



Assembly of European Regions

Youth Regional Network

Strategic Programme

2009-2010



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INTRODUCTION

The participation of young people in all aspects of life is crucial precisely because young people are affected by the decisions made by governments, whether at regional, national or international level. Policy areas such as housing, environment, transport and education, to name but a few, have a direct impact on the lives of youngsters just as much as on those of the adults.

The world of today concerns young people just as much as the world of tomorrow. To deprive the young people of today of the opportunity to participate in the governance of society is to deprive them of both the right to affect what happens around them and to shape their future.

Europe is not only a continent of countries but also a continent of regions. In all aspects of life certain issues are better solved at different levels of government (local, regional, national or European). It is therefore crucial to let young people involve themselves in the management of these issues at all levels.

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation¹. AER is committed to pay more attention to youth issues because it fully understands the stakes of the youth policy in the long run and puts the principle of subsidiarity in the field of youth issues².

AER created the **Youth Regional Network (YRN)**, which provides a platform of regional youth organisations, councils and parliaments from wider Europe. The platform works as a forum where young people can influence regional and European policy while exchanging experiences and good practice.

AER's Youth Regional Network was established on the 25th November 2008 in [Wiesbaden](#) (the region of [Hessen, Germany](#)), where ninety young people representing 55 European regions launched Europe's first and only platform of regional youth councils, parliaments and organisations. During the founding meeting young people adopted the Wiesbaden Resolution, which laid out the guidelines for future cooperation (see Appendix 1).

The main idea behind launching the YRN was to stress that decision-making should be based upon the principle of [subsidiarity](#). This means that, on the one hand, youth policy at European level should reflect the diversity of the regions and of the young people that live in those regions. On the other hand, youth policy within the regions should maintain a European dimension so that the common challenges faced by all young people can be tackled when co-operating in sharing ideas, knowledge and experiences.

This Strategic Programme is the next step towards ensuring that the voice of young people is taken into account at regional and European level and that the young people have influence on their future. The Strategic Programme explains the mission, structure and priorities of the network.

¹ For further information, please see: www.aer.eu

² For further information, please see: www.aer.eu/en/main-issues/youth.html

AER YOUTH REGIONAL NETWORK

a. Who we are?

The AER Youth Regional Network (YRN) is a common platform of youth organisations/councils/parliaments acting at regional level in Europe. This platform is a forum for discussion and exchange of experience between young people across all European regions. All youth parliaments, councils and organisations, which represent the voice of young people from AER members as well as non-member regions, are invited to join the YRN.

b. Our objectives

The YRN has four main objectives:

- Encouraging more effective communication between young people to build a sense of a common future;
- Promoting the principle of subsidiarity and developing interregional cooperation at European level;
- Encouraging greater youth participation in local and regional democratic processes;
- Developing a sense of civic and political responsibility.

c. How do we work?

The YRN works in the following way: networking, influencing policy, exchanging best practice and experience.

1. Networking

- Creating an European forum that allows young people to address specific regional issues;

2. Influencing policy

- Involving young people in decision-making processes at regional and European levels;
- Developing a sense of civic and political responsibility among young people and encouraging youth participation in democratic processes.
- Applying the principle of subsidiarity to decision-making processes by influencing European youth policy from a regional perspective;

3. Exchanging best practice and experience

- Working together on European projects and utilising European funding;
- Bringing together young people to enlarge the European networking (many of the regions represented in the YRN are not within the EU zone).

According to the Wiesbaden Resolution, adopted on the 25th November 2008, the main objectives are:

"We, as members of regional youth councils, parliaments and organisations, and on behalf of all young people living in Europe, hereby establish the AER Youth Regional Network, an initiative of the Assembly of European Regions, which will:

- *provide a common European platform of youth organisations acting at regional level;*
- *exchange practices and experiences of youth organisations in the European regions;*
- *put into practice the principle of subsidiarity in the field of youth policy;*
- *bring young citizens closer to Europe while acknowledging their regional identities, and thus give real meaning to the idea of "unity in diversity".*

d. Our values

The YRN gives a youth perspective to the values of its founding organisation, the Assembly of European Regions:

Equality in diversity: the YRN shares AER's respect for diversity. The youth regional councils, parliaments and organisations within the network have equal status.

