

# ANNUAL REPORT





## **YERUN Publications**

YERUN 2020 Annual Report, January 2021

Editors: YERUN Brussels Office  
(Secretary General, Silvia Gomez Recio,  
Strategic Communication & Policy Officer, Chiara Colella,  
Policy Officer, Inês Roquero da Costa Pinto)

## **YERUN Brussels Office:**

Rue du Trône 62,  
1050 Brussels  
Belgium

## **Transparency Register:**

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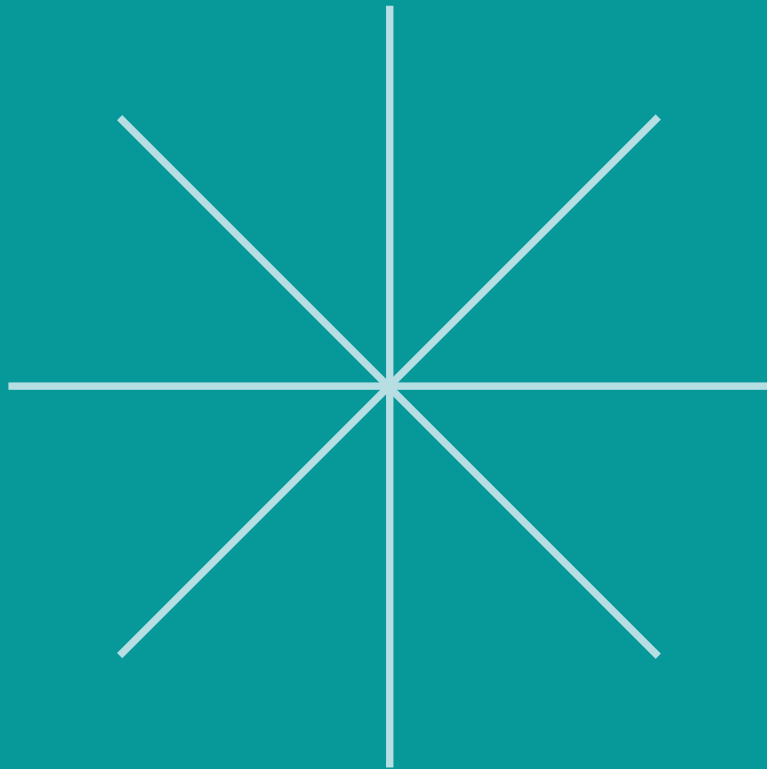


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# Foreword

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## **Rector Bernd Scholz-Reiter, YERUN President**

Since 2019 I have had the honour to serve as President of the Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN), fostering young universities' impact in shaping the European higher education sector.

The year 2020 has been, without any doubt, an odd year. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been remarkably challenging for all universities across the globe, forcing them to adapt to a new reality in an instant.

Nevertheless, I am proud to see how YERUN members have been supporting each other in these difficult times, proving their resilience to the several implications of the crisis.

Thanks to its well-established governance structures, its Brussels office, its working groups, and, of course, thanks to each individual member, YERUN activities have significantly progressed in 2020. Together, we have tried to make the best out of the crisis, looking for innovative ways to strengthen the collaboration among our members and to contribute to the development of EU research and education policies.

In fact, after the outbreak of the pandemic we initiated a series of COVID-19 related activities, which led to the publication of a YERUN reflection paper on 'The world of higher education after COVID-19'. We then followed closely the EU negotiations on the multi-annual financial framework 2021-2027, in particular regarding the new Erasmus and Horizon Europe programmes. With the intention to best prepare our members for all the opportunities evolving from such programmes in the next seven years, we organised dedicated virtual trainings in which we were honoured to have the participation of colleagues from the European Commission.

