



"la Caixa" Foundation

2026 Call

Postdoctoral Junior Leader fellowships

Retaining



*Rules for
participation*

lacaixafoundation.org

Fellowships

Introduction

The "la Caixa" Foundation, committed to the belief that scientific advancement, research, mobility, and professional development are essential drivers of societal progress, is launching the postdoctoral fellowships programme aimed at recruiting outstanding researchers of any nationality who wish to further their careers in STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in Spain or Portugal. The programme targets experienced researchers with an exceptional track record, demonstrated through the originality and impact of their scientific contributions. Candidates should also show strong leadership potential, with the capacity to lead their own research group in the future.

In addition to supporting scientific excellence, the fellowships offer a comprehensive training programme that integrates scientific, technical, and transferable skills. This initiative aims to foster the development of fellows as independent researchers and future leaders in the scientific community.

Timeline



1. Call for applications

- 1.1. The "la Caixa" Foundation is offering 20 **three-year postdoctoral fellowships** to recruit experienced researchers to carry out their projects **at any university or research centre of Spain or Portugal**. The research must be carried out in the research areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), including Bio and Health Sciences.
- 1.2. The call for applications is intended for researchers who **finished their doctoral degree two to seven years prior to the application deadline** and fulfil the requirements for mobility between countries.
- 1.3. The choice of the host institution will not be binding during the candidate selection process. Candidates should state the host institution that they would prefer to carry out their project on their fellowship application on a provisional basis. To do this, a Declaration of Interest letter with the official institutional letterhead and signed by a representative of the host institution of preference must be attached, indicating its willingness to accept the fellow. A template is provided in the online application platform and on the programme's website. This Declaration of Interest will not be binding on any of the parties. The fellow may change the preferred host institution before the start of the fellowship.

- 1.4. The fellow should start work at the host institution between 2nd May and 31st December 2026. The "la Caixa" Foundation must be notified of the fellow's start date at the host institution prior to this date and as soon as an agreement is reached.
- 1.5. Candidates may freely propose a research project to be carried out at the host institution of their choice.
- 1.6. The call for applications opens on the date it is published and closes on 25th September 2025, at 2pm Spanish peninsular time (Central European Summer Time - CEST).

2. Fellowship amount

- 2.1. The maximum payment amount will be €320,100¹, broken down as shown below:

/ Three maximum annual payments of €102,500 which include:

- a) **Labour costs (salary included): a maximum of €64,000 to cover the total labour costs of the host institution hiring the fellow.** This amount includes Social Security contributions and any other payments made by the employer, as well as the fellow's annual gross salary.

In any case, the minimum annual gross salary to be offered to the fellow by the host institution must be €47,000.

If the total labour costs exceed the maximum amount offered by the "la Caixa" Foundation, the host institution will cover the excess.

- b) **Annual research project costs of €38,500**, which include:

- » Purchase and maintenance of scientific equipment and consumables;
- » Travel expenses and daily allowance;
- » Registration fees for scientific congresses, seminars and conferences;
- » Management fees for industrial and intellectual property rights related to the project;
- » Patenting costs;
- » Personnel hiring costs linked exclusively to the fellowship project;
- » Expenses related to the mandatory secondment;
- » Overheads;
- » Other expenses directly related to running of the research project.

This amount will be managed by the host institution for the benefit of the fellow and it must be justified separately.

/ **Gross annual family allowance of €1,200** for each of the researcher's dependent children. The family allowance will be determined at the beginning of the fellowship and will be reviewed during the fellowship period, this allowance being receivable from the month following the birth or adoption of the child. If both parents obtain a postdoctoral Junior Leader fellowship, this allowance will be only granted to one of the parents.

¹ The allowance is calculated based on 2 children. The maximum allowance may be increased if the number of children is greater than 2.

/ **Mobility allowance (moving and housing) of €5,400 gross** to be paid at the start of the fellowship if the fellow changes the host institution to carry out the postdoctoral Junior Leader fellowship and this change implies a moving of the place of residence. To be eligible for this allowance, the selected host institution must be located at a distance greater than 50 km with respect to the initial host institution.

These amounts will be gross and included under the total labour costs for each fellow incurred by the host institution hiring them. In addition, these amounts will be subject to any tax retention legally required.

