RNY Mentoring Program

May 2021

COST Action CA 18123 Rural NEET Youth Network: Modelling the risks underlying rural NEETs social exclusion

RNY Mentoring Program

1. What is the Rural NEET Youth Network?

Rural NEETs' Youth Network (RNYN) aims at developing a model of comprehension for rural NEETs' social exclusion risk and protective factors based on the bio ecological model. The Action has three major goals:

- · upholding future research capability, with an emphasis on Early Career Investigators (ECI) and Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC);
- · creating a rural NEETs' online observatory;
- · fostering knowledge use by policy makers and practitioners.

The RNYN work plan will be produced by different working groups, but in this mentoring program a cross working group collaboration is aimed. In the long run, RNYN's scientific impact will lead to the creation of a rural NEETs' observatory, integrating ECI in a broad multidisciplinary community and strengthening the COST Inclusiveness Policy. Long-term socio-economic impact is expected to be translated into (in)ternational legislation to tackle rural NEETs' needs and promote sectorial innovations. RNYN is a timely proposal by creating networks/platforms to organize findings, connect critical mass dealing with rural NEETs and **build up research capacity.** It is also socially relevant, by aiming at informing policies and on-the-ground practices.

To reach the goals, the action board is conducting a **mentoring program** in the second and third year of the project. The aim is to capture relevant topics for the rural area and support young researchers to set up research proposals, which can help the local development of NEET challenges.

2. RNYN mentoring program in snapshot

2.1. What is the RNYN mentoring program?

The mentoring program aims to support Early Career Investigators (ECI), i.e. researchers up to 8 years after their PhD completion) as well as PhD students in developing research proposals on rural NEETs related topics. Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC) mentors and mentees participation in the mentoring program will be given priority. ITC countries consist of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Republic of Serbia. The mentoring program is intended to contribute, therefore, to develop and retain productive, professional researchers, who can reach out to the rural areas and capture the needs of youth and their specific risks and opportunities in these regions. As such, the primary focus of the program is mentoring young researchers, supporting them in the preparation of multidisciplinary research projects, by developing their interest for relevant rural topics. The focus of the program is to build upon group and peer-to-peer mentoring mechanisms. RNYN members will be involved in the mentoring program, to make sure that the RNYN working group results feed into the mentoring program, while profiting from their knowledge and experience to develop the research topics.

2.2. When is the RNYN mentoring program taking place?

RNYN has scheduled two parallel mentoring programs between January 2022 and December 2022. Each edition will be delivered for 12 months.

2.3. Who is expected to participate in the RNYN mentoring program?

The mentoring program is dedicated to ECI who completed their PhD in the previous 8 years (70% from ITC countries, and a gender-balanced group). The mentors will plan a series of educational events (workshops, webinars, conferences and others) to maintain young researchers' engagement, ensure exchange and cross-inspiration. The program will be dedicated to research project development in the area of the mentoring program. It will include a kick-off training school; individual and small group mentoring sessions focused on research project development; and the evaluation and submission of project proposals. Local stakeholders will be also invited to activities, to make sure, that the research proposals have a meaningful, applied focus.

2.4. What are the expected outcomes of the RNYN mentoring program?

The expected <u>outcomes</u> of the mentoring program are to:
· Train 24 ECI/PhD Students (12 each year);
· 70% from ITC countries;
· gender-balanced group;

The expected <u>outputs</u> are:
· 80-100% of the participants submitting proposals for national or international research funding programs, until the end of Action;
· 30% proposals approved until the end of the Action.

2.5. Who is managing the RNYN mentoring program?

The mentoring program will be managed by Bahanur Nasya (<u>office@wonderland.cx</u>) and by a team of two more members that will act as a management team of this activity.

3. RNYN mentoring program in detail

3.1. Why mentoring in RNYN?

Training opportunities in COST Actions are excellent ways of disseminating knowledge developed within the Actions to targeted groups and/or building capacity in highly innovative topics or methods. RNYN has proposed a two editions of a one-year mentoring program for ECI to achieve this goal. We uphold several reasons for developing a mentoring program dedicated to ECI and PhD students in RNYN.

