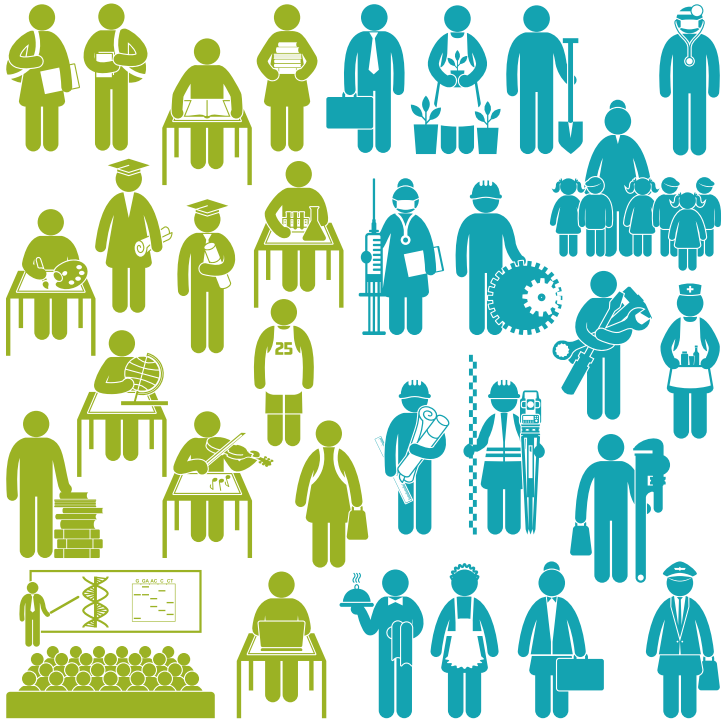
EDU LAB | European Youth in Transition to Education and Labour



Youth Voices from Kosovo: Youth Agency and Resilience in Education-to-Work Transitions – Preliminary Findings (Pristina region, CS11)

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Horizon Europe EDU-LAB (WP4)

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Case Study Location

Kosovo: Pristina region, XK (CS11)

- Capital-region case study centred in Pristina, Kosovo's main hub for higher education, services and employment.
- One case-study location coordinated by AAB College, focusing on young people's education-to-work transitions in the Pristina region..
- The case reflects diverse youth pathways and backgrounds, including secondary/VET and higher-education students, employed, job-seeking and NEET youth, as well as participants from Serbian and RAE (Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian) communities.



Study Aim & General Information

Study Aim

To understand how young people navigate education-to-work pathways, how institutional conditions enable or constrain their aspirations, and how young people adapt, persist and propose ways forward.

Evidence base for the findings presented

- CS location: Pristina region, Kosovo (case-study CS11)
- Focus Groups: 12 / 74 unique youth participants
- Participatory Workshops: 32 sessions / 62 unique youth participants / 30 completed all four workshops
- Structured Diaries: Total nr: 410 collected SD1 = 96 collected / SD2 = 314 collected
- Preliminary findings: thematic analysis completed for FGs / PW and diary data will be analysed in the next stages.

Preliminary-analysis procedure will be introduced in the WP4 overview; no separate analysis slide is included.

Participants

Location

Prishtina (case study) 87

Gender

Female 65

Male 22

Age

15–18 years 23

19–23 years 31

24+ years 33

Country of Birth

Prishtina 42

Other cities in Kosovo 37

Serbia 5

Other countries 3

Other countries: Germany, Switzerland and Turkey. N = 87

Migration Background

No migrant background 87

Migrant background 0

No participants reported a migration background.

Ethnic Minority Background

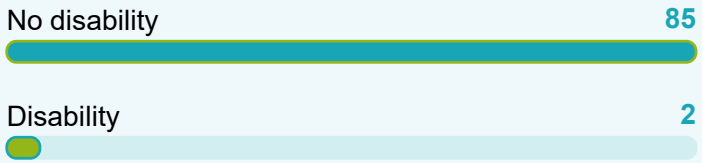
No ethnic minority background 77

Ethnic minority background 10

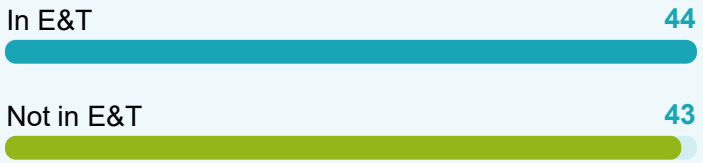
6 Serbian; 4 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian participants.

