

Policy Brief
on Rural NEET

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Youth and Mobility in EU Rural Areas



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Executive Summary

- » NEET (“Not in Education, Employment, or Training”) refers to those who are unemployed, not in school or vocational training programmes.
- » The percentage of NEETs in the age category 15–34 in EU is 13.60%; the proportion is higher in rural areas.
- » High importance to deal with rural NEETs from policy, social and other types of planning perspectives.
- » Mobility is of high importance in rural NEETs’ lives.
- » It is relevant to deal with rural NEETs’ mobility as it allows moving on a local level (i.e. from rural to urban places), but also it shows whether rural youth have the capability and will to move within the regional, national and international level or to decide to stay in rural areas.

Background

This policy brief is based upon findings from the COST Action CA18213: Rural NEET Youth Network: Modelling the Risks Underlying Rural NEETs Social Exclusion. This network brings together researchers and practitioners from 31 countries and aims at developing a model of comprehension for rural NEETs' social exclusion risks and protective factors based on a bio-ecological model. The three specific goals of the action are:

1. upholding future research capacity, with an emphasis on Early Career Investigators, and Inclusiveness Target Countries;
2. creating a rural NEETs' online observatory; and,
3. fostering use of knowledge by policy makers and practitioners. For more information, please consult

<https://rnyobservatory.eu>

Data on Rural NEET youth in the European Union

The latest data available from Eurostat for 2019 shows that NEET rates in the EU were: 5.6% for youths aged 15–19; 14.5% for people aged 20–24; 17.2% for those aged 25–29; and, 17.4% for those aged 30–34. Eurostat figures for the EU27 in 2019 clearly underscore that the proportion of NEETs is higher in rural regions with numbers at 15.0%, compared to urban areas with 12.9%. This difference is greater in Southern and Eastern European countries. The highest rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU was recorded amongst people living in rural areas (reaching 27.1%), followed by 24.3% of people living in cities, and 22.3% living in towns and suburbs.

The 2008 economic crisis exacerbated the growth of youth unemployment in many countries. The figures for 2008–2013 are notably worse for rural regions: they show higher rates of unemployment and of NEET youth. Contemporaneously, it is expected that the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will have negatively affected rural NEET youth in the same way the 2008 crisis did. However, this is a trend that needs to be confirmed both by data and future trends on youth unemployment. In connec-

tion with mobility, over the two last years (2020 and 2021) inland, rural, and border regions have received new attention. Given that they are seen as safer, more natural places and offer new opportunities for remote work, new indicators of regional value, growth, and sustainability as well as social cohesion are becoming increasingly visible. However, it is still too early to see the extension and intensity of such movements and whether they are having any impact on the lives of the most vulnerable rural youth and rural sustainability more generally.

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Overview

In recent years, discussions on three inter-sectional topics (rurality, youth, and mobility) have been at the forefront of the debate concerning sustainable rural development as well as the 2030 agenda adopted by the United Nations. Mobility in EU rural areas and its associated impact upon social inclusion and rural development is a phenomenon which has been poorly studied until today. Our research network has published some outcomes that can be used to shed some light on how these processes of mobility affect youth by paying special attention to those classified as 'NEET', that is Not in Education, nor in Employment or Training Rural Youth.

Mobility is both a fundamental and important characteristic of human activity: it fulfils the basic need of going from one location to the other in order to partake in employment, kinship and education. Mobility could be reflected as an ability to move around

on the local scale, e.g., going to the store, doctor, school, workplace, to nearby city to fulfil some other needs, everyday commuting etc. However, mobility could be also considered more widely, from the trans-local, regional, or even international migration perspective.

Rural areas are characterised by low population density, a dispersed settlement pattern with low population totals at any point, a scattered pattern of small service outlets, and a concentration of middle- and high-order facilities into widely separated urban nodes. In many rural areas, public transportation is underdeveloped, usually with low frequency and poor connectivity with nearby towns. In such circumstances, people without a car are dependent on the available public transport, or must rely upon others. Such barriers may limit or burden youth participation in education and/or work and other social activities more generally.

