

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Your Voice Matters Survey 2026



What young women and gender-diverse people are telling
us about their lives in Aotearoa



YWCA
Tāmaki Makaurau
Auckland

FOREWORD



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Young women and gender-diverse people should not have to keep proving the realities they live. This report makes those realities harder to ignore and shows why listening must lead to action.

Young people are not asking us to shape their future for them. They are asking for the power to shape it themselves. Their knowledge must be treated as evidence, their participation must influence decisions, and the institutions with power must be accountable for what follows.

At YWCA Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, our responsibility does not end with publishing this report. We will use what respondents have shared to guide our work and advocate for change alongside young people. We ask everyone with the power to change policies, institutions, workplaces, services and communities to listen carefully, share power and act.

To every person who took part: ngā mihi nui for the time, honesty and trust you gave this survey. Your voice matters, and this report is one step in making sure it leads somewhere.

“Young people are not asking us to shape their future for them. They are asking for the power to shape it themselves. Our responsibility is to ensure their voices carry weight and their participation has real influence over the future of Aotearoa.”

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Young people are telling us what needs to change

Young women and gender-diverse people are growing up in a period of intense pressure and uncertainty. Six years after the COVID-19 pandemic first disrupted daily life, many are navigating rising living costs, insecure work and study pathways, public system strain, global conflict, climate anxiety, political polarisation, online harm and rapid technological change.

Too often, young people are spoken about rather than listened to. The Your Voice Matters Survey was created to hear directly from young women and gender-diverse people aged 16–30 across Aotearoa New Zealand about their wellbeing, safety, financial security, opportunity, representation, support, trust, hope and concerns for the future.

A total of 1,159 young people responded. They did not describe one isolated issue. They described connected pressures: financial insecurity, mental health strain, safety concerns, exclusion from opportunity, low trust in leadership and unequal experiences, especially for disabled, neurodivergent and gender-diverse respondents. At the same time, respondents described hope as active and collective, built through community, care, young people and collective action.

The survey findings will inform YWCA Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland’s advocacy, programme development, partnerships and future research. They are also intended for decision-makers, funders, employers, educators, community organisations and the wider public. Young people have been clear about what they are experiencing, what helps and what needs to change.

“That’s what gives me hope - people showing up for each other.”



Seven insights, one connected picture

1 Young people are under cumulative pressure, not isolated stress

Only 5% described their wellbeing as thriving, while 36% said they were struggling or not great. Money and cost of living, mental health, and stress or pressure were the most commonly selected day-to-day impacts.

2 Financial insecurity is shaping wellbeing, opportunity and future hope

57% felt not at all or only a little financially secure. Respondents with lower financial security also reported lower average wellbeing.

3 Safety is a daily calculation - offline, online and especially after dark

77% felt not at all or only a little safe in public spaces after dark. 41% had experienced in-person harassment or harm in the previous 12 months, and 25% had experienced harm online.

4 Access to opportunity depends on systems, not just ambition

Only 4% were very confident they had the same shot at opportunities as others their age. The most commonly selected barriers were confidence or self-doubt, financial costs and not knowing where to start.

5 The burden is not evenly shared

Disabled, neurodivergent and gender-diverse respondents reported poorer outcomes across several measures. Disabled respondents, for example, reported particularly high financial insecurity, poor wellbeing and lack of safety after dark.

6 Young people feel unheard and have low trust in leadership and institutions

Half felt their voice mattered not at all or only a little in decisions about their community and Aotearoa's future. 84% had low trust in political leaders and 73% had low trust in public institutions

7 Hope is alive, and it lives in community

Respondents were more hopeful about their own future than Aotearoa's, and 76% were at least somewhat confident positive change was possible. Open-text responses most often located hope in people, community, rangatahi and collective action.

What young people told us

Respondents described connected pressures across wellbeing, financial security, safety, opportunity and trust - but they had not given up on the possibility of change.

1,159 respondents · aged 16–30 · across Aotearoa · February–March 2026

Only 5%

described their wellbeing as thriving

36% were struggling or not great

57%

felt financially insecure

77%

felt unsafe in public spaces after dark

41%

experienced in-person harm in the past 12 months

4%

were very confident they had the same shot at opportunities

84%

had low trust in political leaders

76%

were at least somewhat confident positive change was possible

The burden is not evenly shared

55% of disabled respondents and 55% of gender-diverse respondents described their wellbeing as struggling or not great.

Disabled, neurodivergent and gender-diverse respondents reported poorer outcomes across several measures.

A national snapshot of young people's lives

The Your Voice Matters Survey by YWCA Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland was created to hear directly from young women and gender-diverse people aged 15–30 across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The survey was open from **2 February to 6 March 2026** and was shared online, primarily through Instagram and Facebook. The final cleaned dataset included **1,159 valid responses**.

The survey asked about the issues shaping young people's lives now and their hopes for the future. Topics included wellbeing, opportunity, representation, financial security, safety online and offline, support, trust in leaders and institutions, whether young people feel their voices matter, and what changes they want to see in Aotearoa.

The survey included quantitative questions and open-text responses. The findings show what respondents selected from a set of options and how they described their experiences, concerns, hopes and priorities in their own words.

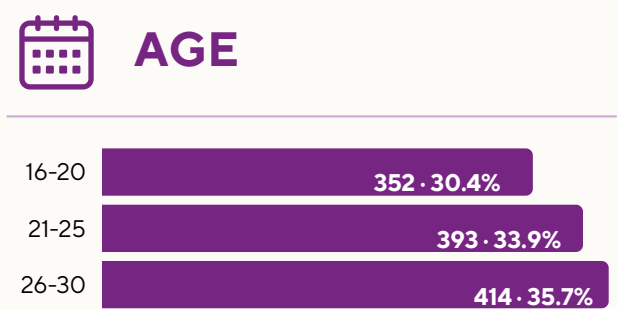
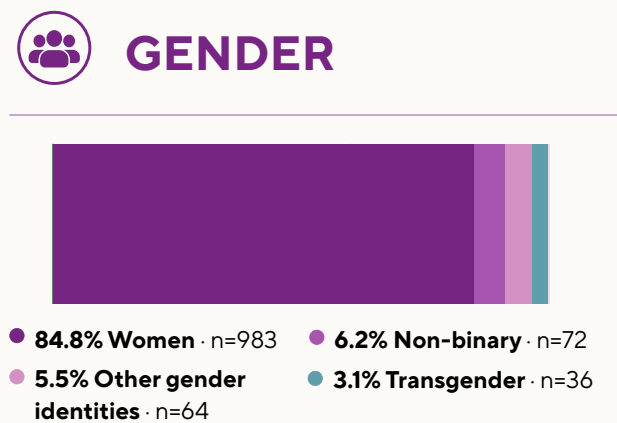
How to read this report

This survey provides evidence about the experiences, concerns and hopes of the young women and gender-diverse people who responded. It is not a statistically representative survey of all young women and gender-diverse people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

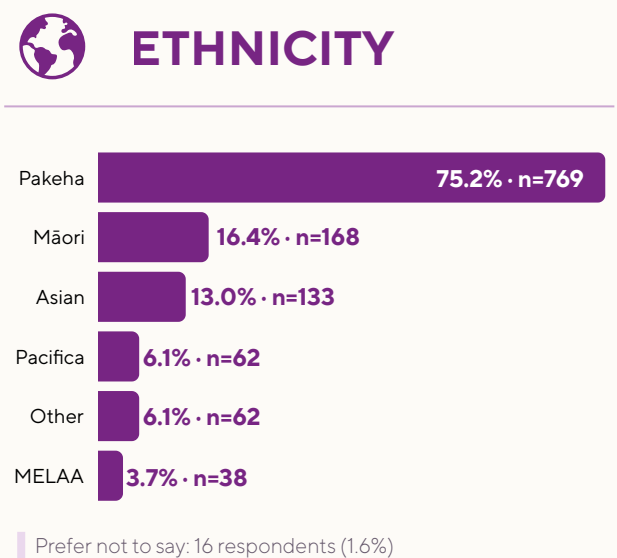
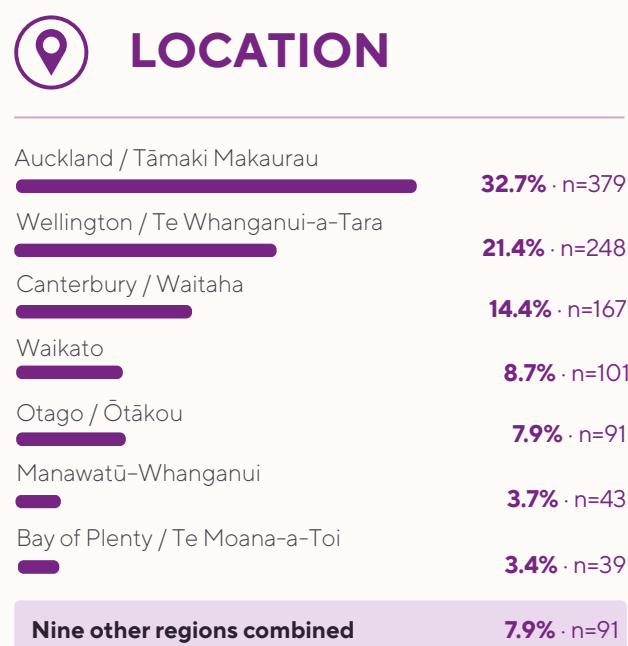
Some groups had smaller numbers of respondents, and many identities overlap. Subgroup findings should be treated as important signals within this survey sample and interpreted with care. The report focuses on the strongest patterns across the data, especially where quantitative findings were reinforced by open-text responses.

