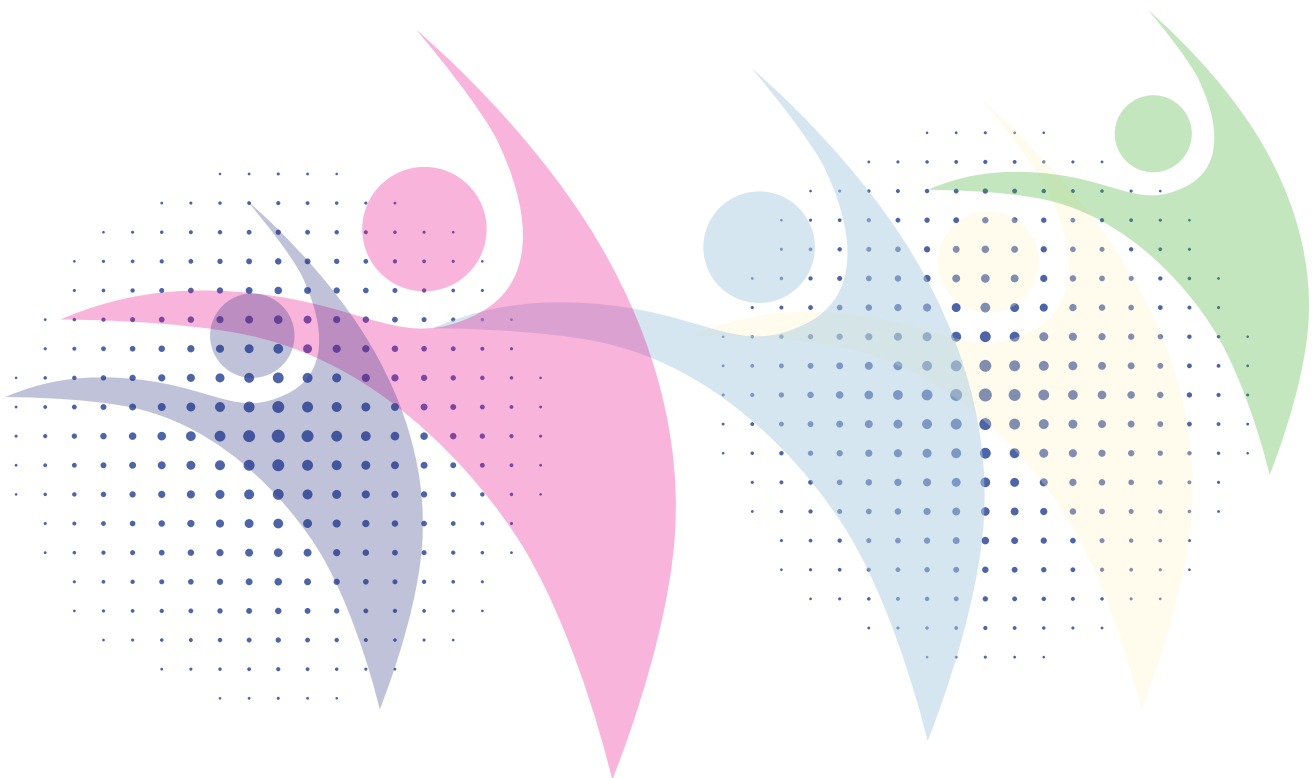




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Support Mechanisms for Youth Employment in Kosovo

From Fragmented Measures
to an Integrated System



EU RELATIONS
G.E.I.E.



Disclaimer

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth unemployment continues to be one of the most serious socio-economic challenges in Kosovo. Even though several national strategies have been approved over the years, young people still face many structural, institutional, and informational barriers that limit their access to decent and meaningful employment ([RCC, 2021](#)). These challenges affect youth from rural areas, young women, and marginalized communities the most, because they often have limited access to career guidance, timely information, and support services ([Kelmendi, 2023](#)). As a result, these gaps do not only limit the future of individuals but also slow down Kosovo's wider socio-economic development and its progress toward EU youth policy priorities.

Findings from desk research and youth-focused consultations show several systemic weaknesses that reduce the effectiveness of current youth employment policies. These weaknesses include poor coordination between institutions, outdated and passive Public Employment Services (PES), low awareness and limited access to support programs, weak mechanisms for youth participation, a mismatch between vocational education and labor market needs, and an underdeveloped digital system for employment data and service delivery. Together, these problems create a fragmented environment where policies exist on paper but are not always implemented in a consistent or effective way.

The urgency of addressing youth employment goes beyond the interests of young people themselves. Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe, with more than half of its citizens under the age of 30 ([Kelmendi, 2023](#)). High unemployment among such a large youth population creates serious risks for social cohesion, economic competitiveness, and long-term political stability. The impacts can be seen in lower productivity, higher public spending, increased emigration, and declining civic participation and trust in institutions ([Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2024](#)). For this reason, youth employment should be understood not only as a youth issue, but as a national development priority.

