UMF
UNIVERSITATEA DE MEDICINĂ ŞI FARMACIE IULIU HAŢIEGANU CLUJ-NAPOCA

CONSULTATION:
Implementation of the principles of the European Charter and the Researchers' Code

January-May 2024

- REPORT -

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1. INTRODUCTION

The report presents the results of the consultation process among the academic community of the "Iuliu Haţieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy regarding the implementation of the principles of the **European Charter of Researchers** and the **Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers** within our institution. The survey was carried out in order to collect data to substantiate the development of the future action plan in the field of research and human resources for research within UMPhIH (HRS4R), according to the recommendations formulated following the first stage of evaluation of the documents developed by the university.

2. METHODOLOGY

The consultation of the academic community involved **two stages of data collection**: a **quantitative** phase, and a **qualitative** phase respectively. The investigation sought, on the one hand, to **identify the extent** to which the members of the academic community believe that the "Iuliu Haţieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, through regulatory documents and institutional practices, ensures the **implementation of the principles of the Charter and the Researchers' Code**. At the same time, the objective of the survey was to **identify and measure the importance** attributed by members of the academic community to these aspects in their work or regarding the institution where they work.

First phase of the consultation

The research tool, a self-administered questionnaire, was developed by the Quality Assurance Department in collaboration with the Scientific Vice-Rectorate and the Scientific Research Monitoring Department, aiming at the operationalization of the two European documents and their suitability for the measurement process. The questionnaire included five sections, four of which follow the key themes of the Charter and the European Code of Researchers, and the last section of the questionnaire collected socio-demographic information. The four key themes are:

1. Ethics and academic professionalism
2. Recruitment and selection in research
3. Social rights and research working conditions

4. Training and professional development.

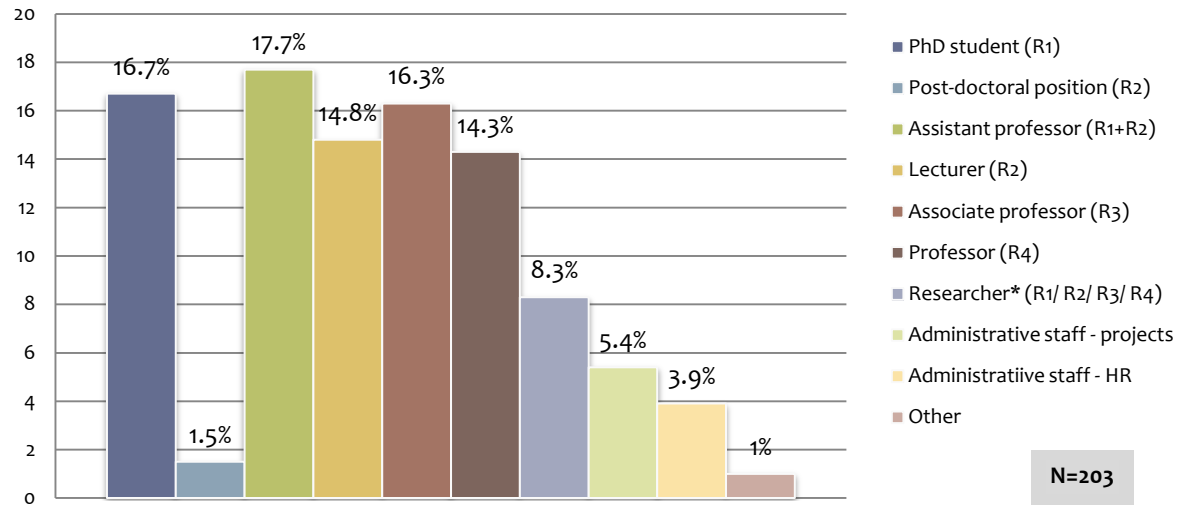
All four sections had a similar structure: a **battery** of questions aimed at the **respondents' agreement** with a series of statements referring to the current situation/ status within UMPhIH, an item for **ranking the statements according to the importance given by each respondent**, respectively an **open-ended question** that allowed respondents to add suggestions and other remarks. For the recruitment and selection dimension, an additional question was included to **rank the criteria used in the recruitment processes for research vacancies**. The option for this structure of the questionnaire was motivated by the general objective of the investigation: **the identification of priority measures for the future strategy of research and human resources for research** of the "Iuliu Haţieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy.

Data collection was conducted between **22.01.-18.02.2024**, questionnaires being filled out anonymously, in electronic format, through the OfficeForms platform. The answers were coded and transposed into databases, later being analyzed and processed in SPSS and MS Excel.

Participation and the quantitative sample

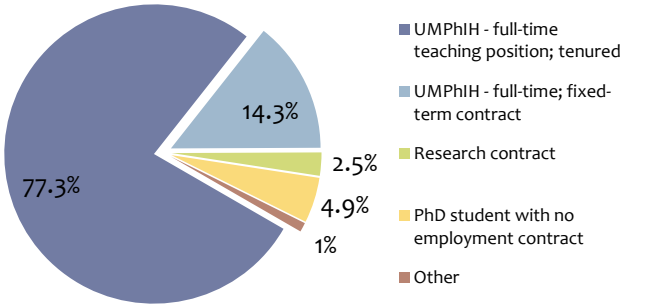
In the first stage of the consultation, 203 forms were completed online, almost two-thirds of which were completed by teaching staff (total 63.1% - university assistants, heads of work, lecturers and university professors). 16.7% of respondents are PhD students, respectively 8.3% researchers and 9.3% administrative staff (either for managing research projects or working in human resources). 1,5% of respondents were post-doctoral students employed exclusively on research projects. Referring to the descriptors for the four categories of researchers (R1-R4), there is a higher percentage of researchers in the R2 category, as this may also include respondents who selected "teaching assistant" and "lecturer", they being primarily full-time teaching positions and also having researcher duties.

Respondent status



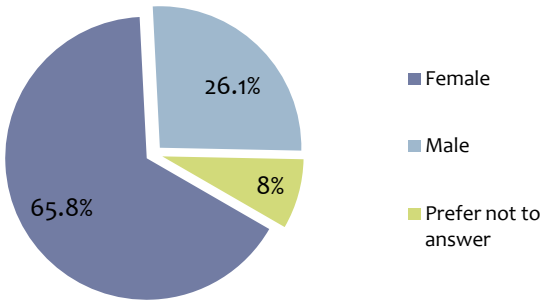
According to the percentages in the graph above, more than 16.3% of the respondents were R2 (1.5% R2 post-docs + 14.8% R2 Lecturers + part of the Assistants out of the total 17.7%). In addition, taking into account the fact that 21% of the respondents mentioned having between 6-10 years of experience in Higher Education, including research (see below, on page 5), and considering that in the first 4-6 years the doctoral thesis was defended, we estimate that approximately 20% of the survey participants were R2 researchers (n ≅ 40).

Employment status



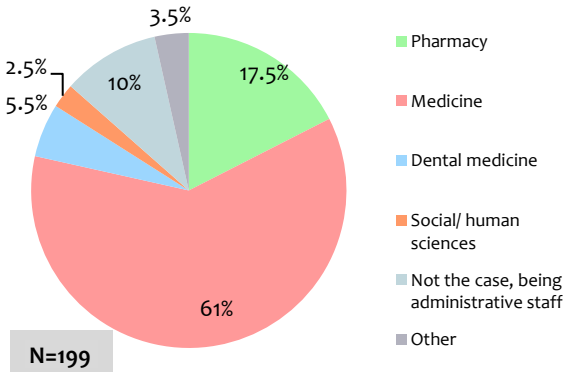
N=203

Sex



More than ¾ of the respondents are permanent employees of UMPhIH, and almost 2/3 are women. More than 6 out of 10 respondents conduct research in the field of medicine, and 39% have a seniority in higher education between 11-25 years, 45.5% having a seniority of less than 10 years inclusive.

