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Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

Update on the MSCA: Opportunities for Doctoral Training

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EUA-CDE Thematic Workshop,
Liège, 15 January, 2026

Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions

Outline

- Overview of MSCA
- Zooming on MSCA Doctoral Networks
- Synergies with University Alliances
- Stakeholders feedback on MSCA in Horizon Europe
- Future outlook: Ideas being examined for the next generation MSCA Doctoral Networks

Pillar I: Excellent Science

Reinforcing and extending the excellence of the Union's science base

European Research Council

Frontier research by the best researchers and their teams

€16 billion

Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions

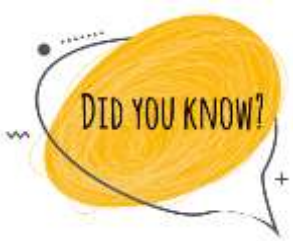
Equipping researchers with new knowledge and skills through mobility and training

€6.6 billion

Research Infrastructures

Integrated and inter-connected world-class research infrastructures

€2.4 billion



23 Nobel Prize winners either backed by or involved in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions between 2012 and 2024

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Key features

Researchers' training, skills and career development (all stages of career)

Excellent research in all domains (bottom-up approach)

International, inter-sectoral & interdisciplinary mobility

Attractive working and employment conditions

Structuring impact on organisations through excellent programmes

Strong collaboration beyond academia

The Actions

50% of Budget goes to Doctoral Networks (EUR 3.3 billion)

Doctoral Networks

Doctoral programmes in and outside academia

Postdoctoral Fellowships

Support to excellent postdoctoral researchers

Staff Exchanges

Support for research and innovation staff exchanges

COFUND

Co-funding doctoral and postdoctoral programmes

Choose Europe for Science

- Single Beneficiary with Partners
- Multiple Researchers Recruited

MSCA and Citizens

Public outreach events (Night)

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What is a Doctoral Network (DN) ?

- ✓ One consortium
- ✓ Proposing a research project
- ✓ With interlinked individual PhD research projects
- ✓ For doctoral candidates

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Implementation modes

DN

Doctoral Networks

Participants implement a joint research programme

DN-ID

Doctoral networks Industrial Doctorates

Doctoral training with the non-academic sector

DN-JD

Doctoral Networks Joint Doctorates

Doctoral programme to deliver joint degrees

All 3 modes compete within the same scientific panels

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MSCA Industrial Doctorates

- Doctoral candidate spends ***minimum 50%*** of fellowship period ***at premises of non-academic*** partner
- Doctoral candidate is ***co-supervised*** by academic and non-academic supervisors
- **All** the doctoral candidates of the project must pursue Industrial Doctorates

MSCA Joint Doctorates (JD)

- ***Highly integrated*** international, inter-sectoral and multi/interdisciplinary collaboration in doctoral training
- Selection, admission and evaluation of doctoral candidate ***jointly*** done by the degree-awarding institutions
- Joint ***supervision***
- Lead to ***Joint, Double or Multiple*** doctoral degrees
- ***All*** *the doctoral candidates of the project must pursue Joint Doctorates*

