

Research Report

# DJ LAB PRO

Emerging DJs in Central-Eastern Europe, the Balkans  
and the Baltic States: Competencies, Barriers &  
Support Needs

**VIRTUAL GEISHA**  DJ LAB



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# Scope & Limitations

This report is based on self-reported qualitative and quantitative data collected from 170 emerging DJs across Central-Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Baltic states through a structured questionnaire conducted as part of the DJ LAB PRO project (LIVEMX, 2025).

Due to the project operational base in Poland, Polish respondents represent 54% of the sample, which limits direct cross-country comparisons.

The report does not claim statistical representativeness of the region; its purpose is to identify recurring patterns, structural gaps, and shared experiences as perceived by artists navigating early-to-mid career stages in local music ecosystems.

**170**

Respondents

**15**

Countries covered

**73%**

Never played abroad

**77%**

No cross-border  
network

**66%**

Early/developing export  
readiness

**36%**

Prioritise mentoring &  
strategy



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# Methodological Note

Data was collected via a multi-section questionnaire covering six domains: basic profile, self-assessed competencies, export readiness, mindset and values, motivation and support needs, and equality and inclusivity. Quantitative responses were scored on 1 - 10 scales. Qualitative open-text responses were analysed thematically.

Quantitative data was cleaned and standardised: country names were harmonised, regions were assigned based on geographic and political groupings (Central Eastern Europe, Balkans, Baltic States), and analytical variables were computed including skill averages, skill gaps, and export readiness tiers.

Open-text responses were coded using keyword-based thematic analysis across 12 categories (e.g., passion for music, career growth, frustration/inequality, inclusivity). All visualisations are based on the cleaned dataset.



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# Executive Summary

DJ LAB PRO set out to understand the structural barriers facing emerging DJs in Central-Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Baltic states. What the data reveals is a paradox: artists in this region demonstrate strong technical and self organisational skills, yet remain almost entirely locked within local ecosystems, with minimal cross-border presence and significant gaps in the strategic and relational competencies that international careers require.

**This is not a talent deficit. It is a structural and informational one.**

Three core tensions define the landscape of emerging electronic music artists in the region: high local confidence versus international invisibility; strong intrinsic motivation versus the absence of career infrastructure; and a deeply individual artistic identity versus recognition that professional growth requires community and systemic support. These findings form the basis for concrete recommendations for future support programmes, festival infrastructure, and European cultural policy.



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# 1. Who Responded

## A Profile of Emerging DJs in the Region

Before analysing competencies and barriers, it is important to understand who completed the questionnaire · where they are from, how active they are, and what genres they represent.

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### 1.1 Geographic Distribution

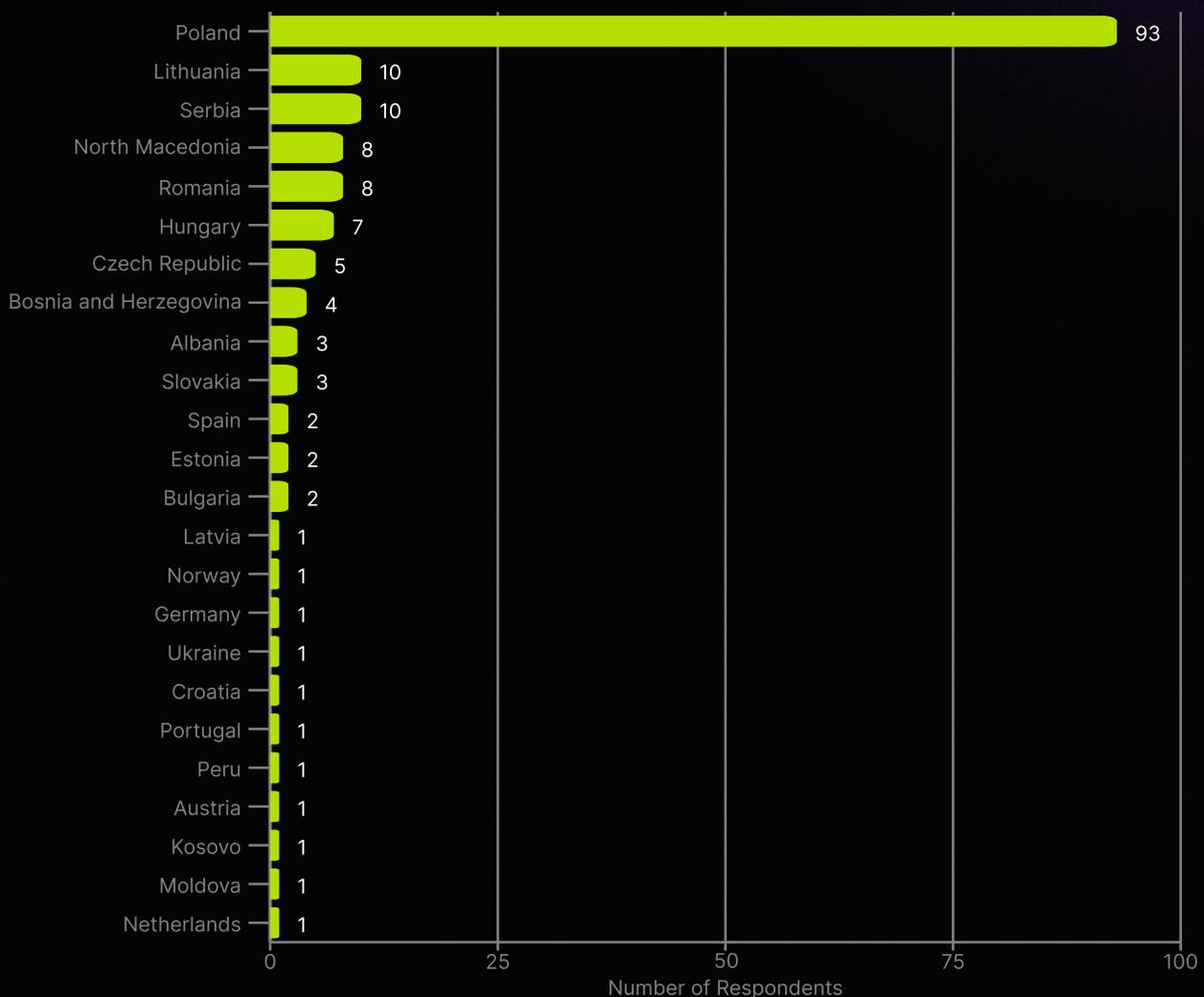


Figure 1.1a · Respondents by country (N=170)



