

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action Postdoctoral Fellowship Annotated Guide

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Disclaimer: This Annotated Guide is based on the ‘Guide for Applicants’, the proposal template and our experience as MSCA National Contact Points. The document is meant to complement and not replace information contained in the official documents. If in doubt, always refer to the information provided in the official document. For questions on the proposal, please contact your National Contact Points and/or your local Euresearch support.

1. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) in Horizon Europe

1.1 MSCA Work Programme 2021-2022

In order to write a competitive proposal, we strongly recommend studying not only the [Guide for Applicants](#) but also the objective, expected impact and outcome given in the [MSCA Work Programme 2021-2022](#). Align your project and training towards the outlined overall objective, impact and outcome.

1.1.1 The Objective of the Postdoctoral Fellowship

The MSCA Work Programme 2021-2022 defines the goal of the Postdoctoral Fellowships as: 'Enhancing the creative and innovative potential of researchers holding a PhD, wishing to acquire new skills through advanced training, international, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility.'

1.1.2 Expected Impact

Proposals under this Action should contribute to the following expected impacts:

- Enhance the creative and innovative potential of researchers holding a PhD and wishing to diversify their individual competences and skills through advanced training, international, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility while implementing excellent research projects across all sectors of research
- Strengthen Europe's human capital base in R&I with better trained, innovative and entrepreneurial researchers
- Enhance the quality of R&I contributing to Europe's competitiveness and growth
- Contribute to Europe's attractiveness as a leading destination for R&I and for good working conditions of researchers
- Facilitate knowledge transfer and brain circulation across the European Research Area (ERA)
- Foster the culture of open science, innovation and entrepreneurship

1.1.3 Expected Outcome

Project results are expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

For supported postdoctoral researchers

- Increased set of research and transferable skills and competences, leading to improved employability and career prospects of MSCA postdoctoral fellows within academia and beyond;
- New mind-sets and approaches to R&I work forged through interdisciplinary, intersectoral and international experience;
- Enhanced networking and communication capacities with scientific peers, as well as with the general public that will increase and broaden the research and innovation impact.

For participating organisations

- Increased alignment of working conditions for researchers in accordance with the principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers;
- Enhanced quality and sustainability of research training and supervision;
- Increased global attractiveness, visibility and reputation of the participating organisation(s);
- Stronger R&I capacity and output among participating organisations; better transfer of knowledge;
- Regular feedback of research results into teaching and education at participating organisations.

1.2 General remarks

- Check the eligibility criteria to make sure you comply with the mobility rule and the years of research experience in the General Annex Part B of the Work Programme.
- Examples of existing projects can be found on the CORDIS projects' database
- The acronym of your proposal should be short, easy to pronounce and remember. Some online tools might be of help: <http://acronymcreator.net> or <http://acronymify.com>.
- Proposal language: avoid jargon and write out abbreviations the first time they appear.
- Be consistent how you refer to yourself: 1st person (I, me) OR 3rd person (the researcher, the ER, the fellow). If you use the "we", define it.
- Abstract should not be a usual scientific abstract, but sell your project and be understandable to the generalist. Give 1-2 sentences to put your project into a context and write your objective simply and clearly. Give then the background (state of the art) and specific aims as well as some details on your project plan.

2. Formatting Requirements

- ✓ Body Text Font Size: 11 points minimum (Times New Roman)
- ✓ Table Font Size : 8 points minimum
- ✓ Page Margins: 15 mm minimum (not including headers and footers)
- ✓ Literature References: In Footnotes, font size 8 (included in page limit)
- ✓ Required Header: Call: [insert call identifier] – [insert call name]
- ✓ Page Number Format: Page X of Y
- ✓ Don't include hyperlinks. (Evaluators will be instructed to ignore hyperlinks to information that is specifically designed to expand the proposal, thus circumventing the page limit.)
- ✓ Tables are only to be used for illustrating the core text of the proposal; they cannot be used to contain the core text itself.

3. Annotated Template

Applicants must submit Part B of their proposal as two separate documents:

Part B1

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Excellence 2. Impact 3. Implementation | } | <u>10 pages maximum</u> |
|---|---|-------------------------|

Part B2 (No overall page limit)

4. CV of the researcher (5 pages maximum)
5. Capacities of the participating organisations (1 page for the overview and 1 page for each participating organisation)
6. Ethics Issues
7. Letters of Commitment of the partner organisation (for Global Fellowship only)

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Part B-1

1. Excellence

This section has a weight of 50% and is the most important award criterion. Based on successful proposals, we observed that the excellence part is not shorter than 4 but not longer than 5-6 pages.

