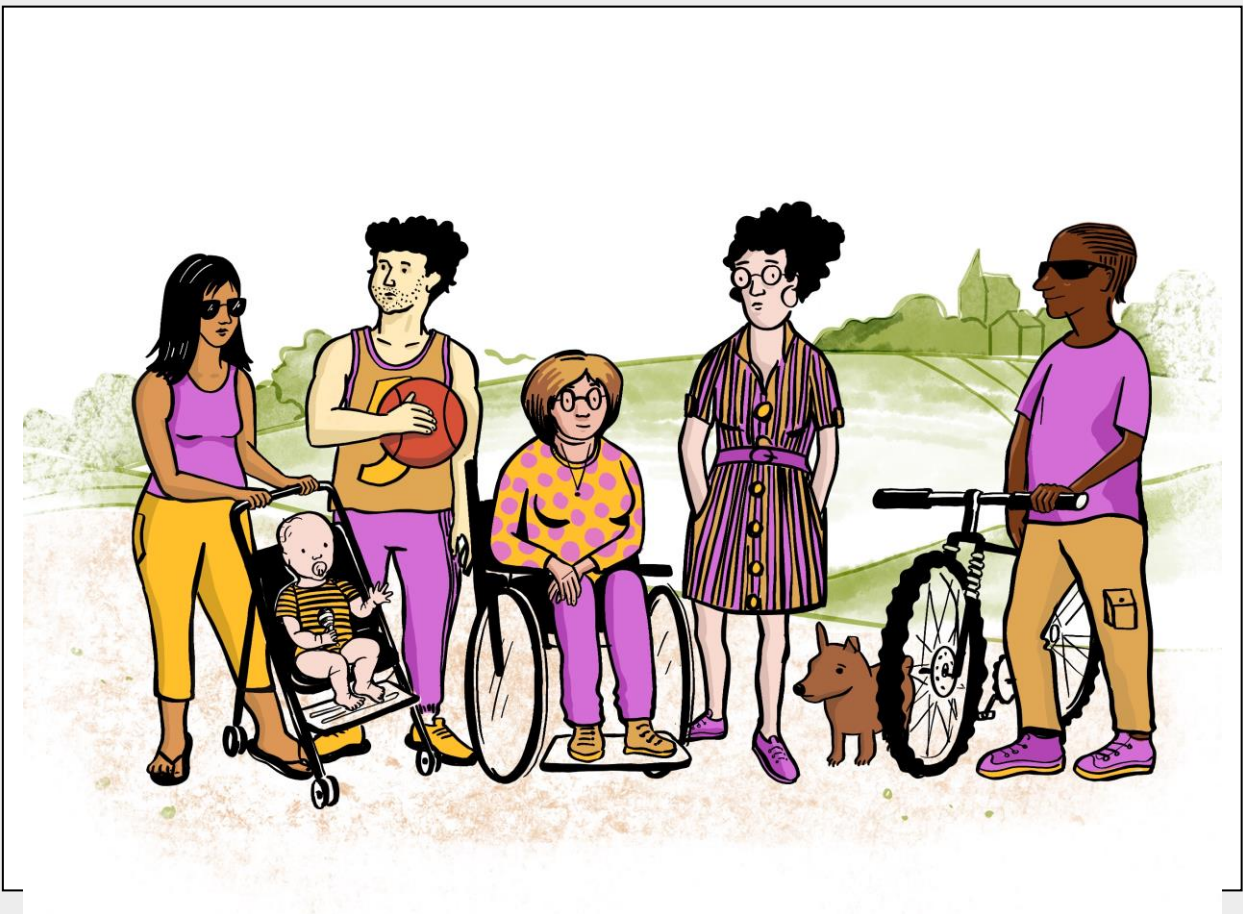


VET GOES RURAL:

Innovating VET practices in isolated rural and remote regions of the EU

Bottom-Up Stakeholders Feedback Project Report

(January 2023)



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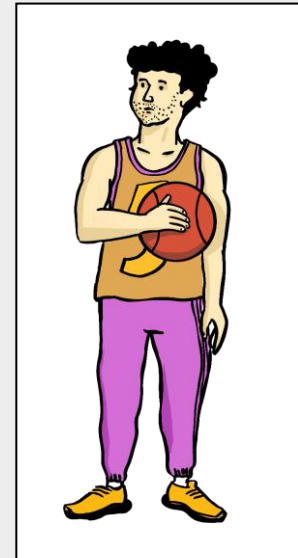
VET GOES RURAL:

Innovating VET practices in isolated rural and remote regions of the EU

Grant Agreement 2021-1-ES01-KA220-VET-000024868

Prepared by VETgoesRural Project partners country level reports submitted December 2022.

- 1) Radio ECCA, Fundación Canaria, Spain
[Radio Ecca Bottom-up stakeholders feedback report](#)
- 2) National University of Ireland Maynooth, Ireland
[Ireland NUIM Bottom-up stakeholders feedback report](#)
- 3) IDP Sas Di Giancarlo Costantino (Italian Development Partners, IDP), Italy
[IDP Bottom-up stakeholders feedback report](#)
- 4) Institut De Haute Formation Aux Politiques Communautaires (IHF), Belgium
[IHF VET Goes Rural - European Union feedback report](#)
- 5) PRISM Impresa Sociale S.R.L., Italy
[PRISM Bottom-up stakeholder feedback report](#)
- 6) Eyropaiko Institoyto Topikhs Anaptykshs Κεντρική Μακεδονία (EILD), Greece
[VETgoesRURAL Bottom-Up Stakeholders Feedback Greece](#)
- 7) Como Una Cabra, Spain
[Como Una Cabra Bottom-up stakeholders feedback report](#)



Written and Assembled by Michael Kenny (Associate Professor), Department of Adult & Community Education, Dr. Margaret Nugent (Research Associate), Dr Patrice McCormack (Research Associate), Department of Adult & Community Education Maynooth University, Ireland.

Any errors in this report are the responsibility of the author.

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Introduction /Methods

Terms of Reference (Ref. Project Application, 2021)

Task leader: NUIM; all partners involved: The diagnostics of rural regions, the EU context and the comparison with urban areas will be finalised in a report. It will also comprise final policy recommendations for the enhancement and promotion of higher quality standards in VET education for rural and remote areas of the EU.

As part of the VETgoesRural project partners engaged in a “Bottom-up Stakeholders Feedback” consultation on the barriers to progression into Vocational and Further Education/Training (VET and FET¹), for students from rural and remote isolated areas. Partners were asked to use face-to-face and online surveys, interviews, and focus groups as per agreed template in the “Bottom-up Stakeholders Feedback” manual. This report captures the feedback from VET/FET learners and educational practitioners (teachers/managers and community organisations) in the VETgoesRural project to project partners; particularly those from rural areas that are particularly remote and isolated.

The recruitment process for learners and educational practitioner stakeholders was conducted via exploratory email and telephone calls requesting participation in the project from a range of strategic stakeholders in Vocational Education and Training (VET) or, as referred to in Ireland, Further Education and Training (FET). The stakeholders are all rurally engaged and provide education directly or indirectly to learners from isolated and remote rural communities. In general, participants in the stakeholder consultation were actively or recently engaged with VET as a learner, provider, or community leader.

