



YOUNG MIGRANTS CAN ACHIEVE CHANGE

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Written by Blansfloer Coudenys

The project

The “Young Migrants Can achieve Change” or YMCAC-project was first developed around the core mission of the SIRIUS network: To facilitate social change for young migrants through multi-stakeholder collaborations. With the upcoming elections for the European Parliament in 2024, we wanted to pay extra attention to the inclusion of young people who traditionally do not have the right to vote in these elections for a myriad of reasons. We realised that although these young migrants are often excluded from traditional ways of influencing the political process in the EU (through voting), they have a great deal of valuable insights which can contribute very strongly to our everchanging and growing EU. We thus wanted to focus on all the other ways through which the voices of these young people can be heard and valued in our democratic process. Thus the mission of this project was developed as follows: “ YMCAC aims at training young migrants living in Europe on creating advocacy campaigns to claim their rights and be active citizens besides the fact of not being able to vote for the #EPElections2024.”

We developed the following objectives for this project, aligning them strongly with the objectives for the European Year of Youth 2022:

- The first objective was for all participants to be trained on advocacy (around SDGs, local actions for migrant education, European frameworks) within the framework of the University of Youth and Development (UYD) of the North South Centre of the Council of Europe. This included a weeklong event during which we will gathered all our participants with the aim to train them and to kick off the campaign-process.
- A second objective, following the initial gathering, was to support the young migrants while they set out to bring to life the campaigns they created during the initial training within their own national context and communities.
- A third objective was that we, as SIRIUS, would implement an advocacy campaign to promote the together.eu platform among our members, participants and general public, as well as to encourage young people to get involved in their cities as active citizens, asking questions, participating in debates and/or exposing their ideas towards policy makers (at local, regional and/or national level).

To finalise the project, SIRIUS set out the goal of collecting all the ideas gathered during those actions and convert them into policy recommendations towards policy makers, especially towards MEPs. This report is the culmination of the work we've been involved in in the past months, which includes formulating these recommendations which we hope will serve MEPs to implement in their campaigns towards the European Parliament Elections 2024.

Joining the UYD

“The University on Youth and Development (UYD) is a partnership between the Spanish Government (INJUVE), the European Youth Forum (YFJ), the Spanish Youth Council (CJE) and other international youth led organisations and youth serving organisations. Since 2000, it takes place in the Euro-Latin-American Youth Centre (CEULAJ - Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres), in Molina, Spain.” As the UYD gathers representatives of youth organisations and youth movements to discuss, train and be trained around the main issues on the global

agenda, it was the perfect platform for us to kick-off our YMCAC-project and gather our participants.

To find our participants we focused on young migrants in Spain, Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, United Kingdom, and Ireland. In those countries we have members who work directly with young migrants and refugees, so we believe that it would be relevant to have those people involved in the project to achieve the goals of the training and post advocacy campaigns. For the training we invited two participants per organisation from each country and ultimately gathered 10 young migrants, together with two experienced trainers and a couple of people from the SIRIUS Network to provide additional logistical and linguistic support.

We used the 5 days of the UYD to provide initial training on campaigning etc. and give our participants the chance to get to know the other young people involved in the project. Additionally our participants will be able to get to know and network with various other organisations and participants involved in the UYD. During these 5 days we used a wide range of workshop and networking techniques with the broad goal of providing interactive communication between young migrants, civil society organisations and the UYD. The full schedule of the training can be found at the end of this report (Appendix A).

The YMCAC-campaigns

During the UYD our participants learned all there is to know about campaigning, with a specific focus on engaging in various forms of campaigning for SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). The goal for the campaigns is to help young migrants appeal to MEPs to ensure local institutions are working towards these goals and are transparent in their actions so accountability can be insured. To achieve this goal the young migrants were trained and supported in creating an advocacy campaign which fits the needs and context of their local community. The participating young migrants also learned about the various EU institutions and their functions as well as about the SDGs.

During the training the young people were advised on how to translate the various SDG-subgoals into actionable items which fit their own national context.

