Addressing the precarity of academic research careers

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FINAL CONFERENCE: TOWARDS A NEW ACADEMIC CAREER FRAMEWORK FOR LATVIA

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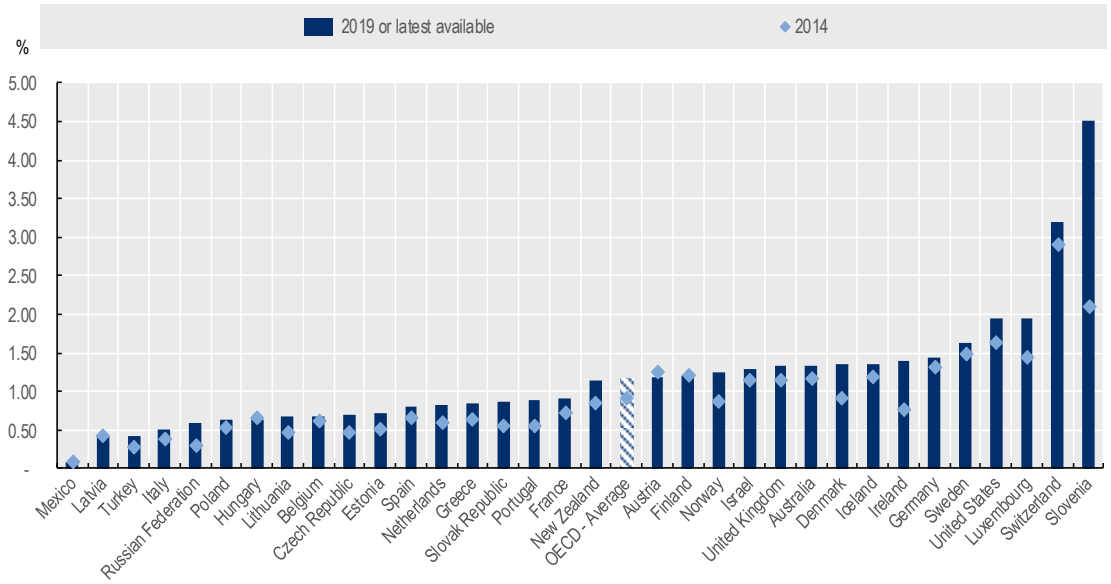
http://www.oecd.org/sti/science-technology-innovation-outlook/research-precariat/

Share of doctorate level attainment in the population

25-64 years, 2014 and 2019 or latest year available



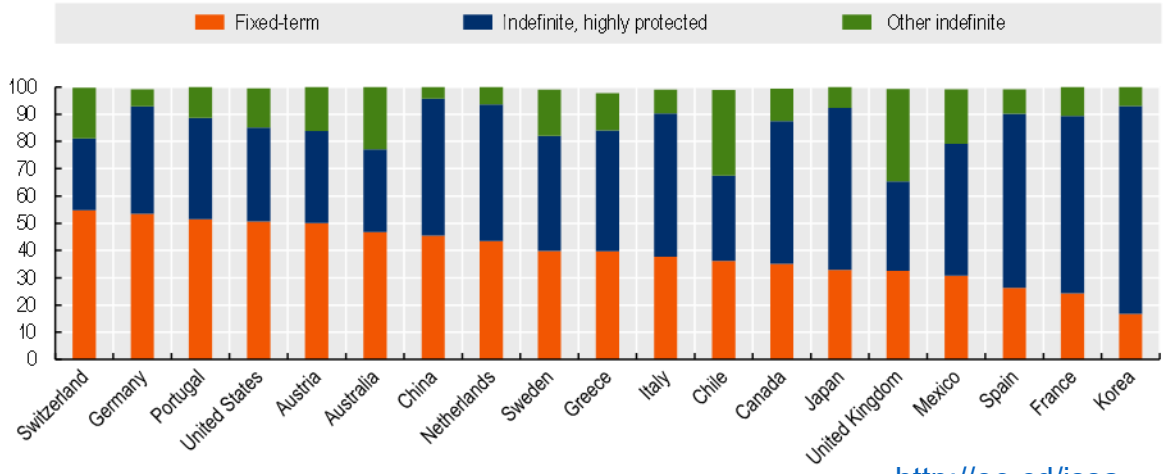
OECD (2020), "Education at a glance: Educational attainment and labour-force status", OECD Education Statistics (database), https://doi.org/10.1787/889e8641-en (accessed on 22 September 2020).

- The OECD average share of 25-64 year-olds with a doctorate is around 1%, but the share has been increasing, and if current trends continue, 2.3% of today's young adults (those aged 25-34) will enter doctoral studies at some point in their life.
- The share of doctorate level attainment in the population (25-64 year olds) of OECD countries has increased by 25% during the 5-year period 2014-2019.
- The traditional academic career cannot absorb the increasing number of doctorate holders wishing to stay in academia.

- Higher education has been the traditional sector of employment for doctorate holders in most countries.
- Many younger doctoral holders will no longer find a stable career position in academic research.
- Around one third of the OECD labour force are in temporary or part-time jobs or are self-employed, but the scale of precarity is much higher in the academic research sector, especially among early-career researchers.

