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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on providing glocal opportunities for young people living in rural and remote areas

Delegations will find attached the abovementioned conclusions approved by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) at its meeting on 25-26 November 2024.

Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on providing glocal opportunities for young people living in rural and remote areas

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

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT

1. Rural communities play an essential role in advancing the European Union's vision and a core part of the Union's identity. As stated in the European Commission's long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas¹, 'rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy' and therefore require a heightened focus. The diversity of landscape, culture and heritage is one of Europe's most defining and remarkable features of rural and remote areas. Living in these areas can offer numerous benefits, including better quality of life, enjoyment of nature and biodiversity reduced pollution, possible lower living expenses, safer environment² and stronger communities.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 (Communication on LTVRA) COM/2021/345 final.

² Eurostat Online Statistics: Urban-rural Europe - quality of life in rural areas 2022.

2. By 2040, the European Union (EU) aspires to have stronger, more interconnected, resilient, and prosperous rural communities³. Despite current efforts, significant disparities exist between rural and urban areas, even though 137 million people, around a third of the EU's population, reside in rural areas⁴. Although rural communities are essential for sustainable development and economic and social cohesion, they are also often affected by depopulation, particularly among young people. As a consequence, a larger proportion of the population living in the EU's rural and remote areas is facing socioeconomic challenges.
3. The advantages of living in rural and remote areas may be outweighed by challenges, including, among others, fewer job opportunities, weaker infrastructure (concerning energy, transport, mobility and information), lower access and availability of quality education and training at all levels, including early childhood education and care, social services, healthcare or sport, cultural and leisure activities. As a result, many, often times young people, may choose to leave rural and remote areas for better opportunities. This can lead to important changes to demographic structures in particular geographic areas.⁵
4. Although young people's opportunities are defined by their local realities, global trends, such as climate change, digitalisation, mental health issues, employment and education opportunities, economic and other inequalities, have an increasing effect on their lives. For rural youth, glocal⁶ opportunities offer the potential to bridge the gap between their immediate environments and the broader global perspective by tailoring strategies and solutions to fit their local needs and conditions.⁷

³ Conclusions on a Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas (LTVRA), 15631/23.

⁴ 'Rural areas represent 83% of the EU territory Rural areas account for 341 million hectares (m ha), which represent 83% of the total EU land area. More than half of this rural land area is remote, meaning that it is located far from cities. Cities, towns and suburbs account all together for 17% of the EU land area (70.3 m ha).' Communication on LTVRA. SWD (part 1).

⁵ Publications Office of the European Union: Eurostat Regional Yearbook – 2023 Edition (Eurostat Regional Yearbook – 2023), 2023.

⁶ The term 'glocal' is further defined in the Annex I.

⁷ Communication on LTVRA.

5. Rurality is not a uniform concept, environment, or circumstance⁸. Rural and remote areas host diverse and lively communities of young people with varying needs and challenges. This diversity requires answers and solutions tailored to regional and local needs that take into account the unique needs and resources of each area. In this context, the specificities of the outermost regions should be taken into account, as often their insularity and isolation tend to amplify the gap between urban and rural areas. It is also essential to guarantee equitable treatment and the complete involvement of youth in both rural and urban environments and to understand the differences and reduce the rural-urban gap where it exists including by strengthening the connections between rural and urban areas across all Member States.
6. Even though there is a diverse and wide-ranging focus on young people in the European Union, there is a perception that most policies targeting young people do not place sufficient emphasis on rural aspects and that rural policies may not cater to the specific needs and circumstances of young people living in rural, remote, peripheral, less-developed areas and outermost regions^{9,10}.

⁸ Commission staff working document executive summary of the evaluation of the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy on territorial development of rural areas {SWD(2021) 398 final}.

⁹ EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership: Young people in rural areas: diverse, ignored and unfulfilled.

¹⁰ Articles 174 and 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union acknowledge the specific status of rural areas, outermost regions, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions. In this document, references to rural and remote areas also include peripheral, less developed areas and outermost regions are also taken into consideration.

7. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027¹¹, as a framework for European collaboration on youth policies, and the European Youth Goals¹² focus on fundamental areas concerning the participation, engagement, and meaningful contribution of young people in society. Youth Goal #3 focuses on inclusive societies, creating accessible and open environments for all young people, while Youth Goal #6 focuses on creating rural areas where young people can fulfil their potential¹³.
8. The Council conclusions on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas¹⁴ emphasised the importance of local opportunities, and the promotion of cross-sectoral approaches and invited EU Member States to encourage and facilitate active citizenship and meaningful participation by young people in all their diversity in rural and remote areas in all relevant decision-making processes, especially on issues that affect them.
9. Challenges related to social inclusion in rural and remote areas may be linked to the availability of and access to land, infrastructure, digital technologies, information and high-quality, social and healthcare services, educational, youth work and employment opportunities as well as level of participation in all relevant decision-making processes. Ensuring equal access to opportunities for all, without any form of discrimination is essential.

¹¹ 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).

¹² 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).

¹³ Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council establishing guidelines on the governance of the EU Youth Dialogue, European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, OJ C 189, 5.6.2019.

¹⁴ 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, OJ C 193, 9.6.2020.

10. The five Union of Equality Strategies adopted by the Commission in 2020 and 2021¹⁵, as well as the Commission’s Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health¹⁶, underline the importance of an intersectional approach. These documents highlight, that individuals may belong to one or more groups in vulnerable situations at the same time and illustrate the need to combat multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. These can have a great impact on young people, including those living in rural and remote areas, who are not a homogenous group, and ‘have a multitude of identities, diverse needs, resources, backgrounds, life situations and interests, and face diverse challenges and opportunities¹⁷.’
11. The Communication from the Commission on a comprehensive approach to mental health and the Council conclusions on a comprehensive approach to the mental health of young people¹⁸ in the European Union identify the need for specific measures related to prevention, promotion and support in the field of mental health of young people living in rural or remote areas.¹⁹

¹⁵ Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030; LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025; Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025; EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025; EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion, and participation 2020-2030.

¹⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health, (Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health) COM(2023) 298 final.

¹⁷ Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on inclusive societies for young people, OJ C, C/2024/3808, 27.6.2024.

¹⁸ Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on a comprehensive approach to the mental health of young people in the European Union. OJ C, C/2023/1337, 30.11.2023.

¹⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health, COM(2023) 298 final.

12. The Council conclusions on mental health²⁰ recognises ‘that mental health problems are associated with many forms of inequalities, such as, for example, people in vulnerable situations, minorities, marginalised groups and those in disadvantaged socioeconomic situations including those living in long-term care services, those experiencing loneliness and social isolation, children and young people, older people, women, LGBTI²¹ persons, cancer patients, persons with disabilities, refugees, migrants, prisoners and people experiencing homelessness’.
13. Women and girls are vital for the sustainable development of rural and remote areas, bringing added value to local communities. They are frequently the driving force of innovation, diversification, and the development of new opportunities²². However, these roles are often overlooked or invisible. Many women and girls in rural and remote areas still face challenges related to employment, entrepreneurship, quality education and training opportunities, unequal sharing of care responsibilities, access to land, early childhood education and care, long-term care as well as health care services, and insufficient representation in decision-making.^{23,24}

²⁰ Council conclusions on mental health, 15971/23, paragraph 24.

²¹ See the Commission’s LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, (COM(2020) 698 final).

²² European Investment Bank, Support for female entrepreneurs: Survey evidence for why it makes sense, November 2022, ISBN: 978-92-861-5378-5.

²³ Communication on LTVRA.

²⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (9th Cohesion Report), March 2024.

