

# Youth Voice & Leadership Engagement Report

Findings from the 2023 engagements with young people on  
the refresh of the Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action.



MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI  
Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

## Authors

Alice Black, Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi. Data analysis by Eliza Cummings, Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi.

## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

The Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action aims to embed the voices and perspectives of young people in decision-making at all levels. The Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi Youth Advisory Group co-designed and helped lead engagements with young people to ensure youth voice and participation were centred during the refresh of the first Youth Plan. Twenty youth-led hui were held with 325 young people across Aotearoa New Zealand in addition to 1,080 young people who participated in the Youth Plan Refresh online survey. In total the voices of 1,405 young people contributed to the Youth Plan Refresh engagements. Insights gathered through the engagements and survey directly informed the Strategic Framework of the refreshed Youth Plan.

These were the primary findings from the survey and engagements:

- Young people want to share their voices in a wide range of ways but feel there is a lack of support to do so.
- Equity is important to young people who highlighted the value of hearing from less privileged voices.
- When young people do engage, they want to be taken seriously and see outcomes.
- There is a need to create safe, non-judgmental spaces where young people can share, make mistakes, and grow.
- Young people identified leaders as people who guided, supported or cared for others, role modelled, and actively listened.
- Some young people talked about the limitations of traditional notions of leadership and argued for a more collective understanding that better aligned with indigenous worldviews.
- Young people talked about lack of self-confidence as a barrier to leadership, alongside lack of opportunities and support.
- Young people want opportunities for leadership to be accessible, funded, and inclusive.

## Background

The Youth Plan aims to ensure that the voices and perspectives of young people are listened to, valued, and embedded in decision-making at all levels. The first **Youth Plan (2020-2022): Turning Voice into Action – Rebuilding and Recovering** was launched in July 2020 and focused on actions government agencies would take, while the refreshed **Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action** emphasises collaboration between government agencies and the youth and community sectors. A review of the first Youth Plan began in mid-2022. The review took a two phase approach:

- Phase One: Review and
- Phase Two: Refresh

Phase One focused on reviewing the impact of the Youth Plan and identifying opportunities to improve its effectiveness. Phase Two sought to refresh the Youth Plan to strengthen and build on the success of the first iteration.

The Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi Youth Advisory Group (YAG) assisted in enabling youth voice and participation during both phases. The MYD YAG fed back on the Youth Plan (2020-2022) as part of Phase One. During Phase Two, the MYD YAG co-designed and helped lead engagements with 1,400 other young people.

## Survey and engagements

During the engagement period, 20 youth-led hui were held with 325 young people across Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, 1,080 young people participated in the Youth Plan Refresh online survey. In total, the voices of 1,405 young people contributed to the Youth Plan Refresh engagements. This report focuses primarily on the survey results which have been enhanced by insights from the 20 hui.

Across the survey and facilitated engagements, particular emphasis was placed on hearing directly from the seven priority cohorts of the refreshed Youth Plan:

- rangatahi Māori
- Pacific young people
- rainbow young people
- disabled young people
- young women
- young people from ethnic communities (in particular, former refugees and recent migrants)
- young people living in the regions.

The priority cohorts were chosen to acknowledge that some groups of young people experience greater wellbeing threats, based on factors such as their ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, disability, and geographic location.

In total, there were 16 questions included in the survey organised under three sections (See Appendix 1):

**Demographic questions** were included to provide context for the responses and to enable priority cohort-specific analysis.

**Voice questions** asked if respondents had shared their voice with government before, how they had done so or why they hadn't, what government could do to support them to share their voice, and what methods of sharing their voice they were most likely to use.

**Leadership questions** asked if respondents identified as a leader, what leadership meant to them, what barriers they thought were in place preventing youth leadership, and what opportunities there were for young people to develop into leaders.

Young people shared whakaaro and kōrero about youth voice and leadership and what government and others can do to better support both these forms of youth participation.

### Who participated?

Most survey participants (84%) lived in the North Island (see Figure 1). The largest age cohort was the 16–17-year-old group (33%), with 24% of young people in the 14-15 age group and 16% in the 18-19 age group (see Figure 2). The majority of young people were New Zealand European/Pākehā/European (71%; see Figure 3). Twenty percent of participants were Māori while 14% were Pacific peoples.

Close to a quarter of survey participants identified as being part of the rainbow community (24%; see Figure 4), while 9% were part of the disability community. Eight percent of participants were from the migrant community and 1% were from a refugee background. Most participants (61%) did not identify with any of these communities and 6% did not want to disclose. The majority of young people identified with being female (62%; see Figure 5), with 3% identifying as transgender, 4% non-binary, and 3% as gender diverse.

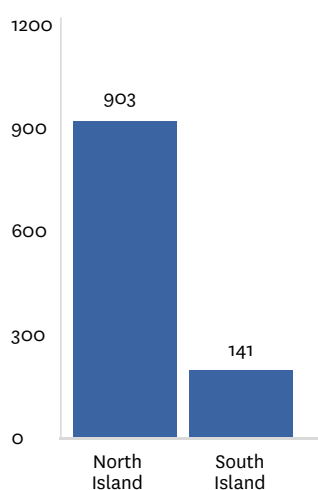


Figure 1. Location.

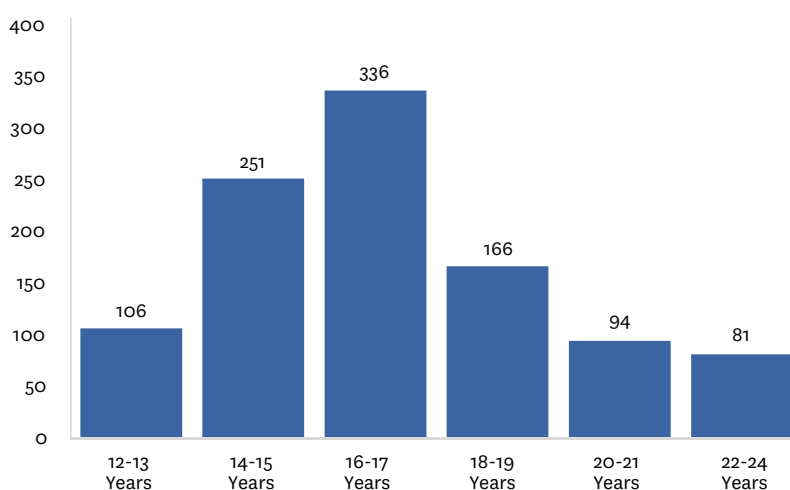


Figure 2. Age.

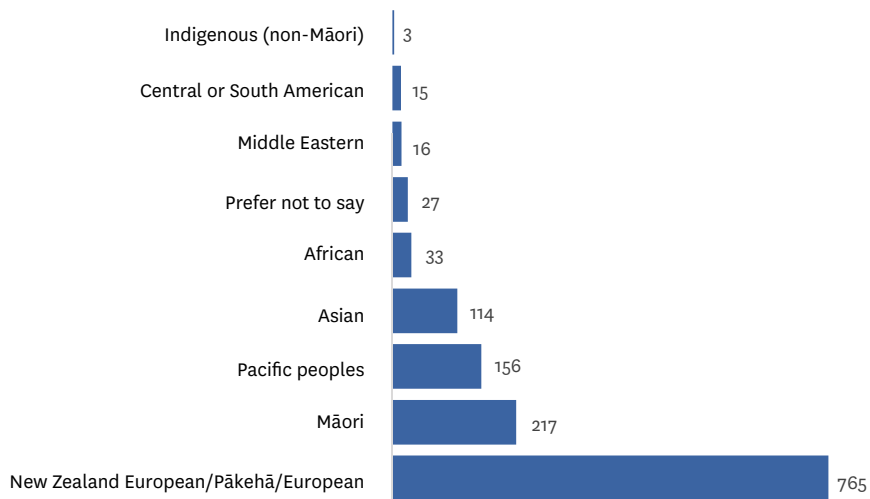


Figure 3. Ethnicity.

