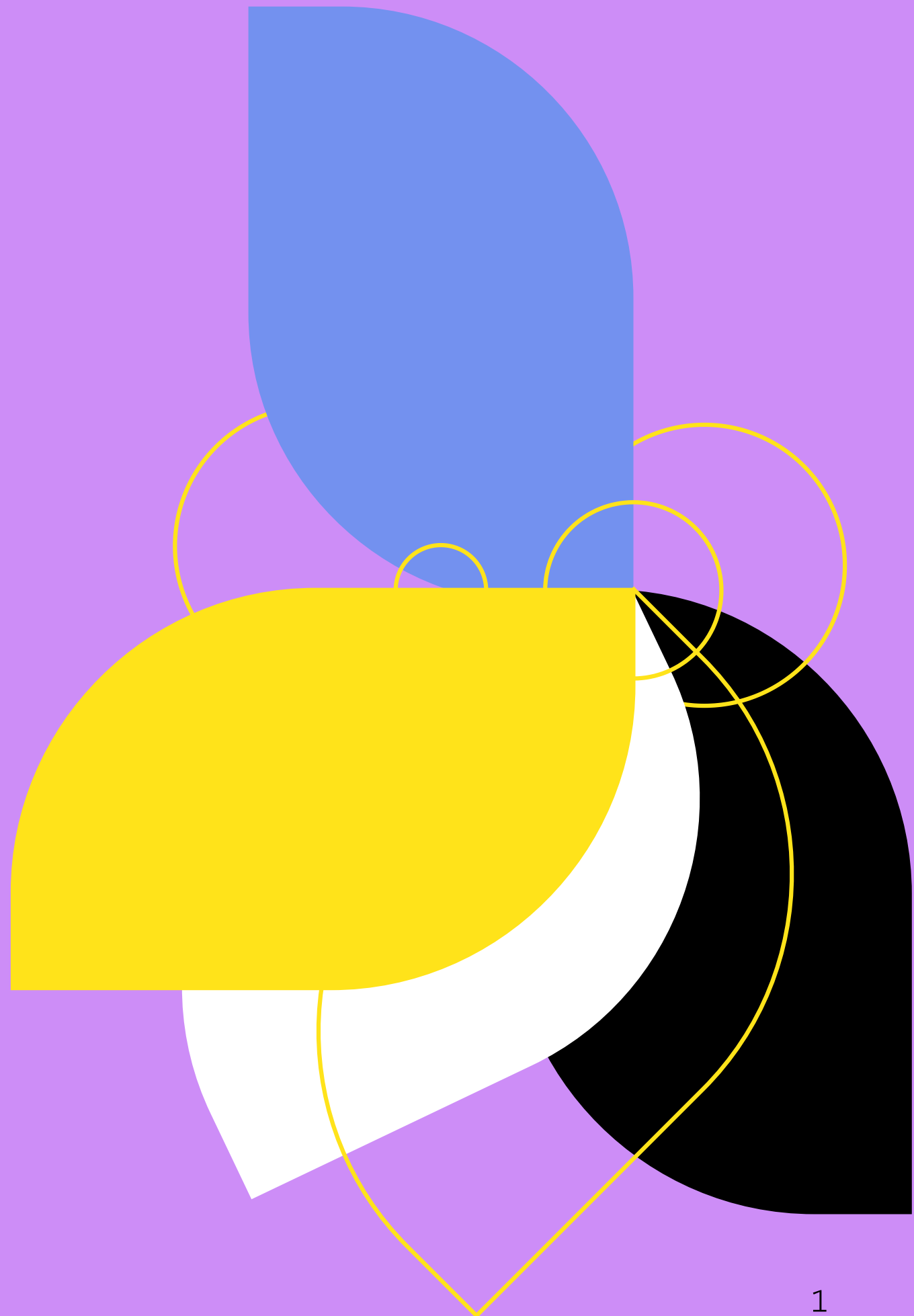


Voices for choices

Data for decisions
that matter

2025 country report — **Poland**



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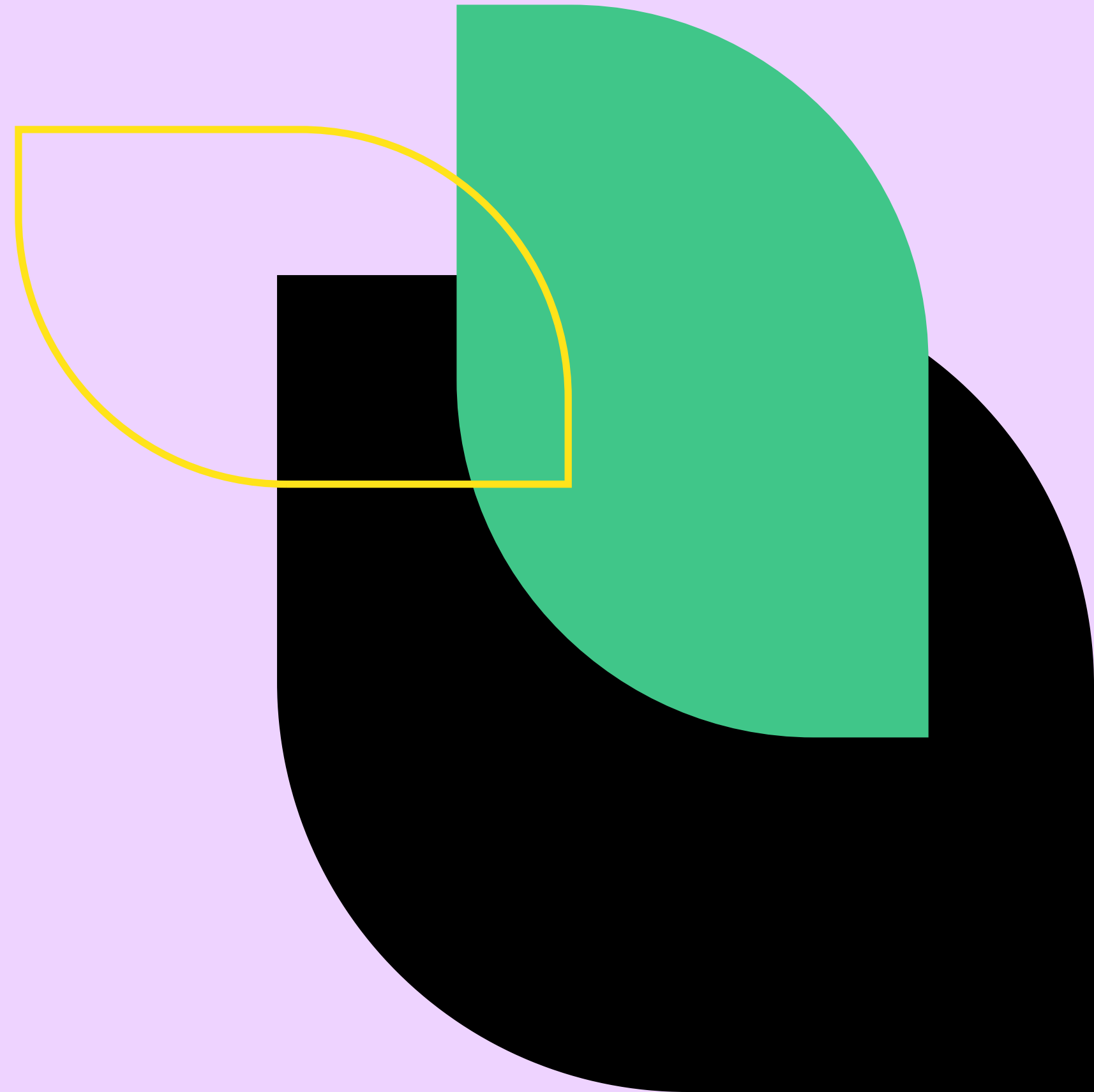
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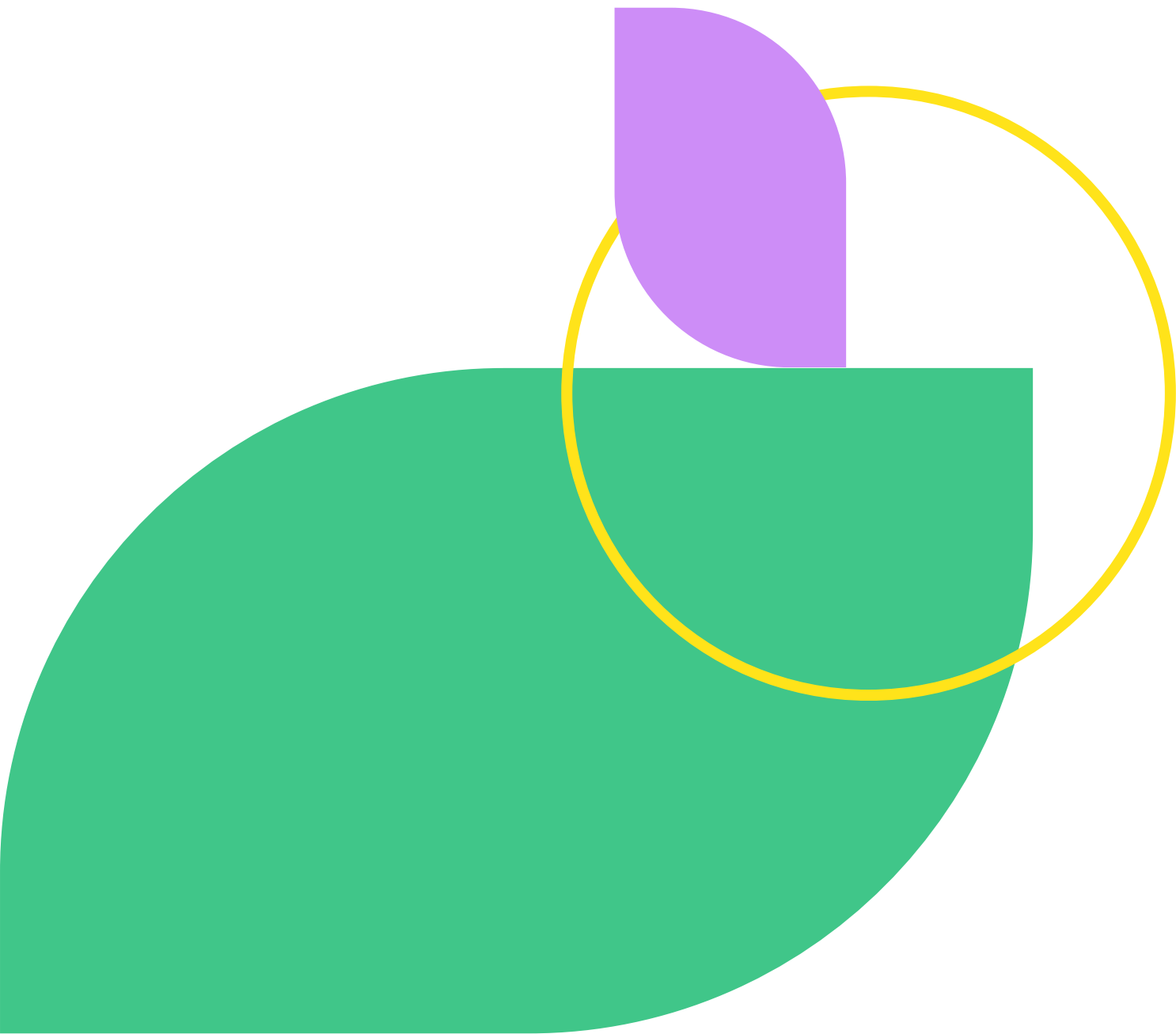
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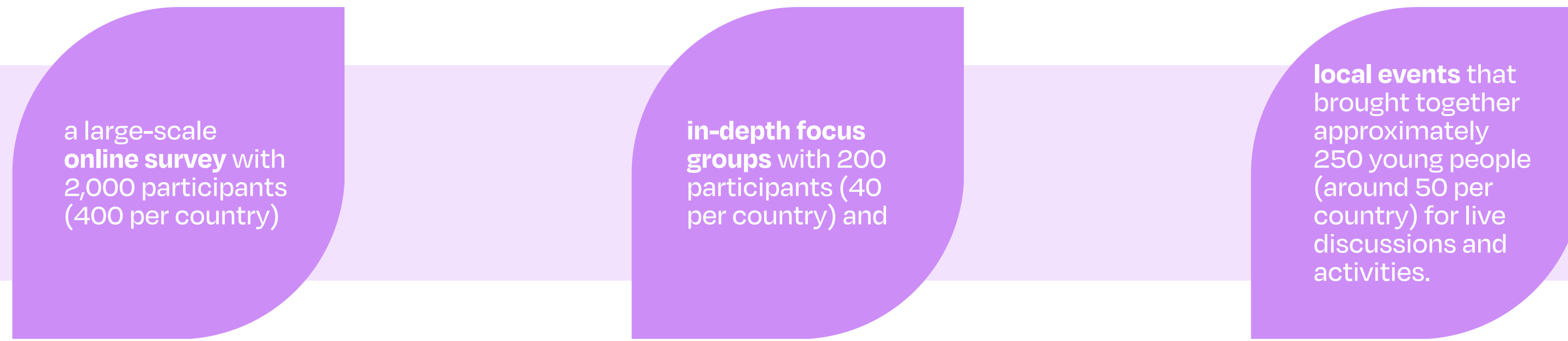
Introduction



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 Polish 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 Poles 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 Poland and strengthen democratic participation in practice.

Young Polish think that...*



POLARISATION & DEMOCRACY

- 67% Poland is **polarised**
- 91% **Politicians** are **responsible** for polarisation
- 67% Better **education** is the best solution to **overcome polarisation**
- 57% **Experts** are the **most trusted source** of information
- 72% **Elections** are their favourite form of democratic engagement

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

- 34% Don't know if AI contributes to polarisation
- 73% AI-generated content has not affected their political opinions

51%

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

78%

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

79%

Governments should **invest more in affordable housing**

38%

Somewhat **prepared to handle the green transition**

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

80%

Governments should use technology to create jobs

37%

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

EQUITY & PROSPERITY



SECURITY & RESILIENCE

54%

NATO should be in charge on Europe's defence

88%

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

57%

Ukraine should join the **EU**

63%

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

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

74%

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

68%

AI can help guarantee online safety

71%

Environment-friendly options are **too expensive**

62%

The **EU** should **support governments** in **reducing their environmental impact**

