

# Professional career of Sorbonne University postdocs

As part of its HRS4R strategy, Sorbonne University implements an action plan aimed at improving the recruitment, employment and career conditions of research staff. For young researchers in particular, who are often contractual staff, the university wishes to put in place career support measures, with the prerequisite of a better knowledge of this type of researchers, their background and their expectations for their future career. .

In this context, a survey was sent to all post-doctoral or ATER (Attachés temporaires de Recherche) researchers who had an employment contract at Sorbonne University completed between 2019 and 2021, in order to question them about their experience at Sorbonne University and their professional future as of the 1st April 2022. The survey was also disseminated via the heads of research units. A total of 635 former employees from the three Faculties, including 226 ATER, were contacted, and 104 complete answers to the survey (16.4%) were received. The answers to the questionnaire are anonymous as to the identity of the respondents and their unit of assignment.

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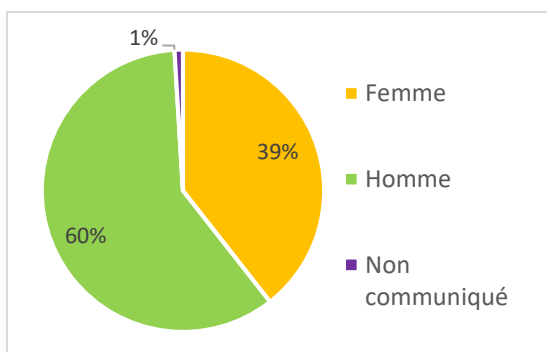
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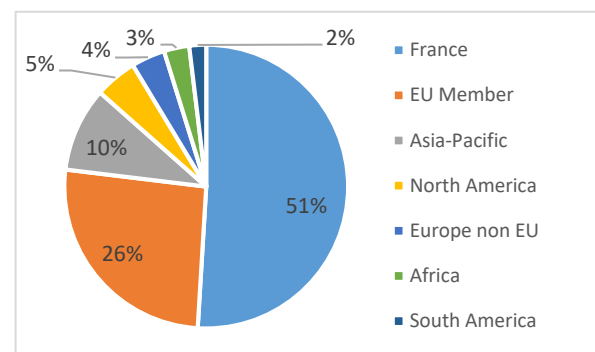
## The respondents

The respondents are mostly men (60%), a ratio slightly higher than that the numbers for post-docs and ATER reported in the University 2020 social report (53%). Most have research interests in Physical Sciences, Engineering and Life Sciences, with a low representation of human and social sciences (all in ATER positions). Although the research units are not identified, the themes show that most components of the Faculties of Science and Engineering and the Faculty of Medicine are well represented. Half of the people questioned are of French citizenship, 2/3 received their doctorate in France. The average age is 33 years old, with a median year of doctorate awarded in 2018.

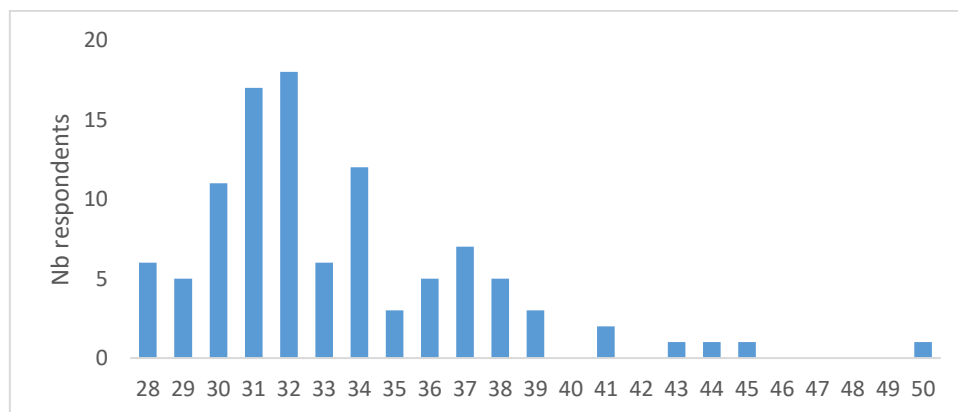
**Figure 1 – Gender of the respondents**



**Figure 2 - Citizenship**



**Figure 3 – Age distribution**



**Figure 4 – Distribution of the year of award for their PhD diploma**

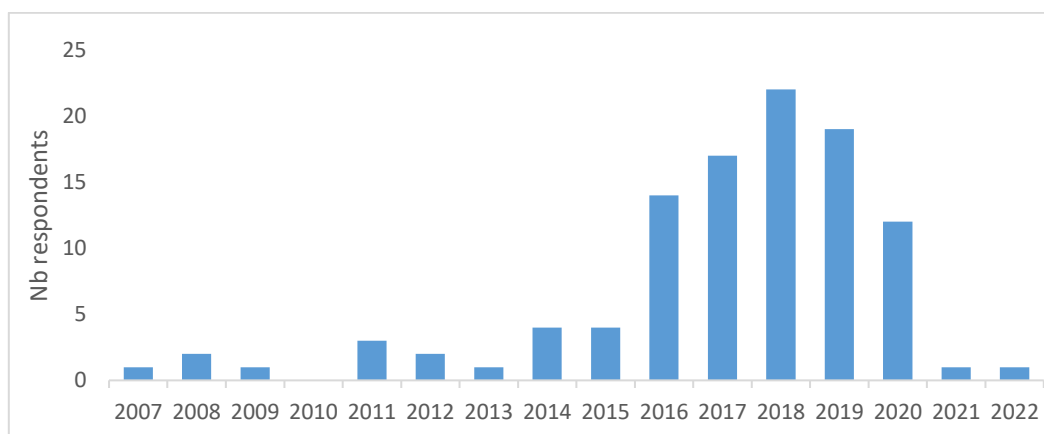
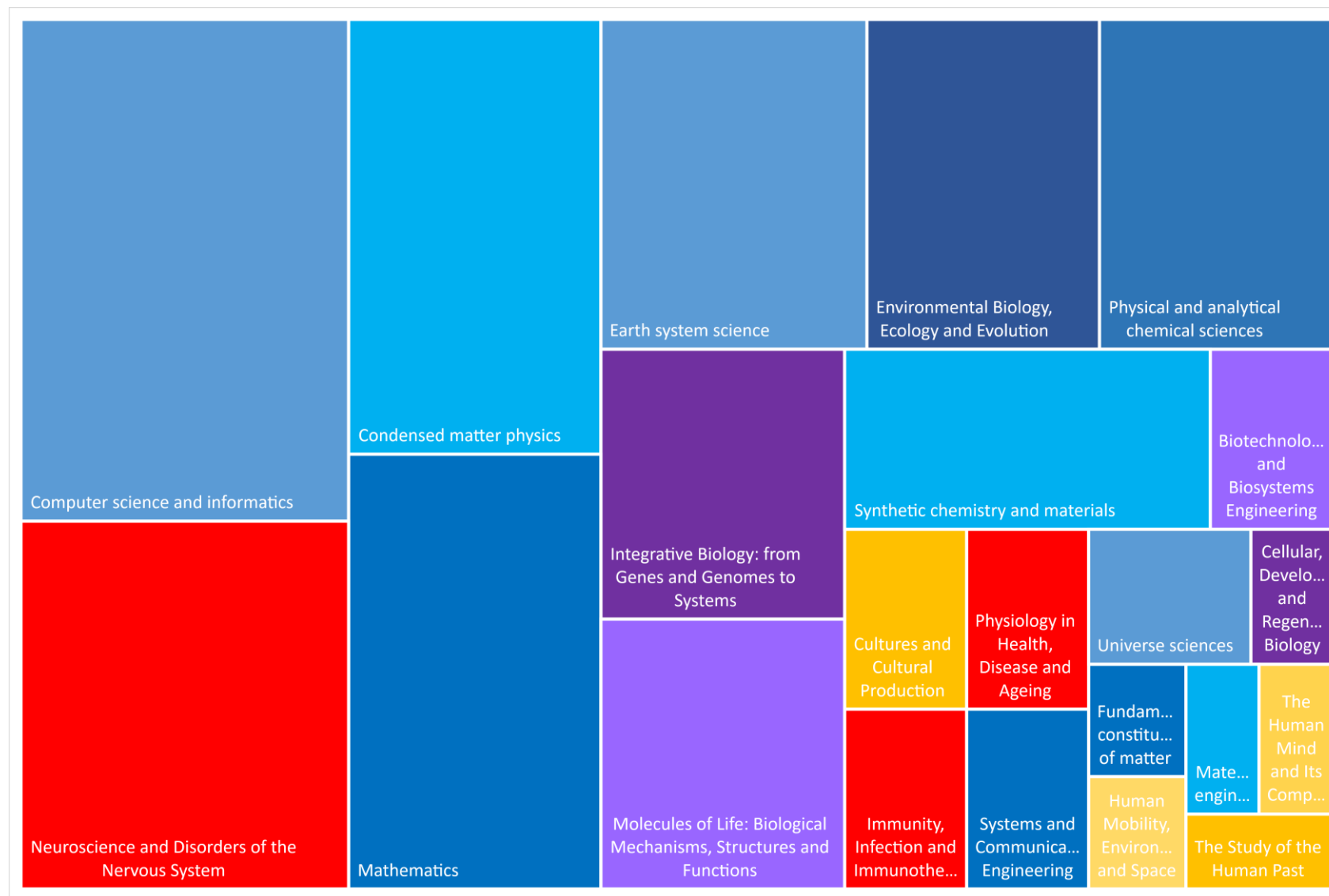


