

# Youth Dialogue

## **Creating Opportunities for Youth**

Outcomes of the 7th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue, created  
at the EU Youth Conference 2020, Zagreb, Croatia.



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## Introduction

This report contains the general and further outcomes of the 7th Cycle of Youth Dialogue which were created by conference participants at the EU Youth Conference 2020, Zagreb, Croatia. The document has four sections:

- An overview of the conference programme;
- An outline of the process used within the cycle to create the general and further outcomes;
- A report on the general outcomes of the 7th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue created by conference participants, which has been produced to provide material for an upcoming Resolution on the outcomes of the 7th cycle of EU Youth Dialogue. These relate to the theme of the 7th Cycle of Youth Dialogue 'Creating Opportunities for Youth';
- A report on further outcomes on Opportunities for Rural Youth created by conference participants. This has been produced in order to provide material for the upcoming Conclusions of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council 'Raising Opportunities for Young People in Rural and Remote areas'.

## Section 1: Conference Overview

The EU Youth Conference of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was titled 'Opportunities for Rural Youth - How to Ensure the Sustainability of Rural Youth Communities across the EU'. It took place on the 9th-11th March 2020 in Zagreb Croatia. The conference was opened by the following speakers:

- Vesna Bedeković, Assoc. Prof., Minister responsible for youth;
- Mariya Gabriel<sup>1</sup>, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, EU Commission;
- Tanja Herceg, President of the Youth Advisory Board of the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

All of the opening words warmly emphasised the importance of focusing on rural youth and using the various EU instruments and opportunities for developing opportunities for young people in rural areas. Following this, the findings of the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities were launched and conference delegates participated in a series of workshops to develop the overall outcomes of the cycle.

On the second day, a panel discussion 'How can the EU Youth Dialogue meet the rural youth needs?' was held containing four speakers:

- Marko Boko – European Parliament, Office in Croatia;
- Silja Markkula – European Youth Forum;
- Mr Nicholas Kujala - Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi;
- Maria Francesca Cristea – Member of the Romanian Youth Council;
- Ivana Radanović – Association Network Zagor, Croatia.

The panel emphasised the importance of sustaining engagement with young people in rural areas beyond the current cycle of youth dialogue, and ensuring they were properly represented in future cycles. Following a more detailed presentation on the findings of National and European Youth Dialogue Activities, participants then took part in a second round of workshops held on the theme of 'Opportunities for Rural Youth'. The further outcomes were developed through these workshops.

The third day contained a panel discussion on "The importance of rural youth for a sustainable Europe, and an overview on rural development and young people's challenges across the EU". Speakers were:

- Rok Damijan – President of the Slovenian Rural Youth Association;
- Mariaus Schlageter – Vice President of the German Federal Youth Council;
- Bernardo Freitas – Portuguese National Youth Council;
- Sebastian Lassnig – Rural Youth Europe;
- Tijana Trako Poljak, Assis. Prof. – Rural Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb;
- Howard Williamson, Prof. – Faculty of Business and Society, Professor of European Youth Policy, Cardiff University.

The panel emphasised the importance of considering the needs of young farmers and agriculture, whilst audience members raised discussion on gender equality. Alongside this, the panel discussed

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<sup>1</sup> Who gave her presentation by proxy due to COVID-19 restrictions.

the role that proximity to the city might play, and how young people in very remote areas may be more excluded than those in rural areas nearby to cities.

Finally, the handover ceremony of the EU Youth Dialogue to the German Presidency took place, before the conference was closed by Mr. Ivica Bošnjak, State Secretary, Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy.

## Section 2: Forming the Outcomes

The 7th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue process was based on several interlinked processes. Firstly, National and European Youth Dialogue Activities took place amplifying voices of young people. This used participatory approaches supported by researcher analysis to efficiently and reliably capture the opinions of over 56,000 young people. Methods included focus groups, survey work, participatory action research, visual methodologies and dialogue events.

The findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities were then elaborated in two reports. The first report focused on the cycle theme 'Creating Opportunities for Youth' and the three subtopics of the 2019/2020 Trio of Presidencies of the Council of the European Union: Quality Employment for All; Quality Youth Work for All; and Opportunities for Rural Youth. These subtopics were linked directly to Youth Goal #7 Quality Employment for all and Youth Goal Number #6 Moving Rural Youth Forward, as well as other youth goals such as the Youth Goal #8 Quality Learning. The second report elaborated on the topic of 'Opportunities for Rural Youth', providing detailed findings from the common European surveys conducted within the National Youth Dialogue Activities.

Both findings reports were distributed and presented to the participants of the EU Youth Conference 2020 in Zagreb, Croatia (EUYC 2020 Zagreb). The EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants then had a chance to build on these reports by engaging in workshop groups to further debate and elaborate on the voices of young people. Through these workshop groups the recommendations and examples of good practice in this document were created. These were elaborated individually by each group, so do not necessarily represent an agreed position shared by conference participants. The recommendations and examples of good practices were recorded by the facilitators and researchers working on the cycle, based on discussions and presentations of participants to the conference floor. Within this document, each recommendation is reproduced individually as fully as possible, meaning some may duplicate or overlap. They were also grouped and summarised for the purposes of this document. Separate workshops took place for the general outcomes of the cycle and the specific outcomes on rural youth.

