



Ministry of
Education, Science
and Innovation

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME FOR EXCELLENCE IN DOCTORAL RESEARCH IN MONTENEGRO



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INTRODUCTION

The basis for the adoption of the Programme

At the beginning of July 2024, the Government of Montenegro adopted **the Strategy for Scientific Research Activity in Montenegro 2024-2028 along with the 2024-2025 Action Plan**¹, which represents the most important sectoral strategic document for the area of science and research.

The Strategy defines three strategic objectives, the second referring to **“Strengthening the human resources and institutional capacities in the field of science and research”**. Among other things, to achieve this goal, the **Operative objective 2.1** has also been identified: **Support to hiring young researchers** and within it the **Activity 2.1.1 Completion of the scholarship programme for excellent PhD research**. The main goal of this activity is to motivate researchers in the early phases to do research by awarding scholarships for excellent PhD research, strengthening human resources in research and innovation, increasing the number of young researchers and strengthening the exchange of knowledge between the academic and economic sector and internationalisation of research.

The strategy has also defined **the priorities of the scientific research activity**², as follows:

- Sustainable agriculture and food value chain
- Energy and sustainable environment
- Sustainable and health 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

The 2024 Work Program of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation³ (II Field of science and innovation, 3. Other activities) for the third quarter of 2024 determined the implementation of the Programme/Call for support to doctoral research/young researchers.

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

² In line with the Article 9, paragraph 2, Item 1) of the Law on Scientific Research Activity (“The official gazette of Montenegro), No 080/10, 040/11, 057/14 and 082/20)

³ <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/42e9ec5c-df47-4ed6-b6ca-2286f5189fd5>

In the part of the legal framework for the area of scientific research activity, the basis for the adoption of the Programmes of Scholarships for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro was determined in the **Law on Scientific Research Activity (The Official Gazette of Montenegro”, No 080/10, 040/11, 057/14 and 082/20)**⁴, as follows:

- **Article 10** defines the priorities in the scientific research activity carried out through the programmes of general interest. One is the programme for “*stimulating the research that prompts training and mobility of Montenegrin researchers aiming to enable their work in research centres and institutes, and the use of superb technologies and modern laboratories in the country and world.*”
- **Articles 10, 11 and 12** determine that the Ministry provides:
 - Terms and conditions for authorisation and the manner of use of the funds from the state budget, allocated through the Ministry, for the programmes of general interest;
 - The terms and conditions that have to be fulfilled by the manager of the scientific research project and programmes, as well as the researchers who have been hired in the research team and the amount of funds necessary for the implementation of the scientific research programme and project; and
 - Criteria for the appointment of the expert and the procedure of evaluation of the scientific research programmes of general interest, other programmes and projects financed from the state budget, that are performed by the experts from the field of sciences that the programme, i.e. project refers to.
- **Article 13** defines that for financing the scientific research activity for programmes of general interest, the Ministry launches a call and that the contract defines mutual rights and obligations between the Ministry and the beneficiaries and
- **Article 16, Paragraph 2, Item 2)** stipulates that the Council proposes the programmes of general interests for the following year.

To determine the programme of general interest in line with the legal provisions, which stimulates the training and mobility of Montenegrin researchers and provides all legal conditions for implementation of this programme and meet the conditions for launching the call on the Council’s proposal, the Ministry of Education Science and Innovation nominated the **Scholarship Programme for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro for adoption**⁵.

To support the Programme’s implementation, within the Agreement on Implementation of the Scholarship Programmes for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro, concluded with the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Montenegrin universities determined the amount of the study allowance (scholarship) for those doctoral students on their universities, who have become entitled to grants in the form of scholarships based on this Programme.

Regarding the EU integration, one of the key objectives for the area of science and research is a **complete integration into the European Research Area (ERA)**. In the part of **ERA Priority 1**⁶ that refers to the “*Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge*”, **Action 4** refers to the “*Promotion of attractive and sustainable research careers, balanced talent circulation and international, transdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility across the European Research Area*”. Key initiatives within this action refer to improving the working conditions of researchers,

⁴ <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/1e14d5db-4a2a-4298-9bfc-3c93d771e411>

⁵ Conclusion of the Council for Scientific and Research Activity No 04-082/24-1082/2 from 4th September 2024.

