

# Looking at the Future, Learning from the Past: Current Activities and Upcoming Goals of the European Paediatric Association, the Union of National European Paediatric Societies and Associations

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Residents and delegates of the European pediatric societies and associations gathered in Istanbul, Turkey, in December 2019 to renew the Board of Directors of the European Paediatric Association (EPA), which is the Union of National European Paediatric Societies and Associations (EPA/UNEPSA)<sup>1</sup> (Table I; available at [www.jpeds.com](http://www.jpeds.com)). Following a discussion among the delegates of the EPA/UNEPSA member organizations, the newly elected Board will engage proactively in leading the union of European pediatric organizations toward the challenges facing the discipline of pediatrics in the areas of research, education, knowledge transfer, and advocacy for children's health and well-being. Major efforts of the new Board will include projects for the improvement of healthcare systems in Europe<sup>2</sup> and the development of educational programs designed to form stronger advocates and skillful professionals able to best meet their patients' challenges and be confident in their leadership as experts in child and adolescent health. This commentary describes the current activities and perspectives of EPA/UNEPSA and its new board of directors.

## Looking at the Future, Learning from the Past

Civil society and culture have progressively and substantially changed in Europe and globally; as a result, the discipline of pediatrics is facing profound transformations and needs constant innovation to meet the ever-increasing needs of the patients.<sup>3</sup> In fulfilling its responsibilities, the new EPA/UNEPSA Board will enjoy the encouragement and strong support showed by the member societies during the General Assembly. The Board members will work in an energetic, team atmosphere and in close collaboration with the member societies, which will allow them to succeed in achieving their objectives and to meet the challenges posed by a dynamic evolving world.<sup>4,5</sup>

EPA/UNEPSA can ground its activities on a solid international network of collaborations developed worldwide. This will assist EPA/UNEPSA in best serving the interests of the

European children and in building new bridges between pediatricians in East and West, as well as in the North and South of Europe.<sup>6</sup> The activities of the Board will be characterized by working to balance the need to respect cultural and social diversities with the importance for European pediatricians to “speak with one voice” on behalf of children.<sup>7</sup> This goal will be pursued tirelessly, by seeking the collaboration and harmonization among the main European pediatric constituencies, in respect of their mission and statutory independence, and by acknowledging the distinct role of primary, secondary, and tertiary pediatric care.

## Foundation and History of EPA/UNEPSA

EPA/UNEPSA is a pan-European scientific association that operates on a nonprofit basis, working closely with the major international organizations, including the World Health Organization, United Nations, European Medicines Agency, and the Council of Europe. Its main objective is to encourage scientific cooperation between not-for-profit national European pediatric organizations and between European pediatricians working in primary, secondary, and tertiary pediatric settings, to promote child health and well-being and to foster comprehensive pediatric care.<sup>1</sup>

EPA/UNEPSA was founded 45 years ago in the St Sophia Children's Hospital in Rotterdam by 18 European countries. It now represents 50 National European Pediatric Societies and Associations and their more than 150 000 member pediatricians working in Europe. Its General Assembly is composed of the presidents of the major national pediatric societies active in the nations of geographic Europe or culturally linked to the European continent. Currently more than three-quarters of all European countries are represented in EPA/UNEPSA (Table II; available at [www.jpeds.com](http://www.jpeds.com)). In its role as the prominent European pediatric organization, EPA/UNEPSA has especially fostered education of healthcare professionals, families, caregivers, and patients. This important goal has been pursued throughout the years

EPA	European Paediatric Association
IPA	International Pediatric Association
KOL	Key opinion leader
UNEPSA	Union of National European Paediatric Societies and Associations

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2020.02.034>

by developing programs focused on transferring specialist knowledge to generalists and promoting public health information and prevention programs.<sup>8,9</sup>

A fundamental element of EPA/UNEPSA's role as a pan-European organization is to understand and embrace diversity<sup>6</sup> and to foster the exchange of experiences and cooperation among pediatricians in Europe, enabling its member societies and associations to exchange scientific information and share best practices, in the spirit of "learning across borders and languages."<sup>9</sup>

Its major milestones and activities include the biannual international meeting Europaediatrics, a formal collaboration with *The Journal of Pediatrics*, research studies and educational courses, and the collaboration with the International Pediatric Association (IPA).

### The Biannual International Meeting Europaediatrics

Periodical meetings of the presidents of the national European pediatric societies focus on the most urgent issues of pediatric healthcare.<sup>10</sup> This biannual flagship event has become an important tradition of bringing together pediatricians and child health professionals from Europe and throughout the world. The objective of Europaediatrics is health promotion and prevention of disease and disability through primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and where prevention is not possible to provide up-to-date, evidence-based information on treatment. Optimization of health and well-being of children and their families and promotion of children's rights to health, equity, and social justice are among the key topics.<sup>2</sup> Scientific programs are developed in collaboration with the national European pediatric societies along with major subspecialty societies, the World Health Organization, and international societies across the world. Its workshops and scientific sessions are known for being of benefit to generalists as well as specialists in Europe and beyond.

