

**YOUTH
LEADERSHIP
LAB**
REPORT
2026

We thank our partners for their support



The IDF Europe Youth Programme and the IDF Europe Youth Leadership Lab

The Youth Programme is one of IDF Europe's core activities. It aims to support young people living with diabetes in their advocacy journeys, improving their leadership skills and fostering co-creation and connection.

The main objective of this programme is to empower young people to become strong diabetes advocates. This is achieved by providing opportunities to learn from and be inspired by the experiences and work of their peers, while developing practical skills for advocacy and leadership. Equally important is the goal of strengthening the network of young diabetes advocates across Europe, so that together, they can drive change and shape the future of diabetes care.

Between 2011 and 2019, IDF Europe organised Youth Leadership Camps (YLC) in collaboration with its member associations in Slovenia, Italy, the Netherlands, Croatia, Cyprus, Romania, the Czech Republic and Turkey. Reflecting the health situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, IDF Europe set up an online leadership training programme, the Youth Leadership Lab (YLL), which acted as a replacement for in-person camps while restrictions for such gatherings were in place in 2020 and 2021.

Although participants remained highly engaged online, returning to in-person camps in Poland, in 2022, strengthened interpersonal bonds, enhanced co-creation and played a key role in empowering IDF Europe's youth advocates. Building on the success of this hybrid version of YLL – which combined two online sessions with an in-person week – IDF Europe has since organised the YLL editions in Bulgaria, Serbia and Italy.

This year, the YLL was held for the first time in Portugal, in Évora. This edition marked two significant milestones: the 15th anniversary of the programme and the centenary of the Associação Protetora dos Diabéticos de Portugal (APDP), the Portuguese Diabetes Association, the oldest in the world and an actively member of IDF Europe.

The event also recognised the contribution of João Nabais, one of the co-founders of the programme in 2011, during his time as Chair of IDF Europe and a native of Évora.

The Lab took place from July 5 – 11 and was successfully organised in collaboration with APDP and its youth group.

The exceptional collaboration among all stakeholders in organising the event truly demonstrated a shared commitment and passion in creating a unique and memorable experience for all the participants. We extend our sincere thanks to Minimed and Lilly for their long-standing partnership and continued support of the IDF Europe Youth Programme and to Dexcom for their valuable participation.





This year's YLL welcomed 20 participants, 4 project mentors, 2 bridge mentors and 2 support mentors, representing a diverse group from 20 countries: Albania, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Malta, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.

This report was co-written with YLL Mentor Martina Mallia.



ONLINE SESSIONS

In preparation for the lab, **two online events** were held in June for participants to get to know each other and generate enthusiasm for the upcoming week.

During the **opening online session on June 10**, participants had the opportunity to meet each other as well as faculty members, their mentors, the hosting associations, the IDF Europe team and the YLL sponsors and partners.

During the second **online workshop session held on June 20**, participants were introduced to this year's four working groups and their respective themes. The session also provided an introduction to project management principles and a preliminary overview of health economics, laying the foundation for more in-depth explorations during the Lab.

These virtual sessions helped prepare participants for the lab, while building anticipation and excitement that was already palpable online.





WELCOMING SESSION

The atmosphere began to build as participants arrived in Évora on July 5, the day before the official lab programme began. From their first interactions they began forming connections that would stronger and more meaningful throughout the week.

Simple greetings quickly evolved into endless conversations. An informal icebreaker game helped ease initial nerves and created a warm and welcoming environment. Through laughter and playful interaction, the first bonds of friendship began to form.

The following day, the YLL 2026 officially began in Évora with heartfelt and inspiring words from the IDF Europe team and Board, representatives from APDP and members of its youth group

The opening remarks were delivered by **Tadej Battelino**, IDF Europe Regional Chair, **Elisabeth Dupont**, IDF Europe Regional Manager, IDF Europe Board Members **Jaivir Pall** and **Uros Bogdanovic**, who also serves as the IDF Europe Youth Representative on the Board. Together, they warmly welcomed participants, introduced IDF Europe and its youth programme and shared inspiring reflections that set the tone for a week dedicated to empowerment, collaboration and youth-led advocacy.

We were also honoured to welcome representatives from APDP. Diana Lopes, a nurse at APDP, attended on behalf of its president, Dr José Boavida. She introduced participants to APDP and its work before offering a warm welcome on behalf of the association. Joining her were two YOURAH alumni, Pedro Pires and Madalena Gonçalves, members of the APDP Youth Group, who presented the group's work and reflected on their own experiences as former YLL participants. Their testimonials offered inspiration and encouragement to this year's cohort, highlighting the programme's lasting impact and the opportunities it creates for continued engagement in diabetes advocacy.



