

Programme Description & Application guidelines



Luxembourg
National
Research Fund

 AFR

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION AND APPLICATION GUIDELINES

AFR 2024 CALL

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The AFR 2024 call deadline: Wednesday, 13th March 2024 (14.00 CET).

Changes to the previous call:

There will be no AFR Bilateral Call in 2024.

Please also refer to the AFR specific selection guidelines for AFR Individual. They give detailed instructions on how to prepare and submit an application and have to be read in conjunction with the present document. Do not hesitate to contact the FNR staff for any further explanation.

EARMARKED FUNDING AFR individual IN

At the end of 2021, Quebec and Luxembourg signed a cooperation agreement to strengthen cooperation and exchanges in the field of student mobility by earmarking an AFR Individual grant to finance a work contract, paid to the Luxembourg host institution, allowing Quebec students to pursue their doctoral studies in a public research institution in Luxembourg. To benefit from this earmarked AFR grant, any Quebec researcher must be a Canadian citizen, a resident of Quebec and hold a valid Canadian passport.

In parallel, Quebec students will forward a copy of the AFR application submitted to the FNR to the person responsible for the Quebec.

1. Glossary

FNR: Fonds National de la Recherche (Luxembourg National Research Fund)

AFR: Aides à la Formation-Recherche: FNR's Individual and bilateral PhD and Postdoc Grants

AFR PhD: Individual AFR grant supporting a doctoral position

AFR Postdoc: Individual AFR grant supporting a post-doctoral position

AFR - PPP: Public Private Partnerships under AFR for doctoral or postdoctoral candidates (see separate call)

Host institution: Institution eligible to benefit from AFR by hosting the PhD candidate

Partner institution or (international) collaborating institution: organisation/institution in Luxembourg or abroad not eligible for funding under AFR but collaborating in the project (e.g. research or PhD awarding institution abroad, but also institutions providing infrastructure or other support to the candidate).

PhD awarding institution or degree awarding institution: higher education institution in Luxembourg or abroad, awarding the PhD degree and officially responsible for the verification of academic standards of doctoral training. In the case of an official co-supervision, more than one degree awarding institution may be associated to an AFR Grant.

2. General Principles of the AFR Programme

Through the research grant scheme **AFR**, the FNR supports PhD research training and Postdoctoral research in Luxembourg and abroad.

In line with FNR's vision, mission and strategic priorities, the key objectives of the AFR individual and bilateral programme are stated as follows:

- . Attract and train the most talented doctoral and postdoctoral candidates from any nationality in Luxembourg.
- . Support excellent Luxembourg stemming doctoral and postdoctoral candidates to undertake their PhD training/ Postdoctoral research abroad.
- . Enhance high quality standards for PhD training in Luxembourg, by ensuring that the principles of the [National Quality Framework for Doctoral Training](#) are respected in the framework of the AFR programme.

2.1 Objectives and main characteristics of AFR calls

2.1.1. Main Characteristics of the AFR individual call (PhD)

The **AFR individual (IN-OUT)** programme for PhD grants has a bottom-up approach i.e., proposals in all domains of research and technological development are eligible for funding. Proposals do not need to align with the [National Research Priorities \(NRP\)](#) but should fall within the expertise of the main researchers supervising/mentoring the grant's beneficiaries.

The programme targets excellent researchers to be trained in high quality research environment.

2.1.2. Objectives of the AFR bilateral call

This specific call is dedicated to the cooperation between **Luxembourg based research institutions and public research institutions and universities from Quebec (Canada), Singapore, the RIKEN IMS Center (Japan) and the NASA Ames Research Center (NRC).**

By offering PhD- and Postdoc grants conducted jointly in Luxembourg and selected countries abroad, the FNR aims to foster bilateral research collaboration and strengthen networking activities and links between public research institutions of both countries. In line with FNR's vision, mission and strategic priorities, the key objectives of the AFR bilateral programme are stated as follows:

The **AFR Bilateral** programme has also bottom-up approach. Further, the AFR bilateral programme targets the most talented researchers to be trained in high quality research environments that ensure an optimal PhD training / Postdoctoral research environment.

