

## **ERA Consultation Contribution (3): Lifting Barriers and Moving Researchers in the European Union**

At the heart of the European Research Area is a very simple idea: the free movement of *knowledge*. Although the notion of ‘free movement’ is as old as the European Union (EU) itself, the fifth freedom is new. We give attention to *researcher mobility* because, according to the Innovation Union targets, the EU needs *at least one million* researchers by 2020 [LINK 1]. **We show that mobility is a very risky undertaking for most researchers if these barriers are not removed.** In this third contribution from Eurodoc to the ERA consultation, we highlight several key barriers still in place and suggest ways of lifting them.

### ***Barrier 1: Mobility experience is not recognised***

Mobility experiences – particularly short-term mobility – are often not recognised sufficiently in evaluations of career path development because their effects are less quantifiable than scientific publications. They are generally seen as a ‘good thing’, but, like outreach activities, becoming more mobile rarely translates directly into job security. On the contrary, high levels of mobility (especially at the early stages of a research career) may mask what is actually happening in practice: the proliferation of short-term contracts in place of permanent positions. **The lack of demonstrable and direct recognition of mobility experiences is a fundamental barrier to promoting mobility.**

**There needs to be clear incentives for researchers to be mobile.** We propose that these incentives are integrated into assessments of research careers (e.g. for promotion) and funding evaluations.

### ***Barrier 2: Recruitment procedures are complex and opaque***

The very complexity and opaqueness of recruitment procedures prevent mobility even if the researchers decide to work in another country. Job announcements are usually not circulated widely in advance and are often in a foreign language for both European and international applicants. **We recommend that job announcements should at least be made available in English. Rules concerning the recruitment process should be made clear to all applicants at the very start and the process itself should be transparent.** This would allow both employers and candidates to know their roles, responsibilities and anticipated outcomes – a fundamental principle of the European Researcher Charter and the Code of Conduct for their recruitment [LINK 2].

Eurodoc has been a strong supporter of the Charter and the Code since the very beginning and played a key role in its development. To show our continual commitment to the implementation of the Charter and the Code through the Human Resource Strategy,

Eurodoc recently signed a letter of endorsement to further promote these principles [LINK 3]. There are, however, many challenges ahead for implementing the Charter and the Code, which remains a voluntary instrument. **We recommend that the EU, member states, universities, research institutions and stakeholders work together to make the Charter and the Code a binding instrument.** Furthermore, the promotion and monitoring of these principles must be a joint undertaking.

Since the ERA was launched in 2000, the EU has devoted a lot of resources to improving the recruitment procedure, one of the outcomes being the Euraxess job portal [LINK 4]. Although one of the most developed EU instruments in this regard, Euraxess is under-utilised by incoming/outgoing researchers and their employers/funders. If ERA is to be completed by 2014, Euraxess needs to be better integrated with other existing – and more frequently used – job portals.

### ***Barrier 3: Lack of opportunities and support structures for family members***

Decisions to be mobile for researchers with partners and families are especially difficult. In such instances, if the net benefit of mobility is only for one partner, it is easy to argue against it. **We therefore caution against policies and programmes that stipulate mobility as a requirement for funding or eligibility if there are no support systems in place for partners and families.** To encourage and assist researchers with partners and families to become mobile, we recommend that research or funding institutions introduce robust infrastructures and allocate resources for practical matters such as: support job seeking for partners, kindergarten allocation for those with young children, language courses, accommodation and so on. Posting such information should be only the first step; there must be personnel dedicated to assist researchers navigating these issues. Put simply, **institutions must improve their internal structures to assist partners and families of mobile researchers.**

### ***Barrier 4: Insufficient and lack of mobility funding***

Obtaining funding for mobility is a very challenging task. With the exception of the Marie Curie schemes, which are tied to specific institutions (i.e. the institutions administer the grant, which are not portable should the researcher wish to move to another institution), most of the European and national funding schemes have a long list of eligibility restrictions that contradict the notion of *free movement*. For instance, the grants may only be applicable for travel to a particular region or country, for exchanges between selected sectors, or for researchers of certain nationalities.

In terms of actual cost, funding is often too low. For example, grants are generally applicable to cover the costs of researchers and not their families. This lack of funding is a strong disincentive to become mobile. Early stage researchers face particular challenges in securing mobility funding, which is often not included in their contracts and need to be applied for separately. **Researchers will not be mobile without adequate funding support.**

**Funding schemes should be more integrative, taking into account the actual costs related to bringing along family, and securing social security when being abroad. Mobility grants should have no restrictions as to who is eligible to apply and should be portable across institutions.**

***Barrier 5: Transferability of social security and pension rights***

Securing social security and pension rights is already challenging for most researchers under (short-term) contract conditions even in their home countries. Within the context of mobility, social security and pension access, and their transferability, are particularly problematic. There is often a lack of information on these issues for researchers, who are likely to be more preoccupied with practical/immediate issues. Early stage and highly mobile researchers are especially vulnerable to differences between national social security and pension schemes. For instance, incoming researchers are frequently asked to start field work or laboratory work prior to sorting out their contract conditions; any injury incurred may not be covered by the hosting institution.

**Information concerning social security and pension schemes should be easily accessible and in a comprehensible format for researchers.** There must be dedicated personnel who are able and willing to assist researchers on these matters. **The EU and all research institutions must work together to enable transferability of social security and pension rights. Furthermore, bilateral agreements between the EU and non-EU countries should be promoted in order to secure the researchers' rights.**

To sum up, the lack of demonstrable and direct recognition of mobility as a part of a researcher's career, lack of funding and portability of funding, opportunities and mobility schemes for family members, social security and pensions can thus result in researchers viewing mobility as a risk rather than an opportunity or even advantage. Therefore, **a more holistic approach jointly pursued by European governments, the EU and public and private organisations employing researchers is needed to ensure that mobility is attractive for all researchers at any stage of their careers.**

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This contribution was written jointly in November 2011 by the mobility and career development working groups. Please contact the mobility working group coordinator for any questions or further information at [mobility@eurodoc.net](mailto:mobility@eurodoc.net).

**Entry to the EU is a key barrier for third country nationals,** and Eurodoc has already elaborated the inconsistencies between the admission procedures for junior and established researchers in our first contribution to this series [LINK 5]. We continue to call on the EU institutions and the member states to work together to remedy this discrepancy.

## References

LINK 1: p. 9 of the Innovation Union communication

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/innovation-union-communication\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/innovation-union-communication_en.pdf)

LINK 2: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/recommendation>

LINK 3: <http://eurodoc.net/news/2011/11/04/eurodoc-officially-endorses-european-charter-and-code-of-conduct>

LINK 4: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>

LINK 5: <http://www.eurodoc.net/news/2011/09/22/era-consultation-contribution-attracting-non-eu-researchers-to-the-european-research-area>