

Marie Skłodowska-Curie
COFUND – Fellowship Programme



Guide for Applicants
Call for Proposals 1 + 2

Please read this document carefully before submitting your application

Disclaimer: This guide has no legal value in itself. The information it contains cannot be used as a basis for appeal.



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Important Dates*

Recruitment Step	Call for Proposals 1	Call for Proposals 2
Call Publication	8 th of November 2020	22 nd of October 2021
Information Webinar	8 th of December 2020	3 rd of November 2021
Call Deadline	8 th of January 2021	17 th of December 2021
Eligibility Check	3 weeks	3 weeks
International Peer Review	10 weeks	10 weeks
Interviews	end of April/beginning of May 2021	mid April 2022
Decision	Mid May 2021	end of April 2022
Contracting	6 weeks	6 weeks
Start of Fellowships	between 1 st of July and 1 st of October 2021	between 1 st of June and 1 st of September 2022

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* These dates are indicative and may be subject to a change

1. PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

In an era of increasing complexity, multifaceted requirements and perspectives represent a significant challenge both for the research enterprise itself and for the career perspectives of persons acting within. To responsibly address the challenges of the present, research is increasingly required to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. Researchers are also increasingly pursuing professional opportunities beyond academia, requiring a widely diversified skill set. While this is true at every career level, the postdoctoral phase is crucial as it is where researchers can develop their full potential and lay the groundwork for their future careers.

STAR is a training and mobility programme that aims to foster the career development of experienced researchers within the framework of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) COFUND scheme. The overarching goal is to provide an inspiring and productive environment and comprehensive support to attract, develop, and globally interconnect experienced researchers, allowing them to develop the necessary skill set required to tackle today's challenges.

STAR will be implemented by the University of Siegen, a mid-sized German higher education institution, located about 80 km east of Cologne in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia which has one of the highest research expenditure in Germany. More than 200 professors at the University of Siegen represent a pool of potential hosts (supervisors) for fellows interested in conducting individual driven research/training projects. STAR will be supported by an expandable consortium of currently 23 academic and non-academic partner organisations, offering specialised hosting/training opportunities to experienced researchers recruited and employed by the University of Siegen.

Applicants can apply for a fellowship with their own research idea, but they have to find a supervisor at the University of Siegen and possibly at a partner institution. This supervisor should be able to support the planned project, especially with regard to her/his own expertise, the required infrastructure, possible limitations of hosting capacities etc. Moreover, selected research topics must relate at least one of the [STAR Research Areas](#). Interdisciplinary projects are highly encouraged

1.1 Fellowships

During the lifetime of the programme, STAR will offer 20 fellowships to the most promising experienced researchers proposing an excellent and highly innovative individual research project. Interested candidates can apply either for an INCOMING or an OUTGOING fellowship.

There will be two calls for proposals, each offering a total of 10 fellowships. 6 in the INCOMING and 4 in the OUTGOING mobility scheme. Fellows will be selected following open, transparent, merit-based, impartial, and equitable procedures mainly based on an international peer review and subsequent interviews.

1.1.1 Mobility Schemes

Regardless of the mobility scheme (INCOMING or OUTGOING), all fellows will be recruited and employed by the University of Siegen. Each fellow will receive a full-time employment contract for the entire duration of their fellowship receiving full social security coverage (incl. health insurance, pension payment etc.) in accordance with national German law. Detailed information about the finances of each fellowship can be found in the section [Financial Aspects](#).

In STAR, the following two mobility schemes are offered:



INCOMING (24-month): 24-month fellowships for experienced researchers at a participating chair at the University of Siegen. Diversified sectoral and intersectoral exchange opportunities incl. secondments will be offered.



OUTGOING (24-36 month): Fellowships for experienced researchers starting with an initial outgoing phase of 12-24 months at an international STAR partner organisation (outside Germany!) followed by a mandatory return phase to a chair at the University of Siegen with a length of 12 months. Diverse sectoral and intersectoral exchange opportunities including secondments will be offered.

1.1.2 Eligibility Criteria

Researchers interested to apply for a STAR fellowship must meet the following eligibility criteria:

IMPORTANT: As a general rule, researchers, who hold a permanent position with the University Siegen, or any of the partner organisations where a research stay is planned during the fellowship (initial outgoing phase or secondment), are not eligible to apply for the programme.

INCOMING mobility scheme:

- **Experienced Researcher:** At the date of the STAR call deadline the candidate must be in possession of a doctoral degree or has at least 4 years of full-time equivalent research experience. This is measured from the date when the researcher obtained a degree entitling him/her to embark on a doctoral programme (either in the country in which it was obtained or in which s/he is recruited), even if the doctorate was never started or envisaged. Periods of inactivity in research (e.g. unemployment, periods of employment outside research, parental or long-term sick leave) do not count towards the time of research experience.
- **Mobility Rule*:** Candidates cannot have resided or carried out her/his main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Germany for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the STAR call-to-apply deadline. Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention (1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol) are not taken into account.
- **Nationality:** The candidate can be of any nationality.
- **No age restrictions apply.**

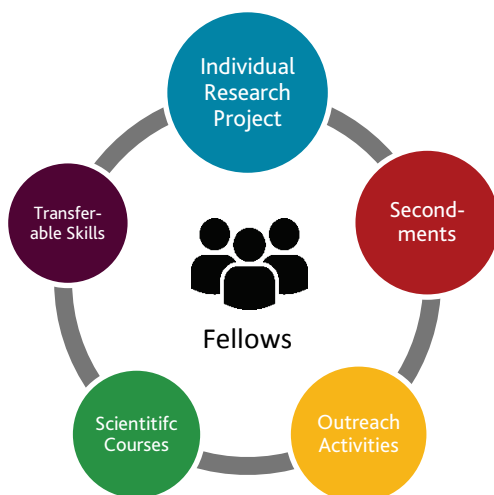
OUTGOING mobility scheme:

- **Experienced Researcher:** At the date of the STAR call deadline the candidate must be in possession of a doctoral degree or has at least 4 years of full-time equivalent research experience which is measured from the date when the researcher obtained a degree entitling him/her to embark on a doctoral programme (either in the country in which it was obtained or in which s/he is recruited), even if the doctorate was never started or envisaged. Periods of inactivity in research (e.g. unemployment, periods of employment outside research, parental or long-term sick leave) do not count towards the time of research experience.

