



Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

Deliverable D8.2

Innovation Forums

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Executive summary

The research project *Constructing Learning Outcomes in Europe: A multi-level analysis of (under)achievement in the life course* (CLEAR) investigates the causes that influence young people's school performance and learning quality in different areas of Europe, with a focus on eight European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. The analysis is based on a multidimensional approach that integrates the perspectives of Spatial Justice, Intersectionality and Life Course Research. The goal is to understand how the intertwinement of individual, structural, institutional, spatial, and relational factors shape the construction of learning outcomes and how the latter impact young people's educational pathways contributing to both success and difficulties in educational environments across Europe. To enhance the project's capacity to take into consideration a plurality of voices and standpoints of different stakeholders in education and to strengthen its capacity to disseminate outcomes by accessible languages, a Transversal Participatory Approach has been integrated to insert participatory actions throughout the project's life span.

The Deliverable yields new information and insights deriving from the process of design, organisation, and implementation of the Innovation Forums at local levels. The Innovation Forums are collaborative and interactive events, organised with the aim of encouraging open dialogue, critical thinking, and the sharing of diverse stakeholders' viewpoints through the application of participatory methodologies. Specifically, the main target groups of participants are policymakers/experts in education, professionals in education and young people. The Innovation Forum provide a space where individuals from different sectors and perspectives within the field of education come together to engage in constructive conversations, promoting mutual insight and the co-creation of imaginative and effective responses to complex challenges. A total of 9 Innovation Forums have been implemented, involving a total amount of 180 stakeholders in the field of education. The events were context-sensitive, allowing regional and local perspectives to be highlighted in addition to the national policy concerns. Each team of the CLEAR project that managed an Innovation Forum produced a descriptive report in which the most relevant information concerning its design and implementation are presented.

The Innovation Forums enabled the research teams to better focus the importance of rethinking how educational systems construct and assess learning outcomes. There is a need to move beyond standardized and competitive approaches, which often converge too heavily on quantifying individual performance and fail to appreciate subjective, fragmented, or nonlinear learning pathways. Many interventions during the Innovation Forums highlighted the value of actively listening to students and involving them in shaping educational policies. This suggests a need for more personalized, flexible models that acknowledge individual and regional differences.

Another common theme was the creation of more welcoming school environments based on mutual trust, peer support, and the recognition of emotions and personal challenges, which frequently remain unaddressed in the current educational framework. Participants stressed the importance of fostering an ongoing dialogue between schools, communities, and other social actors. Education should not only adapt to the socio-economic context but also contribute to its transformation.

Finally, one of the most innovative aspects of the Forums was the direct involvement of young people as co-leaders in the research process. This approach helped dismantle traditional barriers between institutions and youth, creating spaces for free expression and genuine confrontation. The feedback gathered from the participants in the Innovation Forums highlights a general appreciation about the format, content, and inclusive atmosphere of the events. Participants valued the open and respectful dialogue, as well as the opportunity to share meaningful perspectives. Many participants found the experience to be both emotionally engaging and intellectually stimulating, with young participants especially appreciating the feeling of being genuinely heard. The events underscored shared concerns about educational policies and demonstrated a strong interest in continuing these kinds of initiatives.

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1. Introduction

As a pivotal component of the Transversal Participatory Approach (TPA) integrated throughout the project under the coordination of WP8, the *Innovation Forums* (Report) implemented in the final phase in each partners' county represented the peak of the participatory actions promoted in CLEAR. The integration of the TPA into the project research scheme aimed to enhance the dissemination of results and to include a wider range of voices in the considered in gathering data and information and interpreting their analysis. The TPA was integrated into various phases of the project, focusing on different specific objectives while consistently aligning with the overall goal of enhancing the project's capacity to better fit local contexts through the engagement of different typologies of stakeholders.

The Innovation Forums (IFs) have been designed as participatory event aimed at discussion and cross-fertilisation of ideas among different actors of the educational environments at local level. The IF's main objective was to discuss, reframe and further elaborate findings and insights deriving from of the empirical research, using these materials as stimuli for discussions among different profiles of stakeholders involved in local education systems. The goal was not to validate the research findings, but to use them as a starting point for a participatory dialogue. This dialogue aimed to highlight critical issues, fill gaps, and identify perspectives enhancing the understanding of how learning outcomes (LOs) are constructed. Each Innovation Forum was designed as an open path of discovery, built on discussions and debates around the challenges and opportunities within local contexts.

In relation to the project's overall scheme, the Innovation Forums served not only as opportunities for discussion and re-elaboration of contents, but also as tools for dissemination. In this sense, the synchronisation with the work coordinated by WP9 has been managed throughout the project.¹ Through the IFs, indeed, the project results have been further elaborated seeking more understandable and applicable formats targeting wide range of audiences, by working on language and presentation styles aimed at contributing to the public debate concerning educational contexts.

As conclusive stage of the TPA, the IFs were meant to create opportunities for:

- The engagement of three different profiles of stakeholders. Specifically: policymakers at both the national and local levels, professionals in education (such as teachers, social workers, and non-profit activists), and young people with varying connections to education systems, ranging from those continuing their education to those who have dropped out. The invitations were extended to persons who were already engaged in the activities of Work Packages 4, 5, and 6.

¹ A relevant output of this collaboration is the constant update of materials presented in the section devoted to participation on the project's website (see <https://clear-horizon.eu/participation/>).

However, participation from previously under-represented groups in the project (with particular reference to school teachers) was also encouraged to ensure a broader range of standpoints considered by the project. The ideal number of participants was suggested around twenty, but the flexible design of each IF allowed for adjustments based on the specific needs of local contexts and the stakeholder networks that could be reached.

- The main purpose of the IFs was not to validate the research findings, but rather to encourage an open exchange among participants, using the data, information and analysis deriving from the empirical phase of CLEAR as conversation stimuli. The goal was to foster a free and participatory dialogue based on the diverse subjective experiences and professional skills of those involved. Through this discussion, innovation was sought by deepening the understanding of the project outcomes, identifying potential gaps in the research, and formulating proposals for changes in educational policies and practices. Additionally, these discussions allowed to refine the interpretation of results from the empirical investigations conducted in CLEAR and contributed to the more effective definition of the languages and formats to be used for local dissemination.
- The experimentation with a collective forum of actors experiencing educational environments at different levels. These participants were prone to explore new perspectives and reflect on the opportunities and challenges related to cross-sector collaboration within their local or national contexts. The IF also constituted a chance to highlighting the potential benefits of European Union programs, emphasizing how these initiatives can promote active participation and democratic values within youth research.

The heterogeneity of the profiles of the involved stakeholders, along with their varying statuses within the educational environment, highlighted the importance of addressing ethical considerations. Local teams took great care to create balanced working groups and to ensure safe and inclusive discussion environments. Consistently with this approach, the IFs were held in accessible spaces that required minimal effort to navigate. These locations included rooms for both group and plenary work, areas for displaying materials, internet access, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities. The goal was to foster informal yet functional settings that encouraged open exchange.

More specifically concerning the ethical dimension, at a formal level all the participants in the IFs have been provided with informed consent documentation about the purposes of the event, the use of the insights deriving from the working tables, the anonymisation of data, and the meaning of the IFs within the larger research process promoted by CLEAR. They have been also asked about their willingness to be represented in the visual documentation of the IFs. Finally, the possibility to withdraw their availability for participation at any moment of the implementation process has been stressed. In addition, in managing discussion in sub-groups and during the plenary discussions, all the



teams have taken care that a balance among the voices expressed was sought, giving floor to those participants whose opinions were less prominent in the discussions, although avoiding forcing participants to necessarily contribute to every topic of conversation. In this sense, the role of facilitators in the IFs was key. Indeed, it was mostly through the mediation of facilitators that the overall aim of creating safe and encouraging space for discussion was pursued, starting with questioning the power relations dynamics traditionally reproduced by standard methods of social research.

Despite the flexibility allowed in their design at a local level, the IFs were structured around three common goals:

- Create conditions for active participation in a deliberative space. Participants were enabled to express themselves freely in their own language, contributing equally to the discussion. This approach aimed at fostering a reflective exchange of opinions, including between different views, and stimulating the questioning of one's own views.
- Applying innovative methodologies. The working groups organized within the framework of the IFs made use of creative and participatory approaches that departed from the traditional modes used in academia, making the dialogue more dynamic and accessible.
- Stimulating cross-fertilization of ideas. The participation of figures from different fields (institutions, educational systems, civil society and young people) was a prerequisite to discussions through which to reconstruct perspectives and develop original proposals and recommendations.

From the CLEAR partners' standpoint, implementing the IFs under the TPA scheme presented several significant challenges. The very nature of the IFs introduced various innovative elements compared to the more established and traditional practices and methodologies that guided the empirical research phases.

Specifically, these innovative elements can be categorized into two main dimensions:

- Processual: the IFs offered opportunities to present portions of the empirical research findings in formats and language that were accessible to a non-academic audience. These findings were actively discussed by a diverse group of participants, facilitating a process of circular reflexivity regarding the analyses conducted and the ways knowledge was disseminated from the empirical research.
- Methodological: The methods used in the IFs were often new for the research teams involved. This required them to develop new skills in participatory, visual, and interactive techniques aimed at promoting collective discussions.

Concerning methodology, it is important to highlight the support provided to project partners by the Core Team of WP8, particularly through the partners of CODICI. Drawing



from their expertise in participatory methods and processes, they offered essential methodological and organizational assistance throughout the project. This support included capacity-building activities during project meetings, the circulation of operational guidelines for the logistical organization of the IFs, the provision of comprehensive methodological materials, the development of visual and textual resources to stimulate discussions during the IFs, and individualized support to address specific questions or challenges.

The final design of the locally implemented IFs was coordinated using a shared tool², the so-called “Octopus”, among the partners. This tool was developed to provide a flexible framework that allowed for the adaptation of IFs to local resources, temporal and human resources availabilities, and specific contextual features. It included both methodological recommendations and practical guidelines to ensure that all partners have a consistent understanding when organizing the IFs. The tool was organized into multiple sections, which cover essential aspects such as the core features and goals of the event, the methods and techniques to be employed, the target participants, the anticipated outcomes, and the overall structure of the activities.

The approach shared by the project partners allowed for strong adaptability in the final design of the IFs, to fit the diverse cultural, economic, and organizational contexts at a level. Each team was able to tailor the approach based on their specific human resources and operational capacities. Key in this process was the use of participatory methods rooted in dialogue, employing various tools and techniques. Methodologies such as the World Café, the use of interview excerpts as conversation starters, and the discussion of hypothetical scenarios were also utilized. The materials discussed in the IFs included the creative and experimental use of visual materials developed from data collected in Work Packages 3, 4, 5, and 6. Indeed, during the empirical stages of the project, the most significant content that emerged from the research was selected and transformed into visual materials with the assistance of a graphic designer and under the coordination of CODICI. It is important to stress that the work of preparation and adaptation of such materials derived from the previous Participatory Actions coordinated by WP8, as presented in the WP8 Strategy Paper and the chapter focused on the TPA included in the WP7 Comparative Analysis Report.

The materials were crafted to facilitate dialogue. Some were designed for a diverse audience, while others targeted specific interlocutors. The aim was to encourage original reflections and contribute to the emergence of innovative insights during collective discussions. The teams organising the IFs were enabled to freely select the materials they deem more effective for their events.

² The tool is displayed on the project’s website section devoted to participation, see <https://clear-horizon.eu/tools-resources/>

Specifically, the materials³ prepared by the WP8 Core Team and adapted to the local contexts (starting from the translation in national languages) were:

- A visual material drawing from the analysis of WP3 - Quantitative analysis of Learning Outcomes. The WP3 analysis led to the identification of four distinct categories regarding the opportunities available for young people in different European territories. Each category was based on the types of employment and the highest level of education realistically attainable by youths in various regional contexts. While grounded in empirical data, these four categories were reformulated into concise, relatable phrases that resemble realistic statements one might hear from individuals dealing with varying opportunities in their local contexts. In the initial phase of the activity, these statements were organised on a graph without predefined scales. Participants were invited to draw on their personal knowledge and lived experiences to position themselves on the graphs, and also to place their own or another chosen region within this framework. In a subsequent step, other dimensions were introduced to further examine and discuss the participants' placements and interpretations.
- A set of textual stimuli aimed at fostering an exercise of imagination and contextualisation drawing from WP4 - Institutional Analysis, Policy Review and Assessment. Basing on the analysis of the interviews conducted for WP4, a series of realistic yet open-ended scenarios presented with the scenarios were designed to prompt reflection, stimulate critical thinking, and foster group dialogue. Each short story framing the scenario was intentionally presented with limited information to encourage participants to engage creatively, drawing on both personal knowledge and imagination to fill in the gaps, interpret the characters' situations, and respond to guiding questions about the possible directions each character's life might take.
- Different excerpts from the WP5 - Qualitative Research with Young People - interviews with young people conducted at a local level. The selection of the excerpts was conducted by the national teams with the support of CODICI, aiming at proposing the most relevant and context fitting texts, thus considering the varying conditions of youth population in the different areas. Drawing from their personal positioning in the field of education (as learners, professionals and/or former learners), the participants were asked to react to the texts, with particular attention to: learners' perceptions and experiences about inclusion/exclusion; learners' perceptions and experiences about justice and injustice; the relevance of interpersonal relationships, listening, and empathy; the perception of "constraints" and "freedom" and the role of motivation; the recognition and enhancement of

³ A detailed and visual presentation of these materials will be included in the forthcoming D9.2 Guidelines to Use Participatory Methodologies.

diversity; spatial inequalities; the connection between educational contexts and the future of societies and the desires of young in terms of reform of the educational systems.

- A graphic output from the analysis of the data gathered through the survey coordinated by WP6 - Expert Survey on Policy Coordination. The graphic tool displayed a chart visualising two dimensions, likelihood and desirability, with regard to three distinct future scenarios based on the responses of the experts who participated in the survey. The visualization consisted of two overlapping areas: one yellow area illustrated how likely each scenario was considered, while a blue area indicated how desirable each scenario was perceived. This layered format allowed for a discussion of the survey respondents' assessment of the of different future scenarios. Participants exchanged ideas about the probability and desirability the scenarios, relating them to the praxis of measurement of learning outcomes and the role of merit and excellence as mainstream discourses.

In addition, the selection of relevant information about local contexts condensed in the Discussion Papers produced by the WP7 - Comparative Analyses and Reporting - Core Team were suggested as background materials to be used during the debates in the IFs with the aim of improving contextualisation and providing participants with comparisons among different countries and regions analysed by the CLEAR research.

Finally, to further support the partners in planning the IFs, a pilot Innovation Forum was organised by part of the WP8 (UNIGE and CODICI) in Genoa on the 1st of February 2025. The pilot was a chance to test the stimuli for discussion, and provide the project partners with a detailed report that paved the way for a shared discussion on the occasion of the project meeting in Porto (March 2025).

In this report, we outline the rationale behind the documents provided by partners (see Annex 1) concerning the implementation of the IFs, which summarize their key information and dimensions and highlight their main features. The purpose of this paper is thus descriptive, as the analysis of the output resulting from the IFs will be included in the forthcoming Deliverable D8.3 National Participatory Report.

2. Rationale of the National Reports on the Innovation Forums

The template applied for reporting on the Innovation Forums in the CLEAR was designed to facilitate a systematic, comparable, and exhaustive collection of the participatory experiences shared by the partners. Its structure is divided into three main sections: preparation, implementation, and results. This organization allows for a comprehensive description of the entire event cycle, from the initial context to the outcomes and subsequent actions.

In particular, the template encouraged partners to reflect on relevant aspects such as how participants were engaged, the ethical and management dynamics at play, the content discussed, and the effectiveness of the methodological tools used. Special attention was



given to the IF's impact in terms of innovation and the potential to gather valuable insights for further research and dialogue with policymakers. This approach not only highlighted the diversity of local contexts but also promoted a coherent and integrated framework at the project level.

3. Main Features of the Innovation Forums

Drawing from the national reports on IFs, this section presents the main features of the implemented IFs, providing quantitative information, as well as presenting the variable methods and solutions applied by the project partners. As visible in Table 1, the 9 IFs have been implemented in a time span ranging from February the 1st to May the 12th 2025.

Table 1 - Logistic features of the Innovation Forums

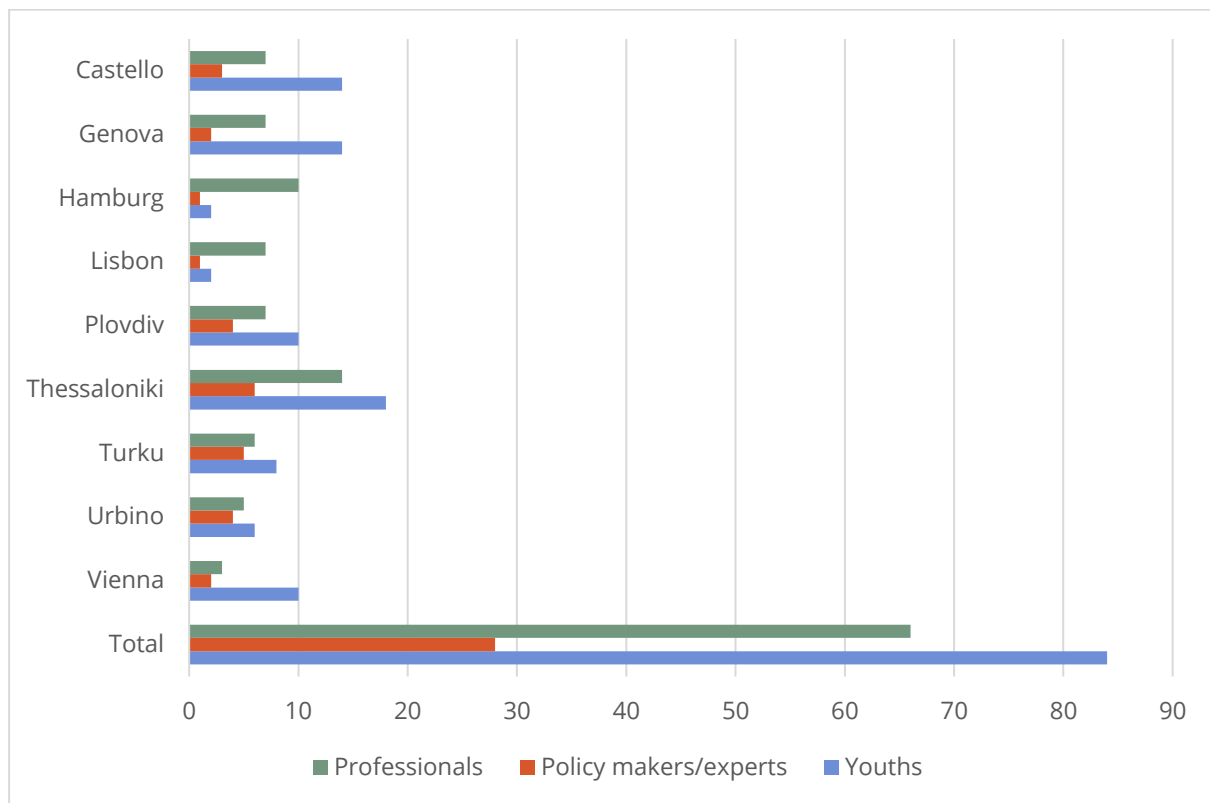
Country	City	Place	Date	Duration	Recruitment methods
Austria	Vienna	social agency	29.04.2025	3 hours	WP4 expert interviews, WP5 young people's interviews and WP8 co-learning workshops, student groups and academic networks, youth services
Bulgaria	Plovdiv	university	15.04.2025	3 hours	participants in WP4 & 5, participants in the first focus groups, mapping of main local institutions
Finland	Turku	youth art and activity centre	23.04.2025	2 ½ hours	personal invitations, participants in WP5 and WP6, young people only through their facilitators
Germany	Hamburg	social and training institution	01.04.2025	4 hours	participants in WP4 & WP5, local policy makers, researchers, social and youth workers
Greece	Thessaloniki	university	14.04.2025	6 hours	An invitation-only strategy, stakeholder mapping, local authorities, VET institutions, NGOs, and second-chance education providers
Italy	Genoa	co-working space	01.02.2025	2 ½ hours	invitation-only approach, drawing on the personal and professional networks of the UNIGE research team
	Urbino	university	04.04.2025	2 hours	drawing on networks of schools, CLEAR research participants, desk mapping of main institutions
Portugal	Lisbon	social centre	12.05.2025	3 hours	participants in WP4,5, and 6, and in the focus groups, local stakeholders
Spain	Castello	NGO premises	6.05.2025	4 hours	participants in WP4 & 5; support of the Chamber of Commerce

Source: National Reports (see Annex 1)

The venues utilised have different typologies, and the low-threshold spaces and extra-academic spaces prevailed. The duration of the IFs ranged from 2 to 6 hours. The strategies applied for engaging participants were multi-channel, relying on inviting those who had already taken part in the project as participants in the fieldwork and in previous

participatory actions in the project. Then national teams turned towards networks of academic and policy experts, NGOs, social agencies, with whom they had established contacts. A third most used methods for recruitment were stakeholder mapping and involving of youth facilitators. Many teams made focused efforts to involve particular groups among youth who were underrepresented in public debates such as immigrants (Hamburg) and ethnic minority youth (Thessaloniki, Plovdiv and Castello).

