

Press release

New donor generation, old fundraising models: Nonprofits risk losing relevance

Young people are donating, but differently from previous generations. Organizations that continue to rely on traditional fundraising models will lose access to a growing share of potential supporters in the future. This is the key finding of a new study by commercial growth and pricing consultancy Simon-Kucher and UNICEF Germany. Beyond traditional donations, younger generations are increasingly using digital giving formats, donation-related purchasing decisions, and social media to support good causes.

- 39 percent of young donors engage in digital donation formats
- 38 percent of donors aged 18–29 and 36 percent of donors 30–39 prefer purpose-driven purchases over direct donations
- Giving is often influenced by external triggers
- 46 percent of younger donors prioritize animal-related causes, while child-focused initiatives rank second
- Across age groups, visible impact, transparency, and control over fund allocation rank among the most important decision factors

Cologne, July 1st, 2026 - The next generation of donors is engaged, but follows different rules. While many nonprofit organizations continue to rely on traditional fundraising campaigns, younger people are increasingly shifting their engagement to digital channels and everyday purchasing decisions. As a result, giving is expanding beyond the traditional donation moment, becoming more digital, situational, and integrated into everyday life.

Digital channels gain importance

The study shows that younger generations engage with charitable causes through a much broader range of channels than previous generations. Digital offerings play a central role in this shift: In total, 39 percent of young donors engage in digital donation formats, underlining the growing importance of digital ecosystems. At the same time, 26 percent participate through purchase-linked giving and 21 percent through crowdfunding, highlighting the diversification of giving formats. “Younger generations are not giving less, but they are moving beyond traditional donation models,” says Björn Dahmen, Senior Partner. “To stay relevant, charities need to rethink giving as digital, situational, and embedded in everyday life.”

When buying becomes giving

For younger generations, charitable engagement no longer takes place solely through traditional donations. Instead, they are increasingly supporting projects and organizations through everyday purchasing decisions. 38 percent of donors aged 18–29 and 36 percent of those aged 30–39 prefer purpose-driven purchases over direct donations, indicating a clear substitution effect. Supporting causes through purchases is perceived as

practical, low-effort, and seamlessly integrated into daily life, allowing donors to create impact without changing their routines.

Giving is triggered, not routine

Unlike older generations, younger donors are less driven by habitual giving. Instead, their engagement is often situational and influenced by external triggers. Overall, 29 percent donate during crises, 26 percent respond to appeals from friends and family, and 23 percent act on social media calls to action. This shift highlights the growing role of urgency, social influence, and digital touchpoints in driving donations.

Animal welfare leads among younger donors

Preferences for causes also differ significantly between generations. 46 percent of younger donors prioritize animal-related causes, making it the most supported category within this group. Child-focused initiatives rank second, while older donors continue to prioritize them as their primary cause.

Transparency and impact drive engagement

Clear communication and visible impact are critical for engaging younger audiences. Specifically, 34 percent want a detailed overview of planned measures, 32 percent value honest insights into challenges and progress, and 31 percent expect regular updates on outcomes. These expectations underline the importance of transparency, accountability, and storytelling in modern fundraising.

Rethinking donor engagement

Young donors remain active, curious, and open to supporting charitable causes, especially when giving fits naturally into their daily lives and when the impact of their contribution is clearly visible.

“The study highlights what we at UNICEF are already seeing: Young people want to engage, including in support of children, but on their own terms,” says Thorsten Peters, Head of Marketing and a member of the Executive Board at UNICEF Germany. “They donate where they’re already active, in everyday digital moments, through platforms that fit seamlessly into their lives. Earning their loyalty will depend on thoughtful and relevant design of messages and the giving experience.”

The findings highlight an urgent need for charities to rethink their engagement strategies or risk missing out on the next generation of donors.

Dahmen summarizes: “Ultimately, the future of fundraising may depend less on louder appeals and more on creating a seamless, transparent, and engaging giving experience”.

About the study

The study was conducted by Simon-Kucher in partnership with UNICEF Germany in November 2025 and is based on a Germany-wide online survey of 997 respondents conducted with Appinio. The research focused on donors aged 18–39, with a control group aged 40–75 to identify youth-specific behaviors.

About Simon-Kucher

Simon-Kucher is a global consultancy with more than 2,200 employees in 30+ countries. As a trusted commercial advisor focused on unlocking better growth, we combine deep consulting expertise, growth specialization, and technology to scale lasting impact. We optimize every lever of commercial strategy – product, pricing, innovation, marketing, and sales – based on what customers want and value. With over 40 years of monetization experience, we are recognized as the world’s leading commercial growth and pricing specialist.

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