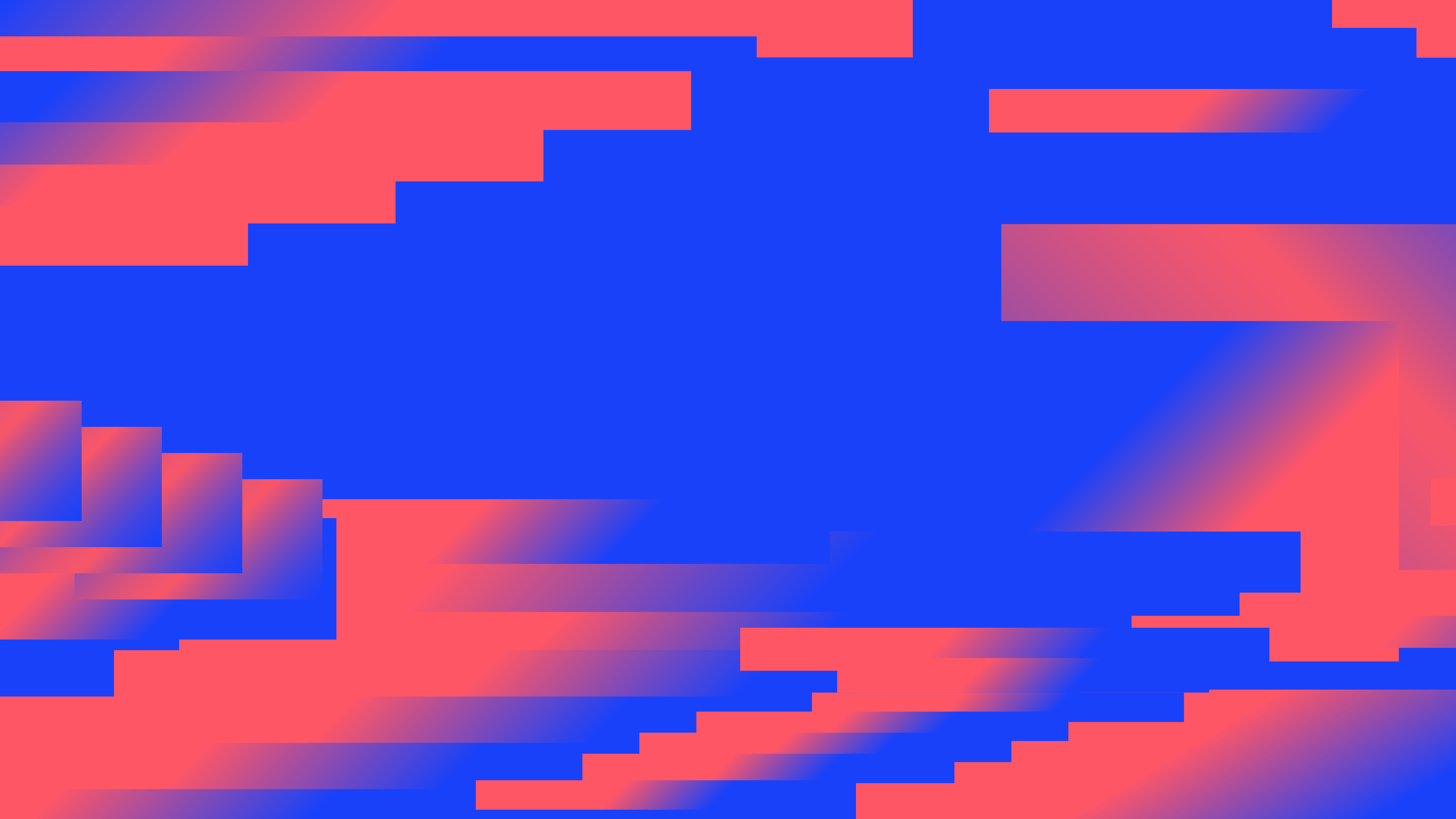


~~GENERATIONS~~

DEBATE



Walking connotes that some facet of the world changes at every step, and that something changes within us too.

👉 Italo Calvino, 1984

maize.

A JAKALA COMPANY

Designing Futurabilities

**MAIZE stands for two things:
a strategic design company that explores
cultures and technologies to generate sustainable
growth and a cultural factory that engages
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approach with data and technology to positively
impact businesses, people, and society.**

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Context

It first started when we were reading some reports about the future of generations at work. They insisted on the disruption that Gen Z was bringing into the workplace, on the impact of phenomena such as “quiet quitting,” and how the physical office was never going to be a *thing* again. We looked around, and **very few of those things resonated with us**: all these reports were depicting a US-centric (catastrophic) scenario where different generations were clashing one against the other, each trying to change - or maintain - the world of work according to their specific and unique world vision.

It didn't seem like our daily reality at all. We then decided to take the matter into our own hands. We wanted to gather **raw and unseen data** on the topic of generations at work, in order to develop our grounded-in-reality yet original perspective on the current situation of the workplace. Moreover, we aimed at considering a person's whole work cycle: from the moment they step foot in the world of work, choosing a job or starting an internship, to their first hardships and achievements, through their future ambitions. Work is also, and always, for all generations, a matter of which

life stage and relative needs one finds themselves into.

Since most of the reports adopt a North American view to consider the issue, we focussed on what was happening in a context closer to us. In fact, one of our goals was to offer a unique **European perspective** into one of the most complex socio-economic topics of current times and suggest directions for organizations that are based in Europe on how to move forward. We believe this report is a valuable read as it talks about all of us and speaks volumes about our past, present, and future. This report

aims to give an **interpretation of a few contemporary phenomena**, stemming from the responses of a limited but significant sample of respondents. Our intent is to **go beyond certain labels** and current mainstream headlines through an autonomous reading of the collected evidence. Finally, this document might be a useful tool for those working with **people and talent development** in organizations, as it strives to connect data with current emerging phenomena.

Methodology and panel selection

We said that what we were reading in mainstream reports did not resonate with our experience. Nonetheless, we didn't have any other specific hypothesis about what was happening in the workplace. We were surrounded by a lot of information

and pompous predictions about the future of work, so our main goal was to **gather original and unbiased data**, to dissipate the noise around this topic and establish what was what by looking at the numbers.

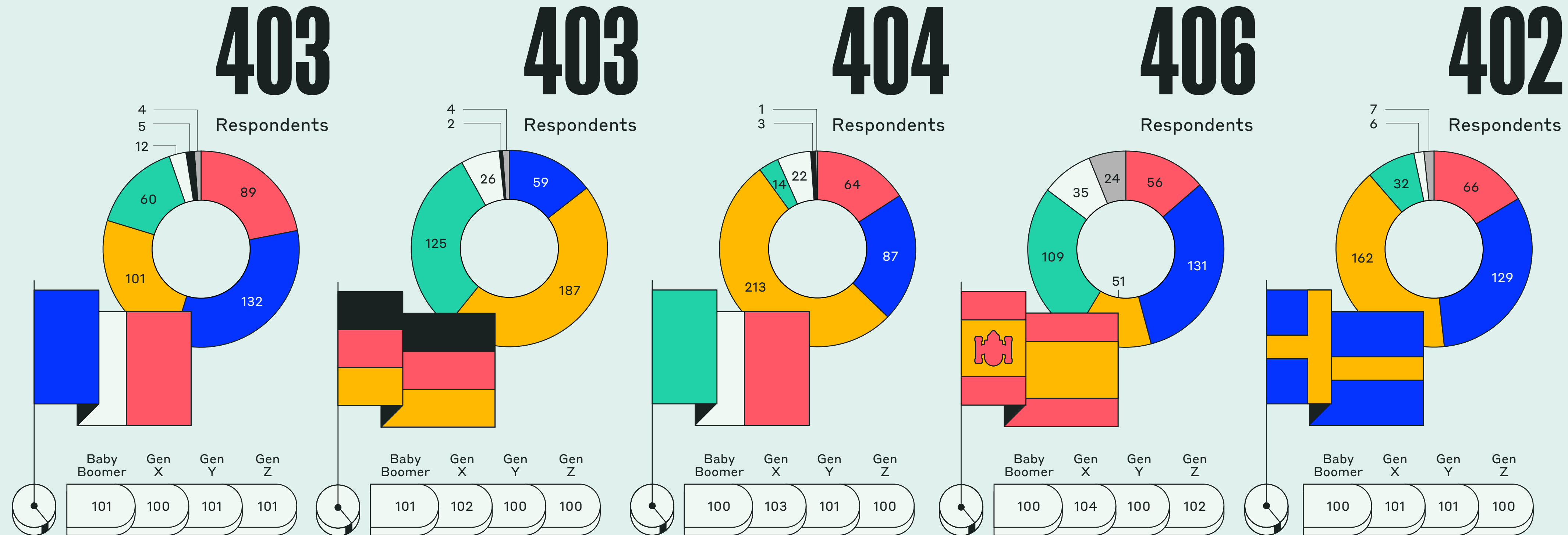
To decrease human bias, we also relied on automatic classification and clustering for those answers that contained loose text from

our respondents. We employed our product, CELI.analytics, to analyze the raw text, and the results obtained automatically were later revised by human analysts.

We selected our respondents from five different countries: **Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and Sweden**. The survey was administered to **500 people** from each generation,

How to read

- Higher education (Master's degree, PhD, specialization course)
- Bachelor's degree
- High school degree
- Apprenticeship / Professional training
- Middle and elementary school diploma
- No diploma
- Other



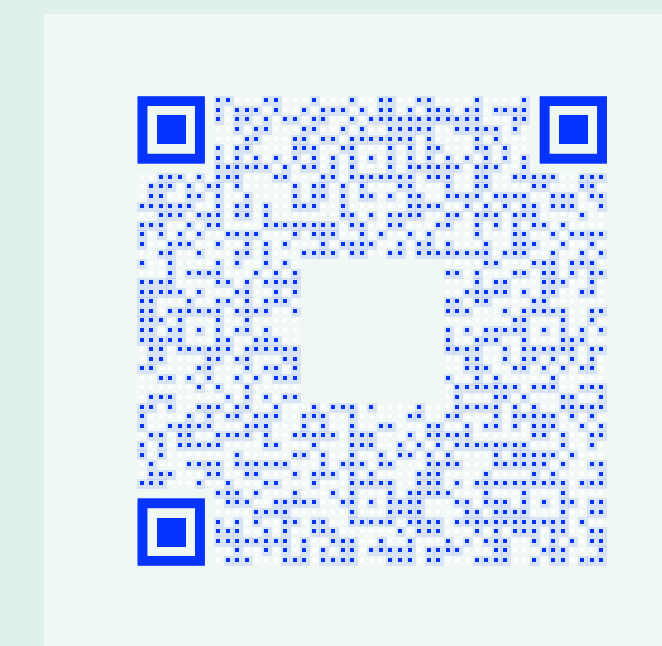
equally distributed across the geographies, between May and June 2023: the so-called Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964, currently aged 77-59), Gen X (1965-1980, currently aged 58-43), Gen Y (1981-1996, currently aged 42-27), and Gen Z (1997-2010, considering people currently aged 18-26). The total sample of surveyed workers is **2,018 people**.

Along with demographics criteria, we selected respondents who **are currently in the workforce** and are **employed in an organization**, either small or large, private or public. Since we were interested in seeing how the different generations are interacting in the workplace, we excluded freelancers from our pool.

Although Europe presents significant differences with the US in terms of phenomena in the workplace, it is nonetheless a **Western** conglomerate of countries, and we would love to see similar research conducted in other areas of the world. Moreover, all of our

respondents present a high level of education, since they are all employed in a formal organization.

Generations Debate has also been a **live discussion** that served to get a **closer look at people's unique stories** and at the several points of contact that exist among different age groups. Check out our **series of short videos** collecting the highlights of the discussion.



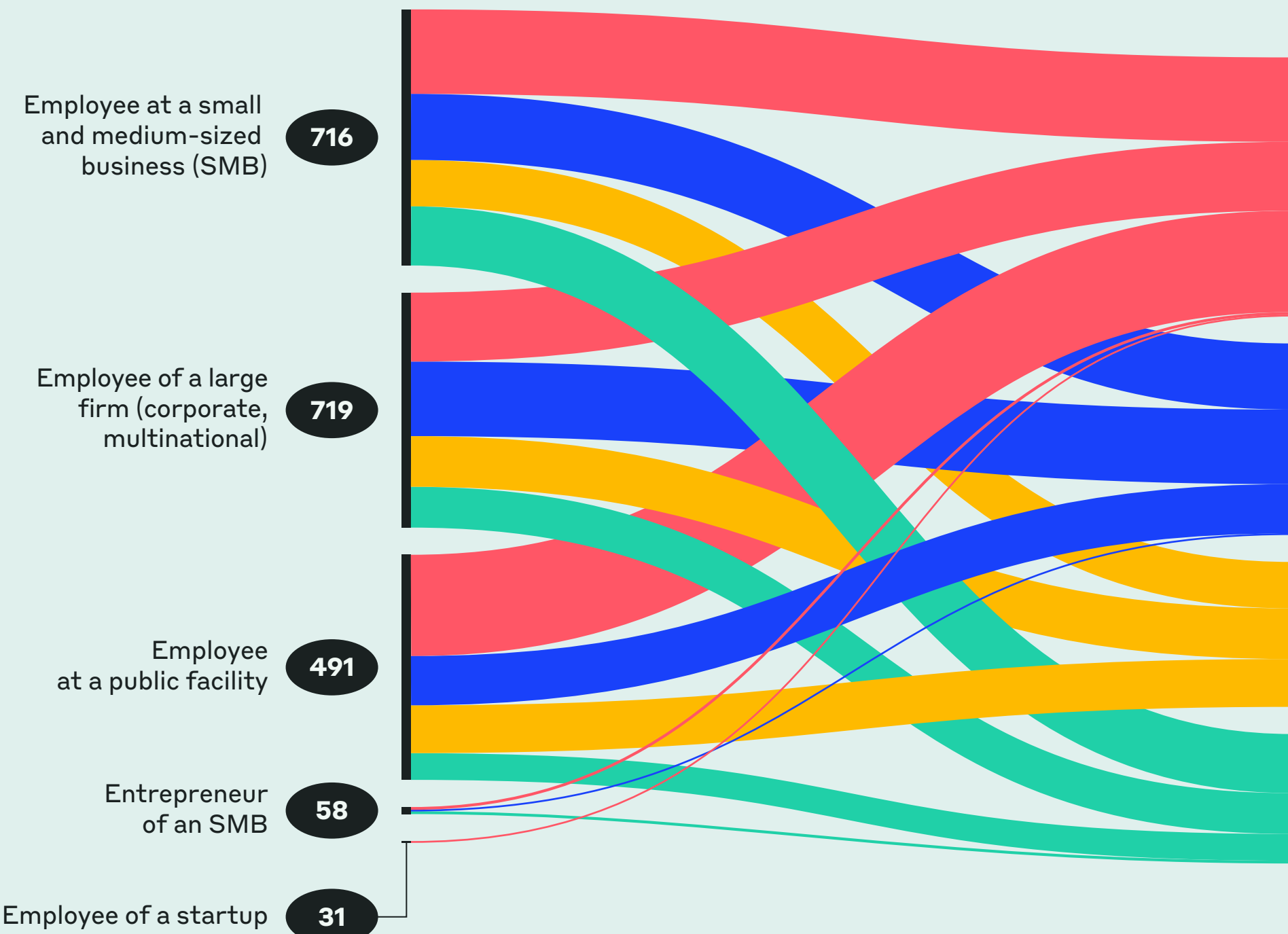
Check out video highlights from the Generations Debate live discussion

FIGURE 1

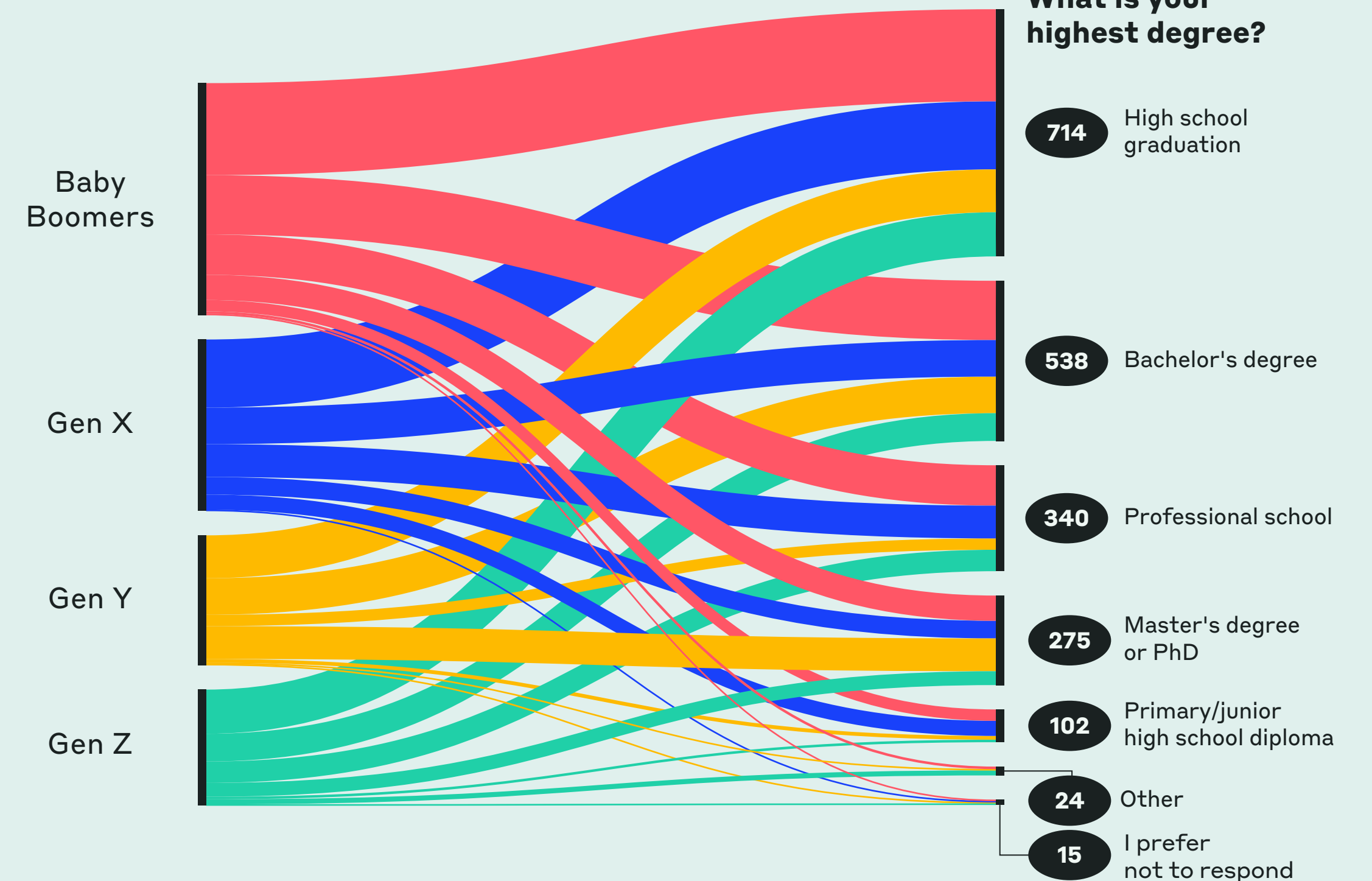
Respondents' type of occupation, level of education, and years spent in the job world

The sample is mainly composed of private company employees, and a smaller part of workers are employed at public facilities. Respondents are relatively highly educated and a significant amount has been in the job world for more than 20 years.

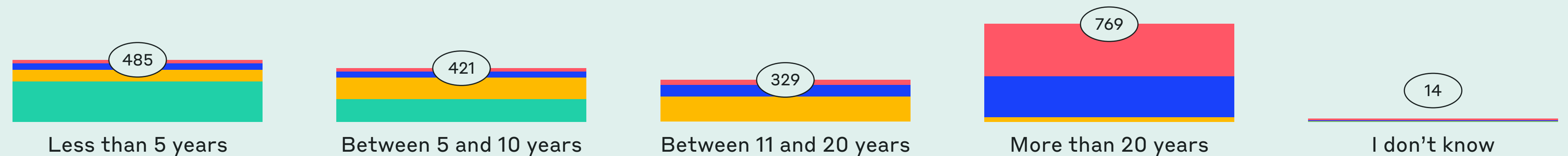
Where do you work?

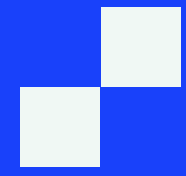


What is your highest degree?



How long have you been working?





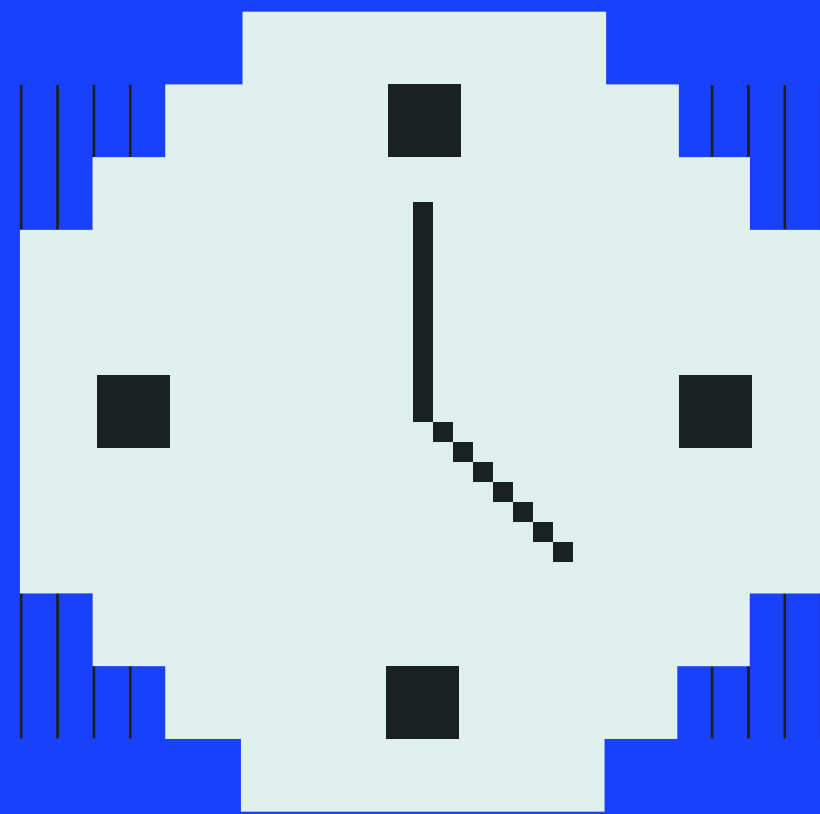
CHAPTER 1



Your time



FREE



WORK

Work time



When approaching the topic of work through the lenses of the different generations, one would expect to see some of the most mainstream opinions reflected in data. For example, that all Baby Boomers want is to retire with a good pension, that Gen Y is quiet-quitting and that they are all going to work for NGOs; or even that Gen Z does not want to work at all.