The rural areas under study followed the criteria outlined in the VETgoesRural project proposal and informed the Project Partner country reports identifying vulnerable areas where learners who do not progress or drop-out of mainstream learning. The area rural area characterises included:

- Areas with less than 5,000 inhabitants and areas that have experienced local de-population;
- Areas with more than 25% of the aged population over 65 years of age;
- Areas where the unemployment rate relatively high (greater than 9% locally);
- Areas where the unemployment rate and the aging of the population put the development of these areas at risk;
- Areas where the primary sector labour dependency rate relatively high;
- Areas where the rate of low skilled adults and dropouts is quite high.

(Source: Radio ECCA, IDP, PRISM, IRL., Como Una Cabra Partner Reports)

The characterises of the areas investigated varied across the project Euro-scape, but, as summarised in the IDP and other project partner reports were:

- All were within the required specifications of the VETgoesRural Project specifications.

¹ Hereafter referred to as VET in this report

- The areas, in general, are characterised “... by a level of unemployment ranging from 9 to 15 per cent, with youth unemployment seeing higher peaks of up to 20 per cent.” (IDP partner report)
- The population over 50 years of age accounts for about 50% of the total population, or, “More than 25% of the aged population (>65 years)” (EILD partner report)
- Mainly family-run small and medium-sized local enterprises in various primary sectors ranging from agri-industry to the mechanical industry, and tourism, etc.

Numbers engaged in the VETgoesRural Project Stakeholder Feedback

The numbers of learners and practitioners² engaged by each project partner are listed following and the narrative of their feedback makes up the body of this report.

VETgoesRural Project partner	Country	Interviews Implemented	Focus Group Meetings Implemented	Number of VET Learners Engaged	Number of VET Practitioners Engaged	Number of Participant surveys Engaged
Radio ECCA	Spain	17	1	18	21	11
Como Una Cabra	Spain	14	2	18	11	2
PRISM	Italy	13	0	6	10	4
IDP	Italy	10	1	12	13	9
Maynooth University (NUIM)	Ireland	30	4	21	16	12
EILD	Greece	19	2	25	20	10
Total		103	10	100	91	48

About VETgoesRural

The 'VETgoesRURAL' project aims to improve VET professionals' skills and capacities to provide enhanced training and foster learners' engagement particularly in isolated rural and remote areas of the EU where there is identified isolation, disadvantage and dis-engagement from mainstream education for particularly disadvantaged communities. To fulfil this aim, the project seeks to design, test, and inform innovative VET teaching and training methods, with an appropriate mix of open, digital and participative learning methodologies.

The VETgoesRURAL project addresses needs and priorities recently noted by the EU and its Member States, particularly the EU Council Recommendation on VET (December 2020) that noted that “VET programmes need to be accessible for vulnerable groups, low-skilled people and people in rural or remote areas”, and, “VET staff need to undertake continuing professional development to deliver high quality training through digital skills and effective innovative methods”. In line with the EU policy-making framework, project partners also identified a clear need for enhancement and support of rural people’s increased participation in VET. The project emerges from the intention of seven (7) partners to cooperate transnationally to innovate educational practices with isolated rural/remote communities and recommend these practices to other education and policy practitioners.

² For formal, informal and non-formal education and training (Radio ECCA partner report November 2022).



The aim of the VETgoesRURAL project is to increase the quality of VET programmes and remote rural learners' participation and retainment in VET. The project encourages the strengthening of capacities and practices of national, regional, and local VET practitioner and their teaching networks. The expected VETgoesRURAL project impacts include:

- 1) Enhanced capacities of VET providers to engage and educate learners to enhance skills, increase engagement in continuing education, and increase motivation among learners;
- 2) Knowledge transfer and capacity building to foster innovation and new practices in the VET sector for less-skilled learners living in rural/remote areas of Europe;
- 3) Increase awareness of the role of long-life learning and education for rural/remote populations as a key way to re-think the development and regeneration of their areas.

This will lead to an increased recognition of VET for geographically disadvantaged areas in policies and education services at EU, national, and local level. Project results will include:

- Improved feedback on EU and national VET teaching practices in isolated remote/rural areas;
- Innovative methodologies and tools to enhance VET engagement practices for isolated remote/rural areas;
- Strategies and approaches tailored to the specific needs of rural low skilled learners;
- A free e-learning course to increase practitioners' quality of training offered in the concerned areas; and
- The project will design, test and fine-tune innovative VET teaching and engagement methods, applying an appropriate mix of open, digital and participative learning environments.

Over 240 VET professionals and 100 learners from isolated rural/remote communities will be involved in the VETgoesRURAL project activities. Other local key stakeholders such as policy-makers, education providers, and civil society representatives will be invited to contribute and participate.

VETgoesRURAL Project Partners

The VETgoesRURAL project aims at the professional development of VET practitioners in isolated rural and remote areas to deliver high quality training by implementing innovative training methods, with an appropriate mix of open, digital and participative learning environments. The project operates through 2022 and 2023, supported by ERASMUS+ funding. The project partners are:

	Partner Organisation	Country	Website
E10054972	Radio ECCA, Fundación Canaria	Spain	www.radioecca.org
E10213028	NUIM - National University of Ireland Maynooth	Ireland	https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/adult-and-community-education
E10211467	IDP - Sas Di Giancarlo Costantino (Italian Development Partners, IDP)	Italy	www.idpeuropa.com
E10010821	IHF - Institut De Haute Formation Aux Politiques	Belgium	https://www.ihfeurope.eu/

	Communautaires		
E10167050	PRISM - Impresa Sociale S.R.L.	Italy	www.prismonline.eu
E10154518	EILD - Eypopaiko Institutoyto Topikhs Anaptykshs Kεντρική Μακεδονία	Greece	http://eurolocaldevelopment.org/
E10270970	Como Una Cabra	Spain	www.cabrasenred.es

Rural VET Educational Progression Background

According to EUROSTAT, 27.8% of the EU population lives in rural areas. Rural areas are defined as territories with a population density lower than 300 inhabitants per square kilometre and a population with macro-regions experiencing high levels of rural isolation, especially among the Mediterranean countries and the EU Outermost Regions (e.g. Canary Islands).

Rural areas are often presented as homogeneous areas of settlement and possibility but that is far from the reality. Rural areas have higher out-migration, higher dependency ratios, more older age residents, more persons dependent on primary production activities, higher level of unemployment, significant levels of under-employment, greater exclusion from economic and social prospects, and greater exclusion from vocational/further/higher education than non-rural populations. Society is learning that rural areas are also subject to precarious employment, decreasing small business viability, declining access to state services particularly emergency services, greater levels of mental health affliction, greater levels of environmental impact, increasing remoteness due to cost of living/travel, and increasing fuel poverty. However, access to accurate data on rural remoteness and its consequences is not readily available due to the multifaceted complexity of rural disadvantage. Examples of this complexity are the desire of rural people to keep their personal situations private in small rural communities; the contrast between the non-rural people who retire to rural tranquillity and the farmer/business owner who own significant assets; and disadvantaged families and in-migrants who are there because of poor opportunities in more advantaged areas, etc.

It would take a significant report to accurately profile the levels of disadvantage experienced by rural people and it is significantly more complex to profile the exacerbated levels of disadvantage of those who are in remote and isolated rural areas seeking access to continuing education. However, it is evident that most stakeholders in this project believe young people are continuing beyond 2nd level education if they are aware of the positive outcomes of education, and if feasible to attend VET courses.

