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ANNEX

*European Commission Decision C(2025) 2916*

# ERC Work Programme 2025



**European Research Council**

Established by the European Commission

## About this document

*This document is the annual Work Programme for the European Research Council (ERC) funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.*

*It is the legal document which sets out how the ERC will allocate its funding for the corresponding year.*

*It is established by the ERC Scientific Council and subsequently adopted by the European Commission.*

*The rules applying to the submission and peer review and evaluation of proposals, as well as to the award of grants to successful legal entities are set out in "The European Research Council Rules of Submission, and the related methods & procedures for peer review and proposal evaluation relevant to the specific programme implementing Horizon Europe", referred to in this document as "ERC Rules of submission and evaluation under Horizon Europe", and available at:*

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/erc-rules-for-submission-and-evaluation\\_he-erc\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/erc-rules-for-submission-and-evaluation_he-erc_en.pdf)

## How to apply for ERC grants

*Principal Investigators who wish to apply for ERC grants need to do so through the EU Funding & Tenders Portal, which contains all information on each call, as well as details of National Contact Points, who can provide information and personalised support in different languages:*

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>

*More information on the ERC in general, including its mission and organisation, a description of its funding schemes, a step-by-step application guide, and details on funded projects is available at:*

<http://erc.europa.eu/>

## Summary of main features in 2025

*This ERC Work Programme is the fifth under the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation of the European Union ('Horizon Europe').*

*Most third countries associated to the predecessor Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020 have already, or are expected to be, associated to Horizon Europe. For the purposes of the eligibility conditions, transitional arrangements will continue to apply to applicants established in Horizon 2020 Associated Countries or in other third countries negotiating association to Horizon Europe.*

*Starting, Consolidator, and Synergy Grants will be available under this Work Programme under the actual cost model. Advanced Grants will be implemented as a pilot call using a lump sum contribution.*

*Restrictions on applications to the 2025 calls based on the outcome of the evaluation of calls of prior Work Programmes of the ERC, as well as restrictions for former panel members will apply – see restrictions on submission of proposals under section "Admissibility and eligibility criteria" below. As of 2024, restrictions also apply to Principal Investigators with successful proposals undergoing grant preparation in selected previous calls.*

*For ERC Starting and Consolidator Grants, as from 2023, the reference date towards the calculation of the eligibility period is the certified date of the successful defence (and not the award) of their first PhD degree.*

*While scientific excellence remains the sole criterion of evaluation for frontier research grants, changes to the structure of the Curriculum Vitae and Track Record, as well as to the evaluation procedure, were introduced in 2024. As of 2024, for Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants, a maximum of 44 proposals per panel are assessed at step 2 of the evaluation. Moreover, a distinction in the scoring at step 1 is made between proposals obtaining a score of A and invited to step 2 of the evaluation, and proposals obtaining a score of A but not ranked sufficiently high to be invited to step 2. These novelties continue to apply in Work Programme 2025.*

*ERC Principal Investigators funded under one of the abovementioned grant schemes of prior Work Programmes will also be able to apply for complementary funding via the Proof of Concept Grants.*

*As of 2024, applications to the Proof of Concept Grant are evaluated and selected in two instead of three rounds, based on two specific cut-off dates. This approach remains in place for the Work Programme 2025.*

*To further encourage the submission of excellent proposals by Principal Investigators currently based in non-associated third countries, the ERC has decided to double the amount of additional funding that can be awarded to Advanced Grant applicants moving to the EU or an associated country to take up their ERC grant.*

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# Objectives and Principles of ERC Funding

The fundamental activity of the ERC, via its main frontier research grants<sup>1</sup>, is to provide attractive, long-term funding to support excellent investigators (Principal Investigators) and their research teams to pursue ground-breaking and ambitious research.

Research funded by the ERC is expected to lead to advances at the frontiers of knowledge and to set a clear and inspirational target for frontier research across Europe.

The ERC also awards complementary funding for the Principal Investigators funded by its main grants, in order to fulfil its mission of supporting new ways of working in the scientific world, and to raise the profile of frontier research in Europe, as well as the visibility of ERC programmes to researchers across Europe and internationally.

***Excellence is the sole criterion on the basis of which ERC frontier research grants are awarded***

The ERC's main grants, as well as other Principal Investigator-led actions, are evaluated based on the sole criterion of excellence, comprising a set of detailed evaluation elements decided by the ERC Scientific Council based on the specific objectives of the grant.

The evaluation of applications to the ERC's main grants is conducted by peer review panels composed of renowned scientists and scholars selected by the ERC Scientific Council. The panels may be assisted by independent external experts working remotely.

The ERC's peer review evaluation process has been carefully designed to identify scientific excellence irrespective of the gender, age, nationality, or institution of the Principal Investigator and other potential biases, and to take career breaks, diverse research career paths, as well as the applicant's contributions to the research community into account<sup>2</sup>. The evaluations are monitored to guarantee transparency, fairness, and impartiality in the treatment of proposals. ERC calls are expected to be highly competitive.

***Applications can be made in any field of research***

The ERC's frontier research grants<sup>3</sup> operate on a 'bottom-up' basis without predetermined priorities.

The ERC puts particular emphasis on the frontiers of science, scholarship, and engineering. It welcomes proposals of an interdisciplinary nature, which cross the boundaries between different fields of research, pioneering proposals addressing new and emerging fields of research, or

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<sup>1</sup> Starting Grant, Consolidator Grant, Advanced Grant, and Synergy Grant, also referred to in this Work Programme as 'main grants'.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding negative impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak on a Principal Investigator's CV and Track Record, see the section "Evaluation criterion and procedure".

<sup>3</sup> 'ERC frontier research action' means a principal investigator-led research action, including ERC Proof of Concept, hosted by single or multiple beneficiaries receiving funding from the European Research Council (ERC).

proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions.

ERC funding may also enable new ways of working in the scientific world, with the potential to create breakthrough results and facilitate commercial and social innovation potential of funded research<sup>4</sup>.

***Independent researchers of any age and career stage can apply for attractive long-term funding***

The ERC awards funding to excellent investigators looking to set up or consolidate their own independent research team or programme, as well as to already established research leaders.

The ERC awards flexible, long-term funding for a period of up to five years for the Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants, and up to six years for the Synergy Grants. The Scientific Council reviews funding conditions regularly to make sure that grants remain competitive both at the European and at the international level.

The maximum grant amount varies by grant type. An ERC Starting, Consolidator, and Synergy grant can cover up to 100% of the total eligible direct costs of the research plus a contribution towards indirect costs, in accordance with the conditions set out in the Model Grant Agreement used for ERC actions.

The Advanced Grant will be awarded as a single lump sum contribution for the entirety of the project under this Work Programme. The lump sum will cover the beneficiaries' estimated costs for the project<sup>5</sup>.

ERC grants are portable<sup>6</sup> as described in the Model Grant Agreement.

The ERC aims to use procedures that maintain the focus on excellence, encourage initiative, and combine simplicity and flexibility with accountability<sup>7</sup>. The ERC is continuously looking for ways to improve its procedures in order to fulfil these principles.

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<sup>4</sup> If requested by the granting authority, additional obligations to grant non-exclusive licenses for the exploitation of results apply to the beneficiaries of ERC frontier research grants in case of a public emergency (applicable up to four years after the end of the action) (see Annex 5 of the Model Grant Agreement used for ERC actions).

<sup>5</sup> In accordance with the Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025) ([ARES \(2021\)4424362](#)).

<sup>6</sup> 'Portability' means that Principal Investigators may request to transfer their entire grant, or part of it, to a new beneficiary, under specific conditions

included in the Model Grant Agreement used for ERC actions. These conditions may include provisions for the transfer of equipment purchased and used exclusively for the implementation of the project. For those proposals where ERCEA makes use of Union funds allocated to Member States under shared management and transferred to the Horizon Europe budget (see footnote 20 below), the right to exercise portability will be limited to legal entities established within the territory of the concerned Member State which has requested the transfer of such funds, in accordance with Article 15(5) and (6) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695.

<sup>7</sup> Beneficiaries of ERC research grants are not required to submit a plan for the exploitation and dissemination of the results during project implementation.

## ***Principal Investigators from anywhere in the world can apply for an ERC grant***

ERC grants are open to researchers of any nationality who may reside in any country in the world at the time of the application.

*The ERC is particularly keen to encourage excellent proposals from Principal Investigators based in non-associated third countries wishing to carry out a project with a host institution in the EU or in one of the Associated Countries.*

The host institution must be established in a Member State or an Associated Country. However, the team members of any Principal Investigator, as well as one of the Principal Investigators in a Synergy Grant Group<sup>8</sup> may be based outside of the EU or an Associated Country (see “Eligible host institution”). In this context, further guidance in tracking various security aspects and mitigating associated risks in research have been published by the European Commission, Directorate General for Research and Innovation: Tackling R&I Foreign Interference: Staff Working Document, 2022; the Council Recommendation on Enhancing Research Security, 2024; and the factsheet on Research Security: Building Blocks for Risk Appraisal, 2024<sup>9</sup>.

## ***The ERC frontier research grants aim to empower individual researchers***

## ***and provide the best settings to foster their creativity***

The Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants will support projects carried out by individual teams, which are headed by a single Principal Investigator. ERC Synergy Grants will support small groups of two to four Principal Investigators and their teams with a designated Corresponding Principal Investigator.

The constitution of the research teams is flexible. Depending on the nature of a project, the research team may involve team members from other research organisations situated in the same or in a different country (see “Eligible host institution”). ERC Synergy Grant Groups are neither networks nor consortia of undertakings, universities, research centres, or other legal entities.

*The ERC supports individual Principal Investigators. Support for consortia is provided by other calls under Horizon Europe.*

## ***Host institutions must provide appropriate conditions for the Principal Investigator to independently direct the research and manage its funding***

An ERC grant is awarded to the institution that engages and hosts the Principal

<sup>8</sup> See corresponding table in subsection “Objectives, maximum amount, and duration” below.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation: [Tackling R&I Foreign](#)

[Interference: Staff Working Document](#), 2022; [Council Recommendation on Enhancing Research Security](#), 2024; factsheet on [Research Security: Building Blocks for Risk Appraisal](#), 2024.



Investigator(s)<sup>10</sup>. Grants are awarded to the host institution with the explicit commitment that this institution offers appropriate conditions for the Principal Investigator(s) to independently manage the ERC funded research. It is expected that Principal Investigators will be able to start their project within six months of receiving an invitation letter to start the grant agreement preparation from the ERC.

In the case of Synergy Grants with more than one host institution, each of the host institutions will offer support to the Principal Investigator(s) hosted by them for the duration of the grant.

The host institutions must engage the Principal Investigators for at least the duration of the grant.

The conditions<sup>11</sup> offered by the host institution or institutions, including the '*portability*' of the grant, are the subject of a supplementary agreement between the Principal Investigator(s) and the host institution(s)<sup>12</sup> and must ensure that the Principal Investigator is able to:

- apply for funding independently;

- manage the research and the funding for the project, and make appropriate resource allocation decisions;
- publish independently as main author and include as co-authors only those who have contributed substantially to the reported work;
- select and supervise the work of team members, including doctoral candidates or others;
- have access to appropriate space and facilities for conducting the research;
- meet the time commitments described in the grant agreement<sup>13</sup>.

Public or private institutions, including universities, research organisations, and undertakings can host the Principal Investigator and their team as long as the principles indicated above are respected and the Principal Investigator is not constrained by the research strategy of the entity.

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<sup>10</sup> Normally the Principal Investigator will be employed by the Host Institution, but cases where, for duly justified reasons, the Principal Investigator's employer cannot become the host institution, or where the Principal Investigator is self-employed, can be accommodated. The specific conditions of engagement will be subject to clarification and approval during the granting procedure, or during the amendment procedure for a change of host institution.

<sup>11</sup> These conditions are consistent with "The European Charter for Researchers" included in Annex II to the [Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to](#)

[attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe.](#)

<sup>12</sup> This is supplementary to the ERC Grant Agreement and is described in the Model Grant Agreement for ERC actions.

<sup>13</sup> Time commitments will be monitored, and in cases where the actual commitment is below the minimum levels set out in this Work Programme (see "Minimum Time Commitment"), or the levels indicated in the grant agreement (see "Proposal description" in the section "Main Frontier Research Grants"), appropriate measures may be taken, up to and including grant reduction, suspension or termination in accordance with the grant agreement.

*The ERC welcomes applications from Principal Investigators **hosted by private for-profit research centres**, including industrial laboratories.*

Host institutions are expected to make all appropriate efforts to provide the conditions to attract and retain scientists and scholars of the calibre to be awarded an ERC grant, within the framework provided by the Model Grant Agreement and any other available administrative and legal possibilities.

### **Open science**

Open science is a general principle of the Horizon Europe programme, and a core principle of the ERC. The ERC is committed to the principle of open access to the published output of research, including, in particular, peer-reviewed articles and monographs. It also supports the basic principle of open access to research data and data-related products such as computer code, algorithms, software, workflows, protocols, electronic notebooks, or any other forms of research output. The ERC considers that providing free online access to all these materials can be the most effective way of ensuring that the results of the research it funds can be accessed, read, and used as the basis for further advancement.