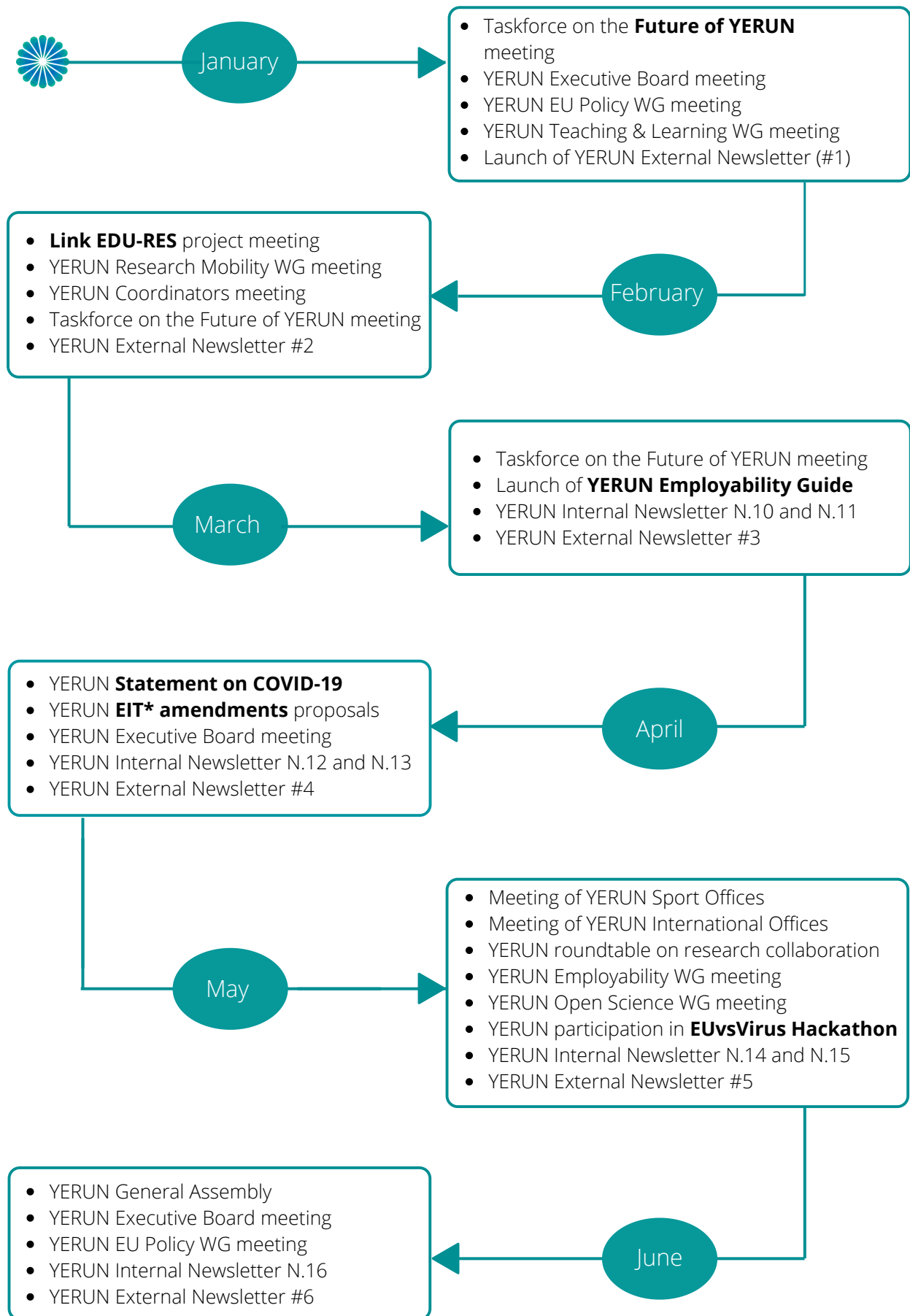
2020 was also a year of new directions in EU education and research policies, specifically the publication of the European Education Area and European Research Area communications as well as the emerging debates on the future of higher education. YERUN members have accompanied these reflections by actively positioning themselves on these crucial policy developments.

Finally, 2020 was a key year for the future of our network. The Taskforce for the Future of YERUN worked hard to define the guidelines of YERUN's future activities, achieving at the end of the year a new Strategic Plan for 2021-2025.

