

ICoRSA Conference Report Addressing Researcher Career Precarity in Portugal: perspectives from EU countries 2024

Aims of the conference

ICoRSA Conference held on January 12, aimed at discussing research precarity in Portugal with examples from Germany, Italy and Spain. For a broad overview of the European context where these country systems are included, invited experts from OECD and the European Commission presented recent the reports on precarity in Research Careers and the recent European framework for research careers under the European Commission's European Research Area (ERA) policy action 4. The Conference ended with a panel discussion with representatives from key stakeholders as university leadership, and representatives from the Portuguese Funding Agency (FCT) for ERA.

The workshop was co-organized by the national and local associations ANICT and NInTEc. It gathered 88 People joined online and 30 onsite.

Key highlights of the event

Research precarity, challenges and recommendations

OECD defines “research precariat” as a postdoctoral with fixed-term positions and no prospects of permanent employment and it is a worldwide reality. Dr Cláudia Sarrico's session on **Research Careers** showed data from the reports Reducing the Precarity of Academic Research Careers” and “Promoting diverse Career Pathways for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Researchers and other sources that research precarity is still a reality with effects on well-being and mental health, decreased the attractiveness of research career as a choice, affecting diversity, gender equality and research choices and ultimately the quality of science. In 2021, around one-third of the OECD labour force were in temporary or part-time jobs. **Germany and Portugal ranked second and third in the OECD**, respectively, in terms of fixed-term contracts. **Italy 11th and Spain 17th**. Precarity needs to be addressed in **a sustainable matter** considering the future generations. The increase of 25% of the share of PhD holders (between 25- and 64-year-old) in the population of OECD countries between 2014 and 2019 indicates the attractiveness of research but indicates the urgency in tackling this matter.

Policy instruments to promote research careers

In Europe's European Commission has designed a set of policy instruments established by the European Research Area (ERA) to promote research careers. Dario Capezzuto, DG RTD Policy officer for Research Careers of the dedicated Agency for Research and Development – DG RTD presented the new The Recommendation sets new guidelines and initiatives to promote researchers' working conditions, fostering inter-sectoral mobility and addressing persisting inequalities in research careers, contributing to the consolidation of the European Research Area (ERA). The recommendation includes a revised definition of "researcher" and its categorization in four profiles, from R1 to R4; a revised update of the skills and competences of researchers, entitled RESEARCHCOMP; the inclusion of research managers within the spectrum of research professions; and a revised European Charter for Researcher.



Dr Luísa Henriques (Senior advisor to the Board of Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation FCT and co-sponsor of Action 4 – ERA Policy Agenda) addressed the challenges in translation into practice of the European Framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe. These include the recognition of equal esteem and reward of different paths regardless of the sector; the recognition of non-linear, hybrid and multi-career careers; social protection irrespective of the form of employment – specific measures to R1-R2.

In terms of European policy at the ERA future initiatives should promote a) co-created guidelines for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on research careers based on the exchange of good practices and lessons learnt, for better quality jobs and a better functioning research labour market, b) community of practices to share experiences in order to advance implementation at European, national, regional, organisational levels on strengthening research careers and improving mobility; c) consolidated Research and Innovation Careers Observatory fulfilling the needs of policy makers and stakeholders with the involvement of relevant actors beyond the R&I community, and jointly eliminating gaps, d) recommendations for better career development and European tenure-track like models, and related funding mechanism and, e) co-created investment pathways, joining and coordinating forces to reduce precarity and to facilitate paths for non-academic research careers.



Initiatives to promote research career frameworks

[Sustainable Careers for Researcher Empowerment \(SECURE\)](#) project is funded by Horizon Europe's programme of the European Commission. The project will promote a common career structure to ensure career progression of researchers, by identifying transferable skills and competencies,

facilitate intersectoral collaboration and mobility patterns. SECURE will also analyse the implementation of tenure-track models into career frameworks.

Examples of tenure models in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain

Germany

Dr Martin Grund (Tenure-Track Programme Germany, VDI/VDE-IT), presented the German Tenure-track programme developed in 2016, by both German Federal Government (Ministry of Education and Research) and the 16 German Federal States (Länder) researchers on the levels of **R3 levels to permanent position as a professor (R4)**. The programme will run from **2017** until **2032** and will provide 1 billion Euros to establish a total of 1.000 tenure-track professorships at **75 public universities** in Germany.

