

Eurodoc Conference 2021

Improving Doctoral Training in Europe

Session: Career development of Early-Career Researchers

Eurodoc Postdoc Survey:

Key findings about the employment conditions of
postdoctoral researchers working in Europe

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Eurodoc Postdoc Survey

- Aim: Make an in-depth characterization of the population of researchers at the postdoctoral stage of their careers working in Europe
 - Institutional and international mobility
 - Stability of employment and funding
 - Access to social welfare
 - Role definition and clarity of rights and responsibilities
 - Career support and plans
 - Wellbeing and work-life balance
- Data were collected between October 2018 and February 2019



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Why?

- Postdocs

- No consensual definition
- Perform a diversity of roles without recognition as an autonomous staff category and/or without suitable institutional integration
- Are undercounted

- *Reducing the precarity of academic research careers (OECD, 2021)*

- Research precariat
- Need for stronger evidence base



Postdoc

- All researchers with a doctoral degree that are not yet fully independent and are in non-standard employment

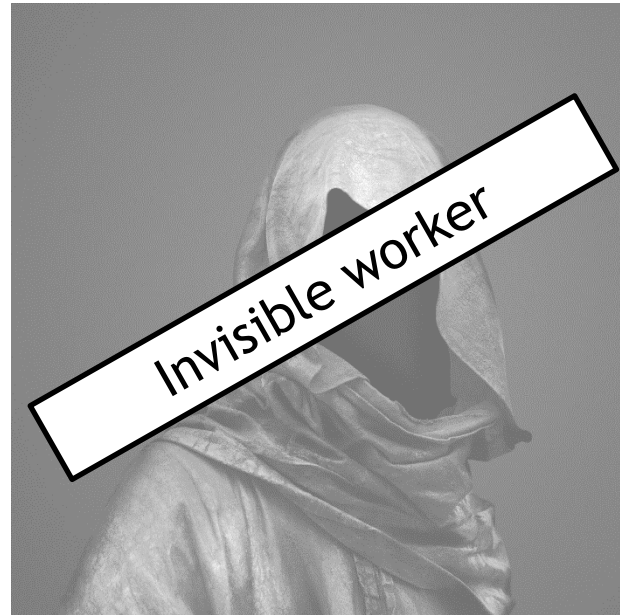
Postdoc paradox

“Big issues”



Wonder Woman ; All Star Comics #8 (William Moulton Marston, 1941)

“Daily hassles”



The Hollow man – Free wallpapers



Survey participants

- N = 1784 R2 researchers
- Nationals from > 34 countries worldwide
- Worked in 30 European countries
- 51.7% female; 47.3% male; 1% alternative/undisclosed
- Birth age: 50.5% were 31-35 years
- Academic age: 67% were 1-5 years from receipt of the doctorate
- > 70% were in a relationship (married or otherwise)
- 23% had children

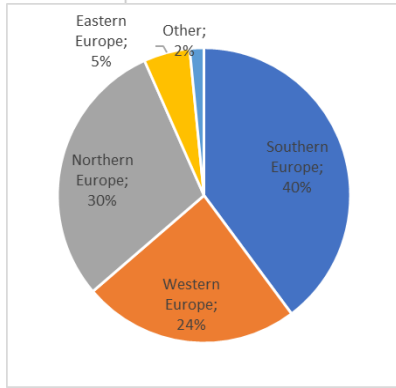
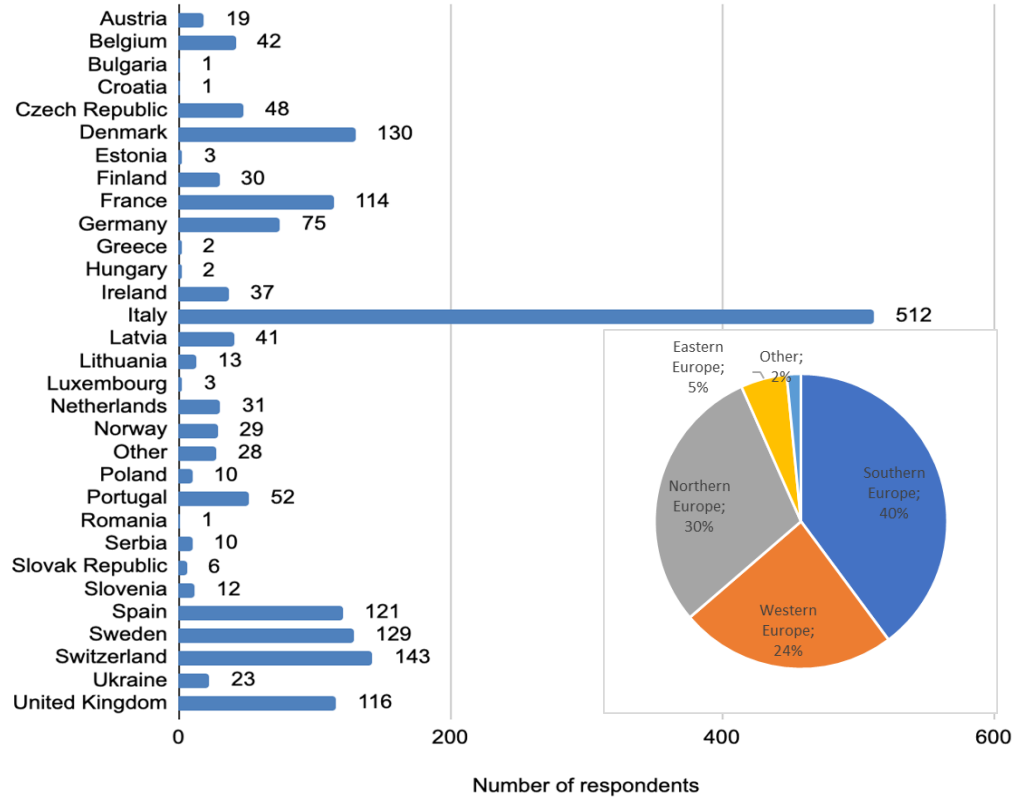


