

APPROVED

by the Management Board of the Estonian Research Council on 22 December 2017,  
Directive No. 1.1-4/17/162

## Guidelines for Mobilitas Pluss postdoctoral grant applications

### 1. Scope

The guidelines for submission and evaluation of the Mobilitas Pluss postdoctoral 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 supplement Estonian research and development institutions and businesses with young and talented researchers, who have studied or worked in foreign countries and have acquired skills and knowledge for conducting research and development.

### 3. Definitions

**Implementer** – the Estonian Research Council (ETAg) serves as the implementer of the Mobilitas Pluss programme.

**Postdoctoral fellow** – a researcher who has been awarded a doctoral degree or an equivalent qualification within the past five years as of the deadline for the submission of grant applications. The date of the award of a doctoral degree is the date specified on the document of the awarding institution. In case the postdoctoral fellow was on pregnancy leave, maternity leave or parental leave or in compulsory military service (or equivalent alternative service) after the award of the doctoral degree, the period of qualification is extended by the corresponding period in full months, rounded up to the higher number of months.

**Postdoctoral 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.

**Postdoctoral grant** – a grant awarded to researchers coming from a foreign country to an Estonian research and development institution for implementation of a specific research and development project (hereinafter ‘the grant’).

**Host institution** – an Estonian research and development institution or undertaking, which is the final beneficiary of the grant and serves as the place of implementation of the postdoctoral project and, upon award of the grant, enters into an employment contract with the postdoctoral fellow, who will be hired as a researcher for implementation of the postdoctoral project.

#### **4. Grant eligibility period**

In accordance with the terms and conditions of the Mobilitas Plus 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 postdoctoral project, i.e., the postdoctoral fellow. The application must include a confirmation that the host institution will enter into an employment contract with the postdoctoral fellow for implementation of the postdoctoral project.
- 5.2. The recipient of the grant must be a postdoctoral fellow who has completed his or her doctoral studies and has been awarded a doctoral degree in a foreign country (by the time of signing of the grant agreement) and who has not completed doctoral studies in and been awarded a doctoral degree, incl. under a co-supervision contract, by the institution that applies for the grant for implementation of the postdoctoral project. A grant agreement must be concluded within 180 calendar days after the implementer has decided to award the grant.
- 5.3. During the grant period the postdoctoral fellow cannot serve as a principal investigator or senior research staff of a personal research funding project and as a team leader or senior research staff of an institutional research funding topic funded by ETAg.
- 5.4. The person of the postdoctoral fellow, specified in the application, cannot be changed during the application procedure and implementation of the postdoctoral project.
- 5.5. In the appointment of postdoctoral applicants coming to Estonia from abroad, individuals who have previously received Estonian state scholarship funding in order to obtain a doctoral degree abroad with the requirement to return to Estonia to continue their research, will be preferred.
- 5.6. The postdoctoral fellow has to work for the host institution during the project and with the place of work in Estonia.
- 5.7. The implementer has the right to establish research and development priorities according to the field of research and type of funding.

## **6. Host institution and postdoctoral supervisor**

- 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 Grating Support" (hereinafter 'the Regulation on Processing Applications').
- 6.2. The host information must provide information on other simultaneous applications, if any, submitted for funding the specified postdoctoral 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 applicant is a private institution), the application must include (under additional information) 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. The applicant must describe under additional information whether it applies for the grant according to General Block Exemption Regulation or as de minimis aid. If the support is applied for according to the General Block Exemption Regulation, the funding rate of the project depends on the conditions set in Article 25 of the General Block Exemption Regulation. The applicant must describe whether fundamental research or applied research will be carried out during the project.
- 6.4. The postdoctoral supervisor in Estonia should be a leader or senior research staff of a large-scale research project (i.e. an institutional research grant, personal research grant, a target-financed research topic, a European framework programme project, etc). The supervisor must have an employment contract with the host institution. The supervisor must have an Estonian doctoral degree or equivalent qualification.
- 6.5. 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).
- 6.6. The host institution will cover the self-financing of the project according to the Mobilitas Plus grant conditions (self-financing is applicable in case of grants and allowance specified in clauses 9.3, 9.4 and 9.5).