Once we returned to our homes, and own communities, we stayed in touch with the participants and guided them through putting their campaigns into actionable items. We provided the young migrants with informational support as well as financial support so they could implement their chosen actions. We asked the young migrants to shape their chosen actions in such a way that they encourage active political participation among young people. Moreover, we would like these young migrants to see and understand how their active participation, their voice and vote, can help provide better opportunities for young people, specifically in terms of migration and equal education opportunities.

The following campaigns were developed and are currently being undertaken by our participants:

Superaccio – Sharing Experiences of being a young migrant in Europe

Superaccio is a non-profit organisation located in Spain which works with young people at risk of social exclusion through action and sport. 5 young people who are supported by this organization joined the YMCAC-project.

They decided to share their own stories and experiences as part of their campaign to shed a light on the hardships young migrants go through every single day. These are their own words:

What is your own experience of being a young migrant in Europe?

Said: "It has been a brutal experience, with moments with a lot of intensity both positive and negative, I have met many people who have made me feel very bad when all I wanted and have always wanted was to integrate, learn and have healthy relationships, this has made me feel disappointed and lost in many moments because the path has not been easy. Even so, I didn't let myself be defeated by the situations and within myself I continued to be me without losing my objective. And thanks to this my situation has now changed. Now that I can choose my path and the people I want to be close to me, I am able to show without fear the said that for many years I had to protect inside me. After my experience I don't feel hate but it is very clear to me that in the EU a lot still has to change so that everyone is treated as a person and so that the thousands of immigrants and refugees stop suffering in a world that belongs to everyone and that should be even more humane."

Habibou: "The truth is that I never imagined emigrating to the EU from Benin and it was one of the strongest decisions I made, especially because it was a hellish road where I lost many companions, life in the EU as an immigrant is very difficult, there are stories of successes and failures. Can you imagine migrating in a country for five or six years without papers, without a job, without a family, without friends? After my experience I feel that we will have no future. Human beings have advanced immensely from a technological and scientific point of view but they have made very little progress in their psychology, there is still violence, there is still selfishness, the importance of humanism in life is to treat others as people, to be a little sensitive to their emotional world."

Why this campaign?

Said: "To put an end to injustice. To stop the existence of opportunists who take advantage of the weakness of people from other origins who are only trying to start their lives legally. Because we should all have the same rights and because in a country with laws that regulate and control the functioning of the economy and society, black contracts should be much more persecuted and eliminated. It is a reality that we are all aware of, and as consistent and committed advanced countries we should fight for the complete elimination of these situations that make life impossible for many people. Our campaign aims to make this reality visible to all those people who do not suffer from it. These situations happen every day and it is the responsibility of all of us, regardless of our origin and whether we are directly affected or not, to make them disappear now."

Habibou: "Because of inequality, I know that words have power, and if we use them repeatedly, our unconscious will begin to perceive them as real, so that a real transformation

of our environment will begin, which is why, based on my new experiences, to help us overcome, our campaign aims to make visible this reality of migrants."

Do you have any ideas about how things might change for EU arrivals like yourself in the future?

Said: "The system should be changed, the reception system. It should be a system whose main focus should be to get into the skin of that person who has just arrived in the worst conditions in a country he/she does not know and who is totally lost and full of fear. The system should have as its main objective to take people in, to take care of them, to recover them and to help them build a better future for them and for everyone. When we get the system to assume this objective and recognise that these situations are not going to stop and that we must find a real solution for them, only then will our society be better and more humane.

Along the same lines, it is essential to radically change the messages that the media send to society, we need realistic messages so that everyone understands that we are all people and as people we do things right and wrong just like everyone else."

Habibou: "Humanity has had to migrate all over the world for its survival, so this goes a long way to support immigrants in the US, as we don't know if we will have to take the same practice in search of a place to survive and achieve the dreams we want to find."

Ajmal and Ibtihal – Bringing together ethnic minority communities

Ajmal and Ibtihal are two young advocates from the UK. They share a passion for community-spaces and involving young people in those spaces, to create safe environments where everyone can feel accepted. They partnered for their campaign with Unleashing Refugee Potential. A UK-based organisation supporting young refugees and asylum seekers in their educational journeys.

