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The future of youth in rural areas: responsibilities of local and regional authorities

Current Affairs Committee

Rapporteurs:[1] James MOLONEY, Ireland (L, ILDG)
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Summary

This report draws attention to the specific challenges faced by young people growing up in rural communities, including regarding access to education, employment, and affordable housing. It notes that young people in rural areas have less opportunities than their urban peers to participate in public and political life and provides a framework for local and regional authorities on how to provide better support for young people to be able to stay in rural areas.

In a resolution, the Congress calls on local and regional authorities to address these challenges in their policies, to provide support to rural youth organisations and to acknowledge the role of rural youth in safeguarding cultural heritage and rural traditions. It encourages them to promote youth participation, paying particular attention to youth from vulnerable and minority groups. It encourages associations of local and regional authorities to support rural municipalities to improve services provided to rural youth and young people's awareness of them.

In a recommendation, the Congress calls on governments of the member States to support rural youth via national youth, employment and housing policies and to ensure appropriate infrastructure in rural areas in order to provide equitable delivery of public services.

1 L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions.
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress.
SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats.
ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group.
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group.
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RESOLUTION 481[2]

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe,

1. Bearing in mind the 2003 Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life which called on local and regional authorities to pursue specific policies for youth in rural areas as well as Congress Recommendation 224 on (2007) "Ensuring the continuity of social services in rural regions" and Recommendation 252 (2008) "Services of General Interest in Rural Areas, a key factor in territorial cohesion policies"

2. Taking note of Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 of the Committee of Ministers on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030 and the work done by the youth sector of the Council of Europe and by the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), with whom the Congress regularly cooperates to promote youth participation;

3. Recalling the United Nations Youth Strategy which identifies youth participation, access to education and health services, and economic empowerment in its priorities, and draws specific attention to the need to promote access to services for youth in rural areas;

4. Keeping in mind that UN Sustainable Development Goal SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) calls for the support of positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas and that by addressing the challenges faced by young people in rural areas, local and regional authorities can also contribute to achieving SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure);

5. Bearing in mind the current European Union Youth Strategy (2019-2027) which includes 'Moving Rural Youth Forward' as one of its goals, to ensure equality for young people in urban and rural settings;

6. Recalling the European Social Charter (ETS n° 163) and the responsibility of local and regional authorities to promote and protect their citizens' social rights, including those of young people living in rural areas;

7. Taking note that population movements towards urban centres linked to economic development leave rural areas deserted and impact service delivery;

8. Considering that young people in rural areas have to face specific challenges linked to their geography, ranging from access to education, housing, digital connectivity and public services to community and well-being, social isolation and participation in political and public life;

9. Acknowledging the positive contribution of intergenerational links to social cohesion in rural communities and underlining that such an intergenerational exchange can also benefit urban youth;

10. Concerned about the lacunae in rural areas that are within local government mandate such as access to transport, employment, leisure, specialist support services, heightened visibility within their communities and the lack of awareness amongst young people of the services available to them;

11. Aware that both the financial crisis of 2008 which gave way to austerity policies upon rural areas and the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns which have affected Europe since early 2020 have also highlighted and exacerbated the issues young people face in rural communities;

12. Calls on local and regional authorities in member States to:

a. reflect and address in their policies the daily challenges experienced by rural young people, particularly in relation to education, public transport, health care, housing, employment, more quality jobs and digital connectivity, including place, person and evidence-based measures to develop young people's potential and provide better 'support to stay' for rural young people;

2 Debated and adopted by the Congress on 24 March 2022, 5th sitting (see Document CG(2022)42-15, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs James MOLONEY, Ireland (L, ILDG) , Aida JALILZADE, Azerbaijan (R, ECR).

b. engage in dialogue and partnership with rural young people, their organisations and other NGOs to promote youth participation and develop skills for navigating youth transition to employment, to make sure that any revised and/or new policies that affect rural young people's lives are as relevant and effective as possible;

c. ensure the vitality and future of local democracy by actively encouraging and enabling young people in rural areas to participate in political and public life and in decision-making processes, by promoting youth participation via structures such as youth councils and by providing training, and to consider including representatives of youth councils in the executive committees of local government bodies ;

d. integrate an intersectional lens to their policy-making process regarding rural youth, to ensure the best representation possible of young women, youth from minorities, migrant communities and youth vulnerable groups which are part of rural youth;

e. provide financial and other support to youth organisations and other community-based organisations as part of local youth policy in order to stimulate social interaction and networking, thereby reducing social isolation amongst young people in rural areas, such as for example by providing community buildings and other places for young people to meet;

f. acknowledge the importance of youth engagement in protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage and protect rural traditions and develop measures to establish a positive image of rural areas, taking inspiration from the European Union Youth Strategy (2019-2027) Youth Goal #6 "Moving rural youth forward";

g. develop the means to ensure that young people from different backgrounds can be included in national and international youth projects, for instance by implementing programmes led by youth workers and via information campaigns targeting rural youth, to show them the available mobility opportunities;

h. take action for the preservation of sustainable rural areas which are fundamental for the economic and social cohesion of an entire territory as urban and rural wellbeing are directly interlinked and complementary, developing the scope of young people to use existing natural and human resources in a sustainable manner;

i. acknowledge the interdependence between urban and rural areas and the suburban areas connecting them which have a specific role to play in developing urban-rural relationships that will facilitate not only youth transition to the job market but also contribute to improving their health and well-being;

j. encourage regional authorities and associations of both local and regional authorities in member States to actively support rural municipalities in order to improve access to transport, careers advice, leisure, specialist support services, and heightened visibility within their communities and the lack of awareness amongst young people of the services available to them.

RECOMMENDATION 473[3]

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe,

1. Bearing in mind the 2003 Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life which called on local and regional authorities to pursue specific policies for youth in rural areas as well as the Congress Recommendation 224 on (2007) "Ensuring the continuity of social services in rural regions" and Recommendation 252 (2008) "Services of General Interest in Rural Areas, a key factor in territorial cohesion policies" ;

2. Taking note of Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 of the Committee of Ministers on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030 and the work done by the youth sector of the Council of Europe and by the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), with whom the Congress regularly cooperates to promote youth participation;

3. Recalling the United Nations Youth Strategy which draws specific attention to the need to promote access to services for youth in rural areas and the current European Union Youth Strategy (2019-2027) which includes 'Moving Rural Youth Forward' as one of its goals, to ensure equality for young people in urban and rural settings;

4. Recalling the European Social Charter (ETS n° 163) and the responsibility of local and regional authorities to promote and protect their citizens' social rights, including those of young people living in rural areas;

5. Considering that population movements towards urban centres linked to economic development leave rural areas deserted and impact service delivery and that young people in rural areas have to face specific challenges linked to their geography, ranging from access to education, housing, digital connectivity and public services to community and well-being, social isolation and participation in political and public life;

6. Concerned about the lacunae in rural areas that are within local government mandate such as access to transport, employment, leisure, specialist support services, heightened visibility within their communities and the lack of awareness amongst young people of the services available to them;

7. Aware that both the financial crisis of 2008 which gave way to austerity policies upon rural areas and the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns which have affected Europe since early 2020 have also highlighted and exacerbated the issues young people face in rural communities;

8. Invites the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. take measures at the national level to support local and regional policy makers in developing and implementing effective strategies and policies that support rural young people;

b. support young people in rural areas via national youth, employment and housing policies, recognising the specific needs of rural young people; and develop policies for the preservation of sustainable rural areas and for urban-rural complementarity which is fundamental for the economic and social cohesion of an entire territory;

c. ensure appropriate infrastructure in rural areas in order to provide equitable delivery of public services, data connectivity and housing opportunities for young people, noting that this support will be particularly important during recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left young people particularly disadvantaged in terms of current and future opportunities;

d. acknowledge the importance of youth engagement in protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage and protect rural traditions and develop measures to establish a positive image of rural areas, taking inspiration from the European Union Youth Strategy (2019-2027) Youth Goal #6 "Moving rural youth forward".

3 See footnote 2.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

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INTRODUCTION[4]

1. Young people in rural areas have been the subject of public policy and research, particularly in recent decades, in light of population movements towards urban centres linked to economic development and concerns regarding delivery of social services in rural areas.

2. The world into which young people grow is changing in many ways, as a result of globalisation and other processes of restructuring. Structural declines in employment in agriculture and other land-based industries in rural areas, coupled with newer jobs in the service sector, mean that rural young people now live increasingly in a 'risk society' where individuals are less dependent on traditional support structures, such as family and church, and more dependent on labour markets and the welfare state.[5] One consequence of this 'individualisation' is that social inequalities or any 'crises' that young people experience are generally related back to the personal characteristics of an individual, rather than processes beyond that individual's control.[6]

3. The United Nations Youth Strategy[7] identifies youth participation, access to education and health services, and economic empowerment in its priorities, mentioning specifically the need to promote access to services for youth in rural areas. More broadly, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities - calls for the support of positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning (target 11a). However, by addressing the challenges faced by young people in rural areas, local and regional authorities can also contribute to achieving SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure).

4. In a similar vein, the current European Union Youth Strategy (2019-2027)[8] includes 'Moving Rural Youth Forward' as one of its goals, to ensure equality for young people in urban and rural settings.

5. The Youth sector strategy 2030 adopted by Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers[9] on 22 January 2020, to provide policy guidance and a broad political roadmap for the period 2020-30, insists on inclusiveness and, although rural youth is not specifically mentioned therein, the European Youth Centres of the Council of Europe carry out a yearly programme of study sessions and other activities including on rural youth.

6. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("the Congress") has considered the general situation in rural areas in some detail since 2007,[10] including aspects related to youth participation, the social rights of youth, transitions to employment, partnership working, place-based approaches, and local government action in communities.[11] The Congress has also committed to empowering youth and reducing the divide between rural and urban areas, in its 2021-2026 priorities.[12]

7. The social rights of all citizens of the Member States of the Council of Europe are guaranteed by the European Social Charter. The Congress, by its Resolution 442 (2019) has called on local and regional authorities to encourage national authorities to sign up to the European Social Charter, to disseminate

4 This explanatory memorandum is based on the document prepared by the Council of Europe consultant Dr Jayne Glass from researcher at Scotland's Rural College and Honorary Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. The written contribution is available from the Secretariat upon request.
5 Shucksmith, M. (2004), Young people and social exclusion in rural areas. Sociologia Ruralis 44(1): 43-59
6 Jentsch, B. (2004). Experience of Rural Youth in the 'Risk Society': Transitions from Education to the Labour Market. In: Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (eds) Young People in Rural Areas of Europe.
7 See 'Youth 2030'.
8 For specific detail of the 'Moving Rural Youth Forward' goal in the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 see the dedicated Youth Goals website.
9 Committee of Ministers' Resolution (2020)2.
10 See Congress Recommendation 224 "Ensuring the continuity of social services in rural regions" (2007) and Recommendation 252 "Services of General Interest in Rural Areas, a key factor in territorial cohesion policies" (2008).
11 Including work of the Congress that looked at A better future for Europe's rural areas (2017) and Developing urban-rural interplay (2020).
12As set out in paragraph 71 of Resolution 465: 2021-2026 Priorities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2021).

it and to raise awareness of the social rights of young people[13] through various initiatives.[14] Accordingly, local and regional authorities have a responsibility to promote and protect their citizens' social rights, including those of young people living in rural areas.[15]

8. The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), which has a working group on rural youth and with whom the Congress regularly cooperates to promote youth participation, has drawn the attention of the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress to the situation of rural youth in Europe. In line with the Congress' commitment to youth empowerment and its interest in the development of rural areas, and in response to the proposal made by the Advisory Council on Youth, the Rapporteurs have prepared the present report.

9. This report builds on previous work of the Congress by outlining the specific challenges faced by young people in rural areas. It takes note that rural areas struggle with demographic ageing, the emigration of young people and infrastructure challenges. It then considers how local and regional government policies can address these challenges, drawing on case study examples where possible. Based on the evidence presented, the report concludes by offering a framework for local and regional authorities that can be adapted to different place contexts.

1. RURAL YOUTH – KEY DATA AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

10. In 2018, around 45% of the world's population lived in rural areas. By 2030, the global share of the rural population is projected to drop further to 40%[16]. In the European Union (EU), almost 30% of the population (137 million people) live in rural areas which cover over 80% of its territory[17] (49.2% of young people in the EU aged 15-24 were living in a rural area (with differences between Member States in relation to population density and demographic structure, both in rural and remote areas).[18] In Russia, in 2020 25% of the population lived in rural areas, following a downward trend since 2010. Similarly, in the same year 23% of Turkey's population was rural, and this downward trend has been progressing since the 1960s, with a steep acceleration in the 1980s. In the other twenty Council of Europe member States this percentage ranges between 5% (Iceland) and 85% (Liechtenstein) and at least 9 countries the rural population is above the 30% range (Albania 40%, Armenia 38%, Azerbaijan 48%, Bosnia and Herzegovina 50%, Georgia 40%, Moldova 60%, Montenegro 35%, North Macedonia 42%, Serbia 45%).[19]

11. In another Congress document (2017) it is noted that many of the predominantly rural small European regions (EU NUTS-3 category) are experiencing population decline.[20] These include rural areas of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Scotland, Finland, the Baltic States, Romania and Greece. However, many of the intermediate regions are experiencing population growth, including in parts of the UK, Germany and France. The statistics clearly demonstrate the diversity across Europe's rural areas in terms of population change.

12. Higher rates of out-migration tend to occur amongst young women in many remote rural areas, with this often attributed to the constraints of living in a close-knit and controlling community. Additionally, some families may put pressure on young people not to leave their hometown, deliberately limiting the opportunities available to them as they grow up.[21] These issues raise difficult questions about the extent to which training and further education opportunities should be adapted to local labour market needs to encourage young people to stay.[22]

13 This report takes a similar definition of 'young people' as that used in Resolution 442 (2019): that 'young people' are a heterogeneous group in constant evolution and 'being young' varies greatly from one country to another. The definition therefore remains flexible, depending on the context.
14 As set out in Resolution 442 (2019) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – Social rights of young people: the role of local and regional authorities.
15 The European Social Charter explicitly refers to children and young people as entitled to social rights in terms of education and labour market integration.
16 www.un.org/development/desa/pd/themes/urbanization
17 A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas – towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous areas by 2040 (European Commission, 2021).
18 Eurostat: EU-28 population by educational attainment level, sex, age and degree of urbanisation (%), presented in 'Raising Opportunities for Young People in Rural and Remote areas' (Council of the European Union, 2020, para 3).
19 World Urbanization Prospects 2018, https://population.un.org/wup/Country-Profiles/;
20See A better future for Europe's rural areas (2017).
21 Culliney, M. (2014) 'Going nowhere? Rural youth labour market opportunities and obstacles', Journal of Poverty and Social Justice, 22(1), pp. 45–57.
22 Shucksmith, M. (2004) 'Young people and social exclusion in rural areas', Sociologia Ruralis, 44(1), pp. 43–59.

13. The rapporteurs underline the specific support rural municipalities need from the associations of local and regional authorities in member States in order to address the lacunae related to access to transport, careers advice, leisure, specialist support services, and heightened visibility within their communities and the lack of awareness amongst young people of the services available to them.

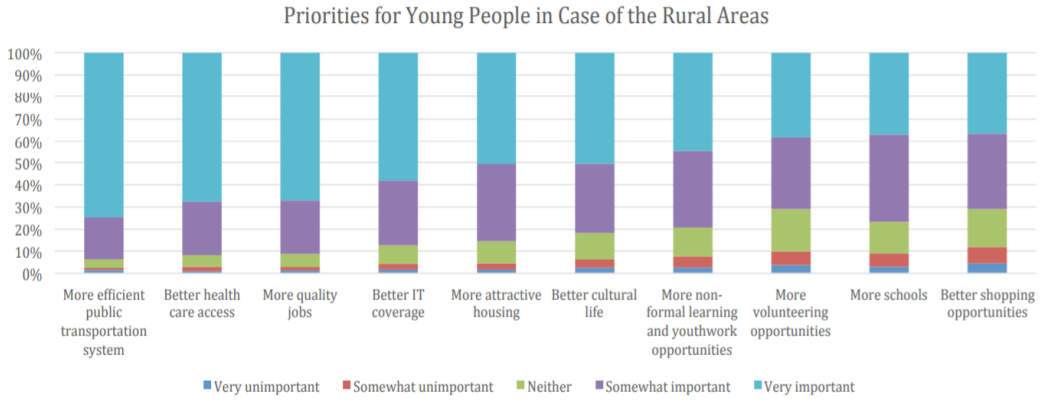
2. STRENGTHENING THE POTENTIAL AND AGENCY OF RURAL YOUNG PEOPLE: LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

14. Living in a rural area can instil a sense of identity and pride, as well as resilience that enables young people to become informed and engaged members of society. Young people have been shown to be particularly active participants in the productivity of family farms,[23] as well as creative in their leisure and recreational opportunities,[24] with an appreciation of "hard work and independence" as "intrinsic to rurality itself".[25] There are also many positive aspects of living in a rural area.

15. These include proximity to nature and a greater sense of community belonging than is typical in urban areas. Indeed, a recent survey of rural young people found that 80% of young people live in rural areas because of their emotional and family ties, with 71% feeling optimistic about the future, despite the many challenges they described about living in a rural area, and only 26% planning to move to a town or city.[26] Overall, younger children tend to express more positive views of the rural lifestyle, with increasing dissatisfaction appearing as they become older.[27]

16. As part of the structured dialogue work that took place during the development of Goal #6 of the EU Youth Strategy ('Moving rural areas forwards'), a survey of young people revealed a range of priorities for young people in rural areas (see Figure 1 below). Chiming well with the challenges outlined in Section 2 below, this group noted public transport, better access to health care, and more quality jobs as their 'top three' priorities.

Figure 1: Support mechanisms for increasing the attractiveness of rural areas for young people



17. There are a range of EU employment-related policies that have been designed for young people. In the past, these have tended to neglect the rural dimension,[28] yet today they are quite broad and far-reaching (see Table 2).

23 Riley, M. (2009) '"The next link in the chain": children, agricultural practices and the family farm', Children's Geographies, 7(3), pp. 245–260.
24 Jones, O. (2007) 'Rurality, Power, and the Otherness of Childhood in British Contexts', in Panelli, R., Punch, S., and Robson, E. (eds) Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth: Young Rural Lives. New York: Routledge, pp. 193–204.
25 Black, N., Scott, K. and Shucksmith, M. (2019) 'Social inequalities in rural England: Impacts on young people post-2008', Journal of Rural Studies. Elsevier, 68(August 2018), pp. 264–275.
26 Malcolm Watson Consulting (2018) Rural Youth Project 2018 Survey Report.
27 Powell, M. A., Taylor, N. and Smith, A. B. (2013) 'Constructions of rural childhood: challenging dominant perspectives', Children's Geographies, 11(1), pp. 117–131.
28 Dax, T., Machold, I. and Gerry, C. (2002) '"Youth Spirit" - the ingredient that makes all the difference?', in Dax, T. and Machold, I. (eds) Voices of rural youth. A break with traditional patterns? Vienna, Austria: Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, pp. 158–178.

