

ACTION PLAN

Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria (Council for Agricultural Research and Economics)

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Web link to published version of organisation's HR Strategy and Action Plan:

http://sito.entecra.it/portale/cra_carta_eur_ric.php?lingua=EN

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1. ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

STAFF & STUDENTS	FTE
<i>Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD. students either full-time or part-time involved in research</i>	854
<i>Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)</i>	0
<i>Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation)</i>	0
<i>Of whom are women</i>	445
<i>Of whom are stage R3 or R4 = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor</i> (Note: Researchers and Technologists of levels I and II according to the National Labour contract for Public Research Organisations)	174
<i>Of whom are stage R2 = in most organisations corresponding with postdoctoral level</i> (Note: Researchers and Technologists of level III according to the National Labour contract for Public Research Organisations)	610
<i>Of whom are stage R1 = in most organisations corresponding with</i>	70

<i>doctoral level</i> (Note: Scholarship holders in possession of a Ms.Sc. or equivalent degree and Research Grant holders)	
<i>Total number of students (if relevant)</i>	
<i>Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff)</i>	1854
RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for most recent fiscal year)	€
<i>Total annual organisational budget</i>	151.184.539 €
<i>Annual organisational direct government funding (designated for research)</i>	134.286.527 €
<i>Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)</i>	8.477.946 €
<i>Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research</i>	2.777.591 €
ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE (a very brief description of your organisation, max. 100 words)	
<p>CREA is Italy's largest public agricultural research institution. Established by Legislative Decree no. 454 of 29 October 1999, it has legal personality governed by public law and operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies. CREA has general scientific competence in agriculture and carries out research and develops technology solutions with a view to enhancing the protection and preservation of natural resources and biodiversity of agricultural, forestry and fisheries ecosystems as well as the profitability and competitiveness of agriculture, agro-food and forestry activities, in a context of sustainability and health of the productions.</p>	

2. NARRATIVE (MAX. 2 PAGES)

Ethical and professional aspects

The gap analysis carried out on ethical and professional aspects has shown that the situation within CREA is mostly in line with the principles set out in the Charter, both in terms of compliance with existing laws/regulations and practices in force. However, some actions to be undertaken have been identified in order to improve the application of ethical and professional principles by researchers.

In particular, although a CREA's Code of individual conduct applicable to all staff is in place, the adoption of an internal Code of ethics and professional behaviour should be envisaged with a view to pointing out specific provisions on: researchers' professional responsibility, dissemination, exploitation of results of research, tutoring of young researchers, improving engagement with society in order to ensure that research is made known to the public.

The survey's responses highlighted a general awareness of researchers about their accountability towards their employers and funders for the efficient management of the funds received for research. However, the gap analysis emphasized the need for internal guidelines on scientific and financial accountability vs authority in decision-making processes.

With regard to evaluation systems, both the gap analysis and the survey have emphasized the lack of an internal evaluation system for the assessment of researchers' individual performance; however, the Decree of the President of the Republic of 26 January 2011 (Article 14) stated that criteria for the evaluation of individual performance of researchers would be produced by ANVUR but, so far, they are not available.

Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment

Concerning the recruitment procedures of the CREA, a substantial formal correspondence has been verified as set out at point n. 14 of the European Charter for Researchers "*... employers or funders of researchers improve the recruitment methods and career evaluation/appraisal systems in order to create a more transparent, open, equal and internationally accepted system of recruitment and career development*" and the relevant legislation (Legislative Decree No 165, March 30, 2001, Articles 35-38-57, Legislative Decree of 27 October 2009, No.150). In particular, the CREA is totally aligned with the Charter principles with regard to the absence of discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion, etc., as well as the formulation of the Selection Advertisements, which clearly state operating procedures, selection criteria and professional requirements for each positions. However, selection advertisements are published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic and on CREA website (<http://sito.entecra.it/portale/>) in the Italian language only. In order to increase accessibility for EU citizens, it will be necessary to produce English versions to be published on the EURAXESS website: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/>. Further improvement are needed in: i) the heterogeneity of the selection committees by increasing, for example, the number of international experts and members from the private sector; ii) communications targeted at unsuccessful candidates; iii) feedback to interviewees on strengths and weaknesses of their applications; iv) attributing higher values to mobility experiences, especially at international level; v) clarification of career perspectives and permanent job opportunities for post-docs.

