Programme and Application Manual

Early Career Rescue Fellowship Programme

Application Deadline: 9 January 2026, 11:00 AM CET

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1. Context and Aim

Academic freedom is under pressure in many regions of the present world. The global mobility of scholars is restricted, funding is severely limited or cut, and the free practice of research is suppressed due to political intervention. This is not only true in regions of war and in authoritarian systems, but also in liberal democracies like in the USA. It particularly hits scholars in the early phases of their career, where they need the most support and time to shape their research future. Addressing the challenges of today's world by enabling innovation and advancement of knowledge requires freedom and pluralism of research, global interaction, and a particular support for excellent early career researchers under pressure.

The State of Baden-Württemberg and its three university-based international Institutes for Advanced Studies strive at contributing to this essential need. The Zukunftskolleg Konstanz (ZuKo), the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) and the Tübingen College of Fellows (CoF) provide strong and highly supportive research environments within their renowned universities. They have a long experience in supporting scholars from all over the world by temporary visiting fellowships. They are open to all disciplines – each with particular foci and strengths, enabling high-quality research, academic cooperation and establishing new research networks within their disciplinary and interdisciplinary environment.

The aim of the *Baden-Württemberg Early Career Rescue Fellowship Programme* is to provide temporary rescue havens for postdoctoral researchers

- with a minimum of one year and a maximum of seven years of post-doctoral experience
- who cannot conduct or continue their work in the USA appropriately because of actual restrictions – such as travel restrictions, or cancelled funding, projects or appointment.

The programme is open to researchers from all over the world, independently from where they are currently working. It offers two years of time at a renowned Baden-Württemberg university, preferred by the applicant, providing a safe research space, a focus entirely on their project and support for continuing their academic work under excellent conditions. It aims at facilitating their career development and new orientation within the Baden-Württemberg research area and beyond; and it offers new networks, exchange and interdisciplinary debates at one of the Institutes for Advanced Studies within their international fellow community.

For questions regarding the programme please contact:
Mihaela Mihaylova, zuko-application@uni-konstanz.de, or
Annette Doll, fellowships@frias.uni-freiburg.de, or
Niels Weidtmann, info@cof.uni-tuebingen.de.

2. What the Fellowship Offers

- 24-month employment contract with one of the universities, preferred by the applicant, between 1 July 2026 and 30 November 2028,
- monthly salary of up to ca 6.000 € (pre tax, and pre mandatory German social and health security contributions) depending on the professional experience, in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement for the Public Service of the Federal States (TV-L). The exact amount of the salary can only be determined individually,

- 24-month stay at one of the three participating Institutes for Advanced Studies
- appropriate workplace and professional research infrastructure,
- implementation of the applicant's research project, in cooperation with a local host and/or local laboratory facilities (if needed or intended),
- additional funding for research and cooperation, mobility allowance and compensation of the inbound and outbound journey,
- assistance in developing academic skills, creating networks in Baden-Württemberg, attending language courses,
- additional support for families, finding accommodation etc.

The programme is subject to final budget confirmation by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research and Arts.

3. Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible, candidates must **fulfil all of (1) the formal** and **(2) the basic academic quality eligibility criteria. (3) Applicants must carefully follow all given form requirements and length limits listed in the Application material section (below 4.).**

1. Formal eligibility criteria

- Applicants must hold a completed doctoral degree plus a minimum of one year and a maximum of seven years of post-doctoral experience. Time off for family, medical reasons, or non-academic professional activities will not be counted as part of the relevant period (see FAQ). Candidates may **NOT** hold a permanent professorship (Tenure).
- Applicants must provide a statement in the letter of motivation about how the own research is threatened by the current political restrictions in the USA.
- Applicants must provide proof that they cannot conduct or continue their research in the USA because of current political pressure, such as travel restrictions or cancelled funding, projects or appointment in 2025 or 2026, where applicable, **OR** a letter by an academic referee confirming that the applicant's research is threatened by current political restrictions and explaining how.
- Applicants must select their first and second choice of university and respective Institute for Advanced Studies, and specify at each university one local host they would like to work with (not necessary to be already contacted)
- Applicants must propose a research project that can be supported at the University of Freiburg or the University of Konstanz or the University of Tübingen (regarding disciplinary, infrastructural, technical, and laboratory requirements, if applicable).