- The report uses young women and gender-diverse people for the survey constituency and respondents when describing this sample. Gender-diverse subgroup findings use the standardised gender response group: non-binary, transgender, gender fluid, gender queer and gender diverse respondents. Respondents recorded as Other or No response are not included in that subgroup.
- Narrative percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. Chart labels generally use one decimal. Percentages use the valid response count for each question, and sample sizes are shown as n. Totals may differ slightly from 100% because of rounding. Multi-select questions can total more than 100%

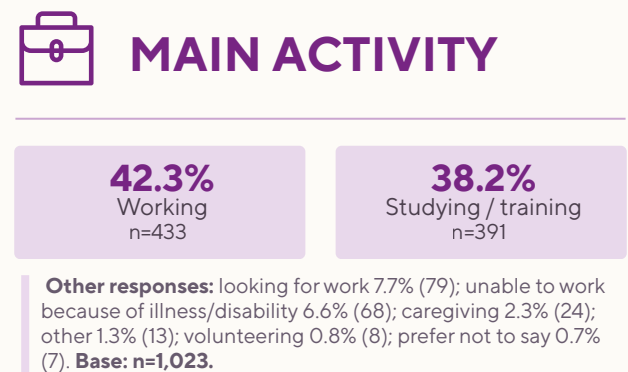
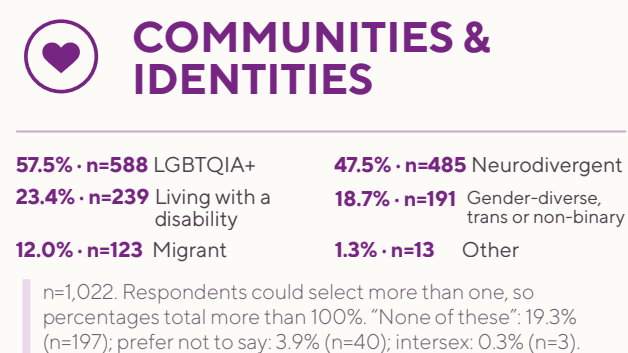
Who responded



Other gender identities combines gender fluid (17), gender queer (16), gender diverse (9) and other self-described identities (22). Four respondents (0.3%) had no recorded response.



Includes respondents from Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, Nelson, Northland, Southland, Gisborne, Marlborough, Tasman and the West Coast.

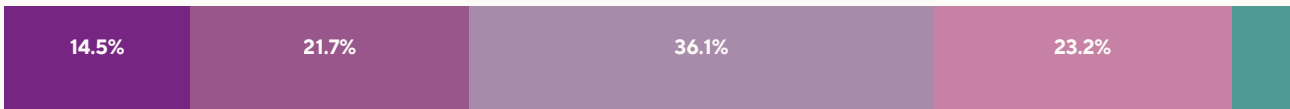


Young people are under cumulative pressure not isolated stress

Young women and gender-diverse people described what it feels like to come of age under pressure from every direction.

Only 4.5% of respondents described their wellbeing as thriving. 36.2% said they were struggling or not great. The largest group - 36% - described their wellbeing as okay. When asked what had the biggest impact on how they felt day to day over the past year, respondents most often selected money and cost of living (56%), mental health (43%), stress or pressure (42%), and study or work demands (31%).

Overall wellbeing

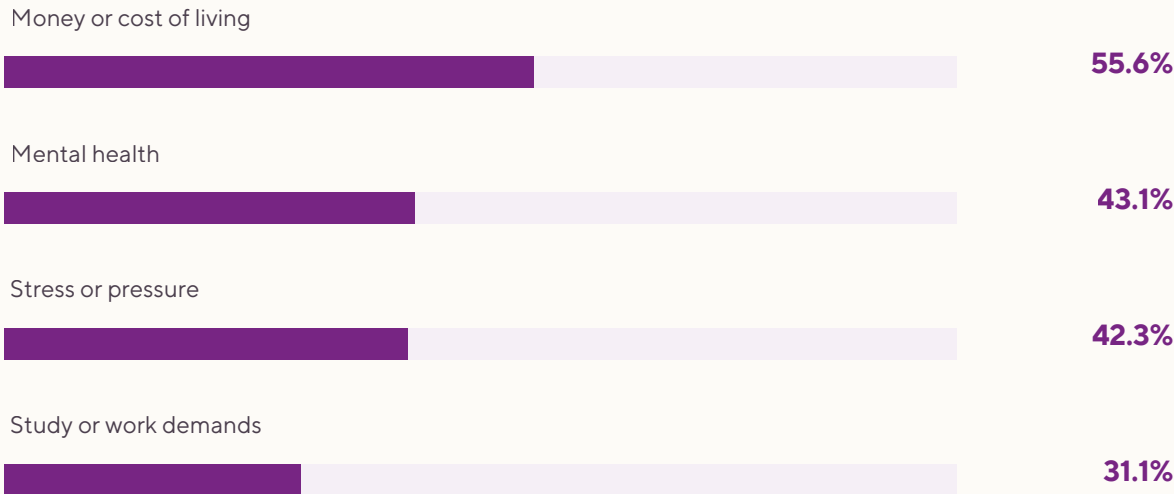


● Struggling 14.5% ● Not great 21.7% ● Okay 36.1% ● Good 23.2% ● Thriving 4.5%

Source: Your Voice Matters Survey 2026, n=1,159.

"All of my issues feel so big, but most of them feed into each other."

Biggest day-to-day pressures



Source: Your Voice Matters Survey 2026, n=1,159. Respondents could select up to three impacts.

Pressure is connected, not isolated

Open-text responses indicated that these pressures were often interconnected. Some respondents linked financial stress with poorer mental health, and described study and work pressures affecting sleep, confidence and energy. Others described loneliness and isolation as adding to existing pressures. Disability, chronic illness and neurodivergence were also described as affecting access to work, education, support and social connection, while some respondents linked discrimination, harassment and political uncertainty with additional stress.

Alongside these pressures, 65% of respondents said they often or always felt pressure to look, act or live a certain way. Nearly one in five said they rarely or never felt safe being fully themselves. These pressures were reported more often by gender-diverse, disabled and LGBTQIA+ respondents.

65%

often or always felt pressure to look, act or live a certain way

Nearly 1 in 5

rarely or never felt safe being fully themselves

Open-text responses suggest that wellbeing was shaped by more than individual coping or resilience. Respondents described pressures linked to finances, work and study, health, loneliness, discrimination and safety, and many also called for changes to the wider conditions affecting their lives.

Individual supports such as counselling, confidence-building or financial guidance may help, but respondents' answers also point to the importance of addressing affordability, secure work, accessible public services, safe environments and social connection.

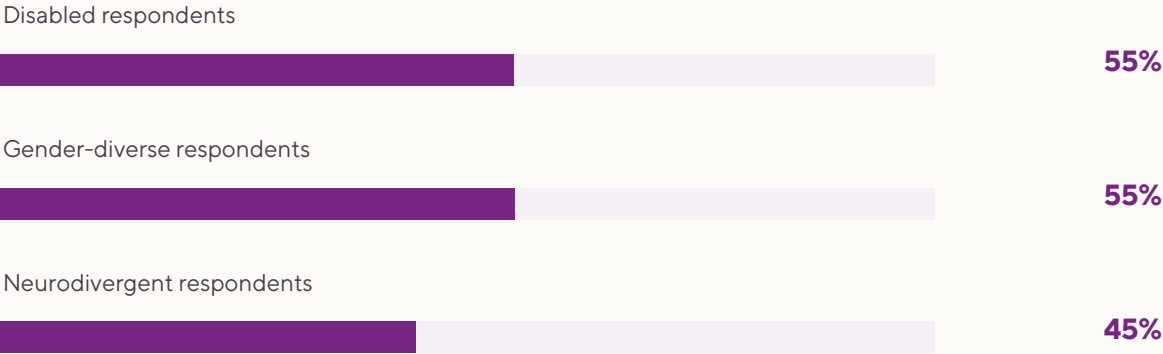
The findings suggest that wellbeing is closely connected with the conditions of young people's everyday lives, including financial security, access to support, safety, social connection, identity and belonging, and confidence about the future.

