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European candidaemia is characterised by notable differential epidemiology and susceptibility pattern: Results from the ECMM *Candida* III study

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- ²⁰ ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5318-2942
- ²¹ ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7615-0521
- ²² ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8850-2715
- ²³ ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2243-7644
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- ³⁴ ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0202-364X
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- ³⁶ ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2054-2857
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SUMMARY

The objectives of this study were to assess *Candida* spp. distribution and antifungal resistance of candidaemia across Europe. Isolates were collected as part of the third ECMM *Candida* European multicentre observational study, conducted from 01 to 07-07-2018 to 31-03-2022. Each centre (maximum number/country determined by population size) included ~10 consecutive cases. Isolates were referred to central laboratories and identified by morphology and MALDI-TOF, supplemented by ITS-sequencing when needed. EUCAST MICs were determined for five antifungals. *fks* sequencing was performed for echinocandin resistant isolates. The 399 isolates from 41 centres in 17 countries included *C. albicans* (47.1%), *C. glabrata* (22.3%), *C. parapsilosis* (15.0%), *C. tropicalis* (6.3%), *C. dubliniensis* and *C. krusei* (2.3% each) and other species (4.8%). Austria had the highest *C. albicans* proportion (77%), Czech Republic, France and UK the highest *C. glabrata* proportions (25–33%) while Italy and Turkey had the highest *C. parapsilosis* proportions (24–26%). All isolates were amphotericin B susceptible. Fluconazole resistance was found in 4% *C. tropicalis*, 12% *C. glabrata* (from six countries across Europe), 17% *C. parapsilosis* (from Greece, Italy, and Turkey) and 20% other *Candida* spp. Four isolates were anidulafungin and micafungin resistant/non-wild-type and five resistant to micafungin only. Three/3 and 2/5 of these were sequenced and harboured *fks*-alterations including a novel L657W in *C. parapsilosis*. The epidemiology varied among centres and countries. Acquired echinocandin resistance was rare but included differential susceptibility to anidulafungin and micafungin, and resistant *C. parapsilosis*. Fluconazole and voriconazole cross-resistance was common in *C. glabrata* and *C. parapsilosis* but with different geographical prevalence.

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Introduction

The epidemiology of candidaemia has changed over the past decades. The proportion of *C. albicans* has declined from 70% to 80% in the 1980–90s^{1,2} to ~40–60% in recent population based European reports.^{3–6} In parallel, the proportion of *C. glabrata* has increased, particularly in Northern Europe, the US and Australia,^{4–7} and the proportion of *C. parapsilosis*, particularly in Southern Europe, China and Latin America.^{8–11} Moreover, *C. auris* has emerged globally over the past 13 years but with a highly uneven burden in different European countries and centres due to its unique ability to cause nosocomial transfer and difficulty to control outbreaks.^{12–14}

Acquired antifungal resistance in *Candida* is diverse with respect to agents, underlying mechanisms, magnitude of minimal inhibitory concentration (MIC) elevation and frequency.¹⁵ Amphotericin B resistance is extremely rare. Echinocandin resistance is mediated by hotspot mutations in the *fks1* target gene and for *C. glabrata* also *fks2*. It arises after a median of 30 days of treatment and more readily where sub-therapeutic drug levels and biofilm occur, such as infected foci and on the mucosal surfaces, compared to the bloodstream, which hampers timely detection.^{16–18} Azole resistance on the contrary, is most often multifactorial with target gene mutations, target gene upregulation and efflux pumps acting in concert and typically evolves after long-term (months) therapy.^{15,19} Although a recent study for the first time demonstrated horizontal transfer of chromosomal and plasmid located azole resistance in *A. fumigatus* under laboratory conditions, transfer of antifungal resistance genes has not been demonstrated for *Candida* isolates and is not regarded a significant driver of resistance.²⁰ Hence, resistance is most commonly due to an intrinsically resistant species (thus predictable from the species identification) or acquired in the individual patient during the course of antifungal therapy. Consequently, there has been a low level of suspicion for acquired resistance in the antifungal drug naïve patients. However, in-ward patient to patient transfer of fluconazole resistant clonal *C. glabrata* isolates and outbreaks of fluconazole resistant *C. parapsilosis* isolates in paediatric and adult settings have been reported undermining species identification as means of predicting the appropriate therapy in the antifungal naïve patient.^{21–26} They illustrate the importance of contemporary and localized epidemiological data for the appropriate initial management of candidaemia, to monitor the emergence of acquired resistance and predict future challenges and the importance of antifungal stewardship.

Based on this background, the European Confederation of Medical Mycology (ECMM) *Candida* III European multicentre observational study commenced in 2018.²⁷ The objectives were to assess epidemiology, adherence to guideline recommendations and associated outcomes of candidaemia across Europe.²⁸ This work analysed isolates that were collected as part of this multicentre study and reports species distribution and susceptibility patterns across Europe.

