



Call for Proposals

MISSIONS: Enhancing Research - Promoting Well-Being

TRAPEZIO - Paving the way to research excellence and talent attraction

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Fondazione
Compagnia
di San Paolo

Call for Proposals

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- **Publication date:** 20 September 2021
- **1st closing date** 30 December 2021
- **2nd closing date** 31 March 2023

Background

The European Innovation Scoreboard 2020 rates Italy as being among the Moderate Innovators in the European research and innovation landscape, part of an intermediate cluster of countries that are below the continental average according to a wide spectrum of 27 reference indicators. The gap between Italy and the leading countries is corroborated by two fundamental indicators relating respectively to the economic resources allocated to this area and the personnel employed. In terms of the ratio between expenditure on research and development (R&D) and GDP, Italy is at 1.4% compared to a European average of 2.1%, ranking 12th out of 28¹ European countries and 16th if only public investments are considered.² In terms of human capital, there are 2,252 researchers per million inhabitants in Italy, a figure that relegates the country to 22nd place in Europe³.

The strength of a national research system can be measured by its ability to win grants - and therefore financial resources - awarded internationally on a competitive basis. In the 2014-2020 MFF, Italy obtained 9.63 B€, split between Horizon 2020 (5.48 B€), the European Regional

¹ The rankings stated above refer to the pre-Brexit scenario (the EU-28), therefore including the United Kingdom.

² Source: Eurostat data.

³ Source: Eurostat data.



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Development Fund (3.77 B€) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (0.38 B€)⁴.

Focusing on Horizon 2020 (H2020) - a seven-year framework programme recently came to an end and was replaced by Horizon Europe - Italy ranks 2nd in Europe in terms of proposals presented (behind Spain), in 4th place in terms of grants won (behind Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom), in 5th place for coordinated projects (behind the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, France) and resources obtained (behind Germany, United Kingdom, France and Spain)⁵. As regards the success rate of the proposals presented, Italy (11.7%) has gradually approached the European average (12.0%), nonetheless recording a noteworthy gap from the main direct competitors, for example France (15.3%) and Germany (15.0%)⁶.

Interpreting these figures differently, regarding them as relative rather than absolute values, reveals a fairly discouraging picture. If we compare the financial contribution received through H2020 with the FTE number of active researchers, Italy ranks 14th in Europe at € 34,119⁷. Although Italy is in the middle of the ranking, albeit at a considerable distance from the top positions, the considerable productivity of the Italian research system despite the small number of researchers is a positive sign. The funding per inhabitant, however, is disappointing, with Italy languishing in 18th place⁸, a position that encourages reflection on the competitiveness of the national research system. In this respect, what stands out is the “double” delay compared to both the “research gems” (including Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Finland), small countries characterised by widespread excellence, as well as the ability to attract and enhance high quality human capital, and to the “engine countries” (Spain, Germany, United Kingdom, France), large states with their own critical mass that allows them to deploy significant “fire power”.

Among the programmes funded in the framework of H2020, researchers are attracted above all to the ERC, an instrument that supports scientific excellence through a pan-European competition between frontier research projects presented by individual researchers (Principal Investigators).

⁴ Source: European Commission data.

⁵ Source: European Commission data.

⁶ Source: European Commission data.

⁷ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data.

⁸ Source: European Commission data.



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The figures for the ERC - introduced in 2007 as the “backbone” of basic European research and implemented in FP7 and H2020 - highlight the presence of an “Italian syndrome”: the existence of a multiplicity of critical problems that determine an unexpressed potential among Italian research organizations, which are struggling to capitalise on their talents.

First of all, there is a patent lack of Italian organisations among the Top-30 Host Institutions in the history of the ERC⁹. This situation reveals the gap between Italian research organisations and the club of ERC “champions” competing for leadership on a continental scale. Looking closely at the competition in the ERC arena and considering the 12,123 ERC grants awarded in 34 countries from 2007 to 2020, Italy comes 7th in terms of the number of grants won (714) and 8th in terms of budget obtained (€ 1.05 B€)¹⁰. To mitigate for the factors of scale, the relative values can again be examined: taking the ERC grants won per million inhabitants as a reference metric, Italy drops back into 19th place (11.98)¹¹, overtaken by both the “research gems” and the previously mentioned “engine countries”.