"I am surviving rather than thriving."



Wellbeing reflects the conditions of everyday life

Some groups reported much poorer wellbeing



Share describing their wellbeing as struggling or not great. Subgroup bases: disabled n=239; gender-diverse n=150; neurodivergent n=485. See Insight 5 for a deeper exploration of these disparities.



NATIONAL CONTEXT

22.9%

Of people aged 15–24 experienced high or very high psychological distress in 2024/25.

Source: Ministry of Health, Annual Update of Key Results 2024/25 New Zealand Health Survey. This measure provides national context but is not directly comparable with the YVM wellbeing scale.

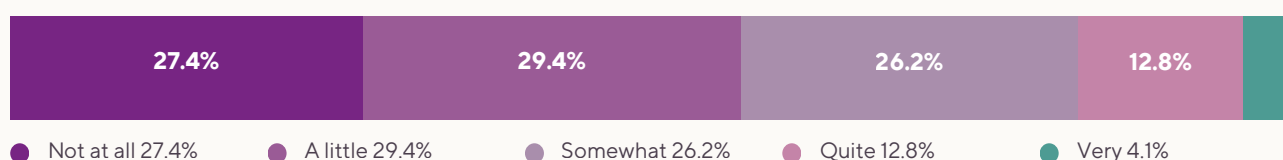
What this means

The findings suggest that mental health support is important, but is unlikely to address all of the pressures respondents described. Supporting young people to thrive will also require action on the wider conditions associated with wellbeing, including financial security, safe and inclusive environments, accessible support and stronger social connection.

Financial insecurity is shaping wellbeing, opportunity and future hope

Money is one of the clearest pressure points in the survey. Nearly 57% of respondents said they were either not at all secure or only a little secure financially. Only 17% said they felt quite or very financially secure. When asked what had the biggest impact on how they felt day to day, money and cost of living was the most common response.

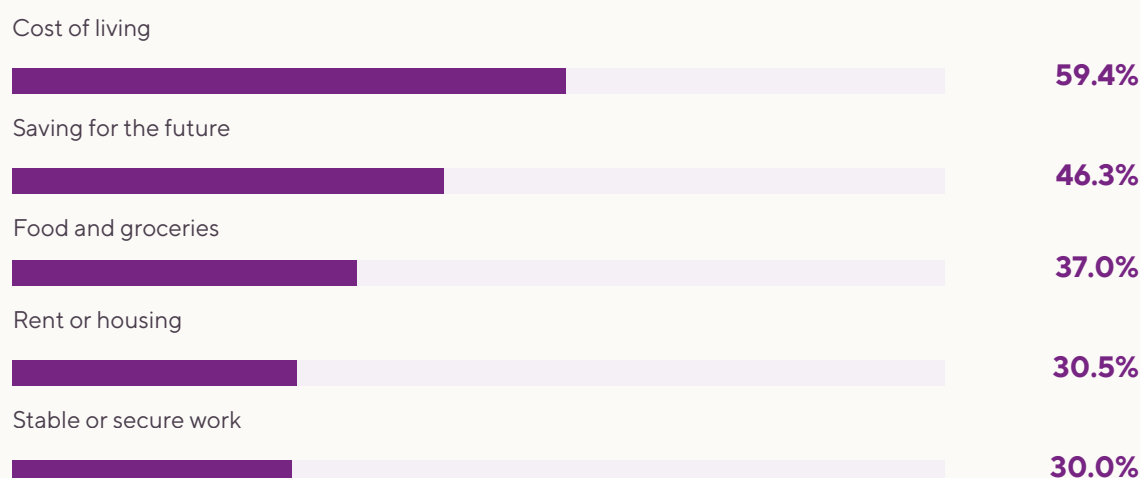
How financially secure respondents felt



Source: Your Voice Matters Survey 2026, n=1,145.

"Money has been the biggest struggle. It is exhausting living week to week and not knowing what I will have to sacrifice to pay the bills."

Main money worries

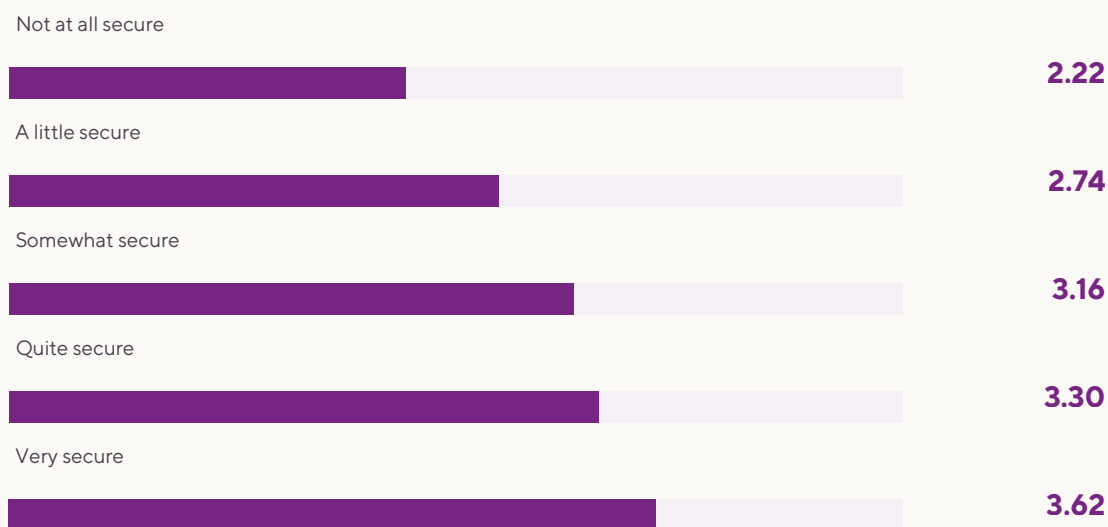


Source: Your Voice Matters Survey 2026, n=1,140. Respondents could select up to three worries. Other common worries included not being paid enough (20%), student loans (20%) and transport costs (14%).

Financial security is closely tied to wellbeing

Financial security was strongly associated with wellbeing in the survey. Respondents who felt very financially secure had an average wellbeing score of 3.62 out of 5, compared with 2.22 among those who felt not at all financially secure. Average wellbeing increased at each level of financial security.

Average wellbeing by financial security



Average wellbeing uses a five-point scale from struggling=1 to thriving=5.

65%

of neurodivergent respondents were financially insecure

44%

of gender-diverse respondents named finding stable work as a money worry

“When you are in survival mode financially, it is hard to take risks or pursue opportunities you genuinely care about.”



What financial insecurity closes down

For many respondents, financial insecurity meant constantly calculating what could be delayed, reduced, avoided or missed altogether. It meant saying no to opportunities, staying in unsuitable jobs, taking on too much work, delaying healthcare, limiting social connection, living in unstable housing or feeling unable to plan beyond the next pay cycle.

Respondents described financial insecurity as limiting the choices available to them. Financial pressure could make it harder to pursue opportunities based on their goals, interests and aspirations, with decisions instead shaped by immediate costs, location and what they could realistically manage.

Financial insecurity was higher among some groups. Disabled respondents were especially affected: 76% were financially insecure, compared with 52% of everyone else. Gender-diverse respondents were more likely to name finding stable work as a money worry (44%, compared with 30% overall). Neurodivergent respondents also showed higher rates of financial insecurity across multiple measures.

Young women and gender-diverse youth are sometimes told they need better financial literacy. Some respondents did ask for more practical education about money, tax, saving, investing and navigating adult systems. But financial literacy cannot solve low wages, unaffordable rent, food insecurity, student debt, unpaid labour or insecure work. Respondents are asking for the conditions that make financial security possible.



EQUITY CONTEXT

76%

of disabled respondents reported being financially insecure.

Disabled n=239. Respondents who did not identify as disabled n=906 for the financial security question.

