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# REPORT

## INSPIRING ERA EXCHANGE online event on ERA ACTION 4

HOW TO MAKE RESEARCH CAREERS MORE SUSTAINABLE AND ATTRACTIVE?  
WAYS TO BENEFIT FROM THE NEW EU-LEVEL POLICIES AND TOOLS

A tour in the wide range of policy measures and tools and in good practices for their use

November 13, 2024

**Introduction:** INSPIRING ERA consortium in close collaboration with the European Commission and other stakeholders held an online event on ERA Action 4 “Promote attractive and sustainable research careers, balanced talent circulation and international, transdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility across the ERA”. The overarching goal was to discuss the European measures and tools helping researchers and scientists to boost their careers.

**Objectives of the event:** The main objective was to highlight and promote the vast portfolio of the European research careers instruments with the particular emphasis on the opportunities they offer. Moreover the purpose of the meeting was to address challenges related to research careers in Europe, facilitate knowledge exchange among stakeholders, and explore strategies for improving research conditions and mobility across the continent. Beneficiaries of the above are primarily researchers and scientist, but apart from that universities, employers, industry and other stakeholders.

**Attendees:** The event brought together approx. 200 attendees, including researchers, scientists, students, phd candidates, but also policy officers/advisors of different administrative levels, executives, project managers, officials, HR experts and others representatives from EU and non-EU countries.

**Methodology:** An overview of the INSPIRING ERA project, including the concept of INSPIRING ERA EXCHANGE was provided by Maciej Woszczyk from National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR), followed by the EC representatives from the ERA, Spreading Excellence and Research Careers Unit, Luísa Henriques (FCT, action sponsor) and a group of practitioners from universities and business sharing their experience with particular measures. The agenda was complemented by the intervention from Claudia Sarrico, OECD representative and Emmanuelle Gardan’s (Coimbra Group, action sponsor) concluding remarks.

**Content:** The opening remarks were given by Manuel Aleixo, Head of Unit who underlined the fact that we are in the moment of transition, meaning the new Parliament and emerging College of Commissioners and it needs to be taken into consideration in the discussion along with upcoming challenges related to that fact.

Dario Capezzuto highlighted the context of research’s and researchers’ situation, including the growing number of researchers in Europe, which currently exceeds two million. Out of the major challenges he pointed out recruitment and working conditions, a need to fighting precarity and ensuring financial wellbeing, better response to labour market’s skills need, enhancing intersectoral mobility, improvement the assesment and reward system and finally balancing the talent circulation. Thus the necessity to create a single market for researchers, scientific knowledge and technology is rooted in the treaties - and to that end there is a package for attractive and sustainable research careers in the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24. The Commission’s representative outlined the objectives of Action 4, which aims to create a more structured and attractive research career framework by promoting best practices, encouraging mobility, and introducing a harmonized European framework for research careers.

A package for attractive and sustainable careers includes 4 strands: setting standards of research careers (Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Research Careers along with the new European Charter for Researchers), supporting these standards’ implementation (Mutual Learning Exercise to MS, ResearchComp, ERA Talent Platform etc.),

research and researchers assessment (covered by ERA Action 3), coordinating investments (pilot call under Horizon Europe facilitating organizational change in order to have better research careers and to ease employability of young researchers). The political momentum around the careers will be upheld and the idea is to have a flow of researchers between all sectors instead of promoting e.g. a transfer from academia to industry. Charter as one of the fundamental documents cover a variety of topics and measures, incl. for instance a necessity of balanced circulation of talents.

The policy landscape was further elaborated upon through an insightful presentation from a representative of Portugal's Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT). Luísa Henriques provided a member state's perspective, how do member states perceive and understand Action 4 to get to know if Europe goes in the right direction in the substance of research careers. The historical overview of its development and meaning in the European attempts and discussions proved the focus evolution from system's centred focus to researchers' centred and groundbreaking changes implemented by the New ERA approach and recent ramping up of the research careers policies. Despite these advancements, concerns were raised that new reports from the European Commission and other advisory bodies might be refocusing the narrative back to system-level needs rather than researcher-centric policies. Lesson learnt: the competition for talent is a reality.

