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# INTRODUCTION

The 2024 YOURAH Forum, held in Brussels from 7 to 9 November, brought together young diabetes advocates from across Europe for an inspiring and impactful three days. Organised by IDF Europe, this annual gathering is designed to amplify the voices of young people living with diabetes, equipping them with the tools and connections needed to influence health policies at the European level. This year's Forum, themed "Raising the Voice of the Youth Diabetes Community at the European Level," focused on empowering participants to become effective advocates for their community on the European level while fostering collaboration with key stakeholders.

Over the course of the Forum, participants learned about the EU's decision-making processes, particularly its role in shaping healthcare policy. Through advocacy training, group planning sessions, and meaningful discussions the young advocates worked on designing a youth-led campaign aimed at keeping diabetes high on the political agenda. The Forum also served as a platform to strengthen connections within the YOURAH network, encouraging collaboration among participants to address shared challenges and opportunities in diabetes care and advocacy across Europe.



This year's FORUM welcomed 14 young diabetes advocates from across Europe: Cyprus, England, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Portugal, Scotland, Serbia





## CELEBRATING YOURAH SUCCESSES

At IDF Europe, we believe in the importance of providing a platform for young advocates to share their stories, achievements, and future plans. By doing so, we wish to inspire and celebrate successes, to strengthen the sense of community within the YOURAH network. The YOURAH Successes session at the Forum truly showed the power and creativity of young advocates.

The session started with Alyssa Faulkner from Scotland, who shared her experiences in shaping policy at both the regional level in Scotland and at the European level in the European Parliament. Her presentation perfectly complemented the theme of the Forum, offering practical tips on effective advocacy that participants found extremely useful during the group discussions that followed. Alyssa's journey is a powerful reminder of the impact that young voices can have in influencing policy and driving change.

Next, we heard from the DiaNear group: Mārtiņš Zvackis, Joana Amorim, Sophie Miller, and their mentor Lazar Begovic. This team of advocates, all alumni of this year's Youth Leadership Lab, presented their project, an app called DiaNear, designed to connect people living with Type 1 diabetes across the globe. The concept, developed during the Youth Leadership Camp this summer, shows the innovative spirit of the youth community. IDF Europe is proud to support DiaNear as it demonstrates how youth can take the lead not only in advocacy but also in innovation.

These stories reflect the diverse contributions and ambitions of the YOURAH network, underlining the value of empowering young people to shape the future of diabetes care and advocacy.





## SETTING THE SCENE

To better understand the European Union’s history and its role in our daily life, the Forum began with a visit to the House of European History. Through the interactive exhibition, participants explored the origins and evolution of the European Union, gaining valuable insights into the events and principles that created and shaped the Union. On the next day of the Forum, participants visited the **European Parliament**, where they explored the Parliament’s role in shaping European policies.

The day continued with an engaging presentation by Izabell Thunström and Maxence Prizzi from IDF Europe, who introduced the participants to IDF Europe’s advocacy efforts at the European level. They highlighted the work of the **MEPs Mobilising for Diabetes (MMD)** group, an initiative bringing together Members of the European Parliament across party lines to advocate for the interests of people living with diabetes, showcasing how strategic partnerships can raise diabetes higher on the European agenda.



*“I really enjoyed the visit to European Parliament and the session following it about EU policymaking. It was all new to me, but it was pitched at an appropriate level and I felt that I learnt the most from these sessions. The information about how to interact with decision-makers will be so useful so it was really great to have a guide to this.”*

In the evening, IDF Europe hosted a networking event that provided participants with the opportunity to engage with professionals from the "European bubble", including Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APAs). This informal event allowed young advocates to exchange ideas, build connections, and gain a more personal insight into European policymaking and advocacy.





## ENGAGING WITH OTHER YOUTH COMMUNITIES

During the Forum, participants had the chance to attend an insightful presentation by **Dr Roxana Albu**, representing the **European Cancer League (ECL)**. She shared ECL's mission and activities, highlighting the organisation's focus on health advocacy and empowering youth to drive this meaningful change in public health policies across Europe.

The session provided participants with a broader perspective on advocacy outside the diabetes sphere, showcasing how collaboration across different health advocacy sectors can amplify impact. She also introduced the ECL Youth Ambassadors Programme, inspiring participants with examples of successful initiatives led by young advocates in cancer prevention and health promotion.

IDF Europe looks forward to continued collaboration with ECL and its Youth Ambassadors, to create a collective effort to raise awareness and prioritise health across Europe.

## LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

A highlight of the Forum was the dynamic session led by **Merce Duran-Sindreu**, Strategic Alliances Manager at Medtronic, and **Ashley Ross**, an Executive Coach. They focused on enhancing advocacy and communication skills. Building on their experience in the field, Merce and Ash delivered engaging and interactive sessions which empowered participants to confidently articulate their messages and connect with different audiences.



Merce's segment emphasised the importance of authenticity and empathy in advocacy. She shared practical tips about appearance, body language, and ways of speaking, that are important to keep in mind when engaging with policymakers and the broader community.



## TELLING STORIES

Ash brought his unique perspective as an executive coach, focusing on self-confidence and resilience in advocacy. His workshop was centred around the importance of storytelling in advocacy, following up Merce's closing sentence that "people will never forget how you made them feel". He encouraged participants to find their own powerful stories, and recognise the value and uniqueness of their own experiences. "Everyone has a story worth sharing, regardless of how ordinary or extraordinary they perceive it to be."

His practical techniques for framing discussions and overcoming communication barriers were particularly valuable as participants prepared to engage with Members of the European Parliament.

This session not only equipped participants with essential skills but also encouraged them to reflect on their personal advocacy styles. By blending storytelling, strategy, and self-assurance, Merce and Ash inspired participants to become more effective communicators, ready to amplify the voice of the young diabetes community at all levels.





# DIAlogue - A YOURAH Campaign

The final day of the Forum was dedicated to a collaborative group work session to design a youth-led campaign to engage Members of the European Parliament. Titled "DIAlogue" by the participants, the campaign reflects the commitment of the young diabetes community to create meaningful connections and open conversations with policymakers across Europe.

Participants began the session by working in two groups, brainstorming about ways to target and engage MEPs. Building on the skills and knowledge gained before and during the Forum, both groups incorporated key advocacy and communication strategies into their ideas, to make sure that their campaign would resonate with European decision-makers.

At the end of the session, the two groups came together to share and refine their ideas, combining their strengths into one campaign idea. The main takeaway from the discussion was the importance of working for the inclusion of people with lived experiences in the decision-making process. Discussions ended on the next steps required to bring the DIAlogue campaign to life, with participants and IDF Europe staff outlining the steps to ensure its successful implementation.



IDF Europe is now following up with the Forum participants and other YOURAH members interested in European-level advocacy to finalise and launch the campaign. With DIAlogue planned to begin at the start of the new year, this initiative will highlight the power of youth collaboration and cocreation in driving meaningful change for the diabetes community across Europe.

# Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the partnership of Lilly Diabetes, and Medtronic and for their longstanding support of the youth programme.






We would like to thank the European Cancer League for their presence and introduction, and we are looking forward to further collaborations.

We thank all YOURAH members, and IDF Europe staff who took part in the organisation of this event.

And a very special thanks to all participants who continue to fill this programme with life, energy and meaning.

**Visit our website and follow us on social media to learn more about the YOURAH network and our youth projects**

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