

# A MANIFESTO: Fostering Early Career Researchers' careers in Europe

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## Europe needs more scientists!

There is a wide consensus throughout Europe about the need to further attract and retain the best talent for research. Indeed, research is the basis upon which present and future generations will be able to conduct the major transitions our societies are embarked on. This requires fostering research careers at a European level and increasing the recognition of the research activity, in both the public and the private sectors. By “career” we mean how researchers are recruited, how their work is assessed, rewarded and eventually disseminated, which employment conditions they are offered and how they, as well as society, can profit from mobility across sectors and countries.

The lasting COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by the war against Ukraine and its economic consequences, is bringing unprecedented challenges for the research communities in all EU member states. It deeply affects researchers, particularly early career researchers, and the governing of research institutions and businesses. Its negative impact has been widespread and is lasting, denting productivity and career prospects of researchers. While we discuss long-term goals, **we feel that there is an immediate priority to mitigate, as much as possible**, the effects of the pandemic on early career researchers.

The promotion of young researchers' careers in Europe can only be effectively addressed through an increase of the level of public and private investment in R&D throughout all European regions. This has been explicitly acknowledged in the EC communication of September 2020 as well as in the Council conclusions of December 2020 on the ERA and of May 2021 on research careers. **More recently, the “Pact for Research and Innovation”, as agreed in November 2021, emphasises the need for better research careers.** It is crucial that all member states embrace the Pact **to ensure that Europe has enough qualified researchers in these very uncertain pandemic and post-pandemic times.**

We argue further that one must guarantee that European, national, and local investments in career development systems will be implemented. The goal is to improve the attractiveness of research careers across the entire European Research Area (ERA), thereby ensuring a more **multidirectional** and **balanced** brain circulation.

To reach these goals, it is crucial to mobilise all stakeholders, including national funding agencies, private foundations and more generally the private sector, in cooperation with the European Commission. We also stress that the European Research Council, which has built a unique consensus across the research community in Europe, should continue to be strengthened and its originality consolidated, while it should also be used as a model for other programmes.

To achieve these goals, one needs to activate an in-depth policy debate about research careers across Europe. It must articulate related issues mixing public and private systems, taking into consideration that careers are a national competence and the autonomy of institutions is to be preserved.

The following priority themes need to be carefully addressed throughout Europe:

**I. Monitoring.** In view of the complexity of the issue, a special priority must be given to implementing open monitoring and reporting systems across Europe. Although conclusions on such matters as career paths have already been approved at the level of Research Ministers in the Competitiveness Council, it remains to implement such systems, e.g. through some “pilot projects”. The monitoring should include the following:

- Guarantee the implementation of **open observation, monitoring and reporting systems** across Europe about annual progress in framework conditions, working and employment environment and issues such as remuneration, social security and pensions.
- Monitor the annual **mobility “flows” of researchers**, as well as of **research career paths and progress in training and career development systems at institutional level**.
- Include **as an immediate goal** an in-depth study of the pandemic’s effects on early career researchers and younger students’ intention to engage in a PhD programme.

## **II. Improve research careers in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) and in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):**

- Focus on **early career researchers** and improve their employment and working conditions;
- Implement rapid concrete actions to alleviate the impact of the Covid crisis on early career researchers whose work has been severely hindered.
- Improve employability of trainees by strengthening career development systems involving the non-academic sector from the onset, matching skills with needs, and increasing career guidance;
- Improve recruitment, rewarding and assessment systems giving more appreciation and value to **research performance beyond scientometry** in order to encourage openness, collaboration and sharing as a means to increase research quality and impact. A better balance between educational, research, managerial and entrepreneurial achievements is the goal, thus **establishing true European practices for recruitment and career development**.
- Consider recommendations for a stepwise approach to **joint recruitment schemes**, piloted among “European Universities Alliances” and their surrounding ecosystem, mainstreamed across higher education and extended to research institutions in EU member states and associated countries.

## **III. Stimulate research careers and recruitment of PhDs in industry, SMEs and business firms:**

- Guarantee that the recently established **taxonomy for sustainable financing**, in close articulation with the EU New Green Deal, promotes innovative, sustainable and regenerative business activities, **facilitating research careers in industry, SMEs and business firms**.
- Ensure **better matching of transversal skills with the needs of business** in search of highly skilled talents, to ensure a better flowthrough of PhD talents.
- Optimise the collaboration between the actors of the ecosystem to **leverage talent**, at a national/regional level and across employers.

## **IV. Involve national funding agencies in cooperation with the EC:**

- Explore the possibility of **agreements among funding agencies, RTOs and HEIs on common principles for the assessment of research and researchers**.
- Foster EU-wide recommendations to funding agencies, RTOs and HEIs on post-COVID mitigation.
- Promote the **articulation of national programmes with Horizon Europe** to enlarge the recruitment, training and career development of early career researchers, through an adequate coordination across countries following open, transparent and merit-based recruitment principles, facilitating joint recruitments by institutions from different countries.
- Foster the necessary articulation among national agencies and EC towards a stepwise process leading to a **pan European job market for young researchers** based on a common framework for research assessment.