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Vision and Mission

YouAct is an independent non-governmental organisation 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 realized,
- 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 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 judgment, 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, a 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 realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Europe is a region where young people’s Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights have been realised 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.

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 and 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 countries that are championing 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 countries, 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. 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 the field of SRHR, and YouAct aims to tackle these problems through youth activism and advocacy.
YouAct met 2017 well-prepared, ready to gather the fruits of previous work, but also dedicated to creating new opportunities for collaboration and the advancement of youth SRHR.

YouAct advocates further invested in their capacity building and actively participated in numerous regional and international events. We have been recognized as experts and invited to speak as young people, share our work and shape international conferences. Several advocacy initiatives and projects were also developed on hot topics, like abortion rights and CSE. In 2017, the network focused on being strategic.

YouAct strengthened its partnerships and in collaboration with other youth-led organizations, laid down a common vision for the ideal future of young people when it comes to SRHR. Resource mobilization was also high on our priorities and the results were not shy to appear, with several successful projects in 2017 only. All in all, 2017 was a year to be remembered and celebrated, for all the individual, organizational and the broader SRHR wins.
Abortion Rights in Poland

On the 11th January 2017, in Brussels, European Youth advocates from YouAct, CHOICE for youth & Sexuality, and ASTRA Youth, concerned by recent developments in Poland call on the European Parliament to monitor legislative developments and increasing restrictions to sexual and reproductive rights and services across Europe. YouAct was represented in Brussels by Ana Rizescu, Eimear Sparks and Hannah Kunzlik.

Recent developments in Poland have served to highlight the precarious state of women’s health and rights in Europe with rising political support for increased restrictions to women’s reproductive health such as access to contraceptives and abortion services. We are alarmed by statements being made by senior Polish government officials about the intention of the Polish government to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention “Istanbul Convention” on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Driven by their commitment to human rights and concerns over increased restrictions to reproductive health and services; youth advocates from YouAct, CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality and ASTRA Youth met with MEPs and policy-makers on the 11th and 12th of January to demand a stronger European parliamentary response to increasingly regressive legislation in Poland and throughout Europe.

Their action builds on the mobilization of thousands of Polish women, men, girls and boys in 2016 supported by solidarity movements throughout Europe who have raised their voices in opposition to Poland’s plans to further restrict the law on abortion. Their actions influenced the Polish Parliament’s decision to dismiss the “Stop the Abortion” bill; however the threats to fundamental reproductive rights remain with the development of new legislative proposals which seek to further restrict access to essential services. In Poland, this is most plainly evidenced by the recent move to impose restrictions on the availability of emergency contraception. Evidence shows that restricting access to safe abortion only forces girls and women to resort to private, illegal or unsafe services, which pose a serious risk to their health and lives..
Abortion Rights in Poland

During their meetings with Members of the European Parliament, the youth advocates shared their concerns and suggestions for what the European Parliament could do to safeguard young people’s and women’s rights and will call for:

- Increased Access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education;
- Fulfillment of access to safe and legal abortion services for all women and girls without stigmatization, discrimination, intimidation or victimisation of women and girls requiring these services;
- Increased funding for the development of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive services
- Increased funding for youth SRHR projects;
- A more standardized procedure in collecting data on SRHR services across the Member States;
- Implement a funding stream for the monitoring of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the European Member States;
- Relevant monitoring of number and conditions of illegal abortions;
- Address the plans of the Polish Ministry of Justice to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention.

On December 20th 2016, YouAct, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, ASTRA and ASTRA Youth facilitated a webinar that aimed to share youth-led advocacy efforts for Abortion Rights in Poland
In February, YouAct member Laura Cooper Hall attended “Step it up for Gender Equality – Youth for Gender Equality Forum”, an interactive and inspiring initiative to promote dialogue, exchange, learning and networking for people engaged in promoting gender equality in their daily lives. The event was organised by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, in collaboration with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, PES Women, Young European Socialists, Rainbow Rose and the Global Progressive Forum and took place in Brussels.

An interactive conference, organized under the ALL of US umbrella – “Youth mobilizing for sexual and reproductive health and rights!” took place at the European Parliament and Laura was one of the selected speakers, where she addressed the participants, and the Members of the Parliament on the topic of youth participation, and perspective on gender equality within the borders of EU.

YouAct Supports SheDecides Campaign

YouAct welcomes the innovation of the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Lilianne Ploumen and supported by Rutgers in launching the She Decides global fundraising initiative, set up to counteract the damaging effects of the Mexico City Policy.