14. The EU recognises that demographic change is, among others influenced by life choices that individuals and families make and emphasises the need for supportive public policies to enable young people to fully realise their potential. The Communication on the "Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action"²⁵ highlights in particular, the critical need to support younger generations in accessing quality jobs, affordable housing, and decent living standards.
15. Rural and less-developed regions may particularly face an ageing population, low educational attainment, workforce shrinkage, youth outmigration and risk falling into a ‘talent development trap’²⁶, which undermines their ability to build sustainable economies as well as hampers their competitiveness and growth. The Commission’s Communication on “Harnessing Talent in Europe’s Regions” outlines the need to transform these regions into vibrant, talent-driven economies, building upon the local strengths of rural regions. Addressing these challenges requires tailored support to empower youth, improve access to education, training and employment, enhance access to innovation and training facilities, invest in the creation of quality job opportunities and promote social inclusion. Ensuring that people living in rural and remote areas, including young people have the opportunity to thrive is essential for reducing territorial disparities and enhancing social cohesion across the EU.^{27,28}

²⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action (The Commission’s Demography Toolbox), COM/2023/577 final.

²⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Harnessing talent in Europe’s regions (Communication on Harnessing talent), COM/2023/32 final.

²⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (9th Cohesion Report), March 2024.

²⁸ Publications Office of the European Union: Eurostat Regional Yearbook – 2023 Edition.

16. Cohesion policy and, in rural context, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) plays an important role in supporting Member States and regions in their effort to enable a better reflection on multiple development challenges, reform needs and differing socioeconomic and territorial disparities by channelling targeted support focusing on the specific needs of each region. While bearing in mind the asymmetric impact of challenges posed by green and digital transitions, demographic transformation, changing global economic trends or climate change, mapping infrastructure, human capital and service needs may facilitate more efficient programming of EU funds in outermost, sparsely populated, islands, mountainous, and border regions, and rural areas. This can contribute to diversify employment opportunities and enhance in formal and non-formal education and training, including through digitalisation support, making rural and remote regions more attractive places to live and work, thereby ensuring their sustainable development.²⁹

²⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the 9th Cohesion Report (Communication on the 9th Cohesion Report) COM (2024) 149 final and the 9th Cohesion Report.

17. The United Nations’ ‘Decade of Family Farming’ Global Action Plan (2019-2028)³⁰ underlines that to ensure the generational sustainability of family farming, it is essential to empower youth, in particular young women, by facilitating access to land, natural resources, information, education, infrastructure, financial services, markets, and involvement in policymaking processes related to farming. By facilitating the intergenerational transfer, young farmers can blend traditional, local knowledge with innovative practices to promote their crucial role in inclusive rural development. The negative trend of ageing farmer population can endanger the viability of rural areas, therefore strengthening forms of support for young farmers and entrepreneurs, helping them to start agricultural activities, incentivise the transfer of farms and making agriculture more attractive to the younger generation together with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) can play an important role in generational renewal.
18. The OECD’s ‘Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People’ calls for targeted measures to support young people in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. This includes providing integrated social, health, housing, and employment services tailored to local contexts. The recommendation highlights the importance of investments in education, housing, and health for rural youth, alongside collaboration among stakeholders, to create supportive environments for their success.³¹

³⁰ FAO and IFAD. 2019. United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028. Global Action Plan. Rome.

³¹ OECD, Recommendation of the Council on creating better opportunities for young people, Meeting of the Council at Ministerial Level, 9-10 June 2022, JT03497457.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THAT

19. Across Europe, rural regions' inadequate ability to attract talent³² or access to infrastructure and quality services related to everyday life pose substantial barriers to the well-being and socioeconomic development of rural youth. This may limit rural youth's connectivity and access to quality education and training, employment, healthcare, housing, social services, youth work, culture, sport and leisure activities, impedes their socio-economic opportunities and therefore their freedom to stay³³.
20. Many young people living in rural and remote areas are facing barriers regarding access to learning and a lack of awareness of opportunities related to digital services and platforms, causing a heightened level of isolation and a possible digital gap between rural and urban areas. Digital access, job-relevant and digital skills can act as a catalyst for localised empowerment and inclusion.^{34,35} For young people not in education, employment and training (NEETs), these barriers can be particularly detrimental, as limited digital connectivity further restricts their ability to seek education, employment, and training opportunities, exacerbating their social and economic isolation. Addressing the digital divide is essential to re-engage NEET youth and equip them with the skills needed to participate in the modern workforce. The reinforced Youth Guarantee³⁶ stresses the importance of supporting young people, especially NEETs, labour market integration locally, also in rural and remote areas by making sure the necessary opportunities exist at local and regional level thereby making it easier for them to remain in these areas.

³² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Harnessing talent in Europe's regions (Communication on Harnessing talent), COM/2023/32 final, 2023.

³³ Letta, E. (2024), Much more than a market, Speed, Security, Solidarity Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens, April 2024.

³⁴ Communication on LTVRA.

³⁵ Communication on the 9th Cohesion Report and the 9th Cohesion Report.

³⁶ Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee (2020/C 372/01).

21. In many rural and remote areas throughout Europe, young people, especially women and young people living with disabilities, face disparities compared to urban areas in access to formal and non-formal educational and training and to informal learning opportunities and encounter significant obstacles to their personal and professional development. Limited access and availability to high-quality education and training programmes not only exacerbate the skills gap but also may lead to brain drain and an increase in unemployment rates among rural youth who struggle to find jobs relevant to their qualifications in their area.
22. Access to glocal and comprehensive information about local, regional, national and EU programmes and funding opportunities is essential for the development and empowerment of rural youth. Vertical and horizontal language barriers may hinder their ability to comprehend and navigate these documents effectively, limiting rural youths' access to EU initiatives^{37 38}. Effective dissemination of information can be supported by intersectoral collaboration, helping to overcome these barriers and fostering capacity-building and local networks. This is paramount to ensure equitable participation and maximising the benefits of EU programmes such as Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and LEADER, and funding opportunities for rural youth across Europe at all levels.
23. Geographical factors can hinder young people's access to employment and affordable housing opportunities and better connectivity, creating a state of uncertainty, increased dependency on financial resources and an incentive for mobility and urbanisation locally.

³⁷ Moxon D., Bárta O. (2024). EUYD10 Results of the Consultation Phase: We Need Youth. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10656746.

³⁸ The EU Rural Action Plan is mentioned in the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040, COM (2021) 345 final.

24. Rural youth communities may face challenges, such as lower educational attainment, unemployment, or a lack of decent working conditions. Furthermore, inadequate access to youth work, youth organisations, community spaces and quality social, cultural, sports and leisure activities can lead to difficulties in creating, joining or maintaining communities. These factors may reduce opportunities for social interactions which can result in negative effects on well-being, feelings of isolation, loneliness and potentially lead to weak support systems.
25. Young people living in rural and remote areas may be prone to insufficient support services including in the area of mental health³⁹. Mental health issues may have a negative effect on their education, employment and social security. These include a sense of exclusion, resulting in negative feelings of isolation; online and offline bullying and harassment by peers; excessive media use, the fear of missing out and increased exposure to addictions. At the same time, these young people lack access to structures that could help them avoid and recover from these threats, and as a result, anxiety and depression persist and many mental health issues go untreated.
26. A wide range of factors determine healthy longevity, including health promotion and disease prevention, access to healthcare services, living and working conditions, types of occupation and the surrounding environment. Although rural areas offer health benefits, such as better air quality and proximity to nature, urban regions typically have a greater number and variety of healthcare facilities⁴⁰. Lack of quality healthcare services is associated with difficulties in preventing and treating health problems. Furthermore, while agriculture provides numerous employment opportunities in many rural areas, occupations like farming can have a hazardous or detrimental effect on physical health⁴¹. It is therefore essential to invest in labour saving and labour enhancing technology.

³⁹ Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, COM(2023) 298 final.

⁴⁰ Eurostat regional yearbook 2023.