Figure 1 - Distribution of the typologies of participants in the IFs



Source: National Reports (see Annex 1)

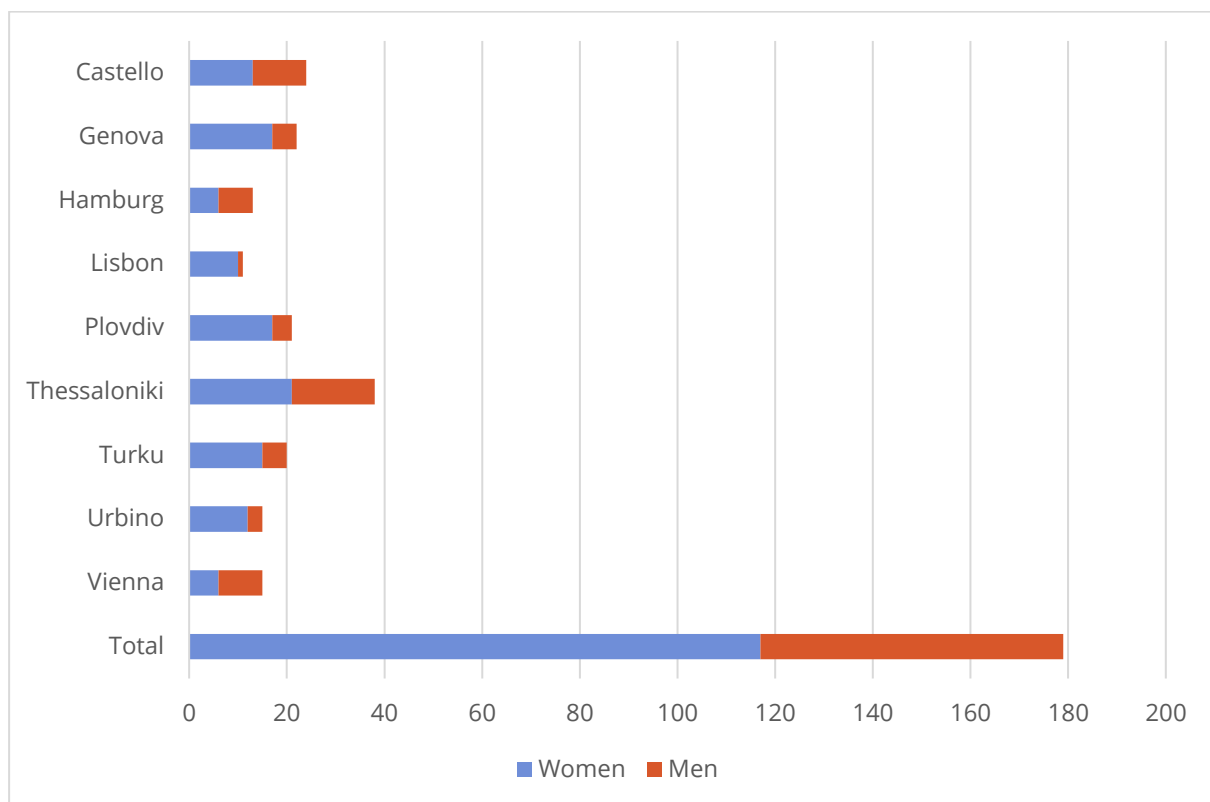
The overall number of the participants in the IFs is 180, with a female percentage of 64%. the three main categories of participants are distributed in the following way: 30 policymakers/experts, 66 practitioners and 84 youths. Despite that the initial strategy aimed at an equal representation of all groups of stakeholders, the final distribution of participants was clearly in favor of young people. In most countries it was policy makers were more difficult to recruit. This represents one of the few common problems shared by teams in organizing the IFs.

It is relevant here to underscore the intensive outreach work preceding the forums that all research teams made to secure wide representation of participation in terms of stakeholders' positions, gender and local specificity. The IFs were prepared and coordinated by usually three to five researchers in each context, except the pilot one in Genoa where 9 people from the two CLEAR teams (from the University of Genoa and CODICI) were involved. Before the event, the IF organisers had contacted between 20 (as in Castello) and 60 (as in Hamburg) potential participants in the event by e-mail, phone



and face-to-face meetings and needed to do this in several rounds thus expanding the list of contacts in a snowball manner. Mainly due to pragmatical reasons, most of the Innovation Forums have been implemented in the metropolitan areas of belonging of the research teams. This acknowledged limit in terms of spatial engagement results from the need for the local teams to rely on already established contacts and networks while addressing potential participants, as well as from the limited (economic, time and human) resources devoted to participatory activities in the distribution of efforts planned by the partners.

Figure 2 – Gender balance among the participants in the IFs



Source: National Reports (see Annex 1)

Despite the enormous efforts, the aspired stakeholder balance could not be achieved. As already mentioned, men and policy makers proved also difficult to involve in Lisbon, Plovdiv, and Hamburg. In Turku, Vienna and Castello, the youth participation turned to be a particular challenge with some of the invited young people not responding or accepting the invitation but then dropping out at the last minute. Still, in the overall participation in the CLEAR IFs, youth was the most numerous and often the most vocal group in the debates. Many teams involved professionals for visual documentation of the event and in Genoa visual designer hired by UNIGE for preparing the visual material for the whole consortium. The rigorous outreach before the event and the follow up work appropriately served the dissemination objective of the project.

According to their different design, the discussions in the IFs have been organised with sub-working groups with varying numerosity, from 5 to 8. Most groups were with mixed



composition with representatives of all three categories of stakeholders. In Turku the Finish team preferred to have groups composed of young people and their facilitators only in order for the youths to feel more at ease to speak freely, so they organized three youth groups and one solely of regional policy makers and experts. In Thessaloniki the groups were formed autonomously by the participants following the design of World Café. The table discussions have been fed with different kinds of materials deriving from the empirical work in CLEAR. The materials were prepared and contextualised with the support of the WP8 Core Team. As visible in Table 2, materials deriving from WP3 to WP7 have been variably used.

Table 2 – Group management, materials for discussions and methods applied

Country	City	Group composition	Methods for stimulating debate	WP findings discussed
Austria	Vienna	3 mixed groups	questions about the educational chances in different regions; questions about the educational decision-making among young people; questions about the preferred educational career; the graphic output in “naked design” based on WP6 DELPHI poll findings	WP3, WP4, WP5
Bulgaria	Plovdiv	3 mixed groups	ice-breakers; quotes from young people's interviews; likely and desirable future scenarios; contrasting quotes from teachers and employers	WP4, WP5, WP6
Finland	Turku	4 uniform groups	ice-breakers; quotes from young people's interviews	WP5
Germany	Hamburg	3 mixed groups	ice-breakers; quotes from young people's interviews; imagined contrasting educational paths	WP3, WP4, WP5
Greece	Thessaloniki	6 groups organised as World Café	ice-breakers; quotes from young people's interviews; likely and desirable future scenarios; posters, drawings	WP4, WP5
Italy	Genoa	4 mixed groups	ice-breaker; poster with four statements related to young people's educational futures in different economic contexts; imagined contrasting educational paths; quotes from young people's interviews; likely and desirable future scenarios; comparative tables	WP3, WP4, WP5, WP6, WP7
	Urbino	3 mixed groups	ice-breakers; quotes from young people's interviews; likely and desirable future scenarios; imagined contrasting educational paths	WP4, WP5, WP6
Portugal	Lisbon	2 mixed groups	visuals 'What if you lived elsewhere', ice-breakers; quotes from young people's interviews	WP3, WP5
Spain	Castello	3 uniform groups	ice-breakers; quotes from young people's interviews; likely and desirable future scenarios	WP5, WP6

Source: National Reports (see Annex 1)



More specifically, materials deriving from WP3 – focused on quantitative analysis – were utilized in the Vienna, Hamburg, Genoa, and Lisbon IFs. The WP4 results in terms of policy analysis were discussed at the IFs in Vienna, Hamburg, Thessaloniki, Plovdiv, Genoa and Urbino. Excerpts from the qualitative interviews with young people gathered for WP5 have been used in all the IFs. The stimuli deriving from the results of the WP6 survey were used in Genoa, Urbino, Plovdiv and Castello. Finally, then WP7 National Discussion Papers were used as background materials to feed the discussions in the IFs in Italy and Greece. Concerning the methods for stimulating the debate, all teams freely chose the form of ice-breaking and then the visual materials developed by CODICI with some variations. All national teams reported that the discussions were lively and that many of the IF participants expressed a wish to have had more time and/or more discussions in the future organised with such participatory methods.

The implementation of the IFs faced surprisingly less difficulties than expected. The reported hitches were related to the logistical complexity of managing the discussion and the language diversity in regions where migrants and ethnic minorities were among the IF participants. It was clear that the national teams had already learnt from the experiences of the previous PAs which significantly increased the researchers' own expertise. Once enough varied participation was ensured through a wide range of strategies and the visual materials for encouraging debate were ready, the team members acted as qualified mediators and managed to deal with diverse challenges in the process. No significant ethical issues were raised during the plenary and group discussions mostly because they were given due consideration before the event. Participants in all IFs gave positive feedback regarding the format, content, and atmosphere of the IF. They appreciated the sense of openness, mutual respect, and the safe, relaxed and enriching environment for dialogue. Some responses were humorous or brief, indicating a relaxed and informal environment. Many found the experience very stimulating: "IF prompted so many thoughts and emotions," (Genoa IF participant); "This is the first time I said something about school that wasn't just complaint - but proposal."; (Thessaloniki IF); 'It felt as a punch in the stomach' as a Lisbon IF participant described the emotions during the discovery of different points of view. Some participants remarked that they had feared about the event being just another form of tokenistic participation but found that in the Thessaloniki IF "young people were not just present, but listened to." The Urbino team noted the differences in behaviour among the various types of participants: professionals and policymakers expressed surprise at the depth and development of the young participants' positions and thoughts on these topics while the young people underlined the importance of having the opportunity to present their views on educational trends, which they were rarely asked about. In most countries participants were surprised to discover that their opinions did not differ much from those presented by other groups. In all IFs participants were concerned with the need of changes in the educational policies and praised the relevance of the issue of learning outcomes. Commonly participants (Castello, Plovdiv, Lisbon, Vienna IFs) expressed the desire to see this type of initiative

replicated and expanded so that it does not remain as a one-time session. In Turku the issue of sharing the results of the IFs in other regions was raised while in Hamburg some participants expressed the wish to take part in the final project conference in Lisbon.

Summing up, the IFs organised in the CLEAR regions significantly strengthened the participatory quality of the project. It provided space for the three main stakeholder groups to share their personal experiences of learning throughout life, express their concerns with the barriers to achieving better learning outcomes for all and search for innovative solutions to the discussed challenges. While no further events have been reported one month after the IFs in all countries, the teams organised various follow-up actions such as posting reflections from the IFs on social media such as institutional and personal LinkedIn pages, university and project websites and sending certificates of attendance, summary reports and photos to participants via mail or phone.

Notwithstanding the strong flexibility of their design, the IFs maintained a common aim in terms of main outputs. All the discussions and debates have indeed targeted the elaboration of suggestions addressing two main dimensions: further research in the field of learning outcomes construction and education, and recommendations targeting policymakers.

A summary of these outcomes is reported in the Table 3, while their systematisation and interpretation will be included in the upcoming D8.3 National Participatory Report. The overall picture emerging from a crossed reading shows that young people and professionals are expressing a strong demand for educational systems that are more equitable, inclusive, and flexible. These systems should be responsive to genuine needs and acknowledge non-linear pathways to learning in order to better fit the flexibility and non-linearity of contemporary educational and biographical pathways. It also emerges the recurrence of systemic barriers – at a bureaucratic, symbolic, and cultural level – that impact educational environments, shrinking the profiles of young people that can effectively emancipate through education.

Furthermore, a generalised rejection of standardized evaluation models was expressed, as they are often perceived as stressful, anxiety-provoking and exclusionary. This latter topic also relates with the dominant understanding of concept of merit, that was often recalled as questionable. Rather, participants often claimed for a stronger valorisation of informal skills, as a “device” for a better synchronisation among education, labour market, and local communities.

Finally, the role of adults within the field of education – teachers, trainers, and policymakers – was stressed as crucial in fostering relationships and providing support.



Table 3 – Summary of the outcomes of the IFs

Country	City	Summary of the outcomes
Austria	Vienna	The findings from the IF strongly support previous insights deriving from the empirical research, as while access to educational and employment opportunities in Vienna is theoretically broad, it is highly unequal in practice. The barriers faced are not only material but also symbolic and systemic, significantly impacting young people with migration backgrounds, mental health issues, or nonconforming gender identities
Bulgaria	Plovdiv	Participants highlighted critical issues within the education system, which is perceived as rigid and unresponsive to individual needs. Important topics like mental health, school guidance, and talent development are neglected. Participants called for greater focus on nonformal education and the development of soft skills. They criticized standardized assessments and advocated for more personalized approaches to learning. Finally, inclusive reforms that actively involve all stakeholders in the education system were stressed as necessary
Finland	Turku	The IF highlighted that young people often feel their needs are overlooked, especially concerning mental health and guidance for school and career. Participants emphasized the importance of genuine listening, safe spaces, and accessible services that are free from stigma. They also noted a significant lack of realistic information about educational and employment opportunities. The discussion stressed the pivotal role of trust, peer support, and tailored educational pathways. Against this background, the recent austerity measures applied by the Government are viewed as a potential threat to these good practices
Germany	Hamburg	Participants discussed the gap between young people's expectations and the reality of the labour market, which is often worsened by bureaucratic regulations and ineffective institutional communication. Mentors and advisors play a crucial role in maintaining motivation and self-efficacy among young people. There is a need to listen more to young individuals and to value the external recognition of their skills. It was recommended to further investigate the disparity between support programs and institutional constraints
Greece	Thessaloniki	Participants emphasized the importance of overcoming stigmatizing labels in schools and recognizing the skills gained in migratory and informal contexts. Participants expressed their criticism of traditional assessment models and advocated for more narrative and inclusive approaches. They highlighted the significance of authentic and structured youth participation in educational policies. The notion of a uniform definition of "success" was challenged in favour of diverse and personalized visions. Recommendations included reforms in assessment methods, teacher training, informal recognition, and a more participative governance
Italy	Genoa	The IF emphasized the essential role of teachers as mediators between structural inequalities and individual opportunities. The existing culture of assessment, which many consider anxiety-inducing and not very inclusive, was called into question. Participants advocated for more room for student autonomy, empathetic educational practices, and a stronger valorisation of informal knowledge. Recommendations included reforms in evaluation methods, improved teacher training, and increased equity in educational pathways



Country	City	Summary of the outcomes
	Urbino	A shared vision emerged among participants regarding the urgent need for participatory educational spaces, active listening, and a re-evaluation of the teacher's role as a facilitator. Participants suggested redefining the concept of "merit" as "talent", emphasizing the value of individual uniqueness and potential. The recommendations advocated for systemic change grounded in inclusion, trust, and empowerment
Portugal	Lisbon	Participants emphasized the need for education policies that are locally sensitive and more inclusive for youth in vulnerable conditions. They criticized the fragmentation among institutions, the rigidity of school systems, and the lack of active listening. They claimed for greater youth participation in decision-making processes and for enhancing training for teachers and social workers. It was suggested that policies be evaluated based on social impact rather than solely on quantitative data
Spain	Castello	The IF highlighted several barriers that prevent the inclusion of young people, especially migrants, in educational and employment opportunities. Key issues raised included the recognition of qualifications, insufficient guidance, and difficulties in accessing clear information. Participants also emphasized the need to address job insecurity and housing challenges. There was a call for stronger connections between educational institutions and businesses. The recommendations suggested structural reforms to promote equity and accessibility in the educational system

Source: National Reports (see Annex 1)

4. Conclusion

The IFs organized in the CLEAR project shared many of the characteristics of participatory research, as they could not be strictly defined in terms of methodological design, they were not fully systematic and limited in terms of statistical representativity of participants' profiles and numbers. In contrast to the mainstream research methods (as discussed by recent literature on non-standard and creative research methods, see for example Call-Cummings & Ross, 2022; Fricker, 2007; Kidd et al., 2017; Walker & Boni, 2020; Brown, 2022; von Benzon et al., 2021; Giorgi et al., 2021), they were a collaborative mutual learning experience fostering reflection and self-discovery. The debates stimulated in the IFs can contribute to deepen the reflection yield in CLEAR about the process of learning outcomes construction.

Participants have highlighted cross-cutting elements that characterise educational systems in different countries and their impact on how learning outcomes are understood by institutions and are applied for steering the learners' trajectories. Such elements encompassed the need for greater inclusiveness and for overcoming both structural and symbolic inequalities. A widespread critique has emerged against traditional evaluative models, which are often seen as rigid, anxiety-inducing, and unrepresentative of the diverse individual pathways. The quantification of individual educational performance through marks and/or other quantifiable expressions has been often discussed in the IFs as unable to represent and give value to the different pathways that different profiles of learners follow to reach standardised learning outcomes. As in neoliberal societies the impact of inequalities in terms of individual resources gets increasing relevance, fostering

unequal “competition” among learners contradicts the understanding of education as key tool for compensating structural disadvantage.

In several countries, including Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria, participants expressed the urgency of reforming evaluation practices, considered as the most relevant “materialisation” of the logics underlying learning outcomes construction. The claimed reforms would seek to adopt more personalized approach able to recognise subjective attitudes and competencies also acquired in informal and, more general, life contexts such as the migratory pathways. Among the gathered recommendations for orienting the reforms, we find the involvement of different stakeholders in discussions about changes in the education system, which should also include learners’ standpoint, a larger freedom for teachers in choosing teaching methods and pace, individualizing educational paths according to students’ interests, decentralised organization of the educational system, more able to take into account the specificities of different communities and students at the local and regional level.

Similarly, in Finland, Austria, and Germany, discussions have underscored the importance of creating safe spaces in educational environments, fostering mutual trust, and providing peer support to ensure that educational trajectories are accessible for everyone. For instance, in the Finnish case where youth centres are generally well performing and able to support young people in their lives management, they have been cited as a potential model for inspiring a change in formal education environments. Indeed, as the approach of youth centres is not primarily driven by efficiency goals or time constraints and does not hide behind the professionalism, it was emphasised as a potential direction to be followed aiming to foster more inclusive environments in formal education too.

Emerging from contexts like Portugal and Spain is a call for educational policies that are more attuned to local specificities, focusing on social impact rather than just quantitative indicators, and actively involving young people in decision-making processes. Especially in the case of metropolitan areas where the spatial inequalities are often widespread, the ability of educational policy in acknowledging the specificities of different territories, was quoted as pivotal. This would require tailored support mechanisms aligned with local realities and the diverse trajectories of young people. Moreover, when discussing the relation between education and other structures of the local contexts, the advocated synergy was not framed as a mere adaption of the educational systems to the local economic context, but also about as dynamic process that entails that also educational policy could influence the productive fabric of the region.

Overall, the IFs have confirmed the processual nature of learning outcomes construction, framing them as collective, dynamic, and context-sensitive process, where the voices of young people and local educational stakeholders should be entitled with a role in creating more equitable, relevant, and transformative educational pathways.



Concerning the contribution of the IFs to the overall impact of the CLEAR project, the effect on the involvement of different profiles of stakeholders has substantially improved its dissemination capacity. But it is more specifically about the engagement of young people in the research process that the IFs were truly innovative as well as effective. Against the background of a transversal inability of the institutional systems to hear the voices of young people when designing policies targeting young population, chances for participation constitute precious opportunities for countering established (and often unproductive) practice or relation between youths and institutions. The IFs succeeded in creating such opportunities, starting from the involvement of youths not just as recipients, but also as key players in the process of reflection and proposal regarding the process of learning outcomes construction. The generally very positive feedback from young participants in all the IFs confirms that the national teams were able to create conditions for trust and free expression, lowering symbolical thresholds usually occurring in hierarchical educational environments. Experiencing being genuinely heard by adults and professionals can be framed as one of the most relevant achievements for young people in the CLEAR project. Relying on this basis of trust and dialogue, during the IFs young people have shared their personal experiences, expectations, and challenges faced during their educational journeys and transitions to work. This involvement helped to highlight issues that are often overlooked, such as emotional fragility, housing insecurity, and systemic discrimination, while also challenging standardized educational models. Through their feedback, most of the young participants expressed clear appreciation for how they benefited from connecting with peers and professionals in education, finding spaces for authentic listening, open dialogue, and recognition of their skills.

With respect to the specific objectives of WP8, the IFs effectively performed the role of “closing the cycle” of Transversal Participatory Approach, bringing the empirical work results and some of the outcomes of the previous Participatory Actions to the tables of discussion. In addition to the synchronization with the dissemination activities and purposes coordinated by WP9, these elements enable to positively consider the impact of the IFs also in terms of strengthening of the internal consistency within the CLEAR research scheme.

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Annex 1 – National Reports on the Innovation Forums

In the following Annex, the National Reports on the Innovation Forums are ordered by countries and are structured as follows: 1) Preparation of the Innovation Forum, 2) Implementation of the Innovation Forum, 3) Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up.





Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Austria

Yuri Kazepov, Nikoletta Jablonczay, Niklas Pernhaupt

University of Vienna

May 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	April 29, 2025
Venue	<p>1090 Wien, Pramergasse 9, Austria Institut für Soziologie Website: https://www.univie.ac.at/en/about-us/locations-maps/university-of-vienna-locations/</p> <p>The workshop took place at 1090 Vienna, Pramergasse 9, a meeting and conference facility provided by the University of Vienna. The building is shared with Caritas Socialis and also served as the location for our Vienna Consortium Meeting in 2024.</p> <p>The space is well accessible and multifunctional, equipped with a kitchen and barrier-free facilities, making it suitable for diverse group needs. While institutionally affiliated with the university, the venue offers a non-institutional and non-academic atmosphere, creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all participants.</p>
Duration	9:30 – 12:30 (3 hours) + one hour lunch
Engagement process	<p>To recruit participants for the Innovation Forum, we employed a multi-channel communication strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expert Outreach: We first contacted all experts who had taken part in our WP4 expert interviews and WP8 co-learning workshops in 2024. - University Channels: We shared the event information with two student groups at the University of Vienna whose academic focus relates to vulnerabilities and social inequalities. - Academic Network: We reached out to researchers affiliated with the major universities in Vienna. - Gatekeeper Engagement: We collaborated with local gatekeepers who facilitated contact with young adults who had participated in the WP5 study. - Youth Services and Educators: We also approached local youth support organizations, teachers, and training centres. <p>All invitations were sent via email and included a concise description of the Innovation Forum, background information on</p>

	<p>the CLEAR research project, and key logistical details about the event.</p> <p>This strategy aimed to gather a diverse and balanced group of participants in terms of gender, migration background, age, and educational or professional experience.</p> <p>Despite the broad outreach, only one participant was recruited through a University of Vienna student group, and one young adult from the WP5 sample (via snowball sampling) chose to attend. The other participants were recruited through our gatekeepers from the WP4 and WP5 packages.</p>
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2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

<p>Participants</p>	<p>The Innovation Forum brought together a total of 15 participants, including a diverse mix of professional backgrounds and life experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 Teachers/Youth Advisors (2 female, 1 male) - 10 Young Adults (3 female, 7 male) - 2 Researchers (1 female and 1 male) <p>Nine participants could be considered with a migration background. No minors were present. The age range spanned from approximately 18 to 65 years, reflecting different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.</p> <p>All personal data—including names, institutional affiliations, and professional roles—were fully anonymised in line with ethical research standards, unless participants chose to share this information themselves.</p>
	<p>All participants were fully informed about the purpose and objectives of the Innovation Forum in advance. Prior to the event, all participants signed both the attendance list and the informed consent form.</p> <p>The Innovation Forum was conducted in full anonymity: no personal data were collected or stored, and no name badges were used.</p> <p>Signed informed consent forms are securely stored on the institutional premises of the University of Vienna and are not accessible to third parties. No ethical concerns were raised by participants before, during, or after the event.</p>



	<p>Photographic documentation was carried out by Miriam Aistleitner. A total of 7 photographs were taken, and all images are stored securely on the University of Vienna's institutional servers, protected from third-party access.</p> <p>All participants agreed with the photographing and some also agreed to participate in videos how the future of schools should look like.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>Agenda and Implementation of the Innovation Forum</p> <p>The Innovation Forum (IF) followed the structure outlined below:</p> <p>Registration & Informed Consent + Introduction with Presentation (see Annex 3) (max. 30 min)</p> <p>Coffee Break (10 min)</p> <p>Group Work Sessions (80 min)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ice-breaker activity (max. 10 min) Thematic discussions (45–60 min) Creation of a short video (30–60 seconds) (15 min) <p>Coffee Break (10 min)</p> <p>Plenary Session (50–60 min)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Group presentations and video screening (30–45 min) Graphic recording and visual wrap-up task (15 min) <p>Lunch (1 hour)</p> <p>The event was organized and moderated by the University of Vienna team: Prof. Yuri Kazepov, Nikoletta Jablonczay, Niklas Pernhaupt, and Miriam Aistleitner.</p> <p>Opening and Framing</p> <p>The workshop opened with a welcome session introducing the goals of the CLEAR project, its participatory approach, and the underlying research design as per presentation in Annex 3. The day's agenda was presented alongside a summary of the project's progress and the specific purpose of the Innovation Forum. All participants were informed about data protection regulations and signed a registration and informed consent form.</p> <p>Upon arrival, participants were assigned to one of three workshop groups. While the assignment was largely random, we ensured a balanced composition based on general participant categories (e.g., experts or young adults). The goal was to create a constructive group dynamic: for example, WP3 and WP4</p>



groups included both experts and young adults to foster exchange, whereas the WP5 group consisted only of young adults to provide a more comfortable space for personal reflections. Each group focused on one of the work packages (WPs) most relevant to the Austrian context:

- WP3: Quantitative secondary data analysis
- WP4: Expert interviews and institutional context
- WP5: Biographical interviews with young adults

Workshop Groups

The discussions began with short ice-breaker activities, followed by guided conversations based on thematic questions developed by Niklas Pernhaupt, aligned with the objectives of each work package. Each discussion prompt included an introductory question or fictional situation designed to spark reflection and engagement.

