

Voices for choices

Data for decisions
that matter

2025 country report — **Italy**



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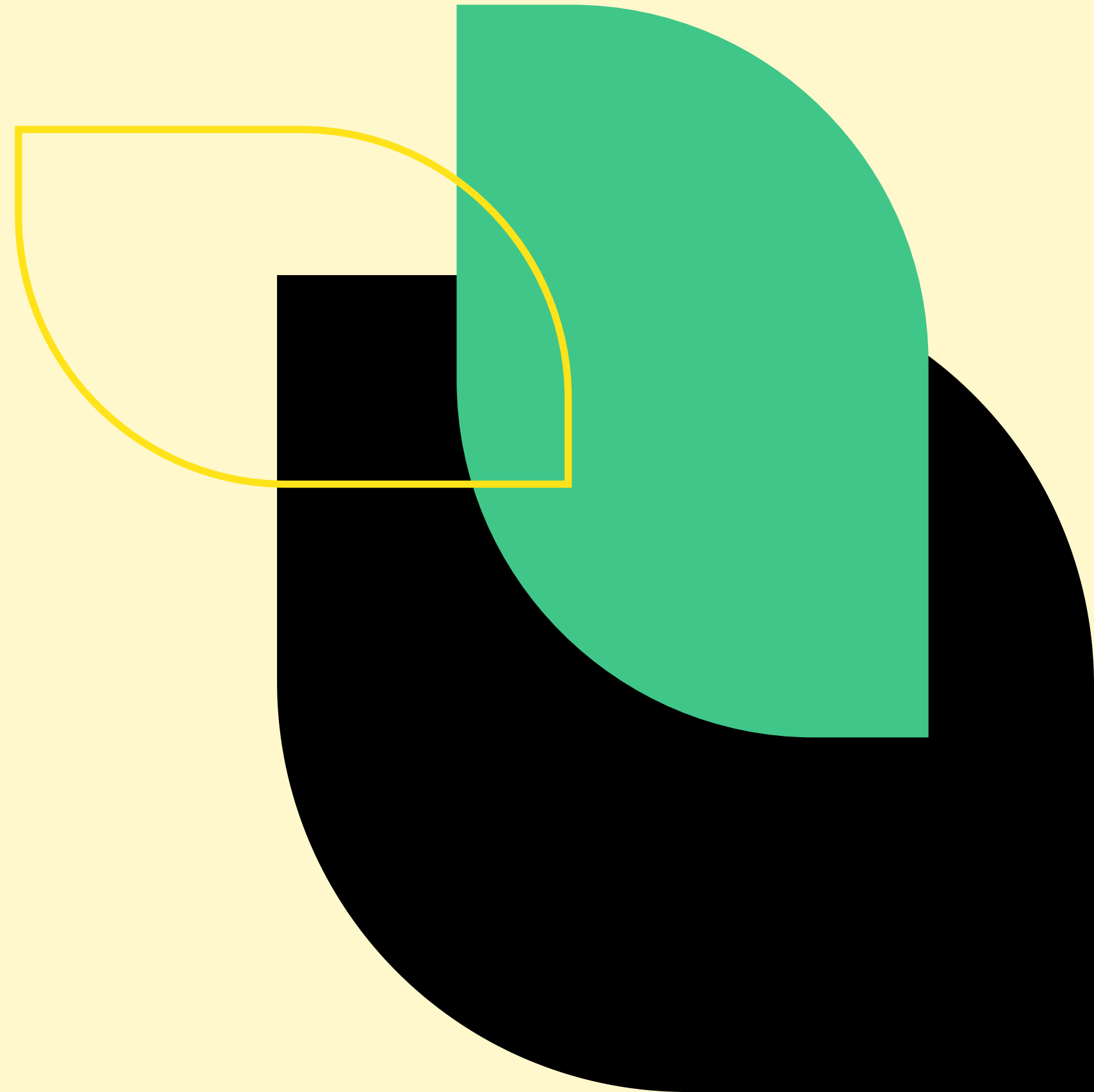
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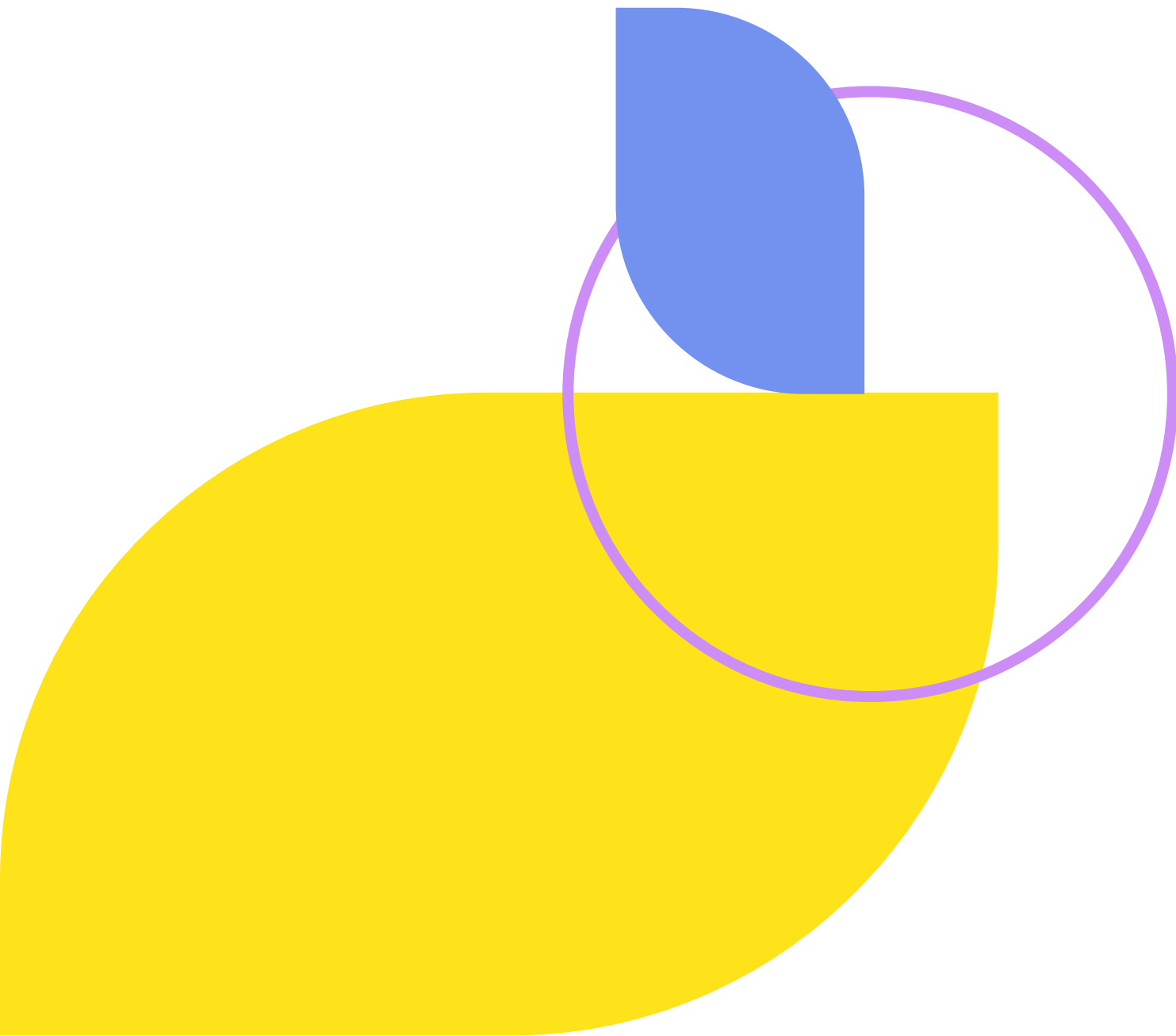
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Introduction

