Young European Associated Researchers

Annual Report 2021

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Young European Associated Researchers
www.year-network.com

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Being the first complete year with COVID-19, 2021 presented itself as a challenging year. As an international network, we were limited in the ways we could meet and discuss, and in the types of events we could organize. Furthermore, we had a strong change in our Board of Directors, with the resignation of 4 board members, including our former president and former Secretary General.

However, we used this year to further develop our online training and networking activities, resulting in seven diverse and well-received events. Among these events, we organized trainings for the development of our young researchers, brought together researchers on a joint research topic and had our first online social event: a quiz where researchers from different RTOs joined together in an informal way. Our most attended event (116 people) was a training session from The Forge on the Science behind Charisma, where 12 trainable techniques were introduced to increase the impact of one's message. These techniques can be used by young researchers during keynotes, poster sessions, meetings, etc.

On an administrative level, we adapted our Articles of Association to clearly define the organization of a General Assembly or Board Meeting via electronic means of communication to be adequately adapted to the new COVID-19 conditions and further streamline our operations.

With a fresh and highly ambitious team, we're optimistic that we can proceed on the path taken. In 2022, we aim for an increase in our activities by organizing ten high-quality events. We hope that some of these events can be in-person, including the first YEAR conference in three years that would be co-organized by SINTEF in September 2022. However, if necessary, we are prepared to organize our events online. In the first three months, we target three diverse online events: a social event (quiz), a webinar where our member researchers will be brought together on the topic of blockchain, and an event on burn-out among researchers and how to prevent them. Furthermore, since 2022 is the Year of the European Youth, we want to contribute to this by making sure that the opinion of young researchers in Europe is being heard. We will closely follow the relevant policy discussions, consult our members, and advise the European bodies when necessary.

Research has never moved faster and in the last years science has much more been the centre of the public debate. This means that a lot is being expected from young researchers. We want to ensure that they are ready for what society expects from them, by helping them to form a strong network of peers, by training them in the necessary soft skills for communicating with their colleagues and the broader public, and by making sure their (mental) health and resiliency is not being overlooked.

Jef Bergmans

President, Young European Associated Researchers

2 YEAR VISION AND MISSION

2.1 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.

2.2 OUR MEMBERS

At the end of 2021 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)

2 YEAR VISION AND MISSION

2.3 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

3 REPORT 2021

3.1 ACTIVITIES

3.1.1 Summary of activities

In 2021, YEAR's network events were held online, similar to what was done already in the majority of 2020. In fact, while planning for the activities of 2021, we created two sets of plans, one with the assumption that the COVID-19 pandemic would be under control and one where we continue to have online meetings. With the start of 2021, face-to-face gatherings were rescheduled due to the pandemic, and YEAR remains committed to safe and member inclusive trainings and events. Given the lessons we learned connected to the organization of online events in 2020, we started 2021 with high motivation and enthusiasm to organize useful and qualitative online events.

Alternating topic-specific seminars with trainings kept the YEAR Network going in full force throughout the year. A total of seven events (3 webinars, 3 trainings, and a Quiz) were organized including content from top trainers and researchers of our members. A total of 449 participants were reached throughout the year, all of these participants were employees of YEAR members. Similar to 2020, in this year, we also observed the benefit of online organisation of events as researchers with various years of experience in their research fields joined our events. Since all events were held 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.

It is worth mentioning that as networking is a major part of YEAR activities, we look forward to the organisation of face-to-face events in 2022. However, since our online events are also well-received, we plan on continuation of these events regardless of whether it is possible to organize face-to-face meetings in 2022.

3.1.2 YEAR Annual Conference 2021

The 2021 YEAR Annual Conference was unfortunately cancelled due to force majeure. At this point in time, YEAR remains cautiously optimistic that a 2022 Annual Conference can take place. It is planned that the 2022 conference would be hosted by SINTEF in September 2022.

