

# Knowledge-based Approach to Moving Rural Youth Forward



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## Disclaimer

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# Introduction

European Youth Goals are one of important pillars of today's EU youth policy. Created during the 2017–2018 cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, 11 broad areas were defined by the young people from across the EU as priority areas in which further development and actions need to be taken. These 11 European Youth Goals<sup>1</sup> are listed below:

1. Connecting EU with Youth
2. Equality of All Genders
3. Inclusive Societies
4. Information & Constructive Dialogue
5. Mental Health & Wellbeing
6. Moving Rural Youth Forward
7. Quality Employment for All
8. Quality Learning
9. Space and Participation for All
10. Sustainable Green Europe
11. Youth Organisations & European Programmes

In my previous publications focusing on the European Youth Goals, two important topics were addressed: basics of youth policy evaluation<sup>2</sup> and analysis of open source indicators connected to Youth Goal no.6: "Moving Rural Youth Forward"<sup>3</sup>. In order to conclude this series of publications, and building on both aforementioned texts, concrete evaluation strategies are outlined in here in order to further support any actor in the youth field in their evaluative practices. Since European Youth Goal no.6 has been already used as the focus of this publication series, it is also used in here to demonstrate evaluative processes in particular linked to rural youth policies.

Both of my previous texts are rather complex and may be considered lengthy as they go into detail and describe all nuances of the evaluation theory as well as details connected to existent indicators on rural youth. Both are necessary to look for answers to complex questions which may occur when diving into the youth evaluation topic. This publication takes on a different approach, however, offering all information in the format of infographics, using visualisation of the key steps and phases to better depict what can be done in reality when conducting evaluation on rural youth policies in order to support processes striving to achieve the European Youth Goal no.6.

Five infographics cover the following topics. Firstly, key evaluation steps are outlined in order to pinpoint the basic structure of an evaluation process to the reader. Subsequently, a vital topic of mapping the rural youth policies is covered in detail. In order to provide as much practical support to the reader as possible, two examples of different evaluative processes are outlined in separate infographics. And eventually, an important part of concluding the evaluation is depicted.

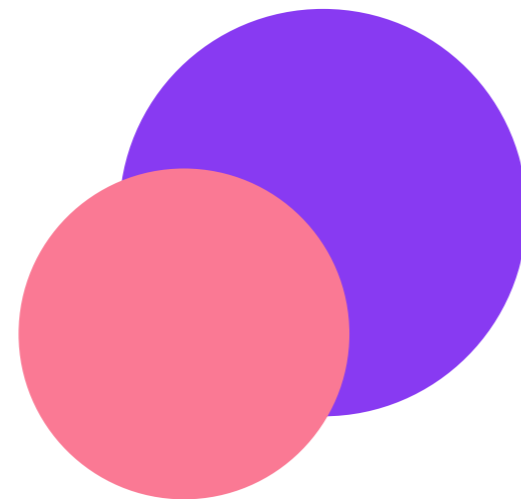
<sup>1</sup> European Commission 2020a.

<sup>2</sup> Bárta 2019.

