



NEETs living in remote areas - Bridging the geographic divide

Problem statement

[Research](#) suggests that distinguishing between urban and rural NEETs is crucial, as rural areas often have higher NEET rates. Rural NEETs face specific barriers, such as limited access to education and employment opportunities, inadequate transportation, and fewer social services compared to their urban counterparts. These disparities can lead to greater isolation and lower chances of (re)-integration into the workforce or education and training.

Rural areas have their own cultural and economic contexts, including different social norms, values, and expectations compared to urban areas. For example, there may be a stronger emphasis on traditional gender roles and community cohesion, which can influence young people's career choices and educational aspirations. In rural areas, the [school-to work transition](#) can be more challenging due to fewer job opportunities, limited physical access to higher education institutions, and less developed infrastructure. This is particularly pronounced in southern and eastern Europe, where urban-rural disparities result in greater inequalities.

Policymakers face significant challenges in addressing the root causes of disadvantage that contribute to the higher incidence of NEET status in remote areas. Factors such as poverty, lack of or limited access to relevant services, and social exclusion make these issues worse, creating environments that are less supportive and inclusive for young people.

These barriers hinder the provision of opportunities and resources necessary for NEETs to succeed. Despite the implementation of various policy measures in recent years, NEETs in remote areas continue to face unique challenges. There is a pressing need to identify and understand these challenges, as well as to draw lessons from successful initiatives across the EU.

Rural NEETs

Helping those geographically left behind



Beneficiaries

- NEETs in recent search
- NEETs in long-term search
- Discouraged and disengaged young people

NEETs living in remote areas

Addressing the problem

Fully understanding the main features of rural NEETs forms the basis for developing or further tailoring interventions aimed at this subgroup. Building up-to-date knowledge on remote NEETs allows policymakers and practitioners to define more adaptable and flexible policies. Based on this, other tips can help policymakers and practitioners identify and target factors responsive to change, supporting further development of youth employment activities at the regional level. Additionally, those working with NEETs can benefit from identifying recent trends and sectors that have shown either positive or negative employment potential for young people in rural settings.

💡 Tip 1: Understanding the needs of rural NEETs

To address the challenges faced by rural NEETs, it is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of their unique characteristics and circumstances. This can be achieved by gathering geolocated data, applying targeted outreach strategies and engaging stakeholders. Such understanding forms the foundation for creating interventions tailored to this subgroup or for further adapting existing programmes. By building up-to-date knowledge about remote NEETs, policymakers and practitioners can design more adaptable as well as flexible education and labour market policies that respond to the evolving

needs of their target groups.

Research on rural NEETs, exploring various aspects including key individual characteristics, highlights the critical influence of educational attainment and gender in shaping young people's trajectories. Remaining in the NEET category in rural areas is often driven by low qualifications and gender stereotypes, which disproportionately [affect young women](#). These factors significantly shape the psychosocial profiles of rural NEETs. For example, rural women in the NEET category tend to be dedicated to family care duties and may develop a more negative view of professional choices, resulting in lower wellbeing compared to their urban counterparts. Conversely, rural men in the NEET category frequently experience unemployment, enduring cycles of precarious and low-skilled jobs, and may come to accept these conditions as normal. Understanding these dynamics is essential for recognising how various factors interact to shape the personal characteristics of rural NEETs.

Research on the determinants of youth unemployment across industries and regions, such as the '[Collaborative and sharing workspaces: policies for youth in EEA peripheral regions](#)' (Cowork4YOUTH), exemplifies this approach. By focusing on less developed regions across four EU countries (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain), this research project analyses existing policies on youth employment and examines the incidence and evolution of youth employment over time and in cross-regional comparison. Findings revealed a negative association between youth employment and sectors classified as 'brown' sectors (those with high pollution or emissions intensity), highlighting the need to consider both regional and sectoral dynamics.

Tip 2: Creating bottom-up approaches and actively involving rural NEETs in policy design and implementation

Addressing the challenges faced by NEETs in rural areas requires innovative strategies that engage the young people they aim to support. Bottom-up approaches, which prioritise local involvement and empowerment, are particularly effective in crafting solutions tailored to their specific needs. By involving these individuals directly in the design and implementation of community initiatives, policymakers can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to more sustainable and impactful outcomes. For example, [involving rural NEETs in work-based social projects](#) not only provides them with practical, soft, and employability skills but also strengthens their connection to the community and can increase their confidence in the job market.