In AFR bilateral grants, consortia of supervisors from Luxembourg and an International collaboration partner can apply for joint projects of a duration of 4 years with **up to 2 positions (PhD and/or Postdoc).**

The positions are considered as **open positions**, i.e. later grant beneficiaries (PhD and/or Postdoc) do not need to be known at submission stage. Only in case of an **AFR-NASA AMES** application, the applicant needs to be known at submission stage.

In the AFR bilateral programme, the involved research groups from the two different eligible countries/ Host Institutions should have complementary expertise to guarantee an optimal research and training environment for the beneficiaries. Through the bilateral international cooperation, beneficiaries will benefit from training opportunities in both institutions and countries and the supervision/mentoring by at least two experts in their field. Scientific support and training offered to the AFR beneficiaries as well as an excellent research framework are key elements for a successful completion of the research project.

2.2 Eligible Host Institutions and Collaborating Institutions

In the application form, a distinction is made between the **Host Institution** and the **Degree Awarding Institution**. If the main host institution is not the PhD awarding higher education institution, the latter must be registered in the online system as first collaborating institution.

2.2.1 Eligible HI and Collaborating Institutions

- The Host Institution (HI) is the institution (and the research group) where the AFR beneficiary performs a major part (> 50 %) of her/his research work. AFR grants provided by the FNR are aimed at Host Institutions to employ AFR beneficiaries to conduct their research work.

The following institutions are eligible HI for this call:

- **Public institutions** performing research in **Luxembourg**
- **Non-profit associations, societal impact companies (SIS)¹ and foundations** performing research in **Luxembourg**, provided that they have obtained a special authorization from the Ministry for Higher Education and Research².
- **+ for the AFR individual (OUT): Recognised public research and higher education institutions abroad or public institutions abroad** with a research mission and scientific competence in the domain of the project.

An organisation must be registered at the FNR in order to be able to submit proposals through the online submission system. More information on eligibility of institutions is available on the FNR website <http://www.fnr.lu/en/about-us/beneficiaries>.

The hosting institutions in Luxembourg are only eligible if they can offer an employment contract for the full duration of the project, i.e. 24 months for postdoc candidates and at least 36 months for PhD candidates

¹ <https://guichet.public.lu/en/entreprises/creation-developpement/forme-juridique/societe-capitiaux/societe-impact-societal.html>

² To be eligible for FNR support, non-profit associations, societal impact companies (SIS) and foundations must be accredited by the Ministry in charge of public sector research. To obtain an accreditation, associations or foundations have to introduce a formal request at the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

- Besides the Host Institution, the doctoral project may be carried out with one or more Collaborating Institutions. These are institutions in Luxembourg or abroad where the AFR beneficiary performs a part of the research, i.e. less than 50 % of the total project time may be spent at a collaborating institution.

The collaborating institution(s) will not employ the AFR beneficiary but commits to offer scientific guidance as well as office and/or laboratory space, if applicable.

Additional Luxembourg based institutions which play a major role in the execution of the project(s) should be listed under 'Collaborating Institution(s)' as well.

2.2.2 Eligible International Collaborating Institutions for AFR bilateral

n.a.

2.3 Supervision

The supervision support and training offered to the PhD candidate as well as an excellent research framework of the PhD project are key elements for a successful completion of the doctorate.

By definition, the supervisor is the intellectual authority guiding the doctoral candidate and taking the responsibility for the good conduct and implementation of the PhD project. The supervisor is thus the individual who does the main supervision of the doctoral candidate and earns the credit for this.

2.3.1 Supervision for AFR individual

Supervisors of AFR-funded PhDs must fulfil the [FNR requirements for principal investigators](#): e.g. the main supervisor must have adequate supervision rights, at the latest, when the AFR project starts.

Further, in the special case where the PhD supervisor is based in Luxembourg and the degree awarding institution is a university abroad, the FNR acknowledges that the requirement for supervision rights needs to be differentiated, depending on the rules and requirements of the degree awarding institution.

2.3.2 Supervisor/mentor and PI requirements for AFR bilateral

n.a.

