

BUILDING STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS with UN & government representatives to advance NCD advocacy

Strategic relationships with United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) representatives are critical for advancing global and national efforts to address noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). The interplay between global commitments and local actions creates a dynamic advocacy landscape where civil society plays a pivotal role. By connecting with decision-makers in capitals and engaging with missions in New York and Geneva, advocates can ensure that national priorities influence global decisions while leveraging international platforms to drive local change.

NCD GOVERNANCE: WHAT HAPPENS WHERE?

CAPITAL

National governments set their NCD agenda and shape global NCD governance as UN Members with decision-making power in UN and WHO governing bodies.

Technical and political staff at the **Ministry of Health** and/or the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** liaise with relevant ministries to arrive at positions on global health matters and give **broad directives to UN missions**.

Consensus across Member States is reflected in global resolutions and commitments which in turn inform national policies and regulations.

GENEVA

The NCD Department at WHO Headquarters leads global normative and technical work on NCDs.

Major decisions are taken by **Member States** through the **WHO Executive Board** and **World Health Assembly** mandating WHO to develop policy guidance, identify best practice, and monitor progress against global commitments.

Advocates can influence these processes by engaging with government representatives involved in these forums.

NEW YORK

The **UN General Assembly** convenes **high-level political discussions and processes** related to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals which include the NCD agenda and broader health and development goals. A small WHO Office facilitates WHO participation in New York based processes.

Representatives of **UN Missions** follow deliberations at the **UN General Assembly** and its subsidiary bodies. They engage in **UN High-Level Meetings** and negotiate Political Declarations.

CIVIL SOCIETY OUTREACH

Engaging with technical and political staff in relevant ministries, responsible for shaping country positions for intergovernmental meetings, enables national civil society to influence global decisions while strengthening advocacy and accountability at home.

Engaging with UN Mission representatives fosters mutual benefits. Diplomats value evidence-based recommendations relevant to their political and technical work, while civil society gains insights into ongoing developments, even when not directly at the negotiation table. By sharing recommendations with government representatives involved in drafting intergovernmental outcome documents—whether during high-level political negotiations in New York or technical deliberations in Geneva—civil society can indirectly influence these critical processes.

Civil society engagement at all levels enhances visibility and ensures advocacy priorities are reflected in global and national NCD decisions. Strategic relationships are key to turning commitments into action.

Civil society engagement with Member States and the UN system

What is a Permanent Mission to the UN?

Permanent Missions to the UN (UN Missions) represent **UN Member States at the UN in Geneva and New York**, facilitating their participation in UN governing bodies and agencies. **Diplomats are posted by their Ministry of Foreign Affairs**. Some have public health or medical expertise, while others are generalists. Those in Geneva often have more health-specific knowledge than their counterparts in New York. However, decision-making authority ultimately rests with national governments, guided by hierarchies within Ministries up to the Head of State. Mission representatives act based on **instructions from their capital** and report back to their capitals regularly.

Geneva vs New York Mission lines

Geneva and New York **missions sometimes collaborate** to align technical and political priorities. Geneva missions, drawing on their work with WHO, provide technical expertise, policy recommendations, and evidence-based inputs to shape their country's health positions. New York missions use this guidance to negotiate resolutions and declarations, ensuring alignment with broader UN agendas.

Both missions communicate regularly with their capitals to confirm directives, ensuring consistency in their positions. Geneva's technical focus and New York's diplomatic expertise complement each other, enabling informed and cohesive advocacy during political negotiations.

Engaging regional blocs

Regional blocs like the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), and ASEAN often **vote as a unified group** in UN negotiations, which gives them significant influence in shaping global NCD policies. These blocs **negotiate a common position** to ensure collective bargaining power, with one country often serving as the spokesperson or lead negotiator on behalf of the entire group. **Engaging with these blocs** helps ensure that NCD priorities are reflected in multilateral agreements, as regional solidarity strengthens advocacy and political leverage during negotiations.

