Support of Scientific Research

Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia

Report on the Implementation of Science Fund Public Calls

(March 2019–June 2025)

About Science Fund

Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia is a public organization established in 2019. Goal of the Science Fund is to support continuous development of scientific research and development activities in the Republic of Serbia through competitive public calls. Its creation and operations areregulated by the Law on the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia ("the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 95/18 – hereinafter: the Law on the Science Fund). The founder of the Science Fund is the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The Science Fund performs activities related to the financing of preparation, implementation, and development of programs, projects, and other initiatives in the field of research policy implementation, including:

- Implementation of programs as defined in Article 20 of the Law on the Science Fund;
- Providing funding for scientific research projects through public calls within the scope of its programs, to ensure continuity in the development of science and research staff, as well as the general development of society. Each public call defines the eligibility criteria, application deadlines, project implementation period, and other relevant information;
- Conducting evaluation procedures for project proposals submitted under the public calls for program implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluating projects funded by the Science Fund;
- Managing databases on programs, projects, and other financed activities;
- Providing financial and other support for international cooperation projects;
- Defining and implementing special programs aimed at improving working conditions and supporting the development of research staff;
- Implementing infrastructure programs to further strengthen the capacities of scientific research organizations (SRO), in accordance with the national Strategy of scientific and technological development of Serbia, Smart Specialization Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2020-2207), and the national Research Infrastructure Roadmap;
- Cooperating with the Innovation Fund and other business entities in specialized programs related to innovation and industry collaboration;
- Promoting science and research results to raise public awareness of the importance of science;
- Engaging third parties from Serbia and abroad as members of expert bodies, in accordance with the law.

Mission of the Science Fund:

To support scientific, R&D, and technological projects that are based on scientific excellence and quality. Special importance is placed on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research that enables collaboration with industry, other research institutions, and international partners in addressing topics relevant to society.

Vision of the Science Fund:

To promote social, technological, cultural, and economic development of the Republic of Serbia by financing scientific research projects.

The Science Fund aims to:

- Provide financial and professional support to researchers from accredited scientific research organizations for implementing scientific projects through Fund programs as defined by law;
- Implement scientific and developmental activities through research and technological programs aimed at achieving the goals defined in the national strategy of scientific and technological development of Serbia;
- Conduct project funding in a way that ensures competitiveness and quality of results, efficiency in research application, openness and accessibility of outcomes, development of research staff, integration into international scientific and technological initiatives, collaboration with the scientific diaspora and the business sector, regulation of ownership rights on research results, protection of intellectual property and copyrights, as well as data protection;
- Ensure a high scientific level and innovation of results, international competitiveness, and relevance in addressing societal challenges, through publicly announced project calls.

Governance Structure:

The governing bodies of the Science Fund, as defined by the Law on the Science Fund, include: the Supervisory Board; the Managing Board; the Director; and the Scientific Council, the highest expert and advisory body.

- **Managing Board**
  The Managing Board consists of a chairperson and four members. The Managing board's role is to adopt general acts of the Science Fund, its Programs, annual plan of the programs, and financial plans, reports on performed activities, rules of procedure, as well as other procedures, as defined by the Law on Science Fund.

- **Scientific Council**
  The Scientific Council of Science Fund is the highest expert and advisory body of the Science Fund. The Scientific Council consists of 15 members, representatives of the scientific community: two representatives from each of six scientific fields – natural sciences and mathematics, technology and engineering sciences, medical sciences, biotechnical sciences, social sciences and humanities, two members from industry, as well as one member proposed by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Its members are internationally recognized in their respective scientific fields, whereas at least two thirds hold the highest scientific or teaching title. The Scientific Council's role is to provide expertise in designing Science Fund's Programs, operations, procedures, and Public Calls.

- **Supervisory Board**
  The Supervisory Board consists of a chairperson and two members. The Supervisory Board's role is to monitor Material and Financial Operations of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, as defined by the Law on Science Fund.

