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INTRODUCTION

The 2025 YOURAH Forum, held in Brussels from November 11 to 13, brought together young diabetes advocates from across Europe for three days of meaningful dialogue, shared learning and collective action. Organised by IDF Europe, this annual gathering aims to bring together alumni from previous years, strengthen the YOURAH network, and provide participants with relevant tools and connections to support effective advocacy. This year's edition focused on the mental health of young people living with type 1 diabetes (T1D) and on the importance of strengthening collaboration between youth organisations engaged in diabetes and health advocacy at the European level.

The Forum provided a space where participants could deepen their understanding of the mental health challenges when living with diabetes, exchange personal experiences and explore how their voices can contribute to shaping more inclusive health policies. Through a combination of interactive sessions, group discussions and collaborative activities, the Forum fostered a sense of connection, belonging and shared purpose within the YOURAH network. Over the course of the programme, participants reflected on their role as young advocates, learned from one another and built relationships that strengthen not only the community itself but also their ability to drive meaningful change.



This year's FORUM welcomed 20 young diabetes advocates from across Europe: Croatia, Cyprus, England, France, Georgia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Moldova, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.



CONTEXT

Diabetes remains one of the major public health challenges in Europe, with around 32 million people living with the condition across the EU, including nearly 300,000 children and young people living with T1D. Beyond the physical demands of the condition, young people frequently face significant emotional and psychological challenges. Anxiety, burnout and feelings of isolation are common experiences, yet mental health support is still rarely integrated into routine diabetes care.



This lack of structured psychological support can affect confidence, academic performance, social participation and overall well-being. Stigma, limited access to adequate technology and a lack of understanding from peers and educators often exacerbate these difficulties. Recently, mental health has gained growing attention in EU policy discussions, creating an important opportunity for youth voices to influence the debate.

Youth organisations play a crucial role in elevating these voices. They create safe environments for young people to express their concerns, share their lived experiences and advocate for change. Strengthening collaboration across these organisations enhances their collective impact, allowing them to influence policies at the intersection of health, youth and mental well-being. Such **collaboration is essential to ensuring that psychological support becomes a core component of diabetes care and that young people can fully participate in society.**

The YOURAH Forum 2025 emerges as a key platform for dialogue, learning and co-creation, bringing together young advocates living with T1D from diverse backgrounds to share insights, build skills and shape the future of diabetes advocacy in Europe.

SETTING THE SCENE

The first day of the YOURAH Forum 2025 opened with a warm welcome and an introduction to the IDF Europe team and faculty. This initial moment set the scene for an environment built on trust, openness and shared expectations. Participants were invited to reflect on what they hoped to gain from the Forum, while also understanding the commitment of the organising team to creating a safe and meaningful space for learning and connection.

The day continued with the first thematic session on the mental health challenges faced by young people living with T1D. Led by **Cristina Petrut**, Clinical Psychologist living with T1D, the session explored the two-way relationship between mental and physical health and highlighted how emotions influence daily diabetes management and its associated vulnerabilities, including anxiety, overwhelm and the pressure to maintain strict control. The discussion also encouraged participants to reflect on strategies that strengthen resilience and support their overall well-being.



"I appreciated every session, as each offered something different — from presentations to workshops and even the visit to the Parliament. The variety of speakers and topics allowed me to learn in multiple ways, gaining both theoretical insights and practical skills" — FORUM participant

Later in the afternoon, **Maxence Prizzi**, Policy and Advocacy Officer at IDF Europe, led a session in preparation to the event organised by YOURAH members, "The Sound of Diabetes", scheduled for the following morning at the European Parliament. This preparatory session supported participants in shaping questions for the event's Q&A segment and in exchanging ideas for potential interventions.

The first day set a strong foundation for the Forum by introducing the main theme, providing essential context and creating space for early reflections. It fostered meaningful discussions, encouraged connections among participants and motivated the group for the days ahead.

THE SOUND OF DIABETES

On day two, participants joined the event organised by the members of the YOURAH Network and hosted by MEP Peter Agius, “The Sound of Diabetes”, at the European Parliament. The event brought together young people living with T1D, policymakers, and experts, including a psychologist, a professor, a sports professional, to discuss the mental health challenges faced by young people living with T1D.

Through three thematic panels addressing the emotional burden of T1D, the impact of stigma and discrimination, and the role of sport in supporting well-being, the event created a unique space for intergenerational dialogue grounded in lived experience.



