TRENDS
AS A SOURCE
OF INNOVATION
FOR GROWTH
AND DEVELOPMENT
OF YOUTH

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This publication focuses on chosen emerging trends in the lifestyle of Generation Z (young people born between 1995 and 2010). These trends reflect their world and provide insight into the challenges and opportunities young people respond to. The publication can serve as an inspiration for institutions, organizations, youth workers, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to work more effectively with young people by using these trends, understanding them better, and creating more suitable conditions for them.

Trends are not just new phenomena but also changes in how young people experience, behave, or value things today. These trends come from a qualitative survey by YouthWatch, using a network of young „trendspotters" across Slovakia. Through many interviews with young people, regular data collection, and careful analysis, we provide a unique look into the mindset of today's generation—how they see the world around them. It's interesting to explore what influences them, how it shapes their decisions and behaviors, how it affects their quality of life, and what impact these emerging trends might have on the future.

Interest in new trends and their connection to the future (Futures Thinking) brought YouthWatch together with the Belgian organization BrusselAVenir. BrusselAVenir focuses on creating shared visions of the future for Brussels and works with young people to understand their perspectives. Organizations use this knowledge to develop future scenarios and various visions of the future (Futures Literacy). BrusselAVenir created recommendations for policymakers and youth organizations through workshops focused on envisioning the future and creating collective stories.

These ideas can inspire Slovakia, which may become more diverse in the coming years due to climate change and migration. Like Brussels today, Slovakia will also need to find answers to similar challenges.

In this publication, we focus on a few chosen trends. For each trend, you can find a description of what it is and how it shows up in young people's lives. We also look at what drives these trends and why young people respond to them in certain ways. Together with our partners, we explored the challenges these trends bring (or might bring in the future) to young people's lives, considering both their positive and negative sides.

You will also find suggestions on how to use these trends as inspiration for working with youth. For some trends, we included questions that don't yet have clear answers but point to possible future developments. These questions are shared at the end of the chapter to encourage further reflection.

USING TRENDS TO INSPIRE THE GROWTH OF YOUTH

TREND: GOOD, BAD, AND DEBATE

Description

Young people are constantly connected to the internet and have unlimited access to information, which fundamentally shapes their perception of the world. Every day, they are exposed to not only a massive amount of information but also a variety of opinions from influencers, media, or their peers. This constant overload of content creates pressure to respond immediately—whether through comments, sharing information, or creating so-called reaction videos. These videos are highly popular and often achieve the highest reach.

In their videos, young people comment on what they see and express their opinions on various topics, often mocking opposing views. In this environment, the phenomenon of "**cancel culture**" frequently dominates, where young people publicly reject and boycott activities or opinions from the opposing side. The more a viewpoint differs or is even bizarre, the more attention it attracts—quick and extreme reactions are key. Discussions often begin with an initial controversial opinion, which sparks responses from others, further increasing interaction and engagement within the community.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats
- **Obstacles in building and maintaining relationships:** Polarization among young people, evident in behaviors such as refusing to interact with someone who holds a different opinion.
- **Information overload:** Young people are exposed to a massive amount of diverse stimuli and information. Without a clearly defined stance, they tend to overthink everything.
- **Deformations in perception:** Too much information can feel overwhelming, unnecessary, and difficult to process or integrate. This can lead to a false sense of understanding, where having only a few pieces of information gives the impression of fully understanding a topic. It is often linked to the rise of disinformation profiles, channels, and media.
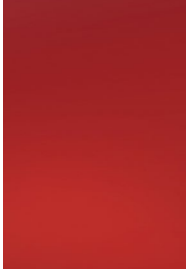
- **Disinhibition effect:** It is a phenomenon that occurs in the online space. Anonymity and the distance between people make them feel less bound by social norms, leading to less restrained or more aggressive behavior than they would display in face-to-face interactions.
- **The space for discussion and debate is disappearing:** The structure of social media platforms encourages only quick and short responses—ideally in the form of emojis. There is no room for extended explanations or in-depth discussions.
- **Insufficient control over social media:** This means that the system for reporting hateful and negative expressions is inadequate. It also poses the risk of a negative impact of the online environment on the morals and values of young people. Such content is often amplified by algorithms, which contribute to trapping young people in like-minded opinion bubbles.
- **Influencer culture:** It shapes the opinions and values of young people, often without proper facts or arguments. As well, influencers do not require any qualifications for their work and are not bound by any ethical code.

Positives Related to This Trend
Young people have a broader perspective, access to a big amount of information, and are more open to various topics, which allows them to better understand the complex issues of the modern world. Key topics that matter to them include gender issues, identity, sexual harassment, LGBT rights, and environmental concerns.

Many topics related to ethics and morality are coming to the spotlight, emphasizing the importance of consistency and integrity in a person's behavior. This is reflected in situations where, for example, if someone is a talented writer or singer but lacks moral character in their private life, young people may choose to stop listening to their music or reading their books.

The growing interest in these topics reflects their effort to create a more inclusive and equitable environment. Young people are actively engaged in advocating for the rights of various groups and continuously work to highlight and address issues that matter to them. This interest is expressed not only through negative or critical reactions but also through positive actions and initiatives that promote change and contribute to greater understanding and respect among different communities.

Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Discussions on Important Topics for Young People
Young people are open to discussions about gender issues, identity, sexual harassment, sexual consent, LGBT rights, and environmental concerns. This interest can be leveraged to initiate dialogues that strengthen their engagement and encourage them to actively participate in addressing important issues. It is not necessary for these discussions to reach a consensus or convince the other side; what matters is that these topics are opened and the diversity of perspectives on debatable issues is highlighted. Engaging in shared discussions about the content young people share can lead to a better understanding of their interests and motivations, fostering deeper and more meaningful conversations. Particular attention should be given to relationship and sex education, which goes beyond preparation for marriage and parenthood. It offers a more comprehensive perspective on these topics, addressing them in a broader and more relevant context.

Promoting Tolerant Communication and Depolarization
Identifying and supporting local or regional leaders who promote tolerant communication can help spread positive values and role models within the community. Teaching young people to better understand others' perspectives,
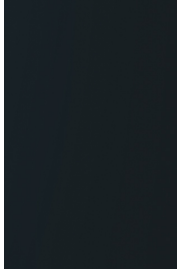
feelings, and needs fosters respect and tolerance in society. It is equally important to emphasize why people hold certain opinions, what lies behind them, and the emotions or values driving them.

Highlighting common ground can also be powerful. For example, while individuals may differ in their views, they often share common values or goals, such as wanting a better world for future generations, even if their approaches differ. This helps reduce the "us versus them" mentality. Tools like nonviolent communication or conflict resolution strategies can be instrumental in this process.

Education for peace emphasizes that a diversity of opinions is natural and that disagreement does not equate to enmity. It should aim to teach respectful dialogue with people of differing views. Dialogue should be framed as a path to understanding, not a battle to prove who is right.

Young people need to learn how to express their opinions without attacking others and how to listen without bias. Modeling behavior that demonstrates listening as equally important as speaking is essential. Initiatives like "Peace Sofas" serve as examples of good practices in promoting dialogue and understanding.

Discussion on "Cancel Culture" and How to Handle Rejection

"Cancel culture" is a phenomenon of collective condemnation based on the demonization of opposing viewpoints. Young people (as well as adults) should be guided to understand the consequences of their behavior in the online space. This includes knowledge on how to avoid online shaming, polarizing rhetoric, and how to engage responsibly in virtual discussions. Developing critical thinking and building media literacy are key tools in this process. In Slovakia, organizations like DigiQ offer education on responsible behavior in the digital space.

Educating young people on how to handle rejection and social ostracism can help them navigate the online space more effectively and develop the skills to respond constructively to negative situations. What is needed is the creation of safe and respectful platforms for discussion, where people can freely express their opinions and be heard without fear of condemnation or boycott. Supporting open dialogue that welcomes diverse perspectives helps to reduce extreme reactions and ostracism.

A Positive Peacemaking Role (Not Only) on Social Media
Young people can be encouraged to take on a peacemaking role (not only) on social media. By promoting positive posts and valuing respectful behavior, we can create an environment where a considerate approach is appreciated more than negative reactions. In Slovakia, an initiative supporting such behavior is the online group #somtu.

Disconnecting from Social Media and Information Detox
A discussion about the benefits of a social media detox and its impact on mental health can help young people find a better balance between their online and offline lives. So far, this tends to happen on an individual level, with some young people using "boring" visuals for their screens and app icons to make social media less appealing. There are also tools like the one sec app, which prevents uncontrollable scrolling and promotes mindful usage.
        The ongoing debate about whether mobile phones should be banned in schools, and at what age, has already been implemented in some countries. Most schools have greatly reduced smartphone use during classes. There are also "tech-free zones" or "tech-free policies" in various places, where people are asked to put away their phones, laptops, PCs, and smartwatches.

