

IPPF funds youth-led projects to tackle abortion stigma

In 2015, young people in IPPF Member Associations were asked to create projects which would tackle the issue of abortion stigma in their communities. Small grants were awarded to promising projects submitted by young people in Ghana, Palestine, Spain, Macedonia and Nepal. Read on for more information about what these projects set out to do, their methods and the results.

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The forged marriage between abortion and poverty in Guyana



By Dennis Glasgow, youth volunteer at Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association (GRPA)

Abortion was legalized in Guyana in 1995. Since the law was relaxed, although abortion is common among Guyanese women there is still some amount of stigma attached to it and this stigma has caused many women to turn to "bottom house" abortion practices, which are not always safe. In our little developing country we see that legal abortion services are easy to access because the legislation is liberal. Even though the services became easy to access, the law stipulated that it must be done within the first 8 weeks of the pregnancy, and the request must be accompanied by a signature from a health care practitioner. For other reasons, the person needs to have an abortion further along the pregnancy then the laws get stricter as a means of deterring them from

Talking about abortion!



Thank you to everyone who submitted their videos for our 'Talking about abortion' film! A youth volunteer at Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association—Dennis Glasgow—is the winner of the video competition and he will be attending the Women Deliver conference in Copenhagen in May! We now have the final product to share with you—hope you all enjoy it!



'Yo Decido Cuándo', arming young people against stigma



by Marianne Forsey, youth intern at IPPF Central Office

This illustration, which was created by one of the young volunteers on the 'Yo Decido Cuándo' project in Spain, features on all of the publicity and information materials. The young woman stands strong and defiant in the face of the threatening tentacles. If the tentacles represent the many of branches of abortion stigma that young women face in Spain, then the sword represents the tools that they need in order to fight this stigma.

For more information about the work young people involved with IPPF are doing to address abortion stigma and promote reproductive rights around the world, check out our blogsite:

<https://youthagainstabortionstigma.wordpress.com>



education is a key tool for changing attitudes, the 'Yo Decido Cuándo' project has helped young people tackle abortion stigma by providing

Ghana

Although the abortion law in Ghana is fairly liberal, almost half of abortions performed there are 'unsafe'.¹ Research has shown that abortion is common among university students, with **67% having had at least one abortion**. However, only 10% of these students used safe, legal abortion services.² The *Peer2Peer* project led by young people at the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG)³ sought to tackle the stigma and misinformation which prevents young people from accessing safe, legal abortion services.

Working with university staff and representatives, PPAG trained students from the University of Ghana on issues relating to sexuality, pregnancy and abortion.

These volunteers visited halls of residence and spoke one to one with other students, distributing flyers with information and contact details for PPAG clinics. Alongside this outreach, *Peer2Peer* volunteers also promoted the project via the university radio station, and on a very popular TV show in Ghana, discussing abortion stigma to mark the Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion.

Over 2000 students were reached with information about abortion, and six students were referred to the PPAG clinic for support. By ensuring that student leaders were engaged from the very start of the project, PPAG volunteers found ample opportunity to open up discussion with students and clarify myths relating to abortion. Students reacted positively to the materials which were shared, which used photos of fellow students to make the information engaging and relatable. Surveys at the beginning and end of the project showed that students' understanding of when abortion was permitted within the law increased, and that stigma would be less of an obstacle to them should they need to access abortion in the future.

“The one-on-one education approach was very effective as the level of confidentiality was high so the students were able to open up to us about their problems.”

Peer Educator



<https://youthagainstabortionstigma.wordpress.com/category/ghana>

¹ <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-ghana>
² <http://www.hsj.gr/medicine/abortions-in-ghana-experiences-of-university-students.pdf>
³ <http://www.ppag-gh.org>

Palestine

As access to abortion is extremely restricted in Palestine, young people at the Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (PFPPA)⁴ developed a project which aimed to **improve awareness of sexual and reproductive rights, especially rights relating to abortion.**⁵

Unsafe abortion is common in Palestine, and the project sought to advocate for women's right to safe abortion services and to educate on the dangers of unsafe abortion.



PFPPA began the project by **training 20 young volunteers** on abortion facts and values. The training included material on sexual and reproductive health and rights, pregnancy, abortion, the dangers of unsafe abortion and stigma reduction. Volunteers painted public murals in different towns to encourage discussion and draw attention to the 'secret' of abortion in Palestine. 20 radio episodes were also broadcast by a university-run radio station with a young audience, and a theatre performance on women's reproductive rights was delivered to 100 young people from the national security forces.

