

Press Release

Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week: The Voice of Youth for the Future of Europe

Vrtojba, Izola, September 16, 2025

During this year's Mediterranean Coast and Macro-Regional Strategies Week (September 15–17, 2025, Izola), special attention was given to young people. At the *Young Minds, Solutions for Europe – Voices from EU MRS Youth Council Members* forum, they presented their ideas and initiatives for the future of Europe. The content of the forum was shaped in collaboration with the Primorski Technological Park, which develops the POPRI program at both the national and international levels. This program enables young people to turn their ideas into concrete projects by acquiring entrepreneurial skills.

The event offered young people a space to directly address decision-makers, exchange experiences, and showcase how their projects can contribute to a more sustainable, innovative, and inclusive Europe. Among the panelists were also talents who began their journey at the national **POPRI** competition and continued at the international **POPRI EUSAIR** competition, led by the Primorska Technology Park. This confirms the importance of supporting young people on their entrepreneurial path.

The panel brought together youth representatives from the **EUSAIR, EUSALP, EUSDR, and EUSBSR strategies**. The discussion was moderated by hackathon-winning tech innovator Oliver Majer, and it clearly demonstrated that young people have the vision, experience, and knowledge to shape the future.

Challenges for Enterprising Youth

Elias Arndt (Germany, EUSBSR) emphasized that young founders often struggle to gain credibility and access to the right business partners. He proposed more mentorship programs, cross-border initiatives, and startup competitions that would enhance networking and visibility.

Lana Rakovec (Slovenia, EUSAIR) highlighted the lack of early-stage financial mechanisms. In her opinion, pre-seed instruments and more favorable conditions for setting up companies are necessary to reduce costs for young people with ideas but without income.

Pejo Bosnić (Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUSDR) pointed out that many funding programs are inaccessible to young people. He advocated for accelerators without capital requirements, more local support, and recognition for mentors who help other entrepreneurs.

Tommaso Barbesino (Italy, EUSALP), as the founder of a green startup, stressed the challenges of accessing funding and cross-border networks. He called for dedicated schemes for green startups, better connections with universities and schools, and greater inclusion of youth in sustainable initiatives.

What Do Enterprising Young People Need?

Easier access to financing in the early stages: Most young people face high startup costs and limited opportunities to secure initial funds. They point out that existing calls often require an established company and revenue, which beginners do not have. They suggest new forms of seed financing and support schemes that allow young people to start without premature financial burdens or relinquishing ownership.

Access to networks and advisors: Young people often lack connections with decision-makers, investors, or business professionals. They need opportunities for networking, cross-border collaboration, and advisors who open doors to the market.

Proper support for development: In the early stages, they lack spaces to test prototypes, affordable co-working spaces, and specialized accelerator programs where they can try and develop their ideas in a supportive environment.

Young discussants shared personal experiences ranging from struggles with gaining trust as beginners to battles with bureaucratic processes and high startup costs. The shared message was clear – Europe needs support structures that enable young people to experiment, learn, and grow without excessive risks in the earliest stages.

Young People Should Co-create the Future

For years, the Primorska Technology Park, through the POPRI initiative, has been creating opportunities for young people to develop their entrepreneurial ideas, gain experience for the future, and connect with others. **Director Tanja Kožuh** emphasized at the closing: “At Primorski Technological Park, we believe that young people are the drivers of change. Their experiences clearly show that at the European level, we need to create conditions where ideas have the chance to grow, and young people have the opportunity to turn them into real solutions. This is not only about building entrepreneurship but also about shaping the future of Europe, making it more innovative and resilient.”



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