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Measuring Meaningfulness Among Ukrainian Youth

LUMY-UA: Life of Ukrainian Youth – Understanding of
Meaning in the UNESCO Associated Schools Network



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Short summary

The war in Ukraine has deeply affected young people, disrupting education, family life, mental health and stability. In times of crisis, research indicates that young people and adolescents who perceive their lives as meaningful tend to exhibit stronger psychological health, greater life satisfaction, and overall emotional well-being and resilience.^{1,2} To better support youth well-being, UNESCO and Voluntās launched LUMY-UA – a youth-led initiative exploring how Ukrainian students experience meaning in life.

LUMY-UA: Life of Ukrainian Youth – Understanding of Meaning in the Network of UNESCO Associated Schools equipped young people with the tools and knowledge to carry out research at Ukrainian schools. This initiative was based on the Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) methodology and is the first global participatory and youth-led initiative using the YMI tool. The students led research in their schools to understand the factors that create a meaningful

life among their peers. The LUMY-UA project aligns with Ukraine's National Recovery Plan and UNESCO's emergency assistance program, reinforcing the role of education in fostering resilience and psychological well-being. The insights will inform a second phase that will allow youth to design and implement actionable recommendations and improve youth meaningfulness and well-being.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Strengthen community networks** through youth engagement, peer support, and trauma-informed communication.
- ✓ **Expand mentorship and skills development** via vocational training, internships, and career guidance.
- ✓ **Empower youth as changemakers** through leadership training, creative hubs, and cultural exchanges.
- ✓ **Boost mental health access and awareness**, integrating self-care into education and offering free support services.

This research initiative highlights the urgent need to invest in youth resilience. With the right tools, support, and opportunities, young Ukrainians can not only navigate today's hardships—but shape a meaningful future.

Why focus on meaningfulness?

There is a need to go beyond meeting basic needs, fostering resilience and purpose in a generation that will soon lead Ukraine's recovery. Youth – Ukraine's future decision-makers – will play a critical role filling societal and leadership gaps left by those who have left or are lost on the frontlines. Prioritizing youth well-being equips them with the **agency, hope, and confidence** to rebuild their communities, enabling sustainable recovery and Ukraine's long-term development.

METHODOLOGY

A global survey-based methodology, the **Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI)**, was developed by Voluntās to amplify the voices of young people by measuring the key drivers of meaning in their lives through data analysis and insights from youth in diverse countries. The research established four key drivers of meaning among youth:



Through questions on each driver, a **YMI score** out of 10 is calculated.

Key results

- With the overall **YMI of 7,3/10** Ukraine scores lower than other countries where the YMI was measured. *Note: YMI scores below 8 indicate significant gaps in overall meaningfulness.*
- Ukrainian youth demonstrate a **high level of social connectivity** (95% say they have people who care about them) but **low level of intentional care about mental health** (less than 50% dedicate time for their mental health when feeling stress and anxiety)
- Students experience **difficulties in communication** with their parents and **separation** from family members due to the war. And while they have a **strong sense of purpose** and want to do something that matters, they **lack guidance regarding their future**.
- Students **with disabilities, IDP students, and students from vulnerable groups** are less likely to feel safe and to have someone they can ask for help.

¹ CDA-UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent. (2024, June 5). UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent. Retrieved from <https://developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu>

² Steger, M. F., O'Donnell, M. B., & Morse, J. L. (2021). Helping students find their way to meaning: meaning and purpose in education. In *The Palgrave handbook of positive education* (pp. 551-579). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

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List of acronyms

ASPnet	UNESCO Associated Schools Partnership Network
FGD	Focus group discussion
IDP	Internally displaced person
KII	Key informant interview
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
NLP	Natural language processing
SDG4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
YMI	Youth Meaningfulness Index

Foreword



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After more than three years of war —more than ever — it is the strength, voice, and vision of youth that offer the clearest signal of a society’s resilience—and its hope. Ukrainian youth today are growing up amidst profound adversity. Yet, they continue to imagine, to care, to lead, and to find meaning in lives shaped by war. This report, *Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth*, is both a testament to their courage and a blueprint for action.

Conducted through a participatory, youth-led process, this research is unique. It does not speak about youth—it speaks with them, through them. More than 130 students from across the country became researchers, asking their peers how they define meaning, where they find purpose, and what they need to thrive. Their answers are deeply reflective of the challenges they face and the potential they carry.

The UNESCO Antenna in Ukraine is proud to have supported this initiative alongside our partners at Voluntās. The findings are not only a valuable academic contribution but a call to recognize meaningfulness as an essential component of mental health, education, and inclusive recovery. They show that while safety and basic needs remain fundamental, young people also require belonging, purpose, and agency. These factors—often not prioritized in humanitarian response—are critical for the individual and collective today and future of Ukraine.

Importantly, this report emerges from the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet), reinforcing our belief in the power of schools not just to educate, but to heal, inspire and empower. Through ASPnet, students became agents of change, shaping a vision of education that centers well-being, engagement, and resilience.

The LUMY-UA initiative aligns closely with UNESCO’s global commitment to transforming education in times of crisis. It echoes our work under SDG 4.7 and our broader efforts to ensure education fosters global citizenship, human dignity, and the ability to build just peace.

Let this report be not an end, but a beginning. A foundation for more youth-led research, for stronger support systems, and for a reimagining of what education can mean in war and recovery. As these young voices remind us, meaning is not a luxury; it is a fundamental necessity and right. And their determination to pursue it inspires us all.

Prof. Chiara Dezzi Bardeschi
Head of the UNESCO Antenna in Ukraine

Introduction

Study background

Adolescence is a pivotal period of self-discovery when young people seek meaning and direction in their lives. A strong sense of meaningfulness not only enhances personal growth but also increases resilience, adaptability, and the ability to navigate challenges. Research shows that having a clear sense of purpose improves psychological stability, fosters personal development, and empowers youth to contribute positively to the world.

Psychologist Viktor Frankl emphasized that meaning in life—derived from purposeful work, love, and courage in adversity—is fundamental to psychological well-being.³ His work highlights that even in extreme conditions, a sense of purpose can help individuals overcome hardship. Similarly, research by Kendall Cotton Bronk demonstrates that young people with a strong sense of meaning and purpose are better equipped to cope with crises, adapt to difficult situations, and recover from setbacks.⁴

Finding meaning during adolescence also helps youth discover their strengths, define their values, and explore ways to make a positive impact.⁵ Even in peaceful and stable environments, young people require guidance and support to navigate personal challenges. For Ukrainian youth, the search for meaning is even more critical—it serves as a key factor in their ability to cope with the ongoing war and build resilience amid uncertainty.

Importance of meaningfulness for Ukrainian youth

Supporting Ukrainian youth in developing a sense of meaning is critical for the country's recovery and long-term stability. Young people are agents of change – future leaders and policymakers who will shape Ukraine's reconstruction. Empowering them to find meaning through purpose, connection, engagement, and self-care strengthens their ability to realize their potential and build a resilient society.

However, young people are also highly vulnerable. Beyond the physical dangers of war, they face severe psychological stress and instability. Many struggle to maintain social connections as family members enlist in the army and their communities endure the traumas of conflict. Disruptions to education, constant air raids, and an uncertain future make it difficult for them to envision stability and purpose. Without targeted support, there is a risk of disengagement and a lost generation—one that feels disconnected from rebuilding efforts. Investing in youth today ensures they remain active contributors to Ukraine's future.

Meaningfulness as a better metric of societal well-being

Applying a holistic approach to measuring societal well-being – one that reflects not just prosperity and wealth but human flourishing – Voluntās has studied meaningfulness worldwide, recognizing that well-being in a society should not only be based on objective factors, such as economic prosperity, but also on the subjective perception of what drives a fulfilling life, such as purpose, personal growth, belonging, and leadership. Voluntās has developed global indexes to understand and compare meaningfulness in life and in work, with the aim of creating a stronger metric for measuring well-being.

To specifically study meaningfulness for youth, Voluntās conducted research in different parts of the world to identify the specific drivers of meaningfulness among youth. In 2024, Voluntās partnered with UNICEF to conduct the first-ever Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) study in Ukraine, engaging nearly 4,000 children and youth under 25.⁶ The research revealed that Ukrainian youth exhibit strong empathy, aspirations, and personal goals, but also highlighted the urgent need to strengthen support networks, enhance community engagement, and create more avenues for youth participation.

³ Frankl, Viktor E. (Viktor Emil), 1905-1997, author. *Man's Search for Meaning : an Introduction to Logotherapy*. Boston :Beacon Press, 1962.

⁴ Bronk, K. C., Talib, T. L., (2010). Purpose in life among high ability adolescents. *High Ability Studies*, 21(2), 121-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13598139.2010.525339>

⁵ Burrow, A., Hill, P., Williams, J. L., Leve, L., Dahl, R., Fuligni, A., Masten, C., and the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (2023). *Cultivating Purpose in Adolescence*, Council Report No. 3. Retrieved from <https://developingadolescent.org/>

⁶ UNICEF and Voluntās (2024). *Youth Meaningfulness Index in Ukraine*. Retrieved from: <https://knowledge.unicef.org/ukraine/resource/youth-meaningfulness-index-ukraine>

The role of education in supporting youth meaningfulness

Education plays a crucial role in helping young people find purpose and motivation. Schools provide a space to explore interests, engage in extracurricular activities, and volunteer, allowing youth to refine their values and aspirations. Interaction with peers and teachers exposes them to diverse perspectives, contributing to their personal growth. Schools also serve as an entry point for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), offering students access to psychologists and counseling services.

Raising awareness about meaningfulness as a well-being metric can help schools and youth co-design initiatives that strengthen resilience, mental health, and community engagement. By understanding the opportunities, challenges, and gaps in youth meaningfulness, stakeholders can implement programs that empower students with guidance, agency, and the tools to drive positive change—both in their own lives and within their communities.

Purpose of the LUMY-UA project

To mitigate the impact of war on Ukrainian youth and support their well-being, resilience, and agency as future leaders, UNESCO partnered with Voluntās to explore how young people in Ukraine experience meaning in their lives.

The *LUMY-UA: Life of Ukrainian Youth – Understanding of Meaning in the Network of UNESCO Associated Schools* project combined UNESCO’s leadership in education during crises with Voluntās’ expertise in youth-focused research. Implemented over six months in 2024-2025, this flagship initiative used a participatory, youth-led research model to uncover what drives meaning for Ukrainian youth.

Through this initiative, UNESCO and Voluntās trained school-aged youth across Ukraine to conduct research, equipping them with the tools to assess meaningfulness among their peers. This report presents a detailed analysis of the data they collected, offering insights into key drivers of youth meaningfulness and recommendations for future programming to enhance their well-being amid ongoing challenges.

Project overview

UNESCO

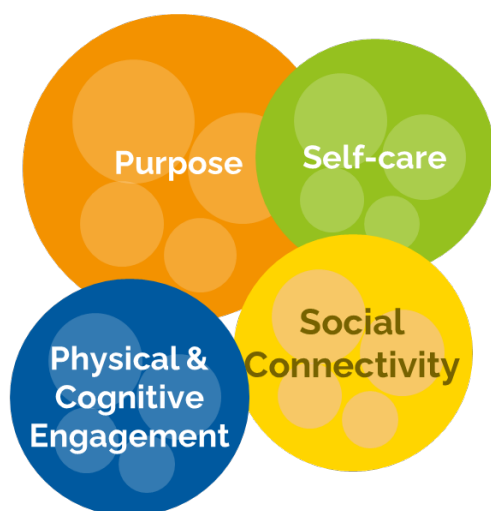
As the lead coordinator of SDG4, UNESCO supports resilient education systems during emergencies and protracted crises by bridging humanitarian, development, and peace-building interventions. As the ongoing war in Ukraine poses a significant risk to the mental health and well-being of the residents of the country, UNESCO has been providing emergency assistance to national authorities in Ukraine aligning with the country's National Recovery Plan to support mental health and well-being, particularly for students and education staff affected by the ongoing war.

Voluntās

Through global research, Voluntās – a development consultancy with a focus on making lives more meaningful and realizing human potential – aims to gather the voices of children and youth across various geographies to understand their experiences and perspectives. Voluntās has conducted extensive research on meaningfulness, including a global flagship study on what is meaningful for children: the Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI).⁷

Building on broader research on meaningfulness in societies and in the workplace, Voluntās developed the YMI to provide targeted insights on what drives meaning among young people. Drawing on existing literature and collecting primary data by surveying children and youth aged 8 to 15 in Denmark, India, and Norway, Voluntās used Natural Language Processing (NLP) to analyze data from these surveys, leading to the identification of four key drivers of meaning for children and youth:

Figure 1. Overarching drivers of meaning



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

- **Social Connectivity** – the quality and depth of relationships that youth cultivate with peers, family members, and other individuals within their social networks.
- **Physical and Cognitive Engagement** – the degree to which youth are intellectually and physically engaged in activities that challenge and stimulate their minds and bodies.
- **Purpose** – the sense of direction, significance, and meaning that youth derive from their actions, goals, and aspirations.
- **Self-care** – intentional actions and practices that youth engage in to nurture their physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Calculating the YMI

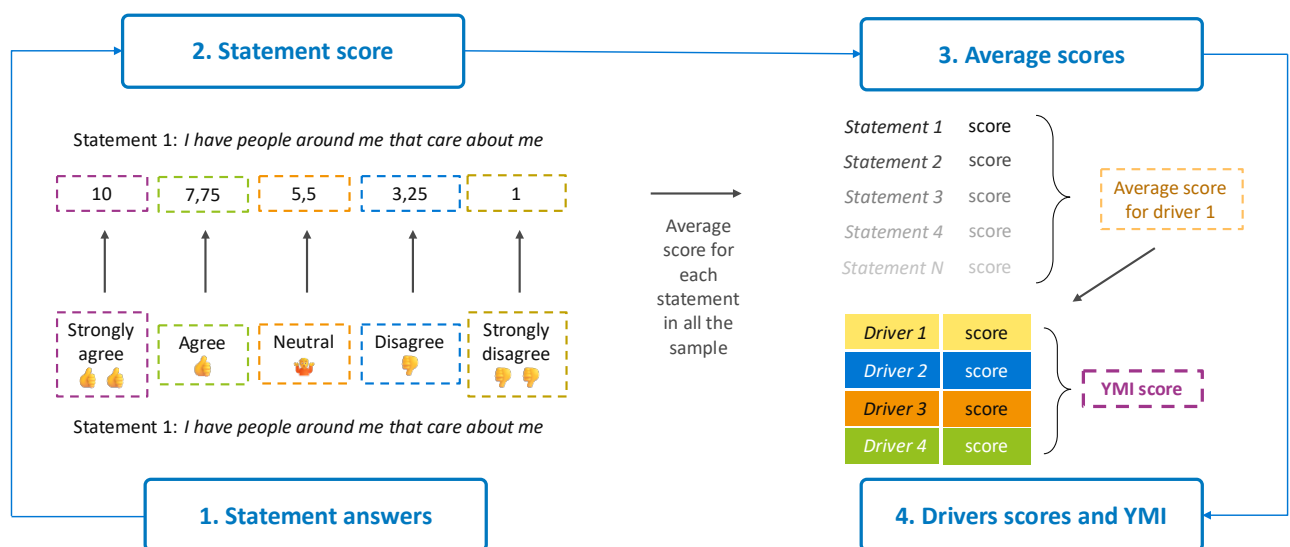
The YMI is calculated by converting students' answers to the YMI questionnaire into numerical scores. First, the students give an answer to each of the statements in the questionnaire, with answer options ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree". Then the obtained answers to each statement are converted to a number on a scale from 1 to 10, and the medium score for a statement is calculated for the whole

sample. After this, the mean value of the statements that belong to each driver of meaningfulness is calculated to obtain the score for the driver.

Each statement in the questionnaire belongs to only one driver: for example, the statement "I have people around me that care about me" falls under Social Connectivity, while the statement "I frequently do things that I believe will help my dreams come true" falls under Purpose.

⁷ Voluntās. Youth Meaningfulness Index <https://ymindex.org/>

Figure 2. How the YMI score is calculated



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Further rounds of data collection in multiple countries, such as Algeria, India, Morocco, Peru, and Ukraine, were conducted to develop a global tool and to validate the YMI methodology globally.

Voluntās x UNESCO collaboration: LUMY-UA project

The LUMY-UA: Life of Ukrainian Youth – Understanding of Meaning in the Network of UNESCO Associated Schools project was developed by Voluntās and UNESCO as part of UNESCO's broader efforts to support youth well-being amid the war in Ukraine. By taking a participatory, youth-led approach, the project provided deeper insights into what drives meaningfulness among school-aged youth while equipping them with tools for self-reflection, research, and action.

This initiative was made possible through the support of the Embassy of Japan, whose contribution enabled the training of youth researchers, the implementation of the study, and the dissemination of findings to key stakeholders working on youth well-being in Ukraine.

At its core, the project aimed to mitigate the war's impact on students' mental health by understanding how they experience meaning in their lives. In alignment with UNESCO's support for Ukraine's education system, the project contributed to the following key outcomes:

- Support for the Ministry of Education of Ukraine in addressing National Recovery Plan priorities through UNESCO's emergency assistance program.
- Strengthening mental health and psychosocial support in education via the Safe Educational Environment System.
- Mitigating the mental health impact of war through policy reforms, capacity building, and expanded school-based psychosocial support.

A Youth-Led Research Approach

Unlike traditional research methodologies, this project placed youth at the center of the research process. Voluntās and UNESCO selected and trained students from UNESCO Associated Schools (ASPnet), enabling them to form research teams that conducted surveys and interviews with their peers using the Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) tool alongside qualitative methods.

Beyond generating valuable insights, this approach empowered students as active contributors—enhancing their research, analytical, and leadership skills while fostering a sense of agency and ownership. With guidance from Voluntās and UNESCO, students worked collaboratively to collect and analyze data, interpret qualitative findings, and share their conclusions.