- **Mobility Rule¹:** Candidates cannot have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the partner organisation (located outside Germany, where the initial outgoing phase will take place) for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the STAR call-to-apply deadline. Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention are not taken into account.
- **Nationality:** If the initial outgoing phase takes place in an EU Member State (MS) or Horizon 2020 Associated Country (AC), the candidate can be of any nationality. If the host of the initial outgoing phase is located in a non-associated Third Country (TC), which are neither MS nor AC, the candidate must be a national or long-term resident of an MS or AC. Long-term residence means a period of legal and continuous residence within one or more MS or AC of at least 5 consecutive years. Time spent in procedures for obtaining refugee status in a MS or AC will be counted.
- No age restrictions apply.

1.2 Training Programme

STAR fellowships are mainly based on an individual research project. In order to promote later employability it will be supplemented by different training measures which are partly voluntary, partly mandatory. The monitoring of each fellow's career progress will be realised via an individual **Personal Career Development Plan (PCDP)** drawn up by fellows and their supervisor(s) at the start of each fellowship. The PCDP will



at least contain project milestones; planned networking activities and secondments; exploitation and dissemination activities as well as training measures that are intended to promote the careers of researchers in the long term (incl. transferable skills training etc.). Training activities can be planned or adapted together with the supervisor(s) in the course of the respective fellowship. STAR offers a high degree of flexibility in this respect. However, applicants have to prepare a training concept tailored to their personal needs as part of their application. This includes a description of the planned research project and further career development measures or planned training activities. Both will be evaluated during the selection process.

The [House of Young Talents \(HYT\)](https://www.uni-siegen.de/hyt/start/index.html.en?lang=en), an interdisciplinary postgraduate career centre established at the University of Siegen for the comprehensive support of junior academics, will coordinate and offer specific trainings (scientific and transferable skills) for STAR-fellows. Further on, every semester the HYT publishes a university-wide course programme from which fellows can choose and book interesting courses and workshops. Many of the events are offered in English. The current programme can be found here: <https://www.uni-siegen.de/hyt/start/index.html.en?lang=en>

1.2.1 Individual Research Projects



The core scientific training primarily takes place through the pursuit of the individual research projects → Training Through Research. This will allow the fellow to master new methodologies and procedures while learning the usage of new scientific instruments and software, both in their own and adjoining scientific fields. The description of the individual research project is one of the most important parts each candidate has to submit within their application.

¹ **Career Break:** STAR relaxes the **mobility rule** for experienced researchers with a career break (i.e., who were not active in research for a continuous period of at least 12 months within the 18 months immediately prior to the STAR call deadline, due to parental leave or having worked outside academia, etc.) by extending the time limits to "...for more than 3 years in the 5 years immediately before the STAR call-to-apply deadline". Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention are not taken into account.

Suggested research projects should be novel and of high scientific quality. They must fit at least one of the following [7 STAR Profile Areas](#). Candidates can propose their own research projects within these thematic challenges and implement their project in a stimulating research environment. Each project is supported by at least one supervisor at the University of Siegen (main supervisor) and, if applicable, further supervisors co-supervisor) at a partner organisation (initial outgoing phase within the OUTGOING scheme and secondments).

You find an overview of the research disciplines and professors of the University of Siegen, as well as a list of current partner organisations with contact details on our website:

- Pool of main supervisors at the University of Siegen: <https://star.uni-siegen.de/professors-uni-siegen/>
- STAR-partner organisations: <https://star.uni-siegen.de/star-partner-organisations/>

Projects must in principle be feasible with the chosen host; each applicant therefore needs a signed Letter of Endorsement (LoE) from each supervisor for his or her application. It is recommended to contact the potential supervisor(s) at an early stage, not only because of the required LoE, but also to discuss the design of the research project. Interdisciplinary projects are highly welcome. Both basic and applied research projects are possible.

STAR Research Areas:

Research Area 1: Digital and Media Culture



The ubiquitous digitalization and mediatization lead to a fundamental cultural transformation of our society, which not only radically changes our perception of the world and our communication structures, but also significantly influences our social life as well as our cultural and political identity. Digitally networked media create new social sectors and modify existing public and private spaces. This media influence and the associated changes in perception not only have effects on the individual, but also

fundamentally renew the interaction of our society on both a local and a global scale. Addressing the associated challenges requires multidisciplinary research that combines social sciences, cultural and media sciences, social informatics, economics, and sensor-based technology, such as is currently being conducted in the Collaborative Research Center "[Media of Cooperation](#)", the Graduate School "[Locating Media](#)" or at the Institute for Media Research and the [iSchool of Media and Information](#) at the University of Siegen.

Research Area 2: Inclusive Society and Social Living Spaces



Social integration is a challenge for our increasingly diversified society in many dimensions. It is a prerequisite for our future social life, both in private and in urban or rural areas. A society which is ageing, inclusive, and migration-influenced, needs to be integrated through social work, but also through technical assistance systems oriented towards people and their special needs. Topics of civil security are also addressed here. In the interaction between the development and application of new

technologies and their socio-economic factors in the implementation as well as the assessment of the possible influence on future technology development, the claim to participation plays an interdisciplinary, research-guiding role as a connecting element. This requires intensive cooperation between social work, development and educational pedagogy with architecture and social informatics and the technical disciplines in the fields of sensor technology and robotics. Multidisciplinary projects are carried out within the framework of the DFG Research Training Group "Consequences of Social Assistance" or within the BMBF project [GINA High-quality interaction strategies for service and assistance robotics](#) as well as within the [GeNeSi](#) gerontology network.

