

Towards the G20

Poland's Ambitions and Prospects
for Membership



About the Report

According to the International Monetary Fund estimates, **Poland's GDP in 2025 exceeded 1 trillion dollars**, bringing our country closer to the ranks of the world's 20 largest economies. This is the culmination of the joint efforts of entrepreneurs, successive governments, and all Polish men and women.

Poland's efforts to join the G20 serve as a symbolic confirmation of this process. Participation in the group's work offers **an opportunity to help shape the global agenda**, including coordination in areas significant to us: financial markets, trade, development and climate policies.

Although obtaining full membership in the G20 will be difficult, we believe that developing a well-structured strategy – one that involves identifying key decision-makers, assessing our country's strengths and weaknesses, and building a broad coalition of actors and institutions – **will be highly beneficial to Poland and will enhance its international standing.**

At the same time, we feel that the Polish debate on the G20 lacks a medium- and long-term perspective. The prevailing view is that Poland's transformation was unique, but it looks far less exceptional from the perspective of the G20 countries.

That is why, together with the **PKO Bank Polski Foundation**, we launched the **“Towards the G20” project**, which presents the issue in an accessible way while incorporating international experiences and perspectives. We hope Poland's invitation to participate in the group's work in 2026 and attend the Miami summit will mark the beginning of its sustained and meaningful engagement with the G20. Achieving this, however, will require **a long-term strategy and cooperation among a broad range of stakeholders.**

The “Towards the G20” consists of four components:

- **an introductory report** – helping to explain what the G20 is, the areas in which it operates, and why it is important;
- **a stakeholder map** – showing where and on which issues to seek allies for Poland's presence in the group;
- **an external perspective** – drawing on interviews with foreign experts to identify the weaknesses of our “candidacy” and areas in which we may have a competitive advantage;
- **a project summary** – outlining the directions around which to build a long-term strategy and Poland's agenda for its participation in the G20.

The project was prepared in Polish and is available in the [Polityka Insight library](#).
Please find below a summary of each component of the report,
together with its key conclusions, in English.

Introduction

The G20 emerged as a forum for coordinating economic and financial policy. However, over time, its scope expanded to include trade, development policy, climate, and energy. Much of the G20's influence comes from the informal, flexible character of the cooperation it fosters. Furthermore, it allows member states to respond to emerging crises more quickly and effectively as they agree on next steps together. **Today the format ranks among the principal instruments of global economic governance, bringing together the world's largest and most consequential economies.**

Poland has been invited to take part in this year's G20 work and in the summit itself, which will be held in Miami, Florida. This reflects Poland's growing economic and political standing, its good relations with Washington, and, above all, broad international recognition of the success of the country's economic transformation. **Crucially, participation in the G20 allows Poland to help shape the global agenda in areas such as financial markets, trade, climate transition and development policy. The Miami invitation should not, however, be regarded as the culmination of Polish efforts.** One of Poland's short- and medium-term objectives should be to secure a permanent, or at least recurring, role in the G20's work and participation in the upcoming summits hosted by the United Kingdom and South Korea.

The central question, then, is whether Poland can demonstrate genuine "systemic significance" and offer the G20 a distinctive contribution that sets it apart from other participants. The report proposes a **"start with contribution, follow with presence" strategy**: steadily building Poland's standing within the G20 through active engagement at both the expert and political levels, and only then strengthening the case for Poland's permanent participation in the group.



