

ESDN Youth Network Policy Note

September 2026

Resilience 2.0: Reimagining education - coupling education reform with future-oriented labor market and social policies

Introduction

In 2020 the [European Sustainable Development Network](#) established the ESDN [Youth Network](#), which is funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.

Its yearly on-site event, the **ESDN Youth Workshop 2026**, took place on **12–15 August 2026** in Vienna at the Austrian Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management, brought together more than 42 UN Youth Delegates and National Representatives on Sustainable Development (SD) from 31 European countries to discuss issues most relevant to them.

The overarching theme of the Workshop was “**Resilience 2.0**” as described in the [2025 Strategic Foresight Report - European Commission](#). Four of the eight areas of action mentioned in the report were dealt with in more detail according to a ranking carried out by the ESDN Youth Network:

- Supporting sustainable and inclusive well-being
- Strengthening democracy as a common good
- Developing a coherent global vision for the EU
- Strengthen long-term economic resilience

Over the four days of the Workshop, Youth Members heard input from experts on all of these topics and were given ample opportunity

to discuss these topics and issues with one another.

The main goal of the Workshop, apart from providing a space for Youth Members to exchange ideas with one another, was to produce a policy document with recommendations on the topics covered throughout the Workshop. This was done by the Youth Members working in smaller groups on five different issues. This Policy Note focuses on Core Issue 1. The other Policy Notes are available separately, as well as in one complete document.

- **Core Issue 1: Reimagining education - coupling education reform with future-oriented labor market and social policies**
- **Core Issue 2: Strengthening democracy as a common good: countering polarization, supporting community building and safeguarding democratic standards**
- **Core Issue 3: Strengthening long-term economic resilience -increasing the ability to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth (circular economy and a resilient labor market)**
- **Core Issue 4: Developing a coherent global vision for Europe - asserting Europe’s position as a strong, stable, and trusted worldwide partner, based on a clear strategic concept**
- **Core Issue 5: Sustainable and inclusive well-being**

Reimagining education - coupling education reform with future-oriented labor market and social policies

While recognizing that unequal access to quality education and persistent educational inequalities remain among Europe's most pressing challenges, this topic focuses specifically on reimagining what and how young people learn. Developed by youth representatives from across Europe, it does not question the importance of the foundational knowledge (traditional subjects like maths, languages, history and sciences), but proposes new ways of teaching it alongside civic, digital and practical skills needed for youth's present and future. The paper concludes with promising practices illustrating how this vision can be translated into action.

In a world of intense labor markets and rapidly changing technology, the only constant is change. We need to reshape our education systems to keep up with the pace. According to Eurostat, in 2026 15.5% of young people under the age of 25 are currently unemployed, which makes a total of 2.987 million young people struggling to enter the labor market (Eurostat, 2026). Ipsos, a global market research firm, writes: "Less than 1 in 2 young people considers themselves well prepared to enter the job market (48%)". With this data in mind, we are keen to propose structural changes within the education system as well as updates regarding the content of curricula.

Education must serve as a foundational pillar in preparing young people to navigate the uncertainty of tomorrow and recognize the value of civic engagement in their communities as a first step toward building robust, cohesive societies. The goal is a dynamic educational framework that not only adapts flexibly to global crises but actively empowers young people to become valuable contributors to resilient communities.

Policy Recommendations

Structural change

The conventional education system, prioritizing memorization over skill-building, is the root cause of the currently observed gap between job market reality and the state of knowledge of students, as emphasized at the WEF 2020. To address this issue and transition away from the outdated cycle, we propose foundational changes in teaching approaches, such as:

Flipping the classroom

- **Move away from top-down and frontal-centered methods** by "flipping the classroom." In this model, targeted and practiced at primary and secondary education, initial instruction and content absorption happen independently, while collaborative work, practical applications, and deep analysis happen during class. The benefits of this approach are manifold: they offer self-paced learning and student autonomy; they leave time in class for active engagement and ensure dedicated individual support.
- **Foster project-based learning:** As a core element of "flipping the classroom", project-based learning focuses on learning by doing, instead of theoretical learning inside a traditional classroom setting. This engages students more, and helps them develop soft skills, enhances team-work capacities, and encourages active citizenship, such as participation in student councils, civil organizations, and youth parliaments.

Grading

- **Innovate the grading system** to fight exam stress and effectively address the challenges posed by artificial intelligence.
- **Incorporate different methods of evaluation**, such as defending a thesis orally, rather than relying strictly on traditional grading systems and essay writing. This shift will inherently promote critical thinking, creativity, and the real-life application of knowledge, and combat plagiarism.

Ultimately, teaching competencies and skills, not just facts, makes education more resilient towards rapid innovation and the drastically changing demands of the labor market.

Ideal curriculum proposal

- **Foster political education** through parliamentary simulations and concrete political projects with the goal of strengthening democracy and participation in political processes.
- **Promote social responsibility** on a local, but also on a global level, to teach solidarity and responsibility, and to create a sense of belonging for young people in their community.
- **Develop digital literacy** to understand the impact of new technologies on society while acquiring the digital skills required in the workplace.
- **Develop administrative and financial literacy** to manage budgets, accounting, investment, taxes, (health) insurance, residence permits, and contracts.
- **Support basic life skills** with a focus on domestic work, refurbishing and crafts, to help communities transition towards circular economies.
- **Foster entrepreneurship** through student initiatives, encouraging adaptive thinking, teamwork and problem-based learning.

By the end of the mandatory education track, students have developed resilience through skills in critical and adaptive thinking, as well as societal navigation. For the above-mentioned additions, we encourage the consultation of external, local organizations.

Good Practice Cases

Throughout Europe, there are multiple examples of countries that have adapted their education curriculum to a more project-based learning approach with an emphasis on life skills and civic engagement. In order to build resilient communities across Europe, it is fundamental for governments to inculcate this

approach through best practice examples and transition mechanisms from countries across Europe.

Existing Practices

- **Bulgarian Vocational Schools:** Bulgaria operates vocational training throughout their education system for young people. This encourages a work-based learning approach through apprenticeships and dual-track education.
- **Finland's Targeted Development Grants:** Finland's education system utilizes targeted development grants (often issued as discretionary government subsidies or "special grants") to address specific policy priorities, promote equity, and drive internationalization without altering the baseline core funding model.
- **Estonia's Tiigrihüpe (Tiger Leap) program:** Estonia's Tiigrihüpe policy was a pioneering 1996 national initiative launched to heavily invest in schools and prioritize IT literacy and internet access in all schools. It laid the foundational framework that transformed Estonia into a leading digital-first society.

Transition Processes:

- [Ireland's National Convention on Education](#): Ireland has taken steps to reform its education system through a landmark initiative. The Convention brings together 150 members to debate core long-term strategies with its recommendations directly informing the Department of Education and Youth's upcoming strategic framework for decades to come.
- [Ireland's New Solutions Innovation Fund](#): Led by state agency Pobal, and funded through the European Social Fund, the New Solutions Innovation Fund aims to enhance the social innovation ecosystem in Ireland. This allows the state to support and scale proven models delivered by organizations (many from an education field), and these 'new solutions' can influence policy and future practice.

Conclusion

The demands of the labor market are drastically changing through digitalization and technological breakthroughs like AI. In order to, on the one hand, match education with the rapidly changing needs of the labor market, and, on the other hand, strengthen communities and make them more resilient, education has to move from teaching facts to teaching competencies and skills through project-based learning. Civic education, digital and financial literacy, as well as political education should be taught with the ultimate goal of fostering critical and adaptive thinking skills, encouraging social responsibility and supporting students in navigating life as a whole.