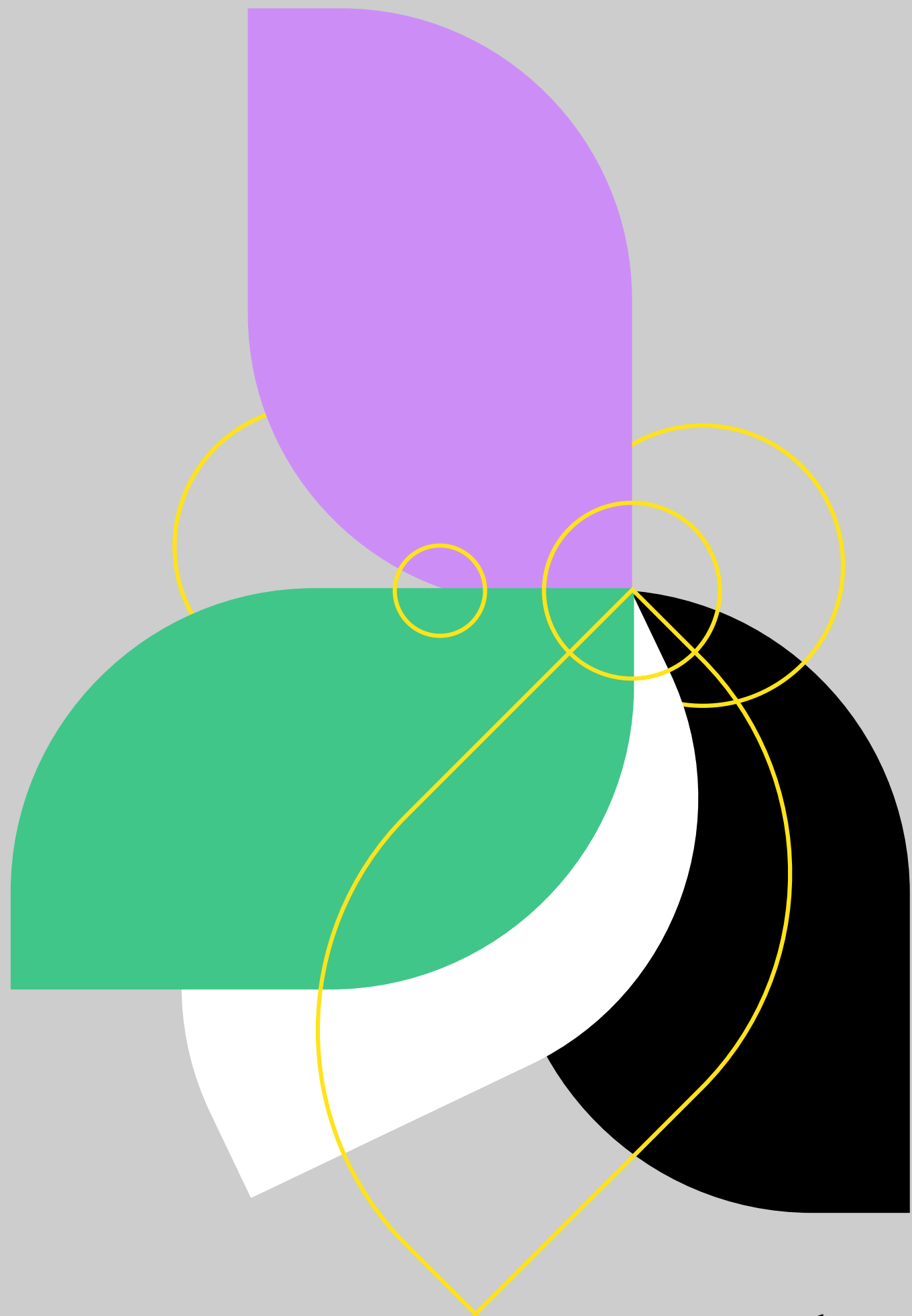


Voices for choices

Data for decisions
that matter

2025 country report — **Denmark**



Content index

03

Introduction

05

Survey

06

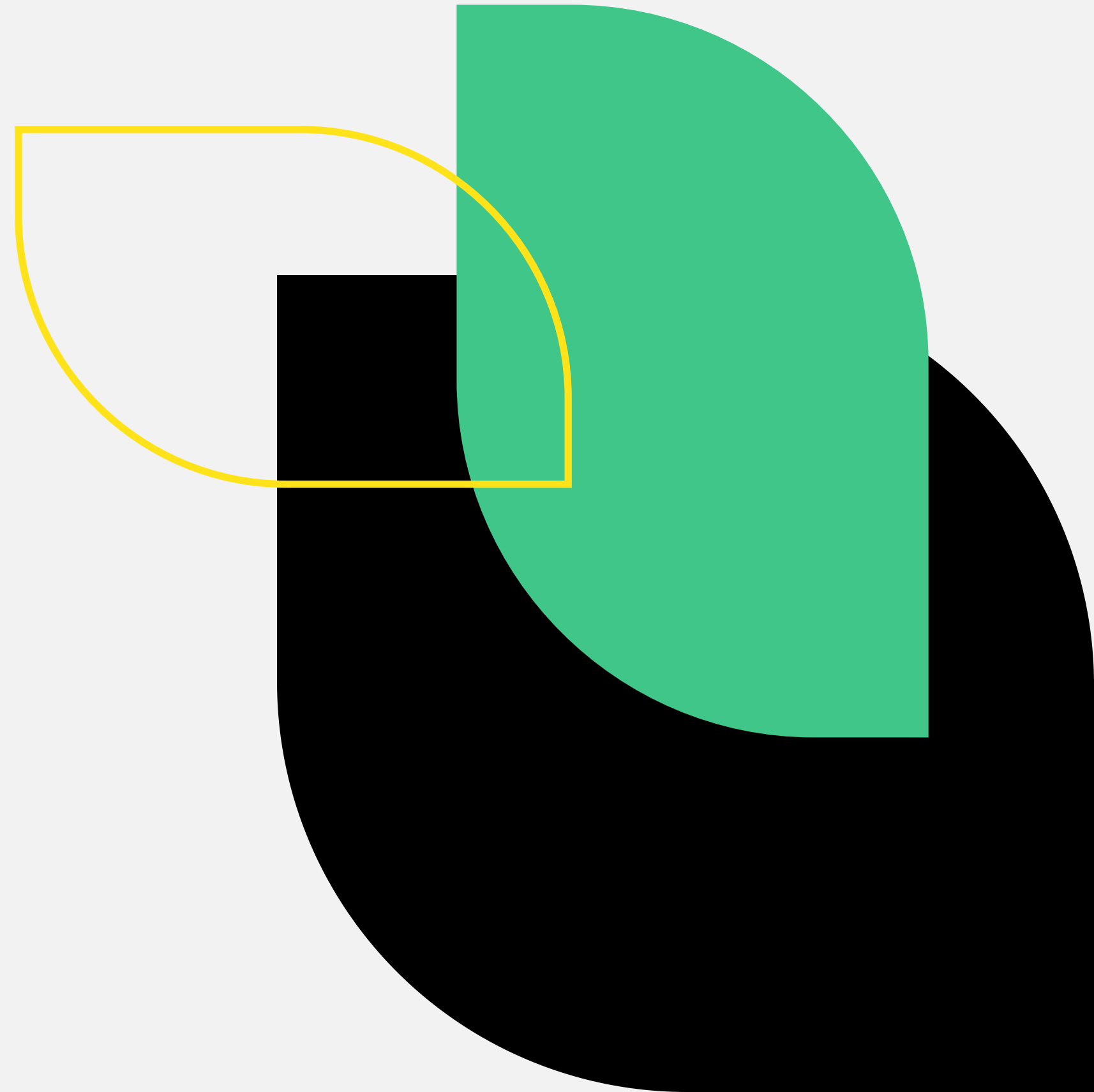
Focus groups

19

Local events

21

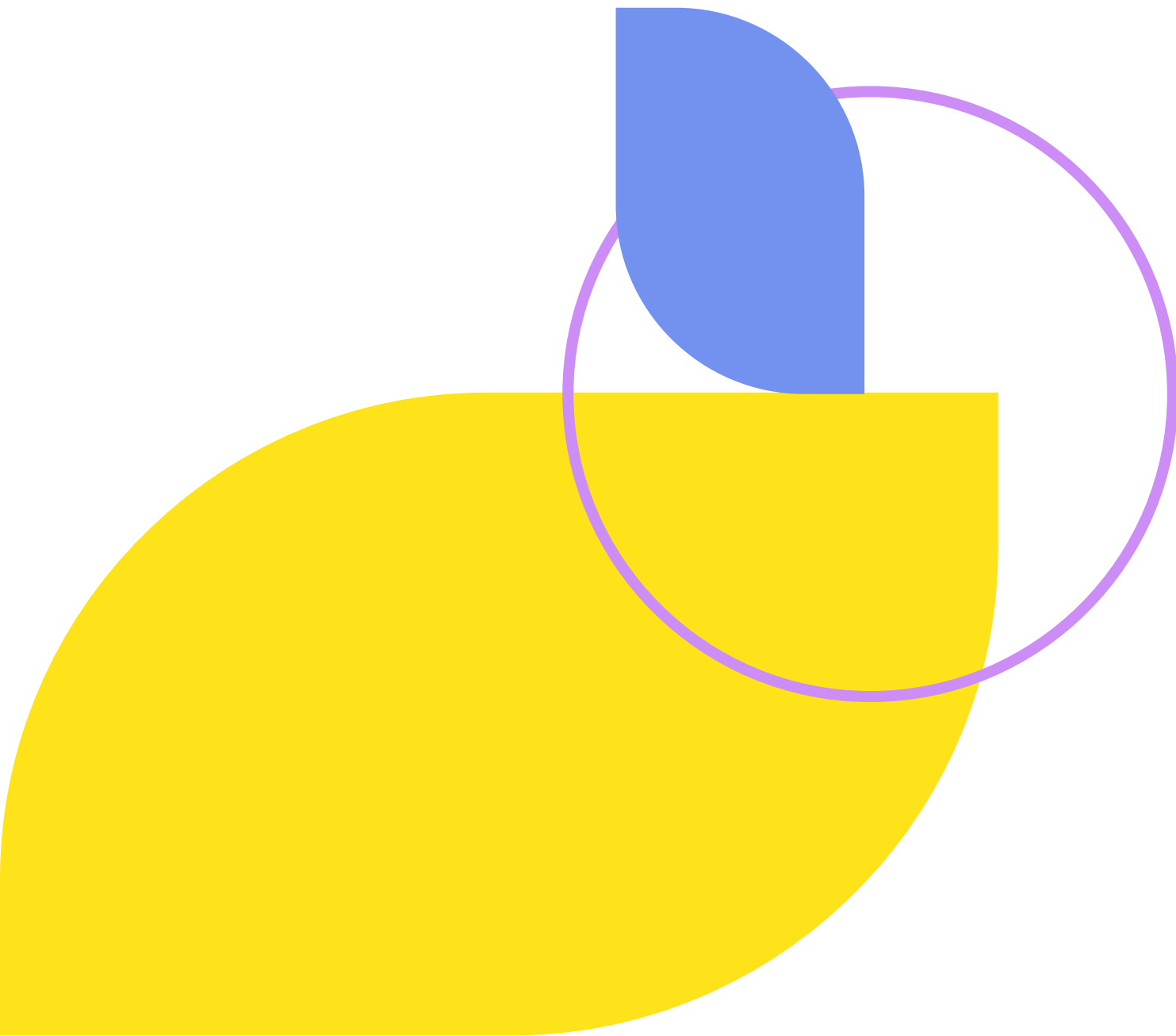
Conclusions



Introduction

Debating Europe is the citizen engagement unit of *Friends of Europe*, an independent and non-partisan think tank working to shape a more inclusive, sustainable and forward-looking Europe. Through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies – such as surveys, focus groups and local events – Debating Europe brings citizens into the heart of the policymaking conversation. Our work empowers people to play a greater role in shaping the decisions that affect their lives, fosters meaningful dialogue and helps build bridges between citizens, policymakers and stakeholders across sectors.

We believe that **designing better policy starts with listening to people**. That's why we work closely with citizens, public institutions private actors and civil society to surface grounded, data-driven insights that inform inclusive and responsive governance.



This Danish country report presents the national findings of **Voices for Choices**, a citizen engagement project (autumn 2024-autumn 2025) that involved over **2,400 young people (aged 18–35)** across five EU countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Poland. The project included:

a large-scale
online survey with
2,000 participants
(400 per country)

**in-depth focus
groups** with 200
participants (40
per country) and

local events that
brought together
approximately