3.1.1. Securing the critical mass and expertise

Within RNYN, senior researchers and ECI have started to collaborate in national reports about NEETs and in a best-practices manual. This means that their interests and research ideas for the next decade are starting to be aligned with this COST action. At the same time, the novelty of the topic, together with its social relevance ensures future visibility and nurtures researchers' commitment to the COST action. This COST action also stresses the need to find geographically relevant partners, considering the challenges that need to be tackled. The involvement of researchers interested in the study of NEETs in ITC facing higher rural NEETs rates ensures the national relevance of RNYN results and, thus, contributes to securing the necessary critical mass that encourages bottom-up and top-down dissemination of this Action's results.

RNYN is also based on a multidisciplinary approach to the issue of rural NEETs' profile and (in)formal support systems. The positive contamination between ideas coming out from different disciplinary areas, facilitated by a common meta-theoretical framework, is a major contribution to reaching a comprehensive model of the mechanisms underlying rural NEETs' social exclusion, adding to the Action's potential impact. Finally, RNYN ensures a continuous commitment of the proponents. The mentoring program and the online observatory to be set up by RNYN in the future are purposively designed to nurture collaboration between senior researchers and ECI. This will uphold a research agenda for the next decade and improve knowledge dissemination stemming from RNYN.

All together, these RNYN features can and should be streamed into a structured training program that ensures that future high-quality research proposals will be developed with the support of more experienced or senior researchers within and outside the Action, further expanding its impact. A mentoring program seems the most desirable training context to achieve that.

3.1.2. Stakeholders involvement

RNYN has agreed that three types of stakeholders must be involved for each country, in order to improve knowledge development and dissemination:

(1) researchers: senior researchers and ECI;

(2) NGOs working in the youth field, with intervention in rural areas, managed by youths or youth workers;

(3) policy makers or youth advocacy organizations, with the power to influence regional/national youth policies.

In the case of NGOs, decision makers and advocacy groups, the selection is kept flexible, because the level of intervention (whether local, regional or national), as well as the degree and sectors of intervention vary greatly across countries. Connecting the mentoring program to the needs of the local organisations, the Action aims to create fruitful collaborations and bring scientific organisations and people in practice closer together. In addition, a mentoring program will hopefully support applied research proposals that offer evidence-based tools and solutions that help shaping better decision-making and interventions.

3.1.3. Long-term impact

In a 4-year timeframe, after this COST action has been fully implemented, it is expected that the RNYN model of comprehension for rural NEETs' social exclusion (including its risks and protective factors) and its online observatory will be the beacon for research on rural NEETs in Europe among academics and practitioners. Three submissions to international research funding in the first two years following the COST action are expected. It is also expected to integrate up to 50% of the involved ECI in new (inter)national research projects, allowing them to share their ongoing research in the years following this COST action. Their results will also encourage other young researchers to develop this area and contribute to its promotion by supporting efforts to make the NEET situation in rural areas more visible and better documented. The mentoring program is fully aligned with the RNYN long-term impact vision, by empowering younger researchers to develop research proposals in the Action main topic or related topics, offering them the right mix of research tools, guidance and networking.

4. How is RNYN mentoring program program organized?

4.1. What are RNYN mentoring program program steps?
The mentoring program will follow a step-by-step approach in the following order:

(1) **Call for mentors**: RNYN opens up one call for mentors within the Action members network website and in eCOST between January and July 2021. The call will seek to involve groups of, at least, 4 mentors. These are collectives of researchers with relevant experience and clear expertise in a given topic that is connected with rural NEETs or rural youth development in general. The topics may focus (but are not limited to) current or potential thematic annual priorities of the Action, such as:

- NEETs profiling;
- Rural youths and mobility;
- Formal education in rural areas;
- Non-formal education in rural areas;
- Employment services support for rural youths;
- Rural youths well-being and mental health;
- Youths participation in rural areas.

