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Responsible Partner	EATRIS-ERIC
Author(s)	Anne-Charlotte Fauvel (EATRIS)
Contributors	Frank de Man (EATRIS), Carlo Rizzuto (CERIC), Lorna Ryan (European Social Survey), Arnaud Roi (DARIAH)

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Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the current recruitment practices that distributed ERICs have put in place to attract talent to their organisations, such as equal opportunity, recruitment and remuneration policies. In a second part, the report reflects on the challenges reported by the ERICs to attract and retain contracted staff at the legal seat as well as staff contracted outside the country’s legal seat. Finally, the report provides recommendations to ERICs-to-be as well as to the ERIC Forum so that the exchange of best practices is optimized within the ERIC community.



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Background

As relatively young organisations, ERICs cannot under-estimate the importance of recruitment strategies and practices to support the development of their organization, right from the start of their operations. Furthermore, the recruitment and employment practices for distributed ERICs can lead to specific challenges, especially when the ERICs employs staff outside the legal seat of the organization or relies on in-kind or seconded personnel.

Approaches (Methods)

This report draws conclusions from a survey carried out between November 2019 and April 2020 on Recruitment, Employment, and Secondment practices. In addition, follow-up interviews with several ERICs (ECRIN, European Social Survey, EATRIS) or ERICs-to-be (ELI) took place to follow up on survey responses or to collect specific insights.

Results

The delivery has been delayed due to the cancellation of a workshop addressing this topic, that was initially scheduled in June 2020.



INTRODUCTION

This deliverable report on “Recruitment Practices and Challenges for Distributed ERICs” draws from the responses collected through a dedicated survey to the ERIC Forum project partners as well as bilateral interviews. The report looks at the current recruitment practices put in place by distributed ERICs and addresses the challenges they face when recruiting and retaining talent.

Unlike single-sited ERICs, distributed ERICs usually rely on relatively smaller size teams (between 10 and 20 employees on average for the seat and hub), do not establish a formal department for human resources management and may dedicate less resources for a comprehensive recruitment and talent retaining strategy. In addition, distributed ERICs closely rely on additional human resources located at the nodes which may lead to additional complexity for recruitment as well employment practices.

This report exclusively focuses on recruitment practices although, unavoidably, also touches upon employment conditions and practices put in place by distributed ERICs and draws comparison with policies and procedures established or foreseen by single-sited ERICs. An upcoming deliverable due for publication in June 2021 will provide best practices guidelines in employment and secondment for ERICs and will further outline the challenges brought by secondment and in-kind personnel referred in Part 2 of this report.

Part 3 of this report summarises the main conclusions of this report and challenges that may lay ahead for ERICs, and pushes forward recommendations for actions to be undertaken by the ERIC Forum.

Part 1: Current ERIC recruitment practices: state of play

1. Main observations from surveys' responses

Most respondents (14 out of 18 ERICs) answered that they do not have a department dedicated to human resources (HR) matters, which is understandable given the relatively small size of ERICs teams (usually less than 20 persons). Recruitment from advertising to the selection is handled by the ERIC itself, although in some rare cases, some ERICs (e.g. ECCSEL, BBMRI) mentioned that recruitment and other HR functions were outsourced to an agency for executive positions that may require access to a larger pool of candidates. Third party remains an exception.

In 2020, the majority of ERICs has taken steps towards formalizing their recruitment practices. Most state they put in place a recruitment procedure (14), an equal opportunity policy (13), a formal remuneration policy (13), and an advertisement policy (9), at least in practice.

For ERICs hosted in other institutions, the approach required less attention as they **either follow the procedures set up by the host institution** (e.g. staff of the European Social Survey are all directly employed by the City University of London) or **created their own policy drawing from their host's existing procedures** (for example, JIV adjusted its recruitment policy from the Dutch Research Council, and ECCSEL from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology).

When asked about advertising channels of their vacancies, responses from ERICs remain limited, and they mostly referred to the following:

- ERIC's own dissemination channels (social media accounts, webpage, nodes' contacts/networks)
- channels relevant within their own scientific community (e.g. CERN's recruitment portal)
- national employment agencies
- the EU's Job Portal, EURAXESS¹ and
- interdisciplinary scientific publications, such as Nature.

The involvement of ERICs in the recruitment of their staff may vary as most mention they have directly employed staff as well as seconded staff and in rare cases, personnel contributed in-kind.

