

2ND CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

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1. Overview of MERIT

The Central Bohemia Mobility Programme for Excellence in Research, Innovation and Technology (MERIT) is a 5-year regional programme for incoming mobility for 30 outstanding postdoctoral researchers from all over the world. It is a joint initiative of the Regional Government of Central Bohemia, 19 regional Research Organisations (ROs) as Host organisations (HOs), and 36 national and international SMEs, large enterprises, universities and high-schools as Associated partners for secondments, all coordinated by the Central Bohemian Innovation Center (hereinafter SIC by its acronym in Czech: Středočeské inovační centrum).

MERIT has 3 strategic objectives which are in line with the regional innovation strategy for smart specialisation (RIS3): 1) to strengthen the European and global human capital base in research and innovation, to contribute to a stronger European Research Area, to increase international openness of participating partners and R&D&I potential of the whole Region; 2) to establish new partnerships and collaborations between academic and non-academic sectors (especially regional research organisations with SMEs), leading to higher competitiveness and innovativeness of both; and 3) to promote science and its many practical applications in society among the youth and to advocate for more representation of female scientists in technical and life sciences research disciplines with focus on applied research.

The large, strong consortium of distinct and respected institutions coming from academic, private and public sectors offers the selected top-class researchers intersectoral, interdisciplinary and international experience, excellent training options, as well as access to unique research infrastructures and wide networking possibilities. All this combined represents an exceptional opportunity to strengthen the career development of the recruited fellows.

MERIT supports research activities and training of selected researchers in the following application areas: **Biotechnology and Biomedicine, Laser technologies, Space technologies, Sustainable energy and materials and Digitalization, including Artificial Intelligence**, all areas respecting **Diversity and Gender dimension** in research content. The duration of fellowships is planned from **24 to 30 months**, including **secondments** with the duration from 2 to 9 months.

In this second call, approximately 15 fellowships will be awarded and will be distributed among the research groups offering fellowships (see Annex 1).

MERIT fellows are governed by the Terms and Conditions underlying the fellowship. The contents of this Guide are for general information purposes and the assistance of applicants. In the event of any discrepancy arising between this Guide and the Terms and Conditions, the latter will prevail.

2. Benefits to fellows

Fellows will be recruited for a minimum of 24 months to a maximum of **30 months**. Due to the demanding level of transferable skills training and outputs expected, the applicants are encouraged to **apply for the maximum period possible**. The candidates will be able to freely formulate their own research topics and choose the appropriate Host Organisation (HO) and secondment organisation (SO), including supervisors.

Selected researchers will be provided with an up to 30 months fully paid internationally recognised MSCA COFUND fellowship, employed by a research organisation located in the Central Bohemia region in the Czech Republic. The fellowships will include a mobility allowance, a family allowance (if applicable), travel allowance, research and travel costs, and can provide a special needs allowance (a financial support for researchers with disabilities).

The fellows will benefit from excellent training programmes in research and transferable skills and from other career development opportunities, as well as, interdisciplinary research options, intersectoral exposure through the secondments, and international opportunities to create partnership and networks. The fellows will be supported in their research projects and in the achievement of their career development goals planned together with their supervisor. The programme is designed to welcome fellows in a family-friendly environment, offering support and guidance in this crucial career phase.

2.1 Training programme

In order to develop the skills of new generations of scientists and meet the industry and research organisations' needs, an ambitious combination of core and advanced research skills and transferable skills training will be offered aiming at holistic career development and a mutual transfer of knowledge between fellows and their HO. The training programme will consist of:

- **Core and advanced research skills:** the corresponding supervisor (from the HO) and co-supervisor (from the SO) will define the requirements together with the fellow. Development in advanced research skills within the MERIT fellows' discipline/s and of core research skills beyond the fellows' discipline/s will be ensured.
- **Transferable skills:** joint training sessions will be provided to all MERIT fellows and will offer them international networking and interdisciplinary experience. The sessions will be organised by SIC and delivered by experts in their field. SIC will require the **mandatory participation of fellows during their fellowship in at least 4 training sessions in transferable skills (minimum 32 hours) of their choice, but Open Science/Open Access will be compulsory.** The wide range of transferable skills will be mainly oriented to innovation, commercialisation and technology transfer reflecting the most current trends, such as citizen science, crowdfunding as one way to finance a research project, an emphasis on communication, entrepreneurial spirit and even co-creation or maker culture, which include digital fabrication, critical thinking and rapid prototyping. In addition to leadership skills topics related to work-balance and sustainable career path will be included.

The MERIT training programme is based on the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and its 4 domains of development (Knowledge and intellectual abilities, Personal effectiveness, Research governance and organisation, Engagement, influence and impact). The training programme boosts the principles of interdisciplinarity, international networking and mainly intersectorality, encouraging the application of research results.

The fellows will also be encouraged to attend and actively participate in many network-wide training events or conferences taking place in different countries all over the world covering their research specialisation.

NOTE: Bear in mind that applicants can make use of this information for their research proposals in relation to their enhancement of career perspectives and employability.

Career development programme for fellows

Core and advanced research skills	Format / time
Advanced research skills within the researchers' own disciplines.	training through research (fellowships and secondments)
Core research skills beyond the researchers' own disciplines by meeting and working with other research teams from various departments/labs at Implementing/Associated partners.	

Transferable skills: Title / description of training outcomes	Format / time
Open Science/Open Access: What are Open Science elements (Open Source, Open Methodology, Open Data, etc.). How to ensure Open Access to scientific publications and research data in Horizon Europe, FAIR data management.	mandatory seminar 8 hrs
MSCA Green Charter: How to include green deal principles in research (reduce, reuse and recycle, use less paper, green purchasing for project-related materials, sustainability of project events, etc.).	workshop 8 hrs
Diversity and Gender dimension in research: How to include diversity and gender dimension and other intersectional categories (such as age, ethnicity, etc.) in individual research projects in different disciplines.	seminar 8 hrs + consultations
Leadership skills: Adopting problem-solving, leadership, critical-thinking and interpersonal skills, personal potential and work-life balance in light of a sustainable career path.	workshop 8 hrs
Public engagement/Citizen Science: Adopting basic Citizen Science skills. Importance and channels; presentation skills, dealing with nervousness, unexpected questions, rehearsing, etc.	workshop 8 hrs
Citizen Science workshop: Adopting co-creation and design thinking skills for innovation and rapid prototyping (human-centred Maker method aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals). Analysis and prioritisation of key problems in the region according to the national strategic agenda. Development of functional prototype solutions according to local technological infrastructure.	3-day workshop in local high school
IPR Management and Patenting: Learning about the legislative framework in the Czech Republic and Europe, principles of the Code of Practice annexed to the Commission. Management of IP in knowledge transfer activities.	workshop 8 hrs
Funding opportunities/Grant writing: How to write a successful application in EU/national funding programmes (based on an expression of the fellows' interest). Adopting basic project management in research.	workshop 8 hrs
Crowdfunding: How to crowdfund scientific research, how to find the right platforms, investors, including preparing an elevator pitch for investors.	workshop 8 hrs
Exploitation of research results: How to exploit research results with an emphasis on applied research and commercialisation (market validation, product or service commercialisation, patent licensing, contractual and collaborative research, spin-offs, etc.), national and European legislation.	workshop 8 hrs
Spin-offs: How to create academic spin-offs, legislative framework, administrative and mental barriers and how to overcome them.	workshop in a local spin-off
Entrepreneurial/Communication skills: Adopting skills to effectively present research results to partners from the business sector (elevator pitch, business language); how to find an appropriate business partner.	workshop 8 hrs

In addition to the training programme, MERIT will offer to all fellows **mentoring/coaching** in three potential key areas of development provided by experienced counsellors, mentors, coaches and experts:

1. **Life coaching** for researchers designed to support researchers to achieve their personal potential, sustainable careers, also in light of work-life balance, especially to balance mental health and overcome academic challenges, focused on time and stress management.