Democracy: the YRN is a democratic structure and promotes democratic values, freedom of choice and transparency. The network encourages the active involvement of all members in the development of its policies.

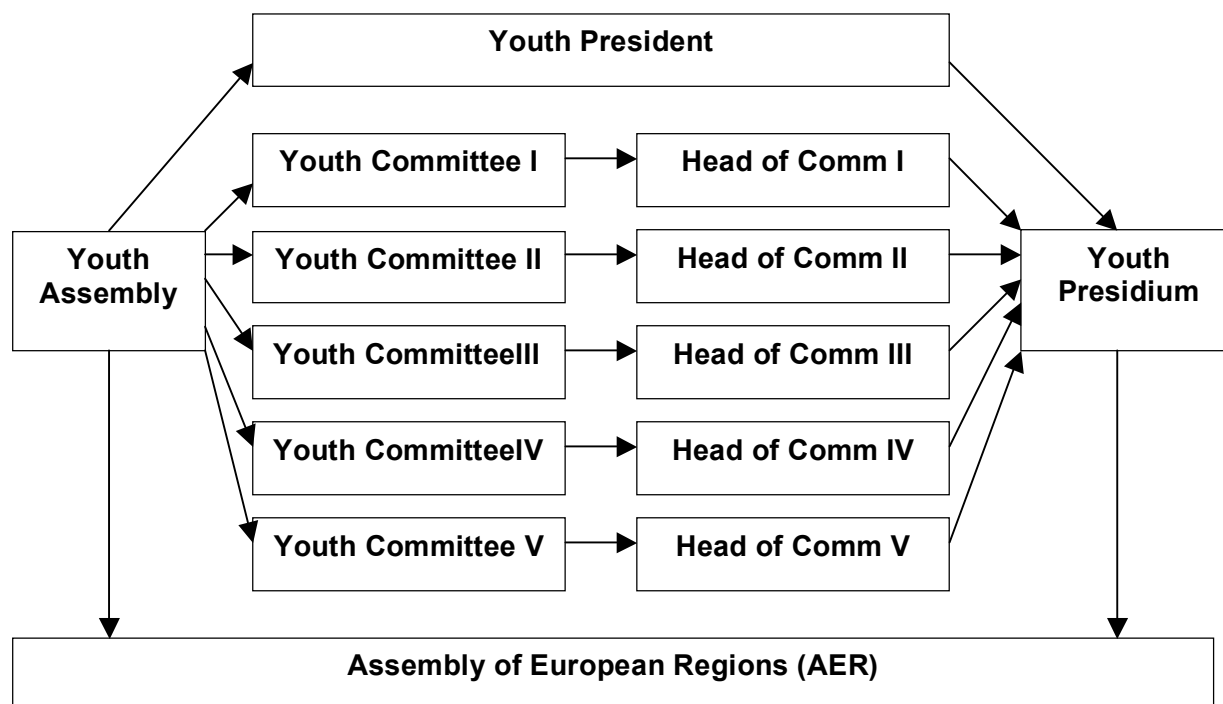
Subsidiarity: the YRN believes that the principle of subsidiarity should be applied to all decision-making processes, which means that political decisions affecting youth should be taken as closely as possible to young citizens.

Solidarity: the YRN believes that this value should assure / strengthen the sense of solidarity in Europe of regions

Innovation and Creativity: the YRN works, takes decisions and implements projects in an innovative and creative way. The YRN strives to develop excellence in all actions and initiatives.

