SQUASH

Slovenian Quantum Science Hub

postdoctoral program

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS
Call 2

Jožef Stefan
Institute
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Co-funded by
the European Union

REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND INNOVATION**

Table 1. History of changes

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	**PUBLICATION DATE**	**CHANGE**
1.0	29/05/2025	Initial version.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 5: Information was added as regards the exact period when applicants' employment can begin in Call 2. Recommendation added about the preparation of documents prior to the envisaged start date.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 5, explicit explanation of allowances in the text, including mobility allowance
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 5, Table 1: Explicit allocation of allowances, including mobility allowance.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 6.0: Language editing of the text.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 6.3: Eligibility criteria compliance: A more detailed and precise explanation and information regarding documents serving as evidence of compliance with the mobility rule, e.g., the elimination of prior information regarding the copy of the passport or national identity card as being appropriate evidence for the mentioned purpose.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 6.3: Research Proposal + Motivation letter: Information was added ragarding the proper manner of saving documents for submission in a non-editable format.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 6.3: Instructions for saving documents The instruction was added as regards how to save documents for submission in a non-editable pdf format.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 8: Editing of the text in order for such to match more closely the text in the Grant Agreement.
2.0	28/02/2026	Section 9: Stages 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 The grading scale was corrected. A more detailed explanation of the evaluation and selection process.

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Purpose of the Guide for Applicants[1]

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 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.

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[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 In Call 2, the expected starting date of employment is between 1 January 2027 and 1 March 2027, provided that all administrative procedures related to employment and moving to Slovenia are completed by then. In view of the project implementation timeline and the applicable funding conditions, the timeframe available for the commencement of employment will be limited. Candidates shall ensure, prior to the envisaged start date, that their personal documentation is valid, complete and in order, so as to avoid delays in the commencement of the employment contract. 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 gross[2] monthly salary of €6,100.00 (with family allowance) or €5,600.00 (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

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[2] Gross salary with employer's social contributions.

note that mobility and family allowances (if applicable) are subject to national taxes and regulations. An employment contract will be signed with each postdoctoral researcher.

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 2. Allowances and endowments for SQUASH postdocs (gross[3] amounts per month)

Allowance	Description	€/PM
Allowance	The monthly living allowance paid to the postdoc during the contract, subject to national taxes and regulations.	**5.100,00 EUR**
Mobility allowance	Added to the living allowance of the postdocs to cover private mobility-related costs (e.g., travel and accommodation costs), subject to national taxes and regulations.	**500,00 EUR**
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. It is subject to national taxes and	**500,00 EUR**
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) are subject to national taxes and regulations.

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[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   Work 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 on the SQUASH platform and create an account using a valid e-mail address and password. The listed e-mail address will be used for all future communication with the applicant.

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

The applicant must complete all online forms and upload the required documents using the templates provided on the SQUASH website [https://squash.ijs.si/en/2nd-call/] or on the platform. 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 groups[4] are especially encouraged to apply.

Table 3. 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.

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[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.

For each applicant only one application per call is permitted.

Applicants who do not meet these criteria are not eligible to apply for a SQUASH postdoctoral position.

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. Such can be in one of the following: an English version or a certified English translation of the PhD certificate, OR an English version or a 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 must provide documents that clearly indicate applicant's location (e.g., place(s) of residence) and main activity(ies) during the relevant period of three years preceding the call deadline. Applicants must demonstrate that they did not reside in Slovenia or carry out their main activity (e.g., employment or study) in Slovenia for more than twelve months within the mentioned three-year period.

  ### 1. Coverage of the Entire Three-Year Period

  Applicants must ensure that supporting documents and explanations provided cover the entire period of three years prior to the call deadline. If the period of three years is divided into sub-periods, all such need to be listed and supported with documents – a separate supporting document must be provided with regard to each sub-period.

  If there are any gaps in the timeline for which no supporting documents are available, the applicant must include a clear written explanation of why such documents cannot be provided.

