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Professional Network Growth and Demographics

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INTRODUCTION

Professional relationships matter more than ever, yet many professionals lack the confidence to build them. New LinkedIn research reveals that 60% are staying on the sidelines of their professional community, missing out on valuable advice, introductions, and opportunities. That number rises to 72% for Gen-Z. Fear is often the barrier: 37% worry about bothering people, 37% fear being judged, and 34% worry about sounding inauthentic.

And it's showing up in how they build relationships. More than half (53%) of Gen Z professionals aren't sure how to get started, while 52% don't know how to turn contacts into meaningful connections. On the other hand, the majority of Millennials and Gen X professionals (83%) say they would help someone at the start of their career who reached out to them, even if they've never met them didn't know.

While these new insights explored professionals' attitudes and behaviors around relationship-building more broadly, we wanted to understand if these trends were also showing up on LinkedIn. To do that, we conducted an analysis of LinkedIn members and their networks, focusing on the average number of new professional connections made monthly on LinkedIn (their network formation rate, or NFR). Looking across multiple member segments and over time, this analysis provides a wider view of how networking behaviors are evolving across the platform.

1. KEY FINDINGS

At a glance:

- **Country:** NFR grew the most in India, rising 99% since Q1 2020.
- **Gender:** There is a persistent gender gap in NFR throughout the period, with men forming 38% more connections per month than women in Q2 2026.
- **Generation:** Gen Z's NFR increased 24% since Q1 2020, while Baby Boomers' NFR fell 43%.
- **Age:** NFR increased 17% for members aged 18–29 since Q1 2020, while it declined 12% for the 30–49 and 50+ age groups.
- **Education:** MBA holders had the highest NFR in Q2 2026 at 114% above the Q1 2020 national baseline, while doctoral-degree holders grew the fastest, up 40% since Q1 2020.
- **Education segment:** In Q2 2026, STAR members' (highest degree was less than a bachelor's and above age 25) NFR was 9% below the Q1 2020 national baseline.
- **Network size:** In Q2 2026, members in the top 25% by network size formed nearly five times as many new connections as those in the next-highest 25%.
- **Verification:** Verified members' NFR was 4.2 times that of non-verified members in Q2 2026.
- **Seniority:** In Q2 2026, senior individual contributors' NFR was 64% above entry-level members' NFR, while managers' NFR was 54% higher.
- **Industry:** Technology, Information and Media had the highest industry NFR in Q2 2026, at 81% above the Q2 2026 cross-country median and 12% above its Q1 2020 level.
- **Job function:** In Q2 2026, members in Human Resources had the highest NFR, at nearly five times that of members in Administrative roles, the job function with the lowest NFR.

