

2023

IMPACT REPORT



ALBA NETWORK

Towards diversity and equity in brain sciences

a division of FENS

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OUR STORY SO FAR

OUR MISSION

Advancing inclusive neuroscience globally

ALBA Network is a rapidly growing global movement committed to fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in brain research. We believe that true scientific excellence is only possible when we embrace diversity and ensure that opportunities are based solely on individual merit.

Acknowledging the systemic barriers arising from socioeconomic disadvantage, educational challenges, and cultural or linguistic disparities, ALBA is committed to dismantling these obstacles. We engage in a wide range of initiatives to challenge bias and promote a culture of inclusivity, empower individuals and organisations to embrace equity, and address underrepresentation in neuroscience and academia. By building robust networks of diverse researchers, we not only strengthen the global neuroscience community but also drive groundbreaking research and innovation.

Joining ALBA is free and offers benefits like participation in the annual General Assembly, involvement in EDI initiatives, speaking opportunities at conferences, and specialised advocacy training.

In 2023, ALBA expanded its global reach by welcoming 511 new members from 13 countries, including Albania, Cuba, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malawi, Mauritania, Nepal, Peru, Romania, Rwanda and Syria, bringing our membership to over 1,700. This growth reflects the increasing international interest in EDI initiatives within neuroscience.



Science is more than just research; it's a shared resource for humanity. To address global challenges, we must reimagine how we practice science today. I urge everyone, especially early-career researchers, to join the conversation. Our old ways need a fresh perspective. The next generation's voices are crucial in fostering collaboration, embracing Open Science, and promoting EDI in both science and society.



Prof. Željka Krsnik
University of Zagreb, Croatia
ALBA Chair 2023-24

ALBA DECLARATION ON EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The [ALBA Declaration on Equity and Inclusion](#) was launched in January 2021 at the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) Global Connectome. This landmark resource outlines concrete strategies to combat bias and foster an inclusive workplace culture at both the institutional and individual levels. The fully referenced, hyperlinked version of the Declaration provides detailed guidance for each action point, addressing specific issues and offering valuable resources, including data, testimonies, and best practices.



The more ALBA's work progresses, the more it will need to incorporate intersectional situations and perspectives, and the more the Declaration will need to help improve equity for neuroscientists as they build their careers around the world. We aim to keep this at the forefront of our thinking as we develop the resources linked to the Declaration.



Prof. Miguel Maravall
University of Sussex, UK
ALBA Board member, Chair of Declaration working group

We are all biased. What can we do?

Commit to recognizing & counteracting bias

- Establish a **working group** that includes key stakeholders & members of leadership
- **Have a policy.** Adopt a written Equity, Diversity & Inclusion policy. Share it widely
- Set **concrete goals** & identify relevant actions
- **Be data-driven.** Continuously collect data to monitor progress & test solutions
- **Raise awareness.** Provide unconscious bias training

Allyship & advocacy

- **Amplify the voices** of minoritized colleagues in both formal and informal settings
- **Nominate individuals** from diverse backgrounds for prestigious events, awards, & recognition

Selection, hiring, and assessment

- **Proactively solicit** applications from underrepresented groups
- Ensure balanced committee representation to minimize **biased gatekeeping**
- Use consistent, well-defined **evaluation criteria**
- Learn to identify and avoid **biased language**, for example in letters of recommendation, teaching evaluations, etc.
- Consider double-blind reviewing or separate streaming of applications to strive for **equitable success rates**

An inclusive workplace culture is a healthy environment for all.

Establish a positive workplace environment

- Adopt and enforce a **code of conduct**
- Follow the [Singapore Statement on Research Integrity](#)
- Endorse the [DORA Declaration on Research Assessment](#)
- Provide **onboarding/ orientation** for new employees to navigate organizational & local cultural norms
- Establish a **mentoring** system

Establish transparent career structures

- Implement clear **advancement** criteria
- Ensure **equal pay** for equivalent positions
- Ensure **equitable service loads** for teaching, advising, and committees
- Explicitly **recognize service** contributions
- Consider broadening **career paths** to provide opportunities beyond PI role

Promote healthy work-life balance

- Schedule all events during **appropriate working hours**
- Allow for **flexible** hours and teleworking where possible
- Facilitate **access to child/family care** (through onsite facilities and/or subsidization where possible)

228

organisations

767

individuals

worldwide have signed
the Declaration

OUR 2023 PRIORITIES

Over the past year, our efforts have been driven by a deep engagement with our community, particularly through our annual General Assembly, where we actively sought input to identify pressing needs and shape our objectives. We explored critical questions around inclusivity, audience expansion, and fostering a bottom-up approach to our activities.