Materials and methods

Isolates

To provide a balanced and representative picture of candidaemia in Europe, the number of eligible centres per ECMM country included in the ECMM *Candida* III European multicentre observational study was determined by population size. As general guidance, the maximum number of included hospitals per country were: eight for each of the six countries with populations > 50 million (i.e., France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, and United Kingdom; mean population 82.5 million), four for countries with population > 25 million and < 50 million (i.e., Poland and Spain; mean population 42 million), and two for the remaining 16 ECMM countries with population < 25 million (mean population 9.4 million). Centres were recruited by ECMM council representatives of each participating country, and also via the EPICOVIDEHA²⁹ and FungiScope³⁰ networks and among the ECMM Global Guidelines contributor and fellow groups.²⁷

Each participating centre included the first ~10 culture proven adult candidaemia cases, defined according to European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) criteria,³¹ occurring consecutively after July 1st, 2018. In total, 632 candidaemia patients were included from 60 centres in 20 European countries. Of these, 399 (63% of cases) bloodstream isolates were referred to the reference mycology laboratories at Statens Serum Institute (SSI), Copenhagen, Denmark (n = 329) or to the Department of Medical Microbiology, Hacettepe University (HU) Medical School, Ankara, Turkey (n = 70) (isolates from Turkish centres specifically) for confirmatory species identification and EUCAST susceptibility testing. The reasons for participating hospitals not referring their isolates were diverse and included workload challenges during Covid-19, isolates not being stored, lack of permission (Russia), and cost (some centres claimed > 1000€ for shipping, which was over the budget). The overall characteristics of the cases with referred

isolates were comparable to those cases for which isolates were not referred (e.g., origin being secondary or tertiary care centre, proportion with malignant disease and catheter related blood stream infection, and species distribution) with the exception that fewer referred isolates were from ICU patients (34% versus 43%, $P = 0.0230$), were *C. auris* (0.3% versus 6%, $P < 0.0001$) or were not identified to species level (0% versus 3%, $P = 0.0012$) (Supplementary Table 1).

Species identification was performed at the SSI using classical techniques (macro morphology on CHROMagar and thermotolerance at 45 °C for *C. albicans* versus *C. dubliniensis*), matrix assisted laser desorption/ionization - time-of-flight mass spectrometry (MALDI-TOF MS, Bruker, Bremen, Germany) with the online available spectrum database mass spectrometry imaging (MSI) when needed,^{32,33} together with DNA sequencing as required.³⁴ For the Turkish isolates, species identification was performed using classical techniques and biochemical profiles (macro-morphology on CHROMagar, micro-morphology on cornmeal tween 80 agar, biochemical assimilation profiles using ID32C® - bioMérieux, Marcy-l'Étoile, France), and when required supplemented with MALDI-TOF (Bruker, Bremen, Germany) or DNA sequencing as previously described.^{32,34}

Susceptibility testing and FKS gene sequence analysis

At the SSI, European Committee on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing (EUCAST) E.Def 7.3.2 susceptibility testing was performed prospectively during 2020–2022 using multiple batches of in house prepared trays.³⁵ Cell culture treated 96-well microplates (Nunc™ MicroWell™, ThermoFisher Scientific cat. no. 167008). Microtitre plates with two-fold dilutions were prepared using serial dilution and two pipette tip changes (well 4 and 7) and frozen at –80 °C prior to use.³⁶ Antifungal pure substances were stored in aliquots at –80 °C and 5000 mg/L stock solutions prepared in DMSO (Sigma-Aldrich, Brøndby, Denmark). The following compounds were investigated (source of compound and final concentration range in parentheses). Anidulafungin (Pfizer A/S, Ballerup, Denmark, 0.004–4 mg/L), micafungin (Astellas Pharma Inc., Tokyo, Japan, 0.004–4 mg/L), amphotericin B (Sigma- Aldrich, 0.004–4 mg/L), fluconazole (Sigma- Aldrich, either 0.03–16, 0.03–32 or 0.06–64 mg/L), and voriconazole (Pfizer A/S, Ballerup, Denmark, 0.004–4 mg/L).³⁷ The following quality control (QC) strains *C. albicans* CNM-CL F8555, *C. krusei* ATCC 6258 and *C. parapsilosis* ATCC 22019 were included for quality control of prepared batches of plates and regular quality control, and results only accepted if MIC results for QC strains were within the target ranges. FKS sequencing was performed as previously described for *Candida* isolates with an elevated echinocandin MIC.³⁴ At the HU, EUCAST testing was performed similarly but with the following minor differences: 96-well microplates (TC-treated Corning Costar, catalogue no. 3595, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany) were used.

