

## Thematic Group on Rural Youth Employment: the Voice of Rural Youth 1st Thematic Group meeting

The first meeting enabled TG members to share personal experience and exchange on challenges and opportunities related to rural youth employment - in view of pursuing the TG's overall objective to explore various approaches to developing sustainable and high-quality rural jobs accessible to young people, and thereby inform relevant policies.

### Introduction



**Thematic Group** (TG) members were welcomed to their **first meeting** by DG AGRI and the European CAP Network - CAP Implementation Contact Point (CAPI CP).

Employment is an important dimension of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) both for young farmers as well as for the rural population working outside of agricultural sector. It was stressed that the TG is designed to be led by young people. The TG comprises 39 members from 19 Member States and a balanced representation of stakeholders with the average age of under 30 years.



This first meeting aimed for TG members to share personal experience and exchange on challenges and opportunities related to rural youth employment - in view of pursuing the TG's overall objective "To explore approaches to developing sustainable and high-quality rural jobs accessible to young people and thereby inform relevant policies".

### Setting the scene

An opening **presentation** by CAPI CP provided an overview of rural youth employment data, including comparisons of different contexts and countries, diversity in definitions of 'youth', and demographic aspects (such as higher unemployment rates for young rural women).

TG members then shared personal experiences and views on rural employment. The first panel included a young farmer from Portugal's Azores islands, representatives of the Estonian Rural Network and Finland's Viisari LEADER Local Action Group (LAG). Panel members highlighted opportunities and challenges for young job seekers in rural Europe, as well as insights from those working on rural youth employment matters. Mobility, broadband access, financial stability, and generational renewal including in the farming sector were mentioned as important

### Event Information

**Date:** 9 March 2023

**Location:** Virtual meeting

**Organisers:** CAP Implementation Contact Point (CAPI CP)

**Participants:** 47 participants from 19 EU Member States, including young farmers and rural entrepreneurs, MAs, NNs, European organisations, the European Commission, Local Action Groups (LAGs), national/regional stakeholder organisations and research.

**Outcomes:** Exchange of personal experiences on challenges and opportunities related to rural youth employment, including youth perspectives as well as institutional perspectives.

**Web page:** [1st TG meeting on Rural Youth Employment](#)

factors to foster youth employment. As regards young farmers, the access to land and loans were mentioned as two most important challenges.

In the following plenary discussion, TG members from Slovakia, Italy, and Ireland highlighted the importance of supporting young peoples' interests for staying in their home areas through securing local work (shepherding was one example) and having access to adequate social services. Participants also highlighted the possibilities offered by the increasing familiarity with online/remote working, as well as the need for building a 'feeling of belonging' to the local communities through e.g., involving more young people in local decision-making.

### Institutional perspectives



A second panel dedicated to institutional support included views from the European Youth Village governance organisation (Romania), Bulgaria's Ministry of Agriculture, the Delft University of Technology (the Netherlands), and DG AGRI Unit B3, responsible for social sustainability. The session underlined that agriculture is often an important rural employer, and that many other job prospects also exist. Infrastructure and services, including family support services, are prerequisites for tackling out-migration and attracting incomers. The potential of collective action by young people was highlighted. Nevertheless, developing a positive culture of cooperation among rural residents is complicated in many rural areas. Strengthening young people's understanding of risk management could encourage their interest in entrepreneurship. It was noted that some people associate working in the countryside with the risk of exploitation, low wages and poor working conditions.



Institutions can better support youth employment by proactively identifying vulnerable groups and raising their awareness of options for training, acquiring the right skills and finding a job. CAP funds can help to some extent within the policy's remit (e.g. Specific Objectives 7 and 8) and the full range of available forms of EU support can be coordinated at national and local levels to optimise youth employment support. Private investors and financial instruments can also provide complementary support. Therefore, a coordinated approach from all institutions is key. The green and digital transition offers significant opportunities for modernising and sustaining rural youth employment prospects.

### Youth employment in different settings



TG members employed in rural areas of Spain, Italy and [Slovakia](#) helped to start parallel group discussions about rural job opportunities in three different settings: 1) **agri-food private sector** mainly covering farm-related jobs, 2) **non agri-food private sector** linked to e.g. tourism, rural services or any other job outside of farming and 3) **public and third sector** including social enterprises and civic initiatives in rural areas. Group discussions benefitted from TG members' experiences and focused on identifying success ingredients and 'must-haves' for helping young people to get and maintain quality rural jobs.

Young people can bring positive change for rural Europe thanks to their inclination to embrace and drive innovation in employment and socio-economic or environmental developments. Employment in agri-food sectors is high in some Member States and diverse; while access to land, credit, and other resources remain very influential. Digitalisation and information campaigns were heralded for improving the appreciation and attractiveness of modern rural career paths and to improve the image of rural areas, highlighting their unique assets (including natural value, cheap housing and the potential of local traditions). Studying or working in different countries was shown to help inspire young peoples' employment ideas and lead to innovative business ventures.

Online opportunities for young 'digital nomads' were perceived as positive, but dependent on associated infrastructure. The importance of networking was underlined for its potential to stimulate employment by connecting young people with peers, markets, and communities. NGOs can contribute to youth employment agendas through services such as LAG local development strategies and funding possibilities for community or business services, such as multi-functional co-working spaces. Particularly outside the agri-food sector, young people can find interesting, worthwhile, and rewarding employment prospects through bioeconomy business opportunities, the silver economy, and intergenerational exchanges.

There was consensus among TG members that supporting rural youth employment requires: a clear, up-to-date understanding of youth employment aspirations locally; tailored support that is easily available and clearly communicated; and encouraging young people's enthusiasm and motivations for rural work.

Closing remarks from DG AGRI echoed the TG members' findings (particularly about young farmers, rural services, and equality) referring to the TG's inspirational contributions that would be shared with other Commission's services supporting rural employment for young people. The TG will continue with informal discussions among members (April-May), networking and communication activities facilitated by the EU CAP Network, and a second and final TG meeting on 23 May 2023.