2. **Leadership/career mentoring/coaching** for those who want to focus on leadership skills and/or become principal investigators.
3. **Business mentoring/coaching** for those who want to create their own business or commercialise their research results.

2.2 Secondments (temporary placement in academic or non-academic sector)

Secondments are mandatory experience. **At least one secondment is compulsory for each fellowship.** It should be relevant, feasible, and beneficial for the researcher and in line with the project objectives. The aim of secondments is to assure intersectoral, international or interdisciplinary experience for fellows, the transfer of knowledge and technologies from research organisations to industry or to gather relevant inputs and industry needs to research organisations. **The applicants need to complete the secondment online form as part of their application.**

The duration of the secondment is from 2 to a maximum of 9 months (Full Time Equivalent, FTE). It can be carried out in one or more institutions in a single period or divided into shorter periods. The secondment will be carefully planned and implemented, taking into account the fellows' personal living and family situation as well.

The secondment can be carried out in the **non-academic or academic sectors** (private or public) in the **Czech Republic or abroad. Secondments in the industry are preferred** due to the application focus of the Programme. Secondments must fulfil at least one of the three key elements: intersectoral, international or interdisciplinary.

Fellows will carry out their secondments at the premises of the Secondment Organisation (SO) while keeping their contract with the Host Organisation (HO). The MERIT programme offers more than 30 secondment options including large enterprises, SMEs, start-ups/spin-offs, international universities and local high schools (see Annex 2). Nevertheless, other institutions can be freely chosen but must be secured by the fellows during their fellowship.

The co-supervisor from the SO will be identified before the start of the secondment and will be named in the **secondment agreement** concluded between the HO and the SO. At the application stage secondments are not to be confirmed.

2.3 Supervision and support

Each fellow will have one primary supervisor appointed by the HO and one co-supervisor appointed by the SO (who will be identified by the start of the secondment and named in the secondment agreement between the HO and SO). **None of them shall be involved in the development of the content of the research proposals. Nevertheless, the technical feasibility of the project within the research group must be confirmed (by email) by the supervisor from the HO.** Where possible, at least one supervisor will be of the opposite gender of the applying fellow, to ensure a gender diverse perspective. However, the supervisors' expertise and area have priority.

The mandatory **Career Development Plan** (CDP) will be designed at the beginning of the fellowship jointly by the fellow and their supervisor/co-supervisor and supported, where possible, by mentors/coaches. The CDP will be discussed between fellows and their supervisors every 6 months. SIC will provide a CDP template. The CDP will include career development in research and transferable skills (seminars and workshops), secondments, dissemination and communication plans, international networking events, research and innovation projects, research methodology and outputs, etc.

The fellows together with their supervisors will be required to submit a progress report every 6 months. Such a report will combine the progress and the final results of the reviewed CDP (including the dissemination and communication plan) and the corresponding Data Management Plan, if applicable.

Moreover, SIC will also do its best to meet the needs and requirements (as reasonable adjustments) for people that might require assistance due to their gender, age, ethnicity, nationality social origin, religion or belief, sexuality, language, or their condition of disability (both physical and mental), political opinion, social or economic situation.

2.4 Financial aspects

- Fellow allowance: €3,980 euros per month. It covers the salary, social security, contributions, taxes and other costs included in the remuneration. This amount will be taxable according to the Czech national laws and regulations.
- Mobility allowance: €350 per month. It is provided to compensate for the cost of the required personal and household relocation of the fellow and his/her dependents. This amount will be taxable according to the Czech national laws and regulations.
- Family allowance: Up to €500 per month. This will be paid if the researcher has family obligations and will have two categories €250 for researchers with family obligations not including children; and €500 for researchers with family obligations including children. These amounts will be taxable according to the Czech national laws and regulations.

In terms of **gross salary**, the minimum gross salary (not including employer's social contributions) offered to the postdoctoral researchers is approximately:

- €3,188 per month for researchers without family obligations
- €3,372 per month for researchers with family obligations not including children
- €3,556 per month for researchers with family obligation including children

In addition to this gross salary, the researchers are entitled to **travel and research cost of €700 per month based** on reimbursement of expenses.

- **Travel costs:** €300 per month. It covers travel expenses for training/events, workshops, conferences, etc. This amount will not be taxable and will be based on reimbursement of expenses.
- **Research costs:** €400 per month. It covers research-related costs and materials and small equipment purchases. Based on reimbursement of expenses.
- Cost of the training in transferable and research skills is the cost spent by the Host Organisations and SIC for the training in research and transferable skills and coaching/mentoring.

Additionally, there will be a special extra one-time contribution of approximately €3,125 provided by the Central Bohemia region, in addition to the research and travel costs mentioned above. This contribution can be utilised for either research or travel costs, depending on researchers' specific needs.

SIC will apply for Special Needs Allowance in case of researchers with disabilities selected within MERIT.

The fellows will be recruited by the HO under the relevant employment law with full social security and health security coverage. In the Czech Republic, the employment contracts imply sickness, parental and unemployment benefits.

3. Key dates

Call open	January 15, 2024
Info session for applicants	March 12, 14:00 CET (online), register in Events
Training “How to write a competitive proposal” for applicants	March 19, 2024, 14:00 CET (online), register in Events
Deadline	April 21, 2024; 23:59 CET
Eligibility and admissibility check	April 15 – April 22, 2024
Evaluation and selection process	April – August 2024
Results	September 2024
Start of the fellowships (including recruitment and relocation)	September 2024 – January 2025

4. Eligibility conditions

Applicants must be in possession of a **doctoral degree at the date of MERIT’s call deadline**. There is **no age limitation**. Researchers who have **successfully defended their doctoral thesis** but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will also be considered as postdoctoral researchers and will be considered eligible to apply.

A **mobility rule will be applied to all categories of researchers**. Fellows must relocate to the Czech Republic. Researchers **must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the Czech Republic for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the call deadline**.

Categories of researchers:

- Standard. Researchers moving within Europe or coming in from other parts of the world.
- Researchers at risk. Researchers with the status of refugees or researchers at all stages of their careers who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty or research career, and those who are forced to flee or have been displaced because of such threats.
- Career Restart. Researchers who wish to restart their research after a career break (e.g., after parental leave, working outside research, etc.). The researchers must not have been active in research for a continuous period of at least 12 months within the 18 months immediately prior to the deadline for submission of proposals.
- Integration. Czech nationals or long-term residents who wish to return and reintegrate in a longer-term research position in the Czech Republic.

Permanent employees (employees having a contract for an indefinite period) of one of the Hosting organisations are not eligible to apply for a MERIT fellowship to this Host organisation.

The applications must be complete and must consist of:

- The Research proposal written in English, complete and uploaded to the MERIT online application system.**
 - Using the mandatory **Technical proposal template** (downloaded from the Template section of the MERIT website). All the sections and subsections of the template need to be kept and properly addressed. **Proposals that will not use the Technical proposal**

template will be ineligible. Excess pages (10-page limit for the research proposal) will be disregarded.

