



“OF COURSE WE CAN!”

Gender Study Session

Narrative report of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe
in cooperation with the Council of Europe

European Youth Centre
Strasbourg, France
25-29 March 2019

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Executive Summary

The Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe in cooperation with the Council of Europe implemented their proposed study session “Of Course We Can” focusing particularly on the gender roles in churches. The study session was held at the European Youth Center in Strasbourg on 25-29 March 2019.

The main focus of this study session has been to address several topics on how churches and church communities, and by extension to the greater society, include or not women, welcome or not diversity and to explore the ways how this inclusion can be carried out beyond stereotypes. EYCE sees young people as a great potential to overcome these gender stereotypes and to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue.

The study session aimed at empowering and encouraging gender-equity among various Christian communities. The study session had several objectives:

- to investigate whether churches are inclusive and welcome all diversity;
- to explore different gender stereotypes in churches;
- to provide knowledge on historical developments on women inclusion within churches;
- to develop a common standpoint and practical approaches.

The numbers of participants, including preparatory team, was 20 in total. Moreover, the EYCE invited two guest speakers in order to provide a different perspective to the session. Participants came from several European and non-European countries, such as Scotland, Finland, Hungary, Italy, North Macedonia, Germany, Estonia, Egypt and Malaysia. The preparatory team was diverse too, consisting of three women and three men, coming from Italy, Hungary, Egypt, Poland and Kosovo. There was a diverse group of people coming from different backgrounds and denominations.

The program offered for this study session involved a variety of sessions in order to discuss, analyze and further explore ideas. Sessions involved bible studies, historical approach, group discussions, debates, prayers et cetera. The group also had the opportunity to visit the Council of Europe facilities in order to experience its role and the work they do. This was an outstanding opportunity to network and connect with different people. In the end several participants sent their future ideas based on the tools they gained during the study session.

Introduction

Context of the Study Session

EYCE has launched a three year Campaign (2017-2019) to raise the awareness about what the most important international organisations defined as an emergency: the migrant crisis in Europe.

The main objective of the Campaign #WeAreEurope is to redefine the concept of migration and to make society a place where migrants are welcome and where values of tolerance and inclusion are respected.

Other relevant objectives are to enable young people to discover and discuss European values and identity, and equip young people with tools and methods for dialogue and panel discussions.

Thinking about human rights, acceptance and social inclusion makes us also think about gender stereotypes which so often affect individuals' acceptance in the society but also in churches.

Churches today are playing an active role in addressing migration crisis. Not only on theological, but most importantly on a practical level – gathering resources for help and support.

This makes us think of marginalisation and gender roles in churches themselves. Even though women are playing an important role, this role is secondary. Being a woman involved in the church, being in charge of the most important aspects of church life and the ordination itself caused conflicts and tensions, prejudices regarding women skills and capacities and divine call to priesthood.

The conviction was that only men could be great preachers and women were considered in their preaching call only when men were involved in wars.

In some way church structures are a reflection of the society, and despite more than 100 years of active struggle for women's rights, women still hold a secondary role in the society. Considering this aspect as one of the most relevant, it's essential that young people encourage advocacy for human rights and citizenship education together with the access to human rights themselves.

Inclusion of women, as for the migrants or any other disadvantaged categories, is a relevant topic that, on an European level, raise debates on social inclusion and “criteria” for social inclusion.

Therefore, it is important for church communities and organisations in Europe to take action and engage in dialogue with the secular society to overcome these stereotypes and develop projects that enhance a constructive cooperation.

This is especially important for young people, being the ones, who will be the stakeholders in the society of tomorrow, which is shaped today.

Aims and objectives

EYCE has always worked towards the inclusion of young people despite of their background, as well as towards empowerment of young people to contribute to civil society and building of an inclusive European community. EYCE has focused its last events and activities on social integration, exploring identity and human rights considering also the role of churches in these relevant topics of our modern society.

Human rights, acceptance and social inclusion are strongly connected to gender stereotypes which so often affect individuals' acceptance in the society but also in churches. Churches and society are very linked to each other influencing each others habits, ways of thinking, moral attitudes, among others. Women have been playing an important role both in society at large and in churches, but this role is often considered secondary despite more than 100 years of active struggle for women's rights.

In line with the general background of the study session proposal, the specific focus was on the roles of women in churches. It is essential that young people advocate for human rights for everyone.

For EYCE, being an organisation of youth working for youth, it has always been essential to enhance the participation of young people on all levels, and empowering young people to actively engage in shaping the society we want to live in.

With this study session have been addressed the questions on how churches and church communities, and by extension to the greater society, include or not women, welcome or not diversity and to explore the ways how this inclusion can be carried out beyond stereotypes. EYCE sees young people as a great potential to overcome these gender stereotypes and to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue.

