



Contest Rules

*SESAR 3 Joint Undertaking Prize for Young
Scientist Award 2026*

5 May 2026

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1 Introduction - What do I need to know?

1.1 What is SESAR?

The Single European Sky ATM (“Air Traffic Management”) Research Joint Undertaking (“SESAR 3 JU”) is established under Council Regulation (EU) No 2021/2085 of 19 November 2021, as last amended by Council Regulation (EU) 2023/1782 of 25 July 2023. It is a European institutional public-private partnership set up to accelerate through research and innovation the delivery of digital transformation, in other words, the Digital European Sky. To do so, it is harnessing, developing and accelerating the take-up of the most cutting-edge technological solutions to manage conventional aircraft, drones, air taxis and vehicles flying at higher altitudes. With the Digital European Sky comes the promise of making Europe’s airspace the most efficient and environmentally friendly sky to fly in the world.

1.2 What is the SESAR Young Scientist Award?

The **SESAR 3 Joint Undertaking Prize for Young Scientist Award 2026** (“YSA 2026”) aims to recognise young scientists with high potential, contributing to the scientific research in the field of air traffic management and aviation (including the domains covered by the nine SESAR 3 JU flagships described in [Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda](#) (“SRIA”)). In addition, the award also provides a mechanism for further professional development.

The YSA 2026 is a financial reward or “Prize”¹ for the individual scientific achievements. It will be awarded following a public contest (the “Contest”).

The YSA 2026 is published and managed by the SESAR 3 JU and the result will be announced at its **SESAR Innovation Days** event, planned in Cork, on 7-11 December 2026², which is the main forum for dissemination of SESAR Innovative Research results and for interaction with the wider ATM research community and industry representatives.

NB: the Contest is NOT a PhD or similar study funding programme³.

Applicants can apply to one of the following two categories:

- **PhD**; or
- **Student**.

Up to three short-listed Applicants in each category will be invited to join the SESAR Innovation Days 2026, where the winner of each category will be publicly announced.

- The winner of the PhD category will receive a **Prize of EUR 10 000**.
- The winner of the Student category will receive a **Prize of EUR 5 000**.

Each of the short-listed Applicants for each category will receive:

- a symbolic trophy,
- the opportunity to present their research at certain high-profile SESAR 3 JU events;

¹ Article 43 of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination and Articles 209 and 210 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast)

² The SESAR 3 JU may reimburse certain travel expenses (travel and accommodation) of the short-listed Applicants, in accordance with Commission Decision C(2007)5858 of 5 December 2007 establishing rules on the reimbursement of expenses incurred by people from outside the Commission invited to attend meetings in an expert capacity

³ The SESAR 3 JU is not an educational establishment, but a **European Union body** within the meaning of Article 187 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and established by Council Regulation (EU) 2021/2085 of 19 November 2021 establishing the Joint Undertakings under Horizon Europe, as amended by Council Regulation (EU) 2023/1782 of 25 July 2023

- the opportunity to have their work publicised via the SESAR 3 JU communication channels; and
- a written interview and article spotlighting them and their research to be posted on the SESAR 3 JU e-news and social media.

1.3 Timeline

Milestone	Indicative timeline
<i>Launch of the contest</i>	5 May 2026
<i>Deadline for the submission of questions</i>	21 August 2026
<i>Deadline for the SESAR 3 JU to publish answers to the questions</i>	1 September 2026
<i>Deadline for the submission of applications</i>	7 September 2026
<i>Notification of short-listed Applicants with the invitation to participate to the SESAR Innovation Days</i>	Mid-November 2026
<i>Announcement of the winners during the SESAR Innovation Days</i>	7-11 December 2026

2 Can I apply?

A young scientist who has contributed to **scientific achievements within the area of European Air Traffic Management and Aviation** as set forth below.

Within the **Student category**:

- Bachelor diploma awarded not more than 24 months before the date of closure of the present Contest, or
- Master diploma awarded not more than 24 months before the date of closure of the present Contest,

Within the **PhD category**:

- PhD diploma awarded not more than 24 months before the date of closure of the present Contest,
- and who are a citizen or a resident in an EU Member State or an Associated Country to the Horizon Europe Research and Development Framework Programme (“Horizon Europe”).

