



SHARING OUR STORIES: A PORTRAIT OF FIRST NATIONS YOUTH VOICES

Results of the consultation

Spring 2021



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CHAIRE-RÉSEAU DE RECHERCHE
SUR LA JEUNESSE DU QUÉBEC

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Highlights

Portrait

- **227 young people responded to the survey and 25 young people participated in virtual discussion groups.** Coming from the 10 First Nations in Quebec, they are between 15 and 35 years old; 72% are female, 20% say they belong to the LGBTQ2S+ community and 45% live in a community.
- **Young people characterize their voices as hopeful and healing, passionate, and a catalyst for change.** However, the young people we met said that their voices are not sufficiently valued.
- **96% are proud to be part of their nation and 90% feel strongly supported by their loved ones** (93% by friends, 87% by family and 66% by elders).

Being heard

- 25% feel heard by political decision-makers and 24% have the opportunity to express themselves through political bodies. **It is in these instances that young people feel the least listened to and heard.**
- **There are important associations between feeling heard in your community and feeling supported in that expression.** A proportion of 51% of young people feel completely or somewhat listened to in their community or setting. Of this proportion, 82% believe that young people are encouraged to give their opinion, 78% believe that their needs are taken into account, 79% believe that their voice has an influence and 61% believe that young people have leadership.
- Given the limited scope or influence of their voices in decision-making, **young people distinguish between being listened to and being heard.**

Spaces and forms of expression

- **75% of young people** feel that they have the opportunity to express themselves **at work and in school environments, 71% favour social networks and 70% appreciate spaces of artistic expression**, while 24% feel they have the possibility of expressing themselves through political bodies.
- **Young people are challenged by the many issues affecting their communities:** 70% of respondents say they are particularly concerned by the territory, 69% by culture and traditions, 66% by health and wellness, and 60% by education. In addition, 47% of respondents are concerned about social justice and 41% about economic development or employment.
- **58% of participants express a strong sense of leadership**, however 35% feel left out in decision-making in their communities or settings.
- **The standard political spaces for expression are not sufficiently adapted to the realizations, values and identities of First Nations youth.**

The barriers

- **Four barriers affect the experiences of young people:** 46% of respondents do not know who to approach to express their opinions, 46% find spaces of expression to be intimidating or stressful, 45% have difficulty expressing their ideas and 44% say they have a lack of self-confidence.
- **Young people affected by mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.) feel less involved in decision-making processes.**

- **The possibilities for expression in certain settings seem to be linked to the forums and support networks that are available.** 46% of respondents have difficulty expressing themselves because they do not know who to talk to. Of this number, 56% also have difficulty expressing themselves in intergenerational circles, 61% at work or school and 52% through political bodies; 55% live outside the community.

The future

- **Youth want to make their voices heard for many reasons.** They believe that this would allow them to improve their communities, support future generations, raise awareness about the history of First Nations and share their experiences.
- **Six courses of actions** have emerged to promote the voices of First Nations youth:

- 1 Value youth, their identity and their cultural pride;
- 2 Empower youth in decision-making processes;
- 3 Develop and adapt various culturally safe platforms for listening, expression and discussion;
- 4 Transform spaces of expression and decision-making contexts so that they value traditional methods;
- 5 Foster the collective aspect, the plurality of opinions and networking opportunities;
- 6 Strengthen the political and historical knowledge of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth.



Introduction

This document presents the results of a consultation conducted with First Nations youth in Quebec. It was carried out in the context of the renewal of the 2022-2026 Youth Action Strategy of the 2030 Quebec Youth Policy. It will fuel the reflection on the transition of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network (FNQLYN) which seeks to obtain independent status. The consultation was carried out with the team of the Indigenous stream of the Chaire-Réseau de recherche sur la jeunesse (CRJ).

The initial purpose of this project was to carry out a consultation with First Nations youth from communities and urban areas in a different and stimulating way, in order to obtain a more accurate portrait of their realities and priorities. Given the diversity in terms of regional realities, the FNQLYN was concerned with creating a representative and creative process to reach young people. It was about providing spaces to reflect their points of view in a variety of ways, as well as building the capacity of young people among different political bodies. Given the health and social conditions the province experienced with the pandemic in 2020, the plan had to be adjusted to run activities entirely online.

The objectives pursued were to:

- Feed the FNQLYN action plan for the renewal of the 2022-2026 Youth Action Strategy (i.e., taking into account the updating of its mission);
- Give young people a voice and enhance their experience as experts of their realities, by offering them spaces for reflection and expression;
- Strengthen the consultation processes among First Nations youth;
- Create a “portrait” of the voice of young people.

This document summarizes the comments and data collected during the consultation of the FNQLYN that was carried out from April to November 2020. This report therefore sheds light on certain aspects of the voice of First Nations youth, in particular the spaces of expression and the support mechanisms available or to be considered to ensure adequate support. This data can inform the spokespersons of the FNQLYN, as well as the organizations that support young people, so that they can orient their decisions in line with the real community needs and priorities.

This consultation project echoes the oral traditions of the First Nations and aims to create spaces that are conducive to exchanges and honest discussions on their various realities. The flight of geese (illustrated on the cover page), symbolizing young people who act as scouts, thus represents the approach adopted in this consultation. By focusing more on the backgrounds, experiences, needs, priorities, values and sensitivities of Indigenous youth, this process provides a portrait that is more representative of them.



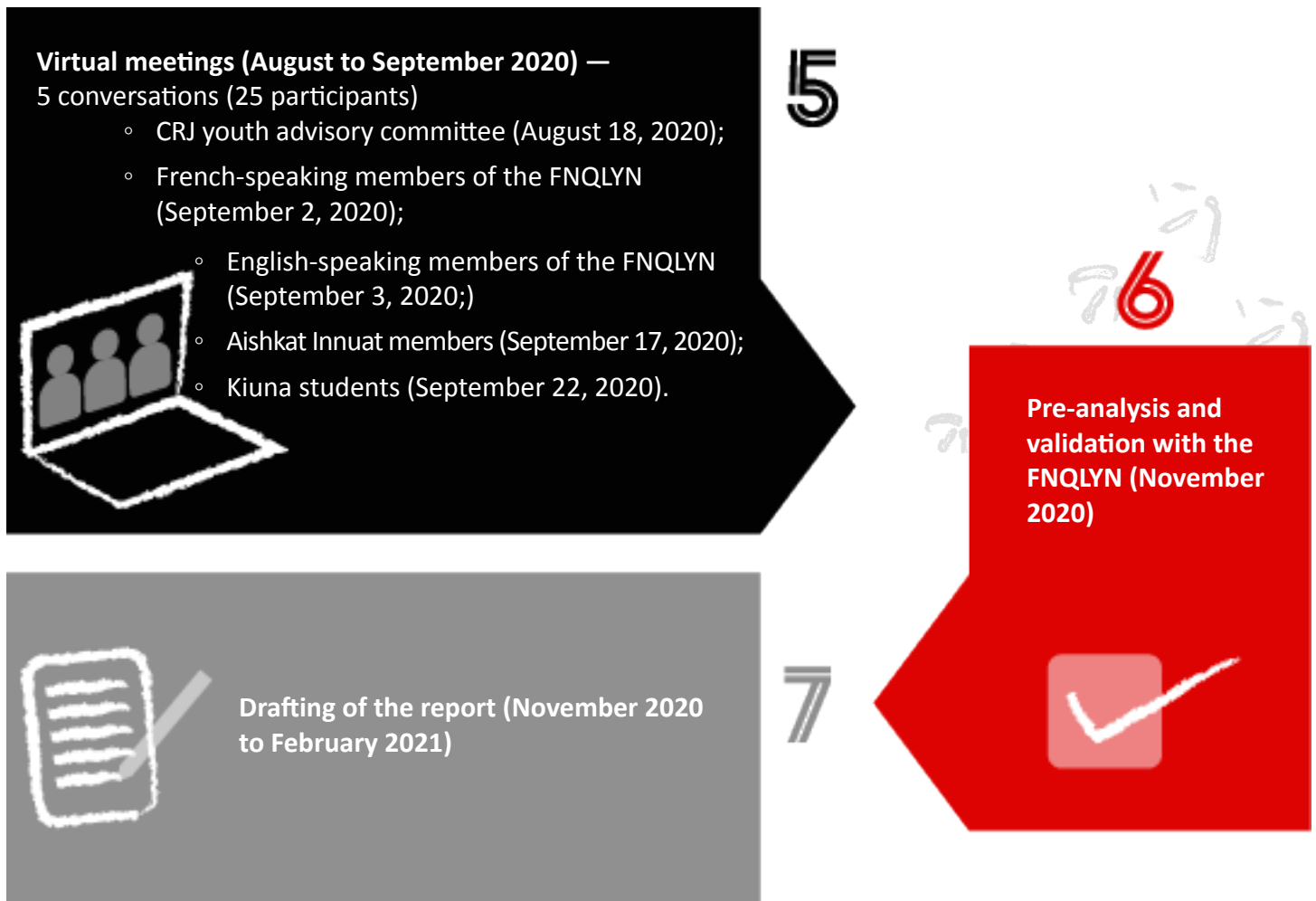
Methods

This consultation favoured the adoption of methods that are respectful of everyone's knowledge and expertise while valuing fairness and humility in taking into account the contributions of each person. These methods promote practices that are advantageous and beneficial to young people and their communities, as well as reciprocity, particularly in terms of benefits and repercussions. Moreover, the entire process and communications were carried out in a process of transparency.

