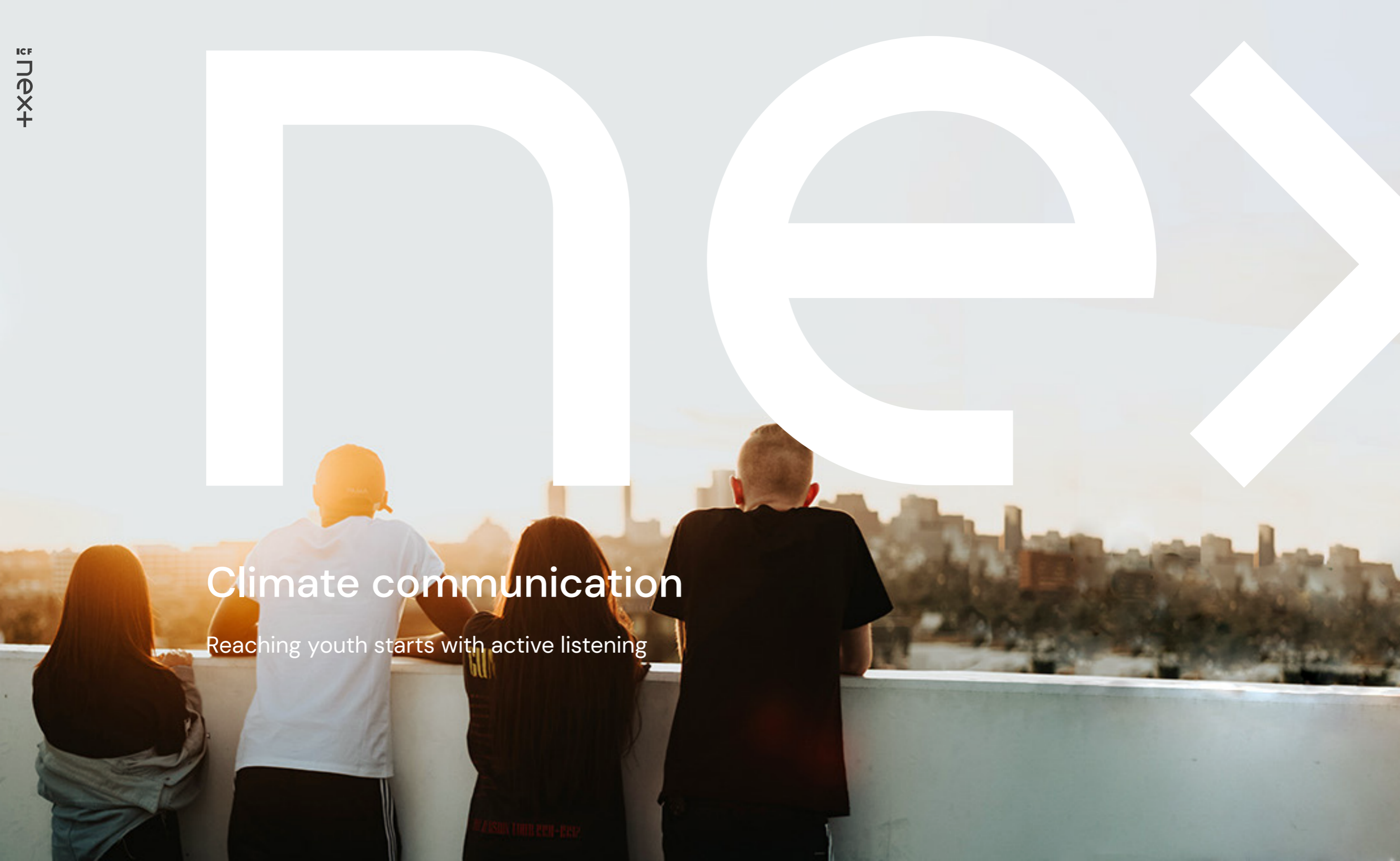


NEA

Climate communication

Reaching youth starts with active listening



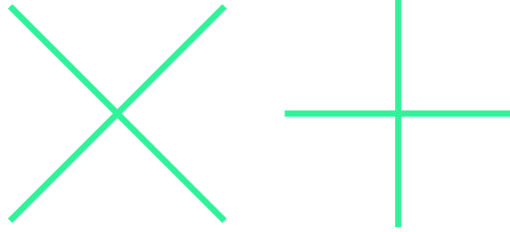


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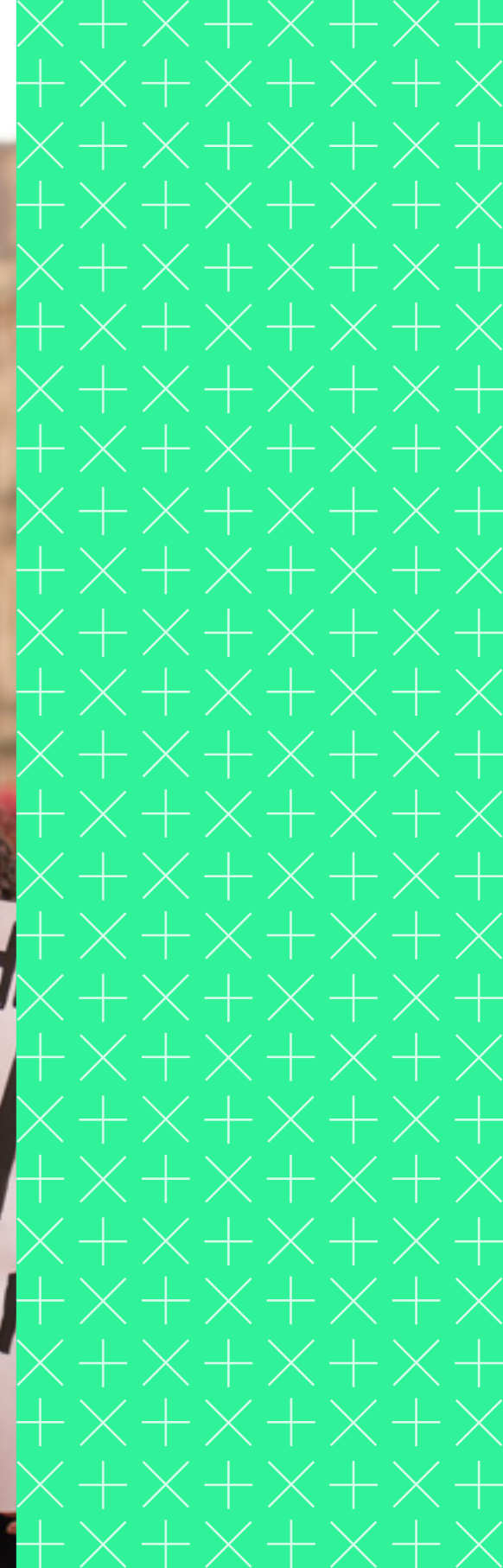
Look out for interactive elements in this document



Foreword

Today's youth will suffer the consequences of decades of climate crisis' inaction—but they are not identifying as victims. In September 2019, 46 million youth took part in a climate strike in more than 4,000 locations in