

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

AFR PHD AND POSTDOC GRANT SCHEME 2013-2

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1. Background

The Fonds National de la Recherche Luxembourg (FNR) established the national research grant scheme AFR (Aides à la Formation-Recherche) to support PhD and postdoctoral researchers in Luxembourg and abroad. By providing individual fellowships, the FNR wants to support research training that clearly advances the beneficiary's own career. The project should be in-line with the research objectives of the hosting research group and useful to the Luxembourg R&D setting.

The FNR offers doctoral research grants for up to four years (3+1) and postdoctoral research grants for up to two years. The FNR actively encourages the conclusion of employment contracts between AFR beneficiaries and their host institutions, thereby giving the beneficiaries access to full social security coverage including health and pension insurances. Stipends without employment contracts are only awarded in exceptional cases.

Following two successful applications under the Marie-Curie-Actions of the European Commission (FP7-People-Cofund) in 2008 and 2010, the European Commission financially supports the AFR Postdoc scheme for the period 2009-2014. All AFR Postdoc grantees eligible for Marie-Curie Cofunding are hence in addition fellows of the highly-esteemed Marie-Curie Scheme.

2. AFR Objectives

In-line with the FNR's general strategy, the objective of AFR is to contribute to the development of human resources in Luxembourg R&D, translated in the long term by an increased number of qualified researchers pursuing a research career beyond their period of AFR funding. Particular importance is laid on the selection of high-quality proposals. Furthermore, the FNR sets quality standards for doctoral research training in Luxembourg. On the postdoctoral level, the FNR actively promotes the mobility of early-stage researchers.

The FNR contributes to the improvement of working conditions and career perspectives for researchers, on the one hand by enabling employment contracts between AFR beneficiaries and their host institutions and on the other hand by raising awareness of researchers' rights and responsibilities at an early career stage.

Moreover, the FNR fosters the information exchange among AFR fellows through the set-up of a network of current and former beneficiaries. Annual network events to enhance the exchange are organised by the FNR.

Another objective of the AFR is to promote public-private partnerships (AFR-PPP) by paying an incentive for research projects carried out in collaboration with the private sector.

3. Who can apply?

3.1. Eligible Applicants

AFR follows a bottom-up approach, has no thematic limitations and is open to all researchers, regardless of their nationality, desirous to engage into research training in Luxembourg (i.e. more than 50% of time spent in Luxembourg). In case the research training takes place abroad, the applicants must have a strong link to Luxembourg (nationals and/or residents > 5 years). In case of collaboration with a private company in Luxembourg at least 25% of the time must be spent in the company in Luxembourg.

The **AFR PhD** grant scheme is open to applicants holding a university degree of a recognised higher education institution, allowing them to enter into doctoral training. In case applicants do not hold the degree yet special rules apply (see 'Guidelines for PhD applicants'). The FNR offers up to 10 AFR PhD grants per call to researchers abroad. Applicants are only eligible for AFR PhD funding if they are not undertaking their PhD for more than a year.

Applicants for the **AFR postdoc** grants must have obtained their doctoral degree no longer than 8 years before the application deadline. If a candidate does not hold a PhD degree yet, the final PhD examination must have been passed the latest 1 month after the call submission deadline. In addition, postdoctoral candidates are subject to a **mobility clause**: the postdoctoral research study has to be carried out in a country different from where the applicant has been principally (> 12 months) working in the 24 months preceding the call deadline. AFR beneficiaries are eligible consecutively for PhD and for postdoctoral funding, but should keep in mind the binding mobility clause for a postdoc grant.

3.2. Eligible Institutions

The Host Institution (HI) is the institution where the AFR beneficiary performs the major part of her/his research. The HI must offer supervision support and office or laboratory space allowing the applicant to properly carry out the described research project.

It is the responsibility of the applicants to find a suitable HI with a competent research group in their field.

