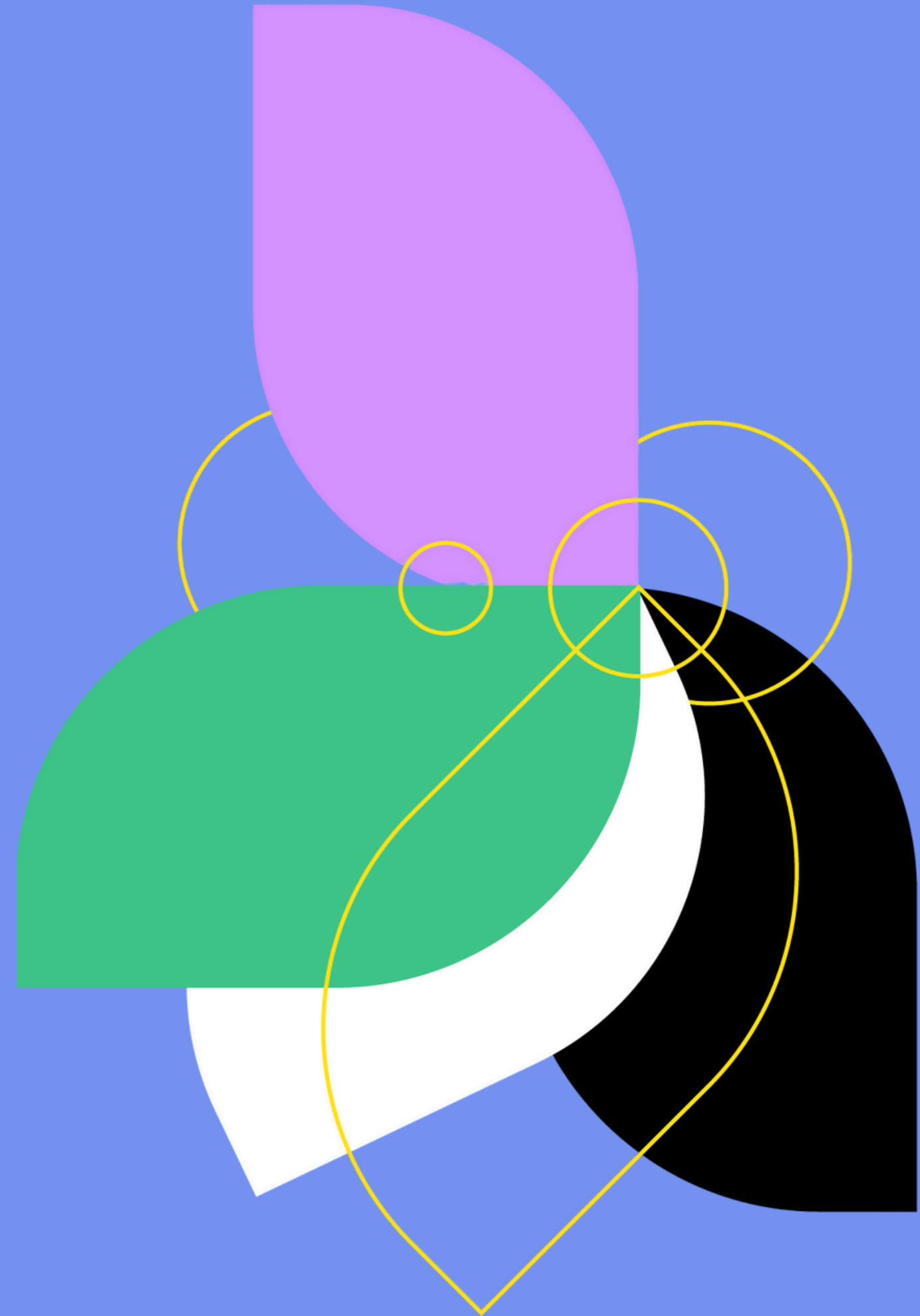


Voices for choices

Data for decisions
that matter

2025



Acknowledgements

Director: Adam Nyman

Project Lead: Alessandra Cardaci

Project Coordinators: Julie Malaize, Talisa Mazzoni

Project Advisor: Theofanis Exadaktylos

Author: Mihai Iliaoaia

Editor: Amanda Rohde-Stadler

Design: Dorothee Louis, Diogo Lacerda

Friends of Europe supporting team: Nathalie Furrer, Nakoma Hartwig, Dharmendra Kanani, Francisco Lopez, Davide Sofia



In partnership with



DEO

**POLIS
180**

GRASSROOTS-THINKTANK FÜR
AUSSEN- UND EUROPAPOLITIK



With the support of



Co-funded by the
European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

TrygFonden

Table of contents



4	Executive Summary
10	Demographic comparison & methodology
15	Polarisation & democracy
32	Security & resilience
47	Equity & prosperity
62	Climate & sustainability

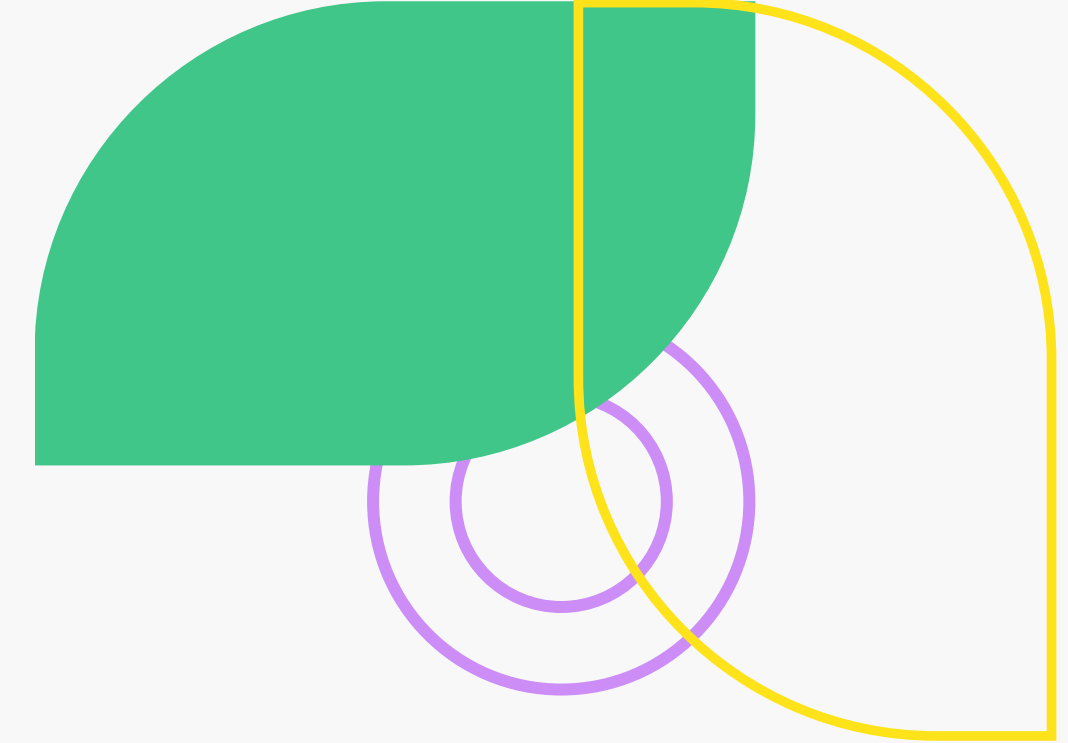
Executive Summary

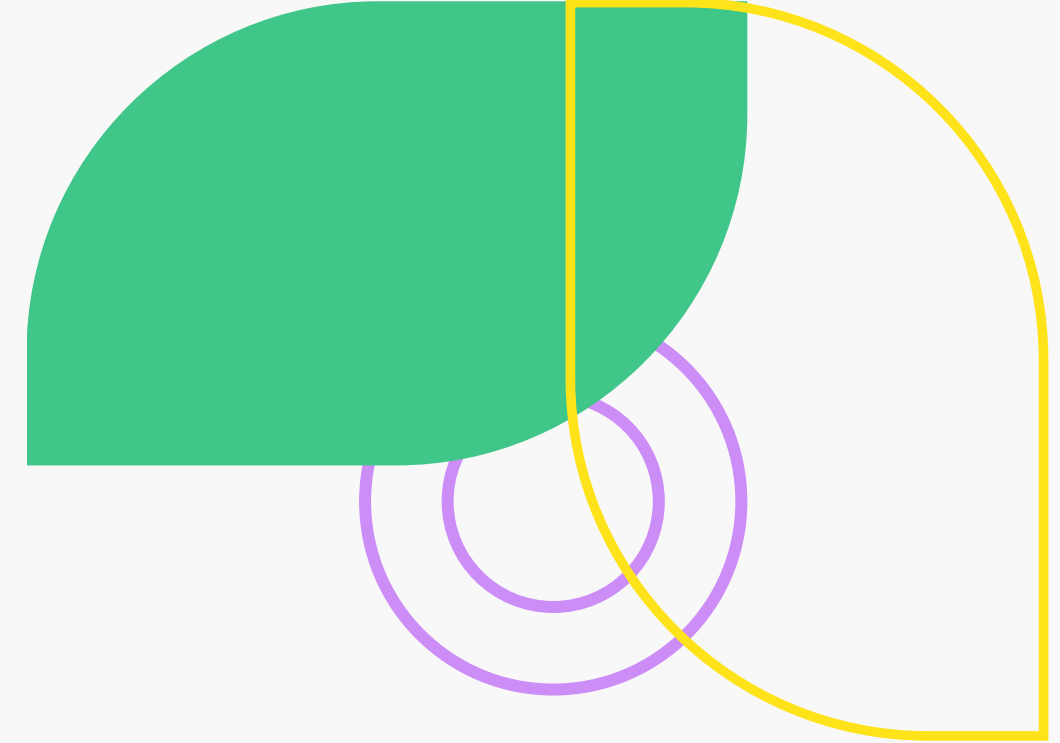
2024 was the biggest election year in history, with half of humanity eligible to go to the polls. In the European Union (EU), that included around **22 million first time voters** – young people who were able to express themselves through the democratic process for the first time.

Run between November 2024 and January 2025, this comprehensive survey spanning five European countries – **Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Poland** – sought the views of **2,000 such young people** aged 18-35.

With little trust in politicians and governments, respondents told us they want to be **more involved in decision-making**, and to receive the **same level of support and protection that previous generations have received**.

And while they worry their voices may go unheard as mounting polarisation, security threats and rising living costs risk pushing environmental and social priorities to the sidelines, young people have a clear view: **meeting the challenge of one should not come at the expense of the other**.





They are confident in Europe's ability to merge environmental stewardship and social protections, measured and practical when it comes to responding to external threats, committed to democratic processes and determined to hold their leaders accountable.

They are also clear about what roles they expect the EU, national governments and business to play in society, signalling their **hopes for what Europe's renewed social contract should look like.**

This confidence matters. Amidst the green, digital and demographic transitions which define our times, young people represent an important constituency.

But they represent no single cohort – **these young people tout strong values, ideologies and political opinions, but are less likely to be loyal to a single party,** assessing issues on a case-by-case basis. While trends emerge for some issues (such as climate action, support for Ukraine, and distrust in politicians and traditional and social media), national contexts often prevent singular viewpoints from emerging (for example on perceptions of economic growth and the role of AI).

Decision-makers must open their doors and their minds, and be ready to respond to the ideas and needs of these younger generations. This study builds on the outcomes of *2024 Voices: citizens speak up!* which canvassed the views of a broad cross-section of Europeans of all ages. Our latest report digs deeply into the sentiments and experiences of young people in particular.

Polarisation & democracy



Crisis of trust in media and institutions

Traditional and social media both rank low on credibility scales. Scientists and subject-matter experts retain comparatively high trust, while participants in Denmark and Germany tend to trust public institutions more than those in Poland or Italy.

Generational differences

Generational differences on matters such as politics, migration, climate and social rights are common. Disagreements emerge more in discussions with parents or co-workers than with friends and partners, who are more likely to share similar views.

Commitment to elections

Despite substantial distrust in politicians, young people remain committed to democratic processes, notably national elections.

AI's influence on democracy

While many are uncertain about AI's role in driving polarisation, few profess to having their opinions swayed by AI-generated content. A notable minority sees effectively governed AI as a tool to widen democratic engagement.

Security & resilience

Feeling relatively safe – for now

Most respondents feel secure in their daily lives and online.

Calls for greater independence

Europe's reliance on authoritarian regimes for energy is viewed critically, especially in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There is broad agreement that the EU should reduce dependence on external actors.

Collective defence a priority, diverging views on the United States

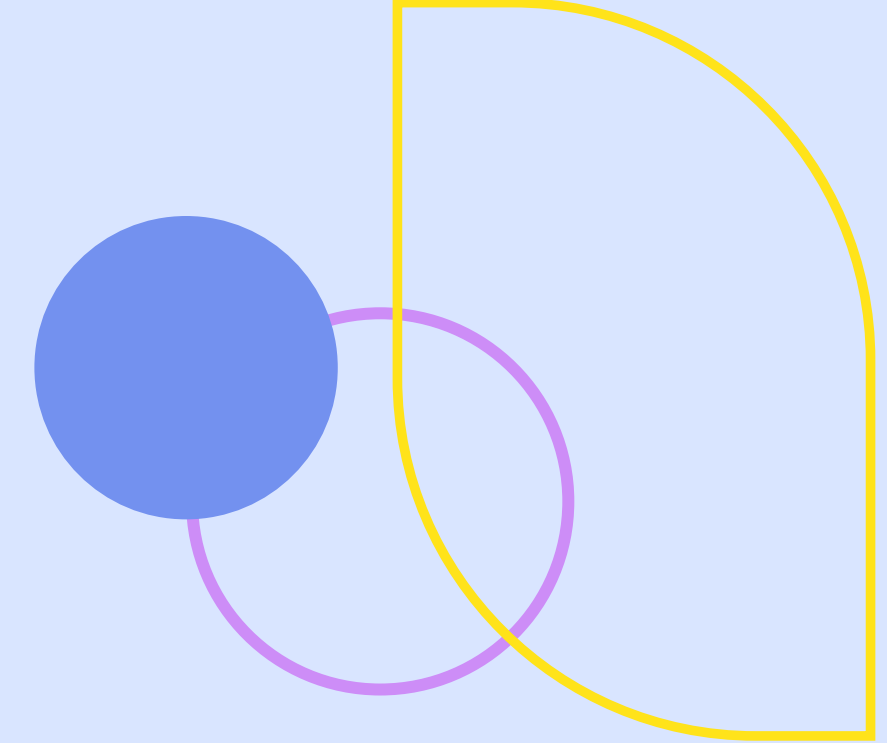
Across most countries, there is robust support for both the EU and NATO to oversee European defence. Although many are wary of relying on the United States, Polish respondents stand out for their emphasis on US involvement, reflecting concerns over Russia.

Openness to EU expansion

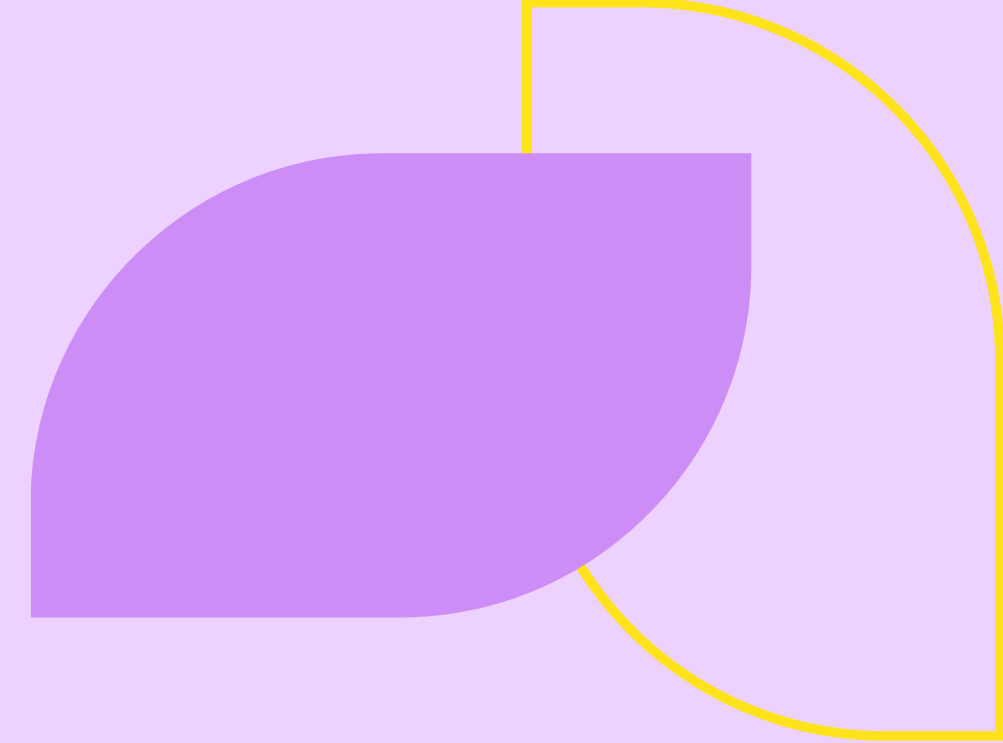
A majority express support for bringing new countries into the EU, notably Ukraine and other nearby nations.

AI in defence

Young Europeans cautiously support the use of AI for cybersecurity, real-time threat detection and strategic enhancements. Nonetheless, apprehensions persist over AI's maturity and potential misuse for surveillance or disinformation.



Equity & prosperity



Poor financial prospects, low expectations of support

Young people in most countries report stagnant or worsening personal financial situations, with Denmark showing slightly more optimism. They have limited faith in governments or the EU to provide economic relief, and business-driven solutions receive even less confidence.

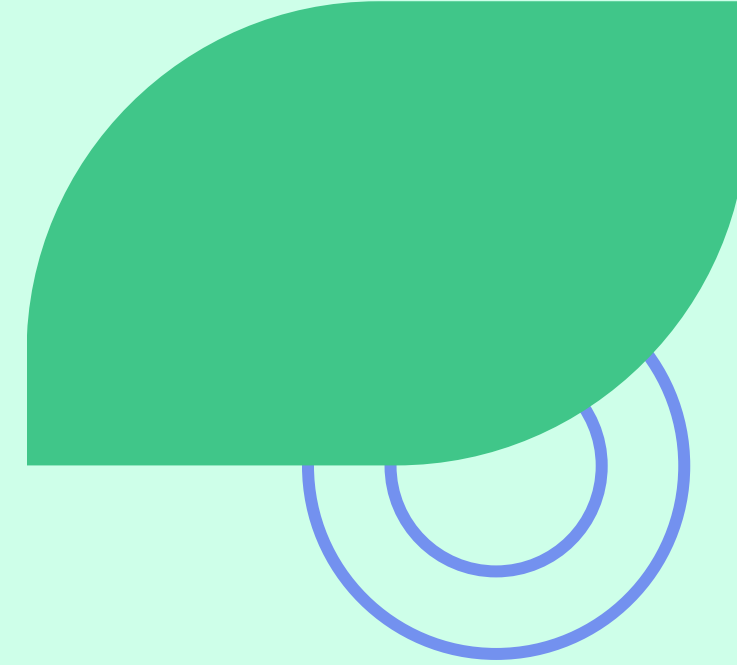
Priorities for inclusive growth

Chief proposals include affordable housing, guaranteed minimum incomes and improved skills education. Young Europeans do not see social welfare and green initiatives as incompatible with economic advancement, but rather as potential assets for the EU's competitiveness.

Readiness for the digital green transition

Information gaps persist. Many want concise, localised details on how green policies impact employment and everyday life. Most feel only partially prepared for the transition to a green economy, yet they express confidence in their digital competence, suggesting scope for targeted training and awareness programmes.

Climate & sustainability



Heightened concern but limited trust in institutions

Respondents largely view climate change as an urgent threat, endorsing bold measures – such as terminating fossil fuel investments and advancing green technology. They call for clear, concrete action and transparency from both businesses and governments.

Shared responsibility but unequal burden

Participants emphasise holding the private sector accountable through regulation and taxation. At the same time, they are reluctant to endorse policies that increase personal financial strain.

