

UKRO Horizon 2020 Condensed

MSCA Post-Award Factsheet

Introduction

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) are comprised of 5 schemes: Innovative Training Networks (ITN), Individual Fellowships (IF), Research and Innovation Staff Exchanges (RISE), Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes (COFUND) and Researchers' Night (NIGHT); see the [MSCA UKRO Factsheet](#) for an overview of the programme. The MSCAs have annual calls and are unique under Horizon 2020 in that they are supported exclusively through unit costs, except for NIGHT which has a biannual call and projects are supported through Coordination and Support Actions (CSA). More guidance on unit costs are provided in the MSCA specific annotations in the Horizon 2020 [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#) spanning pages 440-582.

Grant Preparation

As is the case for all Horizon 2020 proposals, the eight months to grant from the call deadline principle applies. Therefore, for the most part, applicants will receive their results within five months of the call deadline and successful proposals will usually be asked to sign their Grant Agreement within the remaining three months. Each project will be allocated a Project Officer from the Research Executive Agency (REA), who will be responsible for its management on behalf of the EU. Project Officers provide instructions as to the steps required to complete grant preparation and are the first port of call for any questions concerning the process. Furthermore, throughout the lifetime of an MSCA award, as a general rule, awardees are encouraged to discuss concerns, changes and questions with their Project Officers in the first instance. UKRO regularly publishes articles on the MSCAs which can help subscribers with the management of their project(s). Summary notes from the UKRO MSCA Focus Group meetings which cover approaches to the management of each MSCA scheme under Horizon 2020 are available on the [UKRO Portal](#).

Eligibility Conditions

In order for individuals to engage in MSCA projects, they will have to meet action specific eligibility conditions. Generally speaking, the two main factors taken into consideration are the individual's career stage/status and their international mobility. The MSCAs identify two career stages relevant to certain schemes:

**Early Stage
Researcher (ESR)**

• Shall, at the time of recruitment by the host organisation, be in the first four years (*full-time equivalent research experience*) of their research careers and have not been awarded a doctoral degree.

**Experienced
Researcher (ER)**

• Must, at the date of the call deadline, be in possession of a doctoral degree or have at least four years of full-time equivalent research experience. Any parental leave periods do not count towards the time of research experience.

In terms of the [mobility rule](#) applied, though it can vary for some schemes (notably the Reintegration, Career Restart and Society & Enterprise panels of Individual Fellowship) the standard condition stipulates:

“The researcher cannot not have resided or carried out his/her main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the call deadline”. “Compulsory service, short stays and time spent obtaining refugee status ... are not taken into account.”

In order for costs on a project to be eligible, researchers and other individuals on MSCA projects must meet the eligibility conditions. Eligibility conditions will also be outlined clearly in the Grant Agreement and should be noted by every project partner for all projects.

Unit Costs

The MSCAs are unique in that they are supported exclusively through unit cost contributions based on set amounts multiplied by the number of person months implemented. The rates (in Euros) vary by scheme and are listed the work programme. As listed in the [2018-2020 MSCA Work Programme](#) the unit costs are:

Scheme	Researcher unit cost [person/month] Euros			Institutional unit cost [person/month] Euros	
	Living allowance*	Mobility allowance	Family allowance	Research, training and networking costs	Management and overheads
ITN	3270	600	500	1800	1200
IF	4880	600	500	800	650
RISE	2100			1800	700
COFUND	ESRs	1935		325	
	ERs	2740			

(*A correction co-efficient will apply to these costs (see MSCA Work Programme table 4)

For COFUND: Unit costs are subject to a co-funding rate of 50% as stated in the grant agreement. Unit costs are reduced by 50% if researchers are recruited under fixed-amount fellowships.)

In all cases, it is very important that the **Researcher unit costs** are used to the benefit of the Fellow in full. Where these costs make up the salary of the researcher, they provide a gross figure from which statutory deductions for both the employer and employee can be made. For most UK organisations, we understand that standard practice is to apply a conservative exchange rate during the implementation of the project to account for currency fluctuations. This is then followed by a corrective balancing payment to the researcher part-way through, or at the end of, the project to ensure they receive the full amount.