Figure 5 – Research areas

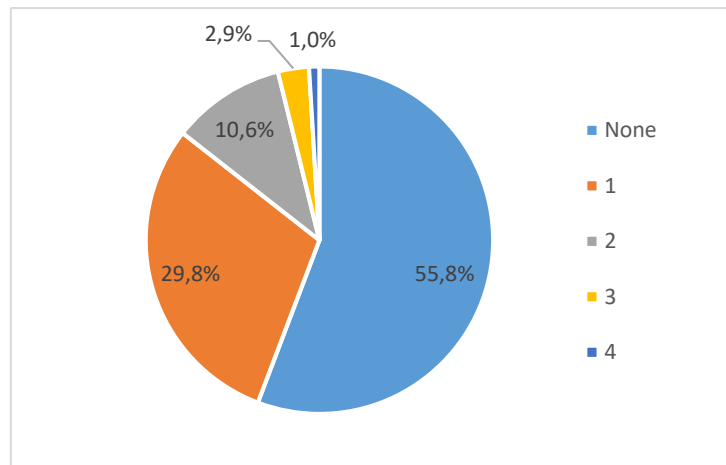


## Career paths before Sorbonne University

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For 56% of respondents, the postdoc position at SU was the first position after their PhD, the 2nd for 30% of them, and the 3rd or more for 14%. These previous jobs were mostly in research (75%), and 36% abroad.

**Figure 6 – Nb of employment contracts between the PhD and SU**

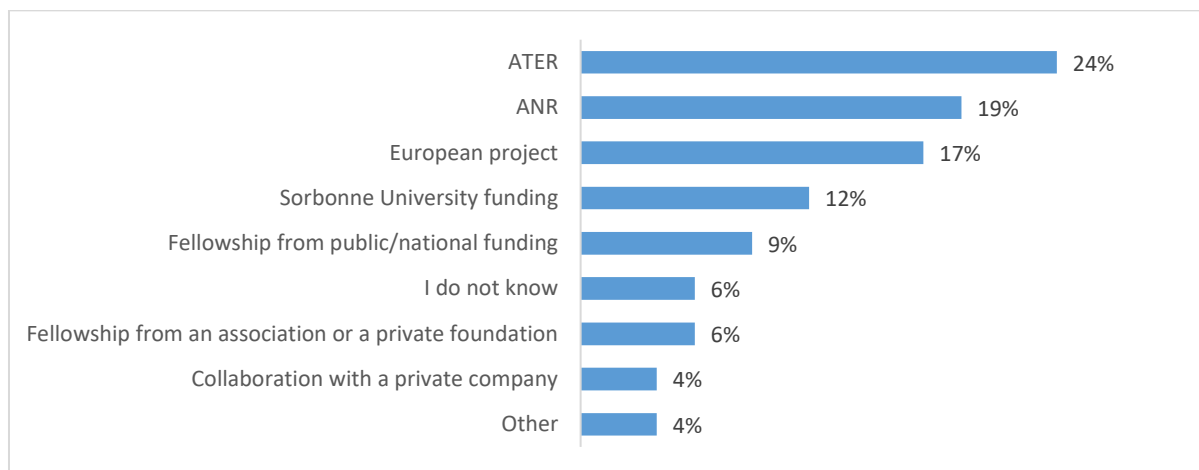


## Type of employment contracts at SU

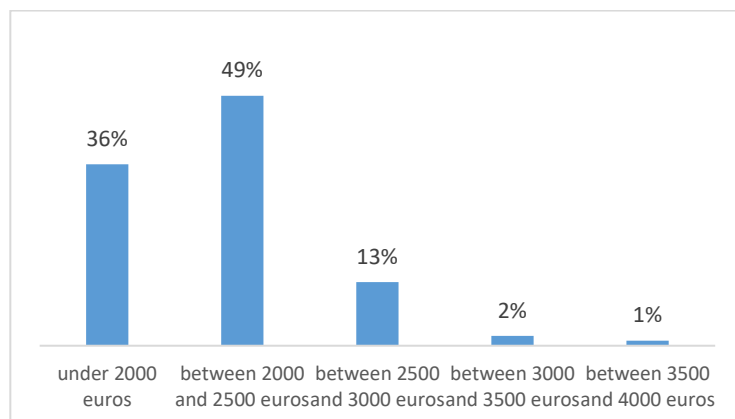
The vast majority of respondents (94 out of 104) had an employment contract with Sorbonne University as their employer, and the remaining 10 were employed by CNRS, Inserm, or SATT Lutech. This reflects the distribution of the survey, systematically sent to SU employees and transmitted to others via their former research units.

About a quarter of the people have had an ATER contract, the others come from funding from the research units' own resources (ANR, European projects, foundations, industrial collaborations), or from SU funding. The average duration of the contracts was 17.2 months, with a net salary between 2000 and 2500 euros for half of them. It should be noted that all ATER contract employees declared a net amount of less than 2000 euros, in accordance with the remuneration grid.