It's also important to share informational campaigns with older generations—parents and grandparents—to educate them about the risks of social media when it's used incorrectly.

There should also be a discussion, as Yuval Harari brings up in his latest book Nexus, about whether, just like we sometimes overeat when we're not hungry, we should stop "overloading" on information, since our brains can't process it all, and instead try an "information detox."

An attractive range of activities, such as night games, overnight stays in unusual places, or unique sports, can help with this. They offer young people new and enriching experiences. However, it's also important to provide unstructured free time, where young people can do what they "need," encouraging their initiative to come up with their own ideas.

Food for Thought

How can we ensure the safety of the online space where young people interact, and which influences their moral values?

How can we guide young people toward coming together, finding compromises, and engaging in respectful communication? Can we lead them in this direction when they see a society and politics that are so polarized?

Is internet regulation the only option, or can we also use other approaches and tools?

Won't young people move to new, secret platforms where we, the older generation, will completely lose our influence and control in the online space?

TREND: GLOBALISASIA

Description

Young people are showing an increased interest in the culture and lifestyle of Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, China, and India. This interest is primarily driven by the technological advancement of these countries and the various innovations emerging from sectors such as the automotive industry, information technology, and gaming. Asia is also experiencing economic growth and demonstrates significant influence through so-called "soft power." Soft power is a concept that describes a country's ability to influence other states through culture, values, diplomacy, and ideas rather than using military or economic force (known as "hard power").

A huge influence on the popularity of Asian culture is also driven by Chinese TikTok, which significantly overtakes other social media platforms and actively promotes the perception of Asian personalities and cultural elements. The growing interest in all things coming from Asia is further supported by the widespread availability of services and products from Asia, deepening the fascination with these countries and their cultures. Art, the film industry, music, and literature can have a profound impact on foreign countries. For instance, South Korean "K-pop" and Korean dramas have a significant global influence, enhancing the image of South Korea.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats
- **Idealization of Asian countries:** Superficial understanding and idealization of Asian countries, cultures, and people. Young people may lack awareness of serious issues such as human rights violations or child labor in China, as well as the authoritarian regime governing the country. A fascination with the creative industries might divert attention away from the real world and a deeper understanding of the actual challenges these countries face.
- **Excessive time consumption:** The significant amount of time young people spend watching Asian movies and series also influences their behavior.

- **Unhealthy beauty standards:** Asian pop culture, particularly the South Korean phenomenon of "K-pop," often emphasizes physical appearance and a specific type of "perfection." Such pressure to conform to beauty ideals can negatively impact the self-esteem and mental health of young people, who may feel they fall short of these standards. For instance, South Korea has the highest number of plastic surgeries per capita in the world. Korean society places significant importance on physical appearance, making plastic surgery highly popular. Common procedures include double eyelid surgery, nose reshaping, jaw reduction, and facelifts.
- **Promotion of Consumerism:** Many aspects of this trend are closely tied to consumerism. For example, the promotion of brands, fashion, and technology can encourage materialism among young people, leading to unhealthy consumption habits and a constant pursuit of the latest products and brands.

Positives Related to This Trend

Young people are increasingly interested in learning languages such as Korean and Japanese. They are drawn by the opportunity to study or intern in these, to us, exotic countries. South Korea and Japan are recognized for their high standards in education and technology. At the same time, there is a growing interest among young people in traveling and exploring the history of these countries. Values such as thoughtfulness, calmness, order, politeness, respect, discipline, and hard work—often portrayed in the media as typical of Asian culture—resonate strongly with Slovaks as well.

Asian pop culture (K-pop, anime, or manga) often promotes creativity and artistic self-expression. Many young people start exploring new artistic forms, music styles, and fashion, which inspire them to create their own content.

At the same time, there is big global connectivity among young people, as young people in Slovakia are not only inspired by Western influences but also begin to look toward the East and a completely different culture, which supports global and intercultural education.

Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Using Asian Culture as an Attraction
Asian culture can serve as an appealing tool to attract young people to events and gatherings. Once their attention is captured, discussions can continue on various important topics relevant to youth.
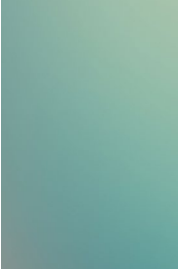
Discussion on Sensitivity and Masculinity
"K-pop" artists often portray masculinity focused on visual appeal. This image is softer and less "rough" compared to traditional male ideals, emphasizing skincare, hairstyling, and fashion. This trend promotes the idea that men can be just as fashion-conscious as women and that caring for one's appearance is not a sign of weakness. Male artists often have delicate facial features, wear make-up, and choose fashion that is not strictly masculine or feminine. In "K-pop," it is common for men to openly express their emotions.

This creates space for open discussions among young men about expressing emotions and breaking stereotypes surrounding masculinity. Let us focus on reducing prejudice and encouraging emotional openness to empower their ability to express feelings and spark a conversation about how today's youth perceive these concepts.

Practical Skills and Know-How
Let's organize events where young people can learn Asian techniques in arts, self-care (such as yoga, tai chi, etc.), or how to organize their space and home according to Feng Shui or the Marie Kondo method. The Marie Kondo method, in particular, focuses on keeping only items that are useful and bring joy, known as "sparks joy." It can help maintain order in the home while also promoting mental clarity and peace. By offering young people practical skills, we can support their confidence, mental health, and personal growth.

Taking advantage of the Popularity of Anime
Compared to traditional cinematography, anime often highlights ecological benefits. Engaging in activities related to anime that incorporate ecological and sustainable elements can capture the interest of young people and draw their attention.

Self-Discovery Tests and Training in Asian Values
Incorporate tests like "How Much Asian Do You Have in You?" into our programs, using fascination with Asian characteristics to support personal growth. Develop tasks and challenges focused on values such as perseverance, respect, emotional openness, tolerance, and solidarity. Provide support and create an environment that fosters mutual help and the development of young people through shared activities.

Food for Thought

⭐*Does the fascination with demonstrated thoughtfulness, restraint, and inner discipline relate to the fact that young people have few examples of respectful communication, recognition, or fairness around them?*

⭐*Are the fragility and emotional expressions of male characters in Korean dramas and series attractive to girls because they differ so much from the traditional image of men in our culture (not crying, not showing emotions, suffering in silence)?*

⭐*What ideal of beauty do we want to promote in today's adolescent girls and boys? And how does Asian influence contribute to this?*

⭐*Traveling or studying in these countries is less accessible than in other parts of Europe. Does the rule apply that we value more what is harder to obtain? Or is it the effort of every new generation to differentiate itself as much as possible from the previous one, or from their parents' generation?*

TREND: WORK SMART, NOT HARD

Description

Traditional concepts related to employment, such as having a single job with one employer for a long time or keeping fixed working hours from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., are not the foundation of professional life for many young people. Many of them do not perceive their identity only through work, focusing more importance on their personal lives. They value finding a way to enjoy life, earn money, and maintain a work-life balance.

Today, it is not school that primarily prepares young people for their future careers. Instead, the younger generation often prepares themselves through the internet and social media. According to statistics from [McCrindle](#), more than 40% of today's Generation Z learn through videos on social platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram.
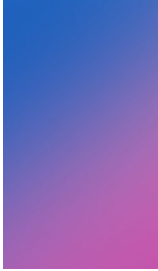
The internet and social media allow young people to earn money with less effort while also offering opportunities to develop ideas worth funding. This approach is linked to the phenomenon of the "FIRE movement" (Financial Independence, Retire Early), which promotes the idea of financial independence and early retirement. This approach can also be perceived as egocentric, focusing on doing only what brings personal enjoyment.