## **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 host institution in cooperation with the postdoctoral fellow 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 postdoctoral project grant;
  - 8.4.2. Details of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor;
  - 8.4.3. Title of the postdoctoral project in Estonian and in English;
  - 8.4.4. Brief summary of the postdoctoral project in Estonian and in English;
  - 8.4.5. The requested grant period;
  - 8.4.6. Envisaged budget of the postdoctoral project in accordance with Section 9;
  - 8.4.7. General research background of the envisaged postdoctoral project, previous research and development activities of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor and links with the postdoctoral project;
  - 8.4.8. The main objectives, hypotheses and methods of the postdoctoral project, as well as proposed annual research plan;
  - 8.4.9. Information on procedures to ensure compliance with general ethical standards in the postdoctoral fellow'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 postdoctoral fellow'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;
  - 8.4.10. The expected results of the postdoctoral project, potential applicability of the results and potential for future research;
  - 8.4.11. The place of implementation of the postdoctoral project and the quality and sufficiency of the infrastructure available for the postdoctoral project at the host institution;
  - 8.4.12. The expected impact of the postdoctoral project on society, economic development, objectives of the measure and horizontal themes (equal opportunities, regional development, integrated public governance, promotion of information society).

## **9. Budget of the grant**

- 9.1. The unit costs of the budget of the postdoctoral project are specified in Annex 2 of the Minister of Education and Research Decree No. 1.1-2/15/481 of 30 December 2015.
- 9.2. The postdoctoral grant rates of the national personal research grant will be adopted as the unit costs.
- 9.3. For postdoctoral grants in the field of experimental research the unit cost is €3 541.66 per month (€42 000 per year) and in the field of non-experimental research €3 333.33 per month (€40 000 per year);
  - 9.3.1. The unit cost includes the salary fund of the postdoctoral fellow at the host institution, research expenses and overhead expenses);
  - 9.3.2. It is not possible to get the unit costs for a shorter period than one month;
  - 9.3.3. Payment of the unit cost is subject to submission of a certificate by the host institution, confirming that the postdoctoral fellow is working under an employment contract at the host institution during the grant period. The certificate should include the name of the postdoctoral fellow and the period of employment at the host institution, which should be at least equivalent to the grant period.
- 9.4. Unit costs of the postdoctoral fellow's relocation allowance:
  - 9.4.1. The unit cost of relocation allowance is €4 000 for projects lasting under 2 years and €5 500 for projects lasting two years;
  - 9.4.2. The unit cost includes the allowance payable to the postdoctoral fellow, who is employed by the host institution, to cover the costs of relocation in Estonia, including any taxes applicable to allowances pursuant to Estonian legislation (no overhead is charged on the relocation allowance);
  - 9.4.3. An application for relocation allowance may be submitted by a postdoctoral fellow who has not lived, studied or worked in Estonia within 180 calendar days immediately prior to the opening of the call for applications;
  - 9.4.4. The unit cost of relocation allowance is paid to the host institution as non-recurrent allowance only in the first year of the research project.
- 9.5. The unit costs used for activities, which are supported under the unit cost scheme, can be adjusted during the eligibility period in case of justified requirement in connection with modification of the unit costs of the national grant scheme. The adjusted unit costs will be applicable to calls, which are adopted after the adjustment.

## **10. Grant period**

- 10.1. The minimum grant period is 12 months and the maximum period is 24 months.

