



INPUT TO CONSULTATION

QUALITY JOBS ROADMAP

High-quality jobs in research and innovation are essential to Europe's justice, equality, and competitiveness agendas. Yet many researchers face precarious contracts, gender and intersectional inequalities, regional disparities, and poor working conditions. The Quality Jobs Roadmap is an opportunity to recognise research and innovation (R&I) as a strategic employment sector and improve job standards in EU funding, careers, and institutions. Better working conditions and career security will support innovation, inclusion, and sustainability of the European R&I.

The EU R&I labour market is structurally precarious, especially in early career stages. Many researchers rely on fixed-term, project-based contracts tied to competitive funding with limited social protections. This model deepens precarity, creates unclear accountability, and leaves early-career researchers vulnerable to exploitation, including gender-based violence and other abuse. Precarity limits access to training in transferable skills and blocks career mobility beyond academia. It also deters talent, reinforces inequality, undermines long-term planning, and affects mental health. Women, racialised researchers, and those in widening countries are disproportionately affected.

The Roadmap should address precarity by promoting stable, long-term positions through core funding, not only short-term grants. EU-level guidance or minimum standards should cover contract duration, social protections, and employer obligations in publicly funded R&I. The EU should monitor employment outcomes in EU-funded projects to assess progress on reducing precarity and supporting inclusive careers. Transferable skills training and inter-sectoral mobility should be supported throughout researchers' careers. Research assessment and funding systems must align with inclusive HR strategies that reduce structural drivers of precarity, and this should be embedded in CoARA. Early-career researchers must be meaningfully represented in shaping career policies. Precarity must be recognised as a barrier to excellence, inclusion, and competitiveness.

Work-life balance, parental leave, and care-related interruptions must also be addressed. Many early-career researchers lack access to care leave in competitive funding schemes, and care-related costs such as childcare during conferences are often ineligible. These



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conditions reduce research time and career progression, especially for women, who may delay parenthood, reduce working hours, or leave research. Interruptions negatively impact evaluations, re-entry, and funding prospects. Precarity combined with poor work–life balance limits access to housing, stability, and family formation.

The Roadmap should support protections in funding and employment that promote work–life balance, recognise care-related costs, and guarantee access to paid parental leave. Funders must ensure timelines and evaluation criteria accommodate leave and offer continued funding and structured re-entry, especially in schemes such as the ERC and national excellence grants.

Gender-based violence and harassment in academia are widespread and severely impact wellbeing, work performance and retention. Institutional responses remain weak and protections uneven. The Roadmap must recognise gender-based violence as a core job quality issue, with institutional responsibility and EU-level standards aligned with the zero tolerance code of conduct. It must acknowledge that gender-based violence undermines research excellence and inclusion.

Mental health challenges are pervasive among researchers, particularly early-career staff, due to insecurity, overwork, and lack of support. Poor mental health leads to attrition, exclusion, and reduced performance. The Roadmap must include mental health as a core element of job quality and encourage institutional policies to promote healthy research cultures. Researcher wellbeing is key to the long-term sustainability and performance of European R&I.