Table 1: Overview of policy instruments and funds for young people in the EU[29]

Support for young farmers	Support that extends to non-farmers
Young Farmers Scheme for farmers under 40 who set up an agricultural holding for the first time. with an annual 25% top-up to basic payment, for five years. (compulsory for Member States	Business start-up support up to €70,000 on submission of a business plan; support for non-agricultural and micro/small enterprises/diversification of farm businesses, basic services and village renewal (M7), co-operation and support for innovation
Start-up aid for young farmers introduced by rural development policy (EAFRD) for young people under 40 who set up as farmers for the first time, which supports generational renewal of farmers at a flat rate payment to max. of €70,000	Youth Guarantee (ESF and Youth Employment Initiative) to ensure that all young people under 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, education, apprenticeship, traineeship (within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education)
	Youth Employment Initiative which supports young people living in regions where youth unemployment is higher than 25%, focussed on young people who are "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEET)
	ERASMUS+ which has a stronger focus in 2014-2020 on improving young people's job prospects, tackling youth unemployment and facilitating the transition from education to work

3. CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS

18. Specific issues affecting young people in rural areas across Europe are in many ways like those in urban areas, including access to education and training, employment, housing, welfare, and access to facilities only open to adults.[30] Rural young people also appear to share the usual mainstream aspirations as their urban counterparts. However, differences exist between living in urban and in rural areas despite work done to level the playing field in urban-rural interaction.

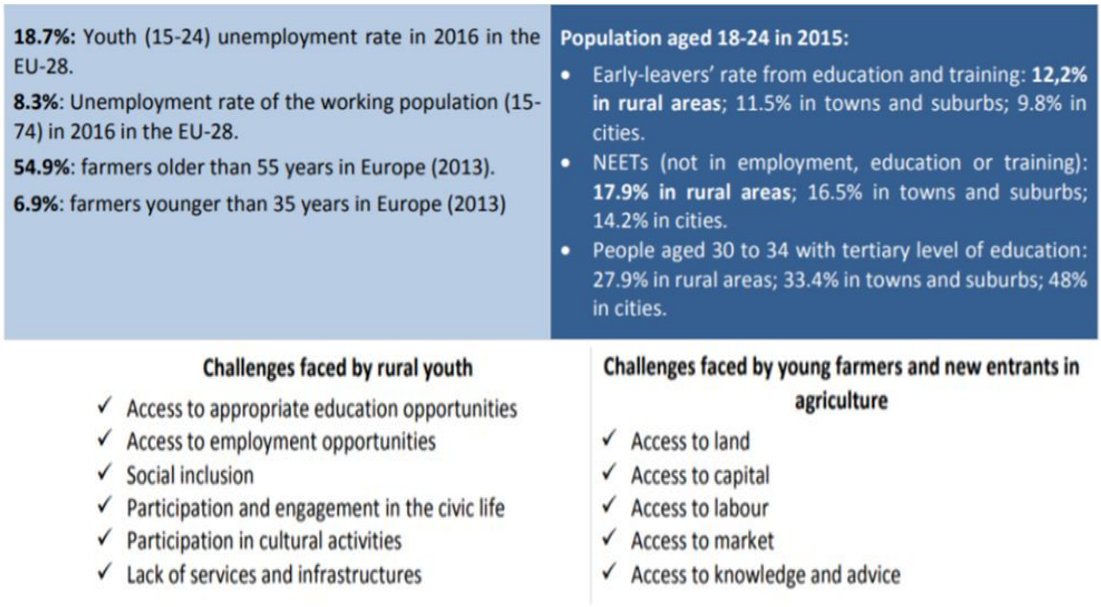
19. Young people are widely identified as a vulnerable group when considering the risk of poverty and/or disadvantage in rural areas.[31] Indeed, young people in rural areas experience challenges related to access to transport, careers advice, leisure, specialist support services, and heightened visibility within their communities, all of which may be less common concerns for young people in urban areas. These issues can be coupled with a lack of awareness amongst young people of the services available to them, with those most excluded finding it particularly difficult to access support.[32]

20. The assumption that 'to get on in life, you need to leave',[33] perhaps reflects stereotypes that leaving a rural area is evidence of ambition, while staying is due to a lack of ambition or arrested development. Those 'left behind' being described as 'no-hopers'[34] and typically associated with lower income families with lower educational levels reinforces a lack of attachment to the area or sense of pride/belonging. However, research on the same topic in the USA has found that it is can be the highest-achieving rural students who are among those with the greatest community attachment, and that student perceptions of local economic conditions are influential on the decision to leave or stay.[35]

29Source: ENRD factsheet.
30 Shucksmith, M. (2004). Young people and social exclusion in rural areas. Sociologia Ruralis 44(1): 43-59.
31 European Commission (2008) Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas. Brussels.
32 Atterton, J. and Brodie, E. (2014) Rural Scotland in Focus: Young people contributing to a vibrant rural Scotland. Edinburgh.
33 Shucksmith, M., Chapman, P. and Clark, G. (1994) 'Disadvantage in Rural Scotland: How is it experienced and how can it be tackled?'.
34 Pavis, S., Platt, S. and Hubbard, G. (2000) Young people in rural Scotland.
35 Petrin, R. A., Schafft, K. A. and Meece, J. L. (2014) 'Educational Sorting and Residential Aspirations Among Rural High School Students: What Are the Contributions of Schools and Educators to Rural Brain Drain?', American Educational Research Journal, 51(2), pp. 294–326.

21. At the same time, Europe's overall population is ageing. This process is more pronounced in rural and remote areas across Member States, where there is generally a higher share of older people.[36] Demographics are a key factor in the economic growth of an area and the outward migration of young people from rural areas has become a key concern.[37]

22. The chart below[38] presents some key data about rural young people in the EU as an example, outlining the challenges they face.



23. These challenges are coupled with the effects of urbanisation, which remain a key driver of change that has a significant impact on future policies.[39] The preservation of sustainable rural areas is fundamental for the economic and social cohesion of an entire territory as urban and rural wellbeing are directly interlinked and complementary.

24. This section provides more detail on these specific challenges experienced by young people who live in rural areas.[40]

3.1 From education to employment

3.1.1 Access and attainment

25. Access to education is more limited in rural areas across Europe than in cities, and the higher per capita costs of education provision in rural areas can be an important limiting factor.[41] Early literacy skills are important determinants of children's success at school, and poorly educated and poorly qualified young people have been found to be particularly exposed to exclusion and marginalisation in rural areas, with disparities in educational attainment a key concern.[42]

26. Despite this negative narrative about attainment, some studies have shown a high degree of satisfaction with the education system in rural areas.[43] It is also clear that family engagement with schools in rural settings is very important to address challenges related to young people's academic

36 See UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 18 (2017).
37Augère-Granier, M.-L. (2017) Rural poverty in the European Union. European Parliament Think Tank.
38 Source: ENRD factsheet.
39 See Global Trends to 2030 – Challenges and choices for Europe (ESPAS, 2019).
40 This section draws heavily from: Glass, J., Bynner, C. and Chapman, C. (2020), Children and young people and rural poverty and social exclusion: A review of evidence. Report to Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland.
41 Augère-Granier, M.-L. (2017) Rural poverty in the European Union. European Parliament Think Tank.
42 Pluskota-Lewandowska, A. (2010) 'Lifelong learning for inclusion-between theory and practice', Eastern European Countryside, 16(1), pp. 115–130.
43 Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (2002) 'Education and individualisation among young people in Angus, Scotland', in Dax, T., Machold, I., and Gerry, C. (eds) Voices of rural youth. A break with traditional patterns? Vienna, Austria: Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, pp. 38–58.

and social outcomes. Research from Europe and further afield notes the need for more research about family engagement in rural settings and how good relationships between rural families and schools can have positive outcomes for rural youth, despite community poverty.

27. Rural schools have also been found to have more intergenerational connections than urban schools (for example, parents and teachers who grew up together), as well as community cohesion outside of the school that allows teachers and families to interact informally. One example in Norway noted the way in which a rural school imports and transfers knowledge across the community, reproducing local community cultures.[44] In the event of threatened school closures, these inter-generational connections, cultural links and extended school activities that involve local communities have been found to be particularly important when contesting state-led changes to rural school provision

3.1.2 Entering the labour market

28. The experiences of young people in rural households received considerable academic attention in the early 2000s when rural young people were studied in detail by scholars across Europe.[45] Overwhelmingly, this work found that the needs of rural young people are often 'invisible' within geographies which are viewed by society at large as 'idyllic', 'natural' and 'peaceful' rural settings. It was also concerning at the time that most policies targeted at young people across Europe did not acknowledge that young people in rural areas encounter quite distinct problems.

29. As one expert explains, "in the area of employment, this could mean that those people who fail to secure a job (of a certain status) explain this with their own perceived shortcomings, rather than with structural causes."[46]

30. These types of perceptions may lead to less political action, with problems instead attempted to be solved at the level of the individual. The cumulative effects of the economic crisis of 2007-2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic have also redistributed social and societal risk, with young people particularly disadvantaged in this context of 'individualisation'.

