

THE VOICE OF YOUTH - **THE VOICE OF CHANGE!**



**Youth Movement for
Development of
the Rural Areas in
Bulgaria /YMDRAB/**

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STATEMENT

**ON THE CHALLENGES AND NEEDS OF YOUNG
PEOPLE LIVING IN THE RURAL AREAS OF BULGARIA**

**PREPARED BY THE PARTICIPANTS IN PROJECT
"THE VOICE OF YOUTH – THE VOICE OF CHANGE!"**

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CONTEXT:

In the last twenty years Bulgaria has been struggling to transform from a centrally-planned country where ideas and opinions were imposed to people into a democratic country with citizens understanding their rights but also responsibilities towards the whole community. However, especially with the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, the process of building a strong democratic society and a country developed on economic, political and social terms has been slowed or even stopped. The political environment in Bulgaria reached crisis levels in the beginning of 2013. Youth unemployment in Bulgaria has been reaching record levels and continues to increase. Illiteracy among young people is booming, aggression between students has become a normal daily occurrence. The opinion of young people lacks recognition and respect by adults, resulting in intergenerational problems. All the young people in Bulgaria have been facing such challenges. However, the young people living in the rural areas have been bearing burden even larger at its scope considering that the rural areas have not only been suffering from the previously stated problems, but also from further complexities in terms of lack of infrastructure and access to basic services.

Considering all this, we, the participants in the project **“The Voice of Youth – The Voice of Change!”** and members of the Youth Movement for Development of the Rural Areas in Bulgaria (YMDRAB) believe that young people can have an active role in the process of development of our society and can contribute to overcoming the major problems that the Bulgarian citizens face.

This statement underlines the main problems that young people from the rural areas face. These problems have been clustered in three fields, namely: **1) Democracy and Youth Participation** **2) Social Inclusion of young people** and **3) Youth in diverse Societies**. Furthermore, the statement includes the official position of the participants on the changes that need to be seen so as to ensure fair opportunities for personal and professional development of rural young people. The document ends with a description on the role of youngsters, youth organizations and institutions in the process of rural development and change.



DEMOCRACY AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

PROBLEMS:

- **Few opportunities for participation in governance;**
- **Lack of comprehensive youth policies;**
- **Misunderstanding between generations;**
- **Motivational challenges;**
- **Difficult access to quality information;**
- **Lack of youth structures — Youth Centers.**

OUR DEMANDS:

- ⇒ **Political Participation:** Creation of more possibilities for the rural young people to express their vision on the development of their local communities;
- ⇒ **Effective youth policies:** Creation and revision of youth policies that effectively tackle the challenges that rural young people face and that allow them for personal and professional development;
- ⇒ **Intergenerational dialogue:** Rural young people should be respected for their opinion and vision. Their competences and experience should be valued and accepted by the society and policy-makers;
- ⇒ **Motivation for participation:** Rural youth should be motivated and inspired to be active citizens and effective contributors to the development of their local societies;
- ⇒ **Promotion of youth organisations and volunteering:** Volunteering should be promoted as a way of building community responsibility. Additionally, youth organizations should be supported as well as their work as a main source of providing volunteering activities, spaces for exchange and development of rural young people;
- ⇒ **New media:** The media should be used as a channel for informing rural citizens and in particular young people on the opportunities that the local authorities and institutions provide for their development. The media should recognize and make the work of youth organizations more visible and valued;
- ⇒ **Creation of Youth Centers:** Young people should be provided with the space to share and exchange, therefore creation of Youth Centers in rural areas could be seen as youth-friendly environment providing possibilities for such needs.



SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

PROBLEMS:

- **Youth unemployment in rural areas;**
- **Difficult transition between education and work;**
- **Bad social securities and access to healthcare;**
- **Bad educational possibilities;**
- **Transportation problems;**
- **Lack of cultural and social life;**
- **Lack of opportunities for development of talents;**
- **Pollution and problems with environmental protection.**

OUR DEMANDS:

⇒ **Employment:** Boosting the economy, creation of more employment and eradication of the discrimination on gender and age bases;

⇒ **Social Enterprises:** Promotion of social enterprises as a way for creating more employment and better quality of the work places;



⇒ **Quality Internships:** Ensuring the provision of quality internships by the private and public sector as a way of supporting the transition between education and employment of rural young people;

⇒ **Effective Education:** Provision of quality education at all levels, which takes into account the individual characters of students and allows them for effective learning and development. Education that builds strong citizens and open-minded young people;