Scholars from the field of migration studies have widely explored the concepts of mobility but also, more recently, they have begun to examine the concept of (im)mobility in order to better understand the phenomenon in a more holistic manner. This theoretical framework can also be useful when analysing rural youth mobility and its impact upon building sustainable rural spaces.

Thus, it is not only relevant to know why youth move from one place to another (i.e., from rural to urban places and vice-versa), but also whether rural youth have both the capability and the will to move within the rural territory, or to decide to stay solely in rural areas. These questions are relevant for the analysis of rural sustainability, but also wider policy making.

We assume that the following policies may help to reduce the aforementioned barriers in terms of a) transportation and commuting within rural areas, and b) the attraction and settlement of internal and international migration.



Policy recommendations

- » To develop and maintain high quality public transport network in rural areas. It is also pertinent to consider some transportation solutions which could be implemented depending on the specificities of the context, such as on-demand bus services, carpooling, and car sharing. These policies should bear in mind subsidising and special tariffs, all based on the equity principle, together with continual analysis of user needs.



- » To develop the approach of considering rural areas from the perspective of their potential diversity and changeability rather than (as is so often the case) “isolated”, “stagnating”, and “problematic”. Rural areas should be considered as places of intensive changes which are prevalent throughout rural-urban and rural-rural inter-relations (e.g., supply chains, agriculture firms, and migratory flows) and such advantages should be taken into account during the planning process.



- » To deploy more holistic approaches into rural sustainability policies. For example, there is a need to expand farming by introducing them to sustainable forms of agriculture and the primary sector. Other economic sectors can also be considered, be attractive for newcomers, or new niches of employment for rural NEET youth can also be considered (e.g., tourism, renewable energies, or gastronomy). New lifelong learning opportunities and creating spaces for rural youth involvement in the policy process are also suggested.



- » Take the personal perspectives and needs of youth into account in order to explicitly address their willingness (or unwillingness) to be(come) mobile. Prior research has shown that rural youth are more willing to move within the country than urban youth, yet remain less willing to move to a different country. It will be useful for policymaking to know whether (beyond the will to move) there exists the capability to carry out these movements and how policies may help.

- » To support ensuring the inclusion of newcomers into the agricultural sector. However, special attention should be paid to involuntary newcomers since their coming into the sector is driven mostly by spatial (im)mobility mechanisms. This will help to avoid the risk of a sustainable farming framework failing to meet its ambitions.



- » To identify bottom-up practices which successfully address youth mobility in rural areas. The identification of these practices should also highlight the ways in which these interventions can be applied to other rural contexts. To that end, the study of their scalability by the elaboration of pilot projects should also be taken into account.



- » To take youths emotional bonds and affective belonging into account in order to generate effective policies to combat rural brain drain. More efforts are needed to create and keep emotional bonds to their homelands by strategically targeting them both before they leave and afterwards in order to keep them engaged with the future of their regions whilst living abroad.