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 Italian 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 Italians 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 Italy and strengthen democratic participation in practice.

Young Italians think that...*



POLARISATION & DEMOCRACY

- 59% Italy is polarised
- 81% Politicians are responsible for polarisation
- 79% Better education is the best solution to overcome polarisation
- 76% Experts are the most trusted source of information
- 68% Referendum is their favourite form of democratic engagement

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

- 44% AI contributes to polarisation
- 74% AI-generated content has not affected their political opinions

55%

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

83%

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

86%

Governments should **invest more in affordable housing**

47%

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

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

77%

Governments should use technology to create jobs

34%

AI will provide more opportunities to improve living standards for all

EQUITY & PROSPERITY



SECURITY & RESILIENCE

59%

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

52%

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

66%

Ukraine should join the **EU**

83%

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

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

62%

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

63%

AI can help guarantee online safety

82%

Environment-friendly options are **too expensive**

81%

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

67%

Investments in fossil fuels should be **stopped**

77%

Governments should work more closely with **businesses to reduce their impact** on the environment

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

32%

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

CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY



*Source: 'Voices for Choices - Data for decisions that matter' survey report



Focus groups

Young Italians from *Voices for Choices* express a **strong sense of urgency across the themes** of sustainability, economy, democracy and security, yet this is accompanied by **deep scepticism about institutional will and capacity to deliver** meaningful change. While their perspectives vary, several cross-cutting trends emerge: a call for **inclusion and fairness**, frustration with empty gestures, **concern over disinformation and digitalisation**, and a demand to **connect policies more closely to everyday realities**.