1.1 Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious, and go beyond the state of the art)

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Describe the quality and pertinence of the R&I objectives; are the **objectives** measurable and verifiable? Are they realistically achievable?
- Describe how your project goes **beyond the state-of-the-art**, and the extent to which the proposed work is ambitious.

Put specific objectives in a prominent position on the 1st page. The objective is the concrete result of your project, which you will achieve by following a series of steps. Defining the objective is essential for writing a strong proposal. Demonstrate that you know exactly what you are going to do.

When you write about the state of the art of your research field, keep it focused on your topic. This is the scientific part of your proposal. So try to cite the most relevant references.

The proposal should not just be a continuation of an existing project, but show its originality and the innovative aspects of the research. Describe how your research goes beyond the state of the art. Describe that your project contributes to advancements in your field. Be as specific as possible.

Describe the timeliness of the project: Why is the project important now?

1.2 Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, consideration of the gender dimension and other diversity aspects if relevant for the research project, and the quality of open science practices, including sharing and management of research outputs and engagement of citizens, civil society and end users where appropriate)

In this subchapter, several aspects of the methodology should be addressed. Structure this subchapter with sub-sections and don't leave out any aspect. If any aspect is not applicable to your project, justify it shortly.

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- **Overall methodology:** Describe and explain the **overall methodology, including the concepts, models and assumptions that underpin your work**. Explain how this will enable you to deliver your project's objectives. Refer to any important challenges you may have identified in the chosen methodology and how you intend to overcome them.

Describe the way in which you will achieve your objective and solve the scientific questions that you address in your proposal.

While the project should be original and ambitious, it must still be feasible. Describe the overall method in enough detail for the evaluator to understand what you are planning to do. Don't provide every single detail (this is still the excellence section and not implementation 3.1), but be specific.

Graphics and tables can help to summarize. They should not add new information but help the reader as a 'graphical summary' of the project or method. Display information in a concise way

- **Integration of methods and disciplines to pursue the objectives:** Explain how expertise and methods from different disciplines will be brought together and integrated in pursuit of your objectives. If you consider that an inter-disciplinary approach is unnecessary in the context of the proposed work, please provide a justification.

Refer to the interdisciplinary aspects of your approach. How will the expertise from different disciplines be combined? If you don't plan an interdisciplinary approach, provide a short justification.

- **Gender dimension and other diversity aspects:** Describe how the gender dimension and other diversity aspects are taken into account in the project's research and innovation content. If you do not consider such a gender dimension to be relevant in your project, please provide a justification.

Remember that that this question relates to the **content of the planned research and innovation activities**, and **not to gender balance in the teams in charge of carrying out the project**.

Sex, gender and diversity analysis refers to biological characteristics and social/cultural factors respectively. For guidance on methods of sex / gender analysis and the issues to be taken into account, please refer [to this page](#).

For those who wish to read more about how to consider Gender dimension in Research and Innovation, there is a long [Report](#) from Nov 2020 providing definitions and examples.

- **Open science practices:** Describe how appropriate open science practices are implemented as an integral part of the proposed methodology. Show how the choice of practices and their implementation is adapted to the nature of your work in a way that will increase the chances of the project delivering on its objectives [e.g. up to ½ page, including research data management]. If you believe that none of these practices are appropriate for your project, please provide a justification here.

*Open science is an approach based on **open cooperative work and systematic sharing of knowledge and tools as early and widely as possible in the process**. Open science practices include early and open sharing of research (for example through preregistration, registered reports, pre-prints, or crowd-sourcing); **research output management; measures to ensure reproducibility of research outputs; providing open access to research outputs** (such as publications, data, software, models, algorithms, and workflows); participation in open peer-review; and involving all relevant knowledge actors including citizens, civil society and end users in the co-creation of R&I agendas and contents (such as citizen science).*

*Please note that this **does not refer to outreach actions** that may be planned as part of the communication, dissemination and exploitation activities. These aspects should instead be described below under 'Impact'.*

Describe here any measures you plan to do for an open science practice. What kind of open science practice is already in place at the hosting institutions and can you apply the practice to your project? Is it appropriate and if not, explain the reasons here.

