

# IMPACT REPORT

2024



**ALBA NETWORK**

*Towards diversity and  
equity in brain sciences*

a division of FENS

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# STRENGTHENING SCIENCE THROUGH INCLUSION AND ALLYSHIP

In 2024, the ALBA Network deepened its commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable neuroscience community by centring our efforts on allyship. True allyship demands more than passive support— it requires continuous action, self-reflection, and a willingness to challenge systemic barriers. This year, we focused on amplifying the voices of researchers from historically underrepresented backgrounds, including neurodivergent scientists, scientists with (in)visible disabilities, women and gender-diverse individuals, and Indigenous researchers.

We addressed the pervasive impact of implicit and structural bias on career progression, mental health, and workplace culture. From gender disparities to the challenges faced by disabled scientists navigating inaccessible systems, we worked to elevate discussions that challenge the status quo. We also confronted the often-overlooked toll of toxic academic environments, advocating for a shift toward cultures of accountability, transparency, and genuine inclusion.

At the heart of our work was a commitment not only to highlight these issues but to equip individuals and institutions with the tools to drive meaningful and lasting change. Through open dialogue, policy advocacy, and collective responsibility, we continue to reinforce the idea that equity in science is a shared endeavour requiring sustained, intentional action.

The ALBA Declaration on Equity and Inclusion remains a catalyst for change, offering concrete, evidence-based strategies to counter bias, create inclusive workplaces, and promote allyship. By adopting these best practices, institutions can

begin to dismantle systemic barriers and advance equity across the STEM landscape.

Looking ahead, organisations must recognise that equity and inclusion are not optional ideals, but essential drivers of innovation, performance, and sustainable growth in an increasingly diverse global research community.

Reflecting this momentum, ALBA welcomed 556 new members this year — including researchers from five new countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, Senegal, Slovakia, and Uganda — bringing our total membership to over 2,300.



*It has been inspiring to witness the ALBA Network's continued growth and impact across the global neuroscience community. Over the past year, we've focused on listening, learning, and acting with intention to support those who have long been unheard and underrepresented in the brain sciences, with the goal of fostering truly inclusive and equitable representation. We hope our work is helping to create a community where everyone feels a true sense of belonging — one that cares for, supports, and empowers its members.*

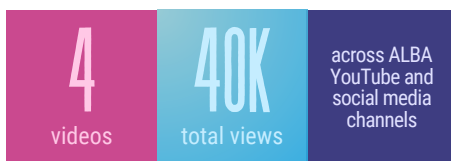


**Prof. Francesca Cirulli**  
Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Italy  
ALBA Chair 2024-25

# CHALLENGING BIAS AND DRIVING COLLECTIVE ACTION

## Allyship for diversity in brain research

Supported by the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP), this video series showcases four leading US-based researchers in psychiatric neuroscience and neuropsychopharmacology sharing best practices on allyship in science. Through their experiences, they highlight how genuine support for underrepresented scientists drives diversity, innovation, and inclusion across the research community.



The series features (clockwise from top left):

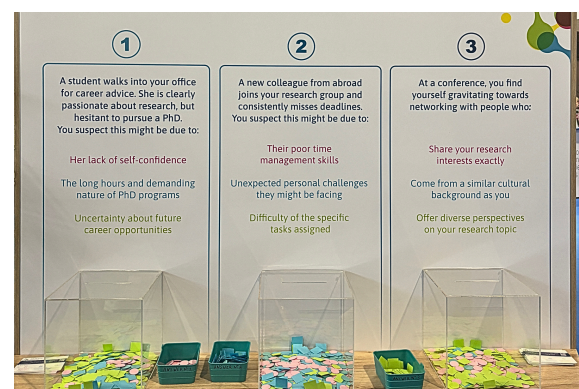
- Dr Yasmin Hurd (Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai)
- Dr Marina Picciotto (Yale School of Medicine)
- Dr Edythe London (University of California, Los Angeles)
- Dr Mercedes Perez-Rodriguez (Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai)

## “Check your privilege”

At the FENS Forum 2024 in Vienna, Austria, ALBA launched an interactive game to spark reflection on bias in academia. Delegates explored three real-life scenarios, each tied to a specific type of bias:

1. A student’s hesitation to pursue a PhD (gender bias)
2. A colleague missing deadlines (attribution bias)
3. Gravitation toward familiar faces at events (affinity bias)

For each, they selected interpretations shaped by personal assumptions, systemic factors, or neutral views.