Data management

The number of centres were expressed as median, range, and the interquartile range (IQR=25th percentile–75th percentile) determined. Contingency analyses with Chi-square and Fisher's exact test was used to compare species proportions. Classification as wild-type (WT) and non-wild-type (NWT) and Susceptibility classification as Susceptible/ Susceptible, Increased exposure/ Resistant (S/I/R) were performed according to the available epidemiological cut off values (ECOFFs) and revised EUCAST Clinical breakpoints for fungi v. 10.0 valid from 4 February 2020.³⁸ For species where EUCAST has not set breakpoints, the recently proposed pragmatic breakpoints were applied.³⁹

Results

A total of 399 blood culture isolates from 41 centres in 17 European countries were referred (Fig. 1). The median number of referred isolates per centre was 10 (range 1–18, IQR= 9–10; for cases with mixed *Candida* infections more than one isolate was sent). The most common species were *C. albicans* (47.1%), *C. glabrata* (22.3%), *C. parapsilosis* (15.0%), *C. tropicalis* (6.3%), and *C. dubliniensis* and *C. krusei* (2.3% each). Less common species represented by one to four isolates were *C. lusitanae* (1%), *C. guilliermondii* and *C. kefyr* (0.8% each), *C. pelliculosa* and *C. inconspicua* (0.5% each), and *C. digboiensis*, *C. haemulonii*, *C. auris*, *C. rugosa* and *C. orthopsilosis* (0.3% each). The overall species distribution mirrored that of the entire patient population with the exception that fewer referred isolates were *C. auris* (1 (0.3%) versus 14 (6%), $P < 0.0001$). This difference reflected that Russian isolates ($n = 35$), which included 13 *C. auris*, were not referred (Supplementary Table 1).²⁸ However, the species distribution varied among centres. For 35/41 centres that included at least nine isolates, the proportion of *C. albicans* was $\geq 50\%$ of the isolates in 15/35 (43%) centres but $\leq 30\%$ in 7/35 (20%) centres (Turkey, $n = 3$; UK, $n = 2$; France, $n = 1$; and Belgium, $n = 1$) (105/169 isolates versus 16/69 isolates; $P < 0.0001$, Fisher's exact test) (Fig. 2). *C. glabrata* was the most common species in four centres (one each in UK, France, Slovenia and Belgium) and *C. parapsilosis* in two centres (UK and Turkey). When focusing on countries represented by more than one centre, a difference in species distribution across countries was also noted (Fig. 3). Austria had the highest *C. albicans* proportion (77%, $P = 0.003$ compared to other countries, Chi-square), France, Czech Republic and the UK the highest proportions of *C. glabrata* (25–33%, $P = 0.2145$) while the highest proportions of *C. parapsilosis* (24–26%, $P = 0.0025$ compared to other countries, Fisher's exact test) were found in Italy and Turkey.

All isolates were amphotericin B susceptible (MIC ≤ 1 mg/L) with the following species-specific modal MICs and (ranges): 0.125 mg/L (0.03–0.25 mg/L) for *C. dubliniensis*, 0.25 mg/L (0.06–1 mg/L) for *C. albicans*, 0.5 mg/L (0.03–1 mg/L) for *C. glabrata*, 0.5 (0.06–1 mg/L) for *C. parapsilosis*, 0.5 (0.125–1 mg/L) for *C. tropicalis*, and 0.5 mg/L (0.5–1 mg/L) for *C. krusei*, respectively. All *C. albicans* and *C. dubliniensis* isolates were susceptible to fluconazole and voriconazole (Table 1). However, fluconazole resistance was found in 4% of *C. tropicalis*, 12% *C. glabrata*, 17% *C. parapsilosis* and 20% other *Candida* spp. for which pragmatic breakpoints have been proposed. A correlation between fluconazole and voriconazole MICs was found both within each species and across species (Table 2). The 11 fluconazole resistant *C. glabrata* isolates derived from eight centres in six countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Italy, Sweden, Turkey and the UK) and six of these were voriconazole non-wild-type (MIC > 1 mg/L) (Tables 2 and 3). In these six countries, the acquired fluconazole resistance rate in *C. glabrata* was 23% (11/48) versus 0/41 in the remaining countries ($P = 0.0007$, Fisher's exact test). The 10 fluconazole resistant *C. parapsilosis* isolates derived from seven centres in three countries (Greece, Italy and Turkey), and all were voriconazole non-wild-type and I or R (Tables 2 and 3). In these countries, the fluconazole resistance rate in *C. parapsilosis* was 37% (10/27) versus 0/33 ($P = 0.0001$, Fisher's exact test). The fluconazole resistant *C. tropicalis* derived from a centre in Germany and was also voriconazole resistant. The fluconazole resistant *C. guilliermondii* isolate derived from Slovenia and was voriconazole non-wild-type (MIC > 4 mg/L). Finally, the fluconazole resistant *C. auris* isolate derived from the UK and had a voriconazole MIC of 2 mg/L.

