



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Leila Akkari

Group leader

NKI (The Netherlands Cancer Institute)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Leila Akkari is an Associate Professor and Group Leader at the Netherlands Cancer Institute in Amsterdam. In 2019, she was nominated Junior Member of the Oncode Institute and became senior member in 2023. After an MSc between Montpellier (France) and Manchester (UK), she performed her PhD studies in Cell Biology at the Institute of Molecular Genetics of Montpellier, CNRS - French National Research Center, France, and completed her postdoctoral training in cancer biology, immunology and genetics, first at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, USA, and then at the Ludwig Cancer Center in Lausanne, Switzerland. In 2017 she joined the Netherlands Cancer Institute in Amsterdam, where she established her research laboratory. Since early on in her scientific career, she has been interested in understanding the complex interactions between cancer cells and normal cells within tumors and she works towards elucidating how external signals regulate cancer malignancy. Research in her group focuses on the role of immune cells in tumor maintenance and therapeutic resistance in brain and liver cancer, in order to harness these cells in personalized anti-cancer treatments.

She is recipient of prestigious personal research grants, such as the Vidi Research Grant from the Dutch Science Research Council (NWO) in 2020 and three research grants from the Dutch Cancer Society (KWF), including the Young Investigator Grant, Bas Mulder Award in 2017. In 2020, she was selected by the renowned life sciences organization European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) for their Young Investigator Program. In 2022, she is leading a multi-million euros consortium to target brain cancer with different immunotherapies and novel nanocarriers (NWO).



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Geneviève Almouzni

Research Director

Institut Curie

Paris, France

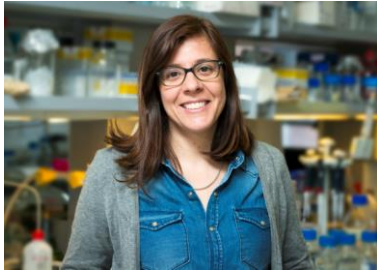
Geneviève Almouzni has a longstanding interest in supporting women in science, in her team, in her unit, her institute and in all her investment in various scientific context. She was highly engaged for the LIBRA project in EU-LIFE, convinced women facing difficulties should be supported, and exchanging, sharing experiences to evolve was a major step for the success of the project.

She is EMBO member, Member of the French Academy of Sciences, fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences, Director of the Research Center of the Institut Curie from 2013 to 2018 and (honorary director since then) is a director of research exceptional class at the CNRS and Principal Investigator at Institut Curie since 1994. She is a world leader in genome organization and function during development and health. Her research explored chromatin dynamics combining biochemistry, cell biology and physical approaches with advanced imaging and omics and she trained many scientists in this field. Active in the field of Epigenetics and European actions, she coordinated the EpiGeneSys Network of Excellence to move epigenetics towards systems biology and then the Labex DEEP with a major focus on mentoring young group leaders. She received distinctions as officer of the merit order, knight of the legion of honors, knight of the Academic Palms (2021) and benefited from competitive grants (ERC Advanced Grants and Proof concept, a Pathfinder SuperRes) and awards including Woman in Sciences FEBS / EMBO (2013) and the grand prix FRM (2014). She served on the EMBO Council, as chair of the EU-LIFE alliance, as co-chair of the European LifeTime initiative and was appointed on the ERC council in 2019, where she is chairing the working group on Gender and diversity issues.



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Maria João Amorim

Principal Investigator

IGC (Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência)

Oeiras, Portugal

My name is Maria João Amorim. I received my Ph.D. in Virology in 2007 from the University of Cambridge, UK. After 3 postdocs in zoonosis, systems biology and virology, at the NIMR and university of Cambridge, I moved to Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência in Portugal where she became a group leader in 2012. In 2022, I became an associate professor at the Faculty of Medicine, vice-director and group leader at the Católica Biomedical Research Centre, both institutions from the Universidade Católica Portuguesa. My research focuses on viral host interactions to identify novel antiviral targets and strategies. I authored 35 peer reviewed publications, co-coordinated an EU based research project during COVID pandemics with over 75 scientists from 20 countries. Over the last 10 years, I mentored more 37 students: 2 Erasmus students, 7 completed MSc students, 12 PhD students (3 completed, 5 as co-supervisor, 4 as main supervisor ongoing), 6 Post-docs (2 completed), 10 undergraduate and graduate small projects. I attracted more than >4.5 million euros to develop my research including an ERC CoG, La Caixa and HORIZON-HLTH-2023-DISEASE. My work was cited over 1000 times since 2018 and my h-index is 20 (Scopus). The expertise I can offer as a mentor relate with career choices, namely what to consider to make the right choice and on coaching activities for job interviews.



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Amelie Baud

Junior Group Leader

CRG (Centre for Genomic Regulation)

Barcelona, Spain

Career summary

2009 - 2013 PhD in Genomic Medicine and Statistics at the University of Oxford UK 2013 - 2017 Postdoc at the European Bioinformatics Institute at Cambridge, UK 2017 - 2020 Postdoc at the University of California San Diego, USA Since Oct 2021: Junior group leader at the Centre for Genomic Regulation, Barcelona

Started an independent research programme as a postdoctoral fellow supported by a 4 + 1 year postdoc fellowship from the Wellcome Trust (UK) (1 year extension for 2 maternity leaves), research project focusing on "indirect genetic effects" arising from the genes of social partners (cage mates in lab mice) Research topic: genotype to phenotype path, genetic effects arising from genes in the environment (genes of social partners, genes of the microbiota) Interdisciplinary research: computational + experimental (working with mice) More on my professional activities: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2448-0283>

Professional attributes

Creative in research (NOT in the kitchen or garden) Passionate about my research Persistent (went through many, many rejections) and confident (about the future, myself, and others; not all the time but much of it) Strong work-life balance, with two kids I care about people, getting to know them individually, helping when I can

Relevant personal information

Grew up in the east of France Like to spend time with my family and friends, be in nature Moved around France then UK (2 different cities) then US then Spain; most of that with a partner and later young children

Objectives and expectations

Making a difference for someone

Previous experience

(only mentors) Am a mentor in the BIST mentoring program, and was part of a peer-mentoring group. Informally supported/mentored several female colleagues over the years.

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Renee Beekman

Group leader

CRG (Centre for Genomic Regulation)

Barcelona, Spain

Dr. R. Beekman holds a Master of Science Degree in Molecular Medicine (2005), a Medical Degree (2007, non-practicing) and a PhD Degree in Hematology (2013), all obtained at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. She is experienced in Epigenetics, Chromatin, Three-Dimensional Chromatin Structure, Genetics, Bioinformatics, Cancer, Hematology, Acute Myeloid Leukemia and Mature Lymphoid Malignancies. She obtained her PhD Degree in the group of Prof. Dr. I.P. Touw, focusing on genetics in acute myeloid leukemia. From 2013-2019 she was a postdoctoral fellow in the groups of Prof. Dr. E. Campo and Dr. J.I. Martin-Subero in the IDIBAPS, Barcelona, Spain. During her postdoc she focused on the epigenetic characterisation of lymphoid leukemias and lymphomas. In 2018 she received the La Caixa junior leader fellowship to start her own research line to study the role of epigenetic heterogeneity and stochastic gene expression events in development and disease. In January 2020 she started as group leader in the CRG, Barcelona, Spain where she is heading the Single Cell Epigenomics and Cancer Development lab. In her current research she focuses on understanding the accumulation of epigenetic events in normal and malignant B cells using single-cell technologies as well as on using genome-editing strategies to generate and characterise lymphoma-associated pre-malignant in vitro models.

As mentor Dr. R. Beekman can offer a view on different types of research fields and on her personal journey, from translational to basic research. She can furthermore elaborate on how to adapt when moving between these different research environments. Finally, as a mother of three, she can give insight on how to combine a scientific career with having a family.



