



Ministry of
Education, Science
and Innovation

FUNDING PROGRAMME FOR POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH EXCELLENCE





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INTRODUCTION

BASIS FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

The Government of Montenegro adopted the *Strategy for Scientific Research Activities of Montenegro 2024–2028*, together with the *Action Plan for the period 2024–2025*¹, in early July 2024. This Strategy represents the most important sectoral strategic document in the field of science and research.

The Strategy defines three strategic goals, the second of which concerns the *Strengthening of Human Resources and Institutional Capacities in Science and Research*. In order to achieve this goal, *Operational Objective 2.1: Support for the Engagement of Young Researchers* has been identified, which includes Activity 2.1.2 – the implementation of the Postdoctoral Research Programme for Excellence. The main objective of this activity is to provide opportunities for gaining international scientific experience and access to advanced research infrastructure that is not available in Montenegro, as well as to encourage the professional development of young PhD holders who wish to continue their research careers and further enhance their scientific work. The Strategy also defines the *priority areas of scientific research*, namely:

- Sustainable agriculture and food value chain
- Energy and sustainable environment
- Sustainable and medical tourism
- Science, education and culture
- Medicine and health
- Socio-political and socio-economic challenges of the Montenegrin society
- New materials, technologies, products and services
- Natural disaster risk management
- Informational-communicational technologies

According to the Work Programme of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation for 2025², under the area Science and Innovation, section 3. Other Activities, including the implementation of the Programme/Call for the Award of Postdoctoral Research Scholarships, are planned for the third/fourth quarter of 2025. Following consultations with members of the Council and the research community, the title was adjusted to Funding Programme for Postdoctoral Research Excellence, as it more accurately reflects the essence of the measure – namely, that funds are not awarded as individual scholarships to researchers, but rather as project-based funding of scientific research activities within a public call, in accordance with the Law on Scientific Research Activities. In terms of the legal framework for scientific research activities, the basis for the adoption of this Programme/Call is established in the *Law on Scientific Research Activities* (“Official Gazette of Montenegro”, No. 51/25)³, as follows:

- Article 11 stipulates that the funds from the state budget assigned for the financing or co-financing of scientific research activities shall be allocated on the basis of a public call announced by the Ministry.
 - Article 43 stipulates that scientific research activities may be funded or co-funded from the state budget, local self-government units, financial resources of scientific research institutions, donations, and other sources in accordance with the law, as well as through national and international programmes and projects implemented in Montenegro.
- Financing or co-financing of scientific research activities from the state budget includes the granting of funds for:
- national or international scientific research programmes and projects implemented by research institutions; and
 - other activities of scientists and researchers that promote scientific research work and are important for the conduct of scientific research activities.

¹ <https://www.gov.me/clanak/strategija-naucnoistrzivacke-djelatnosti-2024-2028>

² <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/c72856e6-27ca-47d4-91d0-7a5afc296971>

³ <https://www.sluzbenilist.me/propisi/2730B46C-EC20-4151-A2D9-890889700B9A>

The Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, upon the proposal of the Council for Scientific Research Activities, has nominated the Funding Programme for Postdoctoral Research Excellence for adoption.

Rationale for the Adoption of the Programme

High-quality human resources form the foundation of research and innovation (R&I), and continuous support for researcher career development and the promotion of research excellence are key to strengthening the international competitiveness of the scientific community. This Programme directly contributes to the advancement of the science, research, and innovation system by strengthening human capacities, rejuvenating the research workforce, and providing postdoctoral researchers with the opportunity to take on leadership roles in research projects.

By adopting this Programme, an institutional framework is established that enables:

- Support for postdoctoral researchers in conducting independent research, allowing them to plan and implement research projects autonomously, develop their own ideas, and strengthen their research competencies.
- Enhancement of professional and managerial skills of researchers, enabling them to effectively lead research teams, manage projects, and develop the strategic capabilities necessary for an independent research career.
- Development of international cooperation, through networking with foreign partners and institutions, exchanging knowledge and experience, and establishing long-term collaborations that strengthen the international visibility and competitiveness of researchers.
- Fostering collaboration with the business sector, enabling researchers to engage with industry partners, gain applied research skills, and develop innovative solutions and practical approaches, while strengthening their professional networks and impact/

The Programme aligns with the strategic goals of human resource development in science, research, and innovation, and promotes research excellence. It enables postdoctoral researchers to assume leading roles in both national and international research environments. The Programme provides support to those who have already demonstrated excellent results under mentorship, are ready for independent research work, and have the potential to become leading scientists. In this way, it ensures the long-term sustainability and quality development of the research sector.

1. BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE FUNDING PROGRAMME FOR POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

I. Subject and Objectives of the Programme

The Funding Programme for Postdoctoral Research Excellence is focused on awarding grants to postdoctoral researchers for the development of independent research projects, as well as for the establishment and management of their own research groups within institutions in Montenegro. The Programme is intended for researchers within seven (7) years of obtaining their PhD and enables them to develop research skills, build international contacts, strengthen professional competencies, and achieve outstanding scientific results. In doing so, it contributes to the long-term competitiveness of Montenegro's research sector through the development of new generations of excellent researchers and research groups.

In addition, the Programme includes co-financing of applied research and collaboration with the business sector, thereby strengthening research capacities for the creation of applied knowledge and innovations relevant to the economic and social development of Montenegro.

The expected results immediately after the completion of the projects are as follows:

- Increased number of independent excellent researchers;
- Strengthened research and managerial skills of postdoctoral researchers;
- Increased number of excellent research groups;
- Enhanced international mobility and cooperation with leading research groups abroad;
- Increased collaboration with the business sector.

The specific objectives of the Programme, expected five years after continuous implementation, are as follows:

- Creation of a new generation of independent, excellent researchers;
- Strengthened human resources in research and innovation, and improved international recognition of research groups;
- Increased number of projects and scientific papers developed in cooperation with leading research groups abroad;
- Increased number of projects ready for further commercialisation.

II. Priority Research Areas

The Programme is based on the priority areas of scientific research defined in the Strategy for Scientific Research Activities of Montenegro 2024–2028.

This means that the subject of postdoctoral research projects must fall within one of the aforementioned priority areas of scientific research.

III. Financial Framework of the Programme

The total value of the Funding Programme for Postdoctoral Research Excellence amounts to €1,100,000 for the period 2025–2028, while for 2025, an amount of €500,000 is planned for the co-financing of the first year of research under the approved projects within this Programme and the accompanying Call for Proposals.

Funds in the amount of €500,000 for 2025 have been approved by the Law on the Budget of Montenegro for 2025⁴, as follows: Organisational Code 40701 – Ministry of Education, Science and

⁴ <https://www.sluzbenilist.me/propisi/3B74EDB7-095E-4176-9B7C-2777D6C50FA8>

Innovation, Programme 19 040 – Development of Science and Technology, Subprogramme 19 040 001 – Scientific Research Activities, Activity 19 040 001 003 – New Programmes and Calls for Science and Research, 431-9 – Other Transfers to Institutions.

Grants for project implementation shall be awarded for a period of not less than 24 months and not more than 36 months. For the purpose of implementing and financing this Programme, the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation shall announce a Call for the Funding of Postdoctoral Research for Excellence⁵.

IV. Eligibility Criteria – Applicant and Partners

IV.1 Applicant

The Applicant must be a licensed scientific research institution based in Montenegro, in accordance with the Law on Scientific Research Activities (“Official Gazette of Montenegro”, No. 51/25). The postdoctoral researcher must be employed by the institution on a permanent or fixed-term basis, or engaged in a research project in accordance with the Labour Law and the institution’s internal acts, in a manner that ensures continuity of engagement throughout the project’s duration. Alternatively, the institution must express its intention to employ the postdoctoral researcher in the event of project approval, which shall be demonstrated through a Statement of Intent to Employ issued by the Applicant.

Additionally, depending on the type of institution, the following conditions must be met:

- a. If the Applicant is a research institution from Montenegro, it must qualify as:
 - an “research and knowledge-dissemination organisation” or a “research organisation”, meaning an entity (such as universities, research institutes, technology transfer offices, innovation intermediaries, natural persons, or virtual collaborative entities focused on research), regardless of its legal status (organisation under public or private law) or method of financing, whose primary goal is to independently carry out fundamental research, industrial research, or experimental development, and to disseminate the results of these activities to the wider public through teaching, publication, or knowledge transfer, in accordance with the EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2022/C 414/01), Chapter 1.3, point 16 (ff)⁶.
- b. If the Applicant is a business entity, it must:
 - be registered in the Central Register of Business Entities of Montenegro;
 - have its registered seat in the territory of Montenegro;
 - have fulfilled all obligations regarding the regular payment of taxes and contributions;
 - not be subject to pre-bankruptcy, bankruptcy, or liquidation proceedings, nor have suspended its regular business activity, in accordance with national regulations; and
 - not be classified as an undertaking in difficulty, according to financial statements for the previous year (2024).

⁵ In accordance with Article 11 of the Law on Scientific Research Activities (“Official Gazette of Montenegro”, No. 51/25)

⁶ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022XC1028\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022XC1028(03))

IV.2 Partners

Although partners are not mandatory under the Funding Programme for Postdoctoral Research Excellence, cooperation with partners is allowed and encouraged, particularly with domestic research institutions, members of the international research community, and representatives of the business sector. Such partnerships contribute to improving the quality of research, the transfer of knowledge, methodologies, and technologies, the applicability of research results, and the overall impact of the project.

