

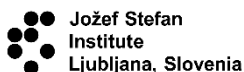


SQUASH

Slovenian Quantum Science Hub

postdoctoral program

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS



Jožef Stefan
Institute
Ljubljana, Slovenia



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the European Union

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REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
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Purpose of the Guide for Applicants¹

This guide offers detailed instructions and practical information to help you prepare and submit your application for the SQUASH Postdoctoral Program. It also provides a general overview of the SQUASH program and the evaluation process.

1. Overview of the SQUASH Program and how it aims to Impact on European Science

The SQUASH (Slovenian Quantum Science Hub; <https://squash.ijs.si/en/front-page/>) postdoctoral program is a prestigious initiative co-funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions program (GA No.101177446) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Slovenia. The Jožef Stefan Institute in Slovenia is the program beneficiary, and it aims to attract outstanding postdoctoral researchers from around the world to engage in cutting-edge research in quantum science and related fields.

SQUASH is structured to champion European excellence by strengthening research capacities across academia and industry through international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral mobility. The program promotes the principles of the European Research Area (ERA), ensuring open science, gender equality, career development, and responsible research and innovation. Through structured training, secondments, and mentoring, SQUASH enhances the skills and career prospects of postdoctoral researchers, helping to shape Europe's future scientific leaders.

The SQUASH project aims to bring 40 postdoctoral researchers to Slovenia. Based in Ljubljana, the Jožef Stefan Institute, Slovenia's leader in quantum research, is hosting this initiative with the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Mathematics and Physics as an implementing partner.

This initiative is designed to advance research skills in four multidisciplinary fields: quantum theory, quantum materials, quantum technology, and quantum computing & information. Through a broad range of international and intersectoral secondments, as well as career-developing training programs, participants will acquire a blend of versatile skills, thus boosting their career opportunities. The project aims to develop a generation of skilled and innovative quantum-science professionals across research, technology, and academia, to tackle the upcoming challenges of the second quantum revolution.

In addition to the Jožef Stefan Institute, which will also host researchers, the SQUASH program is joined by a diverse group of associated partners, including world-leading academic institutions from the EU and beyond.

The SQUASH program aims to attract some of the world's best postdoctoral researchers to work in areas related to quantum sciences, while at the same time acting as a beacon of good practices in Slovenia and across the European Research Area (ERA), aiding the European Commission in its ambition to create a single, borderless market for research, innovation and technology across the EU. By creating strong ties among a wide range of EU and international institutions collaborating closely within SQUASH, we will create an effective network that will continue to thrive long after the SQUASH program is completed.

¹ Disclaimer - The views expressed in this document do not represent those of the European Research Executive Agency (REA). REA is not responsible for any use made of the information contained herein.

Applications are invited for the four Key Research Areas:

Quantum Theory:

- Quantum many-body physics
- Quantum at high energies
- Theory of quantum materials and manipulation of light with matter

Quantum Materials:

- Quantum magnetism
- Quantum nanomaterials
- Advanced quantum materials

Quantum Technology:

- Hybrid quantum devices
- Optical trapping technologies
- Exploiting quantum on micrometer and nanometer scales

Quantum Computing and Information:

- Qubit platforms
- Quantum calculations and simulations
- Quantum information

2. Supervisors within our wide network

Each postdoc will be assigned a primary supervisor who will provide guidance throughout the postdoc's research. The supervisor will serve as an active mentor, helping the postdoc define, refine, and implement their research and training goals. Additionally, the supervisor will facilitate the postdoc's integration into the organization by encouraging participation in activities such as seminar series and staff meetings. They will also support the postdoc in establishing connections with other partners to enhance collaboration and professional growth.

All our supervisors are top-level scientists in their respective SQUASH-related research areas. They have substantial experience in supervising students and postdocs, managing projects, and/or holding prominent leadership positions. Many of them are recipients of prestigious awards.

More information about the supervisors and their contacts can be found at <https://squash.ijs.si/en/advisors/>.

3. Secondment Opportunities

The SQUASH network comprises the Jožef Stefan Institute as well as the Implementing and Associated Partners across Europe and beyond. These include universities, research institutes, and industry leaders, offering diverse secondment opportunities (ranging from 3 to 12 months) to enhance researchers' interdisciplinary experience.

Applicants can find more information about the Implementing and Associated Partners at the SQUASH website: <https://squash.ijs.si/en/discover-squash/#partners>.

