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## Early Career Scientist (ECS) attendance and participation at the annual EGU General Assembly: are online meetings more accessible than in-person meetings for ECS?

**Anouk Beniest**<sup>1,2</sup>, Johanna Stadmark<sup>3</sup>, and Claudia Jesus-Rydin<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Earth Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (a.beniest@vu.nl)

<sup>2</sup>GEOMAR, Helmholtz Center for Ocean Research, Kiel, Germany

<sup>3</sup>Department of Geology, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

<sup>4</sup>European Research Council (ERC), Scientific Department, Brussels, Belgium

The European Geosciences Union (EGU) is Europe's leading community-lead organization for Earth, planetary and space science research. The EGU organizes its General Assembly (GA), the largest, most prominent geosciences event in Europe, annually. Until 2019, the event was only organized in-person, but in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the event became completely virtual in 2020 and 2021. The in-person meeting attracted over 16,000 scientists from all over the world, whereas over 17,500 people participated in the virtual events. This rise in the number of participating scientists implies that online meetings are more accessible than in-person meetings.

Early Career Scientist (ECS) account for about half of the total EGU membership. An 'Early Career Scientist' is defined by EGU as 'a student, a PhD candidate or a practicing scientist who received their highest degree (e.g. BSc, MSc or PhD) within the past seven years', with some exceptions to this time-frame that account for research career breaks. ECS are often in a particular stage of their career where networking and showcasing scientific output are essential for success. We have analyzed self-declared data provided by ECS participants during the registration phase of the annual general assembly to investigate the impact of virtual meetings on the participation of Early Career Scientists to the GA between 2015 and 2021. We analyzed if there were any shifts in the diversity of ECS with respect to gender and geographical location and to what extent ECS were involved in convening scientific sessions.

We observed a general increase (5-30%) in ECS participation from 2015 until 2021 irrespective of gender. In 2019, the total increase of all participants stalled, but 2020 saw a 10% increase of participants. In 2021, ECS attendance fell, equaling the numbers of 2019. The large majority of ECS that participate in the GA are from the western parts of the EU (including the UK and Norway, 60-65%) and the eastern parts of Europe (6-7%) followed by China (6-10%). During the free virtual

meeting in 2020, ECS from Central Asia, India and Central America saw the largest increase compared to 2019 (> 65%). During the paid virtual meeting in 2021, the participation of ECS from northern (72%) and western Africa (42%) increased the most. ECS from India, Oceania and the Pacific regions, North America and from countries in eastern Europe also showed an increase in numbers between 15-20% compared to 2020. About 10-12% of ECS participate in convening scientific sessions, this number remained stable during the physical events, but during the virtual events, participation dropped significantly, with only 8% of ECS participating in the organization of scientific sessions in 2019 and 6% in 2021.

Our results show that the participation of ECS from EU countries remains stable, regardless if the meeting is in-person or virtual. ECS participation from ECS from eastern parts of Europe and countries outside of the EU, decreases during virtual meetings. ECS participation from ECS outside of Europe, especially northern and western Africa, India and Oceania and the Pacific region increases when a virtual component is provided.