ARUA EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS FELLOWSHIP

AGE-LIMIT EXEMPTION CRITERIA



Purpose: The described criteria seek to enable disadvantaged women aged 35 and above, whose PhD completion was delayed by poverty and economic disadvantage (PED) or by refugee status or displacement (RDP), to compete equitably for the ARUA Early Career Researcher (ECR) Fellowship, supported by the Mastercard Foundation. Disability may be considered where it compounds either pathway. The exemption does not lower the scientific merit standards of the fellowship programme.

WHO QUALIFIES FOR THE EXEMPTION (ALL MUST BE MET)

a) Be a woman aged 35 and above at the call deadline

b) Hold a PhD awarded normally within the preceding eight years. Extensions of up to 12 years post-PhD may be considered where documented disruptions occurred, such as disability-related leave, caregiving or severe financial hardship.

c) Meets ECR scientific merit standards defined in the fellowship call for applicants

d) Demonstrate at least one of the two disadvantage pathways below, PED or RDP, and provide credible evidence of its effects on academic progress.

Note: Disability is not a standalone exemption pathway. It may be considered only where it materially compounds poverty or economic disadvantage, or barriers associated with refugee status or displacement.

DISADVANTAGE PATHWAYS AND EVIDENCE

1. Poverty or Economic Disadvantage (PED)

Rationale: Applicants must demonstrate an economic barrier that delayed or disrupted their studies. They must also provide evidence of current economic disadvantage and explain how fellowship support is likely to enable research or career progression and contribute to improved economic security. The following circumstances may support this pathway.

- **Low-income or first-generation background**
  - Evidence must establish economic disadvantage. Examples include means-tested financial aid, fee waivers based on economic status, supported by income verification such as tax assessments, employment records or other means-test evidence. First-generation status or attendance at an under-resourced school alone does not establish low income.
- **Paid work undertaken to fund education**
  - Applicants must demonstrate that significant paid work was undertaken out of financial necessity during studies and materially delayed or disrupted academic progress.
  - Evidence may include institutional, employer, or supervisor letters confirming the work undertaken during a previous degree and its effect on study progression, together with employment or income records where available.
  - Where independent evidence is unavailable, an affidavit or attestation from a parent or guardian may be considered as supplementary evidence.
- **Unsupported caregiving responsibilities**
  - Applicants must demonstrate that major caregiving responsibilities without adequate support materially delayed or disrupted their studies.
  - Evidence may include letters from an institution, supervisor, health or social-service provider, or another appropriate independent source confirming the responsibilities and their impact on academic progress.
  - Where independent evidence is unavailable, an affidavit or attestation from a parent or guardian may be considered as supplementary evidence.
- **Fee interruptions or lack of essential resources**
  - Applicants must demonstrate that inability to pay fees or obtain essential resources halted or disrupted their studies or research.
  - Evidence may include institutional or supervisor letters; fee or interruption records; financial-aid, bursary, scholarship or fee-waiver records based on a financial-needs assessment; employer letters, contracts or payslips; recognised NGO, social-service or community-authority confirmation; and tax, income or other means-test evidence

2. Refugee or Displaced Person (RDP)

- **Status:** The applicant was a refugee, asylum seeker, or internally displaced person at some point during postgraduate or PhD studies.

- **Impact:** The applicant must demonstrate clear disruption to study or research, such as interrupted enrolment, documentation or work-permit barriers, residence in a camp or transit setting or security events.
- **Evidence:** Examples include UNHCR. Government or NGO documents; host-institution attestations; interruption letters; residence or work-permit history.

Disability as a Compounding Factor

- **Status:** Physical, sensory, psychosocial, intellectual, neurological, or developmental disability may be self-identified and, where possible, corroborated by a medical, disability-services or comparable note.
- **Impact:** The disability must have materially contributed to delayed academic progress through lack of or delayed access to reasonable accommodation, assistive technology, accessible transport, care support, or other necessary support. It is considered only where it intersects with current poverty or economic disadvantage or barriers associated with refugee status and displacement
- **Evidence:** Examples include a disability office or medical note, records of requests for accommodation or assistive technology and a supervisor or institutional letter confirming the impact on study progression.

WHAT APPLICANTS MUST SUBMIT

a) **Exemption declaration**: identify the PED or RDP pathway or both and any disability-related compounding letter.

b) **Personal statement**: Provide no more than 1,000 words explaining the barriers, their timeline and effect on academic progress, actions taken and why the fellowship is appropriate now. For the PED pathway, explain current economic disadvantage and how fellowship support is likely to improve economic security.

c) **Supporting evidence**:

- Provide at least one primary and one corroborating item for each pathway claimed. Include supporting evidence for any disability-related compounding factor.
- A letter of attestation will be required from a person or body with direct knowledge of the applicant's circumstances, such as an institutional representative, employer, recognised NGO, community authority, or social-service provider.
- Where independent documentary evidence is not reasonably available, an applicant may submit an affidavit from a parent, guardian, or other responsible adult. An affidavit will be treated as supplementary evidence and will carry less weight than independently verifiable documentary evidence.