

# How can we empower the next generations to build a more sustainable future?



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## Corporations, educators and governments must prioritize sustainability and environmental literacy to prepare the next-generation workforce.

### In brief

- ▶ Despite already having a strong foundation of sustainability knowledge, younger generations crave more engaging ways to receive sustainability-related content.
- ▶ To further environmental literacy for all generations, organizations need to address misinformation on social media and amplify trusted sources of content.
- ▶ Organizations can aid the fight against climate change by helping reduce the cost of a sustainable lifestyle, to encourage more widespread adoption.

- ▶ Nearly half of all respondents, across generations, pointed to the cost of achieving a sustainable lifestyle as the primary barrier for increased sustainability.

Over

# 75%

of Gen Z and Gen Alpha report that their education is helping them live a more sustainable life

To supplement the teachings received in formal education, organizations need to focus on expanding the ways in which

survey respondents also cited the lack of tangible sustainability knowledge as the next biggest barrier.

The pathway to progress exists at the intersection of climate change and the need for sustainability education. The willingness for change is strong, even among older generations. Nearly two-thirds, or 65% of Gen X and Millennial respondents said they were either extremely or very willing to make changes to their daily life to address climate change.

To capture this momentum, the onus rests with companies, governments and non-profits to find the way forward and help equip younger generations with the knowledge and tools they need to help lead current and future sustainability initiatives.

For the purposes of this analysis, the following generational birth year ranges were used: Gen Alpha was defined by birth years 2007<; Gen Z was defined by birth years 1997-2007; millennial was defined by birth years 1981-1996; Gen X was defined by birth years 1965-1980; baby boomers+ was defined by birth years 1964>. Throughout the report, the term "younger generations" is referring to Gen Alpha and Gen Z, while "older generations" is referring to millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers+.

### Summary

Organizations of all kinds, from corporations to educational institutions to governments, have a responsibility to help prepare the next-generation workforce for the future of sustainability and related jobs. This monumental task will require "green skilling" both younger and older generations, providing more reliable information on the topic of environmental literacy via social media and other outlets and encouraging the adoption of sustainable behaviors in all aspects of life. ■

**G**lobally, stakeholder capitalism – the idea that businesses have a responsibility that extends beyond their shareholders – has gathered significant momentum in the last few years. Consequently, boards and management teams have been prompted to rethink the role of their organizations in terms of who they serve, what contributions they can make to society and what constitutes long-term value.

The global environmental sustainability movement has gained momentum in the last several years as businesses, governments and NGOs respond to increasing demands from a wide range of stakeholders – investors, customers, regulators, employees, and local communities – to adopt more sustainable practices and reverse the impact of climate change. Gen Z and Gen Alpha will need to play a pivotal role in these conversations, initiatives and actions, given that they are the next generations entering the workforce.

- ▶ Local environmental issues of most concern are those that impact daily life and health, such as waste processing and severe weather due to climate change.
- ▶ 30% of all generations ranked social media as their most prevalent source for information about sustainability, especially for Gen Z and Gen Alpha. Yet, at the same time, all generations said social media was only their third or fourth most trusted source of information.

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education can help activate more sustainable choices. This foundational knowledge will be critical as the next-generation workforce looks to fill the need for green skills, or skills that enable the environmental sustainability of economic activities in the future.

To harness the energy of younger generations and advance their own sustainability ambitions, organizations of all types – from governments and corporations to NGOs and educators – will need to be ready to elevate the environmental literacy of younger and older generations.

The survey found that although Gen Z and Gen Alpha have a deeper knowledge of sustainability issues, many were still eager for more sustainability-related information and content. Moreover, only 56% of Gen Alpha and 45% of Gen Z were satisfied with the sustainability education they received in school and in focus groups many said the curriculum was superficial, outdated and not inspiring. Workshops and hands-on learning were cited as the most critical improvements to sustainability education.

Everyday decisions on transport, food, energy and consumables all contribute to how fast and far we can go to reduce emissions. In addition to citing cost as a barrier to achieving a sustainable lifestyle,

### Methodology

To parse out how to engage these generations and involve them in sustainability initiatives, the global EY organization (EYGS LLP) and JA Worldwide, a global nonprofit organization focused on education, conducted a survey in late 2022 to analyze how both younger and older generations regard sustainability education and related activities.

In the survey, EY and JA found that while both younger generations (Gen Z and Gen Alpha) are better educated on sustainability and environmental issues than any generation before, they still desire for additional learning and volunteering opportunities. The survey included 24 questions about participants' environmental concerns, their current engagement and future action plans, and their ideas for improving sustainability education. This report includes the findings from more than 1,200 responses from 72 countries across Americas, EMEIA, and APAC areas

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