

Early career researchers value their jobs, but there's room for improvement

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The SNSF is committed to ensuring good working conditions for early-career researchers and promoting their independence. In February, the SNSF launched a survey to learn more about the working conditions of

researchers employed by higher education institutions in the projects it funds. Nearly 4,000 early-career researchers (doctoral students, postdocs and further staff) took part, corresponding to a response rate of 47%.

Positive working environment

In general, four out of five [respondents](#) said they are somewhat or very satisfied with their working conditions as well as their social environment. The intellectual demands, content of the tasks and level of responsibility are also viewed positively: at least three out of four respondents are somewhat or very satisfied with these aspects.

Participants spend most of their time working on research (nearly 75% of time for doctoral students and postdocs, but less than 60% for further staff); this is followed by teaching, which occupies on average about 10% of respondents' time. In terms of career plans, one third of respondents wish to take up a research position within academia and one quarter are aiming for a full professorship or a scientific position outside academia. More than 70% (two thirds of women and three quarters of men) feel that they have enough time to pursue their career goals. More than 80% consider the SNSF project to be somewhat or very helpful in their career.

Fixed-term contracts and overtime are common

Job security is a source of dissatisfaction among more than one in three respondents (36%), a trend that is more pronounced among postdocs and further staff. Overall, however, nearly half (59%) of respondents say they are somewhat or very satisfied with this aspect. More than 95% of doctoral students and postdocs and 80% of further staff have fixed-term contracts. The duration of these contracts increases with the age of the researchers. However, about 60% of postdocs and further staff would

prefer to have longer contracts. Most contracts are full-time (58%), and 75% of researchers indicate being satisfied with their contractual work time. However, almost 60% work more than their contractual hours, and compensation for working overtime is possible for less than half of participants. Other sources of dissatisfaction for 20–30% of respondents include income, space left for private life and workload.

Eight percent of respondents, including more than twice as many women as men, report having experienced discrimination or harassment within their current academic activities. This figure is lower than that reported in other surveys, but it is of concern to the SNSF and will be discussed with the higher education institutions in the near future. Of these cases, [gender discrimination](#) is most often cited (42%), followed by race-based discrimination or harassment (22%) and age discrimination (17%). About 16% of respondents felt pushed towards inappropriate academic behavior.

Most respondents are aware of their respective rights as an employee in an SNSF-funded project, such as a written employment contract, remuneration in accordance with the relevant salary ranges and PI (principal investigator) support regarding their career. However, less than half of survey respondents knew about their entitlement to SNSF gender equality grants (25%) and flexibility grants for childcarers (41%).

Exchange with mid-level academic staff and the higher education institutions

The results of our survey show that people employed in SNSF projects generally value their work. However, the results also indicate a need for action in certain areas. "The [academic world](#) must adapt to the demands of today's [labor market](#), especially to the expectations of up-and-coming generations in terms of independence and prospects. Swiss higher

education institutions must continue to be able to attract the best talent," says Angelika Kalt, director of the SNSF. "We will analyze the results in depth and use them as a basis for constructive exchange with representatives of mid-level researchers and the higher education institutions."

"As part of our multi-year program 2025–2028, which we have just drawn up, we are committing ourselves even more to optimal working conditions for early-career researchers," says Kalt. The SNSF will intensify its cooperation and dialogue with higher education institutions regarding working conditions for SNSF-funded staff, such as duration of contracts, workload and protection against harassment. Meetings are already planned for autumn. The SNSF will also monitor the situation of early-career researchers more systematically.

More information: SNSF early-career researcher survey—survey report: www.snf.ch/media/en/dUHc9D1PqY...cher_Survey_FORs.pdf

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