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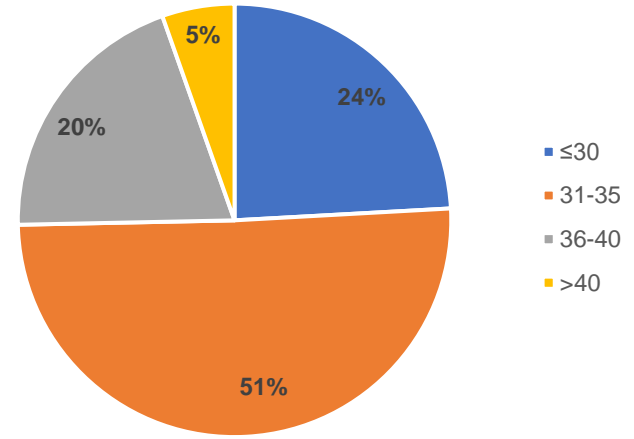


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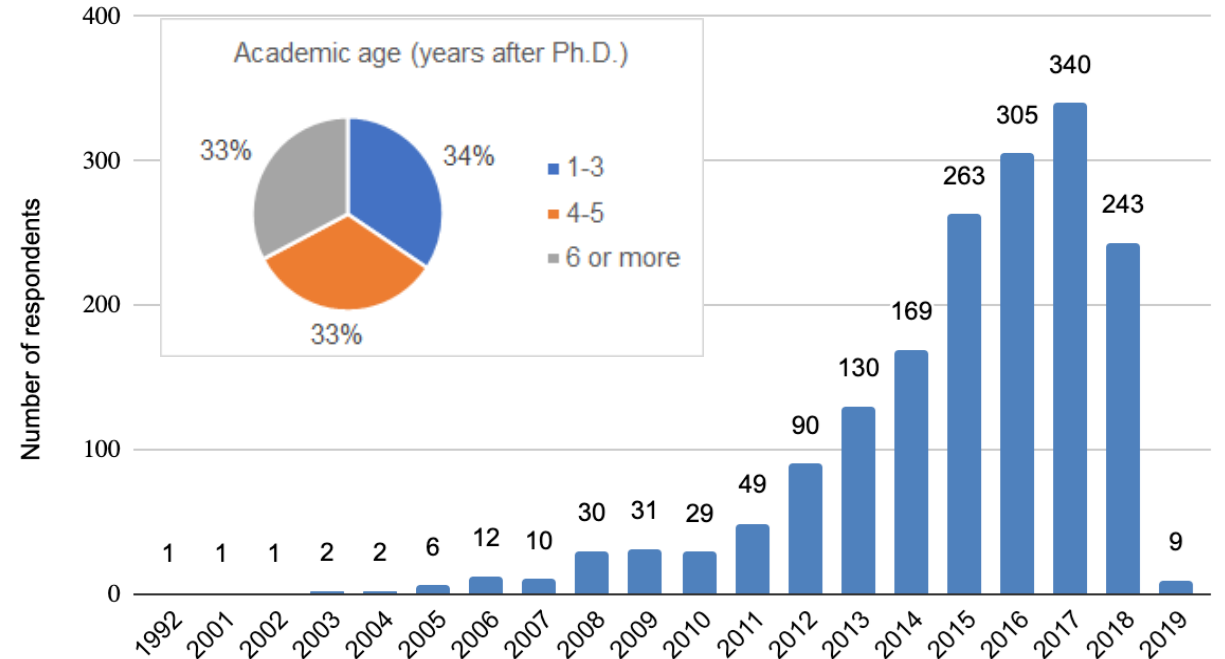
Section 1: Q4. In which country do you work?



