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Rheumatic & Musculoskeletal Diseases

EDITORIAL

EMerging EULAR NETwork (EMEUNET): a remarkable foundation for the future

Alessia Alunno ,[1] Felice Rivellese ,[2] Kim Lauper ,[3,4] Daniel Aletaha ,[5] Maya H Buch ,[6,7] Laure Gossec ,[8,9] Peter Mandl ,[5] Pedro M Machado ,[10,11] Caroline Ospelt ,[12] Anna Molto ,[13,14] Sofia Ramiro,[15,16] Elena Nikiphorou ,[17,18] Alexandre Sepriano [15,19]

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For numbered affiliations see end of article.

Correspondence to
Dr Alessia Alunno;
alessia.alunno82@gmail.com

In 2009, EULAR pioneered an initiative to support the creation of a European network of young rheumatologists and researchers in rheumatology with the aim to widen collaborations, promote education and eventually integrate them into EULAR activities. This was the dawn of the EMerging Eular NETwork (EMEUNET). A mapping of priorities, unmet needs and educational preferences of European young rheumatologists, led to the establishment of the first framework of activities by Daniel Aletaha, Laure Gossec and Maya Buch.[1 2] Over the subsequent 10 years, the development and success of the project surpassed even the most optimistic views. When interviewed for the EMEUNET 10th Anniversary Newsletter issue, Professors Paul Emery, Josef Smolen and Maxime Dougados, the EULAR leaders who supported the birth of EMEUNET, shared that it has indeed exceeded their expectations.[3] EMEUNET has remarkably and steadily grown to become the largest network of young rheumatologists and researchers in rheumatology in the world with more than 2500 members to date (table 1).

As past and current leaders of EMEUNET, our overarching objectives have remained education, mentoring and integration within EULAR. The achievement of these goals has been pursued with a multifaceted range of activities carried on by the enthusiastic people who joined the working group over time. Over 160 young rheumatologists from 29 EULAR countries volunteered to invest their time, efforts and commitment contributing to the growth and development of EMEUNET. In parallel, we established a network of passionate Country Liaisons in each of the 46 EULAR Countries to engage as many young rheumatologists as possible across Europe in EMEUNET and its activities.

A milestone in our history was the vision to have social media presence which would break down geographical barriers and allow EMEUNET to dramatically broaden its reach.[4] This endeavour also paved the way to long-standing collaborations with the EULAR journals since EMEUNET members have become the spokespersons of Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases and RMD Open on Twitter and Facebook and, more recently, have increasingly engaged in podcasts and webinars.[5] Such partnership was further strengthened by the establishment of a mentoring programme for peer-reviewing skills that over 5 editions allowed 111 mentees from 26 European countries to graduate as independent reviewers.[6] Following a survey distributed in our community, we realised that postdoctoral mentoring was yet another field where EMEUNET could intervene and help close the gap. Thanks to the commitment of outstanding mentors across Europe, we have established this new successful programme and its third edition is currently running.[7]

The identification of the educational needs of young rheumatologists along with the valuable input of several working group members fostered the stemming of other projects, which are now fully established in the EULAR educational portfolio, such as the EULAR Epidemiology and Immunology Courses and the EULAR-EMEUNET Twitter journal club. Such proactivity of talented colleagues gave rise to other joint initiatives with EULAR in the field of postgraduate education, including analysis of core competences[8] and assessment of competences in rheumatology training,[9 10] as well as the development of a

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Table 1 EMEUNET members by country (only countries with >10 members are shown) as of 31 July 2021

Country	EMEUNET members (n)*
Italy	249
UK	209
Spain	191
Netherlands	161
Romania	147
Portugal	144
France	137
Egypt	129
India	88
Germany	82
Russian Federation	77
Turkey	70
Greece	68
Denmark	60
Poland	54
Ireland	53
Switzerland	45
Belgium	44
Hungary	42
Ukraine	41
Sweden	36
Austria	35
Croatia	34
USA	27
Norway	27
Slovenia	25
Serbia	23
Bulgaria	21
Lithuania	21
Czech Republic	17
Moldova	15
Mexico	15
Brazil	14
Albania	14
Australia	13
Peru	12
Finland	12
Japan	12
Tunisia	11

*Last updated 31 July 2021.
EMEUNET, EMerging Eular NETwork.

