



European
Commission

Eurydice *Brief*

Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe Academic Staff 2017

Education and
Training



Eurydice Brief

Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff 2017

This Eurydice Brief focuses on the findings of the Eurydice report *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017*, published in June 2017. Information was gathered by the Eurydice Network in 35 countries. The focus of the data collection was on academic staff working in public and publicly subsidised private higher education institutions, with data drawn from top-level regulations or information on large-scale publicly subsidised programmes. The Eurydice Network data was complemented by information from other sources, including a range of research and policy reports, as well the outcomes of two qualitative surveys addressed to academic staff trade unions and quality assurance agencies. Statistical information from the UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) data collection was also used, along with information from the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER).

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UNDERSTANDING WORKING CONDITIONS AND CAREERS OF ACADEMIC STAFF

In recent years, higher education has undergone profound changes. While change is often influenced by local, national and regional factors, some aspects are related to global developments stemming from the increasingly central position of knowledge to societal and economic growth.

In Europe, alongside the growth in student numbers, the higher education sector has become increasingly differentiated, both in terms of institutions and programmes. While public authorities still have a crucial role in regulating and co-ordinating higher education provision, there has been a gradual shift away from rigorous central control towards new forms of steering and influence, in particular through new funding models and quality assurance systems. The Bologna Process has also contributed to structural changes, particularly with regard to curricular reforms, quality assurance and mobility (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015).

While higher education has been subject to increasing demands amidst fast-moving societal transformation, little attention has been paid to the staff at the centre of the picture. Change in the higher education environment means that there are inevitably changes to the expectations, work roles, status and professional conditions of academic staff. The lack of Europe-wide investigation into the situation for academic staff gave rise to this project that set out to explore the academic profession in different countries, cultures and institutions.

Although Europe-wide reports on academic staff may be lacking, a number of key European Commission policy documents nevertheless recognise the importance of staff. The Commission's modernisation agenda for higher education states that 'the reform and modernisation of Europe's higher education depends on the competence and motivation of teachers and researchers' (European Commission, 2011, p. 5). The agenda acknowledges that 'teaching and research staffing has often not kept pace with expanding student numbers which puts pressure on already strained capacities' (ibid., p. 5). Thus, it calls for 'better working conditions including transparent and fair recruitment procedures, better initial and continuing professional development, and better recognition and reward of teaching and research excellence' (ibid., p. 5). It also highlights the need for sufficient institutional autonomy, enabling higher education institutions to attract and retain the best teaching and research staff. Moreover, the agenda pays special attention to international networking, promoting mobility opportunities for academic staff.

Demands on higher education have been increasing, but little attention has been paid to the impact on academic staff.

The Eurydice report is a first step to filling this information gap.

This Brief presents some of the main findings from the Eurydice report *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017* focusing on areas of most relevance for policy-making:

- Similarities and differences in defining academic staff;
- Human resource policy development;
- Key characteristics of academic staff;
- Careers, job security and working conditions;
- Teaching;
- Quality assurance and monitoring.

Who are academic staff?

Defining the concept of academic staff in higher education may seem a straightforward issue. Rather as the term 'school teacher' immediately invokes a clear picture of the profession in the mind's eye, the notion of academic staff in higher education is also ubiquitous and likely to convey a defined image of higher education teachers and researchers. However, while the profession may be easily recognised, the fact that academic staff are to be found in every country may also obscure the reality that they are far from being a homogeneous group.

Academic staff are a heterogeneous group

The degree of difference in academic staff categories from one country to another is a striking feature of the European higher education landscape.

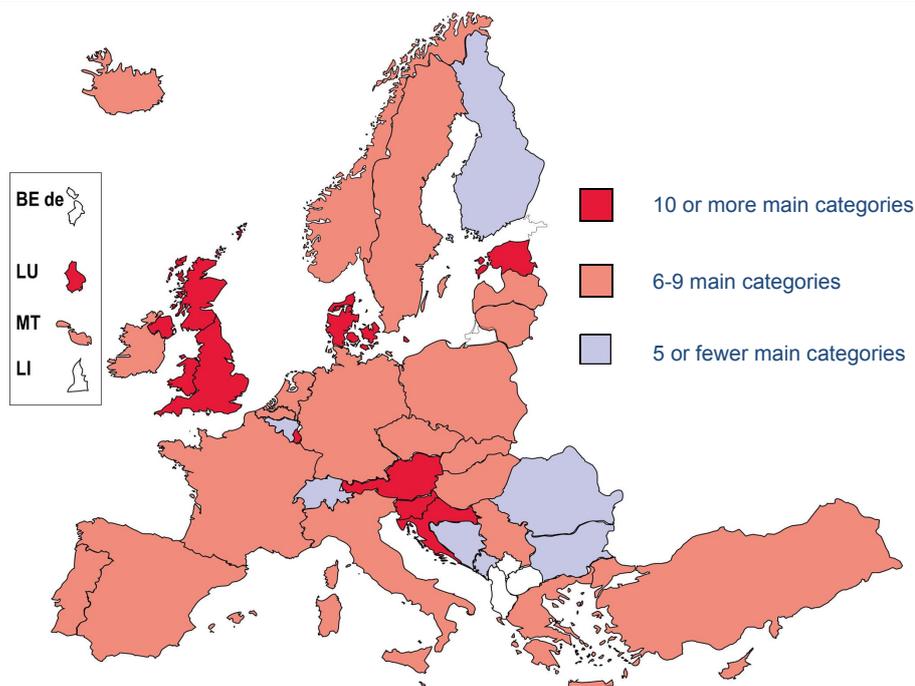
Academic staff can be differentiated by a number of features: their main activities (teaching and research; teaching only or research only), the type of institution in which they work (university or other higher education institution), their contractual status (indefinite or fixed-term contracts) as well as their integration or not within a clearly defined career path.

Comparing any two European countries by the main characteristics defining academic staff results in quite different overviews. Even the number of main categories of staff reveals significant differences between countries. There are 10 higher education systems with 10 or more main categories of academic staff, and seven with five or less. Between these extremes, 22 systems have six to nine main staff categories.

The degree of difference between categories of academic staff, as well as between national systems, is wider than often assumed.

Within each of these categories staff may be employed on fixed term or indefinite contracts, may or may not be required to hold particular qualifications, and may have teaching and/or research defined as primary tasks. The combination of these factors provides a complex framework within which academic staff are located.

Figure 1: Number of main categories of academic staff in higher education institutions, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

