

Sustainable Careers for Researcher Empowerment

WP5

*Report on Summit and Policy Roundtable Promoting
the Research Career Framework*

Deliverable 5.4

*Report on Summit and Policy Roundtable
Promoting the Research Career Framework*



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RESPONSIBILITY

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1 Introduction

On March 6, 2025, the SECURE consortium held its Closing Summit in Brussels. The Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) hosted the event in its meeting rooms. 77 participants from the SECURE consortium, the European Commission, the European Research Agency, member state research ministries, the sister project DocTalent4EU, research funding agencies, research performing organizations, as well as universities attended in person. Additionally, 205 participants attended the event online. In total, the SECURE Closing Summit had 282 participants.

The goal of the Closing Summit was to present the development of the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) and the SECURE Tenure Track-like Models (TTLM). Both build on the new [Council](#)



Figure 1. Registration desk at the SECURE Closing Summit. From left to right (FLTR): Martin Grund (VDI/VDE-IT), Saša Zelenika (University of Rijeka), Sophie Bouccara (Adoc Talent Management), and Cornelia van Scherpenberg (VDI/VDE-IT). Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).



Figure 2. Audience of the SECURE Closing Summit. FLTR: Tracy Wietecha (ICoRSA), Nataša Jakominić Marot (University of Rijeka), and Alina Irimia (UEFISCDI). Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

[Recommendation](#) of December 2023 on a ‘European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe’ (C/2023/1640) and translate them into a toolset of concrete measures and actions which can be used by research performing and funding organizations (RPOs/RFOs) to further develop their research careers. A set of actions from the SECURE RCF was selected and tested by our pilot organizations (RPOs/RFOs). They reported their lessons learned and challenges during the implementation at the SECURE Closing Summit. Additionally, we invited stakeholders representing RPOs, RFOs and early and midterm career researchers to discuss the further development of the SECURE RCF and TTLM and its future implementation.

For documentation purposes, an artist created graphic recordings of the talks and discussions during the event. Additionally, photos and videos were taken to be shared online (e.g., [short video summary of the SECURE Closing Summit on LinkedIn](#)). All presentations are shared on the SECURE website (<https://secureproject.eu/secure-summit>).

Acknowledgement: The hybrid event was facilitated via Zoom and recorded. With the help of the AI-tool [Whisper by OpenAI](#) (version: 20231117) the recorded audio script was analysed to create a text transcript. This text script was summarized with ChatGPT 4o (version: March 18, 2025) to annotate our own notes of the SECURE Closing Summit.

2 Agenda

09:00 – 10:00 Registration

10:00 – 10:35 Opening Session

- Gordon J. Dalton (PLOCAN, SECURE Coordinator) – Introduction
- Wainer Lusoli (Research Executive Agency, REA) – Opening Remarks
- Dario Capezzuto (European Commission, EC) – Update on Research Careers in the EU
- Luísa Henriques (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, ERA Policy Agenda, Action 4) – Update on ERA Policy Agenda

10:35 – 11:15 Talks on RCF and TTLMs

- Gareth O'Neill (Technopolis Group Belgium, WP2 Lead, Research Careers Framework)
- Emma Day (WP3 Lead, Tenure-Track-Like Models)

11:15 – 11:40 Coffee Break

11:40 – 12:25 Policy Roundtable: The Future of Research Careers

- Dario Capezzuto (European Commission, EC)
- Luísa Henriques (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, ERA Action 4)
- Gareth O'Neill (Technopolis Group Belgium, WP2 Lead, RCF)
- Emma Day (CRAC-Vitae, WP3 Lead, TTLMs)
- Norbert Bencze (EuroDoc)
- Erna Karalija (ICoRSA, UNSA)

12:25 – 13:20 Lunch on Premises

13:20 – 13:30 Talk on DocTalent4EU – Aurea Cophignon (Coordinator DocTalent4EU)

13:30 – 13:35 Talk on Action Plans – Corina Falcón Moya (PLOCAN)

13:35 – 14:05 Interview with SECURE Trial Organizations – Session 1

- Panagiotis Moiras (University of Cyprus)
- Saša Zelenika (University of Rijeka)
- Isabel Rocha (NOVA University Lisbon)

14:10 – 14:40 Interview with SECURE Trial Organizations – Session 2

- Alina Irimia (UEFISCDI)
- Corina Falcón-Moya (PLOCAN)
- Sophie Bouccara (Adoc Talent Management)

14:40 – 15:10 Coffee Break & Poster Session

15:10 – 15:55 Policy Roundtable: Next Steps for Stakeholders

- Ádám Molnár (EURAXESS Hungary, Bay Zoltán Research Centre – Mainstreaming Plan)
- Mostafa Moonir Shawrav (Marie Curie Alumni Association, MCAA – Early Career Researchers)
- Marta Agostinho (EU-Life – Research Institutes)
- Emmanuelle Gardan (Coimbra Group – Research Performing Organizations, RPOs)
- James Morris (Science Europe – Research Funding Organizations, RFOs)
- Gerard Downes (DocTalent4EU)

15:55 – 16:00 Closing Remarks

- Stijn Delaure (REA) – Reflections
- Gordon J. Dalton (PLOCAN, SECURE Coordinator) – Closing of the Event

16:00 Onwards | Networking Drinks & Snacks

3 Summary of Sessions

3.1 Opening Session



Figure 3. FLTR: The moderator of the SECURE Closing Event Silvia Gomez (YERUN) and the coordinator of the SECURE project Gordon J. Dalton (PLOCAN). Photos by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

The SECURE Closing Summit was opened and moderated by **Silvia Gomez (YERUN)**. The Closing Summit introduction was provided by the **SECURE Coordinator Gordon J. Dalton (PLOCAN)** who presented a brief summary of the project success. Within the two years of the project direction (January 2023 – March 2025), two frameworks (SECURE RCF and TLLM) of high importance and exploitation for the European Commission were developed and partially tested with the six pilot organizations. Extensive stakeholder engagement and consultations added to this evidence-based framework design. The SECURE RCF closely followed the latest Council Recommendation on research careers, issued in December 2023, and has laid the foundation for the next range of ten funded projects under HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-02-03 (Talent ecosystems for attractive early research careers – pilot) starting in summer 2025.

For the **European Research Executive Agency (REA)**, **Wainer Lusoli** (Deputy Head of the Unit “Reforming European R&I and Research Infrastructures”) highlighted three pillars in his opening remarks: (1) scale, (2) fragmentation, and (3) excellence.

1. Scale – Europe has over 2.15 million researchers (45% in public institutions) and this talent pool must remain competitive against China and the U.S. in both quantity and quality.
2. Fragmentation – Research careers are embedded in different sectors and legal frameworks, requiring better harmonization and more intersectoral collaboration.
3. Excellence – Competitive career conditions are necessary to attract and retain top talent in research.



Figure 4. Wainer Lusoli (European Research Executive Agency) given opening remarks to more than 280 attendees in the room and online. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).