Through the YLL, I had the opportunity to meet young people living with diabetes from different countries, backgrounds and experiences. What surprised me the most was how quickly we built such a strong connection. In just a few days, a group of people who had never met before became a supportive community that felt like a family –

Waleed Haider Shah, Denmark



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INSPIRATIONAL LECTURES

Oria James, diabetes advocate and consultant with the WHO Global Diabetes Compact, has been living with T1D for 17 years. During her inspirational lecture, she reflected on how her diagnosis unexpectedly shaped both her personal and professional life, ultimately leading her to a career in global diabetes advocacy. Drawing on her own experiences, Oria explored how living with diabetes helped her develop essential skills such as resilience, adaptability, strategic thinking, relationship building and effective communication. She emphasised that many of the abilities people with diabetes develop through managing their diabetes every day can become powerful strengths in advocacy and beyond. A central theme of the session was the importance of understanding your audience and using strategic communication to create meaningful impact.



Through interactive activities and practical examples, participants were encouraged to reflect on how to tailor their messages to different stakeholders and lead with curiosity rather than assumptions. Oria concluded by inviting participants to recognise the valuable skills that life with diabetes has quietly taught them and to embrace those strengths as they continue their own advocacy journeys.



Liam Eaglestone, CEO of the Steve Morgan Foundation, shared how his personal experience of living with type 1 diabetes (T1D), alongside his youngest son Jack, inspired his journey into advocacy. Diagnosed just one year apart, Liam reflected on how he evolved from being Jack's caregiver to becoming an expert by experience, driven by a shared determination to improve life with diabetes. He recounted how the challenges of managing Jack's glucose levels led their family to embrace innovation through the #WeAreNotWaiting movement, highlighting how advocacy often begins with a personal need before growing into broader action.

Liam also presented the work of the Steve Morgan Foundation, which has committed £100 million over 10 years to support T1D research and peer support initiatives. Throughout the session, he encouraged participants to see advocacy as a journey built on partnership, ambition, relentlessness and humour, reminding them that meaningful change often starts with one problem, one person and the courage to take the first step. He concluded with his motivating message to participants: "Keep on attacking."



THE NEAR-PEER MENTORING APPROACH

In 2023, the IDF Europe YLL Programme introduced a near-peer mentoring approach, creating a two-way learning opportunity for both participants and mentors. This model provides participants with an opportunity for continued development beyond the core programme, allowing them to further develop the skills, knowledge and confidence gained during the Lab. Since its introduction, the approach has continued to evolve year on year, with new mentoring roles being introduced to further strengthen the support structure.

At IDF Europe, we believe that the most effective mentors are those who have direct and relevant experience. YLC and YLL alumni are uniquely positioned to take on this role, as they not only continue to develop their own leadership skills and confidence but also provide participants with valuable insights, guidance and support drawn from their personal experiences within the programme.

In its most structured format to date, this year's programme included four Project Mentors, two Support Mentors and two Bridge Mentors, each contributing a distinct role to the overall mentoring framework.

Project Mentors Klara Gustavsson (Sweden), Calum Skye (UK), Nemanja Velickovic (Serbia) and Salome Gerard (France) supported participants throughout the programme by acting as trusted guides during group work, facilitating discussions and providing support with day-to-day group dynamics.

Support Mentors Martina Mallia (Malta) and Liv Fritzen (Denmark), having previously completed their term as project mentors, returned to play a pivotal part in shaping the mentoring environment. Drawing from their previous experiences, they provided guidance, mentorship and support to fellow mentors, helping to ensure a consistent and supportive learning environment.

Bridge Mentors Kristinn Ingi Reynisson (Iceland) and Alyssa Faulkner (Scotland), both returning to the programme for the third time as mentors, brought extensive experience and a strong understanding of the programme's structure. They played a key role in connecting faculty members and mentors, facilitating communication, alignment and collaboration throughout the week.



Following the success of the previous year, the mentors gathered in Brussels for a dedicated training weekend ahead of the YLL. This in-person preparation proved instrumental in strengthening the mentoring team, providing a valuable opportunity to reconnect, exchange experiences and develop the skills needed to best support participants.

Beyond the practical preparation, the training weekend fostered trust, open communication and a strong sense of teamwork among the mentors. This foundation created a safe and supportive dynamic that continued throughout the Lab, enabling mentors to confidently address challenges, support one another and collaborate effectively to enhance the overall participant experience.



