

YOUTH AND YOUNG FARMERS THEMATIC INITIATIVE

Summary of the final report



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Introduction

The ENRD Youth and Young Farmers Thematic Initiative (henceforth the Youth Initiative), formally launched in December 2012, belongs to the set of activities undertaken by the ENRD in order to accompany the preparation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) for the 2014–2020 programming period.

The purpose of the Youth Initiative is to consider how best to improve the ways in which rural youth and young farmers benefit from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) support.

In view of that, the Youth Initiative seeks to 1) *identify and understand what worked well and less well* in the implementation of RDPs in regards to supporting young farmers and rural youth; 2) *explore ways in which young people can be involved* in the design and implementation of rural development policy

at EU, national and regional level; and 3) *raise awareness* of the possibilities offered by the rural development policy and the activities carried out through the implementation of the RDPs in support of youth in rural areas, while stressing the needs of young people.

Data was collected through three main types of activities namely desk research, field research (case studies, interviews), and discussions at meetings. The research activity was conducted in two phases.

During the first phase, national-level information on RDP support for youth and young farmers was collected in 14 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) through desk research and semi-structured interviews with various actors involved in RDP implementation. In the second phase, more detailed research was conducted on the rural youth-related practices of six EU Member States (Austria, Italy – Tuscany region, Poland, Sweden, Slovakia, and United Kingdom - England). The main findings of both research phases were discussed at the key dissemination and validation event, the Youth and Young Farmers Workshop held in Brussels on 11-12 December 2013.

The analysis done by the Youth Initiative does not have the ambition to cover all EU Member states neither describes all specificities of the researched topic. On the contrary, it focuses on 15 EU countries that represent various geographical, historical and cultural contexts and highlights the most important findings of the qualitative research which was undertaken in these countries.



1. Supporting rural youth

What has been done so far?

Youth in rural areas are financially supported through various funds and programmes, depending on the country context. The EAFRD finances youth-related projects or interventions in rural areas in all countries examined. In the majority of cases, national public funds and private financing as well as the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund also concurred in supporting youth projects in rural areas. Other sources of financing, such as European Fishery Fund in Finland, the Youth in Action programme in Austria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, and different kinds of foundations in Poland, Sweden and United Kingdom, were also used.

Concretely, the analysis undertaken on a number of projects shows that more than half were co-financed by the EAFRD (58%). The main funding sources for the rest of the projects were in the order of importance: private funding (23%), Youth in Action programme (7%), national public funding (6%), other sources (4%) and ESF (2%). In spite of the fact that in all countries examined more than one source of funding is used for youth-related projects, no strong evidence of complementarity between these sources was found.



EAFRD support to rural youth

During the programming period 2007-2013, the EAFRD has supported young people predominantly through its young farmers' scheme. Measure 112 'Setting up of young farmers', implemented in 24 Member states, was the only measure directly targeting youth. By 2012, more than 126 000 young farmers had received support under this measure across the EU with a budget (EAFRD + national resources) of around five billion euro. France has the highest number of supported young farmers through this measure followed by Poland, Italy and Romania. Other measures, such as supporting modernization of agricultural holdings (measure 121) or training and advisory services (measure 111), indirectly targeted young farmers in most of the countries examined.

Support for non-farming projects that targeted young people indirectly has been provided mainly through measures aimed at enhancing quality of life in rural areas under Axis 3 and LEADER. In addition, few countries used age-related eligibility criteria to promote youth in selected RDP measures.

Youth involvement in the design and preparation of Rural Development Programmes

As regards the involvement of youth in the consultation of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), youth organizations were found to be involved in ten out of fifteen of the countries studied. When interviewing youth and young farmers' organisations in the second research phase, it became clear that it is difficult for a lot of youth organisations to participate as a major actor in the consultation process. Youth are often represented as a part of a larger organisation, and youth representatives only get to voice their concerns in internal meetings.

When analysing specific references to youth in the RDPs, in the majority of the countries youth were mentioned – mainly in relation to outmigration and ageing of rural population - in the programmes' SWOT analyses. Besides, it was observed that there is a relation between youth participation in the RDP consultations and their mention in the SWOT analysis. Out of all the RDPs examined, only Swedish mentioned youth as a horizontal priority for the whole programme.





2. What worked well and less well?

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Undertaken by:

Relevant policy authorities

- Involving youth in the preparation of the RDPs
- Setting-up working groups on youth both to support the RDP preparation and implementation
- Recognizing youth's issue in RDPs e.g. mentioning youth in SWOT analysis, making youth one of the RDPs priorities as in the Swedish case
- Utilizing available measures that directly and indirectly target youth
- Targeting youth by specific eligibility and selection criteria for youth-related projects
- Spreading information about RDPs' opportunities among youth

Local Action Groups (LAGs)

- Promoting youth-related projects
- Including youth in Local Development Strategies (LDS)
- Employing youth engagement officers
- Implementing transnational co-operation projects oriented on youth
- Setting-up specific project schemes for young people
- Setting-up a youth council

National Rural Networks (NRN)

- Organizing youth related events
- Taking over facilitating and networking role in youth issues
- Running thematic working group on youth

