



European scientists: too often, like acrobats without a net

By Sabine Louët

Published on EuroScientist: www.euroscientist.com

Juggling work with the demands of personal life may lead to compromises in research careers

As we are still early in the New Year, the season is still about planning the year ahead. As a result of such plans, the need to juggle becomes more pressing. We all try to master the art of arranging, in a skilful way, the professional and the private spheres of our existence. Some have too much work. Some have too much time on their hands. Some balance the two in a manner that they did not know they could.

To enjoy a career in research, some are paying a high price on their [private life](#)—let alone suffering from [sleep](#) deprivation. More often than not, they are facing the consequences of living with precarious research positions and facing the constant need for high mobility. In principle, mobility is one of the greatest advantages of doing research. It broadens your horizon, enhances your experience.

The trouble starts when it is not simply just you on your own. For dual career couples, for example, there is often one person left behind. Having to compromise so that the other can progress in their research is often the only option. The move will balance out in the long term, as long as it is not always the same person who makes the sacrifice.

Read this post online: <http://www.euroscientist.com/european-scientists-too-often-like-acrobats-without-a-net>

EuroScience | 1, Quai Lezay-Marnésia | F-67000 Strasbourg | France
Tel +33 3 8824 1150 | Fax +33 3 8824 7556 | office@euroscience.org | www.euroscience.org

Thus, the context in which many European scientists operate has deep implications for family life. Not having stability, makes many postpone plans to have children, for example. Those children, who, once born, will not necessarily find [adequate childcare](#) structure to welcome them, once both parents go back to work. Each researcher needs to keep their [options](#) open and stop worrying about whether they will stay in research until they reach [retirement](#).

So many scientists across Europe are faced with this kind of dilemma. Even more so now that some country's research budget are been scaled back; resulting in decreased opportunities for careers in research at all. Now, after years of recession, the seriousness of the situation has reached new heights. Many scientists are turning their back on a career in research. Out of necessity. Some seek refuge in the private sector, working as developers in the software industry or project managers in the biotech sector. Others will simply find a niche and set-up their own technology start-up. These are the lucky ones; they still work in a field in which they can apply the skills they have learned as scientists.

Others change tack completely. Real life examples of unlikely career paths involve a former mathematician setting up a therapeutic massage practice, or a chemist becoming a secondary school teacher. All of the decisions to try and make a decent living—and balancing both their work and life—are laudable. Yet this is not exactly the plan they had when they started out. Nor does it provide fodder for the kind of [scientist's biopic](#) that Hollywood is so keen on.

But if this is the only way some European researchers will adapt to their unforgiving environment, so be it. To make it possible for many more researchers to take that step, it would be necessary for the rest of the economy to acknowledge their worth, their creativity and their adaptability, which is not often the case in European countries. Otherwise, they become like acrobats trying to impress without a net. In the event of a fall, the consequences may be brutal.

Photo credit: [hbp pix](#)