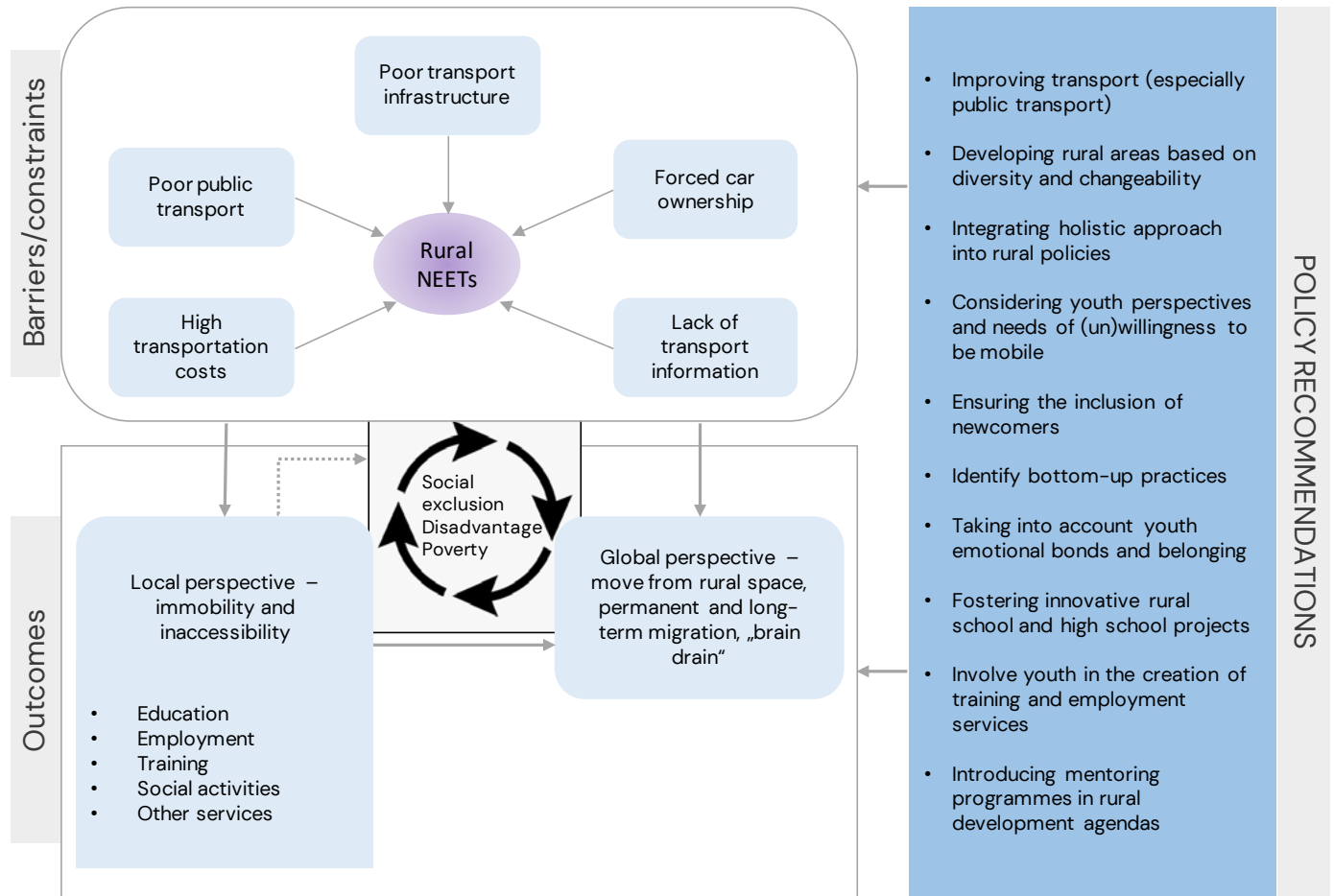
- » To foster innovative rural school and high school projects. To attract young adults and re-invigorate rural areas, it is necessary to invest in infrastructures compensating regional and historical inequalities against urban areas. Some innovative primary rural school projects have been shown to function as an attraction pole for young families in some contexts. It is also relevant to mention successful initiatives in secondary education, such as SAT programmes developed in Colombia by FUNDAEC, and which could be replicable in our European context as the United Nations recommends. SAT secondary education is adapted to rural settings, so youth do not have the need to leave if they do not want to, nor have the capability to do so.



- » To foster training and employment opportunities to NEET rural youth by engaging them in the creation of the service. To involve youth in the creation of training and employment services that could take their needs and views concerning (im) mobilities and mobilities into account.



- » To include mentoring programmes in rural development agendas in order to provide informal support to newcomers and thus foster a more humanistic and welcoming environment to internal (but also international) migrants who have recently arrived in rural contexts.



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