

## AER Youth Regional Network (AER) Activity Report 2022-2024 (August 2022 - February 2024)

Created by the Assembly of European Regions (AER) in 2008, **the Youth Regional Network (YRN) is a cross-regional youth platform, promoting active youth participation at regional level.** Composed of youth regional councils, youth county councils, youth organisations, and young people joining on an individual basis, in AER's network and membership, the YRN provides young people with opportunities 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.

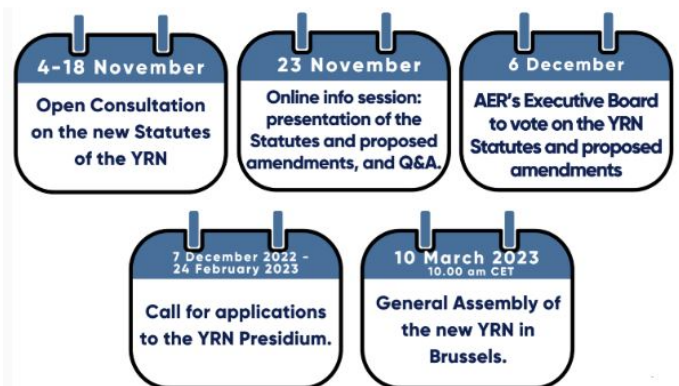
YRN activities include: capacity-building, debates, workshops, policy work, elaboration of toolkits and statements, exchange of best practices, international events... **all with the goal of making youth voices heard in regional and European policy-making, and in providing young people from all over Europe with a platform to meet, exchange views and learn from one another.**

### 1. The YRN Revival Process

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, the YRN became inactive, and disappeared for two years.

The **Summer Academy 2022 in Donegal County, Ireland**, represented a good opportunity to start the revival process of the YRN, hearing from the Summer Academy youth delegates, and building from enthusiasm, ideas and feedback. It proved successful, as several youth delegates joined the YRN, and some were even elected in the YRN Presidium!

**A revival process was officially launched in October 2022**, calling upon AER member regions to inform their youth regional councils about the opportunity and appoint their youth representatives in the YRN. The revival strategy also called upon youth organisations and young people in Europe, with an interest in the regional dimension of policy-making and international cooperation, to join the YRN. **A renewed YRN membership campaign, a call for applications, and revamped YRN Statutes, were released.**



The primary target audience was the **young politicians, youth coordinators, youth regional councils, youth county councils, youth organisations and youth networks from the AER member regions**. Several member regions participated in the revival process and/or nominated their youth representatives in the YRN (e.g. Nordland, Innlandet, Viken, Värmland, Catalonia, Donegal, Timis, Salaj, Vojvodina, Primorje-Gorski Kotar...). Other young people from AER member regions joined the YRN on their own initiative. Finally, young people from non-member regions of the AER joined the YRN.

An **open consultation on the renewed YRN Statutes** and an online information session were organised, followed by the announcement of the **YRN General Assembly 2023**, and the **call for applications to the next YRN Presidium**.

## 2. The YRN General Assembly 2023



The **“new YRN” General Assembly** took place on **10 March 2023**, at the AER office in Brussels, with an hybrid format allowing online participation. The event consisted of roundtable discussions and introductions, of YRN and AER presentations, and of the election of the YRN Presidium for a one-year mandate.

Were elected:

- **President:** Jim Simonsen Jensen (Nordland, NO)
- **1st Vice-President:** Anette Amalie Bang (Nordland, NO) - who had to resign during her mandate, as she was elected as Minister in Nordland, and such position is incompatible with any other elected position in a board.
- **2nd Vice-President:** Norbert Nagy (Salaj, RO)
- **Chair of the TC on Youth Participation & Governance:** Sigrun Myrvang (Innlandet, NO)
- **Chair of the TC on Mental Health & Wellbeing:** Daria Sustrietova (Kirovohrad, UA) - who was replaced during the mandate by Cinta Serras (Catalonia, ES).
- **Chair of the TC on Gender Equality & Women Empowerment:** Maylinda Bajrami (Tirana, AL)

Until the YRN General Assembly, the AER Secretariat led the YRN revival, as there were no YRN members left. From the moment the YRN General Assembly took place and a YRN Presidium was elected, then the YRN became youth-led again, and the AER Secretariat regained its support role to the YRN, rather than an interim leadership role.



### 3. Online meetings and activities

#### 2.1. Organised by the YRN

##### **Regular online meetings of the Thematic Committees (TCs)**

The TCs on Youth Participation and Governance, and on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment organised regular online meetings with YRN members, advancing their positions and the preparations of their activities, contributing in particular to building the YRN Action Plan and the YRN Youth Participation Toolkit.