2. ERICs policies and procedures for equal opportunities, recruitment, announcement and remuneration

The basic principles of ERICs' recruitment and employment policies are provided in the Statutes, and usually include the following:

- **ERIC is an equal opportunity employer:** Nondiscrimination principles shall be followed for recruitment and employment: EU-OS (Art. 26); CLARIN (Art. 23); DARIAH (Art. 28); EMSO (Art. 24); CESSDA (Art. 17); LifeWatch (Art. 12); ESS (Art. 24); EMBRC (Art. 24); ICOS (Art. 21); EUBI (Art.10).
- **Employment contracts shall follow national laws of the country in which the staff is employed** (CLARIN; DARIAH; EU-OS; EMSO; EMBRC).

¹ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs>

- ERIC shall advertise all vacancies (DARIAH, ICOS) and shall set **an adequate time-period for the receipt of applications**; ERIC shall not offer any position to any applicant before the lapse of the abovementioned time period (EMBRC; DARIAH).

2.1 Equal opportunities policy

13 ERICs stated they set up an equal opportunity policy. Those policies though not detailed in the survey responses usually ensure that ERICs follow transparency and non-discriminatory principles in their recruitment procedures, employment practices as well as in their standard operations. Some ERICs have ensured that their commitment is reflected in their job offers. For example, DARIAH’s vacancies include the following statement: “DARIAH ERIC is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to employment policies, procedures and practices which do not discriminate on grounds such as gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, race, religious belief, sexual orientation or membership of the travelling community.”

It is important to acknowledge that in addition **several ERICs show pro-activeness and have chosen to give preference to candidates belonging to a discriminated group.** For example, EU-OPENSREEN will give preference to candidates with disabilities. Prep-ERICs such the Extreme Light Infrastructure (ELI) also expressed their intention of pro-actively implementing a gender equality and diversity policy through their recruitment practices by actively encouraging young female talents to apply for ELI positions.

In other cases, equal opportunities policies also impact the ERIC’s governance bodies, in the case of the European Social Survey, the “composition of any body or committee of the ESS ERIC shall reflect an appropriate gender balance and a general balance of skills.”

Reflecting their commitment to transparency, **some ERICs explicitly included in their equal opportunities policy their intention to publicly announce all vacancies** (ECCSEL, ICOS).

As the European Commission recently announced Gender Equality Plans will become mandatory for research organisations receiving Horizon Europe funding as of 2022, pro-activeness towards supporting gender equality through recruitment practices and beyond should soon become a priority shared by all members of the ERIC Forum.

2.2 Recruitment policy

14 ERICs confirmed they had a recruitment procedure in place. The level of details of ERICs’ existing recruitment policies and procedures very much varies, and usually include the equal opportunities principles cited above. Based on the responses collected and DARIAH’s detailed input, **recruitment procedures include the four following steps:**

- Step 1 – Preparing the recruitment: analysis of the needs, drafting of the job description, defining internal responsibilities.
- Step 2 – Finding the right candidates: job announcement and active search (advertisement strategy – national, international, channels) for candidates, possible outsourcing.
- Step 3 – Selecting the applicants: initial screening and interview planning.
- Step 4 – Onboarding the final applicant: contracting and integration.

Depending on the ERIC some additional step could be foreseen in the recruitment process, such as the formal approval of the final candidate by (the Chair of) the Assembly of Members (EURO-ARGO). Recruitment procedures should remain a living document and may be adjusted throughout the lifetime of the ERIC.

2.3 Announcement policy

9 ERICs mentioned having an announcement policy in place, rather in practice than in writing. Such policy would describe the channels used for advertisement and may include the standard duration of the vacancy opening and a standard description of the vacancy. In their survey response, DARIAH provided a detailed description of their standard job announcement², which could be of help for ERICs looking to formalize their current HR announcements and future ERICs planning their recruitment strategies.

As already stated, most ERICs make only use of their own communication channels (social media, website, newsletters). A few respondents also mentioned **specific platforms** whose relevance should be further considered by other ERICs: *EURAXESS, Euractiv, EuroBrussels, Nature publications*, national employment agencies, *Academic Transfer, Stepstone, Indeed*.

