

StayOn_

A more inclusive, active
and creative world!

POTENTIALS ASSESSMENT REPORT

POLAND

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1. INTRODUCTION

StayOn is a transnational project coordinated through the cooperation of eight European partners whose ultimate objective is to create conditions that enable young people to "stay on" rural areas by ensuring access to opportunities, benefits, services, and jobs. With this potentials assessment report, we intend to examine current and future labor market needs and identify potentials for implementing possible support solutions in Poland by The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre, one of StayOn's project partners. This report is to be read as part of the project's "Impact management and research" work package, representing a systematic effort to provide credible evidence on the causal impact of interventions meant to integrate young adults, and NEETs¹ especially, in the labor market.

The work package is managed by the European Center for Social Finance (ECSF). It encompasses a series of activities, including developing a Theory of Change and related impact management framework, creating periodic impact evaluations, and learning to inform decision-making within and among the organizations involved. This report proceeds as follows. After this brief introduction, Section 2 details the methodology used to conduct the potentials assessment, Section 3 describes the context, while Section 4 reports the findings. Finally, in the last section, we interpret them and discuss the lessons learned to facilitate the translation of findings into practice for the project's partners.

2. METHODS

Data collection

Data collection took place in two phases. The first step included a questionnaire filled out jointly by two informants: a local representative employed by the project partner The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre and an external stakeholder. The questionnaire, available in full in the Appendix to this report, was divided into four parts and gave the respondents the chance to support their answers with secondary sources:

- 1) The first part aimed at gathering general information about the respondents and their organizations;
- 2) The second part explored the Polish community or communities of interest in the implementation of the project;
- 3) The third part investigated ten driving forces of youth employment within the local context (these are listed in Table 1 below);
- 4) In the fourth part, the respondents were involved in ranking the driving forces according to the level of impact on youth employment and the degree of influenceability. The goal at this stage of the research process was to classify the driving forces into four categories:
 - *negligible blows* show low impact and low influenceability on youth employment;
 - *realizable trifles* are highly influenceable driving forces with low impact on youth employment;

¹ Young persons not engaged in education, employment or training.

- *unshapable trends* are characterized by high impact and low influenceability;
- *crucial potentials* are highly impactful and highly influenceable driving forces that represent prospects for action;

5) The last part allowed for final comments and the possibility to share further insights about the phenomenon.

Table 1. Driving forces of youth employment (Parola, 2020)

<i>Driving forces external to the labor market</i>	<i>Driving forces internal to the labor market</i>	
	<i>Demand for workers</i>	<i>Supply of workers</i>
A. Automation	C. State of the economy	F. Poor skills of job-seekers
B. Globalization	D. Type of contracts	G. Type of education
	E. Informal work	H. Skills mismatch
		I. Demographic factors
		J. Socioeconomic factors

As indicated by researchers at the ECSF, external stakeholders could be - but were not limited to - public officials and other public servants (e.g., mayors, council members, politicians), young people not in employment nor education and their families, youth workers, and business owners in the community or communities of interest. For this study, the external stakeholder chosen occupies several roles at a national and European level: he is the President of Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej (ZMW), the Polish rural youth association, Vice-President of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) in Brussels and a member of the Youth Advisory Board to the President of Poland.

Phase two of data collection consisted of an online interview with the local representative and the external stakeholder. The goal of the interview was to have a clearer understanding of the questionnaire responses collected in phase one. The interviewees were asked a series of open-ended questions, resulting in follow-up questions by the interviewer. The interview was held in English via Zoom on 11 April 2022 and 12 April 2022, lasted 89 minutes and revolved around the information provided in the questionnaire.

Data analysis

We employed an amended version of the intuitive logics approach to scenario development to analyze the data, which is particularly suited to support decision-making processes by generating options for action (Kosow & Gaßner, 2008). Depending on their position in the two rankings, driving forces were assigned a weight (from one to ten). Driving forces ranked number one were assigned a weight of ten, driving forces ranked number two were assigned a weight of nine, and so forth. This process allowed for the development of an impact/influenceability matrix. We then examined the respondents' input regarding the four quadrants in which the ten driving forces appeared.