What this means

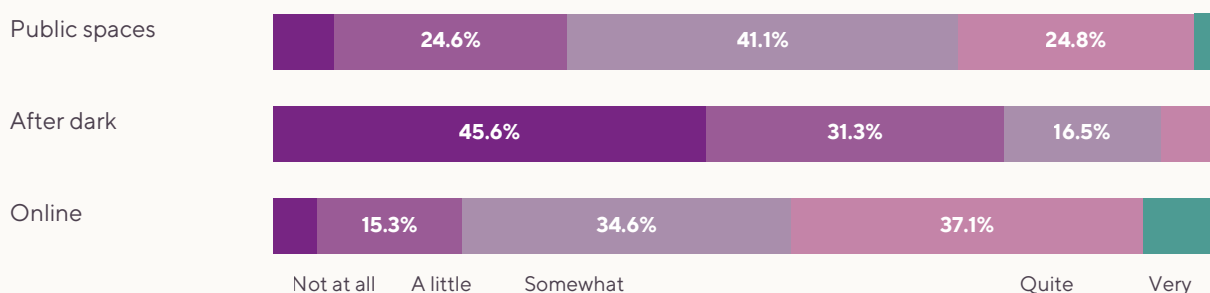
Financial insecurity is a wellbeing issue, an opportunity issue and a future-confidence issue. Support must go beyond individual confidence-building or financial education and address the material conditions that make life unaffordable and opportunity unevenly available.

Safety is a daily calculation offline, online and especially after dark

Safety concerns extended across both public and online spaces, but were especially pronounced after dark. More than three-quarters of respondents said they feel either not at all safe or only a little safe in public spaces after dark. Around 40% said they had experienced harassment or harm in person in the past 12 months. One in four reported experiencing harm online. Nearly three-quarters reported witnessing harassment or harm happening to someone else.

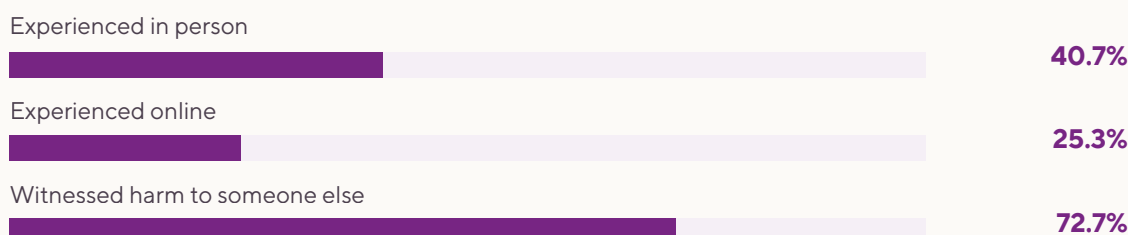
These numbers describe the daily calculations young women and gender-diverse people are making about where they go, how they get there, what they wear, who they are with, when they leave, whether they speak up, whether they post online, and whether it is worth the risk.

How safe respondents felt



"The level of violence and abuse women experience here, in public and in private, is horrific, and it affects how safe we feel every day."

Harassment or harm in the past 12 months



Source: Your Voice Matters Survey 2026. Valid base sizes were n=1,120 for public spaces and feeling unsafe after dark; n=1,119 for online safety; n=1,124 for in-person harm; n=1,123 for online harm; and n=1,120 for witnessed harm.

Safety concerns restrict participation

Respondents linked safety concerns to misogyny, sexual harassment, men's behaviour, alcohol, poor lighting, isolated public spaces, unsafe public transport, weak consequences for harmful behaviour, and the expectation that women and gender-diverse people should manage risk themselves.

60%

of disabled respondents felt not at all safe after dark

36%

of gender-diverse respondents experienced online harassment or harm in the past 12 months

In the past 12 months, in-person harassment or harm was reported by 54% of disabled respondents, 46% of neurodivergent respondents and 45% of LGBTQIA+ respondents, compared with 41% overall. During the same period, 42% of disabled respondents experienced online harassment or harm.

Online safety was also a major concern. Respondents described misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia, body shaming, cyberbullying, privacy concerns, image-based abuse, scams and doxxing, alongside emerging AI-related harms. For some, being safer online meant withdrawing, hiding parts of themselves or avoiding certain platforms.

When safety concerns lead young people to avoid public spaces, transport, social activities or online spaces, the impact extends beyond fear. It can restrict participation in work, study, community and social life.

"I would like to be able to feel safer interacting online without having to withdraw completely."



The burden of safety cannot sit with those at risk

Respondents most often looked beyond individual safety strategies and called for changes to the spaces, cultures and systems around them.

What respondents called for

- Safer public transport and better lighting
- Consent education and active bystanders
- Consequences for harassment and violence
- Online reporting that works
- Protection from image-based and AI abuse
- Cultural change addressing misogyny

“Women feeling safe starts with educating men on consent, respect and body autonomy.”



NATIONAL CONTEXT

37%

of women felt safe or very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark in 2023, compared with 72% of men.

Source: Stats NZ, Wellbeing statistics 2023 updated.

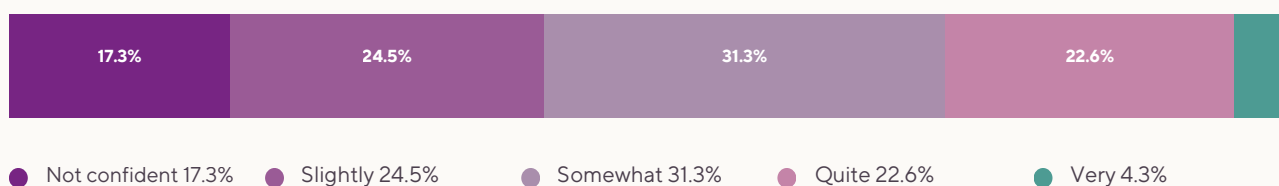
What this means

Responsibility must shift to the institutions, systems and people with the power to prevent harm. Action needs to move beyond individual safety tips and towards prevention, accountability, safer public design, safer transport, stronger online protections and cultural change that addresses the root causes of misogyny, discrimination and violence.

Access to opportunity depends on systems, not just ambition

Young women and gender-diverse youth are often told to be confident, back themselves and take opportunities when they come. The survey shows that access to opportunity is not that simple.

Confidence in having the same shot at opportunities

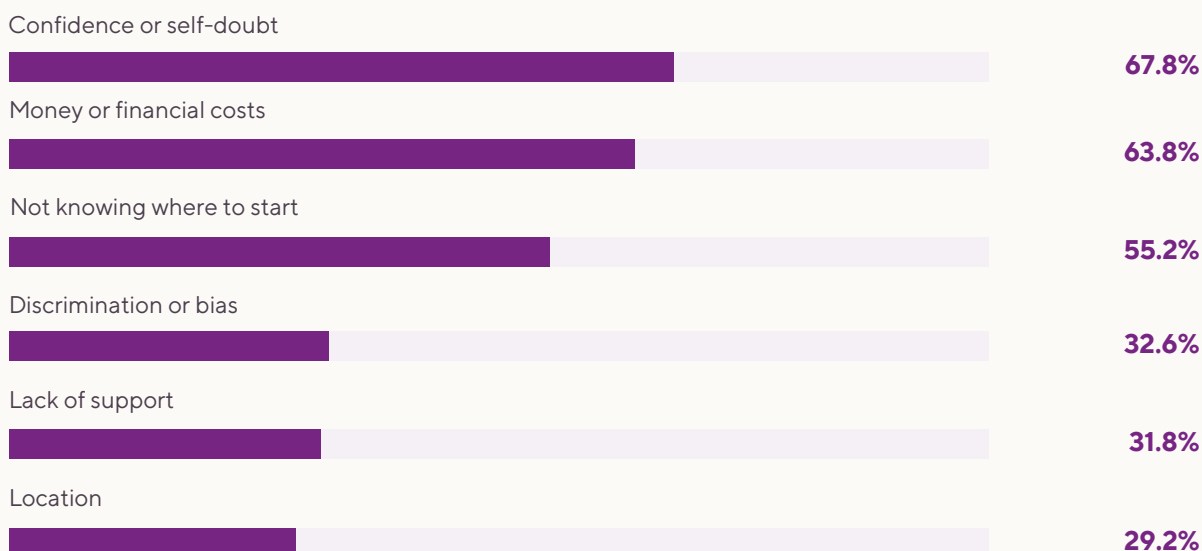


Source: Your Voice Matters Survey 2026, n=1,159.

"I don't even know [what opportunities] exist, or the effort to get to them takes more time than simply surviving."

Confidence was not simply an individual issue. Respondents linked confidence and self-doubt to money, health and disability, discrimination, family responsibilities, limited information, access to mentors and networks, and whether systems and spaces made them feel they belonged. Open-text responses focused overwhelmingly on barriers rather than enablers.

Barriers to opportunity



Source: Your Voice Matters Survey 2026, n=1,159. Respondents could select more than one barrier.

Cost, connections, and exclusion shape access

Access often depends on information, support and connections people already have. Some young people have people around them who can explain pathways, share contacts, help with applications or cover costs. Others navigate unfamiliar systems with much less support.

