

# Advantages and Challenges of Structured Mobility for Doctoral Candidates in Europe



- Gareth O'Neill
- YERUN Staff Week
- UAM in Madrid
- 14 November 2018



The European Council of Doctoral  
Candidates and Junior Researchers

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# This talk

- Eurodoc=early-career researchers
- Structured mobility in MSCA ITN
- Survey on triple I mobility in ITN
- Preliminary responses to 3I survey



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# Eurodoc=early-career researchers



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# Eurodoc=early-career researchers

Background and activities of Eurodoc:

- Legal registered non-profit organisation
- Founded in 2002 and based in Brussels
- Federation of  $\pm 30$  national associations
- Run for and by early-career researchers
- Funded by member fees and volunteers
- Run events, workshops, and work groups



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# Eurodoc=early-career researchers

We develop policy on topics for ECRs:

- Career Development
- Employment Status
- Interdisciplinarity
- Mobility
- Research Integrity
- Doctoral Training
- Equality
- Mental Health
- Open Science
- Research Quality



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# Eurodoc=early-career researchers



**Impact Outlook**

- "A PhD no longer guarantees an academic position, a PhD is becoming more and more a stepping stone to a career outside academia"
- "Through our national associations, we are directly and quickly able to assess the main issues and needs of over a million early-career researchers in Europe"

**Carole O'Neill** is a frequent speaker in international congresses in Europe. She is President of Eurodoc and an expert on structural mobility and Open Science in the Netherlands and for the European Commission.

**Emma Storti** is a postdoctoral researcher in computer science working in data management and integration, open data and business intelligence. She is a general board member of Eurodoc and of the Italian PhD Association.

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## A balancing act

President Gareth O'Neill and General Board Member Emma Storti elucidate the ways in which the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) is seeking to revolutionise the career development of early-career researchers

Could you introduce the term "intersectoral mobility", and explain why it is such an important topic among early-career researchers (ECRs)?

GO: The term "intersectoral mobility" refers to the movement of researchers between academia and the public/private sector (industry). Within an academic context, the term is generally used for unfilled research positions from academia to industry. Intersectoral mobility is important for ECRs as the majority of doctoral candidates and junior researchers across Europe must find employment in industry due to the relatively long time to academia – yet doctoral and even postdoctoral training is geared towards a career in academia.

What is the current situation regarding doctoral careers in Europe? How has this changed in recent years?

GO: With the steadily increasing number of doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers in Europe, a PhD no longer guarantees an academic position. A PhD is becoming more and more a stepping stone to a career outside academia. The reason for this increase in ECRs is Europe is striving to be a world leader in research and innovation as well as aiming to increase the level of education and scientific research in general across the continent of Europe. PhD holders, the majority of whom live and work in industry, achieve both of these aims. This situation has been greatly served by the PhD Society in the media and highlights the career and professional development from both academic institutions and ECRs themselves.

ES: In recent years, traditional structured careers in academia for PhD holders have changed significantly. Changes in Europe, as well as the labour market in general, today, junior researchers are in a less secure and less desirable position in the research community. For many of them, it has become increasingly common to have positions that are precarious in terms of the short duration of contracts, working conditions and lack of long-term prospects. It is also common for junior researchers to face repeated periods of unemployment. Furthermore, many of them face their career paths for instance due to intersectoral mobility, where they may move to industry and eventually return to academia. The added value of such career paths is rarely acknowledged in employment and promotion of universities, creating non-standard career profiles as obstacles for the modern research career. A focus on career development for junior researchers and recognition of non-standard careers is badly needed.

What are some of the barriers to career development and programming into a non-academic field? How does Eurodoc hope to overcome these barriers?

GO: One clear barrier is that most ECRs want and expect to stay in academia. Statistically speaking, this is simply not viable. Academic institutions need to be more explicit about the opportunities in academia and ECRs need to accept this fact and prepare for a possible career in industry. We are looking into ways to engage with the public/private sector via collaborative work with ECRs and industry. ECRs need practical intersectoral skills, courses such as communication, project management, leadership, collaborating, networking and entrepreneurship. A third crucial barrier is that ECRs often do not come into contact with industry during their research projects and often have no industry contacts or experience. Collaborative projects, career and networking events and paid temporary placements in industry should be more the norm at academic institutions to support their ECRs' careers.

