# Doctoral thresholds - could our data predict the abandon rate?

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# Coimbra Group

Founded in **1985** the Coimbra Group is an association of **long-established European multidisciplinary universities of high international standard**.

The Coimbra Group is committed to creating special academic and cultural ties in order to **promote internationalisation, academic collaboration, excellence in learning and research, and service to society**.

It is also the purpose of the Coimbra Group to **influence European education and research policy** and to **develop best practice** through mutual exchange of experience.

One of the pioneering actors in the creation of Erasmus+, the co-creation of the European Universities Initiative, and the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

# Doctoral Studies Working Group

**One of 12 working groups of CG**

**The main goals:**

- **Permanent exchange of information**
- **Sharing of best and innovative practice**
- Joint activities in the organization of doctoral programs and support of early research careers.
- Assisting CG Universities in their aim of increasing participation in European research and education projects
- Offering our expertise as an excellent basis for possible contributions of the Coimbra Group to European policy-making relating to doctoral studies and early research careers.
- High light: Annual Coimbra Group 3MT Competition

https://www.coimbra-group.eu/working-group/doctoral-studies/

# Data in shaping doctoral education
# - An example of ongoing activities of WG

**GOALS:**

**What information is available on doctoral training  for the leaders of the Universities and Graduate Schools?**

**Can we compare,  get ideas for developing our activities  etc. from the data available?**

**METHODS:**

**Survey to the DS WG members carried out spring 2024**

**-> a wide range of responses were received from all over Europe, from 17 universities**

**To ensure quality and consistency, discussions on the preliminary results at the WG meeting June 2024**

# Basic data

90 % receive funding from their state by the results of doctoral education and its results

Indicative/legal duration of a doctoral degree
50 %: 4 years
< 50 %: 3 years
<10 %: more that 4 years

In 60 %, the duration of completing a doctoral degree is limited

Monitoring doctoral researchers

Progress >90 %

Well-being < 60 %

Funding indicators
< 40 % number
of graduated doctors
> 40 % number
of doctoral researchers

In over 90 % of countries these indicators are transparent

Supervision:

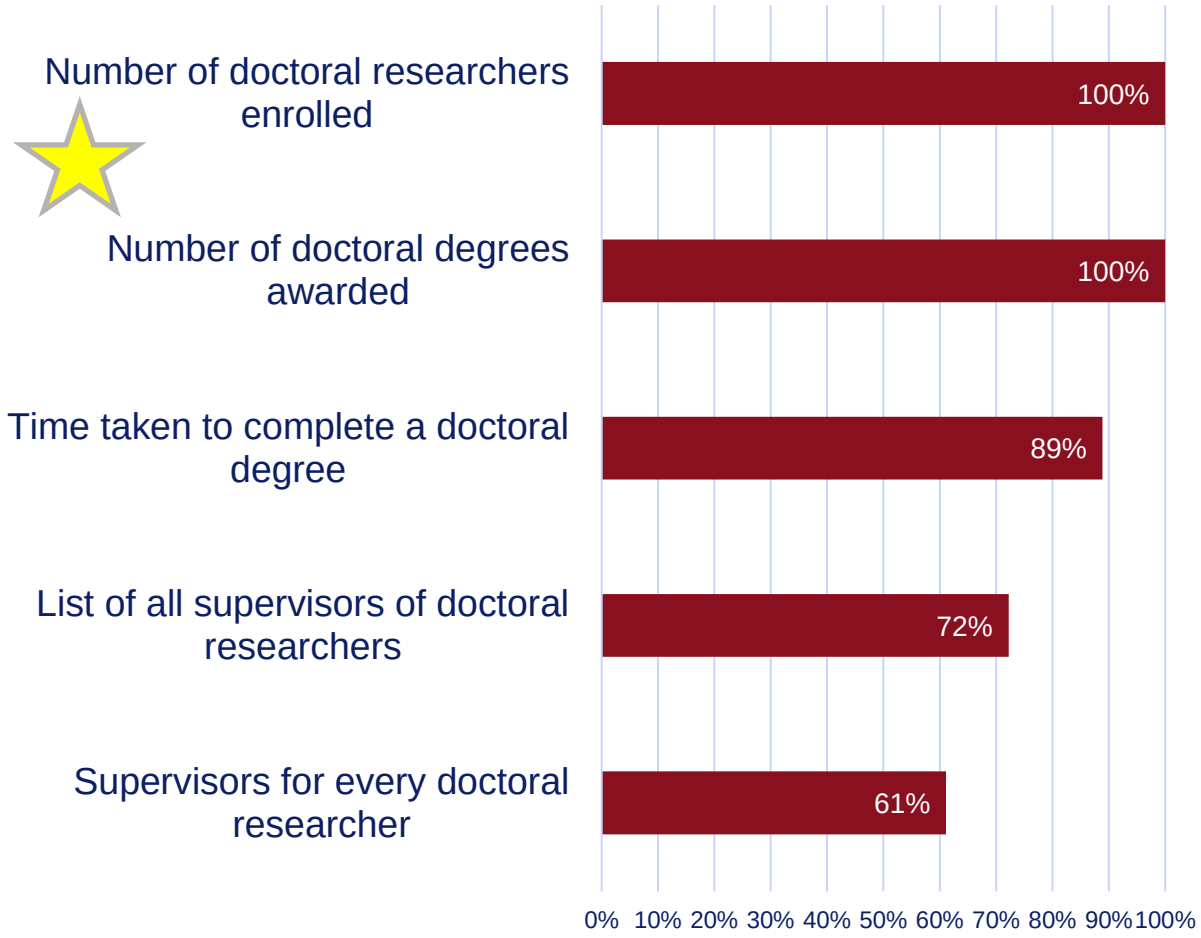
1/3 limit the number of doctoral researchers per supervisors

