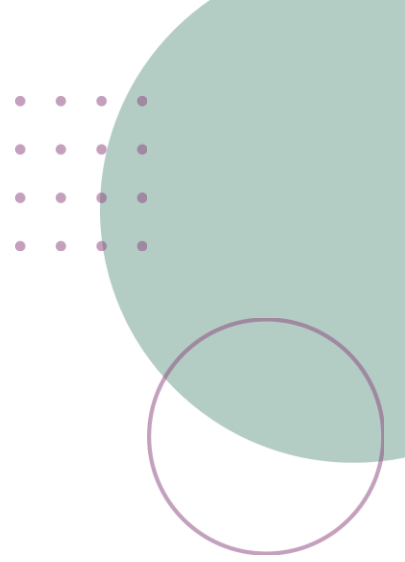


Youth participation and employment in Albania and Montenegro

Youth Voices for Peace and Inclusion

Youth priorities for meaningful participation, well-being and access to employment through the Youth, Peace and Security agenda

October 2026



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Young people and partners at the project kick-off meeting in Tirana

Prepared with young people by NISMA ARSIS in Albania and Juventas in Montenegro

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Introduction

Young people's participation is essential to building inclusive and peaceful communities. Meaningful participation requires opportunities to shape decisions, develop practical skills and contribute to solutions to the challenges they experience. The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda provides a framework for recognising this contribution and connecting young people's leadership with public institutions, civil society and community action.

This publication was developed through Youth Voices for Peace and Inclusion, implemented from December 2025 to August 2026 by Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror ARSIS in Albania, in partnership with Juventas in Montenegro. The project was supported through the RYCOgnizing YPS: Meaningful Youth Participation in the Western Balkans granting scheme, implemented by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) with support from German Cooperation through the German Federal Foreign Office. Its purpose was to strengthen young people's participation in local decision-making and their capacity to lead initiatives promoting peace, inclusion and the prevention of violence, hate speech and disinformation.

The project connected consultations and community mapping with a three-day Youth Leadership Boot Camp in Durrës, participatory policy workshops, mentoring and dialogue with institutions. Young people identified shared concerns, examined their causes, developed recommendations and presented their proposals directly to decision-makers. Regional exchange between participants from Albania and Montenegro supported peer learning, trust and cooperation, while community initiatives and digital communication provided opportunities to put their ideas into practice.

The two policy briefs brought together here reflect this process. The Albania brief focuses on meaningful participation, employability, and mental health and well-being, with attention to young people facing social, economic or geographic barriers. The Montenegro brief examines employment and the transition from education to work, drawing on youth discussions and an exploratory online survey. It addresses practical learning, fair recruitment, working conditions, career guidance and access to support. Together, the papers connect young people's everyday concerns with the YPS pillars of participation, prevention, protection and partnerships.

The publication offers public institutions, municipalities, education and employment actors, health and social services, employers and civil society practical recommendations grounded in participants' experiences and proposals. It invites continued dialogue and follow-up, with clear responsibilities, accessible opportunities and feedback on how young people's contributions are considered. Its central purpose is to help translate youth priorities into institutional action and visible improvements in young people's lives.

Scope and use

This publication brings together two policy briefs developed through young people's participation in Albania and Montenegro, connecting their experiences and priorities with practical actions under the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. Part one, prepared with young people and supported by Nisma ARSIS, presents six recommendations addressing meaningful participation, access to employment, mental health and well-being, inclusion, institutional feedback and regional cooperation. Part two, developed with the support of Juventas, draws on research into employment and learning opportunities in Montenegro. Its five recommendations focus on practical education, fair recruitment, improved working conditions, financial support and accessible information and career guidance.

The publication is intended to inform the work of central and local decision-makers, municipalities, youth institutions and councils, education and employment actors, health and social service providers, employers, civil society and regional cooperation organisations. These actors can use the recommendations to identify priorities for policy and planning, strengthen cooperation, improve services and create sustained opportunities for young people to contribute to decisions affecting their lives. The briefs also provide a basis for continued dialogue, advocacy and monitoring of institutional responses to youth proposals.