250 young people
(around 50 per
country) for live
discussions and
activities.

The report focuses on what emerged from a diverse group of young Danes today, shedding light on their views, priorities and concerns. What choices do they feel are available to them? What role do they believe they have in shaping policy, society and the future? And what do they need to feel more empowered and heard?

By capturing these insights, this report aims to support policymakers, funders and organisations seeking to **better connect with young people** in Denmark and strengthen democratic participation in practice.

% OF YOUNG DANES THINK THAT...*



POLARISATION & DEMOCRACY

- 36%** Denmark is **polarised**
- 44%** **Politicians** are **responsible** for polarisation
- 39%** Better **education** is the best solution to **overcome polarisation**
- 50%** **Experts** are the **most trusted source** of information
- 44%** **Elections** are their favourite form of democratic engagement

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

- 28%** Don't know if AI contributes to polarisation
- 44%** AI-generated content has not affected their political opinions

34%

Their life will get **harder** in the **next five years**

39%

Their **government** will **protect them** in hard times

63%

Governments should **invest in more affordable housing**

38%

Somewhat **prepared to handle the green transition**

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

52%

Governments should use technology to create jobs

40%

AI will provide more opportunities to improve living standards for all

EQUITY & PROSPERITY



SECURITY & RESILIENCE

44%

The **EU** should be **in charge on Europe's defence**

51%

NATO should not **reduce their role** in European defence

64%

Ukraine should join the **EU**

74%

Cybersecurity should be a **top priority** for European defence

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

65%

The EU should invest more in AI in defence and space security

62%

AI can help guarantee online safety

55%

Environment-friendly options are **too expensive**

63%

Expect the **EU** to coordinate the **economic efforts** among its 27 countries

56%

Businesses should work with governments to **ensure transparency**

64%

Governments should **work more closely with businesses** to reduce their environmental impact

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

41%

It's unclear if AI & tech will protect the planet from climate change

CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY





Focus groups

Young Danes from *Voices for Choices* highlight a strong frustration with **exclusion from decision-making processes**, particularly on climate policy, economic reform and digital governance. Despite high levels of education and civic engagement, many feel their perspectives are not meaningfully represented within existing institutional structures. Across discussions, recurring concerns included **low levels of trust** in political and economic institutions, demands for greater transparency and accountability, and a shared sense of urgency about the pace of systemic change. At the same time, participants **emphasised optimism and responsibility**, stressing that solutions to European challenges must combine structural reform with **inclusive participation and collective action**.