- The research proposal must match to the chosen research group's focus and must be feasible within the chosen research group.
- B. Evidence (print screen, PDF) of the e-mail confirming the feasibility of the applicant's proposal from the prospective supervisor.**
- C. The CV of the candidate written in English** (5-page limit, extra pages will not be counted).
- D. The online forms filled in and complete:**
- **Eligibility form**, to declare the applicant's compliance with the mobility rule and research experience.
 - **Ethics Issues Table and, if applicable, Ethics self-assessment**, to declare whether the proposed research activity deals with the research areas focusing on human embryos/foetuses, humans, human cells/tissues, personal data, animals, third countries, environment & health and safety, artificial intelligence, other ethics issues. If the research proposal raises one or more of the issues listed in the ethics issues table (**which means any of the boxes is checked 'YES'**), an [ethics self-assessment](#) must be completed. This ethics self-assessment must include a description of the issue, the way the applicant intends to deal with them in order to ensure ethics compliance and any relevant documents (such as authorisation or necessary permissions) with the expected timing of obtaining them. All successful proposals, including those on the reserve list, will be subject to an Ethics screening or to an Ethics Review by the European Commission (see point 6.5).
 - **The Secondment form.** A temporary placement (secondment) can be carried out in the non-academic or academic sectors (private or public) in the Czech Republic or abroad. The name of secondment organisation (corresponding to academic or non-academic sector) must be indicated in the form. A list of more than 30 secondment opportunities is available at the MERIT website and in Annex 2 of this guide. Applicants can also suggest their own secondment.

5. How to apply - step by step

Step 1. Comply with the mobility rule

Applicants must make sure they comply with the mobility rule, that means must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the Czech Republic for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the call deadline.

Applicants must be ready to commit for up to 30 months for the fellowship and relocate to the Czech Republic.

Step 2. Identify a suitable host organisation (HO) and research group/supervisor corresponding to the applicant's research topic

Go through the research organisations' profiles, as well as the open research groups (available in the MERIT website and in Annex 1 of this Guide) and select one Host Organisation and the appropriate research group. The supervisors corresponding to each research group are also listed on the MERIT website.

Applicants are welcome to contact the Project Office of the HO to know more about their research infrastructure, environment and supervisors.

Step 3. Confirm the feasibility of the research project

Applicants must obtain evidence (by email) that their research project is technically feasible and in line with the research group, **see part 5.2**. This confirmation will be uploaded in the online system as part of the application.

Step 4. Identify a suitable secondment

When the choice of HO and research group is done, the applicants are encouraged to identify a suitable organisation for a temporary placement in academic or non-academic sector that could help, strength, or improve to the research proposal. **To simplify the orientation, the applicants can use the filter on MERIT website (section Research options – [Secondments](#)).**

The MERIT programme offers more than 30 secondment options including large enterprises, SMEs, start-ups/spin-offs, international universities and local high schools (see Annex 2). Nevertheless, other institutions can be freely chosen but must be secured by the fellows during their fellowship. See section 2 of this Guide for Applicants for more information.

Step 5. Register into MERIT online system

The application process is carried via the online application system (OAS). A manual on how to register into the OAS is available at MERIT website.

In this first step, the applicants will provide their basic information and create a password.

Step 6. Apply for a MERIT fellowship

Once the registration is complete the applicants will be able to fill in the mandatory online templates and upload the necessary PDF files (see section 5.1). Failure to complete these forms and PDFs by the call deadline will result in the application being deemed ineligible.

Remember that during the preparation of the research proposal the prospective supervisor and/or co-supervisor must not be involved in the development of such proposal.

Throughout the application process, applicants can get support for the application by contacting any member of the management team (details are on the MERIT website).

5.1 Key parts of the application form

A complete application consists of mandatory forms filled in online and PDF files which must be uploaded.

Mandatory online forms:

- **Registration to MERIT CALL 2024 for applicants**
 - Selection of researcher type - Standard, Researcher at Risk, Career Restart, or Reintegration.
 - Selection of research panel - 1) Biotechnology and Biomedicine, 2) Laser technologies, 3) Space technologies, 4) Sustainable energy and materials, or 5) Digitalisation including Artificial Intelligence).
 - Selection of Research group
 - Project name
 - Project acronym
 - Abstract of the research proposal (max. 2,000 characters incl. blanks).
- **Eligibility form**
 - PhD details (field, name of thesis).

- Date (or forecast date) of doctorate awarded and name of the institution.
- Location of work/residence in the 3 years immediately prior to the call deadline.
- Sworn statement.
- **Secondment form**
 - Selection of the type of SO (academic or non-academic) that would be relevant and add value to the research.
 - The applicant will be able to name 3 options either from the list of SO available on the website (see Annex 2) or another SO suggested by the applicant. At the application stage secondments are not to be confirmed.
- **Ethics Issues Table and Ethics Self-Assessment** (if applicable).

PDF files to be uploaded:

- **Research proposal** (mandatory Technical proposal template to be downloaded from MERIT website), which consists of Excellence, Impact and Implementation sections, and it will be limited to 10 (ten) A4-sized pages. Please note that excess pages (10-page limit for the research proposal) will be disregarded:
 - a minimum font size of 11 points (text inside tables 9 points),
 - single line spacing,
 - margins (top, bottom, left, right) of at least 15 mm (not including any footer or headers),
 - recommended font Times New Roman,
 - hyperlinks in the core text will not be open by the evaluators (avoid using them),
 - footnotes are to be used exclusively for literature reference, min. font size 8. They will count towards the page limit.
- **CV of the researcher.** In line with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, evaluators will be briefed to take-into-account variations of CVs. Variations in the chronological order of CVs Career breaks or variations in the chronological order of CVs are not to be penalised, but regarded as an evolution of a career, and consequently, as a potentially valuable contribution to the professional development of researchers towards a multidimensional career track. 5 pages limit, extra pages will not be counted. The CV should contain the following, if applicable:
 - work experience (including breaks),
 - publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals,
 - invited presentations to international conferences,
 - organisation of international conferences,
 - research led by the researcher,
 - granted patent(s),
 - examples of participation in industrial innovation,
 - prizes and awards,
 - funding received so far,
 - supervising and mentoring activities,
 - other items of interest.
- Email (PDF or other format), proving that the applicant's project is technically feasible and in line with the research group.

5.2 Technical feasibility of the research proposal (endorsement)

All research projects submitted to MERIT must **prove their technical feasibility in order to be accepted as eligible**. Therefore, the applicants must **receive an endorsement from the prospective supervisor or the group leader of the chosen research group before applying**. The supervisor provides his/her assessment only with regard to the technical feasibility, not the scientific judgment of the research topic or the applicant's qualifications.

In case the supervisor finds the applicant's research project not feasible within the chosen research group, the applicant is not allowed to submit his/her application or must contact another research group.

There are **2 ways** to get such confirmation of the feasibility (endorsement):

1. The applicant **contacts the prospective supervisor or the group leader of the chosen research group** listed on the MERIT website (by email, phone or other mean), **describe his/her research qualifications and experience and send an abstract of the proposed project**. The supervisor should provide feedback to the candidate **within 7 calendar days**. If the prospective supervisor does not respond to the applicant's request in 7 days, the applicant should contact the MERIT Management Board immediately.

2. The applicant **contacts the MERIT Management Board at info@meritcb.eu, describe his/her research qualifications and experience, send an abstract of the proposed project and the name of the chosen research group/s or supervisor/s** listed on the MERIT website. The Management Board will ensure the supervisor's feedback regarding the feasibility of the research abstract. The research abstract will be anonymised. The applicants who prefer to avoid direct communication with the Host Organisation can proceed this way.

In both cases the applicants must get an email feedback following this (or similar) template:

Template for endorsement

I hereby express my endorsement for Dr. X's application, with myself as the supervisor, based on the evaluation of the technical feasibility of the proposed project. The project can be successfully implemented using the available equipment, expertise, and resources within my department.

Template for refusal

I hereby declare I cannot express my endorsement for Dr. X's application, with myself as the supervisor, based on the evaluation of the technical feasibility of the proposed project. The project cannot be successfully implemented using the available equipment/expertise/resources within my department, for the following reasons:.....

