



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

APPROVED

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Directive No. 1.1-4/19/127

Guidelines for Mobilitas Plus returning researcher grant applications 2020

Chapter 1

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. Scope of Application

The guidelines establish the procedure for applying for, evaluating, allocating, and reporting on the Mobilitas Plus returning researcher funding, and the conditions for suspending and terminating the project.

The guidelines are established on the basis of Annex 1, “Conditions for the provision of grants under the “Mobilitas Plus” 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 researchers, who have studied or worked in foreign countries and have acquired skills and knowledge for conducting research and development, back to Estonian research and development institutions and businesses.

3. Definitions

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

Returning researcher – a researcher who is a current/former Estonian resident or an Estonian citizen, has worked outside of Estonia for at least two years immediately prior to the closing date of the call for applications, and who conducts basic or applied research or development and implements an independent returning researcher project.

Returning researcher project – the 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.

Return grant – a grant awarded to researchers, who are Estonian citizens or residents, coming from a foreign country to an Estonian research and development institution for implementing a specific research and development project (hereinafter “grant”).

Host institution – an Estonian research and development institution, undertaking or higher education institution, which is the final beneficiary of the grant and serves as the place of implementation of the returning researcher project and, upon award of the grant, enters into an employment contract with the returning researcher.

4. Grant Eligibility Period

In accordance with the terms and conditions of the Mobilitas Pluss grants, the grant can only be used until 31 December 2022.

5. Applicants

5.1. A host institution as the final beneficiary can apply for the grant to be awarded to a person, who will implement the returning researcher project, i.e. the returning researcher. The application must include a confirmation that the host institution will enter into an employment contract with the returning researcher for implementation of the returning researcher project.

5.2. A grant application can be submitted for a returning researcher, who has completed a postdoctoral fellowship or an equivalent level of research in a foreign country by the closing of the call for applications.

5.3. The place of work of a returning researcher within the last two years must be located outside of Estonia. The calculation of the period starts from the date of closing of the call for applications. In justified cases, the Evaluation Committee may propose to award the grant to a researcher who has worked abroad for a shorter period of time.

5.4. Preference is given to returning researchers who have previously received Estonian state funding in order to carry out a postdoctoral research project abroad.

5.5. The implementer is entitled to prioritise research and development fields for each call for applications.

5.6. During the project, the returning researcher has to work at the host institution on a full-time basis with a place of work in Estonia.

5.7. The returning researcher, specified in the application, cannot be replaced during the application procedure and implementation of the returning researcher project.

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 "Regulation on Processing Applications").

6.2. The host institution must provide information on other simultaneous applications, if any, submitted for funding the returning researcher project or any part thereof from several measures or other state budget, European Union or foreign aid funds.

6.3. If the grant being applied for can be construed as state aid (the support will also be used for economic activity), the application must include (under additional information on the relevant form) the information specified in Article 6 (2) of the General Block Exemption Regulation¹, and the application must be submitted before the commencement of any relevant activities. The applicant must describe under additional information on the relevant form 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 basic or applied research will be carried out during the project.

6.4. The host institution will provide the returning researcher with the necessary working environment for implementing the project (incl. working space, administrative and support functions, etc).

6.5. 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 specified in clauses 9.3 and 9.4 of the current document).

7. Processing Return Grant Applications

The implementer is responsible for processing grant applications (hereinafter "applications").

¹ Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (ELT L 187, 26.06.2014, p 1–78), amended by Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/1084 (ELT L 156, 20.06.2017, p 1–18)

Chapter 2

CONDITIONS FOR APPLYING FOR A GRANT

8. Applying for a Return Grant

8.1. 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).

8.2. The application is prepared by the host institution in cooperation with the returning researcher and it is then submitted to the implementer via ETIS.