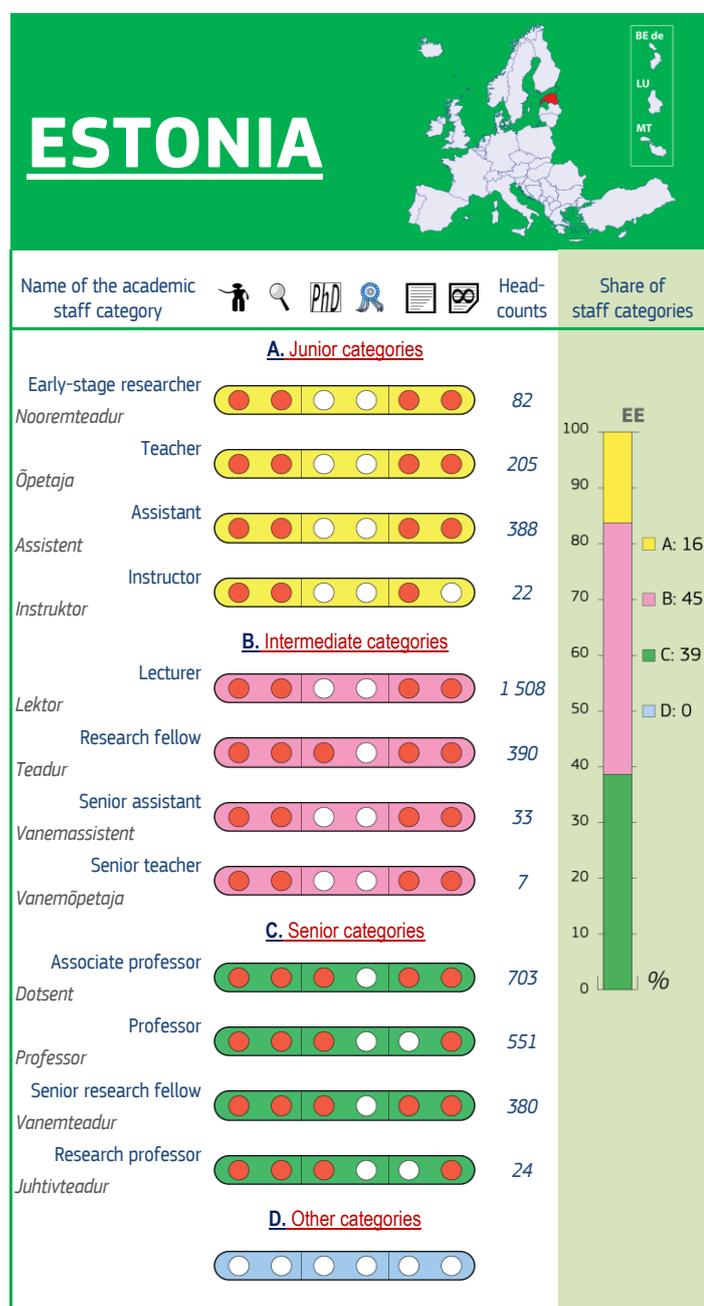
The number of main categories is taken from the national diagrams published as Annex 1 to the Eurydice report European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017, pp 107-144. The national diagrams aim to show the 'most representative categories' which normally refers to categories comprising at least 5% of the total academic staff population. In some countries, however, and particularly those with a large number of staff categories, a category with a smaller proportion of staff may still be an important structural element of the system, and are shown.

Categories of academic staff that have only management responsibilities, visiting academics and honorary staff categories have been systematically excluded.

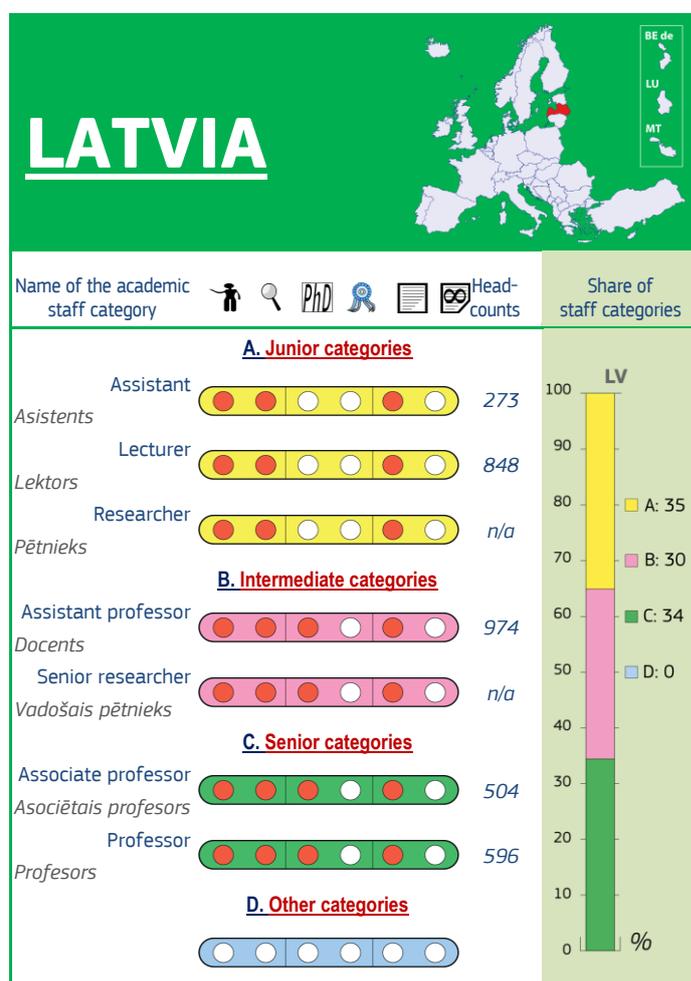
As an example, the national diagrams ⁽¹⁾ that follow show two neighbouring countries with similar demographic characteristics – Estonia and Latvia. These countries display considerable differences with regard to higher education staff categories. Estonia reports 12 main categories, while Latvia only seven. In Estonia, staff employed in 10 of the categories have the possibility to work on indefinite contracts. However, in Latvia, all categories of academic staff are employed on fixed term contracts. In other aspects, such as qualification requirements, there are a number of similarities between the two systems, with the PhD being required for employment in most intermediate categories, and for all senior categories.

⁽¹⁾ Further information on the methodology used to produce the national diagrams can be found in Annex 1 of the main report, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017, p. 107.

National diagrams of academic staff categories



Source: Eurydice, statistics based on HTM, 2016 (reference year of data: academic year 2015/16).



Source: Eurydice, statistics based on IZM, 2016 (reference year of data: academic year 2015/16).



Such pictures of structural differences and similarities can be observed between all European higher education systems. The overall European picture is therefore a mosaic with common elements, but considerable diversity as well. No two systems are identical in respect of these main structural elements, and there are no clear patterns related to the size of the country.

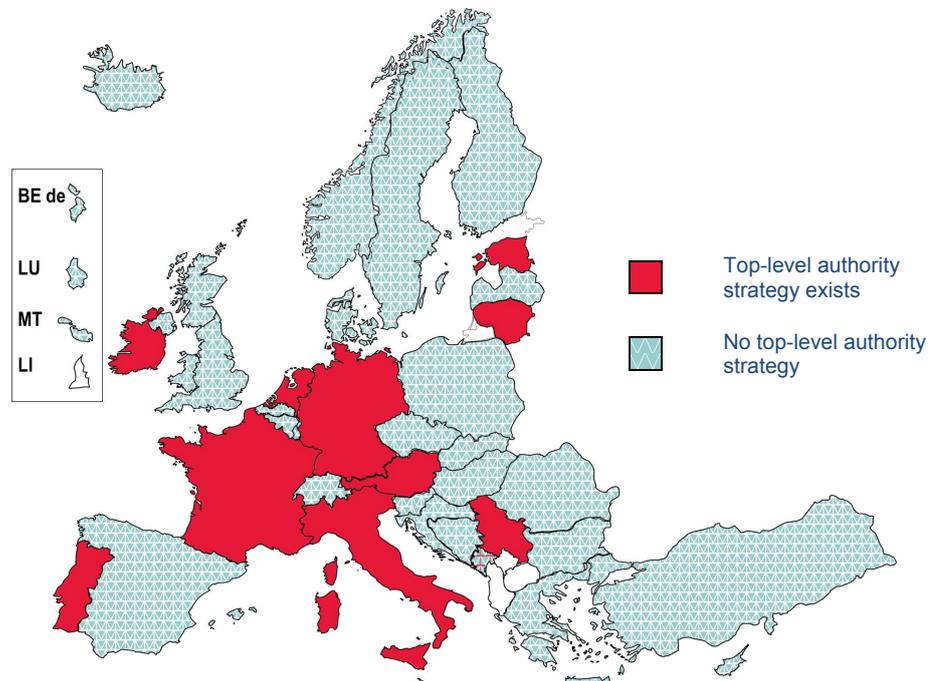
Higher education institutions are generally responsible for human resource policies

Many systems lack high level mid- and long-term planning of academic staff needs.

