

EXCELLENCE IN AFRICA 100 PHDS FOR AFRICA PROGRAMME

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS
SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 20th of April 2021 (17:00 CET)

Introduction

Africa's growth has been accelerating in recent years, creating an ever-increasing need for highly educated researchers in science and technology across the continent.

[Mohammed VI Polytechnic University \(UM6P\)](#) in Morocco and the [École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne \(EPFL\)](#) in Switzerland have jointly launched the [Excellence in Africa \(EXAF\) initiative](#) to support the training of professors and doctoral candidates in Africa. This path-breaking initiative is intended to hone the research skills of early-stage researchers through collaboration with, or supervision by, EPFL professors. It is based on the premise that this will help build their career as researchers and professors and thereby enable them to have a significant economic and societal impact in Africa. A Joint Steering Committee comprised of members from UM6P and EPFL constitutes the governance board of this initiative.

About Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P)

[UM6P](#) is a higher education and research institution that places focus on technology, innovation, sustainability and social responsibility. With a strong belief in the merits of "learning by doing", UM6P has implemented, and is continuously developing, experimental platforms and living labs with a design that allows researchers to achieve their full potential. The University's mission revolves around several pillars, some of which are:

- Addressing the biggest challenges faced by Africa by pushing disciplinary frontiers of research and education;
- Educating the next generation of culturally-aware and socially-responsible critical thinkers, problem-solvers, skilled entrepreneurs and global leaders;
- Providing a cutting-edge, world-class education system based on diversity and meritocracy and develop long-lasting partnerships with leading local and global universities, research centers, governments, corporations, institutions, and networks.

About EPFL

[EPFL](#) is one of the world's top institutes of science and technology. It brings together students, professors, and staff members from more than 120 countries. EPFL is a public institution endowed with three missions: teaching, research and innovation. It collaborates with a wide array of partners, including other universities, middle and high schools, companies, political actors and the general public, with the aim of having a real impact on society at both a national and a global level.

Mission

The UM6P/EPFL EXAF 100 PhDs for Africa programme is one of the three pillars of the Excellence in Africa initiative. It is designed to fund science and engineering graduates intending to complete a PhD at an African higher education institution (their *home institution*). PhD candidates benefitting from the programme will be jointly supervised by a professor employed by their home institution and an EPFL professor. They may spend short time periods at the EPFL in the laboratory of their EPFL co-supervisor, but will chiefly conduct their doctoral studies and their thesis research at their home institution. Their degree is going to be awarded by their home institution.

Call for proposals

A first call for proposals is now open for PhD projects in [all disciplines that are taught at EPFL within its doctoral school](#). The programme is open to science and engineering graduates who have an outstanding academic track record and wish to complete a PhD at an African higher education institution. Applicants must prepare their application **based on these application instructions** and submit it before the deadline of this call for proposals, which is **20 April 2021 (17:00 CET)**.

Female researchers are particularly encouraged to apply.

Eligibility and requirements

1. The applicant must be a national of an African country.
2. The applicant must be enrolled in an African academic institution and reside in an African country for the duration of the PhD.
3. The applicant must hold a Master's degree awarded after the 1st January 2018¹ or must be enrolled in his/her final year of master study and will most likely complete his/her Master's degree within the next six months after the deadline of this call for proposal (**20th of October 2021**). In any case, master's degree must have been awarded by the time the fellowship agreement is signed.

¹ Date of the actual award, according to the national rules of the country in which the degree was awarded.

4. The applicant Master's degree must be awarded from a higher education institution in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) or in one of the disciplines that are taught as a subject of advanced research at EPFL.
5. Applicants who already started a PhD can apply if they have been registered as doctoral students less than six months before the deadline of this call for proposal (**20th of October 2020**).
6. The applicant must have an outstanding academic track record, as evidenced from the official transcripts of all higher education institutions they have attended.
7. The applicants must have the endorsement of a professor of their home institution who is willing and entitled to supervise their doctoral thesis for its full duration. This professor must hold a PhD and have a strong record in research training and mentorship.
8. The home institution of the applicants must certify that the proposed PhD supervisor is eligible to supervise the PhD thesis of the applicant for the full duration of the fellowship.
9. The home institution of the applicants must provide appropriate conditions for granted applicants to complete their PhD project, including adequate facilities, mentoring and supervision.
10. The applicants must indicate if they are already receiving or are to receive financial support from another funding source for their research work or if they have applied for such support. This will not reduce the strength of the application; the level of the EXAF fellowship support will simply be reduced by the amount that has been, or is to be, received from other funding sources.
11. Granted applicants must devote on average 80% of their working time to the approved research thesis over the full duration of their PhD fellowship. The remaining 20% of their working time may be devoted to other activities at their home institution, such as teaching or attending courses.
12. Granted applicants must show documentary evidence that they have been admitted into the home institution's doctoral study programme before any fellowship agreement is signed (see below for details on the fellowship agreement).
13. Applicants are allowed to submit only one application per call within this programme.
14. Granted applicants must participate in webinars, workshops, conferences, summer schools organised by the UM6P or other events organised by the 100 PhDs for Africa programme and can be invited to present their research.

