

The Movers of Tomorrow?

How Young Adults
in Europe Imagine and
Shape the Future



Country Report Poland

**ALLIANZ
FOUNDATION**

The Movers of Tomorrow?

Young adults in Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom share a deep sense of anxiety about the future. Eight out of 10 openly question whether their generation should have children, as many believe their societies will become less livable in the future.

They feel that their countries are becoming less equal, less safe and more divided, and they want to have a say in how these issues and other pressing concerns are addressed.

But how are they making their voices heard? The vast majority are taking individual and everyday actions, such as voting and changing what they eat and how they shop and travel. However, only few of them have so far chosen to amplify their individual voices and exert more pressure on decision-makers through collective action, for example by joining a social movement.

Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study 2023

To learn more about how young adults imagine and shape a livable future society, the **Allianz Foundation** commissioned the **SINUS Institute** with conducting a representative survey among 10,000 young adults (aged 18 to 39) in **Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK** – five countries that reflect Europe's diverse realities on much-discussed issues such as minority rights, anti-democratic tendencies and climate action.

All findings from the five-country study can be accessed at allianzfoundation.org/study.



The Future Young Adults Want

Although Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK differ in terms of their economic conditions, political landscapes and historical trajectories, the young adults surveyed in these countries show **more similarities than differences**. This “European” perspective also extends to what young adults see as a desirable future society.

- > Nearly three out of four strongly agree that a **robust social welfare state** and an independent justice system should be the fundamental building block of a future society.
- > Fifty-two percent of young adults seek a **fair and eco-friendly future** with equal opportunities for minorities and the less privileged, not only in education and employment, but also in sharing the responsibilities of the green transition.
- > **Strong democratic institutions**, including a free press and a participatory political system are prioritized by 47% of young adults.
- > Overall, there is less agreement among young adults when it comes to **personal wealth, military strength and traditional values**. While some identify these as a priority (35%), most do not. Personal wealth, in particular, is a highly divisive issue.

The Future Young Adults Expect

By and large, young adults want to live in a future society that is safe, affordable, eco-friendly and fair. Yet, they feel that the conditions for building that future are under threat. Although there is some cautious optimism regarding ecological developments and opportunities for migrants and other minorities, in most other regards all five countries are expected to decline over the next 10 years.

Green, Yet Less Equal

The trend about which young adults are most hopeful is climate action, for example promoting the use of renewable energies. The majority of young adults support today's green transformation agenda and expect their countries to become more eco-friendly over the next 10 years. Close to

two thirds feel cautiously hopeful that the fight against climate change can be won (except in Germany, where only 38% agree that that will be the case).

Besides this trend (though this is mostly not directly connected to climate action) many fear that the gap between rich and poor will grow (59%), in part due to rising energy, food and transportation costs, which two out of three young adults expect. These perceived risks likely explain why a robust social welfare state remains crucial for most.

Militarized, Yet Less Safe

Young adults have conflicting feelings about their country's ability to defend them from threats from beyond their national borders. Close to 60% of respondents agree that Russia's war in Ukraine could spread to their country. Yet, about the same number rejects the idea of compulsory military service outright.

Despite their reluctance to serve in the military, many young adults expect their country's armed forces to expand over the next 10 years (40% vs. 23% who think otherwise). However, this higher protective wall is not reassuring to them. In fact, more young adults agree than disagree that their countries will become less safe in the future, not only because of geopolitics but also because of an eroding justice system, which 30% predict, especially in Greece (41%) and Poland (37%).

Diverse, Yet More Divided

Despite their grim economic outlooks many young adults expect the future to bring better opportunities for migrants, the LGBTQI+ community and other minority groups in particular. These opportunities extend beyond the job market to areas such as the education system. At the same time, notably more young adults agree than disagree that social cohesion will suffer in the years to come, and that the rift between different groups in society will widen.

These projected divisions can not only be attributed to an ongoing cultural shift from traditional to secular, individualistic values – which some embrace and others despise – as they also reflect deep disagreement over so-called wedge issues, especially those related to diversity. For example, while 69% of young adults, on average, support the right of same-sex couples to adopt children, only 39% do so in Poland.

