

# Research, Analysis, and Campaign: Supporting NEET Individuals, Youth in Transition, and Guidance Providers

## UFO – Unlocking Future Opportunities



### Abstract

This report represents an in-depth analysis of the rising challenges faced by young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), a group that makes up a significant part of the global youth population. NEET youth are at heightened risk of social exclusion, long-term unemployment, and mental health struggles, with particularly severe impacts on vulnerable groups. It also looks closely at students who may be at risk of falling into this category, highlighting the key factors contributing to their vulnerability.

Based on desk research and field interviews carried out in Portugal, Slovenia, Germany, and North Macedonia, the study synthesizes the implications of high NEET rates. It also explores students' hopes and worries about their future, as well as the perspectives of teachers and youth leaders who work closely with them.

The extended document also dives into the concept behind the “Unlocking Future Opportunities” project, describes the partners' specific backgrounds and needs, and presents a social media campaign designed to inspire action and engagement from target audience – both NEET youth and students who may be at risk – by offering guidance and sparking conversation online.

The report serves as starting point for the upcoming moments of the “Unlocking Future Opportunities” and that will support them with valuable insights.

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## Background & Relevance

The term NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is used to identify young people – typically aged 15 to 29 – who are disengaged from formal education systems, the labour market, and vocational training opportunities. In recent years, the NEET population has attracted growing attention due to its implications for national productivity, social cohesion, and the well-being of young people. The COVID-19 crisis further exacerbated this issue disrupting education, limiting job opportunities, and increasing the mental health burden on youth.

The “Unlocking Future Opportunities” project emerged as an innovative collaboration among four European organizations who intend to help young people discover their strengths and take charge of their futures, whether that means continuing their education, entering the workforce, or getting involved in their community.

Understanding the background and the multifaceted causes of NEET status is essential for designing effective interventions and building resilient pathways to further education, employment, and social participation. This document aims to explore these dynamics and offer practical insights for organizations and schools committed to supporting youth – along with their teachers and youth workers – while also providing guidance and motivation to help young people connect with meaningful opportunities.

## 1. Idea of the project

The “Unlocking Future Opportunities” was born out to a shared challenge across the partner countries: the ongoing struggles marginalized young people are facing, that fall into NEET (Not in Education, Employment, nor Training) situations. It stems from a deep understanding of youth disengagement and their missed chances to support their growth, learning, and potential. At its core, it’s about opening doors – supporting young people in overcoming the barriers that hold them back, and guiding them towards education, meaningful work, and a bright future.

By offering fresh perspectives and accessible support – along with practical tools and methods via Career Guide and eBrochure - this project aims to foster environments that don’t just include young people but truly empower them. Through these resources, the initiative highlights the many pathways available, helping young people discover their potential and take confident steps towards their future.

## 1.1. Objectives

This small-scale partnership “Unlocking Future Opportunities” aims to strengthen young people’s engagement in society and help them develop the skills they need to thrive. At the same time, it seeks to better equip those who work closely with youth – youth workers, educators, and mentors – by enhancing their approaches to be more effective and impactful.

At its core, the project aims to:

- **Educate youth workers, educators, and facilitators:** Provide practical tools and innovative methods to enhance their work effectiveness.
- **Internationalize practices:** Foster cross-border activities among partner organizations.
- **Stimulate creativity and productivity:** Inspire both youth workers and young participants to think creatively and bring their ideas to life.
- **Open horizons:** Expose young people to new experiences, perspectives, and future pathways.
- **Stimulate proactivity:** Inspire young participants to take initiative and confidence into shaping their lives.
- **Personal and societal engagement:** Ensure inclusion and opportunities creation.

Many youngsters today are unaware of the opportunities available to them nor their own potential – a challenge that has deepened in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, contributing to rising numbers of NEET youth and a growing sense of social disengagement. Building on these core aims, this project puts a strong focus on empowerment, awareness, and support. By using creative methods, we aim to guide young people rediscover their sense of purpose, boost their confidence and feel more in control of their future. The goal is not only to improve their quality of life, productivity and proactivity, but also strengthen their well-being and connection to the community around them. At the same time, we are committed to equipping youth workers, educators, and facilitators with the resources they need to enhance their skills and competences – through the Career Guide and eBrochure.

To achieve these aims, the project pursues the following objectives:

- To support organizations, strengthen and expand their youth work by introducing fresh ideas, encouraging cross-border collaboration, and promoting inclusive approaches.
- To support youth workers, educators, and facilitators by giving them access to practical and creative tools, methods that help them better connect with and support the young people they work with.
- To empower young people to recognize their strengths, believe in their potential, and take charge of their future – whether in education, career, or their roles in society.
- To provide young people with meaningful learning experiences that allow young people, through exploring new environments, meet diverse peers, and use creative tools that boost their confidence, motivation, and curiosity.

- To foster a stronger sense of initiative, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement helping young people feel like they truly have a voice, a role, and the power to make the difference in their community and beyond.

## 1.2. Target Groups

In this project, we will be focusing on three main groups of people:

- **Primary target group:** Young people – aged 14 to 30 – who face tough challenges, whether they come from disadvantaged backgrounds or have limited opportunities, that make it harder for them to stay engaged in education or feel like they belong in their communities.
- **Secondary target group:** Youth workers, educators, and mentors who work closely with these young people every day.
- **Tertiary target group:** Organizations and institutions like youth associations, community centres, and schools that are dedicated to supporting young people.

## 1.3. Outputs

The outputs of this project are designed to serve the three target groups.

Young people aged 14 to 30 are the primary focus of the Campaign and Career Guide. Through these tools, we aim to raise awareness by sharing research-based insights, motivate young people with inspirational content, and provide them with meaningful sources of support – whether through our NGOs or specific institutions in each partner country.

In addition, the project outputs will be valuable resources for organizations and institutions working with young people, including youth workers, educators, and mentors. Across all groups, the emphasis is on inclusion, particularly supporting marginalized young people from diverse backgrounds who are eager to contribute to a more engaged society while taking charge of their own futures.

We focus on youth because we recognize that many young people are motivated to build a better future but often lack access to the knowledge and tools needed to make this possible. Our outputs aim to bridge that gap by empowering them with the resources they need to succeed.

## 1.4. Partners

The partners involved in this project come together with a shared drive to grow, innovate, and make a lasting difference in the lives of young people. Each organization brings unique perspective, yet they all face similar challenges in their countries as well as in their daily youth work. What unites us is a deep commitment to learning, evolving, and applying fresh approaches in their local communities.

This partnership is rooted in the desire to exchange ideas, develop practical tools, and explore creative methods that can adapt to different personal and social contexts. By embracing non-formal education practices, the partners hope to enhance their support for young people – especially those at risk of social exclusion or not in employment, education, or training.

Through transnational meetings, youth exchanges, and shared resources, the project provides space for inspiration, collaboration, and meaningful learning. The partners are not only motivated to gain new skills – they are equally motivated to turning these insights into real, positive starting points for a change.

Their involvement ensures a dynamic, forward-thinking collaboration with the potential to strengthen youth work across borders, build long-term partnerships, and amplify the collective impact of their efforts.

## 1.5. Working Methods

By researching and analysing existing data, along with exploring different perspectives on the challenges and fears young people face about their future, it will provide a strong foundation for the subsequent project results – Campaign, Methodology, Career Guide, and eBrochure – ensuring they are relevant, thoughtful, and truly responsive to young people's needs.

The working methods are the following:

- Desk research: Reviewing existing literature and reports to gather background knowledge and identify trends related to youth challenges and NEET risks.
- Field research: Conducting interviews and questionnaires with the primary and secondary target groups, as well as experts and stakeholders from relevant sectors.

The need for this kind of research and analysis has been widely discussed among youth workers, educators, and legal representatives within our organizations. They increasingly encounter the concerns and uncertainties young people face about their future – concerns that can lead to disengagement and, ultimately, a higher risk of becoming NEET.

Based on the insights we gather, we will launch a dedicated campaign aimed at reaching and connecting with the primary target group. The goal is to motivate and enlighten them

with meaningful support sources, helping them feel empowered and hopeful about their future.

## 1.6. Expected Outcomes

The research will produce a comprehensive analysis of the various obstacles face by NEET individuals, as well as the hopes, fears and perspectives of young people regarding their futures – factors that can contribute to the risk of becoming NEET. This analysis will be valuable for organizations and institutions where youth workers, educators, and mentors support young people from diverse backgrounds.

Building on this research, the project will develop a broad range of outputs, methods, and tools designed to improve engagement with marginalised youth. These resources will enable more effective workshops, youth exchanges, and greater awareness of available support services. Ultimately, the project will empower youth workers and organizations to better address the needs of young people at risk, fostering inclusion and increasing opportunities for positive change.



## 2. Partners Involved

The partners involved in this project are from 4 European countries: Associação de Solidariedade Social Crescer Sem Risco, from Portugal; Družinski inštitut Objem, inštitut za mentalno zdravje otrok, mladostnikov in odraslih Maribor, from Slovenia; Tabana NGO e. V., from Germany; and Youth association Info front – Prilep, from North Macedonia.

A key strength of the “Unlocking Future Opportunities” project lies in its diverse partnership. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the four partner organizations representing Portugal, Slovenia, Germany, and North Macedonia. Their complementary expertise sets foundation for a robust, collaborative approach to youth.

The partnerships are built on the principle of balance: experienced organizations in the field of Erasmus+ and non-formal education and newly established organizations. The partners and participants will be involved directly in the workshops during the activities like Transnational Meetings, and two Mobilities of Young People (Youth Exchanges).

## 2.1. Associação de Solidariedade Social Crescer Sem Risco



Crescer Sem Risco is based in São Vicente, Madeira Island, Portugal, and supports around 60 children and young people aged 6 to 20 from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our main activities include tailored educational support and study assistance to foster academic success. We also provide recreational programs that create an inclusive environment, featuring creative workshops focused on self-awareness and essential life skills, as well as informative sessions on key developmental topics.

Our dedicated team of social workers, youth workers, and a sociologist is committed to empowering these youths through various initiatives and activities. We actively participate in national and international youth projects, particularly through Erasmus+ programs, enhancing their reach and impact. Our goal is to cultivate a supportive community that enables every youngster to realize their full potential in the society.

## 2.2. Družinski inštitut Objem, inštitut za mentalno zdravje otrok, mladostnikov in odraslih Maribor



Družinski inštitut  
OBJEM

Družinski inštitut OBJEM was founded in 2023 as a non-profit NGO with the mission to provide psychosocial support for youngsters in need, preventive programs and activities for youth workers and pedagogical workers and to promote importance of mental health of modern youth and children, citizenship, responsibility and voluntarism.

The main aim is to contribute to personal growth of youth and their families. Institute primarily works in the local and regional area. Our focus group is teenagers, and our doors are open to them every day of the week. We provide psychotherapies, consultations for them and their parents and other assistance they may need growing up, and mentoring programs for youth and children. A lot of them joined us as volunteers working with younger generation of children. We also provide trainings and non-formal learning opportunities at really low or no cost at all.

## 2.3. Tabana NGO e. V.



TABANA NGO e. V. is a young and passionate non-governmental organization based in Bad Neustadt, Germany, created by a team of enthusiastic youth workers, trainers, and professionals with a shared mission: to support and inspire young people through meaningful learning experiences.

Our work centres around non-formal education, youth mobility, creative activism, and intercultural exchange, particularly through the Erasmus+ programme. We believe that every young person deserves the chance to explore their potential, develop new skills, and take part in shaping a more inclusive, creative, and engaged society.

One of our main focus areas is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) as a creative and practical tool for both young people and youth workers. We explore how AI can be used to spark imagination, support personal projects, and make digital tools more accessible and useful in everyday learning and youth work.

We help young people discover new perspectives for their future and take their next steps with confidence. Whether it's through workshops on job searching, CV and motivation letter writing, or guidance in returning to education or training, we aim to empower them to build self-belief and take action.

We actively take part in various local, regional, and international initiatives that address topics such as human rights, gender equality, anti-discrimination, environmental awareness, creative writing, and the arts. Our team brings experience from across Europe, having taken part in and facilitated numerous training courses and youth exchanges on topics such as media literacy, digital skills, bullying prevention, inclusion, and cultural diversity.

We work directly with young people aged 12 to 30, coming from different backgrounds, nationalities, and religions. We create safe and engaging spaces where they can learn, express themselves, and grow. Our team includes not only youth workers and facilitators, but also healthcare professionals, graphic designers, EVS mentors, and social workers — all motivated to share their knowledge and continue learning from others.

As a growing organization, we're always eager to connect with new partners, explore fresh ideas, and discover innovative ways to make a positive impact on the lives of young people.

## 2.4. Youth association Info front – Prilep



Info front – Prilep is a youth association and non-governmental organization that provides information to young people regarding the Erasmus+ programme, stimulates creativity, creative activism, youth mobility, non-formal education, cultural exchanges, and information distribution. The projects we have executed, the ones we are currently working on, and the ones we are preparing for the near future are local and international. The focus is on the topics of European awareness, digitalisation and digital tools, human rights, refugee issues, inclusion, self-promotion, gender equality, art and culture, creative writing, storytelling, environmental issues, and sport.

Furthermore, the organization is running a Youth centre, where different workshops about career development and language skills are organized. In the field of media, we are the publisher of the free youth magazine “MYG”, written by hosted EVS/ESC volunteers, both in English and Macedonian, available at [www.issuu.com/infofront](http://www.issuu.com/infofront) and our website [www.infofront.mk](http://www.infofront.mk).

The organization works with volunteers and freelancers. Currently, as part of the staff, we have 15 volunteers on a voluntary contract and 5 freelancers. Our group of learners consists of 50 youngsters for non-formal education activities and 120 high-school students from the associated partner VET school SOU “Riste Risteski-Richko”.

Formed in 2011, “Info front – Prilep” also acts as a Macedonian branch of Loesje International (an activist organization standing for human rights and freedom of speech) ([www.loesje.org](http://www.loesje.org)). Active in the field of volunteering, since 2012 we have and EVS/ESC sending, coordinating, and hosting accreditation. As of 2022, the organization holds an accreditation in the field of youth for the years 2022-2027.

Info front – Prilep is a newcomer organization in small-scale partnership but has vast experience with organizing workshops and working with these target groups. They are in need methods, and they need to make new partnerships and contacts for internationalization of their work and future projects.

### 3. Results of the research (Desk research, Field research)

The research underlying this report is built on a dual approach:

#### 1. Desk Research:

- In-depth literature reviews and analysis of NEET's context, consequences, and its evolution in the last decade, highlighting the COVID-19 crisis and the impacts made on NEET individuals.
- Examination of most known and best policies and theories, their best practices and shortcomings.

#### 2. Field Research:

- Interviews – through questionnaires methods – with representatives from the primary target group (NEET individuals), secondary target group (teachers, youth leaders, and educators) and students who are within reach of transitioning from mandatory schooling.

This section articulates how these methods complement one another in building a comprehensive picture of current practices and potentials in empowering young people into taking charge of their future.

#### **Desk Research Methodology:** Literature and Data Research

A substantial component of this study stems from a rigorous desk research phase that informed both the theoretical framework and the empirical grounding of the analysis. The research team:

- **Analysed Reports and Policy Documents:** Drew insights from a wide range of sources including EU Commission Reports, OECD youth employment reviews, Eurostat datasets, and studies on the social impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Identified Trends and Vulnerabilities:** Examined the socio-economic factors contributing to NEET status, highlighting vulnerable groups.
- **Synthesized Findings:** Mapped challenges and opportunities across both formal and non-formal learning contexts, linking empirical evidence with conceptual models that emphasize inclusion, resilience, and collaboration.
- **Reviewed Literature:** Explored literature on NEET's situation, youth studies, social exclusion and professional disengagement, and mental health. Particular attention was given to theories such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Human Capital Theory, Social Exclusion Theory, and Positive Youth Development models.