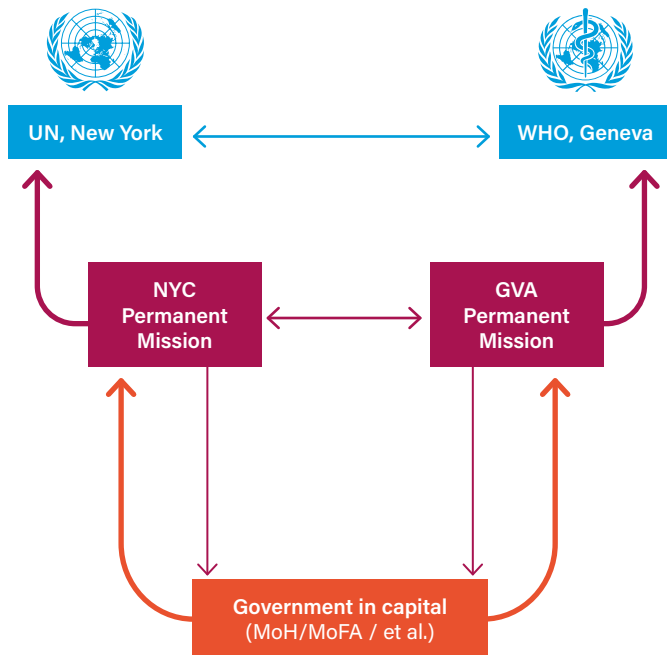


Figure 1. Basic NYC-GVA-Capital triangulation

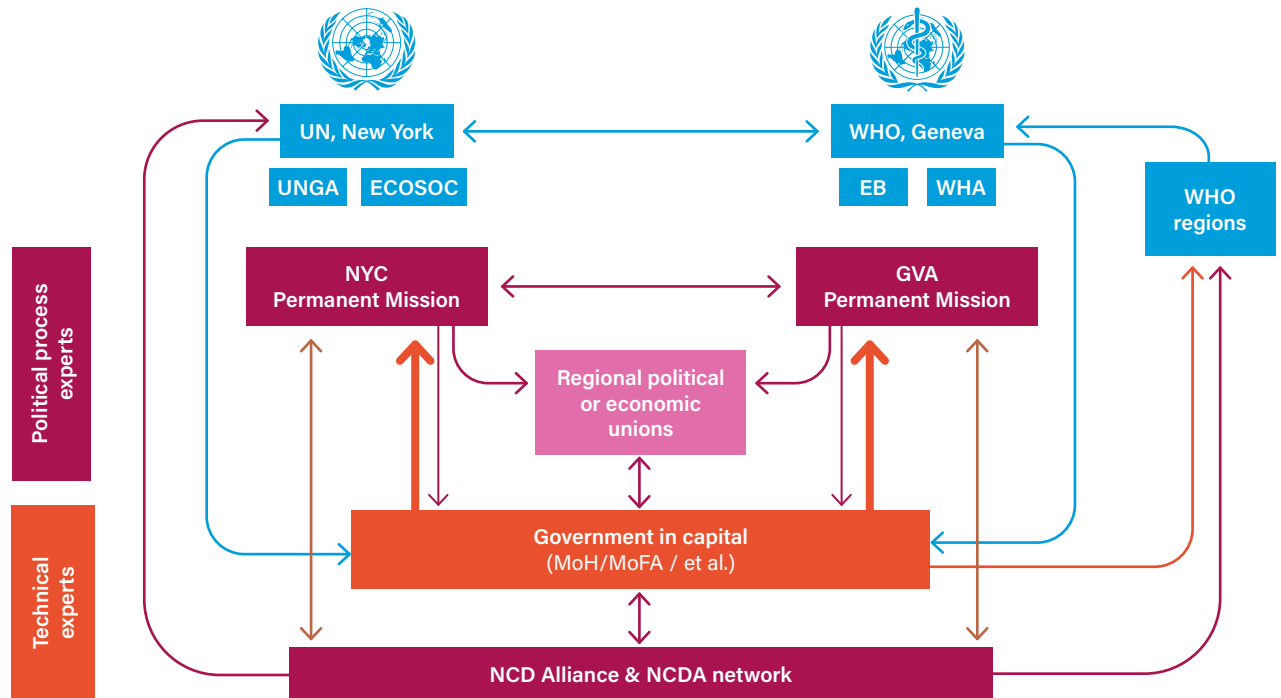


Figure 2. NYC-GVA-capital triangulation including relationship to NCDA network, regional blocs and WHO regions

Practical advice on how to engage your country's representatives in Geneva and New York

Consult the so-called 'Blue Book'

This resource provides contact details for UN Missions in [Geneva](#) and in [New York](#). Aside the Blue Book, you can try to get direct details or introductions from your contacts in capital to avoid cold outreach.

Engage in writing and in person

Work to build and strengthen your relationship with government representatives at MoH and MoFA in capitals. For missions – start by engaging mission representatives in writing, introducing your organisation and areas of interest, building rapport and trust. Arrange in-person meetings where opportunity arises. In-person interactions can provide insights not shared in writing, and increase the likelihood that your materials will be used.

Be diplomatic

Use appropriate protocol when contacting the Ambassador or Permanent Representative of a UN Mission. Be sure to check the Blue Book for accurate titles and honorifics. Your relationship may become more informal over time, but always follow your representatives' lead.

Adapt to their expertise

UN mission representatives are generally employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If the representative you are addressing does not have a health or NCD background, be prepared to make the case for your policy position from a broader economic or development perspective.

Make sure that your position is evidence-based

The more evidence-based the information, the greater the chance that your mission representative will consider your position. It is helpful to bring written materials such as a policy brief or position statement that your representative can consult and refer to after the meeting.

Connect with the NCD Alliance throughout the engagement process

NCD Alliance maintains relationships with many governments and UN Missions and follows WHO and UN processes very closely. Close alignment and exchange with NCD Alliance help present a united civil society voice and will help you be as informed and prepared as possible.



The 2025 UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs is a major opportunity for civil society advocacy at the highest level. Start planning your engagement with your country's capital contacts and UN Mission representatives now by reading more on when and how to engage your missions around the UNHLM process [here](#). Contact NCD Alliance to coordinate your outreach and learn more about opportunities to meet your UN representatives in person.

UN Mission Personnel and Hierarchy

A UN Permanent Mission typically follows a structured hierarchy. At the top is the **Permanent Representative** (PR), often an Ambassador, who is the highest-ranking official representing their country at the UN.

Below PR are **Deputy Permanent Representatives** (DPRs), who assist in managing the mission's diplomatic and political responsibilities.

Counselors and First, Second and Third Secretaries support the PR and DPRs, focusing on specific areas such as political, economic or legal affairs.

Attachés and Specialists provide specialized expertise (such as health), while **administrative staff** handle day-to-day operations.

LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION?



Take a look at a [sample letter](#) to see how to contact your UN representative [here](#).

LEARN MORE



For more detail on advocacy opportunities within the UN System and the WHO, consult NCD Alliance's publication [Connecting the Dots](#).