



NOVEL MSCA

POSTDOCTORAL
PROGRAMME

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

CALL 2



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GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

Contents

1 Purpose of the guide	4
2 NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme	4
2.1 Objectives of the programme	4
2.2 Research areas and themes	5
2.2.1 Research areas of the first call: The prevention and Care and Methods and Models ...	5
2.2.2 Research areas of the second call: Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing ...	6
3 The NOVEL Fellowship	7
3.1 Eligibility criteria	7
3.2 Roles, Responsibilities, and Benefits	8
3.3 Working conditions	11
3.4 Appointment conditions for researchers	12
4 How to apply	13
4.1 Call and selection schedule	13
4.2 Eligibility criteria and application requirements	14
4.2.1. Eligibility criteria	14
4.2.2 Required application documents	16
4.2.3 Research proposal and support letter	17
4.2.4 Submission	17
5 Evaluation and selection process	18
5.1.3 Selection Committee review	19
5.1.4 Final decision	20
5.1.5 Appeals & Redress	20
5.1.6 Results of the call	21
5.2 Evaluation criteria and scoring	21
6 Ethics	22
7 Further information and contacts	24



7.1 NOVEL organisation	24
7.2 Moving to Finland	24
Appendix 1: Checklist for preparing your application	26

NOVEL MSCA POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAMME

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

1 Purpose of the guide

The aim of this guide is to provide potential applicants with an overview of the NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme and NOVEL MSCA fellowship, practical information on how to apply, and a description of the evaluation process. Concerning applying, this guide should be read in combination with the NOVEL MSCA call text. If you require further information about the NOVEL MSCA Programme, please consult the contact information in section 6 of this guide.

2 NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme

NOVEL targets diverse talents and a variety of brain health research perspectives. We welcome researchers from diverse social, cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, and accommodate interdisciplinary research designs. The selected applicants will have full-time positions for three years to advance their career and make a significant impact in brain health research.

2.1 Objectives of the programme

Novel brain health solutions across four focus areas: Prevention and Care, Methods and Data, Innovation and Society, and Ethics and Well-being (NOVEL) is a globally unique interdisciplinary and intersectoral postdoctoral training. This programme is dedicated to inclusive brain health research and the associated competencies in innovation, management, leadership and ethics. Over the project's lifetime (2024-2029), NOVEL will provide training for 14 postdoctoral researchers with diverse backgrounds, who will be hosted by the research groups within the University of Eastern Finland's NEURO Research Community (NEURO RC).

NOVEL has the following objectives:

- Attracting talented researchers across Europe and globally through provision of outstanding research environments, intersectoral mentoring and secondments, and the opportunity to actively participate in and develop the world-class NEURO RC.
- Nurturing a rich pool of research excellence that has a tangible impact on society and the region.
- Reinforcing intersectoral networks involving both academic and non-academic stakeholders at regional, national, and international levels.
- Establishing itself as an international benchmark programme for interdisciplinary postdoctoral training in brain health.
- Enhancing career development opportunities for researchers, especially historically under-represented ones, within Europe and beyond.

2.2 Research areas and themes

The novelty of the NOVEL research framework lies in its multifaceted approach to addressing critical aspects of current and emerging brain health challenges. It integrates cutting-edge technology and data, collaboration between basic and clinical neuroscience, and a responsible foundation to drive innovation and societal impact. It promotes efficient knowledge transfer from science to clinic and from academia to industry. Emphasizing both commercial and social innovation, the research fosters co-innovation among diverse stakeholders and enhances well-being through patient-centered practices. The holistic and ethics-driven approach sets a visionary standard for interdisciplinary brain health research. The postdoctoral researchers are invited to plan their research activities in line with the following research areas taking into account the extraordinary possibility for interdisciplinary research proposals.