The situation is complicated by evidence now confirmed by the figures that Italian universities are quite prolific, but their success rate is less than brilliant. Applications submitted by Italian institutions in 2020 recorded a success rate of 7.6% for StGs (vs. a European average of 13.4%) and 8.3% for CoGs (vs. a European average of 13.2%)¹², testifying to an “endemic” weakness in the quality of proposals.

Finally, to complete the unfavourable picture there is a phenomenon that has been exacerbated in recent years, which is that Italian researchers are valued but are often expatriates. Comparing the number of ERC grants won by researchers of Italian nationality with the number of grants won by Italian Host Institutions, a bleak picture emerges. In 2020, Italian researchers distinguished themselves on a European scale - ranking second in the StGs (53 grants), first in the CoGs (47) and fourth in the AdGs (¹⁴) – but many of them work permanently abroad: Italian Host Institutions

⁹ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG; period: 2007-2020.

¹⁰ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2020.

¹¹ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2020.

¹² Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG; period: 2020. NB (1): the European Commission has not yet published the data for applications received in 2020 as part of the AdG call. NB (2): the Host Institutions considered are those listed at the time the applications are presented.

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have in fact won 20 StGs, 17 CoGs and 8 AdGs¹³. Aggregating the data relating to the three main forms of ERC grants, Italy presents a net balance of -69 for 2020, placing it at the very bottom of the list of countries suffering from the brain drain that benefits countries which successfully attract leading foreign researchers, including the United Kingdom (+81), Switzerland (+39) and the Netherlands (+31)¹⁴.

Context and specific objectives of the call for proposals

Looking at the results achieved in H2020 by the two regions involved in this call, Piedmont comes 4th in terms of participations (1493 with a success rate of 13.5%) and 3rd in terms of financial contribution (537 M €); Liguria is closely behind in 7th position both in terms of the number of participations (810 with a success rate of 14.9%) and in terms of financial contribution (315 M €)¹⁵. In terms of recipients, universities (31.3%) and research centres (20.4%) in Piedmont are awarded more than half of the financial resources, and figures for Liguria are higher, at 11.3% and 45.1% of the available budget respectively¹⁶. Overall, the two regions boast several centres of national excellence, with the Top-10 Italian organisations in terms of financial contribution in H2020 including both a Piedmontese and a Ligurian organisation. The competition is however concentrated: considering Piedmont and Liguria as a single virtual region, the top 4 organisations in the ranking receive almost half (42%) of the H2020 budget¹⁷.

Looking at the regional dimension in more detail, in the history of the ERC, Piedmontese Host Institutions have achieved 37 successes (7th region in the national ranking) and Ligurian ones 51 (5th region in the national ranking)¹⁸. Compared with H2020, the ERC galaxy is even more oligopolistic: between Piedmont and Liguria only 8 institutions have received an ERC grant and,

¹³ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG; period: 2020. NB: the Host Institutions considered are those listed at the time the applications are presented.

¹⁴ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG; period: 2020. NB: the Host Institutions considered are those listed at the time the applications are presented.

¹⁵ Source: European Commission data.

¹⁶ Source: European Commission data.

¹⁷ Source: CSP processing of European Commission data.

¹⁸ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2020.



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again considering Piedmont and Liguria as a single virtual region, the first 3 institutions in the ranking have so far won 90% of the grants.¹⁹.

The context briefly outlined in the previous paragraphs reveals two priorities that are the principal reason behind this call:

- In light of the many obstacles that still stand in the way of Piedmontese and Ligurian organisations benefiting from international research funding programmes, we feel it is important to train local institutions to compete on the European stage, in order to strengthen their competitiveness, reputation and economic sustainability over time.
- Given the stiff competition that exists in the most prestigious research arenas in Europe, we want to introduce ad-hoc tools intended to enhance the best project proposals which, despite receiving a very positive assessment (e.g. being awarded the Seal of Excellence), fail to win funding, due to existing budget constraints and, at the same time, fail to attract talented researchers to Italy.