Sustained Impact & Future Applications

By actively engaging in this research, students not only gained critical skills but also became agents of change, positioned to develop their own well-being initiatives in response to the challenges Ukrainian youth face. The project's findings will also help UNESCO tailor future programming and strengthen youth-led initiatives focused on mental health and well-being.

Project stages

The LUMY-UA project was structured into several key phases: inception, training of youth researchers, data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings. Throughout each phase, students from ASPnet schools played an active role—participating in training, conducting research, sharing insights with their peers, and presenting findings to stakeholders.

At the **inception** stage, Voluntās conducted a desk review to explore key drivers of meaningfulness and inform the project's design. Based on the Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) methodology, Voluntās developed research tools for quantitative and qualitative data collection, established the sampling approach, and designed training materials. Meanwhile, UNESCO collaborated with ASPnet schools to select student participants for the project.

The **capacity building** stage was a key element of the LUMY-UA project, designed to prepare youth participants to conduct research. It consisted of a one-week in-person training camp, conducted by UNESCO and Voluntās for 68 students and 15 teachers from ASPnet schools. The students and teachers participated in the training sessions on meaningfulness, research methods, data collection, mental health, and other topics aimed at equipping them with research skills and awareness of the relevance of meaningfulness and well-being.

Figure 3. Training camp held in September 2024 for the students



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With guidance from Voluntās, students conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) at the camp where they had an opportunity to be both participants and moderators. After the camp, students formed research teams at ASPnet schools and conducted presentations for their teams sharing the knowledge gained during the camp. Before the students started data collection, Voluntās conducted webinars for all the members in the student research teams to provide practical guidance on conducting surveys and key informant interviews (KIIs), preparing students for the field stage of the project.

Student teams conducted participatory **data collection** across ASPnet and neighboring schools, with teams conducting presentations at their schools to introduce their peers to the concept of meaningfulness and to encourage them to participate in the survey. After the data collection stage finished, Voluntās analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data of the research (from the survey, KIIs, and FGDs) to produce the **final research report**.

Voluntās supported the selection of the most active youth teams who surveyed the highest number of respondents. To qualify for the competition, teams were required to complete at least 25 surveys, to conduct one KII and to submit a fieldwork report with the KII transcript. The winning teams participated in the **presentation** and discussion of the research findings during the in-person launch of the research with UNESCO, the Ministry of Education, the Embassy of Japan, and Voluntās at Kyiv City Hall on January 29, 2025.

The presentation allowed youth to share their work, take ownership of their findings, and engage with a broader audience of stakeholders. At the event, the vision for the next steps of this project was discussed, while the students presented their initiatives related to increasing meaningfulness and youth well-being that were rooted in the insights from their research.

Methodology

Data collection methods and sample parameters

This research was youth-led, employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to capture diverse perspectives on meaningfulness and youth well-being. The methodology included desk research, surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs)—each designed to provide a unique lens into how Ukrainian youth experience meaning in their lives. By leading the data collection process, student researchers took ownership while Voluntās and UNESCO guidance and training ensured methodological rigor and representation in sampling.

Desk Research

To inform the study design, Voluntās conducted a desk review of previous research on the Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) and broader studies on meaning and purpose in adolescence. These insights were used to adapt survey questions and develop qualitative interview guides, ensuring that the research effectively measured meaningfulness among Ukrainian youth.

Survey

The quantitative survey was conducted by student research teams at their schools, based on the YMI methodology developed by Voluntās. The survey included a mix of closed and open-ended questions, structured using Likert-scale statements to assess key drivers of meaningfulness in youth lives. It also explored how students define and prioritize meaningful aspects of life.

The survey was conducted online using Qualtrics, with 27 unique links assigned—one per student research team—to track progress. To extend reach beyond oblasts with ASPnet schools, an additional survey link was distributed to students in other oblasts, increasing representation and validating findings.

- **Survey period:** October 23 – November 15, 2024
- **Target group:** Students in grades 6 to 11, with a balanced gender distribution
- **Data reporting:** Each team submitted a technical report detailing schools, grades, and distribution strategies, as well as challenges encountered.

Figure 4. Students presenting the concept of meaningfulness and the survey at their schools



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Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

As a part of this research, each student team conducted one KII. The interviews aimed to delve deeper into how respondents understood the concept of a meaningful life, what they considered the most important factors in creating meaning, and how their perceptions of meaning had evolved since the start of the war. The key informants were male and female students from grades 6 to 11 who were physically present in Ukraine.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were conducted among the male and female students aged 13 to 16, who participated in the in-person training camp, with students themselves moderating the discussions. The FGDs provided an opportunity for students to compare their experiences and perspectives, which encouraged a deeper discussion and exploration of key topics related to meaningfulness. The group setting allowed participants to engage with each other's ideas, offering a more dynamic exchange and revealing common themes and differing opinions regarding meaningfulness and its drivers.

Data analysis

Voluntās carried out the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data from the survey, interviews and FGDs. The quantitative analysis included calculating the distributions of answers for individual statements, the scores for individual statements, the scores for the drivers of the YMI and the total YMI for the whole sample. For the purposes of the comparative analysis, we grouped the regions of Ukraine into four macro-regions: West, North, Central, and South-East.

We tested the answers to the statements by students in different demographic categories (gender, grade, macro-region, disability, and others) for statistical differences using the Eta coefficient test. The statements with the most statistical differences by these groups, which is shown by the highest level of the Eta coefficient, are listed and discussed in this report.

Student teams prepared clean transcripts of their KIIs, as well as summaries presenting key insights. They also transcribed direct quotes that illustrated the interviewee's perspectives. The transcripts for FGDs were prepared by Voluntās. The qualitative answers from the survey, the KIIs and the FGDs were analyzed to identify common themes and to interpret them in connection with the quantitative answers and considering the wider context. Natural language processing (NLP) and thematic analysis were used for the qualitative analysis.

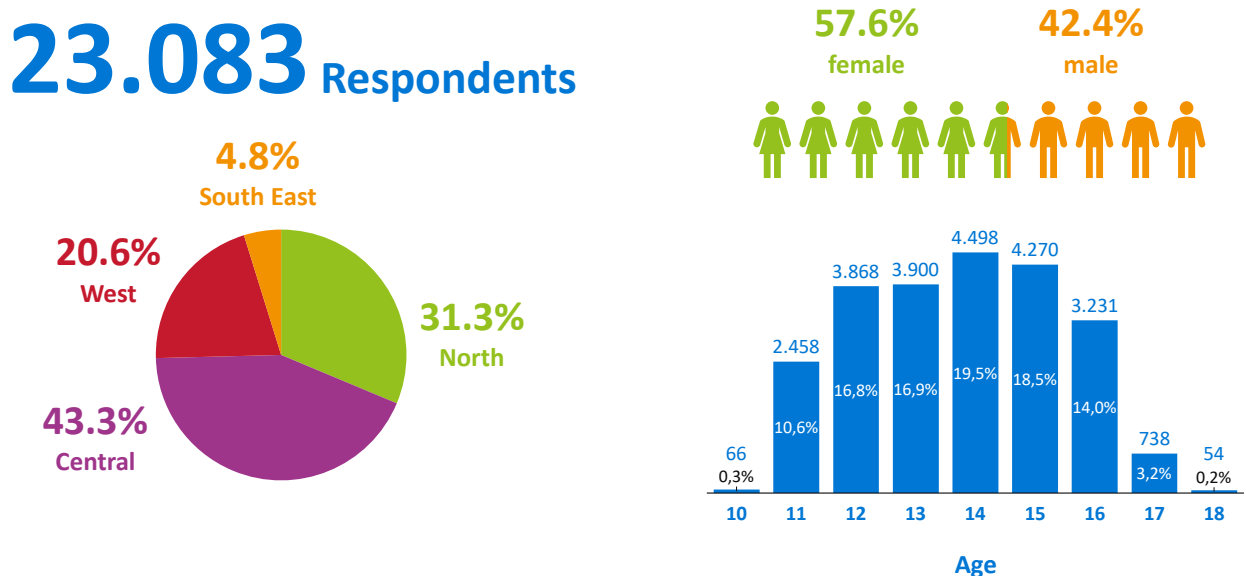
Demographic profile of the surveyed students

The YMI survey collected responses from **23,083 students**, of whom 57.6 percent (13,294 respondents) were female and 42.4 (9,789 respondents) percent male.

In terms of regional distribution, 20.6 percent of respondents (4,764 students) were from the Western region (Chernivetska, Ivano-Frankivska, Lvivska, Rivnenska, Ternopilska, Volynska, and Zakarpatska oblasts), 31.3 percent (7,215 students) from the North (Chernihivska, Kyivska, Sumska, and Zhytomyrska oblasts and Kyiv city), 43.3 percent (10,006 students) from the Central region (Cherkaska, Khmelnytska, Kirovohradska, Poltavska, and Vinnytska oblasts), and 4.8 percent (1,098 students) from the South-East (AR of Crimea, Dnipropetrovska, Donetsk, Kharkivska, Khersonska, Luhanska, Mykolaivska, Odeska, and Zaporizka oblasts and Sevastopol city) – the area most heavily affected by the war, with large areas currently under Russian military control.

Regarding distribution by age, the largest group of respondents (20 percent, or 4,498 students) were 14 years old, as illustrated in the graphic below.

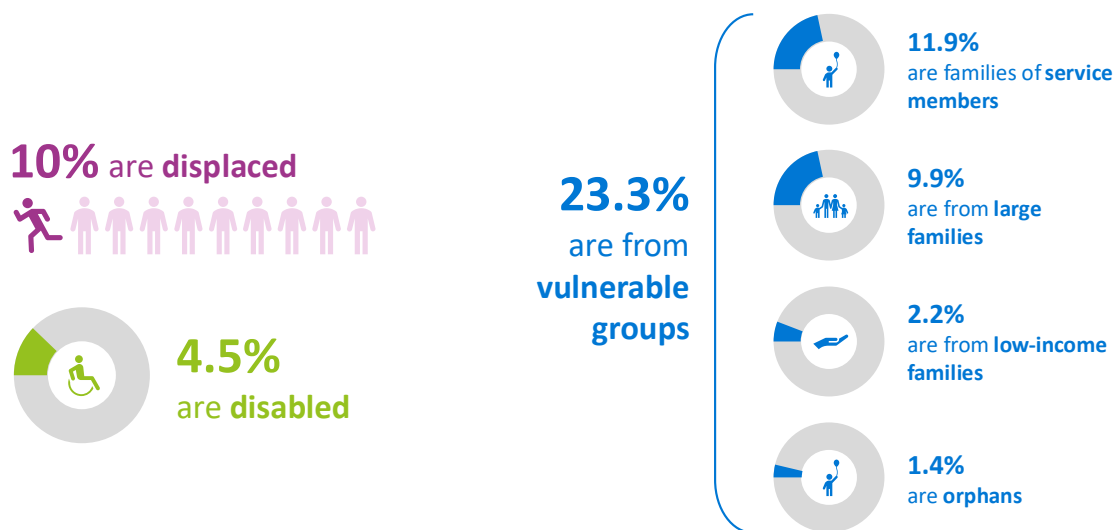
Figure 5. Demographic and geographic distribution of the surveyed students



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

The survey also highlights the vulnerabilities within the respondent group. 10 percent of respondents (2,465 students) are displaced, reflecting the impact of ongoing conflict on population movement. Additionally, 4.5 percent of respondents (1,037 students) reported having either physical or other kinds of disability.

Figure 6. Respondents belonging to vulnerability categories



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Key challenges and limitations

The participatory and youth-led research model presents certain challenges and limitations to the research, which may have affected the representativeness of the results. Below are some of the key limitations encountered in the project:

- Possible sample bias due to convenience sampling

In the quantitative survey, the data was collected at the schools by sharing the survey link among students. The data collectors did not control the parameters of the sample. Therefore, the final sample of the survey could be skewed and susceptible to bias. To address this challenge, Voluntās trained and guided student research teams to reach out to the students from different demographic groups and locations aiming for their proportional representation in the sample. The ages and gender distribution of the sample indicate a relatively normal distribution of respondents, indicating that this has not significantly skewed the data.

- Geographical limitations of the sample

The ongoing war in Ukraine created significant barriers to accessing certain regions, limiting the comprehensive coverage of the study. Additionally, the research was carried out by the students of ASPnet schools, which are not present in all regions, further narrowing the scope. Some participating students were internally displaced persons (IDPs) from conflict zones who had less contact with neighboring schools in their new communities, restricting the number of students they could reach. To address this, the Ministry of Education was asked to share the survey link in other regions, but the challenges posed by both the war and the absence of ASPnet schools in certain areas resulted in an uneven geographical distribution. This limits the representativeness of the sample, as some areas were either inaccessible or underrepresented, potentially skewing the findings.

- Risk of low-quality responses

The survey form was self-administered, leaving more space for incomplete surveys, misinterpretation of questions, mistakes, and non-factual answers, such as mischievous and intentionally inaccurate answers. To mitigate this limitation, Voluntās reviewed and cleaned the survey database after the data collection stage ended excluding incomplete surveys, surveys by the respondents that did not match the sample criteria, and those with clear patterns of deliberately irrelevant answers.

Understanding of meaningfulness

How Ukrainian youth define meaningfulness

As part of this research initiative, and considering the specific conflict context in Ukraine, it was important to understand how young Ukrainians define meaningfulness today. Students at Ukrainian schools who were interviewed by their peers in this project were asked to share what a meaningful life means for them, and how the war has impacted their sense of meaning.

For many respondents, the concept of meaningfulness is associated with **understanding their goals, the purpose of life, and the awareness of their actions**. Students emphasize that a meaningful life is not merely about existing, but about actively and consciously living each day. Key components of this include having a purpose, a connection with oneself and others, and a sense of personal significance. As one interviewed student noted: *“For me, a meaningful life is when I understand what I’m doing, what I’m saying, and, in general, what’s happening in my life.”* (Interview with female student, 14, Kyivska oblast).

Another student shared, *“You know, for me, a meaningful life is when you understand that everything you do matters. You’re not just ‘living through it’ but genuinely enjoying the fact that you’re important to yourself and to others.”* (Interview with female student, 15, Kyiv city).

A meaningful life was often described as **understanding why you live**. This involves both specific goals and a deeper awareness of one’s essence and mission in the world. One respondent shared, *“For me, a meaningful life is a life where there is meaning, purpose, connection with yourself and others, and a sense that what you do is important to you now and in the future.”* (Interview with female student, 15, Lvivska oblast).

One of the most important characteristics of a meaningful life for students is the **sense that their actions matter**. This significance can be reflected in major achievements or small moments. As one respondent noted:

“And most important, I think, is finding joy in the little things, not just waiting for big achievements. Just savoring those moments — the sun shining or a beautiful leaf drifting in front of your face.”

Interview with female student, 15, Ivano-Frankivska oblast

At the same time, the respondents highlight the need for **harmony between their personal desires and the needs of their community**. One student expressed it this way: *“For me, a meaningful life is having clear goals and a sense of purpose in my actions. It means I live not only for myself but also for others. I do something useful and feel that my contribution matters.”* (Interview with female student, 13, Zhytomyrska oblast).

External circumstances, such as the war that is going on in their country, also influence the sense of meaningfulness for students. One of them emphasized:

“At the moment, there’s a war in the country, and it’s very hard to plan anything ahead. A meaningful life is about living in the moment, one day at a time, fulfilling your desires here and now, without postponing them until tomorrow.”

Interview with female student, 16, Chernihivska oblast

However, many believe that **inner peace and self-awareness help maintain a sense of meaning even in difficult conditions**. As one respondent noted: *“I think meaningfulness is a certain worldview. A person needs to be fully aware,*

take responsibility for their actions, know what they want from life, and feel comfortable with it." (Interview with female student, 16, Kyiv city).

The students' reflections on what makes life meaningful show that for them, it is a synergy of purpose, conscious choices, the significance of their actions, and harmony with oneself and the world. It is a continuous process of seeking meaning, self-development, adapting to change, and savoring each moment.

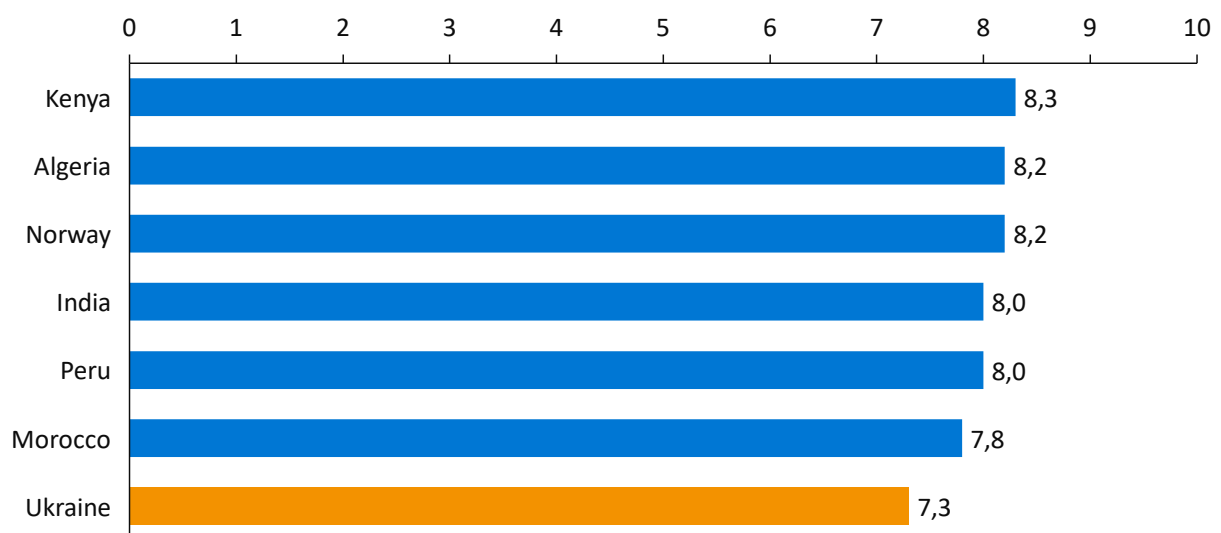
Measuring meaningfulness for Ukrainian youth: YMI and its drivers

In addition to qualitative insights, the Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) survey provides a comparable metric of meaningfulness in Ukraine, allowing for assessment in relation to previous research in other countries. The results indicate that the **overall YMI score for students in grades 6–11 in Ukraine is 7.3 on a scale of 1 to 10**, where 1 represents the lowest level of meaningfulness and 10 the highest.

