

Position Paper

EUSALP Youth Council 2025-2026

Galtür (Austria), 10.07.2025

The EUSALP Youth Council is an official body of the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) that aims at building bridges to enact youth-led change in the Alpine region.

The Youth Council aims to represent the alpine youth, their ideas, and their opinions in EUSALP. Its mission is to bring the youth of the different alpine regions together and build a bridge between them and politics. The proposal of concrete political action to the EUSALP body as well as the direct implementation of projects are tasks of the Youth Council. The responsibilities of the Youth Council also include consultation with the Executive Board and the General Assembly of EUSALP as well as close cooperation with the nine Action Groups of the EUSALP, to ensure that the youth's voice is heard in the decision-making process.

Finally, members of the Youth Council are invited to actively work in other projects within the EUSALP Youth framework. The EUSALP Youth Council also represents EUSALP towards other youth organisations and acts as a multiplier to widen youth integration in the Alpine Space.

This Position Paper defines the priorities of the Youth Council's work. In the following, objectives, priorities and concrete projects are defined for each Thematic Group (TG) of the Youth Council, as well as the members of the respective TG are listed. The list of reference councillors for each Action Group is annexed to the Paper.

TG 1: (Sustainable) Tourism

The Alps stand as one of Europe's most treasured natural and cultural landscapes. For generations, its dramatic scenery and vibrant traditions have drawn visitors from around the world. In recent years, however, the increasing influx of tourists has begun to place significant pressure on local communities, ecosystems, and cultural heritage. The EUSALP Youth Council believes that tourism, when approached thoughtfully, can be transformed from a potential threat into a powerful opportunity – one that fosters sustainable economic development while preserving the Alpine region's unique character. Our vision is to promote a style of tourism that honors and safeguards local culture, supports resilient local economies, minimizes environmental impact, and ensures that the benefits of tourism are shared more equally throughout the year and across the region.

Although eco and slow tourism models are often more beneficial for local ecosystems and communities, they cannot compete against bigger mass tourist destinations on their own. Therefore, our goal is to highlight attractions and Alpine eco-villages and farms that pay a lot of attention to sustainable practices, care for the environment, and promote sustainable tourism on a smaller scale.

At the same time, the Alpine regions face a critical challenge: depopulation. Many young people are leaving their hometowns for larger cities in search of education and employment, leading to aging populations and stalling economic vitality in small communities. This rural exodus is further compounded by the lack of stable, year-round job opportunities, as many Alpine towns see their economies fluctuate dramatically with the changing seasons. Ski resorts often become "ghost towns" in summer. The EUSALP Youth Council is committed to reversing these trends by creating new opportunities for young people to study, work, and build their futures within their own communities – ensuring that the Alps remain both vibrant and viable for generations to come.

To build a truly sustainable Alpine tourism model, young people must be seen not just as beneficiaries, but as active drivers of change. The EUSALP Youth Council believes in empowering youth through participation in local tourism planning, digital innovation, and entrepreneurship. By supporting youth-led start-ups, community projects, and cultural initiatives, we can unlock fresh ideas and create inclusive, year-round opportunities that strengthen the Alpine identity. Encouraging digital tools, like apps for eco-friendly travel or local storytelling, can also make sustainable tourism more accessible and attractive to the next generation.

Another thing that we will pay attention to during this one-year mandate is the so-called "Alpine code of conduct": Alpine norms that have to be respected (such as no littering on trails, saving water and energy in hotels and apartments, using refillable water bottles, etc.). For that we plan to collaborate with local tourism boards and educate young adults through our social media accounts. We will promote eco-certified accommodations and transport options.

Missions

- Promote sustainable tourism by enhancing green travel and promoting less-known regions.

- Raise awareness of eco-villages as unique, lesser-known destinations that offer authentic, environmentally friendly experiences.
- Raise awareness with tourists for responsible travel and alpine norms / behaviours (no littering, resource and energy-efficiency, ...).
- Protect alpine resources and nature.
 - Implement sustainable tourism as support for local economy and ecology.
 - Avoid mass tourism in the Alps and bring tourism back “to the roots”. Tourism should not damage the authenticity of the landscape and regional traditions.
- Promoting year-round tourism to avoid alpine “ghost-towns” off season, that respects alpine communities / inhabitants.
- Improve the attractiveness of the Alps for young people.

Key activities

- Initiate cooperations with new Interreg Alpine Space projects.
 - Focus on 3.2 (digitisation) and 1.2 (protection of nature).
 - Check which projects got selected and contact them for possible cooperation).
- Contact AG2 to get involved in suitable projects.
- Collaborate with AG3 on “Discover Mountain Jobs” and possible future projects.
- Contact AG5 and participate in / contribute to the final Smart Community Conference in Freiburg (Germany).
- Create a network between young alpine clubs to support the missions above.
- Organise more field visits with relevant actors focussing on sustainable tourism.