The aim of the Study Session is to empower youth to encourage gender-equity among various Christian communities.

The aim was reached through several objectives as listed below:

- to investigate whether churches are inclusive and welcome all diversity;
- to explore different gender stereotypes in churches;
- to provide knowledge on historical developments on women inclusion within churches;
- to develop a common standpoint and practical approaches.

Participants

The preparatory team (International Planning Committee is EYCE working language) was in charge to select potential participants who applied to the Study Session according to a call that was spread out through EYCE social media channels and CoE website.

The whole group was composed of 20 young people coming from different part of Europe but also from other continents (Asia and Middle East). The preparatory team used the following three selection criteria: 1) country of residence; 2) gender; 3) christian denomination; 4) age (18-30 years old)

According to these three criteria, the group was composed of 6 male participants, 12 female participants and 1 non - binary. The christian denominations represented were Catholic, Protestant, United, Reformed, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Anglican. Having such a variety of different christian denominations and countries the group had a beautiful spiritual environment that allowed people to feel comfortable and safe. The countries represented were Italy, UK, Malaysia, Finland, Macedonia, Poland, Egypt, Germany, Russia, Greece, Kosovo, Estonia.

Mostly the group was composed by young Theology students and active leaders in their own religious communities. People were eager to be engaged in the dialogue and the discussion of Study Session topics and contributed greatly to the success of the project.

Study Session

The programme of the Study Session was thematically divided. The first part was the most challenging for the participants. They have been asked to share their own experiences about their church communities attitude towards gender issues.

The Waldensian Pastor Elisabetta Ribet, professor at the University of Strasbourg in Church and Society themes, offered a lecture on the role of women in the European ecumenical context introducing then the session with an historical chronology on women preachers and Christian debates about this relevant question.

The question about women ordination was also tackled. The first Bible Study of the program was meant to discover, through some controversial New Testament passages, how the early Christianity approached women presence in the communities.

Participants did a visit at the Council of Europe and met Mrs. Carlien Scheele, Gender Equality Division Commissioner, to whom they asked questions about the Division working policy and its approach to gender matters.

The second part of the program led the participants towards the unity path in Christ among Christian communities and ecumenical field.

Cristina Buffa, PhD student at the University of Strasbourg and fellow of the Catholic Focolare Movement, gave a lecture about Chiara Lubich, the foundress of this movement in Italy, sharing the lady experience as an example of good practice of love and fellowship. It was the second part of the program.

The second Bible Study offered was a chance for the participants to read other New Testament passages where unity and no gender division is clearly stated.

Coming to the end, participants have been equipped with some tools offered in workshops in order to enable them to draft their own projects as a concrete outcome of the Study Session.

The drafts are the concrete example also about how do they want to make a big impact and change in their churches communities and raise awareness on human rights education, women empowerment and gender issues.

Churches communities should provide safe space not only for women but also for people who have different gender orientations, listen to them and help them in being accepted and included.

Within this Study Session the intercultural dimension of the learning process was of great significance. Besides coming from different countries, cultures and social backgrounds, the participants were also representatives of their faith tradition and the role of their church communities in shaping the values of Europe.

The safe forum for intercultural exchange was provided, to give participants not only the knowledge about other traditions, but also secure direct encounters with young people from different traditions, which contribute greatly to breaking down the potential stereotypes and barriers. It could also generate new perspectives through which the topic could be addressed and discussed on a local level.

Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE)

EYCE is an umbrella organisation of Christian Youth organisations from all over Europe who seek unity between Christians and are engaged in the work for justice, peace & the integrity of creation.

The organisation was founded in 1968 as an initiative of youth leaders engaged in ecumenical peace and reconciliation work, later known as the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe.

EYCE wants to encourage Churches and Christian youth movements in Europe to strive towards the unity of all Christians. Its goal is not to form one church structure, but to look for a means to work together despite of different denominational viewpoints.

EYCE believes that bringing people together is the best way to foster mutual understanding between different Christian denominations and traditions. It tries to provide young people with a

place to develop an understanding of the different expressions of faith in different denominations and countries.

Its vision statement reads as follows: EYCE being the only pan-European ecumenical organisation for young people from all contexts, we promote our shared Christian values for a better life by giving witness of our hope and mission towards young Christians, members of church, society and politics participating in decision making processes on all levels.

Motivated by common faith in God, driven by the values based on our Christian identity, we discover mutualities and respect differences in theology, spirituality and cultural traditions, as well as lifestyles.

We live in a modern and dynamically changing European society where we promote justice, peace, integrity of creation and Human Rights through empowerment of young people and interreligious dialogue.

