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Questions and Answers on the European Partnership for Researchers

Why more action for researchers now?

While situations vary considerably across institutions and countries, the urgent need for an active and sustained policy at national and European levels has become increasingly apparent over recent years because of:

EU countries still produce more science and engineering graduates and PhDs than the US and Japan, but researchers make up a much lower share of the workforce in the EU. Many European graduates and doctorate holders either move away from research careers or pursue research in countries where they find better opportunities – mainly in the US; in many Member States outdated national legislation and practices still hinder or prevent competition-based recruitment in the public sector. The prevalence of short-term contracts for young researchers and advancement based on seniority rather than performance means it can take many years before talented researchers are able to become independent scientists in their own right.

Many researchers are trained in a traditional academic way which does not equip them for the needs of the modern knowledge economy.

- the upcoming retirement of a generation of researchers, with no prospect of their complete replacement in many countries combined with a declining interest of young people in scientific careers (since 1998 the share of science and engineering degrees has declined or stagnated in 19 of the 27 Member States) and the substantial imbalance in the proportion of women in the highest positions of research careers even though female doctoral candidates frequently outnumber male;
- the increasing worldwide competition to train, attract and retain the best scientific talent;
- the structural fragmentation of the European researchers labour market, which hinders the trans-national mobility of researchers within the EU, due in particular to a lack of open recruitment, cultural factors and problems which can be encountered by highly mobile workers in such fields as social security, taxation and transferability of pension schemes.

In summary, many Member States do not efficiently employ their excellent human potential and at the same time other regions of the EU are already experiencing bottlenecks which are only likely to get worse in future and form a major impediment to the achievement of the Lisbon goals.

What is the Council position?

In many Member States reforms and actions are underway in support of researchers and the 2008 Spring European Council confirmed investing in people and modernising labour markets, and investing in knowledge and innovation were priority areas for the next cycle of the Lisbon Strategy. In particular the Council made a commitment that the Member States and the EU must remove barriers to the free movement of knowledge by creating a **"fifth freedom"** based on:

- enhancing the cross-border mobility of researchers, as well as students, scientists, and university teaching staff;
- making the labour market for European researchers more open and competitive, providing better career structures, transparency and family-friendliness.

The results of the extensive public consultation on the 2007 Green Paper "The European Research Area: New Perspectives" also showed that realising a single labour market for researchers is the top area of expected action at the EU level by stakeholders.

The European researchers' partnership seeks to capitalise on this political momentum and stakeholder support.

What are the problems which this initiative seeks to address?

This communication seeks to address obstacles to researchers' mobility and the strong disincentives for those wishing to move jobs between institutions, between academia and industry or between countries.

In many Member States public research institutions, and in particular universities, often have little autonomy over hiring due to outdated national legislation and practices which still hinder or prevent competition-based recruitment.

Researchers are among the most mobile categories of workers and can often hold a series of short contracts during their careers. They are therefore particularly likely to be confronted with difficulties in relation to their social security rights and supplementary pensions.

Despite important ongoing reforms, promotion structures in many public research institutions remain rigid and often make it difficult, for universities in particular, to compete in the international market. In many Member States there is a two-tier workforce with short-term contracts for young researchers contrasting with little job to job mobility by senior researchers on permanent contracts.

Researchers need to be fully equipped with the skills necessary to participate in a range of roles in the modern knowledge economy. But most researchers in Europe are still trained in a traditional academic setting. They often lack the skills and competences necessary to, for example, manage intellectual property, bid for project funding or set-up their own start up company. For example, researchers working for SMEs may find that they need to manage projects, handle the company's communications or manage intellectual property. Established researchers can also lose touch with the latest techniques and methods and may receive little support to expand their competences or skills as their career develops, e.g. into management positions within their institution.

Why a partnership approach? Why not legislative action?