Deep Mistrust in Established Institutions

Although 62% of young adults cope with these insecurities by remaining cautiously optimistic about their own personal future, young adults perceive their societies as being in a state of transition – in a **waiting room to the future that is marked by profound uncertainties and in which the old ways of doing things no longer seem to work and new forms of “making” the future have yet to prove effective**.

These “old ways” apparently include the current policymaking processes: While young adults do acknowledge today's politicians as de jure leaders, they also regard them with mistrust. For 55%, this mistrust runs so deep that they agree with the provocative statement that politicians are “puppets of powerful, shadowy elites”. In the same vein, industry is often regarded as a barrier to change, especially when it comes to the green transition. The mainstream media, too, are widely accused of pursuing their own agendas rather than reporting the facts.

Conversely, young adults express some excitement about old and new forms of grassroots politics, such as social movements, citizens' initiatives and new collaborations with artists and the cultural sector. However, there is a gap between interest and participation. A total of 57% of young adults are in favor of street-level protest, yet most have never taken part in any.

Room for Growth: Civic Action by Young Adults

Most young adults want to have a say in their country's future. And a clear majority of them already do have a say in individual ways, such as by voting and having political conversations. Yet, young adults are more hesitant when it comes to amplifying their individual voices and collectively pressuring decision-makers and the public.

Individual Everyday Actions Preferred

Civic engagement has many faces – ranging from more formalized acts such as voting to more “hands-on” collective actions like joining a protest march to less visible everyday efforts like shopping and travelling in ways that are less harmful to people and the planet. While all modes of engagement can potentially impact policies and public sentiments, well-coordinated collective actions are often more effective.

On an individual level, a clear majority of young adults in all five countries are already active. Many vote (76%, on average), donate money or things (63%), boycott products with a bad ecological footprint (45%) and share their political opinions with those in their social circle and at work (60% and 44%, respectively).

Compared to these individual actions, team efforts are few and far between, though: **On average, more than 70% of young adults have never joined in a protest march, a sit-in or citizens' initiative, even though the majority of them call for more grassroots efforts. When addressing this ambivalence and asking about their willingness to get involved, about a quarter of the population express an interest in doing so – in addition to the 25% to 30% who are already active, thus growing the potential recruitment pool for collective action to about 50% of young adults in Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK, an invaluable asset for a resilient civil society.**

Yet, given young adults' deep anxieties about their country's future, these numbers beg the following questions:

- > Does their current involvement align with their concerns about pressing issues such as climate change, social inequality and material insecurity?
- > Are the current modes of engagement suitable for an age group which more than any other "lives" online and is used to being given ample opportunities for co-creation?
- > And, most importantly: Why do young adults take civic action? Why not?

The Why: A Call of Duty and Personal Growth

In particular, young adults get involved when they sense a moral duty or a chance for personal growth. Forty-five percent say they invest their time, treasure and talent because they want to be sure, in the future, that they did everything they could, and about four out of 10 simply see it as their "duty" as citizens. For 41%, civic engagement is spurred by a desire for personal development, such as learning about conscious consumption or gaining new skills while planning a political event.

Across the five countries, young adults tend to prioritize purpose over personal gain. Many have moved toward civic engagement due to their profound worry about a specific problem. **Climate change, discrimination and racism exert**

a particular pull: At least 60% of those who are deeply concerned about one of these issues have already taken some form of action.

The Why-Not: No Clue, No Desire, Too Risky

It cannot be assumed that all young adults want to get more involved in civic engagement, but simply lack the knowledge and time (32% and 29%, respectively, identify these as major barriers). In fact, around 50% are either unwilling or unsure about going on a protest march, joining a citizens' initiative or another form of collective action; one in four prefers not to talk about political issues and one in 12 does not plan to vote. Ever.

This reluctance does not always signify a lack of interest, but also a concern about the potential downsides of getting involved in hot-button issues: Numerous young adults say they do not have the courage to take civic action, and between 54% and 69% agree that, in their country, doing so could expose them to several risks – including physical harm, hate speech (especially online) or even legal consequences. While many can put up with conflicts with friends and family, stress and frustration, less than one third would be willing to face economic, physical or legal risks, even if they strongly believe in the cause.

The Movers of Tomorrow?