We bring our member organisations closer to one another, to identify our needs and equip the members with tools and methods to develop our work.

Today EYCE has approximately 28 member organisations from all over Europe, among them denominational and ecumenical youth movements and youth committees as well as some churches. The organisation is mainly run by volunteers aged between 18 and 30. One full-time employed General Secretary, based in the office in Brussels is taking care of the administrative tasks.

EYCE regularly organises seminars, study sessions, training courses, workshops and other meetings. Many times, EYCE member organisations organise activities that are open for participation from other EYCE members.

EYCE also offers support by providing international ecumenical news on the EYCE website, by providing contacts and networking amongst EYCE members and partners and by raising the concerns of EYCE member organisations towards the Churches, the ecumenical movement, the European Youth Forum and the European Institutions.

Preparatory team

Study Session preparatory team members were selected by the EYCE Executive Committee. A call was spread out and the Executive Committee evaluated the applications and made the final decision according to the three following criteria: 1) gender; 2) Christian denomination; 3) country; 4) age (18-30 years old).

Bastian Küntzel was the external trainer appointed by the Council of Europe and he was a team member too.

The preparatory team was composed as it follows:

- 1) **Angelita Tomaselli**, Course Director, EYCE Chairperson, Waldensian (the Waldensian Church is a Protestant Reformed Church based in Italy), Italian, Theology student seeking for ordination
- 2) **Giulia Dalmonte**, Waldensian, Italian, activist and experienced in gender issues, European representative to the World Student Christian Federation working group on Identity Diversity and Dialogue
- 3) **Noora Mattila**, Lutheran, Finnish, Theology student seeking for ordination
- 4) **Ramy Hanna**, Orthodox, Egyptian, Intercultural Theology student
- 5) **Visar Xhambazi**, Kosovar, researcher at Pristina Institute for Political Studies

Programme

Sunday the 24th

20:00 - Welcome evening

The welcome evening opened the Of course we can! – Study Session. The participants were welcomed, and they were offered practical information about the study session and the youth centre. Rest of the programme of the welcome evening was focusing on getting to know each other and playing ice breaking games.

Monday the 25th

9:30 - Welcome Space

The Welcome Space was an open and participant-centred method that requires extensive preparation before the implementation and then very unstructured facilitation during the exercise.

The setting was that there were chairs and tables arranged to suit a 'space' or pushed to the side of the room. The team members were all at their spaces ready to help and/or explain or facilitate.

In the middle of the room was an 'Info-Point' – a flip-chart: "Welcome in this Space. It is for you and your curiosity to explore. You have to your disposal many different spaces".

We encourage you to use it to find out what will happen in the next week, to get to know new people and to start discussing the topics of our Study Session.

Also, it carried a message for the participants to pass by all the spaces that were prepared for them as follows:

Programme Flow Space:

The programme was displayed on the wall as a river where symbols to show the flow of the programme together with the objectives and indicate how different programme elements were designed to support achieving those objectives.

Also, different words of the aims and objectives could be circled and explained further in an attached piece of paper to show and explain how we had worked on each word and how the clarity of them and a shared understanding is important.

A team member was at this 'space' to explain to participants who come there the programme flow and answer possible questions.

Participants were encouraged to put emphasises and questions on post it's onto the programme flow.

Biographical Mapping Portraits:

Participants were asked to come in pairs to find material to paint each other's portraits on a piece of paper. While they draw, they should find out more about each other and include that information on the portrait. Following this, participants were asked to stick their portraits next to a big map of Europe and link it with a piece of string to their place of residence.

Concept Space:

On one wall was the beginnings of mind-maps on concepts: Non-Formal Education, Faith, Human Rights, Feminism, Equality, etc.. One mind-map (on the topic of what a mind map is) was there to explain how a mind-map works. The others showed only the central topic and were open for participants to elaborate.

There were many empty pieces of paper, marker and tape. The facilitator encouraged participants to add descriptors, put questions, comment on what's there to disagree or to agree.

Expectations Sharing Space:

On one wall, there was a 'weather' landscape. A dark cloud, a sun and an umbrella and a large tube of sun-screen. Participants were asked to add their fears or concerns to the dark cloud, their wishes and hopes to the sun. On the umbrella, they should add ideas of what they should avoid in order to make the best out of the potential goodness they will experience in the study session.

11:30 - Definitions

As it was the first in-topic session, we preferred to be sure that all the participants had a common ground of understanding the main keywords that the Gender Equity study session will be centered around.

The main aim was to reach common understanding through definitions for the Study Session keywords & for the participants.

