SECURE

Sustainable Careers for Researcher Empowerment

SECURE2 Bulletin – December 2025

Reshaping Research Careers

Supporting the European Research Area
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What can you find in this bulletin?

The SECURE2 Bulletin brings you news and opportunities focused on career improvement, job security and skills development, aimed towards researchers and research organisations across Europe. Issued twice a year, in June and December, it covers project progress and highlights main developments in European research sector.

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Project team at the kick-off meeting in Sarajevo, September 2025. Photo: Oleksandr Berezko

SECURE2 Initiative Kicks Off Another Four Years of Improving Research Careers

"Researchers often want to stay in research, but there isn't the career progression they would wish for within academia. Instead, many face a string of short-term contracts, frequent moves across institutions and even countries, and little clarity about the path ahead"

The Horizon Europe project SECURE 2 kicked off in June 2025 and brought together 18 partner institutions united by a shared ambition: to build more attractive, transparent, and sustainable research careers across Europe. For young researchers, the SECURE2 initiative carries particular weight, as it tackles one of the most pressing issues they face today – job insecurity. The first SECURE project, active throughout 2023-2025, laid the foundation by developing the Research Career Framework (RCF) recommendations. For continuation, we bring lessons learned: we'll have more time, hopefully a more stable policy environment, and eight pilots with senior institutional buy-in.

The Initial Maturity Mapping Process

In the first six months, SECURE2 partners identified the starting point in implementing policies and practices aligned with the Research Career Framework. Pilot institutions within the project consortium self-assessed their level of development across eight action areas. This baseline assessment highlighted shared trends and challenges, and provided strategic guidance for the next stage, when several out of 88 actions will be chosen for implementation in each of the 8 pilots. The official results of this maturity mapping process are expected in May 2026. The infographic below shows this process in more detail.

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Research Career Framework
(SECURE RCF)

What SECURE Does:

- Strengthens research careers across Europe.
- 8 Action Areas, 88 Actions.
- Helps institutions identify gaps, needs, and strengths.
- Pilots real interventions to improve career pathways.
- Creates transparent and fairer career systems.
- Connects researchers and RMAs into a shared ecosystem.
- Supports long-term change through the RCF.

What the Pilots Gain:

Clear career pathways and transparent criteria.
Better support for early-career researchers.
Reduces precarity and isolated career routes.
Improved assessment and evaluation processes.
Stronger institutional policies aligned with the European Research Area.
Aligns institutions with ERA priorities and HRS4R principles.

Why This Process Matters:

Creates transparent and fairer career systems.
Reduces precarity and isolated career routes.
Strengthens institutional capacity for career development
Aligns institutions with ERA priorities and H RS4R principles.
Supports early career researchers through training & guidance

8 ACTION AREAS
88 ACTIONS

Action Area 1
STRATEGY
Clear institutional vision and longterm commitment to developing attractive and sustainable research careers.

Action Area 2
STABILITY
Improving job security, contract clarity, and predictable career pathways.

Action Area 3
CONDITIONS
Ensuring fair, supportive, safe, and inclusive environments for all researchers.

Action Area 4
SKILLS
Building research, transferable, and leadership skills aligned with evolving career needs.

Action Area 5
MOBILITY
Supporting geographical, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary mobility throughout the career.

Action Area 6
ASSESSMENT
Fair, transparent, and modern research career assessment aligned with Open Science and diverse contributions

Action Area 7
PATHWAYS
Creating clear, inclusive, and structured pathways for academic and non-academic careers.

Action Area 8
INTEROPERABILITY
Making researcher skills, roles, and competences comparable and transferable across institutions and l sectors.

RCF Implementation Process:

BENCHMARK SELF-ASSESSMENT:
Institutions fill out a structured self-assessment using the automated SECURE RCF template, scoring their maturity across eight Action Areas. This sets the baseline for identifying the initial maturity level of the institution.

MID-PILOTING CHECKPOINT:
Results are analyzed to identify strengths, weaknesses, and priority needs in each institution (pilot). This highlights where support, training, and policy interventions are most needed.

ACTION PLAN CO-DESIGN:
Based on identified gaps and needs, tailored actions and capacity-building activities are designed and implemented in each pilot institution. These actions test practical solutions for strengthening research careers.

PILOTING ACTIONS
Based on identified gaps and needs, tailored actions and capacity-building activities are designed and implemented in each pilot institution. These action test practical solution for strenghtening research careers.

MID PILOTING CHECK POINT
Based on identified gaps and needs, tailored actions and capacity-building activities are designed and implemented in each pilot institution. These actions test practical solutions for strengthening research careers

RE-ASSESSMENT OF RCF BENCHMARKING:
Based on identified gaps and needs, tailored actions and capacity-building activities are designed and implemented in each pilot institution. These actions test practical solutions for strengthening research careers.

European Research Ecosystem Updates

COST Action Cross-Cutting Activity (CCA) on Career Development for Young Researchers: Mid-term Conference

Mid-term Conference, led by Eurodoc, was held in Brussels on 3–4 December 2025. The aim of the CCA is to analyse and improve career development conditions to attract and retain the best researchers in Europe and it is composed by early-stage career researchers and career advisors.