A MSCA video on Open Science explains its meaning and importance.

- **Research data management and management of other research outputs:** Applicants generating/collecting data and/or other research outputs (except for publications) during the project must explain how the data will be managed in line with the **FAIR principles** (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable).

Specify how you will manage your data during the fellowship and whether the data set can be organized in line with the FAIR principles. To know more about FAIR principles, [check here](#).

For guidance on open science practices and research data management, please refer to the relevant section of the [HE Programme Guide on the Funding & Tenders Portal](#).

1.3 Quality of the supervision, training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Describe the qualifications and **experience of the supervisor(s)**. Provide information regarding the supervisors' level of experience on the research topic proposed and their track record of work, including main international collaborations, as well as the level of experience in supervising/training, especially at advanced level (i.e. PhD and postdoctoral researchers).

Scientific supervision arrangements should clearly define that the proposed supervisors have sufficient expertise, time, knowledge, experience and commitment to be able to offer the appropriate support to the researcher and provide for the necessary progress, review and feedback procedures/mechanisms.

Include here information on the track record, awards and collaborations of your supervisor. If the supervisor has coordinated EU or other large projects, mention this here. Previous experience supervising Marie Skłodowska-Curie or similar fellowships should also be mentioned. Since this is not only about the qualification as a researcher, but as a supervisor, it is important to mention the level of experience in supervising PhD and postdoctoral researchers.

There should be only one supervisor per hosting institution. If there is any other expert or senior scientist providing training or ensure transfer of knowledge, this should be described in the subsection of 'two way transfer of knowledge'.

- **Planned training activities** for the researcher (scientific aspects, management/organisation, horizontal and key transferrable skills...).

Training is a crucial aspect in the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship. Define specific training objectives linked to your career goal and indicate how you will receive training through research under the supervision of your future supervisor and other members of the staff.

Refer to an individual training to diversify your skills and competences for your career development (working with a personal career development plan).

The scientific training should be excellent and you should become an expert in the field thanks to the fellowship. New knowledge should also include 'transferable skills, such as management experience, understanding intellectual property rights, training on gender issues, presentation and writing skills- or acquire a new languages.

- For European Fellowships: **two-way transfer of knowledge** between the researcher and host organisation.
- For Global Fellowships: three-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher, host organisation, and associated partner for outgoing phase.
- Rationale and added-value of the non-academic placement (if applicable).

Explain the two-way transfer of knowledge: both (host & fellow) should benefit from the fellowship. Be as specific as possible how you will transfer your knowledge to the host and how you will learn new competences at the hosting institution(s).

The benefits for you and the host organisation can also be new networks or collaborations that will arise from the fellowship. Or you bring to the project access to data and samples.

Supervision is one of the crucial elements of successful research. Guiding, supporting, directing, advising and mentoring are key factors for a researcher to pursue his/her career path. In this context, all MSCA-funded projects are encouraged to follow the recommendations outlined in the [MSCA Guidelines on Supervision](#).

Supervision

Employers and/or funders should ensure that a person is clearly identified to whom researchers can refer for the performance of their professional duties, and should inform the researchers accordingly.

Such arrangements should clearly define that the proposed supervisors are sufficiently expert in supervising research, have the time, knowledge, experience, expertise and commitment to be able to offer the research doctoral candidate appropriate support and provide for the necessary progress and review procedures, as well as the necessary feedback mechanisms.

1.4 Quality and appropriateness of the researcher's professional experience, competences and skills

Discuss the quality and appropriateness of the researcher's [existing professional experience](#) in relation to the proposed research project.

Here you should demonstrate that you have a high potential for reaching professional maturity and that the proposed research and training will contribute to your professional development as an independent researcher.

Demonstrate what you have done so far and that this research experience can contribute to your professional development during the fellowship.

Report on your past research ideas and track record. Mention projects that you lead and original ideas that you had, for example during your PhD. Mention also any funding or prizes that you were awarded. Outline any methods you developed.

This is the part of the proposal where you can describe your profile. Don't duplicate your CV but emphasis in your own words existing experiences relevant for the fellowship and project.

2. Impact

The impact section has a weight of 30% and it takes about 2-3 pages to cover the 3 subchapters. It is important to justify the expected impact with what you wrote in the excellence section. Don't provide just statements without any justifications.

2.1 Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- **Expected** skill development of the researcher.
- **Expected** impact of the proposed research and training activities on the [researcher's career perspectives inside and/or outside academia](#).