ERICs also mentioned that they make use of additional academic and scientific networks relevant within their community. The use of EU projects and other infrastructures' newsletters was mentioned by one ERIC (EMBRC), even though this practice has grown over the years with research infrastructures' collaborative projects usually including job section in their monthly or quarterly newsletters.

As the ERIC network and Forum grew, we observed that ERICs started pro-actively promoting vacancies from other ERICs (for example, BBMRI has done so for years in their monthly newsletter).

Although the community of ERICs is involved in diverse scientific disciplines, it is important that ERICs exploit one another's networks for expanding their pool of qualified candidates, especially for nonscientific positions. Such collaboration may also further encourage cross-ERIC mobility and should be actively supported by the ERIC Forum.

2.4 Remuneration policy

13 ERICs have already developed a remuneration policy.

Several ERICs hosted by another organisation specified that they have to follow policies already developed by that organization. Alternatively, ERICs may also choose to follow resolutions or policies set up nationally for a specific branch of workers (e.g. EURO-ARGO adopted rules defined by the *Syntec* agreement for engineers), or model their policy on that of a nearby university (for example, CLARIN and Utrecht University).

² A job advertisement at DARIAH should include the following information: The job title; The name of the organisation that will employ the person (in case of secondment agreement, the relationship between the organisation for which the person will work and the actual employer should be clarified); The exact address where the person will work; A description of the organization (context, vision, mission, activities, etc.); The duration of the contract. If there is a probationary period, it should be clearly indicated. If the contract can be eventually extended, it should be also written, i.e. "with possible prolongation"; The foreseen starting date of the employment; The salary range, depending on experience and qualification; The job description; The responsibilities; The minimal requirements; The expected skills; The application procedure, including a closing date for application, types of documents to submit, (i.e. a cover letter, a resumé, eventually references, etc.) in which format (i.e. all documents in one pdf file), an email address where to send the file and a contact person if there is any question; A description of the selection process: confirmation of application receipt by email, time slot for interviews, duration of the selection process, eventually composition of the recruitment committee; A mention about "equal opportunities policy".

In other cases, ERICs used the support of external experts (EATRIS) to define a policy that would be competitive enough with industry standards. For example, EATRIS and ECRIN which are ERICs focusing on medical research, both made the choice to align their remuneration standards with those of the pharmaceutical industry so that they can attract and retain highly qualified candidates.

Remuneration policies may not apply to all ERIC staff: the policy may be deemed necessary only for executive positions and would not apply to seconded staff, whose formal employer is not the ERIC.

In most cases, ERICs' remuneration policies had to be approved by the Assembly of Members.

Even though an ERICs decides not to adopt a formal remuneration policy, salary adjustments (e.g. based on inflation rate) should be foreseen from the start of the ERIC's operations and included in the initial multi-annual budget to be approved by the Assembly of Members.

Part 2: Recruitment challenges faced by distributed ERICs

In this second part, we will discuss the multiple recruitment challenges reported by ERICs in operations and distil lessons learnt for future ERICs.

The HR needs of an ERIC under preparatory phase may substantially differ from those of an ERIC in operations.

Recruitment strategies should be carefully planned and assessed by any prep-ERIC going through this important transition. In addition, recruitment may be particularly challenging for ERICs which are in their early operations. Once the ERIC status granted, we observe that most ERICs will then kick off their recruitment procedures and rapidly expand the prep-phase team shortly thereafter. Prep-phase staff of the RI may seamlessly be “transferred” to the ERIC, or in some cases, the staff would have to formally apply for the same position at the ERIC (ex: EU-OPENSREEN) through public recruitment, including for executive leadership positions, which may delay the effective start of a new ERIC’s operations.

Furthermore, we observe that an increasing number of distributed ERICs employs staff working in different countries, leading to great diversity of contractual arrangements in different countries than the ERIC’s statutory seat. This is a development and a challenge which should be closely monitored by the Forum.

1. ERIC’s recruitment challenges with directly contracted staff

On the one hand, the attractiveness of ERICs as employers should be underlined: ERICs are newly established international organisations, facilitating scientific breakthroughs and societal progress, which brings substantial opportunities for staff to innovate and to professionally grow as the ERIC grows.