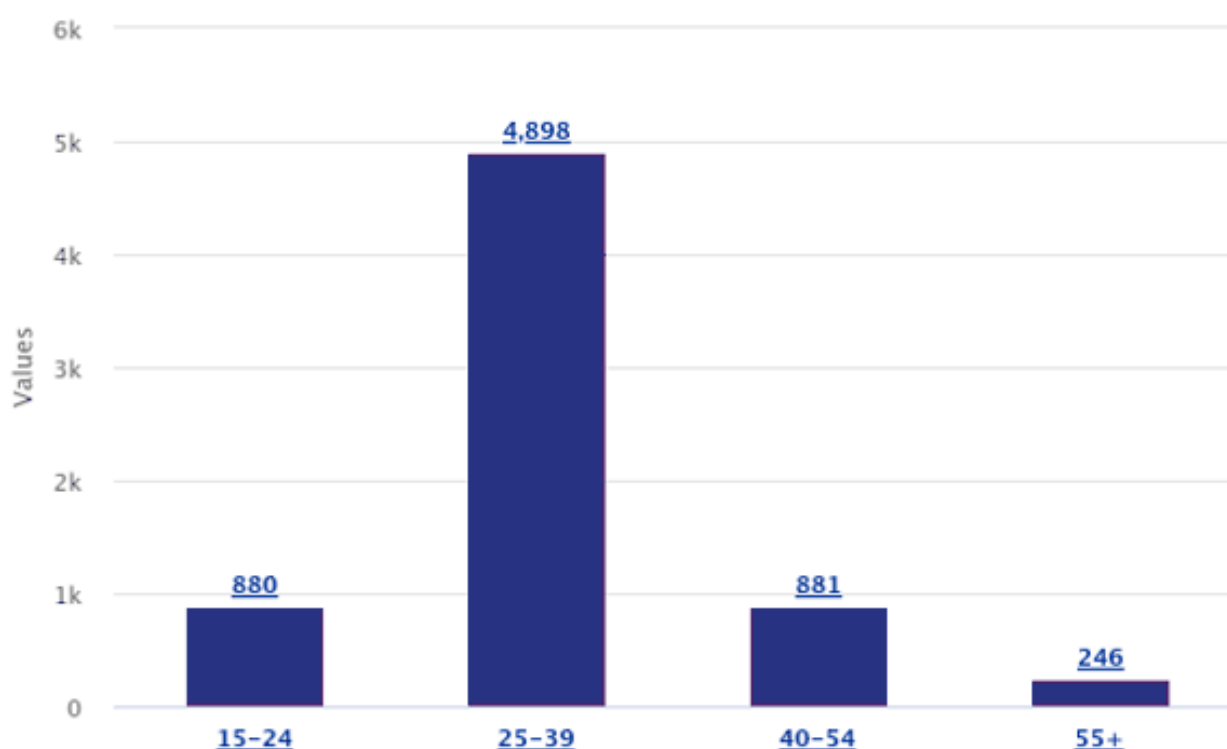
To respond to these challenges, this policy brief proposes the creation of an Employment Support and Transition Framework (ESTF). The ESTF is planned as a coordinated and youth-centered mechanism that strengthens the transition from school to work, modernizes employment services, and improves cooperation between ministries, municipalities, education institutions, the private sector, and youth representatives. Through joint planning, standardized procedures, integrated data systems, and clear accountability tools, the ESTF aims to turn fragmented efforts into a more accessible and effective support system. The policy recommendations in this brief focus on strengthening PES capacity with youth-friendly counseling, ensuring career guidance in all upper secondary schools, reactivating youth participation mechanisms, creating structured advisory channels with employers, and developing a unified digital platform for youth employment services. When these measures are implemented together under the ESTF, Kosovo can build a more coherent, inclusive, and results-oriented system for youth employment.

2. INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment in Kosovo continues to be one of the most serious and complex socio-economic problems, even after many years of policy focus and support from international donors. The problem is not only about numbers, although the youth unemployment rate remains among the highest in Europe. It is also about structural issues that show deeper weaknesses in the connection between education and employment, the lack of coordination between institutions, and slow policy responses ([Bellaqa & Gollopeni, 2021](#)).

The graph below presents newly registered employments in Kosovo by age group for the period 2020–2025. The data show a sharp disparity between youth (15–24) and prime-age adults (25–39). While only 880 new employments were recorded for youth aged 15–24, the number rises dramatically to 4,898 among individuals aged 25–39. This pattern illustrates that young people are entering the labor market at much lower rates than older age groups, highlighting significant barriers in school-to-work transition and early career opportunities.

