

1. ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP

The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), with support from the Mastercard Foundation, invites applications for the third cohort of its Early Career Research Fellowship Programme. The programme will support **forty (40) early-career African researchers** to undertake six-month research fellowships at institutions hosting or affiliated with ARUA's thirteen (13) Centres of Excellence (CoEs) and twenty-two (22) Africa–Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs).

The fellowships will commence in **May/June 2027**, depending on the readiness of successful applicants, and will run for six months, ending in October or November 2027, respectively. The **deadline for applications is 15 February 2027**.

The programme aims to strengthen the research capacity, productivity, and global competitiveness of early-career African researchers by providing opportunities to undertake focused research, collaborate with experienced researchers, and benefit from structured mentorship at ARUA CoEs and CoREs. Through these engagements, Fellows are expected to generate high-quality research outputs, strengthen research networks, and contribute to knowledge generation and solutions to Africa's development challenges.

The fellowship provides an opportunity for researchers to spend time away from their regular teaching and institutional responsibilities to focus on research and professional development. Fellows will be hosted at institutions outside their home countries to promote cross-border research collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Applicants must be African nationals, hold a PhD in a relevant discipline and be 35 years or younger at the time of application, except where an age-limit exemption is granted under section 4 (b). At least 70% of the fellowships will be awarded to women.

1.1 About ARUA

The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) is a network of leading African universities committed to strengthening research excellence and global competitiveness while generating knowledge that contributes to Africa's socio-economic transformation. ARUA brings together universities from diverse backgrounds to pool their expertise, resources, and research capacities, creating a critical mass of researchers capable of addressing Africa's development challenges.

ARUA advances this vision through its thirteen (13) Centres of Excellence (CoEs) and twenty-two (22) Africa–Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs), which promote collaborative and interdisciplinary research, strengthen research and postgraduate training, and foster strategic partnerships across Africa and beyond.

1.2 About the Mastercard Foundation

The Mastercard Foundation is a registered Canadian charity and one of the world's largest foundations. Established in 2006 through the generosity of Mastercard when it became a public company, the Foundation operates independently, with its policies, operations, and programme decisions determined by its own Board of Directors and leadership. It works with visionary organizations to advance education and financial inclusion, enabling young people in Africa and Indigenous youth in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work. The Foundation has offices in Toronto, Kigali, Accra, Nairobi, Kampala, Lagos, Dakar, and Addis Ababa.

For more information, visit www.mastercardfdn.org.

2. BACKGROUND

ARUA implements its research and capacity-strengthening initiatives through thirteen (13) Centres of Excellence (CoEs) spanning diverse disciplines and twenty-two (22) Africa–Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoREs), established in partnership with The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities. These structures provide platforms for collaborative and interdisciplinary research, postgraduate training, and partnerships that address Africa's development priorities.

The CoEs cover a broad range of thematic areas, as outlined below.

Natural Sciences	Humanities

1. Water 2. Energy 3. Non-Communicable Diseases 4. Materials, Energy and Nanotechnology 5. Climate and Development 6. Sustainable Food Systems	7 Post-Conflict Societies 8. Good Governance 9. Inequality Research (ACEIR) 10. Migration and Mobility 11. Notions of Identity in Africa 12. Unemployment and Skills Development 13. Urbanization and Habitable Cities

The 22 CoREs are organized into four thematic areas as outlined below:

Public Health
1. Advanced Infectious Diseases Research and Training 2. Multimorbidity 3. Food Environment Actions for the Promotion of Health 4. Non-Communicable Diseases and Multimorbidity 5. Genomics for Health in Africa 6. Preparedness and Response to Pandemics and Shocks 7. Health, Gender, and Sexualities 8. Translational Research in Infection, Immunity, and Inflammation 9. Migration and Health
Green Transition
10. Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation 11. Sustainable Water and Land Resource Management for Human Well-Being 12. Renewable Energy 13. Water Resources Management for a Sustainable and Just Future 14. Integrative Conservation Biology Research and Training
Innovation and Technology
15. Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, and Theoretical and Computational Thinking 16. Sustainable Food Systems 17. Creative Economies: Cultures, Innovation and Sustainability 18. Engineering for the Future 19. Mathematics
Capacities for Sciences
20. Building Capacities for Interdisciplinary Peace Research: Exploring Conflict, Environment, Technology, Inequality, and Identity in Africa 21. Promoting Impactful Research and Education on Inequalities, Poverty, and Deprivation Across Africa 22. The Politics of Sustainable Development