ADVOCACY, LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Throughout the week, we shared moments of learning and connection designed to strengthen the participants as young leaders. The sessions combined advocacy, leadership, communication, diabetes management and policy engagement, giving them tools to grow both personally and as voices for their communities. More than developing skills, it was about building confidence to speak up, raise awareness and support others living with diabetes.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY – HOW AND WHY ?

As one of the first sessions of the week, this session introduced the fundamentals of physical activity and its role in T1D management. Iryna Vlasenko, former Board Member of IDF Europe, explained how different types of exercise affect blood glucose levels and how insulin, nutrition and treatment strategies can be adapted to support safe and effective physical activity. The session concluded with an interactive discussion, where participants exchanged questions, experiences and practical tips, creating a valuable opportunity for peer-learning.



YLL – WHAT NEXT ?

"What Next?" aimed to inspire participants by demonstrating the many opportunities available to continue their advocacy journey beyond the YLL. Three YLL alumni and diabetes advocates – Calum Skye, Alyssa Faulkner and Joana Amorim – shared their personal stories of living with T1D and reflected on how the programme became a catalyst for their personal, academic and professional growth. Through honest accounts of both the challenges they encountered and the opportunities they embraced, they illustrated how advocacy can take many forms, from launching community initiatives and influencing healthcare policy to speaking at international events, raising awareness, supporting peers and pursuing careers within the diabetes field.

Despite their different paths, they all shared a common message: advocacy is a journey, not a race. Participants were encouraged to find causes they are passionate about, use their lived experience with authenticity, embrace opportunities as they arise and continue learning along the way. At the same time, the speakers highlighted the importance of caring for themselves, recognising when it is time to slow down or take a step back and remembering that there is no pressure to achieve everything at once. By balancing personal wellbeing with a commitment to creating change, every individual can develop their own meaningful and sustainable path in advocacy

The Power of AI in Project Management



In this practical session, Carlos Sánchez Corujo, Senior Customer Marketing Specialist from Minimed, introduced participants to the potential of artificial intelligence as a tool to support diabetes advocacy and project management. Rather than presenting AI as a replacement for human creativity and critical thinking, the session focused on how it can be used responsibly to save time, structure ideas, reduce administrative workload and strengthen the impact of advocacy initiatives. Participants explored how AI can support every stage of a project, from researching problems and generating ideas to creating campaigns, monitoring progress and communicating results.

A strong emphasis was placed on the responsible and ethical use of AI, encouraging participants to critically review AI-generated outputs, protect personal and clinical data and maintain human judgement at the centre of decision-making. Through practical examples, prompting techniques and demonstrations of different AI tools, participants gained confidence in using AI to enhance their local advocacy projects while preserving authenticity, creativity and the human connection that lies at the heart of effective advocacy.

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The IDF Europe Youth Leadership Lab turned ideas into action. It connected me with inspiring young leaders from across Europe and gave me practical skills, lifelong friendships and the confidence to advocate for better diabetes care in Europe - Andrew Schembri, Malta

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HEALTH ECONOMICS

Dexcom's own Anette Mehler, EMEA Senior Market Access Manager and Jaivir led yet another practical session on Health Economics and Outcomes Research (HEOR), highlighting how evidence can be used to strengthen advocacy and influence healthcare decision-making.

Participants then applied these concepts ahead of the week in Évora by developing a Country Challenge Card. This involved identifying a key diabetes-related gap in their country, its impact, the relevant decision-makers, the evidence required to support their case and one realistic next step towards change. The session concluded with an interactive role-play, where participants assumed different stakeholder roles, including policymakers and worked against the clock to present and negotiate their perspectives. This exercise provided valuable insight into the complexities of decision-making while reinforcing the importance of strategic, evidence-based advocacy and effective stakeholder engagement.





IMPOSTER SYNDROME WORKSHOP

Liv, alongside Paco Orengo, Communications Specialist at Minimed, introduced the participants to the concept of imposter syndrome, exploring the feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty that can arise even in the presence of experience, knowledge and achievements. For many of the participants, this session labelled feelings they may have already experienced throughout their advocacy journey.

Participants explored the challenges of stepping into advocacy roles, including the pressure to represent the voices of others, doubts about their own expertise and the expectations placed upon them. The discussion highlighted that experiencing moments of doubt does not diminish the value of their lived experience nor the important contributions they make within the diabetes community.

By raising awareness of imposter syndrome, the session encouraged participants to recognise these feelings, share experiences with one another and build greater confidence in their role as advocates. It also reinforced the value of their personal stories and perspectives as powerful tools for creating change.