Are young adults truly the "movers of tomorrow"? The answer is "yes" – potentially. But they cannot single-handedly change the course their societies will take. Not least because of the risks and disadvantages that to this day prevent many young adults from getting involved.

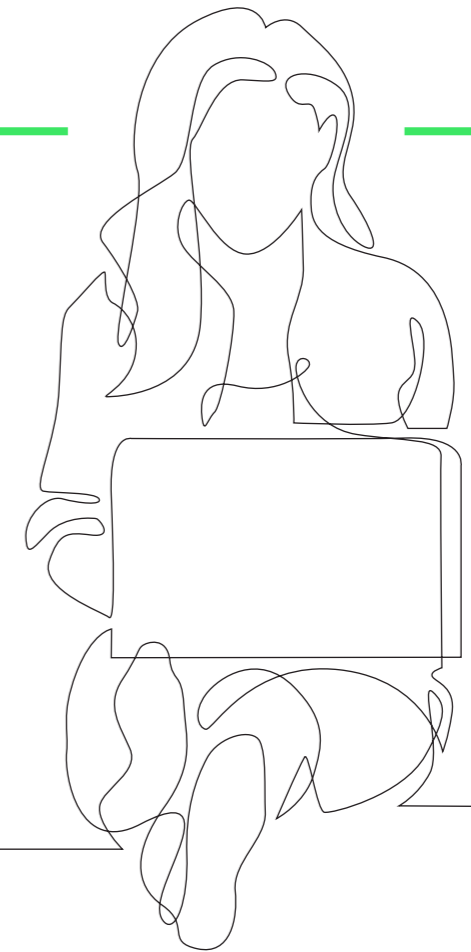
To learn more about what exactly is needed to unleash the civic potential of young adults, the Allianz Foundation invited 78 leading voices from civil society, the arts and journalism to seven interactive Future Labs in seven European cities – Athens, Berlin, Istanbul, London, Palermo, Warsaw and Prizren in Kosovo. Valuable lessons emerged from them, including the need to craft more compelling change narratives, address burnout, create and defend safe spaces and foster dialogue among young adults, civil society and its public and private funders. All the insights and recommendations are detailed in the Allianz Foundation Future Labs report, which is available to download at allianzfoundation.org/study.

Generation Z vs. Millennials: Only minor differences

The focus of this study is on two generations of young adults: the so-called Generation Z (whose adult members are currently aged 18 to 26 years) and Generation Y, also known as Millennials (currently aged 27 to 39 years). In the coming years and decades, these young adults will shape the direction their countries take, and some are already doing so today.

More interest has recently been shown in understanding and comparing each generation. This interest often comes with the temptation to label a given age cohort as uniformly "woke" and "climate anxious" (Generation Z) or as "self-absorbed" and "non-committal" (Millennials), just to name a few traits. However, our analysis shows that the differences between the two groups are mostly small, measuring only a few percentage points in the following areas:

- > Survey participants classified as Generation Z are, on average, slightly more optimistic about the future, slightly more concerned about the climate, diversity issues and social justice, slightly more willing to take civic action and slightly more willing to take risks.
- > The surveyed Millennials are, on average, slightly more concerned about freedom of the press, somewhat more conservative when it comes to migration, slightly more conscious about traditional values, somewhat more concerned when it comes to energy and living costs and even more disappointed by the political leadership.



In times like these, I understand when people hesitate to have children.



