ROLE MODELS
FOR MOBILITY OF
WOMEN
SCIENTISTS
PART 3

Ira Didenkulova and Gianna Avellis
therolemodels.net
Women have widely been recognised as a source of untapped potential in the field of science. So far, different steps have been taken to better understand the barriers and obstacles faced by women, for example present calls in the Science in Society panel in HORIZON 2020 deal with the horizontal and vertical segregation experienced by women in their careers, and best practices to manage these issues.

The aim of all of the endeavours is to foster female participation in all scientific fields with particular regard to male dominated STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines and to increase the effective representation of women in decision-making positions, to facilitate the whole process.

One problem regards mobility, one unique difficulty that we have identified regards mobility, including participation conferences or accepting a work place which requires commuting. These issues result in a decreased capacity to build scientific networks with colleagues in the same field and a reduced flexibility to meet different work possibilities.

We have developed an electronic book (e-book) of successful female scientists, who have been through a period of mobility in their careers. The aim of this e-book is to share the stories of these Role Models with young female scientists, and to provide inspiration and hope to those that face similar challenges in their own careers.

Our Role Models are recipients of honourable fellowships such as Alexander von Humboldt fellowship, Marie Sklodowska Curie fellowship and L’Oreal-UNESCO fellowship for Women in Science.

Our Role Models represent a wide range of scientists careers and span a diverse range of nationalities, cultures, family situations, research fields and career stages. Some of them are early career scientist, whilst others are well established and renowned researchers.

We believe this diversity is important for
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our readers, to help them to identify and find a personal connection with their own particular situation.

Issues related to for example, unconscious gender bias in the selection processes and the definition of excellence in science, work-life balance and dual careers, have been explored in this e-book, underlying how mobility impacts female scientists in particular.

Below you will find the interviews with several women in sciences, from PhD students to established scientists. We hope they are a source of information and inspiration for other female scientists.

This work is funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Alumni Award for innovative networking activities and supported by the Marie Curie Alumni Association.

THE PROJECT

This Project focuses on the networking of women in science and technology paying special interest to their mobility, and should provide mentoring support to those women, who do or plan to do their research abroad.

PROJECT MANAGERS

The Project is managed by Ira Didenkulova and Giovanna Avellis. We are very happy to receive any kind of feedback from you. You can contact us directly by e-mail or using contact forms on therolemodels.net. We are always seeking good candidates to include in our Role Models e-book, please, do not hesitate to nominate yourself or a colleague.

NETWORKING

The network is organized through a number of the relevant associations as follows:

• GEMS (Gender Equality for Mobile Researchers in Science) Working Group of Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA);
• ECWT (European Center for Women in Technology);
• EUWWIN (European Women Innovators and Inventors Network);
• EPWS (European Platform of Women in Science);
• m-WiSET (mobile Women in Science Engineering and Technology) Working Group of Marie Curie Fellows Association (MCFA);
• ITWIIN (Associazione Italiana Donne Inventrici e Innovatrici) and others.

COACHING AND MENTORING

One of important outcomes of this project is coaching and mentoring of young women scientists, which is supported in several ways: Publishing an e-book on Role Models for mobile women scientists; Publishing papers on Role: Models in high-level peer-reviewed journals; Creating an electronic database with a possibility to request mentorship; Organizing annual workshops and special sessions, booths and town hall meetings at major relevant conferences.

E-BOOK ON ROLE MODELS FOR MOBILE WOMEN SCIENTISTS

We are publishing electronic books (e-books) about excellent women scientists and different challenges they face during their careers. These e-books are available to be used by coaching programs that support the development of systematic approaches to increasing the representation and advancement of women in science, engineering and technology. The stories contained in the e-book are useful to mentoring and coaching programs focusing on careers of women scientists.

DATABASE OF ROLE MODELS FOR MOBILE WOMEN SCIENTISTS

We are interested in facilitating networking between excellent women scientists and understanding the role of mobility in their careers. Therefore, we do not limit ourselves to outstanding candidates (e.g. recipients of the Leibniz Prize or ERC Advanced Grant), but rather to successful researchers who found healthy balance between their academic career and family life. Our database is open to all nominations, including self-nominations and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Ira Didenkulova and Gianna Avellis
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Anahid Basiri

**NATIONALITY: IRANIAN**

Research field: Geospatial Information Science (GIS)
Doctorate: K.N. Toosi University of Technology, Iran 2012
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship: University of Nottingham UK 2013-2015
Currently: Lecturer in Spatial Data Science and Visualisation, University College London (UCL)
Languages spoken: English, French, Farsi, German