Secondments are an integral part of the SQUASH Postdoctoral Program, designed to enhance the researchers' skills, expand their professional networks, and provide exposure to interdisciplinary and intersectoral environments. These secondments take place at various institutions, including research organizations, industry partners, and policy-making bodies, to ensure well-rounded professional development.

The postdoctoral researchers have access to a diverse range of secondment options at our partner organizations. These partners provide specialized research environments where the postdocs can gain hands-on experience in cutting-edge scientific fields.

Each postdoc must undertake at least one secondment during their 3-year contract. The secondment can be either intersectoral (industry/academia) and/or international. During the postdoctoral training, secondment plans will be discussed with the Personal Supervision Team, ensuring alignment with the postdoc's career goals and their Personal Career Development Plan (PCDP).

4. Training and career development

The postdoctoral researchers in the program will conduct investigations on topics of their choice within the four Key Research Areas. The program encourages independence to empower postdoctoral researchers in developing original, innovative, cross-sector, top-level research projects, while offering high-level, personalized supervision.

Through a combination of academic supervision and individualized career guidance, postdoctoral researchers will be able to define an ambitious, yet achievable, professional trajectory. By working closely with their supervisors, they will explore various career paths in a PCDP, which will be established early in the program and regularly revised thereafter.

Each postdoctoral researcher will be supported by a Personal Supervision Team (PST), formed to guide both the research and the career-development process. The PCDP will be initiated within the first month of the program and reviewed regularly to reflect the evolving project needs and personal goals. The plan will be updated annually to track progress and assess the quality of supervision and training. Postdoctoral researchers will play a central role in shaping their PCDP, ensuring it aligns with their aspirations and training needs. The Personal Supervision Team—comprising a primary supervisor and any relevant secondment supervisors—will meet quarterly to assess progress and provide strategic input.

SQUASH training events will include:

- International conferences
- Topical workshops
- Annual training events
- Exhibition and science slam
- Participation in European Researchers' Night
- "Meet the Leaders" sessions

4.1 Training on Research Skills

The scientific training in SQUASH is grounded in the principle of training through research, taking place primarily through the execution of individual research projects. Postdoctoral researchers will acquire new methodologies, techniques, and software competencies, while strengthening their problem-solving abilities and gaining independence in their work. Key scientific training goals and research-skills

milestones will be outlined in their PCDP, which will guide and structure each participant's professional growth.

In addition to hands-on, project-based training, postdoctoral researcher will be encouraged to attend relevant academic courses offered by the Jožef Stefan International Postgraduate School and the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics at the University of Ljubljana, for example:

- Selected Topics in Contemporary Physics
- Classical and Quantum Chaos
- Condensed-Matter Theory
- Artificial Intelligence for Science
- Advanced Materials Processing

Open-science practices and FAIR data management will also be included as part of dedicated training by institutional Data Stewards.

4.2 Training in Transferable Skills

To complement the scientific and technical training, the SQUASH program offers a broad range of opportunities to develop transferable skills. These activities are delivered both locally and through partner institutions, and are designed to strengthen the postdoc's professional effectiveness, communication, and leadership capabilities.

Available trainings include:

- Workshops on intellectual property and entrepreneurship
- Courses in science communication and career development
- Workshops on project management
- Training in research ethics, integrity, science policy, open science

5. Employment conditions

The selected postdoctoral researchers will be employed for 36 months. The expected start date for each of the calls is available on our website <https://squash.ijs.si/en/join-us/>. The postdocs will devote themselves full-time to research activities and training related to the SQUASH program. Parental, sick, and care leaves will be permitted in accordance with the applicable regulations.

The postdoctoral researchers will be employed under a standard fixed-term, salaried employment contract, in accordance with Slovenian national legislation. They will be entitled to all statutory benefits granted by national law and the hosting institution's internal rules, including working hours, flexible scheduling, paid annual leave, sick leave, parental leave, social security coverage, pension contributions, and family allowances.

The position includes a gross² monthly salary of €5,600.00 (with family allowance) or €5,100.00 (without family allowance). This amount covers all taxes and statutory payments. The net salary will be calculated after deducting the required employee social security contributions and direct taxes. Please note that mobility and family allowances (if applicable) might be subject to taxation depending on the individual postdoc's circumstances, which will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. An employment contract will be signed with each postdoctoral researcher.

² Gross salary with employer's social contributions.