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Gabriele Bergers

Group leader

VIB-KU Leuven (Vlaams instituut voor Biotechnologie)

Leuven, Belgium

Dr. Gabriele Bergers is a Professor of Oncology at the University of Leuven and a group leader at the Vlaams Instituut Voor Biotechnologie (VIB)-Center for Cancer Biology in Leuven since 2016. Prior, she followed the faculty rank at the University of California, San Francisco, and was a Professor in the Department of Neurological Surgery and a PI in the Brain Tumor Research Center (BTRC) at the Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of California, San Francisco until 2016.

The overall research interest of her group relates to the tumor vasculature, which entails an integral and critical component of the tumor microenvironment and closely interacts with distinct cell constituents of the heterogeneous tumor community. Such crosstalk is pivotal not only for the genesis and progression of a tumor but also for the tumor's ability to resist therapeutic elimination. Besides the expanding ability of tumor vessels to fuel tumors sufficiently with oxygen and nutrients, they hinder immunosurveillance and provide a protective niche for tumor and other stem cells, thereby regulating their maintenance and propagation. Due to the substantial plasticity of tumor endothelial cells, her lab recently identified mechanisms to reinstate the vasculature's immune-supportive functions and help invigorate anti-tumor immunity.

Over the years, her group has made seminal discoveries about the function of the tumor vasculature, with its different vascular tumor niches in regulating neovascularization, inflammation, immunity, and invasion in cancer and in understanding intrinsic and adaptive resistance mechanisms of tumors to antiangiogenic and immunotherapies. For her research, Dr. Bergers has received several awards, including the Sidney Kimmel, the Sandler Opportunity, UCSF Breakthrough Biomedical Research, and the Judah Folkman award. She has been an External Advisory Board member for various universities and pharmaceutical companies. Dr. Bergers was the co-director of the U54 Tumor microenvironment Brain Tumor Center at UCSF until 2016. She is a Scientific co-founder of Oncurious.



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Valerie Borde

Research Director

Institut Curie

Paris, France

After graduating from Rennes University (France) in Biochemistry, I came to Paris VI University to get a Master and then a PhD in Molecular Pharmacology. I studied the mechanism of action of Topoisomerase II, a major target for chemotherapy, that makes breaks in the DNA.

Then for my postdoc, I decided to go to the USA, at the NIH (Bethesda, Maryland) where I began to study the process of meiotic recombination, for which it was recently discovered that it involved a new type of Topoisomerase II.

I really enjoyed these postdoc years, and it was quite successful since I published a few major papers. At the end of my 4 years postdoc, I had a first baby. We did not want to stay and live in the States, so we went back to France 6 weeks after, and there I made a second, short (one year) postdoc in Paris, while applying for a permanent researcher position at the CNRS.

I obtained this position in 2003, had a second baby, and spent 5 years as a researcher within a team, developing my own research topics. I published again some good papers.

This progressive independence and publication success incited me to set up my own research team. For this, I applied to a starting grant package which I obtained, and was selected through an international call to start my junior group at the Curie Institute, in the department led by Geneviève Almouzni at the time.

I enjoyed a lot these new responsibilities, especially the training of the PhD students and postdocs, and the freedom to lead my own research.

I also found that paradoxically, I was able to work very efficiently being a group leader, since I was no longer doing the experiments myself, and therefore was able to work from home in the evening or when needed.

After 6 years as a junior group, I had to move on, and was promoted as a senior PI at the Curie Institute, within another department.

Since then, I lead a group of around 8 persons. I also became deputy director of our department, which allows me to participate in the department direction and get to know all the scientific, organizational, and administrative decisions, and to know each member working in the department.



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My everyday life in the lab consists of managing the research projects, mentoring the PhD students and postdocs, writing papers, grant applications, reviewing papers and grant applications from others. I also try to read as much as possible the literature. I am also invited to many international meetings, which is very demanding, but always beneficial for the research and the interaction with my colleagues.

I would be happy to share my experience on how to cope and manage both the work and personal lives especially as a mother of two young children, how to manage with the different types of personalities of the lab members and the specific needs for each of them. And many other things and challenges regarding being a scientific group leader.



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Florence Cavalli

Junior Group Leader

Institut Curie

Paris, France

Junior Group leader at Institut Curie since 2020, Florence Cavalli manages a computational lab dedicated to pediatric and brain tumor cancer research.

As a bioinformatician, she has been working very closely with biologists and clinicians. She now develops her research program focusing on tumor heterogeneity in close collaboration with clinicians.

Having studied/worked in France, UK, and Canada, and now a mum of 3, she will be happy to also share her experience on career path and leadership.



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Susanna Chiocca

Director, Viruses and Cancer Unit

IEO (Istituto Europeo di Oncologia, IRCSS)

Milan, Italy

Susanna Chiocca was born in Padua, Italy. She obtained her Bachelor of Science (BS) from the University of Texas, El Paso, Texas (UTEP). In 1990 she received her PhD from the University of Texas Graduate School of Biomedical Science, MD Anderson Cancer Center, studying viral RNA splicing. Susanna Chiocca then pursued her postdoctoral studies on cancer and viruses at the Swiss Institute of Experimental Research (ISREC) in Lausanne, Switzerland and at the Research Institute for Molecular Pathology (IMP), in Vienna, Austria. In 1998 she moved to Milano, Italy to the European Institute of Oncology (IEO). In 2005, she became an independent Group Leader at IEO and since 2015 she is a IEO Unit Director. Her research interests focus on viruses and cancer, and over the last ten years on head and neck cancer.

The overall focus of Dr. Chiocca's lab is to determine the mechanisms by which oncogenic viruses and other tumor microenvironmental stresses contribute to neoplasia. Over the last ten years we have been using head and neck cancer as a model system because one category of these tumors has been shown to be etiologically driven by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) positive, while another one is not and is negative for HPV. This provides an excellent avenue to compare the effects of cancer that is driven by a virus vs. those in a cancer driven by other non-viral factors. Recently, within the EU-LIFE LIBRA project she has furthered her interest in biological and clinical sex and gender differences in cancer and through Cariplo Foundation funding she is also aiming at integrating gender in precision medicine for innovative social, professional and research practices.

Director, Viruses and Cancer Unit,
Director, WoMen in Science Program

<https://www.research.ieo.it/research-and-technology/principal-investigators/susanna-chiocca/>

<https://www.research.ieo.it/research-and-technology/translational-research-programs/women-in-science-program/>

e-mail: susanna.chiocca@ieo.it



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Ana Cvejic

Group leader

BRIC (Biotech Research and Innovation Centre)

Copenhagen, Denmark

Ana Cvejic is a Professor at the University of Copenhagen and a Group leader at the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Centre (BRIC), Denmark. In 2008 Ana received her PhD in Biochemistry at the University of Bristol, UK. She then moved to the University of Cambridge/Wellcome Sanger Institute, UK to start a Postdoctoral Fellowship, with Professor Willem Ouwehand. In 2012 Ana was awarded the CRUK Career Development Fellowship to start her independent group at the University of Cambridge. In 2015 Ana was awarded ERC Starting Grant and in 2016 EMBO Young Investigator award. In 2022 Ana was a recipient of the ERC Consolidator Grant and she moved her group to University of Copenhagen/BRIC.

Focus Areas

With the principal expertise and research interest in the molecular regulation of blood stem cell fate choices Ana's research sits at the intersection of molecular biology, genetics and systems biology and it closely couples experimental approaches and "big" biological data analysis. The aim of her group is to decipher how differentiation pathways of HSPCs are influenced by different microenvironments. To achieve that her group uses state-of-the-art single-cell data generation combined with computational analysis to establish principles of blood lineage differentiation.

Expertise

Ana's scientific expertise is in the areas of haematopoiesis, stem cell biology and single-cell technologies. She has extensive experience in grants writing, expanding research portfolio, and mentoring postdocs. Ana can also provide insight into challenges related with setting up a lab, relocating a lab, career progression, and gender-related biases.



