

Rural Youth Work 101

Advancing the inclusion of rural youth in Europe through
volunteering and rural community-building



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
22-26th April 2024



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I. Executive summary

This executive summary provides an overview of the main findings and recommendations of the study session, offering insights into the critical aspects of rural youth work and the steps needed to support and empower rural youth in Europe.

The study session "Rural Youth Work 101", organised by Rural Youth Europe in co-operation with the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe was held in the European Youth Centre of Budapest from the 22nd to 26th April 2024.

It aimed to foster the inclusion of rural youth in Europe through volunteering and community-building initiatives. Organized by Rural Youth Europe (RYE), the session gathered 32 participants from various rural youth organizations across Europe to address the unique challenges faced by rural youth and develop strategies for enhancing their socio-economic and political participation.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in activities designed to deepen their understanding of the specific challenges rural youth encounter, such as isolation, limited opportunities for participation, unequal employment and education prospects, and restricted access to resources. These issues often contribute to a sense of detachment from European identity and ideals among rural youth.

The study session equipped participants with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to improve youth work in rural areas. They developed practical solutions tailored to the unique needs of rural youth and drafted policy recommendations to address these needs. Additionally, a toolkit was created to support rural youth workers in fostering community-building and enhancing youth participation in rural areas. The event emphasized empowerment, teaching participants how to implement policy recommendations locally and use tools such as podcasting for advocacy.



Key recommendations from the study session include developing strategies to make rural youth work more inclusive and accessible, addressing the diverse needs of rural youth populations, and strengthening the organisations in terms of funding, sustainability, and advocacy by implementing best practises from their European peers. The session also highlighted the importance of promoting these best practices to enhance the effectiveness of rural youth work across Europe and supporting networking and collaboration among rural youth organizations to facilitate the exchange of ideas and collaborative projects.

The study session concluded with participants reflecting on their learning outcomes, evaluating the activities, and discussing follow-up actions to continue improving rural youth work. The collaborative environment and diverse participant backgrounds contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions in rural youth work, making this study session a successful event.

II. 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

In the last few years, especially with the European Youth Work Conventions and the European Youth Work Agenda, youth work has been particularly advancing across Europe (in different volumes in different countries). Although there is still a long road for youth work to be further established, recognized and mainstreamed, rural youth work is a side of youth work that is not given an equal amount of attention. This is a wider problem, as decision-makers or institutions tend to focus more on cities and more urban and/or suburban areas in general, as they de facto gather a bigger number of citizens, and tend to not equally focus also on more rural areas. This is further widening the gap between rural communities/rural youth on one hand, and on the other hand not only decision-makers and institutions, but also citizens from more urban areas who are usually prioritised. Rural areas are often seen not as a high priority, and that is a wider problem as rural youth are more likely to lose parts of their European identity, but also their trust in European ideals, when they feel that Europe is not as close to them as it is to bigger cities and the citizens there.

Furthermore, rural youth work can present unique challenges and opportunities compared to youth work in urban and/or suburban areas. Rural youth are facing additional challenges due to their rural background, such as isolation, limited opportunities for participation, lack of equal opportunities for employment or education, limited access to resources and ultimately their rights. Youth workers in rural areas need to be aware of these challenges, in order to

work as paid professionals or as volunteers to develop youth activities and opportunities that are relevant and accessible to the youth in their communities. Rural youth work is structurally different from urban youth work, as it has different characteristics; youth work in rural areas requires creativity, flexibility, and a deep understanding of the unique needs and challenges facing young people in these communities. With the right support and resources however, youth workers can play an important role in supporting rural youth to thrive and achieve their goals. For all these reasons, we strongly believe that this activity was particularly relevant today, and it contributed to the priorities of the Council of Europe and Rural Youth Europe, while directly empowering young people from rural areas, and ultimately further advancing the inclusion and participation of young people in rural communities.

Rural Youth Europe has a very long history of cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and in bringing rural youth issues in the political agenda and in youth policy. As the biggest rural youth organisation in Europe, with 500.000 young members, we have been working on rural youth issues since our creation in 1957. We have run study sessions with the European Youth Centres for several years now. While the previous years focussed on democratic participation, shrinking civil space, sustainability, well-being and resilience in terms of rural youth and their actions, this year focussing on the youth work done by rural youth, fits in well and helped us also to include learnings from past sessions. We were also delighted to hold the activity in light of the review of the 2017 Recommendation on youth work.

Preparation

Martin Siemen (Germany), a long-time member of the RYEurope network and former board member, took over the course director role. RYEurope Board members Nicolai Olsen (Denmark) and Fiona O'Leary (Ireland) joined as team members, to contribute with their knowledge and experience from Non-Formal Education Activities funded by the Council of Europe.

The Preparatory Meeting in Budapest was held on the 11th and 12th February in Budapest, with Martin, Spyros, Fiona and the external educational Advisor Karen Ayvazyan joining in person. It was held in a hybrid format for Nicolai, to join online.