- Engaging in transnational co-operation projects oriented on youth
- Providing business-related training and other advisory services to young people
- Setting up specific youth web platform e.g. for informing about RDPs possibilities
- Organizing competitions of successful projects implemented by young people
- Creating an online database of youth-related projects

Youth and young farmers' organisations

- Implementing projects aiming at preparing and educating young people to participate in the public life and political debate within their regions
- Taking pro-active role in initialising youth projects, motivating young people to get involved in rural development and disseminating relevant information



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CHALLENGES AND LIMITING FACTORS

Lack of youth focus and youth participation from the bottom

- General lack of targeted policy focus - no clear youth objective at the RDP level
- Underrepresentation of young people in the decision making process at the RDP level as well as at the local level (e.g. LDS)
- Lack of strong youth and young farmers' organisations, insufficient coordination amongst several youth organisations
- Limited incentives for youth to get involved in the development actions caused by the lack of future prospects in rural areas
- Lack of ownership by youth - projects and initiatives are often designed for youth, not by them

Scarce coordination and complementarity among funding sources

- Little evidence of coordination between different actors
- Limited complementarity on the use of funds

Issues about administration and financing of youth projects

- Lack of knowledge about funding opportunities among young people
- Administrative costs and burden for applying to EAFRD projects (e.g. complex application procedures)
- Delays in awarding funding and frequent changing of rules



- Finance-related issues such as low aid intensity and low funding levels, difficult access to credit and the system based on the refunding without advance payments

Lack of capacity among youth actors

- General lack of capacity in relation to applying for public funding
- Insufficient level of project management skills amongst young
- Not enough skilled and enthusiastic youth leaders
- Lack of training and knowledge, specifically on management and on integrating new practices for prospective farmers with no-farming origin

Specific challenges for young farmers

- Scarce access to land due to land's price, tax regimes
- Low popularity of farming linked to insufficient promotion of this profession



3. Policy implications

How to be more effective in the future?

The findings of the research revealed that there is still a considerable space for the inclusion of young people and their needs in rural development policy design and implementation.

The final report of the Youth Initiative identifies six key policy areas for improvement and provided suggestions for the 2014-2020 programming period, addressing various policy actors:

→ Improving policy focus on youth and recognizing youth as a partner in national, regional and local policy making

It is important to stress that youth issues are best recognised when youth is included in the consultation process of the RDP as well as in all strategic documents at national, regional and local/LAG level, yet not only formally. Recognising youth as RDP actors is important to better identify their needs and effectively target them.

It could be also useful to make a specific SWOT analysis for rural youth to find out the main issues that the rural development policy – and other policies – should tackle. This would help preparing well targeted measures, with relevant eligibility and selection criteria that are considered crucial for the success of the youth involvement.

It should also be acknowledged that rural youth is a heterogeneous group. For successful targeting, it is necessary to identify different youth groups and their needs, as well as to design appropriate strategies to target each group. It is especially important to note that the needs of young farmers and non-farming youth differ significantly.

Young people should also be encouraged to participate in the definition and implementation of LAGs' strategies. LAGs should ideally have in their team a contact person able to engage young people.

Often the difficulty to encourage youth involvement in RDP consultations is also related to the poor participation of young people in the decision-making process at national, regional and local level. Encouraging greater youth participation in local problem-solving by e.g. establishing local youth parliament, employing local youth engagement officers or organising regular meet-

ings with young people would involve and motivate them to think about the future potential of their rural homes. Informal discussions can also be helpful in capturing the views and needs of rural youth.

→ Improving complementarity of funding

In order to make the best impact possible, RDP youth actions must be coordinated with actions of other European, national and private funds. Networking and coordination is required to make the best use of the available funds, as well as to avoid overlaps. Furthermore, information on funding opportunities from various sources should be easily accessible to rural youth. Ideally, there would be a single contact point for information on youth-related funding opportunities.

→ Reducing administrative burdens and making more accessible financial support

Administrative obstacles, bureaucracy and finance-related issues were mentioned to be major bottlenecks for young farmers and rural youth projects. In general, the reduction of administrative burden would help not only younger generations but all RDP beneficiaries. In addition, actions should be done to make the project applications easier and specific advisory services could be set up to assist young people to prepare and present their projects. Simplification of administrative procedures and foreseeing shorter timeframe for implementation would encourage rural youth to implement their projects.

In addition, aid intensity for young people could be increased to reduce the need of own financing and overcome or reduce problems related to access to credit.

→ Encouraging youth ownership and involvement

The main key to a successful project is the involvement of young people and their ownership of the project. In general, a lot of projects are designed and implemented for youth and children. There were fewer examples of projects designed and/or implemented by youth. Yet, those projects where youth have taken ownership were considered the most successful.

Better youth ownership and involvement could be achieved by having a dedicated person within each LAG



to work with youth and youth projects, giving at the same time visibility to the LAG work amongst youth. This is even more necessary if the LAG operates an umbrella scheme for youth projects. In many of the Member states analysed, the LAGs work closest with youth in terms of RDP delivery. LAGs should consider setting up a youth council or a youth LAG which could operate as an advisory body in youth matters.