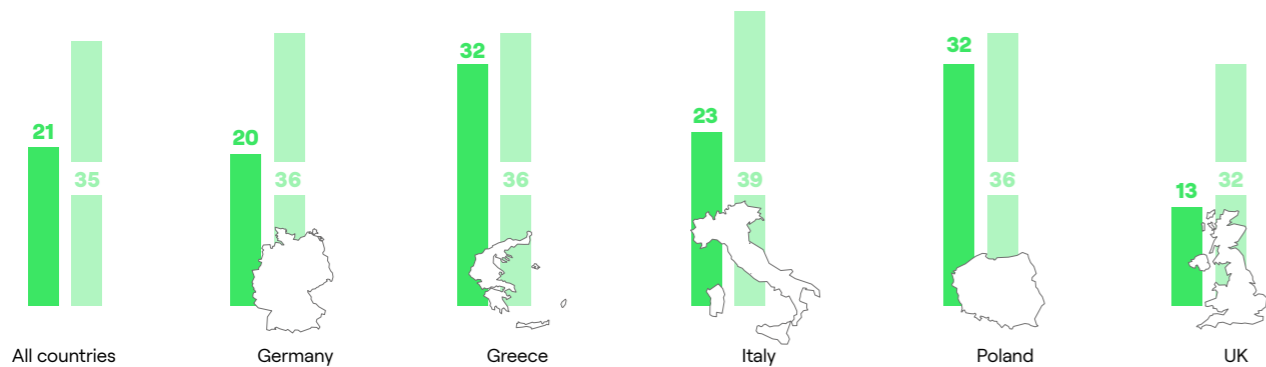
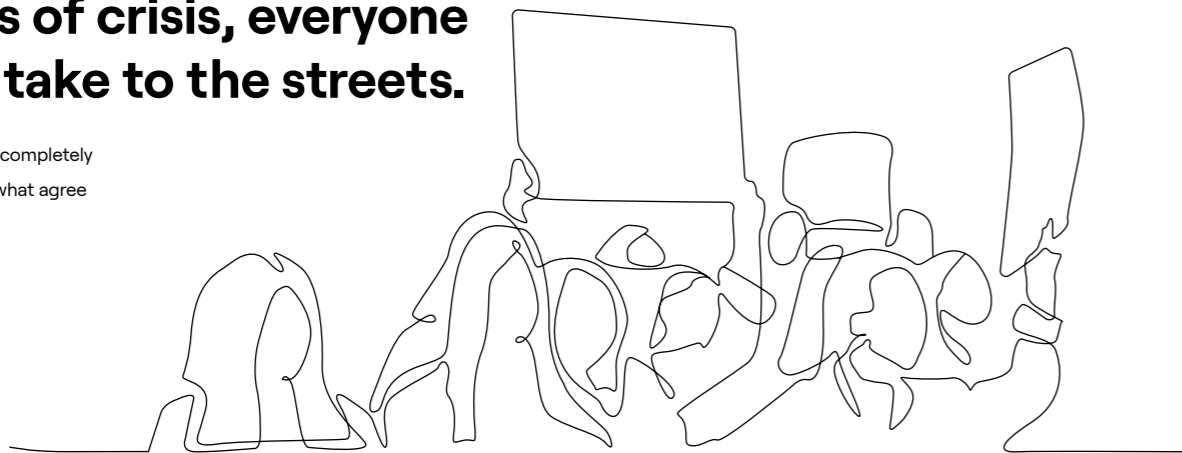
81%
AGREE



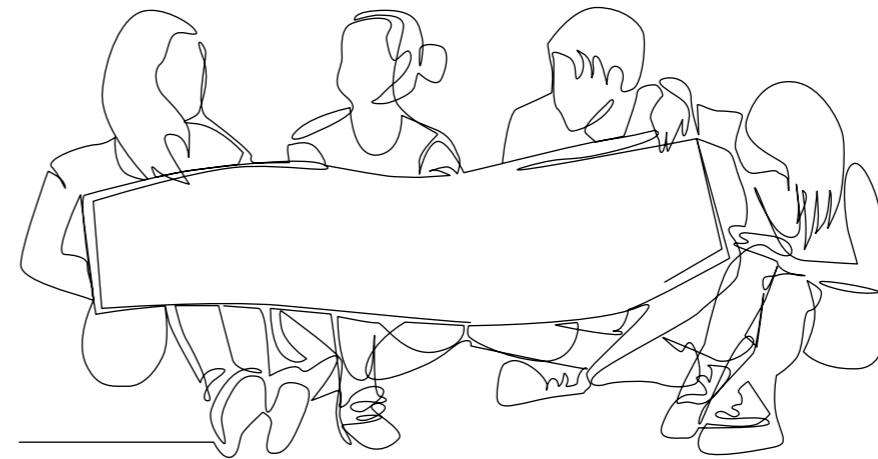
ATTITUDES TOWARD STREET-LEVEL PROTEST, IN %

In times of crisis, everyone should take to the streets.