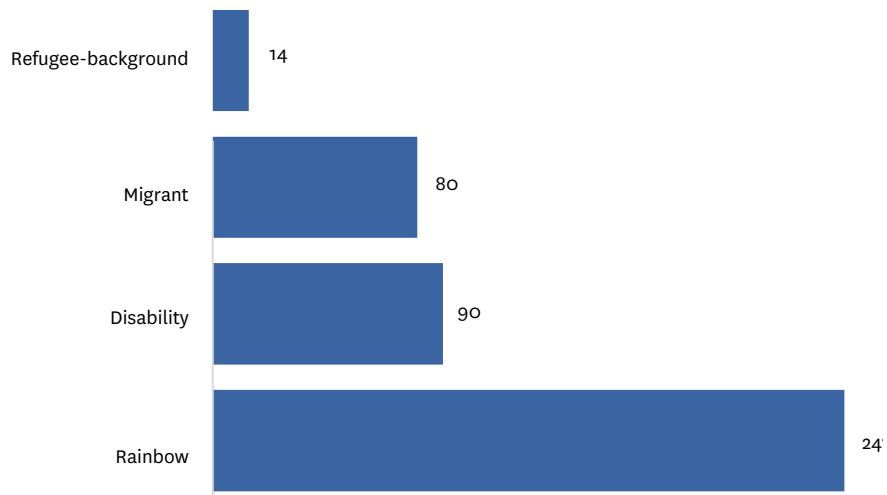


Figure 4. Additional priority cohorts/communities of interest

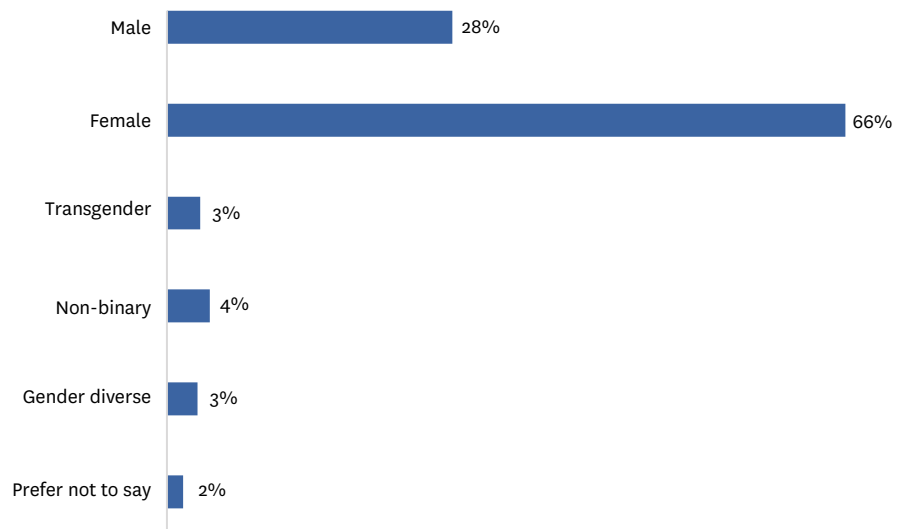


Figure 5. Gender identity. Note: Percentages add to >100% as participants could select multiple options.

# Voice

## Who is sharing their views?

While young people were keen to share their thoughts with government, the majority (62%) had not done so before (see Figure 6). However, 18–24-year-olds were more than twice as likely (50%) to report having shared with the government compared to 12–17-year-olds (19%; see Figure 7). Note, however, that in Figure 9 the second highest mechanism of engagement was formal democratic processes (including voting) which is not accessible to the younger cohort.

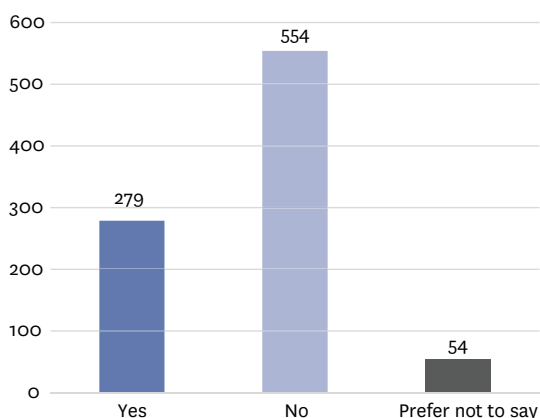


Figure 6. Have you shared your views, thoughts, opinions or questions with government before?

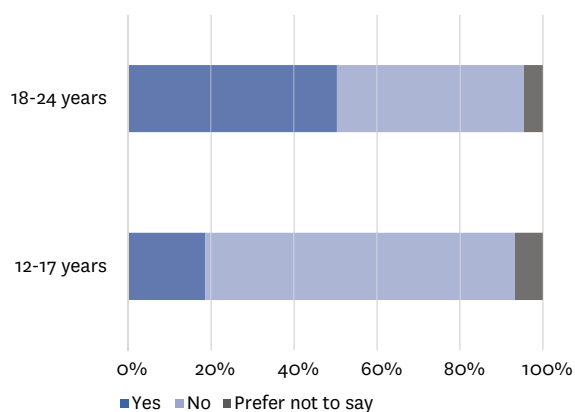


Figure 7. Have you shared your views, thoughts, opinions or questions with government before? (Age groups).

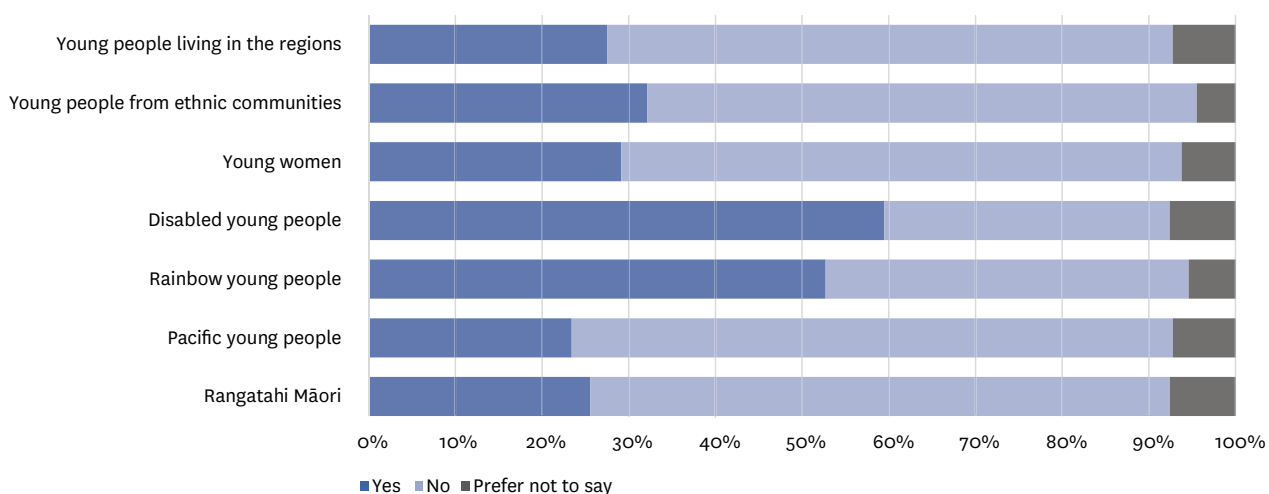


Figure 8. Have you shared your views, thoughts, opinions or questions with government before? (Priority cohorts).

Among the priority cohorts, disabled young people most frequently reported having shared their views before at 59%, followed by rainbow young people at 53% (see Figure 8). Of those who had shared their views with government before, the majority were at protests (28%), followed by formal democratic processes (28%), and online petitions (26%, see Figure 9).

18–24-year-olds were slightly more likely to engage in protests than 12–17-year-olds (20% vs 18%), while they were considerably more likely to report participating in formal democratic processes (24% vs 7%; see Figure 10). 18–24-year-olds were more likely to complete online petitions (18% versus 14%), while 12–17-year-olds were more likely to engage with other online means (20% versus 12%). 12–17-year-olds had engaged with youth forums and leadership positions at approximately twice the rate of 18–24-year-olds.