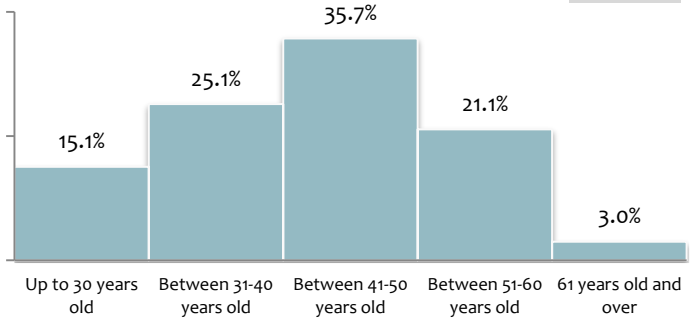
Field of research

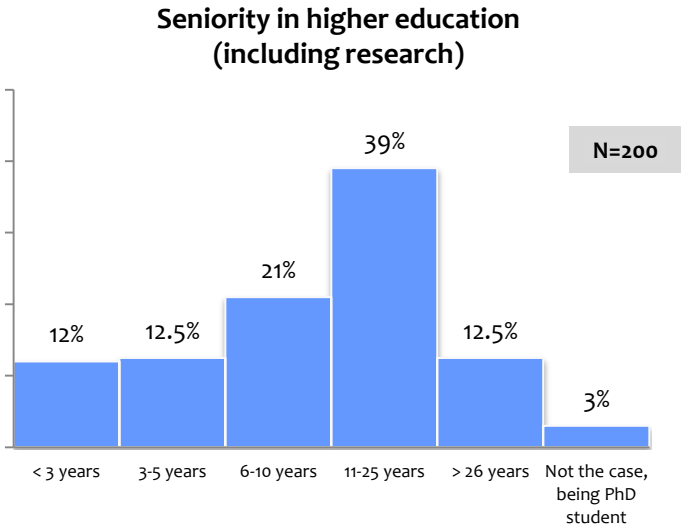


N=199

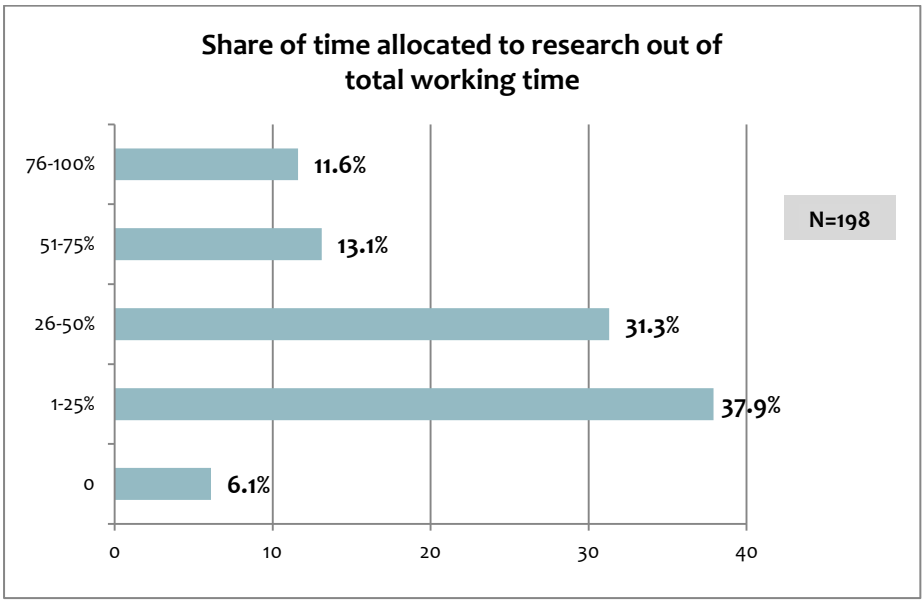
Age

N=200



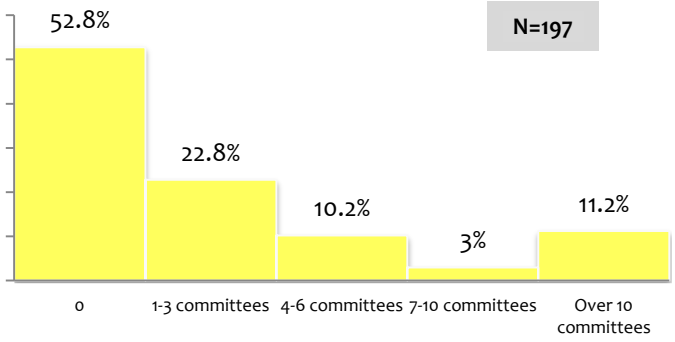


Regarding the time allocated to research activity out of total working time, the highest share is recorded for the interval 0-25%, with 37.9% of respondents stating that they allocate to research up to a quarter of their time, followed by the interval 26-50% of the time of work, with a weight of 31.3%. Filtering the teaching staff respondents from the entire sample (university assistants, heads of work, lecturers and university professionals), an increase in the weight of the time allocated to research activity is observed with the increase in teaching rank: 72.2% of the university assistants allocate up to 25% from their working time to the research activity. There are higher proportions of heads of papers, lecturers and university professors who appreciate that the research activity requires more time from their total working time: 46.7% lecturers, 46.9% associate professors, respectively 57.1% professors can allocate between 26-50% of working time. 21.4% of the university professors respondents mentioned that they can devote more than half of their time to research activities.

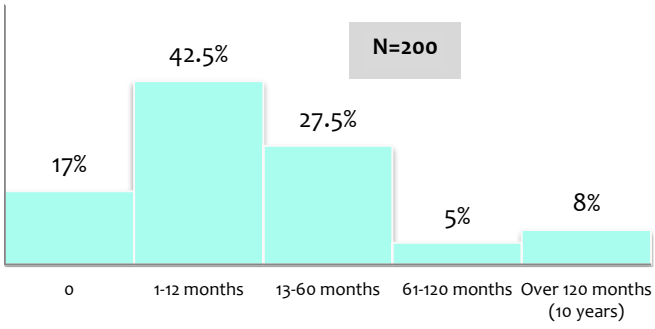


With regard to the evaluation experience for selection for research positions (including the competition for admission to the Doctoral School), 1 out of 10 respondents was a member of more than 10 committees. More than more than half of the respondents do not having such a qualification (52.8%). In general, international research experience is rather low, with the highest share of responses, 42.5%, registered for 1-12 months. More than 1 in 4 respondents (27.5%) have international research experience between 1 and 5 years, and 8% of respondents in the sample having extensive experience of over 10 years.

Number of selection committees (including admission to Doctoral School)



International research experience



Second phase of the consultation

Following the preliminary analysis of the results from the quantitative stage, in-depth documentation of the salient themes through the collection of qualitative data was prioritized. The qualitative stage of the consultation process focused on the perspectives of **PhD students**, **researchers** and **research centres directors** regarding the **organization and conduct of research within the university**.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with doctoral students in the three doctoral fields, in different years of their doctoral internship (*see below the characteristics of the qualitative convenience sample*), and interviews with four directors of the university's research centers/groups respectively. Considering the suggestion of the HRS4R working group of experts, PhD students, researchers and center directors voluntarily participated in the consultation process – all participants received and signed informed consent prior to conducting the interviews. The discussions were recorded and later transcribed by the specialized staff of the Quality Assurance Department (QAD). For data confidentiality, each participant was assigned a code, and full recordings and transcripts were not accessible to third parties. Transcripts were processed through thematic analysis by the QAD staff (sociologists).

The tables below include characteristics of participants during the qualitative stage.

Participants characteristics (semi-structured interviews)

Doctoral students

Interview participants (n=14)	
Characteristics	**Descriptives**
Gender	58,3% females 41,7% males
Year of study	1st year (21,4%), 2nd year (35,7%) 3rd year (14,3%) 4th year (28,6%)
Filed of research/ doctoral	Medicine (43%) Dental medicine (28,5%) Pharmacy (28,5%)

Researcher category	R1 (100%)

In the case of the directors of research centers/units within the faculties, 4 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with four directors (100% - R4, 25% Medicine, 50% Pharmacy-Chemistry, 25% Dentistry, 100% women).

Characteristics of focus-group participants

Focus-group participants (n=16)	
Characteristics	**Descriptive statistics (%/ mean and standard deviation)**
Average age	38.56 ani (8.82)
Gender	56,25% femei
Field of bachelor degree	Biology (37,5%), Biochemistry (12,5%), Chemistry (12,5%), Chemistry-Physics (6,25%), Life sciences (6,25%), Medicine (6,25%), Pharmacy (12,5%), Physics (6,25%)
Bachelor degree graduated … years ago	15.25 years (7.655)
PhD	81.25% participants
Field of doctoral studies	Biology (23%), Chemistry (7,7%), Medicine (38,5%), Physics (7,7%), Life sciences (7,7%), Veterinary medicine (7,7%), + 1 PhD student (Medicine)
Doctorate degree awarded … years ago	7.77 years (4.69)
Seniority in research	11.13 years (6.61)
Seniority in working in research centre	7.06 years (2.89)
Number of projects as principal investigator	0.56 projects (0.81)
Number of projects managed	0.38 projects (0.5)
Researcher category (R1-R4)	R1 (18.,8%), R2 (43,8%), R3 (37,5%)

According to data above, a total of 34 researchers were consulted in the qualitative stage, distributed by researcher category as follows: R1 = 17 researchers (50%), R2 = 7 researchers (20.6%), R3 = 6 researchers (17.6%), respectively R4 = 4 researchers (11.8%).

3a. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS – Quantitative phase

I. Ethics and professionalism

The ***ethics and academic professionalism*** section included three questions. The one was a battery with 9 statements to which the respondents expressed their agreement, the second question asked the respondents to rank the statements in relation to the importance they attributed to each of them. The last non-mandatory question allowed respondents to add details and other observations regarding aspects related to the ethical dimension and academic professionalism.

According to the respondents, **sufficient attention is paid to the prevention of discrimination** within the "Iuliu Haţieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, more than 9 out of 10 survey participants affirming this (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 93%). Similarly high proportions were also registered for the **support of research autonomy through existing policies, regulations and procedures** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 92.8%), and the **evaluation of teaching and research activity in a regular and transparent manner** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 91.6%) respectively.

On the other hand, the statements that met higher proportions of disagreement were related to the **effectiveness of the Ethics Commission in resolving complaints** (total *partial disagreement* and *disagreement*, 17.3%), the **effectiveness of the Scientific Research Ethics Commission** in reviewing approvals for conducting research (total *partial disagreement* and *disagreement*, 15.3%). Worth noting are also the proportions of disagreement regarding the **comprehensive nature of the criteria for evaluating research activity** (total partial *disagreement* and *disagreement*, 13.3%), and informing researchers about regulations of conducting research (total *partial disagreement* and *disagreement*, 12.8%).

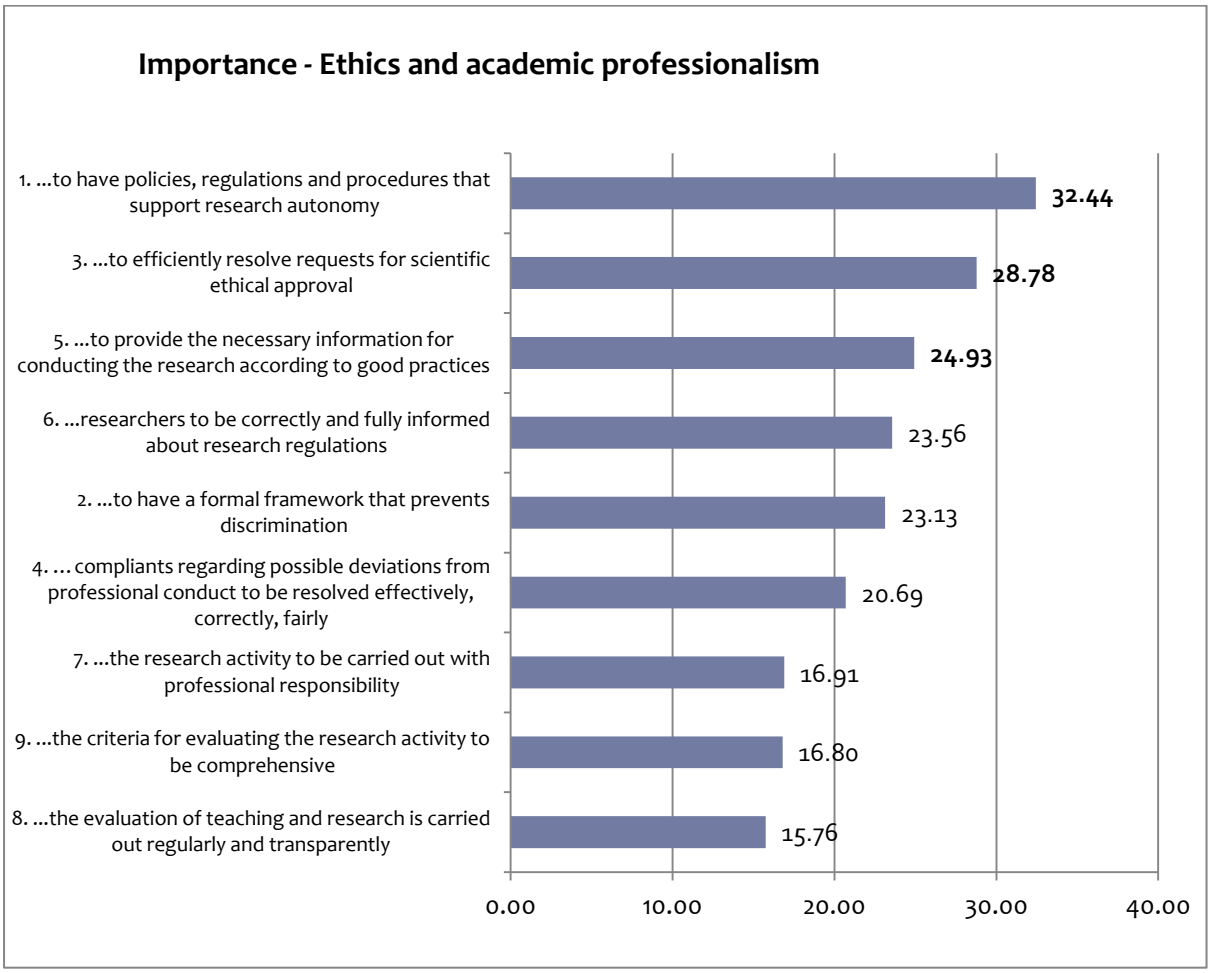
Ethics and academic professionalism within UMPhIH
1. UMPhIH policies, regulations and procedures support research autonomy (n=193)
4.1%
25.4%
67.4%
3.1%
2. Within UMPhIH, sufficient attention is given to the prevention of discrimination (n=186)
4.8%
15.6%
77.4%
2.2%
3. The Scientific Research Ethics Committee efficiently resolves approval request (n=183)
8.7%
15.6%
77.4%
6.6%
4. The University Ethics Committee effectively resolves complaints (n=139)
11.5%
17.3%
65.5%
5.8%
5. UMPhIH provides the necessary information for conducting research according to good practices (n=195)
7.2%
20%
68.7%
4.1%
6. UMPhIH correctly and fully informs researchers about the regulations governing research (n=194)
8.2%
17%
70.1%
4.6%
7. The research activity in UMPhIH is conducted according to professional responsibility (n=193)
6.7%
16.1%
73.6%
3.6%
8. The evaluation of teaching and research activity is carried out regularly and transparently (n=197)
4.6%
14.2%
77.7%
3.6%
9. The criteria for evaluating the research activity are comprehensive (n=196)
10.7%
26%
60.7%
2.6%
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
1 - Disagree
2 - Partially disagree
3 - Partially agree
4 - Agree

Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation
1. UMPhIH policies, regulations and procedures support research autonomy (n=193)	**3.57**	.719
2. Within UMPhIH, sufficient attention is given to the prevention of discrimination (n=186)	**3.68**	.667
3. The Scientific Research Ethics Committee efficiently resolves approval request (n=183)	**3.42**	.904
4. The University Ethics Committee effectively resolves complaints (n=139)	**3.42**	.909
5. UMPhIH provides the necessary information for conducting research according to good practices (n=195)	**3.53**	.801
6. UMPhIH correctly and fully informs researchers about the regulations governing research (n=194)	**3.53**	.834
7. The research activity in UMPhIH is conducted according to professional responsibility (n=193)	**3.59**	.772
8. The evaluation of teaching and research activity is carried out regularly and transparently (n=197)	**3.65**	.729
9. The criteria for evaluating the research activity are comprehensive (n=196)	**3.45**	.786

Importance given to aspects related to ethics and academic professionalism

To generate the hierarchy of importance of the aspects related to ethics and academic professionalism, weighted averages were calculated according to the respondents' options: the number of respondents who chose an item as the most important was weighted with 9, respectively the item with the lowest importance was weighted with 1. Thus, it turned out that the most important aspect regarding ethics and academic professionalism is the **existence of policies, regulations and procedures that support research autonomy** (weighted average 33.22), followed by **efficiency in analyzing research projects and granting research ethics approvals** (weighted average 28.78), respectively **informing researchers in such a way that the research is conducted according to the best practices** (24.93).



Priorities ethics and academic professionalism

Using the answers to the two previous questions, an analysis of the priorities was carried out according to the importance given by the respondents and the perception of the implementation of the respective aspect within the University. For example, an item with a high importance and, at the same time, a high average, indicates aspects achieved to a large extent within our institution that meet the expectations of members of the academic community. On the contrary, an item with a low mean, but a high importance from the perspective of the respondents suggests the need to prioritize measures that lead to the improvement of results regarding those aspects.

According to the results, the priority is the efficiency of the Scientific Research Ethics Commission's activity in analyzing and granting research ethics approvals. From the perspective of the respondents, UMPhIH supports the conduct of research in conditions of autonomy, being an item with a high average and a high level of importance.

Proposals and comments

"Proposals: the criteria for evaluating the activity of teaching staff and the value of the points awarded to each criterion should be discussed with them, not imposed before they are applied; to take into account the proposals of teaching staff in establishing the criteria and values of the scores; that appropriate points be awarded for non-remunarated activities

- e.g. the work of the head of discipline (who is not rewarded in any way, whose work is not recognized and appreciated in any way, but on whose activity almost all the situations and reports of the UMF are based), member of competition commissions for the position and in those of the specialist or primary exam, the capacity of residency coordinator or master's degree director (who receive 0.05 p only in the grid, which does not reward the work done), participation with papers in the UMF Days (where only the first author receives points - Why?), participation with works at other events (it is scored with 0.05 p only in the grid, which is not correct). It was argued that the quality of course holder is no longer scored because the teaching staff are already paid for it, but the teaching staff are also paid for the research activity within the projects/grants, respectively they are also paid for the management positions and yet, in these cases, they also receive many points in the evaluation for additional salary. The evaluation grids (criteria, scores) should not be changed untimely, but communicated at least one year before the evaluation, in a transparent manner, to allow teachers to organize their work so that they can obtain the highest possible scores. Conclusion: the evaluation process for additional salaries focuses on research and publication activity, but there are important activities of teachers that are not recognized and valued at their true value, which could change by taking into account the proposals of those evaluated ."

"The results of a research should not be evaluated only by scientometrics, but especially by the progress, however small, that it brings to real, practical medicine..."

"The increased duration (sometimes more than two months) of the time required to obtain the approval from the Scientific Research Ethics Commission should raise certain questions aimed at finding solutions in order to make the evaluation protocol of submitted files more efficient. Within SCJU Cluj, obtaining approvals is much easier to obtain."

"The time it takes to get ethics committee approval is often too long - one possible option would be to have two ethics committees, one for human studies and one for animal studies."

"All personal information and documents that include personal data should be sent by email, in pdf format and password protected. For example, the password should contain the last 6 digits of the CNP plus the first letters of the last name."

"I believe that professional responsibility also addresses the exposure of teachers to noxious substances and pollutants, and as a result they should be properly remunerated according to the law and properly included in the work group."

"To provide transparent, timely information on funding sources and to provide logistical and administrative support for the development of research projects."

"For example, personally, I am waiting from November 2023 for the approval of the ethics committee for a study that will interview health professionals, anonymously."

"Unfortunately, the Ethics Commission [of Scientific Research] is very difficult to respond to requests. Sometimes it takes over 4 months to get an approval."

"We want to encourage / support research activity in collaboration with colleagues from other Disciplines / departments, to create bridges for the formation of research teams."

"[As] an academic, I find the UMF's attitude of asking me to do the work of a secretary to be abusive!!! It is defiant and counterproductive! I can do quality research and teaching when I have time for it. Until then we pretend to be researching, publishing and training doctors."

"Please, as far as possible, try to expedite the opinions of the ethics commissions."

II. Recruitment and selection on vacant positions

The ***recruitment and selection section*** contained four questions. The first of these was a battery of 9 statements to which the respondents affirmed their agreement, referring to their perceptions of the job selection processes organized by UMFIH. The second question asked respondents to rank the statements according to the importance assigned to each statement generally in job competitions. The next question in the section contained 10 job selection criteria, and the respondents ranked them according to the importance given to each of them. Finally, the last question in this section, being optional, allowed the respondents to make additions regarding the holding of selection contests for positions and the carrying out of recruitment processes in the field of research.

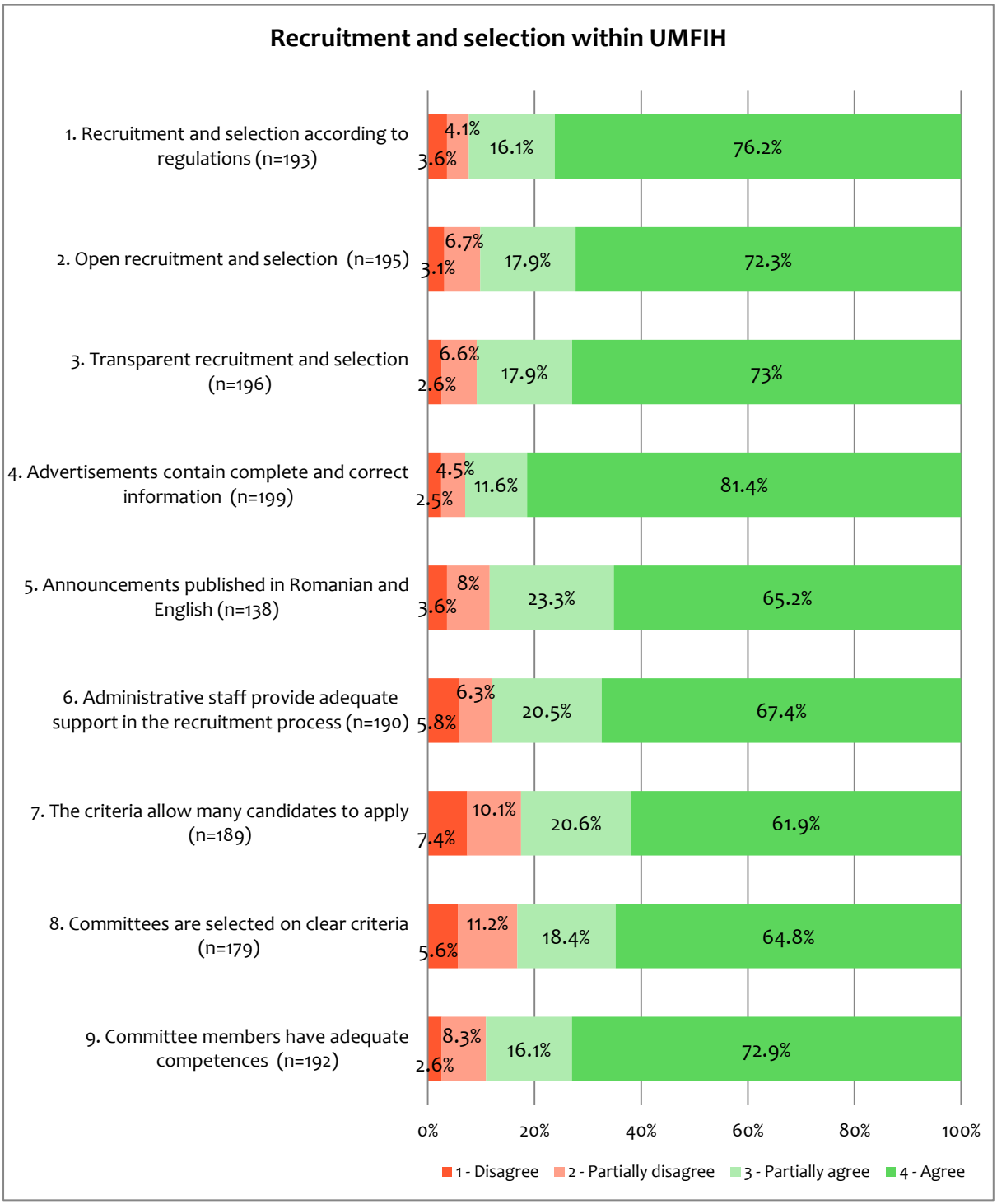
Consultation participants believe that **recruitment announcements contain complete and accurate information**, with more than 9 out of 10 respondents stating this (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 93%). At the same time, high percentages of agreement were also recorded regarding the **conduct of recruitment and selection processes**: **according to the regulations** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 92.3%),

openly (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 90.2%) and **transparent** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 90.9%).

On the other hand, the statements that gathered higher proportions of disagreement are those regarding the **permissive selection criteria** (total *partial disagreement* and *disagreement*, 17.5%), respectively the **clarity of the criteria on the basis of which the selection commissions are designated** (total *partial disagreement* and *disagreement*, 16.8%).