As always, reality is way more nuanced than the *vox populi* would suggest. Being born during a certain period does play a role in people's decisions about their study path and their job, but it is definitely not the only factor; in fact, it may not even be the most prominent. Some of the topics in our survey were supported by the majority of participants across all generations, thus demonstrating that some issues evoke strong feelings that **transcend the boundaries of age**.

No matter how you look at it, it seems that living in a **constant state of uncertainty** has brought us to reevaluate one common thing, i.e. **how we spend our time**. Which is a reasonable quest, since most of our time is spent at work: the average duration of a European's working life aged 20-64 is 35.2 years, which totals to about 61,500 hours in a lifetime.

The **unpredictable nature** of the period we are living in has made us more self-reflective and brought us to ask ourselves questions about how we employ our time, and how we could

do it differently. The constant **feeling of being at a crossroads** regarding the use of our time and energy certainly translates to our working life and employment too. To date, there are plenty ways through which we can support ourselves, although steadily growing inflation, a decline in purchasing power, and an unstable job market pose several difficulties that are hard to overlook when deciding whether to follow one's heart and desires or find a decent-paying job. To these elements, add the need to protect one's mental health, and it seems to become an impossible puzzle to solve. *Should I look for a job that pays a better salary? A job that allows me to do what makes me happy? Should I just take more time for myself? More time to devote to others?*

This first chapter will focus on these questions in particular: the ones that are most strongly represented across the whole spectrum of generations and that elicited the strongest responses from our participants.

What everyone wants is...

About a decade or more ago, quotes like “If you do what you love, you’ll never work a day in your life” pervaded inspirational blog articles and magazine headlines. Online movements like *#bustleculture* and *#riseandgrind* then became popular in the Silicon Valley startup environment and giant tech companies, where entrepreneurs believed that the more time and effort you spent on work — sacrificing friends, family, and selfcare — the greater your self worth was. This concept later spread around the global corporate sphere. But a **strenuous wake-up call** made the

entire world of work aware of what lies beyond professional duties.

When the global COVID-19 pandemic hit, workers forced to stay home found themselves in a radically different environment, in which they simultaneously worked longer hours and spent more time with their families. This made many realize that **time can be spent differently than what they were used to.** What were once activities relegated to weekends, or squeezed into busy routines, could be prioritized and conceived as a central part of their days, or at least be given an equitable amount of time.

When we asked about which are the most important aspects in one’s career path, we found that, overall, “work-life balance” is the number one priority that **largely and consistently resonates across all generations;** “having a secure and long-term job” coming right behind. In fact, our findings show that beyond these two primary needs, all other desiderata sit much further behind in workers’ minds: “improving one’s knowledge and skills,” “working in an organization that shares one’s values,” and “being in control of work tasks” are important to just about a third of respondents; and, interestingly, with little to no

imbalance when between generations. Also notable is that “being able to make a difference through one’s job” and “climbing the ladder to increase salary” appear to be of marginal importance, to all age groups.

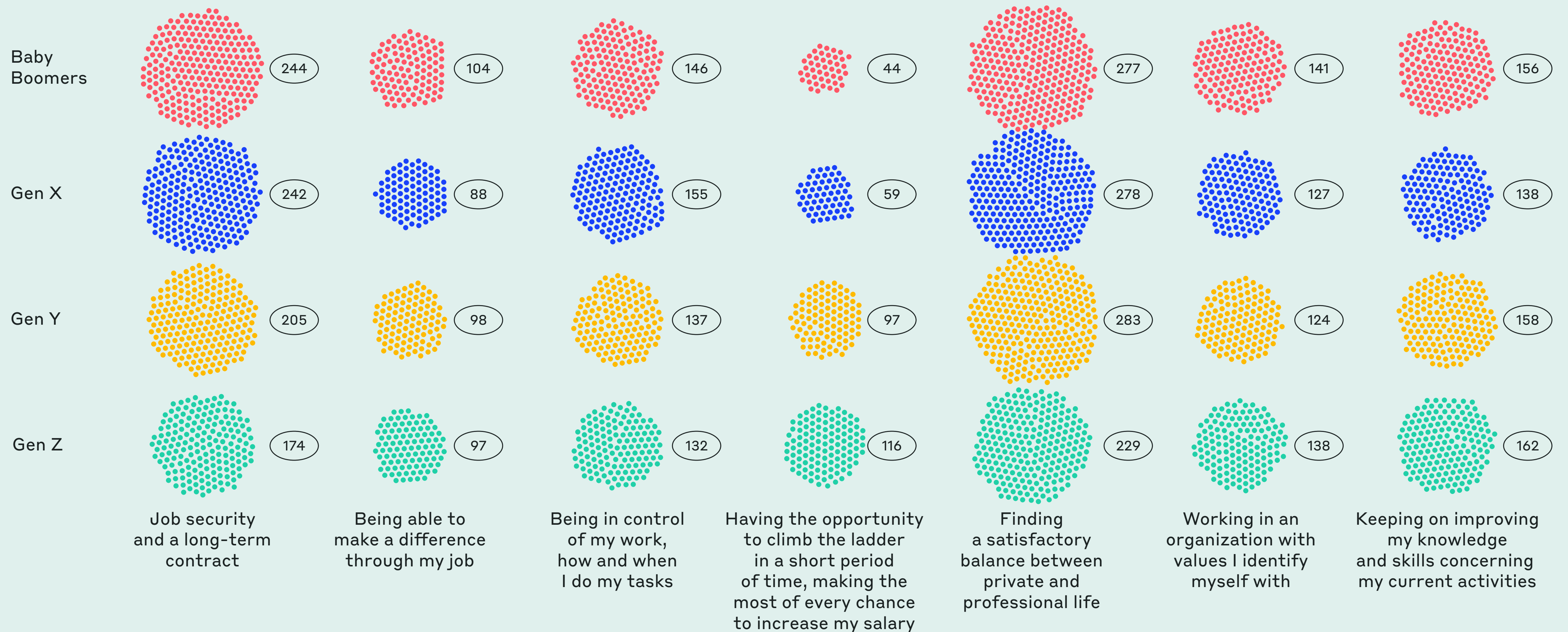
FIGURE 2

The most relevant factors playing a role in one's career

Work-life balance is the utmost priority across all generations, and having job security and a long-term contract comes in second place. Gen Z is the generation that values skills development the most, but Baby Boomers and Gen Y are close behind. Being in control of how and when work is done is particularly relevant for Gen X, while sharing an organization's values is regarded as important by Baby Boomers and Gen Z.

Disclaimer:

* Answers for "Other" and "I wouldn't know" were omitted from this representation.
 * Multiple answer question.



But what does it mean, for different generations, to have a proper work-life balance? What's the value for people in having a balanced amount of time between work tasks and personal time?

Being overwhelmed with numerous responsibilities, Gen Y might have been **the first generation showing signs of unhappiness and dissatisfaction toward organizations** that could not meet their expectations in terms of balance between work and private life.

For example on Reddit, a sharing platform organized in “subreddits” (i.e. spaces to discuss topics of interest for different communities), there is a lot of ongoing discussion on shifting working conditions, job contracts, hiring processes, and more. The youngest age group is also particularly active and vocal on this aspect. On a subreddit dedicated

to “antiwork,” a user posted a **Business Insider** article titled: “Gen Z job seekers are rattling older managers by asking about work-life balance in the first interview.” Among hundreds of similarly-toned comments across the 10-year-plus activity of the 2.8-million-strong (and growing!) community, one reads: “I’ve been asked to go into management 4x at my current job and this is exactly why I do not. I don’t understand how these people can knowingly give their lives to a company.” Another says: “Duh. I’m gonna work till I die, die in debt, and never own a home. I at least want some time to actually enjoy life.”

The considerations on this popular subreddit are just a few evidences of the fact that more people have started to totally resent the idea of work for **mental health reasons**. It appears that 83% of respondents of a **2022 US Deloitte survey**, reported that burnout from work can negatively impact their personal relationships. The more flexible working conditions experienced

during the pandemic have made people and organizations realize that it was possible to work hybridly, somewhat lessening the negative impact that increasing work-induced levels of stress and anxiety have on our well-being. Some even decide to look for **full-remote roles**, or shift their careers, eventually **moving away from cities** to live a slower, less stressful life. “Quiet-quitting” and “acting your wage” have become popular trends on TikTok and in real life, as quests to **start taking on the minimum workload possible** and abandoning the “going the extra mile for the employer” mindset make inroads. For some, wanting to restore one’s psychological sphere means distancing themselves from corporate life in favor of finding different endeavors. As we will explore further near the end of this chapter, there has been a significant increase in people **leveraging their creative skills, passions, and hobbies to make a living** from the comfort of their homes through digital platforms.

👉 WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The term “**work-life balance**” first appeared in the UK during the **Women’s liberation movement** and, more recently, it has been coined by scholars as “an individual’s ability to meet their life priorities while still being effective and satisfied in their work and family roles.”

On the other hand, our survey shows that “having a secure, long-term contract” is the second priority across all generations, which might be tied to the need for more **stability** and **reliability** in the uncertainty that has characterized recent years. Ongoing political turmoil and frequent environmental disasters have **negatively impacted our purchasing power and overall quality of life**, prompting people to seek financial shelter.

Indeed, **continuously increasing inflation rates** are causing worry about rising grocery and energy prices in more than 80% of respondents to a 2022 survey by Intrum on a panel of over 24,000 Europeans, leading to significant **changes in the way workers spend their salary**. Shopping at discount stores seems to be the main shift that the general population has embraced, no matter their age, as well as reducing eating out habits and canceling subscriptions to apps and streaming services.

The latter represents the third most popular way to reduce spending for Gen Z and Gen Y. But **financial anxiety** affects people well **beyond everyday expenses**. The inability to put money aside consistently is negatively impacting those looking to buy a house. Specifically, in Southern European countries — where it’s more common to **buy rather than rent** homes and apartments, and homeownership represents a passage from a life stage to another — Gen Y is currently experiencing **serious economic difficulties** compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers at their age.

The overall uncertainty of the global economy may be even more impactful on the younger generation; Indeed, when asked whether “having the opportunity to climb the ladder in a short period of time, making the most of every chance to increase salary” was important, our data shows that **Gen Z** is the generation that is most **money-driven**, with about a third of respondents.

👉 PERMACRISIS

The term “**permacrisis**” born by the merge of the words “permanent” and “crisis,” is not new, as it first appeared in 1975 in a publication on capitalism and public policy and it is particularly apt to describe how, one after the other, unexpected negative events have been worsening the conditions we live in. Formally, **Collins Dictionary** defines it as “an extended period of instability and insecurity, especially one resulting from a series of catastrophic events.” and selected it as the 2022 word of the year.

More than

A large, bold blue number '80' is displayed. A red circle highlights a percentage sign (%) inside the second zero.

of respondents on a sample of over 24,000 Europeans worry about rising grocery and energy prices according to a 2022 Intrum survey.



Taking a deeper look at the different surveyed countries, we thought **focusing on corporate workers** could provide a relevant view for structured organizations about employee priorities. Those working in these kinds of environments might be getting fewer benefits than public employees, and they might work with more “boundaries” than those employed in startups, but they usually have more opportunities to up their skills, change employers, shift their career path, and so on.

So, what do corporate employees in different European countries value more in their careers?

As mentioned before, a satisfactory work-life balance is the top priority for all generations and countries. The second choice is also shared by all geographies: a secure, long-term contract.

👉 **Swedes** working in corporations value the possibility to have a **quick career and salary increase** more than any other population; almost one third of positive answers come from them. They also rank having a secure and long-term contract as important as being in control of how and when they carry out their work. With an above average inflation rate at the beginning of 2023, Sweden appears to be among the top 5 countries that saw the least growth in salary increase between the end of 2019 and 2022, (measured on hourly wages), together with Netherlands, Italy, Czechia, and Estonia, according to a 2023 analysis by Euronews.

👉 For **Italians**, working in an organization that **shares their same values** is as important as **being in control** of how

and when they carry out their work, and **the opportunity to grow their skillset**.

👉 Out of all the surveyed populations, **Germans are the most demanding**. They selected the greatest amount of options, spanning from feeling in control of work tasks, recognizing oneself in an organization’s values, and more. What they deem as particularly important is having the opportunity to grow as a professional and improve one’s skills.

Top 5 countries that saw the least growth in salary increase, (measured on hourly wages) according to a 2023 analysis by Euronews.

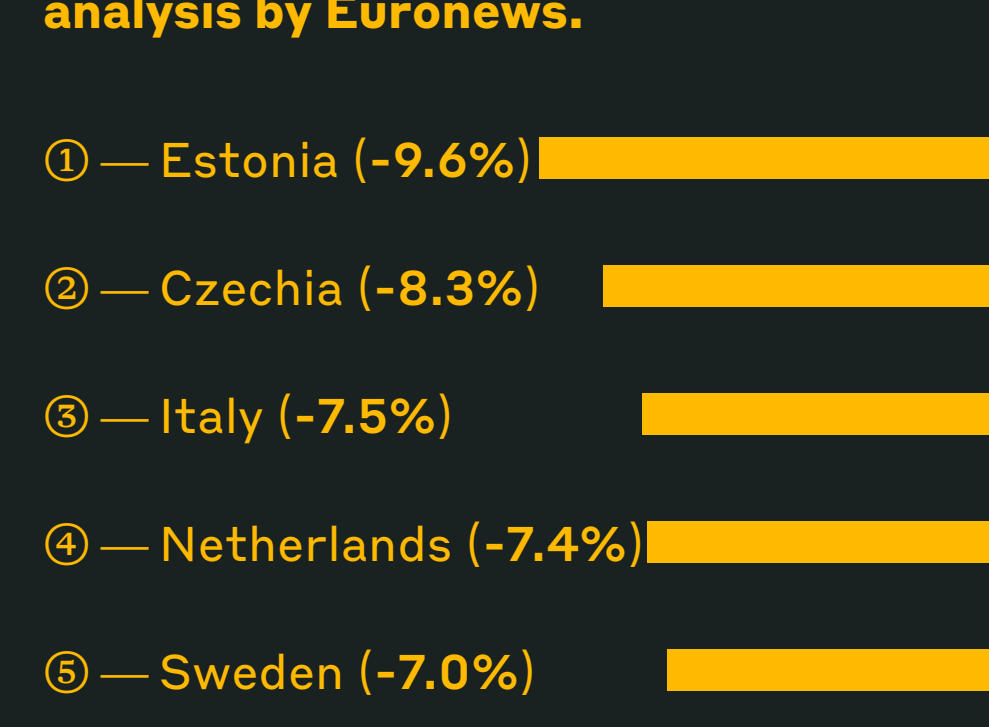


FIGURE 3

Priorities for corporate employees around Europe

White collars around Europe showcase different priorities: Swedes appear to be more practical and money-oriented, while Italians are sensitive to organizational values and growing their skillset. Germans are the most demanding, as they selected the greatest amount of options overall.

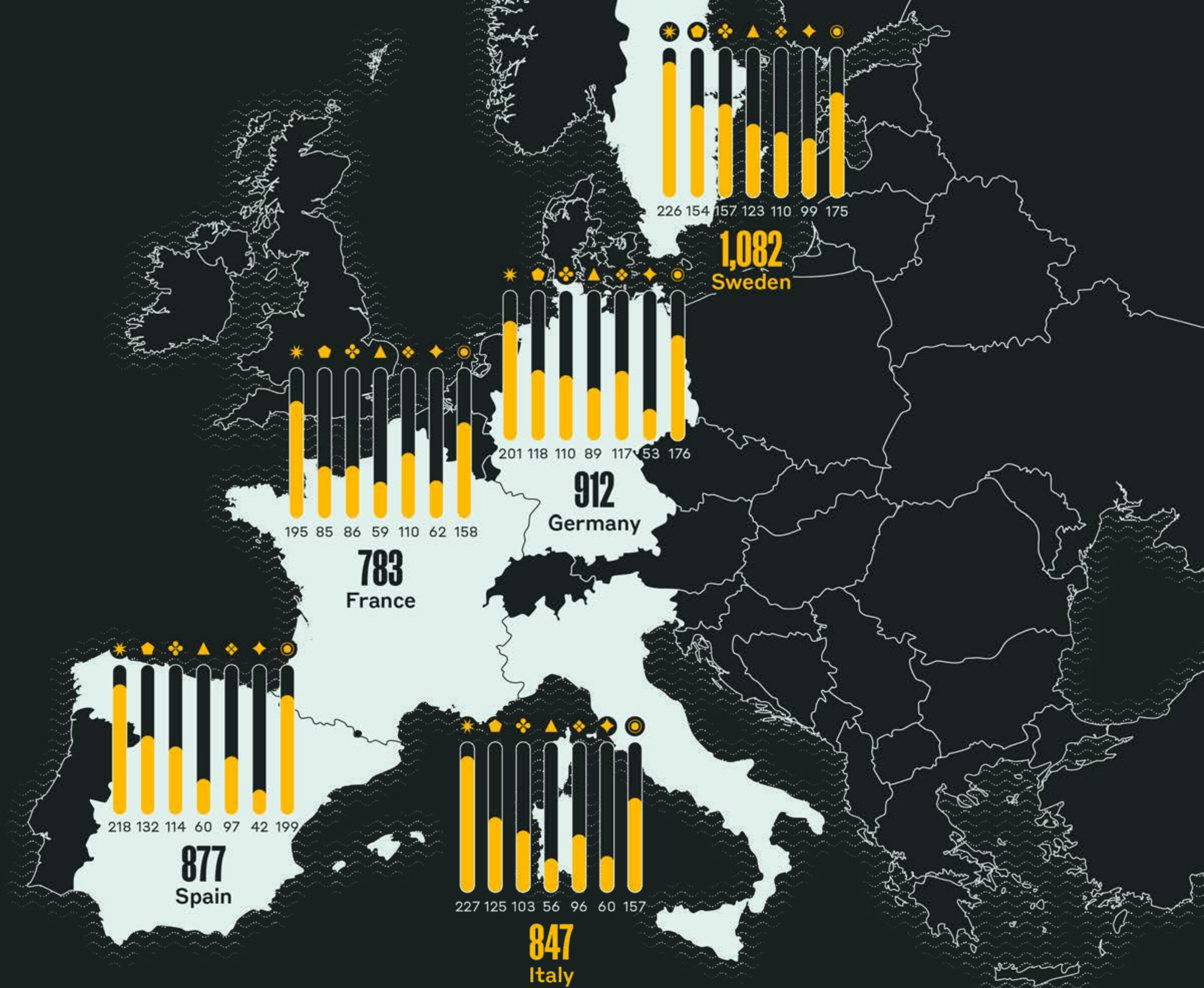
Disclaimer:

* Answers for "Other" and "I wouldn't know" were omitted from this representation.

* Multiple answer question.

How to read

- * — Finding a satisfactory balance between private and professional life
- ◆ — Keeping on improving my knowledge and skills concerning my current activities
- ❖ — Being in control of my work, how and when I do my tasks
- ▲ — Being able to make a difference through my job
- ❖ — Working in an organization with values I identify myself with
- ◆ — Having the opportunity to climb the ladder in a short period of time, making the most of every chance to increase my salary
- — Job security and long-term contract



As shown, outside of hard-earned flexibility, **workers of all ages still point to their salary as a top-of-mind priority**. We expected that to be a critical factor in their choices, so our follow-up question wanted to investigate **what would prompt workers to switch jobs if they knew their salary was safe**. What we found, again, is that the four surveyed generations' priorities are much closer to each other than what might be thought; and that an **even better work-life balance offering would again be the most alluring incentive prospective employers could offer**.

Beyond that, our data presented us with two interesting insights: one relatively unsurprising, and one we did not anticipate.

The former sees Gen Z as almost **twice as likely** (34.4% vs. 18.5%) **to value “the opportunity to experiment with different projects” than Baby Boomers** — the only significant percentage gap in our entire analysis for this chapter.

This isn't shocking: younger people are understandably hungrier about the chance to try out different things. Knowing they could retain their salary, they would be more than willing to jump ships; on the other hand, seasoned professionals tend to become more conservative.

What was much more surprising was **Gen Z's attitude** — and, indeed, that of all generations — **toward jobs whose “positive impact on people and the planet” would be greater at the new workplace**.

Yet we must consider that recent industry reports, and news articles abundantly discuss how the younger age groups make up the **Conscious generation**, an informal term to describe a cohort that demonstrates **greater sensitivity and awareness toward environmental and social sustainability topics**, as reported in a 2023 report by EY, titled “How can we empower the next generations to build a more sustainable future?” Young people's attentiveness to aspects like reduced consumption,

FIGURE 4
In an ideal world...

In an ideal world, where pay wouldn't be a deciding factor, work-life balance would still be the number one reason to change employer. All generations would equally value working with people that are valuable to their personal and professional growth. Experimentation and working with a high degree of autonomy stand at third place in terms of importance; being part of an organization that positively impacts people and the planet is surprisingly the least selected option overall.

Disclaimer:

* Answers for “Other” and “I wouldn't know” were omitted from this representation.
* Multiple answer question.