Collective responses revealed key insights: career uncertainty is a major barrier for potential PhD candidates, regardless of gender; missed deadlines are often seen as personal failings rather than contextual or systemic issues; and many recognised the value of diverse perspectives in networking and collaboration.

The activity underscored how split-second assumptions can expose hidden biases and emphasised the importance of awareness in everyday academic interactions.

## Allyship in scientific conferences

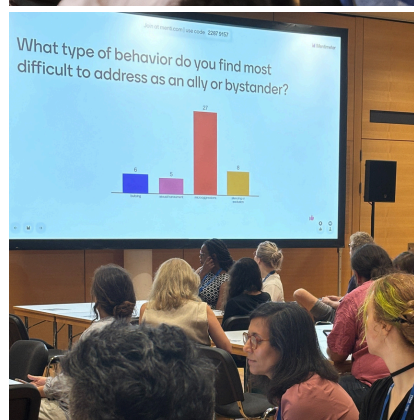
Organised at the FENS Forum 2024 in Vienna, Austria, and supported by IBRO, this workshop aimed to foster inclusivity, safety and belonging in professional settings such as conferences and meetings by addressing problematic behaviours like sexism, racism, bullying, and harassment. Participants were empowered to become proactive allies through:

- Practical tips for navigating and addressing uncomfortable situations.
- Tailored intervention strategies for different contexts.
- A collaborative space to build confidence in responding effectively.

With over 70 participants, the session focused on real-life scenarios presenting allyship dilemmas. Small groups engaged in discussions on challenges related to team travel, conference Q&A sessions, and poster presentations, guided by cue cards on active bystander behaviours. Key concepts – including power differentials, microaggressions, and the **diversity-innovation paradox**, which underscores how diverse teams drive innovation while contributions from underrepresented groups are often overlooked – were explored. The session concluded with actionable strategies and tools for effective intervention in similar situations.

### How can you leverage your privilege and show up for others?

- **The sponsor:** Wholeheartedly and enthusiastically endorses people who are at risk of being overlooked.
- **The champion:** Makes sure people get opportunities and recognition for their expertise, sharing their own spotlight.
- **The advocate:** Learns about the challenges faced by marginalised groups and supports them with growth opportunities.



ALBA-IBRO workshop on allyship in scientific conferences at the FENS Forum 2024, Vienna



**Agnes Uhreczky**  
Flemish Institute for  
Biotechnology (VIB), Belgium  
EDI officer & workshop facilitator

# SHAPING EQUITABLE RESEARCH AND POLICY

## Guidelines on designing inclusive forms for gender and sexual diversity

The ALBA Gender & Sexual Diversity working group has created guidelines encouraging neuroscientists to move beyond the binary categorisation of sex in research, in studies both involving humans and animals. Recognising the complexity of sex and gender, these recommendations aim to improve the data collection, analysis and reporting of their influence on the brain, moving beyond a simplistic male/female distinction. Read the guidelines: [alba.network/GSDinclusiveforms](https://alba.network/GSDinclusiveforms).



### 10 rules for working with LGBTQIA+ data

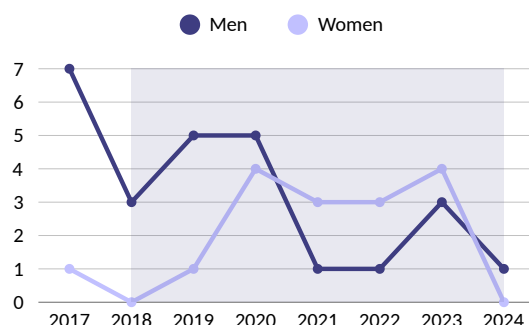
1. Know the difference between sex and gender.
2. Determine what questions are relevant.
3. Decide on the survey design and options.
4. Provide information about how data is used, processed and stored.
5. Consider sex, gender and sexuality across all questions.
6. Determine how to deal with small sample sizes.
7. Practice inclusive reporting on sex and gender.
8. Account for fluidity of gender in longitudinal studies.
9. Balance the demands from reviewers, journals, and/or funding agencies.
10. Include sex and sexuality in studies on animals.

