

SHER

Sustainable Higher Education and Research in Kosovo

Guidelines for the Fellowship Fund (see output 3, activity 3.3)

2nd Call

General Information on the Project and Overall Objective

The project Sustainable Higher Education and Research in Kosovo (SHER) aims at contributing to a sustainable, evidence-based, needs-oriented and gender-responsive Higher Education and Research sector in Kosovo that is in line with the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the European Research Area (ERA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 9. It contributes to the provision of enhanced inclusive and equitable quality of education that promotes research, innovation and internationalization taking into account gender equality and the third mission of universities.

The fellowship grants are directly related to the strategy document “Kosovo Education Strategy 2022 - 2026” (KES). Especially the “Strategic Objective 4: Improve the quality, integrity and competitiveness of higher education” which underlines the increased participation in international programs is addressed by the fellowship grants.

The fellowship grants aim at enhancing the quality of teaching, research and innovation and the internationalisation in Kosovo’s Higher Education and research sector. The fellowship grants will enable PhD students and post-doc researchers to study and carry out research in Austria.

The funding for this project is provided by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and is co-financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) of the Republic of Kosovo.

Methodology

Fellowships for PhD students and post-doc researchers are used as instruments for capacity development of Kosovar institutions and to establish long-lasting contacts within the international scientific community.

Lessons learnt from HERAS+ and SHER 1st Call

The main findings from HERAS+ and the first call of the SHER programme to be considered for the guidelines of the second SHER call are:

- Sufficient preparation time is needed between announcement of results and start of the study/research project in Austria (to allow for travel/accommodation/visa arrangements)
- Sandwich programmes proved to be very valuable for the scholars and institutions in both countries
- Demand for scholarships for PhD students who are already enrolled in Austria
- Post-docs are considerable multipliers. However, a brief justification should be sought from former scholars if they apply again for the same or a similar research project
- Cut-off dates and further specifications for considerable care responsibilities (official/written proof) should be set for applicants at the upper boundary of the age limit
- Clear communication on the maximum funding period for full PhD studies in Austria (max 36 months, also considering preceding programme HERAS+) and the need for own funds for when the fellowship ends
- PhD students who are enrolled in other countries but have an affiliation with a Kosovar institution (e.g. working contract, (medical) students in practical training in Kosovo) should also be considered for a research/study fellowship in Austria
- In order to avoid double funding and/or ensure that the PhD studies remain the focus of a fellowship, applicants with other MESTI funding within the same fiscal year or with a work contract at an Austrian institution exceeding the marginal earnings threshold will not be considered. A disclaimer will be added to the call announcement.
- The importance and benefits of re-employment need to be stressed at the home institutions

Programme Overview

Based on the positive experiences from HERAS+, the project will provide fellowship grants at PhD and post-doc level (250 months in total) including a travel lump sum.

During their studies/projects the scholars will keep close contact to Kosovar institutions (if possible, parts of the studies/projects will be performed at the home institution in form of a “sandwich programme”) in view to their further professional career at these institutions. After completing their PhD studies or their research project, SHER scholars are obliged to return and work at a Kosovar Higher Education or research institution for at least 5 years.

The OeAD will be in charge of the administration and implementation of the fellowship fund.

Specific Objective

The objective is that PhD students and post-doc researchers will contribute to the institutional capacity development of their home institutions in Kosovo by completing their PhD studies and the PhD or post-doc research at an Austrian university or research institution.

Expected result

All scholars will have completed their studies or carried out their research project abroad.

Eligible country

Kosovo

Age limit for applicants

PhD studies:

- no older than 35 (born after 15 January 1991) or exceptionally max 40 years (born after 15 January 1986) in case of considerable care responsibilities (proof required)

Post-doc researchers:

- no older than 50 years (born after 15 January 1976)

Target Group (Eligible)

a) Post-docs aiming to pursue short-term research activities in Austria who are scientific staff members of Kosovar public universities or of other public (research) institutions with Kosovar nationality.

b) Applicants holding a master's degree or PhD students already enrolled in Austria or Kosovo with Kosovar nationality. Those with proven affiliation and engagement for a public or private university or a public or private (research) institution in Kosovo will be prioritised. PhD students with Kosovar nationality enrolled in other countries but with affiliation to a Kosovar institution, e.g. work contract or in practical training, may also apply for a research stay in Austria but may not be given priority in case of a high number of valid applications (no funding of stays or studies in other countries).

