EURYO EUROPEAN RURAL YOUTH OBSERVATORY



EURYO SUMMER SCHOOL 2026

Rural Youth Alternative Futures Manifesto

New Narratives and Possibilities for Empowering Rural Communities

Developed in connection with the Summer School
7–11 September 2026 | Angra do Heroismo

EURYO | European Rural Youth Observatory

EURYO Summer School 2026 ↗

1. Preamble: Young people's identity and shared vision

The participants of the Summer School 'Rural Youth Alternative Futures' are young people, researchers and practitioners connected by a shared commitment to rural communities. Young people recognise rural areas not as places without prospects, but as places where young people should be able to move, learn, work, create, participate and build dignified lives.

Co-organised by EURYO and Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, the five-day Summer School connected research and practice through participatory work on rural mobility, education, entrepreneurship, community resilience and inclusion, including a field visit to Terinov Science and Technology Park in Angra do Heroísmo.

Young people seek futures in which place does not prescribe a narrow set of possibilities. Rural young people hold knowledge of local communities and the right to shape how those communities change. The opportunity to stay, move, return and belong must be supported through practical choices rather than expressed only as an aspiration.

2. The current challenges

- Limited educational and employment opportunities.
- Territorial and regional inequalities.
- Inadequate transport and digital connectivity.
- Youth migration and depopulation.
- Limited access to essential services.
- Insufficient youth participation in decision-making.
- Negative narratives and stereotypes about rural life.

CORE MESSAGE

Rural life should never mean fewer rights, weaker opportunities or a voice that is easier to ignore.

When transport does not arrive, education is distant, work is insecure and participation is symbolic, opportunity becomes determined by postcode. These are territorial inequalities, not individual failures that require collective and institutional action.

These barriers intersect. A course may be available but impossible to reach; a job may exist but offer little security or growth; an invitation to participate may come after the decision has already been made. The effects of these barriers differ among young people and between rural places. Responses must therefore begin with lived circumstances and local evidence.

3. Young people's guiding principles

- Youth participation - policies concerning young people must be developed with them.
- Territorial justice - living in a rural area should not limit rights and opportunities.
- Social inclusion - vulnerable and marginalised young people must not be left behind.
- Sustainability - rural development should protect communities and the environment.
- Recognition of diversity - rural young people are not a homogeneous group.
- Intergenerational cooperation - resilient communities require dialogue between generations.

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE

Nothing about rural young people's futures should be decided without meaningful participation by rural youth from the beginning.

Participation is a right, an ongoing process and an outcome that should be visible in decisions. Institutions should explain what changed because young people took part, and what remains unresolved.

PRIORITY 1 | FREEDOM TO MOVE AND STAY CONNECTED

Why this matters: Without reliable transport and digital connectivity, education, employment, services, friendships and civic participation remain out of reach.

Mobility is more than a one-way departure. Rural young people need genuine freedom to stay, explore, maintain connections and return. Services should also reach young people who cannot easily travel to them, while safe local spaces should allow minority young people to see a future in home communities.

Young people call for:

- Affordable, regular and accessible public transport with timetables adapted to young people's lives.
- Reliable high-speed internet and inclusive access to digital services.
- Support for local, national and international learning mobility.
- Policies that allow young people to leave, learn, return and remain connected to home communities.

THE FUTURE YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want mobility that opens opportunities rather than distance that closes them.

QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

Can a young person leave to learn without losing the possibility of coming home?

PRIORITY 2 | DECENT, FAIR AND MEANINGFUL WORK

Why this matters: Rural young people often face narrow labour markets, informal work, low pay, limited career guidance and expectations that young people must leave in order to succeed.

A useful employment policy asks about the quality and meaning of work as well as entry into a job. Young people, small employers and communities should explore future opportunities together, drawing on each place's assets and recognising that youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) have varied circumstances and aspirations.

