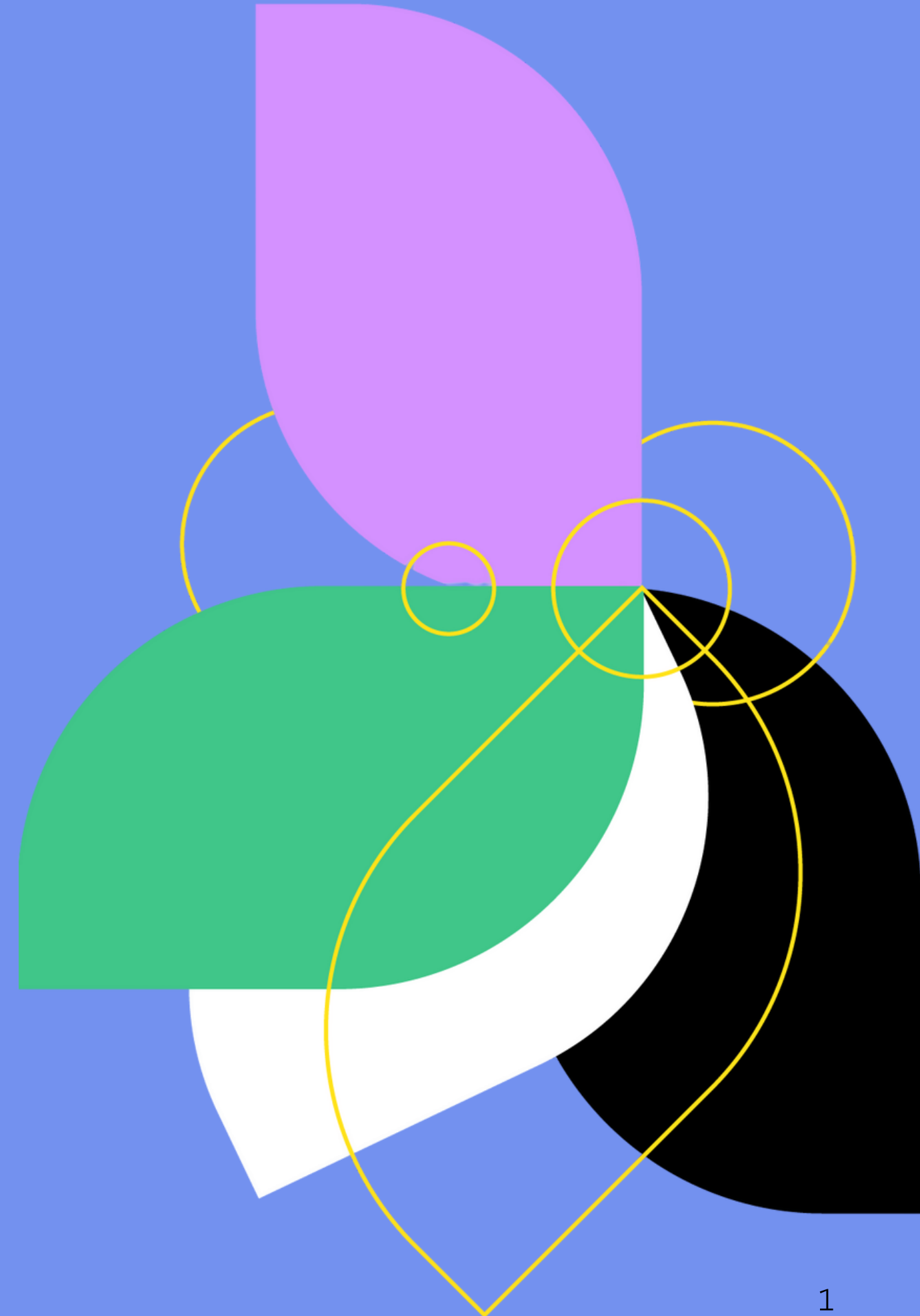


Voices for choices

Data for decisions
that matter

2025 country report — **France**



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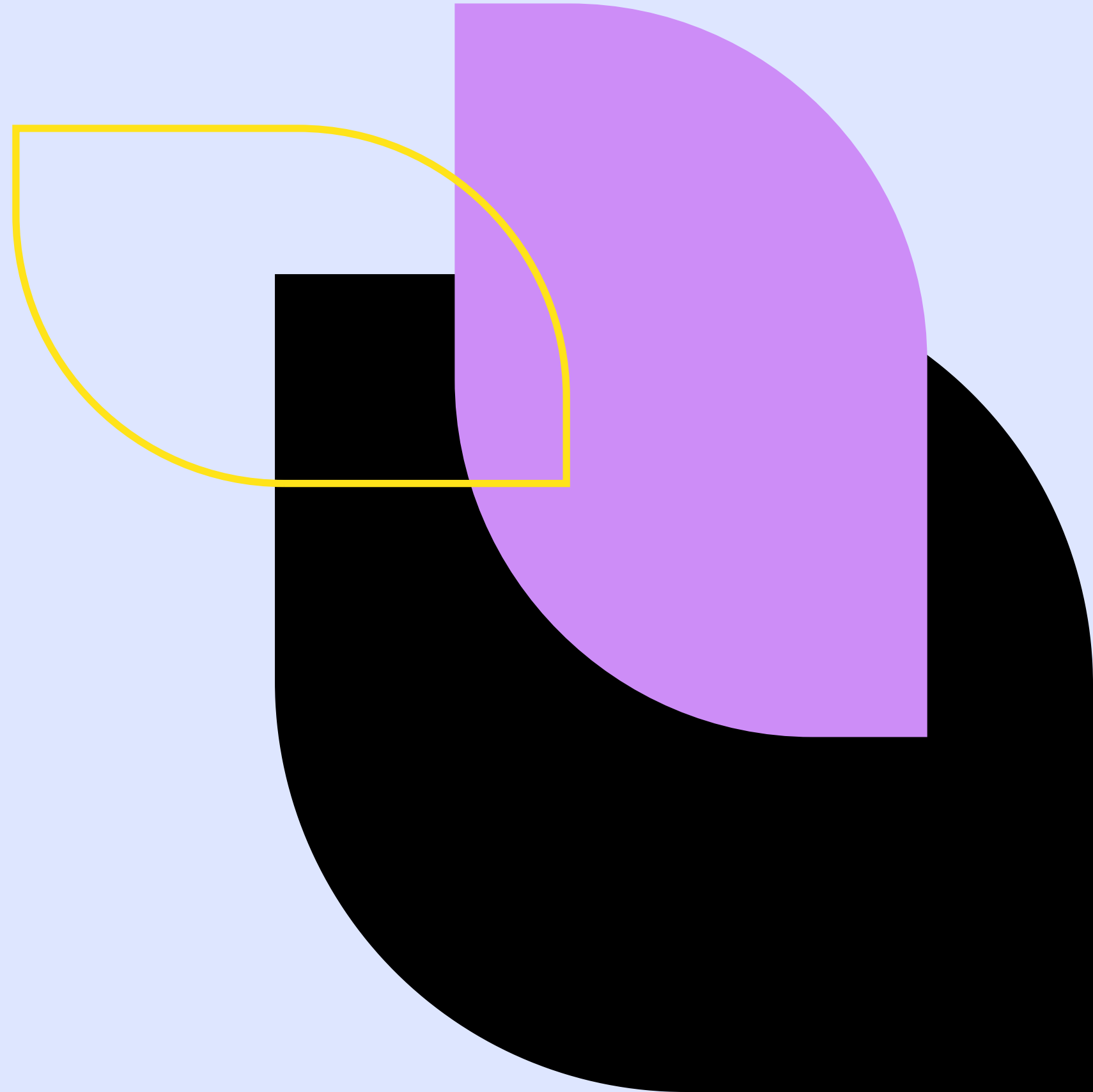
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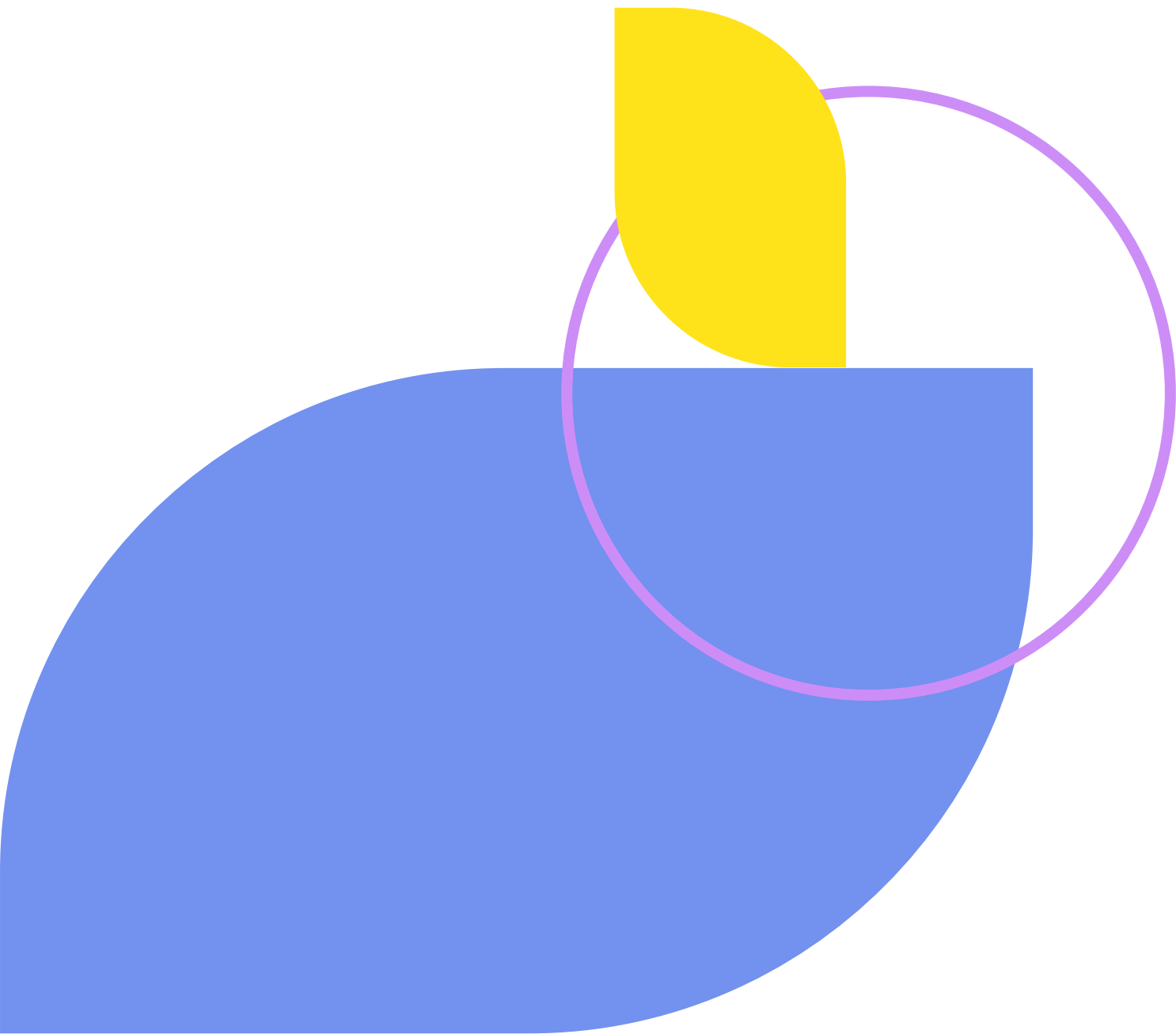
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Introduction



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 French country report presents the national findings of **Voices for Choices**, a citizen engagement project (autumn 2024-summer 2025) that involved over **2,000 young people (aged 18–35)** across five EU countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Poland. In total, 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 French 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 France and strengthen democratic participation in practice.

