European Research Council

Press release

20 January 2011

Over 260 senior top scientists selected in the European Research Council's third 'Advanced Grant' competition

In its latest prestigious competition for 'Advanced Grants', the European Research Council (ERC) is awarding some €590 million to 266 established research leaders. The grants, worth up to €3.5 million each, will allow them to pursue their innovative, 'blue sky' research throughout Europe. This is the third Advanced Grant call since the ERC was launched in 2007 as a flagship component of the EU's 7th Research Framework Programme. The ERC promotes research at the frontiers of knowledge in all domains.

Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn said: "*The European Research Council has now funded over 1700 top researchers, both early-career and senior, across Europe. This latest wave of ERC funding for world-class researchers to do pioneering work at the frontiers of knowledge will help to spark new discoveries and in turn feed the EU's Innovation Union, of which the ERC is an integral part. This kind of investment in excellence is imperative for Europe if we are to compete in the global scientific and economic arenas and deliver on our Europe 2020 objectives of sustainable growth and jobs".*

Compared to last year's Advanced Grant call, there was an increase in the number of applications (2009, representing a 26% increase), as well as selected projects (266, representing a 13% increase), which resulted in a slightly decreased success rate of around 13%.

The ERC competitions are open to the best researchers of any nationality. This time candidates of no less than 26 nationalities are among the selected who will carry out their projects in universities or other research institutions throughout the EU and its Associated

Countries[1]. British, German and French nationals lead in terms of numbers. When it comes to countries hosting successful applicants, it follows the same pattern. (See statistics below.) As regards the profile of the successful researchers, the average age is around 54 years, which reflects the significant experience of the target group of this grant scheme. Of the successful candidates just over 9% are women, with the ratio varying between the different domains and panels.

ERC President Prof. Helga Nowotny commented: *"We are quite excited about the continued and growing attraction of the ERC grants and notice the increase in demand in this call, especially since the quality of proposals remains first-class. We also observe a growing number of highly distinguished scientists, including Nobel Prize and Fields Medal winners, among the selected candidates. I would like to use this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all those, who make it possible to maintain such a high level of scientific excellence: the members of the evaluation panels and the remote reviewers, as well as the Scientific Officers of the ERC Executive Agency whose highly professional support is crucial. Their continuing dedication is the most valuable asset that the ERC provides to European science and the European Research Area."*

The ERC is open to the whole spectrum of research domains and the distribution of proposals in this call is 46% in 'Physical Sciences and Engineering', 37% in 'Life Sciences' and 17% in 'Social Sciences and Humanities'. There is a wide variety of projects selected for funding, for instance developing a chip-sized device to monitor air, water or food quality; exploring how the placebo effect can be used to improve medical treatments; and, exploiting plant strategies to develop new antibiotics. (See further information and examples of projects below)

[1] FP7 associated countries: Iceland, Norway, Lichtenstein, Turkey, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Israel, Switzerland, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Faroe Islands.

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Statistics – Advanced Grant call 2010: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/Statistics_AdG2010.pdf

Lists of selected researchers

In the below lists, the proposals selected for funding are shown. Some additional funds may be confirmed which could possibly enable the ERC to support a few more projects that are presently on a reserve list. In this case, the lists will be updated.

List of all selected researchers by country of host institution (in alphabetical order within each country group): http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERC_AdG2010_Results_All_by_Country.pdf

Lists of selected researchers by domain (in alphabetical order):

- Physical Sciences and Engineering: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERC_AdG2010_Results_PE.pdf
- Life Sciences: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERC_AdG2010_Results_LS.pdf
- Social Sciences and Humanities: http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERC_AdG2010_Results_SH.pdf

Some examples of projects selected for funding

Life Sciences

The SYM-BIOTICS project will study the fixation of nitrogen by the Rhizobium bacteria in plant cells and explore potential applications such as novel antibiotics, green chemicals for plant protection or meat decontamination of microbes such as listeria and salmonella.
(Eva Kondorosi, Bay Zoltan Alkalmazott Kutatasi Kozalapitvany, Hungary)

The project BREATHE will look at the impact of air pollution, notably fine particles linked to traffic-related pollution, on the neurological development of 4,000 children from 40 schools. The team will use innovative epidemiological methods together with environmental chemistry and neuro-imaging.
(Jordi Sunyer, Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology, Barcelona, Spain)

Social Sciences and Humanities

The PLACEBO project will use novel neuro-imaging techniques to study the mechanisms and circumstances underlying the placebo effect with a view to improving medical treatments.
(Christian Büchel, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Germany)

The PASCAL project will study language acquisition by newborns and young infants as well as the influence of bilingual exposure at different ages. One of the objectives of the project is to develop games for infants that will help them handle new languages. Potential results could have an important impact on educational policies.
(Jacques Mehler, Scuola Internazionale Superiore di Stidu Avanzati, Trieste, Italy)

Physical Sciences and Engineering

The InSpectra project will combine two technologies (nanophotonic and silicon technologies) to develop analytical devices the size of a chip which could be used for environmental monitoring and medical diagnosis.
(Roel Baets, University of Ghent, Belgium)

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The 4PI-SKY project sets out to understand the explosive and dynamic nature of the universe. The project will spot astrophysical events with three next-generation radio telescopes in Europe, South Africa and Western Australia. As the Earth rotates, scientists will be able to use one telescope after the other to follow energetic black holes, colliding neutron stars, or astrophysical explosions. (Robert Fender, University of Southampton, UK)

Note to the editors

Set up in 2007 by the EU, the **European Research Council** is the first pan-European funding organisation for frontier research. It aims to stimulate scientific excellence in Europe by encouraging competition for funding between the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age. The ERC also strives to attract top researchers from anywhere in the world to come to Europe. It funds both senior research leaders ('ERC Advanced Grants') and younger, early-career top researchers ('ERC Starting Grants'). The substantial funding is awarded based on peer review evaluation.

The ERC operates according to an "investigator-driven", or "bottom-up", approach, allowing researchers to identify new opportunities in any field of research. The ERC, which is the newest, pioneering component of the EU's Seventh Research Framework Programme ('Ideas' Specific Programme), has a total budget of €7.5 billion from 2007 to 2013. The ERC's governing body, the Scientific Council, is chaired by Prof. Helga Nowotny and is composed of 22 top scientists and scholars. It will soon be partially renewed. The ERC Executive Agency implements the 'Ideas' Specific Programme.

ERC Advanced Grant in brief

- For well-established top researchers of any nationality and age, scientifically independent and with a recent research track-record and profile which identifies them as leaders in their respective field(s).
- Funding: up to €3.5 M per grant (normally up to €2.5 M).
- Calls for proposals: published annually in autumn with deadlines in spring.

ERC also supports early-career top researchers of any nationality and age, with 2-12 years of experience after PhD. The calls for proposals for 'Starting Grants' are generally published in summer with deadlines in autumn.

Links

ERC Press Release - second 'Advanced Grant' call (2009)
http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/Press_release_AdG-2_results.pdf

Statistics - second 'Advanced Grant' call (2009)
http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/Statistics_AdG09.pdf

Some striking ERC-funded projects from previous calls
http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/PROJECTS-EN-LD.pdf

ERC website
http://erc.europa.eu

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