

# 1<sup>st</sup> International **Conference** Rural Youth and the New Youth Guarantee

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**Brescia22**  
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## **NOTE FROM THE RURAL NEET YOUTH NETWORK CHAIR**

On the 14th of September 2022, the Rural NEET Youth Network organized the international conference Rural Youth and the New Youth Guarantee. This conference gathered invited speakers from international stakeholders such as the European Commission, OECD, or ILO to reflect on the upcoming EU policy challenges in tackling youth unemployment and social exclusion. For the past decade, the main EU policy instrument in these domains has been the Youth Guarantee. Overall, the Youth Guarantee has been successful in reducing the rates of young people Not in Employment, nor in Education or Training (NEET). However, there are persisting problems in coordinating European-, national- and regional-level policies in youth employment and in the education and training fields. Moreover, while NEET rates came down over the past 10 years, very specific issues remain unattended such as how can public services engage with NEETs who are harder to reach, including migrants, inactive young women, or those living in remote, rural areas. The impact of COVID-19 on the new policy frameworks, specifically on the New Youth Guarantee, the role of sectors such as the social economy field and social enterprises, or the importance of the dual transition in shaping rural young people's dreams and expectations were just some of the many lines of inquiry explored during this conference.

The Rural NEET Youth Network conference held in Brescia was also an excellent opportunity to showcase the ideas circulating within our COST Action. More than 70 papers were submitted and presented during this conference. The different parallel panels covered several informal collaborations that have been encouraged within the Rural NEET Youth Network, as well as research proposals that are being developed within the mentoring program for young researchers promoted by this Action. This book of proceedings represents, therefore, a summary of the many lively discussions that took place during the event.

One final word is due to all of those who contributed to the success of this conference. To begin with, I would like to acknowledge all of those who dedicated their time to reviewing and assessing abstracts. In the same vein, I would like to thank the core group of the Rural NEET Youth Network for offering several contributions to bring this conference to light, from programming to dissemination. Last but not least, this conference would not be possible without the outstanding efforts made by the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and specifically by Adriano Ellena, Elena Marta, and Daniela Marzana, who committed themselves for months to making sure all of us felt welcome in Brescia.

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## **DIGITAL DIVIDE AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE RURAL AREAS**

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**Aims:** Rural communities are areas that have the same potential to be innovative and progressive as urban ones. However, in rural areas, several problems particularly reduce that potential and marginalize young people, making them NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population. One of the key shortcomings is the lack of adequate access to the necessary information to successfully make the inclusion in economic flows and the transition to the labour market. This limited access to information, in addition to the inability to seize employment opportunities, also affects knowledge sharing and further education as well as monitoring of business and technological innovations and trends, which further reduces the ability of the young rural population to engage in social, economic and democratic processes. The problems faced by unemployed youth in rural areas are related to reduced access to and use of information and communication technologies, i.e. to the digital divide that occurs between urban and rural areas (Hollman et al., 2021). Numerous previous studies indicate significant spatial differences in the degree of access to Internet technologies as well as the use of these technologies in socio-economic interactions (Prieger, 2013).

This study examines the digital divide between urban and rural areas within European countries. The survey is quantitative and uses data from a unique Eurostat database to have access to and make comparisons for several countries. This database contains data based on several pieces of research in the field of digital economy and society, population and social conditions and is suitable for the investigation of phenomena on a global level. The study also aims to investigate influence of factors representing rural areas' digital level on the NEET rate.

**Theoretical approach:** Factors related to the digital level are examined. Particular attention focused primarily on the availability of information and communication infrastructure in rural areas. Broadband internet and mobile broadband access are essential prerequisites for economic and personal development in rural areas (Prieger, 2013). However, rural areas are considered to lag behind urban areas in broadband accessibility and are one of the leading causes of the digital divide.

Digitization is a process that goes beyond technology itself and involves a specific set of skills and a mind-set focused on using these technologies (Meyn, 2020). Transformation of the existing rural environment towards the adoption of digital technologies requires the development of an approach to meet the specific needs of the rural population in order to avoid greater marginalization of rural areas, despite the availability of information and communication infrastructure. In this sense, youths in rural areas are struggling with

many problems, primarily access to education, limited employment opportunities and access to social services and institutions. In addition, demographic trends are not in favour of rural areas, primarily due to the going away of young people to urban areas and the ageing population in general. Thus, the digitalization of the rural regions requires work to increase the digital competencies of the population in order to enable sustainable growth in both social and economic fields and to create a new future for rural communities. Adaptation to digital technologies and integration of digital tools into everyday life are considered through several aspects in this study. In this sense, the intensity of Internet use, the way of using Internet content and devices used to access the Internet are considered.

The paper also provides an insight into the use of financial activities and e-purchases over the internet in rural areas as a starting point for development of business and e-business. Namely rural business also suffer digital divide since they are far from suppliers and markets and failures in access and adoption of ICT reduce their chance to be innovative and competitive and economically sustainable (Morris et al., 2022).

In recent years, many government services and access to public information have been linked to information and communication technologies. On the one hand, e-government can be a point of connection for people from urban and rural areas and an effective tool to reduce the digital divide and empower rural population to achieve social inclusion (Ye & Yang, 2020). On the other hand, to take full advantage of these services, rural people must have the ability and knowledge to use them. Therefore digital divide occurs as well in this field.

**Methodology:** Data from the Eurostat database for 32 countries was used to estimate the level of the digital divide. In order to test theoretical assumptions, various statistical analyses were used. A one-way ANOVA test was used to compare the effects of the type of settlement on the elements used to indicate the digital level and determine the digital divide's existence.

Given that the research presupposes that the digital level in rural areas affects the level of the NEET population, a multiple linear regression model was used to test the assumption. Digital level factors assessed in rural areas were used as predictor variables, while the level of the NEET rate was used as the dependent variable.

**Findings:** The results of testing the digital divide's existence reveal that there are statistically significant differences between the rural and urban areas inside examined digital factors. The results of testing multiple linear regression model indicate that factors such as type of connection to the internet (fixed broadband and mobile broadband) and e-government services are statistically significant predictors of the NEET level. In those cases, the higher value of examined indicators means a lower value of the NEET rate.

The importance of studying the digital differences is reflected in the fact that the resulting gap tends to deepen over time. In this case, disadvantaged groups, where the NEET population can be classified, become even more vulnerable and marginalized over time.

Therefore it is necessary to implement programs to reduce this gap constantly. The results of the study indicate those aspects of the digital divide that are most pronounced in European countries and enable the identification of critical elements for developing programs to support the digital transformation of rural areas. It is important to emphasize that the plans for implementing and accepting digital transformation in rural areas should be strongly harmonized with the needs of a particular community because, in this case, the "one fit to all" solutions are inadequate.

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## **DIGITAL LITERACY, ACCESSIBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY IN RURAL AREAS: THE CASE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN ITALY, PORTUGAL AND SPAIN**

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In a society in which communication is increasingly mediated by ICTs, digital literacy, accessibility and connectivity becomes crucial, especially for young people living in rural and/or isolated environments. Promoting digital inclusion of young people in rural contexts requires, first of all, policies that promote democratisation of access and use of digital tools, in order to overcome a set of barriers, such as accessibility - investment in the acquisition of electronic equipment, such as a computer, for example, which is not always accessible to families; connectivity - many rural and remote areas still have poor internet coverage; literacy - it is necessary to provide young people with a set of skills which enable them to the use of ICTs and the internet (Ferreira & Vieira, 2020). As described above, the use of digital media presents new challenges for young people, as e-learning and social networks are transforming social relationships. Nevertheless, the use of ICT provides several advantages, such as the elimination of physical barriers, access to less costly training, or increased cooperation and communication as well as negative effects range from inequality and social exclusion (Pagani et al., 2016) to cyber-aggression (Mishna et al., 2018), technology addiction (Lachmann et al., 2018), and poorer learning and academic outcome (Hawi & Samaha, 2016). As digital natives, advanced ICT skills can give young people a competitive edge over the rest of society in terms of employment opportunities.

Contemporary young people are also called Digital Natives, thus expecting them to have better digital skills than the rest of the population. These expectations, however, are illusory, or at least are limited exclusively to a small part of technology use, the more recreational one or to a relatively small sample of the youth population. In fact, there is evidence that socioeconomic factors affect the level of young people's digital skills, thus creating a digital divide among them. From an intrapersonal perspective, ICT is changing social interactions. Social media involves creating a digital life and personality which can affect young people's well-being. To respond to these challenges, digital skills now form part of the curriculum of schools and higher education institutions.

In summary, technology is particularly important for young people, specially for those living in rural areas, as it can mitigate the differences from young people living in urban areas, in what concerns, for example the access to resources on digital platforms or the access to online services on education and employment.

This paper intends to map and reflect the situation of ICT in Rural areas, regarding accessibility, connectivity and literacy, and how this can promote or limit young people's opportunities and deepening inequalities. Our analysis focuses on the situation of three

southern European countries (Italy, Portugal and Spain). It was decided to consider these countries for two principal reasons. The first is related to geographical origin: southern Europe. The second is related to the fact that they share several characteristics in common: welfare states (Castels, 1995; Ferrera, 1996; Rhodes, 1997); similar labour market indicators dynamics; political democratic systems (Pridham, 1984; Hopkin, 2001); bureaucracies (Sotiropoulos, 2004) and, of course, the characteristics of the administrations themselves.

In terms of methodology, we will focus on secondary data analysis using international and national databases (Eurostat, ILO, OECD, etc.) on digitalisation.

Keywords: accessibility, connectivity, digital literacy, rural areas, young people and southern Europe countries

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## **YOUNG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS PROCESSED FROM PALM COOKING OIL**

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The presence of innovative products processed from palm cooking oil is widely used in the form of solid soap products for souvenirs, air fresheners, and handicrafts. The existence of this innovative solid soap product comes with a unique and interesting variety. This provides business opportunities to create innovative products in the market. Considering that innovative solid soap products can create job opportunities and generate profits, it is necessary to conduct training and empowerment activities for young people. One of the potential parties in this training is a young housewife who is a member of the Family Welfare Empowerment Group (PKK) in Rawamangun, East Jakarta, Indonesia. Based on the analysis of the situation above, the formulation of the problem is how to improve the skills of young housewives in the PKK group, Rawamangun sub-district, East Jakarta, Indonesia? The purpose of this community service is to improve the skills of young housewives in the PKK group, Rawamangun sub-district, East Jakarta, Indonesia, through the development of innovative solid soap souvenir products using palm cooking oil. This is because the main activities of the PKK are to promote and improve the family's economic standard of living, education, and health, where most of the members are housewives. Empowerment is a process to increase the ability of the community to become empowered both in knowledge and skills. In other words, empowerment is enabling and empowering the community to produce capable and independent human beings. Product development can be said as a series of activities starting from the analysis of market perceptions and opportunities, which will end with the stages of production, sales, and delivery of a product. Product innovation is a combination of various processes that influence each other. Product innovation can come from the consumer's desire for a product to be able to meet their needs (market pull). This encouragement comes from a person or group of people who want to express market needs into real products so that they can be used by many people who need them. The method used in the form of simulations and demonstrations using palm cooking oil as raw material, obtained a positive response from the training participants who were enthusiastic and full of enthusiasm to try to practice the innovative product themselves. The most appropriate way to do this is through demonstrations or direct practice in front of participants. With this demonstration method, it is expected that participants will optimally learn, remember, understand, and be able to re-do the stages in developing innovative solid soap souvenir products using palm cooking oil as raw material. Armed with this training, the young housewives of the PKK group in Rawamangun have opened their horizons in entrepreneurship and are motivated to create business opportunities (home industry) in the form of innovative products processed from palm cooking oil which can later help the household economy. Through this community service activity, it is hoped that it can provide skills to housewives in the PKK group, Rawamangun sub-district, East Jakarta, Indonesia, through the development of innovative solid soap

souvenir products using palm cooking oil. With this training and community empowerment, young housewives are motivated to open up business opportunities through these products so that they can be sold in the market.

Keywords: development, family welfare empowerment, innovation, young community



## COMMUNITY, PARTICIPATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: FLAVORS AND TRADITIONS IN GUARDA

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The transformations of rural territories in more developed countries have tended to give rise to three main types of narratives and perspectives, both in social representations and in scientific analyses: the discourses on pre-modernity and rural crisis, in which rural areas are understood as less developed and backward, thus needing transformation and development; the productivist perspectives, associated with the development resulting from agricultural modernization processes and the agrifood sector; the patrimonialist or rural renaissance approaches, in which rural areas are understood as repositories of traditional cultural values and of higher environmental quality, thus needing to be preserved essentially for tourism and leisure activities, (FIGUEIREDO, 2018, p. 4).

The ideal scenario would be to join in the same policy complementary perspectives that assume the different spheres of rural space and, in this way, achieve the balance of these territories and their populations, safeguarding culture and identity, and promoting strategies leading to demographic and economic recovery.

The social, economic, political and cultural transformations of the meanings of the "rural" place imply rethinking such transformations from the theoretical, methodological point of view and also from the perspective of intervention - application of policies and programs, (CRISTÓVAO, 2012, p.3).

As MATEUS (2011) states, when we analyze the rural areas in Portugal, we must consider the spatial and population components. According to the author, if the first maintains some quantitative relevance, the second refers to a reality of emptiness and depletion (MATEUS, 2011, p. 649).

Despite this unavoidable reality, we are witnessing profound changes and transformation of these spaces, their actors and their ways of life, materialized in their landscapes that, consequently, also modify the images that have always been associated with them.

The resources, once primary, linked to the agricultural sector, are (re)created in a new history to be written and are also converted into tourist attractions and products. This change of roles reaches its exponent from the 80's of the 20th century, through the emergence of European and national policies to enhance the multifunctionality of rural areas, supported by the promotion of its authenticity, culture and heritage, what FERRÃO (2000, p. 48) calls the transformation of the rural world in multifunctional spaces with heritage value, likely to be the preferred product for new tourist typology(ies), which take advantage of, transform and reinvent "old territories". As mentioned by CARDOSO

(2002), cited by SANTOS & CUNHA (2009, p. 2), nature and the environment no longer have the function of agro-silvo-pastoral production prevalent in the past, to acquire an aesthetic, symbolic and playful representation, protagonists of strategies to boost tourism development projects.

Thus, and given the above characteristics, rural territories become an excellent source of virtues with an immense endogenous potential for the development of economic activities, not only those linked to agriculture, but having this at its base (SANTOS & CUNHA, 2009, p. 1).

Through a participatory methodology based on community forums with different agents and local actors, the main concerns and potentialities were identified in order to develop a territorial-based project. This allowed the congregation of the three parishes, whose main objective is to develop community strategies, leading to the sustainable development of these territories, through the valorization of their ways of life and their cultural heritage.

Thus, with this project of Sociocultural Animation we intend to dynamize the territory and disclose the potentialities, customs and traditions of the Teixeira Valley, having olive oil as the common thread. We believe that these types of actions can only be viable with the concerted synergies between the various agents and local actors, based on the basic assumption of any territorial-based intervention strategy, which is the participation of local populations. The scale at which we work induces us to a proximity with the local culture inseparable from the participation and commitment of all around a common project, which in this case is based on "Liquid Gold".

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## AN OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON RURAL TOURISM AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN ALBANIA

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### Aims

The paper aims to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism and youth employment in Albania. It points out that the catastrophic scenarios of the decline in tourism mainly concern urban destinations focused on foreign tourism. In contrast, rural destinations create an alternative and balanced the losses of tourist arrivals in coastal areas. Young people in rural areas in Albania are considered the future of rural tourism and other rural activities, but often lack of supporting by local government, their communities are faced with poverties. The phenomenon of emigration is still present nowadays, especially among young generation who often seek opportunities to study, work and live in another developed country. Rural tourism is a sector which has started to receive attention in the last decade, and research shows that it can play an important role regarding youth employment. This article aims to make an analysis of the labor market perspective for youth in Albania and explore tourism and especially rural tourism development as a potential for employment. The article highlights as follows:

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism in Albania
- The COVID-19 epidemic has created an opportunity for the development of rural tourism.
- An analysis of the labor market perspective for youth in Albania and explore tourism and especially rural tourism development as a potential for employment

### Methodology

This study will take into consideration the primarily on perceptions or attitudinal data, complemented by profile of the community or place with its key social, economic and political characteristics and secondary data provided by the World Travel and Tourism Council and INSTAT Albania focused on 2020 as the pandemic year. Almost 50 people participated in the primary data collection by interviewing and/or focus groups, including young people, their parents, and key informers from local actors implementing youth programs in rural countryside of Albania. Direct interviews with farmers of different ages from 2 regions Tirana and Durrës

So the development of rural tourism would help the population in such areas to diversify their activities and earn some extra income, motivating inhabitants to stay in their own areas. Overall, it would contribute to the balanced development of the regions of Albania.

### Findings



This research will give a clear picture of developing tourism in Albania during the Covid-19 pandemic year. *Improvement:* Therefore, among the measures for rural tourism development after COVID-19, the study strongly recommends that the government draft a meaningful strategy with specific proposals for improving rural tourism and youth employment. However, in order to support rural non-farm activities, which may foster rural employment in a better skills enhanced status, and also serve strategic needs of country's development more efforts are required by government and international actors. International actors along with government institutions can assist initiatives to identify the most effective way to provide vocational training and education for rural people particularly for rural youth.

Keywords: Rural tourism, youth employment, tourism

## LEISURE BEHAVIOR AND DIFFERENTIATION OF MINORITY HUNGARIAN YOUTH FROM TRANSYLVANIA (ROMANIA)

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In our study we analyse the cultural consumption of youngsters from Transylvania. Our primary interest is the validity of the shift in status markers from the classical “highbrow-lowbrow” to the “omnivore-univore” theory. We seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the cultural consumption characteristics differentiating youngsters?
2. What is the structure of cultural consumption among the Transylvanian youngsters?
3. What are the factors governing cultural consumption?

The socio-political changes in the last couple of decades in Eastern Europe – namely the transition to market-based economy and the establishment of the democratic system – lead to important changes in youngster’s life in the region: the “youngster” period has been extended; within this, the period for studying was prolonged; the autonomy of this generation increased. Concomitant with the change in the perception of the term “youngster”, there are significant effects coming from the media, the “consumption industry”, and the globalisation: these youngsters grow up in a society based on consumption.

The relationship between social inequality and patterns of cultural taste and consumption is the subject of a wide sociological debate, two prominent approaches describing social stratification. The two dominant paradigms: that of Bourdieu’s class-based approach (Bourdieu 1978, 1984) and Beck’s paradigm-changing suggestion stating that there are important structural changes coming with the modernism. There are alternate usages the class structure and the stratificational approaches and researchers try to figure out whether the lifestyle- and milieuresearch is a valid alternative for the classical stratification models.

We agree with the Róbert Angelusz’s metaphor about the “distorted mirrors of visibility” (Angelusz 2000) which plastically draws the attention to the deterioration of the “clear sight” when observing society, the reduced transparency of large social groups, as well as the disappearance of some groups. In agreement with the above, we treat social differentiation as a multidimensional – multicomponent – phenomena.

In this study we focus on the cultural segmentation of young people. The formative effect of consumption in the society is an important research direction in within stratification research; one of them, the “omnivore-univore” theorists (Peterson–Simkus 1992, Peterson–Kern 1996, ChanGoldthorpe 2007) study the transformation of the notion of “class” caused by consumerisation and search for new identifying characteristics that replace traditional consumption patterns. Their main finding is the emergence of the

“cultural omnivores” as a class-identification that replaces traditional class-based stratification.

### Data and methods

For the description of the cultural segmentation of youth we have used the data of The Hungarian Youth Research 2016 and 2020, what are representative surveys (regions, age, gender and type of location) regarding the youth aged of 15–29 from the Transylvania.

At first, we performed cluster analysis – using hierarchical clustering – where we identified four main groups: the “(highbrow)culture-orientated”, the “omnivores”, the “screenagers”, and the “passives”. In trying to establish the validity of our relation between cultural consumption and stratification, we first used a logistic regression model and identified the factors behind clusters.

Based on the groups of the cluster analysis, a new consumer group emerges: the omnivores. Socio-demographically, this group strongly differs from the other three. Omnivores mostly come from urban environment, they are younger and most of them are women. Regarding their fathers’ occupation, they are mostly descend-ants of parents with higher positions. The second group, the “screenagers” are mostly men, also younger ones, between 15 and 19, and mainly with a high school degree, their fathers, in turn, mostly have a high school vocational degree, or they work as employees. The third group, the “(highbrow)culture-orientated”, are mostly urban and between 25–29, mostly men. Regarding their education, they have BSc or high school degree, and most their parents also possess a BA or an MA/MSc degree. The passives are also dominated by older men, mainly from rural environment. Most of them only finished the 8th grade or have vocational studies. They are the children of lower educated parents and they either make a living from casual jobs or they are completely inactive.

According to our results, we can say that the stratification of youngsters is determined both by the educational level of the parent but simultaneously the age and the life cycle is also important.

We conclude that we see horizontal and vertical differentiation among Transylvanian youngsters.

We conclude, that the emergence of the consumer society changed the dynamics of the cultural stratification among youngsters, and the horizontal differentiation and lifestyle typologies will be an important field of research. Our opinion is, that vertical and horizontal interpretive frameworks should be used together in youth research. Based on Bourdieu's theory, who – in addition to economic capital – also emphasizes the importance of cultural and social capital, we also recommend the establishment and development of a multidimensional model.

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## **NATIONAL LEVEL SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH IN RELATION TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION: EXAMPLES OF ITALY, MOLDOVA AND LATVIA**

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The aim of the current paper is to give an insight into the macro-level intervention programs aimed at youth in three countries, Italy, Moldova and Latvia, in relation to the importance of effective school-to-work transition for young people.

### Theoretical approach

The school-to-work transition can be challenging because youths have to compete to attain jobs, but they lack experience or the skills employers search for (Caroleo et al., 2020, 2021; Rocca et al., 2021). Across European countries, the school-to-work transition shows different characteristics, based on different provision of the labour-market services, capacity of education systems to provide the skills required by employers, and levels of unemployment. Another important aspect is the prevention of early school-leaving to provide young people with education and skills to attain better paid jobs (De Luca et al., 2020). First, brief comparison is given on Italy, Latvia and Moldova, followed by examples of interventions from these countries.

*Table 1. Statistics data comparing Italy, Moldova\*, Latvia*

Indicators	EU-27	Italy	Latvia	Moldova
% Early school leavers (18-24 years)	9.9	13.1	7.2	20
% tertiary educated (15-64 years, 2020)	29	17.9	33.2	18,3*
Spending on education as % of GDP (2020)	5	4.3	5.9	6.1
% students underachieving in literacy (2018)	22.5	23.3	22.4	46,5**
% NEETs (15-34 years in 2021)	14.4	24.4	13.8	36.6 (for 15-29 aged population)

*Data from Moldova are not in the Eurostat database*



\*[https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Educatia/Educatia\\_editia\\_2020.pdf](https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Educatia/Educatia_editia_2020.pdf)

\*\*[http://aee.edu.md/sites/default/files/raport\\_pisa2018.pdf](http://aee.edu.md/sites/default/files/raport_pisa2018.pdf)

The methodology includes the study of evolution, current context and the development perspectives of this issue. Comparative and systemic analysis is mainly used. The questionnaire and interview method are also addressed.

## Findings

### Case of Italy

Research shows that in Italy the school-to-work transition is one of the longest ones (Pastore et al., 2020, 2021, 2022). The causes can be found in an education system strongly disconnected from the labour market, the scarcity of services orienting young people in the labour market, and the high levels of unemployment. “Alternanza scuola lavoro” is a reform in the school recently introduced in Italy. It consists of the provision of compulsory curricula hours to spend in practical activities, usually in an enterprise or institution connected to the school specific field of study. A higher number of hours are in the schools with a professional or technical content. It is aimed to make the education system closer to the business, preparing students for work, to increase innovation, and to enhance the role of all the players concerning their functions and skills. However, to be efficacious, this reform needs substantial improvements. Criticisms have also emerged, as school managers have not been trained for this type of activity, and in many cases the economic framework in the area of a school is unable to offer adequate opportunities. The occurrence of some incidents involving students during the activities has further exacerbated the discontent among school-teachers, students, and politicians.

### Case of Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova, as in other European countries, it is recognized that youth employment is a precondition for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Identifying the nature and extent of youth employment issues at the national level is extremely necessary for the formulation of integrated policies and intervention programs. Improving the school-to-work-transition is a precondition for helping young people overcome difficulties in finding and maintaining a decent job.

The methodology for researching the transition from school to work has been developed by the International Labor Office and it enhances research on the situation. Young people aged 15-29 in the process of school-to-work-transition can be divided in several groups (data taken from the statistical survey “Transition from school to work (TSM)”):

- 29.9% have completed the process, already having a satisfactory job (average age 25 years);
- 26.6% are still in transition: a) looking for a job, or b) having a job not satisfied with, or c) not working or learning, but intending to work (average age 23.5 years);
- 43.5% have not yet entered the transition process because: a) they are in training or studies, or b) they neither study, nor intend to look for work (average age 21.9).

## Case of Latvia

Prevention of early school-leaving is important, as leaving school leads to social and economic consequences, by limiting students' further options for education and work, thus generally increasing the inequality risks (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018). In Latvia, in parallel to programs that help young people find jobs or gain professional skills, an important intervention has been implemented since 2017. Project "Pumpurs" is a support program with the main aim to prevent early school leaving. Statistics show that the numbers of school-leavers are higher in rural areas: 6.2% in cities and 13.4% in rural areas, imposing a negative impact for their future (Cabinet of Ministers Republic of Latvia, 2021). Therefore, prevention is especially important in rural areas.

In "Pumpurs" project, teachers, professionals and the target students receive consultations, support and training, including financial support. For each target student a personal development plan is prepared to meet the individual needs. In 2020/2021 a total of 19 757 individual plans were prepared (Project "Pumpurs", 2022). The program is aimed to help at the stage when school-leaving can be prevented, thus students do not cut off their further possibilities to study and later gain better paid jobs.

## Conclusions

Major differences can be seen in the three countries (Table 1) and there are various interventions that 1) aim at helping young people find jobs or train specific skills for the job market, 2) focus on the prevention of early school leaving to reduce further risks. For example, in the case of Latvia, the prevention program might have been helpful, as the rates of school-dropouts are lower, further leading to a higher percentage of students in tertiary education that would not have been possible if they had dropped out of high-school. For Italy, the idea to make the school system less disconnected from the labour market could reduce the difficulties for young people, but it must be accompanied by other reforms to fight school leaving. To conclude, it is important to work with both the prevention and with the consequences of youth school-to-work transition issues, as results can be achieved at the state level if proper work is invested.

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## RURAL NEET YOUTH TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK IN LITHUANIA: THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH GUARANTEE INITIATIVE

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The aim of this article is to analyse the role of Youth Guarantee Initiative for a successful rural NEET youth transition from school to work. According to suggested recommendations given by the European Commission, since 2014 in Lithuania, a youth employment support program Youth Guarantee Initiative has been implemented. This programme involved NEET youth using primary and secondary interventions. Currently, three Youth Guarantee Initiative projects are being implemented in Lithuania, which aim to increase the competencies of young people and help them return to school or enter the labour market. The New Action plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee initiative was approved in 2021. Objectives of the plan are following objectives: identification of inactive young people, prevention of inactivity, implementation of initial intervention through early intervention and activation measures, and increased integration of young people into the labor market.

The transitions and situation of young people on the labour market are particularly affected by crises: socio-economic crises such as the 2008 financial crisis, and the current crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (ILO, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; OECD, 2021; etc.). Socio-economic crises have had a particularly negative impact on young people in the labour market and on their transition from education to the labour market (Eurofound, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact not only on youth employment levels but also on working conditions, and it affects young people's search for a job and employability, making them an even more vulnerable group on the labour market (ILO, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; OECD, 2021; etc.). Youth employment declined in Lithuania more significantly than the average in the EU27. The lockdown that started in the country in March 2020 was followed by an increase in unemployment of workers of all age groups, but we observed in particular an increase in unemployment among young people in rural areas (18 to 35 years old). For example, according to Lithuanian statistics, youth unemployment increased from 6.3% in December 2019 to 18.3% in January 2021. In particular, the Covid-19 crisis has hit socially vulnerable groups of young people (unemployed young people, NEET youth, young people in non-standard employment, temporary workers, workers in atypical employment, etc.).

