Young European
Associated Researchers

Annual Report 2023

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Young European Associated Researchers
www.year-network.com

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With taking up the learnings of the pandemic years, we managed to have a very successful 2023 where we had 9 high-quality events, including our annual conference hosted by Tyndall National Institute in Cork (Ireland) and a face-to-face training hosted by VITO in Brussels (Belgium). To be able to organise all of these events we noticed that the rising inflation also affected our ways of operating, therefore this year was the first time that we had to increase our membership fees. Furthermore, we had a change in our Board of Directors, where we elected a new President of our organisation.

Continuing the excellence of the previous year, we had a very diverse range of events. Ranging from stress management and cross-cultural communication, to AI ethics and policies and how to use AI tools in research. With our face-to-face events we focused more on innovations. The focus of this year's annual conference was on 'Creating Innovative Multi-disciplinary Teams' facilitated by *Making Shift Happen*, and our face-to-face training was 'Innovative Collaboration and Creative Brainstorming' facilitated by *The Forge*. Both events provided great networking opportunities and training for professional development. Our all-time record breaking event was, however, AI tools in research, where we had 201 people attending. In this event we heard stories on how tools such as ChatGPT could be utilised in research and how reliable they are.

We decided to get a GDPR audit from Apogado to guide us on the points where we can improve and also offer us training to ensure full GDPR compliance in the future.

2023 was the year where we were able to be more active on a consulting level too since the Covid pandemic. We had 3 events during this year where we as a YEAR network were present.
The first event to which one of our board members was invited to as a youth representative in research was the 6th Industrial Forum Plenary Meeting organised by the European Commision in Brussels. This was the first time ever the European Commission had invited youth representatives from different backgrounds to voice their opinions on aspects such as the Green Deal. Here, we managed to voice our concerns and importance of young researchers in Europe.

The other 2 events YEAR network participated in were in connection with EARTO. There was the EARTO conference in March where we had a small stand to promote our network and talk with representatives from other RTO's. The other was the EARTO Industry Awards event, where we also focused on networking with the other RTO's and finding potential new members.

As we ended the year with fewer members in our network, we will put a lot of effort on gaining new members during 2024. We are optimistic that we can proceed in a similar fashion in 2024, to have nine high-quality events, including our annual conference hosted by VTT 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.

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 2023 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)

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 VITO, we believe very strongly in a connected Research & Innovation community and we support growth and talent development. Promoting young researcher networks like YEAR allows us to amplify the voice of this enthusiastic population, to empower them and to cultivate their talent in order to come up with even more impactful solutions together. It is clear that we must join forces for a sustainable future and YEAR is a great lever for that."

Marianne Wens

VITO, Human Capital* Manager

* because our employees are more than resources

3 Report 2023

3.1 Activities

3.1.1 Summary of activities

In 2023 we have managed to continue the combination of both in-person events as well as hosting training 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 2023, we organised a total of 9 events. These were composed of 4 webinars, 3 trainings (one of which was an in-person event hosted in Brussels, Belgium), one hybrid pub quiz, and our annual conference in Cork, Ireland.

3.1.2 YEAR Annual Conference 2023

The YEAR Annual Conference was held on June 12-13 and hosted by the Tyndall National Institute, Cork (Ireland). The event targeted young and early-career researchers from YEAR member organisations. It provided networking opportunities and training on creating innovative multi-disciplinary teams.

Creating Innovative Multi-Disciplinary Teams

The key focus of this year's YEAR conference was on creating innovative multi-disciplinary teams promoting thinking outside the box and building transferable skills which was facilitated by Jay Chopra, PhD, from Making Shift Happen. In the two-day conference, 45 young researchers from SINTEF, VTT, VITO, TNO, Tyndall, and RISE had the opportunity to learn the theory and apply this knowledge in highly dynamic interactive sessions.

The first day of the conference started with a welcome speech from the Head of the HR, Tom O'Grady, and YEAR board, followed by the first session about the science of trust, the five creative behaviours of innovative teams, and the Herrmann Whole Brain® Model. In the afternoon session, participants started on preparing for the World Café problem solving using the theory acquired.

On the second day of the conference, the participants learned about defining and understanding the problems using innovation tools. Later in the day, the Invention Café took place where participants in small teams focused on growing impactful ideas to solve the problems using multiple idea generation tools and on analysing the ideas generated to prioritise top ideas for each multi-disciplinary team.

Prior to the conference, there was an optional social weekend planned (June 10-11). It started with a city tour on Saturday followed by a traditional afternoon tea and a dinner in the evening with bowling. On Sunday participants went to visit the beautiful town of Kinsale followed by lunch in Garrylucas, a hike at the Old Head of Kinsale, and a visit at Charles Fort.