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Sarah-Maria Fendt

Principal investigator

VIB-KU Leuven (Vlaams instituut voor Biotechnologie)

Leuven, Belgium

I am a Principal Investigator at the VIB Center for Cancer Biology and Professor of Oncology at KU Leuven, Belgium. I hold a Master degree of Science in Biochemistry from TU Munich and a PhD in Molecular Systems Biology from the ETH Zurich. I worked as postdoctoral fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), before starting my independent research program in 2013. My lab is specifically interested in understanding the role of metabolism in driving metastasis formation and in defining the principles of metabolic regulation that enable cancer cells to communicate with and respond to their environment. We apply the powerful technologies of single cell and spatial multi-omics analysis in pre-clinical mouse models and patient samples to study this interplay between cancer cells and their metabolic environment during metastasis formation. My scientific expertise ranges from biochemistry, systems biology to tumor and metastasis metabolism. I am experienced in career guidance as a mentor at the LIBRA Career Development Compass for female junior scientists and I have given multiple talks as well as round table discussions on career development. Moreover, I have been in multiple faculty search committee and I am a member of the KU Leuven research council which evaluates faculty and grant applications.



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Ilana Gabanyi

Group Leader

Gulbenkian Institute

Lisbon, Portugal

I did my bachelor and masters studies in the Universidade de Sao Paulo in Brazil. After my 1st year as a Phd student in the same University I got an international fellowship to continue my studies at the Rockefeller University in New York under the supervision of Dr Daniel Mucida, studying neuro-immune interaction in the gut. There we have uncovered an interaction between gut macrophages and the sympathetic nervous system in response to the presence of a potentially pathogenic bacteria in the gut.

For my post-doc I moved to Paris to work at the Pasteur Institute, being advised by an expert in neuroscience (PM Lledo) and an expert in immunology (G Eberl), I conducted studies in the gut-brain axis field. My post-doctoral work revealed that parts of the bacteria cell wall are able to alter brain neuronal function with implications for appetite and body temperature control. In 2023 I joined the Gulbenkian Institute as head of the Neurobiota lab to study how neurons are able to sense gut bacterial derived compounds.

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Electra Gizeli

Group leader

IMBB-FORTH (Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology of the Foundation of Research and Technology-Hellas)

Crete, Greece

Dr Electra Gizeli is a Professor at the University of Crete, Dept. of Biology and Affiliated Researcher and Deputy Director at IMBB-FORTH. A chemist by training, she carried out her graduate studies in the UK, at UCL (MSc) and Univ. of Cambridge (PhD). Following two short post-doctoral visits in Lausanne (EPFL) and the USA (Sandia National Labs), she received a BBSRC Fellowship and established her group at the Inst. of Biotechnology, Univ. of Cambridge, on acoustic biosensors and their application to bioanalytical sciences.

Upon her return to Crete in 2003 as a Faculty member of the University and IMBB-FORTH, she has expanded significantly her research interests to cover, in addition to biosensor and biophysics, molecular diagnostics, nanobiotechnology and biomedical engineering. The multidisciplinary focus of her work has led to several new findings in the fields of life sciences and nanotechnology. The transfer of innovative concepts from the lab to the society has been a constant inspiration in her group, with emphasis on molecular diagnostic tools for healthcare applications and agro/food safety. She has organized and led several evaluation studies in hospitals in Europe and Africa for novel methods for infectious diseases-testing. She is the co-founder of two spin-off companies of FORTH, both dedicated to diagnostic platforms and methodologies.

In 2022, she established the Mentoring and Career Track Scheme (MCTS) in IMBB which she is still leading together with the MCTS committee. She has ample experience on the mentoring of students and early researchers in both Greece and the UK and can assist particularly those interested in implementing novel scientific concepts derived from their research to the real world. Her large experience with writing and coordinating proposals, and specifically EU-funded Research and Innovation grants with many partners and under several calls (Path-Finder, Health, Environment etc.) can be useful to those interested to seek EU funding in a range of disciplines.

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Jacqueline Jacobs

Group leader

NKI (The Netherlands Cancer Institute)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Jacqueline Jacobs studied Biology, with specialization in Medical Biology, at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, which included two research stays of 6-9 months each, including at the Uppsala University in Sweden. She obtained her BSc+MSc degree in 1996 with highest honors (cum laude, top 1% in the Netherlands).

From 1996-2000 she performed her PhD studies at the department of Molecular Carcinogenesis of the Netherlands Cancer Institute (NKI) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, with Dr. Maarten van Lohuizen, working on mammalian Polycomb-group genes and the control of oncogenic transformation and cellular senescence, as well as on functional genetic screens in mammalian cells. She received her PhD degree in 2000 from the University of Utrecht, with highest honors (cum laude, top 5% in the Netherlands).

In 2000 and 2001 she stayed 2 years longer as a postdoc with Prof. dr. Maarten van Lohuizen at the NKI. At the start of 2002 she moved to New York, USA, for a postdoctoral fellowship position with Prof. dr. Titia de Lange at the Rockefeller University, NY, USA, fully funded by a personal fellowship from the Dutch Cancer Society. In July 2004 she returned to the Netherlands Cancer Institute to complete the remaining half year of her 3-year fellowship at the department of Molecular Genetics.

From 2005 to 2008 she was appointed as Postdoctoral research associate at the NKI, funded by own grant support.

As of June 2008 she was appointed as NKI Junior Group Leader (assistant professor level, tenure-track), also fully funded by own grant support. In September 2012 she was awarded with tenure and appointed as Group Leader (associate professor level) and permanent staff member, first at the department of Molecular Oncology and since May 2017 at the department of Oncogenomics of the NKI.

Her work has been funded by personal grants from the Dutch Research Council (VIDI scheme) and the ERC (ERC starting grant) as well as by project funding from the Dutch



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Cancer Society, the Dutch Research Council and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Marie-Sklodowska-Curie ITN grant).

Jacqueline Jacobs (born 1973, in the Netherlands) is mother of 3 children, first one born in 2003 during her postdoc in the US, the 2nd born in 2005 during her research associate position at NKI, and the 3rd born in 2008 during the start of her tenure track at NKI. Since 2016 she is a single parent.

Summary scientific achievements

Early in her career, Jacqueline Jacobs made key discoveries on how Polycomb-group and T-box transcriptional repressors control cellular senescence and impact cancer development, and how telomere deprotection induces senescence (1-4). Since independence, the Jacobs lab made seminal contributions to the current understanding of DNA repair at telomeres and DNA double-strand breaks, and the mechanisms underlying cancer therapy resistance. These include identifying crucial roles of the ubiquitin ligase RNF8, the HORMA domain protein MAD2L2, and the shieldin complex (5-9). In addition, the lab revealed key aspects of how chromatin controls DNA repair at telomeres and DSBs (10-12), and more recently discovered how MAD2L2, as part of POL η , protects stalled replication forks (13).

Expertise: Molecular biology, Cell biology, Genetics, Functional genetic screens

Current focus areas: Genome stability, Telomeres, DNA repair, DNA replication.



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Helena Kilpinen

Group leader

FIMM (Finnish Institute for Molecular Medicine)

Helsinki, Finland

Dr. Helena Kilpinen is an assistant professor in genome biology at the Helsinki Institute of Life Science (HiLIFE) and a research group leader at the Institute for Molecular Medicine (FIMM) and Neuroscience Center at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Helena received her PhD from the University of Helsinki in 2011 where she studied the genetic mechanisms underlying autism spectrum disorders. For her postdoctoral training, she transitioned to functional genomics, studying how DNA sequence variation influences different levels of gene regulation in human cells, first at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, and then at the European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI) in Cambridge, UK. Helena started her research group in 2016, jointly at the UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health in London and the Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridge, UK, where she held a MRC eMedLab Career Development Fellowship in Medical Bioinformatics. Helena's group moved to the University of Helsinki in June 2020. Her group studies how genetic variation causes variability in cellular phenotypes, in particular during human neurodevelopment, and contributes to differential susceptibility to diseases, both common and rare.