Under Horizon Europe, beneficiaries of ERC grants must ensure immediate open access

<sup>14</sup> This includes peer-reviewed book chapters and long-text publications such as monographs, edited collections, critical editions, scholarly exhibition catalogues, or PhD theses.

to all peer-reviewed scientific publications<sup>14</sup> relating to their results as set out in the Model Grant Agreement used for ERC actions. Open access has to be provided with full re-use rights<sup>15</sup>. Beneficiaries must ensure that they or the authors retain sufficient intellectual property rights to comply with their open access requirements. Publishing costs can be considered as eligible costs provided that the publishing venue (e.g. journal, book) is fully open access.

In addition, beneficiaries of ERC grants funded under this Work Programme will be covered by the provisions on research data management as set out in the Model Grant Agreement used for ERC actions. In particular, whenever a project generates research data, beneficiaries are required to manage it in line with the principles of findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability as described by the FAIR principles initiative<sup>16</sup>, and establish a data management plan within the first six months of project implementation. Open access to research data should be ensured under the principle “as open as possible, as closed as necessary”. These provisions are designed to facilitate access, re-use and preservation of the research data generated during the ERC funded research work.

### **Gender balance**

Under Horizon Europe, beneficiaries of ERC grants must take all measures to promote

<sup>15</sup> For monographs and other long-text formats, commercial re-use and derivative works may be excluded as specified in the [General Model Grant Agreement for ERC Actions under Horizon Europe](#).

<sup>16</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18>

equal opportunities between men and women in the implementation of the action, and aim for a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including at supervisory and managerial level, as set out in the Model Grant Agreement used for ERC actions. ERC Principal Investigators should also determine the relevance of integrating sex and gender analysis into their research. Specific activities promoting equal opportunities or gender balance, or covering the gender dimension of research funded by the ERC can be considered as eligible costs where these costs are necessary for the implementation of the action.

### **Ethical principles**

According to Article 19 of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>17</sup>, the proposed research and innovation activities must comply with ethical principles and relevant national, Union and international legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights and its Protocols. Particular attention must be paid to the principle of proportionality, the right to privacy, the right to the protection of personal data, the right to the physical and mental integrity of a person,

the principle of non-discrimination, and the need to ensure high levels of human health protection. Certain fields of research, like activities aiming at human cloning for reproductive purposes, shall not be financed<sup>18</sup>.

Funding of human embryonic stem cell research is possible within the ethical framework set out in Article 18 (2) and Article 19(3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>19</sup>.

The proposed research and innovation activities must have an exclusive focus on civil applications<sup>19</sup>.

All proposals recommended for funding will be subject to ethics review to identify actions which raise complex or serious ethics issues.

Actions which do not fulfil the ethics requirements of Article 19 of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 shall be rejected or terminated once the ethical unacceptability has been established.

### **Security**

ERC actions must comply with applicable security rules and, in particular, rules on the protection of classified information against unauthorised disclosure, including

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<sup>17</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013 (OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1).

<sup>18</sup> As set out in Article 18(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695.

<sup>19</sup> As set out in Articles 7(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013 (OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1).

compliance with any relevant Union and national law<sup>20</sup>.

### **Research integrity**

Research integrity is a core principle of the ERC. It is essential to maintain and promote a culture of research integrity at all stages of the evaluation and granting process to make ERC competitions fair and efficient, and to maintain the trust of both the scientific community and society as a whole.

Cases of scientific misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misrepresentation of data that may arise during the evaluation or throughout the life cycle of an ERC funded project will be addressed vigorously by the ERC within the applicable legal and procedural framework. Any breach of research integrity by Principal Investigators, team members, or beneficiaries may be sanctioned by measures such as the rejection of proposals from evaluation, requests for measures to be taken by the host institution, reduction of the grant, and suspension or termination of grants.

The host institutions that engage and host ERC Principal Investigators have the primary responsibility for the detection of scientific misconduct, and for the investigation and adjudication of any breaches of research integrity that may arise. Therefore, host institutions are expected to have working structures in place to uphold research integrity, and to

make all appropriate efforts to verify that no allegations of scientific misconduct are pending against any Principal Investigator applying for or participating in an ERC grant, and to bring to the attention of the ERC any such allegations or cases of scientific misconduct.

The ERC applies the same rigour to ensuring that its evaluation process is governed by principles of research integrity, in particular, through rules on confidentiality and conflict of interest.

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<sup>20</sup> See the rules for protecting EU classified information set out by Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified

information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53), Article 20 of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 and Annex 4 to this Work Programme.

# Main Frontier Research Grants

## Indicative summary of calls from the 2025 budget<sup>21,22</sup>

	<i>Starting Grant</i>	<i>Consolidator Grant</i>	<i>Advanced Grant</i>	<i>Synergy Grant</i>
<i>Call identifier</i>	<b>ERC-2025-StG</b>	<b>ERC-2025-CoG</b>	<b>ERC-2025-AdG</b>	<b>ERC-2025-SyG</b>
<i>Call opens</i>	10 July 2024	26 September 2024	22 May 2025	11 July 2024

<sup>21</sup> These dates are indicative. The Director of the European Research Council Executive Agency may open a call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged opening date. The Director may delay the envisaged call deadline by up to two months. The budget amounts for 2025 are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the draft budget for 2025 after the adoption of the budget for 2025 by the budgetary authority, or if the budget is not adopted, as provided for in the system of provisional twelfths.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to this indicative amount from ERC 2025 budget, ERCEA may use Union funds allocated to Member States under shared management and transferred to the Horizon Europe budget to fund exclusively mono-beneficiary proposals which scored A in the last evaluation step but are below available budget and have their host institution established in the Member State that has requested such transfer.

	<i>Starting Grant</i>	<i>Consolidator Grant</i>	<i>Advanced Grant</i>	<i>Synergy Grant</i>
<i>Call deadline</i>	15 October 2024	14 January 2025	28 August 2025	6 November 2024
<i>Budget million EUR<sup>23</sup> (estimated number of grants)</i>	751 (483)	719 (354)	683 (276)	500 (48)
<i>Planned dates to inform applicants after each step</i>	5 May 2025 22 August 2025	18 July 2025 12 December 2025	30 January 2026 12 June 2026	14 April 2025 15 August 2025 27 October 2025
<i>Indicative date for signature of grant agreements</i>	21 December 2025	12 April 2026	17 November 2026	24 March 2026

<sup>23</sup> Rounded to the nearest million.

## Grants

### Objectives, maximum amount, and duration

The objectives, maximum amount, and duration of the main frontier research grants awarded by the ERC are given in the table below.

Under this Work Programme there will be two types of funding for ERC main grants: actual cost and lump sum funding (see table below). In both cases, the maximum grant amount will be project-based, i.e., established upon the budget proposed by the applicant.

Grant	Objectives and Principal Investigator	Maximum amount and duration of the grant	Type of Funding
<b>Starting Grant</b>	<p>Support for excellent Principal Investigators at the career stage at which they are starting their own independent research team or programme.</p> <p>Principal Investigators must demonstrate the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of their research proposal.</p> <p>A Starting Grant Principal Investigator should have already shown evidence of the potential for research independence, for example by having produced <b>at least one important publication as main author or without the participation of their PhD supervisor.</b></p>	<p>Up to <b>EUR 1 500 000</b> for a period of <b>5 years.</b></p> <p>Additional funding up to <b>EUR 1 000 000.</b></p>	Actual Cost



Consolidator Grant	<p>Support for excellent Principal Investigators at the career stage at which they may still be consolidating their own independent research team or programme.</p> <p>Principal Investigators must demonstrate the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of their research proposal.</p> <p>A Consolidator Grant Principal Investigator should have already shown evidence of research independence.</p>	<p>Up to <b>EUR 2 000 000</b> for a period of <b>5 years</b>. Additional funding up to <b>EUR 1 000 000</b>.</p>	Actual Cost
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<b>Advanced Grant</b>	<p>Support for excellent Principal Investigators at the career stage at which they are already established research leaders with a recognised track record of research achievements.</p> <p>Principal Investigators must demonstrate the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of their research proposal.</p> <p>An ERC Advanced Grant Principal Investigator is expected to be an active researcher and to have a track record of significant research achievements.</p>	<p>Up to <b>EUR 2 500 000</b> for a period of <b>5 years</b>.</p> <p>Additional funding up to <b>EUR 1 000 000<sup>24</sup></b>.</p>	Lump Sum
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<sup>24</sup> Except for Principal Investigators in the Advanced Grant 2025 call re-locating to the EU or an Associated Country from elsewhere to take up their ERC grant. In this case, the maximum additional funding shall be EUR 2 000 000.

<p><b>Synergy Grant</b></p>	<p>Support for a small group of two to four Principal Investigators to jointly address ambitious research problems that could not be addressed by the individual Principal Investigators and their teams working alone.</p> <p>Synergy projects should enable substantial advances at the frontiers of knowledge, stemming, for example, from the cross-fertilisation of scientific fields, from new productive lines of enquiry, or new methods and techniques, including unconventional approaches and investigations at the interface between established disciplines. The transformative research funded by Synergy Grants should have the potential of becoming a benchmark on a global scale.</p> <p>Principal Investigators of any career stage are welcome and must demonstrate the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of their research proposal.</p>	<p>Up to <b>EUR 10 000 000</b> for a period of <b>6 years.</b> Additional funding up to <b>EUR 4 000 000.</b></p>	<p>Actual Cost</p>
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Principal Investigators must also demonstrate that their group can successfully bring together the scientific elements necessary to address the scope and complexity of the proposed research question.

Applications must be submitted by a group of a minimum of two and a maximum of four innovative and active Principal Investigators, referred to as the 'Synergy Grant Group', with competitive track records as appropriate to their career stage.

Synergy Grant Groups are expected to demonstrate that they can successfully bring together those elements – such as skills, knowledge, experience, expertise, disciplines, methods, approaches, teams, access to infrastructures – necessary to address the scope and complexity of the proposed research question. Applicants are expected to describe the contribution of each PI, their team, and the

	resources to achieve the objectives proposed.		
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The maximum amount of the grants is reduced pro rata temporis for projects of a shorter duration<sup>25</sup>.

Additional funding up to the amounts set out in the table above can be requested in the proposal to cover the following eligible costs when these are necessary to carry out the proposed work: (a) "start-up" costs for Principal Investigators moving to the EU or an Associated Country from elsewhere as a consequence of receiving the ERC grant, and/or (b) the purchase of major equipment, and/or (c) access to large facilities, and/or (d) other major experimental and field work costs, excluding personnel costs<sup>26</sup>.

Additional funding is not subject to pro rata temporis reduction for projects of shorter duration.

All funding requested is assessed during evaluation.

### ***Intellectual property rights***

The granting authority may, up to four years after the end of the action, object to a transfer of ownership or to the exclusive licensing of results, as set out in the specific provision of Annex 5 of the Model Grant Agreement for ERC actions.

<sup>25</sup> This does not apply to ongoing projects.

<sup>26</sup> The exclusion of personnel costs does not apply to Principal Investigators applying to the Advanced Grant 2025 call.

## Funding

### *Maximum amount of the grant, grant assessment, and Union contribution*

The maximum grant amount varies depending on the grant type (see section "Grants" above) and is established based upon the individual budget proposed by the applicant. The project budget is provided in EUR.

During the peer review evaluation, evaluation panels will assess the funding requested by the applicant, including any request for additional funding (see "Objectives, maximum amount, and duration"), against the needs of the project before making any recommendation for funding.

The funding requested must be fully justified by an estimation of the real project cost. The panels may suggest modifications to the indicative budgetary breakdown in the application, particularly where they consider funding requests not to be properly justified. In such cases, they must explain in writing any such suggested modification. In particular, for the Advanced Grants, the evaluation panels will carry out an assessment on the

proposed budget structure and cost estimates<sup>27</sup> against the planned work in order to formulate, where applicable, recommendations for modified lump sum contributions<sup>28</sup>.

For actual cost grants (Starting, Consolidator, and Synergy Grants), eligible project costs will be reimbursed at a funding rate of 100% for direct costs plus a flat-rate of 25% for indirect costs<sup>29</sup>. Reimbursements will be budget-based and will cover actual costs or unit costs<sup>30</sup> depending on the cost category. The amount of the awarded grant represents a maximum overall figure – the final amount to be paid must be justified on the basis of the costs actually incurred for the project and it may be lower than the requested EU contribution.

For lump sum grants (Advanced Grants), the payment of the lump sum contribution will be based on the work carried out and reported, irrespective of the actual costs incurred for the project and/or the successful outcome of the project activities. In this type of grant, there will be one lump sum contribution (broken down by beneficiaries - if applicable), fully

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<sup>27</sup> Under Advanced Grant call, applicants shall prepare their proposed budget including only costs that would be considered eligible under an actual cost grant, i.e., the project eligible direct costs, plus a flat-rate of 25% of the direct cost categories that qualify for the calculation of indirect costs under the Horizon Europe rules.

<sup>28</sup> In accordance with the [Decision of 7 July 2021 authorising the use of lump sum contributions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the](#)

[Framework Programme for Research and Innovation \(2021-2027\) – and in actions under the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community \(2021-2025\)](#).

<sup>29</sup> Excluding the direct eligible costs for subcontracting and internally invoiced goods and services.

<sup>30</sup> Costs for internally invoiced goods and services directly used for the action may be declared as unit costs.

covering the work to be implemented in the proposed action.

For all main grants, the purchase of equipment, infrastructure, or other assets used for the action must be budgeted as depreciation costs, in line with the beneficiary's usual accounting practices. However, at the request of the applicant, equipment, infrastructure, or other assets purchased specifically for the action (or developed as part of the action tasks) may, exceptionally, be included as full capitalised costs. These items should be clearly listed and justified in the proposal.