STRUCTURE

The YRN is governed by the following structures³:



Youth Assembly

The Youth Assembly consists of representatives of the youth regional councils, parliaments and organizations. This Assembly meets twice a year to decide about the strategy and the actions of the YRN. All decisions are taken by majority rule. The Youth Assembly chooses the Youth President (majority rule).

All youth councils, parliaments and organizations acting at regional level from the European regions can become members of the YRN.

Youth President

Youth Assembly elects the Youth President for a one-year term. The President chairs the Youth Assembly, the Youth Presidium and represents the YRN to the outside. The President stays in contact with the AER President and the AER Secretary General in order to maintain close relations between youth and AER.

Election of the President: the President is elected during the Youth Assembly meeting

³

This is only draft proposal of the structure.

among the participants from the AER member region. Each region has got ONE vote.

Who can be elected as the President: a young representative of regional youth council, parliament or organization, who is between 18 and 30 years old.

Youth Committees

The Youth Assembly is divided into five different committees (see the next section). They meet twice a year during the Youth Assembly sessions. Each Youth Committee elects by consensus a Youth Committee Head who becomes one of the Youth Presidium members.

The Committees are in charge of concrete projects.

Youth Presidium

The Youth Presidium consists of the five Youth Committees Presidents and the Youth President.

The role of the Presidium is to coordinate the actions of five Committees as well as to cooperate directly with AER. That means, the Youth Presidium should:

- attend AER meetings to present young people's point of view
- be in contact with AER Committees
- shape the YRN strategy and priorities

Members

Each region is represented by two people.

All European regions can become members of YRN through their representatives within AER.

YOUTH COMMITTEES

The YRN members can choose to participate in one of five Youth Committees. They elect a head of the Committee for a 1-year term (consensus). Each Committee is in charge of monitoring the main topics, influencing AER policy as well as relevant European institutions and developing the youth projects in this field.

The members of each Committee take direct actions by:

- discussing and exchanging experience and best practice
- deciding about concrete actions and projects of the YRN
- influencing AER and European decision making processes

The Head of each Committee will represent the Committee during the Youth Presidium Meetings, as well as during AER meetings and at European level.

Youth Committee on Sustainable Development

Key areas of activity: sustainable development in all aspects of life, renewable energies, energy efficiency, environment.

Concrete actions: involvement in the AER Youth Summer School 2009 on Water and cooperation with the 2009 Youth Ambassadors.

Youth Committee on Professional Life and Youth Entrepreneurship

Key areas of activity: training, non-formal education as a means of gaining first professional experience, employment, healthy society, equal opportunities, mobility

Concrete actions: involvement in the Eurodyssey programme by promoting the project and having a direct influence on the programme; evaluation of the application of the MYFER Award on Youth Entrepreneurship

Youth Committee on Culture and Education

Key areas of activity: formal and non-formal education, multiculturalism, equal opportunities, diversity, regional languages

Concrete actions: organization of the European Youth Forums in order to educate young people around Europe; evaluation of the applications for AER Scholarship

Youth Committee on Health and Social Affairs



Key areas of activity: cross-border healthcare, equal opportunities, aging societies, balanced lifestyle and addictive behaviors (drugs, alcohol, health and IT)

Concrete actions: involvement in AER Peer Reviews on topics relating to healthcare; AER Working Group on Equal Europe for People with Disabilities; Observatory on Gender Issues

Youth Committee on Communication and Media

Key areas of activity: communication, media, information, multilingualism

Concrete actions: supporting the 'Subsidiarity is a word' movement; Communicating Europe! (establishing contacts with European and regional media; creating a regional database of youth media; improving the YRN Facebook Group and Website)
; AER Photo Competition; AER Regional Reporters.

PROJECTS AND ACTIONS

Concrete projects for 2009-2010 are related to the Youth Committees.

Youth Committee on Sustainable Development:

To raise awareness on sustainable development, especially on eco-friendly lifestyle and to improve intra-regional activities of young people on sustainable development.

