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Initiatives and opportunities for early career psychiatrists: the role of ECPC of the European Psychiatric Association

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International professional associations provide a large number of opportunities and unique projects for early career psychiatrists (ECPs) training, professional development and networking. A meaningful bridge between ECPs and international associations is the initiative to create committees within associations dedicated to the needs of ECPs and composed of ECPs themselves. This allows not only to involve more ECPs in the work of the association, but also to bring the projects of the association closer to the real needs of those to whom they are addressed. This article provides an overview of the main activities under the auspices of the European Psychiatric Association (EPA) available to both members (more information on the EPA website: <https://www.europsy.net/memberships/>) and non-members ECPs. The EPA definition of ECPs is an overarching term including those under the age of 40, trainees in psychiatry or child and adolescent psychiatry (i.e. trainees), or within the first five years after the completion of their training (ECPs). However, some EPA activities are available specifically to psychiatrists that completed their post-graduate specialty training, so throughout this article we will refer to ECPs and trainees separately.

The EPA began its history in 1983, and is now representing about 80,000 psychiatrists from all over Europe. Although the intention to create a network of European young psychiatrists was born in 1999, the formal "Young Psychiatrists Committee" was officially appointed by EPA in 2007, and in 2009 was renamed to the Early Career Psychiatrists Committee (ECPC).¹ Initially the concept of the ECPC was to pay special attention to the needs of psychiatric trainees and ECPs attending the EPA Congress. Promptly the idea began to expand, and the Committee broadened its focus to include more activities in its agenda: i) improving participation of ECPs in the annual EPA Congress; ii) identifying and addressing problems concerning ECPs; iii) promoting the participation of ECPs in the EPA activities; and iv) contributing to the dissemination of activities aimed at promoting the professional development of ECPs throughout Europe. The attractiveness of the EPA Congresses for

ECPs and psychiatric trainees is growing, with usually up to one third of all EPA Congress participants being ECPs. Non-EPA members also take part in the EPA Congress and the membership in the association allows to reduce the payment of the participant's registration fee.

The ECPC is composed by five members, the Chair of the Committee and the four Chairs of the ECPC Task Forces (TFs). The activities of the ECPC focus in four main areas: i) Meetings and Associations, ii) Research, iii) Communication and Publications and iv) Professional Development.² Overall, all Task Forces consist of up to 36 ECPs (including chairs) from different European countries, and trainees who are in the final year of their training are also eligible to join the ECPC TFs. Only EPA members may compose the Committee.

The **ECP TF on Meetings and Associations** aims to facilitate the participation of ECPs and trainees in the EPA Congresses and in other professional meetings related to mental health. This TF promotes and supports the organization of scientific events and collaborations with other scientific associations in the organization of meetings targeted to ECPs. One of the main projects of this Task Force has been the "ECPs Keep In Touch (KIT)" – a message for ECPs and psychiatric trainees of the opportunities that they may benefit from EPA. The ECP KIT has been published in several languages, including English, Russian, Turkish, Azeri, Polish, Spanish, Greek and Italian. For the past two years, the main TF' project has been the study on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on ECPs' and trainees' knowledge and training, working conditions, wellbeing and support, and telepsychiatry, which was done in collaboration with the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT). The new planned initiative of the TF is the ECP Map project, aiming to investigate the presence, structure and activities of local ECP associations across European countries, and to improve collaboration between them.

The **ECP TF on Research** supports ECPs across Europe to conduct research projects focused on education or professional opportunities. This TF has carried out the "REACT

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– Research in Early Career Psychiatrists and Trainees” project, in cooperation with the EFPT. The REACT study has aimed to assess the needs and opportunities for research activities for ECPs and psychiatric trainees. Another important project of the TF was an international study on the involvement of women in academic research and barriers to the professional development of psychiatrists.³ This TF projects have also included collaboration with the EPA Committee on Education in 2021 to organize the EPA Summer School on Research, which was held online due to the COVID-19 restrictions.⁴ EPA Summer Schools are held every year, and in 2023 the 12th EPA Summer School was dedicated to the topic “Focus on Suicidal Behaviors - One Step Beyond”. Participation in the EPA Summer School is open to both EPA members and non-members.