During the meeting the team decided to invite an employee of a large member organisation to share about paid rural youth work, organisational structures in a national organisation and the cooperation between paid and volunteering rural youth workers. Additionally, we decided to have Daniel Grist (England) as an expert and lecturer to record the podcast as a visibility output and produce some media as well as taking over a session to teach the participants podcasting as a tool to follow up on the weeks learnings.

The aim and objectives and the planned outcomes got an update. The production of a policy position on rural youth work was added to the outputs, as well as some content to feed into the drafting process of the CM/Rec on Social, Economic, and Political Participation of Rural Youth.

Once those topics have been discussed, the team has put together a rough draft of the weeks programme and allocated each session to two team members. The following weeks the team members worked on the details of each session with the help of a session template including all important aspects as well as a part for the evaluation after the session was held. While we were joined by Spyros Papadatos (Belgium), the Secretary General of Rural Youth Europe, only during the Preparation meeting, we identified the need to keep the strength of the organising team and ensure a smooth further planning process. Therefore, we have started recruiting two new team members.

Alba Tema (Albania) and Lasha Araqelovi (Georgia) from the RYEurope Members network, joined the team. They have both had first experiences with non-formal education, activity planning and participated in several youth exchanges and national events before. To have a proper onboarding and exchange about the state of planning, the team met online twice

before the study session. During these meeting the decision was made, to have Daniela Hinteregger from Landjugend Österreich (Rural Youth Austria) joining as a lecturer.

Final arrangements and a check of all the planned content was done the day before the study session started. Even though the team consisted of mainly beginner trainers and facilitators, there have not been any issues in the planning and execution of the programme. The feedback provided by the participants is very positive and reflects the good team spirit and support among the organising team.

Aims and Objectives

After the preparatory phase the following have been defined for the activity:

The Study Session aimed to address and rediscuss youth work in rural areas (rural youth work) and volunteering as tools for promoting and advancing the socio-political inclusion of rural youth in Europe today. It raised awareness and built the capacities of our participants as changemakers who actively contributed to building more inclusive and peaceful societies across Europe. This is particularly important in rural areas after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The objectives of the activity were,

1. To raise awareness on the importance of rural youth work, and explore how rural youth work evolved over the last years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. To exchange ideas, experiences and knowledge among the participants in relation to, resilient rural youth work and community-building;
3. To create a toolkit of good examples and best practices of youth activities for rural community-building;
4. To draft policy recommendations on enhancing rural youth work in Europe;
5. To enable the participants to act as multipliers in their local rural communities, spreading the outcomes of this study session.

Participants profile and group

Our study session aimed to welcome young people who are active or wish to be more active in their rural communities, as youth workers and volunteers. We tried to attract exclusively rural youth, young farmers, rural youth workers, and young volunteers, mainly from RYEurope's member organisations, aged between 18 and 30 years old. The selection was done based on the qualities, the experiences and the motivation of these people and we tried to ensure as much as possible a balanced and diverse group. As our study session has a strong multiplying effect and aims at the development of rural youth work and of rural communities, we recruited participants who are motivated to transfer their learning to other participants, but also back to their communities and rural youth organisations after the study session. We hoped to compose a diverse group of participants who have experience and ideas to contribute to the study session and are able to contribute to the peer-learning of the entire group. We tried to ensure a balanced group when it comes to gender diversity, geographical balance, variety of backgrounds, and in general diversity between our participants, in order to make the learning journey as rich and as multidimensional as possible.

The final group of participants has a good mixture of experienced youth workers, from all different ages (18-35), different professional background (professional youth workers, students, farmers, engineers, accountants...) and many different youth organisations in different countries. Excluding the team members, we had 32 participants from UK (Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland), Ireland, Belgium, Spain, Norway, Finland, Austria, Slovenia, Latvia, Albania, Georgia and Armenia.

While there are several participants from the UK, Latvia and Finland due to the members structure of RYE, the participants keep mixing and exchanging in all sessions. Especially their different positions within the youth organisations were a big success. Some of the

participants were representing the employed youth workers position, some the voluntary youth workers and some just started their youth work journey and were able to give a lot of fresh inputs from the consumers side. Even if some participants had a similar role in their youth organisation e.g. National Board member, it was very interesting to see, how different their youth work is, only because of the structural differences (size, target group, age of the org., substructures) of the organisations. Gender-wise we had 22 Female and 10 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 employees and also more participants in political 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.

Basics of 'Rural Youth Work 101'

The Study Session focused on the critical topic of rural youth work, emphasizing the importance of addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by young people in rural areas. The aim was to equip participants with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to enhance youth work in their communities, fostering greater inclusion and engagement.

We explored the multifaceted aspects of rural youth work, delving into the specific challenges and opportunities that rural environments present. The activity helped the participant to identify and categorize the challenges they face in their local contexts and enable them to envision rural youth works future development.

Key areas of focus also included strategies for increasing inclusion and accessibility for diverse rural youth populations.

Practical insights were provided through lectures and the sharing of effective practices.

A significant part of the activity was dedicated to analysing successful youth work practices and identifying the key components of effective rural youth work. This analysis led to the creation of a toolkit aimed at improving rural youth work and enhancing community-building efforts. Additionally, insights from Eva Kotnik of the Advisory Council on Youth provided a deeper understanding of the Council of Europe's recommendations on the socio-economic and political participation of rural youth.