Compared to other countries where the YMI has been measured, **Ukraine's score is the lowest recorded to date**, with the global average standing at 8.0. Research on YMI trends suggests that due to positive response bias (students often rate statements higher even when qualitative responses indicate concerns), scores below 8 reflect significant gaps in meaningfulness levels.

Given that this assessment was conducted more than two years into the full-scale war, following prolonged hostilities, occupation, and major security and humanitarian challenges, Ukraine's lower score is not unexpected. The fact that the score remains as high as 7.3 underscores the resilience of Ukrainian youth, demonstrating their ability to find meaning in life despite extreme adversity. Nevertheless, the assessment of driver scores and the overall below-average YMI score highlights a key gap and area for intervention to support youth in improving their sense of meaning.

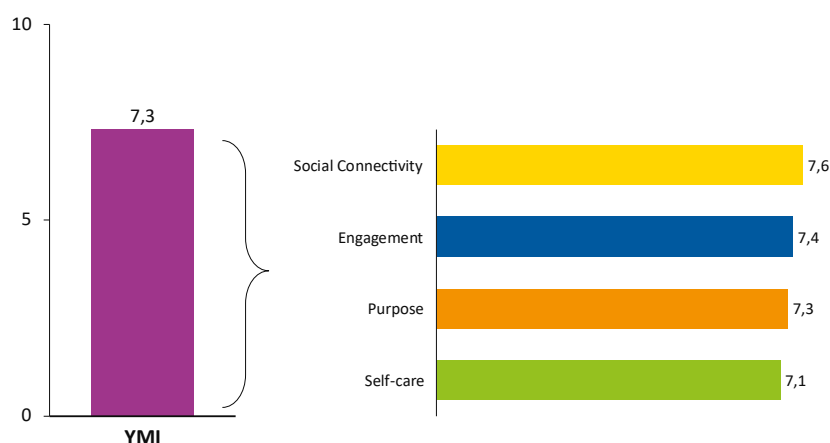
Figure 7. YMI values around the world



Data source: Voluntās, Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

The YMI is calculated as the mean value of the scores of its four drivers: Social Connectivity, Physical and Cognitive Engagement, Purpose, and Self-care. Social Connectivity scored highest followed by Physical and Cognitive Engagement and Purpose, while Self-care scored slightly lower. While the overall driver scores do not differ by a large magnitude, greater scoring differences at the individual statement level highlight key challenges and areas for improvement for each driver. These are further explored below.

Figure 8. Youth Meaningfulness Index (YMI) and its drivers



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Personal perception of the level of meaningfulness

In addition to measuring the level of meaningfulness through the quantitative tool, we looked at the self-assessment of meaningfulness of their life by the students themselves. In the in-depth interviews, the students who were interviewed by their peers were asked to assess how meaningful their life is. They used a 5-point scale where 1 meant “Not at all meaningful” and 5 meant “Fully meaningful”. The average score for all the 26 students who were interviewed is 3.4 points, **validating the quantitative scores and indicating a relatively low average level of meaningfulness.**

13 out of 26 students rated the meaningfulness of their lives by 2, 2.5 or 3 points. They explained their relatively lower ranking mainly by the **need to find oneself, lack of clear goals, and the impact of their age, when worldviews and priorities are still being actively formed.** Some students noted that the lack of clear life goals reduces their feeling of meaningfulness. One student remarked, “*I probably know who I want to be in the future and I'm already doing the things that I want in my future, but I'm not sure about this yet, therefore it's 3.*” (Interview with female student, 15, Lvivska oblast).

Others admitted that they are in the process of self-discovery and shaping the future. Another student said:

“Now I'm at an age where I'm trying to discover myself, looking for what I want to do, thinking about which university I'd like to go to. Now my life is basically a search, a search for myself, a search for how meaningful I want to make my life”

Interview with female student, 16, Kyiv city

Another half of the interviewed students, 13 out of 26, rated the meaningfulness of their lives by 3.5, 4 or 5 points. They demonstrate an understanding of important aspects of meaning in life and a desire to deepen it. For them, key components of a more meaningful life are **achieving goals, balancing actions and rest, taking care of themselves, and living in the moment.**

Many students emphasize that they have goals and are moving in the right direction, although some aspects still need work. For example, one interviewed student admitted that meaningfulness for her is associated with shifting her focus from her weaknesses to her strengths: “*At some point in my life, I began to feel that I was letting go of the phrase “I don't know” or “I don't understand”, replacing it all with phrases like “I will learn”, “I will find out”, “I will do it.”*” (Interview with female student, 16, Kyiv city).

Some students noted the impact of the war, which changed their thinking and added importance to life, “*here and now*”. Students also believe that meaningfulness is not necessarily defined by major achievements but can manifest itself through friendship and benefiting others. One student shared her reflections, “*I think that a meaningful life is not necessarily about great achievements. First and foremost, it’s about feelings, about friendship with yourself and those around you. When I feel useful and satisfied with what I do, that is the real meaning for me.*” (Interview with female student, 13, Luhanska oblast).

The findings suggest that **low personal perception of meaningfulness is associated not so much with a lack of action or achievements, but with temporary difficulties in self-determination**, which are typical for young people. At the same time, students demonstrate the desire for deeper self-knowledge and personal growth.

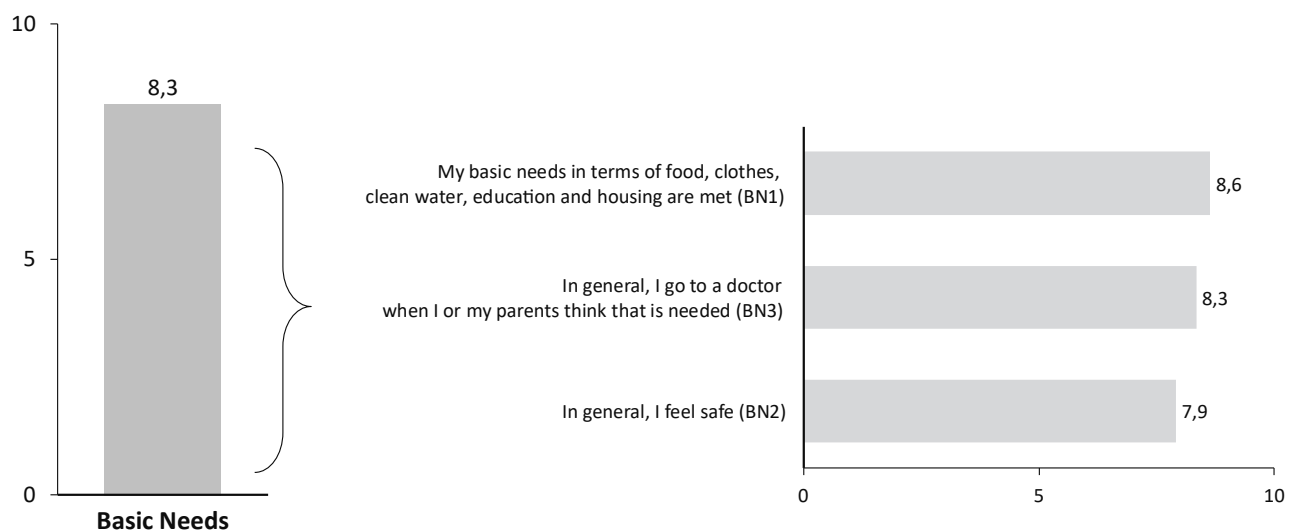
Basic needs of youth in Ukraine

While the YMI findings reveal gaps in meaningfulness, they also highlight a **broader issue in how youth well-being is measured and supported**. While many humanitarian metrics often assess basic needs—such as food, shelter, and safety—these alone do not fully capture what it means to have a sufficient level of well-being in times of conflict.

The YMI survey also assessed students’ perception of their basic needs fulfillment, including access to essential goods, services, and overall safety. The Basic Needs indicator, calculated as the average of these responses, scored 8.3 out of 10, suggesting that **most students have access to fundamental necessities**.

Among the individual components of the Basic Needs indicator, the statement “**In general, I feel safe**” received a **lower score of 7.9**. While this remains relatively high considering the ongoing war, it suggests that students have adapted to constant insecurity or may be evaluating their experience in comparison to peers closer to the frontlines.

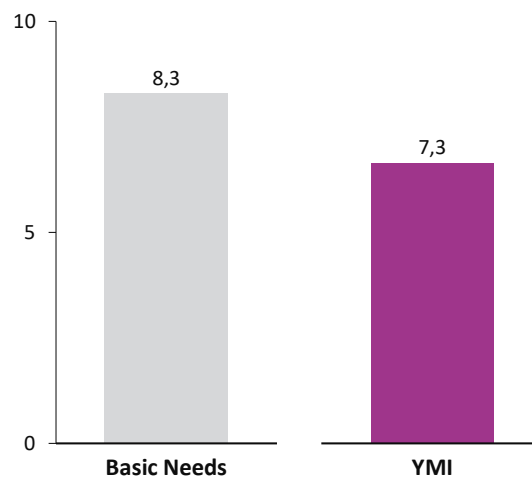
Figure 9. Basic Needs indicator and the statements comprising it



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

However, despite the relatively high score for overall needs, basic needs alone do not equate to a strong sense of meaning—as reflected in the lower YMI score (7.3). This gap reinforces the idea that **ensuring survival is not enough; young people also need opportunities for purpose, growth, and emotional connection**.

Figure 10. Basic Needs and YMI scores

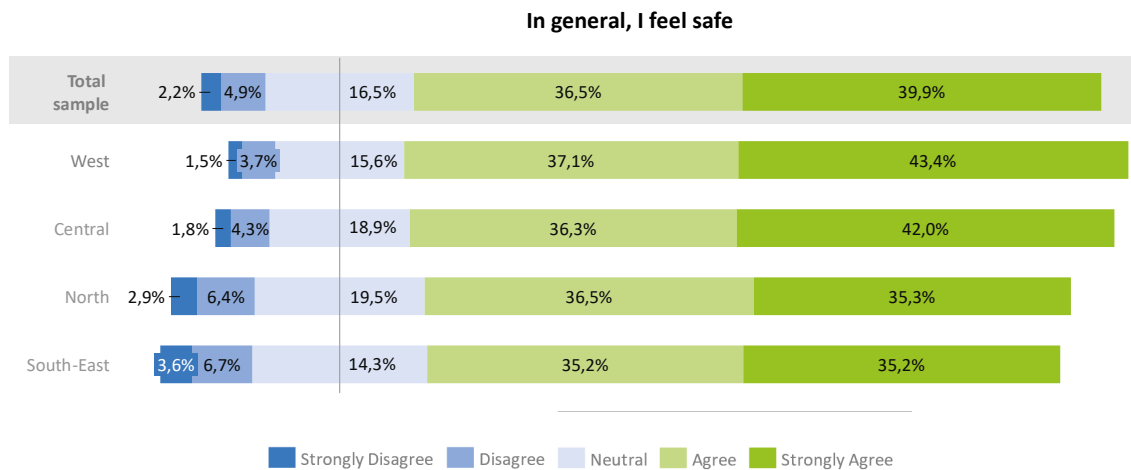


Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Geography also plays a role in perceived safety—**students in the South-East and North macro-regions, closer to active conflict zones, reported feeling significantly less safe** than those in Western and Central Ukraine.

These findings highlight an important distinction: while addressing basic needs is crucial, it does not guarantee psychological well-being or a sense of meaning. For Ukrainian youth to not just survive but truly rebuild their future, support must extend beyond humanitarian aid to initiatives that foster meaningful engagement, personal growth, and social connectivity.

Figure 11. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “In general, I feel safe” across macro-regions

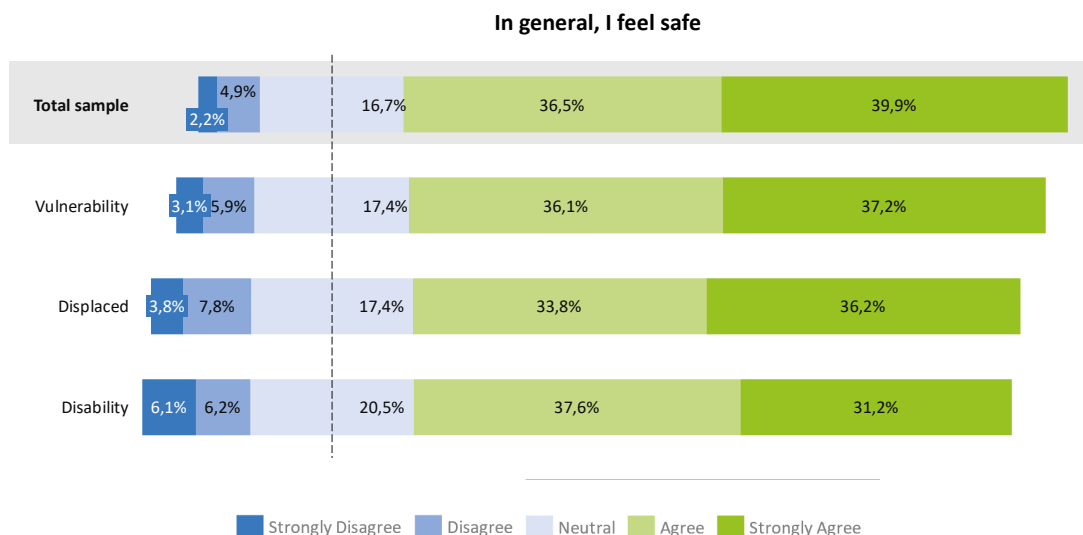


Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Students with vulnerabilities, especially those with disabilities and displaced ones, feel less safe compared to the overall sample. For students with disabilities, limited mobility or other physical impairments could be a factor that prevents them from accessing shelters quickly and complicates evacuation from dangerous areas.

Additionally, being dependent on others for safety or access to essential resources can increase feelings of helplessness and fear for them, especially in unpredictable conditions during the war. For IDP students, the experience of displacement or trauma from hostilities or occupation may exacerbate their anxiety and sense of insecurity.

Figure 12. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “In general, I feel safe” across vulnerability groups



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Drivers of meaningfulness: differences across demographic groups

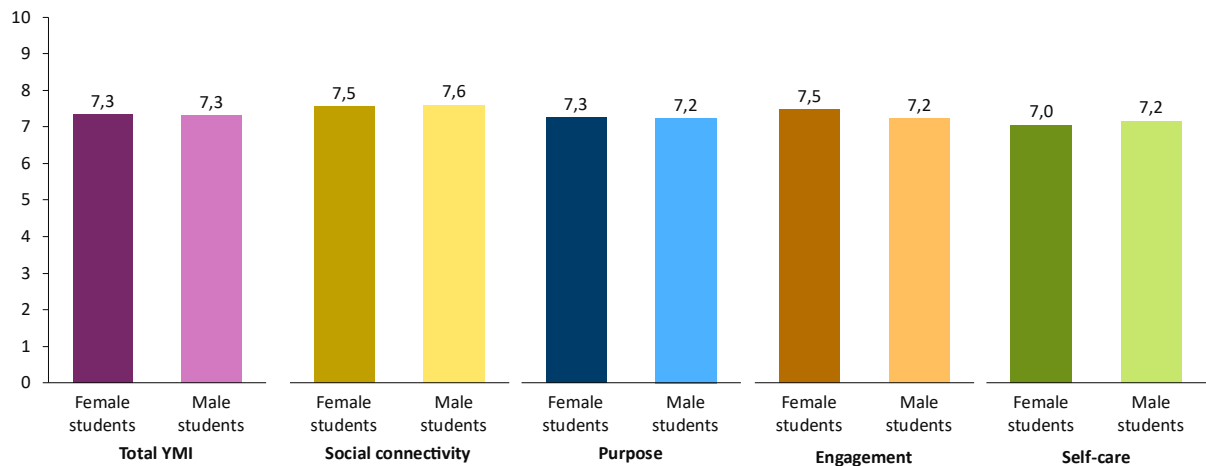
While the overall YMI score (7.3) provides a broad understanding of meaningfulness among Ukrainian youth, further analysis reveals key differences across demographic groups. Various factors—including gender, age, region, and vulnerability status—influence how young people experience meaningfulness and engage with the drivers that shape it. Examining these demographic patterns is essential to identifying who may need additional support and how different groups experience meaning differently. Understanding these variations allows for more targeted interventions to

strengthen meaningfulness where it is most needed. In the case of this study, **demographic differences are relatively minor** but can still provide some indication as to areas where there could be specific focus on relevant groups.

- **Gender**

The analysis of the drivers scores across demographic groups showed **virtually no difference between female and male students**, although more noticeable differences can be observed in the Engagement and Self-care drivers of this index. Female students score slightly higher in Engagement due to more active participation in creative activities and being more likely to reflect on their emotions and their impact on the world, while male students score higher in Self-care by taking time to relax and participating in physical activities more often than female students.