Today, young people have access to various ways to earn money through diverse methods. Some of these, such as influencer marketing, may appear controversial or bizarre. The digital economy creates an environment where virtual money and earning it are becoming increasingly common. This world offers a new perspective on how we acquire resources and view work.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats
- **Academic education is more regarded:** Nowadays, bigger importance is placed on intellectually performed work. Manual professions are often undervalued, making manual labor less appealing to young people.
- **Working from home or remotely:** It has its advantages but also disadvantages. The increase in opportunities to work remotely can result in unclear boundaries between private and professional life. Remote work is also associated with feelings of loneliness, isolation, or a lack of social interactions.
- **Parallel careers and less interest in long-term commitments:** This approach may support flexibility, but on the other hand, it can lead to increased mental pressure, especially when a person has to "switch" between different activities. If conflicts arise between various work obligations or there are ongoing time clashes between tasks, it can lead to overwork and, eventually, burnout syndrome.
- **Pressure to perform:** Young people face an increasing workload and rising demands for higher performance. Employers often set high expectations for productivity, which can lead to pressure and stress in the workplace.
- **Paralysis of choice:** An overwhelming abundance of opportunities can cause excessive stress and pressure, negatively impacting mental health and decision-making abilities.
- **Mismatch between expectations and reality:** Idealistic beliefs about entrepreneurship, without a sufficient understanding of risks or challenges, often clash with the realities of the labor market.

- **Monetization of our hobbies:** Earning money from personal interests, turning hobbies into a source of income, or commercializing leisure activities can result in an inability to separate personal life from work. This also affects unstructured free time for relaxation.

- **The search for quick earnings:** The desire for quick profit or becoming an "influencer" can overshadow meaningful and socially beneficial content. Some earning methods in the digital economy, such as spreading bizarre or controversial ideas on social media, raise ethical concerns. This trend may be perceived as superficial or senseless, potentially undermining the value of work rooted in purpose and social contribution.
- **Flexibility leading to professional uncertainty:** While the digital economy offers flexibility, it can also create a sense of uncertainty. Working on social media or in an online environment can be unstable and dependent on algorithms or platform popularity, leading to a lack of financial and professional stability.

Positives Related to This Trend

This trend supports the creation and growth of small businesses and business initiatives, giving young people the opportunity to start and manage their own companies, and this way contributes to the development of local communities. Furthermore, it creates new professions emerging as a result of technological innovations. It offers young people diverse career paths and development opportunities, fostering their independence and enabling them to make their own decisions while learning from their mistakes.

Creative platforms like TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram enable content monetization, allowing influencers and digital creators to achieve financial independence. This leads to a variety of career opportunities and allows people to earn a living doing what they enjoy. However, there should be a clear boundary regarding what they are willing to do for money.

In response to this trend, a new dimension of career education is emerging, focusing on the development of practical skills, flexibility, and adaptability. Practical learning through experience, known as "learning by doing," is becoming increasingly popular, enabling young people to acquire valuable skills and insights in real-world settings.

Higher mobility among young people due to work also creates new opportunities for career development on a global scale for so-called digital nomads, as well as the ability to work from anywhere. This allows them to better organize their time and focus on activities that bring them fulfillment. Such options provide an alternative to the traditional eight-hour workday model.

The new work culture is youth-friendly and considers their needs and values, particularly through flexible working conditions and a supportive workplace environment. Remote work allows more time spent with loved ones, which can positively impact personal relationships and contribute to the community.
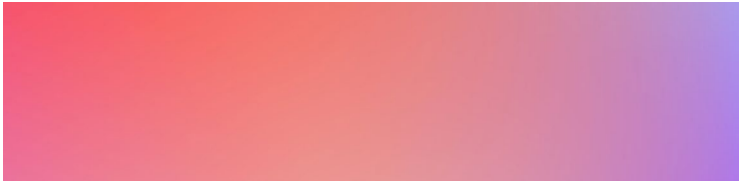
Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Competency-Based Education
We should not focus only on acquiring knowledge and information but also on developing skills and attitudes. Competency-based education can be an effective way to prepare young people for an unstable job market. Education should aim to develop competencies necessary for life in the modern world and the labor market. These include soft skills that foster flexibility, creativity, and the enhancement of analytical thinking.

Working with Own Mistakes and Feedback
Being able to work with one's own mistakes is essential for personal and professional growth, as it provides opportunities for learning and improvement. Viewing mistakes as opportunities can help uncover the root causes of problems, improve processes, and prevent similar situations in the future. This process strengthens resilience, boosts confidence in tackling challenges, and fosters innovation.

However, it is crucial to analyze mistakes objectively and without assigning blame, which leads to a healthy and constructive approach to personal development. Therefore, it is beneficial to develop activities and programs that offer simulated environments where mistakes or failures can occur. In the following reflection, explain how to effectively work with mistakes.
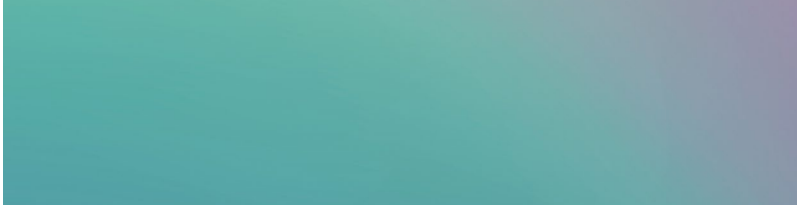
The Question of the Value of Money
Programs aimed at developing financial literacy should focus not only on responsible money management, investing, or financial planning but also on the ethical and moral aspects of finances. This raises questions such as: What is the value of work for money? What are young people willing to do for money? What is the true value of work and money? Can we really buy everything with money? These are the questions that need to be explored with young people.

Work-Life Balance and the Importance of Boredom
It is essential to address the topic of work-life balance, for example, within career counseling, workplace environments, and even schools. Studies show that young people lack unstructured free time, and boredom is often viewed as a highly negative phenomenon in society.

It is important to teach children and young people that, beyond their responsibilities at school or within their families, they should find time to "recharge their batteries." This cannot be achieved through extracurricular activities (especially if they are overscheduled) or mindless scrolling on their phones.

Practical Learning ("Learning by Doing")
Young people can take advantage of opportunities for practical learning and skill obtaining through real-life experiences, enabling them to better understand their strengths and areas for growth. Volunteering and taking part in various organizations can also serve as another valuable opportunity for practical learning.

Food for Thought

★*In 10 years, 70% of today's jobs will disappear, and entirely new professions that don't yet exist will emerge. What should we prepare young people for regarding the labor market?*

★*Although self-employment offers freedom, it can also increase performance pressure, as financial insecurity and unstable income contribute to stress. How does this way of earning affect mental health and overall well-being of young people?*

★*How can we truly find balance between work and personal life in today's fast and dynamic world, where we are constantly online?*

★*If work becomes increasingly individualized and shifts into the digital space, how will it affect social interactions and community building?*

TREND: DIGITAL EMPIRE

Description

The trend addresses the emergence of a new era of influencers and their growing impact on the younger generation. Its essence lies in the fact that well-known or popular individuals on social platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and others—so-called influencers—have the ability to shape the opinions, behavior, and decisions of large audiences, particularly their followers.

The phenomenon of using influencers in Slovakia began about 10 years ago and has become a dominant part of everyday life for Generation Z. Young people increasingly follow influencers on social media, knowing almost everything about them. The first Slovak influencers, such as Gogo, Selassie, and Exploited, became popular through their YouTube channels, where they created content related to video games. Later, influencers like Moma and Lucy-Pug (partners of the aforementioned male influencers) joined, focusing on the beauty segment, makeup, and fashion.

With the coming of TikTok, a new wave of influencers began. Many of them started with just a few hundred followers, but within a short period, their numbers grew rapidly to thousands or even millions. This is partly due to TikTok's algorithms and the simplicity of creating digital content. TikTok has lowered the entry barriers and allowed more people to become influencers. As a result, many young creators from around the world have achieved great success and became well-known thanks to this platform. The new generation of influencers often brings diverse content. Special attention should be given to controversial content, which quickly goes viral as it grabs more of our attention.

