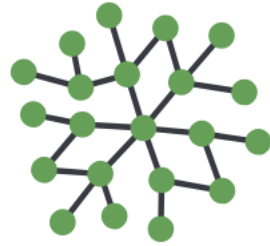


The Current Data Landscape of the Postdoctoral Phase

Dr. Nicholas Russell



**75% of postdocs are
non-German**

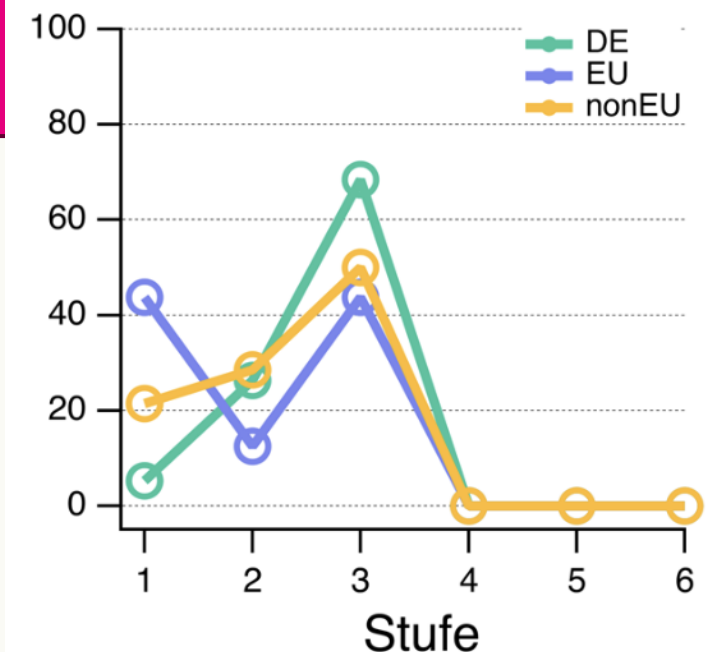
**Were non-German postdocs
receiving a lower salary than
German postdocs?**

**ocs are
an**

Demographics and Employment of Max-Planck Society's Postdocs

 M. Vallier,  M. Mueller,  P. Alcami,  G. Bellucci,  M. Grange,
 YX. Lu,  S. Duponchel

doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.11.27.399733> 



Why do we even need data?

**Academic
knowledge**

**Local vs.
global**

**Political
capital**

Accountability

Why is there a lack of data about postdocs?

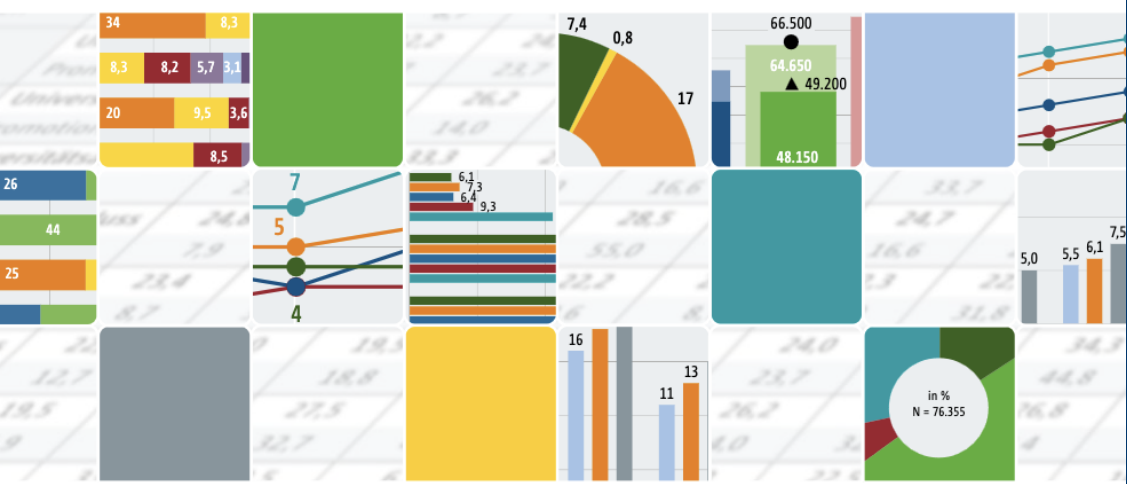
Difficulty creating a definition of a postdoc

