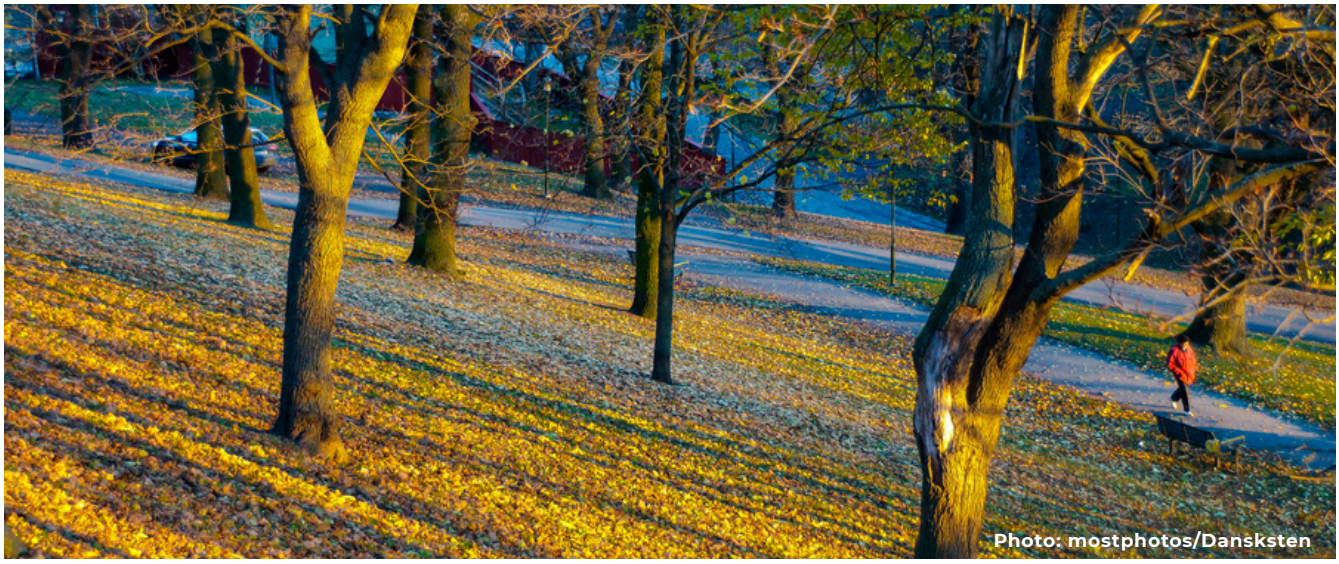
SIN - STIPENDIATORGANISASJONENE I NORGE

Newsletter

Autumn 2025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Greetings from the board

Dear member organisations.

We are pleased to present our last updates. Earlier this September, we held our second quarterly meeting with a total of 16 participants. During this meeting, local groups exchanged their difficulties, successes, and suggestions—the kind of dialogue that strengthens our community and helps us represent temporary scientific staff more effectively at the national level. The organisation of our AGM was also on the agenda, and we agreed on 22 November as the date. Please save the date and spread the word locally. If you want to contribute, join our board! You can also join the election committee and help supervise our election process to ensure it is transparent and fair. Get in touch if you are interested.

Over the past months, SiN has been discussing several key topics: the relationship between PhDs and their supervisors; the transition for PhDs after the end of their contracts, with a special focus on the challenges linked to temporariness in academia; and visa difficulties for non-EU candidates. These issues are interconnected and have real consequences for research quality, career development, and well-being.

The present newsletter is composed of SiN's position statements on different topics, along with an overview of our past and upcoming activities. As always, it is thanks to you as local organisations that SiN can represent temporary scientific staff at the national level. Let's stay in close contact, support each other, and make sure that our voices are heard—while keeping enough time and energy for our own research and dissertations.

