

AER Youth Regional Network's action plan

Adopted the 24th of September 2023 during the YRN capacity building weekend in Koppang, Innlandet, Norway.

The Assembly of European Regions Youth Regional Network

Created by the Assembly of European Regions in 2008, the Youth Regional Network (YRN) is a cross-regional youth platform, promoting active youth participation at regional level. Composed of regional-level youth councils, parliaments and organizations in AER's network and membership, it provides young people with an opportunity to express policy recommendations, to foster debate and capacity-building, to exchange good practices, to reach out to decision-makers and to influence policies. The YRN is a unique forum for young people from diverse regions to raise their voice collectively, while introducing a European dimension to youth policy in those regions.

The YRN action plan

Voicing the opinion of European youth is a great and complex task, especially considering the immense diversity of our regions and the youths living there. Yet, youth face many similar opportunities and issues. The action plan is written with the purpose of mapping areas and topics in the society that affect and engage young people and means by which the Youth Regional Network can address and work with these topics.



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Interregional cooperation

In an increasingly interconnected world, the YRN fostering to work towards a better interregional cooperation has become an imperative for addressing the complex challenges we face today. Interregional cooperation refers to the collaboration and partnership between different regions, whether they are neighboring territories or countries. It is a fundamental strategy for achieving shared goals, economic growth, peace, and sustainability on a European scale.

The benefits of effective interregional cooperation are multifaceted. It allows regions to pool resources, share expertise, and collectively address common issues such as climate change, economic development, healthcare, and security. Moreover, it promotes cultural exchange and understanding, enriching the European tapestry of diversity. However, achieving meaningful interregional cooperation is not without its challenges. It requires bridging differences in language, culture, governance structures, and historical backgrounds. It also demands a commitment to compromise and collaboration, often transcending political borders and interests.

The YRN wants to work towards:

1. Advocating for a stronger cohesion policy that ensures an enhances interregional cooperation
2. Respecting and protecting social cohesion and cultural diversity, as well as strengthening intercultural dialogue

Equality of All Genders & Women's Empowerment

Every person deserves to be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their gender. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. It ensures equal access to education, and contributes to a more stable and peaceful, diverse society. It utilizes the full potential of all individuals, that leads to a more productive and inclusive workforce and life. Gender inequality persists all over Europe and remains a barrier to social progress which is why it's important to have different exchanges of experiences between regions & countries.

The YRN wants to work towards:

1. Fostering a society that is based on the promotion and protection of equality and inclusion of all genders and especially those left behind.
2. Educate others about the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment through workshops.
3. Advocate for policy changes: Get involved in advocacy campaigns to address discriminatory laws or policies that prevent women from accessing equal opportunities.
4. Conduct research and data analysis in the member regions.
5. To create a set of recommendations to present to the AER and beyond.
6. Changing the narrative of women in politics.
7. To tackle discrimination of ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ+ community.
8. Empower women, with a focus in rural areas.
9. Participate in local and international events on Gender Equality.
10. To advocate for vulnerable refugees.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Mental health is a vital component of our overall well-being and quality of life. It encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how we think, feel, and act. In one stage in life you or someone you know will experience tough times. Having the tools and being able to cope with the issues, and handle the situation in the right way, is the key to overcoming tough times. Maintaining good mental health is crucial for several reasons:

Overall Well-Being, Mental health is intrinsically linked to our overall well-being. When we have good mental health, we are better equipped to handle the challenges and stresses of daily life. **Physical Health:** Mental health has a profound impact on physical health. Conditions like depression and anxiety can weaken the immune system, increase the risk of chronic diseases, and hinder the recovery process from illnesses. **Relationships:** Healthy mental health is essential for building and maintaining meaningful relationships. It affects our ability to connect with others, communicate effectively, and empathize with their feelings and needs. **Productivity and Performance:** A stable mental state is critical for productivity and performance in both personal and professional realms. Mental health issues can impede concentration, problem-solving abilities, and decision-making. **Quality of Life:** Good mental health enhances our overall quality of life. It allows us to experience joy, cope with adversity, and pursue our goals and passions with enthusiasm. **Community and Society,** The collective mental health of a society plays a significant role in its overall well-being. Communities benefit when individuals are mentally healthy, as it fosters cooperation, reduces crime rates, and enhances social cohesion. **Resilience,** A robust mental state enhances our resilience in the face of life's challenges. It equips us with the tools to bounce back from setbacks, adapt to change, and persevere in the pursuit of our goals. **Prevention:** Prioritizing mental health can prevent the development of more severe mental illnesses. Early intervention and support can make a significant difference in one's mental health journey.

