



## Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions in Horizon Europe Postdoctoral Fellowships

**Background.** The MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF) were established by the European Commission (EC) to create attractive job opportunities and good working conditions for talented researchers and innovators within Europe. In a mid to long-term perspective, this should render Europe a leading destination for excellent research and innovation. PFs are part of a larger MSCA portfolio situated in Horizon Europe's pillar for "Excellent Science", together with the ERC (European Research Council) funding scheme. The MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships are designed to facilitate scientific excellence and support the career development of grantees. **Mobility** and **transfer of knowledge**, as well as advanced **individual training** to obtain new technical and transferable skills, lie at the heart of this funding scheme. The envisioned knowledge transfer during a fellowship, at local to global level, is expected to contribute to establishing and fostering a broad culture of open science, innovation and entrepreneurship within Europe.

**Supported researchers.** Researchers from **any field** can apply for a MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship to work on their own individual projects (**'bottom-up'** approach). While disciplinary and purely academic projects will be supported, interdisciplinary research and innovation (R&I) projects as well as intersectoral work are highly encouraged. The aim of the fellowship program is to improve the researchers' employability within academia and beyond. This includes incentives for researchers who would like to reintegrate back to Europe, who would like to restart their career after a break from research, and/or who would like to work across sectors.

**Host institutions.** Institutions hosting MSCA Postdoctoral Fellows commit to close supervision, active career development and the facilitation of skills development for the fellow. The Commission expects best effort in providing a safe, equitable and constructive work environment to, and personal development and wellbeing of the fellow.

The fellowships are prestigious, and institutions will benefit from the program by increasing their global attractiveness, visibility and reputation, as well as by broadening their research networks. The program also provides opportunities to establish an efficient transfer of knowledge across the institution. In addition, MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships can be an important steppingstone in the development of future ERC grants.

### QUICK FACTS

- ✓ Apply with your own idea ('bottom-up')
- ✓ Open to any field of research
- ✓ Scientific excellence and career development are core to MSCA PFs
- ✓ "Triple-i" dimension: international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral
- ✓ A period of international mobility is mandatory
- ✓ Interdisciplinary and intersectoral work are encouraged



## Who can apply?

Researchers with up to 8 years of experience in research, measured from the date when they received their doctoral degree until the call deadline\*, can apply, in cooperation with an eligible host institution located in an EU Member State (MS) or Horizon Europe Associated Country (AC). Host institutions can be either academic or non-academic institutions.

Researchers can be of any nationality. However, those going to a so-called Third Country (= non-EU and not associated to Horizon Europe) or those who wish to reintegrate to Europe, must be nationals or long-term residents of EU Member States (MS) or Horizon Europe Associated Countries (AC). Researchers who are refugees in a MS/AC can apply irrespective of their nationality as long as they fulfil the other eligibility criteria.

Grantees have to fulfil strict international mobility rules in order to be eligible, depending on the type of fellowship they are applying for.

*Other eligibility criteria:* A researcher can only submit one proposal per call. Proposals that received less than 70% cannot be resubmitted the following year.

\*Grantees need to have a doctoral degree in order to be eligible at the time of the call deadline, or a successfully defended doctoral thesis, even if the formal doctoral degree has yet to be awarded. Exceptions: career breaks, time spent outside research and reintegration from Third Countries.



## Two types of fellowships

There are two types of Postdoctoral Fellowships – European Postdoctoral Fellowships and Global Postdoctoral Fellowships:

### *European Postdoctoral Fellowships (EPF)*

- ✓ open to researchers of any nationality (exception: reintegration to Europe)
- ✓ for researchers either coming to a MS/AC from any country in the world or moving within Europe between different MS/AC
- ✓ fellowships must be between 12 and 24 months
- ✓ includes options for career restart (after long-term break) and reintegration of nationals or long-term residents of MS/AC

### *Global Postdoctoral Fellowships (GPF)*

- ✓ open to European nationals or long-term residents, as well as refugees of any nationality who are in a MS/AC
- ✓ 1. outgoing phase: 12-24 months in a Third Country (e.g., USA)
- ✓ 2. mandatory return phase to Europe: 12 months in a MS/AC

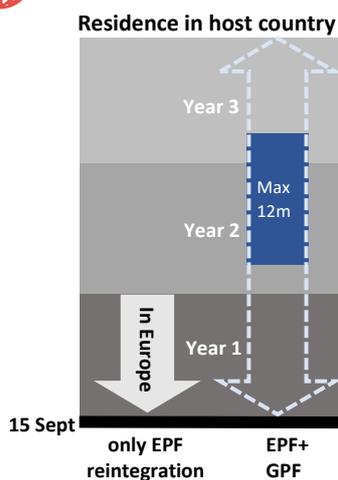
For Global Postdoctoral Fellowships, a Letter of commitment from the Third Country institution hosting the fellow during the outgoing phase is required.



