

Description

Funding is essential for research. Without funding, scientists and researchers cannot make the breakthroughs that society relies on to progress. Horizon 2020 is a European initiative that has provided significant funding to researchers throughout Europe. However, many researchers have been concerned about the future of its funding. The European Research Council (ERC) has announced to provide 653 million euros for scientists and researchers worldwide.

Brexit and Horizon 2020

UK researchers have been worrying about being cut off from Horizon 2020 funding as Brexit negotiations drag on. While the UK government pledged to underwrite Horizon 2020 grants through March 2019, the European Union (EU) warned that a hard Brexit would mean no more funding from the program to UK researchers. There has also been uncertainty over the European Union Parliament's commitment to research funding.

In October 2017, European research ministers agreed that funding for research should increase. However, this agreement was not followed by a budget increase. During follow-up meetings, the EU Parliament reaffirmed its commitment to increasing research funding. Therefore, the announcement of ERC comes as quite a pleasant surprise to EU researchers.

Fierce Competition for ERC Grant Funding

The grants from ERC are part of a larger funding package of €30 billion from the Horizon 2020 program earmarked for 2018–2020. Horizon 2020 aims to support research in critical areas such as climate change, migration, clean energy, and more. The program has already led to the discovery of exoplanets, the Higgs boson, and gravitational waves. The €653 million euro in advanced grants awarded for the first round this year will benefit about 269 researchers across Europe. Competition was fierce, with only 12% of proposals getting accepted.

Recipients include nationals from European countries as well as researchers from Argentina, India, China, the US, Japan, and other countries. Advanced grant funding is available for future competition rounds to nationals of any country.

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Funding Scientific Progress

The grants awarded this year will fund projects in the physical sciences and engineering, life sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The projects represent timely, cutting-edge research. Here are just a few examples that reflect how varied the topics that received the grants are.

For the humanities section, Michael Bruter and a team at the London School of Economics and Political Science will receive a grant to research the phenomenon of electoral hostility. Salvatore Maria Aglioti at the Università degli Studi Di Roma La Sapienza has won a grant to examine why people are dishonest. His research aims to identify how to change unethical behavior.

Researchers from the life sciences section are also not much behind. Gunilla Karlsson Hedestam, a researcher from the Karolinska Institutet of Sweden, received a grant. Her research will focus on gene diversity, exploring why people respond differently to infections and vaccinations. Salvador Aznar Benitah from the Institute for Research in Biomedicine in Barcelona has won funding to investigate the mechanisms of metastases and the effects of diet on metastases. In the physical sciences, Marc-André Gutscher at the CNRS, IUEM Plouzané received an award to examine whether the fiber-optic communication cable networks that crisscross our seafloor can predict earthquakes.

These are just a few examples of researchers who received this grant; there are many more in the list. The generous funding offered by the ERC is a great opportunity for researchers from anywhere in the world to pursue ambitious projects. Only time will tell how far the researchers can utilize this opportunity.

What do you think of this announcement of ERC? Please let us know your thoughts in the comments section below.

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