The used method was 'Stations'; each one of the International Preparatory Committee members to take care of one of the main definitions of the terms as follows: Gender Stereotype, Femininity & Masculinity, Sex & Gender, Ecumenism, Council of Europe CoE and Ecumenical Youth Council of Europe EYCE.

We asked all the participants to freely move around the plenary, passing by each station that carried a label with the keywords above, where they had the chance to ask all questions they had about these words, so that all their needs to be supported, also to provide them with links, resources, printings, fliers, publications, ... etc.

After passing by various stations (keywords), each participant took three coloured sticky notes to write down what they thought under the following titles:

- + **"I didn't know that.."**: For things they came to know for the first time, so to write it on a coloured paper and stick it on the board.
- + **"Not yet clear..."**: For things that are not yet clear, to stick it on another board.
- + **"Also, would like to add..."**: For things they would like to add for the already presented material and stick it on the board.

By the end, all the stations to gather in the plenary to sum up their experience and to read some of their notes to highlight the most unclear definitions, the things most of the participants hadn't known before and new knowledge they learnt.

14:30 - Exploring Gender

The aim of this session was to understand the impact different gender definitions have on society. We used the Gender Matters book and we explored the exercise Good, Better, Best. This activity illustrates gender stereotypes and the way society considers 'feminine' and 'masculine' characteristics desirable or undesirable.

16:30 - Dare to Share

The goal of this session was to increase the participants' understanding of gender approaches in different Christian denominations. The participants worked in three small groups of different denominations. They got to explore and share their own experiences concerning gender issues in their own church communities. Working in small groups was based on reflective questions and pictures in connection with them.

20:00 - International Banquet

The international banquet was the last session in the program of the first day. The aim was to learn about participants backgrounds and share the little nice things of those places. Moreover, we wanted to make the end of the first day more entertaining and fun; thus, we involved participants into the preparation of party.

Participants had the chance to share food and beverages coming from their countries and introduce them to each other. Last but not least, this part also included a European Quiz Game. The winning team was awarded with three symbolic gifts.

Tuesday the 26th

9:30 - Gender roles in churches

The aim of the first morning session was to learn about the historical background on how churches dealt with or coped with gender issues. The session was led by the guest speaker Elisabetta Ribet, Waldensian Pastor and Professor at the University of Strasbourg and a researcher in Church and Society. Elisabetta offered an intervention about the women ministries in the European ecumenical context. The session helped the participants to gain important information they used in the first afternoon session. People showed their interest asking a lot of questions to the guest speaker.

11:30 - Bible study

The participants were divided into two small groups led by IPC members. The first Bible study on Tuesday was focusing on the New Testament passages 1 Cor. 14: 34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15, which in the Christian tradition have been used to exclude women. In the small groups the Bible passages were read out loud and participants got to share their thoughts and knowledge of them. In the end, the two groups gathered together in plenary and share with the whole group the outcomes.

14:30 - The Chronology of women in the Protestant Churches

The aim of this session was to increase participants understanding about the history of the inclusion of women in the protestant church-structures. The session was opened with a short presentation of the historical debate about women as preachers. After the presentation, the participants were divided into three small groups, and each of the group was focusing on different historical female preacher based on booklets prepared by the IPC members. In the end the participants gathered together, and every group shared their discoveries about the women preachers.

16:30 - Broadening Perspectives

The purpose of this session was to understand the 'other side' and what is the understanding of gender matters in different denominations.

The session was organized in the form of a debate and was implemented in five steps.

1. We created two teams representing two different points of view (Conservative and Reformist), ideally two teams consisting of seven people.

The participants were notified that the groups were going to be randomly selected and their answers did not necessarily show their personal views or beliefs.

Rather, it was explained that this was an exercise to encourage discussion and provide the opportunity to think out of the box.

2. Since every debate requires a distinct position where people can make a clear stand on the issue, my question for this debate was: "Should women preach in churches?"

3. Each team had the opportunity to prepare their viewpoints for 30 minutes and afterwards each team delivered a seven minute presentation on their position.

4. Once the presentations were over, both teams had the opportunity for direct points/questions to the other team.

The purpose of direct points was to consider different perspectives and also provide the chance for teams to counter state their counter-arguments.

5. In the end, the floor was open for individual reflections. This was an opportunity to reflect what they've learned from the discussion and what was new for them.

In conclusion and most importantly, the focus of this debate intended to influence the participants to think differently and change/lessen their stance on this issue.

Wednesday the 27th

9:30 - The Council of Europe visit

As the study session is cooperation with the Youth Advisory of Council of Europe, Wednesday morning was dedicated to visit the Council of Europe headquarters, where one of CoE staff had welcomed the group and guided us to the ground auditorium where an introductory video had been displayed about the Council of Europe building, commissions, member states, some articles of its constitution and more.