#### **Field Research Methodology:** Interviews and Questionnaires

To complement the desk research, fieldwork was conducted across the partner's countries – Portugal, Slovenia, Germany, and North Macedonia – providing first-hand insights into the

challenges and perspectives of young people and professionals working with youth. The methodology involved:

- **Structured questionnaires:** Distributed to NEET individuals, students nearing the end of mandatory education, and youth workers, teachers and educators.
- **Focus Group Sessions:** Organized brainstorming sessions with the partners to evaluate the and interpret findings from the questionnaires, and to assess the relevance and applicability of the emerging themes.

The qualitative and quantitative data collected were categorized under core themes such as opportunities and barriers, levels of (dis)engagement with education and employment pathways, and the intersection between youth mental health and socioeconomic participation.

### **Ethical Considerations and Data Analysis**

Ensuring ethical integrity was a cornerstone of the research:

- **Informed consent:** Before taking part, all participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study and provided explicit and voluntary consent prior to participation.
- **Confidentiality and data protection:** Participants' responses were kept completely anonymous, and all data was presented in summary form to protect individual privacy and meet ethical research standards.
- **Data validation through triangulation:** To ensure the findings were accurate and unbiased, we cross-checked the results using multiple sources and methods.

The analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative thematic coding with quantitative cross-tabulation of survey data. This dual-layered strategy strengthened the robustness of the findings and reinforced the validity of the policy recommendations derived from them.



## 3.1. Desk Research

### The Context of NEET Nowadays

Right now, in Europe, over 8 million young people between the ages of 15 and 29 are considered NEET – Not in Employment, Education, or Training – which accounts for approximately 11,2% of this age group. This represents a modest improvement compared to a decade prior, when the NEET rate stood at 15,7% in 2014, indicating some success in youth engagement policies and initiatives. Nonetheless, these improvements remain fragile and unevenly distributed, with persistent disparities across gender, geography, and social and economic backgrounds.

One of the most prominent gaps is gender – 12,5% of young women are NEET, compared to 10,1% of young men. This gap is more than a statistic – it points to deep rooted structural challenges. Many young women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities or limited access to affordable childcare face significant barriers to participating fully in the workforce. The obstacles are even steeper for young mothers, migrants, or those from low-income families.

The COVID-19 crisis didn't create these vulnerabilities, but it sharpened them, disrupting youth transitions into adulthood. As economies shut down, young people were hit hard – especially in industries like tourism and hospitality where they are overrepresented. They also experienced interruptions in education, and limited access to non-formal learning opportunities. This period delayed key life transitions – like moving out, starting a career, or building relationships – leaving a lasting impact on mental health, self-confidence, and independence.

Although the labour market is recovering, young people are still facing unstable and insecure work. More than one in three are stuck in temporary jobs, and nearly one in four are working part-time – often involuntarily and in low paid roles with limited prospects. This kind of precarious employment doesn't just affect income and career development – it also contributes to growing anxiety, depression, and a deep sense of uncertainty about the future.

These psychological pressures are magnified by housing insecurity, another defining issue of youth marginalization. In Southern Europe, between 52% and 65% of 25 to 34 years olds still live with their parents – even when they're working – due to high rental costs and limited access to affordable housing. Contrast that with Nordic countries, where strong welfare systems help most young people live independently, leaving only 2% of employed youth leaving at home. It's a stark reminder that economic insecurity, mental health, housing, and employment are deeply connected.

The EU's Youth Guarantee, launched in 2013 and reinforced in recent years, represents a major step forward. It aims to ensure that every young person receives a good-quality offer of work, training, or further education within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving school. While evaluations have shown positive impacts, particularly when implementation is early and well-targeted, the program's reach and effectiveness are still to inconsistent varying from country and region.

Moreover, many youths support initiative remain isolated. They focus on jobs, but not on the real-life barriers that often prevent young people from taking those opportunities – like lack of childcare, unaffordable housing, or poor mental health support. As a result, some of the most vulnerable young people – like early school leavers, youth with disabilities, young parents, or those living in rural areas – often fall through the cracks.

Recent data trends also highlight the shifting nature of NEET status. Increasingly, young people move in and out of NEET periods over time driven by unstable labour markets, and intermittent educational pathways. What sources suggest are more flexible, long-term models of support, that accompany youth across multiple life stages and transitions.

### **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

Understanding the complex phenomenon of NEET youth requires grounding in relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical research, which collectively offer insight into the root causes, lived experiences, and potential solutions for youth disconnection.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers one useful lens. It shows how young people's lives are shaped, and whether they become NEET, not just by their personal choices, but by a web of relationships and structures – from family and schools to labour markets and governments policies.

Social Exclusion Theory also shifts the focus away from blaming individuals, showing how being cut off from education, jobs, or community life isn't just a personal issue – it's often the result of systems that fail to support or include certain groups – highlighting this exclusion can become a cycle, passed from one generation to the next.

The Human Capital Theory argues that investment in education leads to better employment outcomes. However, this theory has come under examination as rising educational attainment no longer guarantees secure, meaningful work. The decoupling of credentials from employment stability – especially under conditions of labour market flexibilization and job automation – has led scholars to argue that structural labour market shifts have eroded the value of educational achievement for many young people.

In contrast, Positive Youth Development (PYD) offers a more youth-centred and strengths-based approach, emphasizing the need to foster resilience, skills, participation, and agency among young people. PYD frameworks support holistic intervention models that go beyond risk mitigation to promote growth, empowerment, and social inclusion.

A wide body of literature documents rely on the short and long-term consequences of NEET status. Young people who spend long periods in this category face higher risks of persistent unemployment, lower lifetime earnings, and more significant mental health struggles – including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. They are also more likely to experience social isolation, disengagement from civic life, and strained family relationships, which turn in deepen exclusion. The societal costs range from lost productivity and tax revenue to increased spending on welfare and health services.

Certain young people face higher risks: those with low educational levels, unstable family backgrounds, disabilities, migrant status, or who live in rural or underserved urban areas. These overlapping challenges make it even harder to find a path forward.

While programs like the Youth Guarantee have shown promise, critiques in the academic literature argue that such policies often underestimate the complexity of NEET status and overemphasize employability at the expense of broader social inclusion. Fragmented services, short-term funding, and poor coordination between sectors – such as health, housing, education, and employment – mean that many interventions fall short.

A critical takeaway from the literature is the need to de-individualize NEET status – meaning to recognize that becoming NEET is not merely a result of personal failure or poor choices but is deeply shaped by systemic and structural barriers. This perspective is vital in guiding the development of more equitable, supportive, and context-sensitive policies that empower youth rather than stigmatize them.

## 3.2. Field Research

### Introduction

To gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by NEET youth and those at risk of becoming NEET, a field research survey was conducted as part of the project. The questionnaires gathered perspectives from NEET individuals, high school students, and teachers, educators and youth leaders across Portugal, Slovenia, Germany and North Macedonia. Participants shared insights based on their current experiences and roles.

The findings highlight existing practices, pressing concerns, and the need for targeted resources – both to support NEET individuals in overcoming their circumstances and to more effectively guide young people from school into further education and meaningful employment.

Additionally, the results underscore the importance of equipping teachers and youth leaders with tools and strategies to better support the young they work with.

### 3.2.1. NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)

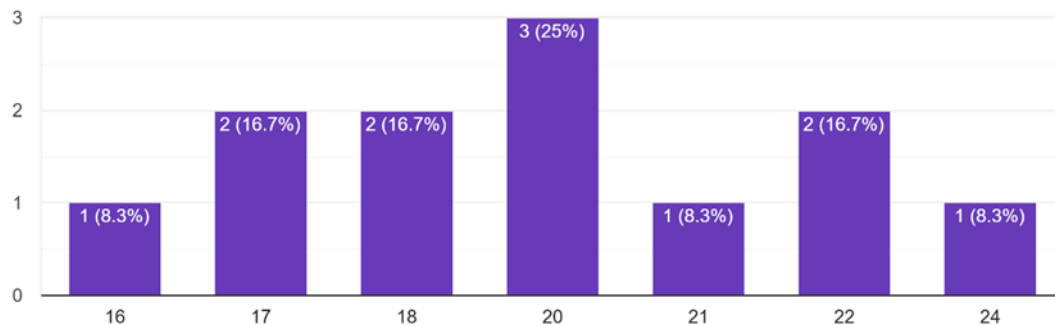
#### a. Participants' Demographics

The survey included a diverse group of respondents:

- Age groups:
  - Under 18 years: [3 / 25%]
  - 18–20 years: [5 / 41.7%]
  - 21+ years: [4 / 33.3%]

##### Age

12 responses

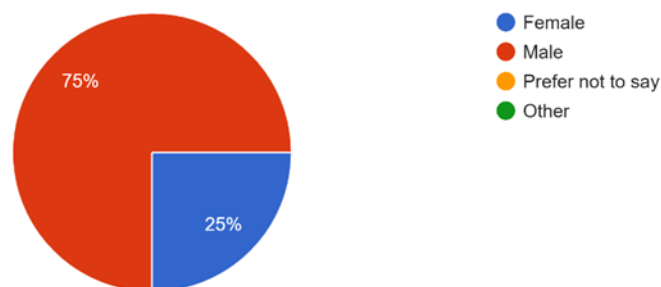


- Gender:

Participants were invited to self-identify their gender, with options including female, male, prefer not to say, and other, ensuring an inclusive approach to data collection. The majority of participants identified as male:

- Female: [3 / 25%]
- Male: [9 / 75%]
- Prefer not to say [0 / 0%]
- Other [0 / 0%]

Gender  
12 responses

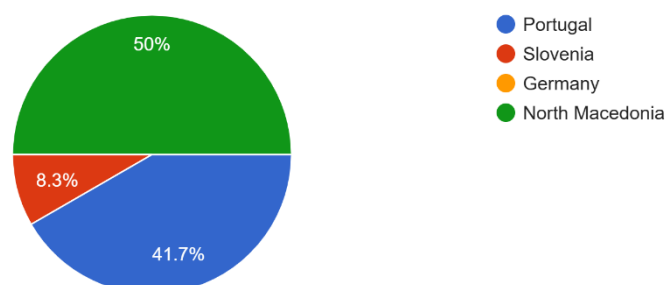


- Nationality:

Participants were asked to indicate their nationality. This approach provided insights into the international makeup of the group, which was reflected in the following distribution:

- Portugal [5 / 41,7%]
- Slovenia [1 / 8,3%]
- Germany [0 / 0%]
- North Macedonia [6 / 50%]

Which country are you from?  
12 responses



## b. Key Findings

- Educational level:

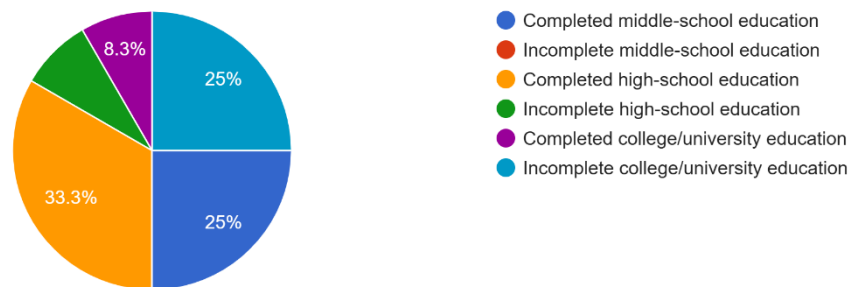
Participants were asked to indicate their highest level of education. The options ranged from incomplete to completed stages of middle school, high school, and college/university. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of their academic backgrounds and ensured a broad representation of educational experiences. One third of the participants reported having interruptions in their educational journeys:

- Completed middle-school education [3 / 25%]
- Incomplete middle-school education [0 / 0%]

- Completed high-school education [4 / 33,3%]
- Incomplete high-school education [1 / 8,3%]
- Completed college/university education [1 / 8,3%]
- Incomplete college/university education [3 / 25%]

Highest level of education completed:

12 responses



- Reason for incomplete education:

For participants who indicated an incomplete level of education, a follow-up question invited them to share the reasons behind their situation. This provided valuable context and helped to highlight potential barriers to education. The following themes emerged from their answers:

- “The course didn’t meet my expectations and wasn’t being good mentally for me”
- “The subjects and the teaching methods”
- “Low income”

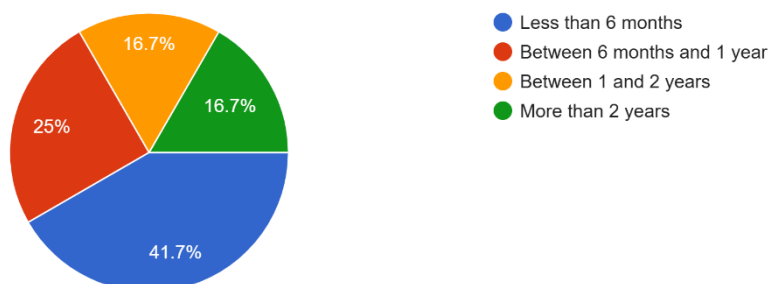
- Duration in NEET situation:

Participants were asked how long they have been in the NEET situation. This question aimed to better understand the length of disengagement within the NEET population, providing insights into both short-term and prolonged periods of inactivity. One third of the participants are at least more than one year disengaged from work, studying, or training:

- Less than 6 months [5 / 41,7%]
- Between 6 months and 1 year [3 / 25%]
- Between 1 and 2 years [2 / 16,7%]
- More than 2 years [2 / 16,7%]

How long have you been out of school and the job market (NEET)?

12 responses



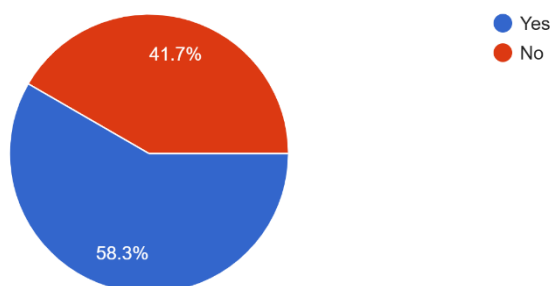
- Previous Work Experience:

Participants were asked if they had any prior work experience, with the goal of understanding their involvement in the labour market. Slightly more than half of the participants reported having had some work experience:

- Yes [7 / 58,3%]
- No [5 / 41,7%]

Have you worked before?