## Tracking gender in neuroscience faculty hires in Switzerland

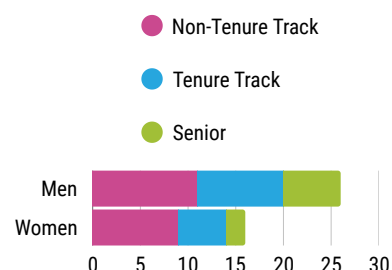
Reliable data on diversity in academia – particularly at leadership levels – remains limited globally. In some regions, inaction and denial of systemic barriers have fuelled the false narrative that academic careers are becoming harder to access for men. Yet existing evidence often shows the opposite. To help fill this gap, a local task force is tracking gender representation in neuroscience faculty appointments across Switzerland over the past six years. This ongoing initiative uses a consent-based, community-driven approach: scientists can nominate recent hires, who are then contacted individually for permission to be included. Of the 55 individuals contacted, 42 agreed to participate.

The resulting dataset includes 34 faculty appointments in the six-year period from 2018-2024: 19 men and 15 women. Appointments are further categorised by appointment type – non-tenure track, tenure track, and senior roles – to offer a more detailed picture. While these findings provide useful insights into gender trends in neuroscience recruitment, the limited sample size means conclusions should be interpreted with caution.

Neuroscience faculty hires in Switzerland by year



Total hires by gender and career stage





## Indigenous voices in neuroscience: Transforming research practices

countries

total views



# ADVANCING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN SCIENCE

## "Breaking down the ivory tower" webinar series

Voyages through brain and behaviour - Prof. Onur Güntürkün (Germany)
My journey with epilepsy and neuroscience - Prof. Philip Haydon (USA)
How the brain remembers and imagines - Dr Donna Rose Addis (Canada)
How my personal story changed my professional life - Prof. Maria José Diógenes (Portugal)
Unmasking the neurodivergent experience in neuroscience - Bethan Burnside (Belgium)
The power of self-awareness: Advocating for accessible neuroscience research - Uma Chatterjee (USA)



Through this webinar series, the ALBA Disability & Accessibility Working Group provides a platform for scientists with disabilities across neuroscience disciplines and around the world, while also reflecting on how to promote inclusive work environments and improve accessibility in research.

## Breaking barriers: Inclusivity and accessibility tips for neuroscience

This video project showcases members sharing valuable strategies and best practices for fostering a more inclusive research environment. By empowering neuroscientists with disabilities, these insights aim to create a more supportive academic workspace. Researchers, funders, organisations, and institutions can leverage this guidance to implement tangible improvements.

Featuring (clockwise from top left):

- Dr Rhiannon McNeill (Germany)
- Dr Donna Rose Addis (Canada)
- Prof. Matt Grubb (UK)
- Dr Catarina Miranda (Portugal)
- Dr Ilya Smolensky (Switzerland)
- Heather Macpherson (Australia)



## Addressing mental health and neurodiversity in academia

As academia has become increasingly business-like over the past decade, pressures such as job insecurity, performance demands, and poor work-life balance have contributed to a growing mental health crisis. A 2018 survey revealed that 41% of PhD students reported moderate to severe anxiety, and 39% experienced moderate to severe depression – rates six times higher than those in the general population. Additionally, around 15% of students identify as neurodiverse, facing unique challenges in research.

To address these issues, the ALBA Network's Disability & Accessibility Working Group hosted a dedicated session on mental health and neurodiversity in academia at the annual congress of the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP) in Milan, Italy. Attended by over 70 participants, the discussion explored mental health challenges in academia, including barriers to openly addressing mental health diagnoses and disclosure in research settings. Panelists shared insights on the pressures of academic life, the stigma surrounding mental health issues, and strategies for fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment. The session also highlighted personal experiences of navigating research while managing mental health conditions, offering recommendations for systemic improvements.



ALBA session on mental health and neurodivergence at the 2024 ECNP Congress, Milan. From L to R (bottom) featuring Amy Zile (UK), Georgia Hodes (USA), Zachary Williams (USA), Rhiannon McNeill (Germany).

“

*Recognise mental health as health, accept trainees with lived experience, and provide the time, resources, and support for people to bring their full selves to research.*

**Dr Amy Zile**

*University of East Anglia, UK  
Session panelist*

### Defining disability

The ALBA Network defines 'disability' as the interaction between a researcher's physical, sensory, cognitive, developmental, mental health and/or other conditions or differences, and the contextual and environmental factors within which they work and live, which together result in limitations to their functioning and participation.