Stages

There are two time windows for the submission of applications under this call. The first deadline is set for 30 December 2021, the second for 31 March 2023.

The same application, meaning the same research project, cannot be submitted for both deadlines.

Eligible entities

The following types of entities with active operational headquarters in Piedmont and/or Liguria are eligible to take part in Target 1 and Target 2 of the call, as detailed in the following section:

¹⁹ Source: CSP processing of European Commission and Eurostat data; analysis units: StG, CoG, AdG, PoC, SyG; period: 2007-2020.

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- Universities;
- Public and private non-profit research entities;
- Public or private treatment and research institutes [*Istituti di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico (I.R.C.C.S.)*];
- Hospital Trusts and University Hospital Trusts.

The Instrumental Bodies of Compagnia di San Paolo are only allowed to take part in Target 2 of the call.

All beneficiaries of the grant must fulfil the subjective eligibility requirements pursuant to the Statute, the Regulations for Institutional Activities and the Application Guidelines of the Regulations for Institutional Activities of Compagnia di San Paolo.

Eligible initiatives and specific contents of the initiatives

Target 1 - Support competitive research

The general aim of the measure is to support high quality international projects in the field of research, enhance participation in international and European (and partly national) competitive calls and increase the ability of public and private research bodies in Liguria and Piedmont to attract funds.

The measure provides for funding to be granted to research projects which have been positively evaluated by an international funding entity, but which have not been financed due to lack of funds. Exclusively for Universities, the call will also allow candidates to apply for projects that have submitted applications under the PRIN - *Progetti di ricerca di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale* 2020, as these are to a large extent consistent with the international funding programmes covered by this Target.



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The funds granted may be used by the proposing Bodies for actions to consolidate the scientific profiles of researchers internationally, to strengthen the scientific and cross-cutting skills of research staff, including design skills, and to promote international networking activities.

Given these premises, projects not focused primarily on research, mobility projects (for example Erasmus +) and, within the ERC programme, projects related to the PoC target will not be eligible for funding.

The call is open to any internal and external staff of the Universities and Research Bodies of the two territories who have submitted a project on behalf of the entity in question, either as Principal Investigator (hereinafter referred to as PI) or manager of the applicant entity's research team stated in the "Person in charge of the proposal within the organisation" section of the specific application. If the PI or scientific manager of the team has moved to another entity, the name of the person who has taken over scientific responsibility for the project presented in response to the call may be entered.

External staff (e.g. research fellows, doctoral students, project collaborations) may also submit an application for ERC calls, provided that they have stated the research body as the host institution and that, as of the date of submission of the application, they are not employed by any other institution, whether public or private.

Each entity may submit multiple projects, even with the same PI. Several projects of the same entity may be funded, but only one project per PI.

All candidate projects for funding under this call must have characteristics that allow them to be evaluated and, therefore, allow a final evaluation report to be produced that is similar or equivalent to the Evaluation Summary Report of European projects (Horizon 2020), which reports the score achieved in relation to a maximum attributable score. If there is only a final overall judgement of the project, rather than a numerical score, the application must be accompanied by a report that states all the evaluation criteria stated in the call and explains how the proposed project satisfied them. In these cases it is preferable, but not essential, to also attach a statement by the funding entity to which the project was presented in the first instance.

Projects will be eligible if they have been submitted in response to an international call and have received a final evaluation as of 1 January 2020, with a request for financial contribution by the



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proposing entity of € 65,000 or more and a duration of at least 12 months. The same requirements apply to PRIN 2020 national projects.

Target 2 - MSCA Seal of Excellence – European H2020 Individual Fellowships and Horizon Europe Postdoctoral Fellowships

This target is intended to fund researchers who have been awarded the Seal of Excellence (SoE) in response to a “Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Horizon 2020 European Individual Fellowships and Horizon Europe Postdoctoral Fellowships” call.