In essence, mental health is the cornerstone of a fulfilling and balanced life. It is not just the absence of mental illness but also the presence of positive attributes such as emotional resilience, self-esteem, and the ability to form and maintain relationships. Recognizing the importance of mental health is the first step toward a happier and healthier life for individuals and society as a whole.

The YRN wants to work towards:

1. Contribute to bettering the mental health care in European regions.
2. Develop online resources on mental health.

3. Share information about the importance of good mental health and the significant connection between mental and physical health.
4. Ensure that young people know how they can get in touch with health personnel or information about mental health issues.
5. Inform young people about how to improve their mental health and how to maintain it.

Youth participation and governance

The youth is the future. The youth have unique perspectives. And the youth are immensely resourceful. In order to build stable and peaceful societies and develop policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations and future generations the voice of youth must be included in politics. Young people's active contributions can bring democratic values to life. Young people's voices are key in making politics representative, and hence, importantly voice or influence in decisions that affect group members' lives. With our unique perspectives on the world, we are key in the shaping of a better future. "Nothing about us without us."

1. Long term vision

- The YRN should be a focal point, collecting information on the resources possessed and developed by the members, which can be of interest for the whole network. Such resources should be made easily accessible. This is one means for the YRN to support the member organizations towards reaching their goals. Providing guidance first and foremost for youths politically involved in their communities, to aid a better, more successful and meaningful youth participation.

1. Concrete actions

- Collecting and sharing general information on opportunities to apply for funding and drafts.
- Create a system to gather and distribute information about events and resources in the different regions to facilitate interregional participation, collaboration and exchange of best practices.
 - To gather the information: In the form of a standardized survey.
 - To distribute the information: Newsletter to members, SoMe.
- Organize educational webinars on activism and civic participation with relevant hosts and with an European perspective

2. Long term vision

Bring governments and youth from different regions together to exchange best practices and discuss the topic of youth participation.

2. Concrete action

- Reach out to the organizing committee of the next Summer Academy to implement a workshop or debate on youth participation, focusing on the dialogue between

elected officials and youth, with a showcase of the Norwegian model of youth participation.

- Suggest making it mandatory that the governments bring youth representatives in the next Summer Academy.

3. Long term vision

Ensure the visibility of YRN and their work and achievements for the regions and governments.

3. Concrete actions

- Creating a newsletter showing achievements to be distributed to member regions.

4. Long term vision

Facilitate the networking and the exchange of best practices revolving around youth participation in Europe. Create common solutions to be tailored in each of the regions.

4. Concrete actions

- Map the barriers faced by European youth in their youth participation.
 - Organize focus groups.
 - Collect information through a form to be filled by the members.
- On the quantitative level, research must be done on the topic in order to determine the overarching directions under youth participation which are to be addressed through the mapping process.
- Make use of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes to gather YRN member organizations representatives. Both as means of creating the space to exchange good practices, but also to get involved in designing and implementing workshops on youth participation for the local community where the gatherings are happening

5. Long term vision

- Encourage the facilitation of good and meaningful youth participation in European regions and encourage member regions to support their YRN delegates financially when attending events.

5. Concrete actions

- Write a statement to the AER highlighting the importance of youth participation with a strong encouragement for regions to support their members.
- Work towards a raise of the YRN budget line.

The Future of Work

Just like the world at large, the world of work shifts and changes over time. The future of work refers to an informed perspective on what businesses and other organizations need to know about how work could shift (given digitization and other trends), plus how workforces and workplaces can prepare for those changes, big and small.