Working conditions and social security

CREA research units are spread in numerous locations in different settings (urban and rural) and with variable staff numbers and access to infrastructures. The disadvantages of some isolated locations should be at least partially corrected by improving networking and collaborative working facilities thus facilitating communications and exchanges.

The strict application of national legislation and of the provisions of a National Labour Contract for Public Research Organisations ensures high standards of working conditions and social security for the majority of staff. However, other contract types are in force for temporary staff (mainly researchers in the early phases of their career) not ensuring the same high standards, nor a full recognition as professionals. It must be pointed out that this reflects a widespread situation in Italy, at least partially motivated by the general economic landscape and of the research sector in particular. Filling all currently vacant research positions by CREA is, at present, prevented by lack of resources.

The internal survey clearly reflects this situation: the two statements "*The performance of researchers is not undermined by instability of employment contracts*" and "*Specific career development strategy for researchers at all stages of their career are present*" received a very high level of disagreement.

A gender issue is not noticeable as confirmed by the internal survey. A slight majority of researchers of CREA are women and the fact that the female proportion decreases at the higher levels of career can be explained by some characteristic courses of studies (e.g. agriculture and forestry) being largely attended by males in previous decades (thus a purely demographic factor). The survey did not show any noticeable differences between males and females on any aspect considered.

The participation of researchers in decision-making bodies is being implemented. For the Scientific Board it is already foreseen in the recently (April 2017) approved Statute. The Statute is being revised (proposal already submitted to the supervising Ministry) with the aim of including an elected representative in the Management Board as well [**approved 22 September 2017**].

Training and development

Three main types of "early-stage researchers" can be identified within CREA: a) scholarship holders (Ms.Sc. or equivalent degree), b) Ph.D. students (financed by CREA where research activities take place; courses provided and diplomas issued by Universities) and c) research grant holders (holding a Ph.D. or three years of previous research experience). A specific internal regulation (Deliberation of the Management Board n. 39 of 14.03.2013 "*Regolamento per il conferimento di borse di studio, assegni di ricerca, borse dottorato di ricerca e soggiorni di studio all'estero a scopo formativo*") establishes and describes the role of a "Supervisor" and the duties of the supervised researcher. However, the supervisor of Ph.D. students is only identified in the University; the Regulation and the relevant agreements between CREA and the Universities should be amended in order to designate also a CREA supervisor for the activities carried out within CREA.

Occasionally, a fourth type of "early-stage researcher" is identified: a Researcher of level III (under the National Labour Contract for PRO) winning a selection for a permanent or temporary position, having just completed his/her Ph.D. studies (three years) or three years of scholarship after a Ms.Sc. degree, being thus still in the initial four years since the inception of the research career. A specific provision to ensure a supervision in such circumstances should be introduced.

In all cases above specific training courses for senior researchers in order to improve their capacity as supervisors, coaches, mentors, tutors will be organised. The responsibility of seniors in the assistance to young researchers will be included in the "Ethical and professional code" to be developed.

As far as life-long training is concerned, CREA has a periodically updated Training Plan. This will be improved in its reference to the objectives set out in the Three-Year Research Plan with a view to ensuring consistency between training and CREA's research strategies. Training courses will be extended to early-stage researchers. Compatibly with available resources, part of the budget will be dedicated for the attendance of externally provided specialist courses for researchers and for international research mobility.