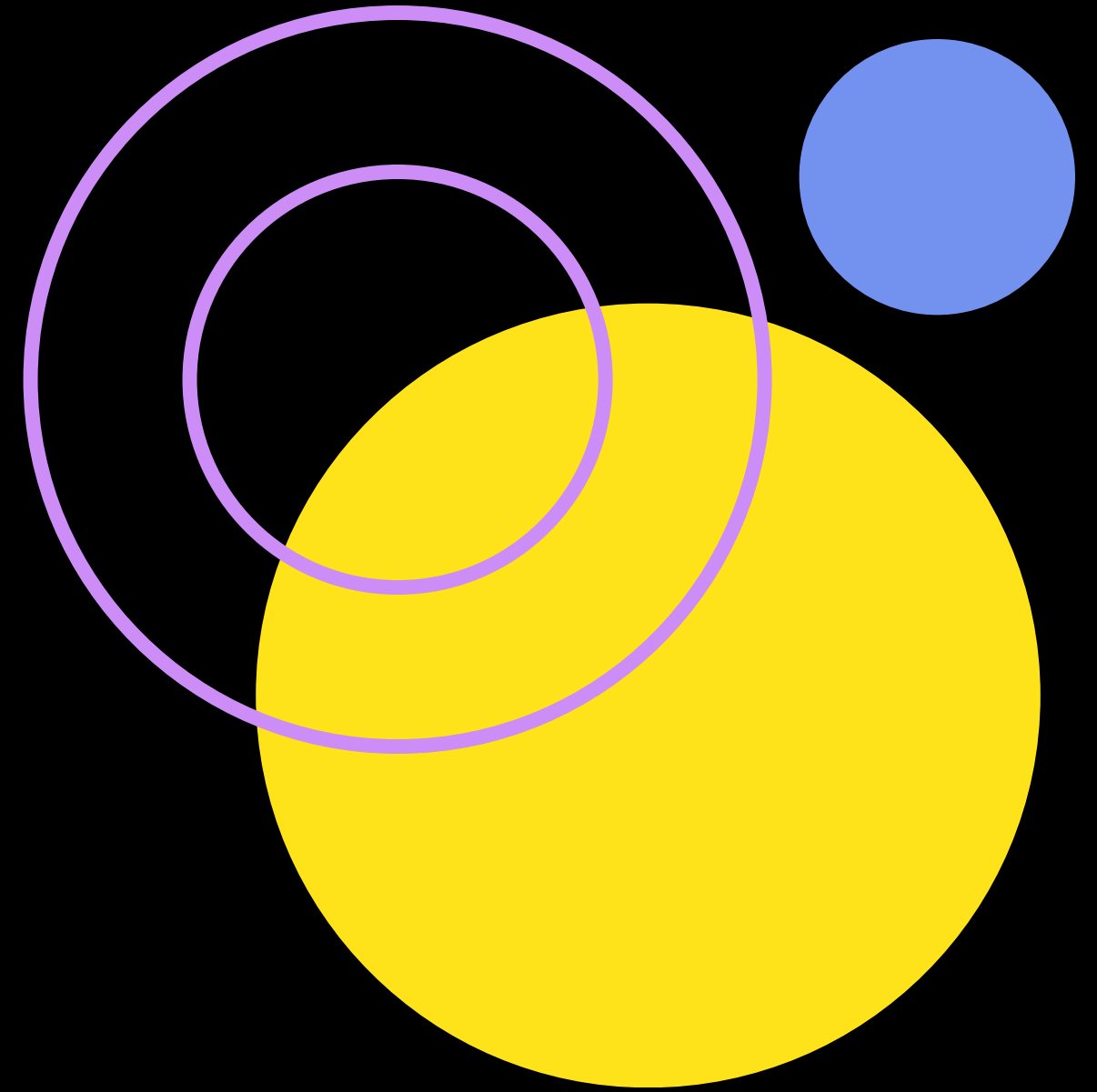
A coordinating role for the EU

Respondents generally want the EU to coordinate climate initiatives while national governments partner with businesses on environmental targets. Cooperation among all levels – EU, national governments, and companies – is viewed as the ideal path forward.

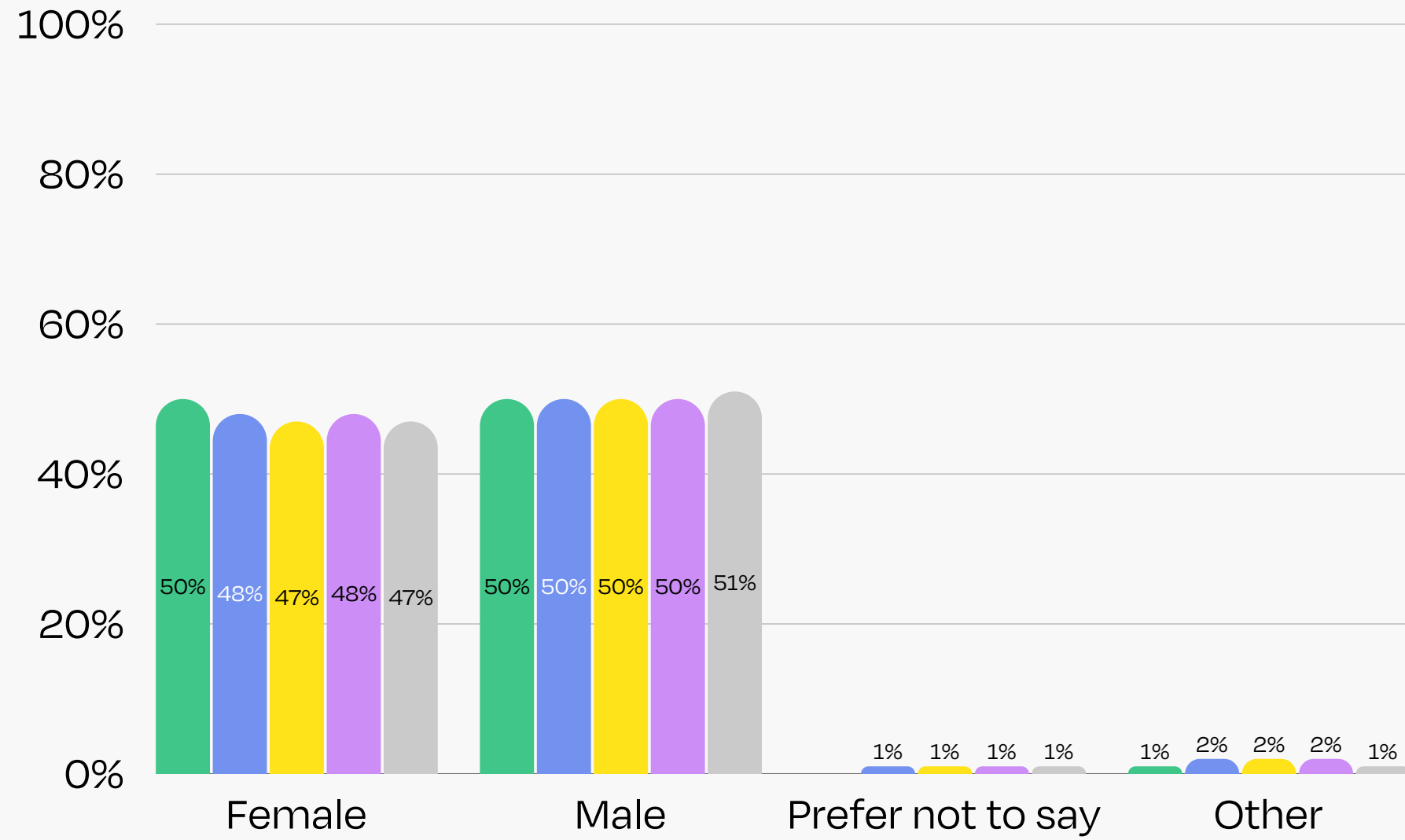
Obstacles to individual action

Cost remains a major impediment to living sustainably. Many consider “green” products prohibitively expensive, question the validity of eco-friendly claims and fear that personal efforts are dwarfed by corporate practices.

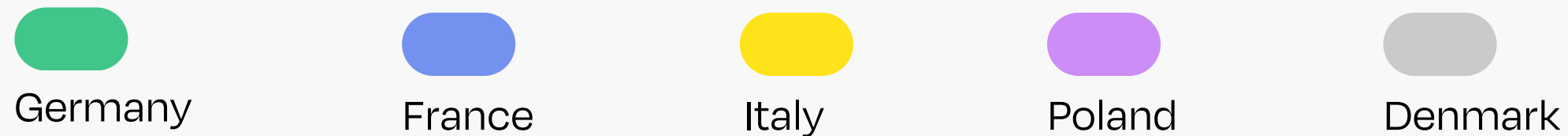
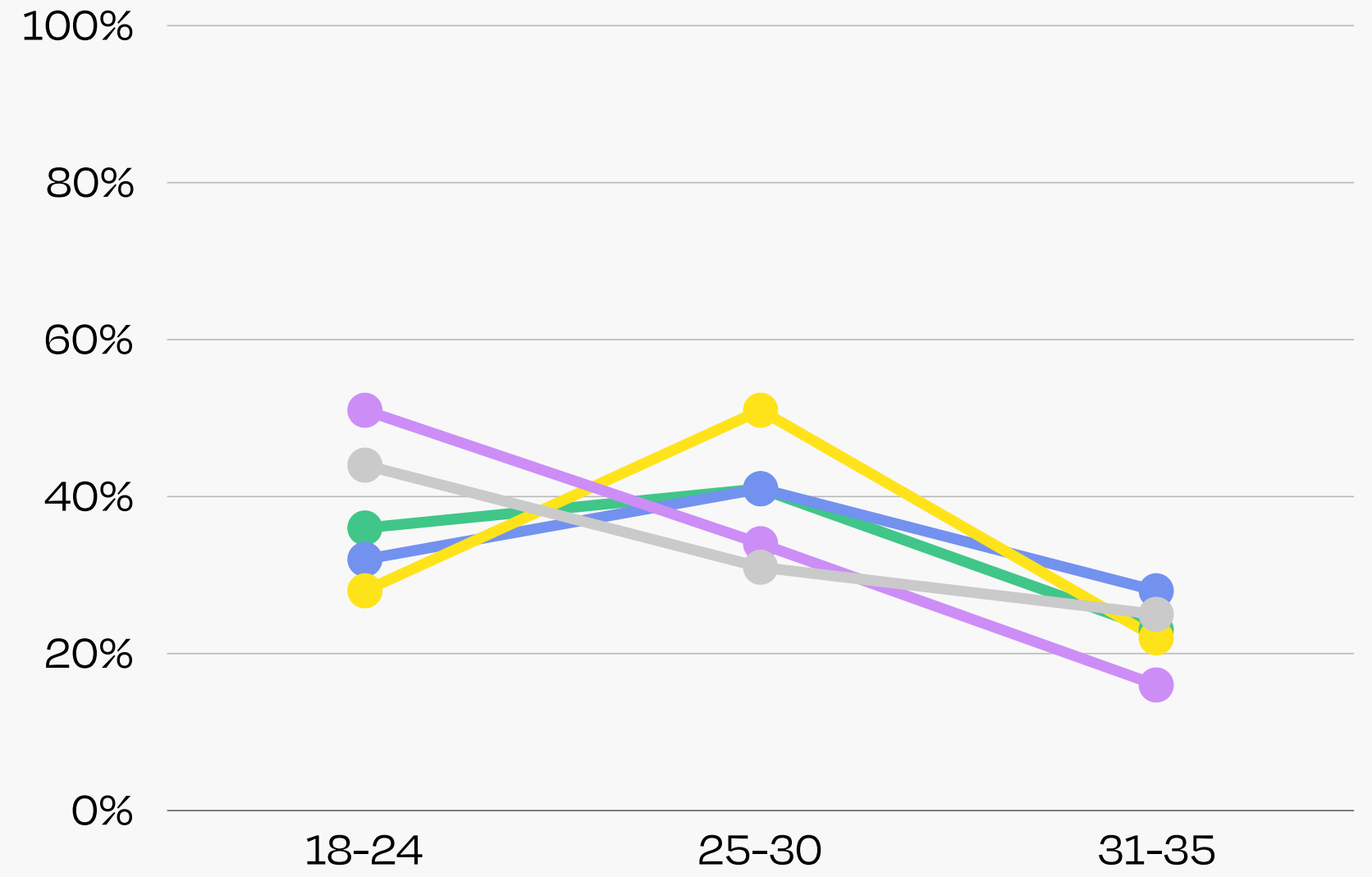
Demographic comparison & methodology



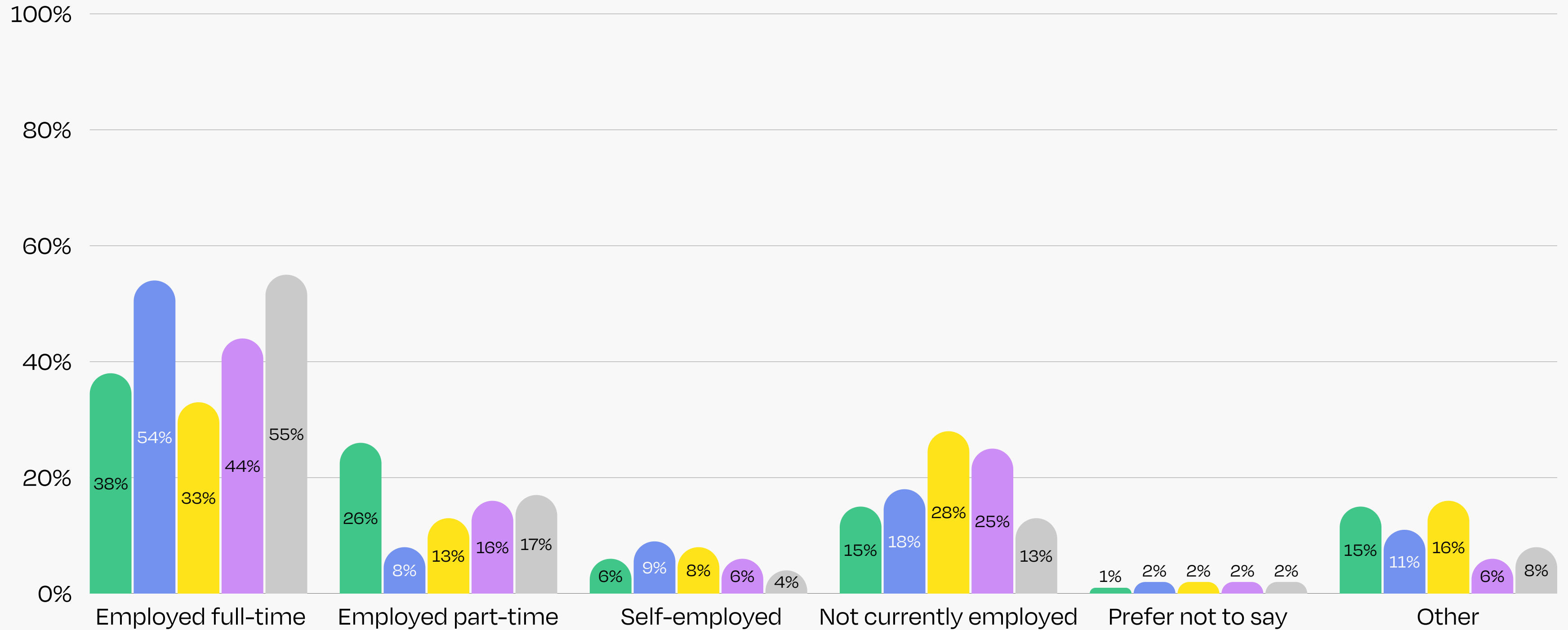
Gender



Age

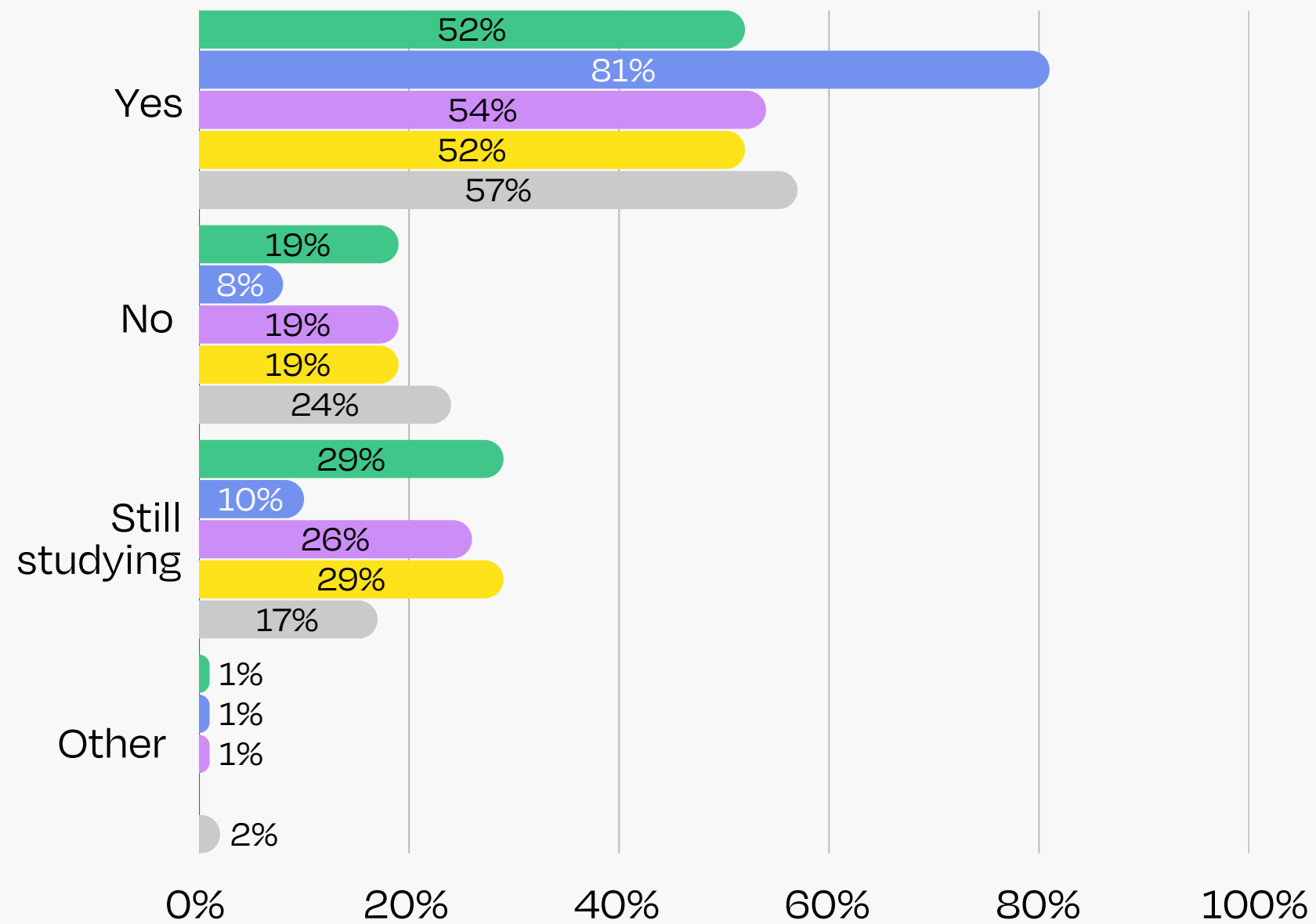


Occupation



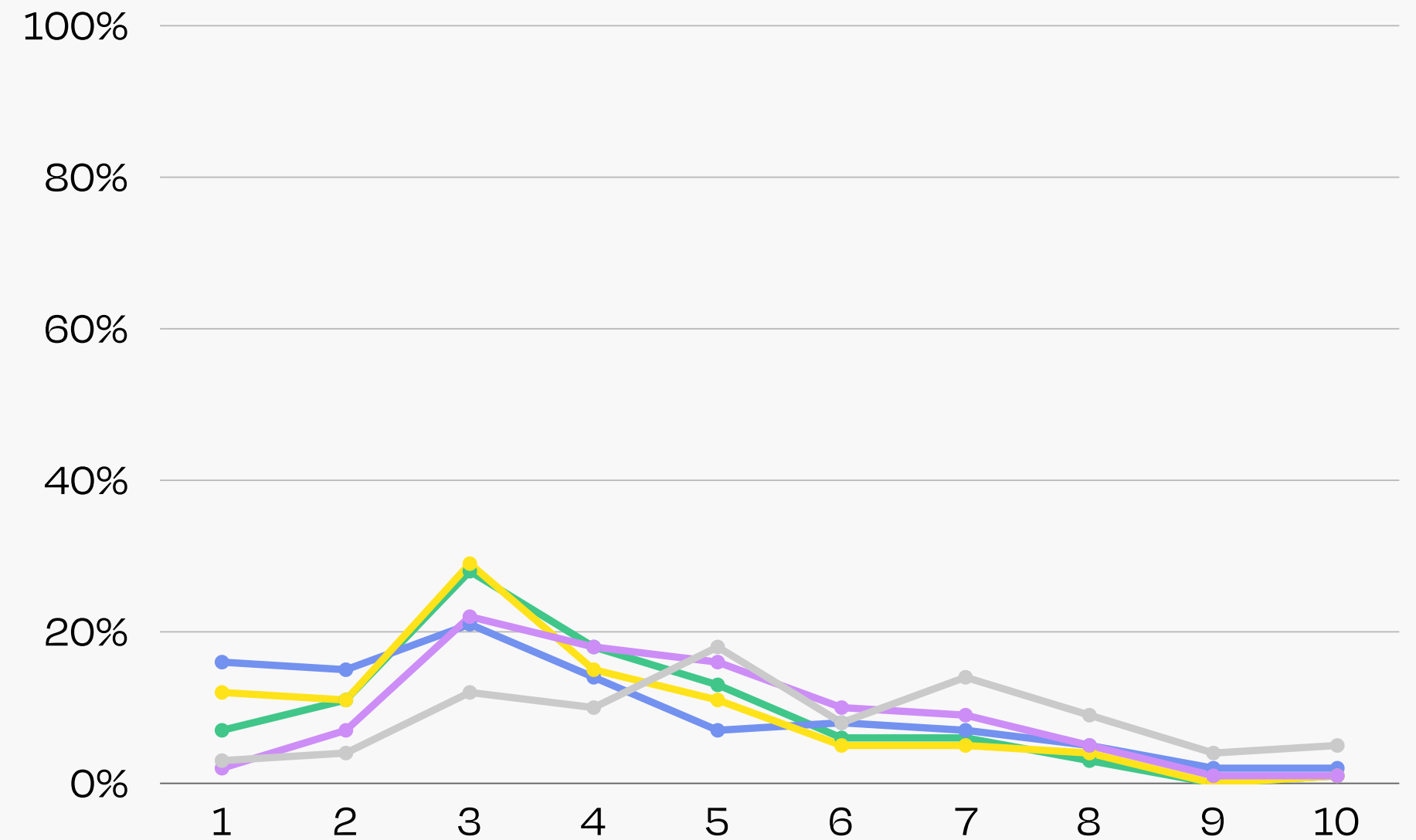
Education

Do you have a university degree or equivalent qualification?



