



Horizon Europe Programme

Guide for Applicants

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF)

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Disclaimer

This guide aims to support potential applicants to the PF 2021 call. It is provided for information purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation of any applicable legal sources. Neither the European Commission nor the European Research Executive Agency (or any person acting on their behalf) can be held responsible for the use made of this guidance document. Note that the guidance provided in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement shall prevail in case of discrepancies.



HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	22 June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial version 	

Note

National Contact Points (NCPs) have been set up across Europe and beyond by the national governments to provide information and personalised support to Horizon Europe applicants in their native language. The mission of the NCPs is to raise awareness, inform and advise on Horizon Europe funding opportunities as well as to support potential applicants in the *preparation, submission and follow-up* of the grant applications. For details on the NCP in your country, please consult the [National Contact Points page](#).

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Postdoctoral Fellowships – A Few Definitions

Academic sector means public or private higher education establishments awarding academic degrees, public or private non-profit research organisations¹ and International European Research Organisations (IERO).²

Associated partners are entities which participate in the action,³ but without the right to charge costs or claim contributions. They contribute to the implementation of the action, but do not sign the grant agreement. Associated partners may not employ the researchers under the action.⁴

Beneficiary is the legal entity that signs the grant agreement (either directly or through an accession form) and has the responsibility for the proper implementation of the action. They contribute directly to the implementation of the research, transfer of knowledge and training activities. In the case of the Postdoctoral Fellowships call, this involves recruiting, supervising, hosting, training and, where appropriate, seconding the researcher.

Long-term residence means a period of legal and continuous residence within EU Member States or Horizon Europe associated countries of at least five consecutive years. Periods of absence from the territory of the EU Member State or Horizon Europe associated country will be taken into account for the calculation of this period where they are shorter than six consecutive months and do not exceed in total ten months within this period.

Non-academic sector means any socio-economic actor not included in the academic sector and fulfilling the requirements of the Horizon Europe (HE) Rules for Participation.⁵

Non-associated Third Countries (TC) are countries that are neither EU member states (MS), nor associated to Horizon Europe (AC).

The **supervisor** is the senior researcher appointed at the beneficiary to supervise the researcher throughout the whole duration of the action. For Global Postdoctoral Fellowships, an additional supervisor should also be appointed for the time spent at the associated partner for the outgoing phase.

¹ If requested by the granting authority, institutions with self-declared research organisations status must provide evidence that their main objective is to carry out research and/or technological development. An assessment will be made on the basis of indicators such as share of research budget, volume of scientific publications and/or registered patents.

² 'International European Research Organisation' (IERO) means an international organisation, the majority of whose members are EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries, and whose principal objective is to promote scientific and technological cooperation in Europe (see Article 2(14) of the Regulation establishing Horizon Europe - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination.

³ For the purposes of Horizon Europe, each specific project receiving funding is referred to as an "action." In the present document, the terms "project" and "action" are therefore used interchangeably.

⁴ For Global Postdoctoral Fellowships outgoing phase, this restriction does not apply. The associated partner hosting the outgoing phase can conclude an additional employment contract with the researcher to ensure adequate medical/social insurance in the outgoing country.

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of 28 April 2021 (OJEU 12.05.2021, L170, p.1).

1. Introduction

This call for proposals offers fellowships to researchers holding a PhD wishing to undertake mobility either to or between EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries (European Postdoctoral Fellowships), or to a non-associated Third Country (Global Postdoctoral Fellowships) in order to undertake an original and personalised research and innovation project. The objective is to improve researchers' employability and career prospects within academia and beyond, with a strong focus on interdisciplinarity and intersectoral experience.

Applications are made jointly by the researcher and a beneficiary in the academic or non-academic sector, which must be established in an EU Member State (MS) or Horizon Europe Associated Country (AC). All domains of research and innovation are eligible for funding, including those covered by the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). Applicants are therefore free to choose the field(s) of their proposed research in a fully bottom-up manner.

Proposals may include an additional period of up to six months ("placement period") at a non-academic sector organisation established in an MS or AC.

Before preparing your application, you are strongly advised to consult the following documents:

- [MSCA Work Programme 2021-2022](#) and [General Annexes](#) to the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022
- [Standard Application Form](#): Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions - Postdoctoral Fellowships
- [MSCA list of keywords](#)

Links to other official documents, including the [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#), are provided on the [call page](#) on the Funding and Tenders Portal and are also accessible via the REA [website](#).

2. Admissibility and Eligibility Conditions

Applicant researchers must meet all eligibility criteria (see relevant sections below) on the day of the call deadline. The proposed beneficiary must ensure compliance with the admissibility and eligibility criteria before submitting the proposal and must maintain all supporting documentation.

