Young European Associated Researchers

Annual Report 2020

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2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As an international network, largely defined by in-person events and activities - the very core of our organization was shaken by the pandemic. However, with great challenge comes great opportunity, and the YEAR board quickly sprang into action by pivoting to provide a rich and diverse program of online events for our members. In the end we managed to organise more events than a normal year, and reach significantly more members of our organization.

We did manage to have one in-person meeting in Brussels in February, where we visited the centre of European administration, and EARTO headquarters. Shortly after the Brussels meeting Corona began to spread in Europe, and international travel was brought to an abrupt halt.

In uncertain times, our vision and mission became more important than ever to guide us. A strategy was developed where we would have a monthly online webinar which roughly alternates between a topic specific and a training event. We had a total of 6 monthly online events reaching a total of 556 participants. This year we had our record largest event, and broke that record three times over to finally set a record attendance at 132 participants for the Sean Mc Carthy training on Horizon Europe.

Highlights from the years' events included a webinar on 'Personal Mastery' from psychologist Merita Petäjä and 'Networking Your Way to Success' from Joppe Quaedvlieg. Both of these events took a very personal approach to developing our core life-skills and professional competences. Another highlight was the research webinar 'RTOs and the Fight Against COVID-19' where Senior Researchers from VITO, RI.SE, Tyndall and VTT presented their research efforts towards the pandemic response. It was very inspiring and motivating to see how our member organisations have been able to quickly respond to the global challenges of 2020. Another very interesting research webinar was held on the topic of explainable artificial intelligence.

2020 will forever be known as the year of Corona, when normal life was interrupted in a dramatic and profound way. Within YEAR 2020 will also be remembered as a year where we reevaluated our way of doing things to achieve our mission under challenging circumstances. 2020 will be remembered as a great success, and a year where we became more aware than ever of the importance of the YEAR network.

I will forever be grateful and proud of the agility and adaptability demonstrated by the YEAR board members in 2020, and the increasing interest and participation of the wider network. I look towards 2021 with cautious optimism and quiet confidence that whatever comes, the YEAR network will continue to adapt and thrive.

Colm Mc Caffrey
President, Young European Associated Researchers

3 YEAR VISION AND MISSION

3.1 WHO WE ARE

YEAR, the Young European Associated Researchers Network, is a non-profit organisation gathering young professionals from different Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) and Industrial Research Bodies (IRBs) across Europe. YEAR aims to support the career of young researchers, providing them with opportunities to increase their skills, spread their professional network and gain international experience.

3.2 OUR MEMBERS

At the end of 2020 the YEAR member organisations were:

- **AICIA** – Andalusian Association for Research and Industrial Cooperation (Spain)
- **AIT** – Austrian Institute of Technology (Austria)
- **RISE** – Research Institutes of Sweden (Sweden)
- **SINTEF** (Norway)
- **TNO** – Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (The Netherlands)
- **TYNDALL** – Tyndall National Institute (Ireland)
- **VITO** – Vlaamse instelling voor technologisch onderzoek (Belgium)
- **VTT** – Technical Research Centre of Finland (Finland)

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3.3   Our Mission

The YEAR Network exists to support its member organisations by giving tailored opportunities to young researchers to develop their careers. We have a special emphasis on the internationalisation of research and we achieve our mission through the three following pillars:

1. **NETWORKING** across different fields of science and technology within an international context and supporting mobility initiatives of young researchers.
2. **TRAINING** through various events (topic specific seminars, webinars, workshops and the annual conference), dealing with key issues aiming to improve young professionals' skills within the European Research Area.
3. **CONSULTANCY** to represent the young European researchers on important and timely topics at the European Commission level.

" YEAR represents an exciting opportunity to enhance the skills, confidence, experience and networks of our talented Young Researchers, and we look forward to a strong engagement with YEAR and its members. *"*

William Scanlon

CEO, Tyndall National Institute

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4 REPORT 2020

4.1 ACTIVITIES

4.1.1 Summary of activities

In 2020, YEAR's network level events moved online.

Face-to-face gatherings were postponed due to the pandemic, and YEAR remains committed to safe and member inclusive trainings and events. Although 2020 looked very different from 2019 and earlier years, this did not diminish the network's motivation nor enthusiasm. The YEAR Network's agility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances was truly highlighted this year, in addition its relevance and the need for such a network to exist was highlighted in many ways.