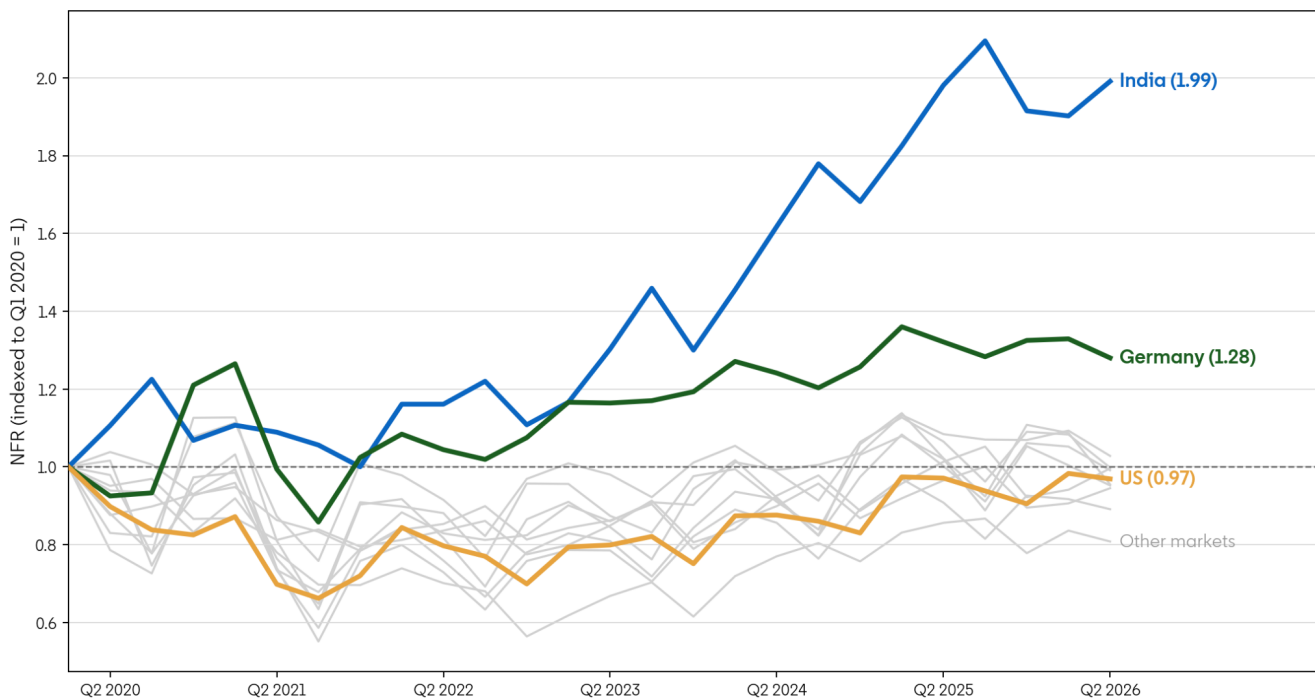


- **Company size:** NFR generally decreases with company size. In Q2 2026, members at companies with 11–50 employees had an NFR 45% above the Q2 2026 cross-country median, roughly in line with their Q1 2020 level.

2. NETWORK FORMATION RATES BY COUNTRY

India, Germany, and the UK were above their Q1 2020 baselines in Q2 2026. India had the highest NFR in Q2 2026, up 99% since Q1 2020. Germany's NFR rose 28% and the UK's rose 3%, while the US' NFR was 3% below its baseline. Brazil (–19%), Italy (–11%), Singapore (–6%), and Sweden (–5%) recorded larger declines.

India recorded the strongest network formation growth, up 99% since Q1 2020



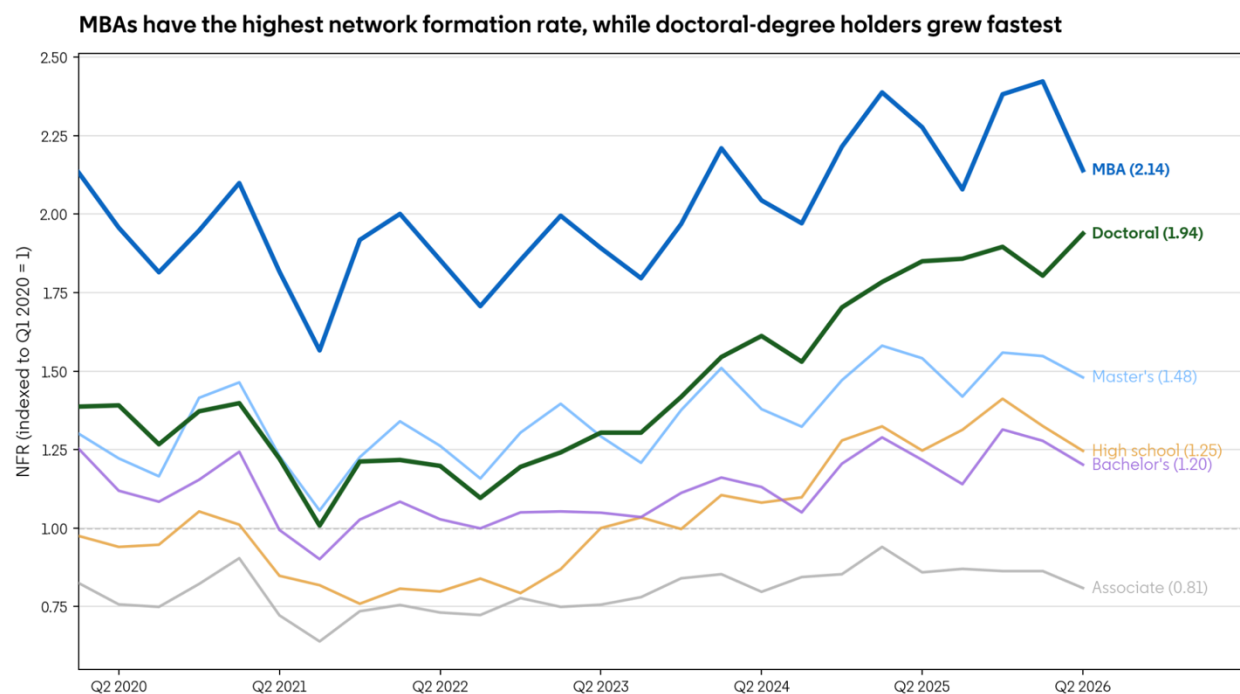
Source: Network Formation Rate: Additional Member Cuts. Q1 2020–Q2 2026. Indexed to each country's Q1 2020 overall NFR (=1).