67%

Businesses should **help citizens adapt** without causing hardship

55%

Governments should **provide tax incentives** to reduce environmental impact

ROLE OF AI & TECHNOLOGY

35%

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

CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY





Focus groups

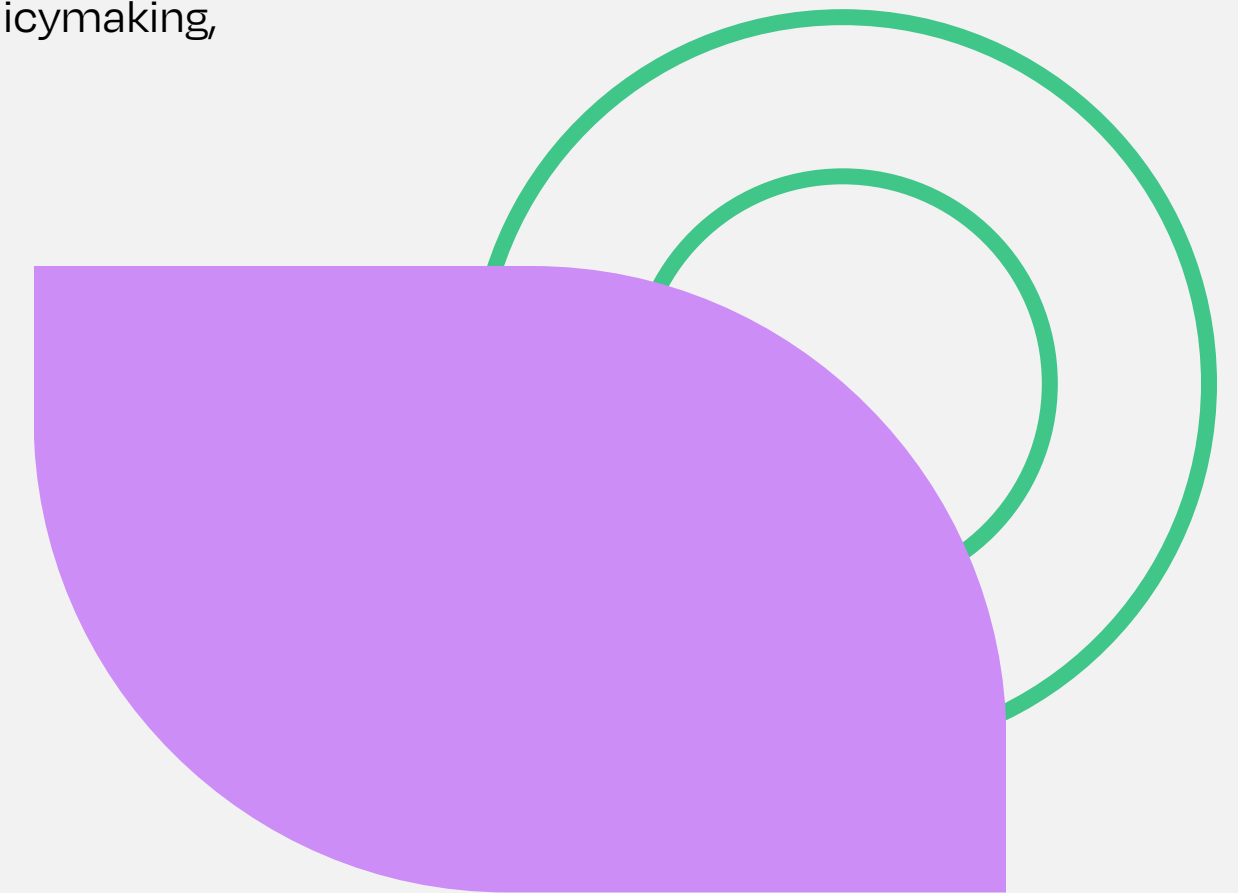
Young Polish from *Voices for Choices* consistently underscore the critical importance of **energy independence**, driven largely by the development of nuclear power, as a core component of national security. This is set against a backdrop of deep-seated **distrust in institutions**, concerns about the negative impact of technology (especially disinformation) and a pervasive sense of **individual economic insecurity**. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires not only strategic investments in energy and defence, but also a fundamental re-evaluation of how public trust is built, how technology is managed, and how citizens are economically supported and educated.

Energy independence & nuclear power

- Energy independence from Russia is seen as essential for Poland's national and economic security.
- Nuclear energy is overwhelmingly supported as the most reliable and stable path to energy independence.
- Participants emphasised that Poland's high energy demand cannot be met by renewables alone.
- Renewables (especially wind) are viewed as supplementary; solar energy is less favoured due to costly panel disposal.
- The strategic mix of nuclear and renewables is considered key to ending reliance on Russian energy.

Distrust in institutions

- Deep distrust in government, politicians and media.
- Politics is seen as a major source of social division and polarisation.
- Media is viewed as biased and lacking objectivity.
- Politicians are perceived as dishonest and driven by emotion over reason.
- Communication failures from institutions allow fake news to dominate.
- Young people feel excluded from policymaking, especially on climate issues.