Emphasis was placed on the co-development of data collection tools with spokespersons and various collaborators of the FNQLYN. This report explains the actions undertaken during this process aimed at ensuring a better representation of the vision of First Nations young people. With the aim of decolonizing the consultation process among young people, different methods were used with the intention of giving young people a voice and focusing on their voices.

Stages of the consultation process





A first series of interviews in the form of discussions were held with the spokespersons of the FNQLYN and the Chief responsible for the youth file of the AFNQL. A second series of group meetings were held, bringing together a total of 25 First Nations youth from across Quebec. These exchanges, led by the FNQLYN and its spokespersons, were held on Zoom. The young people were reached thanks to an engagement strategy of the FNQLYN. Several means were proposed to encourage participation and promote the project, in particular the dissemination of humorous posts on social networks, the development of several contests and the establishment of various initiatives on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat and the use of advertising).

The survey (generated on SurveyMonkey) was disseminated from July to September 2020. The survey was built based on the themes that emerged from the interviews with the spokespersons, and divided into five sections, namely: 1) the demographic portrait of the respondents; 2) their perceptions of their involvement in different settings; 3) players and places that are conducive to listening to the voices of young people; 4) their concerns; as well as 5) their expectations regarding the FNQLYN.

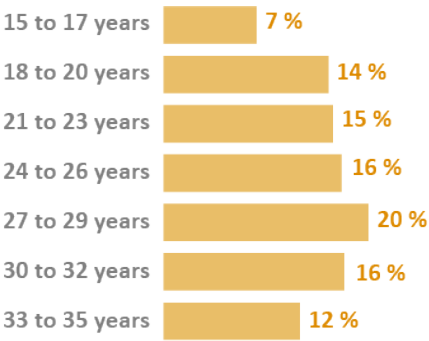
A total of 227 respondents participated in the survey; 164 responded to the questionnaire in French and 63 in English. Of course, the survey covered in this report does not represent the opinions of all young Indigenous people in Quebec. According to 2019 data from the Indian Register of Indigenous Services Canada, in the province, there are 29,349 young First Nations (including the Crees), of which 19,598 are on reserve and 9,751 are off reserve. Considering that the participants completed this online survey on a voluntary basis, the data from this survey represents a portrait of a specific sample.

Results of the consultation

➤ 1. Profile of survey participants

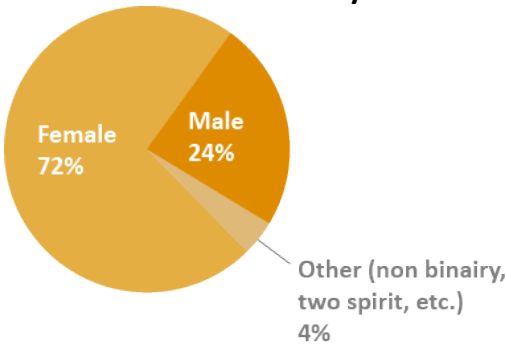
This section presents the profiles of the participants who responded to the survey.

Age of respondents



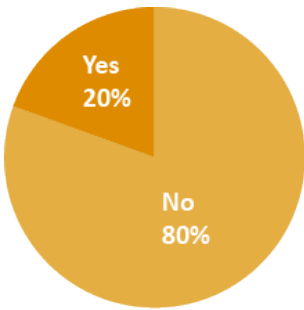
- The poll reached an interesting distribution of young people ranging in age from 15 to 35 years old.
- The 27 to 29 age group is the most represented and the median age is 26.

Gender identity

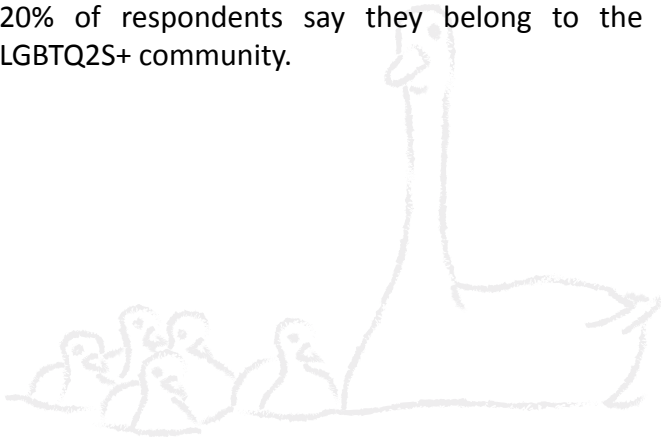


- A higher proportion of women (72%) responded to the survey, while men represent 24% of respondents.
- 4% of respondents identified as non-binary, two-spirit or other gender identity.

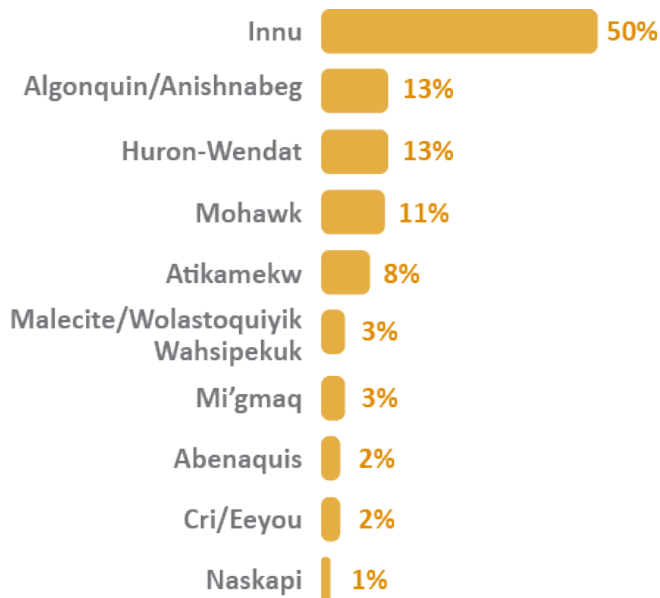
Belonging to the LGBTQ2S+ community



- 20% of respondents say they belong to the LGBTQ2S+ community.

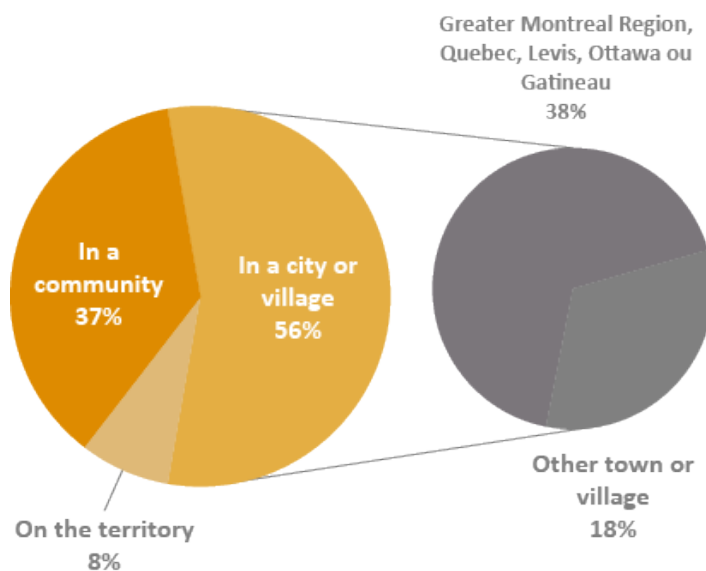


Nation(s) of belonging



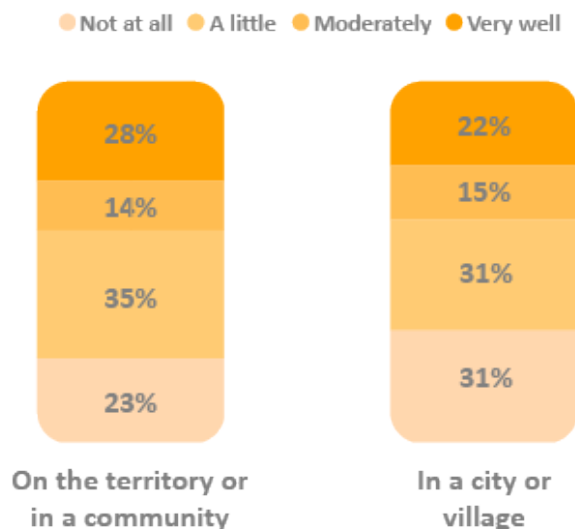
- The respondents belong to the 10 First Nations in Quebec.
- Young people from the Innu nation make up half of the sample (50%), while the Anishnabeg and Huron-Wendat each make up 13% of it.
- The rest of the respondents identify as Mohawk (11%), Atikamekw (8%), Maliseet / Wolastoquiyik Wahsipekuk (3%), Mi'kmaq (3%), Abenaki (2%), Cree / Eeyou (2%), or Naskapi (1%).