## Section 3: General Outcomes of the 7th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue

This section has been produced to provide material for an upcoming Resolution on the outcomes of the 7th cycle of EU Youth Dialogue. A summary is shown below followed by more detailed elaboration of each section.

### *Summary of general outcomes- Quality Employment for All*

- **Improving young workers rights** – through better regulation and reducing discrimination such as by ending unpaid internships and traineeships.
- **Protecting young people’s mental health and wellbeing at work** – as a response to the impact of precarious employment and an uncertain future of work.
- **Blending work and learning** – by creating learning opportunities for young workers, and opportunities for students to experience work-based learning.
- **Promoting recognition of non-formal education and volunteering by employers** – for instance, through expanding and strengthening Youthpass.
- **Extending careers guidance** – for instance, by providing support both during and after education.
- **Increasing support for youth entrepreneurship** – for instance, through mentoring and financial support.
- **Involving young people in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee** – for instance, through collaboration with Youth Council.

### *Summary of general outcomes- Quality Youth Work for All*

- **Youth worker training: implementing European frameworks nationally** – it was identified that the various standards, definitions and competency frameworks developed at European level, should now be implemented on a national basis, to further standardise youth work across Europe.
- **Continuing exchange of youth worker practices across Europe** – was identified as useful such as through Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme transnational cooperation activities training.
- **Increasing delivery of youth work in schools** – was identified as a way of giving more young people access to youth work, and reforming formal education.
- **Increasing visibility and publicity of youth work opportunities** – so that more young people were aware of them.
- **Fostering more inclusive youth work** – so that youth work was sensitive to a diverse range of young people's needs.
- **Further developing digital youth work** – in order to improve the use of digital technologies in the youth sector.
- **Improving pay and labour conditions of youth workers.**

### *Summary - Opportunities for Rural Youth*

- **Creating employment in rural areas** – to ensure rural areas are attractive to young people.
- **Linking farming and youth** – finding synergies between agricultural and youth policy and investing in farming to better support young farmers.
- **Providing vocational education for rural development** – to equip young people with the skills to build a rural economy that is desirable to them.
- **Improving connectivity and transport** – in order to increase young people's access to opportunities outside of their areas.
- **Promoting youth participation in rural areas** – by investing in existing rural youth organisations and bringing public administration closer to rural areas.
- **Investing in the rural youth sector** – by investing in rural youth centres and piloting new approaches to delivering youth work in rural areas.
- **Improving access to information on youth opportunities** – ensuring young people in rural areas are aware of existing schemes such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps

### 3a) Quality Employment for All

#### Improving young workers rights

Various recommendations focused on improving labour rights of young workers and workers in general. They included suggestions to decrease discrimination, end unpaid internships and traineeships, and improve workers terms and conditions through regulation. It was also highlighted that EU funds that create employment opportunities could be better used in order to ensure they fund more long-term positions.

### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** In different parts of Europe there are huge differences in legal regulations when it comes to labour contracts. We recommend introducing minimal labour protection for young workers across the EU, to provide them with standards of minimum wage, ensure paid internship and to regulate the cooperation between education, employers, and the economy. Taking steps to achieve this would require launching some sort of European debate or European campaign for regulation in this area.
- **Recommendation:** Start a discussion and explore the universal basic income as a tool for youth inclusion.
- **Recommendation:** Create an obligatory EU-wide quality and learning agreement for all internships. Guarantee the responsibility of employers to enable "real" internships that enable the development of competencies and are paid.
- **Recommendation:** Ensure sustainable jobs for young people by fostering permanent job positions. Support more long-term projects when using EU/governmental funds that are employing young people.
- **Recommendation:** Use ESF (and related) funding to increase the quality of employment opportunities by promoting meaningful employment that leads to the development of workers. In the following seven years develop labour inspections and standards that should focus beyond technical requirements and include a broader evaluation of workplace quality, including wellbeing of workers in the inspection.
- **Recommendation:** The European Commission should set improving Labour Inspection Services as a priority of the European Social Fund.



- **Recommendation:** Provide incentives to companies to employ people, such as the funding of social security and medical costs by the state through company tax reduction. (Croatia has examples of this.)
- **Recommendation:** Adjust workplaces to be inclusive for young people with less possibilities. Key stakeholders for this are the Ministry of Labour.
- **Recommendation / example of good practice:** Decrease of discrimination in the process of applying for the job. In Finland and the Netherlands they are testing the practice within which a person can apply for the job through anonymous procedure. It can be that a person who performs a job interview does not get a CV and motivation letter in advance, or it gets it without the name of that person. In that way a person who performs an interview cannot form a bias and the possibilities for discrimination are minimised. That practise is great for people of different ages and different socially excluded groups because in that way they get invited to interviews and get a chance to get a job.

### Protecting young people’s mental health and wellbeing at work

These ideas were connected to the findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue activities that mental health and wellbeing at work was an increasing issue of concern for young people. They highlight an increasing concern with ensuring young people feel valued and fulfilled in the workplace, particularly in the new more precarious and flexible future of work.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** To improve the wellbeing of young people it would be beneficial to have flexible working hours or to reduce working hours; introduce a gap year before/after entering the labour market; promote working from home/teleworking to allow people to stay in rural areas; protect worker rights in “new” independent jobs; provide workers benefits that would help them in better work surroundings and satisfaction with work. Key stakeholders to help achieve this are national governments, the EU and employers
- **Recommendation / example of good practice:** Promote training for employers on understanding the intersectionality of youth. Give employers tools to value young people by providing training in this area. For example, within Cyprus, this has been implemented through using Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme with companies or employers.