- 2.2. The "la Caixa" Foundation will sign a collaboration agreement with the host institution, which will receive the fellowship payment directly. This must be fully allocated to cover all required expenses payable by the host institution, as well as the fellow's gross salary and additional amounts and allowances.
- 2.3. The employment relationship between the fellow and the host institution must always comply with current legislation.
- 2.4. The entitlement to the fellowship belongs with the researcher, who will be hired by the host institution.

3. Secondments

- 3.1. Fellows will be required to pursue an international and/or intersectoral secondment of up to 6 months within their research projects in an institution freely proposed by the fellows themselves. The secondments can be carried out at any time after 6 months of active fellowship and before the end of the fellowship.
- 3.2. The secondment can be performed in a single period or can be divided into shorter periods with a maximum of 6 months. Likewise, it can take place in one or more organisations.
- 3.3. Researchers will have a supervisor at the secondment host institution, thus receiving cross-sectoral guidance and ensuring continuity in the execution of the projects.
- 3.4. A declaration of interest letter from the secondment supervisor must be provided by the fellows before the start date of the fellowship at the host institution.
- 3.5. If, due to unforeseen circumstances, the secondment does not eventually take place, the fellow must submit a justified report to the "la Caixa" Foundation explaining the exceptional circumstances that prevented the mandatory secondment from taking place.

4. Complementary training

In addition to the financial support, the fellowship includes a mixed training programme (face-to-face and online) on cross-cutting skills, innovation, and leadership.

Attendance is mandatory for all fellows regardless of their discipline. The "la Caixa" Foundation will cover all costs for these sessions, as well as the fellows' accommodation and travel costs.

Soon after recruitment, fellows will establish a personal Career Development Plan (CDP), based on their personal needs and interests, explaining their key achievements and future goals.

5. Requirements for applicants

5.1. Nationality

Postdoctoral researchers of **any nationality** are eligible to apply for the postdoctoral Junior Leader Fellowship–*Retaining* programme.

5.2. Research training

Those who **obtained their doctoral degree (PhD) two to seven years prior to the application deadline** are eligible. For such purposes, candidates must have obtained their doctoral degree between 25th September 2018 and 25th September 2023, both inclusive. The date of the defence for the doctoral thesis will be understood as the date the doctorate (PhD) was obtained. Therefore, a document must be provided where the date of the thesis defence is certified.

Should an applicant hold more than one doctorate (PhD), the above-mentioned period will be calculated for the first degree earned.

In the event of an interruption of the research activity between the date of obtaining the doctoral degree and the call deadline (25th September 2025), the period in which the doctoral degree must have been obtained may be extended beyond seven years on the following causes:

- a) Illness or accident that led to sick leave of three months or more. An extension may be given for the duly justified number of months.
- b) Maternity. An extension of 1 year can be given for each child born after the PhD defence date. If the candidate can justify longer maternity leave, the eligibility period will be extended to cover the documented leave taken until the call deadline.
- c) Paternity. An extension of 1 year can be applied for each child born after the PhD defence date.
- d) Compulsory National service: An extension may be applied for the demonstrated number of months.

All cases must be duly demonstrated by means of an official supporting document.

5.3. Mobility

Candidates who wish to **join a Spanish centre or university must** have resided or have carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Spain for **more than twelve months in the three years** immediately prior to the application deadline. Short stays, such as holidays, in a country other than their usual country of residence (where they carry out their main activity), will be considered as time spent in their usual country of residence.

A candidate with an uninterrupted period of at least 2 years of inactivity in research (e.g. unemployment, periods of employment outside research, parental or long-term sick leave) must have resided or carried out the main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Spain for more than 36 months in the 5 years immediately before the call deadline.

In the same way, time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention, compulsory national service and/or short stays such as holidays are not considered.

Those candidates who wish to **join a Portuguese center or university must** have resided or have carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Portugal for **more than twelve months in the three years** immediately prior to the application deadline. Short stays, such as holidays, in a country other than their usual country of residence (where they carry out their main activity), will be considered as time spent in their usual country of residence.

A candidate with an uninterrupted period of at least 2 years of inactivity in research (e.g. unemployment, periods of employment outside research, parental or long-term sick leave) must have resided or carried out the main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Portugal for more than 36 months in the 5 years immediately before the call deadline.

In the same way, time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention, compulsory national service and/or short stays such as holidays are not considered.

5.4. International stays

For candidates applying to carry out the research in a Spanish university or research centre, the candidate must have carried out research stays at non-Spanish research centres or universities during their doctorate or postdoctorate, whether of a continuous or discontinuous nature for at least six months prior to the deadline for applications.