Leveraging local knowledge is a key advantage of bottom-up approaches. Rural NEETs, having firsthand experience of their communities' challenges, are well placed to identify pressing issues and potential solutions. Engaging them in dialogue and decision-making processes enriches the quality of initiatives and ensures cultural and contextual appropriateness. [Methods such as community workshops and participatory action can facilitate this engagement](#), ensuring diverse voices are heard. For example, local forums can be organised where NEETs propose ideas for local development projects, such as setting up a youth centre or launching a community clean-up campaign. Capacity building is another critical element; empowering rural NEETs involves equipping them with the skills and resources necessary to participate actively in development processes. This might include leadership training, project management skills, and education in

civic engagement. By investing in the capacity of young people, communities can cultivate a new generation of leaders capable of driving change from within.

Tip 3: Leveraging digital technologies and focusing on digital inclusion

In an era of rapid digitalisation, it is crucial to ensure that NEETs are not left further disadvantaged by the digital divide. [Cedefop](#) defines the digital divide as the disparity between individuals with access to information and communication technologies (ICT) – i.e. making use of services offered on the web – and those without, highlighting disparities within and between countries.

Digital technologies present a significant opportunity for NEETs in remote areas to enhance their skill sets and access new career paths. For example, [in rural regions of countries like Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye, digital skills tend to lag behind](#) urban areas, underlining the importance of targeted digital inclusion efforts. Digital skill levels of young people in rural areas are likely notably lower than both the EU average and those of their urban counterparts. By focusing on comprehensive training that goes beyond mere access to technology, young people can develop both technical and soft skills. This approach not only boosts self-confidence and promotes personal growth, but also facilitates community engagement and mobility. Similarly, [training opportunities in high-demand digital professions](#), such as data engineer, java developer, system and cybersecurity analyst, and salesforce developer, which incorporate soft skills along with mentorship and job placement support, open up pathways to sustainable careers remotely. Ultimately, these efforts can transform lives by providing young people in remote areas with the skills and opportunities necessary to thrive in a connected world.

By investing in initiatives that provide access to digital skills training, online education, and [remote work opportunities](#), policymakers enable NEETs to acquire the necessary skills to compete in the modern job market. This approach can open up employment opportunities not constrained by geographical location, helping to reduce the social exclusion and lack of access to services that many NEETs in remote areas face.

The [Cowork4YOUTH research project](#) shows how co-working spaces and hubs can serve as vital collaborative workplaces for young people. These spaces offer opportunities for training in digital and entrepreneurial skills, fostering an environment where young people can share experiences and knowledge. Co-working environments are particularly prevalent in sectors where remote work is feasible and reliant on intensive networked computer use. Information technology, financial activities, professional services such as public relations and marketing, and administrative support services are all sectors well suited to co-working practices. These collaborative spaces not only facilitate teleworking but also encourage creativity and business innovation, benefiting freelancers, start-up entrepreneurs, and professionals.

By supporting the development of digital infrastructure and co-working spaces in remote areas, policymakers can enable NEETs to access online resources, connect with peers and mentors, and participate in supportive online communities. Such efforts can stimulate local economies, foster social interaction, and ultimately contribute to reducing the digital divide, empowering young people to seize new opportunities and promoting inclusivity in the digital age.

However, digital technologies alone are not a solution. An integrated approach is essential, combining investments in education and ICT with efforts to motivate

young people to use these technologies effectively. This means [providing tailored training programmes that match current job market demands](#) and ensuring that young people understand the tangible benefits and potential career paths associated with digital skills. In addition, fostering partnerships between education institutions, the private sector, and community organisations can create a robust support network, further encouraging active engagement and sustained interest in digital opportunities.

Tip 4: Developing local partnerships and collaborations

Policymakers can bring together local stakeholders, including employers, educators, and community organisations, to develop partnerships and collaborations that support NEETs in remote areas. This approach helps identify the specific needs of NEETs and develop tailored solutions to address those needs.

[Fostering partnerships between rural NEETs and stakeholders](#), such as local businesses and education institutions, amplifying the provision of essential resources, expertise, and networks. For example, local businesses might offer mentorship, while education institutions could provide tailored training programmes. Informal networks and peer support systems also play a significant role. Encouraging young people to form peer groups enables knowledge sharing and mutual support. These networks help NEETs navigate challenges together, share opportunities, and collaborate on projects, such as organising a local skills fair or starting a cooperative enterprise.

Value chain creation and stakeholder engagement are also key success factors. This is illustrated by the good practice example [RAISE](#), an innovative initiative designed to tackle rural unemployment and depopulation in Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain. RAISE focuses on empowering 25- to 29-year-old NEETs by promoting sustainable agro-business and tourism through training, mentoring, and digital tools. By fostering horizontal and vertical cooperation among stakeholders, including local businesses, governments, academia and civil society, this project establishes value chains and promotes cross-sector collaboration. RAISE ensures that rural NEETs can tap into existing networks and resources, providing a more integrated and supportive environment for employment and entrepreneurship.