##### **[Open online meeting \(3-4 June 2023\)](#)**

The YRN Presidium organised an open online meeting on 3-4 June 2023, aiming at informing YRN members about upcoming activities and opportunities, at organising the Thematic Committees, and at starting the work on the YRN Action Plan, and on its thematic priorities. This meeting also represented a peer-learning occasion, where YRN members could exchange experience, best practices and ideas on youth participation in their respective regions and countries.

##### **[Online workshop: Gender biases in worklife \(16 September\)](#)**

The YRN TC on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment organised an online workshop on “Gender biases in worklife” with guest speaker Guncha Annageldiyeva, who collaboratively guides Focal Points in charge of Y-PEER national networks from the Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Arab states; supports the delivery of quality awareness raising activities around issues related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gender Equality and Gender Based Violence (GBV), HIV-AIDS as well as peacebuilding and meaningful participation of young people.

##### **[End-of-year online party \(19 December 2023\)](#)**

To close the year, the YRN Presidium invited YRN members to an informal end-of-year online party, including interactive games such as Kahoot.

##### **[Online workshop on Girls in STEM \(15 February 2024\)](#)**

The YRN Committee on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment organised an online workshop on Girls in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), with guest speaker Ana Nemsadze, a dedicated advocate for Women, Peace, and Security, who serves as the coordinator of this pivotal direction at the NGO Women’s Information Center in Georgia.

##### **[Online workshops on Youth Participation \(February / March 2024\)](#)**

The YRN Committee on Youth Participation and Governance and the Timis County Youth Foundation (FITT) organised and facilitated a series of three online workshops on Youth Participation. The workshops aimed at informing young people about what youth participation entails, and how youth participation models, structures, opportunities, etc. can help them become more involved, active citizens.

## 2.2. Joining AER activities

### [YOUTHopia online workshops \(27 July, 3 August, 10 August 2023\)](#)

YRN members joined a series of three online workshops organised by the AER in the framework of the YOUTHopia project, funded by DG REGIO. **These participatory workshops, “Unboxing the EU Cohesion Policy”, aimed at communicating about youth opportunities offered by Cohesion Policy, and at collecting young people’s input and ideas for the future of this policy.** They notably fed the [YOUTHopia Manifesto](#), “Empowering Youth for Cohesion”.

## 4. In-person activities

### 3.1. Organised by the YRN

#### [YRN Capacity-Building Weekend, Koppang \(22-24 September 2023\)](#)

This event gathered YRN members from across Europe around **capacity-building and networking activities in Koppang, Inlandet County, Norway**. They were joined by young activists from different Norwegian youth county councils, and by local and regional politicians. **The event was hosted by Stor-Elvdal municipality, co-funded by Inlandet County Council, by the Eastern Norway County Network, and by a REVIVE micro-grant.** YRN



members engaged in **capacity-building, peer-learning and exchanged best practices**, within their Thematic Committees, on the topic of youth civic spaces, and more broadly on priority areas and policies they identified. This allowed them to finalise and adopt the YRN Action Plan, and to advance the YRN Youth Participation Toolkit. **The event also included cultural showcases**, allowing the participants to discover traditional singing, dancing and regional products.



#### [Self-defence training, Pristina, Kosovo \(2 December 2023\)](#)

In the framework of the YRN Thematic Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, **YRN members in Albania and Kosovo organised and joined a self-defence training for women**, facilitated by a taekwondo expert.



### [YRN Presidium Planning weekend, Brussels \(8-11 December\)](#)

To close the year, **the YRN Presidium held their last working meeting of 2023 in Brussels**, at the AER office, to plan the YRN activities in 2024, work on the membership and communications strategy, and prepare the YRN General Assembly 2024.

## 3.2 Joining AER activities

### [AER Summer Symposium & General Assembly \(28-30 June 2023\)](#)

**The AER Summer Symposium in Barcelona (Catalonia) was joined by YRN President Jim Simonsen Jenssen and YRN Chair for Youth Participation and Governance Sigrun Myrvang.** The AER General Assembly represented the occasion to inform AER members about the YRN revival and to encourage them to support young people from their regions to participate in the YRN. It also allowed to start developing YRN membership in Catalonia, especially by meeting with the Catalan Youth Agency, leading to one of their young delegates to join the YRN.

