

# STUDY SESSION 2025 REPORT

Rural advocacy: building skills and empowering change-makers across rural Europe



Report of the Study Session  
Held by Rural Youth Europe

In co-operation with the  
European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe

European Youth Centre of Budapest  
16-22 March 2025



*This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe. Any contribution made to this Report can be published as an integral part of it. Reproducing or using this Report is possible, provided the source is acknowledged and the copyright holders grant permission.*

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## Executive Summary

The study session “Rural Advocacy,” organised by Rural Youth Europe in cooperation with the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe, took place from 16 to 22 March 2025 in Budapest. It brought together 35 rural youth workers, volunteers, and advocates from 14 countries across Europe to build their capacity in youth advocacy, enhance participation in democratic processes, and empower them as agents of change in their communities. The study session aimed to empower a new generation of rural youth change-makers, equipping them with skills and tools to engage in advocacy at local, national, and European levels. Key objectives included raising awareness on advocacy, youth participation, and European democratic institutions; building practical skills for meaningful political engagement; and developing rural youth advocates as future representatives in European platforms.

Participants were young people (18-28) active in rural youth work, farming, volunteering, and community advocacy. Careful selection ensured diversity in gender, geography, and experience, with a strong emphasis on peer learning and motivation to share knowledge locally.

### ***Programme Highlights***

The programme combined theory and practice through a structured learning flow that included sessions on the foundations of advocacy and the role of youth in influencing policy, explored intersectionality, rights-based approaches, and communication strategies, and featured practical workshops on public speaking, podcasting, and direct engagement with policymakers; it was further enriched by expert contributions from Marcos Andrade (EYCB), Laure Verstraete (YFJ), Daniel Grist (communication expert), Enikő Varga-Végyvári (CDEJ) and Matias Rubio (Advisory Council on Youth), with daily reflection groups supporting continuous learning and personal feedback.

Participants produced two main deliverables:

1. Two podcast episodes on rural youth advocacy.
2. A practical toolkit to support youth advocacy efforts in rural areas.

Participants concluded the study session having developed stronger advocacy and communication skills, an increased understanding of European institutions and democratic engagement, greater confidence and motivation to take action in their communities and strengthened transnational networks.

The session received high ratings (9-10/10) for its content, facilitation, and interactive methods. Participants appreciated the balance of input and practice, while suggesting minor improvements in scheduling, pre-event communication, and logistics.

## Introduction

The following chapter helps to understand the pre-conditions of the study session and the process of planning, preparation and participants selection before the event.

## Summary of Rural Youth Europe (RYE)

Rural Youth Europe (RYE) is a European Non-Governmental Organisation for rural youth. Established in 1957, it functions as an umbrella for youth organisations working to promote and activate young people in the countryside. It provides international training possibilities and works as an intermediary between national organisations, youth organisations and public institutions on a European level. Rural Youth Europe is a member-led organisation: democratically constituted and led by young people for young people.

The objectives of Rural Youth Europe are to...

- Educate and train young people and create an awareness of rural and social issues
- Actively encourage rural populations and industry
- Support the development of new rural youth organizations
- Network with other European NGOs
- Lobby and highlight the problems and needs of rural youth to focus the attention of international and national bodies, as well as the general public

Furthermore, Rural Youth Europe promotes...

- activities of rural youth organizations
- youth participation
- exchange of best practice
- intercultural dialogue
- sustainable regional youth work
- participation in the formation of (rural) youth policies
- European citizenship
- networking between rural youth organizations
- intercultural learning through participative youth work
- setting up projects to involve young people

## Background

A few years ago, the organization recognized that, even though young people from rural areas were increasingly appearing on the agendas of decision-makers, the discussions and decisions about them were not actually being made by or with young people from rural areas. In response, we embarked on a journey to strengthen advocacy capacities and actions. This journey led us to relocate our office from Helsinki, Finland, to Brussels, Belgium, in 2024, to better represent the voices of young people in rural areas.

Meanwhile, our three member organizations from Wales, England, and Scotland lost their main national advocacy body, the British Youth Council (BYC). They expressed the need to deepen their understanding of advocacy so they could protect their civic space and advocate for young people in rural areas at local, national, and international levels.