Programs of the Science Fund

The Programs of the Science Fund have been designed keeping in mind the needs of the scientific community in the Republic of Serbia and the needs and challenges of society in general. Programs support technological development, advanced and innovative ideas, the development of human resources, laboratories, and scientific infrastructure, integration into international science trends, cooperation between science and industry, and other topics that are of strategic and social significance.

Since its establishment, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia has opened 13 programs:

The Program PROMIS 2020-2020 was intended for excellent research projects led by early-career researchers. The objectives of the program were to engage outstanding young researchers in scientific research, strengthen their professional capacities, enable young PhDs to lead projects, prepare them to apply for other national and international research and development projects—especially within the European Union—establish new research teams, support excellent ideas, and promote research that would positively impact society and the economy. The program supported both basic and applied research in all scientific fields. Projects within this program did not have pre-defined topics. The program enabled young PhDs to define their own research agendas, form their own teams, and collaborate with appropriate laboratories and research centers in Serbia and abroad.

The Program for Development of Projects in the Field of Artificial Intelligence (Program AI) supported the development of artificial intelligence (AI) through two subprograms—one intended for basic research and the other for applied research in the field of AI. The goals were to encourage excellence and relevance in AI research in Serbia, to promote the application of AI research results in the development of the national economy, and to support the growth of human resources in AI. The main thematic areas of the Program were: general artificial intelligence, generative AI, machine learning, natural language processing, planning, knowledge reasoning, computer vision and speech communication, and intelligent systems. Six applied research projects were selected, providing concrete contributions to the development of agriculture, information technology, energy, modern industry, and environmental protection. In addition, six basic research projects were selected to contribute to the advancement of science.

The Program for Cooperation between Serbian Science and the Diaspora: Knowledge Exchange Vouchers provided financial incentives to research organizations, individuals, and research teams in Serbia to foster collaboration and joint activities with members of the Serbian scientific diaspora in related scientific and research fields. It supported the capacity building of research organizations in Serbia through short-term visits from diaspora experts and institutions, and through the organization of joint activities. The goal of the program was to establish collaboration with the diaspora to enhance and exchange knowledge, strengthen ties with international research organizations, jointly address scientific and research-development problems and challenges, co-author publications and patents, support the development of new services and the commercialization of products, enable technology transfer, and prepare joint project proposals for international research funding calls.
The program targeted individual researchers and/or research teams who wished to collaborate with diaspora experts working in foreign institutions. It supported basic and applied research in all fields, with no pre-defined priority topics.

The Special Research Program on COVID-19 aimed to fund projects that contributed to an effective scientific response to the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, as well as to strengthen societal preparedness and response to pandemics. The program was initiated and prepared during the state of emergency declared in Serbia due to the pandemic. It was funded through a World Bank loan under the SAIGE project. The supported projects included 11 in the field of (bio)medical sciences, 1 in (bio)medical engineering and IT, and 2 in economics, sociology, psychology, and complex systems management.

The Program IDEAS aims to support research projects based on outstanding ideas that can have, in the future, a significant impact on the development of science and research, economy and/or society, to include outstanding researchers into scientific and research work, to strengthen professional capacities of researchers and to create new project teams. Program IDEAS is the largest Program of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia. The Program enables researchers to define their own research programs, form their own teams and cooperate with laboratories, research centers and companies in Serbia and the world. The program is implemented within four sub-programs for the development of scientific research in the following scientific areas: natural sciences; engineering and technological sciences; (bio) medical sciences; social sciences and humanities.

The Program IDENTITIES is the first program exclusively dedicated to social sciences and humanities. The program's objectives are to encourage excellence and relevance in Serbian research in these fields, affirm the importance of social sciences and humanities for education and society, and enhance international visibility and cooperation in this domain. The program supports theoretical and empirical research required for defining or redefining identity—its contents, forms, and determinants—and explores the relevance of social and cultural identities for policymaking and state decision-making in Serbia. Thematic areas include identity markers (language, script, history, religion, cultural heritage), ethnic and national identities, space and identity (regions, territories, borders, migration), identity politics, law, security and diplomacy, social, individual and psychological identities, gender identities and communities, identity in literature and art, identity in economy, education, media and digitalization. Researchers could also propose other relevant themes with justification linked to the program's goals.