Several initiatives were shared on best-practices on career development of researchers as the PROSPER, led by University of Liverpool and funded by UKRI. Discussions also addressed supervision and research assessment, drawing on data from the Marie Curie Alumni Association's major 2024 survey of MSCA fellows. The results highlight, among others, the need for improved supervision of MSCA fellows (as only 55.1% agree that goals are clearly explained, while a notable 22.9% disagree) and more transparent and structured assessment systems (as only 60.3% of respondents understand how their performance is measured, significantly lower than for previous items).

Discussions highlighted the need for training and career support adapted to researchers' mobility into industry and sectors outside academia. Relevant evidence from the European University Association (EUA), including the *2025 EUA-CDE Survey Report I (June 2025), Focus: Salzburg Principles – State of Play* and the forthcoming *2025 EUA-CDE Survey Report II (January 2026), Focus: Policies in Doctoral Education*, addresses institutional practices in this area. According to the survey, only 6% of institutional representatives estimate that between 61% and 80% of their doctoral graduates will secure a permanent position in academia.

Conclusions were presented by Nicola Dengo and Joanna Rutkowska (Eurodoc) on the 20 years of the European Charter for Researchers, highlighting key messages such as the need to promote long-term contracts, embed its principles in national legislation, and link compliance to funding mechanisms.

Exploring Sustainable Research Careers: ICoRSA Panel

On December 10, 2025, the International Consortium of Research Staff Associations (ICoRSA) hosted a panel discussing sustainable research careers. Experts from the SECURE2 project, Marie Curie Alumni Association, and other groups presented findings on improving researcher mobility, wellbeing, and the professional recognition of research managers.

The panel centered on practical solutions, featuring SECURE2's pilot framework for tackling precarious careers and the MCAA's analysis of supporting mobile researchers. Broader institutional change was highlighted through grassroots wellbeing initiatives from groups like CAPS/ACP and the professionalization of Research Managers and Administrators, underscoring the need for systemic action to create truly sustainable career pathways.

European Commission's Conference on Research Careers

On December 11–12, 2025, the European Commission's Conference on Research Careers convened policymakers and research professionals that discussed building a more

sustainable and excellent environment for European researchers.

Major topics addressed at the conference included the *Choose Europe* mechanism to attract talented researchers to Europe; the features and importance of initiatives that harmonise standards for the recruitment and assessment of researchers and research managers, such as the Research Community, Research Comp and Research Managers Comp, and initiatives that promote access to pension rights, including RESAVER.

National schemes led by European Member States, such as *Choose France* and Germany's *Global Minds*, were also presented, reflecting a broader global trend to attract researchers. All the presentations are available here.

MTA–HYA Study Highlights Concerns Over Careers and Well-Being in Science

On November 24, 2025, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) and the Hungarian Young Academy (HYA) presented the first comprehensive national survey about researchers in Hungary, revealing significant concerns over career predictability and well-being.

The study's key findings indicate a crisis in career stability, with only 21% of researchers under 40 viewing academic paths as predictable and 66% considering the grant system unpredictable. This contributes to half of all researchers considering leaving their careers. The report also highlighted a mental health gap, showing researchers have significantly lower psychological well-being than the general population, with nearly half of female researchers reporting gender-based discrimination.

In closing, MTA leadership emphasized the need to strengthen institutional support and continue scholarship programs to restore trust in scientific careers.

Calling all Early Career Researchers, Principle Investigators and Supervisors, and career advisors - we need your input!

Our COST Cross-Cutting Activity (CCA) on career development for young researchers has launched a survey to capture perspectives on career development practices and perceptions at research institutions across Europe.

Career development initiatives are essential for young researchers. Yet, there are still some discrepancies between Member States and institutions in terms of working conditions and training opportunities. The CCA want to identify strengths, gaps, and good practices that can be shared transparently afterwards. By participating, you will contribute to an evidence base that can inform fairer and more inclusive career development opportunities.

🔷 Who should respond: Researchers (R1-R2), PI/Supervisors, career advisors
🔷 Time it will take: ~8 minutes
🔷 Deadline: January 31, 2026
🔷 Link: https://bit.ly/3LFeaqI

Survey for Early Career Researchers (ECR), Principal Investigators/Supervisors, and Career Development professional staff across Europe

COST's Cross-Cutting Activity (CCA) on career development for young researchers seeks to capture perspectives on career development practices and perceptions at research institutions across Europe.

Duration: 8 minutes
Deadline: 31 January 2026
Target groups: Researchers (R1-R2), PI/Supervisors, Careers Advisors

Explore Useful Resources, Tools and Opportunities

- [Research Career Framework](#) - a practical toolbox for research-performing and research-funding organisations to reform research careers and reduce the precarity of researchers at their organisations.
- [The ResearchComp Community of Practice](#) - an international network designed to foster collaboration and support research careers across Europe.
- [Research Management Comp](#) - RM Comp is a competence-based framework for Research Managers in the European Research Area (ERA) that identifies key skills and competencies needed for effective research management and supports professional growth.
- Check out a selection of [useful resources on SECURE2](#) website. This is a page that provides a variety of information on professional development, support networks, trainings or instructional materials for researchers.

For more information, contact us at:

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