

## **Eurodoc statement “The increase in fees for the healthcare system exacerbates the financial precarity for doctoral students and early career researchers from non-EU countries in Italy.”**

On 16 October 2023, the Italian Government announced the outlines for the 2024 provisional budget. It stipulates a significant increase in enrolment costs for the National Italian Health System for non-EU residents without formal employment: the annual contribution will increase from 149€ to 700€ per year for doctoral candidates and from 1,200€ to 2,000€ for postdocs, respectively [1].

On behalf of Eurodoc, the administrative board 2023/2024 expresses its concerns as this will also significantly impact doctoral candidates and early career researchers who are non-EU citizens in Italy.

The research sector in Europe depends on early career researchers. Doctoral candidates and postdocs currently make up a significant proportion of researchers affiliated with the Italian higher education institutions. However, they are most often financed by scholarships (the minimum scholarship being 16.243€ per year for doctoral candidates [2] and 19.367€ for postdocs [3]) rather than through proper employment. As a result, unlike other professionals, non-EU doctoral candidates and postdocs are required to pay this increase in health care fees from their own pockets.

The Salzburg principles, based on the Bologna Follow-Up agreement, clearly establish that doctoral candidates are to be considered professionals [4]. According to Eurodoc and other advocates, prioritizing this aspect is essential to foster a compelling higher education and research landscape and establish sustainable and appealing career trajectories, including proper employment of doctoral candidates and postdocs [5]. Furthermore, the higher education and research sector is particularly international: doctoral candidates and other researchers from outside the European Union contribute crucial knowledge, skills and perspectives, without which research and higher education quality will suffer.

With precarity already being widespread for early career researchers, not properly employing doctoral candidates and postdocs reinforces and exacerbates their condition, which has consequences for their access to social security and financial benefits, sustaining a family, and personal relationships. Moreover, the state of precarity and the ensuing insecurity not only hinder the creative environment essential for fostering innovative research but also undermine work efficiency, thereby diminishing overall career prospects and well-being for individuals [6].

It is key to acknowledge that doctoral candidates, postdocs and other ECRs are professionals and should be treated as such.

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## **The statement was authored by the administrative board of Eurodoc 2023/2024**

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## **The statement was approved by the member organisations of Eurodoc**

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**Eurodoc, the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers**, is a grassroots federation of 25 national associations of early career researchers (ECRs) from 23 countries across Europe. Eurodoc was established in 2002 and is based in Brussels. As a representative of doctoral candidates and junior researchers at the European level, Eurodoc engages with all major stakeholders in research, higher education, and innovation in Europe.



## **References**

- [1] The [budget proposal](#) and a press release in [English](#).
- [2]: G.U. n. 80 del 5 aprile 2022; [Decreto 23 febbraio 2022](#)
- [3]: [Art. 22 della legge 30/12/2010 n. 240](#)
- [4]: [Salzburg principles](#). (European University Association)
- [5]: [Researchers manifesto](#) (Initiative for Science Europe)
- [6] [Setting high quality employment conditions for early career researchers](#) (Eurodoc Statement)