

## Report on the implementation of the COFUND BIENVENÜE project for the period 2020-2024

### Key success aspects

- A project that attracted excellent researchers to Brittany
- A robust selection process
- The necessary implication of all scientific networks for the success of the calls' promotion
- A useful website with all key information regarding the project (calls, local ecosystem)
- Creation of awaited common spaces, such as the ERRIE event

### Recommendations

#### Attractiveness and promotion:

- The various scientific communities had unequal appropriation to the project and to the RIS3 strategy, which requires specific and tailored communication, among others towards humanities
- Application drafting requires a lot of time and would benefit of an earlier promotion of the calls.
- The Pluginlabs tool is not online anymore. Work is mandatory to ensure the promotion of the local R&I ecosystem for upcoming calls.

#### Implementation

- Facilitate mobilization of the co-funding on the Host Institution side
- Reinforce the partnership, with more follow-up, exchanges and elaboration of common tools to make the most of the consortium effect
- Improve the communication of the MSCA specifics, such as salary, and of the project, such as the personalized support.

### Contact

Patricia Gautier – European Project Manager - COFUND Bienvenüe  
[msca-bienvenue@bretagne.bzh](mailto:msca-bienvenue@bretagne.bzh)

March 2025



The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 899546.

## INTRODUCTION

---

This report considers the implementation of the Bienvenüe project during its four first years. It is based on a large survey of all actors involved in the project: Host Institutions, supervisors and Bienvenüe fellows. It is also augmented of the evaluation by the Bienvenüe team of Région Bretagne.

The Bienvenüe european project is implemented since November 2020. Coordinated by Région Bretagne and involving a consortium of 8 Host Institutions, it has led to the recruitment of 81 international highly talented researchers. It **is co-funded by the European Union through Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA-COFUND)**, meaning that it respects numerous demanding rules to selected and recruit the researchers.

**The Bienvenüe project has achieved its objectives** with recruiting international highly talented researchers on the Breton territory in its key research and innovation topics (detailed in its RIS3 Strategy). Although several execution difficulties have been identified, the implementation of research projects is satisfactory. **The project has led to progress in the structuration of post-doctoral research in Brittany and in the hosting of international researchers in the Host Institutions.**

This report will first serve to draft the final report to the European Commission for the project. Its conclusions should also serve the implementation of the Bienvenüe+ European project<sup>1</sup>, which continues the Bienvenüe dynamics and the structuration of post-doctoral research in Brittany.

### Sample of the survey

7 Host Institutions out of 8 have participated

Supervisors:

Participation of 67 supervisors representing 71% of funded projects

Representation by cohort: 60% of the 2021 cohort | 92% of the 2022 cohort | 65% of the 2023 cohort

Fellows:

Participation of 45 representing 55% of funded fellows

Representation by cohort: 30% of the 2021 cohort | 60% of the 2022 cohort | 67% of the 2023 cohort

Survey led from September to November by 3 specific questionnaires (open and closed-ended questions)

*The Bienvenüe team thanks all the respondents for their time.*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Bienvenüe+ European project is selected within the COFUND 2024 call and will be implemented from November 2025.

## I. A relevant action underlined by all actors

---

The Bienvenue project aims to

- Improve the visibility and attractiveness of Brittany in its key research and innovation domains,
- Reinforce human forces of Breton research,
- Maximise the implementation and impact the RIS3.

### A. Objective 1: Improve the visibility and attractiveness of Brittany in its key research and innovation domains

The project promotion is firstly supported by a dedicated website (<https://msca-bienvenue.bretagne.bzh>) which centralizes all key information about the calls and the life of the projects. All other communication channels (job posting on Euraxess, event presentation, mailing) refer to it.

It is an essential tool to answer the transparency obligation and the necessity of an international promotion, but also to help the research of information and preparation of the application by the post-doc candidates. A web page was dedicated to each call and gathered all key documents and the access to *Extranet Recherche*, the online application tool. The website presented moreover the Breton research and innovation strategy (RIS3) and its ecosystem, linked to Pluginlabs Ouest (presentation of scientific expertises in each lab).