The higher education sector is key to the shift towards knowledge society, and has been experiencing a significant increase in demands particularly over the last two decades. At such a period, top-level authorities could be expected to have clear strategies in place with regard to human resource development, in order to ensure sufficient numbers of high quality academic staff to guide the change process. However, this is rarely the case in Europe. Few countries have developed mid- or long-term national strategies for human resource planning in higher education. In most countries this responsibility is entirely managed at the level of higher education institutions, with some monitoring of trends at national level.

National strategies set out a policy framework with clear objectives and goals which can then be supported by specific measures, actions and monitoring. Countries without an overarching strategy may still have initiatives in particular areas, usually with more narrowly focused goals. Where national strategies exist, they commonly cover issues such as gender distribution, and the allocation of indefinite and fixed-term contracts, but may also cover topics such as mobility, training and career structures.

Figure 2: Existence of top-level authority mid/long-term strategy on human resources planning in higher education, 2015/16



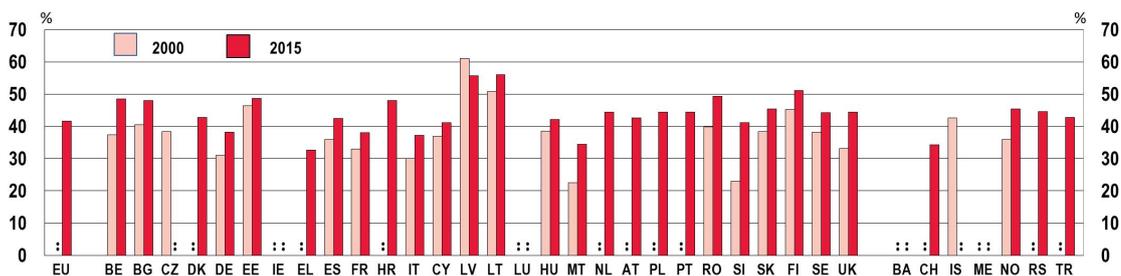
Source: Eurydice.

Gender issues remain

In the last 15 years there has been a substantial increase in the share of female academic staff. Across Europe, however, women still make up only 40 % of the total population. In most countries, the increase is situated between around two and twelve percentage points. Latvia is the only country registering a decrease in the proportion of female staff between 2000 and 2015 (around six percentage points). However, in Latvia, females count for more than half of all academics and, already in 2000, their proportion was particularly high.

Overall, the share of female academic staff is increasing – but women remain under-represented in most countries.

Figure 3: Female academic staff (%), 2000 and 2015



%	EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
2000	:	37.4	40.5	38.4	:	31.0	46.4	:	:	36.0	33.0	:	30.0	37.0	61.2	50.8	:	38.5
2015	41.6	48.6	48.1	:	42.8	38.2	48.7	:	32.7	42.5	38.0	48.0	37.3	41.1	55.7	56.1	:	42.1
%	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	BA	CH	IS	ME	NO	RS	TR
2000	22.5	:	:	:	:	39.8	23.1	38.4	45.3	38.3	33.1	:	:	42.6	:	35.9	:	:
2015	34.4	44.4	42.7	44.4	44.4	49.4	41.1	45.4	51.1	44.3	44.4	:	34.3	:	:	45.5	44.6	42.8

Source: Eurostat (UOE data collection). Online data codes: *educ_iteach*; *educ_uoe_perd03* (data extracted June 2017).

Explanatory notes

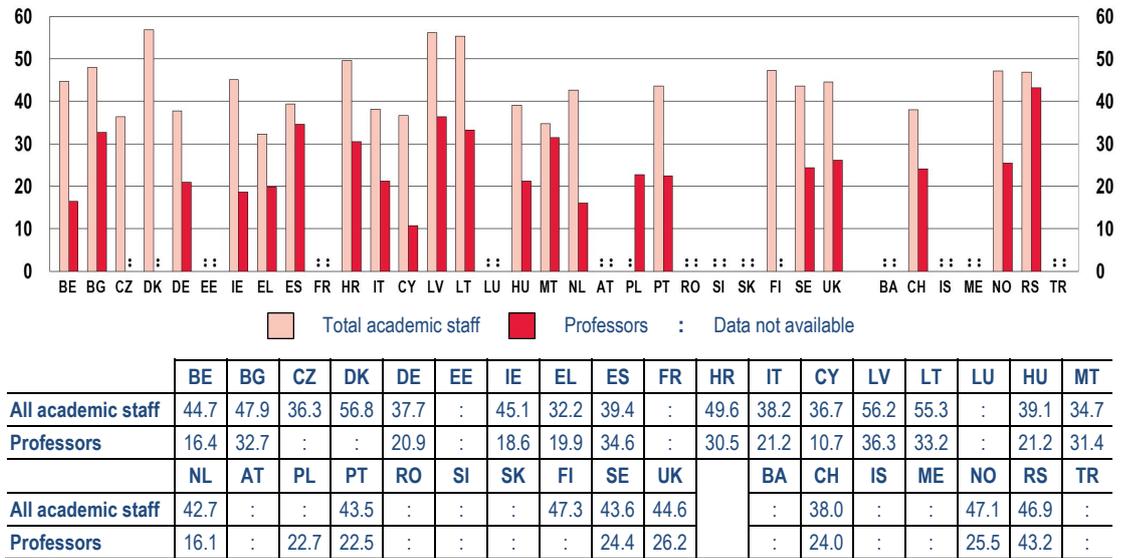
The reference year of the figure is 2015. Countries for which 2015 data was not available are represented by 2014 data (see Country-specific notes).

Data refers to academic staff at ISCED 2011 levels 5-8. It covers all types of higher education institutions (i.e. public, private government dependent and private government independent).

While there is an upward trend in female participation among academic staff, women remain particularly underrepresented in higher ranks. This aspect is important when taking into consideration the fact that there is often more job security for senior categories in the profession. Women are therefore likely to be underrepresented in prestigious and influential academic positions, and more exposed to precarious employment conditions.

Women are particularly underrepresented in higher ranking academic positions.

Figure 4: Share of women among total academic staff and professors, 2013



Source: European Tertiary Education Register (data extracted November 2016).

Explanatory notes

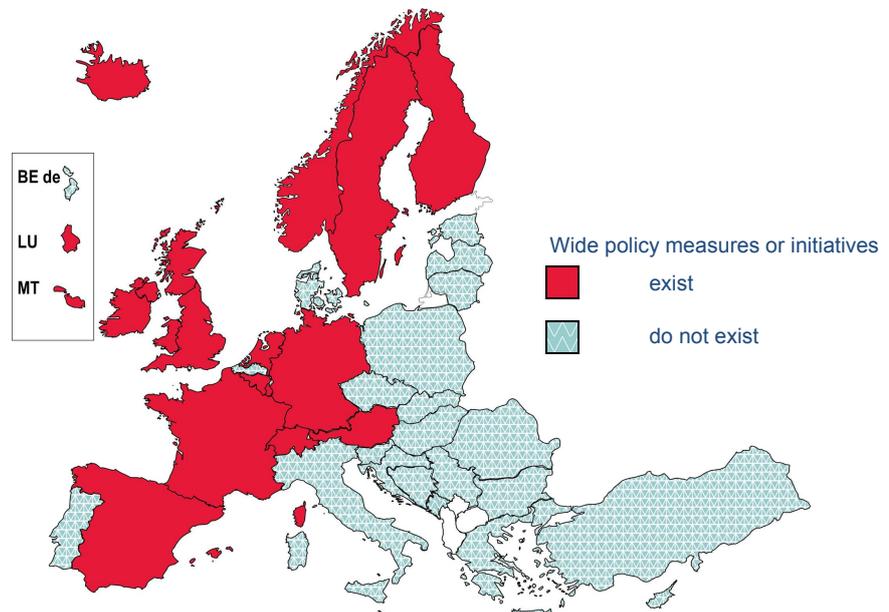
While the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) includes data on academic staff in three types of institutions – public, private and private government-dependent –, the figure only considers public and private government-dependent institutions.