⁴¹ EU CAP Network: Supporting the health and well-being of Europe's agricultural workforce, Policy Insight, June 2023.

27. Young people with disabilities living in rural and remote areas may face significant barriers impacting their quality of life and opportunities, such as limited access to inclusive and high-quality education and training, specialised healthcare, as well as inadequate transport and connectivity. These challenges underscore the need for targeted actions to better support them^{42,43}.
28. Although rural youth, including women, have a significant potential for innovation and economic development, they may encounter barriers in accessing financial resources and navigating complex funding and bureaucratic procedures. Therefore, accessible and clear funding mechanisms, along with targeted investments to support entrepreneurship, including farmership, among rural youth can be crucial.^{44,45,46}
29. Young people in rural and remote areas are prone to encounter unique sustainability challenges that are exacerbated by the escalating climate crisis, significantly impacting their daily lives. Compared to their urban counterparts, they often are more vulnerable to environmental or climate-related issues. They need increased access to sustainable resources and solutions, further intensifying their vulnerability to environmental threats. As the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴⁷ highlights, this lack of access not only impedes young people's ability to address pressing sustainability concerns but also hinders their contribution to mitigating the climate crisis. Furthermore, to adequately address and overcome these challenges in their environment, they require access to quality formal and non-formal education and training to build the necessary skills and competencies.

⁴² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (EU Disability Strategy), COM(2021) 101 final.

⁴³ Communication on LTVRA.

⁴⁴ Communication on LTVRA.

⁴⁵ European Regional Development Fund, Interreg Europe, Policy brief on: How to boost entrepreneurship in rural areas? April 2020.

⁴⁶ European Commission: Taking stock of how CAP Strategic Plans contribute to the objectives of the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas, June 2023.

⁴⁷ United Nations: A/RES/70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

30. Continuous development through the participation of the local population is essential for rural development, therefore a solid basis for meaningful youth participation is needed in rural and remote areas. Rural youth should be recognized as key stakeholders in rural development and policies should be designed to meet their needs and aspirations by ensuring their ongoing involvement and influence in decision-making processes at all levels. As the Rural Pact⁴⁸ identifies, amplifying the voice of rural areas and raising them higher on the local, regional, national and EU political agenda is to be defined as a key objective.
31. Young people in rural and remote areas can serve as catalysts for positive change, especially within their communities, by driving development across digital, social, and economic fronts. However, despite their potential, rural youth often face significant barriers to fully realising their leadership capabilities and accessing growth opportunities. Overcoming these challenges is essential to harnessing the leadership potential of rural youth and empowering them to drive sustainable development in their communities, thereby fostering inclusive growth and resilience across Europe.

⁴⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development: Open letter on the launch of the Rural Pact, 17 December 2021.

32. During the EU Youth Conference in Budapest, in September 2024⁴⁹, young people proposed to make rural and remote areas more vibrant and attractive for young people by:
- i) Promoting meaningful rural youth participation, especially on issues related to environmental sustainability as well as mental and physical health.
 - ii) Fostering supportive rural communities, challenging prejudice, building accessible intergenerational dialogue, and common spaces as well as strengthening visions for the future.
 - iii) Increasing access to infrastructure, tailored to the needs of young people, such as internet connectivity, information, transportation, clean energy, as well as physical and mental health services.
 - iv) Raising awareness of alternative employment pathways such as remote working and innovative farming.
33. At the EU Youth Conference in Budapest⁵⁰ young people also emphasised that EU, national and local instruments should fit the needs, realities, capacities and resources of young people from rural and remote areas and
- i) Provide support for youth participation within rural development and decision making for example through youth ambassadors, advisory boards, local youth councils and participatory budgeting.
 - ii) Support rural entrepreneurship including farming through awareness-raising on existing EU and national programmes, mentorship, promotion of digital transformation and fostering the use of financial incentives such as tax relief or co-funding opportunities.

⁴⁹ Bárta O., Moxon D. (2024). EUYD10 EU Youth Conference in Budapest, Hungary. Final Conference Report. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13836827.