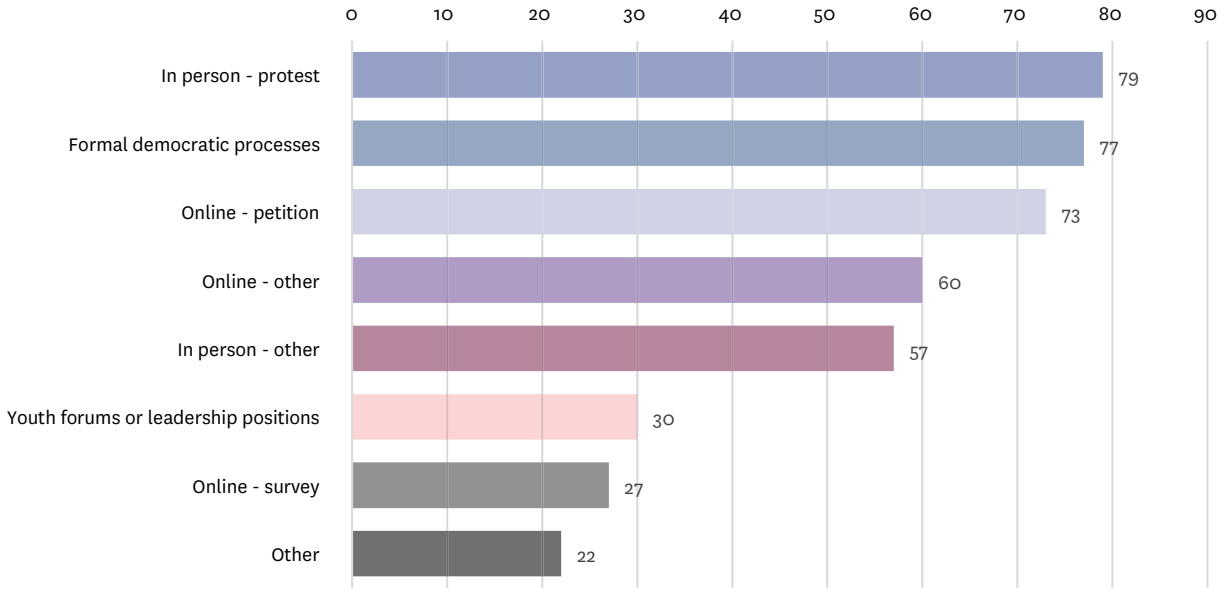


Figure 9. How have you shared your views, thoughts, opinions or questions with the government before?

**Accessibility**

Young people in the engagements felt there was a lack of support to share voice in key places. They want to know the best places to share their whakaaro so it can be actioned instead of collected and disregarded. Young people want a variety of accessible channels to share their voice and develop their leadership skills (see below). There was a need to decode the work of the government to make it more accessible and digestible. For some young people, the question of sharing their voice was difficult given they were not aware of how election cycles worked, and they didn't feel comfortable talking to the government. Young people felt there was a need for the government to adapt to the ways in which young people want to engage, rather than young people fitting into the government's established methods.

Voice, for example, at select committees could be accepted in many forms such as art, videos, and poems. Channels to share voice need to be better promoted and more visible. For some young people, adapting to the language of the government meant losing their own language and authenticity. Importantly, young people's input needs to be actively sought, with



government coming to young people rather than the other way around. Some of the suggestions for making government work more accessible included:

- information should be available in multiple languages including te Reo Māori
- plain English should be standard
- bullet point summaries or abstracts should be provided
- more opportunities for young people to share their voice with decision-makers through social media
- communication could be provided in more engaging formats e.g., games, memes, comics
- Zoom meetings
- community engagements outside of school hours
- more face-to-face events
- allowing more opportunities for youth to get involved, panels to present youth voices
- creating open speaking times for young people to share perspectives directly with members of Parliament (MPs) and prioritising these voices
- more events targeted at youth and not just those of voting age and older
- making it easier to find out who to contact for what.

Thirty four percent of surveyed young people reported accessibility or lack of opportunity as the primary reason for not sharing their views, thoughts, opinions or questions with government before (see Figure 11). One survey participant noted, “It has been hard to find protests that I can attend”, while another stated “I feel as if it’s not that easy like I’ve signed petitions and stuff online, but they aren’t always accessible”. This was followed by apathy or not having a reason to yet (23%), being unsure how to (16%), and the perception of being unheard (11%).

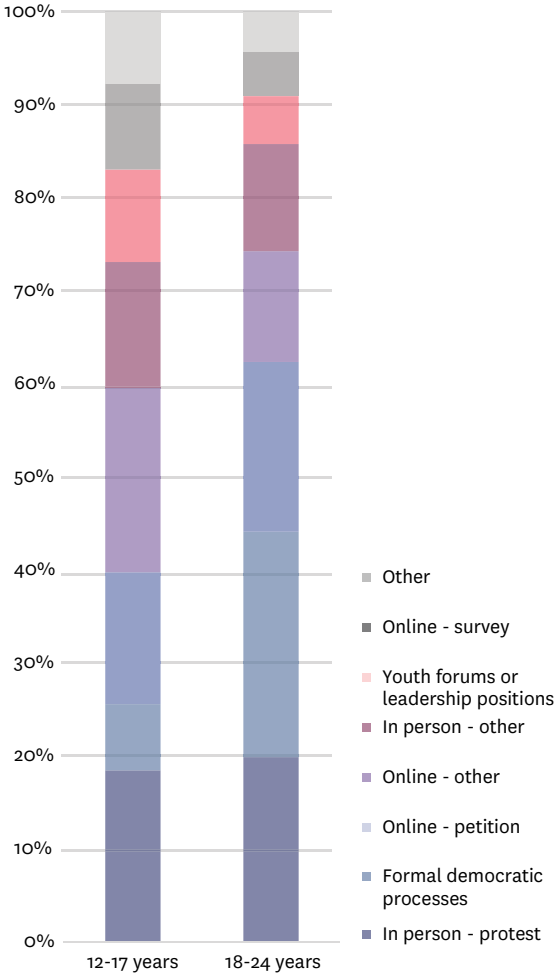


Figure 10. How have you shared your views, thoughts, opinions or questions with the government before? (Age groups).

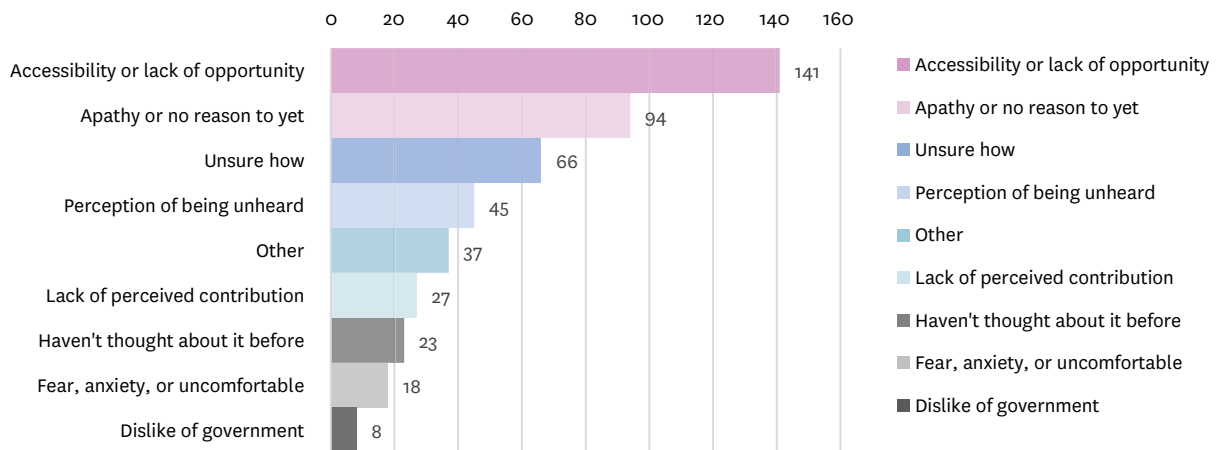


Figure 11. Why haven't you shared your views with government? Note: Percentages above are based on 415 tagged responses, 63 responses were untagged due to lack of detail.