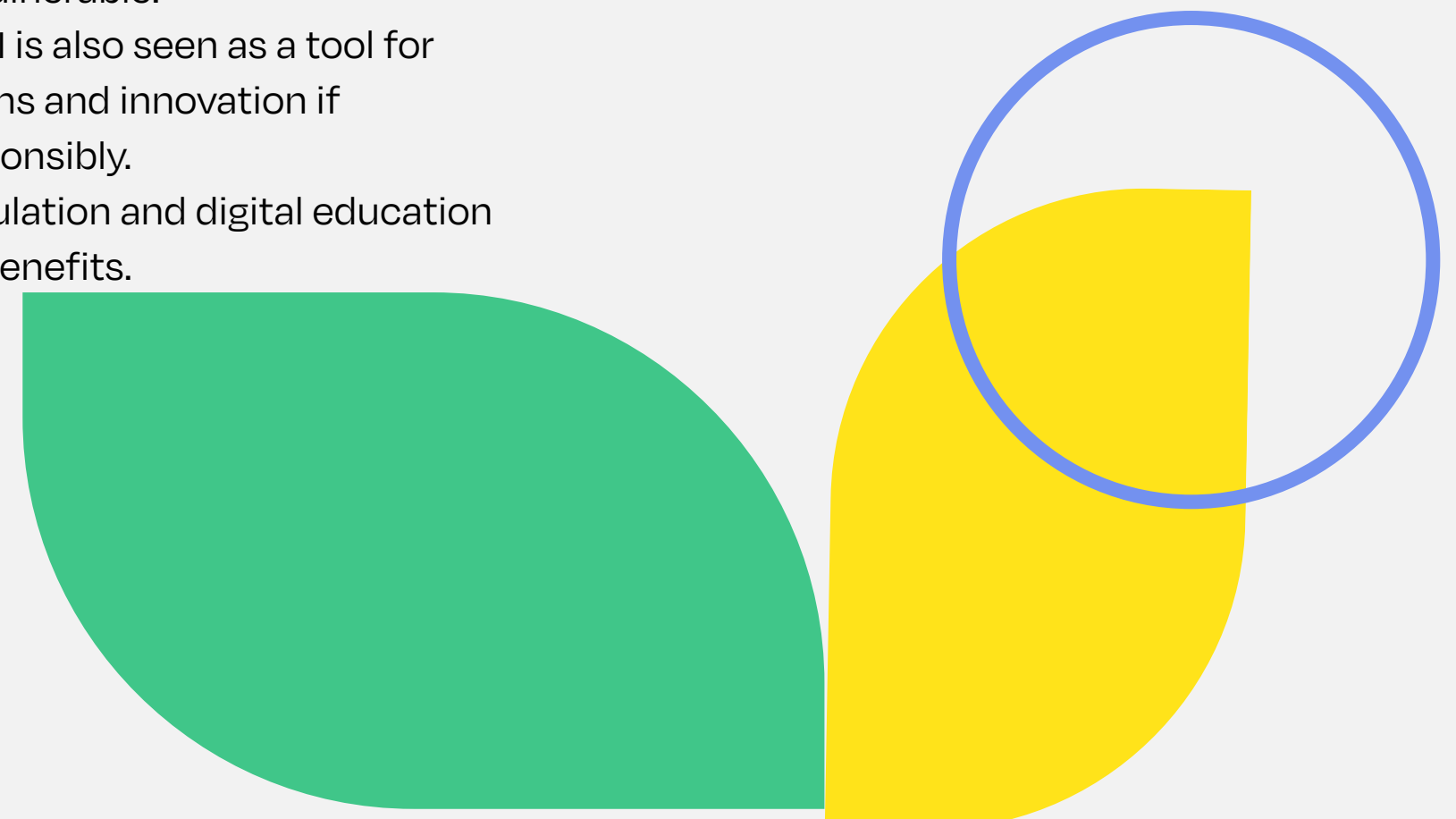


Economic insecurity & state responsibility

- Economic security means financial stability, the ability to afford housing and basic pleasures.
- Many young people work yet are unable to save or plan for the future.
- Strong demand for:
 - State safety nets (e.g., protection during job loss)
 - Affordable housing
 - Modern financial education
- Current school programmes on entrepreneurship are seen as outdated and ineffective.

Technology: double-edged sword

- AI and social media seen as contributors to disinformation, polarisation, and reduced critical thinking.
- Concerns over deepfakes, AI's misuse, and rising cybersecurity threats (esp. Russian disinformation).
- Citizens lack sufficient digital literacy, leaving them vulnerable.
- Despite risks, AI is also seen as a tool for climate solutions and innovation if developed responsibly.
- Need for AI regulation and digital education to harness its benefits.





Democracy

For young Polish, rising polarisation and distrust – amplified by social media, political rhetoric and unregulated technologies like AI – threaten social cohesion and public trust in institutions. Disinformation, deepfakes and declining critical thinking further erode constructive dialogue. Addressing these challenges requires robust civic education, youth engagement and political responsiveness. Participants call for empowering young people with knowledge, agency and inclusive representation as it is crucial to counter populism, foster mutual respect and rebuild a sense of community.

Polarisation in Poland is extremely visible practically everywhere.

Franek, M, 18-24



Polarisation, politics & social media

- Poland is seen as deeply polarised, with young people highly aware of societal divisions.
 - "Polarisation in Poland is extremely visible practically everywhere." – Franek, M, 18-24
 - "Politics is the main source of divisions." – Karolina, F, 18-24
- Politics is a major source of tension, often deliberately used to gain political capital.
- Social media fuels polarisation through algorithm-driven "opinion bubbles".
 - "Algorithms favour divisions on the internet." – Anonymous, M, 18-24 and Mateusz, M, 18-24
 - "Young people enter [opinion bubbles] because it's more convenient for them." – Zofia, F, 18-24
- Many avoid political discussions due to fear of conflict.
 - "We don't talk about politics because we'll argue." – Participant
 - "Why is politics a dirty word, or a word that shouldn't exist?" – Zofia, F, 18-24

Distrust in institutions & media

- Low trust in media and politicians is widespread.
- Media is criticised as *biased*; outlets seen as either liberal or conservative – *rarely neutral*.
- Politicians described as *untrustworthy* and *emotionally manipulative*, avoiding real debate.

Hope in civic education & local engagement

- Despite pessimism, participants see *civic education* as a solution to strengthen *resilience and critical thinking*.
- Emphasis on *local involvement* and *mutual respect* to rebuild trust and dialogue.

AI does not help in combating polarisation.

Participant

Technology & AI: more harm than help

- AI and tech are mostly seen as threats to democracy, spreading disinformation and increasing polarisation.
 - *"AI does not help in combating polarisation."* – Participant
 - *"AI contributes to divisions."* – Participant
 - *"I don't think AI will help democracy."* – Participant
- A few saw potential in AI to *reduce fake news* due to its effort to be objective:
 - *"AI language models try to be objective, so maybe AI can somehow help in eliminating fake news and divisions."* – Participant

Youth engagement, shifting politics & representation

- Participants support *youth civic* participation (e.g., Youth City Councils) to foster dialogue.
- Emphasis on respect, inclusion and making youth feel heard.
- Notable *shift toward right-wing politics* among young people:
 - Driven by *effective messaging, radical change promises, and social media outreach*.
- Right-wing populism seen as appealing despite lack of truthfulness.
- Strong *emotional* messaging influences political views.
- Desire for systemic change includes suggestions like lowering the voting age to 16.

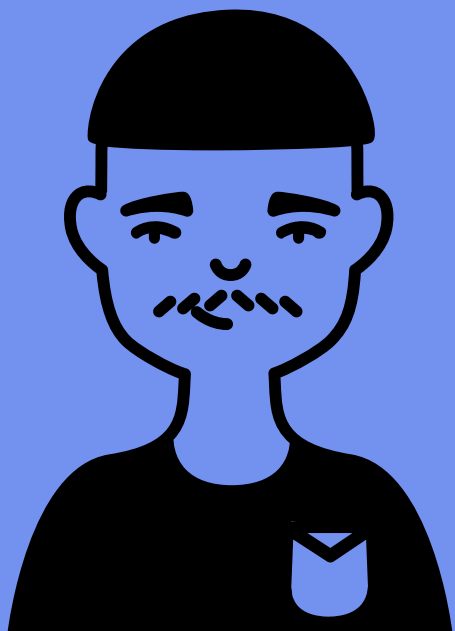


Security

Young Polish perceive security as a complex issue requiring a multifaceted approach, combining traditional defence aspects with modern cybersecurity, energy and social challenges. They see the keys to effectively responding to these challenges as international cooperation, increased investment and societal education and adaptation.

Yes for the fastest possible admission to the Union: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia.

Stanisław, M, 18-24



NATO, EU defence & strategic autonomy

- NATO is seen as the foundation of European security.
 - *"NATO is a guarantor of security."*
 - However, doubts are growing: *"slow loss of certainty about NATO"* and *"the certainty of the USA as a military ally is crumbling."*
- US alliance is valued for leverage: *"it gives them a better bargaining chip in the EU."*
- Participants support greater EU defence autonomy, but are sceptical about a common EU army due to lack of coordination and infrastructure.
- Defence spending should increase, possibly *redirecting funds from the Green Deal.*
- Call for improved NATO–EU cooperation.