Theoretical approach. *The concept of the transition of youth from education to the labour market.* Research literature presents numerous concepts of the transition of youth from school to the labour market (Gebel, 2020; Brzinsky-Fay, 2013; 2011; ILO, 2009; Elder, 2009; Marchetti et al., 2001; etc.). The transition from school to work has been described

as a dynamic process, in which a person moves from the education system to a relatively stable working position (Marchetti et al., 2001). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) describes the transition from education to the labour market as a period between the completion of learning and the first permanent/decent work (ILO, 2009). There are myriad studies of the transition of youth from education to the labour market; and many different ways of evaluating the quality of transitions from education to the labour market have been considered in scientific literature (Gebel et al., 2021; Gebel, 2020; Brazienė, 2020; Baranowska-Rataj et al., 2017; Brzinsky-Fay, 2013; etc.). The transition of youth from education to the labour market is a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon, determined by multiple interacting factors. The situation of youth in the education system, the opportunities to gain professional experience during studies, is the core aspect that influences the employment possibilities of youth in the future (Brazienė, Mikutavičienė, 2013). Other significant individual-level factors include gender, social capital, family status, etc. (Versnel, 2011; Engeström, 2001; Putnam, 2001; Laroche et al., 1999; etc.).

**Methodology.** This research is based on the primary data (collected by the Youth Affairs Agency under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour) of NEET youth involved in the Youth Guarantee Initiative project (N=584). Data was collected from target groups participants personal data files. The data file consists of a: participant's questionnaire, consent to participate in the project form and individual activity plan in the project. In addition, there are 29 variables including socio-demographic (gender, age, education) and other characteristics, for example, the duration of participation in the project, family's situation, living area (urban vs. rural area) what challenges were being faced, what kind of professional's support was being provided, the purpose of taking part in the project and expectations, etc.

**Findings.** The research results had revealed that that level of education attained had the most significant impact on the results of the successful completion of the Youth Guarantee Initiative project. The higher the level of education, the more likely it is that the participants achieve the results of the project, that is return to school or successfully enter the labour market. Sociodemographic characteristics like gender and age were observed statistically insignificant outcomes in the project. Deviant behaviour, different kinds of additions were noticed as particularly important risk factors, which interfere with successful finalization youth guarantee initiative projects. The presence of social risks is a major factor destroying achievement of the project goals. Finally, the general effectiveness of the project was not affected by the duration of participation in the project, but more by services received (or provided) during the project - the more hours devoted to developing young people's social skills and competencies, the more often they achieved the results of the project.

**Keywords:** rural NEET youth, school to work transitions, youth employment, social inclusion for vulnerable youth, Youth Guarantee Initiative

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## GENDER AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS OF YOUNG FARMERS: DO YOUNG WOMEN FARMERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON FAMILY FARMS?

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Although the visibility of women farmers in agriculture is increasing, we have little knowledge about the impact this will have on the environmental management of family farms. Numerous studies have documented that young women farmers show high concern for environmentally friendly farming practices relative to young male farmers. However, family farms are still a prominent business form globally, and it is still unclear whether or not we can expect young women farmers in different employment statuses (manager, or full-time farm worker and spouse) and work schedules (full- or part-time) to show any differences in the adoption of environmental practices compared to young male farmers. This study investigates the question of how increasing the visibility of women on family farms, and young women's sensitivity to environmental concerns relative to male's, plays out in the dynamic of adopting AgriEnvironment-Climate Measures (AECMs). Our results confirm gender differences in AECM adoption behavior when we investigate the employment statuses of young women farmers; however, for part-time family farms, gender differences in the adoption behavior disappears, while they emerge for environmental subsidies received. We argue that gender aspects of the adoption behavior of AECMs contain several overlapping issues, particularly gender differences in the spouse's involvement in farm work.

*Keywords:* Young farmers, Young women farm managers, Agri-environment-climate measures (AECMs), Family farms, Part-time farms

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## **TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION POTENTIAL FOR A BETTER ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE IN ALBANIA**

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### Aims

This study aims to explore nexus of youth, technology, innovation and agriculture and the opportunities that may offered for a better engagement of youth in agriculture, in the case of Albania. Furthermore, the study tends identify the target groups with capacity to contribute in rural development through involvement in agriculture, to evaluate the actual participation of and interest young people in rural communities, challenges and contribution of youth force in the implementation in the sector of agriculture and rural development. Technology and innovation in this study are seen as opportunities available at the sector level, for actively participation of youth in the sustainable growth of rural Albanian territories, by considering them as a potential to enhance, creativity, provide independence and strengthen communicative skills, knowledge, and understanding of youth.

### Theoretical approach

There are many challenges recognized globally, hindering youth involvement in agriculture. On the other hand, is the energy of young people that can help revitalize and enhance rural communities and local economies, strengthening agriculture sector's productivity and effectiveness, through education, entrepreneurship, new technologies and innovative farming practices. Automation, robotics, and digital tools are dramatically changing the nature of farming activities. Digital innovations in mechanization technologies can make agriculture more attractive to rural youth. A growing body of evidence suggests that information and communications technology (ICT), specifically mobile phones and digital tools, are attracting youth and entrepreneurs into the sector (Rosekrans and Hwang, 2021). Technology transfer in the field of agriculture, aiming at technological upgrading and especially information provision (Country Report, 2006). Country, with new technologies, business models or innovative processes, they can contribute to economic growth and prosperity (Hach & Trenkmann, 2019). Albanian youth population comprises 25% of total population, and Albanian population is among the youngest in Europe (INSTAT, 2015). In Albania, the transition from school to work is complicated, and the demand for young workers is influenced by the industry and service sectors and their stages of modernization, as well as the operation of labor market mechanisms (Pano, 2021).

### Methodology

To fulfill the objectives of the study secondary and primary data sources were used. Beside in-depth literature review (based on articles, previous studies, official reports, etc.) an open questionnaire was distributed to different stakeholders, and were collected socio-demographic data, living situation of Albanian youth, as well as data related to real and

perceived challenges for youth (aged from 15 to 34 years old) involvement in agriculture considering the role of: family and rural community, education, training and information, access to resources (finance, land, etc.), stakeholders partnership role, female participation, soft skills required in the labor market in Albania, and other influencing factors that may hinder youth involvement in agriculture, or have potentials for better engagement of them in the sector. Also, the study is complemented by the data generated and collected from National Agency of Employment and Skills (NAES).

## Findings

The findings of this study shown that generally young people tend to seek profitable, and prestigious career paths, and in many rural agricultural communities, are parents that encourage them not working on the family farm. Moreover, this study shows that youth need to have a clear understanding of how agriculture can provide a profitable and exciting career path, and to see agriculture as successful career path, is needed exposing youth to agriculture early on and good education of young people, technical training and, access to resources, etc. Furthermore, technology and innovation may offer opportunities for a better engagement of youth, demonstrating to young people that agriculture can be a viable and profitable business opportunity, and on the other hand are the young generation that are ready to adapt and master new technologies and innovative farming practices to solve challenges in agriculture. Also, the identification of key stakeholders (local governments, nonprofits, and the private sector) and facilitating their partnership in the sector, can play a critical role to improve engagement with youth in agriculture. As conclusion, youth engagement in agriculture can be advantageous, may strengthen the sustainability potential and can enhance the diffusion of innovative technologies and practices into Albania agricultural system. Technology and innovation applicable in agriculture have a potential to enhance, creativity, provide independence and strengthen communicative skills, knowledge, and understanding of youth, and in the same time may increase employability. This study may have an impact on the awareness of the importance and the role of youth can play in agriculture and sustainable development of Albania rural areas, to rise the enthusiasm and motivation of youth to take an active role and fostering the engagement and networking of young people living in rural communities with a perspective in national rural agenda.

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## **MAKING RURAL AREAS MORE ATTRACTIVE TO YOUTH—APPLICATION OF INDUSTRY 4.0 TOOLS**

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### Abstract

Depopulation of rural areas is not the question of insufficient jobs, but rather the insufficient number of prestigious, well-paid jobs, and limited possibilities to make a career (Vaishar, Štastná, Zapletalová, & Nováková, 2020). As the main employer in rural areas, the agrifood and related economic sectors have to be reshaped to build up their resilience, sustainability, and capability to expand smart and attractive services and products. The only way to achieve it is to apply measures focused on the application of new technologies so-called Industry 4.0 to promote smart, precision farming technologies (EIP-AGRI, 2015), the development of alternative food networks, like SFSCs (IPES FOOD, 2018, 2019), improving collaboration and fostering the development of new business models (Lioutasa & Charatsari, 2022). Such an approach should result in a deep transformation of rural areas to shape up crosslinked and the value-added economic network that is very vivid, reflecting and responding to social, economic, political, and environmental conditions fostering its capacity to be resilient, provide business opportunities, decent/attractive jobs as well as access to sustainable, nutritional, affordable, safe, quality, and sufficient food, feed, fiber, and fuel to all stakeholders.

The main objective of this research is to raise awareness about the application of Industry 4.0 tools to create new and attractive business ventures for youth, thus, reversing the negative trend of migration of the young population from rural to urban areas as well as addressing the aforementioned challenges of agrifood system. Carried out through three stages, research involving ‘planning the review’, ‘conducting the review’, and ‘reporting and dissemination, which are suggested in many research (Tranfield et al., 2003). The review is focused on the period from 2019 to 2021 and uses „Agriculture 4.0“ and „Food system and Industry 4.0“ as keywords to undertake a search through Science direct, which is recognized as the most relevant one. This research paper is built on a systematic literature review (SLR) which is a method to select the most relevant and high-quality studies from previous literature (Zhao et al. 2019). SLR is according to Forcina and Falcone (2021) better approach than traditional because it is applied through a replicable, scientific, and transparent process. In such this a way the risk of research bias or non-critical evaluations is reduced significantly.

Based on SLR results, holistic paths of ongoing change are driven by emerging technologies but fueled by new opportunities to generate value +, underpinning the distinct nature of companies, providing extended customer satisfaction, while at the same time addressing pressing challenges, such as sustainability. The final result is a selection of factors that model future agri-food system as a core of rural economies (Nikolić, Mujčinović & Bošković, 2022), “unlocking” its capacity to address very complex

challenges by strengthening sustainability through the promotion of Industry 4.0 based business models increasing competitiveness to attract young people.

Keywords: Industry 4.0, Agriculture 4.0, Food System, New Business Models,

Sustainability, Systematic Literature Review

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGROTOURISM SYSTEMS THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE YOUNG GENERATIONS IN RURAL AREAS IN THE REGION OF KORÇA.

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### Abstract

The main aim this paper is to present the management strategies, addressing young people toward labour market in agrotourism system, which will teach them the skills of doing business through the development of rural markets and promotion of healthy eating. Being considered as a sector under development, still it is yet to know about the characteristics of farms or either farmer that might have a positive impact on tourism enterprises (Williams P, Paridaen M, Dossa K, Dumai M 2001).

During the last decade, in Korca region, agritourism has become an important alternative form of tourism linking two important sectors "Agriculture and Tourism" and providing opportunities, for the rural community of the region to enhance their income. The region possesses a wide range of resources and different historical, cultural and natural attractions that can be developed potentially (Qirici, E., Theodhori, O. 2013). The combination of all these attractions with the diverse relief and landscape, form great opportunities for the development of rural areas of the region. Moreover, farm diversification to tourism it is considered to protect farms from different market fluctuations, driving them to develop new types of business activities and acting as "entrepreneurs" (Besra, N. 2018). Despite the investments of private business operators during the last years and the performance of the sector, it is observed that the effectiveness of their activities and the quality of their services has to be improved. One of the key issues that threatens the success of local business operators, the involvement of young generation in the sector and inhibits farmers to diversify it is the *distinct lack of business skills*. (Demirović, D., Simat, K., & Radović, G. 2014).

Nowadays young people are no longer interested in staying and investing in rural areas. Agriculture is rarely the solution for their studies. They consider this field as unsuccessful or nonprofitable. In order to involve young people in agriculture, field specialists need to inform young people about their precious contribution with new ideas and perspectives (Lattanzi, M. 2005). Today young people can choose professions different from the farmer classic role and can provide more incomes. Here can be included production technologies, marketing, logistics, urban farming projects, environmental science, tourist farms, nutrition sciences and so on.

Generally, agritourism business it is considered as innovative, in the sense that there are a lot of opportunities for "product diversification" (Ochterski, J., & Roth, M. 2008). Based on that, it is believed that new sectors under development, where exist a lot of possibilities

for innovation should be directed toward a new approach, that incorporate to a greater extent the role of *young people* in the sector.

**Methodology:** For this research we have used the surveys through interviews conducted and field observation throughout the Korca region (MBZHR 2020). The data were analysed using descriptive analysis and a SWOT analysis which supports the development of agritourism and the opportunities for the young generation to be employed in this sect. (Strategjia Kombëtare për Zhvillimi dhe Integrim 2015-2020)

**Finding:** The development of agritourism creates new paths for income generation opportunities for the younger generations through an innovative strategy that includes leisure activities for tourism, economic and non-economic benefits for farmers, visitors and communities (MTK 2019-2023).

To understanding and awareness of the necessary managerial skills and capacities through different value chain actors, to increase the opportunities of the new generation to be employed in the agrotourism sector. Also, promoting new ideas (startup) for a rural entrepreneur, who is no longer a farmer, to focus on the alternative business of non-food production.

The opportunity to promote best practices and managerial skills, as an important aspect that affects the sustainable development of the agrotourism sector.

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## **FUTURE PLANS OF NEETS, CASE STUDY IN THE SOUTH-WEST OF ROMANIA**

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In the European strategic document "Youth-Investment and Training" (EUROPEAN COMMUNITY COMMISSION, 2020), the objectives include access of young people to the labour market, together with education, solidarity, civic participation, etc. In this study, we want to capture the preferences of young NEETS in the South-East region of Romania regarding their choices and decisions to plan their professional life at home or abroad. The study answers the following questions: a. What are the plans of NEETS young people in the South-West region of Romania for those who choose to stay in the country or for those who choose to go abroad; b. What is their vision of a future career and what is their vision of starting a family? The two questions will be part of a wider set of relevant questions built around an online questionnaire, providing a contextualisation and description of how young people organise their lives through family and career. The concept of NEETS is used to describe the vulnerable socio-economic situation that young people in the EU (aged 16-29) experience. However, specifically, NEETS has a more complex meaning and a wider range of coverage: from unemployed young people to those who have voluntarily assumed this status, from people with disabilities to those who are looking for socio-professional opportunities, etc. We believe that the participation of each group of young people in NEETS differs from one country to another, and public needs and policies may be different. An analysis of this population group is of major interest. The results of this research are important because Romania is a country with the highest proportion of NEET young people and is insufficiently included in the specialised study circuit.

### Working methodology

In order to achieve the set objectives, we are going to make use of a comprehensive methodology, which includes:

- Analysis of national and European documents (reports, studies, needs assessments, project implementation reports);
- Analysis of national and European public policies on young people and connected fields;
- Analysis of secondary data – available data on young people in rural areas;
- Quantitative research based on the sociological survey: questionnaire applied with selected young people aged between 16 and 29 from rural South-West Oltenia participating in the project;
- Qualitative research: In-depth interview with young people from South-West Romania: Olt, Dolj, Vâlcea and Gorj.

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## **DESIGNING VOCATIONAL TRAINING POLICIES FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS IN AN OUTERMOST EUROPEAN REGION: HIGHLIGHTS FROM A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS**

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### **Aims**

Our goal is to systematically analyze the most needed reforms in the Vocational and Educational Training (VET) sector in The Azores, a Portuguese outermost region, following a participatory research approach involving different stakeholders' perspectives. Our aim is, therefore, exploratory, stemming from a central research question: how can the VET sector be improved in The Azores from a multi-stakeholder perspective?

### **Theoretical approach**

Our goal is justified by three reasons that lay down the context and relevance of our research.

Firstly, VET deliverance in outermost regions is challenged by these territories' limited resources. Outermost regions are small islands within the European Union, which are distant and isolated from the European continent and sometimes closer to non-European countries. These are usually considered low-density territories, typically with small, sparse, and aging populations, which are economically excluded from significant national and international commercial flows (European Parliament, 2015). These regions depend on limited local markets and often rely on a reduced number of goods or the primary sector activities (e.g., agriculture) (European Parliament, 2015). Secondly, the development of VET public policies in outermost regions is driven by high expectations of its short- and long-term impact. Overall, VET refers to educational pathways that go beyond schooling and certification requirements, by preparing students to perform a certain profession or group of professions (United Nations, 1997). In outermost regions, VET is understood as one of the main tools to overcome the shortage of a qualified labor force. However, political proclamations at the regional level often frame VET as a fit-all solution for other societal problems such as school failure, youth out-migration, lack of economic competitiveness and social exclusion. Driven by this narrative, VET may fail to tackle both qualification goals, as well as any of the previously pinpointed societal challenges efficiently (Governo dos Açores, 2022).

Thirdly, the success of VET in outermost regions is strongly dependent on a complex coordination of policies in two ways. VET is heavily supported in these territories by EU funds (Direção Regional do Planeamento e Fundos Estruturais, 2014), calling for strong

vertical coordination between regional, national, and European priorities (European Commission, 2020). Such coordination is seldom found in areas of decisionmaking related to vocational training, such as school-to-work transition or youth employment (Shore & Tosun, 2019). Additionally, vocational training implementation requires strong horizontal coordination across different domains of regional policymaking. This requirement, increasingly embedded in pivotal European recommendations (e.g., European Council, 2021), is often challenged by a dominant, bureaucratic culture of policy-making silos, with only a few interconnections between sectoral policies, and a severe loss of efficiency (Christensen, 2015; Marques, 2015). Therefore, looking to the future of VET in The Azores for the next decade through the lens of the integrated governance paradigm (Christensen, 2015) demands fostering the dialogue between the education, economy, and employment sectors, outlining realistic goals and positive expectations that manage to align European, national and regional discourses (Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

### Methodology

Data collection involved the organization of 18 online world-café sessions (The World Café, 2021) involving different relevant stakeholders ( $n = 164$ ): trainees ( $n = 58$ ); trainers ( $n = 21$ ); institutional representatives ( $n = 42$ ); unemployed people registered at local public employment agencies ( $n = 21$ ); and businesspersons ( $n = 22$ ). The study was conducted as part of a public initiative, the Regional Fórum for Professional Qualification, with the intention of informing the design of a new strategy for the VET sector, in The Azores, for the next decade.

Firstly, data was qualitatively assessed, through a content analysis of the proposals shared by the participants during the sessions. Secondly, we conducted a correspondence analysis to analyze which topics were more relevant to the improvement of the regional VET sector for each group of stakeholders.

### Findings

This research reached three main findings, each reflecting different layers of the integrated governance model. The first set of reforms stressed the need for policy measures to improve the social perceptions about VET, in line with the commitment of integrated governance to producing social change through policies (Christensen, 2015). Participants generally acknowledged that VET is still perceived as an inferior, secondchance education modality in the region. These negative social representations are prevalent because VET is presented as a non-normative educational pathway to secondary school certification (Gekara & Snell, 2018) and to develop practical work skills (Martins & Martins, 2016). These views are common in outermost regions, where VET is often seen as a magical solution for early school leaving from education and training (Diogo, 2016).

A second set of proposals reflected the need for reforming the VET sector through coordination between multiple public agencies, as well as between public and private actors (in)directly involved in VET. Stakeholders largely described horizontal coordination requirements, one of the structural axes of the integrated governance model (Christensen, 2015). Their proposals are contextually relevant, as VET involves complex



policies with potential spill-over effects over wicked problems common in outermost regions, such as high shares of young generations out-migration (Farrugia, 2016), low economic competitiveness (European Council, 2021) and poverty (Governo Regional dos Açores, 2022).

The third set of reforms covered a significant number of suggestions aimed at improving the VET sector curricula, associated funding schemes and human resources capacity. Overall, these proposals highlighted another fundamental axis of the integrated governance model: the vertical coordination of policies, with a few references, again, being made to horizontal coordination (e.g., coordination between VET schools) (Christensen, 2015). VET implementation in outermost regions is strongly shaped by the EU funds. These funds bring attached practical requirements for VET development (e.g., curricular structure), which are often hard to achieve in outermost regions. The proposals express, therefore, how the EU financial rules end up constraining both training diversification and specialization, as well as the balance between labor force offer and demand because they are not flexible enough to accommodate regional challenges.

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## **POLICIES FOR NEETS' INCLUSION - YOUTH GUARANTEE IMPLEMENTATION IN ROMANIA BETWEEN PROPOSAL AND REALITY**

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Keywords: NEETs, rural, youth, employment, education, public policies

### Abstract

The Youth Guarantee Program (YGP) is one of the European Commission's most important initiatives to address the issue of high youth unemployment, which aims to provide young people under 25 „a good-quality job suited to their education, skills and experience” or ”the education, skills and experience required to find a job in the future through an apprenticeship, a traineeship or continued education” within four months of leaving school or losing a job. In 2020 the YGP was reinforced, and proposed to reach out a broader target group of 15 to 29 year-olds. Not all European countries have introduced the Youth Guarantee so far, many are still working on plans to implement it. Romania is one of these states.

### Aim

In 2014, European countries started implementing YGP, which led to a decrease in the number of young NEETs in the next 6 years. This paper presents an overview of the YGP implementation in Romania in the 2014 - 2020 period by identifying the main challenges and barriers that prevented the achievement of the proposed results.

### Theoretical approach

Youth unemployment represents one of the main challenges of the European Union due to its economic and social impact (e.g., lack of social support, lack of social insurance, being more vulnerable to physical and mental problems, feeling of shame and low self-esteem, and increased likelihood of experiencing periods of unemployment at later ages etc.) (Brandt and Hank 2014; Gregg 2001; Vancea and Utzet 2017; Shore and Tosun 2019).

The YGP aimed to address two main issues that affect the NEETs' employment: the school to work transition, and the support for employment. This involved a major shift from passive labour market policies to active ones. For the European Commission (EC), the YGP's implementation represented a structural reform in each member state that included reinforcement of the public employment services (PES) and educational system (European Commission 2014). At the same time, this was also an innovative active labour market policy due to the wide variety of measures proposed which included: (a) education

programmes better adapted to the labour market requirements – e.g., initial vocational education, entrepreneurship courses; (b) remedial education school dropout measures – second chance education, or other routes to re-enter education and training; (c) apprenticeship, traineeship, or internship schemes; (d) entrepreneurship and self-employment guidance; (e) training programmes; (f) labour market intermediation services; e) active labour market policies – direct employment creation, hiring subsidies, employment/labour mobility and start-up incentives (European Council 2013).

The YGP, the EU flagship initiative that aims to address the issue of NEETs, has achieved different results in different EU member states due to factors related to the PES capacity of implementation, but also to cooperation/partnership between actors involved in the programme's implementation (Trein and Tosun 2021). The varieties of public-private coordination of the YGP represent one of the main factors which lead to different results in the implementation of the YGP in EU members states. In mixed market economies, the inclusion of private actors in the implementation of the YGP is less encouraged due to the public institutions' central role in labour market implementation. In countries with a higher spending on active labour market policies, a restrictive public-private coordination in YGP implementation is adopted. Emerging market economies (i.e., those found in Central and Eastern Europe) develop new structures for public-private co-ordination of the YGP due to the high number of NEETs given that this implies increased pressure on the government to expand the public-private coordination in order to successfully implement the YGP.

### Methodology

The paper draws on extensive research of the Youth Guarantee Programme implementation process in Romania, using a mix of research methods including secondary data analysis, social document analysis, and public policy analysis. The analysis of the YGP's implementation in Romania involves a secondary data analysis of administrative data regarding the number of NEETs that benefit from various measures (from PES, Ministry of Education), and data about programmes for NEETs financed by the ESF.

### Findings

The main barriers in the implementation of YGP in Romania are related to the lack of coordination of measures between institutions, lack of flexibility in registering young NEETs, low level of partnership with local authorities, companies, NGOs, delays in funding measures to be carried out with funds, lack of centralized monitoring data to provide a picture of progress and necessary improvement measures.

Unlike other emergent economies from Eastern Europe, Romania did not develop a publicprivate coordination mechanism for the implementation of the YG and focused mainly on public actors' involvement in the process. Private actors began to be encouraged to get involved in the YG implementation after the poor results obtained from public institution in this area. The implementation arrangements at the national level have,

of course, affected the results obtained in various EU countries in relation to the YG implementation process. Thus, unlike Romania, most of the countries with higher NEETs rates developed public-private coordination mechanisms which, demonstrably, helped them to reach more NEETs.

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## MAPPING EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION FOR RURAL YOUNG NEETS – AN EUROPEAN OVERVIEW

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The European Union targeted young people living in rural areas in the definition of its European Youth Strategy (2019-2027). This group is referenced in one of the European Youth Goals - Moving Rural Youth Forward, which aims to create the conditions enabling young people to access their rights and fulfil their potential in rural areas, thus ensuring equity between them and young people living in urban areas (European Union, 2018).

Despite this recognition by the international policies, significant differences persist between urban and rural areas, with young people living in rural areas facing additional challenges in their school trajectories and their integration into the labour market. Furthermore, they persist to be invisible to research and public policies, particularly those in NEET condition (Neither in Employment, Education or Training), as the intervention and employability promotion programmes tend to be massive and standardised, without being anchored in the territory.

In this context, the aim of the Track-IN project is to deliver an evaluation model of the effectiveness of Public Employment Services (PES) tracking support types, trying to respond to the challenges of the mismatch between broadband policy package aims and the needs of NEETs in rural areas and contribute to a greater visibility to the constraints and needs that young people face in rural areas (Carcillo et al, 2015). The Track-In project comprises a comparative 6 country case study (Portugal, Italy, Estonia, Lithuania, Spain and Bulgaria), approached by three studies theoretically informed by Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model (1979). The study focused on meso level proposes to map the best practices in tracking young people aged between 25-29 years old, living in rural areas, and who are currently in a NEET situation (not in employment, education, or training).

NEETs in rural areas face several challenges in finding adequate and decent work and tend to combine multiple personal risk factors (poverty, school failure, and low skills) (Simões et al, 2017; Ferreira & Vieira, 2020). On an institutional level, difficulties range from inadequate formal support (e.g., lack of PES resources or adequate training) and informal support (for instance, families with lower socioeconomic status or low resources social networks) that often intensify individual barriers. Structural aspects such as geographical conditioning and depopulation of rural areas often mean fewer job opportunities, dependent on mobility and on specific skills that one may have not acquired due to early school leaving or lack of educational opportunities in the residence area. Therefore, improving their tracking models will impact their inclusion in the job market and they can benefit more from public employment initiatives.

Our presentation will focus on the first task of this study (mapping), presenting a portrait of rural NEETs aged between 25 and 29 years old, over the last decade (2011-2021), identifying all rural PES across the beneficiary countries, using Eurostat Labour Force



Survey (2018) collapsed by degree of urbanisation to delimit the territorial research scope. We will provide a regional focus on Southern European and Eastern regions and on the emergence of digitalisation due to the pandemic crisis. The transnational overview will include indicators on youth population, youth employment and unemployment, education, and NEETs distribution. The characterisation of all indicators will adopt the degree of urbanisation as a central criterion, enabling proportional comparisons between rural areas, towns and suburbs and cities.

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## **EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CANDIDATE COUNTRIES: TRENDS AND POLICIES, A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### Keywords

European Union, Early school leavers; School drop-out, trends, prevention policies, Youth Guarantee Programme

### Aims

Before becoming NEETs children drop out of school or are early school leavers therefore we suggest tackling the issue at the inception phase. In rural areas there is a high early school leaving in poor communities, with a higher propensity for girls to leave school because of lack of opportunities, such as lack of schools, transportation, financial capacity to cover food and accommodation to continue school, lack of motivation to continue to learn, in countries such as Romania, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Moldova, Turkey, Albania. Europe 2020 Strategy required to reduce the early school leaving to below 10%. Although in 2021, 9.7 % were early school leavers, the range is widespread from 2.4% in Croatia to 15.3 in Romania (Eurostat, 2022). Only in three countries has the rate of early school leavers increased Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania (European Commission, 2017). Early school leavers have a higher propensity to be boys except in two countries where more likely are girls Bulgaria and Romania, the gender gap narrowed slightly from 4.1 pp. in 2011 to 3.5 pp. in 2021 (European Commission, 2017, Eurostat 2022). In 2016 there were still more than 4 million early school leavers across Europe and only around 45% of them were employed (European Commission, 2017).