Applicants who were found eligible in the first call, do not have to prove compliance and technical feasibility of their project in the second call, in case they are reapplying with the same project.

5.3 Guidance on Ethics issue table and ethics-self assessment

The MERIT Programme is committed to ensuring that all research activities will comply with ethical principles and relevant European, national and international law. The applicants are required to consider carefully the ethical implications of their research proposals. Therefore, an Ethics Issues Table must be completed online. **If the proposal raises one or more of the issues listed in the ethics issues table, the applicant must also complete an ethics self-assessment in the same online form.**

If the ethics self-assessment is applicable, the applicant must write an overview of local/national licenses/approvals for the proposed research necessary. A list of the relevant local, national and international standards and regulations must be described along with the respective approvals/guideline, as well as how the approvals from the relevant authorities will be delivered for ethical clearance once the project will have been accepted for funding.

An indicative Ethics Issue Table is provided on Annex 3. More information on how to answer the table and complete an ethics self-assessment, please consult the document "[How to complete your ethics self-assessment](#)" by the European Commission.

5.4 Guidance on Gender Dimension in research proposals

If relevant gender issues are missed or poorly addressed, research results will be partial and potentially biased. Gender can thus be an important factor in research excellence. Applicants are required to describe how gender or other intersectional categories (intersections between gender and other diversity categories such as ethnicity, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, and the cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantages) will be integrated into the content of their research. If not relevant, justification must be provided. Gender aspects can be addressed in a specific work package or as a task within a work package.

Integrating the gender dimension in research and innovation is an added value in terms of excellence, creativity, and business opportunities. It helps researchers question gender norms and stereotypes, to rethink standards and reference models. It leads to an in-depth understanding of different genders' needs, behaviours and attitudes. A more differentiated approach may also include for example children or people with disabilities, which can have all sorts of ethnic and genetic origins, and cultural and social backgrounds. They all have the right to see their specific needs addressed. The gender dimension in research enhances the societal relevance of the knowledge, technologies and innovations produced. It also contributes to the production of goods and services better suited to potential markets..

Applicants are encouraged to use the [Toolkit Gender in EU-funded research](#), which aims to give the research community practical tools to integrate gender aspects into their research at all stages (ideas and hypothesis, project design and methodology, research implementation, data analysis, and dissemination of research result). Another reference document is [Gender Innovation 2: how inclusive analysis contribute to research and innovation](#).

Example of checklist for sex and/or gender in research content (Toolkit Gender)

Research ideas phase:

- If the research involves humans as research objects, has the relevance of biological sex and/or gender to the research topic been analysed?
- If the research does not directly involve humans, are the possibly differentiated relations of men and women to the research subject sufficiently clear?

- Have you reviewed literature and other sources relating to differences in the research field?

Proposal phase:

- Does the methodology ensure that (possible) sex/gender differences will be investigated: that sex/gender differentiated data will be collected and analysed throughout the research cycle and will be part of the final publication?
- Does the proposal explicitly and comprehensively explain how sex/gender issues will be handled (e.g., in a specific work package)?
- Have possibly differentiated outcomes and impacts of the research on women and men been considered?

Research phase:

- Are questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, etc. designed to unravel potentially relevant sex and/or gender differences in your data?
- Are the groups involved in the project (e.g., samples, testing groups) gender-balanced? Is data analysed according to the sex variable? Are other relevant variables analysed with respect to sex?

Dissemination and communication phase:

- Do analyses present statistics, tables, figures and descriptions that focus on the relevant sex/gender differences that came up in the course of the project?
- Are institutions, departments and journals that focus on gender included among the target groups for dissemination, along with mainstream research magazines?
- Have you considered a specific publication or event on sex/gender-related findings?

The gender dimension issue can be particularly challenging for researchers from technical and life sciences research disciplines which are relevant for MERIT. Therefore, SIC will offer training on how to successfully and meaningfully include the gender dimension and intersectionality in the content of the fellows' research projects as part of the transferable skills training for all accepted fellows.

6. Evaluation and selection process

6.1 Eligibility check

The eligibility check of all applications will start after the call is closed. All applicants will get feedback on their eligibility.

All mandatory eligibility criteria are described in part 4 – Eligibility conditions):

- Eligibility form filled in (PhD degree, and Mobility rule), complete secondment form and ethics issues table, and ethics self-assessment, if applicable.
- The research proposal (must be written in English, and must be completed and submitted before the call deadline, through the MERIT online application system.
- Failure to use the mandatory template, complete the online forms and upload the files by the deadline will result in the application being deemed ineligible.
- Excess pages (10-page limit for the research proposal) will be disregarded.
- Failure to provide evidence (PDF) of the e-mail confirming the feasibility of the applicant's proposal from the prospective supervisor will result in the application deemed ineligible.
- No more than one application per candidate.

- Permanent employees (employees having a contract for an indefinite period) of one of the Hosting organisations are not eligible.

Documentary evidence listed in the applications may be requested as appropriate from successful candidates.

Applicants **may be contacted after the call deadline by the members of the Management Board, in case some minor formal mistakes are identified** within the eligibility check, e.g. the secondment, ethics or eligibility form incorrectly filled in. **Applicants will have 24 hours to fix such mistakes.**

Serious formal mistakes, such as failure to use the mandatory template for the research proposal, including deviation from the template and some subsections missing, or failure to provide evidence of the feasibility of the research proposal, **will not be accepted and these applications will not be eligible.**

6.2 Redress process

All candidates will have recourse to redress solely in regard to procedural issues or perceived incorrect application of eligibility criteria, and not with regards to the scientific judgments of the evaluators and members of the interview panel.

Applicants will have 10 calendar days to apply for a redress procedure after being notified of their eligibility check results. **The redress request must be submitted via the MERIT webform on the MERIT website and using the redress template available on the MERIT website (in the section MERIT committees).** Applicants will be informed by email within 5 working days if their redress request is accepted from the date the redress is submitted. If so, a new evaluation will be conducted on procedural issues. The applicant will receive the final result within 15 working days from the date the applicant received the notification of the redress being accepted. The redress request is evaluated by the Redress Committee, composed by the Ombudsperson, a Human Resources Specialist of SIC, and the Head of Research, Transfer and Cooperation of SIC. The decisions of the Redress Committee are final.

6.3 Evaluation of eligible applications

Admitted applications will be evaluated and approximately 15 fellowships in the second call will be awarded to successful candidates following a **two-phase evaluation and selection process** (written and oral interview). Considering the number of fellowships offered by each research group (see Annex 1), the top-ranking proposal per each research group will be selected.

All evaluators will be briefed to avoid **unconscious gender and diversity bias**, for both the written and the oral selection phases. The evaluation and selection process will have a total duration of 4 months approximately after the eligibility check is done.

For the written evaluation phase, specific selection committees corresponding to each research area will be formed of international and national peer-reviewers (pool of evaluators) who will be interconnected among themselves to ensure the principles of equal opportunities transparency, ethics, and intersectorality oriented on applied results. **Three independent evaluators will be assigned to each admitted research proposal. Each evaluation team will be gender mixed.**

In order to better assess the relevance of the secondments in non-academic sector and the level of applicability of the research projects and to include the industrial point of view, the pool of evaluators will

be composed not only by scientists from the academic sector, but also by experts from the industry, particularly from the R&D departments of high-tech companies.

The gender dimension and other intersectional categories such as age, race, nationality, sexual orientation or geographic location are carefully considered as part of the evaluation and selection process, despite the technical and life sciences focus of expected research projects.