1

Empowering student voices

To truly foster a bottom-up approach and broaden EDI discussions, it is essential to actively engage and support student groups. By systematically including younger voices in all ALBA working groups, understanding and addressing unmet mentorship needs, and guiding students to appropriate EDI resources, ALBA can play a pivotal role in empowering the next generation of neuroscientists and ensuring that their perspectives are integral to our collective efforts.

2

Attracting EDI sceptics

A persistent disparity in faculty advancement within the brain sciences underscores the need to combat 'diversity fatigue' and challenge the myth of a level playing field. To address this, we must engage in difficult but necessary conversations about bias and privilege, track EDI metrics to assess our impact, and offer incentives for change at both individual and institutional levels. By doing so, we aim to engage EDI skeptics and foster a more inclusive and equitable neuroscience community.

3

Reducing barriers to conference attendance

Increasing diversity at meetings through inclusive language and actions is essential for fostering a sense of belonging among colleagues from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. This involves making participation more equitable for parents and caregivers, rotating time zones for online meetings, and implementing live captioning and real-time translation whenever possible.

4

Defining underrepresentation

To ensure our efforts reach those who need them most, we must develop a nuanced understanding of scientific privilege across diverse cultural and geographic contexts. This understanding should account for region-specific circumstances and systemic barriers that contribute to disadvantage and underrepresentation, extending beyond gender to include factors such as disability, socioeconomic background, and citizenship.

EMPOWERING YOUNG SCIENTISTS

Mentorship workshops

ALBA's mentorship workshops create safe, supportive, and inclusive spaces for young neuroscientists to advance their careers and build global connections. Held at major international neuroscience conferences, these interactive sessions cover career development, leadership, and networking, guided by experienced mentors from ALBA and partner organisations. In 2023, workshops were successfully conducted at the following forums:

- International Conference of the Society of Neuroscientists of Africa (SONA) 2023 in Johannesburg, South Africa - Organised with World Women in Neuroscience (WWN) and Southern African Neuroscience Society (SANS)
- FENS Regional Meeting (FRM) 2023 in Algarve, Portugal
- British Neuroscience Association (BNA) Festival of Neuroscience 2023 in Brighton, UK - Organised with the BNA Scholars Programme

Fireside chat series

This initiative aimed to identify unmet mentorship needs for diverse students and early-career neuroscientists globally. We held two sessions: the first, led by Prof. Ana Silva (Uruguay), focused on students in the Americas; the second, moderated by Prof. Shubha Tole (India), targeted late-stage PhD students in India pursuing postdoctoral opportunities in Europe.

Based on feedback received, we have identified the following programmatic needs:

- Connect underrepresented international students with mentors attuned to their challenges.
- Offer workshops on application processes, scientific and grant writing, and presentation skills, tailored for international students.
- Provide guidance on navigating research careers in academia and industry.
- Create a centralised database of European neuroscience researchers to foster connections and collaborations.



ALBA-IBRO-WWN-SANS Mentoring Circles at SONA2023: Leadership at all career stages



Mentorship workshop at FRM2023: Diversity and inclusion in neuroscience



Mentoring Circles at BNA2023: Co-producing solutions in research culture and careers

FOSTERING GLOBAL DIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

In partnership with IBRO, ALBA developed webinars, events, and a podcast miniseries to raise awareness about the challenges faced by diverse demographics of neuroscientists and explore actionable solutions for greater equity. These initiatives aimed to challenge assumptions about equal opportunities in science, address skepticism around disparities and EDI efforts, foster a nuanced understanding of privilege and disadvantage, and extend the impact of conference content beyond the events.

ALBA-IBRO Global Diversity webinars

A toolkit to succeed in neuroscience in Africa

Walk the talk: Concrete actions to promote diversity in neuroscience in Latin America

Diversity and inclusion in neuroscience in Oceania, what can we do better?

Unfinished business: Persistent global gender disparities in neuroscience

Addressing global socioeconomic inequalities in neuroscience

333

attendees from

55

countries

1.8K

total views

The series showcased several notable highlights, including discussions on Argentina's Micaela Law, which mandates gender training for all state officials and university staff; insights into the Māori academic experience during the first-ever ALBA webinar focused on the Oceania region; a testimonial from Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council's first transgender scientist; an exploration of cultural and societal influences on women's access to and advancement in neuroscience careers in Pakistan; and discussions on promoting equitable resource and funding allocation in global neuroscience.