- The research project must not involve topics that are excluded from funding due to ethical issues.
- Applications exceeding page limits (see below: Application Materials) will not be considered.
- Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.

2. Basic academic quality eligibility criteria

- General requirement for publication record: 3 peer-reviewed publications. The publications can appear in different media, such as books, journals, repositories or websites, and can have different formats. These include monographs, journal articles, articles on preprint servers, and contributions to anthologies and collection of essays. If available, please also provide a persistent identifier (e.g. DOI/Digital Object Identifier). An exception is made for papers that have already been accepted for publication, in which case the editor's confirmation of acceptance must be enclosed.
  A Single-authored monograph counts as 3 peer-reviewed publications. Edited-volumes do not count except for individual articles within the volume.
  Manuscripts not accepted for publication before the application deadline as well as textbooks, reprints, translations, book reviews and editorial publications do not count.
- The project should not be of local interest only but should have sufficient potential for international transfer.

4. Application Materials

Candidates apply exclusively via the online application portal BITE. We do not accept applications submitted by other ways of communication. After final submission, applicants will receive an acknowledgement of receipt.

Apply via BITE here: APPLICATION FORM

All information requested in the application form on BITE **must** be filled in.

Additionally, the following materials (in English) are required to be submitted with the application**.** Page limits may not be exceeded; formal structure requirements must be fulfilled. Applications that exceed the allowed number of pages will not be considered further. Please create **one PDF** with all the following relevant application documents, include a table of content in the beginning, and upload it on BITE:

1. Letter of motivation (1 page max., font size: 11, lining space 1.15). The letter of motivation should include a statement how the research project is threatened by the

current political restrictions. It should also include a statement concerning the disciplinary fit or distance of the hosts.

2. Research proposal (5 pages max., including footnotes, headers, footers, and bibliographical references, font size: 11, lining space 1.15)
Please make sure that your project proposal addresses the following issues:

- Short summary (max 1 page)
- Aim and scope of the project
- Innovative potential, originality and relevance of project
- Suitability of methodology
- Expected contribution to the field of research
- Feasibility of project and work plan
- Suitability of the – preferably two – University/ies for the research project
- All ethical issues raised by the proposed project (if applicable)
  The candidate should explain how ethical issues will be addressed, so as to conform to national principles.

3. CV in a tabular form, **no** publication list (5 pages max., font size: 11 lining space 1.15)
Applicants can submit evidence-based CVs that reflect also their extra-curricular achievements and qualifications.

If applicable, applicants should indicate in the curriculum vitae the dates of birth of children and periods of childcare (e.g. periods during which an individual temporarily gave up work for parental leave). Those periods will be considered when calculating the years of postdoctoral research experience

4. Writing sample (30 pages max.) A writing sample is a generic name for a relevant academic paper, a book chapter, a chapter of the PhD thesis of the applicant etc. which allows the Recruitment Committee to gain more insight into the scientific work of the applicant and his/her ability to communicate her/his scientific approach and objectives. The applicant may choose to submit one sample or several ones, however the total number of pages is not allowed to exceed 30.

Applicants from e.g. linguistics/literature/history etc. fields can submit the writing sample in the original language version, so there is no need to translate it.

The writing sample can be a co-authored publication when that is the most relevant publication of the candidate. However, it should be clearly understandable which contribution each of the authors made.

5. Proof of planned funding/position in the USA that has been cancelled or cannot be taken up in 2025 or 2026 due to current restrictions (funding, entry/visas), where

applicable **OR a letter by an academic referee** confirming that the research project of the applicant is threatened by the current political restrictions and explaining how.