The **Institutional unit costs** are directly linked to the Researcher unit costs. They can only be claimed if the host institution successfully recruits researchers (or sends staff on secondments in RISE projects) in accordance with the months specified in the Grant Agreement. The project has the flexibility to use the Institutional unit costs as they see fit to ensure the successful implementation of the project. For example, in an ITN or RISE project, the coordinator may retain a higher proportion of the Management and Overheads budget or one organisation may have lower research costs and, therefore, receive a reduced Research, Training and Networking contribution. All redistribution of the Institutional unit costs should be formalised in writing in a Consortium Agreement.

The '**Mobility Allowance**' is to be used by the recruited researcher to cover costs related to their mobility, such as travel and accommodation. It is to be used to cover the private costs of the researcher. The 'Mobility Allowance' should not be used to cover professional costs as these are covered by the 'research, training and networking costs'.

Travel costs for professional reasons, such as the travel costs for the recruited researcher to take up the fellowship, should be covered by the '**research, training and networking costs**'.

The visa costs for the recruited researcher are for professional reasons and as such should come from the '**research, training and networking costs**', even if they are incurred prior to the date of recruitment.

Where the recruited researcher has family members which will be relocating with them, the family allowance should be used to cover the travel and other relocation costs, including visa entry costs, for the family members. The '**Family Allowance**' is meant to reduce family related obstacles to researcher mobility.

Consortium Agreement

Consortium Agreements are highly recommended for all MSCA projects involving a number of partners in the beginning of Horizon 2020. As of 2016, Consortium Agreements are mandatory for both ITN and RISE projects. Neither the Commission nor the REA provide templates or any detailed guidance on what should appear in a Consortium Agreement, though they do recommend that they cover:

- Internal organisation of the consortium;
- Management of access to the electronic exchange system;
- Distribution of EU funding;
- Additional rules on rights and obligations related to background and results;
- Settlement of internal disputes;
- Liability, indemnification and confidentiality arrangements between the partners.

UKRO, the European Commission and the REA do not advocate the use of any standard Consortium Agreement templates. However, below are some examples that consortia may wish to use and adapt to their own needs:

- DESCA 2020 Model Consortium Agreement;
- LERU template for European Training Networks (ITN);

Participant Portal 'My Projects'

As with all Horizon 2020 projects, management and implementation will be carried out from start to finish through the Funding and Tenders Opportunities Portal (FTOP). All ongoing projects are available to individuals through their 'EU Log-in' (previously European Commission Authentication Service (ECAS)) profile under '[My Projects](#)' > '[My Area](#)' which becomes visible after logging in. Comprehensive guidance concerning the management of projects through the Funding and Tenders Portal is available in the [Online Manual](#) and '[How to](#)' [Wiki](#) (must be logged in to access).

Financing and Reporting

Pre-financing of MSCA projects is limited and can be up to a maximum of 75% of the total EU contribution, 5% of which will be retained for the Guarantee Fund. Pre-financing will normally be transferred to the Coordinator within 30 days from entry into force of the Grant Agreement or 10 days before the start date of the project. The Coordinator can only transfer funds to beneficiaries that have already acceded to the Grant Agreement and only when the minimum number of beneficiaries has been met (normally three beneficiaries in three different EU Member States/Associate Countries).

Through the EU Log-in on the Funding and Tenders Opportunities Portal MSCA projects are accessed in the 'My Projects' management system. MSCAs work on the basis of **Continuous Reporting**, i.e. information concerning the project can be added at any time throughout the duration of the project and will be consolidated at the reporting stage to help alleviate the administrative burden of bringing reports together. This mode of reporting is particularly important for the **Researcher Declaration** which needs to be uploaded within 20 days of the recruitment of the researcher (or start date of the secondment in RISE projects). The Researcher Declaration includes personal data of the individual (name, date of birth, nationality, gender, family status, etc.) and information related to the project allowances (start and end date of recruitment, hosting institution, etc.).