10.2. Implementation of the postdoctoral 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 postdoctoral fellow, 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 evaluates applications and provides a final evaluation and score for each application, based on the opinions and scores of the expert panel and taking into account the following criteria:
  - 11.13.1. justification and scientific quality of the application (methods, expected results, including particular field-specific or application-related characteristics, etc);
  - 11.13.2. the qualifications of the postdoctoral fellow and the supervisor and the capacity to implement the project;
  - 11.13.3. sufficiency of the infrastructure, budget and cost-efficiency of the postdoctoral project (research capacity of the host institution, sufficiency of the available research environment and infrastructure, justifiability of the budget, level of experimentality etc);
  - 11.13.4. impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy, and on horizontal themes.
- 11.14. 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.
- 11.15. All evaluated criteria have equal weights.
- 11.16. The evaluation committee will establish field specific ranking lists 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. The allocation of funds between research fields and the number of projects funded will be decided by the Evaluation Committee.
- 11.17. In case of applications with equal final scores, preference will be given to the applicants who have previously received Estonian state scholarship funding in order to obtain a doctoral degree abroad with the requirement to return to Estonia to continue their research. After that, 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.

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

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

11.20. 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 postdoctoral fellow. The host institution and the postdoctoral fellow 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 postdoctoral fellow should submit a consent and an action plan on fulfilment of the conditions.

## **12. Granting of applications**

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

12.10.1. to grant the application in full;

12.10.2. to grant the application in parts;

12.10.3. 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 postdoctoral fellow consent to the implementer's decision on reducing the amount of grant. If the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow 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 postdoctoral 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 postdoctoral fellow, the supervisor, 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 Granting 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 postdoctoral fellow 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. Entry into grant agreement**

- 13.1. The implementer will enter into a trilateral agreement with the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow (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 agreement is concluded within 180 calendar days after adoption of the decision on granting the application.
- 13.3. The grant is released to the host institution and the host institution is required to enable the postdoctoral fellow to use the allocated grant for implementation of the postdoctoral project in accordance with the application.
- 13.4. Payment of the grant will be subject to the terms and conditions specified in the trilateral grant agreement.
- 13.5. If a grant is released, the host institution should enter into an employment contract with the postdoctoral fellow for implementation of the postdoctoral project if they did not have an employment contract before the award of grant or the award changes the terms of the existing employment contract between them.

#### **14. Temporary suspension of the postdoctoral project**

- 14.1. Temporary suspension of the postdoctoral project may be applied for in case the existing employment contract of the postdoctoral fellow 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 postdoctoral project may be temporarily suspended on the basis of a reasoned joint application of the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow, 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 postdoctoral project.
- 14.3. In case of circumstances referred to in clause 15.1, the postdoctoral 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 postdoctoral project.

#### **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 postdoctoral fellow has submitted a respective request;
  - 15.1.3. the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow has materially violated the requirements set out in these Guidelines;
  - 15.1.4. the postdoctoral fellow is not able to commence or continue implementing the postdoctoral 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 postdoctoral project pursuant to clause 8.4.9, has not been issued by the time of commencement of human research or animal testing.

## **16. Reporting**

- 16.1. A final report of the postdoctoral project should be drawn up in English (except for the popular essay referred to in clause 16.2.1, which should also be submitted in Estonian) by the host institution in cooperation with the postdoctoral fellow, and the host institution will submit it to the implementer through ETIS within the month following the expiry of the grant period.
- 16.2. The final report of the postdoctoral project should include the following information:
- 16.2.1. 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;
- 16.2.2. any other facts, which are considered to be relevant by the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow;
- 16.2.3. a report in the use of the grant amount.
- 16.3. In case of early termination of the postdoctoral project, the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow are required to submit the final report in accordance with clause 16.1
- 16.4. In case the host institution is not able to draw up the final report in cooperation with the postdoctoral fellow, the final report should be drawn up and submitted to the implementer by the host institution alone.
- 16.5. On the basis of the final report, the Evaluation Committee evaluates the implementation of the postdoctoral project and the implementer makes the evaluation available to the postdoctoral fellow and the host institution via the ETIS.

## **17. Publication of the results of a postdoctoral project**

- 17.1. The full texts of any publications created as a result of implementation of the postdoctoral project will be made freely available to the public via ETIS by the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow, 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 postdoctoral project will be made freely available to the public by the host institution or the postdoctoral fellow after the expiry of the restriction.
- 17.3. All publications of the results of the postdoctoral project should include a note on financing from the European Regional Development Fund and the number of the Mobilitas Plus postdoctoral 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.



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