Welcoming a new coordinator

In September, YouAct welcomed a new Network Coordinator on board!

Ana Rizescu was not a member of YouAct, but for years she has supported us as a wonderful partner. She has 10 years of experience, having worked in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights since she was 15. She started out working on Comprehensive Sexuality Education at the community and national levels in Romania. She later brought the perspectives of the adolescents and young people with whom she has worked, the positions of organizations led by young people, and her own perspective, to high level advocacy at the EU and UN levels through her work as a Coordinator of Y-PEER Network. On joining YouAct, Ana had this to say, “I’m really looking forward to building upon the great work YouAct has been doing in Europe and internationally. I’m excited to take up this new challenge, and hope I can bring a fresh vision for YouAct’s future.”

YouAct AGM explores access to abortion services for women and girls in Europe

In January of this year, we held our Annual General Meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia where members 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 7 European countries in order to facilitate access to safe and legal abortion services as part of a comprehensive and integrated package of health services.
Engaging with the Post-2015 and ICPD Review processes

Since November 2011, YouAct has been working with international partners to ensure the ICPD Review Process identifies gaps and areas for advancing the ICPD Programme of Action 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 reaches its culmination with the CPD and UNGASS, YouAct members are turning their focus towards ensuring 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; this side event was hosted by Link-up partners, as well as the International Women’s Health Coalition, Resurj, UNAIDS, IFMSA and YouAct.

YouAct participates in Sexual Rights Initiative event on criminalization of sexuality and reproduction

Since October 2013, YouAct has been working with international partners towards making young people’s voices heard within the SDGs and Post-2015 processes. We’ve been engaging as member of the UN Major Group on Children and Youth (MGCY), regularly inputting on documents, statements, and positions. We also gave input on the Sustainable Development Solutions Network’s (SDSN) draft goals and targets. YouAct members also received training on the SDG and Post-2015 processes at the 2014 AGM, which has contributed to overall increased knowledge within our network. As a network we’ve 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.

Alongside the 26th session of the Human Rights Council, the Sexual Rights Initiative, in partnership with Amnesty International, Ipas and UNAIDS, hosted a parallel event examining the interplay of the criminalization of sexuality and reproduction with 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.
Mobilising young SRHR advocates in Europe around EU elections

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 to realizing the human rights and wellbeing of adolescents and youth.

In advance of European Elections, participants made their voices heard by communicating these calls through 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 a further 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. We asked Lucy whether the project influenced her to become a young decision-maker, and she had this to say:

“Yes I think the European Dialogue for Youth Rights project did indeed influence me to stand and has made me really motivated to get involved in elections, and to encourage other youth to register and vote. I have seen the importance of our involvement with Europe and the power of the European Parliament. The European Youth Meeting and the follow up since then has given me reassurance that young people have the drive to be involved with politics and that this involvement can be influential. I am so pleased with the impact we have made. I hope that we can do even more when the new parliament is elected.”

Raising Awareness - As part of the project, we also sought to share our learning with young people in our respective countries. A further 9 young people 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.

Hearing at the European Parliament

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 FGM prevention programmes
- CSE in informal settings: reaching marginalised and out-of-school youth
- Children & Families Bill in the UK
- Personal reflections from a young person on growing up without CSE in the Netherlands, and working on CSE programming in South Africa
- CSE & SRHR in the Post-2015 Development Framework

Youth presenters covered a lot of ground in terms of the themes and issues addressed in the presentations. The variety 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. Visual harvester Frederic Williquet captured the proceedings by drawing visual notes of key points and interventions.

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

YouAct is proud to have become a recent member of EuroNGOs

YouAct became a full member of EuroNGOs this year. 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
YouAct’s work in Publications

**PUBLICATION**

WHO’s *Entre Nous* magazine

http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/256899/343777_Entre_Nous_8o_korr7.pdf?ua=1

**PUBLICATION**

IPPF’s latest issue of *Choices* Magazine

http://www.ippfen.org/sites/default/files/IPPFE_N_CHOICES_WEB.pdf

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**Welcoming 4 new members!**

YouAct is delighted to have welcomed 4 new members on board: Martin, Charoula, Anna, Marrieke and Luciana join us from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Sweden, the Netherlands and Romania where they all work nationally to further the SRHR of young people and adolescents!

**Martin, Bulgaria**

"Joining YouAct was a celebration in itself because I had the chance to meet other committed young activists and learned enormously from their experience in advocacy, campaigning and SRHR activism."

**Luciana, Romania**

**Anna, Sweden**

**Charoula, Cyprus**

**Marrieke, the Netherlands**