### Young people have lots to say, but don't feel there are enough ways to share

Young people in the survey reported interest in a wide range of ways to share their views with government (see Figure 12). Overall, the most popular means of sharing views with the government were online surveys (73%), voting (67%), signing a petition (56%), and social media (45%). Overall, less popular options included email, attending a protest, face-to-face, at an event, direct contact with your MP, or sending a letter. It is interesting to note the discrepancy between how young people want to share their views and how they actually have shared their views. This likely relates to the accessibility issues discussed in engagements.

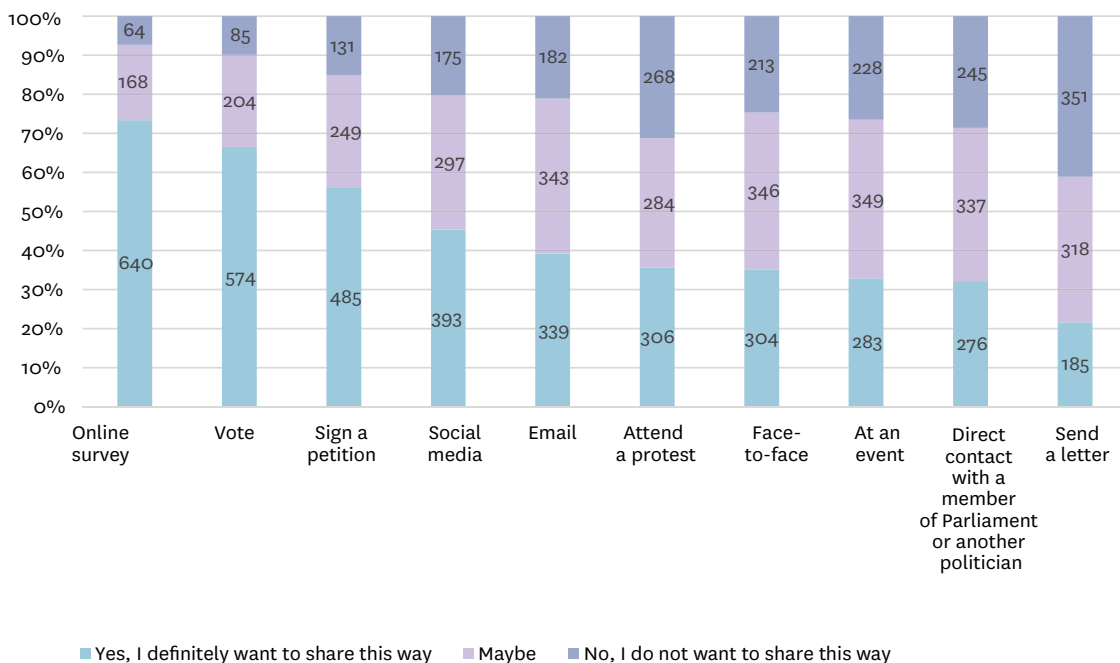


Figure 12. What ways would you want to share your views, thoughts, or questions with the government on the issues that matter most to you?

It can be observed in Figures 13-16 that interest in different methods to share views increased with age, however this was not the case for all methods. For example, 49% of 18–19-year-olds reported wanting to attend a protest compared to 46% of 22–24-year-olds (see Figure 17). 16–17-year-olds were also the most likely to want to send an email than other age groups (45%; see Figure 18).

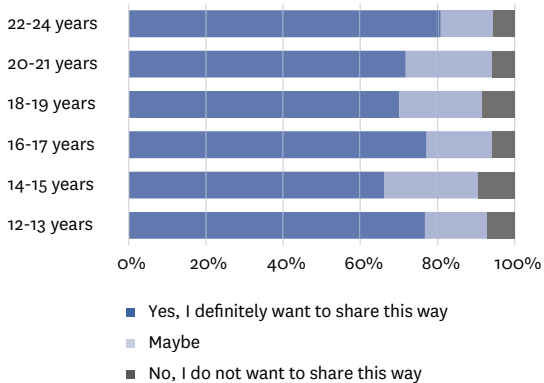


Figure 13. Online survey (Age group).

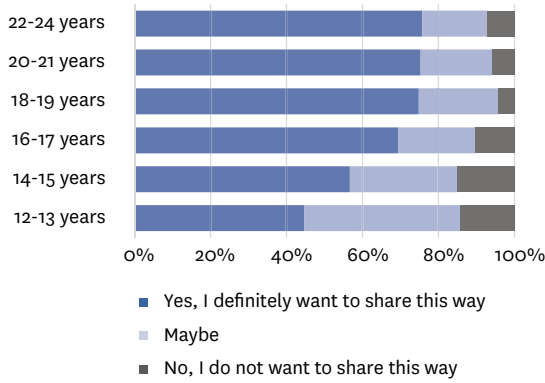


Figure 14. Voting (Age group).

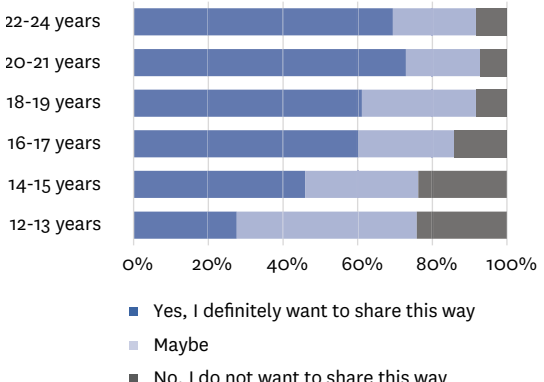


Figure 15. Sign a petition (Age group).

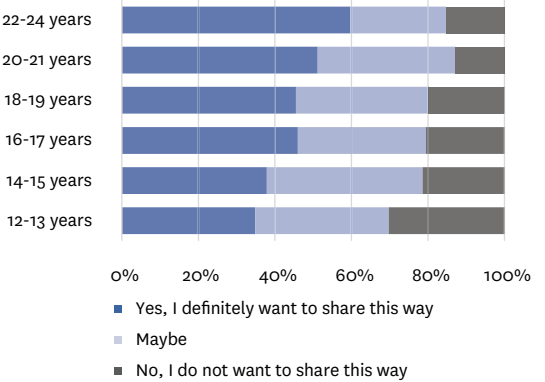


Figure 16. Social media (Age group).

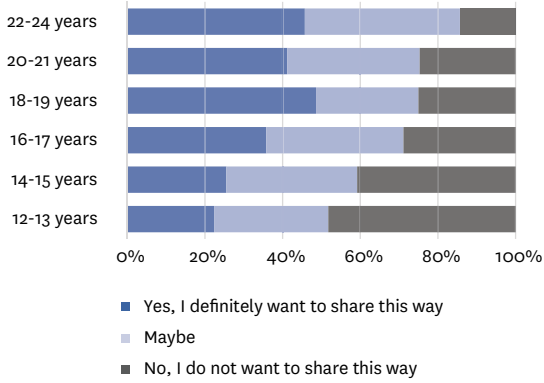


Figure 17. Attend a protest (Age group).

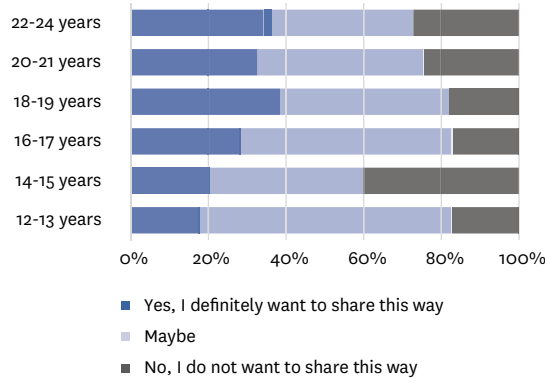


Figure 18. Email (Age group).

