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About YouAct

Vision and Mission

YouAct is an independent organization that aims to empower young people to advocate for their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, by joining forces in Europe to make our voices heard. We believe that active and meaningful youth participation is essential to reach the following goals: We envision a world where sexuality is accepted as a positive aspect in life and where the SRHR of young people are realised, where young people have access to accurate information and youth friendly services and can decide freely and responsibly about all aspects of their sexuality and reproductive lives.
Sexual and reproductive rights are universal human rights and essential for better health and well-being. They ensure dignity, respect, equality and integrity. Sexual and reproductive rights should apply to young people as much as they apply to adults. **YouAct** believes it is essential that young people are aware of the full scope of their rights and entitlement. Therefore it is necessary that conditions to realise these rights be guaranteed.

*We believe that young people have the right to:*

**Choose**: this includes the right to choose from a full range of contraceptives, the right to access safe and legal abortion, and the right to decide if, when and how many children to have.

**Know**: this includes the right to access comprehensive, accurate, unbiased, information on sexuality in order to make informed choices about one’s sexual and reproductive life.

**Freedom**: this includes the right of individuals to develop themselves and live free from stigma, discrimination and judgement, the right to express one’s sexuality, and the right to freely choose one’s partner or partners.

**Health Care**: this includes the right to Sexual and Reproductive Health services that are safe, accessible, youth friendly and provided by skilled health care providers, and the right to access reproductive health supplies.

**Safety**: this includes the right to live free from physical or psychological harm, threat of harm; and the right to be protected from all forms of violence, coercion and harmful practices.

**Privacy**: this includes the right to protected privacy including personal space and confidentiality, including in health service provision and the right to choose freely over one's sexual and reproductive life.

**Youth Participation**: this is the right of young people to meaningfully participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

**Equality**: the recognition that Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights apply to everybody equally, without discrimination or stigma.
History

YouAct was founded in 2004 to strengthen and unify the voices of European youth advocating for the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). YouAct’s founders identified that low numbers of young people from Europe were actively engaged in advocacy and awareness-raising on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues; prior to the establishment of YouAct, the voice of European youth was almost completely lacking at high-level international forums. 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.

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 the national, regional and international 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.

The voice of European Youth is no longer absent from UN commissions, special sessions and high-level meetings. Skilled young people from Europe are able to effectively advocate and raise awareness about young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights; Furthermore YouAct’s network of partners in regions across the world has expanded to ensure greater coordination of advocacy efforts and sharing of knowledge.
European Focus

Europe is a region where young people’s Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights have been realized according to varying degrees. YouAct’s focus is mainly on SRHR within European and national contexts, however we also direct advocacy activities towards SRHR internationally, ensuring that the voice of European young people is present at all levels.

YouAct advocates for sexual rights in solidarity with our peers and partners in the Global South through advocating for the European Union to deliver on and expand its Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) commitments to realizing SRHR, through funding opportunities, development aid, awareness raising and advocacy efforts, YouAct aims to ensure that the Sexual and Reproductive Rights of all young people are realised. Young people in every region experience significant violations of their rights and accordingly diverse young people must be trained as advocates for the full realisation of young people's rights internationally.

The position of YouAct as a European youth network is a significant one, as a region with slightly better opportunities for young people to be involved in policy development and decision making, this gives the organisation and its members a platform to build from to ensure young people's voices are heard. Nationally, members continue to experience different levels of opportunity for participation and YouAct aims to ensure that there is a high level of youth participation in decision making on SRHR across Europe as a region and within the Council of Europe countries.

While Europe is home to many championing countries that are championing in the field of SRHR, there are also many countries within the region where youth still struggle to exercise their sexual rights. Due to religion, patriarchal discourses and lack of political will and commitment in many European counties, and where governments present opposition to advancing sexual rights at the global level, there is a lack of comprehensive sexual education available to youth. Subsequently, there is a low usage of contraception, high HIV rates, and a
lack of access to safe and legal abortion\textsuperscript{1}. Gender gaps and inequality continues to persist, and thus gender based violence is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the region. It is clear that Europe still faces many gaps within in the field of SRHR, and YouAct aims to tackle these problems through youth activism and advocacy.