⁶ <https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/documents/european-research-area-policy-agenda-2022-24>

strengthening skills, employability and the attractiveness of research careers, promoting inter-sectoral mobility and encouraging the full recognition of the research profession. The objectives of the Scholarship Programme for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro continue the previously mentioned developmental direction concerning the promotion of the development of research careers.

Elaboration on the necessity for the Programme’s Adoption

The long-term development of scientific research activity primarily depends on the basis and quality of human resources. Therefore, the investment in their excellence is one of the key strategic directions in the area of Montenegro’s scientific research activity.

To create adequate conditions and enable the development of scientific research activity, it is necessary to enable attractive working conditions for researchers and scientists and adequate instruments for support in developing their careers. Specifically, the strengthening of scientific research careers is achieved through the development and promotion of attractive and sustainable working conditions, which further contributes to the implementation of a strong cycle of knowledge into Montenegro’s scientific research system, which additionally improves its attractiveness. Creating such conditions allows representative research and accepting innovative European challenges, i.e., developing an attractive scientific environment for young researchers and the scientific research community. It represents a foundational precondition for long-term sustainable competitiveness and motivation for keeping the talent in the country.

The Scholarship Programme for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro represents an answer to the abovementioned needs of the scientific research activity system and is in accordance with Montenegro’s strategic framework and trends and standards in this area at the EU level.

1. BASIC INFORMATION ON THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME FOR EXCELLENCE IN DOCTORAL RESEARCH IN MONTENEGRO

1.1 Subject and Objectives of the Programme

The **Programme's subject** is awarding grants in the form of scholarships for doctoral research projects by excellent doctoral students, i.e. PhD students in Montenegro's universities.

The **programme's objectives** are:

- Strengthening of human resources for research and innovation;
- Broadening of the researchers' pool in Montenegro;
- Retention and attraction of the youth in Montenegro;
- Exchange of knowledge between academic and economic sectors;
- Promotion of competitiveness of academic and economic sectors; and
- Internationalization of the scientific research activity.

Through this programme, students of doctoral studies should achieve significant results in research, have intensive cooperation with the research team, primarily mentor, strengthen the connection of the research team with international or economic partners through mobility, and empower the capacities to contribute to the development of research work in their specific field in Montenegro, and to prepare project applications for the EU research and innovation funds and participate in them.

1.2 Programme's General Characteristics

This programme shall finance students pursuing doctoral studies in Montenegrin universities who have been hired by institutions/organisations established in Montenegro and unemployed people.

The scholarship shall be awarded for a period of three (3) years.

University - a host institution of the scholarship holder, submits the application to the Ministry for the student of doctoral studies, who, at the moment of application for a doctoral research project,

should have a mentor. If a mentor has not yet been decided by the time the call application is submitted, a temporary mentor should be listed in the application, who will follow the PhD student's work in the initial phase of doctoral studies until the mentor is determined.

It is advised that the project application also identifies the supervisor/co-mentor of the PhD student in the partner institutions where the mobility shall take place (university/other scientific research institution outside of Montenegro or company in Montenegro or abroad).

Supervision over the work of the doctoral studies student for the duration of the scholarship is a mentor's obligation.

University—a host institution is obliged to provide the conditions for the PhD student's work in accordance with the European Charter for Researchers and Employer's Code of Conduct when hiring a researcher⁷, such as a mentor's allocation of time for work with the scholarship holder, access to laboratories and equipment for research, access to information and library resources, workspace, and other conditions defined by the scholarship award contract.

The programme will be conducted through the Call for Awarding the Scholarship for Excellence in Doctoral Studies in Montenegro.

