

Meet scientists from the EMBO communities

Alessandra Gruevska

Growing up in science

EMBO Scientific Exchange Grantee at University of Valencia in Spain

Alessandra Gruevska grew up wanting to improve people’s health. After obtaining a degree in pharmacy in her home country Macedonia, Gruevska went on to do a Master in Pharmacological Research at the University of Valencia in Spain, where she’s now completing a PhD.

As part of her PhD project, Gruevska is identifying new pharmacological targets for chronic liver disease and liver fibrosis – a process that occurs when liver tissue becomes scarred. “We found that one antiretroviral drug had protective effects on the liver, but we don’t know all the molecular mechanisms behind these effects,” she says. Thanks to her EMBO Scientific Exchange Grant, Gruevska was able to spend three months in a laboratory at the University of Florence, in Italy, to learn how to isolate and grown a specific population of liver cells called hepatic stellate cells. Hepatic stellate cells promote fibrosis in response to liver injury or long-term inflammation. “This is the first time this has ever been done in the lab,” Gruevska says.

Nikolai Klena

Peeking inside a cell’s antenna

EMBO Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Human Technopole in Italy

Klena’s PhD research is focused on primary cilia – microtubule-based organelles that protrude from the cell membrane. To EMBO Postdoctoral Fellow Nikolai Klena, cilia are some of nature’s most fascinating structures. “These hair-like organelles protrude from the cell surface help algae and single-celled eukaryotes to move around in man-made and natural environments, such as endoplasmic-reticulum storage vesicles that misfolded proteins accumulate in disease. “There’s no cure for these diseases, and we use to use autophagy as a way to remove misfolded proteins from the endoplasmic reticulum,” Klena explains.

Carmine Settembre

An escape turned into passion

Professor of Neurology at Federico II University of Naples | Group leader at the Telethon Institute of Genetics and Medicine in Pozzuoli, Italy

Carmine Settembre started to work in a lab because it was the life he had always dreamed of. Now a professor of neurology, he says he has never looked back. Now a professor of Neurology at Federico II University of Naples and a group leader at the Telethon Institute of Genetics and Medicine in Pozzuoli, Italy, Settembre leads a team of eight researchers studying the molecular mechanisms of autophagy – the process by which the body gets rid of damaged proteins and cellular components.  Settembre and his team are investigating which selective autophagy may be a great tool to treat many chronic conditions, such as endoplasmic-reticulum storage vesicles that misfolded proteins accumulate in disease. “This is very interesting, and truly, and they can in some world-class talent to help you learn and use these pieces of equipment to your advantage,” he says. Besides doing exciting science using advanced technologies, Klena also benefits from the training and network opportunities provided by EMBO. “An EMBO fellowship really opens your possibilities,” he says, living in Italy, which offers a high quality of life and a rich cultural heritage, is “the icing on the cake.”

What could be a way to reconcile the different initiatives in which EMBO can support setting standards and how scientists should be promoted? It can also support scientists reach the necessary standards and social-specific elements flatten the gradient of participation scientists from different initiatives to increase participation in the EMBO Programmes throughout Europe going in this direction.

What are current initiatives in this respect? Current initiatives in Italy are address- ing movement in research, schemes to support the best researchers in the country, and an efficient system to evaluate research. Very recently, the Ministry for Education, University and Research launched a programme to support individual investigators that was supported by the Italian EMBO Members. To help kick off this initiative, the Italian community of EMBO Members got together, ran an election, and created a steering committee of the Italian EMBO Members. This steering committee composed of 12 people and brought it to the attention of the scientific community.

How can promotion of EMBO been part of them, and in general, how would benefit from support on their initiatives that support scientists to excel and their debate should be about initiatives that support science, that is done in the entire country.

What has been part of them, and in gener-

To EMBO Postdoctoral Fellowship to join the Human Techno-
pole in Italy. There he is being studied the structure of cilia will help to elucidate heme metabolism and what goes on in disease. “We know that primary cilia are important for signalling pathways, but we really don’t know what’s in there,” Klena says.

At the Human Technopole – Italy’s new hub for research in the life sciences – Klena can take advantage of expert advice and state-of-the-art equipment. “The microscopes and the facilities are truly, incredibly, and they’re in some world-class talent to help you learn and use these pieces of equipment to your advantage.”

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inflammation. Using these and other findings, Gruevska was able to leverage her research to help further improve people’s health. After obtaining a PhD from the University of Naples, she went on to do a Master in Pharmacological Research at the University of Valencia in Spain, where she’s now completing a PhD.

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EMBO opportunities in Italy

EMBO Postdoctoral Fellowships
Fund internationally mobile researchers for a period of up to two years. Five additional fellowships are reserved for those applying to work in participating countries, and an interlocutor is guaranteed to provide assistance and initial quality screening. Applications open all year round.

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 six months. Applications open all year round.

EMBO New Venture Fellowships
Help early career scientists to explore topics outside their current area and enter a new research direction. They fund research visits of up to three months. Application deadline: 2 May 2023.

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 year. Applications open all year round.

The EMBO Young Investigator Programme
Supports group leaders in the early stages of setting up their 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 round.

EMBO Courses & Workshops
Researchers at any career stage and from any discipline in the life sciences can apply for a grant up to 700 euros to cover registration fees, travel and accommodation cost to participate at any EMBO Course or Workshop.

EMBO Lecture Courses
Train PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. Application deadline: 1 March.

EMBO Lecture Series
Fund series of lectures of EMBO Members and Young Investigators at different institutions. Applications open all year round.

EMBO Press
Publishes five journals that serve the global life science community: The EMBO Journal, EMBO Reports, EMBO Molecular Medicine, Molecular Systems Biology, and Life Science Alliance, which is published in partnership with Rockefeller University Press and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press. EMBO Press offers Open Access publication at no cost for corresponding authors based in Italy and who are not associated with a publisher and are an academic institution.

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