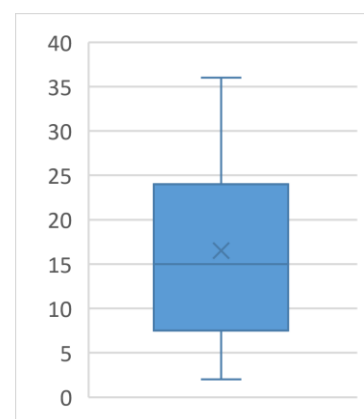
**Figure 7 – Funding sources of the employment contracts**



**Figure 8 – Net salaries**



**Figure 9 – Contract duration (months)**

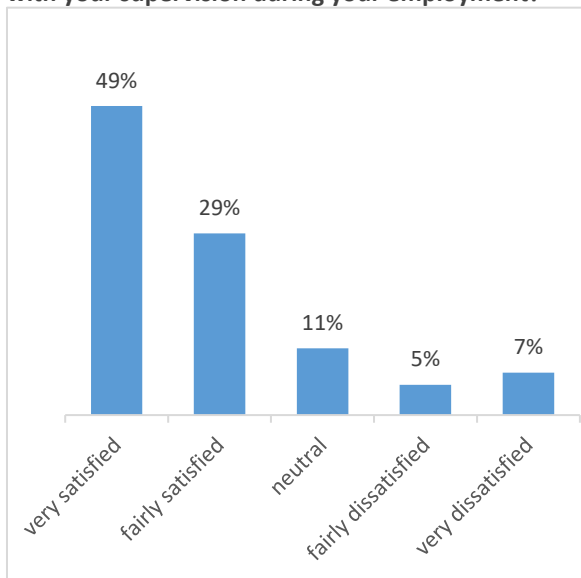


## Employment experience at SU

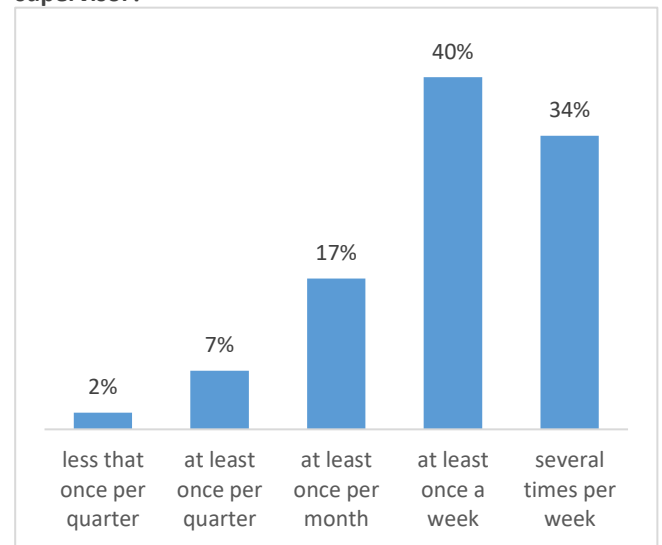
The vast majority of respondents are satisfied with their experience at SU and with their supervisor. However, 12% of them feel dissatisfied or even very dissatisfied. The latter had generally had less frequent interactions with their supervisors, no career advice, and report problems of poor management, lack of support, poor working conditions or failure to take health issues into account.

In terms of career support,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of people claim to have received none, the others have benefited from advice from their supervisor or other staff in their unit. None of them received support from the HR departments on this aspect.

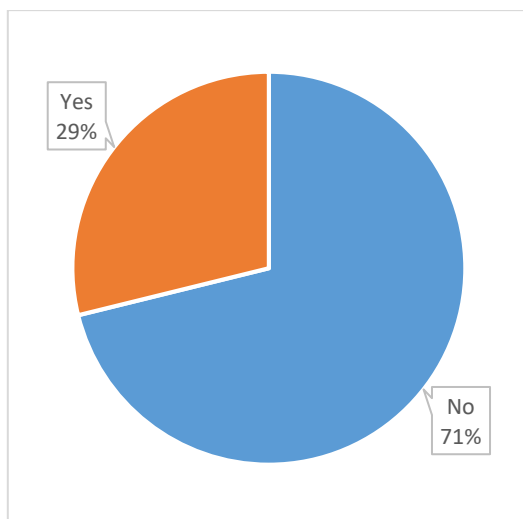
**Figure 10 – What was your general satisfaction with your supervision during your employment?**



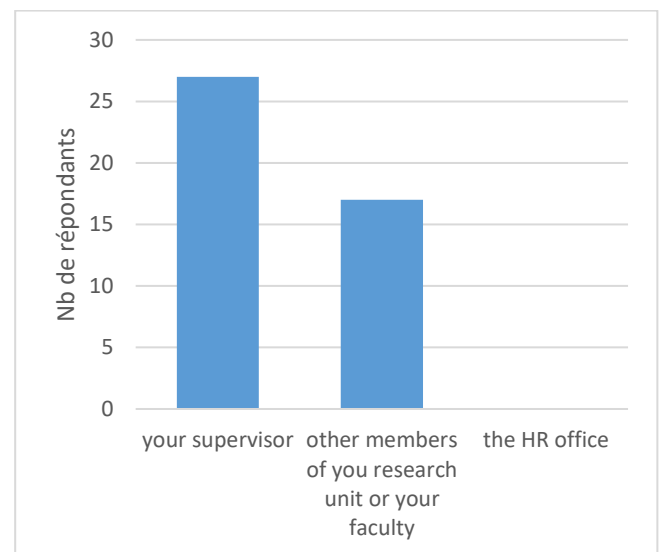
**Figure 11 – How often did you meet your supervisor?**



**Figure 12 - Have you benefited from career counselling/advice during your employment at SU?**



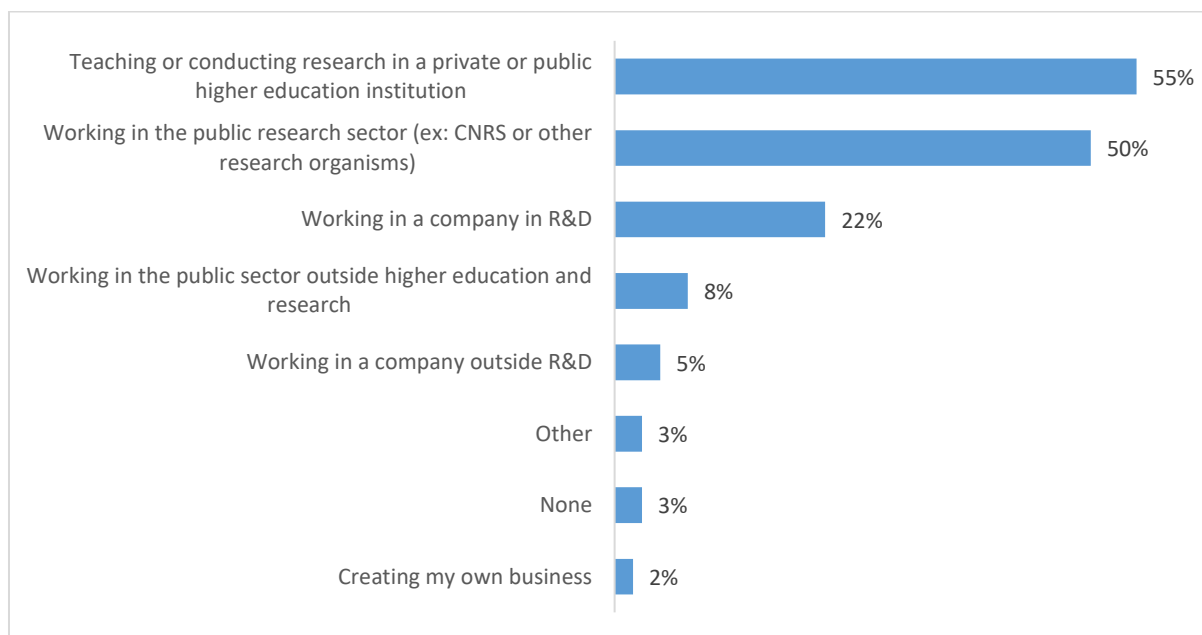
**Figure 13 – Who provided you with career advice (30 respondents) ?**



