



Responsive and flexible career
development framework for researchers

REFLEX European workshop

Career Choice: Researcher

Bratislava, November 9, 2016

Outcomes report

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1 Background and purpose

1.1 About the REFLEX project

In today's ever changing world, systematic and focused career management is becoming increasingly important for both researchers and their employers. However, research organisations face the challenge of how to guide researchers through this process and how to enable them to become creative, critical and autonomous intellectual risk takers.

Currently a variety of career development tools are available, some of them are formal and structured, others are based on informal and self-directed approach. Reflex project aims to ensure that these tools, usually designed for the use in certain research environments, can be transferred to other contexts.

REFLEX – a two-year project joining forces of partners from five European countries addressed these challenges through designing of intelligent career development framework based on the direct involvement of researchers, their employers, HR departments, EURAXESS Service Centres and other relevant actors.

Steps taken to create this framework:

- The pool of existing career development tools and practices was collected and analysed with regard to their applicability in different national contexts.
- Scenario workshops with researchers and other local stakeholders were organised in every project country to learn about the country specific situation.
- A set of modules were defined to describe certain practices, procedures and skills, which will be combined into the common framework and its country specific mutations. The framework will integrate and complement existing tools into the context sensitive models of career development services.
- Practical testing and implementation of the framework carried out within the project will help to spread these tools towards the researchers and other stakeholders.
- Training model scheme focusing on the development of career management skills for researchers was designed, adapted, and tested to different national contexts.
- Mutual learning and feedback activities will ensure the coherence and continuous improvement of all project outcomes.
- To increase the transferability of this framework to other national and institutional contexts, European level workshop was organised together with other EURAXESS networks and organisations representing the researchers and their employers.

1.2 Background for the REFLEX European workshop

Reflex project activities are based on a bottom-up approach and direct involvement of researchers, their employers and other stakeholders who are engaged in the career development support. The European workshop is the final task of the Reflex project together with the European workshop report.

The aim of the workshop was to introduce and get feedback on the results of the REFLEX project as well as to encourage further involvement of different European level stakeholders and actors in the common dialogue on career development of researchers.

96 registrations were recorded and 88 participants attended the event: 14 nationalities were represented. Among the participants, there were representatives of EU level networks and institutions including Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), European Commission (EC), European Universities Association (EUA), European Council of Doctoral Candidates (EURODOC), EuroScience, Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA), Science Europe and Young European Associated Researchers Network (YEAR). Representatives of other projects dealing with the researchers' career development support within the EURAXESS network (PIPERS, EURAXIND, TOP III) and other members of EURAXESS network have also been present.

Main outline of REFLEX workshop

The first part of REFLEX workshop combined interactive group sessions, talks/speeches and panel discussions aiming to introduce the topic of career development to the stakeholders groups, especially researchers, their employers and research policy makers.

In the second part of the workshop, the participants were invited to three parallel group sessions. The participants selected in advance which group session they wanted to attend. Each group session had about 30 participants, 1 moderator, 1 speaker and 3 table facilitators.

- Session 1: Starting the researcher career (focus: PhD candidates)
- Session 2: From uncertainty to established careers (focus: young researchers)
- Session 3: Becoming the leaders (focus: experienced researchers)

During the parallel sessions, the participants were divided again into 3 smaller groups of approximately 10 participants each, with a facilitator for each group. The parallel sessions debuted with a context presentation from an invited guest followed by a presentation of the proposed General Model Training Scheme (GMTS). The main outcomes of Reflex project were presented in plenum by the moderator and then further discussed during the three parallel group session. The aim of the parallel sessions was to reflect on what should be the next steps in helping the researchers to develop excellent careers and how can REFLEX outcomes contribute to that.

Each group (table) was equipped with a set of cards containing all the elements (measures) included in the GMTS; a poster of the GMTS was displayed on the wall next to each table. Participants had an additional list of modules with a brief description of each element (measure) included in the proposed GMTS. The participants were then asked to comment on the GMTS and its relevance. Each participant had to select 2 measures (cards) from the 5 main categories included in the GTMS, which they think researchers at the given career stage need the most. It

was also possible to suggest new measures that were missing from the proposed GMTS. Participants presented the selected measures to the rest of the group explaining why they chose that particular measure and how they believe this measure can contribute to the career development of the specific target group. The selected cards were at the end posted on a flipchart organised according to the 5 main categories and ranked by the participants. Two persons from the groups stayed with the created scheme, while the rest circulated to see the outcomes of the other tables.

