

EPFLglobaLeaders
co-funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
Doctoral Fellowships at EPFL

Application guidelines

Calls for applications:

Call 1 deadline 15 December 2020 (17:00 CET)

Call 2 deadline 15 April 2021 (17:00 CET)

Introduction

EPFL, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, is one of the most dynamic university campuses in Europe and ranks among the top 20 universities worldwide. Its mission is to provide first-rate education, foster pioneering research, and promote cutting-edge technological innovation. The EPFL community comprises more than 16'000 people, including over 10'000 students and 3'500 researchers from 120 different countries. There are in total around 2'200 doctoral candidates, and EPFL provides them a vibrant working environment.

As a world-leading scientific institution, EPFL is committed to playing a critical role in the transition towards a sustainable society based on technological innovation. This goal requires not only generating new knowledge and technology but also training responsible scientific leaders who will be able to think across boundaries and envision all-encompassing solutions to critical societal problems.

Mission

EPFLglobaLeaders is a **new and innovative doctoral fellowship programme**, which aims to attract to EPFL outstanding doctoral candidates from all over the world seeking to - and with the potential to - become leaders in the transition towards sustainable societies. The programme is designed to:

- Increase their knowledge and awareness of pressing societal questions from the very beginning of their doctoral studies;
- Increase their capacity to come up with innovative answers to global challenges;
- Prepare them to take leadership roles in private companies, academic research institutions, or non-profit organisations committed to creating a sustainable society.

To this end, the EPFLglobaLeaders programme will provide excellent doctoral candidates with the appropriate training, experience, and guidance to become the next generation of responsible engineers and science leaders. This doctoral fellowship programme is open to applicants in any discipline included in the areas of research of EPFL. Selected applicants will carry out their doctoral

studies at one of the five EPFL campuses and will benefit from a multifaceted training programme – including a secondment in the non-academic sector and a specific “[EPFLglobaLeaders Leadership training](#)”.

Calls for applications

Forty-eight (48) excellent doctoral candidates will be recruited over two calls for applications. The calls are scheduled as follows:

	Call 1	Call 2
Call opening	1 October 2020	1 February 2021
Call deadline	15 December 2020 (17:00 CET)	15 April 2021 (17:00 CET)

EPFLglobaLeaders fellowships are available in any discipline included in the research areas of EPFL. The programme is open to applicants to any of the 21 [doctoral programmes](#) available at EPFL.

The duration of an EPFLglobaLeaders doctoral fellowship is 48 months (4 years).

EPFLglobaLeaders actively promotes equal opportunities and supports gender equality. Female researchers are strongly encouraged to apply.

Eligibility criteria

The following eligibility criteria must be fulfilled:

1. Citizens of any nationality may apply.
2. Applicants must hold a Master’s degree (or equivalent)¹ before they sign their employment contract.
3. Applicants must be **Early Stage Researchers (ESR)**; by the time they sign their employment contract, they must not have completed more than four years of full-time research, and they must not have been awarded a doctoral degree.
4. Applicants must fulfil the MSCA transnational mobility rules and must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Switzerland for **more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the call’s deadline**. Exceptions to these rules are possible in order to ensure equal opportunities for applicants whose scientific career was interrupted. Therefore, the time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention, compulsory national service, maternity leave, and/or short stays such as holidays are not taken into account.

¹ See art. 4 of the “[Ordinance on the doctorate conferred by the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne](#)”



How to apply

The application procedure for EPFLglobaLeaders is integrated into the EPFL Doctoral School selection process. Therefore, applicants to the EPFLglobaLeaders programme must initially follow the same process as all applicants for a PhD at EPFL² and refer to the application guidelines provided by the doctoral programme that they have selected.

Each doctoral programme has its own application deadline; therefore applicants must check the webpage of the relevant programme for detailed information as well as the [deadline overview](#).

To be considered for the EPFLglobaLeaders programme, applicants must submit their application **before the application deadline of the EPFLglobaLeaders programme** (Call 1: 15 December 2020, 17:00 CET; Call 2: 15 April 2021, 17:00 CET).