Empowerment was a crucial theme throughout the activity. Participants developed policy recommendations and learned how to implement them in their local contexts.

The session combined theoretical discussions, practical insights, and collaborative activities, aiming to empower participants as changemakers in their rural communities and also forming a strong network between them for future collaboration.

III. 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 with an introduction to the session's framework, the Council of Europe, and Rural Youth Europe. Besides several presentations and activities to explore these topics, the participants heard a speech by Balint Molnar, the director of the Youth Centre, to highlight the connection between our week's topic and the work of the CoE and the Youth Centre itself. The theme introduction was followed by a social introduction, where the participants engaged in team-building exercises and creating a collaborative environment, discussed their own concepts of youth work and volunteering, and set learning goals. The participants were very eager to already dive deeper into the topic and therefore not too excited about the number of presentations done on this day. But throughout the week, it became clear, the information was needed at this point.

After working on definitions of youth work the previous evening, the participants explored the unique aspects and challenges of youth work in rural areas in the morning after. They also shared about their own youth work done in the different organisations and levels. Participants identified and categorized challenges in rural youth work and volunteering in a playful session, defined the historical and current landscape, and envisioned its future on a large timeline. Discussions also included strategies for increasing inclusion and accessibility for diverse rural youth populations.

Practical insights were shared, with a lecture by Daniela Hinteregger from Landjugend Österreich on success factors in rural youth work and the collaboration between paid and volunteer rural youth workers, on the next day. Following this, the participants exchanged effective practices from their own experiences in a talk-show format, providing a platform for sharing best practices. To give the participants room for their learning journey, the afternoon was free.

On the next day the Participants analysed the successful youth work practices, which they have shared on the day prior. They detailed the practises and a with the help of a template and the learnings from all the other sessions of the week, they defining key building blocks for effective youth work, focussing on 6 different subtopics. This led to the creation of a toolkit to improve rural youth work and boost community-building efforts.

Next, insights from Eva Kotnik from the Advisory Council on Youth were provided, discussing the work of the Advisory Council on Youth and the drafting process of the Council of Europe's recommendation on the socio-economic and political participation of rural youth. The recommendation's draft was discussed based on identified challenges and possibilities to use the future document and process for local, regional and national rural youth work were discussed. Eva also shared some practical examples on defining policy positions and how to reach out to politicians and institutions with them.

The last day focussed on Empowerment, with participants drafting policy recommendations (connecting back to Eva's examples) and learning how to follow up in their local contexts. A workshop on using podcasting for advocacy was led by Daniel Grist. To come to a conclusion, the participants reflected on the week's activities, evaluated their learning outcomes, and contributed to improving future youth activities. The session closed with personal exchanges, fostering future cooperation, and a closing ceremony with certificate distribution.

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.

During the Study Session we have also tested a new tool called "Learning Logs" which were supposed to be used for self-reflection throughout the days and especially every evening. The tool was also used to document the participants learning goals and function as a notebook. Additional to this continuous reflection, we have opened the space for different ways of reflection and evaluation on the last day, collecting a lot of inputs for future activities and getting an impression of the learning curves of each participant.

The Evaluation showed us that the participants all had different motivation, engagement and feelings throughout the week, but have all ended the activity with a high level of satisfaction and motivation, not only content wise but also from the social/group side.

The participants favoured the storytelling and interactive elements in the sessions and enjoyed the mixture of external inputs and internal discussions.

One main point of improvement was the preparation of the local best practises, which the participants were supposed to do as a homework. The task was given enough time in advance, but the format and how it was needed during the week was not clear to everybody, therefore some have prepared too much detail and for those who did not prepare much, the efforts to transfer this content into the toolkit format were high. We concluded the preparation of toolkit templates will be done before a homework is given to the participants. Therefore, it can be much more specific and the whole process is more effective.

Discussions, Conclusions and Ideas

One of the favourite Sessions was "Professionals in Rural Youth Work", where our Lecturer Daniela Hinteregger presented her Rural Youth journey from being a long-term Volunteer to becoming project Manager at the national federation and several best practises that are in place at LJÖ. It focussed on the cooperation of volunteers and employed Youth workers and how organisations can support their volunteers to deliver successful activities and projects. The participants got inspired by the variety of programme of the organisation, which is only possible because of the strong cooperation with the regional subsections.

One can learn several key strategies from the actions of LJÖ. By offering annual training sessions on leadership, communication, and project management, the organisation demonstrates the importance of continuous skill development, which can then be applied in practical settings such as championships and campaigns. The model highlights the effectiveness of having employed youth workers handle logistics, visibility, and long-term planning, while volunteers generate most of the content and ideas. Additionally, distributing annual activities among regional subsections ensures an equitable workload and fresh input from across all regional subsections of an organisation.

Participants came from very different organisations. Those who were set up in the beginnings of the 20th century and have >10000 Members all over the country while some were only a few years old with max. a few hundred members only active in certain regions. The ones from well established organisations were not very surprised by The Presentation from LJÖ, but were able to quickly identify some actions, they can easily improve in their own work. Whereas the participants from newer organisations got very inspired and motivated to increase their organisational strength and want to try out several actions to boost their members competences and therefore diversify the organisations work.