To ensure broad accessibility, all webinars were live-captioned, subtitled in English and local languages, and made available on ALBA's YouTube channel.

“

For Middle Eastern researchers in the US or UK, scientific performance and achieving success benchmarks can be challenging when you're grappling with the practicalities of assimilation while also compartmentalising the ongoing strife in our home countries.



Dr Ubadah Sabbagh
MIT, USA
Webinar panelist

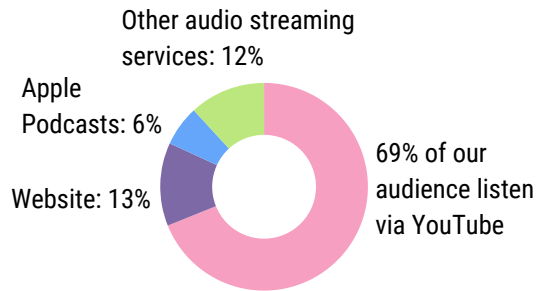
“

I appreciated the guiding questions, pacing, and diversity of speakers. I also valued the moderators' emphasis on female mentors, especially when panelists defaulted to "he" pronouns.

Attendee
Webinar on neuroscience in Africa

ALBA-IBRO Podcast Miniseries & Events

Hosted by Dr Asma Bashir, neuroscientist and founder of Her Royal Science, the ALBA-IBRO podcast miniseries provided a broader audience with exclusive insights into diversity and inclusion topics covered at ALBA-IBRO events at international conferences. Our listeners now span more than 43 countries, with the majority being in USA, Belgium, UK, Germany and Egypt.



SFN 2023
11-15 November

IBRO 2023
9-13 September

DR ASMA BASHIR
Podcast Host

Episode 2 - Better together: Making neuroscience research and its benefits global

Episode 3 - Deconstructing colonial and historical biases in neuroscience

SONA 2023
11-14 July

Episode 1 - Towards inclusive mentoring in African neuroscience

“
My research focuses on Black women, and I emphasise that perspective to ensure clarity and reflexivity. It’s crucial to acknowledge the specific realities we study; we must be explicit, whether we’re discussing Black, Latin, disabled, or white children, to accurately reflect the diversity in our research.



Dr Tiffany Younger
Columbia University, USA
Guest on Episode 3

“
Through my engagement with ALBA-IBRO initiatives, my key takeaway is the importance of building local capacities. Exchange programs can bridge expertise gaps, developing skilled experts and fostering true bidirectional collaboration in regions like Latin America, Africa, and Asia-Pacific, without imperialist tendencies.



Prof. Francisco Parada
Universidad Diego Portales, Chile
Guest on Episode 2

“
At the Science Communication Hub Nigeria, we are committed to fostering collaborations between emerging scientists and established principal investigators. This cultivates mentor-mentee relationships through our extensive database of Nigerian scientists across various disciplines.



Dr Royhaan Folarin
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria
Guest on Episode 1

ALBA Events at Conferences

In 2023, ALBA organised various diversity sessions - such as talks, panels, workshops, and networking socials - at meetings of the British Neuroscience Association (BNA), Swiss Society for Neuroscience (SSN), Society of Neuroscientists of Africa (SONA), European Brain and Behaviour Society (EBBS), International Brain Research Organization (IBRO), European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP), Mediterranean Neuroscience Society (MNS), and Society for Neuroscience (SfN).



PROMOTING WORKPLACE INCLUSIVITY

The ALBA **Disability & Accessibility** Working Group is spearheading two key initiatives to challenge ableism and promote inclusivity and accessibility in neuroscience.

“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)

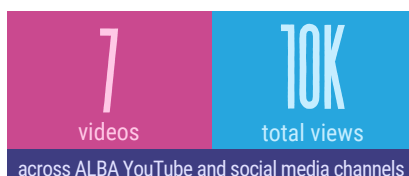


Breaking barriers: Inclusivity and accessibility tips for neuroscience

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

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



ALBA's **Gender & Sexual Diversity** Working Group successfully organised webinars and developed comprehensive guidelines to promote the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ in science, foster dialogue, and advocate for meaningful change.