Political leaning

How would you place yourself on a 'left-right' scale of 1-10, where 1 is 'Extremely Left' and 10 is 'Extremely Right'?



Methodology

This study, based on an online survey conducted by Debating Europe between November 2024 and January 2025, captured the diverse perspectives of 2,000 young people aged 18-35, from five European countries – Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Poland – on four crucial themes:

→ **Polarisation & democracy**

→ **Security & resilience**

→ **Equity & prosperity**

→ **Climate & sustainability**

Participants were drawn from a broad cross-section of society, reflecting a balanced diversity of gender, age and background.

The survey was conducted in the participants' native languages for optimal engagement and understanding.

The quantitative and qualitative data generated from the survey provides a snapshot based on a vast dataset, enabling deeper exploration of additional data, such as demographic correlations within and across countries and themes.

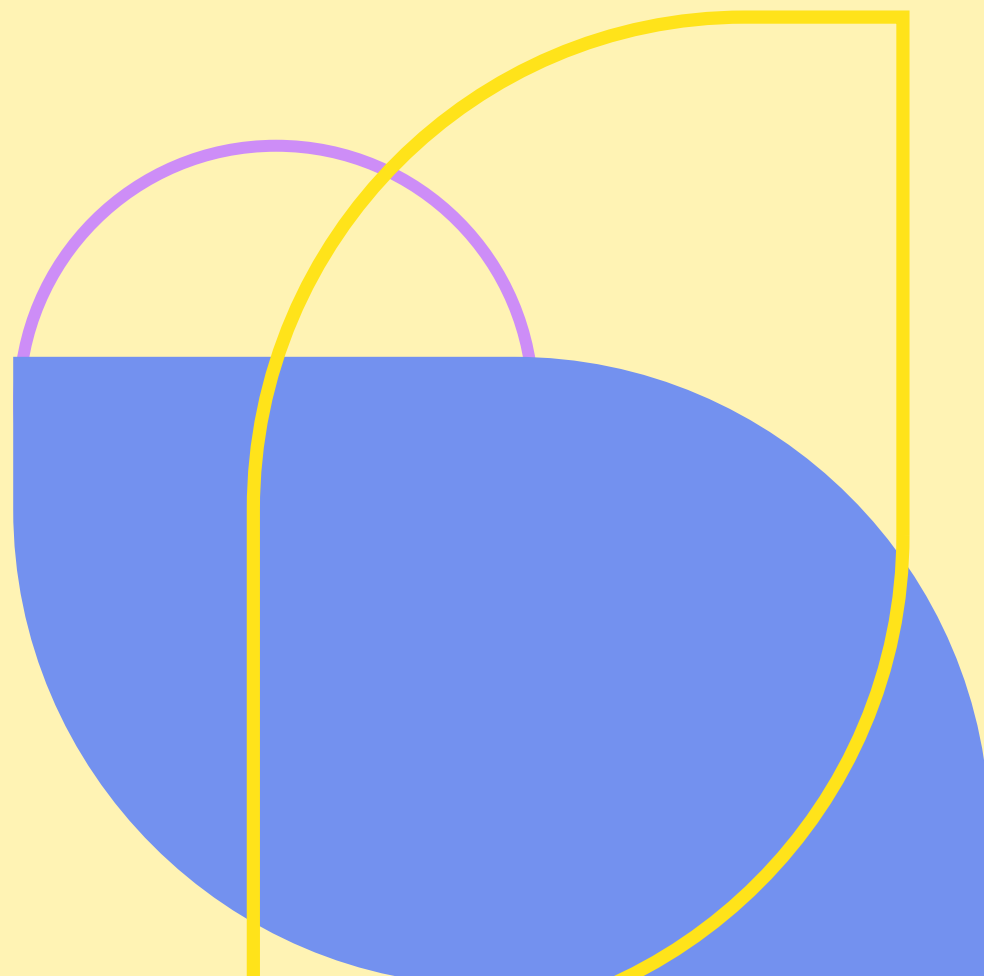


Polarisation & democracy

Overview

Across Europe, mounting polarisation is reshaping public and private discourse. From mainstream politics to everyday conversations, issues like migration, war, gender equality and the economy increasingly spark controversy. While spirited debate is intrinsic to democracy, many young Europeans in this study view current levels of polarisation as counterproductive and driven largely by demagogic politics, a divisive media landscape and, in some cases, external influences such as Russia.

Yet young people are clear about potential solutions to counter divisions in society. Participants see education as the most powerful tool to bridge divides, alongside measures like more equitable economic policies and greater media transparency. Despite widespread scepticism toward politicians and media outlets, these young Europeans remain committed to democratic processes – including national and European elections – and show openness to civic engagement beyond the ballot box.



Who you discuss politics with

Germany,
France & Italy

- 1 - Friends**
- 2 - Parents**
- 3 - Partner**

Poland

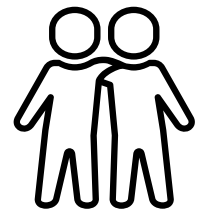
- 1 - Parents**
- 2 - Friends**
- 3 - Partner**

Denmark

- 1 - Parents**
- 2 - Friends**
- 3 - Colleagues**

A small share of participants – 7% in Germany to 13% in Denmark and Poland – avoid political talk entirely.

Talking politics: close circles and online forums



Friends vs. family

In Italy (65%), France (71%) and Germany (74%), friends are the top confidants for political discussions.

Denmark is the exception, with 49% talking primarily with parents.



Romantic partners and extended family

Next to friends and parents, respondents often talk politics with partners, ranging from 38% (Poland) to 55% (France).

Just 10% of Poles vs. 28% of Danes discuss politics with their extended family.



Online and work settings

Political discussions on social media remain rare (11% in Denmark, 18% in Poland).

Workplace or university colleagues are a relatively frequent choice, notably in Poland (44%) and Germany (42%).

Harmony & friction: who agrees, who disagrees?

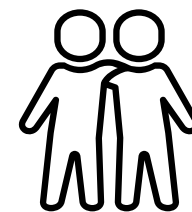
Though politics can spark friction, many participants find broad agreement within their social circles.



Partners and parents

Between 43% (Denmark) and 56% (France) say they align politically with their partners.

Roughly half also see eye-to-eye with parents. France (28%) and Italy (28%) are more likely to disagree with parents, pointing to intergenerational divides.



Friends

Friends are most likely to share political views: 68% in France, Italy and Poland, and up to 75% in Germany.

Denmark is an outlier, with only 50% feeling they agree with friends on politics.



Work colleagues and social media

Up to 50% in Poland agree with their colleagues, while only 30% do in Denmark.

Online discussions more often reveal disagreements, except in Denmark and Poland.

Interestingly, climate change rarely tops the list of most divisive issues, though it appears in discussions with family and friends – particularly in Germany, France and Italy.

Hot-button issues: what divides us?

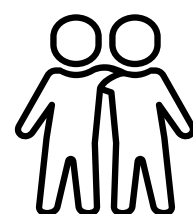
When asked which topics most often cause tension, young Europeans point to politics and the economy – but patterns differ across social contexts.



Family

Migration is the top bone of contention in Germany, France and Italy, although it ranks similarly with politics and the economy in France and Italy.

Danes cite security (18%), while Poles overwhelmingly pick politics itself (31%).



Friends and colleagues

Politics emerges as the most common divider among friends in France, Germany, Italy and Poland, whereas Danes cite the economy (19%).

At work, political disagreements top the list in most countries, except Italy, where the economy ranks first (15%).



Online

40-60% of participants do not discuss divisive topics online.

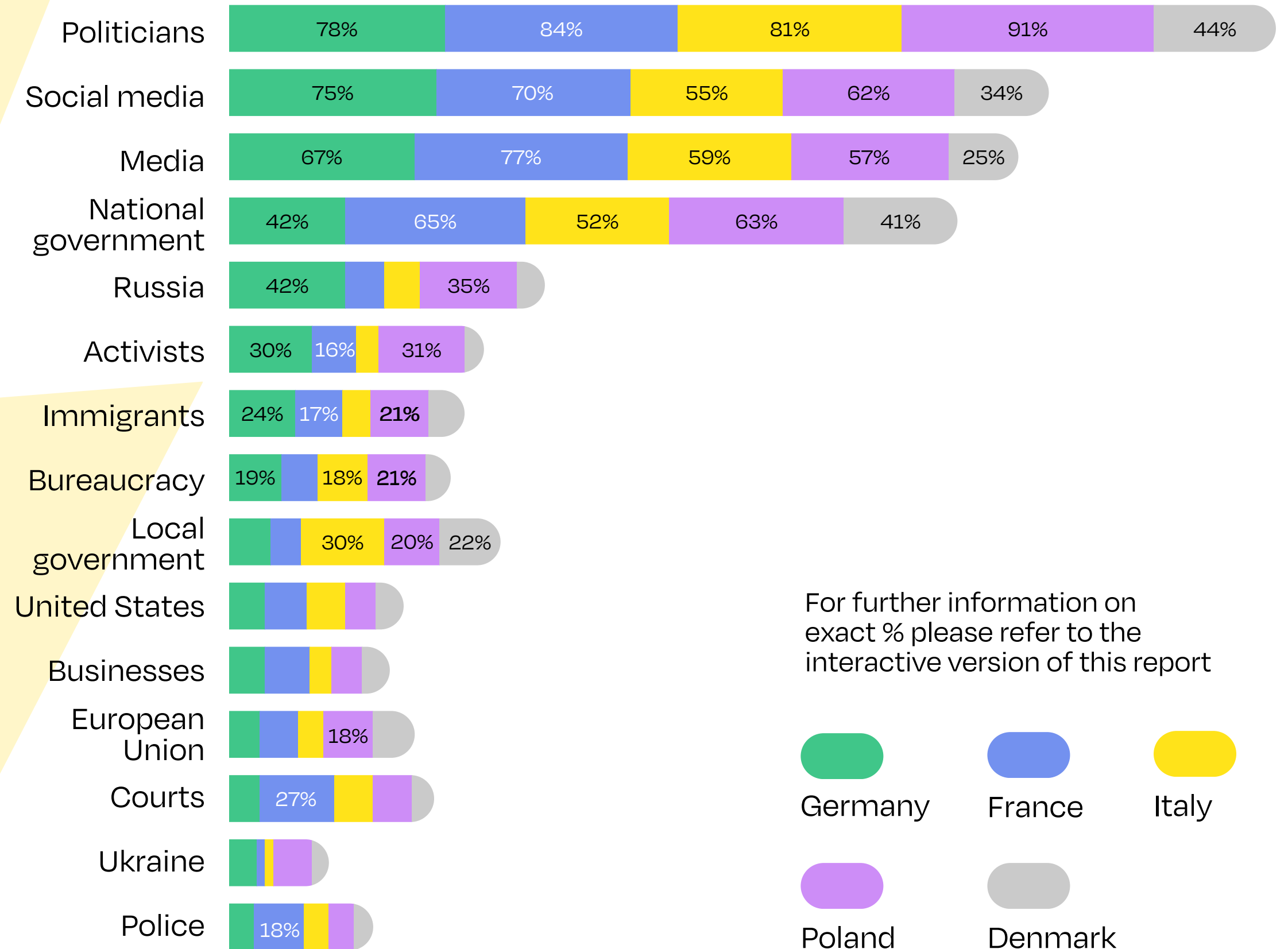
Among those who do, political arguments come out on top across France, Italy, Denmark and Poland (12-21%).

While 11% of Germans talk politics online, migration is the main flashpoint for a slightly higher share (14%).

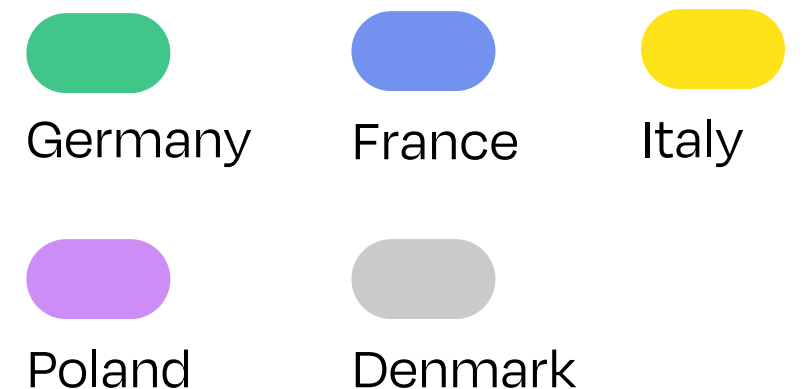
Drivers of polarisation: politicians, media and beyond

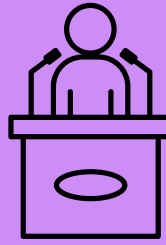
A strong majority view politicians, social media and the media as central forces fracturing society.

Who do you think is responsible for polarisation in your country?



For further information on exact % please refer to the interactive version of this report





POLITICIANS

- Identified as the leading cause of social division, spanning from 44% in Denmark to 91% in Poland.



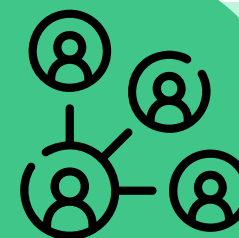
NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

- Many hold national governments responsible for polarisation (41% in Denmark to 65% in France).



TRADITIONAL & SOCIAL MEDIA

- Traditional media is blamed by a high share of respondents in most countries – from 57% in Poland to 77% in France – but only by 25% in Denmark.
- Similarly, social media platforms garner blame from only 34% of respondents in Denmark, while elsewhere the figure is higher – from 55% in Italy to 75% in Germany.



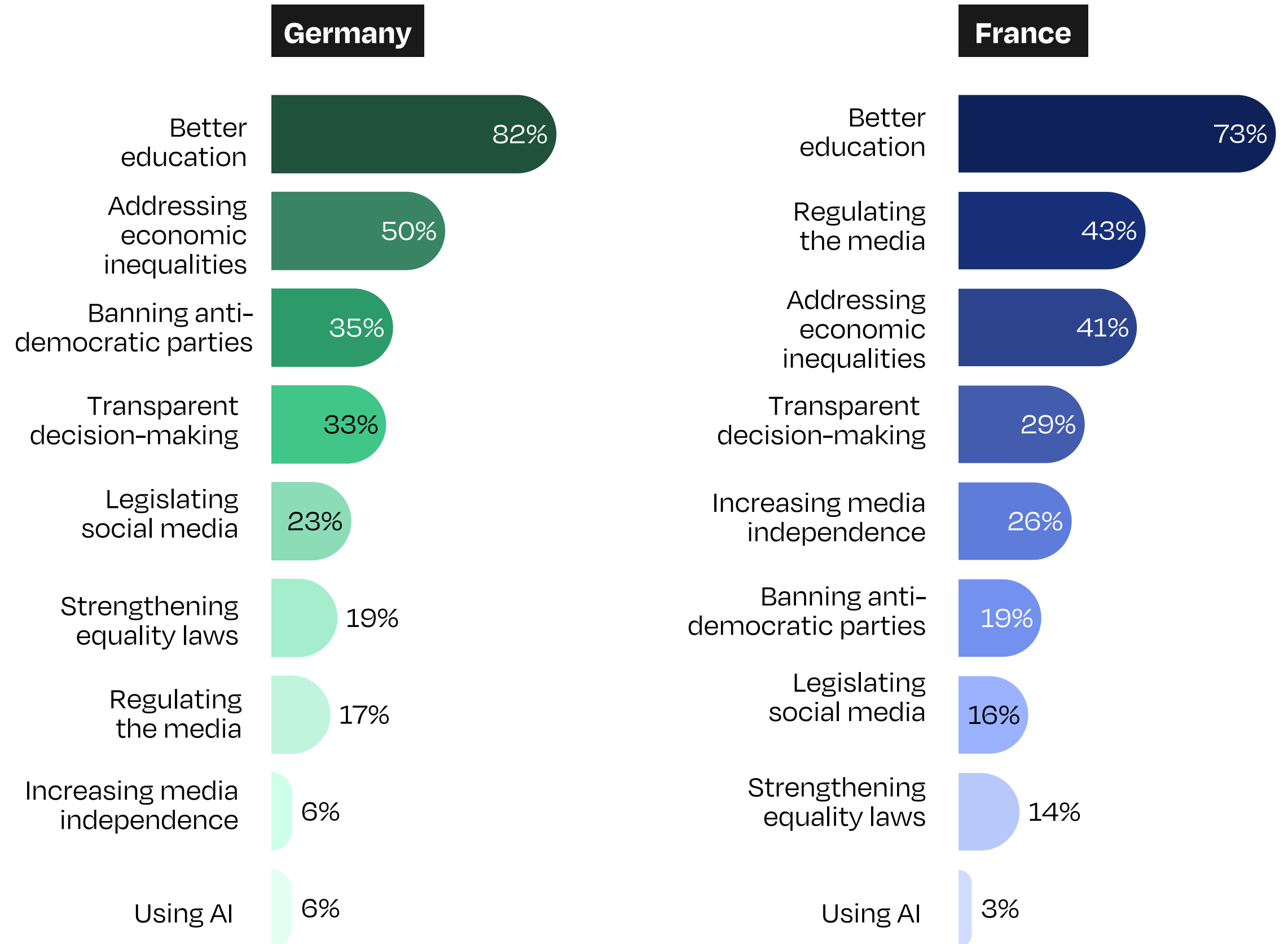
FOREIGN INFLUENCE

- Russian interference is cited as an issue by 10% of Danes, 35% of Poles and 42% of Germans – revealing notable differences in perceived external threats.