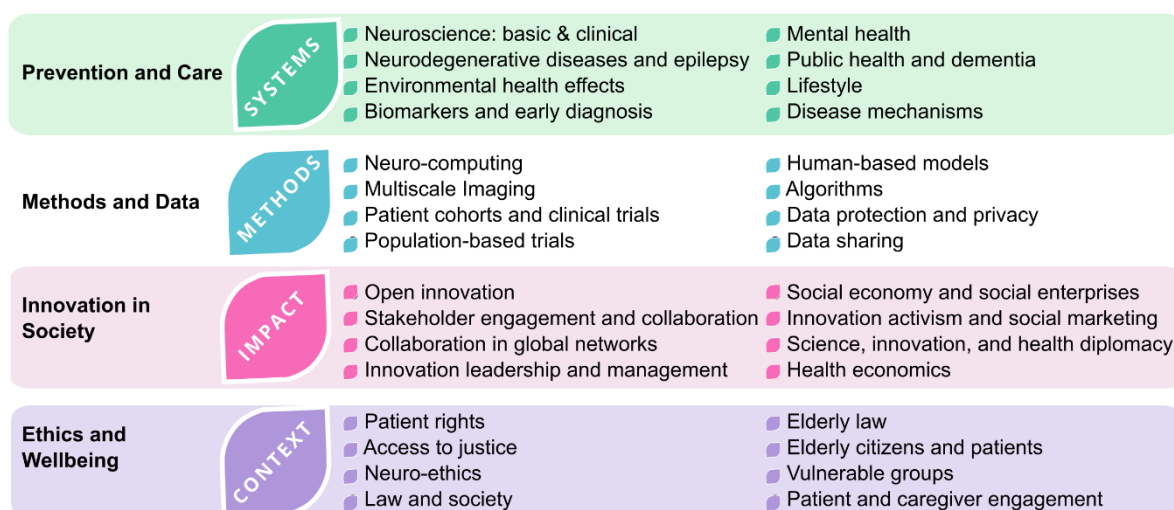


Figure 1. Outline of the NOVEL research areas

Postdoctoral researchers will be recruited into two research areas per call. The first call (open March-May 2025) focuses on the research areas of Prevention and Care as well as Methods and Data. The second call (open December 2025-February 2026) focuses on the research areas of Innovation in Society as well as Ethics and Wellbeing. Applicants will define their own research topic within these broad research areas.

2.2.1 Research areas of the first call: The prevention and Care and Methods and Models

Both genetics and environmental factors contribute to brain diseases, with environmental and lifestyle factors significantly influencing their global burden. In addition to genetics contributing to disease risk, we emphasize the importance of environmental and lifestyle factors. Effective prevention will require integrating large

exposure datasets, multi-omics, imaging, epigenetics, and advanced data analytics to uncover biomarkers, assess disease risk and suitability of treatments. This knowledge will support better personal lifestyle choices, identify therapeutic targets, reduce healthcare costs, and guide regulatory efforts to protect public health.

We also actively develop human-based disease models and technologies related to the use of human brain tissue samples. iPSC technologies, patient brain biopsies and resections, and novel human-based cellular models will be used to study genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors in brain disorders. These efforts are complemented by studies on living human brain material using electrophysiology, single-cell technologies, and omics approaches to bridge preclinical findings with clinical applications.

By integrating human-based models and advanced methodologies, we aim to uncover disease mechanisms, identify therapeutic targets, and develop novel diagnostic and prognostic tools. Approaches include omics-based analyses (transcriptomics, epigenomics, proteomics), imaging, behavioral studies, deep phenotyping, electrophysiology, histopathology, and AI-driven neuroinformatics, enabling personalized insights into brain disorders. We actively develop new AI-based approaches to answer the needs in analyzing and integrating heterogeneous brain data originating from a variety of sources and measurements

For further details, see descriptions of the research groups and supervisors on NOVEL webpage: www.uef.fi/novel.

2.2.2 Research areas of the second call: Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing

This call focuses on two research areas: Innovation in society and Ethics and wellbeing. Within these areas, we examine how brain health can be understood, supported, and improved from diverse social and economic perspectives. Our research addresses the socio-legal-economic dimensions of brain health innovation, while also exploring broader questions around ethics and wellbeing, as well as societal and economic impact.

We investigate how challenges, such as neurological disorders and mental health issues can be addressed through innovations, systems, policies, and laws that prioritize accessibility, fairness, and effectiveness. This includes examining the role of new products, services, and companies, as well as preventive measures, care paths and treatments, in improving outcomes by focusing on ethics, wellbeing, and cost-effectiveness. In these contexts, we explore Public and Patient Involvement (PPI), patient rights, and access to services and care, including the cultural, social, and economic forces guiding these activities.

By integrating perspectives from innovation research, health economics, and legal studies, we provide insights into solutions that deliver tangible value and societal impact. We are further interested in how specific brain health issues and solutions influence individuals, communities, and societies. Our research highlights existing inequalities and offers actionable strategies to make health and social care systems more inclusive. Also, we aim to ensure that health research, development, and innovation (RDI) practices and processes are responsive and supportive for diverse populations.

Our research is grounded in a wide range of research methods, including interviews, surveys, and registry data analysis, alongside participatory and co-research strategies. We also offer possibilities to use existing data sets (e.g., **SHARE**) to create new knowledge and robust evidence. By evaluating the potential of novel, inspiring approaches, we support brain health solutions that are not only effective but also equitable and rooted in the lived experience of citizens, patients, and caregivers.

For further details, see descriptions of the research groups and supervisors on NOVEL webpage: www.uef.fi/novel.

3 The NOVEL Fellowship

NOVEL will fund 14 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships during the Programme's lifetime (2024-2029). Each fellowship will have a **3-year duration**. During their fellowship, the postdoctoral researchers will undertake a research project, participate in training and career development activities and undertake at least one secondment at a partner organisation. All fellowships will be based at UEF Kuopio Campus, Finland, within the participating research groups.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

The candidates must fulfil the following eligibility criteria (detailed instructions and fillable templates for reporting these in the application are provided and must be used):

- hold a **PhD degree** (or equivalent, including a research-based thesis) by the closing of the call
- should have **less than 7 years of research experience** (full-time equivalent research work at a university or at a research institution, assessed from the date when the PhD study right ended)
- **fulfil the mobility requirement of the MSCA actions:** at the date of the call deadline, the applicant must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies) in the country of their host organization (Finland) for more than

12 months in the 36 months immediately before the reference date. Compulsory national service and/or short stays are not considered. Procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention is also not considered.

