

The following is a translation from Estonian. In case of disputes, the Estonian text shall prevail.

Conditions and Procedure for Mobilitas 3.0 “Support for the Implementation of MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship Projects” activity

1. SCOPE OF APPLICATION, RESPONSIBILITY

- 1.1. This directive establishes the conditions and procedure for applying for, determining, allocating, and reporting for the activity “Support for the Implementation of MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship Projects” (hereinafter referred to as “support”) under the program "Support for the Internationalization of Research and Development and Participation in the International Knowledge Market" or Mobilitas 3.0 (hereinafter referred to as the "program").
- 1.2. The Estonian Research Council (hereinafter referred to as the "Council") shall operate in accordance with this regulation and the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Research.
- 1.3. The preparation and revising of this regulation, as well as the allocation of the support specified therein, shall be coordinated by the research and development funding department of the Council.
- 1.4. In matters not regulated by this regulation, the Council has the right to make informed decisions, involving experts as necessary.

2. THE AIM AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. The aim of the support is to motivate early-career researchers pursuing postdoctoral research to apply for Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (hereinafter MSCA) funding, facilitate the completion of postdoctoral research in Estonia, and support the transfer of expertise acquired abroad to Estonia.
- 2.2. The support is provided to researchers who intend to pursue postdoctoral research in Estonia and have previously participated in an MSCA postdoctoral fellowship call for applications, met the evaluation threshold, but received a negative funding decision.
- 2.3. The support is awarded for the implementation of an independent research project and it is not intended for covering the own contribution of other research projects.
- 2.4. The supported project must contribute to at least one area of smart specialization defined in "Estonian Research and Development, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021-2035" (hereinafter referred to as the RDIE strategy). The Council will verify the project's contribution to smart specialization areas defined in the RDIE strategy; if there is no connection, the support will not be granted.

3. DEFINITIONS

Estonian Smart Specialization Areas - Focus areas of the RDIE strategy with business and economic potential, which are: digital solutions across all areas of life; health technologies and services; valorisation of local resources; smart and sustainable energy solutions.

Implementer - The Estonian Research Council serves as the implementer of the programme.

Postdoctoral Fellow – A researcher who has applied for a Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowship, is an employee of the host institution during the support period, conducts the postdoctoral research project, and for whom the host institution seeks funding according to the regulations of this scheme.

Postdoctoral Project (also referred to as the project) - A description of scientific research that clearly outlines a well-defined research problem and the planned fundamental or applied research to solve it.

Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) - Funding measures under the European Union's research and innovation framework program "Horizon Europe," aimed at supporting the skill and career development of researchers by offering opportunities to gain experience in different countries and sectors. The Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowship aims to promote the career development of researchers with a doctoral degree through mobility.

The support - Regulated by this procedure and provided based on it, the support is intended to enable a researcher to come to Estonia from abroad and carry out their postdoctoral project here.

Host Institution (also referred to as the institution) - A research and development institution, a higher education institution, or other private or public sector institution registered in Estonia, where a postdoctoral fellow seeks to carry out their research project.

4. ELIGIBILITY PERIOD

- 4.1. The support can be used from January 1, 2023, until December 31, 2028.
- 4.2. The support is provided for a period up to two years.
- 4.3. The support period starts on the date agreed upon in the support agreement, but no later than December 1st of the year of application.

5. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE HOST INSTITUTION, POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW AND POSTDOCTORAL SUPERVISOR

- 5.1. The host institution may apply for funding for a postdoctoral researcher who has received a positive result (i.e., at least 70 points) in the MSCA postdoctoral fellowship call for application during the two years preceding the submission of the application but remained unfunded.
- 5.2. The supervisor of the project must have an employment contract with the host institution. The supervisor must have a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification.
- 5.3. During the grant period, it is possible to request a change of (co)supervisor for a substantial reason. The determination of the justification for changing the supervisor and the assessment of the qualifications and supervisory capability of the proposed new supervisor provided in the application will be evaluated by the implementer, involving experts when needed.

