

Survey-based insights on the participation of rural youth structures in policy-making

This report presents an evidence-based examination of the participation of rural youth structures in policy-making across Europe, derived exclusively from a transnational survey conducted as part of this report.

Situated within the broader framework of the research on "Realities and trends in rural youth participation in policy-making," this survey complements previous qualitative findings, such as those drawn from focus groups and literature review, by offering quantitative and qualitative data directly from young people involved in various youth structures.



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**Rural
Youth
Forward**

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Introduction

This document presents an evidence-based examination of the participation of rural youth structures in policy-making across Europe, derived exclusively from a transnational survey conducted as part of this report. Situated within the broader framework of the research on **"Realities and trends in rural youth participation in policy-making,"** this survey complements previous qualitative findings, such as those drawn from focus groups and literature review, by offering quantitative and qualitative data directly from young people involved in various youth structures.

The primary purpose of this document is to explore how rural youth currently engage in policy-making, identify the barriers and enabling factors that shape their participation, capture their perceptions of recent trends, and articulate their recommendations for enhancing meaningful youth involvement in decision-making processes.

The survey, conducted between April and June 2025, gathered responses from 127 young people across at least 18 European countries. These respondents are primarily young people actively involved in diverse youth structures, including local and regional youth organizations, youth councils, informal youth groups, and student unions. The analysis integrates descriptive statistics with qualitative insights derived from open-ended questions, providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities and dynamics that affect youth participation in policy-making. Where relevant, direct quotations are included to highlight youth perspectives authentically.

While the survey offers a valuable snapshot of the lived experiences and perceptions of rural youth engaged in these structures, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The respondent pool, although diverse, may inherently reflect the views of already engaged and motivated young individuals, potentially underrepresenting the perspectives of disengaged rural youth. Furthermore, responses varied significantly by country and type of structure, suggesting caution when generalizing findings across all rural contexts in Europe. Nevertheless, the insights drawn from this survey provide important empirical grounding that reinforces and enriches the overall findings of the report, making a significant contribution to understanding the current state and future potential of rural youth participation in policy-making.

Profile and engagement of respondents

The survey garnered 127 responses from rural youth across Europe, representing at least 18 countries. The largest share of identified respondents came from Italy (approximately 19% of those who provided a country), with strong participation also from France, Germany, Romania, Austria, and other countries. A majority of respondents (61%) were between 18 and 25 years old, with smaller groups under 18 (17%), 26–30 (17%), and a few above 30 (5%). In terms of gender, about 58% identified as women and 38% as men, with a small minority (4%) identifying as non-binary.

Most respondents have direct experience in rural youth structures: two-thirds (**84** individuals) are **currently or previously involved** in a youth structure active in rural areas, while one-third are not. These youth structures take various forms. The most common types were **youth organizations** – 37 respondents (29%) belonged to a local youth organization, and 47 (37%) to a regional or national youth organization. A notable number were part of **informal youth groups** (13 respondents, ~10%) or **student councils/unions** (11 respondents, ~9%). A smaller segment (8 respondents, ~6%) were involved in **local, regional, or national youth councils or other representative bodies**, and an additional 11 respondents chose “Other” types of structures.

Over **two-thirds (66%)** indicated that their youth structure is **youth-led**, highlighting the prominence of peer leadership; about 22% said their structure is not youth-led, and 12% were unsure. Meanwhile, **61%** reported their structure is **based in rural areas**, whereas 29% said it is not (perhaps working *for* rural youth from an urban base), and ~10% were unsure. This suggests the sample includes both organizations physically rooted in rural communities and some working with rural youth from outside rural areas.

Respondents occupy a range of **roles** within their youth structures, often wearing multiple hats. Over half (63 respondents) are general **members**, and many serve as **volunteers** (46) in activities. Nearly one-third (41) have been part of a **core organizing team**, and about one-quarter held **leadership positions** such as leader/coordinator or president (31 respondents, ~24%). Another quarter has experience as **project managers or activity coordinators** (33 respondents, 26%). Fewer respondents identified roles in communications (13) or as youth workers/facilitators (17), administrative support (10), or mentoring/training (7). Notably, **only one** respondent described their role as a dedicated **policy or advocacy officer**, highlighting that formal policy-focused positions are rare in these rural youth structures. Overall, the profile of respondents indicates a diverse and engaged group of rural young people, most of whom are actively involved in youth-led organizations and initiatives, often in multiple capacities.

