

**Ministry of University and Research**

**Directorate-General for Internationalisation and Communication**

**Public notice for the submission of project proposals to be funded  
under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)**

**Mission 4, “*Education and Research*” - Component 2, “*From Research to Business*” - Investment line 1.2, “*Funding projects presented by young researchers*”, funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU**

**Funding of projects by young researchers who won the ERC grant**

**Guidelines for Applicants**

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## 1. Purpose

These guidelines intend to provide **support to applicants** who wish to participate in the [Public Notice no. 247/2022](#)<sup>1</sup> (henceforth “*Notice*”) aimed at supporting the research activities of young researchers who have won European Research Council - ERC Starting Grant calls.

The guidelines are addressed to Applicants. They can also be used as a reference tool by the “*Implementing Entities*” (Host Institutions) to ensure that researchers are properly supported in carrying out their activities.

## 2. Recipients

The applicants are the **Principal Investigators** who obtained the European Research Council - ERC **Starting Grant** under the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Framework Programmes. The Applicants’ grant must **still be active with a foreign Host Institution on the date of the publication of the Notice**.

Applicants must also undersign an agreement with an Italian Host Institution no later than **31 May 2023**, by means of the “**grant portability**” feature provided by the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Framework Programmes for the ERC theme.

Moreover, **at the date of publication of the Notice (23 August 2022)**, applicants must have a **minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 7 years full-time equivalent experience in research**, measured **from the date of award of the doctoral degree**.

The Implementing Entities, which are eligible as beneficiaries of the funding as referred to in this Notice, are:

- State and non-State **universities**, including online universities and Special University Institutes
- **Public Research Bodies** with offices throughout the country.

## 3. Type of projects

Proposals must be **complementary or consequential** with respect to the activities included in the **First Submission** developed throughout the winning projects of the European Research Council - ERC Starting under the Framework Programmes Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe.

Within the proposal, the applicants must include, under penalty of exclusion, **short periods of mobility** for a **maximum of 6 months**, including periods for research or teaching in other locations in Italy or abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> A courtesy translation of the Notice is available at the following link: [DD\\_247\\_ENG\\_Courtesy\\_translation\\_v2.pdf \(mur.gov.it\)](#). Please note that in case of discrepancy between the Italian language original text and the English language translation, the Italian version shall prevail.

### 3.1. Fundable proposals

Project proposals may relate to one of the research areas belonging to the **scientific-disciplinary macro-sectors** listed in Annex 1A.

### 3.2. Eligibility criteria

In order to achieve the NRRP objectives and to implement its provisions, project proposals must:

- be consistent with the objectives and purposes of Regulation (EU) 2021/241, with the general strategy and the component of the NRRP;
- aim at achieving the results measured with reference to Milestones and Targets assigned to the Investment;
- comply with the “do no significant harm” principle, pursuant to Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852, in accordance with the technical guidelines prepared by the European Commission (Communication from the Commission 2021/C58/01);
- be suitable for addressing and bridging gender inequalities;
- support the participation of women and young people, also consistently with the provisions of Decree-Law No. 77 of 31 May 2021 (c.d. Simplification Decree), converted, with amendments, by Law No. 108 of 29 July 2021 on the management of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP);
- promote the exploitation of research results and guarantee the protection of intellectual property, ensuring open access to the public, access to research results and related data (for example, publications of original scientific research results, raw data and metadata, sources, digital graphic and image representations and scientific multimedia materials), in the shortest time and with the least possible limitations, according to the principles of “Open science” and “FAIR Data”.

Compliance with the conditions listed above must be declared.

In particular, compliance with the “**do no significant harm**” principle must be declared through the transmission of the Declaration of fulfilment of the DNSH principle, which is to be signed by the applicant (Annex 2A).

The applicant must also complete the self-assessment form on compliance with the **ethical requirements** relating to the European Research Council - ERC Starting Grants (Annex 3A).

### 3.3. Duration

The activities envisaged in the project proposal must be carried out within a **maximum period of 36 months** and – in any case – **no later than 31 May 2026**.

## 4. Presentation of the application

The Principal Investigator must submit the application in English, under penalty of exclusion and inadmissibility, exclusively electronically, via the <https://www.gea.mur.gov.it> platform, starting from **22 September 2022 at 12:00 PM** (Rome time) and strictly **no later than 11 October 2022 at 12:00 PM** (Rome time).

The Ministry, at the opening of the terms for submitting the application, will guarantee access to the online platform for those authorized to submit project proposals. Through this access, the applicant will be able to perform all activities related to filling out and submitting the application.