Inability to count how many postdocs there are

The constant turnover of postdocs

Fear of bad publicity/backlash

National Report on Early Career Researchers 2025



Statistical Data and Research Findings on Doctoral Candidates
and Doctorate Holders in Germany

Overview of key results



Important Findings

Less than 10% of academic
positions are permanent

82% of postdocs on temporary
contracts will leave academia

30% of academics at universities
are non-German

Important Findings

71% of postdocs on fixed-term contracts are strongly considering leaving academia

Professorship is no longer the primary career goal



Gregor Fabian | Christophe Heger | Merritt Fedzin

Barometer für die Wissenschaft

Ergebnisse der
Wissenschaftsbefragung
2023

Longitudinal Data Collection of PhD Holders

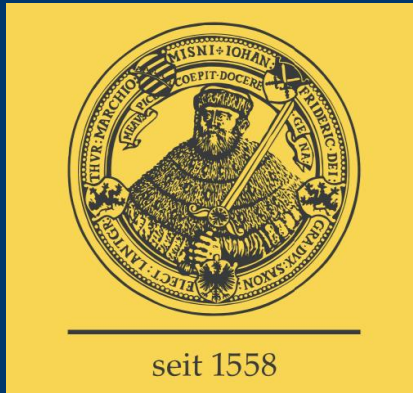


nacaps 
National Academics
Panel Study

The IAB-INCHER project of earned doctorates (IIPED): A supervised machine learning approach to identify doctorate recipients in the German integrated employment biography data

Dominik Heinisch (University of Kassel and INCHER-Kassel (Germany)),
Johannes Koenig (University of Kassel and INCHER-Kassel (Germany)),
Anne Otto (Institute for Employment Research (IAB) Rhineland-Palatinate-Saarland (Germany))

German Institution/Organization Postdoc Surveys



Friedrich-Schiller
University of
Jena (2011)



Max Planck PostdocNet
(2020, 2022, 2024)



Leibniz PostDoc
Network
(2022, 2024)

International Surveys



► PLoS One. 2022 Feb 2;17(2):e0263185. doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0263185](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263185)

U.S. postdoctoral careers in life sciences, physical sciences and engineering: Government, industry, and academia

[Maya Denton](#)¹, [Maura Borrego](#)^{1,*}, [David B Knight](#)²

CAREER FEATURE | 24 October 2023

Falling behind: postdocs in their thirties tire of putting life on hold

Temporary contracts, low salaries and cost-of-living hikes force many researchers to put off parenthood and other big decisions.

ISTAART
alzheimer's association

PIA TO ELEVATE EARLY CAREER
RESEARCHERS (PEERS)
PROFESSIONAL INTEREST AREA

LISTENING TO EARLY CAREER DEMENTIA RESEARCHERS

► eLife. 2021 Jan 11;10:e60613. doi: [10.7554/eLife.60613](https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.60613)

A survey of early-career researchers in Australia

[Katherine Christian](#)^{1,✉}, [Carolyn Johnstone](#)¹, [Jo-ann Larkins](#)², [Wendy Wright](#)³, [Michael R Doran](#)^{4,5,6,7,✉}





