

Status of the study

In the fall survey, we conducted a factorial survey and a choice experiment to find out what attributes of early career funding CTC participants think are important. The attributes varied in terms of location (Switzerland only, abroad only, or mixed) and duration (2, 3, or 4 years). The analysis shows that a potential funding scheme with

mixed location and a duration of 4 years is preferred over abroad-only. Switzerland-only schemes are the least preferred, independent of duration. These findings may be taken into account in the revision of the early career funding schemes.

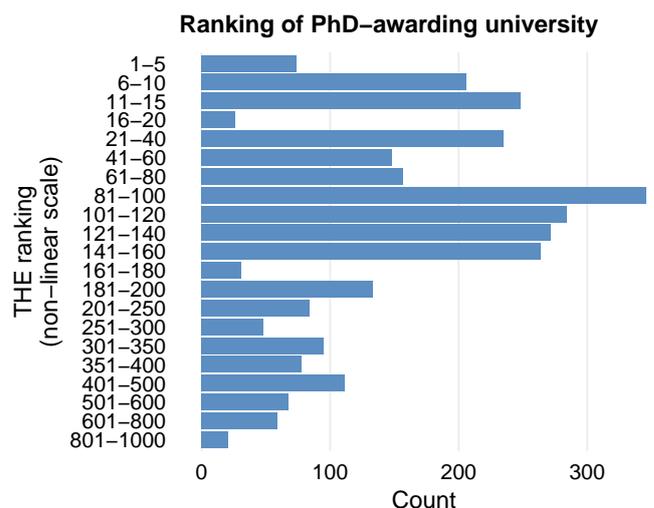
PhD characteristics and success in the first application for a CTC grant

In this newsletter, we explore data on the PhDs completed by CTC participants. We focus in particular on descriptive associations between selected characteristics of the PhD and the probability of being funded in the first observed application to a grant scheme included in CTC: Early Postdoc.Mobility, Postdoc.Mobility, Ambizione and Eccellenza. For this analysis, Early Postdoc.Mobility and Postdoc.Mobility were grouped into a single funding scheme, we retained only the first application submitted by each participant, and we excluded

resubmissions as well as applications with insufficient PhD data. Our sample comprises of 3'342 applications. Overall, 43.2% of the applicants are women and 56.8% are men. With respect to research domain, 28.8% completed their PhD in the humanities and social sciences, 37.9% in mathematics, natural and engineering sciences, and 33.3% in biology and medicine. All results presented below are descriptive; they document associations in the CTC data and should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effects.

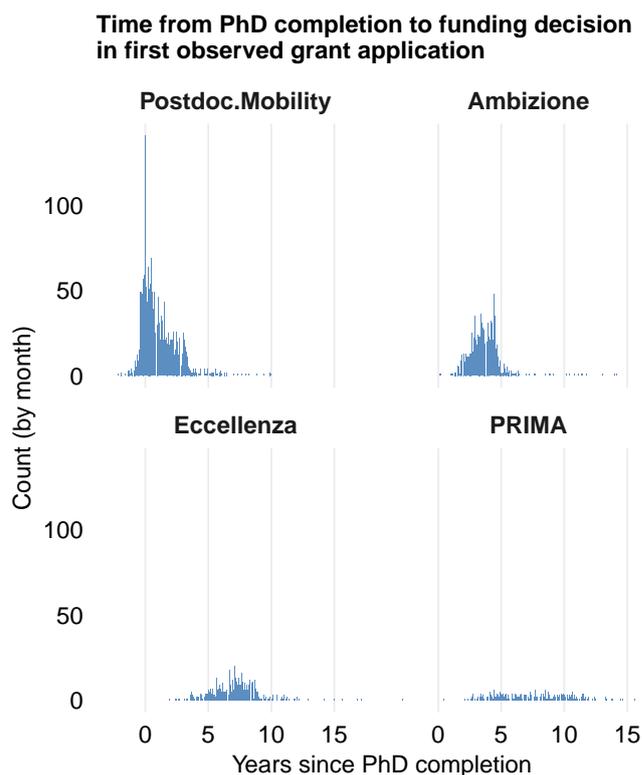
Ranking of PhD-awarding university

CTC collected the THE World University Ranking of the PhD-granting institution at the time of PhD obtention, as information on the environment in which the PhD was received. Around one-fifth of the CTC participants (19%) received their PhD from a university in the top 20, 48% from a university in the top 100, and 81% from a university in the top 200. Is a higher THE ranking of the PhD-awarding university associated with a greater chance of success at first observed grant application? A logistic regression analysis shows no association between the THE ranking and success at the first observed grant application, controlling for cohort, research domain, and grant scheme (OR = 1.00). In other words, the ranking of the PhD-awarding university, on its own, does not differentiate successful from unsuccessful applications.