On the other hand, most ERICs are still currently considered as relatively “young” organisations, in the sense that **they still suffer from limited visibility which may hinder their capacity to attract highly qualified candidates, especially outside of their specific scientific networks.**

However, the first wave of established ERICs acknowledged that as they grew, refined their recruitment and communication strategies, and gained more visibility in their field, the quantity and quality of candidates has been improving throughout the years. Such evolution also demonstrates the importance for new ERICs of establishing a robust recruitment strategy with close attention paid to announcement channels, as well as guaranteeing attractive and competitive employment conditions for their staff right from the start of the ERIC’s operations.

When sharing some of the challenges they faced with attracting qualified candidates, ERICs mentioned the following:

- Competitive package for executive positions

Several ERICs acknowledged the importance of **planning for an attractive remuneration package when recruiting senior leadership positions**, meaning that if relevant to the ERIC and in order to recruit highly qualified candidates, that package may be higher than the standards expected in academia.

- Attractive location for ERIC statutory seats and hubs

Although the location of the ERIC statutory seat (and most often, the location of the hub) may have been decided by the Assembly of Members much before the ERIC status was obtained or may naturally remain where the preparation phase was handled, several ERICs highlighted **specific recruitment challenges directly linked to where the ERIC is formally established.**

They pointed out the cost of living as being one deterring factor for candidates to apply – an observation made by both EMBRC, whose legal seat is located in Paris (FR) and INSTRUCT, whose legal seat is located in Oxford (UK).

In addition, the choice, for the seat or a major hub of a European smaller city rather than a capital would also mean that the city may be less connected to international transportation hubs, making frequent travel lengthier for the ERIC's staff, and may offer less attractive conditions for international candidates, such as international schools for their children.

ELI, a prep-ERIC with multiple operational seats (or hubs) in Eastern Europe, plans to hire staff in two facilities located in Hungary and Czech Republic. Its director is already well aware that the Hungarian facility, located 2 hours from the capital, Budapest, may be a problem to attract international staff and is discussing with local authorities the possibility of setting up an international school.

Although this option can only be explored for ERICs that hire a substantial number of employees at the same location, this pro-activeness demonstrates the importance for the prep-ERIC to plan for an attractive work environment.

On the contrary, other ERICs, such as EATRIS, whose legal seat is based in Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and ECRIN, with legal seat based in Paris, noted that operating in a capital city had been a true asset for their recruitment in their hubs so far and helped their organisations have access to a large and diverse pool of candidates at local level.

ERICs that plan to hire international staff could for example foresee an additional “welcome package” to contribute to moving costs.

- Staff mobility and career development

Most distributed ERICs teams are and will remain relatively small – between 10 and 20 employees, as long as their direct operations will be limited to the legal seat. In this context, **upward mobility within small teams remains very limited**, which may weaken ERIC's ability to attract and retain talent. Career development opportunities, and the future possible development of direct operations in several Countries should therefore not be overlooked. Specific attention should be paid to budgeted (cross-)training, staff's personal growth, and maintaining a healthy and rewarding work culture.

Limitations on contracts' duration can also be a challenge: some ERICs have to follow the host institution's policy. For example, the Euro-Bioimaging Bio-Hub staff is employed under EMBL's Staff rules and regulations, which may limit the contract duration of Euro-Bioimaging's staff. Some others may depend on the continuation of third-party funding and/or membership funding to retain staff (for example, project management staff for EU grants).

Another threat identified by ERICs staff is also the risk of **seeing the ERIC terminated** as termination is a step foreseen by ESFRI lifecycle approach of a research infrastructure³. In this context, staff may perceive job protection as insufficient, especially when they previously held secured academic positions, and there is no long-term commitment from the member countries.

³ ESFRI Roadmap 2021, Public guide, page 19.

https://www.esfri.eu/sites/default/files/ESFRI_Roadmap2021_Public_Guide_Public.pdf (last accessed: January 15, 2021)

ERICs as well as prep-ERICs, such as ELI, may also perceive these **challenges as opportunities to recruit early-career to mid-career staff** and ensure that the experience young graduates acquire working for the ERIC is a decisive steppingstone for their future career development. Once they have accumulated enough seniority, former ERIC staff would then become attractive candidates for Universities, Research Institutions, or Industry.

- Attracting candidates with the right skillset

Several ERICs expressed difficulty hiring highly performing candidates for communications roles which required both scientific knowledge and communication experience – for roles requiring very specific technical knowledge (for example, IT personnel), or for lower-level candidates (INSTRUCT), laboratory staff (EU-OPENSREEN), technicians and operators. In all cases, the issue is however not specific to ERICs and is a recruitment problem recognized nationally and globally.

