

# **Using Technology for Young Women's Empowerment within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals**

Report of the Study Session held by  
European YWCA

in co-operation with the  
European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe

European Youth Centre, Strasbourg  
11 – 16 December 2016



This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

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## Executive Summary

The present report describes the study session titled “Using Technology for Young Women’s Empowerment within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”, hosted by the European YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) and the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe, during the 11 - 16 December 2016. The programme for this study session was developed during a preparatory meeting at the European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, on 29 September - 1 October 2016. The preparatory team consisted of five young women from Switzerland, Spain, Belarus and Romania. The preparatory team included an assigned educational advisor from the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe.

This study session gathered 37 young women from 17 countries of Europe, including 1 participant from Lebanon and 1 participant from Zimbabwe. They were between 18 to 30 years old, coming from a variety of different professional backgrounds, having engaged in online and offline activism, networks, international, national, regional or local engagement and activism, bringing an incredible range of knowledge and experience in the study session. It was a colourful and inspiring group. All were coming together for a week of intensive work on knowledge building, skills building on gender equality, women’s rights and the SDGs as well as scaling up a newly established Young Women’s Leaders Network that launched on 8 March 2017 – International Women’s Day.

This study session consisted of the following four parts, all unquestionably linked:

1. Two days of knowledge building on the main topics of gender equality, women’s rights, human rights mechanisms and the SDGs, including their connection to modern information and communication technologies.
2. One and a half days of applying the varied and wide knowledge of the participants into building the first and only network of young women across Europe addressing, advancing and acting as thought leaders on the SDGs.
3. Intense skills building sessions offering very practical knowledge necessary to implement our work of advocacy skills, technical skills and self-care for engagement in the agenda of women’s rights and the SDGs.
4. Finally, last but not least, being an informal network of young women leaders and change agents already; the final day aimed to formalize this network by collectively working on the aims, objectives, branding and programme content forwards forming the network.

### Knowledge building

The first two days ensured that the participants shared some basic common ground on all the topics mentioned above. Each one of these topics is wide and complex and each young woman participating brought their own view and stories to enrich the discussions. It was necessary to open discussions on Gender Equality and Women’s Rights, using our working methods that promote a human rights-based approach. Likewise, it was important to introduce the Council of Europe as a partner of the European YWCA and its role fighting for human rights. In addition we introduced as well what the SDGs are. It is also worth noting that even with all the participants having experience of working to implement human rights and women’s rights, not all of them had heard of the SDGs.

Not surprisingly, all of these topics raised a lot of interest and many questions to be discussed:

- What exactly does the European YWCA do? What does the Council of Europe do?

- Who is responsible for implementing the SDGs? How can we contribute as a group and each of us as an individual?
- Must true feminism consist of intersectionality? If so, how does this look like?
- How can hate speech be addressed in a light-hearted and engaging way that is creative, humorous and constructive?
- Which social media and online platforms are the Young Women's Leaders Network to use, and what are our experiences with other transnational online networks?

In addition to working on the questions listed above, throughout the course of the study session, informal spaces for participants offered additional practical learning. This is a direct manifestation of young women leaders coming together to prepare for working towards a common cause of women's rights and gender equality within a formal, international framework such as the SDGs.

On the last days of our study session, participants engaged in intense discussions on how to build our very own network. Parts of the conversations were questions such as: what platforms to use, what resources are available, how to formulate our goal precisely and how to market it. In five groups the participants prepared five possible starting points for a network. One of these was chosen in a democratic process. Then the important points from all the ideas were identified and added to the chosen base-idea to create the start of the European YWCA's young leader's network. The collective agreement was that the Young Women's Leaders Network would act as a platform of knowledge exchange and thought leaders for national, regional and international action (please see section on main outcomes on more information of the Young Women's Leaders Network).

The feedback provided by the participants in the formal evaluation forms was overall very positive. They felt empowered, satisfied and motivated to keep working for our common cause with the newly met friends. Four working days was certainly too little time to do, discuss and share all that all of us wanted. Yet, the young women were able to each learn useful skills and meet important women who work towards the same goal as them all over Europe.

The study session gave a sense of strength, empowerment, unity, solidarity, friendship but also increased knowledge about the situation in other countries, about common problems, about instruments and frameworks promoting Human Rights. In addition, newly acquired skills of advocacy, self-care and/or practical technological skills and interesting reflections on gender questions, can certainly also count as important outcomes of the study session.

# 1. Introduction

The aim of the study session 'Using Technology for Young Women's Empowerment within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals' was to ensure that a critical mass of young women acting as change agents who are involved in European YWCAs are empowered, mobilized and engaged in advancing human rights at national and regional levels, through Agenda 2030 by using recent technology. This aim connects closely to the European YWCAs strategic plan and the ways of work we have available to make change happen. It is therefore not surprising that the addressed topics of the study session were as follows:

1. Knowledge building: concepts of Gender Equality, Women's Rights, Human Rights mechanisms and the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Skills building: advocacy, project planning and monitoring & evaluation skills in the context of Sustainable Development Goals with the use of theology.
3. Establishment and strengthening of young women's network<sup>1</sup>: that internally and externally works for the empowerment of young women's rights in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals with the use of theology.

Given the addressed topics, the following sections provide a list of questions and statements raised during the study session in order to give an insight into the issues, questions and conversations covered under each of the main components.

## Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Human Rights:

- What are the Sustainable Development Goals, and how do they relate to us?
- What are basic and more advanced concepts of gender, feminism, intersectionality and women's rights as human rights? Also how does this relate to our daily-lived experiences?
- What is the Council of Europe, and how does it support human rights? How is gender equality promoted within the Council of Europe? What is the No Hate Speech Movement and what can we learn from it? We especially looked at how to build regional momentum from home.
- What are each of our own stances, and how can we support the upholding of human rights?
- What is the European YWCA and how does it connect to all the above topics?

## Modern forms of information, communication and technology:

- We established a common ground on what is modern technology and how it can help in the work of promoting human rights and gender equality.
- We discussed on what are the ethical questions of artificial intelligence regarding human rights - how can we make sure that machines will have the right values and how those will reflect on valuing diversity between human beings? Or even before that - what role can technology play within our goal of reaching human rights for everybody without discrimination? How can it support or hinder?
- We also engaged in capacity building sessions, facilitated by the team and participants presenting useful tech tools and their application, as well as offline and online advocacy.