For many respondents, financial pressure affected whether opportunities were realistically accessible. Opportunities often come with additional costs, including transport, clothing, equipment, unpaid time, application fees, study costs, relocation, childcare, technology, or time away from paid work. For those already managing high living costs or low incomes, these costs can make opportunities unaffordable.

Respondents also described an entry-level experience trap: jobs require experience, but gaining experience can require unpaid work, financial resources and access to professional networks that not everyone has.

93%

of the 673 open-text responses described barriers rather than enablers

57%

of gender-diverse respondents named discrimination or bias as a barrier

Respondents described systems that treated disabled, neurodivergent, gender-diverse and migrant people, and those affected by racism or cultural exclusion, as difficult, risky, less capable or invisible. Discrimination or bias was also selected by 50% of disabled respondents, 42% of neurodivergent respondents and 40% of LGBTQIA+ respondents, compared with 33% overall.

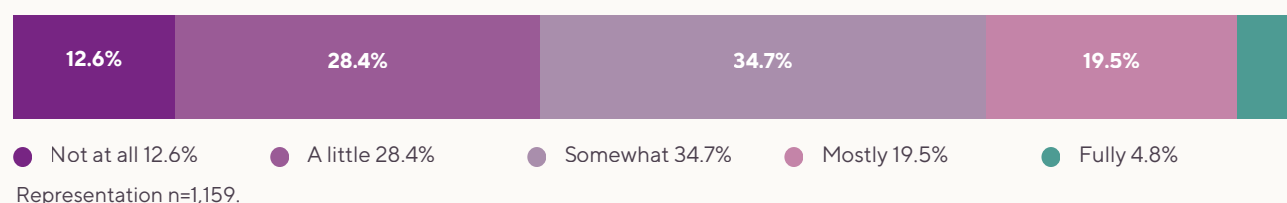
"I need the job to get a vehicle and I need the vehicle to get the job."



Opportunity should not depend on resources people already have

Access is also shaped by whether young people can see people like themselves in the places they want to enter. Forty-one percent of respondents said people who look like them or share their lived experience were not at all or only a little represented in New Zealand media, workplaces or leadership. Only 5% felt fully represented. When people do not see themselves in these spaces, it becomes harder to imagine that they belong there.

Representation in New Zealand media, workplaces and leadership



What access can depend on

- Money and transport
- Clear information
- Flexible workplaces
- Health and disability access
- Mentors and networks
- Freedom from discrimination



NATIONAL CONTEXT

14.4%

of people aged 15–24 were not in employment, education or training in the March 2026 quarter.

Source: Stats NZ, Labour market statistics March 2026 quarter. This national measure is contextual and is not directly comparable with the YVM findings.

What this means

Support needs to move beyond telling young people to be more confident. Confidence grows when pathways are visible, affordable, accessible and backed by real support. Opportunity should not depend on already having the resources, confidence and connections that opportunity is supposed to create.

The burden is not evenly shared

The pressures described in this survey are widespread, but they are not experienced equally. Disabled, neurodivergent and gender-diverse respondents reported some of the largest and most consistent disparities across wellbeing, safety, financial security and access to opportunity.

55% of disabled respondents and 55% of gender-diverse respondents described their wellbeing as struggling or not great

Selected disparities across the survey

Indicator	Overall	Disabled	Neurodivergent	Gender-diverse	Māori	Pacific	Asian	European
Struggling or not great wellbeing	36.2%	55.2%	44.7%	55.3%	40.5%	43.5%	25.6%	36.2%
Financially insecure	56.9%	76.2%	64.9%	61.5%	63.1%	64.5%	42.1%	56.2%
Not at all or only a little safe after dark	77.0%	82.8%	78.8%	76.6%	78.6%	77.4%	70.7%	77.9%
Experienced in-person harassment or harm	40.7%	54.0%	46.4%	48.6%	45.2%	37.1%	32.3%	42.0%
Less than quite confident in equal opportunity	73.1%	85.8%	78.8%	86.7%	74.4%	79.0%	71.4%	71.3%

Valid n varies by question; subgroup categories overlap. Base group sizes: disabled n=239; neurodivergent n=485; gender-diverse n=150; Māori n=168; Pacific peoples n=62; Asian n=133; European n=769. Gender-diverse analyses use the standardised gender question (n=150), not the separate community-identities measure shown on page 8 (n=191). Financial insecurity combines “not at all” and “a little” secure; after-dark safety combines “not at all” and “a little” safe. “Not quite or very confident” combines not confident, slightly confident and somewhat confident; it does not mean respondents had no confidence. Harassment or harm refers to experiences in the past 12 months. Bold indicates results at least five percentage points above the overall survey result. Differences are descriptive and have not been tested for statistical significance.

Disparities appeared differently across groups

Disabled respondents

55% reported struggling or not great wellbeing; 76% were financially insecure; 60% felt not at all safe after dark; 54% experienced in-person harassment or harm in the past 12 months.

Neurodivergent respondents

45% reported struggling or not great wellbeing; 65% were financially insecure; 46% experienced in-person harassment or harm in the past 12 months.

Gender-diverse respondents

55% reported poorer wellbeing; 61% were financially insecure; 57% named discrimination; 70% felt poorly represented; 36% experienced online harassment or harm in the past 12 months.

Māori respondents

63% were financially insecure; 79% felt not at all or only a little safe after dark; 45% experienced in-person harassment or harm in the past 12 months.

Pacific peoples respondents

Had the lowest mean self-rated wellbeing among the ethnicity groups reported here, at 2.58 out of 5. Interpret with caution because of the smaller sample.

Asian respondents

54% felt poorly represented; 21% selected family expectations as a day-to-day impact; 49% selected jobs and the economy as a top future concern.

"I am extremely aware that the world is not built for people like me. Even when individuals are kind and want to be accommodating, the way their businesses are built, or the way they operate...means I get shut out of so many opportunities my able-bodied peers have access to."



Equity must be designed in

These disparities do not show that some groups are inherently more vulnerable. They show that some groups reported greater barriers and poorer outcomes across multiple measures.

An intersectional approach recognises that identities and circumstances overlap, so barriers can also overlap. Disability, racism, financial insecurity, migration experiences, gender, sexuality, neurodivergence and lack of support can combine in ways missed when each issue is considered separately.



NATIONAL CONTEXT

17%

of people living in New Zealand households were disabled in 2023

10.2%

of people aged 15–29 identified as LGBTIQ+ in the 2023 Census

Sources: Stats NZ, Disability statistics 2023.

What this means

Programmes, services, policies and advocacy should be designed from the outset to reflect the needs and experiences of disabled, neurodivergent, gender-diverse, Māori, Pacific peoples, Asian, migrant, refugee-background and LGBTQIA+ young people. Equity means identifying and reducing the barriers that limit access to safety, support, recognition and opportunity.

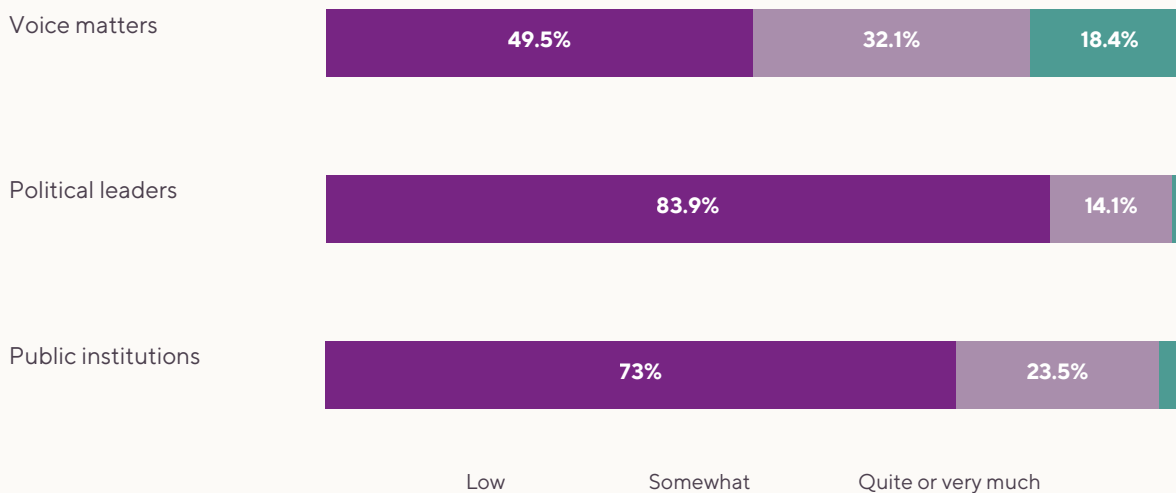
Young people feel unheard and have low trust in leadership and institutions

Many respondents felt their voice mattered little in decisions about their community and the future of Aotearoa.

Low trust was even more pronounced when they considered whether political leaders and public institutions would understand and act on issues affecting young people.

