

# Youth-led projects to tackle abortion stigma

In 2019, young people in IPPF Member Associations were asked to design projects to tackle abortion stigma in their communities. Small grants were awarded to promising projects submitted by young people in Albania, Colombia, Nigeria, Spain and Tanzania. Creativity, resourcefulness, challenging myths, and forging relationships across communities thread through all the projects that followed. Read on for more information about what these projects set out to do, their methods, and the results.

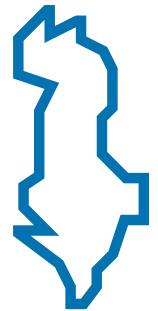
IPPF gratefully acknowledges the support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in being able to provide small grants to our Member Associations for this work.



To hear stories and young peoples' perspectives from running and participating in these projects - working to address abortion stigma and promote reproductive rights around the world - check out their blog:



# YOUTH ACTIVISM TO TACKLE ABORTION STIGMA



## ALBANIA

Albanian Centre for Population and Development (ACPD)

Women and girls have the right to accurate information around abortion in Albania, must receive counselling prior to accessing an abortion, and must provide both a provide verbal and written request. Girls aged 16 or under require the approval of a parent or guardian. This project, led by ACPD used creative peer-to-peer training, radio and television shows, interactive public fairs and social media, to reduce stigma and discrimination around abortion. Young people learnt about both their right to access a safe abortion, and how to navigate the legal framework in Albania.



"I never thought I will participate in this kind of activity. As a young student and especially medical student, I believed that abortion is just a medical procedure. This training helped me to understand the stigma and discrimination that women and girls face, and its consequences."  
Besimir, a medical student

## What we did

- Over 2,500 young people were reached, including rural, Roma youth and young medical students.
- Presenting on national radio, four young leaders reached 2,000 people with positive narratives on abortion.
- The project led to an increase in young people accessing SRHR services at ACPD. After hearing about the legal framework, 50 young people requested counselling on abortion.
- Through training, young peoples' knowledge of abortion care and services increased. Nearly all young people reported a greater understanding of abortion in Albania, as well as stereotypes and the possible stigmatisation. Young people reported increased confidence sharing this information with friends and peers.

## Challenging narratives

At a fair in Tirana, two contradictory stories were displayed, illustrating the choices women and young girls make as they navigate stigma and discrimination when considering and accessing an abortion. They tested the reaction of young people who visited their stall, encouraging people to step into the stories, challenging stigma and stereotypes.



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 [acpd.org.al/sq/](http://acpd.org.al/sq/)

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# JÓVENES VIVE

Veeduría por la Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo



## COLOMBIA

The Asociación Pro-Bienestar de la Familia Colombiana (PROFAMILIA)

In Colombia, abortion is legal in several circumstances, including to safeguard someone's mental health. Jóvenes VIVE is a Veeduría Juvenil (Youth Citizens' Oversight) that carries out advocacy activities directed at health providers, with the aim of protecting young people's right to access abortion services. Many groups work to ensure access to these services, and Citizens' Oversight is a way of making institutional bodies accountable. Jóvenes VIVE's purpose is to help bring down barriers to access SRHR health provision in the local area.



"Jóvenes VIVE has become a group that is more than activist colleagues, it is a group of friends, a family that has empathy, and that wants fight and change the world." Mariana, participant of the group

## What we did

- Workshops and training on a rights-based approach to abortion and SRHR, for new participants and the community, e.g. in clinics or universities.
- Interventions aimed at local health providers through a range of action towards health institutions (letters, requests and petitions). Since the group is an official oversight organisation, health institutions have a duty to reply on how they are addressing the requests and concerns raised.
- Social media activities disseminated accurate information about abortion, and offered further support, through referrals and accompaniment via Whatsapp and phone-lines.
- Collaborated and coordinated action with other pro-choice groups, such as talks for the community, or activities on key dates.