Underpinned by the 'social model' approach, this definition – developed by the Disability & Accessibility Working Group – shifts the focus from individual impairments to the external barriers in a person's environment that can 'dis-able' them.

# RECOGNISING UNDERREPRESENTED TALENT IN RESEARCH

## ALBA-Elsevier Award Lecture on Brain Sciences

Supported by Elsevier, this award annually recognises outstanding research achievements by a PhD- or MD-qualified scientist working at the frontiers of brain research. Recipients must have contributed to diversity in neuroscience and be based in a country underrepresented in neuroscience publications and conferences.

Dr Limei Zhang, Full Professor of Physiology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, was selected as the 2024 recipient for her significant contributions to systems neuroscience and neuroendocrinology.

Both Dr Zhang and the 2023 recipient, Dr Agustin Ibañez (Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Chile / Trinity College Dublin, Ireland), delivered Special Lectures at the FENS Forum 2024 in Vienna, Austria, highlighting their impactful research.



*Receiving the news of this award has fuelled my motivation to continue promoting science and education in Mexico, especially for women and mothers pursuing high-level scientific careers.*



**Dr Limei Zhang**

*National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico*  
2024 ALBA-Elsevier Award winner

## ALBA-Roche Research Prize for Excellence in Neuroscience

Supported by Roche, this annual prize recognises outstanding brain research by mid-career scientists from underrepresented backgrounds, whose work may improve our understanding of the causal mechanisms of brain diseases and holds promise for future translation. It celebrates researchers at a pivotal stage in their careers who demonstrate scientific independence, originality, and the potential to shape the future of their field.

The inaugural prize was awarded to Dr Mootaz Salman, MRC Career Development Fellow at the University of Oxford, UK, for his exceptional contributions to neurodegenerative disease research and innovation. The award was presented at a dedicated ceremony during the FENS Forum 2024 in Vienna, Austria.



*I think we're only beginning to glimpse what organ-on-a-chip and humanised models can achieve in the field of neurodegeneration and neuroscience in general, and so this award is a huge motivation for me and my team to keep pushing forward our work in this area.*



**Dr Mootaz Salman**

*University of Oxford, UK*  
2024 ALBA-Roche Research Prize winner

## ALBA-FKNE Diversity Prize

Founded together with the FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence (FKNE) Scholars, this award highlights a scientist who has made outstanding contributions to the advancement of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the brain sciences. In 2024, we honoured the efforts of researchers at all career stages, including students, postdocs, and principal investigators, who were based in Europe and conducted at least 50% of their work at a European research institution.

Prof. Narender Ramnani, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK, was selected as the 2024 recipient for advancing diversity in neuroscience in the UK through policy influence and initiatives promoting gender and ethnic representation in research, leadership, and the British Neuroscience Association.



*This prize shines a light on a crucial truth: while talent is everywhere, opportunity is not, and yet meaningful change is still possible. Let's work together to shatter the glass ceilings that prevent talented individuals from contributing their excellence to our field.*



**Prof. Narender Ramnani**  
Royal Holloway,  
University of London, UK  
2024 ALBA-FKNE Diversity  
Prize winner

## ALBA Travel Awards

Building on our successful travel grant programme to the FENS Forum 2024 – supported by the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) and the Chica and Heinz Schaller Foundation – this year we offered ten selected early-career scientists from underrepresented backgrounds the opportunity to attend major neuroscience conferences worldwide. These grants, covering meetings held between April 2025 and April 2026, support professional development and foster international collaboration in neuroscience.

Awardees represented a range of career stages, including PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, research/staff scientists, and professors or equivalents. The travel grants enabled recipients to participate in leading scientific meetings such as the International Society for Neurochemistry and the American Society for Neurochemistry (ISN-ASN), Society for Neuroscience (SfN), Society of Neuroscientists of Africa (SONA), European Pain Federation (EFIC), Schizophrenia International Research Society (SIRS), FENS Regional Meeting (FRM), and Neural Mechanisms of Cognitive Function.

By breaking financial and geographic barriers, the ALBA-ACNP Travel Awards continue to strengthen global inclusion in neuroscience, empowering researchers to share knowledge, build networks, and advance their careers on the international stage.