Participants

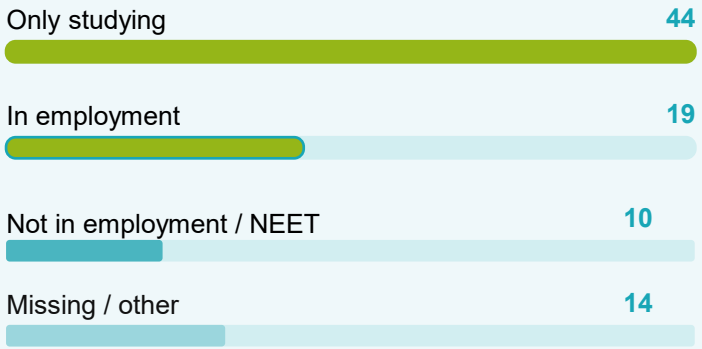
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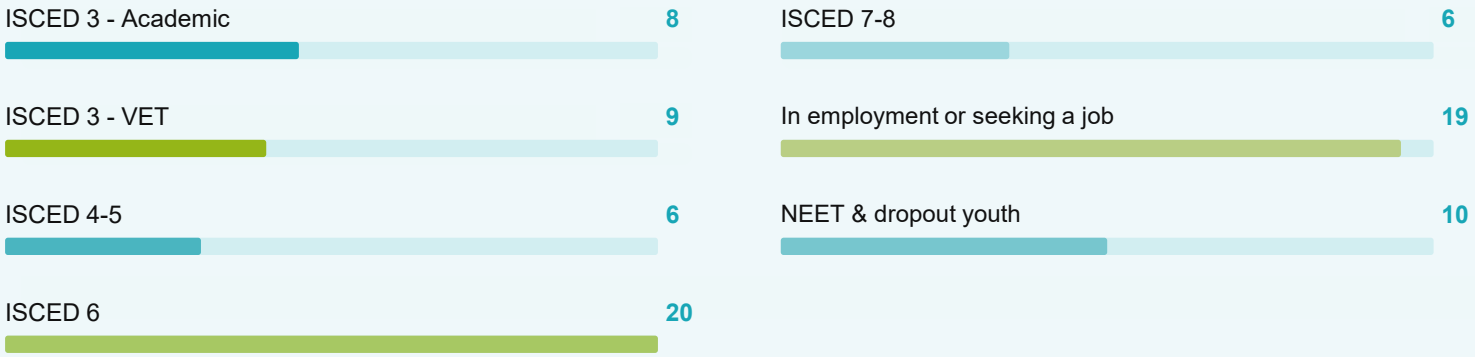
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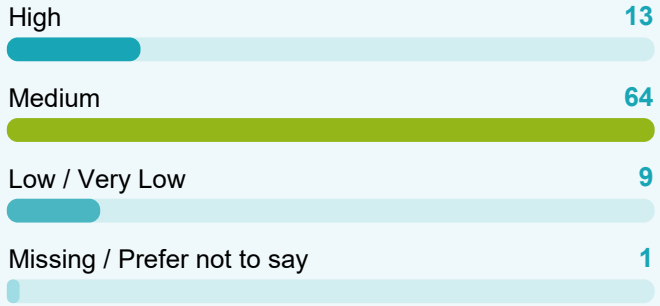
Employment situation



Profile



Perceived SES



Preliminary Data Analysis

Aim

To obtain a systematic first reading of each focus group and create a comparable basis for cross-group thematic analysis.

Procedure

A structured deep-analysis template was applied separately to each focus-group transcript. Recurrent ideas across groups were then compared and synthesised by the research team. These preliminary findings informed the deeper thematic analysis presented at ECER 2026 and developed further in the submitted paper.

What to extract from the data

1. **Recurring patterns across focus groups**
   Repeated ideas and experiences appearing within and across groups.
2. **Agreements, disagreements and nuances**
   Shared perspectives as well as differences in participants' experiences and interpretations.
3. **Problems, barriers and critical transition points**
   Constraints affecting education, employment and education-to-work pathways.
4. **What works well / enabling factors**
   Support, opportunities and resources that help young people move forward.
   ***Context note**: the Serbian-community focus group was interpreted with attention to its specific community and data-collection context.*

Summary of key findings: How Agency and Resilience Emerge from the Kosovo Findings

Agency and resilience emerge at the intersection of aspirations, institutional barriers and pathway mismatch.

