



## **UNIFI4FUTURE Call for Applications – 2026 Edition**

### **University of Florence Call for the development of innovative and ambitious project proposals to be submitted under the European Research Council (ERC) funding programme – Starting Grant scheme, with the University of Florence acting as Host Institution**

#### **Article 1 – Purpose and Scope of the Call**

The UNIFI4FUTURE call aims to enhance research excellence and strengthen the competitiveness of the University of Florence in participating in the European Research Council (ERC) funding programme, Starting Grant scheme.

To this end, the University of Florence intends to invest institutional resources to support outstanding early-career researchers of any nationality who wish to submit a project proposal in response to the ERC Starting Grant call. Specifically, these resources are intended to fund up to five research projects to be carried out within the University's Departments, with the objective of supporting the development of innovative and ambitious research proposals capable of going beyond the state of the art in the relevant research field and achieving competitiveness within the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant programme.

Successful applicants shall therefore undertake a research pathway aimed at submitting a project proposal as Principal Investigator under the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant scheme, indicating the University of Florence as Host Institution, except in duly justified cases of force majeure or objective impossibility.

Selected candidates will benefit from the scientific support provided by the University ERC Task Force and from the technical-administrative support offered by the European and International Research Unit – Direct Funding Office, for the preparation of their ERC Starting Grant proposals, as detailed in the service description attached to this call (Annex A UNIFI – Our Services).

#### **Article 2 – Financial Coverage**

The total budget available for the 2026 edition of the UNIFI4FUTURE initiative amounts to €350,000.00. Funded projects will have a duration of 18 months, from 1 October 2026 to 31 March 2028.

Each selected project will receive a maximum contribution of €80,000.00, of which €60,000.00 (gross employer cost) will be allocated to the recruitment of the selected candidate through a dedicated 18-month Postdoctoral appointment (*Incarico post-doc*), and up to €20,000.00 will be allocated to cover research-related expenses aimed at supporting the development of the project proposal (such as consumables, mobility costs, and publication expenses).

The portion of funding allocated to research expenses will be assigned to each project, taking into account the justified requests submitted by candidates at the application stage, at the sole discretion

of the Evaluation Committee. Requests may be approved within the limits of the overall budget availability referred to in this Article.

Postdoctoral appointments will be activated in accordance with Article 22-bis of Italian Law No. 240 of 30 December 2010 and will be hosted by the Department indicated at the application stage. The Director of the hosting Department will act as the institutional contact person for the research project.

### **Article 3 – Eligible Applicants**

Researchers holding a PhD degree, or an equivalent qualification obtained abroad (recognised as equivalent solely for the purpose of awarding the post-doctoral position by the evaluation committee), are eligible to apply.

The degree must have been obtained within the time window between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2025, with the possibility of extension in the following cases, in accordance with the rules of the European Research Council (ERC):

- Maternity leave: automatic extension of 18 months for each child born or adopted before or after the PhD award.
- Paternity leave: extension equal to the actual duration of the leave, supported by appropriate documentation.
- Compulsory military service: extension equal to the duration of the service.
- Serious illness or long-term medical treatment (of the candidate or of dependants): extension equal to the certified period during which research activity was interrupted.

Applicants must also demonstrate the ability to conduct independent research, evidenced by at least one scientific publication as main author or without the participation of their PhD supervisor. Applicants are required to submit a radically innovative research idea, capable of substantially advancing the state of the art in the proposed field of investigation.

All eligibility requirements must be fulfilled by the deadline of the call.

The Administration reserves the right, at any stage, to exclude candidates from the selection procedure by reasoned decision if the required eligibility criteria are not met.

Each candidate may submit only one application in response to this call.

### **Article 4 – Characteristics of the projects**

Applicants are required to develop an 18-month research project to be carried out within the framework of the UNIFI4FUTURE initiative. The project is conceived as a research pathway aimed at preparing and maturing a proposal aligned with the criteria of the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant scheme.

Accordingly, proposals must consist of frontier research projects based on a bottom-up approach, addressing new or emerging fields and introducing unconventional and innovative approaches capable of advancing knowledge beyond the current state of the art.

The project will be hosted by the University of Florence, specifically within a Department whose research profile is consistent with the proposed topic and suitable for the implementation of the planned activities.

For this purpose, at the time of submission of the application — prepared according to the template attached to this call (Annex 1 – Application Form) — applicants must include a Letter of Intent signed by the Director of the selected Department. The letter must confirm the department’s willingness to host the candidate for the implementation of the UNIFI4FUTURE project and specify the spaces, facilities, and infrastructures that will be made available. The document must be prepared using the template provided with this call (Annex 2 – Host Department Letter).