Figure 13. YMI and drivers scores by gender

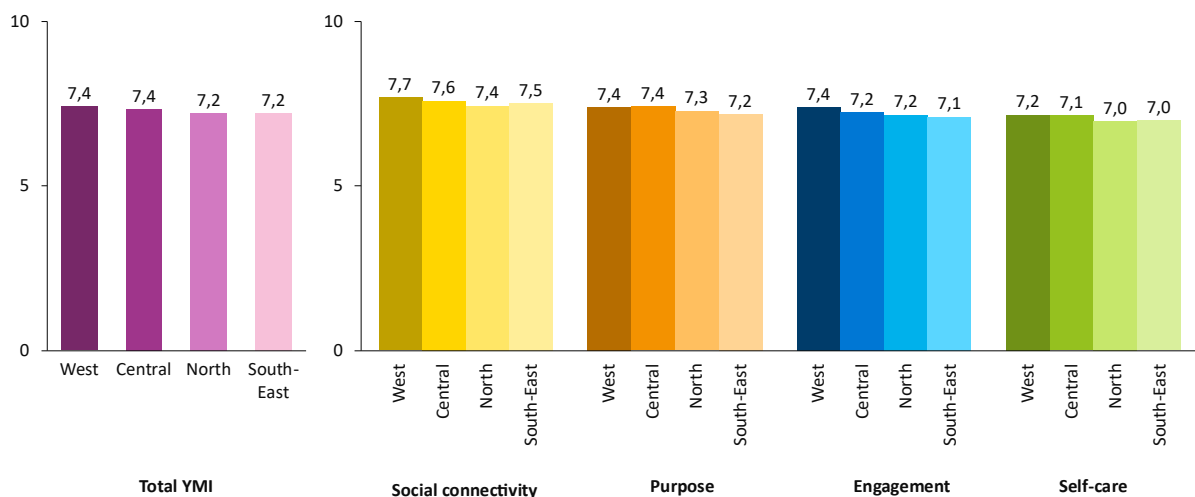


Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

- **Region**

Across all drivers, **survey responses of students from the South-East region, are lower than in other macro-regions**. However, with only 4.8 percent of respondents from this region (1,098 students), these findings should be interpreted cautiously, as the small sample size may limit broader conclusions.

Figure 14. YMI and drivers scores by region



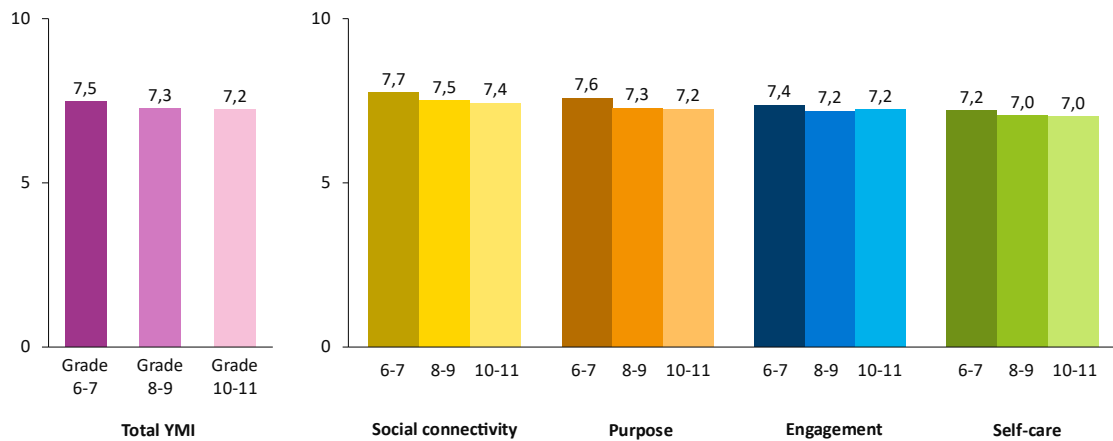
Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

● Age

Analysis of YMI scores across different school grades reveals a gradual decline in meaningfulness as students grow older:

- 6th and 7th graders report an average YMI score of 7.5.
- 8th and 9th graders show a drop to 7.3, reflecting a decline across all meaningfulness drivers.
- In grades 10 and 11, the YMI score stabilizes, remaining largely unchanged from middle school levels.

Figure 15. YMI and drivers scores by school grade



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

This trend suggests that early adolescence is a period of relatively higher perceived meaningfulness, possibly due to greater social engagement, structured activities, and a sense of exploration. However, as students progress through middle school, they face academic pressures, identity exploration, and increasing responsibilities, which may lead to a temporary dip in meaningfulness.

Interestingly, despite these lower scores, many students express optimism that their sense of meaning will grow over time. This sentiment is reflected in in-depth interviews, where students acknowledge that meaningfulness is an evolving process shaped by life experiences and self-discovery.

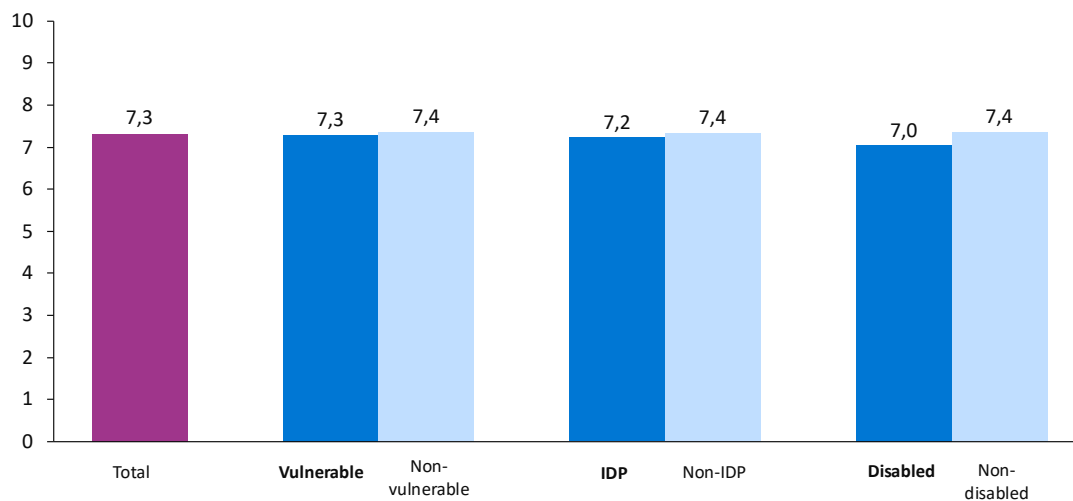
One of them remarked, *“I can’t say my life is 100 percent meaningful because I’m still growing, and it’s all changing.”* (Interview with female student, 15, Kyiv city). Similarly, another respondent stated, *“It also depends on age and the development of a person as an individual. Therefore, I can say that meaningfulness comes with age.”* (Interview with female student, 16, Kyiv city).

These insights highlight that while adolescents may struggle with defining their sense of purpose, many view this as a natural phase of personal growth. Supporting students during this transitional period—through mentorship, purpose-driven education, and opportunities for self-exploration—can help sustain and strengthen their sense of meaningfulness as they move toward adulthood.

● Vulnerability categories

Students who belong to vulnerable groups as well as IDP and disabled students **score lower in the YMI** than their peers who do not belong to any of these groups.

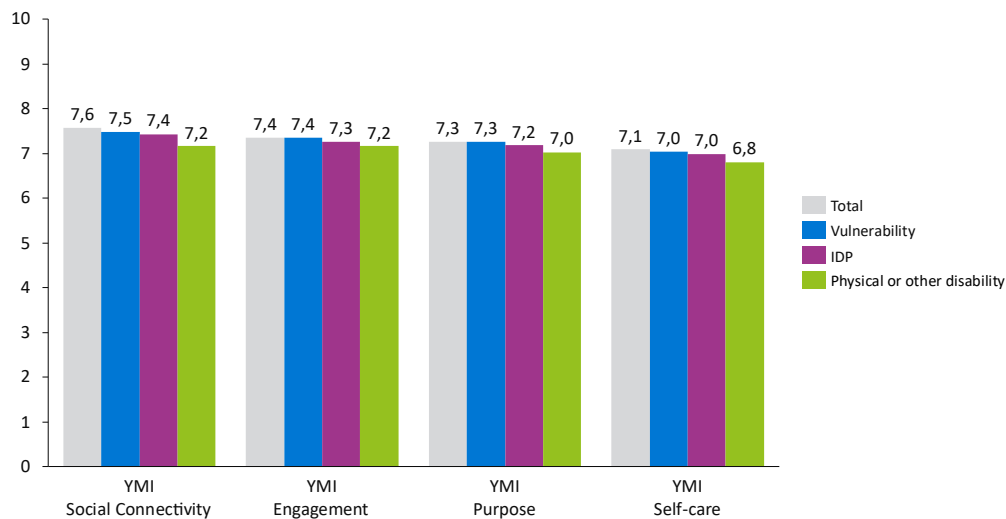
Figure 16. YMI scores by vulnerability, displacement and disability



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Students in vulnerable groups, IDP students, and disabled students **demonstrate lower scores across all drivers**. Among all these groups, individuals **with disabilities** exhibit the lowest scores across all drivers, not only scoring lower on statements that reflect the ability to engage in physical activities but also being less likely to believe that they can overcome difficulties and achieve their dreams.

Figure 17. YMI and drivers scores by vulnerability categories



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Drivers of meaningfulness

Analyzing the specific statements that comprise each meaningfulness driver allows for a deeper understanding of what contributes to, or hinders, students' sense of meaning. The qualitative insights from focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews further reveal the complex dynamics of social connections in shaping students' well-being.

Social Connectivity

Social connections—especially with family, friends, and broader communities—emerge as one of the **strongest sources of meaning for Ukrainian youth**. The ongoing war has reinforced the role of family as a key pillar of emotional support, even as students **struggle with communication barriers, belonging, and access to supportive networks**.

Among vulnerable youth, particularly students with disabilities or displaced students, difficulties in accessing support and feeling valued are more pronounced. These findings highlight the need for **inclusive environments** that foster a sense of belonging, mutual understanding, and strong peer relationships.

Social Connectivity as a driver of meaningfulness

According to the survey, Social Connectivity is the **strongest positive driver** of meaningfulness among Ukrainian students. The presence of close relationships with family, friends, and like-minded individuals is central to their well-being.

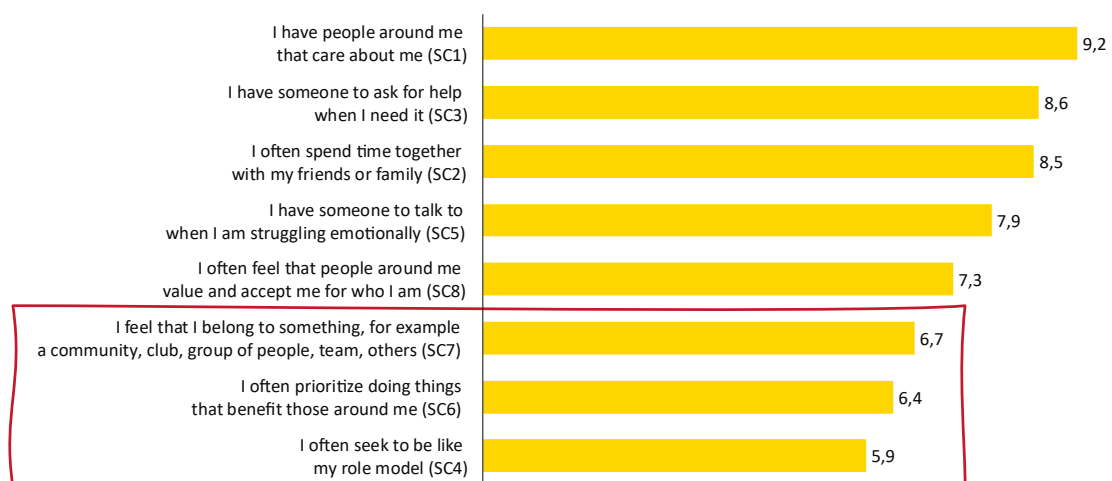
During FGDs, students repeatedly emphasized that **family plays a key role** in shaping their values and responsibility toward others. Many noted that their family relationships guide their sense of duty, care for future generations, and connection to a shared purpose.

For some, both **social interactions and time spent alone** contribute to their sense of meaning, reflecting on how social engagement and personal reflection are equally essential in navigating life's challenges.

Social Connectivity statement scores

Out of the statements that form the Social Connectivity driver in the YMI, the surveyed students scored highest in the statements *"I have people around me that care about me"* (9.2), *"I have someone to ask for help when I need it"* (8.6), and *"I often spend time together with my friends or family"* (8.5). These high scores suggest that Ukrainian students have a reliable support system to help them navigate difficult times. While adolescence is typically associated with increasing independence from family, war has likely reinforced strong family bonds as a source of security and meaning.

Figure 18. Scores of Social Connectivity statements



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Conversely, the lowest-scoring statements in this driver highlight key challenges and gaps in students' social connections, with *"I often seek to be like my role model"*, *"I often prioritize doing things that benefit those around me"*, and *"I feel that I belong to something, for example a community, club, group of people, team, others"* receiving

below-average scores. These findings suggest a lack of role models, limited sense of belonging, and greater individualism among Ukrainian students. Displacement, disrupted school routines, and war-related instability have likely contributed to these challenges.

Without a strong sense of belonging, self-confidence and overall well-being may be negatively impacted, underscoring the need for inclusive environments, community-building initiatives, and mentorship programs to support youth integration and engagement.

Barriers to social connections

One of the most significant barriers to social connection is the **physical absence of loved ones** serving in the military. The absence of parents or family members creates emotional strain and a sense of isolation. One student shared, *“I would like to be with my mother more often, she is a junior sergeant at NGU, and I rarely see her.”* (Male student, 15, Dnipropetrovska oblast). Given that having supportive relationships is a key factor in driving social connectivity, physical separation from parents and family members due to war is a significant challenge for many students.

Many students also express **difficulties in communicating** with peers or their parents, often feeling a gap in mutual understanding and emotional connection. Despite this, they also express a strong desire to improve these relationships. According to one student, *“I would like to improve my relationship with my father, but it is very difficult to talk to him, so I don't even know how to do it,”* (Female student, 15, Cherkaska oblast). A student from Zhytomyrska oblast commented:

“I would like to strengthen the relationship with my parents, because in some things they do not understand me. I want to have a relationship with people who will appreciate and love me as I am. It would help me to communicate better with other people, to express my opinion correctly, and to get rid of my fear of people.”

Male survey respondent, 17, from Zhytomyrska oblast

Importance of belonging to a supportive peer group

The **quality of relationships** with friends and the community – particularly among peers – plays a crucial role in shaping students’ sense of meaningfulness. They long to **feel respected and accepted among their peers**, which fosters their sense of social connectivity. *“I would like to improve relations with classmates. To spend more time with them”* (Female student, 14, Cherkaska oblast).

A supportive peer network builds confidence and serves as an important counterbalance to self-doubt and insecurity. Some students describe their peer groups as places where they discover their **self-worth and shape their life priorities**. One student who participated in a FGD shared, *“By changing my environment, my habits and hobbies completely changed. I moved from bad habits to a healthy lifestyle. Overall, my quality of life improved.”* (FGD #1 participant). Others mention how communication and support from friends can shift their mindset and push them to set new goals.

Value of independence

While relationships with family and peers are vital, **adolescence is also a time of growing independence**. Many students describe this phase as a period of self-exploration and the crystallization of personal values.

One student said, *“Honestly, I believe that the people around me do not even have the right to influence my understanding of meaning and purpose in my life, because I live my life directly. I don't want others to influence that at all. So, when I stopped completely listening to others’ opinions, what they think stopped bothering me so much. I believe I began living my own life, and this led me to my true goals, to my true sense of meaning and significance, and I think that's what everyone needs. You can listen to others, but you have the right to disagree.”* (FGD #3 participant).

The war experience has accelerated students' reflections on identity, purpose, and personal agency. Many are deeply aware of their role in shaping the future and seek to **define their own impact**.

“The war changed me even more in 2022, when two shells hit our main building, and I think something broke inside me. But it had an impact, it changed my worldview. It made me more radical in my thinking about language, culture, our history, the development of our country, and what I would like to change. My character changed a lot, I became more confident in what I’m doing, and why I’m doing it, and what I need in my life.”

FGD #5 participant

However, finding a balance between independence and connection is a challenge. Some students experience conflict when their personal beliefs differ from those of their family, peers, or authority figures.

Students who participated in FGDs pointed out that the opinions of others can have a negative impact when outside views cause doubt about one’s own beliefs and lead to a shift in perspective, especially when it involves stereotypes or criticism. One of them said, *“A barrier for me is often the fear of judgment. For example, I may know what I want to say, but I’m always afraid I’ll make a mistake, and I’ll be judged.”* (FGD #1 participant).

Fear of criticism and rigid social hierarchies can hinder self-expression and contribute to feelings of isolation. At school, some students expressed a desire for more open dialogue and collaborative learning environments, where they feel their voices are heard and valued. While many appreciate structured guidance and discipline, others noted that strict hierarchies in the classroom sometimes make it difficult to express their ideas freely.

At the same time, **confidence** plays a crucial role in students’ ability to assert themselves and pursue their goals. One student noted, *“If you don’t feel confident, then you basically live with the thought that you can’t do anything.”* (FGD #5 participant).

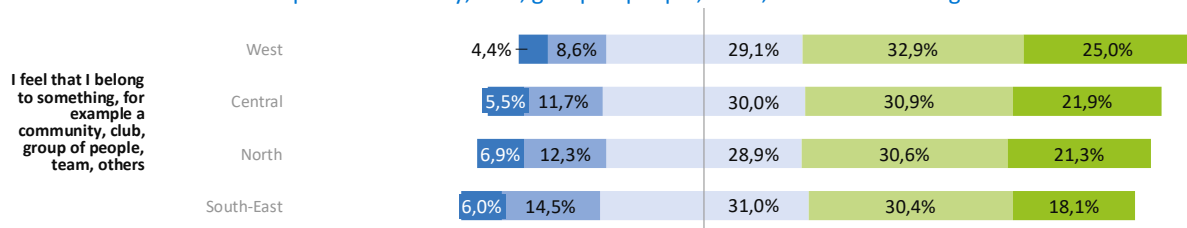
Demographic and vulnerability factors in the Social Connectivity driver

While social connectivity is a key driver of meaning, certain demographic and vulnerability factors shape how students experience relationships, belonging, and support. Regional disparities, disability status, and other social factors influence students' ability to form strong connections, access support networks, and feel valued within their communities.