"I wish we didn't have to fight for a sentence amongst paragraphs."

How respondents rated voice and trust



Low combines not at all and a little. Valid n ranges from 1,046 to 1,050.

84% had low trust in political leaders

Low trust reflects a perceived gap between concern and action

These findings raise important questions about how much influence respondents feel they have in public decision-making. Their responses show strong concern about issues including cost of living, housing, healthcare, climate change, Te Tiriti, public services, safety, human rights, education, mental health and employment. At the same time, trust in political leaders and public institutions was low, suggesting a gap between respondents' concern about these issues and their confidence that decision-makers will understand and act on them.

50%

said their voice matters not at all or only a little

2%

had positive trust in political leaders

When asked what one thing they would change in Aotearoa right now, respondents most often pointed to government and political leadership. Political change was seen as an upstream condition for addressing living costs, housing, healthcare, climate action, Te Tiriti, public services, equity and safety.

Young people do not want to be treated as a token consultation group, a future workforce, a social problem or a paragraph in someone else's strategy. They want to be taken seriously as people already living with the consequences of decisions made now.

"It's incredibly difficult to feel seen, heard or valued."



Rebuilding trust requires power, not just consultation

Communication alone will not address the concerns underlying low trust. Respondents described decisions as disconnected from their lived realities and criticised what they saw as insufficient action on the cost of living, climate change, Te Tiriti, health and public services, and the safety and rights of marginalised communities. They also called for more long-term decision-making.

Rebuilding trust requires more than consultation. It means involving young people before decisions are made. It means valuing lived experience as evidence, making participation accessible and meaningful, and resourcing youth-led work. It also means creating decision-making spaces that include young women, gender-diverse youth, disabled and neurodivergent young people, Māori, Pacific peoples, Asian, migrant young people, young people from refugee backgrounds and LGBTQIA+ young people from the outset.



NATIONAL CONTEXT

5.7 to 4.9
2021 2023

Average trust in Parliament fell from 5.7 out of 10 in 2021 to 4.9 in 2023.

Source: Stats NZ, New Zealanders' trust in key institutions declines.

Note: The national measure uses a different population and scale, so it provides context rather than a direct comparison with YVM.

What this means

Young people's low trust warrants serious attention. Rebuilding trust will require visible action, meaningful representation, Te Tiriti-honouring decision-making, accessible participation and genuine power-sharing with the young people most affected by public decisions.

Hope is alive and it lives in community

Respondents are worried about the future. They are under pressure, financially stretched, concerned about safety, facing uneven access to opportunity and reporting low trust in leaders and institutions. Despite this, they have not given up.

Respondents reported slightly higher hope for their own future than for Aotearoa's future. Many have not given up on themselves. What they are less confident in is the direction of the systems and structures around them.

Hope and confidence

Hope for my own future



Hope for Aotearoa



At least somewhat confident combines somewhat, quite and very confident. Valid n ranges from 1,053 to 1,071.

76%

at least somewhat confident that positive change is possible

"That's what gives me hope: people showing up for each other."

Hope is active and collective

Many respondents did not locate the possibility of change primarily in those currently in power. They located it in people, community, rangatahi, volunteers, activists and ordinary people doing good things in difficult conditions.

Across the open-text responses, hope was sustained through care, organising, creativity, learning, protest, cultural connection, relationships with whānau and whenua, and the refusal to give in to despair. Some described hope as something they choose or practise because the alternative is despair.

Where young people located hope

- Community care and mutual support
- Collective action and activism
- Culture, whenua and belonging
- Rangatahi and future generations
- Whānau and close relationships
- Personal resilience and determination

"I have hope for the future as a radical choice rather than choosing despair."



Hope cannot be sustained by positive thinking alone

For some respondents, hope was fragile. They described having little or no hope; some placed their hope in leaving Aotearoa, while others felt afraid, tired or unsure whether things would improve.

Te ao Māori, whakapapa and reconnection with whenua appeared as meaningful sources of hope, particularly for Māori respondents. These forms of hope are grounded in identity, belonging and continuity, not only positive thinking.

When asked what gave them hope for the future, one Māori respondent wrote:

“Reconnection with whakapapa. Our children connecting with their land and heritage.”



WIDER CONTEXT

38%

of citizen
departures

People aged 18–30 accounted for 38% of migrant departures by New Zealand citizens in the year ended June 2025.

Source: Stats NZ, International migration June 2025.

Note: This describes the age profile of departures. It does not indicate why people left or the proportion of young adults who left Aotearoa.

What this means

Hope grows when young people have reason to believe change is possible, when they are connected to others, when they can act on what matters to them and when their voices lead to something real. Supporting hope means investing in connection, leadership, belonging, advocacy, youth-led action and spaces where young people can turn concern into collective power.

Seven priorities for action

What young people asked for is practical and connected: affordable lives, support before crisis, safer spaces, real pathways, voice with power, Te Tiriti equity and rights taken seriously, and belonging and connection.

What needs to change

Throughout the survey, respondents were asked what would make a positive difference. Their answers were practical, specific and consistent. They span policy, systems, culture, community, infrastructure and daily life.

Young people are asking for material change, safer systems, meaningful voice, accessible support, stronger community, and places where they can belong, lead and be taken seriously.

Young people asked for	What this means in practice	Who needs to act
Life that is affordable	Fair pay, paid placements, adequate student support, adequate welfare and disability support, affordable housing, transport, food, healthcare and education.	Government, employers, education providers, funders and public agencies.
Support before crisis	Free or affordable mental health support, long-term counselling, peer connection, culturally safe and gender-affirming support, trusted adults and help navigating systems.	Health system, schools, tertiary providers, funders, community organisations and youth services.
Safer spaces online and offline	Better lighting, safer transport, active bystanders, consent education, stronger responses to harassment and violence, online reporting that works, and protection from AI and image-based abuse.	Councils, transport agencies, schools, justice sector, online platforms, communities and government.
Real pathways into work, study and leadership	Clear information, mentors, paid experience, genuine entry-level roles, flexible and accessible recruitment, disability accommodations, childcare-friendly structures and networks that open doors.	Employers, education providers, funders, youth organisations and professional networks.
Voice with power	Young people involved before decisions are made, youth leadership that is resourced, lived experience treated as evidence, and accountability when young people are asked to contribute.	Government, councils, institutions, funders, boards, NGOs, schools and tertiary providers.
Te Tiriti, equity and rights taken seriously	Te Tiriti-honouring decision-making, anti-racism, disability inclusion, gender affirmation, LGBTQIA+ safety, migrant and refugee inclusion, and protection from political scapegoating.	Government, public agencies, service and programme providers, employers, funders, media and community organisations.
Belonging and connection	Free or low-cost places to gather and spend time, cultural spaces, queer and gender-diverse spaces, accessible community spaces, creative opportunities, whānau connection, peer support and representation.	Community organisations, councils, funders, schools, workplaces, media and cultural organisations.

Life that is affordable

Respondents are not asking for more advice about budgeting. They are asking for income, jobs, housing, transport, study and essentials they can afford. They want wages that reflect the cost of living, student support that covers living costs, paid student placements, secure jobs, fair pay, accessible welfare and disability support, and lower costs for groceries, rent, healthcare, childcare, transport, power and education.

“A student allowance I can actually live on.”



Support before crisis

Health and wellbeing support was the most-selected type of support overall. Respondents want counselling and therapy that is free or affordable, responsive, culturally safe, gender-affirming, disability-inclusive and available before crisis point. They also want peer connection, whānau and family support, safe community spaces, creative opportunities and trusted people outside clinical settings. Wellbeing is relational and is built in connection, not isolation.

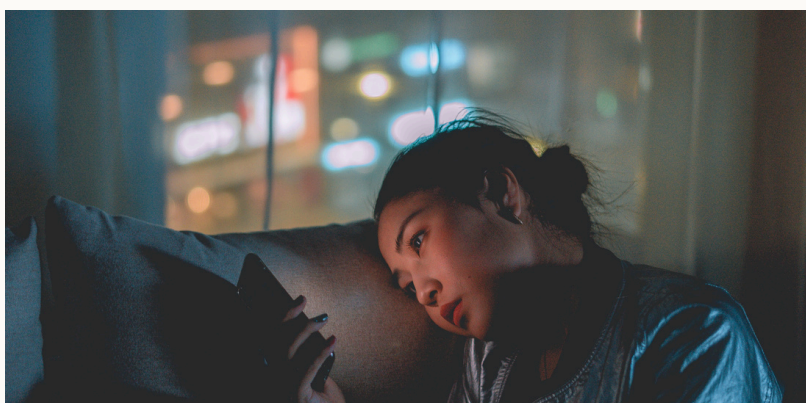


“Mental health, but not just with counselling as a solution, instead a social model of support.”