In our efforts to strengthen the voice of rural youth at the European level, we have been heavily focusing on advocacy since 2023. We began developing position and policy papers more systematically, established our first-ever Pool of External Representatives (PER), and implemented other mechanisms for external representation and advocacy. However, along the way, we realized that many of our members did not fully understand what advocacy was or how to engage in it. As a result, the need to build their capacities in this area became

increasingly urgent. For most of our members, advocacy was an entirely new world, and they were unsure how to participate in different advocacy processes, particularly at the European level.

With this study session, we directly addressed our strategic plan, which aims to empower young people from rural areas to advocate for their needs, improve their lives, and reduce inequalities. Many young people from rural areas are losing interest in a common European identity due to the perceived remoteness of European decision-makers and the feeling that their needs and concerns are not respected in national and international decision-making. Through this activity, we sought to enhance advocacy competencies and empower young rural people for active engagement. In doing so, we worked toward bridging not only the urban-rural divide but also the gap between European and local decision-making.



## Preparation

Anja Fortuna (Programme Manager at the Secretariat of RYE) took over the course director role. Spyros Papadatos, Petter Jacobsen, Stina Moen and Jana Apala joined as team members, to contribute with their knowledge and experience and willingness to learn and improve their training skills. The Preparatory Meeting in Budapest was held on the 20th and 21st January in Budapest, with Petter, Jana, Nelli, Stina, Anja and Spyros joining in person at EYCB. The preparation meeting was supported by Educational Advisor Nelli Gishyan. At the preparatory meeting we first went through the aims and objectives of the Study Session, the proposed daily flow and background content information. This gave us a good background to start working on daily session distribution, ensuring that there is a natural flow, participants can follow, learn and we reach set aim and objectives.



## Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study session was to empower a new generation of rural youth change-makers and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to actively engage in advocacy efforts at local, national, and European levels, thus fostering meaningful participation and amplifying their impact on societal change.

Objectives:

- To bring together rural young people from across Europe and to provide a space for interaction.
- To raise awareness on the importance of advocacy, European democratic processes, the institutions as well as the topic of meaningful rural youth participation.
- To build capacities and equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary so they can advocate for their needs, ideas and meaningfully participate in political processes and society as rural youth change-makers.
- To create a new generation of rural youth advocates and leaders, equipped with the needed competencies and tools to participate at the European level and become RYE's new generation of representatives.

## Participants profile and group

Our study session aimed to bring together young people who are already active—or eager to become more involved—in their rural communities as youth workers, volunteers, and advocates. We specifically sought to engage rural youth, young farmers, rural youth workers, and young volunteers, primarily from RYEurope's member organizations, aged 18 to 30 years old.

Selection was based on participants' qualities, experiences, and motivation, ensuring a balanced and diverse group. Given the study session's strong multiplying effect, we prioritized

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individuals who demonstrated a clear commitment to sharing their learning—both within the session and upon returning to their communities and rural youth organizations. We aimed to create a group that could contribute valuable ideas and experiences, fostering an enriching peer-learning environment.

To make the learning journey as dynamic and multidimensional as possible, we carefully considered gender diversity, geographical representation, and a variety of socio-economic and professional backgrounds.

The final group reflected a rich mix of experienced and emerging youth workers, ranging from 18 to 35 years old, with diverse professional backgrounds, including youth work, farming, engineering, and research. Participants came from a wide range of youth organizations and rural initiatives across multiple countries, ensuring an international perspective.

Excluding team members, we welcomed 35 participants from Armenia, Austria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, and the UK (Wales, England and Northern Ireland). Gender-wise we had 24 Female and 11 Male participants. While this is a little imbalance, it reflects the usual participation patterns in RYEs member organisations. On national level, there are more female volunteers, leaders and employees and also more participants in their activities. Due to this, there is a similar imbalance on European level. We have not struggled with the gender imbalance at this study session, as most participants had an extensive knowledge not only about their own youth work but also about their opposite gender peers. At the same time, we will discuss this topic with the network before the next study session, to ensure improvement on this area.

Throughout the session, participants demonstrated a high level of motivation, respect, and enthusiasm. They were deeply engaged in discussions on advocacy, democratic participation, and rural youth engagement, bringing valuable insights from their own experiences. Their diverse economic and socio-cultural backgrounds further enriched the dialogue, fostering meaningful exchanges and cross-border networking.

## Programme - inputs and discussions

This is the main body of the report in relation to the themes of the study session. It presents a summary of the main thematic blocks, findings and presentations in relation to the theme.

