

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



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ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Tiago Castela

In Portugal's Higher Education institutions (HEIs), increasingly scholars teach and research within the framework of temporary contracts, with no access to tenure. Among scholars in teaching positions, the importance of adjuncts has greatly increased: in 2012, 30 percent of lecturers were adjuncts; by 2018, adjuncts accounted for 42 percent of all lecturers in public HEIs. There is no precise data on scholars in research positions; many work at public HEIs while being hired by private associations owned by the HEIs, and the overwhelming majority of researchers have temporary contracts. There is a gender and generational divide: most tenured scholars are male and over 50. Most scholars under the age of 50, women being in the majority, are not on permanent contracts. Among doctoral students, the situation is worse: they rarely have access to teaching (which, in reputable HEIs in other States, is expected and paid), competitive funding is scarce, and intramural funding is virtually non-existent. In fact, in contrast to HEIs in other countries, Portugal's HEIs accept many doctoral students with no prospect of financial support, ultimately promoting the reproduction of inequalities. This situation has various undesirable effects for teaching and research, starting with the low attractiveness of Portugal's Higher Education system for scholars trained in other national systems. Moreover, it reinforces the disconnect between teaching and scientific research, which in turn impairs rigour and creativity in both activities, affects the creation of long-term teams (since the social space-time of scientific research, especially basic research,

is made impossible by temporary contracts), and prevents access to collective deliberation in HEIs for scholars without permanent contracts, who tend to be female and younger.

The alternative entails abandoning the conceptual model of "excellence" supposedly brought about by competitive temporariness, which sustains the above-mentioned forms of erosion of academia, and opting for a model of collaborative careers. While the use of temporary contracts in HEIs is justified, it is urgent to reverse the increase in adjunct lecturer contracts and define a maximum percentage of researchers with temporary contracts identical to that of the teaching career, not to exceed 30 percent. In consequence, it is crucial to define national evaluation criteria, notably for the granting of tenure. It would also be important to consider the possibility of progression within the career, again within a national framework, as happens with other kinds of experts in the Portuguese State apparatus. If there is a role for private associations owned by HEIs, namely in the invaluable promotion of interdisciplinarity, the possibility of not employing such associations for hiring scholars should be explored, notably to strengthen the deliberative processes within HEIs. It is also necessary to give doctoral students access to teaching, freeing scholars in teaching positions from part of their excessive lecturing load, and to begin the transition to a system where hiring doctoral students is common. It is urgent to reflect on the future of HEIs in Portugal as a whole, driven by an academic ethics of collegiality and collaboration.