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"Early career researchers as stakeholders in university decision-making in Europe"



Early career researchers (ECRs) in Europe

ECRs

Usually including:

- PhD students
- PhD holders without tenured positions
- Typically, between 1-10 years after completing PhD studies
- Generally, not older than 45

(Signoret et al., 2019; Christian et al., 2021; Jamali et al., 2023).

Multi-faceted role:

- perform cutting-edge research
- development of knowledge across various fields
- contributing to the academic community



Current positions:

- Precarious employment status
- Limited chances for career progression in academia
- Limited research funding
- Pressures in terms of scientific productivity

- › In 2022 there were **669.9 thousands doctoral students in the EU** with the rising trend (European Commission, 2024)
- › Several **hundred thousand postdocs** across Europe (Science.org)



Inclusion of ECRs in decision-making processes in HEIs

- › **Conventional** (senior academics represented in HEI managing bodies) vs **contemporary** (New Public Management with the rise of stakeholder power) approach to decision-making
- › What is the role of ECRs in HEI decision making?
 - › ECRs **lack formal roles** in university decision-making bodies (European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers, 2020)
 - › ECRs as **the most vulnerable group** within the academic ecosystem (Jamali et al., 2023)
 - › The inclusion of ECRs in decision-making bodies is crucial as they bring **fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that can drive positive change** within HEIs (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2011)

Research objective:

Understanding the role of ECRs as **(internal) stakeholders in HEI decision making** according to Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Mitchel et al., 1997)



Decision making body	ECR LEGITIMACY <i>(extent of formal representation in HEIs)</i>	ECR POWER <i>(ability to influence change)</i>	ECR URGENCY <i>(their claims are prioritized)</i>
Main board/committee at central (top) level of decision-making, e.g. Senate, General Assembly, University level committees	Low: Lithuania, Germany, Turkey, Croatia, Cyprus, Israel, Portugal Medium: - High: -	Low: Lithuania, Germany, Turkey, Croatia, Cyprus, Israel, Portugal Medium: - High: -	Low: Lithuania, Germany, Turkey, Croatia, Cyprus, Israel, Portugal Medium: - High: -
Faculty board at faculty or school (meso) level	Low: Turkey, Cyprus, Portugal Medium: Lithuania, Germany, Croatia, Israel High: -	Low: Lithuania, Germany, Turkey, Croatia, Cyprus, Israel, Portugal Medium: - High: -	Low: Turkey, Croatia, Cyprus, Israel, Portugal Medium: Lithuania, Germany High: -
Department/research unit level decision-making body e.g. department board	Low: - Medium: Germany, Turkey, Croatia, Cyprus, Israel, Portugal High: Lithuania	Low: Turkey, Cyprus, Portugal Medium: Lithuania, Germany, Croatia, Israel High: -	Low: - Medium: Germany, Turkey, Croatia, Cyprus, Israel, Portugal High: Lithuania

Source: 55 interviews with ECRs from 7 countries during 2023-2024



Mechanisms for furthering ECR representation

The participation of ECRs in university decision-making is fundamental for inclusivity in higher education.

Solutions:

- › **Structural changes:** ECRs are not well represented at university level and/or school level decision-making bodies - Election of ECR in HEI decision-making bodies has limited possibility to solve the problem
- › **Cultural changes** are necessary in order to reduce the prioritization of senior researchers' interests



Find more at:



COST Action VOICES: Making Young Researchers Voices Heard for Gender
Equality

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