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TG 2: Mobility and Connectivity

Transportation is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union and in the alpine region. Therefore, it is very important for us to be able to travel sustainably and limit our carbon footprint. However, we note that it is for the moment difficult to move without a car in a lot of mountain areas. We note that traveling across borders is often hindered by a lack of coordination between national and regional transport providers, resulting in poor connections and incompatible ticketing systems. Initiatives like EU-wide interoperable ticketing systems (e.g., digital mobility passports) could significantly ease cross-border travel. We therefore support actions to unite the systems and make it easier for inhabitants of the alpine regions to switch to public transport instead of using motor vehicles.

Young people in the Alps are often overlooked when it comes to mobility planning. Not all young people own a car and train travel across the Alps can be too expensive for many. Several promising initiatives already exist to improve the affordability of public transport for young people. The Youth Caliceouncil supports these initiatives. EUSALP should encourage offering advantageous prices on public transport passes for all students and workers.

In general, we should promote the use of public transport by strengthening the offer, increasing connections and simplifying the booking / information process. As rail is currently the most efficient way of transport, the railway infrastructure has to be updated by constructing new railway lines and improving existing ones. Examples of trains designed for local mobility are already being studied in several European countries and could serve as a source of inspiration (local train solutions, such as battery-powered or hydrogen trains, are being piloted in countries like Germany and Austria and could serve as models for the Alpine region). Nevertheless, it must be stated that all types of transport should be made appropriately sustainable in the Alpine regions.

The Youth Council therefore supports the electrification of railway, tram and trolleybus lines and the implementation of actions aimed at reducing the environmental impact of vehicles. As well as strengthening the presence of charging stations in our mountain regions that remains highly unequal and varies significantly from one country to another. Additional actions should include the promotion of energy sources with a lower life-cycle environmental impact and promoting the use of lightweight vehicles, which not only emit less CO₂ per kilometer but also enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

In Europe, human capital is the key resource for safeguarding our standard of living. The Youth Council advocates a dedicated mobility framework that is linked to clearly defined research projects and designed to intensify personal exchange among scholars in the Alpine region. Direct, on-site interactions bind researchers emotionally to their joint project, accelerate the transfer of tacit knowledge and consolidate networks of excellence that digital formats cannot reproduce. To this end, host institutions—universities, laboratories and cultural research centres—should provide a limited number of low-cost sleeping facilities for external project partners, while an interoperable “science pass” subsidises public transport for journeys undertaken expressly in connection with an approved research endeavour. By lowering financial barriers and anchoring every journey to a concrete scientific objective, the concept brings people, knowledge and innovation together, thereby amplifying both the quality and the impact of Alpine research collaboration.

Missions

- Foster stronger cooperation among European mobility stakeholders to develop an integrated transport network that minimizes inefficiencies and enhances the attractiveness and efficiency of both public and freight transportation.
- Engage with mobility stakeholders to explore strategies for increasing the appeal of public transportation, with a specific focus on developing offers and incentives tailored to young people.
- Develop and implement a cross-border Alpine Youth Ticket, inspired by the ALPTICK initiative, in collaboration with CIPRA Youth Council, EUSALP, the European Union, and relevant stakeholders.
- Collect and analyze mobility data across the Alpine region, while ensuring full compliance with GDPR to inform public transport agencies and support evidence-based policy decisions.
- Promote public transport as the preferred mode of travel for young people exploring the Alpine region, highlighting its affordability, sustainability and accessibility.
- Begin planning a unified Alpine transport platform with real-time GPS, cross-border ticketing, multilingual support and integrated pricing. Partner with existing platforms and promote features like crowdsourced updates and sustainability rewards.
- Support for national authorities to promote innovative transport solutions for small railway lines, such as the DRAISY and TELLI projects in France.
- Build a network of Alpine institutions that mutually provide subsidised travel and low-cost beds for project-based researchers, strengthening face-to-face exchange and rapid knowledge transfer.

Key activities

- Improve the efficiency of EUSALP events by providing a car sharing document and support for alternative journeys.
- Support Pitch Your Project initiative in relation with the mobility topic and help them to reach their goals.
- Support the expansion of the “YOALIN” project.
- Support AG4 in planning and organizing the EUSALP mobility conference 2025.
- Foster topic-based collaboration between AG1 and AG 4. Conducting an availability survey of eligible institutions and compiling the results in a shared database.

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TG 3: Alpine resources and risk governance

The Alpine region is full of diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and unique ecosystems: it is a treasure waiting to be explored. It is a place where tradition meets modernity and where nature inspires communities.