3. ACTIONS

Title action	Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)	Responsible Unit	Indicator(s) / Target(s)
(1) <i>Code of ethics and professional behaviour</i>	March 2018	Scientific Board	Code approved by the Management Board and published on CREA website One training session open to all researchers by web streaming
(2) <i>Internal rules on the administrative and financial accountability vis-à-vis project resources</i>	July 2018	Office for the support to the management of research projects	Rules approved by the Management Board and published on CREA website. One training session open to all researchers by web streaming
(3) <i>Guidelines for the protection of data</i>	March 2018	Office for information systems	Guidelines published on CREA website One training session open to all researchers by web streaming
(4) <i>Transparent criteria for the periodical evaluation of scientific performance of researchers</i>	March 2019 (provided specific guidelines by ANVUR are produced in the meanwhile)	Office for Management control and research assessment; Scientific Board	Document with principles and procedures approved by the Management Board
(5) <i>Publication of recruitment advertisements on Euraxess and on CREA website in English language</i>	Since 2018	Office for HR recruitment	Recruitment advertisements in the English language on CREA website and Euraxess Indicator (since 2019): percentage of applications from abroad in CREA selections for researcher

			<i>positions</i>
<i>(6) Increase the presence of international experts and members from private sectors in the register of selection committees candidates maintained by CREA</i>	<i>September 2017</i>	<i>Office for HR recruitment</i>	<p><i>Application form and call for experts translated into the English language and published on CREA website [DONE]:</i></p> <p><i>http://sito.entecra.it/portale/public/documenti/application_for_crea_register_of_experts.doc</i></p> <p><i>http://sito.entecra.it/portale/public/documenti/information_on_crea_register_of_experts.pdf</i></p> <p><i>Indicator (since 2019): percentage of experts from abroad and from the private sector in the register</i></p>
<i>(7) Definition of guidelines for selection committee members</i>	<i>December 2018</i>	<i>Office for HR recruitment</i>	<p><i>Approval of Guidelines by the Scientific Board and by the Management Board</i></p> <p><i>Guidelines published on CREA website in the Italian and English languages</i></p>
<i>(8) Specifications of a multi-annual recruitment plan for permanent researcher positions</i>	<i>December 2018</i>	<i>Office for HR recruitment</i> <i>Office for HR management</i>	<i>HR Plan approved by the Management Board</i>
<i>(9) Reinforcement of internal networking instruments and support to young researchers</i>	<i>March 2018</i>	<i>Scientific Board</i>	<i>Approval by the Management Board</i>
<i>(10) Improved guidelines on mobility and sabbatical leave</i>	<i>March 2018</i>	<i>Office for HR management in consultation with the Scientific Board</i>	<i>Approval by the Management Board</i>
<i>(11) Web page on career</i>	<i>December 2017</i>	<i>Office for International</i>	<i>Web page available on</i>

<i>options</i>		<i>relationships</i>	<i>CREA website</i>
(12) <i>Initiatives to improve the efficacy of conflict resolution</i>	<i>June 2018</i>	<i>Office for HR management</i>	<i>One awareness raising event (conference in web streaming) on conflict resolution in a research environment</i>
(13) <i>Revision of the regulation on scholarships, research grants and PhD students.</i>	<i>June 2018</i>	<i>Office for staff training</i>	<i>Rules approved by the Management Board and published on CREA website.</i>
(14) <i>Revision of the Training Programme</i>	<i>December 2018</i>	<i>Office for staff training</i>	<i>Training Programme approved by the Management Board</i>
(15) <i>Directives on mobility and training in research projects</i>	<i>December 2018</i>	<i>Office for staff training</i> <i>Office for the management of research projects</i>	<i>Directives approved by the Management Board</i>