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“Having been born during the time of war in my country, Iran, I had to leave all of my friends in my hometown at a very young age to move to different cities and countries. I have been an ‘immigrant’ ever since I can remember! Mobility has become a part of my life; it is now my lifestyle. I even met my husband while I attended a conference in Florence, Italy. Just in the last six years alone, I have worked in four different countries and attended more than 30 international conferences and workshops. I think, this high-level of mobility has made me very flexible and adaptive. The best part of mobility is meeting and working with the greatest names in my research area and this has helped me a lot to stand on their shoulders and look ahead.” - Anahid Basiri.

Ana was born in a small and lovely town in Iran, Zanjan. Since her early childhood, Ana has been very excited about understanding how technology actually works. She did well at school and she passed the tough national entrance exam to start a Bachelor of Civil Engineering-Geomatics in 2002. Ana received her BEng degree in 2006, her Master of Geospatial Information Science (GIS) in 2008 and her PhD (GIS) in 2012, all from the K.N. Toosi University of Technology. She graduated as the youngest female PhD awardees in GIS in Iran, with several awards and honours, including the elite student of the University (2010). While attending a conference in Italy she met Pouria, and they married a few years later. During the last year of her PhD, her husband was diagnosed with brain cancer and they went to Germany for his treatment. While Ana and her husband were in Hanover for his brain surgery, Ana visited the director of the Institute of Geo-Informatics and Cartography (IKG) in Hanover, and started a collaboration with the IKG team. Since then, she has been appointed as a guest scientist at IKG working on several projects. During her husband’s rehabilitation period she visited some other institutes, including the Universities of Heidelberg and Salzburg and initiated some collaborations. “Every new place and situation can have some opportunities embedded; even a terrible one, like Pouria’s brain tumour, gave me the chance to extend the network of my collaborators. Those visits were the best distraction from the difficult moments we were facing at that time”, Ana adds.

On completion of her PhD, Ana accepted a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the Department of Computer Science, Maynooth University, Ireland. She worked as part of a big team of researchers, investigators and students on the Science Foundation Ireland funded project “Strategic Research in Advanced Geo-technologies”. Ana worked on multi-modal pedestrian navigation services, particularly developing an image-based positioning and navigation service.

At the end of her project in Ireland, she started a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship at the University of Nottingham. She joined a network of 13 fellows based in nine countries in Europe, as a part of the MULTI-POS project. Ana worked on the challenges and future directions of Location Based Services, such as seamless (indoor/outdoor) positioning technologies and the privacy concerns associated with location data.

She studied the current solutions and proposed new ones. The structure of Marie Curie Fellowship and its generous travel budget allowed her to attend international conferences, workshops and seminars, and also have an industry secondment. While working on her research project at Nottingham, her husband was offered positions at the University of Oxford, and at the Ordnance Survey, Southampton.

Due to the combination of her husband’s health, meaning she wished to be near him as much as possible, and Ana’s enthusiasm for her Marie Curie Fellowship, meaning she wished to continue focusing on her research, she began commuting a relatively long distance every day. “Seven hours driving, on a daily basis, may seem a bit difficult to many, but I actually enjoyed it most days. It gave me a nice period of time to think, plan, relax and get ready for actual work. I did not even ask if I could work from home during that period”, Ana adds.

As well as presenting her work at international conferences and seminars, Ana has published her research in high impact journals. During her Marie Curie Fellowship, Ana volunteered to take some teaching and PhD co-supervision responsibilities with the support of her mentor. She became the guest editor of a high impact journal in her research area, and organised some international conferences and seminars. All of these publications and presentations, along with the collaborations she initiated and expanded, plus the leadership skills she learned, and the teaching and supervision experiences gained during her fellowships have helped Ana take her career to the next level, resulting in academic offers from Universities in Australia, the US and Scotland. Sadly, the recurrence of her husband’s brain tumour required them to remain close to the specialist medical team in Oxford, where her husband underwent a second surgery and was receiving chemotherapy.

Therefore Ana took three-months compassionate leave, turned down offers of academic posts further away, and instead accepted a research post at the University of Southampton. Later on, after a longer term career break, she secured a permanent lectureship at Center for Advanced Spatial Analysis, University College London (UCL).

