

Investing in People

The launch of the European Research Area (ERA) in January 2000 signaled the birth of a true internal market for science and technology. Working to coordinate national research policies toward shared objectives and resources, the ERA provides a framework to enhance the attractiveness of the European Union (EU) to researchers worldwide. This is key to achieving the goals that European leaders agreed to in Lisbon in March 2000 and in Barcelona in March 2001, which include making Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world and devoting 3% of gross domestic product to research by 2010.

This increase in investment should increase the demand for scientists—by up to 700,000 more researchers, which is troubling. The EU already produces, in relative terms, more Ph.D.s than the United States, but most European countries note that their young people's interest in scientific careers is decreasing. And although the EU attracts many foreign researchers, they do not compensate for the number that leave Europe. Also, European researchers suffer from a lack of public recognition of their work, their profession, and their role in society.

Such concerns have led the European Commission (EC) to develop an ambitious strategy for human resources and mobility, based on four priorities: making science more attractive for young people; improving training and mobility opportunities to facilitate the access of researchers to new knowledge and skills, and to attract researchers to Europe; developing better job opportunities for researchers by closing the gap between academia and industry; and improving public recognition of the researcher's status and profession. The first steps have already been taken. Information and assistance to researchers wishing to relocate are being improved with the launch of a mobility Web portal and a network of 400 mobility centers. The portal presents information on career opportunities and incentives for mobility available to researchers throughout Europe (<http://europa.eu.int/eracareers/>). The centers provide personal assistance to researchers and their families in all matters relating to their mobility.

A policy document approved in 2002 proposes action to address recruitment, training, evaluation schemes, contractual relations, and career prospects. It calls for the harmonization of doctoral programs, announces the launch of a code of conduct for the recruitment of researchers and a "European Researcher's Charter" for career management, and proposes a common European framework for career development, evaluation, and recognition. Finally, new legislation is in preparation that should improve entry conditions for non-European researchers in the EU by introducing an accessible "scientific visa."

These measures complement the extra financial support for training, mobility, and career development in the EU Sixth Framework Programme for Research (2002–2006). The Programme devotes nearly 10% of its 17.5 billion budget to human resources and mobility, and for the first time it offers training opportunities to non-European as well as European researchers. Mobility schemes, however, are of little use if we cannot attract more talent. We need to increase investment in scientific higher education and research, improve our infrastructures and our networking capabilities, and persuade all stakeholders of the importance of research to society. Only then will we be able to attract more people to scientific careers, increasing the number of researchers from 5 per 1000 to 8 per 1000 of the active scientific population by 2010.

We need to overcome the fragmentation of our research structures and initiatives and strengthen our Europe-wide capabilities. This is precisely what the ERA is all about. It offers a global framework to foster collaboration through networking and joint initiatives, while enhancing competitiveness and creating new jobs. The ERA promotes competition for talent as well as collaboration in the pursuit of excellence. Mobility across the Atlantic, in both directions, plays an important role in this objective: Migrant researchers are often lynchpins of partnerships between Europe and the United States. In making Europe as attractive to U.S. scientists as the United States is to Europeans, we can strengthen transatlantic collaboration in science and technology.

We have little time to implement the Lisbon and Barcelona mandates if we want to meet the deadline set for 2010. But the EC will continue to work to create the conditions by which an enlarged EU will be able to meet its ambitions to enhance knowledge and foster peaceful and sustainable growth.

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