History and structure of the G20

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- **The G20 is one of the most important formats of global governance, characterized by its limited, informal nature**
 - **It coordinates the actions of the world's most important economies to promote global stability (primarily financial) and creates favorable conditions for sustainable development**
 - **Though it influences global standards, its decisions carry no force under international law**
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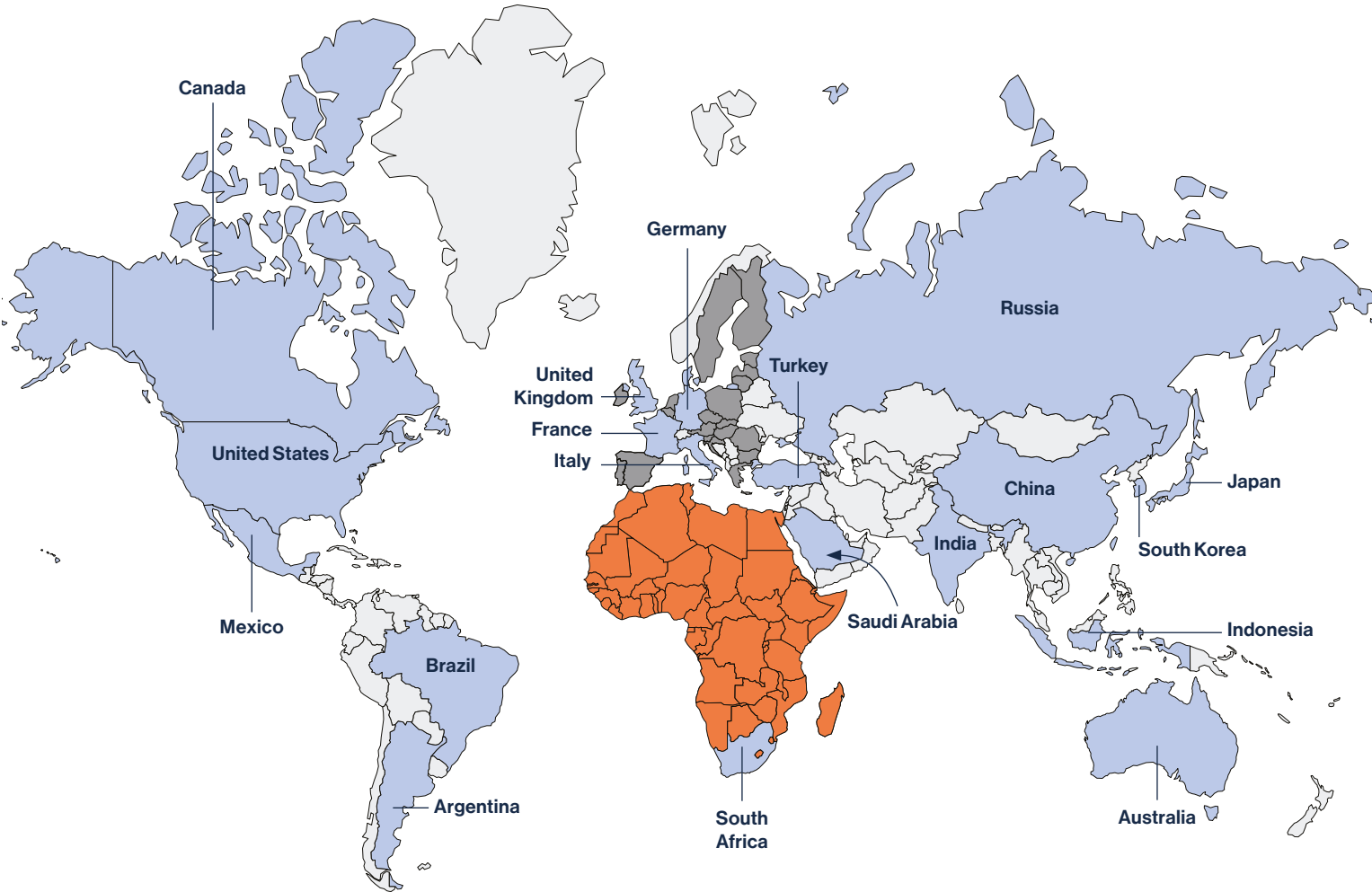
The G20 was established in 1999 as an informal platform joining finance ministers and central bank governors. Its creation was a response to the string of financial crises of the 1990s, which made it clear that economic stability required coordination extending beyond the G7. A further turning point came with the 2008 global financial crisis, when the G20 began convening at the level of national leaders and became one of the principal mechanisms for coordinating international economic policy.