Main Questions from the 2024 Survey

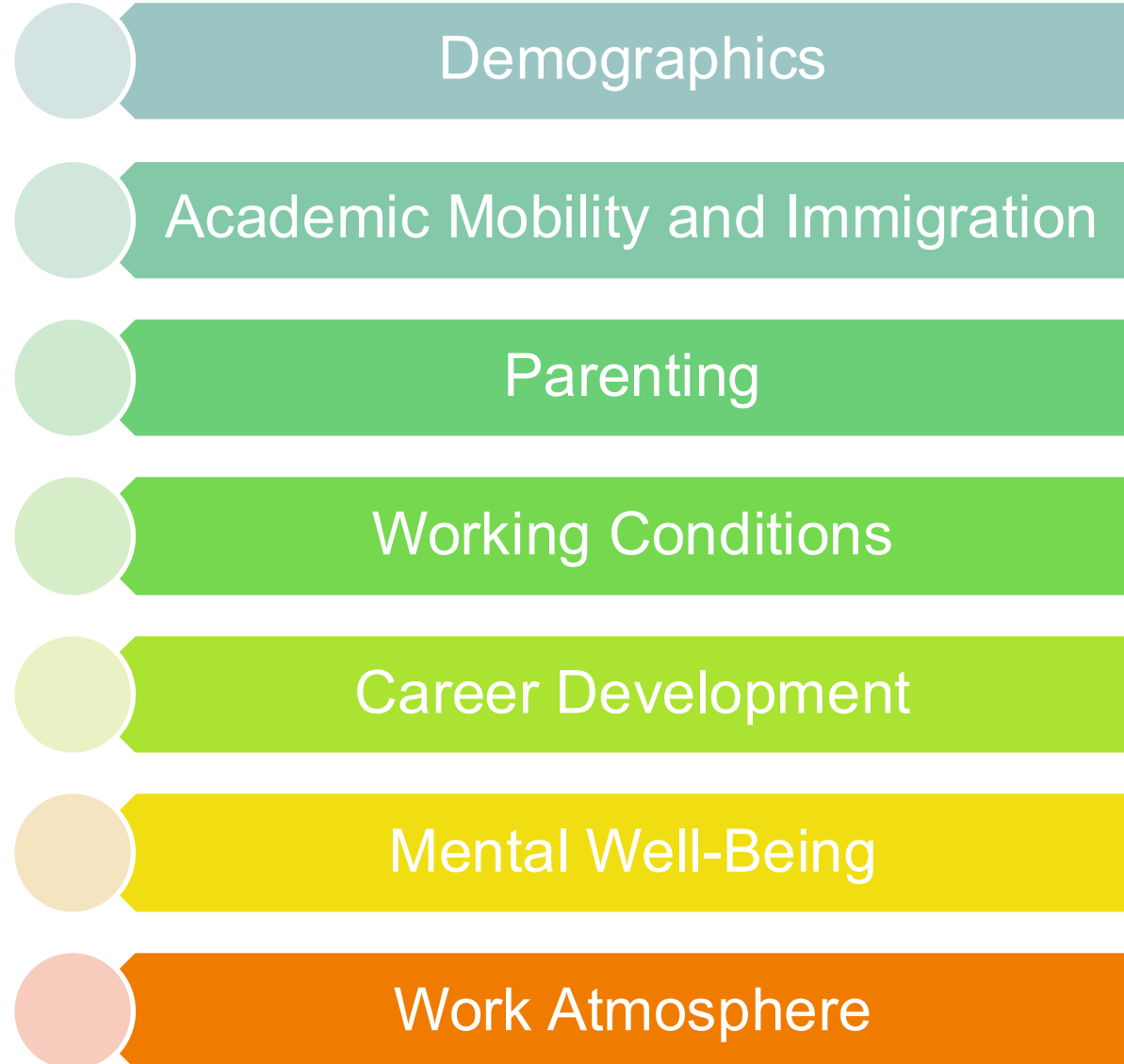
Are the career development needs of postdocs being met?

Do postdocs know where to turn should they encounter discrimination, harassment, or bullying?

Where are postdocs coming from? And importantly, where do they want to go?



The 2024 Survey Sections





MENTAL WELL-BEING

PHQ-8
(Depression)

GAD-7
(Anxiety)

Satisfaction
with Life Survey



PHQ-8
(Depression)

GAD-7

Satisfaction
Life Survey

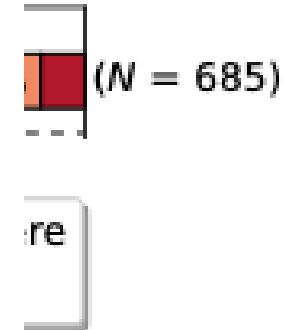
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[nature](#) > [career news](#) > article

CAREER NEWS | 12 August 2025 | Correction [14 August 2025](#)

All respondents

Postdoc depression and anxiety rates are rising, finds survey of 872 researchers



The Max Planck Society is good at attracting international postdocs but struggles to retain them, survey finds.

