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Germany's VBL launches pension tracker platform for researchers



EUROPE – A platform launched by German pension fund VBL is seeking to keep international researchers informed of the first and second-pillar pension benefits they have accrued across the whole of Europe.

At the moment, approximately 2m mobile researchers have accrued pension benefits in Europe, many of them working in public services at universities and public research entities.

Claudia Wegner-Wahnschaffe, project manager for the platform – initiated by the public supplementary pension fund of the German Federation and the Länder – said providing a clearer picture of pension benefits was "part of Europe's fight for the best researchers".

She added: "Working contracts for mobile researchers are getting shorter, and it is not unusual to have as many as 15 different placements."

Dubbed findyourpension.eu, the online portal, sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, aims to collect as much information as possible on contact details and pension systems, including an FAQ related to universities or other public research institute.

Researchers receive information about administrative hurdles and necessary registrations, as well as overviews of the various national and occupational pension systems.

"Researchers can enter the names of their employers and find out which pension benefits they might have accrued working for them," Wegner-Wahnschaffe told IPE.

The project manager said she was currently campaigning for support from the European Union and seeking additional partners at the various public research institutes and pension providers on the Continent.

She added that the process had been easier with countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden, which already have national tracking systems in place.

She also pointed out that the quality of the information provided had been safeguarded through a "joint network of knowledge and information".

This network includes different stakeholders from the research area and organisations such as the public pension fund association EAPSPI.

Wegner-Wahnschaffe said the platform would also cooperate with the EU's own researcher job platform EURAXESS, noting that some people had inquired about the project's relationship with the pension portal the EU wants to establish.

"We are including both the first and the second pillars, not just occupational pensions, because mobile researchers need a clear picture of their complete pension biography built up during their whole career," she said.

"And it is not yet clear when the EU platform will be set up given its size and the complexity of the systems."

She added that it might be easier to set up portals for the different groups of highly mobile employees of various sectors, such as the health and construction sectors, and that those smaller projects might help serve as a litmus test for a more complex pension tracking system.

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