### ***Call budgets***

For the Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grant calls, an indicative budget will be allocated to each panel in proportion to the budgetary demand of its assigned proposals in order to equalise the success rate across panels.

## Admissibility and eligibility criteria

The beneficiaries (and their actions) must remain eligible for the entire duration of the action. Costs and contributions will be eligible only as long as the beneficiary and the action are eligible. Applicants and beneficiaries must immediately inform the services of the European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA) at any point in time of any events or circumstances, which would be likely to affect the fulfilment of the eligibility criteria.

For actual cost grants, the Principal Investigator will have the flexibility to modify the budgetary breakdown during the course of the project. Requests to modify the budgetary breakdown of additional funding<sup>31</sup> may be accepted only provided that such modifications remain within the objectives for which the additional funding was awarded.

For Advanced Grants, the Principal Investigator will have the flexibility to use the lump sum contribution as they see fit, as long as the project is implemented as agreed. Where additional funding is awarded, that part of the contribution can be used with the same flexibility as the rest of the contribution during the implementation of the grant, provided that the initial decision awarding the Union

contribution, including the additional funding, is not called into question.

### *Admissible and eligible proposals*

All proposals must be complete, readable, and accessible. They must be submitted by eligible Principal Investigators as defined below before the relevant call deadline. A complete proposal needs to include all parts or sections (see section “Proposal submission and description” below). A proposal can be submitted in any official EU language. However, for reasons of efficiency, the use of English is strongly advised<sup>32</sup>. Proposals which do not meet these criteria may be declared inadmissible.

The content of the proposal must relate to the objectives and to the grant type set out in the call, as defined in this Work Programme. If a proposal is considered not to relate to the objectives of the grant and/or call for proposals, it will be declared ineligible.

Applications where the Principal Investigator proposes to commit less time in the EU or an Associated Country, or to the project than the minimum percentages set out in the subsection “Minimum time

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<sup>31</sup> As defined in the subsection “Objectives, maximum amount and duration” above.

<sup>32</sup> The working language of the ERC evaluation panels is English. If the proposal is in an official EU language different from English, the ERCEA will provide the evaluation panels with a raw machine

translation version of the proposal. Such a translated version will not be verified by the ERCEA. An English translation of the abstract must be included in the proposal.



commitment" below will be declared ineligible.

If it becomes clear before, during, or after the peer review evaluation phase that one or more of the admissibility or eligibility criteria have not been met, the proposal will be declared inadmissible or ineligible, and it will be rejected.

Where there is a doubt on the admissibility or eligibility of a proposal, the peer review evaluation may proceed pending a decision of the Responsible Authorising Officer following the opinion of the admissibility and eligibility review committee<sup>33</sup>.

### **Eligible Scientific Fields**

All scientific fields are eligible for ERC funding<sup>34</sup>.

### **Eligible Principal Investigators**

The ERC actions are open to researchers of any nationality, who intend to conduct their research activity in any EU Member State or Associated Country<sup>35</sup>. Principal Investigators may be of any age and nationality, and may reside in any country in the world at the time of the application.

Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grant proposals are submitted by the Principal Investigator(s) taking scientific responsibility for the project, on

behalf of the host institution. There are specific eligibility criteria for a Principal Investigator applying to the Starting or Consolidator Grants based on the date of the successful defence of their first PhD degree<sup>36</sup> (or equivalent doctoral degree<sup>37</sup>) as set out in the table below. This 'streaming' allows applicants to be compared with researchers at a similar career stage.

Groups of Principal Investigators applying for the ERC Synergy Grant must fulfil the conditions listed under the subsection "Objectives, maximum amount, and duration" (see corresponding table). One of the Principal Investigators must be designated as the Corresponding Principal Investigator.

At any one time, one Principal Investigator per Synergy Grant Group, except the Corresponding Principal Investigator, may be hosted and engaged by an institution outside of the EU or Associated Countries.

The ERC expects the composition of a Synergy Grant Group to remain unchanged throughout the lifetime of the grant. If a Principal Investigator leaves a Synergy Grant Group, the grant may continue only exceptionally, subject to a scientific evaluation, and provided that all eligibility criteria will continue to be met.

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<sup>33</sup> For further information, see applicable [ERC Rules of submission and evaluation under Horizon Europe](#), which can be found on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal.

<sup>34</sup> Research proposals within the scope of Annex I to the Euratom Treaty, namely those directed towards nuclear energy applications, must be submitted to relevant calls under the Euratom Research & Training Programme.

<sup>35</sup> See Annex 3.

<sup>36</sup> In order to be eligible to apply to the ERC Starting or Consolidator Grant, a Principal Investigator must hold a PhD or an equivalent doctoral degree.

<sup>37</sup> See ERC Scientific Council's note on 'PhD and Equivalent Doctoral Degrees' in Annex 2, including specific provisions for holders of medical degrees.

Eligibility period: Principal Investigator(s) who have successfully defended their first PhD		
Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced and Synergy Grant
<p>&gt; 2 and ≤ 7 years</p> <p>prior to 1 January 2025</p> <p>Cut-off dates: Successful defence of PhD between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2022 (inclusive)</p>	<p>&gt; 7 and ≤ 12 years</p> <p>prior to 1 January 2025</p> <p>Cut-off dates: Successful defence of PhD between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2017 (inclusive)</p>	<p>No specific criteria</p>

*The date of the PhD considered for the calculation of the eligibility period is the date of the successful defence of the first PhD degree.*

*The eligibility periods set out in the table above can be extended beyond 7 and 12 years for the Starting and Consolidator Grants, respectively, for the following properly documented circumstances<sup>38</sup>, provided they started before the call deadline:*

*- **Maternity**: 18 months extension for each child born before or after the date of the successful defence of their first PhD degree. If the applicant can document a longer total maternity leave, the eligibility period will be extended by the documented amount of actual leave(s) for all children taken before the call deadline.*

*- **Paternity**: extension by the documented time of paternity leave taken before the call deadline for each child born before or after the date of the successful defence of their first PhD degree.*

*- **Long-term illness**<sup>39</sup> or **national service**: extension by the documented amount of leave taken by the Principal Investigator before the call deadline for each incident, which occurred after the date of the successful defence of their first PhD degree.*

*- **Disability**<sup>40</sup>: Extension corresponding to the reduced amount of working time (including leave taken) and/or the degree of disability as documented by the Principal Investigator, before the*

<sup>38</sup> For applicants whose first eligible degree is their medical degree such incidents can be considered from the date of completion of their medical degree.

<sup>39</sup> Over 90 days for the Principal Investigator or a close family member (child, spouse, parent or sibling).

<sup>40</sup> Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)).

call deadline, and which occurred after the date of the successful defence of their first PhD degree.

- **Clinical training:** extension by the documented amount of clinical training received by the Principal Investigator **after** the reference date of the first eligible degree and before the call deadline, **up to a maximum of 4 years**.

- **Major disasters**<sup>41</sup>: extension by the documented time of a Principal Investigator's inability to work<sup>42</sup> before the call deadline due to a major disaster, which occurred after the date of the successful defence of their first PhD degree.

- **Seeking Asylum:** extension by the documented time of the Principal Investigator's inability to work before the call deadline due to seeking asylum<sup>43</sup>, which occurred after the date of the successful defence of their first PhD degree.

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<sup>41</sup> Major disasters include large-scale geological (e.g., earthquakes), meteorological (e.g., floods) or human-caused (e.g., armed conflicts) events that cause loss of life or property.

<sup>42</sup> For a minimum of 90 days.

<sup>43</sup> The possible period of extension runs from the start date of asylum/refugee application to the date of decision on the applicant Principal Investigator's refugee status and/or receipt of specific residence permit.

## Minimum time commitment

Principal Investigators funded through the main ERC grants must spend a minimum percentage of their working time on the ERC project, and a minimum percentage of their working time in a Member State or Associated Country<sup>44</sup>, as set out in the table below.

Minimum percentage of the working time of a Principal Investigator that must be spent	Starting Grant	Consolidator Grant	Advanced Grant	Synergy Grant
On the ERC project	50%	40%	30%	30% for each Principal Investigator
In a Member State or Associated Country <sup>45,46</sup>	50%	50%	50%	50% for each Principal Investigator engaged and hosted by an institution in the EU or Associated Countries

<sup>44</sup> For further guidance, see the [Annotated Grant Agreement](#) on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal.

<sup>45</sup> For Principal Investigators hosted and engaged by international European research organisations, any time spent working for these organisations may count as working time spent in a Member State or an Associated Country for the purpose of the Principal Investigator's time commitment.

<sup>46</sup> See subsection "Eligible Host Institution" below regarding field work.

## **Eligible Host Institution**

The host institution (Applicant Legal Entity<sup>47</sup>) must engage and host<sup>48</sup> the Principal Investigator for at least the duration of the project, as defined in the grant agreement. It must either be established in a Member State or Associated Country<sup>49</sup> as a legal entity created under national law, or it may be an international European research organisation (such as the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), etc.), or any other entity created under EU law. In a Synergy Grant, one host institution, except the corresponding host institution, may be an international organisation or a legal entity established outside the European Union or an Associated Country, subject to any restrictions provided in Annex 3 below.

International organisations with headquarters in a Member State or Associated Country will be deemed to be established in that Member State or Associated Country. Any type of legal entity, public or private, including

universities, research organisations and undertakings can host Principal Investigators and their teams.

To be eligible, legal entities from a Member State or an Associated Country that are public bodies, research organisations, or higher education institutions (including private research organisations and private higher education institutions) must have a gender equality plan or an equivalent strategic document in place for the duration of the project. The gender equality plan or equivalent must fulfil the mandatory requirements listed in Annex 5 below.

It is expected that the research project will be implemented within the territory of the Member States or Associated Countries<sup>50</sup>. This does not exclude field work or other research activities in cases where these must necessarily be conducted outside the European Union or the Associated Countries in order to achieve the scientific objectives of the project/activity<sup>51</sup>.

It is also expected that the host institution will be the only participating legal entity in the case of a Starting, Consolidator, or

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<sup>47</sup> The applicant legal entity must have stable and sufficient resources to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects. Information on financial capacity checks is provided in the ERC Rules of submission and evaluation under Horizon Europe. Applicants that are subject to the administrative sanction of exclusion or are in one of the exclusion situations set out in the [Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council](#) (the "Financial Regulation") are banned from receiving EU grants and can NOT participate. Please see Articles 136 and 141 of the EU Financial Regulation, as well as important information on possible exclusion and

registration of economic operators in the Commission's Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) on the final page of this Work Programme.

<sup>48</sup> See footnote 10 above.

<sup>49</sup> See Annex 3.

<sup>50</sup> With the exception of Synergy Grant projects, when a Principal Investigator is hosted and engaged by an institution outside of the EU or Associated Countries (see corresponding table in subsection "Objectives, maximum amount, and duration" above).

<sup>51</sup> Time spent on such field work or other research activities may count as time spent in the EU or the Associated Countries for the purpose of the Principal Investigator's time commitment.

Advanced Grant. In a Synergy Grant, up to four host institutions may engage Principal Investigators.

Where they bring scientific added value to the project, additional team members may also be hosted by additional legal entities<sup>52</sup>, which may be established anywhere, including outside the European Union or Associated Countries, or international organisations, subject to any restrictions provided in Annex 3 below.

Legal entities established outside the European Union or an Associated Country are eligible for funding when:

- they are one of the host institutions in a Synergy Grant at any one time<sup>53</sup>, or
- they host additional team members bringing scientific added value to the project, or
- their participation is deemed essential for carrying out the action,

provided that they are not excluded from participation or covered by restrictive measures set out in Annex 3 below.

### **Restrictions on submission of proposals**

Thousands of high-quality proposals are received each year and only outstanding proposals are likely to be funded. In order to maintain the quality and integrity of ERC's evaluation process, the Scientific Council decided to introduce restrictions on applications from 2009. These restrictions were extended from 2015.

The following restrictions apply:

- A researcher may participate as Principal Investigator<sup>54</sup> in only one main frontier research grant at any one time<sup>55</sup>;
- An applicant Principal Investigator, whose proposal has been selected for funding and who is preparing a grant agreement<sup>56</sup> under a 2023 or 2024 ERC call, may not apply for a Starting, Consolidator, Advanced or Synergy Grant under a 2025 ERC call;
- A researcher participating as Principal Investigator in one of the ERC main frontier research grants may not submit another proposal for a main ERC grant, unless the existing project ends<sup>57</sup> less than two years after the call deadline;

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<sup>52</sup> Consortium agreements are not required for ERC multi-beneficiary grants, as the Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants will support projects carried out by individual teams, which are headed by a single Principal Investigator. The ERC Synergy Grant Groups are neither networks nor consortia of undertakings, universities, research centres, or other legal entities.

<sup>53</sup> See corresponding table in section "Grants. Objectives, maximum amount, and duration" above.

<sup>54</sup> Including all Principal Investigators supported under the Synergy Grant.

<sup>55</sup> A new main frontier research grant project can only start after the duration of the project fixed in a previous grant agreement for one of the main frontier research grants has ended.

<sup>56</sup> As described in the [ERC Rules of submission and evaluation under Horizon Europe](#).

<sup>57</sup> According to the duration of the project fixed in the previous grant agreement of the main frontier research grant.