For the oral interview phase, a gender balanced interview panel will be set up by inviting international evaluators (including the evaluators of the proposal); the Chair of the corresponding scientific panel; an expert on gender/intersectoral topics; the MERIT Programme Manager; an HR representative, the director of the corresponding HO, and an external observer (an independent evaluator). Oral interviews will be held through one of the following online platforms: ZOOM, Teams, Skype or a virtual showroom.

6.4 Evaluation criteria of the research proposals and oral interviews

Phase 1 – Criteria for written evaluation (research proposals)

Written evaluation criteria are based on excellence, impact, and implementation. All of the separate elements of each criterion will be considered by the evaluators in their assessment. Each proposal will be remotely evaluated by three evaluators in an individual and independent manner. After carrying out their individual evaluation, the evaluators will join in a consensus discussion in order to agree on a common position, including comments and scores for each award criterion in a **Consensus Report**. The aim of the Consensus Report is to give a clear assessment of the proposal based on its merit, with justification and clear feedback on the proposal's strengths and weaknesses. The quality and consistency of the reports will be checked by the Chairs of each panel (research area).

Evaluation criteria for excellence, impact and implementation

Excellence	Impact	Implementation
1) Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state-of-the-art). 2) Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project). 3) Quality of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host. 4) Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills.	1) Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development. 2) Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities. 3) Sustainability of the candidates' research project in the Region. Opportunities to continue the research through regional/international collaboration with relevant industry or academic sectors.	1) Quality and effectiveness of the work plan and assessment of risks. 2) Relevance, feasibility and benefit for the research project objectives of the planned secondment. Quality of the secondment choice in terms of at least one of the following principles: intersectorality, interdisciplinarity or international mobility.

Scoring to each criterion and weight

	Scale	Criteria weight	Total weight
Excellence	0-100	50%	70%
Impact	0-100	30%	
Implementation	0-100	20%	

Those candidates that reach at least 75% in the written stage, but a maximum of 30 candidates distributed among the fellowships, which means a maximum of two candidates per fellowship offered by each research group, will be invited for an interview.

Phase 2 – Criteria for oral interview

For the oral part, the members of the interview panel will have access to the Consensus Reports in order to ensure the consistency and equal treatment of the proposals. As the experts in the written phase, members of the interview panel will join in a consensus discussion after each interview to agree on a common position, including comments and scores for each award criterion, which will be formulated in a **Panel Report** that will contain a clear assessment on the candidate's skills and abilities.

Criteria for interviews

Together with the invitation for oral interviews, candidates will receive the Consensus Reports including comments and questions. The goal of the interviews is to assess the candidates' motivation for their research proposal, their capability to communicate effectively and their potential to lead a future team of their own. The interview will be held online and in English. To ensure standardisation and objectivity in the process, all candidates will have 30 minutes for the interview, including five minutes for the candidates' presentation about their research topic and motivations to come to the Czech Republic, and 25 minutes for questions asked by the members of the interview panel. There will be a fixed set of questions for each category and they will correspond to a weighted score (scoring 0-100).

Scientific discussion	Communication ability	Potential for leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion following the questions raised in the Consensus reports - Discussion on the gender dimension /intersectionality in the research proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidence - Clear and concise communication targeted to different audiences - Giving and receiving feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interest in coaching and mentoring or leading own research groups - Past experience with leading challenging projects

Scoring to each criterion and weight

	Scale	Criteria weight	Total weight
Scientific discussion	0-100	50%	30%
Communication ability	0-100	25%	
Potential for leadership	0-100	25%	

Final results

A weighted total score will be calculated based on the scores of the report from the consensus discussion (70%) and the scores from the oral interview (30%).

For proposals with the same score, the following sub-criteria will apply:

- Priority selection according to the scores they have been awarded for 1. Excellence, 2. Impact 3. and Implementation.
- Assessment of the secondments and gender dimension in research proposals.
- The gender balance among the selected researchers will be taken into consideration.
- Any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity.

6.5 Award of Fellowships

The MERIT Steering Committee will be responsible for awarding the fellowship according to the priority list resulting from the scores obtained in the two-phase evaluation process. **There will be a reserve list of 8 proposals** in case some of the successful applicants decide to decline or withdraw from the programme for any reason that makes them unable to accept or continue their fellowships.

The list of selected fellows will be available at the MERIT website and they will be informed by the MERIT Programme Manager about an offer for a fellowship position in the chosen HO.

6.6 Ethics screening

All successful proposals (ranked list and reserve list) will be subject to an Ethics screening. Ethics experts will determine whether there are any relevant ethical aspects of the beneficiaries' projects that have not been adequately addressed. The Ethics experts can issue a binding report with the changes to be made to the ethical aspects described in the projects of which the beneficiary will be notified. **The beneficiary will have a maximum period of a month from the date of notification to make these changes and present them to the Ethics experts.** If the beneficiary fails to comply in the time given, the fellowship will be withdrawn.

For those research proposals involving the use of Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs) or human embryos (hE) will automatically proceed to the Research Executive Agency (REA) of the European Commission for an Ethics Review. Such research may not start without approval of the European ethics review and of the MERIT Programme Ethics Committee completed by the communication of the explicit approval in writing from REA to the fellow. If the fellow breaches any of its obligations regarding selected research proposals involving the use of human embryonic stem cells (hESC) or human embryos (hE), the grant may be reduced or terminated.

The MERIT fellows must carry out the action in compliance with Ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity), and applicable EU, international and national law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Supplementary Protocols.

Before starting an action, task raising ethical issues, the fellows must have obtained all approvals or other mandatory documents needed for implementing the task, notably from any (national or local) ethics committee or other bodies such as data protection authorities.

The documents must be kept on file and be submitted upon request by the coordinator to the granting authority. If they are not in English, they must be submitted together with an English summary, which shows

that the documents cover the action tasks in question and includes the conclusions of the committee or authority concerned (if any).

Useful documents related to Ethics: [How to complete your ethics self-assessment](#), [Identifying serious and complex ethics issues in EU-funded research](#) and [The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity \(2023\)](#).

6.7 Start of the Fellowships

The successful beneficiaries will be contacted (by email) by the MERIT Programme Manager and put into direct contact with their corresponding HO. The HO will start the recruitment process that will conclude with a signed contract. The fellows will be employed under the relevant labour law with full social security and health security coverage.

Any other documentation specified by the HOs (including but not limited to academic transcripts and documentation required in relation to mobility rules) shall be supplied to the HOs as soon as possible. Visa, migration and relocation support will be offered by EURAXESS, and the Welcome Office of SIC and the corresponding HO. **The preferable period for relocation will be the following four (4) months after the selection process is completed, and no later than ten (10) months after accepting the fellowship.**

The visa application for nationals outside of the EU may vary in processing time. The organisation Euraxess and the corresponding HO can provide assistance together with the MERIT Management team but are not responsible for the approval and granting of the visa.