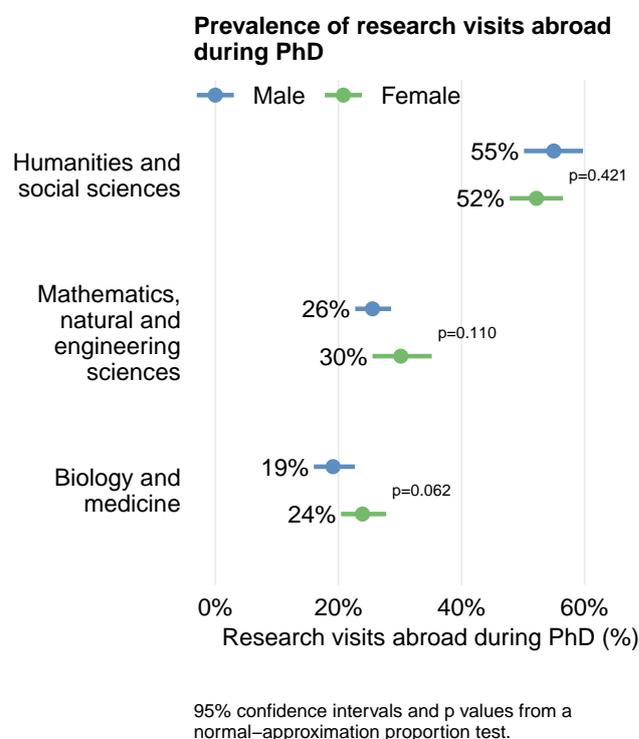
Time from obtaining PhD to first observed grant application

We examine the time that elapses between the PhD completion date reported by CTC participants and the date of the funding decision for their first observed grant application. This duration naturally varies by grant scheme, as each instrument has different eligibility windows. For Postdoc.Mobility, the mean is 1 year and 1 month. For Ambizione, the mean is 3 years and 9 months. For Eccellenza, the mean is 7 years and 2 months. Finally, for PRIMA, the mean is 7 years and 5 months. The distribution by month varies by grant scheme. For instance, it is more concentrated around the PhD completion date for Postdoc.Mobility, while it is much more spread out for PRIMA. Negative values indicate that the funding decision for some participants' first observed application occurred before they officially completed their PhD or at least before the PhD end date that they reported. A logistic regression analysis shows no association between the time that elapses since PhD completion and success at first observed grant application, controlling for cohort, research domain, and grant scheme (OR = 1.00). This indicates that the time that elapses since PhD completion, on its own, does not differentiate successful from unsuccessful applications.



Research visits during the PhD

Approximately one-third of the CTC participants (32.7%) undertook a research visit at an institution abroad during their PhD. Two-thirds did not undertake a research visit (63.7%), while a small share undertook a research visit within their home country (4.3%). Controlling for cohort, research domain, and grant scheme, we found no association between success at the first observed grant application and having undertaken a research visit during the PhD, either in general (OR = 0.98, 95% CI [0.82, 1.15]) or abroad (OR = 1.11, 95% CI [0.94, 1.32]). Having undertaken a research visit during the PhD, either in general or abroad, does not differentiate successful from unsuccessful applications. The prevalence of research visits abroad varied substantially by research domain. It was highest among the participants who did their PhD in the humanities and social sciences (53%), followed by mathematics, natural and engineering sciences (27%), and biology and medicine (21%). Within each domain, differences between women and men in the likelihood of having completed a research visit abroad were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).