Feedback

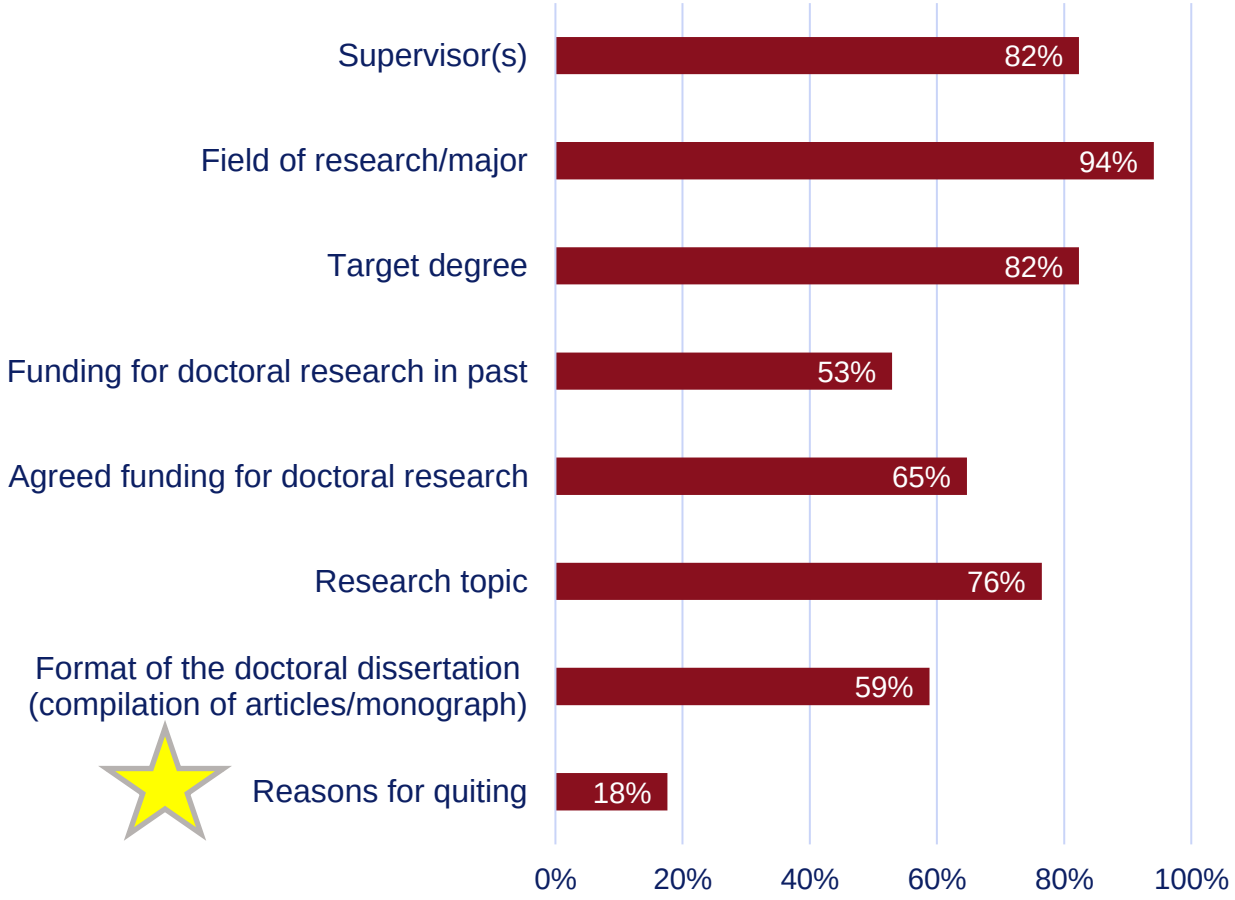
<80 % collect feedback from doctoral researchers

