CALL FOR PROPOSAL

Article 1 – Subject Matter and Definitions

1. The SIR Programme (Scientific Independence of young Researchers) is designed to support young researchers in the early stage of their independent research activity.

2. The Programme is designed to fund research projects with high scientific quality developed by independent research teams, under the scientific coordination of a Principal Investigator (PI), either of Italian or non-Italian nationality, resident in or moving to Italy, who has been awarded their PhD (or medical specialty training) up to 6 years prior to the publication of this call for proposals.

3. The constitution of the research team is flexible. Depending on the nature of the project, the research team can involve researchers from the same host institution or researchers from different organizations, whether Italian or not. In those fields where research is often conducted individually such as, for example, Humanities or Mathematics, the exclusive presence of the PI is also appropriate.

4. The guiding principles of the SIR Programme are:

- high scientific quality is the sole evaluation criterion
- projects in all fields of research are eligible for funding
- adequate funding is provided to attract outstanding researchers
- adequate funding is also intended to attract the host institution, with 10% of the project costs being destined to the host institution, where the PI is not permanently employed by said institution
- the host institution guarantees the independence of the PI, both scientific (by providing an adequate research environment for the PI to independently carry out the project) and administrative (independent managing of the funding)
- eligible PIs are researchers who have been awarded their first PHD up to 6 years prior to the publication of this call for proposals or whose first medical specialty training has been completed up to 6 years prior to the publication of this call for proposals. The date of award of the PhD (or medical specialization) is the date of the oral examination of the relevant dissertation.
- 5. For the purposes of this call for proposals, the following definitions apply:
 - 'Minister' and 'Ministry' respectively refer to Ministro e Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR) (Minister and Ministry of Education, Universities and Research, respectively);
 - 'CNGR' refers to the Comitato Nazionale dei Garanti della Ricerca (National Committee of Research Guarantors), as of Article 21 of Law No 240 of 30th December 2010;
 - 'CdS' refers to Comitati di Selezione (Evaluation Panels), as of Article 20 of Law No 240 of 30th December 2010, modified by Article 63 of the Decree-Law No 83 of 22 June 2012, ratified after amendments in Law No 134 of 7th August 2012;
 - 'University' refers to any university or other Italian institution of university status, either public or not and of any denomination, including superior graduate schools;
 - 'Research Institutions' refers to all public Research Institutions monitored by the Ministry;
 - 'Principal Investigator (PI)' refers to the young researcher in charge of the coordination of the activities of the project and therefore in charge of the scientific coordination of the project;
 - 'Host Institution' refers to the University or public Research Institution applying with MIUR where the PI will carry out their research project;
 - 'Research Organisations' refers to every other body, either public or private, national or international, whose main purposes include research activities and the circulation of their

results, whether in the form of teaching, publication or transfer of technology, and whose profits are entirely reinvested in research activities, in the circulation of their results or in teaching.

• 'CINECA' refers to the CINECA inter-university committee which manages the electronic processes for the submission and scientific evaluation of the research projects.

Article 2 – The Principal Investigator (PI)

1. The PI must have been awarded their first PhD (or medical specialization) up to 6 years prior to the publication date of this call for proposals, and should be less than 40 years of age on the date of the call launch.

2. Extensions to this period may be allowed in case of properly documented career breaks when these have occurred within the eligibility period (point 1). Eligible career breaks are: a) maternity leave, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered reduced by 18 months for each child born before or after the PhD award; b) paternity leave, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered mount of paternity leave taken for each child born before or after the PhD award; c) long-term illness (over ninety days), clinical training or national service, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered time since the award of the first PhD award; c) long-term illness (over ninety days), clinical training or national service, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered reduced by the actual amount of paternity days), clinical training or national service, the effective elapsed time since the award of the first PhD will be considered reduced by the actual amount of leave taken for each incident which occurred after the PhD award.

3. The elapsed time since the award of the first PHD or medical specialization should not in any case surpass 9 years, including the cases where the calculation of the eligibility period takes into account more than one career break (point 2).

4. Moreover, in order to be eligible, a Principal Investigator will have produced, before the launch of this call for proposals, at least one publication without participation of their PhD (or medical specialization) tutor, to show their ability to conduct research independently. As indicators of scientific quality, applicants should also be able to demonstrate a promising track-record of achievements appropriate to their research field and career stage, including significant publications (as main author) in peer-reviewed scientific journals of their field, invited presentations in international conferences, granted patents, awards etc.