ES: Eurodoc periodically investigates the career development and employment of researchers in Europe through studies conducted by our Working Group (WG) on Employment & Careers and our WG on Mobility. We also carry out surveys among our national association members and ECRs from across Europe, which show that most ECRs are unsure of their future career options and lack adequate career development support. Our efforts are therefore focused, on the one side, on making ECRs more aware of their employment chances in academia and the benefits of non-academic careers. On the other side, we engage in constant dialogue with all major European institutions in higher education and research, where we push for the development of national and European frameworks for the career support of ECRs that focus on the broader labour market.

How are you collaborating with academia and industry to improve the career development of the ECRs?

GO: We collaborate on a European level with academic institutions through our partnership with European University Associations, League of European Research Universities, Global European Research Universities, and Young European Research Universities Network. We also collaborate on a national level with academic institutions via our broader network of researchers who are actively engaged in their respective countries. As academic institutions, we are looking into ways to engage with the public/private sector via collaborative work with ECRs and industry. ECRs need practical intersectoral skills, courses such as communication, project management, leadership, collaborating, networking and entrepreneurship. A third crucial barrier is that ECRs often do not come into contact with industry during their research projects and often have no industry contacts or experience. Collaborative projects, career and networking events and paid temporary placements in industry should be more the norm at academic institutions to support their ECRs' careers.

ES: By being in constant contact with the European community of ECRs through our national associations, we are directly and quickly able to assess the main issues and needs of over a million ECRs in Europe. Eurodoc develops focused policy on issues related to higher education and research thanks to this community. By means of specific WGAs that welcome contributions from interested ECRs, national dialogue and external experts, to support these positions, we often conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses in the form of national and European surveys. Our most ongoing findings are shared with our institutional partners and provide the basis to further discuss and develop possible solutions to issues for ECRs.

What do you believe the key issues or 30 key career development for ECRs in the coming five years will Eurodoc need to be a part of this conversation and that solution?

GO: Outside the key problems we have already noted, I think fundamental issues for ECRs, and researchers in general, will be the implementation of Open Science and the increasing stress and mental health problems in academia. Both need to be career development. Open Science will entail a whole new way of working, research and sharing research data and results. This transition will necessarily involve training researchers for the various open science practices, such as open access, open data, and open science. These skills must simultaneously be relevant for both academia and industry to ensure the reality of open science. Having a societal shift and a growing number of researchers moving to industry. Following on from this, an increase in skills training and links related to research and knowledge can be an increase in work stress. We know from studies that researchers are significantly stressed and suffer from mental health issues. A balanced system that takes the workload and work-life balance of researchers into account is absolutely crucial. London will continue to attract researchers and highlight these issues under ECRs, with all of our most stakeholders in the field. The long-term goal must not be career accountability as a remedy to general society but also internally to the researchers who maintain the system.

www.eurodoc.net

O'Neill & Storti (2018)

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# Structured mobility in MSCA ITN



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# Structured mobility in MSCA ITN



- Main objectives of ITN:
- Create excellent doctoral and research programmes
  - Train new innovative and entrepreneurial generation
  - Improve career chances in (non-)academic sectors



[Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions \(MSCA\)](#) | [Innovative Training Networks \(ITNs\)](#)

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# Structured mobility in MSCA ITN

Three main implementation types of ITN:



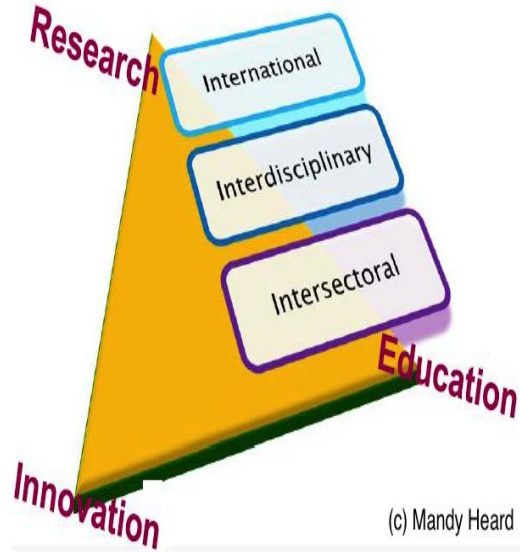
# Structured mobility in MSCA ITN

Research and training activities of ITN:

