



## New Board for ICONS

Sandra Rodrigues, Alberto Rodriguez-Moldes Sebastian, Evgenia Klironomou, Bianca Turini, Alejandra Padilla Camargo, Cristina Sastre Jachimska and Nuria Rego Falagan, were selected as the 2026 officers of ICFO's Organization and Network of Students

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The ICFO Organization and Network of Students (ICONS), continues its mission to strengthen its PhD community by promoting educational and social activities that connect students with the broader photonics community at ICFO. Through initiatives such as the International Food Festival, Pride Month activities, Women in Science Month and Earth Day, ICONS fosters interaction, collaboration and a sense of belonging within the institute.

Since its creation in 2004, every year, the ICONS general assembly has appointed a new board through an open vote. The 2026 team is composed of Sandra Rodrigues as President, Alberto Rodriguez Moldes Sebastian as Vice President, Evgenia Klironomou as Treasurer, Bianca Turini as Secretary, Alejandra Padilla Camargo as Communications Officer, Cristina Sastre Jachimska as Diversity and Inclusion Officer, and Nuria Rego Falagan as Outreach Officer.

Looking ahead, the new board aims to build on the strong foundations of previous years while further enhancing community engagement. As Sandra Rodrigues and Alberto Rodriguez explain, "For this incoming year, we hope to keep up the good work that has been developed in the past with the Food Festival, Pride Month activities, Women in Science Month, Earth Day, and so forth. In that line, we would also like to keep working on events that encourage interaction between researchers and make integration easier for newcomers, like social Fridays and book clubs." They highlight that facilitating early connections among researchers is key to helping newcomers better understand the research environment and their future path.

Strengthening ties with ICFO Outreach is also a priority. This year also marks the introduction of a new role within ICONS. As Outreach Officer, Nuria Rego explains that "having a dedicated person within ICONS allows us to respond more efficiently when participation is requested and to organize a small task force of interested PhD students who want to engage in outreach regularly. The goal is to make this collaboration smoother while giving more PhD students the opportunity to engage with the public and share their science." For the board members, ICONS plays a central role in shaping the PhD experience. Cristina Sastre emphasizes that "Associations like ICONS are essential when it comes to creating professional and community networks among PhDs," noting that it enables conversations on scientific, social and cultural topics while fostering friendships and a stronger sense of community. Similarly, Bianca Turini points out that "ICONS gives students a place to connect, tackle issues they care about, and engage with the scientific community. For ICFO, we are a community reference, while for us, it is a way to drive the changes we want to see," and that it provides a space to lead projects in a friendly and non-hierarchical environment.

Being part of the board is also a valuable learning experience. Evgenia Klironomou notes that "Being part of the ICONS board encourages PhD students to take initiatives and assume responsibilities, it teaches them how to manage their time and provides a first glimpse of how the organization of colloquiums, talks and other social events works." For Alejandra Padilla, the experience "has shown me the impact that a committed group of students can have on the ICFO community. It's been a great opportunity to connect with other ICFOians and realize that, at the end of the day, we all want an enjoyable PhD journey."

For Sandra Rodrigues, being part of ICONS has shown her "the real power of community" and the importance of combining different strengths within a team to achieve shared goals.

Congratulations to the new ICONS board, and many thanks to the outgoing team for their dedication and contributions to enriching the PhD experience at ICFO.