

SUMMARY

The emigration of young people, driven by the lack of opportunities, infrastructure, and employment prospects, remains a significant contributor to the demographic decline in rural regions. In the aim of **empowering and engaging rural youth**, fifty young individuals from Italian rural areas set up the 'Give Back - Giovani Aree Interne' association through an Erasmus+ project. Collaborating with other associations, they sought to foster regional development. Since 2022, the association has been involved in various initiatives aimed at promoting youth participation in rural policymaking.



CONTEXT

The 'Give Back' initiative was launched in Irpinia by the youth participants of an Erasmus + grant that drawn inspiration from the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 goal 6 'Moving rural youth forward' and Italy's National Strategy for 'Inner Areas' \(SNAI\)](#). Irpinia is classified as an inner area within the Campania region of southern Italy. According to the SNAI, these areas are characterised by significant challenges such as demographic decline, social exclusion, and limited access to essential services. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 indicates a strong need to provide support for rural youth to access cross-border mobility opportunities and to ensure, among other things, that young people in rural areas are actively participating in decision-making processes.

The 'Give Back - Giovani Aree Interne' initiative emerged to tackle these issues. It aims to create a learning community that connects policymakers, engages stakeholders, and involves civil society. The goal is to empower young people to contribute to their hometowns, counteracting the loss of talent and cultural richness caused by depopulation.

Theme(s): Democracy and participation, youth

Country: Italy

Organisations: Give Back Giovani Aree Interne', non-for profit organisation

Start & end date: 12/2021 – 10/2022

Budget: EUR 27 095

Funding sources:

Erasmus+ (Grant Agreement No: 2021-1-IT03-KA154-YOU-000007240)

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OBJECTIVES

- > Encourage active participation of young people from rural areas in democratic processes;
- > Promote understanding of local, national, and European decision-making processes among young people;
- > Establish an innovative and easily accessible platform for communication and dialogue among young people and political decision-makers;
- > Raise awareness among young people about the resources available on their territory and its development strategies.



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

'Give Back - Giovani Aree Interne' emerged as a non-profit, social-promotion association in 2022, born out of an Erasmus+ project involving 50 young individuals from across Italy. The project facilitated exchange of expertise, soft skills, and non-formal knowledge among political, economic, and social actors operating in Italian rural areas, primarily in the southern regions. The beneficiaries were young individuals engaged in social activities and students.

At the heart of this EU-funded initiative was a five-day summer school event, organised by local youth, aimed at re-igniting discussions about youth and rural areas in Italy. The event included workshops with deputies, academics, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and experts, delving into topics such as European citizenship, youth participation, and entrepreneurship. With 50 direct participants from eight Italian regions and 50 speakers, the event extended its reach to approximately 250 indirect beneficiaries, including local inhabitants.

Having recognised the pressing need for a dedicated national organisation to rejuvenate Italian rural areas, the project participants decided to establish the 'Give Back' association. This rural youth think tank targets students, researchers, and professionals in economic, social, and cultural spheres. The association facilitates dialogues between youth and policymakers, advocating for policymaking proposals inspired by European Union values.



RESULTS

Since its inception, Give Back has been engaged in initiatives aimed at promoting youth involvement in rural policymaking. From organising events and participating in conferences to conducting research projects, the association **fosters dialogue and action**. Supported by a **network of experts and a scientific committee of academic, business, and public administration backgrounds**, 'Give Back' amplifies its efforts through **toolkits, ebooks, a manifesto, workshops**, and more.

In 2023, 'Give Back' hosted its inaugural **RURALTHON, a dialogue project aimed at cultivating awareness of the economic potential of rural heritage**. The event in Castelvetere sul Calore involved 50 youth in a competition of ideas and solutions, attracting sponsorship from 15 local companies and engaging over 20 stakeholders.

Since then, the association has been actively involved in activities such as the 'Feedback' rubric on Instagram, online talks on European matters, and research projects on youth citizen participation and digitalisation in Italian rural areas.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > 'Give Back' aims to broaden participation and engage new individuals in efforts to transform rural areas through new events, publication of scientific papers, and articles proposing innovative solutions.
- > An innovative aspect of the think tank is its approach to addressing isolation in small rural villages across Europe, creating a sustainable, cross-generational, and interdisciplinary network.
- > The summer school event is a cost-effective and adaptable methodology, thus highly replicable in diverse contexts.
- > The strength of the network lies in members' capacity for self-organisation and independent contributions.
- > The untapped potential of small rural communities can be harnessed through supportive networks.
- > The think tank serves as a catalyst for engaging young people and local stakeholders in practically and effectively addressing challenges facing rural regions.