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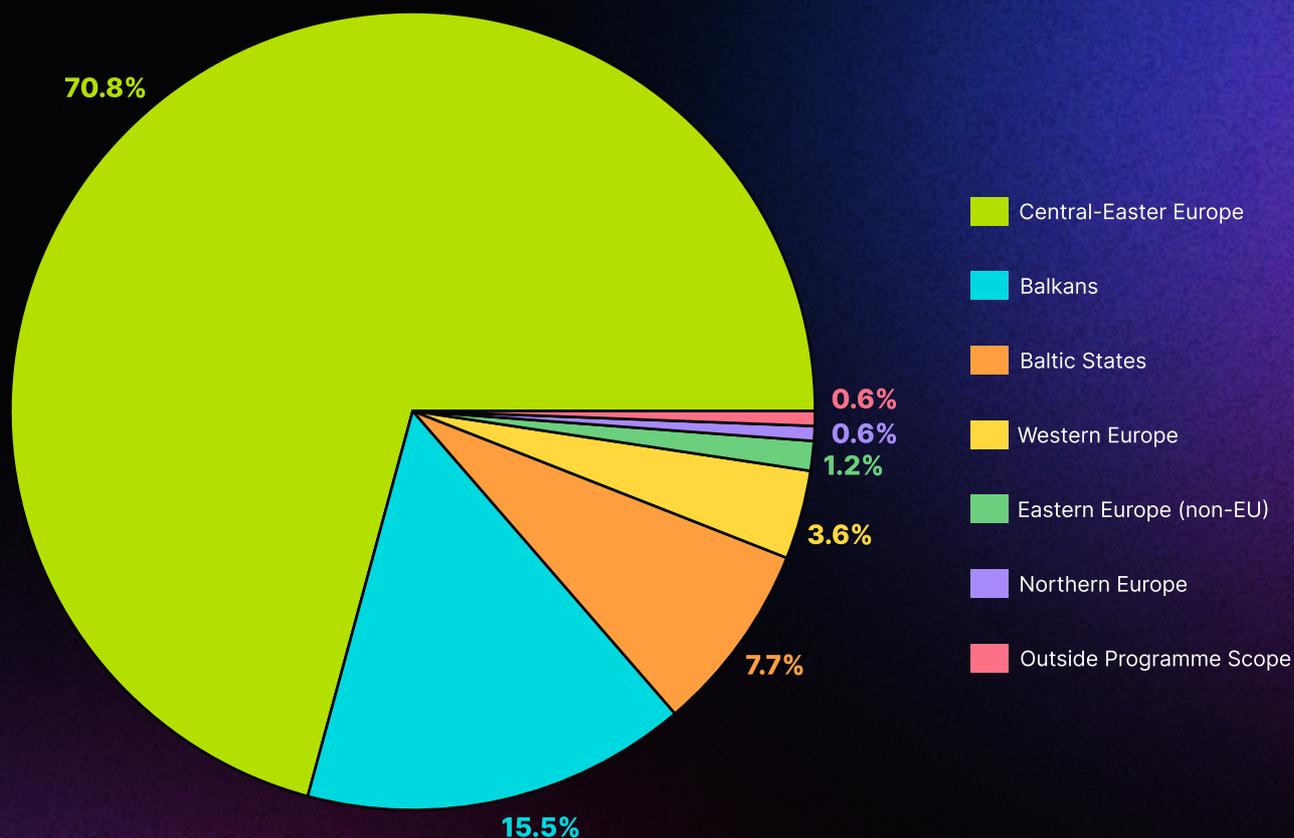


Figure 1.1b · Respondents by region

**Central-Eastern Europe: 118 respondents (69%)**

· of which: **Poland: 92 respondents (54% of total)**

**Balkans: 27 respondents (16%)**

**Baltic States: 13 respondents (8%)**

The concentration of Polish respondents is a direct function of the project operational base and outreach channels, and should be read as a methodological characteristic of the dataset, not as a claim about the region's demographic composition.



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## 1.2 Age & Gender

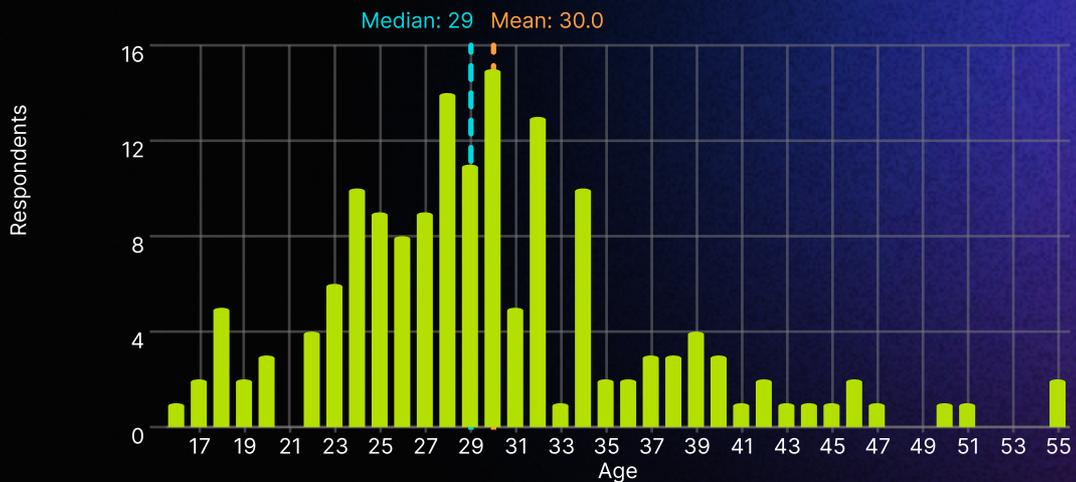


Figure 1.2a · Age distribution of respondents (N=158)