How to read

■ Baby Boomers ■ Gen X
■ Gen Y ■ Gen Z



mental health, equality and human and animal rights eventually **reflects in the employer and work environment they look for.**

Indeed, platforms for conscious job seekers such as [GreenJobsBoard](#) have become popular among those looking to put their skills to work at organizations making responsible choices, be them environmental, societal or governmental. In some cases, manifesting disagreement with companies that continue with “business as usual” and adopt detrimental practices comes from those who still haven’t entered the world of work. For example, students from a prestigious French university, HEC Paris, [boycotted TotalEnergies’](#) stand at the recruitment fair on campus by showing signs that read “No climate killer jobs for us.” From a [2017 EY survey](#) on 16-19 years old respondents, it emerges that 62% would **avoid working for certain employers due to their perceived image**, with the oil and gas industry in first place; defense

and insurance second and third respectively. There have been several cases of employees [leaving their positions](#) at companies like Credit Suisse, McKinsey & Co, and others, as reported by BBC.com. For example: in 2022, an experienced consultant working for British multinational oil and gas company Shell, posted a video on LinkedIn explaining her reasons for resigning, clarifying that the company’s communication statements on sustainability did not match their actions and business development plans. At the bottom of [her post](#) one can read: “I don’t know what impact this action will have on my business and career, and it’s possible my reputation may be damaged in the eyes of people I have worked with. However, I feel like there is no other choice I can make.”

However, when asked whether an employer with an increased sensitivity toward these issues could be a meaningful factor in choosing a new job — and, again, not sacrificing anything with regard to salary —

only a meager number of respondents selected the option, which came out last by a significant margin: 375 people, equally divided among generations, and Gen Z actually behind Gen Y (26.4% vs. 28%). The second-least selected option, “Working in an organization that allows autonomy and freedom,” still counted 431 preferences — 15% more, with the four generations again split equally.



of 16-19 years old respondents would avoid working for certain employers due to their perceived image according to a 2017 EY survey in the US.

What about one's passions and hobbies?

The very concept of work-life balance implies that “work” and “private life” are two separate chambers whose coexistence creates an equilibrium that sometimes blurs into toxic forms of imbalance.

As the lines between the two get thinner, workers are increasingly demanding to take back some form of control in the name of flexibility — itself an elastic concept, which differs across contexts, job types, and indeed generations.

For example, in structured organizations it coincides with **different levels of freedom** when deciding working hours, the use of paid time off and leaves, growth paths choices, and more. Still, for some people these relatively simple arrangements are not enough.

So what if we could move toward a more integrated concept of work, combining personal interests with the professional sphere?

The idea is still nascent, but getting a foothold. According to our survey, almost **half of respondents across all generations** have tried to incorporate personal interests in their job, and a significant number of them succeeded (at least for a part of their life). It is also true that for the majority of Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y respondents

answered that **no task in their job was ever related to something they had a personal interest in.**

The data shows slightly different numbers for Gen Z, for which there is an above-average number of people whose first job is more directly tied to one of their personal interests. Moreover, around a third mentioned that they kept working on something they personally liked as a **side hustle.**

Turning one's passions and hobbies into a paying job or side job has become more popular with the rise of online digital platforms. In the age of the **creator economy**, being a creator means producing — and potentially monetizing — original content that is usually shared on online platforms. For instance, YouTube enables creators whose following reaches a certain size to earn money with their Partner Program. In 2020, the initiative supported 142,000 full-time equivalent jobs in the EU, contributing to the EU27 GDP with €2.38 billion. However, it is worth mentioning that an estimated

FIGURE 5
Is work just work?

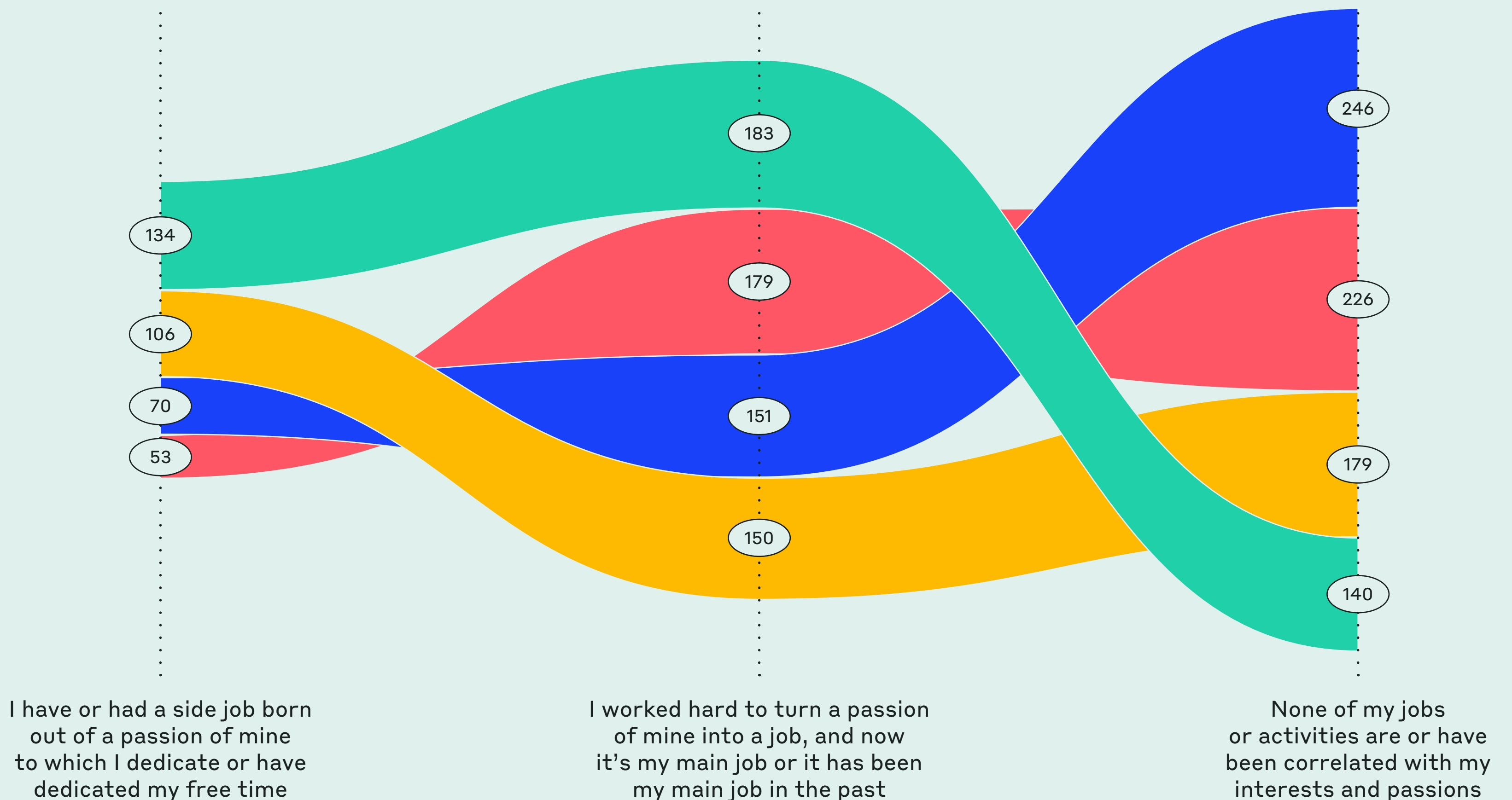
When asked to reflect on the role played by passions and hobbies along their career for the different age groups, it appears that the oldest generations are much more likely to conceive their jobs as mainly functional. While almost the same amount of Gen Z and Baby Boomers have or have had a side job.

Disclaimer:

* Answers for "Other" and "I wouldn't know" were omitted from this representation.

How to read

- Baby Boomers
- Gen X
- Gen Y
- Gen Z



46% of full time creators and 68% of part time creators make less than \$1,000 annually, as reported by a 2022 Linktree US-focused study. Beyond YouTube, Patreon, and Substack allow different kinds of creators to elaborate content for their audience by paying a small monthly fee to access their premium newsletters, and videos. Other platforms, like Etsy, offer the opportunity to open virtual shops and sell hand-made accessories, home decor, clothes, stationary items, and so on. **Established brands** have also been making moves to position themselves as “creator-friendly,” leveraging the idea of **entrepreneurship** and **attracting younger generations**. For example, in 2021, H&M launched “Creator Studio:” an AI-powered, responsible “merch platform” that allows anyone to create personalized apparel by applying original artwork on clothing items. With 70 garments to choose from, such as sweaters and t-shirts, creators can generate pieces, share them with their fandom, and

sell them with on-demand production and distribution, at a global level. Indeed, critical to the success of creators and young entrepreneurs are **online communities**, virtual networks that span across different platforms, where individuals’ views and opinions become one in search for support, understanding and, ultimately, a sense of belonging.

Part of the allure derived from being a creator resides in the relative independence some of them enjoy. Creators mostly answer to their audience — especially the paying kind — and the platforms they host their content on, but the organizational structure of their operation rarely resembles that of a traditional company, especially not until they reach a certain size.

In our data, Gen Zs are shown to be slightly more interested in the idea of being “bosses of themselves,” either at present or in the future, than other generations. However, only one in ten respondents actually signaled their preference for increased independence.

👉 CREATOR ECONOMY

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development defined the “**Creator Economy**” as “an evolving concept which builds on the interplay between human creativity and ideas and intellectual property, knowledge and technology.”

142,000

is the total full-time equivalent jobs in the EU that the **YouTube’s creative ecosystem** supported in 2020.

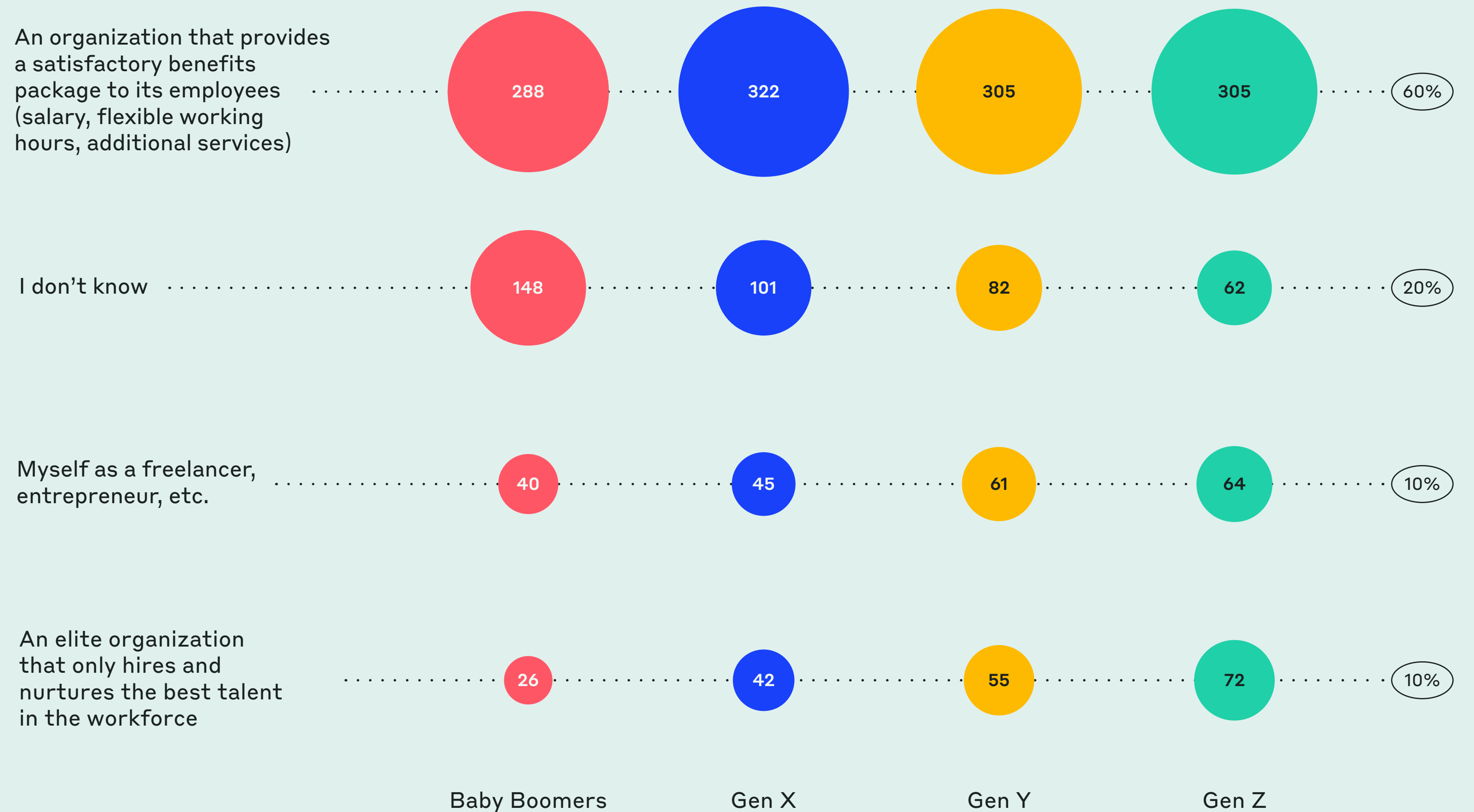
The overwhelming majority (60%), across all generations, rather opted for “working in an organization that enables well-being, work-life balance, and good benefits,” showing that while the prospect of merging one’s passion with their job is attractive, doing so inside a well-established company is more desirable than venturing into the uncharted waters of entrepreneurship.

FIGURE 6
The best type of employer by generation

When thinking about their ideal employer for the future, there is a gradual, slight increase in those who envision becoming their own boss as the age of the respondents decreases; the same goes for being hired at an elite organization that selects the best talents. Although a well-paying, secure job at an organization that values the well-being of its employees is still the number one choice across all generations.

How to read

- Baby Boomers
- Gen X
- Gen Y
- Gen Z



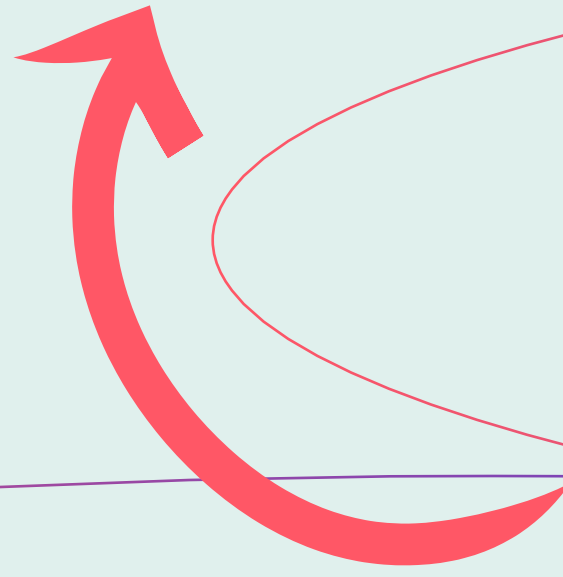
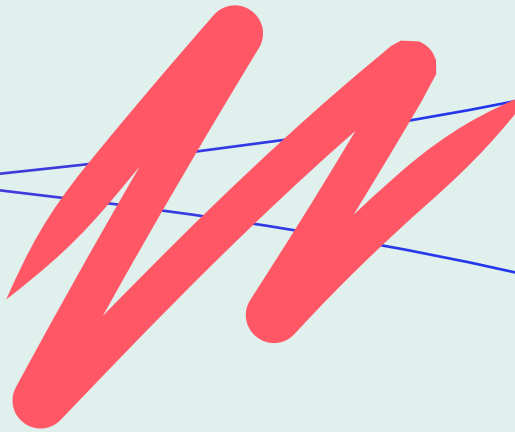


Key

TAKEAWAYS

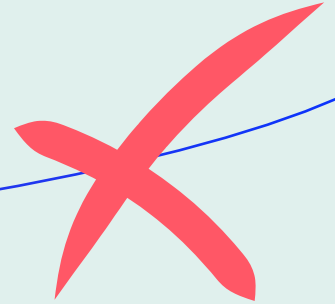
① — Looking at the *priorities* that respondents mention when thinking about their career path and employment conditions, *intergenerational differences are much less significant than expected*, especially if we consider the ongoing discussions and arguments that popular industry reports and news articles often highlight.

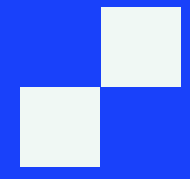
② — The *two main desiderata*, across all generations, are working conditions that favor a strong *balance between work and life*, and *economic stability through long-term contracts*. Despite registering a slight increase or decrease in importance for a few age groups, *other aspects* such as upskilling, sharing the same values as the organization, and being able to make a difference through one's job only appear to be of *secondary relevance* to all respondents.



③ — Even in an ideal world where salary wouldn't be a deciding factor, *no generation reported a strong drive* toward wanting to work for an organization that has a *positive impact on people and the planet*. The *Conscious Generation* might be very vocal in how they express their thoughts, but we could not find confirmation in our data. Personal well-being and growth are still far more important than people and planet well-being across all generations.

④ — When thinking about the growth of the *younger generations' inclination toward experimentation and exploration*, the jobs of the so-called *creator economy* are the first things that come to mind. However, the willingness to experiment and take different directions does not necessarily translate into the desire for taking an entrepreneurial path.

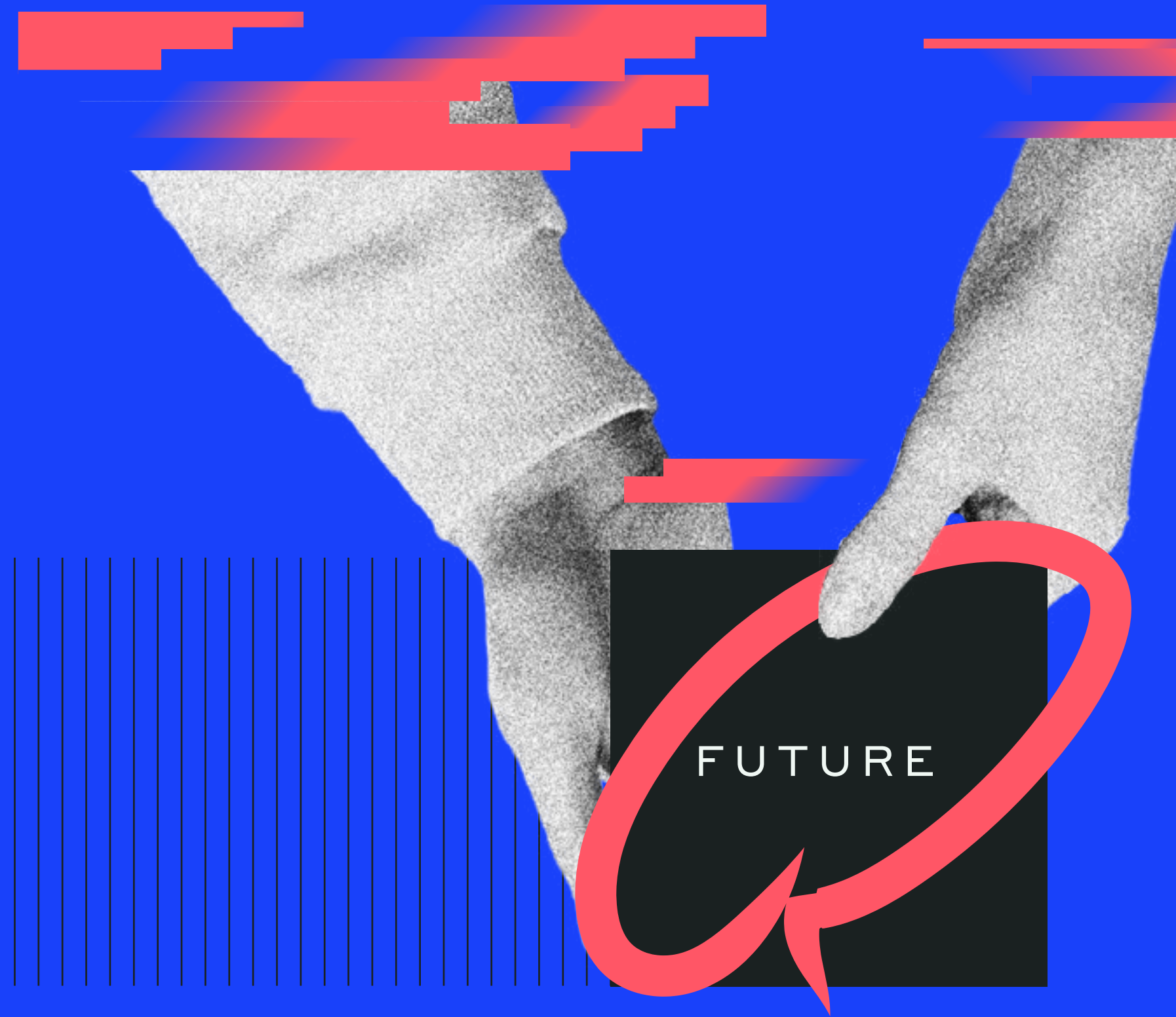
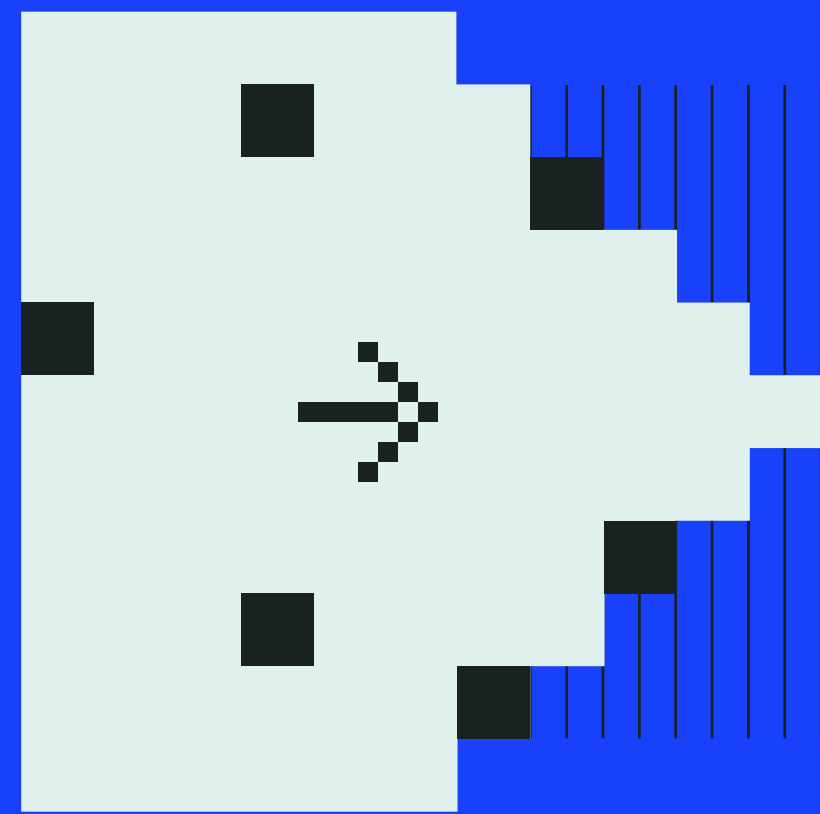




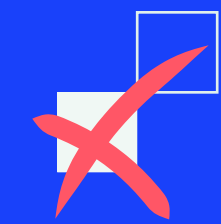
CHAPTER 2



Past choices



and future ambitions



What makes up our attitudes and outlook on life? An infinite amount of elements play a role in determining how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, and thus our values and goals. Our parents' vision, the people we encounter along the way and, in more practical terms, the socio-economic status we are born in.

