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Young EFIS: Three years of progress – Reflecting on achievements and embracing new horizons

Marking a milestone

Over three years ago, in February 2020, a group of enthusiastic early career immunologists joined forces to create the young European Federation of Immunological Societies (yEFIS) network [1] (Fig. 1). Operating under the auspices of the European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS), yEFIS was established with a primary focus on supporting and empowering junior researchers in the field of immunology across the continent [1, 2]. The yEFIS community encompasses Early Career Researchers (ECRs) specializing in immunology, ranging from doctoral candidates to professionals with less than a decade of work experience, excluding periods of PhD studies, parental leave, and sick leave. It welcomes immunologists from various domains, including academia, industry, and nonacademic roles like journal editors and scientific communicators, thereby representing the interests of a broader spectrum beyond ECRs. The primary mission of the yEFIS network is to facilitate interaction and knowledge exchange among colleagues throughout Europe, fostering collabora-

tions and jointly addressing shared career-related challenges.

Thanks to the support from EFIS, the yEFIS network has experienced remarkable growth, now boasting over 770 registered members compared to 270 members in September 2020. To better manage our member pool, an important step was the introduction of the yEFIS profile on our website. This profile allows ECRs to easily update their information, which is crucial given the dynamic nature of our careers. As ECRs in the rapidly evolving landscape of immunology, we often move between institutions, change positions, and seek new opportunities. The yEFIS profile enables us to maintain an accurate and up-to-date representation of our network.

Moreover, we highlight the importance of national young immunologist groups within each EFIS-affiliated society. Hence, we have been proactively advocating for the establishment of such groups throughout Europe [2]. We are thrilled to witness the rapid growth of young national immunological societies, with numerous countries now boasting their own well-structured and dedi-

cated groups (Fig. 2). Indeed, the yEFIS network currently comprises representatives from 16 young national immunological societies, as opposed to three in 2020 [3]. The growth in national representation highlights the recognition and influence that yEFIS has gained within the European immunology community. As yEFIS becomes a well-established and influential platform, it can better advocate for the interests of ECRs, collaborate with other organizations, and work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for young immunologists in Europe. Indeed, one crucial aspect of the past three years has been the establishment of connections between yEFIS and other junior groups, including international societies, which serves as a testament to our growing global recognition.

Though the yEFIS journey was challenging and uncertain, the consistent motivation of young immunologists has shown that anything is possible. In this report, we take a moment to reflect on the remarkable achievements of the past 3 years and outline our vision for the future of yEFIS.

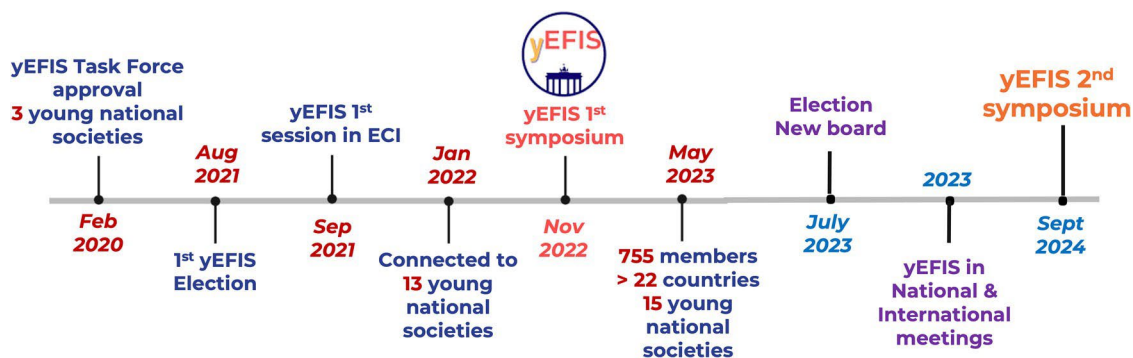


Figure 1. Three years of yEFIS achievements.



Figure 2. Logos of various national young immunological societies in Europe, all united as constituents of the yEFIS task force.

The crucial contributions of yEFIS working groups

From its very beginning, yEFIS has been committed to fostering collaboration and providing support to young immunologists [2]. To achieve this, we set up dedicated working groups, each operating independently and focusing on specific tasks. This strategic approach has enabled us to make the most of our volunteers' time and expertise, and concurrently undertake multiple projects highlighted in this section.

The yEFIS communication working group

The Communication Working Group is responsible for ensuring effective communication within the yEFIS community and beyond. We manage the yEFIS website, social media platforms, and newsletters to keep members informed about events, opportunities, and updates. By engaging in strategic communication, we promote yEFIS activities and initiatives to a wider audience, enhancing the visibility and impact of the network. Collaborating closely with young societies and other

yEFIS working groups, we organize social media campaigns and boost the visibility of immunology-related events.