This project is concerned with disengagement from mainstream education of younger people from remote and isolated rural areas, and the lack of opportunity for younger and more adult residents of remote and isolated rural areas to continue their education. Vocational education and training (Further Education and Training in Ireland) is presented as a viable option for less skilled and less educated people from remote and isolated rural areas because it is of shorter duration, costs less, is more accessible, leads to employment that is more readily available in rural areas, and is more in keeping with the traditional blue collar and semi-skilled manual employment culture of rural areas. Returning to the issue of accurate data, early school leaving, non-completion and educational drop out are also multifaceted complex issues particularly for rural communities. The model of full-time

linear progressive and advancing school attendance is not the norm for rural remote rural residents in the same way it is in urban residents. Where the community is dependent on precarious employment possibilities, primary industries, and seasonal work such as tourism, people require a much more flexible educational route. A person may need to ‘pause’ their education for some time for personal, family, financial and care reasons, etc. They may wish to avail of the opportunity to return to education at a later stage but that is increasingly less possible as continuing education increasingly packaged in defined educational packages. Further educational progress is increasingly presented as a progressive pathway up the educational levels with state funding increasingly tied to evidence of upward linear progression. This progression is directly linked to employment possibility usually outside the rural area. Employment statistics reveal that people with tertiary education (ISCED³ 5-8) have an employment rate of 84.8%, those with upper and post-secondary education (ISCED 3-4) 74.8%, and those with lower secondary or less (ISCED 0-2) 54.3%. While the overall EU participation rate of adults in learning is 11%⁴ (2021), well below even the target set for 2020 (15%), in isolated and remote rural areas participation and continuation in education is even more difficult.



An Early School Leaver⁵ (ESL) is defined as a person aged 18-24 whose highest level of educational attainment is lower-second level or below and are not currently in education. As noted above early school leaving is deceptively complex and varies from country to country and region to region. However, it is evident that rural areas of Southern, Eastern and peripheral EU countries are particularly vulnerable to non-completion of mainstream education for many and/or all of the reasons presented above. While progress has been made⁶ [In Q2 2021, only 3% of those aged 18-24 were defined as early school leavers, a decrease from 12% in Q2 2005 (Heeran-Flynn⁷, 2017, p. 7, Social Justice Ireland⁸, 2020)] progress is varied and disjointed.

Early school leavers have poor labour market outcomes in every country. For example, just under two thirds (64%) of early school leavers aged 18-24 were not economically active in Ireland compared to 35% of other persons aged 18-24 years in Q2 2021. Early school leavers had an employment rate of just 21% in Q2 2021, much lower than other persons aged 18-24 (54%). The

³ International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). See <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/wRsc/classification>

⁴ See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics&oldid=568260

⁵ See <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/school-education/early-school-leaving>

⁶ For example Ireland has performed well on reducing the rate of early-school leaving since 2005 and had the fourth lowest rate in the EU-27 in 2020.

⁷ See Heeran-Flynn, L. (2017). *Early School Leaving: predictive risk factors*. Report commissioned by Foróige & Tusla. [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/V3_Heeran_Flynn, L. Early School Leaving - Predictive Risk Factors July 2017 .pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/V3_Heeran_Flynn,_L._Early_School_Leaving_-_Predictive_Risk_Factors_July_2017_.pdf)

⁸ See The Impact of Early School Leaving, 2020. <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/impact-early-school-leaving>

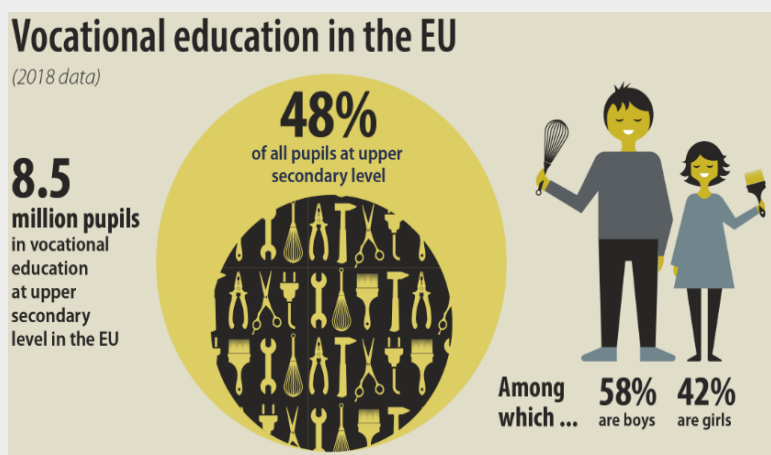
poor labour market status of early school leavers points to the need for a continued focus on this cohort and on addressing educational disadvantage. The situation is significantly more concentrated in remote rural areas interspersed with under-employment and other combinations.

Participation in high quality education has benefits not only for young people themselves but also for taxpayers and society. These benefits typically last over the course of an individual's lifetime. Continuing the example for one of the FETgoesRural Project partners; Ireland, according to the OECD⁹ (2019) adults with a tertiary degree in Ireland earn on average 81 per cent more than adults with upper secondary education. They are more likely to be employed, the employment rate is 11 percentage points higher for degree holders than for those with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (OECD, 2019). Socio-economic disadvantage also follows a student throughout the education system with younger graduates from more affluent areas earning around €2,000 more a year on average than their peers from disadvantaged areas. 80% of adults, who do not participate in lifelong learning programmes, especially those with low levels of education, express no interest in doing so and seeking no information about learning opportunities¹⁰. Balancing learning with working and personal life is a real struggle for rural learners.

Even when controlling for different factors, graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds earn more than €600 less after graduation than others (HEA¹¹, 2020, p.129.).

This evidence, duplicated similarly across the peripheral countries of Europe presents a challenge to policymakers, and points to the value of investing in education at all stages, and the particular importance of investing in early childhood education, continuing into adulthood, and a continued focus on tackling educational disadvantage.

VET in the EU



17.7 million students studied at the upper secondary level in the European Union (EU) in 2018 of which 45% (8.5 million pupils) participated in vocational education; male (58%) / female (42%).

Figure 1. Vocational Education in the EU (2018)

[Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20201109-1>]

As noted by Institut De Haute Formation Aux Politiques Communautaires (IHF Project Partner report) “the lack of data related to VET in rural areas was the main obstacle to this research. During the desk research, we noticed the data is mainly focused on the macro-level or entities such as cities,

⁹ See https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019_CN_IRL.pdf

¹⁰ See <https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/impact-education-levels-employment-outcomes>

¹¹ See <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2020/06/HEA-Graduate-Outcomes-Survey-Class-of-2018.pdf>

the European Union, etc. Furthermore, guidelines for promoting VET in European Union are also focused only on the European Union general, without any specification related to rural areas.”

The benefits of investing in education, both to the individual, to the economy and to society, far outweigh any initial outlay of resources, and should be at the forefront of decisions regarding the investment and resourcing of our education system as a whole. Disaggregation of outcome statistics on the effects of early disengagement from mainstream school suggests that remote and isolated rural areas are subject to these disadvantages to a greater degree than more central and connected areas such as urban and peri-urban areas.

While there are exceptions, e.g. the Czech regions dominate in terms of vocational education for both genders, people from isolated rural areas have greater limitations to equipment or connectivity to take full advantage of digital learning. Also, for VET professionals, the Covid-19 pandemic has meant a reduced or different kind of support offer for learners, with additional stress and anxiety as they, VET professionals, had to digitally up-skill themselves quickly.

The Challenge of Engaging the Less-Engaged

Cognisant of UN Sustainable Development Goal SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities¹²) and addressing the challenges faced by young people in rural areas, local and regional authorities can also contribute to achieving SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) (Moloney and Jalilzade¹³, 2022, p.2.) by engaging those most at risk of being isolated from continued education. Shucksmith¹⁴, (2010, p.14.) notes that the LEADER+¹⁵ initiative seems to have been largely unsuccessful in piloting innovative ways of engaging with young people in rural development.

