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Navigating the Next Normal: Innovative Approaches to
Enhancing Youth's Education-Employment Transitions in Post-
COVID-19 Europe (NEXT-UP)

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WHAT IS A LIVING LAB?



Living labs are user-centred, open innovation platforms based on a systematic user co-creation approach in real-life settings ([ENOLL](#))



Living labs bring together the key stakeholders - researchers, employer reps., policy makers and civil society (youth, NGOs) - to focus on the 'wicked societal problems' (youth employability).



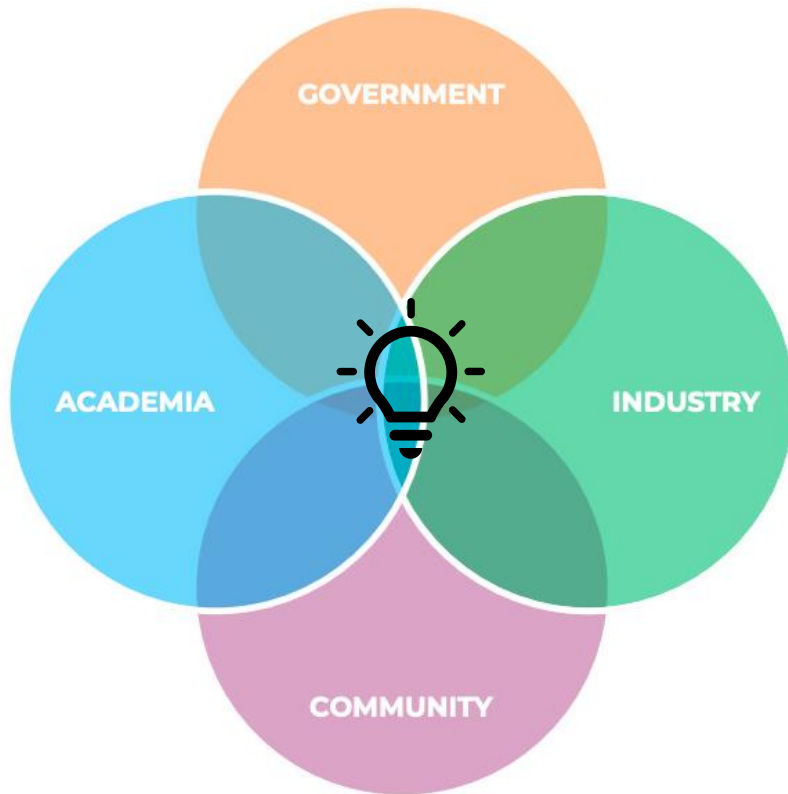
These problems have no single solution and often involve conflicting interests among many actors. LLs offer a collaborative space for integrating diverse perspectives.



Stakeholder engagement in LL is voluntary, open, and involves active dialog and feedback loops



LL approach is based on Quadruple HELIX model of innovation



bringing together the 4 groups of key stakeholders helps...

- ▶ Break the silos
- ▶ Speak the 'same language'
- ▶ Learn from each other
- ▶ Avoid overlapping efforts
- ▶ Build trust and create synergies
- ▶ Co-create innovations

Employability means different things to different stakeholders...

Youth - A sense of *future security* and *meaningful work* that matches their skills and values. Often linked to *opportunity* and personal development

Employers - a combination of *skills, adaptability, and work readiness*. Importance of *soft skills, not just technical*

Researchers - a process in which graduates navigate edu-labour market transitions by strategically using agency and employability *capitals* (human, social, symbolic, economic). Not only skills, but structural barriers

Policy makers - treat empl. as *a labor market strategy to reduce unemployment*, through training or re-skilling. Skills agenda.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN LIVING LAB ACTIVITIES

🧠 Researchers:

- Gain a *reality check* for research.
- Test concepts and models in *real-life contexts*.
- Share knowledge with a *broader community*, beyond academia.

💬 Youth:

- Voice your *ideas, needs, and frustrations*.
- Co-create *policy recommendations* and *practical solutions* that reflect your lived experience.

🏢 Employers:

- Access *insights* on future skills and labour market trends.
- Build *innovation partnerships* across education, policy, and society.

🏛️ Policymakers:

- Engage directly with *citizens, researchers, and enterprises* in shaping evidence-based policies.



Next-UP Living Lab events

Workshop	Timing	Description
LL Kickoff	November, 3	LL intro, brainstorming ideas on youth employability: challenges, opportunities and service needs in post-covid era (Hybrid)
Initial Findings Sharing	Apr 2026	Initial insights from Next-UP sub-studies, stakeholder feedback (Hybrid)
Foresight Game	Aug/Sept. 2026	Scenario mapping for youth employability, role play (Online/Onsite)
Policy Co-design	Apr 2027	Collaborative policy design with stakeholders (Hybrid, FI) ->Policy briefs, round table with EU policy makers
Skills prediction/skills matching Workshop	Aug 2027	Evidence from Machine learning and big data analysis comparing skills developed and required in job ads (Hybrid)
ABM Testing and kickout	Feb 2028	Scenario testing using agent-based models (Hybrid)

Your role:

- Participate in bi-annual workshops, engage in co-creation activities organised by Next-UP project researchers
- Share feedback on our research snapshots, that will be sent to you
- Feel free to contact us

<https://www.nextup-project.eu/>





THANK
YOU!

Questions for group discussion (1h)

- What are **the biggest hurdles** that young people face when moving from education into employment: reflections on the long-lasting effects of COVID-19 (20 min)
- What **best practices**, programs or strategies for enhancing youth education-to-employment transitions have you observed (20 min)
- If you had (a **magic wand**) all the resources and power needed which one challenge, that we discussed, would you pick and how would solve it? (20 min)
- **Disclaimer:** *we will take notes of these discussions and share the summaries with you, no personal information will be included in any of these.*