

## European Youth Village Programme – rural youth empowerment in Romania

### SUMMARY

First piloted in Romania, the European Youth Village (EYV) Programme engages villages for youth participation, civic engagement and community-led development. It empowers young people to engage in local decision-making and collaborate with municipalities to co-create solutions, with only the most outstanding achievements recognised through the European Youth Village title. Originating in Romania, it has also been replicated in Slovakia, demonstrating its value as a cross-national model for empowering rural youth and integrating their voices into development strategies at all levels.



**Themes:** Democracy and participation, Youth

**Country:** Romania

**Organisations:**

- > Asociația pentru Dezvoltare Activă, civil society organisation
- > Go Free – Asociația pentru Sprijinirea Societății Civile, civil society organisation

**Start & end date:** 12/2018 - ongoing

**Budget:** EUR 200 000 to EUR 300 000 per year

**Funding sources:**

- > Erasmus+
- > European Solidarity Corps
- > Romanian American Foundation
- > Local funding (from municipalities and other private sponsors)

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### CONTEXT

Rural areas across Romania are characterised by small, dispersed villages, ageing populations, and limited access to services and opportunities, leading to youth outmigration, low participation, weak representation, and limited dialogue with local authorities. **As a result, many rural young people feel excluded from decision-making processes and lack opportunities** to shape their communities.

The programme responds to these needs by **empowering local youth groups** to organise community initiatives, facilitate dialogue with municipalities and co-create solutions to local challenges.



### OBJECTIVES

- > Transform rural communities into places where young people are active **leaders and partners in local development**;
- > **Empower young people** through participation, leadership, innovation and cooperation with local authorities;
- > Address challenges such as limited **opportunities**, lack of **safe spaces** for young people, weak **dialogue** with decision-makers, social **exclusion** and low **access to resources**;
- > Provide young people with **mentorship, training** and a clear mandate **to lead initiatives** and **implement** youth-led action plans.



## ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

Starting in 2018, the programme follows a yearly cycle that combines outreach, group-building, selection of villages for the EYV title and one **year of youth-led local action**.

The process starts with **awareness and mobilisation activities**, mainly targeting young people but also local authorities. National and local outreach, peer-learning spaces and events introduce the programme and connect young people from different villages, encouraging and supporting them to form local initiative groups.

The **open call for applications** for the European Youth Village title is a key milestone each year. The programme provides **information and application support** for new youth initiative groups, which work with their municipality to prepare their candidacy. Finalists and villages awarded the EYV title receive a different form of support: a team from the programme, mentors and alumni help them run **youth consultations**, identify **local needs**, build stronger **relationships with decision-makers**, and prepare **action or sustainability plans**.

For villages awarded the EYV title, there is a year-long **implementation phase**. During this period, local youth groups – supported by mentors and municipalities – organise workshops, festivals, debates, awareness campaigns, advocacy actions, youth forums and activities that create or revitalise spaces for young people. The youth groups also promote their results, organise strategic meetings with local authorities and are **supported to access further resources** (e.g. European Solidarity Corps funding).

Key actors include rural young people, mentors, alumni of the programme, municipalities and local partners. Rural youth are the main beneficiaries but local authorities and the wider community also benefit.



## RESULTS

- > Between 2019 and 2026, **25 rural communities in Romania and 3 in Slovakia were awarded the title European Youth Village**, while over 50 other villages were engaged through outreach and learning activities.
- > More than **3 000 young people** have been involved in **shaping and leading local initiatives**.
- > EYV **activities have reached around 30 000 young people** through over 500 youth-led actions, including workshops, debates, festivals, advocacy campaigns, youth forums, consultations, and initiatives to create or revitalise youth-friendly spaces.
- > Local initiative groups resulted in around **40 youth-led projects**, attracting over EUR 500 000 in funding from local, national and European sources.
- > Tangible **community improvements** include youth centres, dedicated local youth budgets, stronger youth structures and more regular and meaningful cooperation between young people and local authorities.
- > Long-term impacts include stronger rural youth ecosystems, with **young people gaining leadership, confidence, visibility and agency**.



## SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > Young people are **trusted to lead** but supported with mentorship, training, peer support and a clear action plan framework.
- > Strong partnerships between youth groups and municipalities turn participation into a **shared local responsibility**. Local ownership, multi-stakeholder cooperation and tangible results build community confidence in the EYV process.
- > Rural youth are treated as **co-creators of village life**.
- > The EYV title provides a **public mandate for youth leadership**, while mentors, alumni, events, advocacy tools, networks and shared learning sustain change beyond the year-long implementation phase.
- > Rural youth participation grows when there is **recognition, continuity and practical support**.



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