The Alps are experiencing variability of precipitation and significant temperature variations, changes that can influence water availability, flood patterns and ecosystem balance. Yet the region is also a testing ground for innovative adaptation and sustainable practices. By diversifying renewable energy and fostering local energy networks, mountain communities can stabilize supply while cutting emissions. At the same time, improved monitoring and warning systems, climate-proofed infrastructure and ecosystem-based land management bolster preparedness and buffer hazards. Layered on top of these measures, cross-border cooperation, community engagement and dedicated research initiatives unlock the Alps' rich social and natural capital, offering a generic blueprint for risk reduction, energy transition, adaptive planning and resilient development in mountain regions everywhere.

Our goal is therefore to bridge the gap between young people and the Alpine region by implementing innovative initiatives that engage, educate, and empower on nature-based solutions, risk reduction, and cultural heritage preservation. We aim to create a vibrant and sustainable future for the Alps, where young people are at the forefront of shaping its destiny. By doing so, we can inspire future generations to become active stewards of this precious environment.

To strengthen this connection, we aim to empower young people to become active participants in shaping the future of the Alpine region; we can ensure its cultural and natural heritage is preserved for generations to come.

Furthermore, in relation to risk management, the intention is to collaborate with the relevant authorities already present in the area to promote the dissemination of good practices in the event of a disaster as well as to involve young people in voluntary activities that are part of the Civil Protection.

Missions

- **Strengthen Risk Awareness:** Empower youth to engage more deeply with the Alpine resources and associated risks by using social networks, setting up events or organizing educational classes.
- **Support Environmental Care:** Raise awareness amongst the young people about significant ecological issues in the Alps and inspire them to take up practices that would help the cause.
- **Increase Youth Involvement:** Ensure that youth who have developed ideas can communicate them and be involved in the decision-making process in relation to the Alpine policies, ensuring the voices of young people to be heard.
- **Working and Cooperating** with the EUSALP's Action Group, especially AG6, AG7, AG8, AG9 but furthermore also with the Alpine Convention, CIPRA and CIPRA Youth Council, DG REGIO (European Commission), Interreg Alpine Space and other Interreg programmes, the EUSALP TSS, Department of Civil Protection, other entities and all related bodies.

Key activities

- Participate in AG6's 2nd Landscape Conference in autumn 2025.
- Engage with AG7 to identify opportunities and shape a path toward future joint initiatives.
- Collaborate further with the Task Force of AG8 on the themes of climate change adaptation (CCA) and risk governance.
- Partner with (local/regional) entities, cultural institutions, natural parks and influencers to engage and make youth aware on the Alpine resources and connected risks through a social media campaign focused on risk awareness, preparedness and resilience, events and educational programs.
- Engage with ongoing or future Interreg projects linked to this topic.

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TG 4: Education, Soft Skills and Digitalization

The Alpine region faces unique challenges in aligning its education systems with the needs of the local labor market, particularly in key sectors such as tourism, agriculture, environmental sustainability, and digital innovation. To ensure that young people in the region are equipped with the right skills to succeed, it is essential to foster collaboration between youth, educational institutions, and industry leaders. This initiative focuses on bridging the gap between education and the Alpine labor market by enhancing digital literacy, promoting sustainable practices, fostering soft skills development, and increasing the attractiveness of the region for students and young professionals. This year, we're particularly addressing the pressing issue of young people forced to leave their hometowns because of a lack of local higher education facilities. By working closely with EUSALP's Action Group 3, local organizations, and international partners, we aim to create synergies that empower youth to become leaders in the Alpine economy and stewards of its natural resources.

Missions

- Promote the decentralization of higher education facilities: Enable young adults to remain in Alpine areas while accessing quality educational opportunities without compromise.
- Align Education with the Demands of the Alpine Labor Market: Adapt the educational system in the Alpine region to better match the skill requirements of the local labor market, with a focus on digital skills, sustainable practices, and soft skills.
- Strengthen Collaboration on Dual Systems and Mountain Jobs: Collaborate closely with AG3 on dual education systems and the "Discover Mountain Jobs" project to provide hands-on learning opportunities that are directly aligned with local job prospects.

Key activities

- Host a Collaborative Event with AG3: Organize an event with Action Group 3 to promote the decentralization of higher education facilities by showcasing best practice examples from the Alpine territory to politicians and stakeholders.
- The event will be complemented by a dedicated educational fair designed to empower high school students from rural areas or small Alpine villages by connecting them with higher education opportunities within their region. Universities and institutions will showcase their programs, highlighting the diverse, high-quality educational paths available close to their home. The fair will be further enhanced by a university field visit, providing students with a firsthand experience of campus life and academic facilities, thus making the option of pursuing local higher education more tangible and attractive.
- Search and highlight innovative educational programs from other mountain countries that can be applied in the Alpine region to make it more attractive for students and young professionals.

- Collaborate closely with AG3 on dual education systems and the "Discover Mountain Jobs" project.

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Annex: Youth Council contact points for each Action Group

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