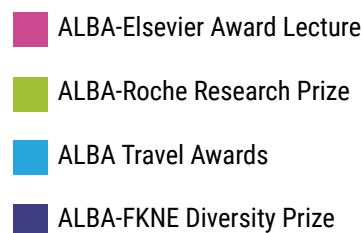
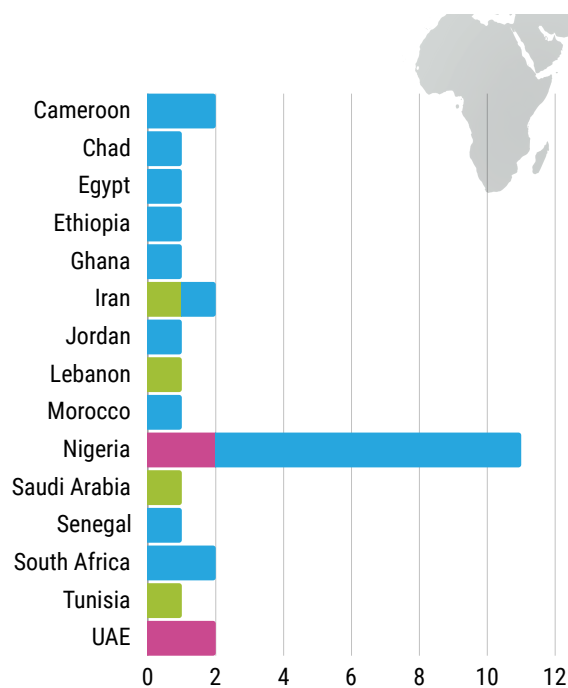
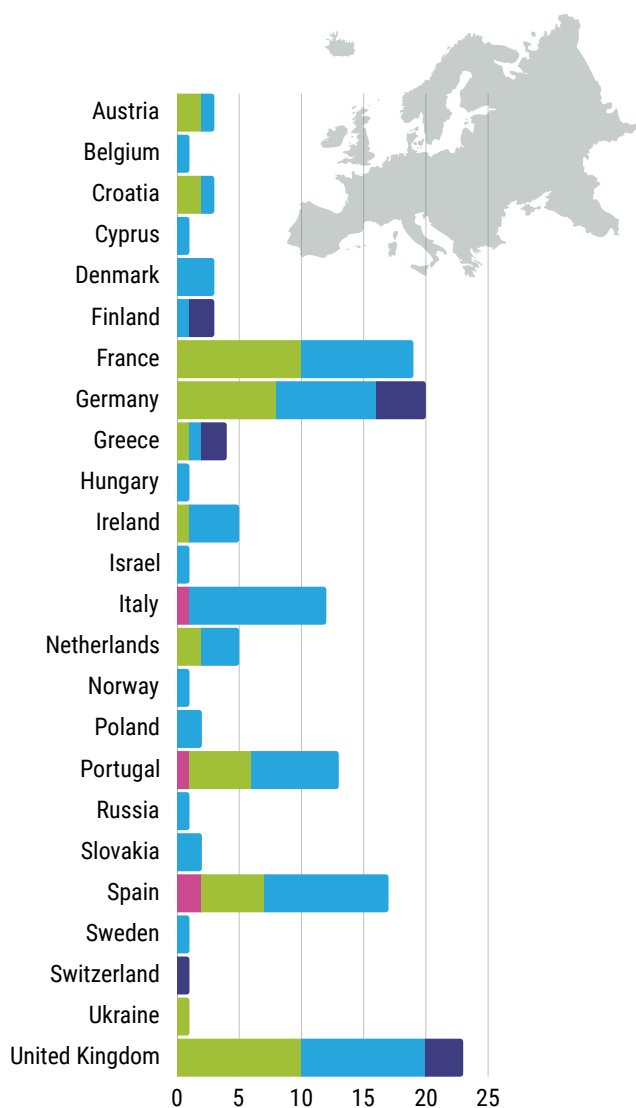
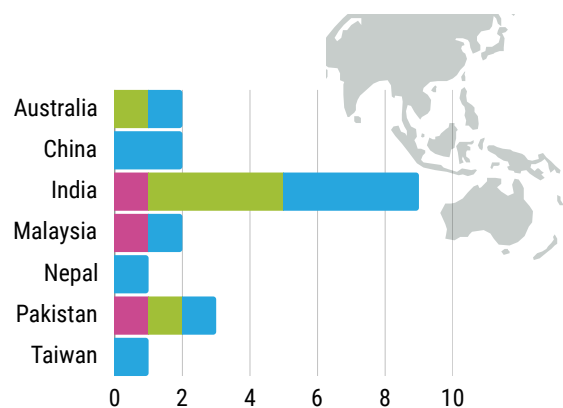
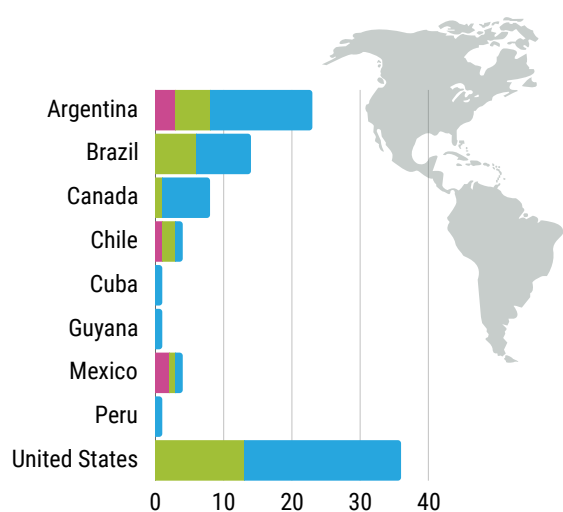
## ACNP Annual Meeting Travel Award