Young French think that...*



POLARISATION & DEMOCRACY

- 83%** France is **polarised**
- 84%** **Politicians** are **responsible** for polarisation
- 73%** Better **education** is the best solution to **overcome polarisation**
- 75%** **Experts** are the **most trusted source** of information
- 68%** **Referendum** is their favourite form of democratic engagement

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

- 27%** AI does not contribute to polarisation
- 75%** AI-generated content has not affected their political opinions

49%

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

79%

Their **government** will **not protect** them in hard times

84%

Governments should **invest more** in **affordable housing**

38%

They feel **prepared** to **handle** the green transition

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

57%

Governments should use technology to create jobs

40%

AI will not provide more opportunities to improve living standards for all

EQUITY & PROSPERITY



SECURITY & RESILIENCE

57%

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

47%

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

55%

Ukraine should join the **EU**

81%

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

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

60%

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

55%

AI can help guarantee online safety

76%

Environment-friendly options are **too expensive**

78%

The **EU** should coordinate the **economic efforts** among its 27 countries

79%

Expect businesses to work with governments to **ensure transparency**

74%

Governments should **penalise businesses** which don't reduce their environmental impact

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

30%

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

CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY





Focus groups

Young French from *Voices for Choices* express a **deep sense of urgency and frustration** across the key themes of sustainability, economy, democracy and security. While their perspectives vary, several cross-cutting trends emerge: a demand for **systemic change**, a loss of trust in institutions, a call for **stronger social protections** and **concerns about the role of technology** in shaping their future.

Systemic change & coherence

- Youth demand long-term, inclusive policymaking.
- Reject fragmented, short-term solutions and greenwashing.
- Call for policy consistency across sustainability, economy, democracy and security.
- Emphasise redistribution over growth and inclusive civic participation.

Socio-economic justice

- Struggle with financial instability, housing and education costs.
- Support universal income, affordable housing and free youth services.
- Demand fair wages, strong corporate regulation and social protections.
- Link economic insecurity to political radicalisation and unrest.

Distrust in institutions

- Feel unheard by governments and corporations.
- Frustrated by broken political promises and lack of transparency.
- View voting as ineffective without structural reform.
- Question Europe's reliance on NATO and opaque defence policies.



Digitalisation & AI

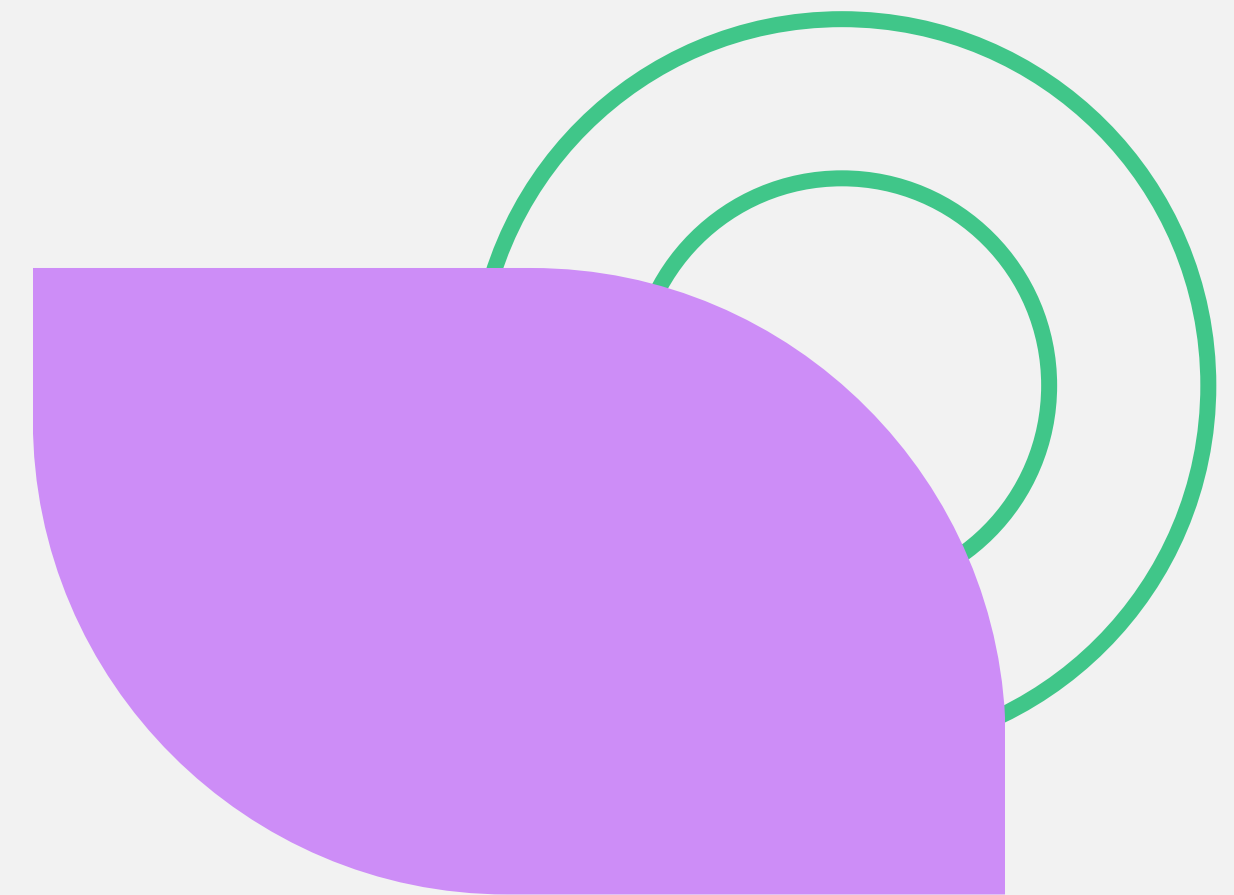
- See AI as both opportunity and risk.
- Worry about job loss, disinformation, surveillance and algorithmic bias.
- Demand strict regulation and public accountability.
- Support ethical use of digital tools to promote equity.

Youth participation & local power

- Push for deeper civic engagement beyond voting.
- Advocate for decision-making power at local and regional levels.
- Oppose technocratic and corporate control over public policy.

Security & societal safety

- Redefine security to include economic, gender-based and climate risks.
- Call for transparent, ethical defence and cybersecurity policies.
- Emphasise youth voices in shaping geopolitical and domestic safety strategies.



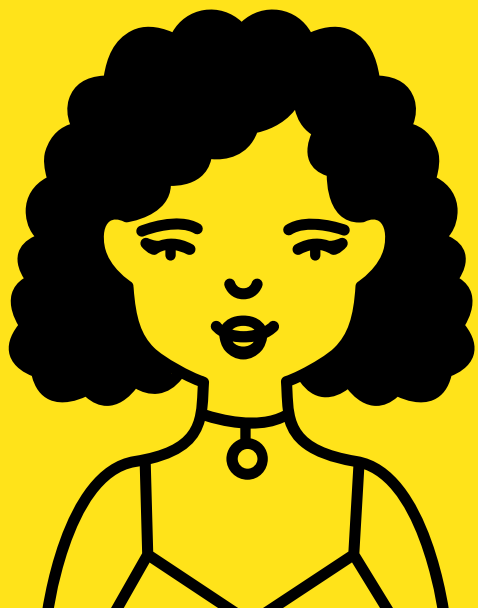


Democracy

Young French see democracy as a system in need of reinvention. They believe that education, civic engagement and responsible media regulation are essential to restoring trust and bridging divisions.