The following are eligible HIs for AFR grantees:

- Recognised research and higher education institutions in Luxembourg or abroad;
- Public bodies or private associations¹ in Luxembourg with a research mission and scientific competence in the domains of the project; the respective document certifying their research mission and, in the case of associations, their statutes have to be submitted;
- Private companies located in Luxembourg active in R&D, in collaboration with a public research institution in Luxembourg or abroad; if private companies intend to serve as HI, they need to provide an accreditation ('*agrément*') issued by the Ministry of Economic Affairs in order to be eligible;

¹ Associations sans but lucratif ou fondations régies par les dispositions de la loi modifiée du 21 avril 1928 sur les associations et les fondations sans but lucratif

- Public institutions abroad with a research mission and scientific competence in the domain of the project; the respective document certifying the research mission and the statutes have to be submitted.

3.3. Terms and Conditions

Applicants should refer to the 'AFR Terms and Conditions' for regulations about holding the award (e.g. other eligible funding, the start date of the project, additional remuneration, or acknowledgement of FNR funding).

4. Selection Criteria

The AFR applications for PhD and postdoctoral research projects will be assessed according to the following selection criteria:

1. Scientific quality of the research project
2. Profile of the applicant
3. Quality of the host institution (including PhD supervision and training)
4. Interest of the research project in the Luxembourg R&D setting

Additional criterion for postdocs:

5. Potential for career development

PhD applications are reviewed by the members of the four thematic AFR expert panels. The evaluation of the AFR Postdoc applications is carried out by external experts in the domain of the proposals. The written evaluation is followed by a discussion during an expert panel meeting. All applicants receive a written feedback on the arguments that led to the funding decision.

More detailed information about the selection criteria and the peer review process are described in the documents 'AFR Evaluation Guidelines for Remote Reviewers and Panel Members' as well as 'AFR Guidelines for Applicants' available on www.fnr.lu/AFR.

5. Financial Contribution and Duration of an AFR Grant

5.1. Grant duration

Under the AFR, the research grants for PhDs are awarded for a period of up to 4 (3+1) years.

PhD applicants who have had external funding for a limited period of time (< 12 months) may apply for AFR funding for the remaining time of their PhD research project. However, in case the PhD project is on-going for more than 12 months (call deadline counts) the application is not eligible and will be turned down without further evaluation.

The research grants for postdoctoral researchers are awarded for a period of up to 2 years. The minimum AFR Postdoc grant duration is 12 months.

5.2. Employment contracts and fellowships

Employment contracts are the rule. Simple fellowships, termed "stipends", paid directly to the beneficiaries, are only possible in well-justified cases outside Luxembourg (i.e. in the cases where conclusion of an employment contract with the host institution is not possible; or results in a net salary for the Beneficiary below $\frac{3}{4}$ of the amount received for a stipend). Beneficiaries of an AFR fellowship must be covered by a health and accident insurance.

5.3. Financial Contributions of AFR grants

For AFR beneficiaries with employment contracts, the FNR pays a maximum contribution to the annual salary costs of the host institution as follows²:

	PHD	POSTDOC
Max. AFR contribution (including employers' charges)	39,175€ / year	55,586 € / year

A topping-up by the employer is possible up to a certain amount. For further details, please refer to the 'AFR Terms and Conditions'.

For AFR beneficiaries without employment contracts, the FNR pays a stipend to the recipients:

	PHD	POSTDOC
Max. AFR contribution (stipend)	18,000 € / year	25,200 € / year

The FNR does accept cumulating two grants for living costs of different origin up to the maximum limit indicated in the Grand-Ducal Regulation³ (see Terms and Conditions). Researchers who have been awarded a grant for living costs from an external source of funding may apply for AFR fellowship. However, in case of approval of the two grants, the full basic grant is paid by the FNR and the topping-up may come from another source that needs to certify their awareness and agreement with the AFR grant.

5.4. Travel lump sum

For all AFR beneficiaries, the FNR allocates a one-off travel lump sum based on the airline distance between the beneficiary's residence at the moment of the application and her/his host institution. For further details, please refer to the 'AFR Terms and Conditions'.

5.5. Training allowance

The FNR is awarding a training allowance to each AFR beneficiary to cover costs for participation in training events directly related to the AFR research project. These training events comprehend:

- scientific/non-scientific training seminars
- scientific conferences
- summer/winter schools
- field work or travel between scientific contacts involved in the project

The training allowance amounts to max. 6,000 € / PhD or to max. 4,000 € / Postdoc and is paid to the host institution (in case of an employment contract). In case of a stipend it is paid to the AFR beneficiary. It is the responsibility of the AFR beneficiary in agreement with her/his supervisor(s) or main scientific contact(s) to manage the travel allowance over the AFR funding period. For further details, please refer to the 'AFR Terms and Conditions'.