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Aleksandra (Ola) Kołodziejczyk

Group leader

IIMCB (International Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology)

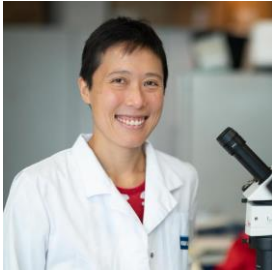
Warsaw, Poland

Aleksandra specializes in exploring genomic, metabolic, and immunological aspects of gastrointestinal health. Her research involves utilizing both experimental and computational approaches to elucidate the mechanisms underpinning chronic gut and liver diseases. Her work delves into cellular-level phenotypes, associated niches, and the intricate interplay between the host and microbiota. In addition, she possesses over a decade of experience in single-cell RNA sequencing, encompassing both experiments and data analysis.

Aleksandra is also available to discuss topics related to career mobility in the scientific field, as she has accumulated extensive experience in this realm. Her educational journey includes a Bachelor's degree from the University of Perugia in Italy, a Master's degree from the University of Heidelberg in Germany, a PhD from the University of Cambridge, EMBL EBI, and the Wellcome Sanger Institute in the UK, and a postdoctoral fellowship at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel. Currently, she serves as a Principal Investigator at the IIMCB in Poland. Notably, Aleksandra has been awarded an EMBO Long-Term Fellowship and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA) Individual Fellowship. She has also assisted numerous colleagues in preparing MSCA applications and can provide guidance on crafting your own application, highlighting key areas of focus and relevant elements from your CV.

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Lynette Lim

Group leader

VIB-KU Leuven

Leuven, Belgium

Lynette Lim is a neurodevelopmental biologist, who works on how brain circuits are formed, focusing on the specification and maturation of cortical inhibitory neurons. The Lim lab use genetic models, spatial and single-cell transcriptomics to define how developmental programmes drive neuronal diversity and cortical circuit formation. Originally from Singapore, Lynette obtained her PhD at the National University of Singapore in 2007, under Prof Markus Wenk. Her thesis work focused on lipid metabolism in neurons. In 2012, she was awarded a fellowship from the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) and joined the lab of Oscar Marin, first at the Instituto de Neurociencia, Spain (2012-2014), then at King's College London (2014-2019). During her postdoctoral training in the Marin lab, she has published seminal findings on how early developmental programmes shape brain wiring.

Her work has been published in numerous top tier journals such as Science, Nature Neuroscience, and Neuron, and is recognised an emerging leader in the field in cortical circuit assembly. In 2019, she was awarded, but respectfully declined, the Wellcome Trust Sir Henry Dale Fellowship. In 2020, she was appointed group leader at the Flanders (Vlaamsch) Institute of Biotechnology, Center for Brain and Disease (VIB-CBD), and Assistant Professor at the University of Leuven (KUL) in Belgium. Since 2020, her work has been successfully funded by the research foundation in Flanders (FWO). In 2021, she was one of 13 top researchers who was awarded the flagship FWO Odysseus grant, which aims to encourage excellent researchers to come and work in Flanders and establish themselves within the Flemish research community.



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Saskia Lippens

Head of Bioimaging Core; Deputy Technology Director

VIB (Vlaams Instituut voor Biotechnologie)

Gent, Belgium

Saskia Lippens holds a Ph.D. in Life Sciences - Biotechnology, which she earned from Ghent University. With a career spanning over a decade, she boasts a rich background in fundamental Life Sciences research at both Ghent University and the University of Lausanne. Upon her return to Belgium, she decided to shift her focus from conducting her own research to facilitating scientific progress in a supportive role. This transformative journey began in 2012 when she joined the effort to launch VIB's BioImaging Core. Initially, her primary responsibilities revolved around implementing volume EM and developing workflows for correlative light and electron microscopy. These endeavors were aimed at serving diverse research domains within the Life Sciences field. In 2017, Saskia ascended to the position of Head of the VIB Bioimaging Core, allowing her to further enhance the core's capabilities and services.

In 2023, she assumed the role of Deputy Technology Director at VIB Technologies. This program has evolved to encompass a formidable team of over 100 tech-savvy professionals, all dedicated to empowering life science research through their profound technological expertise. Saskia is deeply passionate about interdisciplinary collaboration and the creation of frameworks that attract, nurture, and cultivate the talent necessary for driving future technologies. Her career trajectory is marked by a commitment to interdisciplinary work, innovation, and the convergence of technology and science.

As a mentor, Saskia offers valuable insights on strengthening transferable skills, which are essential for careers extending beyond the traditional scientific track. She serves as a sounding board for individuals interested in pursuing careers in core facilities or other enabling units within the life science environment.

Notably, within her institute, she was the first woman appointed as Head of a Core facility. Saskia balances her career with her role as a partner and mother of two teenagers. High on her list of priorities are well-being and inclusivity, and she provides support to mentees who may encounter challenges related to these aspects in their own environments.



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Tineke Lenstra

Group leader

NKI (The Netherlands Cancer Institute)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

I have been a group leader at the Netherlands Cancer Institute (NKI) and Oncode Institute for ~7 years, focusing on transcription dynamics in single cells. Over the years, I have followed multiple mentoring/leadership courses from organizations such as EMBO, NIH and True Colors. In addition to mentoring the members of my group, I am a postdoc mentor at NKI and hopefully soon for EU-LIFE. I believe that being a good mentor is an important part of my job and that good mentorship can make a large difference for the development, motivation and skills of future scientists.



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Reini Luco

Group leader

Institut Curie

Paris, France

My scientific trip started at the Hospital Clinic of Barcelona as a PhD student at Jorge Ferrer's lab (Spain). This is the first time I heard the word chromatin and I could never separate from it ever again. In my PhD, I studied the role of histone marks in spatially organising in the nuclear space genes relevant for an inherited type of diabetes using in vivo mouse models. During my postdoc at the NIH in Tom Misteli's lab (USA), my passion for chromatin exponentially increased when I realised that it can go beyond the DNA and also regulate RNA splicing. This seminal discovery allowed me to build my own research group in 2013 at the Institut de Génétique Humaine in Montpellier (France), where I continued to study the global role of histone marks in defining cell type-specific splicing patterns. By 2022, change knocked at my door again, and the lab moved to the Institut Curie where we are developing CRISPR epigenetic and RNA editing tools, to better understand the leading role of histone marks in establishing cell type-specific splicing patterns essential for the acquisition of novel phenotypic traits characteristic of pro-metastatic invasive cells.

So why am I doing this? In Montpellier I got the opportunity to become a mentor of first year female PhD students in a program called Women in Science. I realized that my role was not only to support you to gain self-confidence, but also to give you the space to express yourselves with no judgement and inspire you with new ideas. I liked it so much, that when I moved to Paris, I enrolled in the same program. I know you fear the lack of stability and private life from our job, but I am here to show you that it is possible, and YOU can do it too. So dare :)



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Henri van Luenen

Director of Operations

NKI (The Netherlands Cancer Institute)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

My name is Henri van Luenen and I was born in 1963. Since 1987 I have been working at the Netherlands Cancer Institute (NKI) in Amsterdam. I started as an undergraduate student. After two short projects I was offered a position as PhD student which I gladly accepted. I started to work on a very ambitious project, hypomethylation of DNA and the relationship with cancer, but 3 years into this project I switched completely the topic of my research because it was getting a bit too risky. During the next 3 years I studied the mechanism of transposition of the DNA transposon Tc3 in *C. elegans*. It was a very successful period and my PI asked me to continue the research as a postdoc after I finished my PhD; which I did. While enjoying doing research I also got involved in management tasks, first small but gradually bigger tasks. In 1999 I applied for the position of director of operations of the NKI. I was appointed in that position and I am still doing this with much enthusiasm and satisfaction. In the first few years I continued to do research but some 10 years ago I stopped that because the management tasks and responsibilities were growing. During my appointment as a researcher and later as director of operations, I have on many occasions witnessed and/or discussed issues related to career and personal development. I would be more than happy to support female early career researchers in an important phase of their career by mentoring them.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Barbara Maier

Principal Investigator

CeMM (Research Center for Molecular Medicine of the Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Vienna, Austria

I am appointed as Principal Investigator at CeMM since 01/2021 and currently lead a team of 5 young scientists, with several additions planned for 2024. Prior to becoming a group leader, I completed my postdoctoral training at Icahn School of Medicine (Mount Sinai) in New York. My research is focused on tumor immunology and cancer immunotherapy. In my lab, we are studying how tumor-derived signals reprogram local and distant immune and stromal niches fostering anti tumor immunity. We work with high-dimensional data (single cell RNA sequencing and imaging), human samples and murine models, and a variety of immunology techniques.