*Of course, it is relatively difficult to keep the balance between furthering my own research career and being the main care-giver for a person fighting against brain cancer, all while living in a country where I do not have the supporting network of our families. But I think, thanks to the flexibility I have been shown by my employers, and the compromises we both have made, that we are doing OK. My husband successfully finished his radiotherapy early in 2017 and returned to work. I started my new post at Southampton, where I can hopefully do some research and improve my track record for the next time I apply for a grant or scheme or post”, Ana says.

"Seven hours driving, on a daily basis, may seem a bit difficult to many, but I actually enjoyed it most days. It gave me a nice period of time to think, plan, relax and get ready for actual work. I did not even ask if I could work from home during that period", Ana adds.
Elena Grossi

Elena Grossi is currently working as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Early Stage Researcher (PhD) in molecular biology in Pamplona, a small city in the north of Spain.

Elena was born and raised in Rome, surrounded by art and history, and since early childhood, she has always been passionate about reading and writing; interests that were strongly supported by her parents. Therefore, it was a natural choice to enrol in a classical high school, thinking that math and science were “not her thing”. However, a fortunate meeting with an inspiring biology professor totally changed her mind, awakening her interest in the biological sciences and prompting her to pursue a career in biological research.

Therefore, she decided to undertake a Bachelor Degree in Biological Sciences in Rome and, even during her first year as a young undergraduate student, she was told over and over that mobility was essential, not only because funds were limited in Italy, but also because it would add great value to her curriculum. With this in mind, Elena was awarded a summer fellowship to carry out a research placement at Harvard University during her Master’s degree (Genetics and Molecular Biology).

This opportunity was offered by the Armenise-Harvard Foundation, which promotes student mobility and provides young scientists with a chance to explore different scientific environments.

By the time she came back to Rome, Elena was conscious that leaving her comfort-zone and challenging herself was an important way to bring out the best in her.

Therefore, at the end of her Master’s Degree, she applied for several doctoral programs throughout Europe, and, as a result, she was offered a PhD position in Spain, as part of an Initial Training Network (ITN), funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, to study the molecular mechanisms of aging. Thanks to this European network (ITN-RNAtrain) she has had the possibility to meet and collaborate with the best researchers of her field, and to travel all over Europe for doctoral meetings, internships, scientific conferences and workshops.

These experiences have not only improved her technical expertise but also taught her that “soft skills” are a key, though often underestimated, part of doctoral training.

During her PhD studies, Elena has also experienced some tough moments, feeling sometimes rootless, which is not unusual for people living abroad.

However, she has had the privilege to meet a very diverse group of people and to enjoy many different experiences that enriched her personally, providing her with the strength and flexibility necessary to face new challenges and to be ready to take the next step in her life.
Hiba El Hajj

NATIONALITY: LEBANESE
Research field: Oncology/Parasitology
Doctorate: Montpellier University (France)
Current position: Assistant Professor, Departments of Internal Medicine
And Experimental Pathology, Immunology and Microbiology, Faculty of
Medicine, American University of Beirut, Lebanon
Languages spoken: Arabic, French and English

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Dr. Hiba El Hajj was born in a village in the Chouf region of Mount Lebanon, elder of four children (two sisters and one brother), she grew up in a family with a working father and a housewife mother. Hiba’s mother wanted her daughters to have a different lifestyle to her own conservative upbringing, and Hiba’s parents pushed her to be successful and independent which revolutionized her life. Hiba was a gifted scholar and always ranked among the top students throughout all her academic journey. After finishing her Master I in Biology in 2001, she realized that she wanted to deepen her knowledge and pursue a PhD in the fascinating field of Microbiology. At that time, doctoral schools in biology were not very common in Lebanon, and the few that existed were prohibitively expensive. She applied confidentially for different programs in France, knowing that, being a single woman who seeks to travel alone, from her village, will be a tremendous obstacle. She got accepted in many programs due to her outstanding performance. When Hiba informed her relatives that she would travel, and was faced with outrage from the village community. Strongly supported by her parents, Hiba was the first single woman to travel away from her village to pursue graduate and doctoral studies.

In a very unfortunate turn of events, shortly after her arrival to France, a fire burned more than half of her lab. Hiba had been the last person to leave the lab before the fire. Being Muslim, and since that happened in 2001, few months after the twin towers attack in New York, she was interrogated by the French Police and Montpellier University security about this being a potential intentional incident. Despite all the problems she encountered, she adapted very quickly to the competitive French PhD program, where students were judged by about 50 principal investigators and where only the first 25% of the students get a fellowship for their PhD. Hiba ranked 8th among about 100 students from all programs in Biology of the University of Montpellier, and first from the Parasitology Program.