Depending on the overall lifespan of the project, beneficiaries will also be obliged to complete **Periodic Reports**. The schedule of reporting for each MSCA project will be detailed under Article 20 of the Grant Agreement. Generally speaking, though not exclusively, reporting periods last 18 months. *Note: Individual Fellowships with a duration of two years or less will only report at the end of the project.*

At the end of a reporting period, projects are required to submit both a **Technical Report** giving an overview of progress so far and a **Financial Report** declaring costs so far, for MSCA in terms of the number of person months implemented. These two parts of the report will need to be submitted together as one report within 60 days of the end of each reporting period. The REA will process the reports as soon as possible and, assuming the reports are accepted, the corresponding payments will be transferred (up to 90% of the total EU contribution). The final 10% of the project costs will be released following the successful submission and acceptance of the **Final Report**. The Final Report is also made up of both technical and financial updates and should be submitted within 60 days of the project end date. Once the Final Report has been accepted, the remaining unit costs related to the project will be released along with the Guarantee Fund.

There will also be a **Mid-Term Meeting** for those involved in ITN or COFUND project in accordance with Article 19. The meeting provides an opportunity the beneficiaries, partner organisations, entities with a capital or legal link as well as the recruited researcher to meet with the Agency to discuss any issues that have arisen. The objective of the meeting is to assess the recruitment progress and procedure, clarify the eligibility rules for fellows, raise awareness on the rights and obligations of fellows and beneficiaries, assess any deviation of the original training programme and define contingency plans if necessary. For those involved in an ITN the meeting must be organised within the first reporting period, ideally between months 13 and 15. For those involved in a COFUND project the timing will be determined by the Agency.

Recruitment, Employment and Visa Considerations

For projects with recruitment of fellows during the project duration (ITN, COFUND) beneficiaries *must advertise and publish vacancies internationally* and, as a minimum, they should be posted on the **EURAXESS Jobs** portal. MSCA fellows must be hired on a full employment contract by the host institution (including Early Stage Researchers). Hence the necessity to consider UK visa regulations when advertising job vacancies. There may also be visa entry considerations for MSCA fellows on secondments to UK host institutions.

The employment contract must comply with Article 32 of the MSCA Grant Agreement, which specifies recruitment and working conditions for researchers, as well as researcher obligations, such as working exclusively on the MSCA project and submitting evaluation questionnaires.

Record Keeping and Audits

Audits for MSCA projects are different from other Horizon 2020 projects. When monitoring and/or auditing MSCA projects, the main concern is whether the **Researcher unit costs** were correctly implemented. In practice, this means auditors don't look at actual costs. Instead, evidence is sought that clearly demonstrates the eligibility of the researcher/staff member against the scheme conditions, as well as the correct mode of engagement, i.e. that the researcher was employed as a full member of staff with associated benefits, and that this was the case for the period of time claimed for. Auditors will also check that the number of months declared correspond to the actual number of months spent by the researchers on the research training and innovation activities.

Many different types of evidence to prove the correct implementation of the Researcher unit costs, correct employment conditions and working time can be retained, including but not limited to:

- Researcher/staff member's CV;
- Copies of diplomas;
- Lab books;
- Scientific articles;
- Library records;

- Travel documentation;
- Employment contracts; and
- Time Sheets.

How long these type of records should be retained following the end date of the project will be indicated under Article 18 of the Grant Agreement and is normally five years.

As previously explained, assuming the **Researcher unit costs** are accepted, the **Institutional unit costs** will be accepted without any detailed checks from the European Commission/REA.

More information:

- European Commission Funding and Tenders Opportunities Portal for:
 - **Calls for proposals**
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>
 - **Work programmes**
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/reference-documents>
 - **MSCA Specific Work Programme**
http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/main/h2020-wp1820-msca_en.pdf
- **MSCA Web Page**
https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/msca-actions_en
- **MSCA Section on Horizon2020 Page**
<http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/marie-sklodowska-curie-actions>
- **H2020 Online Manual** http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/index_en.htm
- **MSCA How to Manage My Project**
http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/how-to/manage-your-project_en
- **'How To' Wiki**
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/pages/viewpage.action?spaceKey=ECResearchGMS&title=1.+Grant+Management+Services+tool>
- **European IPR Helpdesk Fact Sheet** on IP management in MSCA
https://iprhelpdesk.eu/sites/default/files/newsdocuments/FS_IP_management_in_MS_CA-H2020_v1.0.pdf
- **UK visas and immigration website**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration>
- Sign up to the UKRO Portal to stay up to date on the MSCAs: ukro.ac.uk
- For specific questions, contact your UKRO European Advisor.
- UK NCP Helpdesk:
 - Email: mariecurie-uk@bbsrc.ac.uk
 - Phone: + 32 2 230 0318