- (1) A **Code of ethics and professional behaviour** shall complement an already existing general code of individual conduct that applies to all types of staff. A specific Code, inspired by such documents as *Freedom, Responsibility and Universality of Science* (ICSU, 2008), the *Singapore Statement on Research Integrity* (2010), the *Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations* (2013) should clarify expected behaviours on aspects that go beyond a mere compliance with laws and rules, to include intellectual honesty, accountability, fairness in working relationships, mentoring duties of senior researchers, engagement with Society at large, commitment to the dissemination of results.
- (2) The scientific responsibility of researchers on planning, performing and monitoring the activities carried out in research and development projects is clearly established and implemented. However, the scope and the degree of **authority of researchers on the project budget** needs to be clarified, in particular with respect to the Administration and the researchers' hierarchical superiors. An explicit **internal rule** shall be developed under the main responsibility of the Office for the management of research projects. The rule could be included in a broader regulation or be the subject of an independent document. After approval by the Management Board of CREA it will be published on CREA website.
- (3) The development of appropriate guidelines for the **protection of scientific data** will help researchers to comply with recognised good practices. Guidelines shall regard rights

to access, risk management (systems protection from intrusions, backup, disaster recovery), data use and sharing.

- (4) At present, a system for the periodical assessment of researchers' productivity (scientific as well as of dissemination and support to innovation processes) is not in place. A recent Legislative Decree (n. 218 of 25 November 2016) includes the introduction of "adequate evaluation systems" among the obligations of all Public Research Organisations, including CREA. A previous national law (DPCM 26.01. 2011, G.U. 20.05.2011, n. 116) established that criteria for the evaluation of individual performance of researchers would be developed by ANVUR (National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research), but such criteria have not been produced so far. As soon as national criteria are available, a document, possibly in the form of an internal Regulation, will be developed under the responsibility of the Office for Management control and research assessment, taking into account the opinion of the Scientific Board and finally approved by the Management Board. The principles of independence and competence of the evaluators, as well as their international provenance, when appropriate, will be observed.
- (5) All recruitment advertisements for researcher positions (permanent and temporary) will be translated into the **English language** and published in full on **CREA website** and in summary, with link to the CREA website, on **EURAXESS**. This will be operational from January 2018; from January 2019, on an annual basis, statistics will be collected on the number of foreign candidates submitting applications.
- (6) At present, **external selection committees members** for researcher positions are drawn from a **register** maintained by the CREA Office for HR Recruitment, permanently open to new applications. Committees (typically made of three members) include experts from the register from a minimum of one (R1 positions, external member chairing the committee) up to three (R4 positions). An effort to increase the number of experts from the private sector and the proportion of foreigners will start by making the application form available in the English language on CREA website with appropriate instructions in the same language. This will be operational from September 2017 **[DONE]**; from September 2018, on an annual basis, statistics will be collected on the number of foreign experts and experts from the private sector admitted in the register.
- (7) Members of selection committees are regularly briefed on the procedures of selection as dictated by current national legislation on public recruitment. CREA will develop **additional guidelines** in order to raise the awareness of committee members on principles of the Charter and Code highlighting additional requirements; e.g.:
 - due recognition of the value of mobility experience, including with the private sector and international;
 - due recognition of competences acquired all through the career, including on-the-job training, lifelong learning and non-academic credentials;
 - due recognition of the value of teaching, mentoring, coaching, supervising;
 - need to avoid excessive reliance on bibliometric indices as means of evaluation of individual competence;
 - stability of criteria for the judging merit by implementing the list of evaluation criteria
 - providing individual information to non-successful candidates (protecting their privacy)
 - providing feedback on strengths and weaknesses of applications to interviewees.

Such guidelines will also provide researchers with a stable reference on their career path development.

- (8) CREA currently develops a **HR Plan** as a component of the Three-year Research Plan. The criteria and implementation of the HR Plan will be revised in order to describe in a quantitative as well as qualitative way the permanent positions that will be made

available in a three-years perspective. The areas in which positions will be available shall refer explicitly to the research strategies outlined on the Three-year Research Plan. This will provide clear indications to young researchers and post-docs about their actual career perspectives within a reasonable time framework.

