

APPROVED

by the Management Board of the Estonian Research Council on 31 January 2017,

Directive No. 1-1.4/17/21

Guidelines for Mobilitas Pluss top researcher grant applications

1. Scope

The guidelines for submission and evaluation of the Mobilitas Pluss top researcher grant applications are established on the basis of Annex 1, “Conditions for the provision of grants under the ‘Mobilitas Pluss’ programme of internationalisation of research and support for mobility and the next generation” (hereinafter ‘grant conditions’), of Decree No. 1.1-2/15/481 of the Minister of Education and Research.

2. Aim

The aim of the activity is to bring to Estonia top-level researchers with international experience, who would create a research group at an Estonian research and development institution and supervise doctoral students.

3. Definitions

Implementer – the Estonian Research Council serves as the implementer of the Mobilitas Pluss programme.

Top researcher – a researcher with a doctoral degree or equivalent qualification (hereinafter ‘doctoral degree’) who preferably corresponds to the R4 profile (leading researcher) or at least to the R3 profile (established researcher) of the European Framework for Research Careers. A top researcher is a leader of his or her field and head of a research group, has a good international professional reputation and publishes high-quality publications.

Top researcher’s project – description of scientific research, which includes a clearly defined research problem and a specification of basic or applied research to be used for resolving the problem.

Top researcher grant – a grant awarded to researchers coming from abroad to an Estonian research and development institution for implementation of a specific research and development project (hereinafter ‘grant’).

Host institution – an Estonian R&D institution that has been positively evaluated during the regular evaluations, which is the final beneficiary of the grant and serves as the place of implementation of the

top researcher project and, upon award of the grant, enters into an employment contract with the top researcher, who will be hired as a researcher for implementation of the top researcher's project.

4. Grant eligibility period

In accordance with the terms and conditions of the Mobilitas Pluss grants, the grant can only be used from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2022.

5. Applicants

- 5.1. A host institution as the final beneficiary may apply for the grant to be awarded to a person, who will implement the top researcher's project, i.e., the top researcher. The application must include a confirmation that the host institution will enter into an employment contract with the top researcher for implementation of the top researcher's project.
- 5.2. A grant application can be submitted for a top researcher, who has been working outside of Estonia for the past five years at least before the opening of the call for applications and, during this period, has not been in any employment relationship or law of obligations relationship with Estonian research and development institutions or businesses, except for contracts under the law of obligations concerning short-term performance of a one-off task (e.g., serving as an opponent in examination, reviewing, etc).
- 5.3. The person of the top researcher, specified in the application, cannot be changed during the application procedure and implementation of the top researcher's project.
- 5.4. The top researcher is required to create a research group at an Estonian R&D institution.
- 5.5. The top researcher is required to supervise doctoral students during implementation of the top researcher's project.
- 5.6. The top researcher must work in Estonia at host institution for at least 75% of the standard full-time working time during the implementation of the top researcher's project. The top researcher has to inform the implementer of any other employment relationships he or she may have.
- 5.7. The implementer has the right to establish research and development priorities according to the field of research for each open call of applications.

6. Host institution

- 6.1. The host institution must comply with the requirements set in § 2 and § 3 (1) and (2) of the Government of the Republic Regulation No. 133 of 21 August 2014, "Requirements and Conditions for Applying for and Processing Applications for Structural Assistance of the Period 2014-2020 for Establishment of Regulation on Conditions for Granting Support" (hereinafter 'the Regulation on Processing Applications').
- 6.2. The host institution must provide information on other simultaneous applications, if any, submitted for funding the specified top researcher's project or any part thereof from other measures or other state budget, European or foreign aid funds.
- 6.3. If the grant being applied for can be construed as state aid, the application must include the information specified in Article 6 (2) of the General Block Exemption Regulation, and the application must be submitted before commencement of any relevant activities.
- 6.4. The host institution will provide the top researcher with the necessary working environment for implementing the project (incl. working space, administrative and support functions, etc).
- 6.5. The host institution should provide self-financing to cover 17% of the cost of the top researcher's project.

7. Processor of applications

Processing of grant applications (hereinafter 'applications') is managed by the implementer.