By [Virginia Gewin](#)

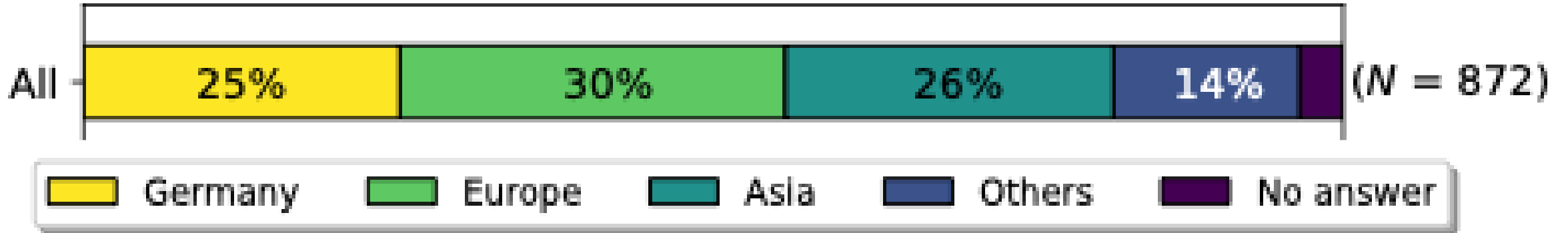
Highly educated German postdocs (Heidemann et al. 2021)

depression: 4.6%

Germans are ~50% more likely to be moderately to severely depressed



Nationality



Max Planck postdoc survey 2024: **74%**

Max Planck PhD students survey 2021: **58%**

Max Planck Scientists: **57%**

([mpg.de/international/facts_figures](https://www.mpg.de/international/facts_figures))

Max Planck directors: **40%**

([mpg.de/international/facts_figures](https://www.mpg.de/international/facts_figures))

Max Planck Employees generally: **36%**

([mpg.de/international/facts_figures](https://www.mpg.de/international/facts_figures))

Leibniz Institute postdocs 2024: **20%**

Germany general population 2022: **18%** (Destatis 2023)

Nature's global postdoc survey 2023: **61%**



Do you plan on continuing to live in the country
of your MPI after employment?

 Yes, in the same city  Maybe  I dont know
 Yes, in the same country, but in a different city  No

Why do
postdocs not
want to stay?

Family in a different country

Language barriers

Attractive job prospects elsewhere

Lack of job prospects in Germany

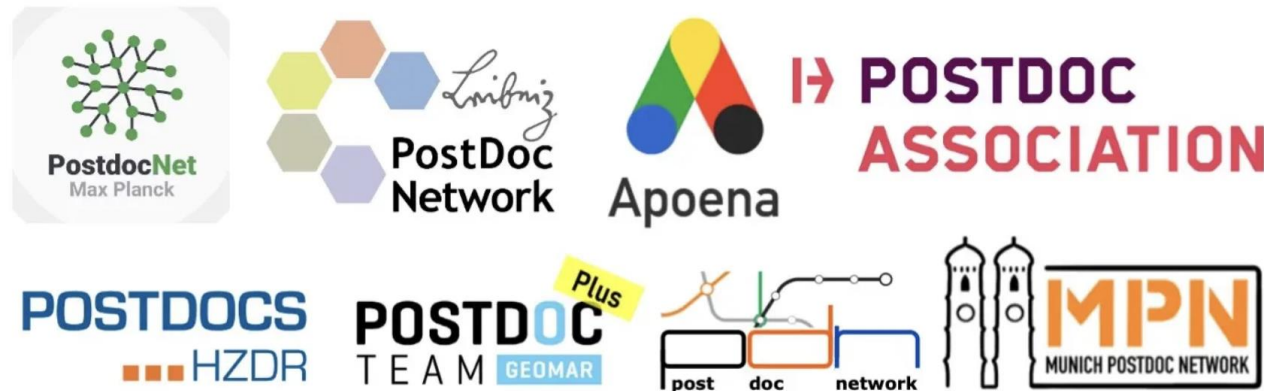
WissZeitVG

WissZeitVG Timeline

- March 17, 2023: Eckpunktpapier from BMBF (3-year postdoc)
- March 29, 2023: Statement by postdoctoral associations