SiN Board

1-Position Statements

EURODOC Statements

Statement on Doctoral Supervision

PhD candidates are required to attend introductory courses together with their supervisors. These sessions are extremely beneficial, as they cover essential information about PhD regulations, university requirements, and recent updates. However, it has been reported by several PhD candidates in Norway that supervisors often do not attend these courses.

This results in supervisors being unaware of important procedural changes. Consequently, when candidates raise these issues, often midway through their PhD, supervisors may disagree with the statement and even fail to verify the information, even when it is clearly stated on the university's website. For example, some of the universities are no longer accepting literature reviews as part of the PhD thesis. Many supervisors are unaware of this change, leaving those candidates who focused on reviews in a difficult position.

Moreover, it would be highly beneficial for supervisors to attend mental health awareness sessions designed for PhD students. As in many cases, supervisor behavior has been identified as a major source of stress and mental health challenges among candidates. Naheeda Hamza, Eurodoc Liaison Officer and Davit Gigilashvili, Head of Communications are the contributors from SiN.

Read the full statement on Zenodo: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15784650

Statement on Equitable Opportunities in Academia for Early Career Researchers

In August 2025, during the Annual General Meeting in Copenhagen, Eurodoc released a landmark statement on equitable opportunities in academia. This was not just another policy note, but the organization’s first comprehensive declaration dedicated entirely to the challenges faced by early career researchers.

The statement begins by acknowledging what many in academia already know: early career researchers often operate at the bottom of hierarchical systems, with little power to influence their own paths. For those who belong to under-represented or marginalised groups, this imbalance deepens. Gender, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic background, or other intersecting identities can create layers of barriers, each compounding the difficulties of building an academic career.

Eurodoc stresses that while diversity and inclusion are often discussed, some groups are still routinely overlooked. By drawing attention to these blind spots, the organization aims to ensure that no early career researcher is left behind simply because their struggles have not yet been recognized. Through this statement, Eurodoc commits itself to advocating for a fairer, more inclusive, and more supportive academic environment. It calls on institutions, funders, and policymakers to take concrete steps that remove obstacles and create real opportunities for all.

This important declaration was shaped by several voices within Eurodoc, including our EuroDoc liaison Officer- Naheeda Hamza, who is among its authors. Ultimately, the statement is not just about fairness for its own sake. Eurodoc frames equity as essential for academic excellence, innovation, and the retention of talent.

Read the full statement on Zenodo: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16921002

Relationship with supervisors

Insights on Supervisor Conflicts: Results from DION's 2023 NTNU Survey

The conflict with a supervisor can be a source of substantial mental health challenges. PhD candidates experience conflicts with their supervisors of personal and academic nature. Due to the temporariness of their position, they are in a vulnerable condition and often afraid to speak up. What aggravates the situation is the lack of clarity and knowledge on how to act in such situations. A vivid illustration of this is a survey conducted by our member organization at NTNU, which we believe can generalize to other institutions nationwide to a large extent. In 2023, DION, our member organization representing Norway's largest university NTNU, conducted an anonymous survey over three NTNU cities (Trondheim, Gjøvik, and Ålesund) on problematic relationships between PhD candidates and their supervisors. The results were alarming. 30% of the PhD respondents reported that they had experienced problems with their supervisors, which often included both personal and academic matters. Two thirds of all participants were not aware of any guidelines for handling such situations. Therefore, more than half of those who faced the conflicts did not contact anyone on this matter. 33% mentioned that they did not know whom they could contact, while 27% were afraid to speak up due to possible negative consequences. Only one in every five PhD candidates who experienced the conflict resolved it on their own without any need for external involvement.

The survey was conducted in the context of ongoing discussion whether there is a need for an impartial stipendiatombud - omdpudsperson for PhD candidates and other temporary scientific employees, and DION proposes creation of such position as one of the solutions, which is largely supported by the survey's respondents as well. Only 5% of the respondents said that an ombudsperson is not needed.