12 responses



- Details of last employment:

For participants who reported prior work experience, a follow-up question inquired about their most recent job and the length of time they were employed. The responses are summarized as follows:

- “Part-time at bar services, up to 1 month per each”
- Two answers for waiter/waitress, one for the duration of 3 months and the other unspecified
- “Restock for two weeks”
- “1 month as a store operator”
- “I’m working as a postman for 5 months now”
- “Barber 3 years”



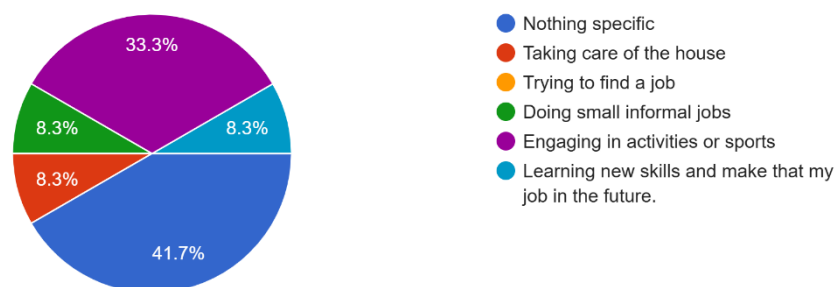
- Daily activities:

Participants were asked how they usually spend their day. This question aimed to capture their daily routines, interests, and use of time, offering a glimpse into their lifestyles and levels of engagement in various personal, social, or leisure activities. Only a small portion of the participants – 2 out of 12 - reported being engaged in work-related activities:

- Nothing specific [5 / 41,7%]
- Taking care of the house [1 / 8,3%]
- Trying to find a job [0 / 0%]
- Doing small informal jobs [1 / 8,3%]
- Engaging activities or sports [4 / 33,3%]
- “Learning new skills and make that my job in the future” [1 / 8,3%]

How do you usually spend your day?

12 responses



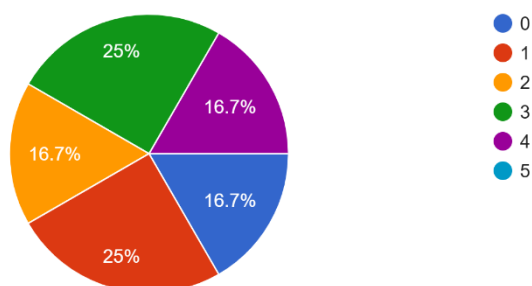
- Guidance received during education:

Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, how much guidance they received during their education to help them avoid falling into a NEET situation. This question aimed to assess the effectiveness and presence of educational support systems in preparing students for future opportunities. A slight majority of participants rated the guidance received in the lower half of the scale:

- 0 [2 / 16,7%]
- 1 [3 / 25%]
- 2 [2 / 16,7%]
- 3 [3 / 25%]
- 4 [2 / 16,7%]
- 5 [0 / 0%]

On a scale from 0 to 5, how much guidance did you receive during your education to avoid being in this situation? (0 – none; 5 – a lot)

12 responses



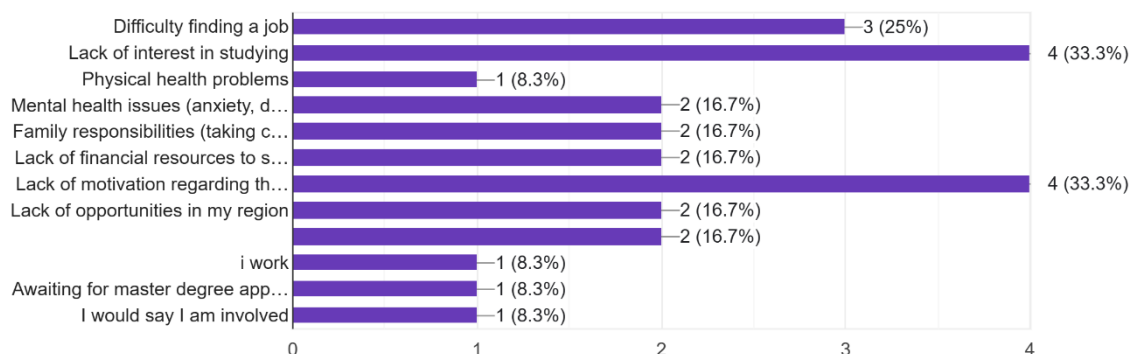
- Reasons for being in a NEET situation:

Participants were asked to identify the main reasons they are currently in a NEET situation, with the option to select multiple factors. This question aimed to uncover the diverse and often interconnected challenges that contribute to their current status. The answers are summarized as follows:

- Difficulty finding a job [3 / 25%]
- Lack of interest in studying [4 / 33,3%]
- Physical health problems [1 / 8,3%]
- Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, etc.) [2 / 16,7%]
- Family responsibilities (taking care of children, relatives, etc.) [2 / 16,7%]
- Lack of financial resources to study or take courses [2 / 16,7%]
- Lack of motivation regarding the job market [4 / 33,3%]
- Lack of opportunities in my region [2 / 16,7%]
- \*Blank answer\* [2 / 16,7%]
- "I work" [1 / 8,3%]
- "Awaiting for master degree application" [1 / 8,3%]
- "I would say I am involved" [1 / 8,3%]

What are the main reasons you are not studying, working, or participating in training? (You can select more than one option)

12 responses



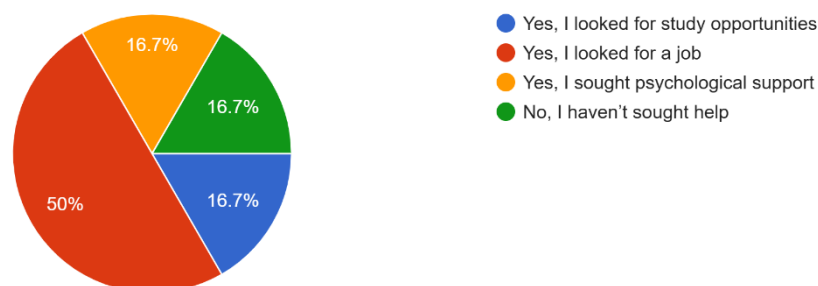
- Efforts to seek support:

Participants were asked whether they have sought help to change their NEET situation. This question aimed to understand their level of proactivity, awareness of available resources, and any attempts made to access support systems or services to improve their circumstances. Only a small fragment of participants – 2 out of 12 – reported not having sought any form of help:

- Yes, I looked for study opportunities [2 / 16,7%]
- Yes, I looked for a job [6 / 50%]
- Yes, I sought psychological support [2 / 16,7%]
- No, I haven't sought help [2 / 16,7%]

Have you sought help to change this situation?

12 responses



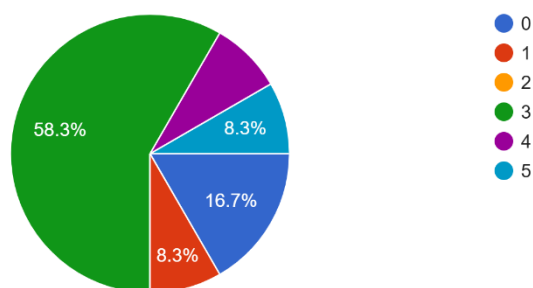
- Impact on mental health:

Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, how much their mental health has been affected by being in a NEET situation. This question aimed to shed light on the emotional and psychological toll of prolonged disengagement and to highlight the importance of mental health support for individuals facing such challenges. The majority of participants rated the impact on their mental health in the higher half of the scale:

- 0 [2 / 16,7%]
- 1 [1 / 8,3%]
- 2 [0 / 0%]
- 3 [7 / 58,3%]
- 4 [1 / 8,3%]
- 5 [1 / 8,3%]

On a scale from 0 to 5, how much has your mental health been affected by this situation? (0 – not affected at all; 5 – greatly affected)

12 responses



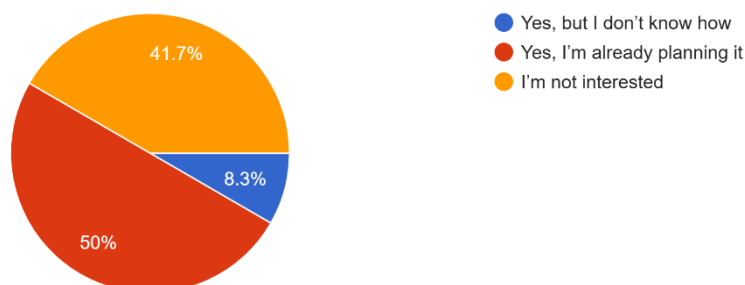
- Interest in returning to education:

Participants were asked whether they would like to return to studying. This question aimed to assess their motivation and willingness to re-engage with the education system, offering insight into their future aspirations and the potential demand for accessible learning opportunities. A small majority of participants expressed the will to reengage with their studies:

- Yes, but I don't know how [1 / 8,3%]
- Yes, I'm already planning it [6 / 50%]
- I'm not interested [5 / 41,7%]

Would you like to go back to studying?

12 responses



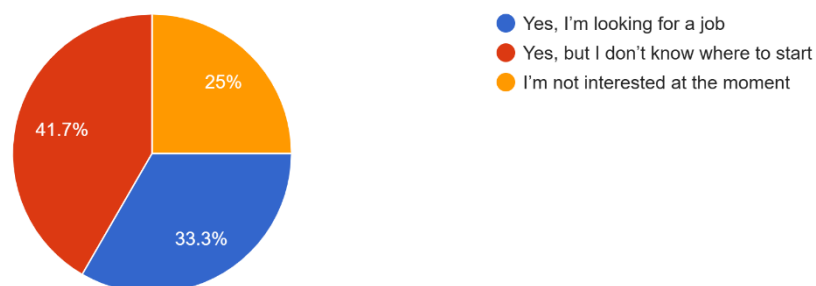
- Interest in employment:

Participants were asked whether they would like to work. This question aimed to understand their willingness and readiness to enter or re-enter the workforce, providing insight into their aspirations, motivation, and potential engagement with employment opportunities. Three-quarters of the participants expressed interest in employment, though not all were clear on the steps to move forward:

- Yes, I'm looking for a job [4 / 33,3%]
- Yes, but I don't know where to start [5 / 41,7%]
- I'm not interested at the moment [3 / 25%]

Would you like to work?

12 responses



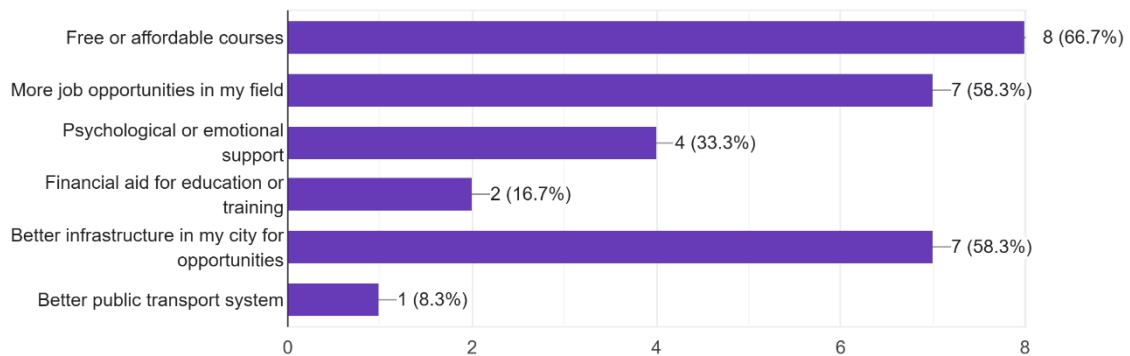
- Support needed to exit NEET situation:

Participants were asked to select, with the option to select multiple factors, that they believe would help them get out of the NEET situation. This question aimed to identify key areas of support that could empower individuals to re-engage with education or the workforce. The responses are summarized below:

- Free or affordable courses [8 / 66,7%]
- More job opportunities in my field [7 / 58,3%]
- Psychological or emotional support [4 / 33,3%]
- Financial aid for education or training [2 / 16,7%]
- Better infrastructures in my city for opportunities [7 / 58,3%]
- "Better public transport system" [1 / 8,3%]

What could help you get out of the NEET situation? (Select up to 3 options)

12 responses



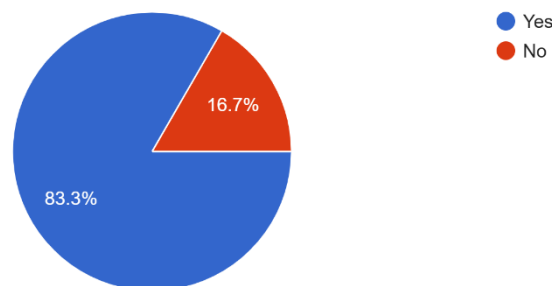
- Familiarity with the Erasmus program:

Participants were asked whether they are familiar with the Erasmus program. This information can help assess how effectively Erasmus is reaching its audience and how it might be used to better promote opportunities or provide guidance for those in NEET situation. The majority indicated that they were familiar with Erasmus programs:

- Yes [10 / 83,3%]
- No [2 / 16,7%]

Are you familiar with the Erasmus Program?

12 responses



### c. Thematic Feedback

- Open-ended feedback:

Participants were invited to share comments about their current situation or offer suggestions for enhancing support for NEET youth. This open-ended question aimed to capture personal experiences, challenges, and ideas, providing valuable qualitative insights into the needs and perspectives of NEET individuals. Responses help identifying gaps in current support systems and can inform the development of more effective and tailored support strategies. The collected feedback is the following:

- “Give young people more opportunities, not only in work but university wise also, because here all they do is look up to numbers from the previous 3 years, without even considering if they know a lot of the area, they want to study nor the motivation they have to.”
- In between my last job and now, I tried a lot to search for jobs, a lot of them weren't in my area of interest and yet I was willing to sacrifice that to just make ends meet for a while, and still I wasn't accepted in any or the one I got to interview, offered conditions that I couldn't meet unfortunately”
- “Studying to get into a public university, an idea to improve is to have better ways to find different degrees, how they work and the level of job opportunities it offers”
- “Open more jobs”
- “I think it would be good if, at school, the teachers helped us, the students, more, in order for us to be more well informed about the job and study opportunities that exist out there”
- “More projects with more people”

### 3.2.2. Future Expectations – High School Students

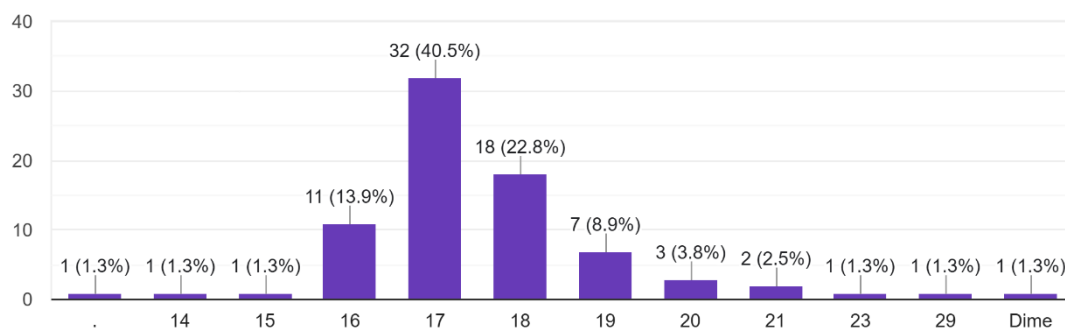
#### d. Participants' Demographics

The survey included a diverse group of respondents:

- Age groups:
  - Under 18 [45 / 57%]
  - 18-20 years [28 / 35,4%]
  - 21+ years [4 / 5,1%]
  - Unidentified answers [2 / 2,5%]

Age

79 responses



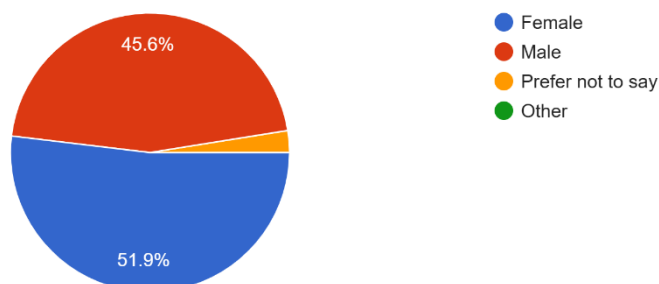
- Gender:

Participants were invited to self-identify their gender, with options including female, male, prefer not to say, and other, ensuring an inclusive approach to data collection. A small majority of participants identified as female:

- Female [41 / 51,9%]
- Male [36 / 45,6%]
- Prefer not to say [2 / 2,5%]
- Other [0 / 0%]



Gender  
79 responses

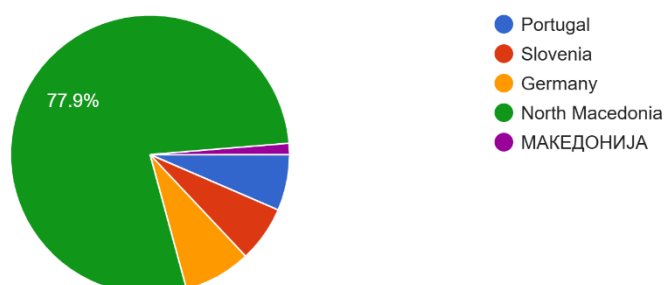


- Nationality:

Participants were asked to indicate their nationality. This approach provided insights into the international makeup of the group, which was reflected in the following distribution:

- Portugal [5 / 6,5%]
- Slovenia [5 / 6,5%]
- Germany [6 / 7,8%]
- North Macedonia [61 / 79,2%]

Which country are you from?  
77 responses



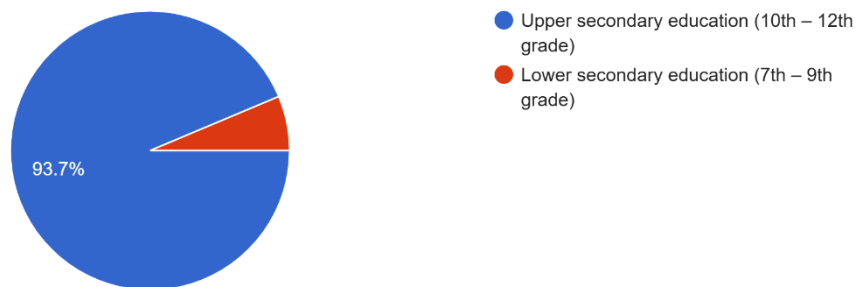
- Schooling status:

Participants were asked to indicate their current schooling status. The majority of the participants find themselves in the upper secondary education, between the 10th and 12th grade:

- Upper secondary education (10th – 12th grade) [74 / 93,7%]
- Lower secondary education (7th – 9th grade) [5 / 6,3%]

#### Schooling status

79 responses



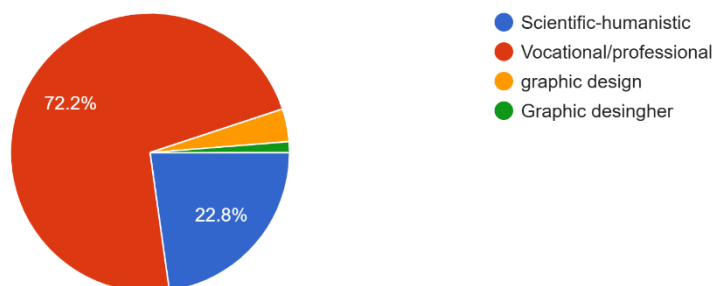
- School course:

Participants were asked to specify the course or field of study they are currently enrolled in. This question aimed to gather information about educational backgrounds and areas of academic or vocational focus. Understanding the types of courses pursued helps identify trends, align support services with participants' interests and qualifications. The majority of participants reported being enrolled in vocational or professional course:

- Scientific-humanistic [18 / 22,8%]
- Vocational/professional [57 / 72,2%]
- “Graphic design” [4 / 5%]

#### School course

79 responses



### e. Key findings

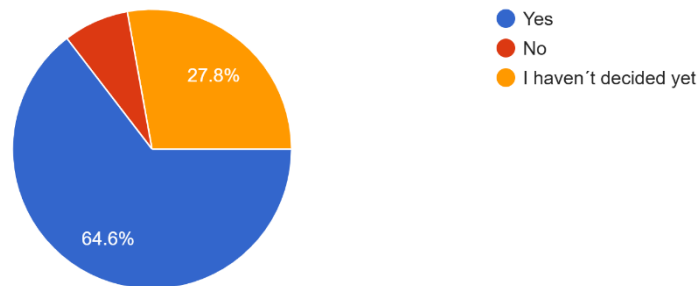
- Intention to continue studying after secondary school:

Participants were asked whether they plan to pursue further education after completing secondary school. This question aimed to assess their educational aspirations and future plans, providing insight into motivation, and the level of ambition among youth. The majority of participants indicated plans to continue their education, while a portion of them remained uncertain about their next steps:

- Yes [51 / 64,6%]
- No [6 / 7,6%]
- I haven't decided yet [22 / 27,8%]

Do you intend to continue studying after completing secondary school?

79 responses



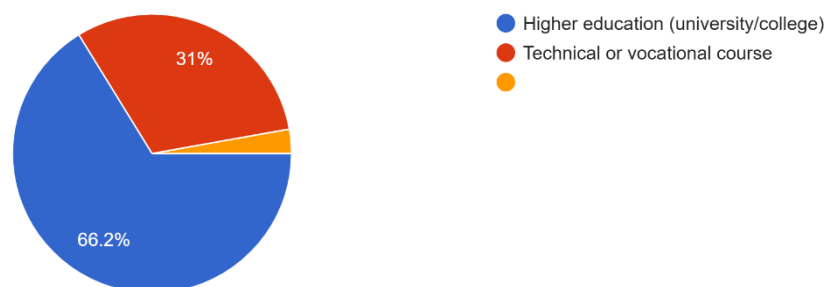
- Type of education planned after secondary school:

For those who indicated an intention to continue studying after secondary school, a follow-up question asked about the type of education they plan to pursue. This question aimed to explore the preferred educational pathways, providing deeper insight into participants' goals and the directions they see as most accessible or appealing. The majority of participants indicated plans to pursue higher education:

- Higher education [47 / 66,2%]
- Technical or vocational course [22 / 31%]
- \*Blank answer\* [2 / 2,8%]

If yes, what type of education do you plan to pursue?

71 responses



- Factors influencing academic training decision:

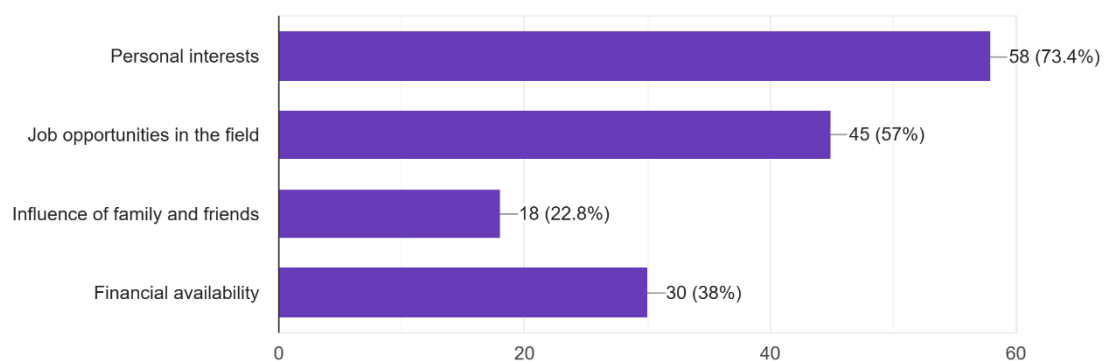
Participants were asked to identify the factors that most influence their decision regarding academic training, with the option to select multiple responses. This question aimed to uncover the key motivations and considerations that shape educational choices. Understanding these influences provide valuable insights into the decision-making

processes of youth and supports the development of more responsive and supportive educational guidance and policy frameworks. The answers are summarized as follows:

- Personal interests [58 / 73,4%]
- Job opportunities in the field [45 / 57%]
- Influence of family and friends [18 / 22,8%]
- Financial availability [30 / 38%]

What influences your decision about academic training the most? (You can select more than one option)

79 responses



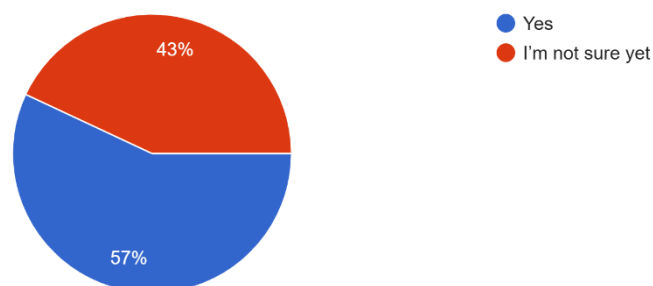
- Career aspirations:

Participants were asked whether they have a specific profession they would like to pursue. This question aimed to explore the clarity of participants' career goals and their level of vocational orientation. Identifying whether youth have defined professional aspirations helps assess their readiness for career planning, the alignment between their educational paths and job interests, and the need for career guidance or exposure to different occupational opportunities otherwise. A slight majority of participants report having a specific profession in mind:

- Yes [45 / 57%]
- I'm not sure yet [34 / 43%]

Do you have a specific profession you would like to pursue?

79 responses



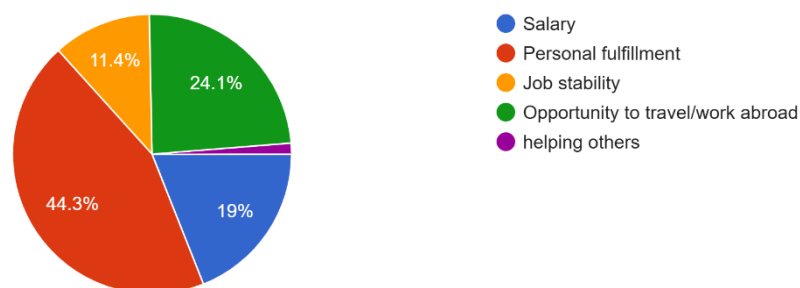
- Main factor choosing a career:

Participants were asked to identify the primary factor influencing their choice of career. This question aimed to understand the core motivations behind their professional aspirations. The responses provide insight into the values and priorities that shape youth career decisions. The answers are outlined below:

- Salary [15 / 19%]
- Personal fulfilment [35 / 44,3%]
- Job stability [9 / 11,4%]
- Opportunity to travel/work abroad [19 / 24,1%]
- “Helping others” [1 / 1,3%]

What is the main factor in choosing your career?

79 responses



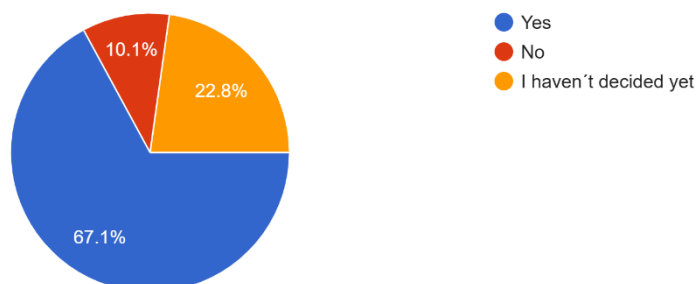
- Consideration of working abroad:

Participants were asked whether they would consider working abroad. This question aimed to assess their openness to international mobility and interest in pursuing employment opportunities outside their home country. Understanding participants' willingness to work abroad provides insight into their career ambitions, perceived opportunities and limitations in the local job market, and potential interest in international programs or support for cross-border employment. The majority of participants reported being open to work abroad:

- Yes [53 / 67,1%]
- No [8 / 10,1%]
- I haven't decided yet [18 / 22,8%]

Do you consider working abroad?

79 responses



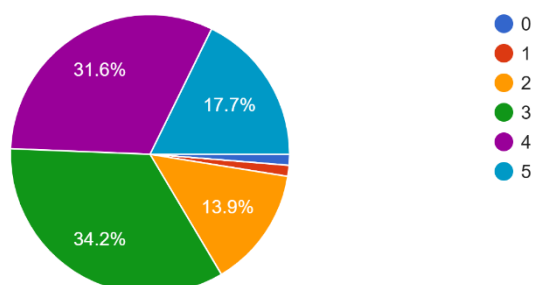
- Perceived preparedness for university:

Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, how well they believe their education has prepared them for university studies. This question aimed to gauge their confidence in the knowledge, skills, and competences acquired during secondary school as they transition to higher education. The responses provide valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the education system in equipping students for academic challenges ahead, highlighting areas for potential improvement in curriculum and support services. The majority of participants rated their readiness in the higher half of the scale:

- 0 [1 / 1,3%]
- 1 [1 / 1,3%]
- 2 [11 / 13,9%]
- 3 [27 / 34,2%]
- 4 [25 / 31,6%]
- 5 [14 / 17,7%]

On a scale from 0 to 5, how well do you think secondary education has prepared you for university? (0 – not helpful at all; 5 – very helpful)

79 responses



- Perceived preparedness for the job market:

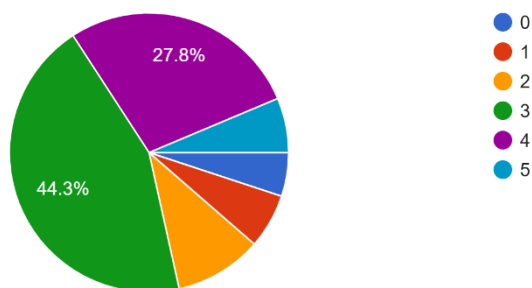
Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, how well they believe their education has prepared them for entering the job market. This question aimed to assess their

confidence in the practical skills, knowledge, and competences gained through secondary education as relevant to employment. While the majority of participants rated their readiness on the higher half of the scale, there was a notable portion who rated their preparation below average:

- 0 [4 / 5,1%]
- 1 [5 / 6,3%]
- 2 [8 / 10,1%]
- 3 [35 / 44,3%]
- 4 [22 / 27,8%]
- 5 [5 / 6,3%]

And how well has it prepared you for the job market?

79 responses



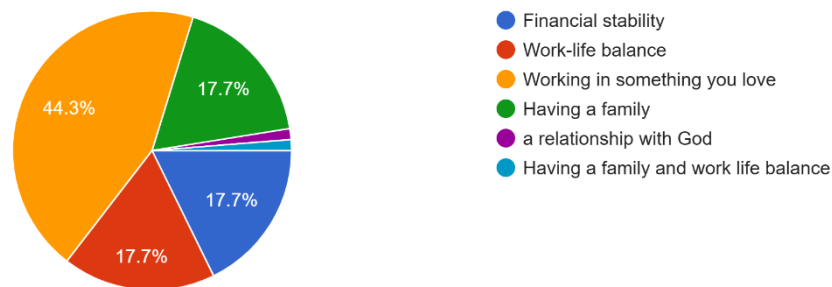
- Key factor for a happy and successful future:

Participants were asked to identify what they consider most important for achieving a happy and successful future. This open-ended question aimed to capture their values, priorities, and definitions of success and well-being. Participants' preferences are the following:

- Financial stability [14 / 17,7%]
- Work-life balance [14 / 17,7%]
- Working in something you love [35 / 44,3%]
- Having a family [14 / 17,7%]
- "A relationship with God" [1 / 1,3%]
- "Having a family and work life balance" [1 / 1,3%]

What do you consider most important for a happy and successful future?