Section 1: Q1. How old are you?



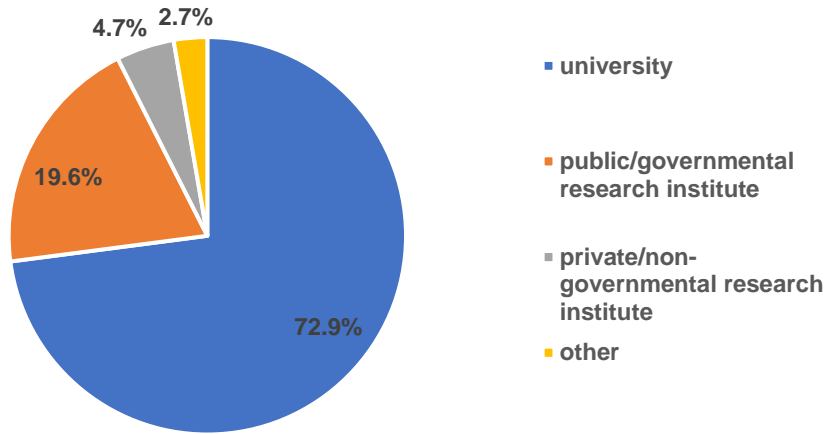
Section 2: Q1.1. In which year did you complete your PhD?



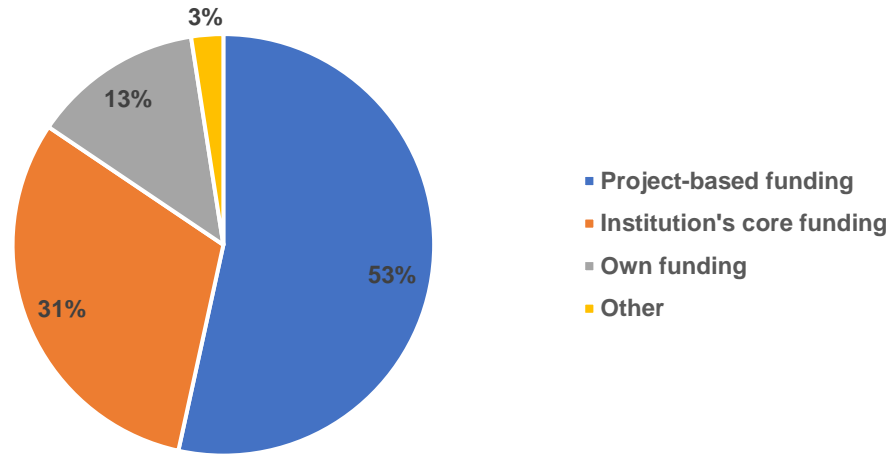
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Survey participants

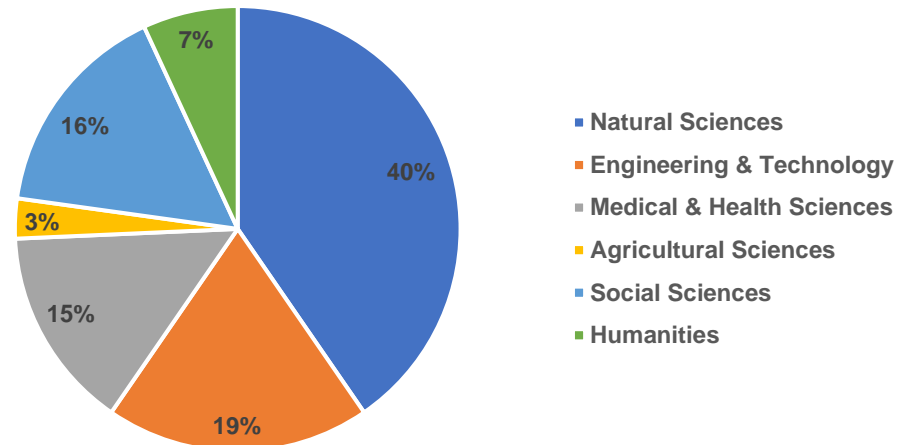
Section 2: Q6. For which type of institution do you conduct research?



Section 2: Q7. Who is funding your current position?



Section 1: Q5. In which research field do you work?