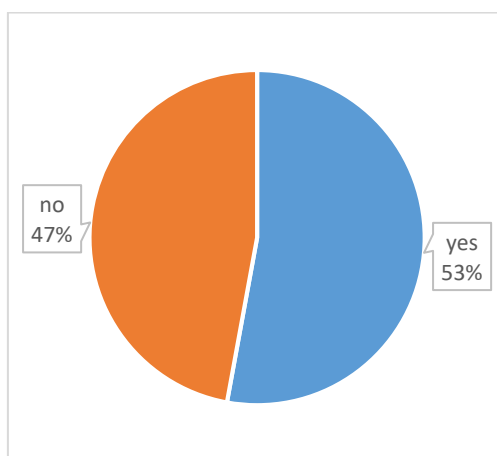
## Career prospects

The vast majority of respondents were considering an academic career, as teacher-researcher in higher education or in research organisations. 20% of them planned a career in the private research sector, and less than 10% for careers other than research or teaching. Thus, half applied for the CNU qualification (French certificate to access higher education recruitment positions).

**Figure 14 – Career plans after the SU contract (several answers possible)**



**Figure 15 – Have you applied to the CNU qualification?**



## Professional situation as of April 1, 2022

As of April 1, 2022, 87% of respondents were employed, 35% of them have even had several positions since their contract at SU. The average period of unemployment since the end of their contract at SU was 4.55 months, with however great disparities: 42% of people have had no period of unemployment.

Among the 13% of respondents without a work contract, 8% were actively looking for work, the others either already had job prospects, were unemployed, or had created their own business (only 1 person).

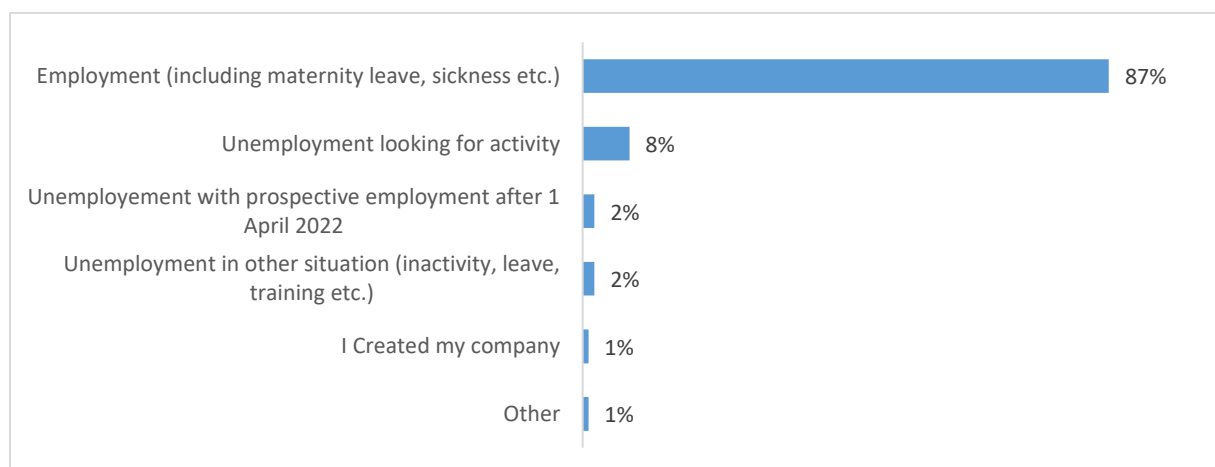
Among those employed, 40% had a permanent contract or equivalent (civil servants), 49% a post-doctoral type contract and 10% another type of fixed-term contract. Only 3 people were employed part-time.

The vast majority of position were in Research and Higher Education and R&D, other categories included health, education, management, innovation, or consulting for less than 10% of job types. A PhD diploma was an prerequisite for 85% of these jobs, i.e. for research and higher education professions. The majority of the positions described included personnel management tasks, project management and had an international context, but only 36% included budget management.

Half of the positions occupied were post-docs (51%), other permanent academic positions for 23% (lecturers, professors, research fellows), engineers, or project managers (15%), or others. It can be noted that the male/female ratio was similar to that of all respondents population for job seekers, post-docs and research fellows. However, men were overrepresented in engineering positions and women overrepresented in teaching or lecturer positions. AT the date of their hiring, post-docs had on average 3.3 years of post-thesis experience, 3.7 years for lecturers, and 4.9 years for engineers.

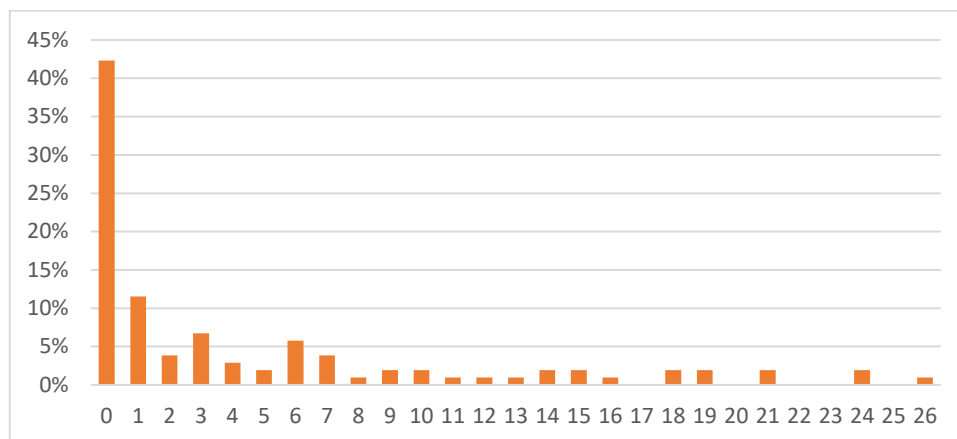
About half of respondents in employment found their position through their professional network, and about a quarter through competitions. There was no noticeable bias between the types of jobs held and the sources of funding/type of post-docs during their time at SU. Post-doc position remain one of the main career opportunities. It can nevertheless be noted that the ATER fellows had a more diverse career, in teaching or as project managers in particular.

