leaves 60% of youth in precarious agricultural value chains with limited access to credit and markets.<sup>45</sup>

In the country, global digital platforms have created new opportunities, but also new forms of exploitation, specifically in the portfolio of remote work, where they recruit thousands of Kenyan youth for remote work such as AI training and audio translation. These jobs often pay below minimum wage. Young workers face erratic schedules, lack of benefits, and constant threat of sudden termination.

As formal employment opportunities dwindle, Kenya's traditional social safety nets are also unraveling. The country's 'reliance on help' score, measuring youth access to informal support networks, has decreased by almost 2 points. This growing isolation leaves young workers particularly vulnerable when enterprises record low turnovers, gig work dries up, or crops fail, with no fallback options.

Kenyan youth need policies turning these precarious work opportunities into dignified jobs, focusing on: (1) enforceable minimum standards and fair pay on digital platforms, (2) public-private partnerships to provide credit sharing facilities and (3) hybrid social protections that cover both formal and informal employment. Without this, the youth dividend, and the nation's future, remains at risk.

42 Shujazz Inc., *Young and Kenyan - Income and Work* (2025), <https://kenyanyouthtrends.shujaazinc.com/income-and-work>

43 FinAccess, *FinAccess HouseHold Survey* (2024), <https://www.fsdkenya.org/blogs-publications/the-2024-finaccess-household-survey-is-kenyas-financial-sector-reaching-its-limits/>

44 Republic of Kenya, *Kenya Youth Agricultural Strategy 2017-2021* (2017), <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/ken171450.pdf>

45 KIPPRA, *Economic and Social Impact of Youth Engagement in Kenya's Food System* (2025), <https://kippra.or.ke/economic-and-social-impact-of-youth-engagement-in-kenyas-food-system/>

By contrast, other regions show signs of recovery, particularly after the pandemic shock. In **Europe**, Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded one of the most significant improvements globally, gaining nearly 26 points and approaching the European average. Its score is now just below those of Moldova, Serbia, and Italy—the latter also making a strong gain of 18 points. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, Armenia, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan each improved by around 15 points. Azerbaijan also made progress (+5 points) and now stands out as one of the top-performing countries globally, relative to its economic peers.

In **Latin America**, most countries registered positive progress. However, Peru diverged from the regional trend, with a sharp drop of 10 points, now scoring on par with Lebanon at around 50. Bolivia stands out as the only country in the region overperforming relative to its income level, showing that policy choices can make a tangible difference. In **East Asia & the Pacific**, the Philippines made one of the largest gains in the region (+20), despite some setbacks elsewhere. Timor-Leste, for example, saw a notable 17-point decline, which tempered overall regional progress.

Beyond youth unemployment and NEET rates, the **prevalence of vulnerable employment** offers another crucial lens on young people's right to decent work.

**Figure 53: Change in reduction of vulnerable employment by region (2015–2024)**

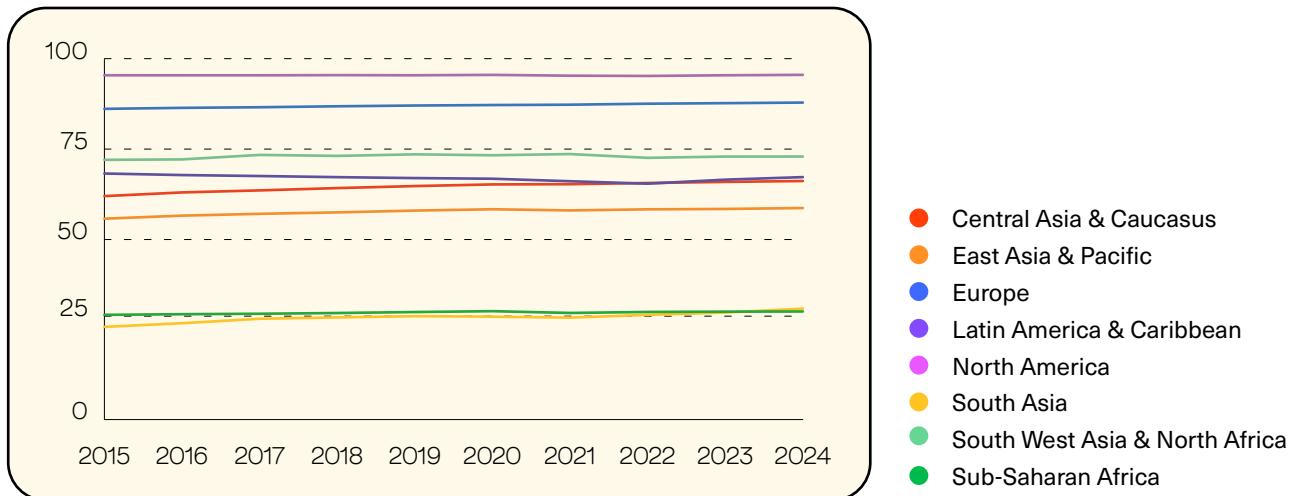


Figure 53 shows a line chart displaying 'reduction of vulnerable employment' scores over the past decade, alongside the global average, showing how scores have evolved between 2015 and 2024.

The data shows modest global progress, but a closer look reveals wide disparities between regions and within them. **South Asia** has made the most substantial gains (+5.3 points), followed by **Central Asia and the Caucasus** (+4.4), and **East Asia & Pacific** (+3.1). **Europe** shows small improvements, but its higher scores already reflect stronger protections. In contrast, Latin America & the Caribbean is the only region showing negative stagnation, signalling growing precarity in youth employment. The South West Asia & North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and North America have made slight gains, but not enough to be called progress, and their internal disparities remain high. Although progress is visible in some areas, **vulnerable employment remains a persistent challenge**, particularly for low-income and marginalised youth. It also does not capture precarious forms of work, such as the gig economy or those working on zero hour contracts, in which young people are overrepresented.

