



BASNET Forumas
15th year anniversary

International meeting of stakeholders

From Challenges to Solutions:

**Addressing Systemic Issues for
Early Career Researchers in the
Baltic States**

Vilnius, 27 of November 2024
Meeting materials



Supporters & Sponsors

The meeting is organized by



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Meeting Description

Early-stage researchers (ECRs) are vital for the ongoing development and innovation. They bring **fresh perspectives, energy, and a forward-looking approach**. ECRs also represent a unique stakeholder group in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) **whose agency is essential to the achievement and long-term viability of academic institutions**.

The meeting “Situation of young research in the Baltic States: Development or waste of future scientific potential?”, held 2023 in the Lithuanian Seimas, **highlighted the following specific challenges faced by ECRs working in the Baltic States**: insufficient funding for basic research; too much mistrust in the ability of ECRs to realise their scientific ideas; too little involvement of ECR representatives in decision-making bodies at all levels; lack of mentoring and clear and transparent career development rules and an imbalance between scientific and business needs. Long working hours were also identified as one of the main challenges for ECRs in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. ECRs complain that work-related stress is so high that it leads to burnout. It was also noted that there is a lack of comprehensive research and monitoring of the situation of ECRs in research institutes and universities.

The aim of the event

The aim of the meeting is to draw the attention of stakeholders from the Baltic States to the challenges of ECR meet in research organizations and to discuss the steps to be taken to improve it on a systemic level.

Participants

The invited speakers, guests and participants represent Baltic States national science policy makers, organizations regulating and financing scientific activities, ECRs as well as researchers studying the ERC situation in Europe and Baltic states.

Organizing Committee

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dalia Satkovskiene,
BASNET Forumas, Chair

Prof. Hab. Dr. Gražina Tautvaišienė,
LFD

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sandra Pralgauskaitė,
VU FF

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Živilė Rutkūnienė,
KTU



10:30 – 11:45 **Panel Presentations - Session 1**

Identifying Systemic Issues:

The Current State of ECRs in the Baltic States

Chair: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Giedrė Purvaneckienė, Vilnius University

- **Prof. Habil. Dr. Artūras Žukauskas**,
Chair of Science Committee of LR Seimas
(2020-2024 term of office)

“Recent Progress in Resolving Issues for Early Career Researchers in Lithuania”

- **Dr. Katrin Kiisler**,
Head of R&D Policy Department at the Ministry of Estonian
Education and Research

„Rethinking Support for Young Researchers in Estonia”

- **Prof. Habil. Dr. Baiba Rivža**,
Latvian University of Life Sciences and Technologies

Prof. Baiba Rivza, prof. Andris Teikmanis

“Challenges of early-stage researchers in Latvia and what can we do?”

- **Dr. Edita Bagdonaitė**,
Adviser at the Research and Higher Education Policy Analysis
Unit, Lithuanian Research Council

A brief overview of EU & OECD policies to promote skills and career development for early career researchers”

11:45 – 12:00 **Coffee Break**

12:00 - 13:00 *Panel Presentations - Session 2*

Identifying Systemic Issues: The Current State of ECRs in the Baltic States

Chair: Prof. Habil. Dr. Gražina Tautvaišienė, VU ITPA

- **Prof.Dr. Ingrida Ulozienė,**
Head of the Research Affairs Department, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences

"Situation of young researchers at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences: challenges and solutions"

- **Prof. Dr. Gita Revalde,**
Riga Technical University, Latvia

"Is it easy to be an ECR at Latvian universities?"

- **Dr. Joana Smirnovienė,**
Researcher, VU Life Sciences Center

"Scientific Career in Biotech from an Early Career Researcher Perspective"

- **Prof.Dr. Loreta Kelpšaitė-Rimkienė,**
member of Klaipėda University Council

"The ECR Journey: Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Success"

13:00 – 14:00 *Lunch Break*



14:00 – 15:00 *Round Table Discussions - Session 1*

Unpacking the Challenges in the Baltic States: Discussion on specific themes, including Priority Policies, Funding and Resource Allocation, Collaboration with Business

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Aurelija Novelskaitė, Lithuanian Center for Social Sciences

- **Dr. Edita Bagdonaitė**, Policy adviser, RCL
- **Prof. Habil. Dr. Juras Banys**, President, LAS
- **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Juozas Grigas** LUHS, LYAS
- **Prof. Dr. Toomas Vaimann**, EYAS