For example:

For the Call 1 (deadline: 15 December 2020) there are three possible situations:

1. The application deadline of the chosen doctoral programme is **the same** as the EPFLglobaLeaders programme (e.g. EDMX): applicants must submit their application before 15 December 2020 (17:00 CET) at the latest.
2. The application deadline of the chosen doctoral programme is **after** the deadline of the EPFLglobaLeaders programme (e.g. EDAM for which the deadline is 15 January 2021).
 - ✓ Applicants must submit their application **before** 15 December 2020 (17:00 CET) at the latest.
 - ✓ If they apply **after** 15 December 2020 (and before 15 April 2021 (17:00 CET)), their application will be considered as part of **Call 2** of the EPFLglobaLeaders programme.
3. The application deadline of the chosen doctoral programme is **before** the deadline of the EPFLglobaLeaders programme (e.g. EDEY for which the deadline is 1 December 2020).
 - ✓ Applicants are encouraged to submit their application **before** 1 December 2020 (23:59 CET).
 - ✓ If they apply **between 1 December and 15 December 2020** (17:00 CET), they must choose the next doctoral programme deadline (for EDEY: 30 April 2021), but their application will still be considered as part of **Call 1** of the EPFLglobaLeaders programme.

Application Checklist

Applications must be submitted via the regular EPFL Doctoral School [online application form](#) and include the following information and documents:

✓ **Application to the EPFLglobaLeaders programme:**

² [Guidelines for application to a PhD at EPFL](#)



- Dedicated box must be ticked
- Mobility question must be completed
- Text box must be completed with explanation of the motivation for the EPFLglobalLeaders programme (maximum 2000 characters)

✓ **Requested information (all applicants to the EPFL doctoral programmes):**

- Personal details
- Academic background
- Doctoral programme
- Contact details of three referees³ who can supply a recommendation. These recommendations are confidential and will only be accepted if they are received via the online application platform. Each recommendation consists of a standardised form and a letter with the referee's comments.

✓ **PDF documents to upload (if not originally in English, French, German, or Italian, documents must be translated into one of these four languages):**

- Official diplomas and grade transcripts from all higher education institutions that the applicant has attended (after and excluding high school)
- Statement of objectives which clearly explains the motivation for the chosen doctoral programme (maximum 2 pages)
- Copy of passport or official identity card

Once they are submitted, applications cannot be corrected.

Selection process

Timeline

The whole selection process, from the call deadline to the final selection of the EPFLglobalLeaders grantees, takes around 6 months. Throughout this process, applicants are able to monitor the status of their application on the EPFL Doctoral School [online application platform](#) and receive email notifications for status updates.

		Call 1	Call 2
Call deadline		15 December 2020	15 April 2021
Stage 1	Selection of applicants	15 February 2021	15 June 2021
	Supervisor matching stage	30 April 2021	15 September 2021

³ The referees' recommendations are a required part of the application file and, as such, are also due by the chosen deadline. Messages will automatically be sent to referees when the application is submitted; they will then be invited to complete their recommendation online. Therefore, applicants should submit their application early enough in order to leave their referees enough time to submit their recommendation before the deadline. It is not possible to change the referee details once the application is submitted. As a courtesy, applicants should ask their referees ahead of time if they are willing to supply a recommendation letter to support the application. Applicants are notified by email when each referee has provided his/her recommendation. The system allows the applicants to send one reminder per referee.



Stage 2	Evaluation	30 May 2021	30 September 2021
	Final decision	15 June 2021	15 October 2021
	Notification to applicants	30 June 2021	30 October 2021
Start of the fellowship		At the earliest: 1 Jul. 2021 At the latest: 1 Jan. 2022	At the earliest: 1 Nov. 2021 At the latest: 1 Mar. 2022

The full selection process is divided into two stages as follows:

Stage 1: selection of applicants

1. The Programme Management Office (PMO)⁴ conducts an **eligibility** check of all applications.
2. The doctoral programme committees evaluate the applicants' level of excellence and decide on the **admissibility** of each eligible applicant to their respective doctoral programme.
3. All admissible applications are **scored** by both the doctoral programme committees and the Intersectoral Excellence Committee (IEC)⁵, based on the EPFLglobaLeaders evaluation criteria described below (see Art. 9).
4. The PMO ranks all admissible applications based on the final score received by each applicant. The final score is the average of the score provided by the doctoral programme committee and by the IEC.
5. The PMO communicates the **shortlist** of the top-ranked EPFLglobaLeaders applicants from all doctoral programmes to all EPFL laboratories for the supervisor matching stage.