The **ability of young people to rely on informal support networks** during times of difficulty, such as unemployment or transitions between jobs, is equally crucial.

The indicator 'reliance on help' measures the proportion of youth (15–29) who say they have someone to rely on in times of need. It is a proxy for social capital and connectedness, especially vital when formal protections fail. The time-series and distribution data reveal a worrying erosion of this safety net in several regions.

**Figure 54: Change in reliance on help by region (2015–2024)**

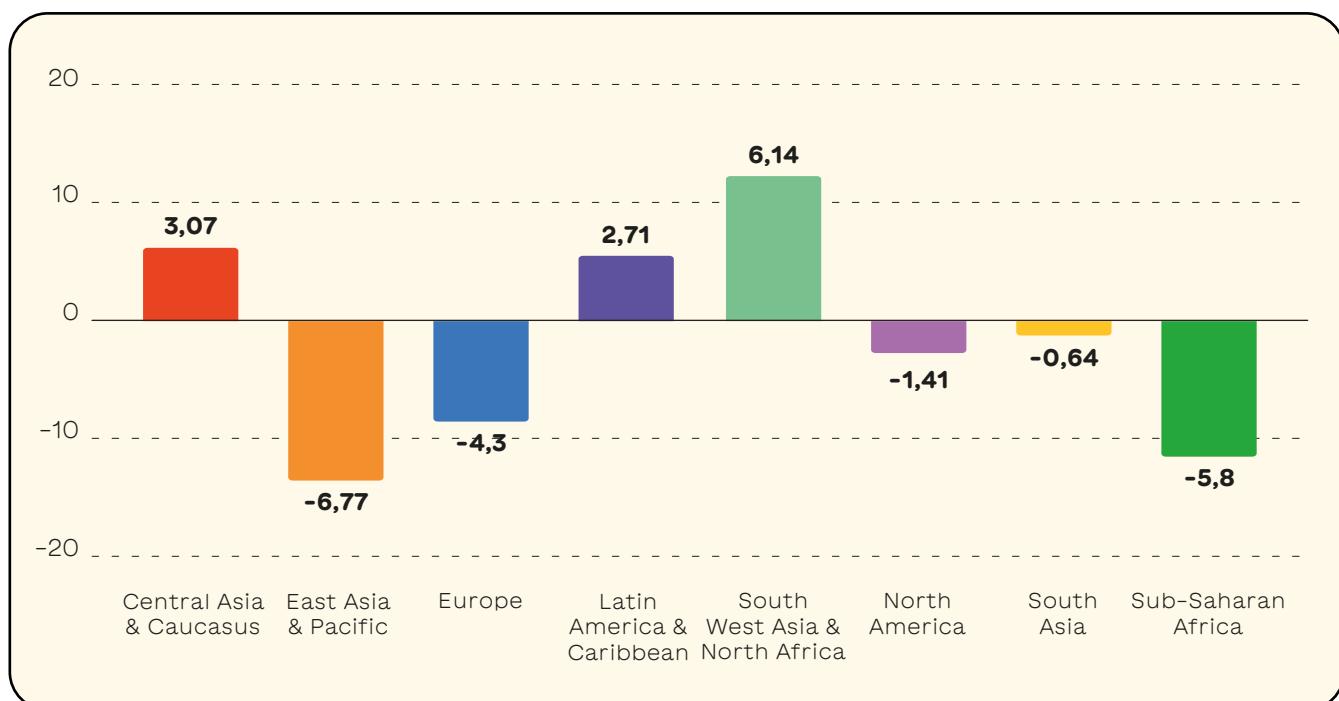


Figure 54 shows the change in 'reliance on help' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

Between 2015 and 2024, sharp drops were recorded in **East Asia and Pacific** (−6.8 points), **Sub-Saharan Africa** (−5.8), and **Europe** (−4.3). This suggests growing isolation or fraying community ties, possibly exacerbated by urbanisation, digital fragmentation, or intergenerational disconnect. Even in **North America**, the score declined slightly, reinforcing broader concerns around youth loneliness.

Only South **West Asia & North Africa** (+6.1), **Central Asia and the Caucasus** (+3.1), and **Latin America & the Caribbean** (+2.7) showed meaningful gains, hinting at stronger or revitalised social bonds in those regions. Regionally, countries with lower formal protections often showed higher reliance on social networks, but these relationships are neither universal nor guaranteed. In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, for example, where formal protections lag, the drop in scores suggests that even these informal systems are under strain, leaving young workers particularly vulnerable and with no fallback option when there are lack of work opportunities or when crops fail.

Ultimately, these trends reveal a global landscape where access to decent work remains deeply unequal, and where too many young people are still being left behind. Furthermore, the world of work is rapidly changing, with pressure on young workers to adapt to changing environments, or in which they are overrepresented in precarious forms of work such as the gig economy.

The right to quality working conditions needs to be applied to all areas of work, particularly new and emerging realms, including the gig economy. Bridging this gap requires targeted investment in youth employment programmes, stronger protections for informal workers, and inclusive systems that recognise the specific challenges young people face as they enter adult life.

## Right to continued education

The right to continued education, including lifelong learning, is accounted for in international human rights law, and is a key moment in young people's lives, particularly as they transition into adulthood and towards independence.

Complementing the right to primary and secondary education, the right to continued education looks at young people who wish to pursue further studies in tertiary or vocational contexts. Similar to the barriers faced by young people in enjoying their right to primary and secondary education, gender discrepancies, a lack of inclusion and diversity amongst peers, and discrepancies in quality and academic freedoms, hamper young people's equitable access to quality and continued education.

**Figure 55: Regional trends in the right to continued education – progress across indicators**



Figure 55 tracks whether key indicators related to the right to continued education have improved, stagnated, or declined in each region. It provides a visual snapshot of where progress is happening and where it is not, helping identify regional priorities for action.