Partners in the project may be:

- c. other scientific research institutions from Montenegro or abroad, or
- d. business entities with their registered seat in Montenegro.

Eligible partners referred to in point IV.2c., if they are scientific research institutions from Montenegro, must be licensed in accordance with the Law on Scientific Research Activities ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 51/25). They must also meet the same additional conditions as the Applicant described in point IV.1a. Eligible partners referred to in point IV.2c., if they are scientific research institutions from abroad, may include universities, research institutes, or virtual collaborative research-oriented entities. Eligible partners referred to in point IV.2d. shall not be required to be licensed scientific research institutions, but must meet the same additional conditions as the Applicant described in point IV.1b.

The grants awarded to applicants referred to in point IV.1a. and to partners from Montenegro referred to in point IV.2c. do not constitute state aid, provided that they are organisations for research and knowledge dissemination ("research organisations") and do not meet the conditions for being considered an undertaking. These conditions do not depend on their legal status (whether established under public or private law) or on their economic nature (whether they seek to make a profit or not). The decisive factor for not meeting the definition of an undertaking is that economic activities consisting of the offering of products or services on a given market do not exceed 20% of the organisation's total annual capacity. If a research organisation carries out both economic and non-economic activities, public funding of non-economic activities shall not fall under Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, provided that the two types of activities, their costs, funding, and revenues can be clearly separated to effectively avoid cross-subsidisation of economic activity.

Applicants referred to in point IV.1a. and partners referred to in point IV.2c. from Montenegro shall be obliged to study the *Guidelines for Beneficiaries regarding the application of State aid rules* and confirm compliance with the main provisions by signing the Applicant's/Partner's Declaration (Declaration on Non-Economic Activities).

The grants awarded to applicants referred to in point IV.1b. and to other partners that are business entities constitute (de minimis aid), in accordance with the Law on State Aid Control ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 012/18)⁷.

V. Financial Conditions and Project Duration

The value of funds per individual project within the Funding Programme for Postdoctoral Research Excellence, awarded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, may amount to up to €70,000 for a period of 24 months and up to €100,000 for a period of 36 months.

The total value of an individual project includes the grant funds awarded by the Ministry for the eligible project costs.

⁷ <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/c44499b7-4a41-4758-a8db-ea55d5358c3a>

VI. Double Funding

The principle of the prohibition of double funding implies that the same costs must not be financed twice from the state budget, European Union programmes, international sources, or other providers of state aid.

Applicants may not request or use funds from the state budget, European Union programmes, international funds, or other sources of state aid for the same costs that shall be financed or co-financed under the proposed project. In other words, double financing of the same costs is not permitted.

VII. Number of Applications per Applicant

An Applicant may submit multiple project proposals, provided that the same costs are not financed twice from the state budget, European Union programmes, or international sources for the same beneficiary of grant funds.

VIII. Eligible Project Activities

The funds allocated under the Programme shall be used to cover eligible project costs, which must include:

- a. Costs of the monthly salary/fee of the postdoctoral researcher;
- b. Research activities within the project;
- c. Development of human, research, and institutional capacities;
- d. Procurement of research equipment and materials;
- e. Short-term mobility of the postdoctoral researcher and the research team (if applicable), including activities related to mobility and networking, which may include participation in conferences, fieldwork in Montenegro for the purpose of collecting research materials and data, research stays at institutions abroad, attendance at seminars, and all types of training that contribute to the professional development of the postdoctoral researcher (and the research team), strengthening their research and professional competencies and contributing to the achievement of the general and specific objectives of the project;
- f. Medium-term mobility of the postdoctoral researcher, including activities related to mobility and networking, specifically stays at institutions abroad lasting at least three months per year, contributing to the achievement of the general and specific objectives of the project; and
- g. Supporting consulting services, including services necessary to achieve project objectives or knowledge transfer, such as expert consultations in areas of knowledge and skills not possessed by the project team. This may include, for example, the analysis of scientific results, consultations on the commercialisation of scientific outcomes, and similar activities.
- h. Dissemination costs.

IX. Ineligible Project Activities

Funds allocated under the Programme may **not** be used for:

- The purchase of used equipment;
- The purchase of passenger, freight, or commercial vehicles;
- The Rental of equipment, tools, and materials⁸;
- Any type of construction works;
- The purchase or lease of real estate;
- Cash withdrawal from the project account.

All other activities not listed in point VIII of the Programme shall also be considered ineligible.

⁸ Costs related to long-term rental or leasing of equipment are not eligible.