■ % agree completely
■ % somewhat agree



Who has taken collective action?
Who else is willing?



28%+24%
Street-level protest

27%+26%
Citizens' initiatives

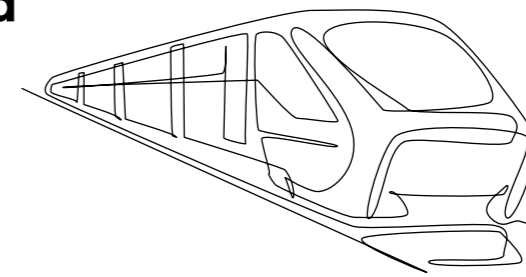
20%+20%
Non-violent civil disobedience

■ Have already taken action
■ Have not taken action, but would consider it

CHANGING PERSONAL HABITS

I have modified how I travel.

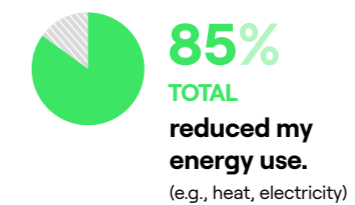
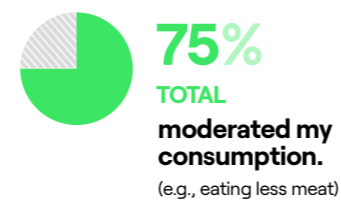
(e.g., less air travel)



67%
TOTAL



I have...



Poland in International Comparison

Overall, the future outlooks and civic actions of young adults in Poland closely align with those of their peers in Germany, Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom, and they are more similar than they are different. In other words, the aforementioned findings also apply to 18- to 39-year-olds in Poland.

Nevertheless, a few areas appear in which young adults in Poland differ from those in the other countries surveyed.

Political Attitudes: More Conservative Than Average, But With Strong Concern About Democracy

In all five countries surveyed, the majority of young adults identify with the political center. However, young Poles are noticeably more right-leaning than their peers abroad (23% vs. 18% on average) across all the countries are right-leaning or far-right-leaning. This conservative tendency is reflected in certain political attitudes. For example, only in Poland do a majority of young adults disagree that same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt children (61% disagree vs. 31% on average). Young Poles are also the least likely to endorse quotas in parliaments and on company boards for women (38% vs. 54% on average) or ethnic minorities (29% vs. 44% on average).

Conservatism among young Poles, however, does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with democratic backsliding. Young Poles are among the most convinced in the sample that strong democratic institutions are critical to a good life, that is an independent justice system (78% vs. 69% on average), independent media outlets (62% vs. 48% on average) and citizen participation in political decision-making (61% vs. 52% on average). They are also more likely than their peers abroad to reject both authoritarian calls for to “strong” leadership and political violence: Only 18% believe that the latter can ever be morally justified (vs. 22% on average).

Desired Future: More Emphasis on Economic Growth and a Strong Military

Generally, young adults in Poland also want a secure, affordable, eco-friendly and fair future society. However, they also place more emphasis on high-paying job opportunities (67%) and high economic growth (55%) than their peers abroad (vs. 54% and 47% on average, respectively). Con-

versely, they attach less importance to achieving low social inequality (39% vs. 49% on average) and equal opportunity for minorities (38% vs. 53% on average). These priorities put them more in line with the conservative minorities in the other countries surveyed rather than the mainstream.

Young adults in Poland are also by far the most likely to call for a stronger military (52% vs. 30% on average) – no doubt a reflection that their country will get involved in a war (60% strongly concerned vs. 42% on average).

Expected Future: More Concern About the Economy Than the Climate and Poor Overall Outlook

Among young Poles inflation is by far the most pressing concern (84%). Most believe that this problem will only continue to worsen over the next decade (68%). Along with young Greeks, they are also the least likely to believe that the climate situation will improve (42% vs. 50% on average). Perhaps this helps explain why they are second only to Italians when it comes to pessimism with regard to the future of their country (70% vs. 64% on average across all five countries).

