

“The EU Rural Pact: Contributions to Education and Social Inclusion of Young People in Rural Areas” Stakeholders’ meeting

Summary

Place: COST Association Headquarters Avenue du Boulevard – Bolwerklaan 21, 1210 Brussels

Date: 04.09.2023, 10.00 – 12.30

CA 18213 members: Francisco Simões (Chair); Liena Hacatrjana (Vice-Chair); Mariano Soler (Science Communication Officer); Maria Fernandes-Jesus (WG1 Leader); Tatiana Ferreira (WG2 Vice-Leader); Vladislava Lendzhova (WG2 representative)

Context

The Rural NEET Youth Network (RNYN) organized a meeting on the 04th of September with DG Youth, DG Employment and Rural Youth Europe. RNYN is a network of inclusive multiple stakeholders and researchers covering 33 European countries, dedicated to foster knowledge, skills and best practice exchange as well as to address current knowledge gaps about rural NEETs. In a few months, RNYN will evolve to a permanent, research-led association, the European Rural Youth Observatory.

The meeting aimed to explore new avenues for expanding social inclusion and education prospects for young people, in the framework of the EU Rural Pact as well as to identify collaboration opportunities under EURYO initiative with the stakeholders attending this meeting.

RNYN: An exploration of findings and recommendations

In the **first part of the meeting**, Francisco Simões, Chair of the Rural NEET Youth Network and appointed member of EU Rural Pact Coordination Group, outlined the expected outcomes for the meeting: finding common avenues for joint work in the future between the Rural NEET Youth Network, with a focus on the needs and priorities of the stakeholders. These outcomes seemed relevant in the context of the establishment of EURYO. Moreover, the issues of social inclusion and education were selected as two important talking points considering the EU Rural Pact vision. Afterwards, Liena Hacatrjana, Vice-Chair of the RNYN, presented an overview of this network composition and outputs.

Following this contextualization, Tatiana Ferreira, WG1 Vice-Leader of the RNYN, delivered a summary of main findings and recommendations of RNYN Working Group 1 dedicated to rural NEETs social inclusion, based on a survey identifying 43 projects recently conducted across 14 countries. The main highlights stemming from this working group efforts are the following:

- Rural young people are very often recipients but not developers of the social inclusion projects implemented in the countryside.

- The cooperation between institutions in order to deliver coordinated social services and interventions is far from being the rule – most of the times public service providers, NGOs and other stakeholders do not even know each other.
- Lower digital skills among rural young people constitute a key issue to be addressed in the following years – especially in the context of digital social services expansion as well as of digital employment.

Francisco Simões (on behalf of WG2) stressed some of the conclusions coming out from the efforts of RNYN Working group 2 focusing on formal and non-formal education and rural NEETs. He pinpointed that:

- In Reinforced Youth Guarantee the focus is mostly on labour market, not on education in rural areas (something that should also be a priority).
- Youth Guarantee's ambitions are seldom matched with local resources, economic opportunities, and young people's expectations, at the regional level.
- New instruments such as the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, through its Pillar 6, seems to be, in turn, filling in the educational gap with massive reforms and investments being made in education and VET. However, these efforts are not being delivered according to regional gaps, particularly in Southern Countries showing greater urban/rural gaps in terms of the school to work transition process.

The **second part of the meeting** was dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the EURYO. This part consisted of three different modules:

- A brief presentation of the Rural NEET Youth Network and the main results achieved after three years of implementation (*please find attached the presentation*).
- A short overview of the EURYO and intended actions/ activities to be developed in the near future (in terms of international research, consulting & development, training and knowledge dissemination).
- The timeline for establishing the EURYOs (expected to be launched in Brussels in March 2024).

Potential collaboration avenues

The meeting included several Q&A sessions. Below, we list some of the potential bridges between the future EURYO and the stakeholders needs:

- DG Emp considers that frameworks or instruments such as the **European Year of Skills** (commitments and events) or the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** could learn from EURYOs community experience. The **involvement in several networks/communities** associated to the EAfA seems to be a leeway for adding a “rural element” that is still missing or at least not systematic in this initiative approach.
- DG Youth considered relevant that the EURYO engages in **the on-going EU dialogue** for promoting young people's participation. EURYOs engagement with this initiative might be crucial to help shaping the upcoming **EU Youth Strategy**, starting in 2027. Moreover, DG Youth suggested the **analysis of the impact of pivotal programs (Erasmus+ and other) on rural areas**. This analysis is

missing and can also be combined with non-public data from the European Commission to further refine this examination. In that sense, EURYO can become a social partner for the Europe Commission dedicated to such evaluation tasks. There was also an agreement that there is a need to update indicators to better assess the impact of EU policies. This means to **further develop youth-lead (bottom-up) indicators** that can capture rural younger generations perspectives. In that sense, EURYO can also be a partner with the capacity to collaborate with the European Commission in developing these new indicators.

- Rural Youth Europe considered that EURYO can represent an opportunity for this pan-European network to **develop evidence-based knowledge about key issues affecting young people's inclusion** – such as employment, development of skills and micro-skills or the effects of the twin transition in rural youth labour markets. Therefore, there as an agreement that both parties (Rural Youth Europe and RNYN) should meet soon to discuss how Rural Youth Europe can become a partner of this initiative.

Attachments

- RNYN Working Group 1 policy-brief (on social inclusion)
- RNYN Working Group 2 policy-brief (on formal and non-formal education)
- Francisco Simões for the European Parliament on the Recovery and Resilience Framework Pillar 6 (Policies for the Next Generation)

Useful links for EURYO

<https://rnyobservatory.eu/web/>

Useful contacts

Rural NEET Youth Network

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