As ERICs are gaining a strategic involvement in the development of the European Open Science Cloud, one can expect **that ERICs will continue to seek more staff with IT and data expertise**, which is already in high demand, also from industry. ERICs should take into consideration that **those positions may require more time to be filled and may foresee the support of external recruiters in their budget** to attract the right candidates.

- Attracting candidates from academia

We observe that ERICs make much use of existing academic networks and academic channels to support their recruitment (for example, jobs.ac.uk or the Academic Transfer platform⁴ in the Netherlands).

In this context, **ERICs hosted by universities acknowledged that the network and visibility acquired by the university constitutes a substantial asset for recruitment**, especially in the early years of the ERIC's operations.

It is expected that scientific positions may be filled by candidates with prior academic track. But a few respondents shared that ERICs may have difficulty competing with benefits offered by academic institutions and could appear as less attractive employer to academic candidates. An employee at a university would usually benefit from a standard contract, which guarantees higher level of job protection than ERICs whose employment contracts may be unexpectedly shortened or ended if they lose funding or member countries. Obviously, chances for a university to permanently close in the future remain much lower than the termination of a RI.

In larger academic organisations, unions are expected to negotiate salary adjustments to compensate for inflation while those adjustments may require bilateral negotiations for ERIC staff. Transitioning from a university position to an ERIC position could also mean a loss of rights and benefits, in terms of seniority, or pension benefits. These concerns may impact on the ERICs' retention of staff.

Yet, it is also important to underline that ERICs at their establishment very much operate like “scientific start-ups”, usually following a relatively flat organizational structure, requiring staff to wear multiple hats and offering them the opportunity to innovate and take part in “something new”. For academic posts, such flexibility could also mean more academic freedom than universities can provide for.

⁴ <https://www.academictransfer.com/en/>

These observations reiterate the importance for prep-ERICs and ERICs to ensure they are competitive employers and pay close attention to the working conditions and training opportunities offered by “competitor employers”, such as universities and other international research organisations.

- Specific challenges of new ERICs

Recruitment procedures may also be hindered by the time required to set up relevant recruitment and employment policies, contracts, payroll administration as well as delays with receiving the membership fees from member countries. These difficulties were for example experienced by EU-OPENSREEN based in Germany, where one year was needed for the infrastructure to appear on the public registry, which then required an advanced payment from the host country to cover personnel costs.

2. ERIC’s recruitment challenges with staff based outside the host country

Distributed ERICs usually interact with different kinds of staff. Beyond a small team of directly employed staff working at the ERIC seat, they may also directly contract or second staff in the hubs and in the nodes, which means contracting staff in other countries than the seat’s country.

2.1 Seconded and in-kind personnel in the nodes

ECRIN facilitates clinical research and relies on “European Correspondents”, based in each Member or Observer Country to ensure the efficient management of multinational trials.

Most of its Correspondents are currently seconded, meaning their salaries are paid by a host institution thanks to the country’s membership fee.

This scenario was already foreseen in ECRIN’s statutes⁵ and ensures that **even though ECRIN is not the direct employer, the correspondent is under the management authority of the ECRIN-ERIC Director General**. The correspondent works directly with ECRIN’s hub team and one staff member from the hub acts as his or her line manager.

ECRIN is involved in the recruitment of seconded staff in the nodes and would join at the minimum the final rounds of interviews. The recruitment procedure is usually fully handled by the host institution.

In other cases, such as at EATRIS, the nodes may appoint “National Coordinators” to facilitate service provision (**in-kind personnel**). The national coordinators are directly employed by the node institution and would usually work part-time on EATRIS activities dedicating the rest of their working time to other activities. The national coordinators are not seconded to the ERIC as their salaries are paid exclusively by the node institution.

However, in practice the national coordinators must interact on a regular basis with the EATRIS seat. Therefore, EATRIS chose to establish “national coordinators collaboration agreements” to clarify and facilitate the relationship between EATRIS and individual national coordinators. In addition, a description of the missions of national coordinators was

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:324:0008:0020:EN:PDF> – see Article 8.4: The ECRIN-ERIC European Correspondent shall represent the ECRIN collaborator hosted at each national hub. The work of the ECRIN-ERIC European Correspondent shall be under the management authority of the ECRIN-ERIC Director General, with a functional link to the national hub, and he/she shall act as relay to the national clinical research network and hub for the various ECRIN-ERIC activities such as structuring activities and provision of coordinated services.

prepared by the EATRIS seat in order to facilitate their recruitment by heads of nodes and ensure consistency in the role across all EATRIS member countries.