### Blending work and learning

These recommendations and practices link to the findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities, which highlight there is a need to make strong links between work and learning and provide a blending mixture of both to young people. This arises from the concern that the formal education system does not equip young people with the competencies they require for future forms of work. The ideas from the conference floor identify that blending work and learning is both about reforming formal education systems, as well as bringing better learning and training into the workplace. This group of recommendation and practices also links directly to the recommendation on providing access to youth work in school. These are shown in the next section of this report.

*Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Promote support systems for young employees such as free training for employees with a "youth coach". This should be provided within companies using the expertise of National Youth Councils. Youth coaches could work in both youth centres and workplaces.
- **Recommendation:** To foster professional development, it is important to include international training and job shadowing; and exchange programmes within companies and partner organisations for employees. Key stakeholders in this are employers and national governments. National governments should support this through funding.
- **Recommendation / example of good practice:** Adjust school curriculum to labour market needs. For example, by holding classes dedicated to soft skills development as well as information on rights. Citizenship education in Portugal might provide an example of good practice for this. Key stakeholders to implement it are Ministries of Education in member states.
- **Example of good practice:** Implementing work experience into formal education: German dual college degrees combine work and business experiences. These can be seen as *long-term* internships or job shadowing programmes.

*Promoting recognition of non-formal education and volunteering by employers*

A key set of ideas from the conference floor was how to ensure that employers recognise the competencies and experiences provided by non-formal education and volunteering. This is connected to one of the findings from the National and European youth dialogue activities – that there is a need to blend non-formal and formal education in order to ensure young people have the right skills for work. Strengthening Youthpass was a particular feature of this discussion, and two groups outlined that Youthpass could be used as a tool to recognise all forms of volunteering and non-formal education. It was suggested this might require collaboration between the youth sector and employers to redevelop Youthpass so that it better reflects competencies that are of value to employers.

*Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Co-build the content and competencies within Youthpass with employers and strengthen information. This requires connecting Erasmus+ and work environments through dialogues. A good practice for valuing voluntary work is AHA in Austria.
- **Recommendation:** Use Youthpass as a tool for recognising learning from all internships, non-formal education and informal learning. Promote this on the EU level used and within all EU member states. This will help to advance recognition, to encourage mobility, develop mutual understanding between the employment and youth sector, and help to formulate and define skills. This process should be led by member states and involve youth organisations, employers, etc.
- **Example of good practice:** In France volunteering done through the seven-month-long civic service of young people is recognised as work experience. The civic service is Government

organised and participants have the same advantages they have as when they're studying, such as financial support for transportation.

- **Example of good practice:** Recognition of competencies gained through non-formal education/volunteering in Lithuania. Through participation in Youth Volunteering Service, a young person can get a score of 0.25 while applying to the University. In Ireland a person can get extra points when they apply to University if they volunteered or participated in non-formal (for example, art, photography), and put volunteering on your CV as work experience. In the Netherlands people can get extra points for scholarships if they participated in volunteering. However, the practice of giving extra points should be used very carefully because pupils might see it as one extra thing they have to do in order to get needed points. But at the same time, it can relieve some stress, because they do not have to engage in some curricular activities if they think that volunteering can provide them with needed points.

### Increasing support for youth entrepreneurship

Reflecting the findings of the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities there was a recommendation on the promotion of entrepreneurship coming from conference participants. Young entrepreneurs were said to need financial support, as well as other measures such as mentoring.

#### Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants

- **Recommendation:** Develop financial instruments to promote entrepreneurship on an EU level. Linked to rural areas this should focus on “AGROpreneurship” providing aid, tax reduction, access to land, access to finance, and access to knowledge for young farmers as entrepreneurs.
- **Recommendation:** Increase social entrepreneurship project funds, particularly at EU level. Key stakeholders for this are Ministries of Education, Ministries of Labour and other bodies allocating EU funds.
- **Recommendation:** Develop programmes for mentorships for young employees and young entrepreneurs (capacity building programmes for mentors, funds).
- **Example of good practice:** Empreende ja! (Entrepreneurship Now!) in Portugal, which provides a grant to help a young person develop a business idea for a year alongside mentoring support. Mentoring.

### Extending careers guidance

Reflecting the need for improving careers guidance highlighted in the National and European Youth Dialogue findings, conference participants highlighted the importance of having access to career guidance after finishing education rather than just within it. According to participants' group presentations, career guidance is needed “Not only for finding your first job but finding your second or third - just throughout your job path.” According to groups' feedback this was linked to precarious employment and mental health and wellbeing: “When young people lose their jobs for the first time that they should still have the guidance to get them there physically, but also mentally. This is not only like the responsibility of youth workers or youth organisations, but also a shared responsibility of the society and particularly employers.”

#### Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants

- **Recommendation:** Provide information on career-related opportunities and job counselling both during and *after* education. Ministries of Education are key stakeholders in enabling this.
- **Recommendation:** Recognise the shared responsibility of society and employers, in particular, towards guidance and support of young employees.