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Key findings

Stability of employment and funding

- 41.2% have had 3 or more temporary contracts
- 78.7% had less than 2 years remaining in their position
- 89% were full-time employed
- 42% declared having no specifications about number of hours of work/week
- With specifications: 90.3% worked >35h/week



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Region of Europe

North <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lengthier employment contracts• Full-time employment without exclusivity clause ↑	South <ul style="list-style-type: none">• > 4 temporary contracts ↑
West <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Part-time employment ↑• Full-time employment without exclusivity clause ↓	East <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most stable employment• Permanent contract ↑• Public/governmental research institute ↑

Academic age

≥ 6 years

- >4 temporary contracts ↑

4-5 years

- ≤ 2 temporary contracts ↑

1-3 years

- 1st temporary contract ↑

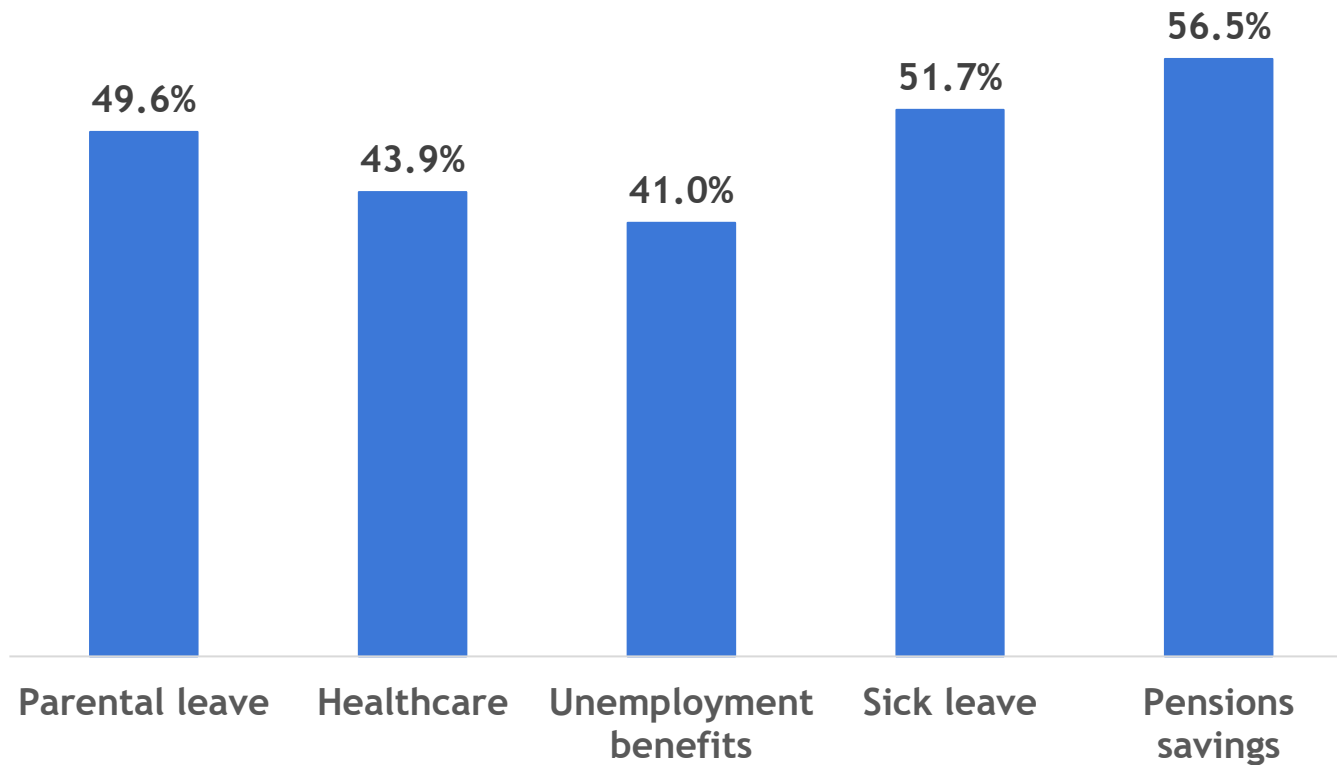
Field of research

Type of institution	Type of contract
Public/governmental research institute <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engineering & Technology ↓	Full-time contract <ul style="list-style-type: none">• > 80% of researchers in all fields <i>but</i> Humanities & Social Sciences
Private research organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medicine and Health Sciences ↑	Part-time contract <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Humanities & Social Sciences ↑



Key findings

Access to welfare



- ~50% have access to welfare

- Parental leave

↑ = ♀



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Region of Europe

North ↑ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental leave• Healthcare• Sick leave• Pension savings	South ↓ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental leave• Healthcare• Sick leave• Pension savings Less access (overall)
West ↑ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental leave• Healthcare• Sick leave• Pension savings• Unemployment benefits	East ↑ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthcare• Sick leave

