

RAISE Youth

Rural Action for Innovative and Sustainable Entrepreneurship for Youth

Date of creation

2018

Description

The RAISE Youth project is an innovative initiative designed to tackle rural unemployment and depopulation in four EU countries: Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain. It focuses on empowering NEETs (young people not in employment, education, or training) aged 25-29 by promoting sustainable agro-business and tourism through training, mentoring, and digital tools.

Key elements of the practice include the establishment of five RAISE Centres, which act as hubs for education, business incubation, and demonstration of sustainable agricultural practices. NEETs received training in sectors like agriculture, tourism, and ICT (Information and Communication Technology), with personalised mentoring and psycho-social support enhancing their employability. Notably, 162 new businesses were started by participants, contributing to local economies.

The RAISE model emphasises collaboration between rural youth, local entrepreneurs, and various stakeholders, fostering value chains that connect individuals across sectors. The use of digital platforms for marketing, crowdfunding, and crowdsourcing, as well as the introduction of smart farming techniques, further supports youth entrepreneurship and sustainable rural development.

The project's sustainability is ensured through capacity-building of local trainers, financial independence via digital tools, and institutional support through stakeholder partnerships. The methodology developed by RAISE Youth is replicable, adaptable to different local contexts, and aims to address long-term socio-economic challenges in rural regions.

Beneficiaries

NEETs in recent search

Young people (NEETs – not in education, employment, or training) in the 4 target countries – Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain – are experiencing unemployment as their biggest problem because it directly affects the possibility of their independence, future planning, building their own skills and abilities. Youth unemployment and NEETs population are highest in rural areas, especially in the 4 target countries.

The primary target group of the project was NEETs aged 20-29, with a specific focus on rural NEETs aged 25-29. The secondary target group included younger NEETs (20-24) as well as suburban/urban NEETs. Out of the 3794 NEET project beneficiaries, 61.5% were women, and a total of 233 Roma individuals benefited from the project, primarily in Bulgaria and Romania.

Countries

Education level and sector

Adult learning

Non-formal adult education.

Level of implementation / Scope

 **Provider level**  **Local level**

Aims of policy/initiative

- Contribution in providing decent and productive work for youth through social innovation in rural areas of 4 EU countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Spain.
- Pilot and promote an innovative RAISE Model of (self) employment, for youth NEETs based on sustainable agri-business in 4 rural regions of EU with high unemployment rates and depopulation.

Features and types of activities implemented

- **RAISE Centres:** The project established five RAISE Centres as training, demonstration, and production hubs in rural areas. These centres offered NEETs training programmes in agriculture, tourism, ICT, and entrepreneurship, with a focus on sustainable practices and modern technologies such as smart farming.
- **Capacity Building and Mentoring:** The initiative provided individual mentoring, psycho-social support, and apprenticeships for NEETs. Trainers and mentors, developed through a "Train the Trainers" model, helped participants build practical skills while offering personalised guidance to enhance their employability and entrepreneurial abilities.
- **Business Incubation and Support:** NEETs were supported in starting their own businesses, particularly in sustainable agri-business and rural tourism. A total of 162 new businesses were launched through the project, and more than 700 NEETs were employed or self-employed after participating in the programme.
- **Digital Tools and Platforms:** The project created digital platforms to facilitate marketing, crowdfunding, and crowdsourcing, allowing NEETs and local entrepreneurs to access new markets and opportunities. These platforms were integral in supporting sustainable entrepreneurship and community engagement.
- **Stakeholder Cooperation and Value Chain Creation:** The initiative promoted collaboration among stakeholders, including local businesses, government, academia, and civil society. This horizontal and vertical cooperation helped establish value chains that connected local entrepreneurs with NEETs for job opportunities, mentoring, and apprenticeships.
- **Sustainability and Transferability:** RAISE ensured the long-term impact of its activities through continuous capacity building, strategic partnerships, and financial sustainability mechanisms like monetisation of digital tools. The methodology developed is adaptable and replicable, designed to be applied in other regions facing similar challenges of rural unemployment and depopulation.

Target group

A key component of the RAISE Youth project was the "Train the Trainers" initiative, which focused on building the capacity of local trainers who would, in turn, train NEETs in rural areas. These trainers were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver targeted education and mentoring programmes in agriculture, tourism, ICT, and entrepreneurship. By investing in the professional development of these trainers, the project ensured that they could not only teach practical skills but also provide personalised support, guidance, and psycho-social assistance to NEETs. This approach not only ensured the continuity and scalability of the programme but also created a sustainable framework for local communities to foster long-term employment opportunities and economic development in rural regions.