Young people call for:

- Secure employment with fair pay, written contracts and social protection.
- Transparent recruitment based on skills, motivation and potential.
- Targeted pathways for NEETs, care leavers and other young people facing multiple barriers.
- Locally adapted career guidance, apprenticeships and mentoring.
- Stronger cooperation among employers, education providers, employment services and municipalities.

THE FUTURE YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want fair chances to work, develop talents and build secure futures in rural areas.

QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

Does the work offer a future that young people themselves consider worthwhile?

PRIORITY 3 | EDUCATION FOR REAL LIFE AND RURAL FUTURES

Why this matters: Distance, school closures, limited course choices and digital inequalities restrict rural young people's learning pathways and future options.

A pathway begins with an imaginable future. Young people should be able to explore possibilities early, help shape vocational programmes and find clear information about regional projects. Schools and families need welcoming networks that can identify difficulties and sustain learning.

Young people call for:

- Equal access to high-quality general, vocational and higher education.
- Investment in rural schools, teachers, digital infrastructure and transport to education.
- Practical, digital, civic, entrepreneurial and socio-emotional skills.
- Vocational pathways connected to local economies and emerging green and digital sectors.
- Youth participation in designing education and training programmes.

THE FUTURE YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want education that prepares every young person for real life without requiring them to abandon home communities.

QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

Are students prepared only for existing opportunities or for futures young people want to create?

Learning, inclusion and access



PRIORITY 4 | ENTREPRENEURSHIP, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Why this matters: Young rural entrepreneurs encounter limited finance, fragmented support, small networks and administrative barriers, despite the potential to create local jobs and new services.

An idea needs an ecosystem. Local businesses, funders, public services and community organisations should connect around young people's projects, including ventures beyond traditional agriculture. Guidance must reach those with fewer contacts and resources, and early income should not create an abrupt loss of essential support.

Young people call for:

- Accessible seed funding, micro-grants and simplified application procedures.
- Mentoring, incubators and peer networks for young rural entrepreneurs.
- Support for social, green, cultural, digital and agricultural innovation.
- Partnerships with universities, science and technology parks, businesses and municipalities.
- Visibility for diverse rural role models and locally rooted success stories.

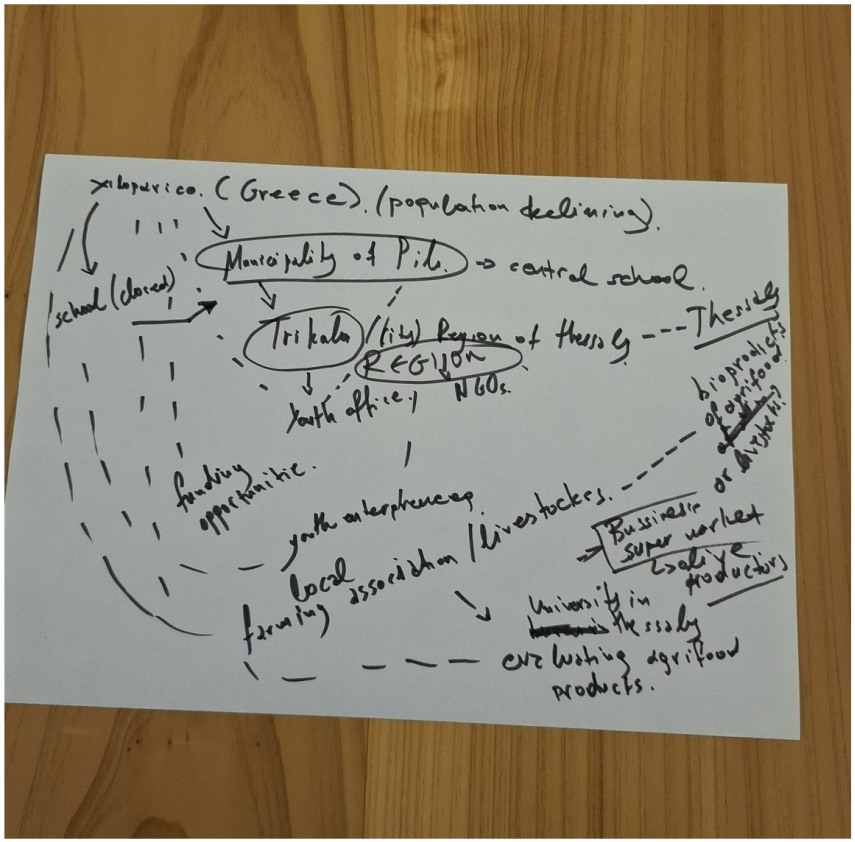
THE FUTURE YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