The Breton scientific community was highly involved in the promotion of the call, both through institutional mailing, personal exchange or during events (international conferences for example). Differences have emerged in the appropriation of the calls by the different disciplines, due to:

- Concurrence with other funding sources, which made the Bienvenue calls less interesting for some disciplines, linked to the post-COVID situation (France 2030 for example)
- A created distance felt by certain communities due to the thematical logic (instead of a disciplinary one) of the project, making the contribution of certain disciplines to the regional strategy RIS3 a priori less obvious, namely the humanities.

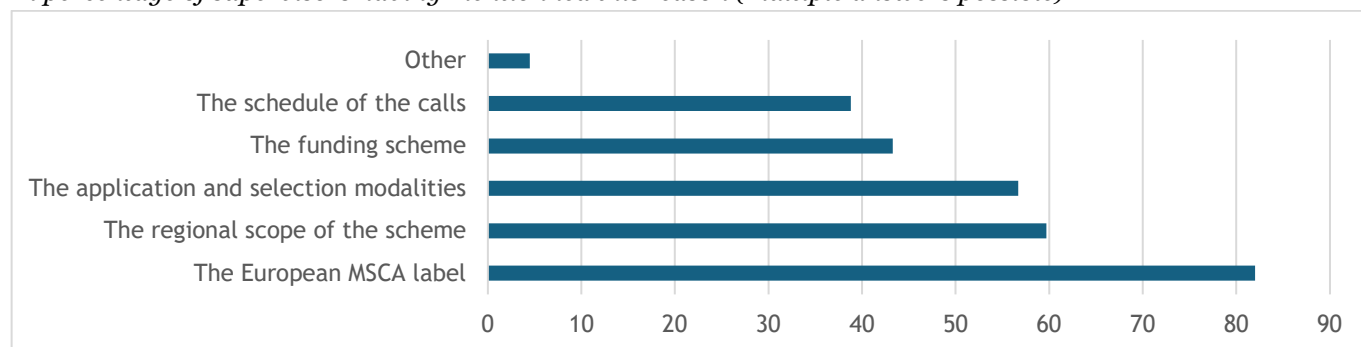
Finally, Information webinars (with around 40 participants by session) during the call promotion were a success, because it is an interesting tool to be directly in contact with candidates all over the world and answer their numerous questions.

### B. Objective 2: Reinforce human forces of Breton research

The application by the post-doc candidate is the specificity of Bienvenue calls. Implication of the supervisor is minimal during the project drafting and inexistent during the selection process. This selection process is independent and based on scientific excellence and originality.

#### **Supervisors: Why did the Bienvenue scheme seem relevant for the project?**

*In percentage of supervisors having mentionned this reason (multiple answers possible)*