The workshop also included an opinion session carried out through the Kahoot session,. The session enabled to present some facts about the career development topic, but also tested the audience's opinion in that regard.

1.3 Workshop agenda

- 09:00 - 09:05** **Welcome**
Katarína Košťálová, SAIA, n. o.
- 09:05 - 09:15** **Opening address**
Lukáš Zendulka, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic
- 09:15 - 09:45** **My career story**
Ján Tkáč, Institute of Chemistry, Slovak Academy of Sciences
- 09:45 - 10:15** **Supporting excellence in researchers' careers through MSCA**
Alessandra Luchetti, European Commission, DG Education and Culture - Research Executive Agency (REA)
- 10:15 - 10:45** **REFLEX project: outcomes and lessons learnt**
Sibylle Hodel, ETH Zürich | Janka Kottulová, SAIA, n. o. | Ďdám Molnár Bay Zoltán Nonprofit Ltd. | Kathrine Vangen NTNU Trondheim | Mark de Vos, University of Copenhagen
- 10:15 - 10:45 Coffee break
- 11:15 - 12:30** **Researchers' career development from different perspectives**
Panel discussion of researchers and experts dealing with researchers' career support

Fredrik Haraldsen, Slovak Academy of Sciences | Bregt SAENEN, European University Association | Michaela Musilová, Slovak Organisation for Space Activities | Olga Pardo Escher, ETH Zürich
- 12:30 - 13:30 Lunch
- 13:30 - 15:00** **Career support for the research careers of the future (parallel group sessions)**
Group discussion on what should be the next steps in helping the researchers to develop excellent careers and how can REFLEX outcomes help in this.

Session 1: Starting the researcher career: focus PhD candidates

Starting with the presentation of Ewelina Pabjańczyk-Wlazło, European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers

Session 2: From uncertainty to established careers: focus young researchers

Postdoctoral funding schemes in Europe Starting with the presentation of Sebastien Huber, Science Europe

Session 3: Becoming the leaders: focus experienced researchers

Starting with the presentation of Alexandra Bitušíková, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica
- 15:00 - 15:30 Coffee break
- 15:30 - 16:00** **What is your opinion on...?**
Interactive feedback survey facilitated by Kathrine Vangen, NTNU Trondheim
- 16:00 - 16:30** **Closing remarks: Researchers' careers in the ERA**
Fabienne Gautier, European Commission, DG Research and Innovation - Open Innovation and Open Science Directorate
- 16:30** **Closing of the workshop**
Katarína Košťálová, SAIA, n. o.

2 Outcomes and conclusions of the REFLEX European workshop

2.1 Session 1: Starting the researcher career (focus: PhD candidates)

Composition of the group: PhD students, HR representatives & Research managers, representatives from EU level organisations and networks.

Guest speaker: Ewelina Pabjańczyk-Wlaziło, European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (EURODOC): **“Starting the researcher career: focus PhD candidates”**.

Feedback on the General Model Training Scheme (GMTS):

The participants referred to the General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) as “relevant”, “ideal”, “useful”, “concise and usable”, “spot on” and “comprehensive, one needs time to go through it” .

Main category	Overview over selected career development measures					
Mobility	Mobility coaching	Social events				
Networking	Mentor	Network with former colleagues	Building an international network			
Career advice	External career support	Career centre	Career Coach	Overview to career development	Facts & Statistics	Funding & Grants
Academic skills & development	Overview over researcher career paths or options	Supervisor development	Academic writing			
Company & organisational interaction	Leaving academia					

The participants of this session received the proposed General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) with enthusiasm and curiosity. During the session participants highlighted that all the necessary components for career development seem to be present in the scheme, but some additional guide might be necessary in order to help the users understand the measures as intended.

The national context is also important, participants from different countries understood the measures based on the reality in their own country. Some measures that the participants neither experienced nor knew about from before needed additional context information in order to be understood. The role and mandate of a gender/equality adviser was for example very well

established in some countries, but very vague in others. Another example is status of the PHD candidates: employee with salary in some countries, versus student status in other countries, which has a lot to say in relation to the status and benefits that this group has. The “Mentor” was the measure selected by the majority of participants and it was also one of the most discussed measure. The mentor was believed to be the key to the researcher’s career development. In general, the participants preferred and focused on the role of people: mentors, supervisors, coaches.