Through the ECR Fellowship Programme, selected researchers will undertake six-month residential research placements at host or affiliated institutions of the CoEs and CoREs. Fellows will work under the guidance of experienced researchers, contributing to ongoing research projects while strengthening their research skills, professional networks, and scholarly outputs.

Applicants are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the research priorities and ongoing activities of their preferred CoE or CoRE to ensure that their proposed research aligns with the host's thematic focus and objectives.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RESEARCH FELLOW

During the six-month fellowship, successful candidates will be expected to:

a) **Undertake collaborative research** aligned with the thematic priorities of the host CoE or CoRE, working closely with an assigned mentor and other researchers to achieve clearly defined research objectives.
b) **Produce high-quality research outputs**, including preparing and submitting at least one manuscript to a reputable peer-reviewed journal indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. In addition, produce at least one public-facing research output, such as a policy brief, research blog, or white paper, to communicate research findings to wider audiences.
c) **Participate in research dissemination and capacity-strengthening activities**, including delivering at least two research presentations and participating in relevant seminars, technical workshops, or other scholarly engagements.
d) **Strengthen research collaborations and partnerships** by actively engaging with researchers and relevant stakeholders within and beyond the host CoE or CoRE, contributing to existing collaborations and exploring opportunities for new partnerships.
e) **Contribute to the visibility and impact of research** by supporting the dissemination of research findings through appropriate academic, institutional, and stakeholder engagement platforms.

4. SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants must meet the following eligibility and selection criteria:

a) **Nationality and academic qualifications:** Applicants must be African nationals holding a PhD in a discipline or sub-discipline relevant to the thematic focus of the selected ARUA Centre of Excellence (CoE) or Africa–Europe Cluster of Research Excellence (CoRE).
b) **Age requirement:** Applicants must be 35 years of age or younger at the time of application. Age-limit exemption may be considered for female candidates older than 35 years at the time of application, subject to the ARUA ECR Fellowship Age-Limit Exemption Criteria. Applicants seeking an exemption should review the criteria before applying.
c) **Institutional affiliation:** Applicants should be young faculty members or researchers at an ARUA member university. Eligible candidates from non-ARUA universities may also apply.
d) **Postdoctoral fellows:** Female postdoctoral fellows may be considered in limited cases.

e) **Research excellence and potential:** Applicants should demonstrate a highly competitive research track record relevant to the fellowship opportunity, with the potential and commitment to develop a strong international research reputation.
f) **Availability and institutional commitment:** Applicants must be available to undertake a six-month residential fellowship away from their home institution and be able to return to their home institution upon completion of the fellowship.
g) **Research readiness and alignment:** Applicants must be engaged in an ongoing research project aligned with the thematic focus of the selected CoE or CoRE and have readily available data to enable them to fulfil the research roles and responsibilities outlined in Section 3.
h) **Gender equity:** Eligible women are strongly encouraged to apply. At least 70% of the fellowships will be awarded to female candidates, in line with the Mastercard Foundation's commitment to advancing opportunities for young African women researchers.

5. CONTRACT AND REMUNERATION

Successful applicants will be contracted by ARUA for a period of six (6) months. The fellowship will provide a **monthly stipend of US$2,000**, a modest accommodation allowance, and travel support covering a return air ticket to the host institution. No additional relocation expenses will be provided.

Eligible female Fellows with young children will receive a supplementary stipend equivalent to 30% of the monthly fellowship stipend to support childcare and related adjustment needs during the fellowship period.