In the application, researchers need to include information on their supervisor(s) at the host institution(s), i.e. (a) senior researcher(s) with relevant expertise and experience who help(s) the fellows to implement their project.



### International mobility



The MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme has strict **mobility** rules. Grantees must *not* have resided/worked/studied in the country of the European host institution (for European Postdoctoral Fellowships, EPF), or the outgoing phase host (for Global Postdoctoral Fellowships, GPF) for more than **12 months in the 36 months immediately prior to the call deadline**.

Researchers *reintegrating* from a Third Country, must move or have moved directly to the EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country where the host institution is located, in the **12 months prior to the call deadline**.



### Secondments

Researchers can include optional secondments to other institutions into their fellowship plans. A secondment is a planned stay outside of the host institution and should add value to the project. It needs to be described and justified in the grant application.

#### European Postdoctoral Fellowship secondments

- ✓ max. one third of the standard fellowship duration

#### Global Postdoctoral Fellowship secondments

- ✓ max. one third of the outgoing phase
- ✓ up to three months can be spent at the European host at the start of the project
- ✓ no secondments during the return phase

Secondments can be carried out at any time during the fellowship, in any country worldwide. The secondment phase can be a single period or can be divided into shorter periods. Secondments to the non-academic sector (e.g., public authorities, industry) are highly encouraged.



### Placement in the non-academic sector

Funding is provided for an **additional period of up to six months** at the end of the fellowship to support researchers seeking to collaborate with a non-academic institution established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. If the fellow is already recruited in the non-academic sector, the placement must be implemented at a different non-academic institution.



Requests should be included in the proposal and are subject to evaluation. The placement needs to add value to the fellowship and is primarily meant to promote uptake of the fellowship results and further career perspectives. A Letter of commitment from the non-academic institution must be provided.



### What can be funded?

Funding is calculated based on unit costs, i.e. flat rate contributions. A country correction coefficient is applied to account for differences in living costs in different countries.

There are two main funding categories, each of which has several sub-categories:

#### *Contributions for the recruited researcher (per person month)*

- ✓ living allowance (to cover the researcher's salary and national compulsory deductions)
- ✓ mobility allowance (covers private costs related to the researcher's mobility)
- ✓ if applicable, family allowance
- ✓ if applicable, long-term leave allowance (contributes to the European host's pay obligations related to the researcher's long-term leave, such as maternity, paternity, parental, sick or special leave)
- ✓ if applicable, special needs allowance (covers additional costs of researchers with disabilities)

#### *Institutional unit contributions (per person month)*

- ✓ research, training and networking contribution (covers costs for e.g., participation in conferences, travels, training, seminars, lab material, books, publication costs, research expenses, secondments etc.)
- ✓ management and indirect contribution (cover the European host's additional costs in connection with the action)

**The University of Bergen provides top-up funding for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships to account for the higher salary costs in Norway.** The Research Council of Norway provides top-up financing for outgoing MSCA fellows\*.

Although it is common for researchers to devote 100% of their time to their fellowship, it is possible to work parttime, to a minimum of 50%. In agreement with the supervisor and the European host institution, and with prior approval by the funding agency, the researchers may opt to work part-time for personal, professional or family reasons. Part-time engagement is not permitted during the outgoing phase of Global Postdoctoral Fellowships.

\* This support scheme is operated by the Research Council of Norway and may be subject to changes.



## Tips for writing a competitive grant application

Calls for MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships are announced annually, and commonly have a deadline in September. Proposals are structured and evaluated using 3 core criteria: Excellence, Impact, and Implementation.