Punësimet sipas grup moshës



Employment by Age | Source: Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK). (2025). [Statistika të tregut të punës / Labor Market Statistics](#).

This indicator is particularly relevant because it reflects both limited access to employment opportunities and weak transition pathways from education to work. When youth employment remains disproportionately low, it signals structural problems in education quality, career guidance, employer engagement, and institutional support mechanisms (World Bank, 2019). For Kosovo, this imbalance means that the country is not capitalizing on its demographic advantage – a young population that could contribute significantly to economic growth if properly supported. Instead, the current trend risks reinforcing long-term unemployment, higher emigration, and loss of trust in institutions among young people.

2.1 Legal Framework and Youth Employment Policy Stakeholders in Kosovo

At the national level, Kosovo’s youth employment system is supported by a wide institutional and policy framework defined in different laws and strategic documents. The Law No. 03/L-145 on the Empowerment and Participation of Youth explains the state’s obligations to support youth development and their economic participation, while the Law on Labour (No. 03/L-212) sets the rules for working conditions and labor rights.

Education and skills development are guided by the Kosovo Education Strategy (KES) 2022–2026, which focuses on making vocational education more relevant and improving cooperation between schools and the labor market. The State Strategy for Youth 2024–2032 adds to this framework by identifying broader priorities for youth empowerment, participation, and socio-economic inclusion. The table below presents key stakeholders related to youth employment initiatives in Kosovo along with their scope of responsibilities.

Institution	Core Competences Related to Youth Employment
Ministry of Economy (MoE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads national employment policy coordination Oversees Public Employment Services (through EARK) Manages digital infrastructure for employment programs
Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operates PES offices nationwide Provides registration, counseling, and activation measures Implements Active Labour Market Measures (ALMMs) Manages employer engagement and job matching
Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversees VET and higher education reforms Ensures alignment of curricula with labor market needs Introduces and supervises work-based learning and internships Coordinates with schools on career guidance
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports youth participation structures (LYACs and Youth Centers) Implements youth empowerment programs Facilitates youth consultation in policymaking

Institution	Core Competences Related to Youth Employment
Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate local youth offices and youth centers • Provide school-based career guidance (where available) • Coordinate local employment initiatives with PES and CSOs • Develop and implement local youth employment action plans
Private Sector & Business Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer internships and workplace learning opportunities • Provide feedback on skill needs • Participate in curriculum advisory processes
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver training and mentorship programs • Support outreach in marginalized communities • Monitor implementation and collect youth feedback

Table 1. Institutional responsibilities for youth employment in Kosovo

At the regional and international levels, Kosovo’s youth employment system is influenced by a wide range of actors. The European Union has a central role through institutions such as the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), and the EU Office in Kosovo. These institutions give strategic direction and shape policies through frameworks like the European Youth Strategy 2019–2027, which highlights youth participation, inclusion, and employment as important priorities. The Youth Guarantee model, implemented in many EU Member States, is also used as a reference for Kosovo, especially because it promotes early intervention and coordinated support during the transition from school to work.

At the same time, development agencies such as GIZ, UNDP, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the [World Bank](#) have supported skills development, entrepreneurship, and youth employment programs. Several EU-funded initiatives under Erasmus+ and IPA II/III also allow institutions, municipalities, and civil society organizations to test new approaches for youth engagement, skills development, and labor market integration. However, even if these projects bring value, many of them remain separate from one another and are not fully connected to long-term national policies.

2.2 Current Initiatives to Boost Youth Employment in Kosovo

Several initiatives are currently being implemented in Kosovo to improve youth employment outcomes. The Active Labour Market Measures (ALMMs) coordinated by EARK – with support from UNDP and the Swiss Development Cooperation – offer internships, wage subsidies, and training programs targeted at unemployed youth. However, these programs often suffer from limited outreach, low absorption capacity, and insufficient tracking of long-term impact.

The GIZ-led “Youth Employment and Skills (YES)” project works with private sector partners to enhance training relevance and job placement, though its impact remains localized. The EU-funded “EU for Youth” and “Enhancing Youth Employment” programs have focused on building soft skills and entrepreneurial capacities, primarily through civil society organizations and municipalities.

Municipal-level unit initiatives are also emerging, including school-based career guidance clubs, local labor market surveys, and youth employability mapping. However, these are often project-based and risk discontinuation once donor funding ends. Moreover, youth participation in the design and evaluation of these initiatives is rare, despite formal structures such as LYACs being in place in many municipalities ([European Training Foundation, 2022](#)).