1.3. Priority Research Areas

The programme rests on the **priorities of the scientific research activity defined by the 2024-2028 Strategy for Scientific Research Activity in Montenegro**, which are:

- Sustainable agriculture and food value chain
- Energy and sustainable environment;
- Sustainable and health 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;

This means that the subject of doctoral research projects must be one of the above-mentioned priorities of scientific research activity.

1.4 Financial Framework of the Project

The total value of the 2024 Scholarship Programme for Excellence in Doctoral Research amounts to 1.500.000,00 € for the period from 2024 to 2027, while **500.000,00 € has been planned for the year 2024** to finance the first year of research based on granted scholarships in

⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d02f13fa-4bb8-4f33-90ee-fc20df447cfc/language-en>

accordance with this Programme and the following Call.

Funds amounting to 500.000,00 €, for 2024 were approved by the **2024 Law on Budget of Montenegro⁸**, as follows: **Org. code 40701 - Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, programme 19 040 Development of Science and Technology, Sub-programme 19 040 001 Scientific Research Activity, Activity 19 040 001 001 National and International Programmes and Projects, 431-9 other Transfers to Institutions.**

The remaining funds from the Programme shall be paid at the end of the reporting periods (after the end of each research year): in the first quarter of 2026 and in the first quarter of 2027.

Grants in the form of scholarships for doctoral research projects will be awarded to excellent doctoral studies students, i.e. PhD students in the Universities of Montenegro, for a **period of up to three years.**

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation will launch the Call for Awarding **Scholarships for Excellence in Doctoral Studies in Montenegro** (Appendix 1).

1.5 Eligible and Ineligible Costs

Scholarship for the doctoral research projects of excellent PhD students in Montenegro encompasses the following eligible costs:

I. Costs of the monthly doctoral student's salary who is hired in the Montenegrin university based on this programme amounts to **1.000,00 € of net** earning.

Note: Mentors and students of lower levels of studies who are allowed to participate in the said doctoral research cannot exercise the right to doctoral research project remuneration.

II. Research costs in gross amount of 15.000,00 € per year. The following costs fall into the research costs:

Material research costs (research equipment/materials, etc)

- Research equipment (Note: within the doctoral research project, the purchase of one computer solely for PhD student's work is eligible);
- Research materials;
- Costs of publication and dissemination—expenditures related to publishing research results in journals or presenting them at conferences.
- Costs for collecting and analysing the data (costs for obtaining or accessing the data, as well as software or services necessary for the data analysis) and the costs of preparation and/or processing of material samples.
- Costs of ethical approval - any compensation concerning the obtaining of ethical approval for research which includes people or animals,

⁸ <https://www.gov.me/clanak/zakon-o-budzetu-crne-gore-za-2024-godinu-sluzbeni-list-crne-gore-broj-124-2023-od-31122023>

Mobility costs:

- Costs of study visits - solely funds for the PhD student's mobility;
- Travel costs of the PhD student, mentor and student of the undergraduate/specialist/master's studies.

Note:

- PhD student's mentor can use the funds up to 2.500,00 € per year for travel costs closely related to the doctoral research project.
- Undergraduate/specialist/master's students may use the funds up to 1.500,00 € per year for travel costs related to the doctoral research project.

III. Study allowance costs (scholarship) (The Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation has offered Montenegrin universities Agreements on the implementation of the Excellence Scholarship Program for doctoral studies in Montenegro, on the basis of which the amount of tuition fees under more favorable conditions should be determined).

Students of doctoral studies from Montenegro's universities hired in institutions/organisations based in Montenegro may exercise the right only to the research costs, not earning costs.

