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About YouAct

YouAct: Our History and Vision

YouAct was founded in 2004 to strengthen and unify the voices of European youth advocating for the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In the initial years of YouAct’s existence, the organization was focused on supporting youth-leadership, establishing a network across the Council of Europe member states, and building the capacity of young people to engage in high-level advocacy at the community, national, regional and international levels.

In 2009 YouAct became an independent youth-led not-for-profit NGO registered in the UK. In the first 3 years of independence, YouAct members and staff focused on laying the groundwork for a sustainable youth-led NGO, while ensuring that young European SRHR advocates had access to platforms on multiple levels from which to advocate for the advancement of young people’s SRHR. Continuing to deliver youth-led trainings and capacity building activities ensured that youth advocates had the skills and confidence necessary to fully utilize these high-level spaces.

Four years onwards, YouAct has supported many European and international youth to effectively advocate for young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights; in the first 3 years of YouAct’s independence alone the organization trained and empowered over 300 youth advocates. Furthermore YouAct’s network of partners in regions across the world has expanded to ensure greater coordination of advocacy efforts and sharing of knowledge.

Executive Summary

In 2013, we stand on the base of these achievements as we continue to advance activities in accordance with our strategic plan, which looks forwards towards 2015. Our strategic plan coincides with the run-up to 2015, during which a number of key milestones relating to the advancement of SRHR through international development frameworks take place. These include the 20th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development as well as the review of the Programme of Action, the target date for the Millennium Development Goals, and the formulation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. It is clear that beyond 2014/2015 new development frameworks will emerge which will provide the basis of our international advocacy efforts for sexual and reproductive health and rights.
As these processes are already in motion, this is a crucial time for YouAct to unify and build the capacity of youth voices to meaningfully participate. In 2013, YouAct delivered training to young people on navigating these processes and identifying the entry points for youth engagement.

YouAct will continue to fulfil its mandate by uniting young people and youth-led networks in Europe towards furthering the realization of youth SRHR through cooperation and joint advocacy activities aimed at influencing governments, the European Council and the European Commission during the process of agreeing a common European position towards the ICPD+20, MDG+15 and Beijing +20 ad Rio+20 processes.

Alongside our work on the regional and international levels to ensure the SRHR of our peers in the Global South are realized, we recognize that gaps remain in the realization of young people’s SRHR in Europe, as well. In terms of national and European level advocacy, YouAct continues to focus on four key areas, identified by our members, as essential to securing the sexual and reproductive rights of youth in Europe.

These include: the right of young women and girls to access to safe and legal abortion, the right of adolescents and youth of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities to live free from violence and discrimination, the need for effective and rights-based comprehensive sexuality programmes for young people across the EU, and the right of young people to participate meaningfully in the design, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes that impact their lives.

We continue to welcome strong youth voices to our membership, and bring our members together to review strategies for achieving aims, receive training according to needs identified, share knowledge, make strategic recommendations for the efficacy of our network, and develop projects and teams for carrying this work forward.

YouAct’s work on the international, regional, national and community levels, continues to be informed by our firm equality-driven approach. YouAct continues to recruit members in an effort to build an organization that is ever-increasing in its diversity by reaching out to progressive youth of all genders, sexes, ethnicities, levels of ability, migration statuses, races, nationalities, socio economic statuses, health and HIV statuses. We involve and empower youth advocates from marginalized communities, and worked to enhance awareness that the term ‘youth’ refers to a group of immense diversity, in order to build a cohesive network of highly knowledgeable and skilled young people who can carry forward youth-led sexual and reproductive health and rights advocacy efforts in Europe.