### Daily Programme and Flow

The programme began on Monday, 17 March, with an introduction to the session's framework, the Council of Europe, and Rural Youth Europe. In addition to these presentations, participants heard a speech by Marcos Andrade, Deputy Director of the European Youth Centre Budapest. These introductory presentations were followed by a get to know each other session, where participants engaged in team-building exercises to foster a collaborative environment. Afterward, the first content session explored and explained what we understand by youth advocacy, the different types of advocacies and how young people can engage in advocacy efforts effectively.

The following day, participants began delving into the connection between policymaking and advocacy, and how youth can influence decision-making processes. This was followed by a session highlighting the importance of a rights-based approach and intersectionality as key elements in rural youth advocacy. The afternoon sessions were more practical, providing participants with tips on advocacy skills and tools.

On the morning of the third day, Daniel Grist, a freelance communication expert and Communication Manager of RYE, delivered a session titled “Ways of communication: reaching out and interacting with decision-makers.” Laure Verstraete, a board member of the European Youth Forum, also led a workshop on “The role of public speaking in advocacy,” which participants found particularly inspiring. Anja Fortuna delivered a session on negotiations, while Spyros Papadatos presented engaging with decision makers. Following this, Matias Rubio from the Advisory Council on Youth at the Council of Europe conducted a session on policy priorities and Council of Europe recommendations on rural youth, identifying key issues affecting rural youth and aligning them with Council of Europe recommendations. To allow participants time for reflection and self-directed learning, the afternoon was left free. This gave the participants the time to reflect on things learned over the past sessions.

Building on the knowledge acquired during the previous days, the fourth day was more practice oriented. It began with a session where participants prepared for their upcoming interaction with policymakers. This was followed by a discussion with Enikő Varga-Végyvári, a member of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) from Hungary. Afterward, participants reflected on their session with policymakers, consolidating the key takeaways. Additionally, they received further insights from communication expert Daniel Grist. These sessions were especially important in the framework of the study session, as engaging directly with policymakers enabled participants to gain practical experience in advocacy efforts.

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to creating a podcast on that served as an advocacy tool but also as a means for discussing effective communication strategies. This session was facilitated by Daniel Grist, who is also an expert in podcast production.

Finally, the last day centred on the creation of a youth advocacy toolkit, compiling key learnings and best practices from the study session. This was followed by an evaluation session, where participants shared their reflections—not only on their overall experience but also on the new knowledge they had gained. The programme concluded with a closing session, final remarks, and certificate awards.

With daily reflection groups in the evening, we have not only ensured a continuous reflection, but also opened a smaller space for participants to share about their feelings and get immediate feedback on the sessions, the practicalities and general topics. This space provided participants with safe space to share their feelings and learnings.

Reflect on evaluation outcomes and lessons learnt:

The evaluation of the learning and sessions showed that participants found the content highly relevant, engaging, and well-structured. They appreciated the mix of theoretical input and practical activities, especially the sessions on advocacy skills, public speaking, communication, and interaction with policymakers. Participants highlighted the usefulness of hands-on tools like podcast creation and toolkit development. The non-formal methods used were effective in supporting learning, fostering reflection, and encouraging participation. Overall, the sessions met or exceeded expectations and contributed significantly to participants’ knowledge, confidence, and motivation to engage in advocacy.

## Discussions, Conclusions and Ideas

The key findings indicate that young people, particularly those in rural areas, have limited knowledge of advocacy and especially limited access to advocacy processes. Many face significant barriers to access, creating a substantial gap between them and decision-makers. The scarcity of opportunities further widens this divide. For many participants, this was their first time encountering the concept of advocacy. Additionally, many expressed a lack of support to actively engage in advocacy processes.

## Connection to Council of Europe

Our study session contributed to the Council of Europe's Youth Department priorities by strengthening youth participation, peacebuilding, and social inclusion, with a particular focus on rural youth. By empowering young people—especially those from rural areas—we fostered their engagement in political processes, aligning with the Council of Europe's commitment to revitalizing pluralistic democracy. The session also promoted peaceful and inclusive societies by enhancing young people's roles in their communities and ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making. Through non-formal education, we equipped participants with advocacy skills, reinforcing the Council's focus on youth work and democratic citizenship.

The study session incorporated key aspects of the Council of Europe's work, integrating relevant processes and engaging guest speakers. Highlights included a welcome speech by the Deputy Director of the European Youth Centre Budapest, as well as contributions from an Advisory Council member and a representative of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ).

