

FAQ over the Back to Belgium Grants

Is it possible to apply at any moment during the year?

No, the *Back to Belgium* Grants are not a continuous process, for which the candidates can apply at any time of the year. The call for candidates is published end November. From this moment, the candidates have 3 months to apply.

Is it possible to apply electronically?

Yes and no. Almost all the application form can be fulfilled and sent by means of an e-mail. Nevertheless, the two mandatory recommendation letters must imperiously be sent by ordinary mail. Without these two recommendation letters the application is incomplete.

I finish the requested two years of postdoc stay abroad in 6 months. Is it possible to apply?

Yes. The condition « 2 years of postdoc stay abroad » is only considered when the candidate takes hold of his/her grant. Therefore, when you apply, if you still have to spend 9 months abroad to complete your 2 years period, you won't be able to begin your *Back to Belgium* Grant before 9 months.

I have several short spells of postdoctoral stays abroad. Can I apply?

Yes, if the total of your stays abroad is at least 2 years.

I have applied for other grants and fellowships to get back in Belgium. Will this weaken my application to the *Back to Belgium* Grant?

No. One of the objectives of the *Back to Belgium* Grants is to bring back researchers with an international experience back, so that they can valorize permanently their knowledge in Belgium. If you have the possibility to apply for several fellowships or grants to obtain a funding to get back in Belgium, you should obviously do it. Nevertheless, in no case can the *Back to Belgium* Grant be combined with another status, fellowship or grant.

Will my experience be taken into account in the computation of my wage?

Of course. Nevertheless, some statuses or fellowships may not be counted in your experience. The HR service of your host institution will handle this. The Service P&O of Belspo can, upon your request, give an estimation of your future salary, based on the experience that would be acknowledged by your host institution.

I have 15 years of experience, can I apply?

Yes. But in any case, the wage scale SW21, research assistant in the Federal Scientific institutions, will be applied regardless of your number of years of experience. For the *Back to Belgium* Grants, it is not possible to gain a higher status than SW21-research assistant, e.g. the statuses put in place by the Communities (research director...), by alleging a higher number of years of experience. Therefore, it seems that if you have more than 10 years of experience, the *Back to Belgium* Grant will not offer you the working conditions (e.g. status) that you could expect elsewhere.

What is my contractual relationship with Belspo?

As a holder of a *Back to Belgium* Grant, you only have a contractual relationship with your host institution. Nevertheless, Belspo remains the funding body and, with that respect, can control the use that you make of the research funds. Therefore, Belspo expects a mid-term and a final report.

What can I buy with the research funds?

Everything that is necessary to your research. These funds are to be used carefully. If you have any doubt, it would be preferable to contact Belspo. This will avoid bad surprises. Let us remind you that no overhead is authorized.

I made my Ph.D. in a foreign country. Are those years taken into account for the 2 years postdoctoral stay abroad?

No. The *Back to Belgium* Grant aims at valorizing in Belgium the postdoctoral experience acquired in a foreign university or research institution.

Is there a list of countries where I should spend my stay abroad?

No. All the countries, European or non-European are possible.

I have no contact with a Belgian university/research institution. Can I apply for a grant?

No. The *Back to Belgium* Grant find its raison d'être in the association between a researcher and a host institution (university). The application of the researcher must be done in agreement with the host institution. Obviously, Belspo cannot find a host institution for you. Only the researcher can develop the requested contacts. Nevertheless, Belspo can give any relevant information on the Belgian scientific and academic landscape, to help the researcher make his/her mind.

Can I apply from Belgium?

Yes. But only if you are in Belgium for a short period of time, e.g. you are in Belgium for Christmas and you take the time to fill the application form in the meantime. Nevertheless, when the final decision is taken and, even more, in order to begin your *Back to Belgium* Grant, you must live abroad.

I am already in Belgium when I can begin my *Back to Belgium* Grant. Is this a problem?

Yes indeed. This is a no-way situation. The *Back to Belgium* Grants are conceived as a support given to the researcher to come back to Belgium from a position abroad. It is a tool to foster international mobility, and not mobility between to positions inside Belgium. This holds even if you occupy a research position in the business sector in Belgium. As soon as you have accepted the *Back to Belgium* Grant, you must do what is needed in order to conform yourself to this requirement. The first position when you come back from (your postdoc stay) abroad should be the *Back to Belgium* Grant.

How long is the decision process taking?

The call for candidates ends mi-March. An official decision should not be expected before mi-May. In any case, the final decision (positive or negative) will be notified to all candidates and to their promoters.

When can I begin my *Back to Belgium* Grant?

It depends on too many factors to be ascertained precisely. September 1st is often chosen by many candidates, for practical reasons. The candidate has one year from the foreclosure date to begin his/her mandate.

Is it possible to cut the *Back to Belgium* Grant in parts?

No. The *Back to Belgium* Grant has a length of 24 months. It must be carried out without interruption. Furthermore, in principle and unless exceptional circumstances, the *Back to Belgium* Grant is carried out as a full-time full-year activity.

Does the European co-funding change something to the Grant?

This European co-funding (a Marie Curie Action under the FP7) for 4 years allows Belspo to offer more Grants and better working conditions to the researchers, for the *Back to Belgium* Grants as well as for the Postdoc Fellowships. As the beneficiary of a *Back to Belgium* Grant, and considering this co-funding, you are considered a *Marie Curie Fellow*.

I went on a maternity/paternity leave. Is the *Back to Belgium* extended?

Of course. This is a legal obligation. This holds for the breast-feeding or prophylactic leave too. The extension is equal to the duration of the leave.

I am not at all happy with the way my application is handled. What can I do?

The Federal Science Policy attaches a great importance to the quality of its services and is keen to improve the way they run. If you think your application has not been treated adequately, and you have [complaints concerning our services](#), BELSPO should hear about it. This complaint will be treated by civil servants independent from those who handled your application.