UM6P/EPFL EXAF 100 PhDs for Africa fellowships imply a full-time employment rate. A lower rate may be permitted only in response to a substantiated request (e.g. for family care duties), in which case the level and duration of the support will be adapted.

Applications that contravene the rules of research integrity and ethics or of good scientific or academic practice will be excluded from consideration.

Eligible costs

The programme awards funding of a maximum of 80'000 Swiss francs in total for a period of at most 54 months. Funding will be disbursed on a periodic basis, starting from the beginning of the fellowship and ending when the PhD thesis is awarded, at the latest.

Eligible costs include and are limited to:

Living allowance

- A living allowance for the PhD fellow; the amount of this allowance must be in line with the standard documented practices of the home institution and will be a function of the cost of living in the country of the host institution.

Tuition fees

- Tuition costs may be included in the budget if there is written confirmation from the home institution that tuition fees apply for all PhD candidates at the institution; in such a case the tuition amount should be justified with documentation. An applicant may be denied a PhD fellowship on the sole ground that tuition fees are deemed too high; the home institution may therefore grant tuition waivers to the recipients of UM6P/EPFL EXAF 100 PhDs for Africa fellowships.

Research costs

- Consumables and direct costs for the use of infrastructure at the home institution or at EPFL.
- Open science costs: costs for data storage and for granting access to data (open research data) and open access publication costs.

Colloquia

- Conference, summer school, and workshop costs for the PhD fellow, namely travel (economy class airfares, public ground transportation), lodging, visa, vaccinations, meals and (if applicable) conference registration fees, provided that the PhD fellow does a poster or an oral presentation at the event.
- During the PhD fellowship, PhD fellows must participate in two summer schools organised by UM6P at Ben Guerir Campus in Morocco. The duration of these events will be approximately one week. Travel costs to these summer schools will be covered by the present UM6P/EPFL EXAF 100 PhDs for Africa fellowship.

Costs related to joint supervision

- Travel costs for the PhD fellow to and from EPFL (economy class airfares, public ground transportation).
- A supplementary living allowance for stay(s) at EPFL.
- Travel costs to and from the African home institution and EPFL for the supervisor and co-supervisor of the PhD fellow (economy class airfares, public ground transportation, lodging, and meals).
- Other costs incurred by the joint supervision (e.g., joint participation in a conference, other costs related to stays at EPFL)

Non-eligible costs

- Institutional overheads
- Currency fluctuations: granted amounts are set in Swiss francs. In case of any currency fluctuations, the budget awarded to the PhD fellow will remain unchanged

Application process and timeline

Interested applicants shall submit an application (see below for details) via the online submission platform before the 20th of April (17:00 CET). The EPFL office in charge of implementing the joint UM6P-EPFL EXAF programme (henceforth the EPFL office) is responsible for checking the eligibility of applicants and for assessing the applications based on the criteria specified in the application guidelines (see below for details).

The EPFL office will then share the shortlisted applications with EPFL professors in the same or related field of research as each applicant. Shortlisted applicants who are pre-selected by an EPFL professor will be notified by the 21st of June 2021 that they will be invited to an online interview, which will take place between the 22nd of June 2021 and the 6th of August 2021. Applicants who are not shortlisted or who are shortlisted but for whom no EPFL co-supervisor was found will also be notified by e-mail by the 21st of June 2021.

The EPFL professors will communicate the results of the interviews to the EPFL office, which in coordination with the Programme Directors of the programme will prepare a list of applications recommended for funding. In addition some applications will be placed on a reserve list, should any of the candidates who were offered funding decline or were eventually considered ineligible.

The Joint Steering Committee will make the final decision by the 06th of September 2021.

Summary:

Deadline for applications: **20 April 2021**

Tentative timeline:

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| Notification of pre-selected applicants | 21 June 2021 |
| Interviews of pre-selected applicants by EPFL professors | Between 22 June and 6 August 2021 |
| Expected results | 06 September 2021 |

(Depending on the number of applications received, the decision dates may change. In such cases applicants will be informed of the new date)

How to apply

Applicants must submit their application via the [on-line submission platform](#) before the submission deadline of **20 April 2021 (17:00 CET)**.