Award of the diploma shall be preceded by the Applicant having defended their thesis.

NB: Non-thesis programmes are considered not eligible.

3 How do I apply?

3.1 Procedure and documents submission requirements

There is no fee to apply to the Contest.

3.1.1. Submission of applications & questions

Applications and any questions, related to this Contest, must be submitted by email to: youngscientist@sesarju.eu.

The email cannot exceed 10 MB.

3.1.2. Subject of the email

Applicants must indicate the following subject line in their e-mail: “YSA2026 [Prize Name (Student/PhD)] - [Surname, Name] – Application”.

3.1.3. Attachments

The application e-mail must include two separate files (ZIP) clearly labelled as indicated below:

1. Scientific File – “Scientific_[Surname]”

This file must contain the documents related to the scientific evaluation of the application:

- 1.1 Application Form (template provided - Appendix A)
- 1.2 Thesis (if link not included in the Appendix A)
- 1.3 Extracts of publications/papers, recommendations or references to online sources (if applicable), referenced in the Application Form⁴. Where such documents are publicly available online, it is sufficient to indicate the source in the Application Form. In case of multi-author publications, the Applicant must clarify in the self-assessment of the Application Form, which part of the paper was contributed to by the Applicant.

2. Administrative File – “Administrative_[Surname]”

This file must contain administrative and identification documents required for eligibility and exclusion verification and, where relevant, for processing the reimbursement of travel costs and financial award:

- 2.1 Declaration of Honour (template provided - Appendix B) duly filled-in and signed
- 2.2 Diploma, certificates from the university or equivalent
- 2.3 Identification form (legal entity and bank account) for natural persons duly filled-in and signed and accompanied with the supporting documents⁵
- 2.4 Copy of ID or passport
- 2.5 Copy of residency permit or equivalent document (if applicable)

⁴ This documentation shall be directly relevant for the purpose of this Contest. The SESAR 3 JU will not make use of the content or results of the above referred documentation other than for the purpose of assessment of the applications with a view of award of the Prize.

⁵ The Legal entity and bank account form shall be submitted **together with the relevant supporting documents**. The form is available at the following website:

https://commission.europa.eu/publications/business-partners-legal-entities-and-bank-accounts_en

2.6 Application checklist (template provided - Appendix C)

*Applicants must provide **evidence for the diploma award date** indicated in the Application Form. This evidence must be included in the **Administrative File**, in one of the supporting documents (i.e. diploma, or, if not indicated in the diploma, university certificate, official transcript, or any official document issued by the educational institution).*

*In the **Application Checklist (Appendix C)**, Applicants must indicate **exactly which document contains the diploma award date**.*

3.1.4. Deadline for the submission of applications

Deadline for submission of applications is **7 September 2026, 24:00 CET**. Applications submitted after this deadline will not be evaluated.

3.2 How to fill in the Application Form?

Application Form (Appendix A) includes a description of the scientific achievements and the necessary references and details of the supervisor of the Bachelor, Master or PhD thesis, the so-called “Tutor”⁶.

Application Form is composed of two parts:

Part 1 – Applicant

A. Application Details

B. Self-Assessment

This section must contain Applicant’s self-assessment in the form of a descriptive text for the selection criterion and the award criteria.

C. Reference documents

This section must contain clear references to the source containing all the documents (i.e. thesis, articles, abstracts, presentations, etc) listed in the Application Form, from which the Evaluation Committee (as defined below in Section 4.2) can retrieve such information. Only supporting documents expressly and correctly referenced in the Application Form will be considered by the Evaluation Committee for their evaluation of each award criterion.

Part 2 – Tutor

This part shall include the details and recommendation of the tutor of the Applicant.

Application Form must be duly dated and signed by the Applicant.

⁶ The term “Tutor” refers to the person who supervises or provides tutelage on the thesis. It can be also referred as supervisor, supporter, mentor etc.

The Evaluation Committee will assess and mark the applications exactly as they were submitted. It may, however, issue requests for clarifications to the Applicants, which, if provided, may in no way modify or improve the initial application. The Evaluation Committee will not make any assumptions or interpretations in addition to what is in the application.

