

Precarity in Norway – union advocacy and wins

ICoRSA workshop

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Outline

- Background
 - Focus on Postdocs and early career researchers
 - Core facts on employment in Norwegian HER
- Main challenges
- Attractiveness on the agenda
 - A yearlong struggle
 - Recent survey
- Some wins
 - Key take aways



Permanent employment is rule of law

- Temporary contracts needs legal basis
- Legal fixed-term positions:
 - PhD candidates, Postdoc,
 - Research position easily terminated, especially when externally funded
- PhD candidate, Postdoc have status as employees (although temporary)
- The Nordic Model - social dialogue

Key issues

Level of temporary employment at least twice as high in HER (16 %) than in Norwegian working life in general (8 %)

If we include all academic positions in public universities and colleges, 45 % are temporary employed

A misuse of postdoc positions

Years and years of temporary employment the reality for far too many young talents



Main challenges

- Research profession losing attractiveness
- Reduced public funding, increased competition and a constant race for external funding
- Work-life imbalance
- Non-competitive salary levels
- High degree of uncertainty

«I love being a researcher, however....»

«No research without researchers»



«Higher education and research is more important than ever»
(Governmental Longterm Strategic Plan on R&HE, 2024-2028)

- Only 1 in 5 post docs would recommend young people to commit to a career in research
- 1 in 3 having a permanent scientific position have applied for jobs outside academia or are considering a change of career

Should I stay or should I go?

Main reasons for leaving:

- Uncertainty regarding funding
- Heavy workloads
- Salary level
- Lack of job security/career prospects

Main reasons for staying:

- Academic freedom
- Professional dedication to their field
- The work/tasks at hand



«Academic research is one of the few professions where the risk is almost purely on the individual»

The attractiveness of the research career (2022)

Fighting causalisation and temporary employment - a yearlong struggle

- Broad political consensus that the high number of temporary positions is a problem
- Monitoring: institutions required to report annually
- Laws and regulations
- Campaigning, surveys, conducting research
- Advocating strong public funding
- Dialogue and consulting stakeholders
- Concern not just for det individual researchers, but for the quality of research, teaching and learning

“You don´t save the planet on a 6-month contract”



Some wins

- Annual monitoring of employment status
- Special committees on research precarity
- Gradually reduced the level of temporary positions
- Increased the minimum contract period for Post docs
- Postdoc as a real qualifying position with the right to professional development, career guidance and progression embedded in University act – to avoid misuse.
- Campaigning workloads – government initiated a new national survey on working conditions



PhD-candidates are in a vulnerable position. Having a union backing me makes me feel secure

Marie Røhme Aunemo,
PhD-candidate at OsloMet

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Key take aways

- Documentation – surveys, statistics
- Knowledge-based Advocacy
- Use every opportunity to highlight the issue of precarity
- Collaborate with key stakeholders (Employers, EU, OECD)
- Organize!
- Never surrender!

