



# YOU.STAND.OUT

YOUng people STANDing OUT through the promotion of local

**KA220-YOU – Cooperation partnerships in youth**

**Project No. 2021-2-IE01-KA220-000051251**

## Research (Need Analysis) on Social Media Marketing Skills among NEETs in Rural Areas

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## You.Stand.Out Consortium

Organisation	Country	Description	Website
Meath Community Rural and social Development Partnership Ltd	Ireland	Offering participation in youth-led events and youth participation activities	<a href="https://meathpartnership.ie/">https://meathpartnership.ie/</a>
Tandem Plus	France	A group of public and private EU and international organisations developing inclusion strategies and employment	<a href="http://www.tandemplus.org/">http://www.tandemplus.org/</a>
NGO Nest Berlin EV	Germany	An umbrella organisation for promoting and executing international projects to create an impact for social change	<a href="https://ngonest.de/de/">https://ngonest.de/de/</a>
Rezos Brands Anonymi Emporiki Eteria Idon Diatofis	Greece	Agri-food SME with expertise in 'Farm to Fork'	<a href="https://rezosbrands.com/">https://rezosbrands.com/</a>
The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre	Poland	Promoting development and entrepreneurship in rural areas	<a href="https://farm-advisory.eu/pl/">https://farm-advisory.eu/pl/</a>
Quality Culture SRLS	Italy	Supporting social inclusion and promoting the values of sustainable development	<a href="https://qualityculture.it/en/home-english/">https://qualityculture.it/en/home-english/</a>
CSI Centre for Social Innovation Ltd	Cyprus	Research institute focusing on developing and introducing disruptive solutions to systemic social, education and economic problems	<a href="https://csicy.com/">https://csicy.com/</a>

## 1. Introduction

Securing employment is challenging in the EU for young people (18 to 20 years old), from rural areas as formal and informal education is not easily accessible resulting in increased numbers of people not in education, training or employment (NEETs). The cost of living crisis is also a barrier to attending university, from transport to rental costs. Furthermore, given the constant technical evolutions in every sector in the labour market, the needs of employers have also evolved, therefore people need to have digital competencies and training. This combination results in social isolation in rural areas thus leaving young people with limited options and potentially leaving the area.

The YOU STAND OUT project aims to address this issue by increasing the opportunities of NEETs in order to provide equal access to the labour market for young people, through the provision of digital training to strengthen key competencies. This will give the youth a choice to remain in their community rather than be forced to leave, ultimately lowering the levels of 'brain drain' and skills shortages. The project will also raise awareness of the issues facing NEETs and engage the communities eg families, local public authorities, SMEs, youth workers and youth organisations in identifying sustainable solutions.

The summary of findings from the research (PR1), which was led by NGO NEST, Berlin and carried out by each of the consortium partners, are presented in this executive summary.

Further information on each of the respective partners can be found in the full International Report or on the [YOU.STAND.OUT](https://www.youstandout.eu) website.

## 2. Objective of the Research

The objective of this research is to determine the levels of digital marketing skills of young people living in rural areas. The findings from this research will be the basis on which all the remaining activities will be developed, thus playing an essential role for successful implementation of the project.

The research provides data on the current youth employment status in each of the consortium partner's countries (seven in total), offering best practice examples from each, and identifying ways in which this project will address the gaps in the relevant digital skills that will enhance young people's interest in their heritage, communities and citizenship in addition to employment opportunities.

Finally, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the needs of the target groups and develop the appropriate training materials to bring genuine added value that will support inclusion, employment and entrepreneurship in rural areas.

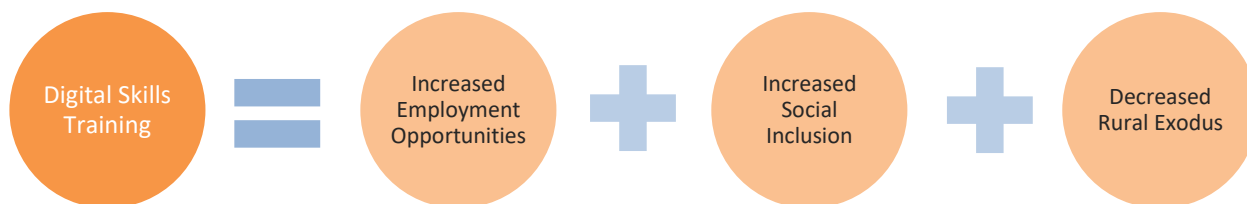
### 3. Research Methodology

The **primary research** was field based and began by collecting information through anonymous online questionnaires circulated to people aged 18 to 29. Each partner surveyed 20 young people anonymously resulting in 140 surveys completed. A questionnaire was used to find out about the areas they reside in, their familiarity and skills in relation to social media marketing, and if they would like to broaden their knowledge of this subject. In support of this, four guided interviews were conducted using a blended format, i.e. face-to-face or on-line interviews. 28 interviews were completed to gain a deeper understanding behind the answers provided and any additional information that may support the development of the training materials in this project.