Place of residence in the last year



- In the past year, 45% of the respondents lived most of the time in a community or on the territory and 56% resided in a city or village.
- Among the respondents who live in a city or village, 38% are located in a large centre, either in the administrative regions of Montreal, Quebec or Gatineau/Ottawa.

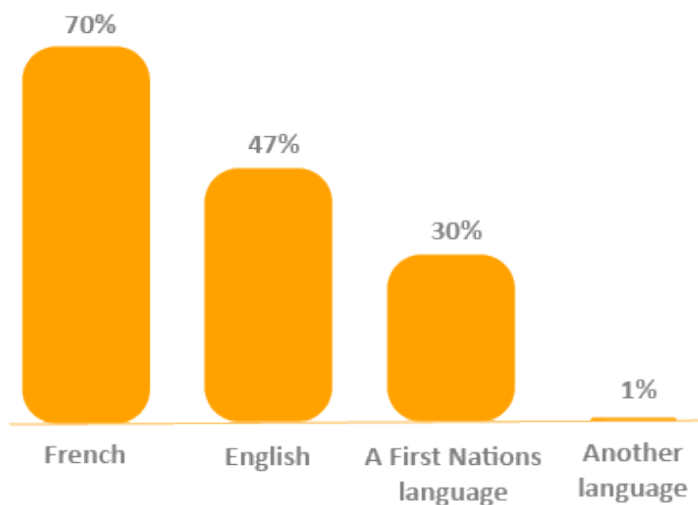
Level of knowledge of an Indigenous language, by place of residence



- A significant number of young people say they speak their Indigenous language very well or moderately (40%). A greater proportion speak an Indigenous language a little or not at all (61%).
- In general, the knowledge of an Indigenous language by respondents living in cities or communities seems similar. People living in communities are slightly more likely to speak an Indigenous language (28% of respondents living in communities) than their urban counterparts (22% of urban respondents).
- Although the difference is minor, more young people in urban areas do not speak their language (31%) compared to young people living in the communities or on the territory (23%).

Language(s) used on a daily basis

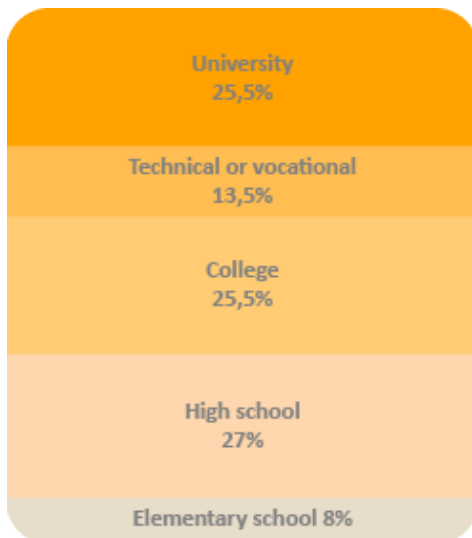
Note that respondents could check more than one box for this survey question.



- 70% of respondents use French in their everyday life
- Of the respondents, 47% use English in their daily lives.
- A significant proportion of young people also use a First Nations language in their daily activities (30%). In the specific case of these young people, a large proportion of people are fluent in a second language (68.3%). In 60.2% of cases, the second language is English, while in 54% of cases, French is used.

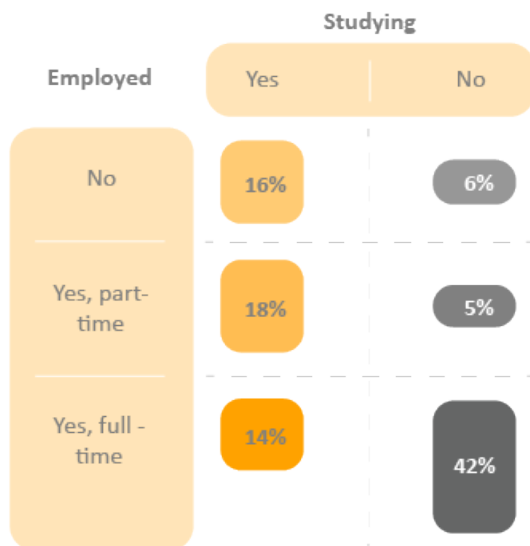


Highest degree obtained



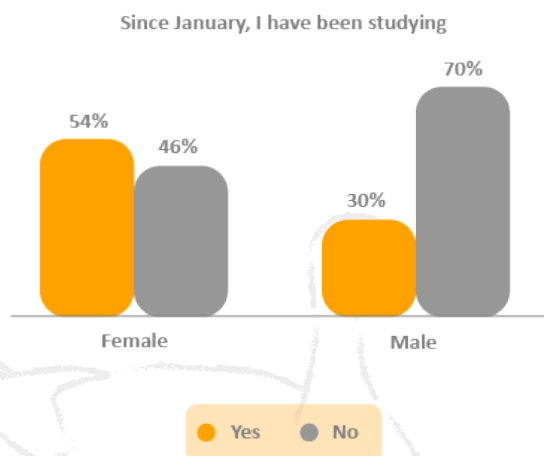
- 8% of respondents indicated elementary school as the highest level of education completed.
- 27% of respondents graduated from high school.
- 26% of respondents have a college diploma while 13.5% have obtained a vocational or technical certification.
- 25.5% of the sample affirms having obtained one or more university degree(s).

Current job



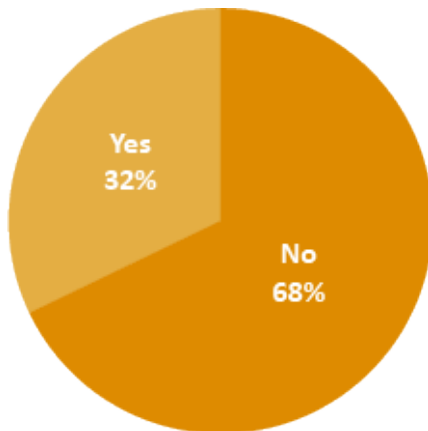
- Almost half of the respondents are full-time workers (56%), although 48% are also students.
- Among all respondents, many are full-time workers who are not studying (42%).
- A significant number of respondents work part-time or full-time while studying (32%).

School attendance by gender



- Among young people pursuing studies, there is a statistically significant difference between women (54%) and men (30%). Thus, a greater majority of young men are not studying.

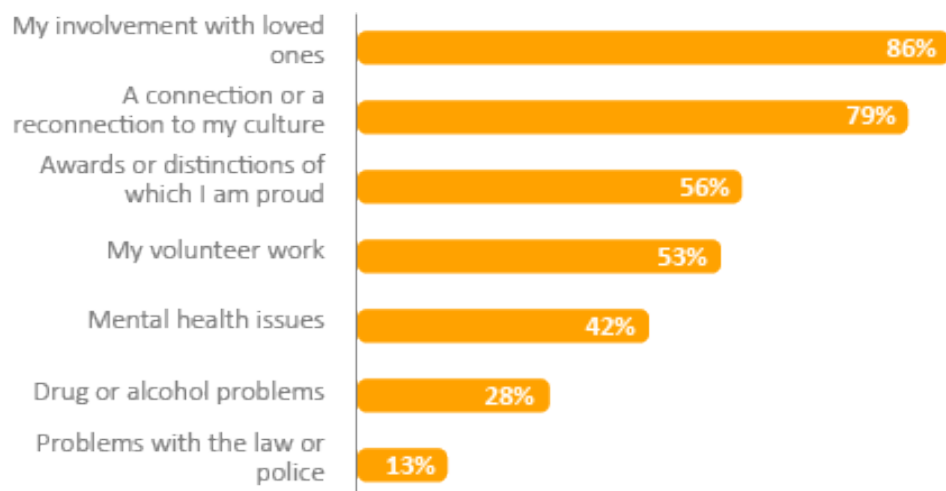
Respondents responsible for children



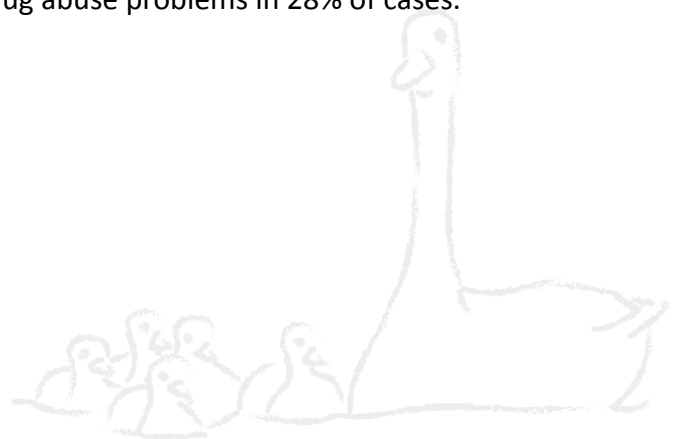
- 32% of respondents have dependent children.

Element(s) that marked the participant's paths

Note that respondents could check more than one answer.



- The paths of young respondents are marked, for the vast majority of them, by involvement with relatives (86%), followed by cultural connection / reconnection (79%).
- A significant proportion of young people say they have experienced mental health issues (42%). In addition, the paths of young people are affected by alcohol and drug abuse problems in 28% of cases.