3.2 Roles, Responsibilities, and Benefits

Postdoctoral researchers in the NOVEL Programme are required to reside and carry out their work activities in Finland. The full-time positions are at the University of Eastern Finland's Kuopio campus.

During their three-year employment period, postdoctoral researchers are committed to:

Designing and conducting their cutting-edge research within one of the programme's four main research areas. The research must:

- be in line with the strategic research area of Aging and health of UEF (see UEF website for these)
- include intersectoral mobility
- collaborate with stakeholders who will assist in generating increased impact
- make use of interdisciplinary expertise of the NEURO Research Community
- exploit the cutting-edge infrastructure available at the UEF
- exploit clinical and medical databases of UEF and its partners when working in research areas 1 and 2
- plan for innovation and translational medicine approaches that have clinical or societal impact and contribute to the development of new technologies, therapies and innovation, or policies and practices aimed at improving brain health and related issues.

The postdoctoral researchers' research involves collaborating across disciplines, such as

- Working with a diverse team of scientists, including experts in neuroscience, data science, and social sciences.
- Fostering partnerships with external stakeholders such as companies, universities, patient groups, and health organizations both in Finland and internationally.

Disseminating Findings

- Publishing research findings in high quality journals and present at international conferences.
- Engaging with the broader community to communicate the significance of research.

- Showcasing achievements nationally and internationally to various stakeholders to elevate their profiles.
- Adhering to Open Science principles.

Participating in Secondments and Visits

- Each postdoctoral researcher will commit to a compulsory intersectoral secondment (lasting 2-6 months) with NOVEL partners that include e.g., health ecosystems, companies, hospitals/healthcare organizations and patient advocacy organizations.
- Additional optional secondments (2–6 months) that can be: a) an extension of the intersectoral secondment in the same organization or in a new one, b) academic secondment to another university or research institution in Finland or abroad or c) interdisciplinary internal secondment to another than their primary hosting research group within UEF.
- Short visits (1-4 weeks): learning professional, collaborative, entrepreneurial and business skills and building international, national, and regional networks with academics and stakeholders.

During secondments and short visits, postdoctoral researchers will work on their research project under the supervision of a co-supervisor from the hosting organization, benefit from their knowledge and networks, and utilize their infrastructure.

Engaging in Professional Development:

- Preparing a personal career development plan
- Receiving personalized supervision and career guidance to support professional growth.
- Engaging in a mentorship process with an intersectoral mentor. Each postdoctoral researcher is appointed a mentor. Mentoring plays a crucial role in fostering career development and helps to identify professional skills and expertise.

Undergoing training

NOVEL's training programme consists of three training pillars, as depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Outline of the NOVEL training pillars

Postdoctoral researchers are expected to participate in training activities and NOVEL community's events and meetings. **Mandatory training activities include:**

- **Regular NOVEL Workshops:** Covering research presentations, partner interactions, career coaching, and updating career and dissemination plans.
- **Strategic and Operative Project Management Coaching:** Project planning, data management, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral integration, and communication skills.
- **Social Lab with Stakeholders Summer School:** Skills for collaborating with multiple stakeholders, creating impactful, future-oriented solutions, and achieving social impact.
- **Empowering Team Leadership Summer School:** Fostering leadership and teamwork skills, with a focus on diversity, equality, and inclusivity.
- **IPR and Commercialisation Workshop:** Training in intellectual property management, patenting, and entrepreneurial strategies.
- **NOVEL Symposium:** A platform to present brain health research and innovation, aligned with the Kuopio Alzheimer Symposium in 2029.

Researchers can also access additional courses and training at UEF and are encouraged to mentor and supervise PhD candidates.

The NOVEL programme equips researchers to:

- Build strong networks
- Foster interdisciplinary research, collaboration and teamwork
- Showcase achievements nationally and internationally to elevate their profiles
- Develop transferable skills in business, ethics, leadership, and innovation
- Enhance communication, dissemination, and problem-solving abilities
- Gain expertise in supervision and teaching
- Expand mobility and cultural exposure through diverse environments

- Foster technology development and commercial awareness
- Contribute to public outreach and policymaking
- Publish in high-impact international journals
- Strengthen scientific integrity and interpersonal skills
- Promote resilience and cultural understanding

By combining rigorous training with a supportive environment, we prepare postdoctoral researchers to lead transformative projects in brain health research and beyond.

3.3 Working conditions

Postdoctoral researchers in the NOVEL Programme are required to reside and carry out their work activities in Finland. The full-time positions are at the University of Eastern Finland's Kuopio campus.

Working conditions in the NOVEL programme fully correspond to those of the national Finnish postdoctoral training system and the UEF practices. The postdoctoral researchers will receive a monthly salary in accordance with the UEF and Finnish standards, and as extra compared to the standard, a family allowance if they have a spouse and/or dependent children. The researchers' working time is specified according to the national collective agreements of researchers in Finland. **The researchers enjoy the same, rather generous government-funded benefits as any other employees in Finland.**

UEF has HR Excellence in Research status, and the guidelines Charter and Code for the Recruitment of Researchers are followed. UEF offers high-quality Central Services and the UEF administrative staff is fluent in English and in assisting international employees. The International Office coordinates, supports and develops staff mobility, assists international staff, and offers orientations. **Migration support will be offered for non-EU postdoctoral researchers, and a dedicated HR officer will assist international staff in any issues of employment throughout the intake process.**

A full-time employment contract (1612 hours work plan annually) is made with each postdoctoral researcher for three years (36 months), including a mandatory initial six-month probationary period. Employment contracts include:

- occupational health care, social security insurance (incl. sick leave), pension contributions, unemployment insurance, annual paid leave, parental benefits, meal benefits and access to university sports services. The university's occupational accident insurance policies cover all employees during work-related travel.
- office space with required IT tools (computers, email accounts, access to e-publications, etc.), open access publishing benefits, and admission to state-of-the-art research/learning infrastructure and laboratory facilities.