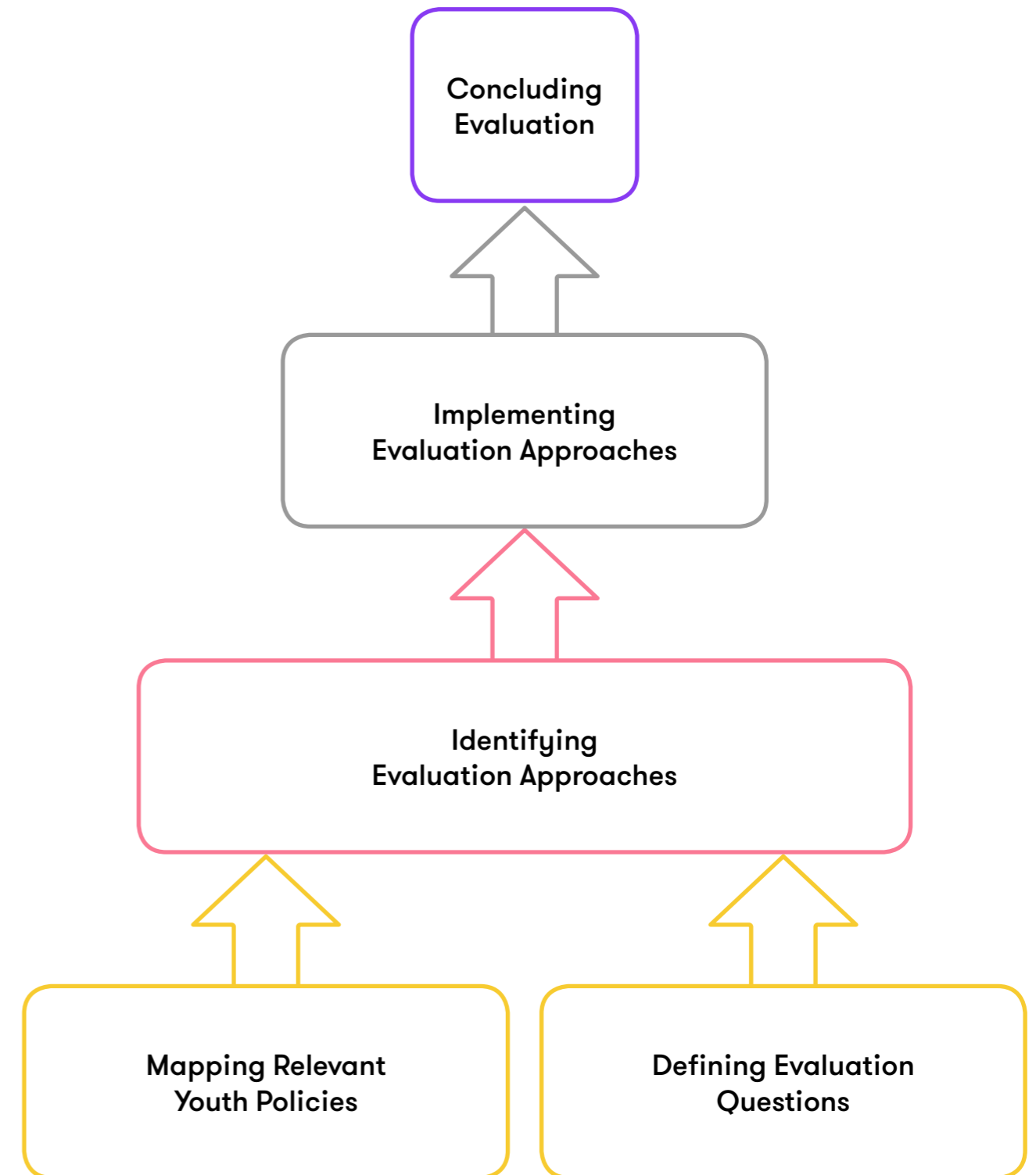
<sup>3</sup> Bárta 2020.

# Complex Evaluation Model:

## Guidelines for Detailed Evaluation of Youth Goals Implementation



### Key Evaluation Steps



# Mapping Rural Youth Policies

## How are young people defined in your context?

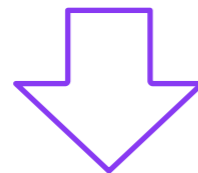
Legal voting age can be important in some contexts, educational milestones can be important in other (e.g. transition between the basic and the middle school), and policy frameworks can have its own definitions.

At the same time, you may be interested in a specific youth group, and then you should base your definition on your needs (e.g. young people 14 to 16 years of age). Nevertheless, please bear in mind that any “custom-made” youth group may be more difficult to follow than officially defined ones, since the data available will likely be based on an official definition.



## How are rural areas defined in your context?

Look at definitions used in your own context and see how they differ from those used by national authorities (e.g. ministries, statistical offices, etc.) or by international bodies (e.g. Eurostat, etc.).



## What timeframe are you interested in?

Situation of rural youth can be described in terms of its current state or in comparison to the past trends. In case the comparative view is chosen, what timespan is taken into account it needs to be defined. Are a few months enough? Are a few years enough? Is a decade enough? Looking at policy frameworks can help as these usually are time-bound, hence limited by the starting date and ending date of the given policy. The time dimension can also be completely arbitrary (as in comparing rural youth needs in 2010 and 2020, covering 10 years of your youth work experience, for instance) or depend on other factors of interest (as in comparing the situation of rural youth before the economic crisis of 2008 and after it, e.g. in 2016).



