



Giving tomorrow's leaders a bigger voice at COP28 and beyond

Global survey shows that young professionals
want a 'just transition' to net zero.



Involving the next generation in the net zero conversation

Climate change is arguably the greatest threat to our collective future. Society's younger members will be most affected, yet tomorrow's leaders lack a voice in today's conversations on this existential issue.

In the Leaders 2050 [Net Zero Influencers report](#), a recent KPMG survey of young professionals,¹ a vast majority (95 percent) believe younger people should be more involved in organizations' sustainability-related decision-making.

Although younger people have a growing presence² at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) within NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and in civil society — they remain under-represented in the political and business sphere, with relatively few attending climate-related events at this caliber.

[KPMG's survey](#) found that just 28 percent of respondents feel they are heard at leadership level. By giving this demographic group more of a say in developing and implementing net zero strategy, organizations stand to gain valuable insights and expertise from people who know and care about sustainability.

ESG is an increasingly important issue for young people, with another KPMG report, [Climate Quitting](#), revealing that one in three employees aged 18-24 in the UK say they have turned down a job offer when the company's ESG commitments were not in line with their values.

What do young professionals think about sustainability?

[Leaders 2050](#) is a global, KPMG-led, multi-sector network for young professionals interested in net zero, clean growth, and sustainability, with a focus on diversity and inclusion. Its aim is to equip the next generation with the skills, networks and purpose to drive a more sustainable future.

In October 2023 we surveyed 363 young people from 38 countries, to hear what they had to say on the private sector's role in COP28 negotiations, and the priorities for senior business leaders. The responses — both globally and regionally — offer some compelling pointers on how private companies can help tackle climate change and its associated social challenges.



¹ Young professional: An individual within an entry to mid-management tier of an organization, typically possessing less than seven years of professional experience and generally under the age of 35.

² <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/fee.2627>

Key global survey findings

Of the young professionals surveyed, 58 percent feel they have a high awareness of global sustainability challenges, while 31 percent say they have “actively participated” or “stay up-to-date” on previous COPs.

There is also a broad acknowledgement that net zero won't happen without the contribution of the business community, with 81 percent of respondents believing that the private sector “plays a critical role” or “should play a larger role” in the COP28 process.

Respondents fear that less privileged members of society, or those in developing countries, may pay a relatively higher cost for the transition to net zero, with the potential for **increased social inequity seen as the greatest risk if we do rapidly transition to a low-carbon economy**. The **single most important COP28 theme³ is cited as ‘just transition’** — equitably spreading opportunities and benefits and minimizing negative impacts in the evolution towards a low-carbon, circular, sustainable economy.

Another major enabler — and possible barrier — is **political will**, which is considered the top challenge, along with financing. The young professionals participating in the survey feel that these issues should be addressed directly at COP28.

Finally, respondents to our global survey spoke of the urgent need to develop appropriate capabilities to power a new, low-carbon economy. **Lack of skills** is seen as the second biggest risk in fulfilling the transition, notably in emerging technologies, policy and regulatory expertise, climate literacy, and energy systems.

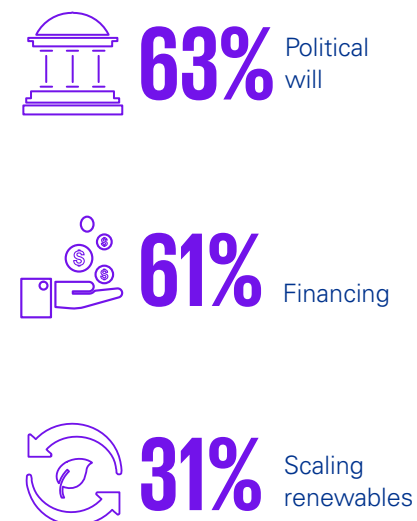
³ <https://www.cop28.com/en/thematic-program>

Key survey findings

Top four most important COP themes



Top three net zero challenges



Biggest risks in net zero transition



Please consider that this is not about maximizing profits or being better than our competitors. This is rather about collaborating and doing the best we can to assure a livable future for everyone. In that I urge you to especially consider global inequalities around the world.

Survey respondent, Germany

Regional insights

Net zero may be a global quest, but economic, political, social and geographical differences are likely to influence strategies across regions and countries. The KPMG survey responses reflected such variations.

Americas

ESG reporting

Respondents from this region are keen to embed ESG reporting, by giving financial and non-financial metrics equal priority, complying with evolving standards, and allocating appropriate resources to ensure reliable, comprehensive data on ESG performance.

In Latin America (specifically Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, and Panama), the young professionals we surveyed believe that clear regulatory standards and taxonomies can accelerate a wider 'just transition'. Through standardized approaches, private companies' sustainability strategies should complement national climate-related policies, through effective measurement and reporting.