Although both national institutions and international partners have implemented several initiatives, the overall system remains fragmented, weakly coordinated, and not fully aligned with the real needs of youth. The existing institutional and legal frameworks offer an important foundation, but without stronger integration, accountability, and active youth participation, their impact will remain limited. This policy paper aims to analyze these challenges and provide practical recommendations to improve the accessibility, coordination, and overall effectiveness of youth employment support mechanisms in Kosovo.

3. METHODOLOGY

This policy brief uses a mixed-method approach that combines desk research with youth-centered insights collected through the Youth Observers (Y-O Model) project. The purpose of the methodology was to identify structural and institutional gaps inside Kosovo's youth employment system and to prepare realistic and evidence-based recommendations.

The main part of the analysis is desk research. This included reviewing national laws and strategic documents, such as the Law on Empowerment and Participation of Youth, the Labor Law, the Kosovo Education Strategy 2022–2026, and materials from the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK). The research also looked at EU youth policy frameworks, including the European Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and Youth Guarantee guidance, as well as reports from development partners like GIZ, UNDP, SDC, and the World Bank.

To complement the desk research, the brief gives strong attention to insights gathered through stakeholder engagements within the Y-O Model project. Structured discussions with Youth Observers, young people from different municipalities who took part in trainings, study visits, and local activities provided practical perspectives on how youth experience public employment services, career guidance, and local support mechanisms. Their reflections pointed to real barriers related to access, lack of information, and limited trust in institutions. These youth inputs were supported by informal conversations with municipal youth officers, staff of public employment offices, and civil society organizations. These exchanges helped in understanding institutional practices, identify problems in implementation, and compare findings from different viewpoints. Even though these engagements were not formal interviews or focus groups, their participatory and experience-based nature added meaningful depth to the analysis.

The methodology also has some limitations. It depends mainly on secondary data and project-based observations, which do not represent a statistically general sample of all young people in Kosovo. Limited time and resources also reduced the possibility for more formal consultations with central-level institutions and for deeper comparative analysis. However, the combination of detailed desk research and firsthand insights from young people and frontline practitioners gives a credible and context-specific foundation for identifying systemic challenges and proposing actionable recommendations.

4. CHALLENGES/ LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

The findings of this study come mainly from the youth-centered engagements carried out under the Youth Observers (Y-O Model) project, supported by complementary insights from municipal officials, public employment office staff, and civil society actors working closely with young people. While the desk research offered important background on the institutional and policy context in Kosovo, the results presented here focus on lived experiences, practical barriers, and perceptions shared by young people and frontline practitioners. These findings help illustrate how young people interact with employment services, what obstacles they encounter, and how institutional practices are understood and experienced at the local level.

Overall, the youth inputs point to four major themes:

- (1) limited practical value of Public Employment Services for young jobseekers,
- (2) weak accessibility and low institutional outreach, especially in rural municipalities,
- (3) persistent challenges during the transition from school to work, and
- (4) low trust in public institutions and minimal opportunities for meaningful participation.

Each theme is discussed in detail below.

4.1 Public Employment Services are experienced as administrative and not supportive

Across municipalities, young participants repeatedly described the Public Employment Service (PES), operating under the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK), as a place mainly used for registration, document submission, or fulfilling legal requirements, rather than a source of guidance or support. Many young people said that their interactions with PES staff were short, administrative, and focused on updating personal information instead of exploring possible career options.

Several Youth Observers reported that they were not offered information about available programs, and many learned about training courses, internships, or employment opportunities through informal channels rather than through PES. Young people also explained that counseling sessions were rare and sometimes non-existent. Even when counseling happened, they felt it lacked structure and did not include concrete steps for improving employability. Participants from rural municipalities emphasized that PES offices in their areas were even more limited, often providing only the basic registration function.

Municipal officials and employment counselors themselves acknowledged some of these problems in informal conversations. They highlighted high caseloads and insufficient staff training as major barriers to offering personalized guidance. Some counselors said that they lacked tools to assess youth needs systematically and had little information about local employers, which made job matching difficult. Others mentioned that communication with schools, training providers, and municipalities remained weak, which further limited their ability to support young jobseekers.

For many young people, these limitations led to a perception that PES is not designed for them. Instead of seeing the institution as a bridge to the labor market, they viewed it as a bureaucratic requirement. Youth Observers frequently expressed that they did not expect to receive meaningful assistance or career advice at PES, and therefore had little motivation to return after their initial registration. This perception was particularly strong among young women and youth from smaller municipalities, who felt that PES lacked the capacity to meet their specific needs.

The overall experience shared by young participants shows that, despite formal institutional structures, many young people do not see PES as a supportive or youth-friendly service. This limits the potential impact of employment programs and creates early discouragement for jobseekers during a critical stage in their transition to work.

