

EUROPEAN RURAL YOUTH FORWARD! CONFERENCE ●

Programme

24 February – 1 March 2026

La Benéfica Cultural Centre, L'Infiestu, Piloña, Spain



Co-funded by
the European Union



Arrival Day · Tuesday 24th February 2026

18:30h

Transfer at Oviedo's Train Station · *Contact us if you arrives later than 18:30h*

20:00

Dinner at Los Caños

Day 1 · Wednesday 25th February 2026

08:00- 09:00

Registration of delegates and breakfast at La Benéfica

9:00

Opening plenary of the conference

To officially open the Conference and give the direction for the event.

Speakers:

- Ketrin Kastehein, Chairperson of Rural Youth Europe
- Sara Álvarez Gómez, President of EPA!
- Begoña García, Secretary of State for Agriculture and Food of Spain
- Marcelino Marcos, Minister of Rural Environment and Agricultural Policy for the Principality of Asturias.
- Glenn Micallef, European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport (Video address)
- Maxi Espeter, Cabinet of Commissioner for Agriculture and Food · European Commission

Moderated by: Spyros Papadatos, Secretary General of Rural Youth Europe

10:30

Presentation EU-CoE Partnership on Youth's study on rural youth

Introduce key findings and evidence on the situation of rural youth in Europe.

Speaker:

- Lana Pasic, Youth Research and Policy Manager of EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership

Moderated by: Spyros Papadatos, Secretary General of Rural Youth Europe

11:00h

Rural Youth at a Crossroads - panel

Explore current challenges, opportunities, and future pathways for rural youth in Europe.

Speakers:

- Martin Siemen Vice-Chairperson of Rural Youth Europe
- Maxi Espeter, Cabinet of Commissioner for Agriculture and Food · European Commission
- Ángeles Marín, General Director for Policies against Depopulation, Ministry of Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge
- Matías Rubio, Secretary General of EPA!
- Martin Žbogar, Vice-President of Slovenian Rural Youth Association

Moderated by: Spyros Papadatos, Secretary General of Rural Youth Europe

11:30

Coffee Break

Map of the village: [click!](#)

Day 1 · Wednesday 25th February 2026

12:00	<p>Demographic challenge policies in Spain Panel in collaboration with the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lucía González Cuesta, Director of local projects• Sara Álvarez Gómez, President of EPA!• Miguel Fernández Labrada, TerrEO Foundation• Carolina López Arias, Mayor of Villagatón• Vicente Pinilla, Grupo Científico País (UNIZAR) <p>Moderated by: Paco Boya, Secretary General for the Demographic Challenge</p>
13:00	Lunch at Los Caños
15:00	<p>Council of Europe work on rural youth and Laboratory Methodology Instructions · plenary</p> <p>Presentation of the methodology of the working group and input on Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eva Kotnik, Member of Advisory Council of Youth of the Council of Europe• Dylan Verdin-Pol, Adviser at Youth Department of the Council of Europe <p>Facilitated by: Lucas Rodríguez, Vice President of EPA!</p>
16:30	Break
17:00 - 18:30	<p>Laboratory · Working Groups</p> <p>To collaboratively explore challenges, experiment with innovative democratic methods, and co-create concrete prototype proposals</p> <p>Facilitated by: Lucas Rodríguez and group facilitators</p>
20:00	Dinner at Los Caños
21:30	Local Folklore at La Maléfica

Day 2 · Thursday 26th February 2026

08:15 - 09:15	Breakfast at La Benéfica
9:30	<p>A Democratic Pact for Rural Europe</p> <p>Speaker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matjaž Gruden, Director for Democracy at the Council of Europe <p>Moderator: Ketrin Kastehein, Chairperson of Rural Youth Europe</p>
10:30	Coffee Break
11:00	<p>Rural Field Visit - outside La Benéfica</p> <p>To provide experiential learning by engaging directly with local rural contexts, actors, and practices; connect policy discussions with real-life rural realities.</p>
13:00	Lunch at Los Caños