The definition of professors (referred to as 'full professors') used for the ETER data collection is available in Lepori et al. (2016, p. 58).

Equal opportunities initiatives are more commonly found in northern and western European countries.

In some countries (18 systems), equal opportunities legislation or other initiatives have been put in place to improve gender balance. Belgium (French Community), Malta and the Netherlands have specific measures and/or targets for higher education. It is interesting to note the concentration of such action in northern and western parts of Europe, and its absence in southern and eastern Europe.

Figure 5: Existence of wide policy measures or initiatives aimed at preventing or limiting gender differences in academic ranks, 2015/16



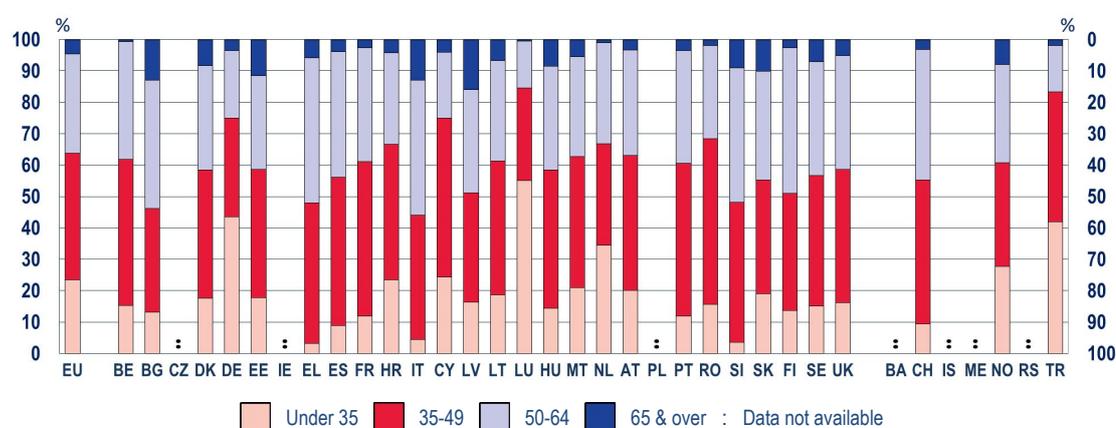
Source: Eurydice.

Some countries face challenges of renewal of academic staff

The share of 50-64-year-olds is above 40 % in Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Finland and Switzerland, and in five countries – Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Latvia and Slovakia – the proportion of staff above 65 exceeds 10 %. All these countries have a relatively low share of staff in the category under 35, which could signal some difficulties in the generational renewal of the academic staff population.

Countries with a large share of older academic staff are likely to be facing problems with renewal of the profession.

Figure 6: Academic staff by age groups (%), 2015



%	EU	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
< 35	23.5	15.4	13.3	:	17.7	43.6	17.8	:	3.3	8.9	12.0	23.5	4.6	24.4	16.5	18.7	55.2	14.4
35-49	40.3	46.6	33.0	:	40.8	31.5	40.9	:	44.7	47.3	49.1	43.2	39.6	50.6	34.9	42.7	29.5	44.1
50-64	31.7	37.4	40.9	:	33.3	21.5	29.8	:	46.2	40.0	36.4	29.1	43.0	21.0	32.9	32.0	14.9	33.1
≥ 65	4.5	0.6	12.8	:	8.2	3.5	11.5	:	5.7	3.8	2.5	4.2	12.8	3.9	15.8	6.6	0.4	8.4

%	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	BA	CH	IS	ME	NO	RS	TR
< 35	21.0	34.6	20.1	:	11.9	15.8	3.6	19.2	13.8	15.2	16.2	:	9.5	:	:	27.9	:	42.0
35-49	41.9	32.3	43.0	:	48.7	52.7	44.6	36.2	37.3	41.6	42.5	:	45.9	:	:	33.0	:	41.4
50-64	31.8	32.3	33.7	:	35.8	29.6	42.8	34.6	46.3	36.3	36.2	:	41.5	:	:	31.3	:	14.8
≥ 65	5.3	0.9	3.2	:	3.5	1.9	8.9	10.0	2.6	7.0	5.0	:	3.1	:	:	7.9	:	1.8

Source: Eurostat (UOE data collection). Online data code: *educ_uoe_perp01* (data extracted March 2017). Calculated by Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The reference year of the figure is 2015. Countries for which 2015 data was not available are represented by 2014 data (see Country-specific notes).

Data refers to academic staff at ISCED 2011 levels 5-8. It covers all types of higher education institutions (i.e. public, private government dependent and private government independent).

For the definition of academic staff within the UOE data collection, see Figure 1.3.

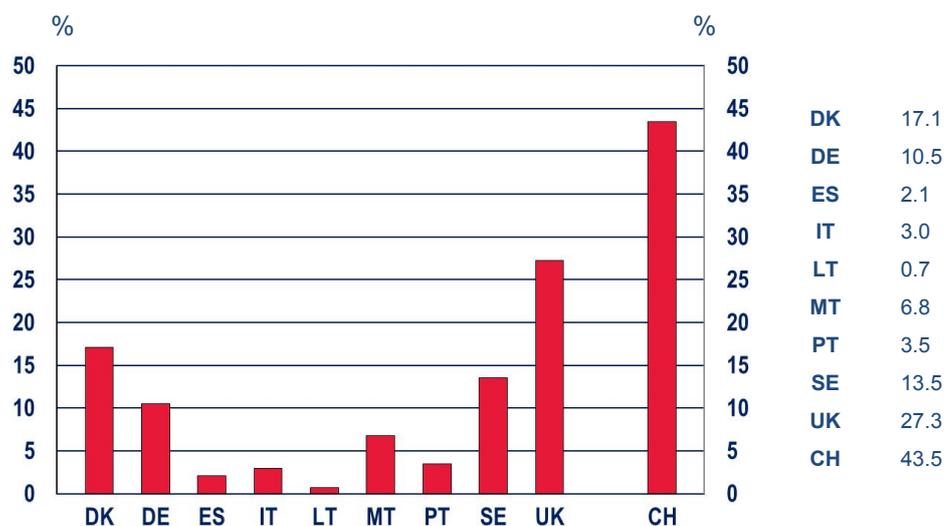
Some higher education systems have attracted many more international staff than others

Internationalisation of European higher education systems has been an important aspect of European and national policy debates over the past two decades. Although the majority of systems have defined strategic objectives related to the internationalisation of higher education, academic staff tend to be mentioned explicitly only in relation to mobility, with most systems monitoring staff mobility flows. Half of the countries reported central level measures to encourage academic staff to participate in joint international programmes or to teach in foreign languages in home universities.

While some countries have very few foreign academic staff, other systems employ large numbers.