Group discussions were facilitated by researchers from the University of Vienna. Participants were encouraged to take notes, contribute freely, and—when comfortable—share personal reflections.

Throughout the forum, photo documentation, as well as audio and video capture, were conducted respectfully and anonymously. Researchers ensured careful note-taking, and visual documentation materials (e.g. group notes, posters) were collected to supplement the data.

Plenary Session and Wrap-Up

The plenary session brought all participants back together. Each group presented their key discussion outcomes and screened the short videos they had created. The session encouraged open questions and reflections from all participants.

To conclude, the graphic output task (inspired by CODICI's "naked design" (based on WP6 DELPHI poll findings) method) was used to collaboratively capture trends, aspirations, and critiques related to Austria's current and future education and training systems.

Participants provided informal feedback on the process, praised the open and inclusive setting, and highlighted the importance of participatory research in shaping future educational and policy debates.



<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p>The Innovation Forums in Austria was titled: Innovationsforum oder “was wäre wenn...?”, In English: ‘what if?’</p> <p>The aim of the Innovation Forum was to create an open space for dialogue between young people and various experts in Vienna, centred on the themes of the CLEAR project and its research findings. Overall, participants showed great interest in the presented results and actively contributed feedback across all topics. Several attendees expressed that the forum could have lasted longer, and some even proposed the idea of establishing core groups that could engage with the project at multiple stages, allowing for deeper, ongoing discussions on different thematic areas.</p> <p>Below, we present a summary of the discussions held within each workshop group, corresponding to the different work packages (WPs) of the project.</p> <p>WP3 – Chances</p> <p>The following two questions were addressed in this group: "Vienna and Austria offer many educational and professional opportunities. Nevertheless, social inequalities remain clearly noticeable for certain groups in a system oriented toward performance." "Imagine you had to explain the Austrian education and labour market system to an important person from another country. This person is particularly interested in one question: 'Which groups have the best and which have the worst chances in the Austrian system?' Please write down your answers."</p> <p>The group discussion moderated by Niklas Pernhaupt as part of the Innovation Forum provided a valuable participatory setting to critically engage with the findings of Work Package 3 (WP3) on educational and occupational opportunities in Austria. The session brought together trainers and students from second-chance educational programs (supra-company training), enabling a dialogical reflection on the structures and inequalities embedded in the Austrian education and labour market systems.</p> <p>The discussion commenced with a prompt highlighting the tension between the availability of opportunities and the persistence of social inequalities in a performance-oriented system. Participants immediately problematized the early</p>
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tracking mechanisms within the Austrian school system, particularly the pivotal transitions at ages 10 and 14, which were perceived as prematurely decisive and socially stratifying. The group identified this rigidity as a significant source of stress, especially for students from disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds. The debate also revealed divergent perspectives on the locus of responsibility: while some emphasized the role of families in guiding educational trajectories, others pointed to structural inequalities and advocated for a more comprehensive school model to extend shared learning experiences until the age of 15.

A recurring theme was the critique of Austria's pronounced valorisation of academic credentials—referred to as "Titelgeilheit"—and the perceived symbolic rather than practical value of the Matura. Participants called for a curricular reform that integrates practical competences and allows for subject choice, reflecting diverse learner needs and labour market realities. While concerns were raised about eroding foundational knowledge, a compromise was found in envisioning a system that balances core competencies with flexible, interest-driven modules.

The discussion further addressed the implications of digital learning and artificial intelligence, with a consensus emerging around the necessity of promoting critical digital literacy and lifelong learning. The Delphi-inspired sticker exercise provided insight into participants' expectations: while merit and performance are expected to remain central, an overreliance on standardized assessments is anticipated to decline.

Overall, the session exemplified the potential of participatory formats in contextualizing empirical findings. By foregrounding lived experiences and fostering dialogic engagement, the forum not only validated diverse perspectives but also highlighted key areas for policy innovation in pursuit of a more equitable and responsive education system.

WP4 – Decisions

We addressed the following two questions in this group:

"In Austria, many people influence the educational paths of young adults. Not only the young adults themselves, but also decision-makers create both opportunities and challenges for their career trajectories."



"Role reversal: Depending on your own position, put yourself either in the role of a decision-maker or that of a young adult. As new experts, what decisions would you make? As young people again, what (different) decisions about career paths would you wish for? Please write down your answers."

The WP4 group work moderated by Yuri Kazepov engaged with educational decision-making among young people and found that it is shaped by a complex interplay of social, familial, institutional, and individual factors. A reflexive analysis of these influences reveals the importance of both structural conditions and relational dynamics in shaping pathways within the Austrian education system.

Social environments—particularly peer groups—play a formative role in guiding perceptions and choices. Adolescents often align their aspirations with those of their friends, suggesting a strong horizontal influence in decision-making. Similarly, teachers contribute significantly to shaping students' self-concepts and educational orientations through their feedback and expectations. Role models within extended social networks—such as older siblings or acquaintances with relevant experience—provide additional reference points.

Families, too, emerge as pivotal agents. As the first consultative body in most educational decisions, parents frequently provide logistical support, engage in discussions about future options, and facilitate access to information (e.g., attending open days). The broader family network can offer professional insights, further informing young people's orientation processes.

Institutional structures, meanwhile, precondition many aspects of educational choice. Grades and performance evaluations exert considerable pressure, reflecting the broader system logic that links achievement with future opportunity. The existing school landscape—its diversity of types and specializations—also shapes what is seen as possible or desirable. Formal guidance services offer important, though sometimes underutilized, support in navigating these choices.

Individual factors such as motivation, self-perception, and subject-specific interests further nuance the decision-making process. Previous school experiences and comparisons with peers influence not only perceived aptitude but also ambition and confidence. Future outlooks—particularly with regard to



employment prospects and societal recognition—are integral to evaluating educational options. This includes a degree of “relative benchmarking” through which young people assess how their choices are perceived in a wider social context. Finally, the analysis points to emerging demands for reform. Participants highlighted the potential of alternative assessment formats—such as portfolios or reflective projects—as complements or substitutes to traditional grading. Questions regarding the relevance of certain subjects, the inclusivity of guidance services, and the recognition of informal learning spaces (e.g., youth centres) signal an urgent need to rethink how educational environments are conceptualized and experienced. These considerations are essential for designing a future-oriented, equitable, and student-centred education system.

WP5 – Careers

The WP5 group discussed the following questions:

"Young adults do not always have a perfect educational and professional career. Some change school types (e.g., from a business school to a polytechnic). Others fall out of the system (e.g., during the COVID pandemic). And still others finish school but do not (immediately) find an (easy) entry into the workforce."

"How would you describe the perfect educational and professional career? Why, then, are careers more difficult in reality for many people? Please write down your answers."

Moderated by Nikoletta Jablonczay, the group explored young people’s perspectives on success, institutional expectations, and the broader social structures shaping educational and professional pathways.

Participants strongly challenged the notion of a “perfect” career, typically framed as a seamless transition from a high-status school track to stable employment. In contrast, they described real-life trajectories as fragmented and contingent, shaped by personal hardships, systemic exclusion, and unexpected disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These non-linear paths were reframed not as failures, but as valuable learning processes inadequately acknowledged by formal institutions. The discussion underscored multiple systemic constraints: early tracking, rigid school transitions, lack of second-chance mechanisms, and insufficient mental health support. The structural tendency to evaluate students through narrow



	<p>metrics—primarily grades and credentials—was widely criticized for overlooking emotional labour, caregiving responsibilities, and resilience in the face of adversity. Participants emphasized that educational systems often disregard individual starting points, applying meritocratic standards that obscure the reproduction of privilege. As one participant noted, informal mechanisms such as family networks quietly reinforce inequality by facilitating access to certain schools or opportunities. Visions for the school of the future were centred not on curriculum content but on pedagogical ethos. Participants called for inclusive, human-centred education: one that validates diverse life realities, supports experimentation, and fosters emotional well-being. The school, in their view, should offer space to reflect, pause, and reorient without penalty. The conversation also illuminated the problematic conflation of behavioural norms with academic performance. Disciplinary assessments were viewed as punitive tools that penalize students for socio-emotional stress, often tied to marginalization. A more equitable framework would decouple behaviour from academic evaluation, while investing in inclusive guidance systems and psychosocial infrastructure. Ultimately, the group articulated a call to rethink educational success in terms of dignity, access, and recognition. Schools must evolve to become spaces of integration—socially, culturally, and institutionally—if they are to serve all youth equitably in an increasingly complex society.</p>
<p>Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion</p>	<p>The workshop discussions were opened with an icebreaker. If needed, the discussion was enriched by the project’s findings, follow-up questions, or targeted questions on professional or educational experiences.</p>
<p>Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?</p>	<p>The participants were divided in three different working groups, all of which were in the same room. There were no specific criteria for division, the participants were divided randomly based on when they have signed the informed consent, yet ensuring a balanced composition based on general participant categories. This enabled us to overcome power disbalances, anonymise the procedures, and avoid our (unconscious) biases as researchers.</p>



<p>Impressions from the IF</p>	<p>In general, the Innovation Forum went very smoothly and with no disruptions. We have observed an inclusive and open conversation throughout the entire forum.</p> <p>The participants have welcomed the specific format of the forum and the ability to freely express themselves and exchange their opinions, experiences, biographies, and personal vignettes.</p>
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3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

<p>Feedback from participants</p>	<p>General conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Innovation Forum in Vienna created a dynamic space for dialogue between young people and experts, focusing on educational inequalities and visions for future schooling in Vienna. Across all three working groups, a strong consensus emerged: while Vienna offers a wide range of educational and vocational pathways, the system remains deeply stratified and often fails to accommodate the lived realities, needs, and aspirations of many young people—especially those from disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds. – A shared concern across all discussions was the early and rigid tracking of students, which reinforces existing social inequalities and limits educational mobility. Participants criticized how decisions made at ages 10 and 14 strongly influence future opportunities, often without sufficient support or recognition of individual contexts such as mental health, socio-emotional challenges, or language acquisition. – Another recurring theme was the overemphasis on academic performance and grades as primary indicators of potential. Participants called for broader, more holistic approaches to assessment that consider personal growth, motivation, and diverse learning styles. The importance of emotional well-being and mental health was also stressed, alongside the need for stronger psychological and advisory support structures in schools. – All three groups emphasized the critical role of significant others—friends, teachers, family members, and youth workers—in shaping educational decisions. Trust, encouragement, and recognition by adults were described as powerful motivators, especially in contexts
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where young people felt unseen or unsupported by the system.

- Participants further highlighted the need to modernize the curriculum and learning formats, advocating for more flexible and interest-based subject choices, as well as greater integration of practical knowledge and digital skills. A hybrid model was proposed that balances compulsory basic subjects with student-chosen modules. There was also consensus on promoting critical digital literacy and accommodating various learning types.
- Finally, the Forum called for inclusive and future-oriented reforms: expanding comprehensive schooling, creating low-threshold exploration spaces like “research workshops,” and rethinking school as a space for social mixing rather than separation. A broader cultural shift was envisioned—one that values curiosity over titles, encourages experimentation, and sees education as a process of growth rather than competition.
- In sum, participants expressed a strong desire to rethink the Austrian education system toward greater fairness, flexibility, and human-centeredness—moving from rigid structures to responsive opportunities that meet young people where they are and help them grow into who they want to become.

We received the following feedback regarding the organisation of the IF from our participants:

1. Satisfaction with the Event

Overall, participants expressed high satisfaction with the Innovation Forum. The structure, clear introduction, and opportunity for active participation were particularly appreciated. Some participants, however, wished for more time to delve deeper into the topics.

2. Opportunities for Participation & Being Heard

Most participants felt actively involved and that their voices were heard. The discussions were lively, and the atmosphere was described as open and welcoming. At the same time, some participants expressed uncertainty about what would happen



	<p>with the results and suggested increasing the diversity of the group.</p> <p>3. Highlights & Positive Impressions Several participants praised the relevance of the topics and the positive, respectful atmosphere. Some responses were humorous or brief, indicating a relaxed and informal environment.</p> <p>4. Suggestions for Improvement & Future Wishes Feedback included constructive suggestions: more time for discussion, better networking opportunities, stronger inclusion of non-academic groups, and expanding the format to include political decision-makers.</p>
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>We summarize the main innovation aspects as follows: Vienna is a city of opportunity, yet access to these opportunities is highly uneven. The previously made interviews during WP4 and WP5 with both experts and young people reveal a systemic mismatch between what is available and what is accessible. This precipitation was reconfirmed during the Innovation Forum. Institutional structures like the AMS and the school system are often perceived as impersonal or even disempowering—especially for young people with migrant backgrounds, mental health challenges, or alternative gender identities. Although Vienna boasts a diverse and dense infrastructure, youth without the “right” credentials, language skills, or social capital face symbolic exclusion and bureaucratic sorting. Supra-company training — intended as a second-chance mechanism — is often stigmatised. Young people report being placed rather than supported, and many experience life-course disruptions that statistics cannot fully capture.</p> <p>At the same time, informal networks act as invisible safety nets. The absence of these networks often leads to emotional exhaustion, prolonged limbo, and delayed integration into education or work. Moreover, mental health, while frequently mentioned in interviews, remains under-addressed in public systems — despite being critical to participation and well-being. This calls for a rethinking of how “transition systems” operate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not merely improving institutional access,



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - but transforming how institutions recognise, respond to, and support the complex lives and needs of young people in urban settings.
<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>The Innovation Forum was publicly announced five days before the event via CLEAR's LinkedIn channel (https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7310240793359765504/) and through the newsletter of the Department of Sociology. Both announcements were published in German. To help the participants settle and support them during the event, a presentation (see Annex 3) during the introductory session and a printed handout was provided (see Annex 4), which was inspired by the Innovation Forum in Hamburg. At the end of the forum, participants received a signed certificate of attendance, promotional materials from the CLEAR project, and writing utensils.</p> <p>The invitation to attend the CLEAR Final Conference was shared during the plenary session. While many participants expressed great interest in joining, the lack of financial support unfortunately makes participation unfeasible for some.</p>

Figure 3 – Innovation Forum in Vienna



Credits: UNIVIE Team



Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Bulgaria

Siyka Kovacheva, Darena Hristozova, Plamen Nanov

University of Plovdiv

May 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	15 April, 2025
Venue	<p>Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, Rectorate, 24 Tsar Assen Str., Plovdiv, Bulgaria Website: https://uni-plovdiv.bg/en/</p> <p>Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” is a well-known public institution, popular among young people and the general public in the city. We checked other venues but the university building in the city centre offered us better opportunities with one big room and two adjacent smaller rooms. Some of the people we invited for the IF had already participated in the preliminary focus group (WP5), which was held again at the same building; several of the interviews with young people were conducted there (WP5); and others recognize the institution as a safe and secure place (they work or study there, or have experience of studying there). We received assistance from the university's administrative staff regarding the reservation and free use of three suitable rooms. The university has a convenient location in the city center, next to a major bus stop and about 15 minutes from the train station, which made the organization of the event easier and allowed us to keep up with the planned agenda.</p>
Duration	14:00 - 17:00 with around 20 minutes coffee break
Engagement process	<p>First, we invited those who had already participated in some of the CLEAR project stages – the preliminary focus groups under WP5, the interviews with young people under WP5, the interviews with experts under WP4. The contact with potential participants was made through several main channels: by email, by phone call and through a personal informal meeting. In our preliminary conversations with them, we provided detailed information about the purpose and nature of the event and were ready to provide additional clarifications if necessary.</p> <p>As a second step in the participant selection process, we targeted local stakeholders who would be interested in participating – students in high schools and universities, teachers, psychologists, leaders and employees of local NGOs, municipal councilors, etc.</p>



2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

<p>Participants</p>	<p>Our Innovation Forum consisted of 21 participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 Policymakers (2 women, 2 men); - 10 Young adults (8 women, 2 men); - 7 Experts working with young people (all women). <p>3 of the policymakers have already participated in a focus group under WP5.</p> <p>2 of the young adults have already been interviewed under WP5.</p> <p>2 of the experts have already participated in a focus group under WP5.</p> <p>The age range of participants was between 18 and 66 years.</p>
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p>All participants have signed the provided list of participants. When registering for the event, all participants filled out a declaration of informed consent and were informed that the discussion groups would be audio-recorded, as well as that several photos would be taken. During the open session, the objectives of the Innovation Forum were highlighted again and the possibility for participants to refuse to be audio-recorded and photographed was reminded.</p> <p>The list of participants and all signed informed consents are stored at Plovdiv University with no access to third parties. They also have been scanned and stored on the bscw-Munster server. The pictures from the Innovation Forum were made by a university's photographer and nobody but the three of us have access to them. In total, 18 pictures were made.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>The IF agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registration - Opening session and Presentation of main CLEAR project results (20 minutes) - Workshops in 3 groups (1 hour and 20 minutes) - Coffee break (20 minutes) <p>Presentation of the workshops' results and general discussion (45 minutes)</p> <p>The Innovation Forum was led by the PU team: Siyka Kovacheva, Darena Hristozova, and Plamen Nanov:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening session – steered by Siyka Kovacheva - Presentation of main CLEAR project results – Darena Hristozova



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WP4 workshop – facilitated by Plamen Nanov <p>WP5 workshop – facilitated by Darena Hristozova</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WP6 workshop – facilitated by Siyka Kovacheva <p>General discussion of the workshop’s results – steered by Plamen Nanov.</p>
<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p>The Innovation Forum in Bulgaria was titled: Ако зависеше от мен... Към какви резултати от обучението следва да се стремим?; English: If it were up to me... What learning outcomes should we strive for?</p> <p>The objectives of the Innovation Forum were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to discuss some of the main results of the CLEAR project from the perspective of the personal experience of participants with different social profiles such as experts, practitioners and young people; - to identify topics and problems in the education and life transitions of young people for which there is a lack of reliable information supported by research data; - to formulate recommendations for educational, youth and social policies to achieve higher learning outcomes. <p>Here below we summarize the main objectives and results of the discussions in each working group, which focused on key findings from three different work packages of CLEAR project.</p> <p>WP4</p> <p>The discussion in the WP4 workshop began with an introduction of the facilitator and the participants, followed by a short ice-breaking exercise. In the first part of the discussion, the participants were introduced to two quotes from the in-depth interviews conducted under WP4, which showed the contradiction between the opinions of teachers on the one hand, who claim that students receive the necessary skills upon completion of their secondary education, and on the other hand, the opinion of employers, who, as users of personnel, see serious deficiencies in the training process. In the second part, the participants were introduced to another quote from an in-depth interview in WP4, illustrating the outdated curricula in some of the subjects and the inability of teachers to teach current knowledge.</p>



At the end of the discussions, the participants were asked to write down on the sheets in front of them three topics/problems that are neglected in the public debate and should be explored, as well as three policy/practical changes that would make education better.

Based on the discussion, several neglected topics/problems were highlighted:

- The weak motivation of students for education and learning new skills – there are countless reasons for this, and this is not talked about in the public sphere, but researchers and the media should pay more attention;
- Teacher training – teachers do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach, and most of them become teachers because of the increase in their salaries in recent years;
- Lack of motivators at school and at university – there are no teachers who can ‘ignite the spark’ in students to develop an interest in certain sciences.

The participants pointed out some practical and political changes that would positively affect the education system:

- Emphasis on the importance of non-formal education in Bulgaria, respectively on the forms of its validation;
- Introduction of the triple, quadruple and five- fold spiral method in education, i.e. inclusion of all stakeholders in the discussion of changes in the education system, in the discussion of the curriculum, etc.;
- Emphasis on the acquisition of ‘soft skills’ among young people;
- Improvement of the professional training of teachers and the need for selection criteria in starting work as a teacher.

WP5

The discussion in the WP5 workshop started with a short presentation of the participants (main occupation and interests). We continued with an ice- breaking question about the best memory of their school years, which predisposed the participants to actively share their experience and helped the actual start of the group work. Already at this early stage of the discussion, the importance of student mobility in foreign educational institutions and early participation in voluntary



initiatives was highlighted, both for the formation of soft skills in young people and for their personal development.

The discussion was focused on a quote from a youth interview from WP5, illustrating one of the opinions related to the necessary changes in education in Bulgaria. The participants were introduced to the quote and it was left in front of them during the discussion. Participants had the opportunity to think for themselves, take notes and, based on their experience, make suggestions on the question: What would they themselves change in education in Bulgaria in order to increase learning outcomes?

As a result of the discussion, several more general proposals for changes in education were made:

- A fundamental change in the education system in terms of training opportunities for young people according to their specific skills and interests;
- Encouraging the participation of young people in extracurricular activities and more information about their benefits, which will enable them to experiment more in searching the right future employment;
- Strengthening communication between parents and teachers – providing parents with more information about their children’s skills, which will also help parents themselves to provide more adequate and tailored support for children in their educational choices and future career orientation;
- Need for more commitment from teachers in their everyday work with students with more potential – more support and encouragement for the acquisition of additional (more than curriculum) knowledge;

Unsatisfactory level of competence of teaching staff in schools and the need for more attention and control at the stage of formation of their knowledge and skills in tertiary education institutions.

At the end of the discussion, the participants had the opportunity to formulate topics on which future research should focus, as well as specific recommendations for education policy.