Inclusion & fairness

- Youth see a gap between political talk and real life.
- Demand affordable, equitable green policies and stronger youth inclusion.
- Support wage protections and universal income.
- Call for ethical, transparent EU security policies.

Socio-economic justice

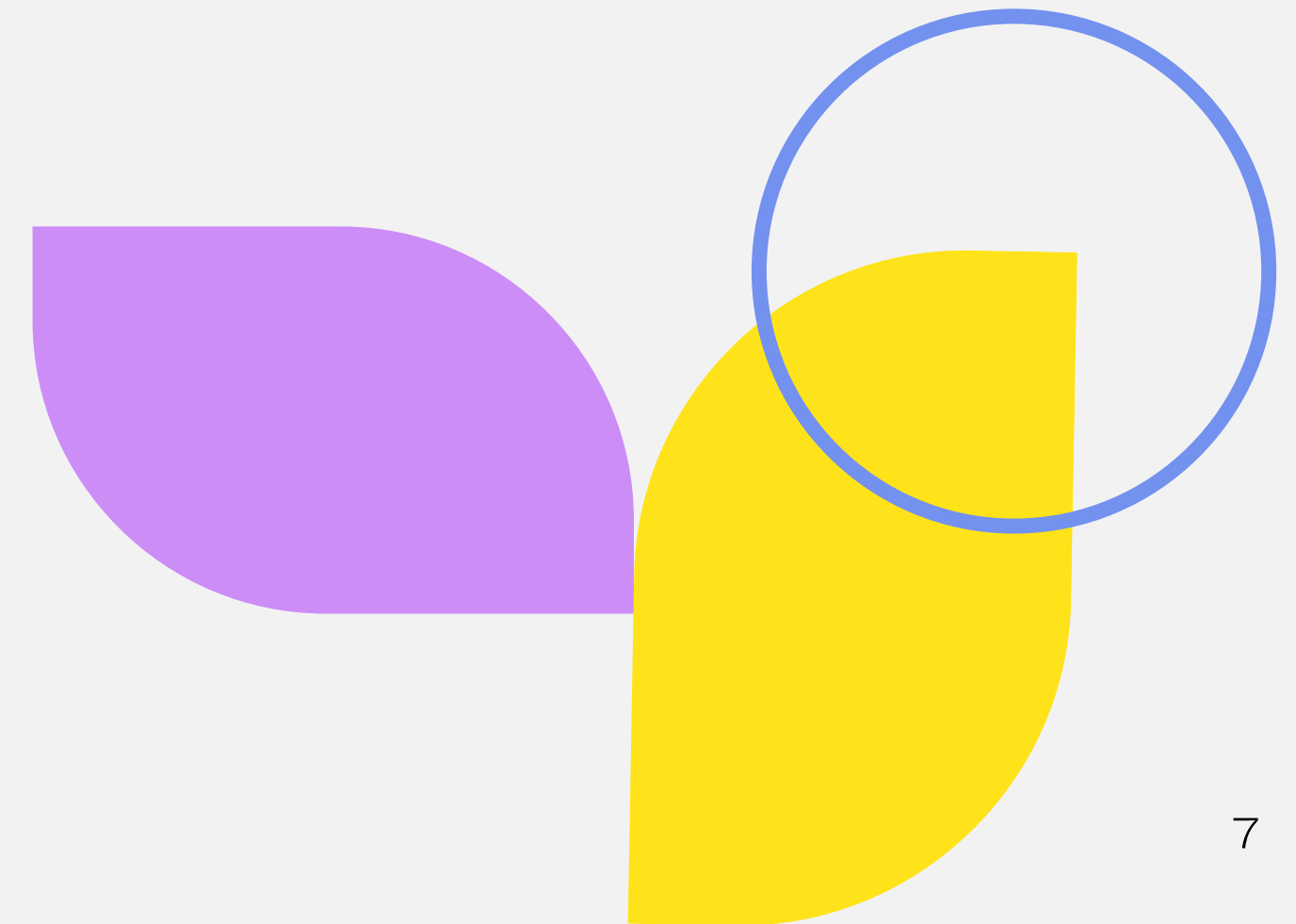
- Concern over job insecurity, high living costs and inequality.
- Call for green jobs, training and robust public services.

Distrust in institutions

- Sceptical of top-down, superficial solutions.
- Criticise focus on individual responsibility without systemic change.