The aim of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive literature review on early school leavers/ drop-out and social innovation in view of preparation for the KA2 Erasmus Plus Programme Cooperations among organizations and institutions, Partnership for innovation, as part of the COST Mentoring Programme.

### Theoretical Approach

There are two distinct concepts: early school leaving and school drop-out. Early school leavers as defined by Eurostat are individuals aged 18-24 and who have completed at most a lower secondary education and who were not enrolled in further education or training in the four weeks preceding the Labour Force Survey. School drop-out are distinct from early school leavers and are defined by UNICEF as children „who gave up frequenting school at a certain educational level” (UNICEF 2012: 8).

The risk of leaving school early is higher among young people with a migrant background, Roma, disadvantaged minorities, refugees (European Commission, 2017). Policy measures focus on (European Commission, 2017):

- prevention policies which address the design of education and training systems
- intervention policies are student centered and comprise early detection of support needed for education and learning
- compensation policies aim to re-engage individuals in education and training and offer education and training for those who have dropped out.

The Youth Guarantee Council Recommendation encourage member states “to involve education and training providers in their Youth Guarantee schemes to ensure that early intervention is provided to students at risk of dropping out and becoming economically inactive”

### Methodology

To illustrate trends of early school leavers Eurostat data will be used based on Labour Force Survey 2011-2021. In order to conduct the literature review on policies a comprehensive desk research will be used using key terms such as early school leavers, school drop-outs along with a questionnaire will be prepared and sent to 27 EU member states and to candidate countries to experts on educational policies asking them to answer a 10 minutes questionnaire.

### Expected Results

A comprehensive review of 203 studies over 25 years published in 2008 by Rumberger and Lim identified two types of factors that predict whether students drop out or graduate from high school:

- factors associated with individual characteristics of students
- factors associated with the institutional characteristics of their families, schools, and communities.

to which we add

- factors associated with labour market characteristics and the design of educational systems (Pastore, 2014, 2018, 2022).

According to Pastore (2022) only two countries within the EU have a dual educational system meaning education and training go together Austria and Germany, the third is Switzerland, however is non-EU. On the other hand Pastore (2022) states that France and Slovenia are trying to adopt the dual system, but it is hard to implement.

A Clarivate search on early school leavers policies revealed only three articles published one in the Australian Journal of Education, one on Spain and one on EU governance by Kuusipalo and Alastalo (2020). So there is a gap in the literature the current paper addresses.

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## “YOUTH FRIENDLY CITIES INDEX”: AN EXAMPLE FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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In order to develop an index to measure the youth friendliness of cities in Turkey (“Youth Friendly Cities Index”) as a part of a pilot study<sup>2</sup>, we decided to learn the importance of factors contributing to their well-being by asking youngsters through a survey. We defined six different domains of well-being as potential determinants: Material well-being, education, health, relations, risk and security, and participation by using a broad survey of the literature and our experience in the field of child-being. These domains formed the modules of the questionnaire we used in the following stage of the research. For each domain, we prepared a list of indicators by using our literature review and tried to develop a list of metrics to be included in our survey. For example, in the material well-being domain, we decided to focus on poverty, not only absolute poverty but also relative poverty. Moreover, we also included relative deprivation as a factor affecting the well-being of a youngster. In this domain, being unemployed or being a NEET were also added to the list of indicators.

We conducted many multivariate statistical analyses such as factor analysis to calculate indices of well-being domains, generalized linear models to observe relative effects of independent variables, and Structural Equation Models (SEMs) to understand a clear picture of determinants of the well-being of youth in Turkey both objective and subjective terms. The advisory committee of the project composed of the experts who were already active in the composition of the questionnaire conducted a series of discussion meetings to develop city-level indicators of the youth’s well-being. These meetings produced a list of indicators to be collected by the field teams. During this process, we tried to transform the findings of the survey into measurable metrics. At the end of the data collection process, we collected information for 54 different indicators in 5 different domains - material well-being was replaced by “employment” opportunities, as our survey showed that the most important determinant of the material wellbeing was having a job-. By giving equal weights to each domain and arbitrarily distributing weights to indicators, we constructed a composite index for 21 different cities.

In the final stage, the index has been launched with a web page (<http://www.gencdostu.org/tr/p/endeks>). The format was inspired by the Better Life Index of the OECD and it allows users to customize the composition of the index. This website has been launched in June 2018 and it is still open to users. During the local elections of 2019, several local candidates addressed the problems of youth by referring to the

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<sup>2</sup> The pilot study, called as was operated by Habitat -one the largest youth organization established in 1994- with the support of the Swedish Consulate in Istanbul was targeting to create a participatory environment for the youngster to improve their living conditions. The pilot study was covering 21 cities of Turkey including the most developed (Istanbul, İzmir, Ankara) and most underdeveloped ones (Muş, Bingöl, Siirt).

findings presented on the web page and proposed policies to improve the situation of youngsters living in their cities.

The advantage of using the well-being approach in this particular case is that it allowed us to understand and present the current situation of Turkish youth from a holistic point of view. Our approach was not limited to only measuring the subjective well-being of an individual, but we also focused on the objective determinants of subjective perceptions. Secondly, our approach also contributed to presenting the complexity of well-being, as we could show the multidimensionality of well-being, by focusing on different domains of well-being. Finally, our approach facilitated the development of local indicators of youth well-being and propose specific policies in each domain. Any improvement in these policies can contribute to the well-being of youngsters. The data and analysis also provide us the tools to compare capability sets of youngsters with respect to gender, rural and other socio-economic variables. It also demonstrates the role of infrastructure has an effect on the capabilities of youngsters by comparing differing cases.

## **ITALY AND YOUTH: A COUNTRY WITHOUT VISION AND FUTURE?**

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Andrea Bonazzi

### Objectives

The primary objective of this analysis is to bring to light all the discrepancies and plights of the Italian youth labor market, which lead the country to a precarity-system, in relation with the opportunities reserved for young people in the European labor market, while, as a second theoretical objective, it will deal with future development of work for young people and the importance of acquiring specific skills that can be spent on the job market.

### Theoretical Approach

A multi-thematic evaluation of the youth labor market, focused on the theme of precarity, and the socio-political context in which young people live is especially necessary in Italy, as the data show a very backward and underdeveloped reality.

There was a need to evaluate three main indicators that are critical: youth unemployment, the school-work link and youth labor policies.

As regards the first point, Italy does not boast a good position, on the contrary it is third from last in terms of youth unemployment in Europe with a rate of 28% (2020). Despite this, the country has not recently attempted to reform and regulate the labor market to ensure greater job opportunities and decrease unemployment, as was recently done in Spain to mitigate, for example, the phenomenon of precariousness. Furthermore, as regards active policies, there is absolutely insufficient expenditure on active policies, as well as not in line with the European average.

In the last period, there is a very strong lack of correspondence between supply and demand for work, especially in terms of wages. I believe that the minimum wage level (reserve wage) has been reached, below which people no longer lend themselves to work in some sectors, such as restaurants, that are crucial for Italy economy.

This phenomenon is given by the cost of living which has dramatically increased due to recent inflation, while wages have decreased over time, marking another figure in contrast to the European average, and wages are now below the poverty line.

As regards the school-work link, it must first be emphasized that Italy, together with the countries of the Mediterranean European Union, has a problem of unemployment due to insertion. Young Italians are unable to combine study and work, then finding it very difficult to enter the job market, where minimum experience is always required, and the internship tool is often abused to obtain low-cost workforce, creating a "Work shock". As a result of this context, Italy has the highest number of young people who don't work or study (3 millions of NEET).

In addition, the Italian labor market prefers an adult workforce, to the disadvantage of the young one who tends to remain in low-level positions or outside the labor market, also generating phenomena of mismatch between studies achieved and work / salary offered.

Lastly, we address the issue of youth labor policies, which are dramatically necessary in Italy. We need to intervene on the issue of wages, precariousness, taxation, encourage the development of start-ups, offer more training opportunities and reform welfare.

Unfortunately, the situation, as you can see, is truly bleak but there are interventions that can be done to heal this situation.

### Methodology

The methodology followed includes, in a majority part, the use of personal knowledge about labor, as well as the use of national and European databases in order to arrive at the confirmation of multiple assessments.

Furthermore, some of these reflections, as they are strictly topical, are to be placed within the contemporary intellectual debate.

### Results

In this final part we address the solutions proposed for the 3 macro-topics initially proposed, namely youth unemployment, the school-work link and youth labor policies:

As for the first and last point, they are closely connected as youth labor policies are the direct consequence of youth unemployment and widespread precariousness, among the main topics.

At the national level, Italy absolutely needs a welfare reform, as it focuses on transfers to families and is still based on the logic of the male breadwinner. And so does the demand for work on the part of companies, which tend, also by virtue of the welfare system, to opt for adults.

In secundis, a strong political intervention is needed with a reform of the labor market on the Spanish model that can guarantee a substantial decrease in precariousness. If young people have the opportunity to have job security, they can leave the family home earlier, take out a mortgage or create a family. It is emphasized that through this reform alone historical Italian problems would be solved such as the fact that we are among the last to leave the family home for young people, that we have a marked demographic decline as there are not enough children to make up for the deaths in this country, which gets older and older.

Furthermore, youth entrepreneurship is not encouraged either. It is characterized by high taxation and poor individual protection, making it disadvantageous, however, within an already saturated market, to start a business independently.

Even soft skills, within an increasingly competitive labor market, play a crucial role and, given that Italy is struggling to support young people in their career path, thanks to scarce resources, we must also rely on European tools, such as the European solidarity corp,



which also allows the certification of soft skills, despite some bureaucratic problems of the Italian regional institutions.

As for the reform of the school-work link initiated with the "Jobs Act", it proved useless in practice.

As we have observed, the European institutions offer numerous programs for the job development of young people therefore, in addition to strengthening the mechanism of the link between school-work, through the coherence between the course of study and the chosen work and the internship supported, together with a tutor obliged to follow the young worker, in order to encourage European programs, we recommend opening a "European door" in each school and training teachers on how to join the initiatives and promote awareness.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that these European initiatives and programs are essential for bridging the born and social difference between young people given the numerous benefits and opportunities to finally make the social elevator really work again.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR RURAL YOUTH: A CASE STUDY IN CATALONIA**

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The European Youth Guarantee initiative was implemented across Europe from 2014, in order to facilitate transition for youths, between the ages of 15 and 25, into employment or educational training within 4 months of becoming inactive. The functionality of this initiative, where training courses are concerned, is dependent upon availability of training centres that are certified as accredited by the government. In Spain, which contains a large proportion of regions that are predominantly rural, there is significant regional disparity, not least in existence of availability of these training centres; rural areas may have as little as 1 local accredited training centre, which may or may not have an available course in an area of interest to a given youth.

The Youth Guarantee was subsequently reinforced in 2020, and among the included changes was an augmentation of the age range of the youth classification to include 2529 year olds. This adjustment, in conjunction with the CoVid-19 pandemic, created a new target demographic and necessitated change in the approaches PES would take to encompass the new age range. Accordingly, there is little and limited research, especially of a qualitative nature, into the functionality of this new initiative in rural areas. The contrast between how the guarantee is envisioned at national level and how it unfolds on the ground in rural areas is not well-understood, where the structure and platform to allow the guarantee to operate is not so developed.

This study therefore analyses the meso-level structure of Public Employment Services (PES) in the autonomous community of Catalonia and includes a case study of the reality in the specific region of Lleida. This case study involves open-ended interviews with members at different levels of the local PES, including the director and various other staff, as well as with local policy makers, youth workers in local organisations and the youth themselves in order to understand how the youth guarantee is being implemented on the ground. This will necessarily take into account the rural reality and the structural constraints, as well as to present the needs and challenges, that have been discovered through experience of the various rural stakeholders, under the new law.

The study also analyses how factors such as gender and migration status may provide additional barriers to certain groups that present challenges in their access to training, and focuses on other constraints that may impact the ability of youth to participate in courses, such as the need to travel, availability of transport, the associated financial constraints and the shortfall of any related support structures. The pandemic has caused an increased reliance on digital technologies which is likely to outlast the pandemic itself (ILO, 2022), and so the barriers to employment or training that exist for those in more isolated areas can be perpetuated. This change in balance between in-person and online courses and

how it finds expression in rural areas, therefore, will also be a point of investigation in this study.

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## **EMPLOYMENT OF YOUNG STUDENTS AGAINST THE DEMANDS OF THE MARKET**

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### Abstract

The current development, in which the global economy is moving, the product of which is also the globalization of the labor market, is increasingly evidenced by the phenomenon of interweaving and dependence of demands and offers, in the regional and national labor markets. This paper deals with some of the ways of cooperation between educational institutions and economic entities that seek to employ young people who have completed their studies in the economic field, especially in finance and accounting. For an organization it is very important that its employees have knowledge about IT and the computer programs it uses. its information systems and the information technology it uses to have a better performance and in function of achieving its objectives and realizing its strategy. Economic systems research and development addresses the entire portfolio of an organization's IT applications.

*Keywords:* labor market, youth employment, practical skills, professional skills.

### Aims

The purpose of this paper is to deal with the issues related to the employment of young people after completing their university studies in the economic field, mainly finance and accounting. analysis of the cooperation opportunities of universities with private and public economic entities in the southern region.

### Theoretical approach

Based on the study carried out by INSTAT May 23, 2022, employment and unemployment by age group for the years 2020-2021 is presented as follows.

Over the year 2021, youth aged 15-29 years old neither in employment nor in education or training<sup>3</sup> account for 26.1 % of the same age group population. In the group of youth aged 15-29 years old neither in employment nor in education or training, 37.3 % are classified as unemployed. The other part is outside the labor force because they are discouraged workers (15.4 %), or fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities (17.5 %), or inactive for other reasons (29.8 %).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> INSTAT, Labour Force Survey

<sup>4</sup> <file:///C:/Users/EA/Desktop/press-release-labour-market-2021.pdf> (INSTAT)

Young people<sup>5</sup> are required to know these programs which they benefit from private training. This portfolio can be an integrated system for the entire enterprise or it can consist of several separate functional applications for accounting, marketing, production, etc.

### Methodology

The methodology<sup>6</sup> used in researching opportunities for cooperation with public and private economic entities to be as close as possible to students in the difficulties and uncertainties they encounter to integrate into the labor market.

This study will be based on secondary and primary<sup>7</sup> data related to the opportunities, skills and competencies that can help young people who finish their studies and have uncertainty in the labor market at the preparatory level, not only theoretical but also practical.

Secondary data will be provided by the various studies done on the problems encountered and by the requests that the economic entities have to employ prepared staff with the appropriate practical and theoretical knowledge. The primary data will refer to the provision of information based on a questionnaire that will be addressed to young graduates in the economic field and private and public economic units as well as the rest of the interested parties.

### Findings

This paper presents the types of services, practical skills and theoretical financial and accounting knowledge that businesses require and the workforce (young graduates) offer. The interviewees were asked about the study programs and if they are satisfied with the knowledge gained during the studies and if they meet your needs according to the demands of the graduate labor market, 57% have selected level 1-3 (Very Satisfied - Somewhat Satisfied) and the rest consider that there is place for improvement. This result serves to continue further studies in what the labor market needs. But these answers are somewhat contradictory since the fact that 68.67% of graduate students work in their profession, which shows that the study programs meet the requirements of the labor market and our students have the appropriate knowledge in accordance with the field of study and the knowledge gained from study program.

To the question: Did the institution/company in which you were employed ask you for additional training and certifications? From the collected answers, it appears that 57% of employers have not asked for additional training and 43% require professional and practical training to replace the work experience that applicants must have for job positions in the labor market.

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<sup>5</sup> PROJEKT- PROPOZIM PËR ZHVILLIMIN FINANCIAR TË INSTITUCIONIT (Studim mbi burimet e reja të financimit për rritjen e të ardhurave të Istitucionit), studim I realizuar nga Departamenti I finances dhe Kontabilitetit, Uniuersiteti "Ismail Qemali" Vlore

<sup>6</sup> Understanding Research Methods, An Overview of the Essentials *By Mildred L. Patten,*

<sup>7</sup> <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315213033>



## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR ACTIVATION AND INTEGRATION OF RURAL NEET'S YOUTH ON THE LABOR MARKET IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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Youth is a crucial period of life when young people gain their economic independence and find their place in society. The current pandemic and economic crisis has exacerbated young people's vulnerability to: higher unemployment, lower job quality, higher labor market inequalities between different groups of young people, longer and more precarious transition from school to work, and increased distance from the labor market.

The aims of this paper are to presents the situation of rural Youths Neither in Employment, nor in Education or Training (NEET) in the Republic of North Macedonia, aged between 15 and 34 years old, in the period from 2015 to 2021, and to address the specific challenges related to employment and social inclusion of rural NEET's youth, to offer assistance and support in that process and to support policy makers in developing adequate instruments to support the transition of young people to employment.

The key data sources for this research were desk research methodology and mainly analysis of secondary resources focused on social inclusion and participation of rural NEET's on labor market and opportunities for their activation. A descriptive analysis was conducted to compare the data in the analyzed period as well as the methods of analysis and synthesis. Secondary data was collected through different official data sources (Eurostat, ILOstat, State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as national programmes and reports). The dynamics were observed within a time range of a 7-year period (2015–2021) and period with the pandemic with COVID 19. The analysis began with descriptive statistics in order to understand the macroeconomic context for being rural NEET in the Republic of North Macedonia.

According to the Labor Force Survey, in 2016 there were approximately 136,000 young people in North Macedonia who are unemployed, not in education or training (NEET), which roughly corresponds to one third (31.2 percent) of the total youth population (34 percent for women)<sup>3</sup>. The NEET rate appears to have been relatively stable over the last few years (Bardak et al. 2015, p. 23). Of particular interest is that for the 15-24 age group, the NEET rate was 24.3 percent in 2016, down from 24.8 percent in 2012 and 41.3 percent in 2006 (ILO statistics). The decline in the rate between 2006 and 2012 could be largely attributed to policies supporting higher enrollment rates in higher education. For the 25-29 age group, the NEET rate is 43.1 percent. The largest part of NEET people (60 percent



or about 83,000 people) are unemployed non-students, and the rest (53,000 people) are inactive non-students. The long-term unemployed make up the largest share (43.5 percent or almost 60,000 people). This reflects the structural nature of unemployment in North Macedonia rather than issues related to the business cycle, as well as the long transition period from school to work, which lasts an average of 25 months (Petreski and Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2017). The next large subgroup consists of inactive young people with family care responsibilities (26.2 percent).<sup>8</sup>

An improving business environment, favorable economic conditions and employment reforms led to a constant decrease in the incidence of NEETs aged 15 to 29 from 32.5% in 2015 to 24.5% in 2019. However, in 2020, during the pandemic, NEETs increased to 26.9% - a trend witnessed in many other EU member states and Western Balkans countries. Although the economic crisis and its labour market impact are expected to gradually fade away, this shows again the vulnerability of young people to sudden economic shocks.<sup>9</sup>

The unemployment problems faced by young people in North Macedonia seem to require a particular urgency from employment policies. Out of the total youth population (15-29) of about 435 thousand people, about 124 thousand were employed in 2016 (28.6%). High youth unemployment means a loss of investment in education and training, a reduced tax base and higher social costs, while long spells of unemployment in early life negatively impact young people's employment prospects throughout their working lives. . Very low youth employment rates, together with the highest unemployment rate in the world (41.3% in 2016), imposes the need to understand what is happening to unemployed and inactive young people, especially inactive ones who are not involved in the educational process. According to Petreski and Zampini (2018), a dominant part of these young people are longterm unemployed persons, i.e. young persons who have been looking for work for more than one year, although there is also a significant number of young persons who take care of the family - and who are mostly women - due to that are not looking for work. Confirming the long period between finishing education and first stable job, less than 40% of young people (15-29) found a job in the first three years after leaving school, compared to over 70% of young people in the EU-28.<sup>10</sup>

The ineffective transition of young people from the education system to the labor market leads to economic costs in terms of lost investment in education, reduced tax revenues and high social costs. Labor force participation has a spatial dimension. The living environment affects the conditions it has so that young people in the R. N. Macedonia living in cities are less likely to become "NEET" compared to young people from rural areas and suburbs.

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<sup>8</sup> Revised program for reforms in employment and social policy 2022, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, December 2019, p.30

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/news-and-events/news/north-macedonias-youth-guarantee-knocking-backnumbers-neets>

<sup>10</sup> Revised program for reforms in employment and social policy 2022, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, December 2019, p. 29

When it comes to gender, we come across information where young women are more likely to be neither employed, nor educated, nor trained to belong entirely to the NEET group. People living in rural areas are less active than their urban peers (64.8 percent and 67.6 percent, respectively) in the Republic of North Macedonia.<sup>11</sup> Young people from rural areas are characterized by a higher unemployment rate. There is an urban bias towards labor market crossings, so that a large number of young people from rural areas in the Republic of Northern Macedonia have a harder time starting their transition compared to young people from urban areas (35 percent and 30 percent, respectively).<sup>12</sup>

Rural area in the Republic of North Macedonia, which cover around 87% of the total area of the country, live 45% of the total population.<sup>13</sup> The rural municipalities in Republic of North Macedonia do not implement a strategy for promotion of youth opportunities offered by the associations working in the municipality as well as promotion of actions by the Employment Agency of Republic of North Macedonia intended for young people aged 15-29 which has an office within the municipalities.

The place where the individuals live, the level of regional development and the degree of urbanization affect the individuals' outcomes within the labor market in many ways. Young people in rural areas and their families have to incur additional costs (i.e., transport costs, costs associated with living in urban areas away from their rural place of origin, etc.) if they wish to continue their schooling.

As a result, increased integration of NEET youth from rural areas into society is expected, increased skills and competencies for employability through a structured system of training, mentoring and career guidance, liaison with employers and increased social inclusion.

Despite several crises, in the last decade the labor market has seen favorable trends, followed by a drop in the unemployment rate, an increase in the employment rate and an increase in net wages. At the end of the first half of 2019, the unemployment rate fell to a historic low of 17.5%, followed by a significant drop in the youth unemployment rate.<sup>14</sup>

The rate of young people who are not employed, nor in education or training (NEET, 15-29) in 2015 was 31.2%, in 2018 29.8%, and in 2022 it is expected to decrease and amount to 22.9%.<sup>15</sup>

Two groups on the labor market in North Macedonia are particularly exposed to the risk of unemployment and inactivity: young people and women. At the end of the first half of

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<sup>11</sup> National strategy for employment (2021-2027) with Action plan for employment (2021-2023), Skopje, September 2021, pp.12

<sup>12</sup> [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26950VNR\\_2020\\_North\\_Macedonia\\_Report\\_Macedonian.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26950VNR_2020_North_Macedonia_Report_Macedonian.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> National strategy for agriculture and rural development of the Republic of North Macedonia (2021-2027),

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia, pp. 11

<sup>14</sup> Revised program for reforms in employment and social policy 2022, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, December 2019, p.16

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.77

2019, youth unemployment (15-24) was 34.9%, while the rate of young people (15-29) who were neither employed nor in education or training in 2016 was 31.2%.

Macedonian unemployment is distinguished by several structural characteristics. The largest number of unemployed people have secondary education and are on the left side of the age distribution. This situation suggests that individuals face unemployment and potentially long years of job hunting after graduation. 56% of all unemployed persons in 2017 have been waiting for employment for 4 years or more, while 78% of the unemployed were long-term unemployed.<sup>16</sup>

The unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 29 in R.N. Macedonia is 35.4%<sup>17</sup>, and the rate of inactive young people is increasing year by year. Nearly one-third of 28.3% of young people in R. N. Macedonia (aged 15 to 29) in 2020 are persons who are not employed or involved in education or training (NEET). The majority of NEETs (62.6%) are unemployed non-students, and the remaining third (37.4%) are inactive non-students.<sup>18</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the North Macedonian economy hard. After a strict lockdown in the spring, followed by a gradual reopening of the economy, social-distancing restrictions were tightened again to slow down contagion. Real GDP contracted by 4.5 percent in 2020.<sup>19</sup>

The quality of available jobs remains a big problem for young people in North Macedonia, with one out of every four (27.6%) employed young people working in an occupation that does not correspond to their level of education.

The institutional framework in the sphere of the labor market consists of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy coordinates the processes of creating strategies, policies and plans for employment, while the direct implementation of specific programs, measures and activities is the responsibility of the Employment Agency. As a public institution, established by the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance, the agency performs professional, organizational, administrative and other tasks related to employment and unemployment insurance and provides support, assistance and services to participants in the labor market.

One of the key active programs on the labor market, which began to be piloted in 2018, and to be implemented in the entire territory of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2019, is the Youth Guarantee. It increases the coverage and inclusion of young unemployed people in the labor market. The youth guarantee is open to all young people up to the age

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<sup>16</sup> Revised program for reforms in employment and social policy 2022, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, December 2019, p.26

<sup>17</sup>[http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/mk/MakStat/MakStat\\_\\_PazarNaTrud\\_\\_AktivnosNaNaselenie/006\\_PazTrud\\_Mk\\_aktivnost\\_mk.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=](http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/mk/MakStat/MakStat__PazarNaTrud__AktivnosNaNaselenie/006_PazTrud_Mk_aktivnost_mk.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=)

<sup>18</sup>.[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26950VNR\\_2020\\_North\\_Macedonia\\_Report\\_Macedonian.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26950VNR_2020_North_Macedonia_Report_Macedonian.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Regional Cooperation Council: Study on Youth Employment In the Republic of North Macedonia, MAKSTAT Labour Force Survey online data, 2nd edition, July 2021, p. 11

of 29 who are not employed, nor are they involved in the process of education or training, and who are registered for the first time in the register of unemployed persons. The purpose of the Youth Guarantee is for young people, within a period of 4 months after they are registered as unemployed in the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, to be provided with appropriate employment, inclusion in one of the active measures for employment or to return to the educational system process through "second chance" programs. All of these are key to successfully integrating young people into the labor market and reducing the outflow of educated staff from the country. The piloting included three employment centers (out of a total of 30), where 5,266 young people were involved, of which 1,916 were employed (of them, 224 through the service of the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia for mediation in employment), 281 people were involved in any of the active employment measures that do not lead to direct employment, but increase the employability of unemployed persons. Accordingly, the success rate of the Youth Guarantee in 2018 was 41.7%. Based on the results of the piloting, the program became universal in 2019, with about 14,000 young people expected to be involved annually, of which about a third will be involved in some active labor market program, i.e. they will be employed in a period of four months after their registration as unemployed.<sup>20</sup>

However, the Republic of North Macedonia spends little on active labor market programs in which the unemployed participate.

The scheme, run by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Ministry of Education and Science of the R. N. Macedonia, the Employment Service Agency and social partners including youth and social work outreach organisations in the R. N. Macedonia, is a government 'structural reform priority'.

General challenges faced by young people from rural areas are the following: lower social integration of the NEET category; lack of necessary employability skills imposed by the current pandemic; low self-confidence and low initiative for activation in the society and networking; lack of a system through which young people will gain work experience to be more competitive in the labor market; lack of opportunities for practical work and investing;

Combining career counseling, motivational training, skills training and job readiness for the long-term unemployed and encouraging companies to hire long-term job seekers through targeted employment subsidies, which include temporary tax deductions and / or exemptions social security.

This indicates the need for better alignment of supply and demand in the labor market and better alignment between the needs of the private sector for labor and the profiles generated by the education system, as well as greater inclusion of the private sector in the education system. To reduce rural migration and revitalize it, it is necessary to develop appropriate social, communal and other services in rural areas, as well as to provide

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<sup>20</sup> Revised program for reforms in employment and social policy 2022, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, December 2019, p.35

greater employment opportunities and encourage entrepreneurship with a focus on rural NEET's youth.

The results obtained by analyzing statistical data confirmed that many factors affect the leading young people to become NEETs. These are: residence environment; social, family and economic background; type of schooling; and labor market structure.

The analysis points to the need to take support actions to improve the education system's efficiency in North Macedonia and to strengthen some institutions regulating the NEETs status with the scope to prevent social exclusion of rural NEETs. Furthermore, understanding how the socio-cultural individuals' background, including the place where an individual has grown up, also affects the rural NEET status propensity, is equally important to support young people.

The suggest to the policy-makers is to achieve an EU-level target stipulating that the share of young people neither in employment nor in education or training should be less than 9 % by 2030. In 2021, an average of 13.1 % was identified as NEET within EU.<sup>21</sup> However, there are differences between Member States as several countries have already reached the goal for 2030.

