

IV

(Notices)

NOTICES FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, BODIES, OFFICES AND AGENCIES

COUNCIL

Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas

(2020/C 193/03)

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL

RECOGNISING THAT

1. All young people should have equal opportunities in the context of their personal and professional development, regardless of obstacles, including geographical challenges. These challenges become bigger in times of global crises such as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which bring societal disruptions and economic consequences, and may additionally weaken and isolate young people.
2. The EU Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 ⁽¹⁾ recognises that inequalities, which affect young people in particular, pose a major political, social and economic risk; generational, territorial and educational divides are developing and new forms of exclusion emerging.
3. Until recently, almost one third of the EU population lived in a rural territory, including a significant number of young people ⁽²⁾. It is clear that there are differences between Member States in regard to population density and demographic structure, both in rural and remote areas. On the other hand, urbanisation as one of current key drivers of change is regarded as having a significant impact on future EU policies ⁽³⁾.
4. The European Union's population is ageing. This process is more pronounced in rural and remote areas and, as a consequence, these areas have a higher share of older persons throughout different Member States ⁽⁴⁾. These intergenerational and geographical imbalances, particularly when combined with poorer socioeconomic conditions, pose challenges to create and maintain comprehensive support services and sustainable service infrastructures responsive to the needs of all, which subsequently may have a long-term effect on social cohesion and solidarity in rural and remote areas.
5. Equality and non-discrimination, inclusion and the participation of young people are among the guiding principles underpinning the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, which takes into account the views of young people as expressed in the European Youth Goals and the EU Youth Dialogue process. In particular, European Youth Goal No 6 (Moving Rural Youth Forward) aims at creating conditions which enable young people to access their rights and fulfil their potential in rural areas.

⁽¹⁾ Adopted by the European Council on 20 June 2019.

⁽²⁾ According to Eurostat database in 2018, 49,2 % of young people age 15–24 were living in rural areas (EU-28 population by educational attainment level, sex, age and degree of urbanisation (%)).

⁽³⁾ https://espas.secure.europarl.europa.eu/orbis/sites/default/files/generated/document/en/ESPAS_Report2019.pdf (Global trends to 2030 – Challenges and Choices for Europe, ESPAS, April 2019).

⁽⁴⁾ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Policy_briefs/ECE-WG1-25.pdf (UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No 18 (2017)).

6. Environmental and climate issues have been identified by young people as one of the areas that the EU needs to address as a top priority ⁽⁷⁾. Combating climate change is one of the major factors in the shaping of future policies ⁽⁸⁾. Since rural development and EU structural funds play an important role in achieving the EU's environmental objectives as well as in combating climate change, additional opportunities related to sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries or tourism for young people in rural and remote areas should be considered.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT:

7. The opportunities of rural and remote areas ⁽⁷⁾ such as the proximity to nature, lower housing costs ⁽⁸⁾ and a higher sense of belonging to a community ⁽⁹⁾.
8. The constraints imposed by the difficulties of accessibility to and from most rural and remote areas, including some islands ⁽¹⁰⁾ throughout the EU as well as the outermost regions of the Union ⁽¹¹⁾ and the Overseas Countries and Territories ⁽¹²⁾.
9. The process of urbanization and its possible effects on rural and remote areas, especially regarding the population ratio (younger/elderly, women/men ⁽¹³⁾, young graduates/young non-graduates) and the need to ensure the availability and accessibility of public and commercial services, leisure time activities, quality jobs and education, digital and physical infrastructures, public transportation, housing, social and health care facilities as well as the sustainability of natural resources.
10. The importance to include the ideas, opinions and creativity of young people in the Member States, including those collected during the 7th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue consultations, as well as contributions during the EU Youth Conference held in Zagreb in March 2020 ⁽¹⁴⁾ within the framework of the specific subtheme 'Opportunities for Rural Youth'.
11. Young people who are NEET ⁽¹⁵⁾ in rural and remote areas and the need for particular attention regarding their education, training and employment prospects, as they are at higher risk of having fewer opportunities ⁽¹⁶⁾ and be more affected by the conditions of economy ⁽¹⁷⁾ as compared to those young people who are NEET in urban regions.
12. The commitment by the European Union and its Member States to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, in particular as regards human settlements and youth-related targets.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/FLASH/surveyKy/2224> (Eurobarometer 478).

⁽⁸⁾ Ibid footnote 3.

⁽⁷⁾ See definitions of 'rural areas' and 'remote areas' in the Annex.