In this subchapter, you need to describe the expected impact of the fellowship on your career. What is the next step after the fellowship and how will the fellowship enable you to take the next step? (For example: applying for a special grant, new skills you will learn, new collaborations you will establish and that will improve your career perspective, transferable skills etc.) It is important to be specific. Show how the fellowship (research project, training, supervision) ideally will help you to get closer to your vision of your future career.

Do the planned training activities fit your career plan inside or outside academia?

Describe the added value on the future career opportunities (medium and long term).

2.2 Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Plan for the dissemination and exploitation activities, including communication activities: Describe the planned measures to maximize the impact of your project by providing a first version of your ‘plan for the dissemination and exploitation including communication activities’. Describe the dissemination, exploitation measures that are planned, and the target group(s) addressed (e.g. scientific community, end users, financial actors, public at large). Regarding communication measures and public engagement strategy, the aim is to inform and reach out to society and show the activities performed, and the use and the benefits the project will have for citizens.

Activities must be strategically planned, with clear objectives, start at the outset and continue through the lifetime of the project. The description of the communication activities needs to state the main messages as well as the tools and channels that will be used to reach out to each of the chosen target groups.

In this subchapter you need to describe the dissemination, exploitation and communication plans. Provide three subsections and be specific in what measures you intend to do for what target audience and with what objective. Demonstrate your awareness about the relevance & applicability of your work. Clearly distinguish what are dissemination, exploitation and communication.

Dissemination:

Explain how you are going to disseminate the expected results to the scientific community. Is there any other community that might benefit from your results? Name some target journals and also participation to (international) conferences to present your work. Again name the conferences you aim to attend. Specify open access publishing.

Exploitation:

What kind of measures do you intend to do for any exploitation of your results? Will your project lead to any product or recommendations for policy makers?

Potential intellectual property issues with the host institute should be clarified at the proposal stage and you should mention what kind of measures will be taken.

Communication:

Communication can start at the beginning of the fellowship and is not necessarily dependent on the project results. It is important to be realistic and to describe a strategic plan and not simply list all possible activities. There is also a [video from MSCA](#) about Communication and Outreach providing some ideas.

Describe any experience you already have in outreach activities. If you do not yet speak the local language, mention how you will tackle this problem. Explain how the outreach activities will help to

create awareness of the importance of your research, thereby improving the public's understanding of science and your understanding of the public's priorities and concerns.

Don't forget that all the activities you propose must be included in your Gantt chart (Section 3.1).

- Strategy for the management of intellectual property, foreseen protection measures: if relevant, discuss the strategy for the management of intellectual property, foreseen protection measures, such as patents, design rights, copyright, trade secrets, etc., and how these would be used to support exploitation.

All measures should be proportionate to the scale of the project, and should contain concrete actions to be implemented both during and after the end of the project.

2.3. *The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, societal and economic impacts*

This is a new subchapter and it is important to address all the three levels of the expected impact (scientific, societal and economic).

Here is also the place to place your project to a bigger picture. What are expected impacts beyond the time of your fellowship?

Refer to any Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or other socio-political goals related to your project and how your project will contribute beyond the time of your fellowship.

Provide a narrative explaining how the project's results are expected to make a difference in terms of impact, beyond the immediate scope and duration of the project. The narrative should include the components below, tailored to your project.

Be specific, referring to the effects of your project, and not R&I in general in this field. State the target groups that would benefit.

– Expected scientific impact(s): e.g. contributing to specific scientific advances, across and within disciplines, creating new knowledge, reinforcing scientific equipment and instruments, computing systems (i.e. research infrastructures);

Describe how your project will create forefront knowledge.

– Expected economic/technological impact(s): e.g. bringing new products, services, business processes to the market, increasing efficiency, decreasing costs, increasing profits, contributing to standards' setting, etc.

Explain how your project can contribute to a higher quality of life of citizens.

– Expected societal impact(s): e.g. decreasing CO2 emissions, decreasing avoidable mortality, improving policies and decision-making, raising consumer awareness.

Show how your project has the potential to advance innovation capacity, competitiveness, and economic growth

Only include such outcomes and impacts where your project would make a significant and direct contribution. Avoid describing very tenuous links to wider impacts.