- The YouAct Steering Committee, 2013
Strategic Highlights

International Advocacy

The fast-pace of developments relating to the Post-2015 process, and the need to respond, impacted on YouAct’s planned activities for 2013, particularly regarding our work on the international level. In 2013, member States, youth and NGO stakeholders globally mobilised around two important processes: review of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Both the SDG and Post-MDG processes have poverty eradication within the context of sustainable development as a primary objective, with the aim of using a global goal framework to achieve this. Throughout 2013, there was growing consensus among many stakeholders that the two processes should be brought together to create one framework. The pre-existing format of two separate processes presented challenges to delivering an inclusive, open and transparent process, as distinct processes can create confusion and inefficiencies. I

The UN Special Event to review the MDGs, which took place in September 2013, indicated that the MDG Review Process, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process, and the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, should be merged. The three stands will come together into an intergovernmental process due to reach agreement in September 2015. YouAct has been participating by working with the Major Group on Children and Youth (MGCY) on key statements and advocacy points, and through working in members’ national contexts to reach our to relevant ministries and UN missions in advance of meetings of the Open Working Group.

We have also worked to establish links with other organizations and networks that are engaged with these processes to work more effectively in partnership. For example, one of YouAct’s steering committee members represents YouAct on the SRHR Platform (or Civil Society Platform to Promote SRHR Beyond 2015) which seeks to unite the SRHR community in developing common asks for the Post-2015 process, with the aim of ensuring SRHR is meaningfully included in the Post-2015 development framework.

In 2013 YouAct continued to heavily engage in the process of the 20-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. In June, YouAct was invited to join the UNECE Regional Youth leadership Working group, which partnered with UNFPA’s Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional
Office (EECARO) on coordinating the agenda, and inviting participants for a Regional Youth Forum held in Istanbul. During the forum, YouAct’s Coordinator delivered a presentation on the significance of the Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration for the ICPD Review Process. YouAct members also facilitated sessions devoted to developing a youth statement, to be presented at the United National Economic Commission for Europe’s Regional ICPD Review Conference in July. YouAct members also served on the drafting committee tasked with synthesizing the final statement, the UNECE Youth Call to Action: http://bit.ly/QEUbHm

In July, YouAct worked with a delegation of young people attending the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) conference, and YouAct’s Coordinator delivered an intervention on behalf of the youth delegation to the conference’s opening plenary: http://bit.ly/1liq2WN. The interventions delivered by the youth delegation were noted and supported vocally by UN ECE Member States in their statements to the plenary. During the conference, YouAct worked with representatives from member states including Austria, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Finland and Poland to advocate for a progressive outcome document. Afterwards, YouAct worked with partners to develop an analysis of the proceedings and outcome. After concerted advocacy efforts on the part of many stakeholders, the UNECE Regional Conference resulted in a progressive Chair’s Summary which contained progressive language on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of individuals; achieving gender equality; reducing legal and regulatory barriers to safe and legal abortion; eliminating barriers to services including age requirements, marital status, and parental or spousal notification or consent; reaffirming the centrality of a rights-based approach to development; recognizing the evolving capacities of young people and adolescents; and ensuring equality before the law for all.

Immediately following the conference, YouAct participated in a meeting of civil society organizations “ICPD Beyond 2014 – From promise to Action, CSOs Defining the Way Forward.” YouAct joined over 70 participants in assessing the ICPD review process and strategies towards 2014. YouAct was invited to deliver a presentation on youth-led strategies towards 2014/2015, and collaborated with members of Choice for Youth and Sexuality, YSAFE, Star Star and Action Canada for Population and Development in delivering a presentation, and facilitating a question and answer session with participants.

The key challenge on the horizon regarding this process remains ensuring the outcomes of the ICPD Review Process, which have been largely progressive, are carried forward into the 2014 Commission on Population and Development (CPD), the Secretary General’s Report in 2014, and crucially, into the Post-2015 Process.
YouAct was present in key spaces during 2013, which provided opportunities for linking and learning. YouAct connected with international partners, many of whom partner with us on global advocacy activities, during the Women Deliver 2013 conference in Kuala Lumpur in May. Two YouAct members participated, one of whom received a scholarship to participate, and was selected by Women Deliver as one of their 100 young leaders. YouAct members worked together on a youth conference report, which was shared through the EuroNGOs newsletter. YouAct also participated in the 2013 EuroNGOs conference in Berlin, Germany in October, where guest speakers from UNFPA, the High-Level Task Force on ICPD, and UN Major Groups shed light on the present and future of the Post-2015 process.