⁽⁸⁾ The share of people overburdened by housing costs is lower in rural areas of the EU (European statistics on regions and cities, 2018).

⁽⁹⁾ Eurofound (2019), Is rural Europe being left behind?, European Quality of Life Survey 2016, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Inhabited small islands that are not outermost regions or OCTs but which have difficult accessibility due to lack of connecting bridges, scarcity of air and maritime transport or other similar factors (see definition of 'remote areas' in the Annex).

⁽¹¹⁾ Those listed in Art. 349 TFEU.

⁽¹²⁾ Those listed in Annex II TFEU.

⁽¹³⁾ Women in rural areas of the EU make up below 50 % of the total rural population and they represent 45 % of the economically active population. According to the analysis, women's employment in EU rural regions (age class 15–64) has increased by almost 2 % in the period 2013–2017 (The professional status of rural women in the EU, European Parliament, 2019).

⁽¹⁴⁾ <https://mdomsp.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Vijesti2020/Creating%20Opportunities%20for%20Youth%20-%20outcomes%20report%2027%20mar%202020.pdf>

⁽¹⁵⁾ Not in Education, Employment or Training.

⁽¹⁶⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#NEETs:_analysis_by_degree_of_urbanisation

⁽¹⁷⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Archive:Impact_of_the_economic_crisis_on_unemployment.

13. Youth work as a valuable instrument for addressing disparities between the rural and urban environments, owing to its potential in helping to engage young people (with wide age-range and diverse backgrounds), including those who are at risk of being left behind, in different types of activities within their respective local communities.
14. Employment opportunities offered via entrepreneurial activities, including engagement in social enterprises ⁽¹⁸⁾. The latter is a tool that enables young people to properly address social and employment-related challenges and offers scope to effectively use existing natural and human resources in a sustainable manner.
15. In this context, activities within the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) ⁽¹⁹⁾, which can contribute to the improvement of the economic and social situation of rural and remote areas, and consequently make it possible to respond to the needs and aspirations of young people living in rural and remote areas.
16. Volunteering, as one of the expressions of active citizenship that can help ensure the social inclusion of young people in rural and remote areas as well as promote solidarity between generations in rural and remote areas, particularly to contribute to the resilience of communities to face adversities and crisis such as COVID-19.
17. Cross-border cooperation between remote and rural areas in Member States' bordering regions that could support their development, thus giving additional opportunities for young people in the field of education and training, work, health, social and leisure activities.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES, IN LINE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

18. Promote cross-sectoral approaches when developing youth policies and related strategies aiming to reduce inequalities between urban and rural/remote areas.
19. Include in relevant strategies and policies, where appropriate, action plans or measures which reflect young people's perspective and views in rural and remote areas. These action plans and measures should be developed on the basis of the knowledge, evidence, best practices, consultations with young people themselves as well as collected and disaggregated data including by sex, disability and other relevant perspectives, in particular where relevant services and/or infrastructures are lacking or need to be improved.
20. Promote effective models of inter-municipal cooperation in the area of youth in rural and remote areas in order to raise awareness and share best practices and evidence among different service providers.
21. Promote and facilitate active citizenship and meaningful participation of young people with diverse backgrounds in rural and remote areas in decision making processes on matters that affect them through appropriate tools, such as local youth councils and innovative/alternative ways of participation; foster cooperation between relevant administration at all levels, where appropriate, while carrying out public consultations (analogue or digital) as a tool to engage with young people; encourage public administrations to facilitate the work of youth-led organisations; and support relevant actors who provide youth work activities at all levels, including outreach youth work.
22. Further promote and improve inter-generational understanding, dialogue and solidarity in order to support mutually beneficial exchanges between generations, and encourage young people to become and remain actively involved in the life of local communities in rural and remote areas, including on family farms.

⁽¹⁸⁾ See definition in the Annex.

⁽¹⁹⁾ See definition in the Annex.