This is what they shared about the initial stages of their campaign:

"After the training, we decided to work on an advocacy campaign together with the organisation Sirius Policy Network. We aim to create a safe space for all youth, bridge the gap with ageing communities and solving community challenges. We will continue to work on our campaign and put it into action."

"During the first meeting we highlighted the main problems we wanted to overcome within our community: The lack of mental health awareness, the lack of various community collaborations and not enough youth hubs. Throughout the meeting, various opinions and ideas were shared on what we could do to create positive changes. Community members showed particular interest into the need for improvement within our local area. Upon the meeting we decided to start a small culture evening where each individual experienced different cultures through the expression of food, attire and the different backgrounds. This created a warmer and more welcoming atmosphere that allowed people to open up more and speak up on what they thought should be done. Our next step is to plan a large culture day that will offer the opportunity for various Leeds head members, youth & migrant communities to connect."

You can read more about their work on the [website](#) they created.

Anna – Sharing the experiences of Ukrainian refugees

Anna is a young woman from Ukraine, who is passionate about the field of refugee and migration law. She partners often with Multi Kulti Collective which is a Bulgarian non-profit organisation working for migrants and refugees. They organise and support a great range of projects and Anna worked with them on her campaign. She decided to interview Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria to share their stories, as a tribute to the incredible resilience they have and the strength of refugees all across Europe.

You can read more about her work [here](#).

Najib – Refugees mental health

Najib lives currently in Hungary, and joined the YMCAC-project through the CEU University. He worked on a campaign by himself. This is his campaign, in his own words:

Najib: “My name is Najib or you can just call me ‘Javed’. I am a refugee living in the EU, and I wanted to help other refugees regarding their mental health or education. I’ve seen a lot of refugees facing these difficulties whether it’s in education or with their mental health (mostly in Hungary). It’s hard for them to get access to mental health resources, because of their financial problems or because it’s not provided for free from the Government. There are a lot of problems going on in today’s world, and we can’t solve them all overnight but if we can help a little bit, we should step up and do our best to help someone. As Mevlana Rumi said: “God gave you wings, why crawl on the ground”. If we’ve the opportunity to help someone in need, why not do it? So, I got in touch with SIRIUS Network and we wanted to do something. I wanted to make a campaign about Refugees Mental health, and to provide them with the help and support they need, because if our mental health is not okay then our whole body is not okay. Somehow it’s connected. When refugees or asylum seekers enter the EU, they provide them with food and shelters but somehow they don’t take their mental health seriously or don’t provide them some more support. I did some interviews and chats with refugees about this topic and here are the results.”

You can read more about his work [here](#).

Laura – Long Way 2 go

Laura lives currently in Ireland and is connected to the New Communities Partnership. She decided to make her campaign about visas, in particular work visas, to enter Ireland and to highlight and bring awareness to the length and difficulty of this process. Ironically due to visa problems she could not join us for the in-person training week in Spain nor for the final event held in Brussels. She decided to use Tiktok for her campaign, to reach a younger audience.

This is what she shared: “With Long Way 2 Go I want to promote clear information and encourage a positive approach to visas in the workplace. I want to share information on stamps and visas in Ireland mostly for those working and I want to encourage better practices in the workplace, building a better workforce in general.

You can find her campaign [here](#).

Kejsi – The struggle of Italian citizenship; Obstacles and best practices

Kejsi is currently a student at the University of Bologna, in Italy where she studies human rights, international relations and intergovernmental relations. Being an immigrant to Italy herself she feels very passionate about the issue of Italian citizenship and the difficulties getting this status. She decided to set up her campaign around this issue.

