



# Youth and young farmers' workshop

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## Group 4

### Rural youth participation in political life

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**ENRD** *Connecting Rural Europe*  
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## Main issues and challenges identified

Rural youth and rural people in general are underrepresented in political life. Urban inhabitants are often much more politically active while rural issues are not the part of their political agenda.

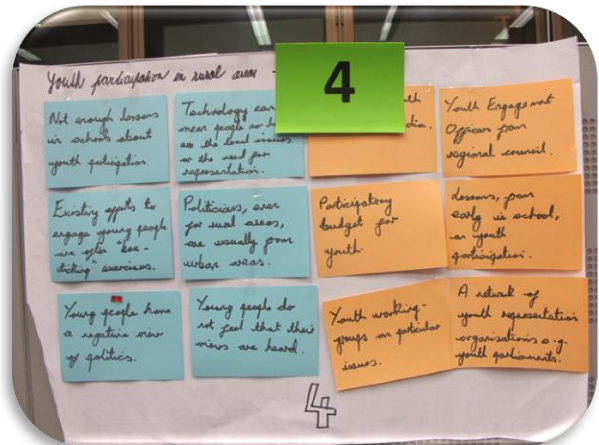
Encouraging greater youth participation in local problem-solving would improve involvement and motivate them to think about the future potential of their rural homes. By becoming active citizens, the likelihood of remaining in local areas increases.

## Main obstacles identified

The main obstacle identified is a lack of initiatives that target young people and seek to get them involved in civic activities at the local level. The initiative can not only come from young people themselves, local authorities and organisations need to get involved.

## Support needed

- ✓ School education plays a crucial role. It should be more focused on political issues and the functioning of local civic life. A number of interesting examples were raised during the discussion:
  - In Scotland and Estonia, rural/local youth parliaments helped improve young people's engagement.
  - In Estonia, the LAG around Pärnu organises meetings with youth. The meetings are advertised through Facebook.
  - In Czech Republic, LAG Sumpersky venkov has established the youth parliament within the LAG's structure. However, this parliament is not recognised by relevant public authorities and hence it does not have an official status.
  - In Sweden, a participatory budget for certain kinds of local level expenditure was developed and high school students were able to take decisions about it.



## Some lessons arising from participants' experiences

- ✓ Not enough lessons in schools about the potential benefits of youth participation in local politics. Young people often have a negative view of politics and more discussions about the value of civic participation could help to reverse it.

- ✓ Existing efforts to engage young people are often 'box-ticking' exercises, which result in young people feeling that their voices are not heard.
- ✓ Politicians, even those elected for rural areas, are usually from urban areas and in most cases do not fully understand the issues young people face in rural areas.

### **Possible action points**

- ✓ Youth engagement officers employed by local municipality/ regional council.
- ✓ A network of youth representatives, e.g. local youth parliaments.
- ✓ Involving youth in decision-making through already existing structures.
- ✓ Youth working groups on particular issues.
- ✓ School lessons on youth participation and political system in the country.
- ✓ Using modern technologies and social media to address youth.
- ✓ Lowering age limit for voting.