



Research Fund

Rethinking Social Contracts for the 21st Century – Demographic Change, Social Protection and Solidarity

Postdoctoral call for proposals

April 2025

Rethinking Social Contracts for the 21st Century - Demographic Change, Social Protection and Solidarity

In today's global landscape, traditional social contracts are evolving and facing increased scrutiny. The unspoken agreements that have historically shaped societies—between citizens, governments, and institutions—are being challenged by demographic shifts, pressures on health and pension systems, political fragmentation, and increasing public debts. Moreover, existing social contracts have delivered unevenly in many regions, as evidenced by deep-seated structural inequalities. This disparity means that the social contract baseline differs between the Minority and Majority World. Increasing social, economic, and ecological pressures call for a critical examination of what constitutes a social contract fit for the challenges of our time.

This research call invites postdoctoral scholars to examine the evolving dynamics of social contracts, considering how social contracts need to be transformed to address the intersection of demographic shifts, migration, and labor market demands, ensuring inclusive and sustainable policies that foster social mobility and intergenerational equity. It shall also look into what role do non-state actors play (e.g., private companies, civil society) to address these questions including, global labor mobility, skills shortages, and crisis response. In a nutshell: How can social contracts evolve to promote solidarity in increasingly diverse societies, balancing demographic changes, migration, and equitable social protection systems?

We welcome interdisciplinary perspectives from fields such as sociology, political science, geopolitics, economics, law, public health, environmental studies, and related disciplines. We especially value solution-oriented research that proposes tangible recommendations and outcomes. Proposed research could explore, but is not limited to, one or more aspects of the following aspects:

Demographic Shifts:

- How can the social contract be updated to address the challenges of aging populations, declining birth rates, and shifting dependency ratios, while ensuring intergenerational equity in health, pensions, and social protection systems?
- What innovative approaches can the social contract adopt to support youth populations in regions experiencing rapid population growth, ensuring access to education, employment, and social mobility?
- How can the social contract integrate private sector actors to enhance public health systems and address the needs of aging societies, particularly in areas like pandemic response and elderly care?

Migration:

- How can the social contract be adapted to integrate migrants and refugees into host societies while addressing concerns about social cohesion and resource allocation?
- How can the social contract be reviewed to address the impacts of climate-induced migration and displacement on both sending and receiving communities?

The Future of Work:

- How can the social contract be updated to address the rise of non-traditional employment models (e.g., gig work, remote work, platform-based labor) while ensuring fair wages, job security, and access to social protections?
- What role can the social contract play in supporting lifelong learning and reskilling initiatives to help workers adapt to automation, artificial intelligence, and rapidly changing labor markets?

We encourage scholars to contribute research that advances our understanding of contemporary social contracts and offers innovative solutions for a more sustainable and equitable future.

AXA Fellowships Guidelines

AXA Research Fund

The AXA Research Fund's mission is to support outstanding researchers and it is committed to improving peoples' lives through innovative research in areas of Climate & Environment, Health, and Socioeconomics.

AXA Fellowships supports promising early-career researchers within **five years of completing their PhD** on topics aligned with AXA's priorities and societal challenges. The support of the AXA Research Fund should be transformative for the researcher and the advancement of their field.

Duration

An AXA Postdoctoral Fellowship is awarded for **a period of 2 years**.

Institution Eligibility

The project calls are global. The AXA Research Fund partners with academic institutions only. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), governmental bodies, foundations, independent research centers, cultural institutions (such as museums), and hospitals are not eligible. **Each institution can only present ONE CANDIDATE** (for the entire institution, *not* one per department, faculty, or laboratory).

In case of several Expressions of Interest submitted from a single institution, all applications would be disqualified.

Institutions hosting an AXA Chair cannot request an extra post-doctoral fellowship for a researcher working on the AXA Chairholder's team. No change of host institution will be possible after the application has been submitted.

Researcher

Candidates should be of the highest caliber and have demonstrated outstanding research achievements, as evidenced by the usual indicators for assessing academic excellence such as research outputs (e.g., publications, citations), research activities (e.g., organizing networks, being involved in communities) and research impact (e.g., policy reports, specific recognition through awards, etc.).