The researcher will be contracted to work for 40 hours per week, with national (bank) holidays and 25–30 personal days (depending on previous working experience, social circumstances such as number of children, etc.) and fully paid maternity/paternity/parental leave.

The institution will provide salary in compliance with national legislation, common practice and offer the same working conditions, rights and obligations as other employees and researchers. Employment conditions will be in line with [the European Charter and Code for Researchers](#). To support participation in SQUASH activities, postdoctoral researchers will be entitled to the following allowances during the 3-year appointment:

Table 1 – Allowances and endowments for SQUASH postdocs (gross³ amounts per month)

Allowance	Description	€/PM
Allowance	The monthly living allowance paid to the postdoc during the contract, subject to national taxes and regulations.	
Mobility allowance	Added to the living allowance of the postdocs to cover private mobility-related costs (e.g., travel and accommodation costs).	5.100,00 EUR (without family allowance*)
Family allowance	Will be paid to postdocs who have (or acquire) family obligations during the program, i.e., have persons linked to him/her by marriage, or a relationship with equivalent status (as recognized by the legislation of the country where this relationship was formalized). It will also be paid if the postdoc has dependent children.	/ 5.600,00 EUR (with family allowance)
Travel allowance**	Will cover work related travel (to meetings, seminars etc.). This sum will be cumulative, but can be used only if travel takes place.	400 EUR
Secondment subsistence**	For secondments to countries with a high cost of living.	100 EUR
Research costs**	For costs associated with research project (incl. computer equipment, workshop organization, submission fees, consumables and other expenses).	350 EUR

* The entitlement to Family Allowance will be checked during the preparation of the employment contract and will be revised in case the postdoc's status changes.

** Travel, research costs and secondment subsistence will have to be approved by the supervisors and Executive Board.

Mobility allowance and family allowance (if applied) may be subject to taxation under certain circumstances, which will be discussed individually.

³ Gross salary with employer's social contributions.

5.1 Special needs and disability allowance

Postdoctoral researchers requiring additional assistance due to disabilities will be able to request additional financial support in the form of a special-needs allowance from the Governing Board. The MSCA Special Needs Allowance is intended to cover additional costs—such as adaptation of the work environment or mobility support—arising from long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, as certified by a competent national authority. These impairments must be of such a nature that participation in the program would not be possible without the requested support (e.g., assistance by third parties, workplace adaptation, or additional travel and transportation expenses). These services or items must not be already funded by other sources, such as social security or health insurance. Requests for both long-term leave and special-needs allowances should be submitted as soon as the need arises.

5.2 Working and living conditions

Postdoctoral researchers will have the opportunity to carry out their research activities in a stimulating working environment at the Jožef Stefan Institute or at the Implementing partner. Each postdoctoral researcher will be provided with office space, computer equipment, and access to relevant technology platforms within the academic department or research group, aligned with their field of study. Remote work will be possible to some extent, subject to the internal policies of the department.

The Jožef Stefan Institute is a member of the EURAXESS Network and maintains close collaboration with the EURAXESS Centre. EURAXESS Slovenia offers essential information and assistance to help researchers and their families plan and organize their relocation, as well as support with mobility-related and administrative matters. All services provided through the EURAXESS Network are free of charge. In addition, the Human Resources department at the hosting institution will support researchers with administrative matters both before and after their arrival.

Additional information about living costs and working conditions in Slovenia:

- <https://www.ess.gov.si/en/jobseekers/work-in-europe-eures/living-and-working-in-slovenia>
- <https://www.gov.si/en/topics/entry-and-residence/>
- https://www.fu.gov.si/en/zivljenjski_dogodki_prebivalci/coming_to_slovenia_to_work_to_study_after_retirement_etc
- <https://www.sloveniabusiness.eu/business-environment/working-and-living>
- <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Ljubljana>

6. Application procedure

All applications must be submitted online through the official SQUASH platform: <https://join.squash.ijs.si/>.

The applicant must register at the SQUASH application portal by creating an account using a valid email address and a password. This email address will be used for all future correspondence.

Upon registration, the applicant will receive an automatic confirmation email with a link to access the platform. The system will also redirect the applicant to their personal dashboard.

The applicant must then complete all the online forms and upload the required documentation using the templates, which are available both on the SQUASH website [<https://squash.ijs.si/en/1st-call/>] and within the application tool. Where a template is not provided, a free-form document may be submitted.