Also we had the chance to visit the main plenary hall of the Council where the decisions and voting processes take place.

The floor was opened for many questions about the dynamics of the Council, official languages, future member states and the main task that the Council plays on the international affairs today.

Another interesting part of our tour was to meet Ms. Carlien Scheele, the Council of Europe Gender equality Commissioner. She proclaimed that the commission entails equal rights for women and men, girls and boys, as well as the same visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life.

Also, the Gender Equality Commission, as Council of Europe Steering Committee, is composed of representatives of the 47 member States and its mission is to steer the Gender Equality Transversal Programme, advise and involve its various components, as well as liaise with relevant intergovernmental bodies, providing expertise and a forum for exchange on good practices and issues of concern.

Also Ms. Carlien Scheele had shown interest to know about EYCE and its activities, also to listen from the participants about the Study Session and how the church today, their her youth, reads the gender equality situation today in various contexts.

- Free afternoon and dinner in town

Thursday the 28th

9:30 - Bible study

The participants were divided into two small groups led by IPC members. The second Bible study on Thursday was focusing on the New Testament passages Galatians 2: 28-29; Romans 12: 3-8, which can be used to support inclusion in the Christian communities.

In the small groups the Bible passages were read out loud and participants got to share their thoughts and knowledge of them. In the end, the two groups gathered together in plenary and share with the whole group the outcomes.

11:30 - Empowerment of women in churches

The aim of this session was to inspire participants with examples of good practice that led to women empowerment in churches. We did this with Cristina Buffa, Catholic PhD student of the University of Strasbourg. See the paragraph about the Study Session program for more information about this lecturer.

14:30 - Strategies to empower women in churches

The aim of this session was to create hands-on and practical strategies for the participants communities to foster progress. We asked to the participants on which issue do they like to work between these:

- A) Ordination
- B) LGBTQ+
- C) Girls-for-Girls Support Group
- D) Human Rights (inclusion/exclusion)
- E) Women's ecumenism
- F) Violence against women
- G) Inclusive Education

After that, we asked the participants to make small topical groups in which they had to talk about their vision. Each group had to describe their goal, their vision.

16:30 - Developing tools

During this session, Stefan Manevski, educational advisor at the EYCS and Bastian Küntzel, external trainer for this Study Session, provided short training sessions to equip the participants

with a short skill-boost that can empower them to develop their own ideas and approaches further. Stefan worked with one half of the group on and around the methods and approaches of Human Rights Education, given an introduction and then discussing with participants deeper how to implement this in their work. Bastian provided a short workshop on how to use Storytelling to create change and how to build stories that resonate with audiences.

20:00 - Movie Night

This was the last session for Thursday. Since the topic of this study session was gender and religion, we decided to pick a movie that is connected to one of our themes and in the same time a movie that both inspiring and entertaining.

As such, we chose a feature-film called “Hidden Figures (2016)” which tells the story of a team of African-American women mathematicians who served a vital role in NASA during the early years of the U.S. space program.

The movie shows how these bright and successful women faced enormous racial and gender discrimination while they climbed the zenith of their careers.

Friday the 29th

9:30 - 13:00 - Open Space

The Open Space methodology was used to offer participants a time and space to explore which topics they want to work on, find partners and allies and start planning their first steps.

15:00 - To-Do List

This sessions’ intention was to ensure sustained impact through action planning, in other words, drafting strategies back home.

The first part was all about visualizing the future they wanted in the community back home and to identify shared pathways in order to help each other make it real. We encouraged participants to develop their own plans.

First, the participants worked on drafting their personal methodology and action planning sheet. Moreover, participants presented their ideas, challenges in the local context, and why their plan was hard to implement.

Also, the participants were encouraged to do a follow up and make their project visible by sending pictures, links, reports, videos, et cetera.

Some of the ideas that were discussed by participants were:

- a) Raising awareness: ongoing project (Lena)
- b) Lectures on human rights focusing on LGBTQI+ community and their existence (David)
- c) Translate the Compass book in Finnish and Arabic (Anna)
- d) Raise the awareness about the ecumenical bodies and organizations (Gemma)

- e) Training course on the role of girls in the orthodox church (Sofia)
- f) Podcast on feminist Christians (Noora)
- g) Thematic workshops, film club and bible study (Esther)
- h) Session plan about human rights focusing on youth (Beltina)
- i) Open call for people who are willing to participate on certain projects (Gabriela)
- j) Write a paper about Caritas, Catholicism in general to understand Ecumenism (Giorgio)
- k) Write a blog for the Lutheran Finnish church (Essi)
- l) Engage in dialogue with local pastors and discuss about gender in local church (Madis)

16:30 - Closing

Participants were asked to fill the online evaluation form and the attendance certificates were distributed.