- 5.4. The host institution will provide the postdoctoral fellow with the necessary working environment for implementing the project (incl. working space, administrative and support functions, etc.).
- 5.5. The postdoctoral fellow must work full-time at the host institution and be located in Estonia during the implementation of the project.
- 5.6. During the support period the postdoctoral fellow cannot be any of the following:
 - 5.6.1. the recipient of the postdoctoral grant awarded by the Council;
 - 5.6.2. the PI or the member of the (senior) research staff of a team or starting grant project;
 - 5.6.3. the recipient of the returning researcher grant.

6. APPLYING FOR A SUPPORT

- 6.1. The implementer will establish the period of the annual call for applications and will announce it on its website and in the Estonian Research Information System (hereinafter ETIS).
- 6.2. The application is prepared by the host institution in cooperation with the postdoctoral fellow and it is then submitted to the implementer via ETIS.
- 6.3. The application can be submitted in Estonian or in English.
- 6.4. The application must include:
 - 6.4.1. title of the postdoctoral project in both Estonian and English;
 - 6.4.2. the host institution;
 - 6.4.3. the names of the postdoctoral fellow and (co)supervisor(s);
 - 6.4.4. a brief summary of the postdoctoral project in both Estonian and English, including the project's objectives, expected results, impact, activity and schedule;
 - 6.4.5. the period of using the support;
 - 6.4.6. field of research and development;
 - 6.4.7. project budget;
 - 6.4.8. project's contribution to smart specialization areas.
- 6.5. The application must be accompanied by the original MSCA postdoctoral grant application and its evaluation summary report.
- 6.6. If the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow has applied for funding for the postdoctoral project or its activities from multiple measures simultaneously or from other sources such as the state budget, European Union, or external aid funds, the applicant must provide relevant information about this.
- 6.7. In cases where the requested funding could be considered state aid (applied for by an unevaluated research and development institution, private higher education institution, or company and used, among other things, for economic activities), the applicant must fill out the state aid form during the application process. As additional information, the applicant must indicate on the relevant form whether the requested support is based on the General Block Exemption Regulation or constitutes de minimis aid. If the support is sought under the General Block Exemption Regulation, the amount of aid depends on the conditions stipulated in Articles 25 and 25b of the regulation, and the application must be submitted

before commencing the activities. The applicant must specify whether the project involves basic or applied research.

6.8. The implementer has the right to request additional data and documents from the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution if necessary.

7. BUDGET AND ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

7.1. The support is paid based on a unit cost.

7.2. The unit cost of the support depends on the current starting grant (PSG) level I amount and its calculation methodology issued from state budget.¹

7.3. The unit cost is based on the "Guidelines for Budgeting Grant Application" annually approved by the Council's board.

7.4. the unit cost includes the staff costs of the postdoctoral fellow at the host institution, research expenses and overhead costs:

7.4.1. The staff costs consist of salary along with any and all state taxes, contributions, and compensations arising from law.

7.4.2. Research costs cover externally procured research and development services, costs related to the (open) publication and dissemination of research and development results obtained during the research project, costs related to the protection of intellectual property, and other necessary research-related expenses based on the specific nature of the research project.

7.4.3. Overhead costs constitute 25% of the sum of expenses from points 7.4.1 and 7.4.2.

7.5. The unit cost is not considered for periods shorter than one month.

7.6. The basis for paying the unit cost is a confirmation letter submitted by the institution, indicating that the postdoctoral researcher is employed by the institution on a full-time employment contract during the grant disbursement period, with Estonia specified as the location of employment. The confirmation letter includes the name of the postdoctoral researcher and the period of employment at the institution.

7.7. The host institution ensures self-financing, which is 14% of the total unit cost.

8. PROCESSING THE APPLICATIONS

8.1. The processing of the applications is carried out by the implementer.

8.2. The processing environment for applications is ETIS. Application submission and communication with the applicant occur through ETIS. Decisions made during the processing, including approval or rejection of the application, are conveyed through ETIS. The parties involved in the application are required to regularly monitor messages in ETIS and keep their contact information up to date.

8.3. The processing of the application consists of the following stages:

8.3.1. registration of the application;

¹ In 2023, the Estonian Research Council has approved a PSG Level I rate of 72,000 euros per year, which equates to 6,000 euros per month.

According to point 2.5 of the "Guidelines for Budgeting Grant Applications" (23 January 2023) the allocation of budget PSG I was as follows: 57,600 euros for direct costs and 14,400 euros for overhead costs per year.