Participation in the format is determined by the size of a country's economy and financial market, as well as the extent of its economic ties with other countries – factors that shape its significance to the stability of the global economic system. The presence of countries from different regions at different stages of development strengthens the group's legitimacy.

G20 MEMBERS

Member countries European Union African Union

In the case of the EU and the AU, the G20 membership consists of the organizations as a whole, not of each individual member state.



SOURCE: POLITYKA INSIGHT.

G20 COUNTRIES COLLECTIVELY ACCOUNT FOR:



SOURCE: OWN ANALYSIS. DATA SOURCED FROM THE WORLD BANK.

Another defining feature of the G20 is its informal character: it was not established by any founding treaty and has neither a permanent headquarters nor its own staff. Member states take yearly turns holding the presidency and are responsible for organizing the leaders' summit during their term. The so-called Presidency Troika (comprising of the state currently holding the presidency together with the previous and incoming hosts) helps sustain continuity across presidencies. The absence of a developed institutional structure lends to the G20's flexibility, but it also means **the group lacks an institutional memory of its own; this role is instead assumed, in part, by officials, sherpas and experts who remain engaged in the group's work over successive years.**

The G20's work runs along two main tracks: the finance and the sherpa. The former brings together finance ministers, central bank governors and their deputies, and concentrates on financial and macroeconomic stability as well as the functioning of financial markets. The latter, comprising leaders' representatives, covers a broader set of issues spanning development policy, trade, and social and health matters. Both tracks are supported by expert working groups, which handle technical work and build compromises ahead of high-level meetings. The G20 also relies on engagement groups, which bring non-governmental actors into its work (among them Youth 20 (Y20), Think 20 (T20), and Civil Society 20 (C20)). The recommendations produced by these groups form an important body of expertise for the G20, which otherwise lacks a developed administration or research capacity of its own.

The G20's informal status also means its decisions carry no force under international law; their implementation depends entirely on the political will of individual states and on cooperation with institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the OECD. Even in such cases, **the G20 can exert real influence over global standards and the direction of economic policy**, and it remains a valuable instrument of international cooperation. However, an excessive number of priorities risks diminishing the group's focus and undermining its effectiveness.



Poland and the G20

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- **Warsaw has to emphasize its unique position as a newly affluent country, at a crossroads between the West and the East**
 - **Lack of member-states' interest in setting the enlargement process in motion as the biggest obstacle**
 - **Poland is not the only country seeking admission**
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Poland's aspirations with respect to the G20 should be understood as an attempt to confirm the country's rising global economic standing, and as part of a broader strategy to increase its influence over global decision-making. The renewed debate over Poland's potential membership has been fueled by its rise in the global GDP rankings, but it is neither the only nor the main argument for deeper engagement with the G20.

The focus should instead fall on what Poland can offer the G20. Its most important asset is its successful economic transformation and subsequent build-out of an open, diversified economy that has proven resilient to crises – a track record that makes Poland a genuinely universal reference point, relevant to developing and developed economies alike. **Poland is often presented as a country occupying a distinctive middle ground.** It is affluent yet still catching up with the most advanced economies; pursuing decarbonization yet still partly reliant on coal extraction; and combining traditional agricultural and industrial sectors with a growing services and technology base. This in-between position strengthens Poland's voice at the G20 table, allowing it to offer the perspective of a state that has undergone a profound transformation, is deeply integrated into both the European and the global economies, and continues to confront challenges typical of converging economies. A further, solid basis for Poland's aspirations is its established standing within other international institutions. Poland belongs to the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, and the OECD,

and Poles hold significant positions on the European and global stages (among them Piotr Serafin, the EU Commissioner for Budget and Mateusz Szczurek, who has taken up the post of Director of the IMF's European Department). Poland is also one of NATO's leading members in terms of defense spending relative to GDP. Together, these factors add further weight to the argument that Poland is systemically significant and capable of building consensus within international fora.

