

WFSW 90th Executive Council Meeting-Session 1
A Contribution to the Debate

Maria João Antunes (ABIC)

Good afternoon to all,
In representation of ABIC from Portugal we would like to salute every participant in this Meeting.

This year has been a very difficult year all over the world and also for scientific research fellows in Portugal. As you know, a large part of the scientific workers in Portugal develop their research and work without access to labor rights. The research grants include a monthly maintenance allowance of about between 1000 and 1500 euros. They do not include holiday or Christmas allowances, like in other types of contracts in Portugal. Also, researchers with a fellowship are not entitled to public social security that includes support for sickness and unemployment, as well as dignified pension. In March, the Portuguese government decided to extend some grants but not all of them. This extension for two months aimed to compensate for the time in which higher education institutions and research centers were closed due to the pandemic. But this measure was not enough to ensure that scientific work was harmed as little as possible due to the closure of institutions. A part of the ongoing work was lost due to the need for seasonal collections or laboratory experiments that could not be followed up. A large part of research fellows indicates that their work was deeply affected by the measures against the pandemic and that they had to be adapted with prejudice to the established objectives. The research fellows had less time, less data and finished their jobs with less quality and in some cases not meeting the expected objectives. But the difficulties more dramatically affected other fellows who ended their scholarships during or shortly before the pandemic situation worsened and who lived and continue to experience unemployment and economic difficulties. As I said initially, these researchers do not have or have had any support in the unemployment situation.

The decades-long divestment in the sector was evidenced in this crisis (instability of employment relationships and lack of working conditions).

The Portuguese government did not protect the links and work of researchers with scholarships or those hired for a fixed or uncertain term.

ABIC worked closely with unions in supporting scholarship holders and denouncing the seriousness of situations. And we continue to do so. Despite the pandemic being an external and unpredictable factor, it brought to light the weaknesses of scientific work in Portugal and this moment should serve as a lever to improve working conditions. Thus, the association will continue to demand the end of research grants and their replacement by employment contracts that allow scientific workers access to labor rights.

Precarious labor in science with low wages, instability, without access to the most basic labor rights is a huge obstacle to the realization of the emancipatory role of science.

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