Applications from underrepresented/vulnerable groups are particularly welcome. The aim is a gender ratio of at least 50:50 and a focus on members of regional universities.

Financed costs

PhD:	1.300 EUR per month (duration 1 – 12 fellowship months*) *with the possibility of extension upon request, maximum 36 months or until end of SHER programme and subject to budget availability, only if academic progress and continued supervision at host institution can be proven
Post-doc:	1.300 EUR per month (duration 1 – 3 fellowship months)
Travel costs:	500 EUR (one time)

Formal Requirements for a PhD/Post-doc application

Completed online application form (direct link will be provided in call announcement on grants.at and SHER website) including the description of the study or research proposal

The following documents must be uploaded with the application:

- Tentative **schedule** and **work plan**
- Two **letters of recommendation** by university lecturers (no specific form is required; must contain a letterhead, date and signature from the referee and a stamp of the institution / department, no older than twelve months at the time of application)
- Written **confirmation** from a professor at the Austrian target university to supervise the applicant academically
- Scan of **passport** (page with name and photo)
- Scan of university **graduation certificate** and/or **evidence of previous studies** (diploma, Master, PhD degree), scan of **enrolment certificate** (for ongoing PhD studies)
- If available: “**Confirmation by the (home) institution**”: it must be demonstrated that
 - the individual need for academic education serves the specific demands of the institution (e.g. within the development plan of the academic institution) and the development needs of Kosovo and
 - that the applicant will be (re)employed by the (home) institution after having finished the studies.
- Confirmation of the **institutional partnership** (if applicable)
- Proof of sufficient **language skills** (English and/or German)

All required documents must be enclosed to the online application. Late submission of documents past the deadline will not be considered.

Timetable

Activity	Responsible	Deadline
Call open	OeAD	October 2025 – 15.1.2026
Formality checks of applications, expert review	OeAD, experts	15.1.2026 – beginning of March 2026
Selection	Selection Board	March 2026
Announcement of results to applicants	OeAD	March 2026
Start of post-doc research and short-term PhD research	Scholars	Earliest start date: 01.05.2026 (up until spring 2027)
Start of full PhD studies	Scholars	1.10.2026

Information

The information campaign will entail an announcement to former HERAS+/SHER scholars and alumni from other OeAD programmes with Kosovar nationality via e-mail. Each fellowship call will be announced on the project website, the website of the consortium partners and the OeAD website as

well as in the Austrian grants database (grants.at). The local SHER team will promote the fellowship fund in all meetings and appointments with Kosovar universities. The OeAD will offer information and consultation for prospective applicants. The fellowship announcements will explicitly encourage members of marginalized groups to apply and there will be active promotion of the call among underrepresented groups.

Selection procedure

1) The OeAD checks the formal eligibility of the applications:

- complete and correct applications and documents
- eligibility of applicant
- meeting of deadlines

2) Review by experts

All eligible applications will be assessed by one to two external experts with relevant research background. The expert team should be gender-balanced if possible (depending on availability and academic focus)

All eligible applications will also be internally assessed by the OeAD in regard to meeting the overall and specific project objectives of the SHER project, e.g. capacity building, SDGs 4+9.

3) Final decision by the Selection Board (based on the score results from step 2)

Members of the Selection Board (gender-balanced board if possible):

- ADA: Head of Selection Board
- MESTI representative for SHER project
- OeAD representative(s) for SHER project (without vote)
- WUS-Austria

The Selection Board will aim to select a balanced portfolio of research and study projects, taking into account the objectives of the call, the quality of the applications and the experts' review.

Aspects that may be decisive when a choice between equally scored applications needs to be made:

- gender: to increase the representation of women within academic research, women will be selected preferentially in cases of equal qualification of female and male candidates
- applicants from underrepresented, vulnerable groups (such as students with disabilities, minorities, non-traditional students)
- regional universities*: to strengthen the capacities of regional universities
- projects performed as "sandwich programmes" (during the project, the scholars will keep close contact with and parts of the research will be carried out at their home institution. The SHER funding will be paid for the research parts in Austria)
- balanced overall coverage of topics and scientific disciplines, implementation of SDGs

The Selection Board will formally approve the decisions and advice the OeAD-GmbH to start the contracting process.

* other public Higher Education institutions than University of Prishtina



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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Information and contact

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