AXA Fellowships supports promising early-career researchers who have completed their PhD for no longer than five years.¹ **Candidates must be awarded their PhD and have defended their PhD certification before submitting their Expression of Interest.** To be eligible for the grant, **researchers must not have a permanent (tenured or tenure-track) position.**

Research Program

The research program should demonstrate its scientific originality and innovative nature and have the potential to contribute to a step change in the field considered. It is the applicant's responsibility to demonstrate the relevance of the proposed research topic to the AXA Research Fund.

Engagement and Obligations

Researchers are required to be proactive in engaging science with society when supported by the AXA Research Fund and use an open-data framework when applicable. Our researchers commit to sharing their project and communicating their research to a broad audience, supported by the AXA Research Fund. In addition, funded

¹ For the 2025 cycle, applicants must have defended their PhD on or after **October 10, 2019**. This date accounts for a 6-month flexibility beyond the 5-year working experience limit. AXA also provides an additional 6 months per child flexibility to account for maternity/paternity leave. For example, a candidate with three children may have defended their PhD as early as April 10, 2018 (October 10, 2019 + 18 months).

researchers agree to provide both an annual and a final project report, as well as committing to sharing their research through speaking engagements in collaboration with the AXA Research Fund. Annual and final financial reports will be requested as well.

AXA Support for Dissemination and Career Development

The AXA Research Fund will provide support through proposed training sessions related to science communication, media, finance, and management. Furthermore, attention will be given to the opportunity for the grant to deliver a significant step-change in the career of the grantee.

Diversity

Diversity will be an important criterion in the selection process, as applied to the research topic, gender and geography.

Budget and Grant Allocation

The AXA Fellowship is awarded for a maximum amount of **140,000€ in total, to be spent over two years**. It is the applicant's responsibility to submit a carefully calibrated budget, appropriate for the ambition of the research program and justified in a detailed and coherent manner. The budget will help cover:

- Annual salary of the researcher (based on institution internal policy)
- Equipment/resources (databases, survey costs, consumables, etc.), academic activities (conferences, workshops, fieldwork, etc.)
- Outreach activities (beyond academic audiences).

Any other type of costs not listed above should be justified in the application template. **Overhead costs are NOT eligible**. No additional budget will be granted. Budget reallocation during an ongoing project must be strongly justified.

Host institutions will be expected to participate in the AXA Fellowship's general funding with studentships, PhD support and material resources related to the research program. There is no minimum requirement on the institution's contribution. However, a larger contribution naturally makes the proposal more attractive. The institution's participation should be detailed in the budget section of the application form. Grants should not substitute for the host institution's responsibilities vis-à-vis its researchers. As a result, the grant cannot be used to procure basic laboratory equipment.

The AXA Research Fund will formalize its support through a **sponsorship agreement to be signed with the host institution**.

Ethics

The AXA Research Fund places extremely high importance on the ethics of the work it supports. Programs are required to comply fully with all relevant ethical review processes and for this compliance to be evidenced. Cases of scientific misconduct (such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or inappropriate behavior towards staff or other parties) will be considered as breaches of the AXA ethical principles² and will be excluded from funding.

Intellectual Property

The researcher and the host institution remain fully independent to conduct the research project. AXA will not claim any right to the ownership or use of the results.

² AXA Group Compliance and Ethics Code, 2024: [Compliance and Ethics Code | AXA](#)

Timeline & Application process

The AXA Research Fund's evaluation process has been designed to assess scientific excellence. The evaluations are monitored to ensure transparency, fairness, and impartiality in the treatment of proposals.

The AXA Research Fund partners with independent external providers to carry out the peer review process in accordance with criteria defined by the AXA Research Fund. The results are then submitted to the Scientific Board for final selection. Please note:

- The complete application must be submitted in English, on time, and online. It must respect the template structure and the page limit.
- The research topic must fall within the scope of the eligible topic focus.
- The candidate must submit a free-standing independent research project involving full-time work for the duration of the fellowship (with the possible exception of up to 20% time dedicated to teaching).