I diversify my sources of information. But sometimes, it just becomes too much, and in the end, I can't keep up with everything.

Fitia, 18-24



Polarisation & democratic fragility

- Young French citizens feel democracy is increasingly fragile, shaped by polarisation, distrust and limited inclusion in decision-making.

"We no longer say 'I don't know'; there's no time to think – we're expected to have an opinion on everything," regrets Sacha, M, 31–35.

- Many link polarisation to political extremes, media sensationalism and social media pressure.
- Some say debates are reduced to rigid binaries, harming friendships and public discourse.

Distrust in institutions & media

- Distrust in institutions is widespread. Young people feel disconnected from elected officials and question whether their voices matter.

"We live in a society that has become increasingly individualistic, with less emphasis on collective decision-making. The fact that the term 'citizen participation' is back in fashion is more frustrating than anything else because, so far, the initiatives being implemented do not really meet citizens' expectations. When we think about the Climate Convention, it seemed to have gone very well, but in the end, only 10% of what citizens proposed was actually taken into account." – Anaëlle, F, 25–30.

- Many distrust traditional media, turning instead to independent journalism, international sources and experts.

"I diversify my sources of information. But sometimes, it just becomes too much, and in the end, I can't keep up with everything." – Fitia, 18–24.



In Europe, they successfully legislated on GDPR, and I believe we will manage to regulate AI as well. However, what worries me is that technology is evolving much faster than we can legislate. By the time we fully understand it, AI will have already changed, meaning we will always be one step behind. That's what concerns me – the risk of not being able to control it.

Eléonore, F, 31-35

Dialogue & political engagement

- Political discussions mostly happen within like-minded groups. Many avoid conversations with those using stereotypes or racist arguments.
- Participants suggest promoting a culture where respectful disagreement is encouraged.
- Civic education is seen as insufficient. Youth call for schools to include media literacy, critical thinking and deep dives into governance to foster informed engagement.

Local action & youth involvement

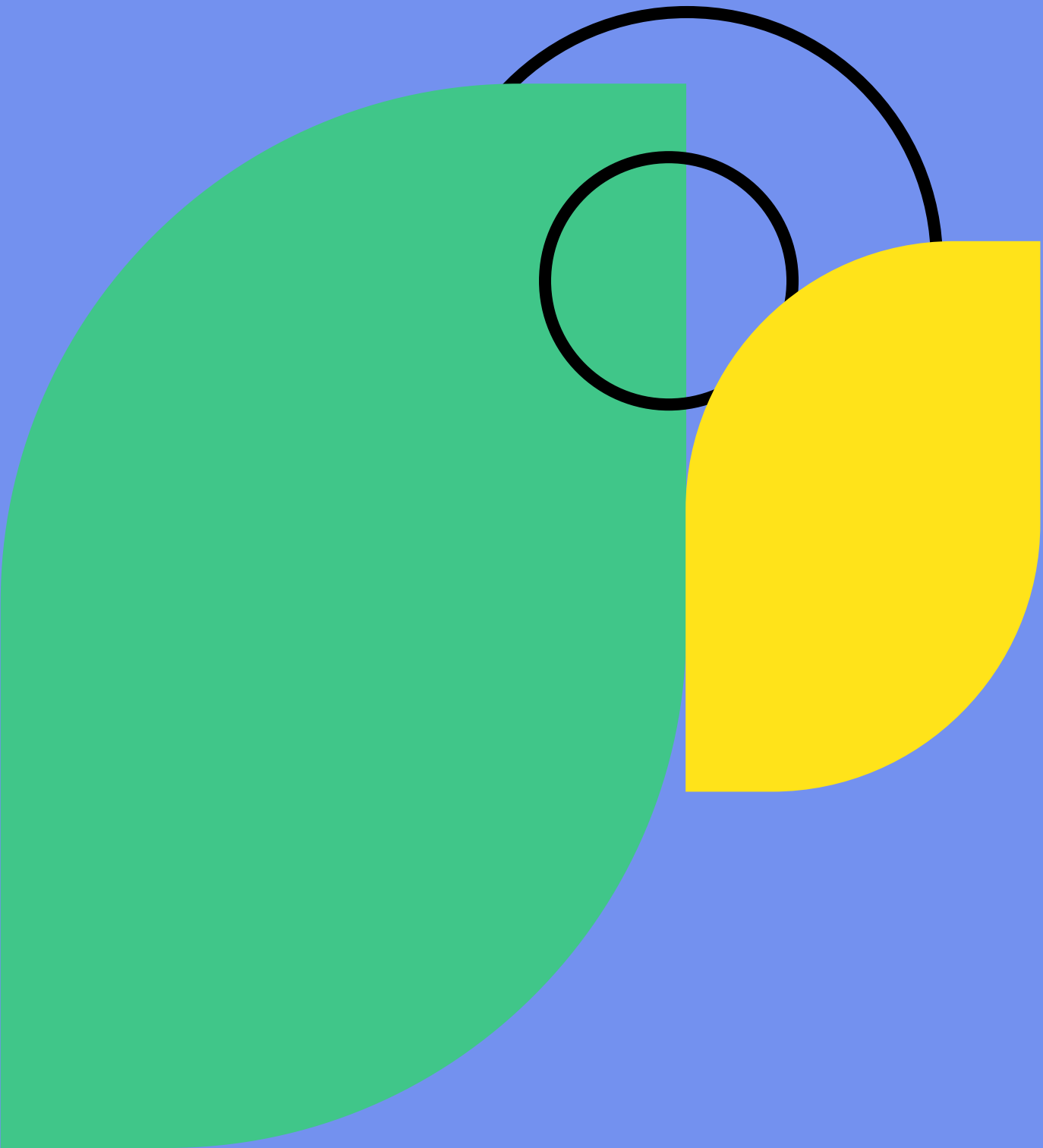
- Many engage in youth councils, local initiatives and grassroots movements, which help them feel more included.
- They advocate for expanding such opportunities in schools and institutions.
- Informal discussion spaces, online and offline, are viewed as vital for making democracy more accessible.