⁵⁰ Bárta O., Moxon D. (2024). EUYD10 EU Youth Conference in Budapest, Hungary. Final Conference Report. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13836827.

- iii) Promote youth-friendly platforms for accessing information on youth programmes, quality employment opportunities and funding as well as launching an EU-wide campaign to foster equal access to work.
- iv) Encourage quality learning opportunities and youth initiatives that widen the experiences of rural youth, such as urban-rural youth exchanges, climate projects, mobile and outreach youth workers, as well as engagement in rural youth organisations.
- v) Improving access to services and information related to mental health through inspiring local action and fostering dialogue on existing funding opportunities and facilities.

ACCORDINGLY INVITE MEMBER STATES AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

- 34. Where appropriate, contribute to identifying, developing, monitoring and ensuring fair and equal access for young people living in rural and remote areas to infrastructure, information, connectivity and services locally along with measures to improve accessibility related to their everyday life.
- 35. Step up efforts to enhance the availability of and access to digital infrastructure and services in rural and remote areas, especially by providing support for electronic devices and other digital matters, building high-quality broadband coverage, improving digital literacy and cyber safety, and sharing good practices between local, regional and national authorities where relevant⁵¹.

⁵¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age, COM/2020/624 final.

36. Further support intersectoral collaboration between local quality educational, training, social, health care, cultural, youth care, youth work, sport and leisure facilities that young people living in rural and remote areas can benefit from to ensure equitable conditions of personal development and well-being in their context while also foster physical and digital accessibility to these facilities and related services ⁵².
37. Encourage authorities, especially in rural and remote areas at local level, to facilitate the participation of rural youth, such as by the establishment of youth councils and processes in decision making, which could serve as consultative, advisory bodies and initiatives. These may contribute to the effective involvement of young people in all decision-making processes in the fields that affect them the most, such as issues regarding education, employment, social inclusion, infrastructure, housing, connectivity, health care (especially mental health) and the environment and may strengthen trust in democratic processes.
38. Promote the establishment and functioning of safe and inclusive youth centres and spaces in rural and remote areas, and where relevant facilitate continuous support of already existing safe and inclusive youth centres and intergenerational interaction. Further enhance initiatives and programmes to empower and support all forms of youth work, and youth organisations in order to recognise their crucial role in reaching out to young people living in rural and remote areas and outermost regions.
39. Encourage local dialogue on rural development to discuss the future of the area and sustainable solutions, which brings together young people, institutions representing different policy areas along with local authorities, as well as social and economic stakeholders to reflect the ambition of the Commission's long-term vision for the EU's rural areas⁵³.

⁵² Communication on LTVRA.

⁵³ Communication on LTVRA.

40. Promote talent support initiatives that adopt a comprehensive approach to nurturing and harnessing talents throughout their lifecycle, by training youth workers, educators and professionals to acknowledge the diverse talents of young people. Empower young people to build on their skills, talents and capacities, regardless of the particular barriers they may face in rural and remote areas.⁵⁴
41. Encourage local and, where relevant, regional youth employment, including targeting those young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs), by raising awareness and facilitating the creation of diverse job placements and prospects in rural and remote areas, focusing on the diversification and development of opportunities in different sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing, digital, climate adaptation and services, and providing support for skill development and training programmes tailored to local economic activities.
42. Foster the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee in rural and remote areas for example by mapping the services available for young people, addressing gaps through mobile, online services, or one-stop shops.
43. Explore ways to attract and retain young people in rural and remote areas, with a special attention to young women, in communities to ensure their long-term economic prosperity and vitality, and consider, where appropriate, cross-sectoral means to support them.

⁵⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Harnessing Talent, COM(2023) 32 final.

44. Explore and support initiatives aiming at intergenerational cooperation and solidarity, by facilitating dialogues and providing in-depth information about good practices, to make it easier for rural youth to thrive locally.
45. Develop, enhance and maintain physical and mental health support programmes tailored to the needs of young people in rural and remote communities, by providing both online and offline support networks, for example, psychological and other preventive services in schools and youth centres, to combat bullying and addiction.