Course Director gave thanks to participants, team members, EYCS and the CoE for the cooperation and support.

An ecumenical service, having the participants actively involved, officially closed the Study Session.

20:00 - Farewell Party

This was the last session in our program, therefore we wanted to make a good party where everyone could enjoy the last night together through dancing, talking and listening to music.

Day by day sessions

Prayers

Daily program included morning and evening prayers. Participants have been approached in advance asking to prepare a prayer according to their own Christian denomination.

Prayers covered the denominations represented in the group. It was a very well participated moment where people prayed, sang and shared their spirituality.

It helped the group to have a comfort space and a space where their spiritual growth was nourished.

Home Groups

The participants were divided into three home groups, which each was led by an IPC member. In the home groups the participants had the possibility to freely reflect their feelings about the ongoing day and programme, to comment and give feedback. Home group discussions were built on Blob three method.

Outcomes and Evaluation

Participants' feedback

According to the evaluation form filled by the participants, statistics show that the overall experience was very positive (76,9%), positive (15,4%) and average (7,7%).

The online evaluation form is available to the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1gltlkc1RodwLk3PrNM93OemqYJQxBEBbsloldJRR-Ms/edit?ts=5c9f3f34#responses>

Among participants comments, some are here reported:

- It was brilliant meeting people from so many different places and churches and learning from them. The speakers and workshops were great.
- The friendships made in this conference are deeply meaningful, emotionally and spiritually. Thank you for this opportunity to learn that there are so many kindred spirits out there.
- The work that the planning team was visible throughout the entire study session. It was very well thought but also fun and enjoyable.
- Truly amazing educational experience.
- This was my first EYCE experience. The subjects of the study session were interesting and atmosphere was friendly and open-minded
- I have struggled in the past to find like-minded people and I have never been in a situation where there would be so many like-minded people who would share both my faith and my values. This has been extremely empowering an experience for me.
- I came to see many topics from a different point of view that helped me opening my mind and accepting different realities. I challenged my education, my personal believes and I brought my experience to enrich and be enriched.
- I am very happy and grateful to have been part of this study session. My expectations were met and surpassed.
- I would say compared to other sessions and training courses i have been part of , the current study session was above and beyond my expectations.
- I have years of experience with all kinds of youth activities but I am not sure if I have ever participated in an event that would have been this stimulating with regards to the programme and methods.
- The workshops have worked very well and they required participants to be the real protagonist of the study session, more than the organizers and the lecturer.
- I was taught new methodologies on how to put in practice my ideas.
- I gained lots of experiences and tools that I can hopefully contribute with in my local communities. I also feel like I finally got to be myself and accepted and respectd as who I

am, which has increased my confidence. I also think my public speaking skills improved, which is ironic, because I have participated in so many activities the aim of which was to improve one's public speaking skills, but I do not know if any of them was as efficient as this one. A reason for this is probably that I got a safe and accepting environment to speak here

- The group was united no matter all the differences involved from every perspective: faith, personal experience, beliefs, gender, sex, sexual orientation, etc... The floor was always open to anyone who wanted to participate, in respect of the others and of themselves.
- It was great to be able to feel in a safe environment.
- When disagreements were addressed it was constructive. I'm not sure all disagreements were addressed.
- The atmosphere to discuss those topics was nice.

What do participants take back home:

- Share the activities and work of European and international ecumenical organisations.
- Study Compass and see how I can do my first workshop.
- Ecumenical workgroup to educate and include queers and churches
- Use my resources and my position in my local communities to help broaden perspectives and minds
- 1) Talk to some local women pastor about this topic (prejudices they face, overall situation in the church); 2) Talk about those topics in my youth group.
- I wish and hope to be able to implement a session on the study session's thematics while adapting it to the local context. I hope that will lead to an actual program. I would love to share with the planning committee what I will be able to do after going back to my organization.
- I was taught skills and tools that will help me implement my ideas back to my community. I got inspired during the session to develop a network for Christian young women inside my university community.

Participants' follow up

In the very last part of the Study Session, participants drafted their own projects using the tools they gained during the week.

Some of them sent the preparatory team their drafts as it follows:

a) Esther Ho (Malaysia), **Bela Dörr** (Germany), **Gabriela Corral Alanis** (Germany)

The idea is to work with university's student council to:

- 1) Human Rights education. Basic knowledge and then maybe thematic, with a long term goal of educating the student council members to conduct trainings of their own in the future.
- 2) Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity education. Small discussions using film/tv to educate.
- 3) If there is demand, an inclusive (+eventually ecumenical) bible study group on campus.