#### Involving young people in implementation of the Youth Guarantee

The conferences participants recommended involving young people in the implementation and development of the Youth Guarantee. This reflects the findings from National and European Youth Dialogue Activities which highlighted the need to promote youth participation in the development of labour market policies and programmes.

#### Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants

- **Recommendation:** Create synergies between the youth sector and employment sector by meaningfully including youth councils and NGOs in the Youth Guarantee task forces on the national level during the entire new funding period.
- **Recommendation:** Involvement of young people in the development of the Youth Guarantee at national level. Key stakeholders for this are the European Commission and member states.

### 3b) Quality Youth Work for All

#### Youth worker training – implementing European frameworks nationally

There were multiple calls from the conference floor to implement common standards for youth work training and qualifications across Europe, and to further promote youth worker training. The findings of the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities reflected that various European level competencies frameworks and definitions for youth workers were basically fit for purpose.

The conference floor responded to this by identifying that the next step in the recognition and training of youth workers was to take these frameworks and ensure that they are implemented at national level. This meant building and implementing national competency and training frameworks based upon common European standards. Unlike historical debates on youth work, there was almost no concern in either the findings or on the conference floor that youth work across Europe was too diverse to implement common standards. This suggests that Europe may be developing a more common and standard concept of a youth worker over time.

#### Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants

- **Recommendation:** Develop quality, accessible and recognised qualifications for youth workers, which include processes to recognise non-formal experience. Stakeholders include young people, youth workers, youth organisations and qualification providers.
- **Recommendation:** Implement national frameworks and guidelines for youth workers in order to better recognise the work of youth workers. This should be based on European recommendations and frameworks that can be adapted to national contexts. Key stakeholders include other official youth structures, Ministries of Education and Youth, or youth departments and youth councils.
- **Recommendation:** Improve training and recognition of youth work by establishing common standards for youth work across Europe. Key stakeholders include the EU and member states, who could be responsible for funding and promotion. NGOs could be responsible for implementation at national and local level.
- **Recommendation:** Recognise that member states should have a cross-sectoral approach to youth work.
- **Recommendation:** We need to fully incorporate agreed principles of Council of Europe recommendation on youth work across all youth work.

#### Continuing exchange of youth worker practices across Europe

In combination with the above, there were a number of recommendations to continue and extend the approach of exchanging youth worker practices and tools between countries, through mechanisms such as Erasmus+: Youth in Action transnational cooperation activities. The importance of making toolkits and resources available in multiple languages was stressed, in order that they can be used more effectively locally.

#### Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants

- **Recommendation:** Expand the reach of positive practice examples, toolkits and materials, as well as educational opportunities for youth workers, by providing all of these in national languages and promoting them nationally. This should be done through cooperation of National Agencies for Erasmus+: Youth in Action and ESC programmes, NGOs and the European Commission, who should provide funding. Adapt them for full-time professional youth workers, amateur youth workers, people who work with young people without knowing they are youth workers, etc., and promote and provide opportunities to access them on a national level.
- **Recommendation:** Facilitate the mobility of youth workers in order to share best practices across the EU – Erasmus+: TCA (Transnational Cooperation Activities) should be maintained for this.

#### Increasing delivery of youth work in schools

The importance of delivering youth work in schools and other formal education settings was identified by conference participants. This reflects two concerns that were also present in the findings of the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities. Firstly, that providing youth work in schools increased the numbers of young people who had access to youth work. Secondly, providing youth

work in schools helps bring non-formal education techniques into formal settings, which is beneficial for equipping young people with skills for the labour market. (See section on Quality Employment for All.) These recommendations also stressed the importance of publicising youth work opportunities through schools.

*Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Foster links between formal and non-formal education and use schools to inform young people about possibilities they have for youth work in their communities. Connect youth work and youth workers with school. This means schools need to promote and recognise youth work. Practically this could mean establishing “info-points” and “youthwork corners” in schools.
- **Recommendation:** Promote collaborations between formal education institutions and youth work and bring youth work into schools. This means developing programmes and seminars for school-based youth workers, as well as creating networks or partnerships and recognition of non-formal education. Doing this will help promote equal access to youth work. Key stakeholders include Eurodesk networks, youth organisations, ERYICA, National Agencies for Erasmus+: Youth in Action and ESC programmes, and Euro and municipality councils.

*Increasing visibility and publicity of youth work opportunities*

The findings of the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities identified the need for better publicity of youth work in order to increase the number of young people having access to youth work. Conference participants explored a number of ways this could be achieved in practice, and specific examples were highlighted in Finland and at European level. There were two dimensions to this: firstly, publicity about what youth work is and what youth work opportunities are available to young people; and secondly, better publicity and communication of the Erasmus+: Youth programme or other similar grant schemes.

*Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Example of good practice:** Campaign for promotion of youth work in Finland. There was an online campaign that aimed at promotion of youth work, focusing on what youth work is and what it does. Youth workers dressed in hoodies and made videos that were shared on social media (Hashtag #HUPPARIKANSANPOULELLA). In addition, youth workers also dressed in hoodies when they went to meetings with politicians in order to show that they are on the side of youth.
- **Example of good practice / recommendation:** Increase the visibility and impact of youth work in order to better promote it towards national-level stakeholders. For example, the Council of Europe ENTER! Youth week could be adapted on a national level and implemented by each member state.
- **Recommendation:** Facilitate better access and dissemination of the information about funding and opportunities for youth work. Key stakeholders include the EU and member states, who could be responsible for funding and promotion, while NGOs could be responsible for implementation at national and local level.

