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Impact Evaluation of the Erwin Schrödinger Fellowships with Return Phase

Final Report
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Executive Summary

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Executive summary

The present impact evaluation of the Erwin Schrödinger Fellowships with Return Phase is based on a mixed-method approach and on an online-survey and a bibliometric analysis of the Schrödinger grant holders and a randomly selected control group. These quantitative elements are complemented by an expert workshop.

The results of this evaluation show that the Schrödinger Program has strong positive impacts on the individual researchers, the involved research institutions as well as the Austrian science system and the European Research Area.

On the level of the individual researchers, the survey results and the comparison with the respondents of the control group that never went abroad suggest that many Schrödinger fellows would not have been able to realize their stay abroad without the Schrödinger Program. This would have been an important loss to their careers, as such stays abroad turn out to have an unmistakable positive impact on the involved researchers' publication output and career prospects. The bibliometric analyses even show that the Schrödinger Program has a slightly more positive impact on research output than other stays abroad as realized by the respondents from the control group.

The higher research output and the good reputation enjoyed by the Schrödinger fellows within the Austrian science system also appear to explain the Schrödinger fellows' impressive career advancement. The survey results show that within 12 years since their Schrödinger fellowship, almost 60% of all Schrödinger alumni tend to become full professors.

Furthermore, this evaluation provides evidence that the Schrödinger Program also has a positive impact on the level of the Austrian universities and research institutions by promoting the transfer of knowledge and skills. The bibliometric analyses of co-publication patterns also show that the Schrödinger Program appears to improve the integration of Austria into international research networks.

At the level of the Austrian science system, the evaluation registered strong constraints that seem to reduce the positive impact of the Schrödinger Program. Both the Schrödinger fellows and the respondents from the control group point out the poor research conditions and unattractive career prospects within the Austrian science system. This is especially true for female researchers despite the numerous efforts for a better integration of women in science during the past decade. Therefore, two thirds of all Schrödinger fellows do not immediately return to Austria after their fellowship. This does not necessarily need to be seen as a loss to the Austrian science system, however, as the results of the bibliometric analyses show that the Schrödinger fellows that stay abroad assume the role of "bridge heads" that improve the integration of Austrian researchers in international research networks.

With regards to the impacts on the European Research Area, the survey results show that although most Schrödinger fellows go to host institutions in North America, Schrödinger fellows show an increased propensity to collaborate and co-publish with researchers from other European countries.

Finally, the evaluation results also suggest that the organization of and benefits provided by the Schrödinger Program are efficient and compatible with the objectives of the program. This appears to be the results of various reforms and adaptations in response to previous evaluations.

Based on these results, the evaluation team recommends a continuation of the Schrödinger Program, which has unmistakably positive impacts on the individual researchers, the involved research institutions and the Austrian science system overall as well as a high level of additionality. To increase the positive impacts of the Schrödinger Program, however, it seems warranted to focus on an improvement of the research conditions and career prospects within the Austrian science system.