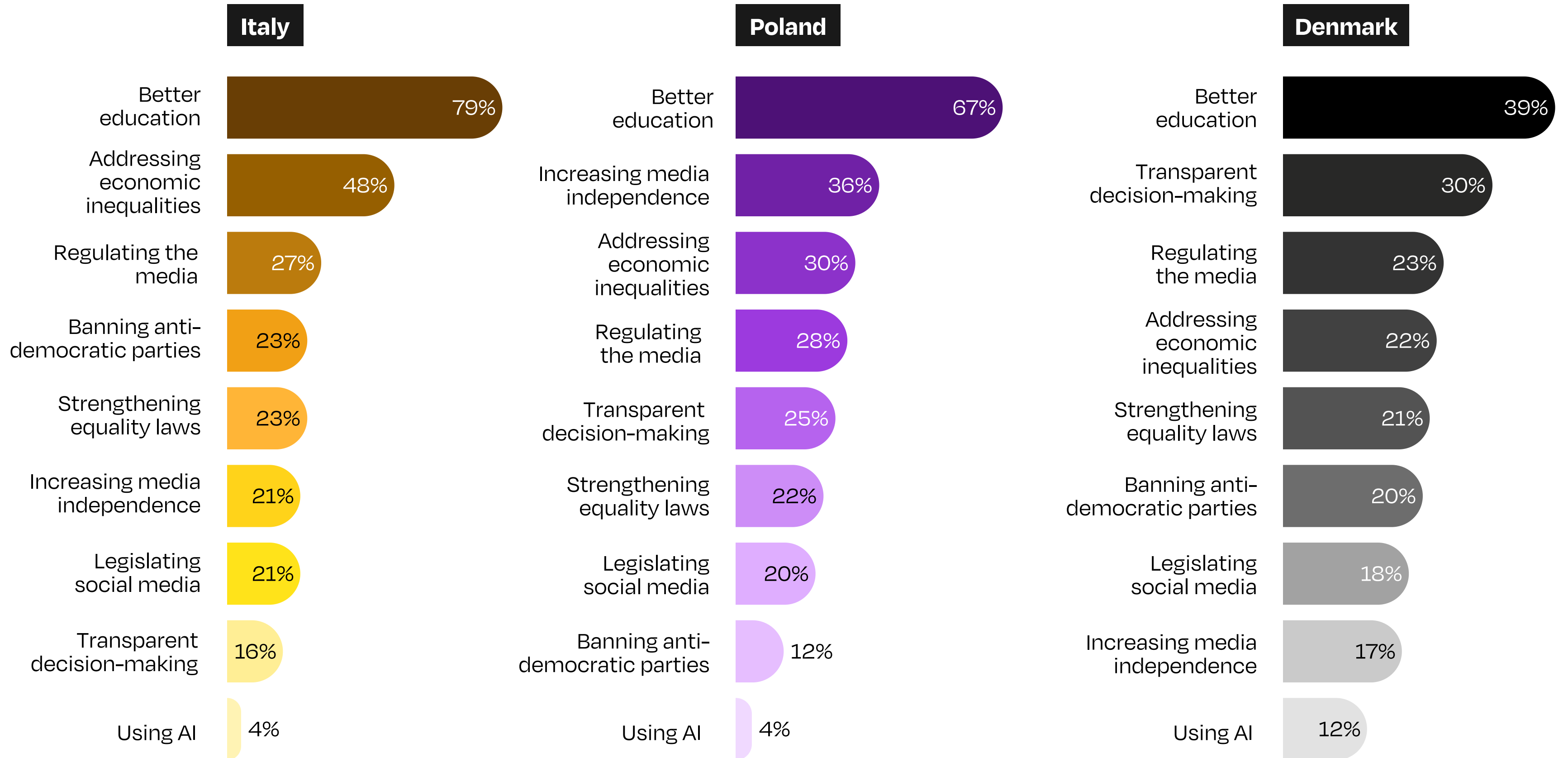
Possible solutions: education tops the list

Asked how best to counter societal divisions, participants overwhelmingly choose improving education as their first line of defence.

What could help in reducing societal divisions?



What could help in reducing societal divisions?



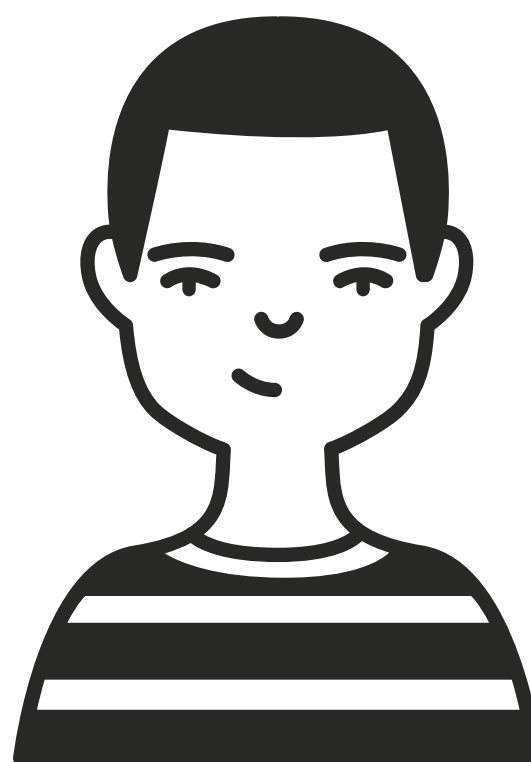


Education

From 39% in Denmark to a striking 82% in Germany, better education is viewed as the cornerstone of societal cohesion.

[Putting] ***an end to the media's use of buzz to boost ratings, and a return to real, objective journalism*** [could help in reducing societal divisions]

suggested one French participant



Other approaches

- Addressing economic inequalities resonates strongly in Germany (50%) and Italy (48%), but less so in Denmark (22%).
- Calls for more transparent decision-making peak in Denmark (30%) and Germany (33%).
- Media regulation splits opinion: popular in France (43%), less so in Germany (17%).
- Banning anti-democratic parties is the third most popular solution in Germany (35%) and fourth most popular in Italy (23%).
- Increasing media independence is a popular solution in Poland (36%), much less so in Germany (6%).
- Proposals like legislating social media or using AI to reduce polarisation receive only modest support.

Trust in institutions & information sources

Young Europeans hold nuanced views on where they place their trust – experts rank high, while politicians and social media fare poorly.

Top trusted actors in all countries:



EXPERTS/SCIENTISTS



NATIONAL HEALTH SYSTEM





NATIONAL VS. EU INSTITUTIONS

- Germany (39%) and Denmark (31%) show relatively high trust in their own governments, while Italy (5%) and Poland (4%) do not.
- All countries express at least moderate trust in the EU, ranging from Denmark (54%) to Poland and Italy (63%).



MEDIA

- Newspapers earn cautious, moderate trust in Denmark, France and Germany, but little trust in Italy (41%) or Poland (61%).
- Television is distrusted entirely by 55% of French, 62% of Italians and 73% of Poles.
- Online news garners more moderate trust than TV but still faces scepticism – especially in Poland where 47% do not trust it at all.



EXPERTS & SCIENTISTS

- Strong majorities, from 50% (Denmark) to nearly 80% (Germany), say they trust expert opinions.
- National health systems also record high levels of trust in all countries with people trusting a lot/somewhat in Germany (94%), France (93%), Italy (89%) and Denmark (88%), and slightly less in Poland (74%).



SOCIAL CIRCLES

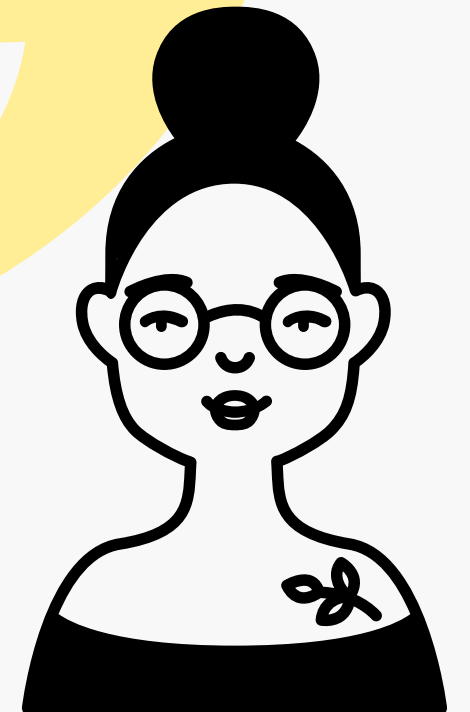
- Friends are generally a trusted source of information, especially in Germany where 40% strongly trust them.
- Families receive moderate trust in all countries, though Italy again shows higher “no trust” levels (19%).

Voting & civic engagement

Despite reservations about politicians, young Europeans from our study remain engaged in formal democratic processes.

I would be motivated to vote if I felt my vote had a real impact on the future of my country

shared a citizen from Poland



High voter turnout

- National elections see strong participation: France (86%), Germany (85%), Poland (89%), Denmark (67%) and Italy (78%).
- European and local elections inspire slightly lower but still notable engagement.

Preferred political channels

- Formal elections are the preferred method of expressing opinions, from 44% in Denmark to 75% in Germany.
- Referendums appeal strongly in France and Italy (68%), but far less so in Germany (19%).

Alternative pathways

- Online consultations and petitions gain traction in Germany, France and Italy.
- A minority prefer citizens' assemblies, direct meetings with representatives or no political involvement at all.

AI & democracy

While many respondents see AI as having a limited effect on social polarisation, sizable knowledge gaps persist.

Role of AI in polarisation; perception of AI impact on personal opinions*

	TEND TO AGREE	TEND TO DISAGREE
AI contributes to polarisation	Denmark, Germany, Poland	France, Germany, Italy
I am worried about AI interfering with democratic processes	Denmark, France, Germany, Poland	France, Germany, Italy, Poland
Regulated AI can improve citizens' influence in decision-making	Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland	France, Germany, Poland
Respondents feel likely to be affected by AI-generated political content	All countries	

* When a country is mentioned in both columns, it means there are split opinions

Contribution to polarisation

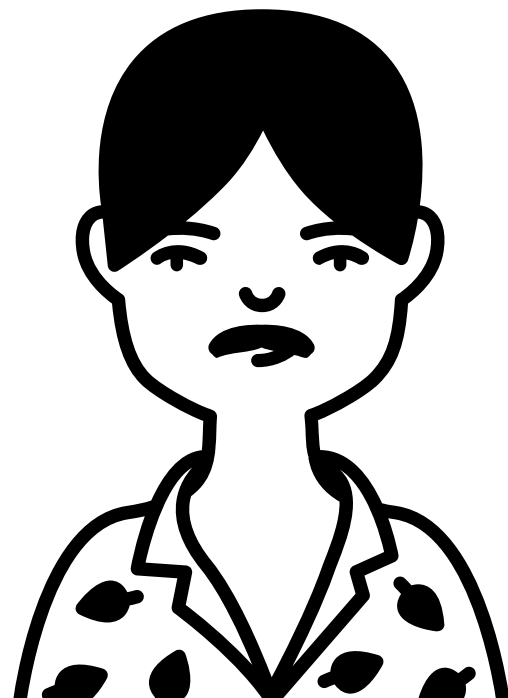
- Denmark is the most concerned (38% say AI moderately/strongly increases division), whereas Italy (19%) and France (24%) downplay its role.
- Large “don’t know” segments exist, from 21% in Germany to 34% in Poland.

AI-generated political content

- Three-quarters of Italian, French and Polish participants say their opinions remain unaffected by AI outputs.
- 41% of Danish respondents admit to having their political opinions affected by AI-generated content. Meanwhile Germans are split: 26% admit to being affected while another 26% express uncertainty as to whether that is the case or not.

Future influence

- Worries about AI manipulating democratic processes fluctuate from 31% in Italy to 38% in France.
- Many remain neutral on the issue, seeing AI as neither entirely harmful nor a guaranteed route to civic empowerment.



I'm sure I've come into contact with content created by AI. Therefore, I feel that I may have been influenced by it unknowingly

said one German respondent

Conclusion

Young Europeans are keenly aware of growing political divisions – fuelled by politicians, media channels and, in some contexts, foreign interference. Despite the risk of escalating polarisation, they see concrete ways forward: improved education, fairer economic policies and more transparent governance. While distrust in politicians and certain media is widespread, strong support remains for core democratic tools like elections and referendums.

Perceptions on the role of AI in fuelling polarisation are still unclear, but most of our respondents consider themselves uninfluenced by AI-generated content.

In short, Europe's younger generations are far from apathetic. They remain committed to democracy, open to innovative solutions for bridging divides and determined to hold their leaders accountable – both at the ballot box and in everyday conversation.

Security & resilience



Overview



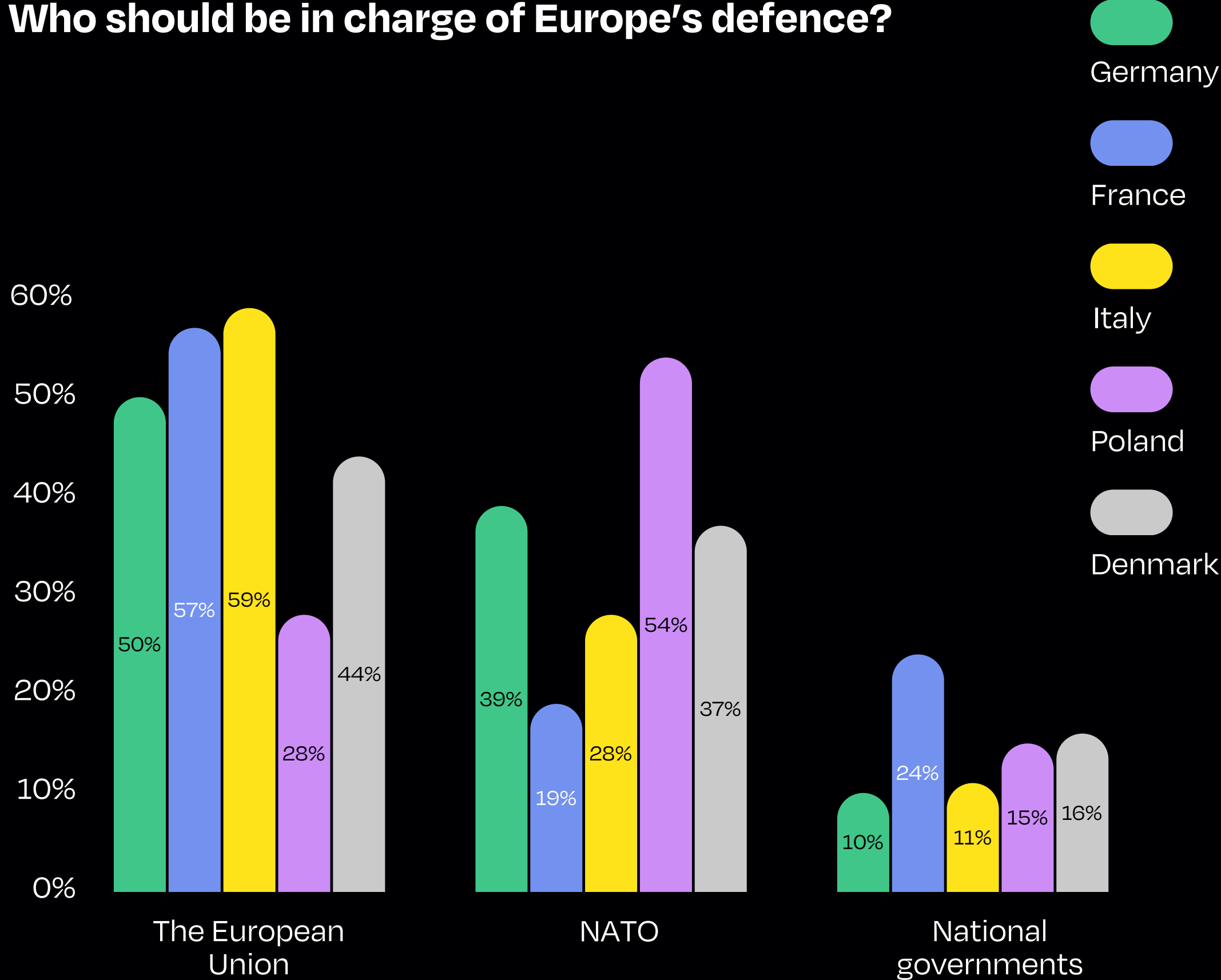
Security concerns – ranging from defence capabilities to online threats – loom large across Europe, often amplified by political rhetoric. Yet according to this study, most young Europeans feel relatively secure in their daily lives, both off- and online. Rather than succumbing to fear, respondents display a measured, practical approach to threats. They call for greater European self-reliance in defence, energy and technology to safeguard Europe's interests and ensure more resilient societies.

This section highlights how young Europeans – especially those in Poland, with its proximity to the war in Ukraine – perceive and prioritise different security challenges. The findings also reveal nuanced views on NATO, the United States, and the potential for artificial intelligence to strengthen European defence. It also explores young people's support for EU enlargement.

Security actors: who should lead?

Participants generally favor an expanded security role for the EU, though preferences vary. Poland stands out as especially supportive of NATO, reflecting deep-rooted concerns over Russia.

Who should be in charge of Europe's defence?

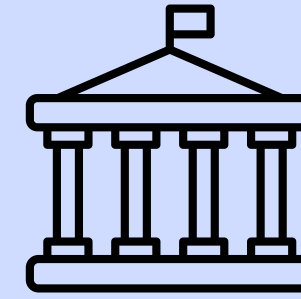




EU VS. NATO

Respondents in Italy (59%), France (57%), Germany (50%) and Denmark (44%) largely prefer the EU to oversee European defence as opposed to NATO or national governments.

Poland departs from this pattern, with 54% wanting NATO in charge. Indeed, many respondents in all countries are against NATO reducing its role in European defence.



NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

While a small subset in each country wishes to keep defence matters strictly at the national level, support for this approach remains relatively low overall. France, with its longstanding military tradition, is an exception, peaking with about a quarter favouring national primacy in defence.



US involvement*

Attitudes toward American engagement vary significantly. In Germany, France and Italy less than one-third of respondents advocate for more US involvement, contrasted by 62% in Denmark and 65% in Poland.



The private sector

Respondents in all countries, except for Denmark, do not want defence capabilities to be handled by businesses.

*This study was run prior to the advent of the new US administration on 20 January 2025. Subsequent surveys will be able to account for changes in sentiment over time.

The main lesson [from the war in Ukraine] ***is that security on the continent must be returned to Europe, and that economic exchanges with dictatorial regimes do not allow sustainable growth***

noted one Italian participant



European defence

NATO, EU, US, cybersecurity, the role of businesses.
Do you agree with the following statements?

	Germany	France	Italy	Poland	Denmark
NATO should reduce their role in European defence	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
The US should be more involved in European defence	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
The EU should not interfere with the defence capabilities of its member states	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
The EU should help its neighbours, like Ukraine and Moldova, build stronger defences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The EU is doing enough to fight the spread of false information online	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
The EU should invest more in defence technologies like artificial intelligence and space security	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cybersecurity should be a top priority for European defence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
National governments should financially support their defence industry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
National defence capabilities should be handled by businesses	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Businesses should play a bigger role in European defence	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

Perceptions of safety: offline and online

Overall, young Europeans report feeling secure in their daily lives, though there is some caution around online threats.

Physical safety

- In France (36%) and Italy (32%), roughly a third do not feel safe in their countries.
- At the other end of the spectrum, Denmark (39%) and Poland (22%) see themselves as very safe, followed by Germany (16%).

Online safety

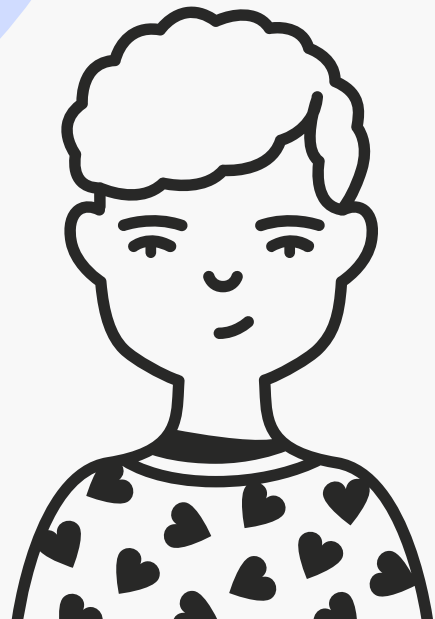
- A slightly higher proportion of respondents feel unsafe on the internet. France leads with 36% expressing online security concerns, while only 16% in Poland feel similarly.
- Even with these concerns, most participants do not feel paralysed by fear. Instead, they want to see stronger collaborative efforts and investments in defence capabilities – both conventional and technological.

Boosting Europe's defence capabilities

Participants frequently call for the EU to become more self-reliant, especially in areas like energy, cybersecurity and arms production.

You can believe whatever you want, that something is unrealistic or impossible, that it will never happen. But in the end, anything can happen, and we may need to be less naive and gullible about the intentions of people, governments, companies and other actors

remarked a Danish participant



Defence spending and industry

While most respondents want to see governments investing in their defence industries (from 62% in Italy to 88% in Poland), they are less keen for businesses to handle national defence capabilities. Denmark stands as a notable exception, where nearly half (47%) of respondents favour a larger private-sector role in defence.

War in Ukraine and European self-reliance

- Majorities in all countries say the war in Ukraine affects them at least slightly, though only around 10% (and 19% in Denmark) feel significantly impacted.
- A consensus emerges against any rushed settlement that might require major concessions. Respondents in Germany, France and Poland, in particular, emphasise a "just and sustainable peace."