Overwork/abuse from supervisors

In academia, excessive workloads and pressure have long been accepted, but for many PhD candidates and postdocs, the boundary between excessive demands and unhealthy expectations is frequently crossed. Supervisors may, consciously or unconsciously, promote a culture in which working on the weekends, in the evenings, and even when ill is accepted as the new norm. Sacrificing personal time is too frequently expected rather than discouraged, especially when taking into account that early researchers' work contracts do not state the monthly working time and as such do not pay for overtime. Unrealistic deadlines, ambiguous expectations, or tasks beyond the scope of the study can quickly accumulate, leaving researchers exhausted and a sense of being worthless .

Early-career researchers often feel powerless to resist because supervisors frequently control contracts, funding, publications, and recommendations for future opportunities. It can feel risky to refuse or even to ask for clarification. The disparity in power becomes particularly damaging when it results in verbal abuse, humiliation, or disregard for one's own boundaries and welfare.
The isolation is what exacerbates the situation. When they feel overburdened or mistreated, many researchers are not sure who to turn to. There is a genuine fear of reprisals and unclear reporting channels. Consequently, issues remain unsaid until individuals burn out, quit, or leave academia completely.

This is more than a personal battle. Attention is required because it represents a systemic problem.

What happens when there is a conflict? Do we need a Stipendiatombud?

Unfortunately, conflicts between supervisor and PhD candidate are rather common. Luckily, most cases can be solved with good communication and low-level mediation. However, for some the conflict can develop to be somewhat larger and there can be a need for more support and help to find a satisfactory solution.
Over several years, there has been a debate if there should be a neutral instance that can facilitate mediation and solving problems that have occured. Some institutions have introduced and established a form of Science ombudsperson, where different stakeholders can refer for guidance and support. PhDs is an obvious group of stakeholders, who are vulnerable and often at the bottom of the hierarchy, and thus needs specific attention and care in order to meet our needs sufficiently.

There have been different opinions if there should be an unique PhD ombudsperson, such as there is an obligation to have a Student ombudsperson for all higher education institutions in Norway, or if it could be sufficient to have a more general Science ombudsperson. In that the resources are scarce at the institutional level and the amount of PhDs vary a lot between institutions, as well as other vulnerable groups, such as PostDocs and other temporary scientific staff, needs to be taken care of as well, there could perhaps be more realistic to have a common Science ombudsperson as well.
As most institutions today do not have either a Science ombudsperson or a PhD ombudsperson, a lot of PhDs and other temporary scientific staff are left without a necessary support and facilitator to solve difficult problems and challenges, among others the conflicts and tensions that can arise between PhDs and supervisors. The obvious solution is of course to advocate and work hard for the establishment of and, preferable, legislative regulation of the obligation to have a PhD or Science ombudsperson at all Norwegian higher education institutions. However, another possible solution could also be that the current Student ombudpersons that already are established can get an extended mandate and more competence on how to approach and solve issues regarding PhDs and other temporary scientific staff. SiN is working on this matter, as it is sad to see so many PhDs standing without the help they need. If we raise our voices together at our different institutions, it could probably bring even more attention to this serious lack of security net and support systems for PhDs.

Employment perspectives and work environment

Temporariness in academia

One of the most enduring obstacles to pursuing a career in academia is the reliance on temporary contracts throughout the early stages of adult life. For many early-career researchers, it can be deeply discouraging to continue on the academic path when doing so frequently requires relocating between institutions, cities, or even countries every few years. Feeling at home anywhere is extremely difficult with this kind of lifestyle.