X. Eligible Costs

- Direct Costs

- a. **Research personnel costs** include expenses for the salaries of newly employed postdoctoral researchers⁹, as well as remuneration for additional work or fees for already employed postdoctoral researchers and members of the research team (if applicable). The Ministry may co-finance the monthly salary of a newly employed postdoctoral researcher under this Programme in the amount of €1,000 net¹⁰. For already engaged or employed postdoctoral researchers, as well as members of the research team, it is permitted to contract additional work or pay fees, which may be financed up to a maximum of 30% of their "Gross 2" salary. Only the Applicant shall be entitled to claim research personnel costs. *The total amount of research personnel costs must not exceed 25% of the total project value if no new employment is foreseen, or 45% of the total project value if new employment is planned.*
- b. **Costs of purchasing research equipment** are eligible if the equipment is directly related to the research proposed in the project. These costs may also include specific IT equipment and software solutions if they are necessary for the implementation of the proposed research. Accompanying costs related to the procurement of equipment (delivery, installation, calibration, and user training provided by the supplier) are also eligible. Under the category "equipment," only equipment with a unit value equal to or greater than €300 (excluding VAT) is considered. Only the Applicant shall have the right to purchase equipment with a unit value greater than €300 (excluding VAT). *The total amount of equipment procurement costs must not exceed 40% of the total project value.*
- c. **Costs of using equipment at another institution**, according to the institution's valid price list, are eligible if necessary for project implementation¹¹. The Applicant and partner institutions from Montenegro participating in the project shall be entitled to use the equipment at another institution. *The total amount of costs for using equipment at another institution must not exceed 20% of the total project value.*
- d. **Costs of consumable materials** for the project refer to materials and devices with a unit value of less than €300, excluding VAT. The right to procure consumable materials shall be granted to the Applicant and partner institutions from Montenegro, if they participate in the project. *The total amount of consumable material costs must not exceed 30% of the total project value.*
- e. **Costs of short-term mobility** related to project implementation, which include daily allowances (only for short-term travel), accommodation costs, and travel expenses. The right to claim short-term mobility costs shall be granted to the Applicant and partner institutions, including foreign partners, if they participate in the project.
- f. **Costs of medium-term mobility** related to project implementation, which include accommodation costs, travel expenses, health insurance costs, and a monthly personal allowance not exceeding €800 per month. The right to claim medium-term mobility costs shall be granted to the Applicant. *The total amount of mobility costs referred to in points e. and f. must not exceed 25% of the total project value.*
- g. **Costs of supporting consulting services** refer to those services for which the postdoctoral researcher or research team do not possess expertise but which are necessary for project implementation. These may include costs related to the preparation and analysis of scientific results, consultancy on the commercialisation of scientific outcomes, and similar services. The right to claim consulting service costs shall be granted to the Applicant. *The total amount of supporting consulting service costs must not exceed 10% of the total project value.*

⁹ The cost of the monthly salary for newly employed postdoctoral researchers, with whom the Applicant shall sign an employment contract, is covered under the Programme. The recognized amount corresponds to the "Gross 2" salary, that is, the annual salary including mandatory social security contributions of the employee.

The gross salary ("Gross 1") includes the net salary, personal income tax, and social security contributions paid by the employer on behalf of the employee. However, these are not all the fiscal obligations borne by the employer; there are also surtaxes and employer-paid contributions, which, when added to "Gross 1," form the so-called "Gross 2."

Other salary supplements, such as jubilee awards, vacation bonuses, and similar payments, are not eligible for co-financing under the Programme

¹⁰ A licensed scientific research institution employing a new postdoctoral researcher may, if deemed justified and in accordance with its internal regulations, provide additional funds from its own resources to increase the postdoctoral researcher's salary.

¹¹ The use of equipment refers to the payment of a fee to another institution for access to laboratories and instruments (analyses, measurements, access to infrastructure).

- h. Dissemination costs**, including costs of publishing scientific papers, proofreading, conference fees, and the organisation of workshops/conferences related to the project's topic. The right to claim dissemination costs shall be granted to the Applicant.
The total amount of dissemination costs must not exceed 20% of the total project value.
- i. VAT on eligible costs** for which the Applicant and partners from Montenegro, if participating in the project, are unable to obtain reimbursement.

The percentages specified above represent the maximum limits for each budget category, and their sum must remain within the total project budget.

- Indirect costs

Only the Applicant shall be entitled to claim indirect costs. *Indirect costs incurred as a result of project implementation at the Applicant's institution may amount to up to 10% of the total project value.*

Indirect costs incurred during project implementation shall not be subject to justification in the Financial Report and may include:

- costs of premises maintenance (legally required periodic inspections, replacement of used materials and components, periodic and extraordinary works and repairs);
- utility costs including heating/cooling, electricity, water, and waste disposal;
- costs related to equipment procurement such as customs and administrative fees, freight forwarding, storage, and handling costs; and
- costs of small inventory items.