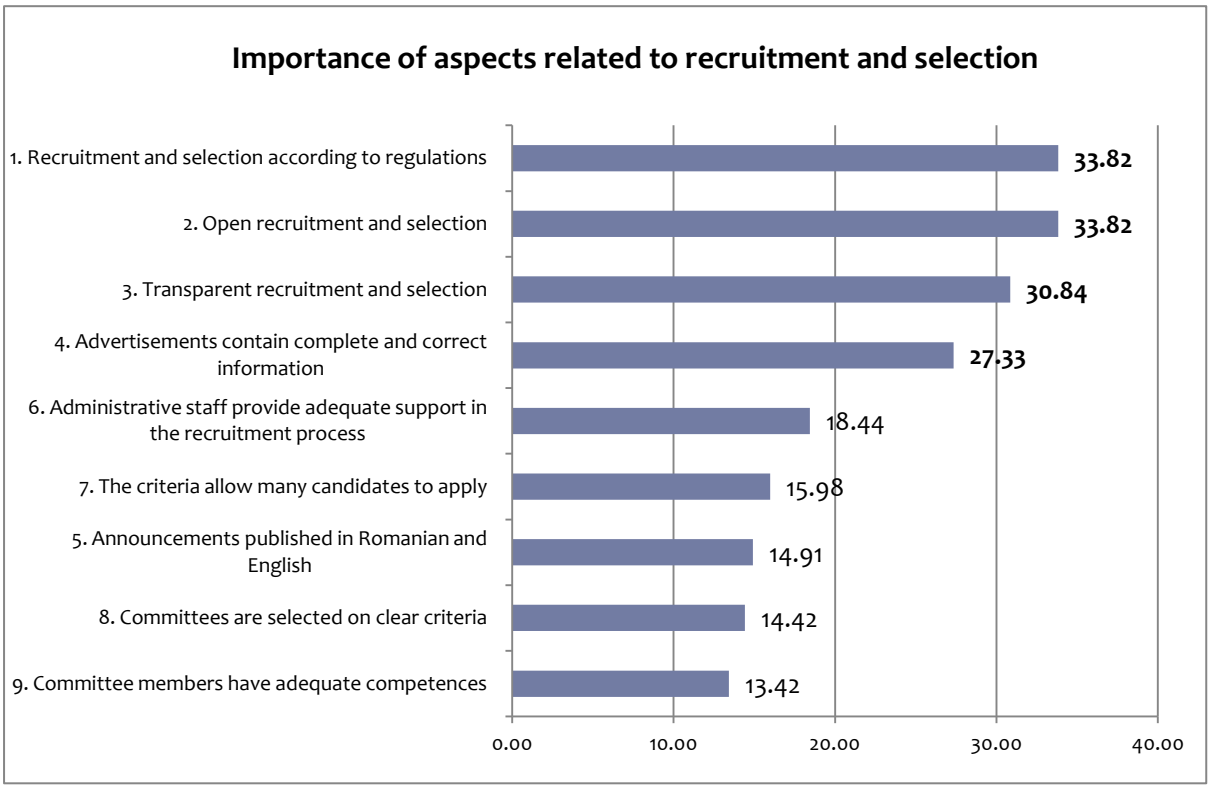
Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Recruitment and selection according to regulations (n=193)	**3.65**	.729
2. Open recruitment and selection (n=195)	**3.59**	.749
3. Transparent recruitment and selection (n=196)	**3.61**	.725
4. Advertisements contain complete and correct information (n=199)	**3.71**	.667
5. Announcements published in Romanian and English (n=138)	**3.50**	.794
6. Administrative staff provide adequate support in the recruitment process (n=190)	**3.49**	.852
7. The criteria allow many candidates to apply (n=189)	**3.37**	.939
8. Committees are selected on clear criteria (n=179)	**3.42**	.898
9. Committee members have adequate competences (n=192)	**3.59**	.753


Recruitment and selection within UMFIH
1. Recruitment and selection according to regulations (n=193)
3.6%
4.1%
16.1%
76.2%
2. Open recruitment and selection (n=195)
3.1%
6.7%
17.9%
72.3%
3. Transparent recruitment and selection (n=196)
2.6%
6.6%
17.9%
73%
4. Advertisements contain complete and correct information (n=199)
2.5%
4.5%
11.6%
81.4%
5. Announcements published in Romanian and English (n=138)
3.6%
8%
23.3%
65.2%
6. Administrative staff provide adequate support in the recruitment process (n=190)
5.8%
6.3%
20.5%
67.4%
7. The criteria allow many candidates to apply (n=189)
7.4%
10.1%
20.6%
61.9%
8. Committees are selected on clear criteria (n=179)
5.6%
11.2%
18.4%
64.8%
9. Committee members have adequate competences (n=192)
2.6%
8.3%
16.1%
72.9%
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
1 - Disagree
2 - Partially disagree
3 - Partially agree
4 - Agree

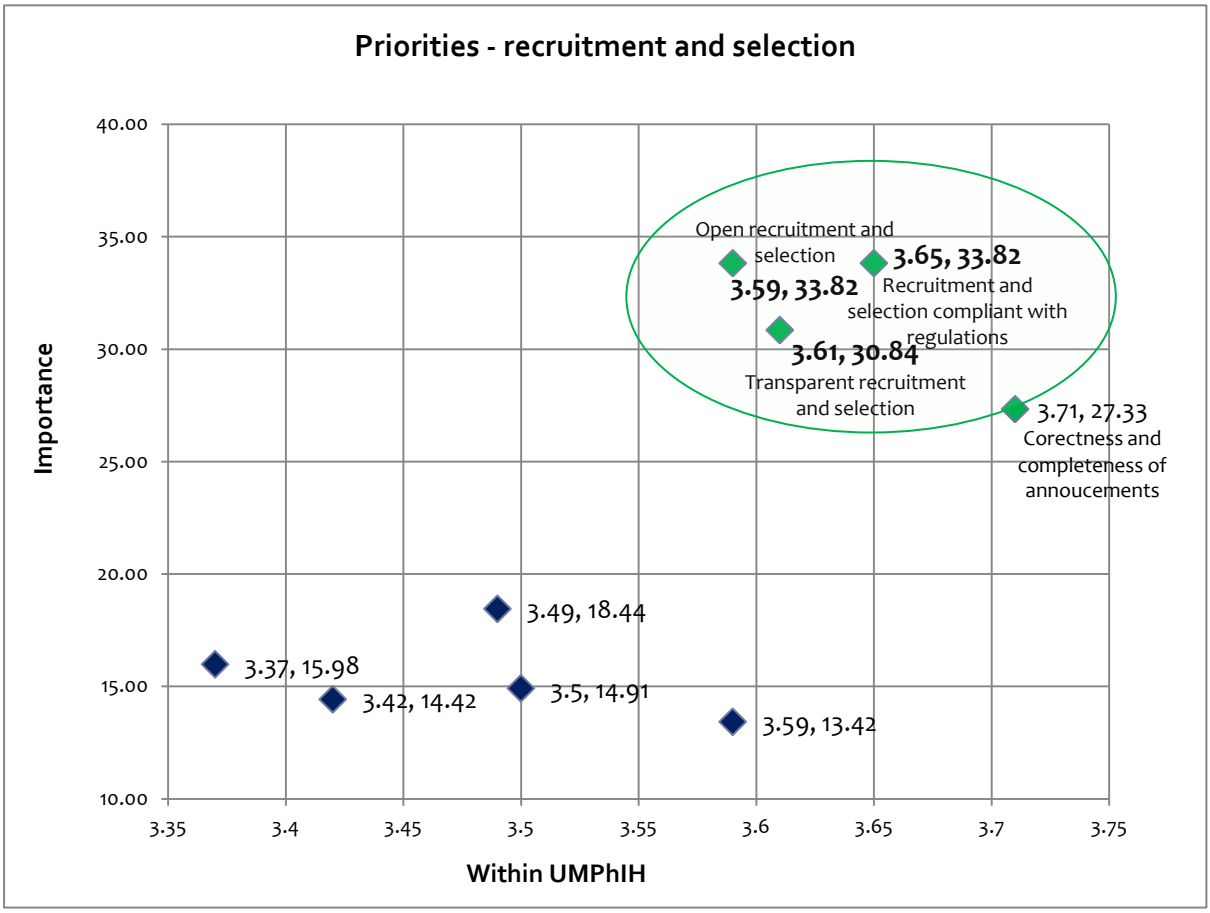
The importance given to aspects related to recruitment and selection processes

After calculating the weights for each criterion, it appears that the survey respondents believe that the most important aspects in the recruitment and selection processes are that they are **carried out according to the existing regulations** (weighted average 33.82), as well as **openly** (average weighted 33.82) and in a **transparent manner** (weighted average 30.84).



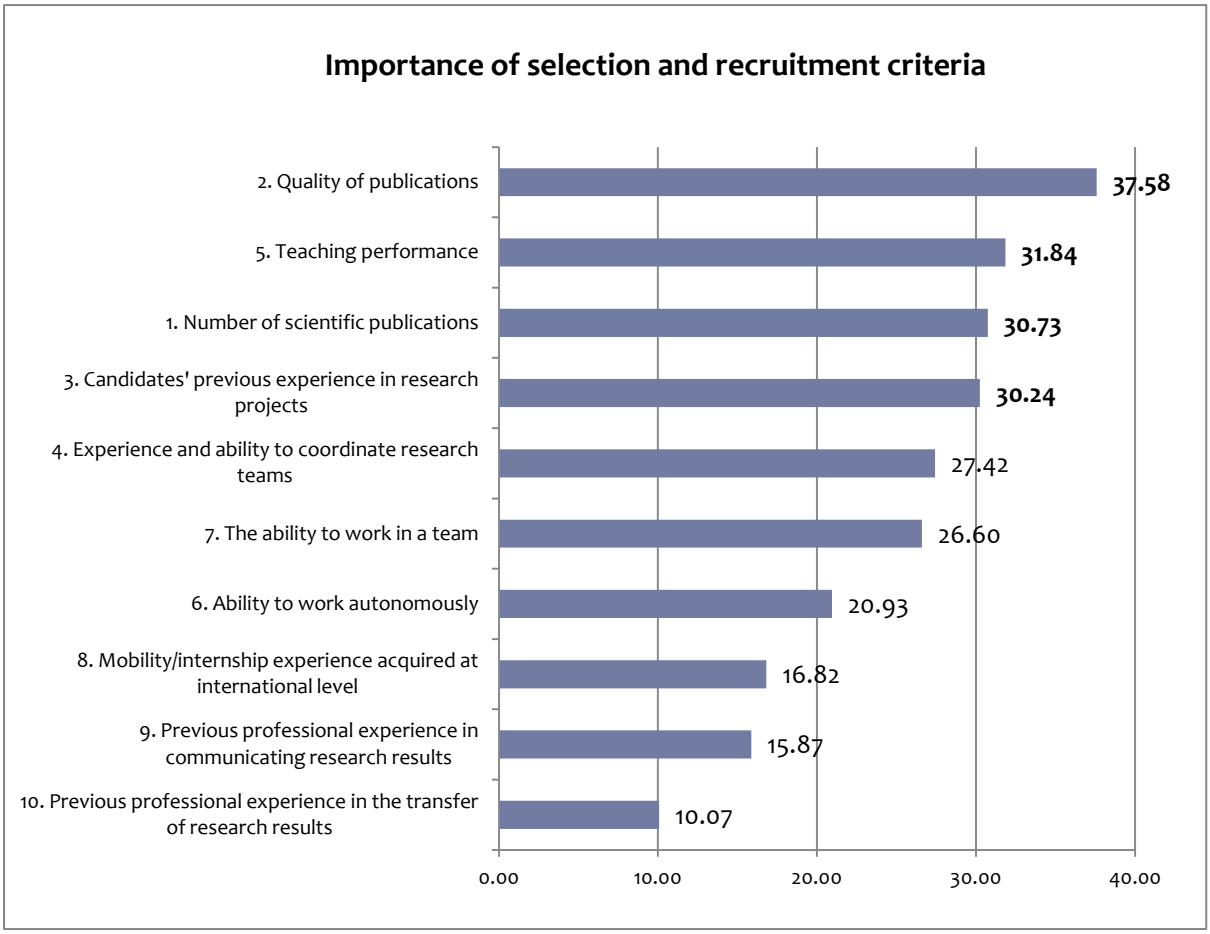
Priorities

Establishing the priorities through the same algorithm described previously (see the *Ethics and Academic Professionalism Priorities section*), from the perspective of the recruitment and selection processes, all the aspects to which the respondents assigned higher importance (**recruitment and selection processes carried out in compliance with the regulations, openly** and **transparently,** as well as the **correctness and completeness of vacancy announcements**) met high averages, as can be seen in the graph below.



