

# How to start a Young GI Section in your country: A cookbook

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## How to start a Young GI Section in your country: A cookbook

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No organisation has a future without active involvement of young people who will devote time and engage themselves in the future development of the organisation. This holds especially true for medical societies, which have been driven in the past largely by volunteers close to retirement. Although experience is an important factor to defend this policy, a mixture of younger and older representation seems to be healthier and may better reflect the diversity and varying interests within a society. Thus, we see more and more organisations involving young people and preparing them for leadership at an age of below 40 years or even younger. Since 2014, UEG has a Young Talent Group (YTG), and now all UEG committees as well as the UEG council have a YTG representative. YTG representatives actively participate in discussions and meetings and help to prepare strategic plans, scientific and educational activities and to develop strategies for the future success of our society. In 2017, YTG published a cookbook on how to start a Young GI Section (YGIS) in order to help young GI to develop activities on a national level. Since then, great progress has been made in starting national YGIS in several countries, and activities of the young GI groups and the YTG have become more and more visible at a European and national level.<sup>1</sup> However, sometimes these activities make only slow progress due to various local factors, for example interest and time of young GIs, fear of senior people to start activities that may get out of control, time constraints, competing societies and interest groups, low number of available or interested people, long distances to arrange meetings or costs that may occur for meetings, technological support and so on. This article highlights some events that have happened since the first presentation of the YTG cookbook and provides some inspiring ideas, but it

also addresses potential obstacles and how they may be solved. This article will hopefully inspire the formation of additional YGIS and support existing YGIS to continue or improve their important activities in the future.

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## Cookbook Version 2.0

This is the second article on how to make a YGIS in your country. The first cookbook was published in the *United European Gastroenterology Journal* in 2017<sup>1</sup> and looked at the major points to be taken into consideration when creating a YGIS in your own country, namely: (a) aims and bylaws; (b) board members, posts and terms; (c) meetings; (d) finance; (e) communication; and (f) how a YGIS can make a difference.

This publication still remains true and serves as a valuable resource for building your own YGIS. The present article focuses more on events that have happened since then and describes the current situation, lists inspiring stories and speaks about potential obstacles and the way they could be overcome. Valuable practical recommendations on setting up a successful GI trainee research network can also be found in previous *United European Gastroenterology Journal* issues.<sup>2</sup>

### Overview of the current situation across Europe

There are currently 44 countries with 48 national societies and 17 specialist societies within the UEG. The YTG – a group of active young GIs that supports junior physicians and researchers working in the field of gastroenterology – is actively working on creating a strong bond between the UEG and young GIs in each country and member society. Therefore, one of the main goals of the YTG for the previous two years has been to encourage the establishment of YGIS in each UEG member country and strengthen the links between UEG and the young representatives of each specialist society. Forty-five of the national societies have a friend of YTG – a young GI who is in close contact with the UEG's YTG and shares the information with other young GIs in their home country. Up to now, 21 countries have their own YGIS, and five more are in progress of founding a section right now. We are also in contact with the YGIS of seven specialist societies: the European Crohn's and Colitis Organisation (ECCO), the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL), European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ESGE), the European Society of Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN), the European Society of Gastrointestinal and Abdominal Radiology (ESGAR), European Society of Pathology and the

European Pancreatic Club. It is always inspiring to see young and active people getting involved in shaping the future of gastroenterology in their home countries, Europe and gastroenterology subspecialties. If you are not part of any already existing YGIS section yet, please feel free to join, promote and found one!

### Five types of YGIS across Europe: which one is yours?

1. *We want that and we can. Support, integrity and inclusion.* There are many national and specialist societies with well-established YGIS, for example the UK,<sup>2</sup> Denmark, ECCO and ESPGHAN. One of the main factors of success for these YGIS was that the initiative or the support to make a YGIS came from the mother national or specialist society. The YGIS have their full support and are working in close connection and collaboration with their mother society. Often the YGIS chair or president is represented in the council of the national or specialist society – with or without voting possibilities. The opinion of the young GIs is heard, they are involved in the decision making on topics that concern the young GI training such as working conditions and so on. This is also a great opportunity for young GIs to learn from experienced colleagues and progress in their careers. Frequently, the YGIS is also sponsored from the mother national or specialist society. This type of YGIS is a great model and definitely something to strive for and look at as an example.
2. *We want that, but we cannot. Dialogue in progress.* There are some countries where YGIS have formed independently from their mother national society. There are different reasons for that, but most of the time there is a lack of support from the national society. The mother national society does not believe that the YGIS is needed and thinks that the young GIs should be involved in decision making, that the young GIs are too young and naïve, are not fully able to understand the 'real situation' and would make bad decisions. Conversely, there are young GIs in these countries who feel the need to be active and express themselves, who have opinions and feel that they have things to offer. In situations like these, it is always wise to look for a dialogue, to seek to understand the mother society, to explain the needs of the young GIs (more influence on training,