4.2 Limited accessibility and weak outreach reduce youth engagement

The second set of findings concerns the accessibility of employment-related information and the extent to which institutions reach out to young people. Young participants emphasized that they often lacked awareness about programs, opportunities, and services available in their municipality. Many said they found out about employment measures only by chance or through social media posts shared by friends, not through institutions that are responsible for communicating with youth.

Youth Observers from rural areas expressed particular frustration, explaining that information about training programs, subsidies, or internships often reached them too late or not at all.

They also mentioned that many announcements were written in formal or technical language, making them difficult to understand. Young people suggested that institutions should use more youth-friendly communication channels, especially Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp groups, which they consider more accessible and relevant for their age group.

Another barrier related to accessibility is the physical distance between youth and institutions. Several participants described long travel times to reach PES offices or municipal youth centers, especially in geographically dispersed municipalities. For those without access to transportation, visiting these institutions regularly was almost impossible. Some participants noted that traveling to the municipal center for every administrative procedure discouraged them from applying for programs or attending meetings.

Digital exclusion also affects accessibility. While many young people use smartphones, they highlighted that online platforms are not fully functional, and registration procedures are confusing. Youth Observers reported that they sometimes encountered broken links, outdated information, or unclear instructions when trying to register for programs. For marginalized communities, especially Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian youth, digital access was even more limited, which further reduced their chances of engaging with employment services.

Municipal youth officers and civil society actors confirmed these challenges. They stated that outreach activities often depend on project funding rather than being part of a stable institutional practice. Some municipalities lack communication staff, which makes it difficult to maintain social media presence or produce youth-friendly materials. At the same time, many youth centers operate with minimal budgets and have limited ability to organize outreach events or engage schools directly.

4.3 The transition from school to work remains unclear and unsupported

A third major theme relates to the experiences of young people during the transition from school to work. Participants across municipalities said that they felt unprepared for labor market entry and lacked guidance during their final years of education. Many reported that they did not receive career counseling in school and had little understanding of how to access employment services after graduation.

Youth Observers who attended vocational schools described significant differences between institutions. Some schools had strong cooperation with local employers and offered practical training, but many others provided only theoretical instruction and no real workplace exposure. Students from these schools reported that they felt lost after completing their studies and did not know how to find internships or job opportunities.

Several young people said that they were unsure about the steps they needed to take after finishing school, including registration procedures at PES or documentation required to apply for training programs. Others mentioned that their teachers had limited information about employment services, and guidance often depended on the personal interest of individual staff members rather than a structured system.

In addition to school-related challenges, young people pointed to gaps in institutional coordination. They explained that there was no clear referral pathway linking schools to PES or municipal youth services. As a result, many graduates missed opportunities because institutions did not proactively reach out to them.

Frontline practitioners supported these observations, noting that cooperation between schools and employment offices is inconsistent. In some municipalities, school directors work closely with PES and coordinate training or internship programs, while in others, communication is minimal. Counselors also mentioned that they rarely receive lists of graduates or information about upcoming school-leaving cohorts, which prevents early intervention.

The transition period is also marked by uncertainty. Several young people said they spent months after finishing school without knowing where to go or how to start their job search. Some described feelings of frustration and demotivation, which contributed to disengagement from employment services. Young women reported even more difficulties, explaining that family expectations, safety concerns, and limited mobility made it harder to participate in training or job-related activities.

4.4 Low trust in institutions and limited opportunities for participation

The final theme identified through youth discussions is the low level of trust in public institutions responsible for employment policies and programs. Many Youth Observers said they felt excluded from decision-making processes and believed that institutions rarely take youth perspectives seriously. Several participants explained that they had been invited to consultations or public discussions, but they felt that their feedback did not influence policy decisions.

Young people also described employment policies as “far away” from their everyday reality. They felt that programs were designed without understanding the challenges they face, especially regarding transportation, financial constraints, and limited experience. Some participants expressed skepticism about the fairness of selection processes for internships or training opportunities, stating that transparency was often lacking.

Low trust in institutions also affects participation in employment programs. Several young people said they were reluctant to apply for programs because they believed the process would be complicated or that the outcomes would be limited. Others mentioned negative past experiences, such as unclear communication, long waiting times, or lack of follow-up.

These findings highlight the importance of strengthening youth participation and building more inclusive, transparent, and responsive institutional practices. Without trust and engagement, even well-designed programs may fail to reach the young people who need them most.

5. POLICY SOLUTION

Kosovo would benefit from establishing an Employment Support and Transition Framework (ESTF) – a structured coordination mechanism that ensures ministries, municipalities, and partners work toward shared goals with shared tools and shared accountability. The ESTF is not a new institution. Instead, it is a way of organizing how existing institutions collaborate, exchange information, and support young people at every stage of the school-to-work transition.

