



# The early-career research phase

## Challenges and opportunities

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# This presentation

**'Early-career' versus 'Independent'**

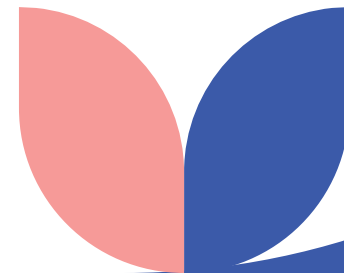
**Early-career** research phase in the **global** context

**African** perspective on **early-career** research phase

**Definition** adopted in the PERKA guidelines

**Challenges** for post-PhD support in African context

**Opportunities** for post-PhD support in African context



# 'Early-career' versus 'Independent'

## Early career research phase

Usually denotes post-PhD, but **not yet** "independent"



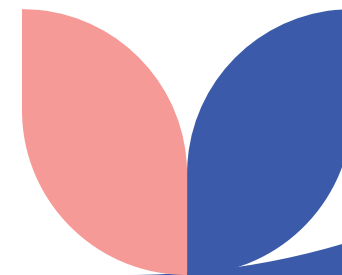
## Independent researcher

A track-record of first-authored, peer-reviewed publications

Established ability of raising their own grants

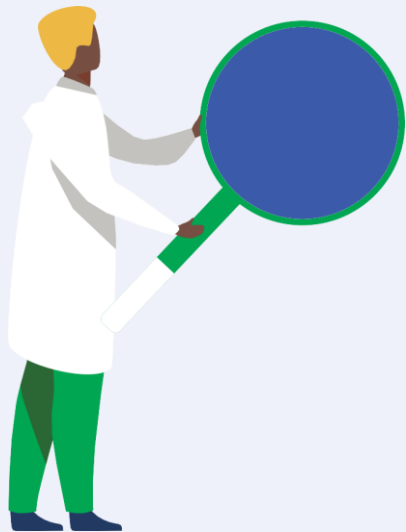
Able to lead a research team as principal investigator

Qualified and sufficiently experienced to do solo supervision of postgraduate students



# Early-career research phase in the global context

Free-standing postdoctoral fellowships


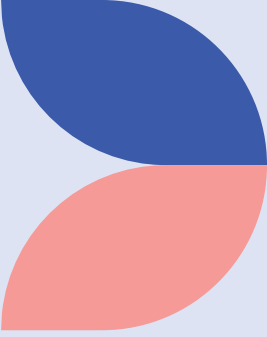


Grantholder-linked funded fellowships


Transitional grants



# African perspective: Early-career research phase




**Age**  
of the researcher




**Length**  
of service



**Qualifications**  
Many hold a Master's  
and aspire to a PhD

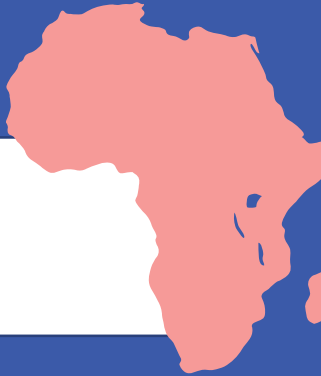


**Rank**  
Academic



**Employment**  
status

# African early career perspectives



Ideal career path exception rather than the norm (PhD – Postdoc – tenured position)

Short-term or grant-based contracts available, permanent positions limited

Women in particular may take career breaks

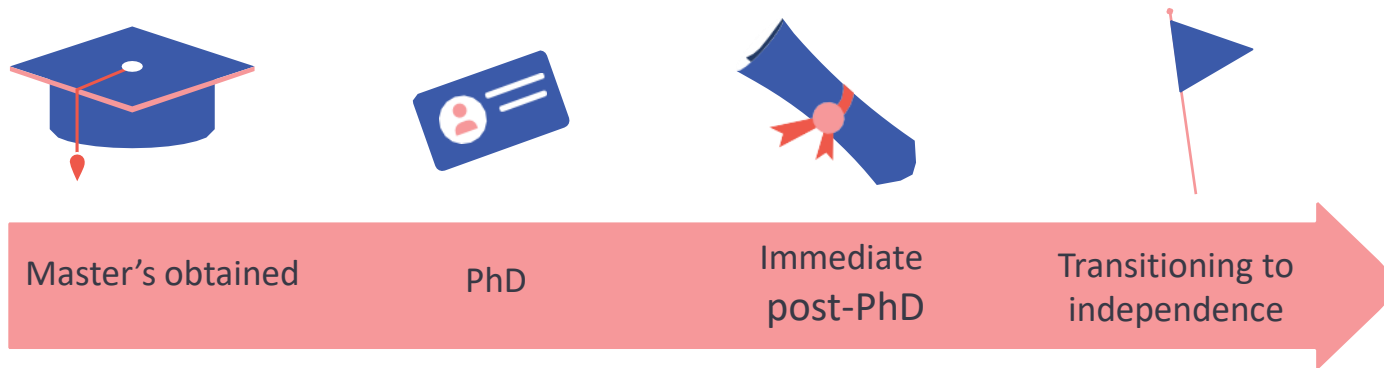
On return fall outside the number of years post-PhD, or the age criterion of fellowships

Pressure to take up employment rather than continue uncertain post-PhD academic track, but some return to academia after period in private / public sector.

A more comprehensive and inclusive definition of the early-career research phase seems justified”



# PERKA guidelines definition



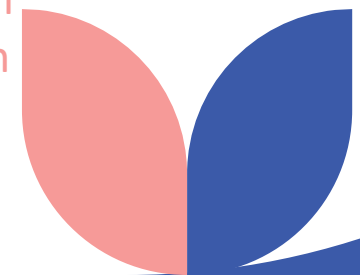
Early-career research phase



Post-PhD phase



The current guidelines focus on a range of models to support researchers who are in the post-PhD phase, which is a stage on this continuum.



# Challenges



- Scarcity of Funding (only five of 29 universities surveyed provide funding)
- No or few policies and strategies in place to support post PhD's
- No or few formal institutionalized development or mentorship programmes (some exceptions in South Africa)
- Fellowships needed for unemployed as well as employed individuals
- Need targeted support to build an independent career, build up a portfolio of (interdisciplinary) work, get exposure to other work environments than home institutions



# Opportunities for post- PhD support in African context

## Diversity of opportunities

International funding schemes and programmes

University embedded programmes

Network-based programmes



## Range of models to tailor programmes

### Strong skills development component

exposure to high-quality research environments and training, similar to capacity development opportunities in some grantholder-linked fellowships



### Adequate funding

Stipends for unemployed early career researchers plus research running costs, similar to free-standing postdoc



### Mentoring initiatives

research residencies at other institutions, exposure to multiple senior academics

Support needed for early career researchers already employed *and* not yet employed

**Let's talk!**