The General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) was considered flexible enough to be adapted to many national contexts, which was highly appreciated. The participants concluded that all universities/colleges, but also private sector should have at least parts of the General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) available for researchers in the coming years.

2.2 Session 2: From uncertainty to established careers (focus: young researchers)

Composition of the group: Post docs, HR representatives & Research managers, representatives from EU level organisations and networks,

Guest speaker: Sebastien Huber, Science Europe (SE): **“Postdoctoral funding schemes in Europe”**

Feedback on the General Model Training Scheme (GMTS):

The participants referred to the General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) as “relevant” and “useful”, “good for researchers but also for HR people”.

Main category	Overview over selected career development measures				
Mobility	Mobility coaching				
Networking	Mentor	Network with former colleagues	Building an international network		
Career advice	External career support	Career centre	Career Coach	Performance & development review	Funding and Grants
Academic skills & development	Overview over researcher career paths or options	Leadership course	Branding of academic skills		
Company & organisational interaction	Employment panel	Business understanding	Leaving academia		

General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) was considered a perfect tool that can be used to map the potential career development measures for both institutions and researchers. Researchers can use the GMTS to orient themselves and fill out eventual career development gaps.

The participants in this session pointed out that the GMTS could be difficult to grasp at the beginning, especially if you are not working with career development nor have experience in this field. It was therefore suggested that the members of the REFLEX project team could function as a resource for the career development tools and offer guidance and advice to the institutions that want to use and implement the GMTS.

“Mobility” and “Building an international network” received a lot of attention from the group, as well as measures like “Mentor”, “Career centre” and “Funding”. The role of the researchers her/himself was also debated when it comes to taking responsibility, being aware and taking advantage of all career development opportunities. This type of awareness among researchers needs to be created and nurtured latest at the Ph.D. stage. The Career centres are believed to enhance the researcher’s ability to make informed decisions when it comes to their careers and could function as a bridge between different stakeholders.

The participants pointed out that in their opinion many of the measures are interlinked, while some of the measures could easily be moved in another category than the one suggested in the GMTS. This proved the flexibility of the GMTS, which was one of the goals of the REFLEX project. General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) is considered to be a good tool to work with because is flexible enough to be used in any context and in any country. Institutions can also use just parts of the scheme and build on it gradually.

Further, the participants concluded that institutions need to constantly update their services and make them reflect the permanent changing skills of the young researchers in the 21st century. The administrative support should always follow the needs of the researchers as well as the strategical goals of the institutions.

2.3 Session 3: Becoming leaders (focus: experienced researchers)

Composition of the group: PhD students, Senior researchers, HR representatives & Research managers, representatives from EU level organisations and networks,

Guest speaker: Alexandra Bitušíková, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica.”
Becoming the leaders: focus experienced researchers”

Feedback on the General Model Training Scheme (GMTS):

The participants referred to the General Model Training Scheme (GMTS) as “useful”, “necessary” and “relevant”.

Main category	Overview over selected career development measures				
Mobility	Mobility coaching	Dual career			
Networking	Conferences	Building an international network	Interdisciplinary collaboration	Mentor	
Career advice	Information about Grants & Funding	Funding and Grants	Performance & development review	Career coach	Gender and equality adviser
Academic skills & development	Teaching competency profile	Supervisor development	Teaching course	Project planning and management	
Company & organisational interaction					

The group agreed on the relevance and importance of the topic in general, but stressed that even though most of the institutions agree about the importance of the topic, it seems that very little is done in practice with regards to career development for researchers.

Participants discussed also how national aspects would influence the use and perception of the suggested career development measures. “Early career dialogue” for example is carried out differently across countries and therefore will influence the researcher’s career differently.

