

Looking ahead to an exciting year in 2025

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At the beginning of a new year, we are full of expectations, hopes, and wishes, but also concerns and worries. This ambivalence may be appropriate for the world at large, but I would argue that the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and its members have already embraced 2025 with enthusiasm and determination. Here are the key reasons.

A special celebration

First of all, in late August this year, the ESC will celebrate its 75th birthday¹ during its annual congress in Madrid (*Figure 1*). This is another milestone in its history we can be proud of. After all these years, the ESC has grown into a global society with 58 National Cardiac Societies (NCS)



Figure 1 The founders and pioneers of the European Society of Cardiology

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and 49 Affiliated Cardiac Societies (ACN) from all continents, with a worldwide reach. Accordingly, the theme of the ESC Congress 2025 in Madrid, which I am sure will again be the greatest event in cardiovascular (CV) medicine worldwide, will be *Global Health*.

Global health

Indeed, diseases of the heart, the brain, and the circulation have become global. With infectious diseases in decline as a major cause of death thanks to hygiene, clean water, antibiotics, and vaccinations as well as a marked reduction in under- and malnutrition, CV diseases are on the rise also in low- and middle-income countries. One of the major drivers of this unfortunate development is the pandemic of overweight and obesity.² The worldwide steady increase in body weight obviously fosters dyslipidaemia, diabetes, high blood pressure, and atrial fibrillation as well as chronic kidney disease and heart failure—all risk factors for myocardial infarction, stroke, and premature death. The good news is that we now have, besides lifestyle measures, novel highly effective drugs at hand to treat obesity as well as each of its complications. Accordingly, this will be a major focus of ESC Congress 2025 in Madrid where, besides our traditional participants, we also hope to welcome many colleagues from Latin America and from all over the world as we will organize this important event together with the World Heart Federation.

Novel cardiovascular risk factors

Furthermore, we are faced with novel CV risk factors: environmental hazards that affect populations around the world, particularly those of low- and middle-income countries. The ESC will address these central issues of today's world at its congress, both in the organization of the on-site event and in the programme itself. In addition, the current ESC leadership created a dedicated task force on *Environment and Sustainability* with experts in the field addressing global warming, pollution,³ noise,⁴ and light exposure, with a particular focus on their impact on CV health and disease. Finally, environmental hazards will be a major topic for the ESC Advocacy Committee and their activities at a political level, with the involvement of decision-makers of the European Union (EU).

A European Union's Cardiovascular Health Plan

Particularly exciting for the ESC is the fact that the Ministers of Health (MoH) of the 27 countries of the EU have made CV health a priority as proposed by the former Hungarian presidency⁵—a historic milestone for the ESC, their members, and the EU population at large! In its press release, the EU Council calls for more robust efforts to help to prevent CV diseases. Furthermore, the presiding Hungarian MoH stated: 'cardiovascular diseases have a devastating impact on individuals and their families, yet in most cases they can be prevented by addressing underlying risk factors through healthier lifestyle choices. Screening and better access to treatment are essential elements to the impact of CVDs. Today's conclusions reflect our commitment to improving cardiovascular health throughout the EU' (*Figure 2*). As Churchill would have said: 'now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning'. We now have a huge opportunity in front of us, but we will also face several challenges. Indeed, the EU's CV Health Plan, that the ESC helped develop in close collaboration with the Hungarian MoH, passed at EU level thanks to the help of numerous colleagues across the 27 EU countries, but in its current form, it is rather general in nature and needs concrete actions and promising projects. To that end, we need the help of all of us; therefore, we welcome suggestions from the members of all ESC constituent bodies. It is obvious, from the EU's press release, that prevention, be it primordial,⁶ primary, or secondary of nature,⁷ is the centre stage for the MoH and the EU Commission, as is access to care with needs to be addressed, since it is truly unequal throughout the 27 EU countries. But, perhaps, we should also foster basic science to better understand diseases with unmet medical needs, as well as registries, an expansion of our EuroHeart vision⁸ throughout the EU for quality control, health economics, but also clinical science. Of note, large data sets in all European NCS are essential to implement artificial intelligence and machine learning to improve patient management and research.⁹ We should not forget environmental hazards as this is currently one of the most important health issues worldwide; of note, besides the EU Commissioner on Health, among the 27 EU Commissioners, there is also an EU Commissioner on Environment, underlying the political importance of that topic.



Figure 2 The timelines of the European Union's Cardiovascular Health Plan

An exceptional educational offer

This year once again, the ESC, besides its annual congress in Madrid offers exceptional educational programmes of its Associations throughout Europe, e.g. ESC Acute Cardiovascular Care in the middle of March in Florence, EHRA at the end of March in Vienna, ESC Preventive Cardiology at the beginning of April in Milan, ACNAP in Sophia-Antipolis in mid-June, and EACVI again in Vienna in December 2025. As new features, the ESC Council of Cardio-Oncology organizes its first meeting in Florence in June and the ESC Digital Cardiology & Artificial Intelligence Committee its first Digital & AI Summit in Berlin at the end of November. The latter event stresses the ESC's commitment to education on and optimal use of this novel technology that has a major impact on our clinical practice.¹⁰

A new ESC Journal

The ESC Journal family has grown over the last two decades into the largest of its kind covering many aspects of CV medicine and science. Today, it enjoys an impressive impact in the scientific literature, not only through its flagship, the *European Heart Journal*, but also through the publications of the ESC Associations and beyond. One growing field of CV medicine that has not been appropriately covered yet is valvular and structural heart disease. Indeed, ever since the seminal first procedure by Alain Cribier on 16 April 2002, transcatheter valve implantation¹¹ has experienced an unprecedented growth, followed by clipping of mitral¹² and now also tricuspid valves.¹³ The later procedures have developed a new specialty of CV imaging, i.e. interventional echocardiography where imagers work closely together to guide interventionalists. Besides these methods, closure of the left atrial appendix, patent foramen oval, and most forms of atrial septal defects, as well as of the ductus Botalli, have become catheter-based interventions. Congenital heart defects in newborns, children, and adults are also more and more managed on an interventional level, be it by pulmonary valve implantation,¹⁴ among other procedures. Finally, the molecular basis of aortic stenosis is an increasing research topic.¹⁵ Thus, it appeared timely to publish a dedicated journal involving all constituent bodies with interest in the field, i.e. the *EHJ Valvular & Structural Heart Disease*, later this year.

Looking towards a bright future

I am looking forward to a successful 2025 and sincerely count on your support to achieve our goals. The ESC's continued success relies on the dedication and efforts of all our volunteers, and together, we can build on the remarkable journey we have pursued for so many years. Wishing you all a happy and healthy 2025!

Supplementary data

Supplementary data are not available at *European Heart Journal* online.

Declarations

Disclosure of Interest

The author declares no disclosure of interest for this contribution.

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