Digitalisation & AI

- Cautious optimism: useful for engagement and security, but risks of misuse.
- Support regulation and digital education to ensure ethical use.





Democracy

Young Italians see democracy not as broken, but as incomplete. They advocate for reforms rooted in education, dialogue, transparency and real opportunities for youth to shape the decisions that affect them. Their insights underscore the urgent need to make democracy more accessible, responsive and resilient in the digital age.

I don't recognise this extreme polarisation in my daily life, it's not as black and white as the data suggest.

Alessandro, M, 25-30



Perception of polarisation

- Young Italians don't strongly feel polarisation in daily life.

"I don't recognise this extreme polarisation in my daily life, it's not as black and white as the data suggest." – Alessandro, M, 25-30

- Blame media sensationalism and social media algorithms for amplifying divides.

"I believe [polarisation] is more of a political and media tool than an actual divide... I think the distance in terms of topics or opinions is somewhat influenced by the examples we see." – Gianluca, M, 25-30

- Call for stronger media literacy and access to diverse and trustworthy information.

Distrust in institutions

- Youth feel excluded from politics; top-down engagement seen as superficial.
- Prefer grassroots forums like youth councils and informal dialogue spaces.
- Propose better civic education and independent media oversight.

Digitalisation & AI

- Mixed views: some see potential for inclusion, others fear manipulation.

"I can't think of a way [AI] would help me engage more or be more present. On the contrary, it takes away the very drive that pushes me to be involved in political events," said Gianluca, M, 25-30.

- Highlight gap between fast tech evolution and slow political response.
- Call for reforms to make democracy more inclusive and transparent in the digital age.

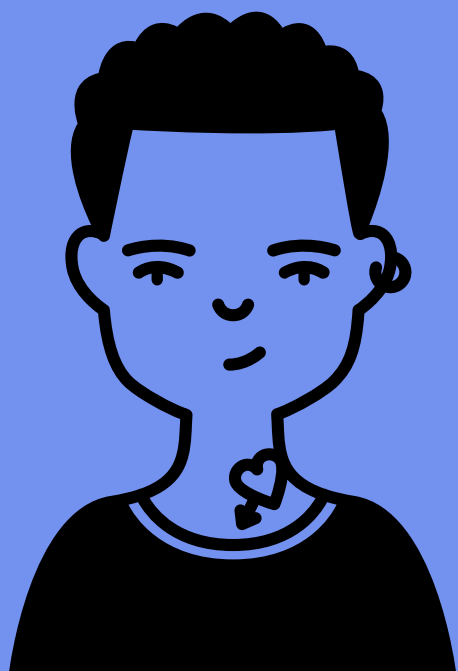


Security

For young Italians, security encompasses much more than national defence. It includes the digital realm, climate resilience, economic justice and public trust. They want the EU to take more initiative in these areas – but in ways that are democratic, transparent and rooted in solidarity. Their vision of security is deeply interwoven with values of autonomy, ethics and inclusiveness.

It could be problematic, but if we want a truly European dimension, I believe that defence is fundamental.

Francesco, M, 18–24



EU security & strategic autonomy

- Support for stronger EU role in defence but mixed on a centralised EU army.

"It could be problematic, but if we want a truly European dimension, I believe that defence is fundamental." – Francesco, M, 18–24

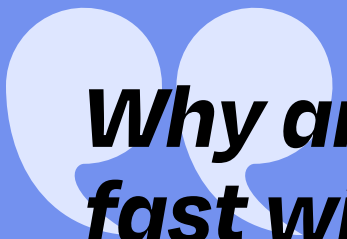
- Desire to balance national sovereignty with EU collaboration.
- NATO seen as important but concerns over US dominance.

"Leaving NATO right now is unthinkable. European countries, including Italy, must remain involved. However, it would be better if the United States, while remaining the key player in terms of budget and power, didn't always dominate the conversation." – Filippo, M, 24–30

- Preference for more self-reliant European defence.