Safer spaces online and offline

Respondents want safety to depend less on individual vigilance and more on prevention, accountability and better environments. They called for early and sustained consent education, men and boys challenging harmful behaviour, better lighting, safer public transport, community presence, reporting systems that work, stronger consequences for harassment and violence, and stronger protections against online harm, AI misuse, image-based abuse and hate.

“Action being taken when you report someone online.”



Real pathways into work, study and leadership

Respondents want mentors, information, networks, money, flexibility and systems that do not assume everyone starts from the same place. They want entry-level roles that hire at entry level, paid experience, clear pathways, accessible transport, disability accommodations, childcare-friendly structures and inclusive workplaces.



“What helps me access opportunities is having clear information about what’s available and what’s required.”

Voice with power

Respondents want youth leadership pathways that are real, not performative. Voice is not only about being asked for an opinion. It is about whether that opinion has somewhere to go, whether it is valued as evidence and whether it leads to action.

“Young people aren’t represented in politics. Supporting them means putting their voices in rooms that make decisions and actually taking it seriously.”



Te Tiriti, equity and rights taken seriously

For many respondents, especially Māori and gender-diverse respondents, the future feels tied to whether rights are protected or undermined. Respondents want Te Tiriti honoured, Māori rights protected, public services strengthened, discrimination challenged and marginalised communities protected from political scapegoating. Equity needs to be designed in from the beginning, not added later.



“Support Māori rights, trans rights and the rights of every human being in this country.”

Belonging and connection

Respondents were clear about what helps them feel confident in who they are: being seen, accepted and not having to explain or defend themselves. They want cultural spaces, queer and gender-diverse spaces, disability-accessible spaces, creative spaces and representation that reflects them in media, leadership, workplaces and education.

“When I feel loved, accepted and seen, I can truly be myself.”



What helps confidence grow



Themes from 791 usable responses to Q14: What helps you feel most confident in yourself or your identity?
Phrase size reflects the frequency of coded mentions; responses could include more than one theme.

How the Y will use these findings

The Y will use these findings to inform advocacy, programme design, partnerships and future research. The survey will not sit as a standalone report. It will strengthen the Y's public voice and support conversations with decision-makers, funders, employers, educators and community partners.

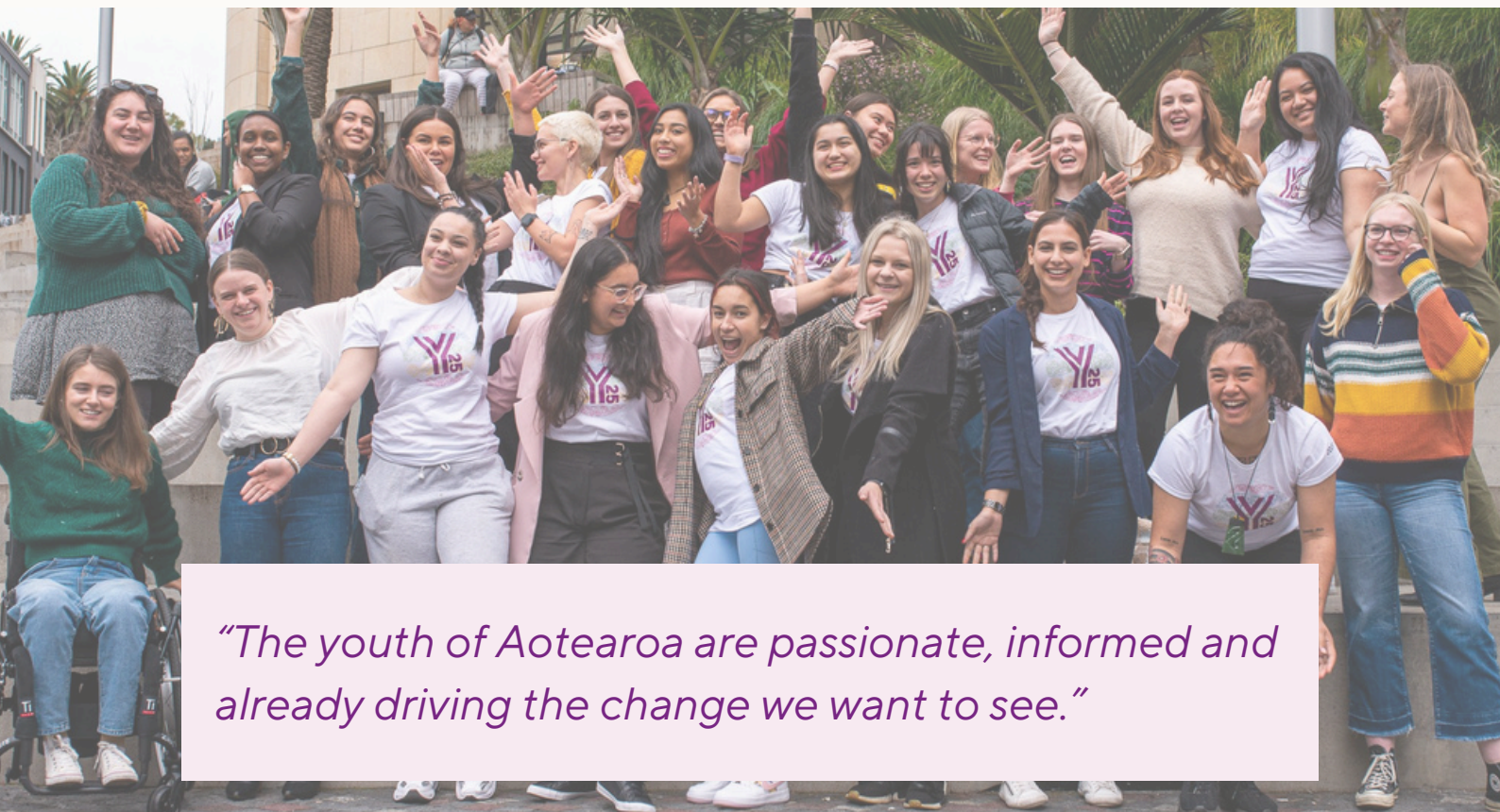
In practical terms, the Y will use the findings to:

- 01** Shape advocacy priorities around financial security, safety, opportunity, youth voice, equity, belonging and wellbeing.
- 02** Strengthen programme design so support reflects what young women and gender-diverse people said they need.
- 03** Develop tailored briefings and share the findings with partners, decision-makers, the wider public, media and political parties.
- 04** Support funding and partnership conversations with credible youth-informed evidence.
- 05** Inform future rounds of Your Voice Matters, track whether key issues shift over time and report back on how the findings are used.

Conclusion

These findings are sobering, but they also point to clear opportunities for change. Respondents identified practical changes that would make life more affordable, safer, more inclusive and more hopeful. They also described hope as something sustained through community, care, young people and collective action.

A total of 1,159 young women and gender-diverse people have shared what is making life harder, what helps and what they want to see change. The next step is to turn that evidence into action by reducing the barriers they identified, involving young people meaningfully in decisions and creating the conditions in which more young people can thrive.



“The youth of Aotearoa are passionate, informed and already driving the change we want to see.”

Reference appendices

Appendix A Survey questions

Appendix B Methodology and data cleaning notes

Appendix C Selected cross-analysis tables

Appendix D Qualitative coding approach

Appendix E Limitations and interpretation notes

Sources used for national context

Survey questions

The survey asked respondents about their lives, concerns, hopes, experiences of safety, access to opportunity, financial wellbeing, support needs, identity and demographics. The questions below are grouped by survey section.

About you

- What region do you mainly live in?
- What is your age?
- What is your gender?

Opportunity and representation

- How confident do you feel that you have the same shot at opportunities, such as jobs, study or leadership, as everyone else your age?
- What makes it harder for you to access opportunities? Select all that apply.
- If you are comfortable, please tell us more about what helps or stops you from accessing opportunities.
- Over the past year, to what extent do you feel people who look like you or share your lived experience are represented in New Zealand media, workplaces or leadership?
- In the past 12 months, when you have done something great at school, work or in your community, did you feel truly recognised?

Wellbeing and identity

- How would you describe your overall wellbeing these days?
- In the past 12 months, what has had the biggest impact on how you feel day to day? Select up to three.
- If you are comfortable, please tell us more about what has most affected how you feel day to day in the past 12 months.
- In the past 12 months, how often have you felt pressure to look, act or live a certain way?
- In the past 12 months, how often have you felt safe being fully yourself?
- What helps you feel most confident in yourself or your identity? For example, connection to people, communities, places, activities, whakapapa, worldview or pūrākau.