Before completion of the formal admissibility and eligibility checks, REA cannot answer questions related to the admissibility and eligibility of a specific proposal. Guidance can be provided by NCPs.

No documents for proof of eligibility need to be uploaded with the application. However, REA may request supporting documents to assess the eligibility after the call deadline.

Please note that as of the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2022 call, proposals involving the same beneficiary and individual researcher submitted to the previous call of MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships under Horizon Europe and having received a score of less than 70% must not be resubmitted the following year.

IMPORTANT	
EUROPEAN and GLOBAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The individual researcher and the supervisor must be two different people. • Applications must be complete and contain all parts and supporting documents. • In case of an optional non-academic placement, the associated partner must provide an up-to-date letter of commitment, to be submitted with the application, confirming their precise role and active participation in the proposal.
Additional for GLOBAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The associated partner for the outgoing phase must provide an up-to-date letter of commitment, to be submitted with the application, confirming their precise role and active participation in the proposal.
If one or more of the above conditions are not met, the proposal will not be evaluated.	

Please note that:

- Only one proposal per individual researcher can be submitted. In case of several proposals involving the same individual researcher, only the last submitted one will be considered eligible. However, note that a supervisor can be involved in more than one proposal in the same call.
- If proposals with the same research objectives and work plan are submitted for different researchers, only the first submitted one will be considered eligible.

EUROPEAN POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS		
STANDARD DURATION		From 12 to 24 months
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		
RESEARCHER	Nationality	Any
	Mobility⁶	The researcher cannot have resided or carried out his/her main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately prior to the call deadline. ⁷
	Research experience (full-time equivalent)	<p>Maximum 8 years from date of award of the (first) doctoral degree.⁸ This limit can be extended (in days) for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maternity leave (18 months – i.e. 548 days per child born after the PhD award date, <u>or</u> the exact duration of maternity leave taken, whichever is longest); - Paternity leave (exact duration per child born after the PhD award date); - Research in a non-associated TC (only for nationals or long-term residents of MS or AC, wishing to reintegrate in Europe);⁹ - Compulsory national service; - Time spent not working in research; - Long-term sick leave (periods > 30 days).
PARTICIPATING ORGANISATION	Beneficiary¹⁰	Single independent legal entity established in an EU MS or HE AC.

⁶ The following periods are not taken into account: a) compulsory national service; b) time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention; c) short stays (such as holidays), i.e. the researcher did not reside or did not have their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country during that period.

⁷ In case of International European Research Organisations, international organisations with headquarters in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country or entities created under Union law, the researchers must not have spent more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately preceding the call deadline, in the same appointing organisation.

⁸ Applicants who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will also be considered as postdoctoral researchers and will be considered eligible to apply. A medical doctor degree will be accepted only when it corresponds to a doctoral degree or if the researcher can demonstrate his/her appointment in a position that requires doctoral equivalency (e.g. professorship appointment). Medical doctor degrees corresponding to basic medical training as defined in Annex V of Directive 2005/36/EC will not be considered a doctoral degree.

⁹ Researchers reintegrating to Europe from a non-associated TC must be based in the TC at the call deadline or have directly moved to Europe (i.e. any EU MS or Horizon Europe AC) within the 12-month period immediately prior to the call deadline.

¹⁰ The same conditions are applicable to *Associated partners linked to a beneficiary* (see also MSCA Work Programme, Definitions section).

GLOBAL POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS		
STANDARD DURATION	From 24 to 36 months: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outgoing phase of minimum 12 and maximum 24 months in a non-associated Third Country; • Mandatory 12-month return phase in MS / AC. 	
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		
RESEARCHER	Nationality	Nationals or long-term residents of MS or AC.
	Mobility¹¹	The researcher cannot have resided or carried out his/her main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the associated partner hosting the outgoing phase for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the call deadline. ¹²
	Research experience (full-time equivalent)	Maximum 8 years from date of award of the (first) doctoral degree. ¹³ This limit can be extended (in days) for the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maternity leave (18 months – i.e. 548 days per child born after the PhD award date, <u>or</u> the exact duration of maternity leave taken, whichever is longest); – Paternity leave (exact duration per child born after the PhD award date); – Compulsory national service; – Time spent not working in research; – Long term sick leave (periods > 30 days)
PARTICIPATING ORGANISATION	Beneficiary¹⁴	Single independent legal entity established in MS or AC.
	Associated partner hosting the outgoing phase	Single independent legal entity established in a non-associated Third Country.