Joint Statement from German Postdoctoral Networks on the Eckpunktepapier from the BMBF on 17.03.2023

MARCH 29, 2023



WissZeitVG Timeline

- March 17, 2023: Eckpunktpapier from BMBF (3-year postdoc)
- March 29, 2023: Statement by postdoctoral associations
- June 6, 2023

BMBF
Amendment to
WissZeitVG (4+2)



Arbeitsbedingungen in der Wissenschaft

Hör auf zu heulen, Hanna!

Zwei Jahre haben junge Wissenschaftler:innen für bessere Arbeitsbedingungen gekämpft. Doch an ihrem größten Projekt, einem neuen Gesetz, sind sie gescheitert.

Ein Kommentar von [Anna-Lena Scholz](#)

6. Juni 2023, 17:33 Uhr

227

WissZeitVG Timeline

- March 17, 2023: Eckpunktpapier from BMBF (3-year postdoc)
- March 29, 2023: Statement by postdoctoral associations
- June 6, 2023
- June 7, 2023
- July 4, 2023



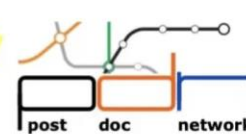
WissZeitVG Timeline

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- June 6, 2023
- June 7, 2023
- July 4, 2023

Joint Statement of the German Postdoctoral Networks on the Draft Bill for the WissZeitVG

The following is an official English translation of the comments sent to the BMBF regarding the Draft Bill for the WissZeitVG dated 06.06.2023.

JULY 04, 2023



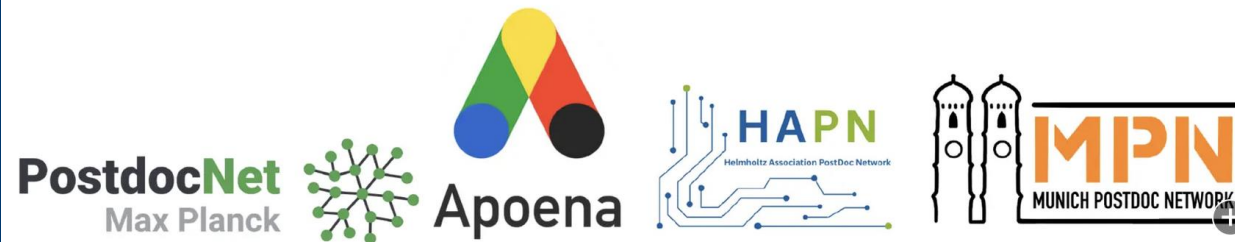
WissZeitVG Timeline

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- June 6, 2023
- June 7, 2023
- July 4, 2023
- May 27, 2024

Statement on the Federal Cabinet's decision on the WissZeitVG amendment of March 27, 2024

MAY 27, 2024

Soon, the Bundestag will discuss an amendment to the WissZeitVG. We, along with other postdoctoral networks in Germany, have drafted a statement to share our thoughts on the proposed amendments.





WissZeitVG Timeline

- March 17, 2023: Eckpunktpapier from BMBF (3-year postdoc)
- March 29, 2023: Statement by postdoctoral associations
- June 6, 2023
- June 7, 2023
- July 4, 2023
- May 27, 2024
- May 26, 2026

Referentenentwurf

des Bundesministeriums für Forschung, Technologie und Raumfahrt

Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Modernisierung des Befristungsrechts im Wissenschaftsbereich



The Proposed WissZeitVG Amendment

Minimum First Contract Lengths

Postdoc: 2 years
PhD: 3 years

Priority of Qualification Fixed-Term Contracts

Contracts have
precedence over
fellowships

No “Carry Over” Time from PhD

6+6 framework
remains

Extensions for family and health reasons

Disability: 2 years
Parents: 2 years
per child

Responses from Postdocs



Joint Postdoc Network Statement

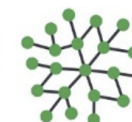
on the
WissZeitVG
draft
amendment



Key points from our joint statement — crafted together with postdoc networks across Germany