23. Further promote accessible volunteering and solidarity activities as a tool for the social inclusion of all young people, especially those in rural and remote areas.
24. Step up efforts to ensure regular, sustainable and affordable means of public transportation in order to better connect urban and rural and remote areas.
25. Where appropriate, improve information technology (IT) infrastructure, including high-speed broadband connection, in order to increase access to use of digital technologies and services.
26. Where appropriate, promote the creation of youth spaces ⁽²⁰⁾ or, where relevant, upgrade existing ones as well as remote access for young people living in rural and remote areas to different types of services, including youth work services, such as digital and smart youth work; in addition, encourage the establishment of different mobile services, such as those for leisure time and counselling, as well as of multi-functional service centres.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE, TO:

27. Promote synergies between different EU initiatives and instruments in the youth field and beyond, such as Erasmus+, the Youth Guarantee, the European Solidarity Corps, the European Social Fund or EU Interreg ⁽²¹⁾, with the aim of enhanced outreach to young people living in rural and remote areas, the facilitation of their access to these programmes, and the administrative simplification, as means of addressing challenges they are faced with.
28. Encourage the exchange of best practices in using the opportunities provided by youth-related programmes and policies such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and the Youth Guarantee, as well as other relevant EU instruments such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and European Regional Development Fund, in order to improve employability, mobility and participation, as well as to promote the EU values ⁽²²⁾; to share practices in solidarity and community development, especially in times of crisis; and to increase social cohesion in rural and remote communities.
29. Organise mutual learning activities, such as seminars, peer-learning activities or other relevant forms of formal and non-formal cooperation which could involve stakeholders from different policy areas, including young people with different geographical and cultural backgrounds, in order to explore cross-sectoral and intra-regional cooperation in access to services.
30. Further promote the attractiveness of rural and remote areas, with specific emphasis on their benefits and opportunities as regards available natural resources, where appropriate, and their sustainable use in order to raise awareness of the potential for entrepreneurial and SSE ⁽²³⁾ activities, taking into account that existing agricultural activities, where relevant, should be preserved and promoted as much as possible.
31. Step up efforts to enhance business knowledge, skills, competences and confidence among young people, where appropriate with a focus on young women ⁽²⁴⁾, with regard to the potential for entrepreneurship and SSE activities in rural and remote areas.

⁽²⁰⁾ See definition in the Annex.

⁽²¹⁾ <https://interreg.eu/>

⁽²²⁾ As set out in Art. 2 TEU.

⁽²³⁾ See definition in the Annex.

⁽²⁴⁾ Ibid footnote 13.

32. Take into account environment and climate change, and in particular the latest scientific reports on both, when formulating future youth-related policies and measures for rural and remote areas, and provide where appropriate relevant education, training and access to information in order to raise awareness and foster participation in environment and climate issues amongst young people living in rural and remote areas.
33. Where appropriate, step up efforts to encourage young people to engage in agricultural ⁽²⁵⁾ and other economic activities in rural and remote areas, through different means such as start-up grants, income incentives, youth self-initiatives and targeted education and training.
34. Encourage cooperation between relevant stakeholders with the overall aim of fulfilling the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning for young people in rural and remote areas, with a particular emphasis on reducing early school leaving and increasing opportunities for equal access to education, training and work.
35. Promote digital education and training as well as non-formal learning and youth work opportunities to improve the overall level of digital skills and competences, as well as to avoid the isolation of young people in rural and remote areas and mitigate the impact of crisis such as COVID-19, for instance by facilitating the access to internet and ICT ⁽²⁶⁾ devices, where appropriate, in all rural and remote areas.
36. Foster cooperation between EU rural and remote border areas, taking advantage of relevant programmes such as EU Interreg, in order to enhance opportunities for local young people.
37. Continue to consider and reflect on issues affecting young people in rural and remote areas when implementing current – as well as developing new – initiatives, such as a long-term vision for rural areas, and where appropriate in the context of activities related to the Conference on the Future of Europe; the European Education Area by 2025; the updated Digital Education Action Plan; the Climate Pact; and a reinforced Youth Guarantee.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

38. Consider research and analysis, using existing tools such as Youth Wiki, and collect disaggregated data (including by sex, disability and other relevant perspectives) with regard to issues related to young people and their well-being in rural and remote areas, in order to contribute to the enhancement of the knowledge, evidence and data to inform policies at all levels, bearing also in mind the need for possible monitoring mechanisms.
39. Foster synergies between EU youth policy and other relevant EU policies and programmes, for instance as regards rural development, agriculture and social cohesion, including by promoting the take-up of the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue in this respect.
40. Promote due attention to challenges faced by youth in rural and remote areas within the pursuit of the activities under the European Union-Council of Europe Youth Partnership ⁽²⁷⁾.

⁽²⁵⁾ For example, only 6 % of all farm holdings in the European Union are run by farmers under 35 and persuading more young people to begin farming is a significant challenge (https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/young-farmers_en).

⁽²⁶⁾ Information and communications technology.