Each brief retains its own focus, evidence base, methodology and authorship. The findings should be interpreted within the context of the participants involved and the methodological limitations described in each part. Together, the papers offer complementary insights into shared challenges and possible responses across the region; they are not designed to provide a statistical comparison between Albania and Montenegro.

PART ONE | ALBANIA

From youth policy to youth reality

Youth priorities for meaningful participation, well-being and employability in Albania through the Youth, Peace and Security agenda

Prepared by young participants with the support of NISMA ARSIS, within Youth Voices for Peace and Inclusion under the RYCOgnizing YPS granting scheme.

Young people are asking for meaningful influence, fair opportunities and accessible support. The project consultations identified three connected priorities: participation in decisions, better transitions from education to employment, and safe, confidential mental health and well-being support. Inclusion and continuing regional cooperation cut across all three.

Albania has an established youth policy framework. The challenge described by participants is to translate existing commitments into accessible services, practical opportunities and institutional responses that they can see in everyday life. The six recommendations below set out actions, responsible actors, ways to sustain delivery and indicators for tracking progress.

From youth consultation to policy priorities

The recommendations are grounded primarily in the experiences and proposals expressed by young people throughout project activities. Consultations, workshops, peer exchange and a three-day bootcamp created spaces to identify challenges, discuss solutions and translate lived experience into practical policy priorities. The brief reports engagement with more than 50 young people across project activities. [2]

The process connected listening through youth consultations, exchange between peers in Albania and Montenegro, and co-creation during the youth bootcamp. External data and policy sources provide context for the youth perspectives and recommendations.

The perspectives reflect the participants in these activities. They are not intended to represent the views of all young people in Albania. The consultation-based findings should therefore be read as qualitative policy insight, alongside the wider evidence.

Evidence in context

- In 2025, 20.1% of people aged 15-29 in Albania were not in employment, education or training (NEET). [5, p. 22]
- The National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 records a 2020 baseline of 20% for young people who feel represented in youth policies at central and local levels, with an 80% target for 2029. [4]
- Globally, around one in seven adolescents aged 10-19 experiences a mental disorder. This global estimate provides context for accessible, confidential support; it is not an Albania-specific prevalence estimate. [6]

What young people want to change

Meaningful participation

“Too often, young people are invited to consultations after decisions have already been made. We do not want to be informed about policies; we want to help shape them.”

(A.K., 19, student from a rural area of Tirana)

Young people want to contribute before decisions are finalised and receive feedback on how their recommendations were considered. Meaningful participation means influencing policy, implementation and monitoring.

Employability and first opportunities

“I want to work and build my future, but it is difficult when you have no experience and no one gives you a chance. Internships and training programs could help young people like me take the first step.”

(M.A., 19)

Young people connect employability with practical experience, mentoring, career guidance and access to first opportunities. The transition from education to employment is particularly difficult for those with limited work experience, young people who are NEET, and those living in rural or underserved areas.

Mental health and well-being

“Mental health is still a topic many people avoid discussing. Young people need safe spaces where they can seek support without fear of stigma or judgment.”

(A.L., 18)

Young people want support that is safe, confidential, accessible and non-judgemental, with clear information about where to seek help and how to reach appropriate services.

Why these priorities matter for YPS

The priorities connect directly with four dimensions of the YPS agenda: participation, prevention, protection and partnerships. Disengagement and reintegration is part of the broader framework, but was not identified as a central priority in these consultations and is not a primary focus of this paper.

- Participation means meaningful involvement in agenda-setting, policy design, implementation and monitoring at central and local levels.
- Prevention means improving access to education, employment, social inclusion and psychosocial support to address vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and contribute to social cohesion.
- Protection means safe environments where young people can participate, express concerns and seek support without stigma, discrimination or fear of harm.
- Partnerships mean cooperation among young people, institutions, civil society and regional actors, with space for dialogue, shared learning and joint action.

This framing recognises young people as actors who shape decisions, strengthen social cohesion and contribute to inclusive and peaceful communities.