² Salary index as of 1st January 2013. In case the Luxembourg salary index changes, the above amounts will be adapted on the 1st January of the year following the index change.

³ Reglement Grand Ducal A162, 31st Oct. 2008

6. AFR Calls and Proposal Submission

6.1. AFR Calls for proposals

The AFR launches **2 calls per year** for PhD and postdoc applicants:

- one in Spring (evaluation until June), and
- one in Autumn (evaluation until December).

Deadlines for ongoing and future AFR calls are announced on www.fnr.lu/AFR

Applications for AFR grants should be planned sufficiently in advance and jointly with all stakeholders involved.

6.2. Application Submission

To be considered for an AFR grant, applicants:

- must complete and submit an online application with all requested annexes (including a scan of the joint declaration signed by the applicant and by the legal representative of the host institution) in electronic format to the online submission system (FNR Grant Management System) <https://grants.fnr.lu> no later than 14:00 (CET) on **call deadline**.
- must use the **forms provided** by the FNR. The Project Description must contain all the sections as indicated in the template.
- must ensure by checking with their supervisor(s) that confidential **reference reports** of each supervisor / scientific contact have been sent to the FNR before the deadline (see application guidelines for more details).

Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered!

Further call information and the **guidelines for applicants** may be downloaded from the FNR webpage: www.fnr.lu/AFR.

6.3. EURAXESS – Help for mobile researchers

The Euraxess Services Centre Luxembourg (www.euraxess.lu) helps researchers who are either planning to come to Luxembourg or to leave Luxembourg with all matters related to transnational mobility such as visa applications and entry conditions for candidates from third countries, information on accommodation and many more.

A guide for researchers from all over the world who wish to work in Luxembourg has been published by the Euraxess Service Centre Luxembourg. Its aim is to make researchers' mobility as easy as possible. It presents an overview of the legal framework in matters such as employment, entry conditions, taxation, social security, health care, as well as information on accommodation and daily life. The **Foreign Researcher's Guide to Luxembourg** can be downloaded on the following link:

<http://www.luxembourg.public.lu/en/publications/economy-and-finance/uni-euraxess-guide/index.html?highlight=foreign%22researchers%22guide>

7. Public-Private Partnerships under AFR (AFR-PPP)

The AFR supports researchers who carry out their PhD research training or postdoc research study in collaboration with a private company active in R&D in Luxembourg.

In order to be eligible for the supplementary financial incentive of AFR-PPP grants, private companies need to be in possession of an accreditation by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, certifying their R&D activities in Luxembourg.

The AFR applicant, the private company and the public partner jointly develop the research project that needs to be innovative and create new knowledge. The private company plays an active role in the supervision and the training of the PhD/postdoc researcher. A contract specifying the contributions of each partner to the research project, including an agreement on IPR, needs to be concluded between the public research body and the private company.

A financial incentive is paid by the FNR under the AFR-PPP scheme. Thus, for AFR beneficiaries with employment contracts under PPP, the FNR pays a maximum contribution to the annual salary costs of the Host Institution as follows⁴:

	PHD	POSTDOC
Max. AFR contribution in case of a public-private partnership (including employers' charges)	42,956 € / year	60,653 € / year

A topping-up by the employer is possible up to a certain amount. For further details, please refer to the 'AFR Terms and Conditions'.

8. AFR Results

Since September 2008, the FNR has launched ten AFR calls for both, PhD and postdoc grants. The submitted research projects were evaluated by international experts. The following table summarises the decisions of the FNR decision bodies:

Year	Projects eligible		Projects funded	
	PhD	Postdoc	PhD	Postdoc
2008	102	38	57	19
2009	250	96	140	54
2010	187	102	95	45
2011	200	92	101	40
2012	252	120	94	55

Lists of all funded projects sorted by domain can be found on the FNR's website: www.fnr.lu/AFR

⁴ Salary index as of 1st January 2013. In case the Luxembourg salary index changes, the above amounts will be adapted on the 1st January of the year following the index change.