Webinars tackling LGBTQIA+ discrimination in academia and the workplace

- Beyond the lab: The LGBTQIA+ neuroscientist's journey
- Workplace experiences of LGBTQIA+ academics in psychology, psychiatry, and neuroscience



The first webinar featured a panel of LGBTQIA+ neuroscientists sharing their personal experiences navigating issues such as career development, inclusion policies, and representation. The second webinar examined recent findings on workplace discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals in the US, emphasising the urgent need for stronger legal protections and reporting mechanisms.

Guidelines on designing inclusive forms for gender and sexual diversity

The working group developed recommendations to help committees and institutions make informed decisions when gathering demographic data on LGBTQIA+ people, that is, individuals with varying genders, sexualities, and transgender and intersex people. Applicable to any setting where such identities are surveyed, including conference registration forms, HR surveys and demographic surveys for research participants, this resource helps ensure accurate and respectful representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in neuroscience settings. Our goal is to assist and empower those unfamiliar with these identities to create more inclusive forms and surveys. Read the guidelines here: www.alba.network/GSDinclusiveforms.

Workshops on EDI advocacy

We organise awareness and skills training workshops for the ALBA community to connect, discuss, and learn how to become more effective and responsible EDI advocates and allies. In 2023, the Active Bystander Training Company Ltd., UK, led a workshop on challenging inappropriate behaviours that may have become normalised over time and fostering a workplace free from bullying and harassment. The workshop introduced the 4D intervention strategy, focusing on overcoming fear in difficult situations, choosing the right words when addressing problematic behaviours, and tackling microaggressions.



I feel much more prepared to intervene in future situations that require action and hope to continue learning.

Attendee
Active Bystander Workshop

ADVANCING RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

ALBA Travel Awards

ALBA's commitment to inclusivity in neuroscience conferences is demonstrated through successful initiatives aimed at reducing barriers to attendance. In partnership with the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) and the Chica & Heinz Schaller Foundation (CHS), we launched travel awards to support young researchers from underrepresented backgrounds in attending prestigious neuroscience conferences.

In 2023, ALBA received 149 applications from 48 countries and enabled 12 individuals to attend the FENS Forum 2024 in Vienna, Austria. The awardees represented a wide range of career stages, including PhD students, postdoctoral fellows, research/staff scientists, and professors or equivalents.



ALBA travel awardees at FENS Forum 2024, Vienna

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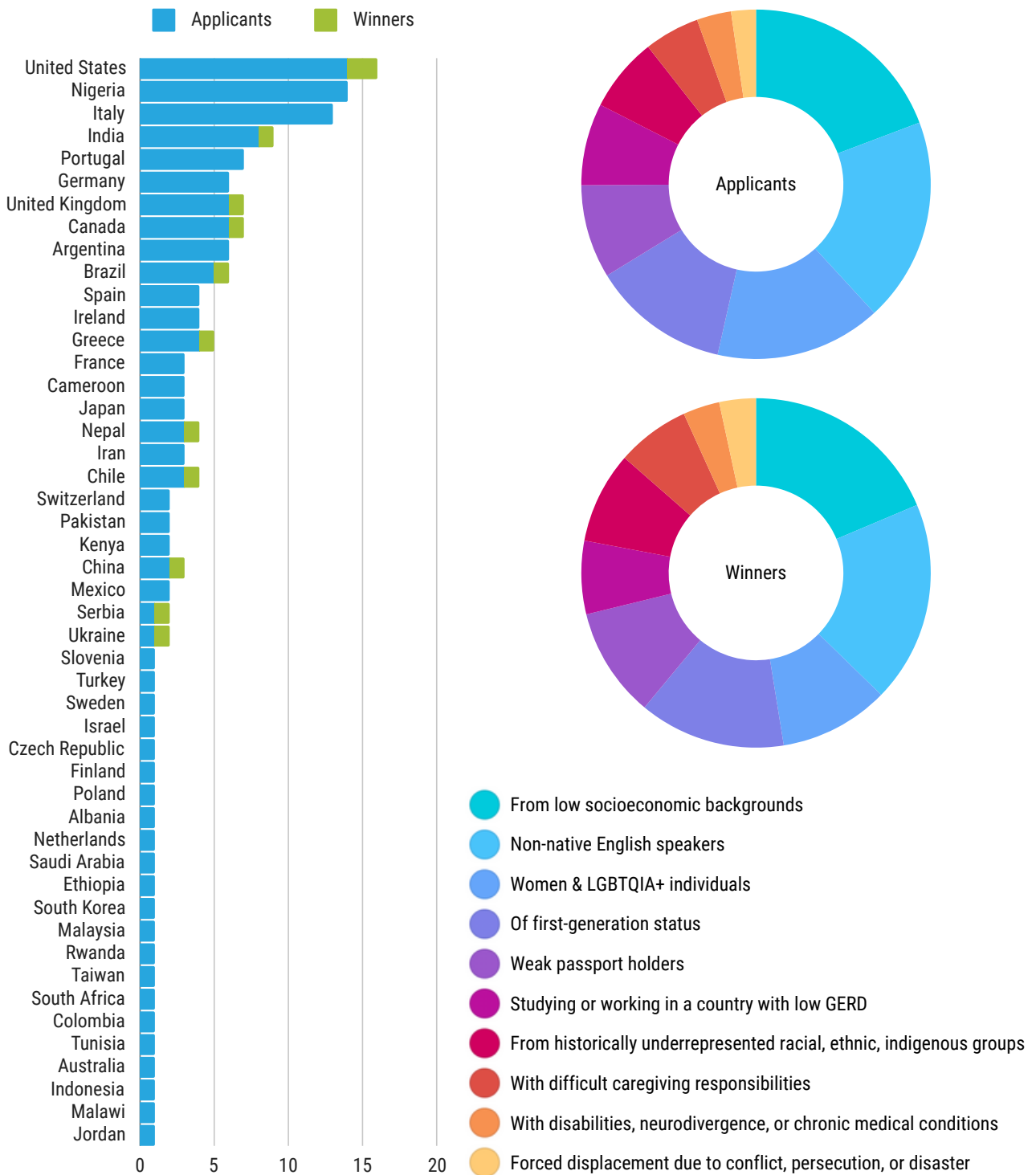
Receiving this Travel Grant was a significant opportunity for my professional and personal growth. Attending the 2024 FENS Forum enhanced my knowledge and skills, and allowed me to contribute meaningfully to my professional community.