The European Commission awards the Seal of Excellence to all proposals that have obtained a score of 85% or more under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions European call but which have not been funded due to limits on the available budget. The SoE certifies that the project proposal was rated excellent and is thus recommended for funding from other sources.

Compagnia di San Paolo therefore intends to offer SoE holders the opportunity to develop their research project at a Host Institution in Piedmont or Liguria.

The beneficiaries of the grant, which will constitute the Host Institutions, may therefore be different from those stated in the application presented in response to the European call, but must necessarily have active operational headquarters in Piedmont and/or Liguria.

To be eligible, the Fellow must have been awarded the SoE after taking part in the 2020 MSCA-IF "European Individual Fellowship" call. For the second closing date (31 March 2023), SoEs awarded in response to the first MSCA-Horizon Europe Postdoctoral Fellowships calls in 2021 and 2022 will also be admitted.

Projects may last a maximum of 24 months, with the exception of projects presented in the Career Restart Panel (EF-CAR), which may extend up to a maximum of 36 months.

If the Host Institution is different from the one stated in the original application submitted for the European call, any changes made to the research project (which must not be substantial) must be highlighted in the request.



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Financial provisions

The total provisions for this call amount to € 3,600,000, including € 1,800,000 intended for the first closing date of 30 December 2021 and € 1,800,000 for the second closing date of 31 March 2023.

The allocation of € 1,800,000 for each closing date is split into € 1,000,000 for Target 1 and € 800,000 for Target 2.

For both targets in this Call, the funding cannot be transferred to any entity other than the one awarded the grant.

- [Target 1 - Supporting competitive research](#)

The contribution can vary between a minimum of € 50,000 and a maximum of € 150,000.

For each project, a series of parameters will be considered, which will converge in a final score that will translate into a share of funding. This will be no less than 50,000 euros and no more than 80% of the contribution provided for within the European project or PRIN project.

In the case of ERC applications, PIs who have submitted an application under the H2020 and Horizon Europe ERC program, excluding PoCs, and who have obtained an “A” score in the first evaluation step starting from the ERC 2019 call, will be able to participate. In this case, a fixed score will be assigned that is equivalent to a contribution of € 150,000 in the case of ERCs with a single PI and € 100,000 in the case of ERC Synergy.

Each entity may submit multiple projects, even with the same PI. Several projects of the same entity may be funded, but only one project per PI.

The Evaluation Committee will establish a ranking in decreasing score order. In the event of a tie, or if projects obtain the same score, the institution with the lowest number of applications eligible for funding and the project presented by the youngest PI will be given priority.

Detailed verification of the information provided will be carried out for the winning projects, on penalty of exclusion from funding.



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- [Target 2: MSCA Seal of Excellence – European H2020 Individual Fellowships and Horizon Europe Postdoctoral Fellowships](#)

The budget of the project presented must correspond to the one presented to the European Commission and awarded the Seal of Excellence, in terms of both the amount and cost items. The final funding disbursed by the Foundation will correspond to the amount stated in the European application. Where necessary, for example if the Host Institution is different from the original application, the total will be recalculated using the coefficient for the country of Italy. Activation or not of the specific “family allowance” items and, where provided (Horizon Europe), of the “Special Needs” item, will be evaluated at the time the grant is made, based on the fellow's needs.

[How to submit applications](#)

Applications must be submitted using the “OLR online requests” procedure accessible via the Compagnia di San Paolo website homepage, making sure that the specific form for the call is selected in the “List of calls and requests” section.

Entities submitted multiple applications must complete an OLR for each research project.

[Documents required](#)

In addition to the documentation required for the OLR procedure, the following documents must be sent using the form provided by Compagnia di San Paolo where required.