8. Application procedure

- 8.1. An application is prepared by the hosting institution in cooperation with the top researcher and it is then submitted to the implementer through the Estonian Research Portal (ETIS).
- 8.2. The implementer will establish a term for submission of applications on an annual basis and will publish it on its website and in ETIS.
- 8.3. Applications should be submitted in English.
- 8.4. The application should specify:
 - 8.4.1. The host institution of the top researcher's project grant;
 - 8.4.2. Details of the top researcher;
 - 8.4.3. Title of the top researcher's project in Estonian and in English;
 - 8.4.4. Brief summary of the top researcher's project in Estonian and in English;

- 8.4.5. The requested grant period;
- 8.4.6. Scientific background of the proposed top researcher's project, previous R&D activities of the top researcher and its links to the upcoming top researcher's project;
- 8.4.7. The main objectives, hypotheses and methods of the top researcher's project, plan for setting up and running the research group, list of planned supervision and expected annual research plan schedule.
- 8.4.8. Information on procedures to ensure compliance with general ethical standards in the top researcher's project. The applicants are required to consider and describe all relevant risks of the project in terms of human participation and collection and use of personal data, including a description of how the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent and confidentiality will be followed in the top researcher's project, what procedures are in place for ensuring welfare of research subjects and for storing and protecting the collected data. The use of research methods that require approval from a human research ethics committee or from an animal testing permits committee, if any, should be clearly indicated in the application. If the respective approvals are available at the time of submission of the application, they should be attached to the application;
- 8.4.9. The expected results of the top researcher's project, potential applicability of the results and potential for future research;
- 8.4.10. The place of implementation of the top researcher's project and the quality and sufficiency of the infrastructure available for the top researcher's project at the host institution;
- 8.4.11. R&D activity of the top researcher in last 10 years;
- 8.4.12. International collaborative research projects and collaboration with Estonian research projects over the last 10 years;
- 8.4.13. Budget of the top researcher's project;
- 8.4.14. The expected impact of the top researcher's project on society, economic development, objectives of the measure and horizontal themes (equal opportunities, regional development, integrated public governance, promotion of information society);
- 8.4.15. The implementer may ask the applicant for additional information and clarifications, including through a short interview.

9. Budget of the grant

- 9.1. The maximum limit of the top researcher grant is €150 000 per year. The self-financing of the host institution will be added to the amount of grant. Self-financing should constitute 17% of the total cost

of the top researcher's project. In case of the maximum amount of grant, self-financing of the host institution would amount to €30 722.89 per year and the total annual budget of the project would be €180 722.89.

9.2. The research grant of a top researcher can include:

9.2.1. Salary of the top researcher, including all state taxes and statutory benefits for full-time work, up to the amount of €80 280 per year;

9.2.2. Salaries of the members of the research group, including all state taxes and statutory benefits;

9.2.3. Travel costs of the top researcher for a return travel to the country of origin once a year (includes flight, train, ferry and bus tickets);

9.2.4. Research expenses (incl. travel expenses) of the top researcher and the research group;

9.2.5. Indirect costs amounting to 15% of direct personnel expenses.

9.3 All costs must comply with the point 12.3 in the Mobilitas Plus Decree.

10. Grant period

10.1. The minimum grant period is 36 months and the maximum period is 60 months.

10.2. Implementation of the top researcher's project should commence within one year after the decision to grant the application, unless a different agreement has been negotiated with good reason. The grant period will commence on the date specified in the grant agreement.

11. Processing and evaluation of applications

11.1. Processing of applications comprises the following stages:

11.1.1. registration of applications;

11.1.2. initial technical review of applications;

11.1.3. decision on accepting or rejecting applications for further processing;

11.1.4. verification of compliance with the requirements for applications and host institutions;

11.1.5. requests for clarifications and further information or additions and modifications;

11.1.6. evaluation of applications and

11.1.7. decision to grant or reject applications.

11.2. The term for processing applications is up to 100 working days from the closing date of the call for applications.

- 11.3. The implementer may require from the host institution and the top researcher, in the course of processing an application, explanations and additional documents concerning the data set out in the application as specified in clause 8.4 or additions to the application if the implementer finds that the application is not sufficiently clear or contains omissions, specifying the exact elements that require clarification, modification or additional information. If omissions are eliminated, the requirement related to the omission is deemed as fulfilled.
- 11.4. When requesting additional information or elimination of omissions in the application, the implementer will set a term of up to 10 working days, and the term of processing the application will be extended by the same term.
- 11.5. The term of processing an application can also be extended in other cases, subject to reasonable justification.
- 11.6. If the application is deemed to be non-compliant with the requirements for host institutions and applications, the implementer will reject the application without evaluating the merits of the application.
- 11.7. Evaluation of applications is organised by the implementer.
- 11.8. Applications are evaluated by the evaluation committee on the basis of the conditions specified in §21 (4) of the 2014-2020 Structural Assistance Act, the Minister of Education and Research Regulation No. 74 "Procedure for Formation and Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Estonian Research Council", Evaluation Guidelines confirmed by the implementer and these Guidelines.
- 11.9. The evaluation committee forwards applications to field-specific expert panels for evaluation.
- 11.10. The expert panel can use opinions and scores of independent experts for evaluation of applications.
- 11.11. The expert panel takes into account the opinions and scores of independent experts when drawing up its opinion and scores, but these are not binding on the expert panel.
- 11.12. The expert panel submits its reasoned evaluations and scores to the evaluation committee'. The evaluation committee takes into account the opinions and scores of the expert panel when drawing up its opinion and scores, but these are not binding on the evaluation committee.
- 11.13 The evaluation committee forms a preliminary ranking list, based on the opinions and scores of the expert panels. The evaluation committee has the right to undertake interviews with the top 10 top researchers in the preliminary ranking list.