over 150 countries. This unprecedented global mobilization shows the massive power young people have.

Their message was clear: previous generations have failed to act and future generations will pay the price.²



How the 'old' view the 'young'

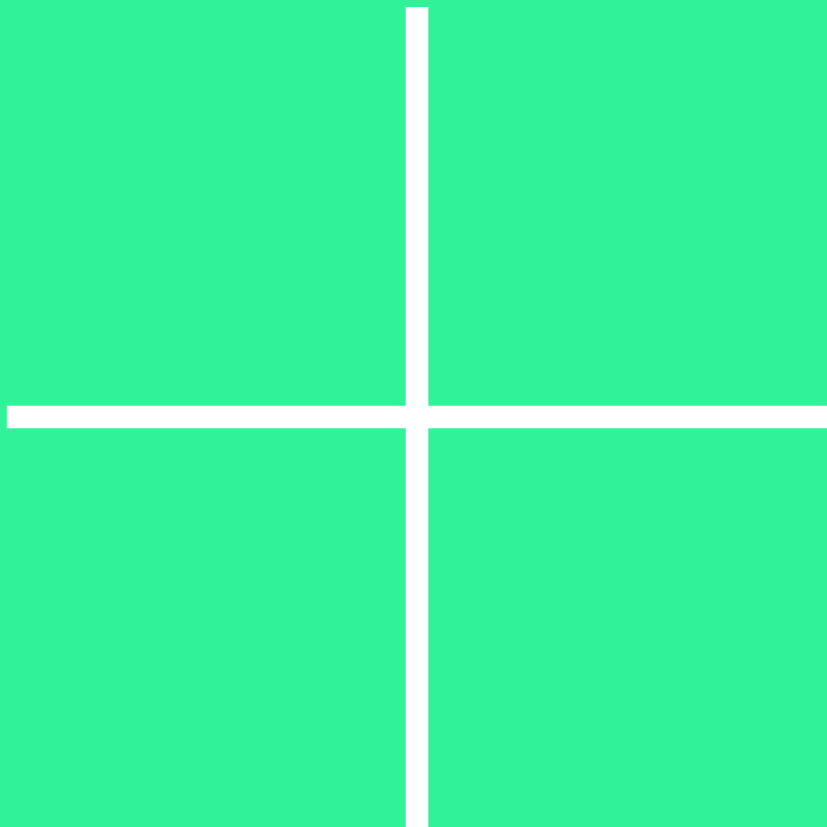
Older generations call them the “dependent generation,” “unable to make autonomous decisions and unlikely to plan for the future”.³ They point out that 57% of 20- to 29-year-olds and 40% of 25- to 29-year-olds are still living at home with a parent.⁴