For candidates applying to carry out the research in a Portuguese university or research centre, the candidate must have carried out research stays at non-Portuguese research centres or universities during their doctorate or postdoctorate, whether of a continuous or discontinuous nature for at least six months prior to the deadline for applications.

6. Application and documentation

- 6.1.** Candidates must apply using the online application platform available in the “Education and Fellowships” section on the “la Caixa” Foundation website.

On this platform, the different pages of the application form clearly specify all information and documentation that must be provided to complete an application for the current fellowships programme. **The application must be completed entirely in English.**

- 6.2.** Information provided by the candidate in the “Prospective host institution” section will be understood to be provisional and will not be binding should the fellowship be awarded.

Candidates who are finally chosen as fellows will have a reasonable period in which to confirm their interest in the host institution that they specified as their first choice. During this time, they can also explore other alternatives that may better suit their personal goals.

If the line of research chosen by the candidate for their research project is different from that originally stated in their application, it must not deviate from it significantly in terms of content or discipline.

Candidates must reach an agreement with the host institution they finally select, at which point the host institution will hire the fellow with the funds provided by the “la Caixa” Foundation.

- 6.3.** Candidates must submit a personal statement with the project proposal that they wish to carry out if they are granted the fellowship. The personal statement must contain the following information:

- 1) Research career directly related to the project proposal, stating the main line of research that the candidate has carried out and specifying the main achievements to date (recommended a maximum of 3 pages).
- 2) Summary of the proposed research project, timeline, and contingency plan (recommended a maximum of 5 pages).

This document’s characteristics and format are detailed in the relevant section of the online application form.

- 6.4.** Using the online application platform, candidates must also obtain, prior to the application deadline, **at least two reference letters** from university professors, researchers, or other appropriate individuals with whom they have had contact either academically or professionally. It is advisable for candidates to let them know as soon as possible that the “la Caixa” Foundation will contact them through an online procedure. This procedure makes it possible to request and attach up to three reference letters to the application form, provided that they arrive before the application deadline (25th September 2025). **The reference letters must be written in English.**

These reference letters are confidential. Under no circumstances may candidates request access to their content nor will the “la Caixa” Foundation provide this, regardless of the final results of the selection process for this fellowships programme.

- 6.5.** Candidates must attach a copy of their doctoral diploma or academic certificate showing the date on which the doctoral degree was obtained.

- 6.6. If a candidate claims an exception due to an interruption of research activity, as contemplated in point 5.2, they must provide the relevant supporting documents.
- 6.7. Candidates must attach an ethics table pointing out the ethical aspects of the project proposal. A template for the ethics table will be provided in the online application platform.
- 6.8. Candidates who wish to avail themselves of the extended mobility rule due to inactivity in research, as contemplated in point 5.3, must provide the relevant supporting documents.
- 6.9. Documents uploaded to the online application platform in PDF format must be clear and legible. Similarly, each page of the original document must correspond to a page of the PDF document.
- 6.10. If the documents uploaded in the online application platform were issued in a language other than English, a translation (which can be done by the candidate) into English must be attached.

7. Selection process

Applications will be evaluated and selected taking into consideration the European Science Foundation's recommendations published in the [Peer Review Guide](#) and will be awarded on a competitive basis. The members of the shortlisting and selection committees will select the candidates who, in their opinion, demonstrate greater merits and capabilities.

7.1. The process is comprised of three parts:

- a) **Eligibility check:** all applications received are screened to ensure that they comply with formal requirements. Eligibility will be checked based on the information provided by the applicant. Only applications that fulfil all the criteria will be included in the Remote evaluation phase.

Should an application not fulfil the formal requirements of the call for applications, the "la Caixa" Foundation will send a notification by e-mail specifying the reason for its rejection.

- b) **Shortlisting:** each eligible application is sent to an evaluation panel made up of two to four experts with broad experience in the discipline of the application and an extensive list of publications or contributions within this field. The applications that receive the highest ratings from each panel will pass to the next phase.

It is advisable for candidates to inform any potential host institutions of interest to them once their application has been chosen for the interview selection phase.

- c) **Interviews:** The candidates whose applications have passed the remote evaluation stage will be invited for a face-to-face interview. The interviews will be conducted by a multidisciplinary selection committee, made up of professors and researchers with extensive experience in selection processes by peer review.

Interviews will be entirely in English.