Improving youth employment and promoting more and better jobs for rural NEETs youth through:

- Support for the integration of young people in the labor market - support for employment, continuing education, internships (Youth Guarantee - integration in the labor market). Developing and implementing specific measures to integrate young people into the labor market (implementing short programs for a second opportunity for vocational education and training, increasing employment subsidies intended for young people at risk, implementing training programs for acquiring skills for NEET youth, training for acquiring digital skills, programs for self-employment and starting your own business, internship programs aimed at young NEETs, etc.)

- Promotion and expansion of the services of the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia aimed at young unemployed persons (Youth Guarantee - activation activities). Services of the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia for the activation of young people (NEET) to support the integration of the labor market (assistance with job search, counseling and guidance, preparation of individual action plans, monitoring, etc.). The measures to strengthen the capacities of the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia to implement the services of the Youth Guarantee, i.e. structural and organizational reform of the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (employment of at least 80 qualified persons and their training, reconstruction/renovation of the local employment centers and upgrading of IT, a new model for managing the service provision system of the Youth Guarantee,

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<sup>21</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics\\_on\\_young\\_people\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_or\\_training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training)

designing new work process, revising the procedures for implementation and reformulation of youth employment services)

- Advancement and reforms of the educational system, with special emphasis on the quality and content of vocational education and training and its relevance for preparing young people for an easier transition and integration in the labor market (Youth Guarantee - early intervention). Establishing regional centers for vocational education and training especially in municipalities where young people face a higher risk of becoming NEET. Reforming the teacher training system to increase the quality of education at all levels (improving teacher training methodologies).

- Identifying, informing and mobilizing young people to participate in programs for inclusion in the labor market and increasing employability (Youth Guarantee - field activities). Field activities to animate and motivate NEETs for their inclusion in the Youth Guarantee. Advancing the processes of dissemination of data and information to young people, their families and the general public, how they would help in the selection of opportunities and directions for education and employment of young people.

- Strengthening the capacity of field workers (training) for field work.

Therefore, social dialogue is necessary, which will include all kinds of negotiations and consultations and exchange of information between the representatives of the Government, employers and workers on issues of their interest, which relate to economic and social policies related to the unemployment of rural NEET youth.



## THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND POLICY RESPONSE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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### Abstract

Youth unemployment is an issue that seriously concerns many countries, both developed and developing countries. High youth unemployment and inactivity have many negative consequences for young individuals and for the whole society. For individuals, the inactivity and unemployment status negatively affect their prospects to find decent jobs, increase the social exclusion and have negative impact on health status. For society the costs of youth unemployment and inactivity include higher benefit payments, forgone earnings, and taxes; and reduce the aggregate consumption. Grinevica and Baiba (2017) argue that youth who are unable to find a job after completing education can be perceived as inefficient human capital with the possibility of deterioration in employment, which could contribute to an individual's social exclusion. On the other side, the current economic instability in the context of youth's prospects and opportunities in the labour market is very uncertain (Balan, 2014). This creates a negative feedback effect on future economic growth and productivity. Consequently, economic costs arise because economic resources are not fully exploited due to high unemployment rates.

Output and unemployment commonly move together. There are number of empirical research focus on the link between the output change and change in the unemployment. The most prominent one is the empirical research of Okun (1962) who defined the relationship between the change in the unemployment rate and the change of output growth rate. Precisely, Okun's Law states that if the unemployment rate falls to 1%, then the output will be increased by 3%. So, to reduce the costs from unemployment, the economy should increase continuously. According to the Okun's Law, the actual GDP should grow faster than potential GDP. Other studies have followed empirically testing the relationship between output and unemployment (Lee 2000; Viren 2000; Moosa (1997)) and mostly revealed the validity of the relationship between output and unemployment rate. But, empirical estimations of Okun's coefficient vary substantially across countries and regions (Moosa (1997)). Also, Okun's coefficients can change over time due to the changes in labor regulations, technology change, preferences, social customs, and demographics changes. However, the concept of the Okun's Law often is use as a basis for developing of economic models for estimation of the cost of unemployment in the economy (Balan (2014); Grinevica and Baiba 2017). Calculation of economic costs is very useful for policy makers as a tool for evaluation the effects, costs, and benefits of policy measures for increasing the employability in the economy.

Youth unemployment levels (as % of total labor force ages 15-24) in North Macedonia (36.9% in 2020), despite recent improvements in labor market indicators, have remained relatively high in comparison with the rest of Western Balkans countries (35.08% in 2020) and the EU average level (14.4% in 2019). Facing with the problem of high youth



unemployment rates, in the several past years, North Macedonia have proposed and implemented different policies and measures to decrease the youth unemployment rates (National Youth Strategy 2016-2025, Youth Employment Action Plan 2016-2020, Youth Guarantee plan (2020-2022, and etc). In that context, North Macedonia was the first country, outside from the European Union, that has implemented the Youth Guarantee program in 2018. All these policies put the focus on improving education and working skills because it is expected that education increases chances for employment of young people, especially for those that belong to the most vulnerable NEET category.

The main focus of this research is to calculate the lost GDP from youth unemployment in North Macedonia and to analyze the effects of policy response measures to reduce the youth unemployment. For that purpose, the following tasks will be realized: (i) to describe the main trends and structure of youth unemployment, (ii) to review the theoretical findings in current literature on economic costs of unemployment, (iii) to calculate the lost GDP by using Okun's Law from youth unemployment in the period from 2017 to 2021 and (iv) to evaluate the effects of policy measures focused to support the youth employability. In this part, special attention will be given to the evaluation of social costs and benefits of Youth Guarantee intervention by using the modified approach of SCBA (social cost-benefit analysis) applied by International Labor Organization (ILO). As a main data source will be used data basis from ILO, Eurostat and State statistical office.

**Keywords:** economic growth, youth unemployment rate, cost of youth unemployment, Okun's Law

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## **EXPERIENCES AND BENEFITS OF NATURAL MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS IN PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL YOUTH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

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### Abstract

Natural mentoring relationships (NMRs) can positively affect children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, well-being, and empower their authentic agency. In addition, NMRs contribute to the intergenerational dialogue and social cohesion in EUs societies, that is, to the current priorities of the EU Council's youth policy. Formal mentoring interventions use the principles of natural mentoring relationships to facilitate the quality and benefits of natural mentoring in the lives of young people. Nevertheless, not enough is known about the dynamics and benefits of NMRs experienced in the general population of young adolescents (12-15 years) in the EU in youths-centred perspective.

Building on the previous research on youth mentoring in the Czech Republic and beyond, the ENCOUNTER project aims to examine the NMRs in experiences of young adolescents in the EU context. While focusing on youths' experiences and perspectives of natural mentoring in their social networks in a rural and urban area in the Czech Republic, the NMRs are explored using the youths-centred exploratory qualitative research design that draws on phenomenological interviews and visual participatory methods (PhotoVoice).

The presented paper will introduce the preliminary research findings on the experiences of current young people in rural area of the Czech Republic of natural mentoring, its forms, perceived benefits and dynamics. This paper presents findings of analysis of sixty open-ended questionnaires and nine interviews collected with 12-15-year-old young people in the Czech rural elementary school. In-depth thematic of combined both data sources and revealed themes of mentoring experience among young people in a rural area, in comparison with data of urban youths.

Preliminary research findings address the field with several new information on NMRs in youths-centred perspective, e.g. Most of the young people in the research sample were able to identify their natural mentor when the youths-centred animation explain who the natural mentors in social networks of young people are. The identified mentors are not necessarily adults but are described as more experienced in comparison to friends. If adult mentors are identified, they are more supportive and trusted in comparison to other adults in youths social networks. Young people also often identified more than one mentor. They found different mentors as their supports in different needs and interests.

The results will inform the formal mentoring interventions of the principles, experiences, and perspectives of natural mentoring in a youth-centred approach that can be implemented in newly-occurring formal mentoring interventions such as youth-initiated

mentoring schemes in rural areas across the EU. Thus research results of the ENCOUNTER project will inform the development of good practices guidelines and new approaches in formal youth mentoring interventions; and social policies on educational services for young people in the Czech Republic while distinct attention to the experiences, interests and needs of rural youths. The ultimate aim of the ENCOUNTER project is to develop and implement a youth-centred mentoring intervention, targeting rural youths and their socio-emotional development, and employability skills in the fields of their interest, by connecting rural youth with mentors identified by young people informed by the ENCOUNTER results.

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## **INTRODUCE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RESEARCH COURSE TO HELP STUDENTS TO ENHANCE SOFT SKILLS: A PILOT PROJECT DONE AT FACULTY OF ECONOMY OF UNIVERSITY OF VLORA “ISMAIL QEMALI”.**

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### Aim

Evidence shows that the biggest innovation problems in Albania come mainly from the lack of a real cooperation between industry and academia. The lack of this type of cooperation comes as a result of lack of information, difficulties in finding contact persons, high transaction costs to find the right partner, which have led to a misperception of agents about each other.

Based on this status quo of cooperation, it is clear that there is a discrepancy between the knowledge offered at the university and those required by the private sector, resulting in outdated, lower quality curricula, less job creation and loss of career opportunities. In response, a new program was piloted by the Faculty of Economy at University of Vlora, with a special focus on introducing entrepreneurship education in a market research course. The aim of the program was to enhance students' soft skills by helping them building problem-solving skills in order to increase their probability to be employed in near future. The program also aimed to provide the necessary knowledge and skills for the development and implementation of business projects in the Albanian market.

### Methods:

The methodology of this study program was based on the philosophy of “learning by doing”, which followed 4 stages: training, collaboration, action, learning, assessment. The teaching methods used include lecture / discussion and practical activities. Emphasis was placed on the conceptual meaning of the material, along with consideration of how these ideas should be applied to solve research or entrepreneurship problems. Students actively contributed to class discussions based on their classroom preparation. The students were separated in different groups and were surveyed at the beginning and end of the courses. For the evaluation of each model a questionnaire was distributed which consisted of a selfassessment of students skills.

### Results



Students who attended the “Market research and Entrepreneurship” pilot program showed a considerable increase of soft skills in comparison to their peers who do not attend the program. It was also observed that students were more motivated and confident because they increase the networking and actions not only inside but also outside the University.

### Conclusions

At the end of the program the results showed that soft and entrepreneurship skills of the students were enhanced and created. The results of the project will serve for launching a new and more ambitious programme, engaging not only students from different disciplines, but also entrepreneurs who needed these competencies and skills.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship education, soft skills, learning by doing, collaboration.*

## YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP - AN ALTERNATIVE TO ALLEVIATING THE HIGH RATE OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN KOSOVO

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### Aims

Kosovo is a young country with limited employment opportunities and with the highest unemployment rate in the Western Balkans. The high unemployment rate of young people, especially those coming from the rural areas, is the main common concern of the government, academics, and citizens themselves. Utilizing secondary data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS), Eurostat, and the literature review, this paper aims to investigate youth unemployment in Kosovo, as well as to explore how youth entrepreneurship has an impact on reducing unemployment. In addition, this paper aims to bring the experiences and policies of other countries towards alleviating youth unemployment and increasing youth employment.

### Theoretical approach

Unemployment as a phenomenon is usually expressed in underdeveloped and developing countries. In Kosovo, there are many young people who are looking for a job, but on the other hand, there are also employers who are looking for workers and cannot find them. According to Avdullahi, Ademi, Salihu, & Krasniqi (2022) given the number of jobseekers job seekers with the number of new jobs being advertised, there is a high disproportion, whereas the number of jobseekers is much higher.

According to Remeikienė, Žufan, Gasparėnienė, & Ginevičius (2020), the lack of skills, experience, and contacts are the main micro-economic factors that cause youth unemployment. Whereas, the main macro-economic factor remains the mismatch between the labor market and the educational system (Manyande N. N., 2006).

Countries with high youth unemployment with low welfare coverage have exceptionally high social and personal costs (Gallie, Kostova, & Kuchar, 2001). Obumneke (2012), stresses that the rapid growth level of prostitution, armed robbery, rape, and all facets of violence can be largely attributed to the incidence of unemployment. Furthermore, it is assumed that alcohol and drug use disorders among youth are related, and come as a result of youth unemployment (Thern, de Munter, & Hemmingsso, 2017).

Young Kosovans prefer to be employed in the public sector, while the private sector remains less desirable. According to Eurostat (2021), government employment includes civil servants and other government employees (on a national, regional, and local level) as well as armed forces. The limits of the government sector employment share vary around 20 %. The share of those employed in the government sector in 2019, varied among the Member States, with the highest proportions in Sweden (29 % of total



employment), Denmark (28 %), Finland (24 %), Croatia, and Estonia (both 23 %) and the lowest in Germany (11 %), the Netherlands and Luxembourg (both 12 %), Italy (13 %) and Portugal (14 %) (Eurostat, 2021). As can be seen in figure 1, the share of government employment in the EU has remained almost stable at around 18 % of total employment since 2000, accounting for 18 % in 2019. Whereas, among the Member States for which data are available, the largest falls between 2000 and 2019 were observed in Malta, Slovakia, Italy, and Cyprus, and the largest increases in Romania, Croatia, and Slovenia (Eurostat, 2021).

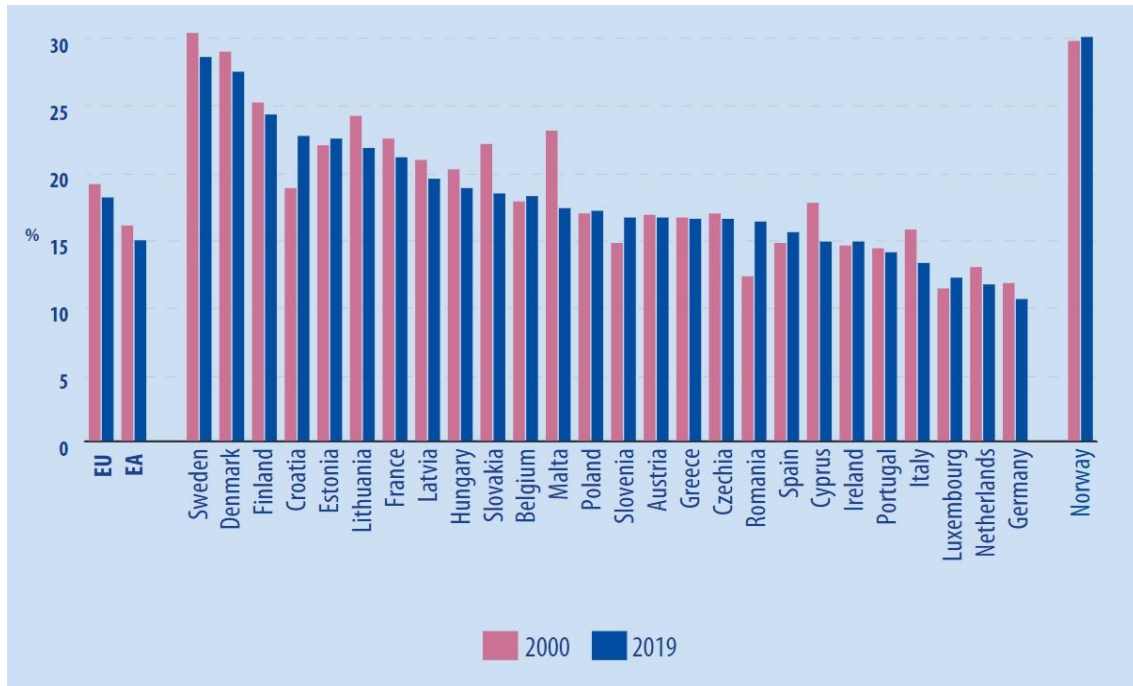


Figure 1. Government employment (as % of total employment)

(Data for Luxembourg and Malta refer to the period 2000-2018 Data for Bulgaria not available) (Source: Eurostat)

Based on the experiences of other countries, in Kosovo, it remains for the private sector to bear the burden of employment and economic development. As (Gribben, 2018) stresses, youth entrepreneurship is increasingly considered an opportunity in building more entrepreneurial and job-generating economies, in Kosovo, it is required more order in the policy environment to maximize the potential of young people as well as a better differentiation in start-up support including more customized finance options for young entrepreneurs.

Youth unemployment in Kosovo refers to the unemployment rate of persons aged 15-24 years (KAS, 2021). According to (KAS, 2021), in the first quarter of 2021, the likelihood of young people in Kosovo being unemployed was twice as high as that of adults. Among persons aged 15-24 in the labor force, 48.6% were unemployed, and unemployment is higher among young females (53.5%) than young males (46.1%) (KAS, 2021).

## Methodology

For the research purpose of this paper, secondary data from the literature review are used in order to identify the definition and the consequences of youth unemployment. Aiming to explore the youth unemployment rate in Kosovo and in particular how the youth unemployment rate varies by gender, the labor source survey results from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics and Eurostat are used.

## Findings

Kosovo is a young country with limited employment opportunities and with the highest unemployment rate in the Western Balkans, whereas in 2018 among WB6 countries Kosovo has registered the highest rate of youth unemployment, at 54.98%. In 2021, youth unemployment in Kosovo was still high reaching 48.60% (KAS, 2021). Young Kosovans usually search for a job after that they have completed secondary school or finished their studies. Most of them do not enter the employment offices to get registered as unemployed but search for a job by themselves. Usually, their preferences are to be employed in state institutions, as they consider it a safer job, as well as other benefits accompanied within the working contract as per defined by law. On the other hand, state institutions cannot generate enough jobs, thus Kosovo has the highest youth unemployment rate in Kosovo.

Youth entrepreneurship is seen as very promising to alleviate youth unemployment in Kosovo. Therefore, as in other countries, policymakers in Kosovo need to create more friendly policies for young people aiming to start their own businesses.

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## A GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF ALBANIA IS ECOTOURISM

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### Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to introduce the ecotourism model as a possible form for youth entrepreneurship.

The importance of ecotourism in the sustainable economic development of the southern area of Albania should be exploited as an enterprise by young people who love the environment. The natural resources of parks, wild river valleys, forests and water and underwater resources will be maintained through this entrepreneurial model by engaging young people with passion in the development of the country and in the protection of the environment. Also this form of entrepreneurship will generate income for families or residents of the area and will contribute to increasing their well-being. In areas close to natural resources, ecotourism will help young people to create new ventures in their place of work by working for their future and not to leave Albania. Orientation of young people towards the labour market in the ecotourism system as well as towards unique enterprises will teach them the skills of doing business, through the recognition of the promotion of natural resources. Given that this model of entrepreneurship is relatively new in Albania, there is enough space to develop in the future and to create a sustainable long-term development. This initiative also requires a comprehensive commitment to youth education, institution building and related logistics.

The southern region of Albania has undergone continuous socio-economic, demographic, structural and natural changes after the 1990s. In recent years, attention is turning to rural development, tourism, and it has become necessary for the whole community to engage in ecological measures to mitigate climate change.

Entrepreneurship in Ecotourism also minimizes the demographic exodus of the younger generations and reduces the abandonment of rural areas and creates new perspectives for the development of the region. This model of tourism development also contributes to the maintenance of natural resources. Sustainable development helps young people see the future in their country, by creating and providing opportunities to increase community well-being in the region. The southern region of Albania possesses a wide range of natural resources, such as the Vjosa, Europe's largest wild river, and various attractions, which can contribute to potential development.

Success in these ventures will be directly affected by the strategic business management skills and innovative ideas of young entrepreneurs. One of the key issues for sustainable success will be the harmonization of economic development and environmental development.

## Methodology

For this research we used literature review and data were obtained from institutional sources such as INSTAT. Descriptive analysis and SWOT analysis was selected which supports the development of ecotourism and the opportunities of the new generation for entrepreneurship and employment in this sector.

**Finding:** The development of ecotourism models create space for the inclusion of many other disciplines, such as management, ecology, marketing, logistics, development and environmental protection projects, systems protection, environmental sciences, etc. Consequently, if well coordinated, they create new jobs for many professions, and many young people with a desire and passion for work and nature.

It is necessary to develop strategic plans that well coordinate the role of all actors in the development of ecotourism and to work closely with the learning curricula to increase skills and to initiate and encourage young people to undertake entrepreneurial initiatives in this sector. Also, a good knowledge of the values of natural resources and environmental care will help young entrepreneurs to provide high quality services to all visitors as well as help protect the environment and preserve ecosystems.

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## **IMPROVING SKILLS OF RURAL NEETS THROUGH ECO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND NEW INITIATIVES**

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### Abstract

Rural society is facing numerous difficulties in the form of poverty, social exclusion, low level of education, etc. (Salamońska & Czeranowska, 2019; FAO, 2022). Youth are especially adversely affected by this situation. Setting up one's own business is crucial because they can produce and sell their agricultural products in rural areas. Sustainable business approach with farm and rural entrepreneurship are a key issue in rural areas to alleviate rural poverty (Naminse & Zhuang, 2018), but rural youth do not want to be involved and work in agricultural, forestry and even fishery activities. This is an important obstacle in sustainable rural development and development of new initiatives and approaches needed for rural youth not employed, nor in education or training (NEETs).

Most rural societies in developing countries struggle with both poverty and low levels of education (Salamońska & Czeranowska, 2019; FAO, 2022). Rural development can be explained as increasing production, income and welfare levels, eliminating imbalances, establishing physical and social infrastructure similar to urban areas, processes, activities and organizations in order to improve the socio-economic and cultural aspects of people living in rural areas and to evaluate agricultural products and initiatives (Nejadrezaei & Ben-Othmen, 2019). Rural development aims to minimize the socio-cultural and economic development difference between the city and the countryside by using rural resources effectively, increasing employment opportunities in rural areas, preventing migration to the city and raising living standards (Kennedy et al., 2001; Dorobantu & Nistoreanu, 2012). Within the scope of rural development activities, the target group consists of young people living in rural areas.

Despite the fact that the NEET concept has different definitions according to age groups there are common features on these vulnerable young people. The widest age group range is 15-34 in the NEET based on Eurostat description (Eurostat, 2020). OECD



(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) defines the NEET aged 15-29.

The main aim of this paper is to define rural NEET's current situation, describe their skills development opportunities through entrepreneurship and new initiatives in the rural areas. The paper also aims to reveal new and convenient initiatives by analyzing the scientific papers. This paper especially aimed to emphasize the importance of adaptation of rural youth to digital and technologic innovations in terms of eco-entrepreneurship approaches.

Entrepreneurship can be defined as the creation or extraction of economic value (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). Entrepreneurship concept widely covers the establishment of a new business, bringing together the production factors properly, undertaking financial, psychological and social risks. Establishing new job opportunities and initiatives are crucial to increase rural inhabitants' welfare. This vulnerable group needs investments from both the public and private sector. On the other hand, urban society has increased environmental concerns. We described the rural NEETs basics required through content analysis and document analysis in this paper (Kuckartz, 2014; Riffe et al., 2014; Erdoğan et al., 2022). The Web of Science (WoS) database was used to collect related studies on rural NEET and entrepreneurship. We applied web based search including these keywords: "rural + NEET, NEET + entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship + cooperative". We found over 150.000 articles related to the mentioned keywords. After the first examination we decided to reduce highly related according to the highest cited articles to apply content analysis. After the content analysis we continued to categorize topics through document analysis.

According to both content and document analysis results, new training platforms were identified, using technology and social media, including environmentally friendly practices that can create opportunities to start an enterprise and increase motivation of youth in rural areas. Interactive learning programs and entrepreneurship courses can be effective for the potential young entrepreneurs with the application of good practices in rural areas. Based on identified results in this paper, we propose a "Rural Youth Cooperative" that could be a good initiative and eco-entrepreneurship model for rural youth. In addition, it is aimed to develop support mechanisms that will contribute to the employment of young people in the NEET group and to develop various proposals for the employment of these young people in existing cooperatives. Because rural areas are still importantly connected to agriculture, forestry (especially non-wood forest products), and ecotourism activities. This policy implementation can also be a pioneer for the other nature-based solutions for instance to establish a new eco-entrepreneurship ecosystem and sustainable rural marketing strategy. Another suggestion could be enhancement of youth in the current rural cooperative and financial support by local governments to improve capacity building and co-creation for the rural NEETs.

**Keywords:** Cooperative, entrepreneurship, eco-innovation, sustainable rural development, social inclusion, motivation factors, Youth Guarantee, labor market policy, nature-based solutions.



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## LOWER GRADES BUT NOT SKILLS: RURAL STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC COMPARED TO STUDENTS FROM LARGER CITIES

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### Theoretical background

Students' achievements in rural areas have been widely studied, revealing discrepancies between larger cities and rural areas that indicate differences in educational quality and skills of students and may lead to further inequality (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018). For example, in Latvia results of centralized exams after the 12<sup>th</sup> grade were lower in smaller cities and rural areas (Krasnopjorovs, 2017), however the negative effect might be related to the type of school and especially small schools. There are also differences in the proportion of students leaving education: in 2018 it was 6.2% in cities and 13.4% in rural areas, leaving negative impact on their further options for work and education (Cabinet of Ministers Republic of Latvia, 2021).

COVID-19 pandemic brought additional challenges to education (e.g., Lindblad et al., 2021) and increased risk for losses of knowledge and even dropping out of school for the vulnerable groups (Azevedo et al., 2020; Kaffenberger, 2021). Thus, it is important to provide evidence about the situation in regional schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. Latvia has a population of less than 2 million and about half of people are located in the capital city Riga or in the closest region (CSB, 2022). In Latvia rural areas are defined as country regions, villages, and towns where people live and work (Latvian Rural Development Program, 1998). In most parts of Latvia the density of people is rather low, leading also to small schools in the regional towns and rural areas.

It is crucial to monitor and develop skills and knowledge of rural youth, in the aftermath of the pandemic. Therefore, the aim of this research was to analyze differences in problem-solving and self-management skills, cognitive abilities and school grades between high-school students in rural areas and in larger cities in Latvia, assessed during the distance learning period in the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Methodology

This research is a part of a larger project that aimed to assess students' skills and academic achievement in Latvia during the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. Students from grade 11 (n=586; 344 of them girls and 242 boys) were assessed, mean age M=17.38 years (SD=0.53).

The following measurements were used in the research:

- *Problem-solving skills* questionnaire, measuring two aspects: Solution development and evaluation and Flexibility to change solution, original internal consistency was  $\alpha=0.79$  and  $\alpha=0.71$  (Hacatrijana, 2021).

- *Self-management* questionnaire, six items assessed on a Likert type scale; internal consistency was  $\alpha=0.77$ . (Hacatrjana, 2021).
- *Nonverbal reasoning abilities* test (Harris et al., 2020) with figural matrices tasks; internal consistency was  $\alpha=0.72$ .
- *Verbal reasoning abilities: verbal analogies* (Kretzschmar, Hacatrjana and Rascevska, 2017); internal consistency was  $\alpha=0.81$ .
- *Academic achievement*: average grades in six study subjects (Mathematics, Latvian, English, Biology, Chemistry, Physics) in the last four semesters (autumn 2019 to spring 2021). Grades vary from 1 to 10 (maximum).
- Demographic questions: gender, age, the level of parental education (from “1Finished primary school” to “6-Doctoral degree”) and perceived difficulty to deal with the distance learning.

Data was collected in cooperation with schools by assessing students during the distance learning in May 2021 (with online questionnaires) and by gathering average grades from the school officials. Parents were informed about the study and could withdraw from participation.

#### Results and discussion

The main aim of this research was to compare the results of students assessed during the distance learning period, based on the location of their school. Therefore, all respondents were grouped as follows: 1) capital city Riga together with the closest regions

(defined as “Regions by Riga”), 2) larger cities (defined as republic-level cities in Latvia) and 3) smaller cities/towns and rural schools. Based on the presented grouping, there were 311 students in “Riga and closest region” group, 105 students in larger cities group and 170 students in towns and rural group. Overall, it is close to the representation of the centralisation towards Riga (CSB, 2022). Results regarding the differences between students in these groups were assessed using one-way ANOVA test (see Table 1).