**Average age: 30 years (range: 16-55)**

**Core cohort (26-35): 52% of respondents**

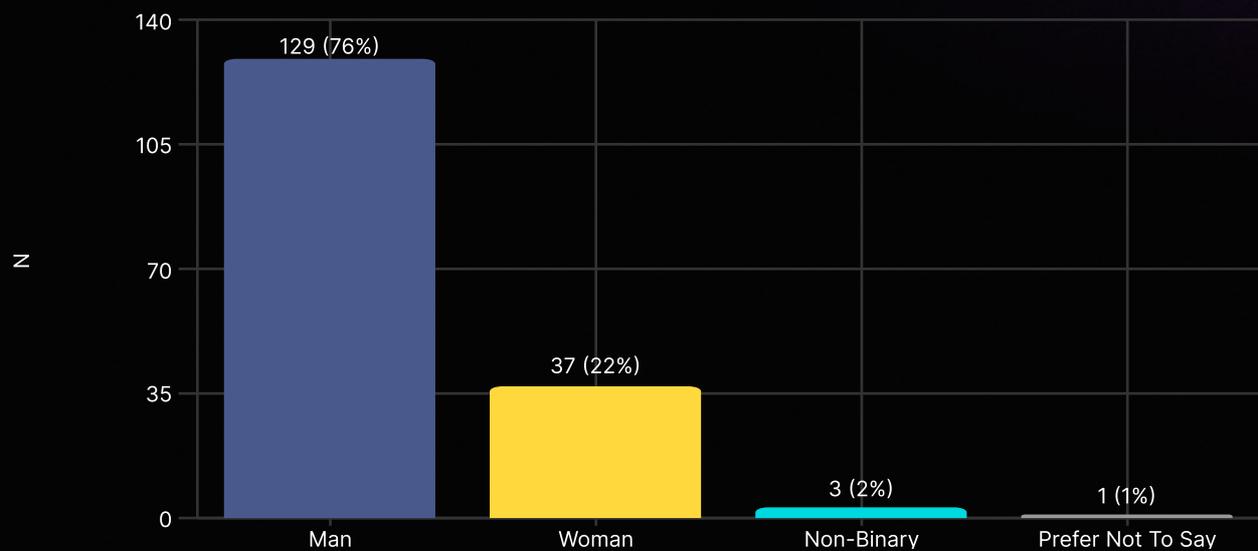


Figure 1.2b · Gender distribution

**Men: 76% (129)**

**Women: 22% (37)**

**Non-binary / prefer not to say: 2% (4)**



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## GENDER GAP

Women are significantly underrepresented at 22% of respondents, consistent with broader data on gender imbalance in electronic music. Notably, women score slightly higher than men on export readiness (4.8 vs 4.3) and networking (6.5 vs 6.2), suggesting that those who do persist face structural barriers rather than competency deficits.

## 1.3 Activity Level & Genre Profile



Figure 1.3a · Performance frequency

The majority of respondents are regularly active - this is not a sample of aspirants but of practising artists. Their barriers are not about getting started; they are about scaling beyond the local.



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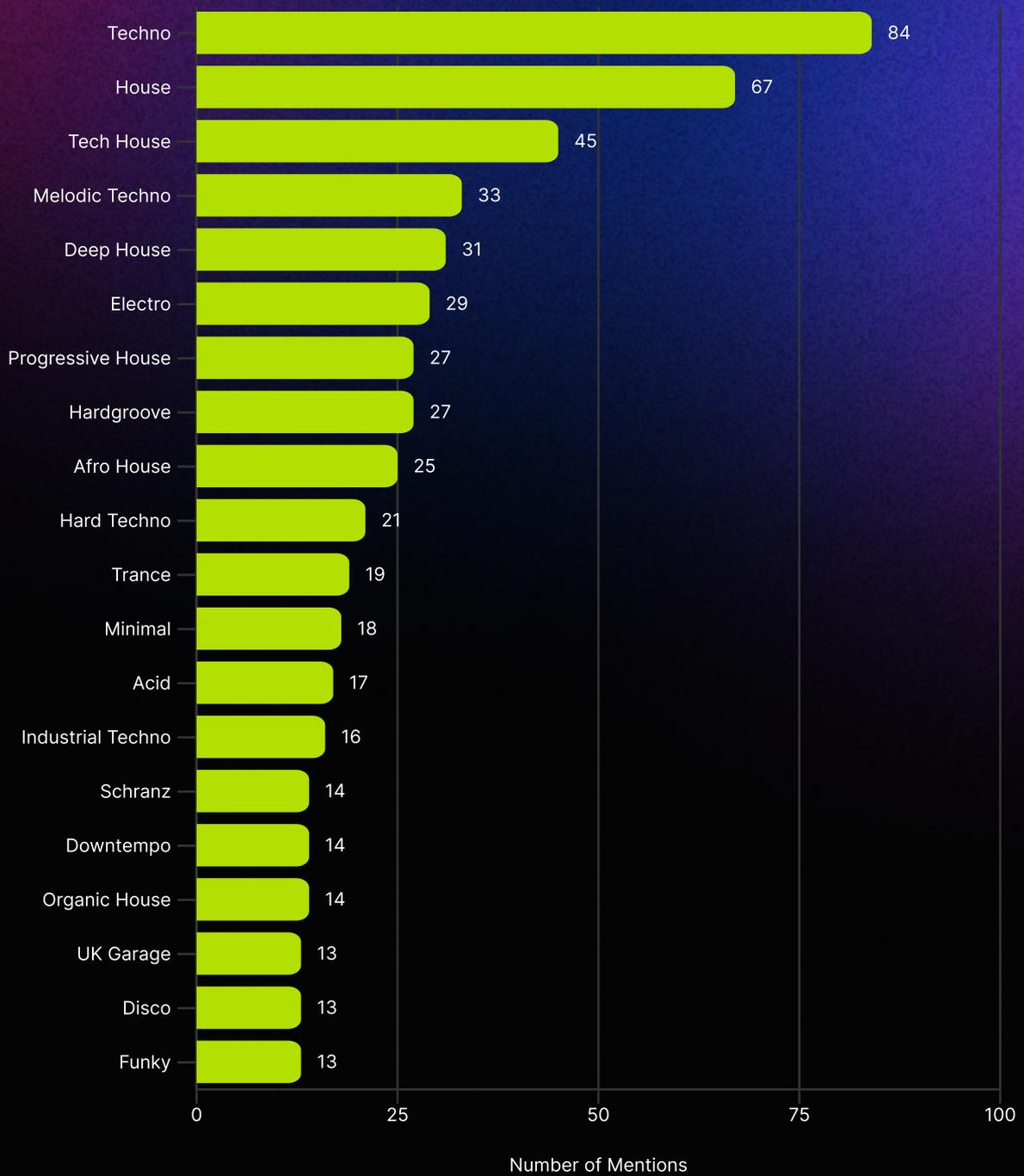


Figure 1.3b · Music genres represented (Top 20)



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# 2. The Competency Paradox

## Strong Where It's Comfortable, Weak Where It Matters for Growth

Respondents were asked to self-assess across seven competency areas on a 1 - 10 scale. The results reveal a consistent and structurally significant pattern.