Technology, AI & democracy

- AI and digitalisation are viewed more as risks than opportunities. Concerns include bias, deepfakes, disinformation and AI's influence on public opinion.

"In Europe, they successfully legislated on GDPR, and I believe we will manage to regulate AI as well. However, what worries me is that technology is evolving much faster than we can legislate. By the time we fully understand it, ask the right questions, and bring lawmakers together, AI will have already changed, meaning we will always be one step behind. That's what concerns me – the risk of not being able to control it. But my dream is for AI to ease our workload so that we have more time to enjoy our leisure activities." – Eléonore, F, 31-35.

- Many express scepticism toward the role of large tech companies in shaping democracy.
- Youth call for stronger regulation and independent oversight of AI, media ownership and content distribution.



Security

Young French emphasise that security is about more than just military strength. They call for a holistic approach that integrates defence policy with economic stability, democratic resilience and climate action. For them, European security is not just about protecting borders – it is about ensuring a just, stable and sustainable future for all citizens, with particular attention to the safety of vulnerable groups.

To have a European army, maybe we would first need articles and a European Constitution to define how it would function.

Justine, F, 18–24



European defence & sovereignty

- Young French citizens support stronger European defence coordination but remain divided on a fully integrated EU army.
- Many favour a dual approach, combining national armies with European cooperation.

"To have a European army, maybe we would first need articles and a European Constitution to define how it would function," – Justine, F, 18–24.

- NATO is viewed as essential but problematic due to dependence on the US amid political instability.

AI in security

- AI is viewed with scepticism, especially in military use.
- Ethical concerns include autonomous weapons, bias and loss of democratic oversight.
- Participants warn of surveillance risks and AI serving private, not public, interests.

Cybersecurity, disinformation & digital regulation

- Russian influence and weak European digital infrastructure are seen as serious security threats.
- Participants call for EU-level media regulation, transparency in digital platforms and public tech investment.
- Proposals include fact-checking during televised debates and stronger oversight of social media platforms.
- Concerns grow as US-based platforms scale back fact-checking efforts.



The police need to be trained to handle certain types of insecurity that are still poorly addressed today. So many of my [female] friends have told me that they filed complaints about sexual assaults... but the police are not trained for this at all.

Nathan, M, 18–24

Broadening the concept of security

- Security is seen as extending beyond defence to include economic stability, social protections and climate risks.
- Climate threats are viewed as political challenges, not just technical ones.

"We are offered technological solutionism [...] while sidelining all solutions related to sobriety, lifestyle adaptation, and resilience. [...] The real solution that must be applied everywhere is to repoliticise certain issues, particularly that of technology. Prioritising technology is a political choice – it serves specific interests and responds to the demands of industrial lobbies, while in reality, technology has enormous ecological impacts." – Alexandre, M, 18–24.

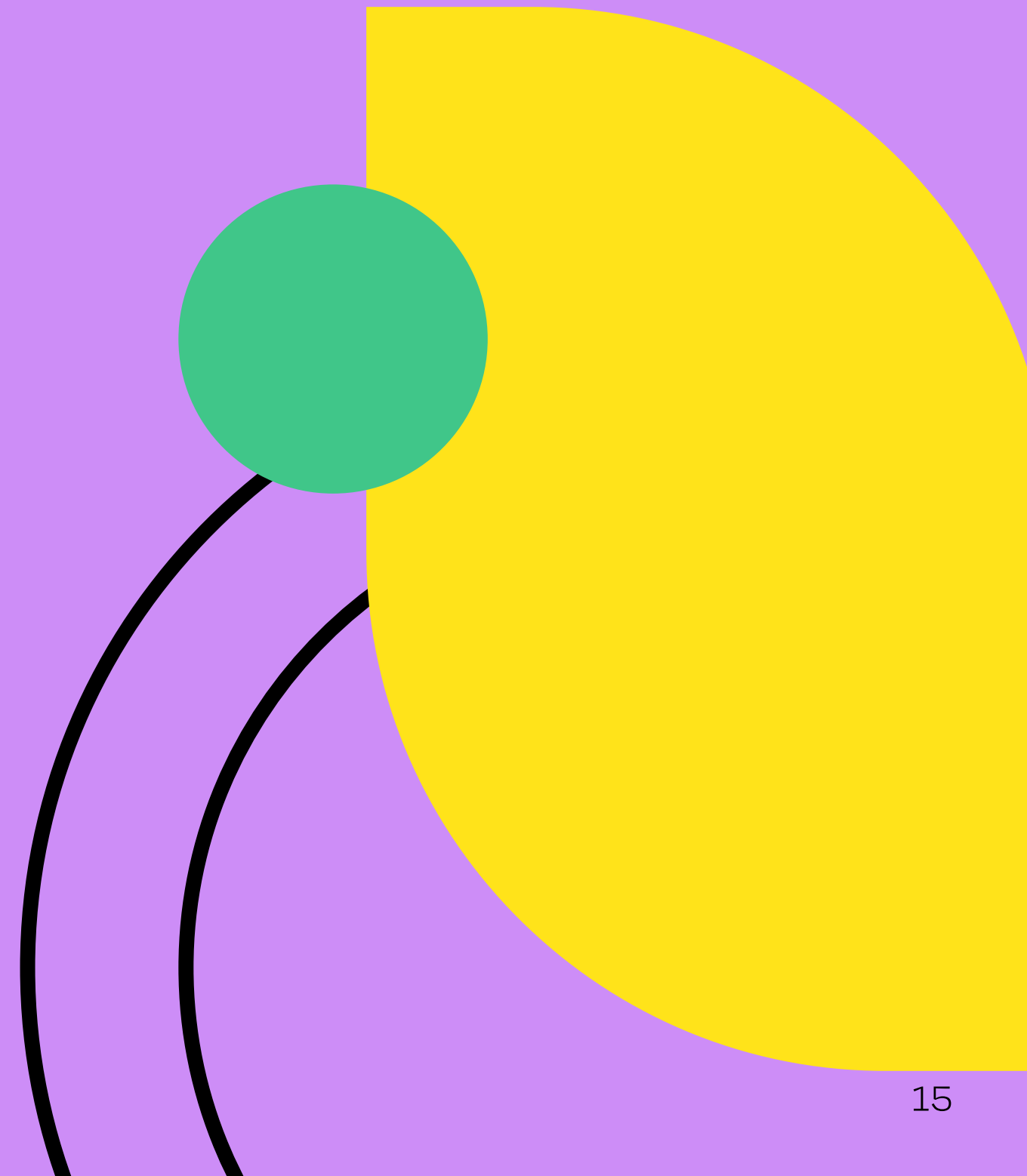
Gender-based violence & safety

- Violence against women is highlighted as a critical security issue.