Yet neuroscientists explain that the human brain isn't fully wired until the age of 25, when we begin to think rationally using the prefrontal cortex.⁵ It's this part of the brain that responds to situations with good judgment and an awareness of long-term consequences. Younger people process information with the amygdala—the emotional part.⁶

Meanwhile, an increasing number of children are being raised by “helicopter parents,” who follow their kids' every move and define their kids' future based on their own experiences rather than the current realities of childhood.⁷

Society might contend that youth are immature and in need of protection.⁸ If this were true, would youth initiate global demonstrations? Would they push the European Commission to make the Green Deal a key priority in its 2019-24 Political Guidelines? It is youth who are asking governments and world leaders to scale up their climate efforts and address the widening gap between words and action when it comes to climate policies.⁹

Chapter 1: Who they are





Gen Z
(Zoomers)
Born 1996 – 2010



Core beliefs

Authenticity, Diversity & Advocacy



Educated

1 in 2 will have a college education



Digital

Spend 15.4 hours per week on their smartphones



Multitaskers

On average will work out of 5 screens at a time



Less Focused

Average attention span of 8 seconds



Social

Spend 7.6 hours per day socialising with friends and family



Cautious

54% would rather save their money than spend



Entrepreneurs

72% want to start their own business

SOURCE: PEOPLE GURU

Introducing Marie, a typical Gen Zer

Marie is celebrating her 18th birthday in 2022.²⁰ **She was born in 2004**, when the EU welcomed new countries. She knows the borders only from her parents' stories. The same year, Facebook was created: both virtual and physical borders were coming down.

She was three years old when the first iPhone was released and **five years old** when Instagram launched.

When the Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015, **Marie was celebrating her 11th birthday**. Extreme weather conditions in Europe had become a "new normal." As of when Marie turned 11, the world had experienced its seventh hottest year on record, with continually rising concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane.²¹

When **she was 12**, she experienced another summer heatwave. 2016 was the hottest year ever recorded. 2020 was hotter still.²²

TikTok went online in 2017, and **13-year-old Marie** was already using her smartphone daily, as were 68% of 12- to 14-year-olds at that time.²³

She was **14 years old** when Greta Thunberg started her climate strike outside the Swedish Parliament in 2018.

And, a year later, **15-year-old** Marie might have joined the global climate strike and the biggest climate marches in history.

For the past two years, like most of her Gen Z peers across the EU and the world, her social life has been heavily restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has taken a heavy toll on her mental well-being.

In 2030 when Europe is aiming to reduce emissions by 55%, **she will be 26** and will probably be leaving her parental home.²⁴ She will be starting her own household and making some very impactful, climate-related decisions.



A few years later, **around the age of 30**, Marie might have her first child.²⁵ But that decision could be influenced by her growing climate anxiety; more and more young adults are considering the impact that having children has on our environment. In developed countries, having one less child could lead to a decrease of an average of 58.6 tonnes CO2-equivalent emission reductions each year.²⁶

In 2050, **she will be 46**. Will she be able to fully appreciate her green lifestyle in a climate-neutral continent? Or will she have to bear the negative consequences of climate change, if the heating of our planet is not stopped in time?



Our house is on fire!

The level of concern about climate change in Europe in comparison with older generations is very high. Some **96% of European youth think that climate change is a “serious problem”**.²⁷ According to Amnesty International’s 2019 Future of Humanity survey, young people consider climate change to be one of the defining challenges of their age.²⁸

Crucially, they’re not asking for small tweaks. They’re looking for fundamental changes in the way the world works. They understand that, just as they enter adulthood, they’re facing a climate emergency that endangers their lives.

Why should we go to school when you won’t listen to the educated?