Four isolates were anidulafungin resistant, three of which were cross-resistant to micafungin (Table 1). These included a *C. albicans* (from Austria), which harboured an Fks1 alteration S645P, a *C. glabrata* (from Spain) that harboured an Fks2 alteration F659I and a *C. parapsilosis* (from Turkey), which harboured an Fks1 alteration L657W. In addition, one *C. inconspicua* (from Turkey) displayed a

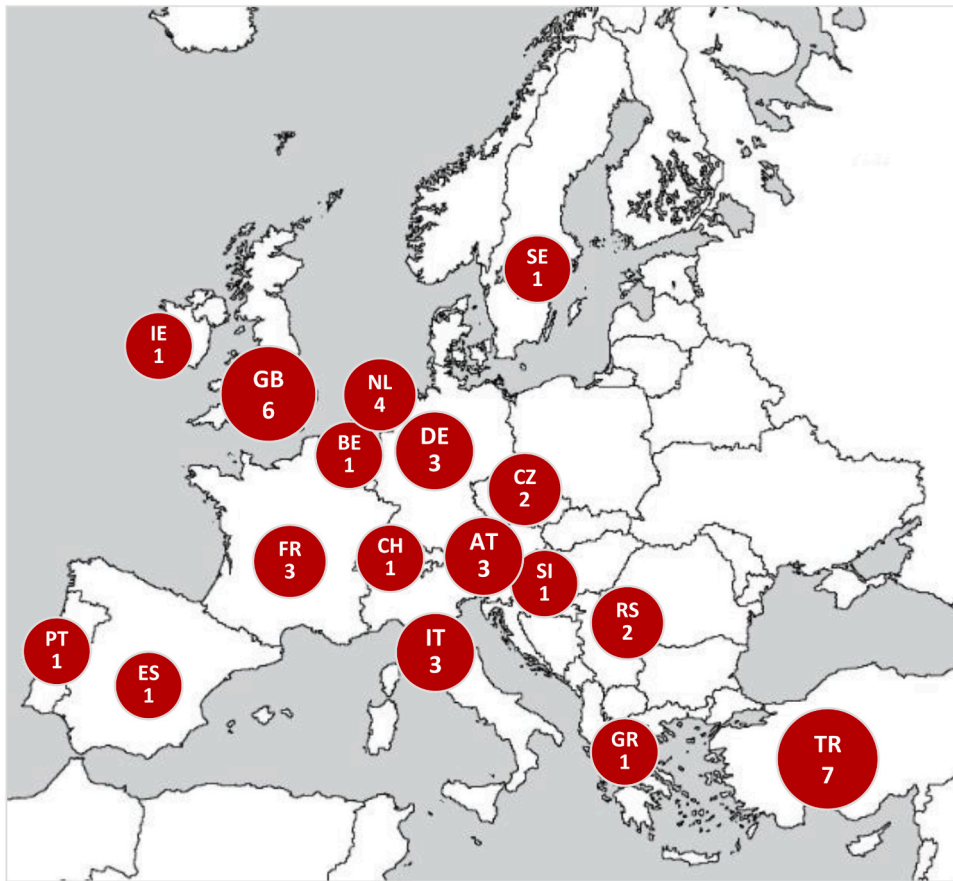


Fig. 1. Geographic location for the 41 participating centres from the 17 European countries. Two letter country codes and number of participating centres are indicated for each country. Circle diameter increase with increasing number of centres.

high anidulafungin MIC (0.125 mg/L) compared to the other *C. inconspicua* included (0.008 mg/L) and compared to the proposed pragmatic susceptibility breakpoint of 0.06 mg/L for this species.³⁹ This isolate did not have the *fks* genes sequenced. Five additional isolates were classified as micafungin resistant due to an MIC, which

was one two-fold dilution above the breakpoint but remained anidulafungin susceptible. These included two *C. albicans* (from Sweden) that harboured an R647G Fks1 alteration and for which the anidulafungin MIC was 0.008 mg/L and micafungin MIC 0.06 mg/L, one *C. glabrata* (from UK) and two *C. parapsilosis* (from UK) with