5. Each PI may submit only one proposal under this call identifier and cannot be among the members of other research teams applying for this call for proposals; coordinators, either local or national, of projects designed for young researchers and funded by previous MIUR calls for proposals cannot submit a proposal under this call identifier, unless said projects have expired at least one year before the date of publication of this call. Similarly, a PI coordinating a project funded under this call for proposals cannot submit a new proposal under a new call, unless the project has expired at least one year before the publication of that call. Finally, members of the evaluation panels (Comitati di Selezione – CdS, see Article 7) cannot submit a proposal for 24 months after the deadline of this call.

Article 3 – Host Institution

1. The Host Institution where the PI will carry out their research project must be a university or public research institution monitored by MIUR. The Host Institution is the only legal entity recognized by the Ministry. However, where they bring scientific added value to the project, additional members of the research team can also be researchers affiliated to other legal entities (for example, private institutions or research centres and/or industrial research laboratories), including those situated outside the national territory or outside the territory of the European Union.

In this case, the Host Institution should cover the direct costs of research activities carried out outside the same Host Institution (see Annex 4); these costs still must be modest. The research project must be implemented mainly within the Italian territory. This does not exclude the possibility that some research activities (for example fieldwork) are conducted outside Italy where this is necessary in order to achieve the scientific objectives of the project.

2. Each Host Institution guarantees the independence of the PI and guarantees that the research activity of the PI will not be constrained by the research strategy of the Host Institution itself, ensuring that the PI is able to:

- submit the funding proposal for the research project in complete independence;
- manage the research and the funding and make appropriate decisions on resource allocation;
- publish independently as senior author and include as co-authors only researchers who have offered a substantial contribution to the project;
- coordinate the work of team members, including students and doctoral candidates;
- have access to adequate space and facilities in order to conduct the research.

3. In case of success of the application and where the PI is not already permanently employed by the Host Institution as professor or researcher, the Host Institution will engage the PI through an appropriate contract.

Article 4 – Research Domains of the Proposals

1. Applications can be made for projects in any field of research within the three Research Domains determined by the ERC (LS – Life Sciences; PE – Physical Sciences and Engineering; SH – Social Sciences and Humanities); submission of the following will be favourably considered:

- proposals of an interdisciplinary nature which cross the boundaries between different fields of research;
- pioneering proposals addressing new and emerging fields of research;
- proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions.

Article 5 – Funding of the projects

1. The cost of the projects funded by this call for proposals can amount to a maximum of \in 1,000,000 for a maximum period of 3 years (pro rata for project of shorter duration). The total budget (\in 47,215,612) is allocated according to the following lines:

- LS Life Sciences: 40%
- PE Physical Sciences & Engineering: 40%
- SH Social Sciences & Humanities: 20%

2. The grant is awarded to the Host Institution, which must ensure appropriate conditions for the PI to independently manage the research and its funding for the duration of the project, by act of commitment signed by the legal representative or person in charge (see Annex 3).

3. The appropriate cost and the related grant (according to the rules set out in annex 4) are determined, on the basis of the needs of the project, by the competent evaluation panel (CdS).

4. The evaluation panels (CdS) may also suggest a modification to the indicative budgetary breakdown in the application, but the PI has the freedom to modify the budgetary breakdown during the course of the project.

5. The costs which can be covered and the criteria for the determination of the amount of the grant are described in Annex 4.

All costs of the project are covered by MIUR funding, except those related to professors, researchers and technicians permanently employed by the host institution. Project costs covered by third parties are also allowed for additional activities that have explicitly been included in the project. Costs covered by third parties must also be clearly indicated in the relevant financial reports.

However, these additional activities must not prevail with respect to activities whose costs are borne by MIUR or host institution. The contribution by MIUR is expected to be significant and to cover the majority of the costs of the project. Therefore, this contribution should cover the key needs of the project and cannot merely be intended as supplementary funding.

Article 6 – Preparing and submitting the application

1. The application shall be submitted by the PI, who holds the scientific responsibility for the project in conjunction with and on behalf of the Host Institution, which is the applicant legal entity. The deadline for applications is March 13th, 2014, at 14. Submission is accepted only via the webbased procedures. All application forms, the Annexes to this call for proposals and all the necessary information for the submission of the proposals will be available in due time on the MIUR page http://sir.miur.it/.