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It was reassuring to learn that I am not the only one who sometimes struggles with imposter syndrome - Monika Mohar, Slovenia

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LANGUAGE MATTERS AND UNITES

Martina and Salomé facilitated a session on the power of language and the profound impact words can have on people living with diabetes. Participants were invited to reflect on their own experiences and consider words and phrases that have impacted their journey, whether through healthcare interactions, conversations with family and friends, or everyday encounters. By sharing these reflections, the group explored how certain language can unintentionally reinforce stigma or negative emotions, while identifying more respectful, person-centred alternatives. The session highlighted cultural differences in language and communication, recognising that communication extends far beyond spoken words. They were encouraged to recognise that the words we choose have the ability not only to influence perceptions but also to empower, support and foster a greater sense of compassion, especially in such a digital age.



Concluding the session, the participants were also introduced to the #LanguageMatters movement and the national language guidelines developed to promote respectful, person-centred communication about diabetes. These resources provided practical guidance for participants to apply within their own communities, while also inspiring those from countries where similar initiatives have yet to be established to advocate for language that empowers rather than stigmatises.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS AND PATIENT ROLES IN ADVOCACY



This interactive session explored the complementary roles of healthcare professionals and people living with diabetes in creating meaningful advocacy. Co-facilitated by Ana Cristina Paiva, a diabetes nurse at APDP, and Joana, the discussion highlighted how clinical expertise and lived experience can work together to influence healthcare systems, improve care and drive positive change. Rather than presenting these perspectives as opposing viewpoints, the session emphasised the importance of building partnerships based on mutual trust, respect and shared goals. Participants also contributed to the discussion by sharing examples of successful collaborations in their own countries, as well as reflecting on the barriers and challenges that can hinder effective partnerships between healthcare professionals and people living with diabetes.

Participants then took part in a "Walk in My Shoes" activity, working in pairs to prepare a joint advocacy pitch from the perspectives of both a healthcare professional and a person living with diabetes.

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The Youth Leadership Lab reminded me that leadership isn't about having all the answers - it's about listening, connecting people and turning ideas into action. I would recommend this experience to anyone who wants to grow, be inspired and realise that together, our voices are much stronger.- Léa Calvez, France

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INTRODUCTION TO YOUTH-LED ADVOCACY: COMMUNICATING WITH DECISION-MAKERS

This session, delivered by Cameron Keighron, IDF Europe's Project Coordinator and Youth Advocacy Committee Coordinator, and Alyssa, introduced participants to the fundamentals of youth-led advocacy and effective engagement with decision-makers. The session explored why advocacy at both national and European levels matters, highlighting the unique value that young people bring to policy discussions through their lived experience and authentic perspectives. Participants were introduced to the key stakeholders involved in diabetes advocacy and learned how national and European advocacy efforts complement one another. The speakers also emphasised the importance of developing transferable skills such as storytelling, networking, confidence, persistence and clear communication to build impactful advocacy initiatives.

To put these concepts into practice, participants worked on developing a short advocacy pitch addressed to a decision-maker, focusing on clearly presenting who they are, the issue they wanted to address and the action they were requesting. The exercise provided a practical opportunity to strengthen participants' confidence in communicating with policymakers and reinforced the importance of preparing concise, evidence-based and action-oriented messages.

Advocacy is not only about policies, documents and projects. It is also about seeing your own pain in another person's story, turning loneliness into connection, fear into courage and personal experience into service - Nail Zakiyev, Kazakhstan

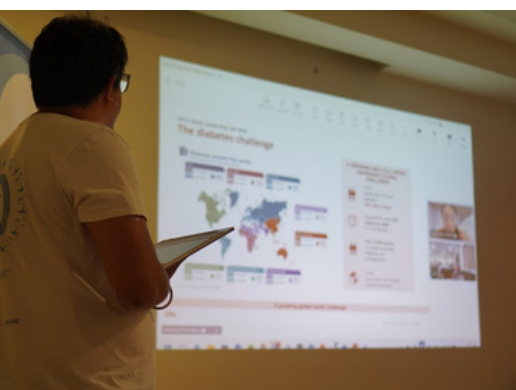




PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

A key session focusing on the mutual value of partnerships and collaboration was led by Jaivir, João Nabais and Ludovica Florezano, External Engagement Manager, Corporate Affairs, Cardiometabolic Health. The session explored the importance of building and sustaining meaningful relationships while remaining true to one's values, purpose and integrity as an advocate. It was particularly valuable to hear perspectives from both people with lived-experience and partners and collaborators, providing deeper understanding of opportunities, challenges and expectations on both sides and how partnerships can be developed in a mutually beneficial way. The session ended with a series of interactive role-play exercises presented by the facilitators themselves then practiced by participants.

