Resolution on young researchers

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on young researchers.

The resolution noted that the EU remains the world leader for the total number of researchers, with a 23.5 % share (compared to 21.1 % in China and 16.2 % in the USA), Europe has not seen a significant increase in the number of permanent academic positions. Only a small percentage of PhD graduates will find a permanent post in academia or public research, obliging young researchers to develop transferable skills and obtain the relevant training necessary to have a chance to develop successful careers outside academia.

In addition, high inflation in the price of goods and services, together with rising rents and mortgage rates, are contributing to a cost of living crisis that heavily impacts young researchers, particularly those on low salaries facing precarious employment conditions.

Career conditions and networking opportunities

The resolution welcomed the Commission's proposals from July 2023 to make EU research careers more appealing, with greater opportunities for mobility. It recalled that improving research careers, particularly for young researchers, is a core priority of the ERA policy agenda 2022-2024 and could help to determine whether the EU maintains its status as a global leader in research and innovation and new technologies.

Stressing the need to strengthen networking between researcher associations and universities across the EU, in order to better promote the common interests of young researchers, Parliament welcomed EU TalentOn and other EU initiatives to promote networking, visibility and cooperation among young researchers.

The Commission is called on to:

- improve the employment conditions and opportunities for young researchers in Europe by pooling consortia together to help young researchers and supporting fair remuneration and career opportunities;

- give priority to implementing a 'Career Observatory' in the form of an open monitoring and reporting system across Europe about annual progress in framework and employment conditions, including remuneration, social security, type of contract and pension levels;

Funding

Noting that the primary responsibility to ensure sufficient and sustainable public funding for science, research and innovation lies with the Member States, the resolution insisted that the Member States should commit to more ambitious levels of research and innovation (R&I) funding, with full implementation of the 3 % GDP investment objective. To fulfil this target, at least 1.25 % GDP of investment should come from public funding.

Parliament regretted that neither the 2024 EU budget proposal nor the proposed revision of the multiannual financial framework envisages an increase in the Horizon Europe budget, which is necessary to improve the success rate for EU funding and avoid squandering talent as young researchers continue their careers outside of Europe. In this regard, an increased budget for Horizon Europe is called for, with the objective of allowing each sub-programme to fund at least 50 % of all proposals graded as excellent.

Mobility and portability

Parliament stressed the importance of using EU funding schemes to incentivise researchers to return to Europe after carrying out their doctoral research in a third country, as a way to counter the brain drain that is damaging European research systems. It regretted that the Council has not taken more concrete steps to commit all Member States to removing the obstacles that can make mobility difficult for young researchers.

Members also welcomed the ERA4YOU initiative and the proposed ERA Talent Platform as a means to encourage inter-sectoral mobility and improve the prospects of young researchers. Moreover, Parliament supports the Commission's plan to build on the pan-European pension fund for researchers (RESAVER) and develop an overarching researchers' careers framework to further promote cross-border and cross-sector mobility.

Gender balance

Given that women account for only a third of researchers and just over a quarter of high-level academic posts, while making up a disproportionate share of researchers on part-time and precarious contracts in Europe, Parliament called for a concerted commitment at EU level and in the Member States to ensure that recruitment and selection processes are gender neutral and free from any biases. It noted, in this regard, that Horizon Europe is currently experimenting with the possibility of anonymisation for some projects to reduce evaluation biases.

Lastly, the Council is called on to swiftly adopt and implement the new initiatives proposed by the Commission to empower research careers and to strengthen the ERA, including the proposed Council recommendation for a revised Charter for Researchers and a European Competence Framework for Researchers.