Figure 5. Dario Capezzuto speaking for the European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD). Unit A.2 – ERA, Spreading Excellence and Research Careers. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](https://ddhomam.com).

for research positions. Well-developed R&I systems rely on foreign researchers, as local talent is often drawn to more stable jobs outside academia. Traditional evaluation methods (publication metrics) hinder career progression for researchers moving between sectors. The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (COARA) is an important initiative to broaden research assessment criteria. Therefore, the next European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda will focus on guidelines for national implementation of the council recommendation, communities of practice for institutional adoption and the talent ecosystems pilot call supporting early-career researcher employability.

In summary, significant progress has been made, but structural changes take time. Member States must commit to implementing EU recommendations. More investment is needed for sustainable, attractive research careers. Europe must act now to retain and attract top research talents.

Luísa Henriques (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Co-Chair ERA Policy Agenda, Action 4) gave an update on the ERA Policy Agenda and reported that until 2020, research careers had not been a priority in the agenda. Through the collaboration of Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia during their presidencies, Action 4 on Research Careers was established in the ERA Policy Agenda. She stressed the importance of data and evidence in guiding policymakers, a point first raised in 2016 during the Slovakian presidency. The new established Observatory on Research Careers (ReICO) will play a major role in monitoring progress and improving the labour market for researchers.



Figure 6. Luísa Henriques (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Portugal) speaking as co-chair of the European Research Area Policy Agenda – Action 4. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](https://ddhomam.com).

The success of Action 4 builds upon collaboration between the European Commission and member states, and continuous engagement of stakeholders (RPOs, RFOs, researchers, etc.) ensuring continuity across policy cycles, avoiding disruptions when presidencies change. Cooperation, not competition, among member states will ensure long-term success in European research careers. Yet, the implementation of new policy measures must be accelerated, focusing on practical adoption at institutional and national levels. Additionally, structural changes are necessary to ensure better working conditions, mobility, and career sustainability.



Figure 7. Summary of the Opening Session as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire.

3.2 SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) and Tenure Track-like Models (TTLM)

Gareth O'Neill (Technopolis Group Belgium) presented the SECURE project's 'translation' of the eight pillars of Council Recommendations and Research Career Framework (RCF) into specific actions for the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF; see [SECURE Zenodo repository](#)). The actions are organized in eight action areas: (1) strategy, (2) stability, (3) conditions, (4) skills, (5) mobility, (6) assessment, (7) pathways, and (8) interoperability. A selection of these actions was trialed with the six pilot organizations: University of Cyprus (Cyprus), University of Rijeka (Croatia), NOVA University Lisbon (Portugal), UEFISCDI National Funder (Romania), PLOCAN Research Institute (Spain), and Adoc Talent Management (France). Additionally, the SECURE RCF was discussed with researchers, research performing and funding organizations, and industry in consultation meetings and via an open survey.



Figure 8. Gareth O'Neill (Technopolis Group Belgium) presenting the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) to the audience. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

Example of Actions in Action Area 3 - Conditions

21. Collect and share best practices on improving working conditions of researchers	26. Review and improve support for flexible working conditions and work-life balance
22. Ensure recruitment and progression are open, transparent, and merit-based	27. Review and reduce bureaucratic and administrative obligations of researchers
23. Communicate clearly on rights and obligations of researchers and organisations	28. Review and improve support for academic freedom and protection from interference
24. Review and improve remuneration for researchers to be competitive and commensurate	29. Review and improve support for equality, diversity, and inclusion of researchers
25. Review and improve support for researchers to access social protection benefits	30. Identify scope of precarity and tailor support to reduce precarity of researchers

Figure 9. Example of actions in Action Area 3 “Conditions” of the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF), which can be implemented by research performing and funding organizations.

The final SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) can be found here: <https://secureproject.eu/rcf>.



Figure 10. Emma Day (CRAC Vitae) presenting the SECURE Tenure Track-like Models (TTLMs). Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](https://www.ddhomam.com).

Emma Day (CRAC/Vitae) introduced the SECURE Tenure Track-like Models (TTLM) which translate Council recommendation number 30 (see [SECURE Zenodo repository](#)): “Member States are recommended to consider developing tenure-track like systems, to be understood as defined frameworks where a fixed-term contract has the prospect of a progression to a permanent position, subject to positive evaluation.”. After extensive research on the state of the art of tenure-track models in Europe (including nine national case studies¹), nine guiding principles for the SECURE TTLM were developed: (1) Fair pay and benefits, (2) stability, (3) transparency, (4) inclusive and health working environments, (5) professional

development, (6) responsible evaluation, (7) recognition through career pathways, (8) supportive management, (9) competitive and inclusive recruitment. These principles followed the key findings of the state-of-the-art research, namely international variance, restrictions of legal frameworks for a country, lack of information (small amount of grey literature), and limitations of tenure-track models (e.g., impact on international and intersectoral mobility). The SECURE TTLMs want to (a) highlight good practice but not suggest one system superior to another and (b) allow for a range of models of different scales. In the consultation process and survey (more than 250 respondents), TTLMs received positive feedback and were seen as a way to reduce precarity by 2/3 of respondents. Additionally, the principles of the SECURE TTLMs were perceived as “These nine principles cover almost all areas of action to reduce the precarity of researchers careers.” whereas the most valued principles were (1) fair pay and benefits with top priority ranking by 170 of respondents and (2) stability with top priority ranking by 153 respondents. To accelerate their application and implementation, recommendations for institutions, funders, and researchers were derived, e.g.:

- **Institutions** should consider developing TTLMs that are flexible and offer a variety of pathways with a

¹ NOVA University Lisbon (Portugal), University of Rijeka (Croatia), University of Helsinki (Finland), University of Edinburgh (UK), University of Antwerp (Belgium), University of Maastricht (Netherlands), Goethe University Frankfurt (Germany), University of Cyprus (Cyprus), R3 accreditation (Spain)

balance of research and teaching, including professorial positions and career paths to permanent positions outside of the track to a professorship.

- **Funders** should consider evaluation of the implementation of tenure track-like models, as well as continuous monitoring of individual career paths within tenure track-like schemes.
- **Researchers** should be aware that recruitment and selection processes on tenure track positions should be inclusive and accessible to all, and that institutions have to support equal opportunities and applications from under-represented groups.

TTLMs can help reduce precarity but must be flexible, transparent, and aligned with national policies.