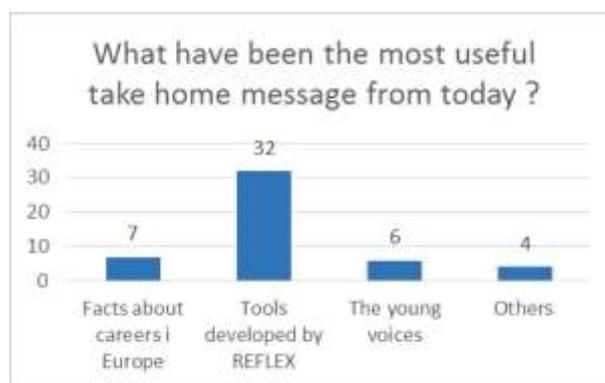
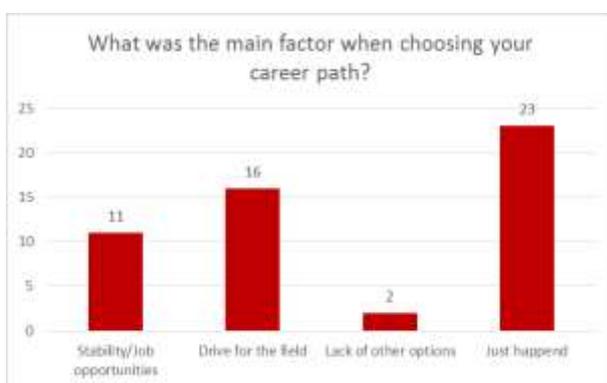
The importance of entrepreneurial aspect of research career and how to disseminate the research in a way that would attract funding and income was also discussed around the table. It was stressed that academia & research environments should try to focus their research to match the needs of the market. Regarding to funding of research it was highlighted the need of a more permanent funding scheme rather than short time funding, since researchers spend way too much time on applying for grants. The disadvantage of short time funding is also that getting excellent research results takes time, usually longer than the funding of the project.

Career development tools like “career coach” and “gender equality adviser” are particularly important since they can also set focus on the need for developing and implementing good institutional policies in that regard. Mobility is also crucial for career development, but the participants suggested that institutions choose a flexible model, which can easily be adapted to the need of the researcher.

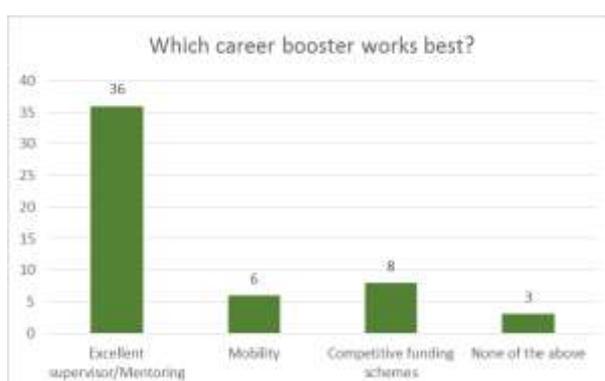
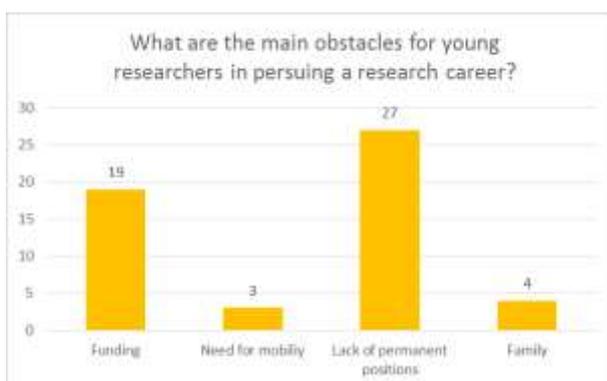
2.4 Feedback from the Kahoot opinion survey

This section briefly introduces some interesting results from the opinion session which was carried out through the Kahoot online tool.