Nowadays, opportunities for **enhancing one's growth path from the earliest stages of life** have multiplied, thanks to easy access to information sources, online education, initiatives to study and work abroad, and so on. For example, in places like the US, the UK, and Australia, among others, it used to be the case that after-school child activities were available to busy parents in need of some free time to tend to personal activities or, more commonly, **work longer hours**. Over the last century, however, the US turned extracurricular activities into **ambitious youth development programs**, which may still determine a high school student's ability to get into one college or another. More recently, in Europe, the **Erasmus program** was created "to promote closer cooperation between universities and higher education institutions across Europe" and encourage **young people's discovery of different cultures and habits** abroad.

To dive deeper in these topics, this chapter will explore how past events and choices play a role in people's current lives, and how they might determine the outline of their future expectations on their job and the world of work at large.

The past counts

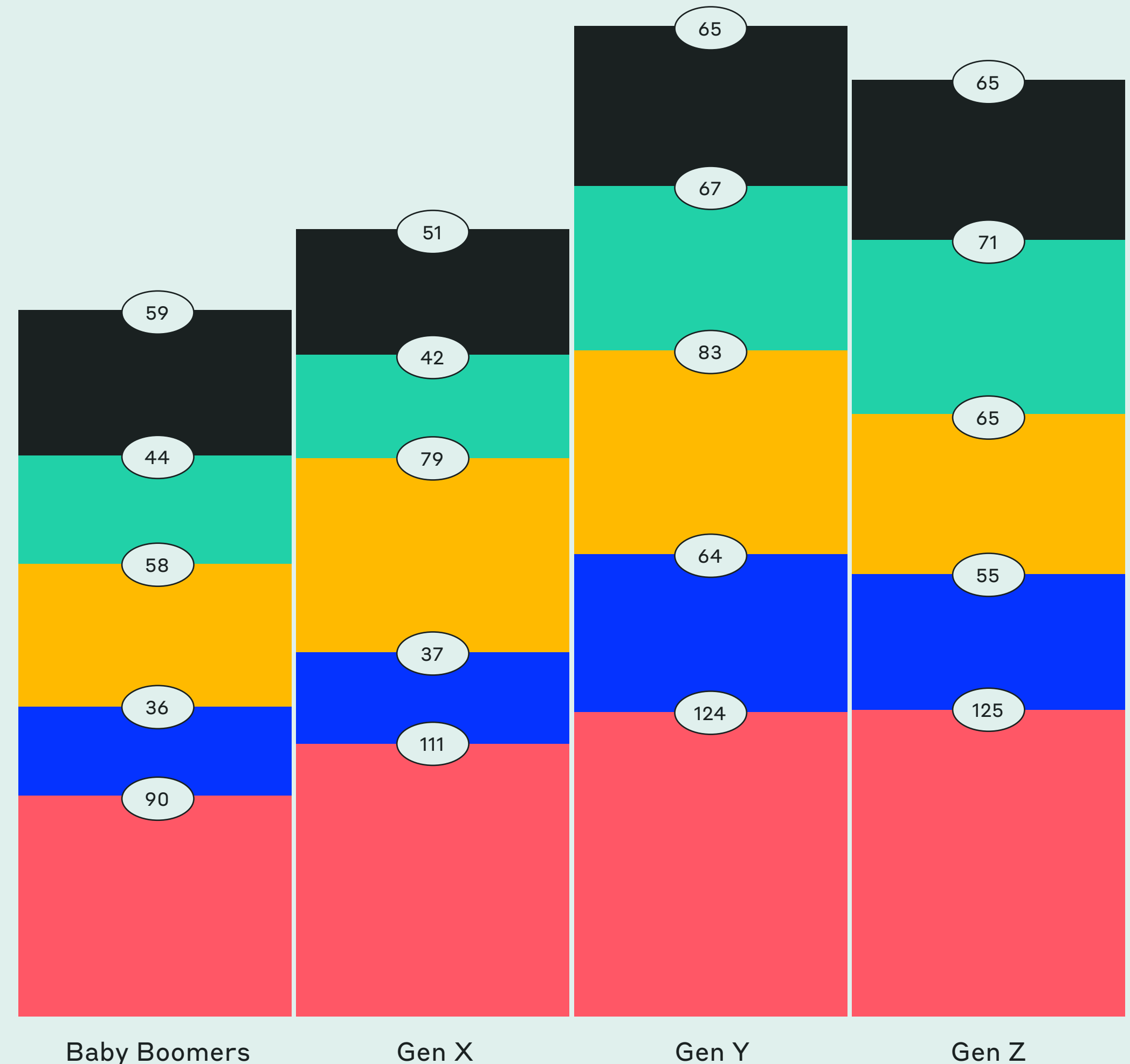
Our considerations about generations, their differences and similarities, are deeply rooted in the belief that it's not just a matter of age, but a situation in which one finds themselves that determines the conditions for what happens next. And there can be **numerous events** that turn lives around at any point. Things can happen by coincidence, after a long time spent working hard for something, or because someone is appointed to make a decision for you. To start exploring people's past events and their influence on the present, we asked our pool of subjects **what situations made them revisit**

FIGURE 7
The top 5 most significant life events influencing early study and career paths

When asked to recall a situation that significantly impacted their early professional career, respondents across all generations identified work-related dissatisfaction as the primary one.

How to read

- Having had an unsatisfactory work experience
- Having met someone special
- Moving to another city
- Being hired at a company I thought highly of
- Family obligations



Disclaimer:
 * Multiple answer question.
 * Only the top 5 most selected options are represented.

their beliefs and motivation drivers during their studies and first work experiences.

What is clear is that **work keeps playing an important role in feeling fulfilled** across all generations, even considering the fact that people have been looking for an increased level of detachment from professional activities. Indeed, all generations recognize **“a feeling of dissatisfaction linked to a work experience”** as the main event driving them to rethink their motivations, ambitions, and beliefs. Even for Gen Y and Gen X (i.e. people currently in their late 20s to mid-50s, therefore in a life phase where they usually find themselves full with new, non-work related responsibilities), dissatisfaction at work is a driver of change. Overall, work-related events seem to be particularly relevant for Gen Y and Gen Z. Indeed, for the youngest age group **“being hired by a company they highly value”** is the second-most significant life-changing event, albeit by a small amount. A choice that could

be explained by the fact that they are just starting to measure themselves with the job world.

“Having moved to another city” has been identified as the second most significant event by Gen X and Gen Y. This might be tied to the need for finding a new and more favorable economic environment to work in. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the Erasmus program and the rise in popularity of more international exchange initiatives along higher education study periods have made it easier to move abroad. A European Commission study on the impact of Erasmus + Higher Education found that since its beginnings, 40% of the students from the so-called “Erasmus generation” who complete a traineeship abroad are offered a job by the organization they trained at, and 23% of them accept to move to the host country.

When asked to explain how these events marked a change in their mindset and beliefs in an open-ended question, participants elaborated

on their choice quite differently from one another. We analyzed their responses with the help of **Analytics**, MAIZE’s own proprietary semantic analytics engine, and found that a significant aspect that negatively impacted people’s early career stages was having **family obligations**. Those ties may have kept respondents across generations from seizing opportunities, or forced them to move away from their city.

Our data shows that relationships impacted **57% of women** who mentioned “family,” “husband,” or “partner” in their answers. It’s not uncommon to see and think about mothers as those adapting to the needs of their children and, unfortunately, to those of their male partner as well. But even when they don’t have to look after their kids, women are instilled with this duty of caregiving from their earliest years of age. From a 2022 European study, it appears that **75% of caregivers are female** and the time they put in to look after relatives and friends in need is unpaid.



of the students from the so-called “Erasmus generation” who complete a traineeship abroad are offered a job by the organization they trained at, according to a 2019 European Commission study on the impact of Erasmus + Higher Education.

If we also consider age, women of the so-called “**Sandwich Generation**” are those who take the bigger toll. The term describes a particular, but ever more common situation, which currently severely impacts late Gen X and Gen Y. Being “sandwiched” or “in the middle” refers to a generation of people who are caring for their aging parents while supporting their own children. Indeed, as the age at which people become parents increases, and overall life expectancy extends as well, so does the difficulty in managing and **caring for other generational groups**. Juggling several duties and feeling responsible for the health and development of others requires a great amount of time, energy and effort, which **clashes** with the need to work and care for oneself.

“**Meeting a special person**” is marked as being particularly relevant for **Gen Y** and **Gen Z**. This could be explained simply by the fact that older generations may have already met a significant other, and therefore do

not think of that as a possible driver of change, despite the fact that the encounter of a special person may not necessarily be tied to amorous relationships. **Peers and professors** have been mentioned as sources of inspiration for changing one’s ideas for the better, providing them with more clarity and opportunities to see themselves from another angle.

As we have seen, there is no one single path, but it’s clear how the experiences one lives along their study path and first work experiences determine a significant portion of the following phases of life. Some feel a sense of **disenchantment** and strive for **better conditions**; others find themselves accepting a situation that they didn’t envision, and it would be incorrect to assume that it’s all about attitudes. It’s a mix of internal and external factors that determine people’s lives.

👉 **SANDWICH GENERATION**

The term “**Sandwich Generation**” was first coined by North American scholars Dorothy Miller and Elaine Brody in the field of social and gerontological studies in 1981, to refer to the disparity that exists between the assistance and support — both monetary and social — exchanged among generations.



of women who mentioned “family,” “husband,” and “partner” in their answers were held back or impacted by ties of kinship during their career according to our survey.

“ From my point of view,
starting a family implies finding pleasure
in spending time with a partner and kids.

Unfortunately, the amount of time I had available
was not enough

to commit to a faster and greater career growth.

♣ MALE ♣ BABY BOOMER ♣ ITALY ♣ CORPORATE EMPLOYEE

“ If the multinational corporation

I'm at now hadn't hired me,

I wouldn't have settled and I would have kept on studying tourism,

which is what I would have liked to end up doing actually.

♣ FEMALE ♣ GEN Y ♣ SPAIN ♣ CORPORATE EMPLOYEE



I was in love with my boyfriend

and I didn't want to move away from him to study

nor to start a job that required much effort,

because he was a blue collar and mentioned feeling a fish out of water

even if it was just about going to

my university friends' birthday parties.

♀ FEMALE ♀ GEN Y ♀ ITALY ♀ SMALL MEDIUM ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEE



I've learnt that hobbies should have nothing

to do with income.

♂ MALE ♂ BABY BOOMER ♂ GERMAN ♂ CORPORATE EMPLOYEE

Relationships in study and work paths

It's true that no two life paths are the same, especially considering the externalities that influenced the growth and development of people in different generations. But what we all have in common, as human beings, is our need for social connections, sharing experiences and relating to others. Be they friends or family, we turn to trusted people to receive suggestions, share exciting or sad news, feel belonging to a group, and, at the same time, to set ourselves apart.

Studies on the impact of social capital — as in solidarity and connection among people — in the post-pandemic era have shown that younger generations have re-discovered the intrinsic value posed by people in their lives, and especially by communities of like-minded individuals. Coherently, relationships have gained a more prominent place with respect to jobs as well. For example, it appears that Gen Z is particularly motivated by receiving in-person guidance and mentorship, which we will discuss further in the following chapter.

82%

of respondents from a 2020 study on Gen Z by the Springtide Research Institute expect their mentor to care about them and to relate to them as a person, not just as colleagues talking about work.

When asked to recall how they chose what to study, more than half of the respondents for each generation affirmed they chose their path on their own. But if we look closer, 41.5% of Gen Z reported they relied more heavily on their **social connections** and networks when making an important choice like picking a field of study.

Baby Boomers, on the other hand, are the generation that mainly decided for themselves, with 65% of them choosing independently, and only around 20% of them following advice from people close to them.

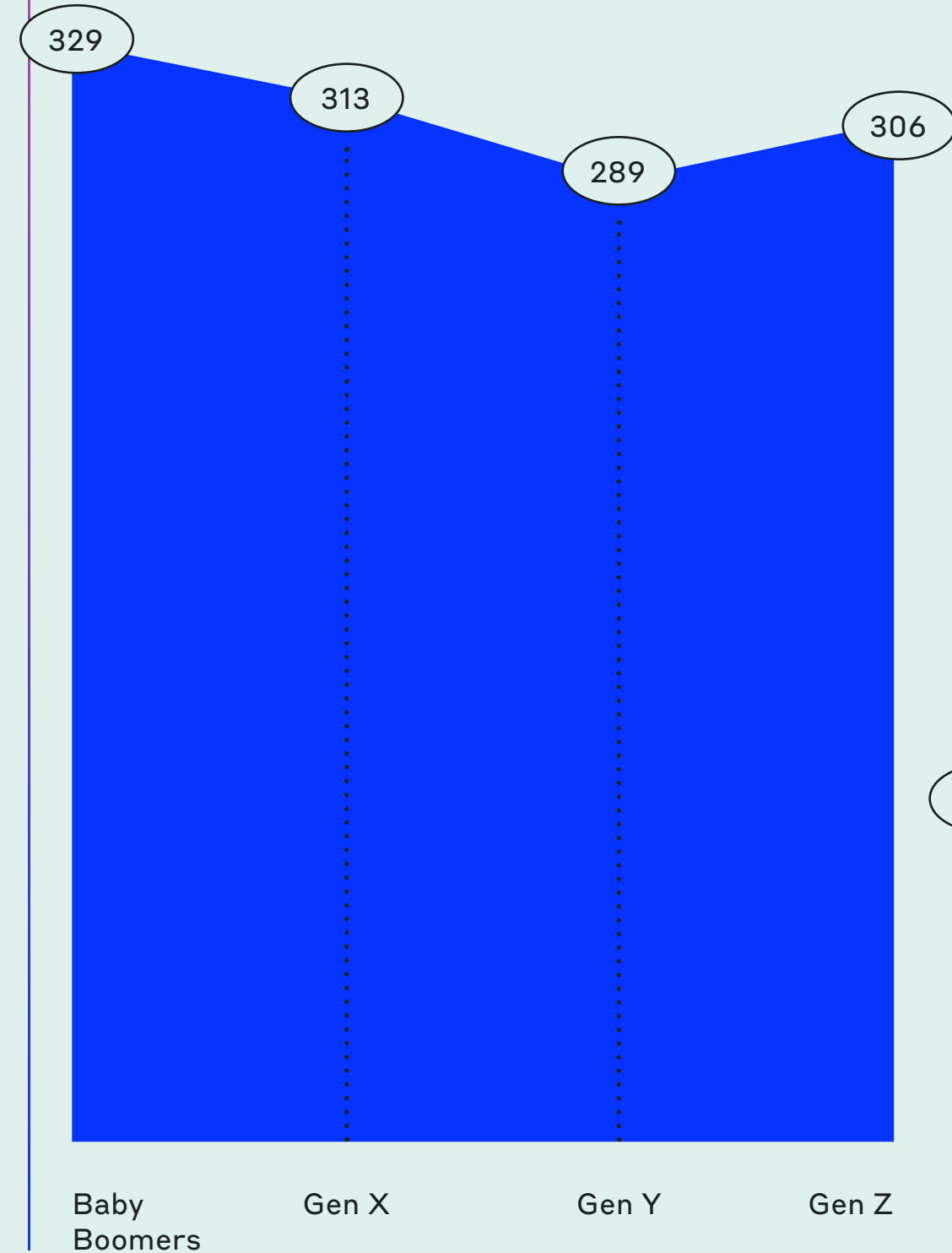
FIGURE 8
Hey, what do you think about...

The amount of people who mentioned choosing their study path completely on their own or having been imposed one sees a decline when looking from the oldest to the youngest generation. At the same time the newest age groups are driving a change in how their choice has become progressively more shared.

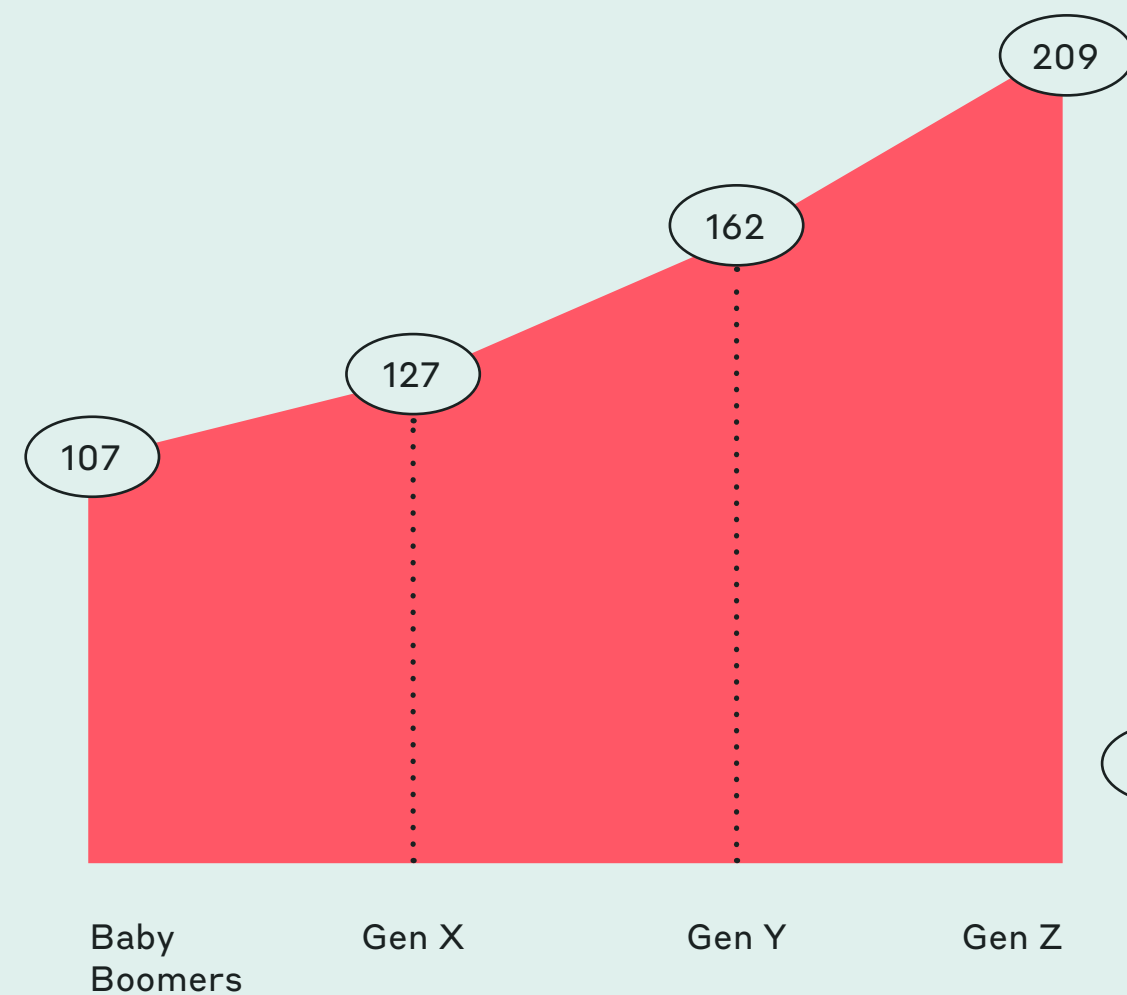
Disclaimer:

* Answers for "Other" and "I wouldn't know" were omitted from this representation.

I made the choice on my own



I received suggestions from people around me



People around me imposed a study path on me



Diving deeper in the pool of respondents, across all generations, it appears that **Spanish** and **Italian** people are the ones that most **relied on others** to make decisions on their study path. Southern European countries are historically known for their deep family ties, developing solidarity and sharing practices; as opposed to Northern European ones, where public and private institutions have always played a central role in **providing support** when necessary. Indeed, our data highlights Sweden as the country where social ties play the least important role in choosing one's study path.

While looking at the different surveyed countries from a generational standpoint, **Gen Z** is the generation that **shares their decisions the most** in 3 out of 5 of the surveyed countries (Germany, Sweden, Spain). **Italy** and **France** are the **exception** with **Gen Y** being the generation that welcomed and looked for more support and guidance from others.

