



HELMHOLTZ RESEARCH FOR
GRAND CHALLENGES

Call for Applications of 03 February 2026

**Helmholtz - OCPC Program
for the involvement of postdocs in bilateral collaboration
projects with China**

**Funded jointly together with the
Office of the China Postdoctoral Council (OCPC)**

A. Background of the Project

China is continuously promoting its research potential, in particular by considerably increasing its research and development (R&D) expenditure and, in parallel, by training R&D staff. In many fields, Chinese scientists and research institutions have caught up with the level of western industrialized countries or will do so in the near future.

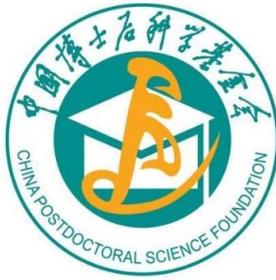
It is therefore of fundamental importance that the Helmholtz Association and its centres should expand or establish sustainable collaborations, in particular with China. Our aim is to accompany China as an important cooperation partner in the scientific sector along the road described above towards a knowledge-based and innovation-driven society so that we can jointly work on the grand challenges facing society and create a win-win situation for both parties.

The Helmholtz program with the Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security serves to consolidate projects between Helmholtz centres and Chinese cooperation partners from universities and research institutes. It is jointly administered with the OCPC, a governmental agency under the responsibility of the MoHRSS.

B. Funding Model

The program enables the Helmholtz centres to integrate up to 25 postdocs in projects they are implementing or intend to establish with partner institutions in China. The young scientists will receive funding and will be able to undertake research work at a Helmholtz centre (here: KIT) for up to two years in order to promote sustainable collaboration with the Chinese partners. Once after having finished the two year research stay, all fellows shall close the program with their Chinese hosting postdoc-station and then be free to move to anywhere, the same for all ordinary Chinese postdoc fellows. They may also choose to stay in the same Helmholtz group or find another position in a third country, unless they have an additional contract with their former Chinese employer.

The funding is composed as follows:



- The successful postdoctoral fellow shall be awarded a research grant of RMB 300,000¹ for two years, equivalent to approx. € 1.511,56 per month² to be used for subsistence allowance, for health insurance, and for travel expenses during the stay at KIT.
- A KIT fellowship of € 1500 per month from decentralised budgets of KIT (e.g. an institute's budget). Funding must be secure. The fellowships include insurance contributions and travel expenses while staying at KIT.

During their stay at KIT, the fellowship holders remain affiliated to their postdoc station in China with respect to employment law. The postdoc station also administers the fellowship funded from the OCPC budget and pays it to the participants. Except for safety instructions, KIT shall not have the authority to issue directives. This mixed funding provides the Chinese researchers with excellent financing, equivalent to the research fellowships for postdocs granted by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

As customary in the case of scholarships, the work results developed by the scholarship holder shall belong to this scholarship holder.

C. Target Group

The opportunity to become involved in a KIT collaboration project primarily targets talented Chinese candidates from a postdoc research station registered with OCPC³. Young scientists under the age of 35 with a Chinese passport, who have taken their degree or will take their PhD degree before the final decision in September 2026 in China or abroad or even abroad at the time of application, are also eligible to apply as long as they can find a postdoc research station to accept their application and to recommend them to OCPC.

D. Funding Period

The agreed OCPC-KIT funding period normally is two years. After completing their research stay in Karlsruhe, the candidates are free to go anywhere, ideally they will continue to be involved in the long-term collaboration project between their home organisation and KIT⁴.

KIT institutes are entitled to withdraw their offer of a stay in Karlsruhe to a visiting scientist within six months after he or she has taken up their project work if it should subsequently become apparent that the candidate is not qualified for the project.

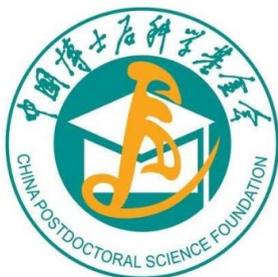
E. Application Procedure

¹ Exchange rate as of 30 January 2026: 36.277,50€

² Exchange rate as of 30 January 2026

³ There are more than 6000 postdoc research stations in China, which means that all excellent Chinese universities and academy institutes fulfil this most important selection criterion.

⁴ At the end of the scholarship period, it is possible to agree with the postdoc station on an extension of the stay at KIT for 1 year. Chinese funding is excluded during an extension.



The procedure comprises five steps:

1. **KIT institutes** that are interested should contact **KIT - International Affairs** by 28 February 2026 with a project proposal (contact person: Oliver Kaas, phone: 45323, email: oliver.kaas@kit.edu)⁵. **KIT - International Affairs** will check whether the formal application requirements have been fulfilled and will forward the formally correct project proposals for OCPC to the Helmholtz Beijing Office by 28 February 2026.
2. The **HGF Office in Beijing** will compile all the files from all the participating Helmholtz Centres and communicate them to OCPC to make sure that OCPC will officially announce the public call on its website before 02 March 2026, with a defined deadline for the application by 30 April 2026. Interested candidates will inform the Chinese **postdoc research station** about their interest and submit their necessary documents to the OCPC by the published deadline. **Candidates who submit their applications directly to the OCPC and not through a postdoc station will not be considered by OCPC.**
3. Each postdoc station, in its own responsibility, will evaluate the candidates based on its own formal evaluation criteria. OCPC will only cross-check the application and recommendation materials to make sure there are not frauds. Theoretically, all the received materials will be forwarded to the HGF Beijing Office not later than 15 May 2026 and then transferred immediately to the relevant KIT institute.
4. The proposed candidates are then finally reviewed by **KIT institutes**, according to §16 of the scholarship guidelines. Suitable instruments for this purpose are video conferences or a personal interview with the candidate. The KIT institutes will make their decisions and communicate the results to **KIT – International Affairs**, which, in turn, will forward the institutes' decisions to the HGF Beijing Office not later than mid July 2026.
5. OCPC will do the check on all Helmholtz decisions, present the list of the chosen candidates to the Minister, and very likely announce the final decision on its website⁶ by end of August 2026. The corresponding approval letters in English will be sent by OCPC to the candidates by October 2026.