6.1 Submission and Confirmation

Once all the application components have been completed, the applicant may submit the application. We strongly encourage the applicant to submit the application well before the deadline in case of any technical or other issue. Once submitted, the proposal can be resubmitted before the deadline. In the case of multiple submissions, only the most recent version will be considered valid. A confirmation message will be sent automatically once the application is successfully submitted.

Only complete applications submitted by the deadline will be considered for evaluation.

Should technical issues arise at any stage of the application process, applicants are encouraged to contact the Executive Board at SQUASH@ijs.si. We cannot guarantee to resolve such technical issues if they are reported less than 48 hours before the deadline of the call. Therefore, applicants are strongly advised to make the first submission well before the call deadline.

6.2 Eligibility criteria

The postdoctoral positions are open to any researchers with a doctoral degree and who comply with the Marie Skłodowska Curie mobility rule (table 2). No age or nationality conditions apply. Researchers from underrepresented groups⁴ are especially encouraged to apply.

Table 2 – Eligibility criteria

Criterion	Rule
PhD certificate	Doctoral (PhD) certificate in English or certified English translation OR a provisional statement in English or certified English translation on headed paper from the academic institution signed by the legal representative confirming that all the requirements related to the PhD program are fulfilled but the doctoral degree has not yet formally been awarded prior to the deadline of the call.
MSCA Mobility Rule	Applicants must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Slovenia for more than 12 months in the 3 years prior to the call deadline. Compulsory national service, short stays (e.g., holidays), and time spent applying for refugee status under the Geneva Convention are not considered. The mobility rule need not apply to the hosts of secondments.
Nationality	The call is open to applicants of any nationality.
Formal proposal criteria	Complete applications, including all the required supporting documents, must be submitted before the deadline of the call. All the submitted documents must comply with the page limits and other specifications detailed in the templates and the Guide for Applicants.
	Application must be submitted in English.
	For each applicant only one application per call is permitted.
<u>Applicants who do not meet these criteria are not eligible to apply for a SQUASH postdoctoral position.</u>	

⁴ With this term we indicate groups under-represented with respect to, e.g., gender, sexual orientation, geographical, cultural, socio, racial and religious backgrounds, disabilities or refugee status.

Applicants who are offered a postdoctoral position will be required to provide documentary evidence to prove they meet these criteria. Failing to provide such documentation by the applicant will result in the offer of a postdoctoral position being withdrawn.

6.3. Overview of the online application procedure

The complete application proposal has four mandatory sections, detailed below:

- **Administrative Data:** In this section, applicants will be asked to enter their personal administrative data through an online form. This includes basic personal information such as full name, surname, nationality, place of residence, date of birth, and other relevant identification details. The purpose of collecting this data is to ensure that each application is properly registered and associated with the correct individual. It also enables the administrative team to verify eligibility and maintain accurate records throughout the evaluation-and-selection process. Please ensure that all information provided is accurate and up to date, as any discrepancies may lead to delays or complications in the processing of your application.
- **Eligibility criteria compliance:** In this section, the applicant must upload proof of their PhD certificate. This can be either an English version or a certified English translation of the PhD certificate, OR an English version or certified English translation of an official statement on headed paper from their academic institution, signed by the legal representative, confirming the date of the successful defense of the doctoral thesis in cases where the doctoral degree has not yet been formally awarded by the application deadline. To demonstrate compliance with the MSCA mobility rule, applicants are required to provide documentation that clearly proves their place of residence and main activity during the reference period, i.e., the three years preceding the call deadline. At least one form of proof must be submitted for each relevant period. Examples of such proofs include but are not limited to:
 - Copy of a passport or national identity card with visible entry and exit stamps
 - Copy of the official proof of residence, such as residence registration certificate, utility bills, rental agreements, or registration with local authorities
 - Copy of the employment contracts or official letters from previous employers clearly indicating the location and dates of employment
 - Copy of the academic transcripts or enrolment certificates indicating the location and dates of study
 - Copy of any other relevant documents that can help confirm the applicant's residence or principal activity during the specified period

All submitted documents must be clear, legible, and properly dated.

If you are submitting only one document per period, you may upload it directly. If you are submitting multiple documents, please combine them into a single ZIP file before uploading. The submitted information and documentation will be scrutinized. Reviewers will pay close attention to the dates and locations stated in the documents.

Non-compliance with the MSCA mobility rule will result in disqualification of the application.