79 responses



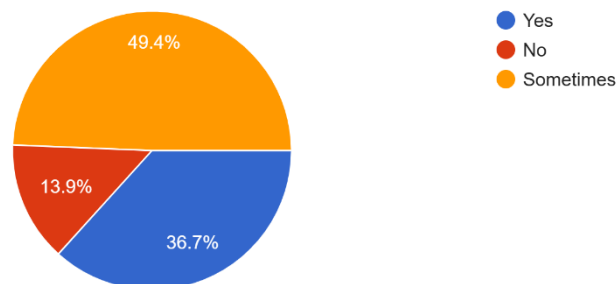
- Experiences of lack of motivation regarding academic or professional future:

Participants were asked whether they have ever felt unmotivated when thinking about their academical or professional future. This question aimed to explore moments of doubt, discouragement, or lack of drive that may impact their educational and career trajectories. Only a small minority of participants reported not feeling unmotivated:

- Yes [29 / 36,7%]
- No [11 / 13,9%]
- Sometimes [39 / 49,4%]

Have you ever felt unmotivated when thinking about your academic or professional future?

79 responses



- Reasons for lack of motivation regarding academic or professional future:

Participants who indicated “yes” or “sometimes” were asked to select the main reasons contributing to this lack of motivation, with the option to choose multiple factors. This question aimed to identify key challenges that obstruct their drive to pursue academic or career goals. Understanding these factors supports the design of effective strategies and support systems to address and mitigate demotivation among youth. The answers are summarized as follows:

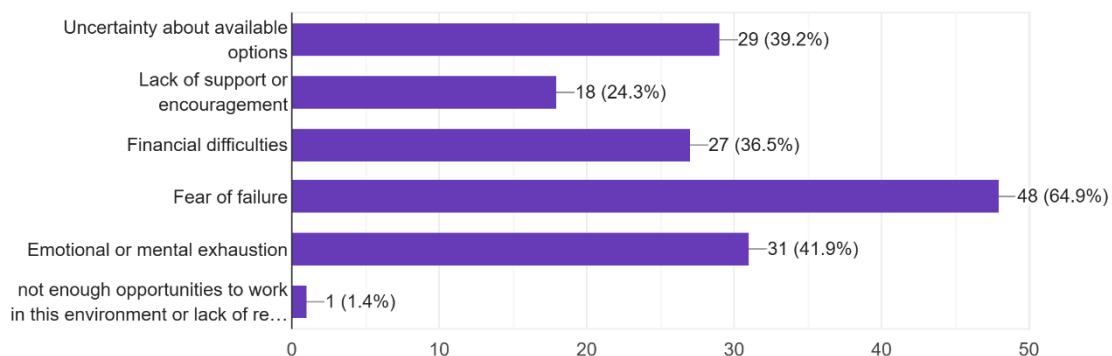
- Uncertainty about available options [29 / 39,2%]
- Lack of support or encouragement [18 / 24,3%]
- Financial difficulties [27 / 36,5%]



- Fear of failure [48 / 64,9%]
- Emotional or mental exhaustion [31 / 41,9%]
- “Not enough opportunities to work in this environment or lack of resources or too much competitiveness in the field” [1 / 1,4%]

If yes or sometimes, what are the main reasons for this lack of motivation? (You can select more than one option)

74 responses



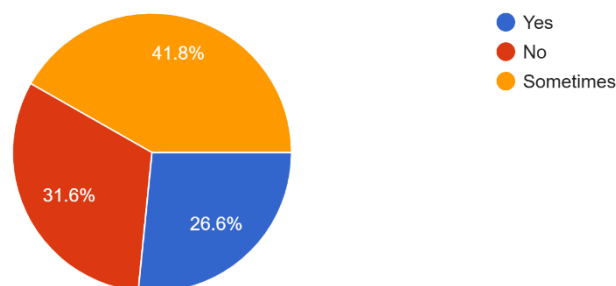
- Experiences of lack of motivation during the transition to the job market:

Participants were asked whether they have ever felt unmotivated when thinking about facing the transition to the job market. This question aimed to explore feelings of discouragement or lack of confidence related to entering employment. Sensibly one-third of the participants reported not feeling unmotivated in this context:

- Yes [21 / 26,6%]
- No [25 / 31,6%]
- Sometimes [33 / 41,8%]

And regarding the transition to the job market? Have you ever felt unmotivated?

79 responses



- Reasons for lack of motivation during the transition to the job market:

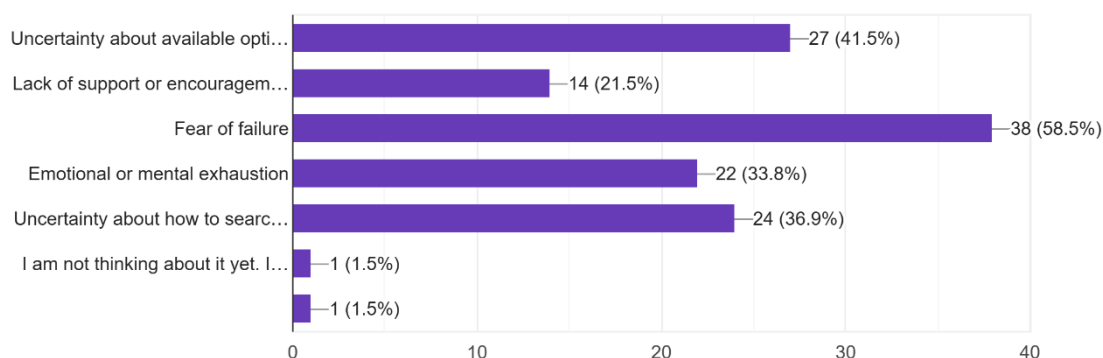
Participants who indicated “yes” or “sometimes” were asked to select the main reasons contributing to this lack of motivation, with the option to choose multiple factors. This

question aimed to identify specific challenges that impact their motivation. Understanding these reasons helps tailor interventions and support services to better assist youth in successfully entering the workforce. The answers are the following:

- Uncertainty about available options [27 / 41,5%]
- Lack of support or encouragement [14 / 21,5%]
- Fear of failure [38 / 58,5%]
- Emotional or mental exhaustion [22 / 33,8%]
- Uncertainty about how to search for jobs [24 / 36,9%]
- “I am not thinking about it yet. I want to study first” [1 / 1,5%]
- \*Blank answer\* [1 / 1,5%]

If yes or sometimes, what are the main reasons for this lack of motivation? (You can select more than one option)

65 responses



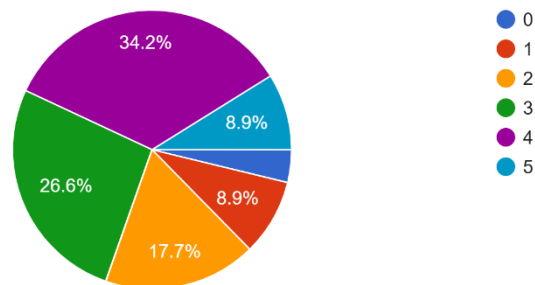
- Rating of school support in future planning:

Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, how well they feel supported by their school in planning their future academic and career paths. This question aimed to assess the effectiveness and adequacy of guidance services, counselling, and resources provided by educational institutions. While the majority of participants rated school's support in the higher half of scale, a significant number rated the support they receive as below average:

- 0 [3 / 3,8%]
- 1 [7 / 8,9%]
- 2 [14 / 17,7%]
- 3 [21 / 26,6%]
- 4 [27 / 34,2%]
- 5 [7 / 8,9%]

On a scale from 0 to 5, how would you rate the support you receive from school in planning your future?

79 responses



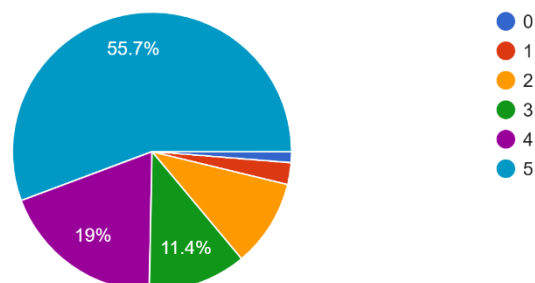
- Rating of family support in future planning:

Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, how well they feel supported by their families in planning their academic and professional future. This question aimed to assess the perceived level of encouragement, guidance, and involvement provided by family members. The responses offer insight into the role of the family in shaping young people's decisions and aspirations. The vast majority of participants rated their family support as above average:

- 0 [1 / 1,3%]
- 1 [2 / 2,5%]
- 2 [8 / 10,1%]
- 3 [9 / 11,4%]
- 4 [15 / 19%]
- 5 [44 / 55,7%]

On a scale from 0 to 5, how would you rate the support you receive from families in planning your future?

79 responses



- Rating of peer support in future planning:

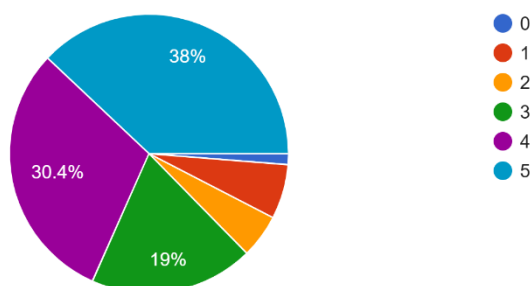
Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, how well they feel supported by their friends in planning their academic and professional future. This question aimed to evaluate

the role of peer relationships in shaping future aspirations and providing emotional or practical support. The majority of participants rated friends' support in future planning in the higher half of the scale:

- 0 [1 / 1,3%]
- 1 [5 / 6,3%]
- 2 [4 / 5,1%]
- 3 [15 / 19%]
- 4 [24 / 30,4%]
- 5 [30 / 38%]

On a scale from 0 to 5, how would you rate the support you receive from friends in planning your future? friends

79 responses



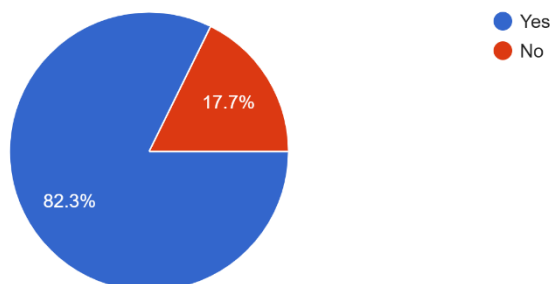
- Familiarity with Erasmus projects:

Participants were asked about their familiarity with Erasmus programs. This information can help assess how effectively the programs is reaching its audience. Increasing outreach and making Erasmus programs more accessible and inclusive could be a powerful way to offer the extra support and guidance students might require. The majority of participants reported being aware with Erasmus projects:

- Yes [65 / 82,3%]
- No [14 / 17,7%]

Are you familiar with Erasmus Programs?

79 responses



## f. Thematic feedback

- Future self-imagining (10 years ahead):

Participants were asked to describe how they imagine themselves 10 years from now. This open-ended question aimed to explore their long-term aspirations, goals, and visions for their personal and professional lives. Responses provide valuable insight into their hopes, ambitions, and potential challenges, helping to understand the motivational factors that drive their current decisions and identify areas where support can foster positive future outcomes. The answers covered topics such as the following:

- Dream jobs and career success: Many participants envision themselves pursuing careers that align with their passions and talents. They aspire to work in stable jobs that they enjoy, often combining multiple roles such as design, writing, sports and artistic pursuits. Some aim to establish their own studios or businesses, while others see themselves as successful professionals or educators in their field. Overall, the focus is on achieving career success by doing what they love.
  - “Completed graphic designer, author, an artist and possibly a psychologist”
  - “I imagine myself working at a stable job. Maybe graphic design – or graphic design as a secondary job. Writing is my favourite hobby, so maybe I’ll write as a third job and perhaps quit one of the others if I make a name for myself in the writing industry”
  - “Teacher” (multiple answers)
  - “Successful barber with my own barbershop”
  - “Employed in my field of study”
- Travelling and working abroad: Many participants dream of combining meaningful work with the freedom to travel and explore the world. Whether it’s working in different countries, building their own businesses with a global reach, or pursuing careers that allow them to move freely, the desire to experience new cultures and opportunities abroad is strong. Some envision traveling continuously, discovering new places, and blending their professional growth with personal adventures, aiming for success without being tied to one location.
  - “Working my dream job and having the opportunity to travel abroad without having the requirement to stay in one place”
  - “Create my business and travel around the world”
  - “10 years from now I see myself travelling from place to place. I imagine discovering small bookstores in different countries and writing about my own adventures”
  - “Working in another country” (Portugal and Germany mentioned in various answers)
  - “I see myself as a worldly person and famous”
- Family and personal life: Many envision a balanced and fulfilling future that combines a stable, enjoyable career with a happy family life. Common

hopes include starting or having a family, owning a comfortable home, and focusing on being a housewife.

- “With a job I like, starting a family”
- “Married with kids and a job I like”
- “A mother with 3 kids and a big house”
- “Family, house, stable job that I like”
- “I imagine myself financially stable and somewhere abroad with the love of my life living in a nice place”
- Financial Stability / Success: Many individuals aspire to achieve financial stability and freedom, often envisioning themselves as successful entrepreneurs or professionals with their own businesses. Success is also linked to recognition, a steady income, and the ability to collaborate and grow in their careers while maintaining a balanced and prosperous lifestyle.
  - “Millionaire”
  - “I imagine myself living happy and financially free”
  - “I imagine myself being successful, having my own business using the knowledge I’ve gained in high school and college. I imagine myself having the financial stability and opportunity to work and collaborate with other people abroad, having a job that provides opportunities to travel and work on different places (maybe even in different fields). It’s really important to me to gain the personal fulfilment, to work with all kinds of people, and meet new people abroad.”
  - “Working my dream job and being successful”
  - “Successful career woman”
- Uncertain / unsure: Some individuals feel uncertain about their future career paths or personal goals, expressing that they are still exploring their options or do not yet see themselves in a clear or suitable place. This reflects a natural period of self-discovery and openness to possibilities, as well as potential uncertainty towards the future.
  - “I don’t know”
  - “So I don’t see myself in a suitable place yet”

- Concerns about the future:

Participants were asked to share what worries them most about the future. This open-ended question aimed to uncover their fears, uncertainties, and potential obstacles as they look ahead. Understanding these concerns provides important insight into the challenges youth perceive, allowing for better-targeted support, counselling, and policy responses to address their anxieties and build resilience. The responses touched on topics such as the following:

- Career aspirations and future uncertainty: Many participants share aspiration to find stability in their chosen paths, but also a deep worry about the challenges that come with it. Concerns range from not finding the right job, being stuck in unfulfilling work, or facing failure despite their efforts.

Some fear being underqualified, choosing the wrong career, or missing out on opportunities due to circumstances beyond their control — such as the rise of AI.

