

EDITORIAL

EAACI Clinical and Research Fellowship Program: Shaping the Future of Allergy and Clinical Immunology

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The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), with over 16,000 members from 124 countries and encompassing more than 50 National Allergy and Immunology Societies (NAIS), is currently the world's largest scientific organization in the allergy and clinical immunology fields. It brings together clinicians, researchers and allied health professionals, all working together with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life of patients with allergic and immunological disorders, through the best quality and up-to-date tools and techniques in personalized medicine and by studying the most recent advances.

Since its foundation in 1956, one of the main priorities of the Academy has been to support and provide opportunities for young clinicians and immunology basic researchers (junior members, JMs) since they are the new generations of allergists and clinical immunologists, and therefore, the future of the specialty [1, 2]. In this context, EAACI has made a significant effort to support JMs through a wide range of educational programs and initiatives, including research and clinical stays, awards,

scholarships to attend focused meetings and congresses, as well as to enhance their presence and involvement in the scientific life of the Academy, including different projects, task forces, reviews, position papers, or guidelines among others [3, 4].

Due to the importance of the JMs within the Academy, being the largest section of EAACI2, the EAACI JM assembly (JMA) was created in 2001 [2–4], and since then, the participation of JMs within the Academy has increased significantly. It is worth mentioning the creation of specific programs for mentoring (mentorship program) [5], scholarships to attend the EAACI congress for undergraduate students (college program) or EAACI JMs (Allergy Quiz), programs to enhance the communicative skills of JMs (Tell Us About Your Project), and in-depth collaborative work with sister and national societies. Moreover, an intense and fruitful collaboration has been established with the three EAACI Journals, namely the *European Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* (Allergy), *Pediatric Allergy and Immunology* (PAI), and *Clinical and Translational Allergy* (CTA), have been established with outstanding results [2, 3, 5].

Among the extensive and comprehensive programs and benefits promoted by EAACI specifically orientated to JMs, one of the oldest and most successful is the Fellowship Program (FP). This initiative aims to give EAACI JMs the opportunity every year to increase their knowledge and improve their professional skills and networking, favoring the mobility of JM researchers and clinicians through stays in top-renowned institutions in Europe to carry out specific projects. Different modalities exist in clinical FP or research FPs with a variable duration (3 or 6 months) [5]. The clinical FP aims to support highly skilled specialists in the field of allergy to spread the specialty throughout Europe. The research FP tries to cover expenses and travel-associated costs of outstanding EAACI JM researchers, with the intention of exchanging knowledge and implementing new techniques between European laboratories. Importantly, in 2023, in response to the war in Ukraine, the EAACI-Ukraine FP was launched with the intention of supporting Ukrainian clinicians and researchers to promote joint projects with members of EAACI.

The data available about the FP from 2019 to 2024 show interesting results. The annual budget EAACI allocated to the FP was over €100k in 2019 and 2020, although there was a significant reduction in the budget between 2021 and 2022 due to the important mobility restrictions between countries caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, after the cessation of COVID-19-related restrictions, the budget dedicated to the program has gradually increased, reaching levels similar to the pre-pandemic years (Figure 1A). Regarding gender distribution, in accordance with overall JM gender distribution, the majority of fellows were women (70.8%) compared to men (29.2%) (Figure 1B). The percentage of accepted fellows to total applications was similar in clinical and research FP (41.3% and 47.9%, respectively), while it is higher for Ukraine FP (61%) (Figure 1C). Spain, followed by

Italy and Turkey, were the countries with the highest number of awardees (Figure 1D), whereas the UK, Germany and Spain were the countries where host institutions were most frequently located (Figure 1E).

To ascertain the opinion of awardees of the FP from 2019 to 2024, a survey was conducted between July and August 2024. A total of 18 responses were received, 12 belonging to clinical FP awardees (66.7%) and 6 (33.3%) to research FP awardees (Figure 2A). All survey participants considered the FP *extremely useful* for their professional development (Figure 2B). Interestingly, 13 out of the 18 participants (72.2%) have already presented their FP-associated research at different congresses, mainly at EAACI and national events, while only 5 (27.8%) have not presented any communication (Figure 2C). In addition, 7 participants (38.9%) have reported that at least a manuscript derived from the stay has already been published (Figure 2D), and a total of 11 articles have been published, with 4 of the participants reporting that their manuscript is in process at the time of the survey. Notably, 12/18 participants (66.7%) thought the duration of the FP was sufficient to meet the objectives of the stay and project, while 6/18 (33.3%) (Figure 2E) thought it was insufficient, most of them corresponding to the short-term (3 months) clinical FP (83.3%) and one from the long-term research FP (16.7%). A total of 13 participants (72.2%) thought that FP grant funds were enough, while 5/18 (27.8%) thought it was not (Figure 2F), mainly due to the lack of budgetary correction between countries.