SECURE Tenure Track-like Models (TTLMs)

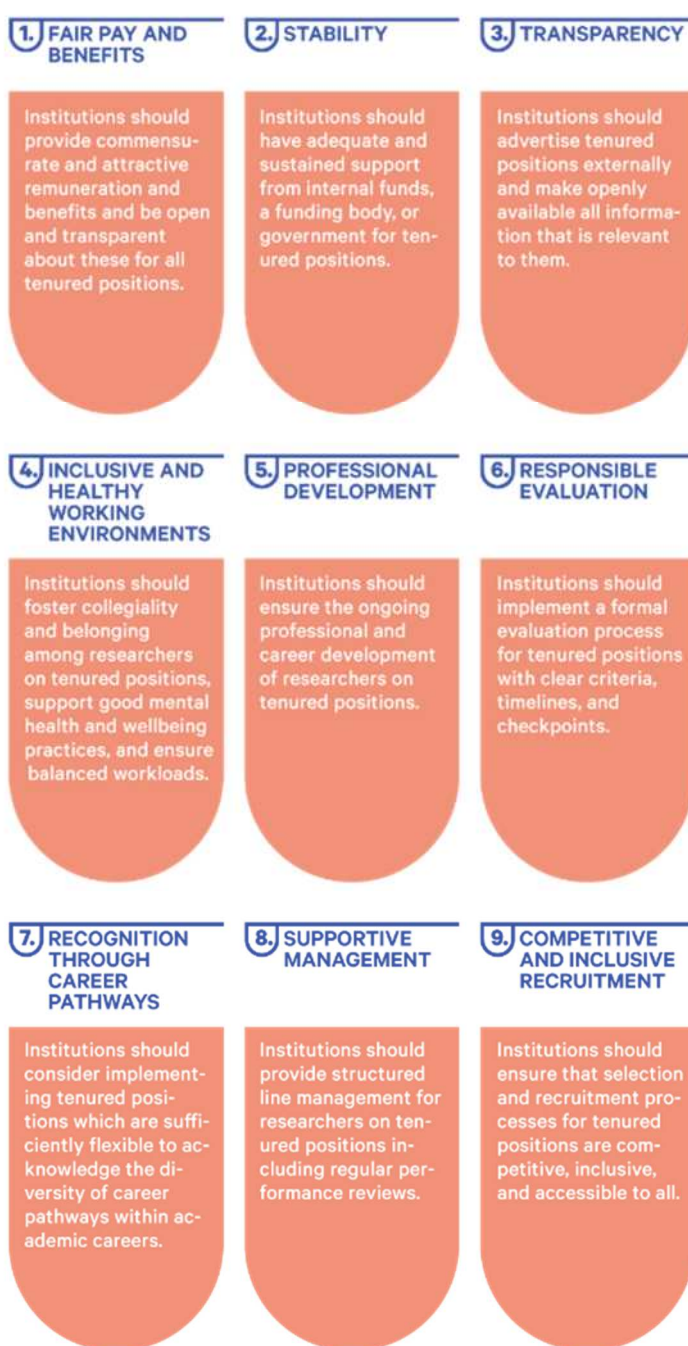


Figure 11. Overview of the nine principles of the SECURE Tenure Track-like Models (TTLMs) with a short description.

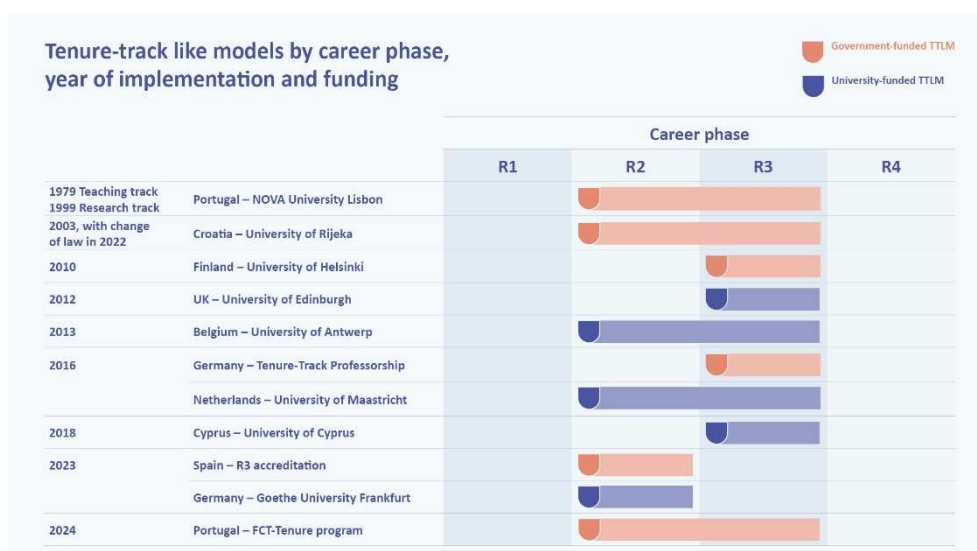


Figure 12. Case studies of tenure track-like models in Europe sorted by (a) year of implementation from 1979 (NOVA University Lisbon) until 2024 (Portugal FCT-Tenure program) and (b) career phase addressed (R2, R3 or R2 & R3).

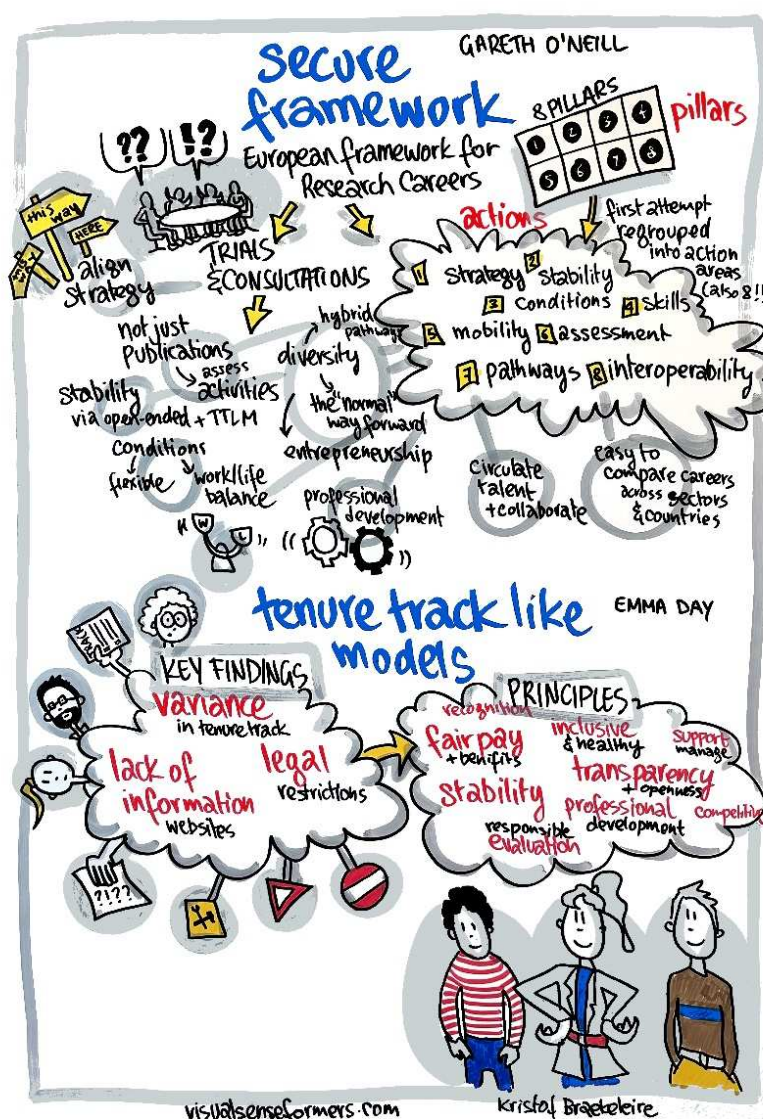


Figure 13. Summary of the presentations on the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) and Tenure Track-like Models (TTLMs) by Gareth O'Neill and Emma Day as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire

3.3 Action Plans

Corina Moya-Falcón (PLOCAN) presented the development of action plans by the SECURE trial organisations based on the [First Draft of SECURE Research Career Framework](#) (RCF). The SECURE RCF translates the eight pillars and 44 recommendations of the European Framework for Research Careers (EFfRC) into 150 more practical actions for research performing and funding organisations (RPOs/RFOs). These actions provide clear, practical guidance while allowing flexibility for organisations to adapt them to their strategic interests and need.



Figure 14. Corina Moya-Falcón (PLOCAN) presenting how the SECURE trial organisations derived their action plans from the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF). Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

The trial organisations selected and interpreted a certain number of the actions. Trials selected at least one action per pillar. Trials run for 12 months from February 2024 until January 2025. The six SECURE trial organisations included three RPOs, one RFO, one research infrastructure (RI) and one recruitment agency (RA):

- University of Cyprus, Cyprus (RPO)
- University of Rijeka, Croatia (RPO)
- Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal (RPO)
- Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Romania (RFO)
- Plataforma Oceánica de Canarias (PLOCAN), Spain (RI)
- Adoc Talent Management, France (RA)

Trial organisations selected 14-16 actions to implement RCF. The action plans were broken down into concrete actions and activities for each trial organisations with targets to be realised within the trial duration of 12 months. Each action was described in detail in [Deliverable 4.1 - Action Plans to Implement SECURE Research Career Framework](#). For each action, the reason for the selection, the activities for action, the targets for activities and the required resources as well as risks and the mitigation were defined by the organization (see example in Figure 15).

PILLAR 1 - Recommendation 4 - Research Technicians	
SECURE RCF Action	Define a clear profile for research Technicians positions with their roles and responsibilities
Reason for Selection	PLOCAN employs research technicians but do not yet have a specific profile for research technicians. One key reason to take this action is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of research operations within PLOCAN by clearly defining the relevant skills and competences of the Research Technicians. Another reason is to enhance the Research Technicians careers within the organisation
Activities for Action	1. Review the existing roles and responsibilities of PLOCAN's staff working in research technician activities. This will be done for an external company specialized in human resources 2. Develop a clear profile for research technicians identifying all key skills, competences and activities. We will do this in close collaboration with our research technicians at PLOCAN
Targets for Activities	1. Analysis to be developed by an external company by trial M6 2. Research technicians profile defined by M12
Resources Required	External company to help with the previous analysis of the research manager role within the organization Staff effort to conduct activities
Risks and Mitigation	Risk: Delay on the process of external consultation and lack of clear outcomes Mitigation: Senior management involvement from the very beginning

Figure 15. One selected action by PLOCAN from pillar 1 – recommendation 4 on research technicians (p. 45, [Deliverable 4.1 - Action Plans to Implement SECURE Research Career Framework](#)).

Trial organisations were committed to improving research careers and differed in the scope and scale of their selected actions and activities due to their strategic interest and priorities. During the trial period, trial organisations met regularly to share experiences, challenges and learn from each other. Most of the selected actions had been completed by the end of the trial period, while others are still being implemented. The results of the trials will be published in the Deliverable 4.2 - Report on Trial to Implement the SECURE RCF (see [SECURE Zenodo repository](#)).

3.4 Interview Panel with the first group of three SECURE Trials: Research Performing Organizations (RPOs)

University of Cyprus, UCY (Panagiotis Moiras)

Key actions:

1. **Stakeholder Mapping Workshop:** A structured session was held identifying key partners based on policy influence, career diversity support, resources, networks, and innovation. This resulted in a prioritized action plan for collaborations on advancing research careers.
2. **Conference on Diverse Careers:** A career conference in Cyprus highlighted non-traditional and intersectoral career pathways. Alumni shared experiences transitioning into entrepreneurship, the private/public sector, and civil society. This session emphasized that research careers do not have to follow a linear trajectory, aligning with SECURE's goal of expanding career possibilities for researchers.
3. **Problem Reporting Tool for Research Management:** A pilot tool was introduced to support research managers and researchers in reporting administrative challenges in real-time throughout the project lifecycle (proposal development to project implementation). Although still in the testing phase, early feedback indicates that the tool has potential to streamline data-driven administrative processes, particularly in public universities where bureaucracy can be a significant hurdle.



Figure 16. Panagiotis Moiras (University of Cyprus) presenting the activities and lessons learned as SECURE trial organization. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

University of Rijeka, UNIRI (Saša Zelenika)

Key actions:

1. **Working Conditions (funding and tenure models):** To support outstanding researchers, UNIRI reallocated internal funds to create a new internal research professorship title. This initiative provided financial support to high-performing researchers to strengthen their activities and ensure career progression.
2. **Assessment Initiatives (institutional collaborations):** UNIRI emphasized the importance of building strong networks and partnerships. The university engaged with key frameworks they worked with in close collaboration (e.g., Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment CoARA).
3. **Charter encouragement:** UNIRI was among the first 10 organizations in Europe to adopt the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R). In context of the SECURE trial, their activities in this framework were revised and restructured.



Figure 17. Saša Zelenika (Vice-Rector, University of Rijeka) presenting the selected actions from the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) for implementation at University of Rijeka. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

NOVA University Lisbon (Isabel Rocha)

Key actions:

1. **Addressing precarity and expanding permanent research positions:** In Portugal, research careers have traditionally been precarious, with a majority of researchers lacking permanent positions. NOVA conducted a strategic analysis, identifying the distribution of researchers and available funding. Through the national FCT Tenure Program, which provided 1,000 government-funded research positions, NOVA secured 228 positions. Therefore, the percentage of researchers in permanent roles was significantly increased, improving career stability.
2. **Career development with impact training:** NOVA launched comprehensive training initiatives to support research career development. A key focus was on impact training, helping researchers write impact narratives and maximize the societal impact of their projects. Also, NOVA joined Vitae, gaining access to career development resources.
3. **Apply for the Human Resource Excellence in Research Award:** Unlike other European universities, Portuguese institutions had not widely implemented the HRS4R. Recognizing its importance, NOVA initiated the certification process and conducted a survey with 170+ respondents to assess the perception on the Charter recommendations and gather feedback.