The Green Program for Cooperation between Science and Industry provides practical support for collaboration between science and the industrial sector, leveraging existing scientific potential. The program supports projects that, through direct application of research results, significantly contribute to societal and economic development, including science and applied research—by engaging outstanding researchers to address vital societal issues and integrating young researchers into scientific work. The program strengthens professional capacities of research institutions and fosters new project teams. The specific objectives of the Program: supporting sustainable development and increasing the level of environment quality by solving problems that are causing climate change, environmental pollution, loss of biodiversity and unsustainable use of natural resources; enabling better monitoring, reporting and prevention of pollution of air, water, soil, and consumer products, having in mind strategic national goals of zero pollution, cleaner circular economy and restoration of biodiversity. The program supports applied research across all scientific fields, resulting in patent applications, patent applications, technical solutions, and protected works, aligned with predefined themes:

- Air, Water & Soil: reducing major air pollutants; enhancing sustainable and efficient water use; reducing industrial, agricultural, and household water pollution; preventing surface and groundwater pollution; sustainably managing water resources to restore rivers and waterways; mitigating pesticide pollution; rehabilitating degraded ecosystems; reducing persistent organic pollutants, microplastics, waste, and harmful substances in products; improving decontamination processes; and addressing environmental disasters.
- Industry: developing circular agriculture with minimal environmental impact; reducing micropollutants (e.g., pharmaceuticals and microplastics); promoting sustainable industrial systems, cleaner technologies, and business models that decrease environmental pollution while influencing consumer behavior; increasing energy efficiency with greenhouse gas neutrality and "polluter pays" principles; and applying digital innovations like remote sensing, AI, and machine learning for emissions control. Also includes designing chemicals, materials, and products with inherently non-toxic lifecycle properties.
- Waste: managing waste streams including plastics, e-waste, batteries, hazardous chemicals, persistent organic pollutants, and heavy metals; and examining their health impacts on humans, animals, and plants.

The Program is structured in two phases. **Phase I** is the present call, focused on generating high-quality applied research results. **Phase II** will launch a separate call open exclusively to Phase I projects that can document a strong commercialization pathway—e.g., validated prototypes, demonstrable market demand, IP protection, and a scalable business model. Only those projects that secure formal partnerships with industrial stakeholders and commit to a predefined co-financing share from non-public sources will be eligible for Phase II funding.

The Program PRISMA supports basic and applied research projects across all scientific fields. It enables researchers to define their own research programs, form teams, and collaborate with laboratories, research centers, and industry within Serbia and internationally. Objectives include: Funding projects based on excellent ideas with potential impact on science, research, industry, and/or society; Supporting development in these areas: Technical-technological sciences; Strategic research in agriculture, food production, and environmental protection; Experimental, practical, and clinical research contributing to human health social sciences and humanities; Artificial intelligence and its applications; Involvement of early-career researchers and strengthening their professional capacity. PRISMA is structured into six subprograms supporting development in: Natural sciences & mathematics; engineering and technological sciences; Biotechnical sciences; Biomedical sciences; Artificial intelligence; Social sciences & humanities.

This PROMIS Program 2023 targets excellent projects by early-career researchers and scientists within seven years of earning their PhD. It supports basic and applied research across all scientific fields with no predefined themes. Program objectives are to empower young PhDs to lead projects; Strengthen professional capacities of early-career researchers and scientists; Engage excellent young researchers in scientific research; Prepare researchers to apply for national and international R&D calls—particularly within the EU; Create new project teams for high-quality scientific research; Support the academic community in conducting research with significant social and economic impact; Proof of Concept Program.