EU enlargement

- Enlargement seen as key to stability and security.
- Ukraine's accession supported, but only *after the war and conditional on reforms:*
 - Ukraine should *"improve healthcare and education, tackle corruption and resolve historical disputes with Poland."*
 - Concern Ukraine shouldn't *"receive preferential treatment over other candidates."*
- Western Balkans seen as more ready:
 - *"Yes for the fastest possible admission to the Union: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia,"* but *"no for Serbia, because it doesn't want it itself."* – Stanisław, M, 18–24

Cybersecurity, disinformation & digital education

- Russian disinformation seen as a major threat to EU stability.
- US instability also viewed as destabilising:
 - *“political danger is felt due to instability in the US.”*
- Cybersecurity seen as crucial; calls for international cooperation and national specialisation (e.g. Estonia).
- Digital education seen as a key vulnerability:
 - *“EU citizens should educate themselves more about cybersecurity to protect themselves.”*
 - *“No one prepares us for safe use of the internet.”*
- Gen Z perceived as more digitally resilient.

Defence spending & public-private cooperation

- Mixed views on defence funding:
 - Some: strictly a public responsibility.
 - Others: support for state-private partnerships, esp. in innovation & tech.
- One participant proposed a privatised defence sector, with state/EU subsidies to enhance innovation.
- Strong support for investing in the European defence industry to reduce dependence on external suppliers:
 - *“invest in the European defence industry.”*

We need to strengthen Poland's energy security by building nuclear power plants

Patryk, M, 25–30



Energy security & nuclear power

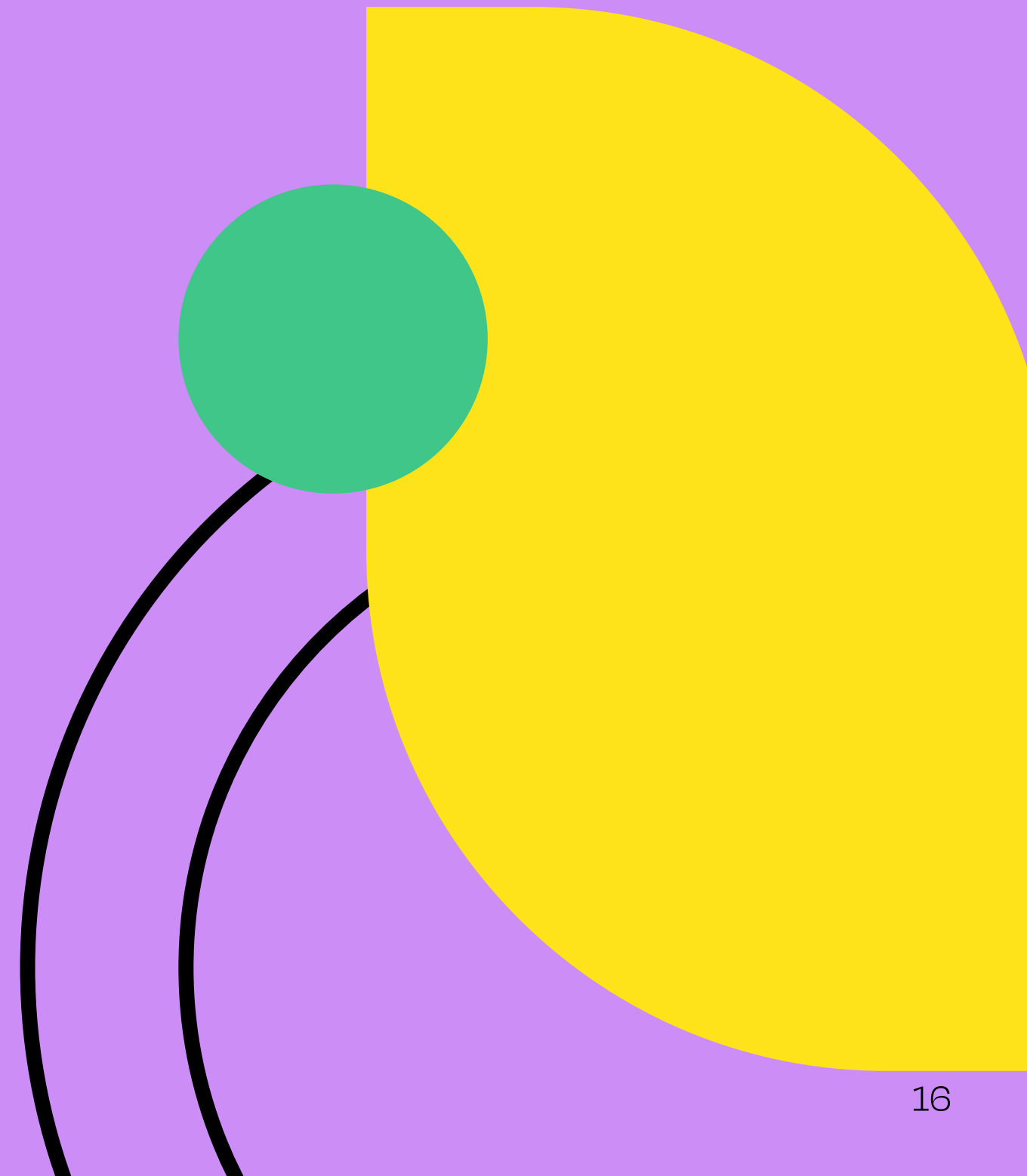
- Energy diversification is key to EU security and prosperity.
- Strong support for nuclear power and Polish energy independence:
 - *"We need to strengthen Poland's energy security by building nuclear power plants."* – Patryk, M, 25–30
 - *"Poland should be energy self-sufficient."* – Stanisław, M, 18–24
 - *"To maintain European prosperity, we must strengthen security in various fields."* – Participant, M, 18–24

Broader threats: demographics, AI, & geopolitics

- Concerns about US–China rivalry, war in Ukraine, and their economic/geopolitical impact.
- Demographic crisis identified as a looming threat:
 - *"A major threat to Poland in the coming years is the demographic catastrophe, temporarily halted by the influx of Ukrainian population."* – Andrzej, M, 25–30
- AI seen as a labour market threat:
 - *"A challenge in the labour market is also the development of AI, through which many people may lose their jobs."* – Gabriela, F, 18–24

Economy

Young Polish in particular feel economically insecure due to low wages and limited saving opportunities, with many lacking financial freedom. Trust in institutions is low, driven by broken promises, poor transparency, and political manipulation of the EU's image. There is strong support for boosting economic and energy sovereignty through "Made in Europe" policies and investment in green and nuclear energy, despite concerns about competitiveness. Strengthening economic and civic education is seen as key to empowering citizens.



Not worrying about surviving until the next month and owning an apartment as a source of stability

Monika, F, 18-24



Energy security & nuclear power

- Economic security is seen as out of reach for many young people due to:
 - Low wages, high living costs, housing unaffordability, and overqualification in jobs.
- Definitions vary:
 - *"Not worrying about surviving until the next month and owning an apartment as a source of stability."* – Monika, F, 18-24
 - *"Being able to afford small pleasures, not just paying basic bills."* – Karolina, F, 18-24
- *"Are unable to save for the future"* even while working and studying." – Fabian, M, 18-24
- Fabian also calls for a *"system that would protect citizens from extreme poverty in case of job loss."*
- Rita, F, 25-30, advocates for *affordable public and social housing*.
- Economic education is seen as outdated and inadequate:
 - *"School programmes on entrepreneurship are outdated."* Rita, F, 25-30 and Julia, F, 18-24
- Differing views on economic well-being:
 - *"Poles live well, and negative beliefs result from their mentality."* – Piotr, M, 25-30
 - Rita disagrees: *"low-income individuals cannot even afford holidays."*

Low trust in institutions

- Trust is alarmingly low:
 - 78% distrust in government, 61% in the EU, 74% in entrepreneurs.
- Root causes: broken promises, poor communication, and political manipulation.
 - *"The government cannot effectively communicate its successes, so society does not appreciate its actions."* – Mikołaj, M, 18-24
 - *"Fake news dominates official messages."*
- The EU is politicised domestically:
 - *"The EU is often instrumentalised in Polish politics, which affects how society perceives it."* – Mieszko, M, 18-24
- Business sector mistrusted for prioritising profits over quality:
 - Viewed as *"focused on quantity, not quality."*
- Proposed solutions: better civic/economic education, improved transparency, stronger institutional communication.