The host CoE or CoRE will provide the Fellow with office space and an enabling research environment to support the successful implementation of their research activities.

6. APPLICATION PROCESS

Applicants must submit the following documents through the ARUA online application portal:

a) **Cover Letter**

A cover letter outlining the applicant's motivation for applying, relevant research experience, suitability for the fellowship, and how they intend to fulfil the roles and responsibilities outlined in Section 3.

The letter must specify the preferred ARUA Centre of Excellence (CoE) or Africa–Europe Cluster of Research Excellence (CoRE). Applicants who have previously studied, worked, or undertaken research at the proposed host institution should explain how the fellowship will build on that relationship.

Applicants may identify potential mentors whom they have already contacted. They should also indicate whether they require a visa to enter the host country and, if so, provide the relevant requirements and estimated processing time.

b) **Curriculum Vitae (CV)**

A comprehensive CV containing personal details (including date of birth, passport number, country of origin, and citizenship), academic qualifications, details of the PhD award, research experience, and scholarly outputs.

For jointly authored publications, applicants should clearly indicate their contributions. The CV must also include the contact details of two academic referees who are not affiliated with the proposed host CoE or CoRE. Shortlisted applicants will be required to arrange for their referees to submit brief assessments of their suitability for the fellowship.

c) **Letter of Support from the Home Institution**

An official letter from the applicant's home institution confirming their suitability for the fellowship, institutional support for their participation, and their expected return to the institution upon completion of the six-month fellowship.

d) **Evidence of PhD Award**

A copy of the PhD degree certificate or other official documentation confirming the award of the doctoral degree.

e) **Research Concept Note**

A brief research concept note of **not more than 1,500 words, including references**, outlining the proposed research project or work plan.

The proposed research must be feasible within the six-month fellowship period and clearly aligned with the research priorities and objectives of the selected CoE or CoRE. Applicants who demonstrate access to existing research data or materials necessary to undertake the proposed research will have a significant advantage.

f) **Samples of Academic Writing**

Two (2) samples of academic writing, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, or policy briefs. Chapters extracted directly from the applicant's doctoral thesis will not be accepted.

For jointly authored work, applicants must clearly describe their individual contributions.

g) **Valid Passport**

A copy of the biodata page of a valid passport which will be used to verify the applicant's identity, nationality, and age eligibility, as well as facilitate international travel arrangements.

h) Applicants seeking an age-limit exemption must also submit the additional documentation specified in the ARUA ECR Fellowship Age-Limit Exemption Criteria (Link)

7. SELECTION PROCESS

Selection for the ARUA Early Career Research Fellowship Programme will be highly competitive and based on the following considerations:

a) **Research excellence and potential:** Applicants will be assessed primarily on their academic standing, research experience, productivity, scholarly outputs, and potential to develop a strong international research reputation.
b) **Research relevance and alignment:** Applicants will also be assessed on the relevance of their research experience and proposed research to the thematic priorities, ongoing activities, and objectives of their preferred CoE or CoRE.
c) **Eligibility screening:** The ARUA Secretariat will review applications to verify compliance with the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 4 and the completeness of the required application documents.
d) **Selection by host institutions:** Eligible applications will be forwarded to the relevant CoE Directors or CoRE Leads for competitive selection, in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the host institution.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND ENQUIRIES

All applications must be submitted through the ARUA online application portal:

Application portal: https://arua.org/early-career-research-fellowships/

For enquiries or further information, please contact:

Email: **ecr.info@arua.org**

Website: **www.arua.org**

Application deadline: 15 February 2027

KEY DATES	
Activity	**Date**
Call for applications opens	20 November 2026
Application deadline	15 February 2027
Completion of eligibility screening and forwarding of applications to CoEs/CoREs	5 March 2027
Deadline for submission of selection results by CoE Directors and CoRE Leads to the ARUA Secretariat	31 March 2027
Contracting and onboarding	April – May
Fellowship commencement	May – June 2027
Fellowship completion	October – November 2027