Key areas:

Environment, Society, Technology

Concrete actions:

- Help youth from European regions to obtain more information on their local environment
 - Draft a template letter that young people can send to their regional administrations in order to gather information on the local environment and on the most pressing local environmental dangers.
 - Develop a to do list with concrete steps and ideas in order to support young people to approach their regional administrations in all issues related to sustainable development
 - Institutions to be contacted: Regional Environmental Ministries/Agencies, Universities and Research Institutions, Environmental NGOs
- Gather information on best practices and facilitate the exchange of knowledge on formal education on sustainable development in schools
 - Contact regional educational ministries and ask for concrete projects, methodologies and toolkits in the area of education on sustainable development
- Support youth from Europe to spread their knowledge about sustainable development and eco-friendly lifestyles to their peers
 - Draft a template letter that young people can send to stakeholders involved in awareness raising campaigns related to all areas of sustainable development (education, sustainable tourism, responsible resource consumption, recycling, conserving natural diversity, etc.) in order to obtain more information on informal education and awareness raising in sustainable development
 - Explore the possibility to organize work-shops on sustainable development
 - Spread information on teaching tools and methodology on work-

- shops over AER and YRN website
- Institutions to be contacted: Youth organizations (i.e. scouts), Organisations involved in awareness raising and campaigning for sustainability
- Based upon the information gathered under action 1-3, the Youth Committee on Sustainable Development will approach regional administrations in order to explore areas of cooperation with regard to awareness raising and education on sustainable development.
- Develop a toolkit for educating young people on sustainable development
 - Informal education: establish contact to the participants of the AER Youth Summer School and exchange ideas with AER youth ambassadors on the issues of sustainability and awareness raising as well as creating small projects to spread this knowledge
 - Formal: exchange ideas with regional educational specialists
- Design a competition among European regions on the topic “Greenest European Region” (working title) that will award European regions according to a set of criteria that reflect the promotion of sustainable development.

Youth Committee on Professional Life and Youth Entrepreneurship

To develop the activities of the YRN concerning the professional life and Youth Entrepreneurship by providing the platform of exchange of best practice and experience between youth organizations, working on common projects and following the already existing AER projects; especially relating to: training, non-formal education as a means of gaining first professional experience, employment, healthy society, equal opportunities, mobility.

Concrete actions:

- Promote the Eurodysse programme
- The committee would like to cooperate and have projects together with Youth in Action-programme

Youth Committee on Culture and Education

To support a means of formal and non-formal education by contributing to the accessibility of the already mentioned, to face the challenges and opportunities related to multiculturalism in the contemporary Europe, to strive for equal opportunities, to strengthen the role of diversity among the European youth at a regional level.

Key activities:

- Formal education: schools, universities, colleges



- Informal education: youth work, participation, engagement programmes, out of school learning, peer-to-peer education, out of school mentoring schemes, sports
- Culture: traditions, language, identity, customs
- multiculturalism
- equal opportunities
- diversity

Concrete actions

The following is a list of the actions and schemes that this group will aim to support and develop throughout their term. Within these actions there are ideas of short-term plans or movements that the group will aim to achieve. As well as working across the continent, the group emphasises the importance of regional action. The group will also always keep in mind the opportunities provided by the 'Youth In Action' programme.

- Scholarships: A small group from the committee will decide on which individual is awarded with the scholarship each year
- European Citizens' forum: This is an optional project that will depend on the individual needs of the region. This particular committee would offer support for anyone who wants to host citizens' forums. After hosting their own, it will be asked that each region provides a feedback report that will be used as aid and advice for anyone else who wants to host a forum.
- Culture Camps/Festivals/Conferences: Events where representatives can come together and focus on one particular topic and exchange ideas in order to organise regional cultural events. Emphasis would be placed on less-active regions
- Create links between different regions: These links will be important in supporting other countries in developing their own programmes. Best practice would be provided by the group to other regions who require advice on developing their own systems
- Do you speak European?: Developing more prizes that award different groups for their style and content.
- Event calendar: on events organized by all of the members of AER YRN, even the small projects

Youth Committee on Health and Social Affairs

To focus on and to develop the activities of the YRN concerning healthcare and social policy, including cross-border healthcare, equal opportunities, ageing societies, balanced lifestyle and addictive behaviours (drugs, alcohol, health and IT).