Dr Ivana Guševac Stojanović
University of Belgrade, Serbia
2023 ALBA-CHS travel awardee

An underrepresented minority in science can be defined as an individual who identifies with one or more of the following:

- Women
- LGBTQIA+ individuals
- With disabilities, neurodivergence, or chronic medical conditions
- Of first-generation status (being the first in a family to attend university)
- Born into racial, ethnic, indigenous or caste groups that are historically underrepresented in their country of origin or work
- Non-native English speakers who are not scientifically fluent in English
- From low socioeconomic backgrounds
- Facing forced migration or displacement due to war, human rights abuses, political conflict, or natural disasters
- With difficult caregiving responsibilities
- Holders of passports with limited travel privileges
- Studying or working in countries with low gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD)

Geographic and diversity breakdown of travel award applicants & recipients



ACNP-ALBA 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 Fiona Hollis, Assistant Professor at the University of South Carolina, USA, was selected as the 2023 recipient.



Dr Fiona Hollis
2023 ACNP-ALBA travel awardee

ALBA-Elsevier Award Lecture on Brain Sciences

Supported by Elsevier, this award recognises yearly research achievements of outstanding quality by a PhD- or MD- qualified scientist who is actively working at the frontiers of brain research, who has made contributions to diversity issues in their career, and who is currently working in a country underrepresented among neuroscience publications and conferences. Winners of two consecutive years deliver Special Lectures at the biennial FENS Forum.

Dr Agustin Ibañez – Director, Latin American Brain Health Institute (BrainLat), Chile, and Associate professor, Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI), Ireland – was selected as the 2023 recipient in recognition of his significant contribution to brain health education and research.

ALBA-FKNE Diversity Prize

Founded together with the FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence (FKNE) Scholars, this award highlights a scientist or group that has made outstanding contributions to the advancement of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the brain sciences. In 2023, 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.

Arish Mudra Rakshasa-Loots, PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, UK, was selected as the 2023 recipient in recognition of his contribution and outreach efforts towards reducing HIV-related healthcare inequities and also in promoting gender, ethnic and regional diversity in mental healthcare, research and teaching.



Brain health and disease don't occur uniformly across the globe. I hope this award helps to highlight the contributions of Latin American researchers, thereby amplifying diversity and representation in neuroscience.