For the participants in this consultation, the voices of First Nations youth are characterized in many ways. During group interviews, participants were asked to express their views on what those voices mean to them. A visual representation of the terms most used demonstrates the strength and diversity of young people.

How would you describe the voice of First Nations youth? (Menti activity).



What I retain is the word hope, and I also connect it with certain more loaded words like distress, which were written [...] I think that among the Indigenous youth, the First Nations, we all carry hope with us [...], there is also this desire for us to be leaders, because without hope, we would not be motivated to participate. In this way, I think that hope is a word that brings us together, and I find that to be something really positive. (Abenaki)



*For me, [the voice means] going towards
my traditions, going towards healing.
(Anishnabeg)*

[The voice of young people,] it is above all resilience. I think that for Indigenous people, this is one of our greatest qualities. It is what helped us through all the historical events with which we were faced, and it is what drives us to go to school, what drives us in the morning to go to work despite everything we may be experiencing. (Atikamekw)

The leadership of Indigenous youth is central when participants describe their voice and the scope of that voice.

The word I see is the next leader for young people, because I attended meetings several times on different subjects, but the young people all talked about leaders for young people, perhaps to teach young people, to become leaders in different communities. (Naskapi)

This voice is described by many as being passionate.

Call it naivety, call it hope, but there is a passion. There is something inside young people... I'm sure our great-grandparents said the same about young people in those days and then about themselves even before, so I really think that it is a little cyclical, but there is a passion that is there, we are willing to push things to make things better [...] The voice is sometimes restricted, but when it comes out, it's incredible! (Mi'gmaq)

For some, having a voice is associated with the ability to influence and promote one's experience.

For me, having a voice means being able to feel listened to, then being able to deliver a message that responds, in fact, to your experience, what you are going through and what you see around you, and then opening up to making things change in your environment. (Atikamekw)

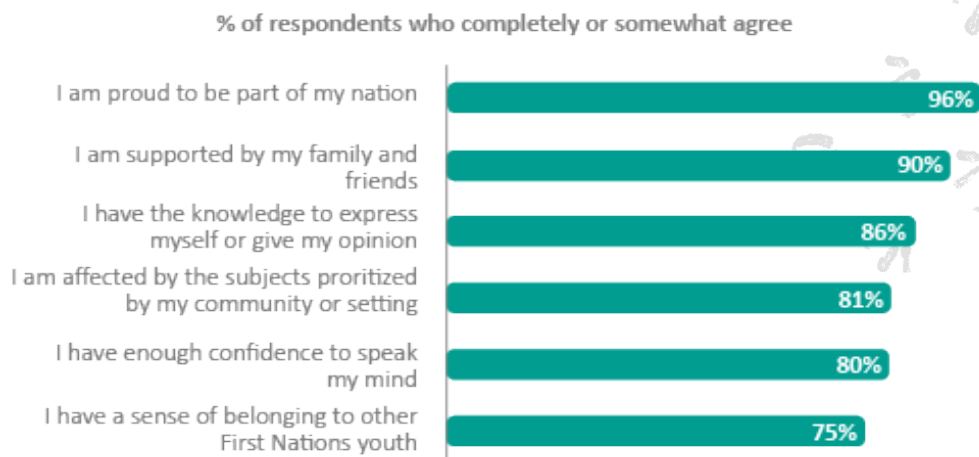
In short, the voices of young people are seen as a bearer of hope and healing, passionate, and a vehicle for change. However, the young people we met affirm that their voices are not valued enough and that they sometimes have difficulty being heard.



➤ 3. Involvement of youth in their communities

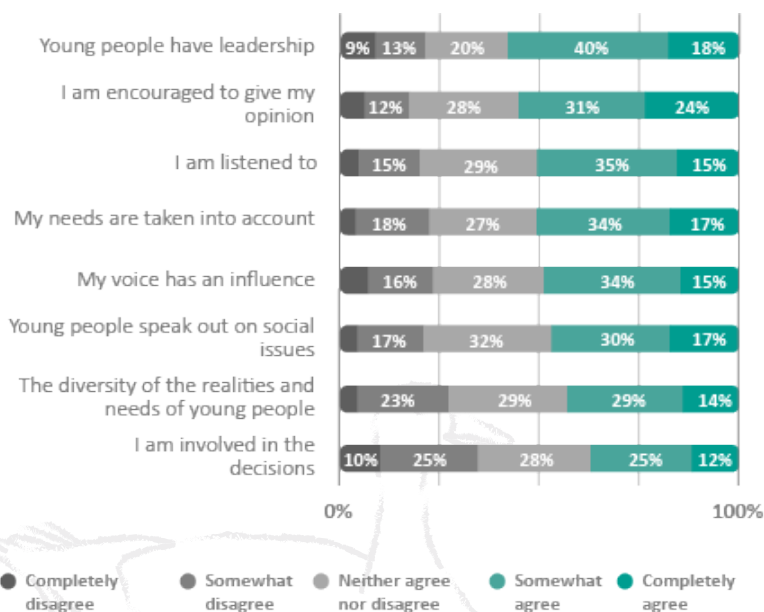
The participants in this consultation raised several elements concerning the place they believe they occupy in their living environments and in decision-making places. They therefore address different themes concerning their sense of belonging, their concerns and the impact they believe they have in these various settings.

Overall, how much do you agree with these statements?



- The young people surveyed are overwhelmingly proud (96%) to be part of their nations and connected to their communities. Moreover, 90% feel strongly supported by their loved ones.
- Three-quarters of the respondents (75%) have a sense of belonging to other First Nations youth.
- In addition, the respondents feel strongly affected by the priorities of their communities and their settings (81%) and affirm that they have the knowledge (86%) and the confidence (80%) necessary to express themselves or give their opinion.

How much do you agree with these statements? In your community or setting...

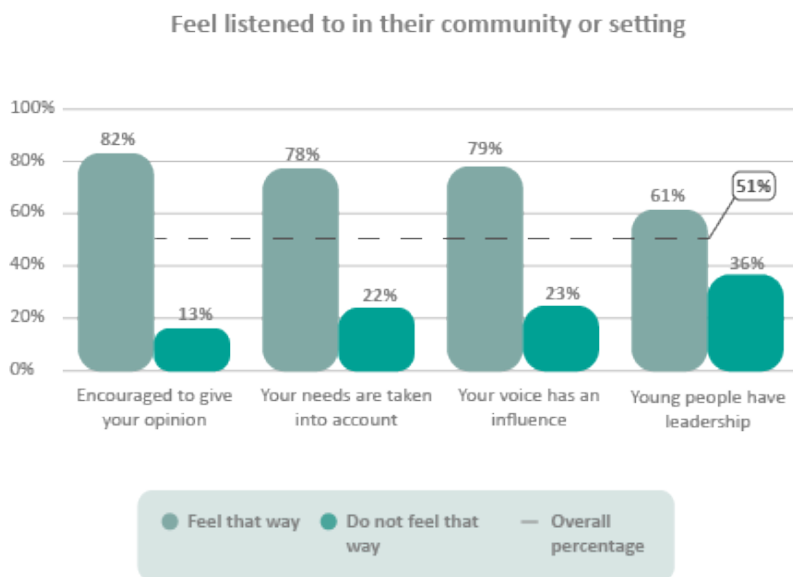


The respondents also shared their vision regarding the involvement of young people in their communities or settings.

- The respondents have a rather positive perception of the participation of young people in the community settings. Thus, 58% of respondents affirm that young people have leadership (somewhat agree and completely agree with the statement), 55% feel encouraged to give their opinion and 51% feel listened to and maintain that their needs are taken into account.

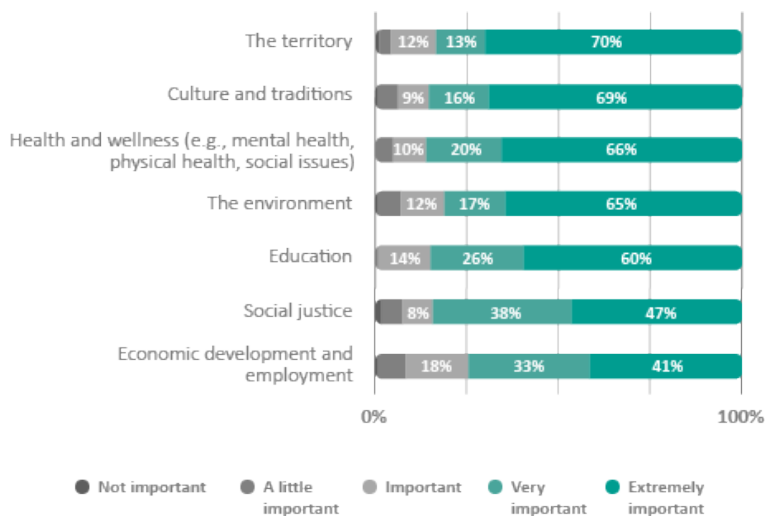
- It is interesting to note that 35% of respondents say that **they do not feel** involved in the decisions of their communities or settings (completely disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement).
- At least one fifth of young people (between 20% and 32%) say they are ambivalent (neither agree nor disagree) about each of the statements.