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<sup>1</sup> The European YWCA powers the Young Women's Leaders Network. Its activities are focused on information sharing and knowledge exchange with a particular focus on the Sustainable Development Goals. It is our mission to contribute to the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Skills and knowledge building:

- Self-Care and mindfulness for personal health and external efficacy;
- Human rights advocacy-offline and online;
- Several practical skills such as using Word press, managing social media platforms, professionally to advance women’s rights, picture processing or discussing different online platforms and their strengths and weaknesses.
- Skills building for regional and national advocacy on shaping and influencing policy related to the SDGs.

Most importantly, we discussed how all of the mentioned topics relate to the network we want to build to promote the SDGs. What is our common vision, our common goal, and how do we want to reach it?

Participants:

Having participants from different ages, backgrounds, countries and knowledge fields, one of the challenges of this study session was to make sure we all had a solid level of knowledge on which we could build the work of the network we created. In that spirit, the main topics of the four days of our study session covered different topics

The participants were young women who are active with the YWCA in their communities or in their national association. Other participants were from women’s rights and technology based organizations. All of the participants had a real clear link and relevance to the three objectives listed but at different stages of their lives. This fostered a sharing environment of knowledge and skills exchange.

The European YWCA managed to find enough applications for the session however faced difficulty with people who were not able to come because of the time of the year and exam period. All of the applicants fit the profile, though in a wide variety of ways - each participant had different levels of knowledge and expertise in the different fields touched upon in this study session. Building a common ground to stand on in all topics despite the differences was one of the challenges faced by the facilitators.

<b>Profile of Participants attending the study session</b>	<b>Number</b>
How many participants (incl. team) actually did attend?	37
How many male participants (incl. team) did attend?	0
How many female participants (incl. team) did attend?	37
How many countries of residence did participants (incl. team) come from?	19
What was the average age of participants (incl. team)?	24

All participants spoke English and thus were able to participate. However, the language levels were different from participant to participant, thus also impacting their participation and understanding of the presentations.



## 2. Programme – Inputs & Discussions

The programme for this study session was developed during a preparatory meeting at the European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, on 29 September - 1 October 2016. The preparatory team consisted of five young women from Switzerland, Spain, Belarus and Romania. The preparatory team included an assigned educational adviser from the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe. The result was the basis for a well-grounded, well-organized programme following our aims and objectives and leading towards the set outcome to establish a Young Women's Leaders Network.

The following section provides an insight into each day of the Study Session programme. For a quick overview please read the Storify [HERE](#) that outlines the week based on the highlights of social media activities.

### Day 0 – Sunday, 11 December

The first day of the European YWCA Study Session was focused on getting to know the 37 participants from over 19 countries. The young women leaders started off by checking in at the reception of the EYCS where they were informed about the welcome evening and important information related to preparation of the next day's session on Sharing of #FeminismInAction. The textbox underneath shows the information displayed by the reception centre for participants to see as they register and receive their room keys.

#### **Welcome to the European YWCA Study Session 2016**

Welcome Evening in the Austrian Room – 20:00  
Do not forget to submit your financial forms  
tomorrow morning.

#### ***Homework #FeminismInAction - Please have a think and prepare for the questions underneath:***

- 1. When did the personal become political for you? Please have a think about when the turning point or "aha-moments" for when feminism and gender equality become significant for you?*
- 2. How did this translate into everyday or bigger actions that you do?*
- 3. Who is your greatest ally, mentor or support for everyday actions for feminism and gender equality and why?*

The welcome evening was opened by Pauline Mukanza, vice-president of the European YWCA, who introduced herself and passed on to the Core Team of the Study Session to introduce them. The participants introduced themselves by stating their name, if they are attending as a part of a YWCA or as an independent and who their feminist hero is.

Following the introduction session, the participants received logistic information related to the coming days ahead, information regarding financial responsibilities and dietary requirements. We then engaged ice breaking introductory activity for the group to get to know each other more.

"Crossing the Line" is a powerful, interactive, and effective activity that builds diversity awareness amongst the participants. The goals of this activity

include helping participants learn about themselves; give participants an opportunity to reflect upon their self- and cultural identity allowing the community involved to appreciate its own diversity more and learn to treat each other like the diverse human beings we all are, instead of as homogenized, singular, cultureless beings. The facilitator asked the participant a question and they were asked to cross the line to the other side of the room if the statement read out applied to them. The following questions were asked: "Have you been active within YWCA for more than 2 years" and "Have you travelled outside of Europe". Finally we were given a Secret Santa for the week. This is an activity where participants are asked to draw a name from a hat of a person who they will pay extra attention to during the Study Session.

## Day 1 – Monday, 12 December

Every morning of the study session started with offering participants a morning prayer, because spirituality is a central part of the European YWCA and its regional movement. We consider this a powerful way to start the day, with a moment of meditation.

Monday was the official starting day of our programme, and Tina Mulcahy, the executive director of the European Youth Centre Strasbourg at the Council of Europe officially opened the day by providing a background of the work, the facilities of the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg and a background of herself as a woman in a position of leadership. This day was dedicated to introductions - of the team, between the participants, to the topic of our study session, to each of our aims and expectations, to the Council of Europe, the Youth Centre, and the base of our network to be. We reached right into the heart of what we wanted as a common ground for all of us, exploring the following areas:

- Building Shared Understanding: Women's Rights, Gender Equality & its Diversity through sharing of #FeminismInAction activity
- My Toolbox: Human Right's Mechanisms & Instruments for Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs in context: Women's Rights & Gender Equality
- Building Shared Understanding: Technology & Advocacy for voice
- Workshop: Workshop for Practical Theological Skills offered by YWCA of Zimbabwe

By covering the underlying principles of gender equality, women's rights and feminism participants also had the opportunity to share their own understanding of the three concepts. In this way the group built a common baseline and used it for the upcoming work. The #FeminismInAction allowed participants to explore the ways in which they manifest the advancement of gender equality and women's rights in daily acts. Moreover, we also shared situations when we had our first feminist 'aha moments', meaning the first time we realized that how and why gender equality is good for *all*. By using interactive methodologies of smart quizzes and smaller group discussions participants had the opportunity to engage in deeper discussions following presentations and feedback to the larger group.