Importance of selection and recruitment criteria

According to UMPhIH respondents, the most important criteria in the recruitment and selection processes are: **quality of publications** (weighted average 37.58), **teaching performance** (weighted average 31.84), **number of scientific publications** (weighted average 30.73), respectively the **candidates' previous experience in research projects** (weighted average 30.24). It should be noted that the previous experience of transferring research results met the lowest level of priority (weighted mean 10.07).



Details and comments

"It is more difficult to evaluate the quality of the research, neither the q1, q2 classification, nor the IF are absolute criteria for defining the quality of the research. Even more

differences between specialties. In addition to criteria related to publications, research projects, how is medical professional performance evaluated? Especially in the European framework."

"The eligibility criteria are very often changed (either annually or every two years), leaving you with the impression that they are made for certain people with the aim of promoting to positions - the habilitation theses are made only with the aim of promoting to the didactic position the highest and not to conduct Ph.D. Currently, the university does not have a clear strategy on human resources (teaching and research), and from this mini-chaos, some come out well, and others are put on hold, some of them choosing to leave the university at some point. The university has not created attractive jobs especially in research and for young people compared to the outside environment (Cluj). We have lost and are losing almost all good students, some of them (very few in number) may manage to complete a doctorate (with those few professors who lead doctorates, the majority as I said are limited to didactic activity only), but, seeing that they do not there is no opportunity for career development, leave. They feel more used than trained. Research means raising funds to enable you to recruit and train. This requires strong lobbying."

"Promotion in teaching positions must also take into account the qualities of a doctor, teacher and good colleague. Scientometrics and criteria based mainly on publications lead to the appearance of people with a good record, but with moral deficiencies, modest level of practitioner and lack of interest as a trainer."

"I propose the elimination of obtaining the approval of the head of discipline for the registration in the competition for the position/promotion in a teaching and research position. This will increase the number of registered candidates who meet the criteria for that position."

"The written and practical exam for the position of university assistant does not make much sense. Most of the time they repeat the specialized exam that the candidates took relatively recently. Research activity, publications or external mobility are not quantified, which are probably worth more than the ability of candidates to reproduce specialized information from some treatises."

"An objective criterion could also be the proportion of original articles/review articles.

"Equal opportunities, prevention of nepotism and relationship-based selection of candidates, establishment of impartial and objective evaluation committees, possibly external; standardization of teaching performance assessment as a (subjective) criterion."

"Professional expertise in the medical specialty for which he is applying, the quality of leader and medical school trainer in the specialty."

"The internal regulations for the selection of teaching and research staff are in need of improvement. For example, a person cannot be part of the competition or promotion committee if one or more candidates were/are part of the research grant teams coordinated by that person. The situation is absurd: with whom should a head of discipline build a research team, if not with individuals within the discipline? In this context, the head of discipline will never be able to be part of the promotion/competition commissions of his own members of the discipline. It's absurd and counterproductive."

"The recruitment process must be more flexible for candidates with studies abroad - the process becomes 10 times more complicated just for bureaucratic reasons that involve translation / legalization of the diploma from English to Romanian, proof of the level of knowledge in English (in the context where a candidate had several years of bachelor's / master's degree with the language of instruction in English)."

"Unfortunately, the eligibility criteria for access to teaching positions are becoming tougher. This limits the access of young candidates to teaching positions - and there is a need for young people to be trained in conditions where the number of students is increasing."

"In the UMPh evaluation of the professional experience, the dissemination of research are not scored in the category of presentations at national/international congresses/ conferences. This fact represents a major deficit in the process of marking the scientific activity of teaching staff. Regrettably, only the presentation during the UMF days is scored."

"The selection criteria are made in such a way that the selection, recruitment and selection of candidates is controlled. The questions above are bad jokes!"

III. Working conditions and environment - research

The section **research working conditions and environment** included three questions. The first question consisted of a battery of 10 statements to which respondents expressed their (dis)agreement, referring to their perceptions of the environment and working conditions within UMFIH. The second question asked respondents to rank the statements according to the importance attributed to each aspect related to the work environment. The last question in the section was an open-

ended and optional question asking respondents for details on topics related to working conditions in research.

According to the respondents, members of the UMFIH academic community **know and benefit from their social rights** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 94.6%). At the same time, the university **ensures the legitimate right of teaching and research staff to be represented** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 88.3%).

In contrast, there were **higher proportions of disagreement for the stimulating and pleasant work environment** within UMPhIH affiliated departments and research centers (total *partial disagreement* and *disagreement*, 23.9%). At the same time, the survey participants affirmed in high proportions the existence of **differences regarding working conditions and access to the research infrastructure depending on career level** (total *partial disagreement* and *disagreement*, 20.9% and 19.7%, respectively).

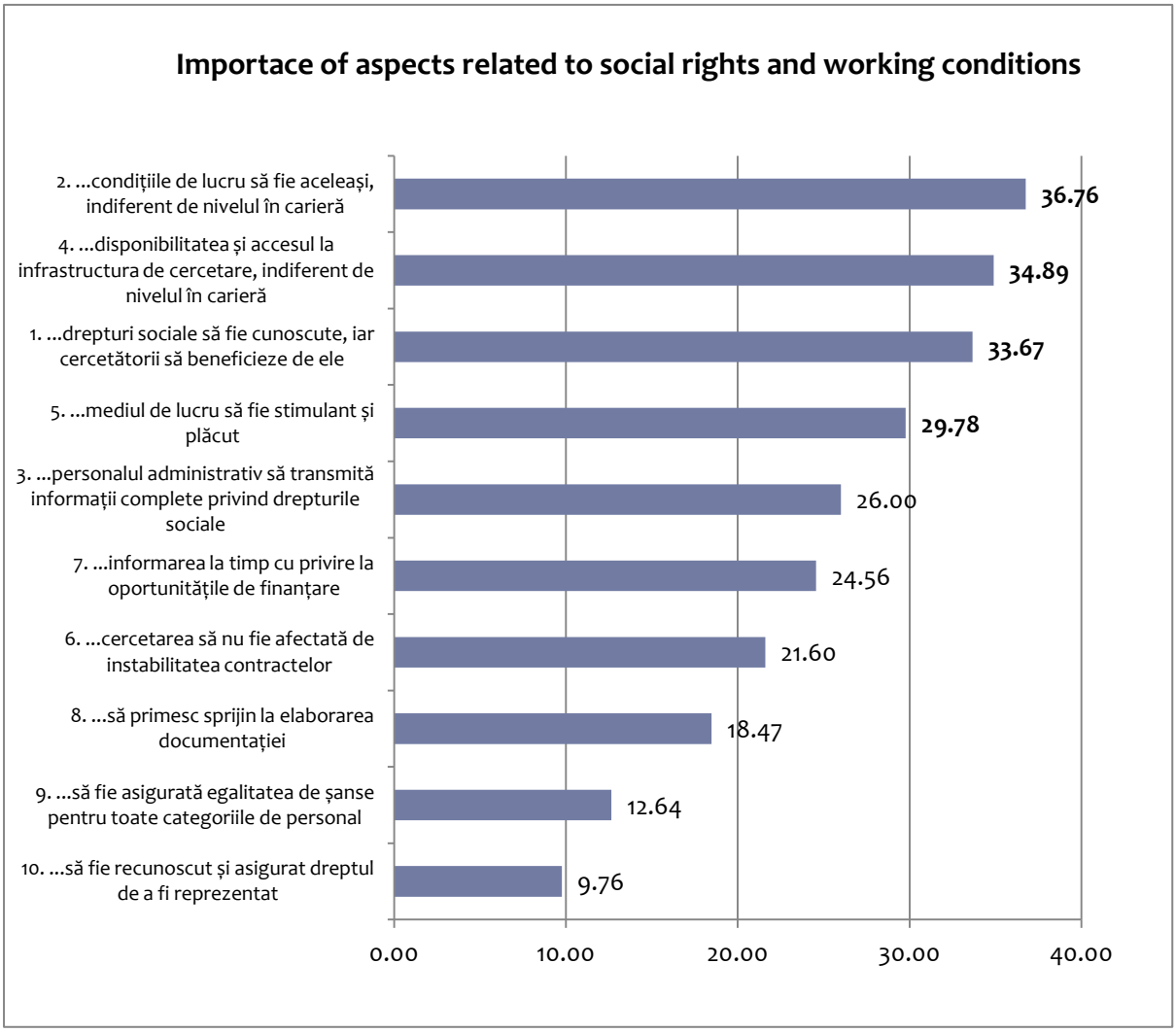
Working conditions, environment and social rights within UMFIH
1. UMPhIH teaching staff and researchers know and benefit from all rights (n=186)
2.7%
2.7%
11.8%
82.8%
2. Working conditions are the same at all career levels (n=181)
9.9%
11%
27.6%
51.4%
3. The staff in the administrative structures of UMPhIH provide comprehensive information on social rights (n=187)
4.8%
9.1%
23%
63.1%
4. UMPhIH offers the necessary infrastructure to conduct research, regardless of career level (n=193)
8.3%
11.4%
25.4%
54.9%
5. UMPhIH departments and research centers provide a stimulating and pleasant working environment (n=189)
10.1%
13.8%
25.9%
50.3%
6. Within UMPhIH, researchers' performance is not jeopardized by the instability of employment contracts (n=170)
10%
8.2%
21.8%
60%
7. Teaching staff and researchers are informed in a timely, complete and correct manner regarding funding (n=196)
6.1%
9.7%
26.5%
57.7%
8. Teaching staff and researchers are adequately supported in preparing the necessary documentation in order to obtain funding (n=189)
6.9%
11.6%
31.7%
49.7%
9. UMPhIH ensures equal opportunities for all categories of personnel (n=180)
6.7%
11.7%
19.4%
62.2%
10. UMPhIH recognizes and ensures the legitimate right of teaching and research staff to be represented (n=180)
3.9%
7.8%
20%
68.3%
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
1 - Disagree
2 - Partially disagree
3 - Partially agree
4 - Agree

Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation
1. UMPhIH teaching staff and researchers know and benefit from all rights (n=186)	3.75	.637
2. Working conditions are the same at all career levels (n=181)	3.20	.993
3. The staff in the administrative structures of UMPhIH provide comprehensive information on social rights (n=187)	3.44	.849
4. UMPhIH offers the necessary infrastructure to conduct research, regardless of career level (n=193)	3.27	.963
5. UMPhIH departments and research centers provide a stimulating and pleasant working environment (n=189)	3.16	1.010
6. Within UMPhIH, researchers' performance is not jeopardized by the instability of employment contracts (n=170)	3.31	.994
7. Teaching staff and researchers are informed in a timely, complete and correct manner regarding funding (n=196)	3.36	.891
8. Teaching staff and researchers are adequately supported in preparing the necessary documentation in order to obtain funding (n=189)	3.24	.913
9. UMPhIH ensures equal opportunities for all categories of personnel (n=180)	3.37	.933
10. UMPhIH recognizes and ensures the legitimate right of teaching and research staff to be represented (n=180)	3.52	.801

Importance of aspects related to working conditions and environemnt, and social rights

From the perspective of respondents, the most important aspects regarding their work environment is that, regardless of the career level at which a researcher is, the conditions in which they carry out their activity should be the same (weighted average 36, 76). This is equally true for **access to research infrastructure**, which should not depend on status/career level (weighted average 34.89). The next aspect in order of importance for this dimension is the **knowledge and realization of researchers' social rights**, with a weighted average of 33.67. Very close to the importance was conducting research in a pleasant and stimulating environment (weighted average 29.78).

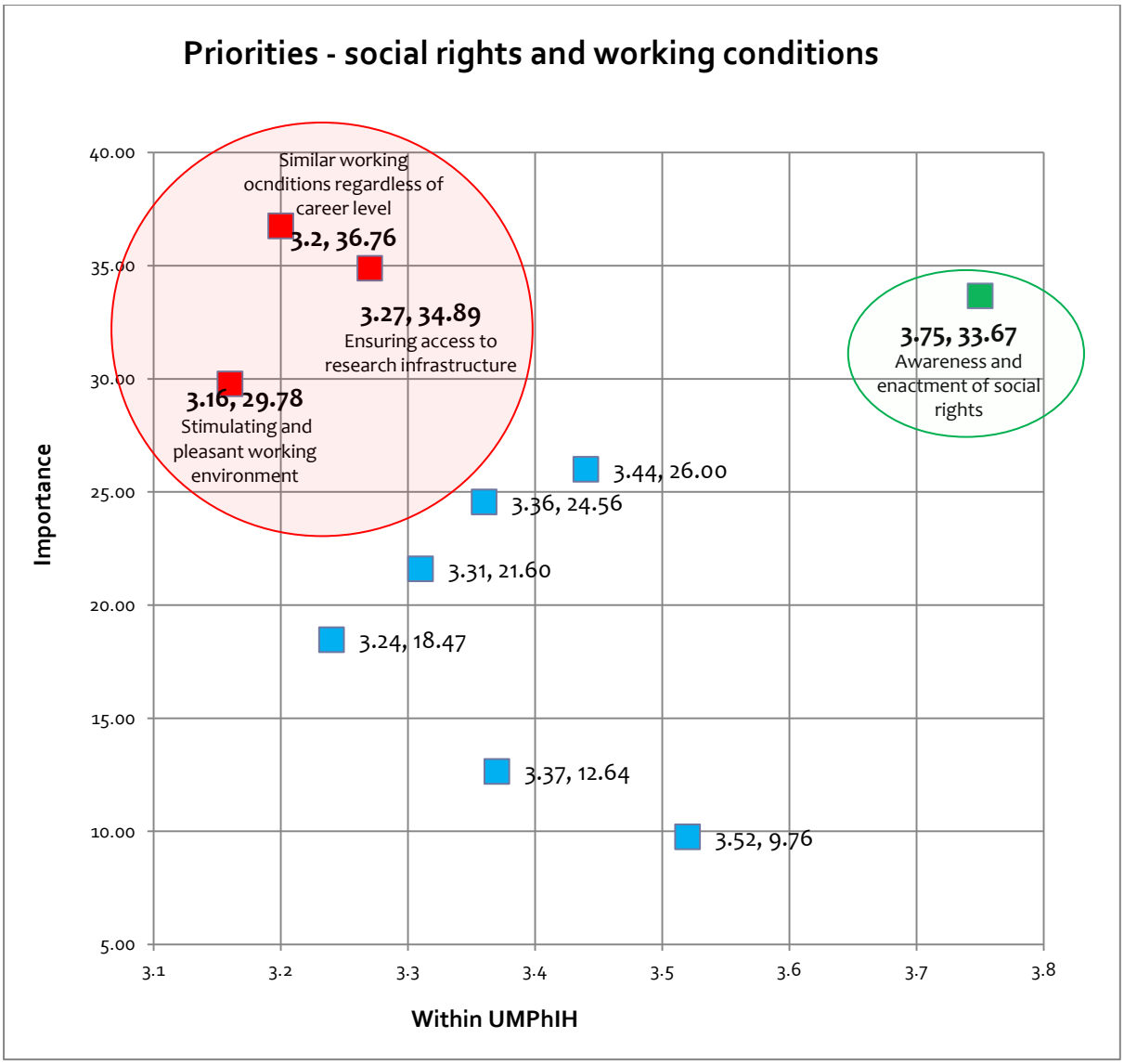


Priorities

Data analysis reveals that the **most important aspects** for the respondents registered **low averages**, so it is necessary to identify and implement measures to address the shortcomings mentioned by participants in the consultation. Therefore, the priorities regarding the dimension of the **working environment** and the **enforcement of social rights** should aim at: **ensuring similar conditions for conducting research** and **access to the research infrastructure**, regardless of the level at which the researchers are

in their career. At the same time, among future measures there is a need to include actions that **contribute to improving the work environment**, transforming it into a more **stimulating** and **pleasant** one.

An important result in this analysis is the fact that members of the academic community attribute increased importance to the **awareness and enactment of social rights** which, at the same time, in their opinion, meets a **high level of agreement** within the UMPhIH.



Details and comments

"The university's research infrastructure is not effectively used by its members. There is modern high-precision functional equipment that stagnates because there is no one to operate it. In other words, technicians are not trained, and then hired, who are capable of measuring the samples of those interested to the maximum potential of the device. However, in some cases a group of potential users (university staff) can be created to be trained and then provide these services - but unfortunately this is somewhat restricted by the fact that in most cases these devices are under the supervision of a teacher who claims to appear co-author (in some cases maybe the claims are higher) on articles just because he opened the door and gave you access to that device, which he considers his personal property (pathetic). If we don't get out of this "my estate" paradigm, there will be absolutely no progress at all.

I would touch on another topic that I consider very important - the university must have a clear regulation about who and under what conditions must appear on articles as authors, i.e. if someone arranges a figure or text from the manuscript it should appear on the work.

In many laboratories it is necessary to connect devices to the water network or to make a three-phase electrical connection - these things are difficult to do and in a long time because most of the time you give up the idea or if you have research funds and it is allowed to you do these works then you do them. "

"In a situation where a large part of the PhD students are also residents and possibly teaching staff, it would help if one day of the week could be devoted to research only without overlapping with the other activities. At the moment, there is no legal framework to receive a day per week only dedicated to research."

"The work environment is important. Not all UMF buildings are properly maintained, meaning there are cleanliness and hygiene issues due to incompetent building managers and cleaning staff not doing their jobs. The teaching staff ended up cleaning some buildings themselves, which is ok, because they know how to do that too, but it takes away from their working time..."

"The extension of fixed-term employment contracts should be considered in order to prevent the loss of staff with teaching and research experience. To consider the development of a team of statisticians to support each discipline in UMFIH, as part of their "core" activity; at the moment, young researchers (including PhD students) have to find their own statisticians to work with, often for a fee."

"Procurement protocols should be simplified. There are quite a few cases where purchased products arrive extremely late/don't arrive at all, which makes research difficult. At the same time, finding intermediaries to purchase the products should be eliminated both in terms of price and time (both factors would be considerably simplified). Likewise, the submission of procurement reports should not be conditioned by certain periods of the year. In the field of research, new ideas can intervene at any step that require new protocols and, implicitly, materials and consumables distinct from those originally ordered."

"The lack of office space for all teaching and research staff in the disciplines is an important problem that negatively affects both research and teaching."

"Research funding opportunities are not promoted at all in departments without experience in accessing research funding."

"In order to conduct research, it is imperative that researchers have access to quality journals in the biomedical field. Unfortunately, this is not the case because UMPhIH does not have access licenses with journals of interest, and many are only accessible from the faculty's internet. The accessibility of information is the basis of modern research, and it is of utmost importance that the faculty takes steps in this direction."

"It would be important to rethink the transition of the university assistant from the fixed period to permanent contracts; there should not be another written exam - as long as it has been sat once, and the doctor in question is practicing as a specialist or even a primary care doctor... let it be only something related to the academic activity, the medical one proving it day by day. "