The ESTF would be organized around four core functions:

Coordinated implementation of national employment measures, meaning that ministries and municipalities align their yearly plans and actions with the Employment Strategy 2024–2028 and other relevant frameworks, while giving special attention to youth-related priorities and gaps.

Data sharing and monitoring, enabling real-time tracking of youth participation in the workforce and employment programs.

Integrated service delivery, standardizing guidance, referrals, and partnerships.

Youth participation and feedback, institutionalizing youth voice in every step of the system.

To illustrate how these functions work together, the following table provides a simple visual overview of the proposed ESTF structure:

Level	Main Body	Who Sits There	Purpose
National	National Coordination Council (NCC)	MoE, MESTI, MCYS, EARK, Municipal Association, employers, CSOs, youth reps	Set priorities, approve annual plan, review progress
Technical	Technical Working Groups	PES experts, VET experts, digital specialists, youth & CSOs	Cross-institutional alignment support
Local	Municipal Implementation Platforms (MIPs)	Municipal youth office, PES branch, VET schools, employers, CSOs	Coordinate services, referrals, feedback

5.1 How the ESTF Works in Practice

The ESTF begins at the national level. A National Coordination Council, chaired by the Ministry of Economy, brings together all key actors 2 times per year to agree on a common work plan and review progress using shared data. This ensures that ministries are no longer operating in parallel but are accountable for collective results.

Supporting the council are Technical Working Groups, which meet 4 times per year and focus on four critical areas:

- 1 Career guidance and school-to-work transition
- 2 PES modernization
- 3 Employer engagement and VET alignment
- 4 Digital integration and shared data systems

These groups support implementation by consulting across institutions, aligning tools and standards, and advising on technical elements to ensure they reflect youth needs and system coherence.

At the municipal level, Implementation Platforms become the operational heart of the system. They convene regularly to connect schools, PES offices, youth centers, and employers, enabling young people to move seamlessly from *information* → *guidance* → *training* → *placement*. These platforms also give municipalities a stronger role in shaping employment support according to local needs – something the current system lacks.

5.2 Expected Outputs of the ESTF

A major improvement introduced by the ESTF is the shift to joint outputs, produced collectively rather than by individual actors. These include:

INTEGRATED YOUTH EMPLOYMENT DATABASE

A shared tool linking schools, PES offices, and municipalities—allowing early warnings, referrals, and real-time tracking.

SEMI-ANNUAL YOUTH ACTIVATION DASHBOARDS

Visual summaries tracking youth engagement in employment measures, regional disparities, and emerging bottlenecks.

ANNUAL YOUTH SATISFACTION SURVEYS

Direct feedback from young people using PES, schools, and municipal services.

5.3 Roles and Responsibilities

While institutions already carry out many of their current roles, the ESTF clarifies how these roles connect and where collaboration is required.

- **The Ministry of Economy (MoE)** provides strategic leadership by chairing the national coordination body, overseeing the modernization of PES, and ensuring alignment between the annual work plan and national labour market policies.
- **EARK** becomes the operational engine of the framework. It manages the integrated database, trains counselors on youth-sensitive guidance, and ensures that municipal PES offices deliver consistent services across regions.
- **MESTI** strengthens school-to-work pathways by embedding career guidance in curricula, collaborating with employers on VET content, and linking schools to municipal and PES structures.
- **MCYS** ensures youth participation through active Local Youth Action Councils, awareness campaigns, and structured youth feedback mechanisms.
- **Municipalities** deliver local coordination, ensuring referrals between schools, youth centers, and PES offices actually function in practice. They also monitor service accessibility for rural and vulnerable youth.
- **Private sector and business associations** contribute by co-designing curricula, hosting internships, and providing real-time information on labour market needs.
- **CSOs** complement public services through outreach, mentoring, and inclusion of marginalized youth.
- **Donors** align funding with ESTF priorities, support digital tools, and extend successful pilots into national practice.

5.4 Why the ESTF Is Feasible

European and regional models show that coordinated employment support mechanisms succeed when institutions operate within a shared framework. To just name a few:



The EU Youth Guarantee demonstrates that early intervention, integrated referral systems, and shared data significantly reduce youth unemployment ([European Commission, 2023](#)).



Kosovo's own experience with GIZ's YES project shows that dual education partnerships flourish when coordination structures are clear ([GIZ, 2021](#)).



Albania's Youth Guarantee pilot reveals that coordinated municipal delivery can be implemented even with limited resources ([European Training Foundation, 2024](#)).



North Macedonia's reforms illustrate how embedding career guidance in schools improves student transitions and raises participation ([Sultana, 2022](#)).