## How can abovementioned policies be described in terms of inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes?

How are the policies funded? From what sources (local, regional, national, international)? In what volume (how much budget is allocated)? In what frequency (monthly changes, yearly budgets, several years of constant funding, etc.)?

What products can be identified as a result of the aforementioned activities? What exists now that did not exist before the services and activities took place?

What services are provided to rural youth? What activities are implemented? What events are held? What structures are put in place?

What long-term and systemic outcomes can be identified?



## What policies affect young people in rural areas in your context?

Based on and limited by the answers to the previous questions, identification of relevant youth policies affecting rural youth is key.

Implicit policies may cover rural youth without mentioning this specific target group, e.g. educational policies, health care policies, etc. Such implicit policies may, at times, have specific rural implementation plans which are worth looking into! Some of the specificities are tackled by the OECD publication including some examples of rural policy delivery.

Explicit policies can occur, e.g. policies for young farmers or policies on youth work in rural and isolated areas.

[add this link <https://www.oecd.org/regional/ministerial/documents/urban-rural-Principles.pdf>]

# What does the situation of rural youth in Jutland (Denmark) look like in 2020 compared to 2015?

Example of a wide evaluation question

## Define rural areas in Jutland!

1 What organizational units can be found in Jutland? What regions? What municipalities? Which of those are to be considered rural? Will the evaluation be conducted on the level of regions or go in depth into municipalities?

2 Have a look at the population grid, the degree of urbanisation, or the urban-rural typology at the Eurostat Statistical Atlas!

3 Based on this information, how do you define rural areas and which geographical location fall under this definition in Jutland? Make a list!



## Define rural youth in Jutland!

1 How is youth defined in Denmark? Are there specific policies which affect Jutland only (or any organizational units within Jutland only) and which have a different definition of youth?

2 Have a look at youth policy-related webpages, or at youth-related official documents, but watch out for the date of the last update!

3 Based on this information, what do you mean by youth in your evaluation process? Create an explicit definition!

4 To gather a first insight, check your list of rural areas and see how many young people live in rural areas in Jutland!



## Define evaluation design and methodology!

1 What type of evaluation best suits the evaluation question? Summative (conclusive) evaluation focusing on outcomes may be the one you are looking for, aiming at discovering changes in evaluated phenomena, in this case, changes in situation of rural youth in Jutland, Denmark.

2 What methods can be successfully used to answer the evaluation question? Firstly, look for any data which are already available: indicators, one-time studies, data available at regional or municipal offices, etc.

4 How can you best collect these data? Via an online survey across all rural areas in Jutland? Focus groups in selected villages or regions? Interviews with local stakeholders such as youth workers or representatives of rural youth movements?

3 After exploring the existent data, decide what areas are already covered (typically educational statistics, employment, etc.) and where more information is needed (typically youth work, well-being, mental health, data connectivity and online behaviour, etc.).

5 Put together a plan featuring:

- Activities (What will happen?)
- Responsibilities (Who is to be responsible for each activity?)
- Timeline (When are the activities to happen?)
- Connections (How do activities link to the overall evaluation questions and further steps?)



## Define stakeholders connected to rural youth in Jutland!

1 What stakeholders can be found in connection to the rural youth as defined by you? Are there regional authorities interested in such an evaluation? Are there municipalities happy to come on board? Are there state-wide agencies which can benefit from the findings and may be interested to get engaged? Are there youth bodies (state-related and independent ones as well!) in Jutland or nationwide which could be invited to cooperate?

2 What opportunities there are in engaging these stakeholders? What data can they provide? What access can they broker that would otherwise be impossible or hard to obtain, e.g. contacts for local community leaders, youth workers, informal youth groups?

3 What are the relationships of the stakeholders you have identified to the rural youth in Jutland? Are there conflicts of interest to look out for, e.g. funding agencies, political actors connected to establishing current policies? How could you mitigate risks connected to the conflict of interest? What stages of evaluation need to be conducted without any influence from these stakeholders?

# What are the impacts of the young farmers' support through Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 in rural regions of the Czech Republic?

Example of a narrow evaluation question

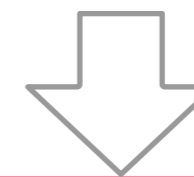
## Defining rural areas in the Czech Republic.