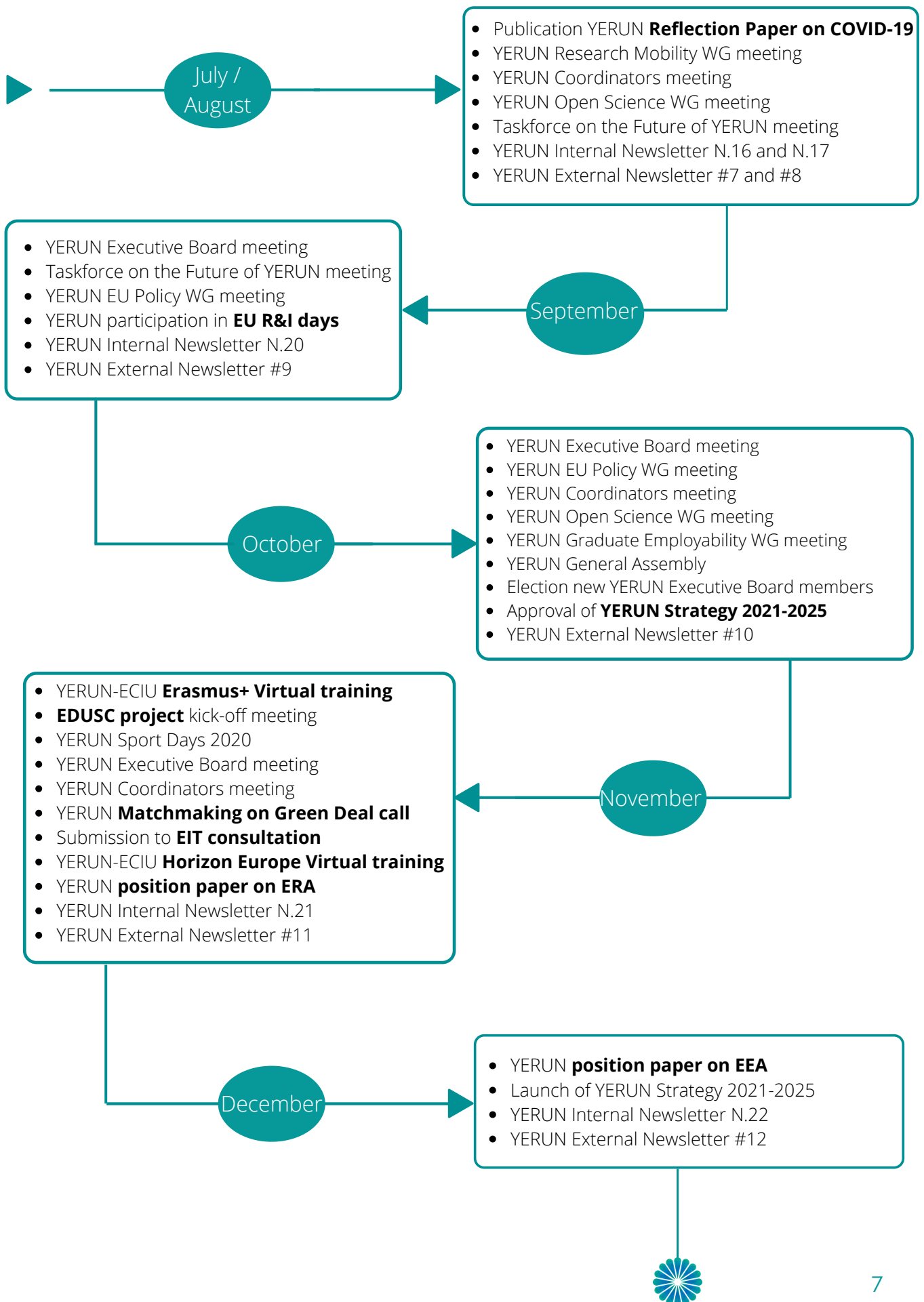
2020 will be remembered as a difficult year, but also as a year in which we learned many encouraging things from the COVID-19 crisis. I am convinced that YERUN will keep those lessons for the future, increasing the network's resilience, strengthening the collaboration among its members, and stepping up its voice in shaping European higher education policies.



# YERUN 2020 milestones



# YERUN 2020 milestones



# 2020 at a glance

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2



General Assemblies

Executive Board meetings



5

4



Coordinators meetings

Taskforce meetings



5

12



Working Group meetings



# 2020 at a glance

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Events



4

12



External Newsletters

Internal Newsletters



14

+900



LinkedIn followers

Twitter followers



+1850

# 2020: An odd year, that changed the world as we knew it

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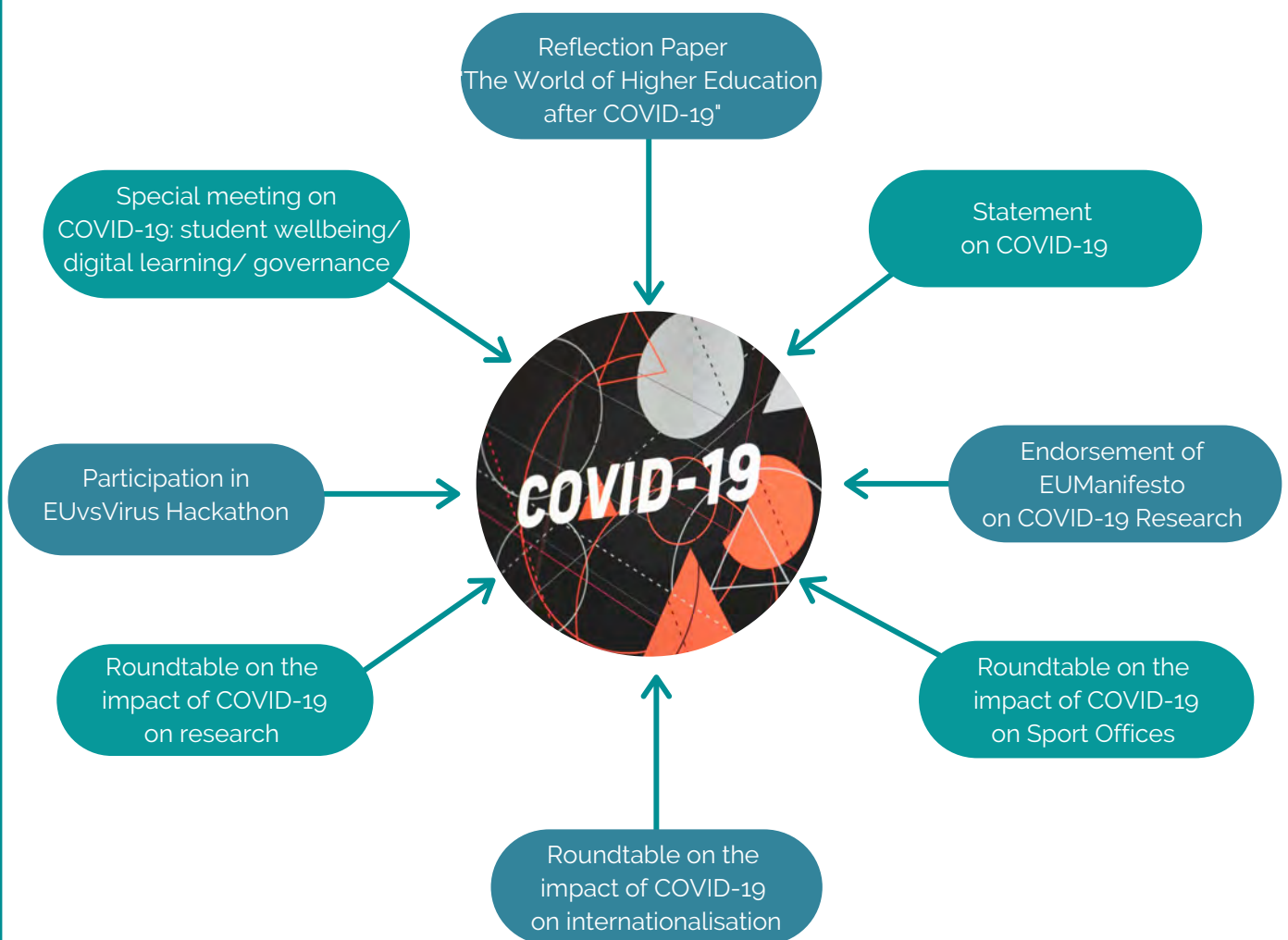