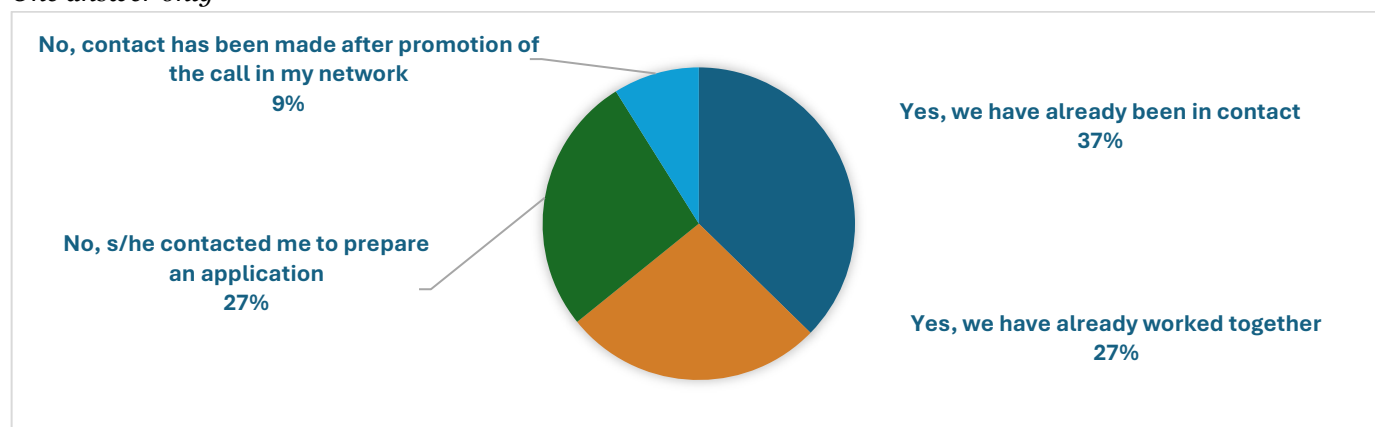


Despite this specificity, which goes against local habits, the project is attractive to supervisors. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie label is a strong marker to attract new researchers. Around 30% of fellows did not know their hosting lab beforehand, and only 27% of supervisor-fellow pairs have already worked together before the application.

The regional scope of the scheme, as well as the selection rate which is less drastic than the one of the similar MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships calls (35% against around 15%), make more attractive the time-consuming initiative of search and support of applicants. Host institutions have expressed that scientific teams have had stronger and progressive interest call after call.

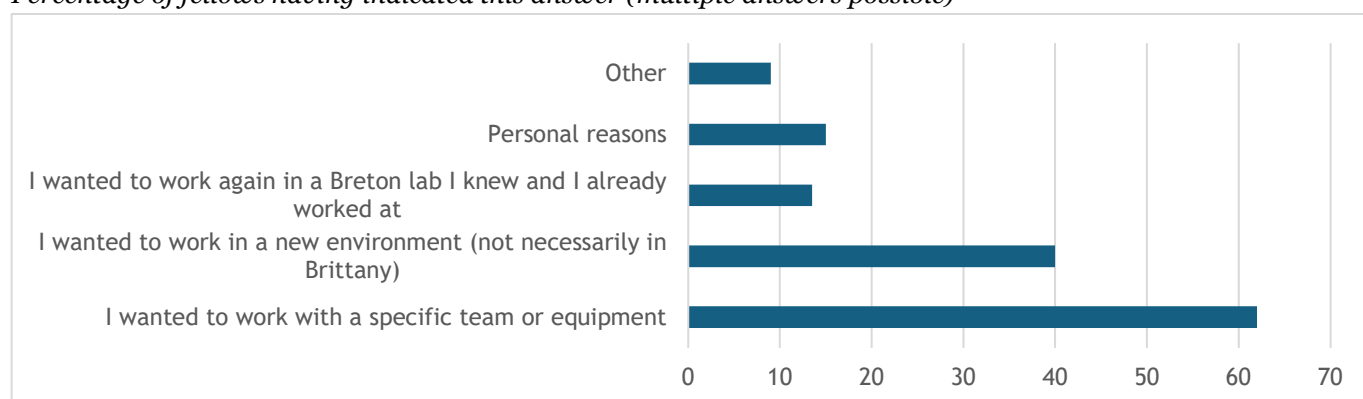
### Supervisors: Did you know the applicant before the application?

One answer only



### Fellows: What were your principal motivations to apply?

Percentage of fellows having indicated this answer (multiple answers possible)



The Bienvenue programme has led to the hosting of researchers that did not have previous links with the hosting team. Several notes of caution have been expressed by supervisors and hosting institutions:

*“To already have worked together a few months and to know each other is a true advantage because the person knows the lab environment, human and institutional. It hinders disappointment and an early departure for diverse reasons (family, couple, relational, local weather...)”*

- a supervisor

*“Integration issue of Bienvenue post-docs in their hosting labs is mentioned in discussion about the scheme. The researchers arrive with their own projects (not part of a ANR consortium, an ongoing project...) and they can have difficulties to find their place in the team and be integrated. How to fit the Bienvenue funded research projects better with the hosting lab priorities to avoid this isolation feeling?”*