Levels and forms of policy engagement

Less than half of the surveyed youth structures are actively involved in policy-making processes. **60 respondents (47%)** indicated their structure is engaged in policy advocacy or decision-making, while 48 (38%) said their structure is **not** involved, and the remainder were unsure. Among those with policy involvement, participation is heavily skewed toward the **local level**. Out of the 60 engaged structures, **50 (83%)** work on **local/municipal policy issues**, whereas engagement at broader levels is less common. **37** respondents (62% of those active in policy) reported involvement at the **regional** level, **28 (47%)** at the **national** level, and **19 (32%)** at the **European** level¹. This suggests that rural youth structures predominantly channel their influence into local community decision-making, with progressively fewer managing to impact national or EU-level policies.

When it comes to the **forms** of policy participation, the most common modes are relatively informal or consultative. **Consultations** connecting young people with decision-makers are the leading activity, mentioned by 65 respondents (~51%). Nearly as many have taken part in **public debates or dialogues** on policy issues (57 respondents, 45%). About one-quarter have engaged in **advocacy campaigns** (33 respondents, 26%) to push for change. More formal or institutionalized activities are less prevalent: only 27 respondents (21%) have participated in **advisory boards or committees** as youth representatives, and **21 (17%)** have been involved in **drafting policy proposals** or written policy inputs. Notably, a significant minority, **25 respondents (20%)**, said their structure had done “**none of the above**” forms of participation, indicating that one in five rural youth structures in the survey have **not** engaged in any structured policy activities. This underscores that opportunities for direct participation in policy processes are uneven; while many rural youth structures take part in consultations and public discussions, far fewer gain seats in formal advisory bodies or contribute to written policy proposals.

Perceived change over the last five years: Despite varying levels of engagement, respondents generally feel that the involvement of rural youth structures in policy-making is trending upward. A majority, **73 respondents (57%)**, believe that rural youth structures’ participation in policy-making has **improved** in the past five years (with 17 saying it “**improved significantly**” and 56 “**slightly improved**”), compared to only 9 individuals (7%) who feel it has **declined**. About 21 (17%) observed that it **stayed the same**, and the rest (19%) did not know. In other words, more than half of these young people sense positive momentum in rural youth engagement, while very few see a backslide. This outlook provides important context for the qualitative insights that follow: it suggests that, in the view of those directly involved, rural youth structures are generally gaining a greater voice in governance, albeit gradually for most, rather than via dramatic shifts.

¹ Many structures engage across multiple levels, but it is clear that the **local arena is the primary sphere** of policy activity for most.

Barriers to participation

Respondents identified a range of obstacles that hinder rural youth structures from participating effectively in decision-making. Several **common barriers** stand out, reflecting both practical resource gaps and attitudinal/institutional challenges:

- **Lack of awareness or information about opportunities**, cited by 67 respondents (53%). Many rural youth simply do not know *when or how* they can engage with policy processes, due to poor information flow and outreach in remote areas.
- **Limited financial resources** – cited by 65 respondents (51%). Funding shortages constrain youth organizations' activities (e.g., inability to travel to meetings or sustain long-term advocacy), making it difficult to participate on equal footing.
- **Geographic isolation** – noted by 46 respondents (36%). The physical distance of rural communities from decision-making centers (and associated costs of travel or connectivity) poses a significant hurdle to consistent participation.
- **Lack of recognition by authorities** – mentioned by 34 respondents (27%). Rural youth voices are often not taken seriously by policymakers, who may dismiss youth-led groups as unimportant or illegitimate stakeholders.
- **Bureaucratic complexity** – 30 respondents (24%) pointed to the complexity of institutional processes. Navigating administrative hurdles and red tape can overwhelm small youth structures, discouraging them from engaging.
- **Limited capacity and skills** – 28 respondents (22%) indicated that a lack of training or experience in policy engagement limits their effectiveness. Without skills in advocacy, public speaking, or policy literacy, youth may struggle to participate meaningfully.
- **Discrimination or stigma** – 25 respondents (20%) perceived **negative stereotypes** (e.g., ageism or bias against rural populations) as barriers to being heard. Such attitudes can lead to youth voices being undervalued or ignored in policy-making.
- **Socio-economic constraints** – highlighted by 24 respondents (19%). Broader socio-economic hardships (unemployment, poverty in rural areas) can limit youth involvement by forcing them to prioritize immediate needs over activism, or by eroding their confidence that participation will help.
- **Cultural and intergenerational gaps** – noted by 20 respondents (16%). Traditional mindsets in rural communities (or among older leaders) may not welcome youth input, and young people can feel culturally disconnected from formal institutions.
- **Political marginalization** – 18 respondents (14%) said rural youth are politically marginalized, lacking influence or representation in mainstream politics. This can manifest as tokenistic consultation or exclusion from decision-making bodies.
- **Language barriers** – for 13 respondents (10%), language was an issue (e.g., youth from linguistic minorities, or needing to use official jargon/English in international forums).
- **Digital divide** – 10 respondents (8%) cited poor internet or tech access, which hampers participation, especially as many engagement opportunities move online.