The year 2020 will always be remembered as the year when the world as we knew it was dramatically shaken and we all had to reconsider our ways of living and working. Due to COVID-19, the world of higher education experienced changes that happened at an unprecedented speed, facing great challenges but also opening up to unforeseen opportunities.

Since March, when universities across Europe were forced to close their physical doors and adapt to online formats, YERUN members have joined forces in learning from each other and advocating towards the EU policy makers in taking into account the challenges faced by universities. Once more, YERUN members have been proving the strength of their resilience, increasing their cooperation and their exchanges to ensure continuity during this crisis.

Concretely, YERUN has organised the following COVID-19 related activities from March until October.

## YERUN COVID-19-related activities



# YERUN Reflection Paper

## "The World of Higher Education after COVID-19"



Cover of the YERUN Reflection Paper on the World of Higher Education after COVID-19 (July 2020)

In July 2020, YERUN published a Reflection Paper on The World of Higher Education after COVID-19. In this paper, YERUN members embarked upon a thorough reflection on the degree of change that this unprecedented situation has brought and will continue to bring about in the European higher education landscape.

Steered by the YERUN Brussels Office, this exercise involved many colleagues across the network, who provided their input on (i) education, (ii) research, (iii) internationalisation, (iv) student wellbeing and societal engagement, and (v) governance. In fact, YERUN organised various roundtables with its members on those topics to better understand the impact of the crisis on their institutions and the key challenges they faced, as well as to highlight and share solutions.

The exercise culminated with the special roundtable on COVID-19 organised ahead of the June General Assembly, which was crucial for the final gathering of information on these themes and which led to the publication of the paper.

The paper, available in the [YERUN website](#), is structured in three parts and contains references to concrete examples:

- **Part 1: What has changed so far?** This part takes stock of how the YERUN network has been affected by COVID-19, the challenges identified, and possible solutions found so far;
- **Part 2: What is coming next?** This part proposes three possible future horizons, reflecting on which changes might remain or not in HEIs in the coming months and years, depending on possible developments in the control of the pandemic;
- **Part 3: What can we gain?** This part exploits possible opportunities in overcoming the challenges.

After its publication, the paper has been shared with European Commission's representatives and fed into the discussion on the impact of COVID on universities. The paper was also featured in an [article](#) on the Research Professionals News website.

# YERUN endorsement of EU manifesto for COVID-19 research



Cover of the EC COVID-19 IP Manifesto (July 2020)

On 28 July, the European Commission launched the IP Manifesto to maximise the accessibility of research results in the fight against COVID-19.

The manifesto provides guiding principles for beneficiaries of EU research grants for coronavirus prevention, testing, treatment and vaccination to ensure that their research results will be accessible for all and guarantee a return on public investment.

YERUN is proud to be among the signatories of this important document. Moreover, YERUN fully shares the principles of openness and accessibility of EU-funded research results on which it is based and their importance in the fight against Coronavirus.



Tweet by Jean-Eric Paquet, Director General at European Commission - DG RTD (July 2020)



YERUN tweet announcing YERUN's endorsement of the IP Manifesto for EU COVID-19 research (July 2020)

YERUN's support to this Manifesto was greatly appreciated by the European Commission. The YERUN Secretary General was afterwards invited to share the network's view on this topic in a dedicated panel during the EU R&I Days, chaired by the Director for Prosperity in DG RTD, Peter Dröll.