Table 1. Differences between students living in various types of areas in Latvia

	Capital Riga and region		Larger cities		Towns and rural areas		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Nonverbal reasoning	5.79	2.67	5.91	2.42	5.61	2.42	0.34
Verbal reasoning	6.04	2.74	6.16	2.81	5.87	2.60	0.12
Problem-solving skills: solution development and evaluation	14.63	5.70	16.16	5.29	15.51	5.50	3.34*
Problem-solving skills: flexibility to change solution	13.24	3.39	13.32	3.42	13.29	3.44	0.02
Self-management skills	16.68	6.17	16.33	5.76	17.46	5.98	1.43

Mean grade in autumn 2019	6.52	1.11	5.93	1.34	6.03	1.31	9.17**
Mean grade in spring 2020	6.38	1.10	6.31	1.27	6.32	1.26	0.21
Mean grade in autumn 2020	6.72	1.16	6.38	1.39	6.26	1.36	4.77**
Mean grade in spring 2021	6.74	1.10	6.41	1.51	6.43	1.37	3.64*
“I have felt difficulties to deal with distance learning”	3.00	1.32	2.70	1.32	3.16	1.31	4.05*
Parental education level	3.78	1.19	3.19	1.27	3.24	1.20	16.60**

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

Differences are found in students' grades which are higher in schools closer to Riga in most of the semesters (including before the pandemic), which might be related to the differences found in the parental education level (lower in rural areas), as previous studies have confirmed (Idris, Hussain, and Nasir, 2020). Students in rural areas also reported more difficulties to deal with distance learning. However, students outside the capital assessed one aspect of problem-solving skills higher, and there are no statistically significant differences in other skills, also no differences were found in cognitive tasks. It has to be noted that these results cannot be generalized as participation was voluntary and not based on statistical stratification. Further analysis based on the school type plus location should be executed.

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## **LESSONS LEARNED AND PREVENTION OF STUDENTS DROPPING OUT FROM EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN BULGARIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS**

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### Aims

This paper aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the education system, especially in the area of support for the prevention of school dropouts. The focus is on how teachers have reacted and evaluated the significant changes in the learning process brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We address the following questions: How can Bulgarian teachers and the educational system prevent students' dropouts? How do teachers identify at-risk students? How do they assist pupils who have a high dropout risk?

### Theoretical approach

All students were forced to switch from traditional classroom learning to online learning due to closed schools caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this aspect, the COVID-19 pandemic has a wide-ranging effect on young people, including the decline of the labor market and job losses, the challenge of entering the labour market for those moving into it, training and education (ILO, 2020).

In addition, low levels of online education participation, particularly among youngsters from the most vulnerable families, might increase the education gap as well as other forms of inequality. It may increase the threat presented by children who are at risk of leaving school. Unemployment, poverty, a higher risk of marginalization, and social isolation are all conditions that preceded low levels of education. That makes it a significant problem that has a direct impact on the quality of life among young people. Youth well-being is a dynamic, complex process (Erikson, 1968). It keeps bringing up a number of problems in sectors including the economy, politics, and society. One of the key elements of young people's development is education.)

### Methodology

A methodology for analysis is based upon in-depth interviews with 20 high school teachers as well as other teaching staff members who share their experience during COVID-19. The majority of the respondents in the interviews were females and ranged in ages between 24 to 58. The data was collected in the South-West of Bulgaria during October 2021 and February 2022.

### Findings





In this study, teachers' experiences, perspectives, and opinions on the educational process during the COVID-19 pandemic are presented. According to the respondents, it is important to discover the most individualized way to engage with young people who are at risk of dropping out of school. Reduced danger of a "digital divide" impact during the pandemic is also emphasized as a major problem. It focuses on critical aspects of how teachers perceive the situation with the enforced change of active learning caused by COVID-19 as both a technological challenge and a chance to rethink their teaching models and strategies. Participants described their experiences in relation to some digital competence of teachers and students' gaps, some deficits in providing a suitable digital environment, work overload, and outlined some positive perspectives in the Post-Covid pandemic for the educational system.

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## EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN BULGARIA: A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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For young people in Bulgaria, dropping out of school has a long-term negative impact, as they are not only unable to participate in the labour market but also driven into a situation of social exclusion. According to various studies, these youths who drop out of school are strongly affected by their family environment, as well as their personal and psychological characteristics. (Hale & Canter, 1998; Morse, 2004 Nonchev et al., 2006; Tassevska, 2008).

This paper focuses on the study of education as an environment for personal development and socio-psychological change (Tattum 1992; Hale & Canter, 1998). The analysis outlines some deficits related to the phenomenon of school dropouts and its nature. In addition, the personal qualities can be considered as a prerequisite for educational and training activities, as well as for learning and participation in classes.

The study presents various personal qualities that are associated with a positive attitude towards education and students' assessment of these qualities through the prism of ethnicity. It shows the pursuit of qualities related to ethics in communication, sociability, and autonomy, i.e., areas describing peer interactions and seeking independence from adults, and reducing control. Young people strive for those qualities that allow them self-regulation, contact skills, and coping with their social world, in which, however, the school has its place (Deci, 2000).

The aim of the study is to answer the following questions: what does dropping out of school depend on; what personal qualities are associated with a positive attitude towards education; how the students themselves evaluate these qualities in their "Real-Self" and "Ideal-Self"; is there a place for ethnicity in this context; why the self-concept is important in the series of actions to overcome dropping out of school (Erikson, 1968)

From a methodological point of view, a secondary Eurostat statistical data analysis about Bulgaria, was combined with the method developed by Ivan Paspalanov for the type of personal tests for registration of the profiles of the self-concept (Paspalanov, 1983). This method was used to establish the notions of the self and the formation of different qualities, with the explication of 17 personal qualities in different areas of manifestation of personality. The method was applied to students of compulsory school age in the frame of the national project "Contemporary Bulgarian Education: Status and Deficits".

Through the secondary analysis of Eurostat data, we seek to obtain a more comprehensive and precise picture of the ESL in Bulgaria between 2011 and 2021.

Limitations of the study: The analysis covers 270 students between the ages of 14 and 16 and focuses on how ethnicity impacts educational activity and school dropouts. Additionally, the location where one lives, the school, the size of the family, the parents'

jobs, and income all have an effect. Due to Covid-19, differences in education have recently been brought on by two new factors: involvement in mobile learning and the potential for distance learning, both of which pose severe security concerns for the nation's Roma population.

The important finding is that the observed aspects of the school environment, together with the teaching practices and values of individual success and attitude in learning, reveal the presence of prerequisites for overcoming school dropout and developing educational influences (Romi, Schmida 2009).

**Keywords:** Early school leaving; Education, Bulgaria, self-assessment; adolescence.

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## THE COUNTRYSIDE AS DESTINY: TWO OPTIMISTIC STORIES AMONG A SEA OF NEGATIVE MEDIA COVERAGE ON RURAL YOUTH IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Keywords: rural youth, media, countryside, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The aim of the paper is to present two untypical stories about rural youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Analysing media coverage on rural youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina either news portals or video materials (topic-related TV shows or YouTube channels) in the last decade, prevailing narratives are rather depressive and repetitive: syntagms such as „demographic disaster“, „the villages are dying out“, „only older persons are left“, „deserted rural areas“, etc. accompanied by gloomy statistics and pictures became overrepresented in the public discourse. The forced and conflict-driven migration during the war in the 1990s resulted in many deserted villages across the country. The ongoing wave of mass out-migration threatens to cause further depopulation, especially in rural areas, where a high percentage of young people face a plethora of disadvantages and some forms of social exclusion almost by default. In the described atmosphere, optimistic stories of youth residing in (remoted) rural areas are rarely heard.

In this case, official data underpin such media narratives. Almost one-quarter (24.3%) of young people (aged 15–24) are identified as NEETs, neither in employment nor in education or training (World Bank & Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, 2019, p. 31), which is substantially higher than in the EU-28.

Research findings from 2019 show that the socio-economic environment has taken over the primacy of influence over heightened desire to emigrate from the individual characteristics that dominated a decade earlier (2009) (Čičić et al., 2019, p. 71). The same study confirms that younger respondents were exhibiting stronger migration aspirations than their older counterparts (ibid.).

Conducting content analysis of the various media sources (primarily news portals and YouTube channels), two positively connotated contents stand out.

The first story is about a young man (B.Č.) living in a traditional village located in Central Bosnia, who is proud of his peasant heritage. Unlike his counterparts, he does not express the intention to migrate, but he is willing to cope with all structural obstacles through his activism. The second story has been made within the serials “Stories from Bosnia“ (Priče iz Bosne“), and it is about a young man (M.H.) who lives in a village located in Zenica-Doboj Canton, with a master's degree earned from the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences UNSA. He is dedicated to the family business in healthy food production, applying his acquired knowledge and skills. During the interview, he does not complain about the hopeless situation, moreover, demonstrating a quite enthusiastic attitude.

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## **IMPROVING YOUTH MOBILITY BY PROVIDING BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION- A STUDY CASE FROM THE CITY OF INDJIIJA**

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Vesela Radovic

### Abstract

The aim of the study was a recommendation and establishment the concept of the specific part of local sustainable development which is recognizing NEET needs in emergencies and global challenges which affect their mobility. Competent authorities have to work on decreasing conditions for NEET's exclusion from wider society. Youth mobility in rural areas is the cornerstone which guarantees that declared goals which are important for NEET's community life will be achieved.

### Methods

Since this is a pilot project, we used methodology appropriate for social science: analyses of documents, historical approach and comparative analysis. A specific case study was presented in this study. It is related to the Indjija Town and municipality located in the Srem District of the autonomous province of Vojvodina in the Republic of Serbia. This municipality includes the town of Indjija and ten of its villages.

### Results

The finding shows that local community awareness related to rural youth mobility arises and some specific measures are applied at the local level. The important fact is that Indjija is a city which devoted a part of the budget to the improvement of youth mobility as well as the mobility of the rural population as a whole. Despite that, there are a few issues related to the limited public transport during weekends which reinforce a sense of social isolation. Youth is not able to attend some social events in Indjija and near cities without a car, and this state starts to be more serious for youth and especially for NEETs group. In some emergencies, like extreme weather events, their mobility is jeopardized, and so they lost their contacts during that period and the possibility to access services available in the city of Indjija. Even though these results are obtained at the local level, they confirmed that the case was pretty serious due to the increased cost of fuel and so maybe even the worsening of the current state of youth mobility. The pragmatic value of the paper lies in information obtained in this pilot research about the improvement of youth mobility and work of emergency services in emergencies using the new concept of transportation and as an initiative for competent authorities to solve this issue in the near future. NEET in this action has to be recognized as a valuable resource and not as a problem for the local community.

### Conclusion

Indjija is a city which can be recognized as an example of good practices related to rural youth mobility. This statement does not mean that there is no space for further

improvement of the public transport system. Policymakers have to define the real youth needs in rural areas and priorities intervention for the improvement of mobility. Since few of the Indjija villages are settled in the Danube River, maybe some possibilities for passenger river transport have to be recognized. Combine with the already existing road and rail system, this kind of transportation may contribute to the faster economic and social development of rural communities. NEETs and rural youth could have a significant role in the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction of rural infrastructure in emergencies and so increase the level of its resilience in emergencies (floods, extreme weather events, etc.). Policymakers should work on finding a way to improve the local public transportation system in rural areas, establish adequate coordination and communication, and provide financial means in order to achieve these goals. In this process, they have to give youth (NEETs) a specific role in the local community and provide their visibility. On the other side, policymakers should build back the citizen and youth's trust in what they are doing for population welfare using all their skills and abilities.

Keywords: city, village, youth mobility, social exclusion, emergency, energy crises.



## INVISIBLE? YOUTH WITH DISABILITY IN LABOUR MARKET IN LITHUANIA

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People with disabilities should have the same opportunities to participate in society and labour market as people without disabilities. It is the main prerogative of human rights and the Welfare State. There are two types of governmental support for people with disabilities - income support and services. Usually, the income support includes pensions and social assistance benefits. Whereas, services include adaptation accessibility to private and public buildings, the provision of technical aids that help in everyday and public environment, and the transportation. Nowadays, the sources of provision can be from state, market, and civil society (Greve, 2015). Baldock et al. (2012) stated that civil society should step and fill the gap between the state, family, and market. Meanwhile, civil society includes the third sector.

On the other hand, Rees and Mullins (2017) conceptualized that the third sector is composed of the organizational activity between the state, market, and private familial spheres. Alcock (2022), analysing welfare pluralism, mentioned third sector providers of welfare within the mixed economy. Thus, social policy and welfare theories tell us that welfare services come from the state, market, family, and the third sector. However, the configuration between these sources can differ in the countries and be unstable over time. Despite these differences, the support for the people with disabilities has to provide them with the same opportunities as the rest of social groups in the society. The provision of equal opportunities for people with disabilities has already been analysed from various aspects in Lithuania. Although, there is a lack of research regarding the youth situation in the labour market in rural areas and the role of NGOs in targetting and supporting this group of people. Thus, this research aims to answer the following questions: What is the employment, participation in ALMP, or education situation of youth with disabilities? and what support is provided by the government and NGOs for people with disabilities? To answer the first question, the secondary data of Lithuanian Statistics and PES (2021-2022) was analyzed and the microdata of LT –SILC 2019 (part of EU-SILC/ Survey of Income and Living Conditions) and microdata of the project "Judam" implemented by Lithuanian DYA (Department of Youth Affairs) in 2021 were analyzed. This project aims to reduce the number of 15-29 year old NEET youth through various interventions and the measures encouraging activity of the young people based on their needs and possibilities. The project started in 2019 and is expected to end in 2023. There were 35 young people with disabilities participating in the project. Unfortunately, the data related to youth with disabilities is not sufficiently comprehensive, therefore, the findings revealed only possible tendencies regarding the success of youth with disabilities in the project "Judam".

For the governmental support analysis, the following legal documents were analysed: Lithuanian Disabled social integration law (1991), Education Law (1991), Law of social services (2006), order of the Minister of Social Security and Labour for the provision of

technical aid for persons with disabilities (2006), Transport concession law (2000), Equal Opportunities law (2003), and Employment law (2016).

For evaluating NGOs' support for the reintegration of the people with disabilities into the labour market, the projects (described on NGOs websites) of 5 NGOs in Lithuania were selected related with the working skills improvement of people with disability. The current ongoing projects and implemented projects related to the reintegration of people with disabilities into the Labour market over 2018-2022 were analyzed. The period was selected according to the accessibility of information on websites.

The research findings revealed that youth with disabilities living in rural areas is "invisible" in the statistics, in the NGOs projects, and policy in general. That is a significant obstacle for evaluation of the situation and creation of a sufficient support system for the youth with disabilities in rural areas.

There is a lack of data on how many young people with a disabilities live in rural areas. The Lithuanian PES does not have data about youth with disabilities employment situation in rural areas. Our data sources indicated that youth with disabilities are mainly educated up to a basic education level. The majority of them have never worked. A minimal number of the persons with disabilities work or participate in ALMP. According to the "Judam" data, sometimes young people also live with families that experience various difficulties, including poverty.

Analysis of the policy revealed that all essential aspects of social integration of people with disabilities are covered. Social services and technical aid provision are legitimated to support people with disabilities to function equally with others in society, including labour market. The employment support is legitimated as well. Nevertheless, the rural aspect is not distinguished in legislation.

The Lithuanian NGOs implement various projects funded by the Department of Affairs of People with Disabilities. Social integration and working skills improvement are the main themes of these projects. However, it is unclear whether these services reach young people with disabilities in rural areas. These projects are concentrated on the improvement of various skills, such as handcrafts, IT skills, practical skills in the workplace, and seek to increase the motivation of people with disabilities as well as to provide them with guidance in their employment journey.

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## **ROLES OF ECO-FARMS AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES FOR RURAL NEETS**

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### **Abstract**

Social enterprises have been developed in different economic activities and regions in Slovenia which is the focus of this analysis. One of advantages of social enterprises can be to integrate and employ vulnerable socially excluded young people that cannot be integrated in the competitive labour market. However, it can also provide opportunities for development of agricultural and with agricultural related activities in rural areas. We focus on three case studies in Slovenia that are related to eco-farming in a typical agricultural activity and agriculture service cooperative that are engaged in marketing with farm inputs and farm outputs as well as processing of agricultural produce.

The first case study is Cooperative Dobrina.

The cooperative Dobrina promotes fair trade for local producers and brings together small farmers who produce organic fresh fruit, vegetables and traditional local food. The cooperative implemented activities to increase its network of producers and encourage new customer segments, including public schools, to procure locally produced quality food.

Great importance is placed on building and maintaining good relations between customers and producers and operating in a transparent manner.

The second case study is social farm Korenika.

The Korenika social farm is recognized as an example of good practice in the field of social entrepreneurship, employment of the disabled and persons from other vulnerable social groups.

They have a system of organic production and processing of food, so they grow crops, herbs, fruits and vegetables on more than 20 hectares. Korenika's mission is to cultivate dignity, respect and self-esteem, both among employees and to other people.

The third case study is Wine cooperative Haloze.

The cooperative connects winemakers for a joint performance on the market. This allows them to reduce the cost of grape production and processing of wine, which makes it possible to achieve higher market prices. At the same time, is a perspective for young people in the border area. They operate according to the principles of social entrepreneurship and connect winemakers in the border area.

To sum up, we clearly illustrate on the important roles of social enterprises in ecofarming, marketing of farm inputs and farm outputs, and processing of agricultural produce for integration of NEETs in the labour market and employment in remote rural areas. These positive experiences can also be transferable to other countries that are facing similar disadvantages in rural areas but also opportunities for development of social enterprises related to eco-innovation in farming, marketing, and processing agricultural and food products.

Keywords: eco-innovation, eco-farms, social enterprises, agricultural service cooperatives, NEETs

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ASSOCIATED WITH RURAL DEVELOPMENT – ROLE OF YOUTH IN TRANSFORMING RURAL AREAS

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### Abstract

Rural areas cover 44.6% of the total EU territory accounting for almost 30% of its population (EU, 2021). Rural areas were always important, contributing to economic growth, social pluralism and wellbeing of population while promoting environmental aesthetics. A recent statement from European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen "...Our rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy..." highlights the importance of rural areas. Rural areas are increasingly diversified, multidimensional, multi-sectoral, multifunctional in rural development, and because of that the study and practice of rural development require skills and insights from a wide range of disciplines. Identification of challenges and opportunities for youth in such an environment becomes more difficult despite the development of better methods and new instruments (Anderson, 2003). Therefore, this research aims to identify challenges and opportunities associated with youth in rural areas/rural development and outline the complexity of interactions that might influence youth to stay in rural areas, apply new and innovative business models and transform rural areas.

The multifunctionality (Knickel & Renting, 2000) and the role of youth in transforming rural areas and in rural development have been analyzed in this research. Recently, the service sector has been expanding rapidly and, as agriculture and industry shrink further, a rise of on- and off-farm non-farming employment activities and incomes, i.e., farm tourism or the integration of care services into farms (Oostindie 2000) become more prominent (Scoones, 2009). Even though agriculture is still very important for rural development, there is a wide range of non-agricultural activities (multisectoral dimension) such as with agriculture related natural resources – fishing and forestry – and services to agriculture (including input supply, marketing, transport, finance, agricultural processing). In addition, among the non-farm sectors are rural manufacturing, mining, other rural services, and rural infrastructure – roads, transport, energy, water, education, health. Diversification of activities has aimed at improving the competitiveness of rural areas, providing provision of alternative sources of income, and strengthening social cohesion in rural areas, those identified also as Common Agricultural Policy goals under the second pillar of rural development.

To achieve such research objectives, a rapid review was conducted using the Web of Science database. Rapid reviews (RRs) are seen as an efficient tool for quick and structured review of available secondary sources and are well used by the policy-makers





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## DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OF AGRICULTURE SECTOR AND SUBSECTORS IN ALBANIA. PROSPECTS OF RURAL YOUTH

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### Abstract

The agriculture sector and its subsectors (livestock, forestry, fisheries, crop production, food and nutrition industry, agri-tourism, medicinal plants) are the most important contributors of the Albanian economy. According to World Bank dataset, in 2020, agriculture, forestry and fishery contributed around 19.1% to the GDP of Albania, while are employed 36.1% of the total workforce. Beside the strategic importance that the sector has in terms of GDP growth and producing food for the population, its impact is vital on keeping rural communities, especially young people, in their territories. In addition, during the last two decades the number of rural population has decreased by 10%.

Despite the favorable conditions (climate, natural resources, very fertile soils, farmers experience), the productivity per unit of agricultural land is far below the average of other Balkan countries and EU. Even the efforts of governments and local institutions, through interventions aiming to improve productivity and quality of agriculture products, increase farmers incomes and improve living standards, have failed to reduce poverty in rural areas and keep rural youth in these regions.

The aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of the current situation, trends and challenges of the agriculture sector as a whole and to address issues that are related to the coherence between agriculture and development of rural territories and their communities, focusing mainly on young people. In addition, this paper provides important findings on the trend and prospects that young individuals have in terms of building their lives in rural areas, getting engaged in agriculture and get educated in agriculture-oriented study programs.

During this study, a mixed method approach was applied, consisting in quantitative and qualitative data. In order to provide a clear overview on the challenges and trends of the agriculture sector, a background description was carried out, using secondary data's from different sources (statistical offices, ministries and other agencies). The primary data collection method consisted on the distribution of the questionnaires on farmers, focusing mainly on demographic factors. In addition, the responses from the questionnaires were analysed in order to obtain their perceptions.

The observed decreasing trend in the number of young people working in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries; it is also reflected in a decline in the number of graduates applying and enrolling in agriculture science programs. Even more pestilent is the

reduction rate that is related to the number of students from rural areas, following vocational schools or high school studies in these disciplines, whose motivation would probably be greater because of the conjunction they have with rural areas. Even though the number of graduates in agricultural profiles occupations has declined rapidly and despite the high demand in the labor market, paradoxically, a large number young people remain unemployed. Beside the structural problems of farm size, low investments, insufficient financial support from the state and the low levels of technology, the sufficient level of knowledge and well-trained human resources remain the most important challenge that Albania is confronting with and is foreseen to continue even more in the future. It is imperative that state policies should look for more efficient ways to increase overall agricultural production and improve quality of life in rural territories.

Albania has a significant trade deficit in delivering agricultural products with the EU. Considering the effects of external factors, first market distortions due to the pandemic of Covid -19, and then the war between Russia and Ukraine, domestic producers will have to face the problem of increased production prices for a mediumterm period. In this context, the market demand for animal and plant products that are locally produced has been already affected and will continue to do so in the future. The above challenges emphasize the strategic role of agriculture and rural communities, as important elements in improving the economic balance of food imports and exports for the local population.

Increasing agricultural productivity, farm diversification, the requirements for the quality and safety of agricultural and animal products, and the reduction of negative impacts on the environment, as part of the approximation of the sector with EU standards, it will lead to an expansion of the labor market in the field of agriculture and its subsectors. Moreover, it will have a significant impact in the demand for welltrained young people, with proper competences and skills needed for the future labor market of this sector.

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## MICRO LEVEL EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS IN RURAL AREAS: DEVELOPING TRANSVERSAL SKILLS IN IRELAND, PORTUGAL AND TURKEY

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European youth face significant challenges as the wider citizenship of Europe makes a transition towards a more sustainable and digitally enabled future. At the heart of this twin transition is UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal No.4 - Education. However, while education in various guises such as formal, non-formal or semi-formal seeks to engage the widest possible audience, young people in rural areas experience challenges that are particular to their socio-geographic status that inhibit the development of the skills required to help them move with this macro-level transition. Issues such as traditional and engrained perspectives on education, depopulation and access to technology are endemic in many EU member states and beyond. Notwithstanding these challenges, programmes that seeks to enhance the employability of young people both in formal and non-formal education at the micro-level do succeed. In short, the narratives that tell the stories of the 'how' these programmes were designed are often lost at the expense of macro-level reporting. It is this gap that the authors seek to address, and ultimately contribute to SDG No.4 as it relates to European rural youth. This paper reports on three programmes that seek to help young Europeans develop critical transversal, or horizontal, skills as part of pedagogical processes of learning in particular contexts and the value of micro-level activities being disseminated widely.

Firstly, we present a community-based study support practice established in 2013 in the 5th Generation of the Choices Programme (5EG), in a municipality in the northeastern of Portugal characterized as a rural and inland area, that has been developed up to the 8EG (2022). Choices is a nationwide government programme created in 2001 whose mission is to promote social inclusion of children and young people from vulnerable socio-economic contexts focusing on equal opportunities and strengthening social cohesion. The programme is based on projects and managed by local organizations. The practice is aimed at children and young people between the ages of 6 and 25 in the neighbourhoods of the Choices Project intervention area (Rodrigues et al., 2018). These young people, in general, come from families with low education levels, with disqualified jobs and/or unemployed situation. The main goal of this study support practice is to promote success and progression in school outcomes through educational support focuses on school monitoring and guidance. It also provides support for individualized learning in a way to increase autonomous and collaborative work among children and young people (Antunes, 2017). Overall, the practice seems to stand out the capacity to generate change in individuals and in addition in the community. For most participants, this local project and

this study support practice has been the only answer in an isolated and stigmatised territory.

Secondly, an adaptive skill assessment tool was introduced developed for the problems and needs experienced in the basic skill assessment processes of young people, which is one of the problems experienced by public and private institutions working for employment.

It is very important to determine the skills that young people have in placing them in jobs and taking them into training programs necessary for the job (Klosters, 2014). In Turkey rate of low skilled youth is more than from other countries at European Union. Government, public and private institutions and NGOs, face with skill and education problems for youth's employment process. One of the main challenges that employment agencies and job experts face with is not to assess youths for job direction, informal and vocational training. This challenge becomes even more difficult in countries like Turkey where the rate of unemployed and low-skilled youth is high. Developing key employability skills and enabling lifelong learning for all presents major challenges for organizations and professionals offering job-oriented training. Each assessment of individual skills and abilities is crucial to creating an environment conducive to learning for young people (Basharat and others, 2020).

Skills tests are the main tool for learning and making assumptions about young people's skills. There are several disadvantages to using a traditional test to accurately identify the skills of low-qualified youth. The use of individualized testing tools and adaptive skill assessment tools supported by artificial intelligence eliminates the disadvantages that can be experienced and provides an opportunity to make more accurate assessments. (Sireci and others, 2005)

Finally, in the context of rural community in the west of Ireland a social innovation programme called INNOVATE21 was developed with the explicate aim of presenting sustainable opportunities for intergenerational knowledge exchange through collaborative community based problem solving. Informed by a social constructionist perspective (Weinberg, 2008), a secondary objective of this programme was for young people to develop critical transversal skills through pedagogically informed embodied learning processes. A total of 26 young rural dwellers met with 12 senior members of their community in an effort to collaboratively solve environmental issues that were particular to their locality that included conservation, recycling and local employability using the DIVE-IN process of problem identification (Flynn, 2018). This process was framed by a whole group entry by the young participants to the Irish pathway to the UNESCO Young Environmentalist Awards. Mixed methods data collected in the form of surveys, focus groups and interviews and analysed triangulated. Findings indicate that young people did develop transversal skills through participation in the programme and that the meaningful, local nature of the activities had impact on the willingness of the young people to engage with their elders. Secondly it was evident that both young and elders had more to offer each other than first thought resulting in the development of a youth membership of the local community council which presented opportunities for the rural young people to have a sustainable pathway for the vertical implementation of the skills that they had developed.

This paper presents a valuable insight into three micro-level programmes and the 'how' of transversal skill development, through meaningful participation, as it relates to macro-level policy. The authors argue that it is vital that such dissemination reaches as wide an audience as possible so that others may adapt and or adopt these practices in their own contexts.

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## POLICY RESPONSES TO REAL WORLD CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH NEET YOUTH: A SCOPING REVIEW

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### Abstract

Over the past ten years, young people who are not in education or employment have come into focus of policy-makers worldwide. In this an inter-sectoral and cross-level policy-making area are high political expectations for various supporting and intervention initiatives. Despite the global focus, there is currently a lack of systematic knowledge of the factors that hinder service creation and policy-making. Therefore, using the case-by-case approach to qualitative text analysis, a systematic literature overview of the focus issues and findings of research in 2013–2021 on young people not in education or employment will be provided. The research revealed five key issues to consider from a service and policy-making perspective: ‘NEET’ as a term, the heterogeneity of target group, the impact of policies for young people, possible interventions and factors influencing young people coping strategies. There were no research papers focusing on youth co-creation, including community-based service creation, although for service creation related to more complex target groups, the need for community level and young as co-production of the service is scientifically proven (Voorberg, 2013; Windsor, 2017; Osborne, 2018). Based on the political categories created by Mascherini (2019) (7), the analysis pointed out that studies on the subcategories defined in the different categories can be partially found, while there were no studies targeting young people having NEET-status whose current situation (e.g. privileged) may lead to the understanding that they do not need support (e.g. Andrade & Jarvinen 2017; Ng-Knight & Schoon, 2017) or whose support has not been sufficient and they are directed towards the following service providers (e.g. Avila & Rose, 2019). Such knowledge may make it necessary for policy-making to take into account the differences between interventions and service creation and to create an eighth category for which the area of vulnerability of the young person (risk situation) is unknown and where it can be taken into account that the young person may not perceive himself/herself in these categories.