2. Applications must be submitted in English and include the following distinct parts:

- a) Administrative form (part A)
- b) Research proposal (part B)
- c) Supporting documentation (part C)

3. The Administrative form (part A) is made of three parts:

- Part A1: brief description of the proposal and presentation of the PI
- Part A2: about the Host Institution
- Part A3: about the economic aspects

In particular, form A1 provides a brief description of the research proposal, reports the proposal's ERC research domain (chosen through a drop-down menu – see Annex 1) and includes one or more sub-sectors and one or more key-words. The form also briefly gives information on the PI (date of the PhD awarded or medical specialization completed, supervisor's name). The PI also needs to indicate the title of one publication produced without the participation of their supervisor and declare whether they intend to apply for any extensions to the eligibility period and the duration of the extensions requested.

4. The Research Proposal (Part B) consists of two parts:

- Part B1: a detailed description of the project, including objectives, state of the art, expected impact, methods and brief remarks on ethical issues or security;
- Part B2: Curriculum Vitae and track record of the PI.

In Part B1 the PI needs to indicate whether ethical issues or security issues may arise from the research project, providing further details in the supporting documentation (Annex 2).

5. The supporting documentation (Part C) will include a copy of the following, scanned and converted in Pdf format:

- declaration of the Host Institution concerning the conditions of autonomy of the PI. This document (a template is available through MIUR's electronic submission system, Annex 3) must be signed, stamped and dated by the legal representative of the institution or its delegate;
- self-certification concerning the lack of impediments of an ethical nature. Otherwise, indication and explanation of the relevant ethical issues and of how these will be dealt with (Annex 2);
- self-certification concerning the lack of impediments of a security nature. Otherwise, indication and explanation of such issues and of how these will be dealt with (Annex 2).

For all the self-certifications, where the application has been successful, MIUR will proceed to verify the declarations and, whenever necessary, will request relevant documentation. Verified false declarations will incur in the termination of the grant by MIUR, without prejudice to personal civil and criminal liability.

6. Incomplete proposals (where parts or sections of the proposal are missing) will be considered ineligible and will not be evaluated.

7. It is possible to modify a proposal until the call deadline if the submission procedure has not been finalized. Documents submitted after the deadline will not be considered for evaluation.

Article 7 – Evaluation and selection of grant proposals

1. Applications are evaluated by three different evaluation panels (CdS), one for each of the three ERC research domains:

- Life Sciences (LS)
- Physical Sciences and Engineering (PE)
- Social Sciences and Humanities (SH)

2. Each CdS is appointed by MIUR and consists of Chairman and 2 members designated by CNGR and chosen from a shortlist of nine candidates proposed by the ERC Scientific Council. The CdSs shall appoint three independent and anonymous external referees for each project. The names of the CdSs members are not disclosed until after the call deadline. Before their appointment, CdSs members and reviewers are requested to sign a declaration concerning the respect of ethical principles, confidentiality and non-incompatibility.

3. With the finalization of every application, the CINECA system will proceed with a formal check of the regularity and eligibility of the proposals. In particular, in order to satisfy all the eligibility criteria, each proposal:

- must be submitted before the deadline;
- must be complete (i.e. each part or section of the proposal must be complete, including the supporting documentation).

4. The formal examination of the declaration of the Host Institution and of the PI's takes place at a later stage and only for successful applications, and is completed by Ufficio V of the Direzione Generale per il Coordinamento e Sviluppo della Ricerca (Directorate General for the Coordination

and Development of Research – Office V), which also acts as administrative office for the evaluation panels (CdS).

5. The allocation of the proposals to the various panels is based on the expressed preference of the applicant (primary ERC research domain). The applicant PI may also indicate a secondary ERC domain. In this case the primary panel (CdS) may request additional reviews by appropriate members of other panels or additional referees. It is the PI's responsibility to choose the most relevant ERC domain and to indicate one or more descriptors for the proposal.

6. High quality of the PI and of the research project is the sole criterion of evaluation. This will be applied to the evaluation of both the PI and the research project.

The evaluation is a two-step process (Annex 5) and follows the common peer-review practice:

- Step 1: part A.1 (see Article 6, Part 3) is the only part evaluated at this stage;
- Step 2: all projects selected in Step 1 are evaluated in their entirety

At the end of Step 1, the proposals are ranked by the panels on the basis of the judgement they have received and the panels' overall appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses. The ranks are as follows:

- a. the proposal is of high quality and is eligible to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation;
- b. the proposal is of good quality but not eligible to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation;
- c. the proposal is not of sufficient quality to pass to Step 2 of the evaluation.

