



Guide for Applicants

Early-Career Scientists Fellowship Programme

ASCENT

Academic Secured Career ENgagement in Toulouse

University of Toulouse



Co-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. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them

Summary

1. Introduction	3
2. Eligibility Criteria	4
3. Fellowship Conditions	5
4. Application Process, Required Documents	6
5. Selection Process	7
6. Evaluation Criteria	8
7. Training & Career Development	10
8. Research Environment.....	11
9. Open Science & Ethics	12
10. Key Dates & Contacts	13

1. Introduction

ASCENT – Academic Secured Career Engagement in Toulouse is a **fellowship programme for early-career researchers** coordinated by the **University of Toulouse** and co-funded by the European Union under **Horizon Europe / MSCA COFUND (Grant Agreement No. 101313640)**, within the **TIRIS** initiative. Building on the strengths of Toulouse's research ecosystem—**140+ research units** spanning life sciences, engineering, environmental sciences, social sciences and humanities—ASCENT supports excellent projects that address society-wide challenges.

ASCENT functions as a 5-year tenure-track-like program, awarding **6 postdoctoral positions**, each of **60 months**, starting **September 2027**. Fellows will carry out an **independent research project** hosted by an eligible unit in Toulouse, benefitting from **structured supervision**, a tailored **Career Development Plan**, and **advanced training** in both scientific and transferable skills. In line with MSCA practice, the programme promotes **interdisciplinarity**, **international openness**, and **ethical and open-science** standards.

ASCENT's aim is to provide the conditions for ambitious, high-impact research while helping fellows accelerate their careers. By connecting projects to the University's clusters and facilities, the programme enables fellows to access world-class infrastructures, broaden their networks, and translate results into meaningful outcomes for science and society.

2. Eligibility Criteria

Academic Requirements

Candidates must hold a **PhD** at the time of **the deadline** (22 January 2027)

Applicants who have successfully **defended** their PhD but have not yet received the **diploma** are eligible. A **B2 level (CEFR)** in **English or French** is required; language training will be provided if necessary.

Mobility Rules

Applicants must **not** have **resided or worked in France for more than 12 months** in the **36 months** preceding the application deadline. Short stays (e.g., holidays) and time spent as a refugee are not counted toward this period.

Non-discrimination and Diversity

There are no restrictions regarding nationality, gender, or background. The programme offers specific support for disabled applicants, refugees, and researchers with atypical career paths.

3. Fellowship Conditions

Financial Support

Over the course of 60 months, each fellow will receive approximately:

Category	Phase 1: Months 1 to 36 ^[1] Gross amount (€/month)	Phase 2: Months 37 to 60 ^[2] Gross amount (€/month)
Living Allowance	3,600 €	3,300€
Mobility Allowance	200 €	N/A
Family Allowance (if applicable)	50 €	50€
Research, Training, PhD funding and Mobility Costs	3,700 €	2,000€

Fellows will be hired on a **full-time employment contract in France for 60 months**, with full **social security** coverage. The compensation follows the MSCA model with **competitive allowances—living** and **mobility** allowances, plus **family** allowances where applicable—with a **minimum gross salary of €3,800 in Phase 1 and €3,300 in Phase 2**.

Each fellow will develop a **Career Development Plan**, benefit from **mentoring**, and access **tailored training** in open science, research integrity/ethics, project management, communication & outreach, and innovation/entrepreneurship.

The programme also provides **access to state-of-the-art infrastructures** and a broad network of **academic, public, and private partners**.

4. Application Process, Required Documents

Applications are submitted exclusively via the **ASCENT online platform** (link available from 21 September 2026 on the ascent website). Incomplete or applications received after application deadline will not be considered.

Required documents :

- **Application form** (to be completed online on the platform from 21 September 2026):
 - **Applicant administrative data**
 - **Prospective host research unit/supervisor(s)**
 - **Research project** (objectives, methodology, feasibility, impact, bibliography)
 - **CV** (following and complying with the application form template guidelines) **& description of previous research activities**
 - **Ethics self-assessment**
- **Identity documents** (to upload as a separate PDF document on the platform)
- **PhD certificate** (to upload as a separate PDF document on the platform)
- **Motivation letter** (to upload as a separate PDF document on the platform)

Important: Applications will be checked for scientific integrity, fraud, and eligibility.

5. Selection Process

The selection process is **transparent, merit-based, and impartial**, guaranteeing **equal opportunities** for all applicants.

Step 1 – Eligibility check. All applications are first reviewed to verify compliance with the programme's eligibility criteria.

Step 2 – Scientific evaluation and shortlisting. Each eligible proposal is assessed independently by **two external peer reviewers** and **two members of the Scientific Committee (SC)**. Scoring follows MSCA-aligned weights: **Excellence (50%)**, **Impact (30%)**, and **Feasibility/Implementation (20%)**. Based on these results, a **shortlist of approximately 18 candidates** is established.

Step 3 – Interviews. Shortlisted applicants are invited to a **structured interview** conducted by the **Interview Committee (IC)**, consisting of a **20-minute presentation** followed by **30 minutes of Q&A**. Candidates are ranked on originality, scientific quality, feasibility, risk assessment, and expected impact, as well as leadership potential and career fit with ASCENT's long-term vision.

Step 4 – Final selection and results. The programme publishes the **final selection list** and a **reserve list**. All candidates receive **detailed feedback** on their application, and **unsuccessful applicants may lodge an appeal on procedural grounds**.