Key activities:

- Building a Youth-friendly European Health System
- Finding solutions to Demographic Change and promote intergenerational solidarity
- Strengthen interregional cooperation in organ donation and in fighting organ traffic
- Healthy Lifestyles and Addictive Behaviors



- Inform young people and their families on addictive behaviors (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, addiction to computer and IT applications)
- Inform young people about good food, eating disorders and the necessity to do sport
- prevent mental health disorders such as depression, loneliness, crime in the families, and promote the importance of families and friends' networks for the well-being of young people
- Equal Opportunities and Equal rights
- promote equity between men and women
- promote tolerance for all sexual preferences
- promote respect for the rights of ethnic minorities and migrants
- promote the rights of people with physical disabilities and mental deficiencies

Concrete actions:

- Bringing in the youth perspective in the existing AER networks and their meetings, through creative means such as theater plays, fairy tales or moderation of debates in the AER Observatory on Equal Opportunities and in the AER Working Group on People with Disabilities
- To communicate about healthy lifestyles and the importance of sport in the daily life of young people, YC4 proposes the following idea: riding the distance from Croatia to Brussels by bike! An AER bike would thus leave Croatia with a young cyclist on the saddle, soon replaced by another young person... this chain would show the attachment of young people to sport and enable AER's YRN to catch the media attention and spread its messages.
- Launching campaigns and creating films targeted at young people and project them in schools and youth assemblies. These campaigns should denunciate all kinds of addictions and be based on real cases, with people witnessing their experience and talking about the solutions they found to get out of their addictions.
- Address parents and raise the awareness of the importance of communication within the families
- Introduce sexual education in schools, by distributing condoms and explanatory leaflets.
- Participation in external conferences

Youth Committee on Communication and Media

To establish an efficient Communication Platform at two levels (internal and external one), to promote the projects targeting youth in their regions by contacting local media, organizing the events in their regions as well as their own projects.

Concrete actions: AER Projects, Communication Platform (internal, external), Long-term objectives

AER projects: The members will support: 'Subsidiarity is a word', Communicating Europe Award 2009, AER Photo Competition, AER Regional Reporters by promoting the projects in their regions, contacting local media, organizing the events in their regions, organizing their own projects within the YRN that will support the AER.



Communication Platform: The Youth Committee 5 will work together on how to establish an efficient Communication Platform at two levels: internal and external one.

Internal:

- Youth Committees: Google Group
- YRN: Google Group
- AER – YRN: Newsletters sent out every three months
 - a) by AER Secretariat:
 - on AER activities that may be interesting from youth perspective
 - to the Youth Assembly
 - b) by Youth Presidium:
 - on regional youth activities or projects
 - collected by Heads
 - to YRN President
 - AER Secretariat

External:

- Youth regional media database – collected by everyone in order to give the YRN publicity
- Will be responsible for inviting guests, speakers, etc to participate in the YRN events

Long-term objectives:

- Corporate Identity: logo, official doc layout, etc.
- Spokesperson: for the time being – YRN President, later on – to be elected, responsible for the external communication
- Website
- Newspaper

CONCLUSION

AER treasures youth as the most important resource of the future and it understands the stakes of supporting youth participation and action in all aspects of life. That is why it commits to promote youth interests at both regional and European level. The 'AER Youth Regional Network' project is to be an axis between past and future AER youth activities. It is about bringing young people from European regions together in a European context in order to discuss problems and concerns they might be confronted with in their respective regions, to share their experiences and exchange hopes for the future, as well as to learn from one another so as to build themselves better.