This is what she shared about her campaign: “The issue of Italian citizenship and how the criteria for obtaining it turn into often insurmountable obstacles for those who, in Italy, were born and raised has become increasingly relevant in the public debate. It is the second generations, in fact, who suffer the greatest consequences of this condition and find themselves trapped in a bureaucratic limbo from which it is difficult to to extricate themselves from. It is in this context that the dialogue between guests who, each with respect to their own personal experience, will contribute to discuss and share obstacles and viable ways in the struggle for Italian citizenship. I organised an event with speakers: The guy on the left (see photo's underneath) is a Counsellor of the mayor of Bologna. They are preparing a project to create an international committee, which is a sort of city council formed by people living in Bologna who are not Italian citizens. This means that we will have some sort of political power, because the mayor will have to take the committee into account when making important decisions for the city.”



Kejsi also wrote the article on the final event of the YMCAC-project. You can read it [here](#).

Policy recommendations

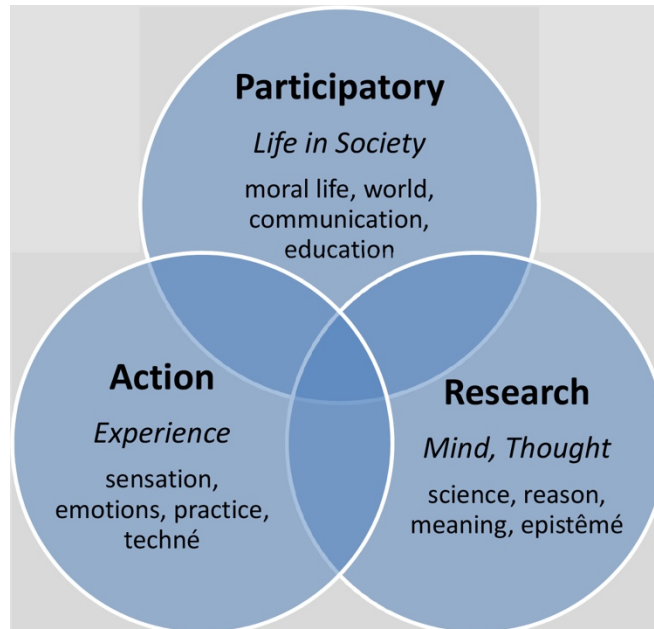
The Youth Participatory Action Model

Although creating a campaign for a certain cause and conducting action research are two very different methods to influence the communities (on any level) around us, they both approach the work with a similar end goal: to create a certain social change. That means that when it comes to including young people's voices it can be highly beneficial to look at the well-researched and well-documented methods utilised to ensure the equitable inclusion of young people's voices. This is where youth participatory action research comes in.

Participatory Action Research (or PAR) is a type of research in which "The participant is active in making informed decisions throughout all aspects of the research process for the primary purpose of imparting social change; a specific action (or actions) is the ultimate goal." (Macdonald, 2012)

In other words: not only is the research used as a catalyst for informed social change, but the research itself is designed and conducted by the participants, by the people of the communities in which the research is conducted.

It is also defined as "a form of action research in which professional social researchers operate as full collaborators with members of organisations in studying and transforming those organisations. It is an ongoing organizational learning process which emphasizes learning, participation and organizational transformation." (Greenwood, 1993)



Schubotz, D., (2019).
Participatory Action Research,
In P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat,
J.W. Sakshaug, & R.A. Williams (Eds.),
SAGE Research Methods Foundations.