As mentioned above, besides the economy, young Poles are also considerably more concerned about threats to democracy, for example media manipulation (57% vs. 41% on average) and the erosion of the justice system (55% vs. 36% on average). They are split on whether the independence of the media and the courts will be eroded or improve. However, they do hold out some hope that governance overall will improve: Thirty-nine percent express optimism here, as opposed to 34% who are pessimistic.

Civic Action: Slightly More Outspoken

Nearly all young Poles have taken at least some action to help address social and environmental problems. For the majority, this means changing individual habits like moderating energy use (84%), consumption (74%) or travel (70%). These modes of action are taken in response to both rising costs and environmental destruction – the issues on which concerned young Poles state they are most likely to take action. Compared to their peers abroad, young adults in Poland are also not shy about expressing their political opinions: Sixty-eight percent are willing to do so in face-to-face conversations (vs. 60% on average) and 47% on social media (vs. 37% on average).

In terms of collective action like participating in

protests and other political events, young adults in Poland are somewhat more active than their European peers, with 30% to 35% having already engaged in civic action. Citizens’ initiatives also hold appeal in Poland, with 36% having already participated (compared to 27% across all five countries), and an additional +29% are willing to do so in the future (vs. +26%).

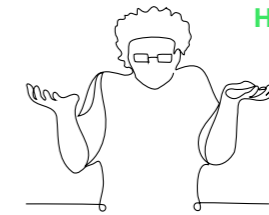
Appealing to their altruistic motives seems most effective when it comes to motivating these potentially active citizens. Survey respondents who are already active say they are mostly driven by their sense of civic duty. As in Greece and Germany, but unlike in Italy and the UK, young adults in Poland are also strongly motivated to engage by their desire for personal growth.

When it comes to barriers to civic action, some young Poles are also more forthright than their peers abroad about the fact that they simply do not have the courage to engage (32% vs. 21% on average). A majority believe that taking civic action could lead to risks and disadvantages. However, their risk tolerance is somewhat lower across the board, with most saying they are particularly reticent to get involved in conflicts with friends and family, to suffer financial or job disadvantages or to get into trouble with the law.

Civic Action in Poland: Six Types of Young Adults

The Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study identified six engagement types in Poland and the other countries surveyed. Among those who have taken little to no civic action so far, 7% of young adults in Poland belong to the politically left-leaning group of **Hesitant Progressives** who have yet to act on their pronounced concerns about environmental and social justice. Members of the sizable **Quiet Mainstream** (27%) are also mostly inactive, but are less politically opinionated and interested. Their counterparts to the right are the **Passive Traditionalists** (10%), who despite their strong religious bent are not particularly involved in any social or environmental causes.

The smallest yet most organized of the three civically engaged groups are the **Conservative Campaigners** (14%), who through their actions seek to promote values of individual prosperity and national identity. The **Proactive Center** (31%) are less driven by any particular issue but nonetheless willing to be involved in shaping the future, preferably through individual actions. Finally, the **Progressive Movers** (12%) are the youngest and most left-leaning group, as well as the one with the highest overall level of civic engagement.



Hesitant Progressives (7%)

- > Pessimistic views of the future
- > Climate concerns
- > Focus: Social (and environmental) security
- > Often secular
- > Usually educated



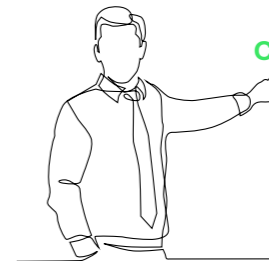
Quiet Mainstream (27%)

- > Usually lower or medium level of education
- > Focus: Own living costs and safety
- > Most likely to delegate responsibility to the state



Passive Traditionalists (10%)

- > Tradition-conscious, often rural
- > Eurosceptic
- > Focus: Costs and traditional values
- > Often over 30 years old



Conservative Campaigners (14%)

- > Second most frequently engaged type
- > Most organized type
- > Focus: Wealth, community, tradition
- > Often urban, religious
- > Some authoritarian tendencies



Proactive Center (31%)

- > Diffuse images of the future, strongly influenced by daily news
- > Somewhat more influenced by social media and companies



Progressive Movers (12%)

- > Most frequently engaged type
- > Focus: Eco-friendliness and social justice
- > Pessimistic view of own country
- > Often urban
- > Not as organized as Conservative Campaigners

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