Any application relating to project proposals submitted by Principal Investigators who have won ERC Starting Grants under the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Framework Programs must include:

- a) The **project registry form**, which provides the title of the research project funded by ERC, the indication of the macro-sector of the project funded by ERC, the identification code of the call in which the Principal Investigator participated, the date of communication of the admission to funding, the score obtained, the date of signing of the Grant agreement, the abstract of the original project, the value of the project, the start and end date of the project funded by ERC;
- b) The form relating to the complementary or consequential **research proposal** pursuant to the Notice, which includes the title of the project, the duration of the project, the keywords (maximum 5), the project abstract;
- c) The **economic-financial plan** – required only if the total contribution requested is greater than or equal to € 200,000 – which presents the total contribution requested and the breakdown of the project costs by expense items (Annex 5A).
- d) The following **attachments**, to be included in the “Attachments” section:
  - i. Identity document
  - ii. Evaluation Summary Report;
  - iii. The identification code of the Grant agreement of the Principal Investigator;
  - iv. “First submission” of the project financed by ERC;
  - v. Project proposal (Annex 6A);
  - vi. Curriculum Vitae of the Principal Investigator
  - vii. Declaration of compliance with the DNSH principle (Annex 2A);

Incomplete applications, due to the absence or non-exhaustive nature of parts or sections, are not considered eligible and are not subject to evaluation.

Each Principal Investigator **may feature in only one proposal** under this Notice and must select **3 vacancies in order of preference** from the list of vacancies provided by the Host Institution.

**At least one preference must be in the Southern regions of Italy.**

This choice becomes **irrevocable** - and therefore not modifiable nor integrable - once the selection activities have been concluded.

## 5. Costs determination criteria

The grant will correspond to the eligible costs within a **maximum limit of € 1 million** for each project proposal.

Upon submitting the application, the applicant must indicate the amount requested:

- For amounts **lower than € 200,000**, the funding is requested as a “**lump sum**”. In this case, the applicant will not have to present an economic-financial plan, broken down into the eligible cost items.
- For amounts **equal to or higher than € 200,000**, the applicant will have to present an **economic-financial plan** by filling in the table provided by the Annex 5A of the Notice.

The following cost items are eligible and can form part of the economic-financial plan:

- a) **Costs of personnel** dedicated to the project referred to in this Notice, in terms of months/person, including costs relating to the recruitment of at least one fixed-term researcher, which should **not be higher than the 20%**,
- b) Other costs:
  1. costs of **tools and equipment**, to the extent and for the period in which they are actually used for the project, applying the depreciation criterion, including costs relating to **infrastructure investments**, in order to enhance the value of the *Host Institution*, which should **not be lower than 20%**. These expenses need to be reported in compliance with the principles of good accounting practice;
  2. costs of **scientific consultancy** or **technical-scientific assistance** services used exclusively for the purposes of the project;
  3. costs of **communication activities** and dissemination of research results;
  4. costs for **short periods of mobility** for research or teaching activities in other locations in Italy or abroad for a **maximum period of 6 months**;
  5. other **operating costs** (such as consumables, publication of books, missions abroad and participation in training and/or dissemination events abroad incurred for the project, costs for the acquisition and use of patents);
  6. **general expenditures**: eligible at a flat rate of **7% of direct costs**.

Within the financial-economic plan, the value added tax (VAT) is considered an eligible cost only in cases where this is not recoverable. In any case, for each project VAT costs must be promptly traced by the information management systems, as they are not included in the estimate of project costs for the purposes of the NRRP.

## 6. Evaluation procedures and criteria

The **selection and evaluation procedures are carried out by each Host Institution** that has received at least one application, within the scope of their autonomy.

For the purposes of carrying out the evaluations, the Host Institutions indicated by the applicant appoint one or more Evaluation Commissions within, as a rule, 30 days from the expiry of the deadline for receiving applications.

The evaluation is based on the following criteria:

1. <b>Scientific congruity:</b> Consistency, clarity and ambition of the project objectives, by reason of complementarity and/or consequentiality with the objectives of the “ <i>First submission</i> ”.
2. <b>Expected impact</b> of the project on the scientific, social and economic level, and adherence to European and international policies (for example, the Sustainable Development Goals and the 5 Missions of the Horizon Europe Framework Program) and in terms of knowledge transfer and / or technology
3. <b>Implementation</b> and feasibility; robustness, clarity and feasibility of the proposed plan on schedule

The achievable score for each criterion is in the range between **0** (The proposal does not meet the evaluation criteria and / or cannot be evaluated due to missing information) and **5** (The proposal successfully addresses the evaluation criteria, and any shortcomings are to be considered marginal). The **maximum score that can be achieved is 15**.