Figure 18. Isabel Rocha (Vice-Rector, NOVA University Lisbon) talking about experiences during the SECURE trial. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

Key Challenges and Lessons Learned

Table 1. Key challenges and lessons learned during the SECURE at the research performing organisations (RPOs): University of Cyprus, University of Rijeka and NOVA University Lisbon.

	UCY	UNIRI	NOVA
Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of political vision and commitment: Policymakers recognize the strategic importance of research but hesitate to allocate sufficient resources. • Short-term political and budget cycles: Research careers require long-term investment, while political terms and funding cycles (3-5 years) create instability. • Public perception and social resistance: Allocating resources to tenured positions may create public dissatisfaction, limiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to performance-based funding: Croatia is shifting towards a lump-sum performance-based funding model, causing uncertainty and affecting decision-making. • Adaptability in resource allocation: Research institutions must remain flexible (resilient) as funding structures change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political instability affects research policy: Frequent elections and government changes disrupt long-term planning in Portugal. • Barriers to intersectional mobility: Researchers face difficulties moving between industry and academia due to rigid regulations.

	<p>policy makers' willingness to act.</p>		
Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication is essential: Researchers must actively communicate the benefits of stable research careers to policymakers and the public. • Promoting Open Science and Citizen Engagement: Transparency and public involvement can increase awareness of research benefits and foster political will. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing feedback and monitoring systems: Continuous assessment allows institutions to refine policies iteratively. • Resilience and adaptability are key: Institutions must prepare for shifting regulatory and financial environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration across institutional units: Effective teamwork across departments leads to stronger policy implementation. • Stakeholder engagement is essential: Involving external actors enhances policy effectiveness and career stability.

Discussion

Key challenges:

1. A major concern was whether universities are succeeding in attracting and retaining talent in research careers. A problem is to have a steady flow of talent from PhD candidates to postdocs.
2. A recurring theme in the discussion was the need for a clear political vision combined with sustained financial investment in research careers. Participants emphasized that while policymakers may express support for research, financial backing often falls short.
3. The discussion highlighted the need for diverse funding sources and institutional responsibility in improving career conditions and continuous job positions in research.

Recommendations:

1. **Improving research career attractiveness:** Addressing the health, work-life balance, quality of mentorship, and job stability especially for early career researchers is just as important as financial compensation.
2. **Political and financial commitment is essential:** Universities and governments must develop long-term funding strategies for research careers.
3. **Exploring alternative funding models:** Universities should leverage external governmental funding and internal institutional financial planning to ensure job security.

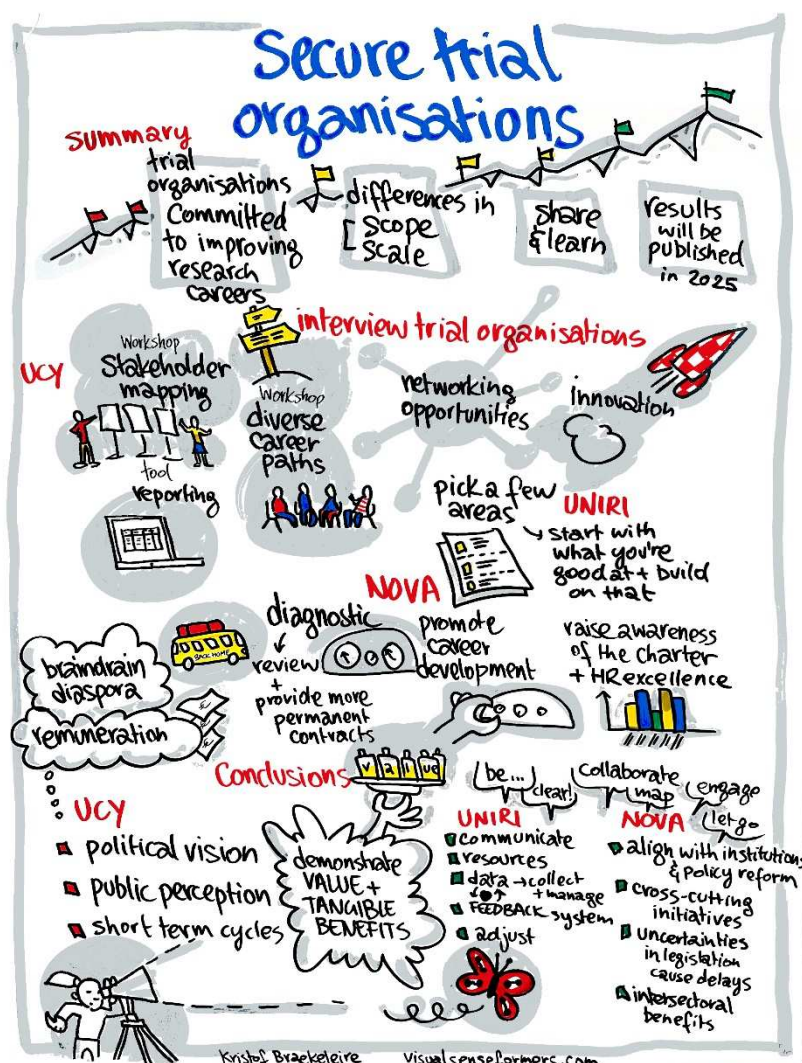


Figure 19. Summary of the presentations on action plans and the trials at University of Cyprus, University of Rijeka and NOVA University Lisbon as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire.

3.5 Interview Panel with the second group of three SECURE Trials: Research Funding Organization (RFO), Research Infrastructure (RI) and Recruitment Agency (RA)

Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding, Romania, UEFISCDI (Alina Irimescu)

UEFISCDI is Romania's primary competitive research funder (RFO) and policy advisor for higher education and research.

Key actions:

1. **Reviewing research assessment frameworks:** Researchers face structural and administrative barriers due to inconsistent research assessment criteria and conflicting regulations. Therefore, a national survey with over 1,000 respondents to identify barriers in research assessment was



Figure 20. Alina Irimescu (UEFISCDI) presenting the results of the SECURE trial. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

conducted.

2. **Aligning with European tenure-track standards:** While Romania does not have a national tenure-track model, recent legislative changes introduce tenure-like structures. A second central action therefore was to investigate tenure-track policies in other European countries and to assess how Romania could integrate similar structures.
3. **Raising awareness on the HRS4R:** UEFISCDI applied for the Human Resource Excellence Award to improve institutional recognition of research careers.

Plataforma Oceánica de Canarias, PLOCAN (Corina Falcón-Moya)

PLOCAN is a Spanish research infrastructure (RI) that provides research services to universities, research centers, and private companies.