Research Area 3: Regional Economy in globalized world



Digitization and globalization have a formative influence on the sustainable use and distribution of resources. They not only lead to global participation in knowledge and prosperity, but can also lead to disadvantages and exclusion. These cultural, socio-political and economic contradictions of globalization also influence the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at the regional level. In Siegen, particular attention will be paid to the consequences of digitization for the regional economy of medium-sized companies with regard to changes in company and management structures, working conditions, business and production processes. The understanding and design of modern economic processes require transdisciplinary research approaches, which are practiced in close cooperation between business, information technology, law and didactics, as well as in cooperation with regional medium-sized companies. Examples of this are the projects [Mittelstand 4.0 Kompetenzzentrum Siegen](#), [Cyberrüsten 4.0](#) or [ELISE \(Development of an interactive and emotionally sensitive learning system for competence development in the field of business process management\)](#), in which digital solutions for small and medium-sized businesses in the region are researched in an interdisciplinary manner.

Research Area 4: Responsive Sensor Technologies



With ubiquitous digitalization, sensory and nanotechnological developments are advancing rapidly and often unreflected into all areas of our lives. Biomolecularly supported sensor technology, personalized digitalized medicine or technical systems that interact autonomously with humans can be used wisely and meaningfully to support humans in all their diversified life situations. Multi-sensor systems and their applications are a long-standing profile-forming research focus of the University of Siegen, which led to the foundation of the North Rhine-Westphalian [Centre for Sensor Systems \(ZEISS\)](#). The activities aim at the development of responsive intelligent sensor technologies for the highly automated world of the future. This focus is characterized by a high degree of interdisciplinary cooperation combining physical and chemical fundamentals, done at the [Center for Micro- and Nanochemistry and Engineering](#) microelectronic sensor development and system realization as well as information technology data processing. The areas of work include nanotechnological integration, ubiquitous sensor technologies, adaptive and compressive signal processing techniques, multimodal imaging approaches of cognitive sensor systems, advanced visualization and recognition systems, and the development of intelligent autonomous systems. A representative example of this Profile Area is the European Training Network (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network) [MenelaosNT](#).

Research Area 5: Smart Materials and Manufacturing



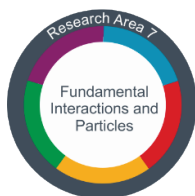
This profile area comprises innovative developments in the field of production technology and new materials, which contribute to a sustainable, ecological, and economic use of resources. These research activities are mainly located at the [Centre for Innovative Materials](#) and in the field of mechanical engineering at the University of Siegen. They aim to develop highly efficient materials and manufacturing processes that minimize resource consumption, maximize performance parameters and are ecologically sustainable. Other areas of work include materials that can survive an infinite number of work cycles, nanostructured composites and intelligent multifunctional materials, systems for monitoring structural integrity, composite materials for lightweight automotive construction and individualized production technologies.

Research Area 6: Individualized Health Care



Based on technological developments at the level of biomolecular sensors, supported by digital medical technology and the redesign of rural health systems in an ageing society, this profile area focuses on a holistic approach to individualized health care in rural areas. The digital networking of all areas of our lives and the future ubiquitous use of intelligent sensor systems, based on biomolecular, sensor-supported, individualized medicine or humanoid robotics based on artificial intelligence, will significantly change the most intimate areas of our daily lives and can - if used sensibly - individually support people in all their life situations. This holds great potential for optimizing rural medical care systems, among other things, but requires close cooperation between disciplines to ensure that the resulting transformation processes take into account not only technological, but also social, psychological, cultural and economic perspectives. Currently, these perspectives are being researched primarily in the project [Rethinking Medicine](#), located at the new School of Life Sciences, and at the [Forschungskolleg Zukunft Menschlich Gestalten](#) (Research College: Shaping a Humane Future) in close cooperation with other university institutes. Teams from medicine, sociology, psychology, computer science, biology and chemistry work together in a cooperative network to develop solutions in the areas of prophylaxis, diagnosis, therapy and aftercare as well as health management.

Research Area 7: Fundamental Interactions and Particals



The basic research in elementary particle physics is proven to be an internationally visible profile area at the University of Siegen, which has a high potential to revolutionize solutions established so far for today's challenges in the future. Research at the University of Siegen on elementary interactions and the cohesion of our matter and quantum information technology is actively and significantly incorporated into the research of internationally relevant consortia, such as CERN or the European "Quantum" flagship, for the further development of this elementary field of research. A prominent example of this research is the Collaborative Research Centre/Transregio "Phenomenological elementary particle physics after the Higgs discovery".

1.2.2 Secondments



STAR aims to promote the careers of researchers in as many ways as possible to prepare the recruited researchers in the best possible way for the desired career paths. During temporary research stays (secondments) at STAR partner organisation(s), fellows can continue their individual research projects in a different environment, sectoral and/or intersectoral. This enables them to gain different perspectives, learn about other methodological approaches and benefit from additional supervision and thinking. Therefore, secondments often have the potential to significantly contribute to the careers of researchers. Applicants should already consider in the course of their application whether a secondment would have positive effects on their own career goals or not. Any planned secondments must be described in their application. The implementation of secondments at a later date in ongoing projects is also possible. The integration of secondments is voluntary but will also be part of the evaluation of the respective application.

The following principles apply:

- Secondments can be implemented at a STAR partner organisation located anywhere in the world, including Germany.
- If you are interested to visit an institution not listed in our already established partner organisations, you can also propose new partners for the programme. Please see the [How to apply](#) section for more details and required documents
- The maximum duration of secondment(s) within one fellowship is 6 months and can be divided into shorter mobility periods (minimum 1 month) at different partners.

- Within the OUTGOING mobility scheme to ensure a proper transfer of knowledge, secondments are only permitted during the initial outgoing phase. A secondment can also take place at the start of the fellowship at the University of Siegen for a maximum of 3 months, allowing the researcher to start the project at the University of Siegen before moving on to the host organisation outside Germany. In such cases, the initial secondment will be considered part of the initial outgoing phase.

Important: If a secondment is already planned in the course of the application, a Letter of Endorsement from the corresponding partner organisation must be enclosed!

