

Workshop 2:

Academic organization perspectives:

Overcoming institutional barriers of early-career progression and brain circulation

The European Union's Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) provides funding for fellowships, in particular for research projects, to encourage young talents and promote academic careers, thereby building a highly skilled research-based human capital. The MSCA fellowships train Early Career Researchers (ECRs), provide them with international and inter-sectoral experience, thus fostering excellent research and boosting jobs, growth and investment, to fill the top positions of tomorrow.

Introduction. The brain circulation into and across Europe stimulated, among others, by the MSCA programme has been shown to be unbalanced regarding the geographical, inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary mobility of researchers. These fluxes of young talents have been shown in particular to lead to brain enrichment in some parts (e.g. in MSCA towards Denmark) and to brain depletion in others (e.g. in MSCA out of Slovenia). This workshop takes a perspective from within the system and the academic organizations to discuss the need for reintegration of researchers into their country of origin in order to enhance synergies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the new European Research Area (ERA). Recent Slovenian studies and the last Conclusions of the Council of the EU show that improvements in the quality of national research and innovation systems with appropriate framework conditions, including sufficient R&D investments and implementation of reforms, are urgently needed to counter such imbalances. More specifically, active policies of connecting and (re)integration of scientists and experts working abroad into the national research environment will be discussed, regarding e.g. funding opportunities and other systemic issues.

General considerations. Existing programmes in several EU member states (e.g. the German [Emmy Noether Programme](#) or the Slovene [Aleš Debeljak Programme](#)) are designed to provide different career opportunities for researchers to follow up after a mobility experience, e.g. through the MSCA programme. Often, these programmes further emphasize future skills and future jobs, whereas the lack of available work opportunities and unfavorable conditions for the highly skilled workforce were observed among the main limiting factors. In particular, academic precarity and scarcity of other work opportunities strongly reduce the attractiveness of a country and its brain retention capacity. These factors are based in the national academic institutions and research funding systems, indicating a need to mitigate these issues by policy interventions that are similarly dependent on the country's specific situation.

Slovenian perspective. From inside the Slovenian academic system, precarity of ECRs is a major barrier to attracting (re)immigration, with aspects that relate to income, overall working conditions and arrangements, possibility of planning for the future, and career development opportunities, as well as social security. The incomes in the Slovene public sector are significantly lower than in many other EU countries, as they are based on national law and union-negotiated agreements. Although this does not constitute the main priority to many researchers, it represents a factual incentive against moving to Slovenia as an experienced researcher. Overall, working conditions include the provided office and laboratory space, supplies, access to needed infrastructure and equipment, or possibilities to work from home. Other arrangements are, e.g., the support with the mobility-related administrative processes for the incoming research staff, with institutional administrative issues, and with arrangements for the researcher's family, including childcare and employment for the spouse. These together constitute major decision factors for the migration, as they define the possibility for the experienced researcher to build both family and career. Moreover, the possibility to plan the career path in advance suffers

strongly from precarious short-term financing, limited prospects for future employment, almost non-existent tenure-track options, very low success rates and the lack of diversity in national funding opportunities, and a very small number of available permanent positions. Furthermore, the Slovene academic system is very hierarchical, favoring large programs and research groups, which keeps ECRs in a dependent position with diminished control over their scientific direction and career development. This leaves ECRs with diminished control over their own careers and strongly limits the independence of experienced researchers. Furthermore, the lack of trust in meritocratic allocation of positions and resources is a major hurdle. Finally, the social security systems within Europe are not aligned, thus leading e.g. to instances of the researcher and their family dropping out of social security or health insurance.

The key questions participants will discuss are:

- What factors do researchers consider when choosing the next destination after a period of mobility (continuing abroad or returning to country of origin)?
- What obstacles are researchers facing when trying to reintegrate after their mobility experience into their country of origin?
- What institutional or national measures can improve the current situation, especially related to limited prospects for future employment and academic precarity?

Moderator: Dahle Sebastian, MSCA fellow, Young Academy of Slovenia

E-mail: sebastiandahle35@gmail.com

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