Young people who feel listened to by their communities or settings according to their perception of being supported



Our subsequent analyses reveal certain significant associations between the feeling of being listened to in one's community and perception of expectations regarding the expression of young people. We observe that 51% of young people feel completely or somewhat listened to in their communities or settings. Of this number, 82% believe that young people are encouraged to express their opinions, 78% believe that their needs are taken into account, 79% believe that their voice has an influence and 61% believe that young people have leadership.

When you think of young people in your community, how would you describe their concerns?



The participants of the survey and the discussions inform us that young people feel concerned by various issues that affect their communities or settings.

- Among the seven stated concerns, about two-thirds of young people consider almost all of these issues to be extremely important.
- Subjects such as territory (70%), culture and traditions (69%), health and wellness (66%), environment (65%) and education (60%) are moreover indicated as being priorities by a similar number of respondents.
- Social justice (47%), economic development and employment (41%) are a little lower priority-wise according to the respondents.

Young people have opinions and things to say. They feel they have both the **knowledge and the confidence** to voice their opinion and speak their mind.

They have something to say, but they must be given the opportunity and then the time to say it because not everyone has taken [public speaking] lessons or whatever. Just give them time and they will talk but give them the place to talk too. (Mi'gmaq)

I would say that the voice of young people is, let's say, a bit shy. People think that they [...] can't say anything. I believe that they don't feel heard and think they have nothing to say, but it's only by talking with them, and continuing to discuss with them, that you realize that, yes, they do have things to say. It is through informal conversations that we can get them to share their voice. (Atikamekw)

The young people met during the group discussions say they are **concerned about the well-being, fulfilment and identity pride of First Nations youth**, but also about the protection of Indigenous languages and access to support and cultural services.

When we look at all the issues such as housing, culture or simply politics, the voice of young people is important in all these areas. (Atikamekw)

Improve mental health services, raise awareness of mental illness and intergenerational trauma, and de-stigmatize disabilities. Raise awareness about sexual abuse and provide prevention and support for suicide. Create opportunities for community participation, job creation and environmental protection. (Mohawk)

The revitalization of culture and tradition. You know, it's something that our parents, our grandparents may have had taken away, but that we are slowly reclaiming for ourselves, so we learn through it, we share, and certainly one of the things we hear no matter what nation we belong to is that a connection to the land is the most important thing. (Mi'gmaq)

The intergenerational bond, particularly between the elderly and the young – this link is essential to the survival of our cultures and traditions. It must be protected. (Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk)



However, they also mention that **challenges related to a lack of listening** limit the reach or influence of their voices at times. According to them, it is often difficult to be heard by their community.

*I find that they [the young people] do not have a lot of influence at the community level. I have heard young people say that their requests or their difficulties were taken for granted [...] But this is not the case in all communities [...] The voice of young people does not have much influence on community politics or major politics... There are often resources for young children, toddlers, parents, mothers, fathers and elders. But you know, the young people are often simply forgotten.
(Innu)*

We also need our voices to be heard from farther away because, in my opinion, the fact that the voices of young people are often ignored means that we have not necessarily found our place in society yet. Also, I believe that, in our communities as well as in urban areas, that you always have to dig in order to go further, to show that you are capable of doing it. (Innu)

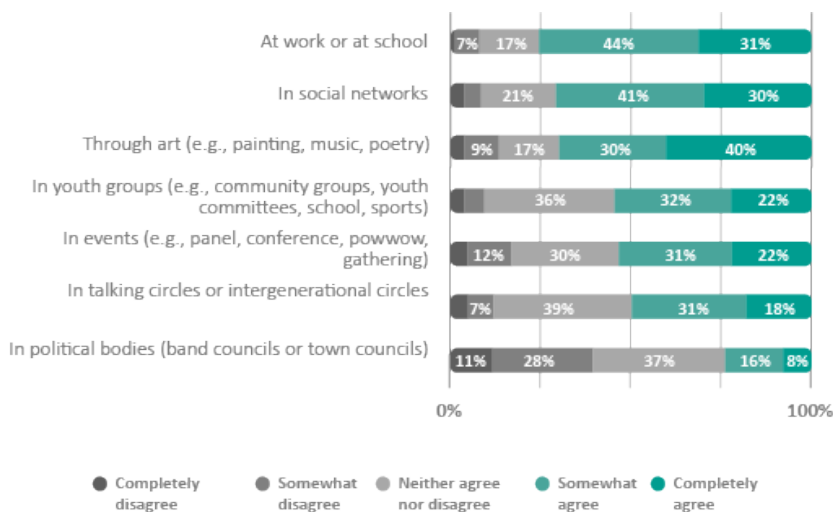
In short, young people feel challenged by and involved in their settings and communities. The young people met during this consultation **want to take up more space** in their communities. We also note that certain challenges complicate the place and promotion of the voices of young Indigenous people.



➤ 4. Spaces and forms of expression

Spaces of expression and sources of support for young people are elements to be taken into consideration in order to understand the portrait of their voices. Through the survey and the conversations, we were able to identify various preferred spaces and places used by young people to share their voices.

In general, how much opportunity do you have to express yourself...



Political bodies are the spaces least appreciated by young people. Only 24% feel they have the opportunity to express themselves in these networks.

The respondents say they are ambivalent (neither agree nor disagree) about the possibility of expressing themselves in events (30%), youth groups (36%), political bodies (37%) and talking or intergenerational circles (39%).

The comments made during the group conversations are in line with the survey results. This highlights the different ways that young people express themselves. **Social networks**, the **arts** and **gatherings** are spaces seen more as comfortable and therefore conducive to expression.

Having a voice, everyone has one, which makes having a voice important to me, but it happens naturally. Not everyone expresses themselves in the same way: there are some who are more artistic, more physical, more other things. (Anishnabeg)



Social networks were mentioned in all of the group interviews as the privileged spaces to express oneself. Virtual platforms are spaces where young people feel comfortable expressing themselves as they have the opportunity to shape the world in their own image, while expressing themselves freely on subjects or issues that affect them. Social media platforms are also inspiring places of expression that foster exchanges between Indigenous youth from around the world.

Yes, that's basically social networks in a nutshell [...] because that is where they come from, that's where I think [...] they themselves have built their own world in their eyes. So, they are very good. The feeling of belonging is there. (Innu)

I think that a lot of people are inspired by social media. I also like seeing through other publications, other Indigenous people who are very involved in Canada and abroad. (Innu)

The **arts** were mentioned by many as being one of the important means of expression, healing and identity valorization.

For me, it's with art. It was a way for me to reconnect. It's kind of a way for me to get away from it all too. You know, I live in the city. I'm not so close to nature [...] I don't have access as often, so it is through my paintings that I can find nature a little bit and it allows me to refocus. (Innu-Atikamekw)

That's another reason why I prefer to perform live, I record my songs in the studio and everything, but I much prefer doing shows, because then I can speak to the public through the meanings of the words of my songs, and a lot of it is related to my relationship with my Innu identity, so when I want to talk about a particular song, it's hard. (Innu)

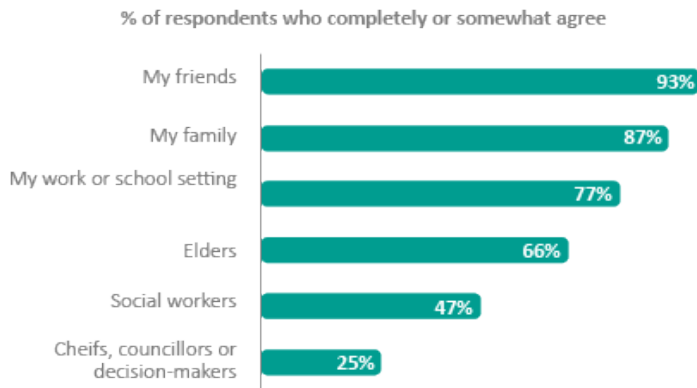
Gatherings and events bringing together young people (e.g., networking, workshops, cultural connection, etc.) are also particularly important. They are considered by many to be opportunities for exchanges between young people from different nations and as places of personal validation.

I love going from one event to the next, because that's where young people meet. There are friends that I only get to see during these types of events, so I think it's good to get to know each other between nations, and exchange and so on [...] I think these are great experiences that develop your leadership, your network is also created with these events. (Atikamekw)

[Gatherings] often provide the opportunity to meet and socialize all together, an event is not necessarily always formal, there is a lot of informal, and informal discussions that take place as part of these events. We can create connections and then go back home afterwards. There is something born from that, I find it really interesting. (Innu)



In general, I feel listened to by...



- Respondents feel more listened to by their relatives. Friends (93%) and family (87%) come first, followed by schools and workplaces (76%) and seniors (66%).
- Intervention environments and political spaces seem to be perceived in a completely different way by young people. Indeed, only 47% of young people feel listened to by social workers and 25% by political decision-makers. Note more specifically that 7% of respondents completely agree with the statement that the chiefs, councillors and decision-makers of the communities (or settings) listen to young people.

Indeed, the young people met during the discussions believe that they are especially listened to by their **family and friends**.