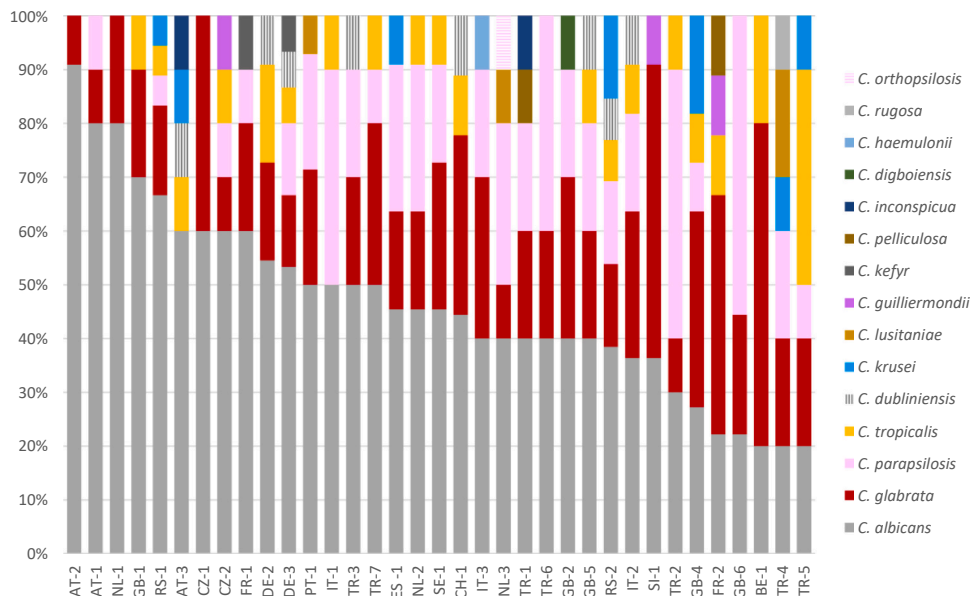


Fig. 2. Species distribution for 35/41 individual centres that included at least nine candidaemia isolates. Two letter country codes are used and a centre number. Centres are sorted according to descending proportion of *C. albicans*.

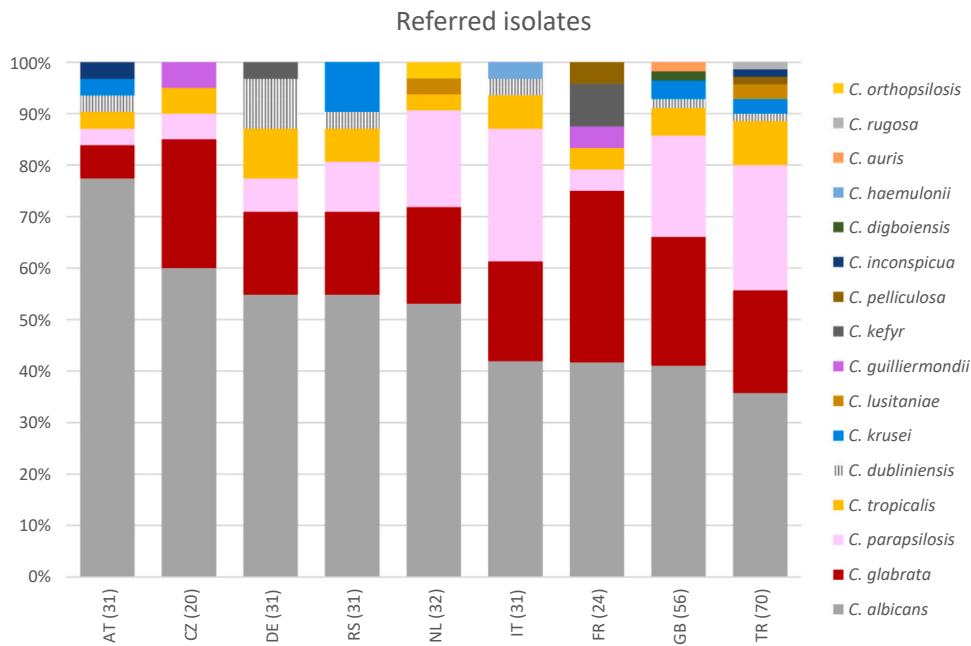


Fig. 3. Country specific species distribution for countries represented by at least 18 isolates (the number of isolates are indicated in parenthesis). Countries are sorted according to descending proportion of *C. albicans*.

Table 1
Susceptibility profile of the 399 European *Candida* blood-stream isolates for azoles and echinocandins.

Species (N)	Fluconazole				Voriconazole				Anidulafungin				Micafungin							
	S	% S	I	%I	R	%R	S/WT ^a	% S/WT	I	%I	R/NWT	% R/NWT	S	% S	R	%R	S/WT	% S/WT	R/NWT	%R/NWT
<i>C. albicans</i> (188)	188	100%	0	0%	0	0%	188	100%	0	0%	0	0%	187	99%	1	1%	185	98%	3	2%
<i>C. glabrata</i> (89)	0	0%	78	88%	11	12%	83	93%	na	na	6	7%	82	92%	1	1%	87	98%	2	2%
<i>C. parapsilosis</i> (60)	50	83%	0	0%	10	17%	50	83%	6	10%	4	7%	59	98%	1	2%	57	95%	3	5%
<i>C. tropicalis</i> (25)	24	96%	0	0%	1	4%	24	96%	0	0%	1	4%	25	100%	0	0%	25	100%	0	0%
<i>C. dubliniensis</i> (9)	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
<i>C. krusei</i> (9)	0	0%	0	0%	9	100%	9	100%	na	na	na	na	9	100%	0	0%	9	100%	0	0%
Other <i>Candida</i> (19) ^b	10	53%	1	5%	8	42%	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na

na. not applicable, neither breakpoints nor epidemiological cut-off value (ECOFF) have been set.