Democracy

Discussions about democracy centred on disconnection, polarisation and a desire for meaningful participation. Young people expressed scepticism toward institutions, but a strong belief in democratic values. They emphasised media literacy, transparency and political education as tools to rebuild trust. AI was seen both as a risk and a potential enabler of inclusion. Participants called for more open, inclusive and participatory democratic practices.

I think many young people lack the necessary skills, especially when it comes to the European Parliament elections... The EU still feels abstract and difficult to access. It should be made easier to understand what it's all about.

Marie, F, 18-24

Polarisation and the public sphere

- Young people felt society isn't deeply divided personally, but media and politics exaggerate polarisation.
- Flashpoints mentioned: immigration, climate policy, war in Ukraine.
- Social media amplifies polarisation through echo chambers, emotional content and algorithms.
- Polarisation is harmful when it replaces nuance with caricature, blocks dialogue, and breeds mistrust.
- Some viewed polarisation as a sign of democratic diversity, but stressed the problem lies in lack of listening and exclusion from discourse.

Civic engagement and political participation

- Youth reject the idea of political apathy—they participate through protests, online advocacy, community work and student initiatives.
- Barriers: complex systems, lack of political education and inaccessible information.
- Perception of performative consultation: institutions ask for input but often ignore it.

"I think many young people lack the necessary skills, especially when it comes to the European Parliament elections... The EU still feels abstract and difficult to access. It should be made easier to understand what it's all about." – Marie, F, 18-24

- Cultural norms discourage youth political identity; early engagement (e.g., school elections, youth parliaments) fosters democratic agency.

Scepticism is healthy... The problem is that politicians often give answers that sound nice but don't really say anything... We need to teach [young people] to demand more: check sources, seek diverse perspectives and ask questions.

Tarek, M, 31-15

Trust, misinformation, & media literacy

- Participants are sceptical but thoughtful media users – favour fact-based and scientific sources, distrust emotional or vague messaging.
- Social media (TikTok, Instagram, X) seen as overwhelming and prone to misinformation.
- Fact-checking includes cross-verifying sources and comparing user content with journalism, though not always feasible for all.

"Scepticism is healthy... The problem is that politicians often give answers that sound nice but don't really say anything... We need to teach [young people] to demand more: check sources, seek diverse perspectives and ask questions." – Tarek, M, 31-15

- Support for media literacy education in schools to build resilience against manipulation and protect democratic dialogue.

AI & democracy

- Concerns: deepfakes, propaganda, biased moderation and suppression of dissent via algorithmic decisions.
- Some saw potential for AI to enhance inclusion – e.g., through translation, accessibility and simplifying complex information.
- Consensus: AI must be transparent, accountable and regulated, with public education on how it works.

Rebuilding dialogue & democratic resilience

- In-person dialogue reduces polarisation; the focus group itself was proof of this.
- Education should be interactive and experience-based, not just factual.
- Call for more local debates, school forums and youth spaces for engagement.
- Schools should encourage constructive disagreement rather than censor controversial student voices.



Security

While young people in Denmark feel generally safe, they expressed concern about emerging threats like disinformation, cyberattacks and digital insecurity. NATO was supported, but opinions varied on the EU's defence role. Participants called for stronger cybersecurity, digital literacy and responsible use of AI. Safety was seen as both physical and emotional – tied to societal trust and stability. Digital safety was a key focus, with the GDPR praised for protecting data. However, many noted a lack of awareness among youth about online risks. They stressed the need for education that builds digital responsibility without being patronising, especially amid rising misinformation and data vulnerabilities.

The EU's role in defence

- Views on EU defence leadership were mixed:
 - Some saw greater EU defence capacity as necessary amid shifting transatlantic ties and new threats.
 - Others warned that duplicating NATO could weaken the alliance and fracture coordination.
- Historical perspective: EU's limited role in 1990s Balkan conflicts highlighted the need for US and NATO leadership.
- Consensus:
 - EU should improve defence cooperation (arms production, intelligence sharing) but not replace NATO.
 - An EU army is unrealistic under current treaties and geopolitics.

NATO & transatlantic relations

- Strong support for NATO and continued US involvement in European defence.
- Europe relies on US for nuclear deterrence and intelligence (e.g., Ukraine war).
- Despite political rhetoric (e.g., President Trump), the transatlantic relationship is seen as essential and mutually beneficial.
- Europe and US provide complementary support globally.
- Future EU defence policy should strengthen, not compete with NATO.

Disinformation & cybersecurity

- Russian disinformation seen as a major threat to security and democratic cohesion.
- Youth are vulnerable due to constant exposure to unverified info and sensational algorithms but also part of the solution through education, fact-checking, and peer networks.
- Call for EU to increase cross-border coordination and invest in digital literacy programs empowering youth leadership.