\textsuperscript{1} Astra factsheet: Status of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Central and Eastern Europe, 2014
Executive Summary

2014 saw key milestones relating to international development, including the culmination of the ICPD beyond 2014 review process, and the culmination of the report of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals. In this crucial moment of 2014, as new UN-led development frameworks and processes were in motion, YouAct sought unify and build the capacity of youth voices, to deliver training to young people on how to understand these international processes and to identify the entry points for youth engagement. Young people must be able to fully participate in these processes in order to advocate for future development frameworks which recognize that by realising young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, step forward in eradicating extreme poverty will be consequently achieved. YouAct played a key role in uniting young people and youth-led networks in Europe towards furthering the realization of youth SRHR through cooperation and joint advocacy activities.

Alongside our work on the regional and international levels to ensure the SRHR of our peers in the global south are realized, gaps remain in the realization of young people’s SRHR in Europe. In terms of national and European level advocacy, four key areas for YouAct to focus on in 2012-2015 are: the right of young women to access to safe and legal abortion, the right of LGBT youth to live free from stigma and discrimination, the need for effective comprehensive sexuality programs for young people across Europe, and the right of young people to participate meaningfully in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs that impact their lives. In 2014, YouAct sought to address these issues through joint campaigns and projects with other European youth networks.

Finally, as an independent youth-led organization, ensuring organizational stability remains central to our efforts. We intend to remain a consistent public youth voice on European youth SRHR advocacy by producing communication materials with regularity, including monthly news updates for our membership, external updates on our activities and frequent updates to our website and social media accounts. We continue to seek financial support for yearly face-to-face meetings for our membership to receive training, share knowledge, contribute to the development of the network, and to initiate projects which carry our work forward.
YouAct’s work on international, regional, national and organizational levels is informed by our firm equality-driven approach. YouAct will continue 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 gender, sexual and ethnic or racial identities, as well as youth of varying abilities, migratory, socioeconomic, health and HIV status. We hope to empower youth advocates from marginalized communities, enhance awareness that the term ‘youth’ refers to a group of immense diversity, and build a cohesive network of highly knowledgeable and skilled young people who can carry forward sexual and reproductive health and rights advocacy efforts in Europe.

- Steering Committee
Advocacy Highlights

International Advocacy

Since November 2011, YouAct has been working with international partners to ensure the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Review Process identifies gaps and areas for advancing the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) beyond 2014. We’ve worked and strategized with partners throughout various stages of the process, culminating in the participation of two YouAct members in the 47th CPD earlier this year. As the ICPD review process is coming to its end within the CPD and UN General Assembly, YouAct members are turning their focus towards ensuring that the outcomes of the ICPD review process are fully reflected in the Post-2015 development framework. We delivered several sessions on this topic at a side event during the 47th CPD; which was hosted by Link-up partners, as well as the International Women’s Health Coalition, Resurj, UNAIDS, IFMSA and YouAct.

Since October 2013, YouAct has been working with international partners towards active youth participation within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Post-2015 processes. We’ve been engaging as members of the UN Major Group on Children and Youth (MGCY); regularly inputting into documents, statements, and positions. We also gave input on the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) draft goals and targets. As a
network, YouAct has been working with ministries and missions from across Europe to coordinate our messaging around key stages of the Open Working Group process, and will continue to work closely as we move into the next phase of the post-2015. We not only engaged with the MGCY influencing their positions, but we strongly advocated for CSE and a specific goal on adolescents and youth. We also provided inputs to a number of consultations run by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) around developing targets and indicators for the SDGs. We also coordinated young people from across Europe advocating towards their Ministries/Departments of Foreign Affairs and their missions in New York.