As such, the target group was divided further into two sub-categories: ages to 18 to 23 and 24 to 29. The rationale for this was that the older cohort may have been employed at some stage or completed some form of higher education e.g. vocational training or third level. Whereas the younger cohort are more recently out of post-primary school or in the early stages/close to completion of further education. The following data analysis is based on answers from 168 respondents overall. Additional information from national reports is provided as appropriation.

**Secondary research**, or desk research, was completed by each partner to identify current projects and initiatives that have similar objectives and recognise best practice examples. The secondary research findings deepened the analysis and national context of the issues that lead to NEETs in rural communities; the relationship to unemployment levels; the need for digital marketing training.

### 4. Secondary Research Findings



#### 4.1 Who are the NEETS?

The NEETs ‘phenomenon’ is a vulnerable social group, who are at risk of exclusion and varying levels of poverty depending on the welfare system of their respective country. The number of people who are classified as ‘NEET’, has further increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic – i.e. unemployment among 15-29 year olds increased by 1.4 percentage points to 13.3% in the first year of the pandemic compared to

2019, and the NEET rate increased by 1.2 percentage points to 13.6%. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020 the EU extended its definition of "young people" in its Youth Strategy to include people aged 15-29 (previously from aged 15-24). As such, it strives to lower the rate of young people who are NEETs for people aged between 15-29 to 9 % by 2030.

Our research shows there are differences characterising the NEETs in each partner country i.e. gender, age and where the majority of them are living, whether in urban or in rural areas.

Throughout Europe young people were, and are, among the most severely affected by the consequences of the pandemic. In 2020, one fifth of the 14 million people unemployed in the EU were under 25. The target group of the You.Stand.Out project, is defined up to and including the age of 29, therefore according to Eurostat, 13.1% of 15-29 year-olds in the EU in 2021 can be assigned to the group of so-called NEETs.

#### 4.2 Gender Gap

In the EU, the risk of being NEET is generally higher for women than for men. However, in countries such as Ireland, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Cyprus, Luxembourg and France, the ratio of young men in the NEET group is higher than that of young women. Countries like Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Italy have equal proportions.

The data regarding NEETs in Poland is determined by a pattern of: women, inactive, inexperienced, highly skilled, "discouraged workers", which is similar to You.Stand.Out partner countries Greece and Italy. This pattern is evident in countries with high proportions of NEETs, who face structural barriers to young people's transition from education to the labour market.

In Poland for example, there is a much higher proportion of women, economically inactive people and people without work experience (or with work experience below the EU average) in the category, although in many cases these are highly qualified individuals. The research shows there is no correspondence between people with a lower level of education and those who are NEETs.

#### 4.3 A rural divide

There are more job opportunities in cities and urban areas and this is one of the central factors why people leave the countryside and move to the cities. However, this also creates a higher density of competition, resulting in a higher number of those who have only poor opportunities for work, and if so, only for low-skilled work in the low-wage sector.

Germany and Italy have a higher number of NEETs in cities is recorded for 2021 (Italy: 24.5%; Germany: 10.2%), and this ratio is reversed in the case of Poland and Greece. Here the difference is more than 4% for Poland and almost 10% in the case of rural areas in Greece (rural: 22.8%; cities: 13.9%). Both countries

are thus recognisably or significantly above the EU-wide average, which shows a share of 13.7% for NEETs in rural areas. In Ireland, France and Cyprus, the differences in the urban-rural comparison are rather small, with Ireland and France below the EU average.

Clearly, there is a need to explore the greater proportions of rural NEETs that occur in European countries with sub-protective welfare regimes and who fall short to support school-to-work transition among the most vulnerable youths (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019).

#### 4.4 Why digital skills are important for rural work

Information and communications technology (ICT) helps to reduce rural depopulation as it enables rural youth to achieve their personal goals through digital platforms for online education, employment, health, administration, tourism, and commerce.

Digital technologies make rural areas places where young people can thrive (Neagu et. al, 2021). They provide more opportunities for youth employment, education and training, as well the ability to leverage a global community of people who have similar interests to theirs through platforms such as virtual classrooms, webinars and various other digital resources (Molefe, 2020).