### [YOUTHopia Final Conference \(Brussels\)](#)

**YRN Vice-President Norbert Nagy presented the YOUTHopia Manifesto, “Empowering Youth for Cohesion”** at the project’s final conference in Brussels, in front of regional representatives, consortium members, YRN members and participants to the YOUTHopia project. This closing event also marked the launch of the **AER Task Force on Cohesion Policy, in which YRN members are welcome to take part.**

### [AER Winter Dialogues, Autumn Bureau & MEET Debate \(29-30 November 2023\)](#)

The AER “Winter Dialogues”, organised in the context of the AER Autumn Bureau in Sankt Pölten (Lower Austria), marked an occasion to involve YRN members in different AER activities. They notably contributed to a workshop organised as part of the **AER Working Group on Mental Health**, provided their input, experience and youth perspective, and discussed the YRN’s future involvement in and input to the Working Group, especially through a **YRN Thematic Committee on Mental Health and Wellbeing**. YRN members also joined the intergenerational debate organised in the framework of the EU-funded **MEET project (“Mobilise Europe = Engage Together”)**. **YRN President Jim Simonsen Jenssen was a speaker at the panel debate**, which was preceded by a preparatory YRN workshop with the young participants, allowing them to share their ideas, experience and [policy recommendations on a Democratic, Inclusive, Green and Digital Europe](#).



### 3.3 Joining external events, platforms and fora

With the YRN being revived, making it visible and known through international events, platforms and networks was one of the priorities of the mandate. It also allowed YRN members to benefit from capacity-building, learning and training activities.



#### [“REVIVE: Revitalizing Voices of Youth in Europe”](#)

YRN Presidium member **Sigrun Myrvang** joined JEF Europe’s REVIVE project, “Revitalizing Voices of Youth in Europe”. Supported by the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, REVIVE addresses the development of youth civic spaces, and the challenges and opportunities they face. Sigrun joined the REVIVE training in Lublin (Poland), European Youth Capital 2023, from 26th May to 1st June 2023, and the REVIVE final conference in Brussels, on 7-8 December 2023.

The REVIVE capacity-building activities represented a **training and co-funding opportunity to organise a YRN workshop on youth civic spaces in Koppang**, and to **bring the YRN perspective on youth participation models** at the project’s final conference.

#### [European Youth Event \(9-10 June\)](#)

YRN Chair for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, **Maylinda Bajrami**, participated in the European Youth Event at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where she had the opportunity to advertise both the YRN and the AER’s YOUTHopia workshops.



#### [Europa Forum Wachau \(21-24 June 2023\)](#)

The AER gathered a YRN delegation at the Europa Forum Wachau 2023, who successfully delivered a **youth pitch on participatory democracy**, attended the event’s high-level discussions, met up with politicians, and joined social events with other young people from across Europe.

#### [European Week of Regions and Cities \(9-12 October 2023\)](#)

YRN Vice-President **Norbert Nagy** represented the YRN and the AER at the workshop “**How to Build Trust among (Young) Citizens to Support Urban Change**”, in partnership with Tilburg Municipality. At the workshop “Youth Engagement in Cross-Border Cooperation”, in partnership with the European Youth



Forum, **AER Vice-President for Youth Mícheál Ó hÉanaigh** shared best practices and models from the AER and the YRN. Through a video message, **YRN member from Donegal County (Ireland) Jack McLaughlin** shared the **PEACEPLUS** young ambassadors initiative.

### [45<sup>th</sup> session of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe \(21-26 October\)](#)

**YRN Chair for Youth Participation and Governance, Sigrun Myrvang** was the **AER/YRN youth delegate** at the **45<sup>th</sup> session of the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg**. A partnership had long existing between the “Rejuvenating Politics” initiative of the Congress and the AER, with the YRN benefitting from an observer seat among the Congress’ youth delegates, and the latter being invited to YRN events. With the YRN revival, this institutional partnership could also be revived, and **provides a platform for the YRN to bring their perspective and recommendations at the Council of Europe**, while exchanging views with and learning from youth delegates from the Council of Europe’s member states.



## **5. YRN publications**

### [The YRN Official Statement Condemning the War in Ukraine](#)

Condemning the War in Ukraine and standing for #YouthAgainstWar was the first statement adopted by the new YRN, and integrated in the “AER stands for Ukraine” official communications.

### [The YRN Action Plan](#)

Co-constructed with YRN members, and finalised and adopted at the YRN Capacity-Building Event in Koppang, the YRN Action Plan states priority areas and policies that affect and engage young people and that the Youth Regional Network works on and addresses.

### [The YRN Youth Participation Toolkit](#)

Elaborated with YRN members during the year 2023, at the occasion of meetings and workshops (online and in person), this Toolkit aims at informing young people about European opportunities that can empower and encourage them to become active citizens. It also offers a comprehensive understanding of participatory concepts in relevant contexts, and serves as a source of inspiration for initiating and advancing initiatives at regional and local levels.