31. For all young people, the transition from school to the labour market has become increasingly protracted and complex. Young people generally remain dependent on their families for longer than in the past, while at the same time they often have new opportunities that have arisen because of increased individualisation. This can result in extended youth transitions that may be non-linear and/or fractured, with young people often 'yo-yoing' between stages in their transition. Young people have varying resources and although individuals are increasingly accountable in the risk society for their own fates, their opportunities continue to be structured by class, ethnicity, gender and age.[47]

32. Educational experiences also influence the types of employment that rural young people seek, as well as whether they opt to work in the national or local labour market, and how they feel about their community and rural life. Concerns have been raised in some communities that there is a lack of vocational courses and that educational provision is not demand-led.[48]

33. As children grow up, the argument has been made that young people need a flexible system that fits around their changing needs, rather than expecting rural young people to follow a standard, linear transition into employment.[49] This may help to avoid the situation documented in some countries, where the national educational system can be a source of demotivation for young people in rural areas. In Portugal, for example, it has been found that "young people in rural areas often have to face up to the

44 Villa, M. and Knutas, A. (2020) 'Rural communities and schools – Valuing and reproducing local culture', Journal of Rural Studies.
45 Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (eds) (2004) Young People in Rural Areas of Europe. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing
46 Jentsch (2004, p.238)
47 Shucksmith, M. and Glass, J. (2021). 'The future of youth in rural areas. How can local and regional authorities help?' Presentation to the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress. 7 May 2021.
48 Green, M. (2007) Everyone matters? Voices of people experiencing poverty in Scotland, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
49 Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (2002) 'Education and individualisation among young people in Angus, Scotland', in Dax, T., Machold, I., and Gerry, C. (eds) Voices of rural youth. A break with traditional patterns? Vienna, Austria: Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, pp. 38–58.

harsh realities of life at a very early stage, at which point some begin to downwardly revise their initial dreams and ambitions".[50]

34. In general, rural young people often have to leave their home/community to attend further or higher education, not having the option to stay with their parents while studying due to the long commute required.

35. An additional reason for not staying at home or even staying at home instead of continuing studies (and low mobility in general) sometimes is high expenses of the travel. Young people after secondary school often do not have a job and thus, they financially rely on their parents. If a higher educational institution is far from home, it disables youth to continue studies or significantly cuts connection with family due to public transport costs. Possible solution: government or regionally provided discounts for students (as it is happening in public transport in Riga and other municipalities in Latvia). If this is too expensive, then another alternative is to support at least big families. For example, families with 3 and more children in Latvia can get a discount card (3+ Ģimenes karte) that cuts public transport cost by 90%. It significantly helps families and youth that study. Another solution that could be suggested for this situation is investing in technological advancement in universities, allowing students to follow lectures and give a number of exams from home (as it happened during the pandemic). So, they could still remain in their hometown and manage to dedicate a few hours a day for their studies without abandoning their family or find themselves in financial struggles.

36. Online, distance learning provision for both further education and higher education has increased in recent years. However, transport and the physical location of colleges/universities remains an important aspect in the mobility decisions of rural-residing students, particularly if a private car is required to travel to classes.[51]

37. The limited number of well-paid, full-time opportunities remains an issue today across rural Europe, with young people particularly hard hit by unemployment across the region in recent years.[52] The Council of the European Union has acknowledged that young people in rural and remote areas who are 'NEET' require particular attention and support in relation to their education, training and employment prospects.[53] This is because they are at higher risk of having fewer opportunities, as well as being more affected by economic conditions, when compared to young people who are NEET in urban areas.

38. For those in work, rural youth are often paid less than their urban counterparts.[54] Described as a 'double disadvantage', this lower pay is coupled with higher rural living costs, including the high cost of using public transport to travel to employment (or running a private car if one is available). It is also interesting to note that urban 'low-pay durations' tend to be somewhat shorter on average, with a higher probability of movement to a better-paid job in urban rather than rural areas.[55] Across Europe, long-term unemployment rates also tend to be higher in rural than urban areas.[56]

39. Social exclusion refers to power relations and processes of change. It looks beyond the labour market to consider other processes that affect the allocation of resources and how people integrate into society (e.g. housing, community, friends and family, agency, capacity). In eastern and southern Europe, youth unemployment is higher in rural than in urban areas, whereas in north and western areas, the situation is typically worse in urban areas. Therefore, there are clear differences in risks both within each national context and between the countries.

40. A key finding from research on European rural areas in the past couple of decades has been that rural young people tend to enter one of two distinct labour markets as they transition into adulthood. A 2004 analysis indicates that the first, the national labour market, is perceived as "well-paid, distant and

50 Dax, T., Machold, I. and Gerry, C. (2002) '"Youth Spirit" - the ingredient that makes all the difference?', in Dax, T. and Machold, I. (eds) Voices of rural youth. A break with traditional patterns? Vienna, Austria: Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, pp. 158–178.
51 Lucas, K. et al. (2019) Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System. Future of Mobility: Evidence Review.
52 Augère-Granier, M.-L. (2017) Rural poverty in the European Union, European Parliament Think Tank.
53 'Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Raising Opportunities for Young People in Rural and Remote areas'. Council of the European Union (2020)
54 Culliney, M. (2014b) 'The rural pay penalty: youth earnings and social capital in Britain', Journal of Youth Studies. Taylor & Francis, 17(2), pp. 148–165.
55 Phimister, E., Theodossiou, I. and Upward, R. (2006) 'Is it easier to escape from low pay in urban areas? Evidence from the United Kingdom', Environment and Planning A, 38(4), pp. 693–710.
56 Augère-Granier, M.-L. (2017) Rural poverty in the European Union, European Parliament Think Tank.

offering career opportunities", while the second, the local labour market, is generally characterised as "poorly paid, insecure and offering fewer prospects".[57]

41. However, it should be kept in mind that international mobility and the intranational dynamics have evolved since then. In some cases, there is no "local labour market" i.e., no local opportunities, or the national labour market is not perceived (at all) so positively, young people from rural areas preferring to migrate directly to other rural/urban areas from better perceived countries, with more economic opportunities.

42. In any event, the routes to these labour markets reflect how patterns of inequality may structure rural youth transitions, with those who cannot leave the local labour market generally becoming reliant on low-qualified, low-paid, insecure and often part-time/seasonal jobs with limited opportunities for progression.

43. However, for some young people who are raised in rural areas and who are focused on pursuing a rural career, a 'restriction' to rural locations does not necessarily equate to stunted aspirations – it can show a "conscious decision to continue a lifestyle to which they have grown accustomed".[58] Similarly, some groups of young people, particularly young women who have not attended higher education, do not see their social inclusion as reliant solely/primarily on their position in the labour market. For these young women, motherhood and the construction of family may be seen as more important (and carrying a higher social status) than low-skilled and low-paid employment in the local labour market.

44. The opportunities for young people to increase/upgrade their skills is also generally thought to be more difficult in rural areas.[59] The small size of rural businesses, as well as transport limitations, can also present a barrier to releasing young people to attend college or training.

45. In its 2017 report on "Forever young? The role of youth policies and youth work at local and regional levels in supporting young people's transition to autonomy and working life" the Congress noted that the successful transition to autonomy for young people requires some investment both in creating municipal youth departments, launching youth projects, supporting youth NGOs and youth clubs and in developing their programmes and activities as well as training youth councillors.

46. The rapporteurs reiterate the interdependence between urban and rural areas and the suburban areas connecting them and underline in this context that suburban municipalities and rural areas that are close to urban areas have a specific role to play in developing urban-rural relationships that will facilitate such transition.

3.2 Housing and the cost of living

47. Access to affordable housing is a common problem that affects rural young people, particularly when the cost of housing restricts their ability to remain in the area and/or there is a lack of social housing and/or single person dwellings to enable them to move out of the family home.[60] Access to housing for young people as they transition to adulthood has also become a growing concern in the context of trying to reduce the out-migration of young people from rural areas.

48. Rural young people have been described as having an 'intensified' experience of housing, due to the strong links between rural housing, the labour market and educational opportunities, which bring knock-on effects: those not earning an adequate and consistent income are unable to live in rural housing that meets their needs.[61]

49. Young people in rural areas often rely on the private rented sector, which can include poor quality accommodation, located in isolated areas, or they may resort to extended periods of residency in the parental home. In a 'worst case' scenario, limited rural housing options can lead to homelessness,

57 Shucksmith, M. (2004), Young people and social exclusion in rural areas. Sociologia Ruralis 44(1): 43-59.
58 Culliney, M. (2014a) 'Going nowhere? Rural youth labour market opportunities and obstacles', Journal of Poverty and Social Justice, 22(1), pp. 45–57.
59 Atterton, J. and Brodie, E. (2014) Rural Scotland in Focus: Young people contributing to a vibrant rural Scotland. Edinburgh.
60 Shucksmith, M., Chapman, P., Glass, J. and Atterton, J. (2021). Rural Lives: Understanding financial hardship and vulnerability in rural areas.
61 McKee, K., Hoolachan, J. E. and Moore, T. (2017) 'The Precarity of Young People's Housing Experiences in a Rural Context', Scottish Geographical Journal, 133(2), pp. 115–129.

particularly as there are very few 'emergency' housing options available for those who feel they can no longer live in the family home or who are forced to leave.