^a Isolates are classified as Susceptible (S), wild-type (WT), susceptible, Increased exposure (I), Resistant (R) and non-wildtype (NWT) according to EUCAST breakpoints and ECOFFs (valid 4. Feb. 2020) [1] and the pragmatic breakpoints for rare yeast proposed by Astvad et al [2].

^b Other species included *C. lusitaniae* (n=4), *C. guilliermondii* and *C. kefyr* (n=3 each), *C. pelliculosa* and *C. inconspicua* (n=2 each), and *C. digboiensis*, *C. haemulonii*, *C. auris*, *C. (Diutina) rugosa* and *C. orthopsilosis* (n=1 each).

wild-type *Fks* genes for which the micafungin MICs were only elevated one dilution above the breakpoint and modal MIC.

Discussion

We assessed *Candida* spp. distribution and antifungal resistance of candidaemia across Europe as part of the third ECMM *Candida* European multicentre observational study. Compared with the two earlier studies enrolling patients in 1997–‘99 and 2006–‘08, respectively, our study shows a decreasing proportion of *C. albicans* (56.4%, 54.0–47.1%, P=0.0027, Chi-square), increasing *C. glabrata* (13.6%, 13.8–22.3%, P= <0.0001, Chi-square) and the highest proportions of *C. parapsilosis* in Italy and Turkey.^{40,41} This confirms the changing epidemiology of candidaemia reported in other parts of the world over the past decades.^{1–11} Nevertheless, noticeable differences in species distribution were observed at the country level as exemplified by a *C. albicans* proportion ranging from 77% to 35.7%, and at the centre level with either *C. glabrata* or *C. parapsilosis* being the most common species at six of the 41 centres. While the underlying reasons for this difference are unknown, previous studies have shown that prior antifungal exposure and age impact the species distribution of subsequent candidaemia.^{42,43}

Acquired fluconazole resistance was common in *C. glabrata* and *C. parapsilosis*. *C. glabrata* has long been recognised for the ability to acquire azole and echinocandin resistance, with fluconazole resistance rates of 8.1% (range 5.6–10.1%) during 2006–16 in the global SENTRY surveillance programme,¹¹ 10.7% in Belgium during 2004–15²¹ and 13.8%, 9.1% and 10.6% in three nationwide studies covering 2011–18 in Denmark.^{4,32,44} In this context, the overall rate of 12% fluconazole resistance in *C. glabrata*, with resistant *C. glabrata* detected in several countries throughout Europe, is concerning but not surprising. In contrast, the epidemiology of acquired fluconazole resistance in *C. parapsilosis* is changing with recent clonal outbreaks in southern Europe, India, the US (California, Indiana, New York and Texas) and South-Korea.^{8,23,45–47} In agreement with this, we found fluconazole resistant *C. parapsilosis* in Greece, Italy and particularly Turkey, and a rate of 24% across these three countries. *C. parapsilosis* is a low virulent species that harbours an intrinsic mutation in the *fks* echinocandin target gene.⁴⁸ It is clinically susceptible to echinocandins despite elevated echinocandin MICs compared to *C. albicans*, although associated with a higher risk of persistence and relapse of infections in humans.^{49–51} Of note, a highly pan-echinocandin resistant *C. parapsilosis* isolate harbouring an F652S *Fks1* alteration was recently reported.⁵² Consequently, the emerging azole resistance in this species suggest a potential of multidrug resistance,

Table 2

Correlation between fluconazole and voriconazole MICs for the 399 *Candida* isolates. The clinical breakpoint for susceptibility ($S \leq X$) is indicated by a double line. The ECOFF (wild-type MIC $\leq Y$) is indicated as a single line (when breakpoints are not established).