ACCORDINGLY INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

46. Explore ways to facilitate access to EU initiatives and instruments targeted at rural youth with a focus on eliminating language and administrative barriers. Where necessary, simplify the wording to be more youth friendly and reduce unnecessary bureaucratic burdens, ensuring that rural youth can more easily access these support mechanisms and information among others through the European Youth Portal. Information and instruments should also be provided in formats that are accessible for young persons with disabilities.
47. Within the framework of youth mainstreaming, enhance the visibility of rural youth in the EU programmes with a youth component and in the post-2027 EU Youth Strategy and make use of the Youth Check at the European level, where appropriate, when designing specific and concrete actions, targeting all young people, including those living in rural and remote areas.

48. Explore opportunities to better target and maximise the use of existing financial mechanisms and, where appropriate, the possibilities of refocusing initiatives in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders to assist young rural entrepreneurs, including among others young farmers in starting, maintaining, and expanding their businesses, while also bearing in mind the structural limitations they might face in terms of accessing financial resources. Additionally, promote existing tools such as the Rural Toolkit⁵⁵, among young people in rural and remote areas and support cooperation amongst all entrepreneurs in rural and remote areas. Doing so will help to secure future job opportunities in rural areas, fostering economic resilience and vitality.
49. Facilitate the implementation of territorial impact assessment, including the rural proofing by assessing the anticipated impact of major EU initiatives on rural and remote areas and encouraging similar approaches at national, regional, and local levels with the aim to ensure coherence, consistency and complementarity between policies and instruments covering issues of importance for rural areas.
50. Continue to build knowledge and carry out evidence-based research on young people living in rural and remote areas using existing tools such as the Youth Wiki and the studies in collaboration with the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, among others.
51. Continue to make efforts to raise awareness and increase the participation of possibly under-represented groups, such as young people in rural and remote areas, in the EU Youth Dialogue and in other relevant EU initiatives such as, the Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) initiative, the EUTeens4Green initiative and the Youth4OutermostRegions project.

⁵⁵ Communication on LTVRA.

ACCORDINGLY INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

52. Emphasise and recognise the strategic role of young people living in rural and remote areas in achieving a green, just and inclusive transition, maintaining food and climate security, by promoting biodiversity and rural revitalisation, creating high-quality jobs, and involving youth in the transformation.⁵⁶
53. Provide opportunities for equitable language learning by facilitating cross-country cooperation, formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities and applicable language training focusing on everyday usage.
54. In cooperation with relevant sectors strengthen the conditions for young people to thrive locally through supporting initiatives that effectively use local resources and infrastructure to create sustainable livelihoods in rural and remote areas, including outermost regions, as well as encouraging the development of adequate housing initiatives tailored to the needs of youth living in these areas.
55. Effectively promote generational renewal⁵⁷ and support young entrepreneurs, including among others young farmers in rural and remote areas by enhancing the availability and accessibility of start-up support. Provide targeted information, access to space, infrastructure, financial support and resources, as well as access to training and mentorship programmes that allow aspiring entrepreneurs, including among others young farmers to overcome initial barriers and embark on their ventures with confidence, thereby revitalising rural economies and fostering sustainable development and innovation across Europe.

⁵⁶ Food Security Information Network (FSIN) and Global Network Against Food Crises, 2024 Global report on food crisis 2024. GRFC 2024, Rome.

⁵⁷ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: 'Summary of CAP Strategic Plans for 2023-27: joint effort and collective ambition', Brussels, 23.11.2023, COM(2023) 707 final.

