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## **Gaia Novarino receives Simons Foundation award**

### **Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative funds innovative research | Neuroscientist Novarino pursues project on autism spectrum disorders**

IST Austria Professor Gaia Novarino has been granted a Pilot Award of the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI) for her project on “Probing development and reversibility of autism spectrum disorders”. Launched in 2003, SFARI is a scientific initiative within the Simons Foundation’s suite of programs focusing on the science underlying a medical condition. Its mission is to improve the understanding, diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders by funding innovative research of the highest quality and relevance. To this end, SFARI grants annual awards to individual scientists who conduct particularly bold, imaginative, rigorous and relevant research. As the recipient of a Pilot Award, Novarino also becomes a member of the prestigious community of Simons Investigators.

Gaia Novarino is a neuroscientist who investigates the genetic and molecular basis of neurodevelopmental disorders. Together with her team, her scientific work aims to identify and study genes underlying inherited forms of epilepsy, intellectual disability and autism. Neurodevelopmental disorders affect millions of children and are often refractory to treatments. Epilepsy often presents with intellectual disability and/or autism, suggesting the existence of common molecular mechanisms underlying these syndromes. Despite a lot of progress in brain research to date, the causes of epilepsy, autism and intellectual disability remain unknown for the majority of cases.

Novarino studied Molecular Biology and received her PhD in Cell Biology in 2006, having performed her predoctoral studies at “La Sapienza” University in Rome, Italy. She worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Molecular Neurobiology in Hamburg, Germany, the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in Berlin, Germany, and the University of California San Diego, USA, before she joined IST Austria as Assistant Professor in 2014. She was awarded a Boehringer Ingelheim FENS Research Award 2016 and an ERC Starting Grant in 2016, and was appointed Kavli Scholar of the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies in 2016.

The Simons Foundation was established to advance the frontiers of research in mathematics and the basic sciences. At its core it supports basic scientific research, undertaken in pursuit of understanding the phenomena of our world. The foundation’s support of scientists takes the form of direct grants to individual

investigators and projects, through their academic institutions, in four areas: Mathematics and Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, autism research (SFARI) and Education & Outreach. The Simons Foundation also seeks to create strong collaborations and foster cross-pollination of ideas between investigators, as these interactions often lead to unexpected breakthroughs and new understanding.

Further information:

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### **IST Austria**

The Institute of Science and Technology (IST Austria) is a PhD granting research institution located in Klosterneuburg, 18 km from the center of Vienna, Austria. Inaugurated in 2009, the Institute is dedicated to basic research in the natural and mathematical sciences. IST Austria employs professors on a tenure-track system, postdoctoral fellows, and doctoral students at its international graduate school. While dedicated to the principle of curiosity-driven research, the Institute owns the rights to all scientific discoveries and is committed to promote their use. The first president of IST Austria is Thomas A. Henzinger, a leading computer scientist and former professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and the EPFL in Lausanne, Switzerland. [www.ist.ac.at](http://www.ist.ac.at)