A significant connection to the Council of Europe's mission emerged through discussions on a rights-based approach and intersectionality in rural youth advocacy. These conversations directly reflected the Council's commitment to human rights and social inclusion, ensuring that advocacy efforts are equitable and representative of diverse communities.

Practical engagement with advocacy tools was a cornerstone of the programme, mirroring the Council's emphasis on youth empowerment and active citizenship. Sessions on communication strategies, public speaking, and direct interaction with policymakers provided participants with essential skills to navigate political processes effectively.

Ultimately, the study session was a transformative experience, equipping young people—particularly those from rural and underrepresented backgrounds—with the tools to become effective advocates within the Council of Europe's broader framework of youth participation, human rights, and democratic engagement.

## Results and conclusions

There are two outcomes/deliverables:

- 1) [2 podcast episodes on rural youth advocacy and](#)
- 2) Toolkit on the topic.

Outside of this our most important outcomes are that rural communities have now more empowered rural young leaders that are motivated to do the advocacy.

## Evaluation

Participants completed an evaluation form that included questions relevant to both the Council of Europe and Rural Youth Europe. The feedback provided valuable insights into the session's impact, effectiveness, and areas for improvement.

The session received positive ratings, with **most participants scoring it a 9 or 10 out of 10**. The event's organization was highly praised, particularly its well-structured format, the balance between sessions and breaks, the engaging interactive elements and the diverse range of speakers. Attendees appreciated the diverse learning methods, including podcasts, workshops, case studies, and group discussions, which catered to different learning styles and made the experience dynamic and enriching.

### Key outcomes:

- Enhanced knowledge of advocacy, political participation, and European institutions.
- Strengthened networks and cross-border collaboration among rural youth.
- Development of practical skills in advocacy, public speaking, and negotiation.
- High levels of engagement, particularly in interactive activities like podcast creation and group exercises.
- Increased confidence in applying advocacy strategies in their own communities.

### Areas for improvement:

While the session exceeded expectations, some participants suggested improvements in:

- Refining the schedule to avoid overlap and allow more breaks for reflect
- Pre-event communication, with a preference for earlier and more structured updates.
- More structured free time, allowing for both networking and personal reflection.
- Logistical aspects, such as a wider variety of food options and smoother travel reimbursement processes.

Overall, the session exceeded expectations, providing valuable learning experiences and fostering connections among participants.

## Follow-up activities

The first step in the follow-up process will be the release of podcast episodes created during the study session. Participants will play an active role by sharing these episodes through social media and their networks, helping to amplify the key messages. Additionally, participants have developed action plans to implement advocacy initiatives in their communities.

To ensure continued engagement, the organising team finalised the narrative report and oversee the completion of the podcasts and a toolkit based on the session's outcomes. Participants remain connected via WhatsApp, fostering peer support and collaboration beyond the event.

As a longer-term follow up, it is expected that the Council of Europe will continue addressing key issues affecting rural youth in future initiatives. We are extremely happy that the Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the social, economic and political participation of rural youth was adopted following our Study Session.

# Appendices

## Final programme

### Sunday, 16 March 2025

Arrival of participants

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Informal welcome evening

### Monday, 17 March 2025

09:15 Social and content introduction

09:30 Opening with introduction to study session

10:30 Welcome words from Marcos ANDRADE, Deputy Director of European Youth Centre

Budapest

11:00 Break

11:30 Introduction to Council of Europe Youth and Rural Youth Europe

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Getting to know each other and the venue, build trust and a safer space

16:00 Break

16:30 Exploring and explaining the youth advocacy

17:30 Reflection group

19:00 Dinner

20:30 International evening

### Tuesday, 18 March 2025

09:15 Social and content introduction

09:30 Connection between policymaking and advocacy

11:00 Break

11:30 Rights based approach, intersectionality of rural youth as an element of advocacy

13:00 Lunch break

14:30 Knowledge and tools for advocacy

16:00 Break

16:30 Practical skills for advocacy from theoretical perspectives

17:00 Reflection groups

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Evening activity decided by participants

### Wednesday, 19 March 2025

09:15 Social and content introduction

09:30 “Ways of communication on reaching out and interacting with decision makers” by Daniel Grist, freelance communication expert, communication manager of RYE, United Kingdom and “Role of public speaking in advocacy” by Laure Verstraete, board member of European Youth Forum, Belgium