  ### 2. Supporting Documents

  With regard to each sub-period, the applicant must provide at least one supporting document that will serve as evidence for the purpose of examination and verification of the compliance

with the mobility rule. Acceptable supporting documents include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Official proof of residence, such as a residence registration certificate where the timeframe is explicitly stated; utility bills where the timeframe is explicitly stated; rental agreements where the timeframe is explicitly stated; relevant documents issued by local authorities.
- Employment contracts or employer-issued letters that specify the exact timeframe and location of work.
- Academic enrolment certificates and documents indicating the country and exact timeframe of study.
- Any other relevant documents that confirm the applicant's residence or main activity during the specified period, provided that they are properly dated and clearly indicate the exact timeframe to which they refer.

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

3. Upload Documents onto the SQUASH Platform

The applicant must upload supporting documents that correspond to the entire period of three years or to individual sub-periods.

If the applicant submits only one document per (sub-)period, they may upload it directly onto the platform. If they submit multiple documents per (sub-)period, they need to combine them into a single ZIP file before uploading. In the examination of submitted information and documents, close attention will be paid to the dates and locations stated in the documents. Non-compliance with the MSCA mobility rule will result in the disqualification of the application.

Please follow the instructions below on the preparation and submission of the required documents through the SQUASH Platform.

- **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 letters of support from referees external to the SQUASH program are mandatory and can either be uploaded onto the SQUASH platform directly by referees or linked through letters of support available at the https://academicjobsonline.org/ website.

The purpose of letters of support is for the referees to provide their assessment of the applicant's previous research activities, research capacity and work experience. Letters of support are mandatory.

Please make sure that your referees (i.e., the providers of your letters of support) are external, i.e., do not participate in the SQUASH program as a supervisor, a reviewer, or a member of the Executive/Governing Board.

Applicants are encouraged to request letters of support from referees directly through the SQUASH portal (i.e., online-application system), which will allow referees to submit their letters directly and securely into the system. In the application procedure, applicants will be requested to provide information on who their two referees are. Once this information is entered into the

portal, please click the button "Send request" in order for an automatic e-mail message to be sent to the referees, asking them to prepare and upload their letter of support. Please make sure that refrees agree to provide the letter, have received the request and that they can access the platform to upload the letter in time. The letters of support must be uploaded by referees not later than 48 hours after the application deadline. After this date, an upload will no longer be possible.

However, if you already have letters of support 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 letters of support already uploaded by your referees. 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 referees.

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.

  Before uploading or sending the Ethics self-assessment form, please save the document in the PDF form in the manner that prevents further editing (see instruction for saving documents below).

- **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. Before uploading or sending, please save the document in the PDF form in the manner that prevents further editing (see instruction for saving documents below).

- **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.

Instructions for saving documents:

Before uploading or sending, please save all document in the PDF form in the following manner, which prevents further editing:

1. Once you complete the form, click Print.
2. Under printer selection, select Print to PDF.
3. Save the file to your desired location.
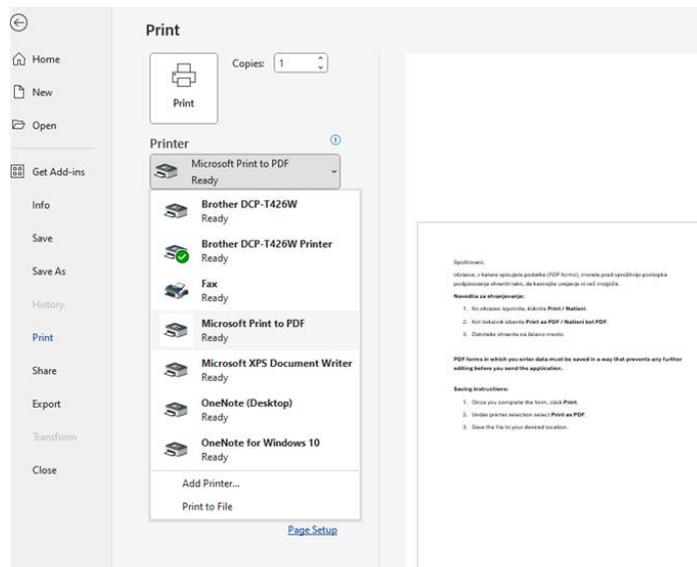
7. Ethics