### [Policy Recommendations for a more Democratic, Inclusive, Green and Digital Europe](#)

Expressed during a YRN workshop in the context of the AER Winter Dialogues and the preparations of the AER “MEET” Bureau Debate in Sankt Pölten, Lower Austria, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November.



## 6. Communications

### [A new YRN Promotional video](#)

Filmed during the YRN Capacity-building weekend in Koppang and edited by YRN Presidium member Maylinda Bajrami, this video is the main multimedia promotional material of the new YRN, displaying the activities that took place in Koppang, and showing the YRN faces and voices, giving them the floor to express what the YRN is about and what it brings to its members.

### **Promoting the YRN publications, activities and events**

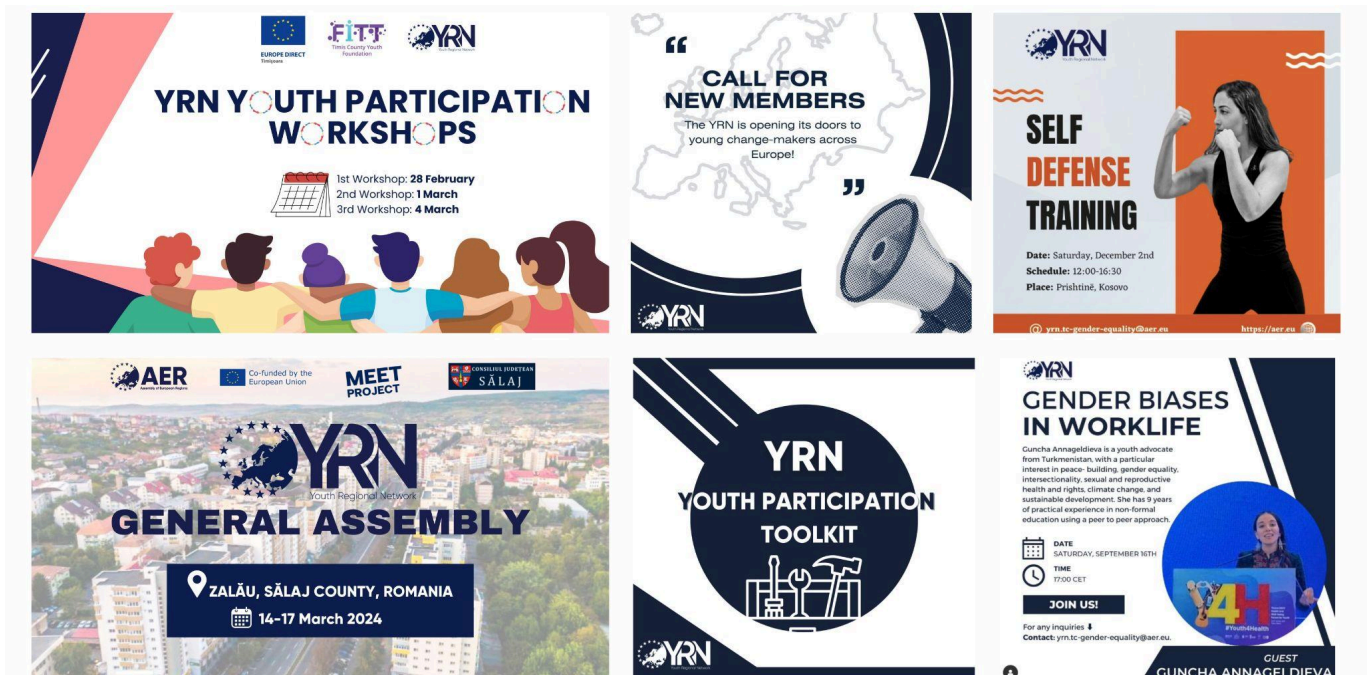
All the above-mentioned activities, events and publications were disseminated and promoted on various communication channels, with graphic design content, to enhance the outreach and visibility of the YRN.

### **Calls and Campaigns**

In order to engage members of the newly revived YRN, and to foster its growth, calls for participants to join events were regularly published, alongside [YRN membership campaigns](#), with the double objective to engage YRN members in events and activities, and to encourage more young people to join the YRN.

### **New YRN communication channels**

In addition to promoting the YRN and its activities on the AER communication channels (website, newsletter, social media), dedicated emailing campaigns were addressed to YRN members, together with the relaunch of YRN social media ([Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#)).







**YRN State of Membership as of 29 February 2024**

- Individual members: 138
- Member organisations: 8