Over the past decade, the idea of going to university has moved from a distant dream to a realistic plan for millions more young people, especially in Asia. Countries across East Asia & the Pacific have stretched the typical length of higher-education careers by about seventeen points, and Central Asia and the Caucasus are just behind.

**Figure 56: Change in expected years of tertiary schooling by region (2015–2024)**

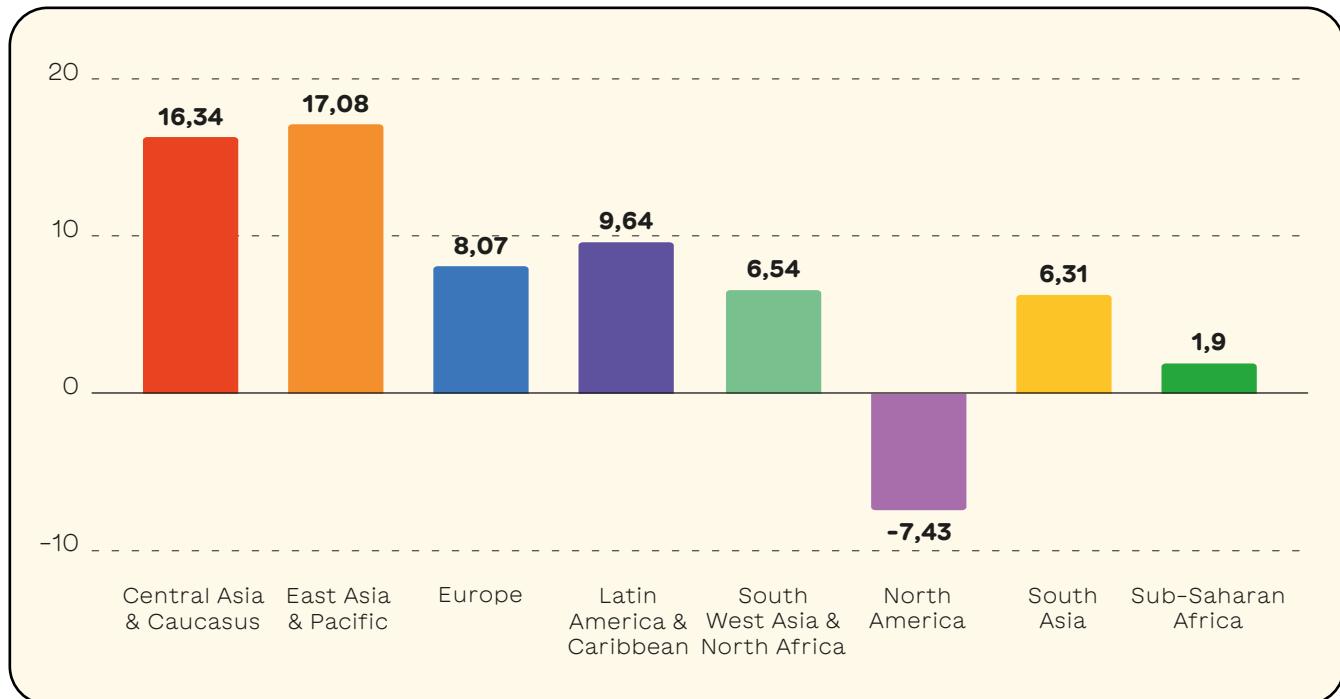


Figure 56 bar chart shows the change in expected years of tertiary schooling scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

**Latin America & the Caribbean** are moving in the **same direction**, only a little more slowly. **Europe** has logged a similar improvement. In South West Asia & North Africa, and **South Asia** the gains are **smaller but still visible**; each step forward adds up to thousands of degrees in the region. Meanwhile **Sub-Saharan Africa** has inched ahead by barely two points, leaving it parked at the bottom of the scale.

**North America**, which started out on top, **has actually lost ground**: fewer young people can count on staying in higher education as long as their predecessors did ten years ago. The lesson is stark: a student in some African countries still sees university only as a long-shot possibility, while a peer in East Asia can almost take it for granted.

Even inside the high-performing regions, the picture is far from even. **Europe**, for example, holds **both world-beating scores and others that scrape the floor**; the same extreme range shows up in Africa. So although the global numbers are heading the right way, a **young person's chance of a full university experience is still dictated less by talent than by the luck of birthplace**.

The global landscape for **women's access to advanced education** has improved markedly, though the **pace and consistency** of progress **vary significantly** across regions. The most substantial regional advance occurred in East Asia & the Pacific, which recorded an impressive increase of +17.61 points. The South West Asia & North Africa region (+15.72) and South Asia (+15.29) also registered notable gains, indicating a strong upward trend in these regions that were historically marked by deep educational gender gaps. Sub-Saharan Africa experienced a solid overall improvement of +11.45, but the regional

average masks a sharp internal divergence. This points to the **persistence of structural inequalities** and a lack of consistent investment in girls' education across the region.

Latin America & the Caribbean (+10.23) and Central Asia and the Caucasus (+8.86) also made progress, yet several countries in these regions showed negative trends or stagnation, suggesting policy gaps or persistent barriers for young women. **Europe** saw a more modest gain of +5.23 over the period, largely because it started from a high baseline. However, this regional stability conceals troubling **reversals in several EU countries**, where the share of women with advanced education **underperforms their economic peers**, raising concerns about emerging inequalities even within traditionally strong education systems.

**North America** recorded the smallest increase (+1.48), maintaining high overall scores but **showing signs of stagnation**. This underlines the importance of continued policy attention to ensure equitable outcomes across different population groups. While the global trend is one of progress, the data reinforce the need for **targeted action to close remaining gender gaps**, and ensure that every young woman can access and complete quality secondary and tertiary education.

On the other hand, the deterioration of academic opportunities is clearly visible when analysing the collapse of **academic freedom**: Across the world the space for independent teaching, research, and debate has narrowed since 2015 in all the regions but Central Asia and the Caucasus, that is increasingly trying to catch up with the global average, albeit still distant (30 points).