- Training through research (projects)
- Development of network-wide training
- Provision of structured training courses
- Exchanging knowledge across networks
- Secondments with partner organisations
- Dissemination and public engagement



# Structured mobility in MSCA ITN



Triple I (3I) mobility:

- Intersectoral = move and collaborate across sectors
- International = move and work across countries
- Interdisciplinary = move and work across fields



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# Survey on triple I mobility in ITN

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Survey on Structured Mobility for MSCA ITN Doctoral Graduates

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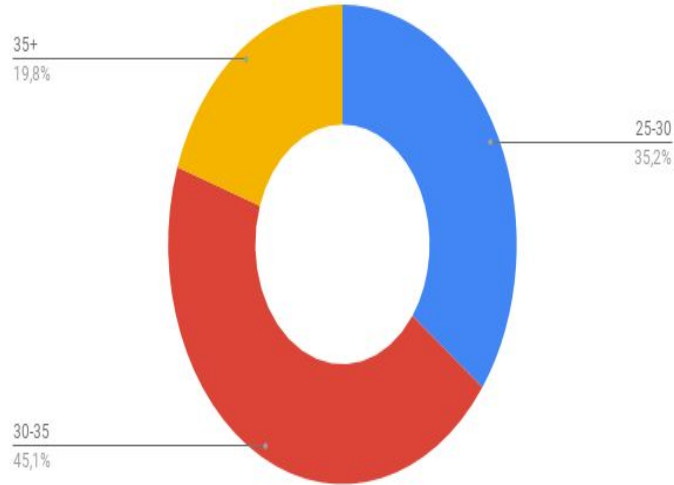
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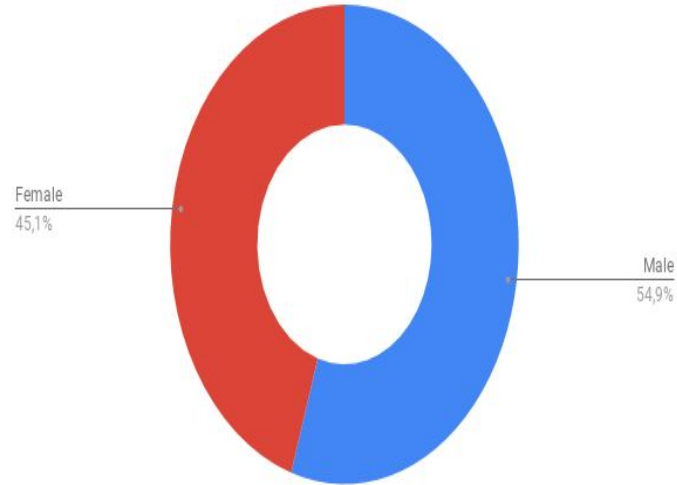


# Survey on triple I mobility in ITN

How old are you?



What is your gender?



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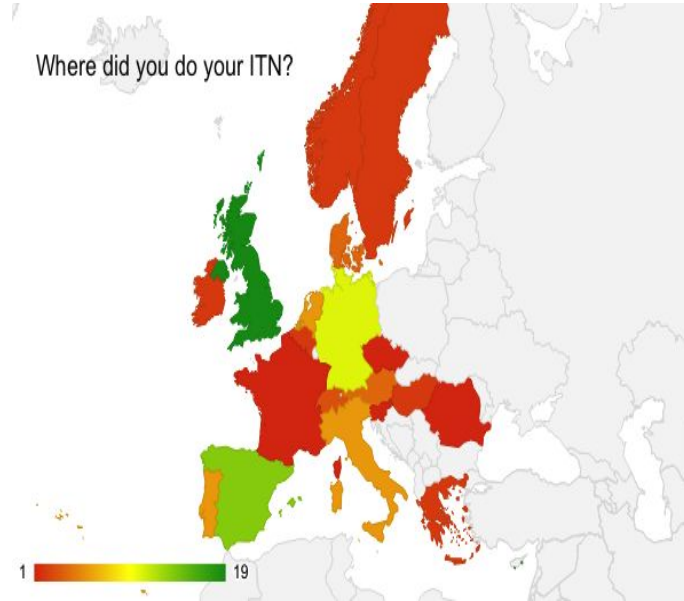
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# Survey on triple I mobility in ITN