From policy commitments to youth reality

Albania's framework includes Law No. 75/2019 "On Youth", as amended, the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 and commitments relevant to YPS. [3, 4] The consultations point to a gap between formal commitments and everyday experience. Participants described challenges in implementation, accessibility, institutional responsiveness and accountability. Strengthening the mechanisms that turn policy into visible outcomes is therefore essential.

Where the gap is felt

- Youth participation: young people are not always involved early enough, and participation is not consistently followed by institutional feedback. Geographic, socioeconomic, accessibility and other barriers can exclude participants.
- School-to-work transition: young people need practical experience, career guidance, internships, mentoring and stronger links with employers. Young people who are NEET and those in rural areas need targeted pathways.
- Mental health and well-being: schools, youth services, health and social care providers need clearer referral pathways and responsibilities. Young people need understandable information on available services.
- Inclusion and equal access: outreach must reach those facing geographic, social, economic or accessibility barriers. Programmes should be designed with young people experiencing exclusion.

Regional learning between Albania and Montenegro

The exchange demonstrated that participation gaps, barriers to employment, social exclusion and the need for safe spaces are shared concerns across the Western Balkans. Regional exchange gives young people opportunities to learn from peers, identify solutions together, strengthen advocacy and contribute to a shared youth agenda.

Regional cooperation should complement stronger participation mechanisms within each context. Its added value lies in connecting young people across the region around common challenges and solutions through peer learning, dialogue, joint advocacy and youth-led action.

Six recommendations for action in Albania

The recommendations translate young people's priorities into practical actions. They build on existing systems and make youth participation, inclusion and support more measurable and accountable.

1. Make youth participation meaningful

What should happen. Develop and apply a practical minimum standard for meaningful youth participation across central and local youth policy processes. Existing youth councils and other mechanisms should ensure early involvement, diverse representation, opportunities to submit proposals, documented institutional responses and regular reporting on how youth input influenced decisions.

Who should act. Lead: institutions responsible for youth and education, the National Youth Agency, the National Agency for Employment and Skills, the authority responsible for child rights and protection, and municipalities. Support: local youth councils, youth organisations and civil society organisations.

How to sustain it. Embed participation standards within existing youth policy implementation, municipal planning and reporting mechanisms.

Indicators

- Number and proportion of municipalities applying agreed participation standards.
- Number of youth proposals receiving a documented institutional response.
- Proportion of young participants reporting that their input influenced a decision or action.
- Regular publication of youth participation outcomes.

2. Create better first opportunities

What should happen. Strengthen pathways from education to employment through career guidance, internships, mentoring, digital and practical skills development. Provide targeted support for young people who are NEET and those in rural or underserved areas. Establish structured links between education and training providers, employment services and employers.

Who should act. Lead: relevant education and employment institutions. Support: schools, public and private vocational education providers, employment agencies, municipalities and the private sector.

How to sustain it. Use existing education, employment and vocational systems. Strengthen collaboration between education providers and the private sector so young people gain skills relevant to the labour market.

Indicators

- Number of structured partnerships between education or training institutions and employers.
- Number of young people accessing internships, mentoring or career guidance.
- Number and proportion of participants transitioning into employment, education or further training.
- Outreach to and participation of young people who are NEET and young people in rural areas.

3. Make mental health support easier to reach

What should happen. Strengthen local referral pathways linking schools, youth centres, primary health care, community mental health and social services. Build frontline professionals' capacities in psychological first aid, recognising distress, safe referral, communication, safeguarding and confidentiality. Give young people clear information on where and how to seek support.

Who should act. Lead: institutions responsible for health and social protection and relevant public health institutions. Support: education institutions, municipalities, schools, community mental health centres, social services and qualified civil society organisations.

How to sustain it. Integrate training into existing professional development systems and establish clear referral protocols.

Indicators

- Number of operational local referral pathways or protocols.
- Number of frontline professionals trained.
- Availability of clear, youth-friendly information on support services.
- Young people's perceptions of the accessibility, confidentiality and safety of support.

4. Reach young people who are often left out

What should happen. Strengthen outreach in rural and underserved communities, provide online and hybrid participation options, and use accessible venues and communication. Work with community centres and other organisations to create safe spaces and activities that empower young people.