On the basis of a systematic literature analysis, that further research and support for NEET-youth must be seen as inter- and multidisciplinary respectively, and that this requires to apply the holistic principle upon approaching young people in service and policy-making, which requires that the young person be seen as a unique person and whose involvement in service creation supports the service’s compliance with the actual needs of young people. As factors contributing to finding and supporting young people (case management), it is important to take into account differences within a single sociological group; the smoothness, stability and interaction between the different site-based policies; young people’s sense of self-perception, rights and autonomy in entering and developing support services; possible coping strategies and the need to provide

support/services in a time and place-based flexible and caring environment through multidisciplinary teams. The results of the study are linked to the EU's reinforced Youth Guarantee, and also pointed to possible future research topics related to the target group.

Keywords: NEETs, Youth Guarantee, service creation, policy-making, interventions, definition, heterogeneity, coping strategies

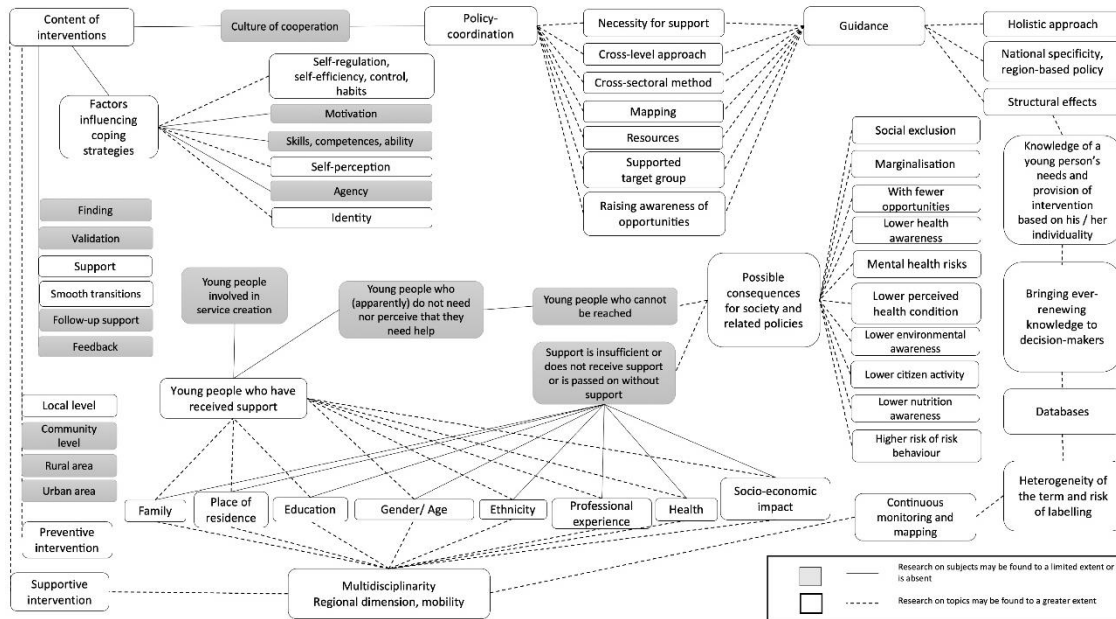


Figure: Main and less represented thematic focuses on case management for young people having NEET-status in research, prepared by the author

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## IMPROVED INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES AND NEW MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE FOR TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION IN THE DANUBE REGION

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The Institutes within Regional Cluster "North-East", have been working for 30 years on topics related to rural development, establishment of LAGs and FLAGs, helping young people to be involved in traditional professions. Our efforts are focused on sustainable and balanced development of rural and underdeveloped areas in Bulgaria with partners from EU. The organization of training and qualification courses for young people from rural and disadvantaged areas is also a traditional activity, as part of the policy to attract and retain human capital in the agricultural sector. The organization has worked on numerous projects for youth and NEET funded by various European and other Programmes.

The report presents information about a project related to the topics of the Conference. Analyzes, methodology and conclusions developed by our team related to youth employment and entrepreneurship, sustainability and community development are presented. The results of the studies presented in the report are the basis for developing proposals for changes and improvement of local and national Youth Policies.

TalentMagnet /TalentMagnet - Improved Institutional Capacities and New Multilevel Governance for Talent Attraction and Retention in the Danube Region. (2020, July 1). TalentMagnet - Interreg Danube. Retrieved June 30, 2022, from <https://www.interregdanube.eu/approved-projects/talentmagnet/> addresses major societal challenges caused by the outmigration of highly-educated young people, primarily from small- and medium sized towns, especially in rural areas, in the Danube Region. This has grave demographic and labour market implications: these countries experience shortage of highly educated labour force. Limited institutional capacities and lack of prior experience of public bodies, other relevant stakeholders (especially in smaller towns) hinder effective combating against outmigration of young workforce from rural areas.

The main objective of TalentMagnet is to strengthen multilevel governance and improve institutional capacities to reduce the outmigration of talented young workforce. Our partnership is characterized by transnational, intersectoral and multilevel cooperation forming a Quadruple Helix model with partners from academia, business, politics/administration and civil society in a joint learning process.

Specific objectives to address the mentioned problems and challenges:

- Develop capacities and facilitate cooperation of public sector bodies and other stakeholders to attract and retain talented young people in rural areas.
- Design, test and promote talent attraction and retention tools and guides: as a clearly identified challenge, many small and medium-sized towns in the region lose highly educated young people.
- Strengthen framework conditions by improving the policy environment: addressing the lack of supportive framework conditions (legislation, funding, support organizations, mechanisms).

We collected and reviewed scientific and practical literature, good practices of talent attraction and retention and its governance, ran primary research on local level. The results were summarized in a Baseline Study. We synthesized findings and tailored them to the needs of smaller towns, especially in rural areas. Partners developed methodology and toolkits for multilevel governance of talent attraction and retention. Using the methodology partner towns are designing talent attraction/retention plans, implement rapid pilot actions. Finally, key findings will be collected, enabling identification of policy learnings, dissemination and capitalization.

Key innovative elements of our approach:

- 1) Holistic: retaining/attracting talent is not just a labour market challenge; in fact, it is a complex issue. TalentMagnet creates ecosystem built on multilevel governance to shape talent-friendly towns.
- 2) Customer focus- we design attractive environment with the „customers” –talented young people - not for them, but engaging them with innovative participative tools.
- 3) Cutting edge methods of behavioural economy: talent attraction/retention requires influencing behaviour; we use approaches developed in behavioural economy (knowledge from private sector).
- 4) Focus on smaller towns: large cities invest heavily in talent attraction/retention. The problem, however, is more apparent in small- sized especially in rural areas.
- 5) Use of innovative ICT solutions: wherever appropriate we use ICT tools – the elearning programme on new multilevel governance and the TalentMagnet app.
- 6) Instead of large-scale investments we propose an integrated system with low-cost solutions.
- 7) Our organization participated in the development of a questionnaire for selfassessment of young people from rural areas, the results of which were used for an app, which was developed by Ruse University.
- 8) Independent surveys will be conducted among stakeholders and young talents who, applying the "Traffic Light Method", will evaluate different towns according to pre-set criteria. The criteria will be selected on the basis of the workshops and activities conducted with young people from the region and the requirements set by them to be a town talent friendly. A similar assessment of the towns, applying the "Traffic Light

Method", will be made by a team of independent experts, based on the developed Talent attraction and retention local plans, applying the same criteria. The collected results will be summarized and based on them will be launched an annual "green", "yellow" or "red" book of municipalities, which will reflect the state and progress of cities in implementing policies to attract and retain young talents. In addition to the quantitative indicators related to the assessment of the conditions for the retention and attraction of young people in rural areas, we also offer a system of six qualitative indicators that range from 1 to 100 /where 1 is the minimum and 100 is the maximum/: ability to attract and keep talented persons, additional training and qualification courses for labor force, the quality of stimulative system, quality of life, environment and services for wellbeing.

The main envisaged result of TalentMagnet is establishment of new multilevel and transnational governance model for talent attraction and retention. Gradual decline of the important part of the region's future workforce is a major threat with negative demographic and labour market implications. To effectively tackle this challenge, most of all a much stronger cooperation of relevant stakeholders is needed – on local, regional, national and even transnational level. However, TalentMagnet not only strengthens cooperation through a better functioning multilevel governance model, but also will significantly improve the capacity of institutional actors, enabling the creation of optimal framework conditions in local communities to attract and retain talents. By attracting and retaining talented young workforce TalentMagnet helps at least to sustain and even increase competitiveness, thus also contributes to the economic development of the rural areas.



## LIFE PLANS IN COVID TIMES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS: THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS

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### Aims

With the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in Europe, most of the governments imposed restrictive measures to people mobility and physical distance (the lockdowns), which severely impacted on the economic activities and performance of many countries. Thus, the health emergency turned rapidly into an economic crisis. Thus, the recession further increased the uncertainty about the economic recovery and the end of the health emergency. This situation is supposed to have conditioned individuals' life course path with the effect of inducing people to postpone or to abandon many life plans.

In the present study, we explore whether the rise of the COVID-19 crisis has delayed or vanished young people's life plans, and especially those related with leaving the parental home, in order to establish their own household, and having a child, during the 2020-2021 period in Italy. In particular, we answer whether this relationship (i.e., between occupational and financial uncertainty and life plans) is somehow moderated by the contextual features, and in particular by living in rural or urban areas.

### Theoretical approach

The expected negative association between economic uncertainty and life plans is consistent with the Uncertainty Framework (see Vignoli et al. 2020). An enormous increase in economic uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic has already been widely documented (Backer et al. 2020; Lambert et al. 2020). Economic uncertainty has been traditionally defined and measured through labour market indicators such as being unemployed or being employed with a temporary contract (e.g., Kreyenfeld 2012). Young people are extremely financially vulnerable to economic crises (Aassve et al. 2013, Sironi 2018). Those who were employed before the crisis are usually in sectors that are particularly affected by recessions (O'Higgins 2014, Verick 2009). Additionally, because employed young people are at the beginning of their work career, they usually rely on informal or temporary contracts, which are easily at risk of ending in recession periods (Marcus and Gavrilovic 2010). Finally, NEETs and those who did not enter the labour market yet face increased difficulties in finding a job, while if they finally succeed to get an occupation that is usually very precarious (Sironi 2018).



Because recessions undermine the occupational stability, as the prospect and the real earning of young people, which are prerequisites for gaining a financial and housing autonomy, most of them postpone the steps towards the transition to adult (Bell et al. 2007, Iacovu 2010).

The expected moderation role of the rural-urban local feature is supported by the sociological framework of the traditional dichotomy between community and society (Tönnies, 2012). On the one hand, young individuals living in smaller municipalities are expected to gain support from a close network of family ties and even from the local community, which partially counterbalance the scarcity of public and private services. On the other hand, large municipalities offer a great variety and availability of market and welfare services, to mitigate the weaker community support.

### Methodology

Using data from the “Youth Project”, carried out by the Toniolo Institute of Advanced Studies, this paper implements logistic models for polychotomous dependent variables to investigate the factors associated with a possible revision of the choice of leaving the parental home and having a child. The analyses have been conducted on a representative sample of 6,000 Italians aged 18 to 34, interviewed in March 2020, April 2021, and November 2021. In more detail, we compare the effect of the occupational condition (with a particular emphasis on the condition of NEETs) and employment vulnerability on the chance of confirmation, postponement or abandonment of the pre-pandemic plans, moderated by the fact of living in rural or urban areas.

### Findings

Preliminary results show that young people with precarious jobs seem to be the most prone to negatively revise their intentions of leaving and planning a childbirth, even compared with those not working. This association is persistent over the two years. Regarding the moderator effect of living in rural or urban areas, we observe that living in both small and large municipalities has a protective effect over the decision to have a child, probably due to the efficacy of the support network of the local community - in the small municipalities - and of the large provision of (private and public) services - in the large municipalities. Results are consistent with those concerning the choice of leaving the parental home if related to temporary workers and NEETs: young Italian NEETs and people with precarious jobs living in the smallest and largest municipalities are less likely to abandon the plan of leaving away.

Keywords: Life plans, Covid-19, NEET

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## **POLICIES FOR NEETS' EMPLOYMENT ACROSS EU COUNTRIES**

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Keywords: employment, education, public policies, active labour market policies

### Abstract

The landscape of public policies addressing the youth employment is very puzzled at European level, with many measures proposed by the European Commission within the Youth Guarantee Programme, but with many other measures developed at national level.

### Aim

Taking into account the diversity of the public policy framework on youth employment, our paper examines the employment policy trends affecting youth in 7 European countries (Italy, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Spain). The cross country comparison of the last 10 years policies on youth employment influencing PES tracking types' effectiveness analyzes the commonalities and differences in policy goals, instruments used, types of active labour market policies proposed to be implemented or specific NEETs targeted.

### Theoretical approach

The public policies addressing NEETs employment assessment look at various types of active labour market policies like: "incentive reinforcement" - measures that aim to strengthen work incentives for benefit recipients (e.g. Tax credits, in work benefits, benefit conditionality); "employment assistance" - measures aimed at removing obstacles to labor-market participation (e.g. placement services, job-search programs, counseling, job subsidies, help in finding and paying for a suitable day care service for employee's children, job rotation schemes, and start-up incentives); "occupation" – measures to keep jobless people busy, to prevent the depletion of human capital associated with an unemployment spell (e.g. . job creation and work experience programs in the public or nonprofit sector – apprenticeship, internship, short-term employment); and "human capital investment/ upskilling" – training for general competences/ soft skills or specific skills/ vocational training (Bonoli, 2010). A more detailed classification of active labour market policies is provided by Tosun, Unt and Wadensjö (2017): human capital investment (general measures that entail basic education and vocational training), labor market training that entails temporary programs to improve relevant skills (e.g. how to write a job application), job search assistance and monitoring (this group of measures contains counselling and mentoring to increase the commitment and motivation of job search, including benefit sanctioning), wage subsidies (the provision of subsidized wages or income support schemes to provide private companies an incentive to hire young people), public sector employment program (the provision of state-funded temporary

employment opportunities) and other that includes measures that cannot be assigned to any of the above categories.

Youth are one of the age categories most affected by unemployment at EU level and economic crises deepen this issue. COVID-19 pandemic also had a negative impact on youth employment, working and living conditions and mental well-being (Eurofound, 2021). Many studies show that youth unemployment has an economic and social impact also (e.g., lack of social support, lack of social insurance, being more vulnerable to physical and mental problems, feeling of shame and low self-esteem, and increased likelihood of experiencing periods of unemployment at later ages etc.) (Brandt and Hank 2014; Gregg 2001; Vancea and Utzet 2017; Shore and Tosun 2019).

### Methodology

The paper draws on extensive public policy analysis of programmes and policies targeting NEETs employment in seven EU countries. The transnational comparative assessment provide an overview of the NEETSs programs and policies across EU, and analyse whether their focus change over time, the policy instruments change over time, there are salient differences across countries, there is a focus on rural areas, there are targets on specific areas (e.g. disadvantaged regions), there are differentiations on categories of NEETs and active labour market policies used. For each country the analysis started from active labour market policies for youth included in LABREF database and was extended to other policies relevant at national level. All the public policies were coded in MAXQDA using a common coding framework.

### Findings

The paper presents the preliminary findings of the cross national assessment of public policies developed within the project Track-IN | Public employment services tracking effectiveness in supporting rural NEETs.

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## **AN OVERVIEW OF CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN ALBANIA: A SOCIAL COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS WITH SPECIAL FOCUS IN YOUTH ARTISTS.**

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The aim of this study is to analyse and to have a general overview of the creative and cultural industries in Albania. The empirical evidences worldwide shows the important economic and social role that the development of CCI industries have in the sustainable economic development of the country. This evidence is also noticed in Albania and based on "Albanian National Strategy on Culture, 2019-2025", CCI are seen as the main driver for economic development in the long term. In this paper we have analysed this sector in order to have an evidence-based snapshot on how these industries contribute to the social and economic development of the Albanian economy. Also we have discussed some of the current issues that these industries are facing today, such as: the challenges and difficulties, as well as the growth opportunities and their potential for future development. In this paper we have obtained the main economic indicators of the Albanian CCI industries from various sources, such as the Labour Force Survey database from INSTAT and the Albanian Ministry of Culture, and some other resources from private bodies and representative organizations, in order to perform a social cost-benefit analysis of these industries with special focus on youth artists employability. The main results of the paper conclude the lack of access to finance of the cultural and creative industries, and little know-how in management, marketing and legal issues of new artist and suggest that promoting professional development of new artist in the cultural industries can be a viable solution for job creation and employment sustainability.

Keywords: CCI industries, youth artist, social cost – benefit analysis, economic growth.



## A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYMENT AND INTEGRATION OF ALBANIAN STUDENTS BELONGING TO RURAL AREAS.

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The fundamental social changes that Albanian society has experienced and continues to experience in recent decades have resulted in major socio-economic changes, and in particular, have affected the perspectives of young people in society.

This study focuses on some primordial issues of Albanian youth, focusing especially on the rural students' perspectives. The aim of the research was focused on the specific position of young people, on the causes and consequences of this change, and in a more specific way deepening the challenges of students belonging to rural areas. In particular, it is empathized with the problems and difficulties, that they have faced while looking for jobs.

Besides gathering and exploring the literature, reports, and data related to our study, about 100 semi-structured questionnaires and about 80 interviews were administered online with students from Aleksander Moisiu University and the Agricultural University of Tirana. Through the questions and interviews conducted with the key students, it was tried to find out if their educational and academic investment was worth it. Through the opinions and students' experiences, it has been concluded that there are differences between students who stay in rural areas and those in urban ones. If there is a difference, what are the main differences? Are these students privileged compared to the students integrated into the rural area?

Data was gathered and analyzed using thematic analysis. Specifically, the research paper should cover four elements: a) Provide an overview of the key elements that characterize the situation of young students in Albania's rural areas, even referring to some case studies; b) In addition an attempt is made to discover opportunities to provide possible guidance or orientation to support the role of young people (students) in rural areas, but in a more integrative perspective; c) Provide an overview of the effect of rural development policies on the integration of young people into social and economic life in rural areas of the country, highlighting the key critical issues of existing rural development policies; d) Identify possible approaches and instruments to improve the integration of youth in rural areas in the context of integration, both concerning rural development and cohesion policy.

Some of the main findings from the data analyzed show that young people feel an added confusion about pursuing higher education. Also, it shows that young educated people belonging to rural areas face greater difficulties in terms of employment and integration. Even when they are integrated or managed to be employed near urban areas, their challenges are doubled due to other high social and economic costs.

Keywords: *integration, employment, social cohesion, social policy, youth*





## **ABANDONMENT OF SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS IN ALBANIA**

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### Abstract

In the recent decade, nearly 18 thousand students have abandoned schools in rural areas in Albania. This paper focuses on the main factors leading to this phenomena which will have a bad impact on the future. Education is one of the most important values in our society and recently has adapted itself to the social changes carrying also many concerning problems. First we should analyze the concept of abandoning schools, its leading factors and what should be done to reduce this phenomenon in the Albanian educational system. Despite the fact that participation in education is an obligation and a child's right, the school dropout is becoming more and more an important issue for rural environment but not only. More and more it is becoming a serious social problem affecting even middle school level. Rural schools face a lot of problems related to emigration due to poverty and other social issues, technology and other facilities. There have been cases in which rural schools have been forced to shut down as families move to urban areas. We will analyze the main causes concerning the educational development highlighting their impact but not seeing only them as the key factors of this undesirable situation.

Keywords: education, rural environment, school dropout.

### Introduction

The school dropout as a negative phenomena is increasing in rural environment due to both historical and social factors. There are cases in which due to patriarchal views, girls as they became adults, are forced to leave school and get married. This leads to inferiority and raises ignorance through society. Economical factors also affect seriously the school dropout because a lot of families do not find job in rural areas and so they can not afford the basic living conditions. Poor people have a lower registration in educational system, compared to the other part of population. Being in such difficult economical situation a lot of children are forced to work in order to help their family and earn a living. This way they are demotivated to learn and thus they easily choose to drop school. Migrating without a proper plan has also had a big impact in our society.

### Purpose of the study:

The aim of our study is to identify and analyze the key factors affecting the school dropout in rural areas and what can be done to lower this negative impact.

### Methodology



The methods used in the present study were from literature, official documents from Ministry of Albanian Education, UNICEF studies.

### Findings

We mentioned some factors contributing to the school dropout but even the curricula itself should be well adapted to our traditions and infrastructure. We should not borrow curricula, even the best on, artificially, without taking in consideration our cultural and intellectual formation and even the lack of infrastructure (schools being far from houses, difficult road conditions, lack of labs). Naturally we ask: How can we reduce school dropout in rural areas? Better social and political decisions and professional teachers eager to learn new things, can influence reduce the impact of school dropout. Every student is talented in different areas but is the teachers duty to identify the students talent. Being an objective phenomena, the school dropout can and must be reduced.

## BECOMING NEET IN EASTERN EUROPE

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### Aims

In this paper we would like to give an overview about the socio-demographic characteristics of NEET's aged 15–29 living in Eastern-Europe, more precisely in four regions of the Carpathian Basin. The aim of our sociological analysis consist in the identification of factors that affects and lies behind the NEET status. In other words, we would like to answer the question *who are the NEET's, which social groups are the most vulnerable* in terms of educational and labour market exclusion. We also examine NEET's attitude toward work and migration, and the effects of Covid19 on youth lifestyle.

### Theoretical approach

According to European statistics (Eurostat) in 2021, three of the examined countries (Serbia, Romania and Slovakia) were between states with the highest NEET rates in Europe. At European Union level, Romania was one of the five countries where NEET rates had increased in the past decade, and nowadays more than 20% of young people aged 15–29 were neither in employment nor in education or training. These numbers underline that in the targeted region transition from education to work is a relevant and severe social problem.

Despite of the huge data on youth positions in social structure, at local level only a few dealt with NEET's, specifically in minority context. As a result of his wide range crossnational youth research Gábor (2012) was drawing the attention to youth vulnerability under the conditions of economic transitions. He mentioned that members of ethnic minorities and those with disadvantaged (mostly rural) settlement are more likely to become members of disadvantaged groups in terms of employment. Csata (2017) has also confirmed that precarious situation is closely related to rural areas, lower education and ethnicity. For example, in case of Romania the social position of Hungarian young people was worse than that of Romanians and he expected no significant improvements in this respect.

### Methodology

In this study we provide a comparative overview of Hungarian NEET's in the neighboring countries of Hungary: Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine, with the aim to present the latest trends of the past two decades (2001–2020) by using two datasets of the Hungarian Youth Research project. The *MOZAIK 2001* research was the first largescale youth study among ethnic Hungarians in the neighboring countries of Hungary, carried out in 2001. The second dataset relies on the *Hungarian Youth Research* project, and its last wave was completed in 2020, with data collection modeled on the earlier survey. In the *MOZAIK 2001* research 6 480-, in *Hungarian Youth 2020* 4 000 young people were surveyed in the neighboring countries of Hungary (in the four larger regions inhabited by

Hungarians outside the border). Both research projects<sup>22</sup> are representative of Hungarian minority youth aged 15–29. In the frame of Hungarian Youth 2020 research personal interviews were made with 2000 young people in Transylvania (Romania), 1000 in Southern Slovakia, and 500 in Vojvodina (Serbia) and Subcarpathia (Ukraine) each, on questions related to demography and marital situation, social background and education, labor market situation, value system, religion, politics, civic attitudes, and migration willingness. Data collection took place at the same time and with the same methodology in the four regions.

The first part of our papers empirical section is a general description of the population, and its attitudes, while the second, using logistic regressions identifies the factors affecting NEET status.

### Findings

In larger perspective, the educational situation of young people has improved somewhat in the past two decades in all regions. While in 2001 32–42% of youth belonging to the Hungarian minority were in education and training, in 2020 nearly half of them were involved in education system. The rate of young NEET's has slightly decreased (with 0,6–8,2 percentage point) and is over 9% in all countries. However, there are still significant gender differences, the gender gap has narrowed by 2020. Being neither employed nor in education or training increases with age, and reaches the highest point in the 25–29 cohort. Young people from villages, but overall with rural residence are more likely to fall into the NEET category, as well as their lower educated and married peers.

Our analysis revealed that the Covid-pandemic has fundamentally changed youth' lifestyle, a large portion of the respondents reported significant changes in their living conditions and economic situation. In the short run, consequences of the Covid19 hit young people with rural residency more than townsfolds, older cohorts more than youngsters, and inactive people more than those present on labour market and in education. Almost all of the NEET's (excepting Vojvodina) reported that their economic situation and further education plans have changed definitely in negative direction as a result of the epidemic.

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## **THE QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT AND THE ASSESSMENT OF WORKING CONDITIONS BY YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

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### Aims

The research aims to verify how people with disabilities who entered the labour market in Poland in the period 2020-2021 assess aspects of their work. Our research focuses on the following elements: employment stability, employment and working conditions, job satisfaction, competencies and development opportunities, social relations and relations at work. In addition to assessing individual areas of work, it is important to answer the following questions:

- Do young people with disabilities work in the open labour market or is it most often the so-called Protected labour market?
- Do young people with disabilities work more often in the open labour market than people in the older age group?
- What jobs do young people with disabilities work at?
- What is the level of remuneration of people with disabilities in the younger and older age group?

The research compares the situation of young people aged 18-29 with disabilities with the case of people in older age groups.

### Theoretical approach

Despite the improvement in the situation in the labour markets, which has been observed for years in many countries, and despite technological development, the development of the information society, and greater awareness of the need for lifelong learning, still a large group of young people remain outside the labour market and the education system. In the literature, this group is called NEET (not in employment, education or training). In addition, subsequent restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in numerous changes in the sphere of work that affected young people the most (Lee et al., 2021, Fiaschi D., Tealdi C., (2021). Adams-Prassl et al., 2020, Eurofound, 2020). The difficulties become even more significant if they are people with disabilities. According to the Eurofund (2012), disability is one of the reasons why young people are not professionally active and are not in education. Due to the special needs of this group of people, we should pay attention not only to the fact of employment but also to the quality of employment, working conditions and their satisfaction with professional life.

One of the primary measures of employment quality is its perception by the employees themselves, which can be reflected in a comprehensive assessment of job satisfaction.



Satisfaction, in addition to determining attitudes and individual evaluation of attitudes towards the work itself, also refers to the level of meeting the individual's needs in the work environment. These needs include financial satisfaction, development and promotion opportunities, or employee relations. Therefore, satisfaction is a complex measure that depends on internal factors (e.g. age, gender or level of education) and external factors (e.g. organizational culture). Job satisfaction is related to the physical and mental wellbeing of employees. Job satisfaction may be a key variable in building value in the labour market for people with disabilities.

#### Data, methodology and findings

Our dataset contains information on around 2300 people with disabilities who participated in the countrywide professional activation programmes in 2020-2021. Within the questionnaire, we gathered information about their employment status and the quality of employment up to 6 months after the end of the programme. We compare the situation of young people aged 18-29 with older age groups by presenting descriptive statistics and running regression models to control for the sociodemographic characteristics and the level of disability.

The preliminary results show that both groups share similar employment outcomes. Most of the programme beneficiaries worked three and six months after the programme (80.6% among young people and 81.1% among older people), most on the basis of the employment contract (97.0% among young people and 97.6% among older people), and most full time (88.0% among young people and 87.8% among older people). Younger people were slightly more satisfied with their job (79.7% among young people and 73.4% among older people) and had a slightly better salary (66.2% of young people and 59.5% of older people earned more than 2000 PLN (app. 420 EUR)), however, these differences are not statistically significant. Young people more often worked in the open labour market (87.2% vs. 79.8%). This difference is statistically significant and holds after controlling for sex, age, education and the level of disability.

The analysis shows that 18-29 years old individuals with disabilities who took part in employment activation programmes share many similarities in the employment outcomes up to six months after taking part in the programme with people aged 30 years and more. The analysis shows that older individuals face more difficulties in transitioning to the open labour market which may suggest that they need more support in this process.