### 2.1 The Skill Profile

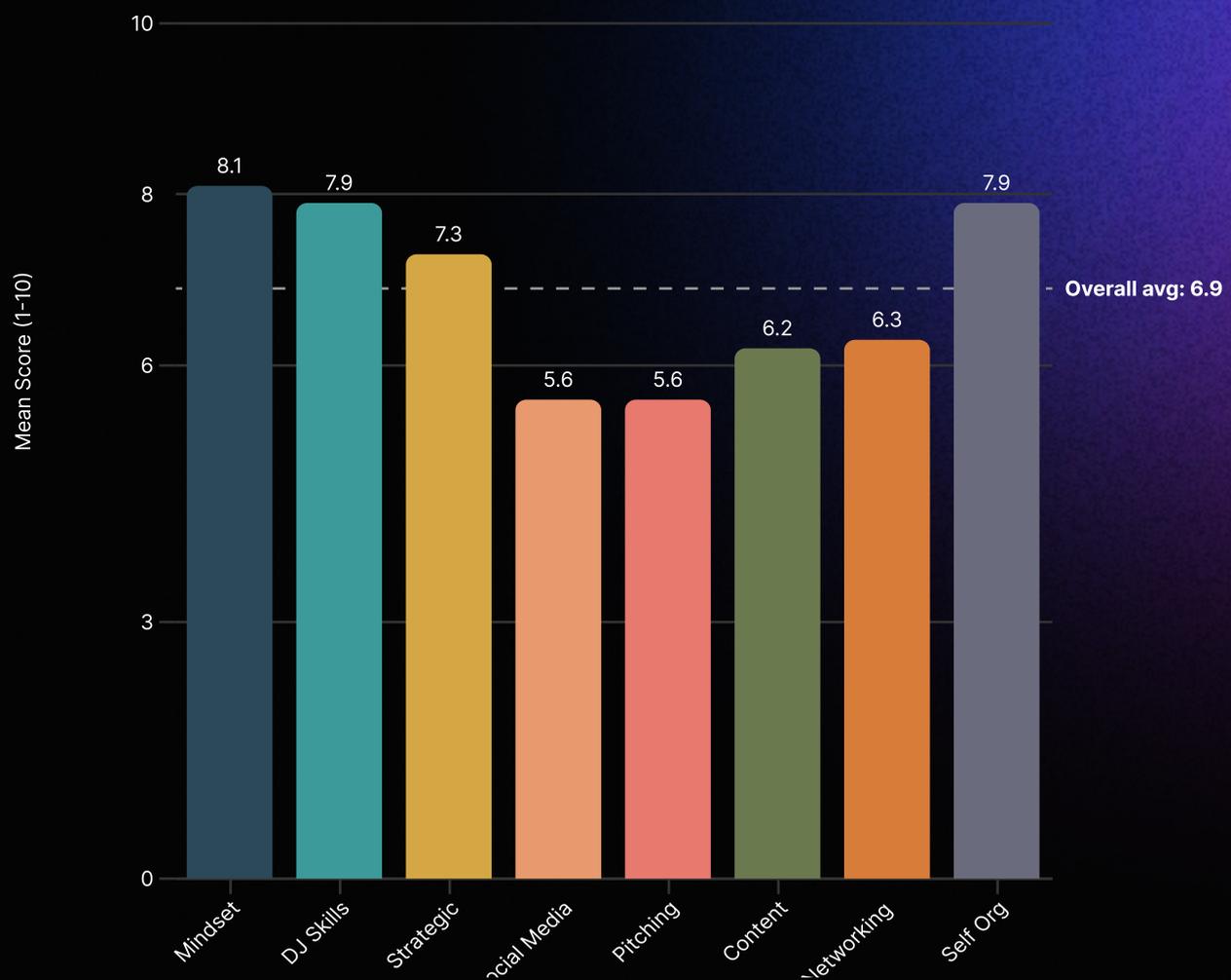


Figure 2.1 · Mean self-assessed competency scores across all respondents (N=170)



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Self-organisation and DJ/Technical skills lead at approximately 7.9/10. Strategic thinking follows at 7.3. The relational and promotional competencies - networking (6.3), content creation (6.2), social media (5.6) and pitching/self-promotion (5.6) trail significantly behind.

Average skill gap (distance between highest and lowest self-rated area): 4.86 points out of 10.

### **CORE FINDING**

**Technical skills and self-organisation score nearly 8/10. The skills directly required for international career development - pitching, social media, networking - score between 5.6 and 6.3. These are precisely the competencies that formal DJ education does not teach, that local scenes do not reward, and that no structural support system in the region currently addresses.**

## **2.2 Competency Profiles by Export Tier**

When we segment the competency profile by export readiness tier, a striking pattern emerges: the gap between Early-stage and Advanced artists is not primarily in technical skills, but in precisely the relational and strategic competencies identified above.

Advanced-tier artists score substantially higher on pitching, networking, and social media - the skills that Early-stage artists most lack.



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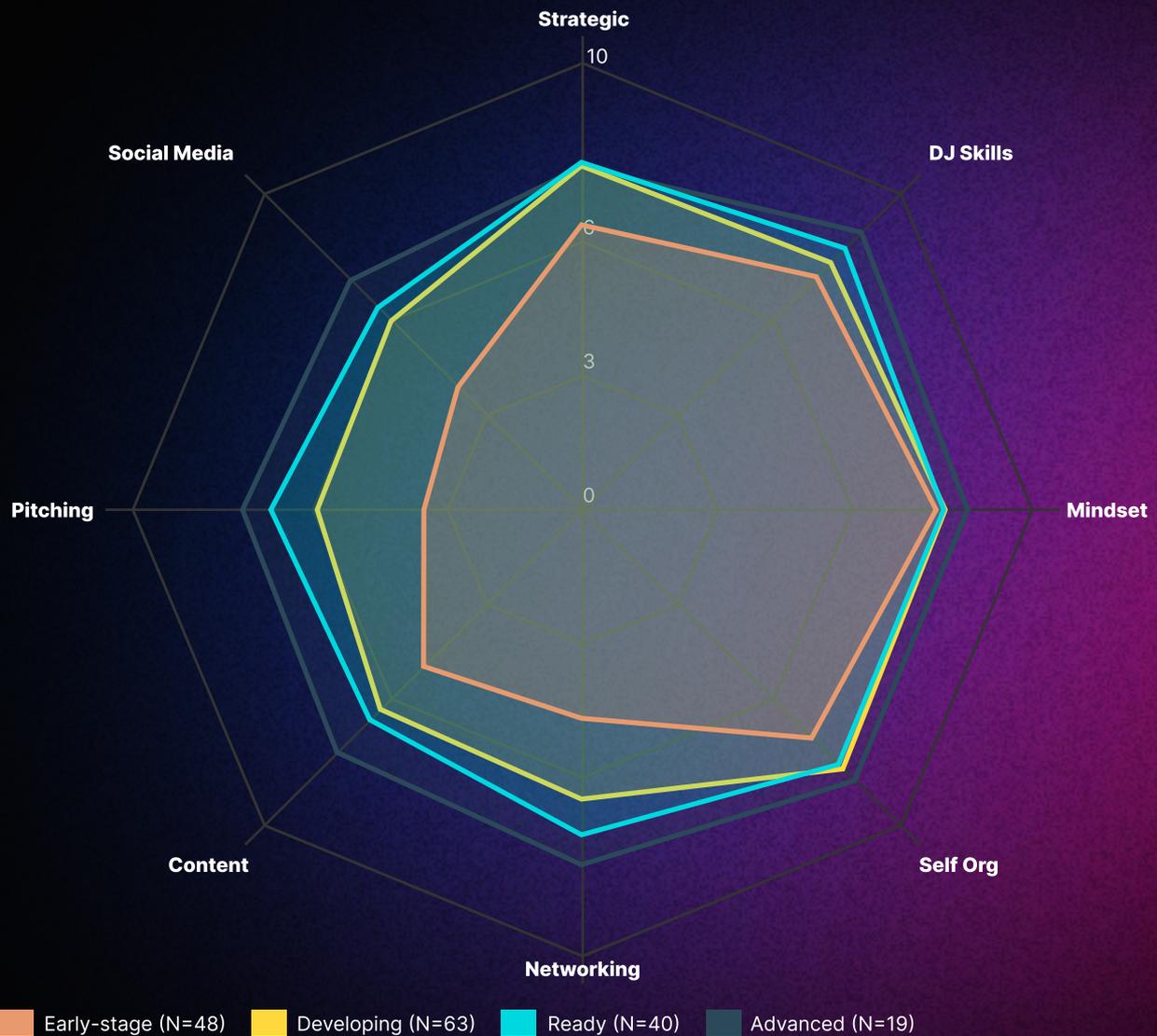