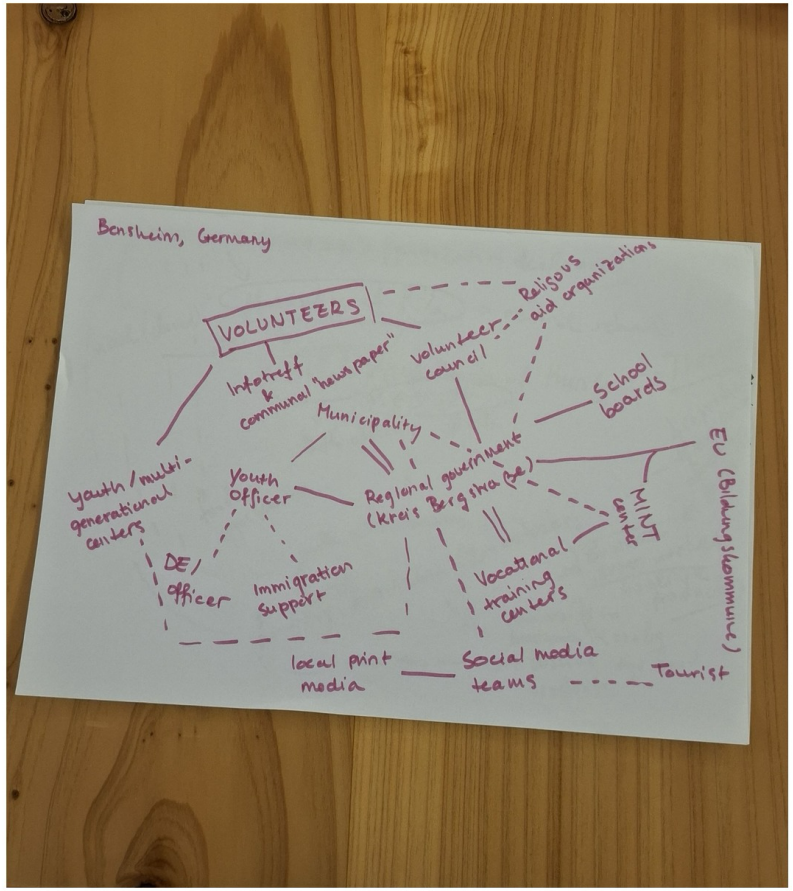
Young people want rural ideas to receive the same trust, investment and room to grow as ideas developed in cities.

QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

What could young people build if local support began with ideas proposed by young people?

Mapping of the rural entrepreneurship ecosystem





PRIORITY 5 | COMMUNITIES WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE BELONG

Why this matters: Participation becomes tokenistic when young people are consulted only after decisions are made or when safe spaces, services and resources are unavailable.

Belonging requires more than an invitation to a meeting. Young people need safe spaces, accessible services, the means to organise, and evidence that young people's proposals influenced public choices. Institutions should actively reach those least likely to be heard.

Young people call for:

- Permanent youth councils and meaningful representation in local decision-making.
- Safe, welcoming and affordable youth spaces for meeting, creating, learning and organising.
- Accessible health, mental-health, social, cultural and leisure services.
- Dedicated budgets for youth-led initiatives and transparent follow-up to youth proposals.
- Intergenerational cooperation that respects young people's knowledge and agency.