These multiple barriers often intersect. For example, a lack of information is frequently tied to geographic isolation and digital gaps; likewise, limited funding exacerbates capacity shortfalls. The data shows that **resource limitations (financial, informational, skills)** and **structural exclusion (distance, bureaucracy, lack of respect)** are at the forefront of challenges facing rural youth structures.

Importantly, respondents provided **real-world examples** that illustrate how these barriers play out. *“When we first launched our youth group, we created a ‘Manifesto’ to present to political leaders. However, we faced significant barriers, as many decision-makers didn’t take us seriously... and were unwilling to meet with us,”* one young leader recounted. It was only after local media reported on their initiative that officials finally paid attention: *“a local newspaper talked about our initiative [and] we gained visibility and credibility. Only then did politicians reach out and agree to meet with us.”* In this case, **lack of recognition by authorities** and perhaps dismissive attitudes toward rural youth meant that the group’s advocacy was initially ignored – a gap they could only overcome by attracting external attention.

Another respondent described how, together with their colleagues, they developed policy proposals from youth consultations, only to see them left out of the national strategy due to **insufficient formal recognition and funding**. This example underscores how even highly organized efforts can be thwarted if institutions do not officially include or fund youth input. Others shared that without travel funds or dedicated staff, they simply **“need a lot of time and...money”** to engage in policy work, resources that volunteer-based rural groups often lack. Such narratives demonstrate that the obstacles are not merely perceived; they tangibly prevent rural youth from having a seat at the table. Overcoming these barriers will require addressing both the tangible deficits (money, access, training) and the intangible ones (attitudes and institutional openness) identified by the respondents.

Enabling factors and good practices

Despite the challenges, the survey also shed light on what **helps rural youth structures succeed** in influencing policy. Respondents highlighted a number of enabling factors that make meaningful participation possible. Chief among these is the presence of **strong networks and partnerships** – fully **85 respondents (about 67%)** indicated that having alliances and connections (with other organizations, communities, or mentors) significantly boosts their ability to engage. Such networks can amplify youth voices and provide support or knowledge exchange.

Another critical enabler is **support from authorities**: 53 respondents (42%) pointed to **supportive local, regional, or national authorities** as a factor that helped their participation. When policymakers are receptive, invite youth to consultations, or actively work with youth organizations, rural youth are far more effective in shaping decisions. **Access to information** was likewise cited by 49 respondents (39%) – knowing *when* consultations are happening, *how* to navigate funding, and who to contact is essential for engagement. **Available funding opportunities** themselves were mentioned by 43 respondents (34%), as financial support (grants, subsidies) enables youth structures to organize, travel, and sustain advocacy projects. Correspondingly, **capacity-building and training** programs were noted by 33 respondents (26%) as enabling factors; when young people receive training in leadership, advocacy, or technical skills, their structures become much more capable of influencing policy.

A range of **other supportive factors** was acknowledged by smaller (but still significant) segments of the sample. These include **recognition and visibility of youth initiatives** (mentioned by 31 respondents, 24%), the existence of **collaborative forums** for youth participation, such as youth councils or working groups (27 respondents, 21%), and **mentorship or peer-support programs** that empower young rural leaders (21 respondents, 17%). **Technology and digital platforms** that enable remote participation (e.g., video conferencing, social media) were also cited by 21 respondents (17%) as an equalizer for those in isolated areas. Even a **flexible policy environment open to innovation** was named by a few (14 respondents, 11%), suggesting that when institutions are adaptable and willing to try new participatory approaches, youth find it easier to contribute. In sum, **connecting with allies, having institutional support, being equipped with information/resources, and leveraging digital tools** form the backbone of effective rural youth participation, according to the survey responses.