2.4 Categories of AFR grants

2.4.1 AFR individual (IN-OUT) grants

The AFR PhD individual grant scheme is subdivided into two categories to which AFR applicants can apply:

- **AFR PhD in Luxembourg (AFR Incoming)**, i.e. candidates from any nationality may apply for a doctoral position in an eligible Luxembourg Host Institution. Candidates will have to spend >50% in Luxembourg under an employment contract with the Host Institution;
- **AFR PhD abroad (AFR Outgoing)**: Luxembourg nationals, or residents in Luxembourg for more than 5 consecutive years, may apply for a doctoral position in a public higher education institution abroad. The rule for this type of AFR grants is an employment contract with the institution abroad, but in exceptional cases, stipends without a work contract can be awarded.

2.4.2 AFR bilateral grants

n.a.

2.2 AFR grant duration and type

AFR PhD grants may be funded for a maximum duration of 4 years postdoctoral researchers up to 2 years.

PhD project proposals shall be planned for the duration of 3 years, ensuring the effective finalisation before the end of the 4th year, given that unforeseeable delays might occur and shall not put at risk the successful termination.

Employment contracts shall be the rule. AFR Grants are aimed at Host Institutions to employ AFR beneficiaries to conduct their research projects. Stipends (i.e. fellowships without employment contracts) are only awarded outside Luxembourg in exceptional cases, i.e. if

- the Host Institution abroad has no possibility to offer an employment contract or,
- an employment contract would result in a net salary for the beneficiary below $\frac{3}{4}$ of the amount received for a stipend.

Within AFR, a PhD or Postdoc on a part-time basis is possible but has to be in line with the host institutions' provisions. In this case, the duration of the AFR grant agreement may be adjusted accordingly.

Latest possible start for projects submitted:

1st January 2025 is the latest start of projects funded under this AFR individual (IN-OUT) call 2024.

The FNR reserves the right to review its funding decision if the start of the project is delayed beyond this date.

2.5 Financial contribution

The FNR has streamlined the financial regulations for applicants and beneficiaries for all FNR funding schemes in one document. The details on the eligibility of costs are available in the [Financial Regulations](#) (relating to the methods of awarding grants from the National Research Fund FNR) applicable as of 1 January 2022.

The salary contribution will be paid until the PhD degree has been awarded (see AFR Terms and Condition, art 27 Termination of the grant) with a maximum duration of 4 years, postdoctoral research projects will be funded up to 2 years. The minimum AFR Postdoc grant duration is 12 months. Tutorial fees or other related research costs are not covered.

The financial support, consult the [AFR Terms and Conditions](#) for further details, awarded under the AFR grant scheme covers the following:

1. Eligible staff cost in AFR

The contribution to the **annual salary costs of a PhD candidate** amounts **48,922 € / year³** and **69,416 € / year⁴ per Postdoc** (salary index as of September 2023).

A topping-up by the employer is possible up to a maximum gross salary of **68,944 €/year⁵ per Phd**. If the salary paid by the employer exceeds this amount, the project is no longer eligible for AFR funding. The salary contribution will be paid until the PhD degree has been awarded with a maximum duration of 4 years.

Alternatively: Beneficiaries of an AFR PhD fellowship without employment contract will receive a **monthly stipend of 1,500 €** (in exceptional cases as specified above). The topping-up of the stipend up to a maximum amount of **2.100 €** per month is possible. The FNR does accept cumulating two grants for living costs of different origin up to the maximum limit indicated above. However, in case of approval of the two grants, the funder of the topping-up needs to certify their awareness of and their agreement with the AFR grant.

³ in case the official Luxembourg salary index changes, the above-mentioned FNR contribution will be adapted automatically by the FNR.

⁴ in case the official Luxembourg salary index changes, the above-mentioned FNR contribution will be adapted automatically by the FNR.

⁵ in case the official Luxembourg salary index changes, the above-mentioned FNR contribution will be adapted automatically by the FNR.