Figure 2.2 · Competency radar: skill profiles by export readiness tier

This radar visualisation reinforces a central finding: technical competence is relatively consistent across all tiers, but the promotional and relational competencies diverge sharply.

The path from local to international is not about becoming a better DJ - it is about building the skills around DJing that make visibility possible.



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## 2.3 What This Means

The paradox is that competence in craft does not translate into career mobility. A DJ can be technically excellent, reliably organised, and strategically self aware - and still be invisible outside their own city.

The skills that unlock European-level careers (how to pitch to international bookers, how to build an audience across platforms, how to network with industry gatekeepers) are learned through access: access to mentors, to scenes, to information networks that simply do not exist in the same density outside Western European hubs.

**This is a structural deficit, not a personal one.**



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# 3. Local Confidence, International Invisibility

The second major pattern in the data concerns geographic reach - or the almost total absence of it.

## 3.1 Export Readiness

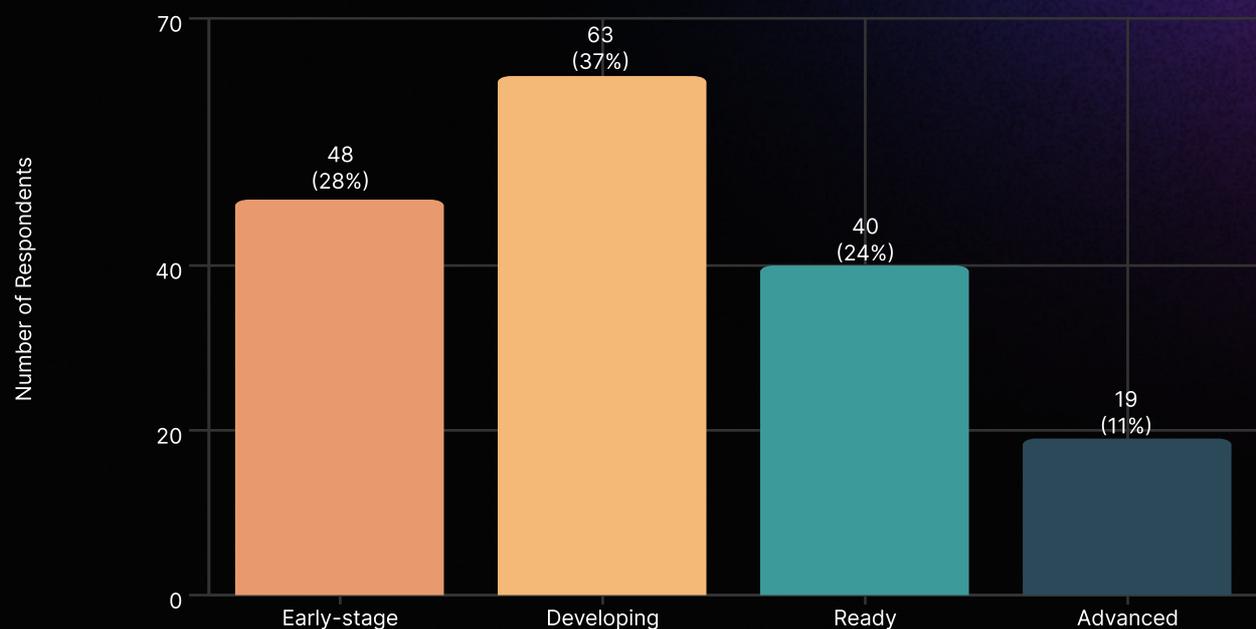


Figure 3.1 · Export readiness tier distribution

**Early-stage:** 48 respondents (28%)

**Developing:** 63 respondents (37%)

**Ready:** 40 respondents (24%)

**Advanced:** 19 respondents (11%)

66% of respondents fall in the Early-stage or Developing tiers - meaning the large majority have not yet built the foundations for cross-border activity.



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## 3.2 Cross-Border Activity

73%

Never performed outside their home country

77%

No professional network outside their home country

Regional comparison of export scores:

5.1 / 10

Baltic States

5.2 / 10

Balkans

4.2 / 10

Central-Eastern Europe  
(incl. Poland)