Essential part of influencer culture is influencer marketing, which has become a powerful tool for promoting products and services. Companies use influencers to sell products through personal recommendations and advertising collaborations, which are often crafted very sophisticatedly. This type of
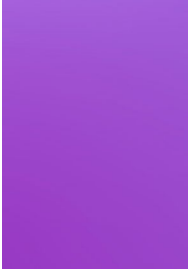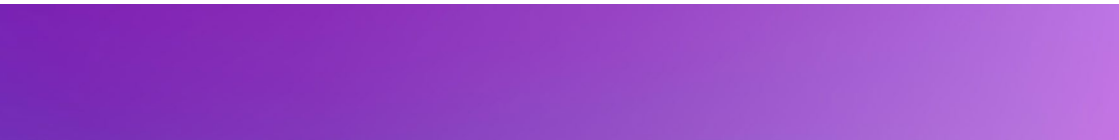
marketing is successful because people tend to trust someone they perceive as a "friend" or someone similar to them. When the opportunity to earn money is combined with creating controversial content, it can negatively influence young people and inspire others to create even more extreme content in an attempt to grab attention and gain followers.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats
- **Influencing young people:** The biggest threat is the influence on the decision-making and opinions of young people. Many of them blindly follow influencers and often fail to realize that they are exposed to targeted marketing and manipulation. This uncritical approach can lead to the creation of unrealistic expectations about life and society.
- **Materialistic lifestyle:** Young people are exposed to constant pressure to buy and own new things promoted by influencers. This trend fosters materialism and unrealistic expectations, which are unattainable for many young people. Many trends promoted by influencers have a short lifespan, leading to wastefulness and unsustainable consumer consumption.
- **Mental health:** Constantly comparing with influencers, who often present an idealized version of their life, can lead to feelings of inferiority, anxiety, or depression.
- **Ethical challenges:** Many influencers promote products that may not be suitable for young people or endorse inappropriate content, which negatively impacts their development and values.
- **Imitating influencers:** "Some influencers present controversial and inappropriate content, which followers initially follow out of curiosity, surprised by its controversy, or mocking it. However, if the influencer becomes popular and is supported by a specific brand (such as in the case of collaborations with energy drink companies), followers receive the message that it is acceptable, even desirable, to behave according to their example.

- **Dependency on popularity and algorithms:** The constant need to be "seen" and followed creates significant pressure on influencers who seek to maintain their popularity. This behavior becomes a norm for followers as well, who similarly seek popularity and attention within their circles, often leading to burnout, stress, and anxiety.
- **Absence of authenticity:** Influencers may be forced to create content that does not align with their true values, simply to maintain their popularity, thereby influencing other young people. Many followers may start comparing their lives with those of influencers, ultimately leading to negative feelings such as envy, frustration, and low self-worth. Young people, in particular, are vulnerable to this type of pressure.
- **False information and lack of expertise:** Influencers may not be experts on all the topics they cover, but their influence can lead to the spread of inaccurate or even harmful information (such as in areas like health, nutrition, or finance).

Positives Related to This Trend

Social media and influencing provides young people with a platform for self-expression, where they can share their opinions and thoughts. For many young people, this represents an opportunity to show their creativity, share personal experiences, and connect with a supportive community. There are also influencers who use their platforms to open discussions on important social, ecological, or political issues. This, in turn, leads to the mobilization of young people and their increased engagement in social matters.

Social media also allows young people to communicate quickly and interactively with influencers, improving their communication skills and creating new relationships or opportunities. Influencers often offer useful advice and tips in various areas such as fashion, health, fitness, travel, and technology. By doing so, they help followers stay updated on new trends and inspire them to try new activities or improve their lifestyle.

For many young people, influencer work is a career opportunity. Influencers often inspire young people to create their own original content and support their creativity. Additionally, social media allows young people to establish new connections and build communities.

Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Entering the World of Young People
Influencers offer a unique opportunity to look into their distinctive world. Asking young people about whom they follow, why they choose them, what content they like, and what, on the other hand, they find unpleasant can spark an insightful and engaging discussion. However, be cautious not to close the door with hasty judgments or premature reactions. Instead, start by asking questions, being curious, exploring, and keeping an open mind. Only after "mapping the terrain" should education and guidance come into play.
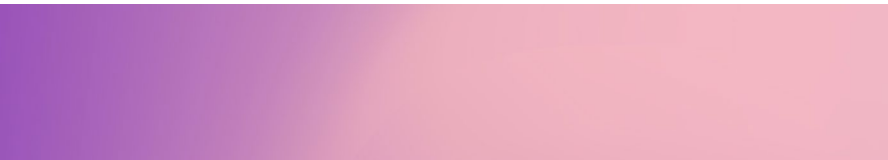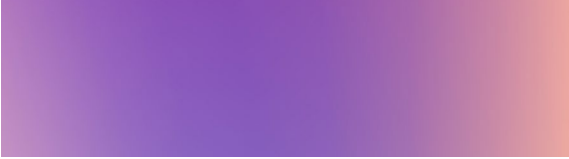
Media Education and Digital Literacy Development
The influencer trend presents an opportunity to develop education in media and digital literacy. Young people should learn to critically evaluate content on social media, identify advertisements, and understand the risks associated with the online world. Help young people understand that content on social media is often sponsored and financially motivated. They need to be taught how to recognize when content is hidden advertising and how to verify the credibility of sources.

Strengthening Ethical and Moral Values
Youth workers, teachers, and parents can use this trend to discuss ethical issues associated with influencer culture, such as truthfulness, responsibility, and respect for others. The education process should emphasize that popularity and
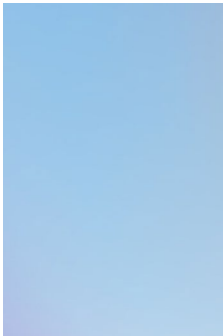
success cannot be achieved at any cost. We should teach young people to act responsibly in the online environment. It is important to explain that everything they post online leaves a digital footprint that could affect them in the future. We should highlight that they should be cautious when sharing personal information or engaging in controversial discussions.

Unrealistic Ideals
It is important to discuss how many influencers show only the perfect aspects of their lives, while the reality can be entirely different. Youth workers should help young people recognize that behind many beautiful photos or videos, there are marketing strategies, filters, and edits that create an illusion of perfection. Discuss that not everything that happens on social media is important, and a person's worth is not defined by the number of followers, likes, or comments. Help young people cope with the pressure to be "perfect" at all costs and always be online.

A Realistic View of an Influencer Career
We should teach young people that being an influencer is a real job that requires a lot of effort, creativity, and persistence. Discuss with them the challenges such as uncertain income, dependence on popularity, and burnout. If young people are interested in a career as influencers, they should be guided to become ethical influencers who spread truthful information, promote meaningful topics, and avoid endorsing harmful products or values.
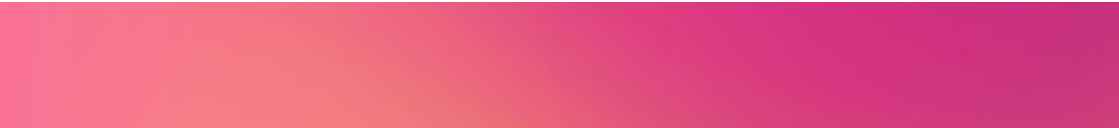
Food for Thought

✳*To what extent are influencers impacting even young children from Generation Alpha? What impact is this having on their behavior today?*

✳*To what extent should influencers be responsible for the content they create and the way it influences young people?*

✳*How might the value of authenticity change in the future of influencers? Will people lean more toward artificial avatars or genuine, authentic figures?*

✳*How might the way influencers interact with their followers change in the future? Will these interactions become more technologically mediated, for example, through virtual reality or AI? What impact will this have on youth?*

TREND: VIVAT HUMANITY

Description

The trend appears as a response to the growing polarization in society. It reflects the need to build understanding, empathy, and mutual respect, emphasizing values such as cooperation and solidarity. The goal is to create a more inclusive society that embraces and supports diversity, whether in terms of appearance, lifestyle, gender, sexual orientation, mental health, or social status. The driving factors behind this trend are young people who are active in social issues and perceive that change is in their hands. This approach is shaped as a reaction to previous trends like "Good, Bad, and Debate" where clear and uncompromising positions, "cutting off," unfollowing, and polarization dominated.

Young people are increasingly open to expressing their emotions, authenticity, and vulnerability. This trend highlights the idea that everyone has the right to their own identity and uniqueness, while rejecting criticism for deviating from the "norm." One of the key messages is that being different is not only acceptable but also worthy of support.

The manifestations of the trend are evident in various aspects of young people's lives—from social media campaigns that celebrate diversity without judgment (such as natural body hair, age differences between partners, or the decision to have or not have children) to the fight for openness on mental health issues. At the same time, young people actively challenge companies and public figures to respect the values they support. Instead of immediate social criticism, they demand improvements and explanation, transforming the conversation toward better understanding and tolerance.

The influence of the trend is also reflected in social changes, such as the revision of the definition of love, which now includes any expression of affection regardless of gender. The stigmatization of hate on social media is decreasing, and new ways and tools are emerging to block hate speech.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats
- **Polarization vs. tolerance:** While the trend focuses on empathy and acceptance of diversity, it may lead to higher polarization between generations or social groups. Older generations, who may hold different values, might perceive the new norms as extreme or unacceptable, which could deepen generational tensions.
- **Normalization of unhealthy lifestyles:** The trend celebrating individual choice and freedom may lead to the normalization of potentially unhealthy lifestyles, such as tolerance toward obesity or other health issues that are perceived as "acceptable" if they are part of personal uniqueness.
- **Exhaustion from constant pressure to be unique:** The constant need to be different and unique can lead to mental exhaustion or burnout. This pressure, combined with pushing personal boundaries in all areas of life, can cause young people to struggle with managing stress and the expectations they put on themselves.
- **Decrease in the quality of discussion:** The desire for acceptance without explanation or argumentation ("accept me as I am, no questions asked") can lead to the collapse of open and critical dialogue, which could block a better understanding of individual needs and further promote the isolation of ideological bubbles.