These cases provide a realistic basis for adapting the ESTF to Kosovo's institutional context.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations translate the Employment Support and Transition Framework (ESTF) into practical steps for each institution. These are not separate reforms on their own. Instead, they work together to help all actors fulfill their responsibilities inside the ESTF, improve coordination, and ensure that the system functions in the same way across all municipalities within Kosovo.

Ministry of Economy (MoE)

As the leading institution for national coordination, the MoE should focus on creating the systems and governance conditions needed for the ESTF to work effectively.

- Develop and manage a centralized digital employment platform that will serve as the main tool for data exchange between PES, schools, municipalities, and employers.
- Introduce youth-focused Active Labour Market Measures that follow the ESTF referral pathways, with clear procedures and simple eligibility rules.
- Apply a results-based performance framework for municipal PES offices, linking financial support to youth outreach, quality of guidance, and employment outcomes.
- Financially support career counseling initiatives offered by civil society organizations.

Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK)

EARK is the main operational institution of the ESTF and is responsible for ensuring that services are delivered consistently throughout the country.

- Modernize frontline services through structured training on youth-sensitive counseling, digital communication, and cooperation with employers.
- Use standardized career guidance protocols and make sure every young jobseeker has a personal profile and a follow-up plan.
- Build long-term partnerships with employers to create structured internships with clear learning objectives and possible pathways to employment.

Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)

MESTI's role in the ESTF is to strengthen the transition from school to work and to ensure that education programs match labour market needs.

- Include mandatory internships or apprenticeships in VET programs and support them with stable cooperation mechanisms between schools and employers.
- Make career guidance part of the school curriculum and ensure that every upper-secondary school has at least one trained advisor.
- Coordinate with EARK and employers on regular skills forecasting to adjust curricula based on labour market changes.

Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS)

MCYS ensures meaningful youth participation within the ESTF and supports outreach and transparency.

- Strengthen the Local Youth Action Councils (LYACs) and make sure they contribute to monitoring and feedback processes inside municipal ESTF platforms.
- Lead national information campaigns that target young people and promote available services, programs, and transition pathways.
- Facilitate structured youth participation in monitoring the Employment Strategy and ESTF activities by defining clear roles inside coordination bodies.

Municipalities

Municipalities serve as the implementation level of the ESTF and are responsible for bringing national frameworks into local practice.

- Establish or reinforce career guidance units in schools and connect them with PES, youth centers, and local employers.
- Prepare Local Youth Employment Action Plans that reflect local labour market conditions while staying aligned with national priorities.
- Co-finance local internships and youth activation measures, especially in rural or underserved areas.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

CSOs contribute to outreach, inclusion, and mentoring as part of the ESTF ecosystem.

- Provide training, mentoring, and outreach activities in marginalized communities that public institutions often do not reach.
- Support monitoring by collecting independent feedback, conducting youth satisfaction surveys, and carrying out community-based assessments.
- Co-design pilot initiatives together with municipalities and ministries that can later be integrated into national systems.
- Support young NEETs with soft skill trainings and career counseling.

Private Sector and Business Associations

The private sector strengthens the demand side of the ESTF by offering opportunities and feedback from the labour market.

- Offer structured internships and short-term placements with basic stipends, coordinated with municipalities and PES structures.
- Take part in advisory processes to help align VET and university curricula with real market needs.
- Provide feedback on graduate performance and skill gaps to improve career guidance and training programs.

Development Partners

While not central actors in the ESTF, development partners can support institutional strengthening and innovation.

- Align their assistance with ESTF priorities and support capacity-building, especially in digitalization and service delivery.
- Contribute to monitoring and evaluation tools that help make policies more evidence-based.
- Support pilot stages of the ESTF and ensure that knowledge is transferred to institutions with a plan for sustainability.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Youth unemployment in Kosovo continues to be one of the most serious challenges for the country's social and economic development. Even though many strategies and programs have been developed in recent years—such as the Employment Strategy 2024–2028 and the State Strategy for Youth 2024–2032—their results are still limited. The findings of this policy paper show that weak coordination between institutions, limited outreach, and the lack of a digital and data-based system make existing measures less effective. Public Employment Services (PES) mostly act as registration offices and not as active partners for young jobseekers. Schools do not provide consistent career guidance, and the transition from education to employment is still not supported by a clear institutional mechanism. These problems persist not because of missing resources, but because the system is fragmented and does not work in an integrated way.

Kosovo already has many of the key elements of a modern youth employment system – strategic documents, institutions, and donor support. But they function separately and without a common framework. What is needed now is to connect these elements better through stronger governance, active youth participation, and the use of digital tools to improve coordination and transparency. The proposed Employment Support and Transition Framework (ESTF) offers a clear model to achieve this. By connecting ministries, municipalities, education institutions, and employers through shared standards and linked databases, the ESTF would make youth employment support more coordinated, measurable, and effective.