During the study session we also had guests who virtually joined as speakers in order to contribute to a richer discussion and share their knowledge on the topic. The invited external guests made a formal intervention because they are key partners of the European YWCA and strategically aligned in implementing the objectives of the organization and the envisioned Young Women's Leaders Network. The following guest joined the conversation on Monday:

- Deputy Executive Director - Lakshmi Puri, from the UN Agency UN Women, who reminded us that young women's empowerment is at the centre for the SDGs and Agenda 2030: "By coming together, our voices and leadership will help policy makers and the international community understands the needs of young women and girls and to recognize the power of young women as change agents." She also set out which SDG indicators are related to women, young women, girls and the use of modern information and communications technologies.

## Day 2 – Tuesday, 13 December

Unlike the Monday that focused on knowledge building from an internal and desk-based conceptual approach, the Tuesday (second day of the study session) was dedicated to further building a common baseline and knowledge for all our participants by inviting external partners who are working on issues of gender, women's rights and the use of theology for

the advancement of the issues addressed. At the same time, we also made an effort to connect all of that knowledge gathered to the practical questions which are connected to the outcome - the establishment of the Young Women's Leaders Network. For that purpose the group needed to start the discussions on what we actually need in order to make change happen for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. Thus we covered the following topics together with other partners:

- No Hate Speech Movement: Building Regional Momentum From Home was presented by Menno Ettema, NHSM Campaign Coordinator at the Council of Europe.
- Council of Europe Gender Equality Unit for Agenda 2030 was presented by Carolina Lasén Diaz, Head of the Gender Equality Unit, Council of Europe.
- The team then guided a session titled Blue-Sky Thinking for Collective Action which focused on What Do We Want? and When Do We Want It? This session was the space for framing of the pan-European network of Young Women for Agenda 2030.

In the first session in the morning Menno Ettema, the NHSM Campaign Coordinator of the Council of Europe visited and introduced the No Hate Speech Movement to the participants. The special focus of this session was on how to build regional momentum from home. As an expert on campaigning online, the No Hate Speech Movement can bring crucial awareness to the future network on finding a balance between freedom of expression and hate speech. Some of the issues discussed included how to express ourselves constructively, and how to point out hate speech in a manner that will raise awareness positively and offer a counter-speech in line with human rights? When reflecting on the limits that define where free speech becomes hate speech, different criteria need to be considered:

1. Intent
2. Impact (public, private)
3. Target - are the people talked about already discriminated?
4. Tone
5. Context
6. Content - what was actually, literally said?

Carolina Lasén Diaz, the head of the Gender Equality Unit of the Council of Europe, held the second session in the morning. She raised awareness again on Gender issues not in a conceptual manner, but with facts and a special focus on gender, or the absence of gender as a topic within Human Rights institutions. The input of Carolina Lasén Diaz raised more concrete gender-related questions which were addressed in the group, such as:

- Equal representation does not necessarily mean gender equality
- The existence of violence does not diminish, even when we have laws against it.
- Intersectionality
- How difficult it is to measure impact
- Online is real life!

The afternoon was then dedicated to continuing the work on those thoughts and focusing into what we as a group can do. The idea of the EYWCA network was introduced in more detail. The afternoon in a flash was consisted of recapping the most important information and then engaging in discussions on what good practices of networks the participants know. Based on what we know, based on the experiences we have made with networks so far, how could we formulate the goal we are working for, and in what form can that be supported? We engaged in blue sky thinking, encouraging the participants to become more focused in their thinking to be able to make clear links all together on the coming day.

The free evening in the city of Strasbourg helped recap some of the discussions and develop ideas.

### Day 3 – Wednesday, 14 December

The morning of the third day was dedicated to learning practical skills that would contribute to the running of the Young Women’s Leaders Network and the work carried out with the different National YWCA’s. In the afternoon the focus of the Study Session changed from building a common base of solid theoretical overview and learning practical skills, to putting all of that knowledge into action for our network. The day explored ways how to ensure that a critical mass of young women from European YWCAs are empowered, mobilized and engaged in activities to advance human rights and gender equality at all levels within the framework of the new SDGs. In short the day consisted of the following sessions:

- Two Workshops which participants could choose to attend:
  - 1) European Women’s Lobby National & Regional Advocacy, presented by *Matilda Flemming, Policy and Campaigns Officer, European Women's Lobby*
  - 2) Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, A Workshop on Self-Care and Safe Spaces as acts of Sustainable Transformation of Power Structures, presented by *Linnea Håkansson, Programme Officer, The World YWCA*
- The afternoon had working groups on Project Design

The European Women’s Lobby is a leading partner of the European YWCA, with one of its board members seated on their board. The Workshop focused on project development. The session offered links between different parts of the study session and focused on building skills needed to implement the concepts previously introduced through the projects developed. The aim of the session was to give participants a good insight into what online and offline advocacy looks like.

The sessions also provided participants online and offline advocacy tools to apply at their national level. Through role-play the participants were able to experience what advocacy can mean in a safe environment. Learning about the importance, methods and implications of advocacy was a transformative experience that went as far as influencing the career plans of some of the women participating.

The World YWCA delivered the second workshop focused on self-care – an important component when acting as community leader and change agent. The World YWCA organization is the European YWCA’s sister organization and has been a partner since our very beginning.



*Image: EWL Advocacy Workshop*

The term “self-care” can easily come across as something superfluous and even as an additional task in the daily, frequently demanding work for women Human Rights advocates. In itself, “self-care” even signals that it is a task to be carried out for- and by only you and not as an endeavour which involves- or is of the general wellbeing of a community or movement at large. In a world which rarely endorses or promotes women human rights advocates to take time to address their own thoughts, health and wellbeing, and where resources may not allow them to rest, it is critical to discuss how self-care matters both for the individual but also for the sustainability of causes. It is important to remove the belief that self-care and turning to a safe space for support and reflection, is in any manner selfish or insignificant. The stress, exhaustion and safety are not only a private matter, but one which is integral to Human Rights and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals - 2030. Self-care is in itself is an act of maintaining energy for women human rights defenders to continue their

engagements and to fuel sustainable resistance when advocating changing the systems working against women's rights defenders.