Projects that achieve an overall score **lower than 9 out of 15** or that have at least a score on the individual criteria **lower than or equal to 1** are **not eligible** for the grant.

Within 15 days of the closure of the merit evaluation procedure, the Host Institutions fill out the **Evaluation Report** (Annex 7A) for each project proposal associated with the vacant and available positions. The Host Institutions send the Evaluation Reports to the Ministry of University and Research together with the documentation certifying compliance with the “do no significant harm” (DNSH) principle.

At the same time, the Host Institutions draw up, for each open position, a **ranking**, ordering the project proposals received according to the scores contained in the evaluation reports and forwarding the rankings to the Ministry of University and Research.

Within 15 days of receiving the rankings, the Ministry associates the open positions to the applicants who are first classified in each ranking and who have indicated the relevant Host Institution as the first among the preferences.

If the rankings contain projects classified as “equal merit” based on the score obtained, the project proposals that has obtained a higher score as defined in criterion n. 1 and, if this score is the same, that has obtained a higher score as defined in criterion n. 2. In case of further “equal merit”, the winning project proposal will be the one submitted by the youngest Principal Investigator.

If the applicant is ranked first in more than one ranking, the Ministry **associates the applicants with the Host Institution indicated in the highest position**, in the order of preferences. In such cases, the applicant is excluded from the rankings of the other vacant and available positions for which he has expressed a preference of a lower grade.

Within **20 days from the publication of the final ranking**, the applicants proceed to **accept or reject** the position assigned. In case of renunciation or non-acceptance, it will not be possible to be placed on other vacant and available positions and also to participate in subsequent editions of this Notice.

Upon completion of the procedure described above, the Ministry adopts the concession decree.

## 7. Attachments to the Notice

### 7.1. Annex 2A (Declaration of compliance with the DNSH principle)

With Annex 2A, the proponent declares that the project proposal complies with the “do no significant harm” (DNSH) principle, pursuant to Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852.

The principle is divided into **six objectives**, to which the project proposal must not cause significant harm:

- i) *Climate change mitigation*: research activities must not generate a significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions
- ii) *Adaptation to climate change*: Research activities must not have an increasing negative impact on current and future climate, on the activities themselves, or on people, nature or properties
- iii) *Sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources*: the activities must not be harmful to the good health of water bodies (surface, underground or marine) nor compromise their quality or reduce their ecological potential;
- iv) *Transition to the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling*: activities must not lead to significant inefficiencies in the use of recovered or recycled materials, must not increase the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or increase significantly waste or its combustion or disposal, causing significant long-term environmental damage;
- v) *Prevention and reduction of air, water and soil pollution*: the activities must not lead to an increase in emissions of pollutants into the air, water or soil;
- vi) *Protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem health*: the activities must not harm the good state and resilience of ecosystems or the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of interest to the European Union.

Furthermore, in line with the European Commission's Communication 2021/C58/01, research activities **must not include**:

- i) activities related to *fossil fuels*, including downstream use;
- ii) activities under the *EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)* which result in projections of greenhouse gas emissions not lower than the relevant benchmarks;
- iii) activities relating to *waste landfills*, incinerators and mechanical biological treatment plants;
- iv) activities where *long-term waste disposal* can cause damage to the environment.



Furthermore, research activities must be compatible with **relevant national and European environmental legislation**.

Annex 2A includes a **table** that shows the six objectives in which the DNSH principle is articulated. For each objective, the applicant must indicate with a yes or a no if the research activity complies with the DNSH principles and must provide a precise justification for the answer.

### **Example 1**

*Environmental goal: Climate change mitigation*

*Was the DNSH principle fulfilled with regards to the environmental objective?: Yes*

*Justification: The measures adopted to modernize the technological assets do not lead to a significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions, as the new equipment has higher environmental performance than those it replaces and as the interventions will ensure maximum energy efficiency. Since the digitalization of processes involves aspects related to the management of big data, the activities will use servers managed according to the “2019 Best Practice Guidelines for the EU Code of Conduct on Data Center Energy Efficiency (JRC)”. Refrigerants used in refrigeration systems will comply with the requirements of the EU Gas Regulation.*

### **Example 2**

*Environmental goal: Climate change adaptation*

*Was the DNSH principle fulfilled with regards to the environmental objective?: Yes*

*Justification: The measure has no foreseeable or negligible impact on the environmental objective, in relation to the primary direct and indirect effects of the measure in its life cycle, given its nature. Therefore, the measure is considered to be DNSH compliant within the scope of this objective.*

## 7.2. Annex 3A (Declaration / checklist on ethics signed by the Applicant)

Annex 3A represents the declaration, in the form of a **checklist** that the applicant must complete and sign to certify the compliance of the project with the **principles of ethics**.