At this point the young, motivated woman who defied the conservative rules of her community, lost hope in pursuing doctoral studies. However, after clearing the fire issue caused by an unsecure water bath, her supervisor, Dr. Jean François Dubremetz, renewed her hope and faith.

Hiba was honored and blessed to know him and to work under his supervision. He added more human values to those she grew with, taught her excellent science and critical thinking that sculpted her passion for research.

She got a fellowship from the French Ministry of Higher Education, despite being foreigner, and could pursue her PhD. Hiba then remained in the lab to complete her first postdoctoral fellowship. She gained confidence and love of every single person in that lab and kept amazing friendship with everyone. Many attended her wedding ceremony in Beirut or came to visit her later.

Although she was offered many post-doctoral opportunities in the USA, Hiba decided to move back to Lebanon for her second fellowship, where she worked on cancer causing viruses. Shortly after she moved to Lebanon in 2006, a tragic Israeli war started. Despite the challenges that this brought, she worked in a great team at one of the most prestigious universities in the Middle East Region, the American University of Beirut. This proved to be a major and decisive step in her professional career.

Hiba was fortunate enough to work under the guidance of one of the pioneers of leukemia research, Dr. Ali Bazarbachi. After six years under his mentorship, she succeeded in joining the Faculty of Medicine as an Assistant Professor in 2012.

Driven by her enthusiasm and faith in the radical change, and with her firm belief that her success as a woman will reflect on her community, she could witness many single women who followed her path and traveled from her village to pursue their studies, including her youngest sister who will defend her PhD in June 2018. Hiba’s PhD students are mostly women, and have been inspired by her to undertake their studies. Hiba focuses on imparting confidence, criticism, perseverance and leadership skills on her students and colleagues. She strongly believes that these are the skills every developing society needs to become better as a whole. Hiba’s contributions to Women in Science were recognized through two prestigious prizes, the “2015 L’Oréal-Unesco for Women in Science” fellowship and the “2016 Rising talents”. These prizes have helped her inspire more young women, and given her international recognition in the field.

Hiba is currently the Deputy Director of the Animal Care Facility at the American University Beirut where she hopes to reach higher administrative and academic ranks to further prove that women can be as successful in leadership positions in Lebanon as well as throughout the world.
Karine Hestroffer was born in Creutzwald, a small coal mining town in the north east of France at the German border. She grew up in Guerting, a nearby village in the Warndt Valley with her two younger sisters. Raised in a family with no tradition of higher education, she enjoyed reading, baking and dreaming of international adventures.

While attending high school in Creutzwald she had a hard time deciding in which field to specialize because she was interested in most subjects. She particularly enjoyed theater which she practiced intensely within the Lycée Felix Mayer’s theater group. Yet she decided to prepare a scientific “baccalaureat” (French high school qualification) with a specialization in mathematics. Nowadays this specialization is often seen as the most generic to open up multiple career possibilities.

In 2004, she moved to Strasbourg (France) where she enrolled in both an entertainment arts and a materials science bachelor’s program thanks to the Centre Régional des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (CROUS) financial support. Strasbourg was a place of choice for a theater lover, and Karine greatly enjoyed watching all the plays she could while learning about the theory of dramaturgy. At the same time, it was in the science faculty, while completing laboratories classes and arguing about the meaning of results with her colleagues that her fondness for science and particularly for physics grew bigger. In the final year of her bachelor degree, she took part in a university exchange to Wroclaw (Poland). The goal of the trip was to raise the interest of the students and tempt them to enroll in a bi-cultural master’s degree between the Technical University of Wroclaw and the University of Strasbourg. While in Wroclaw, Karine completed a short research project which looked into the photoluminescence properties of quantum dots. It was the first time that Karine worked in a research laboratory with ultra-modern equipment, and also her first experience with semiconductor materials. She finished the exchange inspired by her experience and convinced she wanted to specialize in condensed matter physics. From that point onward entertainment arts would remain a hobby.

Following this, Karine was accepted to the French Alternative Energy and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) for a PhD program and moved back to France in 2009. During her PhD she attended several international conferences at which she met world-leading researchers in her field, including graduate students and professors from the University of Santa Barbara-California (USA). Struck by their outstanding research and how approachable the team was, Karine carried out her first postdoctoral position with the group of Professor Mishra from Santa Barbara-California in 2013. Living in the USA was a whole new experience from every point of view, ranging from work habits to implicit social rules.