Job security of corresponding authors, by country of residence

Percentage of corresponding authors, 2018, selected economies

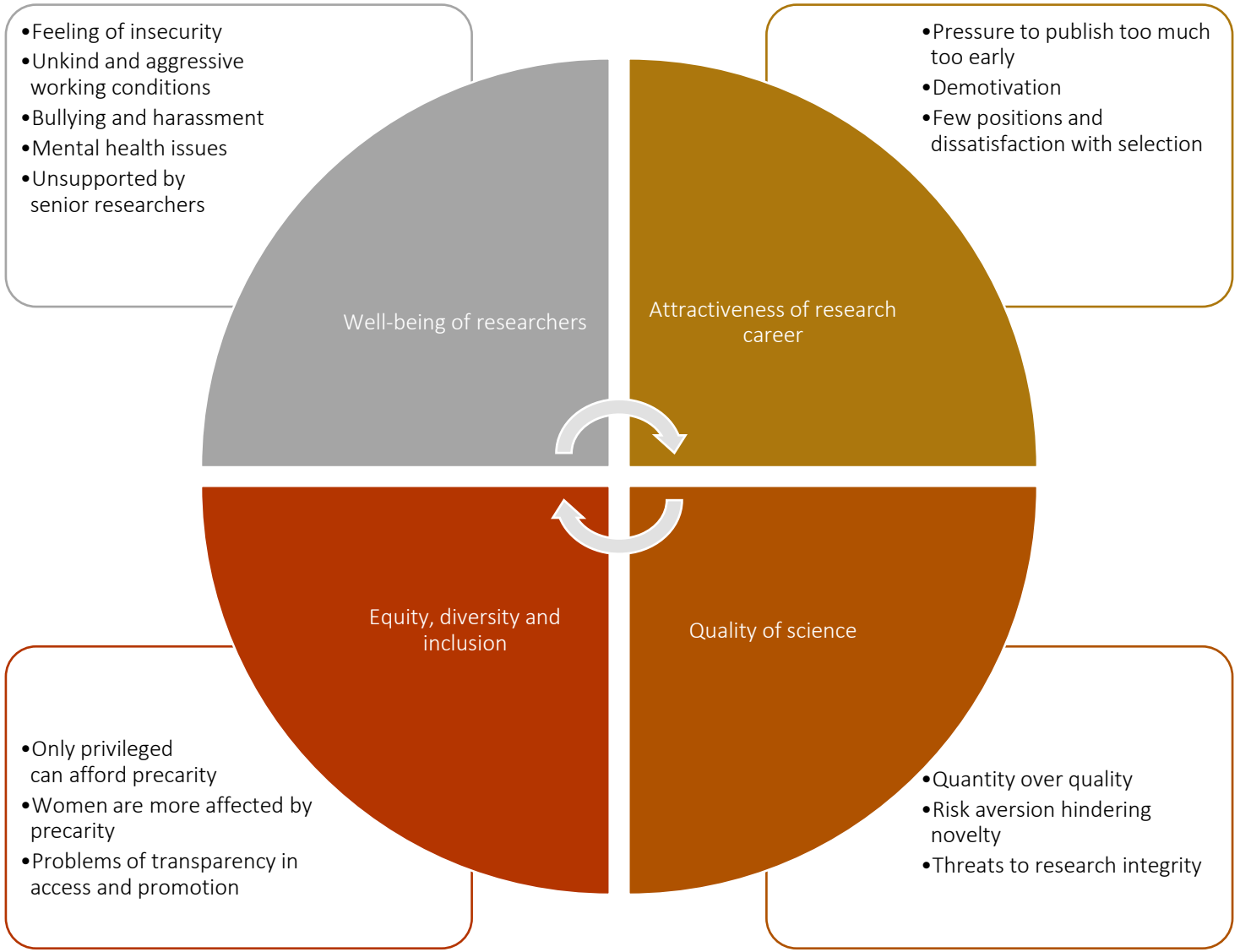


http://oe.cd/issa

Effects of precarity

Wellcome Trust Survey (2020)

Nature postdoctoral-researcher survey (2020)



Challenges

Findings from 15 country notes and circa 100 policy interviews in 11 countries, at EU level and with TUAC members.

- The “permadoc” phenomenon
- Outdated career structures
- Unstructured postdoctoral phase
- Excessive dependency on senior researchers
- Lack of diversity in the research workforce
- Lack of inter-sectoral mobility
- Compatibility of family life and academic career
- Issues arising from international mobility
- Under-developed human resources management in institutions
- The academic career is no longer attractive for some
- Poor evidence base
- Detrimental effects of covid-19

Recommendations

1. Improve the **working conditions** and offer more transparent, predictable and flexible career prospects for postdoctoral researchers
2. Offer broad **professional development** during postdoctoral training
3. Promote **equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion** in research careers by identifying and addressing existing biases and challenges
4. Establish better links between research assessment and funding, and **human resource management** policy objectives
5. Improve **institutional practices** regarding human resource management in research
6. Promote the **inter-sectoral mobility** of researchers
7. Support the **international mobility** of researchers
8. Develop the **evidence base** on research careers
9. **Include all relevant stakeholders** in the governance and coordination of research careers and ensure concerted, systemic action

Factors influencing impact of policy

Enablers	Barriers
Consultation with stakeholders	Research culture
Sector-wide agreements	Incentives shaped by research assessment metrics
Funding with strings attached to policy objectives	Uncertainty regarding funding
Postdoc networks	Lack of good evidence base

Further reading

https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en

https://doi.org/10.1787/72f6f879-en

The research workforce of the future: promoting alternative career options for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers

Follow up project to the *Research Precariat* project

Terms of reference

- Focus on career options within and beyond academia for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers
- Focus more on the value of PhDs than the question of whether there are too many PhDs
- View equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as cross-cutting issues
- Include research evaluation in relation to recruitment and promotion of individual researchers
- Recognise lack of comparative data and different national contexts ('country note' approach)

Let's Discuss!

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