The interest garnered by the public murals allowed PFPPA volunteers to **engage the community in discussions about abortion stigma and the need for amendments to laws** that restrict abortion in Palestine. Consultants, community leaders and specialists including a lawyer, a health educator and a social worker, participated in the radio discussions and raised awareness of 'sensitive' abortion related issues to thousands of listeners. With the support of a legal consultant the young volunteers wrote a letter to the President, calling for the modification of abortion laws to facilitate women's access to safe abortion services.



<https://youthagainstabortionstigma.wordpress.com/category/palestine>

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<http://pfppa.pfppa.org>
<http://www.ippf.org/resource/Unsafe-abortion-Palestine>



“A woman has the right to decide about her pregnancy and options. Abortion should not be dealt with as if it is one case regardless of the woman's social, economic and psychological conditions.”

Youth volunteers' letter to the President

Spain

Young volunteers at Federación de Planificación Familiar de España (FPFE)⁶ formed the *Yo Decido Cuándo* (*I decide when*) project in reaction to the stigma women in Spain experience as a result of having abortions.

This project has been particularly timely given Spain's political situation, in which there have been attempts to overhaul laws regulating abortion, such as requiring young women to gain parental consent to have an abortion.⁷

29 young people associated with FPFE's Youth Friendly Centre and local universities participated in an education course on sexual and reproductive health and rights, with a focus on abortion advocacy. These young people went on to deliver 92 sexuality education workshops, reaching over 900 young people with information on sexuality, contraception, abortion, STIs and pregnancy. The project collaborated with the main abortion clinics in the region, made referrals when necessary, accompanied women to the clinics upon request and evaluated the overall experience of women who had abortions. Beyond this, printed materials about reproductive rights were distributed to over 2000 people, social media messages were shared, and, in the run up to the election, young people were encouraged to write their questions, concerns and demands for political parties on *I Decide When* postcards.

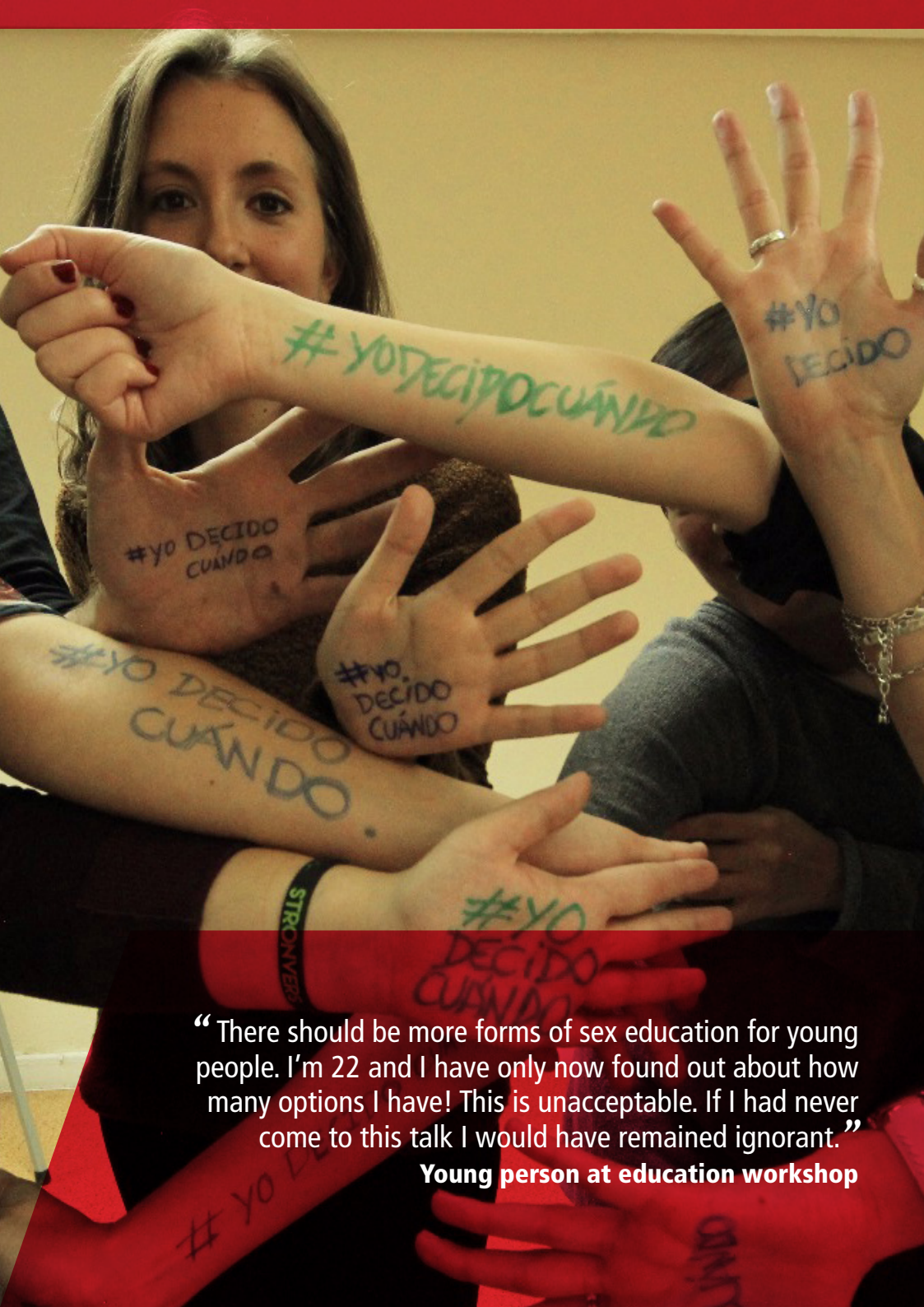
Following the education workshops, young people's understanding of issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights increased, and many young people were encouraged to engage with their politicians to advocate for better access to abortion services. Throughout the project, the FPFE youth centre assisted a total of 415 women with pregnancy-related needs, of which 249 were referred to abortion clinics, with 18 being accompanied in this process. The improved communication with local clinics has resulted in better collaboration and more personalised referrals between the services. The materials created for the project have received positive feedback and will continue to be distributed as they are seen as important communication tools to fight stigmatisation of abortion.