## Everyone's voice matters

Young people in engagements repeatedly brought up the need to hear from all young people, particularly the less privileged voices who may be more difficult to reach. It was seen as the responsibility of those with privilege to speak up for these groups. To do this, the government needs to go to more disengaged young people and actively seek their input, rather than expecting those from marginalised groups to make the effort. There was a perceived need to accommodate different forms of voice (some more quiet than others) and ask questions in different ways and multiple times.

Young people in the regions, e.g., Nelson and Invercargill did not feel they had equal access to opportunities for voice or leadership compared to both adults and young people in the cities. Young people felt that those opportunities that did exist in the regions felt tokenistic with a lack of perceptible outcomes. There was a need for greater visibility of genuine opportunities for young people in regional and rural areas and better promotion of these opportunities (for example, surveys, petitions, and face-to-face engagements).

Disabled young people identified numerous barriers (e.g., lack of parking, ramps, railing, properly designed toilets) to participating effectively in society let alone contributing their voice and leadership. They also identified concerns about those sitting in leadership positions who do not have lived experience of disability. Young people reported wanting to be empowered to represent themselves. They did not want their messages to be diluted.

MYD's priority cohorts showed an interest in sharing their views with government in different ways. Rainbow young people and disabled young people were particularly likely to express interest in attending a protest (61% and 58%), signing a petition (73% and 68%), or voting (80% and 76%). Disabled young people were particularly interested in having direct contact with an MP or another politician (57%). Pacific young people were strongly interested in online surveys (81%).

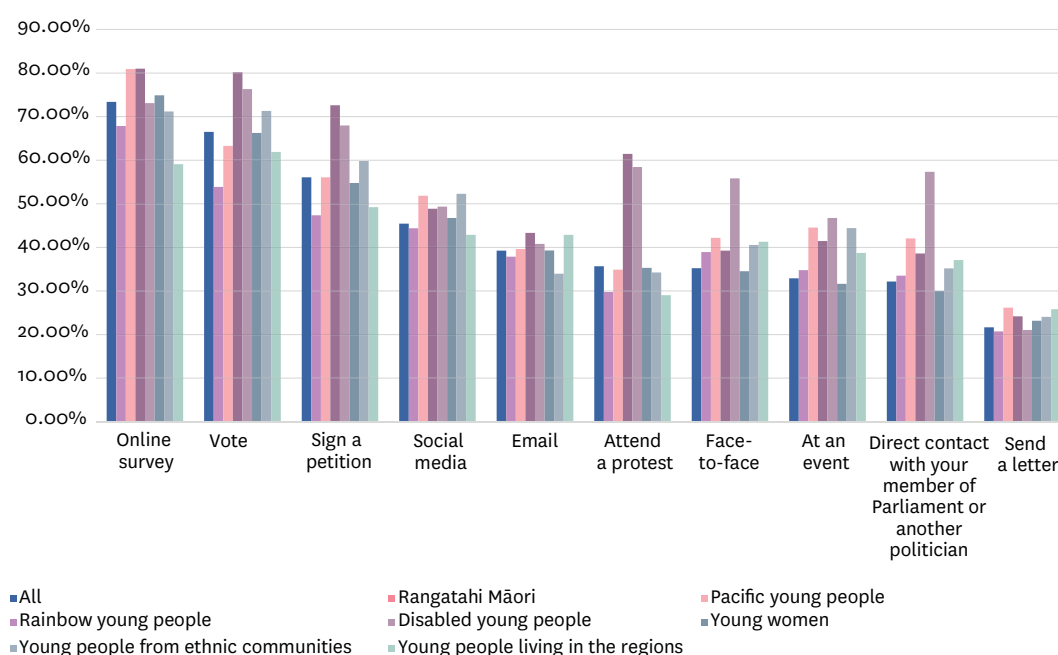


Figure 19. How would you share your views with government (Priority cohort).

## Being heard and following through

Young people reported wanting to be taken seriously and were tired of tokenistic tick box engagements. They expressed their frustration at sharing their voice but not seeing it reflected in decision-making. One young person said in an engagement, “My voice is asked for, but it’s not heard.” There was a feeling that they were asked for their opinions in formats such as surveys simply as a courtesy. Young people want to be involved early in the policy process. When young people do share their voice there is a need to treat this with aroha, care, and respect. Hand in hand with genuinely hearing young people, is following through on actions. There was a belief that adults and government did not follow through on actions after receiving youth voice or report back to young people on outcomes. Young people reported wanting visible results, and they wanted to see summaries of their engagements.

For some young people, having previously shared their voice with government and finding nothing occurred meant that they were unwilling to share their voice again. For those young people who felt they had been heard by decision-makers, they stated that they had to be loud and persistent.

Disabled young people did not feel they were taken seriously and the intersection of being a disabled young person created even more barriers. As one engagement participant said, “Just because we are younger or slightly different from others, does not mean our voice is any less important.” Despite these barriers, young people discussed speaking their minds, continuing to talk, attending events, and using their voice to help those who aren’t in the room to join in. As one young person put it, “I will continue to speak up and not shut up about it until I am heard.”

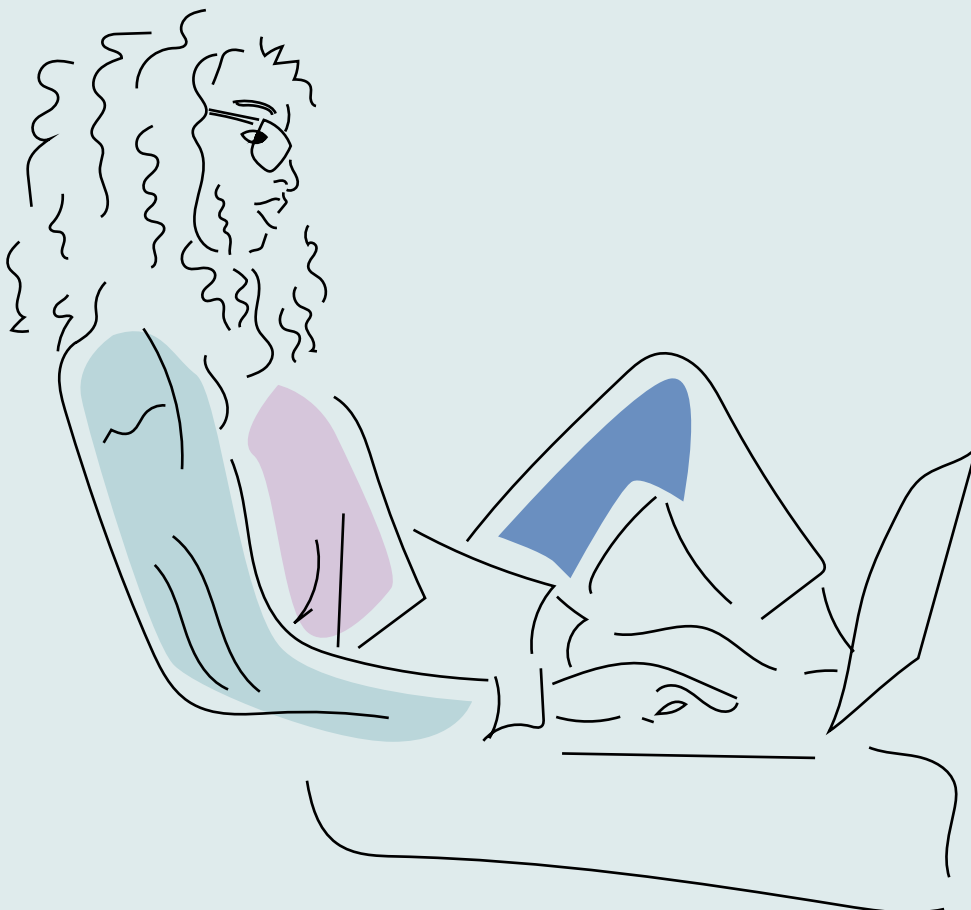
## Safe spaces

There was significant discussion in engagements around creating safe, non-judgmental spaces where young people could share their views without fear of retaliation. It was important to let young people make mistakes without fear of being reprimanded. There were concerns about having a different opinion from the group or not fitting in. Some young people talked about being disempowered by sharing, so found themselves holding back as a result. One young person wondered how to empower young People of Colour (PoC) to use their power and share confidently. Young people want spaces to make mistakes and learn from them in order to improve their confidence.