<50% collect feedback from graduates

# Data available in electronical systems




**For each Doctoral Researcher:**



# Can we find out the reasons for the quitting or predict risk factors?

**–Case Turku & Iasi**

*Doctoral Studies Working Group*

| 2023 | University of Turku | University of Iasi |
|---|---|---|
| **Doctoral researchers** | 2033 | 882 |
| **Supervisors** | 1927 | 243 |
| **Graduates / year** | 202 | ˜150 |
| **Average graduation time** | 7.1 years | 4.45 years |
| **Target time** | 4 years | 3 years until 2024,<br>4 years from 2024 |
| **Part time doctoral researchers** | 60% | 28% |
| **Funded (employed / grant) doctoral researchers** | 46% | 36% full scholarship<br>36% partial budget |

# Definition: Who has quitted or dropped out ?

## University of Turku:

- a doctoral researcher who has permanently renounced their right to study for doctoral degree.
- a doctoral researcher who is **not actively conducting dissertation research** and completing doctoral studies (no legal deadline -> Passive register in use)
  - **Move to passive register possible for the first time after the 2019 annual reporting for those who started in 2018.**

## University of Iasi:

- a doctoral researcher who has withdrawn from the program, at own request
- a doctoral researcher who **did not fulfil obligations in time** and was expelled
  - **For those starting in 2018, the time up –deadline for defending doctoral thesis is still to come**

| | University of Turku | University of Iasi |
|---|---|---|
| **New doctoral researchers 2018** | 343 | 178 |
| **Graduated 05/2024** | 100 (29%) | 110 (62%) |
| **Drop outs 05/2024** | 91 (27%) | will be registered in October 2024, from the 68 remained |
| **Continuing actively 05/2024** | 152 (44%) | 68 |
| **Started as part-time doctoral researchers (according to annual reports of 2019)** | 43% | 18% |
| **Data analyzed:** | a) class 2018<br>b) all doctoral researchers 2023 | doctoral researchers, supervisors and committee members |
| | from annual reports | from annual reports, satisfaction surveys etc. |

# Case Turku

**To keep the right to study active, doctoral researchers hand in the annual progress report to the doctoral programmes**