3.4 Appointment conditions for researchers

The following amounts will be provided for the benefit of the researcher e.g. living, mobility, travel and family allowances:

Living allowance: Following the MSCA guidelines, an average gross salary of €3980/person-month (pm) is paid to each postdoctoral researcher, of which income tax (appr. 35 %) will be deducted. The UEF covers social and health care, pension rights, unemployment compensation, holiday pay and compensation and sickness and parental benefits.

Family allowance: €100/pm (plus 21,2 % side costs) is allocated for researchers with a spouse and/or dependent children, determined when the employment contract is signed, but may also be started during employment.

Mobility allowance: €28/pm is allocated to each researcher for covering expenses incurred when relocating to Finland.

Travel allowance: €375/pm is allocated to each researcher (incl. secondments, short visit, and conference costs).

Research costs: €111/pm is allocated to each researcher, incl. lab consumables, data collection costs, publication costs, etc.

Innovation costs: €217/pm is allocated to each researcher to support innovation activities (e.g., Proof of Concept).

The salary evaluation system and the salary components are defined in the Finnish General Collective Agreement for Universities. The salary is comprised of the job requirement component and the personal performance component, and the employer may pay a job requirement bonus and/or a performance bonus. The salary will be re-evaluated in six months from the beginning of the employment contract at the latest. Thereafter, each postdoctoral researcher may ask the supervisor for salary evaluation at regular intervals, which secures the acknowledgement of work well done.

Following UEF policy, NOVEL is committed to raising awareness and competence in DEI issues, offering information on these to postdoctoral researchers and supervisors. Accessibility of physical, mental, and social environments where everyone, regardless of their personal characteristics, can act and interact equally with others, is emphasized throughout. Different treatment of individuals/groups based on their background, harassment or inappropriate treatment defined by law, agreements, or good manners is not tolerated. Primary supervisor sees that workloads are equally distributed, and salary increases are based on achievements and division of responsibilities. Career advancement of women and minority postdoctoral researchers is supported using role models, mentoring and career planning.

4 How to apply

The application process can be summarized as follows:



Figure 3. Outline of the NOVEL application process

More detailed information about the application process is described in the following sections.

4.1 Call and selection schedule

The five-stage selection process is planned with the expectation of selecting 14 postdoctoral researchers in two calls (9+5). The process started by opening 9 positions in first call (open March-May 2025) in the research areas of Prevention and Care and Methods and Data. In the second call (open Dec 2025-Feb 2026, 5 positions will be opened in the research areas of Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing.

First call: Research areas of Prevention and Care and Methods and Data
Call open /closed, from 1 March 2025 until 31 May 2025
Eligibility & ethics check, notification, appeal possibility early June, 2025
External peer review June-September, notification, appeal possibility late September 2025
Selection Committee review October 2025, notification, appeal possibility late October 2025
Ranking list; Steering Committee's final decision, notification, November 2025
Appointment procedure, November 2025 until February 2026

Table 1: Timeline for the first call round

Second call: Research areas of Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing.

Call open from 1 December 2025 until 28 February 2026
Eligibility & ethics check, notification, appeal possibility early March 2026
External peer review March - May, notification, appeal possibility late May 2026
Selection Committee review June, appeal possibility late June 2026
Ranking list, Steering Committee C final decision, notification, early July 2026
Appointment procedure, from August 2026 until November 2026

Table 2: Timeline for the second call round

The application deadline. The application deadline for the second call is February 28, 2026, at 23.59 (UTC +2/Helsinki).

4.2 Eligibility criteria and application requirements

4.2.1. Eligibility criteria

The applicants must fulfil the following eligibility criteria to be able to apply for the programme (detailed instructions and fillable forms for reporting these in the application are provided on NOVEL's webpage, www.uef.fi/novel):

- hold a **PhD degree** (or equivalent, including a research-based thesis) by the closing of the call.
- should have **less than 7 years of research experience** (full-time equivalent research work at a university or research institution, assessed from the date when the PhD study right ended).
- **fulfil the mobility requirement of the MSCA actions:** at the date of the call deadline, the applicant must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies) in the country of their host organization (Finland) for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the reference date. Compulsory national service and/or short stays are not considered. The procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention is also not considered.

Further information on the requirements for eligibility is listed on the table below. All applications will undergo an eligibility check to ensure that they meet the criteria and rules indicated in the table below. Applicants who do not meet the criteria are not eligible to apply for the NOVEL program. Applicants who are offered a position may be required to provide documentary evidence to prove that they meet these criteria. If they cannot provide this, the appointment offer will be withdrawn.