15:00 – 16:15 *Round Table Discussions - Session 2*

Unpacking the Challenges in the Baltic States. Discussion on: Working Culture, Work-Life Balance & Mental Health

Moderator: Dr. Rima Budvytytė, Senior Researcher of Vilnius University Life Science Center

- **Dr. Miglė Tomkuvienė**, Senior researcher, VU LSC
- **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Juozas Grigas**, LSMU & LYAS
- **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Živilė Rutkūnienė**, Vice-Dean for Studies, KTU FM&NS
- **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mindaugas Zaremba**, Chief researcher, VU LSC
- **Mrs. Gabriele Burbulyte-Tsiskarishvili**, Lector at KU

16:15 – 16:30 *Coffee Break*

Speakers



**Assoc. Prof. Dr.
Dalia Šatkovskienė**

President of BASNET Forumas



**Prof. Dr.
Edita Sužiedelienė**

Vice-Rector of Vilnius University



Mrs. Vaida Aleknavičienė

Chair of Committee on Education and Science of
LR Seimas



Dr. Gintaras Valinčius

Chairman of Lithuanian Research Council

Speakers



**Prof. Dr.
Anne-Sophie Godfroy**

Université Paris Sciences Lettres (PSL), France



**Prof. Habil. Dr.
Artūras Žukauskas**

Chair of Science Committee of LR Seimas
(2020-2024 term of office)



Dr. Katrin Kiisler

Head of R&D Policy Department at the Ministry
of Estonian Education and Research



**Prof. Habil. Dr.
Baiba Rivža**

Latvian University of Life Sciences and
Technologies

Speakers



Dr. Edita Bagdonaitė

Adviser at the Research and Higher Education Policy Analysis Unit, Lithuanian Research Council



Prof. Dr. Ingrida Ulozienė

Head of the Research Affairs Department, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences



Prof. Dr. Gita Revalde

Riga Technical University, Latvia



Dr. Joana Smirnovienė

Researcher, VU Life Sciences Center

Speakers



**Prof. Dr.
Loreta Kelpšaitė-Rimkienė**

Member of Klaipėda University Council



Prof. Dr. Aurelija Novelskaitė

Lithuanian Center for Social Sciences



**Prof. Habil. Dr.
Juras Banys**

President of Lithuanian Academy of Sciences



**Assoc. Prof. Dr.
Juozas Grigas**

Lithuanian University of Health Sciences &
Lithuanian Young Academy of Science

Speakers



**Prof. Dr.
Toomas Vaimann**

Tallinn University of Technology & Estonian
Young Academy of Sciences



Dr. Rima Budvytytė

Senior Researcher of Vilnius University Life
Science Center



Dr. Miglė Tomkuvienė

Senior researcher, VU LSC



**Assoc. Prof. Dr.
Živilė Rutkūnienė**

Vice-Dean for Studies, Faculty of Mathematics
and Natural Sciences, Kaunas University of
Technology & Member of BASNET Forumas
Council

Speakers



Dr. Mindaugas Zaremba

Chief researcher at Vilnius University Life Sciences Centre



Mrs. Gabrielė Burbulytė-Tsiskarishvili

Lecturer from Klaipeda University



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sandra Pralgauskaitė

Vilnius University Faculty of Physics & Chair of BASNET Forumas Council



Key factors influencing the precarity of ECR careers

The stakeholders' meeting, in order to take the initiative to change the precarity situation of early-career researchers, on the basis of the overview made in OECD SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY POLICY PAPERS May 2021 No. 113, identified several key factors related to the changing context of academic research. These factors can be divided into changes in the research environment, changes in the supply and demand for doctoral candidates, and broader changes in academic careers and working conditions. The following are the main factors influencing the precarity of early-career researchers, especially postdoctoral researchers: The precarity of early career researchers is influenced by several key factors related to the evolving context of academic research. These factors can be categorized into changes in the research environment, shifts in the supply and demand for doctorate holders, and the broader changes in academic careers and working conditions. Below are the main factors that influence the precarity of early career researchers, particularly postdoctoral researchers:

By implementing these recommendations, science policymakers and research institutions have to work together to create a more supportive, sustainable, and dynamic environment for early-career researchers, ultimately benefiting the scientific community and society as a whole.