Within the ACNP Travel Award program, one grant is earmarked for an ALBA member in the field of neuropsychopharmacology to attend the annual ACNP meeting. Dr Brenda Cabrera-Mendoza, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Yale School of Medicine, USA, was selected as the 2024 recipient.



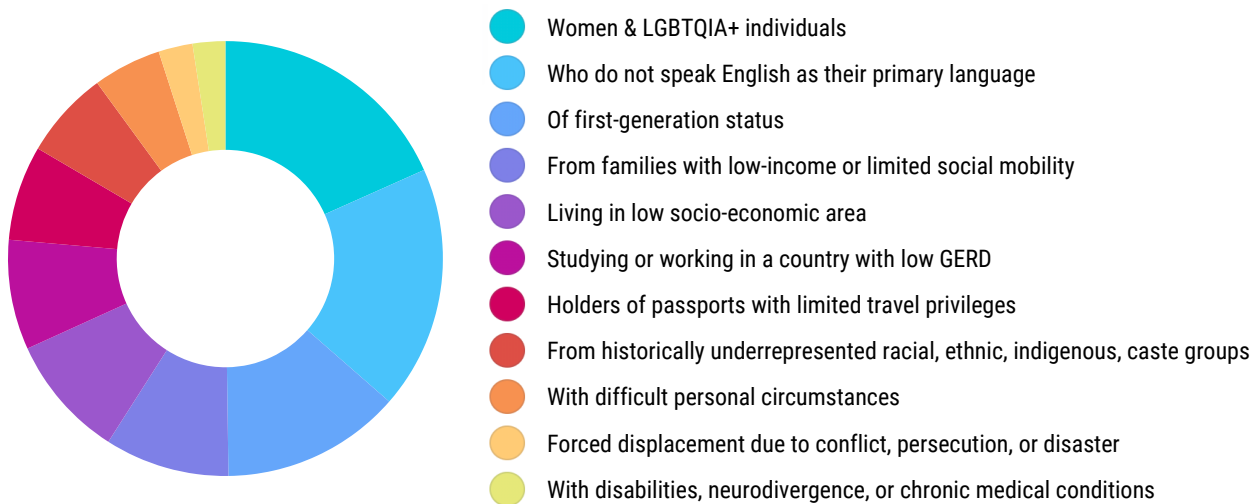
**Dr Brenda Cabrera-Mendoza**  
Yale School of Medicine, USA  
2024 ACNP-ALBA travel awardee

## Geographic distribution of ALBA award applicants





## Demographic breakdown of ALBA award applicants



## Celebrating ALBA Awardees at the FENS Forum 2024 in Vienna, Austria



**Top:** Special Lectures by 2023 and 2024 ALBA-Elsevier Awardees Agustin Ibañez (L) and Limei Zhang (R)

**Bottom:** ALBA-Elsevier award selection committee chair Shubha Tole (L) and ALBA Chair 2023-24 Zeljka Krsnik (R) with the awardees



**Top:** ALBA-FKNE Diversity Prize winner Narender Ramnani (L) with selection committee member Lora Sweeney and ALBA Chair 2024-25 Francesca Cirulli (R)

**Bottom:** Members of the ALBA-Roche Research Prize selection committee (L to R) - Carlos Ribeiro, co-chair Carmen Sandi, Sonja Kleinlogel and Amadi Ihunwo, with the awardee Mootaz Salman.