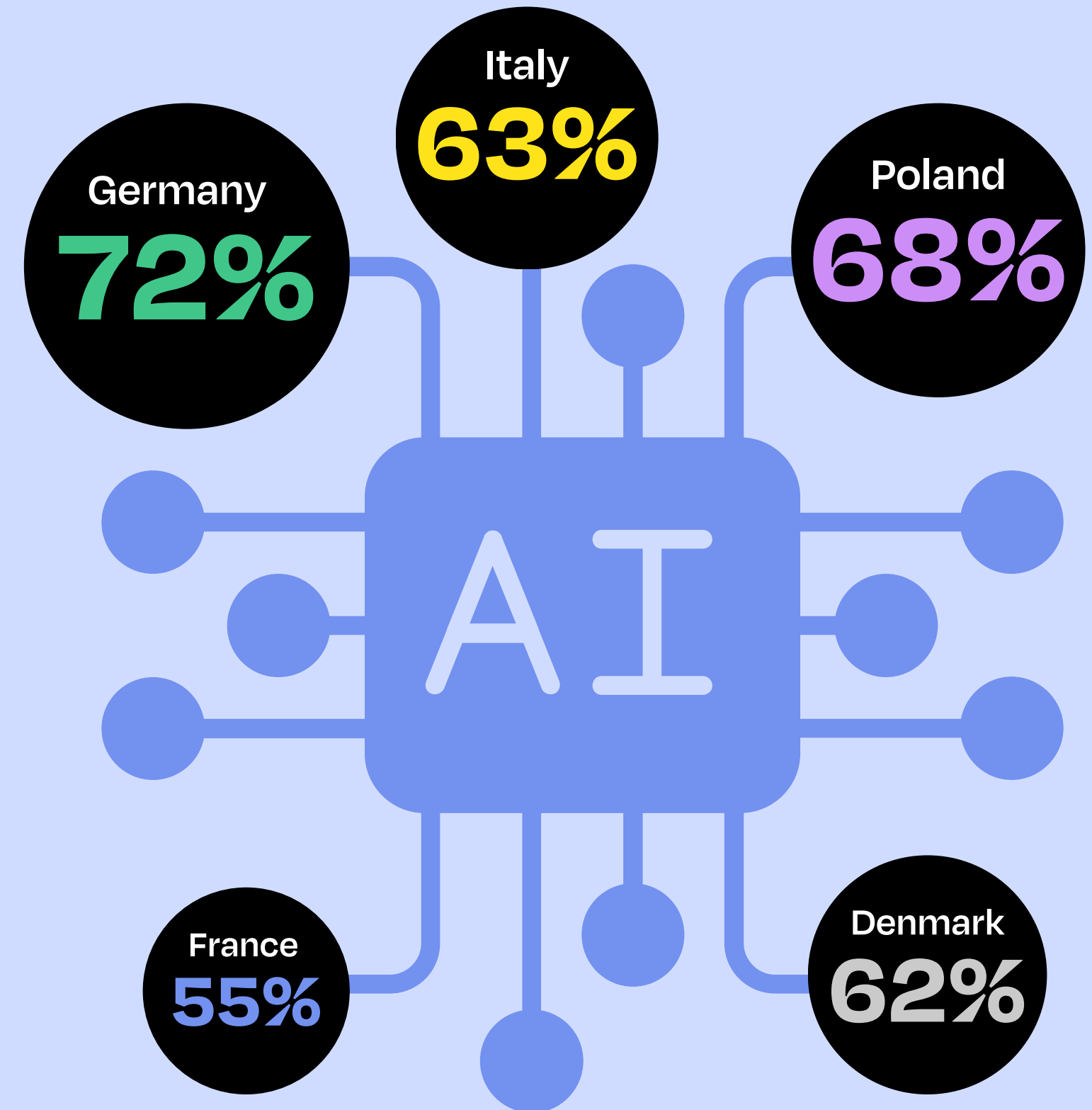
AI & cybersecurity: a "double-edged sword"

Young Europeans generally want their governments and the EU to explore AI-driven solutions for defence – especially cybersecurity – but remain aware of potential pitfalls.

All countries have **overall faith in AI's ability to guarantee online safety.**

Overall agreement across countries on national governments and the EU adopting AI to ensure security except in **France** where we record more split opinions.

Role of AI in online safety



Positive outlook

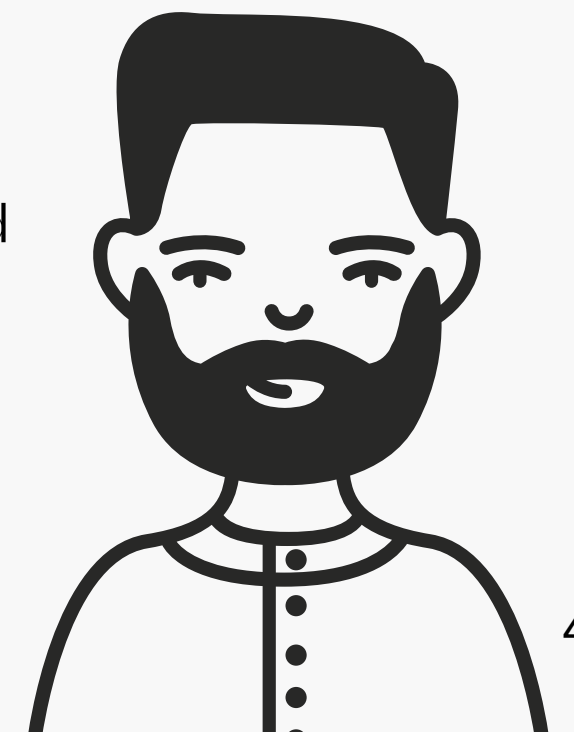
- Polish respondents show the highest enthusiasm for the use of AI to ensure security (55% support), while other countries lean more moderate.
- Respondents saw the potential benefits of AI in dealing with data encryption and network monitoring, as well as guarding against hacking, phishing, bot networks, viruses and spam. AI was also touted for its potential to fight against misinformation, abusive messages, hate speech, scams and other types of harmful content.
- There was clear consensus on the plan for the EU to invest more in defence technology like artificial intelligence and space security, with around two thirds of participants across all countries coming out in support, peaking in Poland at 74%.

Lingering scepticism

- France is most divided, with nearly equal shares in favour and against prioritising the development and adoption of AI for security.
- Many worry about AI's misuse for propaganda, surveillance and data exploitation.

Real-time threat detection: AI can analyse huge amounts of data instantly, spotting unusual activities that could signal a cyberattack

one German participant explained



The challenge of disinformation

Concerns over foreign disinformation – particularly from Russia – are widespread, though levels of alarm differ.

Russian disinformation

- In most countries, more than three-quarters view Russian disinformation as a serious threat to European democracy.
- Denmark registers lower concern (56%).

EU response

- Clear majorities (80% in Germany, 84% in Poland) want the EU to do more to counter disinformation.
- Denmark is again an outlier: 54% call for stronger EU action.

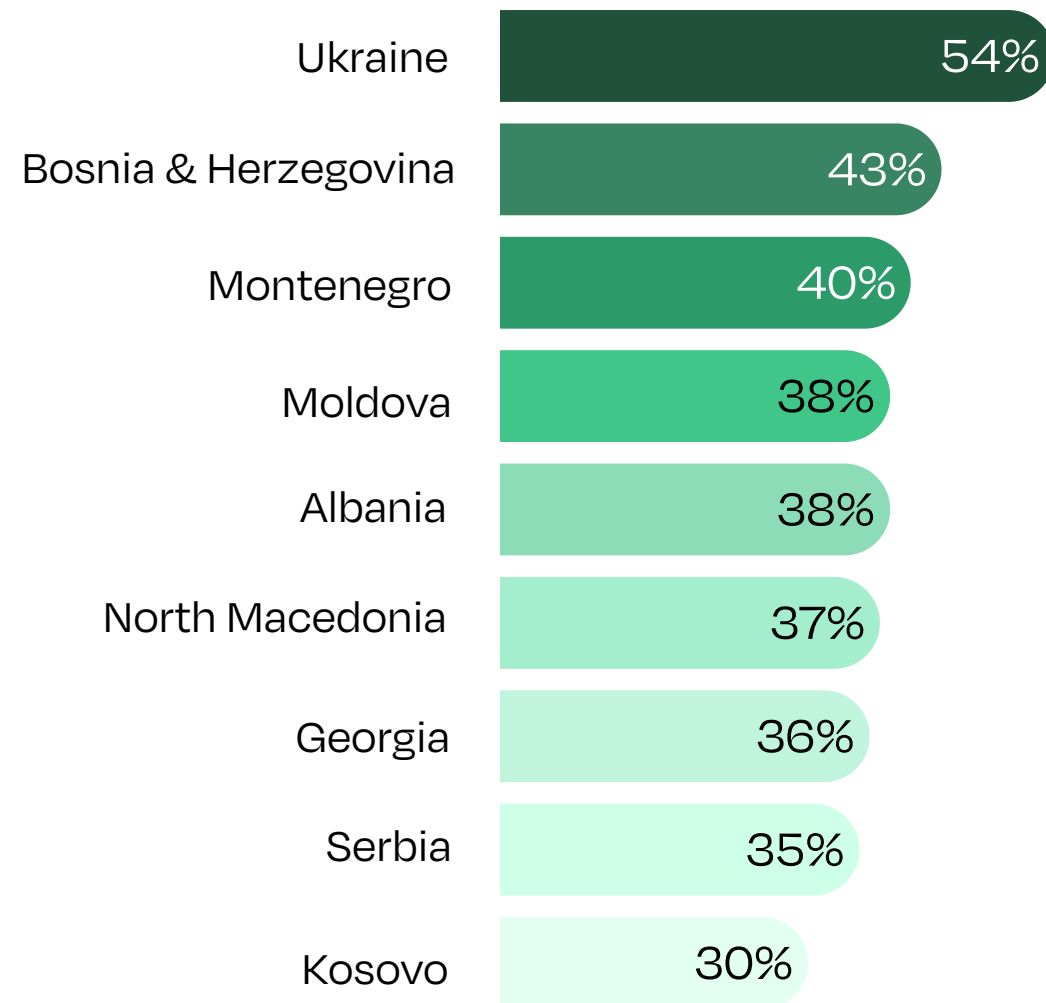
Citizens

- The majority of our respondents (from 54% in Denmark to 78% in Italy) believe that citizens should be more involved in identifying and stopping disinformation.

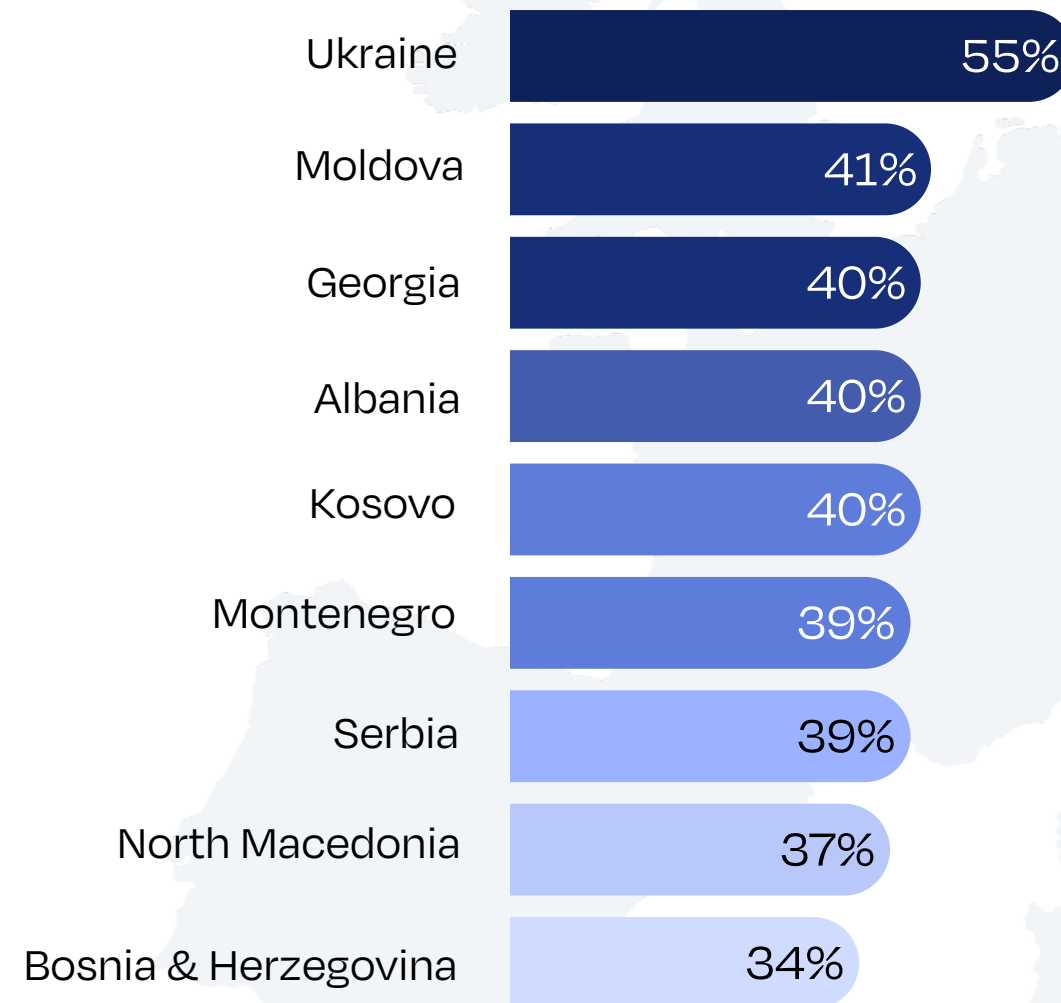
Support for EU enlargement

Many respondents favour an inclusive vision of Europe, with Ukraine receiving the highest support for EU membership.