Alternating topic specific seminars with trainings kept the YEAR Network going in full force throughout the year. A total of six events, 3 webinars and 3 trainings, were organized reaching a total of 556 participants throughout the year! One unforeseen benefit, which highlighted the relevance of YEAR Webinar and Training Topics, was the engagement from senior level researchers and organization members in the virtual events. Since the events moved online, it was possible to increase engagement with member organizations on all levels, across Europe and internationally - as events became more accessible to researchers and employees at all points in their careers.
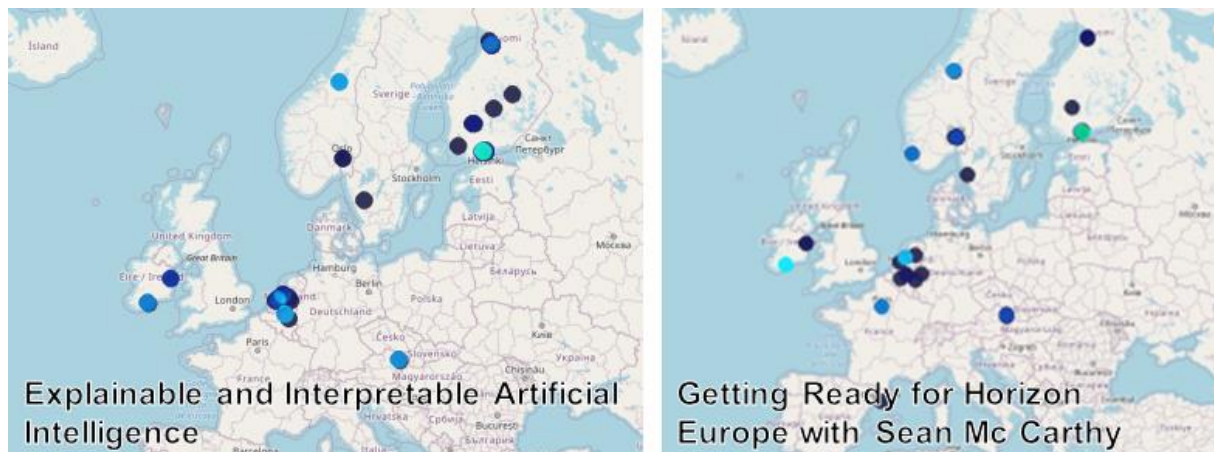

Figure 1. Participants from across Europe joined in for our topic specific seminars and trainings in 2020.

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In addition, several documents, which are or will be made available on the YEAR Network website, have been produced; this includes a report presenting some tips to make the best out of the home office situation caused as a result of the COVID-19 pandemics (https://www.year-network.com/years-tips-to-make-the-best-out-of-your-home-office/); and a guidelines document/information packet on Building a Young Researchers Network.

4.1.2 YEAR Annual Conference 2020

The 2020 YEAR Annual Conference was unfortunately cancelled due to force majeure. At this point in time, YEAR remains cautiously optimistic that a 2021 Annual Conference can take place. It is planned that the 2021 conference would be hosted by SINTEF in June 2021.

4.1.3 Trainings and Webinars

This year YEAR moved online and increased network engagement by offering monthly events – alternating between a training and topic specific workshop. Some of the highlights included a very topical and important webinar on the Fight Against COVID-19 and ongoing research at member RTOs to combat the virus. In addition, a training focusing on a newly required and difficult to master skill – the online presentation. As the year progressed the number of attendees and interest in the YEAR Network online trainings and webinars increased. By moving online and quickly adapting our outreach and engagement to the extra-ordinary situation we were able to boost interactions and increase the net number of young researchers who engaged with YEAR. In addition the visibility of YEAR within the member RTO's increased significantly.

- Networking Your Way to Success with Joppe Quaedvlieg (April 29, 2020)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/year-training-webinar-networking-your-way-to-success-with-joppe-quaedvlieg/

This training focused on creating an opportunity with every conversation, finding people to collaborate with and creating something bigger than could have been done alone. The training included both theory and exercises including: how to present yourself and your skills, how to give real life examples of your skills and how to keep track of your network and follow-up. This training was attended by 79 young generation researchers.

- RTOs and the Fight Against COVID-19 (May 28, 2020)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/year-webinar-rtos-and-the-fight-against-covid-19/

This topic specific webinar brought together four researchers from YEAR Member Organizations – G. Otten (VITO), A. Persson (RISE), P. Galvin (Tyndall) and A. Karvinen (VTT) – to present their work aiming to fight COVID-19, increase understanding and improve safety measures. Over 50 researchers attended this webinar!

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- Personal Mastery with Merita Petäjä (June 17, 2020)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/online-training-on-personal-mastery-with-merita-petaja/

M. Petäjä facilitated a training to teach participants how to focus energy towards goals, making decisions in the moment, keeping one's head clear and cool – seeing life objectively, accepting reality and developing resilience. In addition, she helped participants to work through their own individual development questions. Over 100 researchers attended this webinar!