Young people seek to manage and cope with the uncertainties of the risk society¹⁶, drawing on social networks, civil society, state and markets. But this management of risk and welfare is a task not only for young people themselves but also for those people and institutions that constitute the structures of opportunity within which young people must act; e.g. offering guidance and education. Several studies reveal a discrepancy between young people’s wish to be able to count on the assistance and support of institutions during their period of transition and the ability of those institutions to meet young people’s needs. Young people may seek independence, but they also want dependability around them according to Shucksmith, (2010, p.13.). Shucksmith goes on to state the concept of

¹² Supporting positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

¹³ See [The future of youth in rural areas: responsibilities of local and regional authorities](#) (Moloney and Jalilzade, 2022)

¹⁴ See Shucksmith, M. (2010). [‘How to promote the role of youth in rural areas of Europe?’](#) Note for the Directorate General for Internal Policies. Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, European Parliament. (A report represents a synthesis of existing research, drawing especially on the EU Framework project ‘Policies and Young People in Rural Development’ (PaYPiRD), as well as more recent studies, evaluations and statistics. The PaYPiRD project specifically addressed how young people today experience rural development and how policy measures might respond more adequately to the threat of social exclusion to which young people (aged 16- 25 years) in rural areas are increasingly exposed. Research was conducted in Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal and UK between 1999 and 2002).

¹⁵ For explanation of LEADER+ See https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-toolkit/leaderclld-explained_en

¹⁶ For explanation see <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/risk-society>

‘youth transition’ is fundamental to understanding young people’s situation with “... very little involvement of young people in decision-making”, and “... little account is taken of young people’s ‘voices’ in formulating rural development policies or employment policies, nor in the evaluation of these policies’ success.” (Shucksmith, 2010, p.13.).

In terms of engaging the less-engaged and meeting the SDGs (3, 8, 9, and 11), young people are calling for better coordination between central / regional governments and municipalities to ensure crisis support interventions reach rural areas, as well as advocating for region specific interventions in addressing problems rather than a more general approach (International Labour Organisation¹⁷, 2020, p.48.). In 2003, the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life¹⁸ called on local / regional authorities to pursue specific policies for youth in rural areas. Building on this call, the report rapporteurs emphasised that policies developed by local and regional authorities should reflect and address the daily challenges experienced by rural young people, particularly in relation to education, public transport, health care, housing, employment, quality jobs, and digital connectivity, including place-based and person-based measures to develop young people’s potential (Moloney and Jalilzade, 2022, p.26.). Young people need to be well-connected within and beyond their communities. This is important not only for their learning and personal development but also to interact with their local and wider peers. For those who may wish to stay within the local labour market, good digital connectivity can be crucial for many small business start-ups. Creating local workspaces/hubs within communities may also help (Moloney and Jalilzade, 2022, p.25.)

Local NGOs and other political structures can foster active citizenship amongst rural young people so that they are better able to express their needs and shape policy. However, as pointed out in 2019 research in one rural and significantly disadvantaged region “... youth services have declined across many countries in the past couple of decades ...”¹⁹, and the EILD partner report (2023, p.5.) notes from the feedback of the president of a VET trainer network in one region that the state “... has not yet found the appropriate methodology to proceed with the design of a targeted strategy for these target groups.”

The EU Council Recommendation on VET²⁰ (December 2020), pointed out that “VET programmes need to be accessible for vulnerable groups, low-skilled people, and people in rural or remote areas” and, “VET staff need to undertake continuing professional development to deliver high quality training through digital skills and effective innovative methods”. The EU Council Recommendation on VET aims to improve VET professionals’ skills and capacities in order to provide enhanced training and foster learners’ engagement in isolated rural and remote areas of the EU. The Council recommendation states that VET needs to be more inclusive and accessible for rural learners: inclusive to promote professional and personal empowerment, and; accessible to prevent further migration of younger generations from rural to urban areas looking for better education or work opportunities.

¹⁷ International Labour Organisation (2020). [‘Youth and Covid-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-being’](#). Report by the YOUTH team in the Employment, Labour Markets and Youth Branch.

¹⁸ See the [Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life](#) (2003).

¹⁹ Youth Service Research (2019). [‘Needs of Rural Young People’](#) Northern Ireland.

²⁰ See <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/content/council-recommendation-24-november-2020-vocational-education-and-training-vet-sustainable>

The IHF VETgoesRural partner project report notes that the Osnabrück’s Declaration²¹ (2020) highlights four main areas for encouraging VET in the period 2021 - 2025:

- Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET;
- Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET²² and digitalisation;
- Sustainability – a green link in VET;
- European Education and Training Area and international VET²³.

... and notes “any kind of policy related to developing centres of vocational excellence as innovative incubators”, and a culture of lifelong learning to respond to the emergence of new professions, (green skills, digital skills and sustainability), and cushions the disappearance of other professions (non-digital, labour intensive and non-sustainable) “is welcome” (IHF partner report, 2023). The Osnabrück Declaration (2020) also states that holding digital video conferencing, webinars and programmes is one of the ways to promote climate neutrality through VET delivery.

In planning VET and C-VET engagement participants such as social partners, organisations of civil society as well as VET providers and learners need to be involved in the development of the training programme. The programmes should include the best practices from initial and continuous vocational education and training (I-VET and C-VET) so that their co-integration could be at an optimum (IHF partner report).

The backgrounds of learners who drop out of mainstream education, and/or their families, identified in previous research include experience of living in poverty, mental health issues, disabilities, specific or general learning needs, ongoing social, emotional or health issues, experience of trauma, adverse childhood experiences, substance abuse issues, involvement in anti-social behaviour, and being from minority ethnic backgrounds (Stokes²⁴, 2003). These factors are often experienced by young people in combination and as intergenerational experience, with Heeran-Flynn²⁵ describing how the “... risk factors for early school leaving are highly complex and intertwined” (2017, p. 6) and lead to a gradual process of disengagement from school. Stokes outlined that “... young people overwhelmingly cite the breakdown in their relationship with teachers as causing their early school leaving” (2003, p.83.). A range of literature suggests that a poor relationship with schools is one trigger for early school leaving, and is linked with wider societal inequalities which are reproduced through the school system and culture (Bourdieu and Passeron²⁶, 1977; Lynch and Baker²⁷, 2005; Byrne and Smyth²⁸, 2010). SOLAS²⁹ in Ireland

²¹ See [Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies](#), 2020

²² What is C-VET? See <https://euostart-project.eu/en/post-5-c-vet-what-is-it-and-why/>

²³ More details about encouraging VET can be found in Osnabrück Declaration. *Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies*, 2020

²⁴ Stokes, D. (2003). *Early school leaving in Ireland: The matrix of influences explored*. Doctoral dissertation. NUI Maynooth.

²⁵ Heeran-Flynn, L. (2017). *Early School Leaving: predictive risk factors*. Report commissioned by Foroige & Tusla. [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/V3_Heeran_Flynn, L. Early School Leaving - Predictive Risk Factors July 2017 .pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/V3_Heeran_Flynn,_L._Early_School_Leaving_-_Predictive_Risk_Factors_July_2017_.pdf)

²⁶ Bourdieu, P., and Passeron, J.C. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*. Sage: Beverly Hills, CA

acknowledge the complexities of needs amongst current early leavers that results in very significant impacts for young people and their families as well as the broader community and society.