The future of European security

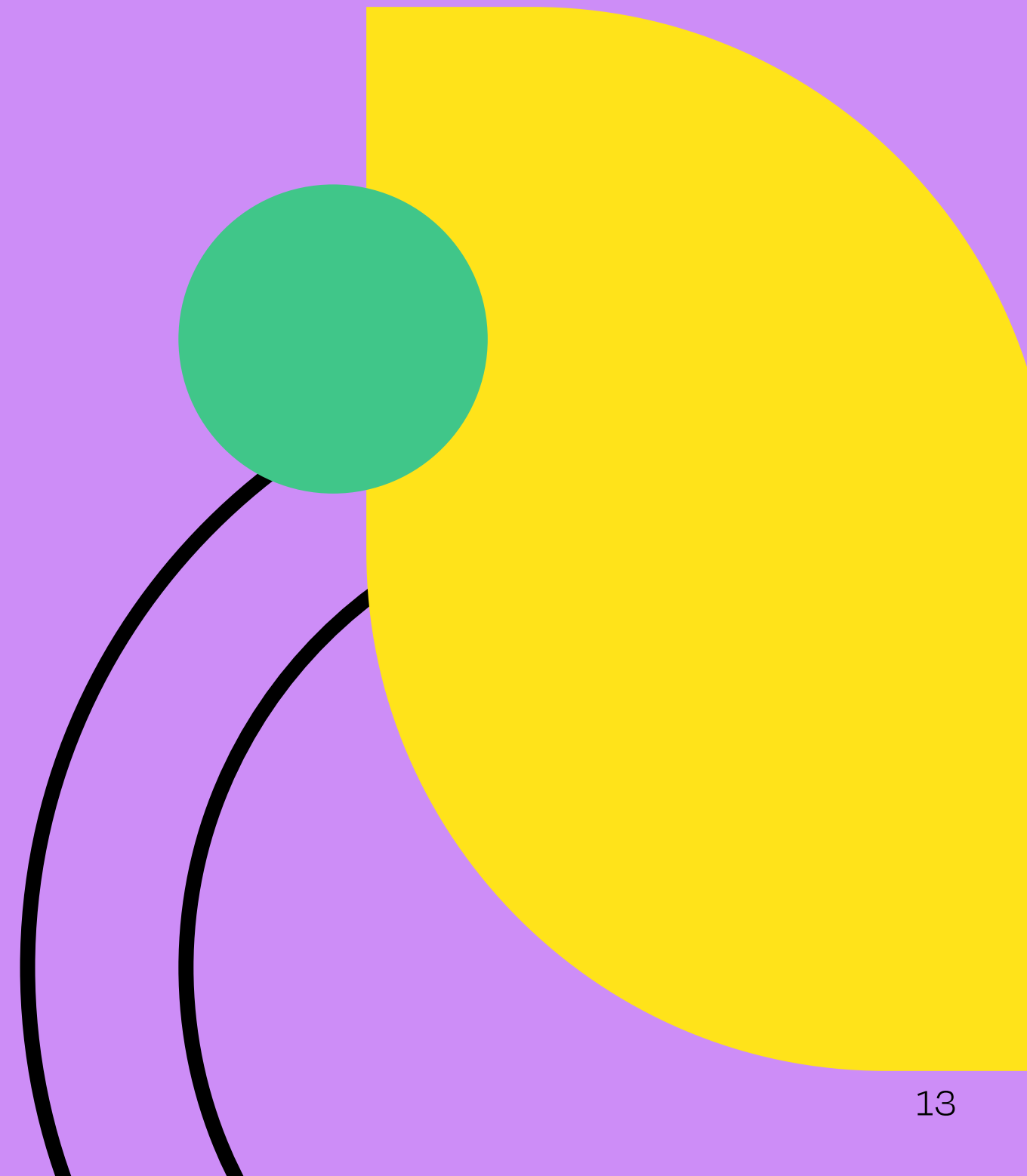
- Threats are complex and interconnected: military, economic instability, energy dependency internal fragmentation.
- Regional instability (Baltics, Balkans) could affect countries like Denmark economically and politically.
- National security includes civil service, democratic support and digital infrastructure, not just military contributions.

AI & security

- AI is a double-edged sword: useful in cybersecurity (spam/phishing detection) but trust in AI for critical security functions is limited.
- Concerns include transparency, data misuse and regulatory gaps.
- Warning against overreliance on AI that could cause blind spots.
- AI requires strong oversight and should be part of a human-led security strategy.

Economy

Discussions centred on economic inequality, lack of opportunity and low trust in institutions. Housing affordability was a major concern, especially in cities, with young people frustrated by high costs, long commutes and limited influence over policy. Many felt the gap between formal support systems and lived reality. Participants shared how, despite stable jobs or education, urban housing remains out of reach, delaying independence and traditional milestones. One noted they couldn't afford rent in Copenhagen even with a state grant. While youth recognised benefits of the Danish welfare model, they felt it falls short in practice, reinforcing structural unfairness.





I know the EU regulates a lot of things, but it's so complex that I have no idea how it works or who makes the decisions.