Within the EU life mentoring programme, I offer advice and mentorship on the following topics:

- Navigating challenges of completing a successful postdoc
- Finalizing your postdoc: publication, planning next career steps
- Transition from postdoc to group leader
- Starting your research group: developing your research plan, first hires, first projects, first grants
- Applying for an ERC starting grant
- Personal & career development'

<https://cemm.at/research/groups/barbara-maier-group>



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Hilde Nelissen

Group leader

VIB-Ghent University

Gent, Belgium

Hilde Nelissen is group leader at the Center for Plant Systems Biology at the VIB and Ghent University. Her research career has focused on the central biological question: How do growth processes determine final plant organ size? Initially, she approached this using molecular biology studying Arabidopsis leaf development. As her interest shifted towards applied research, Hilde redirected her focus to maize. What started as translational research to bring knowledge from Arabidopsis to crops and from the lab to the field, gradually developed into a research line with the goal to decipher the instructor networks that govern leaf size, organ growth and ultimately yield in maize. Because plant organ size control is an important yield component that is also severely impacted by climate change, the teams ultimate goal is to deepen our understanding of the growth regulatory networks to achieve climate resilient crops. To address these biological questions, the team implements a range of molecular and phenotyping technologies, including single cell and spatial transcriptomics. Hilde is currently the co-chair of the spatial omics committee of the Plant Cell Atlas initiative. At Ghent University, Hilde is a lecturer for the courses 'Academic Storytelling', 'Plant Research Technologies' and 'Plant Yield'. Our team aims to create an inclusive atmosphere that stimulates critical thinking, creativity, team work, personal development, job satisfaction, personal fulfillment, mutual respect, scientific transparency and research ethics, while leaving room for serendipity.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Evgenia Ntini

Principal investigator

IMBB-FORTH (Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology of the Foundation of Research and Technology-Hellas)

Crete, Greece

I joined the faculty of IMBB FORTH in September 2021, and since then, I have been leading a dynamic research group of young scientists (<https://ntinilab.com>). In 2022, with the support of a Fondation Santé research grant, I recruited a PhD student, Christos Katsioulas, who was subsequently awarded an H.F.R.I. fellowship under my mentorship, and was also offered a prestigious Fondation Santé fellowship. Additionally, I have supervised three Master's theses, two completed in 2023: Ms Sofia Perdikari was recently accepted as a PhD fellow in a MarieCurie (MSCA) Doctoral Network (RBP-ReguNET), and Ms Nikoleta Pateraki is currently enrolled in the ERASMUS programme, visiting Prof. E. Leucci's lab at KU Leuven, Belgium. She will then pursue her PhD starting in late 2024. As a mentor, I have actively supported and motivated my group members and students to attend workshops and conferences, and summer schools (<https://www.ntinilab.com/news>). This act has not only enhanced the development of their interpersonal and networking skills but also facilitated scientific exchange. For example, my group members have attended the International summer school at IMBB Mainz 2023 in 'Gene regulation, Epigenetics and DNA damage' (attended by Ms Pateraki), the NGS School 2023 in Poland (A. Kozonakis), the RNA summer school 2023, CEITEC Brno (C. Katsioulas), the Summer School 2022 on Ntini, Evgenia CV Chromatin Biology, Helmholtz Munich (C. Katsioulas), as well as have given talks and poster presentations at conferences (for instance, HSBMB 2023).

Furthermore, for two continuous years I have secured financial support from the RNA society to hold a 'Cretan RNA salon' with monthly invited presentations from PIs and senior postdocs from Greece and abroad, promoting the active participation and interactive attendance of students and young researchers.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors

Education

- 2005 – 2009 Department of Developmental Biology, University of Göttingen, Germany PhD in Biology, summa cum laude
- 2000 – 2005 Department of Biology, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece Diploma in Biology

Positions

- 2021 – Present Principal Researcher, Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, FORTH
- 2018 – 2021 Postdoctoral Research Scientist, Dept. Mathematics and Computer Science, Freie Universität Berlin
- 2014 – 2018 Postdoctoral Research Fellow (Alexander-von-Humboldt), Max-Planck institute for Molecular Genetics
- 2011 – 2013 Postdoctoral Researcher, Dept. Molecular Biology and Genetics, Aarhus University, Denmark
- 2010 Research Assistant, Dept. Developmental Biology, University of Göttingen, Germany
- 2005 – 2009 Graduate Student, Dept. Developmental Biology, University of Göttingen, Germany

Complete list of publications

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/myncbi/evgenia.ntini.1/bibliography/public/>
- Bibliometric profile (Google scholars): • > 3,737 citations • h-index 14

Supervision & Mentorship

- 2021 – Present 1 PhD student/ 3 Master's students/ 4 Undergraduate (BSc Thesis)/ 2 Internships Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, FORTH
- 2014 – 2021 3 PhD students, 2 M.Sc. students, Max-Planck Institute of Molecular Genetics/ Freie Universität Berlin (co-supervision in the labs of U. Ørom and A. Marsico)



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors

I have attended an EMBO Lab Leadership Group Leader Course (2022). I am also participating as a mentor in the Mentoring and Career Track Scheme directed by Prof. Gizeli at IMBB FORTH.

Eligible leaves and obligations

- Maternity leave 04/2019 – 02/2020
- Single parenting while moving abroad 05/2021 – 08/2021



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Leïla Perié

Group Leader

Institut Curie

Paris, France

Trained as an engineer, Leïla Perié did a PhD in experimental immunology at Institut Cochin in France. She then did a postdoc in the Netherlands in the lab of Ton Schumacher at the Netherland Cancer Institute and the lab of Rob de Boer at Utrecht University. She studied hematopoiesis and T cell at the single cell level, mixing experimental and theoretical work. Since 2015, Leïla Perié head a group the Curie Institute in France. Her lab is interested in understanding the hematopoietic tree at the single cell level and combines different experimental and mathematical/computational approaches of single cell lineage tracing to study blood cells production. Leïla is also the head of the single cell core facility of her institute. She is the mother of 2 and spends quite some time thinking about how we do research and why. She is also involved in a program developing participatory research. **



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Eliane Piaggio

Research Director

Institut Curie

Paris, France

My research has been focused in the field of immunopathology and immunotherapy for more than 20 years, with an expertise in T cell biology. I obtained a degree in biochemistry and a PhD in Immunology at the National University of Rosario. I did my postdoctoral studies in France and I am currently Research Director at INSERM. I direct the "Translational Immunotherapy Team" at the Institut Curie in Paris, and our team is part of the First French Cancer Immunotherapy Center. My main contributions have been in the field of regulatory T cell-based immunotherapy applied to infectious diseases, autoimmunity, transplantation, and more recently, cancer. My team is interested in the development of new immunotherapies, applicable to patients, using massive single cell sequencing techniques. I am co-founder of Egle-Therapeutics, a biotechnology company developing Treg-based immunotherapies. I have mentored more than 50 students from many different horizons, teaching them how to combine research, training, and knowledge exchange in an open collaborative frame where ethics and environment are respected, which is one of my main and most appreciated missions as women in science.

eliane.piaggio@curie.fr

<https://institut-curie.org/team/piaggio>

EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Laure Plantard

Light Microscopy Expert

FMI (Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research)

Basel, Switzerland

Since 2012, I have worked as a light microscopy specialist in an imaging facility, currently at the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research in Basel. After my postdocs, joining a microscope facility was the perfect way to have a career combining some of my essential requirements namely working in an academic environment, making full use of my years of experience as a biologist, having a very technical aspect to my work and working with people. I would be very happy to mentor people who are considering various career paths. In addition, as I have worked in close collaboration with many teams and researchers at all levels in 5 countries and more than 8 internationally renowned research institutions, I would be happy to share my experience in selecting a lab or an institute for your next step in science.