- **Academic and professional experience:** In this section, applicants must upload their CV using the mandatory template (Europass CV - [Create your Europass CV | Europass](#)), including a standard academic and research record with a list of publications. Applicants include information about any career breaks (e.g., parental leave, illness, caregiving) in their application. Supporting documents—such as employer letters, official-leave confirmations, or personal declarations—can be provided where relevant. Additionally, two reference letters from referees external to the SQUASH program are mandatory. These letters must be either uploaded to the application platform by the referees themselves or linked through letters of support available at the <https://academicjobsonline.org/> website.

The purpose of the reference letters is for your chosen referees to give their assessment of your previous research activities, research capacity and work experience. These letters are mandatory pieces in the application file.

Please make sure that the provider of your letter of support is external, i.e., is not included in the SQUASH program as a supervisor, a reviewer, or a member of the Executive/Governing Board.

Applicants are encouraged to request reference letters directly through the SQUASH online-application system, which allows referees to submit their letters securely. During the application procedure you will be asked to insert the requested information of the two providers of reference letters. Once you enter the information, please click the button "Send request". An automatic email message will be sent to the reference-letter providers, asking them to prepare and upload their letters of reference. Please make sure that your reference-letter providers agree to provide the letter, have received the request and that they can access the platform to upload the letter in time. The reference letters must be uploaded by the reference-letter providers not later than 48 hours after the application deadline. After this date, an upload will no longer be possible.

However, if you already have reference letters uploaded to AcademicJobsOnline.org, you may forward them to us by creating an eDelivery package addressed to:

Jožef Stefan Institute, SQUASH project

Direct

link:

<https://academicjobsonline.org/ajo/Jozef%20Stefan%20Institute/SQUASH%20project>

Instructions for Creating an eDelivery Package

An eDelivery package is a selection of documents in your account to be sent to the selected employer.

The documents could be files from your Portfolio or reference letters already uploaded by your reference providers. To fill out this form, first select the group this package is for. Next click on ↩ below to display the files you can choose. Choose a file or a letter by clicking on ✕ after it to turn into ✓. Press 'Save' to save the package without submitting to the employer (and you can work on it later), or press 'Submit' to submit to the employer. You must have the files existing in your account first before submitting a package. If needed, you can click on → below to request letters from your reference writers.

Please note that your Standard Coversheet must be filled out before creating the eDelivery package.

- **Research Proposal:** In this section, the applicant will need to fill in online forms, e.g., research proposal summary online form with acronym, title, abstract, keywords, selection of key research areas and sub-areas, selection of your supervisor.

You will also need to select your preferred secondment institution. If your preferred institution is not listed, you may choose "Other," which will open a text field where you can manually enter the name of an additional institution. This is a mandatory step in the application process: you must either select at least one institution from the list or choose "Other" and specify the institution.

Research proposal description: (max. 10 pages, mandatory template to be used, available on the website and application platform addressing all the aspects related to the project's excellence, implementation and feasibility, dissemination and communication plan. The proposal must also include a work plan with a secondment, a financial plan for research and travel-related costs during the entire research project, as well as a Gantt chart.

Ethics statement: In case applicant's research proposal includes ethical matters and they mark them in the Ethics self-assessment, applicants should fill in the Ethics statement on the template provided. Even though the statement is not evaluated directly as one of the evaluation criteria, it is meant to offer applicants the possibility to show their awareness of the Ethical implications of their research. If the applicant is selected, the policy related to ethics will be developed under the guidance of the SQUASH Ethics advisor.

Motivation letter: Applicants are required to submit a motivation letter as part of the application. A template with guiding questions is provided and should be followed closely. Please ensure that your motivation letter addresses each of the listed questions clearly and thoroughly.

Supervisor Selection Options: As part of the application, you will be asked about your contact with potential supervisors. If you have already been in contact with a potential supervisor, please indicate this by selecting the name of the supervisor from the drop-down list. If you have not yet been in contact with any supervisor, you are still strongly advised to select a preferred supervisor from the list of available supervisors. Additionally, you should select an alternative supervisor in case your first choice cannot be met.

Selection of Secondment at one of the Associated Partners

As part of the application, you are required to indicate your preferred secondment institution. This choice should be made after discussion and in agreement with your supervisor. A dropdown menu will be provided with a list of 45 available institutions. Please select an institution from this list. If your preferred institution is not listed select the option "Other". This will open a text field where you can manually enter the name of your preferred secondment institution. A secondment position at an institution that is not listed cannot be guaranteed.