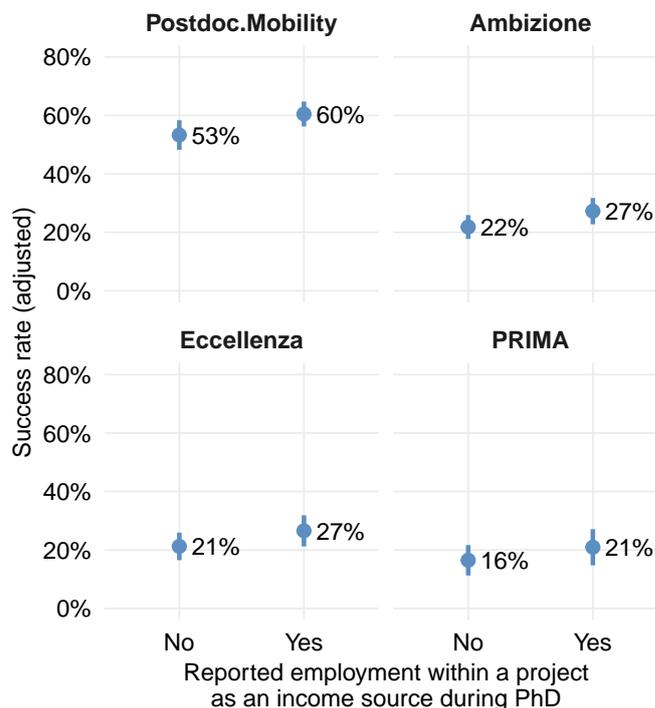
The funding behind the PhD

Almost all CTC participants (99%) reported having at least one income source during their PhD. Half (52%) reported employment within a project as an income source (e.g. PhD salary paid via a project grant from the SNSF or another funding agency), 40% reported an individual grant, and 35% a position as an assistant or similar role. Other income sources were less common: family, partner, or friends (6%), external employment unrelated to the PhD (5%), external employment related to the PhD (3%), employment as a medical resident (2%), a loan (2%), or another unspecified source (2%). Income sources were not mutually exclusive, and participants could report more than one. Is the presence of certain income sources during the PhD associated with greater success at first observed grant application? Among different sources reported, only employment within a project shows a clear and consistent association with success; we therefore focus on this income source. After accounting for cohort, research domain, and grant scheme, participants who reported employment within a project as one of their income sources showed higher adjusted success rates at their first observed application across all schemes compared to those who did not. The difference in adjusted success rates amounted to 7 percentage points for Postdoc.Mobility, 5 for Ambizione, 6 for Eccellenza, and 5 for PRIMA. This association was consistent across grant schemes; we found no evidence that it differed by scheme.

Award-winning achievements

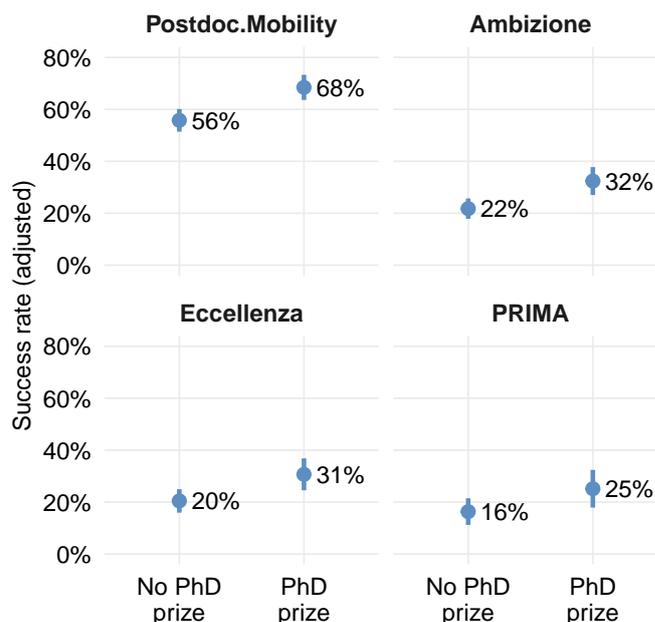
We finally turn to an indicator of formal academic recognition during the PhD. Across the sample, 27% of the applicants received a prize for their dissertation. This proportion was similar among men (28%) and women (27%). The share of applicants who received a prize was also similar across research domains: 26% in the humanities and social sciences, 28% in mathematics, natural and engineering sciences, and 28% in biology and medicine. Did CTC participants who received a prize for their dissertation have a higher likelihood of success at their first grant application? After accounting for cohort and research domain, participants who had received a PhD prize showed significantly higher adjusted success rates at their first observed application across all grant schemes. The difference in adjusted success rates between prize recipients and non-recipients amounted to 12 percentage points for (Early)Postdoc.Mobility, 10 percentage points for Ambizione, 11 percentage points for Eccellenza, and 9 percentage points for PRIMA. This association was consistent across grant schemes; we found no evidence that the prize–success association differed by scheme.

Employment within a project during PhD associated with higher success rates at first grant application



Adjusted predicted probabilities from a logistic regression including cohort, research domain, and grant scheme. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Recipients of PhD prizes show higher success rates at first grant application



Adjusted predicted probabilities from a logistic regression including cohort, research domain, and grant scheme. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Up next

This fall, we evaluated the new diversity of career paths module in a pretest. This module is designed to better understand whether qualifications obtained during academic education are useful for non-academic jobs. We are currently analyzing the data to determine where adjustments may be necessary. In the spring survey, all CTC partici-

pants will receive these questions based on their current activities. We are already excited about exploring the answers of CTC participants.

If you are interested in the data, you can download the scientific use files of the CTC study at [SWISSUBase](#).

About

The Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC) project is hosted at the University of Bern and administered by the Interfaculty Centre for Educational Research (ICER) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (ICFG). The CTC study is being conducted on behalf of the Swiss National Science

Foundation (SNSF). It is a longitudinal panel study with four cohorts (CTC-18 to CTC-21). It aims to track the career paths of researchers applying for SNSF career funding schemes at the postdoctoral level (Early Postdoc.Mobility, Postdoc.Mobility, Ambizione, Eccellenza, and PRIMA).

For more information, see: <https://careertrackercohorts.ch/>

How to cite this document:

Delavy, F., Wilhelmi, B., Mani, J. & Erzinger, A.B. (2026). SNSF Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC) Newsletter 2026/1. Bern: Interfaculty Centre for Educational Research and Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies, University of Bern. Available from <https://doi.org/10.48620/94797>