The candidates access their evaluation report on the website <u>http://sir.miur.it/</u>, and are informed by MIUR of the position of their proposal within the above ranks.

7. At Step 2 and parallel to the evaluation procedure, the panel proceeds to an ethics review through a specific team composed by at least three experts, either members or not members of the panel itself and designated by the panel. At the end of the review the team declare the opportunity of funding the projects examined. The objective of the ethics review is to ensure that the grant does not support research which is contrary to fundamental ethical principles.

Similarly and again parallel to the evaluation procedure, the panel proceeds to a security scrutiny procedure through a specific team composed by at least three experts, either members or not members of the panel itself and designated by the panel. At the end of the procedure the team declares the opportunity of funding of the projects examined. The objective of the security scrutiny procedure is to ensure that the grant does not support research which is in contrast with national or EU security.

8. At the end of Step 2, the proposals are ranked by the panels on the basis of the judgement they have received and the panels' overall appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses. The ranks are as follows:

- a. the proposal fully meets the high quality criterion and can be recommended for funding, within the limits of available funds;
- b. the proposal mostly meets the high quality criterion and can be proposed for funding if sufficient funds are yet available;
- c. the proposal does not meet the high quality criterion and cannot be recommended for funding.

The candidates access their evaluation report on the website http://sir.miur.it/ , and are informed by MIUR of the ranking of their proposal.

9. At the end of Step 2 the PIs ranking at a. level (and in case of sufficient funds candidates at b. level) are invited to attend an interview at MIUR's offices to present their project to the evaluation panel. Interviews are designed to evaluate the attitude of the PI to independently manage the

research project, and will last approximately 30 minutes. The first part will be devoted to the PI's presentation of the research project. The remaining time will be allocated to a question and answer session.

Candidates who are, for objective and demonstrable reasons, unable to attend the interview at the MIUR offices (pregnancy, immobility due to illness, research fieldwork, permanently resident abroad) may participate by video-conference or telephone-conference. However, once invited for an interview and at least 5 days before the date of the interview, all candidates are requested to specify whether they need to resort to one of the alternative options.

10. Once all interviews have been completed, each evaluation panel (CdS) shall retain or amend the level assigned and examine, for each project proposed for funding, the requested budgets and, if appropriate, suggest adjustments, explaining the reasons for the suggestions in detail.

11. At the end of the work of all evaluation panels (CdS), MIUR will publish a decree reporting the final ranking of the projects as determined by the respective panels (one list for each ERC domain) and approve the funding of the projects within the available budget.

12. After the publication of the decree (see previous section) PIs will be able to access the evaluation files of the interview on the website <u>http://sir.miur.it/</u>

13. PIs can ask for a re-examination of the evaluation only and exclusively in case of clear evidence of gross errors (for example, incorrect references to the contents of the project or where the evaluation report appears to lack self-coherence). In all other cases, PIs may rely on the tools of judicial protection provided for by law.

Article 8 – Project approval, management and payment

1. Official communications and feedback to the PI and to the Host Institution may happen through the web page dedicated to the call for proposals. PIs and Host Institutions can expect to receive appropriate feedback on the evaluation results in the form of an evaluation report.

2. The official starting date of the projects will be the 90th day following the publication of the decree approving the funding.

3. Modifications limited to the financial breakdown of the project do not require previous authorization from MIUR; scientific modifications to the objectives of the project are only allowed following authorization by MIUR.

4. If during the implementation of the project the PI transfers from the Host Institution to a different university or national public research institution, the regular implementation of the project must be guaranteed through a specific agreement regulating the relationship between the original Host Institution and the one the PI is transferring to, including details on the equipment purchased and registered at the original Host Institution and the continuation (under the PI) of the activities of staff employed by the original Host Institution with temporary contracts for the implementation of the project. All transfers must be authorized by MIUR.

5. Within the three months that precede the project mid-term, MIUR proceeds to call the PIs responsible for the funded projects for a scientific review on the progress of the project and achievement of the expected results. Reviews are held by the same evaluation panels (CdS) responsible for the evaluation of the project; panel members who are no longer available will be replaced by MIUR at least one month before the review. Where the evaluation panel finds the scientific progress of the project unsatisfactory, MIUR may proceed to the interruption of funding and the PI may be banned from submitting new proposals for MIUR calls for the following 24 months.