One of the most pronounced gaps in social connectivity is the low sense of belonging to communities, clubs, or peer groups across the entire student sample. This statement score also differs by region, with students in western Ukraine reporting relatively higher levels of belonging, while those in the South-East—where more than 20 percent of students (225 respondents) do not feel part of any group—report the lowest levels. This disparity may stem from the war’s

disproportionate impact on this region, as well as broader social and economic factors that affect community engagement.

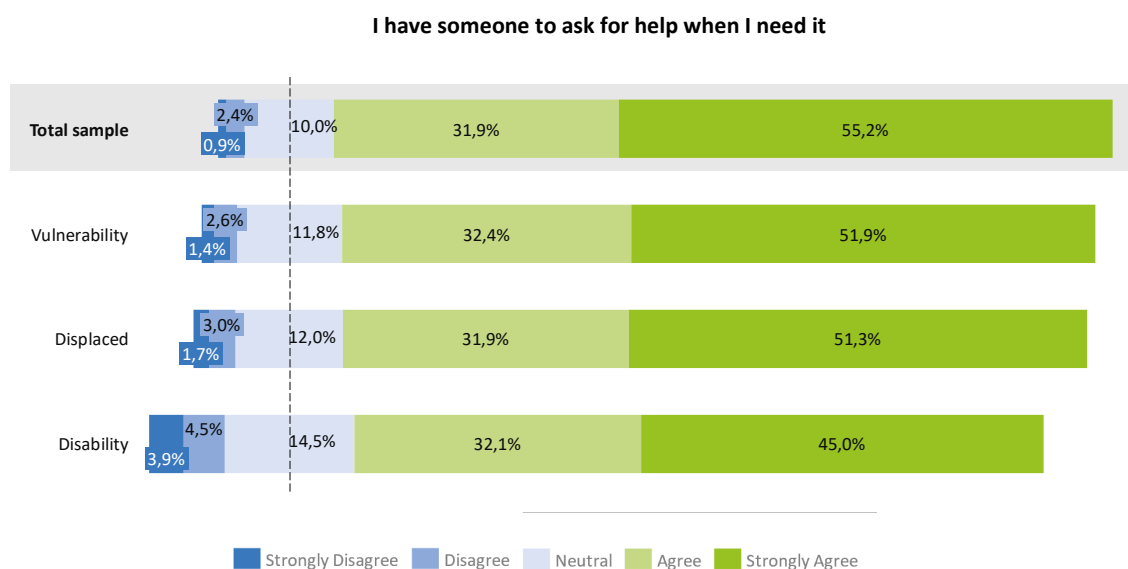
Figure 19. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I feel that I belong to something, for example a community, club, group of people, team, others” across regions



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Students with disabilities are significantly less likely to have someone to turn to for help. In response to the statement ***"I have someone to ask for help when I need it,"*** nearly one in four students with disabilities (23 percent or 237 students) disagreed, remained neutral, or strongly disagreed, compared to only 12.9 percent in the total sample (2,981 students).

Figure 20. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I have someone to ask for help when I need it” across vulnerability groups

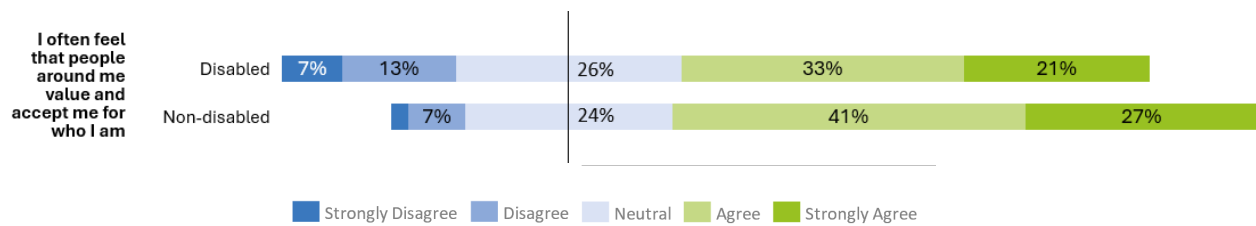


Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Moreover, **students with disabilities feel less accepted and valued.** When asked whether they feel valued and accepted by those around them, noticeable differences emerge between disabled and non-disabled respondents. Among students with disabilities, 20 percent (207 respondents) disagreed with this statement compared to nine percent of non-disabled students (1,730 respondents).

These findings suggest that students with disabilities face greater barriers in forming connections, which may lead to social isolation, lower confidence, and reduced participation in school and extracurricular activities. Without strong social networks, these students may struggle more with identity formation and emotional resilience, making it crucial to enhance inclusive practices, peer support, and mentorship programs.

Figure 21. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I often feel that people around me value and accept me for who I am” by disability status



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

While social connectivity is the strongest driver of meaningfulness for Ukrainian youth, students still struggle with physical or emotional distance from parents, role models, and their communities. Vulnerable youth face additional barriers to integration, acceptance, and support. As adolescents seek both connection and independence, fostering inclusive environments, open communication, mentorship, and community engagement can help strengthen their sense of meaning and well-being.

Physical and Cognitive Engagement

Beyond social connections, engagement in activities that promote learning, creativity, and physical well-being plays a crucial role in shaping students' sense of meaning. Ukrainian youth find personal growth and fulfillment in activism, volunteering, and self-development, while hobbies, sports, and creative pursuits contribute to resilience and emotional balance.

However, barriers such as rigid school curricula, lack of practical and interactive learning opportunities, and war-related disruptions limit students' ability to fully engage in activities that challenge them intellectually and physically.

Physical and Cognitive Engagement as a driver of meaningfulness

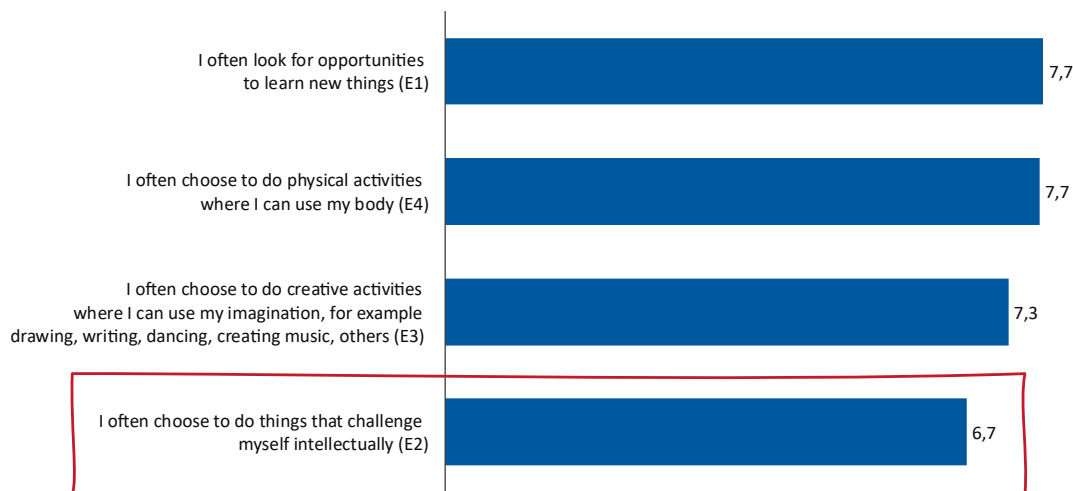
When speaking about activities that provide them with a sense of meaningfulness, students mentioned a wide range of diverse pursuits. During the FGDs, many highlighted the importance of activities related to personal growth, self-improvement, and fields of activity directly relevant to their future. These include participation in various events, activism, and community involvement. Students emphasize that such activities not only contribute to their **development** and **help define their life goals** but also allow them to become role models and sources of inspiration for their future children and the whole society.

As one respondent shared, “For about a year now, I've been an activist and community worker, and my summer was filled with attending events, learning, and growing about three times a week. It gave me a sense of meaning because I felt like I was developing myself and moving toward becoming a role model for my future children and possibly for society.” (FGD #1 participant). Students also mentioned volunteering, creative activities, hobbies, and time spent with friends as key sources of meaning. The desire to **step beyond one's comfort zone** and **continuously learn** is a central theme in their reflections.

Physical and Cognitive Engagement statement scores

Compared to other meaningfulness drivers, students score relatively high in Physical and Cognitive Engagement, indicating an overall willingness to learn and participate in activities that promote self-improvement. However, not all forms of engagement are equally accessible or prioritized. The lowest scoring statement in this driver is “**I often choose to do things that challenge myself intellectually**” (6,7). While students are eager to learn, qualitative responses indicate that they may feel discouraged by the way information is presented, preferring more interactive and practical lessons. It may also reflect the academic workload in high school, which can limit students' motivation to take on additional intellectual challenges.

Figure 22. Scores of Physical and Cognitive Engagement statements



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Self-development is an essential component of success and personal impact

Students view **self-development and pursuing one's passion** as key elements of a meaningful life. They associate it with a better future, financial independence, and the ability to challenge themselves.

Students underscored the significance of stepping beyond one's comfort zone to foster personal development: *"renewing yourself every time, going beyond your comfort zone and further developing yourself as a person"*, as one FGD participant put it (FGD #2 participant). A student who participated in another FGD stressed the importance of intellectual curiosity: *"One should study, one should read interesting literature, learn history, learn languages, be with interesting people, attend interesting events."* (FGD #3 participant).

"For me, what is very important in meaningfulness is self-development and free time for yourself and for hobbies, for what you are interested in doing, for some passions."

FGD #4 participant

Helping others increases sense of meaning

For many students, a meaningful life is about making a **positive impact**. Several respondents describe volunteering, civic engagement, and helping others as key sources of fulfillment. *"You only have one life, and you have to live it to the fullest, because there won't be another like it"* (FGD #1 participant).

Several students mentioned **volunteering** and participating in student parliaments or other initiatives. For them, such engagement is a way to make a positive impact on their community and their country. One student shared her experience volunteering for vulnerable children and talked about the value it brings for her: *"When I volunteer for children who, for various reasons, lack parental care, I truly feel that my life is meaningful. Firstly, I help others find love and warmth, and secondly, I do it sincerely and consciously, which makes it so valuable to me. Volunteering is a two-way experience: for us, it's emotional because we are engaged and helping, and for those children, it's communication, experience, and positive emotions."* (Interview with female student, 15, Cherkaska oblast).

Within the context of the ongoing war, some students are channeling engagement through support for the military – raising money for equipment for Ukrainian soldiers or making makeshift trench candles for them. This brings them the feeling that their contribution is meaningful and helps protect their country.

"We worked so hard, came up with ideas, sold baked goods, drawings, and made things ourselves..."

And then, when we saw that we had raised
a significant amount for the military,
I truly felt that it mattered. That was such a strong feeling,
like this is it—this is the meaning, this is real life.”

Interview with female student, 15, Kyiv city

Volunteering and civic engagement bring students closer to their communities and strengthen their sense of belonging. One student described her happiness and sense of purpose after becoming president of a school organization: *“I joined a group of like-minded people, we worked on the same cause, had a shared goal, and I was very happy because I found my people.”* (Interview with female student, 16, Kyiv city). This example underscores the importance of self-realization and participation in meaningful collective initiatives.

Meaningful activities do not need to be big to make an impact. Students also see value in smaller and personal gestures that make the world around them better.

“I believe that a meaningful life involves
constant self-discovery, development,
and finding ways to do something useful for the world.
These are not necessarily big things –
it can be caring for loved ones, helping others,
and even just wanting to leave a slightly brighter place behind.”

Interview with male student, 17, Kyivska oblast

However, while qualitative insights highlight the role of community engagement in driving meaning, **not all students have access to these opportunities**. The students who participated in FGDs and KIIs were either actively involved in the research process or selected from ASPnet schools, meaning they may be more civically engaged than the broader survey sample.

Survey results on social connectivity show lower levels of youth engagement in community groups and perceptions of belonging, suggesting that many students lack accessible pathways to participate in structured initiatives. Expanding extracurricular opportunities, volunteering programs, and peer-driven engagement could help ensure that more youth experience the benefits of meaningful social participation.

Hobbies and sports contribute to a well-rounded life

Beyond structured engagement, students find meaning in personal hobbies, creative expression, and sports. Many describe activities such as music, dance, chess, and athletics as essential to their emotional balance and self-confidence.

“For me, it’s swimming. Although I used to hate it because my parents made me do it, now it gives me a sense that I’ve overcome many challenges, and it pushes me forward. Quitting swimming would feel like leaving a puzzle incomplete; it would break my heart.” (FGD #1 participant).

Even everyday tasks, like studying, participating in school parliament, or doing household chores, are important for young people, giving them a chance to take ownership of something and to enjoy their work. As one student commented, *“I really enjoy working in our school parliament. I’m the secretary, and I love writing minutes, helping event organizers, and even preparing reports for the school president... This gives me real joy.”* (FGD #5 participant).

Barriers for engagement and need for guidance

The ongoing war has created physical and emotional obstacles to engagement, with students frequently mentioning air raid alarms, stress from displacement, and direct exposure to conflict as limiting factors. *“For many, it can be a stressful situation when the alarm sounds. And it’s even worse if a person has experienced some more serious events, like*

occupation. I have a cousin, grandmother, grandfather, and they are from Bucha. For them it is of course a huge trigger.” (FGD #3 participant).

Students feel restricted by rigid academic structures, which do not allow flexibility in choosing subjects or focusing on their interests. Many advocate for a more personalized approach to education that includes practical life skills such as financial literacy and career planning. “A person should have a chance to change something, to learn something. For example, today I want to specialize in humanities, tomorrow, in sciences. We cannot do it, because here you do not influence it in any way. I just want to have a chance to influence something.” (FGD #1 participant).

Students also emphasize the importance of interactive learning, including VR-based lessons, workshops, and hands-on projects, to make education more engaging and applicable to real life. Students mentioned the LUMY-UA project as an example of such an opportunity for interactive learning:

“Here we can express our thoughts, express our views, and have fun, and get a lot of new, extremely useful knowledge. And this is not at all like any lessons in secondary schools. This is really a very cool example of modern, probably very useful positive activities that could be continued.”

FGD #4 participant

Finally, many young people lack structured guidance on how to apply their skills or choose a career path.

“I really lack opportunities to try myself. It's not that often that you get a chance to try yourself, for example, in some profession or in some field of study. I would like schools, various organizations, etc. to provide more opportunities for teenagers to try themselves in different fields.”

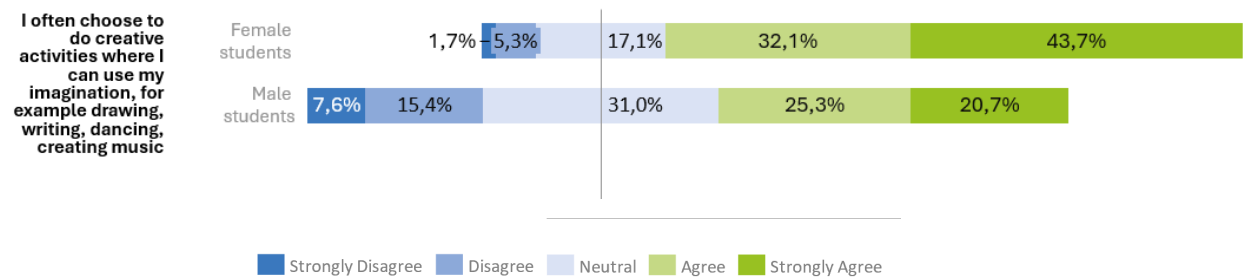
Interview with female student, 15, Kyiv city

Students need support on how to best apply their efforts and more structured and accessible opportunities for their career and civic engagement. A student who participated in the survey said, “I don't even have enough time to understand myself and what I want to do in the future. I think some development programs could help by suggesting the places to obtain higher education and if these places offer any advantages for the truly active, conscious and caring youth.” (Female student, 16, Kyiv city).

Demographic and vulnerability factors in the Physical and Cognitive Engagement driver

Female students are significantly more likely to engage in creative activities than their male peers. Among female students, 76 percent (9,874 students) report frequently engaging in creative activities such as drawing, writing, dancing, or creating music, compared to just 46 percent (4,388 respondents) of male students. The difference between those who expressed strong agreement with this statement is especially pronounced, with almost 44 percent of female students (5,693 respondents) strongly agreeing, which is more than double the share of approximately 21 percent of male students (1,977 respondents) who report the same. This indicates a higher level of uncertainty or disinterest in creative pursuits among boys, while girls are more likely to participate in activities where they use their imagination and talents.

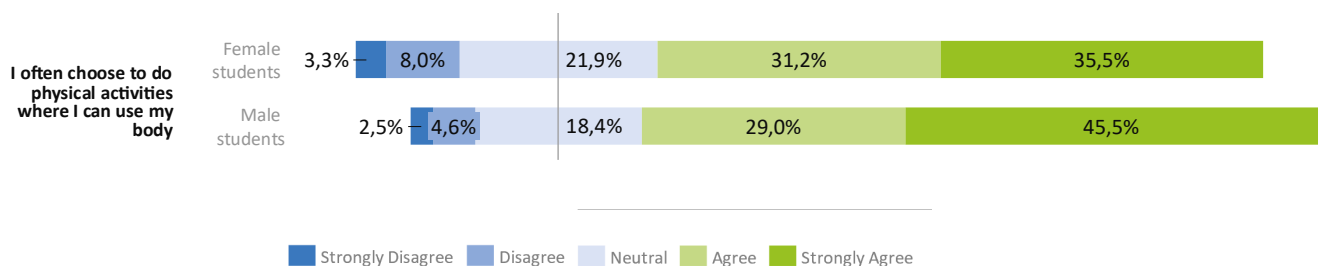
Figure 23. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I often choose to do creative activities where I can use my imagination, for example drawing, writing, dancing, creating music, others” by gender



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

On the other hand, **male students are more likely to engage in activities that involve physical movement** (74.5 percent, or 6,845 respondents, compared to 67 percent, or 8,385 respondents, of female students). This suggests that boys have higher overall enthusiasm for physical activities and may be more inclined to use sports or exercise as an outlet for stress relief and relaxation.

