



# Information note for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellows in Doctoral Networks

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## Information note for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellows in Doctoral Networks

This document complements the general *Information package for Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellows* with information on the conditions of appointment and remuneration specifically for those holding an MSCA fellowship as part of a Doctoral Network (DN) project. Quotations in italics are from the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement (HE MGA) on unit grants with information on the conditions of appointment and remuneration specifically for those holding an MSCA fellowship as part of a Doctoral Network (DN) project.

### 1. What are Doctoral Networks?

The [MSCA Doctoral Networks](#) aim to train creative, entrepreneurial, innovative and resilient doctoral candidates, able to face current and future challenges and to convert knowledge and ideas into products and services for economic and social benefit. The MSCA Doctoral Networks raise the attractiveness and excellence of doctoral training in Europe. They equip researchers with the right combination of research-related and transferable competences and provide them with enhanced career perspectives in both the academic and non-academic sectors through international, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility combined with an innovation-oriented mind-set. The scheme supports substantial training modules, including digital ones, addressing key transferable skills and competences common to all fields and fostering the culture of Open Science, innovation and entrepreneurship. These include, inter alia, training on the use of collaborative tools, opening access to publications and to research data, FAIR data management, public engagement and citizen science.

MSCA Doctoral Networks are encouraged to lead to Industrial or Joint Doctorates.

#### Industrial Doctorates

Through Industrial Doctorates, doctoral candidates step outside academia and develop skills in industry and business by being jointly supervised by academic and non-academic organisations, both of which can be established in the same EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country.

#### Joint Doctorates

Joint Doctorates represent a highly integrated type of international, inter-sectoral and multi/interdisciplinary collaboration in doctoral training. They lead to the delivery of joint, double or multiple doctoral degrees<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Every time this Work Programme part refers to doctoral degrees, this means that the degrees have to be recognised as such by the relevant authorities of the country or countries concerned.

## 2. Recruited researchers

### 2.1. Eligibility

To be eligible for a recruitment within a DN project, you must be a doctoral candidate, i.e. not already in possession<sup>2</sup> of a doctoral degree at the date of the recruitment.

### 2.2. Mobility Rule

The MSCA are based on the principle of physical mobility. You are therefore required to undertake transnational mobility in order to be eligible for recruitment in a DN project. As such, you must not have resided or carried out your main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their recruitment date<sup>3</sup>.

For 'International European Research Organisations' (IERO), 'international organisations', or entities created under Union law, you must not have spent more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before your recruitment in the same appointing organisation.

Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention<sup>4</sup> are not taken into account. Your employer is required to verify this fact, therefore you may be required to provide supporting documentation proving your place(s) of residence or work during the previous 3 years. Note that the mobility rule applies only to your first recruitment within the project, and not to other organisations to which you might be sent on secondment or at which you may subsequently also be recruited. Finally, the mobility rule is related to your residence or main activity and not to your nationality.

## 3. What are my rights as a DN fellow?

The MSCA grant agreement requires that you have access to the infrastructure and supervision that you need to adequately conduct your research and implement your project. Should this not be the case, please refer the matter to your project coordinator.

### 3.1. Recruitment

Vacancies in DN projects must be advertised and published internationally, including on the [Euraxess website](#) (the vacancy note must include the gross salary, not including the employer's social contributions). The recruitment procedure must be open, transparent, merit-based, impartial and equitable. Therefore, the final decision

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<sup>2</sup> Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will not be considered eligible. See Article 6.2.A(b)(i) of the HE unit model grant agreement

<sup>3</sup> Article 6.2.A(b)(vi) of the HE unit model grant agreement

<sup>4</sup> 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol

is taken on the basis of the candidates' scientific skills, the relevance of their research experience, the impact of the proposed training on their career, and ensuring a fair gender representation<sup>5</sup>.

## 3.2. Employment

In principle, you should be recruited with an employment contract which includes social security coverage (unless this is not possible under national law). The employment contract should specify your monthly support; it can state the total/annual salary, as long as it is possible to determine the monthly salary (e.g. by dividing the annual salary by 12). It is also possible that the total amount is divided into 13 (or more) months, depending on the institution's internal practices and regulations. In some countries, a first contract of 12 or 18 months might be given, but it should then be followed by another contract covering the rest of the recruitment time. You are also encouraged to contact the HR department of your host institution if you need more details/info about your contract. A clear explanation of how your net salary is calculated should also be provided by your employer. The specific length of your recruitment must be specified in your employment contract and comply with the minimum and maximum duration as set out in the applicable call conditions. You should be fully aware of and understand all the provisions of your contract *before* signing it. This may require a translation of the contract into English or your mother tongue.