- [Target 1 - Support competitive research](#)
 - Annex 1.1 - Allocation of the project to an ERC area (PE, LS, SSH) and information needed for scoring: PI, funding programme, call, acronym, project title, project duration, score or judgement of merit, maximum score expected, role (coordinator, WP leader,



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Linked Third Party), total number of partners, total man-months of personnel expected for the research entity, total man-months of personnel expected in the project, contribution requested by the research entity, total contribution requested by the project, composition (m/f) of the research group with statement of roles;

- Declaration on headed paper of the proposing entity, signed by the legal representative, certifying that the candidate project has not received other funding;
- Annex 1.2 - Plan for the use of resources, which must consider the fact that the contribution may be between 50,000 and 150,000 euros and cannot in any case exceed 80% of the contribution requested from the international funding body, as stated in Annex 1.1. The amount allocated will in any case depend on the Commission's assessment. The beneficiary entity may therefore request a restructuring based on the contribution allocated. The plan for use of the resources may extend for a maximum of 24 months.

- [Target 2: MSCA Seal of Excellence – European H2020 Individual Fellowships and Horizon Europe Postdoctoral Fellowships](#)

- Annex 2.1 - Application form, signed by the legal representative of the proposing entity and by the fellow, stating the MSCA area and declaring that, at the time of the engagement, the fellow will have no other contracts in place or that these contracts will not prevent him or her from working exclusively and full time for the MSCA;
- Fellow's CV and identity document;
- Copy of the project presented to the European Commission in response to the MSCA Call (Part and Part B);
- Copy of the Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) received from the European Commission following the evaluation, stating the final score obtained;



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- Copy of the “Seal of Excellence” certificate issued by the European Commission;

If the Host Institution is different from the one stated in the original application,

- Annex 2.2 - Statement issued by the proposing entity’s legal representative stating the conditions under which the PI will be received and hired by the organisation, as defined in the European Commission’s Annotated Model Grant Agreement (page 443 onwards²⁰).

Deadline for the submission of applications

Applications must be submitted using the “OLR online requests” procedure accessible via the Compagnia di San Paolo website homepage, making sure that the specific form for the call is selected in the “List of calls and requests” section, by the following deadlines:

- **by 1.00 p.m. at the latest on 30 December 2021, for the first closing date;**
- **by 5.00 p.m. at the latest on 31 March 2023, for the second closing date;**

Evaluation of the initiatives

Once the fulfilment of the eligibility requirements has been verified, the evaluation will be carried out by an Evaluation Committee set up for this purpose.

Participation in the Call implies acceptance of the final decision on the selection of projects and the subsequent allocation of contributions.

During the evaluation, Compagnia di San Paolo reserves the right to request any additional documentation to the information provided and to carry out checks and in-depth meetings with the proposing entity to obtain any clarifications that may be necessary.

²⁰ The reference is to the Annotated Model Grant Agreement drawn up by the European Commission for Horizon 2020, the references for the Horizon Europe MAGA will be supplied as soon as they are available.

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At the end of the evaluation, the applications admitted to receive the contribution will be funded within the limits of the budget available for each Target of the call. If the budget for a Target is not fully used, it can be assigned to the other Target.

Results

Applications admitted to the contribution for Target 1 and Target 2 will be published on the Compagnia di San Paolo website within three months of each deadline. The decisions will subsequently be formalised in a written communication.

If no mention of a project is made on the website, this should be understood as a communication from the Company of a negative outcome.

Research projects must start within 60 days and within 6 months of the grant award decision for Target 1 and Target 2 respectively.

Reporting methods

Reporting of the contribution must be sent via the Compagnia di San Paolo online platform as stated in the contribution allocation decision letter and in its attachments.

No extensions of the terms for use of the contribution will be allowed, except in exceptional cases previously authorised by Compagnia di San Paolo.

Contact details

For information and technical clarifications regarding the form completion procedure, please contact: assistenzarol@compagniadisanpaolo.it.



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For further information regarding the call for proposals, contact the Company by writing to: missionericerca@compagniadisanpaolo.it and entering “TRAPEZIO” Call for Proposals in the subject line.

Any further communications relating to the procedures for submitting projects or clarifications regarding issues of general interest may be added to the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of the Call on the Compagnia di San Paolo website, supplementing the existing text of this Call.

[This call for proposals contributes to achieving the following Sustainable Development Goals:](#)

4. Quality education

9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure





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