

RESEARCH TALENT IS  
EUROPE'S FUTURE

# MSCA PRESIDENCY CONFERENCE 2025 REPORT

On 18-19 September 2025, the MSCA Presidency Conference brought together early-career researchers, university leaders, funders, policymakers, and industry partners in Lyngby, Denmark. Organised by the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) under the Danish EU Council Presidency, the event explored how Europe can attract, retain, and empower talent through people-centred research careers. Talent is not only the driver of competitiveness, but also of democracy and trust in science. Investing in people means sustainable careers, fair recognition, and strong networks across borders and sectors. From purpose to diversity, evaluation, mobility, and culture, participants set a common agenda for systemic reform.

## IN NUMBERS



**400+**  
Participants



**70+**  
Nationalities  
represented



**19**  
Sessions

*'Fellowships attract global talent,  
but Europe must also retain us.'*

Farshid Naseri, Former MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Embed purpose, diversity, stability, and well-being as pillars of research careers.
- Redefine excellence to reward openness, collaboration, societal impact, and mentoring.
- Enable recognised career pathways through cross-border and intersectoral mobility.
- Strengthen universities' role as social actors, anchoring competitiveness, democracy, and trust.



*'Talent moves. And where  
talent lands, the future is  
made.'*

Anders Bjarklev, President,  
Technical University of Denmark



The conference in Lyngby concluded with a clear call: Europe must act boldly to translate values into structures. Precarity and fragmented systems hold talent back, while openness, mobility, and institutional trust can propel it forward. Building on five shared priorities – purpose, diversity, evaluation, mobility, and research and workplace culture – the conference's thematic discussions generated concrete recommendations for Europe's research landscape, explored on the following pages.

### Theme 1

## PURPOSE-DRIVEN UNIVERSITIES



Universities are increasingly challenged to redefine excellence: not as being the best *in* the world, but as being the best *for* the world. The purpose-driven model shifts focus from rankings and income to lasting contributions to society and long-term well-being. Both keynote and panellists emphasised that embedding purpose requires governance reforms, engagement of students and early-career researchers, and accountability towards wider society. A purpose-driven university is not just aspirational – it demands re-anchoring identity, structures, and decision-making in sustainability and societal good.

*'To be purpose-driven, universities must connect to their local communities and let society inspire their research topics.'*

Emmanuelle Gardan, Coimbra Group

### THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Redefine excellence** to prioritise societal contribution and long-term well-being over rankings.

**Reform governance** to integrate early-career researchers and diverse stakeholders.

**Strengthen accountability** by linking universities' strategies to societal trust and democratic values.

**Develop purpose-led strategies** that guide research, education, and operations towards sustainability.

### Theme 2

## ACADEMIC TALENT PROGRAMMES



Talent programmes are powerful tools to align individual growth with institutional priorities. Beyond mentoring, mobility, and leadership training, the strongest programmes foster belonging, purpose, and confidence - values as vital as skills. Yet precarity and structural barriers still undermine access, especially at critical career transitions. To be transformative, programmes must be inclusive, co-created with early-career researchers (ECRs), and balance mobility with long-term stability. By embedding kindness, diversity, and leadership development, talent programmes can prepare researchers not just for jobs, but for sustainable, impactful careers.

*'Talent programmes can change lives, not just for the obvious professors, but particularly when they reach those at the margins.'*

Julie Laursen, participant, UCPH Forward programme

### THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Co-create talent programmes** with ECRs to reflect their real needs.

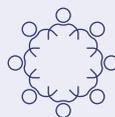
**Ensure inclusiveness** by opening programmes to marginalised and under-represented researchers.

**Train and incentivise supervisors** to provide leadership and raise ECR profiles.

**Balance mobility opportunities** with stability of contracts, funding, and rules.

### Theme 3

## WORKPLACE CULTURE, DEI, AND WELL-BEING



Academic careers are shaped as much by culture as by contracts. Participants stressed that sustainable careers require more than funding or rankings – they demand trust, fairness, and belonging. Well-being must be treated as a test of system quality, not an optional add-on, with employment security and psychological safety built into structures. Supervision is central, requiring training and institutional backing. At the same time, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is inseparable from excellence: it must be embedded into policies, mobility, and recognition, with leaders accountable for progress.

*'If people are our greatest resource, how come we tolerate workplaces that treat them anything but?'*

Marcela Linková, Czech Academy of Sciences

### THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Make well-being**, psychological safety, and employment security structural pillars of research culture.

**Co-create and embed DEI** into policies, mobility schemes, and assessment systems with leadership accountability.

**Mandate supervisor training** and incentivise inclusive leadership practices.

**Track and share progress** through toolkits and key performance indicators.

## Theme 4

# RESEARCH(ER) EVALUATION



How researchers are evaluated shapes not only careers but also research culture. Narrow metrics like citations and journal impact factors have long dominated; but they capture only part of the story – and risk distorting research priorities and values. The shift toward responsible assessment emphasises collaboration, openness, and societal impact, supported by initiatives such as CoARA, DORA, and narrative CVs. Early-career researchers (ECRs) are caught in transition: still judged by traditional measures while expected to contribute more broadly. Reform demands cultural change, leadership commitment, and frameworks that balance flexibility with predictability across institutions.