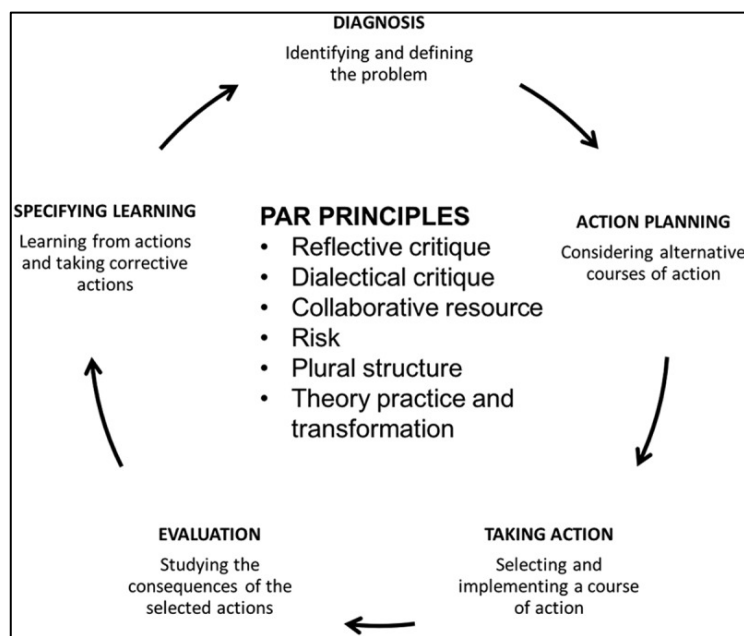
Youth participatory action research (or YPAR) is a subdivision of action research and participatory action research in which the collaborators of the research design and implementation are young people, minors or young adults, who belong to the community in

which the research is conducted and who have a particular interest or stake in the social change initiated or desired by the action research-design. YPAR has its roots in educational research and forms as a theoretical model an excellent example in how to not only engage young people in processes for social change, but in how put young people into the front seat of this social change. At its core YPAR banks upon the interests, passions and needs of the participating young people to creating change through actionable research. This method starts from the very principle of including young people's voices in processes which can hugely affect their own lives and experiences.

Participatory Action Research has 5 main principles (Macdonalds, 2012 and Maguire, 1987):

- The community is involved in the full research cycle
- The question or problem defined within community and by the participants
- Emphasis on the skills and resources within the community
- The researcher is part of the community
- Participants strive for radical change:
 - of researcher and participants (creating stronger critical awareness)
 - of the life of the community (lives of the participants within the community)
 - of the larger social structures

The research cycle of PAR consist of four main research steps: Reach out-Plan-Act-Review (Kelly, 2005). An example of the PAR-cycle is this one:



"Susman and Evered, 1987"

Some of the core-principles of YPAR to include young people's voices were used by our trainers in the YMCAC-project. After the first two days of training we designed to ensure our participants knew what they had to know about campaigning, the various EU institutions and creating social change with their own voices and experiences, we moved towards a more

PAR-informed method by giving participants the opportunity to create their own campaign for their own community. We guided them through the planning and creating of their campaigns while we were still in the UYD. Over the past couple of months we also guided them through the other steps of the PAR-method, including reaching out to other community members in their own contexts to help create and organise the campaign and taking action (in other words: kick off their campaigns)

Many case-studies of YPAR give great insight into what the most important principles are when conducting this type of research with young people, guiding advice on how to make sure the actions undertaken lead to change within the community, but also (and most importantly); advice on how to ensure it is always the young people who stay at the core of the actions (the research or in our case; the campaigning).

These are some of the most important ones which informed our method for the project and will also inform our policy recommendations:

1. Basing research (campaign) on situation and inquiry of the young people
2. Committing to a collaborative process, incorporating knowledge of all participants
3. Keeping social change, action and transformation at the centre of the work
4. Balancing clear instructions and guidance with openness for a creative process
5. Addressing power imbalances (specifically within a compulsory setting)
6. Negotiating action and research or reflection

Recommendations

We asked the young migrants to shape their chosen actions in such a way that they encourage active political participation among young people. Especially because we would like these young people to see and understand how their active participation, their voice and vote, can help provide better opportunities for young people, specifically in terms of migration and equal education opportunities. These recommendations are based on that, guided by the Youth Participatory Action Model, by the things we learned during the past months of the YMCAC-project collaborating with young migrants, and by what our participants value themselves in creating and shaping these campaigns:

1. Utilise a Youth Participatory Action Model to engage young migrants to develop their own political campaigns and become involved in their own possibilities to impact their and other young migrants social and education outcomes.
2. Build safe, but critical, spaces. Trust comes first. Young people in general and in particular those who had to build up an entire new life away from the place they were born deserve to be engaged in safe spaces. Without trust nothing can be built.
3. Showcase how input is used, transparency is key.
4. Address power imbalances throughout the process.
5. Mental health support during the process is a necessity.