### Formal Collaboration with *The Journal of Pediatrics*

In 2012, EPA/UNEPSA established a formal affiliation with *The Journal of Pediatrics*. The affiliation and close collaboration with this journal are key factors in fulfilling the EPA/UNEPSA educational mission, as the society fully embraces the mission of *The Journal*,<sup>11</sup> contributing its efforts to improve the quality of the health and care of infants, children, and adolescents. Through a series of commentaries published monthly in the EPA section of *The Journal*, authors provide information on new technologies and debate current issues in public health, bringing attention to major health problems to a diverse audience of pediatric healthcare professionals. From the articles published in this section, the pediatric community around the world also can read about new EPA/UNEPSA initiatives and the progress of its ongoing, long-term projects. Important organizational changes are periodically announced, and members can follow the

Society's current thinking on how to further improve European pediatrics and receive updates on the educational efforts of the society. EPA/UNEPSA believes in empowering general pediatricians with the best-available information on research in the field so that they can make informed decisions for individual patients, a vision that is shared with *The Journal*.<sup>9,11</sup>

### Research Studies and Educational Courses

EPA/UNEPSA activities include the development of key opinion leader (KOL) working groups. KOLs involved in these activities typically are respected medical experts highly regarded in their field as a result of their innovative research, publications in high-impact research journals, and presentations at renowned conferences. The reports and articles developed by these working groups in collaboration with EPA/UNEPSA include concise information on the most important recommendations for clinical practice. Their studies and expert opinions address clinical topics of current importance for pediatricians.<sup>12</sup>

Pediatricians will be leaders in defining and creating a sound body of scientific and practical knowledge concerning child health.<sup>13</sup> To support this goal, EPA/UNEPSA has developed a program of KOL courses, which aim to transfer knowledge from different areas of specialty pediatrics to general pediatricians. The courses cover various areas of pediatrics, with special focus on prevention, as well as on diagnostic and therapeutic innovations in the management of child and adolescent health.<sup>14</sup>

### Collaboration with IPA and Future Goals

EPA/UNEPSA leadership strongly feels that IPA is for all societies and is working actively to gather the major European pediatric organizations to join EPA/UNEPSA in working within IPA, with the aim of speaking with one voice to advocate for children's health and well-being.

In 2019, EPA/UNEPSA entered a seminal agreement with the European Confederation of Primary Care Pediatrician/Confédération Européenne de Pédiatrie Ambulatoire,<sup>7</sup> active in Europe for 30 years, representing 22 national European Societies and more than 30 000 primary care pediatricians. EPA/UNEPSA emphasizes the importance of a close collaboration between secondary and primary care pediatrics. In the future, combined programs developed with European Confederation of Primary Care Pediatrician/Confédération Européenne de Pédiatrie Ambulatoire are designed to include projects in the area of diseases prevention and health promotion.

### Conclusions

The aim of EPA/UNEPSA is to promote children's rights to health, equity, and social justice. More than a quarter of a century has passed since the iron curtain between East and West Europe, and the importance of exploring similarities

and differences in current challenges and approaches to child health across Europe has not declined. EPA/UNEPSA, with the key contribution of its 50 member societies, has the potential to understand and address differences in pediatric policy and practice among different nations. After 45 years, EPA/UNEPSA is still an expanding and vital instrument in improving the knowledge of European pediatricians and for enhancing health services for all children and the cooperation among their caretakers in Europe, in a continuing effort to fulfill its role as the largest European pediatric association. ■

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**Table I. 2020 EPA/UNEPSA organization chart****Board of Directors**

<i>President:</i>	Massimo Pettoello-Mantovani, MD, PhD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Italy)
<i>Past-President:</i>	Leyla Namazova-Baranova, MD, PhD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Russia)
<i>Vice-President:</i>	Eli Somekh, MD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Israel)
<i>Vice-President:</i>	Hilary Hoey, MD, PhD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Ireland)
<i>Secretary General:</i>	Julije Mestrovic, MD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Croatia)
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Mehmet Vural, MD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Turkey)
<i>Council Member:</i>	Tudor Pop, MD, PhD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Romania)
<i>Council Member:</i>	Angel Carrasco-Sanz, MD, President ECPCP (Spain)
<i>Council Member and President of the biannual scientific Congress Europaepidemiology 2020:</i>	Aida Mujkic, MD, PhD, Full Professor of Pediatrics (Croatia)

**Table II. European nations currently represented in EPA/UNEPSA through main national pediatric societies and associations**

- Albania
- Armenia
- Austria
- Azerbaijan
- Belarus
- Belgium
- Bosnia/Herzegovina
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- France
- Georgia
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Israel
- Italy
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyz Republic
- Kosovo
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Moldova
- Monaco
- Montenegro
- North Macedonia
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Russia
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan
- United Kingdom
- Vatican City