European portfolio for rheumatology trainees[11] under the auspices of the EULAR School of Rheumatology.

While growing as a community, we realised that our membership included about 10% of young rheumatologists from outside Europe (table 1 and figure 1). Thus, we felt the need to broaden our perspectives by establishing collaborations with the American College of Rheumatology Young Investigators[12] and with the recently established Pan American League Against Rheumatism *Joven*[13] and the Asia & Pacific League Against Rheumatism Young Rheumatologists Group (AYR).[14]

Furthermore, we acknowledged the importance of building bridges with paediatric rheumatologists and with associations of young colleagues of other specialities involved in the care of people with RMDs to develop joint projects aimed at pursuing a holistic approach for our patients throughout their life.[15] This is exemplified among others by our partnership with the EMErging RheumatoloGists and rEsearchers group within the Paediatric Rheumatology European Society (PReS),[16] which flourished at the 2019 EULAR-PReS Congress with a joint session on the management of neuropsychiatric systemic lupus erythematosus across the lifespan and the allocation of a EULAR-PReS research grant to a joint project.

EULAR has fully embraced the active engagement of patients as well as their education and empowerment with the European organisation of People with Arthritis/Rheumatism (PARE) being one of its core components. In recent years, the Young PARE subgroup was established to address the unmet needs of young patients with RMD. EMEUNET has had a longstanding collaboration with Young PARE,[17] from the participation in their first meeting in 2016 to the development of joint projects, some of which have been already resulted in the development of EULAR recommendations.[18–20]

In addition to these EMEUNET initiated task forces, the involvement of EMEUNET members in every task force for EULAR recommendations is now well established, having been incorporated in the 2014 EULAR standard operating procedures.[21]

While blowing out our first 10 birthday candles,[22] we kept strengthening the bond with EULAR, which lead

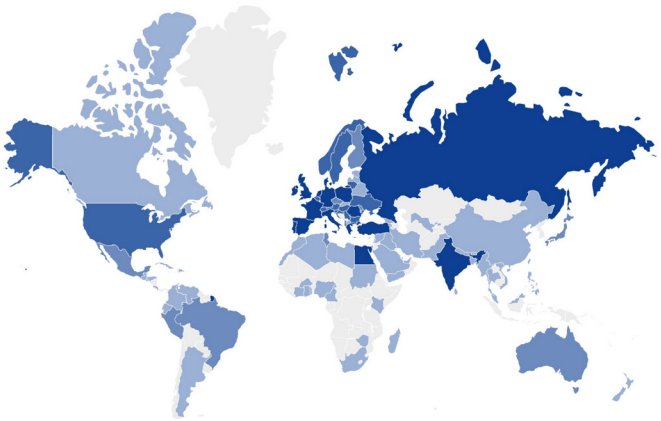

Figure 1 EMEUNET members worldwide, ≥51 members- ; 21–50 members- ; 11–20 members- ; 1–10 members- . EMEUNET, EMerging Eular NETwork.

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Box 1

- EMerging Eular NETwork (EMEUNET) was founded, by Daniel Aletaha, Laure Gossec and Maya Buch, in 2009 and has steadily grown ever since currently representing the largest network of young rheumatologists and researchers in rheumatology worldwide.
- EMEUNET offers a variety of educational. mentoring and networking programmes in close collaboration with EULAR over more than 10 years.
- In June 2019, EMEUNET was recognised as an independent EULAR Committee and included as such in the first-ever EULAR bylaws in January 2021.

to the recognition of EMEUNET as an essential constituent of EULAR by granting it status as an independent committee in June 2019. As of 11 January 2021, EULAR has endorsed the first-ever bylaws of the newly established EMEUNET committee, together with the other representation committees.[23] We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the EULAR leadership that throughout the years has always supported and guided our group up to this most recent achievement.

Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed an unprecedented challenge to the scientific community worldwide and restricted interaction among colleagues primarily to the virtual realm. Building on our established experience on social media and on-line based activities, we strive to support EULAR in adapting the educational and networking offer to a virtual/hybrid setting and support our members in these difficult times.

Looking ahead, as we recognise that our success is only possible thanks to the participation of our members, we asked for their feedback via survey. This assessment, presented at the 2021 EULAR virtual Congress,[24] confirmed our members' perception of our mission as set out in our mission statement. Furthermore, it highlighted areas for improvement, such as raising awareness on the possibility to submit new ideas/projects and the opportunity to further focus on fostering research collaboration. The latter has always been one of our priorities and is an area we are expanding also thanks

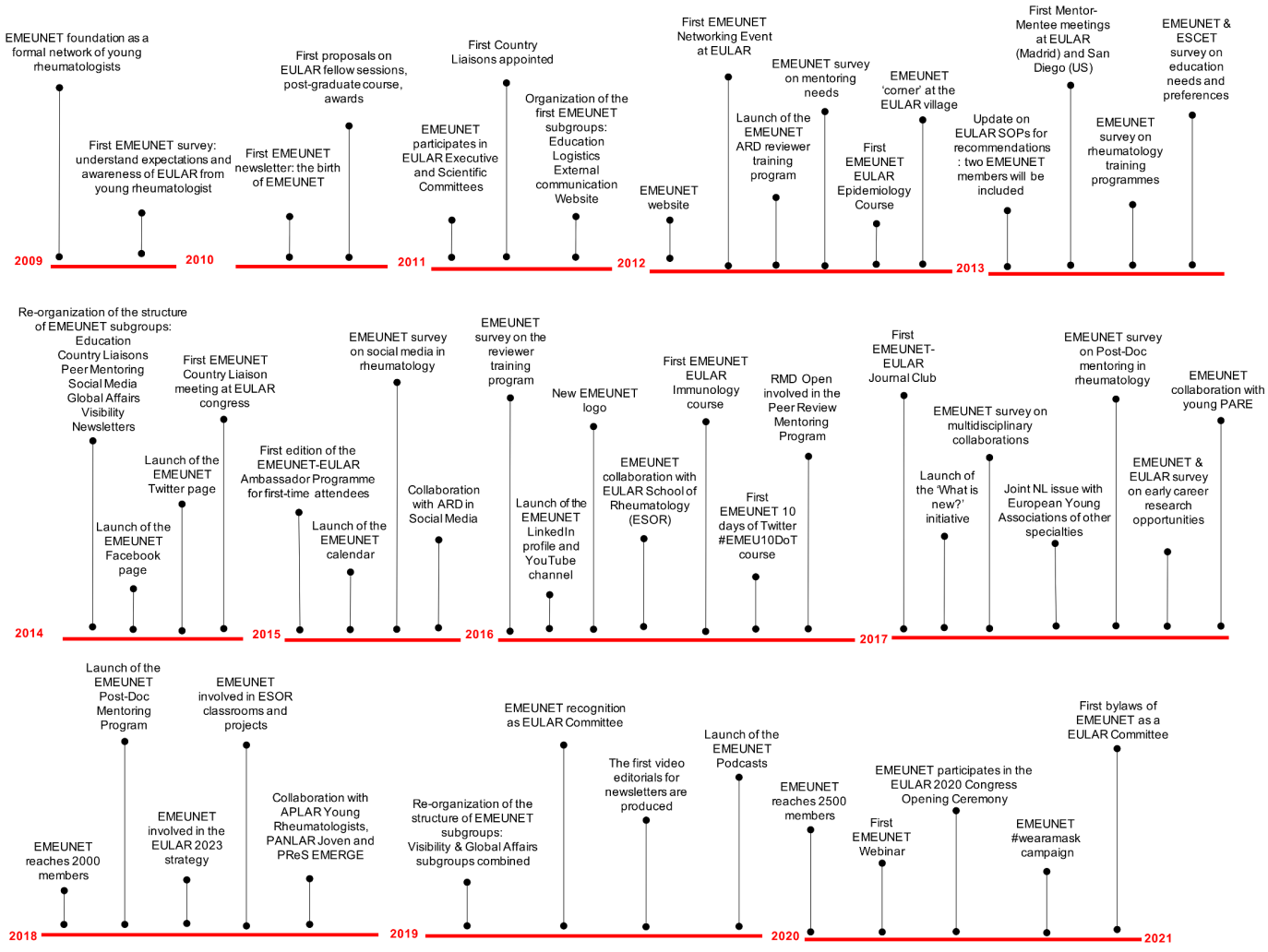

Figure 2 Timeline of EMEUNET activities and milestones. APLAR, Asia and Pacific League Against Rheumatism; ARD, Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases; EMERGE, EMErging RheumatoloGists and rEsearchers; EMEUNET, EMerging Eular NETwork; NL, newsletter ;PANLAR, Pan American League Against Rheumatism; PReS, Paediatric Rheumatology European Society.

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Figure 3 EMEUNET chairs from 2009 to 2021. EMEUNET, EMerging Eular NETwork.

to the involvement of EMEUNET in the newly launched EULAR Virtual Research Centre.[25] In addition, the possibility to have EMEUNET representatives in each of the EULAR content committees, that is, Advocacy, Congress, Education, Quality of Care and Research), as set out in the new EULAR bylaws, will be an incredible opportunity for EMEUNET to help shape the future of the EULAR family.

In conclusion, we recently achieved a milestone in the history of EMEUNET, being recognised as a EULAR Committee(Box 1). Although a lot has been developed and accomplished in the last 10 years (figures 2 and 3), we wish EMEUNET to achieve even more in the future.

Ad Maiora!

Author affiliations
[1]Department of Life, Health and Environmental Sciences, Internal Medicine and Nephrology Unit, University of L'Aquila, L'Aquila, Italy
[2]Centre for Experimental Medicine and Rheumatology, William Harvey Research Institute, The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, London, UK
[3]Division of Rheumatology, Geneva University Hospitals and Faculty of Medicine, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland, Geneva, Switzerland
[4]Centre for Epidemiology Versus Arthritis, Centre for Musculoskeletal Research, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