- A Principal Investigator who is a serving Panel Member for a 2025 ERC call or who served as a Panel Member for a 2023 ERC call may not apply to a 2025 ERC call for the same type of grant;
- A Principal Investigator may submit proposals to different ERC main frontier research grant calls published under the same Work Programme, but only the first eligible proposal will be evaluated.

Further restrictions for submission under the ERC Work Programme 2025 are set out in the table below. **The Scientific Council may decide in the light of experience that different or comparable restrictions will apply in subsequent years.**

The restrictions related to the outcome of the evaluation in previous calls are designed to allow unsuccessful Principal Investigators the time necessary to develop a stronger proposal.

The year of an ERC call for proposals refers to the Work Programme under which the call was published and can be established by its call identifier. A 2025 ERC call for proposals is therefore one that was published under the Work Programme

2025 and will have 2025 in the call identifier (for example ERC-2025-StG).

Inadmissible, ineligible or withdrawn proposals do not count against any of the restrictions in the table below.

Call to which the Principal Investigator applied under previous ERC Work Programmes and proposal evaluation outcome		2025 ERC calls to which a Principal Investigator is <i>not</i> eligible
2023 and 2024 Starting, Consolidator, Advanced Grant, or Synergy Grant	Rejected on the grounds of a breach of research integrity	Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grant
2023 Starting, Consolidator, or Advanced Grant	C at Step 1	Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grant
2024 Starting, Consolidator, or Advanced Grant	A or B at Step 2	No restrictions
	B or C at Step 1	Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grant
2023 and 2024 Synergy Grant	A or B at Step 3	No restrictions
	B at Step 1 or 2	No restrictions
	C at Step 1	Synergy Grant



## Proposal submission and description

### Proposal submission

Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grant proposals are submitted by the Principal Investigator, who has scientific responsibility for the project, on behalf of the host institution.

Synergy Grant proposals are submitted by a Corresponding Principal Investigator who will be the administrative contact point for the group. Together, all the Principal Investigators have scientific responsibility for the group's project on behalf of the host institution, or host institutions, which are the applicant legal entities.

*Proposal submission is made electronically. Early registration and submission is strongly recommended and should be done as early as possible before the call deadline.*

For each call, Information for Applicants<sup>58</sup> is published on the ERC website and the EU Funding & Tenders Portal, which describes in detail how the electronic forms should be completed.

<sup>58</sup> As well as other relevant documents, including the ERC Rules of submission and evaluation under Horizon Europe.

<sup>59</sup> The Extended Synopsis, Curriculum Vitae and Track Record, Scientific Proposal, Resources and Time Commitment are collectively referred to in this Work Programme as the 'research proposal'. Proposals will not include a plan for the exploitation

### Proposal description

A complete proposal consists of the following elements<sup>59</sup>, with the following page limits<sup>60</sup> for Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grant proposals.

***Extended Synopsis: 5 pages***

***Curriculum Vitae and Track Record: up to 4 pages for each Principal Investigator***

***Scientific Proposal: 14 pages***

***Resources and Time Commitment: 2 pages***

***Host Institution Binding Statement of Support***

***Ethics Issues Table***

***PhD record and supporting documentation for eligibility checking*** (for Starting and Consolidator Grants only)

For Synergy Grant proposals, the page limits above apply except that the page limit for the Scientific Proposal is 15 pages and the Resources and Time Commitment element is not limited to 2 pages.

and dissemination of the results, including communication activities, in the sense of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

<sup>60</sup> Incomplete proposals may be declared inadmissible, see section "Admissibility and eligibility criteria" above. References and the funding ID section are not counted towards these page limits.

Only the material that is presented within these limits will be evaluated (peer reviewers will only be asked to read, and will be under no obligation to read beyond, the material presented within the page limits).

*The host institution must confirm its association with, and its support to, the project and the Principal Investigator. As part of the application, the institution must provide a binding statement that the conditions of independence are already fulfilled or will be provided to the Principal Investigator if the application is successful, according to the template provided in the Information for Applicants. Proposals that do not include this institutional statement may be declared inadmissible.*

**Extended Synopsis:** This should be a concise presentation of the scientific proposal, with particular attention to the ground-breaking nature of the research project and the feasibility of the outlined scientific approach. At step 1, the scientific proposal is not assessed, so all essential information must be covered in the synopsis. The applicant will choose a primary evaluation panel (as listed in Annex 1) and may also indicate a secondary evaluation panel. The applicant should indicate when he or she believes that the proposal is of a cross-panel or cross-domain nature. In the case of Synergy

Grant applications, only keywords, and not panels, should be indicated.

### **Curriculum Vitae (CV) and Track Record:**

The CV and Track Record should include personal details, education, key qualifications, current position(s) and relevant previous positions, a list of up to ten research outputs that demonstrate how the applicant has advanced knowledge in their field, with an emphasis on more recent achievements, and a list of selected examples of significant peer recognition. A short explanation of the significance of the selected outputs, the role of the applicant in producing each of them, and how they demonstrate the applicant's capacity to successfully carry out their proposed project may be included, as well as a short explanation of the importance of the listed examples of significant peer recognition.

The applicant may also include relevant additional information on career breaks, diverse career paths, and life events<sup>61</sup>, as well as any particularly noteworthy contributions to the research community. These will provide context to the evaluation panels when assessing the Principal Investigator's research achievements and peer recognition in relation to their career stage. See section "Evaluation criterion and procedure" below.

**Scientific Proposal:** This should be a description of the scientific and technical aspects of the project, demonstrating the ground-breaking nature of the research, its

<sup>61</sup> In the context of the Covid-19 outbreak, any specific situation caused by the pandemic with a

negative impact on the Curriculum Vitae and Track Record should be mentioned under this element.

potential impact, and research methodology. This should include a succinct “funding ID” which must specify any current research grants and their subject, and any on-going application for work related to the proposal.

For Synergy Grants, the research methodology section should also describe and justify the collaborative arrangements enabling the Synergy Grant Group to carry out the proposed joint work.

**Resources and Time Commitment:** The proposal should clearly specify the percentage of the applicant's working time that will be spent in the EU or an Associated Country, and the percentage of the

applicant's working time that will be devoted to the project<sup>62</sup>, as well as a full estimation of the real project cost<sup>63</sup>, including a breakdown of personnel costs, whenever possible by team members category.

In particular, Advanced Grant proposals must include a detailed budget table, based on realistic cost estimates in order to define the lump sum contribution. Cost estimates must be an approximation of the proposal's actual costs, and are subject to the same eligibility rules as actual cost ERC grants.

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<sup>62</sup> For further guidance, see the [Annotated Grant Agreement](#) on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal

<sup>63</sup> For Synergy Grants, the estimation will be presented by each Principal Investigator.

## Evaluation criterion and procedure

### *Evaluation criterion and elements*

For Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy grants, **excellence is the sole criterion of evaluation.**

The panels will primarily evaluate:

- the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of the research project.

At the same time, the panels will evaluate:

- the intellectual capacity, creativity, and commitment of the Principal Investigator(s), with a focus on the extent to which the Principal Investigator(s) has the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project.

In the case of a Synergy Grant application, the peer reviewers will need to see that the collaborative working arrangements between the Principal Investigators, described as part of the research methodology, can ensure scientific excellence.

### *Additional considerations*

During the evaluation, the peer review panels will take into account the phase of the Principal Investigator's transition to independence, diverse research career paths and particularly noteworthy contributions to the research community, as well as possible breaks in the research

career of the applicant and the effects of major life events or pandemic restrictions on the applicant's progression as a researcher. Applicants may include relevant additional information on their research careers to provide context to the evaluation panels when assessing their research achievements and peer recognition (see "Proposal description" above). Synergy Grant Principal Investigators applying as part of a group for a Synergy Grant will be evaluated according to their individual career stage.

In the context of the Covid-19 outbreak, applicants may mention in their research proposal (Curriculum Vitae) any specific situation caused by the pandemic that had a negative impact on their CV or track record.

In general, projects wholly or largely consisting in the collation and compilation of existing material in new databases, editions, or collections are unlikely to constitute ground-breaking or 'frontier' research in themselves, however useful such resources might be to subsequent original research. Such projects are therefore unlikely to be recommended for funding by the ERC's panels. Furthermore, ERC evaluation panels are instructed to approve or reject proposals as a whole, and they may not select parts of a proposal for funding.

Plagiarism detection software may be used to analyse proposals submitted to the ERC.

The detailed evaluation elements applying to the excellence of the research project and the Principal Investigator are set out below (see “Evaluation Elements applying to Excellence”).

### **Evaluation procedure<sup>64</sup>**

#### **For Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants**

A **single submission of the proposal** will be followed by a **two-step evaluation**. The evaluation will be conducted by means of a structure of high-level peer review panels as listed in Annex 1. The panels may be assisted by independent external experts working remotely.

The applicant Principal Investigator can request during the electronic proposal submission that up to three specific persons should not act as an evaluator in the evaluation of their proposal<sup>65</sup>.

**At step 1**, the Extended Synopsis and the Principal Investigator's CV and Track Record will be assessed.

Based on the outcome of the evaluation at step 1, up to 44 proposals per panel will be retained for step 2 of the evaluation.

**At step 2**, the entire research proposal<sup>59</sup> will be assessed.

The allocation of the proposals to the various panels will be based on the expressed preference of the applicant

Principal Investigator (see subsection “Proposal description” above). Proposals may be allocated to a different panel with the agreement of both Panel Chairs concerned.

The panel to which a proposal is allocated may request additional reviews by appropriate members of other panel(s) or additional remote evaluators.

*The ERC welcomes **interdisciplinary research proposals**. Proposals of this type are evaluated by ERC's regular panels with the appropriate external expertise.*

Principal Investigators, whose proposals are retained for step 2 of the evaluation, will be invited for an interview to present their proposal to the evaluation panel meeting.

#### **For Synergy Grants**

A **single submission of the proposal** will be followed by a **three-step evaluation**, including interviews. The evaluation will be conducted by means of a structure of dedicated panels. The panels may be assisted by independent external experts working remotely.

The applicant Corresponding Principal Investigator can request, on behalf of the group, during the electronic proposal submission, that up to four specific persons should not act as an evaluator in the evaluation of their proposal<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Procedural aspects that are not specified in this Work Programme are established in the ERC Rules of submission and evaluation under Horizon Europe.

<sup>65</sup> The persons identified may be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal concerned, as long as it remains possible to have the proposal evaluated.

**At step 1**, the extended synopsis of the scientific proposal and the Principal Investigators' CV and Track Records will be assessed. Proposals will be retained for step 2 based on the outcome of the evaluation at step 1 and a budgetary cut-off level of up to seven times the panel's indicative budget.

**At step 2**, the research proposal will be assessed. Proposals will be retained for step 3 based on the outcome of the evaluation at step 2 and a budgetary cut-off level of up to three times the panel's indicative budget.

**At step 3**, all Principal Investigators (forming the Synergy Grant Group) of the proposals retained for step 3 will be invited for an interview to present their proposal at the meeting of the evaluation panel.

The structure and membership of the panels at each step is not predefined but will be decided dynamically in relation to the proposals received. Step 1 panels will

be formed from approximately 90 panel members and chairs. Five to seven step 2 panels will be formed after the step 1 filtering to ensure the best expertise for a group of proposals. The step 2 panels will be composed using the step 1 panel members, grouping them into panels of comparable size. The panel to which a proposal is allocated may request additional reviews by appropriate members of other panel(s) or additional remote evaluators. At step 3, the interview panels may be reconfigured to ensure the best expertise for the proposals.

### ***Evaluation Elements applying to Excellence***

#### **1. Research Project**

##### **Ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility**

##### **Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grants**

##### ***Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project***

*To what extent does the proposed research address important scientific challenges?*

*To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g., novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?*

### **Scientific Approach**

*To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the ground-breaking nature and ambition of the proposed research (based on the Extended Synopsis)?*

*To what extent does the proposal go beyond what the individual Principal Investigators could achieve alone (**for Synergy Grants**, based on the Extended Synopsis)?*

*To what extent do the Principal Investigators succeed in proposing a combination of scientific approaches that are crucial to address the scope and complexity of the research questions to be tackled (**for Synergy Grants**, based on the Extended Synopsis)?*

*To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project (based on the research proposal)?*

*To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources, and PI commitment adequate and properly justified (based on the research proposal)?*

## **2. Principal Investigator(s)**

### **Intellectual capacity and creativity**

**Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grants**

*To what extent has/have the PI(s) demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?*

*To what extent does/do the PI(s) provide evidence of creative and original thinking?*

*To what extent does/do the PI(s) have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?*

### **Synergy Grant Group**

**Synergy Grants**

*To what extent does the Synergy Grant Group successfully demonstrate in the proposal that it brings together the know-how – such as skills, experience, expertise, disciplines, teams – necessary to address the proposed research question (based on the Extended Synopsis)?*

## Evaluation outcome

### For Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants

At each evaluation step, each proposal will be evaluated for each of the two elements of the proposal: the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of the research project; and the intellectual capacity, creativity, and commitment of the Principal Investigator.

At the end of each evaluation step, the proposals will be ranked by the panels on the basis of the panels' overall appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses, and in particular, the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of the research project.

At the end of **step 1** of the evaluation, the proposal will receive one of the following scores:

**A invited:** is of excellent quality and ranked sufficiently high to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**A not invited:** is of excellent quality but not ranked sufficiently high<sup>66</sup> to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**B:** is of high quality but not sufficient to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**C:** is not of sufficient quality to pass to step 2 of the evaluation.