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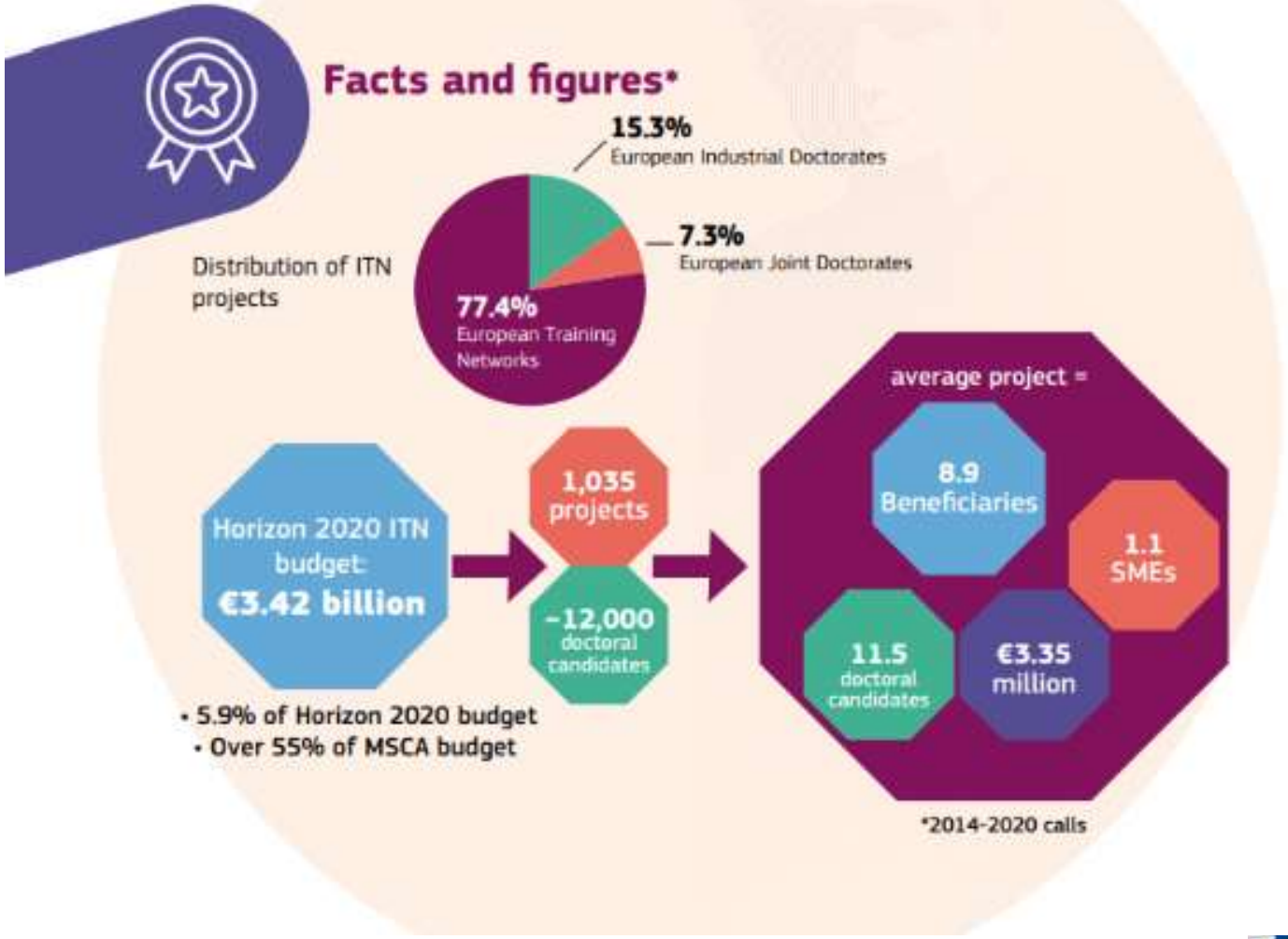
Key Facts & Figures from H2020



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DN projects in the 2024 calls for proposals: Decline in Industrial and Joint Doctorates

DN

Doctoral Networks

Participants implement a joint research programme

Overall: 88%

DN-ID

Doctoral networks Industrial Doctorates

Doctoral training with the non-academic sector

Overall: 6%

DN-JD

Doctoral Networks Joint Doctorates

Doctoral programme to deliver joint degrees

Overall: 6%

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DN improvements since Horizon Europe launch

- ID: Providing an alternative to **multiple recruitment** in Industrial Doctorates (as of 2022 call)
- JD/ID: Unlimited secondment duration (as of 2022 call)
- Standard DN: **Grant size** increased from 360 to 540 Person-Month (as of 2023 call)
- JD: Maximum **fellowship duration** = 4 years instead of 3 (as of 2023 call)
- JD: Maximum **project duration** = 5 years instead of 4 (as of 2023 call)
- JD: Universities from Non-Associated Third Countries can be the second degree-awarding institution (as of 2024 call)