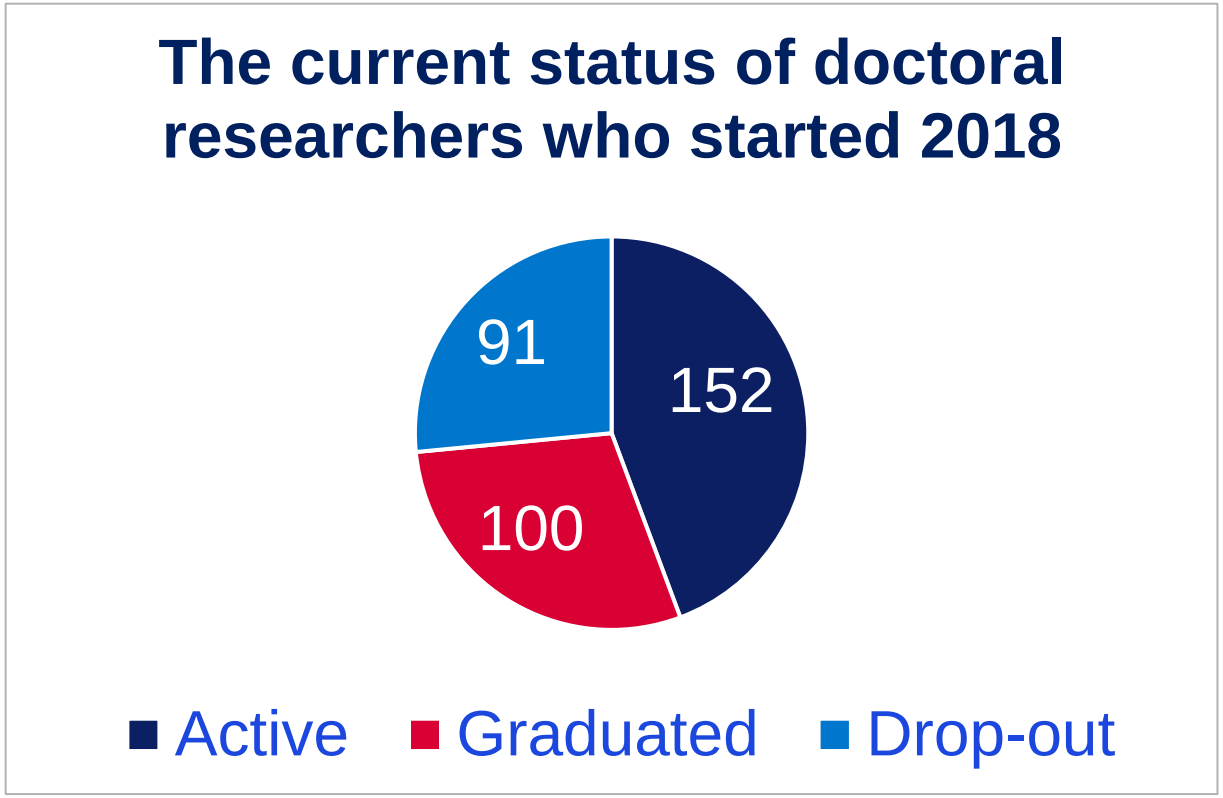
**-> answers from annual progress reports of the "class 2018 "**

**2018 started 343, of which part-time 147 (43%)**

**From the annual reports, had the progress been as planned -> whether there is a difference in the results for those who continue, those who have graduated, those who drop out?**

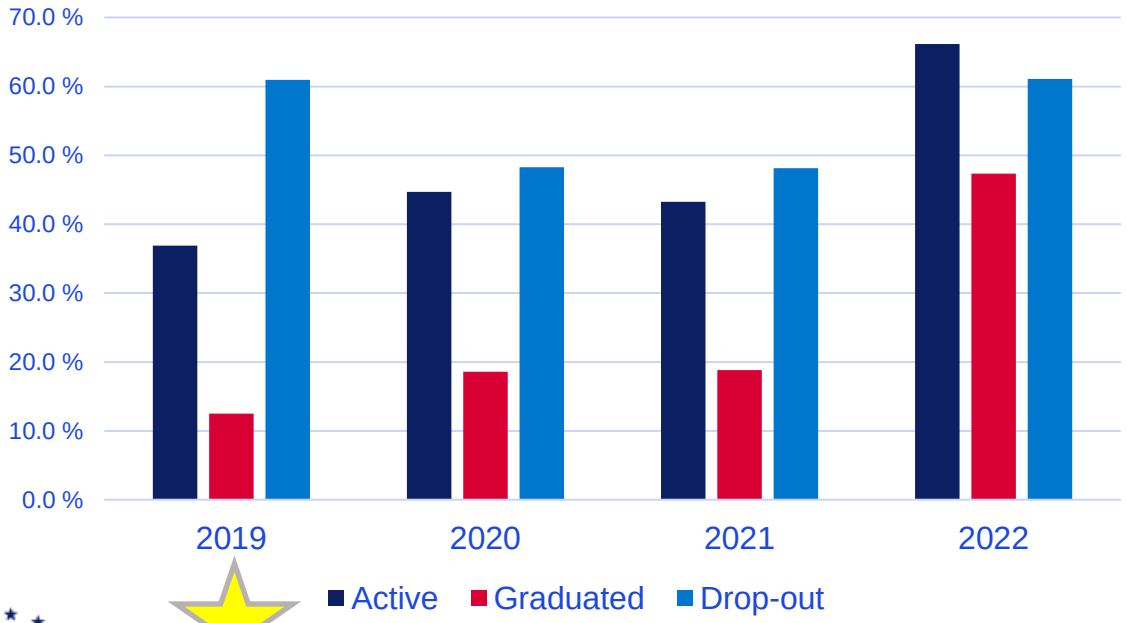
**What about part-time doctoral researchers?**