3. THE POLISH CONTEXT

The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre

The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre is a private, not-for-profit company. The organization aims at providing advisory services to farmers, fostering rural development, and promoting the entrepreneurial spirit among youth in rural areas. Within the StayOn project, The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre takes on the role of community catalyst partner, acting as a change agent that unlocks youth potential and manages change activities in several Polish communities.

The organization is located in the village of Miastkowo in Łomża County, Podlaskie Voivodeship, in north-eastern Poland. Podlaskie is a multicultural region inhabited by Poles, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Russians, and Jews. Podlaskie is an agricultural region; agricultural land covers about 60% of the province's total area. In the past years, Poland has become a major European player with the sixth highest GDP in the European Union in 2021. According to Eurostat, the Podlaskie Voivodeship recorded a youth unemployment rate of 7.2% in 2019² (against a country average of 6.6% and a rate of 3.6% in the Capital City of Warsaw).

Communities in the Podlaskie Voivodeship

The target communities identified by The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre are all located in the territory of Podlaskie Voivodeship. More specifically, the town and villages of Łomża, Piątnica Poduchowna, Piątnica Włościańska, Kalinowo, Marianowo have been identified for the implementation. Łomża is located alongside the Narew river in the west part of the Podlaskie region and it is one of the three main towns of Podlaskie Voivodeship, together with Białystok and Suwałki. The main economic activities of Podlaskie are mostly predicated on its natural environment and include agriculture and forestry, the food industry, construction, and IT. Podlaskie has a substantial rural population, with one-third of total employment in agriculture. Manufacturing and commerce constitute the prevailing economic areas besides agriculture (OECD, 2011).

The town of Łomża is home to the largest dairy producers in Poland, the largest producer of potato starch and derivatives, and a brewery. Other implementation area chosen are the villages of Piątnica Poduchowna and Piątnica Włościańska, which lay approximately 4 km north and 3 km northeast of Łomża, respectively. Finally, the other two villages selected for the project are very small compared to the city of Łomża. Marianowo has 260 and Kalinowo has 384 settlers.

² Data for the years 2020 and 2021 are not yet available.

Figure 1. Panoramic view of Łomża near Narew River (Marcin, 2012)



Those rural and urban-rural communes are struggling with significant economic problems that have led most young people to move to larger cities finding more chances for employment. In recent times, Ukrainian citizens moved to this region due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This situation has led to sudden changes in these regions' social and economic conditions.

Podlaskie faces high digital challenges due to low-density network connections in the region. To increase digitalization, projects such as "Cyfrowe Podlaskie," which is part of the Operational Programme Digital Poland 2014-2020, are being implemented with the aim of training residents who are over 18 years in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The project aims to expand the digital competencies of the residents of the Podlaskie Voivodeship and it is offered for free. In addition, the rural development strategy in the Podlaskie Voivodeship is based on the development of innovative agricultural methods, analysis of labor market opportunities for young people and NEETs especially, such as the creation of programs engaging youth in agriculture, through funding from the European Social Fund and the European Commission (e. g., Erasmus Plus).

Figure 2. Podlaskie landscape (Wikimedia Commons, 2009)



4. KEY FINDINGS

Driving forces external to the labor market

Although, until recently, *automation* was only seen as an outlandish vision in Podlaskie and Poland in general, it has now become a factor influencing not only the labor market but also how workers are evaluated, affecting the career choices of employees. Automation in Podlaskie affects communities operating in the trade business, primarily. One in four employees in this industry is worried due to changes in their professional environment resulting from the use of robots, artificial intelligence, and algorithms that provide new shopping experiences to the customers (International Trade Administration, 2020). The situation is experienced by young people who often choose to work at cash registers as their first job. There are indications that automatic cash registers will soon appear in supermarkets and small local shops.

Adapting the education system to new needs arising from the development of digital technology and modern communication tools is now an essential priority in Poland, as automation might be a significant element reshaping the labor market shortly. It also turns out that automation is used primarily to perform repetitive and precise activities, and industrial production is based mainly on automation. However, Poland can not be considered an automated country yet. Despite the country's potential for increased use of robotics, Poland has only 42 robots per 10,000 workers, leaving the country far behind other European economies (e. g., Germany has 338 robots per 10,000 workers). Today, only 6% of Polish SMEs and 22% of large companies use robots, compared to the EU, where robot use is higher, at 7% for SMEs and 25% for large companies (International Trade Administration, 2020).