7. Ethics

The SQUASH program and everyone involved is obliged to follow the ethical principles of Horizon Europe as outlined in Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the council establishing Horizon Europe. All activities must comply with ethical principles including the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, European Charter for Researchers, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights and its Supplementary Protocols, and must comply with other relevant national, EU and international legislations.

The following activities are not eligible for EU funding and cannot be included in proposals:

- a. Activities directed at human cloning for reproductive purposes
- b. Activities intended to modify the genetic make-up of human beings that could make such changes heritable (apart from research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads, which may be financed)

- c. Activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purposes of research or stem-cell procurement, including the technique of somatic cell nuclear transfer
- d. Activities that lead to the destruction of human embryos

When conducting project proposals, applicants should be aware of the following Core Ethical Principles:

- Respect for human dignity and integrity
- Ensuring honesty and transparency with research subjects, particularly in obtaining free and informed consent (or assent when applicable)
- Protecting vulnerable individuals
- Safeguarding privacy and confidentiality
- Promoting justice and inclusivity
- Minimizing harm while maximizing benefits
- Sharing the benefits of research with disadvantaged populations, especially when the research is conducted in developing countries
- Respecting and protecting the environment and future generations

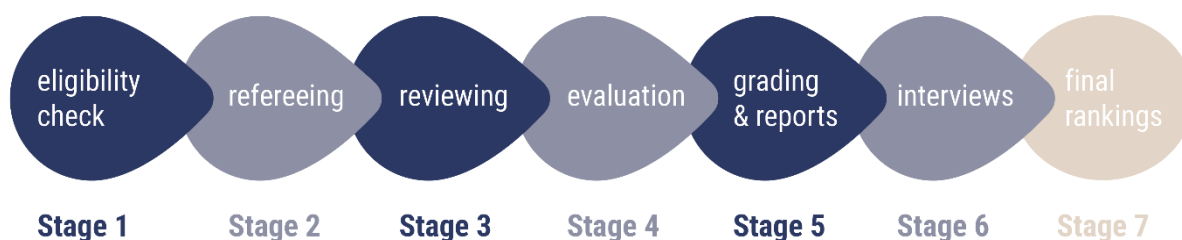
Ethical issues will be taken into consideration and monitored at all stages of the development of the research activities:

- a. **Application stage:** As part of the application documents, applicants will be requested to fill out an Ethics Issues Table (EIT). Only if ethics issues apply and have been highlighted in the EIT, the applicants must complete Ethics self-assessment and explain how they will address ethical concerns.
- b. **Evaluation stage:** The selection panels will flag any ethical issues in the project proposals during the evaluation stage. Candidates selected for an interview will be required to restate the ethical considerations related to their proposed work (if outlined in the project proposal) to assess their comprehension of the ethical aspects of their research.
- c. **Selected proposals:** All selected research projects that have been flagged as potential projects with ethical issues, both on the main list as well as on the reserve list, will be submitted to an ethical evaluation.
- d. **Follow up stage:** The responsibility of the implementation of ethics requirements during the implementation phase of the project will be on postdocs, supervisors of individual postdocs, with the advice of Executive Board and the support of the Project Manager of the program.

8. Redress procedure

Any applicant who is rejected during the evaluation process has the right to appeal to the Executive Board. Appeals will be limited to claims of procedural errors; challenges regarding the final scores given by external reviewers will not be considered. If it is determined that proper procedures were not followed, the Governing Board will review the application again, and its decision will be final. All appeals must be initiated within 7 days of notifying the applicant of their rejection. This timeframe allows for the resolution of any issues before the selection process is finalized.

9. Selection Process and Evaluation



The main steps of the selection and evaluation process are described stage by stage in more detail below:

Stage 1. Eligibility Check

After the closing of the call, applications undergo an eligibility check. This includes checking whether the applicant fulfils the eligibility criteria and the completeness and formal correctness of the submitted application documents. All the applicants will be informed about the status of their application following the eligibility check. All eligible applications go to the evaluation stage. Non-eligible applicants are informed about the redress procedure.