3. NETWORK FORMATION RISES WITH EDUCATION LEVEL — MBAS ARE THE MOST CONNECTED, AND PHDS ARE GROWING FASTEST

Members with more advanced degrees generally form new connections at a higher rate. MBA holders had the highest cross-country median NFR in Q2 2026 at 114% above the Q1 2020 national baseline.

Doctoral-degree holders recorded the fastest growth, rising 40% since Q1 2020. In India, doctoral members' NFR rose 126% since Q1 2020, reaching 186% above the national baseline.

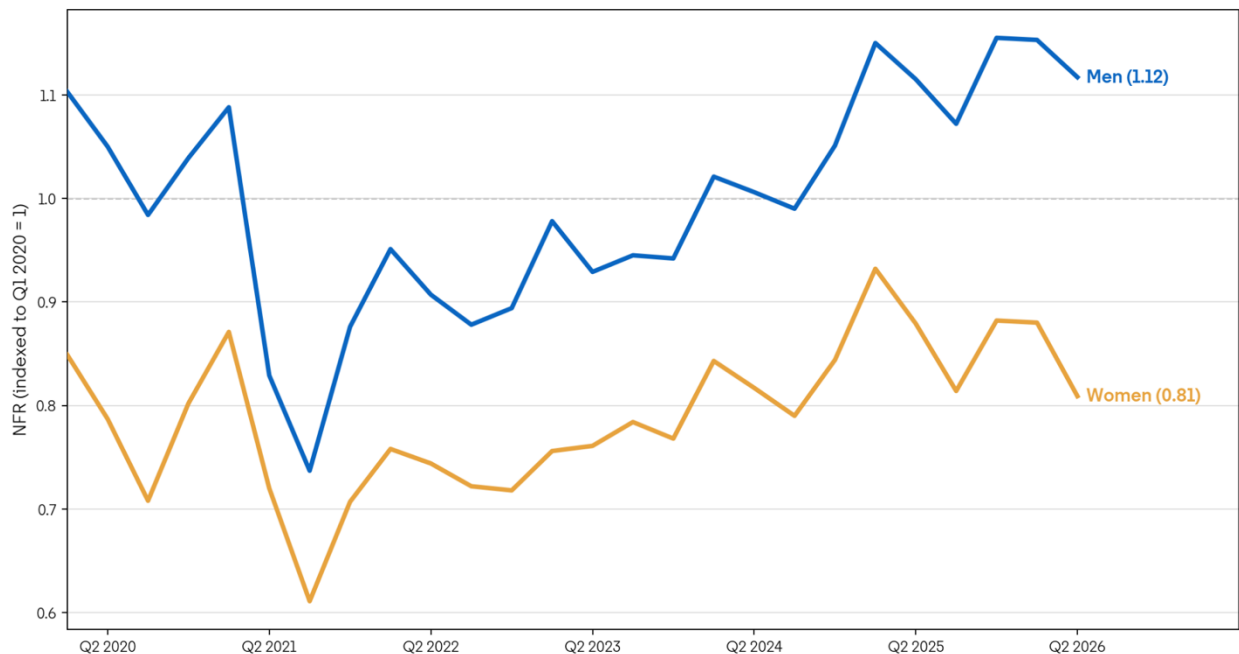
Education level	Q1 2020 (indexed)	Q2 2026 (indexed)	Change
High School Diploma	0.97	1.25	28%
Associate Degree	0.83	0.81	-2%
Bachelor's Degree	1.25	1.2	-4%
Master's Degree	1.3	1.48	14%
MBA	2.13	2.14	0%
Doctoral Degree	1.39	1.94	40%



Source: Network Formation Rate: Additional Member Cuts. Q1 2020–Q2 2026. Indexed to each country's Q1 2020 overall NFR (=1).