Academic age

1-3 years

- Unemployment

benefits ↓

- “I don’t know” ↑



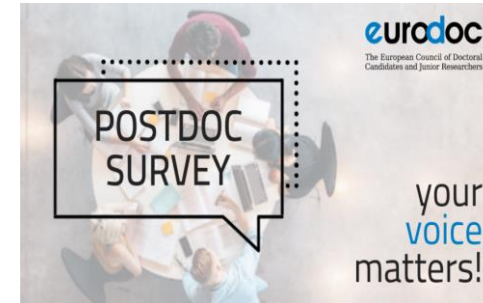
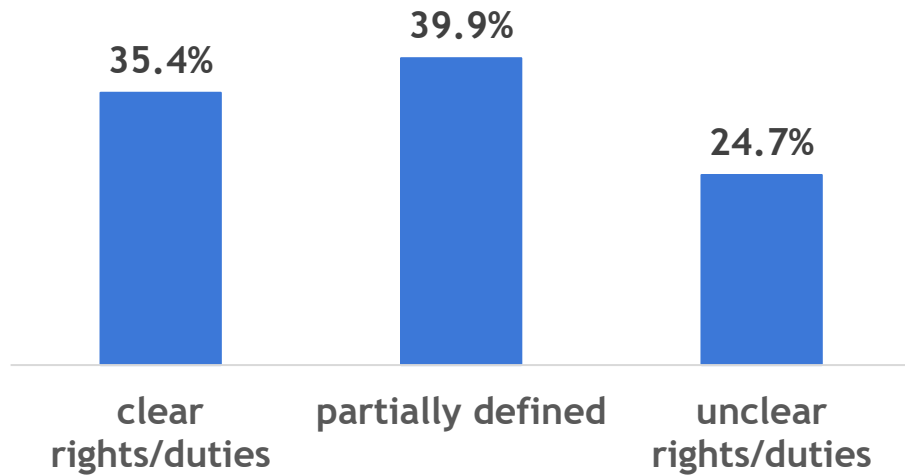
Field of research

Natural sciences ↑ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental leave• Healthcare• Sick leave• Pension savings• Unemployment benefits	Engineering & Technology ↓ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthcare• Sick leave• Unemployment benefits
Medical & Health Sciences ↓ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sick leave• Pension savings• Unemployment benefits	Social Sciences ↑ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unemployment benefits

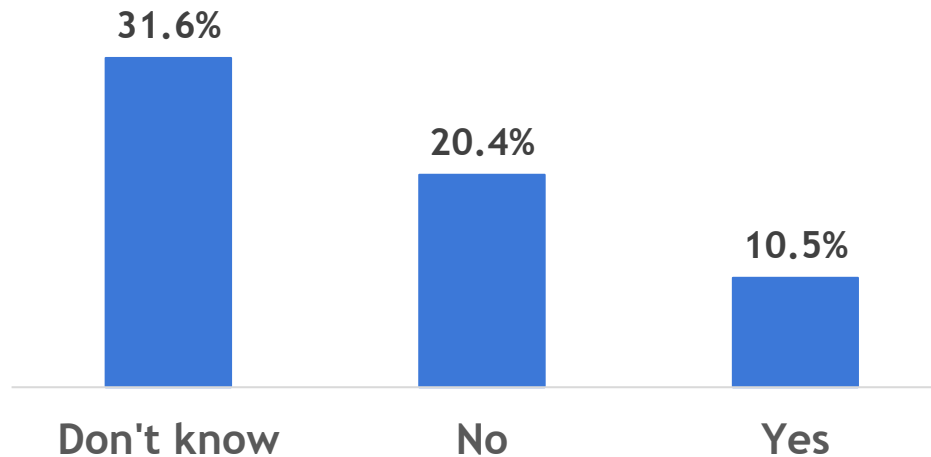


Key findings

Clarity of rights/duties (start)



Representation in institutional governance



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Region of Europe

Clarity of role and rights/duties	Representation in institutional governance
North <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rights/duties: >40% clear• Clearly defined role at start of position ↑	North ↑ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To not know if it is possible to be involved
South <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rights/duties: >70% unclear or partially defined role• Lack role clarity ↑	South ↓ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To have the opportunity to be involved

Field of research

- Medical and Health Sciences
 - ↑ unclear & ↓ clear
 - ↑ to not know if it is possible to be involved in institutional governance