Key actions:

1. **Defining clear research roles:** Overlapping responsibilities between researchers, research managers, and research technicians create confusion in career progression and an ambiguity in research roles. Therefore, in the trial, role profiles for research managers and the research technicians aligned to the ESCO classification were reviewed and developed, to clarify career pathways.
2. **Career development workshops:** Due to limited training and awareness regarding career transitions, sessions on intellectual property and on raising awareness were organized to help young researchers understand job opportunities beyond academia. This helps to reduce the lack of Standardized Career Development Support.
3. **Improving working conditions:** In the trial, working conditions were analyzed and best practices in similar infrastructure in Spain and in Europe were compared, with the goal to improving the actual working conditions.

Adoc Talent Management, ADOC (Sophie Bouccara)

Adoc Talent Management, a recruitment agency (RA) focused on bridging the gap between PhD holders and the private sector, improved the career mobility between academia and industry during the SECURE trial period.

Key actions:

1. **Mapping academic and private sector job titles:** Both PhD holders and private employers struggle to understand the value of PhDs in non-academic settings. A standardized model to match R1–R4 researcher profiles with private sector job roles was developed, with the goal of ensuring consistency across different sectors, making transitions smoother.
2. **Tracking PhD career paths:** Analyzing long-term career paths of researchers enables better career guidance and strategic workforce planning. Therefore, a survey on long-term PhD career mobility was conducted, revealing that at least in France transitions between academia and industry occur at multiple career stages.
3. **Hosting cross-sector career webinar:** Employers have differing views on career breaks and intersectoral mobility. A webinar brought together public and private sector recruiters to discuss intersectoral career paths and challenges.



Figure 21. Sophie Bouccara (Adoc Talent Management) talking about the SECURE trial at a recruitment agency. Photo by Homam Daoud | [dhommam](https://www.dhommam.com).

Key Challenges and Lessons Learned

Table 2. Key challenges and lessons learned during the SECURE at the research funding organisation (RFO) – UEFISCDI, the research infrastructure (RI) – PLOCAN, and the recruitment agency (RA) – Adoc Talent Management.

	UEFISCDI	PLOCAN	ADOC
Key Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmentation: Various research assessment initiatives exist at different levels (national and EU) Adapting national policies to European frameworks is a time-intensive process. The complexity of European frameworks creates difficulties in implementation. Institutions often lack sustainable funding mechanisms for long-term integration of returning researchers. Multiple awareness-raising activities, consultations, and pilot projects conducted simultaneously overwhelmed researchers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When introducing new initiatives, internal resistance to change slowed progress. The trial faced bureaucratic barriers/delays in implementing changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing clear distinctions between different researcher profiles (R1-R4) was complex. For bridging the gap between academia and industry, improving career transparency, standardizing skill recognition, and facilitating smoother transitions is crucial. An important task was aligning with Adoc Talent Management's values: innovation, doctorate valorization, and empowering researchers.
Lessons Learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A structured, overarching alignment of national and EU initiatives is necessary for effective research career development. Regulations should be accessible and comprehensive to researchers and institutions. Strengthening institutional culture: Cross-departmental discussions, leadership engagement, and program officer involvement are key to policy implementation and commitment. Structured reintegration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligning with EU initiatives enhances competence recognition and skills development. Continuous learning among research managers, technicians, and researchers fosters innovation. Involving decision-makers ensures changes and organizational development. Benchmarking best practices: Conducting comprehensive analyses of working conditions and policies helps identify opportunities for improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing training modules: A training program on interdisciplinarity to help early-career researchers collaborate across fields is crucial. Enroll the HRS4R process: This is crucial to align HR practices with European standards. Supporting Industry Collaboration: Documentation and frameworks helps private-sector companies adopt best HR practices for researchers.

	<p>programs should be established to retain returning researchers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital platforms like BrainMap can enhance communication, engagement, and dissemination of research policies. • Post-SECURE Strategy: Continue testing and refining strategic measures and integrate project outcomes into other national topics. 		
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Discussion

The final short discussion of the trials emphasized the importance and value of the open discussion and collaboration in the SECURE context.

1. The value of collaboration between universities, RPOs, and the private sector was stressed as a major point.
2. It was drawn attention to the observation that academia and the private sector are often seen as separate entities, but they share common priorities.
3. Many policies remain difficult to interpret and apply, therefore the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) was highlighted as a valuable tool to simplify and guide institutions.

The discussion reinforced the need for simplified policy tools and stronger cross-sector collaboration, to ensure sustainable research career pathways.

The following coffee break provided the opportunity to deepen the topics and discuss them at the posters the pilot institutions had prepared.



Figure 22. Summary of the presentations and discussions about the SECURE trials at UEFISCDI, PLOCAN, and Adoc Talent Management as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire

3.6 First Policy Roundtable Discussion: The Future of Research Careers

Reflecting upon the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF) and Tenure Track-like Models (TTLMs), the first policy roundtable discussion explored key challenges and opportunities in research careers, particularly focusing on tenure track (TT) systems, industry-academia transitions, evaluation processes, and policy recommendations with the following speakers and a very active audience:

- Dario Capezzuto (European Commission)
- Luísa Henriques (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Co-Chair ERA Action 4)
- Gareth O'Neill (Technopolis Group Belgium, RCF Lead)
- Emma Day (CRAC-Vitae, TTLMs Lead)
- Norbert Bencze (EuroDoc)
- Erna Karalija (ICoRSA, University of Sarajevo)



Figure 23. Photos from the Policy Roundtable “The Future of Research Careers”. FLTR: Erna Karalija, Norbert Bencze, Emma Day, Gareth O’Neill, Luísa Henriques, and Dario Capezutto. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](https://www.dhhamam.com).

Key Themes

1. Tenure Track (TT) Evaluation & Challenges

- While some institutions emphasize TT as a tool for career stability, others (e.g., Vienna BioCenter) see it as less relevant as researchers often leave after gaining prestige.
- TT models have a high success rate, but the evaluation process is minimal—once researchers are on TT, failure is rare.
- Evaluation in TT systems is essential but should be fair, transparent, and lead to actionable consequences.
- COARA initiative was discussed as a potential alternative evaluation model.
- Institutions like Delft University make blunt decisions early—they either offer a permanent position or help researchers transition out, avoiding prolonged fixed-term contracts.

2. Industry-Academia Transition

- Exiting academia for industry is easy, but returning is difficult—industry experience is not easily recognized within academic career structures.
- TT models are not flexible enough to accommodate researchers re-entering from industry at appropriate seniority levels.
- Industry and academia operate on different timelines—industry seeks immediate results, while academic research takes time.
- PhDs are often undervalued by industry, with some preferring master’s graduates because they are “cheaper and easier to mold.” However, once hired, PhDs tend to rise quickly into leadership roles.
- There is a disconnect between academia and industry—researchers prioritize research over transversal skills, while industry undervalues PhD qualifications.
- There is a need for broader assessment criteria beyond traditional metrics to support career mobility.
- Initiatives like Doctalent4EU and SECURE aim to bridge this gap, but engagement from industry remains limited, suggesting they do not prioritize discussions on researcher employability.