Positives Related to This Trend
This trend highlights the importance of mutual understanding and empathy between different groups of people. It helps young people better accept the diversity of opinions, life experiences, cultures, and identities, leading to the reduction of social tensions and conflicts.

      The Vivat Humanity trend supports the idea that everyone has the right to be accepted and respected as they are. It includes the acceptance of various forms of self-expression, different lifestyles, appearances, and gender and sexual identities. This approach opens doors for people who have been marginalized and allows them to feel accepted by society. It also places great emphasis on the de-stigmatization of mental illnesses. This helps young people feel safer

when expressing their problems and emotions, leading to earlier help-seeking and better mental health across the population.

This trend encourages young people to embrace their authentic personalities and vulnerability. It allows individuals to be themselves without the need to conform to social expectations or the pressure of perfection, which strengthens personal well-being and self-esteem. Young people influenced by this trend bring new values into their environment, such as respecting individuality and accepting differences. This leads to the development of a corporate culture that places higher emphasis on diversity and equality in working conditions.

Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Education in Empathy and Respect
This trend offers an opportunity to integrate topics related to empathy, respect for diversity, and understanding of other cultures, opinions, and identities into educational programs. In youth work, we can use workshops, discussions, and projects to develop emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills.

Support for Authentic Self-Expression
For organizations working with youth, this is an opportunity to create safe spaces where young people can freely express their emotions, feelings, and vulnerability. By doing so, we help young people feel accepted and respected, regardless of their differences.

Improving Inclusive Work Skills
For educational institutions and employers, there is an opportunity to focus on developing skills related to inclusion and diversity in the workplace. Young people are increasingly interested in workplaces where their uniqueness is valued, and where respect and equality dominate. This can form the foundation for new types of work programs and training initiatives.

Support of Equality and Diversity in Relationships

Opportunities are also emerging in the field of education within relationships. The trend is normalizing various forms of relationships and lifestyles (such as the so-called "single life," open relationships, and gender neutrality), which can serve as a starting point for new educational programs on healthy relationships, sexual education, and emotional communication.

Development of Parenting Programs

Parents can benefit from new opportunities for education on how to approach their children with respect and understanding while supporting their emotional and mental development. Courses and workshops for parents can focus on effective communication, understanding children's individuality, and fostering their self-confidence. An example is the "Effective Parenting Program" offered by the Slovak nonprofit organization "Parent with Ease".

Development of Understanding Across Generations

This trend can also provide a space for leading discussions about mutual respect and understanding between different generations. While this area may not directly align with the trend "Vivat Humanity," it offers an opportunity to open dialogue and explore shared values and connections that unite us across generations.

Food for Thought

✴ *How to effectively educate young people about empathy and respect for diversity in such a polarized society?*

✴ *How to support authenticity in young people without making them feel pressured to constantly be different or unique?*

✴ *How to teach parents to respect the uniqueness of their children and support them in their personal development, and vice versa?*
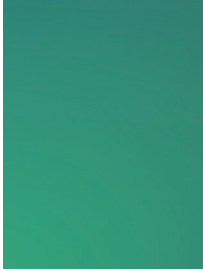
TREND: SCHOOL DISILLUSION

Description
Technologies, online courses, artificial intelligence, and the rapidly changing labor market have introduced new demands on education. This has resulted in a boom in alternative forms of learning that are more accessible and flexible but also bring challenges regarding the quality and regulation of content. Young people increasingly rely on "microlearning," "edutainment," and AI tools, which, in some aspects, are replacing traditional education.

This trend highlights the importance of a fundamental reform of the education system, which should focus more on developing competencies essential for the future labor market and fostering the holistic development of individuals. At the same time, it presents challenges, such as the need to teach young people how to critically engage with technology and manage digital overload effectively.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats
- **Technological and digital inequality in education:** Not everyone has equal access to technology or digital skills, which can restrict access to quality education or deepen the digital divide.
- **Decrease motivation and burnout of teachers:** Low financial compensation and performance pressure lead to teacher burnout, resulting in decreasing motivation to implement innovative approaches to education. This negatively impacts the quality of teaching and the ability of schools to adapt to the evolving needs of students.
- **Lack of skills among students:** The absence of learning guides and too much focusing on mechanical repetition and memorization instead of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and adaptive skills can leave students unprepared for the challenges of the 21st century. Young people often struggle with planning and managing their own learning, which creates difficulties when transitioning to higher levels of education and the work environment.
- **Insufficient quality of education:** Young people increasingly perceive school as impractical and outdated. Given the fast changes in the workplace and the digital era, many students turn to alternative sources of education, such as YouTube, TikTok, and online courses. This increase risks diminishing the credibility of the traditional school system and its role as the

primary source of education. However, the quality of education on popular online platforms, which often lack adequate regulation, cannot always be guaranteed.

- **Lack of adaptation to the changing job market:** The school system often fails to respond quickly enough to the evolving needs of the job market. Students are not adequately prepared for emerging job roles in fields such as technology, digitalization, cybersecurity, and other rapidly growing sectors.
- **The Impact of artificial intelligence on learning and education:** While artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT) offers new opportunities for learning, it also brings risks to the development of critical thinking and human skills. AI could become the primary source of information, raising concerns that students might accept answers without personal inquiry, reflection, or developing the ability to analyze and evaluate information.
- **Decreasing importance of relationships in the school environment:** The change to online education and the use of AI may reduce opportunities for developing social skills and interpersonal relationships, which are crucial for the personal and emotional growth of students. School is not only a place for learning but also for socialization, which could be weakened with a continued transition to digital forms of education.

Positives Related to This Trend

Education is Becoming More Flexible and Accessible. This opens new opportunities for independent learning and personal development. The use of AI and online platforms allows for the personalization of the educational process based on individual needs and interests. Students can learn at their own rhythm, focus on areas that interest them the most, and develop their strengths. This approach has the potential to increase students' motivation and engagement in education.

The trend brings new forms of learning, such as "microlearning" (learning in small sequences), "edutainment" (a combination of education and entertainment), and gamification of education. These methods are suited to the

modern generation, which prefers shorter and more dynamic learning formats, potentially increasing the effectiveness of learning.

The development of technology and AI enables students to access "virtual teachers." These new tools provide continuous support and guidance, which can be especially beneficial for students who lack direct access to traditional teachers or mentors.

Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Encouraging Independence and Taking Responsibility for the Learning Process
It is crucial to guide and support young people in developing independence and taking responsibility for their own learning process. This involves not only helping them avoid excessive "consumption" of information and educational opportunities but also encouraging them to find free time to rest rather than constantly aiming for improvement.

Young people need support in making informed choices among the available options and learning to reflect on their own tempo. They should be encouraged to continue while also being helped to systematize achieved skills and integrate them effectively. Let's inspire young people to set their own goals and evaluate their achievements. This approach teaches them responsibility and self-discipline.

Working with Mistakes and Supporting a Growth Mindset
A growth mindset, a concept developed by psychologist Carol Dweck, is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed and improved through effort, learning, and perseverance. Individuals with this mindset view mistakes and failures as opportunities for learning and improvement, not as evidence of personal incapacity.

Introducing this concept is essential not only in non-formal education but also in school environments and parenting. By fostering a growth mindset,

we can encourage young people to approach challenges with confidence, embrace effort as a path to mastery, and see setbacks as stepping stones toward personal and academic growth.

Supporting Individualism as well as Collectivism
In the educational system, it is essential to find a balance between individual and team goals. Encouraging both individual achievement and collective success is crucial for future workplace dynamics as well as life in general. Therefore, it is important to focus on setting not only personal but also team objectives.
Implementing reward systems that recognize both individual contributions and teamwork is key to keep this balance. This approach prepares young people to value their personal growth while understanding the importance of collaboration and shared success.

Strengthening Collaboration Between Schools, Nonprofits, and the Business Sector
Adapting education to the needs of the 21st century presents an opportunity for closer collaboration between traditional educational institutions and nonprofit organizations. A shared goal could be to provide support, mentoring, and additional educational activities for young people—resources that schools often cannot offer on their own.