The recruitment process has been managed by the node institution and EATRIS seat staff has been invited by nodes institutions to comment on the vacancy description and participate in final interviews. **However, this has not been systematic, which could limit the Seat's oversight on node staff activities.**

Secondment can also be foreseen to support operations of the seat. This is the case for DARIAH, which does not employ personnel in national nodes. DARIAH's central administration (hub) is distributed between four different countries, which implies – if you want to employ your staff directly - having a deep knowledge of labour laws and employment practices in each of them. This is hardly possible for a team of less than 15 people, and as a result, half of DARIAH's team is seconded; the other half is directly employed. When recruiting seconded personnel, the host institution is following its own procedure and policy, even if, similarly to other ERICs, DARIAH gives its input and take part in the recruitment process.

It is important to note that the use of both secondment and direct employment for similar positions may become an issue in the longer-term and this may also point to the need to develop an EU wide approach. As seconded employees follow the policies of the third party, while direct employees follow the ones set up by the ERIC, the ERIC may not be able to guarantee equal treatment for all personnel (remuneration policy, pension benefits, statutory holidays, etc.).

2.2 Contracted staff in other EU countries than the seat

7 ERICs among the respondents stated that they have contracted ERIC staff in other countries than the Hub.

Those ERICs did not state particular challenges in this context, apart from the necessary outsourcing costs for registering the ERIC outside the hub country and setting up payroll administration outside the Hub country, which is a non-negligible investment. ERIC's ability to contract staff outside their hub's country certainly contributes to the competitiveness of ERICs as employers and could help them attract a larger pool of candidates, as candidates would not have to relocate. As a result, ERICs should also put in place clear teleworking policies and ensure that staff contracted outside the hub received equal treatment and benefit from attractive working conditions (e.g. teleworking allowance, regular visits to the hub office).

As more ERICs may continue to expand in that direction, the ERIC Forum is collecting best practices on this matter, which will be further explored in the deliverable 3.3 due in June 2021 (Best practices guidelines in employment and secondment for ERICs).

Part 3: Conclusions and ERIC Forum Recommendations

1. Conclusions

Although most of the distributed ERICs do not have a department dedicated to Human Resources, a large majority of them have taken the appropriate and logical steps towards establishing procedures and policies (Equal opportunities policy, remuneration policy, recruitment procedure, etc.) to support their recruitment strategies and practices. They can rely on many channels for announcing vacant positions, usually leveraging their established scientific networks through their members, nodes and if applicable their host institution (which can truly be an asset given universities' employer visibility), their routine communication channels as well as additional platforms such as Euraxess or national employment agencies.

In practice, distributed ERICs acknowledged challenges that may have hindered their attractiveness as employers, and which led to lessons learnt that may be very beneficial for future ERICs: insufficient remuneration package for executive positions; an unattractive hub location for some candidates; limited staff mobility and career development perspectives; difficulty to find candidates with specific technical expertise; competition with academia's standard employment conditions and job protection. In addition, newly established ERICs had to face administrative hurdles before being able to employ any staff, which again demonstrates the importance of early planning and risk management strategies for future recruitment and employment.

To support service provision and user access in their multiple member countries, distributed ERICs often rely on seconded and in-kind personnel, who are located at the member institutions or the head of nodes. Although these employees may be under the authority of their local institution, distributed ERICs highlighted the importance of keeping an active role in the recruitment process, by co-drafting the job description and participating in the final interviews. Additional agreements may be foreseen to clarify roles and responsibilities of all parties involved.

Special attention should also be paid to equal treatment of ERIC staff, ensuring that contracted and seconded staff, at times for a similar role, as well as directly employed staff based in different countries, still benefit from similar working conditions and remuneration levels.

We also observed that ERICs increasingly contract staff in other countries than the hub's (through direct employment), demonstrating that ERICs also keep expanding their access to a pool of qualified candidates and their visibility as attractive employers across Europe.