Criterion	Rule
Diploma	Diploma certificate in English (accompanied by a non-certified English translation if the initial document is not in English) OR a statement on headed paper from their supervisor/academic institution confirming that the thesis has been submitted and will be defended by the call deadline.
Research Experience	Postdoc researchers Postdocs researchers must have a less than 7 years of experience in research from the date of award of their (first) doctoral degree. The limit can be extended (in days) for the following reasons: • Maternity Leave (18 months-i.e., 548 days per child born after the PhD award date, or the exact duration of maternity leave taken, whichever is longest). • Paternity Leave (exact duration per child born after the PhD award date). • Compulsory national service. • Time spent not working in research. • Long-term sick leave (periods greater than 30 days). Applicants indicate possible extensions in the CV template. They must not provide further evidence at this stage but may be invited to provide proof at some point in the selection procedure.
MSCA Mobility Rule	Candidates must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies etc.) in the country of the prospective host university for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately by the call deadline. The following periods are not taken into account: a) compulsory national service; b) time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention; c) short stays (such as holidays): the applicant did not reside or did not have their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country during that period. Applicants indicate the country location of their residence and main activity in the Structured CV. They must not provide further evidence at this stage but may be invited to provide proof at some point in the selection procedure
Research Topic	Applicants are free in the design of their research project. However, they must present a research project pertaining to the program's overarching theme of Brain Health, connected to one of the NOVEL research areas. This must be made explicit in the application.
Nationality	The call is open to researchers of any nationality.

Status	As the NOVEL postdoc positions contain training and development component, candidates must not have a permanent position at the start of the appointment at UEF. They have to be able to work exclusively on the research training project in NOVEL. NOVEL postdocs are appointed with a full-time. They work full time unless part-time employment has been approved for personal or other reasons by the granting authority of the MSCA COFUND allowance (Research Executive Agency of the EC), UEF and the supervisor in accordance with the MSCA regulation. Candidates may be employed when applying but should resign and take up a full-time contract with reference to NOVEL at UEF when selected.
Formal application criteria	Completeness of the application, including all required supporting documents submitted before the call deadline using the application portal. All submitted documents must be in English and comply with the editing instructions and other specifications indicated below and/or stated in the application portal or the templates. Templates provided must be used. The ethics self-assessment form template must be included. The applicant carries the responsibility that all documents are correct, complete and up to date. Incomplete applications are not eligible and will not be considered. The research project must explicitly address the overarching core theme of Brain Health.

Table 3: Further information on the requirements for eligibility

4.2.2 Required application documents

The electronic application of the candidates must contain the following documents and information in English:

- electronic application form in the UEF recruitment system
- at least one support letter from a supervisor indicating technical fit of the proposal with the hosting research group.
- certified copy of the PhD degree diploma (or other certified proof of successful defence if diploma not received yet)
- Curriculum Vitae (CV) including a full list of publications and information on the length of research experience. The NOVEL template must be used.
- A Research Proposal including a Summary. The NOVEL template must be used.
- Ethical Declaration and Ethical Self-assessment. The NOVEL template must be used.
- preliminary Data Management Plan. The NOVEL template must be used.

Proof of English language proficiency may be asked if it is not indicated in the academic degrees, certificates/diplomas and in the CV, i.e., if the applicant has not completed any academic degrees in university programmes taught in English.

All the documents must be written in English and named using the last name of the applicant and the document title. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE TEMPLATES PROVIDED BY NOVEL MUST BE USED FOR THE CORRESPONDING DOCUMENTS!

You can find all templates on the [NOVEL website](#)

4.2.3 Research proposal and support letter

Application requirements include that the candidates need to:

- **contact at least one supervisor** as early as possible to discuss the technical fit of the proposed research idea with the competence and infrastructure of the hosting research group (including, e.g., equipment, lab resources, availability or possibility to access required data, and supervisory expertise). You can read more about the NOVEL research groups at UEF, including their research areas and contact details, on the [NOVEL website](#).
- If an appropriate technical fit exists, **ask for at least one support letter** to be attached to your application.
- **write a research proposal** independently before submitting the application by the given deadline. Research proposal needs to contribute to at least one research area of the NOVEL programme, and interdisciplinary and intersectoral proposals are strongly encouraged.
- **use the templates** provided (if your documents are not in English and/or if given templates and forms are not used, the application will not be processed further)
- **submit only one application** per call (if you submit many, only the application submitted first will be acknowledged)
- **commit to follow** [Horizon Europe ethical principles](#) by filling in and attaching into your application the compulsory Ethics Declaration and Ethics Self-assessment forms.

You can find needed templates and forms on [NOVEL website](#).

4.2.4 Submission

Applications must be submitted via University of Eastern Finland's electronic application system Varbi. Please doublecheck that you have attached all the required attachments. You can refer to Appendix 1 to assist you in this.

Applicants will receive confirmation on the submission of an application. Link to the

application form is on the NOVEL webpage. Please note that once the application has been submitted you can continue to make further adjustments to the application up until the end of the application period. We strongly recommend that the application is submitted as early as possible.