### Developing digital youth work

Linked to the idea of increasing access to youth work, the conference participants identified the need to develop the digitisation agenda. They discussed the concept of youth work organisations becoming research hubs that provided digital tools for youth work, and the widening range of digital tools.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Increase access to youth work and the quality of youth work through digitalisation. This means use of digital youth work, webinars, virtual youth centers, “web walkers” and development of applications for quality youth work.
- **Recommendation:** Support youth work organisations to act as resource centres that will provide digital and other tools that support youth workers and young people. Key stakeholders for this are young people, youth workers and the IT sector.

### Fostering more inclusive youth work

The conference floor made recommendations on how to promote accessibility and inclusion within youth work – that is to say, increasing the diversity of young people who had access to youth work. This included providing specific training for youth workers on the needs of marginalised groups and use of detached or mobile youth work.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation / example of good practice:** Develop training for youth workers focused on getting the information and understanding of the specific groups of young people they are working with (e.g. LGBTQI young people, Roma young people, young people who identify as disabled). This will help give access to youth work to a more diverse range of young people, so they feel safe and included, helps prevent conflict in youth settings, and promotes good mental health for young people participating. Presentations and training should be delivered linked to the information and target groups that exist in each local reality but coordinated under a common national framework so that approaches can be standardised. An example of good practice is Swedish training for youth workers for working with LGBTI young people ([www.much.se](http://www.much.se)).
- **Recommendation:** Mobile youth work (“youth work in movement”) and detached or outreach youth work should be encouraged in order to contact groups of young people not currently engaged in youth provision.
- **Recommendation:** Use and further support existing organisations and youth-led projects; improve funding for youth work and reduce bureaucracy. Stakeholders: European Commission and national governments.

### Improving pay and labour conditions of youth workers

The conference participants made recommendations to improve the pay and labour conditions of youth workers.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Improve labour protection for youth workers. Youth workers often work on contracts that are project based, or sometimes on a voluntary basis with contracts where their workers' rights may not be well protected. National government should prescribe minimum standards for employing youth workers, covering things such as working hours, benefits. They should also act to enable organisations that employ youth workers to maintain stable employment contacts.
- **Recommendation:** Empowering youth workers: getting youth workers motivated could be done by paying them more.

### Using youth research

The conference participants made recommendations around the use of youth research. These were particularly focused on monitoring and researching the impact of youth work.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Foster research on the social and economic impact of youth work as well as the value. For example, statistics about costs that society has if young people start to go in the wrong direction (e.g. jail, drugs, alcohol, unemployment, radicalisation, health issues, etc.) and how investment in prevention through youth work might be a better alternative.
- **Recommendation:** Create a logbook of data and research on youth work (e.g. data collection, statistics, practices). Good practices can become part of this so that other parties can get insight into youth work.

## 3c) Opportunities for Rural Youth

### Creating employment in rural areas

Reflecting the findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities, the conference participants identified the need to improve employment opportunities and promote economic development for young people in rural areas. There was a sense that rural areas needed to be able to adapt to new economic climates.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Positive discrimination towards rural areas. Lower taxes for people living in rural areas to encourage people to remain in these communities. Key stakeholders for this are national governments and local municipalities.
- **Recommendation:** Creating a mentality within rural areas that is adapted to the modern market whilst still keeping traditional knowledge, skills and tools. For instance, through exchanges, education, workshops and mobile services. Key stakeholders for this include regional governments, NGOs and Youth Centres.



## Linking farming and youth

Specific recommendations were made on farming. These focused on increasing funding and support for farming and making links between Agricultural and Youth policy at EU level.

### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Provide funding and access to sustainable and future-oriented strategies for young farmers in rural areas to make farming more attractive.
- **Recommendation:** Provide support for agricultural entrepreneurship, (“AGROpreneurship”) such as access to land, finance, knowledge; and advantageous tax or fiscal statuses for entrepreneurs in rural or remote areas. This may be encouraged by synergy between youth policy and the EU LEADER programme (links between actions for the development of the rural economy).
- **Recommendation:** Increase synergy between DC- Agri ( Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development) and DC- EAC (DG- Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) by including Youth Goal #9 (Moving Rural Youth forward) and Youth dialogue recommendations and findings in the Rural Development Fund funding priorities.

## Providing vocational education for rural development

The findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue activities indicated there is a need to increase access to educational opportunities in rural areas. In response to this, the conference participants primarily developed recommendations on vocational training and education within rural areas. Vocational learning was identified as important in order that the competencies acquired link to the forms of employment that exist, or could exist, within rural areas. This approach was said to encourage young people to stay within rural areas and might also be linked to other incentives to remain, such as tax reductions for rural residents.

### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Promote vocational careers and life-long learning in rural areas. This can be done through the opening of vocational/professional schools in rural areas. This will give young people from rural areas better skills and tools with which to get a job. Key stakeholders for this are Ministries of Education, national governments and educational institutions.
- **Recommendation / example of good practice:** Development of education centres in rural areas. In Ireland, after finishing high school, a young person can attend a more specific further education centre within their local communities. These are usually established in smaller local communities and offer more specialised vocational education and qualifications.
- **Recommendation:** Provide educational scholarships linked to the needs of local communities. This will help local communities offer young people employment after graduation. Implementing it requires networking between local government and companies, as well as promotional work to inform young people about the opportunity.

