

EUROPEAN RURAL YOUTH

DECLARATION 6 November 2019 Candás, Asturias, Spain

We, more than 70 young professionals from 16 countries, gathered in Candás (Spain) to discuss the most important challenges faced by youth in rural Europe. As a result of various networking activities carried out during the past 2 years, the 2nd European Rural Youth Parliament developed this declaration to improve the life of young people in rural areas. We call on European, national and local decision-makers, rural development organisations, and other stakeholders to respect the needs of the youth and to act accordingly.



Diverse Opportunities for Economic Activities

The gap between rural and urban living and working conditions is increasing. Agriculture and rural tourism are no longer enough to sustain the rural economy. Research and Development, as well as the diversification of the rural economy, have become more urgent. Social exclusion, gender inequality and unemployment are tangible challenges. The situation in marginalised areas is limiting the progress of entrepreneurial initiatives. Lifestyles have changed and with it the structure of villages, jobs, social activities and interpersonal relationships.

1. We want the entrepreneurial capacity and motivation of young people living in rural areas to be increased, through education and training, life-long learning and work exchanges, which encourage social inclusion and ensure the protection of the environment.
2. We ask for an enabling environment for rural businesses, by improving the communication of funding opportunities, creating support schemes for high-risk projects, and fostering cooperation between private and public actors.

Sustainable Farming and Food System

The current food system is increasingly putting pressure on the environment, worker rights and the viability of small farmers. Intensive farming and livestock production are widespread practices across Europe, adding to greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity decline, soil erosion and water pollution. Small farmers are losing competitiveness and power throughout the food chain. The lack of generational renewal is hindering the modernisation and adaptation of the agricultural sector in order to address economic, climate, and social challenges.

3. We call on the EU and other relevant actors to promote a sustainable, organic and safe food system as well as to support networks of farmers by improving funding methods and certification measures.
4. We demand the promotion of innovative, short food supply chains by supporting the capacity of local producers, both vertical and horizontal collaborations and increasing the value of local products.

Infrastructural and Digital Connectivity

One of the ways to make rural areas attractive to young people is to ensure accessibility. Public transportation and roads in a good condition are essential for the mobility of rural inhabitants. Rural areas, where there is less incentive for the private sector to invest in the broadband provision, remain less well connected than cities, and the take-up of ultra-fast broadband is significantly behind Europe 2020 targets.

5. We demand the increase of public and private investments for the broadband expansion and physical infrastructure that connects rural areas, to ensure equal access to public services and support entrepreneurship.
6. We demand the development of local digital strategies capable of closing the divide between urban and rural areas and preventing a further intergenerational gap in the use of digital tools, through fundraising, volunteering, and networking.

Accessibility and Quality of Public Services

There is an imbalance between the accessibility and quality of public services in rural areas. Public services, such as health care, education, social support and government administration, are being concentrated in urban centres of Europe, preventing an equal access. High-quality opportunities that would meet people needs are getting more distant. Public institutions face a lack of ability to develop digital solutions and to innovate. It is one of the cause of peoples' migration.

7. We ask for the empowerment of local decision-making institutions through multiple financial tools which enable the creation of local development strategies, high quality job opportunities in public services, and which equalise regional and urban living conditions, making rural areas attractive.

8. We demand the support of place-based policies and decision-making processes to strengthen local governance over public service development.

Civic Engagement and Political Awareness

Many young people struggle to see the potential in rural areas and rural youth activism is weak. There is a lack of confidence in the ability to make changes and to be heard by local, regional and national authorities. Youth engagement is focussed on recreational and sport activities instead of civic or political activities. Activism with the lack of support and information about civic engagement and political awareness raising activities lead to short term and non-sustainable impact.

9. We want youth to be empowered by the provision of consistent political and social inclusion, and adequate support at a national and regional level.

10. We demand transparent decision-making processes at all levels, especially on urgent policies, including climate change actions, international relations and solidarity, which are directly affecting the young generations.

The European Rural Parliament (ERP) is a long-term campaign that expresses the voice of people in rural Europe and promotes self-help and action by rural people, in partnership with civil society and governments. The ERP Youth movement serves as a platform for young people to ENGAGE in the rural development process, to CONNECT organisations and professionals across Europe and to EMPOWER advocating their needs to multi-level stakeholders.

Find out more: www.europeanruralparliament.com

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