The application deadline for the second call is 28 February 2026 at 23.59 (UTC +2/Helsinki) Processing of applications starts immediately after the end of the application period and therefore late applications, i.e. applications sent after the application deadline or changes made to applications after the application deadline will not be considered.

5 Evaluation and selection process

5.1 Selection stages

The five-stage selection process is planned with the expectation of selecting 14 postdoctoral researchers in two calls (9+5). The process started by opening 9 positions in first call (open March-May 2025) in the research areas of Prevention and Care and Methods and Data. In second call (open Dec-Feb 2025), 5 positions will be opened in the research areas of Innovation in Society and Ethics and Wellbeing.

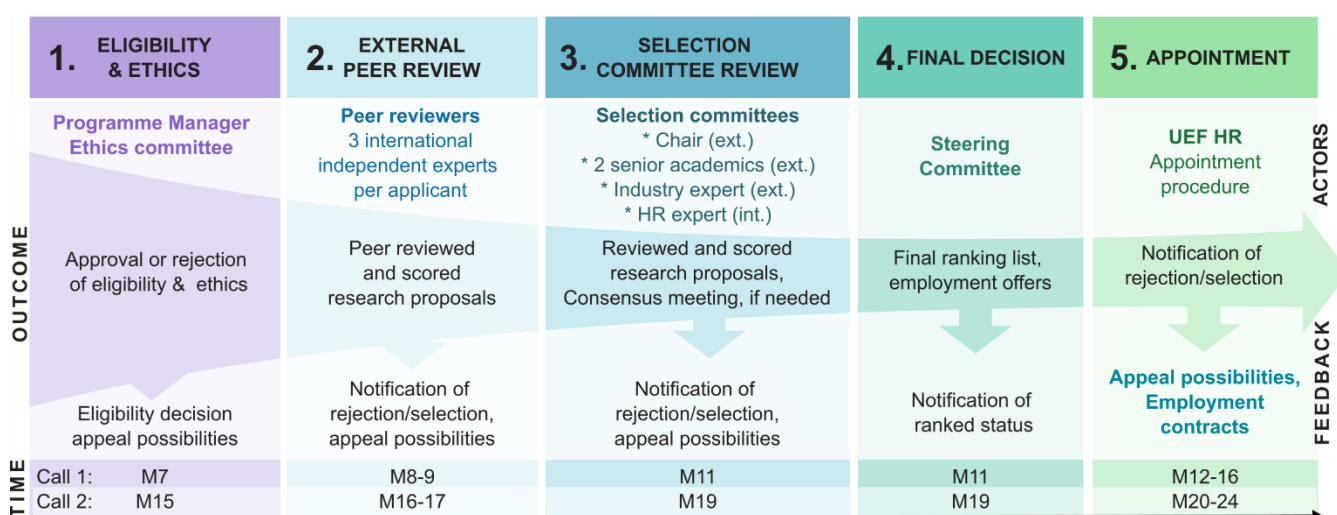


Figure 4. Outline of the NOVEL selection process

5.1.1 Eligibility check

The first step of the selection workflow is the eligibility check pursued by the **Programme Manager** to determine whether the candidates fulfil the predefined eligibility criteria. This is followed by the ethics check pursued by the **Ethics Committee** to evaluate relevant ethical aspects and infrastructure needs for the applicants'

research proposals. If needed, consultation can be asked from the **UEF Ethics Board**. Applications not meeting the pre-set criteria, lacking required documents, or having severe ethical problems will not proceed to the next stage. All eligible applicants passing the ethics check will proceed to the next stage of the selection procedure. More information about the ethical aspects of NOVEL is provided in chapter

All mandatory eligibility criteria are described in part 4.2.1 of this Guide for Applicants (Eligibility criteria). In sum the eligibility criteria are that:

- Appointees are within seven years of having received their PhD
- Appointees must meet the [MSCA mobility rule](#)
- All relevant documentation must be submitted on time

5.1.2 External Peer review

The second step is the **external peer review** conducted by international science experts with no conflict of interest with the applicants or applications. Research proposals and CVs of the applicants will be evaluated independently by **three external science experts**, who provide both numerical scoring and verbal feedback. The Project Manager will calculate the total scores as an average of the individual reviewer's scores. All candidates reaching a pre-given threshold score will proceed to the next stage. See evaluation criteria in section 5.2.

5.1.3 Selection Committee review

The third step is the **Selection Committee (SelectC) review**. Each applicant's research proposal and CV will be evaluated by one of the four dedicated SelectCs, each representing one of the NOVEL research areas.

The Selection Committees are composed of a chair, two international senior academic experts, an industry expert, and an HR expert from UEF. All members except the HR expert are external to UEF. All evaluators provide numerical scoring and verbal feedback to the applicants. The industrial expert will evaluate only section 2 (Impact).

Selection Committees will monitor that the applicants were evaluated fairly in the previous evaluation stage. In case of considerable difference (10 points or more of the maximum of 30 points available) between the scores given by the three peer reviewers in the previous stage, SelectCs discuss and may change the outlier scores within the limit of 5 points out of the maximum of 30 points that one applicant may reach. The Project Manager will calculate the total scores for each candidate as an average of the individual reviewer's scores. The candidates reaching a pre-given threshold score will proceed to the final ranking list (see next section)

5.1.4 Final decision

The fourth step is **the final ranking lists and making the final decision** by the programme's **Steering Committee (SteerC)**. The final decision is based on the weighted final scores of the applicant (External peer review 60 % and the Selection Committee review 40 % of the total scores) calculated by the Project Manager, as an average of the two stages of evaluation (the maximum weighted average score is 30 points).