Separately, I also potentially see myself teaching the parents in my neighbourhood about cybercrime and how to ensure their children' safety online.

b) Sofia Papadopoulou (Greece)

Training course: THE WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND IN GREEK SOCIETY. Historical frame. Challenges. Current situation. Visions for the future.

Target group. Theology students from Greece and from other European countries. The 40% is expected to be students from different denominations. Equal participation of women and men.

Methodology. Combining formal and non-formal education methods.

Lectures given by professors of the Theology school of the Aristotle University.

Women speakers that they are involved in the Ecumenical movement and have an active role inside their churches.

City and duration of the training course. Thessaloniki, Greece, 5 days.

Objectives. Empower young Greek women to take action inside the Ecumenical movement and church. Inspire them that a change inside the Greek Orthodox Church is possible.

Teaching the students the tools and the methodology that is needed to implement their own ideas.

Creating a network for the female students from the Theology school from the Aristotle University, which will provide the safe place to encourage us to commit ourselves to action on behalf of women's rights. Learning from the different denominations and cultures.

c) Beltina Gjeloši (Macedonia)

A pilot session centered on the learning model of the HRE approach particularly focused on **value clarification** and **cooperative learning**.

- Subject(s) of session: 1) **discrimination and stereotypes**; and/or 2) **women's rights**. Choice of subject(s) will reflect the interest/need of local youth.
- Target group: **young people between the ages of 15 and 25**.

- Reach: **call for applications** (10 days) with submission of interest through a Google Form; Organization's social media channels broadcast.
- Expected participants: no more than 20.
- How: duration of **1.5 hours with 2 or 3 activities in groups of 4/5**.
- Materials needed: open space room, chairs, tables, COMPASS and Gender Matters manuals, flipchart, blank sheets of papers, pens, markers.
- By whom: **2 or 3 facilitators** plan and implement the session.
- Aim: **1) test knowledge and awareness** amongst local youth; **2) clarify terminologies**; **3) build understanding and critical thinking** about their rights and local significance; **4) equip youth with practical approaches** to identifying and addressing discrimination; **5) encourage youth to expand on and share knowledge**, awareness, and skills amongst their peers.
- If pilot session gets traction, then a program can be crafted totaling no more than 8 or 10 sessions.

d) Giorgio Rossini (Italy)

A first theoretical and experimental approach to what Ecumenism is thought to be by Catholic people.

Upon the answers given to certain questions, I will write an academic paper to present to the 'Important People' in the Catholic Church structure, such as Presidents of said organizations, Bishops and, why not, maybe to the Pope himself, if the idea will be to considered important and revolutionary in itself.

Infact, in said paper, I do not only to give the answers given to me, but I will present my own point of view on Ecumenism, i.e. ordinary and everyday relation among people from different denominations.

In this way I want to encourage collaborations in doing something, studying something, exchanging and sharing, as similarities are much more in number and value then the differences.

I would like to promote an Erasmus for people to become priests/pastors in other countries and other denominations; to promote a collaboration since childhood in schools and parishes among people from different denominations, in order for Education to be Ecumenical since its beginning.

d) Gemma King (Scotland)

Aim: to raise awareness in Scotland of the international ecumenical organisations and raise the profile of ecumenism in Scotland especially amongst young people.

Action Plan:

1. I will share my experience of attending the EYCE Study Session through social media and traditional media.

2. I will develop a resource for young people which explains what ecumenism is and how to do things ecumenically.
3. I will work with other young people to form an ecumenical network of young people in Scotland along the model of the EYCE.
 - a. I will encourage the network to run study sessions on Gender issues.
 - b. I will encourage the network to run study sessions on human rights education using the resources which I received at the Study Session.

e) Anna Karisto (Finland), Madis Kask (Estonia)

The topic is violence against women. We conceptualised this topic broadly to cover sexual harassment as well. We came up with a non-formal educational programme about violence against women in church youth groups.

This programme content would be designed by a working group which brings together local organisations and scholars that work against gender-based violence and sexual harassment, with Christian communities and churches. Different Christian denominations could be included in this working group, which would bring an ecumenical aspect to this project.

This composition would design a programme that offers the factual data and organisational perspective, but also a Christian approach (human dignity and human rights) to the topics of gender-based violence and harassment. We reckon that churches would be more willing to incorporate the programme to their own youth activities if they are involved in the process of designing it.

The programme would cover the issue of gender-based violence and harassment and both from a grassroots/relatable level, for instance, by discussing everyday examples of gender-stereotypes and letting the young people share their experiences. Wider societal perspective would also be brought to the programme and serious examples of gender-based violence could be covered through story-telling.