**Figure 16 – Employment situation (on April 1, 2022)**

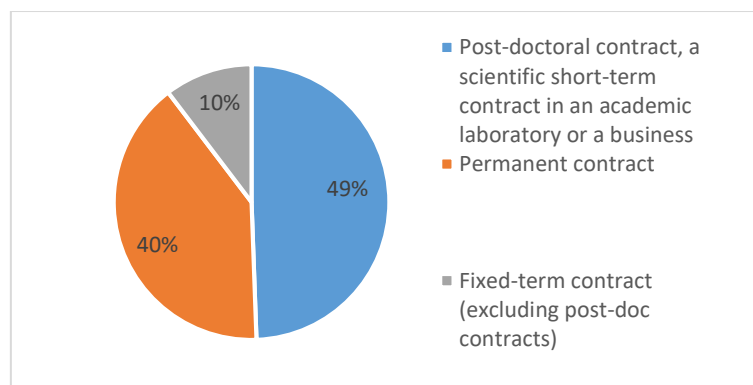




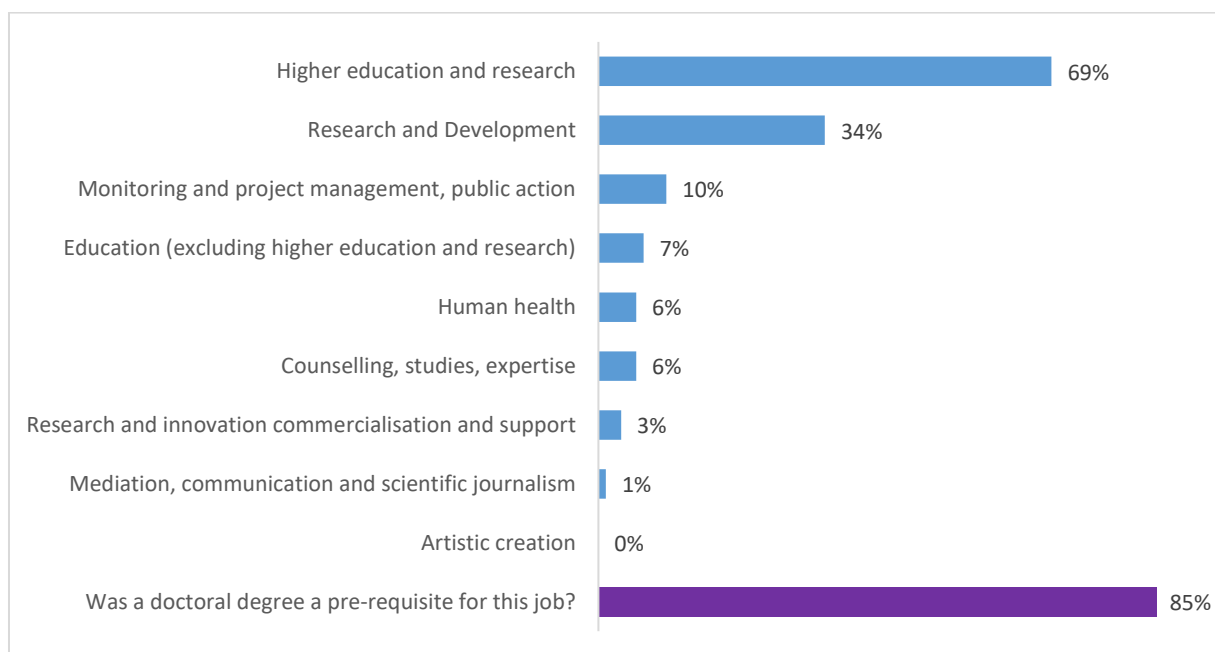
**Figure 17 – Nb of unemployment months between the end of the Su contract and April 1, 2022**



**Figure 18 – Contract type for respondents in employment**



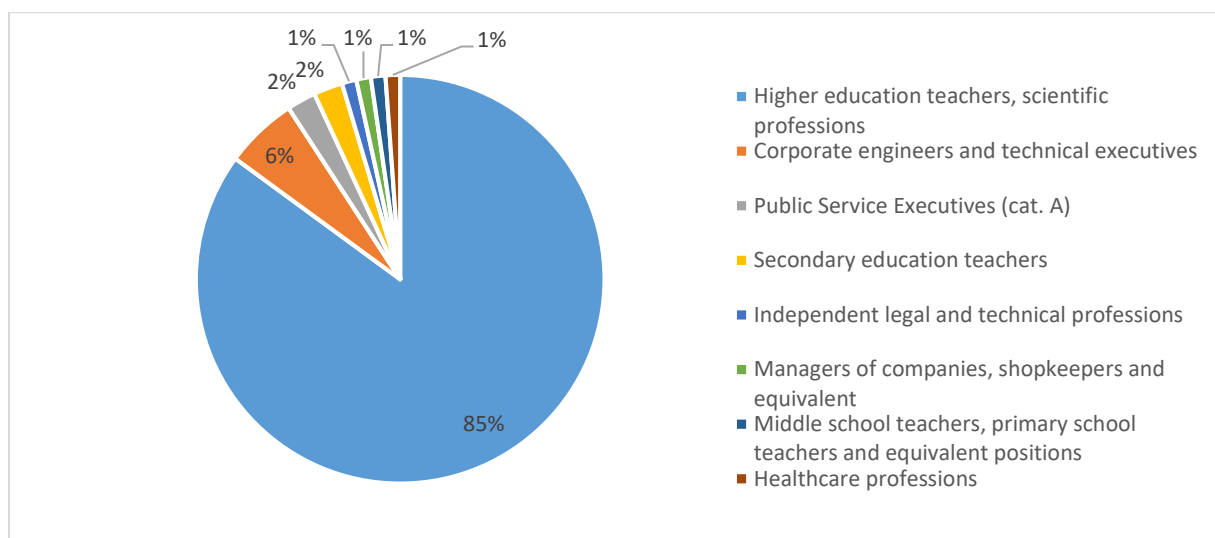
**Figure 19 – Which categorie(s) do your activities fall into?**



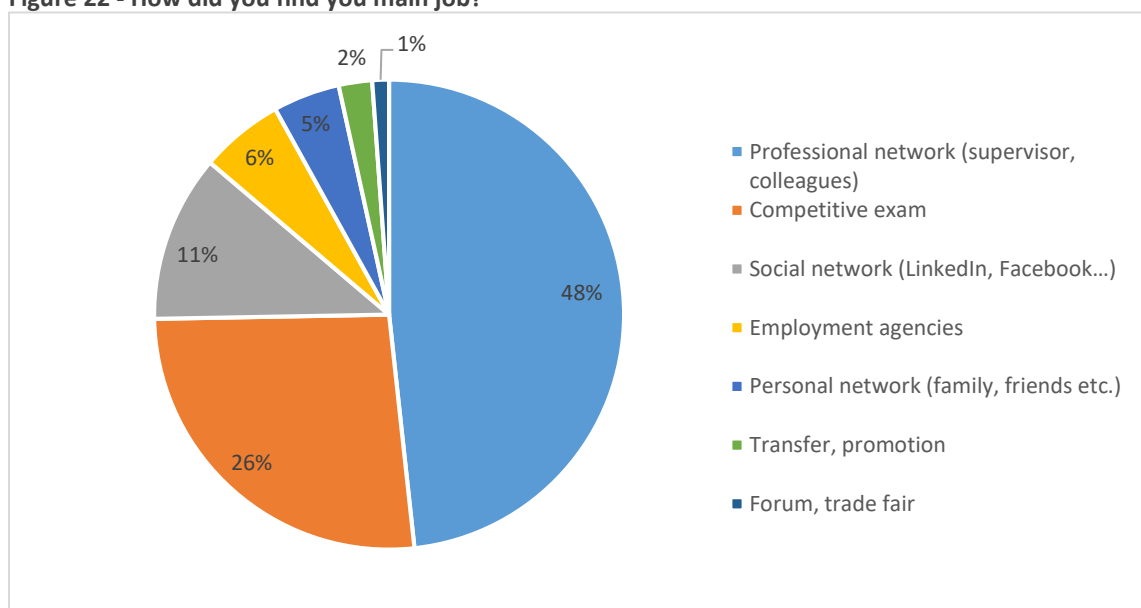
**Figure 20 – What type of duties did your position involve (several answers possible)?**