50. Rural households often face additional overall living costs when compared with their urban counterparts. Transport makes up the most significant part of these additional costs, followed by domestic fuel bills, food, household goods and social participation.

51. The rapporteurs draw attention to the role and responsibility local authorities have in taking the situation of young people into account in this context, in order to develop affordable housing solutions in their localities.

3.3 Digital connectivity

52. The importance of digitalisation for agriculture and rural areas, not only in relation to enhancing quality of life, but also to attract a younger generation to farming and rural business start-ups has been emphasised.[62]

53. In a recent international survey of young people in rural areas in the UK, USA, Canada, Sweden and Australia, 94% of the respondents stated that digital connectivity is essential for their future in rural places, yet slow broadband speeds and poor mobile phone coverage "deleteriously impact their lives".[63] Similar work carried out in focus groups with young people in rural Northern Ireland noted how young people feel socially disadvantaged due to a lack of access to digital technology and/or slow internet connections.[64] These issues can have practical implications for young rural dwellers, such as hindering potential routes to market for a new micro-business or affecting access to online learning/training.

3.4 Public services and other support

54. Access to transport is a key concern for rural young people. Sub-standard and expensive public and private transport infrastructure has been widely recognised as a key factor that can lead to the exclusion of rural young people from the education system and/or labour market. Accessibility constraints to and from most rural and remote areas (including some islands) through the EU have been recognised by the Council of the European Union.[65]

55. The cost of transport can also impact on the social participation of young people who cannot afford to attend activities/cultural events in places far from home. In households without access to a car or money for fuel, young people may be excluded from an activity that most urban young people might take for granted. Young people without access to a bus service in the evenings have described feelings of isolation as they are unable to visit friends or take part in activities,[66] as well as disenchantment with their locality due to not being as well-connected to 'global' reference points as their urban peers.[67]

56. The centralisation of advice and support services has had impacts on rural young people experiencing poverty and disadvantage across rural Europe.[68] Delivering specialist healthcare services in remote rural areas is a challenge experienced by healthcare providers in many countries, with the extent of the issue affected by the actual distances that patients and professionals are required to travel, access to public transport, and levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

57. This creates distinct social inequalities and marginalisation of rural young people because "many of the services that are most distant from the majority of rural communities – including hospitals, job centres and benefit offices – are those whose users are least likely to have access to their own private

62 Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2020). Developing urban-rural interplay.
63 Malcolm Watson Consulting (2018) Rural Youth Project 2018 Survey Report.
64 Youth Service Research (2019) Needs of Rural Young People.
65 Council of the European Union (2020) Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas 2020/C 193/03.
66 Pavis, S., Platt, S. and Hubbard, G. (2000) Young people in rural Scotland.
67 Dax, T., Machold, I. and Gerry, C. (2002) '"Youth Spirit" - the ingredient that makes all the difference?', in Dax, T. and Machold, I. (eds) Voices of rural youth. A break with traditional patterns? Vienna, Austria: Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, pp. 158–178.
68 Camarero, L. and Oliva, J. (2019) 'Thinking in rural gap: mobility and social inequalities', Palgrave Communications. Springer US, 5(1), pp. 1–7.

transport".[69] The centralisation of emergency healthcare services has led to an increase in travelling time for patients and this can place an extra burden on young people from poorer households as they must travel further for specialised care. If a parent or close relative requires hospitalisation many miles from home, this can also have a significant effect on the wellbeing of young people, particularly if they do not have access to transport to the hospital. Support from family members has been found to be crucial for enabling rural residents requiring drug use support services to attend appointments.[70]

58. The heightened visibility of young people in rural areas creates added challenges when seeking confidential drug, alcohol and sexual health advice. This can be particularly difficult for individuals in remote rural areas where healthcare professionals are usually known personally by them and their families, which can act as a barrier to seeking support.

59. The apporteurs highlight the crucial role of public transport and accessible health care services for the empowerment and inclusion of rural young people and the responsibility that rests with local and regional authorities in providing the necessary services in an accessible manner.

3.5 Community and wellbeing

3.5.1 The role of social networks

60. A key characteristic of the rural labour market is that personal networks are often pivotal for securing employment: a lack of the 'right' personal contacts can be a problem for job seekers. This is pertinent because many rural jobs tend to be with small businesses, which may rely informally on their personal and professional networks to hire new staff, rather than advertising jobs publicly.

61. Research has shown that young people manifest 'active' and 'passive' transition behaviors.[71] Those described as active tend to be associated with high achievers who have strong social networks. Those who are more passive tend to have much weaker social networks and levels of achievement. With out-migration generally linked by scholars and policy makers to the challenges presented so far in Section 2 of this report, it is widely accepted that the strength of social networks in rural communities plays a role in encouraging young people to remain in their local labour market.

62. Research in north east Germany has highlighted how, when compared to urban networks, rural networks tend to be smaller and include more family members and fewer supportive relationships.[72] The extent to which local networks can provide much-needed support is also weakened by the selective out-migration of younger and better educated individuals, as well as the ageing and shrinking of the overall population. This highlights how those young people in rural areas who are not integrated into networks beyond their family and friends (or perceive themselves to be poorly connected) have less capacity to cope with their situation.

63. Integrating young people into local networks is important for finding employment, as well as for constructing a basis for their wider participation in community matters. Taking the time to widen and deepen participation of young people in local networks may counter young people's dissatisfaction with rural society and their association of life in other places "with more freedom from the constraints and barriers they face at home".[73] For some young people, however, developing a network and engendering a sense of belonging can be a daily struggle, due to the way that power relations take shape in rural settings. The difficulties associated with visibility and stigmatisation may also contribute to a young person's decision to leave their community, if they do not feel attachment to it.

69 Woods, M. (2005) Rural geography. Processes, responses and experiences in rural restructuring. Sage, London.
70 Shaw, A., Egan, J. and Gillespie, M. (2007) Drugs and poverty: A literature review. A report produced by the Scottish Drugs Forum.
71 Jentsch, B. (2004). Experience of Rural Youth in the 'Risk Society': Transitions from Education to the Labour Market. In: Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (eds) Young People in Rural Areas of Europe.
72 Klärner, A. and Knabe, A. (2019) 'Social Networks and Coping with Poverty in Rural Areas', Sociologia Ruralis, 59(3), pp. 447–473.
73 Dax, T., Machold, I. and Gerry, C. (2002) '"Youth Spirit" - the ingredient that makes all the difference?', in Dax, T. and Machold, I. (eds) Voices of rural youth. A break with traditional patterns? Vienna, Austria: Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, pp. 158–178.

3.5.2 Social isolation

64. A lack of venues for young people to meet and socialise, or a limited selection of activities to take part in, are widely regarded as contributing factors to social isolation in rural areas. A lack of facilities can also encourage young people to leave the area. For those living in households with low disposable income and without access to transport, the issue is more critical and although feelings of isolation are felt especially strongly by those living in remote rural areas, isolation can also be felt in small rural towns. The rapporteurs note that public investments would be needed also to ensure that youth centres and youth clubs can operate in rural areas, ensuring meeting points and opportunities to gather and socialize.

65. Social isolation in rural communities has also been raised as an issue of concern for people with mental health conditions, particularly because of the additional distance from services and help networks. Young carers are particularly vulnerable to social isolation, especially if they are caring for an adult who has a 'stigmatising' mental health problem or drug/alcohol misuse condition and they are very visible in the community. Social isolation can also be a general issue for rural young people, with documented reports of young people feeling lonely or isolated in rural settings, even if they do not associate this explicitly with poor mental health.[74]

66. In the Netherlands, recent research found that growing up in isolated and excluded rural networks creates a sense of inferiority and stigma that can become deeply internalised.[75] For young people, this leads to an overwhelming reliance on family for support, which generates further inequalities for those in rural areas, particularly if their family is not well-connected within the community or if young people do not benefit from untarnished family backgrounds and solid local reputations.

67. These challenges highlight the theme of some young people feeling marginalised by the wider community and the need for research and policy to consider the interactions between rural youth and adults, rather than focussing on young people as a "group hermetically sealed from others".[76] Although the option to be recognised and known in a rural community can be a positive aspect of life (particularly in terms of accessing local networks), for those young people who rightly or wrongly develop a bad reputation or belong to groups that are at a higher risk of exclusion, this visibility can be a disadvantage. Groups at a higher risk of exclusion include LGBT youth whose invisibility, combined with homophobia and a lack of support services in rural areas may "act as push factors in encouraging migration or in leading to exclusion".[77] Roma people also live in rural regions, in segregated communities, and they are at high risk of poverty and social exclusion.[78]

68. Research has noted that some rural residents feel intimidated by the presence/activities of young people which they feel represent a 'cultural threat' to the 'rural idyll' but are not criminal activities, such as congregating in open spaces.[79] As a result, young people often employ "mobile strategies"[80] to navigate these relations and feel more connected to the rural place (for example, through walking and developing a detailed knowledge of the local landscape). This also addresses the fact that, despite an abundance of open spaces, young people are very limited in where they can 'get away' from adults in public spaces.

3.6 Political participation

69. The Congress has always underlined that local democracy requires the inclusion of young people in public and political life. In its own institution it has adopted a strategy for "Rejuvenating Politics" which, since 2014, aims to promote the participation of young people in public life and in the decision-making process at local and regional level.