Alongside the 26th session of the Human Rights Council, the Sexual Rights Initiative, in partnership with Amnesty International, Ipas and UNAIDS, hosted an event examining the interplay of the criminalization of sexuality and reproduction within the international human rights framework. Topics of discussion included the ways criminalization of different aspects of sexuality relate to control over one’s choices, restriction on autonomy and disregard for consent. Panelists explored these issues through an intersectional lens to enable a discussion of effective and rights-based strategies to restore the control of every person over their sexuality, body and life.
YouAct had the opportunity to speak about age of consent laws and the criminalization of adolescent sexuality alongside esteemed panelists from the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning, the Sex Workers Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN), CREA, UNAIDS and alongside moderators Mr. Anand Grover, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health and Neha Sood of ACPD.
Regional Advocacy

In the run-up to EU elections in May, YouAct increased its advocacy towards European decision makers through the European Dialogue for Youth Rights project. In February, a European Youth Meeting brought together 30 young participants from 8 European Countries to engage in training and exchange reflections from their national contexts. Since the meeting, we have been working with these young advocates to put their skills into action by reaching out to current and candidate Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). During the European Youth Meeting, participants collaborated to develop a statement, which calls on decision-makers to prioritize the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in the Post-2015 framework, as well as in Europe. The statement contains specific calls regarding the importance of comprehensive sexuality education as part of the means to realising the human rights and wellbeing of adolescents and youth.

In advance of European Elections, participants made their voices heard by communicating these calls by writing to 82 MEPs from all political groups, as well as 5 national-level decision makers, across 10 European countries. They went on to meet face-to-face with another 4 MEPs and candidates, 6 parliamentary staff, and the head of one National Youth Ministry.

One of our project participants even decided to stand for election. Lucy Bannister, 20, who lives in Manchester, ran as a Green Party candidate for her local council.

As part of the project, YouAct also sought to share our learning with young people in our respective countries. A further 9 youths went on to raise awareness among 58 of their peers, in large part because of a series of follow-up trainings for young people in the UK, organized by Restless Development. These peer meetings highlighted the importance of voting in European elections, and the value of reaching out to decision-makers to ensure that youth issues become campaign issues, and are prioritized after elections.

Finally, perhaps one of the most significant impacts to the project was the 20th Anniversary of the ICPD Program of Action. One of our key strategic outcomes from the last 2+ years has
been to aim to achieve strong outcomes from the ICPD Review process. While the 2014 CPD resolution contains strong outcomes, we had been aiming higher in our advocacy.

As part of the European Youth Dialogues project, YouAct co-organised a hearing at the European Parliament with Slovakian MEP Katarina Nevedalova, which brought young advocates together with MEPs to discuss prioritizing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) on the agenda of the European Parliament (EP). Participants Rhodé, Annie, Luciana, Martin, Robin, Nazzy and Renske met a day in advance of the hearing to share expectations, practice presentations, shape the event, and prep for the next day. The following day, the Hearing was opened by MEP Katarina Nevedalova, who reinforced her strong support for SRHR and youth rights, and shared how these issues have been brought to a European level during her time as an MEP.
Young participants teamed up to share their insights on Human Rights Standards for CSE, dispelling myths about CSE, Integrating CSE and female genital mutilation (FGM) prevention programmes, CSE in informal settings: reaching marginalised and out-of-school youth, Children & Families Bill in the UK and SRHR in the Post-2015 Development framework. We also listened to personal reflections from a young person on growing up without CSE in the Netherlands, and working on CSE programming in South Africa.

Youth presenters covered a lot of ground in terms of the themes and issues addressed in the presentations. The variety and diversity in the hearing agenda speaks to the ability of youth leaders to integrate the rights and specific needs of young people who face various and intersecting forms of marginalization.

The last portion of the hearing was reserved for reflection and debate. Those who attended engaged with presenters to discuss the Estrela SRHR report, and what factors make an enabling environment for delivering truly transformative CSE programs.

Frederic Williquet captured the proceedings by drawing visual notes
In October 2014, UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) Regional Office has launched the “Youth Voice” Regional Campaign that aims to place young people at the center of the future development agenda and to ensure their full participation in the ongoing discussion around the post-2015 development framework. The campaign’s objective is to mobilize young people from Eastern Europe and Central Asia and provide a platform for their voices to be heard. YouAct, along with other organizations, is part of the Regional Youth Leadership Group (RYLG), which is engaged in the overall design and implementation of the campaign.