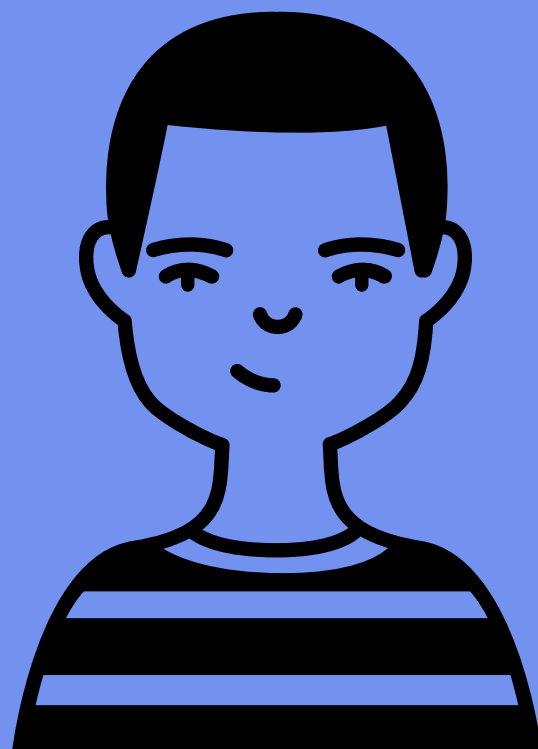
Digital security & disinformation

- Fake news, algorithmic manipulation and reliance on non-European tech seen as threats.
- Strong support for EU-led regulation, European tech autonomy and digital literacy.
- AI welcomed for threat detection, but concerns remain over military use and lack of oversight.



Why are we so fast with Ukraine and so slow with the Balkans?

Alessio, M, 24–30



EU enlargement

- Broad support for Ukraine's accession, both morally and strategically.
- Concerns about EU capacity, internal reform and risk of fragmentation.

"We cannot welcome more countries until we first fix our internal problems, like distrust in institutions or corruption." – Emma, F, 18–25

- Calls for clear criteria and anti-corruption measures.
- Questioned pace and fairness of enlargement:

"Why are we so fast with Ukraine and so slow with the Balkans?" – Alessio, M, 24–30

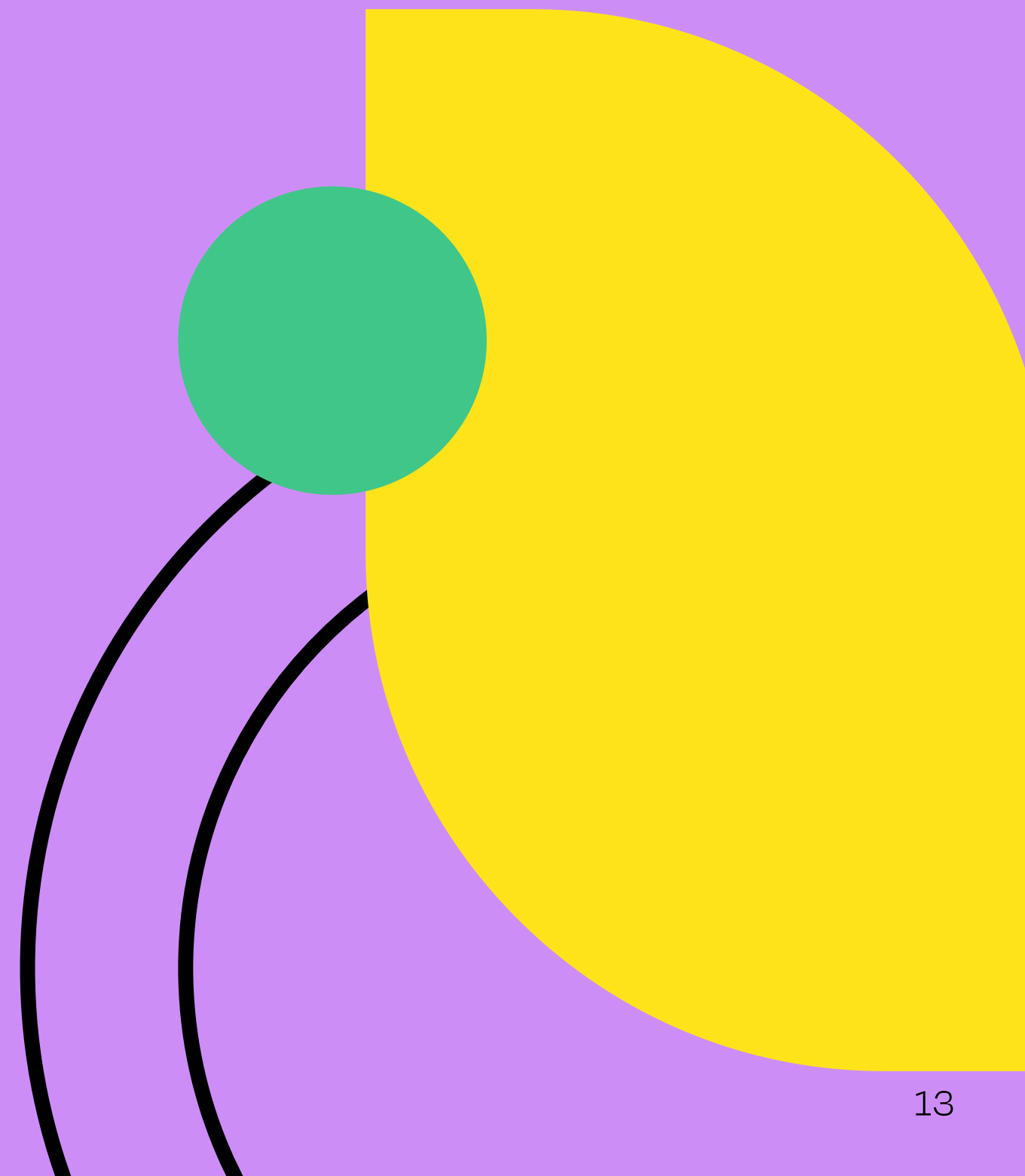
- Belief that careful enlargement could strengthen EU unity and relevance.