6. Copy of the PhD diploma: if the writing system/script used in the diploma is not Latin (for instance, Cyrillic, Chinese), an official translation is requested**.**

7. Optional: up to two letters of recommendation (not from the possible hosts at the preferred universities).

Applicants can either directly upload the letters of recommendation themselves as part of the PDF, or ask the referees to send the letter of reference (including the name of the applicant) directly to zuko-application@uni-konstanz.de. Importantly, these letters of recommendation should be up-to-date, written on an official letterhead, and be duly signed by the referees. The letters of reference **must** arrive before the deadline!

5. Selection Procedure

The selection process is highly competitive and strictly merit-based. It involves three steps:

1. **Eligibility quality check**

To be eligible for application and proceed to the next step, candidates must fulfil **all** of (1) the formal and (2) the basic academic quality eligibility criteria (see above: 3.).

2. **Peer-review**

In the second stage, eligible proposals are forwarded to reviewers who provide a written assessment of the applicant's CV and excellence in terms of career development in line with their 'academic age', and of the research project with regard to academic quality and feasibility.

3. **Final selection by the selection committee**

The selection committee will select the Baden-Württemberg Early Career Rescue Fellows in its selection meeting **in February 2026**. Where two candidates are equally suitable for a fellowship, priority will be given to enhance diversity and inclusion.

The selection committee consists of representatives of all three Institutes for Advanced Studies and universities. Candidates will be informed about the result as fast as possible.

6. Financial Aspects

Successful applicants will become Baden-Württemberg Early Career Rescue Fellows with all the corresponding rights and obligations for the funding period. They become full-time employees at one of the three universities, and fellows at the respective Institute for Advanced Studies over a period of 24 months. For further information see above 2.

7. Redress

Complaints or a formal redress can be sent to a Representative for Academic Self-Regulation via the Programme Director for Research and Fellows at the Zukunftskolleg (address below) at any stage of the application/selection process within 14 days after the notification of the result has been sent. However, in general, the referee reports and decisions of independent experts are not overruled.

The representative investigates the concreteness and significance of the allegations in accordance with plausibility criteria and informs the responsible governing bodies if he deems further action to be necessary. He is bound to strict confidentiality. This is an official and independent position working on the basis of an official university statute.

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8. Ethical Issues

The Baden-Württemberg Early Career Fellowship Programme considers both the need to ensure freedom of research and the need to protect the physical and moral integrity of individuals and the welfare of animals.

In order to identify ethical issues at an early point in the application process, all applicants are required to explain ethical issues arising from their proposed research in their proposal (if applicable). Applicants must explain how these will be addressed.

A preliminary screening during the eligibility check also scrutinises potential ethical issues, even if they were not pointed out by the applicant. In addition, experts in the peer-review procedure are asked to indicate relevant ethical issues raised by the proposal.

If the application successfully passes through the formal selection procedure, the research proposal is referred to the Ethics Committee (EC) of the university chosen by the applicant in case any potential ethical issues are identified. The same procedure applies if ethical issues arise during work on a given project. The EC issues a decision that may include requirements and restrictions. This decision is binding under the employment contract and different laws. As soon as the decision is issued and if it does not stand impede the project, the fellowship is offered to the applicant. If the requirements and restrictions are extraordinarily difficult to fulfil, the Selection Committee has the authority to turn down an application on these grounds.

On the basis of the European Commission's Code of Ethics for Researchers the following fields of research cannot be funded:

- Research activities directed at human cloning for reproductive purposes.

- Research activities intended to modify the genetic make-up of human beings that could make such changes heritable (apart from research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads, which may be funded).
- Research activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purposes of research or stem cell procurement, including the technique of somatic cell nuclear transfer.
- Research that leads to the death of human embryos.

