

## THE FUTURE OF THE ESVS – DEBATE

## The European Society for Vascular Surgery: An Engine for Diversity

Diversity is a need. Diversity makes us colourful. It broadens our minds and leads us to new visions. Diversity encourages us to aim for new horizons and makes us move – both female and male.

International societies, such as the European Society for Vascular Surgery (ESVS), are diverse by themselves! We include different nations, and therefore different cultures, minds, aims, and priorities. This thrills all who are part of, or engaged with, this society: we aim for this diversity, each with respect for the other, curious to learn from each other. It creates new friendships and, naturally, opens our minds to areas we did not even think about before entering this adventure.

The ESVS is a lively, modern, and constantly changing scientific society, representing the members of their different countries. Naturally, besides the many specific characteristics of every national vascular surgery society, the sex disparity differs (Fig. 1).

Overall, 24% of ESVS members were female in 2022; 41% were female trainees. The percentage of women on our various committees differs, reaching 55% (academy). The number of female faculty members at our annual meetings increased from 13% in 2017 to 28% in 2022. These numbers show that the ESVS is encouraging female colleagues to be part of and engaged with our society, with the result that there is an even higher level of female participation than the average of our individual member countries. The ESVS is therefore an engine for diversity.

We are open to all and transparent. The ESVS aims for diversity in all of our activities, specifically and directly approaching our female colleagues to engage with, apply to, and actively take part in the community. Many do apply and are very successful. Tina Cohnert was our first female treasurer, Maarit Venermo is our first female Secretary General, Alison Halliday was our first female president, Isabelle van Herzele has led our Academy, Melina Vega de Ceniga is our successful Editor in Chief of the Vascular Forum. Female colleagues are leading important guidelines writing committees. All this has happened within the last decade, and there are many more examples. All of them did and do a marvellous job with dedication, enabling the society to flourish and be one of which we can all be proud. Our entire office team is female; these talents are the backbone of our society. In the future, we want women to join the working party for diversity and apply for ESVS

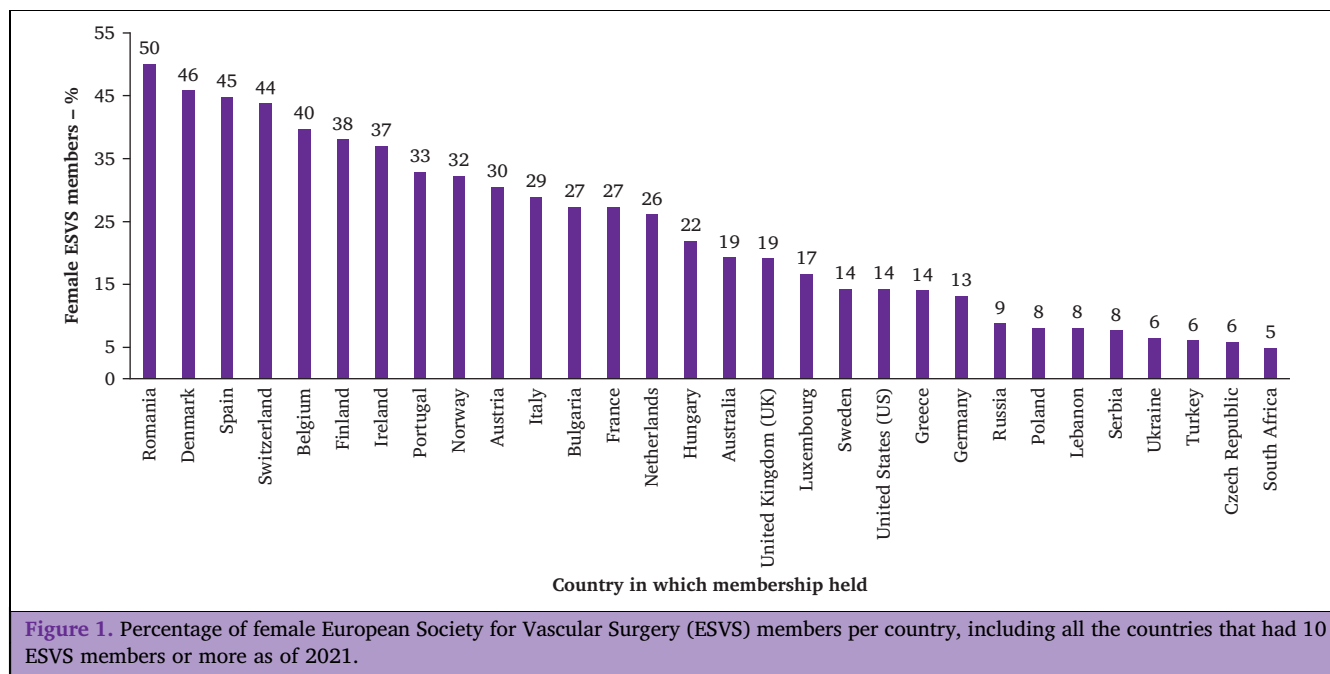
positions. The lack of women applicants for Council and Executive Committee positions has been evident.