Who should act. Lead: municipalities and the National Youth Agency in cooperation with relevant public institutions. Support: youth organisations, community-based organisations, schools and other public institutions.

How to sustain it. Build inclusion requirements into programme guidelines and funding criteria. Municipalities should allocate resources for youth empowerment and inclusion programmes. International funding can complement public investment in accessible infrastructure and outreach.

Indicators

- Proportion of participants reached from rural, remote or underserved communities.
- Number of activities implemented outside central urban areas.
- Participation and retention rates among identified underserved groups.

5. Close the feedback loop

What should happen. Introduce a simple "You Said - We Did" mechanism so young people can see what they proposed, what institutions decided, what was implemented and why.

Who should act. Lead: public institutions and municipalities. Support: youth councils, youth organisations and relevant municipal social fund programmes.

How to sustain it. Build on existing monitoring and reporting requirements and make institutional responses accessible to participants.

Indicators

- Proportion of youth consultations followed by a documented institutional response.
- Average time between consultation and feedback.
- Number of youth proposals tracked from submission to decision.

6. Keep regional youth cooperation alive

What should happen. Continue regional youth dialogue, peer learning, joint youth-led initiatives, YPS discussions, intercultural dialogue and joint advocacy involving Albania, Montenegro and the wider Western Balkans.

Who should act. Lead: youth organisations and regional youth cooperation actors. Support: municipalities, central youth institutions, civil society and regional initiatives.

How to sustain it. Connect regional cooperation with existing youth policies and funding programmes so collaboration continues beyond individual projects.



Peer learning during the youth bootcamp

Indicators

- Number of joint youth-led initiatives developed through regional cooperation.
- Number and diversity of young people engaged in regional activities.
- Number of regional partnerships continuing beyond the project period.
- Joint policy, advocacy or community actions resulting from regional youth cooperation.

Across all six recommendations, meaningful participation requires clear institutional responsibilities, resources, responses and mechanisms through which young people can see the results of their involvement.

Implementation and accountability

Meaningful participation requires a continuous cycle of listening, prioritising, responding, acting and reporting back. Institutions should be able to demonstrate what changed as a result of young people's participation.

A participation mechanism should be able to answer five questions:

- Who was consulted?
- What did young people propose?
- What response was provided?
- What action was taken?
- What changed as a result?

Messages from the field

Show how ideas influence decisions. Young people want to see how their proposals are considered and used.

“Give young people a first chance. Experience, mentoring and internships can open the door to work. Make support safe to access. Young people need places where they can ask for help without stigma. Reach those who are missing. Inclusion must be built into participation. Keep the dialogue going. Regional exchange can build trust, learning and cooperation.”

Albania’s youth legislation and strategic commitments provide a basis for action. The next step is delivery through meaningful participation, accessible opportunities, responsive services and clear institutional accountability. The project demonstrates the value of spaces where young people can identify problems, discuss solutions and engage with peers across the region. Sustained participation should make change visible in their everyday lives.



Youth participation at the kick-off meeting

PART TWO | MONTENEGRO

Youth and employment opportunities in Montenegro

Prepared by young participants with the support of Juventas, within Youth Voices for Peace and Inclusion, implemented by NISMA ARSIS in partnership with Juventas under the RYCOgnizing YPS granting scheme.

Young people in Montenegro need fair access to employment, practical learning and reliable information about opportunities. This paper presents an online survey of 127 respondents, developed after regional learning and exchange during the project bootcamp. It highlights concerns about recruitment fairness, education-to-work transitions, wages and access to support programmes. [11]

Montenegro's youth policy framework recognises people aged 15-30 and provides a basis for participation and inclusion. Youth policy developed through the National Action Plan for Youth 2006-2011, the first Youth Law in 2016, later legislation and youth strategies, supported by central and local institutions and civil society. Youth centres and clubs have also provided spaces for engagement. [8]

Nevertheless, policy commitments do not always translate into accessible opportunities. The ten young participants from Montenegro attending the ARSIS bootcamp in Durrës chose to examine employment because of its importance to their futures. They developed an online questionnaire to collect experiences and proposals from peers across Montenegro, focusing on work, education and support programmes.