Security: one word, many meanings

- Security seen as multi-dimensional: includes digital safety, climate resilience, economic justice and public trust.
- Youth seek democratic, ethical and inclusive EU-led approaches to security.

Economy

This is a generation marked by economic anxiety and a comparison with the past, yet still motivated by a desire for fairness, security and opportunity. Faced with shifting economic realities, young Italians express a strong demand for policies that restore basic economic stability. Their reflections underscore the need to build a future that combines European solidarity with national responsibility. The discussions on digitalisation and AI highlight openness to technological change, with participants welcoming innovation, provided it is accompanied by inclusive policies. Overall, the conversation pointed to a generation ready to engage with change, but expecting institutions at all levels to ensure no one is left behind.



In relative terms, previous generations had a higher purchasing power than current ones

Danilo, M, 31–35



Economic anxiety & demand for fairness

- Young Italians feel life is becoming harder due to precarious work, rising costs and inequality.

"In relative terms, previous generations had a higher purchasing power than current ones." – Danilo, M, 31–35

- They don't expect the same prosperity as their parents but want fairness and stability.
- Strong support for universal or guaranteed income, indexed wages, tenant protections, and investment in housing and public services.

"In Belgium [where I live], salaries adjust automatically with inflation. It's not a raise, it's a right. That gave me peace of mind when I went to the supermarket and prices had gone up." – Mariavittoria, F, 25–30

Balancing EU coordination with national adaptation

- Broad agreement that the EU should coordinate economic and social policies.
- Still, participants stress the need for national adaptation to address local realities.
- Desire for a European framework that guarantees rights but allows for local adaptation.

Openness to AI & digital transition

- Green and digital transitions were less central to the discussion due to limited familiarity.
- Participants are optimistic about AI, seeing it as a tool to support – not replace – human work.
- Emphasis on inclusive reskilling programmes to help adapt to tech-driven change.



Sustainability

Young Italian citizens recognise the urgency of the climate crisis but remain sceptical of national and EU sustainability agendas that feel distant, overly technical or performative. They call for a shift from symbolic gestures to meaningful inclusion. Young people want accessible ways to participate, from local projects to policy dialogues. They also urge policymakers to ground climate action in economic and social realities, making sustainable choices affordable and equitable for all. Above all, they see sustainability not just as a matter of environmental protection, but as a broader societal vision: one that champions mental well-being, economic fairness and resilient communities.

The main point that keeps coming up is that there is no channel for listening to young people.

Elisa, F, 25–30



Frustration with performative sustainability

- Young Italians are deeply concerned about the climate crisis but skeptical of current institutional responses.
- National and EU-level efforts are seen as overly technical or symbolic, lacking youth inclusion.

"The main point that keeps coming up is that there is no channel for listening to young people."
– Elisa, F, 25–30

"There's this feeling of not being heard. And in my opinion, it's a bit of a vicious cycle, because the moment you realise that no one is listening to you, it also becomes harder to even form an idea."
– Federica, F, 25–30

From individual action to systemic change

- Youth feel burdened by calls for personal responsibility (e.g., recycling) while corporations and systems remain unaccountable.
- Cynicism grows when sustainable choices are unaffordable or inaccessible.

Green inequality & economic justice

- Concern that sustainability policies may worsen inequality if not inclusive.

"It's hard to support eco-friendly products, also because at the same time it's becoming difficult to afford regular shopping." – Mario, M, 18–24

- Strong calls for affordable public transport, access to green jobs and climate aid for vulnerable regions.

Digital tools: opportunity & risk

- AI and digital platforms help raise awareness but can spread misinformation or encourage greenwashing.
- Concern over the environmental impact of AI and digital tools, especially for older generations lacking digital literacy.

