

Guidance for postdoc salary allocation at ISTA

Postdoctoral Office (PDO)

17 Oct 2025



CONTENTS

1 Preamble.....	3
2 Postdoc salary levels.....	3
3 Salary allocation – Postdoc lifecycle.....	3
3.1 Starting salary for postdocs	3
3.2 Salary increase of postdocs during employment	4

1 Preamble

The guidance in this document aims to provide a structured and transparent framework for allocating salary levels for postdocs at ISTA, thereby providing general guidance for Group Leaders (Assistant Professors and Professors) in implementing an informed salary strategy at different stages of their postdocs' academic lifecycle at ISTA.

ISTA aims to create a structured framework to allow both Group Leaders and postdocs to rely on more transparent procedures and criteria for salary allocation, while preserving general flexibility that is required for attracting the best early career researchers in internationally competitive research fields.

The document also offers an overview of the current ISTA policies and rules in relation to postdocs' salary and its allocation according to stages of the postdocs' employment.

2 Postdoc salary levels

There are three salary levels for postdocs at ISTA: PD1, PD2 and PD3. The financial compensation for these postdoc salary levels is reviewed annually by ISTA Management, with adjustments ratified each December by the Board of Trustees for implementation in the following calendar year. The salary levels are yearly valorized (based on the general adjustment) and are regularly evaluated to determine whether they are in line with market conditions and adjusted if necessary. Salary data for the current calendar year can be accessed through the respective section of the [Postdoc Office website](#).

Group Leaders are responsible for setting the applicable salary level for postdocs in their group based on the criteria listed below. Group Leaders are not allowed to pay less than PD1 or more than PD3.

This monthly salary shall cover all performance by the employee for the participation in the research and training activities of the employer, including any overtime, even worked on Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays.

Further information on working hours and rest period can be access through the respective section of the [Postdoc Office website](#).

3 Salary allocation – Postdoc lifecycle

3.1 Starting salary for postdocs

Group Leaders should set salaries for incoming postdocs with consideration to the following criteria:

- **Relevant prior work experience of the appointee** – educational background, relevant expertise and qualifications, added value to the host group

- **Scientific excellence** – major academic achievements and previous impactful work; awards; innovation contributions.
- **Market competitiveness for the discipline** – Difficulty in attracting and/or retaining candidates
- **Equity and fairness** – Ensuring equitable pay irrespective of gender, nationality, or other potential discriminators among all postdoctoral researchers within the group is vital for fairness and inclusivity.
- **Additional Factors** – Any other relevant considerations identified by the Group Leader, provided they are applied transparently and consistently.

Group Leaders are required to confirm the reason(s) and a short explanation for the allocated PD-level in the designated section in the Host Info form from a drop-down menu with multiple choice option, including an 'Other' option for any additional considerations (max. characters 100).

OVERVIEW OF ONBOARDING PROCEDURES OF A NEW POSTDOC:

Group Leaders and their A2Ps receive an automated request from the onboarding platform GenApp where they are requested to indicate the salary level of the incoming postdoc (PD 1-3), as well as the relevant funding source (e.g., Cost Center, grant/project code etc.). The Postdoctoral Office (PDO) processes the submitted information and, upon approval of a Finance Check of the indicated funding sources, issues an Offer Letter to the postdoc. The Offer Letter contains the postdoc's annual salary.

For a more in-depth description of the processes and a summary of the rules related to the postdoc lifecycle at ISTA, Group Leaders are advised to consult the respective info section on the [Postdoc Office website](#). This dedicated webpage includes further information on the onboarding process as well as a useful FAQs section.

Please note: Group Leaders are advised to consult their respective Grant Officer and/or team member in Controlling to confirm the availability of funds to cover the proposed salary before any offer is made to the prospective postdoc.

FELLOWSHIP AWARD OR GRANT

If a postdoc is recipient of a fellowship with a lower salary than PD3, Group Leaders can request to top-up the salary to a higher PD level from their group's Cost Center.

3.2 Salary increase of postdocs during employment

Group Leaders can increase the salary at any point of the postdoc's employment at ISTA, and are encouraged to review the salary levels of current postdocs in their group annually, with consideration to the following criteria:

- **Merit** – e.g., research achievements exceed expectations or project goals; securing additional funding (fellowship/contribution to grants); recognition of work performance that meets or consistently exceeds performance standards documented through an established Annual Review Meeting process.
- **Equity and fairness** – Ensuring equitable pay irrespective of gender, nationality, or other potential discriminators among postdoctoral researchers at ISTA is vital for fairness and inclusivity
- **Increase in job scope and responsibilities**
- **Retention** of postdocs who are critical to the success of ongoing projects or whose expertise is in high demand.

Group Leaders are required to confirm the reason(s) and short explanation for the allocated PD-level for the salary increase by email to the PDO.

OVERVIEW OF SALARY ADJUSTMENT PROCESS FOR POSTDOCS:

Group Leaders send a formal notification to the PDO including the relevant reason(s) and explanation based on the criteria listed above. The PDO will proceed with the Finance Check. After approval, the relevant information is submitted to HR and Payroll to process the salary increase accordingly.

Group Leaders should give at least one month notice ahead of the effective date to the PDO if they wish to raise a postdoc's salary. No retroactive salary adjustment is possible.

CONTRACT EXTENSION

Upon notification of a request for a contract extension, Group Leaders are required to confirm whether the postdoc salary should stay the same or increased. In case of salary change, Group Leaders are required to follow the salary adjustment process as set out above.

ANNUAL REVIEW MEETING

The annual review meeting is a structured conversation between the postdoc and their supervisor and is described in more detail in the respective section of the [Postdoc Office website](#). It takes place once per year, usually between the months of October and December. This meeting is an opportunity for joint reflection and mutual feedback between the postdoc and their supervisor, which, among other topics, should also serve as a good occasion to discuss potential salary raise. In case the parties have agreed on such raise, Group Leaders are required to follow the process as set out above.