[5]Department of Internal Medicine 3, Division of Rheumatology, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
[6]Centre for Musculoskeletal & dermatological Sciences, Faculty of Biology, medicine & health, University of Manchester UK, Manchester, UK
[7]NIHR Manchester Biomedical Research Centre, Manchester, UK
[8]INSERM, Institut Pierre Louis d'Epidémiologie et de Santé Publique, Sorbonne Universite, Paris, France
[9]AP-HP, Rheumatology department, Pitié Salpêtrière hospital, Sorbonne Université, Paris, France
[10]Centre for Rheumatology & Department of Neuromuscular Diseases, University College London, London, UK
[11]National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) University College London Hospitals Biomedical Research Centre, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK
[12]Department of Rheumatology, Center of Experimental Rheumatology, University Hospital of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland
[13]Department of Rheumatology, Hôpital Cochin. Assistance Publique - Hôpitaux de Paris, Paris, France
[14]INSERM U1153 Epidémiologie Clinique et Biostatistiques, PRES Sorbonne Paris-Cité, Paris, France
[15]Department of Rheumatology, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, The Netherlands
[16]Department of Rheumatology, Zuyderland Medical Centre, Heerlen, The Netherlands
[17]Centre for Rheumatic Diseases, King's College London, London, UK
[18]Rheumatology Department, King's College Hospital, London, UK
[19]NOVA Medical School, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Twitter Pedro M Machado @pedrommcmachado, Caroline Ospelt @CarolineOspelt and Elena Nikiphorou @ElenaNikiUK

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ORCID iDs
Alessia Alunno http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1105-5640
Felice Rivellese http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6759-7521
Kim Lauper http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4315-9009
Daniel Aletaha http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2108-0030
Maya H Buch http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8962-5642
Laure Gossec http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4528-310X
Peter Mandl http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1526-4052
Pedro M Machado http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8411-7972
Caroline Ospelt http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9151-4650
Anna Molto http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2246-1986
Elena Nikiphorou http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6847-3726
Alexandre Sepriano http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1954-0229

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