The format is divided into several sections.

### *Human embryonic stem cells (hESCs) and human embryos (hEs)*

This section covers projects with activities involving **human embryonic stem cells (hESCs)** and **human embryos (hEs)**.

The following activities are **not eligible for EU funding** and therefore cannot be included in the proposals:

- activities aimed at human cloning for reproductive purposes

- activities aimed at modifying the genetic makeup of humans that could make such changes heritable (apart from research related to cancer treatment of the gonads, which can be funded)
- activities aimed at the creation of human embryos exclusively for the purpose of research or procurement of stem cells, including the technique of nuclear transfer of somatic cells
- activities that lead to the destruction of human embryos
- activities involving human stem cells, both adult and embryonic, can be funded, depending on both the content of the scientific proposal and the legal framework of the Member States involved.

No funding will be granted for activities inside or outside the EU which are prohibited in all Member States. No activity will be funded in a Member State where such activity is prohibited.

Please note that all proposals involving the use of hESCs or hEs will undergo an ethical evaluation and, in some cases, also appropriate approval procedures.

### *Humans*

This section refers to projects with **activities involving human beings** who are **not part of the project staff** (beneficiaries, affiliated entities, associated partners, subcontractors, etc.). It therefore covers research or study participants, people interested or involved in project activities, regardless of its nature or topic.

Common to all fields, the **main ethical issues** concern:

- respect for people and human dignity
- fair distribution of benefits and burdens
- the rights and interests of the participants
- the need to guarantee the free informed consent of participants (with particular attention to vulnerable categories of individuals such as children, patients, discriminated against, minorities, people unable to give consent, etc.).

Furthermore, the methodologies used should not result in discriminatory practices or unfair treatment.

### *Human cells or tissues*

This section refers to projects with activities that use, produce or harvest **human cells or tissues** (including human fetal or embryonic tissues or cells, other than hESCs).

It is possible to obtain cells or tissues:

- from commercial sources
- as part of this project
- from another project, laboratory or institution
- from a biobank.

### *Personal Data*

This section concerns projects with research activities that involve the **processing of personal data**, regardless of the method used (eg interviews, surveys, questionnaires, direct online retrieval, etc.).

**Personal data:** Information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person.

An identifiable natural person is a person who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more aspect-specific factors physical, physiological, genetic, psychological, economic, cultural or social identity of this natural person (article 2 (a) EU Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR) on the protection of personal data).

*Examples:* name, address, identification number, pseudonym, profession, email, CV, location data, Internet Protocol (IP) address, cookie ID, telephone number, data provided by smart meters, data held by a hospital or by a doctor.

Individuals are not considered "identifiable" if identifying them requires excessive effort.

Fully anonymized data does not fall under the data protection regulations (as from the time it has been completely anonymized, the GDPR is not applicable).

**Special categories of personal data** (formerly known as "sensitive data") – Includes personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs or trade union membership and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, health data or data relating to the sexual life or sexual orientation of a natural person (Article 9 (1), GDPR).

The processing of such data is subject to stricter data protection safeguards. Member States may introduce special derogations / limitations with regard to the processing of genetic, data, biometric and health-related data.

**Personal data relating to criminal convictions and offenses** – This data may only be processed under the control of official authorities or when the processing is authorized by the law of the Union or of a Member State which provides adequate safeguards for the rights and freedoms of data subjects (Article 10 GDPR).

**Processing of personal data** – Any operation (or set of operations) performed on personal data, manually or by automatic means. This includes:

- collection (digital audio recording, digital video caption, etc.)
- registration
- organization, structuring and storage (cloud server, LAN or WAN)
- adaptation or alteration (union of sets, appification, etc.)
- retrieval and consultation
- utilization

## *Animals*

This section refers to projects with **research activities involving animals**. Animal welfare is a value of the European Union (Article 13 TFEU). Animals have an intrinsic value that must be respected and treated as sentient creatures.

There is a wide range of EU legislation aimed at ensuring animal welfare and which may be relevant to your projects.

### *Non-EU countries*

This section concerns projects with activities involving **non-EU countries**.

This is the case where:

- the activities are carried out, in whole or in part, in a non-EU country
- the participants or resources come from a non-EU country
- the material is imported or exported to a non-EU country.