3. Employability vs. Employment

- Discussion on whether universities should focus on long-term employment or employability (building skills for broader careers).
- HR in Flanders highlighted how shifting focus to employability has expanded networks that appreciate research careers.
- Universities are losing talent to industry and struggle to attract them back due to rigid career paths and lack of support mechanisms.

4. Structural & Cultural Barriers

- Academia has a communication problem—it fails to effectively advocate for research investments and societal value.
 - Research funding is insufficient, with concerns about prioritization (e.g., high military budgets vs. low research investment).
 - There is a lack of trust between researchers and institutions regarding career structures.
5. Diversity & Gender Equality
- TT models may not effectively support gender balance, particularly at critical career transition stages (R2 level).
 - Germany's TT program successfully promoted gender equality, filling 50% of new TT professorships with women - addressing the “leaky pipeline” issue in academia.
 - A focus on “equal opportunities” rather than gender alone is preferred, acknowledging diverse career challenges across different groups.



Figure 24. Summary of the policy roundtable “The Future of Research Careers” as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire.

Final Words

- **Dialogue** (Erna Karalijs): Improve cross-sector discussions.
- **Voice** (Norbert Bencze): Researchers need to be heard in shaping policies.
- **Collaboration** (Emma Day): Strengthen industry-academia partnerships.
- **Not a failure** (Gareth O’Neill): Universities may lose talent, but society gains.
- **Culture evaluation** (Luísa): Reform research assessment framework.
- **Implementation** (Dario Capezzuto): Ensure policies are put into practice effectively.

Conclusion

The roundtable emphasized the need for flexible career structures, improved industry-academia collaboration, and broader assessment criteria to support sustainable research careers. Universities, policymakers, and industry leaders must work together to create career paths that are secure, mobile, and attractive, ensuring that research remains a valued and viable career choice.

3.7 DocTalent4EU Project Presentation

Aur a Cophignon (Universit  C te d'Azur) as coordinator presented DocTalent4EU, a sister project to SECURE funded under the same call. DocTalent4EU had held its closing event in Brussels the day before the SECURE Closing Summit. The DocTalent4EU project aims to transform the recognition and employability of PhD holders in Europe by addressing the skills gap between doctoral training and industry needs. The project involves eight partners, including seven European universities and the European University Foundation.

Project goals and results:

1. **Skills Intelligence:** A machine learning system analyzed job postings for PhD holders on a European job platform labor market trends and surveys and interviews with industry representatives helped refine key skill requirements.
2. **Interdisciplinary Curriculum:** Modular, interdisciplinary, and industry-focused training on communication & negotiation, teamwork, leadership, networking, etc.
3. **Digital Credentials:** Recognizing skills with open badges (informal recognition) and European digital credentials (certified and official) for better visibility.
4. **Local Talent Management Centers:** Career support hubs with career guidance, skills training, and industry partnerships (e.g. structured career tracks for PhDs in academia, R&D, international organizations, consulting, entrepreneurship, etc.)

Next Steps & Policy Recommendations:

- Expand to at least 40 others European HEIs using DocTalent4EU project results to develop/improve local Talent Management Centers for ECRs
- Improve research competency frameworks (ResearchComp) by incorporating missing transferable skills.
- Better align policy with real PhD training durations: Need for more structured, longer PhD programs—current PhD durations (often 4.5 years) exceed the official policy of 3 years, creating a funding gap.
- The project's long-term goal is to connect European Talent Management Centers through initiatives like PhD Hub, improving mobility and career prospects for PhDs across Europe.



Figure 25. Aur a Cophignon (Universit  C te d'Azur) presenting the DocTalent4EU project, funded under the same call as SECURE project. Photo by Homam Daoud | adhomam.com.

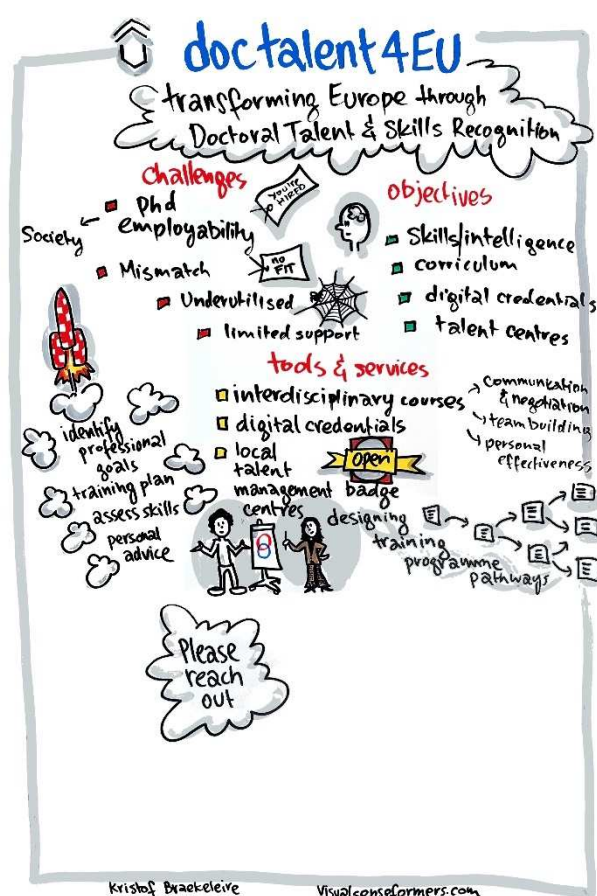


Figure 26. Summary of the sister project presentation DocTalent4EU by Aur a Cophignon as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire.

3.8 Second Policy Roundtable Discussion: Next Steps for Stakeholders

The second policy roundtable focused on important next steps that stakeholders involved in the improvement of research careers should take. The discussion involved six key themes, emphasizing the need for systemic change, better mobility policies, institutional resilience, and stronger advocacy for research careers in Europe. The panel included the following speakers:

- Ádám Molnár (EURAXESS Hungary, Bay Zoltán Research Centre – Mainstreaming Plan)
- Mostafa Moonir Shawrav (Marie Curie Alumni Association, MCAA – Early Career Researchers)
- Marta Agostinho (EU-Life – Research Institutes)
- Emmanuelle Gardan (Coimbra Group – Research Performing Organizations, RPOs)
- James Morris (Science Europe – Research Funding Organizations, RFOs)
- Gerard Downes (DocTalent4EU)



Figure 27. Policy Roundtable “Next Steps for Stakeholders”. FLTR: Gerard Downes, James Morris, Emmanuelle Gardan, Marta Agostinho, Mostafa Moonir Shawrav, and Ádám Molnár. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](https://www.ddhomam.com).

Key Themes

1. Research mobility and immigration challenges
 - EURAXESS plays a crucial role in implementing European Commission policies on career development and researcher mobility through its network of 660 institutions across 43 countries.
 - The panel emphasized that mobility should be a choice, not an obligation, and that cross-border talent circulation must be facilitated without creating additional bureaucratic obstacles.
 - Visa issues, administrative barriers, and national differences in regulations remain significant challenges that need EU-level intervention.
2. Funding structures and career precarity
 - Short-term, project-based research funding contributes to job insecurity in academia. There is a need for longer-term and flexible funding models that provide stable career paths for researchers.