The overarching aim of this workshop was to demonstrate how the World YWCA Safe Space model<sup>2</sup>, as part of self-care, can help young women advocates identify and find their places of safety, comfort and encouragement to build their leadership. This workshop furthermore offered space to foster a discussion on how transformation of power structures, as demanded by the SDGs, requires us to face the power structures in our immediate environments and especially around the topic of self-care. The workshop specifically focused to engage participants to explore how we can build safe and non-judgmental support networks, sustaining friendships and families, personal contemplative practices / spirituality, ensure sexuality and other topics that are important in accordance with participants themselves.

As an outcome of the workshop, participants worked together to put together action points of how we can dismantle the power structures which make self-care a taboo and 'unnecessary' subject to talk about within women's rights fields.

After lunch we connected all of the different threads together. We opened the session by feedback from the two workshops, linking it to our desired outcome of establishing the Young Women's Leaders Network and included more formal interventions by external guests. The following guests joined the conversation on this occasion:

- Talat Yaqoob – an independent young women's rights trainer provided a statement on the importance of transnational women's rights movements in order to scale up change.
- Laura Bates – online activist and founder of the online network Everyday Sexism also provided a statement of the importance of young women leading change both offline and online. The statement was echoing the important work the participants of the study session were about to embark on.
- Deirdre de Burca from SDG's Watch Europe, a European wide coalition that works collectively to promote and monitor the implementation of the SDGs, took the opportunity to echo the importance of the SDG Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Participants recapped ground-ideas on what a network can be and what the SDGs are, especially SDG – goal 5. We understood that the special feature of the network we were building was that it is the only Network focused on SDGs for Young women across Europe. Through sharing our experiences, our ideas and through encouraging each other this network is meant as a tool to furthering our work and keeping us on track. All of us are part of a much larger movement, and it is together we'll have the power to change our realities one step at a time.

In order to influence the SDGs in our countries through a digital network, what do we need and what do our previous experiences teach us about digital networks teach us to consider?

To answer those questions we engaged in blue sky thinking and split into groups that worked out strengths and weaknesses of using digital networks. To name a few examples which were identified:

Challenges:

- Language and time barriers
- Keeping the energy up
- Keeping in touch/ making sure everyone is involved

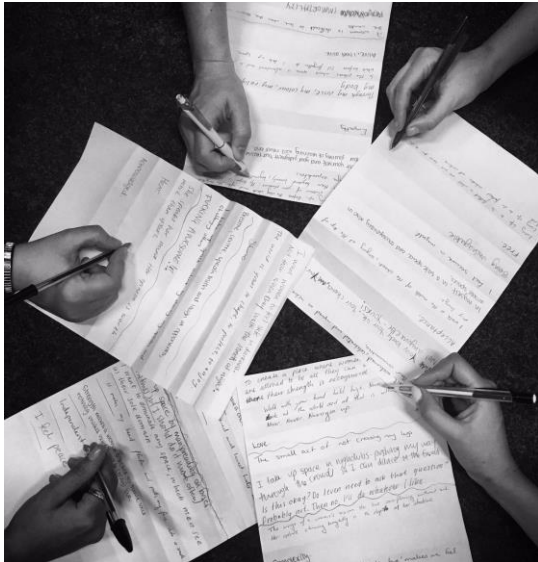
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<sup>2</sup> World YWCA Safe Space Manual: see Appendix 6, References and Resources

## Strengths

- Support network across Europe
- Share knowledge and tools
- Solidarity, motivation and fresh ideas
- Impact of a network is larger than a solo-action

The session came to intense discussions that ended in splitting up into five groups that were given time to develop each a concept for the network. It became apparent in that session how much knowledge there is and how different the different focuses are.



*Image: Feminist Poetry Workshop*

What tools do participants know? What platforms are used in all countries of Europe? How could our action for the 8th of March 2017 look like, and how can we launch our network? These and related questions were given to the groups to answer each in their own way.

In the evening participants again offered workshops in which they shared their very own expertise:

1) an evening of short movies related to women's rights issues and discussions was offered by the Scottish YWCA connected to a project they have done on feminist poetry. Together, the group listened to performed feminist poetry and produced poems themselves. The results were inspiring interpretations of the poems as well as strong expressions of the participants.

2) Another workshop offered that evening was about gender and women's rights perspectives. This was an informative workshop that allowed the participants to dive deeper into gender and women's rights discussions and exchange their understanding and experiences. There is no one sole way to understanding feminism - This is a diversity that demands the space to be explored.

## Day 4 – Thursday, 15 December

This day was dedicated to finalisation and evaluation. After the morning opening, the groups had one hour to finalize their presentation of the network they'd like to see happening, after which we presented the developed ideas and tried to connect them into a common idea. The afternoon was dedicated to mindfulness and an evaluation of the week, after which we officially closed the study session. This was a good reason to celebrate together in the evening during our goodbye party.

During the break of the morning, after the groups had finished their preparations, all the women made "Thursday in Black - No X-cuse for violence" group-pictures - a tradition in the YWCA movement (started



*Image: Thursday in Black, no excuses for violence against women and girls!*



by the World Council of Churches) to remember women who live through violence and gender-based violence by wearing black every Thursday. In the morning sessions the five groups finally presented their network ideas. Here is an overview of the proposals:

1. **Linked-In Group:** a network that focuses on professional connections, sharing of tools and information and a hashtag campaign for the 8 March. The group proposed sharing stories from women through videos and proposed using as main network Linked-In platform.
2. **Multiplatform Approach focussed on SDG #5:** This group promoted using several platforms for the network, containing closed (safe) spaces, a document bank, and Facebook group as well as not forgetting about Google ad-words. The goal is sharing information on the skills of the individuals but also information on women's rights in the different countries to show not only different approaches, but also cultural peculiarities.
3. **Website with Intranet:** The third group wanted to take time until the 8 March to prepare the launch of a new website, including an intranet for safe sharing of tools and information, webinars, accessibility to funds and translations into different languages. At the launch of the website on the international Women's day, joint events across Europe would take place and be streamed live, addressing different priority issues, such as equal pay, maternity leave, education and many others. There would be an age-limit but no limit on gender. This group also suggested including a membership fee to pay for the website and the work it involves.
4. **SDG-Network:** This network-idea focuses on making full use of the fact that it would be the only young-women's network focusing on the all of SDGs, not only Goal n.5. Their vision is: Young women realizing the 17 SDGs - shaping the future. On a website there would be the opportunity to share information, split into expert-teams, organize events throughout the year such as flash-mobs, campaigns, sessions, etc. To pay for events as well as the upkeep of the website they suggested applying for funds from the UN.
5. **#SHEISQUEEN:** This idea was less clear on the actual network, but had a strong idea on what to do with the network. Through a hashtag campaign women could share their stories and goals in social media and go viral on the 8 March. To start it off they suggested inviting celebrities to share first, as ambassadors, encouraging all women to participate. To gain more momentum they also suggest approaching influencers from the media. The network would be grounded in a website, where information on the SDGs and fundraising opportunities could be shared.

After all five networks were presented and questions answered, the group voted on which idea they want to choose as the base of the European YWCA Network for young women - with a clear majority the Idea #5 won, convincing with their concrete content that makes our future work more possible. To make sure all the amazing ideas and considerations of the other groups are not lost, especially those stronger in building an actual network, the participants had another half an hour of group-work, during which they defined what part of their network-idea will be crucial to include in the chosen base to make it stronger. A core group consisting of participants from all groups then worked the result of those discussions into the chosen network-idea. This is what the result looked like (photo):

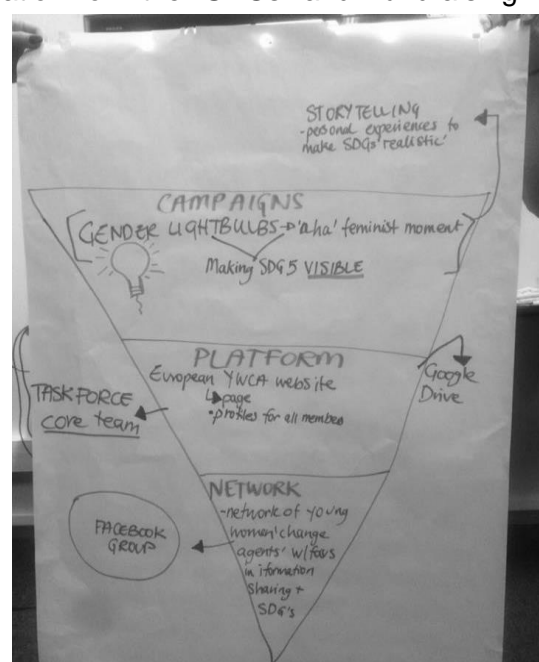


Image: Idea #5 as a base with additions from all groups

It became visible in that chart that participants looked for a multi-platform model to be able to address the different needs of a network. The following is how the participants defined the purpose and vision of the network:

*“We are a network of young women change agents who participated in the European YWCA Study Session 2016. Our goal is to preserve the connection between current members, and focus on information sharing and knowledge exchange with a particular focus on the Sustainable Development Goals. It is our mission to contribute to the achievement of Agenda 2030. We believe that empowered and connected women and girls can build on equality and lead change.”*

Today this has been refined to: *“Its activities are focused on information sharing and knowledge exchange with a particular focus on the Sustainable Development Goals. It is our mission to contribute to the achievement of Agenda 2030.”*

After lunch the motivational speaker Elenora hosted a session on the Power of Mindfulness that brought us all back into the present. Her reminder to never lose sight of our roots that lead us to do what we do, as well as to never forget to be mindful of the moment, grounded the group in the here and now again. The session stressed the importance of being in the present when engaging in with people. At the sidelines of this, participants mobilized to set up a private Facebook group for everyone to carry on the conversations towards the establishment of the Young Women’s Leaders Network and towards the mobilization of the online action of International Women’s Day.

From the visionary discussions of what we want our network to be to really coming back to the network of women that we already are, simply by being here and having got to know each other. This is also the network we visualized in our evaluation and celebrated in the evening.



*Image: Evaluation exercise*



*Image: Celebrating together*

#### Departure Day– Friday, 16 December:

Friday was the departure day for all participants. The study session preparation team met up for a final evaluation and feedback round.



### 3. Main Outcomes Of The Study Session

The outcomes of the Study Session can be explained on different levels. Firstly, the study session has successfully launched the Young Women Leaders Network that will lead us forward and direct our work towards empowering women, especially young women within the framework of the SDGs. In addition, the study session has supported individual learning experience for each of the participants, and has provided them with inspiration from those days.

The entire Study Session was designed to work with the human rights based approach in each of its sessions. This also extends to the network that was started at the Study Session, which is strongly connected to furthering human rights, women's rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals through the use of technologies. It aims to support and empower youth by building a network through which the participating women will share their stories, their knowledge, express their solidarity and plan the most effective plan of action.

Having a very diverse group of young women in the study session was both a blessing and a challenge. Through the mingling of such a variety of women with such a wealth of experiences and knowledge, it became very clear that gender equality, women's rights as human rights and the SDGs are topics that need to continue to be addressed in all of our communities. It is not a matter of course to have the privilege to explicitly make those topics present in everyday life - or special moments, for that matter. And it is even less self-evident to have knowledge on the SDGs.

Discovering these topics together, discovering how they are connected, related and pushed through technology as well as learning practical skills on how to do so while staying healthy was a journey that was valuable, in different ways to each of us. The possibility to share knowledge in the evening workshops and/or participate in them and profit from each other's expertise while bonding as a group was an important addition to our programme - it both empowered the young women to show their capabilities and empowered the participants to learn the skills they found important to learn as a member of the network.

It makes a tremendous difference to start a network with a group of young women who know each other and have a common vision of what the network can be for them and their communities. It was an insight which all participating women took with them, that gender equality, women's rights, human rights, correct and competent use of technology, self-care and the SDGs are topics that we need to keep working on - for ourselves and for a more just future. One way to do this is by staying connected, encouraging and helping each other out with knowledge, advice and by sharing our stories. It is by joining hands that we will be able to cover ground, covering it in a net of women firmly taking one step at a time towards what should be.