However, the view outside Europe is different. In 2017, the number of women entering US medical schools surpassed men for the first time.<sup>1</sup> The trend of women entering medicine has continued to rise since the 1980s. However, currently in academic surgery and vascular surgery in the USA and Germany, less than 20% of leadership positions are held by women.<sup>2,3</sup> Some attribute the lack of female representation in leadership to the theory of a “pipeline”, suggesting that, as more women enter the field, the number of female leaders will increase and eradicate gender disparity.<sup>4</sup> Studies on female representation in science, engineering, and medicine have shown that this is not the case. Female physicians publish fewer scientific papers than their male colleagues.<sup>5</sup> Female advancement is not happening at the expected rate. Even in medical fields such as paediatrics or obstetrics and gynaecology, where women have represented > 50% of residents and entry level positions for over three decades, there remains a disparity in leadership positions. Empirical evidence demonstrates that gender disparity is not simply a pipeline issue.<sup>6</sup> However, the numbers from US studies only partly mirror the situation in Europe.<sup>7</sup> The percentage of women in medicine in Sweden, the UK, Germany, and Austria are similar: 47%, 47%, 45%, and 46%, respectively. However, in leading positions, there were differences in favour of Sweden: the female percentage of academic professors at the Karolinska Institute was 28%, in Oxford it was 22%, and in Vienna it was 19%. In Finland, 58% of doctors are female, 67% or those achieving a doctoral degree are women, and 38% of people in leading positions are women. Obviously in Sweden and Finland female doctors have a better chance of achieving a leading position than in Germany or Austria. This difference could be explained by a better congruence of professional and family life; in Sweden and Finland, public efforts to support childcare and education were implemented systematically in 1970. In 1974, gender neutral “off time” for childcare was introduced in Sweden. Furthermore, Nordic society is less hierarchical. Teamwork and a transformative style of leadership have a big impact. In Sweden, a leader is more team oriented, motivating, and consensus oriented, whereas leaders in Germany are more enforcement oriented and autocratic. These are typical male associated features, whereas in Sweden more female oriented characteristics are favoured.<sup>8</sup> One generation later, the embedded ambitions of the Nordic countries have a clear result. Such societal reforms help to close the gender gap.

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Although there is certainly improved representation of women in vascular surgery compared with several decades ago, a discrepancy persists. This is what we realise in our society, too. Although we are constantly emphasising the importance of diversity and increasing female input into our annual meetings and committees, there is still a gap. Thus, we have to use all our tools to overcome this disparity. Equality, diversity, and inclusivity are the core values of the ESVS. Naturally, we are grateful for all contributions to closing this gap.

Female leadership adds so much to diverse thinking and broadens traditional horizons. This is thrilling. And much more: it adds insight and evidence, and last but not least, it appreciates previously unrecognised values, which makes our society and community blossom. We have so much potential; we want to let it fly. This is a great common aim, worth all effort.

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