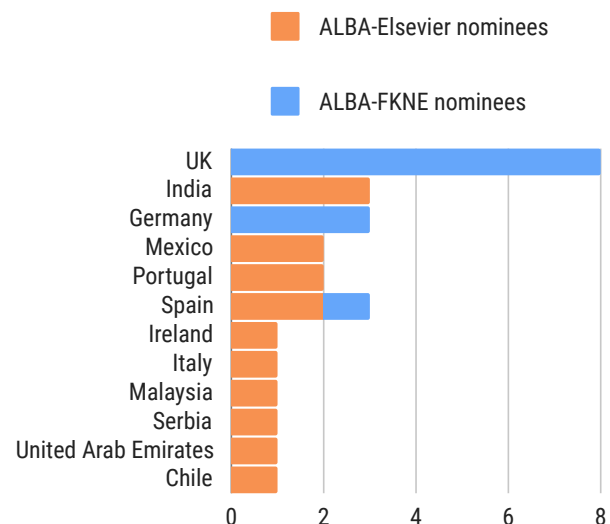
Dr Agustin Ibañez
2023 ALBA-Elsevier awardee



As a queer brown immigrant from the Global South, I am committed to creating a more inclusive culture for our researchers and research participants alike. This recognition enables me to remind other multiply-minoritised and early career researchers: you are not only welcome in neuroscience, but your lived experience and perspectives are essential to progressing this field forward.



Arish Mudra Rakshasa-Loots
2023 ALBA-FKNE awardee



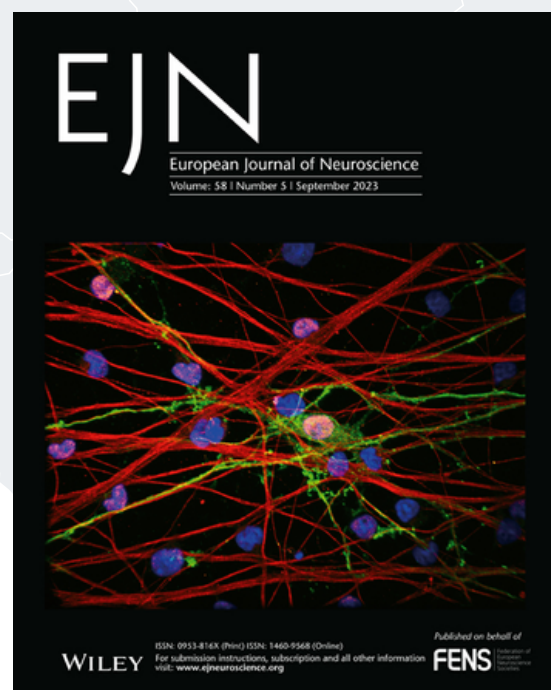
STRENGTHENING FENS COMMUNITIES

ALBA is actively collaborating with representatives from the following pan-European and national FENS member societies to address regional diversity and inclusion challenges, identify unmet needs, and empower the creation of more inclusive scientific environments at the national level.

- Armenian Neuroscience Society
- Austrian Neuroscience Association
- Belgian Society for Neuroscience
- Brain Research Society of Finland
- British Neuroscience Association
- Croatian Society for Neuroscience
- Czech Neuroscience Society
- Georgian Neuroscience Association
- German Neuroscience Society
- Hellenic Society for Neuroscience
- Italian Society for Neuroscience
- Lithuanian Neuroscience Association
- Malta Neuroscience Network
- National Neuroscience Society of Romania
- Neuroscience Ireland
- Norwegian Neuroscience Society
- Polish Neuroscience Society
- Russian Society for Neuroscience
- Serbian Neuroscience Society
- Slovenian Neuroscience Association
- Sociedad Española de Neurociencia
- Sociedade Portuguesa de Neurociências
- Société des Neurosciences
- European Behavioural Pharmacology Society
- European Brain and Behaviour Society
- European College of Neuropsychopharmacology
- European Sleep Research Society
- European Society for Neurochemistry
- Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco Europe
- International Behavioural And Neural Genetics Society

Strategies and a checklist for increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in your journal

In collaboration with the European Journal of Neuroscience (EJN) and Wiley, ALBA has contributed to the development of practical guidelines to enhance DEI in scholarly publishing. Recognising the pervasive influence of cognitive biases, we have outlined strategies for authors, editors, reviewers, and readers to ensure that scientific research is evaluated and communicated fairly and equitably. This initiative stems from a panel discussion co organised at the FENS Forum 2022. To learn more and access our self-administered checklist, read the full editorial in EJN [here](#).





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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 **SOCIETY for
NEUROSCIENCE**

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