**What are the reasons, maybe problems with supervision? Any other interesting questions?**

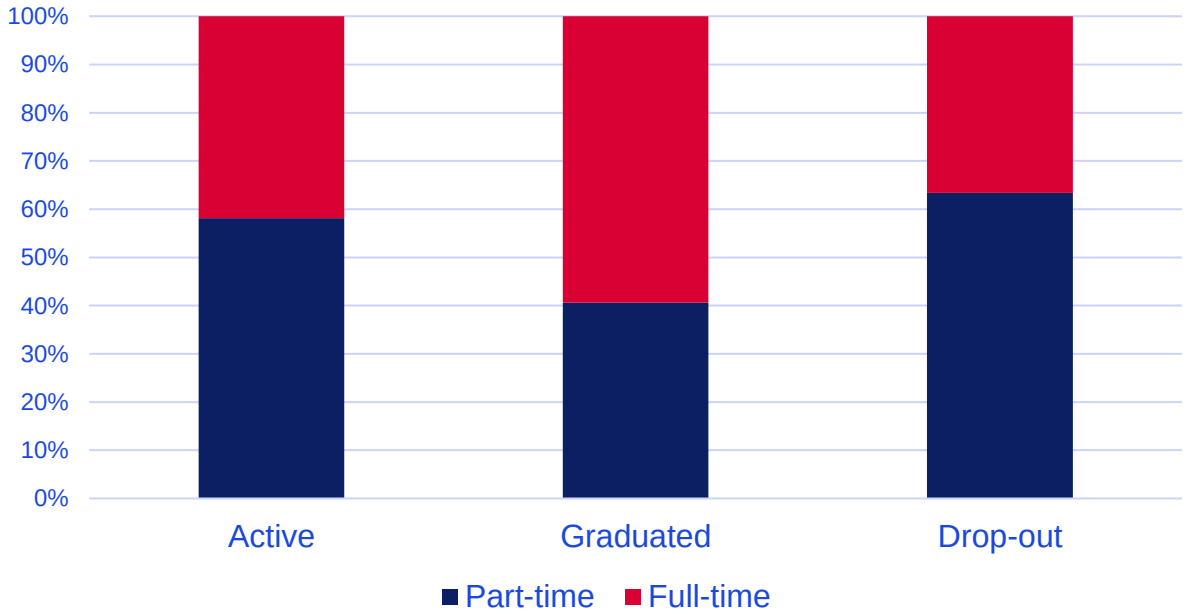


# Case Turku, doctoral researchers who started at 2018

How doctoral researchers who started in 2018 have reported their degree progress in 2019-2022 compared to their current (2024) degree status. The graph shows the proportion who said their degree was not progressing as planned.




How class 2018 doctoral researchers reported in their first annual monitoring on the full-time /part-time status of their doctoral work compared to their current (2024) degree status (A/G/D-O)