1.2.3 Outreach Activities

Outreach Activities

As part of the training, fellows are also involved in the dissemination (sharing research results with potential users), exploitation (use of results for commercial purposes, in further research activities, in public policymaking etc.) and communication (promote the action and its results incl. media and the public) activities of their own individual projects as well as the STAR Fellowship Programme. Among others, fellows are requested to:

- Publish their individual research results in at least one internationally respected journal (**peer-reviewed and open access**)
- Present their results at least one well-known international conference
- Present their projects and results on the STAR programme events (kick-off; stakeholder meetings)
- Support the STAR project manager to publish project/result related information on the project website/social media (incl. information for non-specialists) as well as press releases at national and/or European level. STAR fellows will be asked to select at least two additional communication activities (YouTube, participation at open days of research, researchers' night events, girls and boys days or promoting the projects in lectures or seminars (higher education) etc.)

1.2.4 Scientific Courses

Scientific Courses

In addition to the individual research projects conducted by each fellow, STAR will offer further training opportunities to develop scientific skills. During their projects fellows can voluntarily participate in training courses offered by the University of Siegen. As long as the available budget (see [Research Training and Networking Costs](#)) is sufficient, fellows can also take courses offered by external providers if they are of added value for the fellows career development.

Mandatory Courses: To raise awareness for certain topics at the start of the fellowship, the participation of the following two courses is mandatory for each fellow:

- **Research data management and Open Science/Open Data**
- **Rules of good scientific practice**

Both courses will be organised by the HYT in cooperation with the Centre for Information and Media Technology (ZIMT) and the University of Siegen library.

1.2.5 Transferable skills

Transferable Skills

To complement the training, several transferable skills courses will be offered by the HYT. Fellows will be able to freely choose suitable training opportunities from this portfolio or courses offered at their host (partner organisations) during their research stay there. **The participation in at least two transferable skills courses is mandatory.** With the support of different facilities/departments at the University of Siegen, the HYT will ensure a minimum set of relevant and high-level courses. To allow outgoing fellows or fellows on temporary secondments to attend events offered by the HYT, all workshops will be made available as webinars on demand.

Courses offered by the HYT in English include but are not limited to:

- Introduction to the German Academic System
- Publication strategies
- Advanced grant proposal writing using the ERC Starting/Consolidator Grant as a template
- Transfer and commercial/entrepreneurial exploitation of research results, including patents and software licences.
- Career development for experienced researchers with individual coaching.
- Leadership qualifications
- Advanced project management
- Presentation skills
- Science communication

You can find the current course programme [here](#).

As long as the available budget (see [Research Training and Networking Costs](#)) is sufficient, fellows can also take courses offered by external providers if they are an added value for the fellows career development.

1.3 Financial Aspects

The University of Siegen offers, co-financed by the European Union, a financially well-equipped fellowship which provides on the one hand good remuneration for the fellows (**Researcher Costs**) and on the other hand funds for the implementation of the individual research projects (**Research, Training and Networking Costs**). Besides financial issues, the University of Siegen and its partners will also offer research related infrastructure (e.g., laboratories, equipment), office space, and workplace equipment as well as a large set of administrative services.

Each fellow will be a **full-time employee of the University of Siegen** for the entire duration of their fellowship (including secondments and possible outgoing phases) receiving full social security coverage (health insurance, pension payment) in accordance with national German law. During research stays at one of the participating partner organisations, fellows will retain their employment contract with the University of Siegen and will continue to be paid by it.

1.3.1 Researcher Costs (salary)

The Researcher Costs will consist of a) *Living Allowance*, b) *Mobility Allowance*, and if applicable c) a *Family Allowance* amounting to the following numbers, defined as being the **employer gross salary**:

Researcher Costs	EUR/person-month
Living Allowance (adjusted by CCC)	4,880,-
Mobility Allowance	600,-
Family Allowance (if applicable)	500,-

- The **Living Allowance** will be adjusted through the application of a country correction coefficient (CCC; you find the CCC for each country on the STAR-website in the [Documents](#) section) to account for differences in the cost of living in the country of the host organisation. For the incoming scheme and during the return phase of the outgoing scheme, the CCC for Germany will apply (97% \triangleq 4,733,60 EUR). For secondments the Living Allowance will not be adjusted.
- The **Mobility Allowance** will be paid to every fellow as part of their salary to account for costs related to the fellows mobility.

The minimum amount of the sum of Living Allowance (after correction) and Mobility Allowance will not fall below 3,836 EUR. In case of a very low CCC (e.g., India: 63.4%), the Researcher Costs may be below this amount. In such rare cases, the costs will be increased to the mandatory minimum.

- The **Family Allowance** will be paid to fellows who have at least one of the following family obligations:

- marriage
- relationship with equivalent status to marriage
- dependent children maintained by the researcher.

The entitlement to Family Allowance will be checked upon receipt of the proposal and will not be revised during the fellowship.

The **net salary of the fellow** results from deducting all compulsory (employer/employee) social security contributions and direct taxes.

1.3.2 *Research, Training and Networking Costs*

In addition to your salary, each researcher receives an amount for Research, Training and Networking Costs (RTNC). This will cover all expenses related to the individual research and training project of the fellow. For the RTNC, STAR will provide up to 800 EUR per fellow-month. Fellows must be able to conduct their research project based on this amount (a Budget Plan is a mandatory proposal component).

Purchases >1000,- EUR can only be made if stated in the Budget Plan and approved by the project manager. The Research Training and Networking Allowance can be used for but not limited to:

- Consumables: e.g. laboratory supplies, chemicals
- Equipment: e.g. scientific instruments or devices needed for your project
- Books, maps, etc.
- Travel and accommodation: including secondments, conferences, other networking activities
- Publication costs
- Training courses
- Visa and other fees

Unused funds can be pooled or transferred to following months after consultation with the STAR-project manager.

1.4 Ethical Issues

STAR will be carried out in compliance with ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and applicable international, EU and German law. All research performed will adhere to the Horizon 2020 ethics policy including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

STAR will not fund research activities that: aim at human cloning for reproductive purposes; intend to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such changes heritable, or intend to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Each applicant is required to submit an Ethical Issues Table and Ethics Declaration with the proposal (see [Documents](#) section for details) where possible ethical issues are described. A declaration that identified possible ethical issues needs to be accompanied by an Ethics Self-Assessment.