- 1 What regions are considered rural in the Czech Republic? In line with the Eurostat urban-rural typology, it is four regions:
  - Plzeňský kraj,
  - Jihočeský kraj,
  - kraj Vysočina, and
  - Pardubický kraj.
- 2 All of these are going to be treated as rural regions of the Czech Republic, i.e. data will be treated in summation for all of these four regions.

## Defining rural youth in the Czech Republic.

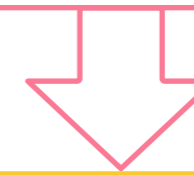
- 1 How are young farmers defined in the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 in the Czech Republic?
  - It is any person who is aged 18 to 40 and at the same time possesses a minimal agricultural qualification and commences, for the first time, an agricultural activity in a lead role.
- 2 How is youth defined in the Czech National Youth Strategy 2014–2020?
  - It is all young people aged 13 to 30.
- 3 Firstly, all young farmers as defined by the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 will be the primary target group of the evaluation. Secondly, young people aged 18 to 30 will be the secondary target group of the evaluation, to see how much of the impact relates to young people as defined by the Czech National Youth Strategy 2014–2020.
- 4 How many young people live in the Czech rural regions according to Eurostat?
  - 248 800 of 20 to 24-year olds\*
  - 184 100 of 20 to 24-year olds\*\*
  - 243 700 of 25 to 29-year olds\*
  - 224 800 of 25 to 29-year olds\*\*
  - 269 500 of 30 to 34-year olds\*
  - 229 500 of 30 to 34-year olds\*\*
  - 347 400 of 35 to 39-year olds\*
  - 256 800 of 35 to 39-year olds\*\*
  - Totalling the rough estimate of primary target group (only 20 to 39-year olds):
    - 1 109 400 of 20 to 39-year olds\* and
    - 895 200 of 20 to 39-year olds\*\*.
  - Totalling the rough estimate of the secondary target group (only 20 to 29-year olds):
    - 492 500 of 20 to 29-year olds\* and
    - 408 900 of 20 to 29-year olds\*\*.

\* in the first quarter of 2014  
 \*\* in the first quarter of 2019 (2020 data not available)
- 5 Why are the numbers not precisely in line with the target groups? Because the publicly available data do not overlap with the selected target groups. You can either change the target groups, using the data availability as a rationale, or try searching national statistical office for more precise figures, as well as try asking regional authorities to provide precise figures.



## Defining stakeholders connected to rural youth in the Czech Republic.

- 1 What state-related stakeholders can be identified?
  - The Czech Ministry of Agriculture
  - The Czech Ministry of Regional Development
  - State Agricultural Intervention Fund
  - Regional authorities in all four identified regions
- 2 What other stakeholders can be identified?
  - Local Action Groups
  - Association for Renewal of Rural Areas
  - Association of Cities and Towns of the Czech Republic
- 3 What other stakeholders can be identified by asking the ones above?
- 4 Make sure you know:
  - What data can be provided by these stakeholders?
  - What access can these stakeholders provide (e.g. to local action groups, etc.)?
  - When is it best to leave the stakeholders out of the evaluation process?
  - Can the evaluation be damaged by connecting the evaluation process to any of those actors?
  - Can the evaluation be supported by taking on board some of the actors?



## Defining evaluation design and methodology.

- 1 In this case, the endeavour can be described as both a summative evaluation (looking at the overall results with no ambition to change the process in the future as it stops in 2020) and an outcome evaluation (focusing on impacts of the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020, not on its processual details).
- 2 Look for existent data, such as:
  - One-time studies
  - Basic information reports
  - Qualitative studies
  - Studies on former policies tackling young farmers
  - National Statistical Office time series and regions
  - Academic papers
  - Official information from the Ministries and other state bodies
- 3 Look at the available data and identify gaps!
- 4 Are you still missing data? Consider looking for additional information sources by:
  - Contacting official bodies (national, regional, local level)
  - Contacting selected stakeholders
  - Contacting authors of relevant papers
- 5 Look at the available data, once more, and identify gaps again!
  - Consider methods to fill in the gaps, generally:
    - Qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, are great to get detailed information and life stories, but you will likely not be able to conduct many of these and therefore the amount of data will be limited.
    - Quantitative methods, such as various questionnaires, are great at collecting lots of data, but concrete life stories, reasons, and contexts, may be hard to obtain.
- 6 Put together a plan featuring:
  - Activities (What will happen?)
  - Responsibilities (Who is to be responsible for each activity?)
  - Timeline (When are the activities to happen?)
  - Connections (How do activities link to the overall evaluation questions and further steps?)