For my part, I feel listened to enough by my daughter, and my family and community too, but that's not enough I find, and I believe that the same cannot be said for the council, they do not consider the young people. (Innu)

I feel listened to by my peers, by Indigenous organizations, by Indigenous young people, but in terms of what goes beyond that, of course I am still a young student who does not have a big voice to make a difference, according to some. (Innu)

School or professional environments seem for some to be places where they find people they can trust.

For me, at [university], the director of my program [...] is Métis [...] and I really appreciate that because she really asks for my opinion as an Indigenous person. (Mohawk)

At my job, until very recently, I had a position that allowed me to express myself a lot, which gave me access to local committees and a lot of meetings with different players in the city. I feel as though I'm still lucky, I have a lot of places outside my community to express myself. (Atikamekw)

I get involved, and I have quite a lot of say in my work environment as well as in the circles in which I have also been, I move through them quickly, but you know, I always saw something concrete that would happen afterwards. That is what motivates me in my life, let's say getting involved when I see that I can make a difference. Sometimes, expressing yourself as part of a group for large bodies does not always have the same impact as expressing yourself alone in a small organization, but we make a difference. (Innu)

Lack of listening is a topic and a concern that was raised during group meetings. Young people sometimes feel instrumentalized by certain players. They have few opportunities to actively participate in formal decision-making bodies.

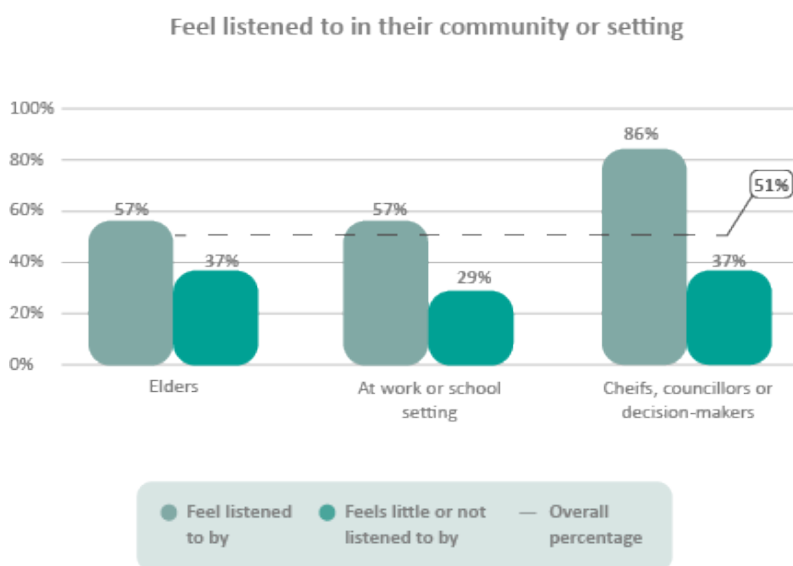
So, what we saw [...] was often the young people who feel like they are being used as pawns [objects]. You know, it was like, let's invite a young person. (Mi'gmaq)

Sometimes, people won't listen to what I have to say. I provide solutions for the community or for other communities sometimes. But often we are disregarded because we are young and it is often a matter of consideration, taking the time to ensure we are listened to. (Innu-Atikamekw)

I differentiate between listening and hearing. You know, sometimes I feel as though we put mechanisms in place, committees ... Often, I have asked myself the question [...] do we put committees in place just to say: "Here you go, here's a platform, you can express yourself there", but in the end, will what we say really have an impact on the decisions of band councils, for example? [...] We are a little jaded. (Innu)

The voice of First Nations youth in Canada, yes, there are groups, but let's be honest, there are youth networks here and there, but I don't know, I would say that in terms of my own voice, I don't feel listened to in those big networks. (Innu)

Young people who feel listened to by their community or setting according to their perception of being listened to by various players



The analysis of certain relationships between the variables under study shows us that the feeling of being listened to by certain players is associated with the feeling of being listened to in one's community or setting.

- We can see that chiefs, councillors and decision-makers play an important role in this equation. Among those who feel heard in their community, 86% feel heard by these players and only 37% do not feel heard by them.
- Moreover, being listened to by elders and the work and education settings is also

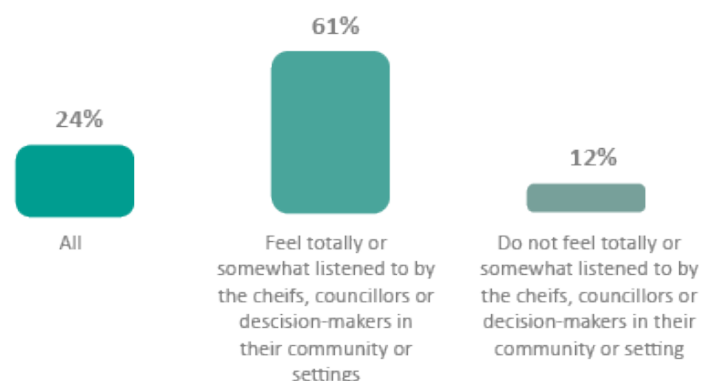
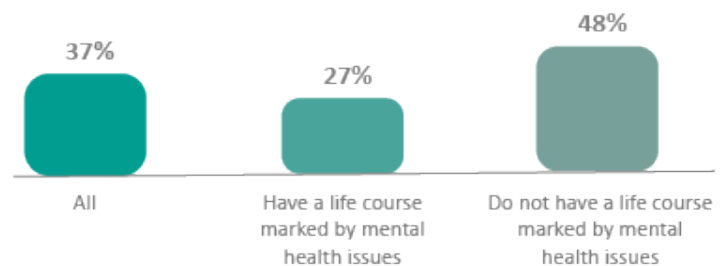
significantly associated with the feeling of being listened to in the community or setting of the youth. Among those who feel listened to in their community, 57% of young people say they are listened to by elders (compared to 37% who do not feel listened to by them), and 57% feel listened to in their work or school settings (compared to 29% who do not feel listened to in these settings).

The **importance of Elders** for young people was raised many times during the group discussions. Many of them specified the elders' role as guides and allies.

The involvement of elders is really the matter that is paramount throughout all of this. [They] teach us things, just by sitting around a fire, chatting with them [...] Just being with them, listening [...] When they are ready to share, we are there with open arms. Essentially, they make the trail in the snow for us. (Mi'gmaq)

Yes, well, I think that what is also important is [being] between young people and elders because there is not the same gap as there is between young people and adults. In the sense that [the] adults are seen more as mentors, people of authority, while the elders are seen much more as cultural guides, people who are easy to approach. I think they mostly feel the respect of others, the respect that gives them all the opportunity to talk. (Atikamekw)

- While 37% of respondents feel involved in the decisions of their community or setting, this proportion is considerably lower among those whose path is marked by issues relating to their mental health than among other young people (48% vs. 27%). Thus, young people affected by mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.) feel less involved in decision-making processes.
- If overall, around a quarter (24%) of young people feel that they have the possibility of expressing themselves in political bodies, this proportion jumps to 61% among those who feel listened to by their chiefs (12%).



Despite the differences that affect the realities of young people and of different nations, the participants see a **particular interest in bringing their voices together**.

We want to share our stories and then say: "Just because you are living in the boondocks of Abitibi doesn't mean that the guy who is in Gaspé doesn't have the same difficulties, that he doesn't have the same challenges, but how do we deal with that? How do we get past that?" We really need to reconnect the nations together. (Mi'gmaq)

During discussions with participants, it emerged that the **group effect** is an element that is conducive to the expression of voices. Indeed, the young people we met affirm that it is important for them to feel supported by their peers when they speak.

Well, I would say that young people have a lot more influence when they are also in a group. So, you know, when you're all alone talking, well then, you're all alone talking about what you're going through, but when you're in a group and you're all discussing the same topic and saying the same thing, well, let's face it, then you are stronger. Then, it is no longer an isolated case, it is a case of the community.
(Atikamekw)

To me, there is a word that I find beautiful, and it is the word "fraternity" [...] This fraternity is not just between young people, I feel as though this is perhaps something that is multigenerational, and this fraternity is strong among us [...] It is by coming together that we will be able to have leverage for negotiation and to make our nation evolve [...] I feel as though the new generation, we want to break down these barriers, you know, and be more fraternal towards each other. (Innu)

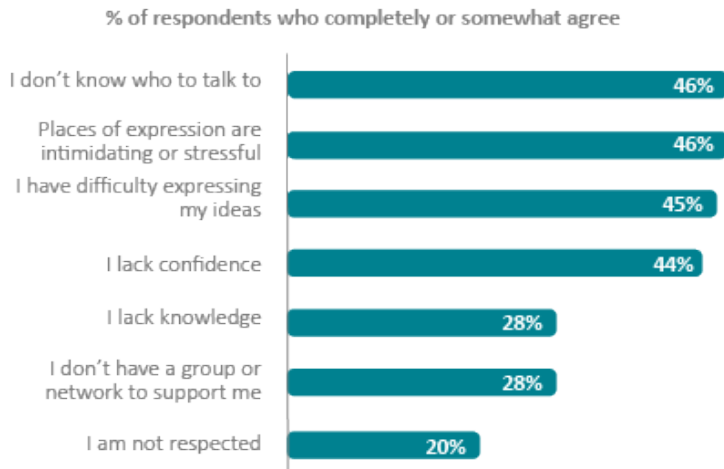
In short, various testimonies show the importance of young people accessing spaces where they feel taken into consideration and being recognized for what they are in terms of their diversity, experiences, knowledge, identities, etc.