Fellowship program is very important in order to maintain commitment of younger members of the Academy since this program aims on giving short-term opportunities to junior members in order to expand their academic and professional network and

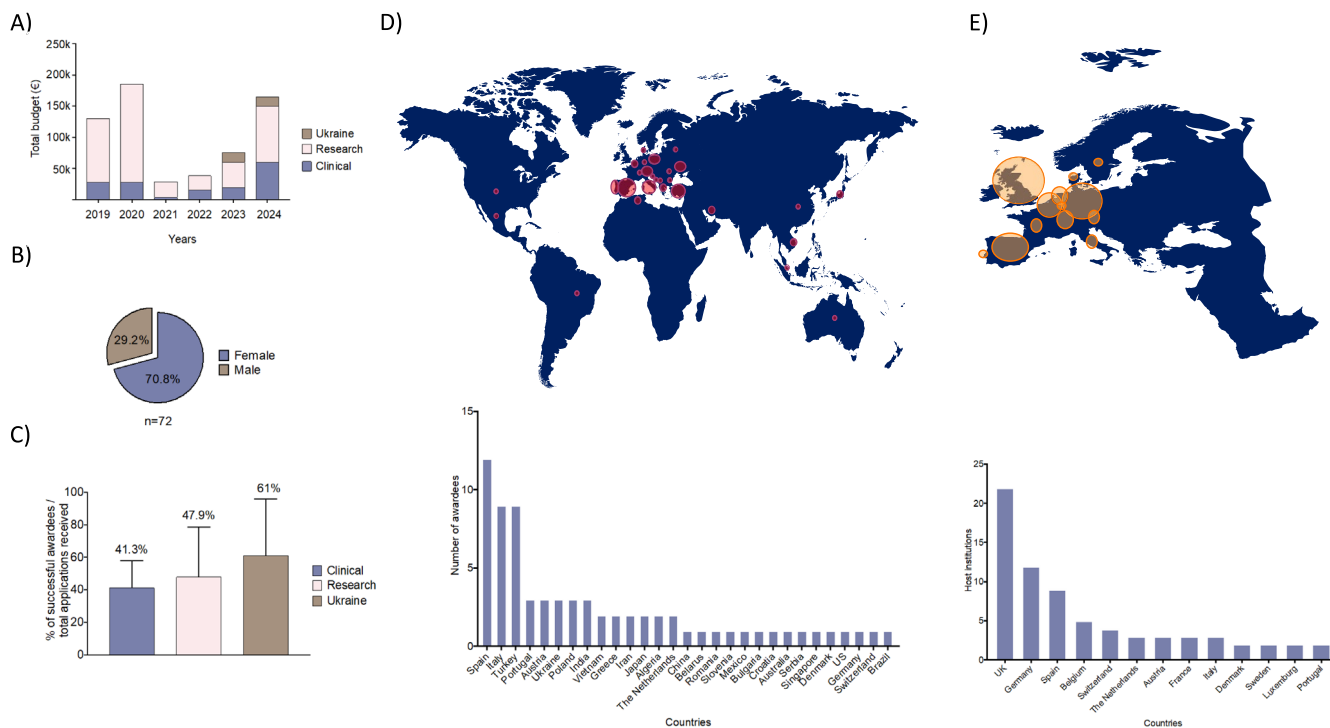


FIGURE 1 | Fellowship program (FP) data (2019–2024). (A) Total budget allocated to each FP modality; (B) gender distribution; (C) % of successful awardees out of total applications received; (D) number of awardees by country; and (E) countries of host institutions by number of awardees.