education and professional opportunities),<sup>3</sup> to hear out the concerns of the mother society and to maintain mutual respect. Young GIs should also look for and give credit for the positive things that have already been developed and value each gesture towards collaboration. In a situation like this, it is not easy to confront the national society, often because the GI community is small, the politics are intense and the future career development of the young GIs could be affected. On the other hand, you should never let go of your standards or lose your integrity and the principles you strongly believe in. Just be prepared not only to complain but also to work very hard. As already mentioned, you should always look for a dialogue and seek support from the mother national society because synergy is always the right way to move forward and achieve the best possible results. Sometimes, it takes time to implement your ideas, and you should be prepared to do it bit by bit and wait for a gradual attitude change from the mother national society. A good example for finding support from the mother national society and gradual change of attitude after forming an independent YGIS is Latvia. The initial surprise about the sudden independent activity of the young GIs slowly grew into mutual respect and offers from the national society to young GIs to participate in the formation of GI community. But know too that if you are not able to negotiate your ideas in a reasonable period of time or the resistance from the mother national society is too strong and you still want to move forward with forming a YGIS, you can count on the support of the UEG. A good example for this is Bulgaria. The YGIS of Bulgaria is now one of the Europe's most active YGIS, actively organising a congress for young GIs with lectures and hands-on training in Bulgaria, helping to organise the European conference for young GIs and actively increasing their participation in the UEG's (educational/support) programmes. All of this can be done if you persist and learn to work through the difficulties.

3. *We want a YGIS, but in reality it is hard.* These are countries where support from the mother national society is there and the YGIS is formed, but the real circumstances fail to support an active and prosperous work of the YGIS naturally. For example, Norway – long distances and geographical obstacles between the young GIs are the main reason for difficulties in running a YGIS, as trainees are scattered across Norway. In situations like these, you should aim to organise teleconferences and look for other ways to work together without actually meeting face to face as often. Then, Skype calls, WhatsApp chats and Facebook groups might come in handy.

In this category, you can also find countries where there is very little initiative from the young people themselves. The mother society supports them, but the young tend to see all the hard work and too little incentives or benefits for actively participating and being part of a YGIS. Sometimes, the working hours are too long – GI training and extra workload can make it feel impossible to take up volunteer work. You also have to be very careful of falling into this trap if you are in a YGIS which has been recently formed. Often, this happens after the initial hype and enthusiasm after forming a YGIS decreases and you reach a plateau phase in the growth of your YGIS. A solution that might help is to have a good plan of action in place beforehand. When founding a YGIS, think about the deadlines of the posts in your bylaws, so that you can always change and evolve, bring in new, active and motivated people and develop new and fresh ideas. Evolve the GI section and bring it to new and higher places. Also think about incentives, personal motivators and competition. These things can help to choose the most active people and make the active ones even more active.

4. *We do not need that.* There are also a number of countries where the young GIs think that the YGIS is not really necessary. These are usually small countries with a close GI community, where all the doctors – the young and the experienced ones – are working in close connection, where ideas and input of young GIs are taken into consideration and difference can be made together. A good example of this model is Estonia.
5. *We are almost there.* Five countries are currently setting up their own YGIS. If you are one of them, we want to wish you the best of luck and remind you that in case of any question or obstacles, the UEG is there for you! Always feel free to contact UEG's YTG for tips, tricks, information and support. We are also able to pair you up with other, already existing YGIS that have successfully talked through similar issues and solved similar problems.

### **The future for the young GIs in Europe looks great and promising**

In May 2019, in Vienna (Austria), the first UEG's YTG meeting with the Friends of YTG was held to discuss the situation with YGIS in all European countries. The meeting was a great success – a good opportunity to learn from each other, exchange ideas, make friends, share inspiration and seek practical support. This kind of meeting will happen again in April 2020 in Vienna. In December 2018, the 1st European Conference of Young Gastroenterologists (organised by the YGIS

of the Croatian national GI society) took place in Zagreb (Croatia) and was considered a great success – a wonderful opportunity to work together with senior colleagues, mentors and learn from each other. The 2nd conference will happen again in 2020 in Dubrovnik (Croatia). Young GI ideas are heard and supported by the UEG. Finally, remember that the UEG offers many opportunities for young GIs – education possibilities, online and classroom courses, summer schools, UEG Week, mentoring programs, visiting fellowships for young clinicians and researchers, different prizes, grants and much more. Therefore, without a doubt, we can say that there are some solid foundations for a better future for young GIs across Europe. A big thank you to Yasmijn van Herwaarden, the chair of the YTG between 2017 and 2019, whose priority was to work with the YGIS in each country and help them become as active as possible. A very warm welcome to the YTG's new chair, Henriette

Heinrich, who has created UEG's Talent Pool – a great opportunity for young and active GIs to join UEG's activities, work in UEG's boards and committees, help make the UEG journal and chair sessions at UEG Week. And remember that each year, there is a chance to join the UEG's YTG as well. Stay young, wild and GI!

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