Successful recruitment should be planned early and thoroughly especially when an infrastructure starts its transition into operations. Recruitment needs of ERICs should well identified and needs for non-scientific staff (communications, legal support, business development, grants management) should be well considered. The announcement strategy also deserves careful planning: will the staff be hired locally, which vacancies should be announced internationally, should the ERIC Forum's networks be utilized, etc.

As we observed, ERICs may in the early days of their operations suffer from limited visibility as recruiter and therefore only have access to a small pool of qualified applicants. Close attention to branding and communications strategies also contributes to raising the profile of the ERIC and may attract more of the right candidates for a position. As ERICs may have to compete with universities, international organisations, industry (and eventually other ERICs!) to attract talent, employment conditions (e.g. competitive remuneration, pension plan, holidays, training opportunities, etc.) must be attractive. In this context, prep-ERICs should not under-estimate the impact of the ERIC hub geographical location on their attractiveness as employers. Although as remote working becomes more frequent and ERICs increasingly contract staff in other countries than their hubs, one can assume that the importance of the hub's location will decrease.

It is also important to underline that ERICs offer unique opportunities for staff to be part of developing and sustaining innovative international organisations, that will facilitate future scientific breakthroughs, and as such, are attractive employers. ERICs are equivalent to “scientific startups” and as ERICs matures and become more operational, they have the ability to offer their staff a flexible and international work environment as well as substantial opportunities for professional growth, as long as in-house training and staff’s personal development are prioritized from the start of the ERIC’s operations.

As we analyzed the challenges associated with the recruitment and inevitably the employment conditions offered by ERICs, and the fact that job protection may be a perceived issue for job applicants, we must acknowledge that long-term commitment of the ERIC’s member countries to ensure sustainability of both the central seat and the whole distributed ERIC is essential to ensure that ERICs are and remain attractive employers in the future European Research Area.

2. Recommendations

This report also provides an opportunity to reflect on how the ERIC Forum could further support ERICs and prep-ERICs with improving their recruitment practices and addressing current and future challenges.

Encouraging cross-ERIC mobility

Among the survey’s responses collected, only one ERIC mentioned leveraging other RI’s networks for recruitment purposes. The fact that the ERIC Community makes little use of other ERIC’s dissemination channels including the ERIC Forum platform for announcing vacancies is clearly a missed opportunity. The ERIC Forum should ensure that any vacancy published by ERIC and prep-ERIC is systematically shared via its own channels and other ERIC’s channels, therefore leveraging wider networks and possibly encouraging future cross-ERIC mobility of personnel, especially non-scientific staff.

Although only a few ERICs have joined the RESAVER⁶ pension scheme until now, the prospect of more ERICs joining could also be an additional factor supporting future cross-ERIC personnel mobility, which remains rare. RESAVER pension scheme also facilitates the fair treatment of distributed ERIC’s personnel employed in different countries as this allows all staff (as long as the country has joined the scheme) to benefit from a similar pension programme.

Additionally, mobility between the ERIC seat, hub(s), nodes and affiliated institutions should be further encouraged to support attractive career development opportunities and build stronger ties between staff involved in the various layers of the ERIC’s operations. This situation has already led to a great diversity of contractual arrangements for some ERICs, which makes the exchange of best practices and contract templates even more relevant in the context of the ERIC Forum. The need for a reference contract or unified reference framework applicable in the various countries where the ERIC has operations could also be explored in the future.

Increasing the exchange of best recruitment practices (ERIC Forum Toolbox)

- As part of the future ERIC Forum toolbox, Work Package 3 of the ERIC Forum project foresees the setting up of a repository of documents (statutes, policies, templates, etc.).

⁶ <https://www.resaver.eu/>; current ERIC members are BBMRI and EATRIS.

Given the important share of distributed ERICs which already developed detailed equal opportunities, and recruitment policies, ERICs should be encouraged to share their recruitment policies and procedures within the Forum in order to help the ERIC community to improve its current practices and avoid additional outsourcing or consultancy costs for preparatory ERICs.

- In addition, as ERICs contract external agencies to set up payroll administrations in other countries than their hubs, recommendations on how to handle these expansions, costs estimates and list of agencies to contact for support could also be useful and help save on costs for future ERICs.
- A list of dissemination channels relevant for any ERIC's future vacancy could be easily assembled and made available to the Forum.
- Based on the report's observations, a checklist of all aspects to be considered when launching a new recruitment could also be put together and made available to the Forum.