The director of the state agency responsible for further/vocational education in Ireland (SOLAS, 2019) noted that “Among the present generation of early leavers, we are seeing an increase in the complexities of their needs – whether they have mental health issues, come from migrant backgrounds so may not have English as a first language or have faced discrimination, or have previously engaged in anti-social behaviour” (Brownlee, SOLAS)³⁰. Smyth et al., reviewing the national early school leavers programme in Ireland, noted that school-based referrals, or referrals through other agencies, is a notable institutional absence given the negative experiences of schooling for many early school learners (Smyth et al.³¹, 2019). Also evident is the absence of groups for possible early school leavers or young people at risk of early school leaving. McCoy³² (2020) notes the absence of early school leavers from migrant backgrounds in educational re-engagement projects is connected to their, the migrants’, lack of awareness of the educational system in their resident country, the lack of social networks to mobilise among their peer-group, and their challenge in re-engaging with education after arrival in a different country.

²⁷ Lynch, K. and J. Baker (2005). *Equality in Education: an equality of condition perspective*. Theory and Research in Education, 3(2), pp. 131-164.

²⁸ Byrne, D and Smyth, E. (2010). ‘No way back? The dynamics of early school-leaving’. Byrne, D., McCoy, S., and Watson, D. (2008). *School-leavers survey report 2007*. <https://www.esri.ie/news/school-leavers-survey-report-2007>

²⁹ The State agency that oversees the building of a world class Further Education & Training (FET) sector in Ireland. See https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf 1

³⁰ See <https://www.solas.ie/news-media/review-shows-early-school-leavers-benefit-from-significant-support/> 2019.

³¹ Smyth, E, J. Banks, J. O’Sullivan, S. McCoy, P. Redmond, S. McGuinness. (2019). Evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme: Research Series Number 82. The Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin. www.doi.org/10.26504/rs82

³² McCoy, S. (2020). Insights from the Youthreach Evaluation. *Education Matters: Ireland’s Yearbook of Education 2019 2020*. <https://irelandseducationyearbook.ie/irelands-yearbook-of-education-2019-2020/further-education-training/insights-from-the-youthreach-evaluation/of-education-2019-2020/further-education-training/insights-from-the-youthreachhttps://irelandseducationyearbook.ie/irelands-yearbook-of-education-2019-2020/further-education-training/insights-from-the-youthreachhttps://irelandseducationyearbook.ie/irelands-yearbook-of-education-2019-2020/further-education-training/insights-from-the-youthreach-evaluation/evaluation/>

VETgoesRural Project Partner Country Report Findings

Stakeholder feedback for this project recorded in project partner country reports came from areas with: higher levels of unemployment, an aging population, lower household incomes, lower levels of digital literacy and a significant percentage of lower-skilled adults. Stakeholders also noted areas with high social and cultural segregation that hinders access to both face-to-face and online education (i.e., without internet connection), plus a lack of specific demand driven educational programmes (See Radio ECCA Partner report). The stakeholders consulted (interviewees and focus groups) “... were learners, trainers and practitioners working in the VET sector” (IDP partner report). The IDP partner report also notes that the learners consulted were mainly “not young”, about 80 % aim at upskilling for a new or better quality of life, and they belong to a low-income level.

The Como Una Cabra partner report (p.3.) notes “One of the main reasons they (Younger people from remote and isolated rural areas) don’t choose to stay in their territories is because of the loneliness and isolation of young people and lack of opportunities” and, “... they do not have access to the same offer of training, leisure, services as in cities.” This is a critical issue in understanding rural depopulation, rural outmigration, and the real human issues that de-motivate learners from remote and isolated rural areas from staying engaged in an education that does not address their needs or their experienced realities. The availability of vocational education facilities in rural areas is noted as a critical factor in the Greek VETgoesRural Project partner report (EILD partner report, p.2.) “There are no VET structures scattered in the province, they are generally concentrated in urban areas”. The NUIM Partner report noted that most learner participants chose the VET course/ college due to location and accessibility. Many described the location as being the “closest” to their location, and they prefer to attend the courses in person and that the methodologies used³³ accommodate their needs (IDP and Radio ECCA partners reports).

Access to transport and information is noted in all reports for example page 2 of the EILD partner report. The lack and cost of both inhibits progression for people from rural areas as noted by learners interviewed. Reports from project partners suggest that networks and digital marketing can address this barrier to “some” extent but does not remove the barrier. The EILD/Greek partner reports that learners noted that allowances are suggested as a way of overcoming the transport and access barrier but they note that allowances do not address the family, caring, employment, family connection, among other, responsibilities that rural VET learners progressing carry,



³³ “... flexible hours and the possibility of the course being blended learning or online to avoid having to travel, in order to take it at the same time as they are working, looking after an elderly relative or children.” (Radio ECCA partners report November 2022).

particularly when these allowances are paid on the basis of receipts after expenditure (EILD Partner report).

Locality/closeness (proximity) of the VET setting is heavily influential in choice of services and centres. Learners chose the VET college based on affordable accessibility, perceived outcome in terms of job satisfaction and income, and the course. Feedback reports suggest better and more options in terms of community-based courses that could result in good jobs (not retail/ hospitality/ early education/ childcare only), such as computers courses/ accounting and business courses.

In addition, the Como Una Cabra partner report identifies a critical issue that is inadequately referred to in literature or policy – that is the “Low prestige of Vocational Training” (p.3.). Higher education has greater prestige from a public and economic perspective as it is perceived as meeting needs and enhancing social and economic resilience. However, remote and isolated rural people generally need to migrate out of rural areas to take advantage of the benefits that higher education brings. The first step in doing this is to migrate out to attend higher education services on a non-rural campus. As vocational education (VE), (and in the case of Ireland further education (FE)), has a lower status and often does not meet local needs, there is a mis-match and consequently exclusion. The Como Una Cabra partner report notes “There is a stereotype that vocational training is for people who are not good enough ...” (p.3.). However, also in the Como Una Cabra partner report (p.4.), the stakeholder VET practitioners note that “... the prestige of vocational training studies in Spain is improving and there are more and more students every year.” That is evident in the NUIM partner country report also, and efforts going on to broaden the range of VET studies on offer. Indeed, perhaps students from rural and remote areas have identified that more graduates of higher education “... are not finding good jobs ...” (Como Una Cabra partner report, p.4.) and this is causing young people to turn to VET to access other possible job opportunities.

Learner stakeholder feedback from Spain identified that there are inadequate VET training places available, particularly training in trades such as plumbing, electricity, mechanics, truck driving, etc. (Como Una Cabra partner report, p.6.), resulting in many prospective learners being excluded. They, (Como Una Cabra report) also note that accessing other training courses requires incurring cost, family support and/or financial resources, and travel. This is supported in all other partner country reports. They, Spanish learner stakeholders and other reports, note that fulltime timetables do not accommodate their rural personal or family/community needs, that not everyone aspires to an urban lifestyle, and that the loyalty and commitment to locality is ignored (Como Una Cabra, NUIM, EILD, and PRISM partner reports).