Regulations are a major driver of corporate behavior in the US, with investors increasingly scrutinizing non-financial reporting. This may place pressure on the US Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) to introduce more rigorous requirements for how companies manage and report climate, cybersecurity and human capital risks.

Skills

According to respondents from the Americas, companies need to double down on training across all levels and business functions, for both general and specialized ESG topics — with a strong focus on building technical capabilities.

Equity

In North America in particular, there is a strong sense of the private sector's responsibility to support a 'just transition' in emerging markets, through innovation and research. To do so, respondents suggested that companies give marginalized, underrepresented, and Indigenous communities a voice in their ESG and operational decisions.

Young professionals in Latin America are especially keen to involve such groups in big infrastructure and natural resources extraction projects. Safe and equitable working conditions and opportunities should be table stakes across supply chains — regardless of whether this is material to the core business.



What we have identified across many sectors is that a lot of weight is given to the environmental impacts and natural resources but that much more attention needs to be addressed to social spheres. Integrating 'just transition' across all efforts should support the balance of that.

Survey respondent, Mexico

Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA)

A balanced transition

Within the EMEA region, the survey indicates strong support among young professionals for detailed corporate roadmaps to net zero, highlighting how the transition may impact both businesses and individuals. Measurement is considered a key tool in embedding social and governance into decarbonization initiatives.

In envisaging a world of renewable energy, many of the young professionals surveyed in Europe believe that large oil and gas majors should help finance a green future. Their peers in the Middle East and Africa acknowledge that society will likely continue to be dependent upon oil and gas for some time, and stress the importance of reducing fossil fuel emissions through investments in carbon capture, utilization and storage.

Private sector responsibilities

With the UAE hosting COP28, it's notable that respondents from the Middle East and North Africa expect the private sector to help drive government investment in clean energy and sustainable projects. These young professionals want to see private and public climate finance and grants, to fund youth-led projects in emissions reduction and renewable energy.



Business (and political) leaders need to accept they and their companies play a role in the climate breakdown, and can help save the world. ””

Survey respondent, The Netherlands

Asia Pacific

Collaboration

In this region, survey participants advocate a strong political will and intergovernmental dialogue to develop cross-border energy projects, with private companies helping to facilitate opportunities to scale energy access and renewables. In one recent example of collaboration, Indonesia⁴ has agreed to export a significant amount of clean, low-carbon electricity to Singapore, an agreement generated by private energy companies.

'Just transition'

Asia Pacific, especially Southeast Asia, hosts several emerging economies. It's therefore little surprise that young working professionals from this region are urging senior business leaders to prioritize 'just transition', so that society's less privileged and most vulnerable people do not suffer from decarbonization.



A further call for collaboration with and support for small island nations and developing countries who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change but don't have the resources or skills to make the necessary changes is crucial — they are already suffering from the consequences of climate change.





Survey respondent, New Zealand

⁴ [https://en.antaranews.com/news/293241/indonesia-agrees-to-supply-low-carbon-electricity-to-singapore#:~:text=Jakarta%20\(ANTARA\)%20%2D%20Indonesia%20is,between%20Indonesian%20and%20Singaporean%20companies](https://en.antaranews.com/news/293241/indonesia-agrees-to-supply-low-carbon-electricity-to-singapore#:~:text=Jakarta%20(ANTARA)%20%2D%20Indonesia%20is,between%20Indonesian%20and%20Singaporean%20companies)

Action points for the private sector at COP28

As the survey results indicate, today's young professionals — tomorrow's leaders — see a central role for the private sector in driving the net zero transition. With political will considered the greatest barrier to decarbonization, businesses have the power to influence and support governmental green energy policies, while investing in their own renewable energy solutions.

We hope our survey can help companies gain a better understanding of how younger people feel about net zero, and how to engage with this demographic to harness its full potential. COP28 provides a perfect platform for involving the next generation in sustainability decision-making, and demonstrating a commitment to climate action, through the following steps:

-  **1. Define 'just transition'** and clarify how this concept intersects with all other COP28 themes, including finance, accountability, and energy. Integrate 'just transition' and social impact considerations into decarbonization commitments and pathways.
-  **2. Prioritize collaboration**, to work with competitors, communities, multilateral organizations, governments, and NGOs to accelerate climate action.
-  **3. Engage young leaders** in your climate and ESG work (including at COP28), creating an environment where they can contribute to solutions.
-  **4. Prioritize ESG skills** development for future leaders in areas like renewable energy and storage, energy-efficiency, measurement and reporting, and circular, low-waste manufacturing and operations.

For further recommendations and case studies on integrating young professionals in ESG decision-making, please read our Leaders 2050 [Net Zero Influencers report](#).

About the survey

In October 2023 KPMG International surveyed 363 young people from 38 countries.

The questions covered a range of issues around the net zero transition, the involvement of young professionals, and the role of the private sector.

The vast majority of respondents were aged 35 or younger.

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