Participant

Low trust & transparency

- Only 39% of peers trust the state, fewer trust the EU or private businesses.
- Political and economic decisions feel distant and inaccessible.

"I know the EU regulates a lot of things, but it's so complex that I have no idea how it works or who makes the decisions." – Participant

- Participants want clearer communication on what institutions do, decision-making processes and beneficiaries.

Broken promises & intergenerational tensions

- The social contract feels weakened – previous generations expected progress, but current crises (climate, inflation, instability) challenge that hope.
- Broken political promises, especially on the green transition, create uncertainty and reduce faith in institutions.

Youth participation in economic decision-making

- Young people want more influence beyond voting or youth parties.
- Suggested tools: citizen assemblies, digital referenda, social media, grassroots activism.
- Concern about the ageing electorate: older voters dominate policy priorities.
- Ideas raised include lowering the voting age and demographic balancing in decision making processes to better reflect youth interests.

Green transition & economic change

- Most young Danes support green/digital transitions but feel excluded from decision-making.
- Strong sense of 'idealism without influence'.
- Sustainability should prioritise inclusion and social equity, not just innovation or privileged access.

European production & strategic autonomy

- Support for buying European-made products to reduce dependence on China/US and support local jobs.
- Acknowledgement that price and convenience still dominate consumer choices.
- Thriving European production needs public support (subsidies, research, education) and a cultural shift in consumption.

Automation & AI in the economy

- AI and automation seen as necessary due to ageing workforce, with potential for productivity and new jobs.
- Concerns about job losses in routine/low-skilled sectors and unequal benefit distribution.
- Worries about privacy risks linked to surveillance and data use by large companies.



Sustainability

Youth expressed frustration over the gap between their climate commitment and political inaction. They called for systemic reforms in food, transport and corporate accountability, emphasising climate justice, equity and accessible governance. A major concern was the lack of meaningful youth inclusion in decision-making.

Participants criticised tokenistic engagement and urged for real power – such as youth councils with legislative roles and citizens' assemblies to break political gridlock.

Many also called for stronger civic education, noting confusion over how climate policy is made. Without clear understanding and real influence, participation feels symbolic rather than effective.

No one likes having top-down decisions forced on them – about how to eat, travel or consume.

Sigurd, M, 20-25



Individual vs. structural responsibility

- Young people frustrated by focus on individual actions distracting from systemic issues like subsidies for polluters, lack of green infrastructure and weak corporate emission regulation.

"It feels like we're being asked to solve climate change by recycling our yoghurt cups, while companies get away with massive emissions." – Participant

- Call for shift from personal guilt to collective responsibility and institutional accountability targeting root causes (agriculture, fossil fuels, inequality).

"No one likes having top-down decisions forced on them – about how to eat, travel or consume. But if we're equipped to understand the challenges we face, and feel part of the solution, especially in communities where we say: this isn't just my responsibility, it's ours – then yes, it may hurt a little, but it's easier because we're in it together." – Sigurd, M, 20-25

Economic access & sustainable living

- Economic barriers limit sustainable choices, especially for low-income groups.
- Meat cheaper than plant-based foods due to EU subsidies; public transport often inaccessible or expensive.
- Sustainability seen as a privilege, not an option for all.
- Proposals: reform EU subsidies to support small sustainable producers, make low-carbon choices the default via price incentives, labeling and education.
- Need to embed sustainability in public infrastructure: affordable housing, walkable cities, clean energy access. Individual effort insufficient without systemic support.

Corporate responsibility & greenwashing

- Scepticism about corporate green marketing; greenwashing seen as misleading and demotivating.

"I think many people struggle to know what's actually sustainable – especially when it comes to clothing. A lot of it comes down to a general lack of knowledge." – Sally, F, 25-30.

- Strong call for an independent green ombudsman to investigate and sanction false claims.
- Demand for mandatory sustainability reporting for all companies, including SMEs.
- Existing frameworks (CSRD, ESG) welcomed but seen as under-enforced and narrow.
- Desire for stronger legal obligations and consumer tools like standardised eco-labels.
- Support for progressive environmental taxes to internalise social costs and fund the green transition.