**Regional and National Advocacy**

Since 2011, YouAct has worked with regional partners on a project led by Rutgers WPF aimed at addressed Youth Sexual Aggression and Victimisation (YSAV). In the first quarter of 2013, YouAct members worked with Rutgers WPF to develop plans for a youth pre-conference event to coincide with a regional conference aimed at bringing together experts and stakeholders from European countries to connect, share knowledge, and discuss possibilities and priorities for action on the issue of YSAV.


During the YSAV conference itself, YouAct members led workshops focused on meaningful involvement of young people in research and advocacy to address youth peer-to-peer sexual violence and coercion. The workshop consisted of several aspects, including a presentation of best practice examples of campaigns and initiatives in Europe that addressed sexual violence and coercion occurring among youth, taking into account the diversity among youth. The session also revisited key recommendations from the Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration relating to the meaningful participation of young people, and the importance of involving youth in campaign development, to ensure that campaign messages are credible to young people.

The workshops also aimed to bring the discourse back to the real experiences of young people. In advance of the conference, YouAct collected anonymous stories from young people, in which they shared their first-hand experiences of the realities of sexual violence and coercion. These arresting stories were read, and recoded by other youth, and the 6 resulting
audio clips were played for workshop participants. A YouAct member was also selected as a speaker for the event’s closing panel, “Acting Against Youth Sexual Aggression and Victimisation in Europe.”

In April, one of YouAct’s Steering Committee members joined the YSAV project Coordinator in speaking about peer-to-peer sexual violence during the 13th session of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Network to Stop Sexual Violence Against Children. Together, they presented research, outcomes and recommendations from the project, and fielded questions from a group of 45 parliamentarians. YouAct effectively communicated key messages on the importance of access to SRHR services, and comprehensive sexuality education that emphasizes gender equality and human rights. The inputs were well received, and a YouAct has since maintained contact and continued the conversation on these issues with one of the parliamentary network’s members from Germany.

In July and August, YouAct held its Annual General Meeting in Dublin, Ireland alongside a YouAct training and planning meeting, “Young People Call for Recognition and Change at a Policy Level.” The training focused on examining policies on sexual and gender-based violence, which do not effectively take adolescents and young people, as a specific group, into account. The meeting also aimed to build the capacity of youth participants to advocate for rights-based policies and programmes for youth. Eight training modules were developed to support participants in understanding how European political structures work, including the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, and to advocate more effectively within these structures.

The outcome of this meeting was a small advocacy campaign focused on calling for Members of the European Parliament and national-level decision makers to prioritize efforts to address youth peer-to-peer sexual and gender-based violence and coercion. Key calls centred on the importance of comprehensive sexuality education in preventing violence, and the provision of a full, integrated package of person-centred services for young survivors of violence, which must be free of legal, social, regulatory, and other barriers.

Evaluation of the training showed a significant increase in advocacy competencies and skills among participants, but perhaps the best measure of the training’s success was the quality of follow-up activities where participants put their skills into practice. These national-level advocacy activities resulted in young people across 6 European countries contacting their MEPs and receiving supportive statements in response to the campaign, concrete commitments from decision makers to follow-up on our asks, and several face-to-face meetings where young people and their MEPs had the opportunity to speak in-depth about the issue.

Participants reached at least 29 decision makers (23 MEPs and 6 national-level decision makers) across at least 6 European countries, with special attention to MEPs on the following Parliamentary Committees: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), Culture and Education (CULT) and Development (DEVE), as well as the European Parliament’s Subcommittee on Human Rights. Participants also returned to their national contexts to deliver peer training to raise awareness of the issue of sexual and gender-based violence among a wider audience of young people, and to inspire other youth to take action by contacting their decision-makers.
Finally, in July and August, YouAct held its 2013 Annual General Meeting (AGM). As our first face-to-face AGM since 2011, this provided a crucial opportunity for members in Europe to come together, exchange valuable information and experience, revisit and confirm consensus around YouAct’s position papers on key issues, and receive vital trainings on 2014/2015 processes, a crash-course in UN advocacy, and time to strategize towards 2014/2015. In advance of the AGM, we also held our annual recruitment round and welcomed two new members, from Poland and Slovakia, during the meeting.

