



European Medical Students' Association

Association Européenne des Étudiants en Médecine

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Youth Involvement in Policy Making

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The European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) represents medical students across Europe. We envision a healthy and solidary Europe in which medical students actively promote health. EMSA empowers medical students to advocate health in all policies, excellence in medical research, interprofessional healthcare education and the protection of human rights across Europe.

Problem statement.

The youth population (aged 15-24), one of the largest demographics today, including 1.2 billion people, is becoming more interested in policy and politics, but they are underrepresented in the policymaking process, both civic and governmentally (OECD, 2017). This population is undoubtedly a crucial agent for positive change in the world, being the leaders of tomorrow. Through active participation, the youth population is empowered to play a central role in their own development and their communities' evolution. Focusing on the involvement of young people is particularly important, as any decision made today will have an impact on the current generation of young people. (EUR-Lex, 2018).

The policymaking process, also called the policy cycle, is composed of several steps through which an agenda is set, and a policy initiative is formulated, adopted, implemented, evaluated, and, potentially maintained. There are multiple levels of participation that the young can have within policymaking, ranging from being passively informed about policies, being consulted, collaborating with decision-makers to being empowered and actively leading initiatives themselves. These levels designate different approaches to youth involvement and are applicable to every step of the policy cycle. While more active engagement leads to a higher quality of participation and more effective policy-making overall, in practice, the efforts of policymakers rarely include working with the youth, leaving them even more disillusioned. (OECD, 2017)

The current challenges limiting youth involvement in policymaking include, among many others, the lack of information on how to get involved, possibly a skill deficit, insufficient resources for youth education on policymaking, financial constraints, involvement of youth in only youth-specific policy and community perceptions that young people's opinions and abilities are subordinate to that of adults (AICAFMHA, 2008 and EU-CoE Youth Partnership, 2014). Nonetheless, there are already some strategies in place to improve and encourage youth involvement in policymaking, one of them being the "EU Youth Strategy", which aims towards a meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of the youth population (EUR-Lex, 2018).

Our view. Aim.

We, the European Medical Students' Association, strongly advocate for the active inclusion of youth in the policymaking process. Adequate representation of youth as a substantial part of our population and the future of our societies plays a key role in ensuring that the interests of young people are respected and heard. New, youth-centred points of view can add significant value to current policies through promoting inclusivity and participation from young people regardless of their background. We see the active participation and involvement of youth as an essential pursuit toward active citizenship. Steps need to be taken away from tokenism and towards active involvement of youth in policymaking to truly

integrate young people's ideas and initiatives into the political landscape. Opportunities and mechanisms for engagement provided by high-level policy institutions need to be in place to promote the involvement of youth in meaningful ways. Engaging with student organisations and representatives on an institutional level has the potential to create great collaborations and initiatives for meaningful engagement. On an individual level, motivated youth should be given the tools and the platform to make a change and be heard in the policy realm.

The role of healthcare students and young doctors in health policy specifically will play an essential role in shaping the policy climate across Europe in the upcoming years. As European medical students, we appreciate the opportunities for involvement in policymaking given to us through collaborations with policy bodies and would encourage high-level institutions and national governments alike to continuously make an effort to involve youth in their policy endeavours.

Recommendations.

EMSA calls upon the World Health Organization (WHO) to:

- engage in meaningful youth involvement activities with youth organisations and individuals across all relevant policy initiatives;
- create opportunities for youth to get actively involved in policymaking, such as internship positions that are aimed to recruit young people and provide them with the professional skills, experience and network necessary to further participate in the policymaking process;
- develop initiatives to gather input from youth on current events and relevant policymaking.

EMSA calls upon the European Institutions to:

- create opportunities for youth to get actively involved in policymaking;
- share such opportunities online and possibly through collaborations with student organisations such as EMSA;
- empower and encourage the participation of youth in their Consultation processes;
- involve European youth organisations in their policymaking efforts in meaningful ways;
- provide technical assistance and funding opportunities to European Youth organisations;
- facilitate youth participation in internships in European Institutions, gaining professional skills, experience and network necessary to further actively participate in the policymaking process.

EMSA calls upon the European Member States and national governments to:

- promote the involvement of local youth and national youth organisations in national policymaking and legislations;

- support student-led organisations and provide them with a platform to actively engage in decision-making processes, especially those affecting students and the youth, with the aim of involving this population in the policymaking system;
- identify and address the challenges faced by the youth, including social, economic, political and cultural barriers that limit their participation and engagement in the policymaking system;
- adapt education systems to ensure that the youth has the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in policymaking actively;
- promote funding and investment in youth programs focusing on developing the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to participate actively in the policymaking process.

EMSA calls upon the EMSA members and medical students to:

- endeavour to be actively involved in health policy and policymaking projects, such as those conducted by the Health Policy pillar of EMSA;
- raise awareness amongst the youth on the importance of active youth engagement in policymaking and their crucial role in shaping the future of our society; for example, by developing campaigns calling for youth participation and involvement in policy-making processes at all levels;
- engage and collaborate with other youth-led organisations to promote a cohesive and interdisciplinary youth action;
- advocate amongst national stakeholders to increase the number of opportunities for youth engagement in local and national policymaking processes;
- advocate for greater involvement of youth and students in policymaking amongst local, national and international stakeholders.

List of Abbreviations.

WHO: World Health Organization

EMSA: European Medical Students' Association

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