Stage 2. Evaluation of Submitted Applications

Each application will be assigned three external reviewers, selected from the International Selection Team to create specialized Proposal Evaluation Committees. These committees will be designed to provide thorough and unbiased assessments. To ensure expertise and relevance, two of the reviewers will be chosen from the applicant's specific research area, while the third will be selected from a related field to bring a broader perspective. Additionally, the Board will take meticulous care to avoid selecting reviewers who have had any prior professional or personal connections with the applicant, thereby safeguarding the integrity and impartiality of the evaluation process.

Stage 3. Reviewing

Each member of the Proposal Evaluation Committee will receive all the necessary resources and instructions to conduct their review effectively. Before accessing the review platform, reviewers must agree to the terms and conditions and complete a mandatory online course on implicit biases to ensure impartiality. This structured process ensures a fair, transparent, and ethical evaluation framework. The names of the reviewers will at no point be revealed to the applicants.

Stage 4. Evaluation

Each reviewer will then complete the evaluation form in the online portal, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals and giving total scores 5–10 following the categories shown in Table 1.1a. The reviewers make their initial reviews of the proposals independently of each other. After they have decided on their scores, they will consult online to reach a consensus of the scores.

Stage 5. Grading and reports

After the deadline, reviewers from the Proposal Evaluation Committee submit their scores and summary reports to the Executive Board. The Executive Board uses these evaluations to rank the applicants and submits the ranked list to the Governing Board. With 20 postdoctoral positions available in each call, the top 40 applicants will proceed to the interview stage. To ensure that only scientifically excellent candidates advance, applicants must achieve a minimum average score of 8 points out of 10 to be included in the shortlist.

Once the Governing Board approves the initial ranking, applicants are notified about the status of their applications. Pre-selected applicants will receive an email inviting them to an online interview, providing three possible time slots, and requesting confirmation of their attendance. They will also be sent interview guidelines to help them prepare. Applicants who are not selected will receive their evaluation reports and information about the redress procedure to report any concerns regarding the process.

Stage 6. Interviews

Each Proposal Evaluation Committee will conduct interviews with the applicants whose proposals they evaluated in the previous stage. These interviews will take place online and will last for 40 minutes, divided into specific segments: 15 minutes for the applicant's presentation and 15 minutes for project-related questions. This structure allows evaluators to gain valuable insights into the applicants' professional skills, educational backgrounds, and relevant past experiences that are crucial for the position. Following the presentation and Q&A session, there will be a 10-minute segment focused on assessing the applicant's future potential. Applicants are expected to cover several key points during their presentation, including a description of the proposed project, its significance within the field of research, interdisciplinary aspects related to SQUASH, the work plan, dissemination and communication/outreach strategies, exploitation activities, and their career aspirations. After each interview, the panel will discuss the presentation and the applicant, assign a score according to the criteria summarized in Table 1.1b, and provide a justification for their decision in a report that follows a predefined format.

Stage 7: Final Rankings

Once all interviews have been completed, the Executive Board will compile a ranking list along with summary reports for each applicant. The final score for each applicant will be calculated using a weighted approach: 70% of the score will derive from the written proposal and 30% will come from the interview performance. In cases where applicants receive equal scores (ex-aequo situations), priority will be given to projects with higher scores in both the written proposal and excellence components.

After this timeframe, any outstanding redress issues will be addressed, and the final ranking list will be submitted to the Governing Board. The list will determine which applicants are offered postdoctoral positions, and a reserve list of five candidates will also be created to account for any withdrawals from the initially selected applicants.

Applicants will be notified of the outcomes and those selected for postdoctoral positions will be asked to confirm their acceptance. Rejected applicants will also be informed and encouraged to apply in future calls. Once confirmations are received, the Jožef Stefan Institute will proceed to prepare employment contracts. After the application process is concluded, every applicant will receive an evaluation summary report. This report will include anonymized results, allowing applicants to see how they ranked compared to others, as well as feedback on their interview performance for those who were interviewed. This step aims to help applicants identify their strengths and weaknesses, thereby enhancing their prospects for future applications.

Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria follow the norms for MSCA project evaluations and are detailed in Table 1.1a for the proposal and Table 1.1b for the interview.

Table 3.1 a – Evaluation criteria applied to the applicant and the research proposal.