Regarding *globalization*, another driving force of youth employment, in Podlaskie, the migratory patterns have expanded, with job-seeking as the most prominent impact factor. Ever since Poland became a member of the EU in 2004, the number of Polish people residing abroad has more than doubled. It is estimated that the peak year was 2007 when almost 2.3 million Poles were working abroad. In 2008 and 2009, there was a return of migrants to Poland, approximately 10–15%. Compared to other EU countries, the demographic structure of Polish migrants shows that most of them are men and young individuals aged 20–29. The results of the 2011 census indicate that the leading destination countries are the United Kingdom (30.2%), Germany (21.6%), the United States (11.4%), Ireland (6.5%), and the Netherlands (4.6%) (Polakowski, 2012). Since the number of highly qualified migrants is rising in Poland, the brain drain reality is becoming an issue.

Driving forces internal to the labor market: demand for workers

Concerning the *state of the economy*, it occupies a critical role in determining the prospects of workers in Poland, as unemployment is two to four times more common among young adults than for the general working-age population. Young people are generally the first to be fired and the last to be employed. Young people in Poland are currently exposed to a triple shock in the labor market. Firstly, young adults are more likely to lose their jobs than the rest of the working population. Secondly, they are more likely to suffer disruptions to their education or drop out of vocational training. And

thirdly, the economic downturn means that young people face more significant barriers to labor market entry due to lower demand for workers. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic certainly did not help. The labor market will take longer to recover than previously thought, with unemployment levels set to remain under pre-COVID-19 levels until at least 2023 due to uncertainty about the course and duration of the pandemic (International Labour Organization, 2022).

Young people in Poland are also affected by the quality of entry-level jobs and the *type of contracts*. More specifically, typical contracts offered to young adults are fixed-term, especially in the age group 15–24 (Polakowski, 2012). The data is unsettlingly higher than in the majority of the European countries. The main issue concerning fixed-term contracts is whether they are an instrument to take the first steps into the labor market or whether such precarious working conditions create an ambush of employment uncertainty in the long run. A common feature of fixed-term employment is its decreasing incidence with the increasing age of workers. One out of four employees in Poland works based on a fixed-term contract, and the rate of fixed-term employment among workers between 15 and 24 years old (62.6% in 2018) is one of the highest in Europe (Kiersztyn, 2021).

Additionally, *informal work* represents a further obstacle in the Polish labor market. According to a survey carried out by an independent Polish economist (Defratyka, 2020) and supported by the Economic Freedom Foundation (in Polish: *Fundację Wolności Gospodarczej*) in a random sample of 1,053 people aged 18 and over in Poland, almost every third respondent (32%) age group of 18–24 years admits they are working informally. Most of them do not condemn undeclared work but rather see it as a standard practice. The rates decrease with increasing age: 22% of people aged 25–34 and 20% aged 35–44 state they are working illegally. The lowest rates are found in the age group 45–54 (9%) and 55 and more (6%). According to Beręsewicz & Nikulin (2018), who investigated the results of the Human Capital Balance (BKL) 2010–2014 survey undertaken by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (2014), the highest proportion of informal workers can be observed in the group of part-time workers (around 12.4%), unemployed persons (about 10.5%), people aged 18–25 (approximately 7.5%), those with only primary education (around 7%) and those without children (about 6%) The highest percentage of informal workers is reported in the north-eastern part of Poland, including Podlaskie Voivodeship. This situation causes financial and social insurance instability and a significant wage gap between informal and formal workers in the community, especially among young people.

Driving forces internal to the labor market: supply of workers

The *poor skills of job-seekers* in Poland keep millions of citizens from entering the formal labor market. Unfortunately, many vocational and technical secondary schools in Poland offer education and training for qualifications that will soon be obsolete, yielding an unbalanced relationship between the acquired skills and the demands of employers. It is also seen that young people choosing vocational schools are less likely to take the final exams in comparison to those who attend secondary schools. Compared to senior generations, youth in Podlaskie is prone to have a better education as most of them choose schools that provide an opportunity to start higher education at a university. In Poland, men are more likely to pursue a vocational track than women. In 2019, 62% of upper secondary vocational graduates were men, compared to 55% on average across

OECD countries. In Poland, 53% of 25-34-year-old women had a tertiary qualification in 2020 compared to 33% of their male peers (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021). Also, young people from relatively poorer backgrounds and smaller towns or rural areas are more likely to perform worse at school than their peers from cities.