These practical activities enabled participants to apply the concepts discussed throughout the session, strengthening their confidence and equipping them with a more strategic, thoughtful and structured approach to initiating and maintaining future collaborations.



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YLL equipped me with the essential tools to collaborate with healthcare professionals, diabetes associations and policymakers to drive positive changes nationally and across Europe. - Luisa pelz, Germany

Now I know how to collaborate with decision-makers, raise awareness and communicate properly about diabetes - Lara Vágner, Hungary

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VOLUNTEERING AND FAIR COMPENSATION

Uroš and Iryna, led a thought-provoking session on volunteering and fair compensation. Through open discussion, participants reflected on the value of their time, expertise and lived experience, while considering the importance of recognising when volunteer contributions are appropriate and when fair compensation should be expected. The session encouraged advocates to approach future opportunities and partnerships with greater confidence, awareness and ethical consideration.

VOLUNTEERING AND RISK OF BURNOUT

As highly active advocates living with diabetes, Cameron and Martina highlighted the importance of recognising advocacy burnout, acknowledging that continuously engaging with diabetes-related topics can become emotionally and mentally demanding. Drawing from their personal experiences, they explored what diabetes and advocacy burnout can look like, emphasising the unique challenge of advocating for a condition while also living with it.

The session explored common warning signs and triggers, alongside practical strategies to protect personal energy while maintaining a passion for advocacy. Through Cameron's contribution, IDF Europe reinforced that advocates do not need to always be available to prove their commitment and that setting boundaries and saying "no" when needed does not prevent future opportunities when approached thoughtfully. The session concluded with small-group reflections, allowing participants to share experiences, recognise moments of burnout and explore approaches to building more sustainable advocacy journeys.





HOW TO ENGAGE WITH THE MEDIA

Harry Bligh, diabetes advocate, freelance journalist and storyteller, introduced participants to the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of diabetes and the responsibility advocates have in ensuring accurate, respectful and impactful representation. Through real-life examples, participants explored how media coverage can both challenge stigma and spread misinformation, learning how to critically evaluate stories, identify misleading narratives and respond constructively when inaccuracies arise.

The session also focused on the power of storytelling as an advocacy tool. Participants reflected on the stories that matter most in their own communities and learnt how to identify compelling angles, tailor messages to different media outlets and develop concise, engaging pitches. Through practical group exercises, they strengthened their communication skills while gaining confidence to work with journalists, leverage social media and use their lived experience to raise awareness, influence public opinion and drive meaningful change.

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*For the first time I felt my own experience actually matters when I use it to help others.
I learned how to turn my story into something useful - Alexander Kováč, Slovakia*

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PATIENT AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Oria introduced participants to the principles of meaningful engagement and the importance of involving people living with diabetes as equal partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of healthcare programmes and advocacy initiatives. Through a practical case study, participants explored how even evidence-based interventions may fail if they are developed without understanding the needs, perspectives and lived experiences of the people they are intended to support. The session emphasised that meaningful engagement goes beyond consultation, requiring genuine collaboration, shared decision-making and recognising lived experience as a form of expertise.

Through an interactive group exercise, participants designed a meaningful engagement strategy for a hypothetical public health programme, identifying who should be involved, how they should be engaged and what insights would be needed to ensure the programme was relevant, accessible and effective. They were also introduced to a practical framework for understanding their target audience before communicating. The session reinforced that successful advocacy is not about creating solutions for people, but with them, placing lived experience at the heart of decision-making and sustainable change.





UNDERSTANDING DIABETES REALITIES ACROSS EUROPE

Elisabeth and Iryna provided participants with an overview of the diabetes landscape across Europe, drawing on data from the [country_profiles](#) developed by IDF Europe in collaboration with its Member Associations. The session explored key aspects of diabetes care, including national diabetes policies and registries, access to insulin, technologies and diabetes education, screening programmes, psychological support and broader health system organisation. By highlighting both progress and persistent inequalities across European countries, the presentation encouraged participants to reflect on the challenges and opportunities for improving equitable access to diabetes prevention, management and care.

The session concluded with an engaging discussion, where participants compared the realities of diabetes care in their own countries and shared examples of successful initiatives as well as ongoing barriers to access. This exchange of experiences provided valuable insights into the diversity of healthcare systems across Europe while reinforcing the importance of collaboration and advocacy to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for people living with diabetes.