After a couple of years in California, Karine wrote a research proposal for which she was granted an Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship. She returned to Berlin in early 2016, where she is now working on her own research project at the Humboldt University. The various mobility experiences gave Karine a strong awareness of how to seek funding sources. They also taught her to quickly adapt to new environments and to feel comfortable in diverse conditions.

But what she likes the most about her international adventures is the strong, heterogeneous and unique friendships she was able to build.
Kateryna Terletska

NATIONALITY: UKRAINIAN
Year Born: 1980
Research field: Computational fluid dynamics
Current position: Senior Researcher at Institute of Mathematical Machines and Systems Problems
Languages spoken: Ukrainian, English, Russian
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Kateryna was born in Kiev, at that time the capital of Soviet Ukraine. From childhood she showed an interest in solving puzzles, which was supported by her father, who sparked her long standing interest in math. At primary school she liked figuring out problems, solving mathematical puzzles, experimenting, reading books and dreaming of exciting new adventures. Her enjoyment of mathematics motivated Kateryna to study the subject in the mathematical school.

As people pass through different stages of life they ask different questions of the world around them. Kateryna questioned the usefulness of math, specifically how does mathematics apply to real life? This question persisted to challenge her, and ultimately determined her way to the science.

Kateryna graduated from the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. After graduation she lectured at the Kiev National University of Construction and Architecture. One of the joys of teaching was watching students developing their own appreciation of the beauty of mathematics. At the same time she started to prepare her PhD thesis, where she first discovered her scientific interest in wave motion. This began with waves in composite materials when Kateryna obtained her PhD in mechanics from the S. P. Timoshenko Institute of Mechanics, through her project researching the propagation of solitary waves in composite materials.

Kateryna took a postdoctoral position at the Institute of Mathematical Machines and Systems Problems, part of the Cybernetic Centre of the Academy of Science of Ukraine. She joined a team involved in computational fluid dynamics, environmental science and, mainly, modelling of stratified flows and internal waves. Working on the international INTAS projects “Strongly nonlinear internal waves in lakes: generation, transformation and meromixis” and “The Nordic Seas in the global climate system” led to international collaboration and the possibility to attend conferences and workshops all over the world.

During the period 2008-2015 Kateryna was awarded the Premium of the President of Ukraine for young scientists and the Premium of Presidium of National Academy of Science of Ukraine (NASU) awards. In addition, she obtained the NASU medal in 2013, specifically established for young scientists. During this time Kateryna’s two sons were born. When her youngest son was less than two years old she obtained an invitation to visit the Korean Institute of Ocean Science and Technology for one month. Not long afterwards, she was invited to participate in a conference in Beijing, and provide lectures at the First Institute of Oceanography in Qingdao, China.

It was the beginning of a new stage in Kateryna’s life. Life with the desire to care for her children and at the same time the willingness to continue her research. That was the real beginning of Kateryna’s mobility experience.

Each year she spends a couple of months far away from her sons, missing some important moments in their lives, but always keeping contact with her family via the internet. Kateryna was driven by a desire to discover the world, developing new research and ways of thinking. Mobility inspired her with new ideas and started personal relationships with new friends. It was also a culturally enriching experience that she, as a mother, can share with her children.

Of course to be mobile, women need strong support from their family. Kateryna is very grateful to her parents and husband. Only with their help has it become possible to realize her ambition of mobility.

Kateryna thinks that the women’s way of life is about continuously maintaining the balance between curiosity and family. And curiosity is the main motivation that inspires people to continue their scientific career.

Mobility is good for the family to cultivate the child’s curiosity, interest in nature and the wider world. Children need to spend meaningful time with their parents, but they also need to see how their parents live their life and achieve their own goals.
Sara Kyne was born in Melbourne (Australia) and completed her undergraduate and doctoral degrees at the University of Melbourne.

Prior to starting her Ph.D. Sara spent six months travelling extensively throughout Europe. This first experience abroad opened Sara’s eyes to the history and diversity of European cultures, and it was then that she became certain that mobility would be an enriching experience both personally and professionally.

During her Ph.D. Sara carried out research at Osaka Prefecture University (Japan), before moving to complete postdoctoral research at the University of Strathclyde (UK). The cultural and scientific diversity of these experiences benefited Sara immensely.

She was thus inspired to apply for a Marie Curie Intra European Fellowship to work in Paris, without speaking a word of French. For many this would have been a deterrent, but for Sara the extra challenge only added to the experience of working in a highly regarded international research institution.