- 8.3.2. checking the technical details of the application, during which it will be determined if the application, applicant, the PI, and other members of the research staff meet the requirements and the contribution of the project to the smart specialization areas;
- 8.3.3. formation of the ranking according to the scores in the evaluation report of the MSCA postdoctoral individual grant application round;
- 8.3.4. decision on approval or rejection of the application.
- 8.4. The scientific excellence of the application is not evaluated but is based on the evaluation report of the MSCA postdoctoral grant application.
- 8.5. The implementer forms a committee to check the project's contribution to the smart specialization areas.
- 8.6. In case of formal inaccuracies which can be corrected without changing the content of the application are present, the implementer will set a deadline of up to ten working days for correction.
- 8.7. The implementer verifies adherence to research ethics principles and the presence of a data management plan in the applications.
- 8.8. In case the application, host institution, or the postdoctoral fellow are deemed not to comply with the requirements, the implementer decides to reject the application.
- 8.9. From the compliant applications, a unified ranking is formed based on the consolidated score of the MSCA call for applications.
- 8.10. Applications with equal scores according to the evaluation report of the MSCA postdoctoral call for applications are ranked as follows:
 - 8.10.1. Preference is given to applications with higher scores for the "Excellence" criterion in the evaluation report; if these scores are equal, then to applications with higher scores for the "Impact" criterion.
 - 8.10.2. Applications that remain tied after the action described in point 8.10.1 are ranked based on a preference for applications that bring a postdoctoral fellow to Estonia who has previously received funding from the Estonian state budget for pursuing a doctoral degree abroad.
 - 8.10.3. Applications that remain tied after the action described in point 8.10.2 are ranked based on a preference for applications in which the postdoctoral fellow represents an underrepresented gender among those ranked higher.
 - 8.10.4. Applications that remain tied after the action described in point 8.10.3 are ranked based on a preference for applications in fields that are less represented among the applications ranked higher.
 - 8.10.5. Applications that remain tied after the action described in point 8.10.4 are ranked through a lottery process established by the implementer.
- 8.11. Applications are funded based on the ranking until the depletion of the funds. The amount of allocated funds is confirmed for each year by a directive from the Council's board.
- 8.12. In the approval decision of the support, the implementer may describe the conditions that the institution and/or the postdoctoral fellow are required to fulfill upon receiving the support, including feedback related to research ethics and data management.

8.13. In case of false information, plagiarism, or fraud, the implementer has the right to terminate the processing of the application and not review the application.

9. GRANTING OF APPLICATION

9.1. The implementer decides to:

9.1.1. approve the application and allocate the support;

9.1.2. not approve the application.

9.2. The decision regarding the application is communicated to the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow within ten working days from the decision, through the ETIS platform.

9.3. Before deciding to not approve the application, the implementer provides the applicant with the opportunity to submit a written opinion and objections regarding the decision within the deadline set by the implementer (hearing). At the hearing, attention will be paid to the assessment of the adherence to procedural rules and to the correction of possible factual errors.

9.4. The decision mentioned in point 9.1 is made by directive the Management of the Council, specifying the period and budget for using the support in case the application is approved.

10. ALLOCATION OF THE SUPPORT

10.1. The implementer will enter into a tripartite support agreement (hereinafter “support agreement”) with the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow, outlining the mutual rights, obligations, and responsibilities of the parties.

10.2. The support is disbursed to the host application, who is required to enable the postdoctoral fellow to use the allocated support for implementing project, in accordance with the application.

10.3. The payment of the support shall be subject to the terms and conditions specified in the tripartite support agreement.

10.4. In case the support is allocated, the institution shall enter into an employment contract with the postdoctoral fellow for implementing the project if such a contractual relationship did not already exist at the time of awarding the support or if the existing employment contract needs to be amended.

10.5. The postdoctoral fellow submits a data management plan to the implementer within the first six months of the project.

11. TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF THE PROJECT

11.1. The postdoctoral fellow may request the temporary suspension of the project in the case of maternity, paternity, or parental leave, compulsory military service, serious illness, or other exceptional circumstances due to which the implementation of the project will become impossible or significantly more difficult.

11.2. The request for the temporary suspension of project has to be requested jointly by the institution and the postdoctoral fellow, based on a reasoned application submitted to the implementer.