WP6

The discussion in the WP6 workshop started with an ice-breaking question about participants’ memories of the best or



the worst day at school. The participants joined freely and shared many good memories of their school days. We discussed three scenarios which the participants were invited to assess their plausibility and desirability. From the WP6 report we initially selected six scenarios where the Bulgarian respondents differed the most from all survey respondents and then created a figure presenting three of them as trends:

- Increase or decrease of standardization and quantification of learning outcomes;
- Increase or decrease of the categorization of learners as successful and unsuccessful;
- Increase or decrease in the prominence given to 'merit' and 'personal achievement'.

We made a visualization with arrows and the respondents could put dots on the more desired or undesired direction, as well as on the more probable or improbable direction on each arrow. Contemplating about the trends, all participants considered that standardization is very likely to happen in the future in Bulgaria as elsewhere in Europe but unlike the Bulgarian survey respondents the members of our group thought the increase undesirable. Arguments concerned the diversity among students from different family backgrounds and different vulnerabilities which quantitative indicators alone cannot capture.

In the same way the group participants assessed negatively the increase in the division of students as successful and unsuccessful because they found this labelling as limiting not only the learning outcomes but also for students' development as learners and as whole personalities. The preferable trend was for a decrease of the categorization.

The third trend was not discussed in the ideological terms but rather more pragmatically. The discussion reached a common stance that the decrease on this arrow was unlikely but more desirable. The participants considered that the educational system should provide more opportunities for the highly achieving students while at the same time giving more support and encouragement for those with less academic achievements. At the end of the discussion, the participants had the opportunity to formulate topics on which future research should



	focus, as well as specific recommendations for the education policy.
Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion	The group discussions were opened with an ice- breaking questions and continued with a discussion on key findings of CLEAR project, based on results from WP4, WP5 and WP6.
Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?	The participants were divided in three different working groups, distributed in three rooms. The participants were divided randomly, achieving maximum diversity in terms of their affiliation (policymakers, young adults, experts, working with young people).
Impressions from the IF	<p>The Innovation Forum went according to the planned program. A few participants left after the workshops and were unable to participate in the final session with discussion of the workshops' results.</p> <p>The participants were very active both in the group discussions and in the final general discussion – they reacted with great interest and willingness. Although leaders emerged in some of the discussions, each of the participants was able to share their experiences and opinions, and the discussions ended with unanimity on the issues raised.</p> <p>The majority expressed their desire and readiness to participate in similar events in future. Everyone agreed that meetings on similar topics should be organized regularly.</p>

3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

Feedback from participants	<p>Although the three workshops focused on different key findings of the CLEAR project (WP4, WP5 and WP6), the discussions raised many common themes and issues, which shows that greater communication is needed between all involved parties in education policy in Bulgaria. As a result of the three group discussions, several key problems in the Bulgarian education system were identified, as well as ways to resolve them.</p> <p>Firstly, a need for a systemic reform – the current education system is not flexible enough and does not meet the individual needs of students. Recommendations for reforms on this issue</p>
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	<p>include: involving all stakeholders in discussions about changes in the education system, more freedom for teachers in choosing teaching methods and pace, individualizing educational paths according to students' interests, decentralizing education, taking into account the specificities of different communities and students at the local and regional level.</p> <p>Secondly, strengthening the role of non-formal and experiential learning – non-formal education and volunteering are key components for acquiring ‘soft skills’ such as teamwork, communication skills and social engagement. Among the proposals several ideas stood out: expanding opportunities for student volunteering, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, cultural, religious and sports institutions, as well as including more practical and interdisciplinary subjects in secondary education, which would prepare students for real life.</p> <p>Thirdly, assessment and standardization issues – the current form of assessment limits students' potential, ignores individual context and social vulnerability, and does not adequately address the emotional and psychological needs of young people. It is necessary to: implement a more personalized approach to students, strengthen communication between parents and teachers, and expand the number of experts in schools who can provide adequate support to adolescents in dealing with emotional problems.</p> <p>Fourthly, the motivation of teachers and students – the low motivation among students is often due to outdated teaching methods, a lack of teachers who can arouse interest in the learning content, and distrust in the quality of the professional competence of teachers. This could change if teacher training in the tertiary education system is strengthened and a transparent teacher selection system is introduced.</p> <p>The discussions showed a clear desire for change – both from young people and from professionals in the system. Education should not be just a transfer of knowledge, but a space for development, support and discovery of potential. This requires political willingness, cross-sectoral cooperation and active participation of all stakeholders.</p>
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>Participants pointed out which sensitive topics related to the education system were not sufficiently researched and also did not find their rightful place in the public debate. On the basis of</p>



	<p>the three workshops, deficits were identified in the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student-parent-school relationship; - Mental and physical health of students; - Effective career guidance models; - Good practices for working with talented students; - Study of student communities, their inner dynamics and satisfaction with the learning process. <p>The recommendations to educational policy can be summarised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater focus on the importance of non-formal education and its validation; - Inclusion of all stakeholders in the discussion of changes in the education system; - Emphasis on the acquisition of 'soft skills' among young people; - Improvement of the professional training of teachers and implementation of selection criteria in starting work as a teacher; - Training opportunities for young people according to their specific skills and interests; - Strengthening communication between parents and teachers – providing parents with more information about their children's skills; - More support and encouragement for the acquisition of additional (more than curriculum) knowledge of students; - More freedom to teachers to choose the methods and tempo of teaching; - More professionals in schools who could help young people deal with emotional problems as well as more focused training of teachers to recognize psychological problems early; - Reduction of the number of students in class (formation of smaller classes).
<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>The Innovation Forum was announced in Bulgarian language by the PU team in LinkedIn (LinkedIn Siyka Kovacheva, LinkedIn Plamen Nanov, LinkedIn Darena Hristozova) and on the Plovdiv University's website: https://logos.uni-plovdiv.net/en/news/-/blogs/16-04-2025</p>



	<p>During the event the participants could take CLEAR pencils, the project leaflet, the announcement of the Final conference as well as other dissemination materials.</p> <p>After the event each of the participants received a summary of the main results of the Innovation Forum by email and a signed certificate of attendance,</p> <p>An article will be published in the university newspaper with analysis of the IF outcomes.</p>
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Figure 4 - Innovation Forum in Plovdiv



Credits: PU Team





Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Finland

Päivi Naumanen, Tero Järvinen, Jenni Tikkanen, Minna Kyttälä

University of Turku

May 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	April 23, 2025
Venue	Youth Art and Activity Center “Vimma” [Nuorten taide- ja toimintatalo Vimma] (Aurakatu 16, Turku city center) “Vimma” is a youth recreation, arts, and activity center owned by the City of Turku. It is a well-known and popular place among young people in Turku and easily accessible. Two premises were rented from the center for IF's needs: a theater space (max capacity 50 people) and a meeting room (max capacity 12 people).
Duration	13:00 – 15:15 (2h15) (+ sandwiches and light refreshments)
Engagement process	<p>Participants were mainly recruited through personal invitations. The target group of Turku IF participants consisted of those local/regional decision makers and experts working with young adults who had already participated in the previous participatory workshops of the research project (focus group discussions in WP5 and WP6). Participants were engaged by making use of these existing networks of contacts of the UTU team and the people they recommended. Experts and decision-makers were invited to the event both by email and by telephone. Young adults attending the event received the invitation only through their facilitators (who were already familiar to the UTU team). As the WP5 interviewees had been told in the Information Notice that the Innovation Forum will be held as a closed event that is neither videotaped nor recorded, we did not promote the event in public or on social media.</p> <p>We focused in particular on engaging young adults. However, some of the young people who initially signed up dropped out at the last minute (those in the most vulnerable situations, according to the facilitators). None of those who were interviewed for WP5 and invited attended the event.</p>

2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

Participants	<p>A total of 19 participants, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -8 young adults (6 women, 2 men). -6 professionals working with young people (3 women, 3 men).
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	<p>-3 local/regional decision-makers (all 3 women). -2 academic experts (all 2 women)</p> <p>The young adults were students at the local vocational institute and participants in a Preparatory education for an upper secondary qualification program (TUVA). Three professionals were the study counsellors or supervisors, and the other three were youth counsellors/coaches working in a third sector organisation and in the City of Turku.</p> <p>In addition, four UTU team members: Tero Järvinen, Päivi Naumanen, Jenni Tikkanen and Minna Kyttälä contributed to the event as organisers and facilitators of the workshops.</p>
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p>All participants signed an informed consent for their participation. In the consent form, they were informed of the main points of the ethical considerations and data processing procedures. However, no personal data or contact details were collected, and therefore no register of participants was created. Furthermore, participants were not photographed. No ethical issues were raised.</p> <p>The consent forms signed by the participants were scanned and will be uploaded onto the BSCW server. The original forms will be stored in a secure repository for the duration of the research project, after which they will be destroyed.</p> <p>No personal data or contact details were collected from participants, so no personal data records were created. Participants were not photographed.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>The final program of the IF consisted of the following six steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Arrival of participants, signing of consent forms, grouping of participants for workshops (managed by 3 UTU team members) (10 min); 2) Coffee, sandwiches and refreshments (15 min); 3) Opening of the event; welcoming remarks, presentation of the research project and CLEAR transversal participatory work, briefing on workshop work (20 min); 4) Workshop discussions and writing comments independently without facilitators (30 min)



	<p>5) Workshop facilitators (UTU team members) discussing on comments with working groups and compiling key points for joint discussion (30 min)</p> <p>6) Final compilation of the workshop discussions and conclusion of the event; workshop facilitators presenting the key points followed by joint discussion and presentation of the selected international results of the WP5 of the research project (30 min)</p> <p>The Forum was managed by four facilitators, of which one was also the chair of the workshop. The facilitators were all members of the UTU team. The chair opened and closed the event. All members of the UTU team acted as facilitators of the workshops, moderators of the discussions and documenters of the workshop comments.</p> <p>Each working group facilitator documented the discussions and comments of his/her working group and photographed the notes. Comments from participants were recorded using coloured post-it notes. Participants stuck the notes on the cardboard containing interview excerpts (from WP5) that served as discussion starters. In addition, the workshop facilitators compiled the key points of the discussion in the booklets. The participants themselves were not photographed, just their notes.</p>
<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p>Following the idea of getting young people more engaged and listening to their voices, the IF workshops focused on the results of the WP5 young adult research interviews. We selected three quotes from the interviews that we thought summed up well the key concerns of young adults based on their experiences of education and learning pathways. The three interview quotes selected focused on the following themes: 1) "young people talk to walls" – young people are not listened to; their concerns about loss of livelihood and lack of access to mental health services are ignored; 2) "feeling bad and anxiety are real problems" – problems expressed by young people, for example those related to gender identity construction and mental health, are not taken seriously and are disregarded as teenage phenomena or as a world inflated by social media; 3) "help with career choices" – young people are left without proper and adequate assistance in their educational and occupational</p>



	choices, often leading to drop-outs from post-compulsory education.
Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion	<p>Workshop participants were asked to share their thoughts on the concerns expressed by young adults in the research interviews. Participants' thoughts and comments were elicited through a couple of questions: 1) Does the interview transcript resonate with your own experiences or the experiences of those close to you? If so, what are your own or your close circle's experiences of or thoughts on this theme? 2) What message would you send to researchers and/or policy makers on this topic? How should the issue be addressed?</p> <p>Participants were first asked to reflect and discuss with each other in peace, after which they were invited to comment on at least one issue or idea for each of the interview extracts. After the independent workshop discussions, the facilitators collected the comments and discussed with the group members the ideas and experiences that had motivated their comments.</p>
Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?	The idea behind grouping the participants was to allow young people to share their thoughts without fear in a group with safe and familiar facilitators. We therefore divided the pre-enrolled participants into four groups, three of which consisted of young adults and their facilitators, and one of which was made up solely of regional policy makers and experts. However, as some young adults did not come up to the event, one group consisted solely of supervisors/coaches and two groups consisted of young adults and their supervisors. Finally, a total of four groups with unequal numbers of participants were involved.
Impressions from the IF	N/A

3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

Feedback from participants	The feedback received during the workshop was positive. The content and implementation were considered relevant and successful. One participant from the expert group commented that it would be interesting to hear more about the discussions that took place in the different groups. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide feedback digitally after the
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	<p>workshop (through QR-code), but no one took advantage of this option.</p>
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>Research questions:</p> <p>The discussion in the workshops was lively. Both the young people and the experts recognized the phenomena described in the interview quotes from the study. The young people had personal experience of dropping out of education and changing fields. The groups discussed issues related to study and career choices most actively, but young people's feelings of unease and anxiety, as well as the fact that their concerns are not heard or understood, also sparked a lot of reflection.</p> <p>With regard to education and career choices (quote 3), one problem identified was young people's access to up-to-date, realistic, and concrete information about different educational opportunities and professions. According to the participants, many young people have distorted perceptions and expectations of working life, which raises the threshold too high and prevents them from trying out things that interest them. Another problem was that young people are being guided into the labor market with an excessive focus on results and efficiency, without being given time to familiarize themselves with different fields and try things out. At the same time, traditional and often stereotypical career models are being reproduced, while young people's own situations, expectations, and aspirations are given too little consideration. The discussion sparked questions about the extent to which the system actually listens to what young people/students expect and hope for from guidance. Another important question is how the study and career guidance system recognizes the diversity of students and is able to respond to the needs and wishes of young people from different backgrounds and in different situations.</p> <p>With regard to young people's wellbeing and mental health (quote 2), the issue was that schools do not see or understand young people's anxiety, and young people themselves do not dare to ask for help because they feel ashamed and stigmatized. On the other hand, a young person's family and home background affect how they dare to show their feelings and ask for help. The discussion prompted questions about whether</p>



teachers and counsellors have sufficient competence and sensitivity to recognize when young people are feeling bad or anxious. The discussion also considered whether teachers are trained to be sensitive and aware of young people's different situations and opportunities to seek help for their problems. Bullying and the formation of hostile cliques among students were also raised in the debates, as these were seen to cause fear, distress, and anxiety. This sparked questions about how to promote a sense of togetherness and belonging among different groups at school and how bullying and ill-being could be prevented.

With regard to listening to young people's voices and concerns (quote 1), some of the young participants and their facilitators felt that the authorities and adults simply do not understand or believe young people's concerns and are therefore unable to help them. The remedy for this would be to genuinely listen to and hear what is troubling young people. In Finland, the most concrete form of this kind of remedy is provided by open youth work (e.g., in one-stop guidance centers, in outreach youth work, and in rehabilitation), where safe places for meeting and listening have been created so that young people feel they can trust the workers listening to them and helping them without the fear of being stereotyped or bullied. According to the participants the youth work that is not primarily driven by efficiency goals or time constraints and does not hide behind the professionalism, but instead listens to young people on an equal footing, has been most successful in preventing marginalization. The latest government austerity plans, however, as commented by some participants, now seriously threaten to undermine this work.

The discussion gave rise to questions about whether youth-oriented work methods could be expanded and extended to the school system, rather than scaled down, so that schools could become safe arenas where, without fear of shaming or bullying, students could rely more on the support of their peers and get help with various problems, whether they concern home or school, mental health or study and career choices. According to the participants, neither authorities nor teachers have usually



the time or the skills to face and engage with young people, whether because they are hiding behind status, professionalism and official jargon, or by trying too hard to solve problems rather than listen to the person.

Suggestions/ recommendations:

Overall, based on the discussions and as a conclusion, the following messages were sent to policy makers:

1) Regarding listening to and understanding young people:

- Instead of cutting back, more youth-oriented and peer support-based methods that promote safety should be added and integrated into the school system. These methods help young people's voices be heard better, increase their trust in the system, and encourage them to participate. Examples of such methods include the "young people telling young people" model for student guidance and career choice.

2) Regarding young people's mental health and well-being:

- Ensure young people's access to mental health and other services – it is not enough that services are available; they must also be accessible, which is why young people must be provided with sufficient information and guidance on the right services. As suggested by the participants, low-threshold services, a variety of contact methods, a human contact at an early stage, and bringing together actors from various fields in one place (multiprofessional approach) are needed to ensure accessibility.

- Improve the sensitivity and preparedness of teachers and counsellors, for example through training, to recognize young people's different backgrounds, circumstances, and starting points when seeking help and support and referring them to the right services.

- Develop methods and practices within the school system to foster a sense of belonging among students, which could strengthen participation and prevent isolation within one's own reference group. Examples of activities that might promote cohesion, as suggested by participants, include class and school trips, excursions, and other shared events that are perceived as providing opportunities to get to know fellow students better.



	<p>3) Regarding young people's school choices and career guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide more concrete and realistic information about different fields and professions and what studying in different fields and professions is like. - Schools should devote more time and lessons to familiarizing students with different educational options and professions, offering opportunities for experimentation, trial and error, and flexible transitions between different educational programs and professions. - Take into consideration the ability of families and parents to support young people and the importance of linguistic and cultural background in vocational choices. - Young people entering the labor market should not be subject to excessive skill requirements; instead, they should be better introduced to their work tasks. - Young people should be offered low-threshold jobs that enable them to gain the work experience they need for entering the labor market. Methods to facilitate entry into the labor market include e.g. the adoption of new forms of learning and skills certification models.
<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>Along with the invitations to the Forum, participants were sent a brief information sheet on the objectives, research questions, methods and work packages of the CLEAR project. Young adults received the invitation and the info sheet via their facilitators. After the Innovation Forum, a concise summary of the working group discussions and conclusions was compiled for the participants. In addition, a PowerPoint presentation given at the event will be sent to the participants (whose email-addresses were already known to UTU team). The young adults' facilitators are kindly requested to send them the summary and the presentation of the event.</p> <p>A news item about the Turku Innovation Forum has been posted on the LinkedIn pages</p>





Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Germany

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do Amaral

University of Münster

May 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	April 1, 2025
Venue	<p>CJD Hamburg, Glockengießerwall 3, 20095 Hamburg, Germany Website: https://www.jugendmigrationsdienste.de/en/ CJD Hamburg is a social and training institution offering integration courses subsidized by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) for young people up to the age of 26. As part of the biographical interviews with young people in disadvantaged and/or vulnerable positions (WP5), CJD Hamburg became our local partner, providing all interviewees with a safe and familiar environment. The CJD provided us with a free conference room for up to 25 people, including white board and TV-screen for our presentation. The CJD is located near Hamburg Central Station, making it easy for all participants to cheaply travel to the venue via means of public or private transportation. The location is barrier free and easy to find. CJD is a private provider.</p>
Duration	10:00 – 14:00 with less than one hour lunch break
Engagement process	<p>We have used diverse communication channels to recruit and invite possible participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First, we have contacted all policy actors who participated in our interviews. - Second, we have contacted local policymakers. However, due to the recent elections both in Hamburg (March 02, 2025) and in Germany (February 23, 2025), many positions have not yet been occupied. We have contacted all political parties. - Third, we have contacted researchers at the main universities in Hamburg, also asking them to invite their students. - Fourth, we have contacted local gatekeepers who provided us contacts on young people involved in the WP5 study. - Fifth, we have contacted all local providers of youth support, teachers, training centres, and trade unions. <p>Most of the invitations were send via email, using a short description of the Innovation Forum and the CLEAR research project, and including the key information on the meeting. The</p>



	<p>email also included a link for an anonymous registration. In some cases, we have called the participants and few participants were invited in person. A major role was also played by our partner CJD, who has spread the invitation in their own networks and also provided few of their own staff to participate in the forum.</p> <p>In total, we have directly contacted over 60 possible participants, the number was multiplied by forwarded invitations.</p> <p>The selection process was oriented to include different stakeholder groups (local policymakers, professionals, employment advisers, teachers, trainers, and young people) genders, and possibly other (ethnic, social) minorities.</p> <p>We have succeeded to have a balanced sample of male and female participants, people from migrant background, and people of different ages and working/educational experiences.</p> <p>During the invitation process, some of the participants have contacted us and asked what we expect from their participation and whether they need to prepare any presentation or provide some information on their work.</p> <p>This was clarified by our research team.</p>
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2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

<p>Participants</p>	<p>Our Innovation Forum included 13 participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 Local policymaker (male) - 5 Teachers/Youth advisors (all female) - 3 Employment advisors (all male) - 2 Young adults (both male) - 1 Researcher (male) - 1 Youth counsellor (female) <p>Six participants were from migration background. No minors have attended the forum. The age range of participants was between ca. 18 and 65 years. All names, institutions, and professional positions were fully anonymised, unless the participants themselves have shared some of this information.</p>
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p>All participants were informed about the purpose and aims of the Innovation Forum, about their rights to engage in or leave the discussion, as well as about the use of graphic material.</p> <p>All participants have signed the list of participants and all but one participant have given their consent with the production of</p>



	<p>graphic contents. The participants were photographed in a way that makes their identification impossible, e.g., only hands were photographed.</p> <p>The informed consent is stored at the institutional premises of the WWU with no access to third parties. No personal data were collected or stored. No name badges were used. The IF was completely anonymous. No other concerns were raised by the participants during, before, or after the meeting.</p> <p>The pictures from the Innovation Forum were made by Jozef Zelinka and Andrea Sittig; they are saved at the institutional servers of the WWU and protected from third party access. In total, 28 pictures were made.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>The IF agenda followed this outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greetings & Registration - Opening session (ca. 15 minutes) - Workshops in 3 groups (ca. 1 hour, 45 minutes) - Lunch break (ca. 1 hour) - Closing session (ca. 45 minutes) <p>The forum was led by the WWU team Jozef Zelinka, Johannes Ludwig Löffler, and Andrea Sittig.</p> <p>During the opening session, we have welcomed the researchers and expressed our thanks towards the hosts. Practical information about the premises, rest rooms, catering, and safety regulations was shared with the participants. The participants were informed about the data regulations and signed the registration form. During the registration, the participants were given different stickers to separate them into three workshop groups.</p> <p>Next, the WWU team has briefly explained the participatory approach of the IF, the research design of the CLEAR project, and presented the agenda of the day.</p> <p>After the introductory note, the participants were divided into three workshop groups. Each workshop group focused on the outcomes of three WPs (WP3, WP4, WP5) relevant for Hamburg. Photo documentation was utilized. No video or audio recordings were made. In the course of the workshop groups, specific documentation of the discussions was managed by the respective researchers who facilitated the discussions. Most importantly, participants were asked to make notes as part of the workshop discussions on sheets of paper. The discussions</p>

	<p>have started with ice-breakers and were followed up by working with the materials provided by CODICI. Every material contained an introductory question or fictional situation, to which the participants responded in their own ways. The researchers have then facilitated the discussions and, where appropriate, presented the project's findings.</p> <p>The three workshop groups were meant to shift between the different tables to work on every WP. However, due to the vivid and passionate discussions, the researchers have decided to only change once. This has turned out to be of great benefit, since during the wrap up session at the end of the Innovation Forum, everyone has learned something new from other groups.</p> <p>The closing session started by summarizing the main outcomes of every group. During the session, participants were asking further questions, shared their observations, and provided feedback on the forum.</p>
<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p>The Innovation Forums in Germany was titled: Erfolgreich leben und lernen in Hamburg – Wer kann das (nicht)?; English: Successfully living and learning in Hamburg – who can (not) make it?</p> <p>The objectives of the Forum were to enable an open discussion between different educational stakeholders in Hamburg on this topic and the research results provided by the research team. Generally, all participants were curious about the research results and have shared their feedback on every topic. We summarize the outcomes of the debates according to every workshop group which represented different project's WPs.</p> <p>WP3</p> <p>The WP3 workshop started with a reflexion on how the participants have estimated their labour market perspective given their then current educational outcomes. This exercise was designed based on WP3 results on the regional disparities based on different opportunity structures.</p> <p>During the session, the participants have shared their experiences and realised that they come from privileged family backgrounds. They had (consciously or unconsciously) perceived their environment as having a lot of opportunities for them to choose their own educational path. Also, the strong support</p>



gave them a heightened sense of agency in making and following their own strategic life decisions. When recalling their school time, they have never or only seldom used the opportunities provided by job centres or schools, such as career days, but have mostly followed their own professional ambitions.

