

Young, hopeful, and unconvinced: The generational progress gap

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The **Worldwide Independent Network of MR (WIN)**, the leading global association of independent market research and polling firms, has released new findings from its Worldviews Survey ahead of **International Youth Day**. Based on insights from over 45,000 people across 45 countries, the data focuses on **young people aged 18 to 24** and reveals a striking paradox: **they remain the most hopeful age group when it comes to their personal future, yet they are notably more cautious than their elders about whether their generation enjoys greater opportunities than the one before it.**

The summary of findings is as follows:

Optimism for opportunities holds amongst young people, but the margin is thinner than previous generations

Globally, 47% of young people believe their generation has more opportunities than their parents, 28% believe they have fewer opportunities and 20% equal. Optimism therefore still wins out, but it is a softer verdict than the one older generations have. For example, six in ten adults aged 65 and over believe their generation had more opportunities than their parents did.

Still, that confidence holds up even when the picture is broken down by country. In 28 of the 45 countries surveyed, more young people see greater opportunity than fewer. Optimism runs strongest in countries such as Vietnam and Georgia where at least eight in ten young people believe their generation is better off. Elsewhere, the mood tips the other way: pessimism outweighs optimism across the remaining 17 countries, led by South Korea (71%), followed by Slovenia (57%), Italy (55%), Spain (54%) and Sweden (51%), while in the United States 45% believe their generation has fewer opportunities than their parents. China offers a more balanced picture, split almost evenly between those who see more opportunity (47%) and those saying opportunities are about the same (45%).

Taken together, the findings feed into the wider debate on social mobility and whether each generation can expect a better standard of living than the last. They also point to something broader: there is no single, global youth experience. Perceptions of opportunity vary sharply from one country to the next, shaped by each nation's own economic, social and political context.

Home ownership remains a major aspiration, but affordability doubts are rising

While just 8% of young people aged 18-24 already own a home, the majority (56%) who don't already own one are still hopeful that they will in the future. Yet, that leaves more than one in four (27%) who do not believe they will ever be able to afford one, a pessimism that runs deeper amongst young women than young men (30% vs. 24%) and among those with lower educational attainment.

That doubt is far from evenly spread. In some countries with more developed economies, more than half of young people believe they will never own a home: South Korea (58%) and the United States (58%)

The stakes go beyond the housing market itself. Across many countries, home ownership is a powerful symbol of economic security, independence and the transition to adulthood, so young people's expectations of owning one offer a useful window into how they view their long-term economic prospects.

Most young people remain hopeful about their personal future, though the optimism is not shared equally

Despite their reservations that they have more opportunities than their parents, young people have not lost hope in their own prospects. 63% are still hopeful about their future in their own country, against 33% who feel pessimistic, making them the most optimistic age group in our study compared to others other age groups, with pessimism growing with age (44% of those over 65 are not hopeful of their own future). That optimism is not shared equally, though: young men are more hopeful than young women (67% vs. 59%), and hope rises with educational attainment.

Here too, the national picture varies widely. In 13 of the 45 countries, including European countries such Germany, France, Spain and Italy, pessimism outweighs optimism amongst young people. At the other end of the scale, Vietnam (98%), and China (97%) are the most optimistic countries, while Slovakia (75%) and Serbia (72%) are some of the most pessimistic.

The gender gap is worth noting. Young women consistently express lower levels of optimism than young men, both about their future and about their ability to one day own a home, a pattern that may reflect the different opportunities, as well as different economic and social expectations placed on young women and men.

Most young people would consider emigrating to find better opportunities, though Japan, Malaysia, and India tell a different story

Young people (18-24) are the age group most willing to move abroad, with the willingness increasing with educational attainment. Overall, two-thirds of young people (66%) would consider moving to another country for better opportunities: 51% would do so if they could migrate legally, and 15% would do so regardless of the circumstances. Just 27% would not consider emigrating at all. This is significant as the willingness decreases with age, with 53% of 35-44-year-olds, 33% of 55-64-year-olds, and only 22% of those over 65 willing to move abroad.

There are only nine countries where a majority of young people would choose to remain: for instance China, Denmark, Japan, Latvia, Norway, Pakistan, Sweden and Vietnam. Willingness to migrate peaks in countries such Spain (91%) and Ecuador (90%),

Perceived opportunity at home and willingness to move abroad tend to move together, though there are exceptions. Japan is a clear example: young people there are relatively pessimistic about their opportunities in the country yet show little appetite for emigrating. Malaysia and India are cut the other way, where positive views of domestic opportunity coexist with high willingness to move abroad.

A similar disconnect shows up between outlook on the future and expectations of owning a home. In some countries, optimism about the future remains high even where expectations of home ownership are low, suggesting home ownership does not carry the same weight as a marker of personal success across all cultural contexts.

Richard Colwell, President of WIN International Association, said:

"Young people remain hopeful about their own future, even though they're less convinced than older generations that their generation has more opportunities than the one before it. That may be one of the most compelling findings of this study; optimism about your own path can coexist with real caution about progress more

broadly. Their economic outlook reflects that same realism: it's sobering that more than one in four don't believe they'll ever own a home. But overall, this remains a generation that believes in its own future, even as it takes a clear-eyed view of the conditions that will shape it."

**Only one country from Africa and two from the MENA region took part in the survey, which should be considered when interpreting regional patterns.*

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