- Explainable and Interpretable Artificial Intelligence (September 30, 2020)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/explainable-and-interpretable-artificial-intelligence/

At the end of September, AIT organized a webinar for YEAR focused on explainable and interpretable artificial intelligence (AI). Three speakers from AIT – A. Jalali, D. Katic and M. Schütz – presented on topics including the background, benefits and disadvantages to AI, machine learning capabilities in the field of computer vision, and transformers on textual content with a "fake news" dataset. This topic specific seminar was attended by 112 persons.

- Getting Ready for Horizon Europe with Sean Mc Carthy (November 18, 2020)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/year-webinar-getting-ready-for-horizon-europe-november-18/

In November, the training focus shifted to preparing for Horizon Europe. Sean Mc Carthy (Hyperion Ltd) gave a two session virtual training focused on (1) identifying opportunities in Horizon Europe and (2) getting ready for the first call for proposals. In the first session, participants learned about going from Horizion 2020 to Horizon Europe, how to understand the funding landscape and identify opportunities, along with the content and items within the three Pillars of Horizon Europe. The second session focused on understanding what is a successful profile for organizations in European Framework Programmes, how the Horizon Europe proposals will be evaluated, understanding who wrote the topics and reading between the lines and strategic networking at a European level. This training was attended by 132 young researchers from member organizations.

- Presenting for an online audience with The Floor is Yours (December 15, 2020)

A training with The Floor is Yours - "Presenting with Impact + Charismatic Speaking" - was originally planned in March, but this training had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 situation. This training was rescheduled for December 2020, with a modified and evermore relevant theme – "How to Present Online" – a skill that is becoming increasingly important. 87 persons participated in this training delivered by Hans Van de water.

4.1.4 Consultancy

Activities conducted under the pillar "Consultancy" enabled YEAR to increase its visibility as the "voice" of young European researchers. Consequently, the Board was invited to present their views and perspectives at different occasions.

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Skills Survey

As noted by the European Commission, Europe's economy needs growth, however not at the costs of its society and values. The EuropeanGreen Deal offers a new European growth strategy based on sustainability and inclusion.Based on this, a survey is planned to be delivered in order to investigate the perspective of the early-career European researchers on how RD&I could further support the target of a sustainable and inclusive growth as defined by the European Commission under the European Green Deal. Preliminary background work has been carried out over the course of 2020, and it is planned to deliver the survey to the young researchers in YEAR by early2021.

Open Science Policy Platform

The mandate of the European Open Science Policy Platform (OSPP) was extended until May 2020. Alexis Sevault (SINTEF) and Michela Vignoli (AIT) acted as the representative of YEAR in this board after Jan Rörden stepped down in 2020. The final OSPP meeting took place in Brussels on February 5th 2020. This meeting was attended by the representatives of 25 organizations that were nominated for the OSPP. A statement from YEAR was prepared and presented. This statement focused on the opinions of young researchers towards Open Science and its complete integration.

More information and documentation about the OSPP can be found on the European Commission website: https://ec.europa.eu/research/openscience/index.cfm?pg=open-science-policy-platform

4.1.5   EARTO Conference

YEAR planned to participate in the 2020 EARTO Annual Conference in Barcelona, Spain on March 25-26, 2020, but, due to the coronavirus pandemic, it was cancelled.

4.2   BOARD MEETINGS

Although only one face-to-face board meeting was possible in 2020, the YEAR Board remained in active communication throughout the year thanks to monthly Board video conferences and two virtual Board Meetings. The face-to-face board meeting was held in February 2020, and first and second virtual Board Meeting was held in mid-June 2020 and early December 2020. The aims of these meetings were to gather at least one representative per member organisation and to take representative decisions. Decisions were discussed and voted unanimously.

- Make the final decision concerning the Annual Conference (postpone/cancel)
- Define the topics, schedule and host of upcoming webinars, seminars and workshops
- Evaluation of the visibility of communication channels and propose improvement to communication material
- Interactions with the EU: increase the visibility of YEAR towards the European Commission; get contacts to support our actions
- Finances

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4.3   COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

YEAR continued its communication strategy this year. Communication within the research organisations was conducted by the board members as representatives of their RTO. The Young networks, present at the respective RTOs, are very important for the internal promotion of the events arranged by YEAR. As for the external communication, webpages, LinkedIn and Twitter were used to inform the followers about the YEAR events. Our LinkedIn group "YEAR Network – Young European Associated Researchers" is especially successful with more than 1,100 members. In addition, the YEAR Network's website had over 8000 visits in 2020. In total, our network brings together a potential of about 4,500 young researchers in Europe.

The communication strategy is continuously updated according to the needs of the network, which in 2020 was especially important as the networks moved online. Nonetheless, the main goals remain (i) the improvement of the visibility and attractiveness of YEAR and (ii) the support of its growth.