While much focus is placed on technology in future-of-work discussions, other factors, such as remote employment and the gig economy, play a large role in not only how work will be done, but who will be doing it and from where. In addition, employers will want to consider what the work is, as a 2020 research report from SHRM and Willis Towers Watson noted that "85 percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 have not been invented yet.

The YRN wants to work towards:

1. Promote the potential of the green economies and the emerging job opportunities within it.
2. Promoting a culture of lifelong learning and continuous skill development is important in a rapidly changing and developing society and world of work.
3. Encouragement to pursue further education, certifications, and online courses to stay relevant and acquire new skills provides means of encouraging lifelong learning.
4. Encourage internships, apprenticeships, and work-study programs that provide young people with practical experience and exposure to real-world work environments.
5. Promote the advantages of remote working and facilitate the development of such jobs.
6. Encouraging the development of exchange programmes and platforms for knowledge exchange within vocational education is important for exchange of best practises, to foster innovation, develop smart innovation strategies and for the recruitment to vocational professions.
7. Discuss the influence of AI on future work - the challenges, ethical implications and the opportunities.

Sustainable Green Europe

Sustainability¹ is our collective responsibility to safeguard the planet for current and future generations. It represents a harmonious balance between meeting our present needs while ensuring that the Earth's resources endure for the long term. In this context, Europe's journey towards a greener future, often referred to as "Green Europe," is both an imperative and an inspiration.

Europe is facing environmental challenges, from climate change and biodiversity loss to air and water pollution. These issues not only threaten the natural world but also impact the health, well-being, and prosperity of its people. Europe's commitment to sustainability is born out of the recognition that the continent's economic, social, and environmental goals are interconnected.

A greener future for Europe is essential for several compelling reasons. Firstly, climate change poses a severe threat to the region, with rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and sea-level rise already impacting communities. Transitioning to clean energy sources and reducing carbon emissions is vital to mitigate these effects.

Secondly, preserving Europe's rich biodiversity is crucial for ecosystem stability and human survival. Healthy ecosystems provide essential services, from clean air and water to food production and flood control. Protecting biodiversity is not just an ethical imperative but also an economic one.- Furthermore, the push for sustainability in Europe is driven by the desire to improve public health by reducing pollution, promoting sustainable transportation, and enhancing green spaces in urban areas. A cleaner environment directly benefits the well-being of European citizens.

Lastly, Europe's commitment to sustainability is grounded in the pursuit of economic prosperity. Green technologies and industries offer significant opportunities for innovation and job creation, positioning Europe as a global leader in the transition to a green economy.

In conclusion, Europe's dedication to a greener future, encapsulated by the concept of "Green Europe," is a response to environmental challenges that cannot be ignored. It is a multifaceted approach that addresses climate change, biodiversity loss, public health, and economic growth, all while striving for a sustainable and harmonious coexistence with our planet and in Europe as one.

¹ United Nations definition of sustainability: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The YRN wants to work towards:

1. Establish a committee for Sustainable Green Europe.
2. Promote environmentalism and boost engagement revolving around this topic.
3. Raise awareness around sustainability and bioeconomy.
4. Integrating more sustainability education; emphasizing the importance of environmental awareness, conservation, and sustainable practices.
5. Ensure that the EU continues to regulate and introduce new laws on the use of non-sustainable products by using its world-leading trade mark to front sustainable products throughout the world.
6. Educate the younger generation on how to live a sustainable life
7. Encourage and foster good practices exchange on green policies, measures and actions, among the member regions

Rural areas

Rural areas, once the backbone of many societies, have been experiencing a troubling trend of depopulation in recent years. As urban centers continue to attract more residents, rural communities are left grappling with dwindling populations, economic challenges, and declining opportunities. This demographic shift not only threatens the unique cultural heritage of rural areas but also poses significant challenges to their sustainability and development. In this context, it becomes crucial to address the depopulation trend and work towards revitalizing rural areas. Doing so can help unlock the untapped potential of these regions and ensure that they remain vibrant and prosperous for generations to come.