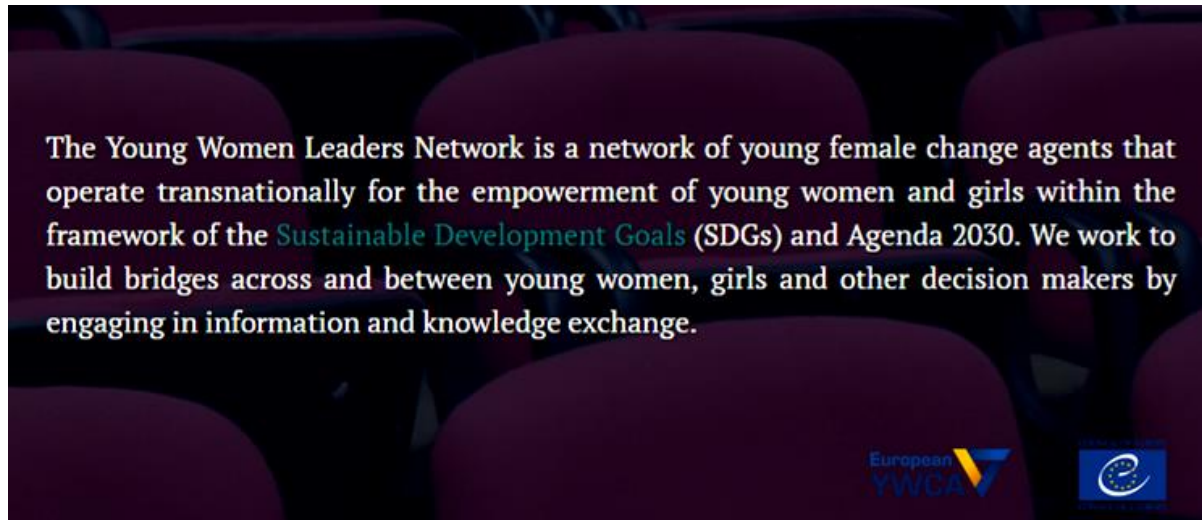
By the end of the study session a page on the European YWCA website had been produced. During the session the participants participated in producing a [Storify](#), and an Instagram photo project acting as a digital exhibition. There was also an existing Facebook group that helped the participants and the European YWCA to stay in touch and coordinate coming work.

Even with all that, the main outcome of the study session is by all means the Young Women's Leaders itself - not only the follow up work that was done achieving a digital network of young women in Europe under the framework of the SDGs - but the network that came to be during the study session of young women who are already, in many different ways, dedicated to working towards a better world.

## Main Outcome – Launching of the Young Women’s Leaders Network:

The network that resulted from the study session is named “Young Women Leaders Network” and can be found through the European YWCA website or directly under <https://tywlnetwork.wordpress.com/>. On the International Women’s Day March 8, 2017, its website, Instagram, Facebook and twitter were launched successfully. It was all put together by the young women of the study session lead by the European YWCA, based on the discussions, work, concepts and decisions we made during our week in Strasbourg.

The network defines itself as follows:



The 5 Objectives of the network are based on SDG #5: Gender Equality and Empowerment of Young Women and Girls. They are clearly stated on the website by starting with one of the Goals of the United Nations and then specifying how the network intends to contribute within its framework:

United Nations Goal: *“Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.”*

### **Our objective: Young women leading change**

Ensure that young women and girls speak for and represent themselves in **all** discussions and decision-making processes by investing in all women’s equitable representation for voice and agency.

United Nations Goal: *“Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.”*

### **Our objective: Economic empowerment of young women and girls for a brighter future for all**

Invest in young women’s economic empowerment by closing gender gaps and traps, for smart economic growth that is sustainable and good for **all**.

United Nations Goal: „*Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.*“

**Our objective: Recognise, reduce and redistribute for gender equality**

Remove **all** legal restrictions to women’s economic opportunities. Close the gender gaps in labour outcomes – respect, protect and recognise all women’s unpaid responsibilities and work.

United Nations Goal: “*Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.*”

**Our objective: A healthy life for full participation**

Recognise the links between sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to the economic empowerment of **all** young women and girls. For comprehensive SRHR services towards a positive life of quality information and choice, free from violence and gender-based discrimination.

United Nations Goal: “*Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.*”

**Our objective: Using technology for young women’s empowerment**

Educate young women and girls on the use of technology as a tool for national advocacy related to the SDG’s, through information sharing and knowledge exchange; Making information and communications technology accessible and useful to **all**.

Following the launch on the 8 March 2017, the Young Women Leaders Network also came together to produce a statement related to the official UN theme ‘Women in the World of Work: Planet 50:50 by 2030’ and the objective of the network.

Please see appendix 2 for statements the graphic that the Network used to share its statement in order to contribute to the conversations held on Women’s day and to celebrate the launch of the network.

## 4. Follow-Up Activities

The prioritized follow-up by the organisers of the session is to maintain and expand the work of the network - this includes supporting the Core Team of the network to be made up of people with specific roles, such as Administration, Website Maintenance, Country Representative, Branding, and Campaign Team.

The life of the network depends on young women striving for change. The European YWCA will be responsible to keep it alive and create a safe and vibrant space for young women to work on making change. Thus, the team hopes that our application for a special session is successful in order for the network to expand, develop and engage in more detailed work involving other key partners in the region and beyond to work for the furthering of the SDGs with technology.

Other follow-up activities for the European YWCA are to work closer with partnerships that have been created during the process of organising. Examples of this include digital action, documentation and knowledge exchange with the No Hate Speech Movement, Council of Europe's Gender Equality Unit, SDG Watch Europe, the European Women's Lobby, The World YWCA and UN Women.

The role of the participants is to take a lead in the establishment and the life of the network. The support needed is calculated to take up 2 hours a week with maintaining the work of the network. The European YWCA is expected to act as a connector between external partners and the member associations of the European YWCA, as well as making sure that the network has all the support it needs to function well.