### Improving connectivity and transport

The findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities indicated that the lack of transport in rural areas prevented young people from accessing other opportunities, such as education, leisure, cultural activities, public services and employment. Responding to this conference, participants acknowledge the need to improve transport in rural areas. They identified ways in which dedicated transport could be provided, linked to accessing specific events and opportunities. In this way they focused on how to increase “connectivity” to opportunities for young people. Transport was a central part of this, but other elements such as digital tools and mobile public services are required.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Improve connectivity and infrastructure. Ensure stable internet connection in rural areas, access participatory structures, improved transport and mobility, and that rural young people have skills to use digital tools.
- **Recommendation:** Improve accessibility of opportunities, primarily through improving transport. This could be done through a car sharing system, free public transportation for youth, bike libraries, mobile public services and digital public services or apps.
- **Example of good practice:** Local municipalities in Frankfurt gave free public transportation for young people from rural areas who were attending cultural events in urban areas (KombiTickets - RMV.DE).
- **Recommendation:** Improve accessibility of transport for young people in rural areas in order to give young people opportunities to participate in opportunities outside their area. This could be done through municipalities organising or subsidising transport. This requires networking between municipalities, transport companies, media and schools, and the provision of information about opportunities.

### Promoting youth participation in rural areas

Conference participants identified that improving youth participation in rural areas required investing in the structures and networks that were already in place for this on a long-term basis. Investing in local youth councils, rural youth representation networks on a long-term basis was identified as important. Alongside this, it was said to be necessary to utilise the EU Community Led Local Development and LEADER programmes (links between actions for the development of the rural economy). The findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities indicated that young people in rural areas sometimes felt closer to their politicians and decision making because you were more likely to know them. As a result, conference participants encouraged the idea of devolving administration and decision making to local level.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Lowering the voting age to 16 so youth can see their input in each community and participate in a quality manner.
- **Recommendation:** Bringing politicians and bureaucracy close to rural areas in order to make it more accessible and tangible. Stakeholders for this include National Youth Councils, local municipalities, educational NGOs.
- **Recommendation:** Participation of youth in local decision-making processes should be

ensured through local youth councils and synergy with the LEADER programme. For youth and together with youth!

- **Recommendation:** Long-term funding for rural youth representatives' networks as well as ensuring promotions of funds and structures. Safeguarding existing structures for participation, such as community-led local development, from dismantling or being deprioritised. Stakeholders for this include European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, European Regional Development Fund.

### Investing in the rural youth sector

The findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities explore ways in which youth activities and programmes could be decentralised to rural areas. Conference participants identified a number of ways for this to occur. At European level the importance of building the Youth Goal on rural areas into EU financing was identified, as well as the need to undertake further research and implement pilot programmes on the delivery of rural youth provision. As with the findings, the importance of rural youth centres and spaces, as well as ensuring young people in rural areas access the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme and European Solidarity Corps was stressed.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Supporting social inclusion and strong social communities of young people by implementing youth-oriented projects such as bus libraries and community youth apps in rural areas.
- **Recommendation:** Establish multi-sectoral pilot programmes for rural projects for young people across a broad spectrum of economic, infrastructure, social and cultural areas using European Commission funding. These pilots should take place in two to three diverse rural regions from across the EU.
- **Recommendation:** Promote more research on rural youth to inform policy change on how to strengthen youth organisations in rural areas and promote rural lifestyles. A key stakeholder in this can be the European Commission and peer-to-peer exchanges should be encouraged.
- **Recommendation:** Local authorities should create and support youth “hubs” at local level in rural areas. This will fulfil the need for physical spaces for young people in rural areas to meet. Co-sharing with other public spaces such as rural cultural centres is a good example of this model to follow.
- **Recommendation:** The European Commission should immediately include youth goals in their overall financing guidelines and include youth goals related to rural youth in rural financing opportunities where applicable.
- **Recommendation:** Further promote youth activities in the rural areas by using European programmes (ESC, E+, etc.) as well as other activities of organisations in rural areas that provide youth work and leisure activities in the rural area. This should involve International Youth NGOs, municipalities and non-formal youth groups.

### Improving access to information on youth opportunities

The findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities highlighted the need to improve access to information for young people in rural areas and particular information about Erasmus+. Conference participants developed a number of recommendations to take this forward.

#### *Specific recommendations and good practices identified by conference participants*

- **Recommendation:** Improve access to information about education, funding and learning opportunities by using modern technologies. This could involve a database of good practice and practical guidelines for developing rural youth opportunities. Key stakeholders: NGOs, Ministries of Technology and Research, and Universities.
- **Recommendation:** Undertake national campaign to inform young people in rural areas about existing opportunities. Key stakeholders for delivering this include Governments, local municipalities and youth councils.

## Section 4: Summary of Conference Outcomes of the 7th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue: Opportunities for Rural Youth

This section has been produced to support an upcoming Conclusions of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council “Raising Opportunities for Young People in Rural and Remote areas”.

### Education in rural areas should provide...

*Recommendations and good practices identified by the EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants.*

- **... support for non-formal education in rural areas.**

Ensure stable funding and accessibility of non-formal education opportunities in rural areas, as well as its connection to the local communities.