Moreover, the survey invited participants to share **best practices and success stories**, illustrating how these enabling factors translate into real outcomes. Respondents described a variety of **approaches that worked** in empowering rural youth voices:

- **Organizing youth forums and councils:** Several respondents emphasized the impact of creating dedicated rural youth forums at the local or national level. For example, in one country, a coalition of organizations held **regional youth forums** where rural young people could voice their concerns directly to policymakers. These events not only raised youth issues up the political agenda but also helped youth gain confidence by speaking in official settings. Regular local youth council meetings with municipality officials were another cited practice, institutionalizing a channel for input on community decisions. Such structures exemplify how **strong networks and supportive authorities** come together by convening youth and decision-makers in dialogue, backed by recognition from officials that youths' perspectives matter.
- **Collaborating with government bodies:** Another frequently mentioned success factor was **formal collaboration between youth structures and authorities**. One respondent highlighted how *"when the Rural Youth Parliament in Slovakia collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture on youth consultations for the Rural Development Programme, their input was acknowledged and included"*, demonstrating the payoff of **official recognition and open dialogue**. In this case, a government ministry actively worked with a youth-led entity, resulting in youth-generated ideas being written into a national policy document. Similarly, respondents from other countries reported that establishing **working groups with ministries** can lead to concrete outcomes – for instance, rural youth representatives co-developed an action plan for young farmers alongside the Ministry of Agriculture, ensuring that youth needs were addressed in the 2023–2027 program. These examples show that when authorities treat rural youth as legitimate partners, providing seats at the table, policies can directly reflect young people's input.
- **Influencing policy through evidence and proposals:** Some youth structures have found success by **professionalizing their advocacy**, for example by producing annual policy papers or budget submissions. One respondent explained that *each year their organization prepares a pre-budget submission with key funding "asks" for rural youth, and "many of these asks have been engaged with and...have been funded"* by the

government. By presenting well-crafted, evidence-based proposals, rural youth groups can speak the language of policymakers and secure tangible investments (an illustration of how **capacity-building, networks, and information access** enable success). Another best practice involved compiling a common position document across multiple rural youth groups, which made it easier to present a **unified youth voice** to authorities and thereby influence national youth strategy. These kinds of structured contributions, backed by research, consensus, and clear asks, have helped convince officials to take rural youth recommendations on board.

Through these stories of effective participation, a clear pattern emerges: rural youth structures are most successful when they are **organized, connected, and invited in**. Supportive conditions (like funding, training, or receptive institutions) are often prerequisites, but equally important is the **initiative of youth themselves** in forming networks, creating platforms to engage (forums, councils), and proactively reaching out to authorities with solutions. Where rural youth have managed to do this, they have moved from being passive stakeholders to recognized contributors in policy-making.

Perceptions and outlook

Looking ahead, respondents shared nuanced perspectives on **current trends and prospects** for rural youth in policy-making. As noted, a majority perceive that participation by rural youth structures has been increasing in recent years. Many also reflected on **why** these trends are occurring and how broader changes in society are impacting youth engagement.

Drivers of recent trends: In open responses, young people attributed the **improvement in participation** to several positive developments. One key factor is seen as **greater political will and recognition of youth at high levels**. Indeed, **53 respondents** selected “increased political will or recognition of youth” as a positive influence on participation trends. This likely reflects new policies and rhetoric focusing on rural youth (for example, the EU and national governments paying more attention to rural youth issues in the past few years). Another major factor is **digital connectivity and communication tools**, chosen by 48 respondents, which have “shrunk” distances and enabled rural youth to join conversations they previously couldn’t. *Growing awareness in society* about rural challenges was also frequently cited – 42 respondents felt that rural issues gaining visibility in the public discourse has helped validate youth advocacy. Additionally, the **emergence of youth-led initiatives and organizations** across rural areas (noted by 39 respondents) is itself feeding a positive cycle: as more rural youth organize themselves, they collectively have a stronger influence. These trends have been reinforced by factors like new **funding opportunities** (33 respondents) for rural youth and occasionally by **capacity-building programs** (though the latter was a less cited factor at 23 respondents). In summary, young people feel that **the playing field is slowly improving** – policymakers are listening a bit more, society is more aware of their issues, youth networks are growing, and technology is helping bridge the gap.