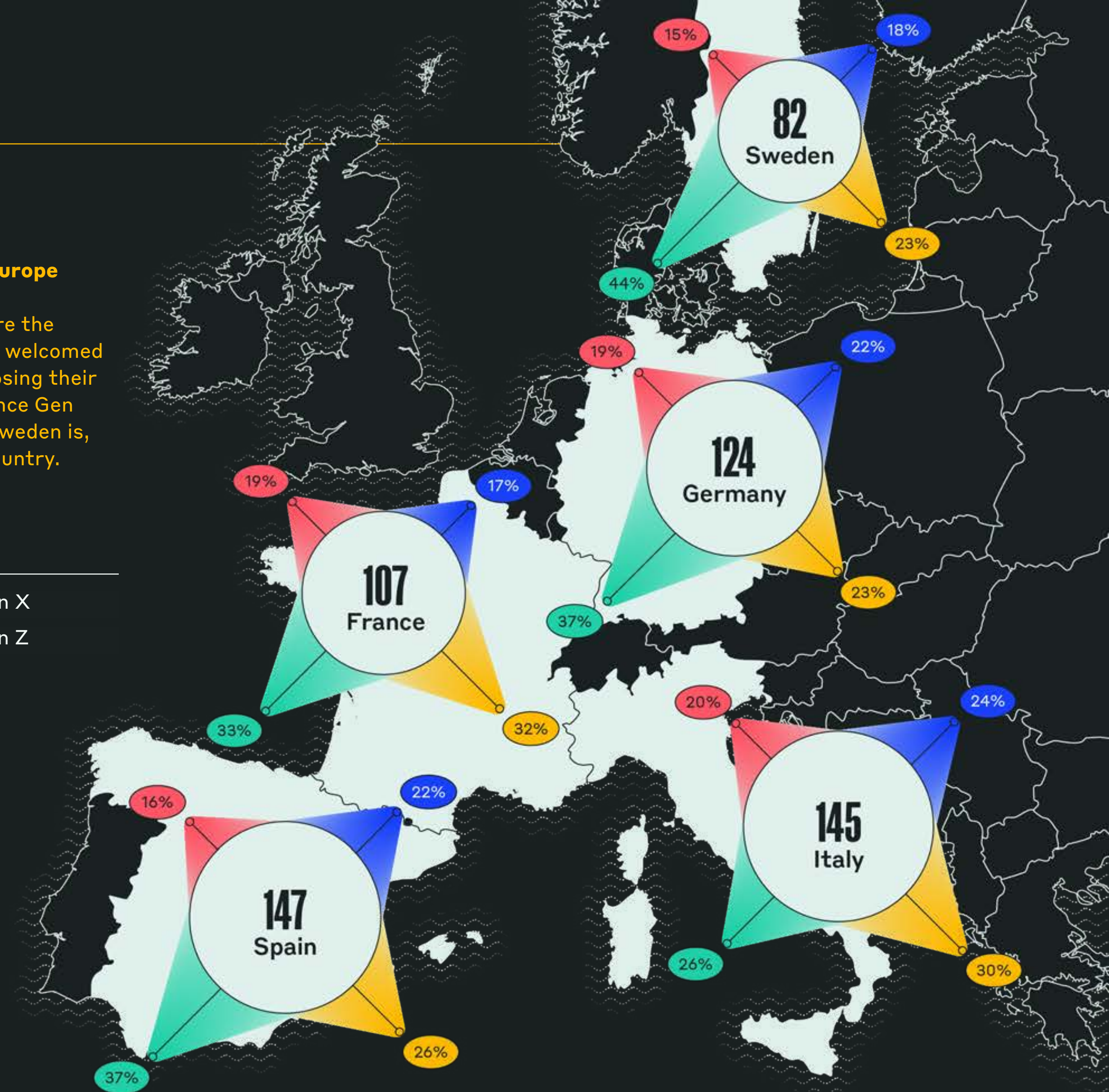
FIGURE 9

Collective decision-making during school years across Europe

Spanish Gen Z respondents are the ones who most looked for and welcomed advice from others when choosing their schools, while in Italy and France Gen Y represents the exception. Sweden is, overall, the least socializer Country.

How to read

- | | |
|----------------|---------|
| ■ Baby Boomers | ■ Gen X |
| ■ Gen Y | ■ Gen Z |



Does this kind of behavior spread from the “studying” phase to the “working” phase?

Gen Z are known for their flexible approach to decision-making and the highly connected network of people they create for themselves. A piece of advice from a trusted **content creator** might be as valuable as one that comes from a lifelong friend. Social media has expanded the ways through which young people find their jobs: data from a **US based survey** confirmed that around half of Gen Z and Gen Y looks for **employment opportunities, contacts recruiters through social media, and actively gathers information to evaluate** whether employers match with their needs.

For instance, TikTok content tagged as *#careertok* currently registers around 2B views. Videos on “How to negotiate a salary,” others titled “Words to avoid on your resume,” and “Three things you shouldn’t say in an interview”

have been trending among younger generations as they look for advice on how to handle the job search. In summer 2023, leveraging the increasing popularity of the “work talk” on the platform, TikTok launched a **pilot program**, called *#tiktokresumes*, and established a partnership with a handful of US companies that accepted short, creative videos from graduate students to apply for entry level jobs.

A recent **European study** by **Stepstone**, — one of the world’s leading job platforms — says that European employers, despite adopting a much less intense use of social media by recruiters than US ones, are changing their strategies in favor of more “social” approaches. LinkedIn remains the most chosen network by European employers to scout for candidates, at 64%; Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) are in second and third place respectively, as **social media screening** has become a more common practice to collect extra information about

applicants (although European laws have been **regulating** this habit since 2017). To amplify opportunities for recruiters, **X** has recently introduced a job posting feature for verified companies to potentially reach a wider, more diverse audience compared to LinkedIn.

Moreover, young professionals have the opportunity to be mentored all across Europe thanks to platforms such as **Mentors4u** or even access a paying **website** in order to do some quality networking.

As we have seen, the decision-making process regarding study and work paths becomes more **shared** and **socialized** with younger age groups and becomes more **individualistic** for older ones.

But what about the moment in which people actually start to work and relate to their organization and its employees? What other differences can we see in terms of vision and behavior at work across all generations?

2B

of views for TikTok content tagged with **#careertok** as of late 2023.

Ways of approaching and living work

When asked how they would define their approach to work, the most striking evidence is that the four generations again recognize themselves in a very similar working style, pinpointing “Flexibility” and “Balance” as the most prominent features of their approach to work.

Whether one is currently satisfied with their work-life balance condition or they are still looking for a position and an employer that allows them to finally experience it, the way they define their approach confirms a strive toward a **working style** that allows for an equitable distribution of time and effort — across all generations. For Gen X in particular, having a flexible mindset is as frequent as being “**Loyal**,” the same is for Baby Boomers with the “Balanced” being as frequent as “Loyal.” “**Optimistic**” is another equally distributed approach across generations. The only adjective that shows a sensible change across

generations is “Entrepreneurial,” which is increasingly chosen as the age goes down. Other words that were included in the options such as “**Informal**,” “**Progressive**,” “**Detached**,” and “**Competitive**” — were selected very few times by the respondents.

FIGURE 10

The most popular working styles across generations (on paper)

When asked to describe their approach in working and living the work environment through 12 distinctive adjectives, all age groups placed the most importance on being flexible, but for Gen X that is as important as being loyal.

Disclaimer: * Multiple answer question.

How to read

The size of the circle corresponds to the amount of people who selected that particular answer



A glance into the future

When talking about “today,” people express their idea on what they would be ready to do in the present and how they experience it given the current circumstances of their working and personal life. But we also aim to explore what expectations they have on the evolution of their careers, their workplace, and the job world at large.

What do they say when they're asked about the future?

We first asked our respondents where they envisioned their **ideal career path** would lead them in the next few years. The majority of **Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z** hope that they will “do what allows me to maintain a **balanced lifestyle** and provide the **well-being** I need.” This is consistent with the choice of priorities we explored in the previous chapter. **Baby Boomers** are close behind, expecting their career to lead them to a place of well-being, but they seem to be the one that have **the least**

40%

of workers who don't expect any significant changes in their career path are Baby Boomers, according to our survey.

expectations about their ideal career path. About 40% of positive answers for this option come from the oldest generation, with Gen X following, and it may be simply explained by the fact that they feel like **they are inching closer to retirement**.

Nowadays **loyalty to employers comes with a price tag**, especially when younger generations are the employees in question. But “job hopping” is not a recent practice. The idea of frequently changing employers — not as a result of being fired — became popular in the 1980s in the US first, when companies started **laying off employees en masse** to save money. The phenomenon has been going on ever since, with a significant increase in rates right after the pandemic hit, becoming known as “The Great Resignation” in the States. In Europe, a **2022 survey by McKinsey** has shown that **one third of responding employees are considering leaving their company**, with “inadequate total compensation” being the first reason why.

Gen Y appears to be at the center of it. According to a **2023 study made by analytics and advisory company Gallup**, 21% of Millennials left their job in 2021, which is three times more than the rest of the respondents belonging to other generations in the workforce. But leaving one job is not, apparently, a reason to seek a better one: indeed, our data shows that changing jobs for vertical career development has only interested 7.4% of Gen Y — by far the least appealing prospect. While Gen Z doesn’t seem to be too interested either, it’s still noticeably twice as keen than their closest elder counterpart (at 13.3%).

At last, what proves to be the most relevant driver of one’s career path for Gen Y and Gen Z, after achieving balanced work-life conditions, is to find an organization that can **earn their trust** and **respect** enough to have a **long-term relationship** with. While “Working for a company that innovates by prioritizing ethical values such as sustainability” is not a feature of paramount importance overall.

THE GREAT RESIGNATION

Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior at University College London’s School of Management **Anthony Klotz** foresaw spikes in quitting rates, and consequently, in job openings in the US right after the pandemic breakout, and named it “**The Great Resignation.**” 35.9 million workers quit in 2020, an additional 47 million in 2021, and 50.6 million in 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

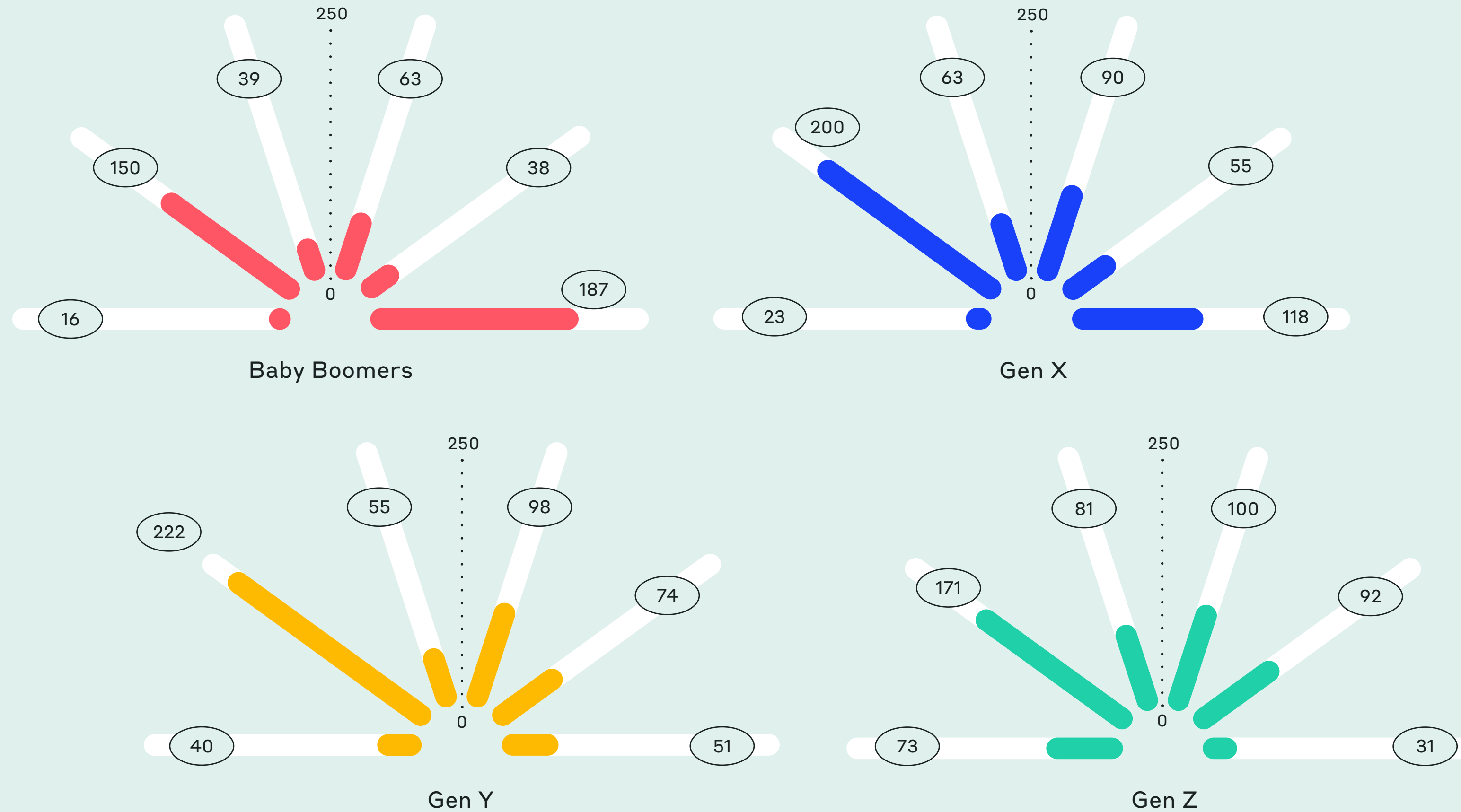
FIGURE 11

Envisioning ideal career paths: it all comes down to...

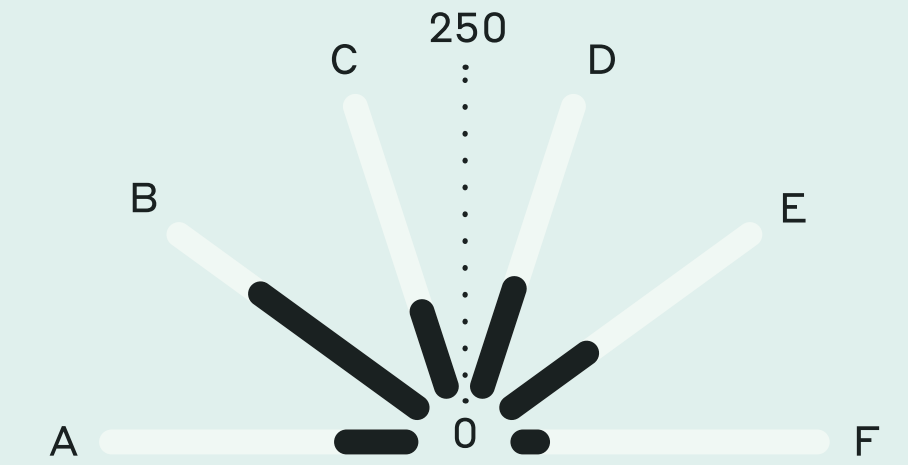
When asked to imagine how their ideal career would look, all generations united under the hope of finding living in a situation that would grant their well-being. Baby Boomers set themselves apart for being the ones that least expect a change from their current position.

Disclaimer:

* Multiple answer question. Max 3 answers.



How to read



- A — To frequently change jobs and quickly climb the ladder by developing my skills (vertical career development)
- B — To do what allows me to keep having a balanced lifestyle and maintain my well-being
- C — To work at an organization that innovates by prioritizing ethical values such as sustainability
- D — To a long-term business relationship with an organization that earned my trust and respect
- E — To a mutually beneficial business relationship with an organization in which I can experiment with a variety of different roles
- F — I don't think it will change from my current situation

Where is the workplace going?

While our respondents seemed to have a variety of opinions on how they would envision their ideal, future career, when asked to reflect upon the potential evolution of their current workplace, most of them split into two categories.

A significant portion of our respondents (the majority of Baby Boomers and Gen X, second place for Gen Y and Z) said that **they do not envision any major change happening.**

Despite their opinions about what is apt and what is not in the present world of work, they still do not think that the workplace will change.

Conversely, the majority of Gen Y and Z (second place for Baby Boomers

and Gen X) thinks that **some aspects will have to change** in order for their company to be able to survive.

However, very few people were able to affirm with certainty **how** the organizational structure of their workplace will change, and they do not think that their organization has set a clear path of innovative changes for itself. Expectations on the evolution of organizations are there, but they are hard to envision. When asked about **what aspects will be more important** for companies in the future, the majority of the respondents affirms that companies should focus on **hiring**

talents and offer them secure, long-term contracts.

A high number of people also says that the top priority for companies should be **to work toward a consciously relevant purpose**.

It is surprising how this consideration comes in with such relevance considering our previous analysis. This might be explained by the fact that when asked to think about personal lives and priorities people may tend to reason more in the short-term, while when asked to consider an organizations' duties, purpose acquires importance. However, having a social conscience does not appear ahead of the more pragmatic factors: having the best talents on the market and offering them satisfactory conditions.

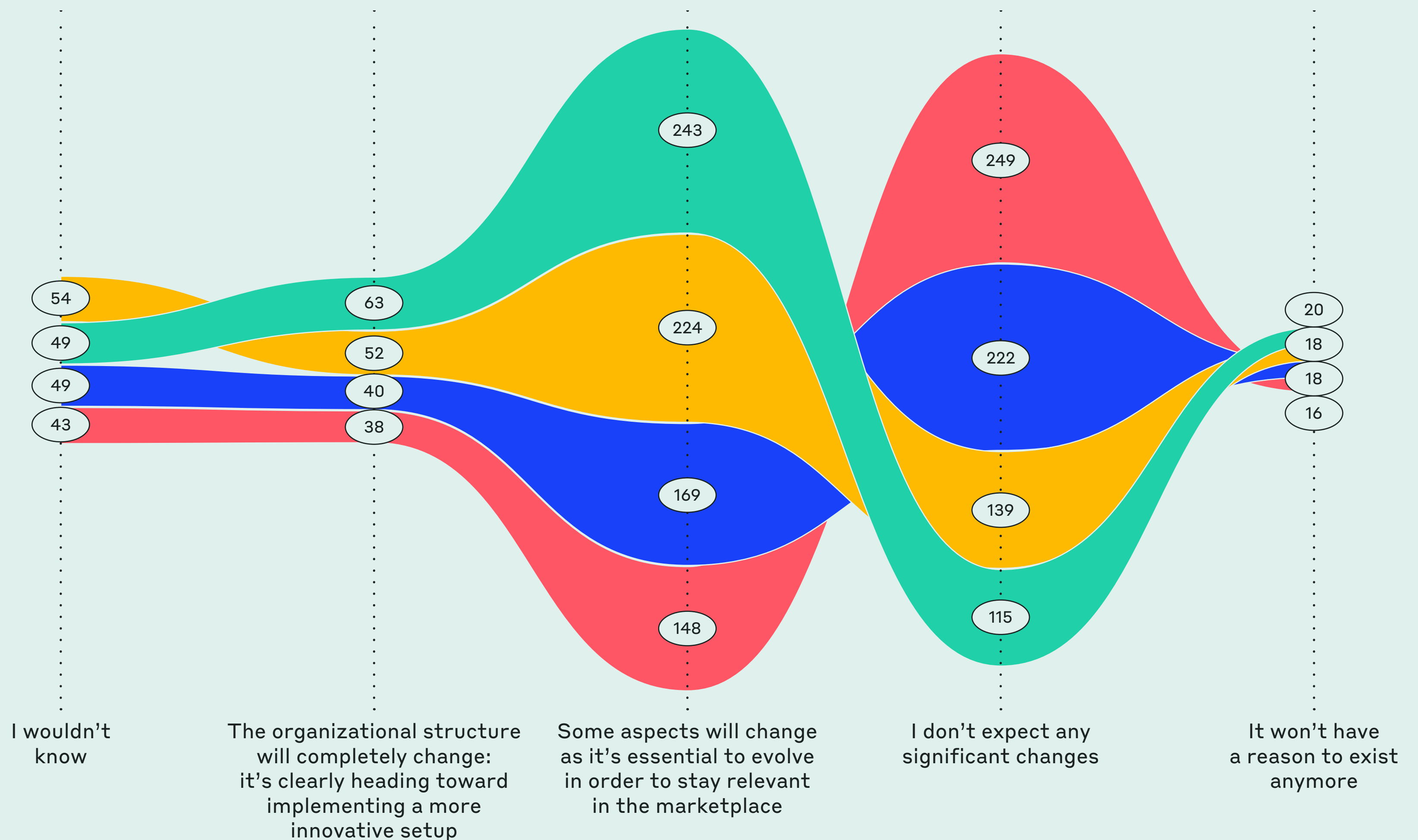
The survey's participants' opinions dealt not only with the workplace and organizational structure: consistently with the previous argument, the majority of the participants — at least in the Baby Boomers and Gen X sections — **think that their**

FIGURE 12
Something has to change, but what exactly?

All generations are positive about their workplace having to change in some way or another. Some already see the nature of this evolution. Most of the respondents don't, but they recognize that change is crucial for their organization to keep doing business.

How to read

- Baby Boomers
- Gen X
- Gen Y
- Gen Z



job itself will not change. These two generations, in addition, do not primarily think that their job will be substituted by **technology**, only a small portion of them thinks that they will have to **reconfigure their activities** in order to integrate new technologies in them.

Gen Y and Z present a more nuanced view: **a higher number of people** (around 10% for Baby Boomers and 25% for Gen Z) **believe that their job will lose specificity** and they will have to integrate technology into their daily tasks. A portion of Gen Z — even though they just started working — is already convinced that their job will **eventually be automated** and replaced by technology. Finally, Gen Y and Z growingly believe that they will not work full time but rather on a **project-based need**.

FIGURE 13
The best ingredients to start writing a successful story, as an organization, starting tomorrow

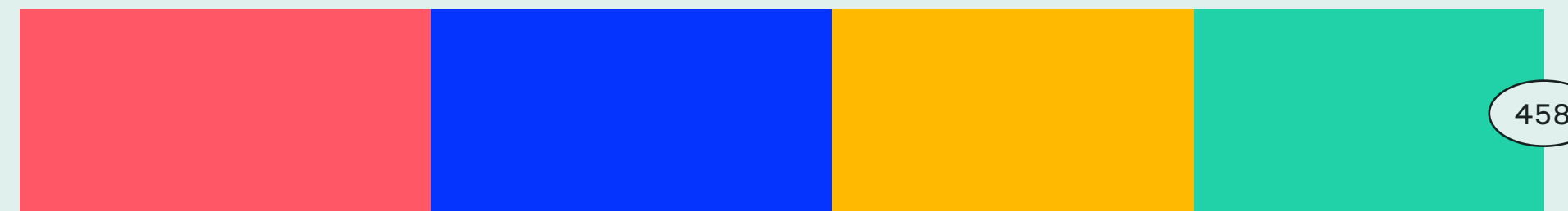
From the point of view of our respondents — employees at various-sized companies, public and private, and owners of small businesses from four different generations — this is how how companies will tackle the future.