Refugee Status

Note that researchers who are refugees in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country according to the Geneva Convention may also apply to both European and Global Postdoctoral Fellowships, irrespective of whether they are long-term residents (see definitions) or not, if they fulfil the other eligibility conditions.

¹¹ See footnote 6.
¹² See footnote 7.
¹³ See footnote 8.
¹⁴ See footnote 10.

3. Secondments and Placements

Proposals may include an optional secondment and/or optional non-academic placement period (see explanation in the MSCA Work Programme), provided they are in line with the project objectives and add significant value and/or impact to the fellowship. The relevance and added-value of these periods will be assessed by the evaluators and may therefore impact the final score awarded to the proposal. Proposals will not be penalised for not including a secondment or placement period.

	Secondment	Non-Academic Placement
Maximum Duration	<p><u>European Postdoctoral Fellowships</u>: Up to 1/3 of the standard project duration.</p> <p><u>Global Postdoctoral Fellowships</u>: Secondments are permitted for up to 1/3 of the outgoing phase.</p>	Up to 6 months duration.
Timing	<p><u>European Postdoctoral Fellowships</u>: At any time during the standard project duration.</p> <p><u>Global Postdoctoral Fellowships</u>: Secondments cannot take place during the mandatory 12 month return period to the host organisation in a MS or AC. However, a secondment can take place at the start of the action, at the beneficiary, for a maximum of 3 months (to be included within the 1/3 maximum duration), <i>before</i> going to the associated partner for the outgoing phase.</p> <p>Note that all <u>secondments</u> can be divided into several shorter periods.</p>	Additional period <i>after</i> the standard duration of the fellowship.
Mobility	Any country worldwide	MS or AC
Sector	Any sector	Non-academic sector only
Encoding in Part A	Yes. In " <i>Call Specific Questions</i> " complete all required information.	Yes. The associated partner must be encoded as a participating organisation.
Description in Part B-1	Yes. The relevance and quality will be assessed by the evaluators.	Yes. The relevance and quality will be assessed by the evaluators.
Supporting Document in Part B-2	None.	Yes. A letter of commitment is required.

Short Visits

Note that secondments and placements are to be distinguished from short visits. Short visits imply mobility to another location outside the physical premises of the beneficiary, including internationally. However, the work done there continues to be supervised directly by the beneficiary. Short visits can only represent a small part of the project duration.

When a secondment or short visit to a TC takes place, the beneficiary shall ensure compliance with the applicable Horizon Europe ethical framework and the corresponding provisions of the Grant Agreement.

4. ERA Fellowships

The ERA Fellowships (ERA-PF)¹⁵ aim at mobility and brain circulation in Widening Countries.¹⁶ The scheme is open to individual researchers of any nationality holding a PhD who wish to engage in R&I projects by either coming to a Widening Country from any country in the world or moving within Europe to a Widening Country.

The scheme will fund proposals submitted to the MSCA-2021-PF call with a beneficiary located in a Widening Country but which failed to score highly enough to receive funding under this call. Only European Postdoctoral Fellowships can qualify for the ERA-PF call (Global Postdoctoral Fellowships are excluded). All other eligibility and admissibility rules applicable to the MSCA-2021-PF call will apply.

Applicants can only be considered for this additional funding opportunity by ticking "YES" to the question "*Do you wish to participate to the ERA Postdoctoral Fellowships and thus increase your chances of being funded?*" in the application form. Applicants who do not reply, or tick "No" to the above question, will not be considered for the ERA-PF call (but will be evaluated and ranked under the MSCA-PF call, if eligible).

The only implementation difference with MSCA-PF is that researchers supported by the ERA Fellowships will not formally be considered as MSCA fellows.

Host organisations from Widening Countries will be informed simultaneously about the results of the evaluation for both MSCA-PF and the ERA-PF call, i.e. all applicants eligible for transfer to the ERA-PF call will receive a standard MSCA-PF evaluation result letter and an attached ERA-PF evaluation result letter. There will be a single centralised evaluation review procedure for both MSCA-PF and ERA-PF.

¹⁵ A budget of EUR 8 million has been earmarked under the [Work Programme](#) "*Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area*"

¹⁶ As defined in Article 2(17) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 establishing Horizon Europe and laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, from the Member States, those countries are Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, for the whole duration of the Programme; for associated countries, it means the list of eligible countries as defined based on an indicator and published in the Work Programme. Legal entities from outermost regions as defined in Article 349 TFEU shall be also fully eligible as coordinators under this component.