Ethical issues also include the avoidance of any breach of research integrity, which means, in particular, avoiding fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or other kinds of research misconduct. In grave instances and after due process has established wrongdoings, fellowship offers can be retracted and current fellowships can be revoked.

9. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How do I apply?

Applicants must complete and submit the online application form on BITE **by 09 January 2026, 11am CET**. **It is highly recommended to start the application early enough to become familiar with the technical processing. If you face any technical problems with the application form, please contact** zuko-application@uni-konstanz.de**.**

In general terms, please send all documents in English language as the Recruitment Committee consists of international experts. Exceptions of this rule are mentioned in the Manual above.

Apply here: APPLICATION FORM

What if there are difficulties in accessing the online application site?

If you encounter difficulties in **submitting your online application**, please contact the application support team via e-mail: zuko-application@uni-konstanz.de.
If there are any questions **concerning the fellowship** please contact one of the Institutes for Advanced Studies (addresses at the end).

Do I have to provide information, requested as application material (f. ex. above ch. 4. nos. 1, 2, and 3), also in the application site form, if requested there again?

Each applicant has to provide all information everywhere where they are requested, even if there are duplications or repetitions in different documents or forms.

Who can I name as possible hosts of my application?

Each applicant must name **two** possible hosts, one at their first- and one at their second-choice university, with whom they would like to or could eventually work together during the fellowship. The hosts should be qualified to support the applicant in their broader research area, and eventually be in a position to provide appropriate disciplinary, infrastructural, technical, and/or laboratory facilities, if applicable. Possible hosts must be professors or experienced researchers, who are employed at least for the duration of the fellowship at the University of Freiburg, or the University of Konstanz, or the University of Tübingen. The applicant does not need to contacted them before or within the application process. Information about departments, institutes, and professors as well as research foci at the three universities are available on the universities' websites.

What kind of proof must be provided that an applicant cannot conduct or continue their research in the USA?

Applicants must proof that they cannot conduct or continue their research in the USA because of current political pressure. This could be a document certificating the denial of entrance/visa to the USA, or cancellation of funding, interruption of a project, refusal or interruption of appointment of the applicant, which took or will take effect in 2025 or 2026, due to reasons related to political pressure in the US. If this is not available, applicants have to provide a letter by an academic referee confirming that the research project of the applicant is threatened by the current political restrictions and explaining how.
In addition to this, each applicant has to include a statement by their own about how their research in the USA is threatened and made impossible by the current political restrictions in the requested letter of motivation.

Are there specific research priorities?

Applications are welcome from all disciplines that can be supported at the University of Freiburg or the University of Konstanz or the University of Tübingen.

Does the location of my home institution play a role in my eligibility to apply?

Applicants from around the world are invited to apply. Applicants could, but do not need to work or live already in the USA.

Will working space be provided?

FRIAS, CoF and ZuKo will provide fully furnished offices for double or multiple occupancy, and whenever possible, single occupancy. Within their university, they will

take care of research facilities, laboratory space or other technical support (if needed or intended).

Do fellowships need to start 1 July 2026?

The 24-months fellowships should be conducted within the period between 1 July 2026 and 30 November 2028. They need not to start 1 July 2026.

Is there support for fellows with families?

Our fellow service teams assist families in finding suitable housing considering their needs regarding price, size, and location. Together with the Universities' Family Services, we provide information on the German system of childcare and schools. Fellows are supported in finding appropriate childcare facilities and in the process of enrolling their children at day-care centres, kindergarten, and schools.

Do you have further questions?

Please feel free to contact us via e-mail:

Zukunftskolleg at the University of Konstanz:
Mihaela Mihaylova, zuko-application@uni-konstanz.de, or

FRIAS at the University of Freiburg:
Annette Doll, fellowships@frias.uni-freiburg.de, or

College of Fellows at the University of Tübingen:
Niels Weidtmann, info@cof.uni-tuebingen.de.