2. A **one-off travel lump sum**, to be paid to the PhD candidate at the start of her/his AFR grant, based on the airline distance between the Beneficiary's residence at the application deadline or start of the grant, and her/his Host Institution:

Distance (km)	Fixed-amount contribution (EUR)
< 500	250
500-1000	500
1000-1500	750
1500-2500	1000
2500-5000	1500
> 5000	2000

3. **A fixed training and mobility allowance:**

The FNR strongly encourages complementing basic academic training with additional training targeting skills development to increase the employability and career prospects of researchers. A specific budget for scientific and non-scientific training of up to 4,000 € / AFR Postdoc grant and 6,000 € / AFR PhD grant is available to cover additional costs (e.g. travel to scientific conferences, conference registration fees) of the AFR grantees.

4. **Extra AFR Bilateral Mobility Allowance for AFR bilateral:**

n.a.

2.3 Working Conditions and Research Culture

The FNR strives to support a positive research culture in Luxembourg, to ensure that all actors involved in research are driven and motivated to contribute to high-quality research.

In order to foster a positive research culture, AFR supervisors/mentors are encouraged to give particular emphasis to diversity and inclusion aspects. This can include developing a gender equity plan in line with the [European Commission's recommended structure](#) or setting relevant KPIs and monitoring progress.

Further, Researchers should be aware of the effects and dangers of unconscious bias and must strive to ensure that diversity and inclusion are fostered and respected in all aspects of their activities, especially with regards to recruitment. AFR bilateral projects are particularly requested to ensure that:

- The training needs of AFR beneficiaries (PhD and/or Postdoc) are identified and recorded, and that an annual training plan exists to address these needs. AFR beneficiaries have a dedicated budget line to assist with these training needs, and the host institution is also expected to contribute to the development of staff.
- Guidance and advice is available on a diverse range of future career opportunities both inside and outside academia.

3. General Principles for FNR-funded research activities

The research activities submitted and funded within the CORE programme should fulfil the following general principles:

- Research activities should respect fundamental **Ethical Principles**, including those which are reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Applicants must comply with the [FNR Research Integrity Guidelines](#). **Research misconduct** e.g. non-compliance with ethical regulations and guidelines, provision of false information, plagiarism or falsification of data, may result in a rejection of the proposal. The FNR reserves the right to pursue further steps in the event of non compliance with ethical standards and/or research misconduct.
- The FNR attaches great importance to the impact of **research outputs** on science, industry, policy making, and society in general. To maximise the possibilities for the impact of research outputs, results from FNR-funded research are expected and required to be disseminated via high-quality publications that are made Open Access in accordance with the [FNR Policy on Open Access](#). Costs for project-related publications can be refunded through the [FNR's Open Access Fund](#). FNR also encourages the deposition of preprints in open access repositories. Researchers and research institutions are expected to ensure appropriate stewardship and curation of research data generated within FNR-funded projects, in accordance with the [FNR Policy on Research Data Management](#).
- The FNR will require a **Data Management Plan** (DMP) to be written for all projects accepted for funding. At project start, a [template](#) will be made available on FNR's Grant Management Platform. This document can be accessed and revised during the entire funding period. It is not required to submit a DMP at the application stage, but it might be relevant for specific research areas, to indicate already at submission stage how data is stored. Therefore, it is strongly advised to start preparations for a Data Management Plan already during the proposal writing. Please consult the FNR Policy on Research Data Management for further guidance.

- The FNR also encourages the **protection and the economic exploitation of research results** when it is possible and applicable and expects that an appropriate IP protection⁶ and exploitation strategy is in place at the host institution.
- The FNR attaches great importance to the **impact of research results** on science, industry, policy makers and the society in general. Therefore applicants are expected to list the value and impact of all research outputs (preprints, research publications reporting new knowledge, data, reagents, software, intellectual property, and training of skilled young scientists). In addition, the FNR also encourages the dissemination of research towards the general public and the media. Thus activities aimed at generating impact need to be foreseen from the initial project planning on.
- As a signatory of the [DORA declaration](#), the FNR encourages applicants to list a **range of research outputs** (including datasets and software, training of researchers, intellectual property). Applicants should not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors⁷, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, but rather focus on the scientific content.
- **Financial support from FNR must be acknowledged** in all publications and other forms of media communication, including media appearances, press releases and conferences, in compliance with the FNR Communication Guidelines, available under www.fnr.lu/logo.
- In the **implementation of the research activities**, adequate attention needs to be paid to gender mainstreaming, as well as to, inter alia, working conditions, transparency of recruitment processes, and career development as regards the researchers recruited on CORE projects. In this matter, the [European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#) offer a reference framework.

