

Young GI Societies in Europe: 2019 Update

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Background: One of the aims of the Young Talent Group is to make United European Gastroenterology (UEG) more attractive for young fellows interested in gastroenterology, and to involve them actively in UEG activities and the activities of their respective national societies. In 2017, we performed a survey among the Friends of the Young Talent Group with the aim of identifying the state of organization and needs of young gastroenterology sections throughout Europe, highlighting areas of further development and improvement.

Aims: The aim of the current web-based survey was to assess the progress of young gastroenterology sections over two years and assess persisting hurdles in forming and running a young gastroenterology section.

Results: Overall, 38 of 42 Friends answered the survey (91%). The number of young sections has significantly increased from 12 in 2017 to 25 in 2019. Young gastroenterologists remained supported, but not influenced, by National Societies. Results of the survey suggest that a lack of dedicated and motivated fellows has replaced lack of funding as the most prevalent hurdle in forming these type of sections.

Conclusion: Our survey shows that the development of young sections has improved markedly within the last two years. However, several limitations like underrepresentation in subcommittees of National Societies remain and need to be addressed in order to involve young gastroenterologists in their respective National Societies and within UEG and by this pave the way for future research, education and excellent quality of care and reduce health inequalities across Europe.



Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest related to this manuscript.

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Background

United European Gastroenterology (UEG) actively promotes the education and interaction between young specialists working throughout Europe in

the management of gastrointestinal diseases. Thus, in 2013 the UEG Young Talent Group (YTG) was founded as a working group with the specific aim of promoting educational activities for young European clinicians and basic scientists, including their active participation during UEG Week. It is composed of seven members and a Chair who serves as a cross-representative in all UEG committees, taskforces and the Council of UEG. The YTG exchanges information with their target group via a network of young ambassadors called the "Friends of the YTG" (FYTG), the young national representative in each National Society that is a member of UEG. In 2017, we performed a survey among the FYTG with the aim of identifying the state of organization and needs of young gastroenterology (GI) sections throughout Europe¹. We found that only half of the participant countries had an established young section in their National Society at the time of the survey. Furthermore, many important

limitations were reported, including lack of resources, absence of interest and limited support by their National Societies. With the current paper the YTG gives an update of the current situation of the young GI sections (YGIS) and of changes within the last three years by reporting on the results of a follow-up survey. Our main objective was to describe the current situation of young GI sections in Europe, their current relationship with their National Societies and to address any putative still existing limitations and needs for the future. These results may help us to develop further specific activities for supporting young clinicians and researchers during the early years of their professional career.

Methods | Target population

The FYTG are young (<40 years) gastroenterologist and digestive health specialists, most of them

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still in training, who act as ambassadors of the YTG across UEG National Societies. “Friends” are appointed by the respective National Society. Each national FYTG gives feedback about UEG activities, and informs UEG about activities promoted by their National Society. They provide information about the needs of the trainees and young gastroenterologists in their countries, and also help to disseminate information about UEG’s Young GI Network initiatives in their own country. To date, UEG comprises 48 National Societies, 42 of which have appointed an FYTG delegate. Four countries have two National Societies (Belgium, Italy, Spain and The Netherlands), and in this case there is one FYTG appointed by each Society.

Methods | Questionnaire structure

A standard questionnaire containing 16 questions examining the current status of young GI sections across Europe was developed using a web-based survey and data collection tool (SurveyMonkey®, San Mateo, California, USA). The following areas of interest were explored:

1. Presence of national YGIS in Europe
2. Structure of YGIS
3. Representation of YGIS in National Societies
4. Hurdles faced in setting up or running a YGIS

Data were collected in the form of single or compound answer multiple-choice questions for nominal data and open-ended text boxes for descriptive exploration. The complete questionnaire is available as a supplementary file ([Supplementary file 1](#)).