Professional experience

Since 2020: Light microscopy expert at the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research, Basel, Switzerland

- 2018-2020: Senior Light Microscopy specialist at the Light Microscope Facility, MPI-CBG, Dresden, Germany
- 2012-2018: Light Microscopy specialist at the Core Facility for Integrated Microscopy, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2009-2011: Post-doc at EMBL, Heidelberg, Germany
- 2005-2009: Post-doc at Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden.

Education

- Ph.D. in Life Sciences, University of Lausanne, Switzerland
- M.Sc. in Biology and Health, University of Montpellier, France
- B.Sc. in Biology, University of Lille and University of Bourgogne in Dijon, France



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Panayiota Poirazi

Research Director

IMBB-FORTH (Institute of Molecular Biology and
Biotechnology of the Foundation of Research and
Technology-Hellas)

Crete, Greece

Panayiota Poirazi is a research director at IMBB-FORTH and leads the Dendrites lab (www.dendrites.gr). She has a BSc in Mathematics and a Masters and PhD in Biomedical Engineering. Her lab uses computational modelling and experiments in rodents to investigate the role of dendrites in complex brain functions. In previous years, her lab also used bioinformatics techniques to study gene regulatory networks and microRNA-mediated regulation.

She can advise on issues related to academic careers. Due to her multidisciplinary background, she has experience navigating different disciplines and integrating different skills/concepts. She can also advise on the challenges faced by women in primarily male-dominated fields such as computational neuroscience and on work-life balance. She has experience with European funding (ERC, EIC, Marie Curie) and can also offer insights about preparing successful applications for these funding agencies.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Helene Robert Boisivon

Group leader

CEITEC Masaryk University

Brno, Czech Republic

I am a research group leader at CEITEC Masaryk University since 2017. Our team studies the effect of warm temperatures and other cues on plant reproduction and seed development in *Arabidopsis thaliana* and *Brassica napus*. We have expertise in molecular biology, genetics, microscopy, tissue culture, among other things. Prior joining CEITEC, I have studied in France (University of Rouen and ENS Lyon), did my PhD studies in Leiden, The Netherlands (2002-2007) and a post-doc at the PSB-VIB in Ghent, Belgium (2008-2012). I moved to Brno in autumn 2012 with my family.

We are a French-speaking family, but never lived in France. I have two kids, now teenagers, who had to learn Czech, when arriving in Brno. I may be helpful to guide female postdocs on issues related to mobility with a family (even so I know every situation is unique). In addition, I am one of the few female foreign group leaders in my institute. I am available to share my experience and the do's / don'ts of working and leading a research group in such environment.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Laura de Rooij

Group Leader

CeMM (Research Center for Molecular Medicine of the Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Vienna, Austria

Laura de Rooij studied biomedical sciences at the University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands). She then joined the Stem Cell and Cancer Research Institute at McMaster University in Hamilton (Canada), where she studied the role of RNA-binding proteins in leukemic stem cells via an in vivo two-step CRISPR-Cas9-mediated screening approach. For her postdoctoral studies, she returned to Europe to work under the mentorship of Professor Carmeliet in the lab of Angiogenesis and Vascular Metabolism at VIB-KU Leuven (Belgium). Here, she spearheaded numerous single-cell transcriptome atlases of endothelial cells, generated from a diverse range of tissues, preclinical models and clinical patient material. In September 2022, Laura moved to Vienna (Austria) to lead her own group at The CeMM Research Center for Molecular Medicine of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, focusing on endothelial cell heterogeneity in vascular aging. Things she would be happy to cover as a mentor include:

- Sharing of knowledge obtained during her years as a traveling academic
- How to balance ambitious scientific projects with a healthy life outside of the lab
- The two-body problem in academia
- How and when to make the transition from postdoc to PI
- Perhaps most important: the wisdom of her mistakes



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Jenny Russinova

Group leader

VIB-Ghent University (Vlaams Instituut voor
Biotechnologie)

Ghent, Belgium

Eugenia (Jenny) Russinova is a group leader at the Center for Plant Systems Biology, VIB and a professor at Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium. She completed her BSc and MSc from Sofia University, Sofia, Bulgaria, her PhD from De Montfort University, Leicester, UK and did postdoctoral training at Wageningen University, Wageningen, The Netherlands. Her work examining the brassinosteroid signaling pathway has provided key information on the subcellular localization and trafficking of brassinosteroid receptor complex and how downstream factors such as the GSK3-like kinases crosstalk with other signaling pathways. Currently, Dr. Russinova is exploring the regulation of brassinosteroid homeostasis. Dr. Russinova serves as a reviewing editor for *The Plant Cell* (2015-) and *PCP* (2021-) and she is a member of EMBO (2018-) and of the National Academy of Sciences (2022-).



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Colinda Scheele

Group leader

VIB-KU Leuven

Leuven, Belgium

Colinda Scheele is a junior group leader at VIB-KU Leuven Center for Cancer Biology as of June 2020 in Leuven, Belgium. Colinda received a Master in Biomedical Sciences from Utrecht University. She performed her PhD research in the lab of Prof. Jacco van Rheenen (at the Hubrecht Institute (Utrecht) and the Netherlands Cancer Institute (Amsterdam)) which she completed in 2020 with highest honours.

During this time, she pioneered unbiased lineage tracing approaches, 3D whole organ imaging techniques and intravital microscopy strategies to study mammary stem cell dynamics and branching morphogenesis (Scheele*, Hannezo* et al., 2017, Nature; Hannezo*, Scheele* et al., 2017, Cell; Corominas-Murtra*, Scheele* et al., 2020, PNAS). She received several awards for her work, including the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds fellowship and the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek award.

Directly after her PhD she started her independent group at VIB Center for Cancer Biology and KU Leuven (Belgium). Her lab studies how healthy mammary tissue architecture prevents or promotes the different steps of tumorigenesis. Her lab uses advanced imaging approaches and organoid models. These tools are complemented with (spatial) omics and quantitative modelling to further elucidate the mechanisms of tissue transformation.

I am open to discussing science in general, (breast) cancer, organoids, and imaging more specifically. In addition, I am very happy to share my personal experiences and advice on transitioning to an independent PI position at an early career stage (both the pro's and con's).

EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Kyriaki Sidiropoulou

Principal investigator

University of Crete

Crete, Greece

Prof. Kyriaki Sidiropoulou (<http://www.sidiropouloulab.com/home>) is the principal investigator in the Neurophysiology and Behavioral Laboratory (NBL) at the Department of Biology in the University of Crete since 2012. She is currently Associate Professor of Neurophysiology. She received her Ph.D. from Rosalind Franklin University of Health and Sciences/The Chicago Medical School in 2003, under the supervision of late Dr. Francis White. She then completed post-doctoral work at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Crete and at the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology of the Foundation of Research and Technology-Hellas (IMBB-FORTH). Her laboratory uses a multi-disciplinary approach, including behavioral, electrophysiological, histological and computational techniques, to investigate the cellular mechanisms of cognitive processes, particularly working memory and long-term memory, in control mice and mouse models of neuropsychiatric diseases. She has published 39 scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals, many of them in high impact journals such as PNAS, Nature Neuroscience, Nature Communications and Cell Metabolism. She has been funded by the European Innovation Council, NIH, Marie-Curie funding schemes, a NARSAD young investigator award and national grants for her research. She is a member of the European Dana Alliance for the Brain and has served as President, General Secretary and Treasurer of the Hellenic Society for Neuroscience. Furthermore, she was an ordinary member of the EBBS executive committee from 2019-2022. She has mentored more than 40 undergraduate students as well as 8 Master's thesis students and 6 Ph.D. students. She is currently mentoring a postdoctoral fellow. Prof. Sidiropoulou is also the Erasmus academic coordinator at the Dept of Biology, University of Crete.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Charlotte Soneson

Research Associate

Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research

Basel, Switzerland

Charlotte Soneson is a research associate in the Computational Biology platform at the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research in Basel, Switzerland, where her work focuses on analysis of data from various high-throughput (omics and other) modalities. She obtained her PhD in mathematics from Lund University, followed by positions in the Bioinformatics Core Facility at the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics in Lausanne, and a postdoc at the University of Zurich. Development and benchmarking of scientific software tools for analysis of biological data is another important part of Charlotte's work, and she is engaged in the Bioconductor project ([Bioconductor - Home](#)) as a package developer, secretary of the technical advisory board and co-chair of the teaching committee. More information can be found at [Charlotte Soneson - Brief CV \(csoneson.github.io\)](#).

EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Katrine Sonne-Hansen

Head of Strategic Research Support

BRIC (Biotech Research and Innovation Centre)

Copenhagen, Denmark

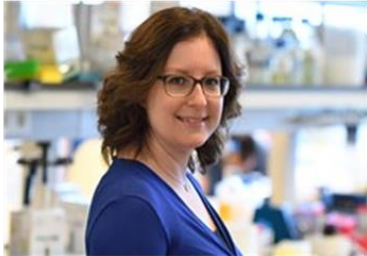
I hold a MSc in biology (2001), a PhD in Health and Medical Science (2005) and have research experience from the Danish Cancer Society (2-year postdoc). In 2009, I joined the Biotech Research and Innovation Centre, BRIC as a research coordinator (grant management and science communication). Since 2015, I have built and headed an interdisciplinary team with responsibilities for pre-award grant support, scientific project management, science communication, researcher talent development (PhD and postdoc training programmes) and international collaborations. Today, I am part of BRIC's Management Team, spearheading the centre's organizational development, talent programmes and international relations.

CORE EXPERTISE

- Leadership of processes, projects and people
- Organisational development
- Strategic partnerships and stakeholder relations
- Research talent development programmes
- Fundraising and grant strategies
- Science communication, outreach and media
- Indicators and impact-oriented evaluations

EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Daniela Thommen

Group leader

NKI (The Netherlands Cancer Institute)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Daniela Thommen is a Group Leader and permanent staff member at the Netherlands Cancer Institute. She received her MD and PhD from the University of Basel, Switzerland. She then trained and specialized as a medical oncologist in Switzerland. In parallel to her clinical training, she worked as a research fellow in tumor immunology in the lab of Prof. Alfred Zippelius at the Department of Biomedicine in Basel. In 2016, she joined the lab of Prof. Ton Schumacher at the Netherlands Cancer Institute in Amsterdam as a postdoctoral fellow. In 2020 she started her own lab at the Netherlands Cancer Institute as a Junior Group Leader and received tenure in 2023. Daniela Thommen has been recognized by multiple personal distinctions including a KWF Bas Mulder Award (2018), the Swiss Pfizer Research Prize in Oncology (2019), a NWO VIDI (2022) and an Aspasia award (2023).

Focus areas

Thommen's research aims at connecting clinical questions with functional analyses in human cancer tissues. To this end, her lab is developing and using patient-derived 3D tumor models that maintain the human tumor microenvironment and allow to functionally perturb this ecosystem. They are applying these technologies to understand the role of intratumoral immune cell heterogeneity for therapy response and to develop novel biomarkers and personalized immunotherapy strategies.

Expertise

Daniela Thommen's scientific expertise relates to the areas of immunology, bioengineering and translational oncology. In addition, she has ample experience with mentoring, either as a mentee herself or as a mentor for PhDs, postdocs and young oncologists. She can also offer insights into the challenges of combining clinics and research, how to plan and pursue a scientific career, how to get funded, and how to (not) achieve a work life balance.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Moritz Treeck

Group leader

IGC (Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência)

Oeiras, Portugal

I opened my laboratory about 10 years ago and have had mentored postdocs and students from my own group and from other groups throughout. Having an outside perspective from a mentor on career ambitions and how to get there will always be useful, or even critical. I have experience from participating in a formal postdoc education programme involving topics such as grant writing, cover letter writing and how to give a job talk, as well as informal mentoring for postdocs from other labs. My previous mentees have gone on to positions in academia, industry and teaching, so I understand that there is more than one career path.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Sophie Trefely

Group leader

Babraham Institute

Cambridge, UK

I grew up and completed my schooling, undergraduate and PhD training in Australia earning a BMedSci(Hons) at UNSW in 2008. I worked for 1 year as a research assistant in the Diabetes and Metabolism department at the Garvan Institute of Medical Research before starting my PhD training studying insulin action in the lab of David James, which I completed in 2015. In 2015 I moved to the University of Pennsylvania (USA) for my post-doctoral training. I joined the labs of Kathryn Wellen and Nathaniel Snyder in a joint position. My focus was on understanding the impact of nutrient metabolism on health. To do this I learned and applied mass spectrometry to understand the role of metabolites as cellular signalling molecules. In January 2022, I established my research group at the Babraham Institute (UK) as part of the Epigenetics and Signalling Programmes. My lab investigates metabolic regulation of the nucleus with the goal of understanding how nutrients affect chromatin modification and how this may be manipulated in cell reprogramming.

My expertise is in metabolism and metabolomics (liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry) in the context of cell biology and epigenetics. In terms of mentoring, I can discuss how to make the most of a postdoc position and do what you love, overcoming technical challenges, networks and relationships, managing projects and collaborations, managing living overseas, and transitioning to a PI position.

EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Isabelle Vernos

Group leader

CRG (Center for Genomic Regulation)

Barcelona, Spain

Isabelle Vernos is [ICREA](#) Research Professor and co-coordinator of the Quantitative Cell Biology program at Center for Genomic Regulation ([CRG](#), Barcelona).

She obtained a PhD in Biology in 1989 from the University Autonoma of Madrid and move as a postdoctoral fellow to the Wellcome/CRC Institute in Cambridge, UK. In 1992 she moved to the EMBL in Heidelberg (Germany) where she established her first independent research group in 2001.

Her group has a long-standing interest in understanding how microtubules organize the bipolar spindle and ensure faithful chromosome segregation during mitosis and meiosis and how failures in this process may generate infertility and other human diseases such as cancer.

The lab follows an interdisciplinary approach using various experimental systems including tissue culture cells, cytoplasmic extracts from eggs of the frog *Xenopus laevis* and in vitro reconstitution experiments combined with high end microscopy methods, proteomics and various proteins expression and purification systems. Altogether the group has obtained novel insights on the mechanism of cell division that were published in high impact journals.

Isabelle Vernos, has extensive experience in the participation to and coordination of EU funded projects as well as national research projects. She has also shown an active role in driving innovation projects by establishing collaborations/agreements with private companies (Clinica EUGIN and Chemotargets).

She was nominated European Molecular Biology Organization ([EMBO](#)) member in 2005 and she serves as advisor and referee for several European and non-European research organisations and Institutes.

She was a member of the Advisory Board for Science, Technology and Innovation for the Ministry of Economy and Competitivity in Spain from 2012 to 2015. In 2015 she was awarded Narcis Monturiol medal for scientific and technological merit. She was a member of the European Research Council ([ERC](#)) scientific Council in the period 2011-2019 and chaired its Gender Balance working group in 2013-2019. She was also chair of the CRG Gender Balance committee during 2013-2023. She coordinated the [Horizon 2020](#) funded



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors

project [LIBRA](#) (2015-2019): Leading Innovative measures to achieve gender Balance in Research Activities.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Sheila Vidal

Head of Research Funding Affairs Unit

IGC (Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência)

Oeiras, Portugal

Sheila Vidal is a highly skilled professional with nearly twenty years of experience in research management. She currently serves as the head of the Grants Office at the prestigious Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência, part of the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in Portugal. As a mentor, Sheila brings an array of knowledge to the table, providing invaluable guidance in conceiving and implementing pre-award grant management strategies, both at the individual and institutional levels. Her extensive experience in research funding policies and her proven track record of successfully supporting Life Science researchers in assembling proposals for prestigious national and international research grant programs make her an exceptional choice for anyone seeking support in this area. Sheila's areas of expertise include providing grant application advice, delivering advanced training modules on grant development, and offering guidance in career development and training for young research managers. If you are looking for a mentor to help you navigate the intricacies of moving professional paths, research management and grant applications, Sheila is an excellent choice.



EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Danijela Vignjevic

Group Leader

Institut Curie

Paris, France

Danijela Matic Vignjevic was trained as a molecular biologist at the University of Belgrade, Serbia and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, US. She did her PhD in cell biology, working on the actin cytoskeleton during cell migration at Northwestern University, Chicago, US. She then did a post-doc at Institut Curie, working on mouse models for colon cancer metastasis as an HFSP fellow and later as an INSERM researcher. She started her independent team at Institut Curie in 2013 when she got interested in how epithelial cells interact with their microenvironment in homeostasis, wound repair, and cancer invasion. Her research strategy combines cell biology and mechanobiology techniques with live-cell imaging using different model systems such as 2D and 3D in vitro cell cultures; tissue slices cultured ex vivo; and different transgenic mouse models. She is a recipient of ERC starting and consolidator grants.

She can share her experience in doing research in different countries, dealing with failure, balancing lab work and family, serving in different committees and experience with interdisciplinary collaborations.

EU-LIFE Woman Postdoc Mentoring Programme

Short bios of mentors



Michela di Virgilio

Group leader

MDC (Max-Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in the Helmholtz Association)

Berlin, Germany

Researcher Identifiers

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- URL for website: <https://www.mdc-berlin.de/di-virgilio>
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/michela-di-virgilio-5382bb44
- AcademiaNet: <https://www.academia-net.org/profile/michela-di-virgilio/78528>
- Academic Discipline / Fields: Biology, Health
- Area of Specialisation: Mechanisms of DNA Damage and Repair, and their link to Systems' Physiology and Human Pathologies.
- Research Interests: Genome Integrity, DNA damage and Repair, Carcinogenesis, Antibody Diversification, B lymphocytes, Immunity.
- Technologies: Genetics, Molecular & Cellular Biology, Biochemistry, Genomics, Transcriptomics, and Proteomics.

Contact Address

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- Laboratory: Di Virgilio Group – Lab of Genome Diversification & Integrity
- Address: Robert-Rössle-Str. 10, 13125 Berlin, Germany
- E-mail: Michela.DiVirgilio@mdc-berlin.de

Education

- 12/2006 PhD in Genetics and Biomolecular Sciences Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy
- 03/2001 Laurea with highest honors in Biotechnology Università degli Studi di Bologna, Italy



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Short bios of mentors

Recent Positions

- Since 02/2022 Tenured S Professor (W2) Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin (Charité), Berlin, Germany
- Since 01/2022 Speaker, Topic 3 “Integrative Biomedicine” Max-Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine (MDC), Berlin, Germany
- Since 01/2021 Senior Group Leader MDC, Berlin, Germany
- 07/2018 – 01/2022 S Junior Professor (W1) Charité, Berlin, Germany
- Since 12/2014 Member of the Extended Faculty Berlin School of Integrative Oncology (BSIO), Berlin, Germany
- 09/2014 – 12/2020 Junior Group Leader MDC, Berlin, Germany

Previous Positions

- 06/2012 – 07/2014 Research Associate Laboratory of Molecular Immunology, The Rockefeller University, NY, USA
- 06/2007 – 05/2012 Postdoctoral Associate Laboratory of Molecular Immunology, The Rockefeller University, NY, USA

Selected Fellowships and Awards

- 2021 – 2026 First-time Professorial Appointments of Excellent Women Scientists Awardee, Helmholtz Association, Germany
- Since 2015 Elected to AcademiaNet: Leading Women Scientists, Robert Bosch Stiftung Foundation/SNSF & Spektrum der Wissenschaft, EU
- 2015 – 2021 ERC Starting Grant 2014 Awardee, European Research Council, EU
- 2014 BSIO Female Independency Award 2014, BSIO/DFG, Germany
- 2014 – 2020 Helmholtz Young Investigators Group, Helmholtz Association, Germany
- 2014 – 2017 VR-NT Project Grant for Junior Researchers, Swedish Research Council, Sweden (declined in favor of Helmholtz Young Investigators)
- 2008 – 2010 International Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship, American-Italian Cancer Foundation, USA
- 2001 Laurea with highest honors in Biotechnology, Università degli Studi di Bologna, Italy

Reviewing Activities



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Short bios of mentors

- Since 2023 Member of the Italian Scholarship Advisory Committee (ISAC). The Armenise
- Harvard Foundation, Boston, USA.
- Since 2022 Editor – Guest Reviewing Editor at eLife.
- Since 2014 Reviewer - Nature, Nature Communications, Molecular Cell, Journal of Experimental Medicine, Journal of Cell Biology, eLife.

Supervision, Mentorship & Teaching Activities

- Since 2015 Direct Supervision of 7x PhD students, 6x Master students, and 4x Postdoctoral scientists
- Since 2015 Member of PhD student Thesis Advisory Committee (20x PhD students; MDC, BSIO, and Open University); University Supervisor/Co-Supervisor (3x PhD-MD/PhD students; Charité); Member of Evaluation/Examination Committees (various institutions in EU)
- Since 2020 Mentor, Leibniz Association Mentoring Program, Germany
- Since 2015 BSIO Graduate School Program; Faculty member & Lecturer Berlin School of Integrative Oncology (BSIO), Berlin, Germany
- 2020 – 2021 I&I@MDC Seminar Series; Co-founder & Organizer Immunology & Inflammation (I&I) network of MDC and the Experimental and Clinical Research Center (ECRC) of the MDC and Charité
- 2018 - 2020 Cancer Seminar Series for PhD students; Co-founder & Organizer MDC International PhD Program
- Since 2021 International Master's Program Molecular Medicine; Faculty member & Lecturer Charité, Berlin, Germany



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Short bios of mentors



Sybille Vonesch

Group leader

VIB (Vlaamsch Instituut voor Biotechnologie)

Leuven, Belgium

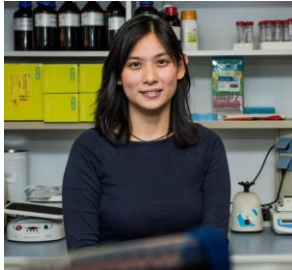
Professionally, I followed a quite traditional academic career path. After completing my PhD at ETH Zurich I left my home country Switzerland for a postdoc at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), and started my own group in Belgium in May 2021. I'm currently heading a lab of 10 researchers (1 technician, 1 bioinformatician, 2 postdocs, 2 PhD students and 4 undergrads) and teach courses on biochemistry and genetics. My research focuses on development of cutting-edge CRISPR technologies for high-throughput genome engineering and functional genomics in microbes, and application of these technologies in the model eukaryote *S. cerevisiae* to study complex eukaryotic genetics.

As a mentor I think my strengths are good listening capabilities, help with identifying strengths and weaknesses and with making decisions, and open and honest feedback. I only recently started my own research group, and while I am still developing my leadership I can share my experience of how to navigate that process. The past 2 years have also taught me a lot about the importance of a good work-life balance and personal strategies to improve it despite a demanding career.



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Short bios of mentors



Cecilia Winata

Group leader

IIMCB (International Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology)

Warsaw, Poland

My scientific training is in the field of developmental biology, genomics, and disease modelling in the zebrafish model organism. I obtained my PhD in 2009 from the National University of Singapore. I then did a postdoctoral stint at the Genome Institute of Singapore, where I studied developmental gene regulation and analysed rare genetic diseases in human using the zebrafish as a model organism. After completing my postdoc, I moved almost halfway around the world to Poland and started my lab at the International Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology in Warsaw in 2014. My lab's research interest is mainly in transcriptional regulation and epigenetics during development, as well as post-transcriptional regulation of maternal mRNAs in early embryonic development in the zebrafish. I can offer my guidance in related science topics as well as scientific career in general. I will also be happy to discuss and share my experiences on moving abroad and dealing with related issues (e.g., navigating cultural differences, adapting to daily living, and language barriers).