In November, the RYLG had the opportunity to participate in a back-to-back Working Group meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria. Representatives of YouAct, ASTRA Youth and YSAFE shared good practices and actively participated in some of the sessions from the Advocacy Training as well. The main focus of the meeting was to revise three publications produced by the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia and develop shorter, youth-friendly briefs. The publications provide a regional overview on Child Marriage, Adolescent Pregnancy and Investing in Young People.
Internal Highlights

In January of this year, YouAct held our Annual General Meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia. It was a very fruitful and successful meeting, where members received training on the SDGs and Post-2015 processes, which contributed to overall increased knowledge within our network. Members also received and delivered training focused on the theme of improving access to abortion services for women and girls in their national contexts. Other trainings and discussions addressed: how to deal effectively with opposition, strategies for advancing consensus around universal access to safe and legal abortion services at high-level forums including the EU Parliament and UN, and linking the ICPD and Post-2015 processes.

During the AGM, members also participated in advocacy activities by meeting with MEP Katarina Nevedalova and Olga Pietruchova, Director of the Gender Equality Department at the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs in Slovakia. After the AGM, participants developed a series of factsheets focusing on what change must happen across seven European countries in order to facilitate access to safe and legal abortion services as part of a comprehensive and integrated package of health services.

Brindusa Luciana Grosu, YouAct member from Romania wrote an article as a contribution to the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence - Take back the Tech! Campaign. In her article, she has shared 10 Tips for Challenging Internet-Based Gender-Discrimination and Online Harassment against Women and Girls.
Access to article: http://www.youact.org/news-article.php?show=m&id=66
This year, YouAct became a full member of EuroNGOs. EuroNGOs is a European network which aims to promote universal access to SRHR worldwide. At the 2014 EuroNGOs AGM, our new coordinator, Ana Rizescu, participated in a panel discussion where she shared how YouAct has been mobilizing young people to call for putting youth and adolescent SRHR at the heart of the Post-2015 development agenda. We are proud to be collaborating with other European NGO member’s to share knowledge and information and promote collective advocacy actions.

YouAct is delighted to have welcomed 4 new members on our team this year: Martin Karadzhov, Charoula Matthaiou, Anna Johannson Dahl, Marrieke Van Oversteeg and Luciana Grosu joined us from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Sweden, the Netherlands and Romania where they all work nationally to further the SRHR of young people and adolescents!

YouAct has also been active in researching and compiling SRHR related bi-monthly news digests and opposition updates. This has been very helpful in keeping our members up-to-date with the SRHR news and what’s happening with opposition. This enabled our members to be well-prepared and well-informed advocates.

YouAct members have also increased their motivation and efforts around Resource Mobilisation in the more conventional funding form of proposal writing and asking for in-kind donations, but also in terms of Human Resources. This included strengthening partnerships with other organisations on projects and activities and collaboration with individuals on specific organisational activities.
Publications

YouAct’s Publications & Contributions:

**European Youth Advocacy Handbook**

YouAct developed this handbook as part of the European Dialogue for Youth Rights project, which included trainings and structured support aimed at facilitating young people to engage in dialogue with European decision makers. This handbook aimed at supporting and empowering young people in Europe with information, tools and inspiration to meet with their decision makers, particularly their representatives at the European Parliament.

**IPPF’S Choices Magazine**

“Young Leaders put Human Rights at the Centre of Future Development” by Grace Wilentz

**WHO’s Entre Nous Magazine**

“European Youth Act for Change" By Grace Wilentz, together with Ivy Miltiadou, Peter Mladenov and Martyna Zimniewska
YouAct wishes to thank all partners and funders for their collaboration and support.

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
International Women’s Health Coalition
Irish Family Planning Association
Podio
Restless Development
Resurj: Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice
RFSU (Swedish Association for Sexuality Education)
Rutgers
Star Star
Staupendahl & Partner
Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Youth Leadership Working Group
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
Women’s Human Rights Alliance Ireland
Y-PEER
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights
YSAFE
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