Methods | Questionnaire distribution

The questionnaire was distributed via email between May 2019 and August 2019 to all FYTG. No incentive was utilised to increase response rate. Participants who did not answer by the

deadline were contacted repetitively in order to achieve the highest possible response rate. Data were collected and held within the requirements of the Data Protection Act. The study did not use clinical data and did not require or seek specific ethical approval.

Methods | Statistical analysis

Analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft®, Redmond, WA, USA). Means and percentages were calculated for data originating from multiple-choice questions. Data obtained were compared to the previously published survey¹ in order to highlight changes over time. Answers from open questions were gathered and, when possible, synthesised.

Results | Questionnaire responses

In total, 42 individuals responded to the survey. Four duplicate responses from individuals within the same country and National Society were received. In each of these cases, the second response was discarded. Out of 42 FYTG members from 36 countries, 38 valid responses from 34 European countries were received, as some members have more than one national society (90.5% response rate). FYTG representatives from four National Societies did not respond.

Results | Geographic distribution

At the time of our previous survey in 2017, UEG had 47 National Societies, 29 of which had appointed a FYTG. In 2019, UEG had 48 National Societies, 45 of which have appointed a FYTG. This represents an important increase in representation of young gastroenterologists via their National Societies (29 vs. 45 YGIS).

Results | Demographic Data

The mean age of the FYTG respondents was 34±4 years with markedly altered gender distribution in comparison to 2017 (55% male; 45% female in 2019 vs. 75% male; 25% female in 2017).

Results | Presence of YGIS in Europe

In 2017, 12 of UEGs 47 National Societies (25%) had a YGIS¹ ([Figure 1A](#)). In 2019, 25 of 48 UEG National Societies (50%) had established a YGIS. Eleven of these sections were newly built up between 2017 to 2019, markedly increasing the representation of young eastern European gastroenterologists within UEG. The growing diversity of UEG and YGIS is shown in [Figure 1B](#).

Results | Structure of Young GI Sections

Admission to young GI sections were regulated in a variety of ways. To be a part of a young section and to benefit from its advantages the sections usually chose to only include trainees (10/24; 42%), while 29% (7/24) chose to base admission on age with the maximum cut off being reported being 40 years. The other 7 young sections (29%) had either no limitations regarding training or age or extended membership to up to three years after completion of their training in Gastroenterology.

The criteria for selection of board members of YGIS across Europe is summarized in [Table 1](#). An appointment of YGIS members to the board of national societies proportion is less driven by the respective national society but more by YGIS members, when data is compared to practice in 2017. More YGIS board representatives are directly elected at YGIS meetings (3/12; [25%] vs 9/29 [32%]). The gender balance of the YGIS governing boards has improved when comparing

