



**Young European
Associated Researchers**
Annual Report 2024



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2024 has proven to be a significant milestone for growing YEAR as the official network of early-career researchers in Europe. Along with taking over as chair for EARTO, the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission, or CEA, has been welcomed as the eighth member RTO in our organisation and will be part of YEAR officially from 1 January 2025. We also hired lawyers from EY Law to help us update the Board of Directors as we have had many changes in the past years. The Board is now accurately updated in the Annexes to the Belgian Official Gazette, the Crossroads Bank of Enterprises (CBE) and the Ultimate Beneficial Owners (UBO) register.

Despite tackling these comprehensive administrative tasks, YEAR did not make any compromises on its mission to fill 2024 with a diverse and valuable set of events to develop the careers of researchers within its member RTOs. In spring, TNO hosted us in the city of Leiden for a two-day training to hone our skills in writing EU Horizon proposals. Thereafter, the annual conference brought us to VTT in the capital of Finland, where participants learned how to develop their disruptive ideas and build transferable skills. Lastly, AIT invited us to Vienna to offer a two-day training to teach us more about research integrity and research ethics. All three of these events provided great networking opportunities and training for professional development.

On top of our face-to-face events we had a variety of online webinars and training sessions, ranging from Sustainable Change in RTO's and Biodiversity and Nature Based Solutions to Agile work in Research Projects and exploring AR / VR / Metaverse.

Our YEAR network continued its presence at the EARTO Annual Conference, with this time also a short presentation slot on the Member's Day of the conference besides having a stand. This opportunity gave us good visibility on what our network focuses on. It also initiated many discussions with RTO's who were eager to talk about the possibility of joining our network to support their young researchers. After several discussions, we have found growth in CEA joining our network as of January 2025, to which we will also help them establish a stable young professionals network internally. We will continue discussions with the other RTO's throughout 2025.

We are optimistic that we can proceed in a similar fashion in 2025, to have high-quality events, including our annual conference hosted by TNO in the Netherlands and two face-to-face training sessions. We will continue to focus on increasing our impact to our member institutes and the community of young researchers in Europe. And we are positive that we will continue to grow our network by connecting more member RTO's to our network.

Nicolaas van Strien

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 2024 the YEAR member organisations were:

- **AIT** – Austrian Institute of Technology (Austria)
- **RISE** – Research Institutes of Sweden (Sweden)
- **SINTEF** – The Foundation for Industrial and Technical Research (Norway)
- **TNO** – Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (The Netherlands)
- **TYNDALL** – Tyndall National Institute (Ireland)
- **VITO** – Flemish Institute for Technical Research (Belgium)
- **VTT** – Technical Research Centre of Finland (Finland)

We will have a new member joining in 2025:

- **CEA** – French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (France).



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.



"At AIT, we are proud to support the professional and personal growth of young researchers, fostering an environment where innovation and collaboration thrive. Networks like YEAR are essential platforms for empowering early-career scientists, enabling them to develop the skills and relationships necessary to tackle the complex challenges of tomorrow. Together, we are building a foundation for groundbreaking research and sustainable solutions for the future."

Brigitte Bach

AIT Austrian Institute of Technology, Managing Director

3 REPORT 2024

3.1 ACTIVITIES

3.1.1 Summary of activities

In 2024, we continued the combination of both in-person events as well as hosting in-person training events and webinars online. In the following section we provide a short summary of each of the events that were organised by us in the past year, for further details please check the event page on the YEAR website (<https://www.year-network.com/events/>). In summary, in 2024, we organised a total of 8 events. These were composed of 4 webinars, 3 trainings (two of which were in-person events hosted in Leiden, The Netherlands, and Vienna, Austria), one hybrid pub quiz, and our annual conference in Espoo, Finland.

3.1.2 YEAR Annual Conference 2024: Disruptive ideas

The YEAR Annual Conference was held on 10-11 June and hosted by VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, Espoo (Finland). The event targeted young and early-career researchers from YEAR member organisations.