## Voice summary

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- » While young people were keen to share their thoughts with the government, the majority had not done so before.
- » Those that had participated before reported doing so mainly through protests (28%), formal democratic processes (28%), and online petitions (26%).
- » Young people want to participate through a broad range of channels, such as online surveys, voting, signing petitions, and social media.
- » Accessibility was a primary barrier for young people sharing their voice.
- » Equal representation was important to engagement participants who repeatedly discussed the need to hear from all young people, particularly those who are not already engaged and those at different intersections.
- » Young people want their voice to be taken seriously and see outcomes as a result of their contributions.
- » Safe spaces where young people can share and learn are important.



# Leadership

## Characteristics of a leader

Young people in engagements highlighted key characteristics of a leader as being a role model, actively listening, being respectful of different opinions and respected by others, supporting others, and in particular, being kind and empathetic. Leadership could manifest in broad ways including going to school, getting a job, or maintaining healthy relationships. A leader was described as confident and strong, able to speak up on behalf of others, and use their voice loudly if necessary. Leaders were identified as people who included everybody’s perspectives in their work. A good leader has a sense of justice and integrity; they are trustworthy and consistent. Similarly in the survey leaders were identified as those who guided, united, or inspired (16%), supported or cared for others (15%), role modelled (10%), and listened (9%); see Figure 20).

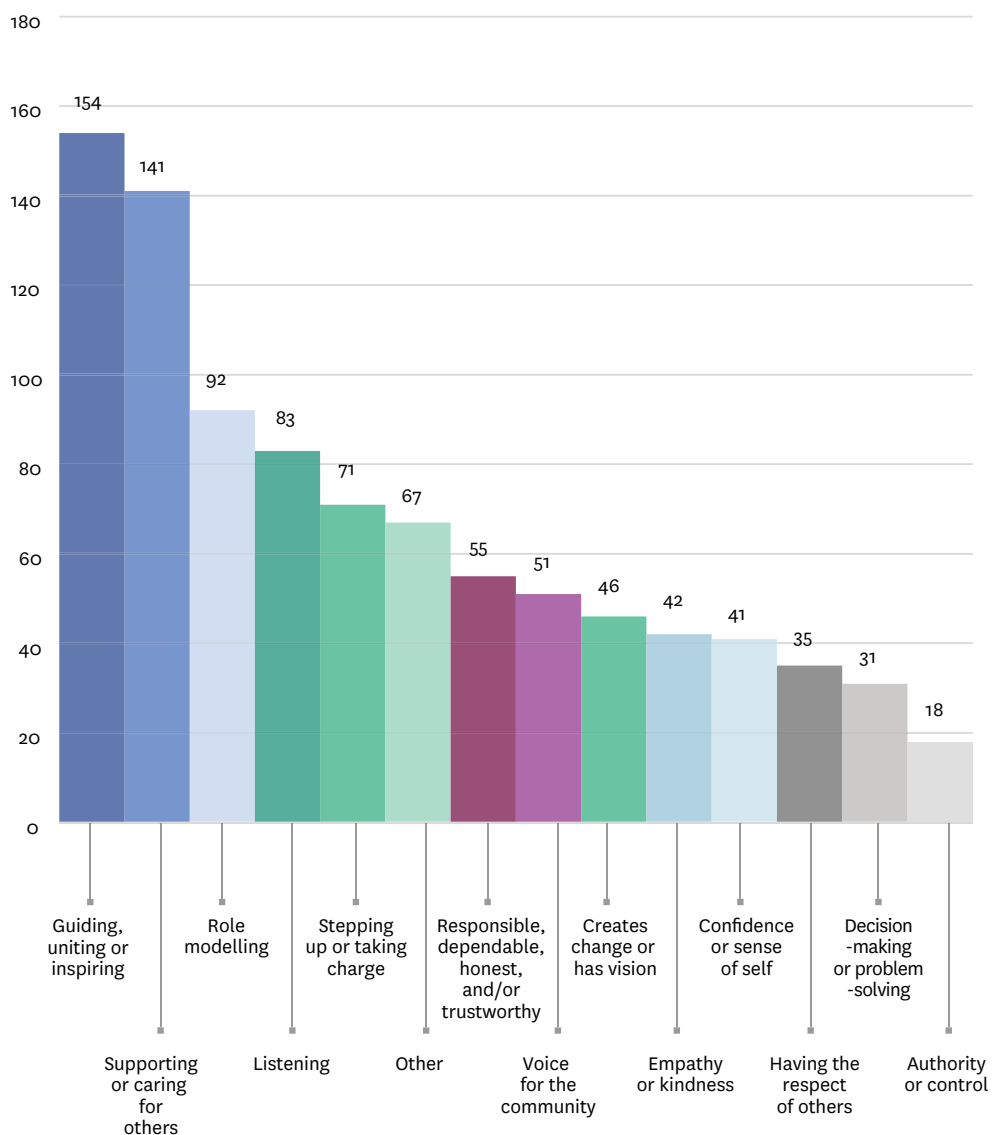


Figure 20. What does being a leader mean to you?

### Many young people see themselves as leaders

Collectively, 83% of survey respondents maybe or did see themselves as leaders (see Figure 21). Older cohorts of young people were more likely to identify as leaders than younger counterparts (see Figure 22) and Pacific young people were slightly more likely to identify as leaders than the other priority cohorts (see Figure 23).

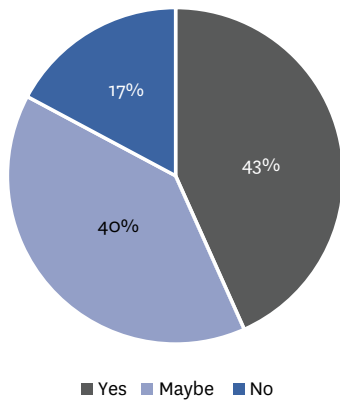


Figure 21. Do you see yourself as a leader?

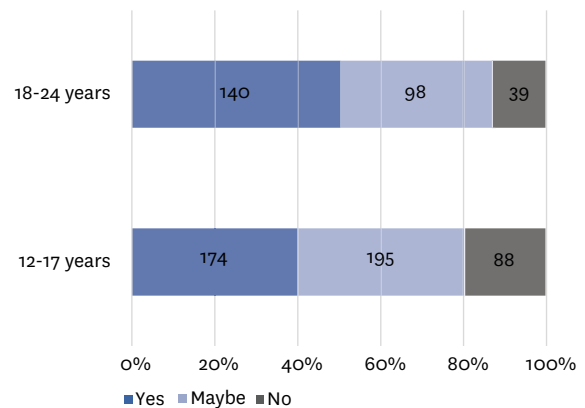


Figure 22. Do you see yourself as a leader (Age group).