Over the last 3 years, the Communication WG has made a great stride in establishing a substantial social media presence. The Twitter/X @y_efis@y_efis account has reached almost 2000 followers while the LinkedIn account (@yEFIS)yEFIS is followed by more than 850 people. On April 29, 2023, yEFIS launched its Instagram account (@yefis.immunology)yefis.immunology, and since then, its reach and impact on this platform have been growing.

through social media, yEFIS organized several campaigns for important days in science, including the International Day of Women and Girls in Science and the Day of Immunology (DOI). In 2021 and 2022, we highlighted some of the many outstanding female early career researchers that are part of the yEFIS network. These remarkable women have made significant contributions to their respective fields, inspiring future generations of scientists and breaking barriers in the academic world. You can support them by nominating brilliant women in your network for the yEFIS Rising Star list of researchers at <https://forms.gle/XZ7GSW8tCVhpKZtt6>.

yEFIS celebrated the DOI in 2021 by introducing scientists who played crucial roles in shaping the field of immunology, such as one of the developers of the first approved mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, Ozlem Tureci, and the father of immunotherapy, William Coley. Furthermore, yEFIS, in collaboration with EFIS, the International Union of Immunological Societies (IUIS), and Immunopaedia, shared a video series of young immunologists, highlighting their views on the COVID-19 pandemic, how immunology contributes to human health, among many other topics [4]. Lastly, yEFIS created an infographic to inform the public about the COVID-19 pandemic. The infographic was translated into different languages, including German, Italian, Turkish, and French.

In 2022, the topic “vaccines” was in the spotlight of the DOI. The infographic about COVID-19 shared the year before was animated and translated into eight languages in total (Day of Immunology – YouTube). Furthermore, yEFIS answered questions from children about immunology and vaccines in plain language and through animated videos shared on social media.

yEFIS participated in celebrating the DOI 2023 and joined forces with IUIS and EFIS once again to organize a social media campaign to showcase the importance of immunological research on public health. We asked ECRs about their research and how it contributes to improving conditions and diseases of public health relevance.

One of the latest activities of the Communications WG is the promotion of young national immunological societies. To achieve this, we aimed to introduce and highlight each of these young societies to the wide yEFIS network via our social media channels. Throughout August

2023, we introduced the young societies on social media to encourage more members to join these societies, fostering increased engagement and collaborations among early career researchers. yEFIS and the Communication WG will keep working to support young immunologists and young national societies and improve their visibility.

The yEFIS career development and education working group

This group aims to organize activities tailored to the needs of young immunologists to support them in their future professional development. Recognizing the need for exploring diverse career paths inside and outside of academia [5], we have invited speakers with different career journeys spanning a wide range from the pharmaceutical industry and consultancy, to medical science liaison roles, and science communication. The speakers gave inspiring talks describing their job roles, explaining which skills gained during their PhD helped them acquire the position, and answered questions from an engaging audience. In parallel, we invited a career consultant who gave a seminar providing guidance to early career scientists in their next career steps, informing them how to structure their CV to better showcase their skills. These events have created resources for the sound selection of career journeys for young immunologists.

With the support of young national societies, we have also mapped some of the top universities and immunology programs in Europe in an effort to help new prospective immunology students. This dynamic map is easily updatable, ensuring the latest information is readily available. Feel free to reach out to us (yefis@efis.org) for any updates or additional assistance. Overall, we are dedicated to providing resources that will help early-career immunologists in achieving their full potential with fulfilling career choices.

The yEFIS European Journal of Immunology working group

The collaboration between yEFIS and the *European Journal of Immunology* (EJI) is a source of immense pride for our network. Together, we have forged a strong partnership that actively supports and promotes young researchers in the field of immunology. Our efforts encompass a range of initiatives, including regular written contributions that center around yEFIS

and national young immunology groups' activities. In addition, we create content for significant occasions like the International Day for Women and Girls in Science and the International Day of Immunology. To learn more, you can check out this link.

One of the key activities of the EJI/yEFIS collaboration is highlighting recent publications in EJI through social media, thus emphasizing the work of young researchers. Through workshops and guidelines, we equip ECRs with knowledge on peer review, editorial work, and more. Additionally, we organize webinars and interviews with both established and early-career immunologists, providing valuable insights and career advice to the yEFIS community (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/eji.202170095>).

Recently, in an attempt to empower emerging immunologists, the EJI editorial team has implemented an editorial policy ensuring comprehensive peer review and thorough feedback for submissions authored by first-time first authors or first-time corresponding authors. yEFIS and EJI are highlighting the achievements of these first-time first authors and first-time corresponding authors on our social media platforms, EJI website, and YouTube.

The yEFIS Equity and Diversity Working Group

yEFIS strives to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all members, ensuring diversity is celebrated and represented in yEFIS activities and leadership. Although researchers in the immunological working field have become more diverse, many underrepresented groups still experience biases and inequalities, albeit these have become subtler. Diversity is not equality, and evidence indicates that individuals who believe biases are not an issue anymore are at an exceptionally high risk of perpetuating them [6]. Thus, the yEFIS Equity and Diversity Working Group is working on challenging disparities, for example, those in access to role models, denigrating/affirming treatment, (under)valuing, stereotyping, being sought out for ideas/opinions, and offers for collaborations.