There is a great diversity among higher education systems in terms of the share of foreign citizens among academic staff. Although information is not comprehensively available across all European countries, statistical data are collected as part of the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER). From the sample countries below it is clear that there is significant diversity among countries: Lithuania (0.7 %) and Spain (2.1 %) had the lowest share of foreign academic staff employed in 2013, while the United Kingdom (27 %) and Switzerland (44 %) had the highest.

Figure 7: Share of foreign citizens among academic staff, 2013



Source: European Tertiary Education Register (data extracted November 2016).

Explanatory note

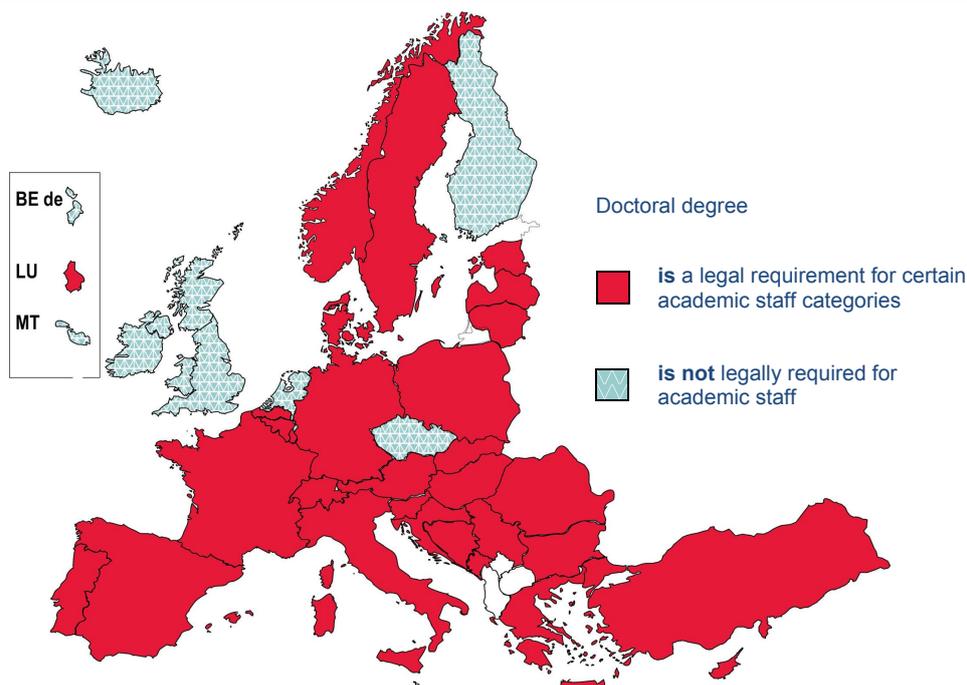
While the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) includes data on academic staff in three types of institutions – public, private and private government-dependent – the figure only considers public and private government-dependent institutions.

Academic careers demand strong qualifications and performance

In many countries, the doctorate is legally required for the appointment to some academic staff categories or positions, particularly at universities.

The PhD is very often required for an academic position.

Figure 8: Doctoral degree as a legal requirement for accessing certain academic staff categories, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

Countries with several higher education sectors that differ in terms of qualification requirements towards academic staff are represented by the university sector.

Habilitation

Habilitation refers to an advanced academic qualification that may be the minimum requirement for a particular staff category, role or position. It does not give access to a concrete position within an institution, but may be necessary for being recruited or progress through one's career to that position. It is usually organised through a formal and structured evaluation of achievements and experiences, but it is not based on open competitions or other competitive testing.

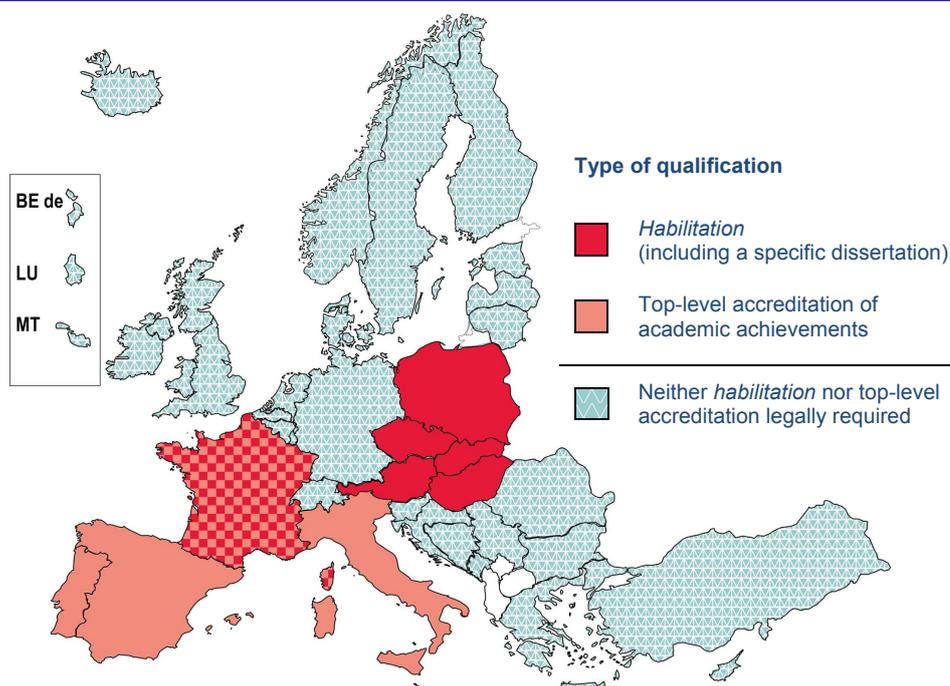
Top-level accreditation of academic achievements

Top-level accreditation of academic achievements refers to a formal, structured and centrally coordinated evaluation of academic achievements and experiences. It does not give access to a concrete position within an institution, but may be necessary for being recruited or progress through one's career to that position. Contrary to the habilitation, the top-level accreditation does not include a specific dissertation/thesis and may include some elements of competition.

Some systems require additional formal qualifications and requirements to be eligible for senior academic positions.

Academics intending to progress towards intermediate and/or senior positions commonly have to comply with a range of further qualification requirements. In some higher education systems, the *habilitation* or a centrally coordinated accreditation are legally required for accessing intermediate or senior positions in academia.

Figure 9: Postdoctoral qualification as a legal prerequisite for accessing certain academic staff categories, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Countries with several higher education sectors that differ in terms of qualification requirements towards academic staff are represented by the university sector.

A postdoctoral qualification is understood either as *habilitation* or as top-level accreditation of academic achievements. Qualifications that do not fall under these categories are not considered.

The figure only considers *habilitation* procedures that include a specific dissertation/thesis (with or without other elements).