# Advocating for the future of higher education in Europe

Since its foundation, YERUN seeks to influence and advise on EU policies aiming at shaping the future of higher education in Europe. In 2020, YERUN was punctually cited alongside long-established networks and regularly consulted by the European Commission via formal and informal consultation, workshops and other Brussels-based initiatives. Moreover, YERUN elaborated position papers on key policy issues.

## • YERUN's participation in EU Consultations



Cover of CSES Study "Towards a 2030 vision on the future of universities in Europe" (September 2020)

### CSES Study "Towards a 2030 vision on the future of universities in Europe".

YERUN participated in a series of workshops and discussions coordinated by the Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP (CSES) and sent written contributions, which led to the publication of the study "Towards a 2030 vision on the future of universities in Europe".

The study sets out a stakeholder-driven, strategic vision 2030 for the future of universities in Europe in research and innovation. Both the [full study](#) and the [summary paper](#) are available at the Publications Office of the EU.



## EC Consultation on Horizon Europe first Strategic Plan 2021-2024.

YERUN participated in the online EC Consultation on Horizon Europe's first Strategic Plan 2021-2025. YERUN provided feedback on the expected impacts that research and innovation (R&I) will need to target within Horizon Europe and on how R&I investments contribute to the EU's political priorities.

The results of the survey were used to finalise the Strategic Plan and to precise the impact logic, which will set the direction for the future Horizon Europe work programmes.



European Commission's Horizon Europe logo



## EC Targeted Consultation on the EEA and the DEAP: the higher education dimension.



YERUN's input to the targeted consultation on the European Education Area and Digital Education Action Plan: the higher education dimension

Cover of YERUN's input to the EC Targeted Consultation on the EEA and the DEAP (September 2020)

YERUN experts participated in EC Vice-President Margaritis Schinas' targeted consultation on the European Education Area and the updated Digital Education Action Plan.

Schinas, responsible for Promoting the European Way of Life, gathered in an online meeting experts from universities across Europe. YERUN experts shared at the meeting their views on the EEA and the DEAP, two communications that were published a few weeks later, on 30 September 2020.



## EIT Stakeholder Forum Online Consultations

In November, YERUN answered two online consultations of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).

The first one was on the new EIT Action to support the innovation capacity of higher education institutions and that aims at:

- integrating a wider number of HEIs into innovation value chains and ecosystems;
- building on previous policy initiatives and establish new activities with depth and breadth;
- supporting inclusive education by extending the EIT Label, currently given to KICs' education programmes, to the wide range of HEIs that will participate in the new action.

The second one was related to the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme that was conceived in 2014 and that aims at reducing regional disparities in innovation across Europe.

YERUN feedback will contribute to the implementation of both actions as part of the EIT's Strategic Innovation Agenda for 2021-2027.



EIT Consultations' logo

## • YERUN 2020 Position Papers

On 30 September, the European Commission launched two communications that will set the European political scene for education, research and innovation for the years to come: "A new ERA for Research and Innovation" and "Achieving the European Education Area by 2025".

In response, YERUN published two position papers that came up as a result of a detailed analysis of the communications and of a series of consultation processes organised among its member institutions.

### The new ERA Communication through the eyes of young universities

In this position paper, YERUN acknowledges the excellent starting points laid out in the Communication in reaching the ERA's strategic objectives and calls on policy-makers to take into account the following policy recommendations:

- Providing adequate funding for universities with a specific focus on adequate operating means;
- Achieving complementarity in design and objectives of EU support schemes;
- Supporting excellence across Europe in a horizontal manner, focusing on all countries and regions and adopting an inclusive perspective;
- Accompanying the update of the Guiding Principles for Knowledge Valorisation with a proper consultation with stakeholders and thorough implementation mechanisms;
- Further improving career opportunities for researchers.

### Young European research universities welcome the EEA communication

In this position paper, YERUN generally welcomes the EEA's policy objectives and also calls on EU policy-makers to further reinforce the EEA by:

- Further enhancing quality in education, by bringing research and education closer together and by ensuring that the human and social dimensions are duly protected under the new digital setting;
- Accurately preparing teachers, staff and leaders for the future of education, by providing them with the training and tools they need;
- Working towards an increased recognition of professional qualifications across the EU, by ensuring synergies between EU education, research and employment policies;
- Embedding a true culture of societal engagement throughout the European higher education community, by encouraging universities to become more linked to their local ecosystems and to embark on a stronger cooperation with non-academic actors.



# YERUN Summer School 2020

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From 6 to 17 July 2020, the YERUN Summer School 'Management Consulting in the Digital Age' took place fully online. The intensive training programme supports master level students to be better prepared for a future career in management consulting, by providing them with an in-depth exposure to the way leading management consulting firms are developing digital transformation projects.

The summer school is addressed to master level students with different backgrounds, namely: 60% from Management and Economics, 30% from Data Science/Statistics/Informatics, 10% from other backgrounds (Law, Political Science, Psychology, etc).