Local partnerships and collaborations can also raise awareness of the challenges faced by NEETs in remote areas and mobilise community support for initiatives that address those challenges. This helps build a more supportive and inclusive environment for NEETs and provides them with the encouragement and motivation they need to succeed. Building these partnerships might involve organising regular community forums and workshops that bring together local stakeholders to discuss shared objectives and potential collaboration opportunities. Offering incentives such as recognition awards or small grants for businesses and organisations that actively engage with NEETs can also motivate actors to engage more deeply.

Tip 5: Fostering rural youth entrepreneurship

Since the youth unemployment crisis following the aftermath of the Great Recession, youth entrepreneurship has been increasingly recognised as a strategy to address high levels of youth unemployment across the EU. By fostering an entrepreneur-friendly environment, young people's creative ideas can become successful businesses, generating employment and sustainable economic growth. While not a universal solution, entrepreneurship offers significant benefits for NEETs, including job creation, human capital development, and new skills acquisition. However, only a minority of young people have the necessary skills and traits for entrepreneurship, highlighting the need for targeted support. Policymakers can play a pivotal role by encouraging entrepreneurship among NEETs in remote areas, providing training, mentoring, and resources to help them develop the skills and confidence needed to start their own businesses.

A range of policy measures can foster rural entrepreneurship; these fall into one or more of the following three categories:

- fostering an entrepreneurial culture;
- providing [mentorship](#); and
- removing practical barriers to entrepreneurship.

Establishing hubs for education, business incubation, and demonstration of sustainable practices can foster collaboration between rural youth, local entrepreneurs, and stakeholders. Using digital platforms for marketing, crowdfunding, and crowdsourcing, as well as introducing smart farming techniques, can enhance youth entrepreneurship and stimulate local economies.

Effective youth entrepreneurship initiatives must target individuals with the right skills and ideas, with public authorities playing a leading role. [Providing incentives](#) and support to entrepreneurs willing to locate their businesses in remote areas, such as tax breaks, subsidies and access to funding, can attract new businesses and talent.

By empowering rural youth to start new businesses, these initiatives not only contribute to local economic growth but also address the challenges of rural poverty and isolation. With the right support, youth entrepreneurship can drive economic growth and equip young people with the skills and opportunities they need to thrive, ultimately benefiting disadvantaged regions across the EU.

Tip 6: Focusing on regional development for the benefit of NEETs

To support NEETs in remote areas, policymakers can use EU regional and cohesion funds. The European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can be used to finance projects that provide education, training, and employment opportunities for NEETs. In addition, other funds may offer suitable assistance, such as the Globalisation Adjustment Fund in the case of larger scale redundancies. These funds can also support entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives, as well as projects that promote social inclusion, including NEETs as a target group. By leveraging EU funding and participating in existing communities of practice or twinning opportunities, policymakers can develop and implement effective projects that address the specific needs of NEETs in remote areas.

Extensive current research outlines various strategies policymakers can

implement to address rural-urban disparities. [These strategies include:](#)

- combining job creation with enhanced accessibility and promoting rural entrepreneurship, such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups;
- improving urban-rural connectivity by upgrading digital and transportation infrastructures;
- developing rural industry clusters, including agriculture, agritourism, and renewable energy sectors;
- promoting lifelong learning and vocational training opportunities;
- boosting off-season tourism in regions that heavily depend on tourism; and
- encouraging companies to participate in social dialogue to reduce the impact of closures and provide retraining and reskilling programmes.

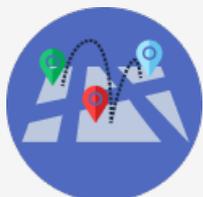
Whatever the support measures, it is crucial to tailor these to the regional context and to engage local stakeholders.

Expected outcomes

The positive outcomes can be expected at different levels:

Expected outcomes at different levels		
		
INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL	SYSTEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving self-awareness and building a career strategy for people living in remote areas by formulating long-term career plans and making informed choices • Developing a positive attitude towards learning, education and training through a better understanding of available options • Taking advantage of digital technologies to gain work experience and develop soft and employability skills via online learning and/or remote work opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using data and trends to identify and reach remote NEETs successfully • Implementing bottom-up approaches that involve remote NEETs in policy design • Fostering partnerships between organisations targeting remote NEETs and stakeholders, such as local businesses and education institutions • Strengthening connections to remote and rural communities through dedicated projects and participatory actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging companies in remote and rural areas to participate in social dialogue to provide retraining and reskilling programmes • Improving urban-rural connectivity through upgraded digital and transportation infrastructure • Increasing opportunities for rural entrepreneurship, SMEs and the resources available to them • Use of EU regional and cohesion funds for projects that involve remote NEETs actions

Related risk factors



Living in remote areas

Related resources

Good practices

 Good practice

Go Remote

Unlocking the potential of remote job opportunities

Go Remote is an initiative designed to reduce youth unemployment by offering training, mentoring, and employment opportunities in remote and hybrid jobs.