Once the programme materials are produced, we thought that it would be beneficial to run training seminars about the programme for those who organise youth activities in their local churches.

It would be beneficial to run the programme for the staff first, as there are issues in some Christian communities with church staff and youth leaders themselves enforcing stereotypes and supporting problematic behaviour. This training would equip the staff to run the programme in their church youth groups.

Individual Project (Anna Karisto)

I am going to translate the Compass Human Rights Education materials into Finnish. The next step is that I need to find an organisation in Finland who is willing to publish the Finnish translation. I am going to ask the Scouts and Guides of Finland, but also the Peace Education Institute (RKI) and Peace School. I think that contacting the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland might also be a good idea, as I think their youth programme would benefit.

After the translation, I aspire to promote the translated copy in Finland and incorporate it to the activities of the Scouts. I also wish I can generally work for the awareness of international human rights work in the Scouts and my local Christian communities both in Finland and Scotland.

Team members' follow up

The Course Director Angelita Tomaselli spread the message of the Study Session in several meetings she has been invited to.

1) European National Councils of Churches, 6th May 2019, Rome, Italy

The meeting was organised by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy.

EYCE is one of the ecumenical youth organisations CEC cooperates with.

The aim of the meeting was to give the floor to the different CEC christian member churches and discussed some themes as inclusion, violence and poverty.

The panel "inclusion" was covered by the Study Session. The Course Director told about the experience at the EYCS and illustrated the outcomes. Pictures have been shown too.

2) Meeting with Kate McElwee, Executive Director of the Women's Ordination Conference, 10th May 2019, Rome, Italy

As the women ordination was one of the main themes tackled in the Study Session, it was offered the chance to meet the Executive Director of the Women's Ordination Conference, which is an American organisation held by Catholic women who advocate and struggle for women ordination in the Catholic Church.

The Course Director met Ms. Kate McElwee and discussed about the Study Session, EYCE and the cooperation with the EYCS and CoE.

Further discussion on developing some sort of cooperation forms are on the agenda of both organisations, EYCE and WOC.

3) CEC Governing Board Meeting, Youth Program, 14-16 May 2019, Strasbourg, France

CEC held its Governing Board meeting in Strasbourg, as the organisation has one of its two Offices based in France. The second one is in Brussels.

In the frame of this meeting, CEC prepared a program with the youth organisations it cooperates with, EYCE and WSCF-E. Delegates have been invited to join this program and discuss about strengthening the cooperation itself and developing other new cooperation forms.

Floor was given to EYCE, represented by the Chairperson Angelita Tomaselli (Study Session Course Director) and she illustrated, among political discussions regarding EYCE and CEC, the Study Session program and EYCE commitment in human rights education, inclusion, migration issues, environment and sustainability matters, interreligious dialogue.

Conclusion

EYCE, as a strong network of young Christians from all over Europe who seek unity between Christians and are engaged in the work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, strives to represent young people as much as possible. It works on an entirely ecumenical basis, and therefore considers itself to be part of the wider ecumenical movement.

Through this Study Session, it succeeded to encourage Churches and Christian youth movements to strive towards looking for means to work together despite of different denominational viewpoints. This means working together to discuss inclusion, diversity, gender stereotyping and women's role in the church today.

Many of the above mentioned obstacles are the result of a lack of information and the fear of the unknown. EYCE believes that bringing people together is the best way to foster mutual understanding between different Christian denominations and traditions. It tries to provide young people with a place to develop an understanding of the different expressions of faith in different denominations and countries. And this what 'Of Course, We can' Study Session had aimed to and successfully implemented, safe space for European and international youth to

investigate, explore, provide and develop the session objectives that empower them to promote gender equity among various Christian communities.

For the unique cooperation offered by Council of Europe Youth Advisory, the study session had succeeded to find a unique chance to find out the European approach concerning the human rights and gender equality nowadays through the visit to the Council and meeting key persons that generously dedicated quality time with the study session members that included brief presentation about the Council structure and open questions space.

This led to an integrated experience on various levels where youth could express themselves freely and share their thoughts, fears, expectations and concerns, also highlight their commitment to their Christian communities and ecumenical movement that keen about the European society and advocating human rights.

EYCE will continue providing contacts and networking amongst youth and raising the concerns of EYCE member organisations towards the Churches, through its commitment to the ecumenical movement, the European Youth Forum and the European Institutions.

Appendix

- Genderbread
- Glossary
- Gender Matter (link)
- Compass (link)
- Call for participants
- Pictures
- EYCE promotional materials
- Powerpoint slides
- Women preachers leaflets
- Study Session timetable
- Council of Europe Gender Equality Division Strategy 2018-2023 (link)
- Gender mainstreaming (link)