Key features of the Tenure-Track Programme:

- Maximum duration of six (6) years.
- The funding covers as well:
 - extension for up to a maximum of 2 years in the event of birth / adoption of a child (1 year per child).
 - extension for up to 1 year if the result of the tenure evaluation (or the interim evaluation) is negative.
 - first two (2) years of a permanent professorship after positive evaluation (after that, the Länder are responsible for funding).
- 118.045 Euro per position per year (incl. personnel and equipment expenses, as well as a strategy component to promote next to the implementation the cultural change and the further development of the personnel structure).

Spain

Dr Peter Boddy (ADOC talent Management Agency Spain) presented the reforms of the Law 14/2011 on Science, Technology and Innovation with new legislation: the **Science and Technology Act** and the **Universities Act**¹. The reforms aimed at improving labour conditions of researchers on fixed term contracts - e.g. severance pays; **reducing fixed term contract use** and, **reducing the age of access to “tenure” track & facilitate R2-R3 transition**.

Features of the Tenure-track model (“contrato de acceso de personal investigador doctor”):

- Fixed-term contract with a minimum duration of three (3) years and a maximum of **six (6) years**. The minimum duration of one year for extensions to these contracts).
- PhD holders
- The law establishes a medium-term assessment:
 - Possibility to obtain a certificate of R3

¹ These Acts are framed under the Ley 17/2022, de 5 de septiembre that substitutes the previous Ley 14/2011, de 1 de junio, de la Ciencia, la Tecnología y la Innovación. More information available: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-14581>

- At the end of second year if the evaluation is positive the researcher may apply to a stable contract “Profesor Permanente Laboral” or “Profesor Titular/ Catedratico ”. This process is led by the State agency ANECA.

The new Law is not until the moment followed by additional funding.

Italy

Dr Angela Agostiano (Head of the Bari division of the CNR-IPCF and italianRSA Board member) presented the main reforms in 2022 faced within Italy’s Resilience and Recovery plan. Before the reform on June 30, 2022, after post-doctoral studies, young researchers could have a fellowship, a short-term collaborative contract or a research grant entitled “assegni di ricerca”. After these, there were two positions, a) RTD-A with no possibility of extension and, b) RTD-B which at the end the researcher could be promoted to associate professor. Under the new Law, the status of there is a limit of one single post-doctoral contract (**research contract**) followed by a tenure track contract. New features of the research contract:

- **RTT:** replaces RTD-A and RTD-B are replaced by a tenure track fixed-term university researcher entitled RTT.
- Total duration of six (6) years and non-renewable.
- However, as of the conclusion of the third year, a researcher who has acquired the **national scientific qualification** may apply to be evaluated for the purpose of applying to the role of associate professor.

Transitional rules:

- The law allows a transitional period from the previous types of contract (RTD-A and RTD-B) for a period of 12 months following the approval of the conversion law, to continue to call RTDb on the basis of the extraordinary recruitment plans funded in the past years and for 36 months thereafter to continue to call RTDa, but also the new research contracts, within the framework of the research programs linked to and funded by the PNRR.

Article 14 foresees Professional roles

The new law includes professional staff with the status of technologists as a new career framework, hired on a permanent basis, and a reserve is established for the posts advertised in the first application of this provision. The recruitment in question is aimed at carrying out professional and managerial activities in support and coordination of research, promotion of the process of technology transfer, design and management of infrastructure, and protection of industrial property.

Portugal

Dr Isabel Rocha (Vice-Rector for Research, Innovation and Value Creation, Universidade Nova de Lisboa – NOVA Research Careers) discussed NOVA’s University (NOVA) initiatives to promote careers of researchers. NOVA became a **public foundation under private law in 2017**. This change allows greater autonomy for staff regulations, although maintaining compliance with government regulations of staff that are civil servants. A constrain faced by Universities in Portugal is its funding based on the number of students per year. At NOVA University the Tenure track is evaluated under a new research assessment Regulation

Recent initiatives by NOVA to attract research talent:

1. New Regulation for the Evaluation of Researchers Performance – Despacho n.o 6757/2023 from June 23, 2023.
2. **New Regulation for incentives to Researchers** – in publication.
3. **New Regulation for Research Careers** – under development.
4. **New Regulation for individual Fellowships** – approved in 2023.
5. **New Regulation for Science Managers and other Science support activities** – under development.
6. **Offices(s) to support career Development** – under development.
7. **Pilot program to support career development for contracted researchers** under the scope of the funded SECURE EU project – 2023/24.
8. Strategic Plan for attracting Talent (with CEI) - 2024.
9. **A new research assessment:**
 - a. Embed the principles from EC and COARA, namely regarding valuation of NOVA University 3rd Mission, Qualitative Assessment, Ethics, Open Science, Interdisciplinarity, among others.
 - b. Relevance of Assessment for contracted researchers:
 - c. Provides information for opening calls for an Academic career in a given area if a contracted researcher is evaluated as Excellent.
 - d. Allows progression for the next payment degree (“escalão”).
 - e. Gives information regarding renewal of contracts, when applicable.
10. Relevance of Assessment for Researchers already in Academic career:
 - a. Provides information for tenure (3 years).
 - b. Allows possibility of progression from Assistant to Principal and Principal to Coordinator
 - c. Under legal analysis is the possibility to progress from Junior to Assistant Researcher given an experimental period.

The Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education launched in 2024 its first call for tenure entitled *FCT-Tenure Call*, a co-fund mechanism between the Ministry and the employers for the hiring of up to one thousand (1000) PhD researchers, exclusively for permanent positions. The programme allows

Conditions of the programme:

- The researchers may be hired for research positions and for teaching academic career with a maximum of 4 hours per week of dedication to teaching in each career for the duration of the support.

The duration of co-funding lasts a maximum of 3 years for each position allocated to the teaching career and up to a maximum of 6 years for each position allocated to the research career.

Key messages per stakeholder

The country cases discussed during the meeting have been experiencing different reforms. Key features of the tenure-track programmes include a maximum duration of six (6) years.

Promoting Researchers' career takes a structural approach to be followed by both employers and policy-making bodies. ICoRSA endorses the policy recommendations set by the report *Reducing the precarity of academic research careers*. Moreover, ICoRSA, suggests the following recommendations:



For employers

- Ensuring the employee status promotes access to social benefits and improves working conditions. This should be safeguarded to all researchers.
- The Human Resources (HR) practices should include the regular collection of working conditions and well-being of researchers. The definition of researcher should incorporate the recent professions in researcher considered under the European Framework for Research Careers – research managers. This exercise should also engage the local associations/unions of researchers.
- A regular dialogue should be promoted between institutional departments and local researchers' associations as a best practice.
- The Charter and Code for Researchers and the European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp) should be adopted, adapted to the needs and context of researchers.
- HR practices should be transparent and inclusive, promoting regular consultations with the local researchers' associations/unions. Best practices could include:
 - Setting an institutional award system of HR and career development practices and
 - Promoting engagement with EURAXESS national services.
- Research community representatives should be included in the governance structures of the institutional decision-making bodies.

For policy makers and funders

- Associative practices are key for a vibrant and supportive community of workers. Existing support as seed money for associative practices of research associations. This is already a practice in some European countries as in Ireland through the Irish Research Council.
- Promote open consultations and exchanges of best-practices between representatives of all stakeholders of the R&I system, namely: rector's conferences, researchers staff associations, and unions, including research managers.
- Increased alignment of Charter and Code for Researchers and the European Competence Framework for Researchers within national funding requirements.
- Assessment of institutional research culture practices in national funding schemes.
- Further investment in EURAXESS services.

- ERA Governance structure should be simplified and include a wider range of stakeholder involvement.

For Research Staff Associations

- As the Member States approved² the *Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe*³ and endorsed the priority actions of the ERA Policy Agenda, Research Staff Associations should consult regularly their national representatives on the implementation of the recommendation.

Action points

- ICORSA will annually collect data about the evolution observed in researchers' precarity, via survey with open data for all stakeholders.

The conferences presentations are available [here](#).

References

OECD (2023), "Promoting diverse career pathways for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers", OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers, No. 158, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/dc21227a-en>.

OECD (2021), "Reducing the precarity of academic research careers", OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers, No. 113, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en>.

Reports are published by the Joint Science Conference (GWK): www.gwk-bonn.de/dokumente/materialien-der-gwk (latest report from 2023: Heft 87)

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/12/08/council-reaches-political-agreement-on-how-to-keep-attract-and-retain-research-innovation-and-entrepreneurial-talents-in-europe/>

³ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15135-2023-REV-1/en/pdf>