At the end of **step 2** of the evaluation, the proposal will receive one of the following scores:

**A.** fully meets the ERC's excellence criterion and is recommended for funding **if sufficient funds are available**;

**B.** meets some but not all elements of the ERC's excellence criterion and will not be funded.

### For Synergy Grants

At the end of **step 1** of the evaluation, the proposal will receive one of the following scores:

**A invited:** is of excellent quality and ranked sufficiently high to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**A not invited:** is of excellent quality but not ranked sufficiently high<sup>66</sup> to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**B:** is of high quality but not sufficient to pass to step 2 of the evaluation;

**C:** is not of sufficient quality to pass to step 2 of the evaluation.

At the end of **step 2** of the evaluation, the proposal will receive one of the following scores:

**A:** is of sufficient quality to pass to step 3 of the evaluation;

**B:** is of high quality but not sufficient to pass to step 3 of the evaluation.

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<sup>66</sup> I.e., exceeds the maximum threshold of proposals that can be passed to step 2.



At the end of **step 3** of the evaluation, the proposal will receive one of the following scores:

**A:** fully meets the ERC's excellence criterion and is recommended for funding **if sufficient funds are available;**

**B:** meets some but not all elements of the ERC's excellence criterion and will not be funded.

Once the evaluation of their proposal has been completed, applicants to all grants will receive an evaluation report, which will include the final panel score and ranking range, the panel comment, and the assessment of the evaluation elements by

each individual independent external expert.

Projects recommended for funding will be funded by the ERC if sufficient funds are available. Proposals will be funded in priority order based on their rank in the ranking list.

**Applicants may also be subject to restrictions on submitting proposals to future ERC calls based on the outcome of the evaluation. Applicants will need to check the restrictions in place for each call (for 2025 calls, see restrictions on submission of proposals under section “Admissibility and eligibility criteria” above).**

# Complementary Funding for ERC Principal Investigators

The grant actions described in this chapter are designed by the ERC Scientific Council as part of its implementation task of establishing the overall scientific strategy for the ERC and developing the ERC's mix of support measures in line with it.

The measures aim, in particular, at fulfilling the Horizon Europe Specific Programme mandates to support new ways of working in the scientific world, including the open science approach, with the potential to create breakthrough results, and facilitate commercial and social innovation potential of funded research.

## Summary of complementary funding with indicative budget and timetable<sup>67</sup>

	<i>Proof of Concept Grant (call)</i>
<i>Call identifier</i>	<b>ERC-2025-PoC</b>
<i>Type of action</i>	<b>ERC frontier research grant</b>
<i>Opening of the call</i>	13 November 2024
<i>Cut-off dates or deadline(s) for application</i>	13 March 2025 18 September 2025
<i>Budget EUR (estimated number of grants)</i>	30 000 000 (200)
<i>Planned dates to inform applicants</i>	26 June 2025 14 January 2026
<i>Indicative date for signature of grant agreements</i>	24 October 2025 14 May 2026

<sup>67</sup> The dates in this table are indicative. The Director of the European Research Council Executive Agency may open a call up to one month prior to or after the envisaged opening date. The Director may delay the envisaged cut-off date or deadline by up to two months. The budget amounts for 2025 are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the draft budget for 2025 after the adoption of the budget for 2025 by the budgetary authority, or if the budget is not adopted as provided for in the system of provisional twelfths.

# Proof of Concept Grant

## Objectives

Frontier research often generates radically new ideas that drive innovation and business inventiveness, and tackle societal challenges. The ERC Proof of Concept Grants aim at facilitating exploration of the commercial and social innovation potential of ERC funded research, and are therefore available only to Principal Investigators whose proposals draw substantially on their ERC funded research.

## Ethical principles

All proposals recommended for funding will be subject to ethics review.

## Admissibility and eligibility criteria

### Eligible Principal Investigator

Principal Investigators<sup>68</sup> in an ongoing ERC main grant, or Principal Investigators in an ERC main grant that has ended<sup>69</sup> after 1 January 2024, are eligible to apply for an ERC Proof of Concept Grant, subject to any restrictions provided in Annex 3 below.

Principal Investigators may submit only one proposal under this Work Programme Proof of Concept call. If an applicant submits also a proposal at the next cut-off date within the same year, only the first admissible and eligible proposal will be considered. A proposal can be submitted in any official EU language. However, for reasons of efficiency, the use of English is strongly advised.<sup>70</sup>

A Principal Investigator whose proposal was rejected on the grounds of a breach of research integrity in the calls for proposals under Work Programmes 2023 or 2024 may not submit a proposal to the ERC-2025-PoC call.

Synergy Grant Principal Investigators are eligible to apply to the Proof of Concept call only with the written consent of all Principal Investigators in the same Synergy Grant project. Principal Investigators in the same Synergy Grant project can each submit one Proof of Concept application under this Work Programme.

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<sup>68</sup> Applicants that are subject to the administrative sanction of exclusion or are in one of the exclusion situations set out by the EU Financial Regulation are banned from receiving EU grants and can NOT participate. See articles 136 and 141 of the EU Financial Regulation, as well as important information on possible exclusion and registration of economic operators in the Commission's Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) on the final page of this Work Programme.

<sup>69</sup> Where the duration of the project fixed in the ERC grant agreement has ended.

<sup>70</sup> The working language of the ERC evaluation panels is English. If the proposal is in an official EU language different from English, the ERCEA will provide the evaluation panels with a raw machine translation version of the proposal. Such a translated version will not be verified by the ERCEA. An English translation of the abstract must be included in the proposal.

## **Admissible and eligible projects**

The beneficiaries (and their actions) must remain eligible for the entire duration of the action. Costs and contributions will be eligible only as long as the beneficiary and the action are eligible. Applicants and beneficiaries must immediately inform the services of the ERCEA at any point in time of any events or circumstances, which would be likely to affect the fulfilment of the eligibility criteria.

All proposals must be complete, readable, accessible, and be submitted before the relevant deadline. Incomplete proposals may be declared inadmissible (see ERC Proof of Concept Grant proposal submission and description below).

The content of the proposal must relate to the objectives and to the grant type set out in the call, as defined in this Work Programme. If a proposal is considered not to relate to the objectives of the grant and/or call for proposals, it will be declared ineligible.

Where there is a doubt on the admissibility or eligibility of a proposal, the evaluation may proceed pending a decision of the Responsible Authorising Officer following the opinion of the admissibility and eligibility review committee. If it becomes clear before, during, or after the evaluation phase, that one or more of the admissibility or eligibility criteria have not been met, the

proposal will be declared inadmissible or ineligible and it will be rejected.

Applicants need to demonstrate the relation between the idea to be taken to proof of concept and their main grant.

A maximum of three Proof of Concept Grants may be awarded per main grant project, except for Synergy Grant, in which case a maximum of six Proof of Concept Grants may be awarded per ERC funded project.

Proof of Concept Grants may run in parallel provided they comply with the eligibility conditions set out in the ERC Work Programme under which they have been awarded.

## **Eligible host institution**

The host institution (Applicant Legal Entity<sup>71</sup>) must engage the Principal Investigator for at least the duration of the Proof of Concept project, as defined in the grant agreement, and must be established in a Member State or an Associated Country as a legal entity created under applicable national law<sup>72</sup>.

To be eligible, legal entities from a Member State or Associated Country that are public bodies, research organisations, or higher education institutions (including private research organisations and private higher education institutions) must have a gender equality plan or an equivalent strategic

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<sup>71</sup> Please see important information on possible registration of economic operators in the Commission's Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) on final page.

<sup>72</sup> It may also be an international organisation with headquarters in a Member State or Associated

Country. Any type of legal entity, public or private, including universities, research organisations as well as undertakings can host the Principal Investigator and their team.

document in place for the duration of the project. The gender equality plan or equivalent must fulfil the mandatory requirements listed in Annex 5 below.

Where they bring scientific added value to the project, additional team members may also be hosted by additional legal entities<sup>73</sup>, which may be established anywhere, including outside the European Union or Associated Countries, or international organisations, subject to any restrictions provided in Annex 3 below.

Legal entities established outside the European Union or an Associated Country are eligible for funding when:

- they host additional team members bringing scientific added value to the project, or
- their participation is deemed essential for carrying out the action,

subject to any restrictions provided in Annex 3 below.

### ***Grant amount, duration, and assessment***

The financial contribution will be awarded as a lump sum of **EUR 150 000**<sup>74</sup> for a period of **18 months**. The ERC expects that, normally, proof of concept activities should be completed within 12 months. However, to allow for those projects that require

more preparation time, the grant agreements will be signed for 18 months. Extensions of the duration of proof of concept projects may be granted only exceptionally.

The lump sum will cover the beneficiaries' direct and indirect eligible costs for the project: if the project is implemented properly, the amounts will be paid regardless of the costs actually incurred. The lump sum has been designed to cover the beneficiaries' personnel costs, subcontracting costs, purchase costs, other cost categories, and indirect costs.

The total indicative budget for the Proof of Concept call is **EUR 30 000 000**.

### ***ERC Proof of Concept Grant proposal submission and description***

#### **Proposal submission**

Proposals are submitted by a single Principal Investigator, who has responsibility for the proposed activities, on behalf of the host institution which is the applicant legal entity.

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<sup>73</sup> Consortium agreements are not required for ERC multi-beneficiary grants, as the Starting, Consolidator, and Advanced Grants will support projects carried out by individual teams, which are headed by a single Principal Investigator. The ERC Synergy Grant Groups are neither networks nor consortia of undertakings, universities, research centres, or other legal entities.

<sup>74</sup> In accordance with the [Decision authorising the use of lump sums for the European Research Council Proof of Concept actions under the Horizon Europe Programme – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation](#).

*Proposal submission is made electronically. **Early registration and submission are strongly recommended and should be done as early as possible before the call deadline.***

Applications can be submitted at any time from the opening date of the call until the final deadline. Applications will be evaluated and selected in two rounds, based on two specific cut-off dates. A Principal Investigator may submit only one application per call. Inadmissible, ineligible, or withdrawn applications do not count against this limit.

### Proposal description

The proposal will provide detailed descriptions of the project, its objectives, planning, execution, and required resources. It will comprise the following required elements:

- A short **description of the idea** to be taken to proof of concept. This should include an indication of the ERC-funded project, from which the idea is substantially drawn, and briefly demonstrate the relation between the idea and the ERC-funded project in question.
- An outline of the **innovation potential** of the idea to be taken to proof of concept. This should include a clear description of how

the idea will eventually lead to an innovation, as well as a description of the novelty and ambition of the expected outcomes compared to existing solutions.

- A description of how the project will make **progress on the path from ground-breaking research towards innovation**<sup>75</sup>. This may include: testing, experimenting, demonstration, validation, and further research covering these and other exploitation aspects; conducting research required to carry out the above activities and to address the weaknesses uncovered by them; clarification of IPR protection or knowledge transfer strategy; plans for involvement of potential stakeholders able to translate research results into innovation (e.g. industry partners, societal or cultural organisations, policy-makers or any other). If such contacts already exist, include supporting documentation like letters of support or intent from the relevant stakeholders; assessment of potential 'end users' of the innovation.
- A reasonable and plausible **plan of the activities** demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of the project, including a description of the timescale and resources<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Experience shows that the path from research to innovation may take different forms: e.g., patenting, creation of spin-outs, licensing agreements, research contracts, research collaborations, consultancy agreements, informal

advice, public engagement, policy reports/contributions to policy, and more.

<sup>76</sup> Non-financial resources needed for project implementation, such as staff working on a task,



planned for the implementation of the proposed project<sup>77</sup>. A budgetary breakdown by cost for each activity should not be submitted.

- Demonstration of the PI's strategic lead (or clear vision) to organise the management of the project, and that the activities will be conducted by persons well qualified for the purpose.
- **Host Institution Binding Statement of Support.**
- **Ethics self-assessment.**

*The host institution must confirm its association with and its support to the project and the Principal Investigator. As part of the application, the institution must provide a binding statement that the conditions of independence are already fulfilled or will be provided to the Principal Investigator if the application is successful, according to the template provided in the Information for Applicants. Proposals that do not include this institutional statement may be declared inadmissible.*

*To ensure fairness to all applicants a **strict limit of 10 (ten) pages** will be applied to the length of proposals. Only the material that is presented within this limit will be evaluated (reviewers will only be asked to evaluate, and will be under no obligation to read beyond, the material presented within the page limit).*

### **ERC Proof of Concept Grant evaluation**

A single-stage submission and single-step evaluation procedure will be used. The evaluation will be conducted by independent external experts.

These experts may work remotely and may, if necessary, meet as an evaluation panel, as set out below on the application of excellence as the sole criterion of evaluation.

#### **Evaluation criterion**

Proof of Concept Grants are awarded in relation to an ERC-funded project under one of the main ERC grants. The activities to be funded will draw substantially on this ERC-funded research.

The funding will cover activities aimed at exploring the pathway from ground-breaking research towards innovation, including social innovation or socially valuable proposition. This includes work

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equipment, consumables, or staff travel requirements.

<sup>77</sup> Applicants are not required to submit a plan for the exploitation and dissemination of the results

including communication activities, in the sense of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

required to prepare the translation of the idea into application, as well as research required to test, validate, and develop the idea further towards exploitation.

The evaluation of admissible and eligible proposals will look into ideas stemming from ERC-funded projects and will select among them the most competitive for further development towards an innovation.

For ERC Proof of Concept grants, excellence is the sole criterion of evaluation. It will be applied in conjunction to the evaluation of both:

- the breakthrough innovation potential, approach, and methodology of the project;
- the strategic lead and project management of the Principal Investigator.

