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Out in the cold

The European Commission's Marie Curie Fellowships provide a brilliant way to promote mobility within Europe — they fund postdocs if they move to labs outside their home country. Germany has stumbled on another way to promote mobility, albeit inadvertently: freeze the research budget.

The German government's announcement last month of the freeze is a response to its current economic crisis (see *Nature* **420**, 452; 2002). As a result, as many as 2,000 postdocs could be without funding. That decision is almost sure to cause a brain drain. But the situation begs an obvious question — where do you put 2,000 postdocs?

The answer remains elusive. Even brand new institutes, such as the Institute for Molecular Biotechnology in Vienna, will create only about 200 positions, of which perhaps half will be postdocs (see *Naturejobs* 4–5; 11 April 2002). So if 20 new similarly sized institutions in Europe open this year, the problem would be solved.

Even in the United States, where everything, it seems, is done on a bigger scale, there is no panacea. The closest thing to a quick fix is the Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research, which is occupying existing space in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The drug-discovery facility will employ about 1,000 scientists. But again, in terms of need, the institute falls short. Even if every single position available were for postdocs, it would only absorb about half the fund-seeking Germans.

The solution, if one can really call it that, will involve Germans scattering far and wide, trying to eke out positions wherever growth seems imminent or under way. Or waiting until the government reverses its position and restores the funding.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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