

SHORT INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION IN PORTUGAL

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A “state of emergency” has been declared in Portugal effective as of March 19 at 00:00 hours GMT. A number of restrictions to daily life and occupations have been adopted that are similar to those adopted in several European countries. They are being widely respected by the population so that enforcement by the authorities has been rarely necessary. As of March 16 all educational activities with the presence of students or pupils have been suspended sine die. In the previous week already a number of universities were similarly shutdown. After the 19th all institutions of higher education followed suit. In the case of the latter institutions a largely successful effort has been made to implement on-line teaching and in general to continue working relationships between faculty and students. This implies an extra work load for faculty members since an adaptation of methods and teaching materials is required. The situation is not so bright in the case of secondary and lower grade schools. In many cases the technical means required for on-line teaching such as computers and internet connections are not available and also the importance of a physical personal interaction cannot be satisfactorily overcome.

Research and development are severely hit by the constraints imposed by the state of emergency.

An important aspect is that of the situation of researchers that do not have a work contract or have short-term contracts. The number of colleagues in such a situation in Portugal is considerable. According to some estimates the number of full time equivalent researchers in those situations is between 35 and 50% of the total. In most cases they have fixed term fellowships that may or may not be renewed from time to time. *In the present circumstances many fear that a fellowship that is ending will not be renewed in due time. Thus trade unions and associations representing researchers are calling for a set of exceptional measures that extend the delays for the termination of current fellowships.* They also ask for an extension of the delays associated with upcoming calls for studentships and fellowships. Both the Association of Research Fellowship Owners (ABIC) and the National Federation of Teachers (FENPROF) that represents research personnel as well have addressed the Ministry of Science and the Foundation for Science and Technology which is the main funding body for research in order to obtain satisfaction for the above mentioned demands. **No satisfactory answer has been received yet.**

In these days, ABIC has promoted a survey of the situation of precarious researchers to obtain reliable information on the difficulties they are experiencing in their daily life and work. They collected already 1600 answers.

The Portuguese Organization of Scientific Workers (OTC) regularly issues information directed towards the scientific community on the situation in the field both in Portugal and abroad.

A notable consequence of the exceptional situation that we are experiencing is the spontaneous mobilization of a significant number of colleagues both researchers and research technicians to contribute to alleviate the gaps of different natures that exist in the National Health Service.

Several groups are working to develop and implement specific tests for detection of Covid19 infection but also to fabricate using 3D printing protection gear for health professionals. A number of research labs and groups in several universities that have expertise in biological methods but also others that work on design of mechanical parts, statistics or informatics are contributing to this effort. In this context, it is curious to note that, apparently, the political “elite” did not think of taking advantage of the treasure of skills held by the scientific community.

Alongside with the national unions, **ABIC** is observing both the sanitarian and working conditions of research workers. Besides the health and sanitarian situation that we are facing, it is with deeply concern that we face the consequences that this situation may bring to scientific and technological system. Since universities and most of all national laboratories are closed, many researchers are working from home. However, due to the specific characteristics of the researches, many of them were interrupted.

Regarding the precarious situation of the vast majority of research workers in Portugal, in order to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, the national Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) **extended all the grants for one month**. However, we are very worried observing the difficulties of many researchers abroad, trying to return Portugal, as well as the cut of the international grants for those who had to return home.

In order to understand how COVID-19 is affecting the researches of scientific workers, we launched a query that will help us to know the real impact of this situation (<https://abic-online.org/noticia/inquerito-sobre-o-impacto-da-covid-19/>).