



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 20 December 2019
(OR. en)

15298/19

JEUN 148
EMPL 615
SOC 815
REGIO 223
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TRANS 596
EDUC 489
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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Background paper on Raising opportunities for youth in rural and remote areas
- Presentation by the Presidency and exchange of views

In view of the first Youth Working Party meeting under the incoming Croatian Presidency (agenda item 5), delegations will find attached a background paper on Raising opportunities for youth in rural and remote areas. The aim of this paper is to kick off the preparations for the future draft Council conclusions that the incoming Croatian Presidency intends to prepare on this topic, and to get feedback from delegations in this regard.

In this perspective, delegations may send written comments on the attached paper to the Presidency (Vladimir.Somen@mvep.hr) and the GSC (andres.tobias@consilium.europa.eu ; eycs@consilium.europa.eu), including on issues that they would like to see be covered and/or messages they would like to see reflected in the future Council conclusions.

RAISING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

Presidency background paper

Youth Working Party meeting on 13 January 2020

Agenda item 5

I. Introduction

Young people in the 21st century have many more options and opportunities than ever before. However, today's modern Europe is faced with a number of challenges and new trends that make young people's life difficult and uncertain, in particular for those living in rural and remote areas.

There are significant disparities between Member States, as well as between their different areas and regions. These differences are quite obvious in terms of territorial divide, since there are clear differences between the quality of life of people living in urban areas on one hand, and those living in rural and remote areas on the other¹.

Access to services and information and quality of services varies significantly from one place to another, which often results in flows of movement from rural/remote areas to urban areas as people (and in particular young people) search for attractive environment, good jobs and better living conditions.

Different challenges in the field of youth policies have already been addressed through the EU Youth Strategy 2019 – 2027, which includes the EU Youth Goals, whereas one of them is focused on rural youth, namely “Moving rural youth forward”. Furthermore, "Opportunities for youth in rural areas" is one of the three subthemes of the 7th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, which deals directly with afore-mentioned EU Youth Goal.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_rural_areas_in_the_EU

It is in this context that the Croatian Presidency has chosen "Raising opportunities for youth in rural and remote areas" as one of the priority topics in the area of youth policy and decided to prepare a set of draft Council conclusions on it.

II. Global trends and challenges affecting young people

Urbanisation or "urban transition" has already been identified as a current megatrend, in light of the projection that by 2030 two thirds of world population will be living in urban areas². This will probably have a significant impact on population, quality of life, lifestyles as well as on the environment. Urbanisation mostly happens in two main case scenarios, namely when people move from rural to urban areas or when the boundaries of urban areas are extended to rural areas.

Another current trend which EU is facing is that of **demographic** nature, with an emphasis on the **ageing of population**. Europe is ageing, as almost one third of EU population is over 65-year old. Recently, there has been a significant increase in percentage of elderly people in rural areas throughout different Member States³. Therefore, a generation divide is an additional context to be taken into account when exploring the possibilities for the youth, especially those related to enhancing social cohesion or promoting EU values.

Moreover, when we refer to rural and remote areas, **climate change and environmental degradation** are having an adverse impact on natural resources such as water and forests, and therefore fuelling youth movement towards urban areas.

Finally, the increasing **lack of employment opportunities** and the **decline of key infrastructure** - such as public transport, schools, health centres and other public services, as well as lack of quality leisure time activities and youthwork - make rural and remote areas increasingly unattractive for young people to remain or settle in.

² <https://undocs.org/E/CN.9/2018/2>

³ https://www.unecce.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Policy_briefs/ECE-WG1-25.pdf

III. Addressing the challenges and providing opportunities

Those young people who, for different reasons, decide to stay within their "unattractive" rural and/or remote communities, are frequently faced with obstacles such as lack of formal and non-formal educational opportunities, adequate employment, transport and health services, sport, cultural and leisure time facilities. Decreased level of social or civic participation as well as of engagement in learning experiences abroad is also more likely in less urbanised areas, too⁴. Therefore, this specific type of population may consequently be exposed to an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Taking into account newly identified trends (urbanisation, demography, climate)⁵ which EU is nowadays faced with and which are very likely to influence youth policies in the future (as well as potentially cause new forms of exclusion), there is a need to discuss how these issues could be addressed from a specific "young people in rural and remote areas" dimension.

We need to further explore the potential that rural and remote areas have in order to contribute to fight these challenges and especially combat climate change and protect the environment, while providing opportunities for young people, such as green jobs or self-employment through social entrepreneurship. We must empower young people to protect existing resources and use them in a sustainable manner.

In this context, the EU and its Member States should also assess how could challenges affecting young people in rural and remote areas be turned into opportunities, how to make rural and remote areas attractive to young people and what measures could be taken in order to create a level playing field between all young people across the EU.

⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 478: How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people (April 2019)
<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/FLASH/surveyKy/2224>

⁵ Global trends to 2030 – Challenges and Choices for Europe, ESPAS, March 2019
https://espas.secure.europarl.europa.eu/orbis/sites/default/files/generated/document/en/ESPAS_Report2019.pdf

IV. Questions to structure the discussion

In a spirit of good cross-sectorial cooperation, in order to have a broad picture of main challenges and best practices regarding young people in rural and remote areas across the EU and help the Presidency to prepare a set of draft Council Conclusions on this topic, Member States are invited to express their views on the following guiding questions:

- Is your country faced with challenges and trends which could have direct an impact on young people living in rural or remote areas? If so, what are the key issues that need to be addressed both at local, regional, national and EU levels from a youth policy perspective?
- What measures and tools do you use on a national, regional or local level in order to overcome specific problems linked to urban vs. rural disparities (where appropriate), specifically regarding young people in rural and remote areas, including their access to different services?
- Which key instruments are being used on a national, regional or local level in order to provide support and encourage young people in active involvement in the life of local communities in rural and remote areas, including the use of existing resources?
- How can EU Member States' cooperation be strengthened in order to provide better opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas, taking into account in particular the abovementioned trends?