1.6 Conditions for Application

Conditions for the student's application shall be:

- That candidate has Montenegrin citizenship and permanent residence in Montenegro;
- That the candidate is under 40 years of age by the deadline for submission of the application;
- That the candidate has a minimum average of 8 at each level of studies (undergraduate/specialist/master's, integrated) where they earned 300ECTS as a precondition for enrolment in doctoral studies;
- That the candidate has enrolled in doctoral studies at one of the universities in Montenegro;
- That they are an unemployed person or hired in an institution/organisation established in Montenegro;
- That there is a mutual interest of the candidate and their mentor for implementation of the doctoral research, expressed through joint preparation of the application as well as submission of the application by the host institution where the doctoral research shall take place.
- That hiring of the future scholarship holder in the host institution is an integral part of their research;
- That the future scholarship holder shall do the research work in the host institution for the duration of the scholarship and
- That the implementation plan of the doctoral research project that is a basis for awarding the scholarship shall include at least three months of international mobility in a scientific institution abroad or inter-sectoral mobility in a company in Montenegro or abroad for training purposes.

1.7 Application Content

The application should contain:

- A signed and stamped/E-signed Application form (Appendix 2) in English.
- A financial plan for the scholarship in Excel format (Appendix 3) in English.
- Biographies (CV in Europass format) of the candidate, mentor and student of undergraduate/specialist/master studies if involved in the research, in English.
- A doctoral student's motivational letter in the English language;
- A letter of recommendation by a mentor on doctoral studies (or temporary mentor) in the English language;
- A certificate on a planned research visit to a scientific institution abroad or a company in Montenegro or abroad with a duration of at least three months, which should contain information on the supervisor or co-mentor of the said institution or an invitation letter from the international scientific institution or company in Montenegro or abroad for mobility lasting at least three months, in Montenegrin or English language;
- Certified copies of diplomas/certificates of acquired higher education, diploma supplements and other educational certificates for acquired 300ECTS, which are the basis for the enrolment in doctoral studies;
- A confirmation that the candidate is a full-time student of doctoral studies at a university in Montenegro;
- A decision of a competent body of the university on the appointment of a mentor - if it already exists;
- A certificate that a candidate is employed in an institution/organisation based in Montenegro, or a certificate from the Employment Agency if they are an unemployed person;
- A copy of a biometric ID card/ a citizenship certificate /a permanent residence certificate.

1.8 Criteria for assessment of applications

The criteria for the assessment of applications are:

- The candidate's, mentor's and host institution's quality - 35 points;
- Originality and innovation of the field and topic of doctoral research - 25 points and
- Work plan, training methods and research results - 40 points.

The application is assessed using the Form for application assessment in Appendix 4, which is an integral part of this programme.

1.9 The procedure for selecting evaluators

To implement this programme and the following Call, the Ministry shall launch an international **Call for Expression of Interest for Evaluators of the Application for the Call for Awarding**

Scholarships for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro (Appendix 5).**Conditions for the selection of evaluators are:**

- A title of Doctor of Science;
- Experience in participating and/or evaluating scientific research programmes and projects; and
- Scientific research results in the last five years in the field of research relevant to a specific proposal of the project (e.g. Scientific papers, monographs, chapters in monographs, lectures, editing, reviewing, awards, patents, participation in scientific projects, etc.)

Evaluators should have a good knowledge of the English language.

If the response to this call is not satisfactory, i.e., if there is no sufficient pool of evaluators from specific research fields necessary for evaluating applications, the Ministry will, when selecting evaluators, use the existing lists of experts from the Ministry or other international databases to appoint an evaluator while adhering to the conditions established in the Call.

Before the application assessment procedure, an evaluator submits a Declaration of the absence of conflict of interests, consent to be appointed as an evaluator for a specific project, and a declaration of project data confidentiality to the Ministry in a specific form (Appendix 6).

The conflict of interest exists if:

- An evaluator, i.e. their married and common-law spouse, partner in the same-sex cohabitation, a relative by blood in the direct or collateral line up to the second degree of kinship, adopter or adoptee and a person with whom they live in the same household, PhD student, their mentor or a member of the research team, or an employee in the host institution that submitted the project application;
- The evaluator has established scientific or professional cooperation with the PhD student who has submitted the project application, their mentor or member of the research team, as well as the host institution that has submitted the project application in the last three years.

1.10 Application Assessment Procedure

The Ministry performs the administrative check of the arrived Call applications.