⁽²⁷⁾ <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership>

INVITES THE EU YOUTH SECTOR ⁽²⁸⁾ TO:

41. Contribute to the effort of raising awareness among young people and the general population in rural and remote areas regarding the opportunities within their local communities, with a view to promoting work-related and professional opportunities on the one hand, while on the other use the available measures within the sector to combat stereotypes on rural youth and promote in a proactive manner a positive image of young people in rural and remote areas.
 42. Make maximum use of the opportunities provided by Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and other relevant EU programmes in order to fulfil the potential of young men and women in rural and remote areas.
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⁽²⁸⁾ See definition in the Annex.

ANNEX

A. References

In adopting these conclusions, the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council take note of the following documents:

- EU Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 ⁽¹⁾
- Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European Cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 (2018/C 456/01) ⁽²⁾
- Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights (CM/Rec(2015)3) – Council of Europe ⁽³⁾
- Council conclusions on digital youth work ⁽⁴⁾
- Council conclusions on Young People and the Future of Work ⁽⁵⁾
- Council Conclusions on Education and Training of Youth Workers ⁽⁶⁾
- Council Conclusions on the role of youth in dealing with demographic challenges in the EU ⁽⁷⁾
- Council Conclusions on promoting youth entrepreneurship to foster social inclusion of young people ⁽⁸⁾
- Council conclusions on smart youth work ⁽⁹⁾
- The 7th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue: Findings from the EU Youth Dialogue Activities in the Member States and across Europe – Creating Opportunities for Youth ⁽¹⁰⁾
- European Charter on Local Youth work (EGL) ⁽¹¹⁾
- Erasmus + Inclusion & Diversity Strategy in the Field of Youth (2014) ⁽¹²⁾
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ⁽¹³⁾
- Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing the Youth Guarantee ⁽¹⁴⁾
- Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for life-long learning ⁽¹⁵⁾.

B. Definitions

For the purpose of these Conclusions, the following definitions apply:

‘Rural areas’

Local administrative communities outside urban clusters, mostly characterised by lower population density, specific socio-geographical and cultural image, vicinity to natural resources and therefore different economic prospects, while at the same time with identified needs for further improvement of specific services aiming at youth as well as general population.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39914/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024.pdf>

⁽²⁾ OJ C 456, 18.12.2018, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/-/recommendation-on-the-access-of-young-people-from-disadvantaged-neighbourhoods-to-social-rights>

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 414, 10.12.2019, p. 2.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 28..

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 412, 9.12.2019, p. 12.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 196, 8.6.2018, p. 16.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 183, 14.6.2014, p. 18.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 418, 7.12.2017, p. 2.

⁽¹⁰⁾ https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/euyd_youth_dialogue_findings_-_version_for_general_release_24th_feb_2020_1.pdf

⁽¹¹⁾ https://www.europegoeslocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20191002-egl-charter_ENG_online.pdf

⁽¹²⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/inclusion-diversity-strategy_en.pdf

⁽¹³⁾ UNGA Resolution A/RES/70 of 25 September 2015.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p. 1.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1.

‘Remote areas’

Local and regional administrative communities, most of them outside urban clusters characterised by difficult physical access, mostly due to geographical/natural divide (islands and/or mountains included, among others) accompanied by limited or less frequent public transport and/or difficult digital connectivity. These areas can share the same aforementioned features of ‘rural areas’. The EU outermost regions as set out in Article 349 TFEU are also considered as remote ones.

‘Social enterprise’

An operator in the social economy whose main objective is to have a social, societal or environmental impact for the general interest rather than make a profit for their owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. It is managed in an open and responsible manner and, in particular, involves employees, consumers and stakeholders affected by its commercial activities ⁽¹⁶⁾

‘Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)’

Enterprises and organizations (cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises) which produce goods, services and knowledge that meet the needs of the community they serve, through the pursuit of specific social and environmental objectives and the fostering of solidarity ⁽¹⁷⁾

‘Youth spaces’

Youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures defined by being autonomous, open and safe, accessible to all, offering professional support for development and ensuring opportunities for youth participation ⁽¹⁸⁾

‘EU Youth Sector’

EU Youth sector generally refers to the totality of organisations, youth workers, members of the academia, youth civil society or other experts involved in youth policy development that carry out youth-relevant activities and projects in the EU ⁽¹⁹⁾.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Social Business Initiative- SEC (2011)1278 final.

⁽¹⁷⁾ International Labour Organization (ILO) definition.

⁽¹⁸⁾ EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, Annex 3 on European Youth Goals, Goal 9, 4th target (OJ C 456, 18.12.2018, p. 16).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Council Conclusions on Young People and the Future of Work (see footnote 33).