XI. Ineligible Costs

Ineligible costs are considered to be all costs that cannot be counted as eligible costs.

XII. Requirements for the Project Leader and the Research Team during Application and Project Implementation

- a) Requirements for the Project Leader during project application:
 - has obtained a PhD degree, and no more than seven (7) years have passed since the date of obtaining the PhD by the deadline for submitting applications under the Call;
 - has a permanent or fixed-term employment contract, or a contract for engagement in a research project in accordance with the Labour Law and the internal acts of the institution, ensuring continuity of engagement throughout the project's duration;
 - in exceptional cases, when the Project Leader is not employed by the Applicant's institution at the time of application submission, a Statement of Intent to Employ the Project Leader in case of project approval must be submitted by the Applicant.

The scientific research qualifications and management potential of the Project Leader shall be reviewed by evaluators based on the evidence and data provided in the CV, including academic or scientific titles, number and quality of scientific publications, number and quality of projects in which the Project Leader has participated (as leader or collaborator), research awards, activities related to the protection and use of intellectual property, international cooperation, collaboration with the business sector, and similar.

The Project Leader may be engaged under this Programme in **only one project**.

The Project Leader shall be required to complete at least one medium-term mobility per year, lasting at least three months, during the project implementation period.

The Project Leader shall be required to publish at least two scientific papers in indexed journals (SCI, SCIE, SSCI, A&HCI) during the project implementation period or provide proof of their acceptance for publication. In addition, the Project Leader must achieve at least one of the following results:

- _ submission of a proposal under Horizon Europe, COST, or other international calls;
- _ submission of a patent/invention/spin-off initiative;
- _ participation in national or other international projects.

The Project Leader is encouraged to ensure that all scientific publications resulting from the project are made available in accordance with the principles of Open Access (OA).

- b) Research collaborators (members of the research team) may be:
 - postgraduate master's students who have completed undergraduate or postgraduate specialist studies;
 - individuals who have obtained a master's degree prior to enrolling in doctoral studies;
 - doctoral students;
 - individuals who have obtained a PhD degree.

The Project Leader may form a research team of up to three members, provided that all members meet the minimum requirements specified in section XIIb and that their knowledge and engagement contribute to the implementation of research and the achievement of project results.

The Project Leader is responsible for the overall results, the achievement of objectives, and the successful implementation of the project.

XIII. Ethical Issues

If the project application involves any ethical issue, the project Applicant shall be obliged to provide approval from an Ethics Committee (if applicable) and/or provide other relevant evidence demonstrating how the ethical issue shall be addressed¹².

XIV. Contents of the Application

The project application must include:

- a) A signed and stamped/electronically signed Application Form of the Applicant;
- b) The project's Financial Plan;
- c) Curricula Vitae (CVs) of the Project Leader and members of the project team (researchers in the research team) – up to 3 members;
- d) Statement of the Applicant on the intention to employ the Project Leader in case the project is approved, applicable only in situations where the Project Leader is not employed by the Applicant at the time of application submission.
- e) Statement of the Applicant on the accuracy of the submitted data, avoidance of double funding, and acceptance of the conditions of the Call, signed and stamped by the authorised person.
- f) Statement of the Applicant and partners based in Montenegro (if applicable) on non-economic activities, signed by the authorised person, applicable only to those meeting the conditions of being licensed scientific research institutions in accordance with the Law on Scientific Research Activities ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 51/25) and "organisations for research and knowledge dissemination" in accordance with the EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2022/C 414/01), Chapter 1.3, point 16 (ff),

¹² This provision applies to research involving ethically sensitive aspects, that is, situations in which the implementation of the project may concern humans, animals, personal data, or potentially risky technologies. This means that the project Applicant must submit approval from an Ethics Committee (of the institution, university, or competent authority) and ensure that the research is carried out in accordance with the applicable ethical standards and regulations.

and Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014, Article 2, point 83¹³;

- g) The Applicant or partner (if applicable), if a company with its registered seat in Montenegro, shall be required to submit the following:
- A copy of the Extract from the Central Register of Business Entities;
 - Financial statements for the previous year (2024);
 - A certificate of settled tax obligations or an appropriate document on the reprogramming of tax debt;
 - A Certificate or confirmation that no bankruptcy or liquidation proceedings have been initiated or are being conducted against the company.
- h) Statement of the partner (if applicable) on participation in the project and their contribution, confirming that the involved legal entities accept all responsibilities arising from and related to the provision of support to the proposed research. In the case of international partnerships, this statement must be preceded by a Letter of Intent or Mandate Letter, and upon project approval, an Institutional Agreement shall be concluded.
- i) Statement on the non-recoverability of VAT, signed by the Applicant and/or partners from Montenegro.