The Youth Regional Network will thus focus on bringing a regional dimension in the young people's reflection about youth issues in a European framework. It will also encourage the members of the Network to consider the idea of further sustainable cooperation of young people from European regions. AER wants to launch and develop



in time a sustainable network of young people from the AER member regions. Representatives of youth councils/parliaments/associations from these regions will form a platform for dialogue and exchange of regional experiences in the European context with the final goal of improving the societies in which they live in.

The Youth Regional Network is a milestone not only for AER, but also for the European youth work because this presents the starting point for a European platform representing for the first time specifically the youth from regions all over Europe.



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| Appendix 1 |
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RESOLUTION

AER Youth Regional Network

Noting that young people are directly affected by the decisions made by governments at European, national and regional level;

Recalling that young people have the right to affect what happens around them;

Understanding that young people are the future of Europe;

We, as members of regional youth councils, parliaments and organisations, and on behalf of all young people living in Europe, hereby establish the AER Youth Regional Network, an initiative of the Assembly of European Regions, which will:

- provide a common European platform of youth organisations acting at regional level;
- exchange practices and experiences of youth organisations in the European regions;
- put into practice the principle of subsidiarity in the field of youth policy;
- bring young citizens closer to Europe while acknowledging their regional identities, and thus give real meaning to the idea of “unity in diversity”.

Therefore, it is hereby resolved that the AER Youth Regional Network is to:

- influence regional policy on jobs, health and education to stop brain drain in Europe and keep young people healthy in an ever-changing society;
- support education to encourage young people to be entrepreneurial, take initiative, and participate in regional policy making;
- manage globalisation by promoting the values and traditions of our individual regions and by exchanging regional knowledge and experience;
- instigate change by educating young people from a regional perspective, and change consumer mindsets by promoting sustainability, the use of renewable energy and technology;
- take action against and overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation by improving education, and migrant participation, and by facilitating exchange among the cultures and identities of all young Europeans.

Adopted, in recognition of the needs and concerns of young people, during the Youth Regional Network Founding Meeting in Wiesbaden held on 25 November 2008.



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| Appendix 2 |
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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Wiesbaden Resolution adopted during the founding meeting contains the main strategic points:

Therefore, it is hereby resolved that the AER Youth Regional Network is to:

- *influence regional policy on jobs, health and education to stop brain drain in Europe and keep young people healthy in an ever-changing society;*
- *support education to encourage young people to be entrepreneurial, take initiative, and participate in regional policy making;*
- *manage globalisation by promoting the values and traditions of our individual regions and by exchanging regional knowledge and experience;*
- *instigate change by educating young people from a regional perspective, and change consumer mindsets by promoting sustainability, the use of renewable energy and technology;*
- *take action against and overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation by improving education, and migrant participation, and by facilitating exchange among the cultures and identities of all young Europeans.*

The strategic priorities of the YRN are the result of the meeting in Wiesbaden as well as of the answers to the questionnaire, which was sent out to all participants prior to the founding meeting.

a. Influencing regional youth employment, health and education policies

The most important concern for young people living in Europe are how to gain a decent education and how to find a good job in a healthy society. In addition to that, the main phenomenon of the young generation living in Europe in the 21st century is migration. Migration influences job markets and education in the following ways: migration gives better possibilities to gain professional experience, a good education, as well as knowledge of foreign languages. It also contributes to tolerance and multiculturalism. Migration can also have adverse side effects, such as brain drain. Overall however, increased mobility offers a wider range of options for young people. Therefore the young generation has to think of ways how to take advantage of it and how to deal with negative side effects.

The main concern of the YRN is how to influence regional youth policy in terms of employment, health and education taking into account some aspects of mobility in Europe.