The project consortium is required to submit electronically a Mobility Declaration within 20 days of your recruitment<sup>6</sup>. This contains data about you and the provisions of your employment contract, including duration, contract type, etc., that the European Research Executive Agency (REA) requires.

## 3.3. Assistance

Your employer is required to assist you in all administrative procedures related to your recruitment within the project<sup>7</sup>, for example in obtaining a visa, preparing your Career Development Plan, etc. They are also required to inform you about your rights and obligations under the grant agreement, including who will be your supervisor, when and for how long your appointment shall last, your salary and conditions, the allowances you are entitled to receive, etc.

## 3.4. Hosting

Each employer has the obligation to host recruited researchers and provide training as well as the necessary means for implementing the action. Your usual place of employment and where you turn up for work each day should normally be at the premises of the institution that has recruited you and which is paying your living and

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<sup>5</sup> Annex 5 of the HE unit model grant agreement – Specific rules for MSCA actions

<sup>6</sup> See relevant Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Work programme

<sup>7</sup> Annex 5 of the HE unit model grant agreement – Specific rules for MSCA actions

mobility allowances (see below). Note that your host institution may be required to demonstrate a proof of your *physical presence* at its premises during the period of your recruitment. Your host institution should provide you with the resources and equipment required to conduct your work. Should it be necessary for you to use the infrastructure or premises of other organisations in order to conduct your research, this should be outlined in the grant agreement.

### 3.5. Supervision

Your host institution should also be able to ensure adequate supervision of your research. How "adequate supervision" is understood, however, will depend on your employer, on yourself, and on the particular field of research. It should, however, be adequate for you to satisfactorily complete your research project. Where supervision is provided by someone based at another organisation, this should be clearly specified in the Description of Action. We also recommend that in such cases a co-supervisor is appointed in the organisation where you are hosted and trained.

For more details, you can also consult the [MSCA Guidelines on Supervision](#).

## 4. Allowances

The funds provided to your employer for the purposes of implementing the project are divided into two categories: those for the benefit of the researcher ("contributions for recruited researcher"), and those for the destination organisation recruiting and hosting you ("institutional contributions") (see relevant [MSCA Work Programme](#) for details).

### 4.1. Contributions for recruited researchers

These allowances are paid to you as the recruited researcher. Note that the total amount received may vary from employer to employer, even within the same country. This is because employer as well as employee payroll taxes and social security costs can be deducted from the gross salary.

- **Living Allowance:** this is the basic, gross amount that you should receive in monthly instalments *before* taxation and compulsory deductions. To ensure equal treatment and purchasing power parity, this amount is then adjusted through the application of a correction coefficient based on the country in which you have been recruited. Fellows recruited in higher cost countries therefore receive a higher gross living allowance than those recruited in lower cost countries. The coefficients applied are indicated in the corresponding [MSCA Work Programme](#). Note that each coefficient applies to the whole country in question, even if the cost of living may differ between cities or regions within that country.
- **Mobility Allowance:** This monthly allowance is intended to cover the costs associated with the fact that you have moved to a different country in order to take up your position. Furthermore, it is for your private use, therefore it is not meant to cover any expenses related to the project (such as secondment costs, travel costs for attending a conference, etc.).

- **Family Allowance:** If you have or will acquire family obligations during the action duration, you are entitled to an additional "family allowance". For the purposes of the MSCA, family is defined as "*persons linked to the researcher by marriage (or a relationship with equivalent status to a marriage recognised by the legislation of the country where this relationship was formalised) or dependent children who are actually being maintained by the researcher*".
- **Long-term leave allowance:** this allowance contributes to the personnel costs incurred by your recruiting institution in case of a leave, including maternity, paternity, parental, sick or special leave, longer than 30 consecutive days. This long-term leave should be requested when the need arises.
- **Special needs allowance:** this allowance contributes to the additional costs for the acquisition of special needs items and services for researchers with disabilities, whose long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments are certified by a competent national authority, and of such nature that their participation in the action may not be possible without them (e.g. assistance by third persons, adaptation of work environment, additional travel/transportation costs). These special needs items or services must not have been funded from another source (e.g. social security or health insurance). This allowance should be requested when the need arises.
- **Non-Eurozone recruiting institutions:** The project budget is calculated and paid in euro; employers must also report their costs in euro. Where your allowances are not paid in euro, i.e. because your employer is not located within the Eurozone, the allowances you receive may consequently fluctuate due to exchange rate changes. Your host is required to report the costs on the basis of an average of the daily exchange rates over the reporting period. It is permissible for an employer to slightly underpay a fellow on a monthly basis, as long as the fellow receives the correct amount by – at the latest – the end of their fellowship.