11.14. The evaluation committee evaluates applications and provides a final evaluation and score for each application, based on the opinions and scores of the expert panel, interviews (if necessary) and taking into account the following criteria:

11.14.1. justification and scientific quality of the application (methods, expected results, including particular fieldspecific or application-related characteristics, etc);

11.14.2. the qualifications of the top researcher and the capacity to implement the project;

11.14.3. sufficiency of the infrastructure, budget and cost-efficiency of the top researcher's project;

11.14.4. impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.

11.15. Applications are scored for individual criteria on a scale of 1 to 5 as follows: 1 - inadequate; 2 - adequate; 3 - good; 4 - very good; 5 - excellent. Scores can be given at intervals of 0.5 points.

11.16. All evaluated criteria have equal weights.

11.17. The evaluation committee will establish a single ranking of all applications based on the final evaluations and scores. Compliant applications will be granted in the order of the ranking until depletion of the funds allocated for that round of applications.

11.18. In case of applications with equal final scores, preference will be given to the application with higher score in the category of scientific quality; in case of equal scientific quality scores, preference will be given to the application with higher score in the category of impact on achievement of the objectives of the measure.

11.19. Applications with a final score lower than 3.5 will not be granted.

11.20. In the final assessment of an application, the evaluation committee may prescribe conditions to be fulfilled by the host institution and the top researcher upon receipt of the grant.

11.21. The implementer makes the assessments and scores, referred to in clauses 11.10 and 11.13, and the preliminary funding proposal (hereinafter 'the proposal'), as well as the position of the applicant in the ranking referred to in clause 11.16 available to the host institution and the top researcher. The host institution and the top researcher have the right to submit a joint opinion on the preliminary proposal within the term established by the implementer. If the evaluation committee has prescribed any conditions to be fulfilled in order to receive the grant, the host institution and the top researcher should submit a consent and an action plan on fulfilment of the conditions.

11. Granting of applications

11.1. Taking into account the final evaluation and the joint opinion received from the host institution and the top researcher, the evaluation committee submits to the implementer a reasoned and impartial proposal:

11.1.1. to grant the application in full;

11.1.2. to grant the application in parts;

11.1.3. to reject the application.

12.2. The implementer has a right, subject to a reasoned decision, to send a proposal back to the evaluation committee for a repeat review.

12.3. The decision on full or partial granting or rejection of an application is made by a directive of the implementer, specifying the grant period and budget for each granted application.

12.4. Pursuant to §9 (1) of the Regulation on Processing Applications, an application may be granted in parts on the condition that the host institution and the top researcher consent to the implementer's decision on reducing the amount of grant. If the host institution and the top researcher do not consent to the implementer's proposal, the implementer will adopt a decision to reject the application.

12.5. The decision on partial granting of an application is made in accordance with the provisions of §9 (1) of the Regulation on Processing Applications and also in cases when the objectives, results or deliverables of the top researcher's project can be achieved with a lower amount of grant than specified in the application.

12.6. A decision on rejecting an application is made if:

12.6.1. the host institution, the top researcher, the application or the grant period does not meet the requirements specified in clauses 5.2, 6, 8, 9 and 10;

12.6.2. the threshold specified in clause 11.18 is not exceeded or met according to the results of evaluation;

12.6.3. the project cannot be supported due to the available budget for funding the applications;

12.6.4. the host institution does not consent to a decision on partial granting of the application with regard to reduction of the amount of grant or modifying the list of supported activities of the project.

12.7. A decision to reject an application should include the information specified in §8 (5) of the Government of the Republic Regulation No. 133 of 21 August 2014, "Requirements and Conditions

for Applying for and Processing Applications for Structural Assistance of the Period 2014-2020 for Establishment of Regulation on Conditions for Grating Support” (hereinafter ‘the Regulation on Processing Applications’).

12.8. A decision on full or partial granting of an application can include auxiliary conditions in accordance with the provisions of §9 (2) and (3) of the Regulation on Processing Applications.

12.9. The corresponding decision on the application will be sent to the host institution and the top researcher through ETIS. A decision on granting or rejecting an application should be sent to the host institution within 10 working days of making the decision.

13. Awarding grants

13.1. The implementer will enter into a trilateral agreement with the host institution and the top researcher (hereinafter ‘grant agreement’), specifying the information referred to in §8 (4) of the Regulation on Processing Applications as well as mutual rights, obligations and liability of the parties.