During these discussions it was also very clear that long established organisations are often not as flexible and forward thinking, as it would be needed to cater the young members living in an ever-changing world. Mostly this seems to be caused by the "it has always worked that way"-mentality and the large structures not allowing new, young ideas to quickly getting to the upper tiers of the organisations. The members of those organisations were very happy to meet motivated young participants from smaller, new organisations and how much they are involving their grassroots members for their national campaigns and projects. The team was

convinced also Rural Youth Europe is able to adapt some of the practises that were shared. To collect policy recommendations even from grassroots members (not only the official representatives of the General Assembly Members) during this study session is one of the steps forward already.

Another interesting point became already clear on the second day, when we were analysing rural youth work issues. The participants tended to generalise the task and looked for rural youth issues in general. While this seemed to be much easier to the participants, we discussed the connection of rural youth challenges with the ones rural youth work is facing. As there is no external institution to make rural youth work happen, it is clear, that every challenge, individuals in rural areas are facing, is also a challenge to the rural youth work, which they do. Ranging from weak infrastructure to the costs of housing, the availability of jobs or the social and cultural possibilities areas have to offer. While rural youth work is initially facing all these challenging aspects, at the same time it is also one of the solutions or creates solutions to some challenges.

Not only the differences between the organisations brought chances to learn from each other, but also the different countries and contexts, the participants come from. When we discussed the policy recommendations, differences in economical strength, the size and history as well as the institutional strength of each other's home country made a big difference. In some countries the only accessible funding for youth work exists on national and international level and there is a general lack. Also, some countries lack structures, institutional and those from civil society, especially on regional and local level. In Others, youth work is mainly threatened by bureaucracy and the lack of innovation. In some countries and regions, there is a good net of local and regional youth councils where the organisations can come together to have a better impact towards politics but also exchange good practises and opportunities. While it is a very good opportunity and does not need many resources, the institutional bodies need to cooperate and accept these councils. Therefore, some time and effort can be initially necessary. Throughout the session especially the actions of civil society were discussed and exchanged, as these practises can be helpful even if your region or country is lacking funding, structures or other support. Not only the youth councils are an example for this, but also

- cooperation with schools and other educational institutions,
- regional exchange possibilities inside a national organisation,
- bigger cooperative events with other civil society organisation,
- cooperation between clubs and organisations for elderly and young people to support and learn from each other
- embrace the exchange of youth and youth work practises between partner municipalities (town twinning network supported by Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

A finding that rather frustrated the participants is about the existing issues. During the Study session we have frequently discussed issues that are persisting for long time and does not seem to improve, although rural youth organisations are constantly pushing towards improvement. These are e.g.

- lack of public transport
- lack of jobs and healthcare
- lack of cultural and social activities
- lack of fast internet connections
- the conservative image

in rural areas. The participants have also pointed out that some of these issues are directly tackled by them (e.g. jobs, cultural and social activities and the bad image of rural areas). But still the opportunities created by rural youth work stay the only ones then.

Connection to Council of Europe

Rural youth work and volunteering are crucial pillars of rural communities, differing significantly from their counterparts in urban or suburban areas. The [CM/Rec\(2017\)4 on Youth work](#) focuses heavily on traditional formats of youth work but lacks an equal emphasis on the complexities and specificities of rural youth work. With the review of this Recommendation currently in preparation, this study session aimed to rediscuss rural youth work, examining its evolution over recent years, its impact by the pandemic, lessons learned, and its adaptation into a more resilient form. Consequently, the session directly contributed to Priority 4 of the CoE youth priorities (dissemination and implementation of the CM/Rec(2017)4 and quality development and recognition of youth work) and to Priority 3 (enhancing the inclusion and participation of young people in rural communities). Additionally, it supports the review and dissemination of the CM/Rec(2017)4 process, advocating for a stronger focus on rural youth work to ensure better implementation in rural areas, beyond urban and suburban settings in Europe.

While we presented the work of the Council of Europe (CoE), particularly its youth department, at the beginning of the Study Session, we consistently revisited these connections throughout the week. When defining youth work and rural youth work, we referenced several definitions from CoE publications. Additionally, some methods used during our session were drawn from resources like Compass, the T-Kit on Social Inclusion, and the "Have Your Say" manual.

The most impactful connection with the Council of Europe was during sessions with Eva Kotnik, Member of the Advisory Council on Youth (AC). She provided detailed information about the work of the AC and the overall structure, thoroughly discussing the process of drafting the CM Recommendation on the social, economic, and political participation of rural youth. Eva ensured participants understood the document's content and the approval process while allowing them to share their perspectives on various aspects and topics covered by the current draft. Although the draft's main content was already clear, participants' input will be valuable for dissemination and prioritizing specific topics in discussions with policymakers. This involvement made participants feel more connected to the Council of Europe's work and eager to approach regional and national authorities with the Recommendation once it is passed by the Committee of Ministers, strengthening their advocacy efforts.