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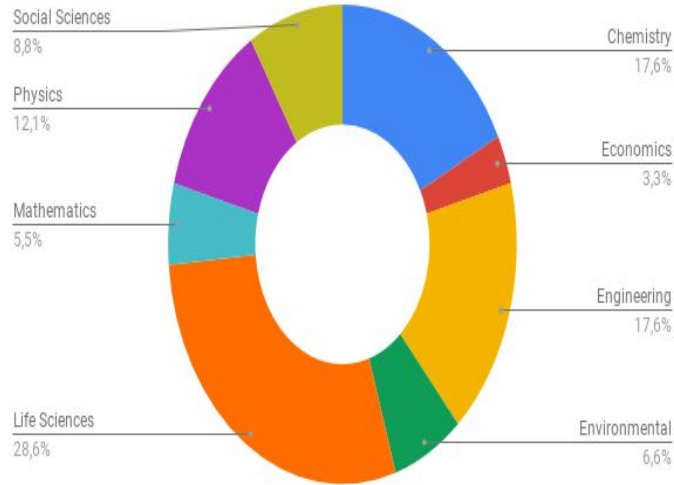
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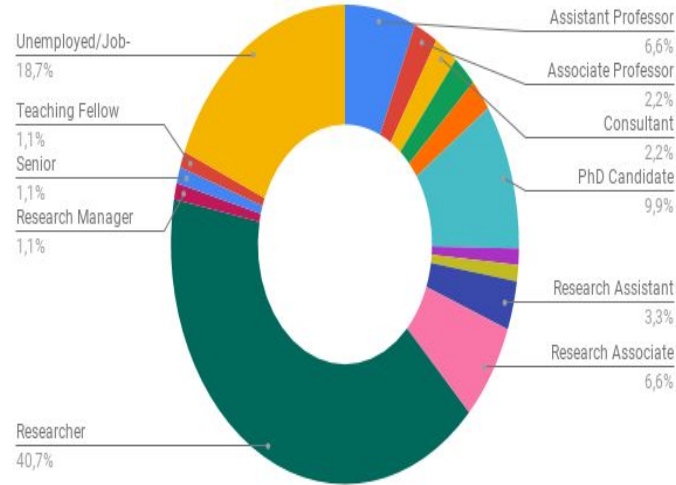


# Survey on triple I mobility in ITN

What is your field?



Are you employed?



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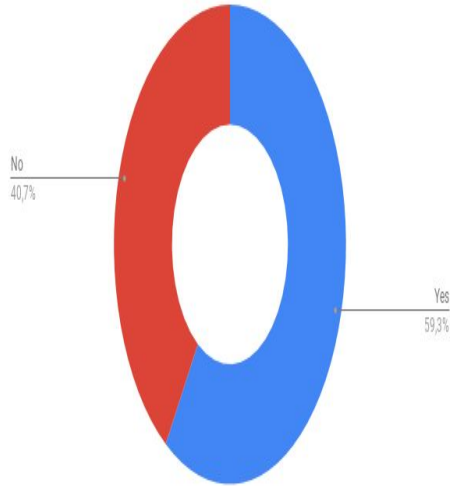
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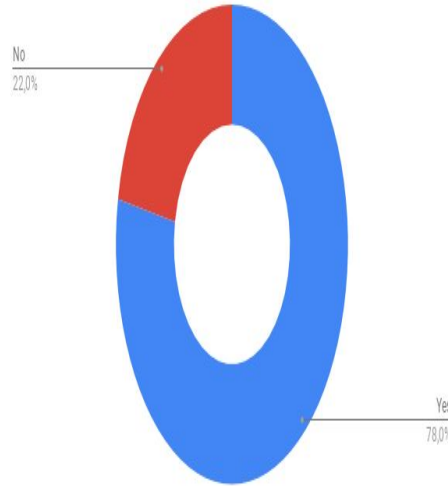