The detailed evaluation elements applying to the excellence of the project and the Principal Investigator are set out below:

#### **1.a Breakthrough innovation potential**

- Does the proposed idea have the potential to drive innovation and business inventiveness and/or tackle societal challenges?
- Are the proposed expected outcomes innovative or distinctive compared to existing solutions?
- Is the proposed idea high risk-high gain?
  - If successful, will the outcome result in a breakthrough innovation?
  - Is there a risk that some aspects are difficult to overcome?

#### **1.b Approach and methodology**

- Are the proposed activities and planning appropriate and effective to explore the pathway from ground-breaking research towards innovation? Activities may include:
  - testing, experimenting, demonstrating and validating the idea;
  - conducting research required to carry out the above activities and to address the weaknesses uncovered by them;
  - clarifying IPR protection or knowledge transfer strategy;
  - involving industry partners, societal or cultural organisations, policymakers, or any other potential stakeholder supporting the translation of research results into innovation;
  - assessing potential 'end users' of the expected innovation.
- Are the proposed timescales and resources adequate for the implementation and feasibility of the project, and properly justified? Will the activities be conducted by persons well qualified for the purpose?

### 1.c. Principal Investigator - strategic lead and project management

- Does the PI demonstrate a clear vision on how to organise the management of the project, the consolidation of information and data needed to take strategic decisions and implement the proposed plan, including risk and contingency measures?

#### Evaluation outcome

Experts will evaluate independently each admissible and eligible proposal and mark it as 'very good', 'good', or 'fail' for each of the three evaluation elements (1.a, 1.b, and 1.c)<sup>78</sup>.

In order to be considered for funding, proposals will have to be awarded a pass mark ('very good' or 'good') by a majority of experts on each of the evaluation elements. A proposal which fails one or more of the elements will not be ranked and will not be funded.

If there is not enough budget to fund all the proposals which pass all three evaluation elements, those proposals which pass all

three evaluation elements will be ranked according to the marks which they received from experts, sorted by the order in which the evaluation elements appear above. Proposals will be funded in order of this ranking.

If necessary, experts will meet as an evaluation panel, in order to determine a priority order for proposals which have the same ranking.

A Seal of Excellence<sup>79</sup> will be awarded to proposals that have received a pass mark in all three of the evaluation elements set out in this section of the Work Programme, but cannot be funded due to lack of budget available to the call.

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<sup>78</sup> Applicants whose proposals are recommended for funding are deemed to fulfil the operational capacity requirements provided for in Article 198(3) of the Financial Regulation.

<sup>79</sup> Information on funding bodies that recognise and support Seal of Excellence projects is available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence/>

# Other Actions

The different actions described in this chapter aim at enabling the Scientific Council of the ERC to carry out its duties and mandate, including its obligations to establish the ERC's overall strategy, and to monitor and control the quality of the programme's implementation from the scientific perspective.

## **Support to call and programme monitoring and evaluation**

### **1. Evaluation of proposals and project monitoring**

The ERC draws upon appointed independent external experts during the evaluation of proposals and the preparation of the ERC calls for ethics review, and for the monitoring of ongoing projects.

*Type of action:* Expert contract action.

*Indicative budget:* EUR 19 927 754 from the 2025 budget.

### **2. Support to programme monitoring and evaluation**

To continue the implementation of the ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (revised in 2018)<sup>80</sup>, experts will be contracted to perform studies, analyses and other activities to support in-house efforts. Potential activities include (but are not limited to):

- Analysis of the scientific output of ERC-funded research, with a particular focus on potential

research breakthroughs and important discoveries;

- Thematic analyses and longitudinal studies on specific research areas in order to detect the footprint of ERC-funded activities on scientific progress and explore the ERC contribution to emerging research areas;
- Analyses of the structural impact of ERC funding such as on researchers' career, national research systems, policy-making;
- Studies on how ERC funded-research is having a long-term impact on society and economy;
- Small-scale exploratory studies to test novel methodologies for portfolio analysis (in relation to quality, interdisciplinarity, novelty, risk profiles);
- Other support activities such as the sourcing, processing, and analysis of structured and unstructured data.

*Type of action:* Expert contract action.

*Indicative budget:* EUR 500 000 from the 2025 budget.

## **Support to the ERC Scientific Council**

### **3. ERC Scientific Council Standing Identification Committee**

Future members of the Scientific Council will be appointed by the Commission following an independent and transparent procedure for their identification, agreed with the Scientific Council, including an

<sup>80</sup> [ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy 2018](#)

open consultation of the scientific community and a report to the European Parliament and the Council. For this purpose, a high-level standing Identification Committee of independent experts has been set up as a special expert group with special allowances of EUR 450 per day charged to the operational budget allocated to the ERC.

*Type of action: Expert contract action. This activity will be directly implemented by the Commission services (DG RTD).*

*Indicative budget: EUR 40 000 from the 2025 budget.*

#### **4. Honoraria and meeting expenses for Scientific Council members**

In recognition of their personal commitment, the Scientific Council members will be compensated for the tasks they perform by means of an honorarium for their attendance at Scientific Council plenary meetings, reflecting their responsibilities and benchmarked against similar provisions in similar entities and Member States. The honoraria and those travel and subsistence expenses related to the performance of tasks of the Scientific Council will be charged to the operational budget allocated to the ERC.

*Type of action: Expert contract action.*

*Indicative budget: EUR 555 000 from the 2025 budget.*

### **Support to open science**

#### **5. Support to the Europe PMC initiative**

Europe PMC is an open science resource for the life sciences and adjacent areas run by the European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI). It provides users with a central site and a powerful search engine to traverse both abstracts and full text of journal articles and books from multiple publishers, as well as preprints from a range of preprint servers, in a centralised, open repository. Working in close partnership with PubMed Central (at the U.S. National Institutes of Health's National Library of Medicine), Europe PMC provides access to abstracts and other metadata for 43.5 million publications, 9.5 million of which are available in full text. Europe PMC was directly accessed by more than 32 million unique IP addresses in 2023.

Europe PMC has been supported by the ERC since 2013. Recommended by the ERC Scientific Council as a repository of choice for publications in the life sciences, it fulfils the critical role of enabling ERC funded researchers to comply with the open access requirements in their grant agreement.

Europe PMC has developed bespoke algorithms to text-mine the literature for funding acknowledgements, as well as amalgamating grant details from other sources. The Europe PMC grant finder web interface and API provide easy ways to identify grants and associated publications; the grants are also enriched with ROR identifiers for institutions. Content is linked to research data and text-mined keywords and is enriched with ORCID persistent digital identifiers for authors; all made available transparently on the Europe PMC

website and via several rich and heavily used programmatic services.

Published open data and software allow scientists to interrogate and reproduce reported scientific experiments and results and provide the much-needed transparency and assurance as to the quality of publications. The open literature offers a window to these research outputs, and through crosslinking Europe PMC enhances their discoverability. Europe PMC also provides mechanisms to enhance credit for these outputs through ORCID linking and collection of additional metadata to increase their discovery.

Increasingly, comprehensive collections of publications can provide the basis for new AI methods (such as Large Language Models) to make sense of the millions of articles published every year. This technology could have a game-changing impact on how we search the literature and use it in research-related processes. Given that a centralised bulk critical mass of open literature that is readily accessible to software is now available, and considering how fast the power of specialist language models is increasing, application to the literature of this transformative technology is overdue.

The [Europe PMC](#) initiative is currently financed by a group of 35 funding bodies from across Europe, including the ERC. The amount of each funder's contribution is calculated based on the proportion of their annual research spend in the life sciences domain.

Based on the unique expertise and experience that EMBL-EBI offers, the

funding bodies represented in the Europe PMC initiative intend to continue to provide financial support to EMBL-EBI to fund this activity after April 2026, which is when the current funding expires. For this purpose, the ERC will provide a co-funding grant to EMBL-EBI to support the maintenance and operation of the Europe PMC repository and its further development as a key resource for researchers in the life sciences. This will entail:

- providing a rich suite of services to help researchers discover relevant research and the data and software that underpin it;
- refining workflows to support monitoring and compliance tracking of the open science policies of ERC and other funders;
- maintenance and development of the manuscript submission system such that researchers can share their accepted manuscripts, preprints and open access publications, including books, in line with Open Access-related funder requirements;
- refining workflows to support the emerging ‘Publish, Review, Curate’ model, for example as adopted by the Open Research Europe platform;
- provision of a helpdesk service to support users;
- providing an easy-to-use website and state-of-the-art programmatic access to content and added-value metadata, persistent identifiers and cross linking provided by Europe PMC; driven by community

standards to ensure that other services, such as OpenAIRE, can make full use of these outputs.

Based on the ERC's research spend in 2022, the funding rate for the co-funding grant to support Europe PMC will be 11%, with a maximum amount of 1 000 000 EUR.

The evaluation committee assessing this proposal<sup>81</sup> will be fully composed of representatives of Union institutions or bodies. The maximum duration of this grant will be 60 months.

*Type of action: Coordination and support action – Grant awarded without a call for proposals in accordance with Article 195(e) of the Financial Regulation and with Article 24(3) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.*

*Form of Funding: Grants not subject to calls for proposals.*

*Legal entity: European Bioinformatics Institute (EBI), Hinxton, Cambridgeshire, UK, which is part of European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), Meyerhofstrasse 1, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany*

*Indicative budget: EUR 1 000 000 from the 2025 budget.*

## **Support to ERC National Contact Points**

### **6. NCP project on strengthening competitiveness in ERC calls**

The ERC wishes to strengthen national and local support to potential ERC applicants, in

particular to those from countries with weak participation in the ERC programme.

A “Coordination and support action” (CSA) is proposed to fund a consortium of formally nominated ERC National Contact Points (NCPs) for identifying and sharing good NCP practices and raising the general standard of support to ERC applicants, taking into account the diversity of actors and experiences.

The proposed activities are expected to be tailored to harmonise the quality of the services provided by the NCPs and level the quality of support supplied to ERC applicants in different countries in the ERC’s calls. Special attention will be given to activities towards widening European participation.

Various activities may be included, such as joint workshops, coaching, twinning or tripling, webinars and other IT tools and fora for enhanced cross-border brokerage events, training sessions and organisation of workshops and meetings.

An integral part of the project will be the organisation of transnational workshops with all stakeholders involved in the ERC application process for coaching potential ERC applicants, and the provision of support for dedicated local ERC stakeholder events. The travel and subsistence expenses of participants should be covered for both types of events.

Special attention will be given to enhancing the competence and capacity building of ERC NCPs, including helping less

including communications activities, in the sense of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

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<sup>81</sup> The proposal will not include a plan for the dissemination and exploitation of the results,



experienced NCPs rapidly acquire the know-how accumulated by NCPs in other countries. Building up cooperation with other relevant stakeholder networks to increase the support to potential ERC applicants will also be encouraged.

The focus throughout should be on issues specific to the ERC and should not overlap with actions in other NCP networks.

In the evaluation of the proposal for the CSA, the potential impact of the project will be assessed. This will take into account in particular whether the consortium has a good representation of NCPs from a range of countries with varying success rates in the ERC's calls.

Only ERC NCPs host organisations which have been officially appointed by the relevant national authorities are eligible to participate in and receive funding for this action. Members of the consortium are required to conclude a consortium agreement. NCPs from widening countries are particularly encouraged to participate in the consortium.

Submission of a single proposal<sup>81</sup> is expected. Only one valid proposal will be evaluated. Only the first admissible (i.e. including the documented support of all the other ERC NCPs) and eligible proposal will be considered.

The evaluation committee assessing this proposal will be fully composed of representatives of Union institutions or bodies.

The maximum duration of the project shall be 36 months.

Type of action: *Coordination and support action – Grant awarded without a call for proposals in accordance with Article 195(f) of the Financial Regulation and with Article 24(3)(a) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.*

Form of Funding: *Grants not subject to calls for proposals.*

Legal entity: *The grant shall be awarded to a consortium of legal entities, which have been officially appointed as, or are hosting, ERC NCPs from Member States or Associated Countries of Horizon Europe, and have the documented support of more than 50% of all the other ERC NCPs for the implementation of this action.*

Indicative budget: *EUR 1 800 000 from the 2025 budget.*

*Indicative timeline: opening date - Q4 2024; deadline for submissions - Q1 2025; evaluation - Q1 2025; information to applicants - Q1 2025; start of the project - Q2 2025.*

### **Other Actions Grants: Union Contribution**

The project budget is provided in EUR. Project costs will be reimbursed at a funding rate of up to 100% for direct costs plus a flat-rate of 25% for indirect

costs.<sup>82</sup> Reimbursements will be budget-based and will cover actual costs, or unit costs, depending on the cost category. The level of the awarded grant represents a maximum overall figure – the final amount to be paid must be justified on the basis of the costs incurred for the project, and it may be lower than the budget requested.

### **Other Actions Grants: Proposal Evaluation and Other Conditions**

**Admissibility and Eligibility Criteria:** The proposals<sup>83</sup> under this part must be focused on requirements specified under this Work Programme.

Actions under this part are open to legal entities<sup>84</sup> established in a Member State or an Associated Country as a legal entity created under national law, international European research organisations (such as the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), etc.), or an entity created under EU law.

Please also refer to Annex 3 – Countries associated to Horizon Europe and

Restrictions Applying to Some Legal Entities.