Money and work

- In the past 12 months, how financially secure have you felt?
- What are your main money worries right now? Select up to three.
- What changes at school or university, at work, in the community or at a policy level would most improve your financial wellbeing?

Survey questions continued

Safety online and offline

- In the past 12 months, have you experienced harassment or harm in person?
- In the past 12 months, have you experienced harassment or harm online?
- In the past 12 months, have you witnessed harassment or harm happening to someone else?
- How safe do you feel in public spaces, such as transport, streets or events?
- How safe do you feel in public spaces after dark?
- How safe do you feel online?
- What would help you feel safer online or offline?

Future and change

- What are your top concerns for the future of Aotearoa? Select up to three.
- In your own words, what worries you most about New Zealand's future?
- How hopeful do you feel about your own future?
- How hopeful do you feel about the future of Aotearoa?
- What gives you hope for the future?
- If you could change one thing in Aotearoa right now, what would it be?
- How confident are you that positive change is possible in Aotearoa?
- Do you feel your voice matters in decisions about your community and the future of Aotearoa?

Trust and support

- How much do you trust political leaders to understand and act on issues affecting young people?
- How much do you trust New Zealand's public institutions, such as government, local council, health, education and justice, to act in the best interests of young people?
- In the past 12 months, when big life changes happened, such as study, health, work, relationships or housing, how supported did you feel?
- What types of support would make the biggest difference for you right now? Select up to three.

Final reflections and demographics

- What is your biggest worry for young people today, and what support would help most?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences, or the experiences of young women and gender-diverse people in Aotearoa?
- What is your main activity right now?
- What is your ethnicity? Select all that apply.
- Which of these communities or identities do you belong to? Select all that apply.
- Is there anything else about you that is important for us to know?

Methodology and data cleaning notes

The Your Voice Matters Survey was conducted online from 2 February to 6 March 2026 and included multiple-choice, scaled and open-text questions.

The analysis used quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores and selected cross-tabulations. Open-text responses were coded thematically to identify recurring experiences, concerns, barriers, hopes and support needs.

Data cleaning

- Duplicate responses were identified and removed.
- Test responses submitted before the survey opened on 2 February 2026 were removed.
- Responses completed in less than 2 minutes and 23 seconds were removed. This threshold was 20% of the median completion time of 11 minutes and 10 seconds.
- Responses that answered only the age and gender questions were removed.
- Partial responses were removed if fewer than 33 of 42 substantive or optional questions were answered.
- Responses showing significant low-effort completion, such as repeated use of dashes, full stops or blank entries, were reviewed and removed.
- Gender responses were standardised into categories for analysis, while respondents' original gender descriptions were retained internally.

Response type	Number
Complete responses	1,012
Incomplete responses retained after cleaning	147
Total responses included in analysis	1,159

Not every respondent answered every question. Percentages use the valid number of responses for each question rather than the full sample of 1,159 in every case. Graphs should show the valid response count as n.

Selected cross-analysis tables

The tables below provide selected cross-analysis results used to support the report findings. They are not an exhaustive set of all possible cross-tabulations. These results should be interpreted as patterns within this survey sample, not as population-level estimates.

Financial security and average wellbeing

Financial security	Average wellbeing	n
Not at all secure	2.22	314
A little secure	2.74	337
Somewhat secure	3.16	300
Quite secure	3.30	147
Very secure	3.62	47

Average wellbeing uses struggling=1, not great=2, okay=3, good=4 and thriving=5.

Pressure to look, act or live a certain way and average wellbeing

Pressure to conform	Average wellbeing	n
Always	2.46	248
Often	2.74	500
Sometimes	3.04	306
Rarely	3.19	84
Never	3.86	21

Feeling safe being fully yourself and average wellbeing

Safe being yourself	Average wellbeing	n
Always	3.68	57
Often	3.31	359
Sometimes	2.73	524
Rarely	2.04	185
Never	1.74	34

Selected cross-analysis tables continued

Feeling unsafe after dark by age group

Age group	Not at all or a little safe	n
16–18	87.6%	201
19–24	77.0%	456
25–30	72.4%	463

Te Tiriti and Māori rights as a future concern by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Share selecting	n
Māori	41.1%	168
Pacific peoples	25.8%	62
European	22.0%	769
MELAA	21.1%	38
Asian	19.5%	133
Other ethnicity	14.5%	62

Low representation by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Not at all or a little represented	n
Māori	38.7%	168
Pacific peoples	46.8%	62
Asian	54.1%	133
MELAA	65.8%	38
European	37.7%	769

In-person harassment or harm by gender group

Gender group	Experienced in person	n
Women	39.0%	952
Gender-diverse respondents	48.6%	146

Qualitative coding approach

01 Analyse each question separately

Open-text responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring experiences, concerns, barriers, hopes and support needs. Each open-text question was analysed separately, with themes developed from patterns in respondents' answers.

02 Group related themes

Responses were assigned a primary theme where possible, with additional themes recorded when a response covered more than one issue. Related themes were then grouped into broader categories to support interpretation across the survey.

03 Select quotes with care

Quotes were selected to illustrate recurring themes and bring respondents' experiences into the report. They were chosen for clarity, relevance and representativeness, and were lightly edited only where needed for readability while preserving each respondent's meaning and voice.

Limitations and interpretation notes

Voluntary response sample

Respondents chose whether to take part. Findings reflect the experiences and views of those who responded, not the full population of young women and gender-diverse people aged 16–30.

Online distribution

The survey was shared online, primarily through social media. This shaped who saw the survey and who felt able or motivated to complete it.

Not population weighted

Results have not been weighted to match national population demographics. Percentages should be interpreted as findings from this survey sample, not national prevalence estimates.

Varying response numbers

Not every respondent answered every question. Percentages are calculated using the number of valid responses to each question.

Multi-select questions

Several questions allowed respondents to select more than one option, so percentages may add to more than 100%.

Small subgroup sizes

Findings for smaller groups should be treated as important signals within the survey, not definitive population-level conclusions.

Overlapping identities

Respondents could belong to more than one group. Group comparisons should be read with an intersectional lens.

Cross-analysis does not show causation

Cross-analysis can show associations, but it cannot prove that one factor directly causes another.

Optional open-text responses

Open-text questions were optional, so not all respondents provided qualitative responses. These findings show how respondents who chose to answer described their experiences and views; they should not be interpreted as estimates of how common those experiences were across the full sample.

Coding involves judgement

Qualitative coding involves interpretation. Responses were coded systematically, but some could reasonably fit more than one theme.

Sensitive topics

Findings on harassment, harm, discrimination, mental health and financial stress may be shaped by respondents' comfort, trust, interpretation of the question and willingness to disclose.

Time-bound findings

The survey was conducted between 2 February and 6 March 2026 and reflects respondents' views and experiences at that point in time.

Sources used for national context

Ministry of Health

Annual Update of Key Results 2024/25 New Zealand Health Survey

Used for: 22.9% psychological distress for people aged 15–24

<https://www.health.govt.nz/publications/annual-update-of-key-results-202425-new-zealand-health-survey>

Stats NZ

Disability statistics 2023

Used for: 17% of people living in New Zealand households were disabled

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/disability-statistics-2023/>

Stats NZ

Wellbeing statistics 2023 updated

Used for: Women and men feeling safe walking alone after dark

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/wellbeing-statistics-2023/>

Stats NZ

1 in 10 young adults are LGBTIQ+

Used for: 10.2% of people aged 15–29 identified as LGBTIQ+

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/1-in-10-young-adults-are-lgbtqi/>

Stats NZ

Labour market statistics March 2026 quarter

Used for: 14.4% NEET rate for people aged 15–24

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-march-2026-quarter/>

Stats NZ

International migration June 2025

Used for: People aged 18–30 as a share of migrant departures by New Zealand citizens

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/international-migration-june-2025/>

Stats NZ

New Zealanders' trust in key institutions declines

Used for: Average trust in Parliament in 2021 and 2023

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/new-zealanders-trust-in-key-institutions-declines/>

About YWCA Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland

YWCA Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, the Y, works towards a gender-equitable Aotearoa where young women and gender-diverse people have the power, opportunities and support to thrive and shape the future.

Our work centres the voices and leadership of young women and gender-diverse people. Through leadership development, advocacy, research, partnerships and our Gender at Work programme, we amplify their experiences, support their leadership, work with employers to advance gender equity in workplaces, and advocate for wider systems and social change.

The Your Voice Matters Survey is part of this commitment: creating evidence from young people's experiences and priorities to inform advocacy, programmes, partnerships and wider change.

We thank everyone who helped share the survey through their communities and networks, and all those who contributed to its development, promotion, analysis and review.

Want to know more

For questions about this report, to explore a partnership, or to support or donate to our work:

Email contact@akywca.org.nz

Website www.ywca.org.nz/auckland/