She Decides is a strong statement in support of women’s human rights - especially their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Find more information here: https://shedecides.com
Human Rights Mechanisms and Youth-led Advocacy

The training course “Human Rights Mechanisms and Youth-led Advocacy” took place in Geneva, on the 2nd to 7th April, 2017. The training course was organized by CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality and the sessions were led together with experts from Sexual Rights Initiative. The participants were representatives of CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, YouAct, Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, YP Foundation from India and NAYA from Kenya.

The training course aimed at strengthening the capacity of youth advocates to advocate with the different UN human rights mechanisms in Geneva, and to use these procedures to lobby for better laws and policies at the national level.

The sessions during training were dedicated to the topics such as the functioning of the Human Rights Council; Treaty Monitoring Bodies; Universal Periodic Reviews; special procedures in advocating for young people’s SRHR at the international and national level; language on SRHR.

YouAct member, Ana Mosiashvili from Georgia has attended the training, with the kind support of our partners, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality. “The training has helped me expand my knowledge on human rights mechanisms and improved my advocacy skills, and this will be reflected in my work for youth rights on national and international levels as well”, says Ana.
UN ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the Joint Youth Statement

The adoption of the 2030 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals was a monumental achievement. The steps that must now be taken, and will be addressed in this forum, involve the implementation and review of these goals. As young people, the implementation of the sustainable development goals impacts our present, as well as our future well-being and prosperity. This forum, therefore, is a vital step in our development and the creation of our future. No work should be done for youth without the participation of young people.

YouAct and partners joined together in the writing of a statement that calls on the UN ECE Regional Forum to consider and address several points so that we together will ensure meaningful youth participation in the regional review of the sustainable development goals.

“Sexuality Education: Lessons Learned and Future Developments in the WHO European Region” Conference in Berlin

Ana Rizescu participated and spoke at the international conference “Sexuality Education: Lessons Learned and Future Developments in the WHO European Region” took place in Berlin, on 15-16 May 2017. The event was hosted by the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), a WHO Collaborating Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Health and was organized in partnership with IPPF European Network, UNESCO, UNFPA, and WHO.
Members of the European Expert Group for Sexuality Education, key experts in the field of sexual and reproductive health and sexuality education and the youth delegation members have all contributed to rich discussions regarding the trends and the current state of sexuality education as well as future strategies and approaches meant to address and overcome existing challenges.

During the meeting, the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) and the IPPF European Network presented the most recent up-to-date overview they conducted on the status of sexuality education in 24 countries of the WHO European Region. The research shows there are great variations in terms of curriculum development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes, across the region as well as within individual countries.

The report and country fact-sheets were complemented by a discussion on main findings and key reflections and Ana Rizescu, YouAct’s Executive Coordinator and EuroNGOs Steering Committee member, shared a joint message, developed in consultation with the other youth delegates. The video message can be found online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55oDTrcAx94

FEMART Festival

Artpolis, Art and Community Center has organized the 5th edition of FemArt Festival, from 25 to 31 May 2017, with over 40 activities in Prishtina and North Mitrovica, Kosovo.

Every year, the FemArt Festival engages over hundreds of women artists and activists from around the world who showcase their creative work through Theater, Film, Documentary Films, Short Films, Exhibition, Performance, Concerts, Lectures, Workshops, Panel Discussions and Presentations on various art forms.
The festival is used as a platform for starting and presenting ideas and creations that bring forward feminist concepts and their development in Kosovo, by being committed to equal rights for women as well as building a bridge for peace in the region.

This year, YouAct's Coordinator, Ana Rizescu, was invited to facilitate a workshop on women and their sexual and reproductive rights. Ana’s presentation had gender equality and human rights at its core and was followed by interactive group exercises, where participants debated concrete case studies and learned from each other and from the facilitated discussion.

On 4-10 June Sofia Pride took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, our member Eimear Sparks attended the Pride Parade in Sofia, Bulgaria. Eimear shared her experience through a blog post: “Around 2000 people attended the Sofia Pride Parade this year – an ever growing number that attests to a growing tolerance for LGBTQI+ rights but in no way contradicts the fact that there is a very long way to go. Amongst the people I was with, one had a partner who had stayed at home because, being from a small town in the country where homophobia is far more prevalent, he was not ready to be publicly ‘out.’

Another had a partner whose disapproval of the LGBTQI+ community was so strong that she had opted not to tell him how she was planning to attend the parade.” Read more: http://youact.org/2017/06/20/experiencing-the-sofia-pride/
UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing

On 21-22 September, YouAct member Cristina Moreno attended the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, Lisbon, Portugal.

The conference was part of the third review and appraisal cycle (2012-2017) of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and Its Regional Implementation Strategy (MIPAA). The focus of the conference was on the discussion “A sustainable society for all ages. Realizing the potential of living longer.”