Addressing this trend requires a multifaceted approach that involves fostering economic growth, improving infrastructure and services, and enhancing quality of life to make rural areas more attractive for residents.

Encourage the diversification of local economies by supporting entrepreneurship and attracting diverse industries. Providing incentives, grants, and business development programs can help create jobs and stimulate economic growth, making rural areas more appealing for both existing residents and newcomers.

Invest in infrastructure projects that enhance connectivity, such as improved roads, public transportation, and broadband internet access. Modern infrastructure can facilitate remote work opportunities and connect rural areas to urban centers, reducing the appeal of urban migration.

Ensure access to quality healthcare facilities and educational institutions in rural areas to meet the basic needs of residents. Attracting and retaining healthcare professionals and educators can contribute to improved public services and enhance the overall desirability of rural living.

Promote sustainable agricultural practices to enhance the viability of farming as a livelihood. Encouraging environmentally friendly farming methods and providing resources for innovation can help sustain rural communities, ensuring they remain attractive places to live and work.

Encourage community involvement and initiatives that celebrate local culture and heritage. Building a strong sense of community and preserving unique traditions can foster pride among residents, encouraging them to stay and invest in the development of their rural areas.

Implement policies that make housing more affordable and attractive for both current and prospective residents. Incentives such as housing grants, tax breaks, or affordable housing projects can encourage individuals and families to settle in rural areas.

Promote tourism by showcasing the natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and unique attractions of rural areas. Investing in tourism infrastructure and marketing can generate revenue, create jobs, and attract visitors who may become interested in living in these areas.

In conclusion, addressing depopulation in rural areas involves a comprehensive approach that focuses on economic revitalization, improved infrastructure, enhanced public services, and community engagement. By creating an environment that is attractive for residents and newcomers alike, rural areas can combat the depopulation trend!

The YRN wants to work towards:

1. Promote decentralization and development in rural areas.
2. Connecting rural youths and communities.
3. Connecting rural youths and communities with urban youth and communities.
4. Highlight and address the specific challenges that young people living in rural areas face in everyday life.
5. Clarify the importance of following up the green deal also in rural areas.
6. Ensuring that the voices of rural youth are heard.

Communication

Effective communication within a youth organization is crucial for its success. It helps build strong relationships among members, ensures everyone is on the same page, and facilitates the achievement of organizational goals.

Hold regular meetings where members can gather to discuss activities, share ideas, and provide updates. These meetings can be in-person or virtual, depending on the organization's structure and needs. **Utilize technology** to your advantage. Create a website, social media accounts, and a dedicated email list to keep members informed about upcoming events, news, and important announcements.

Send out “newsletters or e-bulletins” on a regular basis to update members on recent developments, achievements, and upcoming events. Include articles, photos, and personal stories to engage the audience. **Create online discussion** forums or chat groups where members can engage in discussions, share ideas, and seek help or advice.

Establish a feedback mechanism where members can provide suggestions, complaints, or comments anonymously if needed. This promotes transparency and improvement within the organization.

Appoint youth representatives or ambassadors who can act as liaisons between the organization's leadership and the broader membership. These representatives can ensure that the concerns and ideas of youth are effectively communicated to decision-makers. **Ensure that all voices are heard** and valued, regardless of age, background, or experience. Encourage open dialogue and create a safe space for discussions. **Encourage collaboration** and teamwork among members. When youth work together on projects and initiatives, it fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens communication.

Effective communication is a two-way street. It involves both sharing information and actively listening to the concerns and ideas of members. By implementing these strategies, the YRN can create a supportive and engaged community that works together to achieve its goals.

The YRN wants to work towards:

1. Hold regular meetings where members can gather to discuss activities, share ideas, and provide updates
2. Create online discussion forums or chat groups where members can engage in discussions, share ideas, and seek help or advice.

3. Communicate relevant events and possibilities in Europe to YRN members.
4. Writing statements from each of the committees.
5. React to current affairs in Europe.
6. Electing a communications assistant.