Infrastructure, transport & energy

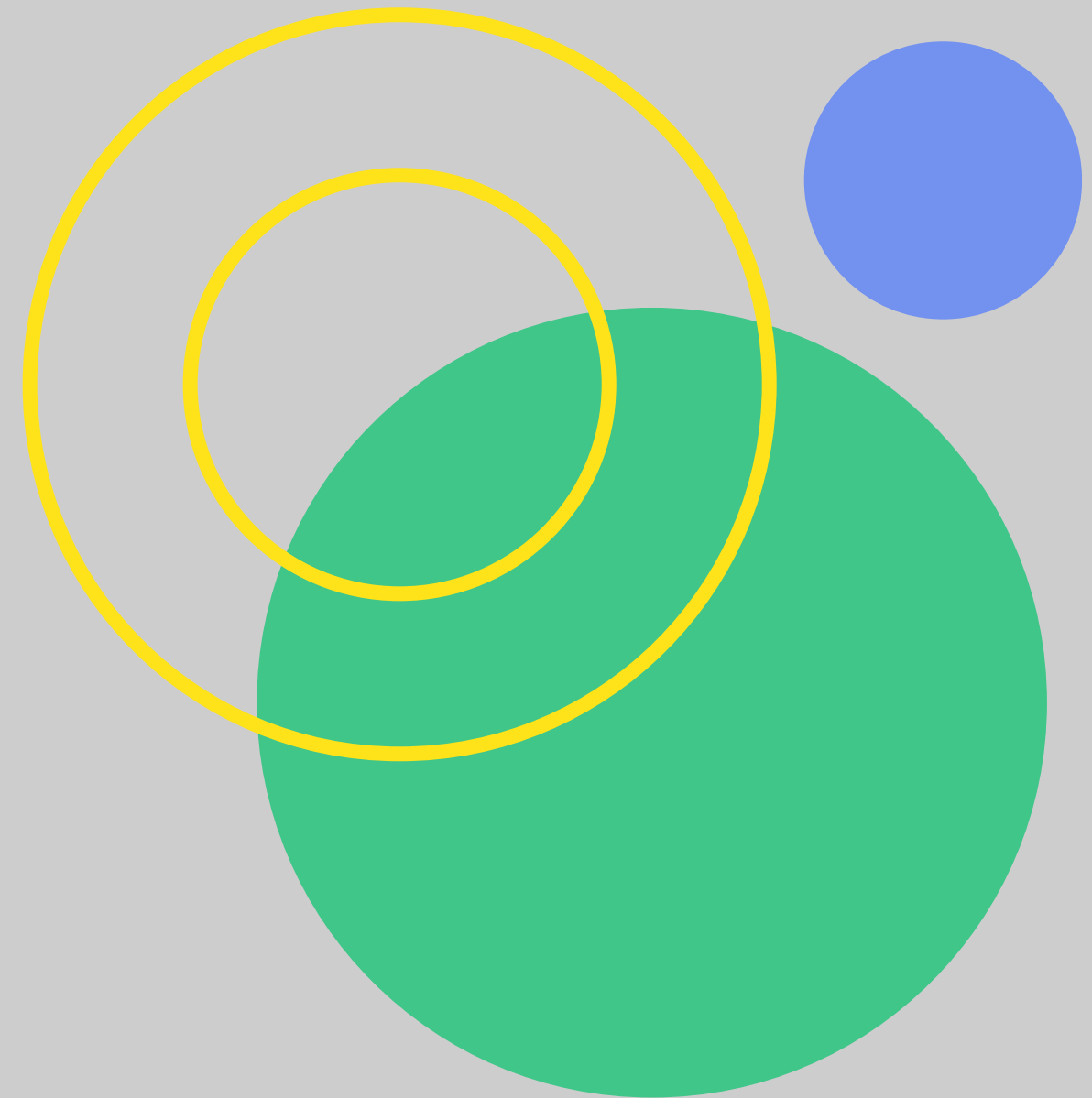
- Transport and energy ranked low in awareness despite major emission sources, reflecting invisibility of structural carbon sources like cars and power grids.
- Consensus to reduce car dependency, requiring major public transport improvements.
- Rural youth feel excluded due to poor infrastructure and high costs.
- Denmark praised for renewable energy progress but clean energy still not easy or accessible for all.
- Support for subsidies on solar panels, district heating and community energy, stressing access for renters and low-income households, not just owners.

AI & environmental impact

- Some participants noted AI's significant energy and water use, especially data centres running continuously.
- Call for transparency on environmental costs of digital services (social media, streaming, AI).
- Urge for sustainability in tech innovation, warning that unchecked digital growth could undermine green transitions.

Local events

*Together with
future generations*



The Italian local event, hosted by Cantiere Giovani in Prato on 27 June 2025, gathered around 50 participants from across Italy. The workshop explored the four Voices for Choices themes: **sustainability, economy, security**, and **democracy**, through inclusive and participatory group discussions.

The aim was to:

- Encourage open dialogue on complex European issues.
- Reflect critically on institutions and active citizenship.
- Generate concrete proposals for policymakers.

Participants began by sharing hopes and concerns about Europe's future, choosing single words to define their vision. Common themes included mistrust in institutions, economic insecurity, and a call for genuine inclusion and simplified bureaucracy.