Following the administrative check, all applications that have met the conditions defined by this programme and Call shall be referred to assessment by evaluators from their area of expertise.

The application assessment process is conducted by evaluators appointed by the Ministry as defined in sub-chapter 1.9.

Two evaluators assess an application individually, in a separate form (Appendix 4), which is an integral part of this programme.

The Final application assessment is the average grade of two evaluators, obtained by adding the total number of points given by the evaluators and dividing it by two.

If the grade of two evaluators differs by 30 points or more, the ministry shall appoint a third evaluator.

All project applications that score at least 70 out of 100 points shall be considered positively assessed. The application shall be accepted for financing in line with the rank list and available budget.

If two or more applications have the same grade, the advantage shall be given to the application with the greater number of points (greater average score by evaluators) according to the individual criteria and order that criteria have been enlisted in Chapter 1.8.

The Ministry shall publish the scholarship grantees for excellence in doctoral research in Montenegro on its website.

1.11 Deadlines for Implementation of Scholarship

Deadlines for the implementation of the doctoral research project, for which a non-refundable grant in the form of an excellence scholarship for doctoral research in Montenegro has been awarded, as well as for the defense of the doctoral dissertation, will be determined individually for each scholarship recipient in the scholarship award agreement.

1.12 Method and Deadline for Submission of Applications

The Call for Awarding Scholarships for Excellence in Doctoral Research stipulates the method and deadline for submitting applications for doctoral research.

The Call shall be opened at least thirty days.

1.13 Contracting Process

Following the revision of evaluators' comments, the Ministry shall prepare the scholarship award contract for all candidates who have been selected for financing, in accordance with rank list order and available Programme/Call budget.

The contracting parties shall be the Ministry, the Host Institution (university), and the Scholarship Holder. Additionally, the contract shall define their mutual rights and obligations. At the same time, the approved application for the doctoral research project and the project's financial plan shall be an integral part of the contract. Following the contract signing, the Ministry shall adopt the Disbursement Decision for the first research year.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

The host institutions where the scholarship will take place shall submit an **Annual Report on the Implementation of the Scholarship for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro, along with the Financial Plan**, yearly. This report shall include the Work plan for the following year prepared by the scholarship holder and their mentor.

The Report is submitted to the Ministry on the Form in Appendix 7, which is an integral part of this programme.

The Ministry shall appoint the evaluator for assessment of the Annual Report on Implementation of the Scholarship for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro, along with the Financial Plan, who assess the said Report and Plan in the Form in Appendix 8 of this Programme. If the Report receives a positive grade, i.e. 70 or more from 100 points, the Ministry shall adopt a Decision on Accepting the Report and Approving Financing of the Following Research year.

After completing the scholarship for excellence in doctoral research in Montenegro, the Host Institution where the scholarship took place shall submit **the Final Report on the Implementation of the Scholarship for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro, with the Financial Plan**, on the Form in Appendix 9, which is an integral part of this programme.

The Ministry shall appoint an evaluator to assess the Final Report Implementation of the Scholarship for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro, along with the Financial Plan, which evaluates the said Report on the Form from Appendix 10 of this programme. If the Report receives a positive grade, i.e. 70 or more from 100 points, the Ministry shall adopt a Decision on Accepting the Final Report and Successfully Implemented Scholarship.

The Ministry is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the doctoral research project for which a scholarship has been awarded. This monitoring includes verifying the completion of activities outlined in the approved project proposal, reviewing the implementation of the financial plan, and assessing the dissemination of results and promotion of awarded scholarships.

3. REPORTING AND EVALUATION METHOD

Each year, the Ministry shall prepare a report on implementing the Scholarship Programme for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro. This report shall be an integral part of an annual report on the Ministry's performance, which the Government of Montenegro shall adopt.

After completing the implementation of the Programme, the Ministry shall conduct an external evaluation of the Programme. The funds needed for the evaluation shall be ensured by the national budget and shall be planned in a timely manner for the year in which the obligation arises.





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