# PROMOTING WELL-BEING AND INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

## Spotlight on the postdoctoral experience

Held during the annual Society for Neuroscience meeting in Chicago, USA, the ALBA-IBRO networking social brought together over 100 attendees to reflect on progress in diversity and inclusion, with a spotlight on the systemic challenges facing postdoctoral researchers. The discussion addressed persistent issues such as job insecurity, visa-related barriers, financial instability, and work-life imbalance – factors that continue to drive many early-career scientists away from academia.

Keynote speaker Dr Mayank Chugh (College of William and Mary, USA) shared insights from his advocacy work and academic policy reform efforts, highlighting the structural inequities that disproportionately impact researchers from marginalised backgrounds. An interactive discussion followed, where participants exchanged ideas and proposed solutions through a collaborative post-it note activity.

Following the event, *The Transmitter* published an article examining the broader postdoc crisis in neuroscience, featuring Dr Chugh's perspectives and referencing the event as part of the ongoing conversation.

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*Some focused on consistent expectations of overtime, poor job prospects and power-based harassment, but most of the post-it notes dealt with inadequate compensation.*



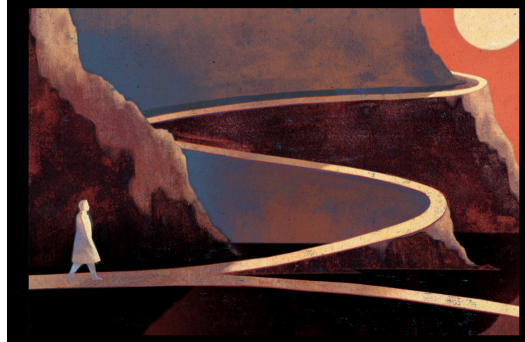
ALBA-IBRO networking social at Neuroscience 2024, Chicago

 **THE TRANSMITTER**

**Static pay, shrinking prospects fuel neuroscience postdoc decline**

[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.53053/NJUY1596](https://doi.org/10.53053/NJUY1596)

CITE THIS ARTICLE



## Overcoming impostor phenomenon

Supported by IBRO and jointly organised by the ALBA Network, World Women in Neuroscience (WWN), and the IBRO Early Career Committee (ECC), this interactive workshop at the FENS Forum 2024 brought together 120 participants to explore the impostor phenomenon through both personal narratives and systemic perspectives.

The session opened with a powerful testimonial by Prof. Shubha Tole (India), followed by a talk from Dr Stamatina Tzanoulina (Switzerland) on the cognitive and societal roots of impostor feelings. Both speakers highlighted the prevalence of these experiences in neuroscience and shared strategies to build self-awareness and resilience.

Participants then joined rotating roundtable discussions, facilitated by expert representatives from ALBA, WWN, and IBRO ECC. These included Martha I. Dávila-García (WWN-USA), Emma Yhnell (ALBA-UK), Pamela Butler (WWN-USA), Anastasia Diamantopoulou (ALBA-Germany), Emmeline Edwards (WWN-USA), Jacque Ip (ALBA/IBRO ECC-Hong Kong), Oritoke Okeowo (WWN-Nigeria), and Srikanth Ramaswamy (ALBA/IBRO ECC-UK). Drawing on lived experience and regional insights, the discussions covered mentorship, cultural expectations, and practical approaches to overcoming impostor challenges – culminating in a shared set of takeaways and tools for action.