**Figure 57: Change in academic freedom by region (2015–2024)**

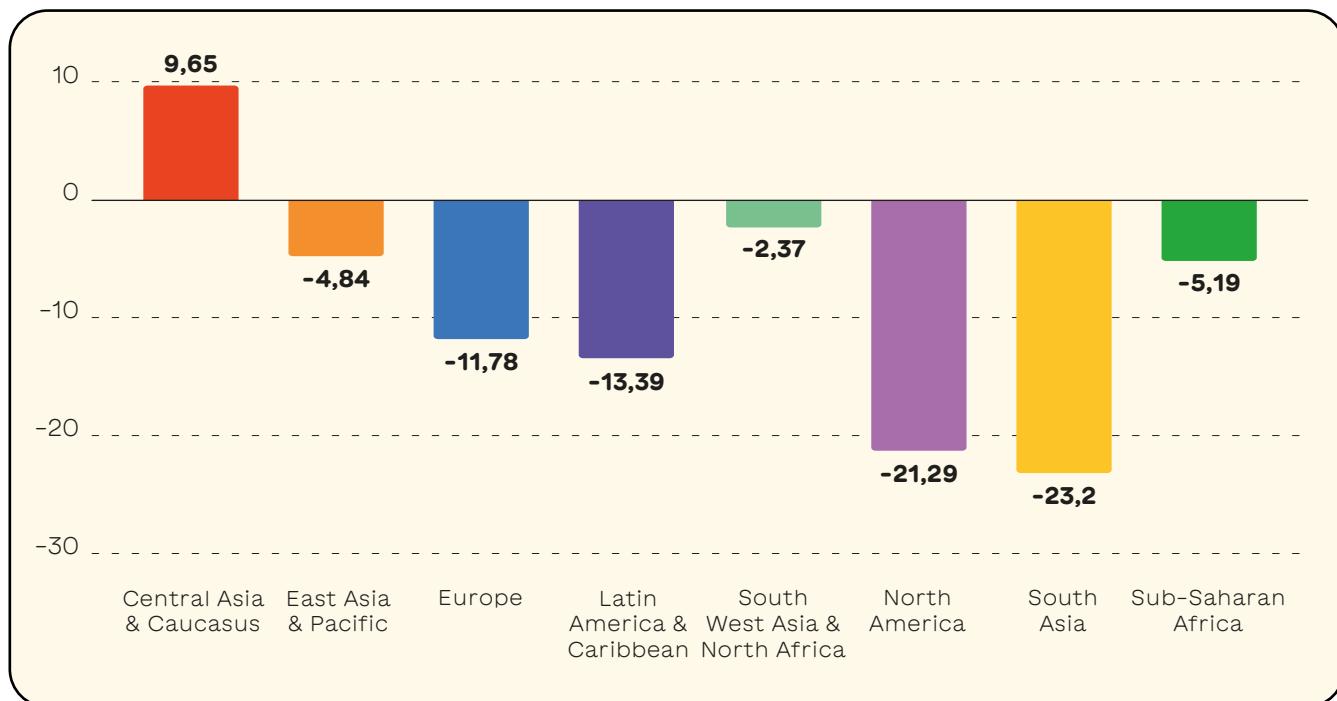


Figure 57 bar chart shows the change in 'academic freedom' scores over the past decade for each world region. Positive values represent improvements, while negative values indicate a worsening situation. The chart helps track progress or regression across regions from 2015 to 2024.

This increase is mostly led by Uzbekistan (+25 points in the last decade). The Uzbek effort has limited impact on the regional average due to the **serious degradation of academic freedom in Georgia** (-14.5) and **Kyrgyzstan** (-17 points).

**East Asia & the Pacific shows a negative slope** (about five points down on average) but its internal inequalities are the widest of any region. Vanuatu is the only country gaining points, bringing it among the top performers in the global chart. Thailand conquered significant progress (+33 point) bringing from third bottom to the upper half. New Zealand, Australia and Taiwan remain near the top of the vertical axis but have all slipped, while Myanmar's score collapses by more than thirty points and Indonesia, Mongolia, Mongolia and the Philippines lose between 15 and 17 points.

**Europe posts an 11-point fall.** Montenegro leads gainer with an 18-point surge, approaching Croatia results. North Macedonia also recorded solid improvements (10.6), yet is still lower in the regional ranking (similar to Bosnia & Herzegovina). **Many EU members slide back:** Portugal, Greece, Hungary and the Netherlands each shed more than a dozen points, while Ukraine dropped 27 points and remains locked below the mid-table line.

**In Latin America & the Caribbean**, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic made headway (+8.9 and +5.9 respectively) but the region is **dominated by sharp deterioration** (−13.4 on average). Nicaragua's 40-point plunge and El Salvador's 60-point collapse drag the regional score far down; Mexico and Argentina each retreat by more than 20 points, and Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Colombia all post double-digit declines. The scatter now spans the full vertical axis, signalling **extreme divergence**.

In the South West Asia & North Africa region, the line dips only slightly (−2.37), yet the plot **shows two very different stories**. Bahrain and Syria record gains—albeit from very low starting levels—while the West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon, and Algeria suffer double-digit declines that anchor the bottom of the cloud, leaving the region's dots spread from the low teens to the high eighties.

North America plunges by more than 21 points, almost entirely because the **United States falls from the low 90s into the high 60s** amid legislative and political pressures on universities.

**South Asia's bar drops even further**, down 23 points on average, and the distribution looks bifurcated. The Maldives gained nearly 18 points, and Sri Lanka and Bhutan rose slightly, but India lost 26 points, Pakistan 21 and Afghanistan 43.