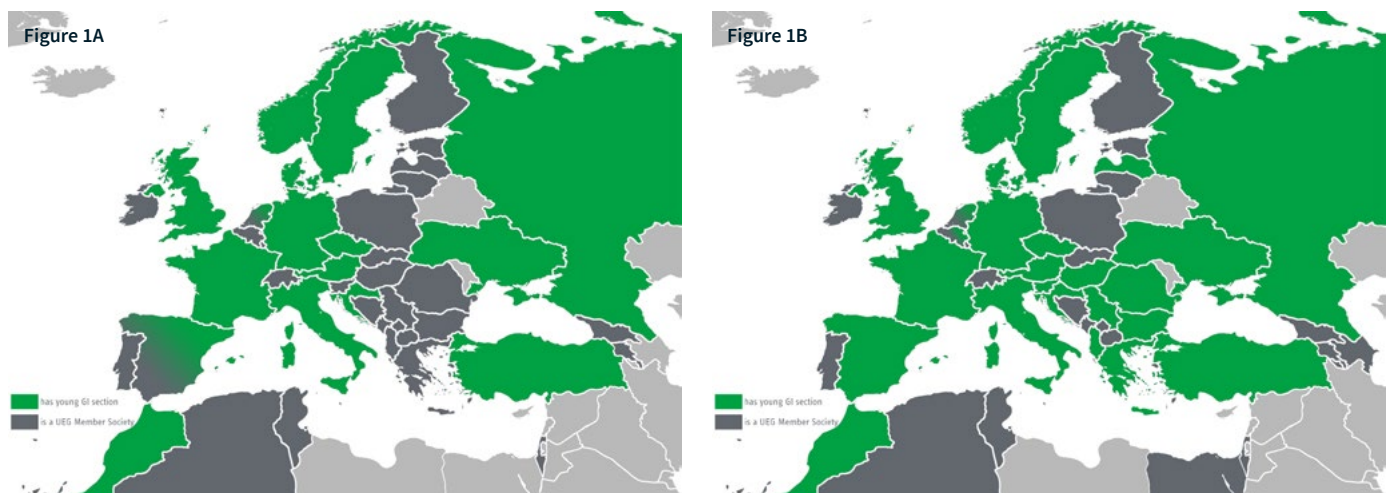


Figure 1 | In 2017 only 25% of national societies had a Young GI Section (A). Meanwhile, in 2019, 50% of all national societies within UEG have supported the formation of a YGIS, with a notable increase in eastern European countries (B). After the survey was closed Ireland and Egypt each formed a Young GI section.

	2017	2019
Open call by YGIS	42%	42%
Direct election at YGIS meeting or National Society meeting	25%	32%
By National Society	17%	10%
By trainee delegates of Gastroenterology training schools	8%	0%
No governing board exists	17%	17%

Table 1 | Appointment of Young GI Section board members. (YGIS: Young GI section.)

	2017	2019
Gender balance considered for YGIS board appointments	40%	63%
Regional balance considered in YGIS board appointments	80%	63%

Table 2 | Gender and regional composition of Young GI sections. (YGIS: Young GI section.)

2017 and 2019 with gender balance increasingly being taken into account in 2019 (40% in 2017 vs. 63% 2019). Regional representation in the YGIS governing boards was taken into account by 67% of YGIS in 2019.

Results | Representation of YGIS in National Societies

Approximately two thirds of YGIS (14/24; 67%) reported representation in the board of their national society in 2019. This is an increase with regards to only 33% of YGIS represented in national boards in 2017. However, representation in the national societies subcommittees (i.e. education or scientific committee) remained at a low level with only 33% (8/24) of YGIS represented in these bodies. This is also reflected in the low involvement (7/24; 29%) of YGIS members in educational issues and development of curriculum items. Organisation of educational events like symposia and hands-on trainings for fellows and trainees are the most reported activities in the group surveyed (5/7; 70%).

The National Societies surveyed provided different types of financial support for young trainees (independently, or in coordination with the YGIS, when present), including: reduced fees for subscription and participation in national congresses (29/ 38; 76%), free educational events (21/28 55%); travel grants to international meetings (16/38, 42%), travel grants to national meetings (16/38; 42%); visiting fellowships (4/38 10%) and awards for young trainees (20/38; 50%). According to FYTG, only two national societies (5%) did not support young trainees financially and 95% of National Societies offered more than one form of support for young trainees.

Results | Hurdles faced in setting up or running a YGIS

The FYTG were surveyed regarding the most important challenge faced when forming a YGIS. The results are summarized in **Figure 2**. Of the 13 FYTG with no YGIS, 8 countries were planning or in the process of forming a YGIS. The main reason given by the majority of the remaining 6 FYTG

without a YGIS not to form a section was lack of funding and resources.

Discussion

The UEG National Societies Committee and YTG are committed to increase representation of young Gastroenterology specialists across Europe within their National Societies and within UEG by promoting the formation of YGIS. The presence of these sections in national societies potentially gives young gastroenterologists more influence on training, education and professional opportunities. While the previous survey performed in 2017 focused on prevalence, structure, and organisation of the YGIS throughout UEG National Society member countries, the latest web-based survey evaluated not only the current status, but also progress and changes in YGIS across Europe over a two-year period.

