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GOOD PRACTICE WEBINAR

Highlights report

Rural youth participation in policymaking

Introduction

This Good Practice Webinar showcased EU-level policies and initiatives, and local projects and tools aiming at improving how rural youth engage in decision-making processes. The webinar discussed ways of: facilitating meaningful participation; enhancing the commitment of all stakeholders; mainstreaming youth voices in local organisation, and empowering youngsters through formal and non-formal education to advocate for rural youth voices at local, national and EU levels.

Organiser: Rural Pact Support Office



24 April 2024



Online



120 participants from 21 EU Member States and 4 non-EU countries (representatives of youth-led organisations, NGOs and Civil Society Organisations, researchers, public authorities, Local Action Groups, rural networks, EU institutions and private sector)



Presentations & recordings ([here](#))



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Setting the scene: EU initiatives to foster rural youth participation

The Rural Pact and the place of youth in the rural vision

Marina Rojo de Blas (DG AGRI) ([PPT](#))



The second shared goal of the Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas sets the ambition for rural areas to be 'engaged in multi-level and place-based governance, developing integrated strategies using collaborative and participatory approaches'. Several of the flagship actions of the EU Rural Action Plan, under the 'stronger' pillar, address youth. Support is coordinated by the European Commission's department responsible for the EU's policy on education, youth, sport and culture (DG EAC). It covers measures under Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27, the EU Youth Strategy goal 6 'Moving rural youth forward' and the Youth Partnership, a long-term cooperation programme between the European Commission and the Council of Europe (CoE) in the field of youth.

EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027: engaging, connecting and empowering young people

Babis Papaioannou (DG EAC) ([PPT](#))



The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 supports all young people and youth workers in accessing cross-border mobility opportunities, with special attention to those facing fewer opportunities. Many rural youth in the EU find themselves in this situation. Goal 6 of the Strategy 'Moving Rural Youth Forward', intends to enhance their active participation in decision-making processes. The Strategy specifically targets young people living in remote or rural areas with the objective of reducing barriers to their engagement in EU policy and programmes. The European Commission's study on rural youth, part of the EU-CoE Youth Partnership 2024-2025, will serve as an important tool to guide the improvement of policies and a continuation of the previous study on '[Young people in rural areas: diverse, ignored and unfulfilled](#)'. The [European Youth Portal](#) provides up-to-date information, including upcoming events for youth, in 27 languages.

Rural Pact Community Group: Youth in rural areas - Empowering the next generation

Alessandro d'Alsazia LAG 'Meuridania' ([PPT](#))



The online group on '[Youth in rural areas - Empowering the next generation](#)' in the Rural Pact community platform, aims to foster collaborations among rural youth and stakeholders, promote youth-led initiatives, and increase young people's involvement in shaping policies and services. Planned activities include workshops, seminars, and conferences tailored to empower rural youth, an online fair of innovative ideas, a series of podcasts with rural entrepreneurs, project catalogues, and policy briefs disseminated to key stakeholders.

Coordinated by [Rural Youth Europe](#), [Rural NEET Youth Organisation](#), and the Local Action Group (LAG) [Meridaunia](#), the community group is open to all stakeholders who have [become members of the Rural Pact](#) and wish to find and exchange with peers.

Learning from inspirational projects and practices

The Scottish Rural and Islands Youth Parliament

Aimee Spence, 'Scottish Rural Action' ([PPT](#))



The [Scottish Rural and Islands Youth Parliament](#) (SRIYP), established in November 2023, is a grassroots democratic assembly, convening youth residents of rural and island Scotland, ensuring inclusive representation, including youth carers.

Over 75 young individuals, aged 15 to 30, attended the inaugural event and identified **ten priority areas for decision-makers** through workshops and discussions. They highlighted challenges such as transportation, the complexity of reconciling diverse viewpoints, and the difficulty of delivering meaningful projects in a one-year funding cycle.

In January 2024, SRIYP delegates actively engaged in a parliamentary debate on rural issues, advocating for their priorities. Looking ahead, the initiative seeks to fortify the emerging rural youth network to advance their priorities effectively.

Mainstreaming youth participation in Sweden

Annie Linsemark, LAG 'Halland' and ELARD ([PPT](#))



The [RURBEST project](#) worked to empower and connect rural youth with policymakers. Project participants engaged in a comprehensive process, including planning and execution of workshops, crafting and presenting a manifesto, and undertaking advocacy activities during events.

This initiative has inspired others, notably the CAP network, to establish the [Young LEADER forum](#), convening for the first time in June 2024. Recommendations for youth engagement include tailored communication for effective outreach, emphasising the benefits, and hiring youth to create inclusive spaces where they actively shape society.

Romanian Rural Youth Parliament

Iulia Fatu, LAG 'Napoca Prolissum' ([PPT](#))



The [Rural Youth Parliament](#) in Romania, organised 11 sessions between 2022 and 2024, involving more than 200 young participants. The project focused on training and capacity building, fostering analytical, communication and organisational skills.

Sessions included practical exercises, such as dialogues with local officials, debates and project development, encouraging a sense of ownership and community contribution.

Recommendations highlight the importance of dedicating funds and resources to support youth initiatives in becoming sustainable. Moreover, investing in digital infrastructure and providing training can bridge the gap in internet access and digital literacy which often hinder youth participation. Mentorship programmes pairing experienced community leaders or policymakers with youth participants offer guidance and knowledge-sharing, helping youth in navigating the complexities of policymaking.