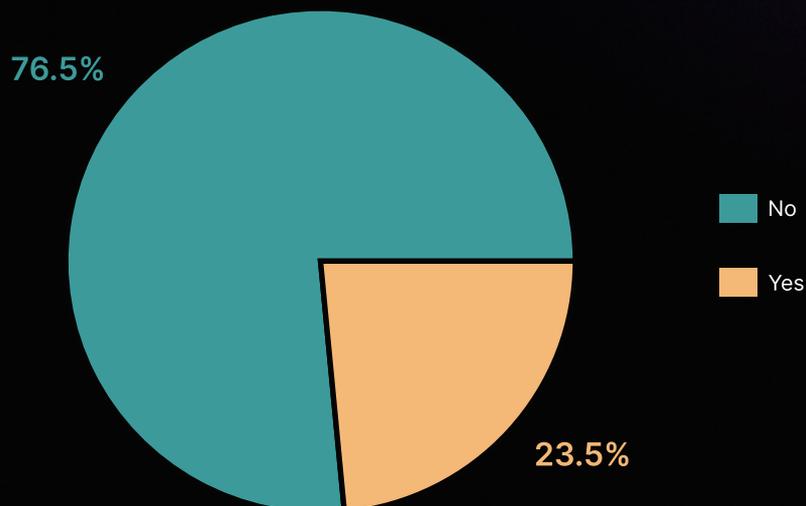


Figure 3.2 · Professional network outside home country

### REGIONAL NOTE

The Balkans and Baltic States show marginally stronger export readiness than CEE - likely reflecting smaller domestic markets that create earlier pressure to look outward, rather than stronger institutional support. None of the sub-regions show export scores that suggest systemic infrastructure for international mobility



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### 3.3 The Skills-Export Relationship

A direct comparison of skill profiles between artists who have performed abroad and those who have not reveals where the real divide lies.

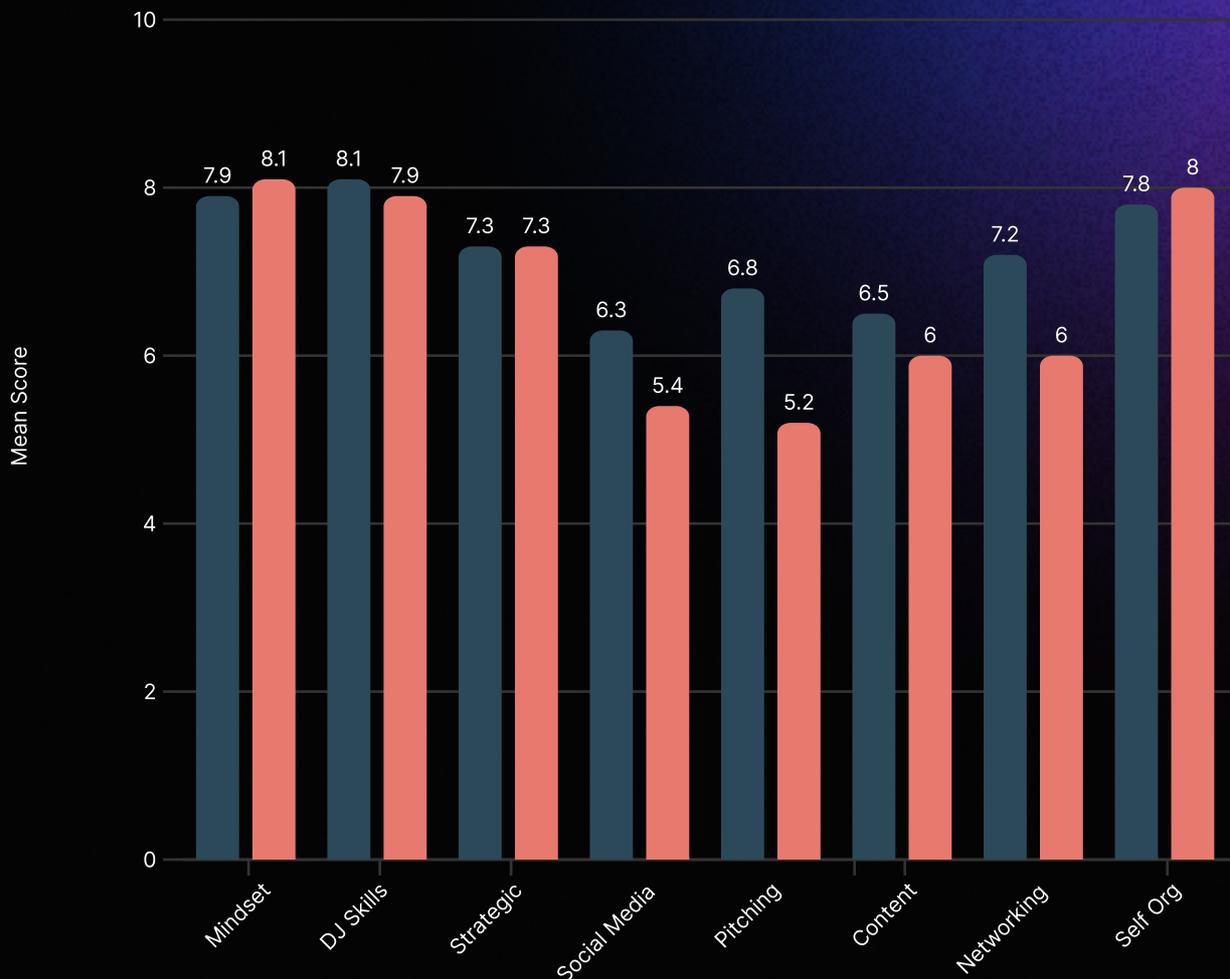


Figure 3.3 · Skill profile: performed abroad vs not

Artists with international experience score higher across all competency areas - but the largest differences appear in exactly the relational skills this report identifies as critical gaps: networking, pitching, and content creation. Technical competencies (DJ skills, self-organisation) remain relatively consistent regardless of cross-border experience, confirming that the barrier to international mobility is not craft - it is visibility infrastructure.

### 3.4 Why This Matters

These artists are not unready in terms of craft. They are unready in terms of infrastructure. Western European markets · Berlin, Amsterdam, London · operate through dense webs of booking agents, festival networks, media relationships, and industry events. Entering from the outside, without existing connections or institutional backing, requires precisely the skills (pitching, networking, self promotion) where our respondents score lowest.

**The international music economy is not a meritocracy.  
It is a network economy.  
And the network advantage is not evenly distributed.**



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# 4. Strong Motivation, Absent Infrastructure

## What Artists Actually Need?

### 4.1 Why They DJ?

Open-text responses about what respondents love about DJing reveal remarkably consistent themes: the experience of connection with an audience, the ability to express identity through music selection, and a sense of purpose that transcends commercial considerations.