Article 165 of the Treaty states that the Community and the Member States shall coordinate their research and technological development activities so as to ensure that national policies and Community policy are consistent and, in close cooperation with the Member States the Commission may take any useful initiative to promote this coordination. Article 163 (d) states that, complementing the activities of the Member States, the Commission shall carry out activities to stimulate the training and mobility of researchers in the Community.

The Commission proposes to develop a partnership between the Commission and the Member States designed to ensure real ownership of objectives and actions. This is essential to jointly drive forward a number of targeted priority actions in key areas selected for their potential impact at the Community, national and institutional levels. Through the partnership, the Member States are invited to play a key role in the exact definition, implementation and monitoring of the partnership, which minimises the risks of low engagement and would allow the dynamic evolution of the measures over time.

What will be the benefits for individual researchers of the partnership?

By the end of the first phase of the partnership, researchers could expect to see:

- research institutions to have greater autonomy to hire the right person for the job;
- full recognition of their qualifications from other institutions and countries;
- all publicly funded researchers' positions to be openly advertised online;
- greater portability of individual grants awarded by national funding agencies and Community research programmes;
- better exploitation of the existing legal framework on derogations for social security dispositions
- A facilitated transfer of supplementary pension rights
- better career development opportunities for early-stage researchers including regular evaluation and more autonomy;
- more flexible contracts for senior and end-of career researchers;
- more women on selection and funding bodies;
- the systematic adoption of policies to promote better work-life balance;
- better training throughout their careers to improve their employability and chances of promotion;
- better links between academia and industry to improve their employability and ability to turn research into results.

Don't we already have European mobility and career development strategies and what about the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers?

It is true that actions for researchers at European level have been gradually developed since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000.

The European Researcher's Mobility Portal was launched in 2003 for researchers seeking to advance their careers and personal development by moving to other countries. It provides information on training and jobs.

The ERA-MORE network, was launched in 2004 and now comprises 200 Mobility Centres in 35 countries provides tailor-made assistance to mobile researchers and their families.

The ERA-Link initiative to network European researchers' communities outside Europe, was officially launched in the USA in June 2006 by Commissioner Potočník with membership in the USA reaching 3 000 in the first year and growing steadily. ERA-LINK Japan will be launched in June this year and ERA-LINK China in 2009.

An estimated total of 70 000 researchers should be able to benefit directly from the "Marie-Curie Actions" under FP7. And the groundbreaking new European Research Council, with an average budget of 1 billion Euro per year, will support the most eminent, truly creative scientists, engineers and scholars. This will have a significant impact on making science in Europe more exciting and attractive.

After broad stakeholder consultations in 2005 the European Commission issued the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment So far, more than 200 organisations representing over 800 institutions, covering 23 countries have signed up to the Charter & Code on a voluntary basis). The first international organisation (EIROForum) signed the Charter & Code in 2006.

However, these are indispensable tools to promote mobility but broader actions are needed to address all the bottlenecks.

Further information on all the Commission's existing initiatives for researchers, including the full list of organisations that have signed up to the Charter and Code, can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers/index_en.cfm.

ERA-MORE and the Researchers' Mobility Portal are to be re-launched in June 2008 as "EURAXESS Researchers in Motion", for comprehensive information on researchers' mobility, jobs and rights.

Why only researchers and not all academic personnel?

The term researchers used in the partnership includes all professionals engaged in the conception and creation of new knowledge, products, processes, methods and systems but also in the management of the projects concerned. Therefore implementing the actions proposed in the Communication such as open recruitment and better training would benefit all researchers, and in particular public sector researchers and academic personnel.

Why a preferential social security treatment for researchers?

Researchers will not receive preferential treatment. They encounter problems like all other mobile workers. However, they are among the most mobile categories of workers, often hold a series of short contracts and are also frequently supplied with atypical forms of remuneration (e.g. stipends, fellowships) during their careers: this means that they are particularly likely to be confronted with social security and portability of pension problems. Obviously, addressing these problems is important for all highly mobile workers, not just researchers.