Europe is not self-sufficient and should cooperate with democratic countries (USA, Canada, Japan).

Kajetan, M, 18-24



Support for “Made in Europe” & local industry

- Strong support for European production:
 - *“We should support European companies.”*
 - *“I agree that we should buy Made in Europe!”*
- Recognition of domestic successes like InPost and questions about why *“there were no questions about ‘Made in Poland’ products.”* – Rita, F, 25–30
- Concern over European competitiveness, especially in tech and automotive.
- EU investments seen as inefficient and needing reform.

Energy security & sovereignty

- Support for investment in:
 - Renewable energy (RES)
 - Nuclear power — seen as a reliable green solution.
- Goal: energy independence from Russia and external suppliers.

Broader strategic & demographic concerns

- Ageing population and demographic decline seen as threats.
- *“Europe is not self-sufficient”* and should *“cooperate with democratic countries (USA, Canada, Japan).”* – Kajetan, M, 18–24
- Economic security seen as a global issue, not just European.
- Calls to support the European defence industry, reduce regulation, and enable a freer market to promote innovation.

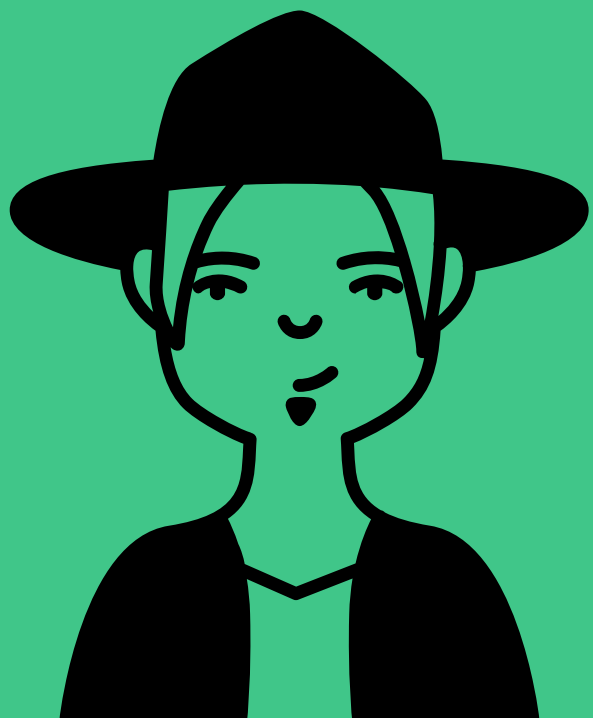


Sustainability

According to young Poles, high costs hinder the adoption of sustainable practices, while mistrust in government and EU institutions fuels demands for transparency and engagement. There is strong support for nuclear energy and renewables, with calls for a just transition for coal regions. Views on AI are mixed - seen as both a climate tool and environmental burden. Opinions on corporate accountability are divided between penalties, incentives, or a balanced mix.

The far-right effectively promotes anti-progressive changes in the context of sustainable development.

Igor, M, 18–24



Environmental awareness & barriers to action

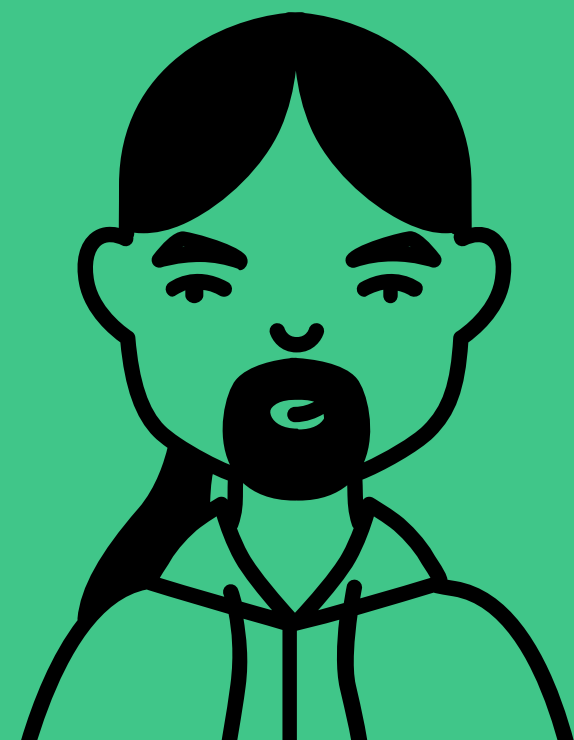
- Growing concern about climate issues, but **economic barriers** are the main obstacle.
- High cost limits adoption of green practices — from organic food to energy choices.
- Strong demand for **subsidies and financial support** to make sustainability more accessible.

Low trust & exclusion from climate policy

- Youth feel excluded from policymaking and distrust both the Polish government and EU institutions.
 - *“Young people feel they have no real impact on climate policy.” – Participant, F, 30–35*
 - *“Existing participation mechanisms are insufficient or poorly promoted.” – Filip, M, 25–30*
- Misinformation from the far-right was cited as a problem:
 - *“The far-right effectively promotes anti-progressive changes in the context of sustainable development.” – Igor, M, 18–24*
- Participants call for more transparency, engagement opportunities, and clear communication.

***We really need
a nuclear
power plant.***

Tymek, M, 18-24



Future energy: nuclear backbone, wind as complement

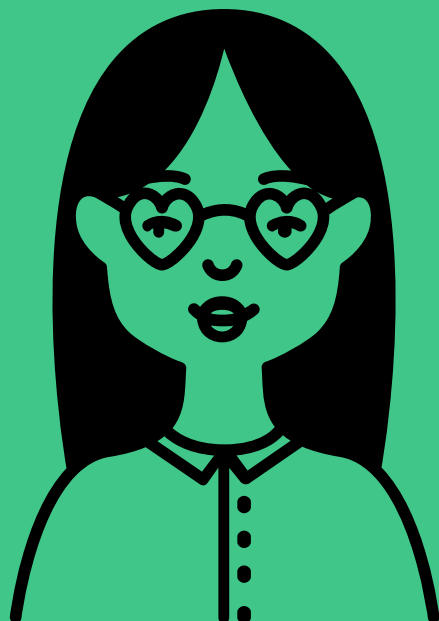
- Nuclear energy seen as essential for stability and independence:
 - *"We really need a nuclear power plant."* – Tymek, M, 18-24
 - *"First, atom, second, atom, third, atom."* – Mikołaj, M, 18-24:
- Wind energy supported, but solar less favored due to disposal costs:
 - *"Wind energy is a better solution than solar, because panel disposal is very expensive."* – Gabriela, M, 18-24
- Emphasis on a just transition for coal workers:
 - *"We must subsidise miners so that when mines close, they find work in another sector."* – Gabriela, F, 18-24