Almost 80% of 15-year-old students across the 37 OECD countries say that they know about the topic of climate change and global warming³⁶; 72% say that they can explain why some countries suffer more from global climate change than others; and 63% can explain how carbon dioxide emissions

affect global climate change. They’re well educated about the climate—but **only 57% think that they personally can do something about climate change**. How can we help them use their knowledge, skills, and attitude to influence change?





Climate change is worse than homework!

According to a global survey²⁹ on climate anxiety, more than half of children and young people feel sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty when thinking about climate change.

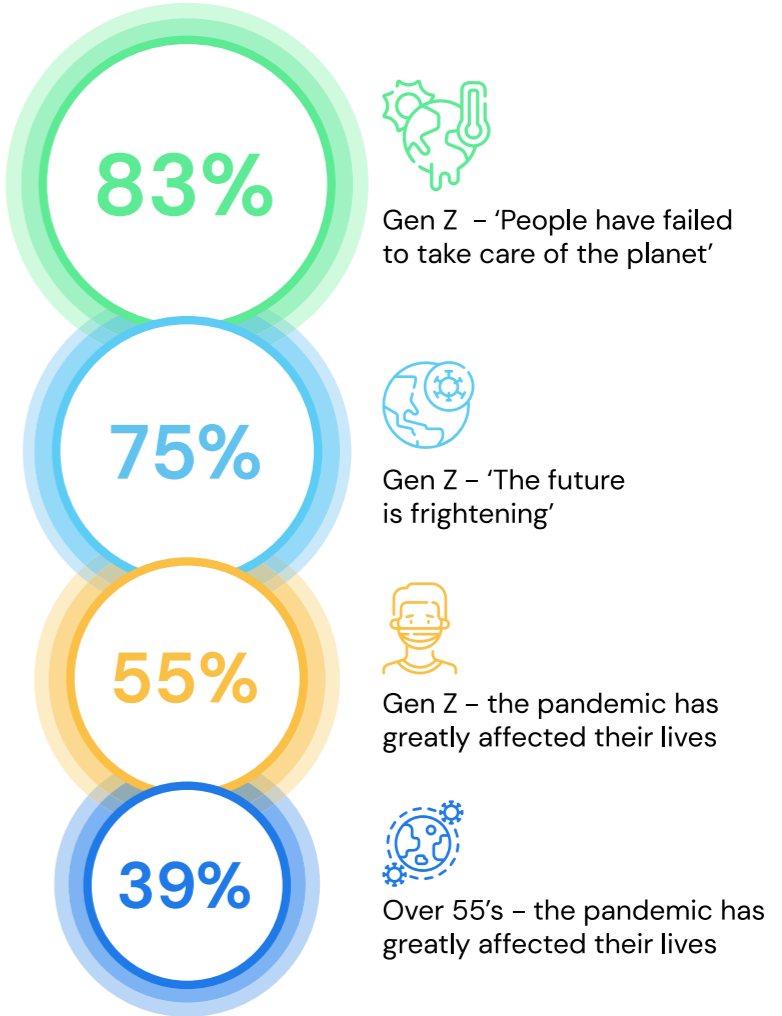
Those negative feelings affect how they function. Some 83% of youth believe that “people have failed to take care of the planet”; for 75%, “the future is frightening.” The on-going pandemic has added to their list of preoccupations: globally, 55% of Gen Zs feel that the pandemic has greatly affected their lives, compared to just 39% of over-55s.³⁰

In 2020, they felt increasingly lonely, and said their mental well-being was at its lowest level.³¹ The pandemic has raised their personal concerns regarding unemployment, health, and education. But climate change and the protection of the environment remain their top concerns, falling to “only” third place for Millennials.³²

It’s not easy to grow up in today’s world. Yet many young adults stay optimistic, with **69% of Gen Z positive that “the environmental changes seen during the pandemic make me more optimistic.”**³³

According to Extinction Rebellion, “the pandemic has shown us that a response in equal proportion to the problem, is both possible and necessary.”³⁴

The prevention of climate breakdown is Gen Z’s biggest hope.³⁵ There’s momentum to win back their trust—through listening to them with empathy, considering their future, taking action.



> Climate anxiety

(SOURCES: GLOBESCAN, 2020, DELOITTE, GLOBAL 2021 MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z STUDY)



We have to change, not the climate!