56. Strengthen intersectoral cooperation in the field of formal and non-formal education and training with a heightened focus on the upskilling and development of human resources, improving working conditions, and increasing the availability of and access to facilities and equipment for educational and training institutions in the areas that are facing the most difficulties.
57. Ensure the active participation of rural youth and relevant organisations in policy discussions and decision-making at local, regional, national and EU levels by working together when designing, implementing and evaluating relevant policies and where possible providing comprehensive up-to-date and disaggregated data on rural youth, including among others young farmers, thus enabling policymakers to better target policies and interventions and create tailor-made solutions for them. Take appropriate measures to counteract the impact of negative demographic trends affecting the lives of young people living in rural and remote areas, including among others young farmers.
58. Enhance cross-border cooperation and EU instruments in the field of mental and physical health by encouraging research on mental health, developing shared monitoring and prevention methods for less-developed territories, and sharing good practices concerning the proliferation of mental health services in rural and remote areas.

Definitions for the purpose of these conclusions:

‘Rural areas’ are local administrative communities outside urban clusters, mostly characterised by lower population density, specific socio-geographical and cultural image, the 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 the general population.

‘Quality of life’ indicators cover a broad range of topics/dimensions, including material living conditions, employment, education, health, social interactions, safety and security, trust, discrimination and the environment.

‘Rural proofing’ means reviewing policies through a rural lens, to make these policies fit for purpose for those who live and work in rural areas. The European Commission put in place a rural proofing mechanism as part of the ‘Better regulation’ agenda, to assess the impact of major EU legislative initiatives on rural areas.

‘Rural revitalisation’ is a way of positively transforming rural areas for present and future generations.

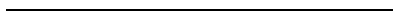
‘Rurality’ is often not defined, however, for the purpose of this document, rurality consists of two geographical levels: rural areas (a classification of the Local Administrative Unit (LAU) level) and a predominantly rural region (a classification of Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics-3 (NUTS-3) level regions). Both rural areas and predominantly rural regions are defined in the same way: the majority of their population lives in rural grid cells. The classification of LAUs defines the degree of urbanisation and the classification of NUTS-3 level regions refers to the urban-rural regional typology.

‘Remote areas’ are local and regional administrative communities, mostly outside urban clusters, characterised by difficult physical access, mainly due to the 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 features of ‘rural areas’ defined above. The EU’s outermost regions as set out in Article 349 TFEU are also considered as remote areas.

‘Glocal’ describes the seamless integration between the local and global; the comprehensive connectedness produced by travel, business, and communications, as well as the willingness and ability to think globally and act locally. ‘The concept of glocalisation captures the dynamic, contingent, and two-way dialectic between the global and the local’ (Swyngedouw (2004)). Some of the most pressing global trends affecting young people include climate change, which disproportionately impacts rural communities and agricultural livelihoods, and the rise of digital technologies, which create both opportunities and challenges in terms of digital literacy, access to education, and employment. Additionally, economic inequality and youth unemployment are global challenges, often necessitating local innovation in job creation, skills development, and entrepreneurship. Mental health issues, exacerbated by global crises and societal pressures, also call for locally sensitive approaches to support and resilience-building. Moreover, the ongoing push for social justice and inclusivity requires tailored solutions to address issues of gender equality, racial disparities, and access to resources, reflecting the unique cultural and social dynamics in different regions. By addressing these global challenges through locally relevant strategies, young people can harness the potential of glocalization to create sustainable and resilient futures within their communities.

‘Talent development trap,’ as described in the Commission’s Communication on Harnessing Talent in Europe’s Regions, refers to a multidimensional challenge faced by some EU regions experiencing a sharp decline in their working-age population, a low and stagnating share of higher-education graduates and a negative mobility of their population aged 15-39. These result in inefficiencies in the local economies, labour markets, education, training, and adult learning systems, as well as low performance in innovation, governance, business development, and service access.

‘Vertical and horizontal language barriers’ describes the complexity of the language barriers that many rural youth face. The horizontal segment focuses on the lack of adequate access to foreign language education, whereas the vertical segment emphasises the difficulty of understanding the complex language for which some resources are available, as well as the lack of youth-friendly phrasing.



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