There is also a significant political dimension to G20 accession, one that would undoubtedly strengthen Poland's global standing and open further avenues for alliance-building. Cooperation with other middle powers, such as states with sufficient weight to shape the international order beyond Europe's own structures, could matter a great deal here. **For Poland, G20 membership is not simply a matter of prestige: at stake is the ability to shape the rules of the global economy and to strengthen its negotiating position by drawing on its own development experience as a source of political and expert credibility.**

As for securing a permanent seat at the G20 table, this remains achievable in political terms, but it would be a long and complicated process. The principal reason lies in the very design of the G20, which operates without clear-cut membership criteria. Two distinct forms of engagement with the format can be distinguished: membership, referring to a permanent place in the group's work, and participation, which covers only attendance at deliberations and leaders' summits. **At present, however, the greatest obstacle facing Poland is the limited appetite among existing members for expanding the format.** The G20's small and exclusive membership counts among its principal strengths, since it eases negotiation, consensus-building and swift decision-making; further enlargement risks undermining this very mechanism. According to the G20@20 Review Report, only one member state has expressed openness to expanding the group, and even then on the condition of full consultation and consensus. At the same time, a quarter of members believe that the G20 group still needs to become more representative.

The weight of this challenge is illustrated clearly by the case of the African Union, the only body ever admitted to the G20 through enlargement. It attained member status in 2023, having spent the preceding thirteen years participating in the group's work as a guest. The African Union's admission reflected both the continent's growing economic weight and the need to broaden the G20's representativeness. It stands as a clear example of the years of sustained engagement required to win the other members' political acceptance and to prove one's usefulness to the group.

Member states' attitudes toward Poland are not unambiguous. Importantly, Poland can point to rapid economic growth and strong resilience to crises relative to other EU states, as well as to its economic openness and international integration. In 2025, its economy ranked 21st in the world by nominal GDP, and sixth within the EU. Its financial sector, however, remains relatively small and can hardly be described as systemically significant when set against the global leaders.

It is crucial to mention that Poland's aspirations to join the G20 are far from unique. Spain, the Netherlands, Norway, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates all find themselves in a similar position, and interest has grown further among states such as Egypt and Nigeria following the African Union's admission. Each of these candidates advances its own case and presents itself in the best possible light. Even so, Poland's invitation to this year's Miami summit offers a chance to take part in working groups and plenary discussions, and, above all, to build alliances – strengthening its standing within the G20's structures.



Poland's accession: sentiment among G20 member states

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- **No clear position among member states, including potentially favorable countries**
 - **The US as the biggest advocate of Poland in the G20, with Canada and South Korea being key potential backers**
 - **Opposition to admitting another EU state by Global South countries**
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G20 states' attitudes toward Polish ambitions vary considerably and largely reflect how each perceives its own interests and the balance of power within the group. **Most actors approach the question cautiously; the report identifies five categories of member-state positions: friendly, favorable, transactional, competitive and unfavorable.**