#### 4.5 Current barriers to rural youths' digital capabilities

Some of the partner countries have some of the lowest rates of youth unemployment in the EU, however young people in rural areas do not have the same access to education and jobs as youths in urban areas due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure in rural areas, such as equitable delivery of public services, public transport, data connectivity, and lack of employment opportunities.

Our research shows that rural Irish areas are more poorly engaged with digital technology, and have lower levels of education and lower incomes. In Cyprus, there are few programs available that approach the specific target group of NEETs in rural areas.

In Italy, the majority of the participants of a survey conducted by Salesforce do not feel ready to operate in a digital-first world. In other words, young people's perception is that the widespread use of digital technology and tools used in one's private life does not automatically equip young people with these skills in regards to the world of work. As such, a well-tailored training will not only increase the digital capabilities of many young people, it will also be a boost to their self-confidence.

#### 4.6 NEETS and Digital Marketing

Most modern communication is done via the internet, especially on social networks, thus making it essential to know how to use them, particularly in the workplace. Digital Marketing is therefore a powerful tool to train the new generations and reduce the employment imbalance. The You.Stand.Out project

includes a focus on social media marketing for the purpose of promoting local cultural heritage.

#### 4.7 Promoting cultural heritage through digital practices

The policies for the promotion of the cultural industry open the doors not only to new sectors of activities and new jobs closely linked to the 4.0 company model, but also to a framework of innovative skills, skills being of transversal and transformational character related to digitisation, to the internet of things and to artificial intelligence. All this within a model of circular economy aimed at the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage in a context of circular and sustainable development.

Increasing access to digital skills training has the potential to empower young people as the beneficiaries of digital rural employment, and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities.

#### 4.8 Moving rural youth forward

The You.Stand.Out project has taken into account the European Youth Goals that aim to specifically support the younger generation. The 11 European Youth Goals highlight the issues affecting young people across Europe, and identify their priorities for a sustainable and successful future, which include “Quality Education” and “Quality Employment for All”. It is Youth Goal #6 ‘moving rural youth forward’, with which the project is most aligned, as it aims to improve the conditions of young people in rural areas and fight demographic and socio-economic decline by unlocking rural youth potential.

## 5. Primary Research Findings

The following data analysis is based on answers from 168 respondents overall.

### Question 1 – Gender

Of the respondents from the seven partner countries, a slight majority identified themselves as ‘female’ (51.9%). 44.9% of the respondents identified as male, while another 2.5% identified as ‘non-binary’. Only in Poland and in France the numbers for ‘male’ respondents have been higher than for ‘females’.

### Question 2 – Age

Approximately two thirds of the respondents to our study are aged 24-29 years old (64.5%), while 35.5% stated they were 18 to 23 years of age when asked. The majority of respondents were citizens of their countries, however, in a few cases the responses showed different nationalities (Spanish, Ecuadorian, Egyptian).

### Question 3 – Population



We asked if the respondents lived in a place with:

- less than 1.000 inhabitants
- 1.000 to 4.999 inhabitants
- 5.000 to 9.999 inhabitants
- 10.000 to 19.999 inhabitants
- 20.000 to 50.000 inhabitants
- more than 50.000 inhabitants

About 70% of our respondents live in small towns and rural regions, with only 29.7% of the respondents living in places with more than 50,000 inhabitants. However, it must be said that an above-average number of participants from Italy who took part in this research had to be assigned to this category (i.e. the Rome metropolitan area), even if the actual living spaces and conditions on site correspond more to small-town and suburban milieus.

#### Question 4 – Educational Level

Just over half of the respondents (51.7%) have completed some form of higher education having obtained a university degree, i.e. Bachelors or Masters. 37.9% finished high school/post primary. Only approximately 10% of our respondents indicated that they had left the educational system after secondary school, or prior to finishing. The data further shows that there is no correspondence between people with a lower level of education and those who are NEETs.

#### Question 5 – Employment Status/NEET

A total of 19.6% of respondents identified as NEET, i.e. one out of five respondents of the study. 30.4% are currently employed; 17.4% are currently in education; 12.7 % are working as freelancers; 11.4% are currently working part-time; 5.1% are doing an internship; and 3.8% are involved in some kind of training on work - based skills.

#### Question 6 – Digital Activities

87% of respondents use both a desktop PC or laptop and a mobile device such as their smartphone or tablet to access the internet. Over 90% use the internet for private purposes; two-thirds also use it for work-related purposes, including job searches and training; and more than half of the respondents said they use it in the context of training (studies) or at school.

Questions were broken down further to consider the EU Digital Competence Framework 2.0, i.e.:

- Information
- Communication
- Creation of Content
- Problem Solving

Overall, the majority of respondents in all countries are well accustomed to performing activities such as using search engines, emailing, participating in social networks and sharing media content. They are familiar with a simple daily use of digital technology.