Beyond the practical inconveniences, there is a significant personal cost. In your late 20s or early 30s, when most people are attempting to establish stable lives with a partner or start a family, academia often demands the opposite: constant mobility, uncertainty, and flexibility. Asking a partner to uproot their own career repeatedly, or making long-distance relationships the norm, adds emotional strain to an already precarious existence. And all the while, there's a looming question: *What happens when this contract ends?*

While long-term stability is still out of reach, there can be an unending sense of pressure to publish, teach, network, and apply for the next opportunity. Even for those lucky enough to secure a permanent position, especially within the research track, continued employment often depends on winning external funding. This means that uncertainty and stress rarely disappear; they just take on a different form. In addition to having an impact on mental health, this ongoing transition drives bright researchers out of academia entirely.

Institutions need to recognize that temporary contracts are a structural issue with major human repercussions, not just a financial one. Crucial steps include providing more defined career pathways, enhancing contract security where feasible, and developing stronger support networks for family planning and dual careers. Academics must begin to view permanence as a need rather than a luxury if they hope to retain talented, driven researchers.

Positive highlights in academia in Norway

Working as a PhD candidate in Norway still comes with several notable advantages, particularly in terms of financial support and workers' rights. Unlike in many other countries, PhD candidates in Norway are typically regarded as employees of the university and receive a regular salary. For the period 2024–2026, the annual salary for PhD candidate with position code 1017 is set to 550,800kr a month. For comparison, the annual salaries for other academic positions in Norway are as follows: 559,400 NOK for a university librarian, 527,400 NOK for a university lecturer, 636,200 NOK for an associate professor, and 701,700 NOK for a university professor. This places PhD candidates' salaries slightly close to those of roles typically requiring a master's degree but below those requiring a PhD.

Crucially, this salary is not classified as a scholarship. It is subject to taxation, which grants PhD candidates access to Norway's comprehensive social security benefits. For example, after submitting their thesis, PhD candidates are eligible for unemployment benefits. Additionally, candidates are entitled to contract extensions following sick leave, even if the leave lasted less than two weeks. Norwegian universities also work on creating a supportive working environment and PhD candidates can report unwanted incidents. Furthermore, external organizations like The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority are available to provide additional support in case of conflict or regulation breach.

Data on the career outcomes and satisfaction of PhD graduates in Norway also highlights the benefits of pursuing a doctorate in the country. At the largest Norwegian university, NTNU, 93% of PhD graduates from the 2019–2021 cohort reported being employed in 2022 while 1% reported being job seekers. Nearly all of these positions were full-time, with an average monthly salary of 733,661 NOK. Furthermore, 87% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their current roles. At the University of Bergen, a survey on 68 PhD graduates who participated in the graduation ceremony of spring 2019 revealed that 42 still worked in academia in 2025. Out of these, 15 held positions as associate professors.

Well-being in academia

Loneliness in academia

In research education and other early career research positions, you are often supposed to be self-reliant and independent. This can at first sight look like a good ideal to stretch for. However, if this ideal is emphasized too much, it can create a toxic environment, where people do not dare to ask for help or show their, often unavoidable, reliance on other people. Especially in research education, you, of course, should be supposed to have certain skills and competences when starting, but, on the other hand, the research education it self, should be a developing arena, where you should be allowed to not knowing everything beforehand. Thus, to foster an environment where people feel comfortable asking for help and looking at mutual dependencies and exchanges of support, is crucial, to create a healthy and developing arena where it is real chances of making successful careers.

When thinking about creating a healthy and developing academic environment, it is also important to be aware of and recognize the, sometimes, harshly competitive climate that surround especially early career researchers. It should be safe to share one's ideas with other colleagues, and it is important to recognize the person who come up with new ideas. However, thinking and idea generating processes in academic endeavors is often collectively done, where it is possible through dialogue, reaching new insights, that would not have been possible to reveal alone. To highlight this important academic collective, where one helps each other in developing their own career, lay the foundation for a productive collaboration.

Dealing with Rejection

Rejection is an unavoidable part of academic life—whether in journal submissions, grant proposals, or job applications. While often discouraging, it is important not to take rejection as a personal judgment. Many outcomes are shaped by external factors: reviewer preferences, limited funding, or changing priorities in research agendas. Rather than seeing rejection as a denial of one's value, it helps to recognize it as part of a complex system. Building resilience in research means understanding that rejection reflects circumstances, not personal worth.