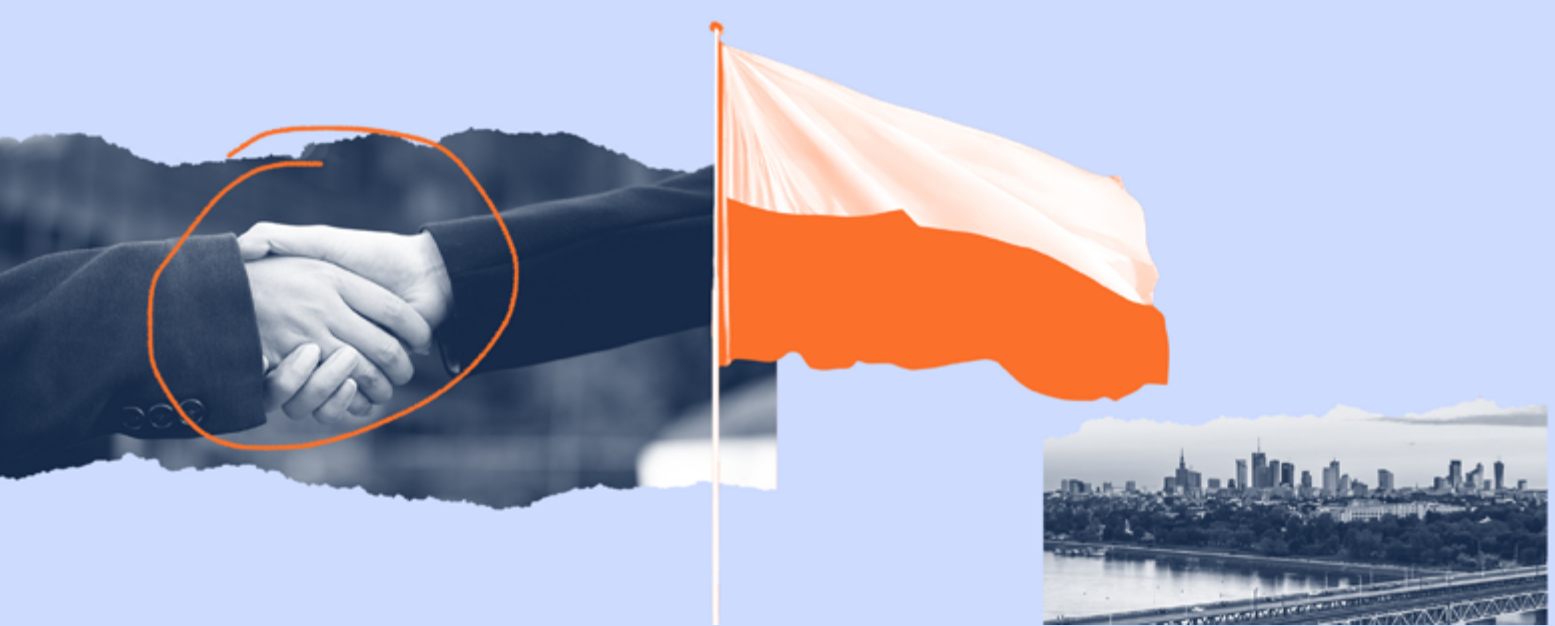
The United States is the strongest advocate of a greater Polish presence within the G20, and its stance amounts to a clear signal of political backing. The fact that Poland received this year's invitation is especially notable, since the presidency holder exerts considerable influence over the dynamics of meetings and over the choice of participants. This year the US chose not to invite South Africa to the group's work, even though it should form part of the troika. Crucially, current US support may not last, and a one-off invitation is no guarantee of Poland's automatic

participation in future presidencies and summits. A larger group of states can be described as favorable toward Poland but not prepared to actively lobby for its membership. This category includes France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Australia, South Korea, Italy, Argentina and Indonesia, as well as the EU acting as an institutional actor. Here the issue is not opposition to Poland joining the G20, but rather a lack of interest in setting an enlargement process in motion. The most consequential set of attitudes, however, belongs to the European states – they might appear the natural backers of Polish aspirations, yet their support turns out to be limited. France has no intention of blocking Polish participation, but its priority lies mainly in strengthening the Global South's representation, Africa in particular. Germany, too, favors changes to the G20's composition only if they are supported by broad consensus, while the EU itself has little incentive to advocate for Poland's membership, given that Europe is already amply represented within the group's structures (Spain and the Netherlands take part in its work as regularly invited guests). This points to one of the core challenges in this regard: Europe's over-representation within the G20. From the vantage point of many states, admitting yet another EU member is not a step toward diversifying the G20 but rather a reinforcement of the Western bloc at the Global South's expense.