13.2. The grant is released to the host institution and the host institution is required to enable the top researcher to use the allocated grant for implementation of the top researcher’s project in accordance with the application.

13.3. Payment of the grant will be subject to the terms and conditions specified in the trilateral grant agreement.

13.4. If a grant is released, the host institution should enter into an employment contract with the top researcher for implementation of the top researcher’s project.

14. Temporary suspension of the top researcher’s project

14.1. Temporary suspension of the top researcher’s project may be applied for in case the existing employment contract of the top researcher with the host institution is temporarily suspended due to pregnancy leave, maternity leave or parental leave, compulsory military service, serious illness or other justifiable circumstances.

14.2. The top researcher’s project may be temporarily suspended on the basis of a reasoned joint application of the host institution and the top researcher, to be submitted to the implementer. If necessary the evaluation committee will provide the implementer with an assessment of justifiability of temporary suspension of the top researcher’s project.

14.3. In case of circumstances referred to in clause 15.1, the top researcher's project can be temporarily suspended for a period of up to three years, whereas the initially allocated grant amount will not be changed due to the temporary suspension of the top researcher's project.

14.4. If a top researcher's project is resumed after suspension, it can be implemented only until the end of the period specified in Section 4.

15. Early termination of grant agreement

15.1. The implementer has the right to revoke the decision on granting the application and to terminate the agreement:

15.1.1. In the cases specified in §22 (3) and §47 (3) of the 2014-2020 Structural Assistance Act, or if:

15.1.2. the host institution or the top researcher has submitted a respective request;

15.1.3. the host institution or the top researcher has materially violated the requirements set out in these Guidelines;

15.1.4. the top researcher is not able to commence or continue implementing the top researcher's project;

15.1.5. there are any other material and justifiable circumstances.

15.2. Pursuant to §23 (2) 2) of the Structural Assistance Act, the implementer has to give the beneficiary an opportunity to present their position before cancelling the grant agreement.

15.3. After cancellation of the grant agreement, the host institution is required to refund the unused portion of the grant to the implementer.

15.4. A positive decision of the human research ethics committee or of the animal testing permits committee, required for implementation of the top researcher's project pursuant to clause 8.4.8, has not been issued by the time of commencement of human research or animal testing.

16. Reporting

16.1. The host institution, in cooperation with the top researcher, submits an interim report, providing an overview of the work completed and results achieved in the project and the general progress of the project.

16.1.1. The interim report should be drawn up in Estonian or in English by the host institution in cooperation with the top researcher and it should be submitted to the implementer via ETIS by the end of the second year of the grant period at the latest.

16.2. A final report of the top researcher's project should be drawn up in English (except for the popular essay referred to in clause 16.3.1, which should also be submitted in Estonian) by the host institution

in cooperation with the top researcher, and the host institution will submit it to the implementer through ETIS within the month following the expiry of the grant period.

16.3. The final report of the top researcher's project should include the following information:

16.3.1. the results (incl. the main results of the research project in the format of a brief popular essay in Estonian) corresponding to the objectives specified in the application;

16.3.2. any other facts, which are considered to be relevant by the host institution and the top researcher;

16.3.3. a report on the use of the grant amount.

16.4. In case of early termination of the top researcher's project, the host institution and the top researcher are required to submit the final report in accordance with clause 16.1

16.5. If the host institution is not able to draw up the final report in cooperation with the top researcher, the final report should be drawn up and submitted to the implementer by the host institution alone.

16.6. On the basis of the final report, the Evaluation Committee evaluates the implementation of the top researcher's project and the implementer makes the evaluation available to the top researcher and the host institution via the ETIS, and shall make a summary thereof public.

17. Publication of the results of a top researcher's project

17.1. The full texts of any publications created as a result of implementation of the top researcher's project will be made freely available to the public via ETIS by the host institution or the top researcher, unless specified otherwise in the conditions of publication, copyright or intellectual property protection.

17.2. If a research publishing house imposes a temporary restriction on access to the publications, the full texts of the publications created as a result of implementation of the top researcher's project will be made freely available to the public by the host institution or the top researcher after the expiry of the restriction.

17.3. All publications of the results of the top researcher's project should include a note on financing from the European Regional Development Fund and the number of the Mobilitas Plus top researcher's project. Any research articles, which do not include a reference to the awarded grant, cannot be included in the final report.

17.4. A summary of the final report of the project will be made publicly available in ETIS by the implementer.

18. Recovery of grant funds

- 18.1. Any grant funds, which are not used for the intended purpose, have to be recovered by the implementer from the host institution.
- 18.2. The host institution is required to allow the implementer or a person authorised by the implementer to audit the use of the grant, rendering all necessary assistance, including allowing access to the premises and the territory of the host institution for the purpose of verifying correctness of any information submitted and submitting all required documents.