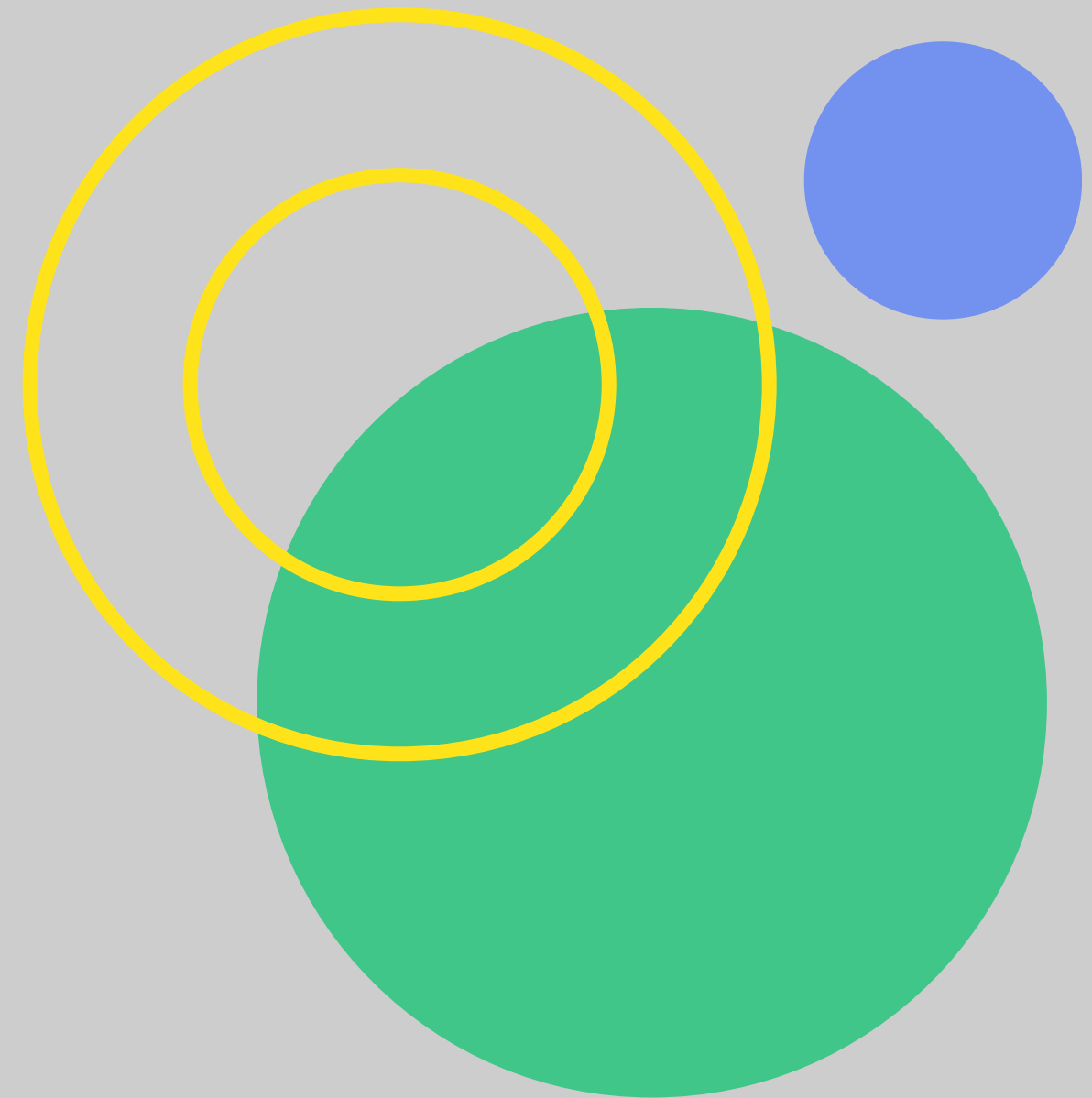
A broader vision of sustainability

- Youth view sustainability as tied to economic fairness, mental well-being and resilient communities.
- They seek real platforms to participate in shaping inclusive, local and justice-centred climate solutions.



Local event

*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 aims were to:

- Encourage open dialogue on complex European issues;
- Reflect critically on institutions and active citizenship; and
- 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

1

**Integrated,
human-centered
policies**

Institutions must adopt joined-up approaches (like the umbrella metaphor) that address sustainability, economy, security and democracy together – rooted in fairness, clarity and lived realities.