- **... reviewed and better promoted Youthpass.**

Youthpass should be used to reflect on and evaluate skills acquired in non-formal learning environments as well as to encourage employers to take such skills into account.

- **... bridges from one learning type to the other.**

Bridging non-formal and formal education should take place not only for the young people, but also for the teachers who might benefit from non-formal learning contexts. At the same time, vocational education can be linked to non-formal learning settings.

- **... enhanced coverage of political participation.**

Topics such as youth rights and democratic participation should be covered in formal and non-formal education, including Youth Goals and European and national youth policies. Direct experience with political processes should be encouraged and supported.

- **... new topics in formal education curricula.**

Rural areas and agricultural topics should be covered in formal education in order to enable young people to make informed choices. Empowering and fostering of critical thinking is desirable as well.

### Social entrepreneurship in rural areas should be supported via...

*Recommendations and good practices identified by the EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants.*

- **... non-financial incentives.**

Conditions should be created for social entrepreneurship to take place. Namely, supporting young people’s capacities to engage in social entrepreneurship is to be ensured. Coaching, mentoring, provision of spaces aiming at support of creative skills, roundtables to enable idea sharing, networking events, visibility support, and many other activities can be included to achieve that goal.

- **... financial incentives.**

Subsidies on various levels (local, regional, national, the EU), zero interest loans, specific programmes and projects supporting financially young social entrepreneurs, and other financial support mechanisms should be established.

- **... co-creation design.**

Abovementioned support mechanisms should be co-created by actors from the international area (the EU), the national domain (representatives of the Member States) and the youth field (youth organisations, youth councils and other youth field bodies) in order to provide instruments visible and synergetic to all stakeholders.

Information and counselling services in rural areas should ensure...  
*Recommendations and good practices identified by the EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants.*

- **... quality infrastructure and connectivity.**

Youth centres as well as other infrastructure, including data connectivity, needs to be ensured in order to support information and counselling services in rural and remote areas.

- **... using a variety of channels, including the mobile ones.**

Online and offline information and counselling opportunities should be available in rural and remote areas, providing youth-friendly and needs-based information. Mobile information and counselling points (e.g. information buses) should be used where appropriate as well.

- **... focus on youth as well as youth-related stakeholders.**

Young people in rural and remote areas as well as local stakeholders and youth workers should be the target group of information services, providing for an information flow to each of the stakeholders in line with their needs. Local authorities may need information on financial schemes supporting rural youth, while youth workers in rural areas may need information on available training and coaching sessions in their vicinity as well as on international mobility opportunities for rural and remote youth (e.g. through the European Solidarity Corps).

- **... financial and non-financial support.**

Financial support of the information and counselling services in rural and remote areas is vital. At the same time, youth workers and counsellors should be provided with a wide range of educational opportunities and trainings in order to keep their skillset up to date and best aligned with rural youth needs.

Public services in rural areas should provide...

*Recommendations and good practices identified by the EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants.*

- **... digital services.**

Stable and good-quality internet connection is a basis for such provision, as well as accessibility of such services to young people and ensuring the young people have skills to use such services.

- **... decentralized services.**

Relocating or decentralizing some of the state-connected administration to the rural areas can provide young people in rural areas with access to services and employment opportunities.

- **... flexible services.**

Services should be available in a range of different formats and options. For example, in case of housing, different support methods for cases of renting, ownership, co-housing, public housing, social housing, and so on, can be prepared.

- **... cross-country services.**

Young people should be able to reach out to the nearest urban hub in case of some services. In order to achieve this, local transport should be designed in cooperation with neighbouring countries in order to facilitate access to urban areas on both sides of any given border.

- **... mobile services.**

Some of the services can be provided as mobile ones. Healthcare, free time activities, and other can move from place to place, giving rural youth an opportunity to participate without the need to travel on their own. Mobile libraries, doctors, or cinemas can be established.

- **... affordable and accessible services.**

All areas of life should be covered by affordable and accessible services, e.g. housing, healthcare, youth work. A position of "Youth Coordinator" could be created to help ensure the existent services are affordable and accessible to rural youth.

- **... multiservice centres.**

Different services can be hosted at one particular place, making such service centre a one-stop-shop across service areas.

- **... services based on research and needs analysis.**

Mapping the specific needs of the young people living in a particular area is the basis to finding solutions and defining action plans and local strategies to saturate these needs in a sustainable way. Local authorities should have access to resources for such mapping and planning.

- **... services designed together with young people.**

Young people should not only be recipients, but also be part of the designing and implementing processes, i.e. to be aimed at during needs assessment exercises and to be allowed to be heard in city councils and other local decision-making bodies. Berlin public transportation network can be an example of good practice.

- **... opportunities to enable youth start-ups to take part in service provision.**

Funding and other support to local youth start-ups, especially in various service-related areas, should be provided.

### Employment in rural areas should ensure...

*Recommendations and good practices identified by the EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants.*

- **... provision and recognition of volunteering as work experience.**

On the level of the EU and of the Member States, rural areas should be supported to provide work experience via volunteering which is recognized at the labour market. These opportunities should include the international options provided by the EU programmes as well as volunteering in agricultural sector which is directly connected to rural labour market situation.