Give an indication of the magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected outcomes and impacts, should the project be successful. Provide quantified estimates where possible and meaningful. 'Magnitude' refers to how widespread the outcomes and impacts are likely to be. For example, in terms of the size of the target group, or the proportion of that group, that should benefit over time;

‘Importance’ refers to the value of those benefits. For example, number of additional healthy life years; efficiency savings in energy supply.

3. Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation

The implementation section has a weight of 20% and is thus the section that counts least. However, it takes about 2-3 pages to outline a solid workplan, risk management plan, Gantt chart and describing the hosting institution(s).

3.1 *Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages*

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Brief presentation of the overall structure of the work plan, including deliverables and milestones.

Keep in mind:

- A work package (WP) is a sub-part of the main project. Each WP has resources, tasks, milestones and deliverables.
- A deliverable is a concrete output of the project. (e.g., document, software, prototype)
- A milestone is a control point in the project. (e.g., completion of key deliverable, analysis or experiment)

- Timing of the different work packages and their components;
- Mechanisms in place to assess and mitigate risks (of research and/or administrative nature).

Outline a risk management plan to assess and manage potential risks. Explain your contingency plan, describing how you will change the project if something doesn’t work the way you expect it to. A well-thought out risk management strategy indicates a well-planned project.

A **Gantt chart** must be included and should indicate the proposed Work Packages (WP), major deliverables, milestones, secondments, placements. This Gantt chart counts towards the 10-page limit.

The schedule in the Gantt chart should indicate the number of months elapsed from the start of the action (Month 1).

In this part, you outline the plan for how you will carry out the project you described in the Excellence section as well as the dissemination, exploitation and communication of 2.2. For each work package, you will have resources and tasks, and usually milestones and deliverables. The main work packages will cover the research work itself. Communication and dissemination of results is also usually a work package.

Deliverables represent output produced during the project. This is often a document such as a report or an article but can also be software or a prototype.

Milestones are control points during the project that help to assess progress. They can correspond to the completion of a key deliverable, for example software or a prototype, which then allows the next phase of work to start. They can also be at intermediary points, for example after analysis of preliminary experiments in order to assess if corrective measures need to be taken, or at a critical decision point, for example where it is necessary to decide which of several technologies to adopt for further development.

To provide a clear overview of the project, the work packages, deliverables, and milestones should be listed in a table or tables. They should also be included in the Gantt chart. Describe how the work plan and the allocated resources will ensure that the research and training objectives are reached. Here, the evaluators want to see if your project is realistic and feasible.

3.2 Quality and capacity of the host institutions and participating organisations, including hosting arrangements

At a minimum, address the following aspects:

- Hosting arrangements, including integration in the team/institution and support services available to the researcher.

Outline the quality of the hosting environment as a research group and how you will be integrated. Mention the practical arrangements that the host institute will make (for example: helping with visas, finding accommodation etc). You can also mention the number of Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellows the host institution has previously hosted.

You need to explain why the project has a maximum chance of success if carried out there. Focus on the competence in relation to implementation, that is, to providing the necessary basis for a successful project.

Describe the infrastructure available at the host institution that is necessary for your project. Explain under what terms you will be allowed to use this infrastructure and how this is regulated. It's important to mention that you will be provided with the necessary laboratory and office space and have access to all the equipment you need.

Also mention any administrative or practical arrangements, for example, if your project will be allocated specific technician support time.

If you plan any secondment describe also the hosting environment of the secondment and how you will be integrated in this team.

If fieldwork or external measurements are necessary, describe the arrangements that have been made for this.

- Quality and capacity of the participating organisations, including infrastructure, logistics and facilities **should be outlined in Part B-2 Section 5** (“*Capacity of the Participating Organisations*”).

While it is important in 3.2 to describe the hosting arrangement and how the hosting environment has the quality and capacity for the fellowship, general descriptions of the beneficiary should be given in B2, Section 5.

Note that for GF, both the quality and capacity of the outgoing Third Country host and the return host should be outlined.

Associated partners linked to a beneficiary

If applicable, outline here the involvement of any 'associated partners linked to a beneficiary' (in particular, the name of the entity, the type of link with the beneficiary and the tasks to be carried out).----- End of page count (max 10 pages) -----

4. Overview of Documents & Links

[MSCA Work Programme](#)

[Guide for Applicants](#)

[PF Call webpage](#)

[Templates for Proposal](#)

[MSCA Guide for Supervision](#)

[European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#)

[MSCA PF website](#)

[Euresearch MSCA website](#)