- (9) The next revision of the Three-year Research Plan (at present foreseen with reference to the years 2018-2020) will make a special focus on initiatives and instruments to increase internal networking (web-based collaborative working instruments) and, provided the necessary funds are available, internal competitive grants addressed to researchers in the initial phase of their career.
- (10) Mobility, especially international, will be encouraged by clear **guidelines** on National Experts on Secondment, Temporary Fellowships (incoming and outgoing), sabbatical leaves. Provided the necessary funds are available, the three-year **Training Plan** will devote resources for short term international mobility with special reference to researchers in the initial phase of their career.
- (11) At present CREA is not in a position to provide exhaustive and regularly updated information to researchers on positions made available by other institutions and funding agencies; however, a webpage will be designed within the official CREA website, where links to the main websites and other sources of information on job opportunities for researchers will be listed.
- (12) A "Committee of Guarantee", mandated by law, is fully operational in CREA, dealing with any issue related to possible discriminations and mistreatments of any kind, although with a broader scope than just researchers. However, the functions and rules of the Committee are not widely known by researchers; an **awareness raising event** (possibly accessible to all via streaming video) will be organized. The possibility of securing the assistance of an independent "peace maker" to deal with issues specific to possible conflicts related to research activities will be explored.
- (13) The current CREA **regulation** on scholarship and research grants holders, PhD student and short-term outgoing mobility http://sito.entecra.it/portale/cra_avviso.php?id=9869&tipo=documento will be updated in order to fully account for the following situations:
 - ensure that all researchers receive due supervision during the first four years after the inception of the research career, despite the type of contract;
 - clarify the role of a CREA supervisor of PhD students in addition to that appointed by the University providing the courses and issuing the diploma.
 - set-up specific training for senior researchers in order to improve their ability as supervisors, mentors, coaches, trainers of researchers in the early stages of their careers.
- (14) Revision of the three-year Training Plan. A Training Plan is produced and periodically updated by CREA. The next revision (expected December 2018) will be improved in order to:
 - make the connection with the Three-Year- Research Plan more explicit and coherent.
 - dedicate part of the resources available to specialist courses for individual researchers
 - ensure access to training to all researchers regardless of the type of contract.
- (15) A specific directive will be issued encouraging researchers to include resources for training and mobility in the budget of research projects whenever appropriate and compatible with the rules of funding bodies.

Actions addressing the implementation of Open, Transparent, Merit-Based Recruitment principles:

- a) A specific **Document on OTM-R policy at CREA** will be produced and published on CREA website in the Italian and English languages, drawing extensively from the current Regulation on Organisation and Operations

[Document approved with President's Decree n. 39 of 5 October 2017 and published on CREA website].
- b) CREA **guidelines** on how the **OTM-R policy is implemented** and applied in selection procedures will be published on CREA website in the Italian and English languages. It will mainly explain current procedures as they are already compliant with national rules on public recruitment.
- c) All relevant documents for the selection process will be published on CREA website in **Italian** and in **English**. A synthesis of selection advertisements will be published on **Euraxess** with links to CREA website.
- d) **E-tools** will be further developed as far as compatible with current regulations on such issues as identification of candidates, avoidance of external interference during interviews, avoidance of leakages of relevant information, etc.
- e) The **Register of external experts** to be employed as members of selection committees (at present comprising 526 experts) will be further enlarged with particular emphasis on experts from the private sector and from outside Italy. The application form and relevant information will be published also in English on CREA website.
- f) **Guidelines/Recommendations for selection committees** in addition to compulsory rules, with general and specific evaluation criteria making reference to principles of the Charter and Code will be issued in Italian and English.
- g) **Feedback** will be provided (individually, in order to protect privacy) to unsuccessful candidates.