Food for Thought

★ *How can technologies and artificial intelligence be effectively integrated into the educational process without compromising the quality of teaching and interpersonal relationships?*

★ *How can schools improve their preparedness for the rapidly changing job market? What should schools focus on?*

★ *How can teachers be prepared for the new challenges brought by technology while also providing them with support to avoid burnout?*

★ *How can the education system support students' mental well-being to help them (re)discover their natural curiosity and joy of learning?*

TREND: THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY

Description

Today, we are witnessing a fundamental transformation of traditional perceptions of masculinity. Once deeply rooted stereotypes and expectations tied to male roles are rapidly evolving. Men now face pressure to redefine their roles in society, with increasing attention given to their emotional, mental, and social well-being. This crisis of masculinity opens a discussion about what it means to be a man in modern society and calls for a reflection of traditional gender norms.

The current trend highlights complex and contradictory signals affecting men—from toxic masculinity to the phenomenon of "femboy" culture. On one hand, there is pressure to follow traditional male roles, portraying men as tough, high-performing, and dominant. On the other hand, society is increasingly encouraging more inclusive and sensitive approaches.

The diverse portrayals of masculinity, especially on social media, create confusion and uncertainty among young men. This has significant implications for their mental health and social relationships.

The driving factors behind this trend include the feminization of education, the weakening of traditional economic roles for men, the breakdown of traditional family structures, and increasing ambiguity in male role models. In response, new initiatives such as courses, clubs, and rituals are emerging to help young men explore their identity and find their place in society. This trend has the potential to create opportunities for a more inclusive and equitable social structure but also brings challenges related to polarization and the mental health of young men.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats

- **Social isolation and escape into the online world:** Among confusion and a lack of male role models in real life, young men increasingly seek safe space in online communities where they can find alternatives for missing social interactions. This can escalate social isolation and deepen dependence on virtual spaces, often dominated by extreme opinions and polarized groups.

- **Rise of misogyny and rejection against feminism:** Due to a lack of understanding of the history and goals of feminism, resistance to gender equality may increase among young men, leading to a rise in online misogyny (exemplified by figures like Andrew Tate) and polarization between genders. This trend can worsen relationships between men and women and reinforce negative stereotypes about gender roles. Online misogynistic role models can negatively influence young men, who may adopt these views and behaviors as a model for success. This poses significant challenges to fostering mutual respect and equality in society.
- **Rise of extreme subcultures and radicalization:** If young men continue seeking answers in extreme subcultures, there may be an increase in radicalization and antisocial groups. Movements like "Incels" or supporters of extreme conservative ideologies illustrate that this threat is real and can lead to heightened violence. This growing trend brings significant risks to social cohesion and highlights the urgent need for strategies to address underlying issues and provide healthier alternatives for identity formation and social belonging.
- **Escalating crisis of male identity in society:** If society fails to adapt to changes in male roles and does not provide sufficient support for young men in shaping their identity, this crisis could deepen. Men may continue to struggle with questions about how to define themselves in modern society, leading to further confusion and frustration.
- **Decrease in mental health and increase of risky behavior:** A lack of emotional support, pressure to perform, and difficulty coping with social changes can lead to a deterioration in men's mental health. This may result in increased rates of depression, anxiety, suicide, and risky behaviors such as aggression and violence.

Positives Related to This Trend
This trend creates an opportunity to redefine masculinity and encourages discussions about healthy expression of male emotions, mental health, and equality in society. It contributes to the elimination of outdated gender stereotypes and can ultimately help reduce stigmatization.

The discussion that masculinity is not only tied to physical strength and performance allows men to be authentic, express their emotions, and seek help when needed. This leads to healthier interpersonal relationships, better conflict resolution skills, and a deeper understanding of their own needs and those of others. Men have more space to take on roles traditionally perceived as feminine, such as caregiving for the family and children. By narrowing the gaps between gender roles, there is potential for a more equitable distribution of responsibilities at home and in the workplace. Changes, such as greater male involvement in parenting or caregiving roles, contribute to creating more balanced relationships between partners and improving the quality of family life.

The trend of the masculinity crisis overall creates opportunities to redefine masculinity in a way that is more inclusive, emotionally healthy, and aligned with the needs of modern society.

Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Development of Programs Supporting Emotional Expression and Mental Well-Being
This trend opens the way for creating programs focused on emotional expression and mental health (not just for young men). Youth organizations and schools can seize this opportunity to foster open discussions about emotions, stress management, seeking help, and building self-confidence (especially) among boys and young men.

Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces and Activities to Explore Identity
Speaking about the confusion surrounding gender roles, it is crucial to establish safe spaces where young people can freely discuss their identity, values, and expectations. Adolescence is a natural developmental stage where questions of identity become especially important, with many young people seeking answers to the question: Who am I?

Our programs can focus on carrying a positive self-concept and building healthy peer relationships, providing the support needed for young people to navigate this critical phase of their lives.

Implementing Mentorship and Positive Male Role Models

The lack of positive male role models can be addressed through mentorship and educational programs. Mature men can act as mentors for young men, helping them navigate questions of identity and masculinity. This can play a valuable role in building strong communities that support the healthy development of boys and young men.

Intergenerational male circles can also serve as a source of inspiring conversations for adolescent boys. Programs can be designed to teach young men how to express empathy, collaborate in teams, and support one another in both personal and professional aspects of life.

There is an opportunity to introduce new models of masculinity that are flexible and authentic. Organizations and communities can create spaces where young men can define for themselves what it means to be a man, free from the pressures of social norms. This approach can start personal growth and self-acceptance.

Supporting Equality and Eliminating Gender Stereotypes

This trend presents an opportunity to work with youth on breaking down gender stereotypes and bringing gender equality. Education focused on equal rights and opportunities for both men and women can be integrated into school curricula and extracurricular activities. Young people can learn how to support gender equality in both personal and professional relationships, creating the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.

<u>Developing Rituals and Experiential Programs for the Transition to Adulthood</u>
The absence of traditional ceremonies of passage that guide boys into adulthood can be addressed through experiential programs such as camps, expeditions, or other activities designed to promote personal development, courage, and collaboration. These programs can provide young men with positive experiences that strengthen their confidence and sense of identity. One Slovak example is the "[Transition](#)" course, a program for adolescent boys aimed at supporting their journey into adulthood.

Food for Thought

✸*What is "true" masculinity? Does it even exist? Can masculinity be defined as something universal, or is it something deeply individual that everyone can define for themselves?*

✸*How can we create programs that help young men navigate contradictory role models and expectations?*

✸*What educational and developmental programs can we implement to help young men distinguish between positive and toxic models of masculinity? How can we work with social media and educational platforms to promote positive behavioral role models?*

✸*How can changing views on gender influence how we build and perceive personal relationships?*

✸*Why are standards of masculinity so different across cultures, social groups, and historical periods? What might it look like if there were no social pressure to conform to "masculinity"?*

✸*Can the diversification of male roles be the foundation for a new and more equitable social structure?*

TREND: BRUSSELS = THE MULTICULTURAL LABORATORY OF THE FUTURE[1]

Description

Brussels is one of the youngest regions in Belgium and also one of the youngest capitals in Europe. Approximately 33% of Brussels' population is under 25 years old, and the average age of its residents is 35. This trend of youth is driven by immigration, internationalization, and education. About 55% of Brussels' residents have foreign origins, making it one of the most multicultural cities in Europe. This diversity is reflected in the lives of young people in the city. The youth in Brussels form one of the most diverse and youngest populations in Europe, facing various social, economic, and cultural challenges. There is no single definition of a "young Brussels resident." It is a complex and difficult-to-define group.
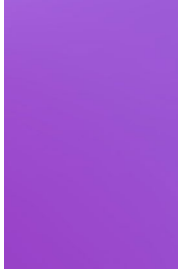
Over 60% of young people in Brussels have foreign origins, with the most common languages spoken being French, but also Arabic, Turkish, and languages of other immigrant communities. These linguistic and cultural differences present challenges in education and employment, as not all young people have sufficient proficiency in the official languages.

The educational system in Brussels, for example, is bilingual, consisting of French and Dutch. A significant part of the youth speaks a different language at home, which increases the need for language support. This linguistic mix leads to differences in educational outcomes, particularly among young people whose mother language is not one of Belgium's official languages.

In addition to the city's multilingualism, area-based division, institutional fragmentation, and ethnic and social segregation in schools further contribute to this fragmentation.