Research proposals from applicants who are invited for a personal interview will be evaluated by the Ethics Committee of the University of Siegen. Open questions will be clarified, e.g. during the personal interview.

2. APPLYING FOR A STAR FELLOWSHIP

Within the given call deadline, applicants have to submit the full set of requested data and documents via the STAR information/submission system or via postal mail (see [Proposal Submission](#)).

Incomplete, delayed or ineligible applications will be rejected!

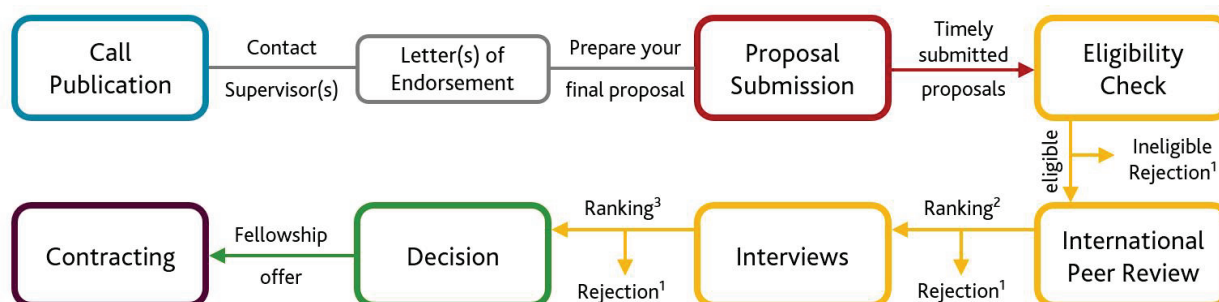
Candidates must provide all documents (not certificates) in English.

Mandatory templates must be used.

Each candidate can only submit one application per call.

2.1 Overall Procedure

The entire STAR recruitment process starting from the call publication, the submission of applications, the evaluation procedure to the employment of successful candidates is shown below.



¹right to appeal; ²incl. waiting list; ³incl. reserve list

In order to prepare and submit a formally correct application, you should read the following information carefully. If you have any open questions, please contact the STAR-helpdesk: star@uni-siegen.de. Each call for proposals will be published through various channels (websites of STAR and the University of Siegen, external recruitment platforms, social media, etc.) and will be open for at least 8 weeks to apply after publication. Applications will only be accepted through the application platform of the University of Siegen and by postal mail.

2.2 Proposal Preparation

If you are interested to submit an application within STAR, we suggest to follow these steps:

1. **Mobility Scheme:** Carefully consider which mobility scheme (INCOMING/OUTGOING) is best for your further career development.
2. **Eligibility Criteria:** Based on the mobility scheme envisaged, check if you meet the required [Eligibility Criteria](#).
3. **Supervisor(s):** Each applicant needs to find adequate supervisor(s) for her/his research project. Identify potential supervisor(s) at University of Siegen (for INCOMINGS), at a partner institution or a research facility of your own choice (for OUTGOINGS and secondments). An overview of all [professors at the University of Siegen](#) and all current [STAR partner organisations](#) can be found on the website. You can also propose new partner institutions of your own choice. If you like to do so, a Letter of Commitment of this institution must accompany your proposal (see [Documents](#) section and the template Letter of Commitment for details). Please note that the choice of supervisors and work places is also part of the evaluation of the proposal.
 - INCOMING: You need at least one supervisor (main supervisor) at the University of Siegen who fits your research idea and offers hosting arrangements.
 - OUTGOING: You need at least two supervisors; one at the University of Siegen (main-supervisor) and one (co-supervisor) at the partner institution of the initial outgoing phase.
 - Secondments: For each secondment an additional supervisor (co-supervisor) is required.

4. **Project Idea:** Sketch up your idea of a research project, develop a project proposal and parallel contact potential supervisors at an early stage. Please make sure to place the project manager in copy (this is mandatory) when contacting potential supervisors the first time. This is to make sure, that no candidates are excluded due to personal preferences (e.g. gender, age, ethnical background, etc.). If you have found your supervisor(s), they need to write a Letter of Endorsement based on your proposal (Technical Annex and Budget Plan).
5. **Letter(s) of Endorsement (LoE):** Supervisors have to ensure the feasibility of suggested projects e.g. with regard to the required infrastructure (equipment, laboratories etc.), her/his scientific expertise to supervise the project, possible limitations of hosting capacities etc. Therefore, applicants need a signed LoE from each supervisor (incl. all co-supervisors) involved in the planned project.
Candidates are required to obtain such a letter by contacting the potential supervisor(s) and discuss the research project in detail:
 - Contact (via email) the supervisor(s) first to pre-discuss your research idea. Please put the project manager in cc: star@uni-siegen.de.
 - Send your Technical Annex and Budget Plan to each of the supervisors.
 - Discuss your research project with each supervisor and update your Technical Annex/Budget Plan if necessary. For the initial outgoing phase, applicants of the OUTGOING mobility scheme should agree with the supervisor of the respective partner organisation on the duration of the stay (between 12 and 24 months).
 - Ask for a signed LoE from each supervisor. Please let your supervisor also sign the Technical Annex and Budget Plan to ensure, that the LoE has been issued on the basis of the current documents.
6. **Documents:** Prepare all required documents for your application. For details see [Documents](#) section.
7. Start your application in our online application portal (<https://jobs.uni-siegen.de/>).
8. If a proposal was rejected, you can either resubmit a revised proposal, or apply with a new project idea within the next call.

Please note: Your application is not complete without a LoE issued by the participating supervisor(s). Since documents cannot be submitted later, please make sure, that the LoE is enclosed with your application.

2.3 Documents

To ensure equal treatment, all candidates must provide all documents in English. Templates are available on the STAR-website (<https://star.uni-siegen.de/star-application-process/application-documents/>). Be aware, that some templates are mandatory, others can be used as is, adapted or replaced according to your needs. Please make sure, that the requested information must be provided even if you are not using our templates. For detailed information about the required content, please refer to the table below and the corresponding template. Limit yourself to the maximum number of pages. All information exceeding the given number of pages will not be considered. Please upload your full application as one pdf document.