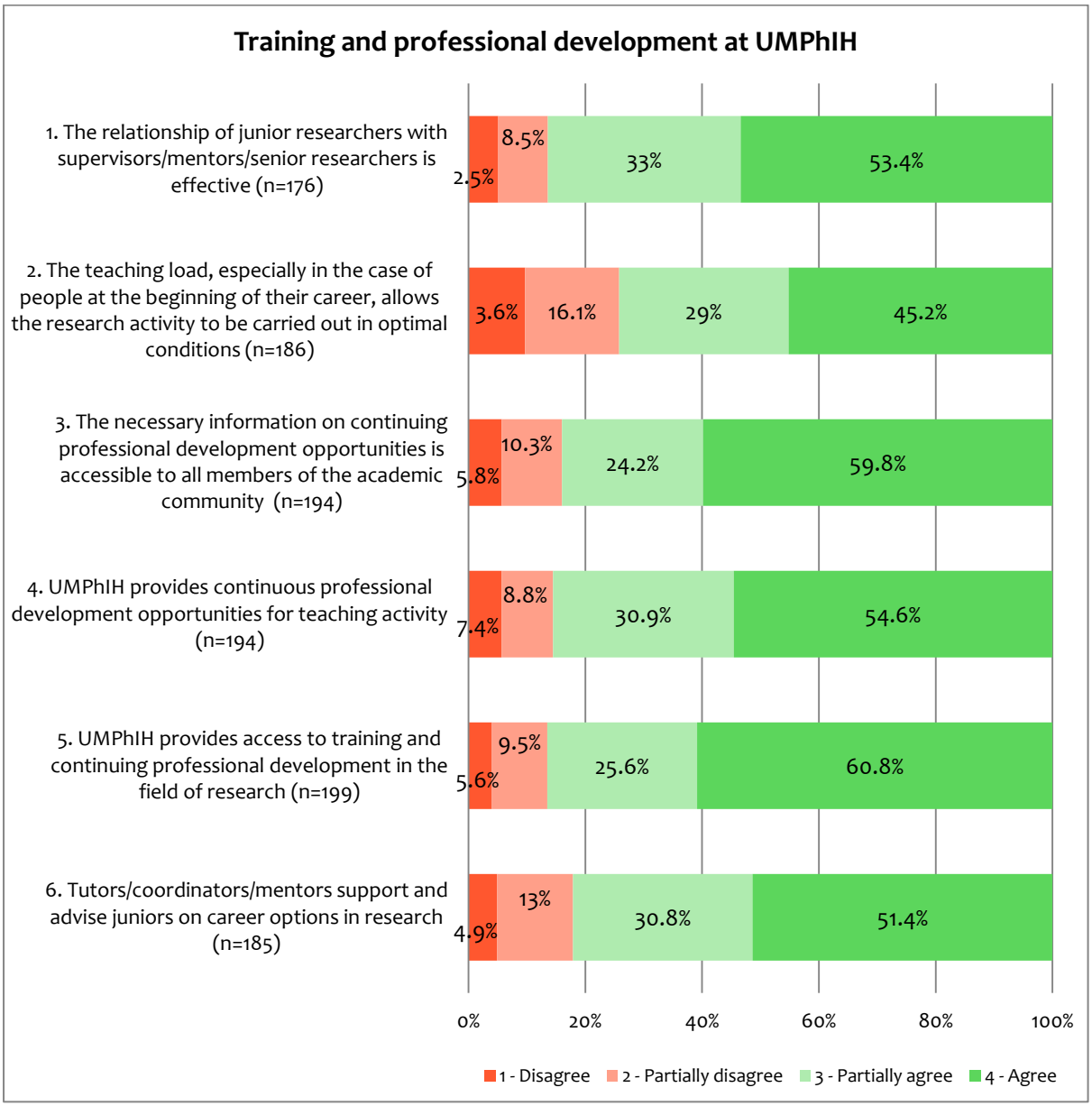
IV. Training and development

The fourth dimension included in the consultation was **training and professional development,** with the section also comprising three questions. The first referred to the conditions of training and development within the university, the second asked the participants to rank these aspects according to the importance they give them, and finally the respondents could add details regarding their answers.

According to the consultation participants, UMPhIH provides **access to training and development in the field of research** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 86.4%), and **the relationship between seniors and beginners is effective** (total *partial agreement*

and *agreement*, 86.4%). There are also high proportions of respondents who considered that the university offers **access to training for teaching** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 85.5%), as well as that the entire academic body has **access to information regarding professional development opportunities** (total *partial agreement* and *agreement*, 85%).

On the other hand, the statement related to the teaching-research load recorded highest proportion of **disagreement**. 19.7% of respondents (total *disagreement* and *partial disagreement*) believe that **the load**, especially in the case of those at the beginning of their career, **does not allow the research activity to be carried out in optimal conditions**.



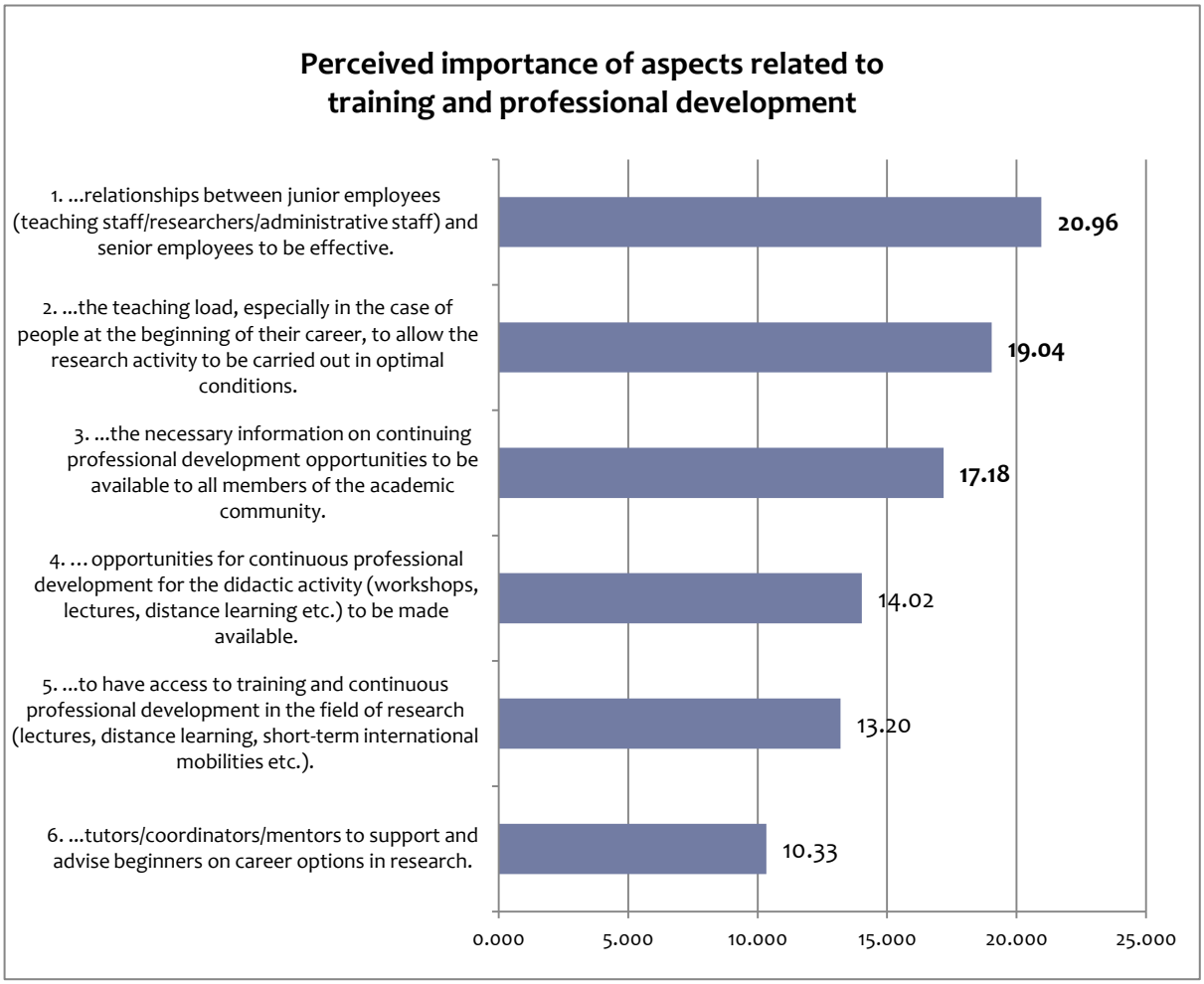
Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation
1. The relationship of junior researchers with supervisors/ mentors/ senior researchers is effective (n=176)	**3.34**	.841

2. The teaching load, especially in the case of people at the beginning of their career, allows the research activity to be carried out in optimal conditions (n=186)	**3.09**	.998
3. The necessary information on continuing professional development opportunities is accessible to all members of the academic community (n=194)	**3.38**	.887
4. UMPhIH provides continuous professional development opportunities for teaching activity (n=194)	**3.34**	.863
5. UMPhIH provides access to training and continuing professional development in the field of research (n=199)	**3.43**	.825
6. Tutors/coordinators/mentors support and advise juniors on career options in research (n=185)	**3.28**	.871

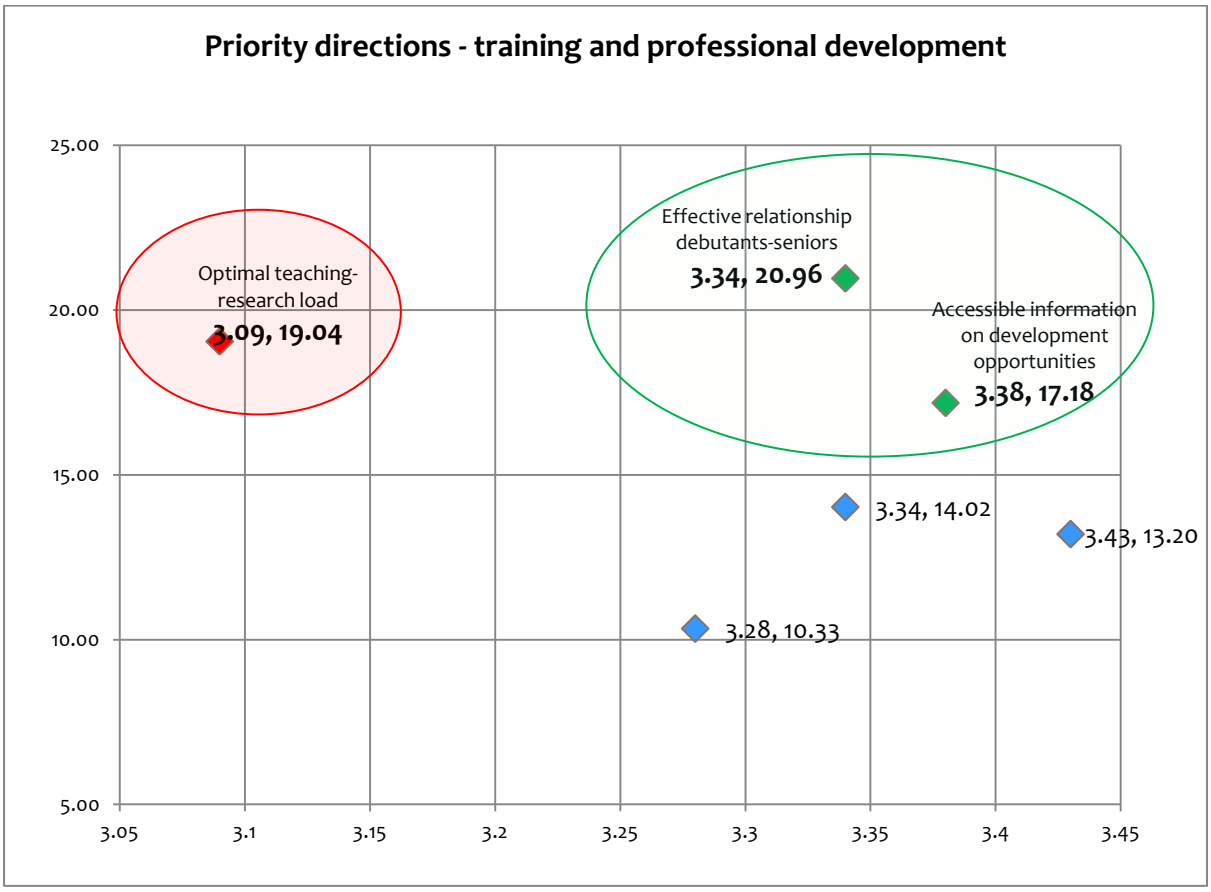
The importance given to aspects related to training and professional development

The highest weighted averages in terms of training and professional development were recorded for the **effectiveness of relations between seniors and junior researchers** (average 20.96), and for **establishing the didactic norm in such a way as to allow the research activity to be carried out in optimal conditions** (average 19.04) respectively, these two aspects being the most important items from the perspective of the respondents.