8.3. The application must be written in English.

8.4. The application shall specify the following:

8.4.1. the host institution of the return grant;

8.4.2. details of the returning researcher;

8.4.3. the title of the returning researcher project in Estonian and in English;

8.4.4. a summary of the returning researcher project in Estonian and in English;

8.4.5. the requested grant period;

8.4.6. the envisaged budget of the returning researcher project in accordance with Section 9;

8.4.7. the general scientific background of the envisaged returning researcher project, previous research and development activities of the returning researcher and their links to the returning researcher project;

8.4.8. the main objectives, hypotheses and methods of the returning researcher project, as well as the proposed annual work plans;

8.4.9. an explanation about how the compliance with ethical issues will be secured during the implementation of the project and a comment on whether the project requires a licence from a specific ethics committee or the licence has already been obtained;

8.4.10. if the project necessitates compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, an explanation about which genetic resources will be used and whether the project requires the due diligence declaration or the due diligence declaration has already been submitted;

8.4.11. the expected results of the returning researcher project, their potential applicability and possible directions for future research;

8.4.12. the place of implementation of the returning researcher project and the quality and sufficiency of the infrastructure necessary for achieving the objectives of the returning researcher project at the host institution;

8.4.13. the expected impact of the returning researcher project on society, economic development, objectives of the measure, and horizontal themes (equal opportunities, regional development, integrated public governance, promotion of information society);

8.4.14. an explanation about which data will be generated during the implementation of the project and how the data will be managed;

8.4.15. a confirmation that the principles of research ethics and good research practice will be adhered to during the conception and implementation of the project;

8.4.16. an explanation about how the results of the project will be disseminated to the public.

9. Budget of the Grant

9.1. The unit costs of the budget of the returning researcher 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 unit costs are based on the directive of the Board of the Estonian Research Council „Guidelines for Budgeting Personal Research Funding Applications“ approved on 4 March 2019.

9.3 The unit cost for experimental project is €4,500 per month and for non-experimental project €4,250 per month;

9.3.1. the unit cost includes the salary fund of the returning researcher 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 returning researcher is working on a full-time basis under an employment contract at the host institution during the grant period. The certificate must include the name of the returning researcher and the period of employment at the host institution.

9.4. Unit costs of the returning researcher's relocation allowance:

9.4.1. the unit cost of relocation allowance is €4,000 for projects lasting for one year and €5,500 for projects lasting for two years;

9.4.2. the unit cost includes the allowance payable to the returning researcher, 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. the returning researcher is entitled to request a relocation allowance if he/she has not lived, worked, or studied 180 days immediately prior to the closing date of the call in Estonia.

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 project.

10. Grant Period

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

10.2. Implementation of the returning researcher project shall commence within six months 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.

Chapter 3

EVALUATION AND GRANTING OF APPLICATIONS

11. Processing and Evaluation of Applications

11.1. Processing of applications comprises the following stages:

11.1.1. registration of applications;

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

11.1.3. requests for clarifications and further information or additions and modifications, if necessary;

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

11.1.5. evaluation of applications;

11.1.6. 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 returning researcher, in the course of processing an application, explanations and additional documents concerning the data set out in the application 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 justified cases.

11.6. If the host institution, the returning researcher or the application does not meet the necessary requirements and the omissions are not eliminated by the deadline set by the

implementer, the implementer will reject the application without evaluating the merits of the application.

11.7. The evaluation of applications is organised by the implementer.

11.8. The applications are evaluated by the Evaluation Committee on the basis of the Regulation No. 74 “The Procedure for the Formation and the Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Estonian Research Council” issued by the Minister of Education and Research on 27 December 2011, on these guidelines, and the evaluation guidelines confirmed by the implementer.

11.9.-The initial evaluation of the applications is carried out by field-specific Expert Panels that have been convened by the Evaluation Committee. The Evaluation Committee is entitled to decide which Expert Panel will process which application.

11.10. The Expert Panel can use the evaluations and scores of independent experts for the evaluation of applications.

11.11. Although non-binding, the Expert Panels shall rely on the evaluations and scores of the independent experts, if any. The Expert Panels will submit the combined evaluations given to each application belonging to their field of expertise to the Evaluation Committee.

