Meet scientists from the EMBO communities

Zoi Lygerou
Collaboration as the key to success
Professor at the University of Patras | EMBO Young Investigator (2002–2005) | EMBO Member

For Zoi Lygerou, collaboration, locally and internationally, is crucial. "We are a small but well connected scientific community here in Greece. This has allowed us to form important complementary research infrastructures," she says. International networks complement what is possible at home. Asked what she loves most about Greece, she does not hesitate: "The sun! Seeing the view from my office and holding sun in my hand!" While government investment in research in Greece has been slow, it is improving. "There is now a realization that you cannot have innovation without a good level of investment in basic research and training," Lygerou comments. Thanks to strong ties, the Greek scientific community is advocating for a new national agency for more efficient access to funding; government campaigns promote opportunities for international students. "There is a real momentum right now. We hope it continues."

Lypsyros uses a combination of imaging, modelling, and molecular biology techniques to study the mechanisms of genome stability. Being an EMBO Young Investigator helped her establish her group. "EMBO has been instrumental," she says, both in helping her to pursue her own research, and attracting her students unique opportunities to work at core facilities—knowledge later shared with the group. "The infrastructure was state-of-the-art, we had everything we needed. I am thankful for the chance to do my research here in Greece," she says.

Zacharogianni explains that Greece is a great place to be a student. "There are so many lively and vibrant student communities in Greece with good institutes, and faculties." After her fellowship she moved into industry. The bio-inustrial medicine, says Zacharogianni, represents a significant part of the Greek scientific community. "The whole country is driving towards the biotech industry," she says.

What opportunities are available for life scientists in Greece?

Biomedical research is very attractive here. There are several institutes and research centres, for example the Foundation Pasteur Institute, the Biomedical Sciences Research Center “Alexandros Fleming”, and the Biomedical Research Foundation of the Academy of Athens. Founded in 1994, the latter is supported by the European Research Council and maintains state of the art research infrastructures, for example for imaging, and is able to participate in the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility, CERN, and others. Our government needs to support the relevant fields to allow the participation of the Greek scientific community.

What advice would you give to an early-career scientist considering a career in Greece?

It is very likely to be passionate about what you do. Research is not always easy, but there will be moments in which you will feel the satisfaction of discovery and contribution to human knowledge. This is very rewarding, but you need to be able to weather the storms. If you are persistent and patient, you will have success, even in suboptimal conditions in a country like Greece, where a researcher is not as well supported as in other countries.

A new chapter for Greek life scientists and clinical researchers has opened up in recent years. Greece now has a vibrant and growing life science community. This has allowed for the formation of new networks and infrastructures, for example for imaging, and be able to participate in the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility, CERN, and others. Our government needs to support the relevant fields to allow the participation of the Greek scientific community.

What are the current trends in the life sciences landscape of Greece?

Greece is paying a lot of attention to health- and medically-related research, which has become even more important during the pandemic. The biomedical research field, other areas related to biotechnology, and the agro-food industry need to be revitalized. Greece also needs to invest in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence and nanoelectronics, which are driving the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution, and keep up with the pace of other countries in precision medicine and biotechnology.

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Greece in numbers

- 1.7 billion euros in Horizon 2020 funding
- 181 MSCA unique participants
- 39 ERC principal investigators
- 1.7 billion euros in Horizon 2020 funding
- 2.235 EMBO members

Opportunities in Greece

EMBO Postdoctoral Fellowships
fund internationally mobile research for a period of up to two years. Five additional fellowships are reserved for those applying to work in participating countries and an interview is guaranteed provided their application passes initial quality screening. Applications open all year around.

EMBO Scientific Exchange Grants
support new international collaborations, enabling the transfer of expertise unavailable in the applicant’s laboratory. They fund research visits of up to three months. Applications open all year around.

EMBO New Venture Fellowships
help early career scientists to explore topics outside their current area and start a new research direction. They fund research visits of up to three months. Application deadline: 7 November 2022.

EMBO Core Facility Fellowships
support training for staff of core facilities that provide services to research institutions or universities. They fund international exchanges of up to one month. Applications open all year around.

The EMBO Young Investigator Programme
supports group leaders in the early stages of setting up their own independent laboratories for a period of four years. Networking is a key aspect. Application deadline: 1 April.

EMBO Advanced Collaboration Grants
fund exchange visits of group leaders with scientists in other EMBO Member States to develop or carry out collaborative projects, or to prepare joint grant proposals. Applications open all year around.

EMBO Courses & Workshops
stimulate exchanges of the latest scientific knowledge and provide training in experimental techniques. Application deadlines: 1 March and 1 August.

EMBO Lecture Courses*
train PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. Application deadline: 1 August.

EMBO Lecture Series*
fund series of lectures of EMBO Members and Young Investigators at different institutions. Applications open all year around.

EMBO Press
publishes five journals that serve the scientific community. Its aim is to provide transparent funding and scholarship opportunities for young researchers and counteract the outflow of young talent.

Facts and figures

Gross expenditure on research and development in Greece has been rising steadily over the past few years and is currently around 1.5% of GDP. The country is a member of the European Union’s Horizon 2020 framework programme and its Horizon Europe successor, which is one of the main drivers of the country’s economic growth. Research and development expenditure as a share of GDP has been rising steadily over the past few years and is currently around 1.5% of GDP. The country is a member of the European Union’s Horizon 2020 framework programme and its Horizon Europe successor, which is one of the main drivers of the country’s economic growth. Research and development expenditure as a share of GDP has been rising steadily over the past few years and is currently around 1.5% of GDP. The country is a member of the European Union’s Horizon 2020 framework programme and its Horizon Europe successor, which is one of the main drivers of the country’s economic growth. Research and development expenditure as a share of GDP has been rising steadily over the past few years and is currently around 1.5% of GDP. The country is a member of the European Union’s Horizon 2020 framework programme and its Horizon Europe successor, which is one of the main drivers of the country’s economic growth.