YouAct furthered its advocacy at the level of the European Parliament in October and December by conducting advocacy activities around the SRHR Report proposed by Portuguese MEP Edite Estrela. YouAct mobilised members, alumni fellow youth organizations, participants from previous trainings, and facebook followers in writing to over 100 MEPs highlighting why voting for the report was important to building consensus in Europe on the importance of realizing young people’s sexual and reproductive rights. This was further emphasized through a series of ‘tweet-a-thons’ preceding key meetings and voting dates, where YouAct members used social media as an advocacy tool. YouAct also mobilized YouAct alumni, previous participants from YouAct trainings, and other youth organizations and youth constituencies in advocating for passage of the report. Unfortunately, the report was replaced by a resolution, tabled by the centre-right European People’s Party. The original report was defeated by 7 votes.

At the end of 2013, YouAct met with partners in the Netherlands to embark on an exciting new project: European Dialogue for Youth Rights. The project brings together four youth-led organizations, and aims to support young people to initiate dialogue with their decision makers on key youth issues. In advance of the European Elections next year, YouAct will be leading on training activities, coordinating and supporting youth advocacy efforts in 7 European countries, and organizing a meeting between Members of the European Parliament and young advocates.

Operating Highlights

In 2013 YouAct continued to build organizational capacity in accordance with the outcomes of an internal capacity assessment carried out in 2011. In January, further updates to YouAct’s Principles and Values documents were reviewed and approved by Steering Committee members, along with a revised recruitment procedure, and new and updated position papers on key issues. In February, YouAct conducted review and revision of its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Tools to improve on how we capture and report on project
outcomes. In August, YouAct submitted new Articles of Association, which were adopted by our directors, and accepted by Companies House.

In the context of the recession in Europe, financial sustainability remains a high priority for YouAct. In 2013 we submitted multiple applications for project-based funding, and are pleased to report that all were successful. Core-funding remains a challenge for YouAct, however, our fundraising task force remains active in seeking-out new opportunities for grants and donations to cover core costs.

Transparency is a fundamental value of our network. In this spirit, our monthly Steering Committee meetings, during which key decisions are taken regarding the direction of our network, have been opened up to all members who wish to participate. Detailed minutes are also circulated to the full network.

As a European network with members from across the Council of Europe member states, YouAct has been researching new ways to facilitate more effective communication between our youth advocates. In August, we received sponsorship, as a not-for-profit, for a new communications platform, which operates through a cloud-based communications system. This online work platform allows our network to collaborate through a series of custom-built apps that give structure to our processes and projects, galleries, discussion forums, and news bulletins.

Within our membership, YouAct continued to issue bi-weekly news updates and opposition digests. Beyond internal communications, YouAct regularly disseminated accurate and relevant information relating to SRHR and youth rights within our network and to a wider audience through our social media presence and website. Frequent blog posts written by YouAct members were also shared via the website, including a series of blogs to mark the 10 Days of Activism campaign, led annually by Y-Peer.

YouAct also used communications channels as tools for advocacy. During the Commission on the Status of Women in March, we hosted a portion of a ‘tweet-a-thon’ to End Violence Against Women and Girls, organized by the International Planned Parenthood Western Hemisphere Region. We used twitter to initiate dialogue with UN missions, Members of the European Parliament, and national-level decision makers at key advocacy moments. We also partnered with other youth organizations to create a ‘thunder clap’ on social media to mark the 1-year anniversary of the Bali Global Youth Forum and its landmark outcome, the Bali Declaration, and to continue to advocate for the integration of its calls into the Post-2015 framework.
Our Partners and Funders

YouAct wishes to thank all partners and funders for their collaboration and support:

Catholics for Choice

Choice for Youth and Sexuality

Civil Society Platform to Promote SRHR Beyond 2015

Directorate of Youth and Sport (Council of Europe)

EuroNGOs

Hope XXL

International Planned Parenthood Federation – European Network

Irish Family Planning Association

Podio

Restless Development

Resurj: Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice

RFSU (Swedish Association for Sexuality Education)

Rutgers WPF

Star Star

Staupendahl & Partner

UNECE Regional Youth Leadership Working Group

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) EECA Regional Office

Women’s Human Rights Alliance Ireland

Y-Peer

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