The five recommendations arising from the survey are to strengthen practical education and work experience, address nepotism and politically mediated recruitment, improve pay and working conditions, expand financial support, and strengthen information and career counselling. The survey provides exploratory insight into respondents' experiences and perceptions; its findings cannot be generalised to the entire youth population.

Context and policy framework

Youth policy in Montenegro draws on equality, volunteerism, solidarity, active participation and access to information. The framework includes the Youth Law, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the Youth Strategy 2023-2027 and local strategies. The strategy identifies gaps in the coverage and functioning of youth structures and in cooperation between public institutions and civil society. Youth offices, clubs, centres, youth organisations and student unions need stronger connections and more accessible services. [8]

The Programme of Accession of Montenegro to the European Union 2026-2027 places education and culture within Chapter 26. The policy priorities discussed in this brief include access to employment for groups facing barriers, social inclusion, and innovative services at local level. Young people with fewer qualifications, social protection beneficiaries, women and people with disabilities need support responsive to their circumstances.

The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2024-2026 offers a route to improve transitions from education to work. Its pilot covers Bijelo Polje, Nikšić and Ulcinj, with the objective of a quality offer of employment, continued education, training or an internship within four months of leaving education or becoming unemployed. [10]

Labour market participation, unemployment, registered unemployment and the share of young people who are NEET measure different things. They also depend on the age range and reference period used.

Official Labour Force Survey measures should be distinguished from administrative registration and from the self-reported employment status in this project survey. [9]

Participants described unemployment, weak links between education and employers, limited practical preparation, and unequal access to opportunities as important concerns. Experiences of marginalisation can compound these barriers. Limited involvement in policy processes and few opportunities to develop entrepreneurial ideas may also leave young people discouraged about their prospects.

At the Youth Voices for Peace and Inclusion bootcamp held in Durrës from 30 March to 1 April 2026, participants decided to ask their peers about employment barriers and possible solutions. They called for sustained support, encouragement and opportunities that enable young people to contribute to the communities in which they live.

Research methodology and respondent profile

The online research “Youth and employment opportunities in Montenegro” was conducted from 15 May to 11 June 2026. An online questionnaire was circulated using snowball sampling, in which participants shared the survey through their networks. A total of 127 respondents took part. [11]

The sample is not representative of all young people in Montenegro. It may overrepresent people connected to the project’s networks, employment discussions and civil society. Women and urban residents are more strongly represented. The age range also extends beyond the 15-30 youth policy definition; the results therefore cannot be treated as estimates for that age group. Percentages are rounded.

Characteristic	Reported composition
Gender	87 female (68.5%); 38 male (29.9%); 2 identifying as other (1.6%).
Age	Average age 23; range 15-38. The largest age group was 21-25 (37.8%).
Settlement	97 urban residents (76.4%); 30 rural residents (23.6%).
Education	59 university graduates (46.5%); 51 with secondary education (40.2%); 6 with post-secondary education (4.7%); 11 with elementary education (8.7%).

Employment status and reasons for not working

Of the 127 respondents, 52 (40.9%) reported being employed and 75 (59.1%) reported not being employed. Among those employed, the reported categories were fixed-term contracts (21), indefinite contracts (20), part-time work (8) and seasonal work (3). Fixed-term contracts were slightly more common than indefinite contracts, suggesting that stability is a concern for some respondents.

The reported employment categories combine contract duration and working time. They should not be interpreted as a comprehensive classification of job quality or security. The 59.1% not-employed share includes students and is not an official unemployment rate.

Education was the most common reason given for not working, mentioned in 47 responses, or close to two thirds of the 75 respondents who were not employed. Other reasons included a lack of opportunities, not searching for work, insufficient time, lack of qualifications, family circumstances and lack of support.

Some open responses also criticised perceived political favouritism and the role of personal connections in recruitment. These comments are important evidence of respondents' concerns and trust in recruitment processes; they do not establish the prevalence of discriminatory or unlawful hiring.

Job search channels and perceived barriers

Internet portals were the most frequently reported job search channel (40.2%), followed by recommendations from acquaintances or friends (26.8%), social networks (13.4%), direct contact at an employer's premises (9.4%) and the Employment Agency of Montenegro (9 respondents; 7.1%). Four respondents said they were not looking for work.