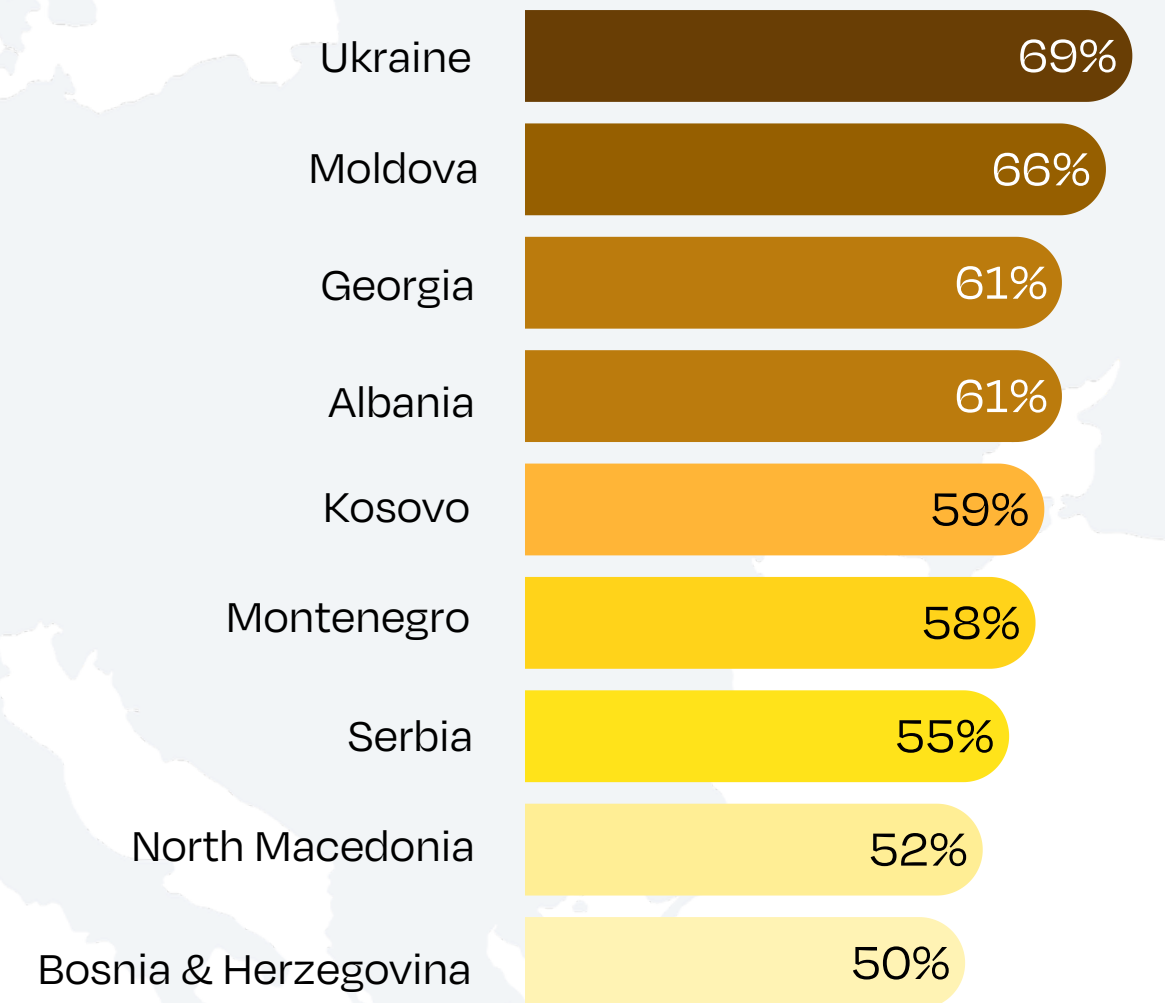
Germany



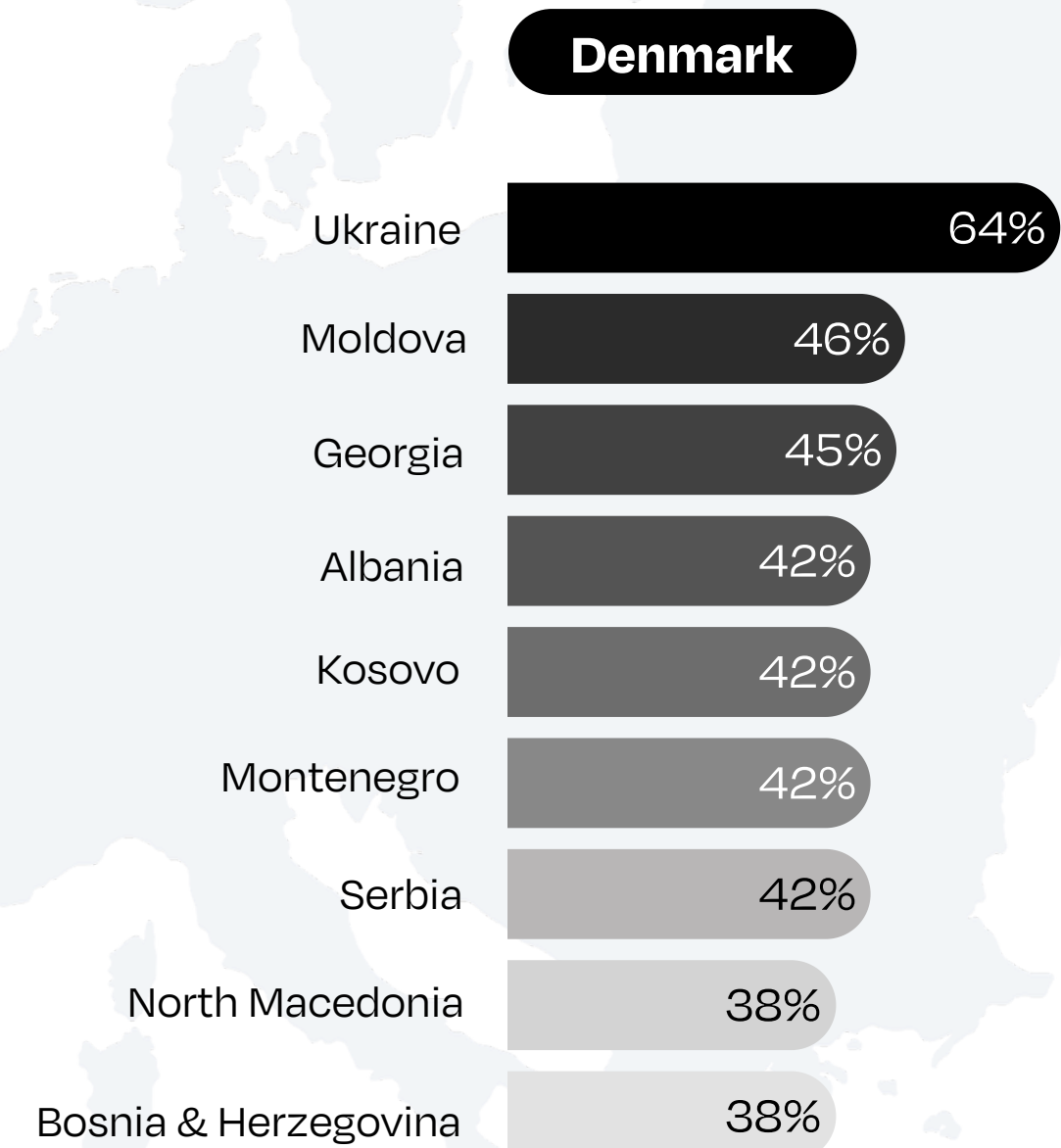
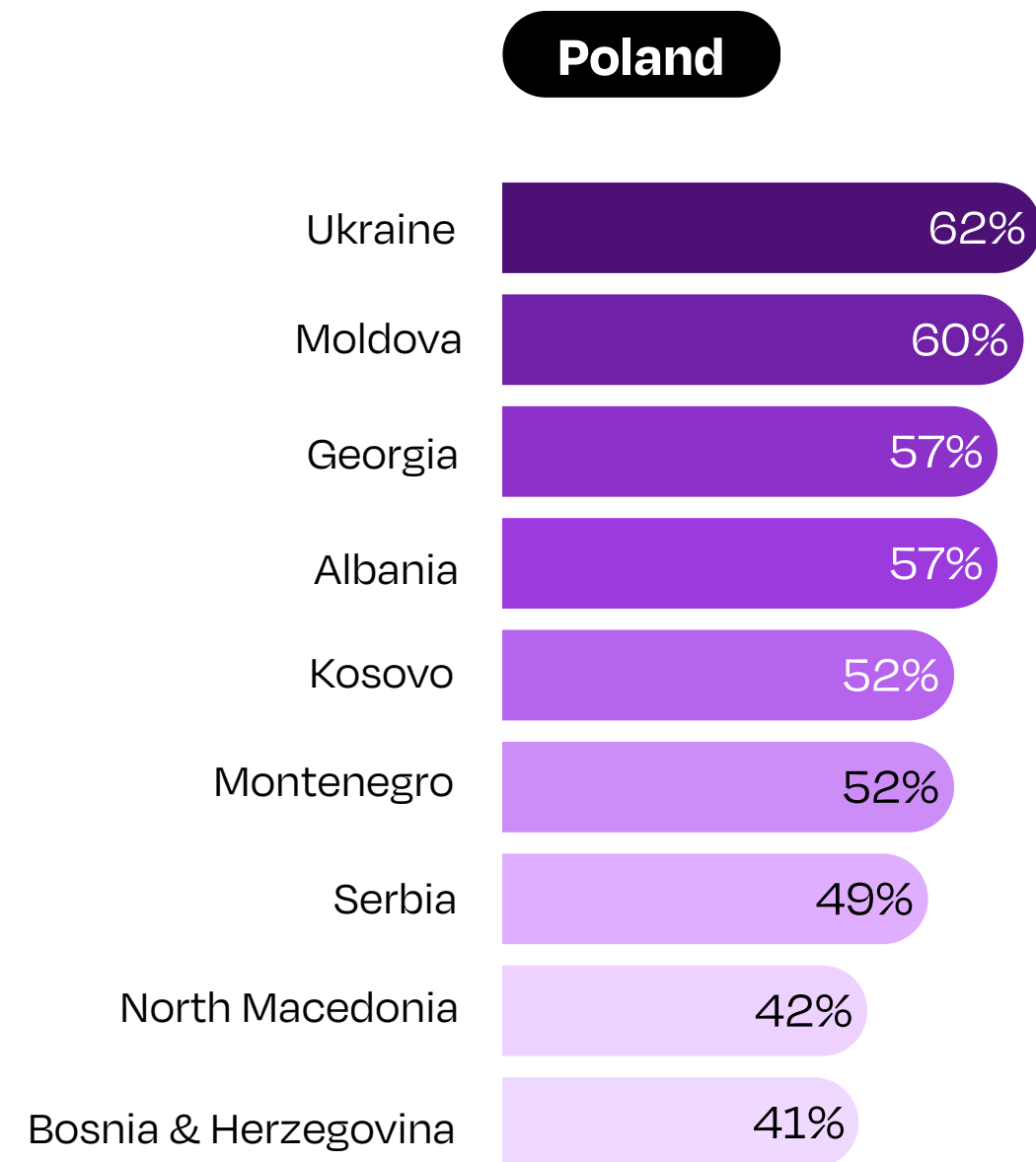
France



Italy



Support for EU enlargement



We must remember to support post-communist countries so that there is no possibility of losing security from the East

emphasised one Polish respondent



Ukraine

- Backed by a solid majority across all countries, peaking in Denmark (64%) and Italy (66%).

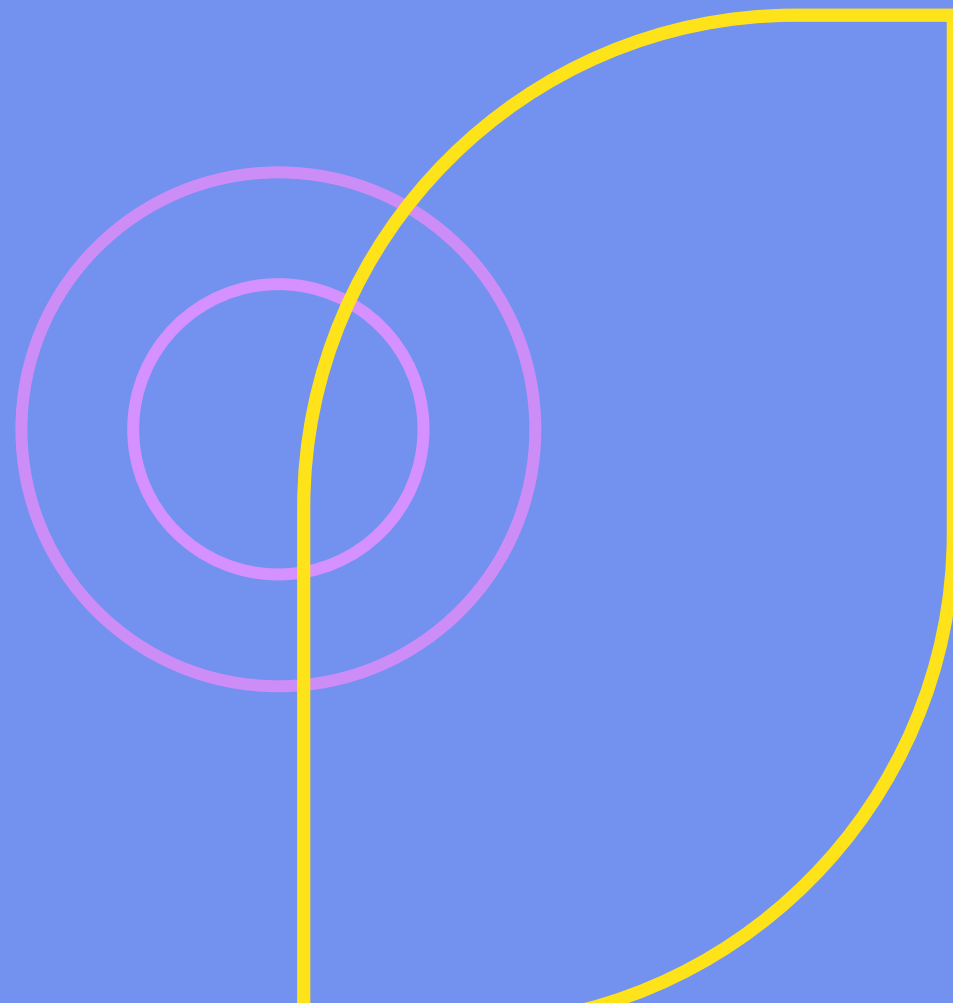
Other candidates

- Italy and Poland show strong support for further enlargement.
- Germany, Denmark and France exhibit more caution, with many respondents indicating no firm opinion.

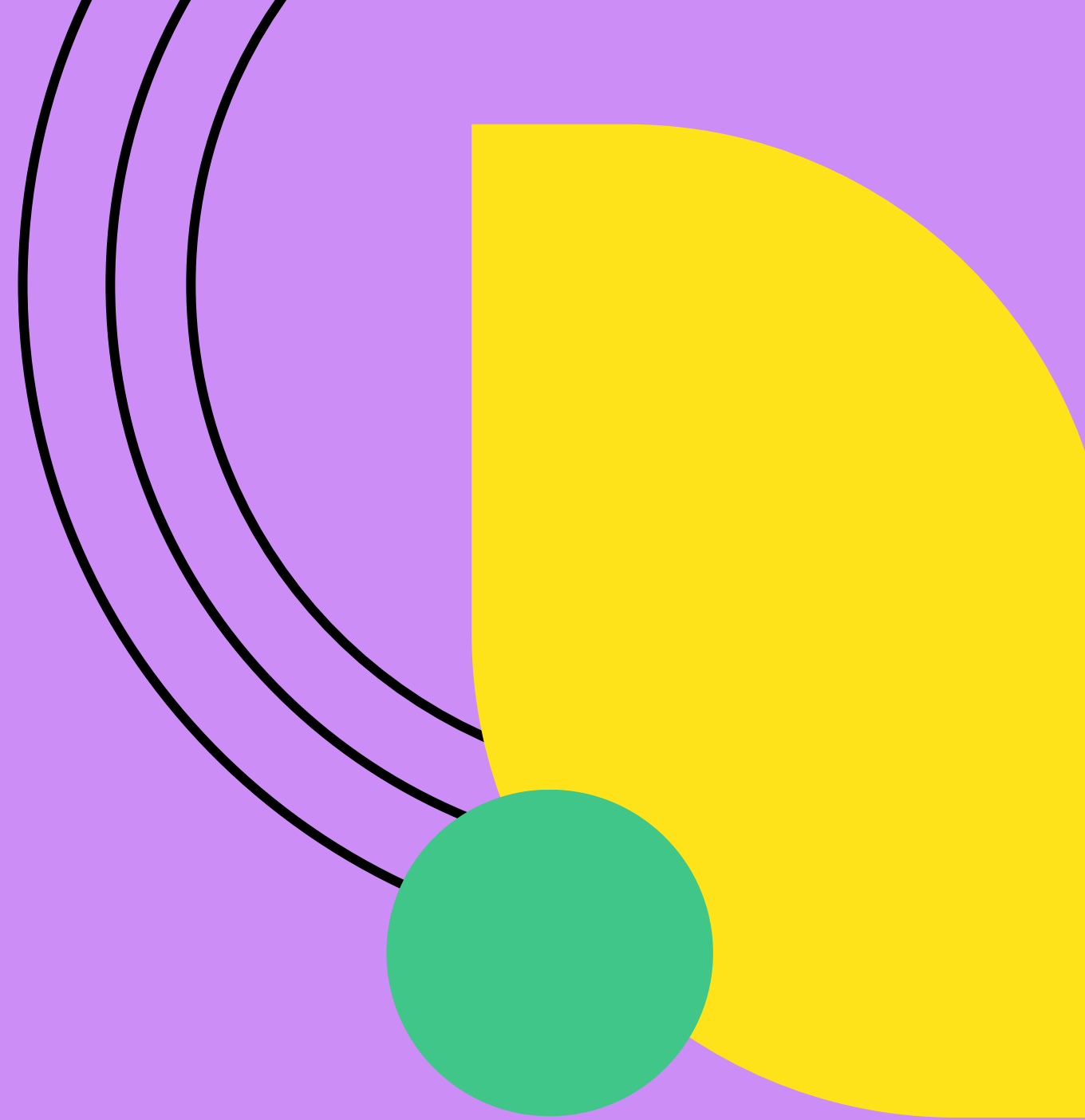
Conclusion

Young Europeans' views on security and resilience highlight a blend of pragmatism and caution. They perceive potential threats – ranging from military conflict to online misinformation – but generally feel safe in their day-to-day lives. Their calls for greater European self-reliance in the defence and energy sectors, along with a cautious but open stance on AI-driven technology, suggest a desire for both preparedness and collaboration.

Whether discussing the need for stronger EU defence mechanisms or the future of NATO and the United States in European security, the consensus is clear: Europe should be more proactive and united in defending its interests, from combating disinformation to ensuring long-term geopolitical stability.



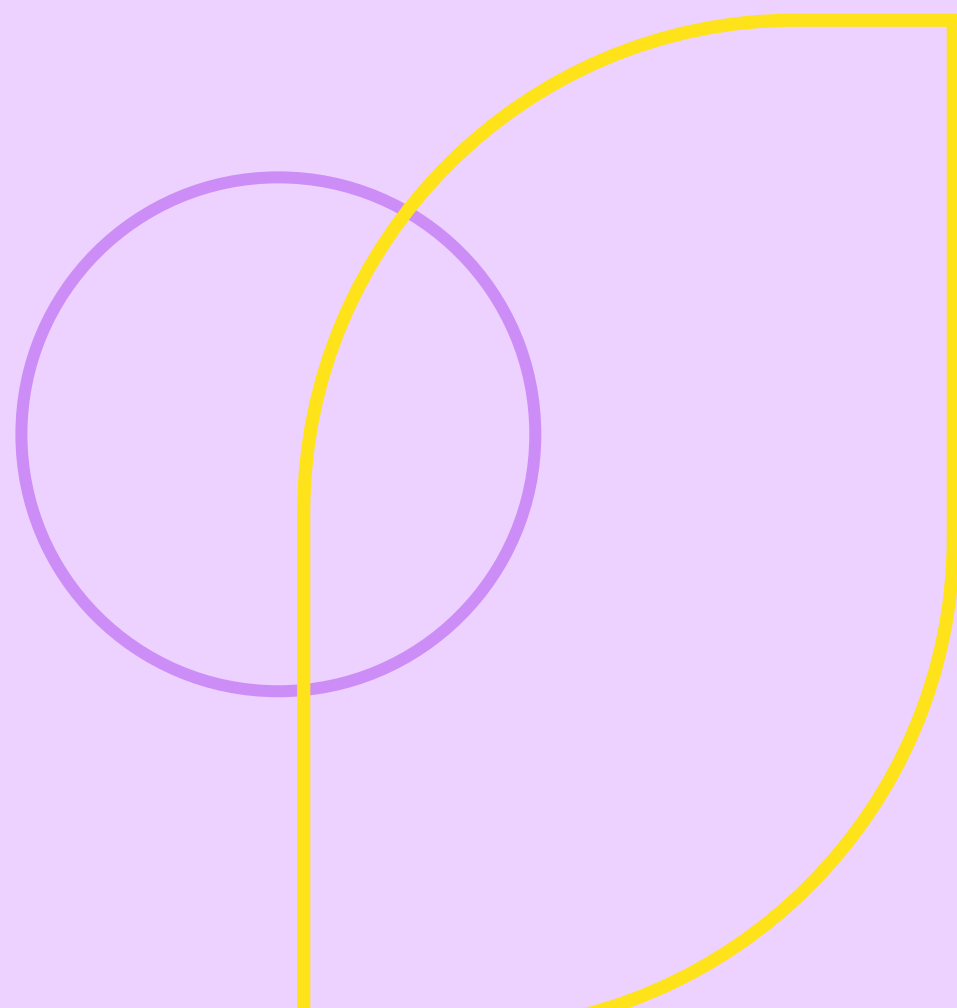
Equity & prosperity



Overview

Three years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine disrupted a global economy still reeling from the pandemic, rising costs for everyday essentials – from food staples to housing – have placed new pressures on young Europeans. In this study, most participants voice concern about their financial stability in the years ahead. While Danish respondents show somewhat higher trust in government support, young people in France, Italy, Germany and Poland largely believe they are on their own in facing future crises. They point to solutions that blend economic fairness with accessibility, including affordable housing, guaranteed minimum incomes and expanded job-relevant skills training.

Despite these challenges, many young people remain committed to environmental protection and social welfare. They do not see the EU's emphasis on the green transition or social spending as incompatible with future growth. Instead, they advocate harnessing these principles to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and social cohesion.



Personal economic prospects

Across all five countries, more respondents say their financial situation has worsened rather than improved over the past year, with French participants especially pessimistic (48%).

Bleak five-year outlook

- Around half of respondents in France, Italy, Germany and Poland believe life will be harder in the coming five years.
- Denmark stands out as an exception: only 34% anticipate worsening conditions.

Low general optimism

- Danish respondents again appear more upbeat, with nearly half (47%) describing themselves as optimistic about the future.
- Italy (25%), France (28%) and Poland (31%) express significantly lower levels of optimism.

Trust in institutions

When it comes to receiving support during a crisis, attitudes toward governments, the EU and private sector actors diverge widely.



NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- Denmark is alone with more than one-third (39%) trusting their government to protect them. The next highest results come out of Germany (28%).
- France (12%), Poland (7%) and Italy (5%) show minimal confidence in governmental crisis support.



EUROPEAN UNION

- Italy (18%), Poland (15%) and Germany (17%) register slightly higher trust that the EU will protect them as compared to their own governments.
- France (9%) sees little difference between national and EU-level support. Denmark again reports higher levels of optimism than other countries (31%).

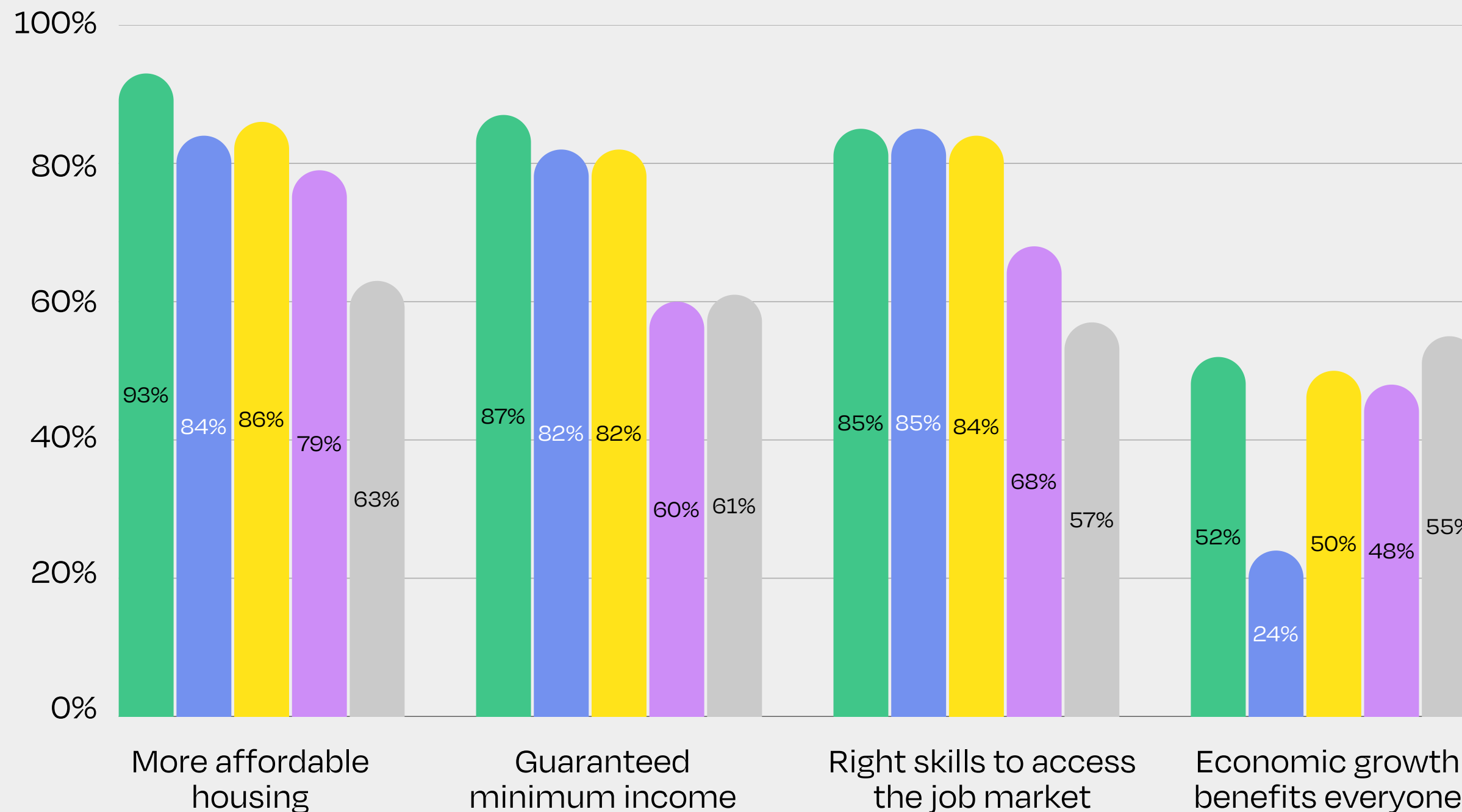
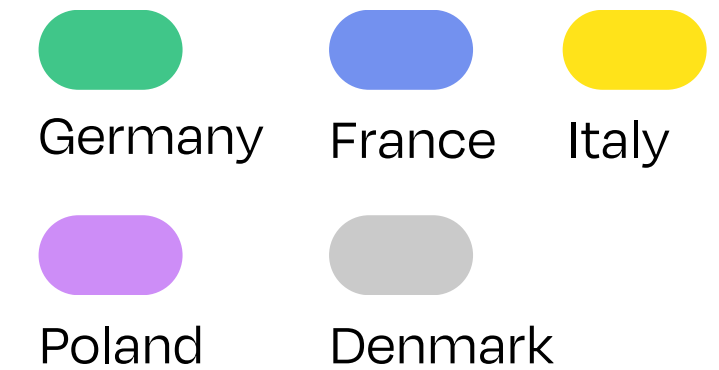


BUSINESSES

- Trust in businesses to protect citizens in a crisis remains strikingly low.
- Only Denmark (23%) surpasses single-digit trust levels, while France is at the bottom (2%).