74 Youth Service Research (2019) Needs of Rural Young People
75 Meij, E., Haartsen, T. and Meijering, L. (2020) 'Enduring rural poverty: Stigma, class practices and social networks in a town in the Groninger Veenkoloniën', Journal of Rural Studies. Elsevier Ltd, 79(August 2019), pp. 226–234.
76 Leyshon, M. (2011) 'The struggle to belong: Young people on the move in the countryside', Population, Space and Place, 17(4), pp. 304–325.
77 Atterton, J. and Brodie, E. (2014) Rural Scotland in Focus: Young people contributing to a vibrant rural Scotland. Edinburgh.
78 Augère-Granier, M.-L. (2017) Rural poverty in the European Union. European Parliament Think Tank.
79 Yarwood, R. and Gardner, G. (2000) 'Fear of Crime, Cultural Threat and the Countryside', Area. [Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), Wiley], 32(4), pp. 403–411.
80 Leyshon, M. (2011) 'The struggle to belong: Young people on the move in the countryside', Population, Space and Place, 17(4), pp. 304–325.

70. The rapporteurs are aware that compared to previous generations, young people today seem to have lower levels of political engagement in traditional forms of political engagement (voting and acquiring a membership at a political party).[81] For young people living in rural areas, this is also challenging. Policy-making is lacking to target this issue, taking into account different modes of political participation.

71. The question of the needs and challenges of rural youth in politically and economically transitioning countries is also of paramount importance. With the increase of right-wing nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, youth political marginalisation has also been noticeable in the past few years. Indeed, examples such as the role of the rural vote in Brexit or the "yellow vests" movement in France resonate with this idea.

72. For example in Croatia, rural youth can benefit from school-based political socialization.[82] Research from the International Civics and Citizenship Education Survey (2016) showed that rural students are more likely to have conservative viewpoints than their urban counterparts. However school-based civic education is associated with a greater acceptance of ethnic diversity.

73. The European Rural Parliament organised in 2019 to foster the participation of rural youth in political matters.[83] They had the opportunity to express their needs, through a platform of participants from 70 countries, with a large presence of young people from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The rapporteurs draw attention to this as an example of a successful initiative towards rural youth's political participation. However, globally there is still a need to increase rural youth's political awareness and initiatives to set a comprehensive and participatory "rural agenda" leadered by the youth.

74. The rapporteurs invite local authorities to actively work for enabling young people in rural areas to participate in decision-making processes, promoting youth participation for example via the creation of youth councils and providing training. Such policies are crucial to ensure the vitality and future of local democracy,

3.7 Challenges in a crisis context

75. One consequence of the individualisation experienced by young people within the risk society (see Section 1.2) is that social inequalities or any crises that young people experience are generally related back to the personal characteristics of an individual, rather than processes beyond that individual's control.[84] As Jentsch (2004, p.238) explains:

> *"In the area of employment, this could mean that those people who fail to secure a job (of a certain status) explain this with their own perceived shortcomings, rather than with structural causes."*

76. These types of perceptions may lead to less political action, with problems instead attempted to be solved at the level of the individual. The cumulative effects of the economic crisis of 2007-2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic have also redistributed social and societal risk, with young people particularly disadvantaged in this context of individualisation.

77. The impact of the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity policies upon European rural areas were significant.[85] These impacts were felt across Europe, where austerity policies have reduced public and private rural service networks (e.g. post offices, banks, public transport, social services, etc.), leading to increased disparities between urban and rural regions, and within rural regions. After the financial crisis, many countries have not managed to support clear futures for young people, which has exacerbated many of the challenges noted above. For example, research in Spain found that almost half of the Spanish municipalities are threatened by depopulation, with the out-

81 Kitanova, M., 2019. Youth political participation in the EU: evidence from a cross-national analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(7), pp.819-836.
82 Schafft, K., Stanic, S., Horvatek, R. and Masselli, A., 2021. *Rural Youth at the Crossroads Transitional Societies in Central Europe and Beyond*. 1st ed. Routledge.
83 See European Rural Parliament: https://erp2019.eu/news/young-people-designing-their-own-future-in-europes-rural-environment/
84 Jentsch, B. (2004). Experience of Rural Youth in the 'Risk Society': Transitions from Education to the Labour Market. In: Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (eds) Young People in Rural Areas of Europe.
85 As noted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Governance Committee, Resolution 422, CG33(2017).

migration of young, trained people connected to the lack of investment in services and infrastructure that has continued since the financial crisis.[86]

78. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns that have affected Europe since early 2020 have also highlighted and exacerbated the issues young people face in rural communities. For example, young people in rural areas were found to be experiencing loneliness during the pandemic more than elder members of their communities.[87] Concerns have also been raised that young people are one of the groups who have been more likely to 'fall through the gaps' of financial and other support during the pandemic.[88] Youth unemployment has risen in rural areas, highlighting significant barriers for young people currently wishing to enter the labour market.[89]

79. Young people are calling for better coordination between central and regional governments and municipalities to ensure crisis support interventions reach rural areas, as well as advocating for region-specific interventions to addressing problems rather than a more general approach.[90] Results of a survey carried out by the Rural Youth Project found that the immediate help young rural people would like from governments includes: sustaining and improving mental health services; improving broadband connectivity; and providing income and/or business/enterprise support.[91]

80. Similarly, there have been calls for investment in access to digital infrastructure and devices in rural areas to enable more young people to work remotely and access online services (including learning, coaching and employment services).[92]

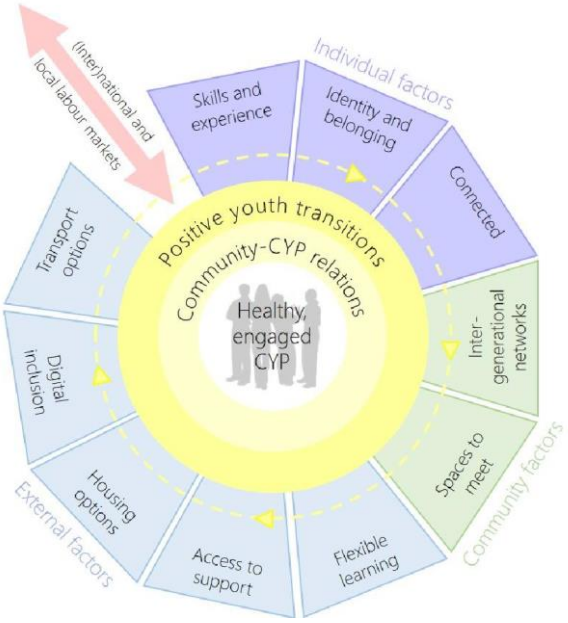
4. A FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

81. The rapporteurs consider the evidence-informed framework developed by experts and presented below a useful tool for local and regional authorities that wish to provide better 'support to stay' for rural young people. The framework encourages the development of flexible and creative support structures that can address each young person's individual and diverse needs. [93]

82. It is centred on nurturing the potential of healthy, engaged rural young people, who are nested within strong inter-generational community networks, which support positive youth transitions. The framework is organised around three types of factors that have been discussed in this report: individual factors (relating to an individual's skills, experience, sense of belonging, and connections); community factors (inter-generational connections, spaces for young people to meet); and external factors (access to flexible learning, other support, digital connectivity, housing and transport).It is intended that the framework can be adapted by local and regional authorities to suit their own place context, working through the multiple ways in which youth transitions can be supported, and young people can develop their own agency. The framework also signals the importance of ensuring that policies targeted at young people do not neglect the extent to which personal experiences are shaped by place-based factors, spatial processes and gender roles.[94]

86 Camarero, L. and Oliva, J. (2019). 'Thinking in rural gap: mobility and social inequalities'. *Palgrave Communications* 5: 95.
87 See the Generation Scotland 'Rural Covid Life' survey results (2020).
88 Scottish Rural Action (2020). 'Rural Communities Survey on Covid-19 – Response and Recovery'.
89 Glass, J., Shucksmith, M., Chapman, P. and Atterton, J. (2021). 'Covid-19 and financial hardship in rural areas: Insights from the Rural Lives project'.
90 International Labour Organisation (2020). 'Youth and Covid-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-being'. Report by the YOUTH team in the Employment, Labour Markets and Youth Branch.
91 Rural Youth Project (2020). Covid-19 survey.
92 International Labour Organisation (2020). 'Youth and Covid-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-being'. Report by the YOUTH team in the Employment, Labour Markets and Youth Branch.
93 Glass, J., Bynner, C. and Chapman, C. (2020), Children and young people and rural poverty and social exclusion: A review of evidence, Report to Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland.
94 Dax, T. and Machold, I. (eds) (2003) Voices of rural youth. A break with traditional patterns? Vienna, Austria: Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen.

83. A framework for local and regional authorities (CYP = children and young people)



Individual factors	Community factors	External factors
Skills and experience - Resilience to non-linear transitions Identity and belonging - Address marginalisation and visibility issues Connected - Strong personal network in the community	Inter-generational networks - Embracing young people in the idyll Spaces to meet - Opportunities to socialise and reduce isolation	Flexible learning - Increase opportunities Access to support - Health, employment Housing options - Accessibility/cost Digital inclusion - Infrastructure and devices Transport options - Public/private

4.1 Factors relating to an individual's capacity and personal development

84. The rapporteurs have noted a range of challenges related to the transition from childhood to adulthood in rural areas. Youth transitions in rural areas can often be 'non-linear' (e.g. involving unexpected events, being limited by lack of access to transport and/or being limited to the training/skills development available in the local area). Ensuring access to (and uptake of) high-quality education, as well as engagement in school activities (within and outside the curriculum) is important to ensure rural young people have the opportunity to engage in a range of learning experiences as they grow up.