- a Host Institution representative

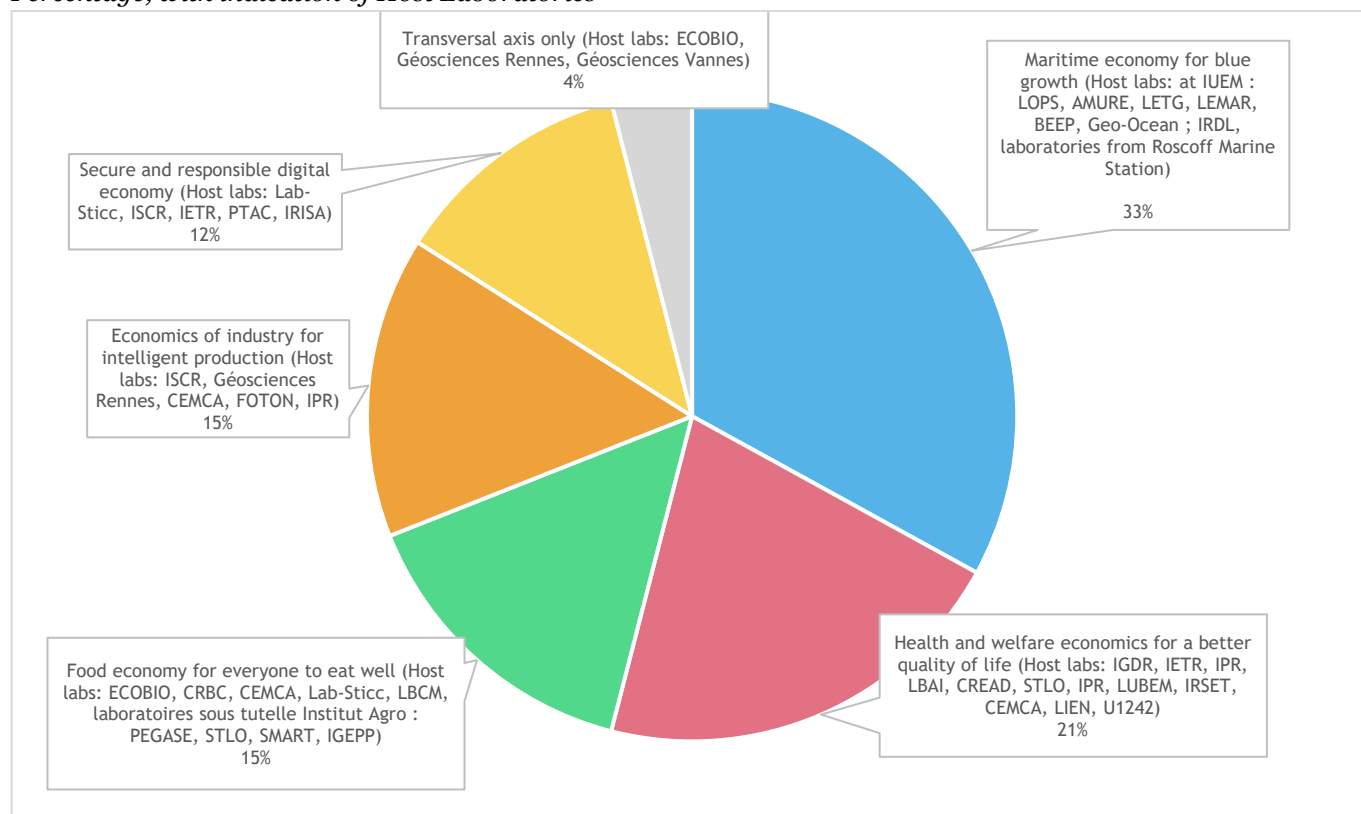
### C. Objective 3: Maximise the implementation and impact the RIS3

Each Bienvenüe-funded project must contribute directly or indirectly to the Research & Innovation strategy RIS3, at least to one strategic domain or to the transversal axis. This contribution is characterized by the thematical impact of the project.

As an example, the REACH-IT project aiming to develop a haptic electronic device for visually impaired people is firstly contributing to the domain Health and welfare economics for a better quality of life (subdomain disability), then is secondly contributing to the domain Secure and responsible digital economy (subdomain electronics).