Several policy recommendations for rural youth work are highlighted, already in place at the CoE Youth Department and supported by the European Youth Foundation (EYF). Local authorities, national governments, and other European bodies should adopt these recommendations. Examples include funding diverse activities, providing non-formal education training, and supporting the exchange of youth workers. Once the Policy Paper is fully completed, it will become a centrepiece of RYEurope policy work, providing a robust foundation for debates within CoE Institutions.

This event not only empowered participants as advocates for rural youth work but also fostered a deeper understanding and connection with the broader goals and processes of the CoE. By actively engaging in the policy drafting and review process, participants are now better equipped to influence and implement these policies within their local and national contexts, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and supportive environments for rural youth across Europe.

IV. Results and conclusions

The main outputs defined for the Study Session were:

- A Toolkit: The toolkit contains good examples and best practices of youth activities for community-building of rural communities, so they can be used at the local level by fellow rural youth workers. This toolkit was produced, mainly from the participants, under the educational guidance of the organising team. That way, our group of participants felt ownership of the main practical output, and at the same time we ensured a diverse toolkit that can be used in a variety of different rural communities when working with young people. It was finalised and published after the end of the study session, so it is disseminated within and beyond the membership of RYE and hopefully be used by various rural youth workers and rural youth organisations around Europe.
- A Podcast: Beyond the above-mentioned toolkit, which is the main practical output of this activity, during our international events in RYEurope we usually produce a podcast, Rural Voices; These podcasts capture the event in a more interactive way from the participants' perspective, and gather the inputs and experiences of the participants. That way, other young people from our network and beyond can get a more accessible and concise understanding of the activity, so they can learn more about the activity and its outcomes and be inspired to join a future RYEurope or CoE activity.
- Policy recommendations: A set of policy recommendations are developed by the participants in the last day of the study session, right after the developed toolkit. The policy recommendations focus on the structural changes needed in order to enable a more fertile environment for rural youth work to further grow in Europe in the future.
- Inputs on the measures outlined in the draft CM/Rec on Social, Economic, and Political Participation of Rural Youth

Toolkit

The Toolkit Content was produced on the fourth day of the Study Session. The participants have already identified, what rural youth work means to them and investigated in the challenges, they face during their rural youth work. All participants had prepared a good and a bad practise from their work as a homework. They presented it to the group and discussed these practises to find the best practises for different situations. After analysing the previous sessions in a team meeting, they came up with six different topics, which have been the most meaningful to each participants youth work in the discussions of the first three days.

- Fundraising
- Project management
- Accessibility and Inclusion
- Organisational sustainability & Impact
- Visibility and Outreach
- Advocacy and Campaigning

While the discussions on rural youth work challenges and the participants practises brought up much more detailed topics, we generalised them and found umbrella terms to collect several tools for each term. While e.g. fundraising is an important topic to discuss about on its own, 'project management' combines different fields like 'communication', 'teamwork', 'resource planning', 'leadership' and 'risk mitigation'.

After detailing and pointing out the success factors of each practise, the participants selected their favourite practises for each of the presented categories, selected one, or two and filled out a template to provide all information, including background, target group, step-by-step, helpful material and success factors. Once the study session finished, we have started to gather a group of team members and participants, to put all the templates together, correct and add some parts and build the toolkit from these inputs. The layout of the finished content was done by RYEurope's Communications Manager and dissemination among the member organisations started via website ([Link](#)), social media and newsletters. As the toolkit is featuring real life examples from many different member organisations and levels, it is a helpful tool for all members of RYE, from grassroots to national level. As many tools work in a universal way, all other youth organisations are able to use it too and benefit from the experiences made in the long-established network of RYE.

Podcast

From the third day, we were happy to have the Podcast expert Daniel Grist with us, to record a new Episode of Rural Voices. He has not only recorded the session but also held several long and short interviews with participants and team members. He also took short videos and photos, to properly promote the episode. Finally, it was published 5 weeks after the activity on all common platforms. The resulting Episode was quickly shared by many of the participants and member organisations, reaching a large number of young people throughout Europe and making it the most successful outcome for the visibility of the Study Session alongside several posts done during and shortly after the Event.

Policy recommendations summary

To put the focus back on rural youth work, we have worked on a policy position for this on the last day of the study session. Reiterating the most important topics from the past days, the participants drafted recommendations for local communities and authorities, national governments and European institutions to ensure, maintain and improve the rural youth work, that is done today. The participants drafted recommendations with 3 different focusses. Actions to Stop, things that need to stay in place and things that need to be initiated.

Main topics included: funding opportunities; providing trainings, skill and knowledge development; Involving youth in political processes; support structures for knowledge exchange and travel opportunities; equality between urban and rural communities; Visibility of opportunities and reduction of bureaucracy

Funding and trainings are demanded to tackle various different topics like Mental health, culture and heritage, accessibility, inclusion and interculturality. Support is necessary for structures like (National) Youth Councils as a platform for knowledge exchange but also a good opportunity to engage youth in policy processes. At the same time exchange should be even more embraced through existing programmes and fundings, which should be more easily accessible and less bureaucratic. These opportunities should be equally available to rural and urban youth as well as to a broad age group and improve in visibility by specifically tailored communication strategies.