Forget about protecting the status quo: more than four in 10 of 15- to 19-year-olds agree that the most significant way to tackle climate change is through a radical change in our habits.³⁷

But the actions they're willing to take differ from those of previous generations. Gen Z considers that the three hardest actions to fight climate change are: giving up video streaming, stopping eating meat, and not owning a car.³⁸

> The hardest actions to fight climate change



For over-50s, the priorities are different: 48% would find it very difficult to give up their cars. This is linked to acquired habits as well as changing needs at distinct stages of life.

Yet even as young people are looking for radical change, climate action is rarely about black-and-white choices. Just as with other generations, young people are balancing climate actions with less ecological choices. Take fashion: While they're more demanding of sustainable options, they're still very much attracted to fast fashion³⁹ and its seemingly endless wardrobe choices.

And while 43% of Gen Z would find it "easy" to give up flying⁴⁰, 58% of them would go for a free holiday to the moon.⁴¹

It's unrealistic to expect Gen Z to sacrifice everything for the environment. But alternatives can be made more attractive to them, enabling enjoyment without having to sacrifice values. Those alternatives should be more affordable and consider their current financial means.

In many cases, the opportunity to choose sustainable products or services is illusory. For many young people in the EU, some sustainable actions (such as buying organic food or opting for an electric car) might be out of reach. They're among those most heavily impacted by the pandemic—with nearly 750,000 more young people currently not employed or engaged in education or training.⁴²

Over three in four of 15- to 19-year-olds agree that climate policies should take income gaps and social inequalities into account.⁴³

Gen Z wants to live a more sustainable life, but they want to do it their way. They need help to make climate-friendly choices sustainable for the many—and not only those who can afford them.

(SOURCE: EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK, CLIMATE SURVEY, 2020-2021)



Like the oceans, we rise!

When Gen Z decide to act for the climate, they often use the means they know best. Climate activists all over the world are harnessing social media to fire up global campaigns and amplify their message. For the digital native generation, it's a natural way to connect with peers and to express their engagement.

4 in 10 Gen Zs have created social media content relating to an environmental, human rights, political, or social issue.⁴⁴

And even though the engagement is serious, the content is often not: YouTube and TikTok videos, Instagram stories, or internet memes enable young people to tackle the big issues—such as climate change—with humor.

Light-hearted messages can have real impact—climate-related posts on TikTok garnered over 20 billion views globally in 2020 alone.⁴⁵

But the influence of young people goes beyond social media. They do the most to support climate activism in real life: **4 out of 10 speak up for the environment and 1 out of 10 are ready to march for the climate.**⁴⁶ Studies suggest that teenagers can convince their parents that climate change is real. Those inter-generational

chats are powerful and effective⁴⁷ and show that teenagers are real agents of change.

They can also influence corporate employment and sustainability policies. When it comes to buying products, following the pandemic, **54% of young people say they're now paying more attention to a product's impact on the environment.**⁴⁸