The following documents must be signed by you and/or your supervisor(s):

- Technical Annex (applicant and supervisor)
- Budget Plan (supervisors)
- Self-Declaration (applicant)
- Letter of Endorsement (supervisors)
- Ethical Issues Table and Ethics Declaration (applicant); Ethics Self-Assessment (applicant)

We highly recommend to use the provided Checklist to make sure your application is complete.

Mandatory Documents

A complete application consists of all documents listed below. Please note: for the red marked documents the use of the template is mandatory!

Administrational Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applicant details relevant for the eligibility check and contracting ▪ Qualifications ▪ Reviewer suggestions and contact details of up to three potential external reviewers
Self-Declaration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To minimize the administrative and/or bureaucratic burden, official documents proving the individual eligibility only have to be provided upon signing a STAR-employment contract. But to be able to rate your proposal you need to give this information in the Self-Declaration. ▪ Information on your status, nationality and residence, compliance with mobility rule, employment status, potential career breaks, etc. needs to be provided here.
Ethical Issues Table and Ethics Declaration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Ethical Issues Table allows you to identify potential ethical problems. If your answer to at least one of the questions is "yes" the form must be accompanied by the Ethics Self-Assessment.
(Ethics Self-Assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Description of the ethical issues identified in the Ethical Issues Table and how the national, legal and ethical requirements of the country(ies) involved are met. Please use the EU Guidance "How to complete your ethics self-assessment", for your statement.

Personal information	You should provide your personal information either in the application portal or on the provided form Personal Information.
Curriculum Vitae (max. 3 pages) & Track-Record (max. 2 pages)	Each candidate must include an up to date CV including a track record.
Motivation Letter (max. 2 pages)	Explain your motivation and the personal goals that led to your application in STAR. Describe the envisaged effects on your personal career and how it will promote and advance the scientific field addressed.
Technical Annex (max. 5 pages)	Full description of the proposed individual research/training project including: excellence, impact, implementation. Formatting conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Page size A4, all margins (top, bottom, left, right) at least 15 mm (not including any footers or headers). ▪ Reference font for the body text is Times New Roman. Minimum font size is 11 points with standard character spacing and single line spacing. ▪ Headers, foot/end notes, captions, formula's, may deviate in font size, but must be readable.
Budget Plan (1 page)	Estimate the planned costs for research and training during your entire research project. A maximum amount of 800,-EUR per month is granted for each fellow.
Letter(s) of Endorsement (LoE)	A signed Letter of Endorsement confirming the feasibility of the proposed project is required from each involved supervisor for the application.
Letter of Commitment (new partner organisation)	New partner organisations may be proposed by candidates. Such institutions must provide a signed Letter of Commitment. New partners need to declare, that they will make necessary infrastructure and supervision arrangements available for the individual research project and that they will best implement the principles of the European Charter for Researchers.

Please also follow the **formal specifications** stated in the different templates regarding font size, font, margins etc. Applications that do not comply with these specifications will be rejected.

2.4 Technical Annex and Budget Plan

Technical Annex

The Technical Annex is the full description of the proposed individual research/training project. Please address each of the following sections: Excellence, Implementation and Impact.

- The section on **excellence** should deal with the state of the art, the research objectives of your project, your concept and your methodology. You should also consider which training (scientific and transferable skills), coaching, summer schools, or secondments would complement your project and help you to foster your career and advance your future goals.
- **Implementation** is in principle your work plan. Please describe your work packages, and milestones, when you plan to go on a secondment, etc. You can display your project schedule in a Gantt chart and/or describe planned milestones and deliverables.
- The **impact** section focusses on the visibility and the overall effect of your project. Describe how you intend to make use of the results for commercial purposes, in further research activities, in public policymaking etc. Please also comment on the impact the programme might have on your career prospects after the project.

Budget Plan

STAR provides templates for your Budget Plan in .xlsx and .pdf formats with predefined categories. These templates are not mandatory and can be used as a guideline only. Predefined categories can be changed and adapted to your needs.

A Budget Plan should cover the entire project duration. It must include all planned costs so that the feasibility of your research idea can be assessed.

Consider that the maximum amount of research and training costs of 800,-EUR per person and month (\cong 9,600,-EUR/year) cannot be exceeded. However, the monthly allowance can be pooled for larger expenses. In general, it is also possible to purchase technical equipment after consultation and approval through the project manager and following the procurement policy of the University of Siegen.

Example: For a specific part of the project a microscope is needed and cannot be provided by the supervisors. The costs for the microscope amounts to 2,500 EUR in total. After approval by the project manager, you can buy the microscope, if the overall project costs do not exceed the maximum of 9,600 EUR per year.

2.5 Proposal Submission

Applications can be submitted either via the online application portal of the University of Siegen, which is highly recommended, or in paper form by postal mail. The online submission system can be found here: <https://jobs.uni-siegen.de/>, a link to the respective job post will be available on the STAR-website.

To submit a formally correct application, the following requirements must be met:

- The application must be in English.
- Only one application per applicant may be submitted per call.
- Applications must be submitted within the given **deadline**.
- Other proposals formats (e.g. by email), incomplete, or delayed applications will be rejected!
- Templates are provided on the STAR-website. Be aware, that some templates are mandatory, others can be adapted according to your needs, but the information asked for must be provided anyway. For detailed information about the required content please refer to the [Documents](#) section and the corresponding template.

2.5.1 Online Applications

- The online application platform is available at: <https://jobs.uni-siegen.de/>
- Here, each candidate creates her/his own profile with personal information first. In the next step you need to apply for the specific job advertisement. The link to the STAR-advertisement will be communicated wherever the call is published, but you can also find it on the application portal. To find it there, you must navigate to "Stellenausschreibungen" and "Wissenschaftliches Personal". Then click on the respective job advertisement (Research Fellowships at Postdoc Level) and navigate to "jetzt bewerben".
- The application platform is still under construction and therefore does not yet have the full functionality in English. However, you will find instructions in the [Documents Section](#) of the STAR-website (see guidelines) and under the first point in the FAQs of the application portal [here](#).
- The application portal will allow applications to be sent until 23:59 CET on the date of the deadline.