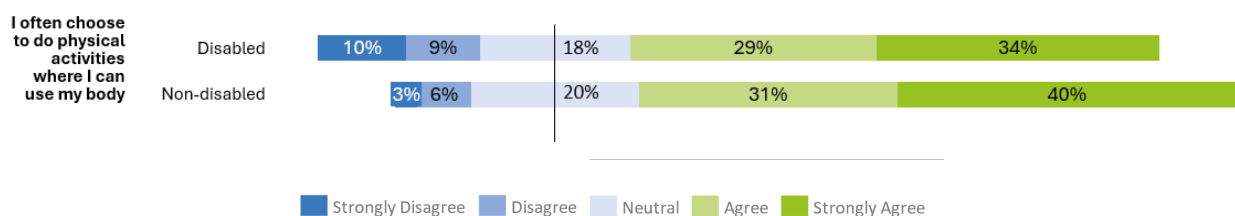
Figure 24. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I often choose to do physical activities where I can use my body” by gender



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Engagement in physical activities also varies for students with disabilities. While 71 percent of students without disabilities (13,991 respondents) often participate in physical activities, only 63 percent of individuals with disabilities (144 respondents) do so. Lower participation among disabled individuals may be caused by health limitations and physical constraints, but also possibly by accessibility or economic issues.

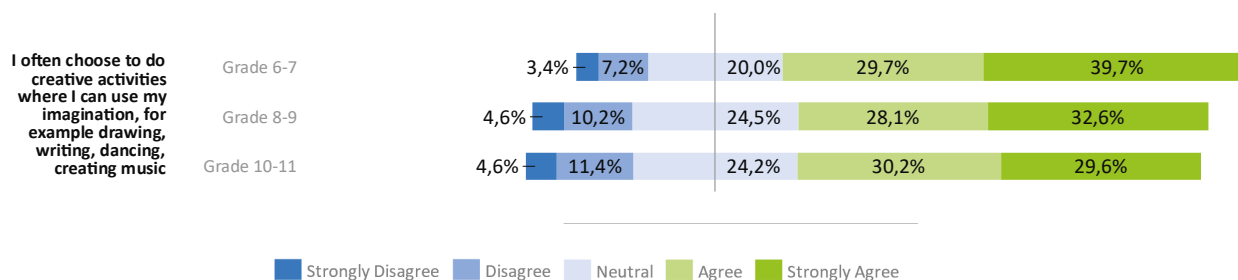
Figure 25. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I often choose to do physical activities where I can use my body” by disability status



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Participation in creative activities diminishes as students get older. Almost 70 percent of the students in the 6th and 7th grades group (5,073 respondents) report engaging in such activities often, while for those in the 8th grade and higher this share falls to less than 61 percent (5,194 respondents in the 8th and 9th grades group and 3,995 respondents in the 10th and 11th grades group). Increasing academic demands and preparation for exams may lead to a reduction in time and motivation for creative pursuits for older students.

Figure 26. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I often choose to do creative activities where I can use my imagination, for example drawing, writing, dancing, creating music, others” across school grades



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Purpose

Students consider having clear life goals as essential for a meaningful life. For them, **purpose is not just about having dreams but taking deliberate steps to achieve them**. Yet, instability and uncertainty caused by the war make long-term planning difficult, highlighting the key role of a **stable home and school environment** in enhancing students' ability to pursue their purpose. Conversations with mentors and peers support students in articulating and reaching their goals. Female students tend to reflect on their future aspirations more than male students, while disabled students face more barriers in taking active steps toward their goals despite having strong motivation.

Purpose as an aspect of meaningfulness

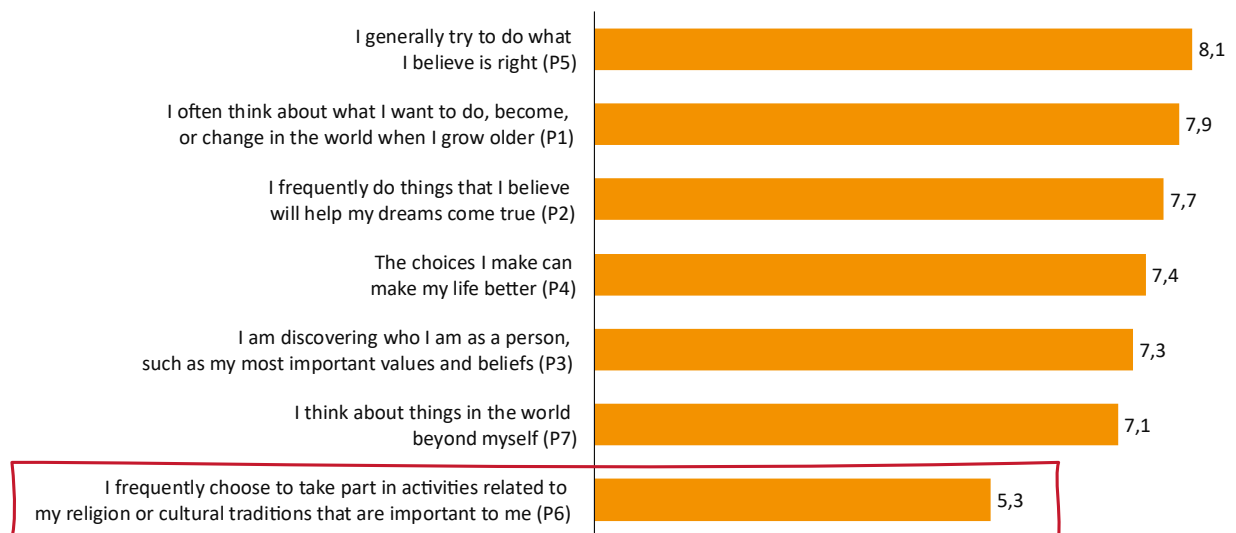
Students consistently emphasized the importance of having a **clear purpose and specific goals** for a meaningful life. One student who participated in an FGD described it this way: *“Without a plan in life, without goals, it is very difficult to live. That is, you are simply moving nowhere. Still, there must be some incentive, some motivation, goals to direct yourself and reach some heights.”* (FGD #4 participant). Another FGD participant remarked, *“If you have something to live for, you will try to live worthily,”* (FGD #1 participant), reflecting the idea that purpose motivates **ethical and meaningful living**.

Purpose statement scores

Most surveyed students say they generally try to do what they believe to be right and often think about their plans for when they grow older. These statements score the highest in the Purpose driver of the YMI. At the same time, **less than 30 percent of students (6,756 respondents) report taking part in activities related to their religion or cultural traditions that are important for them**, with this statement scoring significantly lower than others within the Purpose driver (score: 5.3).

The lower engagement in religious and cultural traditions may reflect shifting generational values, secularization, or limited opportunities to participate due to displacement and conflict. It may also suggest that while students have a strong personal sense of purpose, they lack the ways to share it with others by engaging in activities that are meaningful for their communities.

Figure 27. Scores of Purpose statements



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Purpose and action

For students, achieving their life goals is closely connected with **self-development and self-discipline**. When discussing purpose, they mention self-realization, good education and job, independence, and ability to find one's own path.

Students who participated in FGDs emphasized that life goals must not only exist but also be actionable. One of them explained, *"For a meaningful life, you need to have a specific goal to which you need to go. That is, not just having a goal and doing nothing for it. You need to have a goal and do something to implement it,"* (FGD #3 participant) pointing out the necessity of taking **deliberate steps toward achievement**. Another FGD participant emphasized that goals do not make sense without plans to achieve them: *"Just having goals and not having any way to achieve them, well, that's a bit pointless, I think."* (FGD #3 participant).

Students also often mentioned the importance of having a dream as well as doing something you love, such as a dream job or a hobby. They highlighted how engaging in meaningful work or hobbies inspires personal growth and contributes to overall happiness. Some students shared that they aspire to identify and pursue their **"life's work"** – the activity that stems from their purpose and makes life meaningful.

**"Your life's work is what inspires you
to keep moving forward and to grow in this
and other areas. It gives you positive emotions,
which are very important in life."**

FGD #6 participant

Taking steps to achieve their goals increases the self-confidence of the students. One FGD participant said that tackling challenges makes him more confident: *"If you're not sure, you're more likely to be afraid and say, no, I don't want to do that, so I won't do it, and you stay put. But if you're sure and understand that it might give you some chance, then you go, do it, and you even feel better somehow afterwards"* (FGD #5 participant).

One FGD participant shared her opinion that confidence increases when doing something that brings one closer to one's goals. This, in her view, requires self-awareness – understanding what a person really wants: purpose should reflect one's true self. Another FGD participant expressed a similar opinion, reflecting on how understanding oneself leads to inner harmony: *"[For] harmony with oneself, it is necessary to understand the reasons for one's actions, to build cause-and-effect relationships, and to do self-reflection on what we do in order to realize what exactly caused such actions, to know one's true rhythm"* (FGD #6 participant).

In addition to following one's dreams and passions, the students who participated in FGDs highlighted the importance of self-discipline, responsibility, and making a positive impact on society. One respondent (FGD #1 participant) stated, *"The key component to a meaningful life is not putting everything off until tomorrow and having discipline,"* reflecting the belief that purposeful living requires structure and proactive effort. Having self-discipline was also seen as necessary for achieving personal success in life. Furthermore, students discussed the importance of learning from their mistakes – to understand what they did wrong and to learn from it.

Stability as a prerequisite for achieving goals

Stability and a sense of security are critical for enhancing purpose and overall meaningfulness. Presence of a permanent places – home, school – increases confidence in the future, which helps the students focus on achieving their purpose. Surveyed students expressed the wish to have *"a permanent place of residence, stability in general"* (male student, 14, Cherkaska oblast) and *"greater stability and confidence in the future"* (female student, 16, Chernihivska oblast).

However, uncertainty, such as doubts about living through tomorrow due to war, significantly diminishes the sense of stability. This makes it hard to make plans and may shift the attention of Ukrainian youth towards short-term results which appear more realistic. As one student explained, *"Now, during the war, you never know what might happen tomorrow, and there is no certainty that I will definitely graduate from school, I will definitely go to university, and there is no way to predict things now, and therefore I have no purpose or meaning."* (Interview with female student, 15, Donetsk oblast).

With schools damaged due to hostilities, students lack a permanent place to study and host extra-curricular activities. This inhibits their learning and creative pursuits.

**"On March 4, 2022, a Russian missile hit my school,
and our lyceum has not been rebuilt yet.
So, together with other students,
we need to move between different buildings,
and it turns out to be a big problem for both students
and teachers. Since we live on borrowed ground,
we are based in another lyceum but still function
as our school. There are certain boundaries,
certain barriers, because you can't express yourself freely,
you constantly must ask for permission,
constantly beg for a hall, for something."**

FGD #2 participant

The impact of war on the ordinary life of the students can be also felt in the regions of Ukraine located further from the frontlines, where schools still need to take safety measures, which interrupts studies and after-school activities. A participant of an FGD described how it impacts their daily life: *"Every alarm message, every strike, every missile, it changes everything. There's a direct connection, and if you break that thread, not only will one end fall, but also the other. We had plans, we had rehearsals, and then – bam – an alarm, and that's it, you can't do anything, and your efforts, like that thread, fall down. That's what war is like."* (FGD #2 participant).

Mentorship and shared sense of purpose

Self-doubt and lack of guidance may keep students from realizing their potential. One student who participated in an FGD said, *"The hardest thing is to overcome yourself. Sometimes doubts arise: is it even worth doing this, does it make sense to continue? And you constantly get caught up in thoughts that make it difficult to focus on one thing."* (FGD #1 participant)

At the same time, conversations with teachers, peers, or individuals who share similar interests and goals can enhance meaningfulness by providing guidance, shared experiences, and a sense of purpose. Through **mentorship** and connections, like-minded people can help students articulate their goals and provide support in implementing them.

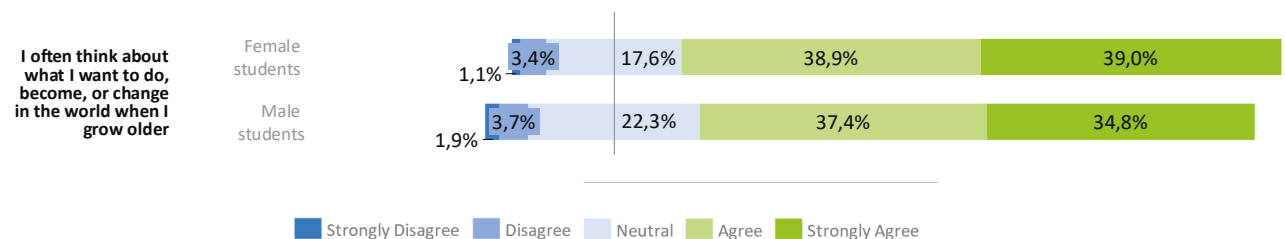
One student shared, “Having mentors is a cool idea. So that every teenager is able to talk to a grown up and educated person who can inspire them. But not with parents!” (Interview with female student, 15, Cherkaska oblast). This points to the importance of establishing mentorship programs, fostering peer support opportunities, and helping students build resilience and overcome self-doubt.

Demographic and vulnerability factors in the Purpose driver

Female students show greater reflection on their future aspirations and impact compared to male students. When asked whether they often think about what they want to do, become, or change in the world when they grow older, **female students report slightly higher levels of reflection than their male peers.**

78 percent of female students (10,325 respondents) agree with this statement, compared to 72 percent of male students (7,025 respondents). This suggests that female students are somewhat more likely to engage in forward-thinking about their future aspirations and societal impact and may have slightly stronger inclination toward goal setting compared to their male peers.

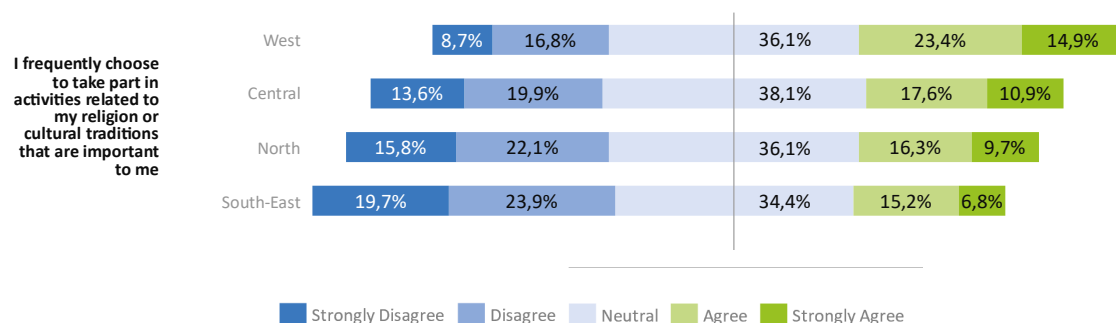
Figure 28. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I often think about what I want to do, become, or change in the world when I grow older” by gender



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

While the surveyed students in total demonstrate low participation in religious or cultural traditions, their **level of participation distinctly differs across regions.** These practices are more common in the western regions of Ukraine, where more than 38 percent of students (1,817) confirmed they take part in such activities and are least likely to be present in the lives of the students living in the South-East, where this share is 22 percent (240 respondents).

Figure 29. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I frequently choose to take part in activities related to my religion or cultural traditions that are important to me” by macro-region



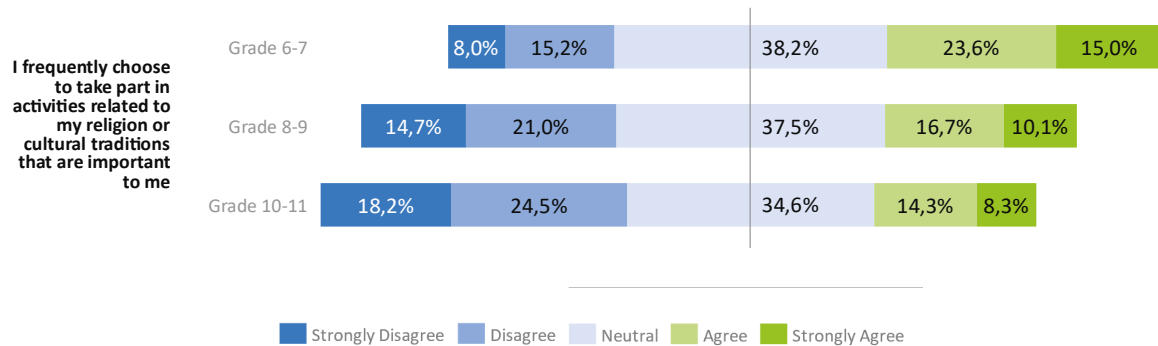
Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

This may result from historical processes, such as secularization and urbanization, which happened unevenly across the territory of Ukraine. The ongoing war may also be a factor in this disparity, as it limits mass gatherings in the regions close to the frontline and causes displacement, disrupting youth’s ties with their communities.

Participation in activities related to religion or cultural traditions also decreases as students get older, reflecting the diminishing connection with their families and communities. While more than 38 percent of 6th- and 7th-graders (2,884

respondents) report taking part in such activities, for students in grade 8 and higher, this share drops to less than 27 percent (2,332 respondents in the 8th and 9th grades group and 1,540 respondents in the 10th and 11th grades group). This may be another evidence of the trend towards individualization among young people as they may be increasingly focusing on their personal goals and values with traditional forms of religious and cultural engagement losing their relevance for youth.