4. MEN FORM NEW CONNECTIONS AT A HIGHER RATE THAN WOMEN, AND THE GAP HAS PERSISTED SINCE 2020

Men formed 38% more connections per month than women in Q2 2026, compared with 30% more in Q1 2020.



Source: Network Formation Rate: Additional Member Cuts. Q1 2020–Q2 2026. Indexed to each country's Q1 2020 overall NFR (=1).

5. MEMBERS WITH VERIFIED PROFILES GROW NETWORKS AT A MUCH FASTER RATE THAN NON-VERIFIED PROFILES

Members who verify their profiles on LinkedIn grow their networks much faster than members who do not verify their profiles, a gap that has persisted over time. In 2026 Q2, unverified members had an average indexed NFR of 0.511, while verified members had a NFR of 2.154, over four times as fast a rate of network growth.

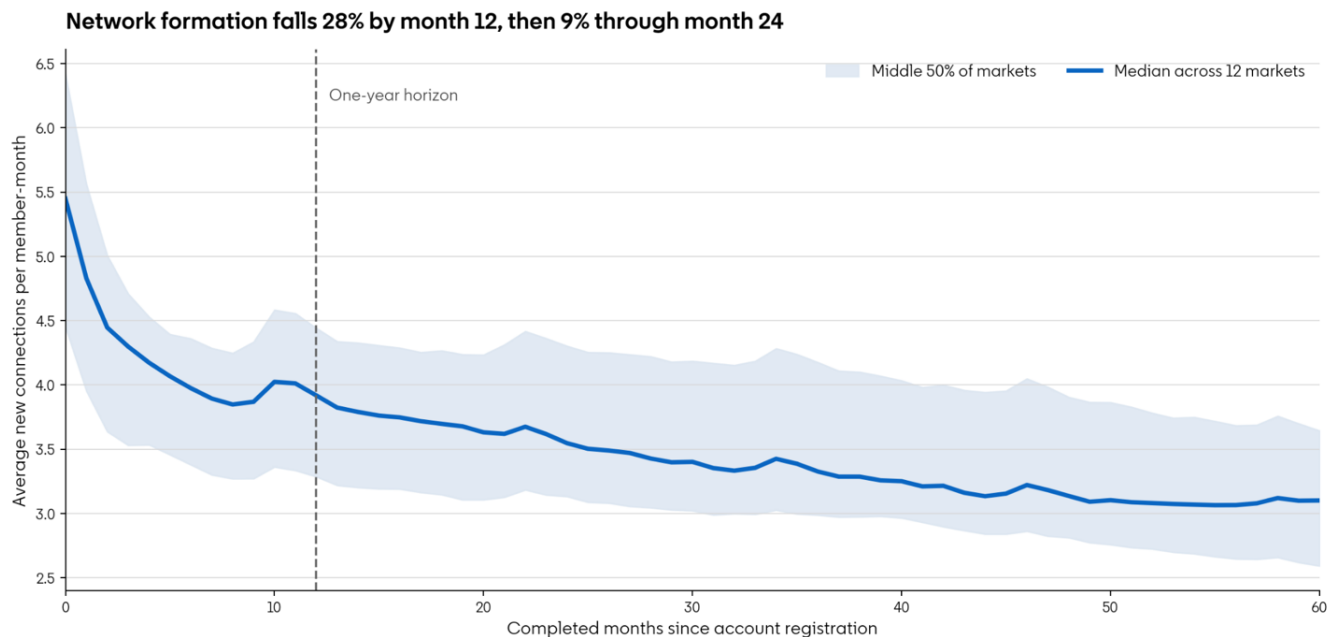
6. YOUNGER MEMBERS ARE DRIVING NETWORK GROWTH — GEN Z NOW CONNECTS AT THREE TIMES THE BABY BOOMER RATE

Network formation rates have diverged sharply by generation. In 2026 Q2, Baby Boomers had an average indexed NFR of 0.402, while Gen Z members had an NFR of 1.281 — more than three times as fast a rate of network growth, up from about 1.5 times in 2020 Q1. Gen Z is the only generation above its 2020 Q1 rate, rising 24%, while Baby Boomers fell 43% and Gen X (–15%) and Millennials (–12%) have yet to recover. The pattern holds in every market studied: Gen Z has the highest NFR and Baby Boomers the lowest in all 12 countries.