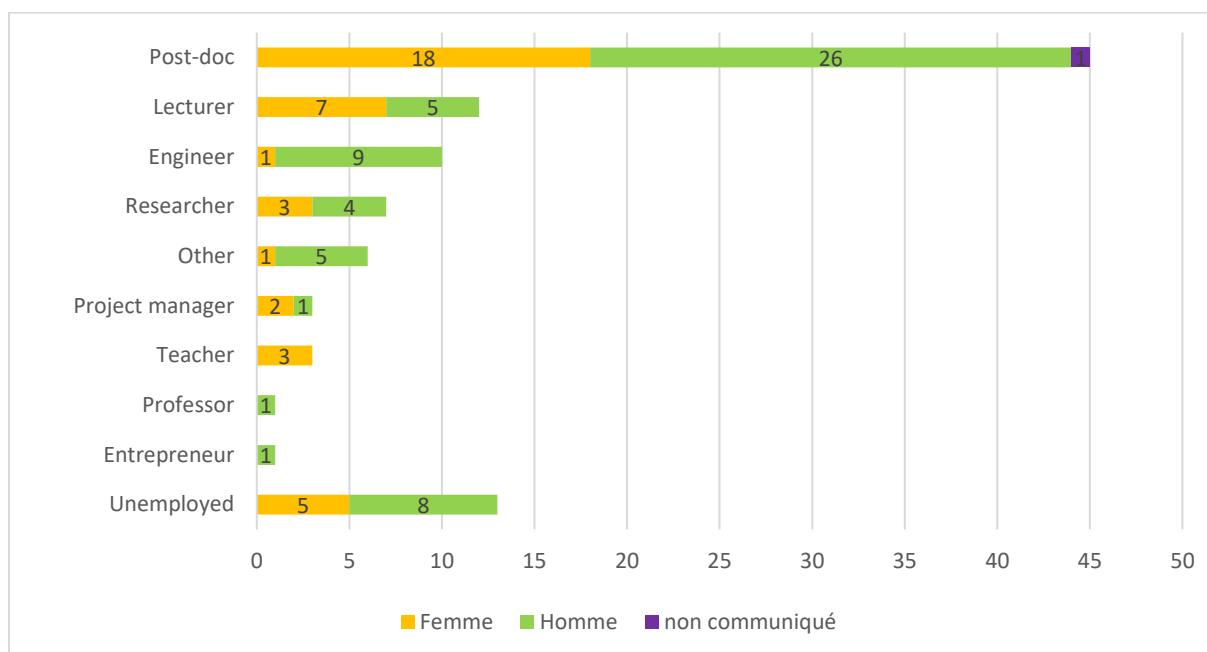
**Figure 21 - What is the socio-professional category of your job?**



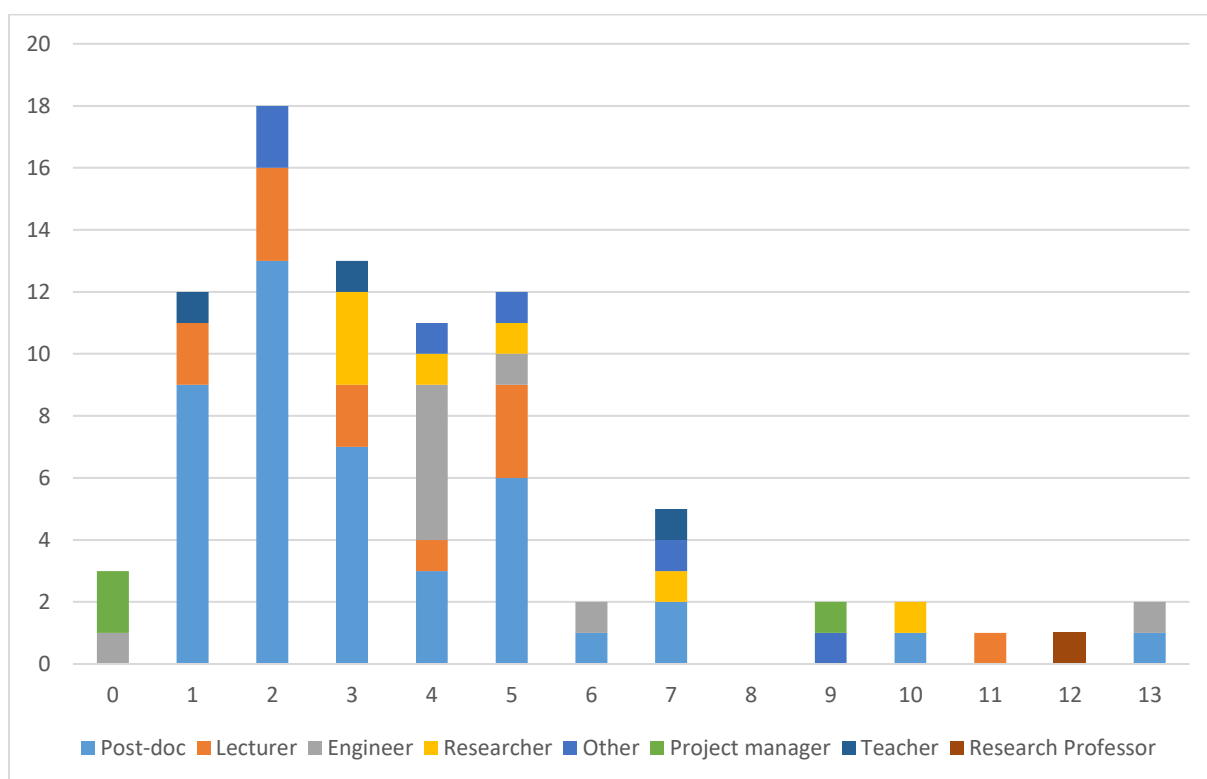
**Figure 22 - How did you find your main job?**



**Figure 23 – Distribution of employments by type of position and gender**



**Figure 24 - Years of post-thesis experience on the date of hiring**



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## Working conditions as of April 1, 2022

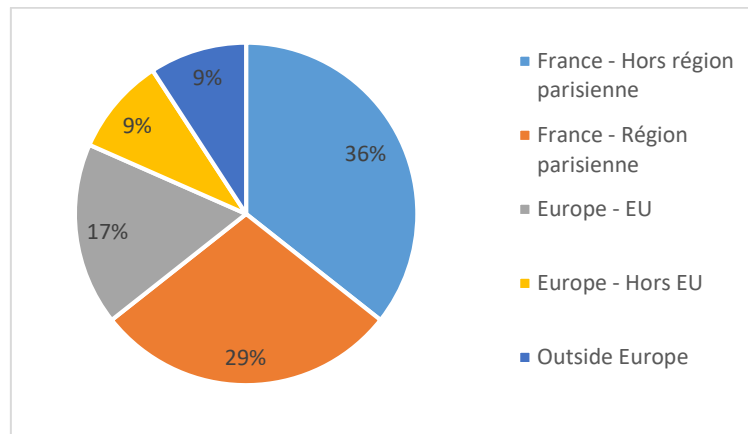
Two-thirds of people were employed in France, one-third abroad (16% in Europe, 9% outside Europe). This departure abroad was for half of them a means of promoting their career, and only 39% wished to return to France after this experience.