Receiving and Giving Feedback

Constructive feedback plays a crucial role in academic and professional development. Effective feedback should aim to support improvement, offering specific and respectful observations rather than judgment. A culture that values learning over criticism creates space for growth and innovation. Whether giving or receiving feedback, the focus should remain on the work—not the person—and on fostering mutual progress rather than assigning blame.

Imposter syndrome

There is ample scientific evidence of increased mental health concerns in academia. For instance, a study in 2018 reported that in comparison to the general population average, depression and anxiety are six times more common among graduate students. [ref] Impostor syndrome is one of the most prevalent mental health challenges in academia, affecting academic accomplishments and mental-wellbeing alike. Impostor syndrome is a psychological phenomenon, when a person feels fraudulent and questions their abilities and accomplishments, despite all the evidence indicating that this is not true. [ref] It is especially prevalent among doctoral and other graduate students. According to the meta analysis of the literature, different studies demonstrate that 50% to 75% of early career researchers experience moderate to severe imposter syndrome. [ref] This is expressed in low self-esteem and recurring anxiety of their work being worthless and fear of being exposed to being incompetent. This is nurtured by high publication pressure, competition for funding, and facing rejections in academia.

We believe a more healthy academic culture can substantially mitigate it. Peer support and open discussion are invaluable in this case. When we do not speak about it, an individual believes it’s just them, but in fact, almost all of us have experienced an impostor syndrome at some point in our life. It is important to speak openly about it. For an early career researcher suffering from the imposter syndrome, it is important to hear that even those people who they admire and consider competent and non-fraudulent, have also experienced the impostor syndrome on their own. The supervisors and experienced and successful researchers can play a vital role in this process. A research published in Frontiers in Psychology last year [ref] reports that there is a significant negative correlation between the supervisor's empathy and impostor syndrome - the more empathetic the supervisor, the less severe is an impostor syndrome. Frequent acknowledgement of doctoral student’s accomplishments and sharing personal experiences of impostor syndrome may help to cope with it. Furthermore, impostor syndrome implicitly questions other’s abilities too, assuming they consistently fail in detecting one’s fraudulent nature. If many colleagues acknowledge our skills, we should perhaps ask ourselves: how likely is it that all of them are deceived?

Where to seek support? Lack of resources or knowledge thereof

It is of utmost importance to have a substantial institutional infrastructure for supporting mental health of the early career researchers: both for prevention as well as supporting those already facing the problems. The problem on the institutional level can be bifold: the lack of resources or the awareness thereof. It should be obvious where one should seek support. Support should be a low threshold contact point known to all incoming individuals. The nature contact points can be diverse, cooperating and complementing each other: occupational health services, designated mental health professionals, support groups for employees with disabilities, support groups for minorities, campus chaplain – to name a few. Besides, safety representatives should explicitly concern themselves with mental health as a significant factor of a safe work environment, in addition to physical safety.

Oftentimes, such infrastructure exists, but early career researchers are unaware of the existence of the support mechanisms. We believe that getting familiar with the support mechanisms should be part of the onboarding process complemented with annual dissemination activities. A brilliant example of this is the Conference on Mental Health Resources organized by our member organization DION at NTNU, where different support groups and professionals presented themselves to the temporary scientific community. According to DION, the majority of the attendees were unaware of such resources being available, indicating the necessity of proactive dissemination and visibility.

Our past activities

SiN in News Outlets (May-September 2025)

Over the past months, SiN has been present in Khrono, a news outlet for academia.
In June, Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås (SiN president) expressed concerns about the visa policy in the United States which implies giving American authorities access to social media profiles. This could restrict academic freedom of expression and make the US less attractive for researchers.