2.5.2 Applications on Paper

If you want to submit your application on paper, we suggest that you contact the project manager Dr. Lena Butz (star@uni-siegen.de) beforehand to inform her, that your application is on its way. The date of the postmark of the senders post office will then be considered as the relevant date for submission within the deadline. Please send your paper application to:

Universität Siegen Referat Forschungsförderung Dr. Lena Butz STAR-Projektmanagement Postfach D-57068 Siegen
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2.6 Selection Process

The selection process consists of four steps described below. The eligibility check is followed by an international peer review. Those who passed the peer review will then be invited for an interview, the decision on who receives the fellowship will be made immediately afterwards.

2.6.1 Scoring System

The evaluation system focuses on the excellence of the proposed projects and the candidates' capacities to implement their ideas and achieve their research objectives. Candidates will receive scores for predefined sub criteria in the international peer review and the personal interview. The international peer review will account for 60% of the overall score and the interviews will contribute the remaining 40%. Candidates can achieve a maximum score of 50, 30 from the peer review plus 20 from the interview. The scores will be assigned using the following marks (intermediate scores with one decimal point):

- 0 – *Proposal **fails** to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.*
- 1 – ***Poor.** The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.*
- 2 – ***Fair.** Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.*
- 3 – ***Good.** Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.*
- 4 – ***Very Good.** Proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.*
- 5 – ***Excellent.** Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.*

In the peer review, each reviewer will award scores for each sub-criterion (see section [International Peer Review](#) for details). The average score of the experts will then represent the final score. In the personal interview scores will be awarded for sub-criteria related to the project and the researcher (see illustration in section [Interviews](#) for details).

Thresholds:

Different thresholds apply at each step and for corresponding sub-criteria. These need to be met by every successful applicant.

- **Peer review:** Only candidates obtaining a minimum score of 3 in each sub-criterion and an overall minimum peer review score of 10.5 in both the "project" and "researcher" criteria, will proceed and included in the ranking for the respective scheme.
- **Interviews:** A minimum score of 3.0 in each sub-criterion and an overall minimum interview score of at least 14.0 points needs to be achieved to meet the threshold for the personal interview.
- **Overall:** Successful candidates must have an overall minimum score of 35 points (70%).

		Sub-Criteria	Average score Reviewer 1-2 (3)	Selection Committee
Application	Project	Excellence* (incl. Quality of Supervision)	0-5	
		Impact*	0-5	
		Implementation*	0-5	
	Threshold: 10.5 Sum:		0-15	
	Candidate	Personal Motivation*	0-5	
		Track Record*	0-5	
		Ability to conduct the project*	0-5	
	Threshold: 10.5 Sum:		0-15	
Total Score Application:			0-30	
20 Candidates (the 10 highest scoring female and male) per cohort reaching the thresholds will be invited for an interview				
Interview	Project Candidate	Project Presentation*		0-5
		Project Discussion incl. Weaknesses / Strenghth*		0-5
		Expected Impact on career*		0-5
		Soft Skills*		0-5
		Threshold: 14.0 Sum:		0-20
	Overall Threshold: 35 Total Score:			21-50

* Sub-Criterion (threshold 3/5)

2.6.2 Eligibility Check

All applications submitted within the deadline will be checked for eligibility. This includes in particular the eligibility of the applicant and the completeness and formal correctness of the submitted application documents. All eligible applications will then be passed on to the next evaluation stage, the international peer review.

Ineligible applications will be rejected. Authors of rejected proposals will be informed about the reasons by email (in exceptional cases by post) and have one week to appeal in writing. The appeal submitted will be reviewed and the applicant will be informed of the outcome of the review within one week, if possible. For general information on the appeal procedure, please refer to the section [Redress Procedure](#).

2.6.3 International Peer Review

The evaluation process of eligible applications is twofold and initially consists of an international peer review. Following this, the highest scoring candidates reaching all necessary thresholds, are invited to a personal interview at the University of Siegen.

Each application is reviewed by at least two international and independent reviewers on the basis of a scoring system that takes into account the degree of innovation of the proposed projects and the ability of the candidates to implement their ideas and achieve their research objectives beyond the state of the art.

The following sub-criteria will apply for your application in the peer review:

Application					
Project			Candidate		
Excellence*	Impact*	Implementation*	Personal Motivation*	Track Record*	Ability *
Quality/novelty/ credibility/feasibility of the research project; inter-/multidisciplinarity	Enhancing the future career prospects of the researcher	Coherence and effectiveness of work plan	Motivation to promote the respective scientific field(s)	Quantity and quality of achievements respecting the career stage	Capability of researcher to conduct the project
Quality and appropriateness of planned training activities	Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate project results		Capacity to reach a position of professional maturity or independence		

* sub-criteria

The international peer review ensures an external, international and independent evaluation of each eligible application, which will be assessed by at least two renowned experts from the proposals field of research. Reviewers will then rate the proposal by assigning scores (see [Scoring System](#) and the table on sub-criteria for details) to predefined criteria.

Reviewer Selection:

Reviewer 1: Applicants are asked to name up to three (including at least one female) potential reviewers in their application. From among these, the most suitable for the submitted proposal will be selected.

Reviewer 2: The second reviewer will be selected from a pool of reviewers of the University of Siegen.

Independency of Reviewers

To ensure independency, and to avoid conflicts of interest, the candidates should consider the following criteria (based on the "Guidelines for Avoiding Conflicts of Interest" published by the German Research Foundation) when suggesting reviewers. If any of these criteria apply, this will result in exclusion of the proposed reviewer.

- First-degree relationship, marriage, life partnership, domestic partnership
- Personal financial interest in the proposal's success or financial interest by persons listed above
- Current or planned close scientific cooperation
- Dependent employment relationship or supervisory relationship (e.g., teacher-student relationship up to and including the postdoctoral phase) extending six years beyond the conclusion of the relationship

Each reviewer has to confirm that none of these exclusion criteria apply and that there is no other conflict of interest.