4.3.1   Communication Tools and Data Storage

The updating of YEAR's communication tools and data storage in 2019, could not have come at a better time. These updates prepared YEAR for an extra-ordinary 2020. Having these important updates already taken into used in 2019, allowed us to streamline the online Board voice communications (e.g. using Google Meet), emailing and document sharing (e.g. G-suite, Google Drive) and ad-hoc communications for event planning (e.g. Slack). In 2020, Clickmeeting continued to be the platform of choice for hosting trainings and webinars.

4.4   FINANCES

YEAR's funding comes through the YEAR membership fee, which is based on the site of the institute separately calculated for each member. The fees have a nominal 5€ per employee fee, with a minimum and maximum fee of 800€ and 6 000€, respectively. In case of running an internal young-researchers network, the member institute receives a discount of 15%.

Every year, YEAR Network dedicates a significant amount of its income to the Annual conference and the YEAR award. However, due to the COVID-19 travel restriction, this focus was shifted towards the YEAR's monthly webinars, sponsored and organized by each member. The focus of the webinars were on researchers profile and training programs relevant to a scientist career path, held by professional trainers. This resulted in a decrease of AC and the board meeting costs, and increase of training and webinar costs. A summary of the 2020 transactions are provided in the table below.

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Bank account balance on 01.01.2020	31 072.36 €

Membership fees 2020	+31 170.50 €
Board meetings	-3 404.69 €
YEAR Annual Conference (sponsored by RISE)	0 €
External relations & EU affairs activities	0 €
Training and webinar costs	-3 799.98 €
Bank, hosting address and accounting costs	-5 575.37 €
Other costs (website, annual report, webinar solution, etc.)	-1 691.10 €

Bank account balance on 31.12.2020	47 771.72 €

5 EXECUTIVE BOARD

5.1 COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

In 2020, the YEAR Board was composed as follows:

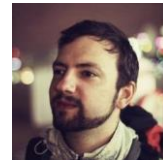 Colm Mc Caffrey (VTT) President

 Anahid Jalali (AIT) Treasurer
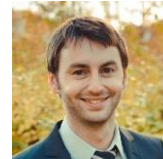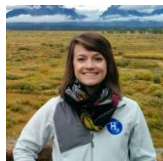
 Alexis Sevault (SINTEF) External Relations

 Jef Bergmans (VITO) Vice-president

 Michela Vignoli (AIT) European Affairs
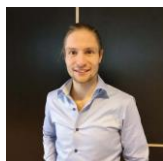
 Simon Gunkel (TNO) Technology Manager

 Caitlin Huotilainen (VTT) Secretary General

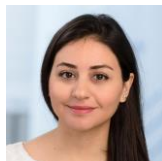 Salvatore Tedesco (Tyndall) European Affairs

 Behrooz Sangchoolie (RISE) Activities Officer

 Mike Wilmer (TNO) Communications

 Ghazal Etminan (AIT) Board Member

All member organisations have at least one board member, ensuring a voice for all YEAR Network members.

5.2 CONTACT DETAILS

YEAR
36-38 rue Joseph II
1000 Bruxelles, Belgium

e-mail: contact@year-network.com
website: www.year-network.com
twitter: @year-network
LinkedIn: YEAR Network - Young European Associated Researchers

6 BECOME A MEMBER

6.1 WHO CAN BECOME A MEMBER?

Any RTO or Research and Development departments of industrial organisations established in member countries of the European Union or of the European Economic Area who is willing to support the career of its young researchers can become a YEAR member. YEAR activities are specially intended for *young-minded people*; therefore, there is no age limit to participation.

An internal network of young researchers is not required for an institution to become a member. Nevertheless, and according to YEAR's experience, an organised internal platform or group of young researchers helps to both increase the visibility and efficiency of YEAR; as young people feel more directly concerned.

6.2 WHY BECOME A MEMBER?

Considering the three pillars of YEAR - networking, training and consulting, the following advantages arise from a YEAR membership:

- **Frequent networking opportunities** with young researchers from all over Europe to get to know and find research partners, exchange experiences, develop new ideas, etc.
- **Yearly event with a fine-tuned education programme** for young researchers on proposal writing, European programmes, interdisciplinary training, mobility opportunities, etc.
- **Topic specific seminars, workshops and webinars** where experts from each member institution have the opportunity to talk about their research, establish new collaborations and share their questions and concerns with members of the European Commission or other important personalities linked to the development and financing of research.
- Opportunities of **young researcher exchanges** between two member organisations or assisting researchers in the process of getting funding for an exchange.
- Assistance in formalising an internal network of young researchers.
- Assistance to develop initiatives around the YEAR pillars.

6.3 HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER?

Contact us at contact@year-network.com and we will guide you through the steps. We have elaborated a simple, clear and efficient process diminishing the administrative burden.

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