The 2020 edition saw the participation of:

- 50 students coming from 8 European universities
- 9 consulting companies
- 11 workgroups
- 2 challenges
- 9 challenge coaches
- 23 guest speakers

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Intensive Training Programme was entirely provided through an online platform. The Training Programme Staff, therefore, organised different preparatory meetings, each for every team, in order to allow students to fully use the platform, familiarise to each other and be ready for the learning process.

The Training Programme was structured in two weeks, each week being organised into two main streamlines:

- daily distance frontal lectures, provided by different Management Consulting Companies, within the program framework;
- a weekly group challenge in which students were involved in, under the supervision of a consulting company and the support of academic tutors.

The challenges, for each week, were launched and coached by two selected Management Consulting Companies. The two best project works (one from each of the two weeks) were selected and awarded at the end of the Training Programme.

# Erasmus+ funded projects in YERUN

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Since 2019, YERUN members are involved in three Key Action 2 (cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices) Erasmus+ funded projects.

Such projects are: BUDS (Building-up Digital Strategists), Link EDU-RES (Joint programmes at Doctorate Level in a European university network: Linking Education and Research towards the European Education Network) and EDUSC (European Digital University Staff Competences).

## **BUDS** Building-up Digital Strategists

In November 2019, the EU funded BUDS (Building-up Digital Strategists) project was launched by a consortium composed of five YERUN members (Rome Tor Vergata University, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, University of Eastern Finland, University Nova de Lisboa and University of Antwerp) and three associated partners (YERUN, Antwerp Management School and Confindustria Assoconsult).

BUDS aims to build up digital skills among higher education students through an in-depth training merging codified knowledge and experiential learning for consulting on digital transformation processes.

The project has a duration of three years and its expected outcomes are:

- the design and delivery of a blended course on digital management consulting made of three self-standing e-learning modules, and
- an experiential-based intensive training programme.



Logo of the BUDS project

Link EDU-RES stands for "Joint programmes at Doctorate Level in a European university network: Linking Education and Research towards the European Education Network"

The project was launched by a consortium of six YERUN members in November 2019. It focuses on the internationalisation of doctoral education and the establishment of collaborative and interactive frameworks for its operation..

Specifically, Link EDU-RES aims at laying the ground for the creation of joint programmes at doctorate level within young European research universities.

The expected outcomes of the project are:

- a portal with guidelines for developing and running joint programmes at doctorate level,
- a student toolbox for joint programmes at the doctorate level.
- a report of national and institutional doctorate regulations for successful cross-border collaboration in joint programmes at doctorate level, and
- an analysis of experiences in international collaboration and doctoral training.

**LINK EDU-RES**

## Linking Education & Research



Joint Programmes at doctorate level  
linking education and research

Logo of the Link EDU-RES project



**EDUSC**

## European Digital University Staff Competencies

The EDUSC (European Digital University Staff Competencies) project was launched in November 2020.

This two-year project aims to sharpen digital competencies of higher education staff and to promote the use of Open Education Resources.

The project team consisting of five partners (Kiron, the Universities Tor Vergata and Carlos III, as well as Confia International and YERUN) will facilitate multiple events, blended training activities and enable practitioners to learn about the latest trends in digital higher education.

# YERUN and the European Universities Alliances

The European Universities Initiative was one of the biggest novelties for the European higher education sector in 2019. That year, 11 YERUN member universities came together under four different alliances and were selected by the EC Directorate-General for Education and Culture as part of the first call of the initiative. Such alliances were CIVIS, ECIU, EUTOPIA and YUFE.

In 2020, the second call of the European Universities Initiative was launched, giving YERUN members a second opportunity to form alliances. This time, from the selected alliances, two were composed by YERUN members: EELISA and ERUA.

Today, YERUN is particularly proud to have 13 out of its 17 members currently represented across 6 different European university alliances. This is not only the result of the continuous collaboration between YERUN members but also of their hard work in everything they do as young research universities.

Moreover, YERUN is currently supporting its members and their respective alliances by offering them different opportunities to share best practices, lessons learned and future plans. This has been particularly welcomed by the recently selected alliances who had the chance to gather some tips and tricks given by the older alliances.

YERUN seeks to make these connections last as it strongly believes that these alliances will be key in shaping the future of higher education.



Logos of the different European University Alliances in which YERUN members are participating

# Connecting YERUN communities in virtual events 2020

## YERUN-ECIU ERASMUS VIRTUAL TRAINING



Logo of the virtual training (left), photo of the participants (right), (November 2020)

The Erasmus programme is certainly an important pillar in the internationalisation YERUN universities. In 2021, a new Erasmus programme will start, with a more ambitious budget than its predecessor. YERUN members will need to be ready for it, in order to catch all the opportunities that the new programme will bring.