AI in climate solutions: potential vs. environmental cost

- Views on AI are ambivalent:
 - Seen as both a *tool for climate solutions* and a *resource-intensive threat*.
 - AI's water and energy use flagged as problematic by Gabriela and Patryk.
- Still, some see AI as helpful in mitigating climate catastrophe:
 - *"AI can help reduce the damage of climate catastrophe by proposing potential solutions."* – Gabriela, F, 18-24

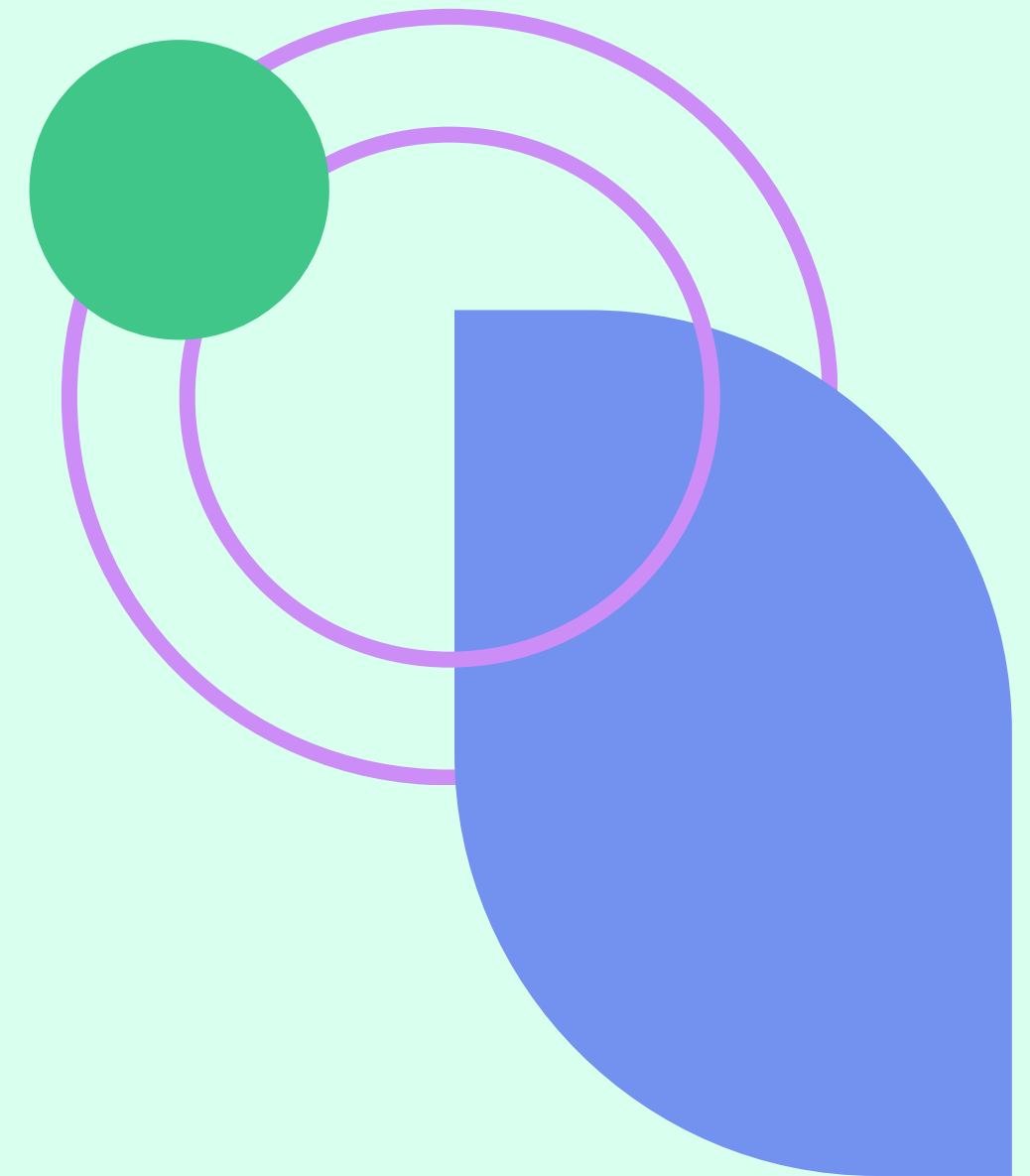
We should implement mechanisms that engage companies, but we can also punish those that do not comply with the law.

Emilia, F, 18–24



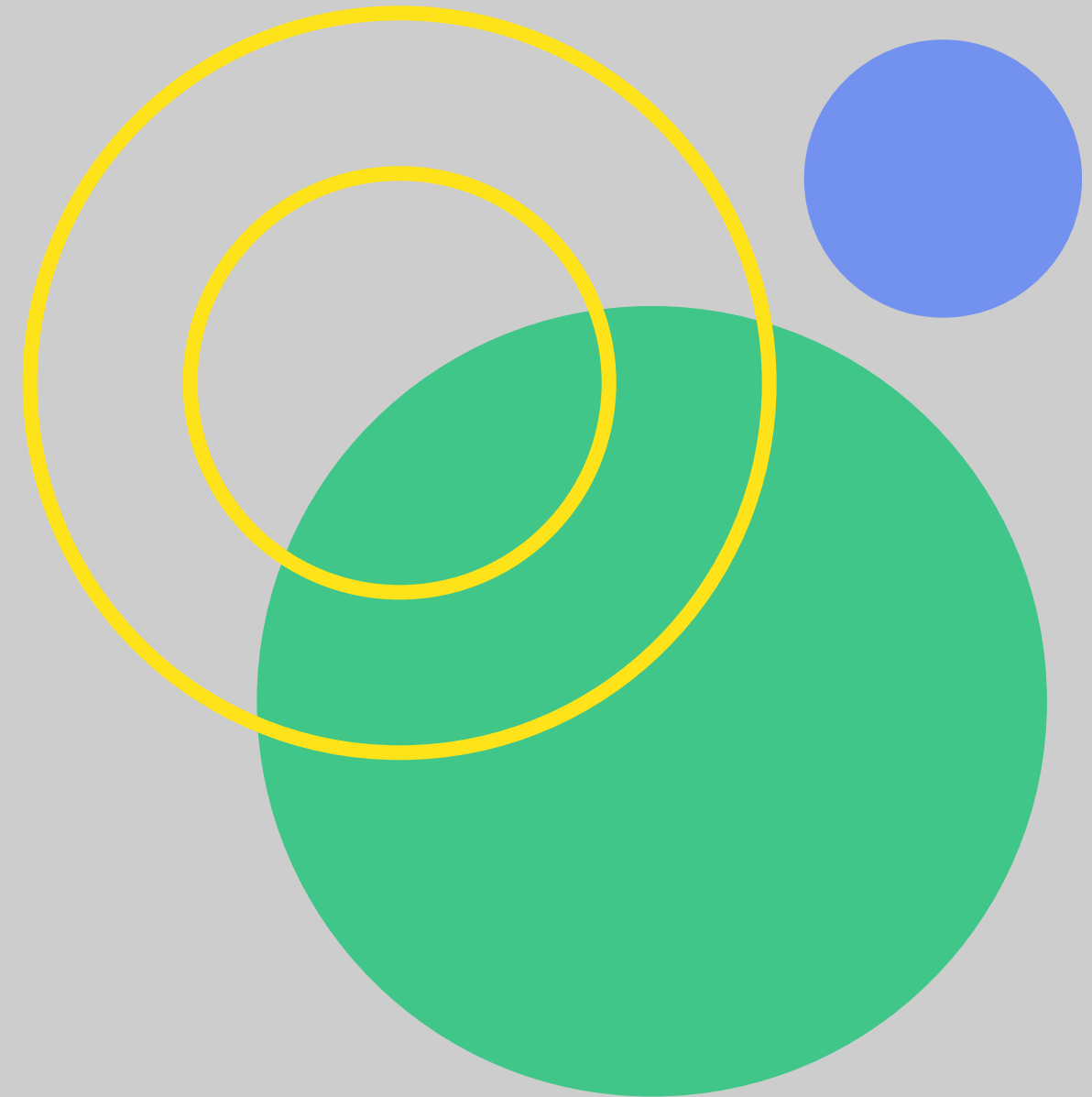
Corporate accountability: penalties, incentives, or both