**Sub-Saharan Africa ends only five points lower overall.** The Gambia bounce of 30 points and Seychelles' 15-point advance lift the upper tail, while Mali (−52), Gabon (−42) and Senegal, Mozambique and Mauritius (−30 to −36) pull the lower tail sharply downward. Scores for 2024 thus range from just over five to almost 90, the widest vertical dispersion of any region outside East Asia.

Taken together, the trends reveal a world in which **academic freedom is contracting almost everywhere**—North America, South Asia and Europe most sharply—and regional averages often conceal chasms between national trajectories.

The **quality of higher education** has risen almost everywhere. Europe has largely stalled, and North America has edged downward, although it still tops the global table. The sharpest improvements came from Montenegro (+38 points), Algeria (+36), Namibia (+34), Mauritius (+32), Tunisia (+31), Kosovo and Jamaica (both +30), Guatemala (+29), Pakistan (+23), and Nepal (+22). Meaningful declines are concentrated in Europe, where Iceland fell by 25 points, Serbia by 21, and Ukraine by 12.

If we judge the vitality of a research system by the volume of work that other **scholars choose to cite, the indicator 'citable documents'** in the past decade has seen almost universal growth, but at very different speeds. The **European Union** still dominates the global citation league and has stretched its lead since 2015. The average score for the twenty-seven EU members has jumped by about ten points, the steepest climb on the map, and the wider **European region** is close behind, just below North America. That rise is not uniform. A large cluster of countries already score in the 70-to-90 range. At the other end of Europe's own scale, though, are countries that barely pass a 10-point threshold, a reminder that the **continent's research capacity is far from evenly spread**. North America's record is mixed. The United States and Canada remain research superpowers—both appear in the upper-half cluster of the 2024 distribution—but their collective gain over the period is modest: just over two points.

East Asia & the Pacific has recorded the second-sharpest rise, but with similar discrepancies. The region now contains one of the single highest-scoring countries in the world (Singapore) and a growing middle tier of nations performing better than a decade ago, but suffering some of the lowest results globally.

The **South West Asia & North Africa** is following a similar upward trajectory, adding roughly seven points since 2015. However, the region's overall score advances even while **many of its members remain stuck near the bottom.**

**Latin America & the Caribbean** managed only a two-point improvement. The region's line rises slowly until 2019, plateaus, and even dips slightly during the pandemic years before edging back up. South Asia has added a similarly small two points, but from a much lower base. **Its best-performing country** (Maldives) still sits well **below the mid-table of Europe or East Asia.** **Sub-Saharan Africa did not improve**, and the region continues to post the lowest aggregate score. The distribution chart lays bare the challenge: almost every country appears below the 15-point mark.

In short, scientific output that resonates beyond national borders is expanding nearly everywhere, yet the gains are heavily skewed. Europe and East Asia surge ahead while much of the Global South remains on the margins of the global conversation.

#### **Urgent work needed: A rights-based framework for opportunities**

The evidence from the Youth Progress Index makes one thing clear: **progress has stalled alarmingly in building opportunities for young people.** Universal political and civil rights which form the basis of democratic societies—from the ability to safely enjoy the right to freedom of assembly and association, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, to live with free media or enjoy the right to academic freedom—are being severely repressed, while civil society globally continues to be suppressed. Democratic structures show a severe underrepresentation of young parliamentarians and meaningful participatory spaces, and hence the gap in policy- and law-making which currently prevents young people from fully enjoying their rights.

This has immense trickle-down effects, particularly for groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination, as showcased in the alarming decline of young people who are able to enjoy their right to live equally before the law, and by extension, to enjoy equal access to justice for any violations that take place. While the YPI indicates that the acceptance of young lesbians and gays is progressing in many regions, they are declining in many countries, particularly in Central Asia and the South West Asia & North Africa. Certain countries across Europe are also seeing a sharp drop. More data is needed to detail the situation of gender diverse youth. Finally, while there is progress to reduce the number of young NEETs, further work is needed in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Young people's human rights are at risk of not only being overlooked, but deliberately oppressed, as a result of not being universally recognised. The full enjoyment of universal civil and political rights are imperative to safe and thriving democracies, and enable the right to meaningful youth participation—a right that is not formally recognised in international law—to be fully realised and enjoyed.

A rights-based approach must therefore be provided to all policy areas, in consultation with youth organisations, to make youth progress a living reality. They are not just development challenges; they are failures to realise legally enshrined rights.

A global UN Convention on the Rights of Young People would change that. It would affirm that **those rights are not optional or developmental goals, but legal rights and freedoms owed to all young people**, and with which they can actively shape the world they want to live in, and have access to justice and redress mechanisms when their rights are violated.

## Youth Rights and Progress in the European Union

The 2024 edition of the Youth Progress Index (YPI) presents a nuanced and increasingly concerning portrait of youth progress within the **European Union (EU)**. While the EU continues to outperform most global regions, boasting several countries among the world's top performers, the overall trajectory since 2019 is one of stagnation. The EU is the second-worst performing region in terms of progress since 2011, trailing only North America. The latest YPI scores **reveal a stark divide**: Denmark (2nd), Finland (3rd), and Sweden (4th) each achieve scores above 89, setting the standard for youth wellbeing, rights, and opportunities. In contrast, southeastern European countries such as Bulgaria (46th), Romania (45th), and Hungary (40th) lag significantly behind, with scores below 80, **underscoring persistent and deepening regional disparities**.

**Key challenges** for young people in the EU revolve around access to affordable **housing, mental health, and persistent inequalities in the opportunity and inclusive society** components. The housing crisis is particularly acute: dissatisfaction with housing affordability among young people has intensified since 2015, with the EU registering a decline of nearly nine points in this area from 2015 to 2024. **Access to healthcare is also deteriorating** in many EU countries, with a marked decline since 2018. Moreover, in terms of **Basic Education**, progress has **stagnated**, and equality in the quality of education is increasingly becoming a problem.