The dates scheduled for the interviews or for the notification of the results may be subject to change due to organisational reasons. If this occurs, candidates will be immediately notified by e-mail.

The "la Caixa" Foundation will notify the candidates interviewed during the final phase of the results via e-mail. The results may be also consulted on the applications platform.

8. Evaluation criteria

Applications will be evaluated according to each candidate's merit, not penalising candidates with career breaks or younger candidates. The evaluation criteria and scores defined to achieve this goal are:

Shortlisting

1. **Excellence of Curriculum Vitae (weight 50%):** each scientific and/or professional curriculum will be assessed in relation to scientific discipline and stage of the candidate's career.
2. **Motivation and research project (weight 35%):** assessing originality, innovation and potential impact of the proposed project, the consistency of the candidate's personal statement and the suitability of the host organisation for carrying it out.
3. **Letters of reference (weight 15%):** reference letters supporting the candidacy will be assessed considering the specific details of the content and the signatory's profile and personal wording.

Interviews

1. **Academic and professional career (weight 50%):** quality of the contributions made to the chosen field, candidate's experience in research management, consistency between the candidate's academic background and track record. Interdisciplinary careers will be positively valued if they reflect the candidate's clear motivations.
2. **Candidate's potential (weight 30%):** the experts will pay attention to "soft" skills, such as clear, consistent messages and communication of ideas, ability to present complex reasoning, teamwork and capabilities such as independent reasoning, originality, innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership.
3. **Motivation and impact of the project (weight 20%):** conceptual and methodological novelty of the project as well as its originality, feasibility and impact on society and the researcher's career.

Further information about the rating criteria that govern the shortlisting process and the selection by interview process can be found in the "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme website.

9. Appeals procedure

- 9.1. Within seven calendar days from the date the notification of results is sent, candidates may submit an appeal by sending an e-mail to fellowships@contact.fundaciolacaixa.org, which must include an explanatory text together with any documents the candidates deem appropriate.
- 9.2. An appeals committee will hear appeals. Their decision will be communicated by e-mail within ten calendar days from the date of receipt of the appeal.
- 9.3. The appeals procedure will be strictly confidential.
- 9.4. The appeals procedure will look at procedural shortcomings and possible errors, not at the evaluation panel's decisions or the experts' ratings and comments. The selection and evaluation processes themselves guarantee the independence and objectivity of the evaluation.

10. Appointment of candidates and choice of centre

- 10.1. The list of candidates chosen as fellows, as well as the candidates on the waiting list, where applicable, will be published with their names and surname(s) on the "la Caixa" Foundation website on 10th March 2026.
- 10.2. Should any fellowships be rejected, these will be offered to the candidates on the waiting list in the order established.
- 10.3. This call for fellowship applications can be declared void for one, some, or all of the fellowships, if this is proposed by the selection committee to the "la Caixa" Foundation.
- 10.4. To be admitted as fellows, candidates must start at the host institution no later than 31st December 2026. Once this date has passed, the fellowship may no longer be activated. Once an agreement has been reached, the host institution will hire the fellow with the funds provided by the "la Caixa" Foundation.

11. Incompatibilities

- 11.1. Candidates may only apply for a fellowship for one of the two postdoctoral Junior Leader subprogrammes included in the 2026 call for applications: Incoming or Retaining.
- 11.2. Fellows who have already benefitted from a postdoctoral Junior Leader fellowship cannot apply for the same programme.
- 11.3. If a candidate cannot attend the final interview to which they have been invited, they must notify the "la Caixa" Foundation of this issue sufficiently in advance so that the place can be offered to another applicant. Otherwise, they will not be allowed to submit applications to other calls of the "la Caixa" Foundation, unless they can demonstrate that there was a reasonable explanation for their failure to attend.

- 11.4.** Resignation of the fellowship means that it will not be possible to submit an application to future calls of the "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships programme, except when this is justified due to illness or other unforeseeable circumstances.
- 11.5.** Under no circumstances may applicants contact the experts who are taking part or have taken part in the selection processes of this call for applications to ask them for information regarding the status of their application or any other aspect related to the selection process. Should this occur, the candidate will be disqualified from present and future selection processes.
- 11.6.** The fellowships are incompatible with any other paid work, fellowship or grant that covers more than the 10% of the annual amount given for salary costs (See 2.1), unless specifically authorised by the "la Caixa" Foundation.
- 11.7.** Fellowships are compatible with other competitive funds that complement the postdoctoral Junior Leader Research Costs, upon the express authorisation of the "la Caixa" Foundation.
- 11.8.** The fellowship will not be compatible with a permanent employment contract from an institution other than the host institution.