- “I’m worried that I won’t find a job, or if AI replaces my job in any way.”
- “Well, at the moment I don’t have any worries about my future, but if I did, it would be finding a good job and a great work experience”
- “Choosing the wrong profession”
- “Being unqualified for the job”
- “Not pursuing my dream career”
- Personal growth, fulfilment, and life balance: Many participants express a deep longing for a life filled with purpose, joy, and emotional well-being. A common fear is not becoming the best version of oneself or leaving important goals unfinished. Participants worry about missing out on meaningful experiences, whether due to external struggles or the natural transitions that come with adult life. Balancing personal time with responsibilities is another key concern, as is the fear of unhappiness or disconnection.
  - “I think that I would be most worried if I don’t get to fulfil my purpose or work in something I love, something that brings me joy and makes me happy. I want to bring something to the community, promote a better lifestyle and something unique. Of course, financial stability is really important to me, and it’s important that I have the resources and opportunities to work what I love.”
  - “Not being able to succeed”
  - “Failure, not being able to finish what I started and be the best version of myself”
  - “Not having enough time for myself and others”
  - “Not being happy and fulfilled”
- Financial security and the challenge of sustaining a livelihood: Many participants worry deeply about achieving and maintaining financial stability in an increasingly expensive world. Concerns centre around the ability to afford everyday living expenses, sustain their desired lifestyle, and provide for themselves and their families. For some, financial struggles are compounded by the fear of unemployment or not earning enough to feel secure. Additionally, there is a tension between financial needs and personal fulfilment.
  - “The total collapse of the world as we know it today (economics, finances, society)”
  - “Cost of living”
  - “Being poor”
  - “Sustainability and being able to afford my lifestyle”
  - “Not having financial stability and not having the opportunity to pursue my dream life”

- Perceived needs for a smoother transition to the job market and/or higher education:

Participants were asked to share what they believe would be most beneficial in supporting their transition to the job market and/or higher education. This open-ended question aimed to identify the types of resources, guidance, or opportunities youth feel they need. The responses provide valuable insights for designing targeted interventions and support systems that address actual needs and improve transition outcomes. The key themes that emerged are summarized below:

- The need for real-world experience and practical skill-building: A significant number of participants stressed the importance of gaining hands-on experience and acquiring practical skills as a key factor in preparing for their academic and professional future. Many expressed a desire for internships, real work projects, and direct engagement with professionals in their field of interest to better understand the demands of their chosen paths. They highlighted the need for learning opportunities that go beyond theory — such as writing a motivational letter, building a CV, or applying specific job-related skills. These insights reflect a common belief that traditional education alone is not enough; practical experience is essential to feel confident, capable, and competitive in today's job market.
  - “Gaining hands-on experience through internships and receiving guidance on resumes and interviews would really help me feel more prepared for the job market or further studies”
  - “Learning how to write a motivational letter and build a CV”
  - “Learning actual skills that are needed for what I want to study or work at, getting more experiences which are required more than education”
- The importance of supportive and informative environments in future planning: Participants consistently highlighted the critical need for both strong support and accessible systems, reliable guidance as they navigate their transition into higher education or the workforce. Emotional, institutional, and social support — from families, schools, and peers — was seen as essential for motivation, reassurance, and confidence in decision-making. At the same time, there was a strong call for centralized information and personalized guidance to help young people understand their options, compare paths, and plan their futures more effectively. Many expressed a desire for structured assistance, expert mentorship, and encouragement to explore their passions without fear of failure. These insights point to a broader need for caring, proactive environments where youth feel empowered and equipped with the tools, information, and emotional backing necessary to imagine and pursue meaningful futures.
  - “Maybe help from the school or professionals about choosing our next steps for our future, helping to plan, teaching u how to be



independent or teach us the pros and cons of each job and the market. I think if from an early age they help us to realize our passion and work towards it, it could help a lot, since most of us already show our passion from an early age, but as we transition and grow and realize the risks and the resources of our environment some of our dreams could fade. It's important to have the motivation and devotion to follow that calling and know that making mistakes is normal. Also, giving us more actual opportunities to work at internships would be very beneficial, as it gives us more experience and it shows us if we'd actually be fulfilled working there"

- "The support I'm getting from my family and school"
- "Building a solid professional network is key. You can do this through events, social media like LinkedIn, and even internships. Knowing people in the field can often lead to more opportunities."
- The pursuit of career stability and exposure to opportunities: Many participants emphasized the importance of stability and predictability in their future careers. A stable job was seen as essential to building a reliable and fulfilling life. At the same time, participants expressed a strong desire for broader exposure to diverse opportunities, including the chance to explore different career paths, attend open days at universities and companies, and understand the full range of options available to them. These insights reveal a dual concern: the need for both security and the freedom to explore. Together, they reflect a broader hope for a future that balances stability with meaningful, well-informed choices.
  - "Have different experiences with different things related to the job and the college I want to finish"
  - "More open days in unis and companies"
  - All information about it collected in one place"
- The importance of personal growth and self-discovery in future planning: Several participants reflected on the deep emotional and psychological aspects of preparing for the future, emphasizing the need for personal development alongside academic or career readiness. Gaining confidence, achieving emotional stability, and discovering one's true interests and passions were seen as vital steps in navigating the transition to adulthood. Some highlighted the importance of encouragement and self-belief in building the motivation to move forward. These insights underline that for many young people, success is not just about external achievements, but also about internal clarity, resilience, and self-awareness.
  - "Finding myself, finding confidence and encouragement to move on"
  - "Reassurance and support"
  - "Upgrading and working better on my future"

### 3.2.3. Teachers and Youth Leaders' Expectations for Students Future

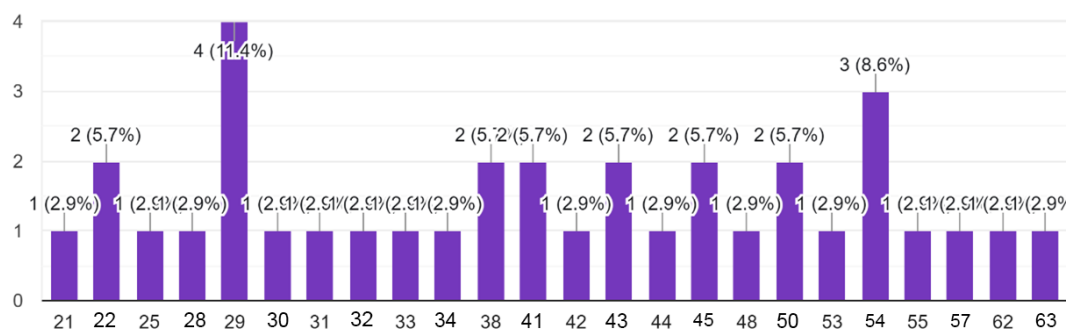
#### g. Participants' Demographics

The survey included a diverse group of respondents:

- Age groups:
  - 21-30 years [10 / 28,6%]
  - 31-40 years [6 / 17,1%]
  - 41-50 years [11 / 31,4%]
  - 51-60 years [6 / 17,1%]
  - +61 years [2 / 5,7%]

#### Age

35 responses

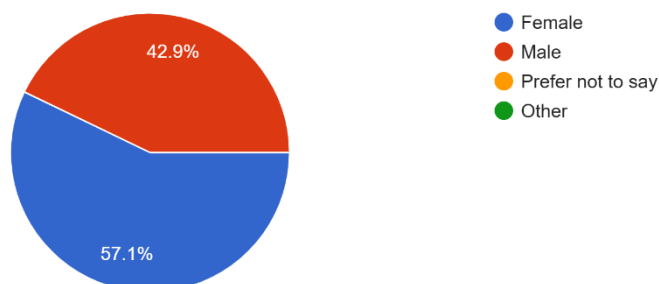


- Gender:

Participants were given the option to identify as female, male, prefer not to say or other. This ensured inclusivity in the responses. The responses showed a slight majority of participants identifying as female:

- Female [20 / 57,1%]
- Male [15 / 42,9%]
- Prefer not to say [0 / 0%]
- Other [0 / 0%]

Gender  
35 responses

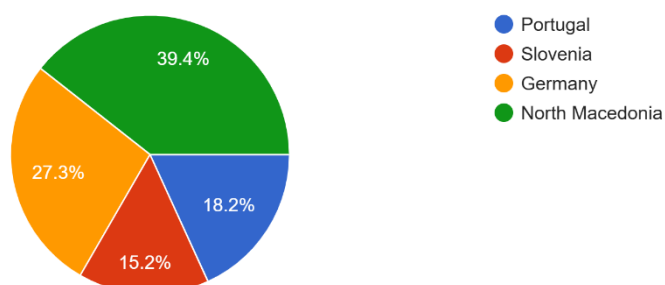


- Nationality:

Participants were asked to indicate their nationality. This approach provided insights into the international makeup of the group, which was reflected in the following distribution:

- Portugal [6 / 18,2%]
- Slovenia [5 / 15,2%]
- Germany [9 / 27,3%]
- North Macedonia [13 / 39,4%]

Which country are you from?  
33 responses



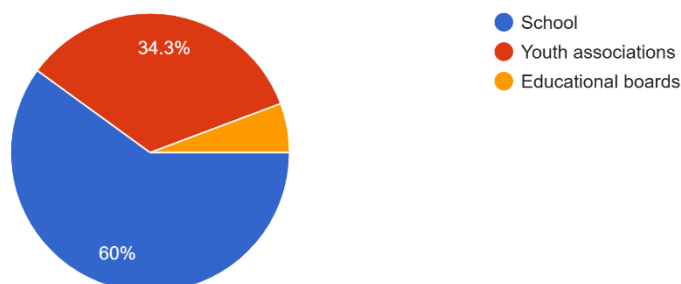
- Type of institution:

Participants were asked to indicate the type of institution they work in. While responses varied, a slight majority reported working in schools:

- School [21 / 60%]
- Youth associations [12 / 34,3%]
- Educational boards [2 / 5,7%]

What type of institution do you work in?

35 responses



## h. Key findings

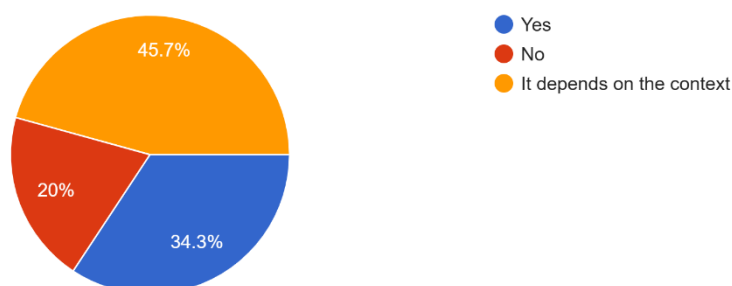
- Post-secondary education intentions:

Participants were asked to share their perceptions regarding whether most students plan to continue their studies after completing secondary education. This question aimed to capture insights into educational aspirations and trends. A slight majority of participants reported the belief that such decisions depend on individual circumstances and context:

- Yes [12 / 34,3%]
- No [7 / 20%]
- It depends on the context [16 / 45,7%]

In your experience, do most students plan to continue their studies after completing secondary education?

35 responses



- Students preferred future paths:

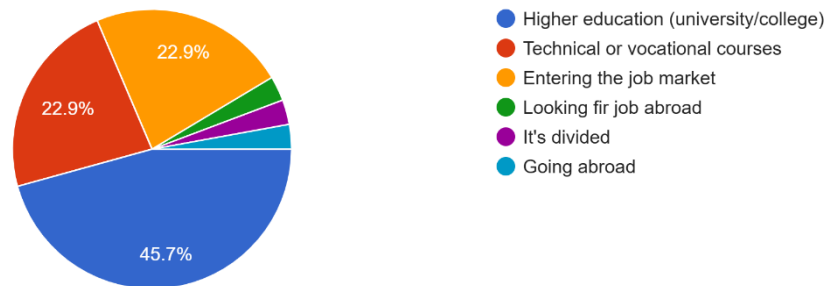
Participants were asked to identify the future paths students most commonly express interest in pursuing. This question aimed to shed light on students' aspirations and preferences, offering valuable insights into the directions that most appeal to them at the end of their secondary education. The participants highlighted the following options:

- Higher education (university/college) [16 / 45,7%]

- Technical or vocational courses [8 / 22,9%]
- Entering the job market [8 / 22,9%]
- “Looking for job abroad” [1 / 2,9%]
- “It’s divided” [1 / 2,9%]
- “Going abroad” [1 / 2,9%]

What future path do students show the most interest in following?

35 responses



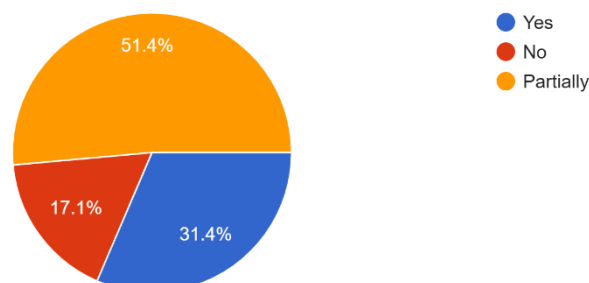
- Access to academic decision-making information:

Participants were asked whether they believe students have sufficient information to make informed decisions about their academic future. This question explored perceptions of the availability and adequacy of guidance, resources, and support systems, offering insight into potential gaps in students' decision-making processes. Most participants felt that students are at least partially informed, with only a small portion expressing concern about a lack of adequate information:

- Yes [11 / 31,4%]
- No [6 / 17,1%]
- Partially [18 / 51,4%]

Do you believe students have enough information to make decisions about their academic future?

35 responses



- Influences on students' academic choices:

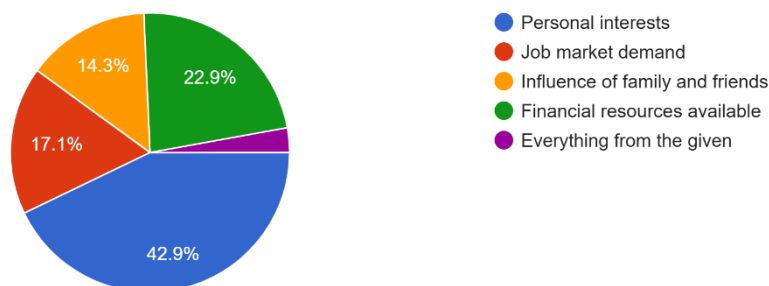
Participants were asked to reflect on the factors they believe most influence students' academic choices. This question aimed to uncover the perceived drivers behind students'

educational decisions, providing deeper insight into the motivations that shape their academic pathways. The participants highlighted the following choices:

- Personal interests [15 / 42,9%]
- Job market demands [6 / 17,1%]
- Influence of family and friends [5 / 14,3%]
- Financial resources available [8 / 22,9%]
- “Everything from the given” [1 / 2,9%]

What do you think most influences students' academic choices?

35 responses



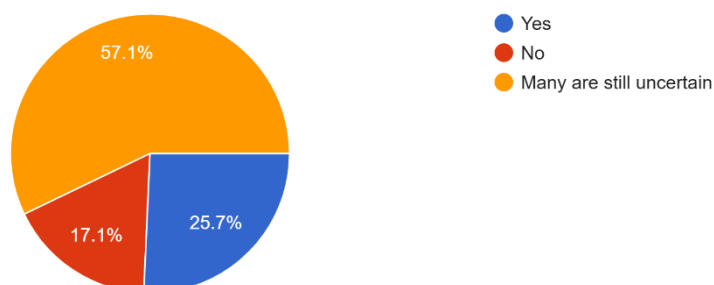
- Clarity of career aspirations:

Participants were asked whether, in their experience, most students have a specific profession in mind by the time they complete secondary school. This question aimed to assess the level of career clarity among students at this transitional stage. Slightly more than half of the participants indicated that students are still unsure about their future professions:

- Yes [9 / 25,7%]
- No [6 / 17,1%]
- Many are still uncertain [20 / 57,1%]

Do most students have a specific profession in mind when finishing secondary school?