11.3. The end date of the project will be extended by the duration of the suspension, but not beyond the deadline specified in point 4.1.

11.4. The support agreement will be suspended for the temporary suspension period of the project.

12. TERMINATION OF THE PROJECT

12.1. The project concludes on the end date of the project period.

12.2. All activities funded by the support must be concluded by the project's end date.

13. PREMATURE TERMINATION OF THE SUPPORT

13.1. The implementer has the right to declare the decision to approve or continue the application as void and terminate the support agreement if:

13.1.1. there is a basis as stipulated in § 14 of the general conditions for the granting and use of funds of the 2021-2027 European Union Cohesion and Internal Security Policy Funds' implementation plans;

13.1.2. the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow has submitted a respective request;

13.1.3. the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow has fundamentally violated the requirements stipulated in these guidelines or the support agreement;

13.1.4. the postdoctoral fellow is unable use the support (due to death, severe illness, relocation to another job, or other significant and justified circumstances);

13.1.5. the supervisor is unable to supervise the postdoctoral researcher (due to death, severe illness, transition to another job, or other significant justified circumstances), and the implementer did not approve the request for changing the supervisor.

13.1.6. the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow has intentionally provided false information or there has been plagiarism or fraud in activities related to the project;

13.1.7. other significant and justified circumstances exist.

13.2. Before the revocation of the decision to support the application or before the termination of the support agreement, the implementer shall give the institution and the postdoctoral fellow an opportunity to submit their position.

13.3. After the termination of the support agreement, the institution is required to refund the unused portion of the support to the implementer. The postdoctoral fellow, together with the institution, is required to submit a final report according to section 14 of this regulation.

13.4. If the decision to approve the application is retrospectively declared invalid, the implementer may demand the return of the granted funding from the host institution.

14. REPORTING

14.1. At the end of the first year of the project, the postdoctoral fellow submits a brief overview of the project's progress in a free format to the implementer.

14.2. The host institution in cooperation with the postdoctoral fellow shall prepare the final report of the project either in Estonian or in English and the host institution shall submit it to the implementer via ETIS no later than two months after the end date of the project.

14.3. The final report shall include the following:

- 14.3.1. project results (including the main outcomes in the form of popular science summaries in Estonian and English, full texts of publications resulting from the project's implementation and referring to the support, and industrial properties) in line with the objectives presented in the application.
- 14.3.2. potential applicability of achieved results, scientific and societal impact, including significance for Estonian culture, society, and/or economy, as well as proposed continuation directions (if applicable);
- 14.3.3. activities related to project communication;
- 14.3.4. if the project necessitated compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, the due diligence declaration;
- 14.3.5. other significant aspects as assessed by the host institution and the postdoctoral researcher;
- 14.3.6. report on the use of the support in accordance with the action plan presented in the application.
- 14.3.7. any other necessary materials for communicating the project, as required by the ETIS final report form.
- 14.4. In case the host institution is not able to prepare the final report in cooperation with the postdoctoral fellow, the final report shall be prepared and submitted to the implementer by the host institution alone.

15. MAKING THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT PUBLIC

- 15.1. The full texts of publications that have been published as a result of implementing the project will be made freely available to the public via ETIS by the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow, unless limited by publishing restrictions, copyright, or intellectual property laws.
- 15.2. Upon the publication of the results of the project, a reference to the European Regional Development Fund and the number of the Mobilitas 3.0 project must be included. Publications that do not contain a reference to the grant will be disregarded in the final report.
- 15.3. If a publishing house restricts access to the articles temporarily, the institution or the host institution will make the full texts of the articles published as a result of implementing the project freely available once the restriction has expired.
- 15.4. The implementer makes the main results of the project's final report, in the form of popular science summaries in Estonian and English, publicly and freely accessible.

16. AUDIT AND RECLAMATION OF THE SUPPORT

- 16.1. The implementer can demand the return of the support that has been used for non-purposeful activities from the host institution.
- 16.2. The host institution is obligated to enable the implementer or their authorized personnel to conduct control over the use of the support and provide comprehensive assistance for this purpose, including allowing verification of the accuracy of the provided data by visiting the institution's premises and territory, as well as submitting all required documents.