<https://youthagainstabortionstigma.wordpress.com/category/spain>

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<http://www.fpfe.org/english>
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/18/spain-abortion-bill-endangers-girls>



“There should be more forms of sex education for young people. I’m 22 and I have only now found out about how many options I have! This is unacceptable. If I had never come to this talk I would have remained ignorant.”

Young person at education workshop

Macedonia

In Macedonia, the *It's About You* project was set up by young volunteers at the Health Education and Research Association (HERA)⁸ to tackle stigma resulting from a government run anti-abortion campaign, changes in Macedonia's abortion law and a lack of comprehensive sexuality education for young people.

Young volunteers from different ethnic backgrounds collaborated with feminist activists to demonstrate the effects of the government's anti-abortion campaign and the restrictive legal amendments.

Young people developed a range of activities and materials to share information on abortion laws and policies, as well as attitudes and stigma in different communities. They created three short videos discussing the problems with the government's campaign, and how the changes in the law have affected women's health and rights. A photo shoot was organised where members of the public were encouraged to share their support for safe, legal abortion and to condemn the government's media campaign against abortion rights. At a conference for the Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion, public figures, parliamentarians and activists were encouraged to take part in the activity. The photoshoot produced 40 photographs which were shared on social media.

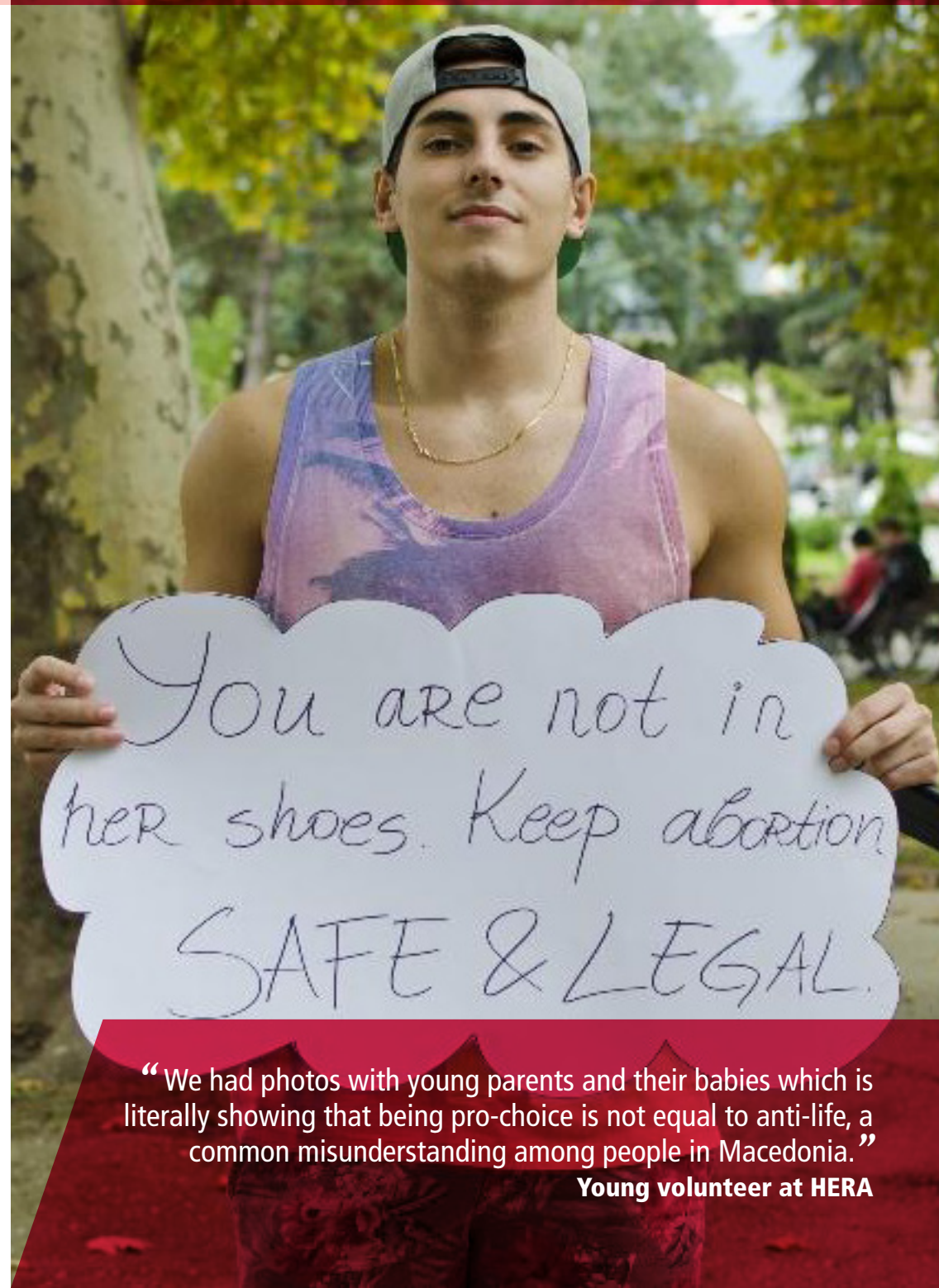
Overall, the materials and messages produced by the project (including a 'tweet-a-thon' addressing abortion stigma) reached more than half a million social media users and disseminated scientific and evidence-based information on topics relating to abortion and the law. The online campaigns sparked debate and challenged the anti-abortion attitudes that have been dominant amongst older generations and propagated by the current government. The volunteers themselves have developed their skills and knowledge relating to abortion, the law, how to use social media as a campaign tool, writing blogposts and communicating messages to the general public.