THE FUTURE YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want to be seen, heard, trusted and able to belong in rural communities.

QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

What changed because young people participated?

PRIORITY 6 | HOUSING AND THE RIGHT TO BUILD A FUTURE

Why this matters: A future in rural communities is impossible when suitable housing is unavailable, unaffordable or disconnected from employment and services.

The possibility of staying or returning depends on a place to live. Housing measures should be planned alongside work, transport and services, with particular attention to young people at risk of homelessness or leaving care.

Young people call for:

- Affordable rental and ownership options for young people.
- Renovation of vacant buildings for youth and community housing.
- Housing support connected to employment, transport and essential services.
- Specific measures for young people leaving care or facing homelessness.
- Youth involvement in local housing and spatial-planning decisions.

THE FUTURE YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

Young people want the genuine possibility to choose rural life, not to be pushed away by insecure or unaffordable housing.

QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

Can a young person choose rural life when suitable housing is out of reach?

5. Responsibilities of key stakeholders

European and national institutions: Create enabling policy frameworks, stable funding and territorial impact assessments.

Regional and local authorities: Co-design services with rural youth and publish clear responses to young people's proposals.

Education and training providers: Deliver accessible, relevant and inclusive learning pathways.

Employers and employment services: Provide fair recruitment, decent work, mentoring and supported transitions.

Youth and civil-society organisations: Reach underrepresented young people and sustain participation beyond single events.

Researchers and networks: Produce accessible evidence, evaluate progress and amplify rural youth knowledge.

Each actor should make its response visible and coordinate with others. Young people should help define success, monitor progress and review whether commitments address the realities young people identified.

FROM DEMANDS TO ACTION

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6. Commitments of the participants

- Challenge negative stereotypes about rural areas.
- Share knowledge, experiences and good practices.
- Include disadvantaged and underrepresented young people.
- Cooperate across countries, sectors and communities.
- Promote the manifesto through EURYO and partner organisations.

The participants commit to carrying the manifesto beyond the Summer School, opening it to wider rural-youth voices and turning its principles into dialogue, advocacy, research and local action.

7. Call to action

Young people call upon European, national, regional and local institutions to recognise rural young people as equal partners in shaping the future. Young people ask decision-makers to listen before decisions are made, involve young people before plans are finished, and support participation with real spaces, resources, responsibility and accountability.

CLOSING LINES

Rural young people should be able to move freely, learn fully, work fairly, live with dignity and participate meaningfully. Young people's futures must be shaped with them.

8. Adoption and signatures

Place and date: Angra do Heroísmo, 7- 11 September 2026.

Names, countries or affiliations of participants signing:

Trainees

Alicia Barreno Díaz; Ana Pimentel; Alexa Atkins; Andréa Barbosa; Chrysoula Kapartziani ; Dorota Bajur-Krawiecka; Federica Demicheli; Izabela Biegalska; Joana Esteves; Jose Antonio Parcha; Julian Willis; Lotte Chin-Kon-Sung; Magdalena Gluch; Marcin Bajur; Marh Echtai; Marta Ludew; Mattia Lamberti; Pasi Hario; Stefania Ferrua; Tautvydas Vencius; Vineet Svristava

Coordination

Francisco Simões; Mariano Soler; Tatiana Ferreira; Vladislava Lendzhova

Trainers

Adriano Ellena; Antonella Rocca; Claudia Petrescu; Elena Marta; Francisco Simões; João Almeida

9. Follow-up and accountability

Publish the manifesto and an accessible one-page summary.

Present it to local, national and European decision-makers.

Invite endorsements from youth organisations and rural stakeholders.

Document responses, commitments and examples of implementation.

The review should record who acted, what changed for young people, and which demands still require a response. Rural youth should be involved in assessing that progress and deciding the next steps.