How to read | ■ Baby Boomers ■ Gen X ■ Gen Y ■ Gen Z

Hire the best talents and offer them long-term contracts



Have a social conscience



Maximize efforts



Focus on high profit ideas






Key

TAKEAWAYS

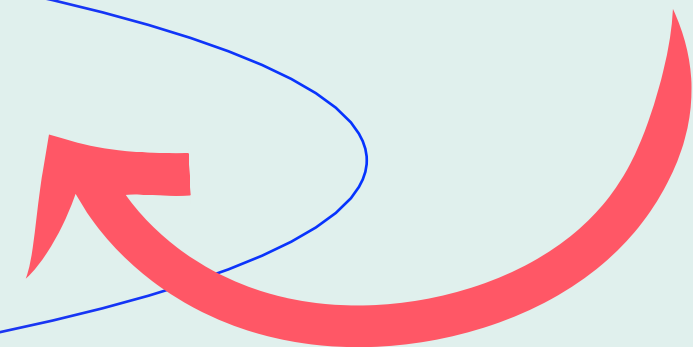
① — Younger generations have become accustomed to using social media platforms for both looking for and applying to jobs as well as becoming more educated on the whole process, all while connecting with peers and like-minded people.

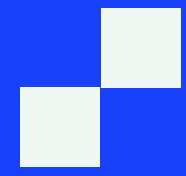


② — Unsustainable, badly-managed, unpleasant workplace environments drive away employees more than anything else. In our data, no other reason (money-driven, status-driven, etc.) proved to be a better motivation to change one's job.

③ — The high demand for a reasonable work-life balance we highlighted in the first chapter comes back as the absolute primary winner in workers' minds regarding their relationship with employers and the workplace. Beyond some physiological dynamism in younger generations (willing to explore and experiment) and a somewhat resigned belief among the more seasoned (who think not much will change), the search for a balanced workplace and a job that doesn't become a person's life lynchpin is by far the more prominent wish, even beyond the desire for a higher salary or status. What's more, that's true of all generations, again converging more than anticipated.

④ — The flexible approach to work is the evergreen that cuts across ages. For many years, workers have been asked for flexibility and adaptability. In turn, more recently, workers have requested more flexible conditions from their companies: in terms of working hours, freedom of movement, and the possibility of career deviations. We could say that the value of flexibility is not storytelling but an internalized approach.





CHAPTER 3



Working, today:

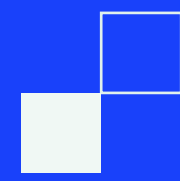
SPACES



SERVICES



spaces, services, and growth



In the previous chapter we discussed how people reflected on their past (e.g. how they chose their study path) and how they envision their future career. Now, we will tackle what is between the past and the future: the present of the workforce, what they wish in their current work life and how that translates for organizations.

We already — partially — covered that in the first chapter, where we highlighted how work-life balance is the most important feature for everyone across generations, and how other factors may instead depend on one's age and the stage of life in which they find themselves. Those were the most pressing issues. However, life — and *work* life as well — is made up of daily activities, places we go to, people we meet (or people we have to see everyday no matter what, like colleagues).

What do people want, then, in terms of their physical surroundings, skills, and growth?

Is it true that in the post-pandemic world offices are no longer a necessity, as everyone would rather work remotely? And if physical offices are “not a thing” anymore, does that mean that the IRL relationships one creates with colleagues have become less relevant?

As always, reality stands between the creases.

 **IRL (in real life)**

As we became used to remote interactions, the abbreviation “**IRL**” gained relevance in the context of work to highlight a meeting that is planned in-person rather than virtually, as has become the norm.

Growing as a professional an individual

We asked workers to look at six values and give each a 1-to-10 score according to how much a given value reflects the company they work for. Much like in other parts of our survey, we noted that there is a lot of consensus between generations: the values one generation feels strongly about (positively, negatively, or somewhere in between) are usually felt similarly by others.

Let's see each one more in depth.

👉 **TRUST:** The value where our median score resulted the highest (6.8/10), and over 61% of votes concentrated in the upper 30th percentile (votes 7-10). All in all, a **value people recognize in their organization**, with numerous workers (the highest overall number) giving it top marks.

👉 **AUTONOMY:** Similar to trust, our respondents generally recognized a **relatively high degree of freedom** granted to them by their organization, although the concentration shifts a little toward lower scores.

👉 **FLEXIBILITY:** Despite a good concentration of votes in the higher-end score zone, some workers voting 1/10 (9.5%) make the **discontent toward employers granting less flexibility** clear; something that, as we have seen, is supported by the rest of the information gathered from the survey.

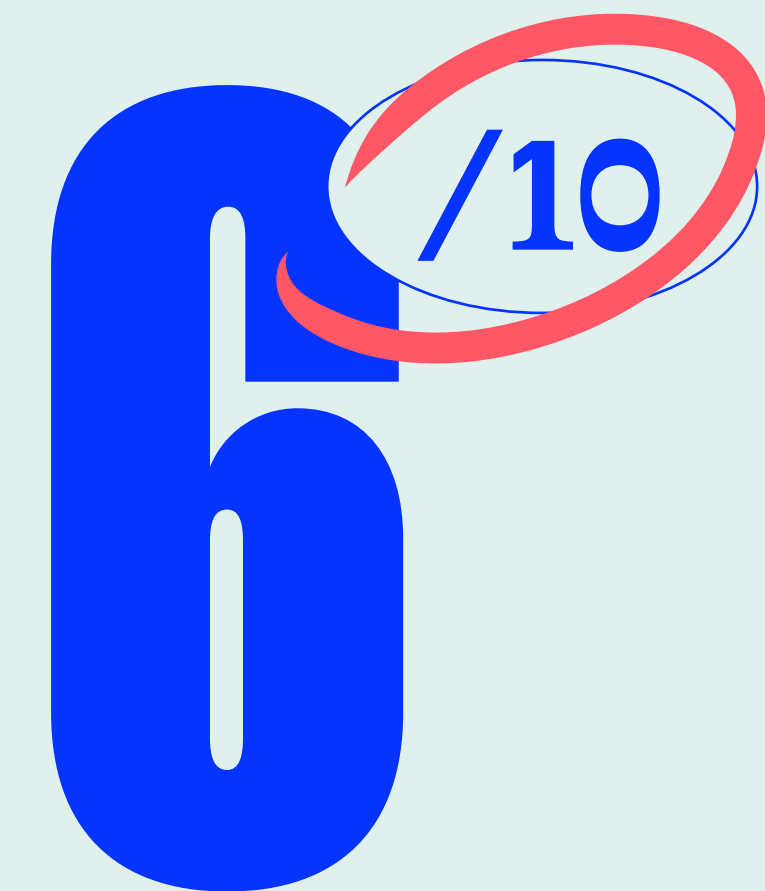
👉 **TRANSPARENCY:** The look on transparency appears to be modest (verging toward slight positivity), with the highest concentration of scores between 5 and 8. It's again a close race between generations,

score 1 was the highest across all six analyzed values: 219 voters, totaling 10.8%. Still, it should be noted that this is mostly driven by the older generations: Baby Boomers alone represent almost 39% of those votes, with Gen Xers following at close to 29%. Unfortunately, this only barely translates into optimism toward the highest percentiles: we need to combine scores 9 and 10 to reverse the trend of votes for 1. In doing so, we can appreciate that Gen Z represents 35% of the votes, while Boomers stop at 18% and Gen Y and X remain somewhere in the middle, meaning that the more pessimistic view persists. Indeed, the median score is the second-lowest of all: 5.6, right behind the 5.5 registered for meritocracy.

In the first chapter, we discussed how the youngest generations would be ready to change companies for one that **empowers them to experiment**

and improve their skills. After all, learning and growing is functional to delivering higher quality work, and potentially in a faster way, but it's also something that increases overall satisfaction and well-being in people. To dive deeper into the topic of growth and learning opportunities, we asked our respondents what **skills** they thought were going to be **essential** in the future.

The diverse perspectives across generations regarding critical future skills paint a picture of a **workforce in flux.** At the heart lies a **shared reverence for ideation and creativity** (almost 17%) — skills that transcend generational divides, highlighting a universal understanding that the spark of human innovation is indispensable. The value placed on problem-solving and lateral thinking across the board (over 17%) further cements the **collective anticipation of complex, nuanced challenges ahead,** demanding agility in thought and action.



is the average level of “flexibility” perceived by respondents at their organizations according to our survey.

Delving into the generational nuances, we observe that leadership evolves in its definition, with “leadership and social influence” gaining incremental emphasis from Gen X through to Gen Z (10, 12, and 14% respectively, with Boomers standing out at 13%). This shift likely mirrors the **transformation of leadership from traditional hierarchies to a more networked approach**, as we discussed above, where influence is exercised across digital and collaborative platforms and reflects the younger generations’ affinity for connectivity and collective action.

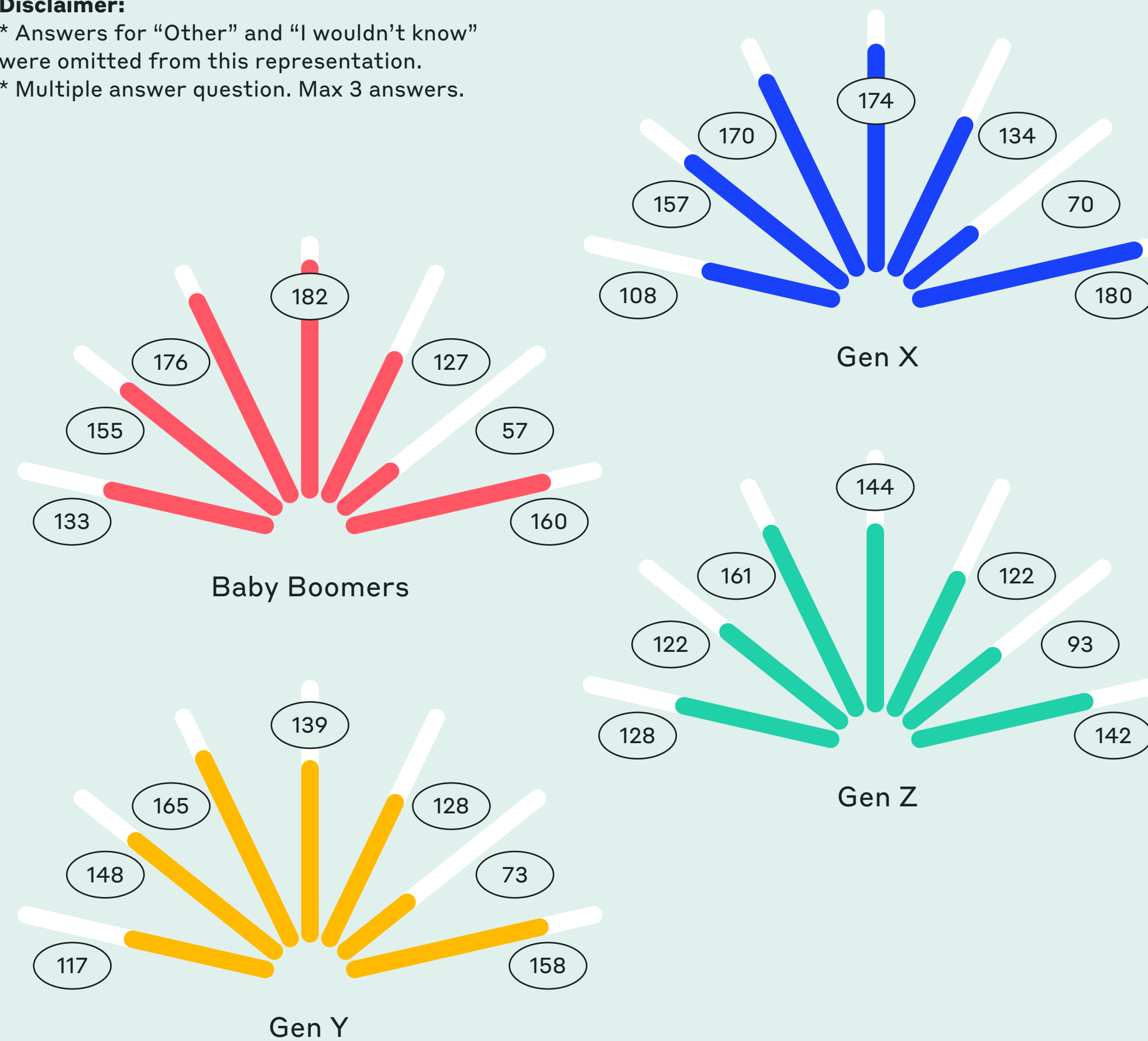
The standout emphasis Gen X places on **resilience and stress tolerance** (18% of the total and the second-highest absolute number of all, with 180 respondents) speaks volumes of a generation caught at the **crossroads of responsibilities**, both personal and professional. It’s a clear nod to their current life phase, often juggling multiple high-stake roles: often being workers,

FIGURE 15
Skills for the future

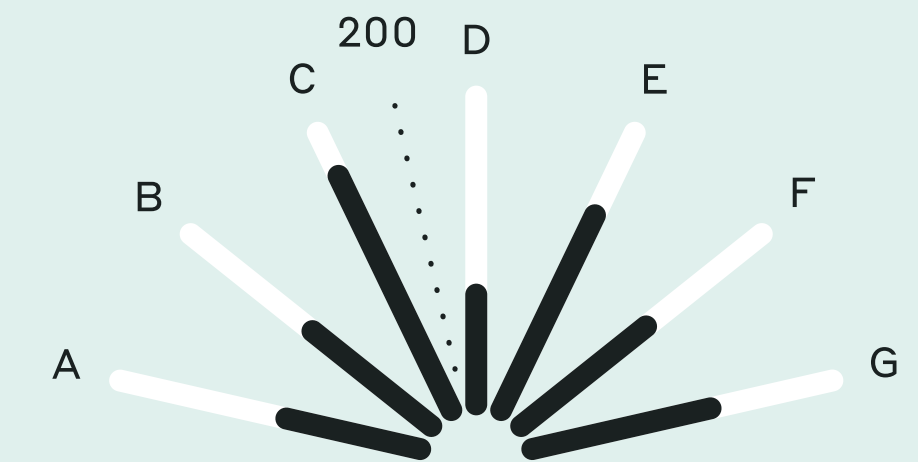
The value that workers recognize in different skills for the future job world is, once again, mainly consistent across generations: design technology is the least selected one by each age group, while the rest persistently register a high count with peaks in problem solving and lateral thinking for Baby Boomers and resilience and stress tolerance for Gen X.

Disclaimer:

* Answers for “Other” and “I wouldn’t know” were omitted from this representation.
* Multiple answer question. Max 3 answers.



How to read



- A — Leadership and social influence
- B — Active and strategic learning
- C — Problem-solving and lateral thinking
- D — Ideation and creativity
- E — Tech systems monitoring and control
- F — Design technology
- G — Resilience and stress tolerance

parents, and caregivers at the same time. Baby Boomers, paralleling this sentiment (16%) yet drawing from a well of rich experience, equally acknowledge the undying relevance of resilience, perhaps shaped by their journey through **economic and organizational upheavals over the decades**.

In contrast, the slightly **cooler reception to “tech systems monitoring and control”** by Baby Boomers, compared to their younger counterparts, might be revealing of the generational pulse on technology — where familiarity breeds confidence for the young, and a sense of caution or disconnection might pervade the more seasoned. Similarly, **the lesser emphasis on design technology** across all ages — by far the least voted skill, at only 7.6% of the total — could indicate its perception as a niche or specialized skill, not perceived as universally essential as the more broadly applicable cognitive and interpersonal skills. In terms of tech

and AI skills development, **Europe is reportedly falling behind** compared to the US and China.

To close this gap, Digital Europe, a trade association representing digitally transforming industries in Europe, set up **ARISA** (Artificial Intelligence Skills Alliance), a project that aims to identify which skills need specific attention and deliver learning programs to job seekers, employees, and decision makers.

Interestingly, the concept of “active and strategic learning” does not command the spotlight one might expect in a time when lifelong learning is championed as key to career longevity. Particularly for Gen Z, the least emphasis placed on this skill could reflect a **new era where learning is seamlessly integrated into life and work**, a silent constant rather than a skill to be explicitly pursued.

LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning is a broad concept originally defined in 1996 by scholars **Davies and Longworth** as “the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills, and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments.”

From workspaces to growthspaces

Demand for office space has been declining for a while now. Explanations include the fact that hybrid work has become the norm for many companies, inflation keeps growing, and funds dedicated to real estate investments have declined: in a nutshell, the costs for physical spaces grow and companies have less money to invest in something that seems to have become of secondary importance, at least for the tech and consulting world.

Nonetheless, offices keep existing and several companies are making employees come back to them on a regular basis. So, it is only natural to ask ourselves what people think about physically going back to the office; **do they perceive a value in being there? Or will offices as we know them today disappear for good?**

In a 2023 study by the McKinsey Global Institute on the global state of the real estate market and its forecast, it appears that cities with certain characteristics will be the most severely impacted by the behavioral change induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Having a greater share

of workers employed in the knowledge economy, a higher proportion of commuters-to-residents and the number of companies where remote work is allowed are all factors that contributed to the decreased value of real estate.

When considering the responses to our question “what’s the value of attending your employment’s work environment?” it appears that work spaces are regarded **as important for relational and pragmatic reasons**, with a slightly higher count for the latter.

Pragmatic reasons include obligation — when physical

attendance is required — for 33% of Gen X, and wanting to **separate personal and work activities**, which is the most selected option out of the five by Baby Boomers at 31%. A designated space for work is a practical device to easily discern between tasks and periods of time to dedicate to work and personal

life by having to move from one environment to the other at certain times of the day. It may seem trivial, but a study conducted by the Scottish government, among others, has shown that, during experiences like the COVID-19 pandemic (where huge masses of workers were forced to work in the same place they lived)

when such separation is absent, it becomes harder to keep a healthy work-life balance and maintain psychological **well-being**.

Relational reasons include cultivating **relationships**, especially valued by Gen Y at 29%, and feeling a **sense of belonging**, deemed as particularly important by Gen Z,

FIGURE 16
Expected changes in office and retail space demand by 2030

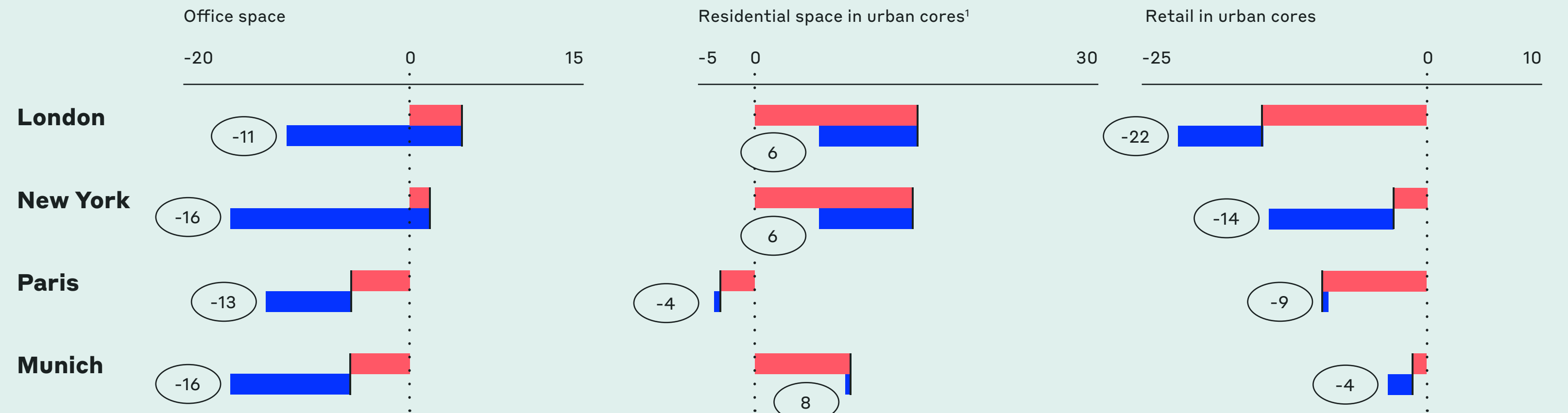
According to a forecast model created by the McKinsey Global Institute in 2023, in major cities around the world, the demand for office and retail space will significantly decrease by 2030 as a result of behavior changes driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disclaimer:

* The original study includes major cities from the Western and Eastern world. Only a selection of cities is included in the representation for the purpose of our analysis.

How to read

- Change resulting from factors unrelated to the pandemic
- Change resulting from pandemic-driven behavior



at 27%; finally, finding more **growth opportunities** is the least selected value overall, with around 20% of positive answers coming from Gen Z and Gen Y. We can thus see that physical presence in the office is more relevant for younger generations, as it provides them with a reference point that functions as the place where to find colleagues, bond with them, and nurture personal and professional relationships.

FIGURE 17
The value of physical workspaces for employees

With increased opportunities for autonomous time management provided by organizations that allow hybrid and remote work, respondents report attending the office mostly out of necessity. On the other hand, workspaces are seen as less valuable for growth opportunities overall.

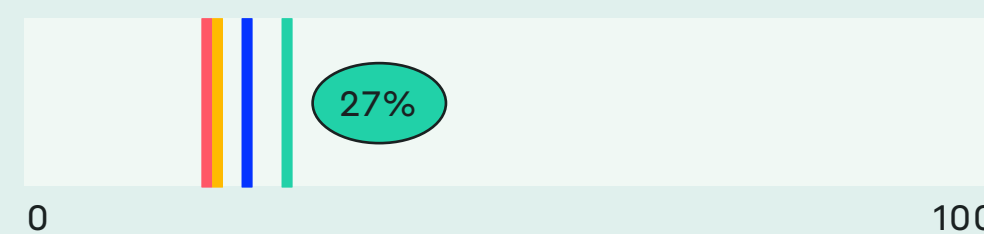
Disclaimer:

* Answers for "Other," "Not applicable," and "I wouldn't know" were omitted from this representation.

