



Stronger



Resilient



Prosperous

Youngsters support local development in rural areas of France



SUMMARY

Rural Volunteering is a programme created by the association InSite with the aim of revitalising rural areas while empowering young people. Participants aged between 18 and 30 engage in voluntary civic service, spending between 6 and 12 months working in rural communities where accommodation, an allowance and training is provided by the initiative. During the period 2018-2023, the project has benefited 250 villages and over **260 young volunteers**, out of which **22% decided to settle in a rural area after the experience**.



CONTEXT

Rural France is faced with significant economic and social challenges, coupled with a prevailing sense of decline. Nevertheless, these rural regions boast diversity and a rich cultural, environmental and human heritage. Many dedicated individuals are actively involved in nurturing positive initiatives within rural landscapes, yet they often face a shortage of both human and financial resources, leaving them feeling overlooked by public policy. Established in 2018 in Termes d'Armagnac, Occitanie, InSite seeks to challenge the prevailing perception of rural areas as forsaken and neglected. Instead, it offers young individuals a rewarding opportunity to contribute meaningfully to these communities. InSite provides support to small villages with less than 1 500 inhabitants, aiding in the implementation of sustainable projects. It focuses on fostering social connections and entertainment, preserving culture and heritage, and promoting environmental sustainability.



OBJECTIVES

To provide an opportunity for engaging young people in rural revitalisation, creating a **win-win scenario that benefits both rural communities and the young volunteers** who become the driving force behind positive change.

Themes: Youth, education and training, nature and environment, social inclusion, social economy, tourism and heritage, employment.
Rural revitalisation

Country: France

Organisations: The association InSite in collaboration with: the French government, the Association of Rural Mayors of France, IDEALCO, UNADEL, local associations and IUT Figeac.

Start & end date: 07/18 - Ongoing

Budget: 1 000 000 EUR

Funding sources: Public funding from the national, regional and local authorities involved in the project, private funding from foundations, patronage and social institutions

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The Rural Volunteering initiative is a support system for both local communities and young individuals seeking meaningful engagement. Its core strength lies in its adaptability, customising each project to the needs of each village through collaborative efforts. Within the process of welcoming young volunteers into villages, there are several pivotal stages. Firstly, there is the prospecting phase, involving the meticulous selection of areas and towns. Then comes the diagnostic stage, a collaborative effort involving data processing and collective work, facilitating the identification of shared needs and a collective commitment to address them. Subsequently, the initiative progresses into mission ideation, where teams from InSite and the municipality involved, including appointed representatives in each rural area, called **local referents**, and associated partners, collaborate to outline the mission's details. The process continues with recruiting volunteers, encompassing a recruitment campaign, application processing and personalised information meetings with the youngsters. Additionally, the project trains the local referents since they are a key element for the accompaniment of the youngsters during their volunteer experience. For monitoring the initiative, the InSite team carries out regular on-site visits to check the mission's progress. Finally, an assessment and evaluation phase ensures a comprehensive review of the mission's outcomes and impacts.



RESULTS

The Rural Volunteering initiative had direct benefits during the period 2018-2023 in **250 French villages**, involving over **260 volunteers** aged between 18 and 30, and engaging **280 local referents**. Moreover, this initiative has reached and indirectly benefited over 200 000 inhabitants within the Occitanie region.

Over the span of 5 years, InSite has achieved significant milestones, including the **creation of seven jobs through supporting 40 villages in Occitanie**. Additionally, an impressive 22% of young participants have chosen to settle in rural areas following their involvement in rural volunteer work, signifying a notable positive impact on retaining rural communities.

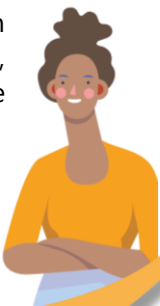


SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

The success of this voluntary civic service mission is rooted in the **young people's full immersion** and settlement within the area where they carry out their mission. They reside in the municipality, becoming integral citizens of the village throughout their experience, actively engaging in crafting a shared journey with elected local representatives, associations and other residents of the rural community.

The organisational and operational model has been designed to ensure replicability by employing an empowerment approach for local stakeholders and young volunteers. This method involves adaptable tools tailored to local realities, pooled resources, use of digital capabilities for communication, dissemination and community building, and establishing partnerships with nationally and locally established structures.

The empowerment and skills transfer approach facilitates a village's progression from a 'supported' status to that of a 'contributor' within the InSite community. Following an initial experimental phase in Occitanie in 2019, the **project had expanded into five other regions** by 2023 (Auvergne Rhône-Alpes, Corsica, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Grand Est and Normandy). Going forward, the plan is to extend the programme to six new regions, aiming to cover the entire national territory.



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