Give Way to Youth! Latvian youngsters engage in decision making

Linda Medne, Latvian '4H' youth organisation ([PPT](#))



The '[Give Way to Youth](#)' initiative addresses the lack of awareness and involvement among young people in rural Latvia in available opportunities and decision-making processes. The project conducted 11 interconnected activities over the 2021-2023 period, focusing on strengthening democracy, developing youth skills for local influence, and enhancing municipal engagement with young citizens. These activities included tailored trainings, a hackathon generating 30 innovative initiatives, research on youth participation, and awareness-raising campaigns, notably through a project film.

Engaging 537 participants, predominantly children and youngsters, the project yielded 20 youth-led initiatives, fostering personal growth and sustained civic engagement beyond the project's duration. Key success factors included participants' ownership of ideas, resilience in overcoming challenges such as access to funding and the crucial role of mentorship.

How to enhance youth participation in policymaking? panel debate

The panel featured insightful interventions from four distinguished speakers, each shedding light on the vital role of rural youth in policymaking and strategies for meaningful participation. **Karen Vandeweghe, European Commission DG EAC**, underscored the importance of integrating youth perspectives into policies to ensure they accurately reflect the needs and aspirations of young people, highlighting the [EU's Youth Check process](#) as a mechanism for mainstreaming youth perspectives.

Hannah Downey, Scottish Government, shared her journey into rural policymaking, emphasising the importance of grassroots initiatives and overcoming harmful stereotypes about rural areas and youth. She stressed the need for more honest communication and being upfront on how rural voices can actually influence decision-making processes to effectively engage youngsters.

Matías Rubio, La Bardal, highlighted the need for policymakers to recognise the challenges facing rural youth and to actively involve them in decision-making processes. He advocated for a community-led approach exemplified through La Bardal's initiatives that bring together youth in rural and remote areas and support them in acquiring the tools and skills they need to take actions.

Carla González, Fundación Galicia Europa, emphasised the importance of acknowledging and celebrating young people's contributions to policymaking through certificates or events. She advocated for more expert and peer-to-peer mentorship and informal education to sustain meaningful participation.

Main points from the group discussions

Creating youth-friendly spaces through place-based initiatives

- > **Engage youth in policymaking from a young age**, integrating their input across all policy areas rather than confining it to specific youth-related topics. Early involvement can create a snowball effect, inspiring enthusiastic participants to reach out and involve their peers, fostering a culture of active participation from the grassroots up.
- > Design **youth-friendly spaces within official structures** to facilitate effective engagement. Providing opportunities to connect those in the local spaces with international contexts and opportunities can enhance their attractiveness for young people.

- > Establish **legal frameworks and institutional support** to facilitate the creation of those spaces. For example, Finland mandates the establishment of youth councils, while some LAGs in France involve young people, aged 14 to 17, in the project selection process.

Facilitating meaningful participation: bridging youth and policymakers

- > Effectively engaging rural youth presents challenges such as limited resources, representation, and ownership of outcomes. Addressing these involves highlighting benefits, establishing inclusive local youth spaces, investing in training and mentoring, and leveraging digital tools to strengthen networks. **Tailored communication strategies and social innovation tools** like hackathons and labs can be effective for engaging rural youth and fostering their creativity.
- > Securing policymakers' engagement presents challenges such as inadequate acknowledgment of youth, insufficient representation among policymakers, and lack of transparency. Overcoming these obstacles involves **providing space for genuine dialogue and involving youth at all stages of policymaking processes** with relevant follow-up actions. Rural youngsters need more opportunities to engage in activities such as participatory budgeting in their schools and communities, ERASMUS+ encounters, and solidarity corps. Policymakers must recognise youth voices as opportunities for shaping the future of rural areas.

Empowering local youth voices – advocating for rural perspectives at national and European institutions

- > Initiatives to connect youth voices at national and EU levels should **start at the grassroots level**, using existing informal spaces accessible to diverse youth groups. Establishing interconnected platforms, such as youth councils or parliaments, is crucial for facilitating effective communication and representation across different governance tiers.
- > Acknowledging that not all youth will feel empowered to participate – it is vital to **ensure diverse representation through various mechanisms**, such as appointing ambassadors, to amplify voices that may otherwise be marginalised. Addressing language barriers and other accessibility issues, such as time and financial constraints, is crucial for fostering inclusivity and ensuring that all voices are heard.
- > Challenges related to digital infrastructure, equipment, and skills can impede effective participation, particularly in rural areas. Efforts to **enhance digital connectivity and provide resources and training** are crucial for enabling rural youth to engage meaningfully in national and EU-level discussions

More detail from the group discussions is available in the [Miro boards at the website](#).

Concluding remarks

Spyros Papadatos (Rural Youth Europe) highlighted two key themes: participatory policymaking and meaningful rural youth participation. The three main takeaways emerging from discussions are:

1. Inclusivity is crucial to address the lack of opportunities faced by rural youth in areas such as education, healthcare, and transportation.
2. Recognising the transformative potential of youth organisations is vital to address gaps in youth engagement spaces.
3. Empowerment is a critical factor, requiring investment in both rural youth and their organisations. Resources need to reach individuals in rural areas and build their capacities, enabling active participation and amplifying their voices in policymaking.

[Upcoming Rural Pact activities and events](#)

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

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