The importance of recommendations indicates that informal networks play a significant role in how respondents hear about work. Use of such networks does not by itself demonstrate nepotism; it should be read alongside the survey's separate findings on perceptions of recruitment fairness.

Respondents could choose up to three perceived obstacles to employment. They identified low wages, mismatch between education and the labour market, lack of experience, too few jobs, inadequate information about opportunities, insufficient practice during education, discrimination by age or gender, low motivation, inflexible working conditions, inadequate qualifications and limited opportunities in smaller communities.

Low wages were the most frequently selected obstacle, with 56 responses. Concerns about the relevance of education, work experience and practical training also point to the need for stronger links between learning and employment. These responses describe perceived barriers and do not measure the relative contribution of each factor across Montenegro.

Attitudes towards the labour market

Respondents rated their agreement with the statements below on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The wording is presented in English as in the research summary, with minor language corrections.

Statement	Mean score
Personal acquaintances are valued more than knowledge	4.17
I would refuse an unsatisfactory job offer	3.70
I am open to employment outside my profession	3.66
Non-formal education increases my chances	3.30
It is easy to find a job in my primary profession	2.69
The education system prepared me for the labour market	2.24
Young people have enough chances without experience	2.14
Job vacancies are not rigged	2.09

The highest mean score, 4.17, reflects a strong perception among respondents that personal connections carry more weight than knowledge. The low score for fair job competitions (2.09) indicates mistrust in recruitment. A mean score alone does not show how many respondents agreed with a statement.

Low ratings for preparation by education (2.24) and opportunities without experience (2.14) reinforce the demand for practical learning and first-job pathways. Respondents were open to work outside their profession (3.66), while also expressing willingness to refuse an unsatisfactory offer (3.70). The score for finding work in their main profession was 2.69.

Priorities when looking for work

When asked about priorities in finding a job, 29.9% selected salary, 27.6% work-life balance, 21.3% job security and 18.1% advancement opportunities. Salary and work-life balance were the most frequently reported priorities, followed by stability and progression. This suggests that employment support needs to consider the quality and sustainability of opportunities as well as placement.

Mobility and reasons to stay

The survey also explored willingness to move. Of respondents, 17.3% did not want to move, 31.5% were open to moving abroad, 18.1% wished to move to another city and 33% were undecided. These are different positions: relocation within Montenegro and uncertainty should not be counted as intentions to emigrate.

Higher salaries were the most frequently reported factor that would motivate respondents to stay in Montenegro (52%), followed by more opportunities for skills development (22.8%), safe working conditions (11.8%) and support for young people (9.4%). Pay is therefore a prominent concern in the responses, alongside learning opportunities and working conditions.

On the reported rating scale, family scored 3.38 as a factor influencing the decision to stay, followed by the overall situation in society (2.83), friends (2.47), social expectations (2.21) and social networks (1.93).

Family was the highest-rated factor in this set. These exploratory responses do not establish future migration behaviour or a population-wide rate of intended emigration.

Non-formal education and training

In the previous 12 months, 55.1% of respondents had participated in some form of non-formal education, while 44.9% had not. Reported activities included conferences, seminars, lectures, workshops, training in IT and soft skills, professional training and certification, extracurricular and student activities, online courses, foreign language courses and private lessons.

Information about educational opportunities most often came through social networks (38 mentions), family, friends or acquaintances (27), schools or faculties (26), youth organisations (20), internet portals (15) and professors or lecturers (13). The prominence of social networks points to their usefulness for outreach, alongside stronger communication through institutions and youth organisations.

Respondents who evaluated these learning opportunities gave the following mean ratings on a scale of 1 to 5:

Aspect of non-formal education	Mean score
Quality of education	4.07
Competence of lecturers	4.04
Organisation	4.03
Usefulness of materials	3.97
Practical applicability of knowledge	3.81

All mean scores were above 3.8, indicating generally positive experiences among those evaluating the activities. Practical applicability had the lowest score, reinforcing the value of learning that can be used in work and daily life.