Timeline

Host institutions phase	Step 1 - Registration <i>Only if your institution is not already registered on the AXA Research Fund's online platform.</i>	April 9th, 2025 – April 17th, 2025 4 PM Paris time
	Step 2 - Expression of interest <i>On the AXA RF platform</i>	April 10th, 2025 – May 5th, 2025 4 PM Paris time
Researcher phase	Step 3 - Research proposal submission <i>On the ESF platform, our partner organization (online link to be provided in due time)</i>	May 19th, 2025 – June 13th, 2025 4 PM Paris time
	Step 4 - Rebuttal <i>On the ESF platform</i>	September 24th, 2025 – September 30th, 2025 4 PM Paris time
AXA Research Fund	Results announcement by email to the candidates	December 2025

Projects selected for funding are expected to start between January 2026 and September 2026.

Application process

Step 1 – Registering

To apply for the AXA Fellowship grants, academic institutions must be registered on our platform: <https://institution.axa-research.org/>. You can check if your institution is already registered in the database via the above link. **Kindly contact your institute's operational contact for direct login if your institution is already registered on our database.** Institutions should appoint a single point of contact (“Operational Contact”) who will handle relations with the AXA Research Fund and be responsible for candidate's application.

Step 2 – Expression of Interest ON OUR ONLINE APPLICATION PLATFORM

Only host institutions can apply, applications cannot be directly submitted by individual researchers. To submit an online Expression of Interest, host institutions need to follow the steps below:

- 1. Log onto our online application platform:** <https://institution.axa-research.org/>
- 2. Go to the “Application” tab and click the “Post-doc” link to go to the “Expression of Interest” page**
- 3. Click “New” and fill in the online Expression of Interest form. Attach a short CV (3 pages maximum)**
- 4. Click “Submit”**

At the stage of Expression of Interest, you will be requested to provide the following information:

- About the candidate
 - Name
 - Birth date
 - PhD defense date
 - Current institution the candidate is affiliated with
 - Short CV (3 pages maximum)
- About the research program
 - Project description: 3000 characters including spaces

You will receive an email confirming that your Expression of Interest has been submitted. If you do not receive the email, please check your spam folder. If further assistance is required, please contact axaresearchfund@axa.com.

You will be able to edit your Expression of Interest as long as you have not clicked on “Submit”. Once submitted, your Expression of Interest can no longer be edited. The Expression of Interest will be reviewed by the AXA Research Fund. You will be informed of the decision pertaining to your Expression of Interest by email.

Expressions of Interest received after the deadline, by email, or incomplete will not be considered.

Step 3 – Full Application

Academic institutions will be given access to the dedicated ESF platform to nominate their candidates by entering their name & email address online. Nominated candidates will be invited to submit their research proposals and will be provided with the necessary information to access the application form. Eligibility criteria of the application call will be screened by our partner organization.

Candidates will have 4 weeks to submit their proposals through the ESF platform. Please note that if the host institution does not nominate the candidate on the ESF platform, the candidate will not have access to the platform.

Applications received after the deadline, by email, or incomplete will not be considered.

Step 4 – Scientific Assessment

The evaluation of the scientific quality of research proposals is carried out in a fully independent manner by our partner peer-review organization. Each application is reviewed by two relevant experts who will assess the candidate’s excellence and the research program’s scientific quality.

Step 5 – Rebuttal

Candidates will have the opportunity to respond online to peer review experts’ comments before their applications are reviewed by the AXA Research Fund. The main purpose of the rebuttal is to provide applicants

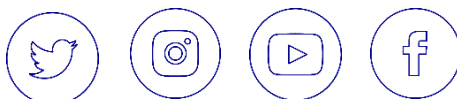
with the possibility to comment on any potential misinterpretations or misunderstandings that may have been made by the experts while initially assessing their proposals.

Step 6 – Selection & Results Publication

The Scientific Board of the AXA Research Fund selects to fund applications based on strength of the scientific case, peer review assessments, the potential of the project, candidate profile and of the institution and overall impact. The AXA Research Fund informs the candidates of the decisions by email. Results will also be made available on the AXA Research Fund's website <https://www.axa-research.org/>.

The Scientific Board's decision is final and cannot be appealed. It can neither be disputed nor subject to explanations or justifications, no feedback will be provided.

Participation in the call for applications implies acceptance of the above-mentioned rules.



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