4. IMPLEMENTATION (MAX. 1 PAGE)

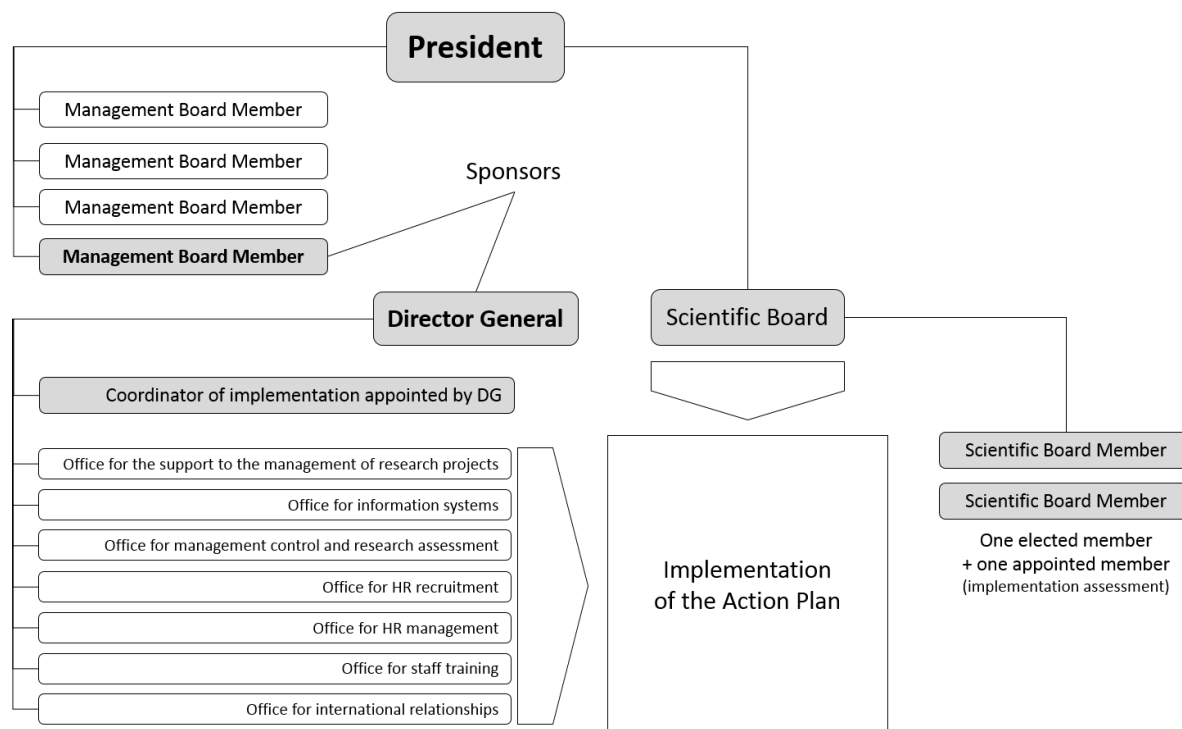
The implementation will be supervised by **one Member of the Management Board** (chosen by the President) and by the **Director General**, both acting together as “sponsors” of the project.

The actual development of documents, procedures, guidelines, etc. will be the duty of **seven Offices of the Central Administration**, as set out under paragraph 3 above. Each Office is managed by a **Director** whose performance objectives will include the specific actions to be carried out within the implementation process.

A **Director**, not in charge of any of the above mentioned Offices, will be assigned the responsibility of overall **coordination** and will **report to the Sponsors** at least every three months and, in any case issues emerge that should be discussed at the highest level.

An independent progress evaluation and assessment of coherence between actions actually performed and the Action Plan will be carried out performed by a **committee** established with **two members of the Scientific Board** chosen by the President: one among the four elected by the scientific Community and one among the eight appointed by the Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forest Policies. The Committee will interact with the **Coordinator** and the **Sponsors** and will **report to the President**. A report will be produced at least every six months describing the state of the implementation, possible issues and corrective actions, if needed.

The following **chart** illustrates roles and responsibilities as has been described above.



Offices will set up a **consultation process with CREA Researchers** during the preparation of the drafts to be proposed to the Management Board for approval, whenever applicable.

The Coordinator and the Office Directors will be responsible for the preparation of the external evaluation phase after the first two years of implementation of the HRS4R.