



Roadmap for Engagement with Younger People in the WHO European Region

Outcomes of the Young Peoples and Young Professionals Forum (YPYP Forum, September 10th, 2021)

As youth we represent one of the largest demographics on earth. We are undoubtedly an essential agent of positive change in the world, representing the backbone of the future and the new leaders of tomorrow. Participation is one of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights guiding principles, and our right to participation has been deemed imperative in numerous international agreements. To respond to our needs and guarantee that their fundamental human rights are recognized and achieved, our active and meaningful participation in societies and democratic practices and processes is crucial. Our tokenistic involvement as observers or co-signatories in statements without including us in discussions are unfortunately too often the reality. This is not enough. Substantive Involvement opportunities have to be provided.

We, as well as our children and grandchildren and generations to come, will have to face the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change as well as health, education, and workforce-related challenges that arise from them.

Meaningful youth participation and leadership cannot be solely driven from the students' perspective. Opportunities need to be provided to give young people and youth organizations the chance to meaningfully engage in policy making at all levels. An enabling environment and relevant evidence-based programs need to be established for youth to benefit. The Young People and Young Professionals (YPYP) Forum is the overdue first step towards a more inclusive WHO European Region that leaves no one behind, including youth.

Call to Member States of the WHO Regional Office for Europe:

Recommendation 1: Establishment of Sustainable Youth Programmes

YPYPs are the future and the present. We are your children and grandchildren. We are the future parents of children who may not have clean air to breathe.

Youth participation is essential for any meaningful impact or sustainable change to occur. YPYPs have the potential to be valuable resources in policy decision making processes, providing different viewpoints. Action needs to be taken to support youth and tackle the challenges that limit their active and meaningful participation and involvement at all levels, including at the national level.

If substantial change to youth engagement is to be put into action, WHO/Europe as well as Member States must take the lead in the creation and implementation of a structured, inclusive and sustainable system for the youth delegates program by:

- Considering the needed financial resources and human workforce for the implementation and continuation of youth programs and meaningful youth participation throughout the upcoming years;
- Investing in youth programs focusing on acquiring the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to actively participate in policy making and stakeholder events;
- Investing in youth delegates programs to WHO events, including but not limited to WHO RC sessions for Europe and the World Health Assembly, as is already implemented by some member states¹;
- Providing funding for initiatives increasing meaningful youth engagement to ensure the voices of younger people are included throughout the programmatic and decision-making processes of WHO/Europe.

Recommendation 2: Policies enabling youth representation

Our engagement is crucial at all levels of society. Starting from Universities, institutions must include youth representatives. Our opinions should likewise be collected in the most transparent and inclusive way on the governmental level. Even if governments and political governance vary across countries, a common framework is needed for the inclusion of youth, to make sure we are not left behind. In order to support these actions and the development of national strategies, member states shall:

- Take lessons learned from other global documents on youth engagement (e.g. *Youth 2030: The UN Youth Strategy*) into account;
- Implement National Public Policies ensuring meaningful youth participation in healthcare-related matters and decision-making processes;
- Collect youth opinions in transparent processes (e.g. through surveys, consultations etc.)

¹ Examples summarised in the IFMSA WHO Youth Delegate Toolkit:
https://issuu.com/ifmsa/docs/ifmsa_who_youth_delegate_toolkit

Call to WHO Regional Office For Europe:

Recommendation 3: WHO promoting youth involvement and leading by example

The WHO Regional Office for Europe has the opportunity to set a precedent for meaningful youth engagement. Follow-up and the extension of these proposals to other WHO Regional Offices is needed to directly contribute to advancing meaningful youth participation globally and at all regional levels. In order to do so, WHO should, in collaboration with YPYPs, draw up recommendations to member states to foster meaningful youth engagement by:

- Developing standardised policies for member states to more easily implement youth involvement in all its potential;
- Drawing up a common framework for the inclusion of youth applicable in all countries and at all levels (within universities, governmental bodies etc.);
- Actively supporting efforts by individual Member States aimed at the professional development of youth and increasing of youth involvement in decision-making, by for example sharing good practices;
- Recommending the development of scholarships for young people who carry our work aligned with WHO priorities and goals.