6. In all publications or other scientific products resulting from the research projects the PI and other research team members must include reference to the funding obtained through this call for proposals.

7. The final financial statement is completed by the PI using "cash basis" and through an online procedure within 60 days from the conclusion of the project. For the verification of conformity to laws and regulations and to the administrative regulations and procedures, each financial statement is also subjected to an internal central auditing procedure carried out by qualified offices within the Host Institution. MIUR proceeds by random checks to the final verification of the expenses, through a verification of the statement's documentation and local checks on the internal central auditing procedures, following the procedures established in the funding decree. The sample selected for the verification must be at least 10% of the funded projects and at least 10% of the total funding.

8. Violation of laws and/or regulations in individual financial statements, or plagiarism, data fabrication and/or misrepresentation, automatically implies the exclusion of the project from the selection, the revocation of the grant and the exclusion of the PI (without prejudice to personal civil and criminal liability) from all future MIUR calls for proposals for a period of five years, starting from the date of the verification.

9. Funding is paid directly to the Host Institution in advance and in a single instalment. Any refunds owed by the Host Institution can be compensated at any stage by a deduction on other contributions received by the Host Institution.

10. Within 90 days from the conclusion of the project the PI will present a final scientific report on the development of the activities and the results, both achieved and expected, of the research, also attaching a list of publications related to the project whose main or corresponding author is the PI. The report is sent electronically to MIUR.

11. The report must also include a comprehensive list of publications and other scientific products resulting from the research project and indicating the source of funding.

12. In accordance with the current laws on the evaluation of the university and research system, the Agenzia Nazionale per la Valutazione dell'Università e della Ricerca - ANVUR (National Agency for the Evaluation of University and Research) is responsible for the *ex post* evaluation of the products of research. The Agency will carry out the evaluation procedures according to the timetable, form and manner determined by the Agency itself.

Article 9 – Open Access

1. Each PI guarantees free online access to all peer-reviewed scientific publication concerning the results of the research project. In particular:

a) the PI must send a digital copy of the published version of the manuscript or a copy of the final version of the work as accepted for publication (following peer-review) to a specific archive of scientific publications, as early as possible, and at the latest at the moment of publication. The PI must also commit to file the relevant data to allow the validation of the results presented in the publications;

b) the PI must guarantee open access to the filed publications and relative data through the archive, at the latest at the moment of publication where the publisher offers open access to its online publications, or within 6 months of publication (12 for social sciences and humanities) in every other case;

c) the PI must guarantee open access through the archive to the bibliographic metadata which identify the filed publications. Bibliographic metadata must be in standard format and include the following elements:

- the terms "Open Access MIUR";

- the title of the program, the acronym of the project and the contract number;

- the publication date and the duration of the embargo, where applicable;

- a persistent identifier;

- the specifications provided for in Article 4 of Decree-Law No 91 of 8th August 2013, ratified after amendments in Law No 112 of 7th October 2013 and especially "a project fiche naming all the parties involved in achieving the objectives".

2. What is indicated above on the publication of the research data does not affect obligations of confidentiality and regulations on personal data protection.

3. As an exception, PIs may not guarantee open access to specific parts of the research data where open access may compromise the achievement of the main objective of the research. In such cases, the PI must file in the archive along with the publication a signed note explaining the motivations for not disclosing parts of the research data.

Article 10 – Funding extent and other provisions

1. For the aims outlined in Article 1 MIUR will co-fund the SIR programme for a maximum of € 47,215,612.

2. The procedures specified in this call for proposals are drafted by the Direzione Generale per il Coordinamento e lo Sviluppo della Ricerca – Ufficio V (Directorate General for the Coordination and Development of Research – Office V).

3. Mauro Massulli, manager of Ufficio V of the Direzione Generale per il Coordinamento e lo Sviluppo della Ricerca (the Directorate General for the Coordination and Development of Research – Office V) is responsible for the procedures.

4. Clarifications and information can be requested from the Research offices of universities and research institutions and from Ufficio V of the Direzione Generale per il Coordinamento e lo Sviluppo della Ricerca (Directorate General for the Coordination and Development of Research – Office V).

5. The provisions of this decree are subjected to positive verification by the supervisory bodies, in accordance with current regulations.

Signed

Annexes

- 1. ERC domains
- 2. ethics and security
- 3. commitment of the Host Institution
- 4. eligible costs
- 5. evaluation procedures and criteria
- 6. application forms