The experience showed me that while everyone's journey with diabetes is different, there are many things that unite us. We share the same passion for advocacy, the same wish to improve the lives of people living with diabetes, and the same belief that young voices can create change - Waleed Haider Shah, Denmark

Meeting young people living with type 1 diabetes from across Europe showed me that, despite our different backgrounds, we face many of the same challenges - Lea Calvez, France





EVENINGS OF REFLECTION, SHARING AND UNITY

The evening sessions proved once again to be a special part of the Lab. In a relaxed and intimate setting, a space was created for participants to open up about their experiences of living with diabetes and the emotions that come with it. The honesty, mutual support and sense of connection that emerged was truly powerful.

COMING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

This session, led by Cameron and Klara, was a memorable experience for participants, designed to explore the personal boundaries we often set for ourselves and how to overcome them. It encouraged participants to confront their insecurities while realising they were not alone.

A supportive environment was created, fostering growth and self-discovery throughout the Lab and setting a positive tone for the days ahead. By engaging in conversations about common fears and barriers, participants began to build confidence and resilience.

SHARED EXPERIENCES

This emotional session, led by Cameron and Alyssa, was a heartfelt and impactful part of the Lab. Participants engaged first in pairs, sharing personal stories and experiences that had significantly shaped their lives. This session provided a safe and supporting environment, allowing everyone to express themselves openly and authentically. These meaningful exchanges deepened the connection and understanding between participants, further strengthening the sense of community.

The shared experience session was first introduced to the Youth Leadership Lab programme by Jean Langford in 2024. We would like to sincerely thank her for this valuable contribution and give her full credit for bringing this inspiring activity to the programme.



TABOO SESSION

The traditional Taboo Session, facilitated by Clinical Psychologist, Cristina Petrut with the participation of Dr Frederico Trigueiros from APDP, created a safe and supportive space for participants to openly discuss sensitive topics related to living with diabetes.

Throughout the week, participants anonymously submitted questions, which were addressed during the session in an open, honest and judgement-free environment. Guided by the principle that "the stories stay in the room, only the lessons leave", the discussion encouraged vulnerability, mutual respect and trust. Participants shared personal experiences, fears and challenges, while receiving professional guidance and peer support, fostering meaningful conversations and strengthening the sense of community built throughout the week.



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I especially loved how safe, supported and heard I felt throughout the lab
- Andrea Nikolaou, Cyprus

The Youth Leadership Lab reminded me that I'm not alone. For one week, I was surrounded by people who truly understood life with diabetes without me having to explain anything. - Patricija, Croatia

I learnt that while everyone's journey with diabetes is unique, we share a deep, mutual understanding and support that people without diabetes simply can't replicate - Luisa Pelz, Germany

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PARTICIPANT PRESENTATIONS

Amongst the many highlights of the Lab were the participants' presentations, during which all participants introduced themselves and their countries, discussed their involvement in their communities, the activities of their associations and the diabetes care provided in their respective communities. They also had the opportunity to share with the group and express their future plans as diabetes advocates.

This approach of exchanging experiences allowed participants to not only get to know each other and create a strong network of people with diverse backgrounds, but also to inspire one another through shared experiences. This session often fostered future collaborations, as participants consulted and learned from each other's knowledge and areas of expertise.

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It gave me the opportunity to meet inspiring young people from many countries and learn from their experiences - Szymon Goldyn, Poland

Being surrounded by others living with diabetes and sharing our personal stories alongside national advocacy efforts inspired me to launch new initiatives at home and grow into a more confident advocate - Luisa Pelz, Germany

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GROUP WORK

Throughout the Lab, participants had the opportunity to collaborate on group projects centred around key themes in diabetes advocacy. Project work is a fundamental element of the YLL, providing participants with the opportunity to transform their ideas, lived experiences and passion for advocacy into meaningful initiatives that can create an impact within their communities.

Working alongside their mentors, participants developed their project ideas from concept to action, beginning during the online workshop and continuing throughout the week-long Lab. The process encouraged participants to identify challenges, explore solutions and collaborate with peers from across Europe, while developing essential leadership skills such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving and project management.

This year, the project themes focused on important areas within diabetes advocacy, including “What’s in My Bag?”: Tackling Stigma in Travel; Youth Voices in Diabetes: Webinar Series; Access to and Safety of Diabetes Technology; and Mental Health. Each group explored their chosen topic through the lens of youth advocacy, aiming to create initiatives that raise awareness, amplify lived experiences, address barriers and support the wider diabetes community.