7. Annex 1 - List of research organisations serving as Host Organisations (HOs) and research groups/laboratories/projects open in the 2nd call

Name of the HO	Name of the research group/department/project	Website link to the research group/department/project	MERIT research area	Number of fellowships offered
Institute of Biotechnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Structural Proteins	https://www.ibt.cas.cz/en/research/laboratory-of-structural-proteins/	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
	Structural Biology	https://www.ibt.cas.cz/en/research/laboratory-of-structural-biology/	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
	Molecular Pathogenetics	https://www.ibt.cas.cz/en/research/laboratory-of-molecular-pathogenetics/	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
Institute of Microbiology of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Structural Biology and Cell Signaling - Construction of microfluidics apparatus	https://peterslab.org/	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
	Structural Biology and Cell Signaling - Chips arrays for clinical diagnostics	https://peterslab.org/	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
Institute of Physiology of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Structural Biology of Signaling Proteins	https://www.biomed.cas.cz/d312/index.php?section=home	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
	Neuroscience – Pain Research	https://www.fgu.cas.cz/en/departments/vyzkum-bolesti	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
Czech Technical University in Prague, Faculty of Biomedical Engineering	Rehabilitation process quantification	https://www.fbmi.cvut.cz/en/research/teams	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
	Telemedicine and Diabetes	https://www.fbmi.cvut.cz/en/research/teams	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1

First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University	Medicinal Chemistry	https://www.biocev.eu/en/research/cellular-biology-and-virology.4/laboratory-of-medicinal-chemistry.45	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
National Institute of Mental Health	Applied Research in Early Stage of Serious Mental Illnesses	https://www.nudz.cz/en/research/early-episodes-of-smi-research-center	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
	Experimental Neurobiology	https://www.nudz.cz/en/research/preclinical-research-program/working-groups/experimental-neurobiology	Biotechnology/ Biomedicine	1
Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics of the Czech Academy of Science	Applied Proteome Analyses	https://www.iapg.cas.cz/en/laboratories/lapa/Research/index.html	Biotechnology/ biomedicine	1
	Molecular Ecology	https://www.iapg.cas.cz/en/laboratories/lme/Research/	Biotechnology/ biomedicine	1
Institute of Botany of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Department of Geoecology	http://labgis.ibot.cas.cz/	Digitalisation/AI	1
Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences / HiLASE	Industrial Laser Applications	https://www.hilase.cz/en/research-programmes/industrial-laser-applications/	Laser technologies	1
	Advanced Laser Development	https://www.hilase.cz/en/research-programmes/advanced-laser-development-ald/	Laser technologies	1
Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences / The Extreme Light	Advanced Laser Development	https://www.eli-beams.eu/research/lasers/	Laser technologies	1
	Laser-driven X-ray sources - Radiation Physics and Electron Acceleration	https://www.eli-beams.eu/research/x-ray-sources/	Laser technologies	1

Infrastructure, ERIC	Radiation Physics and Electron Acceleration	https://www.eli-beams.eu/facility/experimental-halls/e5-electron-acceleration-laser-undulator-x-ray-source/electron-beam-accelerator-for-fundamental-sciences-and-applications-eli-elba/	Laser technologies	1
Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Solar Physics	https://www.asu.cas.cz/en/departments/solar-department	Space technologies	1
	Interplanetary matter	https://www.asu.cas.cz/en/departments/interplanetary-matter-department	Space technologies	1
Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech Institute of Informatics, Robotics, and Cybernetics	Cognitive Systems and Neuroscience	https://www.ciirc.cvut.cz/teams-labs/cogsys/	Digitalisation/AI	1
Czech University of Life Sciences Prague	Hydrological and Climate Variability	www.fzp.czu.cz/en/r-9409-science-research/r-9674-leading-research-groups/r-9669-hydrological-and-climate-variability/r-9713-team-newsonmental Sciences CZU Prague	Digitalisation/AI	1
	Spatial Science in Ecology and Environment	www.fzp.czu.cz/en/r-9409-science-research/r-9674-leading-research-groups/r-12318-spatial-science-in-ecology-and-environment/r-12302-team-newsent - Faculty of Environmental Sciences CZU Prague	Digitalisation/AI	1
Centrum výzkumu Řež (Řež Research Centre)	Energy technologies	https://www.cicrr.cz/	Sustainable energy/Materials	
	Nuclear engineering	https://www.cicrr.cz/	Sustainable energy/Material	

	Structural nuclear materials	https://www.cicrr.cz/	Sustainable energy/Material	1
Institute of Thermomechanics of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Laboratory of Internal Flows	https://www.it.cas.cz/en/d1/l012/	Sustainable Energy/Materials	1
Nuclear Physics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences	Radiocarbon dating	http://www.ujf.cas.cz/en/crl/	Biotechnology/Biomedicine	1
	High energy atmospheric physics	http://www.ujf.cas.cz/en/research-development/large-research-infrastructure-and-centres/crcrat/	Sustainable energy and Materials	1
	Radiobiology	http://www.ujf.cas.cz/en/departments/department-of-radiation-dosimetry/	Biotechnology/Biomedicine	1
Czech Technical University in Prague, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	Additive manufacturing	https://www.fs.cvut.cz/en/home/	Laser technologies	1
Czech Technical University in Prague, University Centre for Energy Efficient Buildings	Indoor Environment of Buildings	https://www.uceeb.cz/en/indoor-environment-of-buildings/	Sustainable energy/Materials	1
	Materials and structures	https://www.uceeb.cz/en/structural-engineering/	Sustainable energy/Materials	1
	Composite structures	https://www.web-old.uceeb.cz/en/laboratory-composite-structures	Sustainable energy/Materials	1
	Control systems and optimizations	https://www.uceeb.cz/en/control-systems-and-optimization/	Sustainable energy/Materials	1
	Electronic systems and diagnostics	https://www.uceeb.cz/en/electronic-systems-and-diagnostics/	Sustainable energy/Materials	1

8. Annex 2 - List of secondment organisations

(Applicants can also suggest their own secondment proposal)

Secondment organisation (SO)	SO area of specialisation	Website	Academic or Non-academic sector	Country
EATON	Energy management	https://www.eaton.com/cz/cs-cz.html	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
VALEO	Digitalisation (automotive sector)	https://www.valeo.com/en/czech-republic-prague-rd-center/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
Deloitte Advisory	Audit & assurance, consulting, risk and financial advisory, risk management, tax, and related services	https://www2.deloitte.com/cz/en.html	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
CRYTUR	Synthetic crystal manufacturing	https://www.crytur.com/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
SHM	Physical Vapor Deposition (PVD) Coating	https://shm-cz.cz/en/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
CARDAM	Additive manufacturing	https://www.cardam-solution.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
Santiago Lab	Chemical synthesis services	https://www.santiago-lab.com/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
NEXARS	Biotechnology (microbiome for human health, recombinant proteins for therapeutic and diagnostic purposes, biocompatible nanomaterials)	https://www.nexars.com/en/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
BEZNOSKA	Manufacturing of implants, instruments and surgical tools for orthopaedics	https://beznoska.com/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic

	and traumatology			
ESSENCE LINE	Biotechnology (genotoxicity, endocrine disruptors, cytotoxicity, DNA diagnostics and other biochemical analysis)	https://www.essenceline.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
DEVINN	Hydrogen technologies and Automotive	https://en.devinn.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
Czech Green Building Council	Sustainability in construction	https://www.czgbc.org/en	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
PRG.AI	Artificial intelligence	https://prg.ai/en/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
EuroGV	Geodetic and photogrammetric	https://www.eurogv.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
AffiPro	Biotechnology (support technologies for life science mass spectrometry using fine-tuned surface chemistry)	https://affipro.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
MAGICWARE	IT and tourism (software products)	https://www.magicware.net/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
Hydronaut Project	Research and training station designed for long-term stays of small groups of scuba divers underwater (testing of new technologies)	https://hydronaut.eu/en/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
J. S. Machar, High School	High School	https://qbl.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic

Kutna Hora Technical High School	High School	https://www.voskh.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
Emil Kolben Technical High School	High School	https://spsrakovnik.cz/	Non-academic sector	Czech Republic
Baltic Open Solution Center	Software solutions and geographical information systems	https://www.f6s.com/company/bosc#about	Non-academic sector	Latvia
DE.TEC.TOR	Biomedicine (detectors applied in particle therapy)	https://detector-group.com/	Non-academic sector	Italy
National Institute for Nuclear Physics	Nuclear Physics	https://home.infn.it/en	Academic sector	Italy
University of Washington, Department of Chemistry	Chemistry	https://www.washington.edu/	Academic sector	United States
North Carolina State University	All fields	https://www.ncsu.edu/	Academic sector	United States
Monterrey Institute of Technology	All fields	https://tec.mx/en	Academic sector	Mexico
Dresden University of Technology	Technical fields	https://tu-dresden.de/#	Academic sector	Germany
Berlin Institute of Technology	Astronomy and astrophysics	https://www-astro.physik.tu-berlin.de/en/	Academic sector	Germany
Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences	Environment and Life Science	https://upwr.edu.pl/en/	Academic sector	Poland
Institute of fluid-flow machinery - Polish Academy of Sciences	Fluid-flow machinery	https://www.imp.gda.pl/en/	Academic sector	Poland
Luleå University of Technology	Technical fields	https://www.ltu.se/?l=en	Academic sector	Sweden
Queen's University Belfast,	Plasma physics	https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforPlasmaPhysics/	Academic sector	United Kingdom

Centre for Plasma Physics				
Technical University of Košice	Technical fields	https://www.tuke.sk/wps/portal	Academic sector	Slovakia
Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture	Construction and architecture	https://architect.com/KNUCA	Academic sector	Ukraine
Global Change Research Institute CAS	Environment	https://www.czechglobe.cz/en/	Academic sector	Czech Republic

9. Annex 3 – Online Applications Forms

Registration to the call

Researcher type	
Scientific panel	
Research group	
Project name	
Project acronym	
Project abstract	
CV	upload
Technical proposal	upload
Confirmation of the feasibility	upload

Eligibility form

1. RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Applicants must be, at the date of MERIT's call deadline, in possession of a doctoral degree. Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will also be considered as postdoctoral researchers and are considered eligible to apply. Candidates selected for funding will be asked to provide documentary evidence to back up the information stated here.

PhD details (field, title of thesis)	text
Awarding institute and country	text
PhD start date	dd/mm/yyyy
PhD end date	dd/mm/yyyy
Date of expected award (if applicable)	dd/mm/yyyy

2. MOBILITY REQUIREMENT

Applicants may not have resided or carried out my main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the Czech Republic for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before MERIT call deadline. This mobility rule applies to all research panels.

Standard. Researchers moving within Europe or coming in from other parts of the world.

Researchers at risk. Researchers with the status of refugees or researchers at all stages of their careers who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty or research career, and those who are forced to flee or have been displaced because of such threats.

Career Restart. Researchers who wish to restart their research after a career break (e.g. after parental leave, working outside research, etc.). The researchers must not have been active in research for a continuous period of at least 12 months within the 18 months immediately prior to the deadline for submission of proposals.

Integration. Czech nationals or long-term residents who wish to return and reintegrate in a longer-term research position in the Czech Republic.

Candidates selected for funding will be asked to provide documentary evidence to back up the information stated here.

Location of work/study for the period from 15/04/2021 to 15/04/2024.	Text
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<i>(Include detail such as institution/organisation where you worked/studied, location and dates, If you resided in different locations during this period, please provide details for each location)</i>	
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Sworn statement of the applicant:

- I hereby declare I have not resided or carried out my main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the Czech Republic for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before MERIT call deadline.
- I hereby declare that I am in possession of a doctoral degree or I have successfully defended doctoral thesis but have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree at the date of MERIT's call deadline.

Secondment form

At least one **secondment is compulsory** for each fellowship. It should be relevant, feasible, and beneficial for the researcher and in line with the project objectives. **The aim of secondments is to assure intersectoral, international or interdisciplinary experience for fellows, the transfer of knowledge and technologies from research organisations to industry or to gather relevant inputs and industry needs to research organisations.** The duration of the secondment is from 2 to a maximum of 9 months (FTE). It can be carried out in one or more institutions in a single period or divided into shorter periods (e.g. in order to accommodate family obligations). Short visits and stays of less than 2 months are not counted as secondments. **The added-value of the secondment must be described in the research proposal.**

The applicants need to complete the secondment form as part of their application, however **at the application stage secondments are not to be confirmed.**

Type of secondment organisation in which the applicant plans to carry out the secondment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic <input type="checkbox"/> Non-academic <input type="checkbox"/> Both
Name of the preferred secondment organisation <i>(either from the list provided by MERIT or applicants' own suggestion).</i> Max. 3 options.	1. 2. 3.
Any secondment organisation already contacted?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Any co-supervisor already contacted?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

Ethics issues table

1. Human Embryonic Stem Cells and Human Embryos		
Does this activity involve Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does this activity involve the use of human embryos?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Humans		
Does this activity involve human participants of both sex/gender?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does this activity involve interventions (physical also including imaging technology, behavioural treatments, etc.) on the study participants?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Does this activity involve conducting a clinical study as defined by the Clinical Trial Regulation (EU 536/2014) ? (using pharmaceuticals, biologicals, radiopharmaceuticals, or advanced therapy medicinal products)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Human Cells / Tissues (not covered by section 1)		
Does this activity involve the use of human male/female/both tissues/cells?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Personal Data		
Does this activity involve processing of personal data?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does this activity involve further processing of previously collected personal data (including use of pre-existing data sets or sources, merging existing data sets)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is it planned to export personal data from the EU to non-EU countries? If yes, specify in the self-assessment the type of personal data and countries involved.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is it planned to import personal data from non-EU countries into the EU or from a non-EU country to another non-EU country? If yes, specify in the self-assessment the type of personal data and countries involved.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does this activity involve the processing of personal data related to criminal convictions or offences?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Animals		
Does this activity involve animals of both sexes?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6. Non-EU Countries		
Will some of the activities be carried out in non-EU countries?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
In case non-EU countries are involved, do the activities undertaken in these countries raise potential ethics issues?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is it planned to use local resources (e.g., animal and/or human tissue samples, genetic material, live animals, human remains, materials of historical value, endangered fauna or flora samples, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is it planned to import any material (other than data) from non-EU countries into the EU or from a non-EU country to another non-EU country? For data imports, see section 4.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is it planned to export any material (other than data) from the EU to non-EU countries? For data exports, see section 4.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does this activity involve low and/or lower middle income countries , (if yes, detail the benefit sharing actions planned in the self-assessment)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Could the situation in the country put the individuals taking part in the activity at risk?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
7. Environment, Health and Safety		
Does this activity involve the use of substances or processes that may cause harm to the environment, to animals or plants (during the implementation of the activity or further to the use of the results, as a possible impact)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does this activity deal with endangered fauna and/or flora / protected areas?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does this activity involve the use of substances or processes that may cause harm to humans, including those performing the activity (during the implementation of the activity or further to the use of the results, as a possible impact)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
8. Artificial Intelligence		
Does this activity involve the development, deployment and/or use of Artificial Intelligence? (If yes, detail in the self-assessment whether that could raise ethical concerns related to human rights and values and detail how this will be addressed)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Other Ethical Issues		
Are there any other ethical issues that should be taken into consideration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

I confirm that I have taken into account all ethics issues above and that, if any ethics issues apply, I will complete the ethics self-assessment as described in the guidelines How to Complete your Ethics Self-Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Ethics Self-Assessment (if applicable)

Ethical dimension of the objectives, methodology and likely impact

Explain in detail the identified issues in relation to:

- objectives of the activities (e.g., study of vulnerable populations, etc.)
- methodology (e.g., clinical trials, involvement of children, protection of personal data, etc.)
- the potential impact of the activities (e.g., environmental damage, stigmatisation of particular social groups, political or financial adverse consequences, misuse, etc.)

