

Best practices on structuring a WFF National Youth Chapter: Italy Youth Chapter

Best practices on structuring a WFF National Youth Chapter – The Italy Youth Chapter

Successfully establishing a World Food Forum (WFF) National Youth Chapter begins with identifying and engaging key stakeholders who are passionate about youth empowerment and are committed to its advancement. These stakeholders may include youth-led and youth-focused organizations, universities, institutions and dedicated individuals who align with the Chapter's mission and vision. Bringing together a diverse group is essential for mapping existing efforts and fostering collaboration, while building a strong and representative foundation that reflects the unique dynamics of a country.

Youth Chapters should be composed of dedicated young leaders with a proven track record of creating positive change in their communities. They should exhibit strong leadership, teamwork and a commitment to driving meaningful youth-led initiatives. Ensuring gender balance in leadership is essential to fostering inclusivity and equitable representation.

A well-structured team is key to effective coordination and impact. As Youth Chapters expand, recruiting individuals with diverse skills and backgrounds enhances their capacity to manage growing responsibilities. A broader, more representative team brings fresh perspectives and strengthens the Chapter's ability to address agrifood systems challenges. By fostering inclusivity and strategic growth, Youth Chapters can build a strong foundation for lasting impact.

Formation of the Chapter

The Italian Youth Chapter was launched during the 2024 WFF flagship event through the collaborative efforts of students from various universities, marking the start of a bold initiative to unite Italy's youth in transforming the country's agrifood systems.

In its early stages, a Steering Committee was established to provide strategic direction, playing a pivotal role in expanding the Chapter's reach, recruiting volunteers and laying the groundwork for future growth. As the Chapter evolved, it became clear that additional structures were needed to manage its expanding membership and activities. This led to the formation of key governance bodies: the Administrative Secretariat, responsible for logistical and operational support; the Executive Board, overseeing strategy implementation; and the General Assembly, serving as the primary forum for member engagement and decision-making. These structures have been essential in ensuring sustainable and effective leadership. Additionally, new leaders are selected through a vote-based system, fostering transparency, inclusivity and fairness in the Chapter's governance.

Capacity development and working groups

After consultations with members, the following priority areas were identified:

- Gender equality and rural women's empowerment;
- Reducing food loss and waste;
- Safe food for everyone;
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation for agrifood systems;
- Nutrition for the most vulnerable;
- Innovation for sustainable agricultural production;

- Agriculture and food emergencies;
- Achieving sustainable urban agrifood systems;
- Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture;
- Transparent markets and trade;
- Resilient agrifood systems;
- Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture;
- Digital agriculture;
- One Health;
- Equitable access to resources for small-scale producers;
- FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative;
- Scaling up investment; and
- Blue transformation.

Considering these focus areas and the interests of the new members, the Steering Committee developed a series of online workshops to equip them with the knowledge and tools needed to contribute effectively to the transformation of agrifood systems in Italy. These capacity development workshops were led by experts, including professionals from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), members of the WFF Local Youth Action team and specialists from the Chapter's own network. The workshops covered both soft skills and technical capacities aligned with the interests of the members. The topics included:

- Codex and food safety standards
- Social media 101
- Gender equality and rural women's empowerment
- Event organization
- Reducing food loss and waste
- Advocacy and partnerships
- Climate change mitigation and adapted agrifood systems
- Research and analysis
- Nutrition of the most vulnerable

Following these workshops, new members were ready to join one of the Chapter's operational working groups, which were strategically created by the Steering Committee to focus on key areas of action.

These working groups allowed members to apply the knowledge gained through the workshops and collaborate on initiatives related to their interests. The operational working groups are:

1. Event organization: Focused on planning and executing the Youth Chapter's events and activities.
2. Social media and communications: Responsible for managing social media presence and outreach.
3. Research and analysis: Conducting research and analysis on the latest national trends in agrifood systems.
4. Advocacy, partnerships and fundraising: Working on building partnerships and raising funds.

These working groups are essential for driving the Chapter's initiatives and ensuring that all members have the opportunity to contribute to areas they are passionate about.

The Chapter's structure

The Italian Youth Chapter is organized into four main bodies to ensure efficient governance and coordination:

1. Steering Committee (Advisory and strategic oversight)

The Steering Committee provides strategic direction, ensures alignment with FAO and the WFF Youth Initiative priorities, and facilitates high-level partnerships. It also ensures democratic governance and supports major decision-making. Key responsibilities:

- **Provide strategic direction:** Define and guide the overall vision, objectives and priorities of the Chapter, ensuring long-term impact and sustainability.
- **Ensure alignment with FAO and WFF Youth Initiative's priorities:** Guarantee that all activities and initiatives are in line with the strategic goals of FAO and the WFF Youth initiative, promoting coherence and synergy.
- **Facilitate high-level partnerships:** Establish and strengthen collaborations with key stakeholders to enhance impact and outreach.
- **Ensure democratic governance:** Uphold transparency, inclusivity and accountability in decision-making processes, ensuring diverse representation and stakeholder engagement.
- **Support major decision-making:** Oversee and contribute to critical decisions ensuring the initiative remains effective and responsive to emerging challenges.

Composition:

- Up to three founding members
- Up to two FAO focal points
- One Presiding Member of the Executive Board
- One Administrative Secretary (coordinating with FAO and the WFF)

2. Administrative Secretariat (Administrative and logistical support)

The Administrative Secretariat provides operational support to the Executive Board and General Assembly by managing membership, finances, logistics and external relations. Key responsibilities:

- **Membership management:** Review applications and communicate with members.
- **Financial management:** Prepare reports, manage the budget and ensure compliance with FAO guidelines.
- **Coordination and logistics:** Propose projects and assist with meetings, events and workshops.
- **FAO & WFF liaison:** Ensure alignment with global initiatives and compliance with guidelines.
- **External relations:** Engage with government bodies, NGOs and private sector partners.
- **Delegation support:** Provide support for Italian Youth Delegates to UN agencies like FAO, IFAD and WFP, if applicable.

Composition:

- One Officer for External Relations & Partnerships
- One Officer for Coordination with FAO & WFF
- One Officer for Internal Oversight

3. Executive Board (Leadership and facilitation)

The Executive Board leads the Chapter's activities and ensures coordination between different working groups. Key responsibilities:

- **Leadership and governance:** Set goals and make key decisions, ensuring that all activities align with the Chapter's mission and objectives.
- **Communication:** Facilitate collaboration between working groups, ensuring clear communication and promoting synergy across different initiatives.
- **Representation and advocacy:** Serve as the face of the Chapter, engaging with external stakeholders and advocating for its initiatives at local, national and international levels.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Track progress, assessing the impact of initiatives and ensuring continuous improvement through feedback and adjustments.

Composition:

- Leadership:
 - One Presiding Member (elected by majority vote)
 - Two Vice-Presiding Members:
 - One for Thematic Working Groups
 - One for Operational Working Groups

- Members:
 - Four Representatives from the Operational Working Groups:
 - Advocacy & Partnerships
 - Event Organization
 - Research & Analysis
 - Social Media & Communications
 - Five Representatives from Thematic Working Groups

4. General Assembly (All members)

The General Assembly consists of all members of the Italian Youth Chapter and serves as the foundation for participation, decision-making and engagement.

This structure ensures clear leadership, effective communication and strong coordination across all levels of the Chapter.