To facilitate the identification of and communication with potential host departments, an overview of the University’s Departments is provided, including their main research areas and relevant contact persons (Annex B – Departments Information Sheet 2026).

#### **Article 5 – Application Procedure and Submission Deadline**

Applications to this Call must be submitted in English, using the template provided in this call (Annex 1 – Application Form), starting from 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026 exclusively through the dedicated online platform available at: <https://sol.unifi.it/bandiricerca>.

The deadline for submission is strictly set for 11<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

The date and time of submission will be certified by the online system, which will automatically prevent any modification after the deadline has expired. No other forms of submission or transmission of applications will be accepted. Applicants must access the platform using their University of Florence credentials; candidates who do not possess such credentials must request them by writing to: [ricercaue@unifi.it](mailto:ricercaue@unifi.it) no later than 4<sup>th</sup> May 2026, 1 PM.

The application for participation (Annex 1 – Application Form), which must be completed in full and exclusively in English, together with all required attachments (to be uploaded in PDF format via the online platform), must include the following information and documents, under penalty of exclusion:

- i. Personal and contact details: name, surname, tax identification number (if applicable), gender, place and date of birth, nationality, citizenship, residence, email address, and telephone number (Annex 1 – Application Form, *Personal Data* section);
- ii. Career requirements: information concerning the PhD degree, including the exact date of award, thesis title, and awarding institution (Annex 1 – Application Form, *Career* section);
- iii. Curriculum Vitae and Track Record (maximum length: 4 pages): professional identifiers (ORCID/Researcher ID), educational background, academic and research positions held, main research achievements, and scientific recognitions (Annex 1 – Application Form, *Curriculum Vitae and Track Record* section), together with a



- detailed indication of participation in projects funded by the European Commission or other funding bodies (Annex 1 – Application Form, *Appendix: Research Funding Track Record*);
- iv. Project information: indication of the hosting Department within the University where the project will be carried out; project acronym and title (maximum 500 characters); identification of one or two relevant ERC panels, accompanied by 2–4 CUN keywords and a set of free keywords (from 1 to 10 terms); project abstract (maximum 1,500 characters); detailed project description (maximum 8,000 characters); financial plan, including the requested budget (up to a maximum of €20,000) with a brief justification of costs (Annex 1 – Application Form, *Project Overview and Research Development* section);
- v. Host Department Letter of Intent (Annex 2 – Host Department Letter): a commitment letter signed by the Director of the selected department, drafted in English using the provided template. Through this document, the Department confirms its willingness to host the candidate, guarantees access to the necessary facilities and infrastructures, and commits to activating the Post-doctoral Position in the event of funding. The document must be completed in full and uploaded in PDF format through the online platform;
- vi. Self-declaration (Annex 3 – Affidavit): a declaration pursuant to Italian Presidential Decree DPR 445/2000, through which the applicant certifies under their own responsibility:
- Scientific and career requirements: possession of a PhD within the indicated eligibility window (or commitment to obtain recognition of an equivalent foreign degree), authorship of at least one publication as main author or without the PhD supervisor, and absence of restrictions preventing submission to the ERC Starting Grant 2028 call;
  - Commitments towards the University: commitment to designate the University of Florence as Host Institution for the future ERC proposal and acknowledgement that any resulting contract will be regulated under the Post-doctoral Appointment framework (Art. 22-bis, Law No. 240/2010);
  - Absence of incompatibilities: confirmation of not having previously held RTT contracts, not being employed on a permanent basis at universities or research institutions, compliance with incompatibility and non-cumulation rules, absence of dismissal from public employment, and absence of kinship or affinity up to the fourth degree with members of University governing bodies or academic staff of the hosting Department or the University;
  - Personal and legal requirements: full enjoyment of civil and political rights,



absence of criminal convictions or pending charges (or declaration thereof), and designation of a digital domicile for official communications;

- Research standards and principles: compliance with the DNSH environmental principle, adherence to regulations on equal treatment, transparency and publicity, commitment to ensure Open Access to research results, and acceptance of confidentiality and personal data protection obligations.

The declaration concludes with consent to the processing of personal and sensitive data and acknowledgement of the University's right to carry out ex officio checks on the accuracy of the statements provided. The document must be completed in full and uploaded in PDF format through the online platform.

Failure to comply with any of the above-mentioned requirements shall be grounds for inadmissibility of the application.