Day 2 · Thursday 26th February 2026

15:00	Laboratory · Working Groups
18:30h	At Llagar de Nando, discovering Asturian Cider Culture · UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage
20:00	Dinner: Espicha at La Pontiga

Day 3 · Friday 27th February 2026

08:15 - 09:15	Breakfast at La Benéfica	
9:30	Working Groups · Engaging Policy Makers To facilitate structured dialogue between rural youth leaders and policy-makers; present and discuss working group proposals; jointly reflect on feasibility, policy relevance, and implementation. 1st, WG share their progress in 3 minutes each; 2nd, split into working groups, and policy makers join the groups to finalise the prototype document. Facilitated by: Lucas Rodríguez and Group facilitators	
11:30	Coffee Break	
12:00	Policy Panel: Reflections on Working Group Outcomes To present the outcomes of the WG, to identify synergies, commitments, and opportunities Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alba Barrutieta, Policy Officer at the European Commission's DG AGRI Haude Blanc, Programme Assistant at the European Commission's DG AGRI Dylan Verdin-Pol, Adviser at Youth Department of the Council of Europe Carolina Gutiérrez, Ministry of Agriculture, Spain. Assistant Deputy Director for Rural Sara Villore, National Youth Council Spain CJE. Vice-president. Moderated by: Matías Rubio, Secretary General of EPA!	
13:30	Lunch at Los Caños	
15:00 - 17:00	The Rural Stakeholders Marketplace. Showcasing youth organisations, initiatives, and good practices	Inter-ministerial working group of Spain - for delegates with invitation only At Piloña Town Hall
19:30	Gala evening* and dinner at La Pontiga	

Optional: Your local or national traditional dress for Gala evening.

To showcase your culture you are encouraged to bring your folk costume or traditional dress for the Gala evening.

*Please note that the dress code for the event is smart casual.

Day 4 · Saturday 28th February 2026

08:15 - 09:15

Breakfast at El Prial

9:30

Good Practices Panel: National & European Perspectives

Share concrete examples of effective rural youth participation and policy influence; inspire replication and adaptation across different contexts.

Speakers:

- Richard Beattie, Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster
- Enni Liinoja, 4H Finland
- Jorren Almey, European Youth Card Association
- Fiona O’Leary, Rural Youth Europe
- Matias Rubio, EPA! and CULTIVA - *agrifood visits program* participant
- Alba Barrutieta, Policy Officer at the European Commission's DG AGRI

Moderated by: Petter Jacobsen, Board member of Rural Youth Europe

10:45

Coffe Break

11:15

Focused Dialogue on Rural Initiatives

In groups to discuss some elements for rural Europe to progress.

To provide delegates with a focused space to explore how rural culture, identity, stakeholder mobilisation, and innovative practices contribute to the development and resilience of rural areas in Europe. Participants select one topic of interest and engage in a moderated discussion, generating insights and recommendations that can inform future rural initiatives.

- Cultural Identity - EPA!
- Energy Communities - RYE & Powering Change project
- Stakeholder Mobilisation - Rural Pact Support Office
- Economic activities in rural areas - RYE

Facilitated by: EPA!

12:00

Closing plenary: WHAT’S NEXT?

Implementing Change for Rural Youth

To consolidate conference outcomes, highlight next steps, and strengthen commitment

Speakers:

- Eva Kotnik, Advisory Council on Youth
- Jana Apala, Board member of Rural Youth Europe
- Margarita Gutierrez, Deputy Director of Youth - INJUVE
- Sara Villore, National Youth Council Spain CJE
- Haude Blanc, Programme Assistant at the European Commission's DG AGRI

Moderated by: Spyros Papadatos, Secretary General of Rural Youth Europe

13:00

Closing of the Conference

Speaker:

- Rosie Bennett, Vice-Chairperson of Rural Youth Europe

14:00

Traditional Lunch at La Pontiga

17:00

Rural Spain in Celebration traditional carnival: Antroxu de Piloña

20:00

Dinner · Picnic bag at La Pontiga

Departure Day · Sunday 1st March 2026

07:30

Picnic bag for breakfast at La Pontiga

08:00h

Departure of delegates by bus

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