PostdocNet
Max Planck



White Paper on the Qualification Principle in the WissZeitVG

A Qualification-Based Framework for Sustainable Academic Careers in Germany

Submitted to the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR)

June 14, 2026

The Proposed WissZeitVG Amendment

Minimum First Contract Lengths

Postdoc: 3 years
PhD: 3 years

Priority of Qualification
First Contract

Contractive
Fellowship

No “Carry Over” Time from PhD

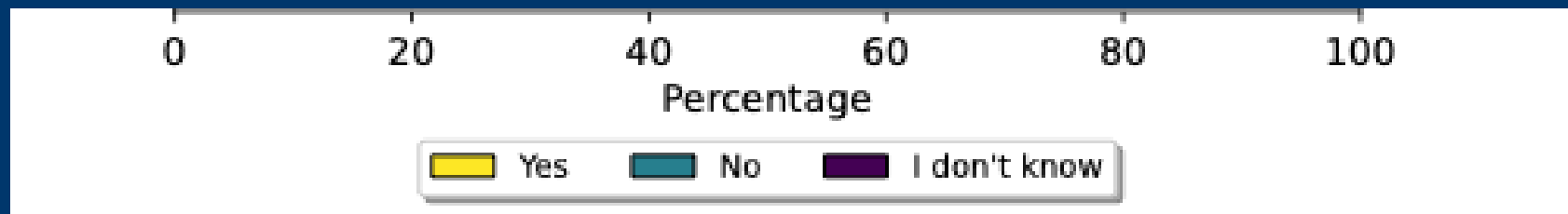
6+6 framework remains

Extensions for family and health reasons

Disability: 2 years
Parents: 2 years per child

A Question from the 2024 MPG Survey

Do you feel there should be a government regulation on the maximum number of years that a postdoc can be on non-permanent contracts?



Issues with the Proposal

What exactly is qualification?