Procedure

Each proposal will be sent to two reviewers for evaluation using the [Scoring System](#). If the scores from the two reviewers differ by more than 2 points on any sub-criterion, a third reviewer will be called upon. The final score for each sub-criterion will then be calculated as the average of the scores given by the two (or three) reviewers.

On the base of the obtained scores two ranking lists will be created (INCOMING and OUTGOING) for those candidates who meet the required thresholds. The 6 highest scoring female and 6 highest scoring male candidates (INCOMING) and the 4 highest scoring female and 4 highest scoring male candidates (OUTGOING) will then be invited for a personal interview.

Respecting national law, additional candidates may be invited (e.g., disabled candidates meeting the thresholds). In addition a waiting list for each funding scheme will be prepared and applicants will be informed about their place on the waiting list.

The selection committee will also inform unsuccessful candidates who are neither invited for an interview nor on the waiting list. The rejection includes an individual Evaluation Summary Report stating the scores achieved and the main strengths and weaknesses of the application. If an application was rejected the unsuccessful candidates have one week to submit a process related appeal.

In the process of the evaluation of your application it can be relevant, if breaks in your career path are mentioned in your proposal. Your scientific track record will be assessed according to the quantity and quality of your achievements in relation to your current career stage. Therefore you should explain reasons for unavoidable delays in your career. These can be but are not limited to:

- Pregnancy, childbirth, or childcare
- Care of family members
- Chronic illness or disability
- Long periods of serious illness
- National military or civil service

Those who also want to explain extended qualification phases, publication gaps, etc. can do so by stating the circumstances in the Self-Declaration of your application.

For the evaluation of the sub-criterion *quality of supervision*, supervisors must add information about their profile (CV + track record) and a description of how fellows will be integrated into their group.

2.6.4 Interviews

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we reserve the right to conduct the interviews online, if necessary. We will inform all candidates invited to the interviews about necessary changes and adapt our plans according to the worldwide situation.

Candidates selected for personal interviews are invited to Siegen to take part in a two day Selection Event. The University of Siegen wants to provide the potential fellows with the opportunity to get acquainted with the possibilities of the fellowship programme and learn more about the university and available infrastructures. Furthermore, it will allow fellows to personally meet their potential supervisor(s) from the University of Siegen and see their future working environment. Travel and accommodation costs for the fellows to attend this two-day event will be reimbursed in accordance with the regulations of the University of Siegen. While the participation on the first day is voluntary, the interview is obligatory. If candidates find themselves unable to attend in person due to significant personal or logistic reasons (e.g. times to obtain a visa), they are offered an interview via video conference.

Event Schedule:

1st day: The first day of the selection event is intended to enable candidates to familiarise themselves with the university, the programme and working conditions in Germany and Siegen. Presentations and workshops will give information, offer the chance to ask questions and to meet the contact persons of those institutions, who offer support to researchers moving to Siegen. Also, information on the course of the second day and instructions for the personal interview will be given. In the afternoon a tour of the campus and a personal meeting (1-2 hours) with the supervisor and work group is planned.

2nd day: On the second day, the personal interviews will be conducted by the selection committee. Interviews are scheduled for at least 30 minutes per person and include a project presentation prepared by each candidate, followed by a discussion. The discussion will be based on project-related questions and include the main weaknesses and strengths pointed out by the international peer review. To ensure equal treatment and fair competition, a standardised catalogue of questions will be used.

All interviews will be conducted in English to ensure that candidates possess the necessary language skills to conduct their project at a foreign institution and to publish the project results. At the end of each interview the selection committee will determine a score for each of the interview's evaluation criteria (see table on criteria) and formulate a summary of the candidate's main strengths and weaknesses.

The following sub-criteria will apply for your application in the personal interviews:

<i>Interview</i>			
Project		Candidate	
Project Presentation*	Project Discussion*	Expected Impact on career*	Soft Skills*
Quality of presentation and convincement of personal motivation	Excellence of the research project (incl. weaknesses/strengths)	Expected impact on employability after the fellowship	e.g. communication skills; capacity for teamwork; conflict skills etc.

* sub-criteria

Selection Committee:

The selection committee is composed of four independent international experts from non-STAR organisations that have a demonstrated expertise in both academia and outside academia. Only those four members will have voting rights. Additional independent leading researchers from the University of Siegen may be invited for specialised scientific support during the interviews.

Other persons who may be requested to participate at the interviews are: the equal opportunities officer, the representative for employees with disabilities, and the staff council. The STAR project manager will act as rapporteur.

2.6.5 Decision

After completing the interviews, the selection committee will prepare a ranking list for each funding scheme (INCOMING and OUTGOING) of those candidates who passed all required thresholds. Since STAR wants to further promote excellence in research, the final funding decision taken by the selection committee, will solely be based on the total scores achieved by the candidates, regardless of their gender. Thus, fellowship offers will be made to the highest scoring 6 INCOMING and highest scoring 4 OUTGOING applicants per call.

If an insufficient number of candidates has passed the necessary thresholds (see [Scoring System](#)), the next highest scoring candidates from the waiting list (of the peer review process) will be invited for an interview. If an application was rejected the unsuccessful candidates have one week to submit a process related appeal.

2.7 Contracting

Successful candidates will be informed by the project manager, who will initiate the drafting of individual employment contracts by the HR department. Candidates must now provide the necessary documents to substantiate the claims made in their Self-Declaration (regarding eligibility criteria). Degree certificates can be submitted in German or English; translations must be officially certified. Candidates should have at least 10 weeks from the time of the funding decision to clarify their personal matters before their fellowship will start.

2.8 Redress Procedure

After completion of each selection step (eligibility check; peer review; personal interview), rejected candidates may appeal. Appeals can only be filed in case of process-related shortcomings (eligibility checks, evaluation procedure, etc.). A review of the scientific decision or quality of the reviewers cannot be achieved by this. Appeals must be sent to the project manager in written form within one week after the rejection was received (taking into account postal delivery time in case of paper applications). The project manager will carefully examine each appeal, forward the result to the selection committee for final verification and will inform the appealing candidate about the result within one week.