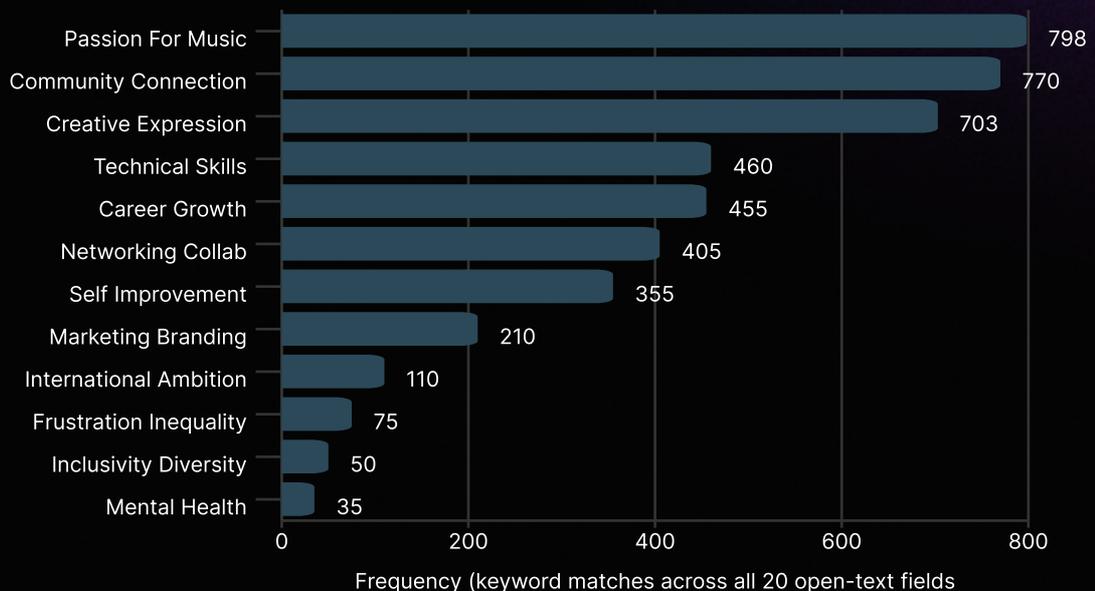


Figure 4.1 · Thematic tags identified in open-text responses

*What I love most about DJing is that it's the one moment when I truly feel like myself. When I play, it feels like it's just me, fully and authentically.*

*Respondent, Poland*

*I love making people dance. It doesn't matter if it's two people or 200 in a club, making someone feel something through music is the most important thing.*

*Respondent, Balkans*



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This intrinsic motivation is a significant asset. It means these artists are not primarily driven by commercial reward · they are driven by the work itself. It also means they are likely to persist through difficulty. But motivation without infrastructure produces burnout, not careers

## 4.1 Why They DJ?

When asked what form of professional support they would prioritise, the response was unambiguous:

**Mentoring & Career Strategy:** Most selected (60+ respondents, ~36%)

**PR / Press support:** 11 respondents

**Content creation support:** 4 respondents

**Music publishing & distribution:** 4 respondents

**No support needed:** 24 respondents

### DOMINANT NEED

**Mentoring and career strategy is by far the dominant need. When respondents explain why, a recurring theme emerges: they do not lack effort or ambition - they lack a map. They do not know how to evaluate what they are doing, because there is no one in their immediate environment who has made the journey before them.**

*I need someone who can tell me what I'm doing wrong or what I should change, because I struggle to be objective. I often feel like I'm doing everything, but I don't know if I'm doing the right things.*

*Respondent, Poland / Central-Eastern Europe*

*I just don't know how to go from a local DJ to something bigger.*

*Respondent, Hungary / Central-Eastern Europe*



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# 5. Mindset, Values & the Sociology of the Solo Career

The questionnaire included a set of open-ended questions about how respondents approach their work, handle failure, and think about community. These responses offer a rare qualitative window into the self-understanding of emerging electronic music artists in the region.

## 5.1 Solo vs. Collective

Respondents were asked whether they identify as solo types or group types. The responses resist simple categorisation · most describe a nuanced position that reflects the actual conditions of the career.

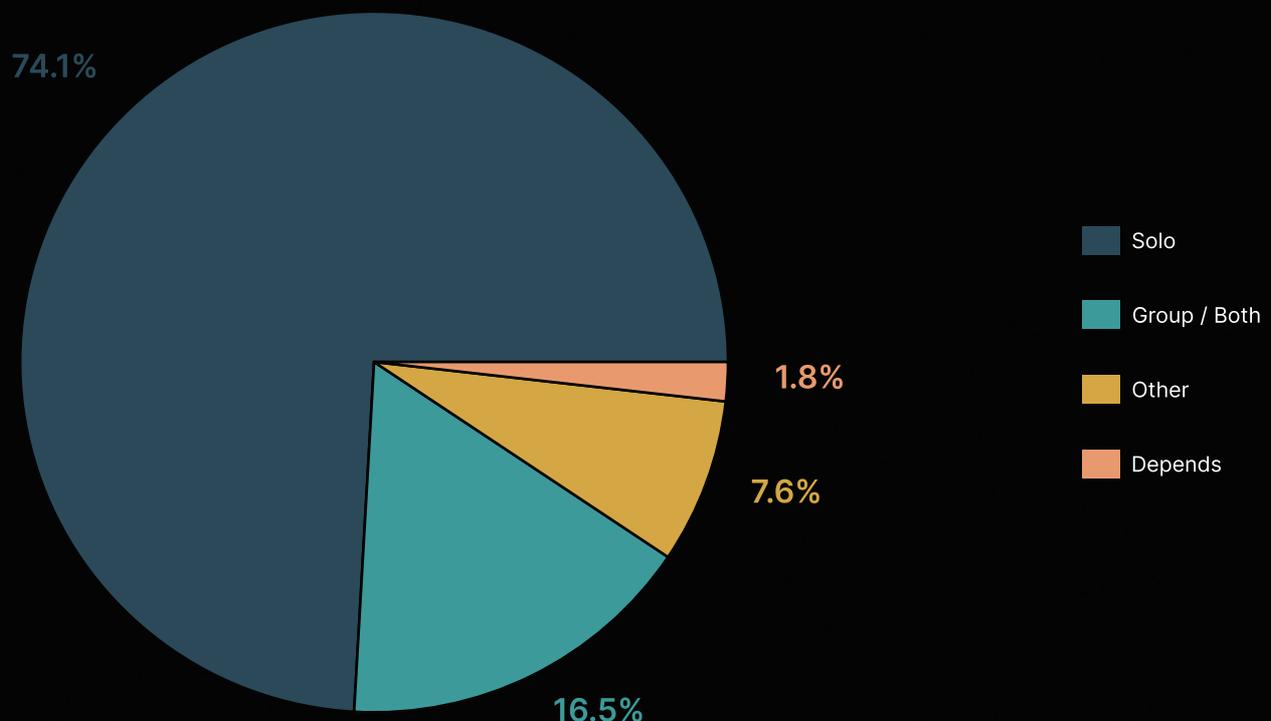


Figure 5.1 · Solo vs group preference



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*As a DJ, I'm solo. I love having full control over my set. But when it comes to organising events and building a scene, I'm definitely a team player. You can't build magic on a dancefloor alone.*

*Respondent, North Macedonia / Balkans*

*Definitely solo. I tend to do all things by myself. It's both a curse and a blessing. Being an individualist helps me focus, but I feel like I couldn't live without social energy either.*

*Respondent, Poland / Central-Eastern Europe*

This tension, between the necessarily solitary nature of artistic identity formation and the recognition that professional development requires community, is one of the defining psychological features of the emerging DJ career.