# Conducting and Concluding Evaluation

Ethics, integrity, and ownership rights matter!

- 1 Make sure the whole evaluation process is done in line with the principles of integrity and honesty:
  - Be as open to all involved actors as possible on what the aims of the evaluation are and who is responsible for the evaluation.

2 Make sure anonymity of respondents is respected.

3 Make sure the results of the evaluation reach back to all of your respondents in order to ensure reciprocity between the evaluators (searching for information) and the respondents (spending time and energy on providing the information).

- 4 Make sure ownership and copyright matters are settled:
  - Who owns the data collected during the evaluation?
  - Who owns the outcomes of the evaluation (e.g. reports, presentations, etc.)?

How to report on evaluation?

- 1 What should be included in the final report?
  - Evaluation background
    - Why was the evaluation done?
    - Who commissioned the evaluation?
    - Who conducted the evaluation?
    - What stakeholders were involved and in what capacities and stages of the evaluation?
  - Evaluation questions
    - State the main question!
    - State any and all further questions you used to guide you, e.g. those connected to secondary target groups or specific aspects of the evaluation!
  - Evaluation methodology
    - What was the evaluation plan?
    - Were there any deviations from the original plan? If yes, state them and explain!
  - Evaluation data
    - What data were collected and from what sources?
    - How were they analysed and how they related to each other?
    - Are they also available to the public, e.g. as an appendix?
    - How is anonymity of the respondents ensured?
  - Evaluation findings
    - What do the data show?
    - How do the results of the data analysis connect to the policy in question?
    - Are the links between the data and the policies strong?
    - Are there further influences which need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings?
  - Evaluation conclusions
    - What are the answers to the evaluation questions?
    - What recommendations can be made based on the answers to the evaluation questions?

- 2 Make sure you tailor evaluation reporting to the needs of audiences you aim at!
  - Detailed reports can be useful for research communities and entities commissioning the evaluation!
  - Short summaries can be useful to reach out to policymakers, state authorities, and media!
  - Infographics can be useful to attract young people and wider public!

# Conclusions

Three publications exploring various aspects of evaluation in areas defined by the European Youth Goals were issued in 2019 and 2020, and this publication series is now finished. There is one more question from me to you, the readers: How can you use this series to upgrade your own work in the youth field?

Let me suggest a few avenues.

Firstly, get inspired in the little things. Even if running a holistic evaluation on this or that topic is not what you want to engage in, I am sure there are lots of evaluative aspects you, your colleagues, or state officials in your area, are already using in their work. Try to identify what is being done already and where maybe an upgrade or a further step could be taken. Maybe you already have processes in place for regular evaluations of various aspects of your work life. How about bring in new stakeholders who could help you think differently on the mechanisms you are already using? How about rethinking your publication strategies when it comes to sharing results? Or maybe just finding new sources of data you did not think of until now?

Secondly, use the series as an argument for conducting evaluation on various youth-related issues, especially in dialogue with state authorities. Specific knowledge of what is going on in your local rural area or the opportunity to compare your rural spaces with those in other countries can open new avenues for thinking and discussions. Evaluation results can inspire by providing insights into practices in other contexts, suggesting new points of view and prompting reflections of our own routines.

Thirdly, support evaluations yourselves, if possible. Let researchers and experts come to your organisations, speak to them, provide them with as much information as possible. That way you ensure that your own accomplishments are acknowledged and potentially multiplied. At the same time, you also contribute to making the world around us a little bit more knowledge-based and little less impression-driven.

And, last but not least, share this and other publications in the series with your colleagues in the youth field (and beyond). Maybe they will find them useful in their own youth-related work. Or maybe they will pass the publications on to someone to who might need help arguing for the small local evaluative exercise they have been thinking of, for a long time. I believe publications have a great potential to create ripples: within us, within our friends and colleagues, and even within people we will never personally meet. Ripples are important in knowledge-sharing, let's support them so that they reach out far and wide.

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