## 4.2. Institutional contributions

These allowances are directly managed by the employer and are divided into two categories: *Research, Training and Networking contributions*, and *Management and Indirect contributions*.

- **Research, Training and Networking contributions:** This is a fixed amount for each month a researcher is recruited in the project. Although administered by your employer, this amount is intended to cover (1) the costs associated with your participation in the project, for example attending training courses, conferences, or when travelling for a secondment and, (2) the costs associated with the overall implementation of the research and training programme of the project (e.g. part of the budget may be used to organised network-wide events and trainings, dissemination activities etc.). This amount should also help cover the cost of your research (e.g. consumables), as appropriate, and can also be used to cover other related costs, such as visas. Note, however, that this amount is administered by the host organisation, not by the fellows themselves. Therefore, please discuss with your supervisor your needs (e.g. conference attendance).

- **Management and Indirect contributions:** This is a fixed monthly amount per researcher per month in order to cover the host institution's costs of involvement in the project.

## 5. Secondments

Secondments are a period of time spent at another organisation within the consortium with the aim of implementing your individual research project. Spending periods of secondment at other institutions within the project is actively encouraged insofar as this is useful for your research or training. Inter-sectoral secondments (i.e. between the academic and non-academic sectors) are particularly encouraged. Note, however, that secondments are limited to one third of your total recruitment period within the project. Therefore, e.g. in case of recruitment for 36 months, no more than 12 months should be spent outside the organisation that is employing you. This limitation does not apply to Industrial Doctorates and Joint Doctorates projects (except for projects selected under the Doctoral Networks 2021 call).

Additional costs related to secondments of 6 months or less (e.g. housing, travel expenses) should be covered by the "Research, Training and Networking" contributions, not by your living or mobility allowance.

### 5.1. Virtual mobility

Virtual mobility is also possible. While virtual mobility does not have the same multifaceted impact on the development of individuals and sustainable cooperation among organisations as physical mobility, it can however complement it, facilitate long-distance collaboration and be an effective means to faster achieving research and training objectives. In this regard, all MSCA proposals are encouraged to explore opportunities offered by e-infrastructures and related services, in particular those provided through GEANT, the pan-European research and education network. These activities should be clearly described in the proposals, should be relevant, feasible and beneficial for the researchers, and in line with the project objectives.

In all DNs, each recruited researcher can be seconded to other beneficiaries and/or to associated partners/associated partners linked to other beneficiaries for a duration of up to one third of his/her actual recruitment period. Virtual mobility will not be considered as a regular secondment since it does not involve physical mobility. Therefore, it will not count towards the maximum duration of one third of the researcher's total recruitment period.

## 6. Specific Issues

### 6.1. Ethics and Research Integrity

The project must comply with ethical principles, including the highest standards of research integrity as set out in the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)<sup>8</sup> and, all applicable international, EU and national law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Supplementary Protocols. Any specific ethics requirements will be outlined in the Description of the action (Annex 1 to the grant agreement).

## 6.2. PhD Enrolment

All recruited researchers must be enrolled in a doctoral programme leading to the award of a degree in at least one EU Member State or Horizon Europe associated country (for joint doctorates: please check the conditions set out in the applicable call). Note that any enrolment costs or tuition fees are eligible costs and should be charged to the employer (under "Research, Training and Networking" contributions). Under no circumstances should these costs be charged to you<sup>9</sup>.

## 6.3. Teaching

Teaching during your recruitment period could be required as a condition of your PhD enrolment, but in such cases this should be outlined in your Career Development Plan and in the Description of Action. Teaching is welcome, insofar as it does not jeopardise the fulfilment of your research activities within the project.

## 6.4. Complaints

Your project should have an internal complaints procedure in place and it should be clear to whom you should refer to in case of complaints. Should any concern arise during project implementation that you are not able to satisfactorily address with your supervisor and/or the project coordinator, please refer to the guidance on complaints in the "National Contact Points, other assistance and information services and complaints" section of the general *Information package for Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellows*. The REA Project Officer responsible for your project will also attend the mid-term review meeting and will offer you the opportunity to discuss any concerns that may arise.

## 6.5. Contract Suspensions & part-time

In certain, limited cases and only with the prior agreement of the REA – it is possible for fellows to suspend the implementation of their respective fellowship. For exceptional personal reasons, it might also be possible to work part-time on your research project. In each case, this matter should be discussed beforehand with your supervisor and you should obtain the agreement of the granting authority.