Thus, the themes should be wide enough to accommodate several mentees interests/proposals, as well as multidisciplinary collaborations. This will also leave room for mentees to pursue specific research themes, later on, during their participation in the RNYN mentoring program. Importantly, in exploring these themes, the mentors will be invited to describe how they will incorporate stakeholders (local/regional/national) contributions in the mentoring program, so that applied research aimed at solving concrete problems affecting rural NEETs is also encouraged.

The call is disseminated by the mentoring program management team across action members; other COST actions; within each members institutions; social media. The mentors group submits their proposal. A form is provided by the mentoring program management team in the Acton website for submission. Proposals are screened by the mentoring program management team to see if they fit the call (meaning that exclusion criteria are not applied). In case groups of mentors submitting proposals are superior to the number of editions, the mentoring program managing team will set up an assessment process, according to Point 5. Finally, results are delivered to the core group, MC of the Action and the candidates. Figure 1 describes how this stage is managed:

CALL & DISSEMINATION	SCREENING PROPOSALS (Do exclusion criteria apply?)	ASSESSMENT	RESULTS COMMUNICATION (to the core group in the forum and to candidates, via email)
mid-July 21	**July & August 21**	**September 21**	**September 21**

Figure 1. Mentors call steps to be implemented by the mentoring program management team

(2) **Call for mentees**: based on the selected topics suggested by the mentors, the management team opens up a call for mentees within and outside the Action, in its website and in eCOST. Two calls will be open in July-September 2021, for both mentoring program editions. The call is disseminated by the mentoring program management team across action members; other COST actions; within each members institutions; social media. The call is organized and set up by the Mentoring Program Coordinator, based on a specific template. Afterwards, a selection process is set up, based on the evaluation criteria presented in Point 6. Finally, results are communicated to the core group, MC of the Action and candidates. Figure 2 presents the steps of the mentees call to be implemented by the mentoring program management team.

CALL & DISSEMINATION	SCREENING PROPOSALS (Do exclusion criteria apply?)	SELECTION	RESULTS COMMUNICATION (to the core group in the forum and to candidates, via email)
July-September 21	**October 21**	**October 21**	**November 21**

Figure 2. Mentees call steps to be implemented by the mentoring program management team

(3) **Mentoring program program implementation:** the program is implemented for 12 months (from January 2022), according to the plan submitted earlier on, by the mentors, with the support of the mentoring program management team. The program is implemented in 2 stages:

(3.1) Engagement: it includes a kick-off training school and a series of online group activities designed for collective exploring the proposal's main theme (for no more than 6 months). At this stage, stakeholders involvement is mandatory where adequate. A non-exhaustive activities list that might be proposed can include:
- o Workshops
- o Round-tables;
- o Seminars/webinars;
- o Testimonial videos by stakeholders.

(3.2) One-on-one, peer online mentoring sessions: on the second part of the program, candidates are matched with one mentor (no more than 3, per each mentor). In the following 5 months, mentees are directly supported in developing a research proposal aligned with the main theme of the program. Proposals might aim at national or international contests. These sessions occur online (delivered through webinars, expectedly through a Virtual Campus tool made available at the Action website). Where needed, peer-to-peer mentoring sessions can be coordinated with on-going group discussions.

Importantly, the whole program will involve no more than two face-to-face activities, preferably a kick-off and a final activity that can overlap international conferences held by the Action. Whenever possible, these activities must overlap WG meetings.

(3.3.) Assessment: a final, face-to-face meeting will be held for projects presentation by the mentees' and assessment by a jury.

(4) **Reporting:** by the end of each edition, the mentoring program management team fills in a report in the Action forum to be received by the core group, by the end of each program edition (M12). Short reporting is also expected at M3 and M6 of the program.

4.2. What is the expected timeline of the RNYN mentoring program?

Table 1 describes in general the expected timeline of the preparation stages of the mentoring program program.

Table 1. Exemplary timeline for the RNYN mentoring program

	Management team	Mentors	Mentees	Core group
M1	Call for mentors	Proposal		Publication of call & dissemination
M2	Mentor selection and Call for mentees		Call for mentees	Publication of call & dissemination
M3	Mentees selection		Mentees selection	Publication of results

Table 2 describes the expected timeline for each edition of the program.