Brazil does not favor expanding the G20 to include Poland, above all because it seeks to strengthen the role and influence of the Global South. Notably, during Brazil's presidency, Polish representatives were admitted to some of the engagement groups (i.e., B20, C20 and T20) even as Brazil continued to oppose any broader Polish involvement in the G20's core work. South Africa strikes a similar posture, and Poland's position is made more difficult by the fact that South Africa was left out of the US presidency's proceedings while Poland received an invitation – a situation that can be read as unequal. The African Union, too, is unlikely to prove a natural ally of Polish efforts, mainly because Poland is already indirectly represented there through the EU. A further category comprises states with a transactional stance: China, India and Saudi Arabia. Their positions are not fixed in either firm support or firm opposition but instead depend on a wider calculation of political and economic advantage. This leaves Poland an opening to build support through bilateral relationships, even if nothing seems to be guaranteed.

Yet another posture is taken by states classified as competitors: Turkey, Mexico, Spain and the Netherlands. For these countries, Polish efforts may be read as a potential threat to their own status and influence. The clearest example is Mexico, which fears that admitting another EU state would strengthen the European bloc within the G20 and weaken its own position. Turkey sees Poland as a rival among the wider group of middle powers vying for greater international standing. The most unambiguous stance of all belongs to Russia, which can be expected to remain consistently opposed to any Polish advance.

Taken together, this analysis of member states' positions suggests that Poland currently enjoys the backing of its single most important partner, the United States, yet lacks the broad coalition needed to carry an enlargement process through. **The greatest potential, however, appears to lie in relationships built beyond Europe, in particular with Canada and South Korea.** Both parties are looking for partners who share their approach to questions of security and international order, while states such as India, China, Turkey and Mexico may shift their positions depending on how trade and political relations evolve. Polish representatives' task is to convert the goodwill it currently enjoys among part of the membership into broader, more active support for its candidacy.



What experts say about the G20's future?

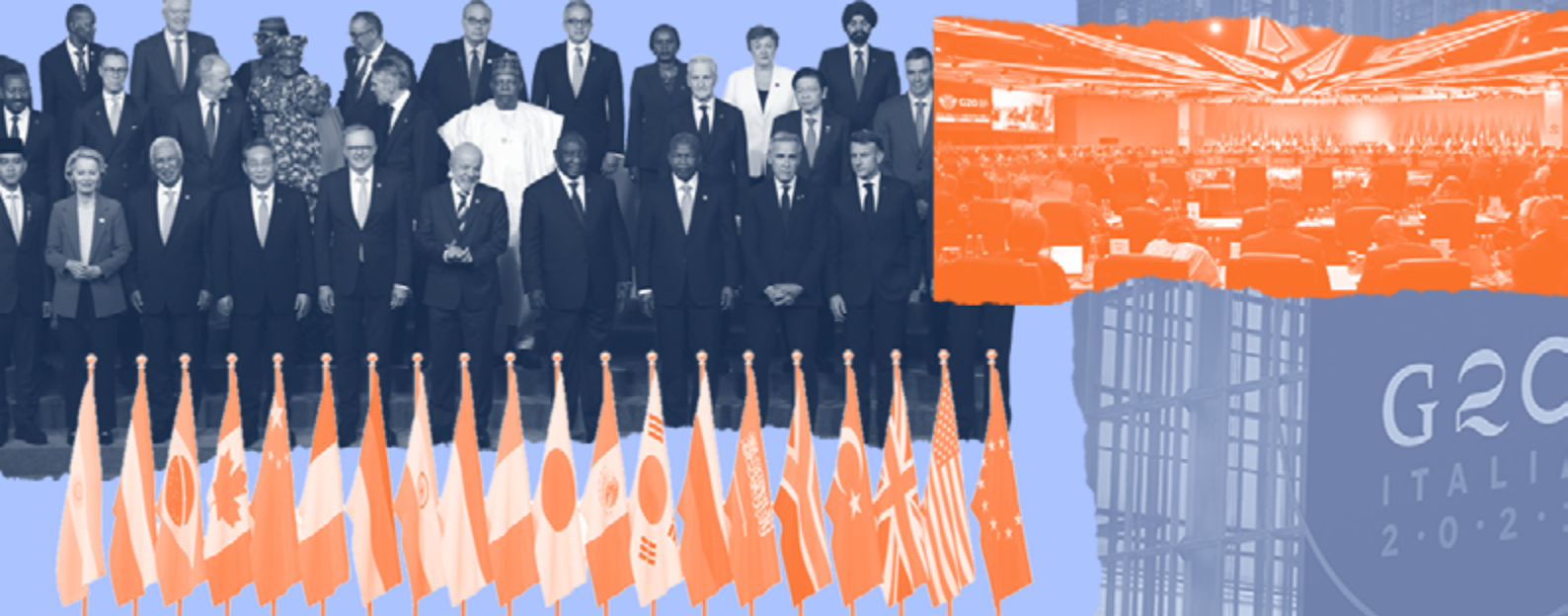
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- **Tensions between broadening the group's agenda and limiting its scope**
 - **Commitment to preserving a thematic core related to macroeconomics, trade, and the reform of international financial institutions**
 - **Talks of formalization**
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We conducted in-depth interviews with international experts and practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of the political and substantive dynamics of the G20 in the context of the successive global challenges facing the group. The 10 interviewees included political advisers, former sherpas and finance ministers from countries that have held the G20 Presidency in recent years, experts who have chaired T7 processes, leading academics, and government advisers.