These results are in stark contrast with our results from the interviews with young people, who often lack family support (especially in terms of financial support), and have to rely on their own. Also, they rarely have more long-term ambitions, but focus instead on short-term tasks. When confronted with these results, the participants were curious about the success stories and strategies of those who were able to move forward in their educational and/or labour market situation. They have also concluded that although success in life and education seemingly correlate, there are many pathways to achieve a good life. One central aspect was also the focus on individual capabilities, agency, and a willing mindset, which were considered key factors in the educational success.

WP4

The WP4 workshop started with an exercise on reflecting a particular case. The case was a young person, who has dropped out of the school and now wants to get back on the track. The participants were asked to deliberate who might this person be and what steps are needed to get back into the school.

When imagining the situation of an early school leaver without vocational training or long-term job perspectives, most participants utilized a rationale of individual agency, socio-economic condition and structural boundaries that limit the ability of young adults to re-enter the educational and vocational system. In one case, early-school-leaving was associated with a young female adult from a poor socio-economic background, while in another case the early-school-leaver was framed as a male with family conflicts, mental health issues, and possible substance abuse.

In two cases, an early school leaver was imagined as a young father and mother under socio-economic pressure. While in case of the father, continuing the studies was connected with the idea of future plans, in the case of the mothers, continuing the studies was connected with childrearing, thereby revealing



	<p>stereotyped gender roles – man as a breadwinner, woman as a caregiver.</p> <p>Most participants operationalized the construction of learning outcomes based on the individual life course situation of young adults. (Under)achievement in this case was strongly related to the past and present (“where do you come from?”; “who are you?”), such as the family situation, as well as personal ambitions (“where do you want to go?”).</p> <p>While Hamburg offers a wide variety of vocational opportunities, institutional boundaries such as age limitations were seen as unnecessary (bureaucratic) limitations in the re-schooling process.</p> <p>WP5</p> <p>The WP5 session started with an exercise based on a quotation from the project’s interviews conducted in Hamburg. The quotation says: Listen carefully and the participants had to reflect on the quote and give their opinion on what policymakers could do differently in their approach to young people. During this session, all participants have expressed the importance of significant others, like teachers, trainers, professional advisors etc. In one particular case, a male participant was deliberately given a better grade by his teacher. As a result of that, he was motivated to study the subject more eagerly and experienced this situation as a trust in his future studies.</p> <p>Another female participant was at risk of dropping out of school, but was given a leading role in school theatre by her teacher. This experience has spurred her motivation and strengthen her self-confidence after which she continued her studies more successfully and even used the techniques learned during the theatre classes to motivate herself in other subjects.</p> <p>In general, the participants have emphasized the necessity of an individual approach by the professionals and advisors instead of approaching the person through stereotypical lenses.</p> <p>It was further highlighted that expectations of academic performance created pressure on the participants and that both students and teachers need to reflect on what works and what not under the given circumstances. Too much pressure on academic performance often leads to deprivation and</p>
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	<p>frustration, as they cannot be reached by everyone in the same way.</p> <p>Finally, it was suggested to acknowledge a culture of failure, which helps to frame the educational process as an experience, not as a competition.</p>
Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion	<p>The workshop discussions were opened with an ice- breaker. If needed, the discussion was enriched by the project's findings, follow-up questions, remarks from previous group discussions, or targeted questions on professional or educational experiences.</p>
Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?	<p>The participants were divided in three different working groups, all of which were in the same room. There were no specific criteria for division, the participants were divided randomly based on when they have signed the informed consent. This enabled us to overcome power disbalances, anonymise the procedures, and avoid our (unconscious) biases as researchers. Furthermore, since not every participant has previously registered, it was impossible for us to estimate who represents which stakeholder group.</p> <p>Only in course of the discussions, this became more obvious.</p>
Impressions from the IF	<p>In general, the Innovation Forum went very smoothly and with no disruptions. Two of the participants had to leave after the lunch break. We have observed an inclusive and open conversation throughout the entire forum.</p> <p>The participants have welcomed the specific format of the forum and the ability to freely express themselves and exchange their opinions, experiences, biographies, and personal vignettes.</p>

3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

Feedback from participants	<p>General conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was criticised that the stakeholders in education and labour market lack systematic cooperation on local level. Some improvements have been made in the recent years, but more cooperation instead of artificial competition and more listening to each other is necessary. - The professionals have welcomed the opportunity to reflect on their own profession and working style, and
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	<p>enjoyed being positively surprised in their everyday routines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The participants have also exchanged their contact information, brought flyers and newsletters, and even thought of joint actions. This is valued as one immediate practical outcomes of the IF in Hamburg. - One young adult concluded that, to his own surprise, he was able to share his whole biography, including his personal experiences of vulnerability during the COVID-19 period. - The professionals have acknowledged that they were sometimes as helpless as those who seek help or advice. - One suggestion from the participants was to provide more precise information regarding the content of the IF; also, in order to obtain permission to participate in the forum. - Some participants did expect more straightforward reporting on the project results, but were in the end thankful to learn about research results in the course of the three workshops. - Others have enjoyed the more informal, anonymous, and low-threshold design of the IF, which made it easier for them to open themselves and engage in the discussions, something they otherwise wouldn't do in more formal meetings. - Two participants of the IF have announced that they would like to join the project's Final Conference. - One professional shared his experience that more measurable indicators have already been deployed in his institution to outweigh the focus on formal learning, but this has often led to discouragement on the side of participants of the courses, who, as a result, feel relegated to numbers and have not been treated as personalities. Some of them have not returned for a next meeting. - All participants have actively engaged in the discussions. - No power hierarchies were observed. - One participant has raised the concern that the current political situation in Germany, in particular the rise of far-right parties, can be viewed as one of the key disrupting
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	<p>factors affecting groups in multiple disadvantaged positions, especially those from migrant background.</p>
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>We summarize the main innovation aspects as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hamburg-Mitte is considered an artificial statistical unit. Young people do not think about their job or educational opportunities in administrative boundaries. - Hamburg is a centre of attraction for many young people, however most of them have unrealistic expectations on themselves and on the city. This often starts in the families. - Young people often do not follow the standard educational paths, but are influenced by role models or other influential personalities. - Professional advisors often must deal with and overcome young people's disappointments. Since they expect to move forward more smoothly or get immediately better paid jobs, the reality that the advisors encounter is that they have to curb their expectations and devise more realistic goals. - New research should explore the binary between the availability of (local/regional) support programs for youth in disadvantaged positions and institutional restrictions such as age limitations in education. - Young people as well as local youth advisors frequently don't understand the purpose of some rules/regulations. Yet, in order to follow them ("to fight against the windmills"), they need to act in accordance with them. One example was a young man who pretended to be in need of assistance in order to continue his studies instead of being forced by the jobcentre to get into the workforce. - The impact of external acknowledgement of young people's qualities and competences by youth advisors or mentors needs to be more accounted for in the future research. - In cases where young people feel that they are not listened to, their motivation and agency decreases, leading to frustration and disappointment with institutional structures.



<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>The Innovation Forum was announced a week before the event took place online on CLEAR's LinkedIn account (https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7310240793359765504/) and on the WWU's institutional webpage (https://www.uni-muenster.de/EW/aktuelles/2025/innovationsforum.html). Both announcements were made in German.</p> <p>We have prepared and printed a handout for the participants (see Annex 3).</p> <p>The results of the Innovation Forum in Hamburg are announced on LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7313600490334806018/) and will be further shared on the WWU's institutional webpage as well as on the CLEAR's homepage.</p> <p>The participants were invited to participate in the Final Conference, which was announced in the plenary session. Two participants have expressed their interest in the event.</p> <p>The participants have obtained a signed certificate of attendance, CLEAR notebooks, bottles, and pencils, as well as other dissemination material.</p> <p>Some participants have asked for further results and contacts on other project partners, as they were interested in the results of other Innovation Forums, in particular in Italy and Greece.</p>
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Figure 6 – Innovation Forum in Hamburg



Credits: WWU Team





Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Greece

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Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

May 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	14 April 2025
Venue	<p>Centre for the Dissemination of Research Results (KEDEA), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (3is Septemvriou Avenue, GR-54124).</p> <p>The venue was selected based on its accessibility, university affiliation, and non-hierarchical layout, suitable for participatory activities and group discussions.</p> <p>KEDEA provided both formal and informal space arrangements, including an open atrium, medium-sized working rooms, and flexible catering spaces. The building, while institutionally hosted, was used in a neutral, dialogic way, consistent with CLEAR's principles of low-threshold engagement.</p>
Duration	12:00 – 18:00 (6 hours, including breaks and informal networking)
Engagement process	<p>The Thessaloniki Innovation Forum was organised with particular attention to cross-sectoral balance, inclusion, and intergenerational dialogue. Participants were identified through a collaborative stakeholder mapping conducted by the AUTH CLEAR research team, with input from local authorities, VET institutions, NGOs, and second-chance education providers. An invitation-only strategy was applied, based on five inclusion criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Diverse youth profiles (NEETs, Roma, migrants, students in VET and SDE) – Balanced representation from municipal policy actors – Experienced educators from VET, adult, and second-chance education – Civil society actors engaged in educational, social inclusion, or rights-based work – Labour market stakeholders from sectors with high youth employment relevance <p>The 38 invited participants were contacted directly by AUTH or partner NGOs. Visual, accessible information was shared in Greek, with translated CLEAR materials adapted for this national context. Participants were encouraged to bring their experience, not formal knowledge, as their main resource.</p>



	<p>Young participants were supported by NGO liaisons before and during the forum. Particular care was taken to create a safe and non-extractive research atmosphere.</p>
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2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

<p>Participants</p>	<p>Young Adults (18 participants): Including NEETs, Roma, migrants, VET students, and learners from Second Chance Schools. Gender: 10 F, 8 M Ages: 18–30 Backgrounds: Mixed socio-economic, migrant, and minority ethnic profiles.</p> <p>Policy Representatives (6 participants): From the Municipality of Thessaloniki: departments of education, youth affairs, and Roma inclusion. Gender: 3 F, 3 M</p> <p>Trainers and Educators (4 participants): From public IEK, OAED apprenticeships, and Second Chance Schools. Gender: 2 F, 2 M</p> <p>NGO Representatives (5 participants): From ARSIS, PRAKSIS, Solidarity Now, KMOP, and Generation 2.0. 3 F, 2 M</p> <p>Academics (3 participants): Professors and researchers in education and sociology from AUTH. 3 F</p> <p>Labour Market Stakeholders (2 participants): From the tourism and healthcare sectors, involved in vocational placements and HR. 2 M</p>
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p><u>Informed Consent for Visual Materials</u> Prior to the start of the Thessaloniki Innovation Forum, all participants were provided with an Informed Consent Document (ICD) adapted from the official CLEAR project template,</p>



translated into Greek and tailored to the context of the Forum.

The document clearly outlined:

The purpose of the Innovation Forum within the scope of the CLEAR project (Grant Agreement No. 101061155, Horizon Europe)

The voluntary nature of participation

Details on how photos, quotes, and written contributions might be used for dissemination, reporting, or academic purposes

The option to decline consent for photography or identification without any consequence for participation

Participants were given time to read the document and ask questions before signing. Consent forms were collected physically on-site by the AUTH coordination team.

Storage and Processing of Personal Data

All signed informed consent forms and attendance records (including names, roles, and email addresses) were scanned and securely stored:

- In encrypted, password-protected folders within the AUTH CLEAR project server
- Accessible only to authorised project team members
- In accordance with the AUTH data protection policy and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU 2016/679)

No sensitive personal data (e.g. ID numbers, addresses, health information) were collected. Participation was anonymised in all outputs unless explicit permission was granted.

Photographic Documentation and Visual Authorship

Photographs were taken during the event by a designated media staff member affiliated with the AUTH outreach and communications unit, with prior ethical approval. Only participants who provided explicit written consent were included in group or individual photos. Photos focused primarily on:

- Group activities and discussion atmospheres
- Visual materials and outputs (e.g. posters, mind maps, the "Tree of Proposals")



	<p>All visual materials were stored in the AUTH archive and disseminated only through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – CLEAR project’s internal communication tools – Official project reporting (e.g. WP8 deliverables) – Social media posts pre-approved by the CLEAR dissemination team <p>Visual authorship is retained by AUTH as the institution responsible for the event and the designated photographer, in accordance with CLEAR’s internal communication and dissemination policy.</p> <p>No audio or video recordings of verbal conversations were made, in order to respect participants’ right to candid expression without surveillance or archiving of spoken content.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>The Thessaloniki IF was structured as a six-hour, dialogue-based participatory forum, guided by CLEAR’s WP4 and WP5 frameworks, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Diverging biographical learning trajectories – Youth perceptions of recognition, assessment, and institutional empathy <p>The forum followed a World Café format, with six thematic tables and rotating 15-minute rounds. Themes were based on recontextualised CLEAR findings.</p> <p>Core Agenda Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 12:00–12:30: Registration and welcome coffee – 12:30–12:50: Opening plenary – presentation of CLEAR, WP4/WP5, and methodological framing – 12:50–13:10: Ice-breaker exercise: “My Learning Path in 3 Words” – 13:10–13:40: Light lunch and informal networking – 13:40–15:40: Six World Café rotations (6 tables × 15 minutes) – 15:40–16:00: Coffee break and reflection wall – 16:00–16:30: Plenary I – Key messages from tables and visual canvas unveiling – 16:30–17:15: Open Reflection Space: “If I Could Change One Thing...” – 17:15–17:45: Plenary II – Closing circle, proposals, and collective takeaways



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 17:45–18:00: Thank-you session and farewell <p>Themes of Discussion Tables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diverging Trajectories: What leads two similar learners to opposite outcomes? (WP4) - Returning to Education: Barriers and bridges to second chances (WP4) - Migration & Recognition: The invisible diplomas and informal learning (WP4) - Participation is Not Optional: Youth voice and institutional listening (WP5) - Grades Are Not Value: Reimagining assessment beyond quantification (WP5) - Success Looks Like Someone Else: Representations and internalised failure (WP5) <p>Facilitators at each table took notes, encouraged visual expression, and supported equitable participation. “Hosts” summarised each round’s key points.</p>
<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p><u>Main Objectives of the Innovation Forum</u></p> <p>The Thessaloniki Innovation Forum aimed to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a dialogic space where young people, educators, institutional actors, and civil society stakeholders could engage in reflective, participatory discussion on learning outcomes, trajectories, and exclusion. 2. Recontextualise and critically elaborate CLEAR project research findings, particularly from WP4 (biographical divergence and educational inequality) and WP5 (youth perspectives and learner voice), within the socio-educational landscape of Greece. 3. Translate evidence into guiding questions and dialogic processes through which participants could challenge, reframe, and reimagine current educational systems, policies, and practices. <p>These objectives aligned with CLEAR’s transversal approach in WP8, promoting locally grounded participatory reflection to support multi-scalar policy transformation and educational inclusivity.</p>



Main Research Outputs Re-Elaborated and Integrated

The following CLEAR research outputs were explicitly referenced, adapted, and operationalised:

WP4: Analysis of educational life courses, with emphasis on divergent trajectories and structural mediation (e.g., class, migration, school labelling).

Re-elaboration: Presented in scenario form (e.g., “two learners, same start, divergent paths”) to initiate table-based storytelling, comparison, and reflection on subjective and systemic dimensions.

WP5: Transcripts and thematised quotes from qualitative interviews with young learners, highlighting how institutional cultures shape motivation, recognition, and disengagement.

Re-elaboration: Converted into visual cards and direct prompts (“They ask us after they decide”, “The grade is not my value”) used to stimulate group dialogue, especially around assessment and participation.

WP3/WP6 (supporting role): While not central, selective statistical findings on disparities in educational outcomes and national evaluation cultures informed the background briefing and table prompts related to assessment and "meritocracy".

WP7: Elements of the national context papers were summarised by facilitators to ensure the discussions were locally situated and policy-relevant.

Main Topics of Discussion

Each discussion table explored a thematically distinct, yet methodologically linked issue derived from CLEAR’s research findings. The six thematic strands were:

1. Diverging Educational Trajectories (WP4)

What systemic and relational factors lead two seemingly similar students to opposite life outcomes?

2. Returning to Education – Second Chances and Structural Barriers (WP4)



	<p>What supports and obstructs re-entry into education for NEETs, adult learners, Roma and migrant youth?</p> <p>3. Migration and Informal Learning Recognition (WP4, WP7) How can competences gained through migration, informal work, or life experience be validated and legitimised?</p> <p>4. Youth Participation and Institutional Listening (WP5) Is participation in education decision-making real or symbolic? How can youth agency be made structural?</p> <p>5. Assessment and Motivation – Challenging the Grade Logic (WP5) In what ways do grades motivate or demotivate learners? What alternatives are meaningful to youth?</p> <p>6. Cultural Constructions of Success and Visibility (WP5) Who gets represented as “successful”? How do educational narratives invisibilise marginalised learners?</p> <p>Each topic was structured with guiding prompts and reworked visual or narrative tools, based on CLEAR outputs.</p> <p><u>Translated Objectives into Guiding Questions</u> Each discussion station was animated by open-ended questions translated from research insights. These were not only cognitive prompts, but also affective and experiential activators:</p> <p>1. Trajectories Table “Why do two people with the same school background end up on different paths?” “What helped—or hurt—your sense of possibility?”</p> <p>2. Second Chance Table “What made you return—or what stops people from returning—to learning?” “What would make second-chance learning feel like a real option?”</p> <p>3. Recognition Table</p>
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	<p>“What have you learned outside of school that no one sees?” “How should the system acknowledge what migrants and informal learners know?”</p> <p>4. Participation Table “When did someone really listen to your voice in school?” “What does real participation look like—not just consultation?”</p> <p>5. Assessment Table “What does the grade say—and what does it hide?” “What would assessment look like if it respected your journey?”</p> <p>6. Success Table “When you hear the word ‘success’, who do you picture?” “How would you define success in your own terms?”</p>
<p>Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion</p>	<p>The Thessaloniki Innovation Forum employed a combination of dialogic, participatory, and arts-based facilitation techniques, aligned with CLEAR’s transversal participatory methodology (WP8). The process design intentionally blurred the boundaries between formal and non-formal methods to foster relational openness and collective meaning-making.</p> <p><u>Opening the Discussion</u></p> <p>The event began with a structured plenary session designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Welcome participants in an accessible and inclusive tone – Present the goals of the CLEAR project and its focus on WP4 and WP5 – Introduce the format and expectations of the day – Establish a safe, non-hierarchical communicative space <p>This was followed by an ice-breaking activity titled “My Learning Path in Three Words.” Each participant was invited to reflect on and write down three words or images that captured their own educational journey. These were then anonymously posted on a communal “Narrative Wall.” This exercise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activated personal reflection – Acknowledged diverse learning biographies – Encouraged emotional investment and vulnerability-sharing – Visually signalled the legitimacy of lived experience as data



Facilitators then explained the World Café format, ensuring all participants understood the structure of the six thematic rotations, their role as co-learners, and the importance of dialogic listening. Clear timeframes, movement instructions, and documentation practices were communicated.

Steering the Discussions

The main dialogue phase was organised around six thematic discussion stations, each grounded in a re-elaborated CLEAR WP4 or WP5 theme. Discussion rounds were organised in six 15-minute cycles, allowing participants to move between topics and contribute to evolving conversations. The following methods were used to guide the discussions:

Table Facilitation

Each table was led by a trained facilitator (from AUTH, NGOs or community educators), who played multiple roles:

- Framing the topic using a short narrative or quote (derived from WP5 interviews or WP4 scenarios)
- Encouraging all voices, particularly from youth and minoritised participants
- Ensuring respectful and equitable turn-taking
- Using open-ended questions as dialogic prompts
- Capturing key points on paper or visual posters

Table Hosting

In addition to facilitators, each table had a designated host, who remained at the table during the rotations. The host:

- Summarised the previous round's conversation to incoming participants
- Maintained thematic coherence and continuity across rotations
- Synthesised evolving ideas and contributed to final plenary reporting

Discussion Stimuli

To avoid abstraction and anchor discussions in real experience, each table used:



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quote cards drawn from WP5 transcripts (e.g. “They ask us after they decide.”) – Scenario posters adapted from WP4 (e.g. two learners, same start, different outcomes) – Coloured prompt questions printed in large font – Markers and large-format paper to allow for key words, visual metaphors, and diagrams <p>Participants were invited to use drawing, mapping, and bullet-point writing as alternative modes of expression, especially for those less comfortable with verbal articulation.</p> <p><u>Collective Closure and Reflection</u></p> <p>At the end of the rotations, discussions were steered back into plenary for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Visual synthesis: the central "Narrative Wall" and table posters were used to share insights – Live co-creation: participants contributed final reflections through an open “If I could change one thing...” exercise – Tree of Proposals: participants wrote recommendations or affirmations on coloured leaves and added them to a symbolic tree installation <p>The final plenary was structured as a reflective circle, where guiding questions were posed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What stays with you from today? 2. What should change in the way we do education? 3. What do you want to say to the people who design the system? <p>This closing phase aimed to honour the process, surface collective insights, and reaffirm that all voices had been not only heard—but taken seriously.</p>
<p>Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?</p>	<p>Yes. Participants were divided into six rotating working groups during the World Café session of the Thessaloniki Innovation Forum. Each group corresponded to a thematic table inspired by CLEAR WP4 and WP5 content. The rotation ensured that all participants had the opportunity to contribute to each topic throughout the day.</p>



The group composition and movement were not fixed throughout the forum. Instead, participants were intentionally redistributed every 15 minutes (following the World Café method), allowing for maximum cross-pollination of perspectives across different sectors, generations, and social backgrounds.