In 2012 Sara moved to the Université Pierre et Marie Curie (France) and immediately set about immersing herself in the new cultural and professional environments, and learning the language.

Initially the experience was quite isolating, but with the support of her colleagues she was able to rapidly improve her oral, listening and writing skills, alongside undertaking a new and exciting research project.

In 2015 Sara’s desire to continue progressing her academic career led her to accept a permanent position at the University of Lincoln (UK) meaning another international move. This latest move has allowed Sara to increase her professional responsibilities and expand her own research further.

With increasing confidence Sara’s professional experience developed and her network of international scientists expanded. Living in France introduced her to a very different way of life; and Sara believes that the country rightly has an exceptional reputation for its historical and cultural influences across the world.

Sara Kyne
NATIONALITY: AUSTRALIAN
Research field: Sustainable synthetic chemistry
Doctorate: University of Melbourne (Australia) 2010
Marie Curie Fellowship: Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris 6 (France) IEF 2012-2014
Current position: Senior Lecturer at University of Lincoln (UK)
Languages spoken: English and French

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Sara believes that her prior international experiences play a crucial role informing her future research directions and the way in which her research group operates.

Sara’s research places particular emphasis on ‘benign by design’ processes and materials, which are fundamental to achieving a sustainable lifestyle for modern society.

Currently, many of the materials that are used on a daily basis are produced from non-renewable fossil fuels, so it is vital to find sustainable alternatives.

Sara’s research takes renewable materials, generally perceived as waste, and transforms these into high value components and products required by society in everyday life.

Sustainability is an increasingly important challenge that will only be met through the contributions of a diverse array of experts globally. This gives Sara the exciting opportunity to collaborate with an ever increasing network of scientists and to retain her worldwide mobility.
Dr Thi Tuyet Tran (June Tran) was born in a small village in the North of Vietnam, a country where Confucianism was firmly implanted during the Chinese occupation. With emphasis placed on the importance of family and comradery, Vietnamese people, especially women of her generation, prize stable jobs in the government sector. These jobs often come with low income, but importantly low commitments, which gives employees more time to take care of their families. June says that she is not a traditional woman who loves easy jobs. However, she is probably also not an exception when it comes to the phenomenon of stable jobs when she had been working for the University of Languages and International Studies – Vietnam National University for almost 20 years, from 1996 to 2015.

June also loves travelling. She travels a lot during her time studying and working. The first two and half year trip overseas studying master’s degree in Australia helped her deeply understand the Vietnamese idiom Di mot ngày đăng, hoc mot sảng khôn, similar to the English phrase “Travelling forms a young man”. Thus, when considering a place to undertake a doctorate, she decided to go overseas to study, even though by that time, mobility was harder as she was married and had a young daughter. As a lecturer of Chinese language, she considered going to Taiwan before being granted an Australian Leadership Award to conduct her doctoral research in Melbourne, Australia.

Moving the whole family overseas was not easy when her daughter was less than three years old and her husband did not know a word of English. Nonetheless, after more than four years in Melbourne the family were integrated into the society, and both June and her husband were able to work and earn money. At this point the family faced a difficult decision to stay in Australia or return to Vietnam, ultimately returning to Vietnam and June continued to work for her university. Upon her return, June was appointed as the Director of the Language Education and Quality Assurance Research Centre; she was also given opportunities to teach and supervise master students. Her daughter was enrolled in a private school, and after initially finding the change difficult, began to enjoy it. They built a nice house and it looked like they would settle permanently in Hanoi. Indeed, June and her husband liked the idea of remaining in Vietnam for an extended period to be close to their aging parents. However, after one and half years being very busy at work with everyday duties, and several rejections to grant applications and research proposals, all with unclear reasons given, she was thinking about another change.

That was the time the Humboldt von Alexander Foundation confirmed that she was selected to be their Postdoctoral Fellow and could conduct her postdoctoral research in Germany. It was an exciting new, but when considering leaving home for Germany, June faced many difficulties. First, she did not gain the support from her university this time. When she had initially agreed to take over the role of the Director of the Research Center, one of her ‘requirements’ was that if she received an offer for an overseas postdoc offer, the university would arrange a leave of absence to let her go without giving up her job in Vietnam. However, when she approached the Rector with the request to conduct postdoctoral research in Germany, the answer was ‘No’. After four months it became clear that accepting the post would mean quitting her job, which she did not expect. Second, her mother did not want them to go; she was very upset and could not understand why June would leave everything: a good job, a nice house and a settled life. Moreover, moving to Germany meant that her family had to face many difficulties: Germany was far from their homeland, they did not speak German, and they had no support network to help with the numerous difficulties that arise from moving countries. Despite all these the decision was made to leave Vietnam at that time. Now, after more than two years in Germany, having experienced many ups and downs, June still assures that she made the right decision. Her postdoctoral experience has been a benchmark for her research, and an eye-opening experience in general. She now deeply understands that Western countries are not at all the same, and Australia and Germany are good and interesting examples of ways in which they are different. She also now understands the disadvantages for countries like Vietnam when lessons from developed countries are often mixed up and applied without closely considering the local context and conditions.