¹³ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2014.187.01.0001.01.ENG#~:text=COMMISSION%20REGULATION%20%28EU%29%20No%20651%2F2014%20of%2017%20June,of%20Articles%20107%20and%20108%20of%20the%20Treaty

XV. Procedure for Awarding Grants

XV.1 Application Procedure

The Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation shall launch a Call for the Funding of Postdoctoral Research for Excellence. The Call shall remain open for a minimum of 25 days.

In the process of evaluating project applications, the following steps shall be carried out:

- a. Administrative verification of project applications;
- b. Evaluation of project applications against the award criteria; and
- c. Acceptance or rejection of projects for co-financing.

XV.2 Administrative Verification of Project Applications

The administrative verification of submitted project applications under the Call shall be carried out by the Ministry.

Administrative criteria:

- a) All required documentation referred to in Section XIV has been submitted.
- b) The documentation is manually signed and stamped/electronically signed by the authorised persons.
- c) The content of the application has been completed using the prescribed templates established by the Ministry, which form an integral part of this Program.
- d) The Applicant must be a licensed scientific research institution in accordance with the Law on Scientific Research Activities ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 51/25).
- e) The Applicant must comply with the definition of a "research and knowledge dissemination organisation" in accordance with the EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2022/C 414/01), Chapter 1.3, point 16 (ff), and/or Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014, Article 2, point 83, and/or must be registered in the Central Register of Business Entities of Montenegro.
- f) Partners from Montenegro (if applicable) that are research organisations must be licensed scientific research institutions in accordance with the Law on Scientific Research Activities ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 51/25) and must comply with the definition of "research and knowledge dissemination organisations" in accordance with the EU Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2022/C 414/01), Chapter 1.3, point 16 (ff), and/or Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014, Article 2, point 83, or must be registered in the Central Register of Business Entities of Montenegro.
- g) The economic activities consisting of the offering of products or services on a given market by the Applicant and partners from Montenegro (if applicable) that qualify as "research and knowledge dissemination organizations" shall not exceed 20% of the organisation's total annual capacity.
- h) The Applicant or partners that are business entities from Montenegro (if applicable) must be registered in the Central Register of Business Entities of Montenegro, must regularly fulfill all tax and contribution obligations, and must not be subject to bankruptcy, liquidation, suspension of operations, or other proceedings indicating financial difficulties, in accordance with national regulations. The enterprise must operate stably and remain solvent according to the latest financial report (for 2024). In the case of international partnerships, the partner may only be a foreign scientific research institution registered in its home country in accordance with applicable regulations. Such an institution must submit proof of legal status and a statement confirming solvency and regular operation. In addition, a relevant document, such as a Certificate of Incorporation, may be submitted to confirm the institution's legal status and registered address.
- i) The application has been submitted in the manner and within the deadline specified in the Call.

- j) According to the Financial Plan, the grant amount does not exceed €70,000 for 24-month projects or €100,000 for 36-month projects.
- k) The duration of the project is at least 24 months and no more than 36 months.
- l) The Project Leader has obtained a PhD degree, and by the deadline for submitting applications under the Call, no more than seven (7) years have passed since the date of obtaining the PhD.
- m) The project is in line with the priority areas of scientific research defined in the Strategy for Scientific Research Activities of Montenegro 2024–2028.

Applications that meet the administrative criteria shall proceed to the evaluation process based on the award criteria.

XV.3 Evaluation of Project Applications Against Award Criteria

After reviewing the submitted project applications, each application shall be evaluated by three evaluators who are international experts in the specific research field to which the project belongs.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation shall, along with the documentation for the Call, prepare a Declaration of Conflict of Interest for the evaluators, as well as the Procedure for Conducting the Project Evaluation Process. The Ministry shall also launch an international Call for Expressions of Interest for evaluators of applications under the Call for the Funding of Postdoctoral Research for Excellence.

The criteria for the evaluation of project applications are as follows:

1. Scientific quality, originality, clarity, and feasibility of the proposed research. This criterion consists of four sub-criteria.

- 1.1 Does the proposed research represent an important contribution in the field of science to which the research topic belongs?

This sub-criterion assesses the contribution of the proposed research to the development of the respective scientific field. Does the proposed research contribute to the generation of new knowledge, and what is its potential to produce results relevant for future research? What is the scientific quality of the research? Does the proposed research demonstrate a novel approach to the research topic?