Participants highlighted how striking the emotional atmosphere in the room was. Many noted that they had *never seen an audience so visibly moved* and several commented that the honesty of the testimonies created a level of connection and empathy rarely achieved in political settings.

Participants also reflected on how the event shifted their perception of their own influence. Seeing policymakers deeply engaged, listening attentively and reacting emotionally reinforced their belief in the power of youth-led advocacy. **The event was described as a meaningful starting point**, a moment that validated their experiences and showed that personal stories can open doors that traditional advocacy methods sometimes cannot.



WOMEN'S HEALTH: WORLD DIABETES DAY EVENT AT THE EU PARLIAMENT

On November 13, participants joined IDF Europe's World Diabetes Day event at the European Parliament, focusing to the theme *"Women's Health: Towards a Sex- and Gender-Sensitive Strategy in Diabetes"*. The session focused on the specific challenges faced by women living with chronic conditions such as diabetes, and highlighted how hormonal changes across the life course influence diagnosis, treatment and long-term outcomes. This reinforced the importance of integrating sex- and gender-sensitive perspectives into research, clinical practice and policy design. For YOURAH participants, this session broadened their understanding of inequalities within diabetes care and reaffirmed the value of including diverse lived experiences in policy conversations.



THE DOUBLE-EDGED ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The session on social media explored the dual impact these platforms can have on young people living with T1D. With the contribution of two YOURAH advocates, **Coralie Alabert** ("Coco and the Podie") and **Ines-Nerina Rambu**, the discussion highlighted both the risks associated with online spaces and the opportunities social media offers as a tool for visibility, empowerment and advocacy.



Through their personal path and experiences, they showed how social media can be used responsibly to share accurate information, challenge stigma and build supportive communities.

Participants reflected on how these platforms can amplify youth voices when used strategically while recognising the importance of protecting their own mental health online. They also engaged actively in the open discussion moderated by Kristin Ingi, that followed the presentations, raising questions and exploring together with Coralie and Ines practical ways to navigate social media safely and purposefully as young advocates.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Participants had the opportunity to join a **session and a guided discussion moderated by Kristinn Ingi** dedicated to strengthening collaboration between youth and health organisations, recognising that meaningful change often comes from shared effort. **Anna Revilla, Alexandra Silva and Danilo Bussi**, representatives respectively from **European Patients' Forum (EPF), European Medical Students Association (EMSA) and Youth European People's Party (YEPP)**, presented their organisations' work, highlighting their missions, recent initiatives and their approaches to engaging with EU institutions. This exchange allowed participants to gain a broader understanding of how other youth communities advocate for health, rights and equity in Europe.

The session emphasised the importance of partnership and collaboration: bringing together different perspectives, combining strengths, and identifying opportunities for joint action. Discussions centred on how youth organisations can align efforts, seize ongoing policy opportunities, and ensure that young people with lived experience are meaningfully included in decision-making processes.



INNER COMMUNICATION

The final session of the Forum focused on the importance of inner communication and self-care in advocacy. Led by **Paco Orengo, from Medtronic**, the session encouraged participants to reflect on how their emotional well-being influences their ability to support others and remain engaged in their advocacy work.

Through practical exercises and open conversations, participants explored strategies to recognise their own needs, set boundaries and maintain balance. The session reinforced the idea that effective advocacy starts with a grounded and emotionally healthy advocate, and that caring for oneself is not separate from supporting the community, it is a necessary part of it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

On the last day, participants shared their reflections on the overall experience of the Forum, consolidating the main insights emerging from the three-day programme. The sessions strengthened participants' motivation to continue their advocacy work and highlighted the value of lived experience as an effective communication tool across different audiences.

Community building was identified as a core strength of the Forum. The safe environment facilitated open exchanges, personal connection and collaborative thinking, contributing to a strong sense of belonging. Mental health remained a central theme, consistently recognised as a priority for future activities within the youth programme.

Key takeaways also included the importance of authenticity and visibility in advocacy. Sharing both the positive and challenging aspects of life with diabetes was seen as essential, and social media was considered a relevant tool to enhance visibility and impact of advocacy activities.

Participants expressed willingness to remain engaged beyond the Forum, both nationally and at European level. Ideas for next steps included developing mental health-focused initiatives, creating local training opportunities, using evidence-based materials to support national work and establishing a continuous communication channel within YOURAH to maintain momentum and collaboration.



Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank the European Patient's Forum, the European Medical Students Association and the Youth European People's Party for their presence and presentations, we look forward to further collaborations.

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

A very special thanks goes 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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