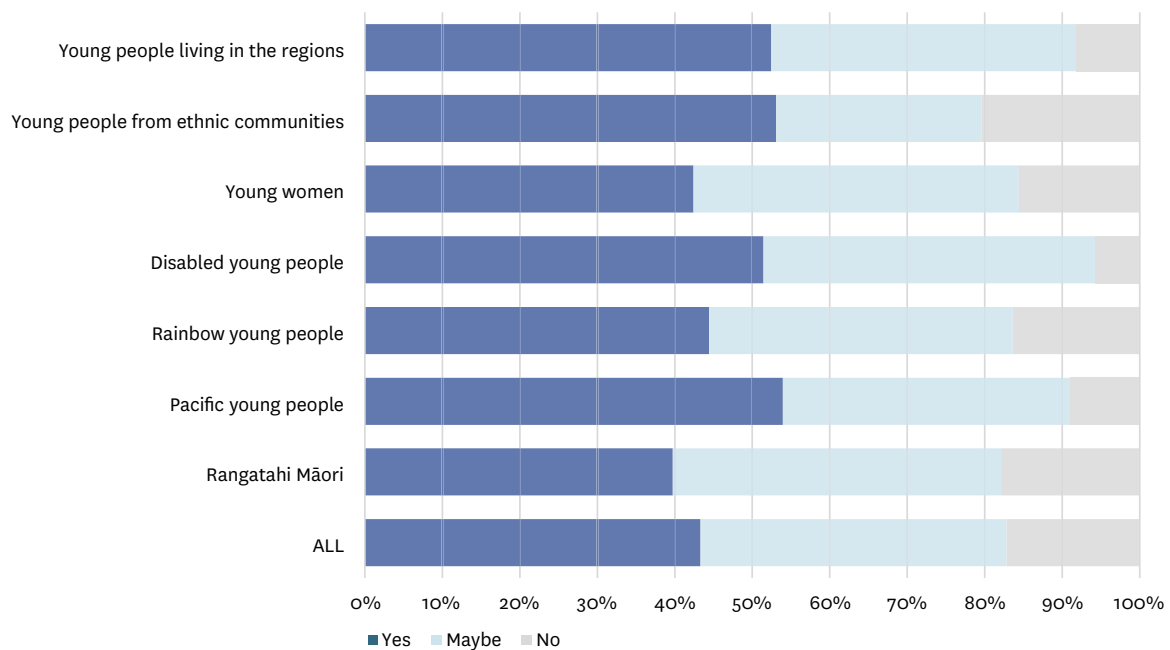


Figure 23. Do you see yourself as a leader? (Priority cohort).



## Leadership is broad and fluid

Young people in the engagements talked about the constraints of traditional understandings of leadership and the need for a greater variety of interpretations. Some young people in the engagements talked about the limitations of the term ‘leadership’ and how this was an individualistic term that doesn’t align with indigenous worldviews. Young people described leadership as fluid, and they wanted to move beyond the Western, colonial context. They also felt leaders should connect people and help others understand that they are all capable of leadership. Young people highlighted that everyone can be a leader, all individuals bring value, and that more diversity is needed.

## Barriers to leadership

Young people in the survey (47%) and engagements talked about lack of confidence as a barrier to leadership and this related to fear of judgement and safety (see Figure 24). Lack of opportunities and support were highlighted by young people in the survey (37%) and engagements. Isolation and accessibility were also issues for young people in the regions who reported that the main opportunities were only available in the major centres.

Young people also highlighted the difficulty of participating in leadership opportunities when their basic needs were not being met (9%). They mentioned the cost-of-living crisis, mental health crises, public health systems being overloaded, and just generally not feeling that they had enough support to focus on anything but the basics. One young person in the survey stated, “It can be difficult to prioritise the needs of others when you struggle to support your own needs.”

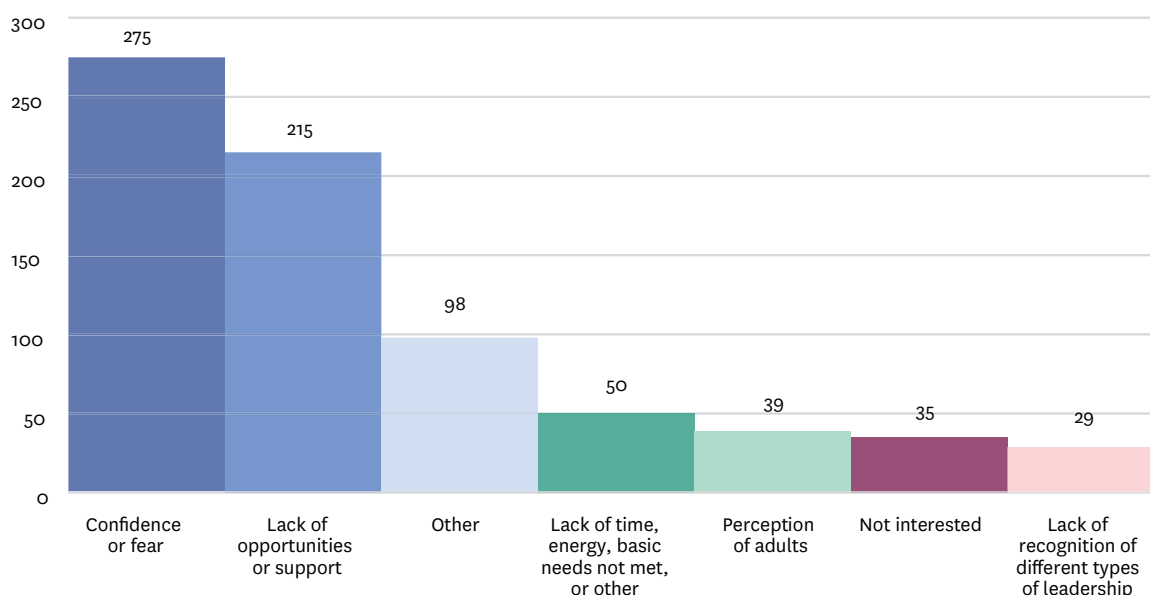


Figure 24. What is stopping you or other young people you know from being a leader?

### Creating more accessible leadership opportunities

Young people in engagements identified numerous ways to make leadership more accessible. Importantly, for young people to be leaders, they felt that they first need to be enabled to have their basic needs met. As one young person pointed out, they couldn't even get a job, so how could they be involved in leadership? Young people want opportunities for leadership to be accessible, funded, and inclusive. Spaces such as youth centres were highlighted as enabling leadership. In Nelson, young people highlighted that the Youth Council was the only leadership opportunity for young people outside of school and this was not always accessible. Young people here noted physical access (i.e., transport) and poor promotion as barriers to accessibility. Young people want opportunities outside of school to develop their leadership skills and make a change. Young people would like programmes and opportunities which allow them to learn and understand what it means to be a leader and develop leadership skills. They feel there needs to be more clear/well-promoted and accessible opportunities which enable and empower them to share their voice and develop their leadership skills. Opportunities were currently seen as needing to be proactively sought out, but they need to be brought to young people. In the survey, young people similarly identified the need for role models and mentors (22%), as well as development opportunities (17%), self-development (16%), and education through school (14%, see Figure 25). Again, safe spaces where young people were able to make mistakes or share in ways that were more informal were brought up (6%). Being valued was an important part of creating safe spaces with one young person stating, "if we were shown that the government genuinely values us, we would feel safer to engage".