Key points to describe are:

- ✓ **Excellence:** novelty of the research, ambition to go beyond the current state-of-the-art, soundness of the concept, appropriateness of methodology, interdisciplinarity, gender dimension (if relevant), open science, quality of the supervision and training (including supervisor and research environment; including technical and transferable skills training), two-way knowledge transfer, quality of the applicant
- ✓ **Impact:** advancement of applicant's career perspectives, activities to maximize outcomes and impact (includes communication, as well as dissemination & exploitation), expected scientific, societal and economic impacts
- ✓ **Implementation:** work plan (including milestones and deliverables\*), risk assessment, quality of the host institution(s), infrastructure

## IN GENERAL

- ✓ Start early
- ✓ Engage with your supervisor
- ✓ Carefully read the call, templates, and the Guide for applicants
- ✓ Get training on writing!
- ✓ Ask your peers and advisors for feedback (mock evaluation)
- ✓ Don't forget about the administrative forms
- ✓ Examine previous and current grants
- ✓ Consider relevant EU policies
- ✓ Plan non-academic work well ahead (if relevant)

\*Mandatory deliverables in granted projects include, but are not limited to, a career development plan for the grantee (within the first 6 months of the project), a data management plan, a communication plan, and a plan for the dissemination and exploitation of results. Note that, in order to extend the impact of their research beyond the academic world, it is expected that fellowship recipients reach out to society and make their research and results also visible to citizens.

Applicants should work closely with their future supervisor when developing the project and writing the proposal as they typically know the host institution and can provide valuable input to the project development. Also, a good relationship with the supervisor can be decisive for the successful implementation of the funded project.

There are several handbooks available with tips on how to write a competitive application for a MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship (see section "Support and further information"). In addition, the Division of Research and Innovation at UiB has



prepared annotated templates for applicants. Please contact your research advisor for further information about this.

**Evaluation:** Proposals are evaluated by subject experts. Each chapter/criterion is scored using a scale from 0 (fail) to 5 (excellent), with increments of 0,1. A weighted total score is then calculated based on the individual scores, and converted into a percentage of the maximum score. **Excellence** is the most important criterion (comprising 50% of the total score), followed by Impact (30%) and Implementation (20%). A detailed description of the evaluation procedures can be found in the guide for applicants (see section “Support and further information”).

**Seals of Excellence:** The EU will award Seals of Excellence to applications with a total score  $\geq 85\%$  which did not receive funding due to budget constraints.

## Support and further information

### UiB support

#### Pre-award

- Many departments and faculties have local advisors that can help you (applicant and/or supervisor) prepare a grant application, including eligibility checks, the obtainment of the necessary approval for your application, giving you feedback on the project description and CV, and more. Reach out to them!
- UiB’s Division of Research and Innovation has contacts for the different funding schemes under Horizon Europe, including MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships. Upon request, and provided sufficient capacity, the Division’s advisors can offer individual support to MSCA PF applicants and supervisors. UiB entities that do not have a local advisor and/or the necessary capacity will be prioritized. In addition, the Division organizes regular info seminars and workshops for both fellowship candidates and potential supervisors.
- Project Establishment Support. If you think that you need funding for e.g. travel, meeting costs or consultants, please contact the administration of your department to find out more about available project establishment support funds.

#### Post-award

- Fellows and their supervisors will be supported in the initiation and implementation of their MSCA project by a dedicated team of administrative support staff at the host department and central support units at UiB.



## Support and further information *continued*

### MSCA website (European Commission)

- [MSCA Fellowship Program](#)

### EU Funding and Tenders Portal

- [EU portal main page](#)
- On the annual call page, under “Topic conditions and documents”, there will be a link to all call relevant documents, including the latest guide for applicants.
- [Reference documents](#) (work programs; proposal, evaluation and reporting templates) (*link will be updated after call opening*)

### Research Council of Norway (RCN)

- [International funding](#)
- [Top-up financing of outgoing MSCA fellows](#)

### Other

- [Net4Mobility+](#), who have released support materials related to different MSCA programs under the precursor framework program, Horizon 2020, amongst those a handbook for the predecessor program “MSCA Individual Fellowships”. As the MSCA fellowships don’t change much over time, this material is still valuable reading.
- [Marie Curie Alumni Association \(MCAA\)](#)

### Relevant EU policies

- [European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#)
- [MSCA Guidelines on Supervision](#)
- [United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\)](#)
- [European Green Deal](#)
- [European Research Area \(ERA\)](#)
- [European Education Area \(EEA\)](#)
- [Digital Skills Agenda](#)
- [European Skills Agenda](#)
- [Zagreb Call for Action on Brain Circulation](#)

### Underlying principles:

- [Open Science](#)

*Disclaimer: The contents presented in this fact sheet reflect UiB’s understanding of the current draft work program for MSCA under Horizon Europe. Changes may occur in the future. The fact sheet will then be updated accordingly.*