The experts consulted for this report place considerable emphasis on the fact that the G20's effectiveness increasingly depends on its ability to contain political tensions and to concentrate on the areas where the group can genuinely be influential. Debates that were once primarily technical and economic in character have come to resemble political rivalry. The downside is that a breakdown in consensus weakens the G20's capacity to function as a forum tasked with coordinating the world's economic policies. Even so, during Indonesia's 2022 presidency, which coincided with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the group managed to preserve continuity in its work and to deliver a final announcement despite the considerable disruptions.

A further, fundamental challenge concerns the agenda's growing scope. Some experts argue that too broad a range of topics blurs the group's identity and slows its response to issues that genuinely require attention. Others counter that incorporating issues important to Global South states strengthens the G20's representativeness and legitimacy. **Nonetheless, there is a shared conviction that the group should preserve a clear thematic core built around macroeconomics, financial stability, trade, and the reform of international financial institutions.** Another significant problem is the gap between the commitments made at summits and their subsequent implementation; in the worst case, the G20 risks losing real agency and becoming little more than a diplomatic ritual. Proposed remedies include strengthening the role of international organizations in monitoring the group's progress, and further formalizing the troika mechanism, together with the working groups and the sherpas who sit at its center. Experts rate the finance track particularly highly, since it is here that the group retains its most significant capacity for real-world impact.





Strategy and recommendations for Poland

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- **Building alliances among like-minded middle powers**
 - **Poland as a credible voice and representative of the region**
 - **Demonstrating Poland's proven track record of economic resilience**
 - **Threefold strategy engaging the public sector, non-governmental organizations and think tanks, as well as business**
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The same experts were consulted about Poland's prospective membership and the strategies it should employ in its bid to join the G20. In their view, the current US presidency represents a serious disruption to the G20's traditionally multilateral character. Its focus on advancing a business-oriented agenda, together with the limited activity of the working groups and engagement groups, has weakened the continuity and effectiveness of the group's work as a whole. Considerable hope is accordingly being placed in the incoming UK presidency, which will be tasked with restoring the group's customary way of working and presenting a fresh momentum. From a Polish perspective, it is also worth noting how experts assess the prospects for further enlargement more broadly. Singapore and Norway are cited as positive examples, both having built their standing through thematic specialization and a high degree of professionalism.