3.1.3 Trainings and Webinars

In this year, similar to 2020, we offered monthly online events– alternating between training sessions and topic-specific webinars. It is worth noting that, before the end of this year, we have sketched the events to be organized in 2022 with the aim to increase our online events to 8 events, while organizing two face-to-face events, one of them being our annual conference. In case the face-to-face events cannot be organized as a result of the measures taken to reduce the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional two online events will be organized resulting in a total of 10 events. In the remainder of this section, we provide a summary of the events organized in 2021.

- YEAR Pub Quiz (April 15, 2021)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/year-pub-quiz/

This event was organized mainly with a networking purpose. Researchers from different RTOs were placed within different groups and asked to answer a series of questions prepared for them prior to the event by YEAR. Over 25 researchers from the member RTOs attended this event.

● Future of Energy – Ever Changing Energy Landscape (April 29, 2021)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/future-of-energy-ever-changing-energy-landscape/

This topic-specific webinar brought together three researchers from YEAR Member Organizations – S. O. Gardarsdottir from Sintef (Hydrogen society), V. Tulkki from VTT (Role of small modular nuclear reactors in future energy systems), and P. Vingerhoets from VITO (Energy and climate strategy) – to talk about the future of energy. Over 55 researchers attended this webinar.

● ERC Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grants with Catherine Halbert (May 27, 2021)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/erc-starting-consolidator-and-advanced-grants/

C. Halbert gave a webinar on ERC starting, consolidator and advanced grants for prospective applicants targeting ERC grants. In this two-hour webinar, Miss Halbert from Halbert Research put the focus on European Research Council Fundings, write-up of ERC proposals, as well as the evaluation and selection processes. Over 50 researchers attended this webinar.

● Industry 4.0 and the Need for AI Driven by Explainability with Denis Rothman (June 21, 2021)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/industry-4-0-and-the-need-for-ai-driven-by-explainability/

The last event before the start of summer holidays was a webinar focusing on AI driven by explainability. In this webinar, D. Rothman author of "Hands-on Explainable AI with Python" shared his view on the development of AI and the need for and role of Explainability as an essential part of it. This topic-specific webinar was attended by 71 researchers.

● Conflict Management with Johannes Tichy (September 17, 2021)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/conflict-management/

The first event after summer was facilitated by J. Tichy who is a certified mediator, negotiation facilitator, and management consultant. In this two-hour training session, J. Tichy focused on conflict management and talked about the benefits and downsides of conflicts. The main points presented and discussed in the training include (i) recognizing conflicts, (ii) addressing conflicts, (iii) handling emotions and feelings, (iv) identifying needs and interests, and (v) non-violent communication. This training was attended by 80 researchers from member organizations.

● The Science behind Charisma: How to Direct your Audience with Michaël Van Damme (October 22, 2021)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/the-science-behind-charisma-how-to-direct-your-audience/

In this training, M. Van Damme from The Forge discussed some surprising experiments that were done that show the impact of the way you present your research or new ideas. The audience received clear tips and tricks on how to improve their charismatic speaking skills. Moreover, 12 evidence-based techniques that can be trained to influence the audience were also shared with the audience. Over 116 researchers participated in this training.

● Good Feedback: Asking for it; Getting it; and Responding to it with Hugh Kearns (November 18, 2021)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/good-feedback-asking-for-it-getting-it-and-responding-to-it/

The final event of the year was dedicated to a training session facilitated by H. Kearns who is recognised internationally as a public speaker, educator and researcher giving lectures regularly at universities across the world including lectures at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Berkeley and Stanford. The main topics covered within the training session were (i) when to get feedback and how to ask for one, (ii) getting timely feedback, especially on writing and performance, (iii) type of feedback (written and verbal), (iv) interpreting feedback and dealing with the emotional reaction to feedback, (v) how to respond to feedback and how to manage the feedback one didn't want. This training was attended by 52 researchers from member organizations.

3.1.4 Consultancy

Activities conducted under the pillar "Consultancy" enabled YEAR to increase its visibility as the "voice" of young European researchers. Since President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen proclaimed 2022 as the Year of European Youth, this pillar will become increasingly important in 2022. The YEAR network will try to keep playing an active role in the activities that are connected to research and young researchers.