June’s own research has benefited immensely from her mobility experiences, she has gained much more insight into issues such as graduate employability, university-enterprise collaboration, higher education governance and foreign language teaching and learning. For her, doing research is not only about reading literature, conducting field-work and writing publications and grant applications. More importantly it is about the real experience of people in a real-world context that creates impact and insight for her to grow as a researcher.
Vered Raz grew up in Israel in a kibbutz with a strong social influence. At that time, all children received the same education without options for special education or talent development. She was determined to be a researcher at an early age, and after compulsory army service she left the kibbutz and financed her own university studies. She completed three degrees within seven years, and graduated at the Weizmann Institute of Science with honors. She also received the Israeli President award for excellence. Diligence, motivation and scientific curiosity characterized her path all the way to her doctoral graduation.

She received a Fulbright Fellowship, which was held at Penn University, Philadelphia, USA. Three years later she received an EMBO and EU-Training and Mentoring of Researcher Fellowship at Wageningen University, Netherlands. Here, she conducted fundamental research on plant development. Six years later she made a career change by accepting a position at Leiden University Medical Centre. Gradually she progressed to a principle investigator and a group leader in the Department of Human Genetics where she researches molecular regulation of muscle aging and age-associated muscular disorders aiming to develop novel therapies for those conditions.

Working in a hospital together with clinicians, and coming face-to-face with patients opened for Vered’s eyes to new challenges and perspectives.

Her current research is multi-disciplinary engaging clinicians, physicists, computer scientists and chemists to solve medical and physiological-related problems.

Communication of biological problems to different people with a broad range of expertise is amongst the more important skills she has thus far developed. Vered uses these skills in science education programs for secondary school students, and she is involved in teaching on both Masters programs and adult education in The Hague region.

Vered also promotes gender diversity and mobility. As an EMBO fellow she served as an ambassador to promote women in science, which nowadays focuses on successfully combining a competitive work environment with a happy family life.

She finds that support from her own family (children and husband) is an essential factor in pursuing a career path in research. Vered has been lucky that her career path has not been impeded by gender bias. At the Hebrew University, as a Bachelor student, and at the Weizmann Institute, as a Master and PhD student, she was not aware of any gender bias. This environment was no different from growing up in a kibbutz, where boys and girls were treated equally. Gender equality at work is also promoted in The Netherlands, and the conditions for working mothers are improving. This is important because working parents provide a positive role model for their own children and future generations.

Vered was selected to be a part of the Comenius program at Leiden University Medical Centre, which is a Dutch government funded program that aims to promote women in high academic positions. Vered thinks that this career development is important not just for promoting women into academic management positions, but should be a program that is available for all genders to participate in.

Vered has three children, the eldest has finished a PhD/MD and plans to follow in Vered’s footsteps by combining medical care and research. Her other two children have equally high aspirations, and also plan to pursue high university degrees.

All three children play the violin, whilst Vered herself focuses her creative energy on plastic art and sculpturing. The combination of creative art and creative thinking seems to work well for her professional and personal life.
Zaineb Chelly Dagdia

NATIONALITY: TUNISIAN
Year born: 1985
Research field: Computer Science
Doctorate: Institut Supérieur de Gestion de Tunis, Tunisia, 2014
Current position: Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow, Aberystwyth University, Wales, UK
Languages spoken: English, French, German, Arabic
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Zaineb Chelly Dagdia was born in Immenstadt, a beautiful, calm town in the Upper Allgäu, the southernmost district of Bavaria in the German Alps. In contrast to that peaceful image, her career and the path she has taken in life were not that quiet; nor that easy. Her life has been full of challenges and adventures; her story of determination began when she turned 6 years old. She would later then go on to live with her aunt at Nabeul, a coastal town in the north east of Tunisia, where she began her education. In this environment, she learned how to be strong, and to always give her best to excel in her studies. Always keeping in mind the determination to make her family proud, she opted for the Computer Science path and took her Bachelor degree receiving honourable distinction at the “Faculté des Sciences Economiques et de Gestion de Nabeul” (FSEEG-Nabeul), Tunisia, and, as a major, she was selected to take her Master’s degree at one of the top-ranked universities in Tunisia, “Institut Supérieur de Gestion de Tunis” (ISG-Tunis). There, she completed her MSc degree in Computer Science, also with honourable distinction, and she felt that it was the right moment to launch her wonderful dream; she wanted to share her research results with a larger audience.