Other general remote rural learner feedback comments in project partner country reports noted that often there is limited or excessively long transport journeys making getting to the educational centres difficult. Many drop out of VET studies because they cannot combine their study attendance with their job. They have to drop out to continue to work, many in family businesses according to project partner reports. Feedback from remote rural learners in country reports note that learners look for the practical aspects of their VET learning; to put into practice what they have learned and more flexibility to choose what to learn. They note that the cost of travel and/or housing rental offered in non-rural areas, and the separation from the family is, in many cases, a reason for course abandonment or for making the decision not to start the VET studies. In the NUIM partner county report four adult learners shared that they commuted over 40 minutes each way to attend courses

..., and some young people used ‘convoluted public transport arrangements’ that required them to commute for up to 2-hours each way. The Greek partner, EILD, report also noted these points and pointed out that “tele-training” would be an option to increase participation for remote rural learners. However, the poor quality of internet connectivity, cost of equipment and severe weather in remote rural areas was also raised. The EILD report noted “... with the right adaptations ... [tele-training] can be a very important tool for the education of non-urban populations” (p.7.).

Practitioner and learner feedback also noted the low number of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) careers and some male-dominated trades such as mining, for example. Country reports note that the main reason why students leave courses without completing them, according to their feedback “... is because they find employment”. However, practitioners note that this is often the wrong choice, because “... they leave the course to take temporary, often very short (1-2 week) jobs, when by completing the course, they could aspire to find a better, longer-term employment” (IDP, Como Una Cabra, NUIM, and Radio ECCA partner reports).

The reason why they, remote rural learners, initially take VET courses was “... improving professional skills, broadening their knowledge, improving their CV and meeting the criteria for obtaining government unemployment subsidies that require training. However, the most repeated reason, and the one they all agree on, is employability, the search for a job ... digital competence, entrepreneurship, languages, basic competences and soft skills” (Radio ECCA and Como Una Cabra partner reports). This is further explained by narrative in the Radio ECCA partner report that “... one of the triggers for not completing the course is a lack of motivation and a misconception of study.” The IDP partner report notes a “... 20% drop out rate, mainly due to unclear view of the course and to loss of motivation due to the engagement required by the course.”

Rural learner feedback in country reports noted that generally people on these training courses have dropped out of compulsory education and have a very traditional concept of education (meritocratic, magisterial) with which they are not satisfied and do not believe they have the ability to pass the course. The Radio ECCA partner report also noted feedback from stakeholders that “... job opportunities in these areas [referring to rural areas]”, “.. despite having studies, are very low.” This finding is supported by employment statistics but levels of underemployment, precarious employment, primary service employment and employment limited by family member dependency is inadequately understood. In addition, the Radio ECCA report noted that stakeholder learners from rural isolated areas (the Canaries, see Radio ECCA report) described their location as “... a rural tourism area, with the minimum necessary resources (health and education) and with few resources for adult education.” The NUIM Partner report and the Radio ECCA partner report noted from feedback that generally as high as half of the students who start continuing education courses do not finish because they find temporary jobs and, because of their precarious socio-economic situation, they prefer to work rather than study. In feedback the majority of learners reported it as being “hard” to get a job and there being “no jobs” in rural locations. Interestingly, some learners indicated that there were “some jobs” in hospitality, child-care and retail but they felt they were undesirable due to cost benefit outcomes (pay, travel costs and time, hours). However, in more detailed discussion both community leaders, education providers, and learners noted that those more skilled and/more experienced in employment and education indicated that there was availability of jobs depending on skillset. The ultimate goal of all participants, according to the IDP partner report, is to gain tools and qualifications that will help them in their job search; they want to receive an official qualification to get a job.

The lack of a greater supply of training specific to the needs of the local area and environment was noted by stakeholders to the Radio ECCA partner report, but they also noted that in isolated areas, it is much more difficult to have specialized courses on subjects that would be relevant for the population due to the lack of professional teachers. Further practitioner feedback highlighted the lack of training to update their locally and specialised knowledge of subjects and/or teaching methodologies (Radio ECCA partner report).

The Radio ECCA partner report noted the following challenges that learners from remote rural areas encounter that have made it difficult for them to complete their course and resulted in drop out included "... lack of time, time incompatibility with employment, lack of motivation and lack of initial level or skills to be able to follow the course successfully." The IDP partner report feedback noted that "... changing this situation would require a change in the mindset of students."

The general reputation of VET locally and in their territory is good, ... an opportunity to improve occupational possibilities, ... no major structural changes are required at VET centres according to the IDP partner report (Italy). The IDP partner report noted that while remote rural students who drop out may "... not feel adequate to the level required, because they are at a lower level", in the Radio ECCA report (p.19.) stakeholder learners highlighted their recommendation that "... individualised accompaniment .. as one of the fundamental requirements for successful completion of the training", that the successful ".. implementation of the course is the personal and individualized treatment of the students", and that "... 85% of participants involved considered the months dedicated to internship very useful for their professional and personal development (PRISM, EILD, and Radio ECCA partner reports).

Stakeholder feedback to the Radio ECCA report recommended greater use of internship opportunities in companies within the courses as requested by learners from rural isolated areas, specific courses meeting the needs of the areas and learners, and training opportunities for practitioners to update knowledge and skills, create a greater use of collaborative practitioner/learner/potential employer and community networks in a flexible educational journey. The Como Una Cabra Project partner report (p.6.) recommends "Working groups, where VET providers, business associations, ... and companies participate in community hall ... periodic meetings to identify educational needs, ... adapt training to the needs of the territory (Como Una Cabra Project partner report, p.6.). Learner stakeholders noted the course topics that stand out as relevant and of interest to them are: entrepreneurship, marketing, languages, fundraising and digital skills (NUIM partner report, IDP partner report and Radio ECCA partner report).

Stakeholder feedback also noted the importance of "homogeneous" learning groups, "educational level, interests, age, moment of life, needs, etc.", that favours collaborative learning, reduces isolation and facilitates the teacher's task. Indeed, the Radio ECCA partner report noted that the adaptation to teaching into isolated areas during the Covid-19 pandemic with adaptations to the new situation was "was a very positive moment for the teachers". Some stakeholders noted that the adaptations adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic facilitated learners in isolated areas to develop, perhaps more important, competency types such as creative and critical thinking when "learning to learn". These skills, creative and critical thinking, were more appropriate for learners from more disadvantaged settings than continuing to use "...traditional rote learning" that does not work for those who have dropped out of mainstream learning. This recommendation come out in the NUIM report, the Radio ECCA report, the Como Una Cabra report, and the IDP report. However, it should be noted that some stakeholders also expressed misgivings about these adaptations as they claimed they demeaned the standards of course certification. Stakeholder feedback from a number of project

partners also noted that adaptation of assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic where there was greater use of “... continuous assessment, recuperations, exercises, practical work, etc.” (Radio ECCA partner report), and away from traditional assessment. They state that these adaptations, “... meant an increase in students' confidence to dare, according to this new form of assessment, to attempt those courses they had left halfway through or for which they did not feel capable of studying a syllabus and taking a final exam” (Radio ECCA partner report).

The Como Una Cabra Project partner report also noted that the focus on education of persons who had dropped out early from mainstream education is an “...opportunity to recover traditions and assume family businesses.”.

The challenges in adapting VET education for migrant learners, ethnic minorities and more disadvantaged groups is, indirectly, bringing a clearer focus on the adaptations needed for the non-traditional learner particularly those from remote and rural areas (NUIM, PRISM, and Como Una Cabra (p.6.) Partner report). Practitioner stakeholder feedback noted the lack of digital resources, from audio visuals to Whatsapp and social media, to update their teaching methodologies and digital competences as teachers of this specific cohort of learners (Radio ECCA, NUIM, PRISM and Como Una Cabra partner reports).

Many learner stakeholders who participated in the project partner country reports described a desire to upskill themselves based on income and skill enhancement using terms such as “better myself” and described desired family outcomes using terms including “give my kids a better life”.