At the same time, respondents are **keenly aware of ongoing challenges** that temper this progress. The most prominent negative influence noted was the persistence of resource and opportunity gaps: **69 respondents**, over half the sample, pointed to **limited or reduced financial resources** as a factor dragging participation down. Indeed, insufficient funding and

investment in rural youth means many good initiatives struggle to sustain or scale up (echoing the earlier barrier of financial constraints). Another big concern is the enduring **rural–urban divide**: “*persistent or worsening rural-urban disparities*” was selected by 50 respondents as a negative trend, indicating that broader inequality between rural and urban areas continues to disadvantage rural youth in having their voices heard. Other factors undermining participation include a **lack of targeted education/training for policy engagement** (44 respondents) – many feel there are still not enough opportunities to learn how to engage in governance – and **political instability or weak governance** structures that make it hard for youth initiatives to find support (35 respondents). Furthermore, **societal stigma or discrimination** against rural youth remains an issue (31 respondents), suggesting that prejudice and the sense of being “looked down on” can discourage young people from stepping up. In essence, while trends are positive overall, rural youth are telling us that **unequal resources, insufficient skills support, and deep-rooted structural inequalities** are still impeding the full realization of their participation. Any gains of recent years are fragile and need to be consolidated by addressing these persistent negatives.

Impact of societal and technological changes: The survey specifically asked whether broader changes, like digitalization, social media, or rising climate awareness, have made rural youth structures more or less inclined to participate in policy. A **clear majority** believes the net effect of these changes is empowering. About **59%** of respondents said that such societal and tech shifts have made rural youth **more inclined** to engage (19% answered “*much more inclined*” and 44% “*moderately more inclined*”), whereas only ~10% felt that youth are now less inclined to participate. Around 18% saw no change, and 13% couldn’t say. This optimistic view was reinforced by many comments praising the role of digital tools. Young people noted that internet connectivity and social media have, to some extent, **leveled the playing field** for rural youth: they can access information, connect with peers, and even join national conversations online without needing to be physically present in capitals. “*Digitization has made it easier to connect to decision makers – they are on social media, you do not have to physically meet,*” one respondent explained, emphasizing how remote rural youth can now interact with policymakers through online platforms. Others echoed that **social media gives rural youth a louder voice**, allowing them to raise issues publicly and build campaigns from afar. Moreover, global movements (for example, around climate change) have permeated rural areas via digital media, inspiring rural young people to get involved in causes that transcend their locale.

That said, respondents also cautioned that technology and social change cut both ways. A few pointed out negative aspects – for instance, the spread of **misinformation and extreme views** in isolated communities through social media, which can breed cynicism or polarization. “*There are many more [young people] who will not be engaged at all, ever. There are a lot of extreme views also circulating,*” one participant observed, worrying that while some rural youth are galvanized, others retreat due to distrust or radicalization. Additionally, not everyone benefits equally from digital inclusion – those with poor connectivity or low digital literacy in rural areas can be left **further behind**, exacerbating inequalities. In essence, societal shifts are broadly seen as a net positive for encouraging youth participation, but they also introduce **new challenges (information quality, digital divides)** that need attention.

Optimism for the future: Despite the hurdles, the prevailing sentiment among respondents about the next five years is one of cautious optimism. About **72%** are optimistic overall about future rural youth participation in policy-making – **75 respondents (59%)** described themselves as “*somewhat optimistic*” and another 16 (13%) are “*very optimistic*” about the future. By contrast, only a small minority (14% in total) expressed pessimism (16 somewhat pessimistic and just 2 very pessimistic), while the remaining 14% were neutral. This skew toward optimism is noteworthy given the candid acknowledgment of current barriers; it suggests that many rural young people see momentum building or believe in the potential for improvement.