To push ahead with her dream in 2010 Zaineb wrote her first research paper, the fruit of her master work, and published it in the “International Conference on Artificial Immune Systems” (ICARIS), Edinburgh, UK. That was the first step that allowed her to move to the next stage of her life together with “Mobility”. The ICARIS program committee was composed of leaders in Zaineb’s research field and that is why she targeted this special conference to submit her research paper. She was really keen to be part of ICARIS, to meet international leaders and share. However, being part of a modest Tunisian laboratory, which was not able to afford funds to cover the ICARIS registration fees and the travel expense, was a major worry. So, she looked for funding opportunities, contacted the conference program committee and applied for a bursary. Luckily, her voice was heard and her dream fulfilled. When the time came, she got that chance to participate in ICARIS and present her work at the conference, where she met people working in her research field including the leaders she had always dreamed of meeting. Zaineb said “ICARIS was my first opportunity to introduce myself to the committee and learn how to be part of the group. Their encouragement and appreciation of my first results were highly motivating for my following research”. Always fascinated by her research topic, eager to pursue her investigations and go further in her research, she did her best to excel in the field she was investigating and succeeded to defend her thesis in 2014 with honourable distinction at ISG-Tunis. Alongside completing her PhD, Zaineb took her first job as a Teaching Assistant (Tenure-Track) at FSEG-Nabeul to help fund her research. Based on what she learnt from her first ICARIS experience, she has published her research in journals, book chapters and at well-known international conferences, where she has presented her work in front of a wide range of professional researchers. When attending conferences, she managed to make new connections, learned about new research fields, and had many fruitful discussions with the attendees, which has played a crucial role in her research.

She has always enjoyed the opportunity to talk about her research and to attend presentations. Zaineb said “Thanks to mobility, I can better present my work now and extend it. All these discussions highly influenced my current view on my research area. The fact of talking to other researchers allowed me to have more professional contacts, to share experiences with them and to initiate potential collaborations.” Enthusiastically, Zaineb added “Most importantly, thanks to mobility I could meet Christine Zarges at several conferences; she inspired me with her passion for research. Among our achievements we succeeded in obtaining the prestigious Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship, which made my position as a research fellow at Aberystwyth University, UK possible. In my Marie Curie project, we have involved many collaborators from our research network, and without mobility that would not have happened.”

Zaineb was awarded the IEEE EHB Young Researcher First Prize, the ACM-Woman Award and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual European Fellowship. Today, Zaineb is engaged in several outreach activities. Among these, she acts as an MSC ambassador and participated in the Horizon-2020-Tunisia event where she gave a talk. Zaineb said “As an MSC fellow, I was delighted to be part of the Horizon 2020 Tunisia event. I was invited as a speaker in order to share my experience on how I got the MSC fellowship. It was really a great pleasure to interact with the audience to explicitly share and detail each step that I made prior to winning the prestigious MSC fellowship.” Recently, Zaineb was honoured to be among the Heidelberg-Laureate-Forum most qualified young researchers to meet with the Abel-Prize, Fields-Medal, ACM-Turing award, Nevanlinna Prize and ACM Prize in Computing winners. Zaineb organized a workshop with Prof Stephen Smale, recipient of the Fields Medal. Zaineb said “I always dreamed to meet the laureates one day and today I am so happy for having this unique opportunity to meet them, to interact with them and to learn from them.”

Finally, Zaineb said “I am so glad seeing my family, all members of Chelly Dagdia and Garcia, proud of me and I thank them very much for their love, their support and encouragement that led me to where I am. It is an amazing feeling to see my parent’s eyes full of joy. But still, this is just a first step which I have gained through the experiences I have lived through previously; and I am eager and ready to take the upcoming steps,” and she ends by saying: “Mobility is the key to gain the 3Cs: Communication, Collaboration and Contribution.”
ROLE MODELS FOR MOBILITY OF WOMEN SCIENTISTS

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