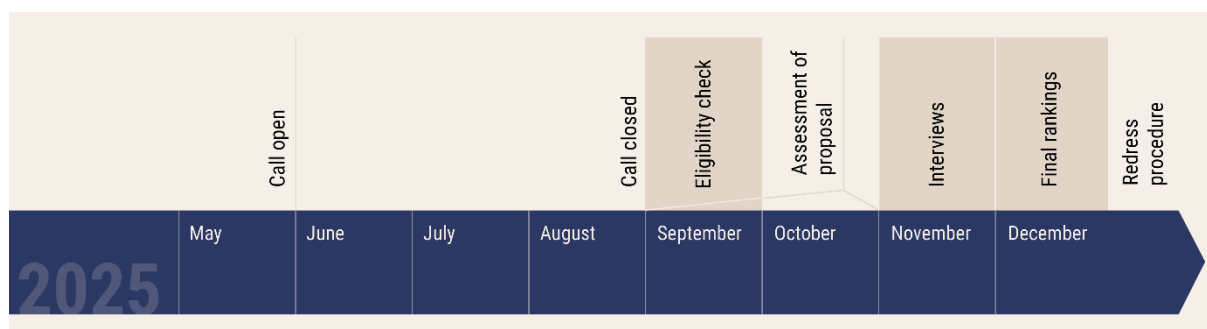
Proposal (50% weight of the total score)		
Excellence (25%)	Feasibility and Implementation (15%)	Impact & dissemination (10%)
Clarity of objectives; Originality of proposed research and awareness of current debates and state of the art.	Comprehensive and appropriate theoretical and methodological framework; Feasibility within given timeframe and available budget; Relevance for the Key Research Areas; Fit with host research groups of SQUASH; Capacity to carry out the research project.	Recognition of anticipated impact of work; Evidence of long-term vision; Publication, dissemination-and-exploitation plan.
Applicant (50% weight of the total score)		
Track record (20%)	Competences and motivation (15%)	Career development (15%)
Qualifications; Research track-record; Awards & Funding; Statements of recommendation.	Past achievements (quality and productivity), demonstrated collaborative aspects; Diversity of dissemination activities including conference attendance and organization, invited talks; Ability to go beyond disciplinary specialisms.	Relevance of fellowship at career stage; Scope for new partnerships and relevance of potential cross-sectoral collaboration.

Table 3.1 b – Evaluation criteria applied to the applicant in the interview.

Project (50% weight of the total score)	
Presentation (25%)	Discussion (25%)
Scientific background, technical capability.	Self-evaluation (weaknesses and strengths), vision of the wider context.
Researcher (50% weight of the total score)	
Expected career impact (25%)	Soft skills (25%)
Career path vision; Motivation; Entrepreneurial awareness.	Teamworking, Communication skills, Outreach interests.

10. The provisional call timeline

The SQUASH application process is organized in several key phases, beginning with the launch of the call and the opening of the application platform. This is followed by the submission and review of proposals, including eligibility checks and a multi-stage evaluation process involving written assessments and interviews. After the evaluations are completed, final decisions are communicated to the applicants, and selected candidates begin their positions in alignment with the program's recruitment schedule.



11. Information on processing personal data in the application platform

During the application and selection process of the SQUASH program, personal data are collected and safely stored from all the applicants.

The SQUASH Executive Board and Governing Board will only use the data for managing the application procedure, and in the approval of the ranking lists and award process to sign the employment contract between the postdoctoral researcher and the selected host organization. Therefore, in accordance with the provisions of General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) on data protection:

- The applicants are asked for consent that their data are collected and processed by the SQUASH respective boards, in order to participate as an applicant in the selection process.
- The applicants are asked for consent for communications about the activities and services of the SQUASH program that may be of interest to them.
- Applicants can exercise their rights to access, rectify and/or suppress their data, according to the General Regulations of Data Protection, using the contact details provided at the time they submit the information.
- Applicants' data will not be transferred unless there is a legal obligation.
- After the submission of the application, each applicant will be invited to voluntarily complete the Diversity Monitoring Survey to enable the SQUASH project to monitor the effectiveness of the SQUASH approach to equality and diversity and to ensure that SQUASH delivers the best possible outcomes. Information that applicants will provide will be used solely to help SQUASH project monitor the diversity of applicants for posts advertised and the success of the SQUASH project's dissemination strategy. In accordance with the Data Protection Act, all information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence.

12. Contact Information

Please make sure you first check out the FAQ section of the SQUASH webpage:

<https://squash.ijs.si/en/1st-call/>.

For general enquiries related to the call—including questions about eligibility, deadlines, access to the application platform, technical issues, or application templates—please contact us via email SQUASH@ijs.si.