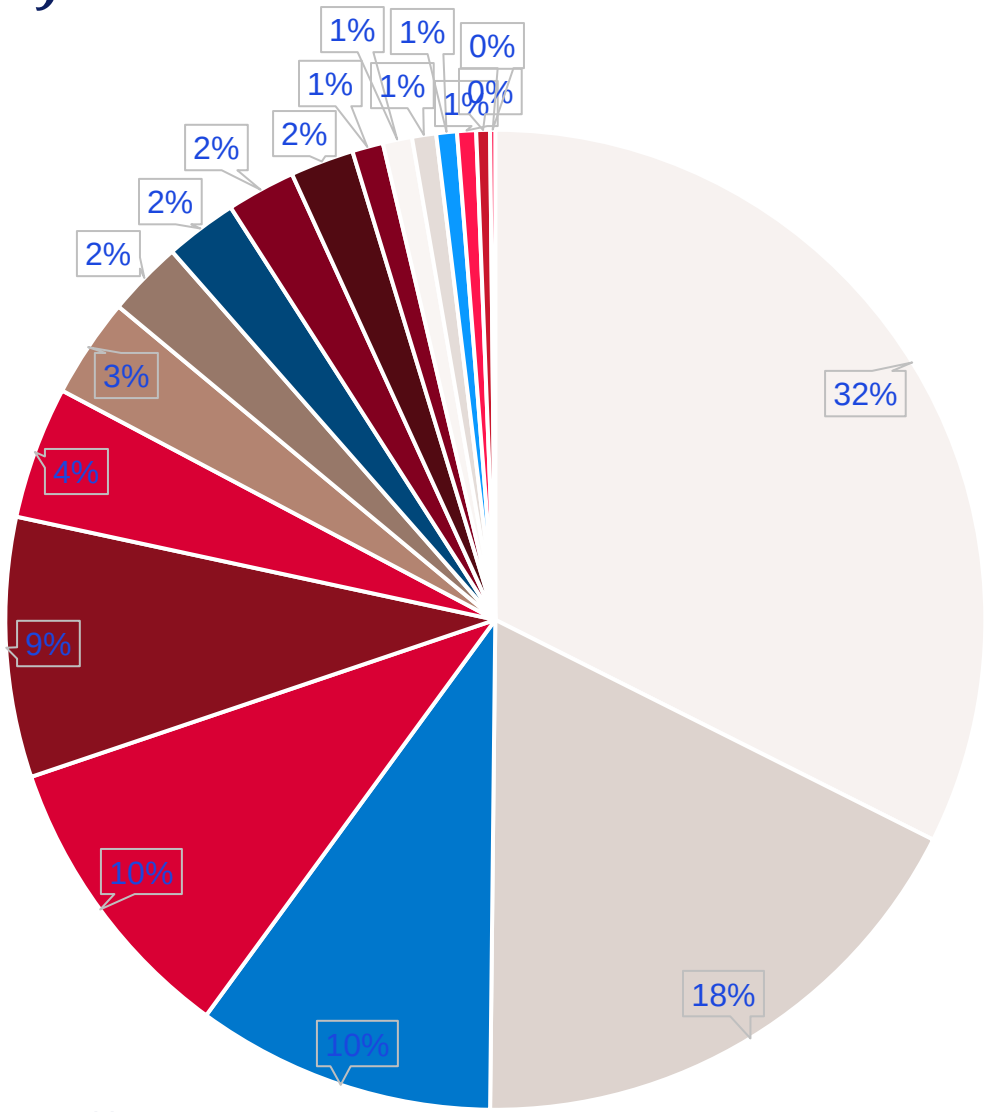
# Case Turku

**The Class 2018 cohort is starting to be too small, looking at all doctoral researchers**

**In addition, data collection improved, this year asked more specifically:**

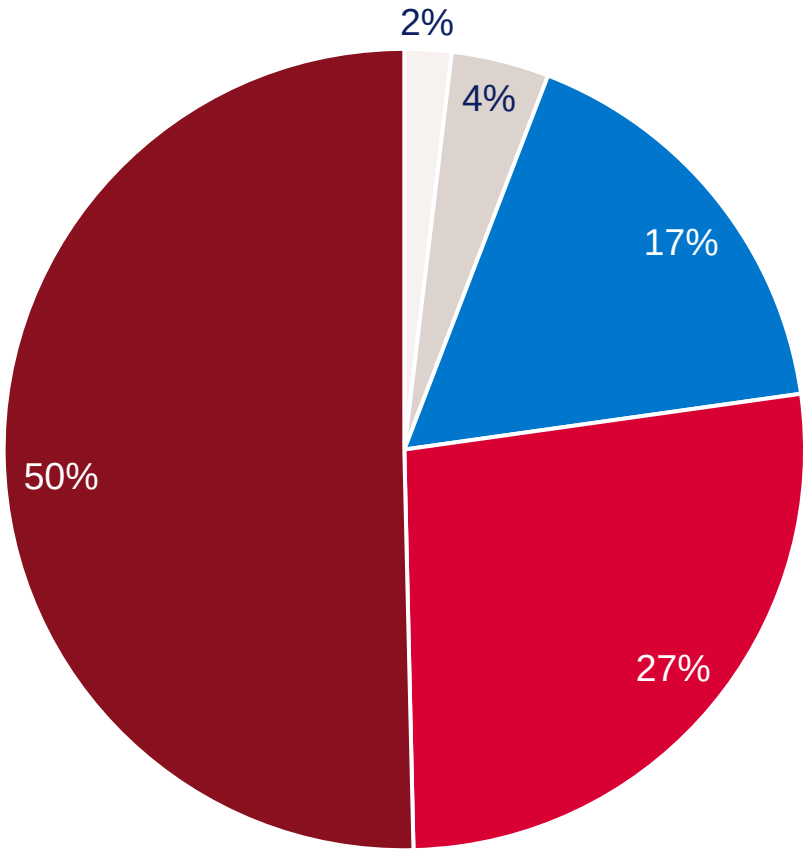
- **What factors made it difficult to achieve the objectives set for the monitoring year?**
- **If the dissertation research did not progress as planned: are you satisfied with the quality of the supervision you received during the monitoring year?**