Employers' activity categories reflected the respondents' job types, with 86% falling within the Education/Research/R&D sector. In 2/3 of the cases it was in public service, and 21% in a private company.

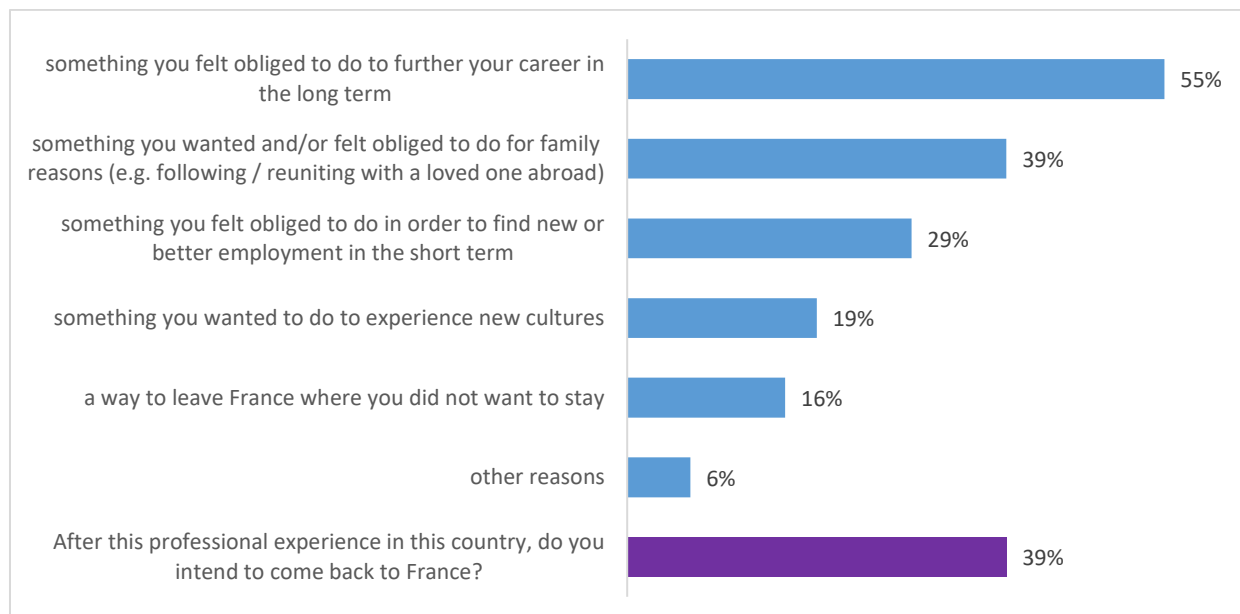
The average salary was €3072, with disparities between the types of employers (€3527 in the private sector vs. €2949 in the public sector), and for positions abroad (€2843 in France vs. €3591 in abroad).

People in employment are relatively satisfied with their professional situation, its adequacy with their PhD, its international openness, career prospects and their remuneration. It can however be noted that the questions on career prospects and remuneration are the ones with the fewest very satisfied opinions and the most negative opinions.

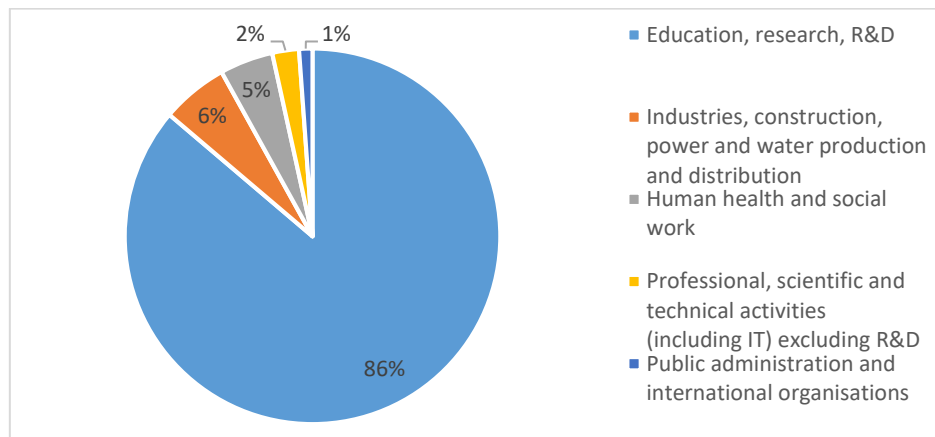
**Figure 26 – Place of employment**



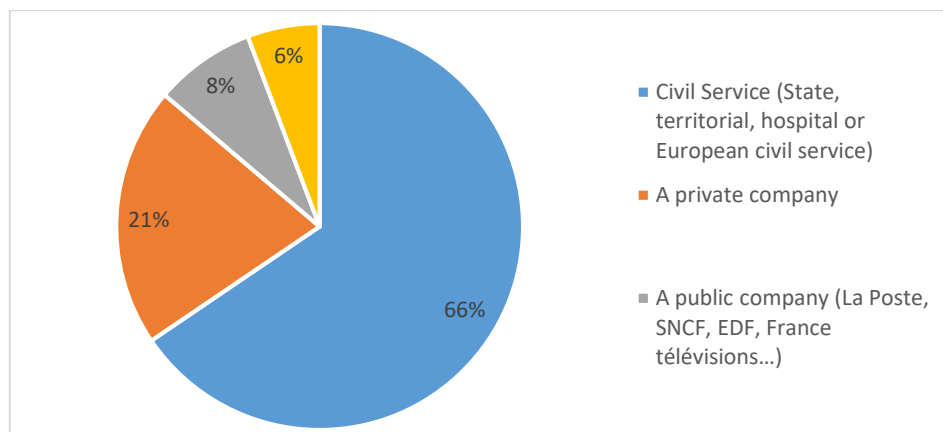
**Figure 27 – Reasons for the departure abroad of the respondents employed out of France (several answers possible)**



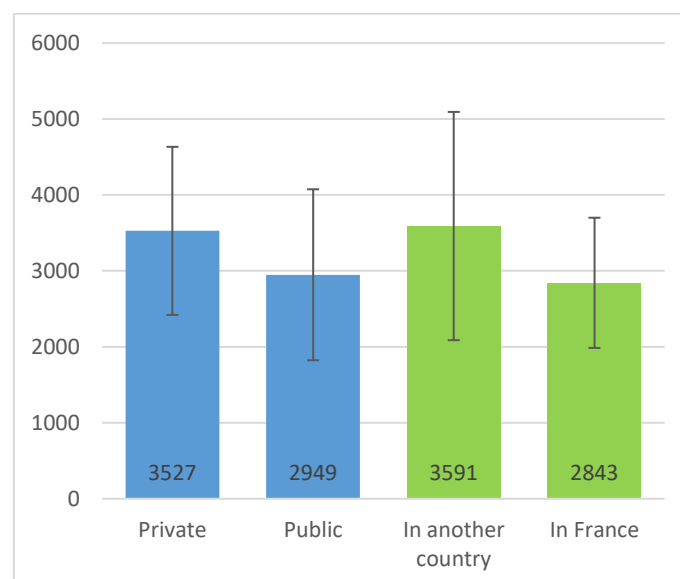
**Figure 28 – Activity sector of the employer**