Theme 1 – Aspirations for meaningful, practical & fair pathways

1. Practical learning and engaging teaching
2. Passion, growth and meaningful careers
3. Merit-based employment and economic security

Theme 2 – Institutional barriers to opportunity

1. Theory–practice gap, overload / rote learning, resource gaps
2. Weak guidance, programme coherence and student voice
3. Perceived nepotism / unfair recruitment and limited opportunities

FOCUS – Agency, resilience & wellbeing

1. Adaptive responses: Self-directed learning, persistence, mentoring / job seeking
2. Stress, work–study balance, demotivation and goal recalibration

Theme 4 – Alignment and mismatch in youth pathways

1. Alignment where study, skills and work connect
2. Partial mismatch: unrelated work, career switching and underused skills

Youth Agency & Resilience: From Mismatch to Negotiated Resilience

Deeper Kosovo analysis presented at ECER 2026

Institutional mismatch → **Adaptive responses** → **Costs & goal recalibration**

How young people respond

- Self-directed learning and skill-building
- Seeking mentors, work experience and alternative pathways
- Persistence despite repeated barriers
- Taking available or unrelated work while pursuing longer-term goals

What makes agency costly

- Stress, disappointment and demotivation
- Work–study balance and institutional inflexibility
- Low trust and uncertainty about fair opportunities
- Delayed or revised goals

Negotiated resilience

“Sometimes I get disappointed but I tell myself… you have to fight because without fighting you can’t achieve anything.”

— Youth participant (NEET)

Agency does not disappear under constraint; it is reshaped through adaptation, continued searching and goal recalibration.

Mismatch may produce resilience, but at psychological and practical cost

Codebook signal: Personal Agency & Resilience and Emotional State/Wellbeing may require more explicit coding.

Conclusion: From Negotiated Resilience to System-Enabled Agency

1. What we learned

The main gap is not low aspiration

Young people remain active and ambitious, but pathway mismatch can redirect agency from opportunity-seeking toward coping and adaptation.

2. What this means

Resilience should not become a substitute for institutional support

Institutions need to reduce avoidable mismatch and create fair, practical opportunities in which youth agency can succeed.

Practical implication

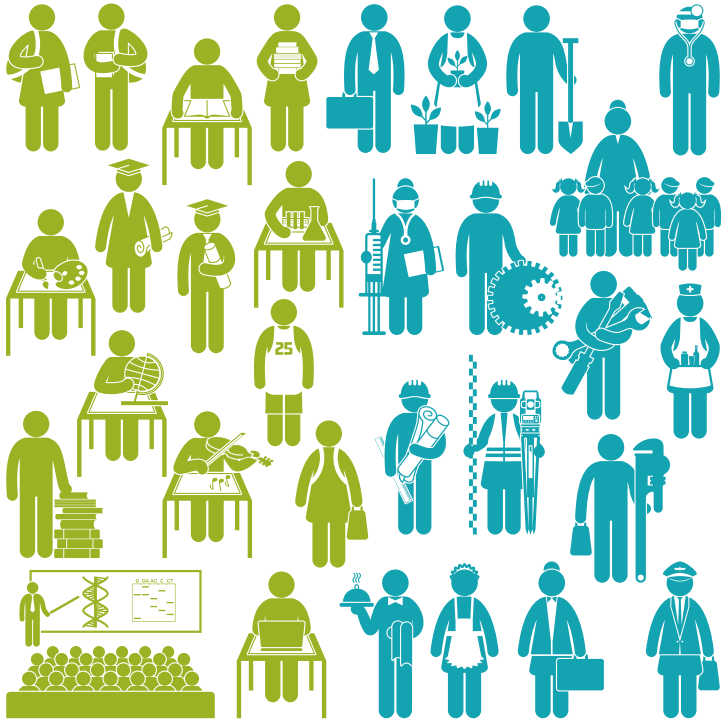
Build an integrated Youth Transition Pathway

Career guidance - Practical learning - Mentoring - Employer links - Wellbeing support

Identify mismatch early — before young people are forced to downscale or abandon their aspirations.

The goal is not to make young people better at surviving mismatch, but to build pathways in which their agency can succeed.

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Thank you for your attention.