- Participants divided on how to regulate environmental responsibility:
 - *“We should make the amount of tax dependent on whether a company undertakes activities aimed at reducing its negative environmental impact or not.”* – Filip, M, 25–30
 - *“Incentives would be much more effective than penalties, because in addition to the companies themselves, consumers could also be affected.”* – Igor, M, 18–24
 - *“We should implement mechanisms that engage companies, but we can also punish those that do not comply with the law.”* – Emilia, F, 18–24



Local event

*Rebuilding trust and
participation in a
polarised landscape*



The Polish local event, hosted by the Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PROM) in Gdańsk on 7 June 2025, brought together participants from across Poland. 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.

A key theme was young people's **exclusion from decision-making** and concerns about the deepening political polarisation in Poland. The discussion revealed a gap between their strong desire to engage and the lack of clear, accessible channels to do so.

The conversation unfolded around several key themes: **barriers to youth engagement** such as limited knowledge about local governance, widespread **distrust in political parties**, and the **challenge of balancing activism** with everyday responsibilities. Participants also reflected on the evolving role of new technologies – particularly AI and social media – as tools for mobilisation and communication among young people.

Emphasis was placed on the need to **rebuild trust** through transparency, civic education and stronger media literacy. Combating disinformation was seen as key to **democratic resilience**, with youth playing an active role in shaping dialogue and restoring social cohesion.

Participants voiced concern about societal divisions and political stagnation, alongside a clear determination and **readiness to participate** – provided they have meaningful opportunities to influence Poland's future.

Top 3 takeaways

1

Polarisation weakens democratic resilience

Participants stressed the urgent need to restore trust in politics by addressing deep societal divisions. Institutions must promote transparency, accountability and respectful political discourse to counter growing polarisation.

2

Civic education and local empowerment

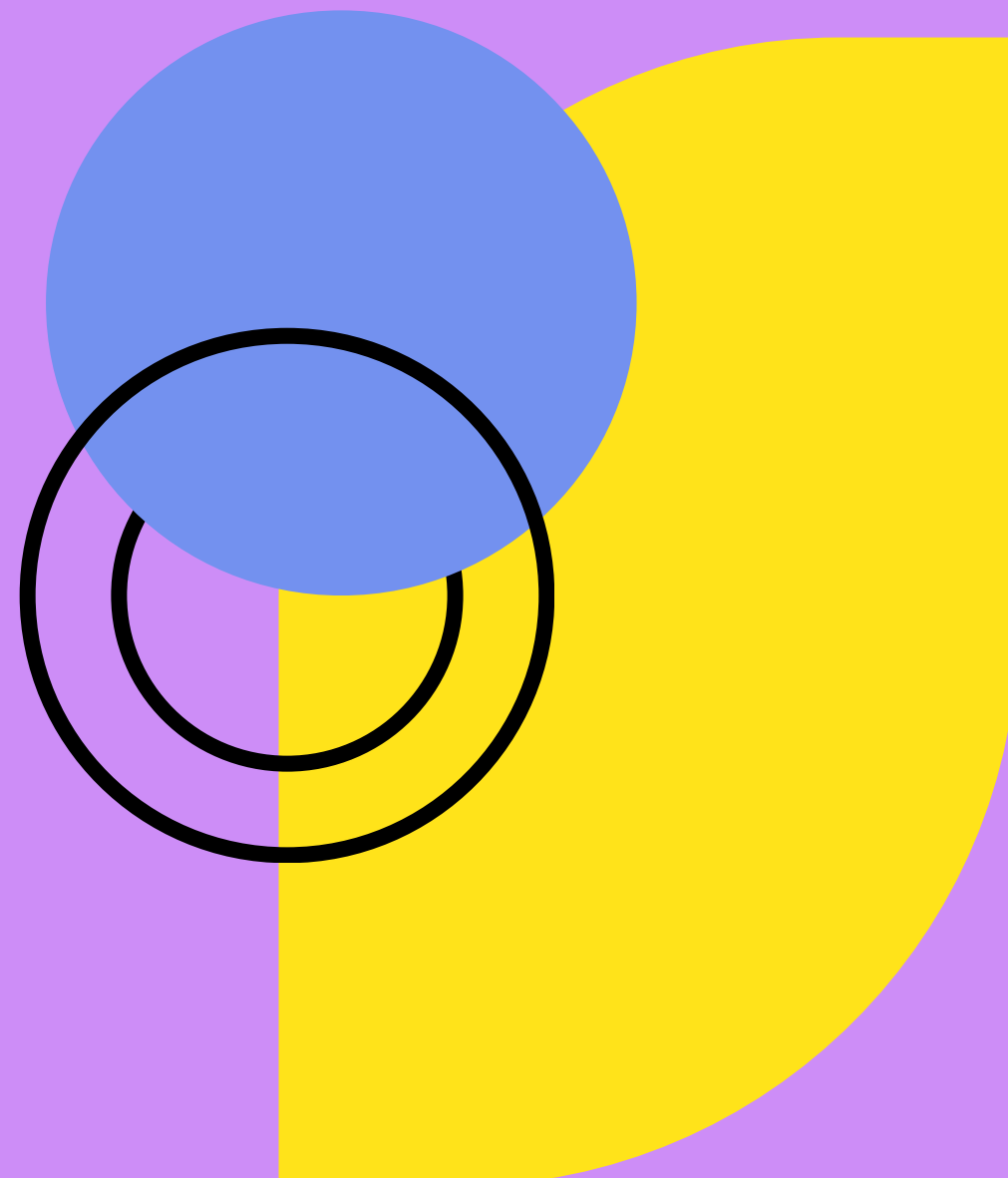
Young people want tools to engage meaningfully. Strengthening civic education – especially about local governance – can reduce apathy and help bridge the gap between youth and public institutions.

3

Digital spaces are key battlegrounds

Technology is both a risk and a resource. Fighting disinformation, strengthening media literacy and supporting youth to navigate digital platforms critically are central to future security and engagement.

Conclusions



Young citizens in Poland emerge from *Voices for Choices* as politically aware, environmentally conscious, yet profoundly mistrustful of institutions. Their insights reflect a deep **desire for security** – economic, social and environmental – grounded in fairness, transparency and genuine engagement. Participants voiced **frustration with exclusion from decision-making**, disinformation and the gap between political rhetoric and real-world challenges, particularly around economic opportunity and climate action. While hopeful about education, youth engagement and civic renewal, they called for **systemic change to rebuild trust**, support a just transition and ensure a more inclusive, resilient European future.

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