Over time, the data show that while Nordic and some Western European countries have maintained or modestly improved their high performance, much of the rest of the **EU has either stagnated or regressed**, especially in the Opportunity dimension, and the rights and voice components.

The YPI underscores the urgent need for targeted, youth-focused policy interventions to address these widening gaps and ensure that all young people across the EU can realise their full potential and have their rights effectively upheld.

Taken together, these trends underscore the urgent need for a **renewed commitment to youth rights, participation, and inclusion** to ensure that all young people have equitable opportunities and a meaningful voice in shaping their societies.

**Figure 58: Five largest increases and decreases in EU average scores (2015–2024)**

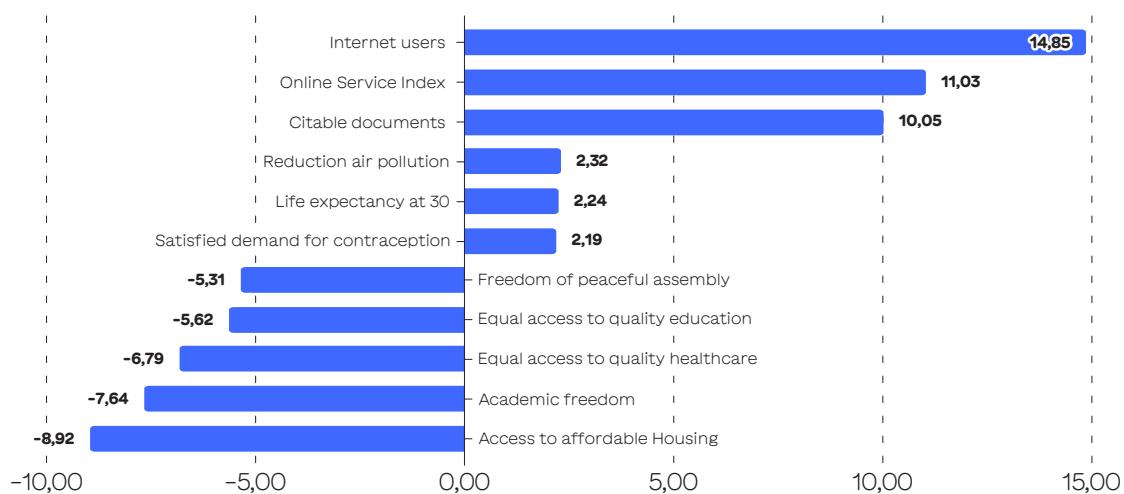


Figure 58 illustrates the 5 largest increases and decreases in scores for the EU average on all the Dimensions between 2015 and 2024. Each bar is labeled with the corresponding delta value, allowing for a clear comparison of improvements and declines across different aspects.

## Youth Rights and Progress in the OSCE

In examining the average of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) participating States, the 2024 Youth Progress Index (YPI) reveals a youth progress landscape that mirrors the overall pattern observed in the European Union, but with even **more pronounced disparities across participating States**, particularly within the Opportunity dimension. The OSCE region encompasses some of the world's leading performers, such as the Nordic countries, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands, all of which score above 85. In stark contrast, several Eastern European, Balkan, and Central Asian states—including Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Türkiye—tend to cluster much lower, with scores ranging from 60 to 70, underscoring significant regional inequalities.

Progress in the Basic Needs dimension has largely stagnated, maintaining a score range of 86 to 87. Like the European Union, OSCE countries have experienced a decline in the Housing component, dropping from 91.40 in 2011 to 89.30 in 2024, driven by a sharp decrease in satisfaction with housing affordability (from 54.48 to 38.11). Nonetheless, there has been notable **advancement in the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension**, which climbed from 75.62 in 2011 to 80.49 in 2024. This improvement is mainly attributable to rapid progress in the Information and Communications component (rising from 71.79 to 85.23), reflecting widespread expansion in internet access and digital connectivity over the period.

Conversely, progress in the **Opportunity dimension has either stagnated or declined** across much of the OSCE region, with scores dipping slightly from 71.01 in 2011 to 70.32 in 2024. The most significant setbacks have been in the **Rights and Voice component, which fell by 6.5 points** over the same period. Considerable declines are apparent in **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly** (from 80.39 to 68.76), **Equality before the Law and Individual Liberty** (84.70 to 76.47), **Equality of Rights Protection Across Social Groups** (79.87 to 68.90), and **Political Rights** (77.16 to 70.34), as well as in **Perceptions of Corruption** (57.60 to 54.12). While there has been some **progress in the representation of young people in parliament** (with scores rising from 12.58 to 18.19), these **figures remain low**, indicating that young people are still significantly underrepresented in democratic institutions.

Taken together, these trends underscore the urgent need for a **renewed commitment to youth rights, participation, and inclusion**—not only within the EU but also across the broader OSCE region—to ensure that all young people have equitable opportunities and a meaningful voice in shaping their societies.

