

Rural Areas

What are the challenges young people are facing?

Young people feel that **rural areas provide fewer opportunities** when compared to urban areas. Though many consultation reports talked of the strong connection to nature and the value of open spaces and the environment, it was felt that living in a rural real makes it **harder to realise your goals and ambitions**.

Two of the most discussed challenges were **poor transport, and limited employment opportunities**. In addition, many consultation reports highlighted poor internet connections, limited cultural, leisure, youth work and education opportunities as well as challenges accessing health care and housing. An important factor was **lack of choice** between opportunities, and **amount of travel** required to access them. Some working group reports highlighted young people in rural areas felt **less able to influence decision making** as they were disconnected from town halls and local government by distance. Some consultation reports highlighted the need for **better basic amenities** such as improved electricity and water supplies.

Many **young people find rural areas less attractive** to live in and some feel it is necessary to move to urban areas to fully realise their future goals. Unsurprisingly, those working groups that analysed the responses of rural youth separately found this issue was more important to them than those in urban areas.

What is young people's vision for the future?

Consultation participants wanted more **equalization of opportunities between rural and urban areas**, and the **development of infrastructure in rural areas** generally. They want to be able to **travel within and from rural areas** more easily and to be able to access **high quality work** and employment directly within rural areas.

There was a desire for a greater choice of, and easier access to all forms of opportunity including, leisure, education, healthcare, youth, and cultural opportunities. In most cases this meant **providing opportunities within rural areas**. However, it was also recognised this could mean providing better information about, and transport to, urban opportunities or EU level opportunities. Access to reliable internet connections was an important part of this. Some young people wanted **stronger connection to decision making** and political and administrative centres and a closer connection to government.

It was hoped **rural areas will become more attractive for young people to remain in**. In general, there was a desire to create a **more positive image of rural areas**, both for their residents and to attract tourism and investment.

What solutions did young people propose in the consultation?

Understandably, a great many consultation reports called for an **increase in the range and quality of leisure, youth, cultural, educational and healthcare opportunities available within rural areas**.

More concrete or complex proposals were:

- Developing **transport infrastructure** and roads - increasing the frequency of bus and rail services, reducing their cost and improving the quality of roads.
- **Decentralising the activities of youth organisations** from urban areas, so that they are more active with rural youth, and promotion of rural youth work generally.
- Increasing the **focus Erasmus +** has on young people in rural areas.
- Providing support and incentives in rural areas for business startups, flexible and innovative working, or entrepreneurship to create **employment opportunities**.
- Enabling young people in rural areas to **access urban opportunities more easily**, by increasing the information available on them in rural areas, and improving transport links to cities.
- Promoting **cooperation between urban and rural educational institutions**, for instance through school exchanges, encouraging Universities to establish campuses in rural areas, or scholarships for rural students.
- **Reviving rural traditions** and heritage in a youth friendly way.
- Ensuring young people in rural areas have **good quality internet access**.
- Strengthen **the marketing of rural areas**, showing the positive sides of rural life.

The Survey Data

How important is this issue to young people?

This issue ranks eleventh and fifteenth among the priorities, as rated by the young people. It has been measured by two separate items: item focusing on creating more opportunities for the young people in rural areas ranked eleventh among priorities of the young people; and item focusing on making rural areas more attractive to the young people ranked fifteenth as rated by young people.

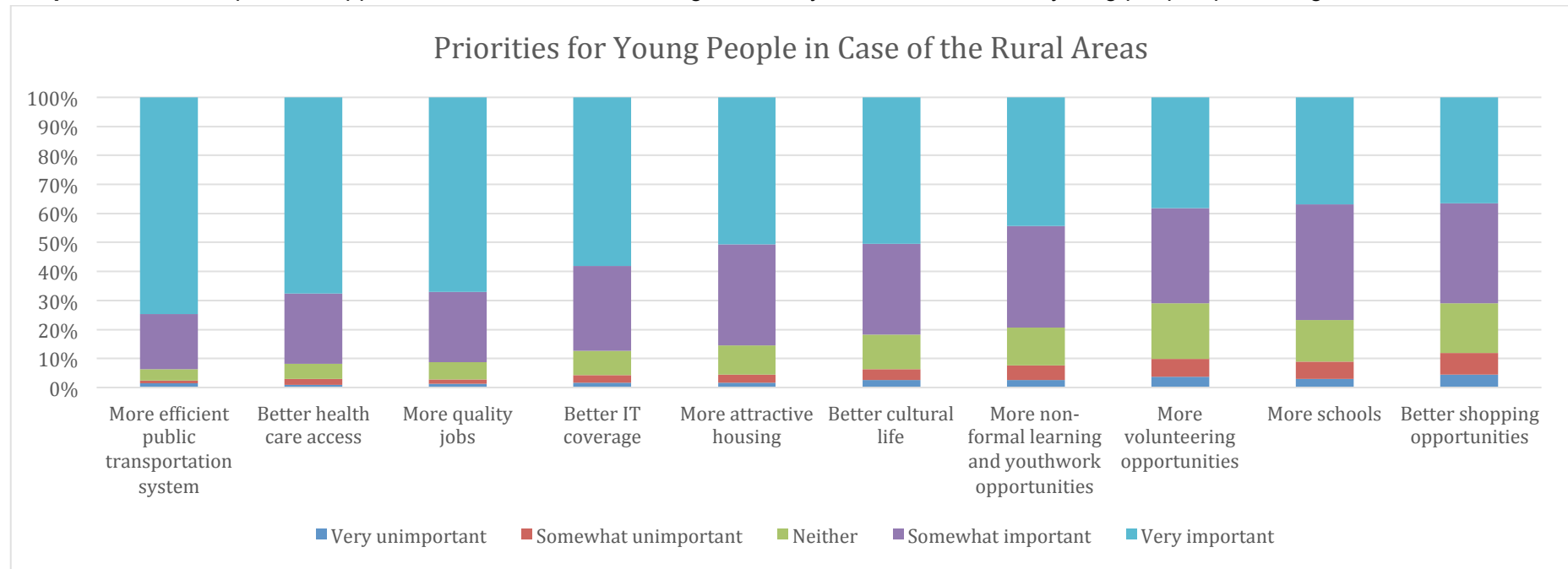
What are the priorities for young people?

Rural areas and their further development have been one of the topics of the national consultations¹. The average scores in the graph below suggest that the young people see the public transportation, health care, and quality jobs to be the most important issues in terms of improving the attractiveness of the rural areas. This finding, connected to the fact that “better shopping opportunities” came to be the least preferred priority among young people, suggests that the young people have a rather reasonable stance towards rural areas: they would not like them to become cities, they would like them to have the basic infrastructure, so that the life in such areas does not differ in basic standards from the life in urban places.

The detailed analysis in the graph below confirms the findings above: there is a rather strict distinction between the first three basic infrastructure-related points, and other priorities. The young people respect the unique nature of the rural places, but wish for the basic standards to become higher.

¹ The item read: “How important do you think the following opportunities are in order to make rural areas more attractive?”

Graph: The most important support mechanisms for increasing attractiveness of the rural areas to young people; percentages.



Where does this report come from?

This report is based on responses to consultation question ‘What needs to change to ensure young people living in rural areas are provided with the similar opportunities to young people in city areas?’ and ‘What needs to change in order to make rural areas more attractive for young people?’. These questions were developed from harvesting tools submitted at the first conference.