Equality of opportunities for next generation researchers in Europe

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Equality of opportunities for next generation researchers in Europe: a snapshot discussion motivated by the ERC statistics

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17 Jun 2020

Abstract

This paper reflects on the results of a survey carried out within the COST TN1301 Sci-G network. The results of the survey are cross-comparisons of the ERC-funded researchers in their native countries following the ERC funding. On the one hand, a Benarres administration appears to be the lead researchers. It is discussed how the statistics of ERC starting grants are a mirror of the need and the most talented young researchers.


1 Introduction

During the previous decade, the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST, https://cost.eu, last access: 16 June 2020) funded several targeted networks targeting specific science policy strategies. One of the first targeted networks funded was TN1301 Sci-Generation (COST, 2013a) which was active during 2013–2017. Sci-Generation provided a platform for scientists at the beginning of their independent careers to meet, discuss and act together with the aim of creating better career perspectives for the new generation of researchers in public research centres and universities, in the true sense of a European labour market, and particularly in countries with fewer opportunities. Sci-Generation consisted of four working groups (WGs): WG1 focused on demographic issues, and in particular on issues that impede the career of young excellent researchers in the so-called COST “inclusiveness targeted countries” (COST, 2018); WG2 addressed career opportunities, i.e., career and funding perspectives for young researchers in the sense of a true European labour market; WG3 discussed issues related to
Four working groups of COST TN1301

WG1: Demographic Issues in “inclusiveness countries” that impede career of excellent young researchers and how to involve them in decision making

WG2: Career and Funding Perspectives for young researchers in the sense of a true European labour market, mobility and pensions

WG3: Quality Assessment, on how multi-disciplinary research can be evaluated, on ethics both in evaluation and science

WG4: Research Community, on synergy fostering between European science policy platforms to avoid duplication of efforts
Obstacles for next generation researchers are shared among many European countries

L1: Lack of resources

✓ Lack of research funding that is in many so-called “inclusiveness countries” well under the European 3% of GDP goal
✓ Lack of trained research administration to support researchers during grant preparation
✓ Lack of support from research administration during project implementation

About 1.78 million researchers (in FTE) in EU28. About 0.3% of them are ERC grantees. About 2% of ERC projects is in CEE countries (2017 statistics)

Compilation by WG1 of TN1301

Source: pinterest.ch
Obstacles for next generation researchers are shared among many European countries

**L2: Lack of measures to stimulate excellence in next generation researchers**

- Biases in the process of evaluation of grant proposals due to e.g. obligation to write grant applications in national language
- Lack of transparency in hiring process results in new leaders hired not on the basis of their merit
- Lack of monitoring and follow-up indicators for success of ongoing or completed projects
- Reforms often led by scientific establishment with no real interest in change
- National research strategies pursue arbitrarily set (numerical) targets
- Lack of priorities for funding allocations to support excellent research
- Likely a more critical reviews of researchers from inclusiveness countries due to low visibility

Compilation by WG1 of TN1301
Obstacles for next generation researchers are shared among many European countries

L3: Lack of excellent research environment and training of the next generation researchers

- Insufficient coaching/mentoring of young scientists in preparing European grant applications
- Permanent/senior research positions are not internationally advertised and/or not filled in a transparent manner
- No evaluation of senior scientists in terms of their mentor capacity
- Lack of mobility (incoming and outgoing) of next generation researchers
- Lack of incoming excellent senior researchers ("excellence attracts excellence")
Obstacles for next generation researchers are shared among many European countries

L4: Lack of independence for next generation researchers

✓ Early-career investigators do not have enough independence to develop independent research lines

✓ A strong role of the local networking is hindering international mobility

✓ Lack of continuity and coherence of national research programs

✓ Insufficient incentives for talents to enter academia and a lack of flow of researchers between academia and industry

Compilation by WG1 of TN1301
Quasi-stationary statistics

a) Numbers of submitted ERC starting grants in the so-called COST inclusiveness targeted countries

b) Numbers of funded ERC starting grants in the so-called COST inclusiveness targeted countries

A dead-end street?

✓ A merit-based society takes several generations to develop

✓ Science policy that rigorously pursue the quest for excellence and adequate working conditions for next generation researchers will eventually be fruitful and pay off.

✓ “There must be a good sheriff in town”, Mihai Girtu

From: https://dianiko.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/stars1000_8053b1.jpg
Internationalisation ↔ empowerment

Transparency as a fundamental condition for stimulating excellence:

1. Transparency during the evaluation of research grant applications to ensure an unbiased evaluation process.
2. Transparency of hiring processes for permanent or senior researchers

Many of ERC StG/CoG holders in countries of central and eastern Europe have returned home after a period in EU15 or USA.
✓ Social network
✓ Optimism
✓ Empowerment
✓ Active citizenship

Source: www.moremusic.biz
Internationalisation ↔ empowerment

My path:
Advanced Study Program NCAR
European Space Agency
ERC StG 2011: MODES

✓ Establishment of own research group
✓ Networking and recognition in the field and beyond
✓ Responsibility
"We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours.”

John of Salisbury, 12th century
“The prize is in the pleasure of finding the thing out,” but a grant would also help

☑ Excellent young researchers are everywhere in Europe.
☑ There are biases everywhere, conscience and unconscious ones. Do not allow them to affect you.
☑ Use the support of your former mentors and experienced colleagues.
☑ Writing project proposals is also a learning process. Enjoy it and write a proposal which will make you proud even if not successful. Learn from failures and try again.
☑ Never loose the joy for discovering unknown as a prerequisite for meaningful academic life
Best wishes

http://www.starwars.com/