ALBA-WWN-IBRO ECC workshop on overcoming impostor phenomenon at FENS Forum 2024, Vienna

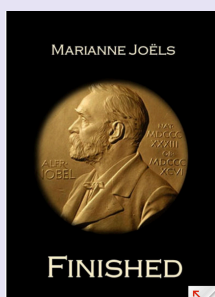
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*This was my first ALBA workshop, and it exceeded my expectations. The speakers were excellent, and the organisers created a welcoming space where we felt comfortable sharing our experiences. It was a powerful reminder that we're not alone in our mental health struggles.*

**Attendee**

ALBA-IBRO impostor phenomenon workshop

## Diversity & leadership in academia: the implicit messages

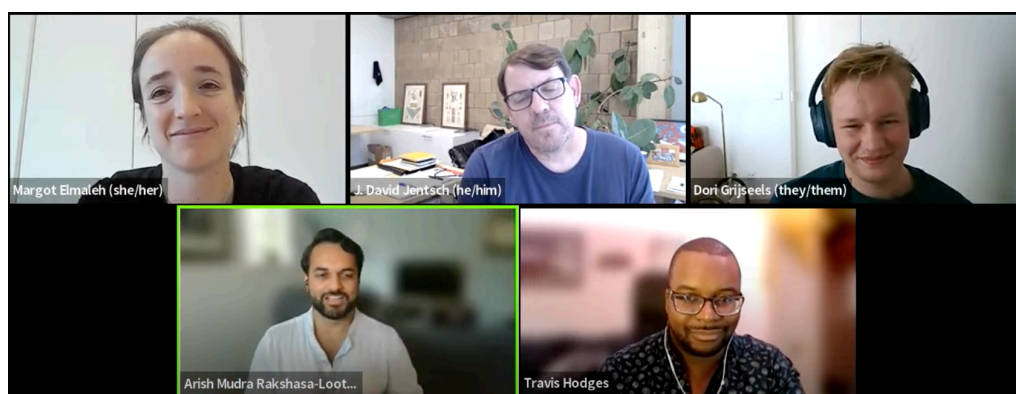


The ALBA Network hosted an online launch of *Finished*, written by **Prof. Marian Joëls** (University Medical Centre Groningen, The Netherlands). The event featured a discussion with Prof. John F. Cryan (University College Cork, Ireland), exploring the book's central theme of toxic academic culture. *Finished* follows the story of Ken Bird, a renowned professor blindsided by accusations of workplace bullying. Through this fictional account, the book highlights uncomfortable dilemmas in academia and encourages reflection on how they're addressed. The eBook is freely available online.



## Mental health and challenges in the LGBTQIA+ neuro-community

Organised and hosted by Dr Dori Grijseels (Max Planck Institute for Brain Research, Frankfurt, Germany), co-chair of the ALBA Gender and Sexual Diversity working group, this webinar brought together a diverse panel of LGBTQIA+ neuroscientists to discuss the unique mental health challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in academia. Panelists explored how toxic academic culture, marginalisation, and discrimination affect well-being and professional development. The discussion highlighted systemic barriers and included research insights, personal experiences, and actionable strategies for creating more inclusive and supportive academic environments.



ALBA Diversity Week webinar featuring (clockwise from top left): Dr Margot Elmaleh (Germany), Dr David Jentsch (USA), Dr Dori Grijseels (Germany), Dr Travis Hodges (USA), Dr Arish Mudra Rakshasa-Loots (UK)

“

Unfortunately, even in 2024, conferences are still being held in places that are unwelcoming, leaving some of us feeling unwelcome and undignified. A binary view of gender equality persists, and broader inclusivity isn't considered when evaluating a department's composition.

“

Seize leadership opportunities to advance your goals. While you may not change minds, you can shift behaviours, perceptions and the conversations we have. Change is possible for everyone, whether you're a new faculty member or postdoc mentoring a graduate student.

“

To ensure open academic positions are genuinely LGBTQ-friendly, it would be helpful to have insight into the research environment and culture. A list of LGBTQ+ supportive supervisors or contacts would make a difference, allowing us to connect directly without relying solely on word of mouth.

“

Build your support network not just with those who share your exact experiences or identities, but with people who share your values. It can also be helpful to seek out different support groups that affirm various aspects of your identity, such as Blackness or queerness.

# FINDING COMMUNITY

From Vienna to Chicago, and beyond, the ALBA Network showed up – hosting events, sparking conversations, and connecting across continents. These moments reflect more than just presence; they represent a growing global movement for equity, diversity, and inclusion in neuroscience. Every encounter, panel, and shared story strengthens our mission: to make science a place where *everyone* belongs.







# THANK YOU

## TO OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

International Brain Research Organization

Society for Neuroscience

Lundbeck Foundation

Elsevier B.V.

European College of Neuropsychopharmacology

American College of Neuropsychopharmacology

Wyss Center for Bio and Neuroengineering

Schaller-Nikolich Foundation

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