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

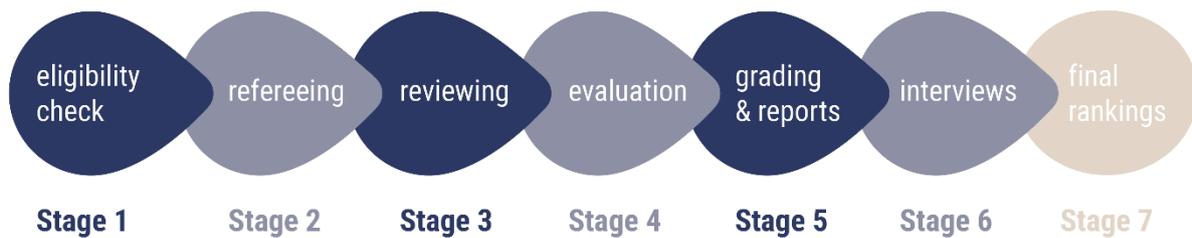Respecting and protecting the environment and future generations

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

Applicants rejected during the evaluation process may appeal to the Executive Board. Appeals are restricted to procedural errors. Complaints regarding grades and comments provided by reviewers will not be upheld. The appeal procedure must be initiated within 7 days of the notification of rejection being sent to the applicant. If it is established that a proper procedure was not followed, the Governing Board will review the application again, and its decision will be final. Redress issues will be resolved before the selection process is finalized.

9.   Selection Process and Evaluation

eligibility check	refereeing	reviewing	evaluation	grading & reports	interviews	final rankings
Stage 1	Stage 2	**Stage 3**	Stage 4	**Stage 5**	Stage 6	Stage 7

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 resources and instructions necessary to effectively carry out the review of project proposals. Before reviewers can begin the revision of project proposals they must agree to the terms and conditions, as well as complete a mandatory online course on implicit bias to ensure impartiality. This process ensures a fair, transparent, and ethical evaluation framework. Reviewers' names will not be disclosed to applicants.

Stage 4. Evaluation

Each reviewer will complete the evaluation form on the online platform, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal and assigning grades 0–10 with regard to each category presented in Table 4.1a. In stage one, the reviewers of a proposal ((i.e., the Proposal Evaluation Committee) will carry out

their evaluation of the proposal independently of one other. In stage two, the reviewers of a proposal will mutually examine each other's evaluation report including grades, and will confirm their consent or disconsent with such. In the event of disagreement, a consensus meeting will be convened, for the reviewers to discuss their dissenting opinions and to reach an agreement, all in order to ensure that the final grade reflects considerations and mutual consent by all three reviewers.

Stage 5. Evaluation report and grades

The evaluation report is both, prepared and submitted by reviewers directly on the SQUASH platform. On the basis of the average grades of written project proposals, the Executive Board will prepare a preliminary ranking list of applications and will submit it to the Governing Board for confirmation. The top 40 applicants will be selected to proceed to the interview stage, provided that the average grade of their written project proposal is 8.0 or above. In the event of there being fewer than 40 proposals evaluated with the average grade of 8.0 or above, fewer will proceed to the interview.

Upon the confirmation of the preliminary ranking list by the Governing Board, the interview stage will begin.

Upon the conclusion of the written project proposal evaluation stage, all applicants will be notified of the conclusion of this stage and will be able to access and view their evaluation report. Furthermore, applicants whose written project proposal has received the average grade of 8.0 or above will receive a notification whether or not they have been selected for interview (i.e. they have been or not have been ranked among the top 40 applicants on the preliminary ranking list).

Applicants selected for interview, will receive a notification of the possible date(s) for online interview. Applicants will be provided up to three possible time slots and will be requested to select (and thus confirm) their availability for interview.