Priorities

This leads to the prioritization of some measures that allow the research activity to be carried out in optimal conditions. The **teaching-research load in a position,** was the item with a **high importance** which, however, **met the highest level of disagreement among the respondents participating in the consultation**. At the same time, it is worth noting that respondents alloted high importance to two other important aspects being simultaneously positively appreciated by them: the effectiveness of seniors' relations with debutants, and the accessibility of information regarding development opportunities respectively.



Details

"It is difficult for young people to do research (doctorate), residency and teaching activity at the same time. A delicate aspect is represented by young people who are researchers and teachers of a good level, but mediocre practitioners and who need to be redirected in the specialty. It's still hard for them and their family to come to terms with it and they see it as a failure."

"To have departments that provide consultation and support for medical statistics (protocol validation, database structuring, selection of statistical methods etc.) to members of the academic community, especially beginners."

"Professional research cannot be conducted without full-time researchers, INCLUDING from clinical specialties, who do research as a day-to-day profession. Doctors who have clinical activity, most of the time both in the public and in the private sector, and who also do

research, perhaps coordinating doctoral students, are doomed to failure. The fact that UMPhIH does not have real and functional clinical research centers is worrying."

"To have real support for research by providing useful research information, a database of research teams and research topics, with research laboratories in the University and existing equipment/ available research methods."

3b. *ANALYSIS OF RESULTS – QUALITATIVE STAGE*

This section includes the analysis of the main themes that resulted from the semi-structured individual interviews conducted with the PhD students and the directors of the research centers (n=14+4), and the themes generated from the analysis of the two focus groups conducted with researchers (n=16) .

I. PhD students

The main themes derived from the interviews with the doctoral students:

(1) **ethics and professionalism:**

- the long period until receiving the the Ethics Committee's approval for which the following measures were proposed:
    a. the organization of two sub-committees according to the type of human/experimental research;
    b. the digitization of the entire process, which involves a first stage of checking all the necessary documents; and
    c. the provision of models / typified for the entire process of obtaining the scientific research ethics opinion, as well as a supplemental Guide, on the website of the Scientific Vice-Rectorate (Scientific Research Ethics Committee section)
- increasing and diversifying information activities regarding the research infrastructure and improving access to it through:
    a. organizing Demonstration days events intended for doctoral students at the beginning of their doctoral internship;

b. organizing didactic activities to present the research infrastructure and services available at both core facility centers;
c. promoting the research services available in all research centers on the website of the Scientific Vice-Rectorate.

- Diversifying the evaluation items of the research activity by introducing in the grid the indicators that recognize:
  a. dissemination of research results (participation at international congresses);
  b. workshop organization activities (for the youngest – PhD students, students within the scientific events organized within UMFIH).

(2) **recruitment and selection**:

- Measures related to the appointment of selection committees for positions.

(3) **working conditions and environment**:

- making the research infrastructure accessible for PhD students by improving information on available services/techniques/methods - information on the website, the possibility to visit the centers, especially during the first year when PhD students review the research projects/protocols;
- making clinical data accessible for doctoral research and developing patient databases
- increasing in doctoral research projects (PCD) funding, better organization of funds (e.g. *pooling of resources*) and streamlining of purchases through PCD
- measures aimed at equalizing working conditions, in particular with the aim of preventing situations in which teaching at career entry level (R1) jeopardizes research activity ;
- improving communication and organization at the level of the Doctoral School so that the free time of the doctoral students is respected ;
- hiring staff for the full use of the infrastructure.

(4) **training and development**:

- changes at the level of the curriculum and doctoral program - aspects related to national legislation (credits are granted only in the first year), but the possibility

of the university/Doctoral School to allow the organization of courses for doctoral students in senior years as well (electives held by staff seniors - normal);

- diversification of MCS courses (not only for clinical research - medicine);
- introduction of data analysis and advanced statistics courses during studies (when PhD students are already at this stage with their projects);
- the establishment of an advanced statistical analysis center accessible to all university researchers;
- courses - accreditation for animal research activity.

II. Heads of research centers

From the analysis of the interviews with the heads of research centers, the following themes emerged:

- structuring core facilities to include both an administrative component (own staff and management) and a research component to establish research direction (coordinated by senior researchers);
- strengthening collaboration between faculty and research centers - improved dissemination of information about available research services (technologies, methods and techniques, potential impact, collaborative practices) - potential for collaboration within budgeted research projects to avoid potential misunderstandings regarding budget allocation;
- increasing awareness of and access to existing research services in core facilities among faculty staff;
- introduction of modules within the Doctoral School to provide an in-depth presentation of available research services/techniques/methods (for both centers acting as core facility);
- improving the research component of educational programs to cultivate talent and increase early recruitment to medical/pharmaceutical research of undergraduate and graduate students;

- improving research culture through better integration of research into clinical practice (training future doctors to use research to improve clinical practice);
- aligning doctoral supervision with research resources (attracted) to ensure the success of doctoral research projects (enrolment of doctoral students guided by professors who coordinate projects)
- prioritizing research by revising the teaching/research ratio in a teaching position so as to incentivize high performing faculty to allocate sufficient working time to research (and less to teaching)
- improving the funding of doctoral research grants by establishing feasibility criteria and allocating grants according to the content of the projects (not a standard amount/project), as well as ensuring the correlation between the research project and the allocated budget
- encouraging PhD supervisors to provide mentoring on the feasibility of research proposals (including through consultation provided by researchers in core centres/facilities)
- improving the understanding of the research flow and the roles of those involved (doctoral student, mentor/supervisor, collaborating researcher at the central unit)
- increasing the efficiency of administrative processes (especially purchases) through digitization and employment of administrative staff in centers (basic facilities)
- organizing specific events to improve collaboration between researchers/research centers and faculty staff (before calls are launched, so coordinators can form teams)
- improving the predictability of research activity by discussing project proposals in advance (before projects are submitted), so that researchers from the centers can be allocated to the respective projects (compensates for the lower salaries of those occupying research positions compared to auxiliary teaching staff – biologist, chemist, etc.)
- improving the remuneration of research center directors, considering their current dual role: research and center management

- introducing different evaluation frameworks for teaching staff, auxiliary staff in research centers and researchers (e.g.: administrative tasks would be assigned to auxiliary staff, so that researchers can allocate time to research activity)
- employing technicians at research centers to cover routine tasks in research activities
- developing a long-term funding policy for research centers (basic facilities) that allows the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment/infrastructure (necessary for high-impact research)
- reviewing research funding to pool resources and increase procurement and allocation efficiency (core facilities should be prioritized taking into account their status – providing research services for the entire research community);
- reviewing the evaluation of doctoral students (emphasis on the quality of the journal, not on the number of articles);
- developing biobanks accessible to doctoral students;
- improving the digitization and integration of data on research carried out within the university by investing in the administrative capacity of DepCDI;
- improving administrative support services (human resources, procurement, legal advice etc.);
- facilitating the hiring of international researchers through proposals formulated within the national research funding programs;
- revision of evaluation criteria to improve ethical alignment in co-authorship situations by linking article content to authors' expertise;
- introducing Doctoral School courses that allow doctoral students the opportunity to obtain *Certificates for conducting ethical research* (both human subjects and in vivo);
- reviewing and improving the possibility of the research centers in the Faculties to generate income (if they meet the periodic evaluation criteria);
- improving the mechanisms that allow pooling of resources for research activity;

- increasing the efficiency of purchasing materials by ensuring stocks of key reagents;
- improving the efficiency of the IRB (ethical approvals) through digitization and extended guidance for applicants (providing templates, sample documents)
- revising the annual assessment framework to include active participation at international conferences – improves university visibility, scientific dialogue, potential to develop international research collaborations/networks;
- identifying means to allow more flexibility for resident physicians who are involved in research and teaching;
- revising the total workload allot more time to research within a position (at least 50 to 70%);
- cultivating the research culture within the university and improving the integration of research results/activities in teaching activities;
- supporting scientific circles to students to cultivate (research) talent during undergraduate studies;
- improving the mentoring and supervision skills of PhD supervisors through regular training and reviews;
- improving the capacity to monitor ethical conduct at all levels through better dissemination and enforcement of existing regulations, as well as regular meetings to discuss progress;
- developing public communication of science and research results at the community level to raise awareness and cultivate voluntary research participation of local community members.

III. Researchers - focus-groups

The main directions of action and measures resulting from the thematic analysis of the focus groups were:

- better planning of research activity (in the medium and long term), as well as of purchases that facilitate the periodic endowment of research centers (with the aim of keeping research competitive)

- improving the organization of research: a clearer model that ensures the autonomy of the research teams, as well as the functioning of the centers as a core facility (for PhD students, the academic community, externally)
- reducing bureaucracy by digitizing some procurement processes and hiring specialized personnel to carry out the procurement activity at the level of the centers
- streamlining purchases through "loans" from the university's research funds to cover the purchases until the funding from the won projects is allocated (for which the contracts are signed)
- strengthening the human resource through employment for a fixed and indefinite period for the full use of the existing infrastructure and for offloading non-specific tasks of researchers
- more frequent consultations between research centers and doctoral supervisors in order to improve interdepartmental collaboration and the realization of doctoral research projects
- actions to identify and maintain talents in research activities (from volunteering to employment in research projects for a fixed period), including a more frequent organisation of *demonstration days*
- recognition within the framework of the annual evaluation grid of the activity of staff/researchers of the activity of disseminating the results
- the introduction of distinct minimum grids/thresholds for the evaluation of research activity
- representation of researchers in the University Senate
- more frequent consultations of researchers regarding the conduct of the activity

4. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The quantitative stage of the consultation led to the formulation of the following main directions of action for a better alignment with the principles of the European Charter and Code of researchers:

1) **ethics and academic professionalism:**

The priority aspect regarding ethics and academic professionalism is the **increasing efficiency of the Scientific Research Ethics Commission's activity**, respondents noting the need for the time for issuing approvals to be reduced compared to the current one.

2) **recruitment and selection**:
The questionnaire-based consultation did not lead to the identification of any particular aspects that require prioritization, all aspects considered important by the respondents meeting a high level of fulfillment within the university.

3) **social rights and working environment**:
According to members of the academic community, key measures regarding the research environment should aim for **ensuring similar conditions for conducting research** and **accessing the research infrastructure**, regardless of researchers' level in their career. At the same time, among the future measures, there is a **need to include actions that contribute to improving the working environment**, transforming it into a **more stimulating** and **pleasant** one, as well as **establishing a healthier balance between professional activity** and **personal life**, especially in the case of R1 researchers who simultaneously carry out multiple professional activities within the university.

4) **training and professional development**:
According to the respondents, there is a need for measures that lead to the **possibility of carrying out the research activity in optimal conditions**, compared to the teaching load. The current offer of training and professional development is diversified and meets the needs of R1 researchers, in particular with regard to training for didactic activity (training courses for doctoral students who also carry out teaching activity).

The limitations of the quantitative stage of the consultation stem from the **relatively low response rate** and the **convenience sample**. However, the main aspects requiring **measures for improvement resulting from the quantitative stage were confirmed and detailed during the qualitative stage**. The latter allowed the **in-depth documentation of the difficulties** encountered by both doctoral students and researchers in the centers. In addition to the measures proposed by these two categories of participants at the consultation stage, the interviews with the directors of the research centers provided

the **highly informed perspective of the category of R4 researchers** with extensive experience of research organization and management.