Fostering inclusive growth

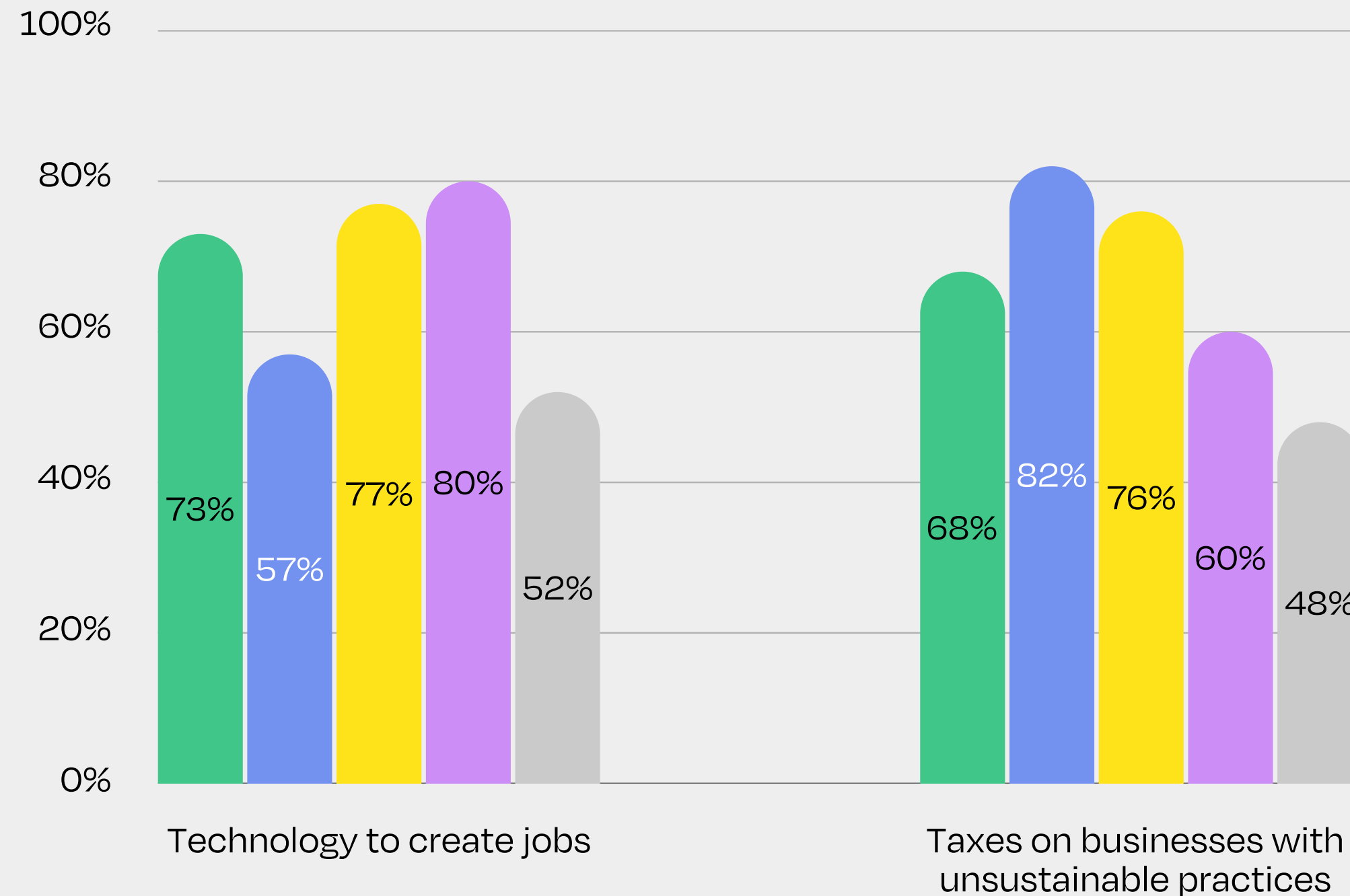
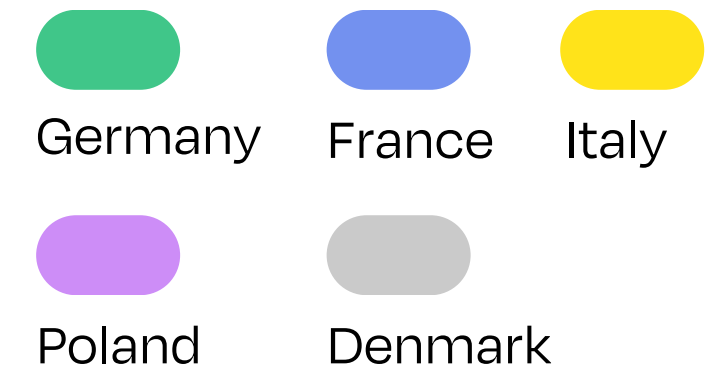
Respondents highlighted various policy measures they believe can drive equitable economic growth.



Most popular policies

- **Affordable housing:** Top priority for Germany (93%), Italy (86%) and Denmark (63%), and second-highest in France (84%) and Poland (79%).
- **Guaranteed minimum income:** Favoured by large majorities in France, Italy and Germany (81%–87%).
- **Marketable skills:** Ensuring the right skills to access the job market is especially popular in France, Italy and Germany chosen by 84-85%.

Fostering inclusive growth



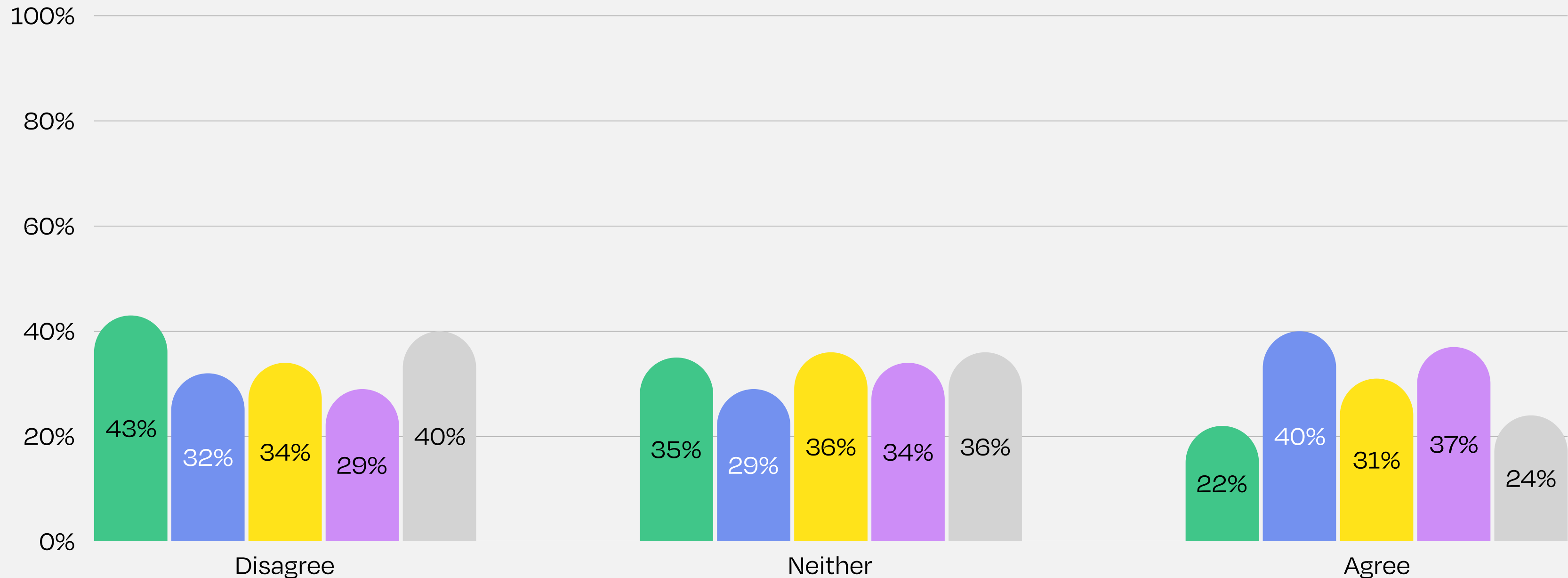
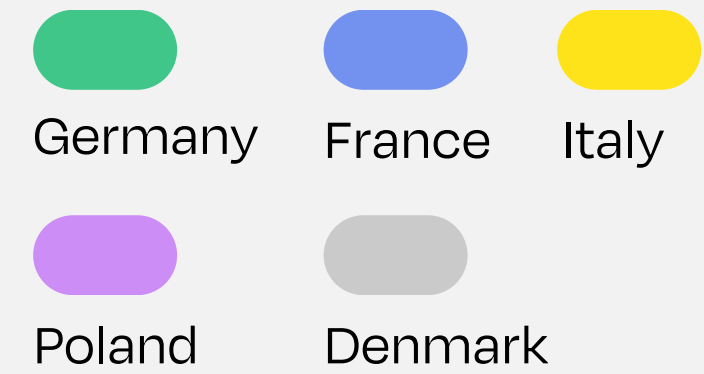
Embrace of technology & artificial intelligence

- Using technology to create jobs is the most popular policy action in Poland (80%), also gaining traction in Italy (77%) and Germany (73%).

Made in Europe

- A majority of respondents across all five countries believe it is important to buy products and services that are made in Europe, from 66% in France to 55% in Denmark.

Will AI provide opportunities to improve living standards?



Views on business and growth

- Around half of respondents believe economic growth benefits everyone, except in France (24%).
- Concern over corporate inaction on sustainability is high in France (68%) and Italy (71%), while only around half of participants in Poland (50%) and Denmark (44%) concur.
- Raising taxes on businesses with unsustainable practices garners strong backing, particularly in France (82%) and Italy (76%).

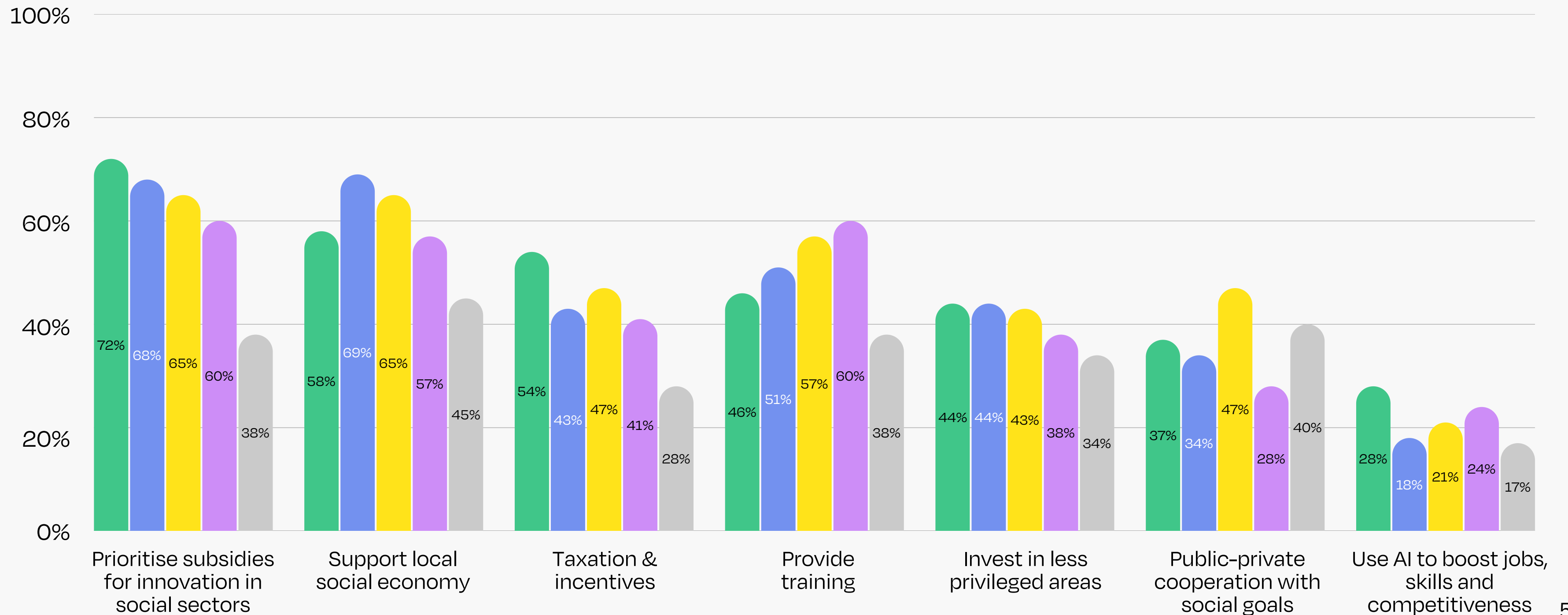
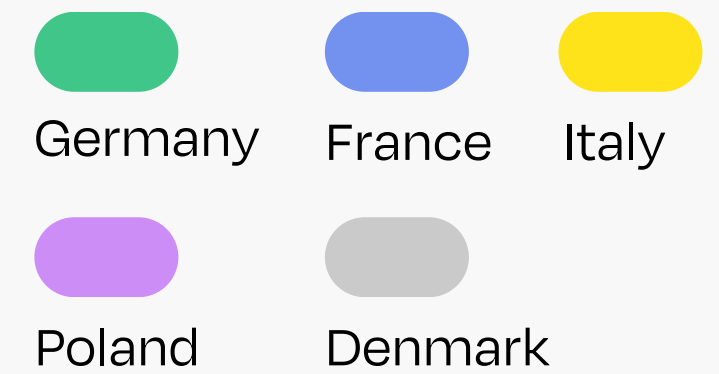
I think we should provide more information on how economic changes and the ecological transition can affect our daily lives. That would raise awareness among more people

explained one French respondent



Balancing economic growth with social welfare

What are the best ways?



Social economy:

balancing welfare and growth



POPULAR SOLUTIONS

- **Local social initiatives:** The leading choice in France (69%), Italy (65%) and Denmark (45%).
- **Subsidies for innovation in social sectors:** Highly favoured in Germany, France and Italy – where it ties at 65% with support for local social initiatives. The option receives less support in Denmark (38%).
- **Training for underprivileged communities:** Especially popular in Poland (60%).



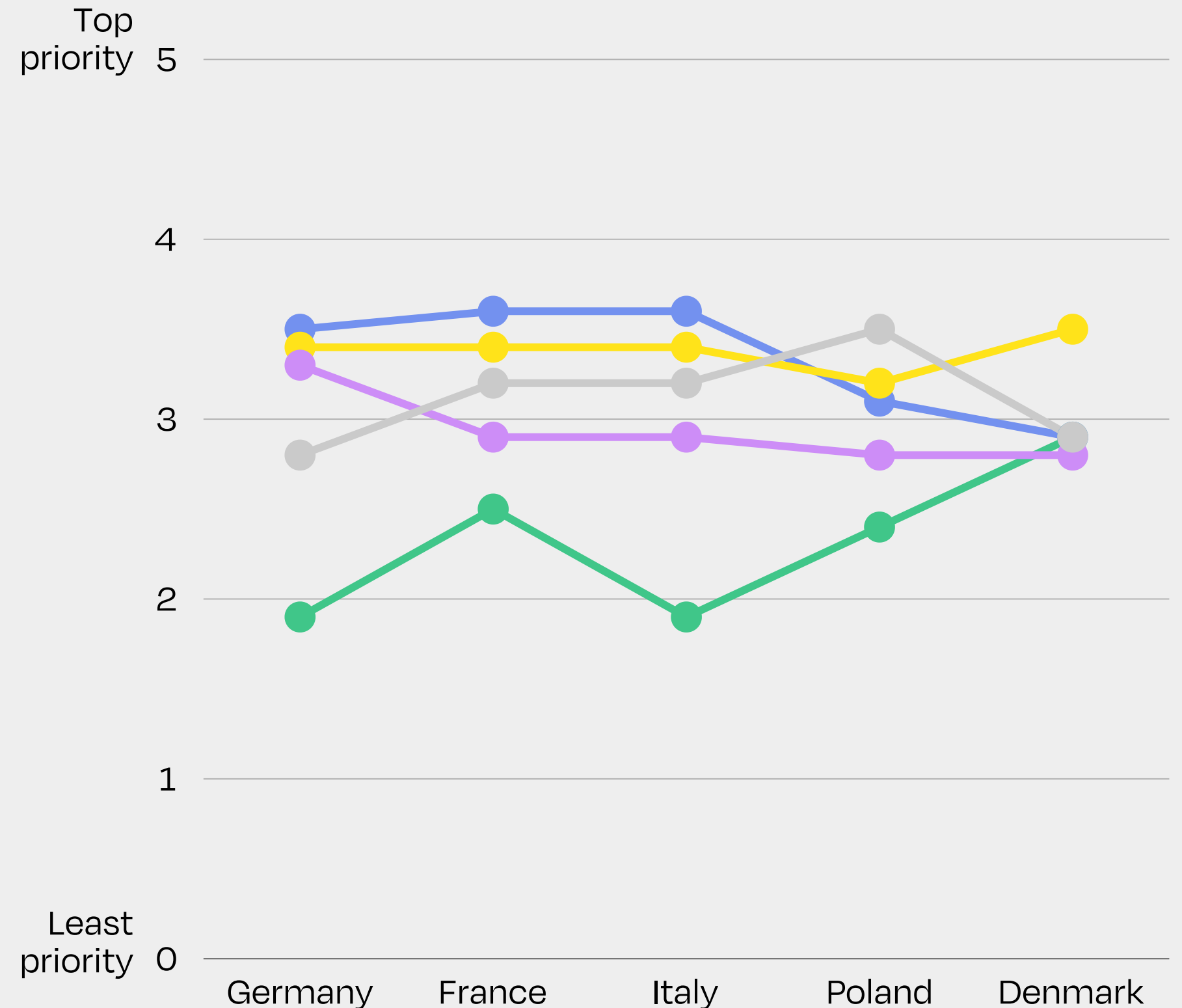
LESS POPULAR APPROACHES

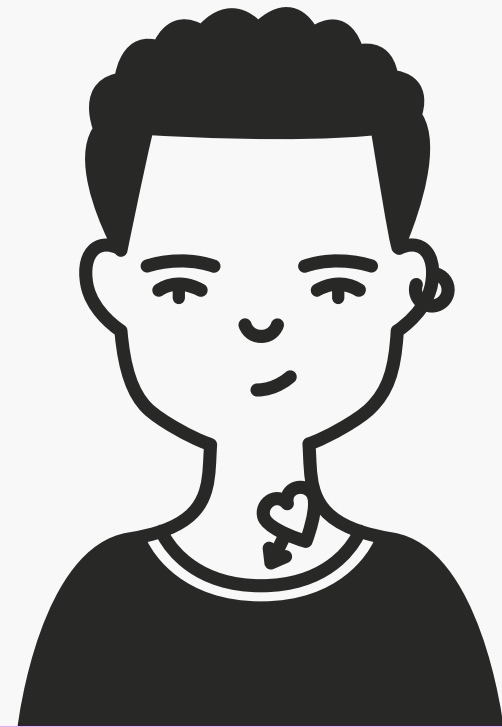
- Public-private partnerships and tax incentives for competitiveness rank below more direct social interventions.
- Using AI to boost jobs and skills has limited appeal, peaking at 28% in Germany.