For dissemination of the final version, we are again looking to spread it through the usual ways for our network, but we are also proud to be included in several European policy processes to bring this position to the table with policy makers.

Contribution to the draft CM/Recommendation on Rural Youth

When planning the Study Session, we were very happy to hear, the youth statutory bodies of the Council of Europe are drafting a Committee of Ministers recommendation on Rural Youth. It was important for us, to include this into our programme and therefore we have

held two sessions with Eva Kotnik, member of the Advisory Council on Youth and member of the Working group for the Recommendation. Eva has not only presented about the general work of the AC but focussed specifically on the Recommendation drafting process. Initially we hoped the participants are able to provide good insights and some input to the drafting process, but as the draft was already presented to the joint council, the discussions held were more focussed on the understanding of the whole process, the details of the draft and which parts are worth to be emphasised and what rural youth can follow up with once the recommendation is officially approved. The participants liked to get involved in such a high-level policy process and very interested about the outcomes. While the recommendation does not only focus on rural youth work, but rural youth in general, many things that have been discussed in the first four days are relevant to the draft and connect well.

V. Evaluation

Evaluation of the study session took place in 3 different stages.

On the first day, Participants have defined expectations and concerns as well as basic rules for the week. Expectations were not only set toward the whole activity but also for the participants own contribution and learnings. Therefore, the participants all got a small handout called: Learning Logs. They have defined at least three learning goals in there, that follow the SMART-Framework and are connected to certain parts of the programme. Throughout the week participants have had the possibility of self-reflection and following the progress of their goals with various tools in the Learning Logs. Additionally, the team included daily reflection groups into the programme, where different interactive methods were used to reflect the daily learnings and overall situation in terms of facilities, programme, well-being and social aspects.

The third stage of evaluation, a collective reflection and evaluation session, took place on the last day. The team has collected different media throughout the week in a museum-like setting. The participants acted as visitors and reflected on the displayed situations and materials.

Afterwards Evaluation took place with several smaller activities and an online survey. The participants rated the single program blocks and their flow, they have drawn their mood curve, shared their individual learnings from the 'Learning Logs' and collective learnings. They also got to share some highlights and low-light with each other in a picture.

Main takeaways from the evaluation were:

- The participants favourite sessions were the ones with a high level of interaction and collaboration. No matter if it was teambuilding, exploring rural challenges or the creation of policy recommendations.
- The participants enjoyed the inputs from Lecturers and Eva. While some struggled to understand the work and importance of the Council of Europe and especially the Youth Department, it was easier to connect to that with Eva sharing her experiences and the practical example of the CM/Rec drafting process
- Satisfaction level of the participants measured in the evaluation form was pretty high. This matches the outcome of the moodcurve activity, where we were able to see some ups and downs with most participants, but a general high level of happiness on the last day. These ups and downs can also be associated with Tuckman's stages of group development and match the phases quite well.
- In Individual learnings, the main focus was on intercultural skills, communication and problem solving, teamwork, motivation, knowledge about other youth organisations and good practises in rural youth work. The good practises mentioned in the evaluation range from fundraising to inclusivity including all of the section topics of the Toolkit, approving that the team chose the right topics for it mid-week. Learning goals that were fully met are e.g. "Learn about how to practically create activities for our local organisation and improve participation" or" and "To be able to practically implement policies and frameworks on local level" and "To collect at least 3 practical examples of best practises to take home"
- As Collective Learnings, the participants have identified the differences and similarities of each others rural youth work and organisations. They have identified and discussed how to apply practises in other contexts and by comparing their work, identified weaknesses of organisations, that were not visible before. Examples of fully met learning goals are "To gain knowledge about organizations in other countries and become more aware of similarities and differences in our practises" and "To learn about the challenges rural young people from another group are facing"

- Giving the participants a homework to prepare before the study session is a good way to have more structured inputs during the event. But to avoid confusion and make sure the participants are happy with their inputs and efforts, the task needs to be very specific, not too complex and ideally there are already some examples or templates available.
- As the activity was mainly about sharing and discussing practises and experiences of participants, they have highlighted the need to staying in contact afterwards. Our approach to that is an alumni group for RYE Events but also giving the participants the possibility to join the Pool of external representatives, where they can take their learnings and knowledge to other European events together with peers from the network. Overall, an event with this focus on exchange and learning from another likely would have benefitted from a longer term than just a week-long course. A more structured approach to the follow up might have been useful

Besides the programme related feedback, the evaluation also included part about the practicalities and facilities. Those have already been assessed in the team evaluation form and is omitted from this report.

VI. Follow-up activities

During the study session we have discussed multiple times about the learnings, participants are able to take home and implement in their local contexts. With the best practise sharing and discussing sessions, the participants came up with a lot more practises, than those which are in the final toolkit. The participants inspired each other with different kinds of events and campaigns but also ideas about structural changes and long-term programmes to improve each other's organisations work. We cannot measure the impact yet, but the participants had several very specific discussions and have already started investigating, how to implement some practises back home. Examples are:

- reviewing of inclusivity of events, publications and activities
- Food schools/cooking classes for children
- Competitions and activities at bigger festivals and farming shows
- Putting more focus on the training of volunteers
- Ways to approach politicians and making them understand the rural position better.