➤ 5. Barriers to expression

The participants mentioned that First Nations youth face many challenges and obstacles when they want to share their opinions and assert their voices.

When I have trouble making myself heard, I feel as though it is because...



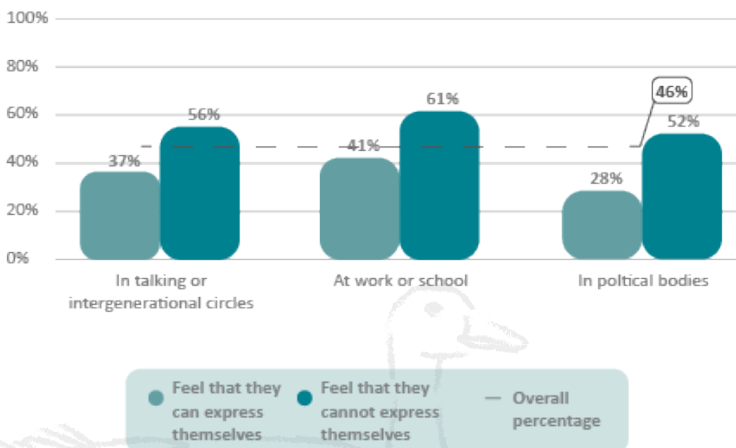
We asked respondents to select the most significant barriers from a list.

- Four barriers particularly mark the experiences of young people in a proportionally equal manner: not knowing who to talk to (46%), feeling that places of expression are intimidating or stressful (46%), having difficulty expressing their ideas (45%) and lack of confidence (44%).
- Lack of knowledge and not having networks to feel supported are less significant barriers; 28% of the respondents selected these two obstacles.
- Not feeling respected is the least significant barrier since only 20% of the respondents identified this challenge.

Statistical analyses show that several elements must be taken into consideration in order to explain the difficulties related to expressing oneself.

Young people who have difficulty expressing themselves because they do not know who to talk to, according to where they feel comfortable expressing themselves

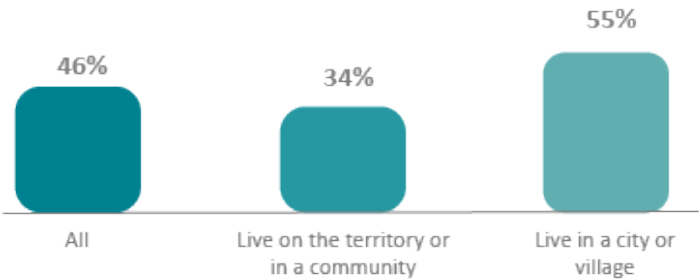
Young people who have difficulty expressing themselves because they do not know who to talk to, according to where they feel comfortable expressing themselves



While, overall, 46% of respondents have difficulty expressing themselves because they do not know who to talk to, this proportion is considerably higher among those who have difficulty expressing themselves in talking circles or intergenerational circles (56%), at work or at school (61%) as well as in political bodies (52%).

We also note that the proportion of respondents who live outside the community is proportionally higher than the proportion living on the territory or in the community in terms of having difficulty expressing themselves because they do not know who to talk to (55% compared to 34%). Young people who are less connected to their home community seemingly have more difficulty knowing where to express themselves.

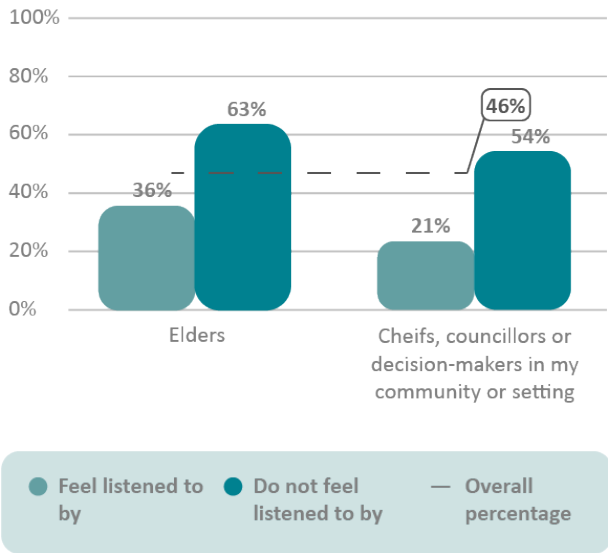
The community has difficulty realizing the issues of youth living in urban areas. (Innu)



Young people who have difficulty expressing themselves because they don't know who to talk to, according to the players

We also find higher proportions of respondents who have difficulty expressing themselves because they do not know who to talk to among young people who do not feel listened to by elders (63%) and among those who do not feel listened to by political bodies (54%).

Thus, it would seem that the capacity for expression in certain settings is linked to the spaces and support networks that are available. Young people who have a smaller network do not necessarily know where and how to put forward their ideas. Therefore, young people would prefer other methods of expression, such as art or social media.



During the discussions, the participants provided some clarifications regarding the issues that affect their ability to express themselves or the possibility of doing so. The participants mentioned that their **young age** puts them in a situation where they are neither informed nor listened to by the adult counterparts. They feel that there is no recognition for their knowledge or experiences.

Information targeting young people is not shared, how can we get involved if we don't know a discussion is taking place or if a concern is raised? When we offer ideas, they are rejected if the ideas reflect negatively on the adult who did not think of them first. (Mohawk)

Others mentioned that this lack of listening is amplified by their **lack of a diploma**; they therefore feel that they have **less legitimacy in the eyes of adults**.

*Because we don't have a diploma, we are not listened to. Even though it's in school or in other places, it seems like because we haven't graduated in this or that, we have nothing to offer, and so we are not listened to.
(Innu)*

I am a young Indigenous person who works in an Indigenous environment, you know, I have also been denied being listened to a lot of time, because I don't have a diploma, because I am young, but you know, sometimes it is about my own culture. [They] never ask me for my opinion and then they'll share sacred knowledge or things like that without our permission as Indigenous people, and that's something that kind of hurts me. (Anishnabeg)

Moreover, **participants living in urban areas or who leave the community to go study** feel less listened to and less legitimate in their demands.

*It's a little bit complicated sometimes. In any case, I speak from my experience since I come from an urban setting, I have zero connection with my community. So, you know, in an urban setting, it's difficult to have more access to our culture and to be able to have a feeling of community.
(Innu-Atikamekw)*

I would tell you that since I left my community to go to school, it's as if I'm a little less Indigenous. I'm not afraid to say it; I think when you leave the community, you get less attention, you try to stay connected, but you don't get to because you left the community. I find that very unfortunate because they say that it is to encourage, basically, the return to studies, but I find that we are not there [...] I feel a little apart I would tell you right now because I'm out of the community. On the other hand, when I was in the community, it was not like that, I was part of the community, I was involved, all that, but then I left, and now this is where I'm at. (Atikamekw)

This feeling is also shared by young people who do not speak the language, who are of mixed race or who **lack confidence in their identity**.

I'm not taken seriously because I don't speak Anicinabemowin or because I speak like I'm white. I'm afraid I won't be seen as Indigenous enough because my father is white. (Anishnabeg)

Ok, I put the word "lost", because I think in a way [...] the traditions and ceremonies have been so broken, that our communities, our families and especially the young people are still trying to find themselves, to come together in the community, to find themselves in traditions and ceremonies. So, for me, that's really what stands out. (Mohawk)

The structure of political bodies is an element that is widely raised as being a barrier for young people. They qualify these official decision-making spaces as being **inflexible, intimidating, symbolic and exclusive**.

The structure somewhat slows down the natural momentum that we might have to express ourselves. You know, sometimes committees are formal, you have a chair, or you have a representative. Then you know, there is an election, there is an assembly [...] I think people, all they want is to come and say what they have to say [...] Then, you know, gatherings [of young leaders], we come out of them feeling "boosted". I feel like we're going home with a bulging chest, ready to go change the world, and that motivates us. (Innu)

It would be helpful to have more inclusiveness, and this must come from both sides. It has to be "ground level", and it has to be "institutional" at the same time. (Anishnabeg)

The leaders of the nation = small "click" that is closed to others. (Huron-Wendat)

Some participants mentioned the **lack of inclusiveness** as being a barrier to expression in these predominantly male and homogeneous bodies, which do not reflect young people and their values.