12. Management of the fellowship and obligations of the fellows

- 12.1.** The applicants who are awarded a fellowship should preferably be a current account or bankbook holder at any CaixaBank or BPI branch office, which is where the monthly payments and any other amounts included in the fellowship will be paid into.
- 12.2.** These fellowships are granted exclusively for on-site projects, that is, to carry out full-time research activity at the host institution's facilities.
- 12.3.** Fellows may collaborate with teaching duties, provided that they notify the "la Caixa" Foundation as far in advance as possible and obtain prior approval from the host institution that has hired them. Generally speaking, and without prejudice to a personalised study and decision on a case-by-case basis, devoting more than 100 hours per year to teaching duties will not be authorised.
- 12.4.** When so required by the "la Caixa" Foundation, the chosen candidates should accredit, through original documents or certified photocopies of these, the files attached to the applications. Likewise, the "la Caixa" Foundation can ask them for the original certificates for any information mentioned in the application.

- 12.5.** The host institutions will manage the amounts that the "la Caixa" Foundation allocates for each fellowship. For such purposes, the host institutions must send the "la Caixa" Foundation a financial report demonstrating the costs of the activities carried out by the researchers.
- 12.6.** The fellows must provide a scientific report on an annual basis, as well as any other information that the "la Caixa" Foundation deems necessary or they must authorise the host institution to provide this.

13. Ethics and Integrity

- 13.1.** The research project carried out by the fellow must comply with the EU's ethical principles, Spanish and international legislation applicable in this field, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
- 13.2.** The research projects of the selected candidates that may involve ethical issues will be sent to the programme's Ethics Committee. Ethical issues that may arise during the implementation of the projects will be also monitored.
- 13.3.** The "la Caixa" Foundation shall not be responsible for the content and results of the research project, including any documentation and information related to it, notwithstanding the methods used for its foundation (e.g., Artificial Intelligence tools). In this regard, they guarantee:
- (i) compliance with all applicable current regulations
 - (ii) non-infringement of third-party rights of any kind
 - (iii) the application of the best ethical practises

Furthermore, within the framework of this call, they exempt the "la Caixa" Foundation from any liability to third parties, arising from the breach of the foregoing.

14. Privacy and data protection policy

- 14.1.** Applicants will be duly informed, within the framework of the registration process, about the processing of their personal data, as well as about the exercise of their rights regarding the protection of personal data in accordance with the provisions of Article 13 and following of the General Data Protection Regulation.
- 14.2.** The Fundació Bancaria Caja de Ahorro y Pensiones de Barcelona, "la Caixa", (hereinafter, "la Caixa" Banking Foundation) with registered office at Avda. Diagonal 621-629, 08028, Barcelona, Spain, acts as the Data Controller for the processing of personal data for the resolution of doubts and queries in this call for applications. The legal basis for the processing is the execution of a contract, at the request of the applicant. Personal data will be retained until the expiry of the applicable statute of limitations. The data will only be disclosed for the purpose of fulfilling legal obligations, as well as to third party providers acting in their capacity as data processors. Access to such data by technology providers located outside the European Economic Area is subject to all required legal

safeguards. You may request further information or exercise your rights of access, rectification, suppression, limitation, portability, and opposition before the Data Protection Officer of the "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, at Avenida Diagonal, 621-629, 08028 Barcelona, or by contacting dpd@fundacionlacaixa.org. You can also complain to the Spanish Data Protection Agency (www.aepd.es).

15. Notes

- 15.1.** The deadlines and times included in these rules are in local Spanish Peninsular time (Central European Summer Time - CEST).
- 15.2.** The submission of an application for these fellowships implies express acceptance by all candidates of all these rules and the criteria and decisions that the "la Caixa" Foundation may use when responding to any doubts about how to interpret the requirements and terms and conditions contained herein.
- 15.3.** Detection of any failure to comply with these rules, regardless of when this occurs and the status of the application within the fellowship awarding process, will result in the automatic cancellation of the application or the fellowship, should it have already been awarded. Should the fellow not fulfil the aforementioned obligations, or any other obligation included among the terms and conditions of the fellowship, the "la Caixa" Foundation reserves the right to act as it deems appropriate, including requesting the return of the amounts received.