This year, we have introduced the yEFIS Rising Star list — a compilation of emerging ECRs from underrepresented groups. This list empowers event organizers to enhance diversity by easily finding and inviting these promising talents

to their events. This list is open for new nominations and can be found at <https://forms.gle/XZ7GSW8tCVhpKZtt6>.

In a joint effort by the EFIS Gender and Diversity Task Force, yEFIS Equity & Diversity Working Group, and Social Psychology expert Dr. Christopher T. Begeny, we have submitted a grant proposal for the IUIS-GEC National Gender Equality Campaign – Comptition4ideas. Our proposal aims to secure funding for our project, which focuses on identifying and quantifying biases and disparities faced by underrepresented groups in the immunological working environment and addressing such behavior. This aligns with our successful webinar in April 2023, where we facilitated discussions on supporting minority representatives and their challenges [7].

Recently, Christos Nikolaou, yEFIS task force member, discussed related challenges in this year's pride article on code-switching. The upcoming yEFIS round table session during the 18th IUIS meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, will further explore code-switching's effects and the struggles marginalized groups encounter to integrate. We aim to underscore that every immunologist's visibility and empowerment are crucial, and when individuals from underrepresented communities assert themselves, they advocate for the whole community. For this session, we have invited renowned scientists from underrepresented groups. Stay tuned for more updates!

In the future, we want to continue our efforts by collecting more data on diversity and equal treatment of researchers in the immunological working environment, for example, by collaborating with the national societies that are already working on such data collection, and employing this data to inform and engage key stakeholders to induce palpable change.

The yEFIS symposium

The yEFIS symposium is one of the most rewarding events organized by the network. It serves as a platform for ECRs to present their research, exchange scientific ideas, and network with peers and established researchers. The “yEFIS first symposium: Shaping the future of immunology in Europe” was held on November 10–11, 2022 at the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in Berlin, Germany [8]. The symposium provided a unique opportunity for

young immunologists to gain visibility, receive constructive feedback, and foster collaborations.

The second edition of the yEFIS symposium will take place on September 1st, 2024 as a satellite symposium of the European Congress of Immunology (ECI) in Dublin. This one-day event will comprise workshops and seminars centered around career development and immunology, and offer ample opportunities for the exchange of experiences among young immunologists.

Aside from the dedicated yEFIS symposium, yEFIS will also be present at ECI and will host a yEFIS Rising Stars symposia, organize a social and networking event for early career researchers, and give ECRs the possibility to chair sessions at ECI.






Fostering the future: A flourishing collaboration between yEFIS and other societies

In our pursuit of advocating for the future of ECRs, yEFIS has recognized the value of uniting efforts with other junior societies, alongside our continuous collaboration with young national immunological societies. Over the past 3 years, it became evident that we could amplify our collective voice by synergizing our endeavors across various levels. This led us to initiate interactions through emails, followed by a significant turnout of these societies at the yEFIS symposium, including EMEUNET, young EHA, ESID junior, and EAACI JM, among others. These moments marked the beginning of a compelling dialogue on shaping our joint future. As a result of these interactions, yEFIS has extended invitations to attend young EHA and EMEUNET respective meetings, highlighting close-knit collaborations. These partnerships flourished, even culminating in joint scientific webinars with EMEUNET on pioneering technologies in Rheumatology and Autoimmunity.

Beyond scientific exchanges, collaborations hold paramount importance. The different societies bring scientific credibility within their respective subdomains (hematology, rheumatology, allergy, cytokine biology, etc.), enabling us to establish interest/study groups focused on specific scientific inquiries. Parallel to our interactions with EMEUNET and young EHA, yEFIS also extended its reach to various global platforms, including Open

Box Science. Presence at the American Association of Immunologists meeting (AAI 2023) in Washington enabled us to connect with European-trained ECRs, currently based in the USA. Similarly, our engagement with the EMIG conference in July 2023 facilitated connections within the European mucosal immunology community. Promising opportunities lie ahead as we look forward to engaging in the International Cytokine Meeting in Greece in October 2023, where preparations are underway for a collaborative session alongside ECRs from the cytokine society. Moreover, we will join the SIICA-SYIS joint symposium on multiomics approaches in immunological research that will be held in Rome, in November 2023. Additionally, our eyes are set on the IUIS meeting in Cape Town, where we anticipate engaging in collaborative initiatives with the newly established IUIS junior community.

Collectively, these initiatives underscore our belief that collaborative efforts are instrumental in making our scientific voice resonate both within and beyond our community. So, why not join us?

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Abbreviations: DOI: Day of Immunology · ECRs: Early Career Researchers · EFIS: European Federation of Immunological Societies · EJI: *European Journal of Immunology* · IUIS: International Union of Immunological Societies · yEFIS : young European Federation of Immunological Societies

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