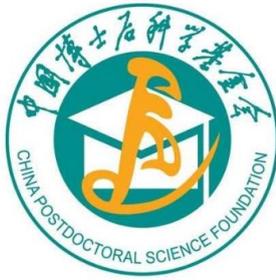
It is expected that successful candidates will start work on their project at KIT within six months of receiving confirmation of their fellowship from the OCPC.

F. Project Proposal

The project proposal of the KIT institute to find a young scientist from China must be written in English and should be structured according to the attached form.

⁵ Helmholtz OCPC coordinator at KIT

⁶ Website: http://www.chinapostdoctor.org.cn/website/showinfo_zcwj.html?infoId=f6f50278-0d13-41b6-bc8b-af94c434c4fb



Part A of the form is to be completed by the KIT institute with its own details and information on the planned project and the required qualifications of the postdoc. Foreign trade regulations shall be considered.

- Title of the project
- Name of the KIT institute
- Name and contact details of the KIT project leader / supervisor
- Internet address of the institute and, if applicable, of the working group
- Description of the scientific topic (max. 1 page)
- Description of the existing or planned collaboration with a Chinese institution (max. half a page)
- Applicant qualifications required

Part B of the form is to contain the documents to be submitted by the postdoc to the OCPC and can be supplemented and modified by the project leader depending on the project proposal.

- Reason for the candidate's personal interest in a research visit to KIT
- CV and copies of certificates
- List of publications
- Two letters of recommendation
- Evidence of English proficiency

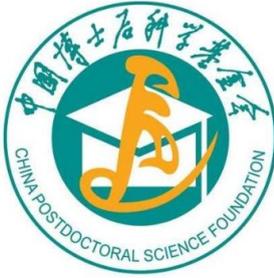
Part C of the form describes the conditions of the program which must be observed by the postdoc.

- Completion of PhD within the past five years
- Not older than 35 years of age at time of application.

G. Foreign Trade Legislation

When planning a proposal, kindly note the following aspects of foreign trade legislation:

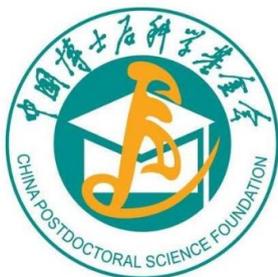
- Does the home organisation (or previous place of education) of the postdoc belong to the so-called 'Seven Sons of National Defence' or is it involved in armaments research for China? If yes, ensure that potential use for military purposes of the knowledge acquired by the postdoc at KIT is excluded and no sensitive or neuralgic research area is concerned.
- Do you know (from publications, for example) whether the postdoc has conducted or is conducting armaments-related research?
- Ensure that the postdoc, outside of his/her work at the institute, will not be given access to any information about other work of KIT that might be of military use (e.g. by limiting access to rooms, plants, instruments, and research data). Moreover, the post-



doc should not participate in general institute meetings or be given access to information and plants of KIT he/she does not have to use for the activities under the project.

- If the home institution of the postdoc is listed in the so-called US Entity / Unverified List according to the above link, he or she must not be given access to goods (including software) subject to the US export control regime during his/her stay at KIT. In this case, institute members having US citizenship must not be involved in the project of the postdoc.
- It must be noted that in case of joint publications of KIT with the postdoc, listing of his/her home institution in the US Entity / Unverified List would have an adverse effect on KIT's image and might aggravate cooperation of KIT with US institutions in general.
- It must be assumed that Chinese guests will have to enter the information developed at KIT in a general database in China, to which all Chinese institutions and authorities will have access and which can be used by them. This may also include work results generated jointly under the project, i.e. results that are also owned by KIT. Hence, no joint results should be developed and the results of the postdoc should not be based on knowledge of KIT. The postdoc should rather be given access to generally accessible information only.
- In addition, it must be assumed that Chinese guests (have to) communicate information on the state of the art at KIT and on its laboratory equipment and the personnel resources required for operation to Chinese authorities. Even if all results will be published later on, an undesired technology leakage may be possible.

28 February 2026	Deadline for providing the project information to Beijing.
------------------	--



HELMHOLTZ RESEARCH FOR GRAND CHALLENGES

02 March 2026	Official call for applications with position information announced in China (on the OCPC website).
30 April 2026	Application deadline on the OCPC Website.
15 June 2026	Helmholtz Centres receive the application documents from OCPC.
End of July 2026	The feedback/responses to Beijing from the center coordinators.
End of August 2026	Final results announcement by OCPC (via website to Helmholtz OCPC Coordinators). OCPC certificates to the researchers awarded with the fellowship.