None of the community-based learners adult learners, in the NUIM stakeholders report, were engaged with Erasmus+ or did not know what it was. One explained that it would be attractive but indicated they could only do it online if it accommodated family commitments. Young learners (Dunboyne College of Further Education also in the NUIM stakeholders report) had greater access to ERASMUS+ options and were very open to participating. However, it became evident in one-2-one interviews that those who had part time jobs would not be able to participate as they may lose their job.



The educational staff/practitioner focus group in the NUIM stakeholders report discussed the challenge of getting young people to progress in education into VET. They emphasised the need for outreach to 2nd level schools, the importance of schools visiting VET education centres, the importance of meeting teachers from 2nd level schools/meeting teachers in VET education centres, and the importance of community educators delivering familiarity and animation work targeted to families and community champions in isolated rural areas. They also emphasised the importance of celebrating the progress of those who had graduated from VET centres. Learner stakeholders noted that many VET teachers are from outside rural areas, they do not know the needs of the rural areas and the result is the training given makes it difficult for graduates to stay in their areas (Como Una Cabra and NUIM partner reports).

The educational staff, community education staff, and community leader interviews and focus groups emphasised the need to make more use of information technology (IT) to deliver the early stages of VET into rural communities, particularly more disadvantaged communities, and then to gradually provide blended education approaches in VET as courses and learners progress (NUIM, Como Una Cabra, and Radio ECCA partner reports). They suggested this requires facilitation and

animation by community educators, facilities such as laptop loans to students, good quality internet connectivity, local learning hubs for students to meet up, and outreach by teachers to where the students are. However, internet connectivity is an issue particularly for remote rural areas (NUIM, Como Una Cabra, and Radio ECCA partner reports) and areas of high altitude (EILD partner report, p.3. and p.6.).

There was a strong emphasis in community leader, community educator, and VET educator interviews on being learner-centred (NUIM partner report). This requires attention to the needs of the student and putting in place services to ease the student's participation. They noted the importance of timetables being designed around the real needs of the learners, assessment being cognisant of the extra challenges for remote rural learners, the need for regular educational and life guidance by guidance counsellors, or employment counsellors (p.3. EILD partner report), who understand the challenges of the rural based learner and their families (Also in the NUIM partner report). Learner and VET practitioner feedback noted that students would like to see improvements in VET centre logistics and timetables/flexibility, in order to make attending classes more comfortable and facilitate progression (IDP partner report).

Some interviewees suggested that VET teachers need appropriate teaching skills/educational delivery skills that will engage the rural learner as a young person (NUIM, Como Una Cabra, EILD, and Radio ECCA partner reports), or as a mature adult (NUIM partner report). This is a vital point because they noted that the type of teaching that is influenced by universal design (UDL) and by cosmopolitan backgrounds and training can exclude those who originate from rural settings. This was particularly evident when the interviewees were in-migrants from outside the country or from non-mainstream ethnic groups (NUIM, Como Una Cabra, and Radio ECCA partner reports). The report of the Greek project partner, EILD (p.3.), notes "VET Trainers should be active listeners, to provide individualized solutions..." to address learners insecurity and to assure them in their transition.

A number of learner interviewees noted that the teacher population in VET needs to reflect the student population in terms of age, attitude, ethnicity, skin colour and other human aspects (NUIM partner report). They noted there is a sameness among the teacher population that can exclude some disadvantaged learners and contribute to their sense of exclusion.

Practitioner staff feedback in the NUIM report noted that future VET³⁴ needs VET teaching that includes a wider global perspective valuing the local, valuing a connection with big business through work experience but also a valuing of small and medium sized local enterprise, an emphasis on diversity and inclusion through active global citizenship education³⁵, and strong emphasis on community for wellbeing and mental health support. While 17 of the 30 learner interview participants indicated a desire to work and live in their location, as young people, many indicated a desire to emigrate/move to a city (NUIM partner report).

All interviewees in the NUIM and Radio ECCA reports, noted the importance of local reasonably priced and accessible services such as transport and accommodation to support them in education. They noted how vital local libraries, study hubs, social spaces for learners, community support, outreach from education centres and user-friendly access to funding for those in financial hardship. They also noted the importance of the connection with their 2nd level education setting as they

³⁴ See https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf

³⁵ See <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced>

transition into VET. Learner and practitioner feedback in the IDP partner report noted the need to improve VET centre selection criteria and procedures to select the people and the level of the course, leading to more homogeneity in the classroom. Learner and practitioner feedback in the IDP partner report also noted the importance of better explanation of course outcomes, and level of commitment requested from participants. They also noted the importance of starting a course with an introductory module, (IDP partner report).

The learners from rural areas noted the opportunities for work and careers that provide services to rural communities (NUIM partner report). However, they noted that these careers, such as local enterprise and local skilled services, are often deprioritised relative to careers and employment in big city-based enterprises. A small number noted the importance of stewardship of rural areas in a time of climate change and ecological diversity loss. They noted that people who grow up in rural areas are best placed to work in these industries but there is less relevance or prestige associated with these careers and municipal government/local authorities place less emphasis on these careers.



Recommendations

- 1) The European Union should make further efforts to establish a common European VET system with flexibility for local delivery.
- 2) The European Union should develop policies aimed at further encouraging mobility, in particular long-term mobility, further enhance the structures of the European VET system. (IHF partner report November 2022).
- 3) The European Union should facilitate coordination among international organizations, such as OECD, UNESCO, ILO etc., to develop a common VET education system as well as guidelines for upgrading the VET system of the European Union, (IHF partner report).
- 4) European and national education policies need to address the lack of knowledge of what VET offers along with the bias towards higher/university education.
- 5) European and national VET policies need to address access to affordable and flexi-time public transport and childcare provision for remote rural learners.
- 6) European and national VET policies need to address access for people with disabilities, people with mental health challenges, people from ethnic and cultural minorities, and the provision of education that welcomes diversity and promotes inclusivity.
- 7) Practitioner stakeholders recommend a focus on career guidance, formal training (secondary, baccalaureate and vocational training), training in the health sector, digital skills, entrepreneurship, immigration, gender and equality, marketing, languages, fundraising and the environment. (IHF, IDP, Radio ECCA, and NUIM, Partner Report November 2022).
- 8) Practitioner stakeholders recommend specific courses meeting the needs of the areas and learners, training opportunities for practitioners to update knowledge and skills, create a greater use of collaborative practitioner/learner/potential employer and community networks in a flexible educational journey.
- 9) Practitioner and learner stakeholders recommend offering gateway courses (short introduction courses) through rural outreach beyond towns.
- 10) The majority of learners interviewed did not have work experience in their course but would like the option (NUIM partner report). This needs to be prioritised for remote rural learners.
- 11) Practitioner stakeholders recommend a focus VET educational projects that involve students in the development of their own territory/area. Practical projects have an impact on the area and are visible (Como Una Cabra Partner report, p.6.). Involving students in the development of their own area with a practical educational focus meets many of the stakeholder and learner feedback recommendations.
- 12) As all stakeholder feedback indicates that the uptake of ERASMUS exchange experience is very low among remote rural learners for the same reasons that cause them to drop out of mainstream education, a focus VET educational projects that involve students in the development of their own territory would stimulate like-level "... [e]xchanges with other countries." (Como Una Cabra Partner report, p.6.).