YouAct was invited as a youth-organisation to contribute and build on the conversations and debates regarding intergenerational relationships in the context of aging. We provided several inputs towards the writing of the NGO statement regarding the inclusion of SRHR issues and youth participation.

The conference panels focused mainly on 1) recognizing the potential of older persons, 2) encouraging longer working life and ability to work, 3) ensuring aging with dignity.

A civil society and a research forum preceded the conference, providing Member States with two statements to complement the Lisbon Declaration 2017.

Members Articles on Speak Act Change Platform

In October, YouAct members Anamaria Suciu, Ana Mosiashvili, Kinga H. Wisniewska and Eimear Sparks joined the “Speak Act Change” initiative – a platform that provides a space for youth advocates to exchange information and experiences from their work in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
YouAct members have contributed to the online platform with articles on different topics, such as:

"Current trends and challenges in the Romanian Non-governmental Sector" by Anamaria Suciu, Romania;

"Gender-biased Sex-selective abortions in Georgia" by Ana Mosiashvili, Georgia;

"Defending Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Era of Retrogression in Poland" by Kinga H. Wiśniewska, Poland

"They Say / We Say – How to deal with the opposition, inspired by the Abortion Rights Campaign Ireland" by Eimear Sparks, Ireland

Find the articles:
http://www.speakactchange.org/

Youth Participation at the EuroNGOs Conference

On the 27th & 28th of September, our members Camila Ochoa Mendoza and Martin Karadzhov represented YouAct at the annual EuroNGOs conference in Brussels. This year the title of the conference was “Reframe: Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in a time of Growing Populism”, and was aimed at discussing how growing conservative, alt-right movements are threatening SRHR and human rights in general. There were panel discussions, side-events and creative hubs aimed at uncovering the problem and creating action points to move forward.
YouAct held a side-event during the conference, titled “The Power of Youth-Led Projects and Partnerships for Countering Populism”. For this side-event, we exhibited our Photo-Wall which displayed photos and descriptions of youth-led projects from around the world that were aimed at promoting SRHR in this time of growing populism. During the event, facilitated by Camila Ochoa Mendoza and Zoe Nussy from CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, we talked about what youth-led organisations and young activists can bring to the table, why it is important to include youth in decision-making processes, and the challenges that young people face in the SRHR world. One of the main lessons that we took away from this session is that the SRHR world needs to be more inclusive of young people, not only because our voices must be heard and taken seriously, but because we are able to provide fresh, innovative ideas and energy to the field. The side-event was very successful, and it was inspiring to see all the young people who are so passionate and motivated to make a difference.

Check out a blog-post written by Camila: "Increasing Youth Visibility at the EuroNGOs Conference"
Europe Unite for CSE Rights

In November European youth advocates from Cyprus, Georgia, Poland, Romania and the Netherlands came together to set up an advocacy plan to bring attention to the need for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Each country-team had researched their national policy context on CSE and identified the key issues that needed to be addressed. With this information, we looked at opportunities to influence policy and develop policy recommendations in order to improve or implement comprehensive sexuality education in the country.

Considering the current realities in Eastern Europe and The Netherlands and the challenges for advancing the CSE agenda, CHOICE and YouAct aimed at empowering and encouraging young leaders to influence their national policies. We strive to create a supportive environment for CSE integration in national level policies!
The meeting “SDGs for Young People, Young People for SDGs. Tracking progress in achieving youth-related SDG and ICPD goals in Europe and Central Asia” took place on 4-5 December 2017 in Sofia, Bulgaria. Anamaria Suciu, YouAct members have attended the meeting on behalf of YouAct.

The meeting had two primary objectives:
- to review progress and identify priorities in advancing the youth agenda of the ICPD and 2030 Agenda;
- to discuss synergies between the ICPD Beyond 2014 regional review outcomes and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The event aimed to:
- contribute to the youth component of the regional monitoring framework for tracking progress of ICPD beyond 2014 outcome informed by the Chair’s Summary implementation of the UNECE Regional Conference “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century”
- provide a framework for youth advocacy and lobbying with national governments and in regional ICPD & SDGs processes.

Approximately 40 participants gathered in Sofia (young people, representatives of youth-led organizations, policy makers – national and/or local/municipal level, statisticians, and regional partners and UN agencies) for two and a half days.

Find out more in the blog-post written by Anamaria, available here: http://youact.org/2018/01/03/sdgs-for-young-people-young-people-for-sdgs-4-6-december-sofia-bulgaria-event-summary/
Intergenerational Entanglements around aging and sexuality: Future approaches to allied advocacy for Ageing, Youth, and SRHR.

Following the conversations about intergenerational relationships and constructing spaces for youth to be engaged in dialogues around the issue of ageing, Cristina Moreno YouAct members who attended the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Lisbon, Portugal, has initiated a process for developing a report that is envisioned to contribute to collaborative approaches for sustainable ageing and intergenerational relationships.