Species (n)	Fluconazole MIC (mg/L)													Total
	0.06	≤0.125	0.125	0.25	0.5	1	2	4	8	16	32	64	> 64	
Voriconazole MIC (mg/L)														
<i>C. albicans</i> (188)														
≤0.004	2		57	54										113
≤0.016		2	3	52	14									71
0.03				1	2									3
0.06				1										1
<i>C. glabrata</i> (89)														
0.03						2	5							7
0.06							18	18						36
0.125							2	23	1					26
0.25						1			2	1				4
0.5									2	1	2	1		6
1												3	1	4
2											1	2		3
4													3	3
<i>C. parapsilosis</i> (60)														
0.008					6									6
≤0.016				1	12	16	1							30
0.03						5	8							13
0.06						1								1
0.125														
0.25									2	2	2			6
0.5										1	2			3
1												1		1
<i>C. tropicalis</i> (25)														
≤0.016		1		5	3	1								10
0.03				2	6	2								10
0.06					1	3								4
0.125														
0.25														
0.5									1					1
<i>C. dubliniensis</i> (9)														
0.008				4										4
≤0.016			1		4									5
0.03														
0.06														
<i>C. krusei</i>^a (9)														
0.25											5			5
0.5										2	2			4
Other <i>Candida</i> (19)														
≤0.016		2		2	4	1								9
0.03														0
0.06							1	1						2
0.125									2					2
0.25									1					1
0.5										1		1		2
1														0
2													1	1
> 4													2	2

^a For *C. krusei*, the ECOFFs are outside the illustrated MIC range (fluconazole: 128 mg/L and voriconazole 1 mg/L).

Table 3

Number of *C. glabrata* and *C. parapsilosis* isolates with acquired fluconazole resistance by country of isolation in the seven countries where fluconazole resistant *C. glabrata* or *C. parapsilosis* was detected. The countries are listed according to geographical location (North to South). Resistant isolates are highlighted in grey shading.

	<i>C. glabrata</i>		<i>C. parapsilosis</i>		<i>Candida</i>
	R	total	R	total	total
Sweden	1	3	0	2	11
UK	1	14	0	11	56
Belgium	2	6	0	0	10
Czech Republic	3	5	0	1	20
Italy	1	6	1	8	31
Greece	0	0	1	2	4
Turkey	3	14	8	17	70
Combined	11	48	10	41	202

which in light of its ability to cause outbreaks as emphasised during the COVID-19 pandemic is cause for concern.^{24,26}

Acquired echinocandin resistance was infrequent in this pan-European study. Three isolates were anidulafungin and micafungin resistant, two of which harboured alterations at two of the most common “strong” hot spot codons in hot spot 1 of the target genes *fks1* (S645 in *C. albicans*) and *fks2* (F659 in *C. glabrata*) known to confer pan echinocandin resistance.¹⁵ The third echinocandin resistant isolate was a *C. parapsilosis* that harboured an L657W alteration in Fks1 and was also fluconazole and voriconazole resistant. Acquired echinocandin resistance in *C. parapsilosis* is extremely rare, and to our knowledge, this specific alteration has not been described before. Moudgal et al. reported a case in 2004 of in vivo selection of an echinocandin and azole resistant *C. parapsilosis* isolate but without target gene analyses.⁵³ Subsequently in 2021, 2022 and 2023, Arastehfar et al., Siopi et al. and Ning et al. each reported

echinocandin resistant *C. parapsilosis* harbouring R658G (four isolates, three of which were isogenic and azole resistant), F652S (one isolate, azole susceptible) and S656P (one isolate, and also azole resistant), respectively.^{52,54,55} These findings suggest that the increased use of echinocandins selects emerging echinocandin and multidrug resistant *C. parapsilosis* which pose a significant concern for clinical management. Five isolates were anidulafungin susceptible but micafungin resistant. Differential susceptibility to the echinocandins may either be due to occasional misclassification of wild-type isolates with an outlier MIC, typically one dilution above the breakpoint. This occurs when the breakpoint is set at the epidemiological cut-off value (ECOFF). ECOFFs are set visually, where the MIC distribution ends, and statistically, including 95–99% of a modelled distribution. Due to inherent variation associated with phenotypic susceptibility testing, a minority of test results for wild-type isolates will fall one dilution above the ECOFF. For anidulafungin and micafungin the breakpoints are set at the ECOFFs. It is therefore plausible that the three isolates in our study without Fks alterations and with differential anidulafungin versus micafungin susceptibility classification represent misclassification of clinically susceptible wild-type isolates. However, true differential susceptibility to the three echinocandins has been documented for *C. albicans* and *C. glabrata*. Arendrup et al. demonstrated that an Fks alteration Fks2p-S663F in *C. glabrata* conferred anidulafungin and caspofungin resistance but retained susceptibility to micafungin in vitro and in vivo in an animal model.⁵⁶ Lackner et al. reported a case of clinical failure during caspofungin treatment but recovery on anidulafungin therapy for a patient treated for chronic mucocutaneous candidiasis.⁵⁷ This caspofungin non-responding *C. albicans* isolate harboured a double mutation in *fks1* resulting in R647R/G and P649P/L alterations and was by EUCAST susceptibility testing classified as anidulafungin susceptible but micafungin resistant and by Etest also caspofungin resistant. A laboratory-generated mutant only carrying a heterozygous R647G alteration retained the differential susceptibility with resistance to micafungin and susceptibility to anidulafungin. The two *C. albicans* isolates in our study, which shared this differential susceptibility phenotype (micafungin resistant but anidulafungin susceptible), harboured the same R647G alteration on both alleles. These findings support that some alterations confer clinically relevant differential susceptibility to the echinocandins, although the activity of the three agents is generally similar. The findings also support the need for testing both anidulafungin and micafungin as markers for echinocandin susceptibility and guidance of therapy as advised by EUCAST.⁵⁸