# Survey on triple I mobility in ITN

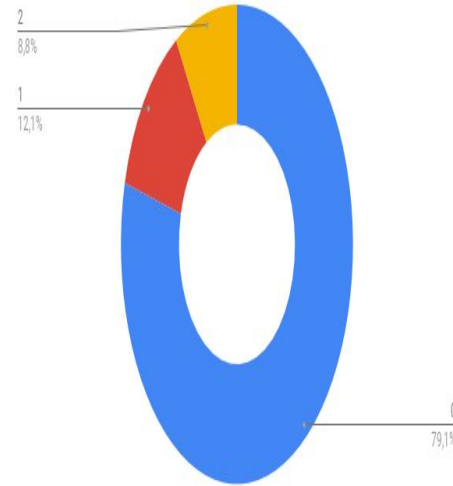
Did you finish your ITN on time?



Are you in a relationship?



How many children do you have?



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# Preliminary responses to 3I survey



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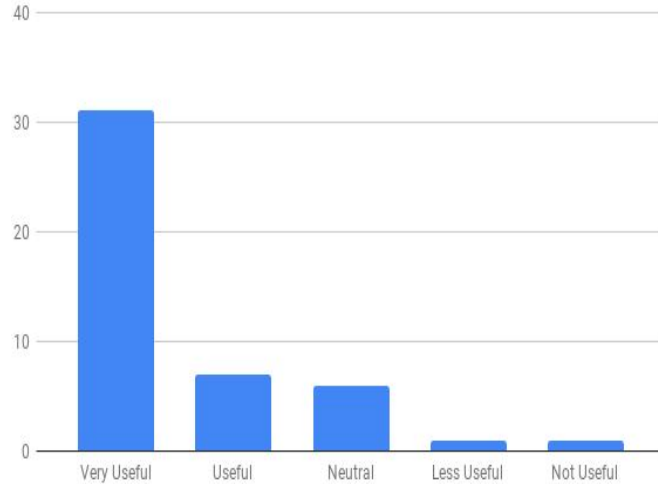
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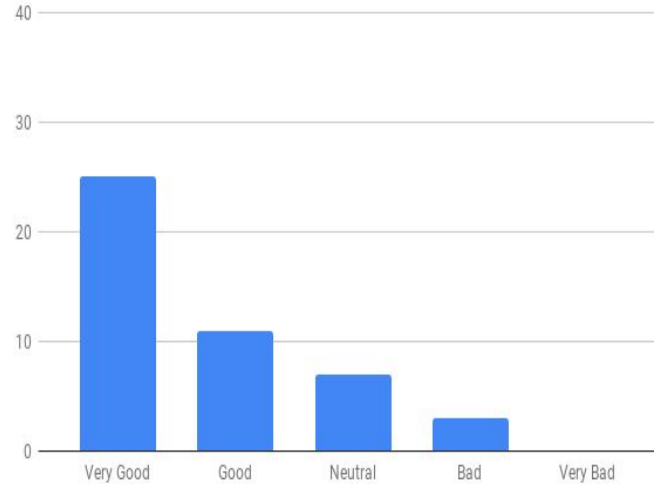
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# Responses on intersectoral mobility



How useful did you find intersectoral mobility during your ITN?



How do you rate the supervision for your intersectoral mobility?