#### **Main contribution of the funded projects to the RIS3**

*Percentage, with indication of Host Laboratories*



## II. A successful execution despite persistent difficulties

### A. Project Management

The management of the project requires a dedicated full-time project manager and collaboration of other team members representing 0,7 FTE. There was no recruitment in the Host Institutions. The implication of Host Institution Bienvenüe referent is variable to the number of hosted fellows.

Overall, Host Institutions representatives expressed satisfaction regarding the project management, for the information circulation within the consortium and with Région Bretagne (score of 4.4/5), and for the support given to fellows by the Bienvenüe team (4,3/5). Fellows positively scored the program as well (4,06/5).

Several Host Institutions representatives shared common difficulties and suggested to work more closely together on common issues, such as installation guides, and to exchange on existing good practices. This could be an interesting way of helping administrative services to develop their skills on MSCA specificities.

### B. The exigent evaluation process conforming to European criteria

Bienvenüe calls are conforming to the MSCA COFUND European requirements and are firstly characterised by an independence process. There were interrogations on two aspects of the calls:

- Absence or minimal implication of the supervisor and of the Host Institution in the drafting of the projet and the selection process: This is not the local habit and led to incomprehensions and problems, with some feeling of an imposed recruitment with prior validation of the lab (see below administrative implementation)
- No thematical or geographical balance or repartition in the list of funded projects: with the goal of the balanced territorial development, Région Bretagne, within its own regional calls, is looking to these aspects while selecting projects. This is not possible for Bienvenüe COFUND calls, which led to some questions for some scientific actors.

#### **A process consolidated over three calls**

Step	Detail	Attention points
1	<b>Check-up of eligibility</b> Of the applicant regarding the PhD rule, the mobility rule, declaration of the supervisor and RIS3 indication	-Strong mobilisation necessary of the Bienvenüe team -Need to have clear instructions given to applicants to ease the subsequent work > key aspect of the Applicant Guide
2	<b>Scientific evaluation</b> Of each application by 3 Independent External Experts	-Crucial issue of external experts' identification to perform the evaluation, relevance of expertise, panel diversity, absence of conflicts of interests -Issue of the tight schedule with the large task
3	<b>Final ranking</b> By the independent Scientific Board	-Clear instructions given to experts -Moderation for efficacy of the discussion
4	<b>Ethical review</b> By ethical reviewers designed for the whole consortium within Host Institutions	-Mobilisation of experts on a large variety of subjects and research topics. -Better monitoring of inclusion of recommandations by fellows

Calls have, due to this rigorous European requirements, led to implementation of a specific process and mobilisation of additionnal resources compared to other similar regional calls. It reinforced regional expertise in this matter.

## C. Implementation of research projects

Supervisors were overall satisfied with the Bienvenue project and its implementation (score of 4,26/5). They indicated a good integration of fellows in their laboratories (4,3/5).

- Administrative implementation

Satisfaction towards administrative implementation is mixed. First, it is mostly judged adequate, with specific process mais relatively simple compared to other similar calls. Administrative process and requirements are not well understood by incoming international researchers, as well as specificities linked to MSCA COFUND funding. Support services within the Host Institutions are currently acculturating to new publics and the language barrier is still in place. Some difficulties are therefore not directly related to Bienvenue.

Only 25% of fellows indicated having received help to settle in Brittany, mainly by their supervisor or by the International Mobility Centres (CMI). Those accompanied by a CMI for visa procedures are very satisfied. Settling difficulties are not particularly highlighted in the survey answers. It should also be noted that some fellows were returning to Brittany where they already had ties (family, studies...) or had already been in the region for several months. To facilitate the arrival, it would be good to ensure an efficient information about the available support to all.

Co-funding by the Host Institution is highlighted as the main drawback of the programme by supervisors and fellows, a remark massively expressed, in various degrees, in all open answers, through all cohorts, and all Host Institutions. Half of the fellows having indicated a non-scientific issue in the implementation points out this financial issue.

As a reminder, for each project, the Host Institution should cover 10% of salary costs (10 800€), and the entirety of research and environment costs (estimation of 19 920€). Host Institutions are choosing how the cofunding is internally provided, as they are autonomous. Most of the Host Institutions have chosen the supervisor to provide the cofunding.