Although participants self-rotated across tables, initial placements were carefully facilitated to ensure that each table at any given time included:

- At least one young person (Roma, migrant, NEET, VET/SDE learner)
- At least one professional (educator, policy representative, or NGO worker)
- Where possible, a mix of genders and institutional roles

This composition aimed to:

- Prevent homogenous groupings (e.g., all educators or all youth in one circle)
- Maximise intergenerational and cross-sectoral dialogue
- Facilitate the emergence of unexpected intersections of experience and perspective

The criteria used for managing group diversity were:

1. Role diversity (youth, professional, academic, policymaker)
2. Experiential proximity to the discussion topic (e.g., migrant youth placed early in the Migration & Recognition table)
3. Dialogic balance, with facilitators observing and ensuring inclusive participation throughout

Two trained facilitators oversaw the flow of group movements and offered additional support to participants who felt unsure or disoriented by the rotation format. Importantly, the seating plan remained non-hierarchical, with tables arranged in circles and no fixed “expert” positions.

This open yet curated group methodology contributed significantly to the forum’s success in generating layered, multi-



	<p>perspective insights and enabling participants to step outside of their institutional roles and into shared dialogue.</p>
<p>Impressions from the IF</p>	<p><u>General Impressions and Atmosphere of the Forum</u></p> <p>The Thessaloniki Innovation Forum was marked by a distinctly open, reflective, and emotionally resonant tone. Despite the diversity of participants—ranging from institutional policymakers to Roma youth, migrant learners, and VET educators—the atmosphere remained consistently non-judgmental and dialogic throughout the six-hour process. Participants frequently remarked on the uniqueness of the space created: one in which “experiences were treated as knowledge,” and “young people were not just present, but listened to.” The narrative approach, grounded in CLEAR’s WP4 and WP5, helped flatten hierarchies and generate affective trust among individuals who would not normally share a table in policy consultations.</p> <p>The tone of the discussions was both critical and hopeful. Many young participants expressed frustration at their past educational exclusion, but also gratitude at being able to express themselves freely. Educators and NGO professionals shared institutional constraints openly, often admitting discomfort with current assessment systems and participation structures.</p> <p><u>Ethical Issues Raised</u></p> <p>No formal or informal ethical complaints were registered during or after the Forum.</p> <p>Participants had all signed Informed Consent Documents, available in Greek and adapted from CLEAR’s standard form, which clearly outlined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Their right to withdraw at any point – The use and storage of visual and textual data – Consent conditions for photographs or quotes <p>Nonetheless, two ethical dimensions were discussed within the Forum itself:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The risk of tokenistic participation: <p>Several youth participants, especially those from Roma and NEET backgrounds, expressed prior negative experiences with being “invited” into policy spaces without follow-up or real</p>



influence. The Forum facilitators explicitly addressed this by stating how outputs would be used and encouraging proposals to be documented in their own words.

2. Visibility and vulnerability:

Some migrant youth were initially hesitant to speak about their undocumented experiences or feelings of exclusion. Facilitators made space for written, anonymous contributions and emphasised that “passing” on a topic was always welcome.

These reflections were handled with careful facilitation, reinforcing the Forum as a space for ethical presence, not just procedural consent.

Difficulties Faced in Implementation

1. Logistical Complexity of Rotation-Based Dialogue:

Maintaining six parallel World Café stations with regular participant rotation posed spatial and timekeeping challenges. Although most participants adapted quickly, two required additional support to reorient themselves after the second round. This was mitigated by assigning two roaming facilitators to assist transitions.

2. Language Diversity and Interpretation Needs:

While most participants spoke Greek fluently, a small subset of migrant youth preferred expressing themselves in English. Ad hoc peer interpretation was provided by bilingual NGO staff. For future Forums, provision of discreet interpretation support or multilingual materials may improve accessibility.

3. Managing Emotional Intensity:

Several stories shared—particularly around institutional racism, learning shame, or self-stigma—were emotionally charged. Facilitators paused discussions when necessary and allowed participants to momentarily step back. No participants exited the forum early, and feedback indicated that the emotional dimension was seen as “necessary, not overwhelming.”

4. Documentation in Real-Time:

Capturing the depth of discussions across six rotating tables was difficult without audio recording (intentionally avoided for ethical reasons). Facilitators took visual notes, supported by summarising “table hosts.” While this preserved confidentiality, it required post-event synthesis by the AUTH team.



	<p><u>Summary of Participant Feedback</u></p> <p>In the final plenary and open feedback box, participants offered key reflections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “This is the first time I said something about school that wasn’t just complaint—but proposal.” - “I came in thinking I didn’t have anything to offer. I’m leaving thinking I should be part of this more often.” <p>“It felt like you really meant it when you said ‘your voice matters’.”</p>
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3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

<p>Feedback from participants</p>	<p><u>Participant Feedback and Reflections</u></p> <p>Feedback was gathered through multiple formats during and after the Innovation Forum, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two plenary reflection rounds (verbal, open-circle format) - A silent feedback wall (“If I could change one thing...”) - A feedback box for anonymous comments - Informal conversations captured by facilitators in field notes <p>The feedback was consistently characterised by a high level of emotional engagement, intellectual stimulation, and a sense of belonging to a space of authentic co-reflection. Below is a synthesis of the most representative and impactful contributions, grouped thematically:</p> <p>1. Acknowledging Recognition and Human Dignity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “This is the first time I felt that someone wasn’t analysing me but listening to me.” - “When I talked about leaving school, nobody asked ‘why didn’t you try harder’ – they asked ‘what happened?’ That changes everything.” - “Usually I go to events where I’m a ‘case’. Today I was a voice.” <p>Several Roma and migrant participants highlighted the significance of not being othered or instrumentalised during the Forum. For them, the emotional safety of the space allowed experiences of failure, exclusion, and resilience to be shared without fear of stigmatisation.</p> <p>2. Emotional and Reflective Impact</p>
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- "I didn't think talking about school would make me feel so much. But when I heard the girl say 'grades are not my value', it stayed with me."
- "We started talking about success and ended up talking about who we are."
- "This made me cry a bit – but not in a bad way. More like something I've been carrying finally came out."

Youth described the Forum as a rare space for emotional literacy, especially in relation to institutional experiences often framed through technical language (e.g., "outcomes," "achievement," "deficits").

3. Critical Reflections on Education Systems

- "The system wants us to be flexible, but it's not flexible for us."
- "They teach us how to pass exams, not how to tell our story."
- "What if every school did this once a year—with parents, too?"

Participants critiqued formal education for its rigid, transactional logic. Several educators also acknowledged feeling constrained by structural pressures that conflict with their pedagogical intentions.

4. Methodological Appreciation and Suggestions

- "The table discussions were intense but short. Maybe we needed two days."
- "I liked that we didn't have to sit through boring presentations."
- "It helped that I could write instead of speak when I felt nervous."

The World Café format was appreciated for its non-linear, multi-voice approach, although many suggested that the rotations could be extended to allow more depth. The use of visual tools, anonymous prompts, and informal creative methods (e.g. mind maps, word trees) was particularly welcomed by NEETs and less formally educated participants.

5. Vision for Continuity and Structural Change

- "Don't let this be a one-time thing."



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “I want to be part of the next step. Not just today.” - “Make space for this in schools. Not as ‘extra’, but as core learning.” - “If the municipality really wants to hear from us, they should come to our spaces too.” <p>There was widespread demand for continuity, including: Follow-up workshops led by young people Municipal youth councils based on Forum methodology Structural integration of reflective dialogue into VET and SDE programmes</p>
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p><u>Exploratory Research Questions</u></p> <p>Based on the narratives, table dialogues, and reflections gathered during the Thessaloniki Innovation Forum, the following research questions can guide further exploration within the CLEAR project’s broader objectives (especially WP4, WP5, and WP8):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do institutional labelling practices shape learners’ educational self-concept and long-term trajectories? This question emerges from participants’ reflections on being named “failures” early and the role this plays in their disengagement or re-entry. 2. In what ways does recognition (or misrecognition) of informal and migration-acquired competences affect motivation and participation in formal learning pathways? Rooted in discussions with migrant youth and NGO workers, this question addresses systemic gaps in validation and their emotional and structural consequences. 3. What alternative models of assessment enable students to feel valued, especially those from marginalised or non-linear educational backgrounds? This question builds on powerful critiques of grading as an alienating mechanism, and the desire for narrative, peer-based, or portfolio assessments. 4. What conditions enable genuine youth participation in educational governance rather than symbolic consultation?



	<p>Drawn from young participants’ frustration with tokenistic “participation,” this question seeks to distinguish performative from structural inclusion.</p> <p>5. How does the framing of “success” within schools and public discourse contribute to educational inequality, and how can more plural conceptions be institutionally supported? Prompted by the table on success and stereotypes, this question challenges monocultural definitions of achievement.</p> <p><u>Policy Recommendations and Priorities for Educational Stakeholders</u></p> <p>During the Forum, participants collectively articulated several practical and visionary proposals. These reflect both bottom-up lived knowledge and the systemic insights derived from CLEAR’s WP4 and WP5 findings. They are directed toward local and national educational policymakers, institutional leaders, and curriculum designers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institutionalise Youth Voice Structures Establish school-based and municipal-level youth councils with decision-making capacity in curriculum, evaluation, and student life planning. 2. Introduce and Scale Narrative-Based Assessment Pilot narrative, formative, and portfolio-based evaluation methods across Second Chance Schools, VET institutions, and general education as inclusive assessment alternatives. 3. Develop a National Recognition Framework for Informal and Migration-Based Learning Establish decentralised hubs (in universities, NGOs, municipalities) that support the validation of life competences through narrative tools and learner-designed portfolios. 4. Embed Empathy and Co-Design in Teacher Training Reform teacher education to include training on intergenerational communication, structural empathy, and participatory pedagogy.
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	<p>5. Redefine “Success” through Curriculum and Media Integration Integrate multiple success narratives into textbooks, school displays, and public campaigns—highlighting non-linear, community-based, and creative pathways.</p> <p>6. Bridge Formal and Non-Formal Education Systems Create mobility frameworks that allow smooth transitions between non-formal learning environments (e.g. youth centres, NGOs) and formal systems like VET and SDE.</p> <p>7. Ensure Long-Term Forum Continuity and Local Adaptation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage municipalities and ministries to adopt the CLEAR Innovation Forum model as a recurring civic practice for inclusive educational policy dialogue.
<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p><u>Dissemination of the Innovation Forum Experience</u> The outcomes and atmosphere of the Thessaloniki Innovation Forum (14 April 2025) were disseminated through multiple formal and informal communication channels, both within and beyond the CLEAR consortium.</p> <p>1. Project-Level Dissemination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A short report and event highlight summary were sent to the CLEAR WP8 coordination team (UNIGE) for integration into project-wide reporting and synthesis documents. - Key insights, quotations, and visual outputs from the Forum (e.g., the co-created canvas, quotes from youth) were translated into English and shared with CLEAR partners via internal email and a secure project repository. - A full English version of the Forum Report (the one at hand), including table notes, was submitted to the WP8 lead for inclusion in the next project deliverable (D8.3 or equivalent synthesis task). <p>2. Online Public Dissemination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A bilingual (Greek-English) news post summarising the event's key messages was prepared for publication on the CLEAR project website.



- A short photo-rich summary post was shared on the official LinkedIn page of the CLEAR project, including a quote from a youth participant.

3. Visual and Printed Outputs for Dissemination

- A one-page bilingual handout summarising the Forum (objectives, methodology, recommendations) was distributed digitally to all participants. It was also displayed at the closing plenary.
- Participants received a digital version of the “Youth Narratives” visual canvas co-created during the Forum, with a brief explanation of how their ideas were integrated.
- Selected quotes and visual content were printed and exhibited at the AUTH pedagogical exhibition space in KEDEA for one week after the event.

Participant Follow-Up and Continued Engagement

Participants were not treated as isolated informants but as ongoing co-thinkers in the CLEAR process. To this end:

- A personalised thank-you email was sent to each participant (via the registration database) containing:
- A digital certificate of participation (for use in CVs or academic portfolios)
- A PDF copy of the full report (in Greek)
- The visual canvas from the Forum
- A short feedback form and invitation to continue engagement

Participants were explicitly invited to engage in future CLEAR activities, including the CLEAR Final Conference, scheduled for September 2025.



Figure 7 - Innovation Forum in Thessaloniki



Credits: AUTH Team





Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Italy - Genoa

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CODICI

March 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	February 1st, 2025
Venue	<p>Condiviso (a communication and design factory with coworking space) + Art Gallery (a private space for arts and exhibitions), at the ancient port of Genoa (a well-known tourist area, very accessible from the city center).</p> <p>The two locations are adjacent, accessible, multifunctional, luminous, comfortable. The buildings are non-institutional, non-academic and low-threshold venues.</p> <p>They are both private spaces on rent.</p>
Duration	14:30 – 17:00 (2h30) (+ aperitivo)
Engagement process	<p>We adopted an invitation-only approach, using a targeted stakeholder mapping process. The engagement of participants was mainly achieved by drawing on the personal and professional networks of the UNIGE research team. More specifically, professionals (school teachers at different educational levels) and policy-makers were selected and invited based on contacts established during previous research conducted by the team at a local level. The invited young people were reached through personal contacts, with only one WP5 interviewee being included. The invited young people were also asked to try to engage other youths. In addition, news about the IF was posted on the official social networks and news channels of the University of Genoa.</p> <p>We have chosen to particularly invest on inviting schools teachers among professionals to give voice to a research target that was rarely involved in the previous stages of the CLEAR research.</p>

2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

Participants	<p>Policy makers: N°: 2; Gender balance: 1 M; 2 F; Type of institutions represented: Regional School Authority; Youth Policies for Genoa Municipality.</p> <p>Professionals: N°: 7; Gender balance: 3 M; 4 F; Education field represented (formal/non formal/informal ed.): formal education; Type of institutions represented: lower and higher secondary schools; Role: teachers.</p>
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	<p>Young people: N°: 14; Gender balance: 1 M; 13 F.</p>
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p>Participants were informed about ethical aspects and data management procedures by means of the Informed Consent Document (the standard document provided by the University of Genoa were adapted with information regarding CLEAR). In the document, participants were also asked about their consent to be photographed.</p> <p>All the participants subscribed the document and no other ethical issues were raised.</p> <p>The signed Informed Consent Documents and the List of Presence document (reporting names and e-mail accounts of the participants) have been scanned and stored online on the project's server.</p> <p>The picture were shot by a professional photographer engaged by the UNIGE Team, and the authorship is shared with him.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>The IF agenda followed this outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registration time (desk + 2 people managing) - Opening session (in plenary -15') - Dialogue session (in subgroups -1h20') - Closing session (in plenary -30') - Aperitivo time (around 60') <p>The forum was steered by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 chairman of UNIGE for opening and closing sessions 1 researcher (UNIGE) + 1 facilitator (CODICI) for group discussions (4+4) 1 professional photographer managed the visual reportage (photo shooting of key moments and activities) CODICI supervised visual reporting and organizational and logistical support <p>Photo documentation was preferred over video storytelling or audio recording. More specific documentation of the table discussions was managed by the researchers who facilitated the discussions in the 4 groups. They took notes on large sheets of paper placed on the table among participants while they were discussing.</p>
<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p>Consistent with the choice of involving as many teachers as possible within the professional sub-group of participants, we</p>

have focused on the impact of evaluation (in terms of rationale, process, and measures) in school environments on students' feelings, aspirations, and future planning.

Starting from a selection of the results of the WP3 statistical analyses, a poster was created displaying four statements related to the potential perceptions and expectations of young people when thinking about their educational futures and building their project plans. The four statements, corresponding to four possible project profiles, were developed based on the analysis of data from different economic contexts and, consequently, the varying opportunity structures of the countries involved in CLEAR.

Drawing from the WP4 analysis of the institutional framing and dominant understanding of LO(s) at a national level, a discussion starter was created, asking participants to discuss the following scenario: "Imagine two people who grew up together. They lived in the same neighborhood and attended the same schools. In school, they were both considered low achievers, but their fates have been very different: one of them is unemployed, while the other is an established professional. What could have led them down such different paths?"

Three scenarios of possible (but not necessarily desirable) evolution of national education systems were derived from WP6. This resulted in a poster through which participants could discuss the gap between the plausibility and desirability of these scenarios.

Starting from a quote extracted from the WP5 interviews, participants were asked to share views and opinions, focusing on their experiences in education (as students, teachers, and/or professionals). The quote was selected for its resonance with a prominent feature of current intergenerational relationships in the Italian context, where young people are often blamed by older generations for their supposed inadequacy, immaturity, and unwillingness to commit to work and, more generally, to challenging activities.

In addition, as "transversal" stimulus, some of the information reported in the WP7 national discussion papers was introduced to the discussion tables by the UNIGE research team, providing participants with further content about the Italian national context, as well as comparisons with other partner countries.



Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion	<p>After the participants' registration and the opening session, participants were divided into 4 groups. Before starting to discuss, a brief ice breaker was proposed to groups' participants. Once the groups had finished their work, we met again for the closing session, where the participants were asked for their feedback.</p>
Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?	<p>Participants were divided into 4 groups, combining the 3 profiles to ensure mixed points of view at each table. The group division was managed right before the event. Two unexpected persons were added to the subgroups at the last moment</p>
Impressions from the IF	<p>In general, the Innovation Forum went very smoothly and with no disruptions. We have observed an inclusive and open conversation throughout the entire forum.</p> <p>The participants have welcomed the specific format of the forum and the ability to freely express themselves and exchange their opinions, experiences, biographies, and personal vignettes.</p>

3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

Feedback from participants	<p>The participants' feedback was collected by means of two main questions in the plenary closing session (see the answers below)</p> <p>1. How did it go today, also in relation to what you expected?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stimulating: "IF prompted so many thoughts and emotions," "I noticed greater self-reflection starting from the experiences brought by others," "I really appreciated the adult stories I heard." - Welcoming and non-judgmental: "I said things that I can't say at school," "I was able to talk to unknown people," "The first reaction to the IF proposal was defensive. But the topic touched me personally. Perceiving the humanity of adults was liberating and not feeling like I was being pointed at or judged." - Decentralization: "I was able to see the same thing from different points of view." <p>2. What suggestions could we give to those who will organize IF in other countries?</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extended discussion time: It would have been desirable to have more time to speak, thus extending the working time of the discussion tables. - Inclusion of more diverse voices: It would be worth multiplying similar experiences by trying to involve even more dissonant voices, pushing for a more pronounced divergence of viewpoints. - Integration into educational settings: It would be interesting to bring this method of reflection into schools/institutions (e.g., middle or high schools) because it would reduce hierarchical dynamics, rebalance roles, and provide an opportunity for comparing different ages and positions. - Recognition of personal narratives as evidence: Occasions such as IF should be encouraged in which the biographical narration of the participants is “processed” as scientific evidence. - Empowering self-organisation: There is a need to recover forms of self-organization to give voice to the desires and needs of those who experience school.
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>Research questions:</p> <p>Group 1: What is the role of those “concentric circles” that play—or should play—a mediating function between the structural context and the micro and family context? What role do mediators—primarily teachers—play in incorporating and addressing the vulnerabilities and effects of inequality in starting conditions? Do they have an equalizing or amplifying function?</p> <p>Group 2: What role do professors, educators, and trainers play in the construction and evaluation of learning outcomes (LOs) achieved by students, in relation to the organizational structures of the educational systems in which they work? Is it possible to imagine a school that places the desires and ambitions of young people at the center, instead of focusing on the needs of production systems? New research should explore young people's perspectives on the school they would like to have, the evaluation systems they envision, and the values that contemporary educational systems should embody.</p> <p>Group 3: What experiments (and with what outcomes) are being applied in the national school system today regarding alternative models of school assessment (e.g., narrative assessments, self-evaluation, etc.)? How much and in what ways does the intergenerational distance in terms of language and</p>



imagination affect the relationship between students and teachers (particularly in high schools)? What opportunities are created to find common ground in terms of language?

Group 4: What alternative assessment methods, different from those currently in use, could reduce performance anxiety in students and improve the learning process? What role do teachers play in this? Which teacher-student relational dynamics could reduce student anxiety during assessment tests of learning levels? How can the concepts of merit and excellence be rethought to promote equity and inclusion, while preventing the emergence of new forms of inequality and/or expanding existing ones? Which stakeholders contribute most to how the concepts of merit and excellence are defined and applied in educational systems? How can we foster the participation of all stakeholders (primarily students, families, and teachers) in the definition and application of these concepts? What impact would an educational system less reliant on scores, grades, and rankings have on student motivation and well-being? What implications would a system that more strongly supports the enhancement of out-of-school activities in the assessment of student learning levels, equating formal and non-formal learning, have?

Suggestions/recommendations for policymakers:

Group 1: Schools should be seen as a facilitating system in promoting the relationship between young people and their social and economic environment. The teaching staff should be trained to support young people in vulnerable conditions, whereas teachers often end up stigmatizing and inhibiting the activation of young people. There should be more opportunities for students, professors, and policymakers to meet, exchange ideas, and get to know each other. Occasions like the IF allow those in different roles to develop greater empathy. This would improve the school both functionally and in terms of personal relationships, having a positive impact on young people who find it more difficult to integrate and build their personal path.

Group 2: Educational institutions should provide structured moments of confrontation among all components of school communities. Horizontal exchanges among students, professors, educators, and technical-administrative staff



generate trust and recognition and stimulate young people to express the limitations and strengths they identify in educational institutions. This confrontation would promote agency and civic participation in the younger generation. The teaching staff should be more stable and less precarious to enable them to build long-term pedagogical programs that are capable of fitting into the context and characteristics expressed by each classroom and pupil. The teaching staff should be larger, and class sizes should be reduced, to allow teachers to focus more on the needs and desires of each student.

Group 3: The Italian school system tends to reduce students' autonomy both in terms of managing the mediation between the institution and family (for example, through the use of the electronic register, which involves direct parent/school communication), and in terms of the opportunity to engage with certain content choices (e.g., the choice between readings deemed interesting and/or useful from the student's subjective point of view). It is important to give students opportunities to gradually measure themselves with forms of autonomy by introducing margins of flexibility in school curricula, allowing them to personalize (at least part of) their educational path. This could increase their sense of involvement and belonging, stimulating active and conscious participation in learning processes. Teacher training should integrate reflective strategies aimed at building empathic relationships with students to promote active listening practices. This would help teachers better understand students' subjective experiences in relation to profoundly changed contexts (of life, work, and education), facilitating a more attentive assessment of individual learning processes.