11.12. The Evaluation Committee is responsible for giving each application its final evaluation and score. Although non-binding, the Evaluation Committee shall rely on the combined evaluations given by the Expert Panels when forming the consolidated evaluation.

11.13. The evaluation is based on the following criteria:

11.13.1. justification and scientific quality of the application (methods, expected results, including particular field-specific or application-related characteristics, data management plan etc);

11.13.2. the qualifications of the returning researcher and the capacity to implement the project;

11.13.3. sufficiency of the infrastructure, budget and cost-efficiency of the project (level of experimentality, research capacity of the host institution, state of the available research environment, sufficiency of the infrastructure, etc);

11.13.4. impact of the project on achievement of the objectives of the measure, on the development of Estonian society and economy;

11.13.5. impact of the project on horizontal themes.

11.14. The 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 compile a single ranking list for all applications based on the final evaluations and scores. The compliant applications will be granted in the order of ranking until depletion of the funds allocated for this call for applications.

11.17. In case of applications of equal final score, 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. After that, preference will be given to the applicants coming to Estonia from abroad, having previously received Estonian state funding in order to carry out a postdoctoral research project abroad.

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

11.19. In the final evaluation, the Evaluation Committee may prescribe certain conditions that the host institution and the returning researcher are required to fulfil upon receiving the grant.

11.20. The implementer will make the evaluations and scores stipulated in clauses 11.10 and 11.13, the initial financing proposal (hereinafter “proposal”) of the Evaluation Committee, and the position of the applicant in the ranking list stipulated in clause 11.16 known to the host institution and the returning researcher. The host institution and the returning researcher are entitled to submit a written joint opinion on the initial proposal within the time limit established by the implementer (hearing). At the hearing, attention will primarily be paid to the assessment of the adherence to procedural rules and to the correction of possible factual errors. The scientific evaluation given by the independent experts or by the Evaluation Committee will not be re-evaluated. If the Evaluation Committee has prescribed certain conditions in the final evaluation that must be fulfilled in order to receive the grant, the host institution and the postdoctoral fellow have to submit a consent to secure the compliance with these conditions.

12. Granting of Applications

12.15. Considering the final evaluation and the joint opinion received from the host institution and the returning researcher, the Evaluation Committee will submit a justified and impartial proposal to the implementer:

12.15.1. to grant the application in full;

12.15.2. to grant the application in parts;

12.15.3. 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 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 returning researcher consent

to the implementer's decision on reducing the amount of grant. If the host institution and the returning 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 returning researcher 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 the application does not meet the requirements set out in these guidelines:

12.6.1. based on the results of evaluation, the threshold specified in clause 11.18 is not exceeded or met;

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

12.6.3. the host institution does not consent to the decision on partial granting of the application or the conditions set.

12.7. A decision to reject an application shall include the information stipulated in §8 (5) of the Regulation on Processing Applications.

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

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

Chapter 4

ALLOCATION OF GRANTS

13. Allocation of Grants

13.1. The implementer will enter into a tripartite agreement (hereinafter "grant agreement") with the host institution and the returning researcher. The grant agreement entails the information stipulated in §8 (4) of the Regulation on Processing Applications as well as the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of the parties.

13.2. The grant is allocated to the host institution and the host institution is required to enable the returning researcher to use the allocated grant for implementing the returning researcher project in accordance with the application.

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

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

Chapter 5

TEMPORARY SUSPENSION AND TERMINATION OF A PROJECT

14. Temporary Suspension of a Returning Researcher Project

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

14.2. The returning researcher project can be temporarily suspended on the basis of a reasoned joint application of the host institution and the returning researcher, to be submitted to the implementer. If necessary, a member of the Evaluation Committee will provide the implementer with an assessment of the justification of temporary suspension of the returning researcher project.