### Question 7 - Digital at Work

Almost two thirds of the respondents indicated that they already have some experience in using some of the digital tools at work (63.1%). The use of social media in a workplace maintains a fairly high percentage (e.g. - 38.1% in Italy) they are therefore regarded as professional tools. Online storage, video calls, search engines result in fundamental tools personally and at work were identified as frequent activities completed by respondents. Creation and sharing of content such as images and videos is mostly linked to the private use of the web rather than the professional one. It could be said that most organisations rely on professional services to create and share their content online.

For participants in Greece, various digital tools used on a regular basis such as backing up files on cloud servers and emailing, were not difficult. The outcome from both Greece and Poland stated that using search engines, communicating via email and social media, and image editing are also part of some work context experience and were used for work related promotion on as social media. In Cyprus, one of the interviewees stated that he produced his own videos to promote his products and services.

### Question 8 – Interest in Training

37.9% of the respondents expressed that they would be ‘*very much*’ interested in receiving training on digital and social media marketing skills. 31.1% of the respondents indicated that they would ‘*probably*’ participate, while 23.5% answered ‘*maybe*’. Only 4.5% of respondents said their participation was unlikely or showed no interest in such kind of training.

These findings prompted question nine.

### Question 9 – Learning Requirements

Given that more than two thirds of the respondents are interested, or even very interested in digital training, respondents were given the opportunity to select their preferences from a list of options.

The majority expressed interest in trainings based on how to build a website, followed by creating video content and promotion using Instagram and Youtube, and using photo shop to edit images. The topics that received the lowest level of interest included learning graphic design for logos; internet copyrights, and understanding excel. Even though internet copyrighting was not a priority learning requirement, it will be still be included in the training as this is an integral part of digital marketing.

Essentially, all respondents are aware that digital competency is fundamental to employment.

The three priority areas identified by respondents were:

**Technical skills:** coding and website management competences were requested by our respondents as few had knowledge in these areas but are aware that these competences may enhance their employment

opportunities. Knowledge of social media algorithms users flows and scheduling posting plans were also identified as useful.

**Communication skills:** respondents are aware of the importance of being able to create and manage online contact with clients and collaborators. There is a strong interest in managing channels and platforms such as YouTube or Instagram. Specific tools for different target groups, communication techniques, and approaches to create and manage a community, are needed.

**Social media skills:** nearly all participants are aware that using and participating in social media is almost ubiquitous. Many respondents may lack knowledge of how to properly run and manage social media correctly, efficiently, and safely. Almost all of the participants share content through social media and networks, and this is regarded as one of the most important skills to acquire for the working environment.

#### Question 10 Social Media Representation of Local Rural Areas

Overall, 42.1% of the respondents rated the image of their region on social media appearances as *'not good'*, while 31.7% claim that their areas are well represented, examples and justifications were provided during interviews. 26.2% said they *'don't know'* if their regions are well represented, which is in contrast to the respondents from Cyprus, whereby a resounding 75% believe that their local area is not well represented on social media.

As the You.Stand.Out project is focusing on social media marketing for the purpose of promoting local cultural heritage, it was important to ascertain young people's relationship to their region, and how they determine the representation of their respective regions on social media.

A lack of basic skills and corresponding training in digital competencies, especially among the young population and particularly in rural areas, clearly shows the great need for further training in digital transformation of almost all areas of society and work.

## 6. Conclusion

As technology is now part of almost every job, having even basic digital skills will open up significantly more employment opportunities, in particular for younger people residing in rural areas.

The You.Stand.Out project is one of a series of projects and initiatives that aim to combat youth unemployment and provide young people with career prospects and a self-determined future worth living by means of various vocational training and continuing education measures. The focus of You.Stand.Out is clearly on youth in rural regions, offering young people in Europe opportunities for digital training, with an emphasis on social media marketing skills.

Social inclusion is closely linked to social and socioeconomic participation. The decreased attachment to the countryside and region is evidenced by "rural exodus" due to a lack of future prospects, and the lack of confidence, both of which can be built up 'locally'.

Digitisation that encompasses all areas of society cannot be underestimated for the upgrading of rural regions and living spaces. With functioning digital infrastructure in rural areas, participation in working life is achievable in rural areas as work opportunities are no longer exclusively confined to on-site presence, thus it's possible for young people to have the choice to live and work in rural areas. As such, it's imperative that young people receive adequate training in digital skills to have increased access to sustainable employment.

Based on the respondents training preferences, the digital skills requested range from website design, coding and image editing to e-commerce development and online marketing. These skills should be at the core of the e-learning program of You.Stand.Out.