People lack knowledge, empathy and active listening. The settings are rigid and not open to change or indigenization, even my nation, and there is very little space for young women. The words of a young woman are not credible: young = little experience and knows nothing about life; woman = associated with stereotypes that are still rooted in the mentality of the population, while men are good leading fathers of families who must be listened to. (Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk)



While the men had the power in the communities as chiefs, councillors, and everything, the women, they developed a different way of embracing the changes and being in big movements, like the Idle No More Movement, or even at the head of social services, or health services. (Atikamekw)

One of the groups that is having difficulty making their voice heard too, is clearly the LGBTQ+ community. If marginalized people don't want to speak, it's because they don't feel heard, so they think they have nothing to say. This is always how it goes. (Anishnabeg)

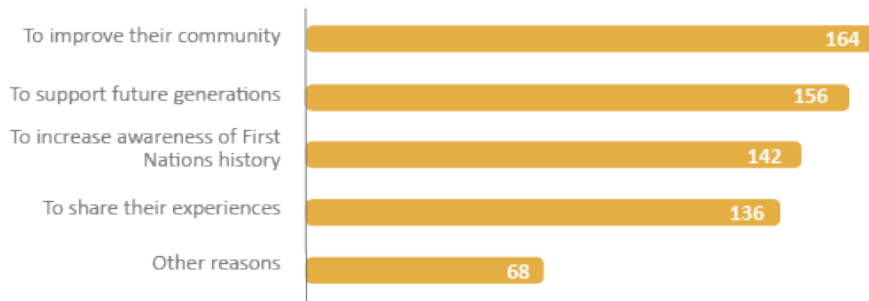
In short, young people want to assert their opinions, however, these are not always accepted and valued by other people. There are many barriers between young people and this promotion. While some spaces seem more suitable for young people, others, due to their inflexibility or exclusivity, leave little room for young people, their experiences and their knowledge.



➤ 6. Avenues for the future

In this final section, we present the reasons why it is important for First Nations youth to share their opinions and provide suggestions to foster this expression.

Why should First Nations youth share their opinions?



- 164 respondents mentioned that improving their communities is an important reason for sharing their opinion, thus making this intention the most frequent.
- 156 respondents mentioned the need to support future generations, 142, to make known the history of the First Nations, and 136, to share their experiences.

Several participants emphasized the strength of young people, both in terms of their **number** and in the originality of their ideas.

The youth are there to “reinvigorate” people a little and push the message a little more. Then sometimes it’s a shock, then sometimes you have to do “change management”, then sometimes it’s going to be difficult, then it can take time. But you know, if we’re able to improve the situation in our communities a little bit, I think we’ll get there. (Mi’gmaq)

There are many young people, there are many of us in the Indigenous population, there are really a lot of young people.

There are a lot of great ideas that unfortunately go no further than just being said. And I think if young people have this help to develop their ideas, it will lead to some very nice things. (Innu)

Promoting the voice of young people is a promising solution for the **future and for change**.

Because they have a right to it, and because most of the time they have laudable concerns. We should encourage them, yes, to listen, but also to share their diverse opinions on many subjects, particularly on their personal and collective dreams. (Maliseet/Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk)

Because we are not asked often enough or given the means to express ourselves often enough. Because children lose their lives from mental illness and neglect but are judged for not doing enough. (Mohawk)

This is very important for the future because we are the future! (Innu)

Young people want to **be listened to, but also heard**, just like adults and elders.

Knowledge is incomplete without our knowledge. The elders need the young, the young need the elders. (Mi'gmaq)

*They have a vision.
(Cree/Eeyou)*

Sharing their voice also allows them to **develop their confidence, their leadership, and to feel important, which contributes to their wellness.**

*For their own well-being!
(Innu)*

*To develop their leadership.
(Atikamekw)*

Six courses of actions were suggested by the survey and conversation participants to foster the voices of Indigenous youth.

1 Value young people, their identity and their cultural pride. The data presented in this report shows the great pride that First Nations youth have in their culture, identity and nation. This pride seems to be a predominant element in their participation. However, it must be more recognized and valued.

Because if you don't feel good about yourself, if you don't feel good about culture or with whoever you are or the community you come from, it is certain that you will not have the biggest voice in the group. So that is why I think one of the most important things is really valuing young people, valuing their culture. (Mi'gmaq)

2 Empower young people by ensuring that they have an important role to play in the decision-making process. This involvement must be carried out at the various decision-making stages in order to respect their collective process. This involves creating a space for discussion and validation at all stages of this process, with the aim of avoiding participation that is only symbolic.

The word that comes to mind is "empowerment" [...] I believe this is really what gives us strength. It's really an idea that must be supported by the people who are there, you know. Give the power, you know, give the power back to those people. Let the, you know, it's the group that chooses, the group that decides, the group that plans, that foresees and then manages its own affairs [...] Because if they are the ones who decide with their own ideas, then they are much more motivated to defend their ideas than the ideas of those making decisions from above. (Innu)

*It is a matter of making sure that we don't just do a certain aspect, that we are truly integrated from the start, and that we are an integral part of program development, review, analysis, etc. [...] That's what "taking our place" is, it's making sure that we're there from the start.
(Mi'gmaq)*

- 3 Develop and adapt various platforms for safe listening, expression and exchange** so that young people can access spaces where they feel taken into consideration and recognized for who they are, in their diversity, in their experiences and knowledge and in their identities.

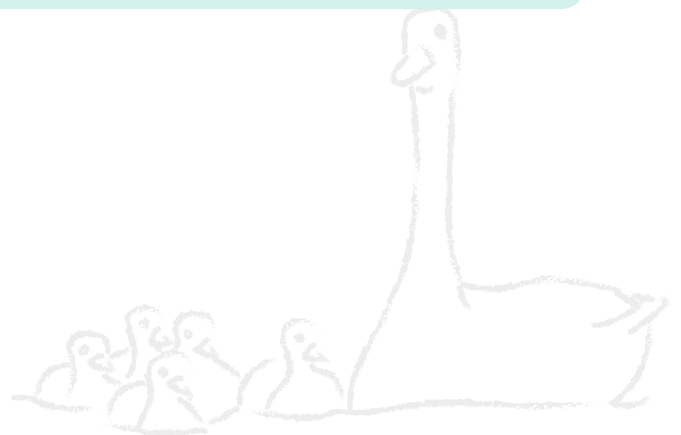
So, I think we can all agree that, to be listened to, you need consideration, time, and also respect for traditions which is super important. (Innu)

It is a matter of making it reassuring. There is a lot of dealing with “you're young, look, you don't know what you're talking about, go away.” But often, as I said, it's the approach to expression that isn't necessarily there yet, that is going to develop. So, what we're trying to do right now with the network is make spaces safe. Sometimes this means making things a little less formal. You know, if you put a microphone in someone's face, they're rarely going to want to talk. If we sit them around a fire with the elders telling stories for example, all of a sudden, they open up and express themselves. (Mi'gmaq)

- Thus, according to the participants, a space that is conducive to the expression of First Nations youth:
 - Allows for a feeling of comfort, safety (especially cultural) and inclusion for all young people;
 - Is a place where young people feel a sense of belonging;
 - Is free from judging others;
 - Is built by young people;
 - Is a space of validation, pride, training and meeting for young people (between young people and with elders);
 - Is a fluid and flexible space without formal structures thus encouraging informal discussions.

- 4 Transform spaces of expression and decision-making places so that they reflect traditional methods.** These teach us the importance of considering individual voices when decisions are made, while recognizing the need for intergenerational input.

When we look at traditional methods, when we talk to elders, our knowledge keepers, they all say it: “The young people, the women, the elders were involved in the process to really make the best decision”. They might have been involved by another party, but the young people were there to be consulted and give their point of view. Because there is wisdom in youth, there is a hope that has not yet been demoralized, demolished, and there is power in it. (Mi'gmaq)



5 Foster the collective aspect, the multiplicity of opinions and networking opportunities between First Nations youth. By the same token, it is essential to encourage **greater representativeness of young people from each nation** within decision-making and community bodies. The **strength of the group** is an important vector for enhancing the voice and opinions of young people.

And basically, what would help to have greater inclusiveness is to focus on our common points, for example you know, the fact that all the Indigenous communities in Quebec have experienced assimilation. Basically, inclusiveness, for me, would be taking into account the realities of others and respecting them. (Innu)

Indeed, it's easier to impose a message when you have that collective force behind you or with you. We are all unique, each nation is independent, is different, has its own systems of governance, its own systems of culture, traditions, etc. But there are things that bring us together, whether it's institutional or whether it's really just because our cultures have similarities, well then let us use these strengths, then we will work together, and for the little things that are unique, well we can take care of those on our own, that's okay. You need both. (Mi'gmaq)

6 Strengthen the political and historical knowledge of First Nations youth, but also among non-Indigenous people, to strengthen this confidence.

We often talk here about raising awareness and then teaching our young people about politics for things such as voting or things like that. You know, we often said that there was not enough done, you know, in terms of encouraging [...], precisely so that they are already informed, and to know that they have a voice. You know, your voice can be listened to and then heard if it is loud enough [...] Young people need to be more aware regarding politics so that our voices are more heard. (Innu)

Historical knowledge perhaps, because in my case, I didn't learn my history until I was about in my senior year of high school. You know, that's when I knew there was something wrong among Indigenous people. I saw a lot of my brothers and sisters abusing alcohol or drugs, so that while studying at Kiuna Institution, that's where I learned why my community had so many social problems. And that's also where I realized that it's important for young people to get more involved. So, knowing more about my history made me want to engage more, so yeah, that would be one thing that would be interesting to include, history. (Innu)