This study is associated with strengths and limitations. Strengths are that many European countries across the breadth of the continent were represented and the number of isolates per centre and country were comparable according to population, thereby avoiding an imbalanced representation of Europe. Consistent susceptibility testing was demonstrated, using the EUCAST standard reference method at experienced reference laboratories. Limitations included not all isolates from the ECMM *Candida* III study being referred for confirmatory identification and susceptibility testing. Yet the species distribution was similar in the overall case collection and the referred isolates. Given that the number of isolates per centre was limited to ~10 consecutive isolates, data should be interpreted with caution, particularly in countries with few centres. The case mix (i.e., patient cohort) at the participating centres may not reflect the nationwide epidemiology of the countries, as it is likely that the recruited centres will be biased towards tertiary centres with mycology-interested colleagues. This is especially true since the current isolate collection excluded neonates and paediatric patients (< 18 years) where *C. parapsilosis* is more frequent.²⁸ Nevertheless, as the epidemiology aligns with current published trends and neonates/paediatric candidaemia only constituted 3–3.7% of candidaemia in nationwide studies,^{4,8} we believe these limitations do not

detract from the conclusions of this study. From a technical aspect, confirmatory species identification and susceptibility testing were conducted at two different sites, with all isolates from Turkey tested at the HU as a tertiary care centre Mycology laboratory in Turkey with advanced experience in fungal diagnostics and antifungal susceptibility testing using reference microdilution methods and the remaining isolates tested at the EUCAST development laboratory hosted at the reference mycology laboratory in Denmark. However, both centres used MALDI-TOF with updated databases for identification and EUCAST E.Def 7.3 for susceptibility testing. Of note, the drug and species-specific modal MICs generated at the two centres were either identical or fell at two neighbouring MICs for the six most common species represented by at least nine isolates (data not shown), confirming consistent MIC testing performance across the two laboratories.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates a continued change in species distribution from *C. albicans* towards *C. glabrata* and *C. parapsilosis*. It confirms a high but stable fluconazole resistance rate in *C. glabrata* and a concerning emerging fluconazole resistance in *C. parapsilosis* in southern Europe, which in one isolate was combined with acquired echinocandin resistance due to a novel L657W *fks*-alteration. However, *C. auris* and other potential MDR species (e.g. *C. haemulonii* and *C. digboiensis*) were infrequently detected and acquired echinocandin resistance was overall rare.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

Outside this work the authors have the following potential conflicts to declare: MaCA has received research grants/contract work (paid to the SSI) from Amplyx, Basilea, Cidara, F2G, Gilead, Novabiotics and Scynexis, and speaker honoraria (personal fee) from Astellas, Chiesi, Gilead, MSD, and SEGES over the past 5 years. She is the current chairman of the EUCAST-AFST. SAA reports research grant from Cidara, lecture honoraria from Gilead, and travel grant from Astellas. MH reports research funding from Astellas, Gilead, MSD, Pfizer, Euroimmun, and Scynexis. PK reports grants or contracts from German Federal Ministry of Research and Education (BMBF) B-FAST (Bundesweites Forschungsnetz Angewandte Surveillance und Testung) and NAPKON (Nationales Pandemie Kohorten Netz, German National Pandemic Cohort Network) of the Network University Medicine (NUM) and the State of North Rhine-Westphalia; Consulting fees Ambu GmbH, Gilead Sciences, Mundipharma Research Limited, Noxon N.V. and Pfizer Pharma; Honoraria for lectures from Akademie für Infektionsmedizin e.V., Ambu GmbH, Astellas Pharma, BioRad Laboratories Inc., European Confederation of Medical Mycology, Gilead Sciences, GPR Academy Ruesselsheim, HELIOS Kliniken GmbH, Lahn-Dill-Kliniken GmbH, medupdate GmbH, MedMedia, MSD Sharp & Dohme GmbH, Pfizer Pharma GmbH, Scilink Comunicación Científica SC and University Hospital and LMU Munich; Participation on an Advisory Board from Ambu GmbH, Gilead Sciences, Mundipharma Research Limited and Pfizer Pharma; A pending patent currently reviewed at the German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DE 10 2021 113 007.7); Other non-

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Appendix A. Supporting information

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