To this end, in the mornings of 4 and 5 November YERUN co-organised with ECIU (European Consortium of Innovative Universities) an exciting virtual training on the new Erasmus programme. The training aimed at preparing practitioners from ECIU and YERUN member institutions for the new Erasmus programme. It was a unique opportunity for them to touch base with experts from the European Commission on all the new initiatives of the new programme.

The training started with an overview of the political context in which the programme was developed and of all its features and opportunities. It then continued with a series of detailed presentations on:

- the new Key Action 1 and the mobility of individuals,
- how Erasmus will go digital, the European Student Card and the blended mobility,
- the partnership projects under Key Action 2,
- the future of the European Universities Initiative,
- the international opportunities of Erasmus,
- the synergies with other EU programmes such as MSCA and Horizon Europe.

The training concluded with a project design and writing session which provided an introduction on how to design successful projects and apply for EU co-funding to conceptualise and implement ambitious ideas surrounding the internationalisation of higher education.

The event was attended by more than 120 participants from 29 higher education institutions and was considered as extremely useful by both YERUN and ECIU members!



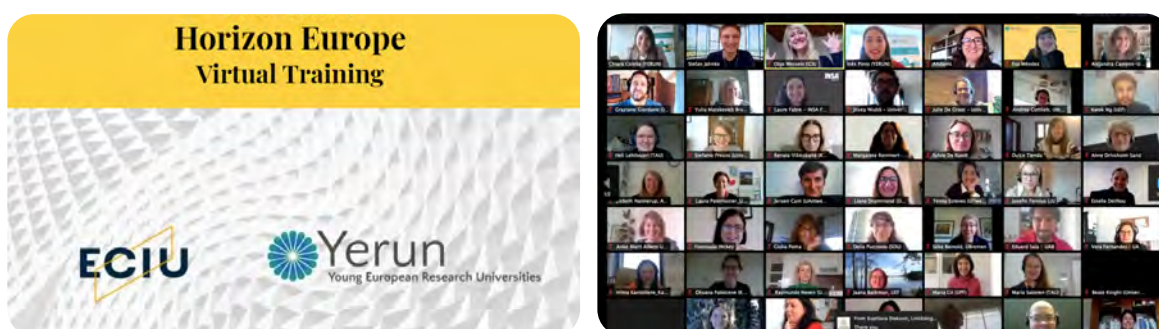
## YERUN-ECIU HORIZON EUROPE VIRTUAL TRAINING

Similarly to Erasmus, in the mornings of 23, 24 and 25 November, ECIU and YERUN co-organised another virtual training, this time focused on Horizon Europe.

The training aimed at preparing ECIU and YERUN member institutions to understand the Horizon Europe's novelties, its work programmes, instruments and calls. These were all presented by high-level EU Commission officials in a mix of centralised and break-out sessions.

Concretely, the virtual training offered two general presentations, one on the new research and innovation framework programme and another one on the mission areas of Horizon Europe. Under the break-out rooms format, participants furthermore listened to a series of presentations on horizontal topics and on some of the Horizon Europe instruments:

- Open Science,
- Impact,
- International collaboration,
- Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions,
- ERC,
- EIC Pathfinder.



Logo of the virtual training (left), photo of the participants (right), (November 2020)

On the last day, the research support officers had the opportunity learn some tips and tricks on how to write proposals with impact, on how to best execute projects under Horizon Europe and how to accurately disseminate and exploit results of a project.

The training was seen by the research support officers as a special networking occasion, giving them the possibility to share experiences among each other, within the virtual training and beyond. It was attended by 150 participants from ECIU and YERUN member institutions!

## YERUN MATCHMAKING ON GREEN DEAL CALL

YERUN organised on 19 November a matchmaking exercise aimed at connecting researchers from YERUN member institutions interested in applying to the Green Deal call, Area 10 "Empowering for the transition towards a climate neutral, sustainable Europe".

The event started with a presentation on the call area 10 facilitated by two policy officers from the European Commission and Q&A session during which YERUN researchers had the opportunity to ask specific questions to the speakers. The presentation focused on the topics of the call area:

- Topic 1: European capacities for citizen deliberation and participation for the Green Deal.
- Topic 2: Behavioural, social and cultural change for the Green Deal.
- Topic 3: Enabling citizens to act on climate change and environmental protection through education, citizen science, observation initiatives and civic involvement.



Photos of the participants (November 2020)



European Commission's Green Deal logo

Researchers then worked in parallel breakout rooms on four different project ideas. It was an opportunity for them meet potential project partners and to brainstorm on the details of the project ideas, including work packages.

About 30 researchers participated and many of them pursued their proposals after the event, leading to tangible research collaborations among them.