The following documents are required as part of the application:

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| PhD proposal | Please use this template for your PhD proposal. This proposal must not exceed 5 pages, excluding potential references (A4, Arial 11-point font, single line-spacing, 2-centimeter margins). |
| Statement of objectives | Please describe your medium- and long-term career objectives and explain how the UM6P/EPFL EXAF 100 PhDs for Africa programme will help you reach your career goals. Your statement of objectives must not exceed 1 page (A4, Arial 11-point font, single line-spacing, 2-centimeter margins). |
| CV | Please use this template for your CV (do not include your list of publications). |
| List of publications (if applicable) | Please use this template for your list of publications. |
| Copy of all higher education grade transcripts and diplomas | Please provide official copies of all your higher education grade transcripts and diplomas (Bachelor and Master). |
| Reference letters | <p>Before submitting your application, please contact two referees to ask them whether they are willing to write a recommendation letter on your behalf. You must ensure that they are willing to write and submit their recommendation letter within one week after the submission deadline (i.e. by 27 April 2021). If they fail to do so, your application will be deemed incomplete and hence ineligible.</p> <p>When you submit your application you will be asked to give the contact details of these two referees and to waive your right to receive or read the letters that they will submit. The referees will then be asked through an automatic e-mail to upload their letter on the on-line submission platform, and they will be notified that their letters will remain confidential.</p> |

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| Home institution supervisor support letter | Please use this template for your home institution supervisor support letter. |
| Home institution support letter | Please use this template for your home institution support letter. |
| Budget | Please use this template for your budget. To the fullest extent possible, please provide details of the costs of your PhD studies. At this stage the budget is only indicative. |
| Ethical issues form | You will be required to fill out an ethical issues form via the on-line submission platform . |
| Copy of passport | Please provide a copy of your passport. A copy of your ID card is accepted at this stage; if you are granted a fellowship, however, a copy of a valid passport and a copy of a document proving that you reside in an African country will be required before any fellowship agreement is signed. |

No documents other than those listed above must be submitted, unless specifically requested by the EPFL office.

The PhD proposal must consist of original text. A limited amount of materials (text, figures, graphs, etc.) published by third parties or by the applicant himself/herself is permissible but must clearly be identified as such, with the source(s) quoted and listed in the references. A software to detect plagiarism will be used in the selection process. Applicants who are found guilty of plagiarism will be excluded from the evaluation process.

Eligibility check, assessment and selection of applications

The EPFL office will check the eligibility of all applications.

The EPFL office will then assess all eligible applications and decide if they are shortlisted for an interview or not, based on the following criteria:

- The applicant's academic track record, scientific excellence and research objectives
- The applicant's motivation and the value added of the programme to his/her career
- The commitment of the applicant's proposed supervisor at the home institution
- The commitment of the home institution
- The degree to which the proposed research topic is in line with EPFL research domains
- The potential positive impacts of the proposed project on the African continent

The list of shortlisted applications will be shared with EPFL professors, who will then make a pre-selection and invite applicants for an online interview, based on their academic track record and their research interests, among other criteria. EPFL professors may also want to contact the home institution supervisors.

The results of interviews with EPFL professors will be communicated to the EPFL office. In coordination with the Programme Directors, the EPFL office will then prepare a list of applications recommended for funding. The list of applications recommended for funding will be transmitted to the Joint Steering Committee, which will make the final decision.

The Programme Directors or the EPFL office may seek the advices of anonymous external referees (that is, referees who are not employed by EPFL, UM6P or by the home institution) at any stage of the evaluation process.

There is no guarantee that shortlisted applicants will be pre-selected by an EPFL professor, or accepted into the programme after the interview, even if they are highly qualified.

Applicants must not contact EPFL professors directly before they have been informed of their pre-selection; However, applicants will be asked to provide the name of an EPFL professor on the online submission platform as the potential co-supervisor they would like to work with.

The EPFL office, the Programme Directors, the EPFL professors and the Joint Steering Committee will assess the applications to the best of their ability. By applying to the UM6P/EPFL EXAF 100 PhDs for Africa programme, applicants accept the decisions taken by the Joint Steering Committee and renounce to appeal against the declared results of the 100 PhDs for Africa programme. No feedback on the reasons for the rejection of the application will be provided. If there is a good reason to suspect a procedural error, the EPFL will check that no administrative, procedural, numerical or data transcription errors have occurred, and that the declared result accurately reflects the judgement of those involved in the selection process.

Decision and start of the UM6P/EPFL EXAF 100 PhDs for Africa fellowships

Final decisions should be announced by the **06th of September 2021**. Should there be an unexpectedly large number of applications, the decision date may be postponed, and applicants will be informed of the new decision date.