"The police need to be trained to handle certain types of insecurity that are still poorly addressed today. So many of my [female] friends have told me that they filed complaints about sexual assaults... but the police are not trained for this at all. There is a high chance that victims will find themselves in front of officers who don't know how to respond or who downplay what they have experienced." – Nathan, M, 18–24.

Economy

Young French advocate for an economy that prioritises social well-being over profit, emphasises transparency and actively involves youth in decision-making. For them, the economic future should be shaped by policies that address inequality, protect workers' rights and ensure a just transition toward a more sustainable system.





It must be recognised that the struggles of young people are societal struggles. Today, we tend to dismiss them. When there are general assemblies of companies, there are often protests that are discredited, and I think the future will show that these were necessary struggles that are not valued today. But they tell young people, 'Yes, but you'll see when you grow up.'

Gabriel, M, 18–24

Financial insecurity & social protections

- Young people feel trapped in cycles of financial instability, especially students from low-income backgrounds, rural areas and outermost regions.
- Education, housing and food access are seen as basic rights, not privileges.
- Many advocate for universal income, affordable housing, free youth services and investment in well-being, not just survival.
- General agreement that the 'quality of life should' not just cover basic survival but also include the ability to pursue passions, spend time with one's family, have the time to take care of oneself, etc.

Distrust in institutions & lack of representation

- National governments are widely seen as disconnected and inconsistent.
- While some trust the EU more, there's still concern about unclear and incoherent economic policies.
- Youth want direct involvement in policymaking – through councils, grassroots initiatives and institutional outreach.

"It must be recognised that the struggles of young people are societal struggles. Today, we tend to dismiss them. When there are general assemblies of companies, there are often protests that are discredited, and I think the future will show that these were necessary struggles that are not valued today. But they tell young people, 'Yes, but you'll see when you grow up.'" – Gabriel, M, 18–24.

- Institutions should reach out to young people, rather than expecting them to always take initiative.



We're led to believe that there's only one possible system, there's only one way for the economy to work because they don't explain how it works, so you can't say to yourself 'ah well, maybe we could do things differently.'

Manon, F, 25–30

Economic communication & education

- Economic discourse is often seen as complex and exclusionary.
- Many call for clearer, more accessible explanations of policies and systems.

"There are plenty of people who don't understand the vocabulary used to talk about these issues. When politicians talk, it's always with convoluted words, it doesn't speak enough to the people, it should be able to speak to everyone and we should also be able to popularise these subjects so that they are accessible to everyone." – Solène-Agnès, F, 18–24.

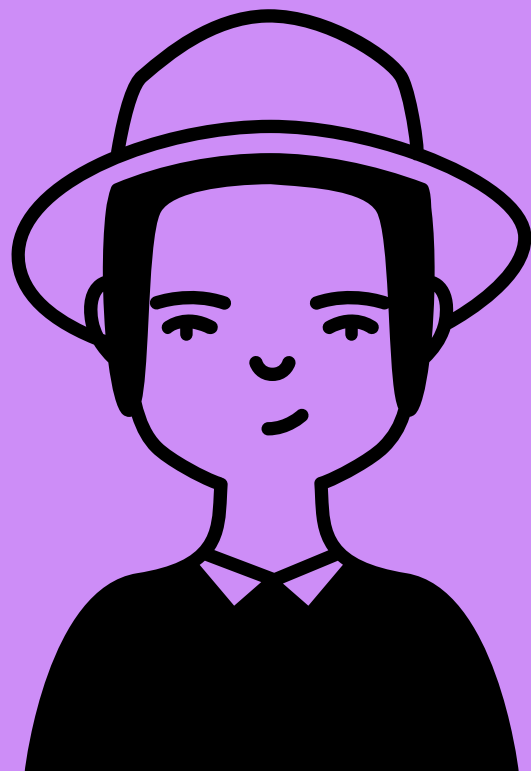
Questioning growth & market-driven models

- Many challenge the focus on economic growth, instead advocating for redistribution, sustainability and regulation.
- There's support for stricter rules on corporate responsibility, fair wages and ethical practices.

"We're led to believe that there's only one possible system, there's only one way for the economy to work because they don't explain how it works, so you can't say to yourself 'ah well, maybe we could do things differently.'" – Manon, F, 25–30.

We hear a lot about green jobs, but it's hard to find them, and some are very badly paid.

Seyba, M, 20–30



Green and digital transitions

- Young people feel unprepared for green jobs, citing unclear pathways and poor conditions.

"We hear a lot about green jobs, but it's hard to find them, and some are very badly paid." – Seyba, M, 20–30.

- Many see the digital transition as disproportionately benefiting corporations, with AI and automation threatening job security.
- They call for AI regulation and European tech independence through public digital infrastructure.

Economic sovereignty & global responsibility

- Some support "Made in Europe" policies to uphold labour and environmental standards, but caution against nationalistic rhetoric.
- Participants stress the importance of global cooperation, supply chain transparency and ensuring that European values extend beyond borders.



Sustainability

Young French envision sustainability not as a side objective, but as a central principle shaping all policy decisions. They call for systemic changes that prioritise intergenerational justice, resource conservation and equitable access over growth-driven or market-based approaches. For them, true climate action must be coherent, enforceable and deeply rooted in social justice, with clear public investment, corporate accountability and meaningful citizen involvement at every level.

We can very well imagine an environmental policy being designed by either the local, regional or national authorities – it doesn't matter. But there must be coherence, it needs to be explained and justified. Without justification, part of the population, those directly affected, will feel either a sense of imbalance or injustice. And in our contemporary society, this feeling prevents collective action.