This issue has several causes and impacts, of various degrees:

- Upstream, there were several mistakes in the promotion and communication around calls: the global presentation of the funding scheme by the Bienvenue management team left it up to each Host Institution to specify its own conditions of cofunding; some supervisors did not realize that in hosting a candidate, they would have to find the cofunding. This was judged paradoxical by some supervisors as they are not involved in the drafting of the project and in the (pre)selection of applicants. This led to some resistance in making some funds available.
- In the beginning of the project, some fellows needed to find additional funds to cover research costs, which was not planned and rescheduled implementation of scientific tasks.

This situation is known since 2022. Despite many meetings within Host Institutions concerned with the most blocked situations (limited funds available) and meetings on the consortium level, including the mid-term meeting in November 2022, no satisfactory solution was found for concerned fellows before the end of their fellowships.

Continuation of this issue reduces for both supervisors and fellows the attractiveness of the Bienvenue scheme. Moreover, it puts into question the added value of this funding compared to others.

- Scientific implementation

Research projects have been implemented since September 2021 and until, for the last cohort, end of 2025. There is no difficulty beyond aleas linked to the project specificities, such as delayed availability of data subject of authorization. Numerous supervisors highlight the high quality of recruited fellows.

Support in place within the programme framework (French classes, training) is not very well known by supervisors, and in a lessen way, by fellows. Network impact of the consortium, which should allow fellows to access all trainings

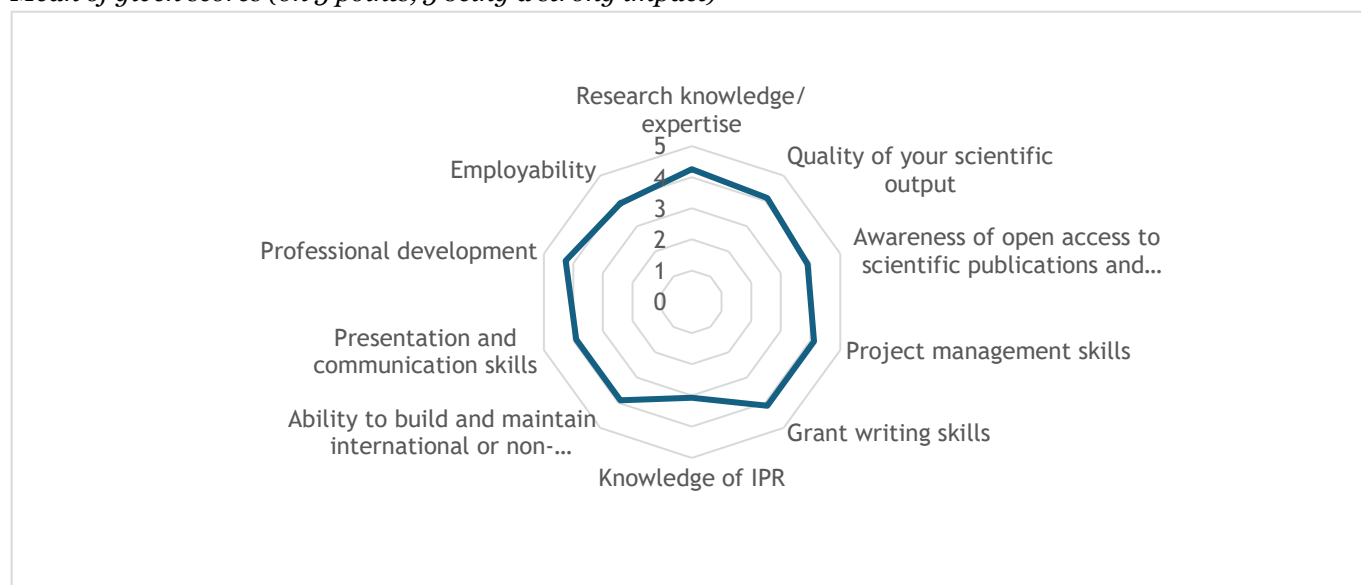
available within the consortium, is limited due to poor circulation of information. On the other side, common events such as the ERRIE events were very appreciated by fellows.