Figure 30. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I frequently choose to take part in activities related to my religion or cultural traditions that are important to me” across school grades

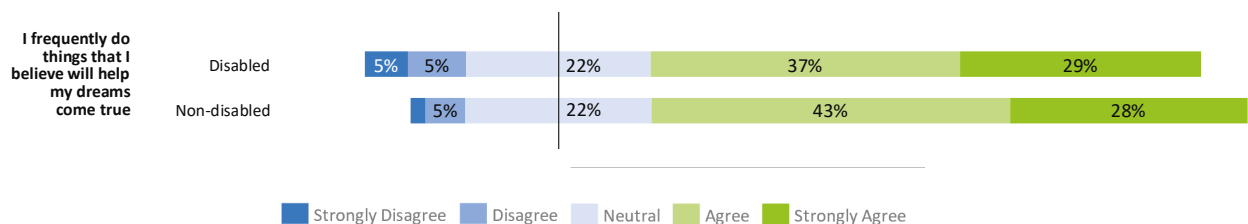


Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Disabled students are less likely to actively engage in steps toward their aspirations. When asked whether they frequently take actions to help their dreams come true, respondents with disabilities report higher levels of disagreement (10 percent, or 97 respondents) compared to non-disabled individuals (less than five percent, or 854 respondents).

These findings suggest that while the overall motivation to pursue dreams remains high in both groups, disabled individuals are slightly less likely to actively engage in steps toward their aspirations. This may indicate additional barriers in opportunity, accessibility, or confidence that could hinder their pursuit of personal goals.

Figure 31. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I frequently do things that I believe will help my dreams come true” by disability status



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Self-care

While the self-care driver scores lower than others, self-care is essential for maintaining **balance and well-being**. Ukrainian students recognize the importance of rest, physical and mental health, and managing stress, but **struggle to prioritize these needs** due to academic pressures and the uncertainty caused by war.

While they take time for fun and relaxation, intentional stress management and connection with nature are often overlooked, highlighting gaps in their ability to fully practice self-care.

Self-care as a driver of meaningfulness

Students emphasize the need for **balance between studies, responsibilities, and personal well-being**. Many believe that adequate rest, physical activity, and emotional well-being are key to leading a healthy and meaningful life.

One student described the consequences of neglecting self-care, sharing the story of a classmate who was hospitalized due to exhaustion after excessive studying for end-of-year exams (FGD #4). This illustrates the importance of **balancing**

productivity with self-care, rather than pushing oneself to the point of burnout. Another student emphasized effective time management and planning since in her view both too little and too much free time disrupt harmony in life.

Adequate sleep, physical activity, and healthy nutrition were seen by the students as key elements of their overall health. Some connected healthy lifestyle to **mental health and self-confidence**, seeing physical and mental health as necessary for confidence.

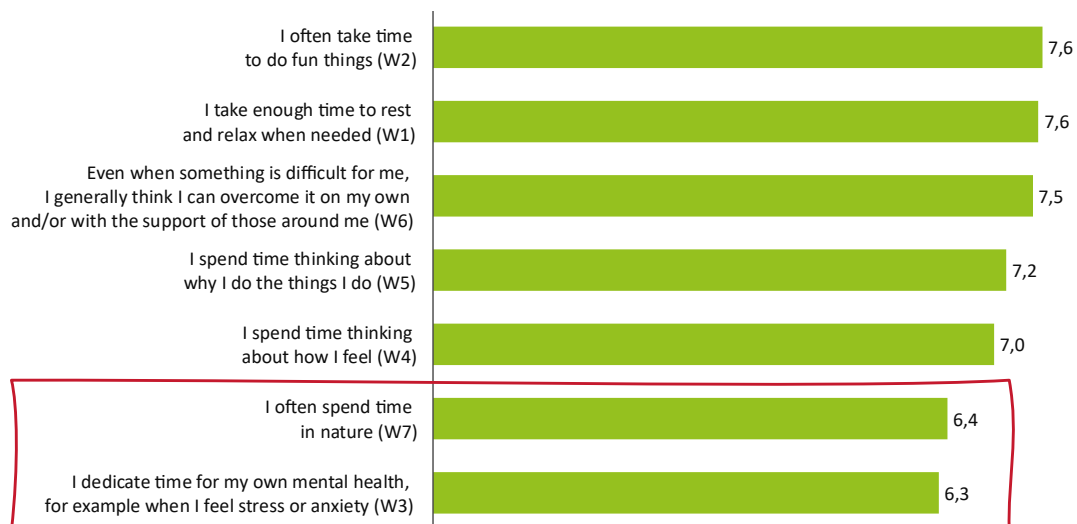
One student stressed that good health simplifies life but is not enough for a meaningful life, saying that it must be complemented by moments of happiness to create true meaning. Students also identified free time and leisure as significant components of life that ensure balance.

Self-care statements scores

The highest scoring statements in the Self-care factor reflect the fact that the surveyed students take time to rest and do something fun. The statements ***“I often take time to do fun things”*** and ***“I take enough time to rest and relax when needed”*** both scored 7.6 points with the statement ***“Even when something is difficult for me, I generally think I can overcome it on my own and/or with the support of those around me”*** coming close with 7.5 points.

Conversely, the statements ***“I dedicate time for my own mental health, for example when I feel stress or anxiety”*** and ***“I often spend time in nature”*** scored the lowest with 6.3 and 6.4 points respectively. This suggests that everyday rest and fun may be more accessible to schoolchildren in Ukraine than being in the nature or addressing their mental health needs. The latter activities not only may take more time but require more intentionality as students need to be able to calm down and change the focus of their attention towards their inner state or to the world around them.

Figure 32. Scores of Physical and Cognitive Engagement statements



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

Rest and relaxation are key elements of self-care

Students understand the value of balancing responsibilities with leisure. Time outside of school is spent on self-reflection and personal growth.

“Trips, moments when I'm alone at home, and generally a quiet, calm atmosphere are when I can dedicate my time to myself, and this is a very good moment to think about a solution to some situation or even just for thinking about who you are and why you're here.”

Interview with female student, 15, Ivano-Frankivska oblast

For some students, meaningfulness is found in moments of **connection with nature** or with **important people** in their lives. Another student described it like this: *“Especially when I visit my father in Montenegro, surrounded by mountains, I understand my purpose in life. Also, when I spend time with friends or family, my life feels meaningful.”* (Interview with female student, 15, Cherkaska oblast). This emphasizes the importance of simple yet profound connections with nature and loved ones.

Challenges to balancing rest and responsibilities

However, many students **struggle with time management, and feel overwhelmed** by school and extracurricular demands, which leaves little room for self-care.

“I don't feel like I have time for anything other than my lessons. I barely have time to do homework, play sports, dance, and for other hobbies, so I remember about having rest only on weekends when I don't have the energy to do anything.”

Female survey respondent, 15, Kyiv city

This sentiment was present in comments by many other students, highlighting the challenges they face when balancing growing demands at school. *“I don't know how to manage my time; deadlines are constantly looming. This leads to demotivation, and I just want to escape into an empty world without worries,”* shared one of them (male student, 16, Lvivska oblast). Another student, discussing what she needs to increase meaningfulness in her life, said, *“Resources and free time. Because with all this homework... It's not even about growing internally, sometimes you can't even get enough sleep!”* (Interview with female student, 15, Cherkaska oblast).

The war in Ukraine adds stress and uncertainty to the everyday lives of students, raising their safety concerns and shifting priorities towards meeting more basic needs. One student who participated in an FGD said, *“Since the war started, everyone's values in life have probably changed. What used to be ordinary, I don't know, a piece of bread, has become so valuable. For example, before, when planes flew, it was normal, but after the war started, when a plane flies, everyone looks at it with fear because it could be an enemy plane.”* (FGD #4 participant).

Students say that they have started to value “each day” and “time with loved ones” more. One of them remarked, *“I think, like all Ukrainians, I realized that it is important to appreciate simple things, to appreciate every day, every minute.”* (Interview with female student, 16, Kyiv city), which emphasizes the deep realization of the unpredictability of the future and the importance of moments that may seem trivial in peacetime.

When daily survival is a valid concern, self-care may come as secondary, reducing students' ability to engage in restorative activities and contributing to chronic stress, fatigue, and burnout. This highlights the need for ensuring access of Ukrainian schoolchildren to psychosocial support services, providing them with opportunities to relax and reconnect with nature, and fostering peer support networks where students can share experiences and coping strategies.

Focus on physical and mental health

Commenting on the essential elements for meaningful life, many students named a healthy lifestyle, including adequate sleep, physical activity, balanced nutrition, and reduced screen time. One student remarked, *“Your emotional state, mood, and productivity depend on sleep. And even our desire to live, well, to live this life.”* (FGD #4 participant). Students also noted the importance of **avoiding harmful habits**, such as drinking and smoking, to enhance life quality and longevity.

In addition to physical health, students stressed the significance of **mental health**, emphasizing relaxation, spending time alone, and engaging in activities like music to relieve stress. A participant shared how playing the piano creates a sense of freedom for her amid the continuing war in Ukraine: *“I start playing, and I don't have any thoughts, like, something will happen tomorrow, something is bad. I just play, and this feeling becomes a kind of freedom.”* (FGD #5 participant).

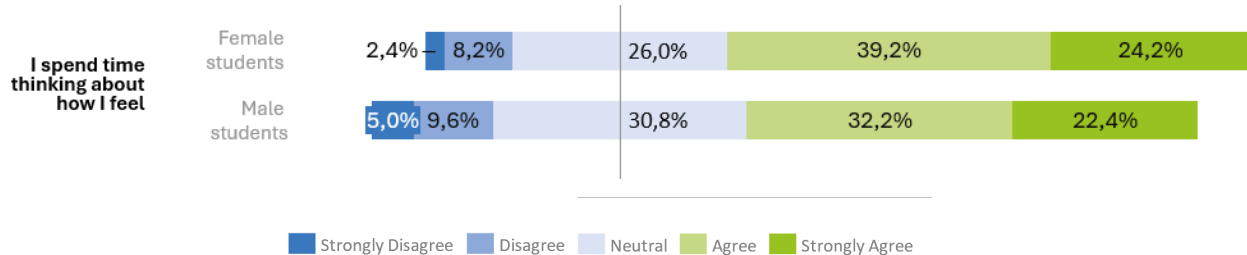
The students also appreciated happiness, comfort, and daily pleasures, such as good meals, adequate sleep, and kind gestures. One FGD participant shared, “*I always feel very pleased when someone wishes me a good day in the morning. Then my day always becomes perfect*” (FGD #4 participant). Comfort was seen as a lifestyle encompassing financial stability, health, and fulfilling work, as well as the freedom to be yourself and not afraid to express yourself.

Self-awareness, gratitude and appreciation of what you already have was viewed as a key element for meaningfulness, too, with one student noting, “*A person cannot live meaningfully if they do not understand that everything around us, the fact that we have the chance to live – we should be grateful for it. And I believe that if a person realizes this, then they will live their life even better, even more meaningfully*” (FGD #5 participant).

Demographic and vulnerability factors in the Self-care driver

Female students more regularly engage in emotional reflection than male ones. Across both gender groups, a significant number of students report reflecting on their emotions, though females show slightly higher participation. A combined 63.4 percent of female students (8,095 respondents) report frequent or very frequent introspection, compared to less than 55 percent of males (5,119 respondents). These distinctions are likely rooted in differences in socialization of girls and boys or their specific emotional processing patterns. Encouraging male students to engage in self-reflection could help foster their emotional awareness and support their overall well-being.

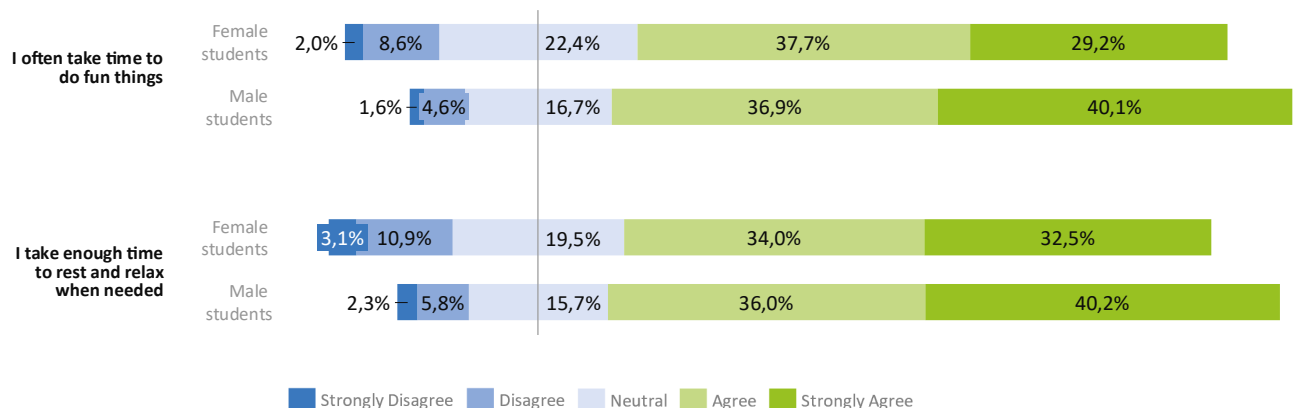
Figure 33. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “I spend time thinking about how I feel” by gender



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

On the other hand, **male students are more likely to engage in enjoyable or relaxing activities.** Firstly, male students are more likely to take time for enjoyable activities compared to their female peers (77 percent, or 7,228 respondents, compared to 67 percent, or 8,544). Secondly, male students report higher levels of taking sufficient time to rest and relax when needed, with 76 percent of them (7,152 respondents) either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the relevant statement, compared to 66.5 percent (8,505) of female students.

Figure 34. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statements “I often take time to do fun things” and “I take enough time to rest and relax when needed” by gender



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

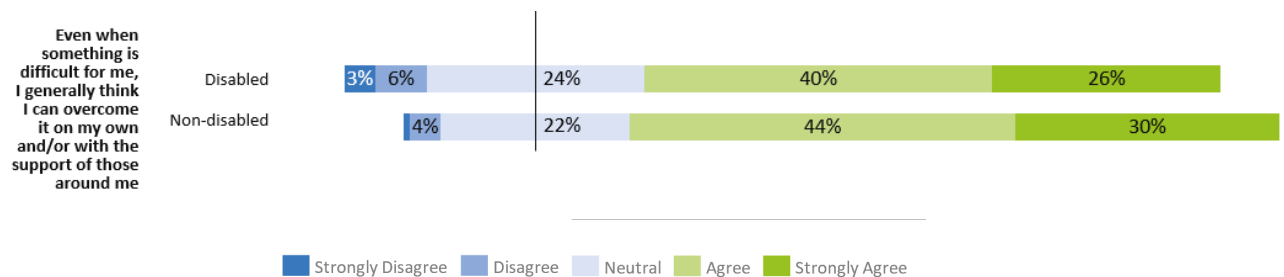
These findings suggest that boys and girls reflect the differences in their socialization regarding the balance between studying or working on the one hand and leisure and personal time on the other hand. The fact that girls manage to allocate less time for rest could mean that they face higher social expectations regarding performance at school,

helping around the house, caring for family members, and performing other tasks. Raising awareness about gender roles and work-life balance can help students recognize and challenge these expectations, while creating a school environment that values both academic achievement and well-being can help balance these competing demands.

Disabled students express less confidence in overcoming challenges. While the data indicate a predominantly optimistic mindset among Ukrainian youth in overcoming challenges on their own or with support of those around them, there is a noticeable gap between disabled and non-disabled students in their perceived ability to overcome challenges. 66 percent of disabled students (657 respondents) expressed confidence in overcoming difficulties, whereas among non-disabled students this share is higher: 74 percent (13,762 respondents).

This gap suggests that disabled students could be more exposed to a variety of impediments, such as limited accessibility, societal biases, or more frequent stress, which can impact their self-confidence and contribute to developing learned helplessness – decreased ability to make decisions or engage effectively in purposeful behavior after being repeatedly exposed to stressful situations beyond one’s control.⁸ Therefore, youth with disabilities may require additional support to strengthen their self-belief and coping mechanisms.

Figure 35. Percentage of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement “Even when something is difficult for me, I generally think I can overcome it on my own and/or with the support of those around me” by disability status



Data source: Measuring Meaningfulness among Ukrainian Youth survey, 2024

What drives meaningfulness: conclusions

To conclude, **social connectivity emerges as a significant driver of meaningfulness** among Ukrainian students, with strong agreement on statements related to connections with family and friends. The overwhelming majority of the students feel supported – they say that they have people who care about them and report having someone to turn to in times of need. Students frequently spend time with friends or family, reinforcing the central role of close relationships in their sense of meaning.

However, several barriers to social connectivity persist. **Physical absence of loved ones** due to military service and **communication challenges** with parents contribute to feelings of isolation, which can be exacerbated by the lack of relatable role models. Additionally, at times students experience fear of judgment, which discourages their self-expression.

Many students find meaning in **physical and cognitive engagement**, such as hobbies, sports, and participation in school governance. Volunteering enhances their connection to their communities and reinforces their belief in making a meaningful impact. They emphasize the importance of **self-development for achieving their goals** and building a better future for themselves.

Their engagement is, however, limited by the war-related **psychological and contextual challenges**. School curriculums that emphasize theoretical knowledge and are not sufficiently flexible in adapting to individual academic and personal interests also hinder students’ ability to align learning with personal goals. Many seek more **interactive and flexible learning opportunities**, as well as **guidance** on future educational and career paths.

Purpose, goals, and self-development are key elements of meaningful life for the students. They associate achieving life aspirations with self-discipline, education, and personal growth. Taking **concrete steps** toward goals enhances their confidence and sense of agency. However, barriers such as war-related instability, self-doubt, and **lack of practical**

⁸ APA Dictionary of Psychology. Learned helplessness <https://dictionary.apa.org/learned-helplessness?amp=1>

opportunities hinder long-term goal setting, underscoring the need for stable environments and mentorship opportunities for students to find their path in life.