* Multiple answer question. Max 2 answers.

How to read | ■ Baby Boomers ■ Gen X ■ Gen Y ■ Gen Z

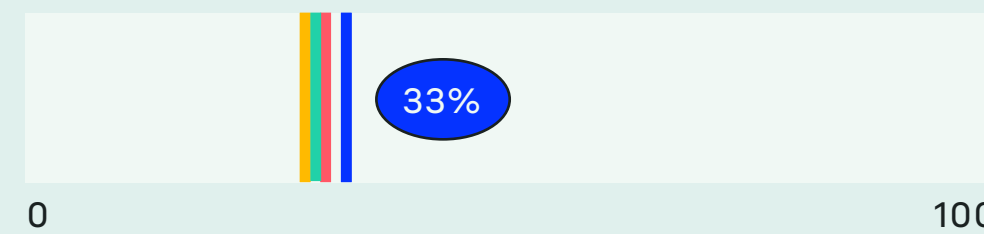
Sense of belonging, it allows me to feel part of a group and to be more motivated to give my best



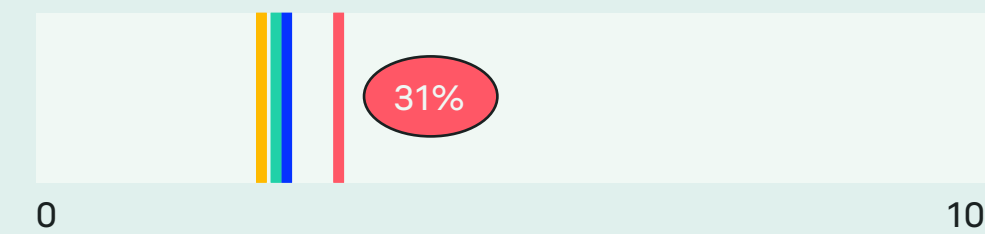
Interpersonal relations, there is the possibility to nurture relations that go beyond the day to day



Out of necessity, to carry out a job for which physical presence is necessary



Possibility to distinguish between work activities and personal life



Growth opportunities, there are more chances for collaboration and exchanging thoughts, that would be limited otherwise



624

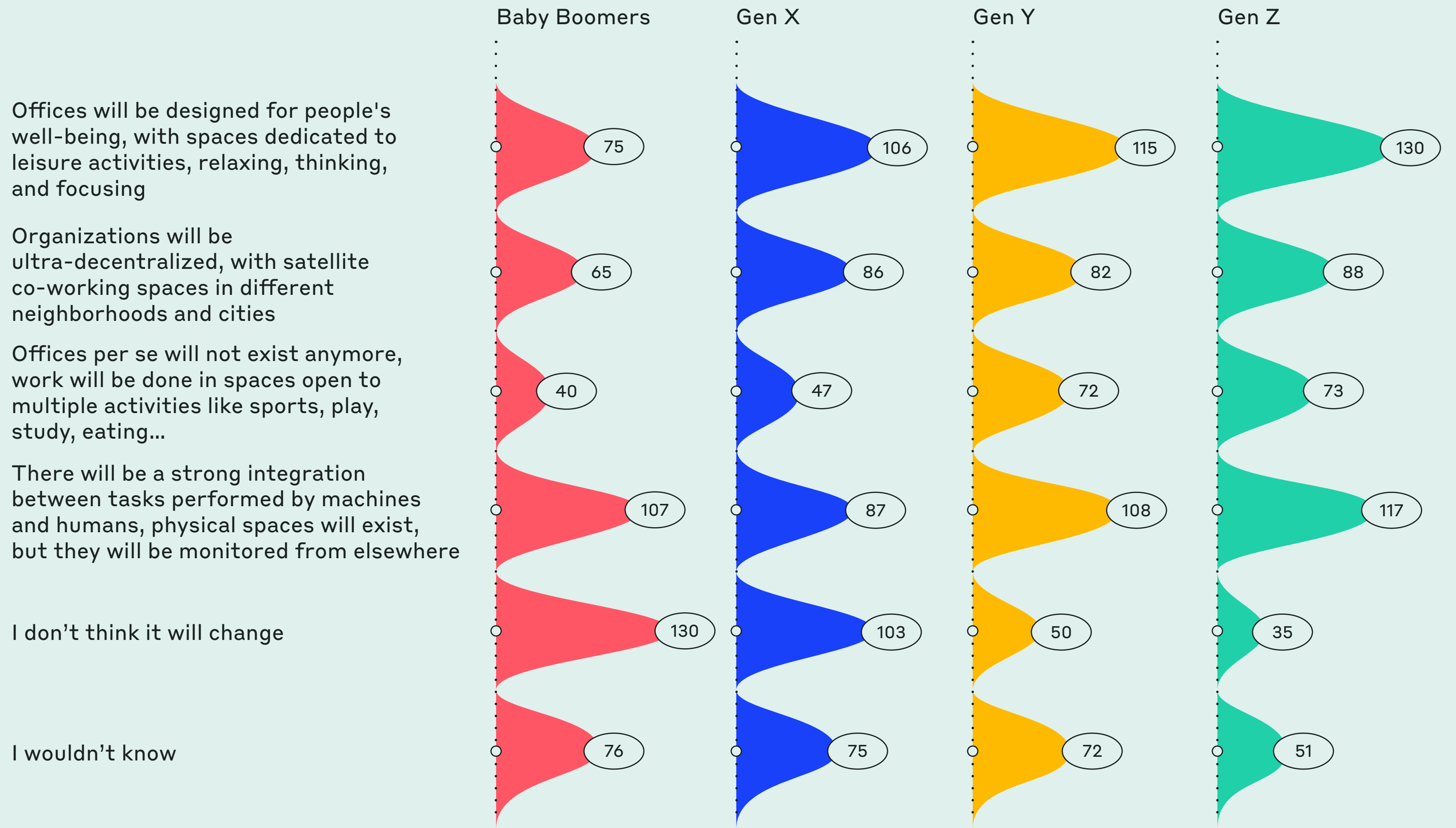
respondents out of 2,018 across generations reported attending the office out of necessity, making it the most frequently selected reason for doing so.

Looking at the future of physical workspaces, about 21% of our respondents believe that **artificial intelligence and machine automation will play a role in the future** — the second-highest-voted option, only a hair below the first (a difference of 7 votes). Boomers, Millennials, and Gen Zers agree unanimously (the latter in particular amount to almost 28% of the total), while Gen X appears less convinced, barely above 20%. There are several reasons why that might be, and it could be sensible to speculate on their current status — one that largely sees them in managerial, powerful positions — as something that is consolidating and that they are thus keen to protect. A potential case of revealed vs. stated preference that, while alluring, can't be fully backed by our data alone. What's more, AI is likely going to impact the nature of work itself, way beyond the workplace, and that lives outside the scope of this report.

FIGURE 18
How generations envision the future of the workspace

Most workers agree that in their vision of the future workspace, offices will be greatly impacted by the introduction of artificial intelligence and machine learning, and that they will be designed to allow employees to reach a higher level of well-being. A future in which no office at all will exist is still far, according to the respondents.

Disclaimer:
 * Answers for "Other" were omitted from this representation.



What our data does tell us is that almost the same amount of people from all generations, except Baby Boomers (who presented slightly less positive answers at around 20%), believe that **organizations will be “decentralized” offering satellite workspaces around cities.** This belief is coherent with a very popular vision of the **city of the future**, where it will be possible to reach any point of interest for basic daily needs within **15 minutes**. Embracing such a model could have several benefits for workers: a shorter commute, encouraging the use of public transport, cycling and walking, and incentivizing organizations to create smaller, distributed hubs for its employees to work where it’s more convenient for them. It is also consistent with other movements that stress the importance of living in functional cities, where the sharing of urban spaces is at the basis of human routines. For example, **Barcelona’s city council has been leveraging its “superilles,”** Catalan

for “superblocks,” 400x400 meters blocks in different districts around the city. This government-funded urban project, which started in 2013 and is now recognized as a best-practice in the urban and sustainable mobility world, has the ultimate goal of recovering as much street space for citizens as possible — moving lanes dedicated to cars to the outside — and **extending the network of connected blocks to around 500 by 2030** for safer, more open air living in terms of pollution, and car traffic.

The idea that offices as we know them might disappear is highly unpopular, accounting for just 11% of our total respondents. What workers do believe — the highest-voted option, at 21.4% across all generations — is that offices will evolve to include areas for leisure and focus, putting **people’s wellness first**. This is particularly true of Gen Z, which constitutes 30% of the total, but Gen Y and Gen X do not trail far behind: 27% and 25%, respectively. There’s reason to

believe this might be the case due to the younger generations’ interest in finding an employer that prioritizes the well-being of its employees, also through **enhanced welfare programs.**

👉 **15-MINUTE NEIGHBORHOOD CITY**

The **“15-minute neighborhood city”** is a concept conceived by French-Colombian scholar Carlos Moreno in 2016. Professor at the Sorbonne Business School and Scientific Director of the Entrepreneurship Territory Innovation (ETI) think tank, he described the model as a way “to fight climate change and reduce the need for forced commuting, have more proximity, more local jobs, more public spaces, and more services.”



5.8B

was the total capital invested in AI and ML in 2023 in Europe, versus \$26.3B in the US, according to the **State of European Tech 2023 study** created in partnership with several leading companies and over 40 industry experts.

The value of welfare

Public welfare refers to **any kind of service or support provided by the government**, which includes centralized national healthcare, family assistance, education, housing, unemployment benefits, and more. What is recognized and provided by governments as a form of welfare is drastically different from country by country. Public welfare in, say, European countries, is on average **more comprehensive than that of the United States**, for example; while Asian countries have other systems of their own.

To start assessing the value that public welfare plays for the population

we surveyed — that is Swedish, German, French, Spanish, and Italian workers — we asked them **to what extent they rely on public welfare** to take care of their own necessities or those of their family. The majority of the respondents (across all generations and countries) stated that they **do not rely on any form of public welfare**. This is especially true for Baby Boomers (74.6%) and Gen X (66.2%). This may depend on the fact that they are in a relatively comfortable financial situation, and might not be eligible for most of the support provided by their governments. Indeed, it's the younger generations who have mentioned they

do take advantage of some benefits, albeit for non-essential expenses, and are in fact **actively looking to expand the cohort of services they access**; something that pairs with their lower purchasing power.

In addition to state-subsidized welfare, **corporate welfare** includes concepts such as integrative health insurance (i.e. dental insurance), money vouchers that can be spent on goods, discounts on certain services or products (i.e. public transportation, as well as travel packages), or other services that the company may offer to their employees (i.e. company kindergarten).

70%

of respondents believe organizations should offer a structured mental and emotional health support program, per a 2021 survey by **Paychex**, a leading provider in software solutions for human resources.

We then asked workers **whether they rely on company welfare** for their personal expenses or those of their families. Interestingly, the majority of them stated that they do not have access to any form of company welfare (our Geographical Focus below highlights the differences between each country).

Curiously, the second-most selected answer is that the respondents **do not rely on company welfare although they are provided with it**; once again, this answer is more selected by Baby Boomers, but a significant portion of the other generations also mentions not considering the benefits their organization offers — even Gen Z. Of those who do, across generations, votes are more or less equally split between having to use it out of necessity and, on the other hand, not considering it necessary. A third, equally-voted option tells us that other workers do, but mostly pursue other passions and personal projects.

Outside of those who can't access any welfare packages, the fact

that the single-biggest pool of respondents said that they don't take advantage of company welfare may be explained by the fact that such benefits **may be perceived as — or actually are — mostly irrelevant with respect to the practical needs and financial challenges** employees are experiencing. Corporate welfare has become particularly relevant to increase employer branding and improve talent retention. Job seekers are provided with popular job aggregator platforms, such as Indeed, which propose detailed guides on how to pick the correct employer based on the benefits they offer. According to the HR Innovation Practice Observatory at Polytechnic of Milan, the more traditional types of benefits such as company cars and company cafeteria have been losing relevance in response to the changes brought by the pandemic. The evolution of corporate welfare has been slowly moving toward **providing more flexibility and first-hand personalization**

FIGURE 19
The value of public welfare for different generations

When asked about the use of public welfare it emerged that the great majority of workers, more than half of the total population, do not take advantage of any form of support from the government; only a fifth of the respondents do, and actively look for new types of support to benefit from.

Disclaimer:
 * Respondents are equally distributed between Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy.
 * Answers for "I wouldn't know" were omitted from this representation.

How to read

- Baby Boomers
- Gen X
- Gen Y
- Gen Z

Yes, I do and I actively look for new types of support that I can benefit from



Yes, I do, but not for necessary expenses



No, I don't make use of support services



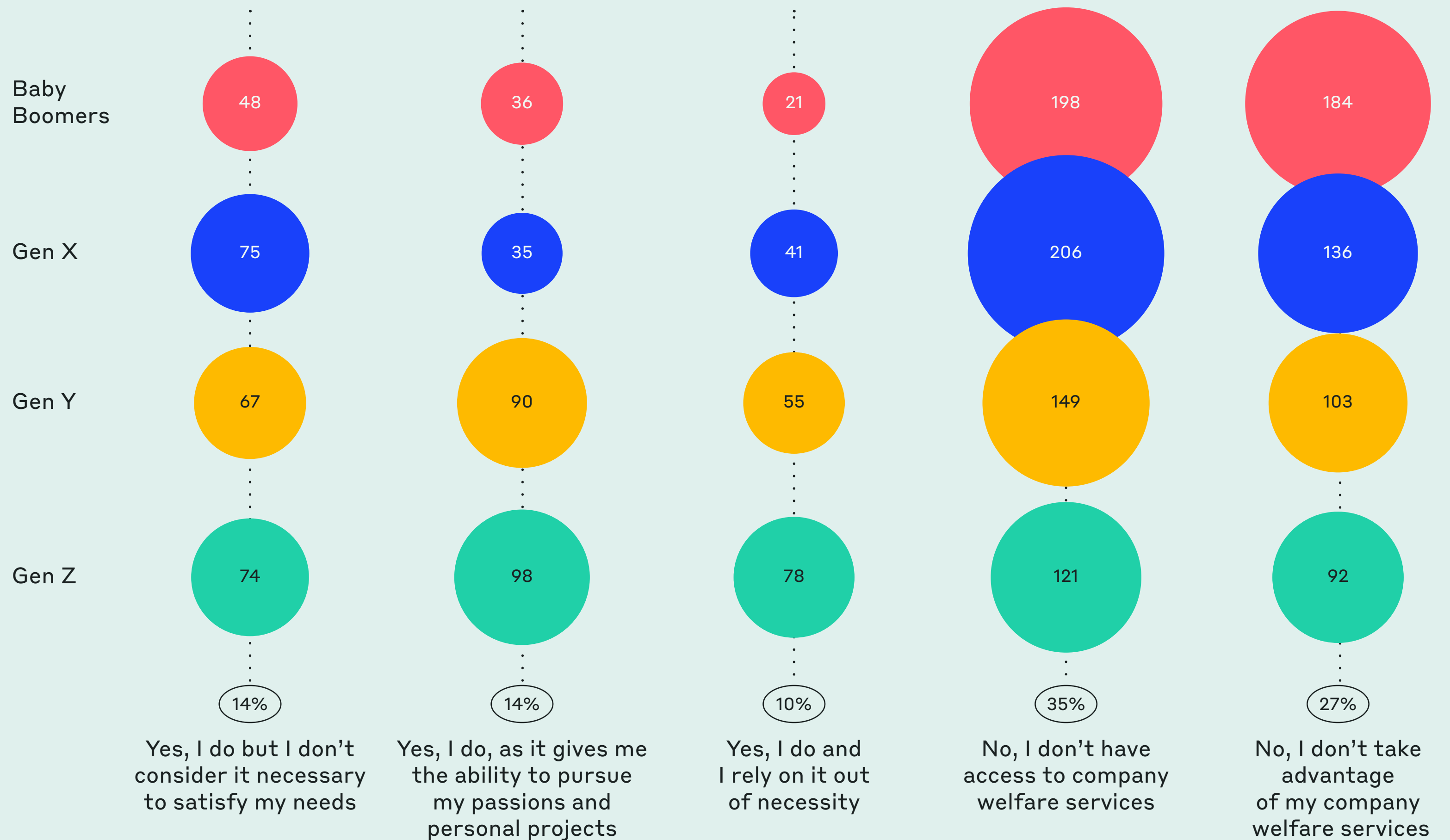
of benefits by employees where physical and mental health, an easier management of family and work tasks, public transport and mobility support, and more options on where to spend meal tickets outside of the company cafeteria should be prioritized.

Still, outside Millennials, the numbers tell us that **there are more workers who do use their corporate welfare benefits (38%) than those who don't (27%)** — and it's fair to assume that at least part of those who don't have any access to them — an astonishing 35% — would use them if they could (especially Gen Z). At a time when neverending cycles of economic crises match the progressive dismantling of public, state-based social welfare (due to privatization and liberalization mechanisms), it's reasonable to think that, much like higher salaries, **requests for extended welfare benefits will be in demand**. Companies should therefore curate their benefit offer, keeping in mind that Gen Z is at the heart of the future workforce.

FIGURE 20
Use of company welfare across generations

For most of the surveyed workers, company welfare is not provided. A similar amount of people report not taking advantage of their organization's welfare benefits, despite being able to access them. Among those who use company welfare, Gen X and Gen Z don't consider it critical for their needs, and Baby Boomers together with the youngest generation use it for personal interest more.

Disclaimer:
 * Respondents are equally distributed between Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy.
 * Answers for "I wouldn't know" were omitted from this representation.



Looking at the distribution of responses regarding the value that workers place on public and corporate welfare across the surveyed countries, we can highlight a few points. As mentioned in the general analysis, our data shows that the majority of people across generations **do not take advantage of any form of public welfare**. That is especially true for **Sweden** and **Germany**, but the numbers are similar for France, Italy, and Spain too. The majority of people who make use of **government support not for essential needs can be found in France and Italy** respectively, while respondents who are **constantly looking for new means of support are more concentrated in Spain**. As mentioned above, Germans and Swedes report less interest in searching for new ways to support themselves and their families through public welfare.

FIGURE 21

Public and company welfare's relevance, across Europe

How to read

Public welfare

- * — No, I don't make use of support services
- ◆ — Yes, I do and I actively look for new types of support that I can benefit from
- ❖ — Yes, I do, but not for necessary expenses

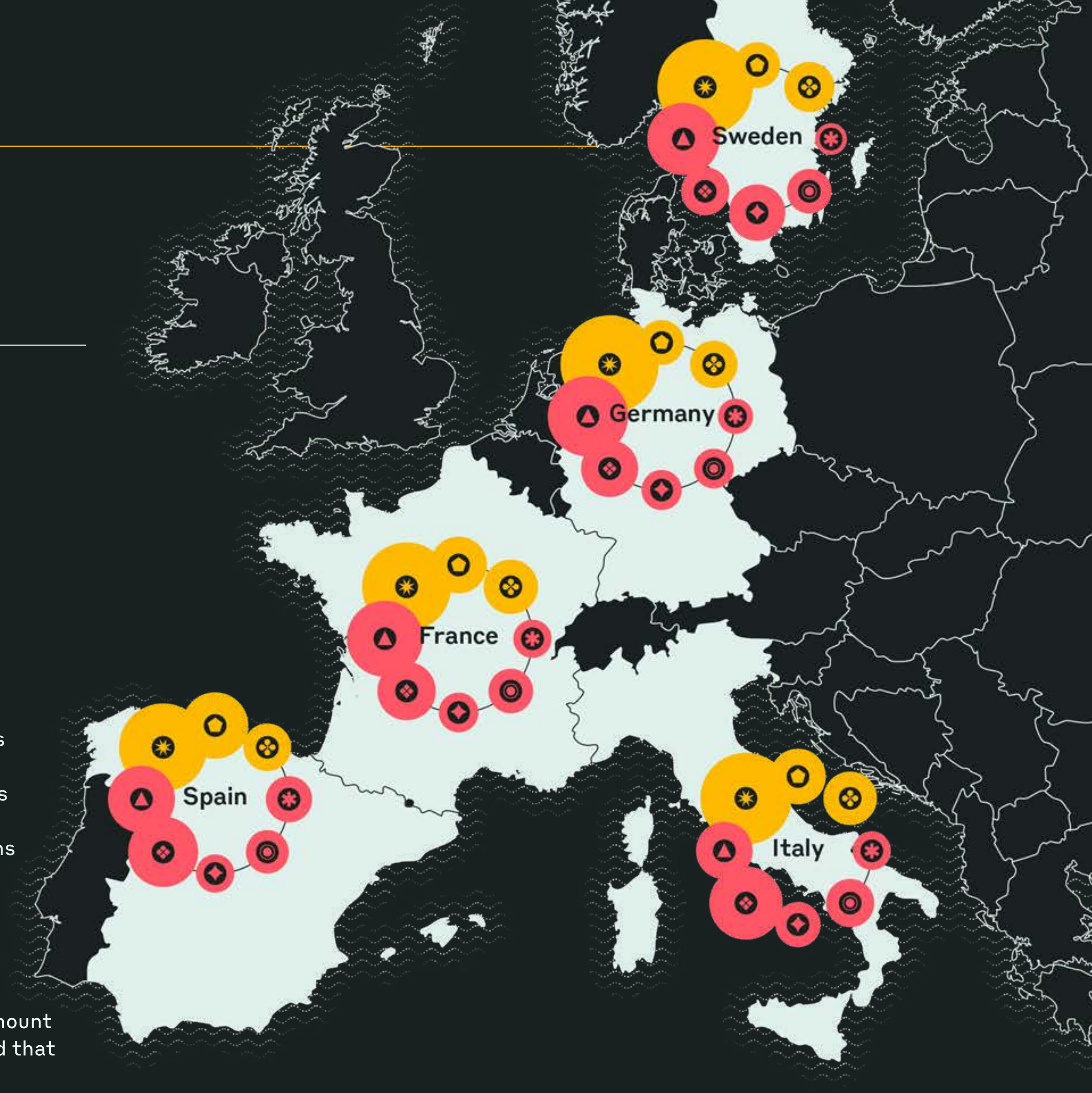
Company welfare

- ▲ — No, I don't have access to company welfare services
- ❖ — No, I don't take advantage of my company welfare services
- ◆ — Yes, I do but I don't consider it necessary to satisfy my needs
- — Yes, I do, as it gives me the ability to pursue my passions and personal projects
- * — Yes, I do and I rely on it out of necessity

260



The size of the circle corresponds to the amount of people who selected that particular answer



Conversely, **Sweden takes more advantage of company welfare** than any other of the surveyed countries, but only **as an accessory** (and not a fundamental means of survival). As we have seen, the majority of respondents **do not have access to any form of company welfare**, while Italy and Spain have the highest concentration of workers who do have access but **do not use it**. Those who affirm that company welfare is important for their everyday life can be mostly found in Spain; for Italians it is mostly a way to cultivate one's passions.