**n=46/91**

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## + Responses on intersectoral mobility

- Future collaboration opportunities
- Expanding Professional network

Networking, learn how other labs works, being more independent because you go out of your comfort zone in a new country/lab with new colleagues for some months. I got several job offers in my last year of PhD thanks to this mobility

Initiate collaborations and gain expertise from participating labs

This helps to gain the first-hand experience of the work cultures in both academic and non-academic settings and subsequently adopt the best ones from both to use in one's research. Also, this helps to figure out future career options

It was good to contrast how systems work in the private and public domain. It gives one insight on how work processes are handled and the values, norms, goals, purposes and interests guiding the organisations

New experiences, able to speak with multiple scientists and professionals

Learn more about topics that were not my main field of study. Widen perspective and way of thinking, rather than limiting to the "known" field of experience. Widen the professional network

Being able to obtain training that would otherwise be not possible. Preparation for alternative careers



# - Responses on intersectoral mobility

- Administrative hassles

Difficulty on different technical language

It is not realistic to expect PhD students to carry out the research they need to accomplish as part of their program and at the same time become active members of a company, especially if the company is not strongly research-driven

You know less of more things

It takes quite some time from your project track and you fall easily behind schedule. If you leave - say for a month - you are (usually) not long enough seconded to become productive, if you stay longer, you lose more time on your ITN project

With family it is a bit difficult, my husband and son followed me everywhere, but it takes more organisation and money

Takes time away to adjust

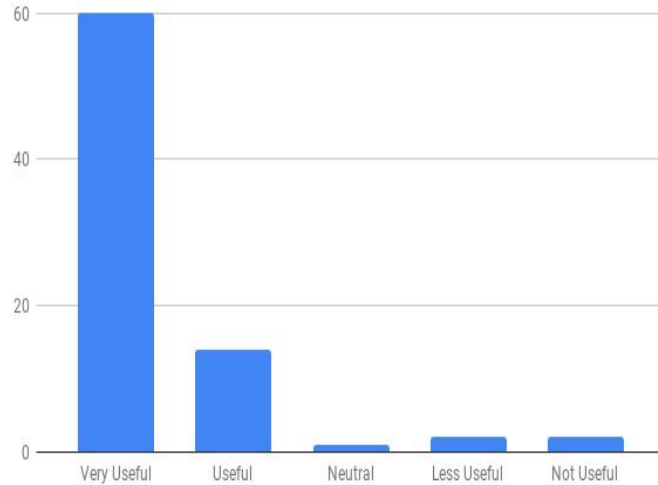
If the mobility is too short, you freeze your research in your hosting center to move there, and the time you start learning something you have to leave

You can be placed in an industry that you don't know enough about or where the employer doesn't know what to do with you

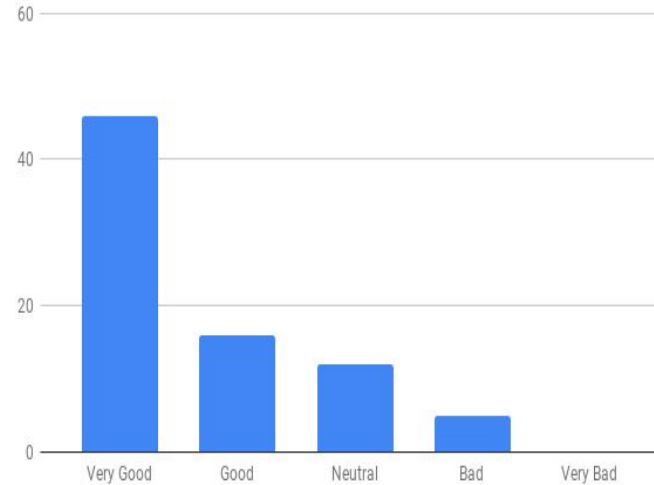
Increases costs of moving and living to more expensive countries



# Responses on international mobility



How useful did you find international mobility during your ITN?



How do you rate the supervision for your international mobility?

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# + Responses on international mobility

- Learning new academic cultures

Networking, get to know new lab and interacting with new people outside your comfort zone. Helps you to get confident and independent. I got several job offers in my last year of PhD from labs from my secondments

Network building and great CV outcome

Exposure to new work environment, new working group, new regions and landscape. Great room for exchange, development of ideas and future networking opportunities.