- Science Europe emphasized the importance of data collection to track research career trajectories and ensure evidence-based policy improvements.
 - A key recommendation was to focus on funding schemes that enable intersectoral mobility, allowing researchers to transition between academia, industry, and public sector roles.
3. Structural and institutional challenges
- Research institutes and universities play a key role in shaping research careers but face challenges such as bureaucratic hiring processes and dependency on external funding.
 - The role of national governments was highlighted, as policies at the member state level often limit research career development due to rigid administrative structures.
 - The European Research Area (ERA) Act, expected in 2026, was discussed as a potential mechanism for harmonizing research career policies across Europe.
4. Gender equality and diversity
- There was a strong emphasis on gender equality and the need to address barriers faced by women researchers.
 - Challenges include the "glass ceiling," gender biases in promotions, and a lack of flexible working conditions (e.g., maternity leave, equal employment rights for researchers' spouses).
 - Examples of good practices, such as flexible maternity policies in Italy, were mentioned as models to be expanded across Europe.
5. The Political Landscape and its impact on research
- The panel acknowledged a shift in political priorities toward defence, security, and economic competitiveness, which might divert funding away from fundamental research.
 - Concerns about hyper-nationalism and protectionist policies were raised, as they could limit international research collaboration and talent mobility.
 - Universities and research institutions were urged to strengthen their advocacy efforts to ensure that science and innovation remain a priority in EU policymaking.



Figure 28. Summary of the policy roundtable "Next Steps for Stakeholders" as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire.

6. Sustainability and long-term impact of SECURE initiatives
 - The SECURE project has laid the groundwork for systemic change, but its legacy depends on long-term implementation strategies.
 - Communities of practice, such as those within EURAXESS and the European Research Area, were suggested as a way to sustain the project's impact.
 - The need for monitoring frameworks to track the progress of research career reforms was highlighted.

Final Words

- **Advocacy** (Gerard Downes): Universities need a stronger voice in politics.
- **European values** (James Morris): Competitiveness through openness and diversity.
- **Iterative policy design** (Ádám Molnár): Address institutions & researchers directly, ensuring clear policy feedback.
- **Unification** (Mostafa Moonir Shawrav): Align research advocacy efforts — industries like steel and semiconductors have a clear voice; research does not.
- **Science communication** (Marta Agostinho): Politicians don't understand how science works. We need to change the narrative.
- **Academic freedom** (Emmanuel Gardan): Academic freedom must remain central to research careers.

Conclusion

The roundtable emphasized the need for policy change, better mobility frameworks, reduced precarity, institutional resilience, and stronger research advocacy. The research community must engage policymakers, defend research funding, and ensure that European research careers remain attractive and sustainable in a changing global landscape.

3.9 Closing remarks

Stijn Delaure (European Research Executive Agency) reflected on the SECURE Closing Summit with the following five key themes for the future direction of research career policies and the responsibilities of stakeholders:

1. **People** – The Core of the Research System: Research careers must be better supported and stabilized. EU projects like SECURE & DocTalent4EU provide tools, but real impact comes from implementation.
2. **Implementation** – Turning Policies into Action: Institutions must adopt and adapt career development frameworks. New initiatives like "Choose Europe" (MSCA action) aim to reduce precarity through permanent positions.
3. **Communication** – Expanding Awareness & Advocacy: Research stakeholders must inform governments, institutions, and researchers about policies and tools. Stronger advocacy is needed to counter shifts in funding priorities (e.g., security & defence).
4. **Evidence & Data** – Understanding Research Career Challenges: More data is needed on researcher



Figure 29. Stijn Delaure (European Research Executive Agency) at the SECURE Closing Summit. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](https://ddhomam.com).

precarity (funding gaps, job saturation, industry-academia mobility), because it means different things in different regions. The OECD-EC Observatory on Research Careers will help provide insights.

5. **Diversity** – Adapting to Europe's Complex Research Landscape: One-size-fits-all policies don't work — institutions must implement frameworks based on their needs. Interoperability and flexibility are key to making research careers sustainable.

Stijn Delaure emphasized that securing sustainable research careers is a shared responsibility, requiring action from policymakers, institutions, and researchers themselves. While significant progress has been made, implementation, communication, and data-driven policymaking will be key to ensuring that Europe remains an attractive and competitive place for research talent.

He took home the request for a Community of Practice on Research Careers.

His final message: "If you don't communicate and advocate for these policies, they won't happen. The responsibility is on all of us."



Figure 30. Summary of the policy roundtable "Next Steps for Stakeholders" as a graphic recording by Kristof Braekeleire.

Afterwards the SECURE project coordinator **Gordon J. Dalton (PLOCAN)** closed the event with emphasizing the richness of the SECURE project, both in its deliverables and the valuable discussions it fostered about the future of research careers. The event showcased strong ideas and strategies for navigating the evolving research landscape, highlighting the importance of continued efforts. He expressed gratitude to the SECURE Closing Summit team, including YERUN, Martin, Cornelia, CPN, and others, for their dedication in organizing the event over six months.



Figure 31. Gordon J. Dalton (PLOCAN) closing the SECURE Summit. Photo by Homam Daoud | [ddhomam](#).

He also underscored the strength of the SECURE consortium, which thrived on its diversity. The collaboration included six pilot institutions, career experts from Technopolis and CRAC/Vitae, employment agencies such as ADOC and EURAXESS, and research staff associations (EuroDoc, MCAA, ICoRSA) that provided an essential bottom-up perspective. This broad range of contributors ensured that different aspects of research careers were considered, making the project more impactful.

Looking ahead, Gordon stressed that the next three years will be critical in determining whether these initiatives will bring real change to the research landscape. There is no room for complacency, and efforts must remain strong to create an "EU paradise" for research and innovation. He concluded by inviting participants to enjoy the networking drinks, reminding them that while the discussions for the day were over, the commitment to improving research careers must continue.

4 Outlook

The SECURE Closing Summit was not only a final event of the SECURE project phase but also a gathering of a European community that is passionate to improve the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers and put research and innovation at the core of competitiveness. The SECURE consortium showed an impressive line-up of results after 26 months: the SECURE Research Career Framework (RCF), the SECURE Tenure Track-like Models (TTLMs), the action plans and trial experiences of the six pilot organizations, the consultations and surveys, and mainstreaming activities. Across the policy roundtables, it became very clear that many steps have been taken on the level of policy and tool development to improve research careers (see also sister project DocTalent4EU). And that now is the time to push for deep implementation of good practices and to keep the exchange across member states, research performing and funding organizations, researchers, and industry ongoing – maybe in a Community of Practice on Research Careers (CoP RC).

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