6. The person comes first (and what they need), their story next (if and when they are ready to share it) , the actions or pursuit for social change comes after. (Only once lived experience has been embodied can we move on to action.)
7. Work with grassroot organisations, let young people work within their own communities.
8. Value the knowledge and unique insights young migrants have, all knowledge can be valuable at some point of the action-process.
9. Give them the opportunity to lead.
10. Learn about and play into the strengths of young migrants, make room for them to figure out their strengths, let them decide what strengths they value and how they want to utilize them.

Presenting the YMCAC-project: The final event

Written by: Kejsi

YMCAC (Young Migrants Can Achieve Change) has come to an end, but its impact will be long-lasting, and the experiences and lessons we learned will stay with us forever. This was not just a “project,” but a life-changing experience that has left an indelible mark on us. Let’s revisit the final event that took place in Brussels on April 12th.

All participants arrived in Brussels a day before the event, which gave us an opportunity to catch up and discuss what was in store for us the next day. However, the day was marred by the fact that four of our friends were unable to cross the border to France, and thus couldn’t make it to Belgium. It was paradoxical that the participants of a project aimed at highlighting the struggles faced by migrants and refugees were unable to attend the final event where they could have raised their concerns with policymakers. Despite this setback, we decided to make the most of our time in Brussels and focus on preparing for the conference.

The final event was held on April 12th at the European Parliament. In the morning, we visited the Parliamentarium, which was an informative and entertaining experience with its many interactive activities about the functioning of the EU and its institutions. After a quick lunch break, it was time for the main event. We were thrilled to enter the Parliament, as it was an opportunity that only a few are granted, and it added to the excitement of the day.

The event was divided into two parts: a “speed dating” activity and a panel discussion. The “speed dating” activity was a great opportunity for us to present our projects and have meaningful conversations with people from different backgrounds. I personally enjoyed presenting my project, titled “La lotta per la cittadinanza italiana: complicazioni e soluzioni praticabili” (The fight for Italian citizenship: complications and viable solutions) and found the following discussion thought-provoking and noteworthy. Moreover, the panel discussion allowed us to delve deeper into the issues that young migrants face and gain insights into the perspectives of the institutions, namely the European Commission and European Parliament.



Although MEP Salima Yenbou was unable to attend, we were grateful for the opportunity to discuss our projects in such a prestigious venue.

In conclusion, YMCAC was an unforgettable experience that has left a lasting impact on all participants. The final event at the European Parliament was a great opportunity to share our projects, network with like-minded individuals, and gain insights into the perspectives of policymakers. We hope that our contributions will help raise awareness of the struggles faced by young migrants and refugees and contribute to positive change.

Appendix A: Schedule UYD-training

DAY	DAY 1 MON. 12 SEPT.	DAY 2 TUE. 13 SEPT.	DAY 3 WED. 14 SEPT.	DAY 4 THU. 15 SEPT.	DAY 5 FRI. 16 SEPT.	DAY 6 SAT. 17 SEPT.	DAY 7 SUN. 18 SEPT.
09.30	Opening Session I	EU Institutions	Joint session	Mindfulness for activists	Draft your action I	Implementing Feedback	 Departure Day
11.00	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	
11.30	Opening Session II	Policy and Advocacy	Joint session	Aims and Objectives	Draft your action II	Feedback and Evaluation	
13.00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
15.00	Introduction Session	How to draft an advocacy campaign	Inclusive society (SIRIUS, JEF, EYCA)	Free Afternoon 	World Café	Closing of Training	
16.30	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break		Coffee Break	Coffee Break	
17.00	SDGs and migration	Online or Offline: what do I choose?	Your campaigns to support migrant youth	Workshop Sharing	Final Plenary		
19.00	Free Time	Free Time	Free Time	Networking Tapas Dinner	Dinner		
20.00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner		
21.30	Evening Activity 1	Evening Activity 2	Intercultural Music Evening	Free evening	Free evening	 Glocal farewell Fest	