Speak another language, widen network

It is essential for the flow of knowledge and the proper creation of a personal network ecosystem

Increase network, more resources than in my country of origin. Professional and personal growth

You get to meet different people and experience new cultures. You get to experiment in a different context and expose yourself to novel ways of thinking and working

Experiencing a new culture, learning a new language, feeling more European

Benefiting from expertise of other institutions and research systems





# - Responses on international mobility

- Too little time to adjust with everything

Lack of stability is a bit difficult with Family. I was lucky that my husband/son followed me everywhere

It can be mentally and sometimes physically exhausting to plan and execute a move to a whole new country for short-term. You then need some time to acclimatise to the new environment

It costs time to travel and make all the arrangements and it can be quite stressful. Also, you have to do a lot of work in a short period of time, so it can be very intense too

Long travel hours. Sometimes need to advance lots of money from own pocket before getting reimbursed

The time you invest here goes against the time limitations in highly experimental 3 years ITN

The mental health burden can be real. PhD students are not supported in that aspect

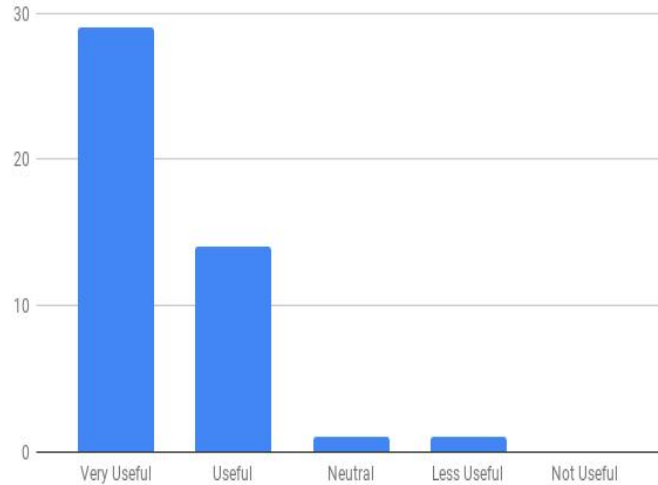
Mobility needs to be backed-up by science. I feel sometimes that mobility is pushed on candidates without strong scientific ideas. Moving with your partner is a downfall

The need to adapt or get integrated in two countries. MSCA already require mobility, so an additional international transfer is deleterious

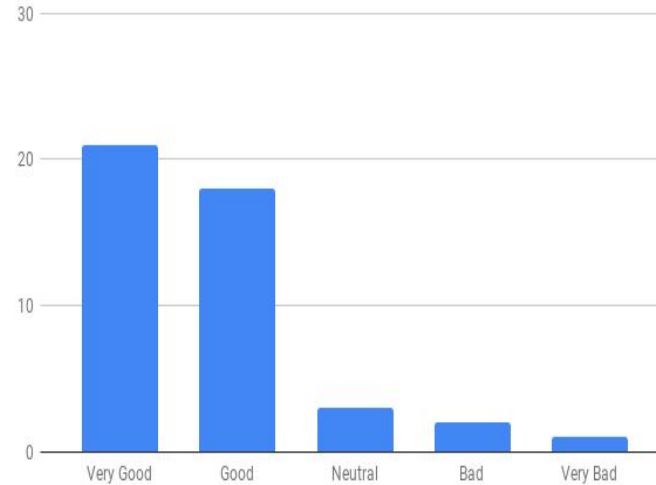
The break in the middle of the program can derail momentum and make it impossible to finish a PhD program designed for three years



# Responses on interdisciplinary mobility



How useful did you find interdisciplinary mobility during your ITN?



How do you rate the supervision for your interdisciplinary mobility?