If available for the Applicants, the documents forming part of the application file shall preferably be submitted **in English**. This would allow the faster evaluation of applications. Should any of the documents not be available in English, a courtesy translation is strongly recommended.

4 How will my application be evaluated?

The evaluation of applications will be carried out in three consecutive phases:

- I. **Administrative phase;**
- II. **Award phase;**
- III. **Post-award phase.**

4.1 Administrative phase

In the Administrative phase, the applications will be first evaluated on their admissibility:

- applications must be submitted in compliance with the **deadline**;
- applications must be submitted as set forth in Section 3, **strictly respect the format required**, sent electronically and include **all the documents required**;
- applications must be readable, accessible, printable.

Applications, considered inadmissible, will be rejected and not evaluated further.

Admissible applications will be evaluated strictly based on:

- A) exclusion,
- B) eligibility, and
- C) selection criteria.

CRITERIA		Type of evaluation	Evidence
I.A	EXCLUSION criteria	Exclusion	
	Applicant does not fall under any of the exclusion situations listed in the Declaration of Honour (Appendix B).	YES/NO	* Declaration of Honour (signed, Appendix B)
I.B	ELIGIBILITY criteria	Eligibility	
I.B.1	Applicant for the Student category: a) Bachelor diploma awarded not more than 24 months before the date of closure of the present Contest, or b) Master diploma awarded not more than 24 months before the date of closure of	YES/NO	Copy of any original document (e.g. diploma, certificate, declaration from

	the present Contest. Applicant for the PhD category: a) PhD diploma awarded not more than 24 months before the date of closure of the present Contest.		the university, etc) proving that the Applicant falls into one of the categories. <u>Date of the issuance of diploma, and title of the thesis shall be clearly identifiable from the submitted documents.</u>
I.B.2	Applicant is a citizen and/or a resident ⁷ of an: a) European Union country or b) Associated country ⁸ to the Horizon Europe Research Framework Programme EU restrictive measures — Special rules apply for certain entities (e.g. entities subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) ⁹ and entities covered by Commission Guidelines No 2013/C 205/05). Such entities are not eligible to participate in any capacity.	YES/NO	Copy of one or both: – Official identification document, proving nationality (e.g. ID card, passport); – Document proving residence in the EU or an Associated Country (i.e. a residence permit or an equivalent document).
I.C	SELECTION criteria	Selection	
	Applicant has contributed to scientific achievements within the area of European Air Traffic Management and Aviation	YES/NO	Duly filled in and signed Application Form (Appendix A) – as a first check, based on self-assessment of the Applicant.

The application, which does not fulfil the exclusion, eligibility or/and selection criteria will not be retained for the second stage of the evaluation under the award criteria.

*With regard to exclusion criteria under point I.A above, the Applicants will be assessed on the basis of their Declaration of Honour. The SESAR 3 JU may, however, at any time of the evaluation and before payment of the Prize, request the original of the Declaration of Honour (Appendix B) and/or the documentary evidence (scanned or/and originals)¹⁰ with regard to the exclusion criteria set out in the present Contest Rules.

4.2 Award phase

The SESAR 3 JU will convene an evaluation committee of high-level experts from the SESAR 3 JU

⁷ Applicant must be able to demonstrate their compliance with this requirement up to the moment of the applications' submission deadline.

⁸ Refer to the following website for the official EU list of such countries:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

⁹ Please note that the EU Official Journal contains the official list and, in case of conflict, its content prevails over that of the [EU Sanctions Map](#).

¹⁰ Please refer to the following web page for additional information and guidance regarding the relevant requirements and model documents under national laws of the EU Member States you may need to submit: <https://ec.europa.eu/tools/ecertis/search>
Such documents for natural persons are mainly the evidence of a clean judicial record and evidence of payment of taxes and social security contributions.

and/or independent external experts to perform the evaluation against award criteria (the “Evaluation Committee”).¹¹

The evaluation will be performed in accordance with the following criterion and scoring tables:

For the PhD category:

No.	AWARD Criteria	Maximum score per criterion	Evidence
II.A	Relevance to the thematic area of ATM & Aviation	10	Ref. Application Form
II.B	Level of innovation: scientific depth & progress beyond the state of the art	30	
II.C	Scientific excellence and soundness of the selected approach	30	
II.D	a) Engagement of the Applicant through European and/or international exchanges or cooperation	5	
	b) Impact through the related publications (have the results of the thesis been published in journals and international conferences; number of publications published, impact factor and relevance of journals)	15	
II.E	Structure, clarity and appropriateness of the written thesis (including quality of references provided)	10	
Total maximum score		100	

For the Student category:

No.	AWARD Criteria	Maximum score per criterion	Evidence
II.A	Relevance to the thematic area of ATM and Aviation	10	Ref. Application Form
II.B	Level of innovation: scientific depth and progress beyond the state of the art	20	
II.C	Scientific excellence and soundness of the selected approach	30	
II.D	Thoroughness of the analysis of the state of the art of the researched scientific field (methodology of the work)	30	
II.E	Structure, clarity and appropriateness of the written thesis (including quality of references provided)	10	
Total maximum score		100	

¹¹ These experts will sign a declaration of confidentiality and absence of conflict of interest before starting their evaluation work. Confidentiality rules will be adhered to at all times, before, during and after the evaluation.

For each category, the Evaluation Committee will provide the SESAR 3 JU Executive Director with a ranked list of Applicants in their evaluation report, including their recommendation of up to three short-listed Applicants.

Only applications that achieve at least 50% of the maximum score for each criterion, and a total score of at least 70 points, will be considered for the short-list for each category, in order to ensure an adequate level of scientific excellence of the award.

On this basis, the SESAR 3 JU Executive Director shall then determine, for each category, the final ranked shortlist and the name of the winner(s) of the YSA 2026.

The short-listed Applicants will be invited to participate at the ceremony of the **SESAR Innovation Days**, where the final ranking and the winners for each category will be publicly announced.

a. What happens if I win? – Post award phase

Subject to their participation at the SESAR Innovation Days and the verification and acceptance by the SESAR 3 JU of the post award documentation, in case requested (see below), the winner(s) will be invited to sign an **award letter**, accepting the Prize.

The winner(s) might be requested to submit within fifteen (15) calendar days following the announcement of the award the evidence documentation, supporting their Declaration of Honour.

Within thirty (30) calendar days from the date of the signature of the award letter, the SESAR 3 JU shall make the payment to the winner's bank account denominated in euros, as identified in a duly filled-in identification form.

5 Processing of personal data

All personal data contained in the application shall be processed in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 2018/1725¹² of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data.

Details concerning the processing of personal data are available on the Privacy Statement at: <https://www.sesarju.eu/dataprotection>.

The short-listed Applicants will be invited to the **SESAR Innovation Days** and to the award ceremony in December 2026.

¹² [Regulation \(EC\) No 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data](#)

6 Further conditions for participation

6.1 Publicity

6.1.1 Publicity by the winner(s)

The winner(s) should promote the Prize.

Unless the SESAR 3 JU requests or agrees otherwise or unless it is impossible, any communication activity related to the Prize (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.) must:

- (a) display the EU emblem and the SESAR 3 JU special logo; and
- (b) include the following text: “Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the SESAR 3 Joint Undertaking. Neither the European Union nor the SESAR 3 Joint Undertaking can be held responsible for them.”

For the purposes of their obligations, the winner may use the EU emblem and the special logo without first obtaining approval from the EU and/or SESAR 3 JU. However, this does not give them the right to exclusive use. Moreover, they may not appropriate the EU emblem or any similar trademark or logo, either by registration or by any other means.

6.1.2 Publicity by the SESAR 3 JU

The SESAR 3 JU does not obtain ownership of the results produced in the context of the Prize.

The SESAR 3 JU may use, for its communication and publicising activities, information relating to the Contest, documents notably summaries for publication as well as any other material, such as pictures or audio-visual material that it receives from the Applicants (including in electronic form).

The SESAR 3 JU will publish the names of both the short-listed Applicants and the winner(s), the amount of the Prize and its nature and purpose — unless they have requested to waive this publication (because disclosure risks threatening its security and safety or harm its commercial interest).

Photos and videos taken by the SESAR 3 JU either in preparation of the award ceremony or during the award ceremony are the sole property of the SESAR 3 JU.