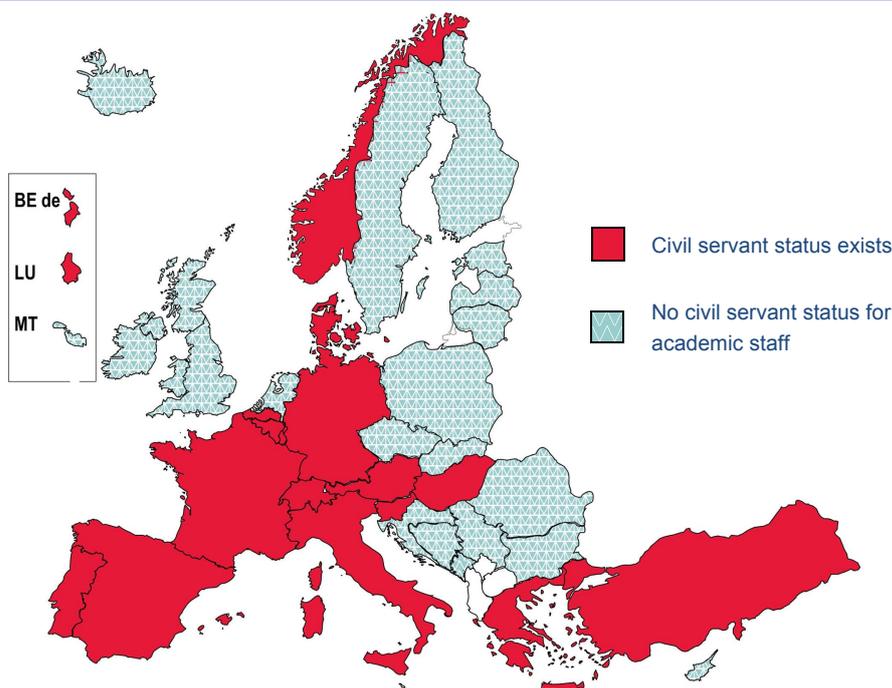
Job security is not the norm in the academic world

While in almost all European countries the higher education sector offers both fixed-term and indefinite job opportunities, in some countries all academics are employed on fixed-term contracts.

In some countries, academic staff may be appointed with the expectation of a lifelong career as career civil servants. However, even in countries where such a status exists, it is open to some – but not all – academic staff.

The share of fixed-term and indefinite contracts varies considerably from country to country.

Figure 10: Existence of civil servant status for academic staff, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

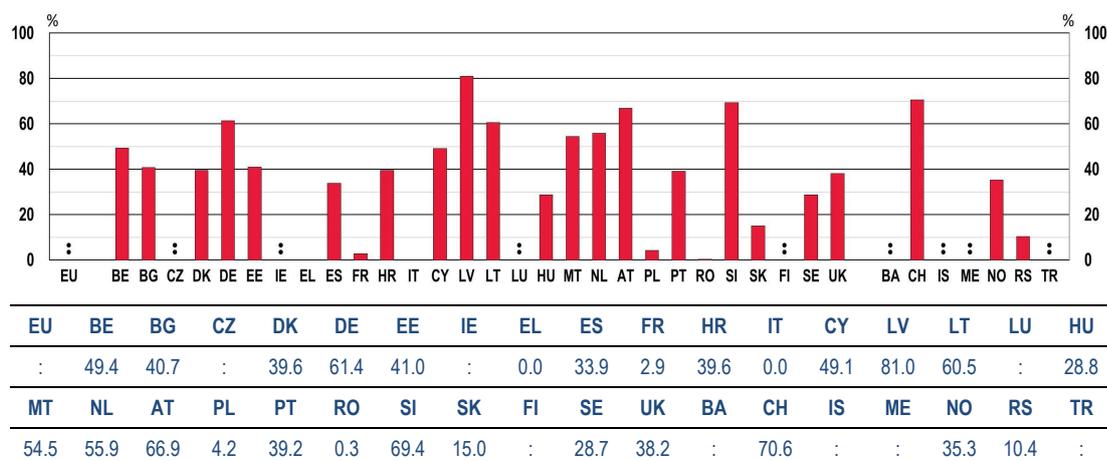
Across Europe, the term 'civil servant' is not defined in the same way and the status does not bring the same benefits. When referring to 'civil servants', the figure refers to staff employed by the public authority/administration, usually following an open competition. When referring to 'civil servants', the figure refers to staff employed by the public authority/administration, usually following an open competition. The employment/appointment is in accordance with legislation regulating the functioning of public administrations, distinct from that governing contractual relations in the public or private sector.

In addition to civil servant status, contractual stability is often determined by the career stage, with junior academics commonly facing more precarious employment conditions compared to their senior counterparts. Indeed, the report's national diagrams show that in 32 systems, junior staff may be employed on fixed-term contracts, while for senior academic staff this is the case in only 19 systems.

Precarious employment conditions also appear to be increasing. Recent trends reported by several countries point to reduced employment opportunities in academia and an increasing proportion of staff in externally funded positions. However, to compensate for this trend, some countries have recently implemented regulatory changes aiming to facilitate access to indefinite contracts.

Patterns of part-time employment also vary considerably across Europe. It is non-existent or rare in Greece, France, Italy, Poland and Romania, while in Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland between 60 and 80 % of all academic staff work on a part-time basis.

Figure 11: Academic staff working part-time as % of all academic staff, 2015



Source: UOE data collection. Online data code: *educ_uoe_perd05* (data extracted June 2017).

Explanatory notes

Data refers to academic staff at ISCED 2011 levels 5-8.

Within the UOE data collection (UNESCO-UIS/OECD/Eurostat, 2016, p. 42), the concept of academic staff includes:

- Personnel employed at the tertiary level of education whose primary assignment is instruction or research;
- Personnel who hold an academic rank with such titles as professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, lecturer or the equivalent of any of these academic ranks;
- Personnel with other titles (e.g. dean, director, associate dean, assistant dean, chair or head of department), if their principal activity is instruction or research.

When referring to full-time and part-time employment of educational personnel – including academic staff –, the UOE data collection uses two concepts: 'contractual working hours' and 'normal or statutory working hours' (ibid., pp. 28-29).

Academics outside the main career path often have temporary employment contracts

Growing demands on higher education institutions at a time of financial constraint have led to more precarious employment conditions for some academic staff.

In line with general societal trends, academic staff career structures are becoming less dependable than in the past. While in all countries a typical academic career path – moving from junior academic positions through an intermediate stage and on to a more senior position – may exist, such a path is not necessarily accessible to all academic staff.

Staff categories that are outside traditional career paths have most likely emerged in response to growing demands on higher education institutions. Indeed, in recent years demands on higher education institutions – whether for more teaching, research or other services to society – have been growing at a time of financial constraint. This has required new approaches to staffing, and the development of new staff categories, as resources were not available to employ sufficient numbers of staff within the traditional categories. Even in highly regulated systems, higher education institutions usually have autonomy for managing these newly created academic staff categories. Such categories, however, are often likely to be affected by precarious employment conditions, and it is now commonplace in many systems to find staff employed on fixed-term contracts outside a recognised career path.

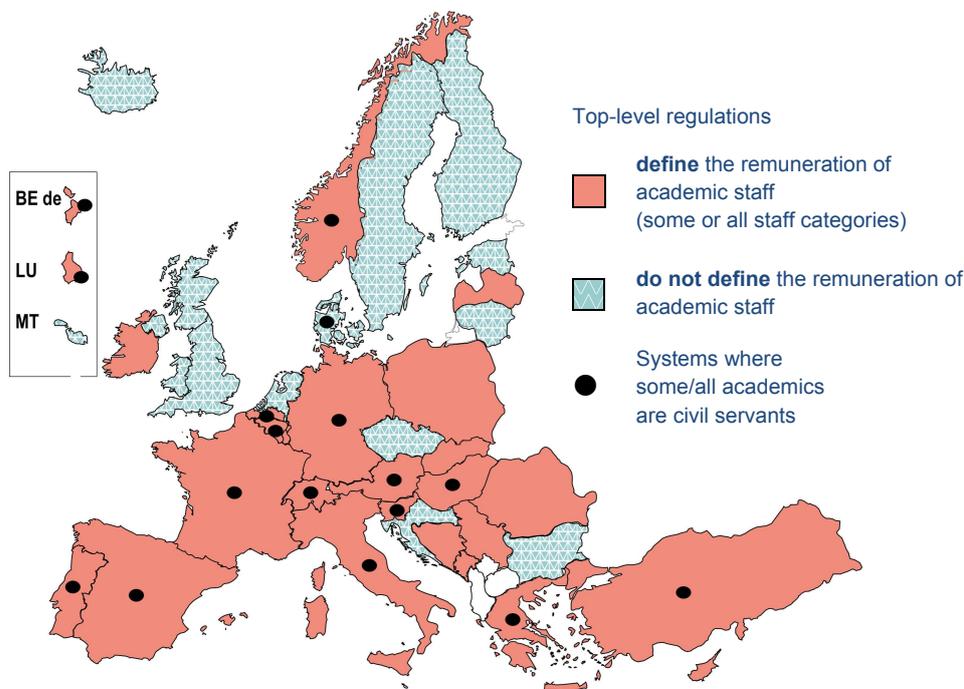
Public authorities commonly regulate academic staff salaries

In most European higher education systems, there are top-level regulations defining academic salaries and/or salary scales. This is almost always the case when a civil servant status exists.