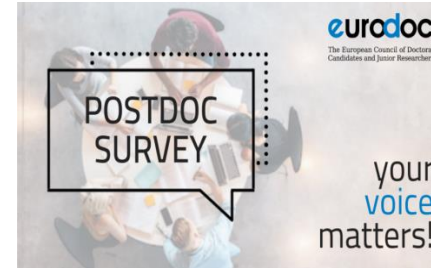
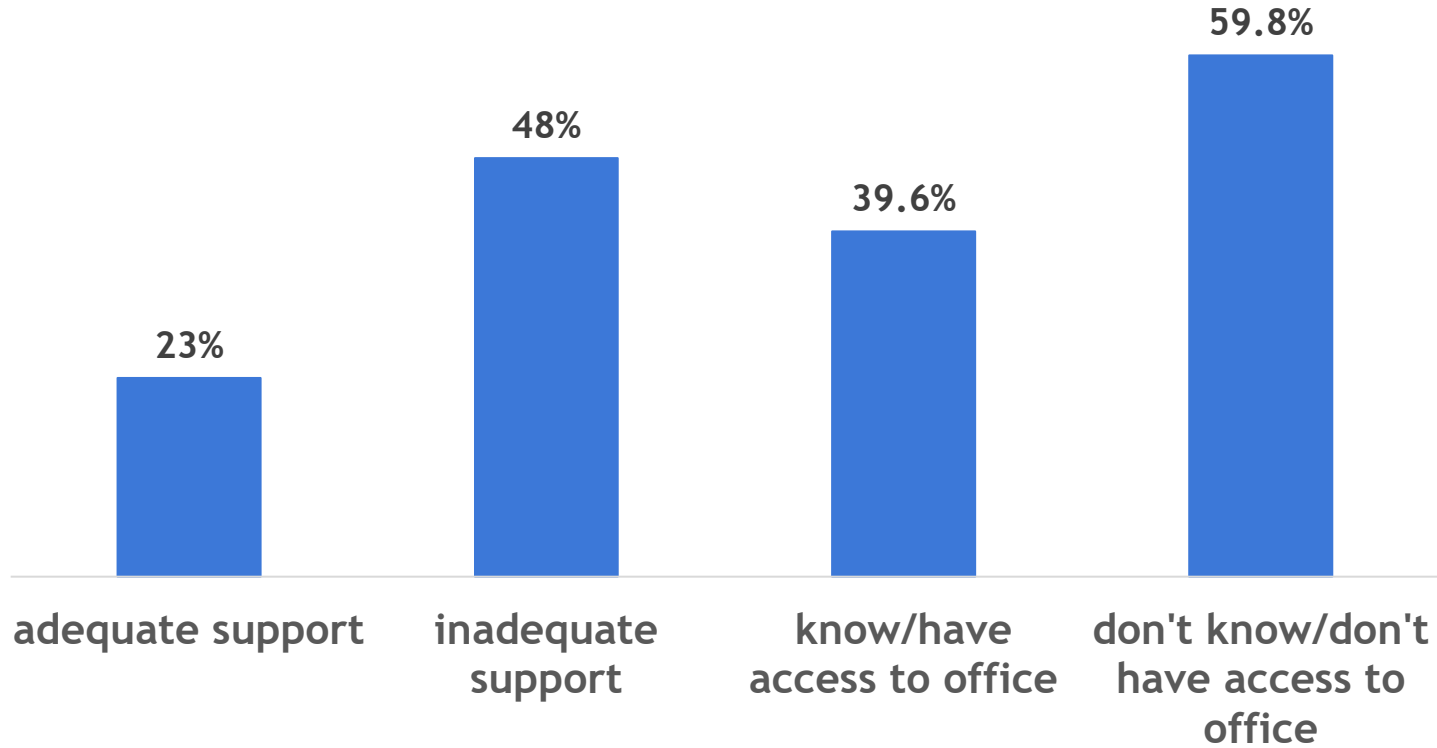
Academic age

Clarity of role and rights/duties	Representation in institutional governance
1-3 years ↑ • Unclear rules	1-3years • To have the opportunity ↓ • To not know ↑
	4-5 years ↑ • To have the opportunity
	≥ 6 years ↑ • To not have the opportunity