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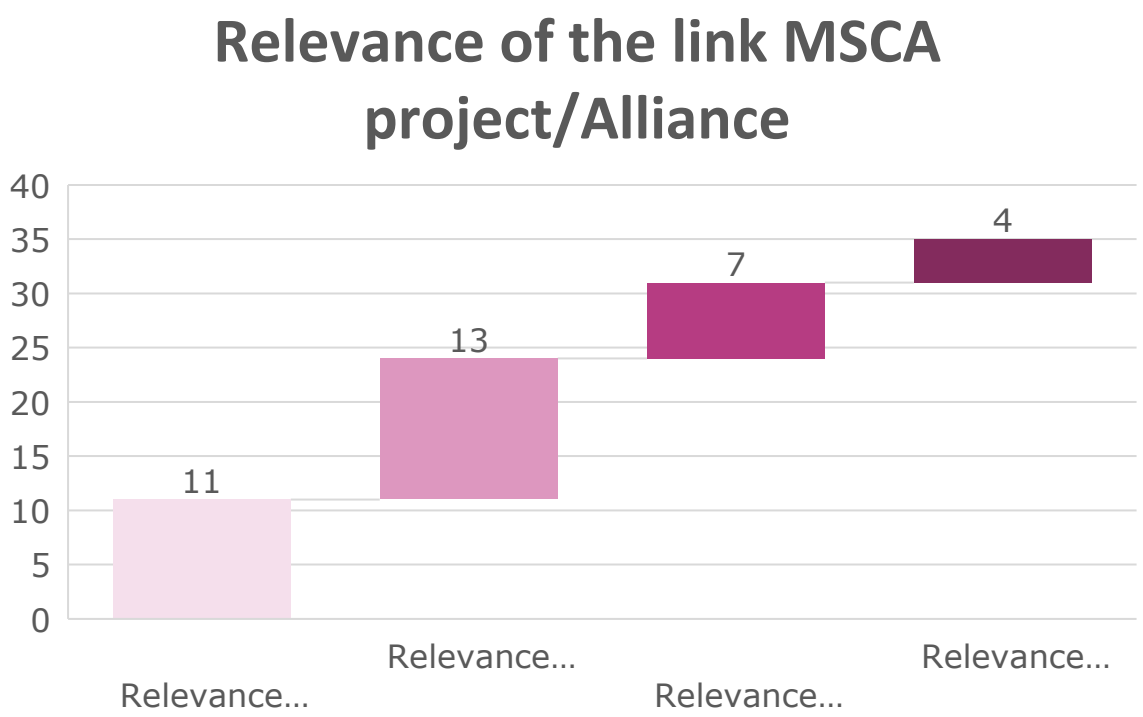
35 of the 65 Alliances have links with MSCA



Relevance score:

0: MSCA listed among sources of potential funding

1: Concrete plans to apply for MSCA funding; existing MSCA project with weak links with Alliance

2: Significant links between MSCA project(s) and Alliance

3: Strategic links between MSCA project and Alliance

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Benefits for Alliances:

- Develop stronger links between participating institutions (researchers, staff work together in MSCA project);
- Attract and recruit talent
- Include new non-academic partners in Alliance ecosystem;
- Support Alliances priorities in research;
- Pilot and fine-tune new recruitment and training models;
- Create joint programmes at doctoral level (building on joint Bachelor/Masters)
- Support their science outreach (Researchers Night...)

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Benefits for MSCA:

- A network (experts to select fellows; employers to hire them; academic & non-academic partners for secondments...)
- Training courses, summer schools, webinars, career fairs... made available to MSCA fellows;
- Facilitation of joint programmes/joint degrees within the Alliance;
- Pooling of Technology Transfer Offices to exploit outputs of MSCA projects;
- Channels for the dissemination and communication of MSCA project outputs

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General feedback on all MSCA

1) Overall feedback calls for ***continuity*** with targeted improvements
2) More ***funding***
3) Significant ***simplificaiton and flexibility*** across the board
4) Further promotion of ***transferable skills*** training related to the private sector
   - ***i.e. IPR, Project Management and Entrepreneurship***

Continuity in more detail:

- MSCA widely acknowledged as the **most successful part of the FP together with the ERC**
- Importance of MSCA as a **fully bottom-up programme based on scientific excellence**, positively impacting the ERA, particularly the **opportunities for early career researchers**
- MSCA key contribution in **improving standards of training and research careers** in Europe and beyond, setting examples for national/ regional funding bodies and individual institutions
- MSCA instrumental for **cross-sectoral partnerships** (academic/non-academic; academia-industry in particular), technology transfer and collaborative research

The « untouchable » features (according to feedback)

- Bottom-up: no prescribed field or topic
- Focus on excellence
- Emphasis on transferable skills
- 3 I's: Inter-sectoral, Inter-disciplinary, International
- Secondments
- Working conditions
- Career Development Plan

Feedback Specific to Doctoral Networks

Continuity/positive feedback: Current DN is fit for purpose

- Very positive on non-academic participation, inter-disciplinarity and structural impact
- Creating collaborations and durable links among organisations
- Positive feedback on improvements introduced since 2021 call, especially on the JD fellowship duration of 4 years and the increase of DN grant size to 540 Person-Month
- Budget increase needed for DN, especially given the low success rate

Identified Issues:

- Persistent/universal complaint: 3-year fellowships too short
  - **Most PhDs take more**
  - **MSCA features take time (soft skills, engaging with society, etc.)**
- Demand declining on ID & JD despite their strategic value
  - **ID: Min. 50% at non-academic premises too rigid, Joint supervisions challenges, excessive admin especially with secondments and visas**
  - **JD: Admin hurdles, incompatibility of rules in some country combinations**
- More simplification and flexibility needed for DN-ID and DN-JD