FNR-funded PhDs are expected to be offered a research and training environment in accordance with the principles enounced in the [National Quality Framework for Doctoral Training](#) (NQFDT). Host institutions of FNR-funded PhDs are expected to implement the NQFDT requirements.

Following an [external assessment in 2018](#) of the implementation of the principles of the NQFDT in the main Luxembourg research institutions, a number of recommendations have been issued in view of advancing the implementation of the NQFDT and further developing the quality of doctoral training in Luxembourg. More specifically, it is expected that:

- an **individual PhD plan** is drafted at the onset of each FNR-funded PhD project, outlining among others the objectives of the research project, the supervision set-up, rights and duties of all involved parties and expected outcomes in terms of reporting, publications, training activities, etc. The individual PhD plan serves as support to all involved parties and should be reviewed at regular intervals.

⁶ The FNR does not present any claim relating to intellectual, see AFR Terms and Conditions

⁷ Do not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles. The scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.

- the PhD supervisory committee (CET - comité d'encadrement de thèse) at the University of Luxembourg, includes **at least one member from a research institution abroad**. Travel/accommodation costs related to the CET participation of the external member can be covered by the CORE budget.

4. AFR Call Timeline 2024

December 2023	Launch of AFR individual Call
13 March 2024 14:00 (CET)	Deadline for the submission of proposals
April - June 2024	Evaluation
July 2024	Communication of FNR funding decision
July - December 2024	Conclusion of AFR Grant Agreements
1st January 2025	Latest start of AFR individual (IN-OUT)

5. Submission and Selection Process

The AFR call foresees one annual deadline. Proposals must be submitted in electronic format using the online submission system (FNR Grant Management System) <https://grants.fnr.lu> until the deadline.

All proposals have to be written in English.

An **eligibility check** will be conducted by the FNR Office to ascertain that the formal eligibility criteria are met, and that FNR's guidelines and policies have been complied with. Applications that are declared ineligible will not be further processed.

Eligible proposals are allocated to panel members for remote review and ad-hoc peer reviewers. The panel is nominated annually by the FNR.

Each eligible proposal is reviewed by two experts/panel members that are closest to the domain of the proposal. The panel members are generalists and not necessarily experts in the specific domain. Each proposal will be discussed in the panel meeting and the panel will then give a final evaluation and recommendation to the FNR as to whether the AFR - project should be funded.

Based on the recommendation of the expert panel the FNR decision bodies will take a formal decision to fund a proposal or not.

More details can be found in the sections below as well as the specific selection guidelines.

6. AFR grants selection criteria

6.1 For AFR individual grants

Proposals are rated and selected on the basis of the following selection criteria:

1) Project's scientific quality/potential

- How excellent / original is the project?
- Is the application well-articulated, in particular the clarity of its objectives and methods?
- Feasibility?

2) Applicant's profile/potential

- Discuss the candidate's curriculum vitae: reference letter(s), achievements, degree levels, including international or intersectoral mobility experience, etc.
- assess the readiness / motivation to engage in the project

3) Quality of host institution, supervision, and training

- Competence of the Supervisor's (and possibly co-supervisor's) track record
- What is the potential of the scientific and non-scientific training to develop the skills and knowledge of PhD and/or Postdoc candidates
- Is the training and career development strategy offered appropriate?

4) Potential impact of the project (academic/scientific or other)

- evaluate the possible impacts of the project

6.2 For AFR Bilateral grants

n.a.

7. Application process and documents

7.1 Application procedure

Applicants must submit their application in electronic format to the online submission system ([FNR Grant Management System](#)) no later than 14:00 (CET) on the deadline, using the templates provided:

An AFR-application comprises an **Online form** to complete and **several attachments** to be uploaded.