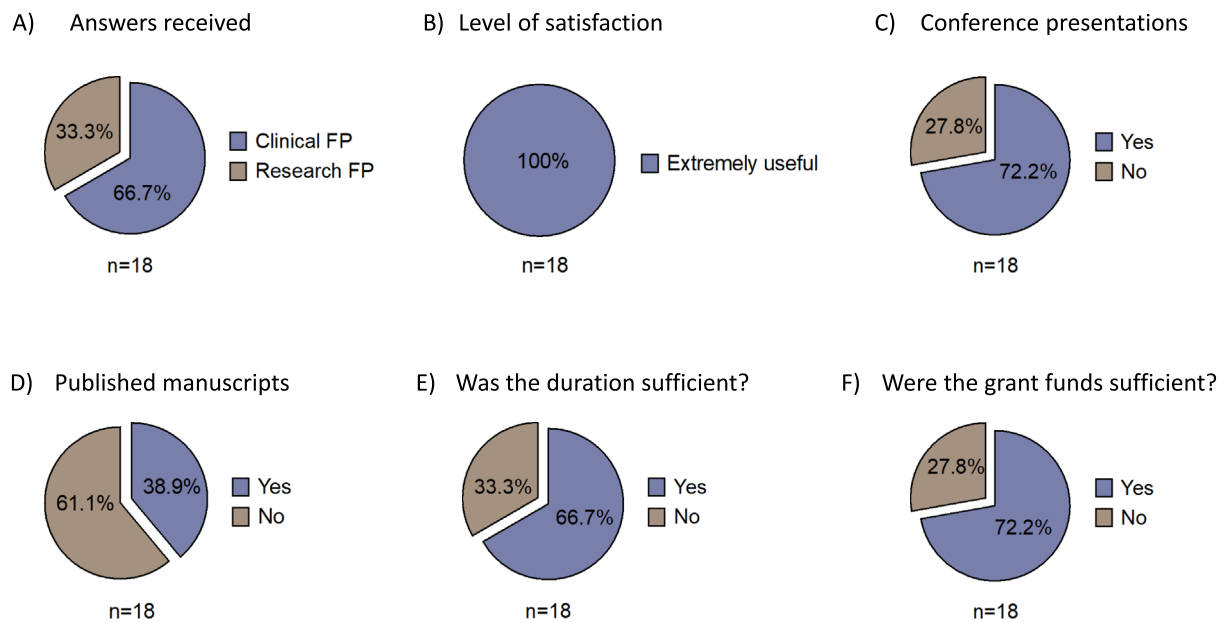


FIGURE 2 | Survey data. (A) % of responses received by fellowship program (FP) modality; (B) level of satisfaction; (C) % of FP-derived data presented at conferences and meetings; (D) % of manuscripts already published; (E) % of responses to the question: “was the duration of the FP sufficient?”; and (F) % of responses to the question: “were the grant funds provided by the FP sufficient?”.

collaborate with prominent names in the field of allergy and clinical immunology. Furthermore it is considered a unique opportunity for personal, academic and professional development since the participants can expand their knowledge outside of the strict borders of their country and interfere with senior members. EAACI supports this initiative and aims to expand this further in order to give more opportunities and support as much as possible younger participants by responding to their needs and even intersperses the structure of the program in order to respond to the participants needs as it has been shown in the survey that has been carried out.

In conclusion, the EAACI FP provides EAACI JMs with an excellent opportunity to enhance their knowledge from both basic and clinical perspectives, being an invaluable enrichment for their career, promoting networking, establishing new potential collaborations, and learning state-of-the-art techniques and procedures in top-renowned research laboratories and clinical facilities in Europe. In doing so, EAACI is fully committed to contributing and supporting to the best training of the next generation of researchers and clinicians in the fields of allergy and clinical immunology.

Conflicts of Interest

M.G. reports personal fees from Sanofi. M.J.T. reports: Receipt of grants/research supports: European Commission, SEAC, ISCIII, Receipt of honoraria or consultation fees: Leti Laboratories, Aimmune Therapeutics, and Diater Laboratories. O.P. reports grants and/or personal fees and/or travel support from AEDA, Alfried Krupp Krankenhaus, ALK-Abelló, Allergopharma, Almirall, Altamira Therapeutics, ASIT Biotech, AstraZeneca, Bencard Allergie GmbH/Allergy Therapeutics, Deutsche AllergieLiga e.V., Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Dustri-Verlag, ECM Expro&Conference Management GmbH, Forum für Medizinische Fortbildung, GSK, HAL Allergy Holding B.V./HAL Allergie GmbH, Immunotek, Ingress

Health, Institut für Disease Management (Essen, Germany), IQVIA Commercial, Japanese Society of Allergology, Königlich Dänisches Generalkonsulat, Laboratorios LETI/LETI Pharma, Lilly, Lofarma, Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, med update europe GmbH, Meinhardt Congress GmbH, Novartis, Paul-Ehrlich-Institut, Paul-Martini-Stiftung, PneumoLive, Pohl-Boskamp, Procter & Gamble, Red Maple Trials Inc., Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, RG Aertzefortbildung, ROXALL Medizin, Sanofi Aventis, Sanofi Genzyme, Springer GmbH, Stallergenes Greer, streamedup! GmbH, Technical University Dresden, Thieme Medical Publishers, Wiley Publishers, Wort & Bild Verlag, Verlag ME; outside the submitted work, Oliver Pfaar is Vice President of the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), a member of EAACI Excom as well as a member of the external board of directors of the German Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (DGAKI); coordinator, main- or co-author of different position papers and guidelines in rhinology, allergology and allergen-immunotherapy; and he is Editor-in-Chief of Clinical Translational Allergy and Associate Editor of Allergy. O.P. has received research grants from MINECO, Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, CAM, Immunotek S.L., Novartis, and AstraZeneca and fees for giving scientific lectures or participation in Advisory Boards from: AstraZeneca, Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Immunotek S.L., Novartis, Sanofi-Genzyme and Regeneron.

Data Availability Statement

The data that supports the findings of this study are available in the Supporting Information of this article.

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