Several other examples are listed in the Toolkit, which we are uploading to our learning platform and distributing among the member organisations. Together with the Policy recommendations we will also put a light on the toolkit on the next General assembly, to ensure a better dissemination from national to local levels.

Beyond the study session, many participants have already made plans for their organisations to stay in contact and exchange further about how they are doing rural youth work. They all became members to the RYE Alumni group ("Friends of RYEurope") where they can exchange opportunities and exchange on recent topics.

To continue policy work and keep the participants active on European level, we have also opened the possibility for all participants to join the pool of external representatives of RYE (PER). Whenever RYE get invitations to events, trainings or conferences, the PER is invited to support the board members by participating. This way we have already largely increased the level of participation of RYE in European activities within the past year and look forward to be even more active in all the different European processes and activities.

Not only the topic was meaningful to the participants. Most of them have also enjoyed the non-formal methodology. Several participants have made plans, to implement some of the methodology in their own rural youth work, as they felt it was very effective. Especially the session about inclusivity, where the participants tried to design an extra-inclusive clubhouse, was interesting for the participants to repeat back home. While some have not liked it because of the playful character, they still think of repeating it with their minor target groups. Overall, the session on outlook and follow ups was very positive and motivating.

When it comes to the follow up of our main outputs, we have a similar approach to all of them. The podcast is published on all common platforms and RYEurope's website ([Link](#)) 4 weeks after the Study Session. The Toolkit was published shortly after on RYEurope's Learning platform ([Link](#)). Postings and Stories advertising these outcomes are published on Facebook and Instagram. The main focus is on Instagram, as it is the platform with the biggest reach within the network. We have tagged all Member organisations and many of them have reposted the material. The publishing of the podcast and toolkit were also announced in the group of participants, so they were able to immediately send it to their networks. As well as commenting on it and adding personal touch to the announcements. As the podcast "Rural Voices" is a continuous element and the Study Sessions episode is already the 3rd Episode in the 5th season, it has many regular listeners, which make up the biggest number of listeners.

The Toolkit itself is designed to be self-disseminating. Members are invited, to go through the tools with their local club, regional boards and national staff. If they find a tool suitable to their current actions, it is implemented. As many of the tools have activity character, all other

stakeholders get to know the toolkit too. Moreover, we set the goal to include the toolkit wherever it fits into our next events and boost the dissemination of it.

For the Policy Paper/Recommendations we had to choose a different approach. Official Policy positions by RYEurope have always to be confirmed by the General Assembly (GA). Outstanding to the collected recommendations compared to other policy positions is the fact, that they come directly from grassroots members and not mainly from the national organisations policy-responsible or the board of RYEurope. As the next GA is already too soon, to hand in documents for approval, the document will only be discussed at the next GA and needs another extraordinary assembly to be officially published toward the end of the year or possibly next year. Still the first part of the follow-up with the policy recommendations is done. The team has sorted the recommendations after the study session and put them all together in a document to form a good base. It covers a large area of topics and give context to each recommendation. From this stage the RYEurope Board and office has created a proper policy position paper which can be presented to the GA and includes all the important points mentioned by the participants, while some new aspects are added to reflect the European rural youth work of RYE.

VII. Appendices

Final Programme

Sunday, 21 April 2024

Arrival of participants

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Welcome evening

Monday, 22 April 2024 - Introduction

09:15 Social and Content Introduction

09:30 Opening with Introduction to Study Session

Welcome by Balint MOLNAR, executive director of the European Youth Centre Budapest

11:00 Break

11:30 Framework and Expectations – *introducing participants to the Council of Europe and Rural Youth Europe, the program, defining learning goals and collecting expectations*

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Team Building adventure - *Getting to know each other and the venue to build trust and a safer space*

16:00 Break

16:30 What is Youth Work? - *Gathering participants concepts of youth work and volunteering and comparing them to existing definitions*

17:30 Reflection group

19:00 Dinner

20:30 International Evening

Tuesday, 23 April 2024 – Exploring Challenges and Evolution of Rural Youth Work

09:15 Social and Content Introduction

09:30 Rural Dimension of Youth work - *Exploring the special characteristics of RURAL youth work by comparing the youth work in the participants' home organisations*

11:00 Break

11:30 Map of Challenges - *Identifying and categorising the challenges in rural youth work and volunteering*

13:00 Lunch break

14:30 Timeline and Vision of Rural Youth Work - *Defining the past and status quo situation to envision the future of rural youth work and volunteering.*

16:00 Break

16:30 Accessibility and Inclusion in Rural Youth Work - *Recognising the diversity of rural youth and finding possible actions in youth work and volunteering to boost inclusion and accessibility*

18:00 Reflection Groups

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Quiz and Karaoke

Wednesday, 24 April 2024 - Grassroots Practises

- 09:15 Social and Content Introduction
 09:30 "Professionals in Rural Youth Work" Lecture by Daniela Hinteregger, Landjugend Österreich
Learning about success factors from practise with paid/unpaid youth workers, professional/beginner youth workers, Supporting structures and on different levels of youth work (local, regional, national)
 11:00 Break
 11:30 Spotlight: Sharing Inspirations from your own Practise
 13:00 Lunch