METHODOLOGY

Network Formation Rate (NFR) is measured in member-months: the average number of new connections a member makes per month. Quarterly NFR is calculated as a member-month-weighted average across all eligible member-months in the quarter, rather than a simple average of the three monthly rates. The analysis ends in Q2 2026, the latest complete quarter. Each group's NFR is indexed to its country's overall NFR in Q1 2020, where the country baseline equals 1.

A member-month is eligible only when the account was registered at least one year before the month being measured. This rolling rule is also applied when calculating the Q1 2020 baseline. We use a rolling threshold so later registrants enter the sample once their accounts reach one year, reducing the upward bias created by the high NFR typical of newly registered accounts, while still allowing entry of new members (which, if omitted would downward bias average NFR estimates missing these 1+ year old new accounts). This also allows proper investigation of Gen-Z members' NFR. As shown below, NFR declines sharply during an account's first year, supporting the exclusion of very new accounts.



Average NFR in 2026Q2, indexed to 2020 Q1

Country	NFR
Australia	0.996
Brazil	0.808
France	0.955
Germany	1.280
India	1.991
Italy	0.891
Netherlands	0.998
Singapore	0.945
Spain	0.991
Sweden	0.952
United Kingdom	1.028
United States	0.969
Median	0.969

Average NFR in 2026Q2 by gender, indexed to 2020 Q1

Country	Women	Men
Australia	0.864	1.117
Brazil	0.681	0.927
France	0.797	1.060
Germany	1.075	1.408
India	2.189	1.962
Italy	0.805	0.988
Netherlands	0.842	1.119
Singapore	0.809	1.150
Spain	0.808	1.107
Sweden	0.867	1.045
United Kingdom	0.892	1.133
United States	0.774	1.145
Median	0.809	1.117

Average NFR in 2026Q2 by educational attainment, indexed to 2020 Q1

Country	High School Diploma	Associate Degree	Bachelors Degree	MBA	Masters Degree	Doctoral Degree
Australia	1.135	0.824	1.182	1.593	1.282	1.938
Brazil	0.475	0.809	0.927	2.761	1.488	1.371
France	0.751	0.801	1.176	2.140	1.452	1.621
Germany	1.571	1.040	1.477	2.499	1.512	2.218
India	2.989	1.390	2.419	3.591	2.439	2.863
Italy	1.683	0.925	1.245	3.204	1.748	2.122
Netherlands	1.165	0.755	1.220	2.300	1.480	1.773
Singapore	1.246	0.709	0.942	2.016	1.028	1.955
Spain	1.038	0.631	1.202	2.569	1.668	1.852
Sweden	1.414	1.001	1.358	2.082	1.544	2.192
United Kingdom	1.347	0.937	1.225	1.960	1.384	1.974
United States	1.382	0.504	1.155	1.914	1.235	1.587
Median	1.246	0.809	1.202	2.140	1.480	1.938

Average NFR in 2026 Q2 by LinkedIn verification status, indexed to 2020 Q1

Country	Verified	Not verified
Australia	2.048	0.534
Brazil	3.001	0.391
France	2.124	0.603
Germany	2.454	0.738
India	4.494	0.944
Italy	2.551	0.465
Netherlands	1.970	0.583
Singapore	1.861	0.459
Spain	2.788	0.492
Sweden	1.818	0.511
United Kingdom	2.154	0.510
United States	2.145	0.353
Median	2.154	0.511

Average NFR in 2026Q2 by generation, indexed to 2020 Q1

Country	1946-1964 (Baby Boomers)	1965-1980 (Gen X)	1981-1996 (Millennials)	1997-2012 (Gen Z)
Australia	0.402	0.962	0.971	1.243
Brazil	0.353	0.847	0.782	0.852
France	0.424	0.846	0.876	1.145
Germany	0.719	1.270	1.280	1.385
India	0.526	1.255	1.399	2.858
Italy	0.393	0.760	0.842	1.439
Netherlands	0.440	0.920	1.014	1.290
Singapore	0.573	1.018	0.872	1.050
Spain	0.432	0.857	0.885	1.383
Sweden	0.365	0.901	0.964	1.180
United Kingdom	0.401	0.968	1.019	1.281
United States	0.307	0.809	0.883	1.549
Median	0.402	0.901	0.885	1.281