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FP10: The Institutional Pipeline

- Commission: Proposal published on 16 July 2025
- Council: Discussions with EU Member States well under way at the level of the Research Working Party and Competitiveness Council
- European Parliament: Rapporteur nominated (Christian Ehler, EPP)

FP10: The Architecture

The structure of the new Horizon Europe

Pillar I
EXCELLENT SCIENCE

- EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL
- MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS
- SCIENCE FOR EU POLICIES

Pillar II
COMPETITIVENESS AND SOCIETY

COMPETITIVENESS[1] :

1. Clean Transition and Industrial Decarbonisation
2. Health, Biotech, Agriculture and Bioeconomy
3. Digital leadership
4. Resilience and Security, Defence Industry and Space

SOCIETY:

1. Global societal challenges
2. EU Missions
3. New European Bauhaus Facility

Pillar III
INNOVATION

- EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL
- INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS AND THE KNOWLEDGE TRIANGLE

Pillar IV
EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

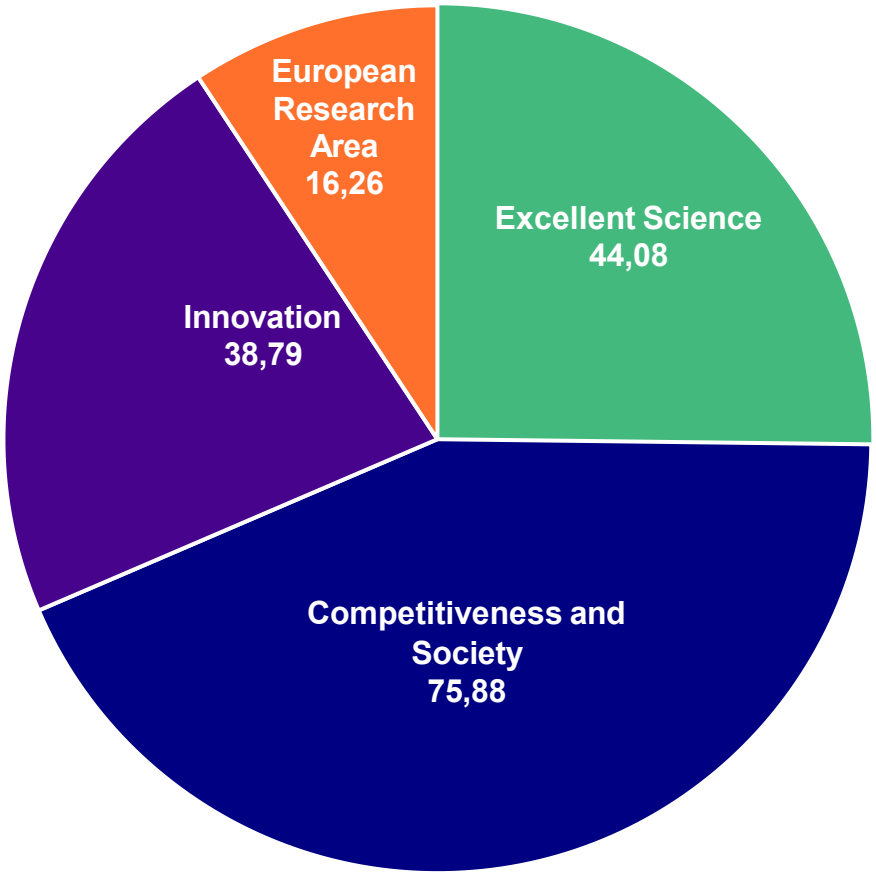
- ERA POLICIES
- RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURES
- WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND SPREADING EXCELLENCE

[1] Consistent with activities under the European Competitiveness Fund

FP10: The Budget

Horizon Europe total budget EUR 175 billion (current prices)

Figures all in EUR billion



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Future Outlook: A scenario being examined for MSCA Doctoral Networks

- Streamline the 3 types of DNs for more flexibility
- Provide ***built-in incentives*** for each Joint or Industrial Doctorate in a consortium
- Consider ***fellowship duration***
- Provide more ***flexibility on the minimum 50% stay*** at the non-academic premises for Industrial DN
- ***Simplify procedures for updating the secondments*** plan during the project lifetime.

Thank you!

 # HorizonEU #MSCA

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions on LinkedIn

https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/