Therefore, the YRN suggests:

- participants of the meetings, but also for the young people in the regions
- fostering exchange of ideas and spreading knowledge via media or in schools
- electing ambassadors responsible for spreading knowledge and involving schools, e.g. in planning conferences
- establishing database projects as to help to link partners for interregional projects
- setting up a digital platform as a means of communication between regions

The YRN will be involved in AER projects concerning these topics. It will also represent the point of view of the young people from European regions at European level. The most important action will be to influence the decision-making process and convince the European/interregional organization to take into account youth perspective.

c. Managing globalisation

Modern society becomes more connected in all respects. Beyond any doubt, our values, traditions, societies and economy are affected by globalization – both in a positive and a negative way. As a negative phenomenon, globalization is perceived as an omnipresent factor, destroying everything that is local and regional. Another negative connotation includes travel possibilities (e.g. cheap flights enabling people to travel more, thus making them neglect local values and traditions). The positive connotation on the other hand, include the fact that globalization can also lead to their cultural enrichment. Cultures mix up, thus creating a new cultural diversity. It is important that apart from taking from other cultures, we enrich them with our unique values and traditions.

It is essential to bear in mind that glocalization, as opposed to globalization, has made global companies adjust their products to local needs and demands. Globalisation provides a huge chance for small and medium enterprises who produce and sell their product – the important thing is that they have to know how to make use of it in a wise way, e.g. by promoting their products via the Internet. They should also remember that it is due to globalisation that more people can come to various regions and taste some local products. Therefore, the most important thing about the globalisation is not to be afraid of it but to profit from its best aspects, such as flow of information, cultures, and values.

The YRN suggests taking the following actions:

- promoting values, traditions, culture particularities of regions to maintain local identity and at the same time to increase awareness of the uniqueness of other parts of Europe
- promoting modern communication means, exchanging knowledge and experience
- organising meetings of young people from student exchange programmes (e.g. Erasmus) so that they can take part in discussions on the differences between the regions they come from and exchange their opinions.

The YRN will affect the question of the global economy by participation in European and regional discussions concerning global economy.

d. Instigating change to promote sustainability, the use of renewable energy and green technology

The YRN promotes equality, sustainability and the use of green energy according to the rule: 'think global, act local'. Young people think together about common guidelines, and how to make them applicable to specific issues. Depending on the issues, an approach has to be taken at legislative or educational level. It is essential to begin with changes and it is legislature that is the first step to do so. No laws mean no results, thus, no changes in mentalities. The solution can be to begin with making people sensitive to certain issues. Beyond a doubt it is a slow process, but it has to be initiated nevertheless.

Therefore, the YRN suggests:

- using modern technology to reduce our energy consumption
- promoting renewable energy resources
- supporting the belief that we are able to change the world

Young people can prompt change. Therefore the YRN suggests educating people from an early age to change consumer habits in order to promote sustainability and renewable energy resources. Green technology and changing mindsets can reduce general consumption, and therefore, it is recommended to give common guidelines and apply them individually in the European regions.

The YRN can be a starting point for exchanging ideas and best practices. In order to make the YRN a successful platform for communication, young people from European regions will continue to attend meetings and participate in them actively. The already mentioned common guidelines have to be promoted by every single participant locally.

e. Taking action against to overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation

Culture comprises such elements as: language, customs, art, music, religion and values. On the one hand, it is culture that brings young people together and helps to create a meeting sphere by building intercultural bridges. On the other hand, it can also divide people. Therefore, culture in the life of young people concerns the following issues:

- conserving regional culture
- having say in what culture is
- coexisting with people that have various cultural backgrounds.

One of the questions directly related to culture is integration. Young people with a migration background are in many instances not properly integrated. Often they do live in parallel societies, are not able to speak the language of the host society and are struggling to perform well in schools and to gain the access to the labour market. The key to integration is education.

To foster culture and improve integration, the YRN suggest:

- Taking concrete steps to overcome prejudices, inequalities, xenophobia and segregation.
- Improving migrant education and participation.
- Facilitating the exchange of views and opinions regarding culture and identities among young people throughout Europe.

Communication is crucial in this respect. That is why the YRN will organise regular meetings and information sessions in order to spread the message and teach about culture.