- 13) Practitioner stakeholders also recommend “Scholarships for internship contracts in companies that provide professional experience” particularly those that relate to the needs of rural isolated areas. (Como Una Cabra Partner report, p.6.).
- 14) All stakeholders recommended improvements in communications and accessibility. This includes roads, public transport, active travel, internet, mobile media, and local communication hubs with guidance support.
- 15) Stakeholder feedback noted the need to equip VET education centres with modern machinery for employment education and optimum digitization. Job placement is an essential part of this strategy according to stakeholders. Provide incentives to local employers to promote the hiring of young people in vocational training.
- 16) Stakeholder feedback noted the need for continued or more scholarships to facilitate the participation of vulnerable rural groups and family members. This includes travel and housing cost subsidies while they study. Funding for VET needs to be culturally considered.
- 17) All practitioner stakeholder feedback noted the need for reduced classroom teacher/learner ratios to improve the quality of teaching and maximise support for vulnerable learners.
- 18) Adopt best practice in VET delivery with introductory modules, engaged delivery, openness to learner feedback, individualised curricula, and periodic one-2-one learner/ graduate follow-up.
- 19) There was a strong emphasis on adapting VET education and training to the interests of the student.
- 20) Make VET studies more flexible, enabling the possibility to study by modules instead of full-time continuous education and training.
- 21) Practitioner and learner stakeholder feedback noted the need to make VET training community-based. Invigorate communities, support people, provide facilities with subsidised rent and tax incentives, make it easier to undertake and, support continuous training, and integrate and involve local development organisations/companies in VET training programmes.
- 22) Practitioner and learner stakeholder feedback noted remote learner drop out due to issues with internet access and internet instability, no access to study hubs and high-quality public library services, and the need for equipment access such as a laptop loan scheme.
- 23)** Many practitioner stakeholder noted the need to continually build teacher capacity in VET for remote rural learners in marginalised learning and learner methods.
- 24) Ground education in the reality and context of the student experience home area to make VET inspiring. Disengagement and drop out is related to limited probability of employment. If viable and sustainable employment is not a reasonably expected outcome VET is devalued. Learners need to be engaged in course content design and teaching, and have access to affordable wrap-around services such as childcare and transport.
- 25) Increase the offer of vocational training adapted to women, support for the social and labour integration of women and the reduction of the gender gap.

- 26) Giving competences in education to the local development community workers and administrations, who work with rural communities on an ongoing basis. Local development agents (LDAs) are a key agent of change.
- 27) Rural community leaders note that transportation (cost and access), childcare (cost and access), access to internet, confidence, generational expectation, and exposure are barriers to educational continuity for remote rural people. Suggestions - online learning with accreditation, more support for learners in terms of enhancing engagement; community liaison, guidance, support, and technological support (LWL in Ireland offer a laptop scheme that has good uptake from rural learners).
- 28) All European, regional, national and local/municipal policies need to be rural proofed along with diversity and inclusion proofing, and VET for rural learners from remote rural areas should be practical, informed by need and rural-centred.
- 29) Some learners noted the need for greater emphasis on interview skills training, curriculum vitae preparation, and basic technology courses being made available in their rural location with more online/ hybrid (distance) delivery of course content with engaging teachers and platforms.
- 30) Some learners and practitioners recommended clearer explanation of the accreditation level value of courses, and the importance of accreditation for progression. This is particularly important for progress to further education and employment - if they could gain employment directly based on their VET.
- 31) Some learners and practitioners recommended wrap-around career guidance services before, during and after the course to signpost possible outcomes.



Conclusion

It is evident that both learners and community leaders from rural areas, and from VET practitioners/teachers, that they agree in terms of barriers to both engagement and continuation of VET (transport, availability and quality of courses, services, IT connectivity, employment and progression, and appropriate teaching delivery). For many VET learners challenges were not education/course content dependent but logistic in terms of geographics and family commitments. Additionally, the types of courses and possible outcomes were seen as a barrier. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest more in-depth engagement with rural communities at an even more local level including small town and local areas where infrastructure including public transport, childcare and internet access is limited, would be beneficial to address VET delivery in remote rural areas. Additionally, interpersonal linking and targeting may impact uptake of VET particularly for disadvantaged groups, immigrant and ethnically diverse communities. Many learners used the word “lucky” when referring to their ability to engage in VET and associated this with driving, having a partner (to support with children or financially) and having funds to pay for their VET course and associated costs (fuel, laptop etc).

It is imperative that access and engagement in VET is not exclusionary based on rurality as both are a locality and life choice. Increased online and hybrid VET delivery is desirable and may enhance uptake and engagement. However, there are associated barriers regarding access to internet and technological supports. It is recommended that rural infrastructure be considered when delivering and providing VET. Moreover, it is recommended that feasibility of outcomes in terms of employment and objective outcomes be learner informed.

END

VET GOES RURAL:

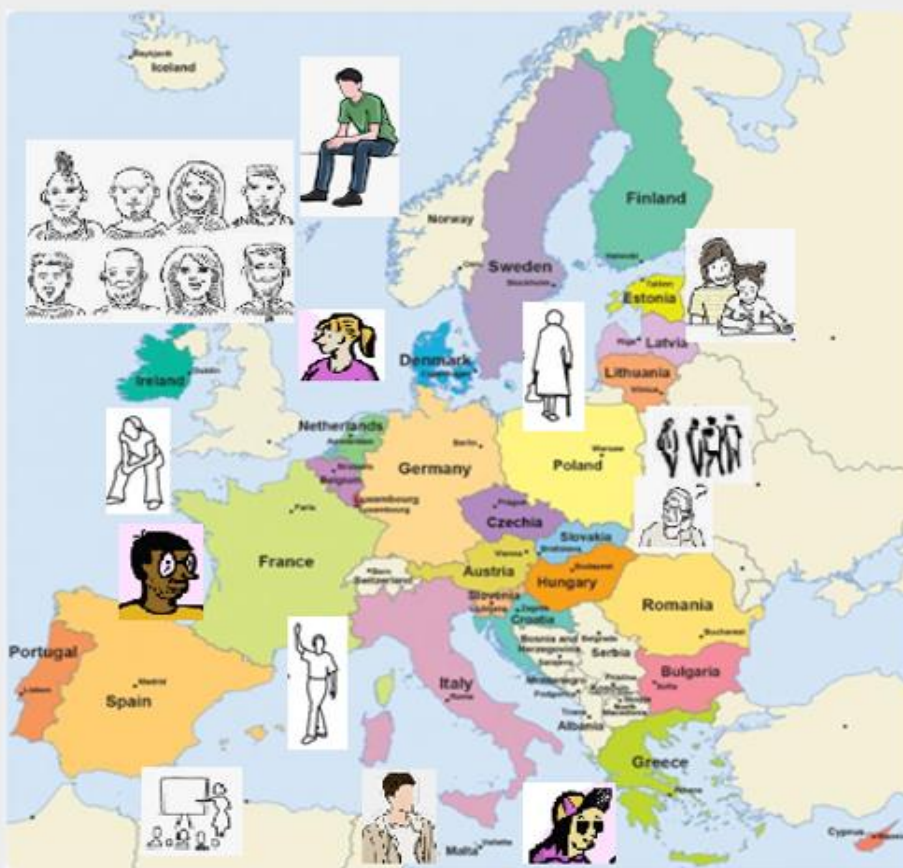
Innovating VET practices in isolated rural and remote regions of the EU

Grant Agreement 2021-1-ES01-KA220-VET-000024868

Bottom-Up Stakeholders Feedback Project Report

(January 2023)

27 countries of the European Union:



- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czechia
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
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- Spain
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