70% of fellows have indicated teaching alongside their projects, for bachelor and master students, but also to younger pupils. A majority has overseen students for their master's thesis. A few have expressed deception as they were not paid for this work, due to lack of process comprehension or opposition by the Host Institutions.

Furthermore, most of fellows have indicated their application -at least once- to a *concours* such as the CNRS one.

### **Fellows: Impact of the Bienvenue fellowship on key skills**

*Mean of given scores (on 5 points, 5 being a strong impact)*



A regularly updated list of research results is available on the [CORDIS website](#) of the European Commission. To this day, are counted 78 scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals, around 15 articles in preparation, 26 conference proceedings, as well as 284 actions of communication and dissemination of results, of which 17% are towards the public.



### III. Impacts of the COFUND Bienvenüe project

---

#### A. On fellows employability

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, 26 projects are still ongoing, 23 of the 2023 cohort and 2 of the 2022 cohort (postponed implementation due to visa issues and maternity leave). Among the 56 fellows having finished their fellowship, 31% did not inform of their posterior situation. On the 38 fellows having ended their fellowship and having informed of their situation, representing 47% of the total Bienvenüe fellows, we can observe that:

- 23 have a fixed-term contract, most of them of post-doc contract. 9 are still in Breton institutions, usually in continuity of their Bienvenüe fellowship.
- 15 have a permanent position, as research, lecturer or equivalent. Among them, 9 are in Breton institutions, mostly in the laboratory where they implemented their fellowships.

Due to the high number of situations without information, despite numerous reminders, it is difficult to compare these results with ones of the European Commission MSCA fellows' surveys<sup>2</sup>.

#### B. On Hosting Institutions

Hosting Institutions shared the impact of the Bienvenüe programme on central administrative services. First, it has contributed to HR internationalisation and forced to go further to support international researchers. Welcome meetings and creation of dedicated document such as internal guides are cited as examples. A bigger attention has been drawn to post-docs support, which is a less visible community in the institutions. A recommendation is to better communicate and valorize results of post-doc projects, such as on the Bienvenüe website<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Supervisors: Which impacts did have the Bienvenüe fellowship on your research team or laboratory?**

*In percentage of supervisors having expressed this reason (open question)*



Asked on the duration of the research project, most supervisors are satisfied with 24-month projects, because it allows to develop ambitious research projects and to communicate on the results.

---

<sup>2</sup> See the last update of the survey (2024) : <https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/news/msca-end-of-fellowship-surveys-show-high-satisfaction-with-the-programme>

<sup>3</sup> Read presentation of funded projects: <https://bienvenue.bretagne.bzh/fellows/>

### **C. On the regional policy to support post-doctoral researchers**

Since the beginning of the Bienvenüe project in November 2020, the regional policy to support post-doctoral research has evolved. A new regional plan for higher education and research has been integrated into the regional strategy for social and economic transitions (SRTES), which was voted in April 2023. It includes a priority dedicated to attractiveness and welcome of international post-doctoral research in Brittany. One of the identified tools is the Bienvenüe project, as the mid-term report at the end of 2022 was very encouraging.

Région Bretagne has developed its support schemes under the Bienvenüe unique brand. Bienvenüe now regroups three funding schemes:

- Bienvenüe Bretagne: the historical support scheme (before named SAD)
- Bienvenüe COFUND: the Bienvenüe project since 2020. The Bienvenüe+ projects aims to continue to offer this opportunity with the recruitment of 75 new fellows.
- Bienvenüe Seal of Excellence: since 2025, Région Bretagne is using ERDF funds to finance projects that were well evaluated but not funded by the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships calls.

Furthermore, expertise acquired while implementing the rigorous call selection process of the Bienvenüe project led to evolution of the selection process of Bienvenüe Bretagne. A partnership between Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR) allows the external and independent scientific evaluation of proposals by the Agence since 2023.

Finally, the Bienvenüe management team has shared about the project and its philosophy with other local administrative bodies, and about its good practices with the MSCA National Contact Points in Europe, after invitation of the REA. It is another way for visibility on the national and European scenes on research and innovation policies.