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1 *This is a trend that reflects the reality of our Belgian partner. For the Slovak context, it is important to view this trend as one of the possible, or even likely, futures in our country as well. The increasingly present climate crisis, migration, and regional instability could be strong factors driving similar developments. Therefore, we believe it is important to present proposals for various measures that can better prepare people for life in a multicultural society.*

There are significant disparities between different neighborhoods in the city, which affects the living conditions and opportunities for young people. Youth from poorer neighborhoods, for example, often have worse access to education and employment compared to youth from wealthier areas of Brussels.

Many young people therefore feel excluded and discriminated against (such as those who went to fight for ISIS). A very sensitive issue is delinquency, stigmatization by the media and the police, and the disconnection of youth from institutions. As many as seven out of ten young people in Brussels do not feel safe when interacting with the police. Almost the same number claim to have been victims of ethnic profiling. The perception of Brussels youth as delinquents only worsens this issue, as people often associate young people from Brussels with crime.

Many young people feel uncertainty. They create and encounter diversity at the same time. For this reason, people in Brussels tend to shape their "creative" identity through creative activities and cultural initiatives. Brussels is home to many artistic projects, music groups, and initiatives that allow young people to express themselves through art, music, and activism.

Current and Future Challenges or Threats
- **Radicalization and social exclusion:** Unemployment, low education, and a lack of opportunities can further create feelings of hopelessness and frustration, which may lead to violence and criminal activities.
- **Increasing distrust in public institutions:** Young people in Brussels feel they are unfairly positioned as suspects due to their ethnic origin. This strengthens the barrier between them and the police, and potentially other institutions, increasing the risk of escalating tension.

- **Social and economic polarization:** The disparities between wealthier and poorer communities can further polarize society and strengthen feelings of inequality and injustice. Language barriers and differences in school quality across various parts of Brussels may cause many young people from immigrant communities to achieve lower educational outcomes than their peers. This leads to long-term social disadvantage.

Positives Related to This Trend

Cultural wealth is a source of creativity and innovation. Young people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds can bring new perspectives and approaches in fields such as art, music, technology, and entrepreneurship. Diversity can become a competitive advantage in various industries. The variety and complexity of social reality can serve as a catalyst for creating new educational models that include digital learning, intercultural exchange, and skills for working in diverse environments.

In a city with high diversity, collaboration between different generations and cultures can generate new solutions in social inclusion and civic engagement. Projects that connect young people with different cultural environments can build bridges and reduce tension. Given its diversity and international presence, Brussels can leverage its experiences to serve as a model for other European cities facing similar challenges in integration and multicultural coexistence.

Opportunities That This Trend Brings to the Field of Youth Work and Other Main Figures in the Lives of Young People

Support for the Multiple Identities of Today's and Future Youth

Many young people in Brussels have multiple identities—whether multicultural, multilingual, or multigender. There is a noticeable shift from individualism to collective functioning and mutual collaboration, regardless of the group they represent. Therefore, it is essential to educate future parents, as well as those
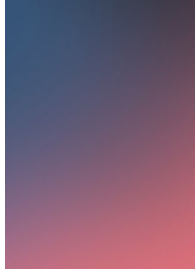
who work with them, to raise their children with more than just gender-neutral emotional development.

We need to start creating an atmosphere for cultural expression in all its forms. The focus should not only be on what divides us or what different cultures represent, but also on connecting, linking, and mutual sharing. Our perception of others is influenced by the information we receive. It is necessary to start filtering out information combined with cultural stereotypes and labeling. We need communication campaigns that challenge us to see things differently. The influence of the media and education about differences are key to overcoming the fear of otherness.
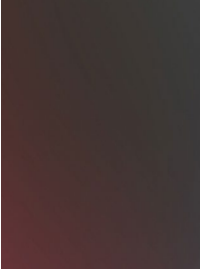
Multilingualism as a Path Forward

In Brussels, it is often said that "everyone can speak their own language," but in group settings, this sometimes loses its significance. We cannot assume that everyone understands the nuances of another language. However, expressing oneself in one's own language creates a safe environment. It is important to provide translators and interpreters or other tools that can facilitate language translation. Brussels should have multilingual media, events, and culture. The situation would be significantly improved by the emergence of various language "hybrids" and a new jargon that could become the language of future Brussels.

Another potential tool could be peer education and support, where peers from different language backgrounds help other young people adapt to a multilingual environment and improve their language skills.

Expanding Spaces for Youth

It is essential to create spaces where young people can do what they want. They need areas where they can open their creativity. Investment in personal development programs accessible to young people who do not fit into current (educational) programs is necessary. These can be platforms where young people with diverse identities and communities feel safe.

Urban spaces should also be designed to support diversity and inclusion. However, these activities should not only be for the youth but also for entire neighborhoods and communities. For example, courses on growing plants with a focus on environmental awareness, not just consumption, or craft activities where young people can improve their skills in various small trades. Such activities would, on one hand, bring generations together while also contributing to the community as a whole.

Creating a Safe Environment

Music can be an effective tool for building connections. It helps create a safe space through musical improvisations in parks. Brussels should desire to be internationally recognized for its vibrant music scene. Musical instruments should be as accessible in public spaces as grills and sports equipment. Given the presence of technology and people's reliance on social media, music can serve as a means of calming, relaxing, and reconnecting with the real world and others. Music can become a practical activity that unites people, much like churches did in the past.

Public spaces, such as museums and squares, are often overloaded with visual information. More empty, open, or closed spaces are needed, where young people can enjoy silence, meditate, or relax without visual overload.

A good practice example is the "Brussels Angels" project, which focuses on improving the safety and well-being of young people in nightclubs and at public events in Brussels. "Angels" in the program distribute mineral water, fruit, and assist those in need, such as people who have had a long night or are in a condition requiring special attention. The goal is to reduce the risk of dehydration, improve safety, and encourage more responsible behavior at public events.

Connecting Education with Art

An increasing number of young people express a desire to eliminate traditional educational institutions. Learning should not be limited to the school environment but should be widespread. Education should be more decentralized, with children moving between various "learning centers." For youth, it is essential to use active forms of learning, such as through different media. Young people should be allowed to create, gaining knowledge in an engaging and enjoyable way.

Young people enjoy collaborating with various artists. Let them create, produce, and present their work not only through language and speech. It is important to provide them with spaces where they can display their creations. Activities should not be focused only on logic, language, numbers, and facts. We should consciously focus on developing activities that further support imagination, intuition, emotions, and a creative approach.

Integration of New Ways of Living with Technology

It is essential to initiate a social discourse if technologies are beneficial for us and in what ways. For young people, technological education should be improved to raise awareness about data collection, addiction, and manipulation on social platforms. Decentralized technological experiments and startups leading to the creation of decentralized web infrastructure should be more actively supported.

Besides supporting critical perspectives on technology, it is essential to bring attention to activities aimed at building relationships, community collaboration, self-awareness, digital literacy, tolerance, and solidarity. This will empower young people to make better and more conscious individual and collective decisions, with the goal of developing more analog connections.

Focus on Skills Essential for the Future
It is crucial to provide activities that encourage instinctive or intentional actions to protect one's own health, safety, and survival—both physically and emotionally. These may become valuable skills in the future. The implementation of practices and tools for building resilience among young people can foster healthy behaviors and habits.

A New Approach to Engaging Young People in Decision-Making Processes
Young people want to influence the future, but their involvement in decision-making needs improvement. They need a better understanding of how and why public decisions are made to participate and act more effectively. Existing formal structures for expressing their views are often seen as outdated and designed by older generations. It is more effective to give them freedom to express themselves or to empower participation through less formal ways.

New Forms of Communication
Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp... Social networks are highly popular among young people. However, it is equally important to invest in direct verbal communication. The choice of channel is less important than remaining accessible and informal. For this reason, it makes sense to collaborate with someone who understands which channels to use, can adapt the language to the target audience, and create communication networks to ensure that various channels and methods reach young people from different communities. To enable young people to meaningfully engage in projects, communication and information must be inclusive and available in various formats—visual, audio—and distributed through organizations that resonate with specific target groups.
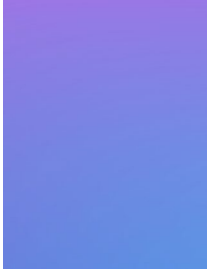
Food for Thought

✳What does true inclusion mean in a multicultural society? Is it possible for every culture and language to have equal space, or will there always be some form of dominance by the majority culture?

✳What is more important for shaping society – a collective identity based on shared values, or the recognition and celebration of individual differences? Can these two approaches coexist, or are they fundamentally contradictory?

✳How does the feeling of "exclusion" from institutions and society impact the overall sense of justice and morality? Does it always lead to radicalization, or can it also inspire constructive forms of resistance and change?