When asked to elaborate on **reasons for their outlook**, optimistic respondents frequently cited the **growing grassroots energy and organization** among rural youth as a basis for hope. “*The main reason for my outlook is the **growing interest** I see among youth networks, particularly in Romania, to actively engage in policymaking... This shows that young people are not only willing, but also increasingly **capable and organized** when it comes to shaping the policies that affect them,*” wrote one respondent, tying their optimism to concrete actions they are involved in. Indeed, many pointed to the emergence of new rural youth councils, cross-border initiatives, and youth-led advocacy campaigns as evidence that a new generation is stepping up, better trained and more connected than before. Another common reason for optimism was the expectation of **policy changes catching up** with needs – for example, respondents mentioned upcoming **policy reforms and strategies** (at national or EU level) that specifically address rural youth, believing these could create more supportive environments. The EU’s increased attention to rural youth and various pilot programs are seen as a positive signal. Likewise, **technological advancements** and innovation in communication were cited as reasons to be hopeful: with even better digital infrastructure on the horizon (e.g., rural broadband expansion, new online tools), engaging rural youth could become ever more feasible.

However, this hope is often **tempered with realism**. Even optimistic youth emphasized that progress will not happen automatically. One respondent, identifying as somewhat optimistic, noted that “*this optimism is tempered by the significant challenge of young people often perceiving a **lack of real impact** from their involvement in policy-making,*” warning that if rural youth do not **see tangible results** from their efforts, their motivation could wane. This sentiment underlines a crucial point: sustaining youth participation gains will require that institutions not only listen to rural youth but also **act on their input** in visible ways. Otherwise, today’s engaged young people might become disillusioned. Pessimistic voices in the survey indeed echoed this concern from the other side – they fear that despite more talk about youth inclusion, “*young people often don’t see change happen*” and may give up trying. Additionally, those less optimistic often cited external threats like economic downturns or political neglect that could reverse recent improvements.

In summary, the outlook from rural youth respondents is guardedly positive. They see their peers mobilizing and some structural winds shifting in their favor, which gives them hope for further progress in the coming five years. Yet, they also clearly articulate that **follow-through is critical**: investments, policy follow-up, and continued networking will be needed to truly “**move rural youth forward.**” The optimism in this survey is not naïve – it’s coupled with a call

for accountability and ongoing effort to ensure that the trend of increasing participation not only continues but translates into real influence on policies affecting rural communities.

Recommendations from respondents

Finally, the survey asked participants to suggest **actions and measures** to further improve the participation of rural youth structures in policy-making, at the local/regional, national, and European levels. The young respondents offered a rich array of recommendations, drawing from their on-the-ground experiences. Across all levels, a common theme is the need for **greater support, inclusion, and connectivity** for rural youth in governance. Below is a consolidated summary of their key recommendations:

At the local/regional level, respondents emphasized:

- **Establishing local youth councils or advisory boards** attached to municipal authorities, to formally integrate rural youth voices into community decision-making. Many suggested creating inclusive structures (youth councils, “rural youth parliaments” in villages, etc.) that regularly convene with local officials, ensuring that young people have a recognized platform to influence local policies and projects.
- **Proactive outreach by local authorities to rural youth.** Rather than expecting young people to come forward on their own, officials and decision-makers should go out to engage youth on their turf. As one respondent urged, local leaders should “*come to where youth meet to discuss matters that affect them*”, for example, by attending youth club meetings, school forums, or community events in rural areas. Such efforts would build trust and make youth feel valued as contributors.
- **Improving awareness and access to opportunities.** Respondents called for better information channels at the local level so that rural youth know about existing programs, funding, or participation opportunities. This could include local information campaigns, youth info points, or workshops on “how to get involved” in local governance. Additionally, local authorities could provide **capacity-building sessions** or mentoring for youth activists, equipping them with skills to navigate policy processes. Support in finding and applying for funding (for youth-led projects or attending events) was also mentioned. In short, invest in **educating and empowering rural youth** so they can engage effectively in their communities.

At the national level, respondents called for:

- **Dedicated funding and support for rural youth organizations.** Many urged national governments to level the playing field by allocating resources specifically for rural youth initiatives. This could mean earmarked grants, simplified funding schemes for small rural youth NGOs, or travel subsidies to ensure rural youth can attend national events. Making existing national youth funds more accessible to rural and grassroots groups (not just well-established urban organizations) is a recurring plea.
- **Formal inclusion of rural youth in national policy processes.** Respondents want to see structural mechanisms so that rural youth’s perspectives are always heard in national decision-making. Suggested measures include establishing **national rural youth advisory boards or committees** within relevant ministries (e.g., Youth, Agriculture,

Rural Development), and mandating that rural youth representatives be included in any youth consultations or working groups that the government organizes. National Youth Councils or similar bodies should actively reach out to and involve rural youth groups, ensuring the “voice from the villages” is present when shaping youth strategies.