Stage 6. Interview

Proposal Evaluation Committees will conduct interviews with the applicants whose proposals they had evaluated in the previous stage. Interviews will be carried online and will last for approximately 30 minutes, in accordance with the following segments: 15 minutes for the applicant's presentation and approximately 15 minutes for project-related questions and discussion. This structure will allow reviewers to gain a valuable insight into applicants' professional skills, educational background, and relevant past experiences that are crucial for the position. Following the presentation and Q&A session, reviewers will have time to assess the interview without the presence of the applicant.

In their presentation, applicants are expected to cover several key points, including a description of the proposed project, its significance within the field of research, interdisciplinary aspects related to SQUASH, work plan, dissemination and communication/outreach strategies, exploitation activities, as well as their career development plan. After the interview, the panel will discuss the applicant's presentation and the overall impression of the project received from the interview. The panel will assign a grade for each category presented in Table 1.1b, together with a short justification of their decision. The report will be provided in a predefined format.

In order to prepare for the interview, applicants are recommended to consult interview guidelines published on the Squash website.

Stage 7: Final Ranking

The final score is calculated as a combination of the average grade of the written proposal and the average grade of the interview by applying the following weighted approach: 70% of the final score will derive from the average grade of the written proposal and 30% will derive from the average grade of the

interview. In the event that two or more applications end up with an equal final score (ex-aequo situations), priority will be determined on the following basis and order: 1) a higher average grade of the written proposal; 2) a higher grade in the excellence category.

Upon the conclusion of the interview stage and the evaluation process, all applicants who have been selected for interview and have concluded such will be informed of the conclusion of this stage and will be able to access and view their evaluation reports.

Upon the resolution of appeals (i.e., redress complaints), the final ranking list of applications will be compiled and submitted to the Governing Board for confirmation. The top 20 applicants whose project proposal has received the final score of 8.0 or above will be selected for a postdoctoral position.

Selected applicants for a postdoctoral position will be requested to confirm their acceptance of the position. Once confirmation is received from the selected applicants, the Jožef Stefan Institute will begin the preparation of employment contracts.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria follow the norms for MSCA project evaluations and are detailed in Table 4.1a for the proposal and Table 4.1b for the interview.

Table 4.1 a. Evaluation criteria applied to the applicant and the research proposal.

Proposal (50% weight of the total score)		
Excellence (25%)	**Implementation and Feasibility (15%)**	**Dissemination and Impact (10%)**
State of the art description; Clarity of research objectives and research methodology; Originality and pertinence of the proposed research; Relevance to the Key Research Areas.	Quality and effectiveness of the work plan; Feasibility within given time-frame and available budget; Appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience competences and skills to carry out the research project; Match between the project and the selected SQUASH host research group(s).	Dissemination-and-exploitation plan (range/diversity of dissemination activities including conference attendance, conference organisation, seminars, outreach activities, etc.); Expected impact on the research field; Expected impact on the strengthening of the SQUASH network.

Applicant (50% weight of the total score)		
Track Record (20%)	**Leadership Qualities and Motivation of the Applicant (15%)**	**Career Development (15%)**
Research experience and past achievements; Professional Recognitions and Services.	Clarity and quality of research and career goals; Demonstrated leadership qualities and ability to go beyond disciplinary specialisms.	Relevance of the project for the applicant's career development; Expected new partnerships and relevance of potential cross-sectoral collaboration.

Table 4.1 b. Evaluation criteria applied to the applicant in the interview.

Project (50% weight of the total score)	
Presentation (25%)	**Discussion (25%)**
Clarity of the presentation, research objectives and methodology; How the project goes beyond the state of the art.	Knowledge of the proposal's research field and how it fits in the broader scientific context; Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan; Awareness of risks and appropriateness of mitigation plans.
Researcher (50% weight of the total score)	
Expected Career Impact (25%)	**Potential of the Applicant (25%)**
Motivation; Career path vision.	Potential for leadership; Communication skills; Independent thinking, ability to propose excellent research; Creativity, originality of ideas.

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/2nd-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.