Looking closer at the respondents who mentioned **actively looking for new types of support to benefit from in terms of public welfare** data shows how the Spanish Gen Z and Gen Y are highly interested in finding new ways to support themselves with government funds. Their French peers search for new forms of public welfare almost to the same extent. Spanish and Italian Gen X equally value public welfare: about three times more than

French, four times more than German and five times more than Swedes of the same age group. While in Italy, the amount of Gen Z who pay attention to this factor equals about the same amount of Gen X. Baby Boomers that look for new forms of public welfare are more frequent in Spain, while only about half of the Swedish oldest age group choose this option.

Diving deeper into the pool of respondents who answered they **don't take advantage of their company welfare services**, Italy, followed by Spain close behind, are overall the countries that most selected this option. The oldest generations across the countries are the age group that seems to be the least satisfied with what they are provided in terms of benefits. A survey conducted by Statista in Italy in 2018 revealed that Baby Boomers are mostly interested in medical, accident and nursing insurance (55.4%), having a supplementary pension (37.9%), and meal tickets (30.7%).

FIGURE 22
Generations actively searching for new forms of public welfare, across Europe

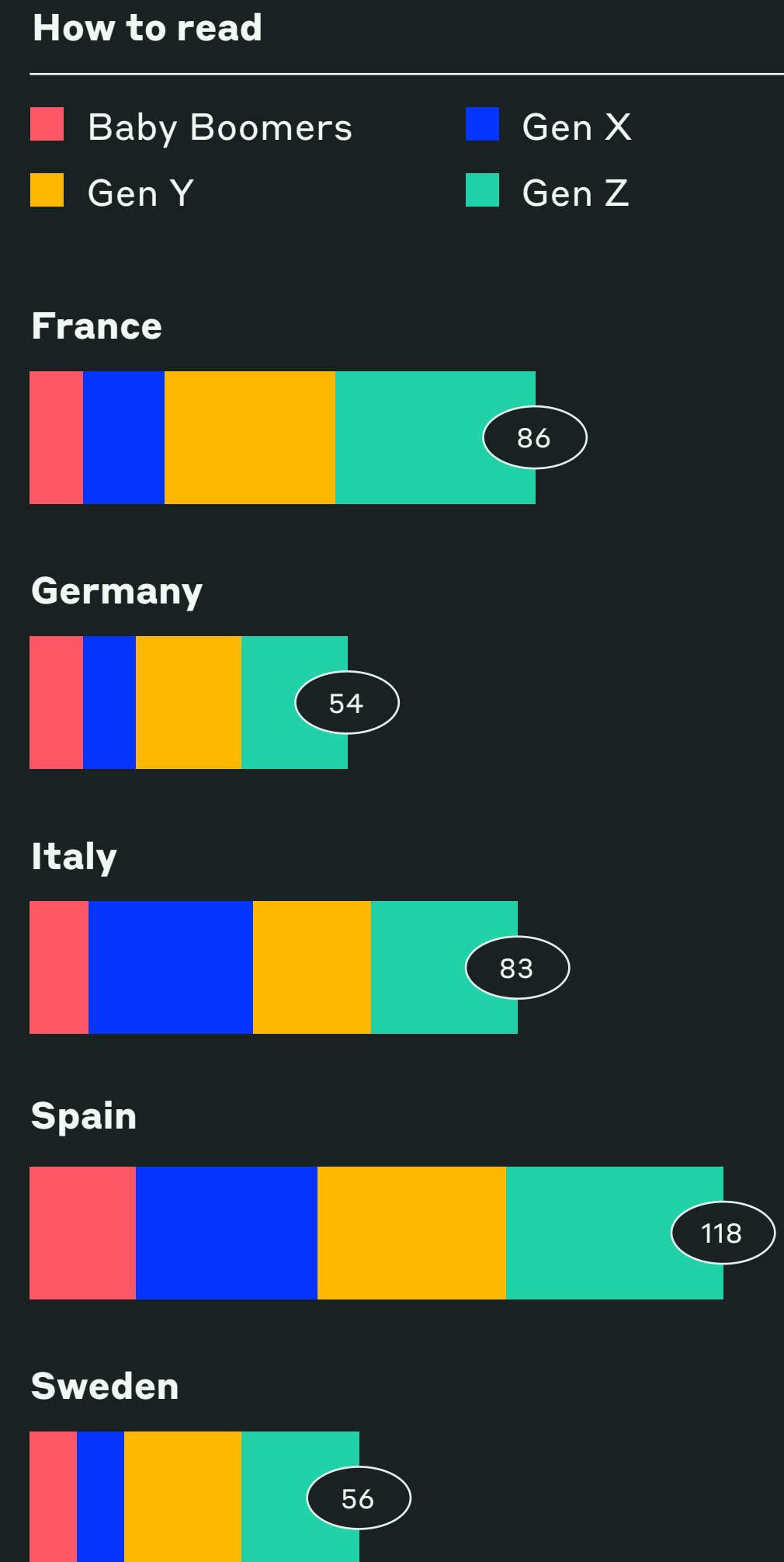
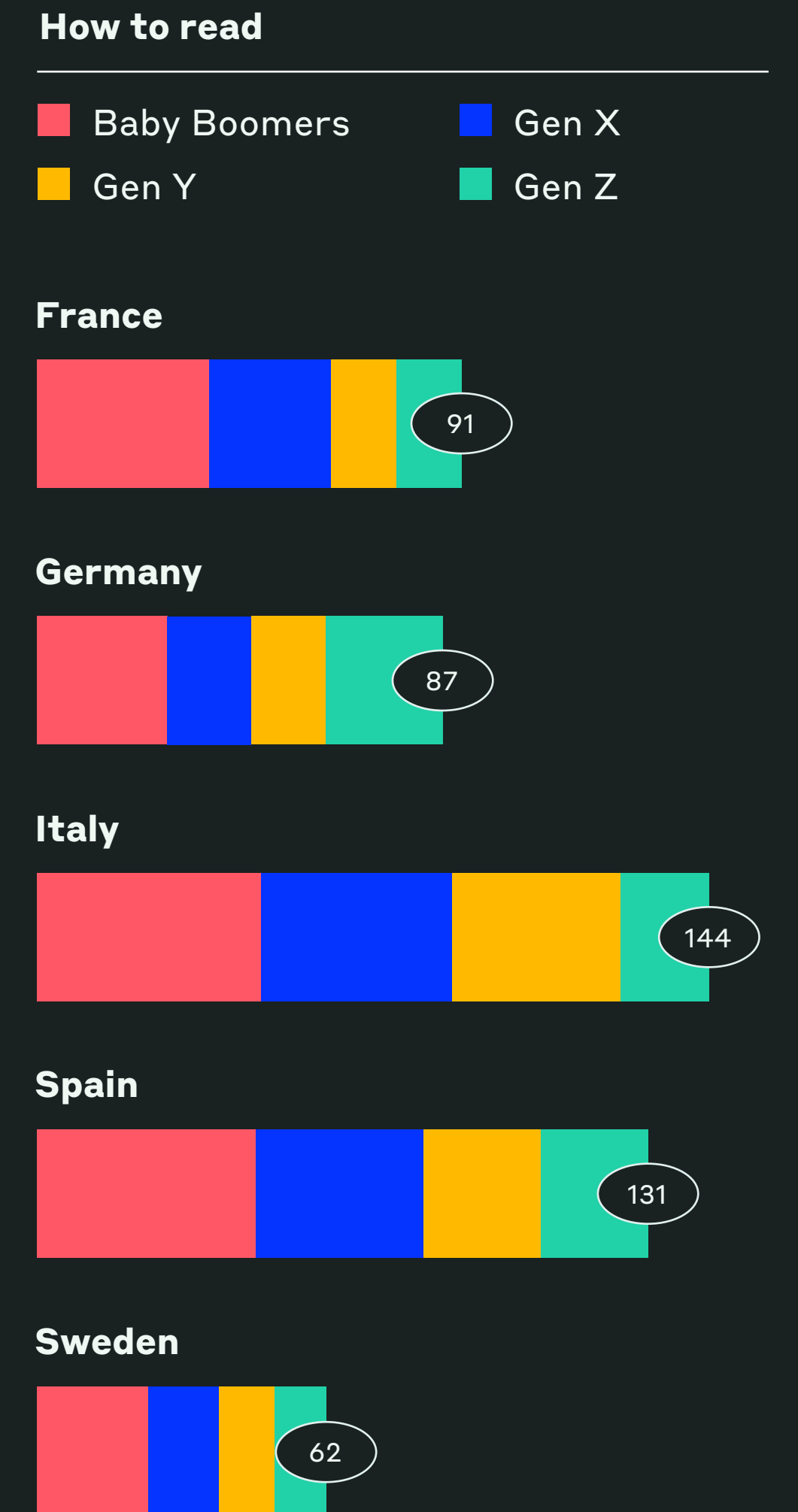
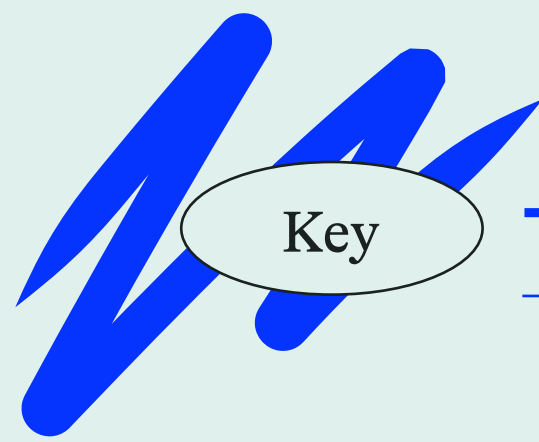


FIGURE 23
Generations not taking advantage of their company welfare, across Europe





Key

TAKEAWAYS

① — The narrative that emerges is one of a workforce *cognizant* of the *timeless value of creativity*, the *pressing need for problem-solving acumen*, and the *changing face of leadership*. It's a workforce that is bracing for the future with a blend of resilience and adaptability, while also signaling a shift in how learning and technology are perceived and integrated into the professional self. For organizations, this tapestry of insights offers a roadmap to tailor their strategies, ensuring they resonate with, engage, and leverage the unique strengths of each generational cohort.

② — The results suggest an overarching consensus that the future of work will be more *attuned to the holistic needs of employees*, blending traditional work tasks with well-being and leisure activities. This reflects a broader trend toward human-centric workplace design. Despite finding value in some in-presence activities, younger generations (particularly Gen Z) are *more open to radical changes in work structure* and show less attachment to the conventional office, indicating a shift toward flexible and non-traditional work environments.

③ — Despite having access to — on average — better *public welfare* than their American counterpart, European workers in our data *seem to largely ignore it*; something that might be skewed by the relatively comfortable working and living conditions of our sample. When it comes to corporate welfare, the single most voted option was again for not finding it valuable, but that is countered by a larger pool of respondents who either *use it for non-essential purposes*, subsidize their passion, or *actually depend on it* — a cohort mainly fueled by Gen Z, suggesting that employers will need to *pay attention to benefits* as much as they should focus on *pushing for higher salaries*.

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Generations Debate has also been a live workshop and documentary with the contribution and expertise of our extended team:
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Irene Mercorelli, Liala Minacapelli.

Eight people from MAIZE's network were involved as protagonists of the live workshop: Alas Gatti, Alberto Cellotto, Alessandra Chiuderi, Anna Nardo, Giovanna Bosoni, Maddalena Diana, Monica Sappa, Silvio Furione.

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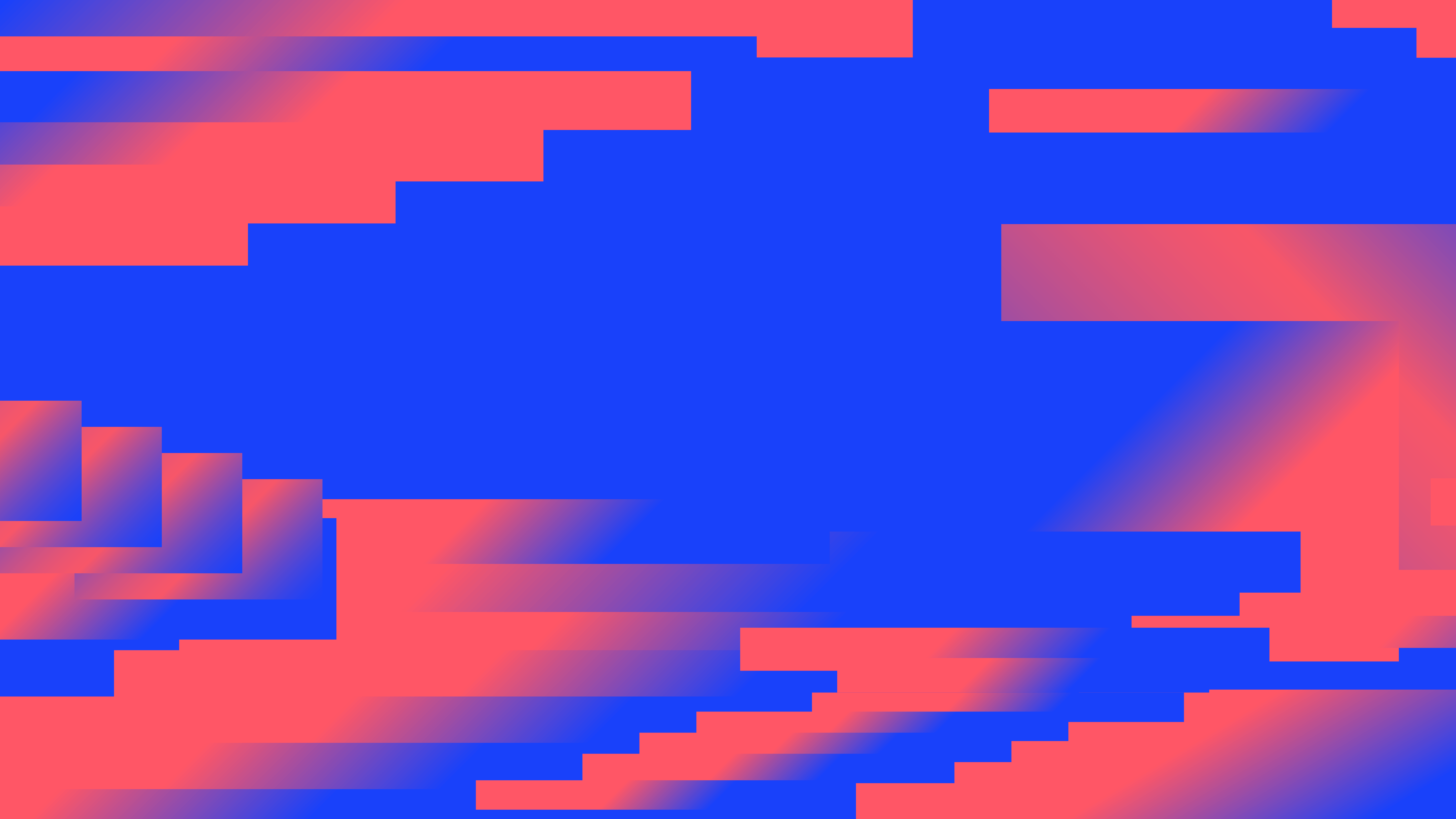
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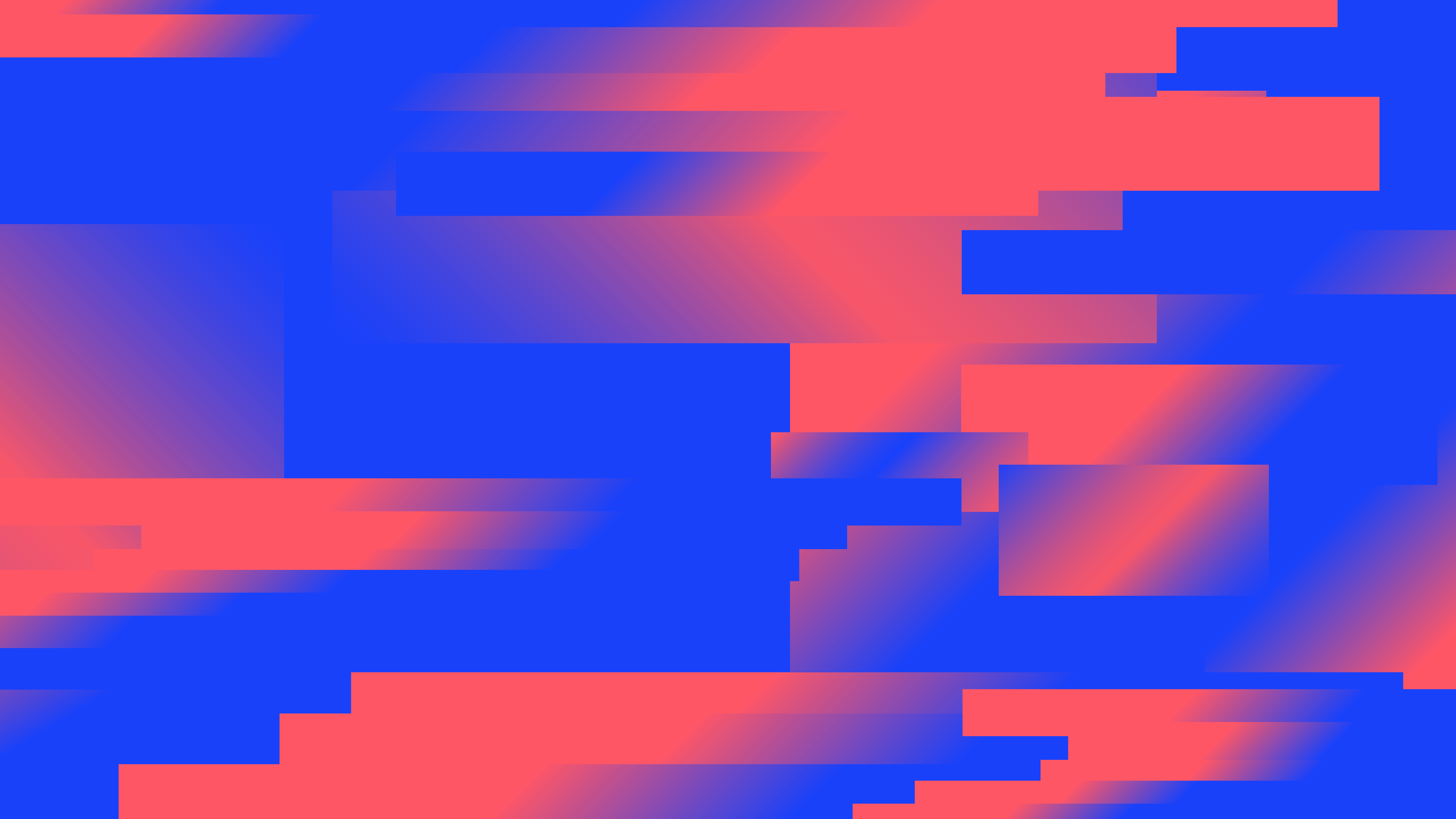
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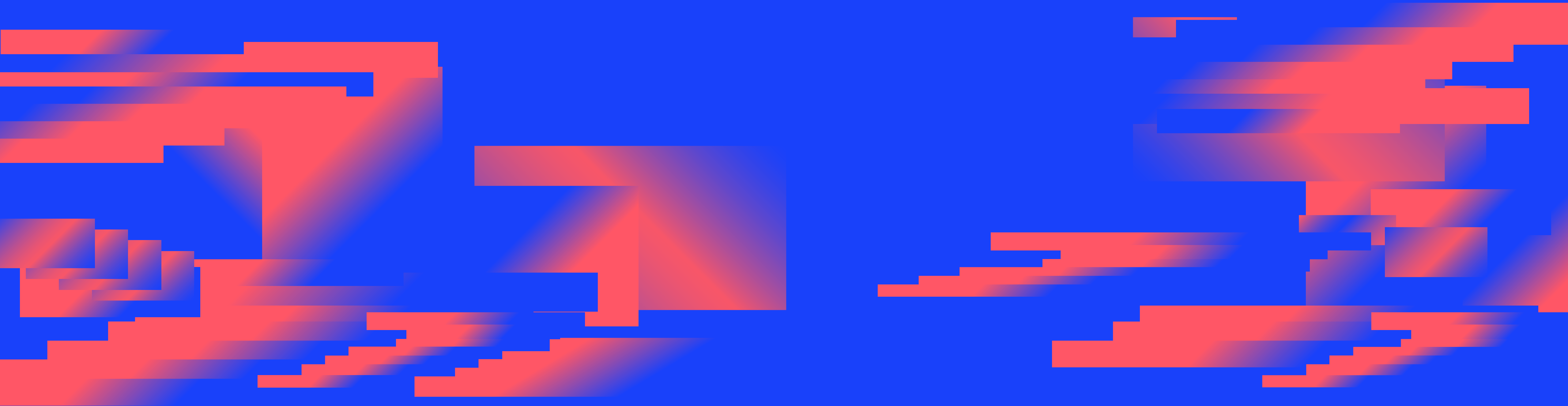






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