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## YOUNG RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO PROMOTE YOUTH RESILIENCE IN ALGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

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### Aims

Food security in Algeria depends very closely on the foreign market. The Covid-19 crisis has brought to light the extroversion of the Algerian food system, with all the resulting risks, and reminds the need for a redeployment of efforts with a view to setting up a vigorous approach of food security. The national data show that the unemployment rates among young people are alarming: 31.1% (2005), 21.3% (2009), and 26.9% (2019). In the rural areas, the problem is more important and increases the internal migration toward cities. A category strongly impacted by unemployment is the category of young people aged 16 to 24 who are three times more likely than adults to be out of work, due to the difficulties they encounter in entering the labour market, closely linked to the question of the adequacy between training and employment and the employability of young graduates.

In this sense, agriculture occupies an important place within the Algerian national economy as well as in the development of its rural territories, with just over 12% of non-hydrocarbon GDP, just over 20% of the active population, and 70% of the national value of food consumption. The rapid urbanisation (70% of the total population in 2020 against 30% in 1970s) raises the issues of food availability, rural development, resilience, and rural poverty. agricultural/rural dualism is apparent in the public policies ignoring, in fact, the others rural population aspirations (culture, sport ...). The rural entrepreneurship concept is less known in Algeria and is not taken into account in the nomenclature of public policies.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the different on-going public programs targeting the rural youth entrepreneurship in relation with the national food security objective and to propose new policy implications in order to enhance the public intervention regarding the rural youth population.

### Public program to promote Youth entrepreneurship

The last governmental program has retained two objectives regarding the entrepreneurship promotion: Develop entrepreneurship, and strengthen the innovation system. These objectives are developed through enhancing the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the incubation to limit the future SMEs mortality.

The scheme to promote salaried employment DAIP (Professional Integration Support Scheme): scheme intended for young people under 35, to facilitate the professional integration of young first-time job seekers.

The data were collected from the public bodies: ANSEJ, ANGEM, CNAC, and the national statistical office. Also, we reviewed the academic studies carried out on this subject on specific areas and programs.

### Work methodology

We retained the United Nations definition: youth as individuals in age group ranging from 15 to 24 years. Rural youth are young people that reside in rural areas embedded in the socio-cultural context and they are heterogeneous in terms of gender, age, and education (regarding the available data). national statistical scheme is not efficient and do not collect information related to the young entrepreneurship (especially in rural areas). So, the adopted methodology was based on the national data collected from the employment bodies (National Agency for Support and Development of Entrepreneurship, National Agency for management of microcredit, national unemployment insurance fund, and the National Statistical Office). These data are analysed based on the regional approach (geographic aspect and rural-urban dimension).

These data are analysed in relationship of the national development programs (rural development, vulnerable population, national solidarity ...).

In second time, we reviewed the academic works on the thematic in the Algerian context.

The main objective is to clarify the following indicators: social cohesion and territorial imbalance, demographic imbalance: rural welfare and generational composition, accessibility: crisis, rural disparities, and services desertification, and the rural governance.

### Findings

Despite the negligence of this vulnerable population from the public nomenclature, these youth are keeping participate in the local development.

The results of our investigations showed that there's a regional disparity in term of new creation between the centre north and the rest of the country. Based on the studies already carried out and the reports provided, we were able to identify the main constraints faced by young entrepreneurs in rural areas. Although shared with other age categories and the entrepreneurial space, the constraints of rural entrepreneurship among young people. number of businesses in remote rural areas in the western and central highlands regions, as well as the southern regions is increasing less rapidly than the number of those in rural areas more accessible to large northern cities. The SME support policy should be more inclusive, especially in regions that are not very attractive to SMEs (especially in the south and the highlands). The improvement of regional ecosystems in these sets is highly recommended to increase the efficiency and sustainability of businesses.

The Covid 19 crisis, although it is still relevant, coupled with the current economic crisis, further weakens the will and the entrepreneurship prospects of young people in rural areas. For this, a short, medium and long-term recovery strategy must be put in place

aimed at improving and improving the resilience of poor rural populations by supporting production, access to markets and technology, and finally, to the employment, all with the overall objective of food security.

The evaluation of previous policies shows a gap between youth aspirations and public support, that why we propose that the design of future interventions should also be built on strong partnerships among rural communities, academia, research, and private sector for increased impact on livelihood improvements.

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## **THE APPROACH OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN THE REMOTE AREAS REGARDING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES IN ALBANIA**

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Nowadays, sexual health education of child and teen continues to be a public health concern nationwide, with not only health, but social and economical outcome as well. For Albania, Covid-19 pandemic has drastically changed the delivery method of offering Information, Education and Communication related to sexual health issues, and it has negative impact on the delivery of the sexual health care, for groups with vulnerabilities, including young people from rural areas. In addition the pandemic unveiled incapacity within our system and make evident the fact that Albania is not adequately prepared to deal with health emergencies. On the other hand stigma and discrimination, socio-economic factors and geographic distance are barriers that make difficult for youth from remote areas to access sexual health services and seek help.

The aim of the research paper is to identify the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Information Education Communication services regarding sexual and reproductive health for young people who lived in remote areas in Albania.

Research Question: What are the needs of young people living in the remote areas in the relation to sexual health and reproductive to approach and use the info linked to sexual and reproductive health services considering psycho-social factors in their lives.

### Research methodology

This research paper used qualitative methodology, and it is descriptive research design. The study populations are youth 16-25 years old living in the remote area in Albania. The snowball sample is used to recruit the participants. In the qualitative research design the sample size is flexible in relation to saturation point. The date's triangulation is used. The tools used in the research are in depth interview, focus group and desk review. The research phases are conducted as follow: Secondary research (desk review) of information available in the public domain, sourced from official published statistics, reports of other research conducted, media reports and social media postings, qualitative in depth interviews conducted with young people from rural areas, and focus groups. The ZOOM platform is used for two focus groups and WHATSAPP is used for 5 depth interviews.

### The results

All the teenagers living in the remote areas in Albania, reported inadequacy sexual education in their schools. This contributed to substantial gaps in awareness, misperception and abilities on sexual and reproductive health. The limitation on sexuality education are appear in different ways, as shortage of inclusion of sexuality education in the formal school curriculum, a fear of youth to be judged and bullied if them express

interest in the sexual and reproductive health, conservative point of view of educators. Consequently these preserve from cultural stereotypes and taboos about Sexual and Reproductive Health Services. Albania hasn't services focused only on youth sexual and reproductive health. The COVID pandemic has made the need for the provision of sexuality education in remote areas in Albania more obvious.



## **SOCIAL ECONOMY ACTORS AND ALTERNATIVE TRAINING PATHWAYS: THE CASE OF NEET YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONTRASTING TERRITORIES (URBAN/RURAL)**

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### Abstract

In contemporary Western societies, increasingly globalized, there is a process of fragmentation of formal school systems (Barrère and Delvaux, 2017). Nevertheless, school attendance remains compulsory during youth, while, at least virtually, learning becomes a lasting and recurrent activity "throughout the life course".

In this process, alternative training offers to the consecrated public education system have emerged in the school market, meeting new social needs, which attract young people in search of training areas associated with "dream" professions (Ferreira, 2017), considered more exciting than the classical professional outlets of the formal school system.

Simultaneously, "places and processes of non-school education" have proliferated, which translate into a "universe of educational and training possibilities" (Palhares, 2008:115) made available to young people. In fact, the social economy (Sousa and Kovács, 2014) and its institutions have taken on a place of reconfiguration of "deteriorated identities" (Goffman, 1982) by the effects of the school verdict, presenting themselves as spaces of reversal of vulnerabilities (namely, those arising from formal education). Indeed, beyond large scale public policies programs like Youth Guarantee (YG), with its failures and voids, it is important to understand how, at the individual micro scale, young people and communities with diverse opportunity structures tackle problems like youth unemployment and/or educational and training deficits.

Based on data collected in the context of a project whose main objective was to identify, among institutions of the social economy, good practices in the field of youth employability, in particular, initiatives aimed at NEET young people (Neither in Employment, Education or Training) social inclusion, we intend, in this presentation, to explore intervention models with NEET young people in contrasting settings, while discussing processes of reconfiguration of the educational and training field beyond the formal educational system.

For the purposes of this presentation, we selected two of the four case studies conducted in 2019, involving interviews, documentary analysis, and observation of the formative and educational contexts (Vieira, Ferreira & Pappámikail, 2019). We selected two territorial contexts (urban and rural) carried out within the framework of distinct institutional structures (at the level of financial support, in particular), the experiences and contributions of these two local initiatives for the promotion of youth employability,

oriented especially to NEET young people show that the use of innovative training processes, combining "tailor-made" training in context, with individualized and flexible approaches, based on a "proximity" work (Breviglieri, Pattaroni & Stavo-Debauge, 2003) has positive results in the "rescue" process of young people in a situation or at risk of social exclusion.

The analysis also allows to address the contrasts between the rural and urban experiences in terms of structure of opportunities and pathways available to young people. Results reinforce the fact that being NEET young person in rural areas means to have fewer educational, training, social and economic resources and having a higher probability of being at risk of poverty as a result of their persistent and often generationally reproduced disadvantage (Corbett, 2013; Shucksmith, 2004; Rönnlund, 2020). Often their support networks are mainly linked to the family (Simões, 2018; De Hoyos & Green, 2011), a family that often tends to devalue the role of school (Sadler et al., 2014). In turn, their opportunities and access to the diversity of public resources is more limited, and many of these responses, among which the Youth Guarantee stands out, offer massified responses that do not always meet the needs and expectations of these young people.

This set of family and institutional barriers makes this process of reversing their structural vulnerabilities even more difficult, which further limits their range of educational and professional opportunities (Carcillo et al., 2015; Rönnlund, 2020).

These frailties highlight the contribution of social economy actors in the composition of alternative responses to the "school form" and its role in reversing vulnerabilities among NEET young people with educational and training deficits, especially in rural areas.

Keywords: NEET young people, social economy, non-formal education, urban/rural

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## SOFT SKILLS AS A WAY OUT OF VULNERABILITY: A STUDY ON ITALIAN YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS

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### Aims

While technology makes it possible to achieve great results in the area of innovation, soft skills are those characteristics that enable a company to be truly competitive because they are most useful in enhancing productivity at work. Therefore, enlightened employers are looking for "talent," that is, people who, in addition to having the technical skills, have transversal and interpersonal skills called soft skills. Soft skills, concern personal qualities, attitude in the work environment and interpersonal abilities. They are, therefore, those individual inclinations that enable to understand others, including emotions and feelings. These skills are much more difficult to acquire and also to measure than the technical ones. According to this, the current abstract presents several objectives. The first is to introduce a new measurement scale (in the process of validation) that can give insights into the assessment of soft skills, tested on a representative sample. The second objective is to see how soft skills overall and their respective subscales perform in the different populations of both NEET and non-NEET and rural-urban. The last goal aims to investigate whether and how these variables may impact psychological well-being.

### Theoretical approach

Many definitions of soft skills exist in the literature. A first distinction can be made between Self-oriented/Intrapsychic and Other-oriented/ Interpersonal skills. The first category refers to what the person must understand and develop by her/himself; the second category gathers what the person can develop by relating with other people (Cimatti 2016). This distinction can also be made in terms of Personal and Social Skills. Personal Skills mainly correspond to cognitive skills, such as knowledge and thinking skills, whilst social skills refer to relationships with other people. Let us consider some: a knowledge skill is the capability of elaborating information; a thinking skill is the ability of exercising critical judgment; personal skills are the capacity and desire to continue to learn and the ability to plan and achieve goals; main social skills can be identified in communication, listening capability, negotiation, networking, problem solving, decision making and assertiveness (Engelberg 2015). The debate on the topic of soft skills has persisted for a long time, and there are a variety of organizations and scholars in different countries that have intervened to identify which sub-categories are among the most

important and informative (see Touloumakos, 2020). Following a theoretical subdivision that considered the review of the literature, a CFA was performed and the reliability of the subscales as well as so of the overall scale was also measured. In addition, the topic of soft skills has increasingly become the focus of NEETs research. Soft skills are essential for both entering and remaining in the labour market. Various researchers have already accentuated and focused on how NEETs in general possess lower levels of soft skills than their non-NEET peers (Marta 2012; Marzana and Poy 2019) as well as psychological well-being. Furthermore, it is evident how urban and rural contexts are very different, with the latter lacking both training and employment opportunities. Living conditions are indeed diverse, and this can only have an impact upon NEETs (Simoes et al., 2017). Given the literature described above, which shows a lack regarding the comparison of these groups in rural and urban areas, it was also decided to assess how soft skills impacted these groups.

## Methodology

This study involves the secondary analysis of data collected by the Osservatorio Giovani of the Istituto Toniolo di Studi Superiori (Milan, Italy) in 2020. Since 2012, the Osservatorio conducts yearly computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) surveys regarding topics related to young people, such as the social and economic inclusion of people that are Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET), as well as healthy behaviours, cultural issues, and participation. The authors contributed to the design of the major study. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Ipsos s.r.l. The representative sample of the Italian population is composed of 6,998 young adults (1834 years old).

To address the research goals, statistical analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.27). With reference to the second aim, it was possible to investigate through multivariate ANOVAs, the differences between rural and urban NEETs and NON-NEETs concerning soft skills and levels of well-being. Subsequently, in order to address the third aim, a stepwise linear regression was conducted. Psychological well-being was considered as the outcome variable, whilst all the soft skills factors were included in the model as predictors as well as urban- rural and NEET – Non-NEETs as dummies variables.

## Findings

First, a factor analysis conducted on the scale shows the presence of 6 factors: Social skills; Positive Vision; Conscientiousness; Motivation; Problem solving and decision making; Leadership. Considering the one way and multivariate ANOVAs, results show a substantial difference between NEETs and non-NEETs on all considered variables (soft skills and well-being) where NEETs have lower scores than non-NEETs. When including degree of urbanization, NEETs have significant differences in psychological well-being, positive vision, and conscientiousness, where rural NEETs perceive lower levels. As for non-NEETs, rural youth have lower perceptions of motivation than peers in urban areas.

From the linear regression that saw psychological well-being as the outcome in NEETs, all variables seem to impact except social skills and problem solving/decision making. In

addition, the rural-urban variable, considered as dummy, has an important impact, confirming what was found in the differences between means.

Such a result shows the importance of knowing and mapping both quantitatively and qualitatively the different soft skills in conditions of vulnerability. It also highlights how the rural situation can make social inclusion more difficult as the compromised skills are those that have to do with taking responsibility, motivation, and vision for the future, tying young people into a situation of immobility and lack of proactivity.

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## TRANSPORT DISADVANTAGE AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACT ON RURAL NEETs: THE CASE STUDY OF LIKA, CROATIA

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The main objective of this paper is to highlight the potential impact of transport disadvantage on young people in rural areas, focusing on rural NEETs. Lika in Croatia is used as a case study.

Mobility and accessibility to various activities and services are very important segments in people's lives. People's mobility and accessibility to activities and services are also influenced by the characteristics of the area in which they live (the extent of transport services available in that area and the extent of activities' locations that people want to access) (Hurni, 2006). These factors can lead to transport disadvantage. Rural areas are severely affected by transport problems. This is due to physical and social heterogeneity, low population density and small numbers of inhabitants. Certain areas (e.g. urban or rural areas) may be disadvantaged by transport. Low frequency of public transport or its complete absence, inadequate roads, lack of sidewalks or lighting are just some of the reasons that make one area worse off compared to another (Murray & Davis, 2001). The main components of transport disadvantage are mobility and accessibility (Kamruzzaman & Hine, 2011). Mobility is a fundamental and important feature of human activity as it fulfils the basic need to get from one place to another in order to participate in employment, kinship and education. Thus, mobility enables social, cultural, political, and economic activities to take place with relative ease (Gasparovic & Prieto Flores, 2021). Accessibility is parameter which is crucial part of the function of determining transport disadvantaged space. It is also the most important spatial factor influencing the development and use of public transport (Bole, 2004; Kozina, 2010). Assuming that public transport is a service that should be available to everyone, the simplest approach to exploring transport disadvantaged spaces is the relationship between the space and the public transport system. Some authors (Murray & Davis, 2001; Hurni, 2007) defined transport disadvantaged spaces as areas where public transport is unavailable or very limited. People's mobility can be affected by the fact that public transport is not available in a given area or runs infrequently, that a person cannot afford transport, that the place of residence is unfavourable in terms of transport and desired activities, and so on. Public transport is used by different social groups for different reasons, so this paper is based on the interrelation between space and the public transport system. Public transport is a particular problem in rural areas. It is often characterised by lower levels of development, low frequency, inadequate timetables, distant stops, etc. (Fawcet, 2009; Knowles et al., 2010). Such problems affect all users of public transport, including young people, with the problem being particularly evident for rural NEETs. In addition, public transport problems could lead to a greater need for personal transport, leading to disadvantage and



exclusion of those unable to drive a car, with young people being particularly vulnerable (Gasparovic, 2016). Lika is a rural region in the mountainous part of Croatia, characterised by depopulation and a small population. The methodology of the article is primarily based on the GIS tools and the spatial analysis of public transport and its timetables. The research shows that Lika is characterised by a poorly developed and spatially poorly distributed public transport network. This shows how poorly public transport connectivity negatively affects young people's daily lives and directly influences their mobility and accessibility to various life services, which can also be considered under the broader aspect of the social and economic pillars of sustainability.

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## THE DIFFERENCES OF EDUCATION IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS IN ALBANIA”

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### Abstract

Albania has made significant progress in developing a multiparty democracy and open market economy, evolving from one of the poorest countries in Europe. As part of this process, Albania has embarked on significant education reforms such as the decentralization of school governance and the introduction of a competencybased curriculum. However, a large number of Albanian students continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies. Equity is also a concern, with continued disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes according to ethnic background and geographical region.

Education is an important aspect for the development of our society. Again education has two different faces in rural and urban education. The learning environments of students have major impacts on how the students shape their careers, contribute towards the society and these environments also determines their performances. Urban areas which are heavily populated faces its own set of challenges when comes to education. What we want to point out are the motives that influence and orient the pedagogical work, the different opportunities of urban schools in relation to rural schools, the least preoccupations for personal life, the tendencies for a higher professional career level and the real predispositions in developing teaching work methods. Albania has made significant progress in developing a multi-party democracy and open market economy, evolving from one of the poorest countries in Europe into an increasingly competitive, upper-middle income economy. As part of this process, Albania has embarked on significant education reforms such as the decentralization of school governance and the introduction of a competency-based curriculum. However, a large number of Albanian students continue to leave school without mastering basic competencies. Equity is also a concern, with continued disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes according to ethnic background and geographical region.

Pedagogy in its treatment of the schools and its problems is more focused on its activity, always taking into account the knowledge that students need to gain. This is also because these components or spheres constitute the most pragmatic and fundamental aspects. The pedagogical aspects and treatments of urban and rural schools are not equal to the programs deriving from their role. These relations obviously deserve a serious approach, especially perhaps, in rural schools, we do not say that they are ignored, but the pedagogical and social factors of development are missing, especially the role of ideas, values and social norms, which are not only natural but also necessary to function in school.

Key words: education, rural areas, cultural factors, educational institution.





#### Aims:

This paper aims to distinguish the educational aspects in urban and rural areas and ways to improve and correct any difference between these areas and the structure of the attitudes and social-pedagogical developments in the city and the village.

**Theoretical approach:** The position of the school as an educational institution is formed and developed in relation to the place where it operates, so differences are created in certain areas of its action, especially when we consider social life, local politics, religion, environmental tradition, history, and distance from town centers. In fact, the school becomes quite individualized and its activity is determined by three basic aspects: dimensions and parameters of life, pedagogical - cultural aspects and social, economic and traditional aspects of the country. These three elements constitute the global aspects that make and create the differences between urban and rural schools.

In the pedagogical sense there is no difference between urban and rural schools because the spirit, program, goals, objectives, functions are unique and must be the same.

Didactics, methodology, pedagogy is the same and the same teaching tools, textbooks, principles, concepts, ideas, methods and ideas are applied. Thus for pedagogy it is not meaningless to claim that urban schools are more involved in political, social and cultural sports life, dominates an emphasized dynamic and they have predispositions for a more accomplished educational life. They also have facilities for recreation and active learning. They have halls and sports facilities and other facilities to motivate students in their learning experience. This conclusion, among other things, is based on concrete situations.

#### Methodology:

This paper includes quality techniques that focus on data collection and processing.

The methods used for this study are Collection and interpretation of information Observations during internships interviews.

#### Findings:

With this research we have tried to distinguish the main differences between urban and rural educational system. The place where the school operates plays an important role in the pedagogical experience, in the expectations and in the success. In this context the distinction between urban and rural schools is one of the fundamental differences that can be made in pedagogy and in society. It is a difference, in fact pedagogical in the functioning of the school especially in education, success and competencies. But this division is not absolute. These differences are made between vital and local characteristics aspects, environmental changes, cultural differences and advantages, human resources and professional capacities and the structure of the attitudes and social-pedagogical developments in the city and the village.

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## URBAN AND RURAL DISPARITIES OF YOUTH LIVING IN THE AREA OF VLORE (ALBANIA)

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### Abstract

Given the significant disparities from rural to urban settings regarding infrastructure, access to services, and training opportunities, the focus of this article are 200 responders of the *Youth Satisfaction Survey (2019<sup>23</sup>)*, coming from the rural areas in the city of Vlore whose answers have been separated from the other (urban) responders. This approach closes in this way the lack of official statistic youth data on local level and the existing gap in the local literature.

The aim of this article is to identify the needs, and assess the awareness of the services provided to young people by the administrative units in the region of Vlore in Albania. This can help to identify possible policy interventions and improve governance practices and services targeting youth living in these localities. Two main issues emerge by this study: the first is the economic issue, identified by the lack of employment opportunities and internship programs, and secondly, the lack of social and cultural facilities. Sharp differences between rural and urban responders are also spotted.

Keywords: youth; rural, inclusion policy; local governance

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<sup>23</sup> The results in this article reflect the analysis from the *Youth Satisfaction Survey (2019)*, carried out by the experts of the "*Vlora Youth Center*", a local NGO.

## **DECISIVE FACTORS FOR NEETS IN EU AREA: A MODEL FOR PREDICTING NEETS RATES**

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Keywords: NEETs, Prediction Model

### Aims and contextualization

Youth not in employment, nor in Education or Training (NEET) refers to a very diverse group encompassing youths aged 15 to 34 years old who are unemployed or inactive for four or more weeks (Eurostat, 2019). NEETs are characterized by a high level of heterogeneity, and a wide variety of profiles and experiences (Yates & Payne, 2006): women and men, young people with high education and young people without education or with a very low level of schooling, young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.

Numerous studies have been published since the launch of the NEETs concept, the majority analyze the characteristics of this category of young people, but a limited number of them focus on the causes and decisive factors that lead to such a status.

Our article aims to come up with a relevant argument for explaining the factors that determine the entry of young people in the category of NEETs in the EU area with a focus on three countries: Italy, Romania, and Turkey. Although very different from a social, economic, and cultural point of view, the three countries have in common the fact that in recent years they have faced a significant rate of NEETs: 23.1% in Italy, 20.3% in Romania, and 32.0% in Turkey while the EU-27 average is 13.1% (Eurostat, 2022). Identifying and analyzing the factors and characteristics of societies and economies but also of young people with the NEET status will help us to identify the predictors of this status and also help those who are able to support the process of socioprofessional integration of this category of the population.

### Theoretical and methodological framework

The various reports at the EU-27 level (Caliendo et al., 2019) place the countries in different clusters when it comes to the specifics of the NEETs population. Referring to the three countries included in this study we note that: if Romania's young NEETs have a low level of school and vocational training, NEETs from Italy and Turkey have other



characteristics: high level of discouragement in seeking a job, major professional responsibilities, etc. These classifications are an important starting point for our analysis.

Some authors (Scherer, 2004; Baranowska & Gebel, 2010; Dietrich, 2012) include in the category of individual factors the unemployment rate and the employment rate, marital status, and the number of family members (Susanli, 2016) but also aspects related to attitude, behavior, shared values young people etc.

In terms of structural factors, the risk of poverty, final consumption expenditure, GDP growth, etc., has an impact on the NEETs rate. By testing and analyzing a complex of factors, especially of a structural nature, we aim "to look beyond the employment/unemployment dichotomy"(Molina et. al., 2021) when discussing NEET. In this paper, we aim to analyze the structural factors likely to influence the NEET rate.

This study is based on data from Eurostat databases at the country level for the years 2005-2020 (Eurostat, 2020). There are 16 data for each country in the created data set (Table 1). The missing values detected in the data pre-processing process were filled with the interpolation method based on the country they are related to. Equations about the countries' NEETs ratios were created using the stepwise regression method. Analyzes were performed using The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0.

There are 19 independent and 1 dependent variable in the data set (Table 1). In addition, all the variables that make up the data set are of continuous data type. Dependent variables used in the study were determined in line with expert opinion. As factors that at the macro-level we identified as possible predictors of NEETs, we considered some proxies of the general country's economic condition, such as the level of unemployment for the whole population, the tax and contribution rate, the final consumption expenditure, GDP level, and growth. Other factors attain the country's level of innovation, such as the number of patent applications and the household level of internet access. Finally, other indicators attain to the education system outcomes, such as the share of tertiary educated, the share of early school leavers, and the share of adults involved in continuous education.

#### Expected results

In the preliminary analysis (Table 1), we focused on the investigation of the impact of structural factors. Table 1 presents an overview of the structural factors.

Table 1 Decisive factors affecting the rate of NEETs in the EU zone

	At risk of poverty rate	Share of Early School Leavers (ESL)	Share of tertiary educated (ISCED 3-5)	Household level of internet access	Patents applications	Total unemployment rate (15-75 years)	GDP growth	Final Consumption expenditure	Adults participation in continuing education (ACE)	Employment rate of recent graduates	Real per capita gdp	Crime, violence or vandalism in the area (%)	Involuntary temporary employment	Adolescent fertility rate	Total tax and contribution rate
TR						Red			Green	Green					
IT						Red			Green	Green					
RO						Red			Green	Green					
BE						Red							Red		
CZ		Red				Red				Green			Green		
DE						Red									
DK						Red								Green	
EE						Red									
ES						Red						Red			Green
CY						Red			Green						
GR						Red			Green	Green					
IE						Red			Green				Green		
LT						Red			Green						
HR						Red								Green	
LV						Red						Red			
AT	Green					Red					Red				
NL						Red									Red
PL		Red				Red									
PT	Green					Red			Green						
SI						Red			Green			Red			
FI						Red									Green
IS						Red						Red			
SE		Red				Red			Green						
SK			Red			Red									
CH			Red	Green		Red									
NO						Red							Green		
UK		Red				Red			Green	Green			Red		
BG		Red				Red									
FR					Green	Red					Red				
HU					Green	Red									
LU		Red				Red			Green	Green					

Preliminary results of the analysis reflect the fact that the three countries belong to different clusters: the characteristics of Italy are closer to those of most EU-28 countries while Romania and Turkey are located together in another cluster, with different characteristics than most of the EU countries. Thus, the relevant factors in direct connection with the increase or decrease of the NEETs rate in Italy are the *Total unemployment rate, referred to as the population aged 15-74 years*, assumed as a proxy of general labor market conditions, and *Real per capita GDP*. For Romania and Turkey, the main factors have to do with education, in particular with the variations in the *Adults' participation in continuing education* and the *Employment rate of recent graduates*. (Table 1)

We observe that in Italy the determining factors are related to the performance of the economic system, while in Romania and Turkey the performance of the educational system. The partial results obtained by us in this paper are close to those resulting from various evaluations conducted by European institutions as we mentioned earlier (European Commission, 2019).

For future research, we aim to develop this type of analysis to investigate in depth the relationships between NEETs rate and individual factors: gender, area of residence, etc. In this way, we aim to complete the modern perspectives of approaching the issue of NEETs that support the need to include issues related to the level of development of the country, access to adult education, etc. (Jonsson et al. 2022; Boeren et al. 2020).

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## RURAL YOUTHS PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN AGRICULTURE: WHAT PUBLIC POLICY OPTIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL TRAINING AND SUSTAINABILITY IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA?