Ukrainian students **value self-care**, emphasizing on the **balance** between academic responsibilities and personal well-being. Leisure time, sleep, physical activity, and caring about mental health are viewed as essential for a meaningful life. Still, **school demands, imperfect time management, and war-related stress** contribute to chronic fatigue and limited self-care opportunities.

While most students express confidence in their ability to navigate challenges and find support, disparities emerge, particularly among **disabled, displaced, and vulnerable students, who report weaker social connections and lower confidence in overcoming difficulties**. Notably, students with disabilities report lower levels of support and belonging, highlighting the need for more inclusive environments.

Gender-based differences are also evident across several dimensions. Female students engage more frequently in emotional reflection, creative activities, and future-oriented thinking, while male students report higher participation in physical activities, leisure, and relaxation. These patterns suggest **differences in socialization and coping strategies** that could inform interventions promoting balance, well-being, and emotional awareness for both groups.

Encouraging self-reflection, emotional resilience, and engagement in meaningful activities can support student well-being and help bridge existing disparities. Targeted initiatives, such as mentorship programs, peer networks, and increased community engagement, can ensure that young people feel empowered to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, several key areas have been identified as essential for improving the meaningful lives of young people in Ukraine. Addressing these areas will help youth feel more engaged, supported, and empowered in their communities while fostering personal growth and resilience. We have identified four focus areas with the following recommendations that outline actions that can be taken in each of them to achieve these goals:

Community support	Focus area 1: Create community safety nets and provide support to improve communication Young people, particularly those affected by displacement, war, or personal vulnerabilities, often feel isolated and seek stronger connections with their communities. To address this, it is essential to enhance integration efforts by organizing creative workshops, volunteer opportunities, sports events, and youth-led initiatives. Schools and community organizations should also provide targeted counseling and mediation services to help students navigate interpersonal conflicts and build supportive relationships with family and peers. Creating an inclusive and communicative environment will promote a sense of belonging and stability for all students.
Career guidance	Focus area 2: Strengthen mentorship, career counseling, and provide opportunities for personal growth Many students lack access to mentorship, career counseling, and vocational guidance, making it difficult for them to plan their futures effectively. Schools should allocate time within the curriculum for vocational training, internships, and volunteering, allowing students to gain practical experience in areas of interest. Additionally, fostering peer-to-peer mentorship programs and providing access to career counseling resources will help young people explore diverse career paths, build confidence, and develop skills necessary for success in the workforce.
Leadership skills	Focus area 3: Empowering students to implement their vision and providing access to experience Students have expressed a strong desire to take initiative in shaping their communities but often struggle with translating their ideas into action. Training programs in project management, leadership, and changemaking should be introduced to equip youth with the necessary skills to design and implement meaningful initiatives. Furthermore, increasing access to non-formal education opportunities—such as cultural exchanges, creative hubs, and community events—can help students build connections with experienced professionals and enhance their real-world problem-solving capabilities.
Mental health support	Focus area 4: Expand access to mental health for students ensuring sufficient time for rest and self-care The ongoing war and instability have led to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout among students, with limited opportunities for self-care. To address this, schools and community organizations should offer free mental health services, including access to therapists and peer support groups. Additionally, a culture of prioritizing mental well-being should be encouraged through curriculum adjustments that allocate time for self-care, stress management, and mindfulness activities. Ensuring that students have the resources and support needed to maintain both mental and physical health is crucial for their long-term well-being and academic success.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders—including schools and policymakers — can work towards creating a more inclusive, supportive, and empowering environment for Ukrainian youth. Investing in these areas will not only improve students' immediate well-being but will also equip them with the skills and confidence needed to shape a meaningful future.

Annexes

Distribution of the respondents

FGD participants

FGD number	Total participants	Females	Males
FGD 1	9	4	5
FGD 2	11	6	5
FGD 3	10	8	2
FGD 4	10	7	3
FGD 5	13	9	4
FGD 6	11	8	3
Total	64	42	22

KII participants

KII number	Gender	Age
KII respondent 1	Female	16
KII respondent 2	Female	15
KII respondent 3	Female	14
KII respondent 4	Female	15
KII respondent 5	Female	15
KII respondent 6	Female	15
KII respondent 7	Female	15
KII respondent 8	Female	15
KII respondent 9	Female	14
KII respondent 10	Female	13
KII respondent 11	Female	15
KII respondent 12	Female	15
KII respondent 13	Female	13

KII respondent 14	Female	13
KII respondent 15	Female	16
KII respondent 16	Female	16
KII respondent 17	Female	16
KII respondent 18	Female	16
KII respondent 19	Male	16
KII respondent 20	Female	17
KII respondent 21	Female	16
KII respondent 22	Female	16
KII respondent 23	Female	15
KII respondent 24	Female	14
KII respondent 25	Male	17
KII respondent 26	Female	14

Survey tool



Voluntās

Meaningfulness among youth

INTRODUCTION

Welcome!

You are about to be part of an important survey.

The survey includes questions to understand what you find meaningful and how you experience meaning in your life. There are no wrong answers! We will analyze the information from this survey to measure how much meaning youth are experiencing in their lives. By doing this, we will learn more about what youth like you need and want so that we can work together with influential actors to make positive changes in the world.

The answers you provide us with will be seen only by the people organizing this survey. Everything you share is completely anonymous, which means that no one will know what you have answered. So please feel free to share your thoughts honestly. Remember it is okay if you do not want to participate. The survey will take 10-20 minutes to complete. Thank you for doing this! YOU are important. Your answers will help us understand and improve the lives of young people across the world!

10 How are you filling in the survey?

- I'm filling the survey on my own (1)
- There is an adult supporting me in filling in the survey (2)

11 I understand the purpose of the survey and how my answers will be used. Hence, I would like to proceed participating in the survey

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

12 Note for adults taking the survey with children: please let the children think on their own and express their own feelings and opinions without influencing their responses

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

First, we will ask some general questions about you

Q1 What is your age?

Q2 What is your gender?

- Girl/Woman (1)
- Boy/Man (2)

Q3 In which oblast do you currently live?

Autonomous Republic of Crimea	Kirovohradska	Khersonska
Vinnytska	Luhanska	Khmelnytska
Volynska	Lvivska	Cherkaska
Dnipropetrovska	Mykolaivska	Chernivetska
Donetska	Odeska	Chernihivska
Zhytomyrska	Poltavska	Kyiv city

Zakarpatska	Rivnenska	Sevastopol city
Zaporizka	Sumska	Currently I do not live in Ukraine
Ivano-Frankivska	Ternopilska	
Kyivska	Kharkivska	

Q4 In which city do you live?**Q5 Have you been forced to change your place of residence after 02.24.2024?**

- Yes (1)
- No (4)
- Do not know / Difficult to answer (5)

Q6 In which oblast did you live before 24.02.24?

Autonomous Republic of Crimea	Kyivska	Ternopilska
Vinnytska	Kirovohradska	Kharkivska
Volynska	Luhanska	Khersonska
Dnipropetrovska	Lvivska	Khmelnytska
Donetska	Mykolaivska	Cherkaska
Zhytomyrska	Odeska	Chernivetska
Zakarpatska	Poltavska	Chernihivska
Zaporizka	Rivnenska	Kyiv city
Ivano-Frankivska	Sumska	Sevastopol city

Q7 Do you go to school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- No, I already finished school (3)

Q8 Write the number or name of your school**Q9 What grade are you in?**

1	5	9
2	6	10
3	7	11
4	8	12

Q10 What is your experience with disabilities?

- I don't have a disability (1)
- I have a physical disability, for example, a mobility, hearing, or vision disability (2)
- I have other types of disabilities, for example, a sensory disability, cognitive disability, developmental disability, or neurological disability (3)
- Do not know / Difficult to answer (4)

Q11 Do you or your family belong to any of these population groups? Select all that apply

- Orphans and children deprived of parental care (1)
- Families of servicemen directly involved in combat operations (2)
- Large families (three or more children under the age of 18) (3)
- Low-income families (4)
- I do not belong to any of these groups (5)
- Do not know / Difficult to answer (11)

STATEMENTS

In this section you will have to choose ONE of the options under each statement. Each option shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement. To make it easier, you have to think to what extent what the statement is saying is true for you.

- Strongly agree: When you completely agree with the statement.
- Agree: When you feel that statement is true but not always.
- Neutral: When you are not sure if you agree or disagree with the statement.
- Disagree: When you disagree with the statement but not completely.
- Strongly disagree: When you completely disagree with the statement

Drivers: Social Connectivity

SC1 I have people around me that care about me

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC2 I often spend time together with my friends or family

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC3 I have someone to ask for help when I need it

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC4 I often seek to be like my role model (a role model is someone you look up to)

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC5 I have someone to talk to when I am struggling emotionally

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC6 I often prioritize doing things that benefit those around me

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC7 I feel that I belong to something, for example a community, club, group of people, team, others

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC8 I often feel that people around me value and accept me for who I am

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

SC OE Are there any relationships or social connections you would like to strengthen, and what would help you do that?

Drivers: Purpose

P1 I often think about what I want to do, become, or change in the world when I grow older

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

P2 I frequently do things that I believe will help my dreams come true

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

P3 I am discovering who I am as a person, such as my most important values and beliefs

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

P4 The choices I make can make my life better

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

P5 I generally try to do what I believe is right

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

P6 I frequently choose to take part in activities related to my religion or cultural traditions that are important to me

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

P7 I think about things in the world beyond myself

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)

- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

P OE What, if anything, would help you feel a greater sense of purpose in your daily life?

Drivers: Engagement

E1 I often look for opportunities to learn new things

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

E2 I often choose to do things that challenge myself intellectually (this refers to things that challenge your brain)

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

E3 I often choose to do creative activities where I can use my imagination, for example drawing, writing, dancing, creating music, others

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

E4 I often choose to do physical activities where I can use my body

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

E OE What, if anything, could help you engage more with physical, creative, or intellectual activities?

Drivers: Self-care

W1 I take enough time to rest and relax when needed

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

W2 I often take time to do fun things

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

W3 I dedicate time for my own mental health, for example when I feel stress or anxiety

- Strongly Agree (1)
-

- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

W4 I spend time thinking about how I feel

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

W5 I spend time thinking about why I do the things I do

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

W6 Even when something is difficult for me, I generally think I can overcome it on my own and/or with the support of those around me

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

W7 I often spend time in nature

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

W OE What challenges, if any, do you face in dedicating time or resources to self-care? What would help you in overcoming these challenges?

Basic Needs**BN1 My basic needs in terms of food, clothes, clean water, education and housing are met**

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

BN2 In general, I feel safe

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

BN3 In general, I go to a doctor when I or my parents think that is needed

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neutral (3)

- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Now we will ask you two questions that you can answer however you want

OE1 What is important to you in your life?

OE2 Why is this important to you?

FEEDBACK

Thank you for answering all the questions! Now, we would like to collect your feedback on the survey

F1 Would you like to provide feedback on the survey?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

F2 Please select which statements you found confusing or difficult to understand, if any

- All statements were clear. There were no statements difficult to understand (1)
- I have people around me that care about me (2)
- I often spend time together with my friends or family (3)
- I have someone to ask for help when I need it (4)
- I often seek to be like my role model (a role model is someone you look up to) (5)
- I have someone to talk to when I am struggling emotionally (6)
- I often prioritize doing things that benefit those around me (7)
- I feel that I belong to something, for example a community, club, group of people, team, others (8)
- I often feel that people around me value and accept me for who I am (9)
- Are there any relationships with someone that you would like to strengthen, and what could help you achieve this? (32)
- I often think about what I want to do, become, or change in the world when I grow older (10)
- I frequently do things that I believe will help my dreams come true (11)
- I am discovering who I am as a person, such as my most important values and beliefs (12)
- The choices I make can make my life better (13)
- I generally try to do what I believe is right (14)
- I frequently choose to take part in activities related to my religion or cultural traditions that are important to me (15)
- I think about things in the world beyond myself (16)
- What could help you feel more meaning in your everyday life? (33)
- I often look for opportunities to learn new things (17)
- I often choose to do things that challenge myself intellectually (this refers to things that challenge your brain) (18)
- I often choose to do creative activities where I can use my imagination, for example drawing, writing, dancing, creating music, others (19)
- I often choose to do physical activities where I can use my body (20)
- What would help you engage more in physical, creative, or intellectual activities? (34)
- I take enough time to rest and relax when needed (21)
- I often take time to do fun things (22)
- I dedicate time for my own mental health, for example when I feel stress or anxiety (23)
- I spend time thinking about how I feel (24)
- I spend time thinking about why I do the things I do (25)
- Even when something is difficult for me, I generally think I can overcome it on my own and/or with the support of those around me (26)
- I often spend time in nature (27)
- Do you face difficulties in allocating time or resources for self-care? (35)

- My basic needs in terms of food, clothes, clean water, education and housing are met (28)
- In general, I feel safe (29)
- In general, I go to a doctor when I or my parents think that is needed (30)

F3 Please provide suggestions to improve this survey, if any.

Key informant interview tool



Voluntās

Meaningfulness in Youth

Key Informant Interviews

S1. Date	
S2. Region	
S3. Enumerator name	
S4. Interviewee name	
S5. Interviewee School	
S6. Interviewee Age	
S7. Consent: Hi! I'm [Your Name]. I'm working on a project where I'm talking to other students about what makes things meaningful or important to them. I'm really interested in hearing what you think because everyone's opinion is valuable. Before we start, I want to make sure you're okay with this. Is it alright if I ask you some questions about what meaningfulness means to you? There are no wrong answers, and you don't have to answer anything you're not comfortable with, and if you want to stop at any time, that's totally fine too. Your response will be confidential, and I only used for the purpose of this exercise. The interview will take 10 minutes. Do you have any questions? Do you agree to be interviewed?	1. Yes 2. No

Q1. What does a meaningful life mean to you? Please answer as you understand it, there are no right or wrong answers.	Open (List form or paragraph)
Q2. How meaningful is your life? Please use the 5-point scale where 1 - Not at all meaningful, 5 - Fully meaningful	Closed (5-point scale)
Q3. Reflecting on the last 3 years (since the full-scale invasion), do you think that your understanding of meaningful life has changed?	Open (paragraph)
Q4. What would make your life more meaningful?	Open (List form or paragraph)
Q5. Tell me about a moment/time when your felt a strong sense of meaning?	Open (paragraph)

Focus group discussion tool



Voluntās

Meaningfulness in Youth

Focus Group Discussion

Background information

Date of discussion	
Name of Facilitator	
Location	
Start Time	

Introduction

Hi everyone and thank you for being here today! My name is _____, and I'm really excited to have this conversation with you. Today, we're going to talk about something called 'meaningfulness.' Now, that might sound like a big word, but it's really about the things in our lives that make us feel good, important, or like what we're doing really matters.

We're going to have a relaxed and open conversation where you can share your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. There are no right or wrong answers—everyone's opinion is important, and I want to hear what you think.

I'll be asking you some questions, and you can feel free to say whatever comes to mind. If you're not sure about something, that's okay too—we're just here to explore and learn from each other.

This discussion will take around **90 minutes** to complete. Please note that participation is voluntary, and this interview is confidential – we will not use your name in the reporting. You are free to withdraw at any stage of the interview, and you are free to decline to answer any question without giving any reason.

Let's start by getting to know each other a little better and warming up with some easy questions. Ready?

Before starting the interview, I would like to receive your informed consent on the following questions:

Note for the interviewer: Please read out loud questions on informed consent and mark "Yes" or "No."

	Yes	No
a. Do you understand that even if you agree to participate, you can decline to answer any questions and are also free to end the interview at any point?		
b. Do you give consent to use your personal information, such as your role, for reporting purposes?		

c. Do you consent to this interview being recorded for the purpose of transcription? [To ask only if needed]		
d. Do you consent to participate?		

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Region	Class

Focus Group Discussion

Section A: Introduction	
Question	Answer
1. Could you tell us a bit about yourself, and where you're from?	
Section B: Meaningfulness	
Question	Answer
Let's talk about what makes life meaningful. 2. What are the key components that you think are essential for a meaningful life? Please write one component on each sticker and remember that there are no right or wrong answers. The aim is to get everyone's opinion.	
Section C: Component Specific Questions	

Question	Answer
Now that we've listed all the components of a meaningful life, let's group similar answers together.	
3. How many groups do we have, and what names can we give to each group?	
4. Why is each component important?	
5. Can you think of any examples from your life or your friends' lives that illustrate how these components impact your sense of meaning?	
6. What activities bring you a sense of meaningfulness?	
7. Are there any barriers that prevent you from doing these things that are meaningful to you?	
8. What can influence your perception of what makes life meaningful? If the students are stuck on the answers, give them an example: social media, social environment, the ongoing war, etc. If adolescents do not spontaneously discuss the impact of war, ask them about the impact of war on perceptions of meaningfulness.	
9. Can you give some examples of how it has changed the perception of meaningfulness?	
10. If you could give any advice to those who create school curriculum and organize after-school activities for students your age, what would you recommend them to make the studies and such activities more meaningful for you?	
Section D: Conclusion	
Question	Answer
11. Is there anything we haven't covered that you think is important to mention about living a meaningful life?	

Final comments	
12. Do you have any final comments/remarks?	
Thank you very much for your participation in this discussion.	End time: HH.MM am/pm



unesco

United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

Measuring Meaningfulness

Among Ukrainian Youth

This LUMY-UA: Life of Ukrainian Youth – Understanding of Meaning
in the UNESCO Associated Schools Network

This flagship research initiative amplifies youth voices in wartime Ukraine by exploring how young people find meaning in their lives. It offers practical insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders seeking to promote youth well-being, purpose, and resilience.

Led by students and supported by UNESCO and Voluntās, the research equips young people with the tools to measure meaningfulness and implement youth-driven solutions. It highlights the power of social connection, purpose, engagement, and self-care in strengthening mental health – especially during times of crisis. The report contributes to a global understanding of youth meaningfulness and supports Ukraine's recovery by inspiring participatory, inclusive approaches to education and psychosocial support.

In partnership with:

Voluntās



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the People of Japan