With the guidance of their mentors, each working group developed a realistic project plan to take forward beyond the Lab and implement within their own communities. By the end of the week, participants presented their project ideas to their peers, showcasing their progress and reflecting on the process of developing their plans.

These presentations represented more than the completion of a task; they provided participants with an opportunity to build confidence, share their voices, receive feedback and strengthen the networks established throughout the programme. The experience empowered participants to recognise their ability to create change, while encouraging them to continue developing and implementing their projects with the support of the wider IDF Europe network.

Through this collaborative approach, participants not only contributed ideas and solutions that can benefit the diabetes community but also continued to grow as confident, skilled and empowered youth leaders.

Throughout the week, I learned from inspiring mentors and young leaders from across Europe, each bringing a unique perspective and experience. With my team we could even transform our idea into pilot project and started to create impact - Alim Yelemes, Kazakhstan

The YLL is a unique opportunity to work and create alongside like-minded people in a safe, trusting and empowering environment. It gives you the chance to inspire and get inspired, while leaving you with the tools and confidence to successfully approach future projects - Salomé Gerard, France



“WHAT’S IN MY BAG?”: TACKLING STIGMA IN TRAVEL

The group developed practical travel guidelines to support people living with diabetes and airport staff, particularly when travelling to places where awareness and understanding may be limited. The resource included visual guidance on medical device placement, a diabetes travel packing checklist, as well as places of friendly travel. Under the slogan “Travel Smarter, Worry Less,” the group presented the first draft of their project, aiming to reduce travel-related stigma, increase confidence among people living with diabetes and promote greater understanding of diabetes management while travelling.



YOUTH VOICES IN DIABETES: WEBINAR SERIES



The group focused on developing a youth-led webinar series designed to create a platform for education, awareness and the sharing of lived experiences. Throughout the week, they developed the structure of the series, exploring ways to make the sessions engaging and relevant for young people. They identified key topics, including awareness and education and proposed interactive activities to encourage participation and meaningful discussion. Through this project, the group aimed to amplify youth voices, strengthen peer-to-peer learning and create accessible opportunities for young people to connect, learn and engage in diabetes advocacy.

ACCESS TO AND SAFETY OF DIABETES TECHNOLOGY

Drawing on the diverse experiences within the group, including perspectives from people living with different types of diabetes such as MODY and KPD, the group developed CGMS4ALL, a project focused on promoting equitable access to continuous glucose monitoring technology. Throughout the week, they built a case for CGM access by combining evidence-based data, cost considerations and lived experiences. They developed targeted policy asks for key stakeholders and created a website to share information, raise awareness and connect the diabetes community.

Through this project, the group aimed to highlight the importance of equitable access to diabetes technology, empower people living with diabetes with knowledge and advocate for systems that ensure technology is available to all who can benefit from it.



MENTAL HEALTH



Given the broad and multifaceted nature of mental health in diabetes, the group explored the topic through different themes, allowing each participant to focus on an area that resonated most strongly with their own experiences and perspectives.

Each participant highlighted the significance of their chosen theme, drawing on personal experiences to illustrate the realities faced by people living with diabetes and the often-overlooked impact on emotional wellbeing. Through their presentations, they identified key challenges and developed clear recommendations and asks aimed at improving support for mental health within diabetes care. The outcomes of these discussions will contribute towards the development of a policy paper, ensuring that the voices and experiences of young people living with diabetes are translated into meaningful advocacy messages and calls for change.

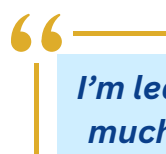


SPORTING ACTIVITIES

This year's Lab once again highlighted the vital role of physical activity in diabetes management and overall well-being.

Led by João Nabais and a dedicated team from the University of Évora's Sports Department, participants took part in a varied programme of daily physical activities that combined movement, learning and enjoyment. From energising morning stretches to traditional and cooperative games, Tai Chi, mind-body relaxation exercises, boccia, pétanque and refreshing swimming sessions, each activity encouraged participants to stay active while strengthening teamwork and connections within the group.

One of the most memorable experiences was the preparation of a flashmob, which participants proudly performed in Évora's main square. More than just a fun activity, the performance became a creative way to raise awareness about diabetes, encouraging participants to step outside their comfort zones, work together towards a shared goal and engage with the local community in a meaningful and memorable way.



I'm leaving with new knowledge, more confidence, lifelong friendships and so much motivation to bring these ideas back to my local diabetes community and continue advocating through my association and social media - Ūla Tamošiūnaitė, Lithuania





CULTURAL IMMERSION

During their stay in Évora, participants had the opportunity to discover the city beyond the meeting room and experience the unique atmosphere of one of Portugal's most historic destinations. Located in the heart of the Alentejo region, Évora is known for its peaceful pace of life, warm hospitality, endless olive groves and the green and golden landscapes that define this part of the country. It is also a region deeply connected to its traditions, where local gastronomy, culture and community remain at the heart of everyday life.