7.2 AFR Application form and documents

Overall, the AFR application in the [FNR Grant Management System](#) consists of the following sections:

- **A form** to be completed online related to the sections hereafter:
 - **Section 1:** Applicant's details
 - **Section 2:** Host Institution's Details
 - **Section 3:** Research Project and Project Framework
 - **Section 4:** Legal and Ethical Requirements
 - **Section 5:** Type of Grant
 - **Section 6:** 'Attachments' - comprising the several documents to be converted to PDF and uploaded. Only PDF files can be uploaded!

For all AFR individual applications:

I. **Project Idea⁸ (TEMPLATE must be used).** (max. of **(11.000) eleven thousand characters** (including the template)- shall provide an outline of the project idea, the hypothesis / research questions, of the innovation and expected project outcomes as well as how the problem will be tackled (methodology and work plan⁹).

After completion of the Word document, please convert it to PDF and upload it into the system (no scanned PDF version). Only PDF files can be uploaded!

Exceptions for more characters:

Additional characters are allowed **for the comments on Resubmission: 1.500 (one thousand five hundred) characters**

NOTE: The 'Project Idea' is part of a web-based online application and cannot be submitted alone.

Proposals exceeding the indicated character limits will be rejected without further evaluation. The project description must include the exact headings of the form.

II. **Applicant's profile:** mandatory to use the Individual Narrative Profile (**TEMPLATE must be used**) + ORCID ID (**up to date**)

+ **Copies of degree certificates** and statement of courses and marks ('relevé de notes') (no template provided, but documents need to be in English, French or German or provided as an official translation in one of these languages)

+ **PhD Registration** (if already available. The PhD registration can be provided later, but it needs to be available before the start of the grant)

+ **Justification of the link to Luxembourg for AFR Outgoing:**

- Copy of Passport or ID-card
- Residence certificate

⁸ As a recommendation, please use font types such as Arial, Times New Roman or Helvetica with a font size of minimum 11 points and adequate line spacing and margins. Pictures and graphs may be included. Scanning of written text is not allowed. FNR uses the tool Count Anything to check the number of characters. The characters are counted including spaces (indicated in Count Anything as Chars).

⁹ Please note that pictures, footnotes and captions are part of the character count.

III. **Main Supervisor's Profile:** mandatory to use the Individual Narrative Profile (**TEMPLATE must be used**) + ORCID ID (up to date)

+ **Support letter by the main supervisor** and description of the research and training environment. Please include a support letter by the main supervisor or a joint support letter in case of (co-)supervision (**max. 3 pages**, no template provided)

IV. **Joint Declaration (TEMPLATE must be used)** must be signed by the person authorised to legally commit the Host Institution, converted to PDF and uploaded. Only PDF files can be uploaded!

NOTE: Late or incomplete applications are not eligible, and the application will be turned down without further evaluation.

7.3 Completing the Online Application Form

The online application foresees two steps:

- **Step 1** consists of a list of "To Do's" including completion of all sections and uploads as mentioned before, plus the final generation of the PDF file of the application as well as the completeness check.

All sections of the Online Application Form can be accessed individually.

The 'Online Application Form' may be saved for each section at any time, and you may come back to it later. Before you submit the completed form however, you need to make sure that all mandatory questions (marked with *) have been completed. The system partially warns you of mandatory sections but put a special attention on the completeness of documents that need to be uploaded. Please also ensure that all data is correct before submission.

Please save the corresponding template to your desktop and complete it off-line. The word templates for the Project description form and the joint declaration are also available on the FNR website (<https://www.fnr.lu/>), make sure you are using the right version (AFR Call 2024).

- **Step 2** consists of submitting the application.

8. Contact details

The first contact to discuss a potential PhD project shall be the potential supervisor and the coordinator of the doctoral programme at the host institution.

For information on the AFR scheme and application modalities, please contact the Fonds National de la Recherche per email: afr@fnr.lu or the FNR Programme Manager (See <https://www.fnr.lu/>) in charge, or the AFR coordination: Asaël Rouby (asaël.rouby@fnr.lu)