1. *Changes in the Conduct of Research*

- **Funding Shifts:** There has been a move from core funding for research institutions to more competitive and project-based funding. This results in funding variability and increased pressure on researchers to demonstrate high performance through metrics like citations and the ability to secure research funds.
- **Global Competition:** The rise of an international labor market for researchers means that early career researchers are competing not just locally, but globally. While mobility is encouraged in some contexts, nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments in certain countries can limit opportunities and hinder the flow of talent.
- **Non-standard Employment:** The growth of non-standard, temporary employment (e.g., fixed-term contracts, part-time work) without a clear pathway to permanent positions is a defining characteristic of research precarity. Researchers in these roles often face job insecurity, poor working conditions, and a lack of career progression.

2. Changes in the Supply and Demand for Doctorate Holders

- **Overproduction of Doctorates:** The massification of higher education and the expansion of doctoral education have led to an oversupply of doctorate holders. In many countries, the number of individuals seeking academic careers surpasses the availability of permanent positions, contributing to competition and limited opportunities.
- **Longer Career Paths:** The aging of the workforce and longer working lives mean that many older doctorate holders continue working beyond retirement age, making it harder for younger researchers to secure permanent positions, thus prolonging the precarity of early career researchers.
- **Diverse Career Options:** While many doctoral holders find alternative employment outside academia, this transition can be challenging, leading to identity loss and difficulty adapting to non-research roles.





3. Shifts in Research Careers and Academic Institutions

- **Decoupling of Teaching and Research:** In many academic systems, the traditional model of the tenured academic combining teaching and research has been replaced by more specialized roles. Research positions are often temporary, with fewer opportunities for career progression, especially outside elite research institutions.
- **Institutional Stratification:** The rise of institutional stratification, where some universities receive the bulk of research funding, has created a competitive environment where only a small number of researchers achieve permanent positions or tenure. This increases competition and makes career advancement difficult for many.
- **Rise of Entrepreneurial Institutions:** Some academic institutions have adopted a more market-driven approach, requiring researchers to secure their own funding and manage projects. This increases the workload and stress on early career researchers, as they often bear the responsibility of obtaining funding and managing research without job security.

4. Worsening of Working Conditions

- **Extended Postdoctoral Period:** The postdoctoral phase, intended as a short-term apprenticeship, has become longer and more arduous due to the tightening bottleneck between non-permanent and permanent positions. This leads to prolonged job insecurity and limited career advancement.
- **Job Insecurity and Stress:** Early career researchers face significant stress due to job insecurity, long working hours, lack of recognition, and dependence on senior researchers. These factors contribute to a deterioration of mental and physical well-being.
- **Lack of Visibility and Academic Freedom:** Many early career researchers face challenges in gaining visibility within the academic community, which is crucial for career advancement. Moreover, the pressures of funding acquisition and project management can constrain academic freedom, reducing researchers' ability to pursue long-term, curiosity-driven research.





5. *Cultural Expectations and Historical Legacies*

- **Traditional Career Paths:** There remains a cultural expectation of a linear academic career, where researchers move through defined stages (e.g., doctoral student to assistant professor to full professor). However, this model is increasingly misaligned with the current reality, where many doctorate holders are unable to secure permanent academic positions and are forced to find alternative careers.

In conclusion, the precarity of early career researchers is shaped by a combination of financial constraints, increased competition, changing institutional structures, and evolving expectations within academic research. These factors create an environment where researchers face significant challenges in securing permanent positions, achieving career progression, and maintaining job satisfaction.

Recommendations to the Baltic States stakeholders

Introduction

The precariousness of research careers has been an issue of increasing concern and policy attention in recent years. Academic research has changed significantly over the last decade, introducing new approaches and technologies. The future of scientific research and its ability to deliver the new knowledge and solutions needed to address pressing societal challenges depends on scientists and their motivation to do science. Tomorrow's science depends on the early-stage researchers (ECR) - PhD students and postdoctoral researchers - entering the system today. For many of these highly qualified individuals, the future does not look so attractive. The Baltic States, as small countries, can ensure their economic competitiveness and the well-being of their people through high-level scientific achievements leading to new technologies.