The annual conference was then accompanied on June 14th by a visit to several Tyndall labs, such as Tyndall Fabrication Lab, the Wearable Lab, the Robotics / Industry 4.0 Lab, the RF / Antennas Lab, The Life Science Interface Lab, and the BioPhotonics Lab.

The average overall rating for the YEAR Annual Conference was 4.82 out of 5, and 82% of participants rated the event as "very good", which was the highest possible choice.

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 Cork, Ireland, a training event about collaboration and brainstorming was organised in Brussels, Belgium. In the remainder of this section, we provide a summary of the events organised in 2023.

● Sustainable energy and energy transition (Webinar: February 24, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/sustainable-energy-and-energy-transition/

The first event of the year covered topics being investigated at VITO, VTT, and SINTEF Energy relating to the energy transition. This covered areas such as the role of battery energy storage systems in the energy transition (Roberto Scipioni, SINTEF Energy), new markets design and models for 100% renewable power systems (Niina Helistö, VTT), and energy system planning for a carbon-neutral Belgium (Partha Das, VITO). This event was attended by 57 participants.

● Stress management for peak performance (Online training: March 24, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/stress-management-for-peak-performance/

This online training was delivered by Erika Karitnig, an organisational consultant and business coach at Trigon Entwicklungsberatung in Austria. As scientists permanently have to deliver results at top performance, for the vast majority this means permanently dealing with a certain stress level. This training covered topics such as awareness of one's own stress behaviour and tools to help manage and reduce stress. Over 70 researchers attended this online training session.

● AI ethics and policies (Webinar: April 21, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/ai-ethics-and-policies/

In the first AI-related webinar of the year, we heard from Peter Biegelbauer, Caroline Lackinger, and Sven Schlarb from the AI Ethics Lab in the Austrian Institute of Technology. The team introduced participants to aspects of AI in the societal context and democratic frame. After a short introduction of AI ethics, interactive elements presented by political science and data science experts allowed the participants to learn more about democracy under pressure as well as applications of Artificial Intelligence in ethically contentious situations. This event was attended by 62 participants.

● Cross-cultural communication (Online training: May 12, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/cross-cultural-communication/

As YEAR we aim to bring the researchers together within our network to collaborate and develop new ideas. As we work together we have to understand our cultural differences as both organisations and our actual backgrounds. This training by Candida Snow focused on the differences between culture and personality, how and when culture can play a role when working together, and creating a common platform and shared understanding. This training had 33 registered participants.

● AI tools in research (Webinar: September 19, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/ai-tools-in-research/

This topic-specific webinar brought together two researchers from YEAR member organisations - Peter Nordström from RISE and Arash Hajikhani from VTT. Many topics relating to AI and its use in research organisations were covered:

- ChatGPT and its competitors: Where are we now, and where are we going?

- How can we use chatbots in our daily work? Some practical examples.

- What are the drawbacks and how do we mitigate the risks?

- How generative AI and language models get compiled?

- What are the benchmarking measures to identify the right LLM for the right task?

- Examples of utilising large language models on research and work-related tasks.

- Future avenues, opportunities and challenges.

This was one of the most popular events of the year with 201 attendees.

● Innovative collaboration and creative brainstorming @ VITO, Brussels (Training: October 9-10, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/innovative-collaboration-and-brainstorming-brussels/

This training event was our second face-to-face event organised in 2023. It was organised with the support of VITO as the local organiser for the training. Over 30 researchers got together in a two-day training event learning about innovative behaviour in teams and techniques for brainstorming. This training was delivered by The Forge, a University of Ghent spin-off specialised translating and applying scientific insights from the field of behavioural science into the real world.

● Batteries, from testing to sustainable production and recycling (Webinar: November 29, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/future-developments-batteries/

Our last webinar of the year covered all topics relating to batteries. The event heard from Taina Rauhala (VTT), on sustainable production of batteries, Robert Johansson (RISE), on battery testing and the new facility for this purpose inaugurated at RISE, and finally Liesbeth Horckmans (VITO) on recycling options for batteries. The number of attendees to this webinar was over 75.

● YEAR Pub quiz (December 13, 2023)

https://www.year-network.com/ourevents/year-pub-quiz-3/

The last event of the year presented an opportunity for networking in the third iteration of the YEAR Pub Quiz. Researchers from different RTOs were placed into different teams to answer a series of questions about the countries of the various YEAR members. This event was a hybrid digital and physical event attended by 16 online participants from all around europe and 12 participants who met together to form small teams of 3-4 people per computer at SINTEF in Norway. In this way, the event could be used for both in-person interaction with coworkers and network expansion outside one's country of residence without necessitating travel.