All proposals must be readable, accessible, complete, and be submitted before the relevant deadline. A complete proposal entails all requested elements. An incomplete proposal may be declared inadmissible.

The content of the proposal must relate to the objectives of the grant as defined in this Work Programme. If the proposal is considered not to relate to the objectives of the grant, it will be declared ineligible.

Where there is doubt on the admissibility or eligibility of the proposal, the evaluation may proceed pending the decision of the Responsible Authorising Officer following the opinion of the admissibility and eligibility review committee. If it becomes clear before, during, or after the evaluation phase, that one or more of the admissibility or eligibility criteria have not been met, the proposal will be declared inadmissible or ineligible and will be rejected.

**Award Criteria** (and aspects that will be taken into account):

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<sup>82</sup> Excluding subcontracting costs, financial support to third parties, and exempted specific cost categories, if any.

<sup>83</sup> The proposal will not include a plan for the dissemination and exploitation of the results, including communications activities, in the sense of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

<sup>84</sup> The applicant legal entity must have stable and sufficient resources ('financial capacity') to successfully implement the projects and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects. Information on financial capacity

checks is provided in the ERC Rules of submission and evaluation under Horizon Europe. Applicants that are subject to the administrative sanction of exclusion or are in one of the exclusion situations set out in the Financial Regulation are banned from receiving EU grants and can NOT participate. Please see Articles 136 and 141 of the EU Financial Regulation, as well as important information on possible exclusion and registration of economic operators in the Commission's Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) on the final page of this Work Programme.

1. Excellence (related to the objectives of the grant):

- Are the objectives of the proposed project consistent with the requirements specified in the Work Programme?
- Do they, where appropriate, correspond to, or go beyond, best current practice?

2. Impact:

- Will the project have a substantial impact in the context of the ERC objectives?

3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation:

- Is the proposed methodology and work plan effective in reaching the goals of the project?
- Do they ensure the highest quality and/or utility of results?

**Application of Evaluation Criteria**

Each evaluation criterion will be marked on a scale of 0 to 5 with an overall quality threshold of 80%<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Applicants whose proposal is marked above the 80% quality threshold are deemed to fulfil the

operational capacity requirements of article 198(3) of the EU Financial Regulation.

# Public Procurement

### ***IT Services related to ERC call Management and Programme Monitoring and Evaluation***

Under Horizon Europe, the ERCEA uses the European Commission's corporate IT eGrants suite. However, due to the specificity of the ERC calls for proposals, there is a need to complement or adapt the solutions to ERC requirements following the guidance of the ERC Scientific Council, in line with the Council Decision establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe<sup>86</sup>.

To achieve these objectives, the ERCEA and the European Commission have committed to a co-development approach of corporate eGrants. In this manner, the ERCEA is able to respond to the ERC Scientific Council's strategic decisions in an agile manner, while contributing to the common needs of the corporate eGrants suite. This requires the procurement of technical assistance (supervised by ERCEA own IT Unit) to customise IT tools to ERC requirements in support of call publication, proposal submission and evaluation. Part of the activity will be related to the enhancement of the technical aspects of their customization, their IT integration, and the associated Business Intelligence reporting needs.

IT technical assistance services are also procured to build and operate the "ERC

Archives": this project aims at preserving information which may have historical value in the future. The content of ERC archives goes beyond the data retention and operational purposes of the corporate eGrants solutions (e.g. maintaining data since ERC creation). Initially, it will only be accessible by staff in a very controlled way in order to respect the Data Protection aspects as agreed with the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS).

The co-development approach ensures compliance with the corporate strategy and the "European Commission Digital Strategy"<sup>87</sup> for security and privacy, interoperability, and user centricity. For local system developments the ERCEA follows the corporate European Commission IT Governance and Data Management described in the "European Commission data governance and data policies".

In addition to the European Commission's corporate IT eGrants suite, ERCEA also makes use of corporate tools, services and processes in the area of Programme analysis, Monitoring, Evaluation and Feedback to Policy. This is in line with the Commission's approach to the evaluation and monitoring of Horizon Europe, and especially, its 'Key Impact Pathways' (KIP) Framework, as well as the strategy for Feedback to Policy.

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<sup>86</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2021/764 of 10 May 2021 establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and repealing Decision 2013/743/EU, (OJ L 167I, 12.5.2021, p. 1).

<sup>87</sup> C (2022) 4388 final. European Commission Digital Strategy:  
[https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/c\\_2022\\_4388\\_1\\_en\\_act.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/c_2022_4388_1_en_act.pdf)

Where the needs of the ERC Scientific Council Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy<sup>80</sup> go beyond the services offered by the European Commission, ERCEA initiates complementary activities especially in area of data management (including data quality assurance, development of data products and other data related).

*Type of action: Public procurement.*

*Indicative budget: EUR 1 500 000 from the 2025 budget.*

### **Support to communication activities**

In line with the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe, the ERCEA supports the Scientific Council in its mandate to communicate with the scientific community, stakeholders and the general public. This includes the implementation of the annual communication strategy adopted by the Scientific Council. The services to be covered under this heading will be defined in agreement with the Scientific Council but are expected to include actions to promote frontier research, event organisation, content creation, online promotion, and media collaborations.

*Type of action:* Public procurement.

*Indicative budget:* EUR 1 000 000 from the 2025 budget.

### **IT services for supporting the identification of independent external experts for the evaluation of proposals**

The ERC Scientific Council is tasked with proposing the appointment of independent external experts for the peer review evaluation of frontier research projects. The Scientific Council is equally responsible for ensuring the quality of the ERC's scientific operations by establishing positions on the selection of experts. The Scientific Council directly proposes the appointment of panel members, while the identification of independent external experts assisting the panels by working remotely has been delegated to Panel Chairs. Each year, about 35,000 independent experts are selected to take part in the evaluation of proposals. The latest developments in machine learning algorithms and semantic technologies can now be harnessed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this identification process. The objective is to contract an artificial intelligence-based service to assist the Scientific Council and the Panel Chairs with the identification of potential independent experts with suitable expertise profiles. The expected outcome is the implementation, provision and maintenance of the software or IT solution providing lists of potential experts, based on panel recruitment needs and on submitted proposals.

*Type of action:* Public procurement

*Indicative budget:* EUR 1 100 000 from the 2025 budget.

### **Assessment of the scientific impact of Horizon Europe-funded research**

The ERC, in cooperation with DG Research and Innovation, will procure services to

identify approaches to assess scientific impact of Horizon Europe-funded research. The potential approach should be inspired by the elements linked to the 'knowledge' objective of the ERC Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy<sup>80</sup>.

*Type of action: Public procurement*

*Indicative budget: EUR 500 000 from the 2025 budget.*

## Indicative Budget

	<i>2025 budget in EUR million</i>
<b>Main Frontier Research Grants</b>	<b>2,652.30</b>
ERC-2025-StG	751.10
ERC-2025-CoG	718.70
ERC-2025-AdG	682.50
ERC-2025-SyG	500.00
<b>Complementary funding for ERC Principal Investigators</b>	<b>30.00</b>
ERC-2025-PoC	30.00
<b>Other Actions</b>	<b>23.82</b>
Experts	21.02 <sup>88</sup>
<b>Coordination and support actions</b>	<b>2.80</b>
<b>Public procurement</b>	<b>4.10</b>
<b>Estimated total budget</b>	<b>2,710.22</b>

The budget amounts for 2025 are subject to the availability of the appropriations provided for in the draft budget for 2025 after the adoption of the budget for 2025 by the budgetary authority or if the budget is not adopted as provided for in the system of provisional twelfths.

Budgetary figures given in this Work Programme are indicative. Unless otherwise stated, final budgets may change following the evaluation of proposals.

The final figures may change by up to 20% compared with the total budget indicated in this Work Programme. Cumulated changes to the allocations to specific actions not exceeding 20% of the maximum Union contribution set in this Work Programme will not be considered to be substantial for the purposes of Article 110(5) of the Financial Regulation, where those changes do not significantly affect

<sup>88</sup> EUR 19 927 754 of this amount corresponds to the cost of experts involved in the evaluation of proposals and project monitoring.



the nature of the actions and the objective of the Work Programme.

If additional credits become available, the Scientific Council will set the rules by which they will be allocated to the calls based on a judgement of the scientific need, number of applications and predicted success rates of the calls.

The budget figures given in this table are rounded to two decimal places.

# Annexes

## Annex 1

### Primary panel structure

#### *Physical Sciences & Engineering*

**PE1 Mathematics**

All areas of mathematics, pure and applied, plus mathematical foundations of computer science, mathematical physics, and statistics.

**PE2 Fundamental Constituents of Matter**

Particle, nuclear, plasma, atomic, molecular, gas, and optical physics.

**PE3 Condensed Matter Physics**

Structure, electronic properties, fluids, nanosciences, biological physics.

**PE4 Physical and Analytical Chemical Sciences**

Analytical chemistry, chemical theory, physical chemistry/chemical physics.

**PE5 Synthetic Chemistry and Materials**

New materials and new synthetic approaches, structure-properties relations, solid state chemistry, molecular architecture, organic chemistry.

**PE6 Computer Science and Informatics**

Theoretical and experimental computer science, information processing, intelligent systems.

**PE7 Systems and Communication Engineering**

Electrical, electronic, communication, optical and systems engineering.

**PE8 Products and Processes Engineering**

Product and process design, chemical, civil, environmental, mechanical, vehicle engineering, energy processes and relevant computational methods.

**PE9 Universe Sciences**

Astro-physics/-chemistry/-biology; solar system; planetary systems; stellar, galactic and extragalactic astronomy; cosmology; space sciences; astronomical instrumentation and data.

**PE10 Earth System Science**

Physical geography, geology, geophysics, atmospheric sciences, oceanography, climatology, cryology, ecology, global environmental change, biogeochemical cycles, natural resources management.

**PE11 Materials Engineering**

Advanced materials development: performance enhancement, modelling, large-scale preparation, modification, tailoring, optimisation, novel and combined use of materials, etc.

## Life Sciences

### **LS1 Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions**

*For all organisms:* Molecular biology, biochemistry, structural biology, molecular biophysics, synthetic and chemical biology, drug design, innovative methods and modelling.

### **LS2 Integrative Biology: From Genes and Genomes to Systems**

*For all organisms:* Genetics, epigenetics, genomics and other 'omics studies, bioinformatics, systems biology, genetic diseases, gene editing, innovative methods and modelling, 'omics for personalised medicine.

### **LS3 Cell Biology, Development, Stem Cells and Regeneration**

*For all organisms:* Structure and function of the cell, cell-cell communication, embryogenesis, tissue differentiation, organogenesis, growth, development, evolution of development, organoids, stem cells, regeneration, therapeutic approaches.

### **LS4 Physiology in Health, Disease and Ageing**

Organ and tissue physiology, comparative physiology, physiology of ageing, pathophysiology, inter-organ and tissue communication, endocrinology, nutrition, metabolism, interaction with the microbiome, non-communicable diseases including cancer (and except disorders of the nervous system and immunity-related diseases).

### **LS5 Neuroscience and Disorders of the Nervous System**

Nervous system development, homeostasis and ageing, nervous system function and dysfunction, systems neuroscience and modelling, biological basis of cognitive processes and of behaviour, neurological and mental disorders.

– *In humans and all other organisms*

### **LS6 Immunity, Infection and Immunotherapy**

The immune system, related disorders and their mechanisms, biology of infectious agents and infection, biological basis of prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, innovative immunological tools and approaches, including therapies.

### **LS7 Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Diseases**

Medical technologies and tools for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of human diseases, therapeutic approaches and interventions, pharmacology, preventative medicine, epidemiology and public health, digital medicine.

### **LS8 Environmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution**

*For all organisms:* Ecology, biodiversity, environmental change, evolutionary biology, behavioural ecology, microbial ecology, marine biology, ecophysiology, theoretical developments and modelling.

### **LS9 Biotechnology and Biosystems Engineering**

Biotechnology using all organisms, biotechnology for environment and food applications, applied plant and animal sciences, bioengineering and synthetic biology, biomass and biofuels, biohazards.

## ***Social Sciences & Humanities***

### **SH1 Individuals, Markets and Organisations**

Economics, finance, management.

### **SH2 Institutions, Governance and Legal Systems**

Political science, international relations, law.

### **SH3 The Social World and Its Interactions**

Sociology, social psychology, education sciences, communication studies.

### **SH4 The Human Mind and Its Complexity**

Cognitive science, psychology, linguistics.

### **SH5 Texts and Concepts**

Literary studies, literature, philosophy.

### **SH6 The Study of the Human Past**

Archaeology and history.

### **SH7 Human Mobility, Environment, and Space**

Human geography, demography, health, sustainability science, territorial planning, spatial analysis.

### **SH8 Studies of Cultures and Arts**

Social anthropology, studies of cultures, studies of arts.

## Annex 2

### ERC policy on PhD and equivalent doctoral degrees

#### **1. The necessity of ascertaining PhD equivalence**

In order to be eligible to apply to the ERC Starting or Consolidator Grant, a Principal Investigator must hold a PhD or equivalent doctoral degree. First-professional degrees will not be considered in themselves as PhD-equivalent, even if recipients carry the title 'Doctor'. See below for further guidelines on PhD degree equivalency.