**Figure 59: Change in score, OSCE Average on Opportunity Dimension (2015–2024)**

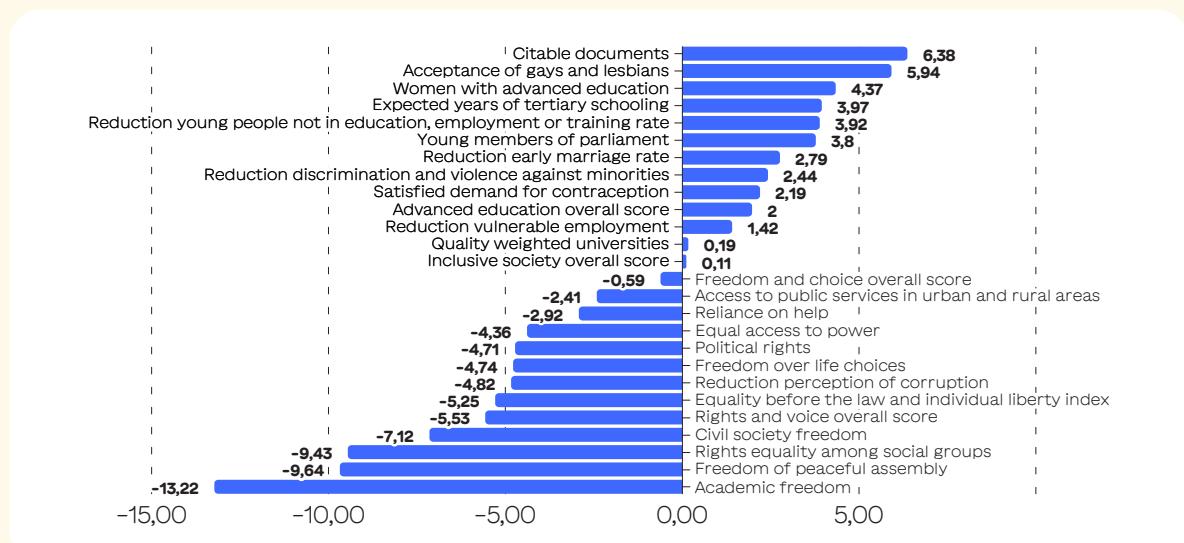


Figure 59 illustrates the increases and decreases in scores for the OSCE average on the Opportunity Dimension between 2015 and 2024. Each bar is labeled with the corresponding delta value, allowing for a clear comparison of improvements and declines across different aspects.

## Recommendations

### Youth Rights: A call to action towards a UN Convention

The Youth Progress Index paints a complex picture of the state of youth rights worldwide. While the global average has experienced a modest upward trend, the index's wide range (from 30.2 to 91.7) reveals stark disparities between regions and countries, leaving millions of young people behind.

The transitional phase known as "youth" is characterised by unique forms of discrimination and barriers that fall through the cracks of existing legal protections: child-specific frameworks end at age 18, while general adult human rights provisions often fail to account for the evolving capacities and distinct vulnerabilities of young people. While it is true that international human rights conventions apply to all, young people as a group suffer from a lack of tailored protection and recognition. Too often, young people are viewed solely as vulnerable dependents, rather than as legitimate rights holders, which leads to their rights being overlooked and contributes to eroding trust in democratic institutions.

The concerning trends highlighted in this report underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive, legally binding international instrument to safeguard the rights of young people. A UN convention on the rights of young people is essential for ensuring a just, equitable, and sustainable future for all. Such a convention would explicitly recognize young people as rights holders, strengthen the legitimacy of their claims, and establish a clear legal framework obligating states to take concrete action to address the challenges identified in this report. It would also create robust mechanisms for monitoring state compliance and holding governments accountable for violations of youth rights.

By bridging the existing gap in human rights protections, this instrument would help ensure that young people, who are both vital agents of social change and disproportionately exposed to risk, have their fundamental rights consistently and effectively protected worldwide.

Call on national governments to:

1. Adopt a UN General Assembly resolution establishing a UN Convention on the Rights of Young People with an accompanying monitoring mechanism that ensures the complete recognition, protection, promotion and implementation of young people's rights.
  - a. The negotiation of the Convention—via an Ad Hoc Committee or Working Group of the General Assembly for example—should include meaningful participatory processes with young people and youth organisations in order to shape the text.
2. Adopt a Human Rights Council resolution that sets up a UN Special Procedure on the Rights of Young People (i.e. a Working Group of Experts on the Human Rights of Young People, an Independent Expert or Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Young People) to assess the extent to which the international legal framework currently upholds young people's rights and the feasibility for greater legal protections.

Promote youth rights and meaningful youth participation processes across existing UN human rights mechanisms' review processes, including as core obligations that should be considered by mandate-holders.

Call on national governments and UN agencies (notably the UN Youth Office and OHCHR) to:

1. Strengthen mainstreaming efforts of young people's rights across all three pillars of the UN (human rights, peace and security, and development). This should include ensuring that youth rights are accounted for within all mandates, and that meaningful youth participatory spaces are established in all processes, in coordination with the UN Youth Office and the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights.
2. Improve young people's and youth-led organisations' access to the UN's human rights mechanisms, including independent and safe access to the UN Treaty Bodies, Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures, through increased funding, capacity building and safeguarding, when needed.
3. Build the capacity for civil society, including youth and youth-led organisations, to apply a rights-based approach to their work and identify how youth rights can be better promoted and protected at all levels.
4. Strengthen coherency and synchronicity between all youth-specific outcomes adopted at the UN Human Rights Council, General Assembly and Security Council, as well as climate procedures, including Voluntary National Reviews and the UN Climate Change Conference, as a means of setting a common global standard for young people's rights.

## Closing the global youth data gap: A call for coordinated international action

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls explicitly for disaggregated data: "high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity [and] migratory status" (Target 17.18). Yet nearly a decade later, the global data landscape on youth remains a fragmented patchwork.<sup>46</sup> Despite some progress, there is still **no comprehensive international framework, platform, or protocol** for collecting, harmonising and disseminating **youth-disaggregated data** across the full range of rights and policy areas.

This lack of robust, age-specific, and intersectional data severely undermines our ability to **identify violations, design effective interventions, and monitor progress on youth rights globally**. It impairs accountability and disempowers youth-led advocacy.

This gap forces civil society and policy makers to rely on either general population averages or overly broad "youth" categories that mask the lived realities of teens versus young adults, and those of marginalised subgroups, especially young people facing layered inequalities based on gender, disability, migration status, class, or ethnicity.

