

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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1. Eligibility Criteria

What if I do not meet the eligibility criteria (e.g., academic age)?

Candidates who do not meet these requirements are advised not to apply. If a Helmholtz Center wishes to submit an application on behalf of such a candidate (due to compelling reasons for an exception from the rule), it should contact the Helmholtz Head Office to discuss the case.

For the purpose of assessing eligibility with regard to the maximum one-year employment rule, the relevant criterion is the applicant's actual time working at the host institution. The formal employer or source of funding is irrelevant. This includes periods spent at the institution under scholarships, fellowships, or similar arrangements. This rule does not apply to applications submitted under the Pilot Track.

Fictional examples for how the Helmholtz Head Office calculates academic age

Laura has been awarded her PhD in January 2019. Two years into her postdoc, she has given birth to her child. Her academic age at May 4, 2026, is 5 years and 11 months (18 months are subtracted). She is eligible.

Nikola has been awarded his PhD in August 2019. During his postdoc, he became the father of two children. For each child, he has been on parental leave for 6 months, in which he has focused on his care responsibilities. His academic age at May 4, 2026, is 5 years and 10 months (6+6 months are subtracted). He is eligible.

Ebru has been awarded her PhD in April 2020. In order to care for her children, she has worked part-time (25 %) over the course of one year in her postdoc phase. Her academic age at May 4, 2026, is 5 years and 5 months (1 year of 25% part-time equals 3 months of academic age). She is eligible.

Ryo has been awarded a PhD in April 2019. Due to a car accident with a lengthy recovery, Ryo was not able to do research over the course of 15 months. Ryo's academic age is 5 years and 11 months at May 4, 2026. Ryo is eligible.

Maria has been awarded her PhD in May 2019. After completing her PhD, she worked full-time in the industry for two years before returning to academia for a postdoctoral position. Her academic age at May 4, 2026, is 5 years and 1 month (2 years are subtracted). She is eligible.

2. International academic partners and / or private partners

Can international academic partners and / or private partners be involved in the HIG?

Cooperation with international partners is strongly encouraged, but they cannot receive any funding from the INF. Similarly, cooperation with private sector organizations to enhance knowledge and technology transfer is encouraged, but the latter cannot receive any funding from the INF.

3. Deadline for submission of documents

Which documents must be submitted before or after the deadline?

One document must be submitted before the official deadline: the Advance notice of planned applications (Application Annex AA1) must be submitted by the Helmholtz Centers via ProMeta by 06 March 2026 as a binding pre-registration for the submission of full applications. After a positive selection decision (and before the group officially starts), two further annexes must be submitted to the contact person indicated in the call: the Career development plan and evaluation concept (Application Annex AA8-ST / AA8-PT, as applicable, as one consolidated PDF) and, for the Standard Track, the University Statement (Application Annex AA9-ST).

4. Financial plan

Where should I integrate the financial plan for the five years and which financial categories must be specified?

The financial plan must be entered in the ProMeta project management platform. In addition, the financial plan must be created using the provided template (see Application Annex AA2) and attached to the proposal. The cost items must be explained in the proposal itself, in accordance with the instructions and examples provided in the template. The financial plan covers the following categories:

INF Budget in EUR	Total financial budget of the Helmholtz Investigator Group					
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Sum
Budget share of the Helmholtz Center	0	0	0	0	0	0
Personnel costs						0
Material costs (incl. Travel)						0
Investments						0
Budget share of the university	0	0	0	0	0	0
Personnel costs						0
Material costs (incl. Travel)						0
Investments						0
Total budget INF	0	0	0	0	0	0
Own budget in EUR	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Sum
Own contribution of the Helmholtz Center	0	0	0	0	0	0
Personnel costs						0
Material costs (incl. Travel)						0
Investments						0
Own contribution of the university	0	0	0	0	0	0
Personnel costs						0
Material costs (incl. Travel)						0
Investments						0
Total budget (Helmholtz Center and university)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Travel expenses can be included under material costs or expenditures. No funding will be granted for overheads. Matching funds should not contain overheads.

The Helmholtz Association aims to offer doctoral researchers regular employment contracts, including social security contributions (see [doctoral guidelines](#)).

5. Electronic signatures

Are electronic signatures required?

Electronic signatures that meet the standards of an Advanced Electronic Signature (AES) or a Qualified Electronic Signature (QES) are required only for the Terms of Agreement, for which a legally binding signature is mandatory. For all other documents, the form of signature is not decisive.

6. Responsibility for export control and knowledge security

Who is responsible for conducting security checks of scientists nominated for funding?

The Centers are responsible for checking the scientists with regard to the risk of unwanted knowledge transfer or scientific espionage. This must be carried out before the final application documents are submitted.

7. Resubmission of applications

Can I resubmit an application?

Resubmission is not categorically excluded, but should only be considered if the final selection panel has encouraged the candidate to resubmit. If there is any uncertainty as to whether resubmission is appropriate, the Head Office should be contacted. If a Center resubmits an application, developments and changes since the last application must be described in detail (see Annex AA3).

8. Evaluation (Standard Track)

How does the evaluation work?

In the case of funding, a contract is drawn up between the Head Office and the Helmholtz Center, in which it is agreed that the results of an evaluation of the HIG leader must be available after four years of funding. The details of the evaluation (process, evaluation criteria, starting date of permanent contract, etc.) are determined by the Helmholtz Center or in negotiations between the candidate and the Center. It is recommended to clarify all premises as early as possible.

9. Appointment to a professorship

What happens if the group leader is appointed to a professorship before the end of the HIG?

If a professorship is taken up, the investigator group can continue as long as it is ensured that the group leader can continue to supervise the group. The salary of the group leader is excluded from the financial planning (to the extent that it is financed by another source) and cannot be transferred to other persons or costs.

10. Extension of funding period

What is the maximum extension of the funding period?

Normally, periods of leave or downtime accepted as a reason for extending the HIG cannot exceed one year in total. The only exceptions to this one-year maximum are additional periods of maternity and parental leave. If you take maternity and paid parental leave, an additional extension can be granted for the period of maternity leave before the birth of the child (6 weeks) and, for single parents, for the partner's parental leave (2 months). In total, the maximum extension in these cases is 15 months and 2 weeks.