Alexandre, M, 31–35

Redefining sustainability

- Young French citizens reject growth-driven models of 'sustainable development', advocating instead for resource conservation and intergenerational equity.
- Sustainability is seen as a core principle, not an add-on.
- Calls for systemic change focus on long-term viability, reduced consumption and social justice.

Corporate accountability & greenwashing

- Strong support for strict regulation and enforcement at the EU level.
- Proposals include advertising bans, market restrictions and independent audits for companies violating sustainability standards.
- Greenwashing is viewed as a major threat to public trust and climate progress.

Public policy & redistribution

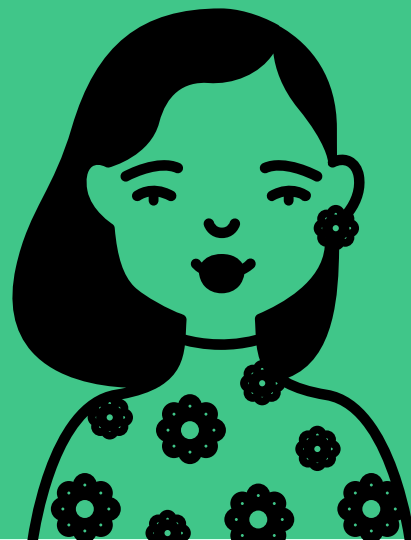
- Emphasis on coherent, well-justified policies to avoid public mistrust.

"We can very well imagine an environmental policy being designed by either the local, regional or national authorities – it doesn't matter. But there must be coherence, it needs to be explained and justified. Without justification, part of the population, those directly affected, will feel either a sense of imbalance or injustice. And in our contemporary society, this feeling prevents collective action." – Alexandre, M, 31–35.

- Participants favour resource redistribution, investment in public transport and subsidies for eco-friendly options, especially in rural areas.

Who is investing in AI? Right now, it's wealthy white men who don't necessarily have sustainability at heart. I think that raises some questions as well. The government has just announced €109 billion in investments for AI. If that money were allocated to the ecological transition instead, the impact would be direct.

Lola, F, 31-35



Energy transition

- Broad consensus on phasing out fossil fuels, with nuclear energy accepted as a temporary necessity.
- Renewables are the long-term goal, though challenges like storage and infrastructure were noted.

Cost, access and daily life

- Sustainability must be affordable and practical.
- Proposals include adjusted work hours, eco-subsidies and a social food security system to support local, sustainable diets.
- Climate policy must integrate economic justice and accessibility.

Education for sustainability

- Participants call for climate education that explains ecological impacts and promotes informed consumer choices.
- Schools should embed sustainability deeply, beyond surface-level awareness.

Digitalisation & AI

- Participants are sceptical of AI's climate benefits, citing energy use and corporate control.

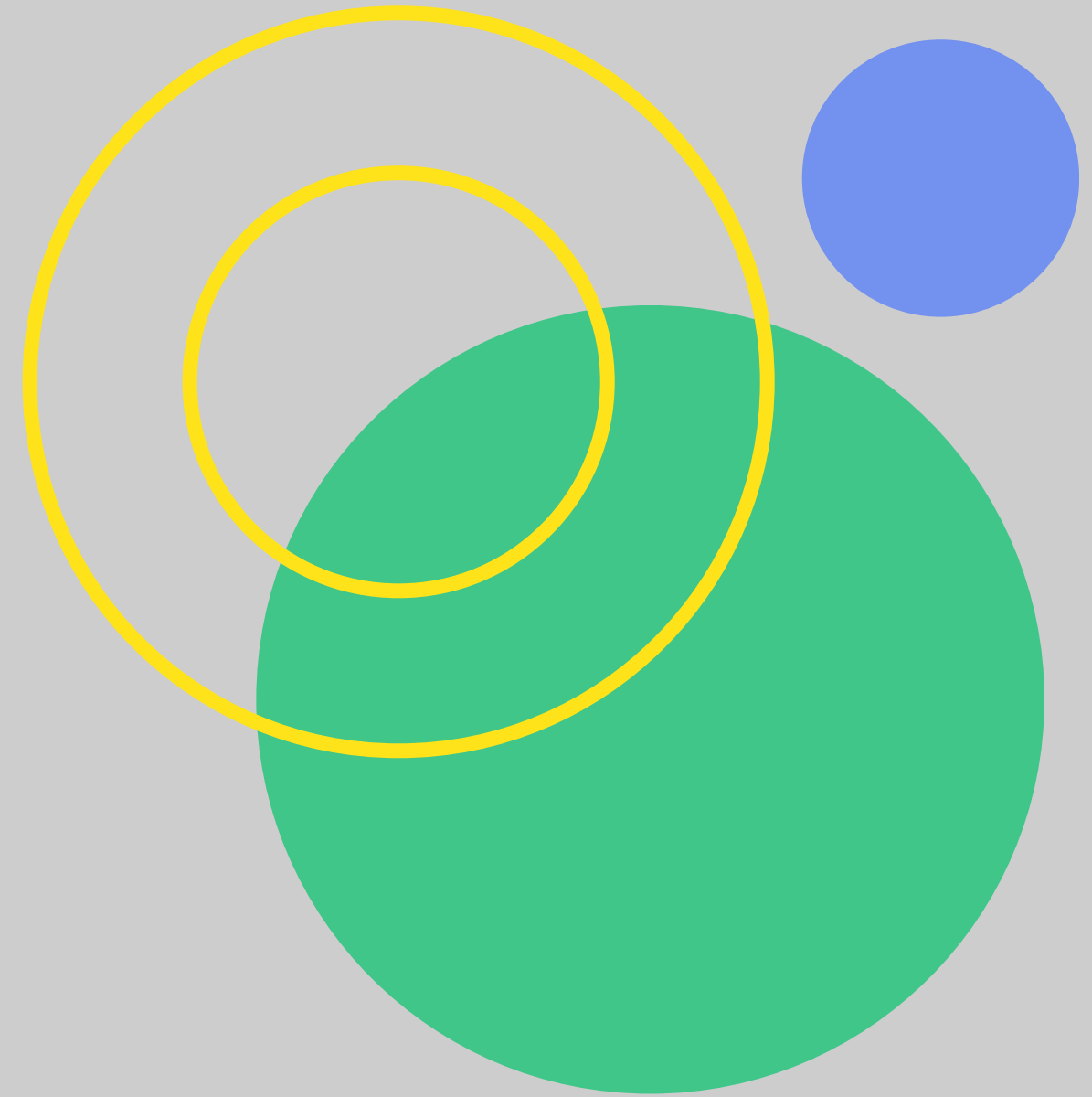
"Who is investing in AI? Right now, it's wealthy white men who don't necessarily have sustainability at heart. I think that raises some questions as well. The government has just announced €109 billion in investments for AI. If that money were allocated to the ecological transition instead, the impact would be direct." - Lola, F, 31-35

"But instead they reduced its budget from €23 to 21 billion this year," noted another participant.