The Program Proof of Concept is designed to test scientific ideas, hypotheses, or assumptions with commercialization potential. Activities in this call focus on the implementation and commercialization of research results identified in project proposals. Development phases are measured by Technology Readiness Levels (TRL): TRL 1 represents fundamental research; TRLs 2–3 involve proving concepts and defining a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). The program supports projects across all scientific disciplines, without topic restrictions, and covers TRL 2–3 phases. Objectives of the program are to support the transformation of research results into commercial or socially beneficial products, increase the number and quality of projects ready for commercialization, promote the importance of intellectual property in research

The Program of Cooperation with the Serbian Scientific Diaspora – Joint Research Projects supports basic and applied research in all fields through cooperation with the Serbian scientific diaspora. Objectives of the program are to improve scientific excellence and relevance by connecting with diaspora researchers, develop international cooperation, knowledge and technology transfer, and innovation, integrate diaspora expertise into Serbian scientific research, prepare and submit joint proposals to foreign and international research funding sources. The program enables researchers to define joint research agendas, form new teams, and collaborate with organizations in Serbia and abroad. Expected outcomes of the program include new scientific knowledge and methodologies, intellectual property and innovations, attraction of investment into Serbia's scientific system, co-authored publications, patents, new services, products, and technology transfer, foundation for long-term collaboration with diaspora and foreign institutions.

The Program of Cooperation with the Serbian Scientific Diaspora: Support for Visits of Diaspora Scientists supports basic and applied research in all fields of science. There are no predefined topics for projects within the Program. The goals of the Program are to foster scientific collaboration with the diaspora to establish or enhance scientific cooperation, improve and exchange knowledge, jointly address research and development challenges, and expand the network of cooperation with the Diaspora. Through the established collaboration, the long-term objectives include the publication of joint papers and patents, support for the development of new services, commercialization of products, technology transfer, preparation of joint project proposals for international funding, and attracting investments into research organizations in Serbia through cooperation between the Diaspora and local scientists.

The Program IDEAS 2024 is the second cycle of the program IDEAS, funding projects based on excellent ideas with potential societal, scientific, or economic impact. Program supports basic and applied research in all fields of science. There are no predefined topics for projects within the Program. The Program enables researchers to define their research programs, form their teams and collaborate with corresponding laboratories, research centers, and commerce. The objective of the IDEAS 2024 are as follows: to finance research projects based on: outstanding ideas that in the future may have a significant impact on the development of science and research, as well as society as a whole; clearly stated motivation for research within the framework of modern trends in the development of science in the relevant scientific fields; development of scientific and practical aspects in the field of technical and technological sciences; development of research of strategic importance for agriculture, food production and environmental protection; development of experimental, practical and clinical research that should contribute to human health in Serbia; research on topics that contribute to development in the fields of social sciences and humanities in Serbia; raising the level of science in artificial intelligence as well as its application; involving young researchers in scientific research and strengthening the professional capacities of researchers within research teams. The program will be carried out within six subprograms, supporting research in: Natural sciences & mathematics; Engineering and technological sciences; Biotechnical sciences; Biomedical sciences; Artificial intelligence; Social sciences & humanities.

The Science Fund plans to open 3 new programs in 2025:

The Program for Supporting Projects in the Field of Artificial Intelligence targets outstanding projects in both basic and applied scientific research in the field of AI, including, but not limited to: e-mobility, green energy transition, and creative technologies. Program aims to accelerate social, technological, cultural, and economic development of Serbia in priority areas of AI. The program's objectives are defined by the Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2025–2030.

The Green Program of Cooperation between Science and Industry – II phase will focus on the commercialization of products resulting from scientific research and on developing partnerships with partners from industry.

Open solely to Phase I awardees, Phase II supports projects that provide clear evidence of market-readiness and secure formal industry partnerships with a defined share of private co-financing.

The Bilateral Collaboration Program with China – National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) aims to foster joint scientific research, publication of scientific papers, and other research outputs through international cooperation between researchers from Serbia and China. Program supports both basic and applied research in natural sciences, engineering and technology, biomedical sciences and AI research.

Program Implementation

From March 2019 to June 2025, the Science Fund supported a total of 553 projects, through 12 opened programs. One program (Program IDEAS 2024) is currently in the evaluation phase, and it is expected that over 90 projects will be funded. The total budget for 13 programs is EUR 106,5 million.