- **... provision and recognition of paid internships as work experience.**

On the level of the EU and of the Member States, rural areas should be supported to provide work experience via paid internships which is recognized at the labour market. These opportunities should include the international options provided by the EU programmes as well as internships in agricultural sector which is directly connected to rural labour market situation.

- **... provision of flexible working conditions.**

Co-working areas, home-office based positions, and other forms of flexible employment should be supported in rural areas. Digital infrastructure and legal frameworks should be adopted to allow for such flexible working conditions to thrive.

- **... youth-friendly and youth-supportive agricultural policy.**

Agricultural policy should not only be friendly towards young people, but it should also be accessible by and supportive of young people. Boosting agricultural start-ups by young people, enabling mentoring and intergenerational learning to take place in agricultural environments, as well as providing reasonable conditions for young farmers to obtain or rent lands; all of these are examples that can contribute to this recommendation.

- **... supporting diverse employment fields.**

Farming and agriculture-related employment opportunities should not be the only option for young people living in rural areas. Diversification of the labour market in the rural areas is needed via policy instruments as well as other measures, such as supporting young professionals from rural areas to come back to their homes and not to stay in large cities.

- **... linking successful careers to rural areas.**

Storytelling concerning a successful career path should not be limited to urban spaces but should also be connected to rural settings. Successful careers in rural areas should be provided with media coverage and shared as success stories in their own right.

- **... guarantee equal salaries between rural and urban areas.**

Salaries for the same positions should not be differing widely between the rural and the urban regions, making the rural areas and work conducted in them comparable in conditions to the urban ones. At the same time, salaries should cover both regular working hours and overtimes in a fair and consistent manner in both urban and rural settings.



## Youth work in rural and remote areas should be...

*Recommendations and good practices identified by the EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants.*

- **... conducted by trained youth work professionals.**

Training and further education of youth workers in rural and remote areas should be ensured in order for the youth workers to be able to deliver youth work opportunities in such areas, including non-formal learning opportunities and counselling.

- **... mobile.**

Some of the youth work opportunities allow for a mobile mode of delivery. This should be taken into account and applied where possible. At the same time, mobility of young people across the rural areas in different countries should be supported (e.g. via the EU mobility schemes).

- **... combining online and offline opportunities.**

Reaching out as many young people living in remote and rural areas could be supported via engagement in a suitable mix of online and offline activities. Combination of those with the mobile mode of delivery mentioned above is to be supported.

- **... based on research and needs analysis.**

Specificity of rural areas in terms of culture, needs, and expectations should be taken into account and hence a needs analysis of a given rural area is to be taken into account when designing and delivering local youth work.

- **... supported in terms of financial as well as non-financial resources.**

Youth work in rural areas needs to be supported in terms of financial, human, and material resources in such a manner so that it is accessible and able to support rural youth within its specific environment. Sustainability is a key aspect of such support.

- **... providing young people with safe spaces to create their own projects.**

Safe spaces in terms of youth work infrastructure should be created with youth as well as for youth. Utilizing of existent spaces should be considered. Recognition of diversity of forms in which the youth spaces can occur is necessary in order to understand its purposes and uses (e.g. libraries, playgrounds, mobile spaces, street-based youth workspaces, etc.).

- **... supportive of and promoting participation on local level.**

Legal status and institutional support for self-organized youth as well as for youth councils on all levels should be enhanced. Local youth action plans should be created together with young people and implemented together with young people. Active participation of young people in rural areas in EU-wide participation initiatives, such as the EU Youth Dialogue, should be ensured.

## Quality leisure time in rural areas should be...

*Recommendations and good practices identified by the EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants.*

- **... recognized.**

Extra-curricular activities should be recognized as an important factor of improving the quality of life of young people in rural and remote areas.

- **... accessible.**

Young people of different backgrounds and needs should be all able to access leisure time activities offered in rural and remote areas. Using modern methods of social interactions could help in engaging people of different backgrounds, for example by creating application procedures which allow for friends to join in, once they see one of their peers applying for a given activity.

- **... happening in youth-friendly places.**

Spaces co-designed by young people for young people should allow for a leisure time spending outside of home which is relaxing as well as safe.

- **... financially and non-financially supported.**

Various actors engage in the leisure time area, and each of them requires a specific financial support: youth centres, cultural centres, sports centres, schools, and many other. Youth workers and youth services should also be supported through infrastructure (both online and offline), equipment, social awareness campaigns, and cooperation with local action groups.

- **... connected to the local community.**

Good practice models should be shared across the Member States in order to enhance the connection between the leisure time activities and local communities. Redefining youth centres in rural communities in order to make the two as interconnected as possible could help the youth centres to accommodate trans-sectoral needs of the young people, offer various areas of interest from co-working spaces through counselling services to purely leisure time activities.

- **... based on research and needs analysis.**

Design of the leisure time activities in rural and remote areas should be based on research and needs analysis findings in order to best fit the situation of young people in these areas. Tailor-making of the leisure time activities to the needs of both the young people and the communities they live in is essential. Research and needs analysis should be conducted via youth-friendly methods such as participative methodologies.

- **... promoting sustainable lifestyle in rural areas.**

Cooperation of youth organizations, local, regional and national authorities should ensure that sustainable lifestyle is promoted in and through the leisure time activities for young people in rural and remote areas.