## Our impact

- The recognition of the group is a great achievement, especially by pregnant people who see them as a support network to access abortion and remove barriers they face. The community's recognition continues to grow, leading to collaboration with other civil society organisations.
- People have reached out through social media for guidance on sexual and reproductive rights, and local political actors have highlighted the potential of this initiative for youth participation. The group was mentioned 305 times on twitter, has more than 6000 profile views and nearly 400 followers on Instagram. Most interactions are from 18-24 years old, 75% of them women.

## Challenging narratives

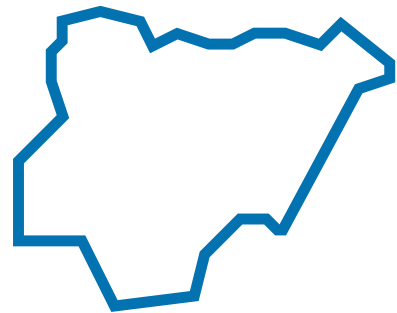
The name of the group is a play on words: VIVE (Veeduría para la Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo; Citizen oversight for the voluntary interruption of pregnancy) means to LIVE, reclaiming what it means to be pro-life. VIVE therefore means standing for the right to life, health, dignity and respect of pregnant women and non-gender conforming people.

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   juvenesVIVE1



# LET'S TALK ABOUT ABORTION



## NIGERIA

Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (PPFN)

Abortion laws in Nigeria are particularly restrictive, and providing an abortion can carry a 14 year prison sentence. With abortion only legal in cases where there is demonstrated threat to the woman's life, the Guttmacher Institute estimates 456,000 unsafe abortions are carried out in Nigeria every year. It is also estimated that unsafe abortions are responsible for 40% of maternal deaths in Nigeria. The Let's Talk About Abortion project aimed to address myths and stigma around abortion, and educate young people on the dangers of accessing unsafe abortions – through youth-led university events, radio shows, public engagement and social media.



## What we did

- Addressed myths and misconceptions about abortion through a call-in radio show, reaching over 350,000 people
- Led a walk through the University of Abuja campus, raising awareness around young women's right to a safe abortion, engaging people in conversation, and tackling stigma.
- Hosted a youth-led medical symposium for university students – tackling myths and misconceptions, outlining safe sex, accessing abortion services and the impacts of restrictive laws.
- The Youth Action Movement (YAM) designed a theatrical performance to illustrate how young people might feel pressured to seek out an unsafe abortion.

## Our impact

- Surveys and questionnaires reported an increased awareness of abortion stigma and its consequences – this included individuals, but also health and community workers
- Myths and stigma around abortion were challenged throughout the project, in particular during the radio show. Of the 15 call-ins, the majority concerned myths and misconceptions
- Medical students who took part in the symposium reported increased understanding of the stigma and myths surrounding abortion

## Take it to the streets!

A mixture of students, youth movement organisers, and student union members taking part in a peaceful walk through the university campus. Over 1000 young people were engaged with information on accessing a safe legal abortion, and ways to access post abortion counselling and care.

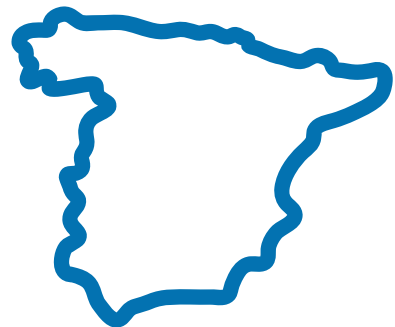
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 [ppfn.org](http://ppfn.org)

   PPFNigeria

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## SPAIN

Federación de Planificación Familiar Española (FPFE)

In Spain, abortion was legalised on demand in 2010, but since 2015 (when the government tried to restrict abortion access), it requires parental approval for under-18s; there is still a lot of misinformation around this issue. "Subscribe to Sexual Rights!" is an awareness-raising project offering accurate information about abortion, reducing myths and stigma through young youtuber voices. The project enlisted two Youtubers to become the voice carrying the message of sexual and reproductive rights: by young people, for young people.