# What factors made it difficult to achieve the objectives set for the monitoring year (2023)?




- **Lack of time or difficulties in time management**
- **Lack of funding**
- **Uncertainty of funding or constantly applying for funding**
- **Other employment**
- **Personal reasons**
- Nothing made it difficult
- Long publication times
- Too much teaching or research duties unrelated to the doctoral dissertation
- Problems with the research material
- Else
- Uncertainty for the future
- Insufficient supervision
- Lack of networks
- Other studies required for the degree in addition to the doctoral thesis
- Lack of workstation/workspace
- Working in a language other than own native language
- Weak motivation / Lack of interest in the subject of the doctoral dissertation
- Poor working atmosphere

# If the dissertation research did not progress as planned: are you satisfied with the quality of the supervision you received during the monitoring year (2023)?



# Case Iasi

- **data transmitted by the 14 doctoral schools each year, for all cohorts of students, so supplementary calculus needed if we want to follow just one cohort of students every year, until the maximum time allowed for graduation (was 7 years - 3 +4 and will be 6 years - 4+2)**
- **just some doctoral schools have detailed annual reports, with 3 parts - one for the doctoral student, one for the supervisor and one for the committee members - progress can be monitored closely; others will only find out potential reasons at the end**
- **satisfaction surveys are carried out by each doctoral school - some yearly, some every 5 years (the re-accreditation period), from which potential reasons for quitting can be inferred**
- **there are few cases of doctoral students who ask for a transfer in another university, due to changes in job/personal life**

# Case Iasi

**Most frequent reason for quitting lies in the triangle JOB-FAMILY-RESEARCH and have to do with:**

- **lack of time for research (including the fact that insufficient finance leads doctoral students to find jobs and put research on a second plan)**
- **unexpected job burdens, changes, travels etc.**
- **unexpected health issues**
- **happy family events (children born, so extra time needed)**
- **lost motivation for research finality/degree/perceived usefulness**

**Other reasons, more difficult to quantify:**

- **unrealistic expectations comparing to required skills for a PhD**
- **supervisor mismatch**

# Conclusions and future

1. The data we have is not enough to really understand the whole picture and to predict dropouts, due to either missing data or to unexpected events (pandemic, crises, war situations etc.)

   But we get similar results: lack of time and time-management, supervision not bad (Turku & Iasi)

2. Delicate, tacit knowledge referring to quitting reasons are usually not available/not officially registered

3. There are categories of data structurally missing - they are not collected and/or not used in either reports or evaluations:

- reasons for doing the PhD and doctoral students' expectations, especially on different fields and categories of PhDs (young - with only academia experience and mature - with job experience)
- the evaluation of the increase in skills from start to finish - would require not just academic records at entrance, but also testing of various skills at the entrance and at the end of the doctoral program, for various scenarios of employment - inside and outside academia

# Conclusions and future

**4. There are important differences in paths, length, thresholds etc. depending on the field - especially between STEM and SSHA doctoral fields**

**5. Data about PhD graduates (after completion, especially long term) is most of the time scarce - usually information is collected immediately after graduation, but rarely - and for a small number of students - after 5 or 10 years after PhD completion**

**6. Data should be better analysed in context, to be able to separate doctoral success related to the academic abilities of the candidate and the one related to the research environment (supervisor, committee members, labs etc.)**

**7. Qualitative data collected through interviews (from supervisors and from employers outside academia) would help build a better understanding of the process**

# Kiitos!
# Mulțumesc!

*Doctoral Studies*
*Working Group*