The *type of education* also seems to affect youth employment in the country. After Poland became a member of the European Union in 2004, accessibility to universities and tertiary education for young people has increased, resulting in the so-called "education boom", especially in rural areas. This phenomenon can be seen in the entire country, including the Podlaskie Voivodeship. In general, higher education, especially university, is greatly valued and considered an essential part of the overall education, regardless of the employment outlook. However, the structure of education also plays a significant role in youth employment and the development of the labor market in Poland. Although the educational boom bodes well for Poland's rapidly aging population, the Polish education system has not been very forward-looking. While mid-level science, technical vocational pathways, and social and business-related studies dominate in the education system, health and social services are preferred by few young people, which might generate a shortage of caretakers and gerontologists in the future.

According to recent research by the Boston Consulting Group (2020), the *skills mismatch* (i.e., the discrepancy between the skills sought by employers and the skills that individuals possess) is a global phenomenon. While Poland's most popular fields of study are humanities, education, and social sciences, the demand for graduates from those fields is significantly low. Additionally, a spatial mismatch exists since young people from rural areas are, on average, less educated and have much poorer prospects when looking for a job as the offers are concentrated in urban areas. From the perspective of young workers entering the labor market, one of the greatest disadvantages is that the most valued characteristic of a candidate is job experience which they most often lack as they enter the job market right after graduating from school. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2019) over 9% of workers in Poland were over-qualified, and almost 14% were under-qualified in 2016.

Demographic factors also play a role in finding and retaining work in Poland. When assessing the labor status of NEET youth in Poland and across the EU, the gender variable continues to play a significant influence. While young men are more likely to be unemployed (searching for work), young women are more likely not to seek a job actively. According to a report by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2016), these discrepancies are due to the traditional position of the woman in the family system. Women are more likely than men to stay home and care for children or elderly people. The issue of low levels of economic activity in Podlaskie is mainly gender-specific. The most crucial self-reported reason for young women's labor market inactivity is the lack of access to childcare services such as nursery schools and kindergartens. Nowadays, Polish youth declare that the fear of losing their job is due to either discrimination against mothers or temporary work deactivation, which may significantly impact their low employment prospects.

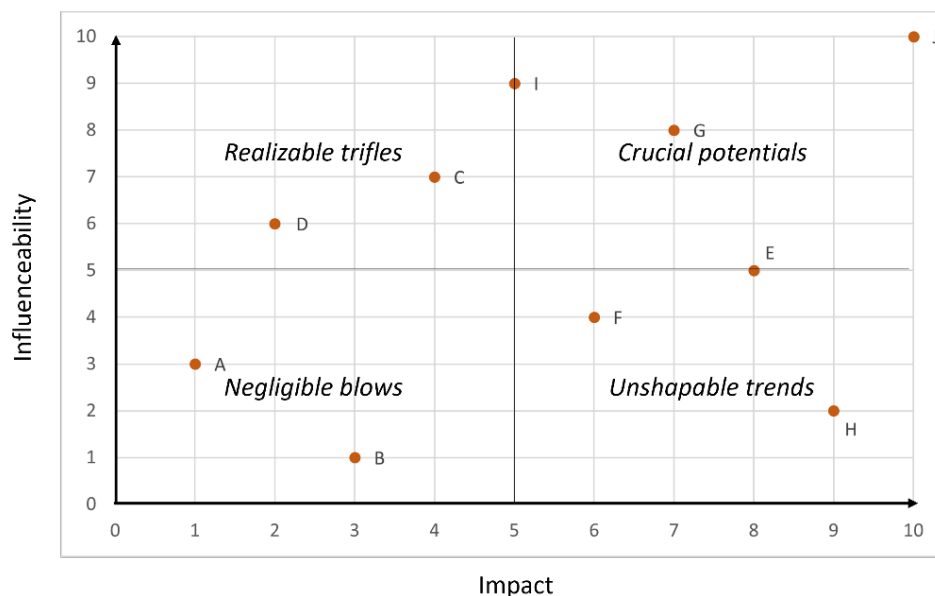
Socioeconomic factors also determine levels of youth employment in Poland. The phenomenon of young people's activity in the labor market and the sphere of education has been one of the frequently raised issues in recent years. One of the measures used