The key focus of this year's YEAR annual conference was on disruptive ideas and learning different tools which would stimulate innovative idea development. The training was facilitated by Hanna Vuotilainen from Vision Factory. During a two-day conference 46 young researchers from AIT, SINTEF, VTT, VITO, TNO, Tyndall, and RISE were given the opportunity to learn the theory and apply different tools in highly interactive sessions.

The first day of the conference started with a welcome speech from the President and CEO of VTT, Antti Vasara, and YEAR board, followed by the first Inspirational talk on Ecosystems and co-creation thinking, which was given by Vision Factories CEO, Krista Keränen via a video call after which the participants were divided in groups to work together. During the afternoon session, the participants had 2 more inspirational talks: What does disruptive thinking mean and the potential in disruptive ideas, and The Double Diamond process, methods and tools. The remaining time was filled with using the theory and tools to prepare a disruptive idea within the groups.

On the second day of the conference, a welcome speech was given by VTT's Senior Vice President of HR, Kirsi Nuotto, after which the participants continued with their last inspirational talk on How to commercialise your innovative idea, with the help of the InnoBoost tool. This talk was given by another trainer from Vision Factory, Outi Kinnunen. Later in the day, the Dragons Den Idea Pitching took place where participants pitched their developed ideas in small teams. The ideas were judged by the two trainers from Vision Factory, Hana and Outi, a manager of VTT's Innovation team, Szymon Wiktorowicz and the YEAR president, Nicolaas van Strien.



Figure 1. YEAR participants at the YEAR AC hosted by VTT in Finland



Figure 2. Training given by Vision Factory



Figure 3. The winning team in the Dragons Den Pitching

Prior to the conference, there was an optional social weekend planned (8-9 June). It started with a city tour on Saturday followed by a traditional coffee and pulla and a dinner in the evening with curling and mini-golf. On Sunday participants went on a hike in the Nuukio National Park followed by lunch at a Finnish mökki at the lake where they experienced the sauna culture including a smoke sauna and palju (hot tub).



Figure 4. The YEAR AC participants on the city tour exploring Helsinki during the social weekend.

The annual conference was then accompanied on 12 June by a visit to VTT Bioruukki where a group of about 20 researchers visited several VTT pilot labs, such as the cellulose films pilot, the Sutco pilot, wet spinning laboratories and chemical pilot plant.

The average overall rating for the YEAR Annual Conference was 4.35 out of 5, and 37% of participants rated the event as "very good", which was the highest possible choice.



Figure 5. Year Board at YEAR AC at VTT, Finland

3.1.3 Trainings and Webinars

In this year, we offered monthly online events– a mix of training sessions and topic-specific webinars. Apart from the organisation of YEAR’s annual conference in Helsinki, Finland we had two extra training events in person this year: a training event about setting up Horizon Europe proposals was organised in Leiden, The Netherlands, as well as a training event about research integrity and research ethics which was hosted in Vienna, Austria. In the remainder of this section, we provide a summary of the events organised in 2024.

- Agile for research projects (Online training: 8 February, 2024)

<https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/agile-for-research-projects>

The first event of the year featured a training on agile applied to research projects. The training was delivered by Sami Paju, a lean and agile coach at VTT. While there are many types of methodologies which are covered by the term ‘agile’, this training focused on the [Heart of Agile](#) and the approach taken by VTT in applying this approach to research projects.

There were 108 participants.

- How to write impactful Horizon EU proposals @ TNO, The Netherlands (Training: 21-22 March , 2024)

<https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/how-to-write-impactful-horizon-eu-proposals-tno-the-netherlands/>

As a network of various European institutes we strive for more collaboration. Creating proposals is an essential skill for young researchers to get more involved with European projects.

Setting up a proposal is itself a project with deliverables, milestones, partners, requiring a significant amount of time. Some of the difficulties in setting up winning proposals include partners who do not know each other and often do not share the same goals, short deadlines, and cryptic call text – and they can all make proposal writing daunting. The training given by LGI Sustainable Innovation focussed on both writing impactful and successful Horizon Europe proposals as well as applying theory of change (ToC) approach for generating draft solutions.

There were 32 participants.