Successful applicants may start their PhD fellowship once the fellowship agreement has been signed by all parties (see below) and provided that they have been accepted to the doctoral school of their host institution. The starting date is 1st of October 2021 at the earliest and no later than 12 months after the date of notice of the award (3 months if they already started a PhD in the laboratory of their EXAF 100 PhDs home institution supervisor). The starting date must fall on the first day of a month.

Fellowship agreements

For each PhD fellowship, EPFL will enter into a specific fellowship agreement with the PhD fellow and his/her supervisor at the home institution. The agreement will set forth the financial details and include provisions on background and foreground intellectual property, scientific publications, legal compliance and ethics.

Publications

The PhD fellow will include the following statement in the acknowledgements of any publication resulting from the sponsored thesis: “This work was sponsored by the 100 PhDs for Africa programme, a joint initiative of UM6P and EPFL”.

PhD fellows shall ensure open access to all scientific publications relating to their PhD thesis, including the thesis itself, through self-archival or open access publication.

Reporting

Thesis plan

Within the first 3 months following the starting date of the fellowship, the PhD fellows must submit a thesis plan, based on the PhD proposals submitted as part of the present call for proposals. The thesis plan must be developed in collaboration with their supervisors. A template will be provided by the EPFL office. The thesis plan must be signed by the PhD fellow and by the supervisors.

Annual reporting

The PhD fellow must submit annual progress reports to the EPFL office, at the end of the calendar year.

Scientific report

The report must be signed by the PhD fellow, his/her supervisor at his/her home institution and his/her co-supervisor at EPFL. The EPFL office will provide a template for the scientific report, which will consist in an updated version of the thesis plan.

Financial report

At the same due date as the scientific report, the PhD fellow and his/her supervisor at the home institution will be required to produce a financial report in Swiss francs. They must attach all documents supporting financial transactions. Additionally, a brief budget of the following year must be included. Detailed guidelines for this report will be annexed to each fellowship agreement.

Expenses incurred by the EPFL co-supervisor in the framework of the fellowship budget will be reimbursed by the EPFL office upon presentation of receipts, according to standard EPFL practices and regulations.

Supervisors' Assessment

At the end of each calendar year, the EXAF office will contact the supervisors to collect feedback on the work performed by the PhD fellow. As part of this feedback, supervisors should provide their evaluation to the EXAF office with their advice on whether the fellowship should be continued or terminated.

Technical clearance

The EPFL office and the Programme Directors will review the progress reports and decide if these documents are deemed acceptable (i.e. technically cleared). If there is any doubt about the quality of the reporting documents or any suspicion of a potential issue regarding the fellowship, the EPFL office and the Programme Directors will report the case to the JSC of the EXAF initiative, which will make the final decision on the continuation or the termination of the fellowship support. Decision criteria will include the progress made by the PhD fellow, the quality of his/her research work, the continued quality of supervision and working conditions and the likelihood that the PhD fellow will successfully defend his/her thesis in a timely fashion.

Early termination

The Joint Steering Committee reserves the right to terminate the fellowship support at any time before the end of the award period, based on a consultation with the Programme Directors, the home institution supervisor and the EPFL co-supervisor, for the following reasons:

- The PhD fellow fails to maintain reasonable progress towards completion of his/her PhD thesis.
- Any of the required scientific or financial reports are not submitted in a timely manner, or are not technically cleared.
- The PhD fellow accepts other employment without the prior approval of the Programme Directors.
- The PhD fellow accepts any type of financial research support without informing the Programme Directors.
- The PhD fellow has been found to be in violation of the professional codes of ethics and responsibilities of the home institution and/or of EPFL, including all rules of good scientific practice at both institutions.

The PhD fellow, the home institution supervisor, and the EPFL PhD co-supervisor will be notified of any decision by e-mail.

In the event that a PhD fellow decides to no longer pursue his/her PhD thesis, he or she must immediately notify the EPFL office in writing, stating his/her reasons for doing so. All funds, if already transferred, must be refunded insofar as the corresponding costs have not already been incurred.

Responsibility

The research projects must comply with the applicable ethics regulations and adhere to the principles of research integrity valid at both the home institution and at EPFL. Relevant ethical authorisations must be included in the application, and EPFL may submit projects for further ethical examination and require approval from its institutional review boards.

The supervisor of the PhD fellow at the home institution will bear the principal responsibility for the PhD research project. In particular, he/she will take into account all ethical, legal and societal aspects of the research and comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including those of their home institution and of EPFL.

The EPFL co-supervisor of the PhD fellow will bear responsibility for the components of the PhD research project that are implemented at EPFL and will comply with all ethical regulations of EPFL.

Questions

For any questions, please contact exaf@epfl.ch. The frequently asked questions (+ answers) may be published on the EXAF [website](#).