Around one third of European higher education systems do not regulate salaries. This generally implies a high degree of institutional autonomy in matters related to the remuneration of academics, but collective agreements or comparable steering instruments may also be used, as in Denmark, Malta, the Netherlands, Finland, the United Kingdom and Iceland. Negotiations between employers and trade unions were also the method for setting salary levels in Sweden until 2016, but now they are mainly agreed through the so-called 'salary talk' between the employee and her or his superior.

Academic staff salaries are regulated in a majority of countries.

Figure 12: Top-level regulations on the remuneration of academic staff, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Top-level regulations refer to legislation or other regulations issued by central (top-level) authorities. Collective agreements are not covered.

General labour legislation defining the statutory minimum wage applicable to all employees is not covered.

Countries with several higher education sectors that differ in terms of regulations are represented by the university sector.

Performance-related pay is possible in virtually all European higher education systems. In theory, this means that successful achievement of work objectives can be reflected in remuneration. However, given other trends in employment of academic staff – including the scarcity of secure positions, and increasing use of fixed-length contracts – many academics may be experiencing an increasing 'performance pressure' in various areas, including research, teaching or qualification upgrading.

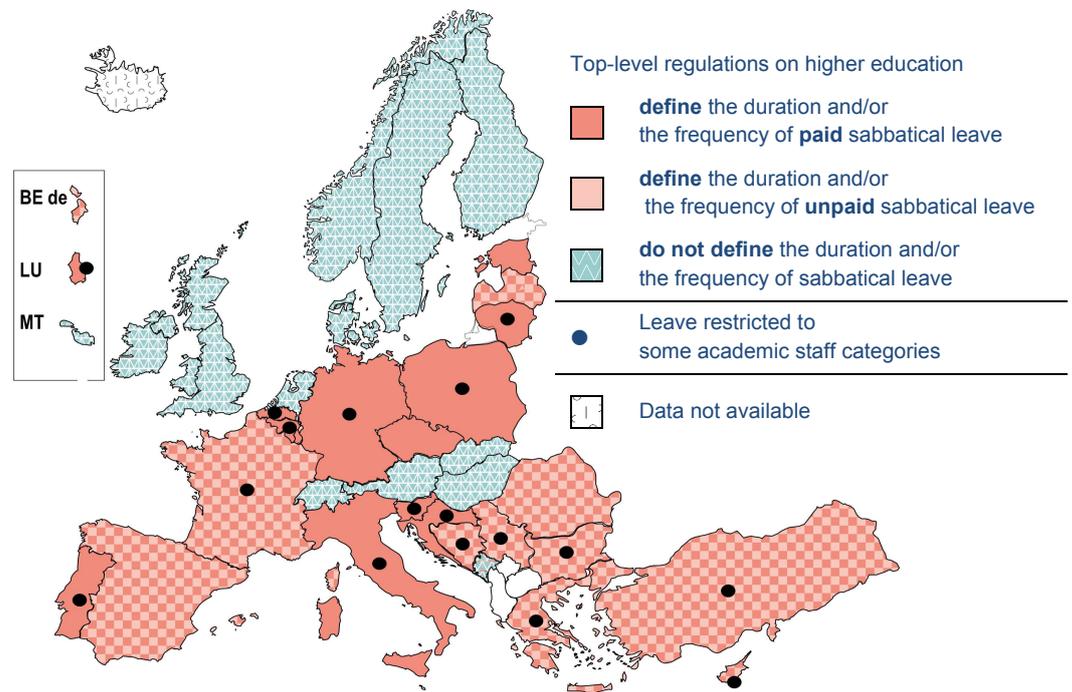
Performance-related pay is possible in almost all higher education systems, but academics may also be experiencing performance-related pressure.

Sabbaticals are an attractive feature of academic careers, but are not available to all

Paid sabbatical leave is often restricted to more senior academic staff.

The efforts required of academic staff may still lead to some substantial, career-specific benefits. Indeed, in most European countries, higher education regulations stipulate the possibility for academics to take a paid sabbatical leave. While this is a rather attractive aspect of the academic profession, the opportunity to take such a leave is usually restricted to some staff categories, in particular medium-rank and senior academics.

Figure 13: Top-level regulations on sabbatical leave for academic staff, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

'Sabbatical leave' refers to a leave that provides the opportunity for academic staff to dedicate a certain period of time to specific activities (rather than to all their usual duties). Commonly, sabbaticals focus on research, but may also concentrate on other activities, such as professional development or teaching at another institution.

Top-level regulations refer to legislation or other regulations issued by central (top-level) authorities. Collective agreements are not covered.

Only top-level regulations referring to higher education are considered. General labour legislation on paid or unpaid leave applicable to employees in different sectors is not covered.

Sabbatical leave for academic staff explicitly dedicated to drafting PhD thesis is not covered.

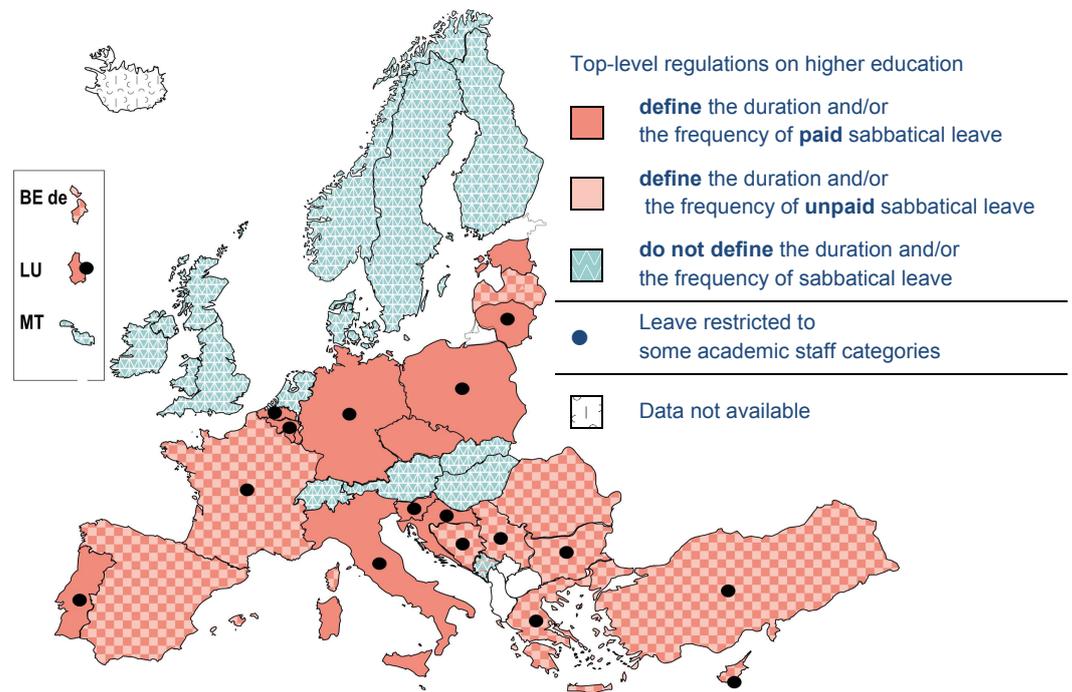
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Countries with several higher education sectors that differ in terms of regulations are represented by the university sector.