3.2 BOARD MEETINGS

The YEAR Board had monthly online Board Meetings and three General Assemblies: start of the year in Helsinki, middle of June (connected to our annual conference at Tyndall, Ireland), and middle of October (connected to our training at VITO, Belgium). 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, seminar and webinars.
- We decided to take an audit to check our GDPR compliance.
- We renewed our Board, after the stepping down of our previous President.
- 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 Industrial Forum

In March 2023, the YEAR network delegated a representative to the Industrial Forum organised by the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs. This event was supposed to happen during 2022 in connection with the European Year of Youth but was postponed to early 2023. For this event the DG had invited a handful of Youth Representatives with different backgrounds, who would all get a given moment to comment on the current affairs and e.g. the European Green Deal in regard to the green transition. Our YEAR delegate was the only youth representative from research. We managed to voice our opinion on the importance of young researchers to get support and make a change, and also on the funding it requires to push new sustainable technologies forward without being dependent on industry who sees it sometimes as a "high-risk investment". We will continue to voice our opinions in 2024.

3.3.2 EARTO Annual Conference

YEAR participated in the EARTO Annual Conference, hosted by Eurac Research in Bozen-Bolzano, Italy on March 28-29, 2023. EARTO brings together over 350 research and technology organisations in Europe from thirty countries. YEAR had a small stand with a roll-up that highlighted the pillars of YEAR along with the activities and support YEAR can provide to young and early-career researchers. Connections were made with RTO's from Italy, Spain, Luxembourg, Denmark, Lithuania, Hungary, France, Slovenia. Meetings and follow-ups will continue on these interactions during 2023 and 20224.

3.3.3 EARTO Innovation Awards

Three representatives from the YEAR board attended the EARTO Policy Event and Innovation Awards Ceremony – 11 October 2023 in Brussels (Belgium) with the purpose of networking and connecting with new potential partners from RTO's who may have interest in joining our network. Connections were built with RTOs from France, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Norway, Spain, Portugal, and even Brazil. Follow-ups on these interactions will continue during 2024 to help achieve our goal of increased membership for the YEAR network.

3.4 GDPR

During the year 2022 we had requested offers from companies who could check our GDPR compliance in the form of an audit and instruct us with a further roadmap on how to implement the changes. The company we decided to go for was Apogado from Belgium. They offered us a 2 phase plan where in Phase 1 is an audit including a GDPR quickscan & roadmap would be delivered, for a fixed price and a Phase 2 would be the implementation of changes with an hourly tariff.
The YEAR board had decided to take only Phase 1, and an audit was conducted during July 2023. A follow-up training to instruct us on how to implement the needed changes by ourselves was planned for January 2024. The work on correcting all the necessary parts will be conducted during the first quarter of 2024.

3.5 FINANCES

YEARS'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.
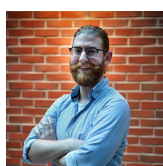
A summary of the 2023 transactions is provided in the table below.

Bank account balance on 01.01.2023	50 060.39 €
Membership fees 2023	+39 679.87 €
Board meetings	-9 516.14 €
YEAR Annual Conference	-20 045.93 €
External relations & EU affairs activities	-2 709.23 €
Training and webinar costs	-13 815.89 €
Legal and accounting costs	-3 500.00 €
Lawyer & Notary fee	0.0 €
EARTO accounting	incl. -3 500.00 €
Other costs (bank, hosting website, annual report, webinar solution, etc.)	-4 123.36 €
Interest rates	+65.96 €
Bank account balance on 31.12.2023	36 095.67 €

4 EXECUTIVE BOARD

4.1 COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

At the end of 2023, the YEAR Board is composed as follows:

Nicolaas van Strien (VTT) President

Salvatore Tedesco (Tyndall) Vice President

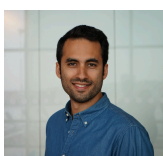Anahid Jalali (AIT) Treasurer

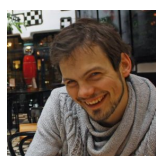Jennifer Carreiro Spencer (VTT) Secretary General

Hajo den Ouden (TNO) Activity Officer

Nikalet Everson (SINTEF) External Relations

Behrooz Sangchoolie (RISE) Communications

Jef Bergmans (VITO) Social Media

Mike Wilmer (TNO) Technology Manager

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
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 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 trainings 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