Additionally, WHO/Europe has the opportunity to lead by example and pioneer the meaningful inclusion of youth by:

- Encouraging other regional offices globally to engage youth leaders to lead this process, as a result of their cultural and socio-economic understanding of the region;
- Considering the potential of creating an international task force to lead efforts of interdisciplinary youth engagement

Recommendation 4: Non-tokenistic youth representation

YPYPs have long been a part of Regional Committee sessions, either by attending as observers or being mentioned as an important part of the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe. We are the future as well as the present. While the organisation of separate events to increase youth engagement, like the YPYP forum, is welcomed, the WHO European Region including its member states need to commit to the meaningful inclusion of youth organisations. Our engagement should go beyond the regional level to the country level as our networks reach vulnerable and hard to reach demographics like no other partner. Time has come to take action and properly invest and develop the needed mechanisms to ensure meaningful youth participation at the regional level by:

- Forming an interdisciplinary subcommittee made up of representatives of different regional students' associations to foster the discussion of different perspectives (i.e. medicine students, pharmacy students, dental medicine students, nursing students, veterinary students etc.) to ensure the representation of a variety of YPYP;
- Supporting the accreditation of youth organisations as Non-State Actors (NSAs);

- Appointing a representative within the Executive Council and including an official youth representative in the composition of the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee;
- Including YPYPs in all WHO European Priorities and discussed topics;
- Including youth organisations in all levels of decision making;
- Guaranteeing the inclusion of youth representation by including as many representatives from different backgrounds as possible, specifically focusing on minorities and vulnerable populations.

Recommendation 5: Meaningful Youth Involvement in Regional Committee meetings

The Regional Committee meets every year to formulate policies, oversee regional programmes, receive progress reports, and consider, revise and endorse new initiatives. It adopts resolutions and makes decisions that guide the work of the Regional Office and country offices for the coming year. We can not be forgotten and ask to be actively involved in all sessions of the WHO Regional Committee by:

- Being involved in all relevant stages of the planning and conduction of the meeting;
- Being actively included in the organisation of side events;
- Being involved in events taking place (including but not limited to the organization of side events).

Recommendation 6: Education as a foundation for meaningful youth involvement

We are the healthcare professionals of the future. Expanding the competencies of youth is of utmost importance to supply us with the necessary skills for valuable and continuous engagement and contributions. The WHO Regional Office for Europe should strive towards education YPOP in policy procedures etc. through:

- The implementation of a learning programme as part of the WHO Academy on global health, containing topics specifically for healthcare students and other young professionals interested in global health;
- Providing manuals and training materials for youth leaders about WHO procedures and the region specifically (its structure, organisation and other relevant aspects).

Recommendation 7: Striving towards making the WHO Regional Office for Europe a more intergenerational workplace

YPYPs are essential to delivering the work of WHO, yet the percentage of professional staff under the age of 30 is staggeringly low. If WHO/Europe wants to represent and speak for young people then it has to actively employ us. These contributions should be recognized by:

- Establishing entry-level positions at WHO/Europe to ensure the organization is an intergenerational workplace, a top employer of choice in the Region, and that the voices of younger people are incorporated into all areas of work;

- Providing informatory packages on how youth can actively participate in the decision-making processes and documents in the WHO Regional Office for Europe and how to influence them

Final Recommendation and conclusion

These recommendations have been made as a result of consulting, discussing and actively engaging with us, the young people and professionals of the region. They are designed to provoke and inspire the changes that are needed for the WHO/Europe to become a truly inclusive and forward looking organization that truly leaves no one behind. The YPYP Forum is a long-needed first step in establishing a more inclusive WHO/Europe that leaves no one behind, including youth. Together with youth, WHO/Europe and the Member States must create a formal framework for youth engagement to be adopted by the 72nd session of The WHO Regional Committee for Europe. The recommendations in this roadmap could be the basis of this framework. Appropriate funding must be made available to implement the necessary changes.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to your response and to collaborating more closely in the near future.