to assess youth's independence is given by their ability to leave their native nest. In Poland, the rate of young adults living with their parents is aligned to those of central and eastern Europe (40-50%) (Sompolska-Rzechuła & Kurdyś-Kujawska, 2022). According to Piszczatowska-Oleksiewicz (2017), some of the main reasons that young adults live with their parents under one the roof are "the lack of a flat, comfort, lack of money, a sense of connection, emotional dependence, willingness to live together, good housing conditions in the family home, no other family, or no job".

The impact/influenceability matrix

Based on the analysis, all ten driving forces were classified in one of the four quadrants of the impact/influenceability matrix, as shown in Figure 3 below.³ Firstly, according to the data collected, 'negligible blows' include A. Automation and B. Globalization since these driving forces are considered to have a low impact on youth employment and are difficult to influence. Secondly, in the left upper corner of the matrix, C. State of the economy, D. Type of contracts and I. Demographic factors make up the category of 'realizable trifles'. Thirdly, E. Informal work, F. Poor skills of job-seekers and H. Skills mismatch have been classified in the quadrant, 'unshapable trends' since they scored high on impact and low on influenceability. Finally, two driving forces have been identified as 'crucial potentials' and, therefore, represent prospects for action: G. Type of education and J. Socioeconomic factors, shown in the upper right quadrant of the matrix. We explore these in more detail in the next section.

Figure 3. Impact/influenceability matrix



5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Crucial potentials

As this report shows, young persons in the Podlaskie Province in Poland face many obstacles with regard to finding and retaining employment. We investigated barriers to youth employment deriving from forces external to the labor market, such as automation

³ For the sake of simplicity, left/lower quadrants were preferred when driving forces were astride two quadrants.

and globalization as well as internal factors playing a significant role in shaping the supply of labor and those affecting the demand for workers. It should be noted that even though external factors are driven by external stimuli, including technological advances and international trade, governments can influence them through policies like tax incentives, tariffs, and quotas, for instance. Thanks to this potentials assessment, we identified two highly impactful and influenceable factors to provide career support for NEETs: the *type of education* and *socioeconomic factors*. This section describes the key findings implications and suggests potential next steps for The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre.

Regarding needs related to the *type of education*, it is evident that Poland suffers from low educational levels in rural areas, causing emigration to bigger cities and countries that pay higher salaries. Providing an equally accessible and high-quality education and training for each citizen should be the focus of Poland's government, social inclusion programs and not-for-profit organizations. Career counselors at The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre might want to address the needs of apprentices harnessing the power of innovation in agriculture and dairy farms in Poland. Young adults should be supported in discovering social, technical, natural, and economic resources around them, as well as engaged in community development groups that come together to boost community-led innovations.

Finally, *socioeconomic factors* also represent crucial potential is in Poland. To address these challenges, The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre might need to undertake a multi-disciplinary long-term approach in collaboration with other stakeholders such as the government, public entities, and local NGOs that consider the benefits of young workers, especially women. Solutions could include partnerships with community-run center-based childcare, childcare cooperatives, and public childcare services. Additionally, The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre could address the unrecognized skills of stay-at-home mothers by promoting continuous skill development, training, and qualification in childcare and related industries.

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APPENDIX

StayOn: a community-based and driven project

Study: Potentials assessment

Questionnaire and Interview guidelines

Introduction and instructions:

With this analysis, we intend to generate knowledge about the context in which Stay-on's participants live. More specifically, we aim to examine current and future labor market needs and identify potentials for implementing possible support solutions. All information collected during our research will be treated confidentially. The data collected will enrich impact management CLUSTER 4, *Outcome indicators Group F*. We will share the results of this study in a report which is part of activity 3.2.10, as foreseen in the project proposal.