Table 2. Expected general timeline for each mentoring program edition

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
Program	Kick-off training School	Engagement group activities (including stakeholders involvement).					Peer-to-peer online mentoring sessions					Final event
Management		Report to the core group in M3 and in M6					------					Final report

5. Who can be a mentor in RNYN mentoring program?

A call will be open to recruit mentors. Each submission will indicate 4 mentors associated to the proposal. It is recommended that the team has a common topic but a diverse background in terms of disciplinary expertise, to improve matching mentors and mentees at a later stage of the process. The call is organized and set up by the mentoring program management team, based on a template approved by the core group. The call remains open from January to July 2021 on the Action Website and eCOST. Both Action members as well as experts outside CA 18213 can apply to be mentors. Proposals are assessed according to a system of 100 points, based on two types of criteria: scientific relevance of the research activities (40 points); record of the mentor as project manager and/or researcher (40 points); Plan for delivering the mentoring program (20 points).

Scientific relevance of the research interest and activities (40 points)
(1) the topic of interest is aligned with CA 18213 focus (10 points);
(2) goals associated to proposal are clear, attainable and defined in a SMART way (10 points);
(3) the contribution to the field of rural NEETs social exclusion is innovative, covering under researched topic (10 points);
(4) the expected contributions of the mentoring program to the development of a research proposal are clear (the candidate presents at least three clear arguments about how the participation in the mentoring program will enable he/she to develop his/her research idea) (10 points).

Record of the mentor as a project manager and researcher (40 points)
(1) Each mentor of the team has as record of approved research projects at an international level, as a main proposer (10 points; 2 points by each project, 10 points for 5 or more projects);
(2) Each mentor of the team has as record of approved research projects at an international level, as a secondary proposer (5 points, 1 point by each project, 5 points for 5 or more projects);
(3) Each mentor of the team has as record of approved research projects at a national level, as a main proposer (10 points; 2 points by each project, 10 points for 5 or more projects);
(4) Each mentor of the team has as record of approved research projects at an international level, as a secondary proposer (5 points, 1 point by each project, 5 points for 5 or more projects);

(5) Each mentor of the team is experienced as master or PhD student's supervisor (10 points; 1 point for each master or PhD thesis supervised, 10 points for 10 or more supervisions).

Plan for delivering the mentoring program (20 points)

(1) quality of the mentoring program content: the proposed mentoring program has a clear focus, clear goals and is supported by adequate methodologies (10 points);

(2) quality of the mentoring program structure: the proposal has an adequate structure to uphold the research project development by the mentees (assessed by the number and type of meetings, an adequate timeline, provision of opportunities to meet or interact with the mentor's fellow colleagues, clear commitment with deliverables – number of proposals submissions and indication of potential national and international funding programs for submission) (10 points).

Exclusion criteria

(1) the topic does not fit CA 18213 thematic focus;

(2) applications that do not reach a total average score of 50 points.

Application of the evaluation criteria

- ✓ The number of points out of which each category will be evaluated are indicated in parenthesis (with each number indicated being the highest).
- ✓ For each application a single average score will be calculated. After that, for each application a single average score (proposed by each reviewer) will be summed and divided by 3 (number of reviewers). At the end, a ranking list will be organized based on the total average score.
- ✓ Starting with those with the highest points, the mentoring positions program will be distributed until the available budget is consumed.
- ✓ For applications with an equal number of average points that fall on the threshold of being supported, a decision will be made to promote the representation of all working groups as equally as possible.

Additional notes

In case of a conflict of interests, such as if the applicant or host is affiliated with one of the reviewers, the reviewer will be excluded from the reviewing processes for the application.