If two or more candidates receive the same score, SteerC may consider the gender balance of the programme/research areas, in addition to scientific balance and the resources of the hosting research groups. In case of similar scores, the Finnish law allows the SteerC to offer the position first to a candidate representing the minority gender within the programme/research area.

The Project Manager will inform the selected postdoctoral researchers of the final decision and provide instructions on the appointment process and signing of employment contracts. The **remaining candidates will be placed on a waiting list** until the selected applicants have confirmed acceptance of the position within 10 days. In case of vacancies, the next person on the waiting list will be offered an employment contract. When all positions have been filled, the Project Manager will inform the applicants on the waiting list about the completion of the selection process.

If less than 9 positions are filled in the first call, the unfilled positions will be opened again in the second call. If any of the 14 positions remain unfilled in the two calls, a third call will be opened.

5.1.5 Appeals & Redress

Applicants will receive feedback in the different stages of the evaluation process together with information on the appeal procedure via a dedicated electronic form. Applicants have **5 days** to send complaints in each stage, which will be resolved during the following **5 days**. Feedback and appeals will be addressed by the Appeals Committee consisting of two external experts and two internal experts.

Appeal may result in one of the following outcomes:

- rejection of the request with justification and formal notification sent to the applicant or
- The request is declared admissible and justified, with corrective action being taken to allow the applicant to proceed in the evaluation process.

5.1.6 Results of the call

The successful candidates will be informed directly by email with an offer of the position. If the offer is declined or ignored for three weeks, positions will be offered instead to the top ranked applicant on the reserve list.

For transparency purposes, the names and project titles of selected Fellows are published on the NOVEL website, following confirmation that successful candidates have accepted the positions offered to them.

5.2 Evaluation criteria and scoring

Five criteria are used for evaluation: the excellence of a) the applicant, b) the research project, c) its impact, and d) its implementation and e) overall quality of the proposal. See Table 1 for focus of assessment in each evaluation category.

SCORING	EXCELLENCE OF	FOCUS OF ASSESSEMENT IN EACH EVALUATION CATEGORY
6 = Outstanding (novelty and innovation at global level) 5 = Excellent (extremely good in international comparison) 4 = Very good (only minor elements to be improved) 3 = Good (some elements need improvement) 2 = Satisfactory (substantial improvement needed)	APPLICANT	Quality of applicant at international level (considering career stage and plans). Record of scient. publications, teaching, supervision, innovation, dissemination. International networks, collaboration, awards, grants, technical competency.
	RESEARCH PROJECT	Quality and credibility of the proposed project, incl. RQ, theory and methods. Originality, ambition level of novelty. Adherence to Open Science principles. Strategic fit with UEF and NOVEL. Potential to reach/re-enforce professional maturity/independence during the fellowship. Quality and appropriateness of the proposed collaborations, within UEF, regionally and internationally.
	IMPACT of the research project	Potential of the plan to produce scientific breakthroughs and advance applicant's personal career aspirations. Quality of the proposed exploitation, dissemination, and communication strategies to academic and non-academic audiences, including publications. Quality of the planned networking activities.
	IMPLEMENTATION of the	Overall clarity, coherence, level of detail and feasibility of the work plan, work packages and the workflow.

1 = Poor (includes severe intrinsic weaknesses)	research project	Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources, project management structure, and the risk management plan. Feasibility of completion within the 36-month fellowship.
	OVERALL ASSESSMENT	Overall quality, coherence and comprehensiveness of the plans and competence. Acknowledgement of mobility and diversity as a potentially valuable contribution to the applicant's professional development and the NOVEL community.

Table 2: Evaluation Criteria

The peer reviewers and Selection Committee evaluators are requested to score each of the specific four criteria and provide a separate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the research proposal as whole, using a scale from 1 to 6 (see table one for details of scoring). The overall score should not be the simple mathematical average of the other sub-ratings, but additional valuable aspects can be acknowledged in that, e.g., concerning applicants' professional development.

Evaluators are also requested to comment (not score) on the ethical aspects of the plan and the one-page preliminary Data Management Plan (DMP). The project manager will calculate the average scores for each applicant in all stages of the evaluation.

In the External peer review, the candidates must reach **a threshold of 15 points** in the total average score (30) to proceed to the next stage.

In the Selection Committee review, **a threshold of 20 points** in the total average score (30) is needed to proceed to the final ranking list. In final ranking, the weight of the External peer review score is 60 % and the weight of the Selection Committee review score is 40 % of the final total score.

6 Ethics

The NOVEL program operates with respect to the highest standards of research integrity and ethical conduct as described in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the Global Code of Conduct. Furthermore, it endorses the ethical principles of Horizon Europe as outlined in the Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe. All activities carried out within the program shall comply with the above principles and must comply with relevant national, EU and international legislations.