Career tracks for R3 researchers are murky

A time-limit on the postdoc is questionable

R1

Completed Doctorate

R2

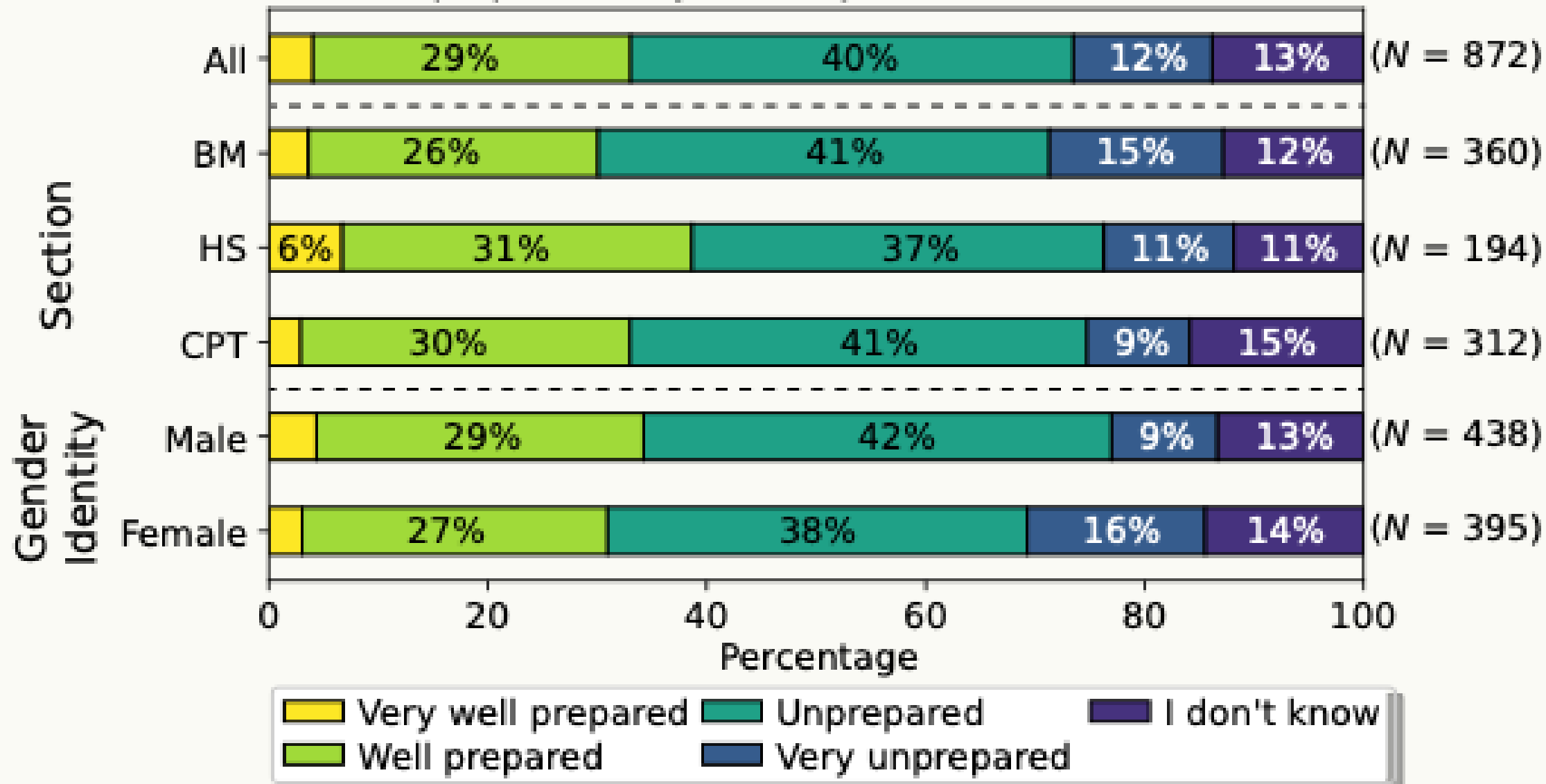
Scientific Independence

R3

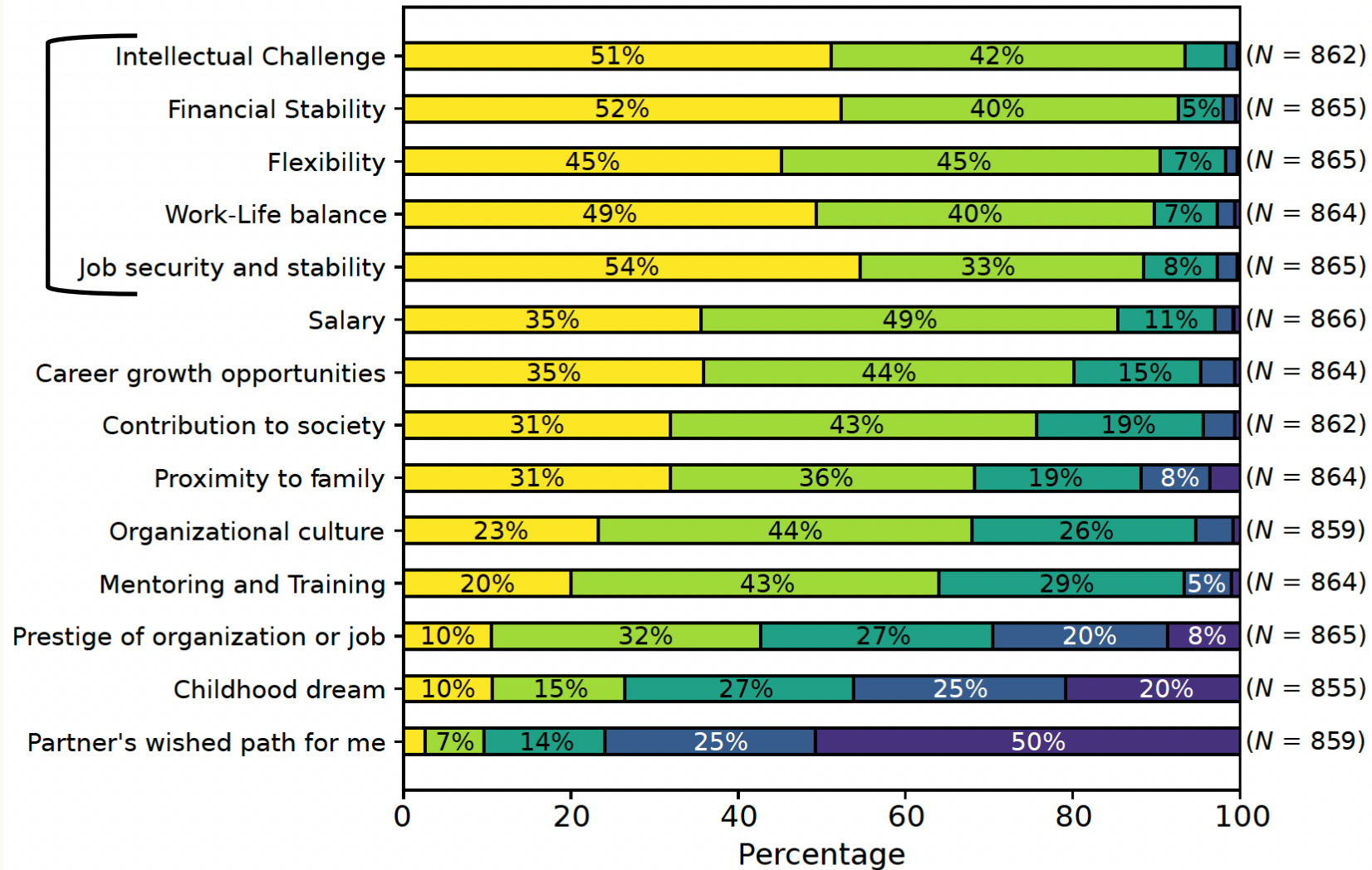
Scientific leadership

Tenure-track positions

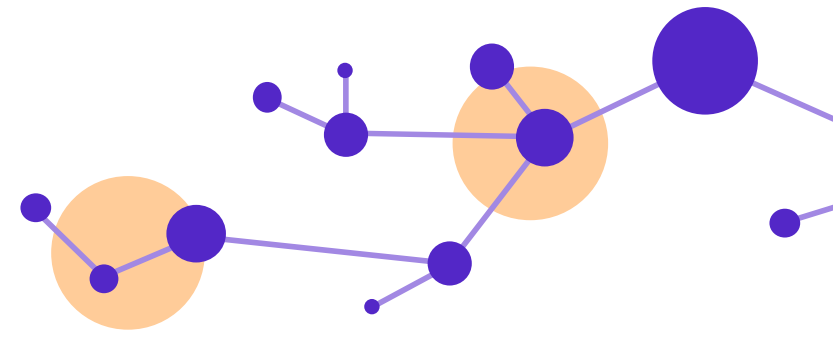
How prepared are you for a job outside of academia?



How strongly do you agree that the following criteria play a crucial role in your employment decisions?



Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree



The German Postdoc Network Postdoctoral Survey

A survey for postdocs by postdocs: Coming this September

WHY DEFINING THE POSTDOC MATTERS



A shared definition goes
beyond administrative clarity.



It would establish **postdocs**
as a visible and measurable
group, creating the
foundation for representation,
accountability, and evidence-
based policy.



Mental Well-Being



Are there differences between
certain groups of postdocs?

Where do postdocs want to
go, and how do they envision
getting there?

Can we finally define a
postdoc?



The Challenges We Still Face

Debates that affect all postdocs are largely in German

Survey burnout is real

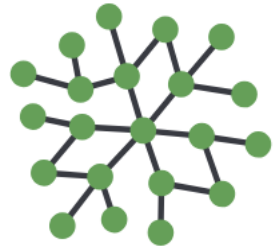
International postdocs are left out of the conversation

Defining a postdoc is incredibly difficult

A BIG thank you to....



PostdocNet
Max Planck



nature

MAX PLANCK
GESELLSCHAFT