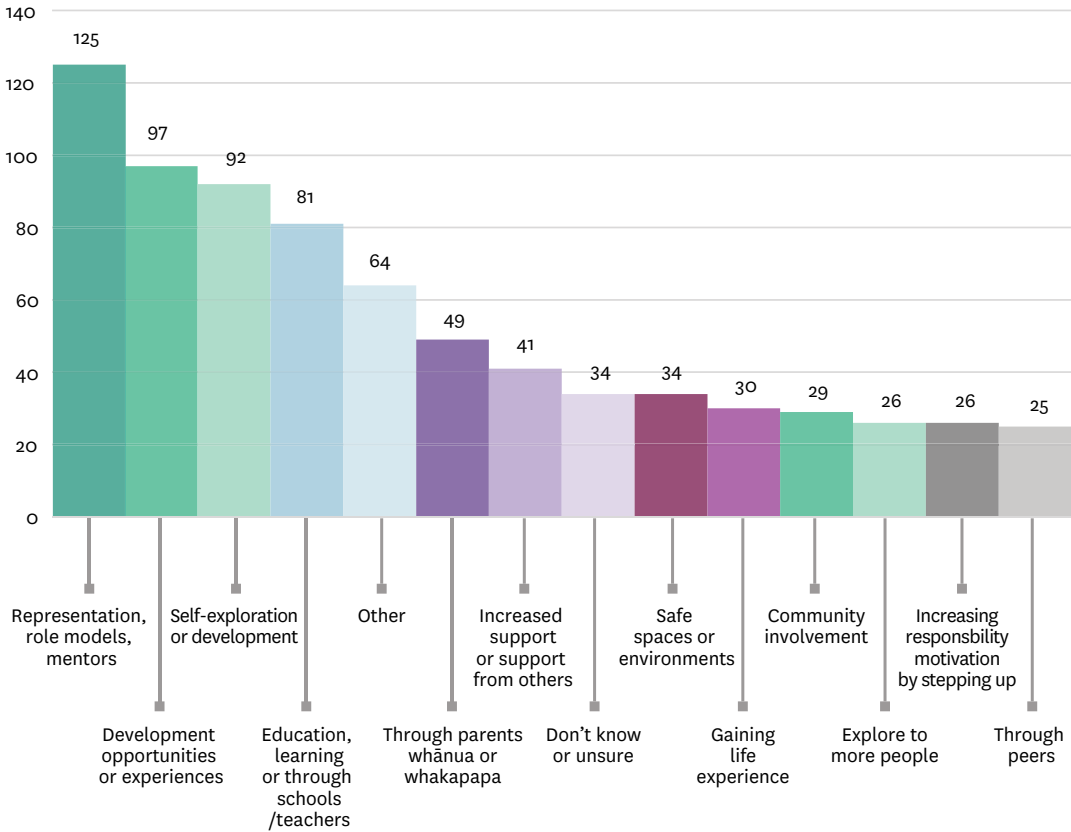


Figure 25. How do you think more young people can develop into great leaders/role models?

## Leadership summary

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- » Many young people see themselves as leaders.
- » Leaders were identified as those who guided, united or inspired, supported or cared for others, role modelled, were kind and empathetic, and listened.
- » Older cohorts of young people were more likely to identify as leaders than their younger peers.
- » Some young people talked about the need for a broader understanding of leadership that aligned with indigenous worldviews.
- » Young people talked about lack of confidence as a barrier to leadership as well as lack of opportunities and support, isolation and accessibility in the regions, and their basic needs not being met.
- » Young people want opportunities for leadership to be accessible, funded, and inclusive. They want role models, development opportunities, and education within and outside school.



## Where to from here?

Are you a young person interested in sharing your voice and taking on leadership? There are several ways you can find youth voice and leadership opportunities. We have outlined a couple below:

### Rangatahi Leadership Opportunities Database (RLOD)

The RLOD was created by Multiethnic Young Leaders NZ to support equitable access to leadership opportunities for young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It provides a free one-stop, open-access database highlighting all current youth leadership opportunities available to young people under 35 years of age.

You can access the website here: [rangatahiopportunities.co.nz](http://rangatahiopportunities.co.nz)

### MYD Socials and Website

MYD promotes voice and leadership opportunities on its socials and website. Keep an eye on the website and follow the socials to see what opportunities come up that interest you.

MYD Website: [myd.govt.nz](http://myd.govt.nz)

MYD Instagram: [@ministryyouthdevelopment](https://www.instagram.com/ministryyouthdevelopment)

MYD Facebook: [facebook.com/ministryofyouthdevelopment/](https://www.facebook.com/ministryofyouthdevelopment/)

Youth Voices Toolkit: [www.myd.govt.nz/documents/resources-and-reports/final-youth-voices-toolkit.pdf](http://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/resources-and-reports/final-youth-voices-toolkit.pdf)

Are you a government agency interested in embedding youth voice and leadership in your work?

Here are some key questions to consider:

- What ways are young people able to share their views with your organisation? What additional ways could you incorporate into your work?
- What are some barriers to engagement with young people at your organisation?
- What can your organisation do to help support youth engagement?
- How does your organisation support youth leadership opportunities?

For more guidance on engagement with young people see: [Youth Development Engagement Guide “Keepin’ it real” A resource for involving young people as well as, the Youth Plan Strategic Framework, Rolling Suite of Actions, and the Measurement Framework](#) .

“If we were shown that the government **genuinely values us**, we would feel safer to engage.”



## Appendix 1: Youth Plan: Turning Voice into Action Survey

Kia ora

Welcome to the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi Youth Plan: Turning Voice into Action Survey. This survey contains **16 questions** and will take less than **eight minutes** to complete.

Responses are anonymous. Information like your age, where you are from, and your ethnicity will only be used and analysed as a group.

What you tell us will help us to refresh the Youth Plan. Your participation is voluntary, so please complete as much or as little of this survey as you are comfortable with.

### Background

In 2019, the government launched the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. This is a long-term plan for every child and young person in Aotearoa New Zealand to have a good life. As part of this, the first Youth Plan: Turning Voice into Action was launched in 2020. The Youth Plan: Turning Voice into Action aims to ensure young people are involved in government decision-making.

We are reviewing the Youth Plan to make sure it is effective and reflects the voices of young

## Appendix 1. Youth Plan: Turning Voice into Action Survey

people across Aotearoa New Zealand. Your answers in this survey will help us achieve this.

### About You

#### 1. How old are you?

- 12 – 13 years
- 14 – 15 years
- 16 – 17 years
- 18 – 19 years
- 20 – 21 years
- 22 – 24 years
- Other

#### 2. What is your gender identity? Please select all that you identify with.

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Non-binary
- Gender diverse
- Prefer not to say
- A different gender (please specify)

#### 3. Do you live in?

- The North Island
- The South Island
- Prefer not to say

#### 4. Do you live in?

- A city or town
- A rural area (for example on a farm)
- Prefer not to say

#### 5. Which ethnic group (or groups) do you identify as? Please select all that apply.?

- Māori
- New Zealand European/Pākehā/European
- Pacific peoples
- Asian
- Middle Eastern
- Central or South American
- African
- Prefer not to say
- A different ethnic group (please specify)

#### 6. Do you identify within any of the following communities? Please select all that apply.

- Rainbow
- Disability
- Migrant
- Refugee-background
- None of the above
- Prefer not to say

#### 7. Did you attend one of the recent face-to-face or online Youth Plan engagements/workshops?

- Yes

- No
- Prefer not to say

## Voice

Think about an issue that is really important to you right now. It is likely that there is some part of the government that works on that issue.

We want to create more ways for you to tell the government about your views on the things that matter most to you.

### 8. What ways would you want to share your views, thoughts, or questions with the government on the issues that matter most to you?

	Yes, I definitely want to share this way	Maybe	No, I do not want to share this way
Face-to-face			
At an event			
Online survey			
Social media			
Email			
Send a letter			
Vote			
Sign a petition			
Attend a protest			
Direct contact with your Member of Parliament or another politician			

Other (Please Specify)

For questions 9 to 16, please do not provide personal information such as name, date of birth, address/location or email address that could identify you, as the survey is supposed to be anonymous.

### 9. Have you shared your views, thoughts, opinions or questions with government before?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

### 10. If yes, how?



**11. If no, why not?**

**12. What can government do to help you share your views, thoughts, opinions and questions on things that matter most to you?**

## **Leadership**

We want to support young people to take on leadership opportunities in their whānau, communities, schools, universities, where they work, and in government. We know that young people are not just leaders of the future but also leaders of today.

**13. What does being a leader mean to you?**

**14. Do you see yourself as a leader?**

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

**15. What is stopping you or other young people you know from being a leader?**

**16. Think about a person who has taught you a valuable lesson, or who you thought was a great leader, teacher, coach, or mentor. This could be a sports coach, kapa haka leader, parent, sibling, or friend.**

**How do you think more young people can develop into this type of person?**



**MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI  
*Administered by the Ministry of Social Development*

**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
**New Zealand Government**