Poland's first line of action in building a lasting G20 presence should be to cultivate relationships with the group of middle powers that prioritizes stability, predictability and the preservation of order, having in mind actors such as Canada, Japan, South Korea and Australia. These prospective partnerships would allow Poland to explore alternative export markets and to strengthen its strategic trade position, with direct benefits for regional development. It also brings the perspective of a country that bridges the experience of developed and emerging economies, which can help foster agreement between the Global South and the West.

A second priority should be to position Poland as a representative of Central and Eastern Europe – a particularly sensitive role given the debate over Europe's over-representation within the G20. Though challenging, a promising strategy would be to emphasize its value by representing a region that currently lacks a voice of its own within the group – namely, by representing the interests of the Baltic states, the Three Seas Initiative, and the Visegrád Group.

A third pillar should focus on conveying concrete economic achievements rather than resting on general declarations of success. Three areas in particular stand out as a recognizable Polish specialization: resilience to external shocks, energy and financial security, and stability of investment conditions. Equally important is the narrative around its own energy-transition experience, one that links climate goals with security and competitiveness. This strategy should be pursued continuously between summits, rather than confined to a political presence at leaders' meetings alone. By doing so, it builds networks of contacts, shapes the substance of future discussions and, above all, improves the odds of further invitations.

Coordination across different constituencies also matter. Public administration should take on the role of organizing the overall strategy by drafting medium- and long-term action plans, defining Polish positions on key issues (such as financial regulations), and building coalitions that bring in the business community and civil society. The government plenipotentiary for G20 participation should also play a greater role in communicating Polish positions externally.

Think tanks and non-governmental organizations have a different task to perform, where Polish research institutions should build expertise in selected areas, run research in alignment with the topics addressed within the T20 and other G20 working groups, and engage with international expert networks. Additionally, they would also be tasked with the mission of educating the public about the motives and rationale behind public sector decisions regarding the G20. **In accordance with the “start with contribution, follow with presence” strategy, Poland's recognition will come from the quality of its engagement rather than from diplomatic efforts alone.**

At the same time, the private sector should not be overlooked. Businesses ought to take an active part in shaping the Polish strategy and to apply its principles consistently in their international activity, with a particular role reserved for the B20 business forum, through which its presence would also take on an economic and commercial dimension, while accounting for differences in messaging to various target countries. Poland should avoid seeking an invitation as a political gesture from a particular host without first having built substantive credibility.

Conclusion

The aforementioned aspirations towards Poland's accession to the G20 forum rest today on firmer foundations than ever before, though this should not be read as synonymous with formal membership. The invitation to take part in the group's work in 2026 undoubtedly marks a breakthrough moment, cementing the political and economic standing on the international stage; at the same time, it does nothing to alter the G20's basic realities – the absence of a formal enlargement procedure, the limited readiness of current members to expand the group, and the persistent argument that Europe is already widely represented within its structures.

Active engagement in the G20's work – through both its working groups and engagement groups – as well as initiatives linking the G20 with organizations such as the G7, the OECD or the Council of the Baltic Sea States, is particularly important for Poland. It improves the odds of deepening cooperation within this elite circle and serves as a tool for advancing Polish developmental and political goals at home. **Poland should present itself as a mature actor with a developed economy while remaining mindful of its recent past.** Not long ago, Poland was still a developing country and a junior partner to the stronger economies around it. Our contribution should center on building economic resilience and pursuing a transformation toward a digital, green and, above all, competitive economy.



Fundacja

The PKO Bank Polski Foundation is one of the largest social organisations in Poland, operating with the support of Poland's largest and oldest bank, PKO Bank Polski. Our activities are based on three strategic pillars: developing future-ready skills, building social resilience, and supporting Poland's inclusive development. We practise a model of modern philanthropy focused on addressing social problems systematically rather than merely mitigating their effects. A key to achieving our goals is transparent cooperation with experienced experts and non-governmental organisations.

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