2

**Genuine youth
participation**

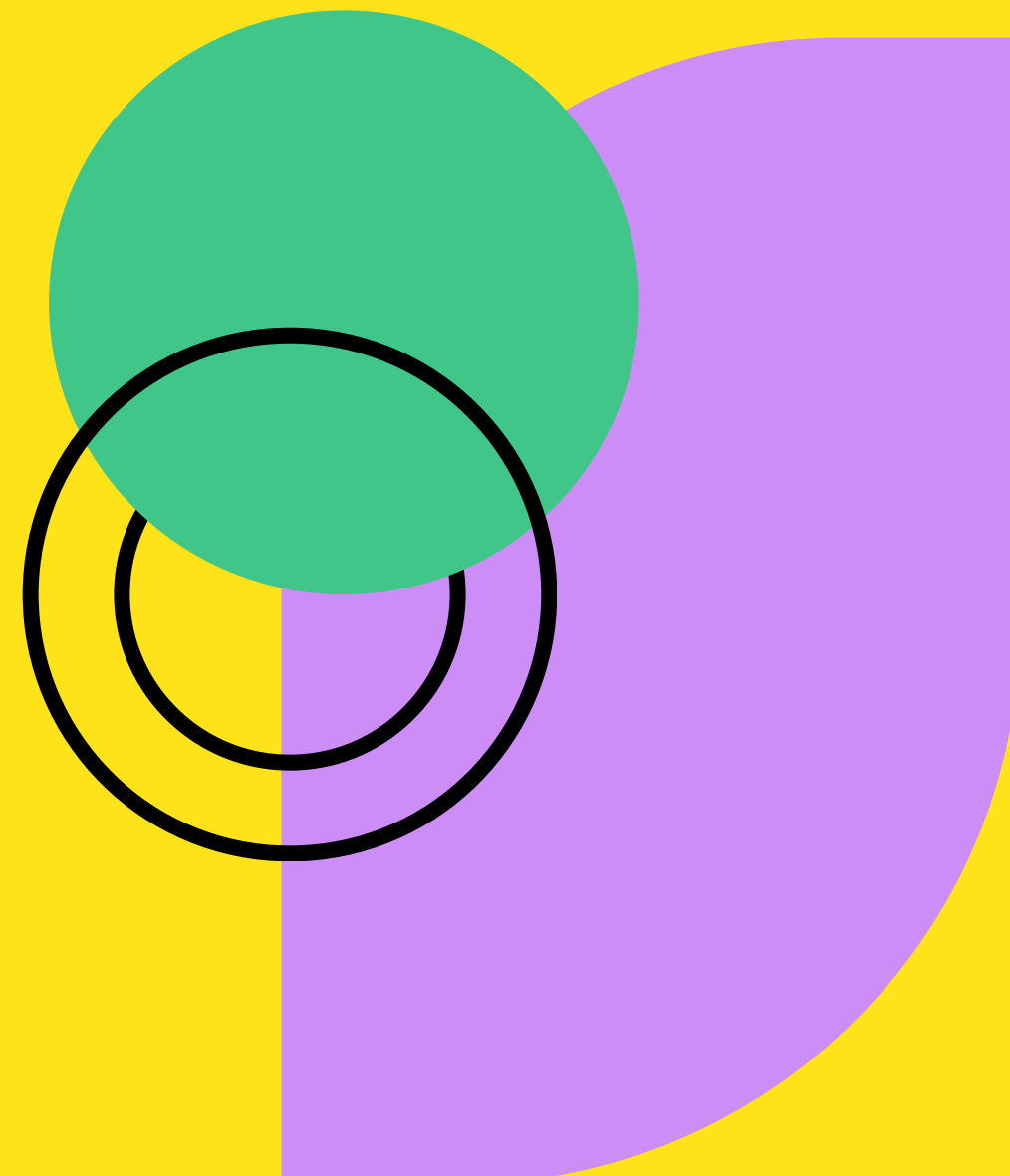
Move beyond symbolic inclusion. Youth want concrete roles in shaping policies, particularly around digital rights, economic justice and climate action – through local projects, councils and citizen assemblies.

3

**Accessibility,
transparency and
digital literacy**

Ensure clear, inclusive communication from institutions. Promote digital literacy to counter misinformation, while creating safe, respectful spaces for democratic expression online and offline.

Conclusions



Young citizens in Italy emerge from Voices for Choices as a socially conscious yet deeply disillusioned generation. Their reflections reveal a **strong desire for inclusion, fairness and meaningful participation** – values they feel are often undermined by tokenistic gestures and political disconnection. Participants expressed a clear **call for structural reforms** that bridge the gap between political ambition and the lived realities of young people. Across all themes, **economic insecurity** surfaced as a dominant concern, highlighting the urgent need for a just, transparent and participatory European response.

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.