6. Evaluation Criteria

Step 2: Shortlisting Evaluation Criteria

Table 1. Criteria and sub-criteria for the selection of candidates during step #2 (shortlisting)

Criteria	Excellence 50 %	Impact 30 %			Implementation 20%	
CV 45%	• Scientific achievements and research quality (outputs, rigour, originality, methods)	5%	• Outreach, teaching, mentoring, Open Science engagement	5%	• Mobility experience (geographical, institutional, thematic),	5%
	• Emerging research independence (designing research with limited supervision)	5%	• International/interdisciplinary/ intersectoral exposure	5%	Evidence of network development	
	• Technical expertise, methodological competence	5%	• Early leadership signals (initiative, contribution to proposals)	5%	• Ethical and integrity awareness	5%
	• Research data management & Open Science skills	5%				
Project 55%	• Originality/clarity of hypotheses and objectives	10%	• Potential to strengthen independence and leadership	5%	• Operational understanding of feasibility and resources	5%
	• Rigour and adequacy of methodology	10%	• Contribution to societal, European, regional, UT/TIRIS priorities	5%	• Ability to discuss risks and propose realistic mitigation	5%
	• Positioning within and beyond the state of the art	5%	• Open Science commitments	5%		
	• Fit with ASCENT domains and host expertise	5%				

Step 3: Interview Evaluation Criteria

Table 2. Criteria and sub-criteria for the interviews of candidates in step #3

Criteria	Excellence 50 %		Impact 30 %		Implementation 20%	
CV 30%	• Ability to articulate scientific achievements and their originality • Depth of reasoning and methodological understanding, technical mastery when questioned • Demonstration of emerging independence (role, contribution)	5% 5% 5%	• Leadership potential (initiative, autonomy, maturity) • Ability to explain scientific and societal relevance of past work	5% 5%	• Ability to explain past mobilities and their added value and Ethical and integrity reasoning when questioned	5%
Project 70%	• Scientific clarity and coherence when presenting the project including the PhD subject • Ability to defend hypotheses, methods and novelty	10% 10%	• Ability to explain how the project advances independence/leadership • Ability to articulate societal impact credibly	10% 5%	• Operational understanding of feasibility and resources • Ability to discuss risks and propose realistic mitigation	5% 5%

Tresholds for Step 2 and 3

- 0- ≤ 20% – The application fails to address the criterion.
- 20- ≤ 40% – **Poor**. The criterion is inadequately addressed or major weaknesses are evident.
- 40- ≤ 60% – **Fair**. The application broadly addresses the criterion but with significant weaknesses.
- 60- ≤ 70% – **Good**. The application addresses the criterion well, though some shortcomings remain.
- 70- ≤ 80% **Very good**. The criterion is very well addressed with only minor shortcomings.
- 80 % **Excellent**. The application fully meets the criterion; any weaknesses are negligible.

7. Training & Career Development

ASCENT fellows will benefit from a structured support ecosystem. Each fellow is paired with experienced researchers and, where relevant, industry professionals through a dedicated mentoring programme. The programme offers regular scientific seminars—both thematic meetings and interdisciplinary workshops—and annual general meetings where fellows present their work and expand their networks with experts. Continuing education is provided throughout the fellowship, with courses on research ethics and scientific integrity, intellectual property and technology transfer, project management and leadership, open science and data management, and entrepreneurship and career development.

Fellows are expected to create a **Career Development Plan (CDP)** with their mentors, to sign a **supervision agreement** that sets out rights and duties, and to communicate and disseminate their results and discoveries to both the scientific community and the wider public.

8. Research Environment

ASCENT fellows will benefit from a structured support ecosystem. Each fellow is paired with experienced researchers and, where relevant, industry professionals through a dedicated mentoring programme. The programme offers regular scientific seminars—both thematic meetings and interdisciplinary workshops—and annual general meetings where fellows present their work and expand their networks with experts. Continuing education is provided throughout the fellowship, with courses on research ethics and scientific integrity, intellectual property and technology transfer, project management and leadership, open science and data management, and entrepreneurship and career development.

Fellows are expected to create a **Career Development Plan (CDP)** with their mentors, to sign a **supervision agreement** that sets out rights and duties, and to **communicate and disseminate** their results and discoveries to both the scientific community and the wider public.

9. Open Science & Ethics

Fellows commit to the European Charter for Researchers and to responsible research and innovation practices. They prepare a **Data Management Plan** in the fellowship, follow relevant approvals and compliance procedures for research ethics (e.g., human/animal subjects, data protection, dual-use), ensure open-access dissemination of publications in line with Horizon Europe requirements, and follow institutional guidance for research data where sharing is possible and lawful. Outreach and communication activities observe MSCA visibility rules, including the required funding acknowledgement and use of logos.

10. Key Dates & Contacts

Key dates

- Call opens : **21 September 2026**
- Deadline for applications : **22 January 2027**
- Shortlisting results : **18 May 2027**
- Final results : **21 June 2027**
- Fellowship starts: **between September 2027 and December 2027**

Contact Information

✉ **Email:** ascent@univ-toulouse.fr

🌐 **Website:** [ASCENT Advanced Fellowship – TIRIS – Toulouse's Science In and For Society](#)

Linkedin : <https://www.linkedin.com/company/130583993/admin/dashboard/>



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. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them