35 responses



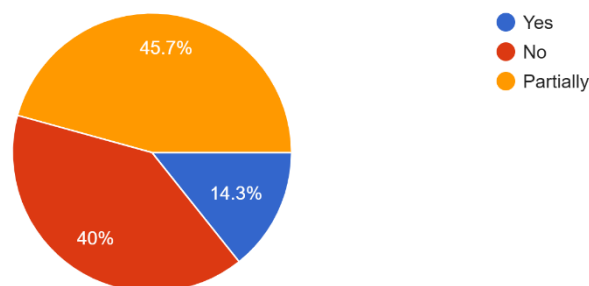
- Job market readiness:

Participants were asked whether they believe students are well-prepared to enter the job market upon completing their education. This question sought to explore perceptions of students' readiness for employment. Only a small portion of participants believe that students are fully prepared to meet the demands of the workforce:

- Yes [5 / 14,3%]
- No [14 / 40%]
- Partially [16 / 45,7%]

Do you believe students are well-prepared for the job market?

35 responses



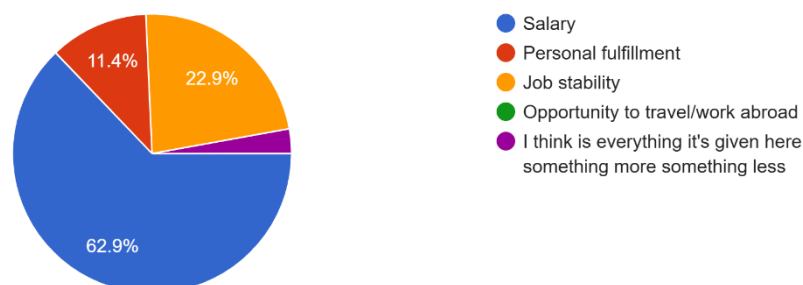
- Primary motivation for career choice:

Participants were asked to share their views on the main motivations driving students when selecting a career path. This question aimed to uncover the key facts that, in their experience, strongly influence students' career decisions. The majority of participants agreed that salary plays a significant role as a primary motivation in career choice:

- Salary [22 / 62,9%]
- Personal fulfilment [4 / 11,4%]
- Job stability [8 / 22,9%]
- Opportunity to travel/work abroad [0 / 0%]
- "I think is everything it's given here something more something less" [1 / 2,9%]

What do you believe is the main motivation for students when choosing a career?

35 responses



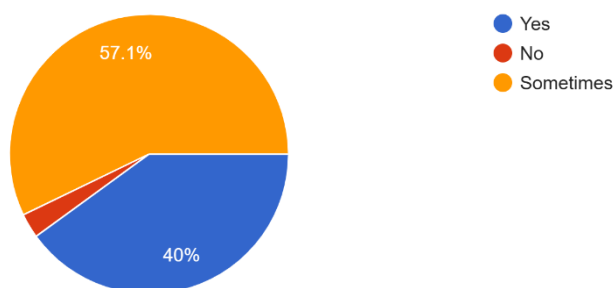
- Observations of student motivation:

Participants were asked whether they frequently observe a lack of motivation among students concerning their future prospects. This question aimed to gather insights into students' levels of engagement and enthusiasm about their academic and career paths, highlighting potential challenges in fostering motivation. Nearly all participants – 34 out of 35 – believe that students do experience some degree of lack of motivation regarding their future:

- Yes [14 / 40%]
- No [1 / 2,9%]
- Sometimes [20 / 57,1%]

Do you frequently observe a lack of motivation in students regarding their future?

35 responses



- Reason for lack of motivation:

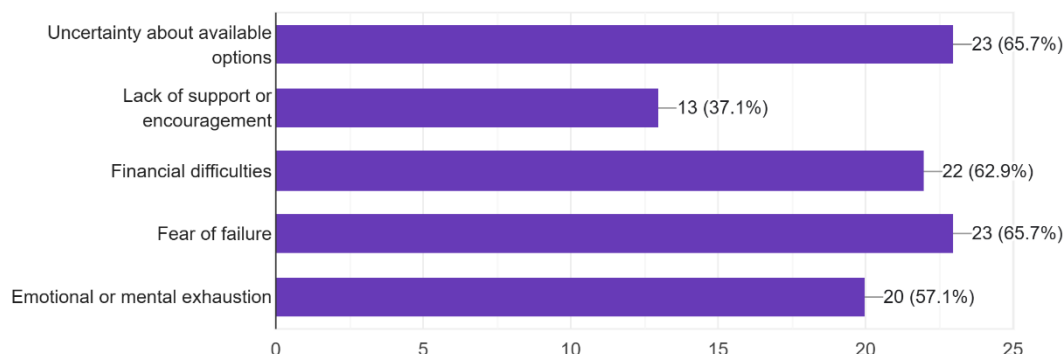
Participants were asked to identify the main reasons they believe contribute to students' lack of motivation regarding their future, with the option to select multiple factors. This question sought to explore the underlying causes that may impact students' engagement and drive. Participants' choices are as follows:

- Uncertainty about available options [23 / 65,7%]
- Lack of support or encouragement [13 / 37,1%]
- Financial difficulties [22 / 62,9%]
- Fear of failure [23 / 65,7%]
- Emotional or mental exhaustion [20 / 57,1%]



What do you think are the main reasons for this lack of motivation? (You can select more than one option)

35 responses



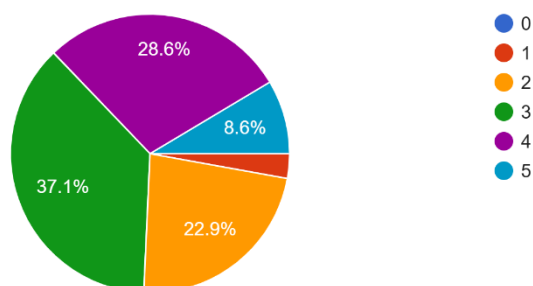
- School support in future preparation:

Participants were asked to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, their rating to which schools provide effective support in helping students prepare for their future. This question aimed to evaluate perceptions of institutional efforts in guiding students toward academic, career, and personal development goals, offering a measurable view of the perceived adequacy of school-based support systems. Most participants rated the support they receive from schools in the higher half of the scale:

- 0 [0 / 0%]
- 1 [1 / 2,9%]
- 2 [8 / 22,9%]
- 3 [13 / 37,1%]
- 4 [10 / 28,6%]
- 5 [3 / 8,6%]

How would you rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, the support schools provide to students in preparing for their future?

35 responses



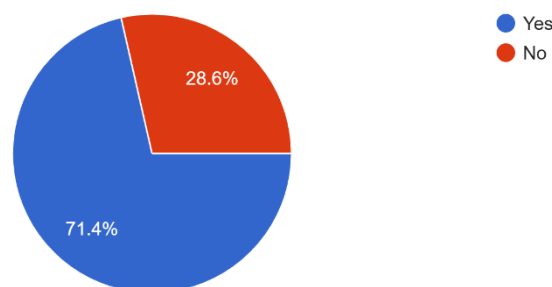
- Familiarity with Erasmus projects:

Participants were asked whether they believe students are sufficiently familiar with Erasmus programs. This question aimed to gauge teachers' perceptions of students' awareness and understanding of international exchange opportunities. Most participants felt that students are generally familiar with these programs:

- Yes [25 / 71,4%]
- No [10 / 28,6%]

Do you think students are familiar with Erasmus Programs?

35 responses



#### i. Thematic Feedback

- Essential skills for workforce entry:

Participants were asked to identify the skills they believe students need to develop before entering the workforce. This question aimed to highlight perceived gaps in current education and pinpoint the competencies considered essential for a successful transition into employment. The responses included the following suggestions:

- Communication and interpersonal skills: Participants believe that strong communication and interpersonal skills are essential for students entering the workforce. This includes not only clear verbal and written communication but also active listening, social and emotional awareness, and the ability to collaborate effectively in teams. They emphasize the importance of networking and adapting communication styles to professional settings, alongside developing digital communication skills. Practical socialization and empathy such as listening are also seen as key to building positive relationships and fulfilling workplace responsibilities.
  - “Work ethic, communication skills, life skills”
  - “Networking, social skills, knowing how to “sell” their skills and knowledge”
  - “Interpersonal skills, active listening”
- Soft and life skills: Teachers recognize that soft skills and life skills are crucial for students preparing to enter the workforce. Key attributes include responsibility, punctuality, loyalty, and a strong work ethic, combined with

a positive attitude and active listening. They also highlight the importance of self-confidence, motivation, and empowerment to help students take initiative and stay committed.

- “Punctuality, active listening, positive attitude, hardworking”
- “Responsibility”
- “Commitment, empowerment and self-confidence”
- Job related and practical skills: Teachers emphasize that students need strong job-related and practical skills to successfully transition into the workforce. This includes not only mastering the specific skills required for their chosen profession but also gaining hands-on practical experience to apply their knowledge effectively. Understanding the material, they studied and being able to demonstrate relevant competences is essential. Additionally, skills such as creating a professional CV are important for presenting themselves confidently to potential employers. Practical, job-specific abilities combined with real-world experience prepare students to meet workplace demands.
  - “Practical experience”
  - “CV making, communication and behaviour according to the profession, but I believe mainly self-confidence and motivation”
  - “Skills needed for the specific job, but also practical skills and experience”
- Professionalism work ethic: Teachers stress that a strong work ethic and professionalism are fundamental skills for students entering the workforce. This includes demonstrating commitment, responsibility, and loyalty, as well as maintaining a positive attitude. Being hardworking and understanding workplace expectations are key to building trust and contributing effectively. Developing these qualities helps students not only perform their tasks well but also build lasting professional relationships and advance in their careers.
  - “Understanding”
  - “Responsibility”
  - “Attention and adaptability”

- Strategies to increase student motivation:

Participants were asked to suggest what they believe could help boost students' motivation regarding their future. This question aimed to gather ideas on supportive measures that could inspire greater ambition and forward-thinking among students, which was given the following answers:

- Educational system, school programs and curriculum: Improving the education system plays a key role in increasing student motivation. Suggestions include implementing new methods, programs, and curriculum that better align with the needs of today's learners. Participants highlighted the importance of making education more attractive and

relevant, empowering students to take initiative in their learning journeys. Additionally, organizing the curriculum more effectively and offering more opportunities connected to the job market can help bridge the gap between education and real-world application, making school feel more purposeful and engaging.

- “More attractive education and empowering them to take the first step”
- “Improved programs in the education systems and more opportunities on the job market”
- “Curriculum organization”
- Educators, school support and guidance: The role of educators, school support, and guidance is essential in nurturing students’ motivation. Participants emphasized the need for motivated and fairly compensated teachers, as well as a strong support system involving schools, families, and friends. Encouraging emotional well-being and building self-confidence through reassurance and support can positively influence students’ outlook on their future. Providing personalized guidance — beyond academic grades — can open students’ eyes to diverse opportunities, helping them understand there are many paths to success. Involvement in social projects, access to information sessions, and dedicated school staff focused on career awareness were also seen as vital components in guiding students toward meaningful and motivated choices.
  - “Perhaps easier accessibility and more opportunities, and specially not only based on overall grading system and evaluations, but also on their own will and motivation (letter of motivation, for example). Also, to give students awareness of the numerous opportunities in different fields and areas there is (by the hand of a school member focused only on that, perhaps), alongside the different ways to be able to reach them. Considering the majority have the idea that straight to work or university after high school are the only two options they have”
  - “They should have self-confidence, and emotional support and encouragement”
  - “Support from school, family, friends, reassurance, more information about work life and success options”
- Mental health, personal development and soft skills: Fostering mental health, personal development, and soft skills is crucial for increasing student motivation. Respondents pointed to the importance of creating safe spaces where students can explore and express their emotions, fears, and aspirations. Activities that encourage self-awareness, personal growth, and respect for oneself help students build confidence and resilience. Supporting students through self-encouragement groups, mental health discussions, and development programs — such as Erasmus — can also

provide them with valuable life experiences and skills beyond the classroom.

- “Self-encouragement groups, activities about mental health to help them to talk about them and their fears. More Erasmus programs that give them a chance to share with others life experiences, develop new skills and find their own path”
- “Working on their soft skills and mental health”
- “Self-respecting”
- Career, job market and real-life preparation: Preparing students for real-life challenges and the job market is seen as a key factor in boosting motivation. Many responses emphasized the need for more accessible and practical information about potential careers, workplace expectations, and job stability. Providing workshops, training programs, and opportunities to travel or gain international experience can help students build confidence and better understand their strengths. A more practical education that teaches relevant, job-ready skills was also noted as essential. Encouraging exploration of diverse job paths, while offering continuous guidance and real-life exposure, can empower students to envision a successful and fulfilling future.
  - “More workshops and training programs, opportunities to travel and learn”
  - “Better education (learns skills that will actually help on the job market)”
  - “Support, more information about real life”
- Opportunities, equal access and mobility: Ensuring equal access to opportunities and promoting mobility were highlighted as vital elements in motivating students for the future. Participants emphasized the importance of a fair system where everyone, regardless of background, has the same chances to succeed. Financial security, space for creativity, and opportunities for personal and professional advancement were seen as strong motivators. Programs like Erasmus, which offer students the chance to study or work abroad, were mentioned as life-changing experiences that broaden perspectives, build independence, and inspire long-term goals.
  - “A system with equal rights and opportunities for all”
  - “Financial security, creativity, opportunity for advancement”
  - “One year abroad on Erasmus or another type of program”

- Suggestions or improving transition guidance:

Participants were invited to share their suggestions for enhancing student guidance during the transition to higher education or the job market. This open-ended question aimed to collect practical ideas and recommendations that could support students in navigating this critical phase more confidently and successfully. The responses included the following:

- Enhancing guidance and support systems in school: Participants emphasized the need for more trained teachers and youth workers specialized in student guidance, alongside increased time and resources dedicated to career counselling within schools. Suggestions included establishing career centres in every school, offering personalized programs tailored to individual students, and coordinating efforts with local youth organizations and municipalities. Introducing specialized staff to provide ongoing support through extracurricular lessons was highlighted to help students explore future options early, reducing last-minute pressure and anxiety around critical academic and career decisions.
  - “I would suggest to have someone in every school specialized, with an extracurricular lesson with different schedules for the different classes) to help guiding and showing new horizons to students for the transition from middle-school to high-school and for the post higher education moment. With this, students would have more opportunities to engage on deciding and thinking of their future, and not only on the prior few months to the decision, as I believe majority does. This would give them awareness of choice they have to make eventually and, with the time to spare, there wouldn’t be the enormous anxiety and pressure most students nowadays feels on their decision making, that including personally wise also.”
  - “More personal work with every student and designed programs for them”
  - “More career guidance in school and youth organizations at local level with coordination of the municipality”
- Connection between education and the job market: Participants highlighted the importance of fostering stronger cooperation between schools and companies to bridge the gap between education and employment. They advocated for more practical, real-life experiences—such as internships, volunteering, and hands-on activities—that go beyond theoretical learning and help students develop job-relevant skills.
  - “More “real life” experiences instead of theoretical information”
  - “Student work, volunteering”
  - “Better and faster employment conditions and career advancement”
- Personal development, motivation and self-awareness: Participants emphasized the importance of helping students understand themselves and gain clarity about their goals and passions. Key qualities such as persistence, self-belief, and motivation were highlighted as essential for students to pursue their dreams and make informed decisions. Encouraging a proactive attitude was seen as vital steps toward achieving fulfilment and success.
  - “To be sure what they want, to try and never give upon their dreams, give all of you for the things you love”