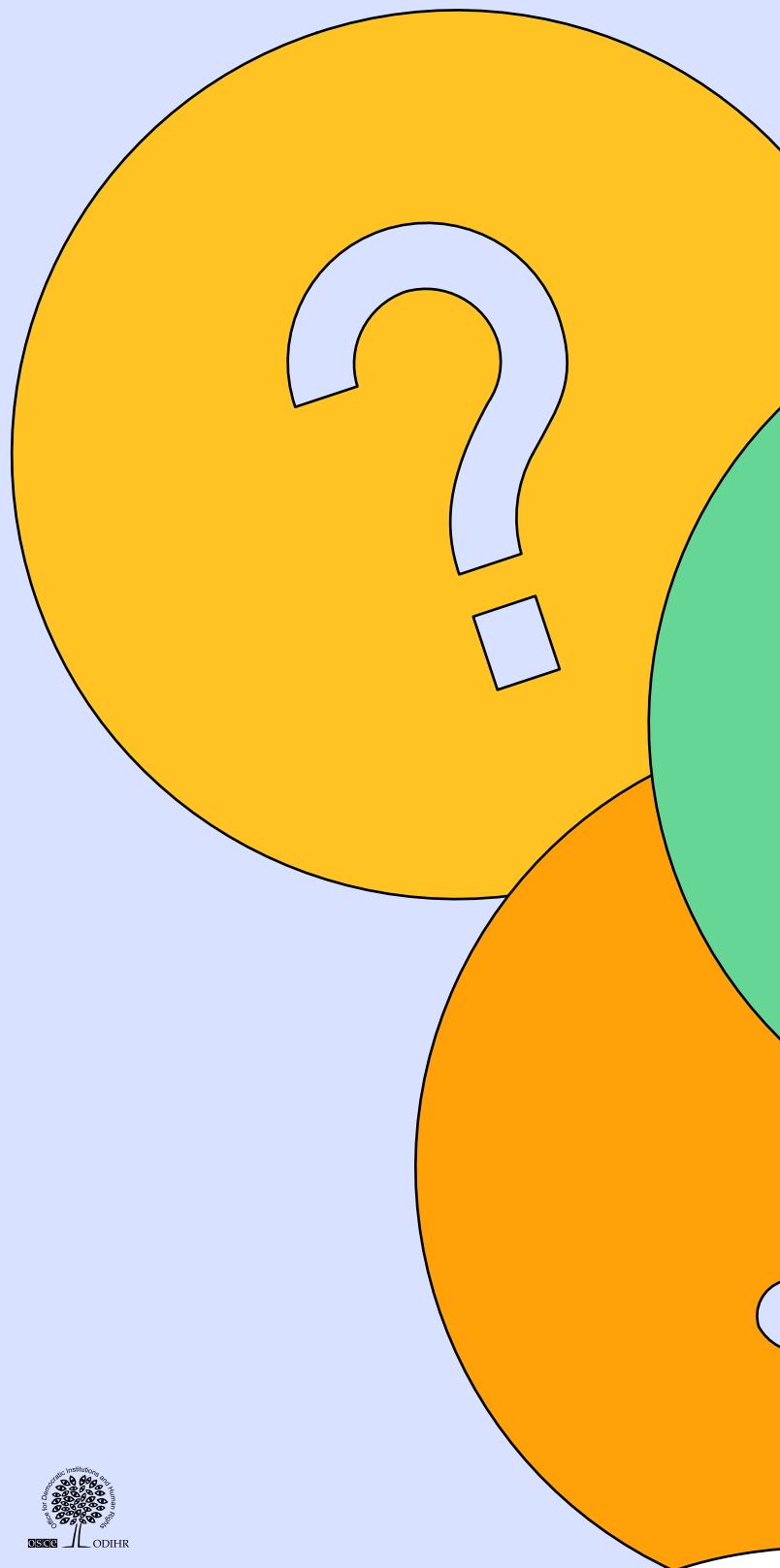
Globally, the collection of youth-relevant data suffers from **three persistent challenges**:

- **Granularity:** There is no internationally agreed standard for defining youth age groups. Data is often collected in broad or inconsistent age bands (e.g. 15–24, 16–29, 18–35), limiting the comparability and policy relevance of many indicators.
- **Coverage:** Few datasets offer a comprehensive picture of youth rights. **Critical domains such as mental health, digital safety, civic space, climate resilience, or access to social protection** remain under-measured or captured only through adult-level proxies.
- **Accessibility and usability:** Even when youth-relevant data exists, it is dispersed across multiple institutions, dashboards, and agencies, often presented in non-youth-friendly formats that inhibit meaningful civic use. In many countries, youth organisations, researchers and advocates face **high entry barriers** to finding and interpreting the data that shapes policy about them.

It is time for the **United Nations system, in collaboration with Member States, statistical bodies, and civil society**, to take coordinated action and build a **dedicated global youth data infrastructure**. This must include:

- **Standardised age-disaggregation protocols**, ideally collecting data by individual years or narrow bands (e.g. 15–17, 18–21, 22–25, etc.) to reflect the fast-changing circumstances of youth and enable comparative analysis. Flexibility is needed to allow re-aggregation by users.
- **Intersectional filters**, ensuring that data can be cross-tabulated by key variables such as gender identity, disability status, rural/urban location, migration history, or income level. This is essential for identifying invisible exclusions.
- **Open source datasets**, published with clear metadata, rights of reuse, and licensing terms that allow activists, researchers, and youth-led organisations to access and use the information for monitoring, advocacy, and programming.
- **Youth-generated data**, with mechanisms to validate and integrate data collected by youth organisations, movements, and community researchers, especially in underreported areas such as mental health, political participation, LGBTIQ+, or informal work.
- **Capacity building on data literacy**, empowering young people and youth organisations globally to interpret, visualise and use data to hold governments accountable. Digital tools, open-source materials, and multilingual resources must be developed to democratise this skillset.

The absence of such infrastructure is a **systemic barrier to youth inclusion and rights**. Without visibility in data, young people remain at the margins of public policy. Society needs to affirm that young people are not just a subcategory of the population, but a **distinct rights-bearing group** in transition, and one whose challenges cannot be understood or addressed without measurement.



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