A city with centuries of history, Évora has countless stories to tell. From the ancient Roman temple and the historic University of Évora to its narrow cobbled streets and whitewashed houses, participants had the chance to explore a place where history is still very much alive and where authenticity has been carefully preserved.

The guided tour was led by João Nabais, who was born and raised in Évora. João guided the group through its most iconic landmarks, sharing local stories and curiosities before arriving at Praça do Giraldo, the city's main square, where participants performed the Lab's flashmob.

This morning offered a welcome moment of relaxation during an intense week of learning. It created space for conversations, laughter and stronger connections, while allowing participants to immerse themselves in the culture, history and spirit of the city that hosted this year's YLL.



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I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to discover another part of the world, another culture and a community that made me feel understood - Nail Zakiyev, Kazakhstan

”



CLOSING

As the week drew to a close, so too did another memorable edition of the YLL.

As participants prepared for the final evening, everyone dressed up for a celebration that marked the end of an unforgettable week. The emotional ceremony began with the presentation of certificates, recognising the commitment and achievements of every participant throughout the programme. The evening also provided an opportunity to honour the people and organisations whose dedication has made such a lasting impact on the youth diabetes community. João Valente Nabais received the YOURAH Award in Recognition of Inspiring Generations of Young Leaders, while APDP, celebrating its 100th anniversary, received the YOURAH Award in Appreciation of Their Outstanding Commitment to Empowering Young People Living with Diabetes. A heartfelt thank you was also extended to all mentors and the IDF Europe team, whose passion, time and commitment made this year's YLL possible.

To lighten the mood before the goodbyes, Alyssa and Martina organised a nostalgic quiz that took everyone back through the week's memories. Laughter quickly filled the room as participants competed in a "Most Likely To..." game and a "Guess the Participant" challenge, revisiting inside jokes, unforgettable moments and the friendships built throughout the Lab.

The closing celebration then became entirely participant-led, together with Iryna. They organised a creative fashion show featuring diabetes-related quotes they would proudly wear on a T-shirt, followed by a cultural sharing session where participants introduced traditions from their countries through music, dance, customs and personal stories. Many also chose to share their own talents and the unique ways they navigate life with diabetes, from writing and reciting poetry to creating origami as a way of coping with anxiety. It became one of the most genuine moments of the week, celebrating not only the diversity of cultures but also the individuality, resilience and creativity of every person in the room.

The evening concluded in true YLL tradition, with everyone signing each other's flags, sharing one last round of conversations, reflecting on the week they had experienced together and already making plans for where they would meet again. Goodbyes were said, but once again everyone reminded each other that it wasn't goodbye, it was simply the beginning of something new and a heartfelt "see you soon".



"I learned advocacy starts with simply using your voice. If you're thinking about applying, DO IT. It might just be one of the experiences that changes your life" – Ūla Tamošiūnaitė, Lithuania



"It was a place where I felt understood, inspired and empowered. I am excited to bring this knowledge to my local diabetes community by promoting youth engagement, advocating for greater attention to mental health in diabetes care and encouraging more young people to become active in shaping the future of diabetes" – Inês Agostinho, Portugal

"I returned home with new ideas, international friendships and a stronger responsibility to ensure that children in Kazakhstan feel that diabetes has not made their lives smaller" – Nail Zakiyev, Kazakhstan



"If you have the chance to attend DO IT. You will have the opportunity to ask the questions you were too afraid to ask" – Lauryn Okende, Sweden



I truly enjoyed the entire programme, especially the inspiring lectures, interactive workshops and the opportunity to hear so many different personal stories – Monika Mohar, Slovenia



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank the Diabetes Portuguese Association – APDP – and its Youth Group for their exceptional professionalism and unique hospitality.

We are grateful for the engagement, partnership and continued support of Lilly and Minimed and thank them for their longstanding commitment to the youth programme

We thank Dexcom for their valuable participation.

We thank Martina Mallia for her contribution to this report.

We extend our special thanks to Oria James, Liam Egelstone and Harry Bligh for their valuable contributions to the programme and for sharing their knowledge, experience and perspectives with our young advocates.

We thank all Alumni, faculty, mentors and staff who spare no effort to improve this programme year by year.

And a very special thanks to all participants who will undoubtedly continue filling 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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We thank our partners for their support