- 1) The proposed research is of key importance for the relevant scientific field. It demonstrates research quality and originality, with the potential to significantly advance the understanding of the proposed topic;
- 2) The proposed research can be considered relevant, but does not represent a significant breakthrough within the respective field of research;
- 3) The proposed research has limited importance within the respective field of research and does not stand out in comparison with existing studies on the proposed topic;
- 4) The proposed research is of no relevance within the respective field of research and does not stand out in comparison with existing studies on the proposed topic; and
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

- 1.2 Are the objectives, purpose, and expected results of the proposed research clearly defined and well justified?

This sub-criterion assesses whether the objectives, purpose, and expected results of the proposed research are clearly defined and well justified. It also evaluates the likelihood of achieving these objectives and results, considering the clarity and logic of the proposal.

- 1) The objectives, purpose, and expected results of the project are exceptionally clearly defined and well justified.
- 2) The objectives, purpose, and expected results are mostly clearly defined and well justified, but in only one segment, they are not clearly defined and well justified.
- 3) The objectives, purpose and expected results of the project are clearly defined and well justified in part of the proposal, but in several segments they are not sufficiently defined and justified;
- 4) The objectives, purpose and expected results of the project are not clearly defined or well justified; and
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

1.3 Feasibility of the proposed research

This sub-criterion assesses whether the proposed research is feasible in terms of the suggested research methods, work plan, composition of the research team, and whether it can be implemented within the proposed timeframe.

- 1) The proposed research is fully feasible;
- 2) The proposed research is feasible, but there is one segment whose feasibility is uncertain;
- 3) Part of the proposed research is feasible, while in several segments, feasibility is uncertain;
- 4) The proposed research is not feasible; and
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

1.4 Capacity and research environment of the host institution (infrastructure, equipment, availability of resources)

This sub-criterion evaluates whether the host institution has appropriate technical and infrastructural capacities for the implementation of the project, including access to modern equipment, laboratories, research spaces, and other relevant resources required for planned activities.

- 1) The host institution has exceptionally well-developed infrastructure and technical capacities that fully support the implementation of the project.
- 2) The host institution has adequate infrastructural and technical capacities, with minor limitations that do not significantly affect project implementation.
- 3) The infrastructural and technical capacities of the host institution are partially limited and may affect the efficiency of project implementation.
- 4) The host institution lacks the necessary infrastructural and technical capacities for project implementation.
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

2. Research Quality and Managerial Potential of the Project Leader. This criterion takes into account two sub-criteria.

2.1 Research Quality of the Project Leader

This sub-criterion assesses the candidate's previous scientific contributions through publications and participation in projects, as well as the quality of their doctoral thesis. Special emphasis is placed on the candidate's ability to independently plan and conduct research, as well as on their potential for further development of an independent research career and the establishment of their own research group through future international projects and innovations

- 1) Exceptional research contribution; the candidate demonstrates a high potential for conducting high-quality research in the proposed field.

- 2) Significant research contribution; the candidate demonstrates a very good potential for conducting high-quality research in the proposed field.
- 3) Moderate research contribution; the candidate has a basic potential for conducting high-quality research in the proposed field.
- 4) Limited research contribution, which may hinder the implementation of research; the candidate shows weak potential for conducting high-quality research in the proposed field.
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

2.2 Managerial Potential of the Project Leader

This sub-criterion assesses the candidate's potential to plan, organise, and lead a research project, taking into account previous experience in smaller project segments and roles within teams. Special attention is given to activities independently led by the candidate, their ability to coordinate and plan tasks, and indicators of autonomy and responsibility in their work.

- 1) The candidate demonstrates a very high potential for independently managing a project, with clearly expressed organisational and planning skills.
- 2) The candidate demonstrates a very good potential for independently managing a project and can organise and plan most activities independently.
- 3) The candidate demonstrates a basic potential for independently managing a project; some segments require additional support or coordination.
- 4) The candidate demonstrates limited potential for independently managing a project, which may hinder the implementation of certain activities.
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

3. Financial Plan of the Proposed Research

This criterion assesses whether the project's financial plan is clear, realistic, and consistent with the objectives, planned activities, and expected results. Special attention is given to the justification of budget items and the adequacy of fund allocation in relation to the planned tasks.

3.1. Clarity and Realism of the Financial Plan

This sub-criterion assesses whether the financial plan is well-structured and transparent, whether the amounts are realistically estimated, and whether they correspond to the scope of planned activities and project duration.

- 1) The financial plan is completely clear, transparent, and realistic; all costs are well justified and proportional to the planned activities.
- 2) The financial plan is mostly clear and realistic, with minor inconsistencies in the justification of certain costs.
- 3) The financial plan is partially clear and realistic; some segments are insufficiently justified or misaligned.
- 4) The financial plan is unclear and unrealistic; costs are not justified or connected to the planned activities.
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

3.2. Consistency of Costs with the Project Objectives, Activities, and Results

This sub-criterion evaluates whether the proposed cost structure supports the achievement of the project's objectives and whether the funds are adequately distributed across phases, activities, and expected outcomes.