Each candidate may submit only one application for participation in this Call, under penalty of exclusion.

All communications relating to the selection shall be published, with legal notification effect, on the Albo Ufficiale of the University of Florence: <https://www.unifi.it/albo-ufficiale.html>.

The Call and the related application forms are available on the University website at the following address: [www.unifi.it](http://www.unifi.it).

#### **Article 6 – Exclusion Criteria**

Applicants shall be excluded from the selection procedure if they:

- i. have submitted their application after the deadline specified in Article 5;
- ii. have failed to provide the required declarations concerning eligibility requirements, or have submitted false or non-compliant declarations, certifications, and/or documentation;
- iii. have resulted as winners in previous editions of the UNIFI4FUTURE call;
- iv. are, at the deadline of this call, subject to restrictions on submitting ERC proposals resulting from previous negative evaluations, in particular applicants who obtained a “C” **score** in the ERC 2026 call, in accordance with the applicable ERC Work Programme.

Applicants shall in any case be excluded from the selection procedure if they fall under any of the following conditions:

- they hold a permanent position at a university, public research institution, or institution whose advanced scientific diploma is legally recognised as equivalent to a PhD pursuant to Article 74, paragraph 4, of Presidential Decree No. 382 of 11 July 1980;
- they have previously held a fixed-term Researcher position (RTT) pursuant to Article 24 of Law No. 240/2010, as amended by Decree Law No. 36/2022 converted into Law No. 79/2022;

- they have a kinship or affinity relationship up to the fourth degree (inclusive) with a professor affiliated with the hosting Department, the Rector, the General Director, a member of the University Board of Directors, or any member of the Evaluation Committee.

The Administration reserves the right to adopt, at any time, a formal exclusion decision in cases where the required eligibility criteria are not met.

The Administration will carry out checks to verify the accuracy and truthfulness of the self-declarations submitted by applicants.

#### **Article 7 – Evaluation Committee**

The Evaluation Committee, appointed after the deadline of the call by Rector's Decree, shall consist of at least five members selected from among the University's permanent academic and research staff, with scientific expertise in fields related to the topics of the submitted projects.

Members of the Committee shall submit a declaration certifying:

- i. the absence of conflicts of interest and compliance with ethical and confidentiality principles (pursuant to Articles 46 and 47 of Presidential Decree No. 445 of 28 December 2000);
- ii. the absence of research collaborations with the applicants during the five years preceding the publication of this call;
- iii. the absence of scientific publications co-authored with the applicants during the five years preceding the publication of this call;
- iv. the absence of criminal convictions, including non-final judgments, for offences provided for under Chapter I, Title II, Book II of the Italian Criminal Code.

With the support of the European and International Research Unit – Grant Office, the Evaluation Committee shall verify compliance with the eligibility requirements within 60 days following the deadline of this call.

For the sole purposes of participation in this selection procedure, the Committee shall assess the equivalence of academic qualifications obtained abroad with the corresponding degrees awarded in Italy.

#### **Article 8 – Selection procedure and Ranking**

The selection procedure will be carried out in two stages.

The first stage, based on qualifications, will assess the applicant's profile (evaluation of the CV and Track Record) and verify the alignment of the proposed project with the scientific requirements of the ERC Starting Grant call, with the aim of determining its competitive potential.

The second stage will consist of an interview, aimed at assessing the innovativeness, ambition, and potential scientific impact of the project, as well as its robustness, methodological coherence, and

feasibility. During the interview, the candidate's communication skills and clarity of presentation will also be evaluated.

Only candidates who obtain a minimum score of 35 points in the first evaluation stage, according to the evaluation criteria set out in Article 9 of this call, will be admitted to the interview phase. The interview will be conducted entirely in English.

The interview procedures, including dates and times, will be communicated by email to eligible candidates. During the interview, candidates will be required to present their research project through a short presentation lasting no more than 8 minutes, followed by questions from the Evaluation Committee.

Following completion of the interviews, the Evaluation Committee referred to in Article 7 will establish a merit ranking, listing candidates in descending order based on their final score. Candidates obtaining an overall score of at least 70/100 will be included in the ranking.

In the event of equal scores, preference will be given according to the following criteria:

- i. membership of an underrepresented gender;
- ii. younger age.

The candidates obtaining the highest scores, up to a maximum of five, will be selected as winners of the evaluation procedure.

The merit ranking will be formally approved by Rector's Decree.