Why don't you go as far as proposing specific social security legislative measures for researchers?

In terms of legislation, given the present legal basis, action is possible only on coordinating social security issues. The European dimension of social security¹ is subject to coordination of regulations across the EU that aims to prevent that application of the different national legislations adversely affects mobile workers². Council Regulation (EC) 1408/71 provides as a general rule that migrant workers are subject to legislation of the country in which they work. But as highlighted in the recent EU Job Mobility Action Plan, new forms of mobility can make the application of current regulations problematic.

The partnership therefore proposes to make maximum use of the current legal framework (in particular those introducing derogations to general rules) for the benefit of researchers. The EU Job Mobility Action Plan foresees improvement of existing legislation and implementation practices concerning social security, taking into account newer forms of mobility. As this will also apply to researchers it is important that their experiences are fed into the assessment of the needs for improvement.

Concerted actions on raising awareness about social security rights, making better use of derogations to general rules to the benefit of researchers and improving administrative co-operation are expected to have a significant positive impact on researchers' mobility.

Won't a European labour market for researchers simply result in "brain drain" from some Member States to others?

The idea of "brain drain" is somewhat outdated. Nowadays, it's about brain circulation. Today's research is increasingly carried out in international cooperation, and most scientific breakthroughs are done in international research groups. Scientific news and discoveries travel fast and are spread even faster via the internet. Researchers are a relatively small and highly specialised workforce so it will not always be possible to find the best qualified individual for a given research position within any single national system, let alone within a single institution. The widespread adoption of open recruitment in the public sector is therefore likely to improve Europe's research performance as well as providing more opportunities for

¹ including statutory pension rights, healthcare, unemployment benefits

² Council Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 on the application of social security schemes to employed persons, to self-employed persons and to members of their families moving within the Community (OJ L 149, 5.7.1971, p. 2.) and the Regulation (EEC) 574/72 (OJ L 74, 27.3.1972, p. 1). They will be replaced by Regulation 883/2004 of the European Parliament and the Council of 29.4.2004 on the coordination of social security systems OJ L 166 of 30.4.2004 and the draft new Implementing Regulation, once the latter is adopted by Parliament and Council.

researchers. A balanced circulation of researchers would therefore be beneficial both within Europe and with the rest of the world.

So far we have heard about a researchers' "passport". The name of the initiative has been changed. Why?

It was originally planned to call this initiative the researchers' passport. But it was decided that this name would give the impression that the initiative was only about trans-national mobility whereas the partnership has a far broader scope. The term "partnership" best captures the whole range of elements regarding both better careers and mobility.

What are the next steps?

In order for the partnership to successfully contribute to the creation of a world class European research system each partner will need to fully contribute. It is therefore important that:

- Council and Commission commit themselves to the common objectives and endorse the proposed actions;
- Member States adopt a national action plan by early 2009 setting out specific objectives and actions to achieve the aims of the partnership. Given the different starting positions of each Member State each plan is expected to focus on different aspects of the overall objectives of the partnership;
- the priority actions identified are implemented by the end of 2010;
- the Commission optimises existing Community instruments, including those available through the FP7 People programme, to reinforce the partnership;
- as an integral part of the partnership, Member States and the Commission:
 - identify good practice and where appropriate develop common guidelines;
 - monitor progress at national and EU levels and report annually based on agreed indicators³;
 - make maximum use of the existing Community legal framework for the benefit of researchers;
- in line with its central role in the governance of European Research Area initiatives, the Competitiveness Council monitors and assesses progress in the implementation of the partnership actions.

What will happen after 3 years? Will the Commission propose legislative measures?

At the end of the first stage of the partnership in 2010 an overall evaluation of the situation and results from actions by the partnership will be made and the need for further EU action to address specific outstanding issues will be considered. The evaluation will fully incorporate the views of researchers themselves and it is foreseen that a major conference will be organised in 2009 to provide a platform for researchers' views.

See also our [IP/08/802](#)