85. The expense of public transport in rural areas is one of the key obstacles to access education. Indeed, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that education which is truly qualitative is available to all rural young people. With this in mind, it is important to understand that the consolidation of a number of schools is often the best way to ensure this in rural areas.

86. Moreover, professional education that addresses the different needs of the regions is available. Along with this, training opportunities and free of charge additional education courses for example, are also readily available to rural young people.

87. Improved understandings of how young people make their own identity and sense of belonging in rural areas emphasise the importance of accumulating experiences and complex social interactions in the place they are based. Strengthening place identity and local culture appear to be highly important to those negotiating the youth transitions described above. This requires issues related to marginalisation to be addressed, particularly in creating more positive relationships and equal power relations between young people and adults in rural places. There is also a role here for rural schools, by strengthening parental engagement and place-based identities rooted in local culture.

88. Creating more opportunities for young people to engage in local activities, sports, clubs, etc. will help to broaden their networks. Equally important is that young people are well-connected to communities beyond their own, via face-to-face networking opportunities, as well as good digital infrastructure and access to electronic devices.

4.2 Empowerment of rural young people through youth work and volunteering

89. Studies of young people in rural Europe in the early 2000s found very little involvement of young people in decision-making. For example, young interviewees in research carried out in rural Austria highlighted a widespread wish to have a voice and participate in decision-making, but this was in contrast with a lack of available opportunities for youth involvement at that time.[95]

90. The Council of Europe's work on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas acknowledge youth work as a valuable instrument for addressing disparities between rural and urban environments. This is because of the potential of youth work to engage young people across different age groups and backgrounds, including those who are at risk of being 'left behind' within their respective local communities.

91. The Rural Youth Project (RYP) is an international grassroots movement to empower young people in developing leadership enterprise and activism skills.[96] The project plays an integral part in making rural places attractive and viable for young people to build their lives in.[97] Funded via the Scottish LEADER programme, much of the work has focussed on Scotland, but the RYP has also conducted research on international experiences of rural young people[98] and supported the ENGINE work exchange programme for young people in rural Sweden and Scotland.[99]

92. Projects in Scotland have included hosting an Ideas Festival with over 100 young people attending over three days. Participants developed business and social enterprise ideas to create change in their communities. Another initiative - 9 to Thrive - explored flexible working patterns. RYP has also just launched the world's first smart village dedicated to young people. There are livestreams, meetings, events, and videos and fact sheets relating to young people living in rural communities.[100]

93. Moreover, volunteering has been described as "one of the expressions of active citizenship that can help ensure the social inclusion of young people in rural and remote areas as well as promote solidarity between generations in rural and remote areas".[101]

94. SALTO-YOUTH is a network of seven Resource Centres working on European priority areas within the youth field, providing young people with valuable non-formal learning experiences.[102] 'SALTO Inclusion' aims to stimulate the inclusion of all young people within the European Commission's Youth in Action programme. They note how various types of young people are missing from international youth projects for a variety of reasons, including geographical isolation. They place a strong emphasis on volunteering as a way to learn and develop skills and experience.

95 Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (eds) (2004) Young People in Rural Areas of Europe. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing.
96 See https://www.ruralyouthproject.com/
97 Presentation about the Rural Youth Project to the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress, 7 May 2021.
98 Malcolm Watson Consulting (2018) Rural Youth Project 2018 Survey Report.
99 This was a partnership between three Scottish LEADER programmes. See this case study on the Rural Youth Project website for more information.
100 See https://www.ruralyouthproject.com/act-do/rural-youth-project-smart-village
101 The Council of the European Union conclusions about opportunities for rural young people
102 See https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-2036/VillageInternationalUpdate.pdf

4.3 Intersectional approaches to rural youth

95. Globally, intersectionality is a concept that is not often mentioned when it comes to rural youth. Rural youth is composed of a set of cross-cutting relationships and identities. Indeed, there is a tendency to think 'geographically' about rural youth, rather than in terms of the different groups who make up 'rural young people'.[103] Rural young people often include minorities, refugees, young women, and others with specific profiles and needs. As a result, support structures and interventions need to be approached through an intersectional lens.

96. At the same time, young people have an important role to play themselves in revitalising local democracies in member States, through social and political participation. Again, youth participation needs a tailor-made and intersectional approach that is joined up with public and private sectors. It is therefore important to develop local youth policy strategies that ensure all groups who make up 'rural youth' are socially, politically and economically involved.

97. In Spain, gender has been identified as an important theme for policy interventions. This is in recognition that some younger women leave rural areas to look for unskilled/low skill employment, while others choose to stay to undertake caring roles. In response, la Asociación Española contra la Despoblación (the Spanish Association Against Depopulation) has launched a programme to encourage more women into traditionally male-dominated types of farming. Called the 'Escuela de Pastoras' (School for Shepherdesses), a farming and livestock training course for women in remote and rural communities is being delivered all over the country.[104] The course is delivered online over nine months, with one month of vocational training in Cantabria. There is a strong focus on managing time with children and creating support networks between fellow female farmers.

98. The Rural Youth Project, an international organisation founded in Scotland, aims at ensuring the visibility of the diversity and the reality of the lives of young people that live in rural areas.[105] Its podcast gives a voice for rural young people to share their experience, giving a more complete sense of their specific profiles and the different groups that they identify with apart from their identity as rural youth.

99. The rapporteurs note that local and regional authorities should integrate an intersectional lens to their policy-making process, so as to ensure the best representation possible of the minorities and vulnerable groups which are part of rural youth.

4.4 Factors related to place-based, bottom-up initiatives in the community

100. Disadvantaged young people can feel very 'visible' and 'stigmatised' in rural communities. This can lead to long-term, negative emotional impacts on young people, particularly if they feel there is nowhere for them to socialise and/or engage in organised activities. Unsupportive relationships with adults in the community may also hinder the development of young people's personal networks within the community and limit the potential for them to seek opportunities further afield.

101. Creating community-wide initiatives to bring together older residents with young people, particularly those young people who are typically excluded from community events, may help to address these issues. There is also an opportunity for owners/managers of rural businesses to include local young people in their business models, broadening young people's horizons and providing training in key skills.

102. The rapporteurs, recognising that social isolation presents a real challenge for rural young people, underline that there is a need for community venues/spaces for young people to socialise in a manner that is seen as 'legitimate' by the wider community such as youth centres, playgrounds for children, public sport facilities and institutions such as schools/libraries/"houses of culture" that should be open for youth initiatives and different interest groups.

103. They note that these are particularly important for reducing the likelihood of mental health issues related to social isolation among young people. Having 'safe spaces' to socialise is likely to have

103 Presentation by Karen Ayvazyan to the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress, 7 May 2021.
104 The initiative is based in Cantabria, Spain. See https://www.escueladepastoras.com/
105 See https://www.ruralyouthproject.com/

additional benefits in the winter months when rural children and young people may have fewer opportunities to socialise/exercise indoors than their urban counterparts.

4.5 Empowerment of rural young people through employment opportunities and entrepreneurship

104. There has been widespread action across Europe to develop employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for rural young people. This includes involvement in social enterprise, developing the scope of young people to use existing natural and human resources in a sustainable manner. The Council of the European Union has also acknowledged the importance of specific activities within the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE),[106] which can improve socio-economic conditions in rural and remote areas.

105. The ERASMUS+ EYE in Rural project – 'The Enhancement of Youth Entrepreneurship' – focusses on enhancing skills and competencies of young entrepreneurs in rural areas.[107] With partners in Greece, Poland, Spain and Turkey, the project offers an online training module and 'pilot' training in entrepreneurship for young people. Outputs from the project include success stories from Greece of young entrepreneurs who have started and/or developed their own businesses in rural areas.[108]

106. ESF funding has been used in Galicia in Spain to deliver career workshops to young people in rural areas who are at risk of social exclusion.[109] Workshops about careers in the audio-visual, communications and music industries are focussed on encouraging participants to take up further education, employment, or training. The workshop topics have also been suggested by local companies which would benefit from a wider pool of talent in these industries. This approach manages to balance the social and economic changes required by rural development with the area's environmental and cultural functions. More than 120 young people have taken part in the workshops, and more than a third of those who participated have either gone on to full time employment or taken up further training. It is hoped that the young people will be encouraged to stay in the area and develop their careers, which will help local social and economic development.

107. In rural Wales, the 'Llwyddo'n Lleol 2050' (Succeeding Locally) project is a campaign that showcases what young people can do and achieve by staying in rural Gwynedd and Anglesey.[110] The project challenges the perception that young people have to leave the area to succeed. There have been two cohorts of young entrepreneurs to date. The first supported 14 young people in a 10-week scheme, helping them to plan their futures. Participants received £1,000 in seed funding, and guidance/support from local experts who helped them develop their ideas into a business plan. All participants have since launched their businesses. The second cohort will target business ideas towards local growth opportunities, making it easier to find mentors and to support business development within local growth sectors such as food and drink, marine, energy and manufacturing.