- **Recognition of rural youth in strategies and discourse.** Several young people recommended that national-level policy frameworks (like youth strategies, action plans, or education programs) explicitly address rural youth needs. This might involve setting specific targets or indicators for rural youth inclusion, or running national awareness campaigns to highlight rural youth contributions and challenges. By incorporating rural youth into the **national narrative**, governments would signal that these young people are a priority and help dispel the sense of marginalization.
- **Investing in capacity-building and networks.** To enhance rural youths’ influence nationally, respondents suggested that government or civil society partners provide more training, exchange, and networking opportunities. For instance, national youth agencies could run leadership programs or workshops in rural areas to develop local youth advocates.
- Creating a **national platform or network for rural youth organizations** was proposed as well – a space to share best practices, coordinate advocacy, and collectively interface with government. Such a platform (potentially a digital one) could connect rural youth leaders across regions, increasing their clout and knowledge. One respondent summed it up: *national authorities should “invest in leadership, communication, and advocacy training for rural youth leaders” and facilitate a national coordination body for rural youth issues*, so that young rural change-makers are empowered and unified.

At the European level, key suggestions included:

- **Expanding transnational programs and funding tailored to rural youth.** Respondents highly value opportunities like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, and many called for scaling these up for rural youth. This could mean more EU-funded projects specifically targeting rural youth exchanges, study visits, or innovation projects in rural communities. Several suggested creating **dedicated EU funding lines or increasing grants** for rural youth-led initiatives (for example, under Erasmus+ Youth or other programs) to ensure that rural organizations can access resources for international cooperation. **Greater mobility support** was also mentioned – covering travel costs for rural youth to attend European youth events or training, so distance and cost aren’t barriers to European participation.
- **Creating a platform for rural youth representation in Europe.** A strong idea emerging from the survey is to establish a formal **European Rural Youth Platform or Council** that would amplify rural youths’ voice at the EU level. Respondents envision bringing together existing networks, such as the European Rural Youth Parliament, Rural Youth Europe, young farmers’ organizations, etc., under a coordinated platform. This body could liaise with EU institutions (European Commission, European Parliament) to ensure rural youth concerns are heard in policy debates. It would also foster collaboration among dispersed rural youth initiatives across countries. The goal

is a more **unified and influential representation** for rural youth in Europe, rather than isolated voices by country.

- **Better communication and outreach of EU initiatives to rural areas.** Many rural youth feel in the dark about what the EU offers. Thus, respondents urge the EU and national authorities to improve information channels to rural communities – for example, campaigns to publicize Erasmus+ opportunities in villages, or Europe Direct centers targeting rural youth with relevant information. Additionally, having materials in local languages and success stories of rural youth projects circulated widely would inspire more participation. One simple suggestion: provide **online workshops/webinars tailored to rural youth** on “how to influence EU policy” and how to access EU programs. This would demystify European processes for newcomers from the countryside.
- **Leveraging digital tools to connect rural youth with EU policy-making.** Building on the digital shift, respondents see an opening for more virtual engagement between rural youth and European decision-makers. They recommended using online consultations, virtual town-halls, or interactive platforms where rural youth can provide input to EU policies without traveling to Brussels. For instance, expanding the European Youth Dialogue to have specific rural-focused online sessions or creating an EU-supported digital forum where rural youth groups regularly share feedback on EU initiatives would make participation more inclusive. In essence, meet rural youth **where they are** – online and in their communities – to hear their voices in Brussels. Respondents believe the EU should prioritize rural-proofing its youth engagement by utilizing technology and targeted outreach, so that young people from remote villages can directly contribute to European discussions on equal footing with their urban peers.

Across all these levels, the survey responses convey a clear message: **rural youth have ideas and expectations for change**. They are asking for tangible support (funding, training), structural inclusion (seats at the table from local councils to European forums), and efforts to bridge the gaps (informational, digital, cultural) that currently limit their participation. These youth-informed recommendations align with the barriers and enablers they described: to reduce barriers, they suggest providing resources and access; to boost enablers, they suggest creating forums and networks for collaboration. In sum, rural youth are calling on authorities and institutions at every level to **open up channels for youth influence** and back it with the necessary support. If these recommendations are heeded, the meaningful participation of rural youth structures in policy-making – from village halls to the halls of Brussels – will not only improve in principle, but become a lived reality for the next generation of rural Europeans.