For more detailed information on how to fill in the ethics self-assessment component of the application, please consult the Horizon Europe guidance document: [How to complete your ethics self assessment](#)

The following activities are not eligible for EU funding and cannot therefore be included in the proposals:

- Activities directed at human cloning for reproductive purposes.
- Activities intended to modify the genetic make-up of human beings that could make such changes heritable (apart from research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads, which may be financed).
- Activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purposes of research or stem cell procurement, including the technique of somatic cell nuclear transfer.
- Activities that lead to the destruction of human embryos.

Ethical issues will be addressed at different stages in the application and selection process:

- As part of the application, applicants are requested to fill out an ethics self-assessment form to identify ethical matters relating to their research project, followed by some open-ended questions to elaborate on potential ethics and diversity matters. The template document is available on the NOVEL website.
- It is advisable to complete the ethics self-assessment form well before the call deadline because answering some of the questions might require consultation from the supervisor(s).
- The Ethics Committee delegates will carry out an eligibility check on the submitted self-assessments.

Eligibility depends on the completion of the ethics checklist, compliance with local requirements and an indication of ethical issues conform the project.

- Successful applicants will be required to review their initial ethics checklist with their supervisor within the first month of their appointment. The supervisor will guide the postdoc through the appropriate ethical approval process by filling out a research ethics application.
- Any project assessed to necessitate ethical approval must be in receipt of ethical authorization before the corresponding element of the project may start.

It is the applicant's responsibility to identify in the ethical self-assessment form any potential ethical issue(s), and to indicate how these aspects will be addressed. This responsibility extends to the duration of the appointment of successful applicants and includes the notification of any newly arising ethical issue(s).

Successful applicants, as members of the NOVEL community, will be expected to uphold the NOVEL values and behave in ways that are consistent with the NOVEL Code of Conduct, and where the behavior of others falls short, to encourage them to do the same.

Important

The ethics self-assessment form must be filled in regardless of whether or not ethical issues are identified in the project. If there is nothing to be reported, it should be stated in the self-assessment. Failure to comply will lead to rejection of the proposal during the eligibility check (step 1).

7 Further information and contacts

For more information on the NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme, please see the programme website: www.uef.fi/novel.

Applicants can follow the status of the selection process at the Programme's website. During the submission phase, the online recruitment system (Varbi) sends an automatic email confirming the successful submission of the application. All evaluated applicants will be notified of their selection status, providing information about their external evaluation results along with details about the appeal procedures.

Further inquiries related to NOVEL and application process can be directed to the following address: novel@uef.fi.

7.1 NOVEL organisation

- Coordinator, Professor Tarja Malm
- Co-coordinator, Professor Päivi Eriksson
- Programme Manager, Paula Inkeroinen
- Impact Manager, Piritta Parkkari

7.2 Moving to Finland

All non-EU citizens planning to work or stay in Finland for more than 90 days must apply for a residence permit from the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) before their arrival. If accepted to the NOVEL MSCA Postdoctoral Programme, we recommend you start the residence permit application process at least 3 months prior to your planned arrival in Finland.

If you are a citizen of an EU country, Liechtenstein or Switzerland, you do not need a residence permit to stay in Finland. However, if you live in Finland for over 90 days, you must register your right of residence. You are allowed start working as soon as you have arrived in Finland. Please make sure your passport is valid.

As a Nordic citizen, you are allowed to arrive and work without a residence permit. However, if your stay in Finland exceeds six months you need to register as a resident within one month of moving to Finland.

Helpful information for a smooth entry into the UEF community has been gathered in the UEF website: <https://www.uef.fi/en/internationalstaff>

Information about immigration formalities is available on the following websites:

- Moving to Finland: <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/moving-to-finland>
- Finnish Immigration Service: <https://migri.fi/en/home>

Appendix 1: Checklist for preparing your application

Applicants may use the following checklist of obligatory requirements and documents before submitting their application. You can download the necessary documents from NOVEL's webpage (www.uef.fi/novel).

Obligatory requirements

☐	PhD PhD Doctoral degree must be awarded by the call deadline. The applicant must not have more than 7 years of academic experience after receiving their PhD.
☐	MSCA Mobility Rule Applicants must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Finland for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the call deadline.
☐	Research aims to improve brain health and related issues.
☐	The research topic aligns with at least one of the research areas of the programme.
☐	Compliance with UEF policies and with local law.
☐	Full-time dedication (1,612 hours/year) to research and training activities, unless duly justified.
☐	Commitment to a mandatory intersectoral secondment, if accepted to the programme.
☐	Commitment to move to work in Kuopio Campus, Finland, if accepted to the programme.
☐	Adherence to the principles of Open Science, provision of immediate Open Access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications of research and ensuring all research data is managed responsibly, in line with FAIR principles

Documents

☐	Submitted online application
☐	Curriculum Vitae including a list of publications. NOVEL template must be used.
☐	Research Proposal including a summary. NOVEL template must be used.
☐	Copy of the Doctoral Certificate in English.

☐	At least one support letter from a supervisor indicating technical fit of the proposal with the hosting research group. NOVEL template must be used.
☐	Ethics Self-Assessment form & Infrastructure table. NOVEL template must be used.
☐	Preliminary Data Management Plan. NOVEL template must be used.