## What we did

- Offered SHRH, gender, media and video editing training for the 2 winners of the youtuber contest.
- Created a [YouTube channel](#) to offer quality information on sexuality and abortion, with seven videos published by the end of the project (and more to come)!
- Training sessions for young media professionals and youth media platforms.
- A communication guide on abortion for activists, specific to Spain's context, tried and tested with young media professionals.

## Our impact

- Wider reach of FPFE through a completely new youth-led communication channel with its own tone. The videos have been viewed at least 1500 times and have been regularly used in educational spaces.
- FPFE has been able to review their own messaging on abortion, for increasing effectiveness of both internal and public communications.
- A two-way learning process was established between FPFE and the young people involved in the project, strengthening the impact of the messages and of the organisation's youth-led interventions.
- The project has strengthened FPFE's relationship with media professionals. The organisation has shared recommendations on how to communicate around abortion in non-stigmatising ways, and FPFE's position as expert source on abortion issues has been reinforced.

## Becoming Sexual Rights Influencers

This was a new and exciting challenge for all those involved in the project. Reflecting on the stigma linked to abortion, debating different reproductive options, looking at access to information and sexual education - a battleground in Spain – has allowed the youtubers to contribute to this in a creative and far-reaching format, and become SRHR influencers too!

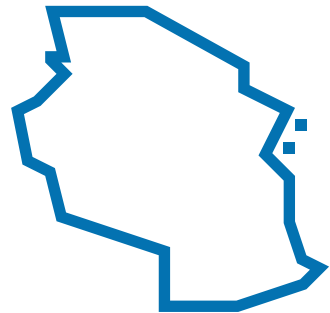
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[fpfe.org](https://fpfe.org) [fpfeong](https://twitter.com/fpfeong)

[FedePlanificacionFamiliar](https://www.facebook.com/FedePlanificacionFamiliar)



# REDUCING ABORTION STIGMA AND STRENGTHENING ACCESS



## TANZANIA

Chama cha Uzazi na Malezi Bora  
(UMATI)

Laws and policies on abortion in Tanzania are often confusing and ambiguous, with unsafe abortions a leading cause of maternal deaths, estimated at 25% of the total. Because abortion is generally understood to only be legal in the cases where a woman's life is at risk, fear of prosecution is a leading cause of women seeking out unsafe abortions. Engaging young people across five universities in the Temeke district, this project aimed to promote access to comprehensive post-abortion care services and tackle abortion stigma, through capacity building and education.



## What we did

- Trained 10 Youth Champions on tackling abortion stigma, identifying barriers to accessing comprehensive abortion care, and solutions to the challenges young people face.
- Engaged health care providers and local government leaders on the need to provide youth-friendly services, and challenged the discrimination young people face around their sexual health, pregnancy, and accessing an abortion.
- Through creative and interactive sessions at universities and after school clubs, Youth Champions worked with over 2,000 young people to challenge negative stereotypes, and outline what abortion services are available.


## Our impact

- Health providers, leaders in education and the wider community forged positive supportive relationships with the youth champions, helping them with space and time to deliver sessions, opening up space to acknowledge and talk about abortion more openly.
- Health providers committed to providing stigma-free youth-friendly comprehensive post abortion care services. At the beginning health providers admitted to having a negative view of young women seeking abortion, stemming from religious beliefs or stereotypes.

## In the community

In after school groups, Youth Champions designed sessions including safe spaces to share stories and experiences around abortion, presented statistics, and learning through participatory 'edutainment'. Working with community leaders and health care workers, the project gained support in the wider community, shifting perceptions and challenging stigma around comprehensive post abortion care.

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 [umati.or.tz](http://umati.or.tz)  [UMATItz](https://twitter.com/UMATItz)  
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