

1. Introduction

The European Society for Clinical Investigation was established in 1967 as a Pan-European Scientific Society with a genuine interest in uncovering the mechanisms of human diseases. ESCI integrates clinical, translational, and fundamental researchers from all over Europe, and its actual members are made of 33 % male and 66,67 % female. The annual scientific meeting of ESCI offers a platform of exchange where every one of its members feels valued and respected because of their difference.

In order to set up a plan for better gender-aware management and activities, we have performed an analysis to identify possible sources of gender bias within ESCI.

Despite the efforts that have been conducted within ESCI to offer equal opportunities to male and female researchers, relevant gender imbalances have been detected at different levels.

The assessment of the last 45 years demonstrated the under-representation of women in ESCI's leadership. Moreover, imbalances were found in funding opportunities and the selection of the winner of ESCI's highest award, "Albert Struveynberg medal" (table 1). Table I shows that the latter has been awarded to 11 male and 2 female scientists until now. Furthermore, only one woman has been elected president of ESCI from its foundation up to today. This fact may rely on the fact that the council of ESCI has been composed of 90% men and 10% women (Table I). We also found that the winners of the best EJCI articles were made of 70% men, whereas winners of young investigator award were gender-balanced (Table I). Contrary to the male dominance within the leadership and decision-making of ESCI, the Central office management has exclusively been performed by women. Therefore, actions are needed to avoid the imbalance within ESCI.

Table 1: Results of the assessment from ESCI foundation until December 2021

	Male	Female
Presidency	27	1
Albert Struvynberg medal	11	2
Council members	150	14
EJCI articles winners	70 %	30%
Winners of young investigator award	50%	50%

2. Objectives

The purpose of ESCI Gender Equality Plan is to create a framework of action for ESCI to support equal opportunities in science and to enhance Gender equality throughout its coordination, management and activities. ESCI strives to reinforce its Gender balance and implement systems and measures that will monitor and ensure gender balance at different levels. This plan aims to minimize biases where these occur and to implement measures that enhance women's chance to achieve a successful scientific career. Finally, given that sexual harassment can negatively interfere with a researcher's performance, measures to handle sexual harassment will also be implemented.

3. Measures

a. Gender balance in leadership and decision-making:

The ESCI Council is the decision-making entity of ESCI. The ESCI Council is currently (December 2021) composed of 9 members from 7 nationalities, 5 women and 4 men, 4 basic/translational researchers and 5 clinical researchers. The current president is a male, whereas the vice-president is a female. The actual composition of the council reflects an inclusive and gender-balanced leadership. However, measures will be implemented to have sustainable gender equality in ESCI's leadership.

1. Procedures for the election of the members of the council

Candidates for ESCI council and the Young Researcher's Council are selected according to their scientific achievement and motivation to serve for ESCI independent of their gender. In addition to the already well-established balance between basic/translational and clinical researchers, women and men should have equal opportunities to join the ESCI council. Since the election of the president of ESCI is made by the council members and as a measure to promote the equal chance for both gender male and female, not only an equal distribution of male and female councillors will be achieved, as a gradual higher number of female Presidents will be aimed, to off-set the large difference between male and female Presidents.

2. Rules for the composition of the council/board

The president and vice-president should be of different gender, but an exception can be accepted in the absence of enough voluntaries for each position. The ESCI Council as well as the Young Researchers Council should have a gender balance of at least 60:40.

b. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression:

Being a scientific society, ESCI's main mission is to advance medical practice and promote science through its diverse activities, including the organization of the annual scientific meeting, the allocation of grants, and the organization of the education program. The central office of ESCI employs dedicated staff for its administrative tasks.

1. Implementation of a gender-balance committee (ESCI-GBC)

To eliminate gender-bias during recruitment of ESCI employees and grant allocation, a gender-balance committee (ESCI-GBC) selected from the council will be implemented. The committee will be composed of 2 basic /translational scientists (1 male & 1 female) and 2 clinical scientists (1 male & 1 female) representing different research areas. The committee will coordinate the recruitment process and for equally qualified candidates will favor the under-represented gender. The committee will have regular meetings twice a year and will write an annual report on the gender status within the different core activities of ESCI.