Several of the participants wrote a blog, a report or an article about the study session in their home countries, mostly for their national or local YWCA. The European YWCA too, informed its member associations of the results and outcomes of the study session through their newsletter and will share this report with them.



Image: Young women participant from Olga Franczak featured in Polish newspaper after participating in Study Session on 8 March 2017.

## 5. Final Conclusions & Recommendations

The most important outcomes of the Study Session are the knowledge and skills building that was experienced by the participants of the session, the learning experience of the preparatory team, and certainly also planting the roots of the network that will carry our continuing work on the study session topics in the future. This was evident in the evaluation forms and exercises carried out during the session in addition to social media testimonials.

Other important outcomes were the collective understanding of concepts of women's rights as human rights, gender equality, feminism and knowledge on the SDGs for the furthering of the Agenda 2030 with a special focus on Goal 5 of the SDGs: Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The participants went through the outlined objectives and formed a network for collective digital action for International Women's Day on 8 March 2017, which was also the official launch of the network.

Through human rights education young women reflected and increased their skills to use technology to advance women's rights and also to take stock of these new competences to increase their own participation within society, by raising awareness on women rights and the current violations occurring in private and public spaces which de facto hinder full participation of women in the democratic processes. Participants also reflected on intersectionality and explored ways of actually working in practice with the concept (how to actually translate the complexity into manageable and useful tools in working for the advancement of women rights).

The main learning priorities concerned good basic knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals with a special focus on goal number 5; good basic knowledge on Gender, Women's Rights and Feminism concepts and ideas as well as, where each of the participants stands personally. The study session gave a clear idea how technology can and is being used to further a specific cause; practical skills that help create, build and sustain virtual networks as well as projects in a good and healthy way; and finally to see the connection points of these areas. The study session worked with human rights based approach within the priorities set by the Council of Europe, clearly addressing both.

The European YWCA had an opportunity to reach out to its young members, which helps increase membership growth that is set through knowledge and skills building. This is important for the overall sustainability of the European YWCA and is related to the organizations first strategic priority. The session covered the very key concepts of self-care, mindfulness and sustainability when engaging in advocacy for the furthering of gender equality and women's rights. The European YWCA will now be able to continue its work of empowering young women and girls across the region in a more dynamic way with the newly established network. The study session supported our aim to be sustainable, as we operate on minimum resources, so the support offered was very important for us.

The European YWCA also aims to make the established network one of its resources by and for its members, thus supporting the exchange of knowledge, connections, and stories amongst its members and supports their respective work for women's rights.

# 6. Appendices

## Digital Advocacy for 2030

### ***'Using Technology for Young Women's Empowerment within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals'***

Study Session organised by **European YWCA** in cooperation with the **Youth Department** of the Council of Europe

12-15 December 2016  
European Youth Centre Strasbourg, France

## PROGRAMME

#YWCA #StudySession16

### ***Sunday, 11 December 2016***

Arrival of participants  
19:00 Dinner  
21:00 Welcome evening

### ***Monday, 12 December 2016***

Breakfast  
09:00 Morning Prayer  
09:30 Official opening of the study session with Tina Mulcahy - Executive Director of European Youth Centre at Council of Europe.  
Introduction, aim and expectations  
11:00 Break  
11:30 Building Shared Understanding: Women's Rights, Gender Equality & Its Diversity  
Sharing of #FeminismInAction  
13:00 Lunch  
14:30 My Toolbox: Human Right's Mechanisms & Instruments Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs in context: Women's Rights & Gender Equality  
16:00 Break  
16:30 Building Shared Understanding: Technology & Advocacy for voice  
19:00 Dinner  
20:30 Optional Workshops:  
Practical Technological Skills  
YWCA of Zimbabwe  
Word Press Workshop

### ***Tuesday, 13 December 2016***

Breakfast  
09:00 Morning Prayer  
09:30 Opening

- 10:00 No Hate Speech Movement: Building Regional Momentum from Home  
Menno Ettema, NHSM Campaign Coordinator, Council of Europe
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Council of Europe Gender Equality Unit for Agenda 2030 Carolina Lasén  
Diaz, Head of the Gender Equality Unit, Council of Europe
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Blue-Sky Thinking for Collective Action
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 What Do We Want? When Do We Want It? : Framing of pan-European of  
Young Women's network for Agenda 2030
- 17:45 Dinner at The Gurtlerhof, 18:45
- 20:30 Free evening

### **Wednesday, 14 December 2016**

- Breakfast
- 09:00 Morning Prayer
- 09:30 Workshops:  
European Women's Lobby National & Regional Advocacy *Matilda  
Flemming, Policy and Campaigns Officer, European Women's Lobby*  
or  
Caring for myself is not self-indulgence – A Workshop on Self-Care and  
Safe Spaces as acts of Sustainable Transformation of Power Structures  
*Linnea Håkansson, Programme Officer, The World YWCA*
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Parallel Workshops Continued
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:30 Working Groups: Project Design
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Working Groups: Project Design continued
- 19:00 Dinner
- 20:30 Optional Workshops:  
Feminist Poetry – YWCA of Scotland  
Gender and Women's Rights Concepts

### **Thursday, 15 December 2016**

- Breakfast
- 09:00 Morning Prayer
- 09:30 Working Groups: Project Design finalized
- 11:00 Break
- 11:30 Presentations, Collective Decision & Group Work
- 13:00 Lunch & Reimbursements
- 15:00 Power of Mindfulness
- 16:00 Break
- 16:30 Evaluation and closing session
- 19:00 Dinner
- 20:30 Goodbye party

### **Friday, 16 December 2016**

- Departure of participants



## **About The European YWCA**

The European YWCA is a regional women's rights organization established to unite national YWCAs operating across 27 European countries – all sharing a common vision of a fully inclusive world where justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment are promoted and sustained through women's leadership, with a special focus on young women. In line with the global movement of the World YWCA, the European YWCA works to ensure that young women are able to claim their rights as empowered leaders, decision makers and change agents in their own lives, their communities, and the world at large. The 2016 Study Session on Using Technology for Young Women's Empowerment within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals is designed to ensure a critical mass of young women involved in European YWCAs are empowered, mobilized and engaged in advancing human rights at national and regional levels, through Agenda 2030 by using recent technology.