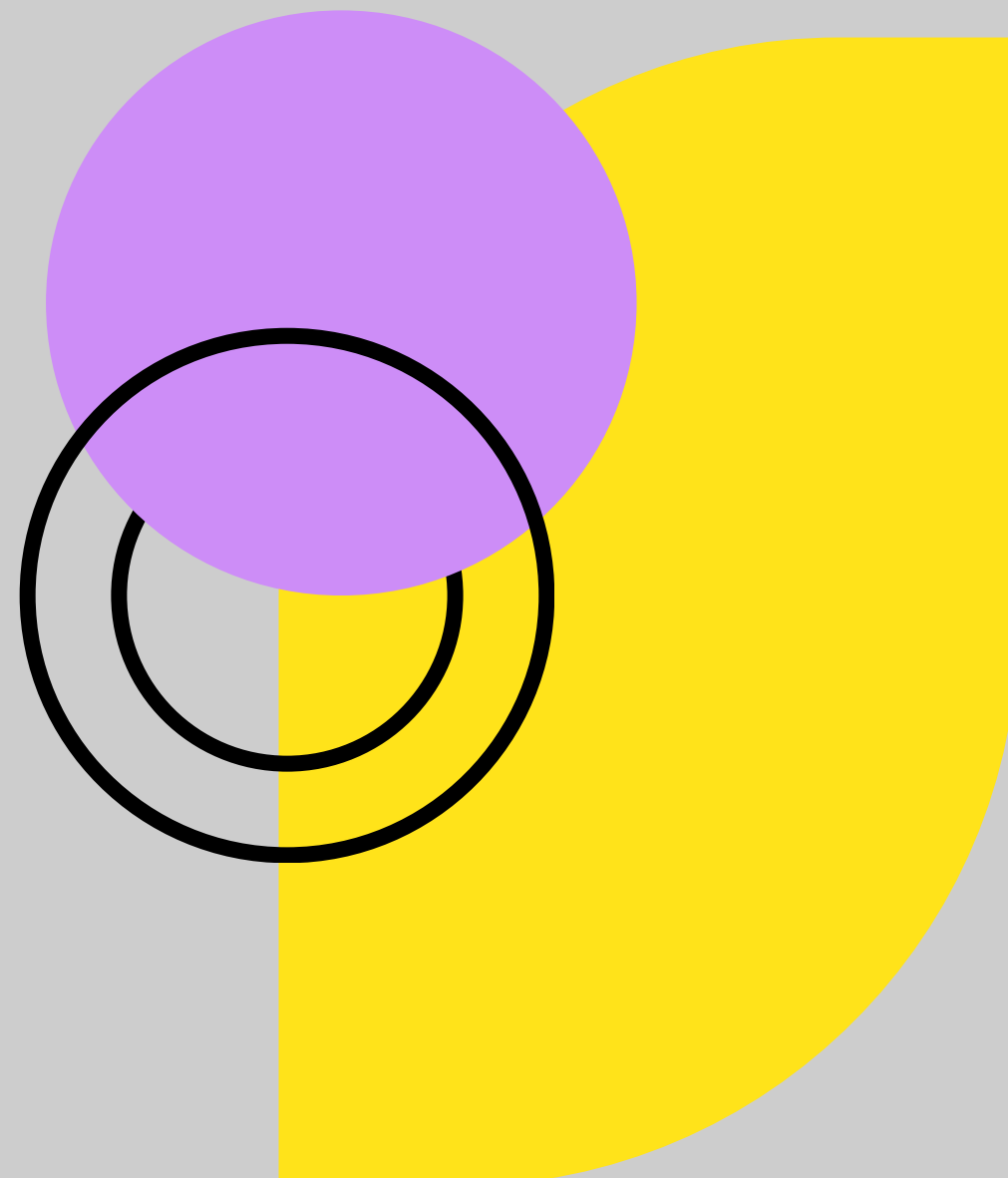
Each group addressed guided questions for their theme, sharing personal stories and proposing actionable ideas. A standout contribution was a visual metaphor: a large umbrella uniting all four themes, symbolising the need for integrated policies to protect rights and meet diverse needs.

Participants voiced a mix of disillusionment and determination. Economic precarity, digital risks, lack of institutional trust, and the need for respectful democratic dialogue were central concerns. At the same time, youth expressed readiness to shape change - if given meaningful channels.

Top 3 takeaways



Conclusions



Across all discussions – security, the economy, climate and democracy – young Danes expressed a blend of scepticism, urgency, and hope. They are concerned about growing inequality, climate inaction, broken political promises and the erosion of trust. But they are also deeply committed to democratic ideals and the possibility of change.

They see themselves not just as future voters, but as co-creators of European democracy today. Their calls are clear: more transparency, stronger accountability and real opportunities for participation – not just consultation. They want institutions that deliver on their promises and are open to shared responsibility. Whether addressing misinformation, housing crises, the green transition or AI governance, young people are ready to lead – not later, but now. What they ask for is not a voice alone, but a seat at the table, and a future that reflects their values and vision.

Grounded in lived experience and shaped by forward-looking aspirations, *Voices for Choices* offers policymakers timely, evidence-based insights – arriving at a pivotal moment as the EU prepares its next **Multiannual Financial Framework**. The message is clear: the future of Europe must be shaped **with** young people, not merely **for** them.

By integrating these findings into Friends of Europe's broader citizen engagement work in Brussels, we aim to inform EU-wide approaches that promote **intergenerational equity**, reinforce **democratic legitimacy** and safeguard **long-term prosperity**. In this way, the perspectives of Denmark's youth can contribute not only to shaping national priorities, but also to advancing inclusive and sustainable strategies across Europe.