The **ECP TF on Communication and Publications** main objectives are to facilitate interactions between ECPs and trainees from European countries with experts in psychiatry, and to increase the dissemination of news regarding ECPs careers and opportunities through the EPA online resources. In the past, the TF promoted the Book Challenge Project with an aim to create a list of readings for psychiatric trainees and ECPs suggested by peers. At present, the core project of the TF is “Online talks with experts”. This project offers a unique opportunity to ECPs and psychiatric trainees to meet with worldwide renowned experts in psychiatry online to discuss between congresses. Participation in this project is possible for both EPA members and non-members. The TF is also finalizing a study to have a better understanding of the trainees and ECPs attitudes regarding the use and utility of Therapeutic Drug Monitoring.

The **ECP TF on Professional Development** aims to collaborate with the EFPT to improve training needs for ECPs, to identify key areas for action in training and career advancement of ECPs and develop projects to address elicited needs including relevant content for EPA Congresses, to support professional networking of ECPs via EPA gaining experience opportunities and events linked to EPA Congresses in collaboration with the LOC. A longstanding successful project that the TF has been organizing is the “Gaining Experience Programme (GEP)”, which is a valuable exchange opportunity which exclusively enables ECPs to have an observership in prominent psychiatric institutions across Europe. The GEP participants receive an EPA scholarship to help with travel, accommodation and other expenses. The TF is also developing a new blended-learning project on leadership in psychiatry in collaboration with the EPA Committee on Education, the “EPA Leadership Academy”, where an online course delivered by prominent experts in psychiatry will be accessible on the EPA E-learning platform which will be complemented by an in-person course. The TF has also collaborated with the European Psychiatry Examination board, where the TF participates in to represent the ECPs, and the EFPT on a Europe-wide survey to understand the perspective of trainees and ECPs on a European examination.

In addition, EPA offers several other sources of support to ECPs and psychiatric trainees, such as special sessions and educational courses during the annual EPA Congress,

EPA Itinerant Courses, and online training modules. Importantly, EPA provides opportunities for psychiatric trainees and early career psychiatrists to participate in the EPA Congress: reduced registration fees, EPA Travel grants, EPA Scholarship program. Furthermore, every year the EPA gives an award of €2,000 to ECPs working in Europe, who publish the best scientific papers in different areas – the EPA Research Prizes.

Importantly, the ECPC has a strong history of collaboration with the EFPT, and many current and past ECPC and TFs members started their professional association activism as EFPT members. Currently, ECPC and EFPT are actively engaged in joint research projects aimed at better understanding the needs of psychiatry trainees and ECPs.

All these activities are aimed at improving the communication of ECPs and psychiatric trainees from European countries with each other, improving their professional experiences, integrating ECPs into the international professional community of EPA. The membership in the EPA allows early career psychiatrists to collaborate fruitfully with (early career) psychiatrists from European countries who have similar educational and scientific interests. EPA promotes cooperation, helps to establish links with mentors on scientific topics and opens up a considerable number of additional academic perspectives.

Anyone interested in the work of the Committee can email ecpc@europsy.net or stay in touch with the ECPC by signing up to receive news at the following link: <https://www.europsy.net/early-career-psychiatrists-committee/>. ECPC is always open to ECPs and psychiatric trainees who wish to contribute to the Committee’s activities in support of doctors starting their careers in the field of psychiatry.

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ETHICS CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was not required for this work.

DISCLOSURES

The authors of the paper are current or former members of the Early Career Psychiatrists Committee of the European Psychiatric Association. AS is a member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Psychiatric Trainees and did not have any involvement in the editorial process of this article as per Guidance for Authors and Editorial Board Member Non-Interference Statement. No other conflicts of interest was disclosed by authors.

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