Group 4: Rethink the school evaluation system by expanding the concept of learning beyond the numerical grade, integrating more formative, cooperative, and personalized evaluation methods that foster individual growth; avoid the polarization between excellence and mediocrity, between "A" and "B" pathways, by valuing everyone's abilities and ensuring equity in the provision of educational and developmental opportunities to all, regardless of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds; review school and career guidance policies so they enable students to explore and develop their talents, beyond labeling



	<p>and categorization that risk limiting opportunities and possibilities for aspiring to certain educational and professional careers.</p>
<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>The materials collected during the discussions were transcribed, systematized, and elaborated into two different outputs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A very detailed, technical, and faithful transcription of the contents collected during the discussions. It is meant to inform the partners about how the discussion groups took place and what emerged from them. 2. A very brief version, written in more approachable language and without technicalities, intended to be sent to the participants as a mini-report of the day. <p>The report for participants has been sent by email and through WhatsApp for those who hadn't registered their email addresses.</p> <p>After the event, we prepared a news article for the Clear project website (https://clear-horizon.eu/2025/03/10/what-i-f-the-first-innovation-forum-of-the-clear-project-took-place-in-genoa-italy/) and a post for the CLEAR LinkedIn account</p> <p>In addition, the Univesirty of Genoa posted new on its official Facebook and Linkeding pages (https://www.linkedin.com/posts/universit-degli-studi-di-genova_unige-unigenova-clearproject-activity-7290372886173814784-nCJ7?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_ios&rcm=ACoAAAfVJocBYo3_9_UzThzJM-BAnIXx-u-vTL4; https://www.facebook.com/share/p/15wfQPCbe3/?mibextid=wwXlfr)</p>



Figure 8 – Innovation Forum in Genoa



Credits: UNIGE Team





Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Italy - Urbino

Eduardo Barberis, Federico Rossi

University of Urbino Carlo Bo

March 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	4 th April, 2025
Venue	<p>The Innovation Forum has been organized in a university conference room at the satellite campus in Fano, within the province of Pesaro-Urbino. The decision to hold the event in Fano was made due to its superior connectivity with the main localities from which participants would travel, as it is connected by the region's main train line and highway, unlike Urbino. Several venues were considered, including non-university locations, but these were ultimately discarded, primarily due to their limited space, which would not have allowed for the proper division of participants into working groups during the Forum. In the end, the Sala Lettura (Reading Room) of the Complesso San Michele, a university complex, was chosen. This venue met most of the initial criteria for selection, such as size, luminosity, accessibility, restrooms, space for offering food and drinks, and neutrality.</p> <p>Potentially negative sides of the venue were: accessibility; furniture that cannot be easily moved (e.g. a high number of chairs)</p>
Duration	The event lasted approximately 2 hours and was followed by an aperitif offered to the participants by the team.
Engagement process	<p>Most people were involved through direct or indirect invitations to the event. Participants were initially contacted from the network of actors who occasionally cooperate with the university, including student groups and teachers from schools in Urbino, Pesaro, and Fano, as well as policymakers from these localities and several third-sector actors dealing with Vocational Education and Training (VET) or supporting school-to-work transitions for individuals in vulnerable positions. Additionally, people who were interviewed during WP4 and WP5 of the project and consented to be involved in other parts of the research were also contacted, although only one of them actually participated in the event.</p> <p>A second round of invitations was sent to actors of particular interest identified through a desk mapping of the main student associations, policymakers, schools, and third-sector organizations outside of our network. We then asked those who</p>

	<p>responded—either positively or negatively—if they knew of other individuals who might be interested in the event. All invitations were sent via email or direct message, with the exception of attempts to contact students in schools, which involved face-to-face presentations and invitations in some cases. Out of the 19 people who agreed to participate, 15 attended the entire event.</p>
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2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

<p>Participants</p>	<p>A total of 15 people participated in the entire Innovation Forum. Participants were not balanced between genders, with women being much more represented than men (12 women and 3 men), but they were quite diverse in terms of background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 were policymakers from Fano, either at the municipal or Local Social Area (ATS) level; - 5 were professionals, including secondary school teachers (1), VET professionals (1), and third-sector actors dealing with support for school-to-work transitions for people in vulnerable positions (3); - 6 were young people, who came from secondary schools in the area (1), bachelor's programs at the university (2), or youth associations (3, with 2 of them also being secondary school students).
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p>At the beginning of the event, all participants received a folder containing sheets of paper, a pen, the privacy policy, and the informed consent form. The privacy policy was briefly presented at the start, and participants were given time to read and sign the forms if they wished. Signed forms were collected at the end, and no participants refused to give consent.</p> <p>No specific ethical issues were raised by the participants. To minimize power dynamics as much as possible, each group was composed of two young people—the maximum allowed by our numbers. We also ensured that university students were not placed in the same group as the steering member who was a university lecturer in the same department (1 out of 3).</p>



<p>Process</p>	<p>The agenda of the Innovation Forum was organized as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 16:30-17:00: Registration of participants, introduction, and explanation of the event's purpose and structure. - 17:00-18:00: Division of participants into three working groups to discuss specific issues from WP4, WP5, and WP6. - 18:00-18:30: Plenary session, wrap-up of all groups, and final comments and remarks. - 18:30-19:00: Aperitif offered by the university's organizing team. <p>Compared to the initial agenda, the registration phase was quicker than expected, allowing the group phase to start earlier (around 16:45). This provided more time for group discussions, which were also extended beyond the initially planned duration (until 18:15) upon participants' requests. They asked to switch between groups to have a quicker second session with different outputs.</p> <p>The event was steered by Prof. Eduardo Barberis, who introduced the event and conducted the group based on WP4 outputs; Dr. Federico Rossi, who conducted the group based on WP6 outputs; and Giulia Sopranzi, a university trainee who volunteered for this task and was trained by the rest of the team on the event's functioning in the days leading up to it.</p> <p>During the event, photos were taken—when possible—by the steering team. The contents of the group discussions were recorded by taking occasional notes, collecting notes from participants who were willing to share them, and taking pictures of the final outputs after the working groups concluded.</p>
<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p>Each group discussed different topics related to the research findings of CLEAR WP4, WP5, and WP6.</p> <p>In the first group, the discussion focused on three topics presented in the WP6 output: the categorization of learners based on achievement levels, the quantification of evaluation, and the role of merit as a central element in educational discourse. Participants were initially asked to position themselves regarding these three issues, revealing different results between the first and second groups. While the first group showed a high degree of polarization, generally stating that these trends were very likely but not desirable, the second group exhibited more diversity in their views. Both groups</p>



differed from the experts involved in the survey, who were slightly polarized on all issues on average.

Participants' positions were later discussed in relation to the survey results, both from Italy and from all project countries, highlighting mismatches and commonalities. During the final discussion, participants explored ways to bridge the gap between desirability and likelihood. One of the most interesting points was the participants' reinterpretation of "merit," which they believed should be framed not in the current competition-oriented sense, but as "talent." This perspective suggests that education and training systems should recognize that all individuals have talents and help them identify and develop these talents. This idea was widely shared among participants in both groups and informed their vision of a desirable future for education and training, although most were pessimistic about its realization.

In the second group, the relationship between learners and educators, trainers, and teachers was discussed, starting from a trigger quote shown in the output poster. The conversation focused on creating safe spaces where learners and young people feel listened to and empowered. Participants noted that schools often focus too much on learners' futures without adequately considering their present feelings. They emphasized the importance of fostering a learning environment that allows for peer-to-peer communication and listening between teachers and learners, building trust between both sides of the learning-teaching dynamic.

A key concern was the need to increase resources for schools with two aims: 1) improving and expanding physical spaces, giving students a voice in organizing their learning environment and providing spaces for self-expression; and 2) training teachers to be empathetic and open to listening to learners effectively. Granting adequate spaces—physical, temporal, and symbolic—to learners emerged as a key empowering tool. Participants suggested that learners should have time to be listened to and some control over their physical learning spaces to modify them according to their needs. Empowerment was seen as the capacity for learners to engage with their learning environments and create new alliances within and outside these spaces. The role of teachers and trainers was identified as



	<p>crucial, with participants mentioning the need for these figures to be aware of inequalities among learners and to try to balance them. Despite starting from WP5 findings, many of these insights appeared to be new and added to the findings collected through interviews.</p> <p>In the third group, school-to-work transitions and dimensions of potential vulnerabilities affecting these outcomes were discussed. Three different WP4 outputs were proposed, but the participants chose one to discuss (“Imagine two persons...”), and the debate was so long that no time was left to discuss other outputs. The discussion reinforced many of the findings from the considered WP, e.g. with the focus on second chance education, drop-outs and problems in connecting education and training paths with the variety of personal configurations. A life course perspective was deemed key in understanding multiple life chances, including also social networks, socio-economic contexts (families and local communities). Soft skills were also mentioned, although they were viewed less problematically compared to the WP4 research findings. Soft skills were seen more as the result of personal experiences that manifest in the ability to build trust and engage with others.</p> <p>More importantly, structural and contextual factors—such as economic conditions, cultural and migration backgrounds, and social networks—were identified as crucial elements shaping young people's transitions from school to the labor market. Participants also highlighted the significant impact of uncontrollable events, such as the pandemic crisis. Based on these premises, at least four main dynamics were identified that can positively shape individual life courses: 1) the acknowledgment of competencies and potential beyond those formally recognized in schools; 2) the importance of mentorship programs to foster motivation, give voice to learners' expectations, and valorize their potential; 3) the relevance of "second chances" to counterbalance possible setbacks in individual life courses; and 4) the development of transversal competencies.</p>
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<p>Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion</p>	<p>All three groups began with icebreaking techniques suggested in the Codici guidelines, where participants were asked to share a personal experience from their educational paths. In each case, the moderators initiated the icebreaking round by introducing themselves using the same approach.</p> <p>Each group was then steered according to the Codici guidelines, with adaptations made to suit the specific circumstances of the event and the backgrounds and requests of the participants (e.g., participants requested the opportunity to see different groups, which was accommodated by allowing for two cycles). The steering methods for each group were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 1 (WP6): A blank version of the WP6 output was printed on a 70x100 cm paper and displayed vertically. After the icebreaking activity, participants were asked to position themselves on each of the three future educational trends using colored stickers provided by the organizing team. Once everyone had placed their stickers, they were invited to comment on the overall results or their individual positions. All participants engaged in this discussion, not only commenting on the sticker placements but also anticipating the potential consequences of each trend on their personal or work lives. The Italian and general survey results were then briefly presented, and participants discussed the differences between these results and their own placements. Finally, participants were asked to brainstorm ways to bridge the gap between the likelihood and desirability of each trend. During the workshop, participants preferred to speak directly to each other, with the moderator summarizing their ideas on sticky notes. Different colored sticky notes were used for feelings and comments and for strategies to make the future more desirable. In the second round, since only one 70x100 cm paper was available, participants used A3 paper and fewer distinct stickers, which created some difficulties but were ultimately managed well. • Group 2 (WP5): A 70x100 cm poster displaying the trigger quote was hung vertically, and A4 copies were distributed to participants. A blank poster was placed at the center of the table for recording participants' thoughts. After the
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	<p>icebreaking activity, the moderator followed the Codici guidelines by asking participants how the quote related to their personal experiences and instructing them to write a short sentence on a sticky note, which was then attached to the blank poster. Each participant shared an experience related to their thought, and the subsequent discussion involved participants commenting on each other's thoughts, mostly expressing mutual support. They began to imagine how to reshape educational and training spaces to better incorporate the initially presented claims. The second cycle was similar to the first, except that, like a World Café, the second set of participants could access the thoughts expressed by the previous group on the poster and sticky notes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 3 (WP4): The graphic output containing an "Imagine" poster was displayed on a multimedia whiteboard, and A4 copies were distributed among participants. Although three prompts were prepared, only the first one, beginning with "Imagine two friends...", was used due to time constraints. After explaining the prompt, the moderator opened the discussion with the question included in the poster, taking notes on a 70x100 cm blank poster placed in the center of the table. Participants then reconstructed hypothetical life and school-to-work paths, followed by a second round where they reflected on when and how different actors could have intervened to ensure successful transitions. The second cycle was conducted in the same manner. <p>At the end of the group phase, each moderator summarized the main conclusions from their group, presenting the outputs and posters resulting from the group work. Although there was limited time for the final discussion, some participants noted that a common narrative was emerging across the groups, particularly focused on the need to valorize individual potential and creativity over standardized approaches.</p>
<p>Were participants divided into different working groups? If so,</p>	<p>Participants were divided into three equally sized groups of 5 people each. The groups were composed before the start of the event to ensure maximum diversity in terms of background while avoiding potentially problematic matches due to power dynamics. The assignment of participants to groups was</p>



<p>based on which criteria?</p>	<p>communicated through stickers of different colors attached to the folder given to each participant. The chosen outputs for the groups were based on the findings from CLEAR WP4, WP5, and WP6. The initial group compositions were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 1 (WP6): 2 young people, 1 professional, 2 policymakers; • Group 2 (WP5): 2 young people, 2 professionals, 1 policymaker; • Group 3 (WP4): 2 young people, 2 professionals, 1 policymaker. <p>However, participants requested the possibility to join more than one group during the event. To accommodate this, a second, quicker round within each group was organized, maintaining the same proportions but mixing participants from the initial groups as much as possible.</p>
<p>Impressions from the IF</p>	<p>No ethical issues were raised by participants, nor did any arise during the event. All participants were comfortable with the privacy statement forms, and none reported feeling uncomfortable during the discussions. It was made clear from the beginning that participants could leave at any time and were not obligated to participate in any discussion if they did not wish to. However, all participants were highly engaged and did not appear to hold back. The tone of the discussion and the leveling effect of the icebreaking activity likely contributed to this, creating a welcoming environment from the start.</p> <p>Within the three groups, differences in behavior among the various types of participants were also noted. In particular, professionals and policymakers seemed very committed to hearing the opinions of young people on topics they deal with daily. They expressed surprise in some cases at the depth and development of the young participants' positions and thoughts on these topics. Conversely, young people mentioned the importance of having the opportunity to present their views on educational trends, which they are rarely asked about. They were also surprised to discover that their opinions did not differ much from those presented by other groups.</p> <p>.</p>



3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

<p>Feedback from participants</p>	<p>At the end of the event, during the aperitif offered in the same location, participants expressed that the Innovation Forum was an excellent opportunity to bring diverse individuals together to discuss current and future trends in education. They noted that such opportunities are usually rare but very valuable.</p> <p>Participants also requested a detailed report of the conclusions reached during the event, and were very interested on the IF methodology itself.</p>
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>The first innovative dimension of the Forum, as reported by participants, was the gathering of diverse viewpoints – a way to get out from usual “communication bubbles”. This was particularly notable in the consideration of young people's ideas, which were connected with policymakers and placed on an equal footing with teachers and professionals. This dynamic raises a set of questions: how do policymakers and professionals envision young people's stances on the future of their education and the sector in general? How do these assumptions change when confronted with the actual positions of young people? What barriers prevent this kind of confrontation from occurring more frequently?</p> <p>Secondly, the Innovation Forum allowed for CLEAR findings to be examined through the lens of stakeholders who, up to this point, had only contributed as research subjects. As noted in the section on main topics above, this process clarified some aspects and challenged others, creating space to expand the CLEAR results. Finally, this problematization and validation of the CLEAR work led to policy implications at both the local and supralocal levels.</p> <p>This entails not only the urgency for a paradigm shift—or at least an adjustment—but also outlines possible ways to implement such a change, adding another dimension to what WP4-6 demonstrated. Among these recommendations, it is especially worth mentioning the call for more innovative and participatory learning approaches that empower young people and do not view them as mere passive subjects. Additionally, there is a push to redefine “merit” as “talent” as part of a new narrative that values each individual's unique qualities.</p> <p>-</p>



<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>The results of the Innovation Forum will be primarily disseminated through the project's platforms, including LinkedIn and the official website. Further dissemination will be provided to the participants in the form of a short report summarizing the main findings of the Innovation Forum. Some participants were interested to use data and methods in future events.</p> <p>There are no follow-up studies planned at the moment, although the steering group believes that the Innovation Forum generated valuable insights that could potentially be used in more academically-oriented productions. However, the ethical issues and feasibility of this still need to be explored.</p> <p>Regarding the Final Conference, participants of the Innovation Forum were informed about it and invited. However, it is unlikely that they will be able to participate due to distance and language barriers.</p>
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Figure 9 – Innovation Forum in Urbino



Credits: UNIURB Team



Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Portugal

Natália Alves, Liliana Zeferino, Cármen Cavaco, Paula Guimarães

University of Lisbon

June 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	May, 12, 2025.
Venue	<p>The Innovation Forum (IF) took place at the Centro Social 6 de Maio, located in Amadora, within the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (Área Metropolitana de Lisboa - AML). This venue was selected due to its location in a territory of particular relevance to the objectives of the CLEAR project, given its history of social vulnerability and the high levels of school failure and early school leaving among young people.</p> <p>The Centro Social 6 de Maio is a civil society organisation with deep roots in the local community, widely recognised for its work with disadvantaged populations. In addition to providing a safe, familiar and accessible environment for all participants, particularly the young people involved in the empirical study (WP5), the Centre also played a key role as a gatekeeper during the process of identifying and contacting the young people to be interviewed.</p> <p>Its mediation was crucial for establishing trust, enabling access to the field, and ensuring informed and voluntary participation by the young people.</p> <p>Although the venue is a private space, it has a strong public and community-oriented mission, and it offered the logistical conditions required for hosting the event (a large room, support materials, accessibility, and proximity to public transport).</p>
Duration	From 10:00 to 13:15
Engagement process	<p>The mobilisation process for the IF was based on a logic of continuity and deepening of the relationships established throughout previous phases of the CLEAR project. Most of the invitees had already collaborated with us in activities under Work Packages 3, 4 and 5, having participated in individual interviews, focus groups, working sessions, and community mediation processes.</p> <p>The main target audiences identified were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people interviewed as part of WP5; • Gatekeepers and representatives of community organisations; • Local entrepreneurs and employers;

- Policy makers working in the fields of education and inclusion;
- Researchers and academics in the area;
- Teachers and employment integration professionals;

- Directors, and staff of Private Social Solidarity Institutions (IPSS);
- Specialists in the recognition of prior learning.

The selection process aimed to ensure the representation of different stakeholder groups (local policy makers, employment advisers, teachers, trainers, and young people), as well as diversity in terms of gender, ethnic-cultural background, and educational and professional experiences. This criterion was particularly relevant given that all CLEAR project activities in the (AML), including the IF, were conducted in the Municipality of Amadora, a territory characterised by strong cultural diversity, a significant presence of migrant populations, and persistent challenges in the field of educational and social inclusion.

The first step involved sending 33 personalised invitations, mostly addressed to stakeholders who had already collaborated with us in previous stages of the project. We received 15 confirmations of participation.

For participants with whom a closer relationship already existed, invitations were extended in a personalised and individual manner, beginning with a phone call and followed by an official email sent from the institutional account. For those with whom we had no prior direct contact, or only an indirect connection, the invitation was sent exclusively by email, including a brief explanation of the project and the aims of the IF.

All invitees subsequently received a second email, which provided more detailed information on the structure of the event, the topics to be discussed, the participatory methodology to be used, as well as logistical information and terms of participation. This follow-up communication also served to clarify questions raised by some participants, such as what was expected of them, whether they needed to make a presentation or bring information about their work. These questions were answered individually, when necessary, also by phone.

Despite efforts to ensure gender balance, it was not possible to achieve an equal distribution between men and women, with



	<p>higher female participation recorded. Nonetheless, we were able to bring together participants from migrant backgrounds, as well as individuals with diverse ages and professional/educational paths.</p>
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2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

<p>Participants</p>	<p>Although 15 participants had confirmed their attendance, the IF was attended by a total of 11 participants. The composition of the group reflected a diversity of professional and social profiles, including individuals with varied backgrounds in the fields of education, social inclusion, and youth work.</p> <p>The distribution of participants was as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 young adults (1 male and 1 female); • 4 professionals/consultants (all female); • 2 teachers (1 male and 1 female); • 1 researcher (female); • 1 specialist in Prior Learning recognition (female); • 1 local policy maker (female). <p>It was not possible to ensure gender balance, with a greater number of female participants. The presence of individuals from migrant backgrounds, along with a variety of ages and professional/educational trajectories, enriched the discussions and reflected the diversity characteristic of the local community.</p>
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p>All participants were informed about the objectives and purpose of the IF, as well as their right to participate voluntarily and to withdraw at any time without any consequence. The intended use of graphic materials was also explained, ensuring full transparency regarding the visual documentation of the event. All participants signed the attendance sheet and gave their informed consent for the capture of images, authorising their use exclusively for scientific, educational, and institutional dissemination purposes, namely in reports, publications, presentations, or platforms associated with the CLEAR project. The informed consent forms are archived at the institutional premises of WWU with no access permitted to third parties. During the opening session, participants voluntarily introduced themselves, stating their name and the institution or organisation they represented. This moment took place informally and spontaneously, reflecting the fact that many</p>



	<p>attendees were already acquainted through their involvement in local inter-institutional networks, such as the Food Bank, Municipal Councils, and other community IF.</p> <p>Although these introductions occurred, no personal data were collected or stored as part of the IF. The event was conducted without the use of name badges, public lists of participants, or any form of visible identification.</p> <p>Photographs were taken by Carmén Cavaco and Paula Guimarães and are stored on the institutional servers of the Institute of Education from the University of Lisbon (IE-ULisboa), protected from external access. A total of 50 images were produced.</p> <p>No ethical, legal, or moral concerns were raised by participants before, during, or after the event.</p>
<p>Process</p>	<p>The agenda of the IF followed the structure below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and reception of participants • Opening session (approximately 15 minutes) • Group work sessions (approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes) • Break (no formal break was scheduled; instead, participants were invited to help themselves freely to food and drinks available during the event) • Closing session (approximately 30 minutes) <p>The IF was facilitated by the team from the IE-ULisboa, composed of Natália Alves, Liliana Zeferino, Paula Guimarães, and Cármen Cavaco. The opening session was led by the coordinator of the local research team, who welcomed the participants and thanked them for their presence, as well as the Centro Social 6 de Maio for hosting the event. Practical information about the venue (access, sanitation facilities, safety regulations, and logistical arrangements) was shared, and data protection protocols were reiterated. At this point, participants signed the attendance sheet.</p> <p>This was followed by a brief presentation of the CLEAR project and the participatory approach adopted for the IF, including an explanation of the agenda and the objectives of the day.</p> <p>After the introduction, participants were divided into two working groups, based on a prior allocation prepared by the team. Each group was directed to a separate room and worked</p>



on the outcomes of two Work Packages considered particularly relevant for the AML: WP3 and WP5.

- Group 1 – "What if you lived elsewhere?"

This group worked with a visual toolkit developed under WP3, exploring inequalities in educational and professional opportunities. The session was facilitated by Natália Alves, with Paula Guimarães responsible for taking notes and capturing visual records.

- Group 2 – "Young People's Voices"

This group focused on the voices of young people collected under WP5, based on quotes and testimonies from the National Qualitative Report (D5.2). The session was facilitated by Liliana Zeferino, with Cármen Cavaco responsible for written and photographic documentation.

The discussions began with graphic and narrative materials provided by the CODICI team, each containing an introductory question or a fictional scenario. Participants were invited to respond freely, sharing their experiences, perspectives, and reflections. The facilitators guided the discussion, contextualising project data where relevant. Participants also took handwritten notes to support their reflections and help formulate collective proposals.