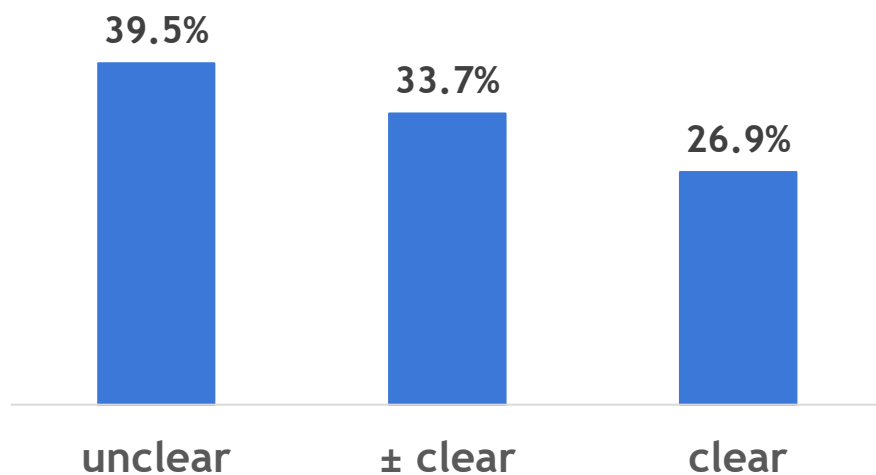
Key findings

Career support

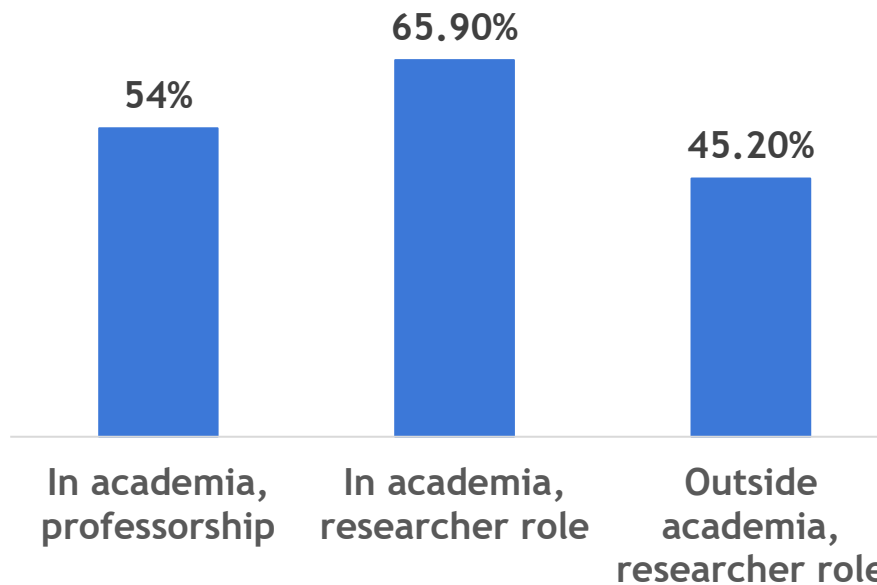




Clarity of career plans



Career plans

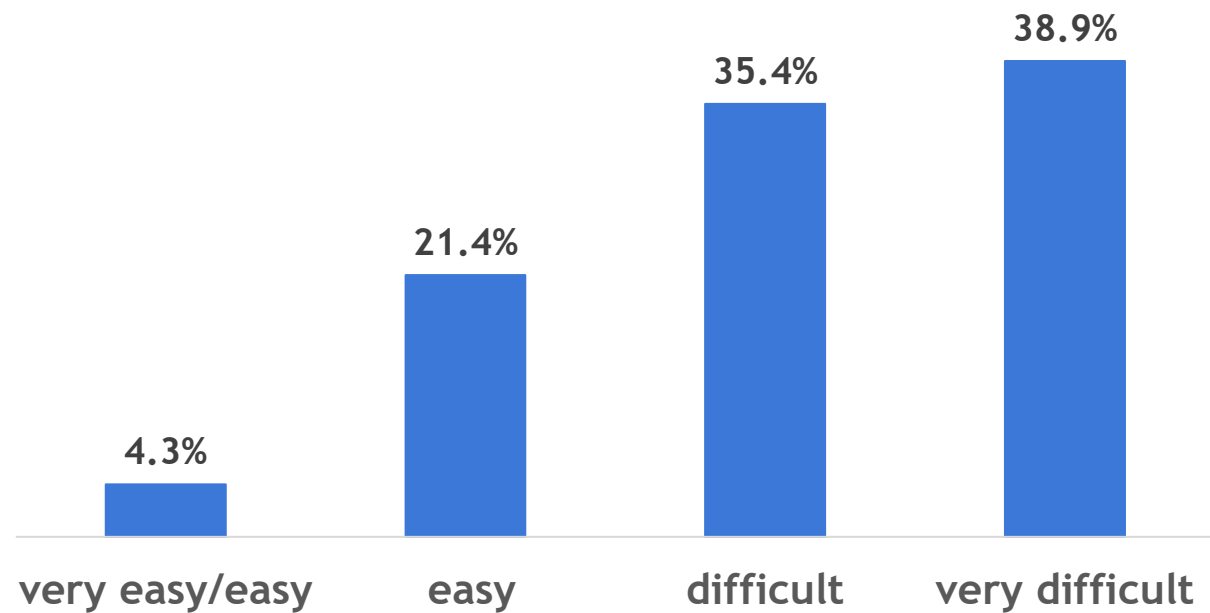


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Achieving career goals



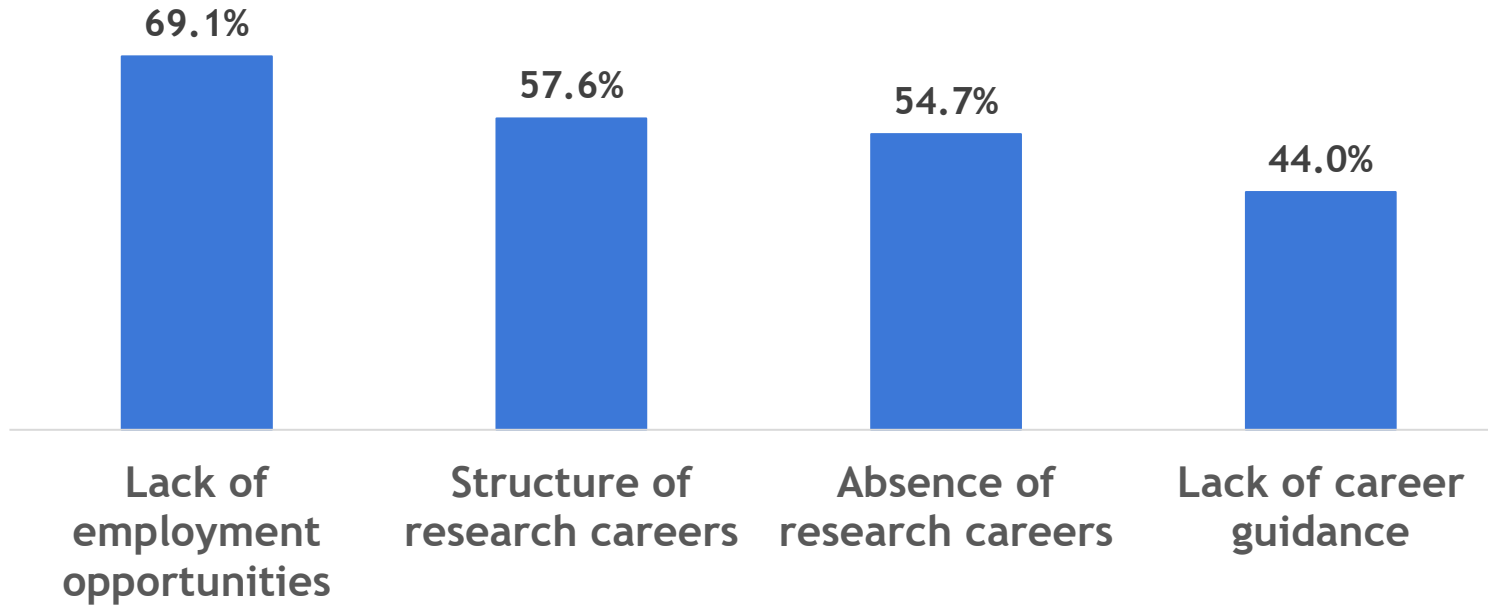
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Barriers to career progress (very serious/serious)



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CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

- **Postdocs employment conditions are mostly precarious**
 - Multiple short-term contracts
 - Long working hours
 - Unsecure access to social provisions

Recommendation

- **Offer stable career prospects based on standard employment conditions**
(i.e., full-time dependent employment contracts either of indefinite duration or with prospects of continuity/becoming permanent)



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CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- Unclear roles rights and responsibilities
- Important structural differences (gender, region of Europe, field of research, academic age)

Recommendations

- What is a postdoctoral researcher?
 - What are the roles these researchers are expected to perform?
 - What is the role of this career stage in research careers?
 - What measures to take to ensure they are recognized as an autonomous staff category?
- **Multidimensional problem** that cannot be addressed with “one size fit all” measures”



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CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

- Adverse conditions for career progress
- Overall absence of career support

Recommendation

- Re-structure/create research careers and ensure diversity of career options
 - Diversity of roles inside academia/research careers (e.g., staff scientist, data scientist)
 - Diversity of career paths in/outside academia (intrasectoral mobility)
 - Ensure access to career support, professional development and other career development opportunities

Doctoral training

- Must be embedded in an open research environment and culture
- Should ensure exposure to industry and other relevant employment sectors

(Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training, 2011)

The term 'industry' is used in the widest sense, including all fields of future workplaces and public engagement, from industry to business, government, NGOs, charities and cultural institutions (e.g. musea).



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Thank you!

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