6.2 Applicable law

The Contest is governed by the applicable Union law complemented, where necessary, by the law of Belgium. The General Court or, on appeal, the Court of Justice of the European Union, shall have sole jurisdiction to hear any dispute between the SESAR 3 JU and any Applicant concerning the interpretation, application or validity of the rules of this contest, if such dispute cannot be settled amicably.

6.3 Checks, audits and investigations

The SESAR 3 JU, the European Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA) may carry out checks, audits and investigations in relation to the Prize¹³.

¹³ For the powers of OLAF, EPPO and ECA, see Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 883/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 September 2013 concerning investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and repealing Regulation (EC) No

6.4 Withdrawal of the Prize — Recovery of undue amounts

The SESAR 3 JU may withdraw the Prize after its award and recover all payments made, if it finds out that:

- a) false information, fraud or corruption was used to obtain it;
- b) a winner was not eligible or should have been excluded;
- c) a winner is in serious breach of its obligations under these Contest Rules.

6.5 Administrative sanctions

If an Applicant has committed irregularities or fraud or has made false declarations, the SESAR 3 JU may also:

- a) exclude the Applicant from all future contracts, grants and contests financed from the EU or Euratom budget for a maximum of five years (or 10 years in case of repetition) and/or
- b) impose a financial penalty between 2% and 10% of the value of the Prize (or between 4% and 20% in case of repetition).

6.6 Liability

The Applicants shall have the sole liability in case of claims related to the activities carried out in the framework of the Contest.

The SESAR 3 JU shall not be held liable for any damage caused or sustained by any of the Applicants, including any damage caused to third parties as a consequence of or during the implementation of the activities related to the Contest.

6.7 Guidance on the use of generative AI tools

When considering the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the preparation of their application as well as any material pertaining thereto, it is imperative to exercise caution and careful consideration. The AI-generated content should be thoroughly reviewed and validated by the Applicants to ensure its appropriateness and accuracy, as well as its compliance with intellectual property and data protection regulations. Applicants are fully responsible for the content of their application documentation (even those parts produced by the AI tool) and must be transparent in disclosing which AI tools were used and how they were used.

Specifically, Applicants are required to:

- **Verify the accuracy, validity, and appropriateness** of the content and any citations generated with the assistance of AI tools and correct any errors or inconsistencies.
- **Provide a list of sources** used to generate content and citations, including any AI-

1073/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (Euratom) No 1074/1999 (OJ L 248, 18/09/2013, p. 1), Council Regulation (Euratom, EC) No 2185/1996 of 11 November 1996 concerning on-the-spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission in order to protect the European Communities' financial interests against fraud and other irregularities (OJ L 292, 15/11/1996, p. 2), Council Regulation (EU) 2017/1939 of 12 October 2017 implementing enhanced cooperation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office ('the EPPO') and Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) and Article 263 of EU Financial Regulation (i.e. Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast) (OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.9.2024).

generated references. All references must be accurate, traceable and properly formatted¹⁴.

- **Be mindful of the risk of plagiarism**, particularly considering the AI tool may have reproduced substantial text from other existing sources. Always cross-check the original sources to be sure you are not plagiarising someone else's work.
- **Acknowledge the limitations of AI tools**, including the potential for bias, factual errors, outdated information or gaps in knowledge.
- **Refrain from using AI tools for formulating original scientific arguments, research findings or critical assessments**. These must reflect the Applicant's own work, expertise and understanding.
- **Do not input personal data or confidential information** into publicly available AI tools and consider the applicable confidentiality data protection rules.

¹⁴ References included in the application should follow a consistent style and contain all the necessary information to allow the evaluators to verify the source (*e.g.*, a properly formatted reference typically includes the author(s), the year of publication, the title of the article/ book or report, the title of the journal or publisher, the volume or issue number (for journal articles), the page numbers (if applicable), URL (if applicable)).

APPENDIX A APPLICATION FORM

Provided in a separate Microsoft Word document.

APPENDIX B DECLARATION OF HONOUR

Provided in a separate Microsoft Word document.

APPENDIX C APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Provided in a separate Microsoft Word document.