4.6 Enhancing social participation and youth engagement

108. Studies of young people in rural Europe in the early 2000s found very little involvement of young people in decision-making. For example, young interviewees in research carried out in rural Austria highlighted a widespread wish to have a voice and participate in decision-making, but this was in contrast with a lack of available opportunities for youth involvement at that time.[111]

109. Encouraging social participation and the involvement of rural youth in local activities and processes provides an opportunity to tackle the challenges outlined in Section 2 that relate to local networks and social isolation that are present in a risk society. Although young people seek to manage and cope with these uncertainties, this task is not only for young people themselves but also those people and

106 The Council of the European Union defines this in their conclusions about opportunities for rural young people as "Enterprises and organizations (cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises) which produce goods, services and knowledge that meet the needs of the community they serve, through the pursuit of specific social and environmental objectives and the fostering of solidarity".
107 See https://eye-project.eu/
108 See https://eye-project.eu/news/success-stories-of-young-entrepreneurs/
109 See https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=4017
110 See https://www.mentermon.com/en/priosectau/llwyddon-lleol-2050/
111 Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (eds) (2004) Young People in Rural Areas of Europe. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing.

institutions which constitute the structures of opportunities within which young people must act (e.g. NGOs and others offering guidance and education).[112]

110. Local NGOs and other political structures can foster active citizenship amongst rural young people so that they are better able to express their needs and shape policy. However, youth services have declined across many countries in the past couple of decades – youth centres can provide safe and welcoming environments for young people but providing these services regularly/at required times of the week can be challenging, particularly as they often rely on volunteer support.[113]

111. Recognising the lack of participation of young people in earlier LEADER programmes,[114] examples now exist of purposeful targeting of young people, particularly via the 6B focus area of EU rural development policy (fostering local development in rural areas). For example, in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, the development of a Youth Local Action Group (LAG) directly empowered young people across the area to take part in LEADER funding decision-making processes during the 2016-2020 programme. This addressed a gap in youth involvement identified in the 2007-2013 programme in that area, with consultation with younger people showing that they viewed the idea of a Youth LAG as potentially beneficial for young people in the islands. A unique Youth LAG was subsequently launched through events in 2018 as part of the 'Year of the Young People' and allocated £100,000 for projects of benefit to young people. The Youth LAG included representatives from youth organisations from across the Outer Hebrides with support provided by area-based Community Learning Development Officers and LEADER staff.[115]

4.7 Factors related to external public policy interventions

112. It is important to recognise that rural young people have a wide range of expectations and realities, which may not map easily onto the standard educational system and which may change over time. Understanding young people's aspirations in more detail, as well as the pressures that might lead them to leave their local community, may help education and other support providers to develop bespoke educational and training opportunities for rural young people. Public policy that supports the development of intellectual capacities, and therefore the 'intellectual mobility' [116] of rural youth through education and training, is also likely to yield positive results.

113. Delivering specialist healthcare services and other forms of youth support has been found to be challenging. The key concern is that this creates social inequalities and marginalises rural young people because so many of the services that they need are distant from their homes. Co-ordinating initiatives that deliver different types of support is likely to yield positive results. Having a single point of contact for issues that rural young people experience may lead to more coordinated and timely responses.

114. Access to affordable/suitable rural housing is a challenge particularly for young people, who may be forced to leave the area or remain in unsuitable accommodation as a result. Others may have to stay in the family home for extended periods. There is a need for place-based solutions to local housing supply issues, with all relevant stakeholders involved in addressing the issue.

115. Young people need to be well-connected within and beyond their communities. This is important not only for their learning and personal development but also to interact with their local and wider peers. For those who may wish to stay in the local labour market, good digital connectivity can be crucial for many small business start-ups. Creating local workspaces/hubs within communities may also help.

116. Rural young people without access to a private vehicle or reliable and affordable public transport can be very constrained in relation to their participation in education, the labour market and social activities. Young people from households on low incomes are less likely than their urban counterparts to be able to travel long distances to take part in clubs, activities or social events. There is scope to

112 Shucksmith, M. (2010). 'How to promote the role of youth in rural areas of Europe?' Note for the Directorate General for Internal Policies. Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, European Parliament.
113 Youth Service Research (2019). 'Needs of Rural Young People'.
114 Metis GmbH, AEIDL and CEU (2010) 'Ex post evaluation of LEADER+'. A report for the European Commission.
115 Atterton, J., McMorran, R., Glass, J., Jones, S. and Meador, E. (2020). 'The role of the LEADER approach post- Brexit'. Scotland's Rural College.
116 Auclair, E. and Vanoni, D. (2004) 'The attractiveness of rural areas for young people', in Jentsch, B. and Shucksmith, M. (eds) Young People in Rural Areas of Europe. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 74–104.

consider place-based solutions to expand/subsidise transport options for young people to facilitate their participation in activities.

117. The rapporteurs would propose to focus more on the idea of connectivity between rural and urban areas, instead of the classic agenda of decentralisation, which may lead to higher degrees of urbanisation in the future. Focussing on connectivity also facilitates understanding and preparing for new trends such as young people (especially from 30 to 35 years old) preferring to migrate from urban areas to rural areas, as a consequence of the corporate life burn-out and of the general admiration for the quiet rural lifestyle that deserves to be preserved.

4.8 Cooperation to strengthen the agency of rural young people

118. The cooperation and collaboration of rural young people across borders and sectors can help to support young people's development by creating additional opportunities for education, training, social activities and other experiences.

119. For example, Rural Youth Europe (RYE), an NGO for rural youth, is an umbrella organisation for youth organisations "working to promote and activate young people in the countryside".[117] RYE acts as an intermediary and provides international training courses for young people across Europe. Led by young people, the organisation seeks to draw benefits for its members from cooperation initiatives. Recent events include a seminar about LGBT+ rights in a rural context, how to turn rural skills and experiences into business opportunities, and the impacts of 'shrinking civil space' on rural youth.

120. Another example, this time for women, concerns the 'WWW 4.0' initiative ('Mit Weitblick Weiblich Wirtschaften' – 'Female businesses with Foresight') in the the Styria region of Austria,, which aims to build a cooperative of self-employed women and female start-ups in rural areas.[118] Supported by two organisations - a regional non-profit that works for equality between women and men, and an agricultural training institute – the focus is on supporting a gender democratic society and providing training for women in agriculture. There is also a focus on networking and cooperation between the participants within the project, to foster knowledge sharing, mutual support and synergies due to multi-sectoral occupations of the participating women.

CONCLUSIONS

121. In 2003, the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life[119] called on local and regional authorities to pursue specific policies for youth in rural areas. Building on this call, the rapporteurs emphasise that policies developed by local and regional authorities should reflect and address the daily challenges experienced by rural young people, particularly in relation to education, public transport, health care, housing, employment, more quality jobs and digital connectivity, including place-based and person-based measures to develop young people's potential. They draw attention to the framework cited in paragraphs 78-79 as a plausible structure for developing specific policies for young people in rural regions.

122. They reiterate the interdependence between urban and rural areas and the suburban areas connecting them and underline in this context that suburban municipalities and rural areas that are close to urban areas have a specific role to play in developing urban-rural relationships that will facilitate transition.

123. Local authorities should ensure the vitality and future of local democracy, by actively encouraging and enabling young people in rural areas to participate in decision-making processes, by promoting youth participation and providing training.

124. Local and regional authorities should also integrate an intersectional lens to their policy-making process regarding rural youth, to ensure the best representation possible of the minorities and vulnerable groups which are part of rural youth.

117 See https://www.ruralyoutheurope.com/about/
118 For more information, see the ROBUST project best practice case study on the WWW4.0 project.
119 See the Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (2003).

125. In this context, the rapporteurs underline the specific support rural municipalities need from the associations of local and regional authorities in member States in order to address the lacunae related to access to transport, careers advice, leisure, specialist support services, and heightened visibility within their communities and the lack of awareness amongst young people of the services available to them.

126. Financial and other support to youth organisations and other community-based organisations is a necessary part of local youth policy in order to stimulate social interactions and networking, thereby reducing social isolation amongst young people in rural areas. In this context, the rapporteurs underline that the provision of community buildings and other places for young people to meet should be a priority for local authorities.

127. Local and regional authorities should also, in so far as possible, enter into dialogue and partnership with rural young people, their organisations and other NGOs to promote youth participation and develop skills for navigating youth transitions. This will ensure that any revised and/or new policies that affect rural young people's lives are as relevant and effective as possible.

128. Given, how young people from different backgrounds are missing from international youth projects for a variety of reasons, including geographical isolation, local and regional authorities should be invited develop the means to reverse this trend, for instance by implementing programmes led by youth workers and via information campaigns targeting rural youth, to show them the available mobility opportunities.

129. At the national level measures need to be taken in order to support local and regional policy makers in developing and implementing effective interventions and strategies that support rural young people and ensure appropriate infrastructure in rural areas in order to provide equitable delivery of public services, data connectivity and housing opportunities for young people. This support will be particularly important during recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left young people particularly disadvantaged in terms of current and future opportunities.

130. Aware of the importance of youth engagement in protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage and taking inspiration from the European Union Youth Strategy (2019-2027) Youth Goal #6, the rapporteurs invite both local and regional authorities and the national authorities to protect rural traditions and develop measures to establish a positive image of rural areas.

131. The rapporteurs note that alongside support provided to local and regional authorities, national governments should also support young people in rural areas via their youth, employment and housing policies, recognising the specific needs of rural young people as outlined in this report. This support should include measures to ensure that rural young people have the equivalent access to digital infrastructure and connectivity as their urban counterparts. This is particularly important following the COVID-19 pandemic which has profoundly changed lifestyles and territorial interplay.