In August, Karl Henrik shared concerns from Aksel Torja on difficulties in the balance between academic and teaching tasks for researchers. Also in August, Karl Henrik argued that Norway should follow Sweden's example and legally protect PhD candidates' right to change supervisors. This measure could elevate the statutes of PhD candidates and acknowledge their autonomy. Karl Henrik also emphasized the importance of having an ombudperson for research, noting that PhD candidates become very vulnerable when such support structures are absent. Additionally, Karl Henrik commented in uniforum on the difficult process for PhD candidates to complain when they meet difficulties at their institutions. Many research institutions do not have a Science ombudsperson or an ombudsperson for PhDs.

Arendalsuka

The topic of what happens when there is a conflict in the supervisory relationship, was lifted in a session at the Arendalsweek the 14th of August. Johan Kristian Andreasen have led a research project with extensive interviewing of 106 PhDs that have undergone a change in supervisor. He found that the most common reasons for changing supervisors was: The supervisor was absent or disinterested, the academic interest did not align, authoritarian and belittling communication, micro-managing and mistrust, power-abuse and harassment and disagreements among supervisors.

After Johan had presented the results, there where a panel discussion where Steinar Sæther from the trade union Forskerforbundet, the higher education responsible in the Parliament for the Labour party, Lise Selnes, the president of the Association of Doctoral Organizations in Norway, Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås, the vice-rector for early career researchers at the University of Oslo, Mathilde Skoie, and the rector of University of Agder, Sunniva Whittaker, (from left to right in the picture below) took part in commenting and interpreting the results. It was a fruitful discussion where we agreed that it should be more common, accepted and less dramatic to change supervisor. Lise Selnes informed that PhDs actually have the right to change supervisor in the government regulations (universitets- og høgskoleforskriften), but that it probably should be incorporated in the law for higher education as well (universitets- og høgskoleloven).

Collaboration with EURODOC

The Eurodoc Conference 2025, held from August 6–7 in Copenhagen, Denmark, focused on the theme “Breaking Barriers: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in Academia.” Organized by Eurodoc with support from PhD Association Network of Denmark (PAND) and the IT University of Copenhagen, the event featured keynotes, panels, and workshops exploring how inclusive and equitable research environments can drive innovation and integrity in academia.
Following the conference, Eurodoc’s Annual General Meeting (August 8–9) reviewed achievements from the past year and set priorities for 2025–26. The focus areas include strengthening fair research careers and mobility across Europe, reforming research assessment to emphasize quality and innovation, supporting researchers affected by war and political instability, and promoting mental health, equitable opportunities, and doctoral training.

A policy document on equitable opportunities in academia, co-authored by our Eurodoc Liaison, was approved by the board during the AGM. Eurodoc also elected a new leadership team and confirmed that the next conference will be held in Budapest, Hungary, in 2026.
The event was especially fruitful for SiN, which was this time represented by four members: two delegates - Karl Henrik Storhaug Reinås (President) and Davit Gigilashvili (Head of Communications), and two observers - Naheeda Hamza (Eurodoc Liaison) and Dimitris Polychronopoulos (Advisory Board Member). SiN delegates also used the opportunity to attend the Nordic Link meeting, where they exchanged experiences with the colleagues from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland, and set foundations for future cross-Nordic cooperation. The first topic that was identified especially relevant for the joint Nordic effort was PhD supervision and challenges related to it.

In addition to insightful keynotes and panel discussions on inclusion as well as precarity in European academia, the conference also featured two dedicated sessions for early career researchers (ECRs) to share their experiences, policies, and studies related to the conference theme.

Our Head of Communications, Davit Gigilashvili, delivered a talk on Equal Access to Language Courses for a More Inclusive Work Environment, drawing from his work with DION and SiN. He highlighted how language can be a barrier to inclusion, both in society and academia, and stressed the importance of making language courses equally accessible to all ECRs. Davit also emphasized the need to properly acknowledge the effort spent on learning the local language as a vital part of career development, which was well-received by the audience.