- 1) The costs are fully consistent with the project's objectives, activities, and expected results; the allocation of funds is optimal.
- 2) The costs are mostly consistent with the objectives and activities, with minor deviations in certain budget lines.
- 3) The consistency of costs with objectives and activities is partial; some items are not clearly linked to the expected results.
- 4) The costs are not consistent with the project's objectives, activities, and results, raising concerns about the efficiency of the budget plan.
- 5) The available documentation does not provide sufficient information for a sound evaluation of this criterion.

The evaluators shall assess individual sub-criteria that make up each main criterion, scoring each sub-criterion on a five-point scale from 1 to 5. The score for each criterion is calculated as the average value of the sub-criterion scores. The scores of the evaluators for each evaluation criterion are of equal weight; therefore, the average score is calculated. Evaluators shall be required to provide a written comment for each score, formulated in a way that gives applicants clear and constructive feedback.

The final score (K) is calculated according to the following formula:

$$K = 0,40I + 0,40II + 0,20III$$

where I, II, and III represent the average scores from the three evaluators for each respective criterion, and **K** is the final score of the project application. The final score is rounded to two decimal places. To be eligible for co-financing, a project application **must achieve a final score (K) of at least 4,00**.

XV.4 Acceptance/Rejection of Projects for Co-financing

Based on the final score (K) of the evaluated project applications, a final ranking list shall be established. The Ministry's officers shall contact the applicants according to the ranking order and within the limits of the available budget, after which the conditions for project implementation shall be agreed upon. Selected applicants shall be required to submit additional documentation as follows:

1. Documentation related to the calculation of salary/fees:
For newly employed researchers, a draft employment contract (unsigned) and a document specifying the salary basis;
2. A valid offer for costs exceeding €6,000, except for the costs referred to in point 1;
3. A Cooperation/Consortium Agreement between the Applicant and all partner institutions (if applicable) involved in project implementation, regulating mutual rights and obligations. This agreement shall define: the roles of partners in the project, the duration of the partnership, pre-existing and newly created intellectual property, as well as any "know-how" developed during the project, mutual financial arrangements, data confidentiality, reporting obligations, and retention of project documentation;
4. A preliminary procurement plan,
5. A Statement form for de minimis aid (for the Applicant and project partners performing economic activities).
6. Proof of educational qualification – PhD diploma.

If the evaluators provide comments or recommendations for improving the project application or modifying the Financial Plan, the Ministry shall contact the applicants to submit revised project applications and Financial Plans in line with those comments.

Any administrative issues may also be resolved during this process by the Ministry.

After completing the negotiation process, the Ministry shall issue formal Decisions on the acceptance or rejection of projects for funding. For applicants whose projects are approved, a Grant Agreement

shall be signed with the Ministry, defining the mutual rights and obligations between the Applicant (Beneficiary) and the Grant Provider (the Ministry).

The list of beneficiaries who have signed Grant Agreements shall be published on the Ministry's website and shall include the following information:

- Name of the Beneficiary;
- Names of partner institutions;
- Title of the project;
- Amount of the awarded grant; and
- A short description of the project.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE FUNDING PROGRAMME FOR POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Under this Programme, the Beneficiary shall submit Annual Reports on programme implementation, accompanied by Financial Reports, which also include Work Plans for the following period, using the template prescribed by the Ministry. The Beneficiary must retain appropriate documentation for every eligible and approved project expense, except for indirect costs, to justify the stated expenditures. Upon completion of the project, the Beneficiary shall submit to the Ministry a Final Report on programme implementation, together with a Financial Report, using the template prescribed by the Ministry.

The procedure for the evaluation of the Annual and Final Reports on programme implementation, along with the Financial Plan, shall be defined in detail in the Grant Agreement and the Programme Monitoring Guidelines.

The Ministry shall carry out monitoring of project implementation within the Program, which includes verifying the level of progress of activities defined in the approved project application, reviewing the implementation of the Financial Plan, as well as overseeing the dissemination of results and the promotion of project activities.

3. REPORTING AND EVALUATION OF THE FUNDING PROGRAMME FOR POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

The Ministry shall prepare an annual report on the implementation of the Funding Programme for Postdoctoral Research Excellence, which shall form an integral part of the Ministry's Annual Report adopted by the Government of Montenegro. After the completion of the Programme implementation, the Ministry shall carry out an external evaluation of the Programme. The financial resources required for the evaluation shall be provided from the national budget and shall be duly planned in the budget for the year in which the obligation for its implementation arises.





**Ministry of
Education, Science
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