### **Objectives:**

1. Knowledge building: concepts of Gender Equality, Women's Rights, Human Right's mechanisms and the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Skills building: advocacy, project planning and monitoring & evaluation skills in the context of Sustainable Development Goals with the use of Technology.
3. Establishment and strengthening of young women's network that internally and externally works for the empowerment of young women's rights in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals with the use of Technology.

### **Output:**

Mobilize a pan-European critical mass of young women and feminist to actively engage as change agents in the shaping of Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Appendix 2 – The Young Women’s Leaders Network: International Women’s Day Statements

**1**  
**YOUNG WOMEN LEADING CHANGE**



Ensure that young women and girls speak for and represent themselves in all discussions, and decision-making processes, by investing in all women’s equitable representation for voice and agency.

European YWCA - Young Women Leaders Network

**2**  
**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS, A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL**



Invest in young women’s economic empowerment by closing gender gaps and traps, for smart economic growth that is sustainable and good for all.

European YWCA - Young Women Leaders Network

**3**  
**A HEALTHY LIFE FOR FULL PARTICIPATION**



Recognise the links between sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to the economic empowerment of all young women and girls. For comprehensive SRHR services towards a positive life of quality information and choice, free from violence and gender-based discrimination.

European YWCA - Young Women Leaders Network

**4**  
**RECOGNISE, REDUCE AND REDISTRIBUTE GENDER INEQUALITY**



Remove all legal restrictions to women’s economic opportunities. Close the gender gaps in labour outcomes – respect, protect and recognise all women’s unpaid responsibilities and work.

European YWCA - Young Women Leaders Network

**5**  
**USING TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUNG WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**



Educate young women and girls on the use of technology as a tool for national advocacy related to the SDG’s, through information sharing and knowledge exchange. Making information and communications technology accessible and useful to all.

European YWCA - Young Women Leaders Network

## Appendix 3 – Lists of Links with Study Sessions Outcomes, Resources and the Network

In several occasions materials of or information about the study session 2016 were shared. There is also the resulting network that was founded based on the study session. The following links lead to the websites sharing information in english:

### **YWCA Scotland**

The YWCA of Scotland shared a short insight to the study session through the feminist poetry produced in the feminist poetry workshop.

<http://www.ywcascotland.org/european-ywca-study-session-2016/>

### **Storify**

During the study session participants made pictures and shared impressions of the different days of our study session through storify.

<https://storify.com/EuropeanYWCA/the-european-ywca-study-session-2016>

### **European YWCA Website**

On our EYWCA website you find the objectives and information about the founded network, as well as a link to its website. We also upload useful materials, from the study session and otherwise.

[www.europeanywca.org](http://www.europeanywca.org)

### **The Young Women Leaders Network**

The network founded through the study session of the EYWCA 2016 can be found in the following link. It shares the objectives, a blog and interesting insights.

<https://tywlnetwork.wordpress.com/>

## Appendix 4 – Participant's of the Study Session

### **Albania**

- FILTO DORIS, YWCA of Albania
- HALILI SONILA, YWCA of Albania

### **Armenia**

- ABOVYAN HEGHINE, YWCA Armenia
- ASATRYAN ASTGHIK, YWCA Armenia
- GISHYAN ALINA, Armenian National YWCA

### **Belgium**

- VANDEZANDE SOFIE, YWCA Antwerp
- VELZEBOER CHRISTINA, YWCA Antwerp

### **Belarus**

- ALTYNOVA MARGARITA, YWCA Belarus
- ZAIDAVA HALINA, YWCA Belarus
- PAULIUK NATALLIA, YWCA of Belarus

### **Switzerland**

- ZELAYA DANIELA, World YWCA / YWCA Honduras

### **Finland**

- SÄILÄKIVI VIVI, YWCA Finland

### **Georgia**

- MKHATVARI ANA, YWCA Georgia

### **Greece**

- SIAFARI LYDIA, YWCA Greece

### **Lebanon**

- HADDAD CHRISTINA, National YWCA of Lebanon

### **Latvia**

- FRAN CZAK OLGA, European Women's Lobby,
- ZOZULE OLGA ISMA, University

### **The Netherlands**

- WITMER JUDITH, YMCA Nederland
- PIET NADIA, Independent
- RENSEN LOTTE, Independent

### **Norway**

- PRICOPE BIANCA-VIOLETA, YMCA-YWCA Global

### **Poland**

- NOWAK MARLENA, Stefan Batory Foundation

- WIETECHIA EDYTA, Stefan Batory Foundation

### **Romania**

- DIACONESCU RUXANDRA-MARIA, YWCA Romania
- COMAN AMBRA-ANDREEA, YWCA Romania

### **“the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”**

- TALEVSKA ISKRA, YWCA Macedonia

### **Ukraine**

- VOLOSHCHUK TETIANA, YWCA of Ukraine

### **United Kingdom**

- TRACEY JEMMA, YWCA Scotland - The Young Women's Movement
- KAUSAR SHABANA, Haringey Council, Independent
- LEE ANNA, YWCA GB
- CRAWFORD CAROLINE, YWCA Scotland - The Young Women's Movement

### **Zimbabwe**

- TAWONEZVI MOREBLESSING, YWCA ZIMBABWE
- 

## **Lecturers**

- FLEMMING MATILDA, European Women's Lobby
- CUYPERS AN, Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham
- HAKANSSON LINNEA, World YWCA
- KHONJE ELEANOR, Unravelling the mind

## **Preparatory team**

- BUZA LADA, YWCA of Belarus
- BANDIXEN NORA, European YWCA,
- MUKANZA PAULINE, European YWCA
- LAZAR DANA, YMCA Timisoara
- SANDESCU ANCA, Educational Advisor, Council of Europe

## **Council of Europe Secretariat**

- GEORGESCU MARA, Educational Advisor, Youth Department
- ETTEMA MENNO, No Hate Speech Movement coordinator, Council of Europe
- LASEN DIAZ CAROLINA, Head of the Gender Equality Unit, Council of Europe
- MULCAHY TINA, Executive Director of European Youth Centre at Council of Europe

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