Quality of teaching cannot be taken for granted

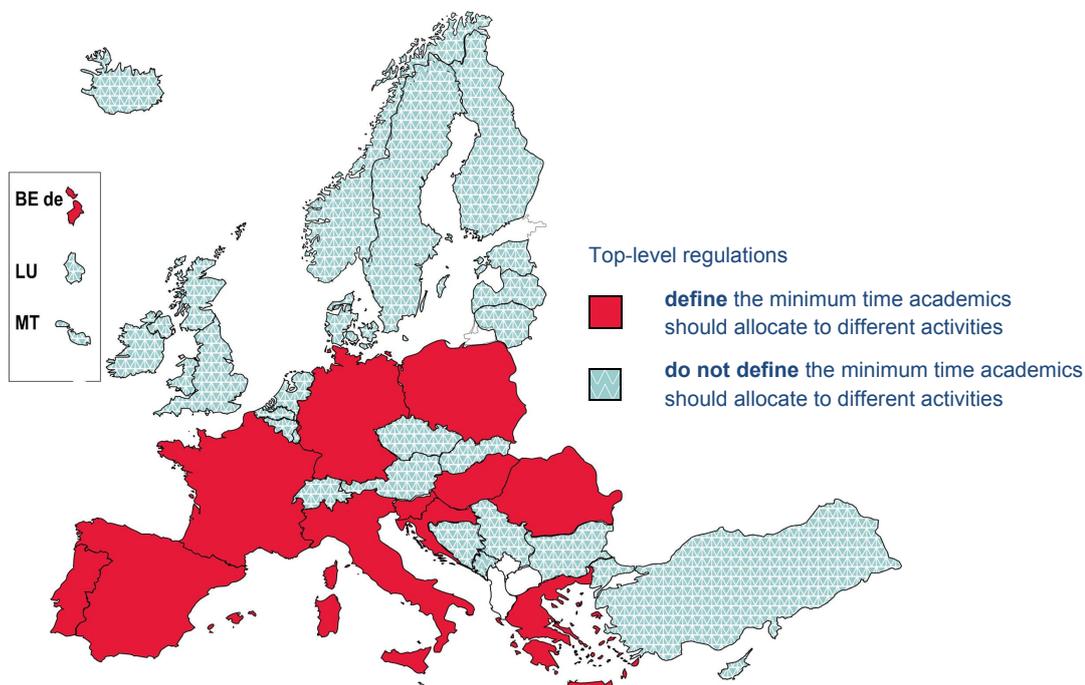
A number of findings point to concerns with regard to the quality of current and future teaching. As the PhD is very often a required qualification for entry to the academic profession, and as teaching is one of the key responsibilities of academic staff, many PhD candidates would hope and expect to develop teaching skills during their degree. However, this is far from the normal practice in Europe.

PhD candidates do not necessarily follow training targeting their teaching skills. Indeed, only a few countries have legislation requiring teaching practice to be a compulsory element of doctoral degree programmes. Moreover, when teaching assignments are stipulated in regulations, they generally apply only to some categories of PhD candidates. Survey data also indicates that PhD graduates often express dissatisfaction with the level of teaching competences they have acquired.

If the main entry qualification to the academic profession does not focus on equipping candidates with teaching skills, there may be other system mechanisms to compensate. However, the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) focusing on teaching is also quite variable. Indeed, across Europe, there are almost no large-scale CPD programmes providing academics with the opportunity to improve their teaching skills. Most initiatives in this area are isolated activities of individual higher education institutions.

Although academic staff require a PhD to be able to teach in higher education, the qualification may not equip candidates with high level teaching skills.

Figure 14: Top-level regulations on the minimum time academics should allocate to different activities, 2015/16



Source: Eurydice.

In about half of the countries, there is some top-level regulation of the workload of academics, with twelve systems prescribing minimum teaching-related activities for at least some categories of staff. There is a tendency to demand more teaching from junior and middle-ranking staff, and less teaching from the most experienced (senior) academics. This cultural reality undermines teaching, as good performance and career

Teaching lacks parity of esteem with research in academic career paths.

In addition to quality assurance, top-level authorities often collect additional information on employment and working conditions. Most commonly, they collect data on contractual arrangements of academics and/or their salaries. In around one third of countries, the list of aspects that are subject to top-level monitoring is more extensive (i.e. three or more listed aspects). In contrast, four higher education systems (the French Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece and Romania) report no top-level monitoring of any aspect.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

This report has made a first attempt at comparing some aspects of reality experienced by academic staff across the different European countries. Several elements suggest that countries face challenges requiring policy attention. Overall, the picture is one of significant diversity, and therefore the following issues, requiring attention by policy-makers and higher education institutions, may be perceived more or less strongly in different parts of Europe:

1) Creating a level playing field for academic careers

Countries generally have a traditional academic career structure, with some academic staff able to travel along a secure path. However, countries also provided evidence of parallel academic jobs that are not part of a career path. Working conditions for staff within a career track and outside it can be significantly different. In particular, many academic staff outside the traditional career path are employed on fixed-term contracts, with unclear career perspectives, and less opportunity to benefit from some advantages enjoyed by their counterparts within the career path. Many countries also have different categories of academic staff in different types of higher education institution employed under different conditions.

While there may be good reasons to explain the current situation, this dual academic staffing reality may cause problems for the future. For example, twelve of the sixteen academic staff trade unions that responded to the project survey reported that their country faces either an important or very important challenge of academic staff leaving the profession. This may be exacerbated in several systems by the problem of having a large proportion of academic staff at the end of their careers.

Academic career paths may therefore not be open to many potential and actual academic staff, and this concern should be considered by policy-makers.

2) Ensuring a good balance between institutional autonomy and governmental oversight

A considerable number of issues in the report could not be examined in depth, as they are handled in many countries under the autonomy of higher education institutions. While this is part of a democratic higher education governance system, autonomy is a feature of a complex relationship between public authorities and higher education institutions. Indeed, whatever the degree of operational autonomy, public higher education institutions all depend on public authority decision-making: how much public money should be invested, and what are the key priorities are among the important questions for the higher education sector and stakeholders alike.

To respond to societal demands, higher education institutions have to be able to employ high quality academic staff. The important task of planning academic staff resources must be worked out between public authorities and higher education institutions, with both actors having their role to play. As mid to long term strategic planning is often weak or absent, the challenge is to ensure that such planning processes are now established.

3) Improving information gathering on academic staff

The report reveals that the nature and extent of information gathered about the employment and working conditions of academic staff varies greatly between countries. This lack of information hinders evidence-based policy-making, making it difficult to identify effective and successful practice.

Equally there is a lack of comparable European statistics on academic employment and working conditions, including on matters such as salaries and proportions of staff employed on different types of contracts. Again this limits the extent to which countries are able to learn from each other, and build on good practice in Europe.

Establishing comparable data in these areas would require an investment in the development of commonly shared concepts and definitions. It would also lead to a better picture of the complex world in which academic staff operate.

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