# The delivery of the YERUN Strategy 2021-2025



Cover of the YERUN Strategic Plan 2021-2025  
(October 2020)

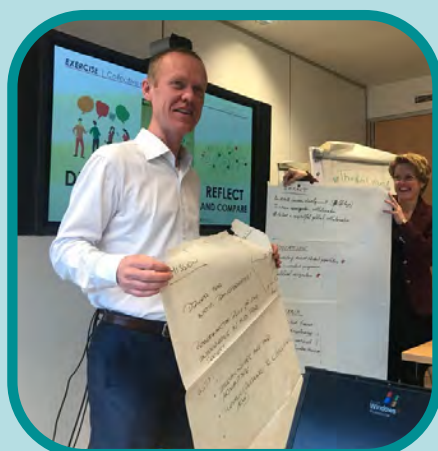
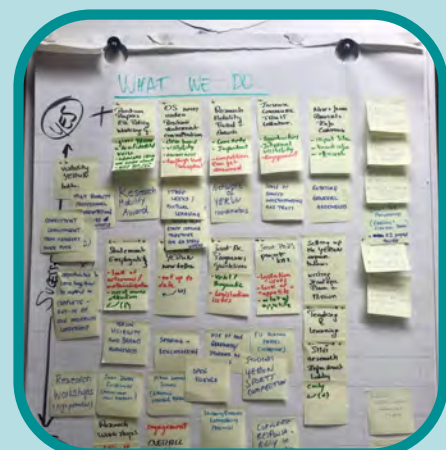
In the past four years, YERUN has managed to successfully establish itself as a well-known network in the competitive Brussels environment by developing its activities both at central level (managed and supported by the YERUN Brussels office with the support of YERUN members) and at members' level (directly implemented at our members' institutions by their staff).

To develop such activities, it has been fundamental to align the individual strategies of YERUN members, to gather their common values and ambitions of setting the scene in higher education, and to showcase their innovative approaches in everything they do as young research institutions.

At this point in time, after this period of consolidation, the need emerged to provide our network with a new strategy setting new priorities to guide our future activities. The momentum is unique, with the beginning of a new financial period (2021-2027) at EU level and with the launch of a series of new Communications from the European Commission that aim at setting the scene for the higher education environment for the next years.

YERUN aims to be equipped with a solid, forward-looking and inspiring strategy for the next five years, allowing the flexibility to take on board new challenges and new actions as the need arises. This is what a special Taskforce for the Future of YERUN has been working on, together with the YERUN Brussels Office, in 2020.





Meetings of the Taskforce on the Future of YERUN (2019 and early 2020).

For one year the Taskforce on the Future of YERUN (TFOY) has been digging into the “why”, “how” and “what” of our network, reflecting on the elements that make us distinctive as young institutions and how we want to use such uniqueness to shape the European higher education system alongside our long-established peers.

The taskforce started ‘from the roots’, namely from the values of our network and the common goals of our members. This exercise was far from being obvious as young universities themselves are still in the process of defining their own identity, in a higher education environment that is still dominated by long-established institutions, that favours tradition and reputation, and that does not appropriately recognise young universities’ intrinsic values, such as dynamism, agility, courage and collaboration.

Thanks to the hard work of taskforce as well as of all YERUN members, in October 2020, at YERUN’s General Assembly, the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 was approved, right in time for a fresh new start of the networks future activities in 2021!

# Looking forward

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## **Silvia Gomez Recio, YERUN Secretary General**

After a very challenging year, in which all of us - both on a personal and professional level - were called to put into question our lifestyles and habits, we are now looking forward to what will come next.

The pandemic has shown us our limitations, but most importantly, our potential as universities and as societies overall. Despite being creative and flexible, 2020 has shown us that we still have much to learn and that it is fundamental to question ourselves to better understand the

world we live in and how we relate to it. Much has been said about how our universities have managed to "go fully digital" in a couple of weeks and make transformations that were supposed to take years possible. However, how our universities and our leaders have cared about their students, staff and their communities, it is for me their most remarkable achievement.

Being guided about universities' role in society has been at the core of YERUN in 2020 and has nurtured the creation of our new strategy. We are very excited to kick off 2021 with our brand new "Enabling Talent to Grow", which will be the lighthouse guiding our activities in the next five years. Relying on stronger-than-ever connections among our members, on the true values that forged us together and on the new perspectives that will be brought to our network by our future new members, we will surf the wave of this change and grasp all the opportunities for young research universities to shape the future European higher education sector.

We are looking forward to our YERUN Staff Days on 7-8 April, organised by our member the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), which this year will revolve around the topic of the Sustainable Development Goals and how our universities contribute to their achievement. This will be one of many activities that we will organise - making good use of virtual tools, but also hoping that we will be able to meet in person very soon.

Even if the outcomes are not at the level originally desired, the new EU budget and the Brexit negotiations finally concluded allow us to plan ahead. Of course, the budget allocated to the programmes close to our hearts, Horizon Europe and Erasmus, could have been higher than what EU Member States committed to, but considering the exceptional times we are living in, we can take it as a good starting point to move forward the European Knowledge Area in the next seven years. I am also glad that the UK will continue participating in Horizon Europe and I regret that this will not be the case for Erasmus. The new post-Brexit conditions push us to be creative and find venues to work even more closely with our members and colleagues from the UK.

I wish all our YERUN members and our colleagues in the European higher education sector a very prosperous, safe and exciting new year ahead.