#### **2. PhD degrees**

The research doctorate is the highest earned academic degree. It is always awarded for **independent research** at a professional level in either academic disciplines or professional fields. Regardless of the entry point, doctoral studies involve several stages of academic work. These may include the completion of preliminary course, seminar and laboratory studies, and/or the passing of a battery of written examinations. The PhD candidate selects an academic adviser and a subject for the dissertation, is assigned a dissertation committee, and designs their research (some educators call the doctoral thesis a dissertation to distinguish it from lesser theses). The dissertation committee consists usually of 3-5 faculty members in

the candidate's research field, including the adviser.

#### **3. Independent research**

Conducting the research and writing the dissertation usually requires one to several years depending upon the topic selected and the research work necessary to prepare the dissertation. In defending their thesis, **the PhD candidate must establish mastery of the subject matter, explain and justify their research findings, and answer all questions put by the committee.** A successful defence results in the award of the PhD degree.

#### **4. Degrees equivalent to the PhD:**

It is recognised that there are some other doctoral titles that enjoy the same status and represent variants of the PhD in certain fields. All of them **have similar content requirements.** Potential applicants are invited to consult the following for useful references on degrees that will be considered equivalent to the PhD:

- EURYDICE: "Examinations, qualifications and titles - Second edition, Volume 1, European glossary on education" published in 2004<sup>89</sup>. Please note that some

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<sup>89</sup>

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6dc168d4-7a44-4a90-a247-4300e9769e47>

titles that belong to the same category with doctoral degrees (ISCED 6 – 1997 classification or ISCED 8 – 2011 classification<sup>90</sup>) may correspond to the intermediate steps towards the completion of doctoral education and they should not be therefore considered as PhD-equivalent.

- List of research doctorate titles awarded in the United States that enjoy the same status and represent variants of the PhD within certain fields. These doctorate titles are also recognised as PhD-equivalent by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF).

### ***5. First professional degrees (for applicants holding a degree in medicine please see below):***

It is important to recognise that the initial professional degrees in various fields are **first degrees, not graduate research degrees**. Several degree titles in such fields include the term ‘Doctor’, **but they are neither research doctorates nor equivalent to the PhD**.

### ***6. Applicants holding a degree in medicine:***

**A first degree in medicine will not be accepted by itself as equivalent to a PhD degree.** To be considered an eligible Principal Investigator, applicants holding a degree in medicine need to provide **the certificates of both the medical degree and the PhD, or proof of an appointment that requires doctoral equivalency** (e.g., post-doctoral fellowship, professorship appointment). Additionally, candidates must also provide information on their research experience (including peer reviewed publications) in order to further substantiate the equivalence of their overall training to a PhD.

In these cases, the certified date of the medical degree completion plus two years is the reference date used for the calculation of the eligibility period established for Starting and Consolidator Grants in the subsection "Eligible Principal Investigator".

For applicants holding both a degree in medicine and a PhD, **the date used for the calculation of the eligibility period** (i.e., medical degree plus two years or the date of the successful defence of their PhD degree) **is the date of the earliest degree that makes the applicant eligible**.

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<sup>90</sup> [ISCED 2011 Operation Manual](#)

## Annex 3

### Countries associated to Horizon Europe and restrictions applying to some legal entities

Most third countries associated to Horizon 2020 have already, or are expected to be, associated to Horizon Europe. Other third countries may also become associated to Horizon Europe during the implementation of the programme. For the purposes of the eligibility conditions, applicants established in Horizon 2020 Associated Countries or in other third countries negotiating association to Horizon Europe will be treated as entities established in an Associated Country, if the Horizon Europe association agreement with the third country concerned applies at the time of signature of the grant agreement.

Please check the Horizon Europe List of Participating Countries on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal<sup>91</sup> for up-to-date information on the current situation on the Horizon Europe Associated Countries.

Entities subject to EU restrictive measures<sup>92</sup> under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), as well as Article 75 TFEU are not eligible to participate in any capacity, including as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties

giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any).

Given the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the involvement of Belarus, there is currently no appropriate context allowing the implementation of the actions foreseen in this programme with legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government controlled territories of Ukraine. Therefore, even where such entities are not subject to EU restrictive measures, such legal entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity. This includes participation as beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, third parties giving in-kind contributions, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any). Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for justified reasons.

The exclusion does not affect natural persons of Russian and Belarusian nationality, who are not established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government-controlled territories of Ukraine, provided that they are not subject to EU restrictive measures. In addition, the exclusion does

sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website, it is the OJ version that prevails.

<sup>91</sup>

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation-horizon-euratom\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation-horizon-euratom_en.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> [www.sanctionsmap.eu](http://www.sanctionsmap.eu) Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the



not affect researchers of Ukrainian nationality with their usual residence in non-government-controlled territories of Ukraine. The confirmation of the eligibility of Russian and Belarusian applicant Principal Investigators will be subject to a screening against the EU sanctions list.

Special rules also apply to entities covered by Commission Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards<sup>93</sup>.

Following the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506, as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments (including the grant agreement itself, as well as subcontracts, purchase contracts, financial support to third parties etc.) can be signed with Hungarian public interest trusts established under Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain.

Affected entities may continue to apply to calls for proposals. However, in case the Council measures set out in the Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506 are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, affiliated entities,

subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties/prizes).

Consequently, in line with the principle of portability applicable to ERC grants, applicant Principal Investigators, who have submitted their proposal with host institutions, which are concerned by the Council measures and have been recommended for funding, will be granted the possibility to ensure the eligibility of their proposal by transferring it to a new, eligible legal entity. Furthermore, in case the legal entity concerned by the Council measures is an additional legal entity, the host institution will be invited to remove or replace that entity and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

**Restrictions for the protection of European communication networks** - The protection of European communication networks has been identified as an important security interest of the Union and its Member States<sup>94</sup>. In line with the Commission Recommendation on the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019<sup>95</sup> and the subsequent report on EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks of 2019<sup>96</sup>, the EU Toolbox on 5G cybersecurity<sup>97</sup>, the second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity of 2023<sup>98</sup>, and the related Communication on

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<sup>93</sup> OJ C 205, 19.7.2013, p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> European Council conclusions of 1 and 2 October 2020 (EUCO 13/20), point 11; Council Conclusions on the significance of 5G to the European Economy and the need to mitigate security risks linked to 5G, 14517/19.

<sup>95</sup> Commission Recommendation (EU) 2019/534 of 26 March 2019 Cybersecurity of 5G networks, L 88/42.

<sup>96</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, Report on EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks, 9 October 2019.

<sup>97</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, 29 January 2020.

<sup>98</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States' progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.

the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of 2023<sup>99</sup>, the Commission together with the Member States has worked to jointly identify and assess cyberthreats and security risks for 5G networks<sup>100</sup>. The toolbox also recommends adding country-specific information (e.g. threat assessment from national security services, etc.). This work is an essential component of the Security Union Strategy and supports the protection of electronic communications networks and other critical infrastructures.

Entities assessed as “high-risk suppliers”, are currently set out in the second report on Member States’ progress in implementing the EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity of 2023<sup>101</sup> and the related Communication on the implementation of the 5G cybersecurity toolbox of 2023<sup>99</sup>. The toolbox also underlines that further developing European capacities in the area of 5G and post-5G technologies by leveraging EU Research & Innovation Funding programmes is a strategic risk mitigating measure. This entails the need to avoid the participation of high-risk supplier entities in the development of other technologies linked to the evolution of European communication networks to prevent technology transfer and the persistence of dependencies in materials, semiconductor components (including processors), computing resources, software tools and virtualisation

technologies, as well as related cybersecurity.

In order to protect the specific policy requirements of the Union and/or its Member States, it is therefore appropriate that the following additional eligibility criteria apply to ERC proposed actions<sup>102</sup> that concern the evolution of European communication networks (5G, post-5G, and other technologies linked to the evolution of European communication networks):

Entities that are assessed as high-risk suppliers of mobile network communication equipment (and any entities they own or control) are not eligible to participate as beneficiaries, affiliated entities and associated partners.

The assessment is based on the following criteria:

- the likelihood of interference from a non-associated third country, for example due to:
  - the characteristics of the entity’s ownership or governance (e.g., state-owned or controlled, government/party involvement);
  - the characteristics of the entity’s business and other conduct (e.g., a strong link to a third country government);

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<sup>99</sup> Communication from the Commission: Implementation of the 5G cybersecurity Toolbox, Brussels, 15.6.2023 C (2023) 4049 final.

<sup>100</sup> Within the NIS framework NIS 1 + 2 [Directive - 2022/2555 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)]

<sup>101</sup> NIS Cooperation Group, Second report on Member States’ progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity, June 2023.

<sup>102</sup> This applies to calls under the Starting, Consolidator, Advanced, and Synergy Grant schemes, as well as to the Proof of Concept Grant scheme.

- the characteristics of the respective third country (e.g. legislation or government practices likely to affect the implementation of the action, including an offensive cyber/intelligence policy, pressure regarding place of manufacturing or access to information);
- (cyber-)security practices, including throughout the entire supply chain;
- risks identified in relevant assessments of Member States and third countries as well as other EU institutions, bodies and agencies, if relevant.

Exceptions may be requested from the ERCEA and will be assessed case-by-case, taking into account the criteria provided for in the 5G cybersecurity toolbox, the security risks and availability of alternatives in the context of the action.

For avoidance of doubt, these restrictions do not prevent submission and evaluation of ERC proposals involving legal entities to which these restrictions may apply. In line with the principle of portability applicable to ERC grants, Principal Investigators who have submitted their proposal with host institutions to which these restrictions apply, and have been recommended for funding, will be granted the possibility to ensure the eligibility of their proposal by transferring it to a new, eligible legal entity. Furthermore, in case the legal entity subject to such restriction is an additional legal entity (as beneficiary, affiliated entity, or associated partner), the host institution will be invited to remove or replace that entity. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

## Annex 4

### Security

According to Article 20 of the Horizon Europe Regulation, actions carried out under the Programme shall comply with the applicable security rules. Projects involving classified and/or security sensitive information will have to go through a security appraisal process to authorise funding and may be made subject to specific security rules.

This procedure applies also to those projects involving materials, methods, technologies or generating knowledge or applications that could be misused with substantial negative implications on the security of individuals, groups, or states.

Specific provision for EU classified information (EUCI) and sensitive information (SEN) will be included in the grant agreement, as necessary and appropriate.

The rules for protecting EUCI are governed by the Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information and the Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2021/259 of 10 February 2021 laying down implementing rules on industrial security with regard to classified grants.

Depending on the type of activity, facility security clearances or equivalent proofs may have to be provided before grant signature. The granting authority will assess this for each case and will establish their delivery date during grant preparation. In these cases, it is not possible to sign any grant agreement, until

at least one of the beneficiaries has a facility security clearance or equivalent proof.

In certain cases, the project results might not require classification but they might be security sensitive and consequently be subject to restricted disclosure or limited dissemination due to security reasons, in accordance with the applicable security instructions in the Security Section of Annex 1 of the grant agreement.

Sensitive information with security recommendation (limited dissemination or restricted disclosure) or EUCI must not be downgraded, declassified or further disseminated, without the prior written consent of the originator of that information (i.e., the body/institution under whose authority the information was created and/or classified). For EUCI generated by EU projects, this is the European Commission.

Further security recommendations may be added to the grant agreement in the form of security deliverables (for example: to create a Security Advisory Board, appoint a Project Security Officer, limit the level of detail, use fake scenario, etc.).

Finally, beneficiaries must ensure that their projects are not subject to national or third country security requirements that could affect the implementation or put into question the award of the grants (such as technology restrictions, national security classification, etc.). Any potential security issues must be notified immediately to the granting authority.

## Annex 5

### Gender equality plan

A gender equality plan of an Applicant Legal Entity must cover the following minimum process-related requirements:

- Publication: formal document published on the institution's website and signed by the top management.
- Dedicated resources: commitment of resources and gender expertise to implement it.
- Data collection and monitoring: sex/gender disaggregated data on personnel (and students for institutions concerned) and annual reporting based on indicators.
- Training: Awareness raising/training on gender equality and unconscious gender biases for staff and decision-makers.
- work-life balance and organisational culture;
- gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- gender equality in recruitment and career progression;
- integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content;
- measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

Other strategic documents such as a development plan, an inclusion strategy or a diversity strategy are considered as equivalent if they meet the requirements listed above.

Content-wise, recommended areas to be covered and addressed via concrete measures and targets are the following:

## **Prior Information of Candidates, Tenderers, Grant Applicants, and remunerated experts - registration of information in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES).**

The Commission operates the EDES, a system established under Articles 135, 142 and 143 of the Financial Regulation. The EDES is used for the early detection of risks related to candidates, tenderers, grant applicants, beneficiaries of contracts and grants and linked third parties, as well as remunerated external experts, with a view to protecting the EU's financial interests.

Candidates, tenderers, grant applicants, remunerated external experts and, if they are legal entities, persons who have powers of representation, decision or control over them, are informed that, should they be in one of the situations mentioned in Article 136(1) of the Financial Regulation<sup>103</sup>, their personal details (name, given name if natural person, address, legal form and name and given name of the persons with powers of representation, decision-making or control, if legal person) may be registered in the EDES, and communicated to the persons and entities referred to in Article 142 (1), (2), (4) and (5) of the Financial Regulation, in relation to the award or the execution of a procurement contract, a grant agreement or an expert contract.

NB: The EDES has replaced the Early Warning System (EWS) and the Central Exclusion Database (CED) as of 1 January 2016.

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<sup>103</sup> Applicants that are subject to the administrative sanctions of exclusion or are in one of the exclusion situations set out by the EU Financial Regulation are banned from receiving EU grants and can NOT participate.