Figure 6. Participants and trainer at the TNO facilities in Leiden, The Netherlands



Figure 7 . Opening by Nicolaas van Strien



Figure 8. Gilles Queneherve (LGI) leading the workshop

- Sustainable change in RTOs (Webinar: 29 April , 2024)

<https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/sustainable-change-in-rtos/>

This webinar explored sustainable initiatives happening at our different RTOs. The three speakers we had were Nils Røkke (SINTEF), Paolo de Heer (TNO) and Bart Doods (VITO). They shared their insights regarding sustainable policies, networks, and international programs they partake in. It included topics like sustainable operations, CSR standards, idea pitching processes, achievements history, a OnePlanet initiative, and more. Following the presentations there was a moment to ask questions to the speakers and for group discussion.

There were 42 participants.

- Biodiversity and nature-based solutions (Webinar: 24 May , 2024)

<https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/nature-based-solutions/>

YEAR hosted the webinar “Biodiversity and Nature-Based Solutions”, exploring innovative strategies to adapt and build resilience to climate change in human-influenced systems. The event featured Martin Jung from AIT, an expert geologist in environmental and water management, alongside Laura Wendling, Senior Research Scientist at SINTEF Community, who presented insights from the Urban Nature Labs project on climate and water resilience. Sven Nicolai, an industrial engineer at VITO, concluded the session by discussing the role of sustainability parks in enhancing biodiversity.

There were 93 participants.

- AR / VR / XR (Webinar: 26 September , 2024)

<https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/ar-vr-metaverse/>

The different aspects of AR/VR/XR Metaverse were explored from the different point of view of three scientists involved in research in this topic. Dr Setareh Zafari from AIT presented a summary on how XR technologies (VR/AR/MR) can be leveraged to advance UI/UX research and offer new dimensions in UX design and evaluation, delving into some exemplary practices and methodologies for conducting effective user studies in XR environments. Simon Gunkel from TNO presented a complete overview of the AR/VR communication landscape, showcasing real-world prototypes based on his experience. Dr Zhi Li from Tyndall presented some of the different micro-display technologies like organic LEDs (OLEDs) and liquid crystal on Si (LCoS), with a special focus on microLEDs.

There were 79 participants.

- Stress in the workplace (Webinar: 10 October , 2024)

<https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/stress-in-the-workplace/>

YEAR hosted the webinar “Stress in the workplace”, and investigated work-related stress and approaches to address it. The webinar was given by Janika Thielecke and Maartje Bakhuis Roozeboom who are two researchers at TNO in the department of Work, Health and Technology. In their work and this webinar they explore the complexities of workplace stress and share recent numbers on the development of work stress. The emphasis was on research on practical strategies for organisations, individuals and even more so on the combined effort of both. The result was that during the interactive session, members of the chat lively started to help each other by sharing their own insights and advice. This shows that the topic of stress in the workplace is of importance and that our researchers are actively finding ways on how to combat their own stress.

There were 121 participants.

- Being Real about Research Integrity @ AIT, Vienna (Training: November 28-29, 2024)

[Being Real About Research Integrity @ AIT, Austria – YEAR \(year-network.com\)](https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/being-real-about-research-integrity-at-ait-austria/)

The last in-person training of the year 2024, YEAR organised at AIT Austrian Institute of Technology (Vienna). This event also included a welcome speech of Brigitte Bach, one of the managing directors of AIT. The training facilitated by the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (OeAWI) covered key topics such as research ethics, authorship, open science, and data management in research activities. Participants also engaged in discussions about the role of AI in research and explored potential concerns surrounding its use. The workshop featured interactive group activities and role-playing exercises, creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. The training received very positive feedback, emphasizing the need for further discussions and increased sharing of information on research integrity. This highlights the significant value of such training, particularly for early-career and younger researchers. There were 26 participants.



Figure 9. The participants of the YEAR training on Research Integrity, AIT, Austria



Figure 10 . Welcome speech of Brigitte Bach



Figure 11. Participants in role-playing exercise

3.2 BOARD MEETINGS

The YEAR Board had monthly online Board meetings, two face-to-face Board meetings, in March in connection with our training at TNO in Leiden and at the end of November connected to our training at AIT in Vienna, and one General Assembly in middle of June connected to our annual conference at VTT in Espoo. 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 discussed and planned the organisation of our conference, training and seminars/webinars.
- We have initiated a Change of Seats with EY Law.
- We renewed our Board and welcomed new board members.
- We focused on expanding our network with finding new members.
- Keeping a healthy financial balance.