The Administration reserves the right to carry out all necessary checks concerning the declarations submitted by applicants. The start of the research activity is conditional upon verification of the required eligibility criteria.

Each selected candidate will enter a Post-doctoral Appointment contract, to be signed by the candidate and the Director of the hosting department.

#### **Article 9 – Evaluation Criteria**

The Evaluation Committee may assign to each candidate a maximum total score of 100 points, of which up to 50 points will be allocated to the first evaluation stage (assessment of qualifications and ERC potential of the proposed project) and up to 50 points to the second evaluation stage (overall assessment of the individual project, research proposal, and interview). Scores will be awarded according to the following evaluation criteria:

##### **1. First Evaluation Stage:**

###### **I. Applicant's Profile (assessment of CV and Track Record) – *maximum 20 points***

In assessing the applicant's profile, particular consideration will be given to:

- scientific production (quality, quantity, and level of independence);
- presentations and contributions at international scientific conferences;
- positions held, responsibilities, recognitions, awards, and patents;
- involvement and prior experience in projects submitted to and/or funded under



European Commission programmes.

II. Alignment of the Project with the ERC Starting Grant requirements – *maximum 30 points*

2. Second Evaluation Stage:

Overall assessment of the interview and the project, conceived as a research pathway aimed at developing a proposal aligned with the criteria of the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant scheme – *maximum 50 points*.

In evaluating the project and the interview, particular consideration will be given to:

- Innovativeness, ambition, and potential scientific impact – *maximum 20 points*;
- Methodology, robustness, and feasibility – *maximum 20 points*;
- Communication skills and clarity of presentation of the applicant – *maximum 10 points*.

#### **Article 10 – Monitoring and Evaluation of Projects Results**

Selected candidates are required to submit, by the end of the sixth month of activity, a detailed scientific progress report. This document must clearly describe both the progress of the research activities carried out within the hosting Department and the advancement of the preparation of the ERC proposal.

The report must be co-signed by the Director of the hosting Department and will be evaluated by the Evaluation Committee established under this call. The report will also be shared, for information purposes, with the University ERC Task Force.

At the end of the funding period, selected candidates shall submit a final report summarising the overall scientific results achieved and the final status of the project proposal submitted to the European Research Council. The report must provide evidence of the achievement of the objectives set out in this call and describe the impact of the research activity on the scientific profile of the selected candidate.

The final report must be co-signed by the Director of the hosting Department and will be evaluated by the Evaluation Committee established under this call. The report will also be transmitted, for information purposes, to the University ERC Task Force.

#### **Article 11 – Processing of Personal Data**

In compliance with the principles of lawfulness, fairness, transparency, adequacy, relevance, and necessity set out in Article 5(1) of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR), and pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 196 of 30 June 2003, as amended by Legislative Decree No. 101 of 10 August 2018, laying down provisions for the adaptation of national legislation to the GDPR, the University of Florence, acting as Data Controller, will process the personal data provided by applicants exclusively for purposes

related to the management and implementation of the present selection procedure and in accordance with the applicable legal provisions.

The provision of personal data is mandatory for participation in the selection procedure. Failure to provide such data may result in exclusion from the procedure.

The Data Protection Officer (DPO) of the University of Florence is Dr. Massimo Benedetti, Head of the General and Legal Affairs Division, Via G. La Pira 4, Florence, Italy, tel. +39 055 2757667, email: [privacy@adm.unifi.it](mailto:privacy@adm.unifi.it). Further information on the processing of personal data is available at the following link: [https://www.unifi.it/upload/sub/protezionedati/Informativa\\_SELEZIONI.pdf](https://www.unifi.it/upload/sub/protezionedati/Informativa_SELEZIONI.pdf)

#### **Article 12 – Administrative Unit and Person Responsible for the Procedure**

The administrative unit responsible for this call is the European and International Research Unit – Grant Office. The person responsible for the administrative procedure is Dr. Eleonora Agresti, Viale Morgagni 40/44, 50143 Florence (Italy); tel. +39 055 2751909; email: [eleonora.agresti@unifi.it](mailto:eleonora.agresti@unifi.it)

#### **Article 13 – Final Provisions and Publication**

For matters not expressly provided for in this call, reference shall be made to the applicable laws and regulations currently in force.

The use of the unmarked masculine form in this call is intended solely to ensure clarity and simplicity in drafting and shall be understood as referring to all genders.

The call will be published on the Official Notice Board of the University of Florence and on the EURAXESS portal of the European Commission.

Florence,

THE RECTOR

*Prof. Alessandra Petrucci*