14.3. In case of circumstances referred to in clause 14.1, the returning researcher project can be temporarily suspended for a period of up to three years. The end date of the project will be extended by the period of suspension.

14.4. After temporary suspension, the returning researcher project can only be implemented until the end date of the eligibility period stipulated in clause 4.

14.5. The grant agreement will be suspended for the temporary suspension period of the project.

15. Termination of a Returning Researcher Project

15.1. The project will end on the end date of the grant period.

15.2. All the activities financed with the grant money must be carried out by the end date of the project.

16. Reporting

16.1. The host institution in cooperation with the returning researcher 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 one month after the end date of the project.

16.2. The final report shall include the following:

16.2.1. the results (incl. the main results of the project in the form of a popular science summary both in Estonian and in English) in accordance with the objectives set in the application;

16.2.2. the full texts of the articles that have been published as a result of implementing the project and also contain a reference to the grant as well as the industrial property rights);

16.2.3. the potential applicability of the results and their importance for Estonian research, society, and economy as well as the possible directions for future research;

16.2.4. if the project necessitated compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, the due diligence declaration;

16.2.5 additional information that the host institution and the returning researcher deem relevant;

16.2.6. a report on the usage of the grant.

16.3. In case of early termination of the returning researcher project, the host institution and the returning researcher are required to submit the final report of the project pursuant to clause 16.1.

16.4. In case the host institution is not able to prepare the final report in cooperation with the returning researcher, the final report shall be prepared and submitted to the implementer by the host institution alone.

16.5. On the basis of the final report, the implementer will assess the implementation of the returning researcher project and make the assessment available to the returning researcher and the host institution via ETIS.

17. Making the Results of the Returning Researcher Project Public

17.1. The full texts of the articles that have been published as a result of implementing the returning researcher project will be made freely available to the public via ETIS by the host institution or the returning researcher, unless limited by publishing restrictions, copyright, or intellectual property laws.

17.2 If a publishing house restricts access to the articles temporarily, the host institution or the returning researcher will make the full texts of the articles published as a result of implementing the project freely available once the restriction has expired.

17.3. Upon the publication of the results of the returning researcher project, a reference to the European Regional Development Fund and the number of the Mobilitas Plus returning researcher project must be included. Publications that do not contain a reference to the grant will be disregarded in the final report.

17.4. The main results of the project in the form of a popular science summary both in Estonian and in English will be made freely available by the implementer via ETIS.

Chapter 6

EARLY TERMINATION OF THE GRANT AGREEMENT AND RECLAMATION OF A GRANT

18. Early Termination of the Grant Agreement

18.1. The implementer is entitled to revoke the decision on granting the application and to terminate the grant agreement:

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

18.1.2. the host institution or the returning researcher has submitted a respective request;

18.1.3. the host institution or the returning researcher has fundamentally violated the requirements stipulated in these guidelines or the grant agreement;

18.1.4. the returning researcher is unable to commence or continue implementing the returning researcher project (the death of the returning researcher, serious illness, transitioning to other employment, or other substantial and justifiable circumstances);

18.1.5. the licence from a human ethics or bioethics research committee has not been submitted prior to the beginning of human or animal experiments or it has become evident that the due diligence declaration stemming from the Nagoya Protocol has been disregarded;

18.1.6. the host institution or the returning researcher has intentionally presented false information, or plagiarism or fraudulent activities have become evident in the project-related activities of the returning researcher;

18.1.7. there are other substantial and justifiable circumstances.

18.2. Before the revocation of the decision to grant the application or before the termination of the grant agreement, the implementer shall give the host institution and the returning researcher an opportunity to submit their position.

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

19. Audit and Reclamation of a Grant

19.1. A grant not used for the intended purpose will be reclaimed by the implementer from the host institution.

19.2. The host institution is required to allow the implementer or a person authorised by the implementer to audit the use of the grant and provide necessary assistance, including allowing access to the premises and the territory of the host institution and submitting all the requested documents for the purpose of verifying the correctness of the information provided.