The RAISE project laid a foundation for sustainable development through bringing together the following stakeholders:

- Relevant Institutions working with NEETs (educational institutions, local and regional public institutions).
- Policy makers, NGOs (high green footprint / environmental impact, awareness about empowerment of NEETs).
- Stakeholders in the area, such as families, companies in green sector and labour market.

Resources

EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment funded EUR 4,763,985 (85% financing).

Lead project partner:
GTF-Initiative for Sustainable Growth (HR)

Beneficiary partners:

- "AUR" - the National Association of Human Resources Specialists (RO)
- CASARRUBUELOS CITY COUNCIL (ES)
- Center for Sustainable Communities Development (BG)
- City of Gospić (HR)
- Factory Ltd. (HR)
- Fema Ltd. (HR)
- FUNDECYT Science and Technological Park of Extremadura (ES)

Evidence of effectiveness of the measure

RAISE Youth contributed to providing decent and productive work for youth through social innovation in rural areas by achieving the following:

1. Enrolled 3,015 NEETs in education and training programmes focused on agriculture, tourism, and/or ICT (Information and Communication Technology).
2. Provided individual mentoring, apprenticeships, and/or mobility schemes to 614 NEETs through the DEMO Center work package, enhancing their employability.
3. Contributed to the employability of NEETs in rural areas, with 788 reported to have gained employment after improving their skills within the project. However, the actual number of employed NEETs is likely higher due to challenges in follow-up assessments.
4. Supported 162 NEETs in starting their own businesses with the assistance of the RAISE team.

In addition to these quantitative results, RAISE has been working on addressing unemployment and depopulation in rural areas more broadly by:

- Creating a transferable methodology that can be applied in different contexts.
- Networking nationally and internationally, facilitating exchanges between countries.
- Introducing sustainable and digital solutions to local communities to foster economic development and resilience.

Overall, RAISE Youth has made significant strides in empowering youth NEETs in rural areas, equipping them with skills, opportunities, and support to pursue employment or entrepreneurship, and contributing to the economic and social vitality of rural communities.

Success factors

The RAISE Youth initiative introduced several key innovative elements that set it apart from previous practices and contributed to its success in addressing youth unemployment and rural depopulation:

- **Sustainable Agri-Business Focus:** Unlike traditional employment programmes, RAISE Youth emphasised sustainable agri-business as a central pillar for rural development. By integrating eco-friendly practices, such as smart farming and permaculture, the initiative promoted long-term environmental and economic sustainability, creating viable self-employment opportunities in agriculture and rural tourism.
- **Digital Tools and Crowdsourcing Platforms:** The initiative leveraged digital tools that had not previously been used extensively in rural youth entrepreneurship. It created platforms for marketing, crowdfunding, and crowdsourcing, allowing NEETs to raise funds, promote their businesses, and access new markets in innovative ways. This use of digital solutions helped modernise rural economies and connect participants to broader opportunities.
- **Integrated Training and Support Model:** RAISE Youth combined formal skills training with personal mentoring, psycho-social support, and real-world apprenticeships. This holistic approach not only equipped NEETs with practical skills but also addressed personal barriers to employment, such as confidence building and resilience. The "Train the Trainers" model was particularly innovative, as it created a sustainable mechanism for continuous learning within communities.
- **Value Chain Creation and Stakeholder Engagement:** A key element of the initiative's success was its ability to foster horizontal and vertical cooperation among stakeholders, including local businesses, governments, academia, and civil society. By establishing value chains and promoting cross-sector collaboration, RAISE Youth ensured that rural NEETs could tap into existing networks and resources, providing a more integrated and supportive environment for employment and entrepreneurship.
- **Tailored and Replicable Methodology:** The project developed a flexible methodology that could be adapted to the specific needs and challenges of different rural areas. By keeping a global perspective while tailoring the approach to local contexts, RAISE Youth created a model that was both scalable and transferable, capable of being replicated in other regions facing similar issues of rural unemployment and depopulation.
- **Gender and Minority Inclusion:** The initiative had a strong focus on inclusivity, particularly engaging women (61.5% of participants) and minority groups like the Roma community. This focus on marginalised groups ensured that the benefits of the programme reached those most in need, further enhancing its impact on reducing rural inequality.

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Related intervention approaches



Helping female NEETs (re)integrate into education, employment or training



Offering mentorship programmes to NEETs



Easing transitions into work



Skills development



NEETs living in remote areas - Bridging the geographic divide