3.3 INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & CONSULTANCY

Activities conducted under the pillar “Consultancy” enable 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.

3.3.1 EARTO Annual Conference

YEAR participated in the EARTO Annual Conference, hosted by Łukasiewicz Research Network in Warsaw, Poland on 15-16 May 2024. EARTO brings together over 350 research and technology organisations in Europe from thirty countries. YEAR had a small stand with a roll-up and a ‘Wheel of Fortune’ that highlighted the pillars of YEAR along with the activities and support YEAR can provide to young and early-career researchers. Additionally we had a short presentation at the end of the 1st day of the conference for EARTO Members, to present our network and what activities we focus on to excel the career of young researchers. During the conference multiple connections were made with RTOs from several EU countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Poland and France. Meetings and follow-ups will continue on these interactions during 2025.



Figure 12. YEAR Board members with EARTO's new and old President and Secretary General

3.4 GDPR

During the year 2024 there was a slow progression on the GDPR matters to be dealt with. We updated our website to now include a cookie-policy. We continue to work on correcting the necessary parts during the first half of 2025.

3.5 FINANCES

YEAR's funding is generated through the membership fees, which are determined based on the size of each member institute and calculated individually. The fees are structured at a nominal rate of 5.50€ per employee, with a minimum fee of 880€ and a maximum fee of 6,600€. Additionally, for member institutes running an internal young researchers network, a discount of 15% is calculated. During the General Assembly in June 2024, the Board made a decision to increase the membership fee to a minimum of 1,100€ and a maximum of 7,700€ starting from 2025.

A summary of the 2024 transactions is provided in the table below.

Bank account total balance on 01.01.2024	36,095.67 €
Membership fees 2024	+35,566.30 €
Board meetings	-6,598.31 €
YEAR Annual Conference	-22,443.62 €
External relations & EU affairs activities	-1,477.10 €
Training and webinar costs	-8,767.32 €
Legal and accounting costs	-9,792.00 €
Lawyer & Notary fees	incl. -6,292.00 €
EARTO accounting	incl. -3 500.00 €
Other costs (bank, hosting website, annual report, webinar solution, etc.)	-2,914.61 €
Interest	90,64 €
Exceptional income from dollar account	+ 374.80 €
Bank account total balance on 31.12.2024	20,134.45 €

4 EXECUTIVE BOARD

4.1 COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

At the end of 2024, the YEAR Board is composed as follows:



Nicolaas van Strien
(VTT)
President



Salvatore Tedesco
(Tyndall)
Vice
President



Anna Kozlowska
(AIT)
Treasurer



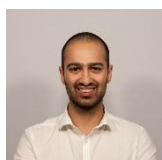
Jennifer Carreiro Spencer
(VTT)
Secretary
General



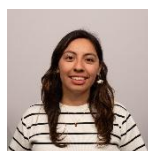
Hajo den Ouden
(TNO)
Activity
Officer



Nikalet Everson
(SINTEF)
External
Relations



Aria Mirzai
(RISE)
Communications
Manager -
Website



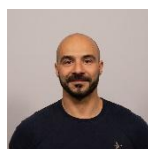
Paulina Rodriguez
(VITO)
Communications
Manager - Social
Media



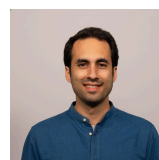
Mike Wilmer
(TNO)
Technology
Manager



Medina Andresel
(AIT)
European Affairs



Walter Messina
(Tyndall)
Mobility Manager



Behrooz Sangchoolie (RISE)
Board member

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

4.2 CONTACT DETAILS

YEAR

36-38 rue Joseph II

1000 Bruxelles, Belgium

E-mail: contact@year-network.com

Website: www.year-network.com

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 consultancy, 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 (conference) with a fine-tuned education programme** for young researchers on proposal writing, European programmes, interdisciplinary training, mobility opportunities, etc.
- **Topic-specific training 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.