The most relevant finding of the reported survey is the strong increase of YGIS across Europe, especially Eastern Europe in a relatively short time frame. This number is likely to increase even further in the coming years since a large proportion of national societies without a young section are planning to start their own section as well. Since the ending of the survey, Egypt and Ireland have reported that a young section was newly formed in their National Society (personal communication). Within the FYTG respondents and YGIS, the male to female ratio changed remarkably in comparison to 2017 with more balanced gender when compared to 2019. Furthermore, representation of YGIS within National Societies remained stable and YGISs took increasing control of selection processes for YGIS boards, although more YGIS are represented in boards of National Societies, involvement of YGIS in National Society subcommittees and the development of educational activities has remained fairly stable throughout Europe. In countries with no YGIS, lack of motivated and

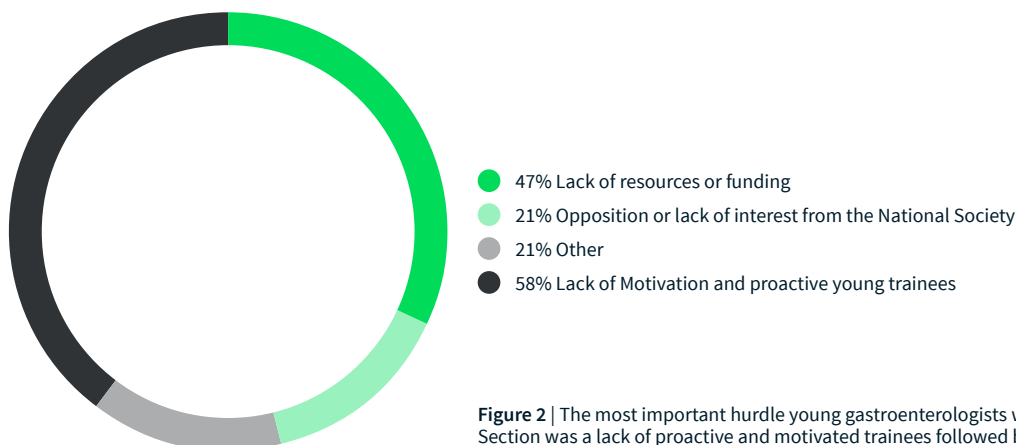


Figure 2 | The most important hurdle young gastroenterologists were faced with when forming a young GI Section was a lack of proactive and motivated trainees followed by lack of funding.

proactive young fellows replaced the lack of resources and capabilities as the most important factor in not forming a YGIS. Lack of interest by the reference National Society, and sometimes even its outright opposition, were still described as a driving force but to a lesser extent than in the previous survey.

While this survey shows significant change across Europe with more YGIS being formed and actively being included and supported by their National Societies, several areas of improvement and future studies remain. Although more YGIS are represented in the National Societies boards, it is unclear how representatives are involved in decision making. The fact that young gastroenterologists remain underrepresented in subcommittees of National Societies is a concern as this limits the impact of trainees. A clear aim should be to include young gastroenterologists not only in the governing boards of National Societies but also in subcommittees. This has been practiced successfully by UEG with cross-representatives in all UEG subcommittees and task forces, with the positive result that more young colleagues are being selected as speakers and chairs during scientific and educational meetings and involved in other projects within UEG²

An important hurdle to be considered in the near future is the lack of motivated fellows to

contribute to the formation of a YGIS. It remains to be explored in further studies if potential cuts in funding³, the structure of training or other reasons prevent young gastroenterologists from getting involved.

In summary, YGIS have increased in number yet need to be supported further in achieving more say and support in their respective National Societies. This could lead to a higher motivation and satisfaction rate within young members of the National societies, and subsequently to a strengthening of the YGISs within Europe. Including the future specialists in the National Society at a young stage might train them to become the future volunteers for the National Society and give them important leadership and management skills. The YTG will continue working and promoting the active collaboration between National Societies, UEG, and the YTG in order to improve representation, training and education across Europe.

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