The research summary reports that free activities accounted for 67.1% of responses on financing education. This indicates the importance of free provision in respondents' access to learning; it does not establish whether commercial courses are unavailable or unattractive to all young people.

Among the 57 respondents who had not attended non-formal education, lack of time, limited provision and lack of information together accounted for roughly three quarters of the reasons reported. More flexible formats, better information and more accessible learning opportunities could help address these barriers.

Use and visibility of public support programmes

Professional training for higher education graduates

The government's professional training programme for people with higher education had been used by 33.1% of respondents, while 66.9% had not used it. Around 64% of those who used the programme assessed it positively, describing it as significant or very significant.

These findings indicate positive experiences among many users. Non-use does not by itself establish a lack of availability or awareness, because some respondents may not meet the programme's eligibility requirements. Information, access and subsequent employment outcomes warrant further attention.

Youth Guarantee

Of respondents, 78% had not heard of the Youth Guarantee programme and only 7% said they knew it fully. This low level of awareness within the sample points to the need for clearer outreach through schools, employment services, municipalities and youth organisations. The finding should be interpreted in the context of the programme's pilot coverage.

Access to quality educational programmes

Only 26% of respondents believed they had access to quality educational programmes in their cities. Almost 42% reported that they did not have access, while 32% were not aware of the possibilities. The responses point to concerns about local provision and the visibility of learning opportunities, with particular attention needed in smaller communities.

Five recommendations for action in Montenegro

Respondents were invited to suggest what the government should do to improve employment opportunities and the labour market. Analysis of their open answers identified five recurring areas for action.

1. Link education with practical experience

Strengthen practical education, paid internships, dual education and cooperation among schools, universities and employers. Align educational programmes with labour market needs while helping young people develop transferable skills and gain experience.

“You don’t know what to do with a university degree.”

Survey respondent

“More practical classes, professional internships, and cooperation between schools, universities, and employers.”

Survey respondent

2. Address nepotism and recruitment through connections

Make job competitions transparent, strengthen merit-based recruitment and respond to concerns about political and personal favouritism. Respondents called for accountability and sanctions for improper recruitment practices and for action against employment mediated through political parties.

“All this is being written for nothing; it’s not the first time. If we don’t vote for a certain political party or don’t have someone to push us, we don’t have a chance.”

Survey respondent

3. Improve pay and working conditions

Higher pay was requested more than 25 times in the open responses. Young people also called for an increase in the minimum wage, pay that reflects qualifications, action on undeclared work, protection for seasonal workers and more flexible working hours.

4. Expand financial support and subsidies

Respondents proposed tax incentives for employers hiring people without experience, subsidies for first-time employment, grants for young entrepreneurs, favourable loans and support for freelancers. These proposals should be considered alongside clear eligibility, transparent selection and follow-up support.

5. Strengthen information and career counselling

Improve information on job opportunities, provide career counselling in schools and other community settings, and increase access to education in smaller cities. Outreach should connect young people with available programmes and explain eligibility, application steps and the support they can expect.

Key findings and conclusions

The research provides a fuller picture of how respondents view employment and the support they need. It highlights perceived unfairness in recruitment, a weak connection between education and work, and concern about wages and working conditions. These issues can undermine young people's confidence in their opportunities and their willingness to engage with institutions.

Addressing nepotism and politically mediated recruitment, improving education and strengthening links with employers should remain priorities. Concerns about future opportunities and mobility also call for better prospects within Montenegro, without treating all intentions to move or uncertainty as plans to emigrate.

There are positive foundations for action. Respondents value non-formal education, report generally positive learning experiences and show openness to employment outside their main profession. Many users of the professional training programme assessed it positively, while the Youth Guarantee provides an opportunity for stronger outreach and support.

Public institutions, employers, education providers and youth organisations should use these insights to strengthen practical learning, fair recruitment and accessible information. Continued dialogue with young people can help test whether improvements meet their needs and translate policy commitments into visible results.

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- The Albania findings are consultation-based. The Montenegro survey uses a non-probability sample with an age range of 15-38. The two evidence bases should not be combined into a single dataset or used to estimate population-wide differences.

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