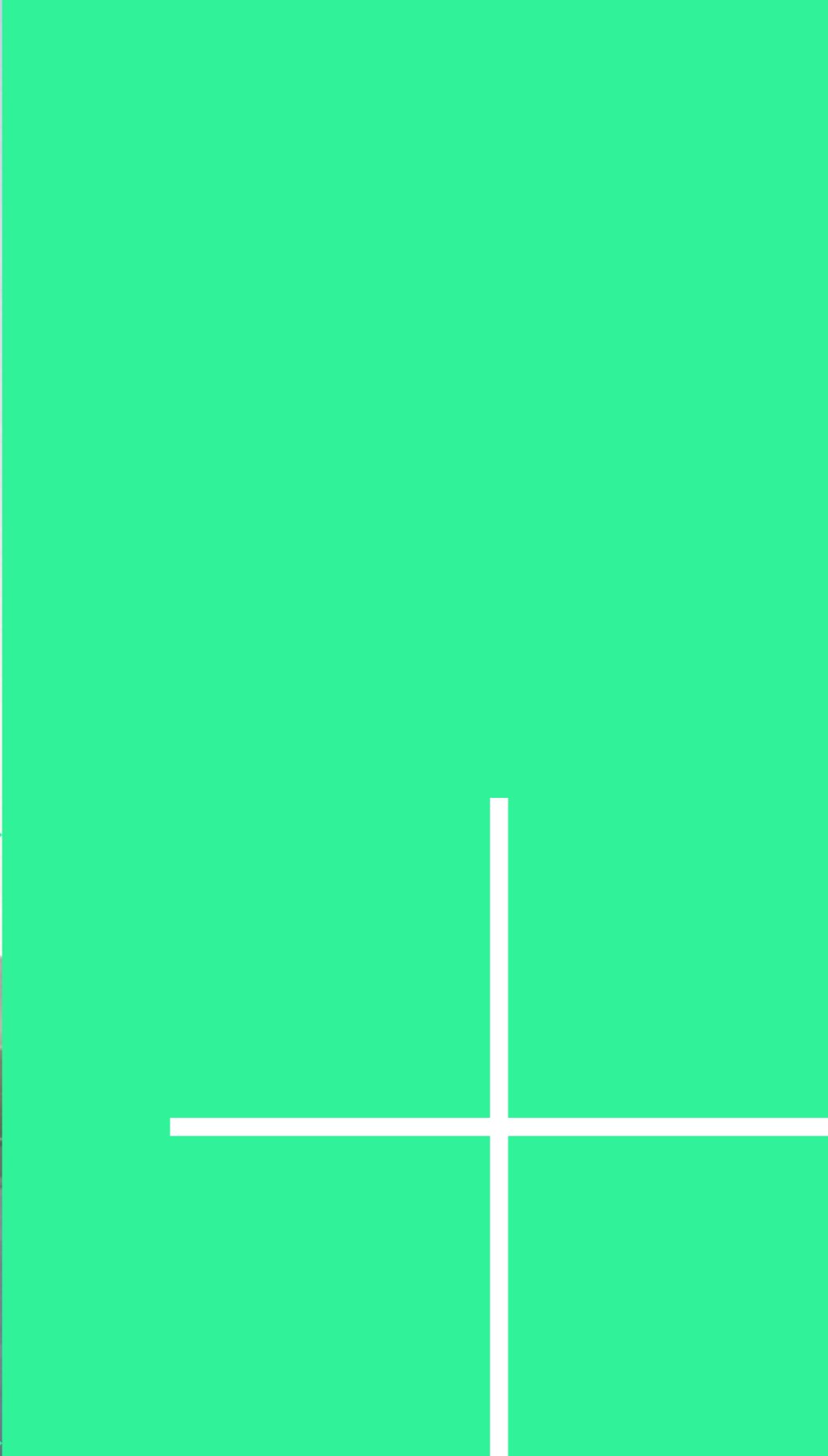
"Buy-cotting" a brand means refusing to purchase a product because of its negative environmental impact, and 28% of Gen Z are actively engaged in the practice.⁴⁹ Half of them are basing their career choices on personal ethics.⁵⁰

A business that wants to be successful with this audience can no longer ignore their demands. They're using their voices and purchasing power to hold companies to higher standards. They can influence crucial political decisions: "...without the youth climate strikes, Europe would not have the Green Deal today⁵¹"

But they're not yet fully aware of their potential impact. Many still don't feel they have much, or any, say over important decisions affecting them, with over 70% feeling lack of influence on the EU.⁵²



Chapter 2: How can we reach them?



The audience is expressing itself. But are you listening?