*'We believe that diverse assessment approaches should be explored and evaluated, taking into account the experience of different stakeholders, including ECRs.'*

Anders Smith, Villum Foundation

## THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Broaden excellence criteria** to include collaboration, mentoring, and societal impact.

**Promote context-sensitive, interoperable evaluation** tailored to disciplines and institutions.

**Implement narrative CVs** with training for both applicants and evaluators.

**Ensure reforms are co-created** and globally comparable through initiatives like CoARA.

## Theme 5

# INTERSECTORAL MOBILITY



Intersectoral mobility is widely recognised as both an opportunity and a persistent challenge. Early exposure to non-academic careers helps researchers build awareness, networks, and transferable skills – yet cultural and structural barriers remain. Universities often fail to reward time spent in industry, while companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, face costs and administrative hurdles. Visa rules, IP concerns, and mismatched timelines between academia and business also limit uptake. To make mobility a genuine career asset, Europe must embed recognition, create bridging mechanisms, and tackle the practical barriers that hold researchers back.

*'Young researchers are one of our industry's greatest resources – the demand is there.'*

Christian Kjær Monsson, Head of Research, Danish Industry

## THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Provide early exposure** to non-academic careers through role models and awareness-building.

**Recognise and reward** intersectoral mobility in academic evaluation and career systems.

**Strengthen partnerships** and bridging mechanisms between universities, industry, and public bodies.

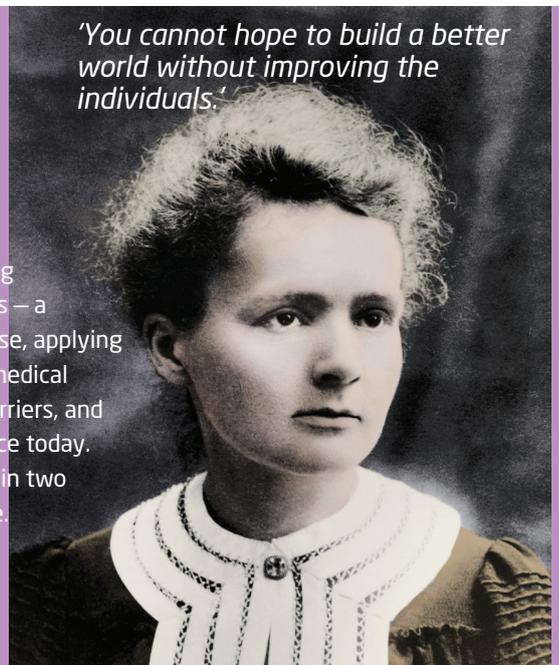
**Simplify pathways** by removing structural barriers – from visas to IP rules – and ensuring mobility is diverse, safe, and multilingual.

# MARIE SKŁODOWSKA CURIE

## A pioneer of purpose and mobility

Marie Skłodowska Curie's life captures the challenges and opportunities still facing researchers today. As a young Polish woman, she left her country to study in Paris – a pioneer of cross-border mobility. She pursued science with a clear sense of purpose, applying discovery to human progress, from radioactivity research to the development of medical treatments. Her career was marked by perseverance through precarity, gender barriers, and a struggle for recognition – challenges that many early-career researchers still face today. Curie was the first woman to receive a Nobel Prize, and the only person awarded in two sciences, showing how excellence is redefined when diversity is allowed to thrive. Her legacy reminds Europe that supporting talent is an investment in its future.

*'You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals.'*





## PUTTING PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE OF EUROPE'S RESEARCH FUTURE

Across all themes, a common thread emerged: research careers in Europe must be built on values that place people at the centre. From purpose-driven universities to inclusive workplaces, participants stressed that well-being, psychological safety, and job security are as vital as funding or metrics. Reforming evaluation systems is equally urgent: collaboration, openness, and societal contribution must count – alongside recognising universities as social actors and anchors of democratic trust. Mobility across sectors and borders should be enabled by flexible rules and rewarded as a strength, not a detour. Finally, institutions and funders must simplify procedures, align incentives, and co-create solutions with early-career researchers. Europe has the frameworks and initiatives in place; the challenge now is to turn them into systemic practice – with accountability for results, respect for institutional autonomy, and the courage to embed change structurally.



*'Early-career paths need flexibility – rigid mobility rules and short contracts push people out of research just when they should be building stability.'*

Emma-Liina Marjakangas, MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow

## CROSS-THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Embed purpose, inclusion, and well-being into the frameworks that shape research careers.
- Address precarity structurally – through longer fellowships, predictable contracts, and clear career pathways.
- Reform incentives and evaluation to reward collaboration, openness, and societal impact.
- Safeguard MSCA's bottom-up character as a foundation for purpose-driven research, excellence, and impact.
- Co-create policies and programmes with early-career researchers to ensure they reflect real needs.



*'To thrive as a democracy, Europe must invest in what makes us strong – our people.'*

Antoaneta Angelova-Krasteva, Director, European Commission

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