The presence of active youth organizations, representing different groups of rural youth, such as young farmers, young rural entrepreneurs, and students of different ages, and their co-operation with other actors active at regional and local level can help improving youth participation. Some countries are lacking active youth organizations and establishing them proved to be difficult. Adequate financial support and human resources, in particular a motivated and strong leader, are considered crucial for launching and running such an organization.

→ **Enhancing youth capacity building and networking**

Increasing young people capacity is vital for ensuring their active and meaningful participation in rural development. Capacity building actions can address different issues, such as citizenship and participation, project application, funding opportunities, project management and entrepreneurial skills.

Specific training programmes for young farmers, such as Erasmus exchange scheme, could be possible solutions to enhance young farmers' knowledge on specific issues and support exchange of experiences.

Networking can be a powerful tool to share experiences and disseminate information, as well as to lobby for youth causes in a coordinated manner. Transnational cooperation, between LAGs but also between NRNs, is highly useful for exchanging information and good practices, as well as for providing the youth with unique experiences.

→ **Facilitating information sharing**

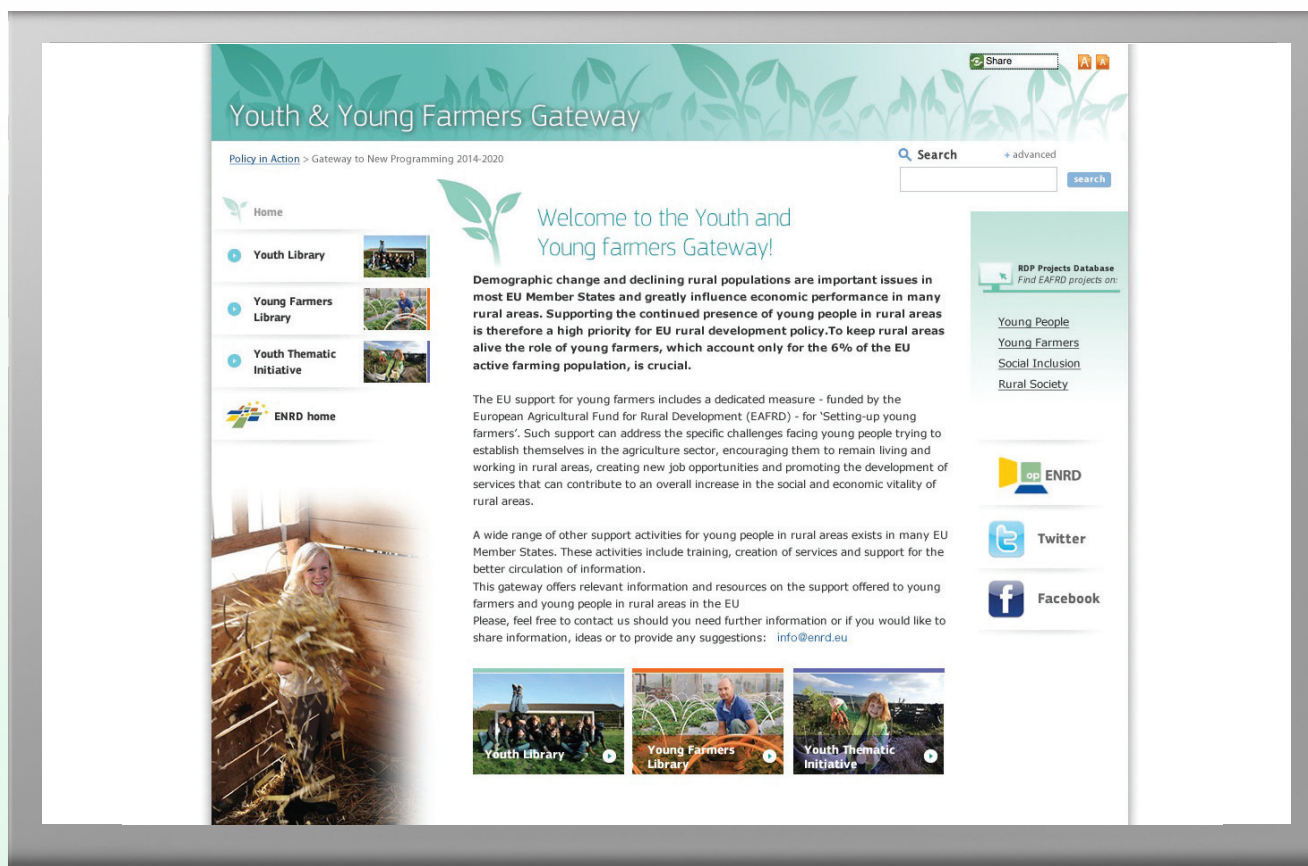
Effective communication of RDPs' opportunities to young people as well as the dissemination of good practices and achievements outwards is very important. Involving youth would possibly be more successful if using methods and media more familiar to them such as web-based solutions, specific web sites and social media as well as the development of smart phone applications. Conferences and seminars aimed at youth and young farmers, as well as sharing best practices, would also help rural youth to get active and to network.





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