



Press release

9 September 2011

The ERC awards over €670 million to 480 emerging research leaders

The European Research Council (ERC) is supporting some 480 early-career researchers over the coming five years with grants worth up to €2 million each. In this fourth 'ERC Starting Grant' competition, just over €670 million is allocated to top talent to carry out their pioneering research in any domain throughout Europe. The number of applications increased by 42% compared to last year. The projects selected cover a wide variety of topics: from studying the exceptional properties of biological nanomaterials to the health impact of exposure to traffic noise and the role of economic media in financial crises.

Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn commented: *"ERC grants are now highly coveted in the research community, not least among younger researchers who often struggle to find funding. I am committed to ensuring that the ERC can continue funding the "cream of the crop". This helps make Europe more competitive on the world stage and contributes to making the Innovation Union a reality."*

ERC President Prof. Helga Nowotny said: *"The marked increase in applications does not come as a surprise. It confirms that demand for ERC funding continues unabatedly and I can confirm that the scientific quality remains extremely high. We need to continue to invest in our brightest talent, notably in these times of economic crisis, as they are key to Europe's future prosperity. So far, the ERC has supported over 2200 frontier researchers and their ground-breaking work in Europe, and many of these projects are starting to bear fruit. The focus of our next efforts will be on attracting more top talent from overseas. "*

In this Starting Grant call, the number of applicants has significantly increased; from 2873 last year to 4080 this year, which represents a 42% rise. The estimated total budget for the



call is an increase of almost 15% from last year. The success rate (12%) slightly decreased compared to the last years.

The average age of selected researchers is about 37 years and 21% are women. Furthermore, in total 38 different nationalities are represented this year, with German, British and Italian researchers taking the lead (see statistics below). The UK, Germany and France host the greatest number of successful applicants. The selected candidates will be based in universities or research institutions situated in 21 countries throughout Europe¹.

This year, 17 researchers are moving from the United States to Europe with their grant, out of which 14 are returning Europeans², while two are American and one is Canadian. As the ERC seeks to increase the share of researchers coming from overseas, an international strategy is currently under preparation.

The ERC grants are open to all fields of research. In this call, 46% of applicants were selected in 'Physical Sciences and Engineering', 35% in 'Life Sciences' and 19% in 'Social Sciences and Humanities'. The projects selected range from understanding how economic media interpret financial crises in the second half of 20th century, to analysing new routes and behaviours of traffickers of cultural goods, and exploring the exceptional properties of biological nanomaterials (e.g. spider silk, bones) in order to use them for other purposes. (For further information, see examples of projects below.)

Lists of selected researchers

The below lists show the proposals selected for funding. Some additional funds are expected to be confirmed which will enable the ERC to support a few more projects that are presently on a reserve list. The lists will subsequently be updated. Proposals placed on the reserve lists will only be published once their actual funding has been confirmed.

List of all selected researchers by country of host institution (in alphabetical order within each country group): http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/erc_2011_stg_results_all_domains.pdf

¹ EU Member State or "FP7 associated country" (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Faroe Islands, Former Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey)

² Nationalities: 3 Italian, 2 German, 2 British, 1 Bulgarian, 1 Greek, 1 Estonian, 1 Hungarian, 1 Irish, 1 Norwegian, 1 Portuguese.



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

- Social Sciences and Humanities:
http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/erc_2011_stg_results_sh.pdf
- Life Sciences: http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/erc_2011_stg_results_ls.pdf
- Physical Sciences and Engineering:
http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/erc_2011_stg_results_pe.pdf

Statistics – Starting Grant call 2011:

http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/erc_2011_stg_statistics.pdf

Some examples of projects selected for funding

Life Sciences

The **QUIET** project will look at possible links between long-term exposure to traffic noise and health problems such as cardio-vascular diseases. The research will mainly focus on vulnerable groups, i.e. children and elderly people. Its results will contribute to help EU Member States to draw informed action plans when tackling harmful noise incidence in people's daily lives.

(Mette Sørensen, Kraeftens Bekaempelse (Danish Cancer Society), Denmark)

The **HIV-Biochip** project will develop a portable, affordable and innovative "imaging system" to monitor AIDS/HIV infection in developing countries with limited access to diagnosis tests and treatments. The system will evaluate the efficacy of current therapies and distinguish patients who need treatment from those who do not.

(Nikos Chronis, Foundation for Research and Technology - Hellas, Greece. He is returning from the University of Michigan (USA) with his ERC grant.)

Social Sciences and Humanities

The **GTICO** project will gather and analyse data on the international illicit trade of cultural goods (motives of traffickers, types of activities such as illegal excavation, pricing structures etc). This comprehensive study will not only develop new approaches to regulate international trade of cultural goods but also help policy-makers to better define laws to fight criminal activities.

(Simon Mackenzie, University of Glasgow, UK)

The **ECONPUBLIC** project examines economic journalism and explains why media representation of economic knowledge still diverges across nations, while economies are now globalised and tend to converge. The project takes into account the impact of the historical context on the formation of economic knowledge and focuses on three major economic crises since 1945, including the 2008 economic crisis.

(Tiago Jorge Fernandes da Mata, University of Cambridge, UK)

Physical Sciences and Engineering

The **NeSS** project is meant to create very high-quality synthetic sounds and to explore new classes of sounds which can not be produced with conventional synthesis methods or acoustic instruments. This project - at crossroads between music, numerical analysis and computing - will pave the way for introducing new modelling methods into the worlds of electronic music and virtual environments.

(Stefan Bilbao, University of Edinburgh, UK)

The **BIHNSAM** project will tackle the drawbacks of currently used artificial materials by exploring biological nanomaterials with exceptional properties (e.g. spider silk, bone etc) as regards resistance, strength, toughness or adhesion. One possible outcome would be the design of the "*world's toughest composite material*" whose potential impact on materials science, the high-tech industry and ultimately the quality of life could be considerable.

(Nicola Pugno, Politecnico Di Torino, Italy)



Note to the editors

Set up in 2007 by the EU, the **European Research Council** is the first pan-European funding organisation for frontier research. It aims to stimulate scientific excellence in Europe by encouraging competition for funding between the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age. The ERC also strives to attract top researchers from anywhere in the world to come to Europe. It funds both senior research leaders ('ERC Advanced Grants') and younger, early-career top researchers ('ERC Starting Grants'). The substantial funding is awarded based on peer review evaluation and can amount to max. €2 million for a 'Starting Grant' and €3.5 million for an 'Advanced Grant'.

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

ERC Starting Grant in brief

- For early-career top researchers of any nationality and age, with 2-12 years of experience after PhD
- Funding: up to €2 million per grant for up to 5 years.
- Calls for proposals: published annually in summer with deadlines in autumn.

ERC also supports established research leaders (with significant research achievements in the past ten years). The calls for proposals for 'Advanced Grants' are generally published in autumn with deadlines in spring.

Links

ERC Press Release on outcome third Starting Grant call (2010)

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/ERC_Press_release_StG2010_results.pdf

Statistics - third Starting Grant call (2010)

http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/Statistics_StG2010.pdf

Some striking ERC-funded projects from previous years

<http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&topicID=562>

ERC website

<http://erc.europa.eu>

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