<https://youthagainstabortionstigma.wordpress.com/category/macedonia>

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<http://hera.org.mk>



“We had photos with young parents and their babies which is literally showing that being pro-choice is not equal to anti-life, a common misunderstanding among people in Macedonia.”

Young volunteer at HERA

Nepal

The law in Nepal allows abortion up to 12 weeks on request, and after this in certain circumstances. However, women are still accessing unsafe abortions, due to a lack of knowledge about their rights under the law, and due to the barrier of stigma and discrimination. Recognising that the negative attitudes of service providers, and concerns about confidentiality/privacy are the major reasons why women in Nepal resort to unsafe abortions, young volunteers at the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN)⁹ developed the *Yuva Pahal* (youth initiative) project to reduce abortion stigma amongst medical students and healthcare providers, and improve young people's access to safe abortion care and good quality information.

Following initial focus group discussions with medical students and youth volunteers, and preparatory meetings with local experts on abortion stigma to develop the curriculum, volunteers on the *Yuva Pahal* project organised comprehensive training workshops for medical students.



A total of 40 medical students from different medical colleges participated in this training. In addition, 20 young volunteers from FPAN were trained on abortion stigma and access, where they were equipped with accurate information and encouraged to examine their own attitudes about abortion in an effort to reduce stigma during outreach and education sessions. Pre and post tests for training participants showed an increase in knowledge and understanding of abortion related issues – these volunteers will go on to share information with their peers about safe legal abortion. As future health care providers, the medical students have been equipped with information they need to provide stigma-free, non-discriminatory services.

“I have understood that abortion is a human right. A woman's bodily autonomy cannot be ignored and must be protected.”

Medical student



<https://youthagainstabortionstigma.wordpress.com/category/nepal>