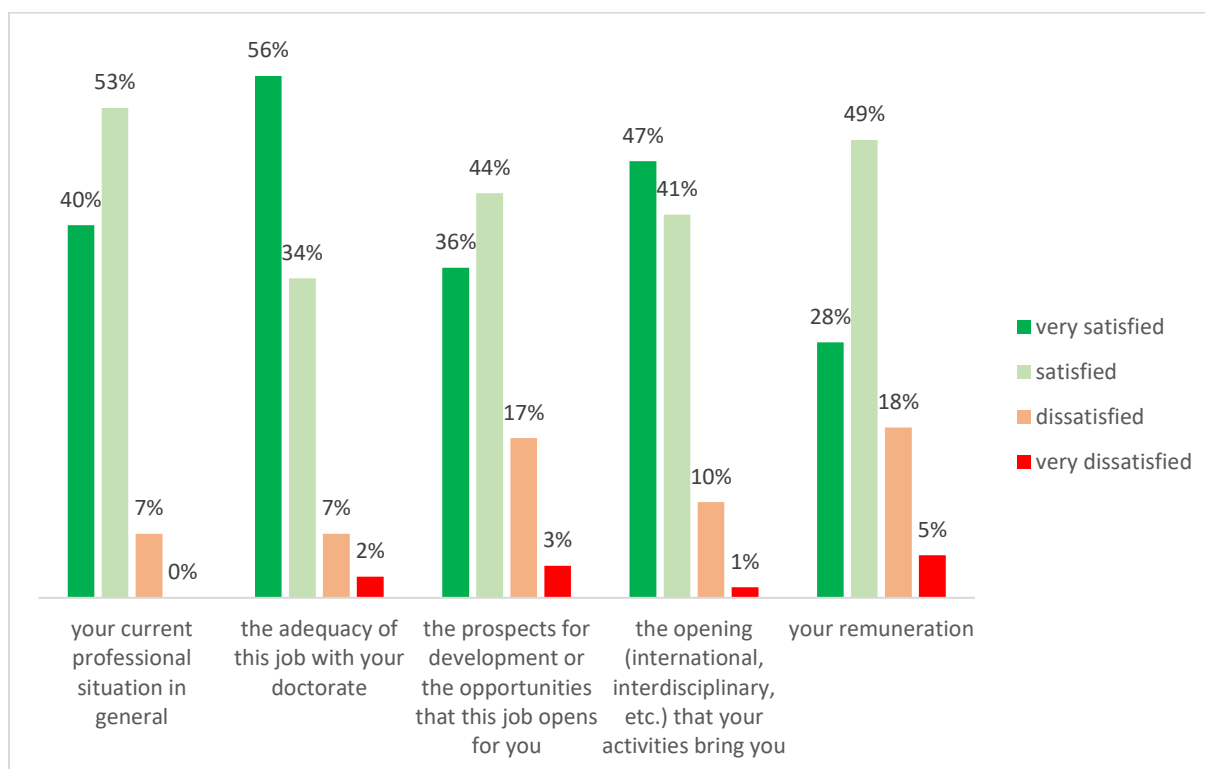
**Figure 29 – Category of the employer**



**Figure 30 – Average net salaries declared by the respondents (in euros)**



**Figure 31 – Satisfaction with you current employment situation**



## Respondents actively looking for employment

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Only 10 respondents indicated that they were looking for a position, which does not allow a reliable analysis of the results. It can however be noted that almost all of these people are looking for a position in research, development or higher education, with an average of 5.6 months of active job search (from 2 to 10 months). Seven out of 10 are also looking for a job outside their region of residence, or even abroad.

The reasons given are the lack of publications, the lack of a professional network, the lack of funding from potential employers and the difficulty of finding a position in the private sector with a PhD without “business” experience.

Job seekers have between 2 and 7 years of experience after their doctorate.

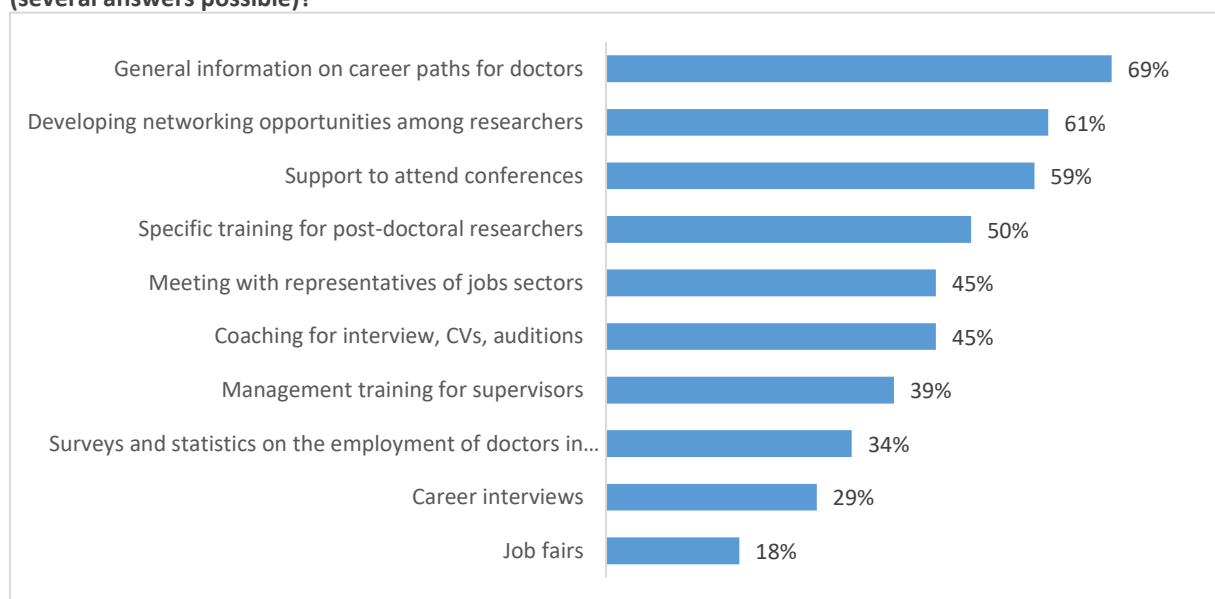


## Career counselling needs

Among the respondents, 29% of people benefited from career support within their SU research unit and all found it useful. In general, 77% of people believed that such support would be useful for their future professional career.

The types of support receiving the most of positive opinions were: general information on the careers paths open to doctors and the terms of the competitions for public employment, the development of their participation in community networks, the funding of travel for their participation in conferences, and training on specific skills dedicated to post-docs.

**Figure 32 - What type of career help do you find adequate to prepare post-docs to their next career steps (several answers possible)?**



## Open comments

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About 10 open comments were received, half of them from respondents who were not satisfied with their supervision during their post-doc. Most of the topics of the comments fell under the following themes:

- Difficulty for international post-docs at the administrative level
- Cases of inadequate tasks for a researcher position and hours incompatible with the place of residence
- Abrupt and unaccompanied end of contract: during the trial period, no extension following a maternity leave, following health problems, etc.
- Poor management and/or lack of recognition by supervisors and their ignorance of the labor code
- Precariousness of post-docs in constant mobility and search for new positions/funding
- Discouragement for a career in the public research sector, in comparison with the private sector offering more attractive salary levels and employment conditions.

But also *“Sorbonne University is the best university I have been to”*