⇒ **Inclusive social security and healthcare systems:** Young people in rural areas have the possibility to access social security and healthcare as a measure to overcome their vulnerability;

⇒ **Cultural and Social Life:** Cultural events are offered in the rural areas in regular bases. Furthermore opportunities for entertainment and spaces should be created where young people can meet, exchange and develop their own ideas with like-minded peers;

⇒ **Support for youth organisations and initiatives:** Youth non-government organisations could be seen as a main source for the provision of non-formal education which is an effective way for personal development of young people, therefore needs to be recognized and supported;

⇒ **Improvement of transport services in the rural areas;**

⇒ **Environmental protection and sustainability:** Creation of a sense of responsibility in young people for the protection of the environment and raising awareness about the concept of Sustainability and Sustainable Development;

⇒ **More opportunities for developing of talents:** Creating spaces and opportunities for rural young people to develop their talents and practice their hobbies.

YOUTH IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES

OUR DEMANDS:

⇒ **Creating spaces for interaction** between majority and minority groups;

⇒ **Information as a tool for inclusion:** Raising awareness about different cultures and religions as a way of creating understanding between citizens about minority groups and ensuring their better integration;

⇒ **Better education:** Ensuring the provision of a better education that creates tolerance and mutual understanding. Raising the educational level of minority groups in effective way with respect to their character and needs;

⇒ **Raising awareness about the rights and responsibilities** of all the citizens of the country;



⇒ **Usage of microfinance practices:** Innovative microfinance practices should be used to increase the financial condition of minority groups and even extend them to the whole population so as to create interlinks between individuals and better inclusion of minorities.

PROBLEMS:

- **Stereotypes and prejudices to minorities;**
- **Lack of interaction between ethnicities;**
- **Low educational status of youngsters from minorities;**
- **Ineffective youth policies of inclusion of minorities;**
- **Discrimination by the majority;**
- **Youth poverty.**

THE ROLE OF:

AUTHORITIES

We call to the attention of the authorities to the importance of young people as a driver of change in the Society. Particularly, we believe that rural youth is the unrevealed potential of our society. Therefore, youth policies, projects and initiatives should focus on the development of opportunities for rural youth to realize its potential and actively contribute to the governance of our community. In line with the demands previously stated, **we believe that:**

YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

As representatives of the Youth Movement for Development of the Rural Areas in Bulgaria (YMDRAB), we believe that youth organisations should take an active role in the process of development and change. Youth organisations should be open, inclusive and democratic allowing for individuals to develop their skills and jointly contribute to the establishment of a youth-friendly environment, allowing for all the young people to realize their potential and support the development of our country and the United Europe. Youth organisations should deliver quality non-formal education as a main tool for building strong individuals, active citizens and well-educated experts.

YOUTH

We, the participants of the project “**The Voice of Youth – The Voice of Change**” and members of YMDRAB believe that all young people should clearly understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and members of the Society. We believe that we need to **be more critical about the processes that take place in our country** and positively contribute to these processes. Solidarity and respect for individuals should drive the actions of young people resulting in overcoming prejudice and eradicating discrimination. As citizens we should **take an active part in the society and be the change that we would like to see!**

- Youth organisations should be recognized for the added value they bring to the society. Financial support should be provided for the effective implementation of their initiatives;
- Establishment and support in establishment of Youth Centers across the rural areas of the country should be undertaken by the relevant authorities;
- Innovative youth policies should be created and implemented effectively addressing the challenges that young people face;
- Exchange of knowledge and experience should be implemented on European and global level allowing for benefiting from existing best practices in other countries;
- Co-management structures should be established on local and regional level, where decisions about the governance of municipalities and regions should be jointly taken between youth and authority representatives;
- Educational reforms should be undertaken resulting in education focused on the development of each individual considering personal characters and abilities. The education should allow for building strong but tolerant individuals;
- Non-formal education should be recognized for its role in developing the personalities of individuals;
- Promotion of entrepreneurship and support for entrepreneurs (especially young) should be implemented tackling the unemployment and improving the economic parameters in the rural areas of the country;
- The “Youth Guarantee” should be effectively implemented as a measure for overcoming youth unemployment and the impact of the recent financial crisis that affected our European community;
- Higher investment in eco-projects and sustainability practices should be undertaken by the authorities responsible.



THIS STATEMENT IS ADDRESSED TO ALL PEOPLE TO REFLECT, ACT AND SUPPORT THE CREATION OF A YOUTH-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT FOR THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN THE RURAL AREAS.

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