- “Students either need to make a decision or face the consequences. The “I don’t know what I want” attitude is not good for anyone”
- “To believe in themselves and to be able to reach the aim by searching for the best solution for their future”
- Practical experiences and innovative educational approaches: Participants highlighted the need for greater exposure to real-life work experiences, such as trial work periods and international opportunities like Erasmus programs, to better prepare students for the workforce. Alongside practical experiences, there was a strong call for modernizing education through innovative programs, updated teaching methods, and strategies that align with the needs of 21st-century students, moving beyond outdated, traditional school models.
  - “There are many but we can’t have XXI century students and still having XIX century schools”
  - “Erasmus on other countries”
  - “To be able to exercise real life work before going to work, like trial time”

### 3.3. Comparative Analysis

#### Aspirations and Motivations

Group	Educational Aspirations	Career Aspirations	Motivation Drivers
<b>NEET Youth</b>	Rather balanced – 50% planning to return to education, 41,7% not interested	75% want to work, but majority doesn't know how to start	Motivation impacted by mental health, limited guidance, and lack of opportunities
<b>High school Students</b>	64,6% plan to pursue higher education	57% have a clear profession in mind	Personal fulfilment (44,3%) Job opportunities (57%) Financial stability (38%)
<b>Teachers/Youth Leaders</b>	View students often uncertain (20%) or context dependent (45,7%)	See student interest spread across university, vocational, and job market	Salary (62,9%) Job stability (22,9%)

#### Guidance and Support

Group	Guidance Received	Perceived Gaps	Suggestions
<b>NEET Youth</b>	Low-rated school guidance (83,4% rated 3 or lower in a 0-5 scale)	Inadequate support led to disengagement	More free courses, job opportunities, better infrastructures and psychological support
<b>High School Students</b>	50,7% rated school support for university 3 out of 5 or lower, while 65,8% rated school support for workforce 3 out of 5 or lower	Lack of real-life preparation, emotional support, structured planning	Ask for career centres, real-world exposure, mental health tools
<b>Teachers/Youth Leaders</b>	Majority believe it's insufficient or inconsistent (62,9% rated it 3 out of 5 or lower)	Lack of trained staff, outdated systems, overreliance on grades	Advocate career centres, improved curriculum, Erasmus, internships



### Challenges and Barriers

Group	Primary Concerns	Emotional Impact	Structural Gaps
<b>NEET Youth</b>	Lack of motivation, job access, financial issues, inadequate school preparation	74,9% rank NEET impact on mental health as 3 out of 5 or higher	Education not aligned with their needs, minimal career guidance
<b>High School Students</b>	Fear of failure (64,9%) Emotional/Mental exhaustion (41,9%) Uncertainty (39,2%)	86,1% feel unmotivated (36,7% of them frequently)	Lack of real-world preparation, lack of information, and rugged job transitions
<b>Teachers/Youth Leaders</b>	Students' fear of failure (65,7%) Uncertainty (65,7%) Financial issues (62,9%)	97,1% observe lack of motivation among students (40% of them frequently)	Curriculum outdated, poor job-market readiness, low school-work links

### Perceived Readiness

Group	Readiness for University	Readiness for Job Market
<b>NEET Youth</b>	Some plan on returning (58,3%), others feel unwilling (41,7%)	75% proclaim interest (yet 41,7% don't know where to begin)
<b>High School Students</b>	Mostly positive (83,5% rate 3 out of 5 or higher)	Positive (78,4% rate 3 out of 5 or higher)
<b>Teachers/Youth Leaders</b>	See students as unprepared yet looking forward	See students as unprepared (40% being totally and 45,7% partially)

### Proposed Solutions and Insights

Category	From NEET Youth	From Students	From Teachers/Youth Leaders
<b>Practical Skills</b>	Need job access and affordable training	Demand CV/interview skills, hands-on learning	Call for internships, workshops, "real life" projects
<b>Emotional/Mental Health</b>	33% request psychological or emotional support	Mental health cited as key to success and barrier	Suggest soft skills, confidence-building, safe spaces
<b>Systemic Improvements</b>	Require better transport and job infrastructures	Suggest more Erasmus, clear info, less pressure	Advocate curriculum reform, guidance roles in school
<b>Motivation Tools</b>	Many lack motivation due to failed systems	Seek exploration and autonomy	Encourage self-awareness, career exploration early

### Familiarity with Erasmus+

Group	Familiarity Rate
NEET Youth	83,3% proclaim familiar
High School Students	82,3% proclaim familiar
Teachers/Youth Leaders	71,4% believe students are familiar

All groups see Erasmus as a potentially transformative tool, yet teachers feel awareness could still improve.

### Key comparative insights

**Shared Aspirations & Uneven Support:** Most young people – students and NEET youth – often share similar aspirations, dreaming of stable and meaningful work. But a lack of clear Guidance and fragmented institutional support often leaves many of them feeling lost, widening the gap between their goals and reality.

**Motivational struggles:** Fear of failure and uncertainty about the future weigh heavily on young people. Educators recognize this, yet many systems still prioritize academic performance over emotional support, leaving little room to build resilience or confidence.

**Consistency across countries:** While each country has its own unique context, the data reveals consistent themes – challenges with motivation, mental health, and gaps in systemic support show up across all four countries involved in the study.

## 4. Campaign

### 4.1. Background & Justification

As part of a broader effort to better understand the challenges faced by young people who are disconnected from education, employment, or training – often referred to as NEET youth – a field research was carried out in Portugal, Slovenia, Germany, and North Macedonia. Through a series of questionnaires, the voices of NEET individuals, high school students, and youth workers were brought to the forefront, offering a clear and honest look at what young people are experiencing today.

What emerged was a picture of young people navigating a difficult landscape. Many NEET youth spoke about feeling stuck, mentally exhausted, or uncertain about where to go next. Some had left education because it wasn't the right fit, others were struggling with financial pressures or lack of opportunities in their area. High school students, while still in the system, often shared similar concerns – uncertainty about their future, feeling anxious about making the “right” decisions, and wishing for more support to figure things out. Youth workers and educators echoed this, acknowledging the gap between what young people need and what support systems are currently offering.

Across all groups, some common themes stood out:

- The impact on mental health and burnout, often linked to uncertainty and pressure.
- A lack of clear guidance on how to transition from school to work or further studying.
- Feelings of emotional and financial instability, especially among those already out of school.
- A strong craving for authentic inspirations, relatable advice, and stories of hope.

These insights showed that young people don't just need information – they need to feel seen, supported, and understood. They need tools that are practical but also uplifting – tools that meet them where they are.

That's exactly what this campaign set out to do. It takes what young people answered on the questionnaires and transform it into something useful: short videos that speak directly to its experience and offers guidance, and motivational quotes that offer reality checks and encouragement in the moments it's needed most. The goal is to provide guidance and inspiration that feels personal, empowering, and grounded in real life.

## 4.2. Campaign Objectives

- To raise awareness about the realities faced by NEET youth, shedding light on diverse challenges they encounter, and to normalize the uncertainty that often accompanies transitional phases in young people's lives.
- To provide accessible, practical tools and relevant information that enhance employment readiness.
- To foster hope, personal agency, and resilience through emotionally intelligent messaging, emphasizing that setback is part of growth and that each path is unique.
- To engage a wider support network – including educators, youth workers, career counsellors, families, and community members – in meaningful dialogue around youth transitions.

### 4.3. Outputs

#### **Video 1: “You Are Not Alone” – A Real Story from NEET to Re-engagement**

This short, one minute video features the real story of Vítor, a 22-year-old from Portugal, who opens about his experience of being NEET. Vítor talks about the challenges faced – feeling lost after leaving university, struggling with lostness and uncertainty – but also about how he found strength in adapting, growing, and slowly rebuilding his path. His story reflects several key themes from the questionnaires, such as educational dissatisfaction, and emotional disorientation - but also resilience, adaptability, and hope – with the purpose to humanize the NEET experience and provide authentic, peer-to-peer motivation rooted in lived reality.

Transcript:

“I’m Vítor, I’m 22, and I’m from Portugal.

I dropped out of university because the course I was taking wasn’t meeting up my expectations, which left me in a NEET situation for around 9 months. Throughout that time, I was jumping from one part-time job to another, and feeling rather lost, to be honest.

But I kept on looking, I kept on trying to find something good for me, until eventually I found a golden opportunity, which allowed me to work on something that I really like and giving me a sense of direction once again.

If you would ask me if this is something I was expecting to be at? Some years ago? Definitely not. But I’m trying to make the most of it and, honestly, I couldn’t be more glad about the opportunity I was given.

And, in case you’re struggling, you are not alone, because if I can get through this, so can you!”

#### **Video 2: “How to Write a CV?” – Clear and Friendly Job Readiness**

This short, 90-second video was created in direct response to questionnaire feedback showing high levels of confusion about how to prepare for the workforce. The video offers a simple and supportive tutorial designed especially for youth with limited or no work experience, to help empower young people with a sense of competence and clarity when approaching job applications.

Transcript:

“So, you want to write a CV but you don’t have work experience yet? Let us help you! Let’s try to keep it simple and in one page, focusing only on the most important.

Let’s begin with the basics: phone number, email (make sure it’s professional), address, and if you have one your LinkedIn or portfolio link.

Then, you'll want to mention your education. So, mention where you go to school, when you graduate, and some achievements you might have gotten along the way.

You'll the want to highlight your skills and make sure that they're relevant to the roles that you're applying for. And try to focus on both soft skills and hard skills.

If you've done volunteering, this is your time to shine! Show how these experiences have prepared you for work. Try to emphasize leadership roles and achievements. Focus on what you learned and how it prepared you for work.

Adding hobbies can show more about your personality and skills. Try to focus on those that demonstrate qualities relevant to the job that you're applying.

Lastly, you can include references available upon request. This means, you're happy to provide them when asked, without putting names and contact directly on your CV.

Don't forget to double check spelling and formatting, first impressions matter. Good luck!"

### **Inspirational Quotes Series**

These quotes were created with real young people in mind – especially those feeling unsure, stuck, or in transition. They're short and honest reminders, designed mainly for social media – where many young people spend their time – but they also work on posters, in workshops, or as conversation starters in group settings.

Whether someone needs a spark of motivation, a little perspective, or just to know they're not alone – these quotes were made to offer that small moment of connection and encouragement.

#### **Inspire & Hope**

- "Feeling lost doesn't mean you are lost. It just means you're exploring."
- "The future hasn't happened yet. You still get to shape it."
- "Healing, learning, growing – all counts as progress."

These quotes are gentle nudges for those going through tough times – reminders that not having it all figured out doesn't mean failure.

#### **Awareness & Reality Check**

- "Fear of failure stops more dreams than failure ever did."
- "Over 60% of students feel anxiety when thinking about their future. It's not just you. You are not alone."
- "Mental health and motivation are connected. You can't thrive in burnout."

These messages reflect the very real stress, doubt, and pressure that many young people shared during the research. They're here to validate those feelings – and to remind youth that they're not alone carrying them.

#### **Guidance & Next Steps**

- "Start messy. Progress is louder than perfection."

- “You don’t have to know the final destination – just take the next step.”
- “Your future isn’t a test. It’s a path – and it’s okay to take detours.”

These quotes encourage action over perfection. They’re here for anyone who feels overwhelmed by where to start, offering reassurance that moving forward – even in small, uncertain steps – still counts.

## 4.4. Expected Impact

This campaign aims to make a tangible difference in the lives of young people by meeting them where they are – emotionally, mentally, and practically. Through real stories, relatable advice, and simple, honest motivation, this campaign is expected to generate impact in young people's lives.

### **Personal Empowerment and Re-engagement**

Young people – especially those in NEET situations or at risk of becoming NEET – will feel more seen, understood, and validated in their experiences. By watching real stories like Vítor's or engaging with encouraging contents, youth are expected to experience increased motivation, self-confidence, emotional resilience, and ready to take the next step.

### **Confidence Through Clarity**

Many young people shared that they feel overwhelmed by job applications or uncertainty where to start. The CV tutorial video and other practical elements of the campaign designed to ease that pressure, increasing clarity around job-readiness steps. Youth are expected to feel capable, equipped, and less afraid of failure.

### **Mental Health and Emotional Awareness**

Many young people highlighted burnout, pressure, and anxiety about the future, as the main emotional struggles. By addressing them and sharing quotes that reflect those real struggles, this campaign contributes to normalizing these experiences and reducing stigma. It encourages young people to care for their mental well-being and recognize that emotional health is a key part of career and life development.

### **Stronger Support Around Youth**

Educators, youth workers, teachers, and community members often want to help, but don't always know how to properly connect. This campaign materials can serve as conversation starters or workshop prompts, helping to foster deeper dialogue and responsive support strategies – with better listening and without judgement.

### **Changing the Story Around NEET**

Often, being NEET is seen as a personal failure, implying blame or deficit. This campaign works to shift that narrative into one of complexity and humanity. By sharing stories grounded in real-life challenges and growth, it highlights a more accurate, human story.



## 4.5. Sustainability & Follow-Up

The videos and quotes developed through this campaign are designed to have a lasting impact. Their concise, visually appealing format makes them highly adaptable for continued use across various platforms and settings, including social media, schools, youth centres and community organizations. This ensures they remain accessible to a wide range of young people, both in formal educational contexts, and non-formal and informal environments.

Beyond the initial campaign period, these materials can serve as valuable tools to support youth engagement over time. They can be incorporated into school curriculum, vocational training, counselling sessions, and workshops, focusing on employability, mental-health, discussion, or personal development. Their versatility allows educators, teachers and youth workers to align them with key themes such as self-confidence, resilience, and goal setting, depending on the needs of their audience.

To maintain their relevance and effectiveness, regular follow-up is encouraged. Monitoring usage and gathering feedback can inform future updates, ensuring that the content continues to reflect the realities, language, and aspirations of its target audience.

Ultimately, this campaign is not intended as a standalone effort, but rather as a foundation for ongoing initiatives in youth empowerment. By embedding its tools into long-term strategies and fostering continued collaboration among stakeholders, its influence can extend well beyond the initial launch – supporting young people’s journeys with consistent, relatable, and inspiring resources.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this research underscore a clear and urgent call: while majority of young people across Portugal, Slovenia, Germany and North Macedonia – alongside Europe in general - continue to demonstrate aspiration, creativity, and a desire for self-determination, the systems designed to support them are often fragmented, outdated, or misaligned with their realities and needs.

From both the desk and field research, it is evident that NEET youth face significant barriers – including poor mental health, lack of financial and social support, and inadequate educational or employment guidance. Many feel adrift in systems that fail to account for the complexities of their lived experiences. Meanwhile, students on the brink of transition from secondary school express similar concerns, voicing fears about the future, emotional exhaustion, and uncertainty about their choices and opportunities.

Educators and youth leaders echo these insights, identifying structural gaps in guidance, motivation, and job market preparedness. While all groups recognize the value of programs like Erasmus+, they also point to the need for more inclusive, accessible, and locally adapted support mechanisms.

What emerges clearly is that empowering youth requires more than just offering job placements or education programs – it demands a holistic and sustained investment in young people's confidence, emotional well-being, life skills, and access to real-world experiences. It requires school systems to go beyond academic performance and build stronger bridges toward personal growth, career exploration, and social inclusion.

To truly close the gap between aspiration and opportunity, interventions must be youth-centred, inclusive, and systemic – linking education, mental health, employment, and civic participation in meaningful ways. Only then can we shift from managing youth disengagement to actively cultivating youth empowerment.