✳If young people lack trust in public institutions, what does that say about the moral foundations of these institutions? Is the morality of a society defined by its institutions, or must institutions reflect the moral values of their citizens?

CONNECTING GENERATIONS THROUGH INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO YOUTH

Anyone involved in education, upbringing, or addressing the connection between different generations in the workplace or community must gain a deeper understanding of how today's young people think, what motivates them, and what they find challenging. This knowledge is crucial for developing strategies and planning measures or specific approaches aimed at building a solidary and prosperous multigenerational society.
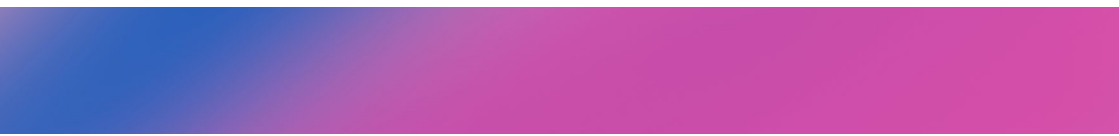
When analyzing the behavior of young people in various areas, as presented in this publication through selected trends, we pay close attention not only to describing these behaviors but also to the challenges and issues that can be identified within specific behavior patterns (trends).

At YouthWatch, we believe that every trend also brings positive opportunities to establish better connections and build bridges between young people and older generations. We see these opportunities as a space for innovation and fresh, creative approaches that expand possibilities for further work with young people and their engagement in processes that contribute to building a society with development opportunities for all its members.
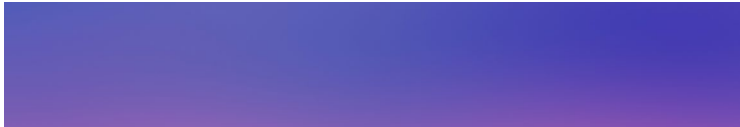
Our partner organizations joined this over two-year collaboration with this very vision in mind. We believe that the insights shared in our publication will contribute to achieving this ambitious goal.

PROJECT „THE FUTURE IS NOW"

The project focuses on delivering innovations through two interconnected project lines aimed at supporting modern youth work and the development of youth policy.

The first line involves mapping and identifying current trends in the lives of young people. By monitoring changes in their interests, behaviors, and values, it becomes possible to gain a deeper understanding of their lives. Recommendations and examples are provided for various key persons working with young people, showing how to apply current trends to introduce innovative approaches in youth work. Additional insights into the lifestyle of young people can be found on the organization's website YouthWatch, as well as in two trend reports: Beyond the Limits of Reality and New Perspectives.

The second line of the project focuses on developing Futures Literacy, which UNESCO presents as one of the key competencies for the 21st century. As part of the project, a foundational publication was created, addressing: futures literacy, a methodology for developing young people's ability to anticipate and prepare for the future, aimed at enhancing their resilience and problem-solving skills, particularly through a collective approach and collaboration, as well as stories about the future seen through the eyes of European youth.
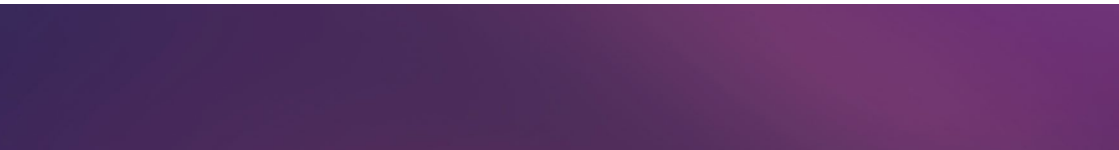
ABOUT
PARTNERS

YOUTHWATCH

YouthWatch is a Slovak association of independent experts in youth work and youth policy. Although the organization was founded in 2015, the experience of its members dates back to the late 1990s. The association was established with the aim of contributing to the quality of youth work through non-formal education, supporting young people, particularly their sense of initiative, identifying trends and needs of young people, and fostering new approaches, innovations, and modernization of youth policy. The expertise of YouthWatch members involved in this project stems from their long-term engagement in conceptual and strategic activities related to the transformation and development of the youth work sector and youth research.

BRUSSELAVENIR

BrusselAVenir is a socio-artistic civic association that creates stories about the future with and for the residents of Brussels. Through a playful, participatory process of envisioning the future, collective ideation, and storytelling, the organization aims to connect people, organizations, and sectors around shared themes. Its mission is to inspire imagination and discussion, foster a desire for a fairer and more sustainable future for Brussels, and activate citizens to take an active role in transforming the city and its society.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mgr. Jana Miháliková PhD.
She has been involved in the field of youth policy and youth work since 1989. She worked as a professional youth worker at a youth center (1989–1997) and later as an expert at IUVENTA – Slovak Youth Institute (1997–2015). She participated in several expert groups focused on youth civic and social participation, the history of youth work, non-formal education, and the quality of youth work. She contributed to several research projects focused on the inclusivity of school facilities, teenage volunteering, and municipal policies toward youth. She is a co-author of several surveys, strategic documents, methodological publications, and guides in the field of youth participation and quality in youth work, such as *Municipalities and Youth* (2015), *Trends in the Lifestyle of Young People* (2018), *The Quality of Youth Work in Slovakia* (2019), and *The Journey to Quality* (2021). At the Office of the Representative of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities, she coordinated a project over the past ten years aimed at increasing the number of Roma children in kindergartens. She also collaborated on a personal development program for young Roma leaders and is currently working as an analyst on a project monitoring inclusive policies aimed at marginalized Roma communities.

Mgr. Alena Tomanová
She has been engaged in non-formal education in the field of youth work since 2008. She worked at IUVENTA – Slovak Youth Institute, in the National Agency for the Youth in Action/Erasmus+ program, where she was responsible for the international training strategy and coordinated a network of regional consultants and trainers. She has experience with various topics, including the recognition of non-formal education in youth work, creating competency profiles, introducing innovations, implementing quality systems in organizations, and

experiential pedagogy. She is the co-author of several publications, research studies, and guides, including *Trends in the Lifestyle of Young People* (2018), *Quality of Youth Work in Slovakia* (2019), *Everyday Heroes* (2019), *Developing Youth Work Innovation* (2019), and *The Journey to Quality* (2021). At Youth-Watch, she leads the topic of emerging trends in the lives of young people. She is also involved in managing a network of trendspotters and trains teachers as part of the long-term non-formal education program.

Khusboo Balwani

Khushboo Balwani is a designer, creative researcher and futurist born and raised in India. She arrived in Brussels in 2012 to work at Strategic Design Scenarios, a design lab specialised in strategic design, scenario building, co-design and foresight. Later as part of her MA studies in Strategic Design at Politecnico di Milano, she wrote a thesis entitled "Futures of work in sustainable living 2050" and designed a speculative game. Through this speculative design work she stimulated a strategic conversation among policy-makers, educators and re-searchers on reimagining new jobs and skills needed to live in the sustainable futures of 2050.

She co founded BrusselAVenir in 2018, a socio-artistic citizen lab that depicts collective futures images with and for the people of Brussels. In her everyday interactions with other Brusseleirs, through critical, participatory and prospective design practices, she co-creates imaginative fiction about the fu-tures of Brussels - stories that make us think about other ways of being, other ways of living. Her mediums thus oscillate from video-making like short films or a TV-show to audio design like a radio show of the futures or an installation inside a running tram. Until 2018, she was a OuiShare Brussels connector and worked locally in mapping the community, researching case studies, fostering

collaborations and strengthening the collaborative economy movement. On a global Ouishare level, she led the Ouishare Fest 2015 & 2016 communications team and had a leading role in the Ouishare Fest 2017 programme design team. In 2016, she co-authored the Sharing Cities Book by Shareable that was incorporated into the curriculum of multiple universities and several policy makers are actively using the book for policy suggestions.

Ellen Anthoni
Ellen Anthoni is a designer and futurist, creating and being part of collective practices for transformation. Her life is about moving hearts and minds, and building better futures inspired by and together with the next generation. She is a (pr)academic, partly running her practice of making futures fiction, partly in academia. As a co-founder and creative lead of BrusselAVenir, she aims to build future narratives that trigger 'Brusseleirs' to take their future in their hands, and increase the futures literacy in the city. Ellen authored three books on changes in youth culture, and co-authored a few more. She has been speaking internationally about trends and futures, and teaches at several universities. Currently, she is finishing her PhD about the methodology of BrusselAVenir at SoMe-THin'K (Social, Methodological & Theoretical Innovation /Kreative, Ku Leuven), in which she translates the learnings of her practice into theory, in the field of Futures Studies.