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### Abstract

Agricultural training is a crucial phase in agricultural policy implementation as it determines youth engagement, participation and employment in this sector. It can also help build resilient communities, stimulate inclusive growth and poverty reduction (Wallace, 2007; Hartl, 2009; Kome, 2021). However, this largely depends on training approaches; method, content and duration of agricultural training. Using some selected public agricultural policies, this paper aims at demonstrating the variations and challenges of agricultural trainings in developing countries of Africa, Cameroon in particular. It equally aims at presenting the perspectives for agricultural sustainability and community development. The programs targeted by this research are AFOP, NCSAPD and PAIJA programs. The guiding premises are that public agricultural policies implemented with appropriate Technical and Vocational Training strategies can stimulate sustained participation of rural youth's beneficiaries in agriculture and enhance their school-to-work transition. To ascertain this, we adopted the theory of strategic analysis initiated by Crozier & Fredberg (1977). We equally associated the Reason Action and Planned Behavior theories (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) that dwells on attitudes and predicting social behavior and very efficient in understating behavior intentions (Armitage & Conner, 2001). The research design was both qualitative and quantitative. In effect, we administered 20 in-depth interviews with beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries and programs administrative actors. Three (03) FGDs were organized, each with 06 participants. In addition, 170 questionnaires have been administered to 170 purposively selected youths making a total sample size of 208. The sample frame for the study was drawn from registered youths beneficiaries, extracted from ministerial communiqués and admission lists into training centers. Field observations and visits to project sites were conducted. Concerning the sampling approach, a purposeful sampling was associated to a snowball technic in the rollout of field activities. Data collected was organized, interpreted and analyzed. While data from FGDs and interviews was analyzed using the content analysis, questionnaires were statistically treated in SPSS, all of these following a sequential model. The results reveal a 54.7 % rate of abandonment, while 45.2 % of rural youths beneficiaries are still farming. Great variation on levels of engagement is observed in the various phases of programs implementation. And this is pertaining to varied training methodologies adopted. As a result, objectives of these agricultural initiatives are not attended which adversely affects community development. This

research therefore concludes that a more diversified, flexible and comprehensive vocational and agro pastoral training is required to equip young men and women with life skills, entrepreneurship and values of agriprenuership to foster their interest in agriculture within public policy arena. This would help stimulate employment and livelihoods (World Bank, 2007; Bennell, 2007; White B., 2012) and reduce rural exodus (Nnadi et al. 2012). The research acknowledges the opportunity that hardworking men and women in poverty hit areas of developing countries of Africa can generate jobs, income and wealth for their families and communities. And that these rural youths including the disabled, forcefully displaced youths, the migrants, returnees and indigenous disadvantaged minorities have the power to transform the agricultural sector in SSA. They can also facilitate sustainable progress for communities and market systems and possess capacities of innovation, adaptability and energy to spearhead rural development, climate smart agriculture and drive Agenda 2030.

*Keywords: Public Policy, Rural Youths Beneficiaries, Agricultural Training, Youth Participation, Empowerment, Rural Development.*

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## THE IMPACT OF YOUTH GUARANTEE FOR RURAL NEETS -WHO PARTICIPATES IN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WITH WHAT EFFECTS? A STUDY ON ITALY, POLAND, AND ROMANIA

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Keywords: European Union; NEETs; Public Employment Services, Youth Guarantee, Italy, Poland, Romania

### Aims

In all EU countries, the public employment services (PES) have the primary role in facilitating the labour market integration of young jobseekers as they often serve as an entrance point to the EU Youth Guarantee (YG) program. Despite efforts through the YG, not many of them register with PES and benefit from their services. This is the case of Italy, Romania, and Poland, which in 2021 were the countries with the lowest share of young NEETs registered.

This paper aims to analyze the profile of young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs) who register with Public Employment Services (PES) and compare them with those who do not. Through the comparative analysis between the three countries regarding the registered young NEETs and those that are not included in the national statistics, we can highlight the extent to which these differences are due to the PES or the characteristics of the NEETs in the three countries.

### Theoretical Approach

From a theoretical point of view, the fundamental concept we need to understand is that of NEETs. Furlong (2006), Elder (2015), and Eurofound (2016) emphasized that there are many different definitions of NEETs and that the NEET population is a heterogeneous group. Given this heterogeneity, the dominant option among specialists (House of Commons, 2010) is to pursue personalized policies instead of universal policies in this area. In this paper, we take into account the heterogeneity of NEETs and analyze the extent to which national YG schemes have taken into account the differences between young NEETs in constructing the offerings of measures.

Another pillar of this paper is the concept of PES which play a leading role in the YG implementation. We try to assess the impact of public actions through the YG program

(Sutherland et al., 2011; European Commission, 2017) on NEETs in three countries (Italy, Poland, and Romania) and the role of PES in these policies. There are different perspectives to performing such an analysis. One of these is to focus on policy objectives, (Nutley et al., 2007), in this case, the increase in the number of NEETs registered in the three countries in recent years. At the same time, we take into account the fact that NEETs are a heterogeneous group and that the measures applied by YG are part of a complex construct, influenced by the national specificity.

We also take into account the spatial context as rural NEETs are more exposed to social exclusion and social marginalization (Simões et al., 2017). Additionally, for individuals living in a rural zone, the access to services is limited, from the use of public transport to job opportunities and recruitment (Sadler et al., 2015).

### Methodology

We used European Labour Force microdata for Italy, Poland, and Romania for 2015 – 2020. We included in the sample individuals between 15 and 29 years old from the NEET group according to the Eurostat definition. To better capture the heterogeneity of this group, we further divide NEETs into categories suggested by Eurofound (2016) – conventionally unemployed (short-term, long-term) and economically inactive (due to family and child care obligations, illness or disability, discouragement, and other reasons). We performed various logit models with the scope of understanding the characteristics of young NEETs who register to PES. We control for the sociodemographic characteristics, labour market status, job-search behaviour, reasons for being jobless, and household situation. To study the effect of rural on PES registration we will perform an Oaxaca Blinder decomposition that allows us to account for unobserved characteristics that may drive the differences between NEETs in urban and rural areas. To our knowledge this is new in the literature. This approach was taken in a previous study by Rocca, Neagu and Tosun (2022) who used an Oaxaca Blinder decomposition on educational level. Moreover, Broschinski and Assmann (2020:2) state that while there is a growing literature on causes and consequences of youth unemployment since the crisis there is little literature on PES from an European comparative perspective.

### Findings and expected results

Our preliminary research shows that the differences in the registration rates among

NEETs could be attributed to both the PES' performance and the characteristics of NEETs. Firstly, we find that while in Italy and Poland PES have wider responsibilities and a higher level of involvement, in Romania the role of this institution is very limited. Also, in Romania, the network of which PES should be part in order to fulfill its responsibilities is missing or is in an incipient phase, in Italy and Poland, PES collaborate with various institutions to ensure that young people have full information and support available.

Secondly, in all countries under the analysis, PES find difficulties in reaching out to more vulnerable individuals as the economically inactive NEETs have a lower probability to register with public employment agencies than conventionally unemployed NEETs. Controlling for channels of job search diminishes the effect of NEETS on PES.

In rural areas, we can see that compared with short-term unemployed, NEETS due to illness or disability (Italy and Poland) and child care (Italy) are less likely to register with PES, and discouraged workers surprisingly are more likely to register with PES (Poland). In Romania, the effect of NEETS categories becomes non-significant once we control for job search channels.

Our research suggests that effective outreach poses a challenge for youth policy programs. It requires innovative, proactive outreach strategies and tailored services that could address their barriers and needs of various subgroups of NEETs.

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## **IDENTIFYING THE EFFECTIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE THE UNIVERSITY –BUSINESS COLLABORATION IN TOURISM SECTOR FOR LONG TERM YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY.**

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As Albania aspires to join the EU, it needs to increase regional co-operation to promote innovation.

Stimulating innovation in industry is seen as a necessity to boost economic growth. Albanian policymakers seek to stimulate universities to become more entrepreneurial by engaging more actively with the tourism sector. In the current context of pressure on higher education institutions to place more importance on economic and social needs, cooperation with the Hospitality and Tourism industry is seen as one of the most efficient ways through which the university can support the regional and national economy. As a result, the purpose of this paper is to bridge the gap between the innovation needs of the tourism industry and the university supply, in terms of human and technological resources, creating real cooperation agreements between them, to ensure employment and long-term economic sustainability. To achieve the purpose of the study, secondary data were used and analysed, deriving descriptive statistics of the variables in the study. The results shown that the selection of the right method should be supported not only financially by the Government but the appropriate strategies should be undertaken for awarding individual researcher prizes in these initiatives.

Keywords: University-Industry collaboration, tourism sector, youth employability, economic growth.

## **RURAL ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND THE FUTURE RURAL LIVELIHOOD DREAMS OF IRELAND'S YOUTH**

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Keywords: Youth futures; rural livelihoods; resilience; farming profession

### Aims

Focused on generational renewal, this paper presents the ideal livelihoods young people envision for themselves in a rural area. In doing so, it ascertains what facilitates young people to stay in rural areas, or what motivates them to return once they have moved away. The research context explored is the dream future livelihoods of youth who want to live in rural areas of Ireland. Further to this, the paper will use rural economic resilience as a lens to examine the implications of the livelihood dreams of youth on rural economic resilience.

### Theoretical approach

Rural economic resilience is used here as a normative analysis framework to examine how the future youth livelihood dreams support or indeed hinder this process. Rural economic resilience can be associated with diversification of the rural economy and the presence of multifunctionality (Wilson, 2010; Steiner and Atterton, 2015; Li, 2022). Fundamental to resilience of any kind is a focus on the interconnections between environment and society with the economy, including the sustainable use of environmental resources (Wilson, 2010; Scott, 2013; Maclean et al., 2014). This paper will also further explore the meaning of rural economic resilience.

### Methodology

Capturing the perspective of youth, future studies provides an avenue to explore the necessary conditions to retain youth in and attract youth to rural areas. This paper uses the futures method developed by Kuhmonen et al. (2016) to understand the ideal or 'dream' future of youth. The personal dream future was explored in relation to livelihood, but also accommodation and lifestyle. The obstacles to the dreams are also examined. As part of the Horizon 2020 RURALIZATION project, data was collected in 2020 and participants were asked to look 15 years ahead to 2035. A questionnaire was administered online targeting youth aged 18 to 30. To reflect different rural regions, the data was collected in two region types based on the urban-rural typology - one predominantly rural region (Western region) and one intermediate region (Mid-East region). Two stakeholder

workshops were also conducted to assess the measures and actors needed to realise the dreams. The livelihood results are focused on in this paper, however the analysis also draws on the wider findings. The dimensions are interlinked. For example, aspects of the livelihood are also linked to realising the accommodation and lifestyle dreams (e.g. salary, work-life balance, remote working).

## Findings

Existing knowledge indicates the attractiveness of the farming profession is an issue impacting the levels of young people becoming farmers. Particular aspects highlighted are the relatively low income, labour intensity and social status of the profession (Access to Land Network, 2018; Regidor, 2012). However a different narrative also exists with research showing positive features of the profession such as independence and working in a natural environment, with demand among some new entrants driven to get ‘back to the land’ (Dolci, and Perrin, 2018; EIP-AGRI, 2016; Wilbur, 2014). The preliminary findings emerging from this research also show that the future rural dreams of youth can be linked positively to farm livelihoods and interest in farming is linked to the intention to be a rural dweller. However, significant obstacles stand in the way of this dream, notably issues related to farm viability.

A lack of rural jobs is emphasised in research examining drivers of youth outmigration. Other aspects of the rural job market impacting youth intentions to migrate are the sectors rural jobs exist in and the quality of rural jobs (Bjarnasona and Thorlindsson, 2006; García-Arias et al., 2021). For example, a lack of interest in working in the primary sector and a view that occupational opportunities are stronger elsewhere are identified as predicting an intention to migrate (Bjarnasona and Thorlindsson, 2006). More broadly in relation to rural jobs, the initial findings on the future livelihood dreams of youth show a presence of entrepreneurship and remote work, yet still a relatively narrow range of professions are imagined as part of the future dreams. This raises questions around how the dreams support resilience based on a diversified economy. In addition to this, some of the personal futures show uncertainty around the future career path. More broadly, these findings raise questions around the nature of career ambitions and the scope for measures that support the broadening of livelihood horizons and ambitions of young people in rural areas.



## SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND ASPIRATIONS TOWARD STEM FIELDS IN RELATION TO THE SUPPORT THROUGH THE MENTORING EXPERIENCE WITH STEM STUDENT MENTORS

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### State of the art and rationale of the project

The 'swing away' from the STEM (science, technologies, engineering and mathematics) field has been observed in society and literature in the Western context since the 1960s (Osborne, Simon and Collins, 2003; ROSE Report, 2010). Only a small proportion of high-school students aspire to become a scientist (Archer & DeWitt, 2017). Multiple factors can impact this: the prevalence of stereotypical social views of science and scientists, experience with STEM subjects, and more importantly, science capital (Archer & DeWitt, 2017; Archer et al., 2015). A concept of science capital (Archer et al., 2015) has shown that children's backgrounds such as class, gender and race impact crucially on children's STEM aspirations (Aschbacher, Ing & Tsai, 2014; Archer & DeWitt, 2017; Mujtaba, Sheldrake & Reiss, 2020), and young people from rural areas may perceive more obstacles to obtain STEM education. On the contrary, persons with a family background or acquaintances in STEM professions, or experiences with STEM themes are more likely to choose the field. The possible issues with choosing STEM education and attitudes towards science are a matter of concern (Osborne et al., 2003; Archer and DeWitt, 2017) for several reasons:

- The standards of achievement and competitiveness of western societies are based on the technological advancements developed by highly educated and adaptable professionals. Nevertheless, the high demand for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) related professionals in the EU context contrasts with a low percentage of students choosing this field for optional exams, future studies and professions (Cabinet of Ministers Republic of Latvia, 2021; CSB, 2022; OECD, 2019). This fact poses a severe threat to economic growth and prosperity in the future as the increasing dependence on highly-sophisticated technology requires professionals with high scientific and technological competence.
- Scientific literacy among the general public is an essential aspect of today's post-modern post-factual westernised societies. It is necessary for the EU's prosperity and democracy that the public is informed and literate by receiving information on STEM advancements and their impact on the EU's societies and their growth and well-being (European Commission, 2015; Science Foundation Ireland, 2016; Thomas & Durant, 1987).
- By increasing science capital among young people with an intrinsic interest in STEM subjects and empowering them to choose STEM studies and careers, the educational system and access to its resources is distributed more equally.



Comparative research has shown discrepancies in students' skills when rural and urban areas are compared (c.f. PISA study, OECD, 2017). There are also significant differences in the results of exams and standardised tests (Krasnopjorovs, 2017), which are lower in smaller cities and rural areas, and also related to the school type and size. Thus, rural youths might be disadvantaged in their level of science capital and further access to STEM education despite their potentially unused intrinsic interest in the STEM fields.

The science education interventions aim to promote access to STEM education and careers, support children's and young people's growth of science capital, empowerment of STEM identities, and improve current STEM literacy. The rural youth's involvement in STEM educational interventions has been studied with a focus on economically disadvantaged regions (Ihrig et al., 2017), and mostly on talented (or gifted) students (Morris et al., 2021). The STEM interventions should be implemented with a youth-centred approach, empowering young people while enhancing their intrinsic motivation in STEM subjects and aspirations, and fostering their science capital.

The main questions to be answered during the planned project:

- Can secondary school students' aspirations and attitudes towards STEM be impacted by the mentoring program with STEM field students from higher-education institutions?
- What are the perceived benefits of participation in the STEM mentoring program (for both the mentees and mentors)?
- How does this participation experience in the STEM mentoring programme enhance the transversal skills of the higher education students that participate as mentors?

### Methodology

To address the issues with interest in STEM education and apply adequate targeted response, it needs to be based on the evidence from the primary research. The presented project will have several steps:

- Screening the rural young people's perceptions of a scientist;
- Designing and piloting a STEM mentoring intervention with a youth-centred participatory approach and active inclusion of young people (Lundy, 2007). The young people's science capital will be enhanced by focused individual interactions with mentors from the STEM field, that is, with an important more experienced older adults sharing the same interests and guiding them with their advanced STEM experiences in a regular collaboration over the course of one semester;
- Evaluating the pilot intervention: participants' experiences and perceived benefits;
- Designing a STEM mentoring intervention ToolBox for future implementation;
- Disseminating the results of the project to professionals, lay public and policymakers, co-created with the project's participants; also adding to the academic discussion on children's science capital.

Expected results and outputs

The project aims at several levels of impact: 1) on the policy level, to help decrease inequality of students in rural areas by increasing their participation in STEM higher education; 2) on the practice level, to design, pilot and evaluate an evidence-based youth-initiated mentoring programme with a participatory approach, 3) on the research level, to investigate the STEM attitudes among young people and track the impacts of the pilot mentoring intervention. Planned deliverables:

- The ToolBox and implementation strategy, designed and co-created with the project's participants and partner organisations, for future implementation in rural areas in Latvia and the Czech Republic.
- A project report for professionals with conclusions and recommendations for STEM education practices.
- A policy report with recommendations for involvement in STEM education and further steps in the implementation of a STEM mentoring program.

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## CLUSTERING NEETS AND PROVIDING SPECIFIC SERVICES IN ITALY AND PORTUGAL

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### Aims

The aim of this project is to identify different types of NEET in Italy and Portugal and the specific actions to improve their conditions.

### Subaims

- To profile different types of NEET: woman, rural, urban, migrant, low educated, those involved in informal work.
- To propose training activities for NEET in order to make them aware of their rights (law, labour, social, personal) and develop new skills.
- To offer through Public Employment Services (PES) personalized services based on profile identifications.

### Theoretical approach

According to European Pillar of Social Rights “*Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market*”. Furthermore, everybody needs active support to employment “*Everyone has the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects. This includes the right to receive support for job search, training and re-qualification. Everyone has the right to transfer social protection and training entitlements during professional transitions*”.

Despite the progress made since the implementation of Youth Guarantees policies, many young people aren't well represented in labour sector. Increased efforts are needed to support young people who are furthest away from the labour market, particularly low-skilled and disadvantaged. In this group it is possible to consider or identify young people that are not formally employed, educated or in training as NEET. Indeed, a long-term NEET status produces severe consequences on a region or a country economy.

The characteristics of NEET population are very diverse and therefore the approach to reach out and engage with them varies among and within EU Member States. It is possible to identify some categories:

- . Inactive;
- . Unemployed.

Furthermore, there are some particular personal characteristics predisposing to a NEET status (e.g. woman, migrants, those living in rural areas).

In 2017, the European Court of Auditors Report suggested that each Member State needed to establish appropriate outreach strategies in order to identify NEET population and to register them (Effective outreach to NEETs, Santos-Brien 2018).

To integrate all NEET categories into the labour sector, personalized strategies for each of them may be needed. For example, in recent year, informality trends decrease in many European Countries, however it still represents one important social problem. Shadow economies have contracted across much of Europe since the global financial crisis, when they touched their peak. Nevertheless, this phenomena remains, on average, about 15–20% of GDP in Advanced Economies and around 30-35% in Emerging Economies (IMF Working Papers, Kelmanson *et al* 2019).

Sometimes, it is possible that young people can be identify as NEET, but they may work under informal labour conditions that, get worse the economy (Schneider and Buehn, 2012) and social situation (Porta and Shleifer, 2008; Dabla-Norris, Gradstein and Inchauste, 2008) and may alter national statistics data. Another example can be found with youth migrant that may not be reached by institutions (Menjívar, C. & Perreira, K. (2019).

It is difficult to arrive at an overall comprehensive assessment of the impact of NEET in shadow economy and in economic growth and development.

Probably, NEET don't consider that situation as a social and personal problem. One of the first steps is to implement the awareness of NEET labour and social rights.

In this sense PES take a leading role with the aim of matching demand with supply of jobs. However, in many countries NEET face different problems that can limit their work, so local authorities, youth agencies and other forms of youth oriented social work at local level can also be part of this process.

### Methodology

Through PES and other institutions it will be possible to identify NEET population (based on agreements).

First step will be the identification of a representative sample (1000 units, for now) extracted by PES. Then, an international survey will be submitted to them in order to identify the differences in NEET profile and their different needs. After clusterize the NEET throught quantitative analysis (Cluster analysis), will be created focus groups with a subsample of each category with the aim to implement a qualitative analysis in order to better classify their needs. Succesively, the results of boths analysis will allow us to develop best or differents solutions. For example, with the collaboration of PES or different specialized stakeholders, it will be possible to organize training to make them awareness of their problem, to propose educational courses concerning soft skills, green skills and ICT skills issuing professional certificates. For the methodology part, it is expected:

- To create an international survey;
- To organize focus groups;

- To collect data;
- To implement qualitative and quantitative research, in order to create a statical model to be applied to other countries;
- To cluster different types of NEET (cluster analysis);
- To create a compositor indicator to measure the vulnerabilty degree with the objective to develop a tool that can be applied in schools to identify students at risk of becoming NEET (quantitative model).

### Findings

Regarding the impact and sustainability of the project, it is expected, in short term:

- To increase awareness of NEETS about their labour rights by developing specific information, education and communication materials.
- To support PES to reach this target group;
- To support institutions that work on labour market at local, regional or national level)

In long term, it is expected:

- To improve PES service offers;
- To improve PES reputation;
- To reinforce the relationship between PES and NEET;
- To improve NEET employability;
- To increase NEET quality of life and their self-confidence.

Regarding informal work:

- To contribute to achieve Sustainable Development Goals in reducing the incidence of fatal and non-fatal work-related accidents and diseases in informal work:
- To have economic impact on fiscal issue and on local GDP (Gross Domestic Product).

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## U-AGRIHUB : CREATION OF YOUTH INNOVATION PARTICIPATORY HUBS TO SUPPORT SMART AGRICULTURE

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### Theoretical approach, aims and methodology

In rural areas there is an increasing impoverishment of social and economic capital.

Some research highlights the alarming depopulation of rural areas (Quaranta et al., 2020). Ageing of the population in the Western European countries and in Eastern countries the exodus from rural to urban areas and moreover, migration abroad – notably of young people and women – risks to lead to a general impoverishment of rural areas. It is evident how a stay in rural areas can favor the entry of young people into the NEET condition and, at the same time, once they have entered, hinder their exit due to the very few alternatives to moving to the city existing in the area. Therefore, rural NEETs are more likely to be socially excluded, they are often involved in family demands, with or without income, and this is especially the case for females (Simões et al., 2017). The rural context tends to hinder and not allow the development of lifestyles more typical of urban areas, as it simply does not present the opportunities to do so. In these areas, school achievements are limited and are accompanied by a clearer dissonance between aspirations and actual qualifications. In addition, these young people are more likely to create a dependency on their family of origin, and to perpetuate a condition of poverty. In this context two important needs arises: On the one hand, the youth as human capital that seeks opportunities to express its potential and, on the other hand, rural areas with their under-exploited territories and assets.

The importance of youth engagement in agriculture is internationally recognized, and it is why the present project aims to create a participatory hub of innovation in smart agriculture where young people can exchange knowledge, increase self-

entrepreneurship and innovative skills in smart agriculture by actively participating in the process of economic, technical, and social development of rural communities. The methodology used will be Participatory Action Research (PAR) thus enabling on the one hand the creation of a network of stakeholders (including municipalities, schools, universities and major youth associations and agricultural cooperatives), and on the other hand the active involvement of young people of these rural areas in the research process and co-construction of outcomes.

### Main specific objectives

- Building partnerships with stakeholders.



- Mapping the territory.
- Assessing the profile of rural youth.
- Organize events concerning the communication of the project idea to engage rural youth in collaboration with important stakeholders and youth.
- Engage interested youth in participatory activities to understand needs and desires.
- Engage youth in participatory activities to build up ideas and start up.
- Modern training to increase self entrepreneurship, digital skills and smart agriculture and food processing.

#### Involved countries

**Albania:** In Albania youth population represent 23.5% of the country official population (Memia et al., 2020). The level of entrepreneurship in Albania is generally considered to be low. Albania yet faces major challenges regarding provision of safe and productive employment for different disadvantaged groups, including woman and rural youth. The country has seen a notable decrease of employment in agriculture, mostly from the migration of part of the rural population toward towns and cities. While urbanization in Albania will continue, it is necessary to find innovative ways to involve and increase participation of young people of rural areas in create an effective framework to enable an active agriculture labor market. Albania government and educational institutions have more than 2 decades struggling to provide inclusion opportunities for youth.

**Bosnia & Herzegovina:** Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most rural European countries with more than 50% of households situated in rural areas. The complex political situation alongside a very complicated institutional set-up continues to be a major burden for more progressive and intensive economic growth within the country. The negative trend of “brain drain” has been present ever since the 1990s, because of the war, but the second wave began almost ten years ago, whereby tens of thousands of the working-age population have left the country (Vracic, 2018; Čičić et al., 2019). Apart from out-migration, the rural-to-urban movements (de-ruralisation) within the country also continue. This threatens the biological sustainability of the countryside that had not been affected by forced migration during the war.

**Italy:** a return to the land is underway in Italy with more than 56 thousand of the under-35s leading agricultural enterprises, a record at the EU level with an extraordinary increase of +12% in the last five years (Coldiretti, 2019). In Italy there are more than 548 thousand companies led by under 35s in all productive sectors, from commerce to manufacturing, from clothing to services with the agricultural sector boasting more than 10 percent of young people doing business and creating jobs. A presence that has in fact revolutionized the field where 7 out of 10 under-35 companies operate in activities ranging from the farm processing of products to direct sales, educational farms, recreational activities, and social agriculture. Thus, this country partner can stand as a best practitioner in the field. Therefore, the project can also be a good opportunity to involve Italian rural NEETs in the agricultural field.

## Expected results

Some of expected results of this project are creation of alternative communication pathways among youth and stakeholders in agricultural sector; may brought back the love and innovation in agricultural sciences and farming through the active participation of young people, while keeping the tradition, and the unique potential that may offer specific territories, products and people, and an overall promotion of agriculture as a viable career option, influencing and shaping their perceptions and behavior towards agriculture. May be expected that this project will significantly contribute towards efforts relating to food security, employment generation, community development, development communication or anyone whose work involves active community engagements. We hope that implementation of this project will contribute significantly in keeping the passion to young generation for agriculture and create impacts in rural communities.

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## **IDENTIFYING THE EFFECTIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE THE UNIVERSITY –BUSINESS COLLABORATION IN TOURISM SECTOR FOR LONG TERM YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY.**

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As Albania aspires to join the EU, it needs to increase regional co-operation to promote innovation.

Stimulating innovation in industry is seen as a necessity to boost economic growth. Albanian policymakers seek to stimulate universities to become more entrepreneurial by engaging more actively with the tourism sector. In the current context of pressure on higher education institutions to place more importance on economic and social needs, cooperation with the Hospitality and Tourism industry is seen as one of the most efficient ways through which the university can support the regional and national economy. As a result, the purpose of this paper is to bridge the gap between the innovation needs of the tourism industry and the university supply, in terms of human and technological resources, creating real cooperation agreements between them, to ensure employment and long-term economic sustainability. To achieve the purpose of the study, secondary data were used and analysed, deriving descriptive statistics of the variables in the study. The results shown that the selection of the right method should be supported not only financially by the Government but the appropriate strategies should be undertaken for awarding individual researcher prizes in these initiatives.

Keywords: University-Industry collaboration, tourism sector, youth employability, economic growth.

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A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON THE CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYMENT AND INTEGRATION OF ALBANIAN STUDENTS BELONGING TO RURAL AREAS. - Juljana Laze (julilaze@gmail.com)

ABANDONMENT OF SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS - Orjeta Balaj (orietabalaj84@gmail.com)

AN OVERVIEW OF CREATIVE AND CULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN ALBANIA: A SOCIAL COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS WITH SPECIAL FOCUS IN YOUTH ARTISTS. - Dr. Lorena Serjanaj , Dr. Klaudja Guga , Dr. Ilira Pulaj , Msc. Rezart Guga (loreenalikaj@yahoo.com)

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON RURAL TOURISM AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN ALBANIA - Mirela Tase (mirelatase@hotmail.com)

ANALYSIS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR RURAL YOUTH: A CASE STUDY IN CATALONIA - Omeed Agahi (omeed.agahi@udg.edu)

BECOMING NEET IN EASTERN EUROPE - Emese Vita (emesevita1@gmail.com)

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DESIGNING VOCATIONAL TRAINING POLICIES FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS IN AN OUTERMOST EUROPEAN REGION: HIGHLIGHTS FROM A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS - Leonor Bettencourt , Francisco Simões , Bernardo Fernandes , Joana Fonseca (leonor.bettencourt@iscte-iul.pt)

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