



POLICY PAPER

RURAL YOUTH WORK



INTRODUCTION

Rural Youth Work brings forward the concept of youth work and puts it in the context of rural and remote areas and the specificities of young people from rural and remote areas. The following document presents recommendations aimed at targeting the concrete challenges that youth organisations and youth workers in rural areas face while implementing rural youth work, as well as challenges that rural young people have when accessing youth work. The document addresses the work of paid and non-paid/volunteer youth workers, as well as youth leaders that are working with the principles of youth work.

Definition:

Rural Youth Work is the practice of engaging with, educating, and supporting young people in rural areas through various forms of interventions (including mobile youth work), programmes, and initiatives aimed at their personal, social, cultural and professional development.

Challenges:

Young people coming from rural and remote areas are facing challenges and obstacles in accessing quality youth work. Rural youth organisations have less resources and support to implement quality youth work and increase the opportunities for young people from rural and remote areas.



These recommendations were created at the Rural Youth Europe Study Session 2024 that took place at the European Youth Centre in Budapest, between 22nd-26th April 2024. The policy paper was created by the Rural Youth Europe secretariat with support from the RYE board. The policy paper was adopted by the General Assembly on the 24th May 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE), and European countries, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity to:

1. Allocate resources for the purpose of development of youth work within the non-profit sector to enable the growth of youth organisations.
2. Encourage countries to financially and politically support national, regional and local youth councils. In the case that there is no youth council, to politically and financially support young people in setting up their own.
3. Enhance opportunities for professional development and training for rural youth workers. This should, among others, include comprehensive training in mental health, first aid, and safeguarding to ensure youth workers, hold the necessary skills to create a safe and supportive environment for youth work in rural and remote areas.
4. Implement tailored-to-rural-areas strategies to retain skilled youth workers in rural areas to prevent the migration of high-quality and skilled youth workers to urban areas, including increasing financial and human resources, expanding development and professional growth opportunities, and in general ensuring that rural youth workers have the support they need to stay and thrive in their communities.
5. Leverage rural youth work to support the collection of evidence and conduct comprehensive research and studies on the needs and challenges of rural youth across Europe.
6. Encourage young people to take leadership roles within organisations by providing meaningful opportunities to gain new skills, personal and professional development.
7. Develop a comprehensive communication strategy that provides young people with all the information about youth work opportunities, utilising both electronic and non-electronic forms of communication.



8. Provide more opportunities for international exchanges and mobility for rural young people to encourage and allow more networking and intercultural learning.
9. Provide specific funding and resources to youth-led rural organisations to enhance their capacity and impact.
10. Increase travel grants and add specific financial support measures beyond the classic km bands for young people traveling from rural and remote areas when they participate in European programs such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC). Streamline bureaucratic processes to reduce the burden of proving the need for additional funding for travel expenses.
11. Provide necessary resources and infrastructure for mobile and digital youth work.
12. Ensure adequate and increased structural/operational funding to youth organisations in rural areas to ensure proper funding, visibility and information about youth work.
13. Raise awareness and promote rural youth work and provide information and support to youth organisations operating in rural areas.
14. Ensure safe and inclusive spaces for rural youth to participate in social, economic, and political activities.
15. Create and support the establishment and functioning of rural youth work infrastructure, such as youth centres in rural areas and other physical and virtual spaces, to ensure the functioning of youth spaces that can facilitate higher quality rural youth work.
16. Enhance the visibility of rural youth, including specific and concrete actions in the EU Youth Programmes and the new EU Youth Strategy post-2027.
17. Ensure that effective strategies and policies that support rural young people are being developed.
18. Provide capacity-building opportunities, and platforms for collaboration and exchange to rural youth organisations.
19. Increase the visibility and knowledge of European and national programs and instruments supporting rural development and youth participation such as Erasmus+, ESC, LEADER, in particular ensuring they reach people from various socio-economic backgrounds.
20. Enhance the practice of bringing European programs, such as youth exchanges, training courses (TCs), and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) projects, to rural areas to increase the accessibility of the programmes, European values, empower rural youth, and broaden perspectives, facilitating the discussion on inclusion and topics like LGBTQI+ issues in rural communities.
21. Support youth work organizations in promoting lifelong learning opportunities to enhance skills and competencies for better integration into work life and beyond. Targeted support should be provided where rural youth work, works to integrate NEETs and minority groups.
22. Continue listening to youth voices and creating channels to help reflect rural youth needs in policy making.

23. Continue providing and promoting funding opportunities through existing or new mechanisms to develop quality youth work in rural areas that go beyond youth programmes (e.g. Rural development funds).
24. Acknowledge the critical role that rural youth work plays mitigating isolation and fostering development in rural areas. By providing platforms for rural youth to actively participate in and lead local initiatives, we can harness their potential to create vibrant, inclusive, and resilient rural communities.
25. Recognise that youth work plays a crucial role in policy creation and advocacy by gathering input from young people, ensuring their voices are heard and integrated into decisions that affect their futures.



We recommend European countries to:

1. Utilise rural youth work and engage rural youth and rural youth workers in the development of comprehensive national youth policies that address the specific tailored needs of rural youth. Additionally, implement the concepts of Youth Test and rural proofing in all policies.
2. Encourage active participation of rural youth in decision-making processes at local, regional, and national levels, ensuring young people and youth-led organizations are included in the development of rural policies.



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