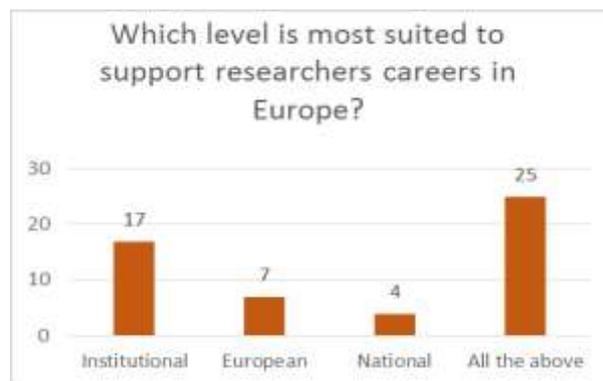
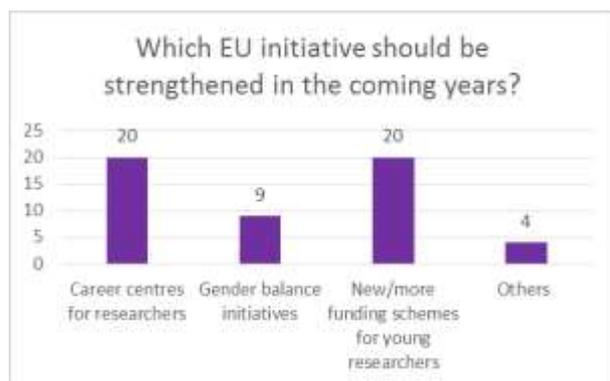
- For many participants their career path was not a result of deliberate career choices.
- The opinion pool confirmed that participants found the tools created within the REFLEX project and presented during the workshop to be useful.



- When asked about the obstacles for the career development of young researchers, participants selected lack of permanent positions as the major problem.
- On the other hand excellent supervisor or availability of mentoring was picked up as the most effective career booster.



- Participants called for more career centres and more funding opportunities for young researchers to be available at the European level.
- Coordination of all levels (European, national, institutional) was considered to be necessary for the effective provision of career support for researchers in Europe.



2.5 Conclusions

As part of the bottom up approach REFLEX European workshop allocated good amount of time to researchers and their career reflections and stories in form of presentation and panel discussions. We learned that being a researcher today is challenging not only because of the high requirements in terms of academic expertise, but also because researchers need to compete for funding and jobs in an extremely dynamic work market. We have also learned about the importance of long term, stable funding that allows researchers to accomplish the research goals. Excellent research requires time and long term funding.

REFLEX workshop included a panel discussion of researchers and experts dealing with researchers career support. During the panel discussion, the participants got an insight over the paradoxes in the researcher's careers. Most of the universities expect today that the researchers will fund their own research; being able to get funding it is seen as an evidence of good research. The paradox is that the quest for funding and the requirements that comes with that is often taking too much time from the time that the researchers would rather use doing research.

Researchers face also unrealistic expectation regarding the time they should spend at work. Researchers would often work up to 80 hours a week, which can leave a mark on the physical and mental health.

Building a researcher career involves being flexible and willing to move across borders numerous times and sometimes living in uncertainty about the future. Many researchers will often not know what is the next step, at which institution or on which continent. Researchers with families have often the dilemma of how they combine the family life with the researcher career, and it is even more challenging when both partners are researchers with career ambitions on both sides.

Further researchers are not always aware of job opportunities outside academia nor know what skills would be required. Some researchers perceive a career outside academia as "second best" or "plan B", mainly because of the lack of interaction and knowledge about other sectors. Similar findings came out from the national workshops organized during the first period of REFLEX project.

European level stakeholders used the opportunity to present their view on the topic and highlighted the importance of the career development topic. The European commission is committed in continuing to improve the financial conditions and opportunities - particularly for

early-stage researchers through grant opportunities like The Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA). At the same time, the European Commission highlights the importance of promoting research careers and raising awareness among the universities and other employers. The significance of Dual Career is also mentioned as well as the need for more funding supporting Dual Careers and setting the focus on developing, promoting and exchanging good practices.

All the above mentioned realities and views on career were presented and debated at REFLEX workshop where researchers and different European level stakeholders discussed about what are the challenges and the opportunities that researchers face and have. While everybody seemed to agree on what are the challenges, it varied a bit what kind of measures participants believed would work out best for boosting the career development of researchers. The career development framework suggested by REFLEX project was received with curiosity and enthusiasm. Many of the participants were eager to start using the tools suggested by REFLEX right away. The researchers and the institutions present gave a lot of positive feedback on the relevance of the topic and praised the balance of the workshop program. Some national features are definitely present when individuals interpret the suggested GMTS, but the flexibility of the framework makes it easy for institutions to use it in any national and institutional context.

Contact information

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For more information about the REFLEX visit the project website www.euraxess-reflex.eu.

Attachments

List of participants

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Kateřina	Cidlinská	Czech Association of PhD Students	Czech Republic
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Michal	Pástor	Technical University in Zvolen	Slovakia
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Kathrine	Vangen	Norwegian University of Science and Technology	Norway
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