5000 characters maximum

Compliance with ethical principles and relevant legislations

Describe how the issue(s) identified in the ethics issues table above will be addressed in order to adhere to the ethical principles and what will be done to ensure that the activities are compliant with the EU/national legal and ethical requirements of the country or countries where the tasks are to be carried out. It is reminded that for activities performed in a non-EU countries, they should also be allowed in at least one EU Member State.

5000 characters maximum

10. Annex 4 – Template of the Project proposal

(To be downloaded on the MERIT website)

This page is for information only and should be removed from the proposal.

Proposals must address each of the award criteria as outlined in the relevant sections and respect the following minimum standards:

- 10 pages limit
- a minimum font size of 11 points (text inside tables 9 points)
- single line spacing
- margins (top, bottom, left, right) of at least 15 mm (not including any footer or headers),
- recommended font Times New Roman
- hyperlinks in the core text will not be open by the evaluators (avoid using them)
- footnotes are to be used exclusively for literature reference, min. font size 8. They will count towards the page limit
- tables are only to be used for illustrating the core text of the proposal; they cannot be used to contain the core text itself

Language:

- avoid jargon
- write in a style that is accessible using figures/tables/charts/diagrams to illustrate where appropriate.
- explain any abbreviations the first time you use them.
- use simple clear text, make sure that it 'reads well'.
- avoid long sentences. Avoid too much repetition.
- do not copy and paste information from other documents/websites. Instead, tailor information to fit with your proposal. Try to make it relevant to your proposed fellowship.
- be consistent with terms used (for example, you can talk in 1st person (me), 3rd person (the researcher, the fellow), use the same term throughout.

Since the technical proposal template is based on the MSCA PF we strongly suggest to the applicants to go over the Handbook MSCA PF 2023 to find useful recommendations and what are the strengths and weaknesses of an application. But pay attention that some of the award criteria are different!

Do not deviate from this template. Keep all the subsections unchanged (1.1, 1.2, 1.3 etc.).

(Acronym of project proposal)

----- Start page count – (max 10 pages) -----

1. EXCELLENCE

1.1 Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state-of-the-art).

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Describe the quality and pertinence of the R&I objectives; are the objectives measurable and verifiable? Are they realistically achievable?
- Describe how your project goes beyond the state-of-the-art, and the extent to which the proposed work is ambitious.

1.2 Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project).

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Overall methodology: Describe and explain the overall methodology, including the concepts, models and assumptions that underpin your work. Explain how this will enable you to deliver your project's objectives. Refer to any important challenges you may have identified in the chosen methodology and how you intend to overcome them.
- Integration of methods and disciplines to pursue the objectives: Explain how expertise and methods from different disciplines will be brought together and integrated in pursuit of your objectives. If you consider that an interdisciplinary approach is unnecessary in the context of the proposed work, please provide a justification.
- Gender dimension and other diversity aspects: Describe how the gender dimension and other diversity aspects are considered in the project's research and innovation content. If you do not consider such a gender dimension to be relevant in your project, please provide a justification.
 - Remember that this question relates to the content of the planned research and innovation activities, and not to gender balance in the teams in charge of carrying out the project.
 - Sex, gender and diversity analysis refers to biological characteristics and social/cultural factors respectively. For guidance on methods of sex / gender analysis and the issues to be considered, please refer to this page.
- Open science practices: Describe how appropriate open science practices are implemented as an integral part of the proposed methodology. Show how the choice of practices and their implementation is adapted to the nature of your work in a way that will increase the chances of the project delivering on its objectives (up to half a page, including research data management). If you believe that none of these practices are appropriate for your project, please provide a justification here.
 - *Open science*: is an approach based on open cooperative work and systematic sharing of knowledge and tools as early and widely as possible in the process. Open science practices include early and open sharing of research (for example through preregistration, registered reports, pre-prints, or crowd-sourcing); research output management; measures to ensure reproducibility of research outputs; providing open access to research outputs (such as publications, data, software, models, algorithms, and workflows); participation in open peer-review; and involving all relevant knowledge actors including citizens, civil society and end users in the co-creation of R&I agendas and contents (such as citizen science). Please note that this does not refer to outreach actions that may be planned as part of the communication, dissemination and exploitation activities. These aspects should instead be described below under 'Impact'.
- Research data management and management of other research outputs: Applicants generating/collecting data and/or other research outputs (except for publications) during the project must explain how the data will be managed in line with the FAIR principles.

1.3 Quality of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Explain how the researcher will gain new knowledge during the fellowship at the hosting organisation (research and transferable skills).
- Outline the previously acquired knowledge and skills that the researcher will transfer to the Host Organisation.

1.4 Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Explain the quality and appropriateness of the researcher's existing professional experience in relation to the proposed Host Organisation, research group, supervisor and the research project.

2. IMPACT

2.1 Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Expected skill development of the researcher.
- Expected impact of the proposed research and training activities on the researcher's career perspectives inside and/or outside academia.

2.2 Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Plan for the dissemination and exploitation activities, including communication activities: describe the planned measures to maximize the impact of your project by providing a first version of your 'plan for the dissemination and exploitation including communication activities'. Describe the dissemination, exploitation measures that are planned, and the target group(s) addressed (e.g. scientific community, end users, financial actors, public at large). Regarding communication measures and public engagement strategy, the aim is to inform and reach out to society and show the activities performed, and the use and the benefits the project will have for citizens. Activities must be strategically planned, with clear objectives, start at the outset and continue through the lifetime of the project. The description of the communication activities needs to state the main messages as well as the tools and channels that will be used to reach out to each of the chosen target groups.
- Strategy for the management of intellectual property, foreseen protection measures: if relevant, discuss the strategy for the management of intellectual property, foreseen protection measures, such as patents, design rights, copyright, trade secrets, etc., and how these would be used to support exploitation.
- All measures should be proportionate to the scale of the project, and should contain concrete actions to be implemented both during and after the end of the project.

2.3 Sustainability of the candidates' research project in the Region (Central Bohemia/Czech Republic). Opportunities to continue the research through regional/international collaboration with relevant industry or academic sectors.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Explain how the project's results are expected to make a difference in terms of impact at regional level (social, environmental, economic, technological, scientific, etc.).
- Describe the strategy to connect the project with relevant industry or academic sectors through regional/international collaboration.
- Explain how the research project can be sustainable in the region (further funding, investment, spin-off, etc.)

3. IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of the work plan and assessment of risks.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Brief presentation of the overall structure of the work plan, including deliverables and milestones.
- Timing of the different work packages and their components.
- Mechanisms in place to assess and mitigate risks (of research and/or administrative nature).

A Gantt chart must be included and should indicate the proposed Work Packages (WP), major deliverables, milestones, secondments, placements. This Gantt chart counts towards the 10-page limit. The schedule in the Gantt chart should indicate the number of months elapsed from the start of the action (Month 1).

3.2. Relevance, feasibility and benefit for the research project objectives of the planned temporary placement in academic or non-academic sector (secondment), (NOTE: secondment is not the fellowship). Quality of the secondment choice in terms of at least one of the following principles: intersectorality, interdisciplinarity or international mobility.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Explain how the project objectives are in line with the planned secondment (in academic or non-academic sector) and how this adds significant value and/or impact to the fellowship.
- Explain what new knowledge will be gain during the fellowship at the secondment organisation and how it will be acquired, in terms of one or more of the following principles:
 - *Intersectorality*: academic/non-academic mobility. The intersectoral experience during the secondments offers opportunities for testing technological development, for higher the impact of R&I outputs, to increase the applicable and market-oriented outcomes of the research project, among other prospects.
 - *Interdisciplinarity*: applying the knowledge and skills from different academic disciplines or subjects that are normally regarded as distinct, to the same task or project.

- *International mobility*: a displacement experience that provides opportunities to get educational, professional, social and/or intercultural skills and increases employability as well as social cohesion.