COST Action CA18213 Rural NEET Youth Network: Modeling the risks underlying rural NEETs social exclusion
Website: www.rnyobservatory.eu – email: Francisco.Simoes@iscte-iul.pt - info@rnyobservatory.eu

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If needed, a list of mentors outside the CA 18213 may be invited by the Mentoring Program Coordinator, after approval by the Core Group, to ensure that the necessary expertise to run the mentoring program is upheld. Up to a maximum of four mentors are selected for each mentoring program, eight in total for two running years. This means that the same mentor cannot apply for two consecutive years.

6. Who can be a mentee?

A call is organized between July and September 2021. In this call, the candidates are invited to submit a proposal with two main fields: description of the manifestation of interest (topic of interest; goals; contribution to the field of rural NEETs social exclusion; expected contributions of the mentoring program to the development of research proposal); plan for future research development in the area (description of deliverables; timeline for these deliverables; potential collaborations within and outside CA 18213 network).

Candidates applying for the CA 18213 mentoring program must comply with the following mandatory criteria:
(1) to be an ECI researcher that completed their PhD in the 8 years previously to the call; OR
(2) to be a PhD finishing his/her thesis in the subsequent 18 months;
(3) to be affiliated with a research institution based in a COST member country;
(4) to present a recommendation letter from a senior researcher from his/her institution.

Evaluation criteria to select the mentees in CA 18213:
Proposals are assessed according to a system of 100 points, based on three types of criteria: scientific soundness and excellence of the manifestation of interest (40 points); plan for future research development in the area (40 points); and additional criteria (20 points).

Scientific soundness and excellence of the manifestation of interest (up to 40 points)
(1) the topic of interest is aligned with one of the mentoring programs focuses (10 points);
(2) goals associated to the proposal are clear, attainable and defined in a smart way (10 points);
(3) the contribution to the field of rural NEETs social exclusion is innovative, covering an under researched topic (10 points);
(4) the expected contributions of the mentoring program to the development of a research proposal are clear (the candidate presents at least three clear arguments about how the participation in the mentoring program will enable he/she to develop his/her research idea) (10 points).

Plan for future research development in the area (up to 40 points)

(1) deliverables: the candidate plans to submit a project proposal for international funding by the end of the mentoring program (15 points);
 OR
(2) the candidate plans to submit a project proposal for national funding at the end of the mentoring program (7.5 points);
(3) timeline for the deliverables: the submission of the proposal occurs within 12 months after the conclusion of the mentoring program (15 points);
(4) the project proposal involves collaborations with members of RNYN network as well as with researchers outside RNYN (10 points)
OR   the project proposal involves collaborations within RNYN members only (7.5 points).

Additional criteria (20 points)
(1) the proponent is affiliated with an institution based on an ITC country (+ 10 points);
(2) the proponent is a woman (+10 points).

Exclusion criteria
(1) the topic does not fit CA 18213 thematic focus;
(2) applications that do not reach a total average score of 50 points.

Application of the evaluation criteria
- ✓ The number of points out of which each category will be evaluated are indicated in parenthesis (with each number indicated being the highest).
- ✓ For additional criteria only 0 or 5/0 or 10 points are awarded whenever one the criterium is fulfilled.
- ✓ For each application a single average score will be calculated. After that, for each application a single average score (proposed by each reviewer) will be summed and divided by 3 (number of reviewers). At the end, a ranking list will be organized based on the total average score.
- ✓ For applications with an equal number of average points that fall on the threshold of being supported, a decision will be made to promote the representation of all working groups as equally as possible.
- ✓ If still no conclusive decision can be reached by the mentoring core group, the chair and vice chair will be consulted to decide.

Resolution of conflicts
In case of a conflict of interests, such as if the applicant or host is affiliated with one of the reviewers, the reviewer will be excluded from the reviewing processes for the application.

7. List of supporting documents

- *[COST Vademecum (Section 6, Training Schools p. 29 and 30)](#)*
- *[CA 18213 Memorandum of understanding](#)*

8. Useful contacts

Useful link: https://www.rnyobservatory.eu

Mentoring Program Contacts:
- Bahanur Nasya (MC member from Austria) office@wonderland.cx
- Paul Flynn (MC member from Ireland) paul.flynn@nuigalway.ie

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