MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship vs ERC Starting Grant

Which funding opportunity fits your research career?

Both the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowship (MSCA PF)** and the **European Research Council Starting Grant (ERC StG)** support excellent researchers under Horizon Europe.

	MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship	**ERC Starting Grant**
Main Purpose	Training, mobility, career development	Research independence and scientific leadership
Target Researcher	Postdoctoral researchers seeking new skills and experience	Researchers ready to establish themselves as independent leaders
Career Stage	0-8 years full time research experience after PhD	0-10 years after PhD
Duration	1–2 years (European) 2-3 years (Global)	Up to 5 years
Funding Scale		Up to €1.5 million (+ additional funding in some cases)

	Unit costs vary according to the country. Average project budget is € 200k	
Mobility Requirement	Mandatory international mobility	No mobility requirement
Research Leadership	Research conducted under supervision	Principal Investigator leads project and team
Evaluation Focus	Excellence, Impact, Implementation	Scientific Excellence
Project Scope	Research excellence and skills development	Ambitious, high-risk/high-gain frontier research

MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship

Best for researchers who want to:

✅ Gain international research experience

✅ Develop new scientific and transferable skills

✅ Benefit from structured supervision and mentoring

✅ Strengthen their CV for future independent funding

✅ Starting to build their research independence

Key Features

- Strong emphasis on training and career development
- Mandatory international mobility
- Individual fellowship focused on the fellow's development
- Excellent stepping stone towards future leadership grants

ERC Starting Grant

Best for researchers who:

✅ Have an established scientific track record

✅ Demonstrate research independence

✅ Have a bold, innovative research vision

✅ Want to build and lead a research team

✅ Aim to become a recognised research leader

Key Features

- Focus on groundbreaking frontier research
- Full scientific independence
- Large-scale, flexible funding
- Opportunity to establish long-term research leadership

What do they have in common?

Both schemes:

- Fund excellent researchers through Horizon Europe.
- Are open to researchers of any nationality.
- Require a host institution in an EU Member State or Associated Country.
- Use international peer review.
- Promote excellence and strengthen the European Research Area.

Choose MSCA PF if:

- You need additional training and skills development.
- You want to expand your network through mobility.
- You are still building your research independence.
- Your project supports your career development goals.

Choose ERC StG if:

- You have frontier research idea.
- You have a strong publication and achievement record.
- You are ready to lead a team and manage significant funding.
- Your research aims to push the boundaries of knowledge.

A career pathway, not a competition

Many researchers use an **MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship** to develop expertise, gain international experience, and build a competitive profile before successfully applying for an **ERC Starting Grant** later in their career.

MSCA PF → Research Independence → ERC Starting Grant

MSCA PF develops researchers. ERC StG develops research leaders.

The best choice depends on the career stage, track record, and long-term research ambitions.

Find out more:

MSCA PF

ERC StG

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. This document is an UNOFFICIAL document prepared by RADIANCE and mERCury projects, the EU-funded projects of National Contact Points (NCP) for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and European Research Council (ERC).