Being beyond the reach of European laws and standards, such activities can raise **specific ethical issues** (particularly in developing countries), such as:

- exploitation of participants
- enhancement of local resources
- risks to project teams and staff
- activities (mainly research) prohibited in the EU.

### *Environment, health and safety*

This section covers projects with activities that can adversely affect:

- **environment**
- **health and safety** of the people involved.

This may be due to one of the following reasons:

- the (experimental) design of the project itself (especially for research projects)
- unwanted side effects of the technologies used.

The health and safety of all human participants must be a priority in all EU projects, especially in projects where the participants may be researchers or uninvolved third parties.

The types of human security risks vary according to the nature of the project, discipline, topic and location. Only the “person in the field” can fully assess the safety issues and / or their willingness to tolerate the risks.

However, both family and unknown settings can lead to additional security problems. Even in family environments, unexpected and non-routine episodes can occur that jeopardize safety.

Furthermore, in some types of projects, the risk of damage to research or other personnel is caused by the activities themselves. Lack of caution or failure to follow standard procedures can cause physical or psychological harm.

### *Artificial Intelligence*

This section concerns projects with activities involving the development, dissemination and / or use of systems or techniques based on **artificial intelligence** (AI).

How an AI solution is implemented or used can change the ethical characteristics of the system. It is therefore important to ensure ethical compliance even in cases where the project does not autonomously develop an AI-based system / technique.

Beneficiaries are strongly encouraged to use the **Assessment List for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (ALTAI)** to develop procedures for detecting and assessing the level and addressing potential risks.

### *Other ethics issues*

As many EU programs intend to support innovative activities, it is possible that the project raises **new ethical questions and concerns that are currently not (fully) covered by the standard questions** in the Ethics Issue Table (e.g., new developments in the fields of neurobiology, human-machine interaction, developments in nanotechnology, genetic improvement, creation of androids and cyborgs, etc.).

### 7.3. Annex 5A (Financial-economic plan)

A **financial-economic plan** must be redacted for project proposals that require funding equal or higher than € 200,000.

Annex 5A provides applicants with the following table, to be used to draft the financial-economic plan:

ERC			
Type of costs		Project cost	requested contribution
Personnel Costs	Principal Investigator		
	Additional non-tenure-track researcher		
Purchase costs	Travel and subsistence		
	Equipment		
	Other goods, works and services		
Subcontracting Costs			
Indirect costs		0,00	0,00
Total		0,00	0,00

Under the “**Project cost**” column, applicants may insert cost estimates relative to the research project, whereas under the “**Requested contribution**” column, applicants may insert cost estimates for which funding under the Notice is requested.

In compliance with Regulation (EU) 2021/241, the double financing of the same activity is prohibited.

The following cost items may be included within the “**Personnel Costs**” category:

- Under “**Additional non-tenure track researcher**”: costs relating to staff to be recruited under fixed-term contracts, research grants, doctoral grants. Personnel costs, including costs relating to the recruitment of at least one fixed-term researcher, should **not be higher than 20% of the total requested contribution**.

The following cost items may be included within the “**Purchase costs**” category:

- Under “**Travel and subsistence**”, operating costs related to missions in Italy and abroad, participation in training and/or dissemination events abroad to which the applicant may participate as part of her/his project;
- Under “**Equipment**”: tools and equipment costs, including software products to the extent and for the period during which they are actually used for the project, in application of the depreciation principle;
- Under “**Other goods, works and services**”:
  - Costs of scientific consultancy or technical-scientific assistance services used exclusively for the purposes of the project;
  - Costs of communication activities and dissemination of research results;
  - Other costs relating to consumables, publication of books, missions abroad and participation in training and/or dissemination events abroad incurred for the project, costs for the acquisition and use of patents).

The “**Subcontracting Costs**” category may include all costs relating to the activities carried out by an external subject external, who is capable to work independently and is not driven by research purposes.

The “**Indirect Costs**” category includes all costs necessary for project implementation, which are not directly connected to the projects (because it is not possible to calculate their exact amount). The value of these costs is calculated at a flat rate of **7% of direct eligible costs**.

#### 7.4. [Annex 6A \(Project Proposal\)](#)

Annex 6A contains information for the **detailed description of all the elements of the project proposal**. The document consists of the following sections to be filled in:

- Abstract
- Research status and objectives (Section a)
- Concepts and methodology (Section b)
- Potential Impact (Section c)
- Measures to maximise impact (Section d)
- Implementation quality and efficiency (Section e)
- Work Package description (Table 1)