3.2 BOARD MEETINGS

Because of travel restrictions among our member institutes, the YEAR Board remained in active communication throughout the year with monthly online Board Meeting and two General Assemblies (mid-June 2021 and early December 2021). 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.

- We adopted new Articles of Association, in line with the updated Belgian legislation.
- We discussed and planned the organisation of our webinars and seminars.
- We renewed our Board, after the resignation of our previous President and Secretary General.
- We made sure to keep a healthy financial balance.

3.3 COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Under the current circumstances, YEAR has brought its activities online and, as such, has focused on its core online presence, by setting up a consistent series of online events. This way, we offer Young Researchers from our RTOs an opportunity to stay connected. These events have been brought online earlier and have reached our young researchers better through our Young RTO communication channels. Events have been held regularly through our online webinar channel at Clickmeeting and are posted in advance on our website. A draft agenda for 2022 to continue this consistency has been made.

Moreover, we are improving our internal communication using asynchronous communication via Slack, and our online workspace.

Given recent events in the cybersecurity landscape, we have looked into and are improving the security of our website, online workspace and communication channels.

Our communication strategy is continuously updated according to the needs of the network, which in 2021 has meant that we have strengthened our move online. Our main goals remain (i) the improvement of the visibility and attractiveness of YEAR and (ii) the support of its growth.

3.3.4 Internal Young Networks

YEAR has been supporting the creation of internal networks of young professionals inside each member organisation, with Tyndall being the most recent example. For this purpose, a guideline has been created to assist in building young researcher networks. This will be published in the YEAR website in the near future.

3.4 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 was 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 2021 transactions is provided in the table below.

Bank account balance on 01.01.2021	48 188.24 €
Membership fees 2021	+34 300.75 €
Board meetings	0.0 €
YEAR Annual Conference (cancelled due to COVID-19)	0.0 €
External relations & EU affairs activities	0.0 €
Training and webinar costs	-4 556.72 €
Legal and accounting costs	-15 961.91 €
Lawyer & Notary fee	ink - 12 461.91 €
EARTO accounting	ink -3 500.00 €
Other costs (bank, hosting website, annual report, webinar solution, etc.)	-3 670.39 €
Bank account balance on 31.12.2021	58 299.97 €

3.5 ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

As an international non-profit association that is based in Belgium, the YEAR network had to update their Articles of Association in compliance with the Belgian companies and associations Code of March 23, 2019. After consultation with our members, our new Articles of Association were approved at an extraordinary General Assembly on 14 December 2021. In line with the current COVID-19 restrictions, we also used this necessary update to clearly define the organization of a General Assembly or a Board Meeting via electronic means in the Articles of Association.

4 EXECUTIVE BOARD

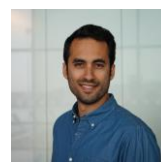## 4.1 COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

At the end of 2021, the YEAR Board is composed as follows:

 Jef Bergmans (VITO) President

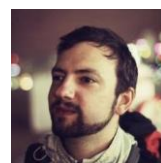 Anahid Jalali (AIT) Treasurer

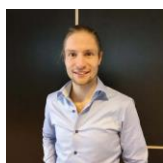 Behrooz Sangchoolie (RISE) Activities Officer

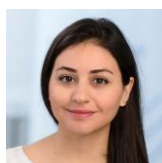 Salvatore Tedesco (Tyndall) Vice President

 Jennifer Carreiro Spencer (VTT) Secretary General

 Simon Gunkel (TNO) Technology Manager

 Mike Wilmer (TNO) Communications

 Ghazal Etminan (AIT) European Affairs

 Cansu Birgen (SINTEF) External Relations

 Nicolaas van Strien (VTT) Board Member

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

4.2 CONTACT DETAILS

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1000 Bruxelles, Belgium

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Website: www.year-network.com
Twitter: @year-network
LinkedIn: YEAR Network - Young European Associated Researchers

5 BECOME A MEMBER

5.1 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 are 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, 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

NETWORKING – TRAINING – CONSULTANCY

www.year-network.com