Safe to speak campaign

We Have Launched the #SafeToSpeak Campaign – Your Story Can Make a Difference

The Norwegian branch of the Movement for a Free Academia, together with SiN, has now launched the #SafeToSpeak campaign. Our mission is clear: to shed light on intellectual harassment in academia and to work for systemic change.
To make this possible, we are collecting at least 100 anonymous stories from students, researchers, and academics who have faced intellectual harassment. By gathering these experiences, we hope to break the silence, give voice to what too often goes unheard, and build momentum for a more open, respectful, and compassionate academic culture.
This campaign is part of a wider Scandinavian effort, running alongside the Danish #SafeToSpeak initiative, and together we aim to make our region a global leader in creating safe spaces for ideas and people to thrive.

How you can contribute

- Share your story: You can safely and anonymously submit your experience here: https://forms.gle/wvhso2LR5haZwbtM6
- Spread the word: Share this campaign with colleagues, friends, and networks to help us reach others who may want to participate.

We encourage all local organizations to share this campaign within their networks, at meetings, and on their social media platforms. You can read more details about the campaign in the link above. Every single story matters. By speaking up, together, we can create a stronger voice for change in academia.

Compensation survey

	Max	Min	Median	Mean	Normalized SD
Member number	2200	50	400	653	108.58%
Operational budget (kNOK)	430	15	97.5	132.7	92.11%
Budget per member (kNOK/person)	1.6	0.08	0.3	0.4	105.96%
Compensation, leader (kNOK/person)	90	0	17	27.4	115.01%
Compensation, not leader (kNOK/person)	45	0	10	14.7	110.30%

Quick look at results from SiN's recent survey, which received responses from 13 institutions. Here are the key findings:

(1) 9 institutions reported having structured compensation packages for their PhD&PostDoc organization board.

(2) The main forms of compensation include:
-Contractual Recognition: Examples include contract extensions and other forms of formal acknowledgment.
-Monetary Benefits: These often take the form of gift cards, bonuses, and other financial perks.

(3) SiN is currently in contact with Khrono to discuss further analysis and reporting on the survey results.

Key takeaway: In general, the board members of the local interest organizations remain largely undercompensated - they work more, often voluntarily, than they are compensated for!

A Stronger Community Through Our Physical Quarterly Meeting in Oslo

On Saturday, September 13, SiN brought together its member organizations for our quarterly meeting — this time in person in Oslo after several online gatherings. The objective of the meeting was to provide a social arena for all SiN member organizations and to create a space for identifying areas where stronger support and interventions are needed for PhDs and Postdocs.
The nearly six hours we spent together reminded us of the unique value of face-to-face dialogue. Conversations flowed more naturally, ideas were exchanged more openly, and new connections were made.
Local organizations had the opportunity to present their work, share challenges and successes, and learn from one another. SiN also presented our ongoing initiatives and received valuable input from members, helping to shape our direction in the months ahead. Preparations for SiN's Annual General Meeting and election in November were also set in motion.
We were joined by representatives from:

- DION (NTNU)
- UiODoc (University of Oslo)
- TODOS (UiT The Arctic University of Norway)
- UiSDC (University of Stavanger)
- PhD-Forum (OsloMet)
- UiADoc (University of Agder)
- USN SPO (University of South-Eastern Norway)
- PhD-Forum ØUC (Østfold University College)

We are grateful for the dedication and energy our member organizations bring to these meetings. Together, we continue to strengthen the voice of PhD candidates and postdocs across Norway.

SiN AGM 2025 - Mark your calendar

It was decided at the physical quarterly meeting that this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and SiN board elections will be held on November 22, in Oslo. Mark your calendars! More details to follow.

SiN encourages everyone interested in contributing to SiN's work to consider running for the board positions.