This document is the product of collective reflections by YouAct members and partners and aims to present a brief outline of the entanglements between aging, sexuality and civil society from a youth perspective. It brings together some definitions of what aging means to us, as well as a compilation of experiences and suggestions on how to promote intergenerational relationships. The reader can join us in envisioning a civil society that constructs robust, sustainable, inclusive and intergenerational advocacy.

The youth organizations mobilized more than 1,000 young people between 15 and 30 years old who answered a questionnaire gathering their views on current challenges they face regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well their recommendations, measures and actions that need to be taken by youth-led networks and policy and decision-makers.

Based on their input, 28 young SRHR activists from 15 countries gathered in Kiev, Ukraine in December 2016, in order to analyze the results, to build their advocacy skills and to develop a joint youth strategy for SRHR lobby and advocacy for the upcoming years (2017-2025).

We would like to acknowledge the support provided by Council of Europe’s European Youth Foundation (EYF), UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (UNFPA EECARO) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN).

On the 24th of July, YouAct hosted the Youth in Power Webinar, which aimed to provide a platform for discussion on how the strategy can be used as an advocacy tool. Furthermore, the webinar also provided more in-depth knowledge on the survey findings as well as an opportunity for Q&A with the project partners.
In the framework of the Europe Unite for CSE rights project, we have developed the infographics for each focus country. The infographics included the recommendations for policy change based on the statistics, social norms and the specificity of the problems in focus countries. Along with the infographics also blog-posts have been published in English and local languages, available here: http://youact.org/2017/12/
Europe Unite for CSE Rights - Infographics

NETHERLANDS

IN WERKELIJKHEID

EEN VEILIGER EN FINIERE SCHOOL VOOR IEDEREEN

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR

1.

2.

3.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

WE CALL FOR A SAFER AND MORE PLEASANT SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE.

1.

2.

3.

IN REALITY

WHAT IS THE STATE OF

EXISTING POLICY

WE ARE TAKING THE INITIATIVE TO TALK ABOUT DIFFERENT FORMS OF PREJUDICE, ORIENTATION (SEXUAL ORIENTATION), GENDER.

Education is in charge of creating an environment in which it is possible to talk about these topics without any fear that it will lead to shame, discrimination or harassment.

CHOICE THE

YOUACT

SHARE NOW
On 18th November 2017, the Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place. Part of the members gathered in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, others joined online. The meeting started with presenting and celebrating the achievements of the network over the past year. Furthermore, discussions addressed the issues of the improvement of cooperation among members, communication channels, working ways, increasing the visibility and presentation of the network, also reviewing and re-defining the priorities for the upcoming year.

The second part of the AGM was dedicated to the election process of new Steering Committee. All the nominees: Anamaria Suciu from Romania/Belgium, Ana Mosiashvili from Georgia, Kinga Wisniewska from Poland/UK and Leah Murphy from Ireland received the sufficient amount of votes.

During the AGM, YouAct's Coordinator Ana Rizescu announced her stepping down, on behalf of the network we thank Ana for her hard work, enthusiasm, and unwavering dedication and wish her all the best for her new endeavors!
2017 was a busy year for YouAct, as diversifying the network’s funding sources became a priority. Several project proposals were submitted and about half of them were successful, covering topics such as advocating for CSE in Europe, combating abortion stigma, promoting the lived experiences of LGBT community members and fighting gender-based violence. Some projects secured funding for the upcoming years, while other small grants were used during the year for strategic activities, projects and initiatives. Creativity was also employed, as YouAct went on to use innovative fundraising instruments and technicals, such as launching a crowdfunding campaign and fundraising during the King’s Day in the Netherlands with the help of Condomerie and our partners.

Read more about crowdfunding campaign: http://youact.org/2017/02/15/support-our-crowdfunding-campaign/

Read more about fundraising campaign during the King’s day: campaign: http://youact.org/2017/05/02/kings-day-fundraising-in-the-hague/
New Partnership with the International Youth Alliance for Family Planning (IYAFP)

In October 2017, YouAct and the International Youth Alliance for Family Planning (IYAFP) announced their partnership.

IYAFP is a network of youth 15-30 around the world advocating for the family planning and SRHR they deserve. IYAFP consists of 60+ volunteer country coordinators around the world who dictate the agenda for their advocacy projects given their country and community context. IYAFP assists through capacity building, funding, and the ideation and execution of projects. On the global level, it creates youth advocacy opportunities and builds partnerships for meaningful youth engagement.

The partnership aims at supporting each other, enhancing our efforts, and having each other’s back on the fight for SRHR.