Investing in the green transition

- Create bigger European businesses
- Produce green energy solutions
- Increase access to green energy solutions
- Digital public services and infrastructures
- Solutions supporting innovation and skills

Which of the following should the EU and national governments invest in?





I don't feel like governments and companies are very transparent anymore, which makes most of the information you get feel like 'take it with a grain of salt.' I don't necessarily feel like I don't get enough information, but [worry] more about whether I can trust it

shared a Danish participant

Information gaps

- Denmark is the only country where nearly half (45%) say they receive sufficient help and information on how the green transition impacts their community.
- Poland (22%) and Italy (16%) feel poorly informed, with many unsure how ongoing changes apply to them personally.

Job readiness

- The majority in every country feels only "somewhat prepared", though Denmark (17%) and France (22%) show higher shares of participants who consider themselves "fully prepared".
- A notable segment – particularly in Poland (29%) – does not expect their jobs to be affected by the green transition.

Digital skills

- Clear majorities in Poland (63%) and France (62%) feel "fully prepared" to leverage digital tools.
- Germany, Italy and Denmark skew toward feeling "partly prepared", often citing insufficient training or infrastructure.

EU policy focus for the next seven years



All countries except Poland rank climate action as top priority. In Poland the top priority is defence and security (climate action comes only fourth)



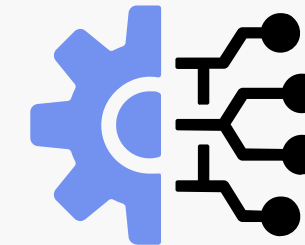
Health

is amongst the top three priorities for Denmark, France, Italy and Poland



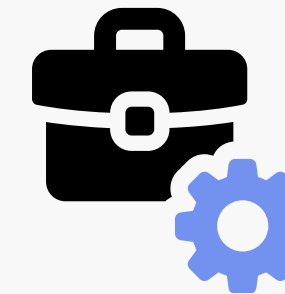
Education

falls amongst the top three for France and Germany, and fourth for Italy



Digitalisation & AI

are in the top three only for Germany



Job & skills

are in the top three only for Poland



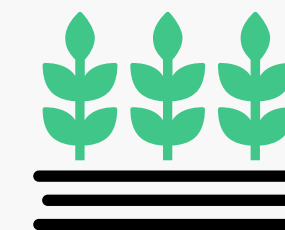
Social welfare

is in the top three for Denmark and Italy, and is the fourth preferred option in France



Defence & security

is a top priority only for Poland, but reaches fourth place for Denmark and Germany



Agriculture

is not a priority for any of the countries surveyed

Climate action

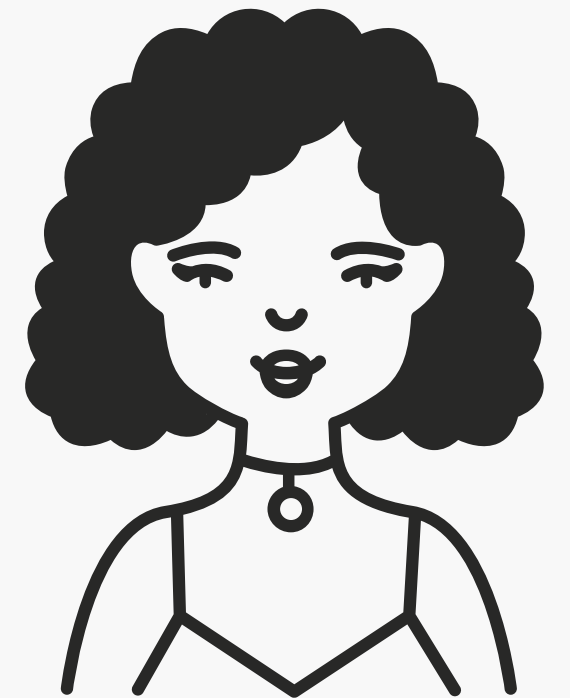
- Top choice in Italy, France, Germany and Denmark – often around 70%.
- In Poland, by contrast, climate ranks fourth (37%), overshadowed by concerns over defence and security (57%).

Other key areas

- Health: Ranked among the top three priorities in most countries, except Germany (31%, sixth place).
- Social Welfare: Particularly important in Italy (55%) and Denmark (38%).
- Education: A high priority in France and Germany (51%).
- Jobs and Skills: Second in Poland (52%), but less emphasised elsewhere.

To feel safe is not to have to worry about whether the war will spread beyond the borders of Ukraine

a Polish participant noted, explaining why defence tops Poland's list



Conclusion



Young Europeans hold nuanced views on equity and prosperity, largely shaped by converging crises – from the pandemic’s economic aftershocks to the war in Ukraine. Concerns about personal finances and institutional support run high, especially outside of Denmark. Yet across the board, respondents maintain confidence in Europe’s potential to merge environmental stewardship with social protections.

Their policy proposals – affordable housing, minimum income guarantees, job-skill training and meaningful climate initiatives – underscore a vision of a Europe that remains competitive without sacrificing social equity or sustainability. Even as uncertainties persist, most young Europeans remain committed to forging a resilient and inclusive future for the continent.



Climate & sustainability

Overview

Over the past few decades, concern about climate change has moved from a topic of scientific discussion to a central issue of public debate. In the EU in particular, climate change frequently appears in policy agendas and headlines, yet many of the young Europeans who participated in this study sense that genuine prioritisation of environmental issues is still lacking. They often feel their voices go unheard – both by policymakers and in corporate boardrooms.

This section explores how young Europeans view climate change at a moment when global events – ranging from armed conflicts to rising living costs – risk pushing environmental priorities to the sidelines. Despite these challenges, most respondents remain committed to addressing the climate crisis and support strong policy measures, such as ending investments in fossil fuels and providing green tax incentives. While they are cautiously open to using AI and green technology to fight climate change, they also highlight concerns about the affordability and genuine impact of “eco-friendly” alternatives.



Feeling unheard:

perceptions of government & business

A central finding in our study has been a sense of limited influence. Many respondents doubt that national or EU-level decision-makers take their perspectives on climate change seriously. They also voice considerable scepticism about the private sector's willingness to adopt greener practices.

It is like things happen all of a sudden. Rules imposed from above without explanation and little trust in the government to carry out what it says

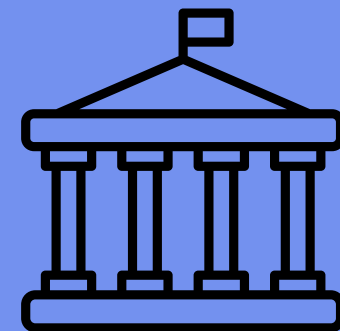
shared a participant from Italy





BUSINESS

Sentiment toward businesses is generally more negative than toward public authorities. Around 40-50% of respondents in France, Germany, Poland and Italy say corporate actors completely ignore their voices. Only in Denmark do as many as 25% believe the private sector values their feedback.



NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

In Italy, 32% of participants say their government does not take their needs and views into account on climate issues, followed by France (27%) and Poland (23%). In contrast, Denmark shows relatively higher confidence, with 31% saying their government values their input very much.

Across all five countries, the dominant view was that the needs of respondents were only taken into account to a small degree by their own governments. Germany shows the highest share in this middle category at 69%.



EUROPEAN UNION

On average, respondents place a bit more trust in the EU than in their own governments on this issue. Nearly half in Italy (47%) and Poland (40%) believe their opinions on climate carry significant weight at the EU level. However, around three-quarters of participants in France and Germany feel the EU only considers their needs and views slightly – or not at all.

As in the national context, a large proportion of respondents in Germany (66%), France (60%) and Denmark (43%) occupy a middle ground, believing the EU acknowledges their perspectives but only to a limited degree.

Individual action & its limits

Many participants express a strong desire to adopt a more eco-friendly lifestyle. However, they cite structural and economic barriers, particularly the high cost of many green alternatives.

It is not so easy to quantify the environmental impact of a product. For example, regional, organic... is not necessarily as environmentally friendly as it is marketed

said one German respondent



Cost as a barrier

Across four of the five countries, 71% to 82% say eco-friendly products or services are too expensive. Denmark is an outlier, with a still-substantial 55% citing cost as a main obstacle.

Environmental knowledge and greenwashing

Only a small minority (31% in Denmark, but significantly lower in other countries) say a lack of information prevents them from going green. More commonly, respondents cite the difficulty of assessing whether certain "green" products truly reduce their carbon footprint – especially in the face of alleged corporate "greenwashing".

Social responsibility vs. local sourcing

Considerations such as worker treatment, biodiversity protection and fair labour practices rank highly in purchasing decisions, surpassing concerns about a product's country of origin. For instance, in Germany, 38% list social responsibility factors as a top consideration when making purchases, while 36% of respondents in France highlight the importance of reducing harmful substances.

Expectations for policy & business

Young Europeans believe tackling climate change should be a shared effort among national governments, the EU and businesses. However, their hopes for how each actor can contribute vary by country.

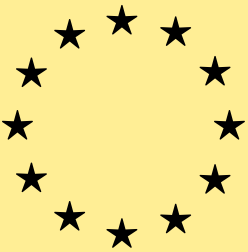
Expectations of EU, national governments & businesses to tackle climate change

Young people in all countries want a **triangle of cooperation** to reduce environmental impact



National governments

should work closely with business, use tax incentives and support citizens to take action



The EU

should act as a coordinator among member states



Businesses

should work with governments & share their expertise

National governments

In France (72%) and Italy (77%), the most popular expectation is closer collaboration with businesses. By contrast, in Germany (68%) and Poland (55%), the top priority is offering tax incentives to encourage greener production. France also stands out for favouring environmental penalties on businesses (74%).

European Union

Coordinating economic efforts to reduce environmental impact among member states is a widely shared priority. Support for this role reaches as high as 81% in Italy. In Poland the top priority is having EU institutions support governments (62%).

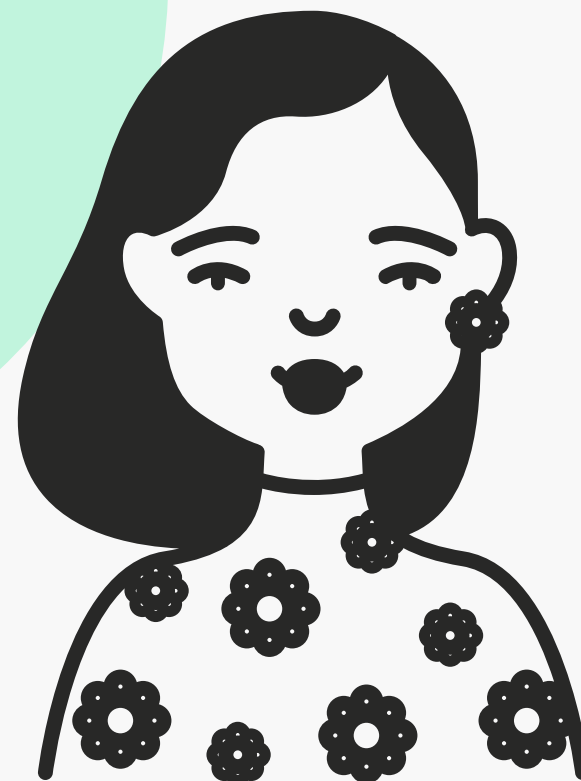
Businesses

A majority across all countries wants businesses to work with governments to ensure transparency around environmental impact. In Germany there are slightly stronger calls for sharing research expertise (74%) and in Poland for helping citizens adapt to greener living “without passing down the cost” (67%).

In general, participants call for stricter regulations and stronger enforcement.

I feel that my efforts are being lost in the negligence of larger companies

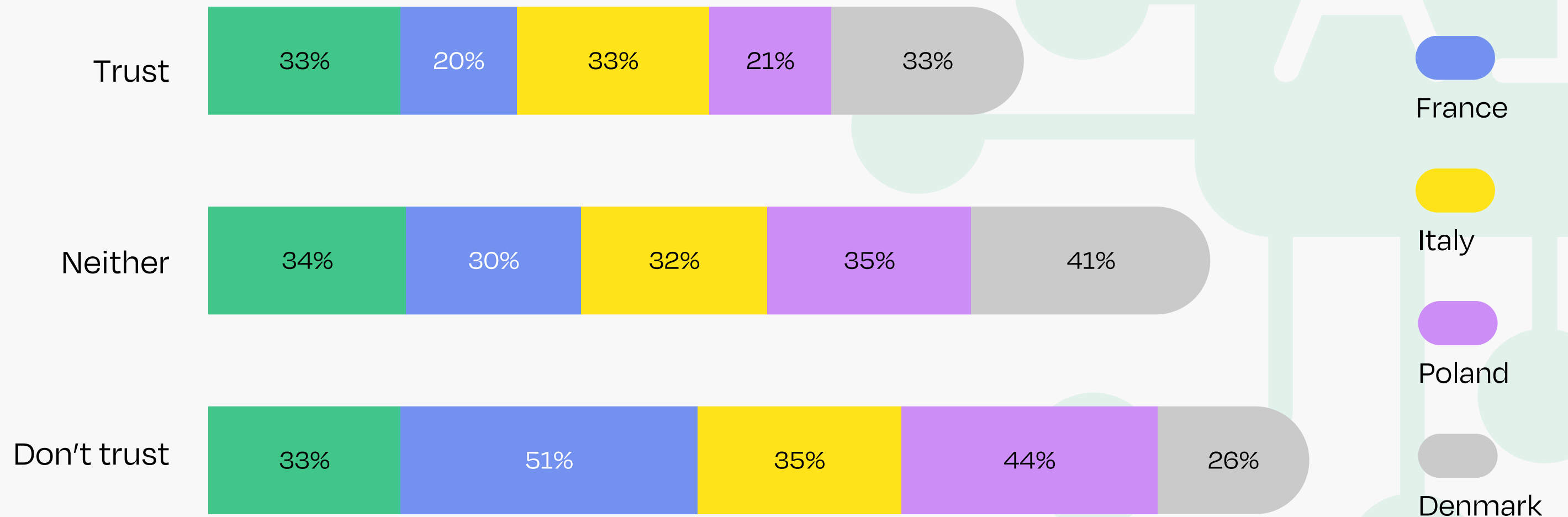
one Polish participant noted



The role of AI in climate action

Opinions on AI's potential to mitigate climate change are split. Roughly one-third of respondents in Germany, Italy and Denmark trust AI to help address climate challenges, while only about one-fifth in France and Poland share this sentiment. Nonetheless, many participants remain neutral, suggesting that the debate over AI's role in sustainability is far from settled.

Do you trust AI to protect the planet from climate change?



Stop investing in fossil fuel

Germany **60%**



France **71%**



Italy **67%**



Poland **49%**



Denmark **50%**



Preferred climate solutions

When presented with various strategies to combat climate change, no single solution garnered majority support across all countries, but several ideas resonated widely:

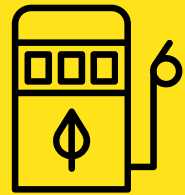
Germany

Top priorities are invest in *green tech and research* (**64%**) and *sustainable economic activities* (**63%**)

Poland

Top priorities are making *public transport fully electric and accessible* (**58%**) and invest in *green tech and research* (**51%**)

Preferred climate solutions



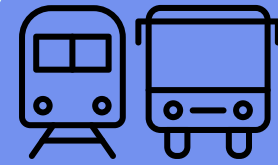
Shifting away from fossil fuels

Stopping investment in polluting fuels is the top solution in France (71%), Italy (67%) and Denmark (50%).



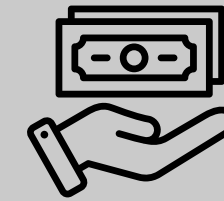
Penalties & fines

Punishing environmentally harmful actions by both businesses and the public garners moderate backing, particularly in Italy (54%), but receives less support elsewhere – possibly because the proposal includes fines on individuals.



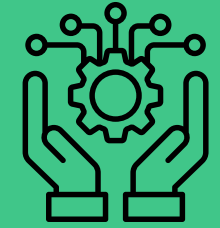
Public transport

In Poland (58%) and Germany (60%), making public transport fully electric and more accessible emerged as a leading option.



Cost of living

Notably, Poland and Denmark show relatively lower enthusiasm for solutions that might increase living costs for consumers.



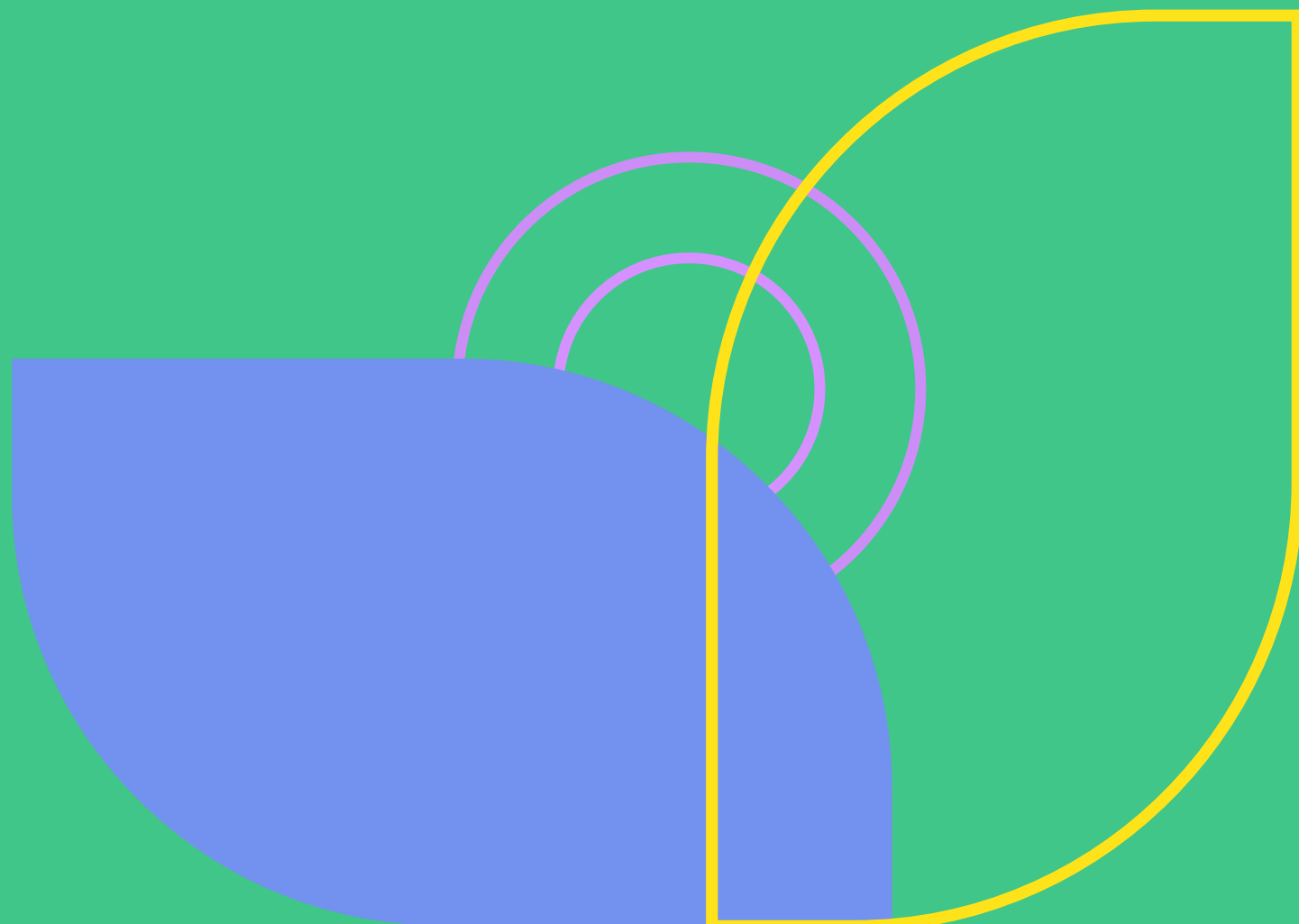
Green technology

Investing in green technology and research is well-received in Germany (64%) and Poland (51%), though it ranks lower in Denmark (30%).

Conclusion

Ten years on from the Paris Accords, the young Europeans in this study remain determined to push for meaningful climate action. While they support concrete measures – ending fossil fuel investments, strengthening public transport and promoting transparency in corporate practices – they are wary of bearing the costs alone.

Their outlook balances optimism about innovative solutions, including AI, with scepticism toward greenwashing and unequal economic burdens. Overall, they advocate for a coordinated effort – across national governments, the EU and businesses – to ensure that climate initiatives are truly effective, equitable and aligned with the urgency of the crisis.



Making European democracy fit for the 21st century

*Contact us with your questions
and comments.*

info@debatingeurope.eu

www.debatingeurope.eu