Stage 2: selection of project proposals

6. The EPFL professors interested in supervising an EPFLglobaLeaders thesis **interview** the shortlisted applicants.
7. The EPFL professors select applicants and **submit** a jointly designed proposal.
8. The IEC evaluates and **scores** the proposals.
9. The PMO ranks the applications based on the IEC score.
10. A **decision meeting** is organised with all the IEC members to discuss the ranking and formally approve the granting of the EPFLglobaLeaders fellowship to the top-ranked applicants.
11. The PMO **notifies** the applicants of the outcome of the evaluation process. The applicants who are put on a reserve list are informed of their position on this list and contacted in case some of the initially selected fellows withdraw.

Evaluation criteria

⁴ The EPFLglobaLeaders programme is managed by a Programme Management Office (PMO) comprised of members from EDOC and from the Research Office. The PMO is responsible for the dissemination, management, and coordination of the EPFLglobaLeaders programme. The PMO also liaises with the European Commission.

⁵ The Intersectoral Excellence Committee (IEC) is an external international peer-review panel chosen especially for the EPFLglobaLeaders programme.

The members of both the doctoral programme committees and the IEC are asked to review and score the applications based on the following criteria:

Stage 1 – Evaluation of the applicants	
CRITERION 1 – EXCELLENCE (weight 0.7)	
Academic results	Grades, awards, Master project, publications
Reference letters	Degree, duration, and nature of the collaborations between referees and applicant; positive and negative comments; degree of enthusiasm
Statement of objectives	Originality of research ideas, quality, motivation
Additional achievements	Relevant work experience, volunteering activities, etc.
CRITERION 2 – APPLICANT’S FIT WITH EPFLglobalLeaders PROGRAMME (weight 0.3)	
Degree of motivation for the programme; ambition to pursue research addressing global sustainability challenges	
Relevant experience or demonstrated interest in sustainability	
Any other proof of readiness and ability to have a societal impact	
Stage 2 – Evaluation of the projects	
CRITERION 1 – APPLICANT’S FIT WITH EPFLglobalLeaders PROGRAMME (weight 0.3)	
Degree of motivation for the programme; ambition to pursue research addressing global sustainability challenges	
Relevant experience or demonstrated interest in sustainability	
Any other proof of readiness and ability to have a societal impact	
CRITERION 2 – VALUE ADDED OF THE EPFLglobalLeaders PROGRAMME (weight 0.3)	
Educational potential of the project for the applicant	
Duration/relevance of stays in the non-academic sector	
CRITERION 3 – QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT (weight 0.4)	
Scientific quality of the proposed research	
Project feasibility	
Project relevance for the transition towards a sustainable society	

Each criterion is scored from zero to five with one decimal place. To ensure a fair treatment of all applications and avoid grade inflation, all experts are requested to interpret the following scale rigorously:

Rating scale: 0.0 – 5.0 (including decimal points)		
5	Excellent	All relevant aspects of the criterion are successfully addressed
4	Very good	The criterion is very well addressed, but a small number of shortcomings are present
3	Good	The criterion is well addressed, but a number of shortcomings are present
2	Fair	The criterion is broadly addressed, but there are significant weaknesses
1	Poor	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses
0	Very poor	The criterion is not addressed or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information



Decision and start of the project

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of the evaluation process by the end of June 2021 (call 1) and October 2021 (call 2).

Granted applicants can begin their fellowship once they have received the official decision letter and once their contract has been signed. EPFLglobalLeaders fellows must start their PhD:

- **Call 1:** at the **earliest on 1 July 2021** and at the **latest on 1 January 2022**;
- **Call 2:** at the **earliest on 1 November 2021** and the **latest on 1 March 2022**.

Rebuttal period

All applicants have the right to a rebuttal procedure if they feel that there have been shortcomings in the way their application was evaluated and that this affected the results of the eligibility check or the final decision. The rebuttal procedure is described in the "[Rules & Regulations document](#)".