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## + Responses on interdisciplinary mobility

- Gaining expertise in other scientific fields will help during project proposal submissions and future career

Creation of new areas of opportunity for research. Expansion of own scientific culture. Exchange of knowledge with other areas

You get to write and collaborate with people from different disciplines which expands the way you think and gives you the opportunity to view your work from varied perspective

Don't know

PhD research is often interdisciplinary but the PhD programs are not. It is necessary to fill gaps at other institutions

Capability of working in multidisciplinary programmes after doctoral programme

Learn more about new topics

Broadening your view

Learning new techniques and perspectives

Initiate collaborations and gain expertise from participating labs

I don't know



# - Responses on interdisciplinary mobility

Losing focus on own research

It can be sometimes difficult to be in agreement on certain issues due to ontological and epistemological differences

While everyone likes to tout "interdisciplinary" (and naturally it has to figure in all grant applications and report-outs), the regnant university structure congeal in a solidly disciplinary structure. And if you're not (correspondingly) "solidly disciplinary," well, while there might be room for you in this exciting two-year project here and that exciting one-year postdoc there and so on, there are just about zero possibilities for long-term employment.

If not properly managed could induce to unfocus the aims and pathways of the research

Maybe it's more difficult to focus on your project. You might also get a lot of different types of input from different people and from different angles that will make it more difficult to figure out what's important for your project and what's not

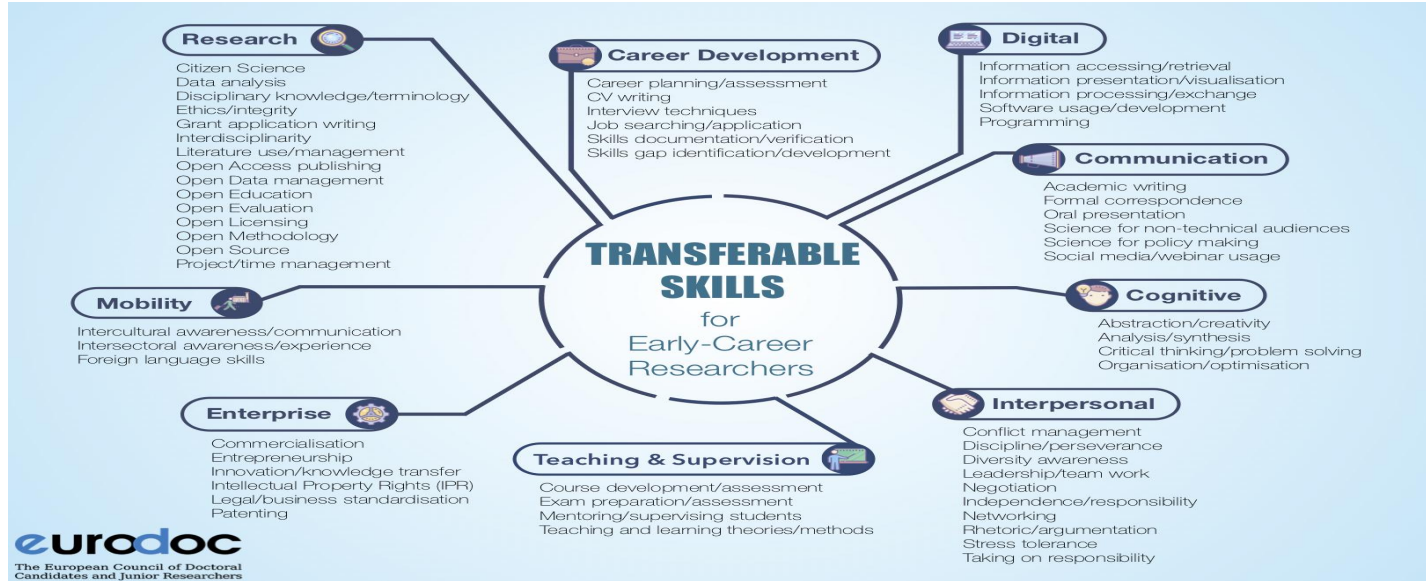
Don't know

It is difficult and not everyone is open minded to see the value of it

Supervisors at the home institution may not understand



# Skills for early-career researchers



[Eurodoc Skills Report \(2018\)](#) | [Eurodoc Skills Infographic \(2018\)](#)

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# Advantages and Challenges of Structured Mobility for Doctoral Candidates in Europe



- Thank you for listening!
- Gareth O'Neill
- President of Eurodoc



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