2. Mentoring Program for female researchers

Because women are underrepresented at the management level in science in academia and in the industry, ESCI will implement a mentoring program for female researchers to prepare them for a competitive academic career and leading positions. Female junior researchers (PhD students or young clinicians) can apply for the mentoring program and selected candidates (10 mentees per year) will be included yearly. ESCI-GBC will allocate senior scientists (mentor) to mentees that will meet regularly to share professional experiences. Mentors will help the mentees to extend their professional network. In addition to the mentor-mentee partnership, ESCI's mentoring program will offer different seminars and trainings to improve individual key competencies. The trainings will include seminars/webinars on soft skills, publication strategy, and, whenever possible, specific research funding for women.

c. Gender equality in funding*1. Gender-balanced Grant allocation*

For its different Grants and awards, ESCI aims to give a 50:50 chance to equally qualified candidates independent of their gender. The selection process will be totally blinded i.e the central office will remove the identity of the candidates upon reception of the application and an anonym identification number will be given to each applicant. The application will be sent to the council members, who will judge the scientific quality and originality of the

research project. After grading, the central office will unmask the candidates and release the winners' list. For grants in which the publication record is a criterion for allocation, the selection of the winners will run in two rounds. The first round will be the evaluation of the research project, and after the central office has registered the grading, the publication will be separately evaluated and the central office will generate the final grade. In case of a gender imbalance of more than 70:30, the gender-balance committee described above will play a consulting role to improve the balance to a minimum of 60:40 by selecting the next best candidate from the under-represented gender.

2. Extension of age limit in calls for researchers with children who had parental leaves

For the different grants and awards, candidates with a justified parental leave will be offered 1 year extension for each child under the age of 12 years old.

3. Implementation of flexible use of the grants/fellowship to suit family needs

For grants that have specific timeframes for project implementation and the final report submission, candidates with a justified parental leave will be attributed appropriate extension.

d. Work-life balance and organisational culture:

1. Gender-sensitive communication

ESCI will ensure that women, men and other recognized gender are treated as persons of equal importance and dignity. ESCI's announcement for its different grants and awards will be gender neutral to attract every scientist independent of their gender.

2. Childcare service/support for attendees during the ASM

ESCI aims to help researchers combine career and family and believes that having small children should not preclude parents from attending meetings. ESCI will help the parents to find appropriate childcare opportunities in each city of the ASM. ESCI will give a monetary support for childcare to single mom/dad researchers that will present their work during the ESCI annual scientific meeting and are parents of children younger than 6 years' old. The money is aimed to pay for childcare outside of the regular one such as evening nursery or babysitting.

3. Maternity / paternity / parental leave provisions for ESCI employees

ESCI will support its employees by paying provisions during parental leave. The amount will be calculated according to the salary and according to national laws.

e. Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content

1. Seminar/workshop on gender during the ASM

In every annual scientific meeting, a pre-meeting symposium that focuses on "Gender-related research and training" will be included. Different aspects of gender in science will be considered, including but not limited to gender-medicine, gender in career development, etc. Indeed, given the physiological differences between male and female, awareness of the effect of sex on the physiology of an individual and its behavior is crucial for understanding sex-dependent pathophysiological processes and the translation of the results obtained. Considering sex-dependent differences throughout the whole drug development process is essential in assessing the risk factors for the pathogenesis of diseases and their progression and will indeed allow a better transfer of the results and their later application to appropriate target groups.

2. Organization of a "ESCI's best women in Science" Session: a special session aiming to increase women's visibility and recognition will be included during the annual scientific meeting. The session will be made of presentation from female scientists and an award will be allocated to the best one.

f. Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment.

1. Training program on sexual harassment prevention

ESCI's central office staff and everyone that is involved in ESCI's education program will be trained to the procedures to follow to ensure appropriate corrective action in handling sexual harassment complaints during seminars or the annual scientific meeting.

2. Measures during the annual scientific meeting:

ESCI will ensure that its scientific meetings are inclusive and safe and will set measures to handle inappropriate behavior, whether sexual or gender harassment, exclusion or discrimination. ESCI will generate a code of conduct. Upon registering online, each attendee will be asked to accept and respect ESCI's code of conduct, which is a requirement for attending the meetings. Moreover, a safety unit (composed of staff from ESCI's central office) will be present at every scientific meeting where anyone that experiences unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature can report to. The unit will record the complaints and will organize appropriate measures in coordination with the ESCI Council. Sexual harassment that are detected during ESCI's education program within its academy will also be documented.

5. Analytical measures, targets, indicators, monitoring and evaluation

The ESCI-GBC will be responsible for monitoring the Gender equality within ESCI. The committee will evaluate gender balance within the different activities of ESCI and will write a report every two years. The results of the evaluation will be published in ESCI's newsletter. According to the results, existing measures will be adapted, and appropriate new actions will be implemented.

4. Timeline

Measures that are described in this plan will be applied as soon as the final version is published on ESCI's website.

Strategic objectives	Initial situation (from ESCI foundation until the end of 2021)	Goal End of 2025
Formation of the gender committee	No gender committee	Gender committee operational from January 2023
To increase the percentage of women as awardee of the "Albert Struyvberg medal"	Two women	At least 2 women
To have a gender balance in grants and awards allocation	More than 70:30	A minimum of 60:40
To implement mentor-mentee partnership	0	Minimum of 10