Budget for the Science Fund programs is provided by the budget of the Republic of Serbia. Also, the budget is provided by the Republic of Serbia (Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation), through a World Bank loan with implementation support, and the European Union, through a grant contribution. The activities are part of the "Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship Project" (SAIGE Project), dedicated to strengthening innovative entrepreneurship and scientific research.

Table 1: Overview of Supported Projects by Program from 2019 to June 2025

#	Program	Year of the Call Announcement	No. of the Supported Projects	Budget (EUR)
1	PROMIS	2019	59	8.964.169,43
2	DIASPORA	2019	92	754.342,42
3	AI	2019	12	2.207.774,08
4	IDEAS	2020	105	29.999.198,17
5	COVID19	2020	14	1.973.435,68
6	IDENTITIES	2023	16	1.999.993,80
7	GREEN Program	2023	20	3.500.000,00
8	PRISMA	2023	97	24.999.999,99
9	PROMIS 2023	2024	30	4.011.823,89
10	Proof of Concept	2024	52	992.154,21
11	DIASPORA Joint Research Projects*	2024	11	2.179.709,51
12	DIASPORA Visits of Diaspora Scientists	2024	45	796.042,25
13	IDEAS 2024**	2024	N/A	24.000.000,00
Total			**553**	**106.378.643,43**

* Program is in process of signing contracts

** Program is in evaluation phase

Support of researchers and scientific research organizations

The programs of the Science Fund aim to support the development of research capacities in Serbia, encourage the involvement of young researchers in scientific projects, enable the procurement of equipment that will remain available to future generations of scientists, prepare researchers for international grant competitions, and facilitate collaboration with the scientific diaspora and the business sector. The programs are designed to support scientific excellence, enhance competitiveness on the international scientific scene, and contribute to addressing relevant societal challenges.

Through 12 different support programs for researchers, the Science Fund has enabled the implementation of 553 scientific research projects across all fields of science, involving 145 accredited scientific research organizations from the Republic of Serbia. So far, the programs of the Science Fund have supported 3906 researchers, of whom 2263 are female researchers and 1643 are male researchers. In addition, 281 researchers are from the Serbian scientific diaspora, coming from 24 countries around the world. Science Fund supports over 800 young researchers in early-stage careers and young PhDs.

Table 2: Overview of Supported Researchers by Program from 2019 to June 2025

#	Program	No. of Researchers	No. of Female Researchers	No. of Male Researchers
1	PROMIS	319	181	138
2	DIASPORA	268	151	117
3	AI	119	41	78
4	IDEAS	1047	613	434
5	COVID19	128	84	44
6	IDENTITIES	115	77	38
7	GREEN Program	232	113	119
8	PRISMA	948	520	428
9	PROMIS 2023	157	108	49
10	Proof of Concept	232	170	62
11	DIASPORA Joint Research Projects*	134	70	64
12	DIASPORA Visits of Diaspora Scientists	207	135	72
13	IDEAS 2024**	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total		**3906**	**2263**	**1643**

* Program is in process of signing contracts

** Program is in evaluation phase

Conclusion

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia plays a key role in strengthening scientific research in Serbia. By designing and implementing competitive funding programs that support scientific excellence, the Science Fund enables researchers across all fields of science to develop their potential and enhance their professional capacities. Through commitment to strategic investment in research capacities, the Science Fund supports the inclusion of young researchers, fosters collaboration with the Serbian scientific diaspora, and contributes to the modernization of research infrastructure — all essential components for the long-term development of science in Serbia.

Beyond its impact on the scientific community, the Science Fund contributes significantly to Serbia's broader societal and economic development. By encouraging research that addresses relevant social challenges and aligning national research efforts with international standards, the Fund enhances Serbia's competitiveness on the global scientific stage. With 553 funded projects and more than 3900 supported researchers — including a significant number of women and international collaborators — the Fund is building a resilient, knowledge-based foundation for Serbia's future.

SCIENCE FUND OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
Acting Director

Prof. Dr Nenad Filipović