Following these discussions, several initiatives aimed at supporting research careers were introduced. One of the key programs highlighted by Slaven Misljencevic from EC, DG R&I, was the ERA Talent Platform, a comprehensive digital resource designed to support researchers and research-performing institutions. The platform consolidates several career-related initiatives, offering a centralized hub for job opportunities, career development tools, and mobility support. The EURAXESS network, which has been operational for over twenty years, was discussed as a crucial part of this platform. EURAXESS provides practical assistance to researchers moving across Europe, offering guidance on employment, social security, and career progression.

Another initiative discussed was the RESAVER pension scheme, which aims to address the financial instability faced by mobile researchers. This initiative provides a portable pension solution for researchers who move between European countries, ensuring that their retirement savings remain intact regardless of their country of employment. While RESAVER has been successfully implemented in several countries, efforts are ongoing to expand its reach and streamline its administration.

The event also featured a detailed presentation on ResearchComp, a European Competence Framework for Researchers, which has been developed to assist researchers in identifying and developing key skills necessary for career progression. The framework consists of seven competence areas and thirty-eight individual competencies that researchers can use for self-assessment and skills development. ResearchComp is designed to facilitate mobility between different research sectors and to help universities and employers create training programs that align with the needs of the research workforce. One of the key takeaways from this discussion was the importance of integrating ResearchComp into doctoral and postdoctoral training programs to better prepare researchers for diverse career opportunities.

A case study from Charles University in Prague (Eva Janů, Lukáš Nachtigal) provided a practical example of how institutions are implementing these frameworks to support researchers. The university has adopted ResearchComp to structure its doctoral training programs and has collaborated with external organizations to provide additional career development opportunities. The presentation emphasized the benefits of having a structured

approach to research career development, including clearer communication with doctoral candidates about available resources and a more cohesive strategy for supporting early-career researchers.

The Research and Innovation Careers Observatory (ReICO), presented by Claudia Sarrico from the OECD, was another key initiative discussed. This observatory is designed to monitor and analyze career trajectories of researchers, providing data to inform future policy decisions. The ReICO initiative aims to bridge gaps in data collection and provide insights into labor market trends affecting researchers across Europe.

The event also addressed the European Charter for Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research Award. Michele Rosa-Clot from the European Commission explained how these initiatives are being implemented to create better working conditions for researchers and ensure institutional compliance with high standards for research employment. Representatives from university (Daniel Müller, University of Siegen) and business (Sandra Blázquez, Laura Garcia Diego, Repsol) shared their experiences in obtaining the HR Excellence in Research Award and discussed how it has improved recruitment and retention of researchers.

The concluding segment of the event focused on the broader policy implications of these initiatives. Participants emphasized the importance of continued advocacy for researcher-centric policies in the upcoming ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027). They highlighted the need for sustained investment in research careers, better alignment between policy frameworks, and improved mechanisms for measuring the impact of research policies.

#### Key Takeaways and Conclusions:

- research careers in Europe face significant challenges, including precarious employment, outdated assessment methods and limited inter-sector mobility,
- action 4 of the ERA policy agenda aims at improving research career structures through best practices and policy alignment,
- the ERA Talent Platform consolidates career-related initiatives, providing job opportunities, career development tools, and mobility support,
- RESAVER offers a portable pension solution for mobile researchers, mitigating financial instability,
- ResearchComp helps researchers identify and develop skills, fostering better mobility and employability across sectors,
- the Research and Innovation Careers Observatory (ReICO) plays a critical role in tracking career trends and informing policy decisions,
- the HR Excellence in Research Award enhances recruitment and working conditions for researchers,
- future research career policies must focus on sustained investment, better alignment of frameworks and improved impact measurement tools,
- continued collaboration among policymakers, institutions, and researchers is essential for maintaining progress in European research career development.

Overall, the event successfully provided a platform for in-depth discussions on research careers in Europe. The presentations and debates underscored the complexity of the issue while also highlighting the innovative initiatives being undertaken to address these challenges. With ongoing policy developments and the continued implementation of supportive frameworks, there is hope that research careers in Europe will become more sustainable,

attractive and rewarding in the years to come. The event concluded with a call to action for continued collaboration between policymakers, research institutions, and individual researchers to ensure that the progress made in recent years is sustained and further enhanced in future policy cycles.