Data collection will happen in two steps:

I Questionnaire: One person per each project partner (project partner's contact) is responsible for identifying at least ONE external stakeholder and, in consultation with him/her/them, fill the questionnaire. External stakeholders can be - but are not limited to - public officials and other public servants (e.g., mayors, council members, politicians), young people not in employment nor education and their families, youth workers, and business owners in the community or communities of interest.

II Interview: The project partner's contact should schedule an online interview with researchers at the ECSF between 23.02.2022 and 16.03.2022. During the interview, the external stakeholder should also be present. The interview will last between 30 and 60 minutes and will revolve around the information provided in the questionnaire. The interview can be held in English (or Italian) and might require the project partner's contact to help researchers with translations if the external stakeholder/s do not speak either one of these languages.

The deadline for the submission of the questionnaire is 22.02.2022.

Please, send it to: giulia.parola@ecsocfin.com and mire.tulu@ecsocfin.com

Thank you for your input and contribution to this study!

1. General information

Project partner (*insert the organization's name and country*):

Questionnaire filled on (*insert the date*):

Interview scheduled on (*insert the date*):

Project partner's contact (*insert name, surname, and contact details of the person filling the questionnaire*):

External stakeholder (*insert name, surname, organization's name, contact details of the person present in the interview, and role in the implementation phase - if any*):

2. Community or communities of interest

(*insert name of the village/s chosen for the implementation phase, indicate the geographical location within the country and the main economic activities*):

3. Driving forces of youth unemployment

The following table lists ten driving forces of youth unemployment according to literature (*read the table and think how these driving forces relate to the labor market in your community or communities of interest*):

Driving forces	Explanation
A. Automation	Process of substituting technology for human labor to perform specific tasks or jobs
B. Globalization	Migratory patterns of young people from rural areas into urban areas
C. State of the economy	General economic situation at the national and regional levels
D. Types of contracts	Typical job arrangements available for young people (e.g., temporary contracts)
E. Informal work	Working off the books can affect and distort unemployment levels as it represents a social safety net for those who are unemployed
F. Poor skills of job-seekers	This refers to poor educational systems producing adults who are not particularly highly skilled
G. Type of education	This refers to secondary education systems with fragile links with the labor market (usually, students have little-to-no practical experience and competencies)
H. Skills mismatch	Discrepancy between the skills that are sought by employers and the skills that young people possess
I. Demographic factors	Some demographic factors such as gender, disability, ethnicity have shown closer links to youth unemployment
J. Socioeconomic factors	Socioeconomic variables such as educational attainment, migration backgrounds, and household income play a role in young people's ability to access the labor market

3A. Does AUTOMATION affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

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3B. Does GLOBALIZATION affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3C. Does the STATE OF THE ECONOMY affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3D. Do the TYPE OF CONTRACTS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3E. Does INFORMAL WORK affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3F. Do the POOR SKILLS OF JOB-SEEKERS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3G. Does the TYPE OF EDUCATION affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3H. Does SKILLS MISMATCH affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role does it play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3I. Do DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

3J. Do SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS affect youth employment in your community or communities of interest? What role do they play?

(Please, answer the question and possibly add any relevant statistics or data that support it, you might include web links useful to researchers):

4. “Impact” ranking

(Please, considering the driving forces’ impact on the community or communities of interest, rank them from 1 to 10, from 1=most impactful to 10=least impactful, typing a number in the second column):

Driving forces	“Impact” ranking
A. Automation	
B. Globalization	
C. State of the economy	
D. Types of contracts	
E. Informal work	
F. Poor skills of job-seekers	
G. Type of education	
H. Skills mismatch	
I. Demographic factors	
J. Socioeconomic factors	

5. “Influenceability” ranking

(Please, considering your organization’s ability to the driving forces’ impact on the community or communities of interest, rank them from 1 to 10, from 1=most easily influenced to 10=least easily influenced, typing a number in the second column):

Driving forces	“Influenceability” ranking
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A. Automation

B. Globalization

C. State of the economy

D. Types of contracts

E. Informal work

F. Poor skills of job-seekers

G. Type of education

H. Skills mismatch

I. Demographic factors

J. Socioeconomic factors

6. Final comments

(Are there any other driving forces affecting youth employment in the community of communities of interest that have not been mentioned in the questionnaire? If yes, please indicate them and add any other comments you consider useful to this study's objectives):

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