For policymakers, the main priority should be to focus less on creating new projects and more on **improving and connecting existing ones**. Strengthening cooperation between national and local institutions, increasing staff capacities in municipalities, and applying performance-based funding would make public investments more efficient. At the same time, developing a national digital platform for youth employment would help Kosovo move closer to EU standards and Youth Guarantee principles, making opportunities more accessible for all young people, including those from rural and marginalized areas.

Finally, further research is needed to better understand which programs really help young people find stable jobs and how their experiences can inform future reforms. Only through coordination, evidence-based policies, and active youth participation can Kosovo turn its young population into a source of long-term social and economic progress. The time to act is now, while this generation still has the energy and potential to shape the country's future.

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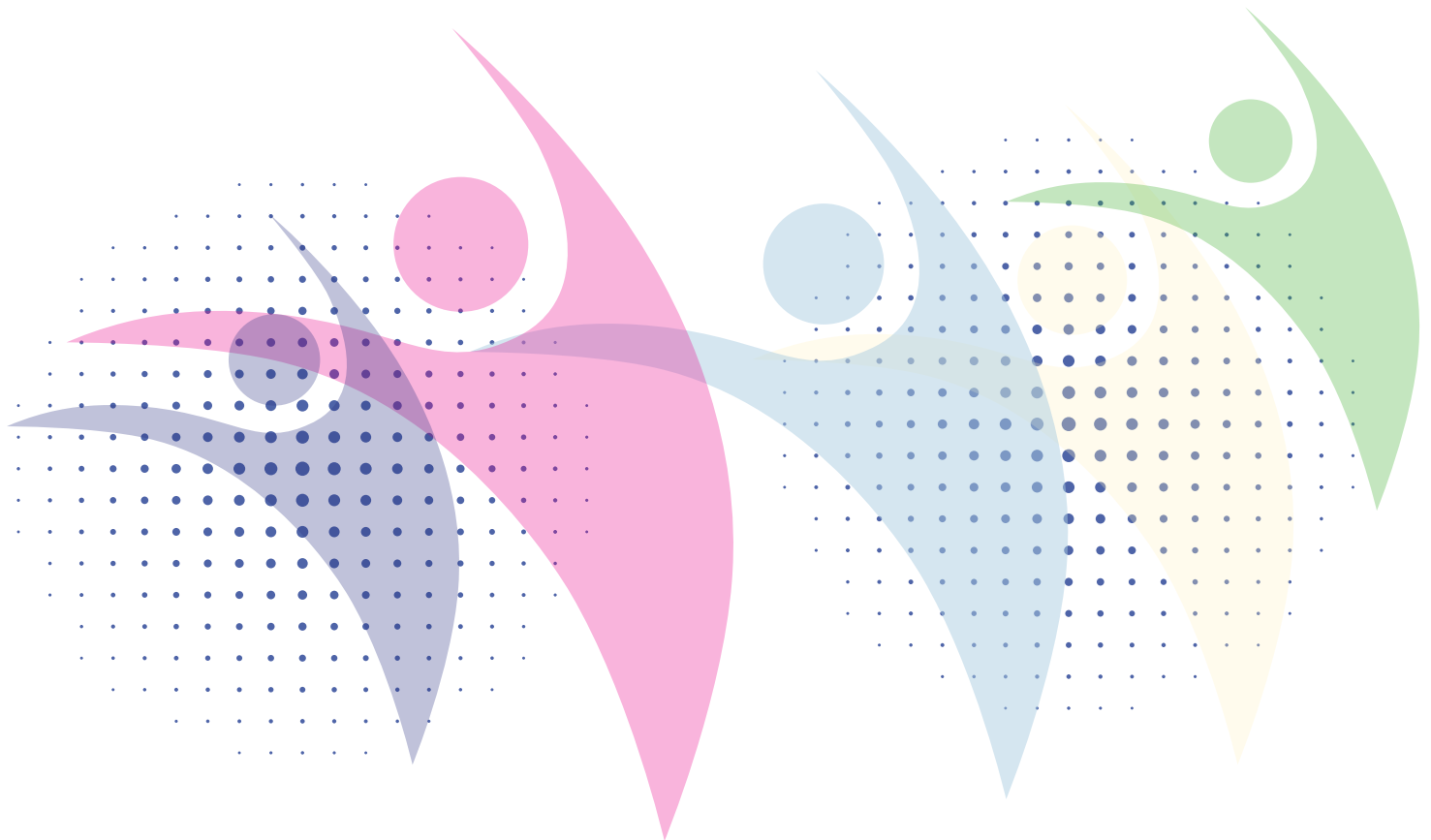
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