The international meeting of stakeholders “From Challenges to Solutions: Addressing Systemic Issues for Early Career Researchers in the Baltic States” held 27 of November in Vilnius aimed to draw the attention of stakeholders to the challenges of ECR meet in the Baltic States research organizations and **to discuss the steps to be taken to improve situation on a systemic level**. During the discussions the participants of this meeting **developed the following recommendations to improve the situation of ECR in the Baltic States:**






To Science Policy makers, organizations regulating and financing scientific Activities

(Parliament Committees for Education and Science, National Research Councils, and National Ministries of Education and Science):


- 1. Recognize the Development of Future Scientific Potential as National Priority.** The development of early-stage researchers (ECRs) and their contribution to scientific progress must be declared a national priority. This will ensure that future scientific potential is not only nurtured but also aligned with the broader national goals for innovation and economic competitiveness.
- 2. Create and Implement a National Strategy for Development of Future Scientific Potential.** Develop a comprehensive national strategies setting of policy options to improve working conditions where ECRs can thrive, stay engaged, and contribute meaningfully to scientific progress and professional development. The strategy should also address the challenges of securing sufficient and constant funding for fundamental research.
- 3. Establish Clear and Transparent Career Development Pathways for ECRs.** Introduce policies that promote mentorship programs, clear career development guidelines, and transparent evaluation criteria for ECRs. These measures will help ECRs navigate their professional trajectories and contribute more effectively to research outcomes.

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- 4. Rebalance Funding Mechanisms for Fundamental Research and Innovative Start-ups.** Decrease funding for uncompetitive start-ups that do not perform R&D activities nor create workplaces for young researchers. Instead of funding companies without competition, increase funding for fundamental research and ensure that ECRs can access to competitive research grants and opportunities for independent research. Adequate funding is essential for fostering an environment where ECRs can pursue innovative and impactful scientific work, leading to innovative start-ups in the future.

 - 5. Ensure specialties and competencies needed to address contemporary scientific challenges.** Implement targeted mobility schemes that ensure third-cycle students and early-career researchers gain the needed specialties and competencies.

 - 6. Promote ECR Participation in Decision-Making Processes.** Actively involve ECRs in decision-making bodies and advisory committees at various levels. Their inclusion will provide valuable insights into the challenges they face, while allowing them to contribute to shaping the policies and practices that impact their careers and the broader research landscape.

 - 7. Address Work-Life Balance and Mental Health Support** Implement policies that support work-life balance for ECRs, recognizing the high levels of stress and the risk of burnout. Policies should include flexible working hours, mental health support services, and clear guidelines on workload expectations.

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- 8. Address for importance of Baltic States Collaboration.** Create a platform that could unite interested organizations from the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) in order to discuss and find solutions that would improve the situation of early-career scientists in the region.

To Research Institutes and Universities:

- 1. Ensure Fair and Transparent Selection Processes for ECRs.** Develop and enforce transparent selection criteria for ECRs, focusing on both the quality and impact of their work, rather than solely on publication counts. Research institutions should prioritize the long-term potential and scientific contributions of ECRs over short-term metrics.
- 2. Provide Strong Mentorship and Career Support.** Establish robust mentorship programs within research institutions and universities to guide ECRs in their professional development. Institutions should create clear, accessible pathways for career growth and ensure that ECRs have the resources needed to succeed.
- 3. Foster Safe and Inclusive Work Environments.** Promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and psychological safety in research settings. This includes policies to prevent harassment, bullying, and psychological pressure, ensuring that ECRs can work in a healthy, supportive environment.

4. **Promote Collaboration with Industry and Other Sectors.**

Encourage collaboration between academic researchers and industry, as well as between different academic disciplines, to align scientific research with societal needs. If a balance between science and business needs is achieved, this collaboration will help bridge the gap between research and its practical application in the economy.


5. **Support Work-Life Balance Initiatives.** Implement policies that support a healthy work-life balance, such as flexible work hours and resources for managing work-related stress. Universities and research institutes should recognize the importance of well-being in fostering productive and sustainable careers for ECRs.

6. **Monitor and Address the Situation of ECRs.** Conduct regular surveys and research to monitor the situation of ECRs within research institutions and universities. This data will help identify ongoing challenges and track progress toward improving the overall environment for early-career researchers.

To ECR associations and organizations

8. **Devote more attention to the scientific and cultural development of the ECR.** Strive to see and understand the changes taking place in science more broadly and, through its representatives, seek to influence them, creating a harmonious, highly educated society of scientists, not only with the results of their research, but also with a culture that contributes to the prosperity of their



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Photo Gallery

„From Challenges to Solutions: Addressing Systemic Issues for Early Career Researchers in the Baltic States“

Opening






Presentations & Discussions









“Commitment to Change: Next Steps for ECR Empowerment”

***Open discussion of proposed solutions to improve the situation of ERC
and formulation of recommendations to the stakeholders***



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