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<sup>8</sup> European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity of ALLEA (All European Academies)

<sup>9</sup> Annex 5 of the HE unit model grant agreement – Specific rules for MSCA actions

## 6.6. Intellectual Property Rights

The participating organisations must give you – and where appropriate their partners in the project – access to the background and results necessary for your research work free from restrictions. "Background" means any data, know-how or information that is held by an organisation *before* it signs the grant agreement and which is needed to implement the project or exploit its results. "Results" means any (tangible or intangible) output generated by the project, such as data, knowledge or information.

## 6.7. Confidentiality

You must maintain all necessary confidentiality relating to your research work.

## 6.8. Submission of Questionnaires

Based on Article 18.1 of the grant agreement, funded researchers are requested to submit two questionnaires about their experience: one immediately following the completion of their research training activities ("Evaluation Questionnaire") and one two years later ("Follow-up Questionnaire"). We strongly value the opinions of all researchers funded through the programme and your responses to these questionnaires will help us shape the future design of the MSCA.

### How do I submit a Questionnaire?

The Evaluation Questionnaire can be accessed [here](#) and the Follow-up Questionnaire can be accessed [here](#). You will need to enter project related information, including your project number and acronym.

## 7. After and during your fellowship

In any DN project, MSCA funding can support the researcher for a maximum period as set out in the [applicable call conditions](#). There is no exception to this rule, meaning that in those cases where the completion and submission of your doctoral thesis takes more time, you may need to look for additional financial support. You may therefore wish to discuss this matter with your supervisor well before the completion of your participation in the DN project.

There are, however, other EU funded opportunities that may be of interest to you once you have completed your project:

### 7.1. MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF)

These are [individual research fellowships](#) awarded to the best or most promising researchers of any nationality looking to enhance their career development and prospects by working abroad. Two types of fellowship are funded: European Postdoctoral Fellowships, whereby researchers must either move to or within Europe (MS or AC), and Global Postdoctoral Fellowships in which the fellow is seconded to a third country for a maximum of two years and then must return to a European host

institution for a mandatory 12-month period. To be eligible, fellows must be postdoctoral researchers at the date of the call deadline, i.e. in a possession of a doctoral degree. At the call deadline, supported researchers must have a maximum of 8 years full-time equivalent experience in research, measured from the date of award of the doctoral degree. Funding is available for a period of between 12-24 months for European Postdoctoral Fellowships and 24-36 months for Global Postdoctoral Fellowships, with an optional additional support to carry out a placement of up to 6 months in a non-academic organisation based in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country at the end of the fellowship. More information is available in the [MSCA Work Programme](#) and the respective PF Guides for Applicants.

## 7.2. The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA)

As an MSCA researcher, you are also eligible to join the [MCAA – the Marie Curie Alumni Association](#). Established as a not-for-profit organisation in 2014, the Association offers opportunities for networking and peer exchange, an alumni directory, job offers, an events calendar, and other services of potential interest to researchers. The MCAA is free to join and is open to all MSCA-supported researchers, past and present. Therefore, you are encouraged to join the association as from the start of your fellowship and invite your MSCA peers to do so.

## 7.3. Other opportunities

A number of other ideas for opportunities after you have completed your fellowship, as well as several online resources are listed in the general information package for MSCA fellows under section 11: “Looking ahead: Opportunities after your fellowship”.

## 8. Key terms

- **Beneficiary:** every participating organisation that signs the Grant Agreement (GA) with the European Research Executive Agency (REA) is considered to be a "beneficiary". Each beneficiary contributes directly to the implementation of the research, transfer of knowledge and training activities by supervising, hosting, training and/or seconding staff members
- **Academic sector:** means public or private higher education establishments awarding academic degrees, public or private non-profit research organisations and International European Research Organisations (IERO).
- **Non-academic sector:** means any socio-economic actor not included in the academic sector.
- **Associated partners:** they are organisations that contribute directly to the implementation of the research, transfer of knowledge and training activities by hosting, supervising, training and/or seconding staff members but do not sign the grant agreement.
- **Entities with a legal or capital link** are organisations with an established relationship with the beneficiary which is not limited to the action nor specifically created for its implementation. These entities implement certain action tasks described in Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement, i.e. hosting and training of researchers but such entities may not employ the researcher.
- **'Interdisciplinarity'** means the integration of information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts or theories from two or more scientific disciplines.
- **Secondment:** is a period of research training with another beneficiary, its entities with a capital or legal link, or a associated partner implemented to further enrich the training experience of a researcher. Secondments are an integral part of the research proposal and must be described in the proposal. They imply mobility to a beneficiary or partner organisation with specific supervision arrangements.