No audio or video recordings were made. All documentation was carried out in written and photographic form by the researchers responsible.

In the closing session, the spokespersons from each group presented the main ideas discussed to the other group, sharing reflections, proposals, and concerns that had emerged from the collective work. This was followed by an open debate, during which participants asked further questions, shared comments, and provided feedback on the IF.

Self-evaluation was conducted in writing, at the end of each group session, through a short questionnaire in which participants were invited to reflect on their experience, express what they had learned, and suggest improvements for future initiatives.



<p>Main topics discussed</p>	<p>The IF was designed as a space for collective reflection and dialogue between actors with different backgrounds in the fields of education, youth, social work and local policymaking. The objective was to mobilise the CLEAR project’s research outputs - particularly from WP3 and WP5 - to trigger debate around persistent inequalities, policy blind spots and practical challenges in ensuring inclusive educational transitions and supporting young people in vulnerable situations. Each working group engaged with a specific set of materials derived from CLEAR research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group 1 worked with visual materials from the WP3 toolkit, namely the activity <i>"What if you lived elsewhere?"</i>, which explores territorial inequalities and their impact on educational and labour market pathways. • Group 2 worked with narrative excerpts from CLEAR Deliverable D5.2 – National Qualitative Report, drawing on the voices of young people interviewed in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. <p>These resources were used not to present finished conclusions, but to stimulate critical dialogue, grounded in the participants’ personal, professional, and institutional experience. Each group was invited to reflect on guiding questions, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do young people experience educational (dis)continuities and constraints in their life trajectories? • What institutional factors, including school structures, family dynamics, and socio-political contexts, shape (or hinder) young people’s agency? • How can educators, families, local authorities, and youth support services reimagine their roles in building trust, promoting hope, and enabling transitions? <p>Group 1 – WP3-based discussions</p> <p>Participants began by reflecting on their own educational transitions, comparing their past opportunities with those of today's youth. Many recalled family encouragement, structural constraints in the educational system, or pivotal personal decisions shaped by historical events such as the post-1974 democratic transition in Portugal. Several highlighted how access to a diploma was essential to “stay in the game”, while others underlined the role of recognition of prior learning (RPL) as an alternative pathway.</p>
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	<p>The conversation moved to the present challenges faced by young people, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family disengagement, especially post-pandemic, and lack of emotional and structural support; • Ineffective class grouping in schools that place vulnerable students together, reinforcing disengagement; • Persistent stigma around vocational education and training (VET), particularly among middle-class families and mainstream schools; • Structural overload in VET programmes, leading to dropouts due to excessive demands; • Social media influence, creating distorted expectations about success and visibility; • Weak labour market incentives, low salaries, and employers' reluctance to hire qualified youth; • Tensions between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, creating fragmented policy approaches and marginalising vocational pathways. <p>Participants articulated systemic contradictions, such as the pressure on schools to offer equal learning conditions while being subjected to centralised curricula and external exams. The lack of autonomy for teachers and the rigid scheduling of national syllabi were identified as key barriers to contextualised and meaningful education.</p> <p>A set of policy recommendations was proposed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising schools as autonomous educational communities, not merely administrative units; • Ensuring policy coherence and alignment between educational and labour market policies; • Promoting youth participation and voice as a strategy to build hope and ownership; • Reducing the bureaucratic burden on teachers to allow more time for relational and adaptive work; • Valuing educational flexibility and personalised approaches as integral to success. <p>The call to “listen and to dream” emerged as a key principle, suggesting that system-wide change must begin by acknowledging the lived realities and aspirations of both students and professionals.</p> <p>Group 2 – WP5-based discussions</p>
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	<p>This group began with a storytelling activity, where participants were asked to share a defining moment from their own educational journey. The testimonies revealed the power of relationships, emotions, and school memory - both positive and painful - in shaping life paths.</p> <p>When confronted with excerpts from CLEAR youth interviews, participants reacted viscerally: some described the experience as “a punch in the stomach”, revealing how deeply they identified with the struggles and injustices evoked. Common themes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The critical role of teachers, particularly in vulnerable contexts, where their attitudes, expectations, and presence can be decisive; • The mismatch between teaching practices and student needs, especially when educators lack training or motivation to adapt to specific social realities; • The impact of gender inequality, especially on young mothers who face barriers to continuing education, while young fathers often receive more institutional support; • The reproduction of intergenerational disadvantage, particularly among low-income, single-parent households; • The absence of time and space for critical thinking, imagination, or meaningful debate in many educational settings. <p>Participants stressed the need for alternative teacher recruitment models that prioritise interpersonal skills, contextual awareness, and resilience. The discussion also highlighted the importance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller class sizes and diversified strategies; • Embedding non-formal education into school curricula; • Creating paid mentorship schemes that enable peer role-modelling; • Promoting joint activities for parents and children to foster shared learning and communication; • Moving away from evaluation-centric systems focused on standardised assessments and rankings; • Acknowledging the reality of youth disaffection, precariousness, and systemic neglect—and the urgent
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	<p>need for preventive measures that go beyond punitive responses.</p> <p>The session ended with a collective reflection on the question: “What can we do to change this reality?” Responses were anchored in the belief that every young person should be able to dream and to realise their aspirations, and that the education system should be a vehicle for dignity, possibility, and transformation - not for exclusion or resignation.</p> <p>The group concluded with three core proposals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reforming the assessment system to prioritise equity and relevance; 2. Integrating non-formal education into curricula for both students and teachers; 3. Strengthening and diversifying the qualifications of professionals working in educational and social support contexts.
<p>Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion</p>	<p>After the registration and welcoming of participants, and the opening session, attendees were divided into two working groups, as previously arranged by the organising team.</p> <p>Given the pre-existing familiarity among many participants, who regularly collaborate within local networks and structures, no ice-breaker activity was needed to initiate the discussions. From the outset, the working environment was characterised by informality, openness, and mutual trust.</p> <p>The group sessions were facilitated by the researchers responsible, who introduced the visual and narrative materials and encouraged the exchange of experiences and reflections. Participants were invited to respond freely to the questions and scenarios presented, sharing their personal, professional, and institutional experiences.</p> <p>Once the group work was completed, all participants reconvened for the closing session, during which each group shared its conclusions and individual feedback on the IF was collected.</p>
<p>Were participants divided into different working groups? If so,</p>	<p>Participants were divided into two working groups, based on an arrangement previously defined by the research team. The division aimed to combine the different profiles represented at the IF (young people, professionals, and policy makers), ensuring</p>



<p>based on which criteria?</p>	<p>a diversity of perspectives in each room and enriching the quality of the discussions.</p> <p>This distribution was managed in advance of the event, based on confirmation of attendance and prior knowledge of participants' profiles. This preparation allowed for a smooth transition into group work immediately following the opening session and contributed to balanced discussions, preventing any single professional or institutional group from dominating the dialogue.</p>
<p>Impressions from the IF</p>	<p>Overall, the IF proceeded smoothly and without any incidents or interruptions, in an atmosphere characterised by openness, inclusiveness, and active participation from all attendees.</p> <p>A climate of mutual trust and attentive listening was evident throughout the event, with participants freely sharing their opinions, experiences, personal trajectories, and perspectives on the topics under discussion. The chosen format (informal, collaborative, and dialogue-based) was particularly valued, as it enabled a rich exchange of viewpoints among individuals from diverse institutional roles and life paths.</p>

3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

<p>Feedback from participants</p>	<p>Participants expressed highly positive feedback regarding the format, content, and atmosphere of the IF. A general sense of openness, mutual respect, and shared purpose permeated the discussions, enabling a safe and enriching environment for dialogue. Several participants highlighted the following key aspects in their written evaluations and final reflections:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Valuing the participatory approach: The informal and collaborative format was particularly appreciated, allowing for genuine exchange among individuals with diverse backgrounds. Participants felt encouraged to speak freely, share personal experiences, and contribute actively to collective reflections without the pressure of formal presentations or rigid structures. 2. Emotional resonance and critical awareness: Many described the experience as emotionally powerful, especially when engaging with the narratives of young people from the CLEAR project. Some referred to these moments as "a punch in the stomach", underlining the
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	<p>depth of identification with the testimonies shared and the urgency of the issues raised.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Recognition of diversity: Participants valued the presence of multiple perspectives - youths, educators, policymakers, social workers, and researchers - within the same space. This diversity was seen as essential for constructing more nuanced understandings of educational inequalities and for designing more inclusive responses. 4. Relevance and practicality of discussions: The group sessions were considered relevant and closely aligned with the everyday challenges faced in the field. Many expressed that the IF provided not only critical insights, but also a space to imagine feasible solutions grounded in their lived realities and professional practices. 5. Appreciation for relational dynamics: The trust, empathy, and sense of shared responsibility that emerged among participants were frequently mentioned as key elements that made the IF impactful. The lack of hierarchy and the mutual listening created a strong sense of community. 6. Suggestions for the future: Some participants expressed the desire to see this type of initiative replicated and expanded, particularly in school settings or inter-institutional networks. They called for more frequent moments of dialogue that bring together professionals, decision-makers, and youth to co-design educational policies and practices. <p>Overall, the feedback underscored the importance of creating inclusive, reflective, and action-oriented spaces where different actors can converge to confront persistent inequalities and reimagine educational futures together.</p>
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>Based on the reflections, lived experiences, and challenges discussed during the IF, several pathways for future research within the scope of the CLEAR project emerged. One relevant research question might be:</p> <p>“How do young people in contexts marked by multiple disadvantages perceive, interpret, and experience educational and professional transitions, and in what ways do current public policies (or their absence) shape these experiences across the life course?”</p>



	<p>This question invites an in-depth exploration of youth agency and reflexivity under adverse conditions, as well as a critical examination of policies (or policy gaps) that may either perpetuate or mitigate intergenerational cycles of inequality.</p> <p>Another research avenue suggested by the IF is: “Which formal and informal local support mechanisms are most effective in promoting successful educational transitions in vulnerable territories, and how can they be strengthened through public policies?”</p> <p>This line of inquiry opens the door to mapping promising practices and identifying scalable elements that could be adapted to other contexts.</p> <p>The IF produced clear recommendations for policymakers, highlighting the urgent need for a strategic reconfiguration of public education and training policies, with greater emphasis on territorial sensitivity and active youth participation.</p> <p>The main recommendations include:</p> <p>Territorialised education policies: Design policy responses that acknowledge the specificities of different territories, particularly in metropolitan areas marked by structural inequalities, such as the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. This requires tailored support mechanisms aligned with local realities and the diverse trajectories of young people.</p> <p>Effective intersectoral coordination: Strengthen coordination mechanisms between schools, social services, health sectors, local authorities, and community-based organisations. The lack of communication among institutions was identified as a key obstacle to building integrated educational pathways.</p> <p>Active listening and youth participation: Create opportunities for young people to actively participate in shaping the measures that affect their lives. The IF underscored the importance of listening to young people’s lived experiences as a starting point for more effective and equitable policies.</p> <p>Professional training for work in complex contexts: Invest in the continuous professional development of teachers and social workers, equipping them to work effectively in contexts marked by multiple vulnerabilities. Emphasis should be placed on</p>
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	<p>relational approaches, intercultural mediation, and managing transitions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring and evaluation focused on social impact: Rethink programme and policy evaluation tools by valuing not only quantitative indicators (such as retention or dropout rates), but also qualitative indicators linked to well-being, identity, and young people’s sense of belonging to educational pathways.
<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>The Innovation Forum was announced a month and a half in advance via the official CLEAR project account on LinkedIn [https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7311342054838550529] and widely shared on the personal accounts of the research team members. Institutional dissemination was also ensured by the IE-ULisboa, with posts published on its official social media channels – Instagram [https://www.instagram.com/p/DJEelW9MKr5/], LinkedIn [https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7323314852351959040] and Facebook [https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1228437502616601]. All communications were published in Portuguese. Each participant received a signed certificate of attendance, as well as CLEAR project dissemination materials, including notebooks, reusable bottles, and branded pencils. The results of the IF held in the AML will be shared on LinkedIn [https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7330611230220406784/] and subsequently published on the IE-ULisboa institutional webpage and the official CLEAR project website. During the closing plenary session, participants were invited to attend the project’s Final Conference, and several expressed their interest in taking part.</p>



Figure 10 – Innovation Forum in Lisbon



Credits: ULISBOA Team





Work Package 8

Framing and Implementing the Transversal
Participatory Approach

National Report on the Innovation Forum

Spain

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June 2025

1. Preparation of the Innovation Forum

Date	6th May 2025
Venue	The Castelló IF was held at the Castelló Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber was one of the stakeholders interviewed during the development of WP4 and one of the most interested both in the event itself and in the possibility of inviting young people from their training courses. It is a private actor.
Duration	The IF started at 10:00 and ended at 14:00, with a total duration of 4 hours.
Engagement process	<p>The engagement process can be explained in two phases:</p> <p>1- Contact with project allies who had already participated in WP4 and WP5. During the fieldwork phase, we informed them of our intention to organise the forum. Once the IF date was confirmed, these were the first stakeholders we invited. We also asked them to suggest other potentially interested actors, help disseminate the event, and assist in reaching out to young people.</p> <p>2- Intensive outreach work during the week of April 14th, including reminders to already committed stakeholders, calls to actors recommended in phase 1, and a thorough search for other relevant agents in the region.</p> <p>The main challenge in the engagement process was the involvement of young people interested in the IF. On this occasion, this issue was resolved thanks to the Chamber of Commerce, which invited an entire group of young participants currently enrolled in a foreign trade training course.</p> <p>The rationale for the invitation was based on the objective of involving both professional and technical staff and young people. For the group of professionals, technicians, and policymakers, the aim was to represent the key institutions in the educational and employment sectors in the region. For the youth, the goal was to involve a diverse sample of individuals aged 18 to 29.</p>



2. Implementation of the Innovation Forum

<p>Participants</p>	<p>Policy makers and professionals/experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 representatives from the Red Cross (3 women) - 1 technician of the Spanish Public Employment Service (woman) - 1 retired teacher (man) - 1 representative from the Valencian Public Employment Service (Labora) (man) - 1 representative from the Ceramics Council (woman) - 1 retired educational inspector and academic (man) - 1 municipal technician - 1 representative from the Chamber of Commerce <p>Youth Group 1: 3 boys and 4 girls, two with university studies, two migrants (one from Colombia, one from Venezuela)</p> <p>Youth Group 2: 4 girls and 3 boys, one with university studies, two migrants from Venezuela</p> <p>The total of participants is 24 people, 14 youths and 10 stakeholders. We consider that represents a rich representation of relevant actors in the field of Castelló and a significative variability of social profiles of youth.</p>
<p>Ethics & Data Management</p>	<p>All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form at the beginning of the session (attached in the annex), which informed them of the session's objectives, their rights, and granted permission to take some photographs during the event. To manage potential symbolic violence that might arise from the joint participation of young people and experts, the IF was designed in such a way that the groups first worked separately, allowing each set of stakeholders to engage with the proposal individually before initiating a collective debate. The outcome was very positive, and both the homogeneous group sessions and the final discussion worked very well.</p> <p>Moreover, special care was always taken to ensure that the young participants felt comfortable. It was repeatedly emphasised that this was a space for policymakers to listen to their ideas, concerns, and proposals.</p> <p>As detailed above, informed consent was collected at the beginning of the session in physical format. We also requested participants' email addresses for future project communications.</p>

advocated for alternative, more student-centred understandings of merit and assessment.

Group B included teachers and employment officers from the regional employment service and the chamber of commerce.

This group considered (1) unlikely, (2) likely, and (3) both likely and desirable. They did not challenge Group A's interpretation of merit and assessment.

The general debate among all professionals focused on the following issues:

- To what extent dual VET will be generalised as quickly as expected under the 2020 VET Act.
- The idea that young people have lost a culture of effort.
- The lack of systematic evaluation in the Spanish education system.
- The moderator brought up the issue of validating prior learning, and participants agreed this policy is underfunded. For example, the validation of certain specialisations in Castelló is only offered every seven years.

Youth Group 1:

Seven young people took part in the second discussion group.

The session followed the scenario-based activity proposed in the toolkit. It began by presenting two hypothetical situations and asking participants to imagine the challenges those young people might face and how they could overcome them. The debate concluded with the following key points:

- The specific barriers newcomers face when regularising their administrative status, recognising prior education, and obtaining residence or work permits.
- The informational barriers related to understanding how to find educational and job opportunities, as well as how to navigate other administrative procedures.
- Institutional access barriers, including limited training offers, grade requirements, or tuition fees in private education.
- The unequal territorial distribution of educational opportunities and the barriers faced by young people who live far from central educational hubs.
- Discriminatory patterns in educational institutions and the labour market that hinder their trajectories.



- Social pressure to follow a specific life course (study, work, start a family), which often does not fit the realities of those entering education later in life.
- The disconnect between educational institutions and companies when it comes to offering internships that provide meaningful, hands-on learning.
- The precarious conditions young people face in the labour market, especially in apprenticeship roles.

Youth Group 2:

The second group of young people followed the same dynamic and used the same materials as the first group, which allowed them to explore the following topics:

- The challenges faced by young migrants. Participants emphasised the importance of training migrants to prevent labour exploitation and to support language acquisition. They also pointed out problems related to qualification recognition and bureaucratic hurdles.
- The issue of affordable housing, especially in larger cities where educational and employment opportunities are concentrated.
- The importance of accessible, high-quality public transport in order to benefit from regional opportunities.
- The lack of available training courses and the difficulty of accessing information about them.
- The vital role of good career guidance and counselling, both within educational centres and through employment and training organisations.
- The serious problem of labour precarity and lack of job security.
- Finally, they lamented that “there aren’t many job opportunities near your people.”

Plenary Session:

Two professionals and two young people presented the conclusions from each group to the plenary. The discussion centred on the following themes:

- Young people proposed simplifying the equivalence process for academic credentials so that migrants’ educational backgrounds could be fully recognised. They argued that migrants are discriminated against when



	<p>they cannot validate the education they received in their home countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both professionals and young people stressed the need to improve career guidance. They felt it was important to deliver relevant talks in high schools. Young participants insisted that such guidance should reflect real labour market opportunities and help them develop strategies to work close to their families. Professionals regretted that guidance has not been dialogue-based so far. One young participant expressed it clearly: “We feel like we’re in the dark and we need a light.” - Regarding guidance, it was noted that although recent legislative changes have improved the educational dimension of guidance, implementation is still severely limited by a lack of resources and training for guidance counsellors. - Young participants also complained that rising housing costs have become a major obstacle to gaining independence. - A particularly interesting discussion focused on the accessibility of available information. Young people explained to policymakers that information about opportunities and courses is not accessible — something that surprised the policymakers. This moment was especially relevant, as the young participants responded directly to a policymaker who had assumed young people simply lacked interest, calling instead for better and more accessible information and guidance. - There was also a debate about the need to adapt to the local economic context, but also about how educational policy could influence the productive fabric of the region. - Finally, it was agreed that the lack of pay for training courses and internships is problematic due to the opportunity costs involved.
<p>Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion</p>	<p>In the youth groups, prompts featuring imagined scenarios and quotes from young people—provided by CODICI—were used. The methodology involved presenting various quotes and situations, allowing a moment for participants to reflect and write down some ideas on post-its, and then discussing the</p>



	<p>emerging thoughts and noting key conclusions and proposals on a large sheet of paper.</p> <p>For the stakeholder group, the “likely and desirable scenarios” dynamic based on WP6 was used.</p> <p>The plenary session began with a brief presentation by one ambassador from each group, followed by an open debate facilitated by the research team. At first, participants were a bit shy, but after 10 to 15 minutes of discussion, they became more engaged, and a very interesting and meaningful conversation emerged.</p>
<p>Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?</p>	<p>Yes, three groups were formed for the first activity: one made up of stakeholders and the other two of young people. As commented, the aim was to produce a safe place in the first part of the IF for young people. The division was also useful to share more specific information of CLEAR with stakeholders, which were more interested in technical details of the project</p>
<p>Impressions from the IF</p>	<p>The team considers this first participatory experience a success. Both the separate group discussions and the plenary conversation were highly relevant, closely aligned with the objectives, and fostered a meaningful exchange of views among educational stakeholders.</p> <p>We want to highlight the creation of a space where young people were able to make their voices heard in front of those who define educational and employment policies in Castelló.</p> <p>The tone of the discussions was always respectful and constructive, but the young participants clearly expressed some of their most pressing concerns—such as the lack of opportunities and guidance. A particularly illustrative example was their reaction to a stakeholder’s comment suggesting that young people do not seek information due to a lack of interest. One of the youth ambassadors firmly responded, pointing out that this was not the case and that there is significant room for improvement in information systems.</p> <p>Overall, the implementation was smooth and did not involve any particularly significant challenges.</p>



3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

<p>Feedback from participants</p>	<p>During the post-session snack, all participants expressed satisfaction and gratitude. Some of the main points they shared with us include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to share space with young people. For example, several mentioned they were surprised to “discover” how young people engage with the available information. They commented that it would be valuable to repeat this kind of space or to hold such events more frequently. - Two young women of migrant origin told us they were very pleased that one of the prompts reflected their own situation as migrants with unrecognised university degrees. - Most of the young participants said they were happy to have had the chance to express their thoughts and demands to the stakeholders. There was a widespread sense of being heard and feeling empowered. - At the end of the session, some young people were deeply engaged in the discussion and wanted to continue it either with us or with other stakeholders. - Stakeholders showed strong interest in the CLEAR project results and asked when the final project reports would be published on the website.
<p>Innovation aspects</p>	<p>The main recommendations that emerged from the IF Castelló are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Simplify the equivalence process for academic credentials to ensure full recognition of migrants’ educational backgrounds. 2- Improve career guidance and counselling in both schools and employment/training institutions, ensuring it reflects real labour market opportunities and supports life planning close to family. 3- Ensure proper implementation of recent legislative improvements in guidance, addressing the current lack of resources and specialised training for guidance counsellors. 4- Enhance access to clear and user-friendly information on available training courses and educational opportunities.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5- Train migrants to prevent labour exploitation and support their language acquisition. 6- Address bureaucratic barriers and improve processes for the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad. 7- Tackle the high cost of housing, particularly in urban areas where opportunities are concentrated. 8- Improve accessibility and quality of public transport to ensure equitable access to education and employment. 9- Expand the offer of training courses and improve the visibility and accessibility of information about them. 10- Address labour market precarity, especially in apprenticeships and entry-level jobs. 11- Support the validation of prior learning more regularly and systematically (e.g., more frequently than once every seven years). 12- Bridge the gap between educational institutions and companies to ensure internships provide meaningful, practical learning experiences. 13- Encourage educational policy to actively influence the local economic structure, not just adapt to it.
<p>IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions</p>	<p>Informative leaflets about both the project and the final conference in Lisbon were distributed. No media outlets were invited, so there is no coverage in online news.</p>



Figure 11 – Innovation Forum in Castelló



Credits: UAB Team