- Calls for regulation of big tech and prioritisation of climate-focused investments.

Local event

*Polarisation, disinformation,
trust: do young French
people think like other young
Europeans?*



The French local event was hosted by Décider Ensemble during Les Rencontres Européens de la Participation in Strasbourg on 19 March 2025. It gathered around 60 participants and mostly covered democracy matters.

The aims were to:

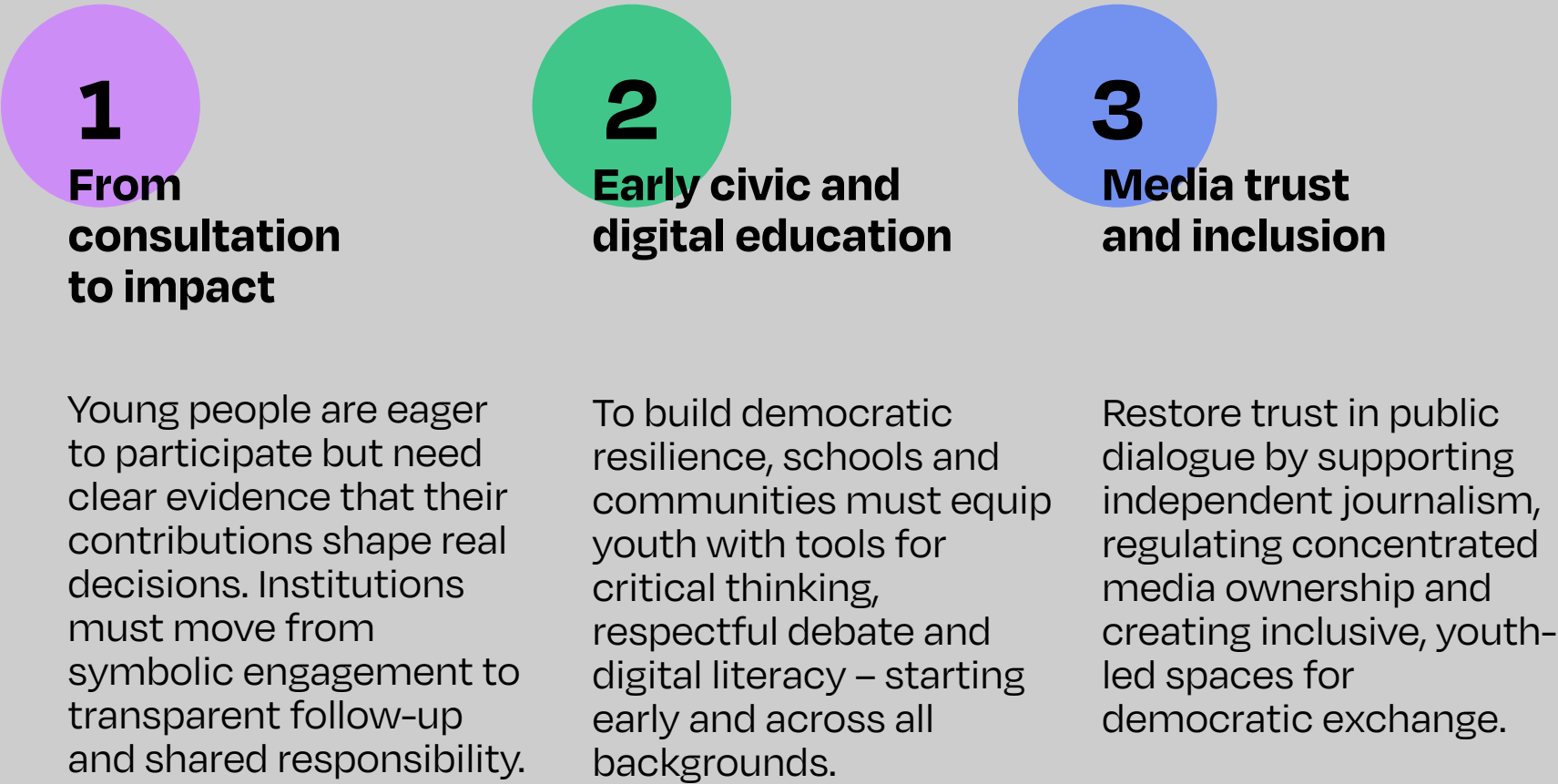
- Encourage open dialogue on multifaceted democracy challenges;
- Reflect critically on institutional roles and citizen engagement; and
- Generate actionable ideas for policymakers.

Participants began by reflecting on their personal experiences of citizenship, highlighting feelings of political disillusionment, mistrust in institutions and frustration when civic efforts fail to translate into real change. The conversation unfolded across three key areas: **meaningful youth participation** in public life, the role of **civic education**, and **trust in media and information** systems.

Key themes included the need to move beyond symbolic consultation towards shared decision-making; strengthening civic education to foster critical thinking, democratic debate and digital literacy; and ensuring access to independent, pluralistic media. Initiatives like Cité des Chances were praised for enabling practical citizenship through training in lawmaking and public speaking.

Throughout, **the role of young people was seen as central** – not only as future voters, but as active partners in renewing democracy and reclaiming public dialogue. Participants voiced frustration but also commitment, expressing readiness to engage if given real influence and accessible channels.

Top 3 takeaways



Conclusions



Young people in France are deeply engaged with the challenges facing their country, but they demand a shift from fragmented, short-term solutions to **systemic, inclusive policymaking**. They call for **stronger regulations** on corporations, greater political **transparency** and economic policies that prioritise well-being over profit. Above all, they seek a future where sustainability, democracy, security and economic justice are not treated as separate issues but as interconnected pillars of a just society.

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 Italy's youth can contribute not only to shaping national priorities, but also to advancing inclusive and sustainable strategies across Europe.