Free Afternoon in the city

- 19:00 Dinner out in the city

Thursday, 25 April 2024 – Measures and Frameworks

- 09:15 Social and Content Introduction
 09:30 Navigating Success: Decoding Youth Work Practises - *Defining building blocks for successful youth work by analysing, sorting and detailing the presented practises, actions, activities and learnings from the past days.*
 11:00 Break
 11:30 Creating a Toolkit - *Assembling a Toolkit with activities, actions and practises to improve rural youth work on local level and boost community building*
 13:00 Lunch break
 14:30 Empowering Rural Youth: Insights from the Advisory Council on Youth with Eva Kotnik, Member of the Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe
Introducing the Advisory Council on Youth and the drafting process of the CM Recommendation on social, economic, and political participation of rural youth
 16:00 Break
 16:30 Blueprints for Progress with Eva KOTNIK
Exploring key measures of the recommendation and generating proposals for the next draft from the defined challenges
 17:30 Reflection Groups
 19:00 Dinner
 20:30 Disco Night

Friday, 26 April 2024 – Moving Forward

- 09:15 Social and Content Intro
 09:30 Empowering Voices - *Drafting policy recommendations based on previous discussions and learning how to follow up with those after returning back home.*
 11:00 Break
 11:30 Creating Sound and Memories with Daniel Grist, freelance Podcaster
Learning about use of podcasting as a tool to advocate for marginalised groups. Reflecting the week with pictures and videos
 13:00 Lunch
 14:30 Evaluating your Learning Journey - *Harvesting Learning outcomes, gaining valuable insights and contributing to continuous improvement of Youth Activities like the Study Session*

16:00 Break

16:30 Closing - *Enabling final personal exchange and connecting the participants as a team for future cooperation; handing out certificates.*

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Free Evening and Farewell

Saturday 27 April 2024

Departure of participants

List of participants

Albania / Albanie

Redi Asabella
Anxhela Meta

Rural Youth Hub Albania

Armenia / Arménie

Vahan Sargsyan
Arshaluys Baghdasaryan

Youth Development Centre of Armenia

Austria / Autriche

Kerstin Brandstetter
Nicolas Fischer

Landjugend Österreich

Belgium / Belgique

Whoopi Samyn

Katholieke Landelijke Jeugd

Finland / Finlande

Elin Ekman
Malin Vesterback

Finland svenska 4H

Dalia Elwan
Kristian Sivula
Oona Niemi

Finnish 4H Federation

Georgia / Géorgie

Levan Nadiradze

Umbrella NGO

Ireland / Irlande

Sheila Keeshan
Joanne Marie Malone

Macra na Feirme

Latvia / Lettonie

Elizabete Šteinberga
Alise Ērstiķe

Latvian 4H

Sandra Eimane
Edgars Dzelme
Ernestis Rudzītis

Latvian Young Farmers Club

Norway / Norvège

Maria Kalliainen Kyrrø
Stona Sofie Evjen Moen

4H Norge

Slovenia / Slovénie

Mikela Ivančič
Eva Golob

Zveza slovenske podeželske mladine

Spain / Espagne

Alejandro Martinez

La Bardal

United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Charlotte Jackson
Megan Bailey

National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs

Victoria Minford

Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster

Jordan Cullen
Emily Charlotte Rose Simpson

Scottish Association of Young Farmer Clubs

Raiff Devlin
Leah Meirion Davies

Wales YFC/CFFI Cymru

Preparatory team

Martin Siemen
Fiona O' Leary
Nicolai Olsen
Alba Tema
Lasha Araqelov

Lecturers

Daniela Hinteregger

Rural youth worker

Daniel Grist

Communications and podcast expert

Course director

Martin Siemen

External Educational advisor

Karen Ayzayan

Council of Europe

Eva Kotnik

Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe

Balint Molnar

Executive Director, European Youth Centre
Budapest, Youth Department

Rosalie Levenslicht

Project Assistant, Education, Training and
Cooperation Division, Youth Department

Sulkhan Chargeishvili

Educational Advisor, Education, Training and
Cooperation Division, Youth Department

List of references used

Compass Manual for Human Rights Education: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass>

T-KIT 8: Social Inclusion <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-8-social-inclusion>

RYEurope Ideation Cards: https://www.ruralyoutheuropa.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Ideation-Cards_FullSet_printable.pdf

Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-essentials>

Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work: <https://rm.coe.int/cmrec-2017-4-and-explanatory-memorandum-youth-work-web/16808ff0d1>

List of links where information about the study session was posted online

<https://www.ruralyoutheuropa.com/event/study-session-2024/>

<https://www.instagram.com/ruralyoutheuropa/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ruralyoutheuropa/>

<https://nfyfc.org.uk/team-travel>

<https://landjugend.at/programm/young-international/rural-youth-europe-internat-seminare/study-session>

<https://4h.no/om-4h/aktuelt/study-session-2024>

Multiple Instagram and Facebook channels of RYEurope Member Organisations