5. Euratom funding for the MSCA-PF call

A novelty under Horizon Europe is that MSCA-PF proposals in the following Euratom (European Atomic Energy Community) domains of research will be eligible for funding:

- Improve and support nuclear safety, security, safeguards, radiation protection, safe spent fuel and radioactive waste management and decommissioning, including the safe and secure use of nuclear power and of non-power applications of ionizing radiation.
- Maintain and further develop expertise and competence in the nuclear field within the Community.
- Foster the development of fusion energy as a potential future energy source for electricity production and contribute to the implementation of the European fusion roadmap.
- Support the policy of the Union and its Member States on continuous improvement of nuclear safety, safeguards and security.

Applicants in these domains of research wishing to be considered for Euratom MSCA-PF (either European Postdoctoral Fellowships or Global Postdoctoral Fellowships) should indicate this in the submission forms.

More restrictive eligibility criteria apply to the Euratom domains:

- The researcher must be a national or long-term resident (see definitions) of an EU Member State or Euratom Associated Country.¹⁷
- The beneficiary and (if applicable) the associated partner hosting the additional non-academic placement period must be based in an EU Member State or Euratom Associated Country.

Ranking of proposals in the Euratom domains

The proposals will be ranked in the same scientific panel ranking lists as other proposals, although the funding will be provided by the Euratom programme.

6. Instructions for Completing Parts A and B of the Proposal

Proposals consist of an administrative part (Part A, filled in online) and a narrative part composed of two separate PDF files (Part B-1 and Part B-2, template available on the Funding & Tenders Portal).

The narrative Part B is the core part of the proposal; it should contain the details of the proposed research and training activities along with the practical arrangements proposed to implement them. The document will be used by the independent evaluators to assess how well the proposal addresses the award criteria (see section 2.4 of the MSCA Work Programme). Only the highest scoring proposals will be selected for funding (within the limits of the available call budget).

¹⁷ For Euratom Associated Countries, please see the Euratom Research and Training programme 2021-2022.

Applicants must use the **Part B template available on the call page** on the Funding & Tenders Portal, and also accessible from the REA [website](#). Please follow all instructions in the template.

⚠ Templates are call specific – make sure you use the template for MSCA PF-2021.

The Part B is composed of two separate documents which must be uploaded as separate PDF files:

1. **Part B-1**, containing a maximum of 10 (ten) A4-sized pages. Any excess pages (i.e. numerical page 11 and beyond) will not be available to the evaluators;
2. **Part B-2**, with no strict page limit for A4-sized pages.

7. Technical Aspects of Proposal Submission

Proposals must be submitted electronically using the European Commission's Online Submission Service accessible via the Funding & Tenders Portal. You will need a stable internet connection for the submission process. Please verify your own computer's configuration against the [recommended system configuration](#).

We encourage you to submit your proposal as soon as possible. It remains possible to reopen, edit and resubmit your proposal as many times as required before the call deadline; only the last submitted version will be evaluated. Prior to the call deadline, it is strongly advised to re-download parts B-1 and B-2, to ensure the PDF files are correct, complete, and not corrupted.

Each participating entity in Horizon Europe (beneficiaries and associated partners) must have a Participant Identification Code (PIC) which identifies the institution(s) taking active part in the project and which must be included in Part A of the proposal. Please contact the relevant representative of each participating entity to be sure to use the correct PIC.

What if your submission failed due to a technical problem?

If you believe that the submission of your proposal was not successful due to a technical error **on the side of the European Commission**, you may lodge a complaint via the [IT Helpdesk](#), within four calendar days after the call deadline.

You should secure a PDF version of all the parts B and annexes of your proposal holding a time stamp (file attributes listing the date and time of creation and last modification) that is prior to the call deadline, as well as any proof of the alleged failure (e.g. screen shots). You may be requested by the IT Helpdesk to provide these items. Any information regarding the proposal will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt the same or next working day, and you will be notified about the outcome of the complaint within the timeframe indicated in the message.

If a complaint is upheld (i.e. the investigation has demonstrated technical issues on the European Commission side which prevented (re)submission of the proposal), the secured files provided to the IT helpdesk will be used for the evaluation. In the absence of such documents, the version present in the IT system will be evaluated.

Scientific Misconduct and Research Integrity

Issues of scientific misconduct and research integrity are taken very seriously. In line with the Horizon Europe Rules for Participation, appropriate action such as termination of the Grant Agreement Preparation phase or, if the Grant Agreement has been signed, the implementation of liquidated damages and financial penalties, suspension of payments, recoveries and termination of the Grant Agreement, will be taken against any applicants/beneficiaries found to have misrepresented, fabricated or plagiarised any part of their proposal. The applicants will also be required to make a "Declaration on Honour" in Part A of the proposal.