 Bulgaria  Croatia  Cyprus

 Finland  Iceland  Latvia

 Good practice

INTERCEPT (motivating mobilizing supporting NEETs green Career Pathway)

Connecting young NEETs with job opportunities in the green sector

INTERCEPT empowered NEETs (individuals not in employment, education, or training) aged 25-29 by offering tailored training and paid work placements with green companies, assisting them in re-entering the labour market. Through research and a pilot programme in Italy, Malta, and Lithuania, the project provides with valuable insights to shape future EU policy on youth employment in the green sector.

 Italy  Lithuania  Luxembourg

 Malta  Poland  Slovakia

 Good practice

Back on Track - Support for young NEETs in rural areas

Fostering the (re)integration of NEETs in rural areas into education, training, and the labour market by increasing their basic skills, resilience, and digital inclusion.

Back on Track aims to (re)integrate young NEETs (not in employment, education, or training) in rural areas into general and vocational education as well as the labour market. The goal is to improve their basic skills and resilience, while strengthening their digital competences, to enable sustainable employment and personal development.

 Austria  Bosnia and Herzegovina
 Bulgaria  Czechia  Germany
 Hungary  Romania  Serbia
 Slovakia  Slovenia

 Good practice

Giovanisì

The Tuscany Region's project for the autonomy of young people

The main objective of Giovanisì is to foster the transition process of young people towards autonomy, thanks to a system of opportunities structured in seven areas: internships, housing, civil service, doing business, work, study, training and Giovanisì+ (participation, culture, legality, social issues and sport).

 Italy

 Good practice

Social Innovators

Socialni inovatorji

Social Innovators is a programme aimed at developing skills for young people in social innovation fields, enhancing their employability, and encouraging impactful projects within local communities.

 Bulgaria  Croatia  Norway
 Slovenia

 Good practice

Tech Your Future

Dalla formazione al lavoro, crea il tuo futuro

Tech Your Future equips NEETs across Italy with the skills and support to launch careers in high-demand digital professions, offering inclusive training and personalised job placement. By connecting talent with opportunity, the project opens pathways for youth to thrive in the ever-evolving tech sector.

 Italy

 Good practice

RAISE Youth

Rural Action for Innovative and Sustainable Entrepreneurship for Youth

The RAISE Youth initiative contributes to providing decent and productive work for youth through social innovation in rural areas of 4 EU countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Spain.

Main objective is to pilot and promote an innovative RAISE Model of (self) employment, for youth based on sustainable agri-business in 4 rural regions of EU with high unemployment rates and depopulation.

 **Bulgaria**  **Croatia**  **Romania**

 **Spain**

Publications

 Publications

NEETs in European rural areas

Individual features, support systems and policy measures

This publication focuses on the topics of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in a rural setting, this edition brings together a number of articles dealing with this complex social challenge. Next to the economic dimension of the NEET issue, the authors investigate regional and partly bottom-up approaches involving local actors and their target populations.

 **EU level**

 Publications

European Commission report on economic, social and territorial cohesion

Ninth edition of this series of reports assessing the state of cohesion in the EU

During the past three decades, EU Cohesion Policy has played a pivotal role in fostering economic and social convergence across Europe, not least in view of the 2004 enlargement. Today, socio-economic disparities persist and a growing number of regions across Europe are facing new challenges. This report takes stock of achievements of EU Cohesion Policy but also look into ways it can be adapted to meet emerging challenges.

 **EU level**

 Publications

How digital inclusion increases opportunities for young people

The case of NEETs from Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey

This study explores the challenges faced by young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) in rural areas of Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey. It examines the relationship between digital skills, digital inclusion, and virtual mobility, and how these factors impact the lives of rural NEETs.

 Bulgaria  Romania  Türkiye

 Publications

Determinants of Regional Youth Employment

Report on employment potential for young people through alternative sectors

This transnational report relates to the Cowork4YOUTH project which aims to enhance knowledge on youth employment policies in less developed regions of the European Union. The project's key findings reveal that youth employment trends have fluctuated due to the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic.

 EU level

 Publications

Pathways to labour market activity for 25+ NEETs in Europe

Transnational research from Lost Millennials

The study on highlights the diverse profiles of 25+ NEETs, including women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and migrants, and identifies significant policy challenges such as the lack of targeted approaches and sufficient financial resources.

 EU level