11:00 Break

11:30 Advocacy priorities: Policy priorities and Council of Europe Recommendation on Rural Youth, by Matias Rubio, Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe, Spain

13:00 Lunch break

14:30 Free afternoon in the city

19:00 Dinner out in the city

### Thursday, 20 March 2025

09:15 Social and content introduction

09:30 Preparing interaction with policy makers

11:00 Break

11:30 Interaction with policy makers: input by Enikő Varga-Végyvári, European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) member, Hungary

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Reflection on the session with policy makers, collecting learnings: input by communication expert Daniel Grist

16:00 Break

16:30 Creating a podcast with the content of advocacy: input by communication expert Daniel Grist

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Evening activity decided by participants

### Friday, 21 March 2025

09:15 Social and content introduction

09:30 Toolkit creation: collecting knowledge for a toolkit on advocacy (part 1)

11:00 Break

11:30 Toolkit creation: collecting knowledge for a toolkit on advocacy (part 2)

- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Evaluation the week and reflecting on new knowledge
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Closing of the study session with final remarks and certificate awards
- 19:00 Dinner
- 20:30 Evening activity decided by participants

### Saturday 22 March 2025

Departure of participants

## List of participants

### ***Participants***

Armenia / Armenie  
**Naro Ohanesyan**  
**Robert Meliksetyan**  
**Meri Chibukhchya**  
**Vahan Sargsyan**

**Uniting Bridge**  
**Uniting Bridge**  
**Youth Development Center of Armenia**  
**Youth Development Center of Armenia**

Austria / Autriche  
**Alexandra Gaisbauer**  
**Angelika Spari**  
**Kerstin Bischof**

**Landjugend Österreich**  
**Landjugend Österreich**  
**Landjugend Österreich**

Estonia / Estonie  
**Rico Rohi**  
**Ketrin Kastehein**

**Estonian 4H**  
**Estonian 4H**

Finland / Finlande  
**Kristian Sivula**  
**Saga Leppiviita**  
**Janessa Halonen**  
**Elina Adalmiina Tuononen**

**4H Finland**  
**4H Finland**  
**4H Finland**  
**4H Finland**

Georgia / Georgie  
**Ketevani Tvalavadze**  
**Lasha Araqelovi**

**Umbrella**  
**Umbrella**

Ireland / Irlande

**Grace Margaret Dineen  
Sophie Sheila O'Donnell  
Aoife Marie Gibbons**

**Macra Na Feirme  
Macra Na Feirme  
Macra Na Feirme**

Latvia / Lettonie

**Elizabete Šteinberga  
Alise Ērstiķe**

**Latvian 4H  
Latvian 4H**

Norway / Norvege

**Oline Knutsen**

**Norges Bygdeungdomslag**

Poland / Pologne

**Patrycja Mikołajczyk  
Kacper Najda  
Norbert Piotr Augustyn**

**Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej  
Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej  
Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej**

Romania / Roumanie

**Bianca-Ana-Maria Borcea**

**European Youth Village programme**

Slovak Republic / Republique Slovaque

**Katrina Turanova**

**Vidiecky parlament mladých na Slovensku**

Slovenia / Slovenie

**Filip Jernej Rebernik  
Tadej Drnovšek**

**Slovenian Rural Youth Association  
Slovenian Rural Youth Association**

Spain / Espagne

**Estefanía Líaño Pérez**

**Association La Bardal**

United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

**Caryl Morris  
Elgan Thomas  
Timothy Charles  
Lydia Gardiner  
Grace Cotton  
Eirinn Braniff**

**Wales YFC  
Wales YFC  
National Federation of Young Farmers Club of Eng  
National Federation of Young Farmers Club of Eng  
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster  
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster**

### ***Preparatory team***

Name :

Spyros Papadatos  
Petter Jacobsen  
Stina Moen  
Jana Apala  
Anja Fortuna (Course director)

### ***Lecturers***

Daniel Grist  
Laure Verstraete

Communications Expert  
European Youth Forum Board Member

### ***Course director***

Name : Anja Fortuna

### ***Educational advisor***

Name : Nelli Gishyan

### ***Council of Europe***

Name : Matias Rubio, Advisory Council  
Enikő Varga-Végyvári, CDEJ

### **Post about the Study Session:**

<https://www.facebook.com/644686104353868/videos/2175712409615691>