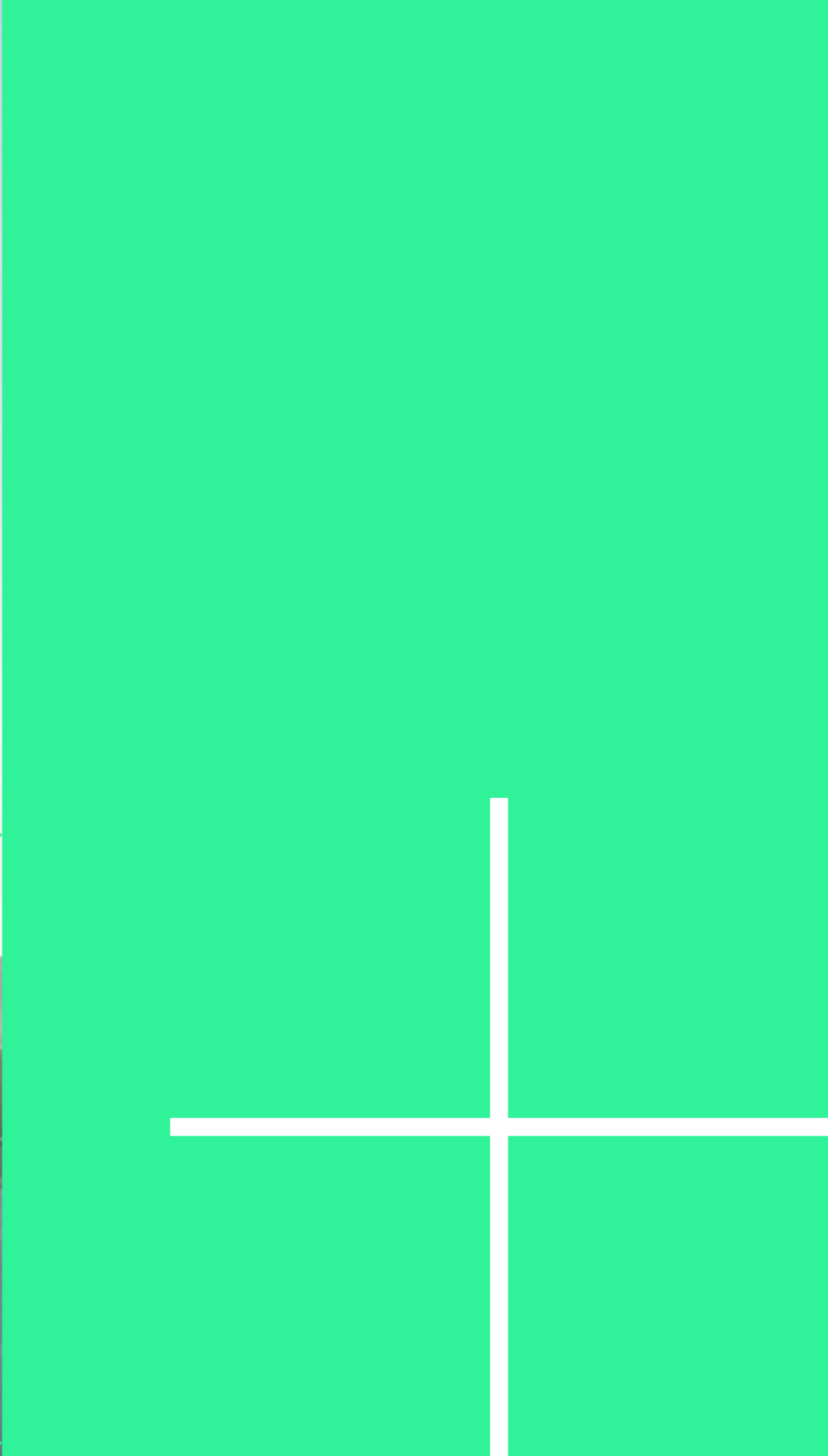
It has never been easier to reach so many people. The online landscape evolves constantly. But Gen Z is more unreachable than ever.

We've all read stories about how challenging it is to build strong relationships with a distracted and discerning generation. Industry experts dwell on Gen Z's perceived short attention spans, disinterest in brand and corporate messaging, and general disregard for what they consider vacuous priorities.

How many of these broad characterizations are accurate—and which of this generation's confirmed habits should we consider in our outreach efforts?

Before you think about adding your voice to the constant stream of conversations already zooming across Gen Z's screens, let's make sure we put in the time to listen to what they have to say for themselves.


Chapter 3: The secret of success



From a psychological perspective, this is the age when a young person's needs transform—from the need to know, they reach the need to create. This evolves into a need to create social values.

While developing their knowledge and life experience, young people find themselves in the so called "self-esteem positive affirmation" stage.⁵⁸

A number of game-changing groups have emerged based on the tenets of younger generations:

 Click the numbers to find out more



transparency

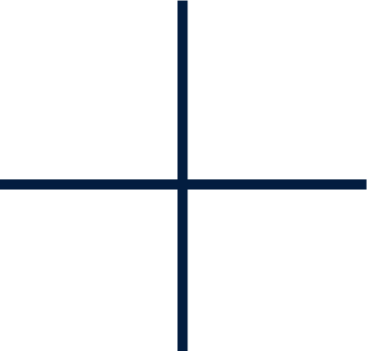
positivity

flexibility

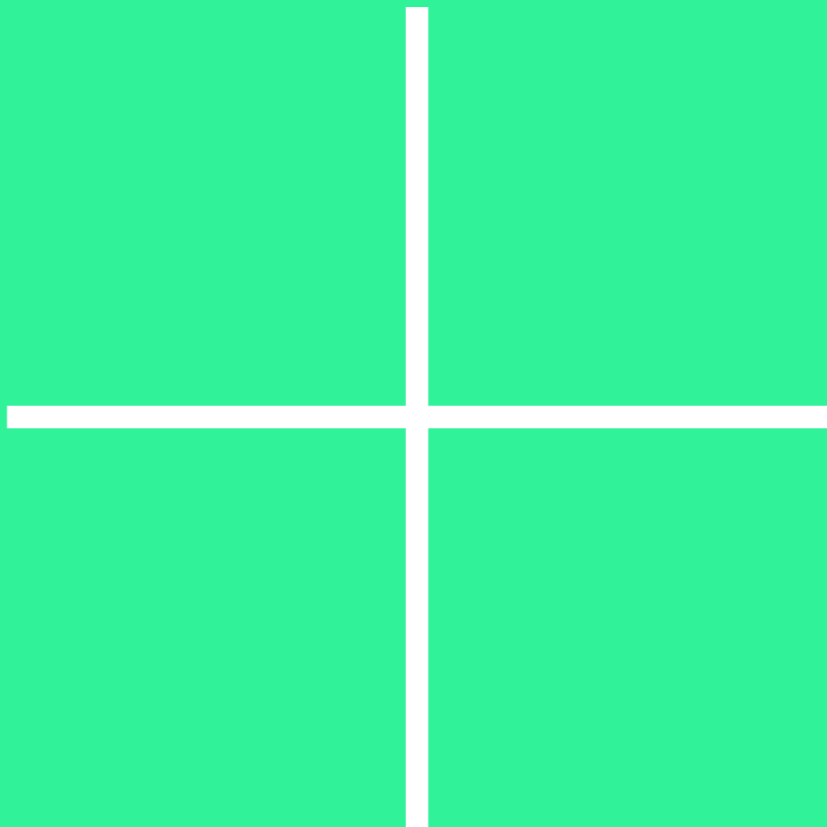


What makes these campaigns successful?

- They build on the “**us and them**” attitude that is present in our genes. As Elliot Aronson explains in his book *The Social Animal*⁶⁸, forming coalitions and grouping together is a natural action when “there is a shared purpose that also benefits each member.”
- They build on youth’s **tendency to see their group as different**, while the others (usually decision-makers) are all the same.
- They operate with the understanding that **an engaging and localized online presence** is a must, whether via the mainstream web or social media. It’s key to sharing ideas among young people.
- They engage in **transparency** and present **strong scientific arguments** to explain what’s happening with the climate.
- They place an **emphasis on emotions** because human choices and actions are more emotional than rational.
- They use a tone of **positivity** in their messaging, even when talking about crises.
- They embrace **flexibility** through showing young people that there is change happening inside a brand’s concept or organization.
- They are putting out a **call to unity**, whether this is intra or inter-generational.
- They focus on **action and results**, to actually show the changes (large or small) that have been achieved with the help of young people.



Chapter 4: The DO's and DON'Ts of reaching to Gen Z





DON'Ts

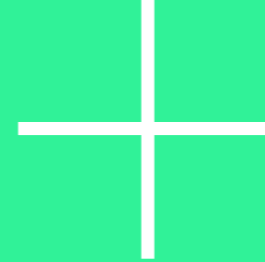
STOP inciting youth to act, when they're the ones who have been urging drastic action in the first place.

STOP informing and educating youth on what they can do to fight climate change if we can't manage to come up with strong actions of our own.

STOP accusing youth of having an attitude-behavior gap such as being in favor of green buying but not buying green⁶⁹ when we're not providing them with any clear, accessible solutions.

STOP believing that, if people want to stop climate change, they should not change the thinking that created and aggravated the climate change problem in the first place.

STOP top-down talking. Young people aren't only the future of our planet; they also represent the present, and they want to be heard.⁷⁰



DO's

START recognizing that young people have their own high aspirations, instead of patronizing them. Think how you can help them to be their best selves.

START thinking about young people as independent agents of change. Think about how you can be an ally, rather than a foe.

START listening genuinely to their concerns, motivations, and ideas, and then give them real choices so they can lead the more sustainable lifestyles they aspire to.

START showing real people, full of hopes and fears, instead of picture-perfect stereotypes.

START considering young people as partners and be aware they expect a two-way dialogue. Think about how you incorporate them into your story.

A new breed: The consulting agency



The ICF Climate Center offers compelling research and unique insights that help organizations establish clear, practical pathways forward through the combination of climate science and predictive analytics.

The Center builds upon the work of 2,000+ climate, energy, and environment experts worldwide—making us one of the world’s largest science-based climate consultancies. ICF works with business, government, and nonprofit organizations to design and implement programs and policies that drive low-carbon transitions and build resilience against the effects of climate change.

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Findings in this report are drawn from the ICF Climate Center, which offers compelling research and unique insights that help organizations achieve their climate goals.



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