

The first mini-symposium „For Women in Science“ as an introduction to the launch of the new call of the L’Oréal - UNESCO National Program “For Women in Science” for 2025

AUTHOR:

ZRINKA LJUBEŠIĆ

The Department of Medical Sciences of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, L’Oréal Adria, and the Croatian Commission for UNESCO within the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia organized the First Symposium “For Women in Science”, on November 8, 2024, at the beautiful Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts Library in Zagreb.

The motivation for the symposium is an outstanding national program “For Women in Science” organized by L’Oréal Adria and the Croatian Commission for UNESCO at the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia. The program started in 2006, and since then more than 70 outstanding young Croatian women scientists, in the final stages of obtaining a doctorate in the field of natural sciences including interdisciplinary fields, have been awarded. By now, the program has been recognized by the broad academic public, and each year a large number of young Croatian women scientists apply for this prestigious grant. The program encourages the development of education, culture, and

science, while affirming Croatian science and its women scientists both at the national and global levels.

Every year, the selection committee has a difficult task to choose the best four of the candidates. The fellows are awarded a 5,000 EUR grant, but even more importantly, they gain public recognition for their outstanding work, bringing their hidden laboratories under the spotlight and showcasing the amazing world of science. Of course, many more than four outstanding women scientists are finishing their PhDs in natural sciences yearly, but within this program, all of them are gaining more attention and appreciation for their hard work. It is an honour to read the applications and witness the amazing results of the hard work of those young women, as well as their enthusiasm for discoveries that contribute to the wellbeing of mankind. Those women are driving change in society, some are pioneers in their fields, while others are essential in maintaining the tradition, and all of them are promising a better future for all of us.



Figure 2. Symposium speakers prof. Helena Jasna Mencer, Vida Demarin, F.C.A., prof. Zrinka Ljubešić and Petra Radić (shown in order from the left to the right). Photo credit Tatjana Bukvić

The selection committee members, all very proud and happy to participate in the selection, have decided to announce the 19th year of the program with the organisation of the mini-symposium “For Women in Science”. The symposium consisted of four invited talks, two members of the selection committee, and two awarded fellows. The opening speeches were given by Irena Šarić Dombaj, Director of Corporate Communications of the L’Oréal Group for the Adria–Balkan region, Rut Carek, Head and Secretary General of the Croatian Commission for UNESCO, and Zvonko Kusić F.C.A., President of the Croatian Commission for UNESCO and President of the Commission of the National Program “For Women in Science” (Figure 1).

The first speaker, prof. Helena Jasna Mencer, the former rector of the University of Zagreb, presented a critical review of her experiences as a reviewer of previous applications. Vida Demarin, F.C.A., also a secretary of the Department of Medical Sciences of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, presented the talk

entitled “Neuroplasticity of the Brain in Health and Disease”. The lecture entitled “Biological Oceanography – History, Challenges, and Future” was given by the first recipient of the “For Women in Science” award and current member of the Selection Committee, prof. Zrinka Ljubešić. The last talk was given by this year’s winner, Petra Radić with the lecture entitled “Why Do Women Have Heartaches?” (Figure 2).

The presenters covered various fields of natural science, followed by an interesting and engaging discussion that not only focused on their talks, but also expanded on the challenges and future facing young scientists. This mini-symposium served as an excellent introduction to the call, and as always, we expect a strong interest from applicants. As Zvonko Kusić F.C.A, president of the Commission of the National Program “For Women in Science”, has emphasized that one of the most important benefits of the program is the wider social impact, which draws the broader public’s attention to young women engaged in top science.



Figure 1. The first mini-symposium „For Women in Science“ opening words given by Zvonko Kusić F.C.A., Irena Šarić Dombaj, Rut Carek and moderator Vida Demarin, F.C.A., symposium organizing committee and speakers and the auditorium (shown in order from the left to the right). Photo credit Tatjana Bukvić