Importantly, many respondents articulate both sides with clarity. They understand the limitation of their solo orientation; they simply lack the environment that would allow them to act on that understanding.

## 5.2 Responsibility & Resilience

Responses to questions about handling mistakes and professional setbacks suggest a generally high level of personal accountability and resilience. Respondents describe adapting to broken equipment mid-set, running to a shop to buy a missing cable minutes before a gig, and recognising, sometimes painfully, the cost of early-career naivety.

*When I was starting out, I played a four-hour set right before Christmas Eve without any compensation. I had no contract. Looking back, I know it was partly my own mistake for not insisting on a formal agreement. It was a tough lesson.*

*Respondent, Poland / Central-Eastern Europe*

This resilience is real and should be taken seriously by support programme designers. These artists do not need to be protected from difficulty · they need frameworks that help them turn experience into transferable knowledge.



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## 5.3 Inclusivity & Access

Responses to questions about handling mistakes and professional setbacks suggest a generally high level of personal accountability and resilience. Respondents describe adapting to broken equipment mid-set, running to a shop to buy a missing cable minutes before a gig, and recognising, sometimes painfully, the cost of early-career naivety.



Figure 5.1 · Solo vs group preference

**Identify as minority group member(s): ~26% of respondents**

**Migration experience: 15 respondents**

**LGBTQIA+: 8 respondents**

**Social/economic exclusion: 7 respondents**

While the majority of respondents do not identify as belonging to a minority group, the 26% who do represent a significant and policy-relevant constituency.

Their presence in the data, and the fact that women show relatively stronger export scores despite being underrepresented, suggests that structural openness to participation does not automatically translate into structural support for progression.



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# 6. Recommendations for Future Support Programmes

The following recommendations are drawn directly from the data and from the implementation experience of DJ LAB PRO. They are addressed to programme designers, cultural institutions, festivals, and European funding bodies working in the music sector.

## 6.1 Make Mentoring the Core, Not an Add-On

Mentoring and career strategy is the single most requested form of support. Future programmes should build from this rather than treating it as supplementary to technical training. Effective mentoring in this context means access to practitioners who have navigated the specific career path from regional scene to international visibility - not generic business coaching.

## 6.2 Address the Pitching and Networking Gap Directly

The competency data is clear: technical skills are strong; relational and promotional skills are not. Programmes should include structured modules on pitching to bookers and festivals, building and maintaining professional relationships across borders, and presenting artistic identity to industry audiences - delivered by people who operate in those contexts.



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## 6.3 Create Cross-Border Infrastructure, Not Just Content

73% of respondents have never performed outside their country. Webinars and online content do not close this gap. What creates export readiness is repeated exposure to professional contexts outside one's home market - showcases, residencies, festival slots, industry events. Future programmes should budget for physical mobility and embed cross-border performance opportunities as core deliverables, not aspirational extras.

## 6.4 Build Ecosystems, Not One-Off Interventions

Several respondents describe learning best through sustained community, through ongoing relationships with peers and mentors, not single training events. The most effective design is a programme that creates a lasting ecosystem: a community platform, alumni network, and resource library that continues to operate after the formal programme ends.

## 6.5 Design Explicitly for Gender Inclusion

Women represent only 22% of respondents, yet show stronger export readiness scores than men. The structural barrier is clearly at the entry and persistence level, not at the capability level. Future programmes should set explicit gender targets, ensure female representation in mentor rosters and speakers, and address the specific safety and visibility challenges that women face in the electronic music industry.

## 6.6 Recognise the CEE/Balkans/Baltic Specificity

These regions are not simply not Berlin. They have distinct market structures, media landscapes, and cultural contexts. Support programmes should avoid assuming that Western European models of career development are directly transferable. The most valuable programmes will be designed with and ideally by people embedded in regional scenes.



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# 7. The DJ LAB PRO Framework

## A Transferable Model

DJ LAB PRO was designed as a replicable intervention. The following elements constitute the core of the model and can be adapted for other regions, genres, or artist career stages.

### Diagnostic phase

Structured self-assessment questionnaire to map competency profile before programme design. Generates data for programme design and participant-level feedback.

### Bootcamp

Intensive residential event embedded in an existing festival. Combines technical workshops, industry panels, and live showcase performance.

### Mentorship phase

Structured one-to-one and group mentoring over 6 months. Delivered via digital platform with community features.

### Showcase stage

Dedicated performance slot at a significant festival for programme participants. Creates tangible export credit and industry visibility.

### Community platform

Sustained digital community beyond programme timeline for alumni networking and resource sharing.



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## Research output

Published report contributing data to broader understanding of regional scene conditions.

Each element addresses a specific identified gap: the diagnostic phase addresses lack of self-knowledge; the boot camp addresses isolation from professional networks; the mentorship addresses the absence of career maps; the showcase addresses the missing performance record; the community platform addresses the loneliness of the solo career; and the research output feeds future programme design.



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# Closing Note

The electronic music scene of Central-Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Baltic states is not a scene in waiting. It is active, committed, technically accomplished, and deeply motivated. What it lacks is not talent it lacks the infrastructure of visibility, the networks of access, and the strategic frameworks that allow talent to travel.

DJ LAB PRO was one attempt to address that gap. This report is a contribution to the understanding of what the gap actually looks like in data, in patterns, and in the voices of the artists who navigate it every day.

The data in this report carries numbers. But behind every number is a person who showed up, filled in a questionnaire, and answered honestly about what they love, what they fear, and where they feel stuck. Their words deserve to close this report.

*I feel like I've reached my glass ceiling on a local scene and I don't really know how to get past that.*

*Respondent, Czech Republic / Central-Eastern Europe*

*I'm in the Prague scene for 10 years and my community believe in me. I believe it's time to expand but I don't know with what to start.*

*Respondent, Czech Republic / Central-Eastern Europe*

*I have been part of the club scene for almost 10 years. I was so driven by passion. But I still don't know how to develop my career on a long-term.*

*Respondent, Poland / Central-Eastern Europe*

*I just don't know how to go from a local DJ to something bigger.*

*Respondent, Hungary / Central-Eastern Europe*



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**DATA COLLECTED:** 2025

**RESPONDENTS:** 170 emerging DJs

**COUNTRIES COVERED:** 15 countries

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