



Information note for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellows in a Co-funding of regional, national and international programme (COFUND)

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Information note for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellows in a Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes (COFUND)

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 Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes (COFUND). Quotations in italics are from the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement (HE MGA) for COFUND.

1. What is COFUND?

COFUND stands for "Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes". The scheme aims to stimulate regional, national or international programmes to foster excellence in researchers' training, mobility and career development, spreading the best practices of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

This is achieved by co-funding new or existing regional, national, and international programmes to open up to, and provide for, international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary research training, as well as transnational and cross-sectoral mobility of researchers at all stages of their career.

COFUND supports Doctoral Programmes (D) and Postdoctoral Programmes (P) for the most promising researchers at different stages of their careers. The programmes must run a selection process based on openness, transparency, merit, impartiality and equality for the researchers who are applying.

1.1. Doctoral programmes

Doctoral programmes offer research training activities to allow doctoral candidates to develop and broaden their skills and competencies. They lead to the award of a doctoral degree in at least one EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country.

Substantial training modules, including digital ones, addressing key transferable skills and competencies common to all fields and fostering the culture of Open Science, innovation and entrepreneurship will be supported. They will 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. The training follows the EU Principles on Innovative Doctoral Training.

Collaboration with a wider set of partners, including from the non-academic sector, which may provide hosting or secondment opportunities or training in research or transferable skills, as well as innovative elements of the proposed programme is valued.

Each researcher must be enrolled in a doctoral programme. Attention is paid to the quality of supervision and mentoring arrangements as well as career guidance.

1.2. Postdoctoral programmes

Postdoctoral Programmes fund individual advanced research training and career development fellowships for postdoctoral researchers. The programmes should offer training to develop key transferable skills and competencies common to all fields, foster innovation and entrepreneurship and promote and (where appropriate) reward Open Science practices (open access to publications and to research data, FAIR data management, public engagement and citizen science, etc.).

On top of compulsory international mobility, applicants are encouraged to include elements of cross-sectoral mobility and interdisciplinarity into their programmes. Researchers must be able to freely choose a research topic and the appropriate organisation to host them, fitting their individual needs.

2. COFUND researchers

2.1. Eligibility

COFUND offers funding for researchers at different stages of their career. To be eligible for recruitment within a COFUND project, you therefore must be at the deadline of the co-funded programme:

- For COFUND Doctoral Programmes, researchers must be doctoral candidates, i.e., not already in possession of a doctoral degree at the deadline of the co-funded programme's call;
- For COFUND Postdoctoral Programmes, researchers must be in possession of a doctoral degree at the deadline of the co-funded programme's call. Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will also be considered as postdoctoral researchers and will be considered eligible to apply.

2.2. Mobility Rule

The MSCA are based on the principle of physical mobility. Researchers may not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the recruiting beneficiary or implementing partner (or — in case of international European interest organisations— with this organisation) for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the co-funded programme's call deadline, unless otherwise specified in Annex I for existing programmes.

Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention are not taken into account.

Recruited researchers can be of any nationality. For COFUND Postdoctoral Programmes: researchers must be nationals or long-term residents of an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country, in case the main part of the research training activities is carried out in a country other than an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country.

3. What are my rights and obligations as a COFUND research fellow?

Beneficiaries in COFUND projects sign a contract (or "grant agreement") with the REA and therefore legally commit to implement the proposed project in conformity with the provisions of that contract. These rules seek to guarantee a number of rights for researchers recruited in a COFUND. They also impose some obligations, both on the beneficiaries and on the recruited researchers. Each grant agreement consists of a "core grant agreement" that is essentially the same for all projects, and Annexes – Part A and Part B – which are specific to the project in question. Part A contains the administrative details and information that will be used in the evaluation of the COFUND proposal, while part B describes all the specificities of the COFUND project, including the salary amount and any other allowances that you shall receive.

3.1. Employment

You should normally be recruited with an employment contract (including sickness, parental, unemployment and invalidity benefits, pension rights, benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases). An exemption from this rule can be accepted only in cases where national legislation or the equivalent internal regulations of International European Research Organisations (IERO), entities created under Union law, or an international organisation, prohibit this possibility and subject to the prior agreement of the granting authority. The contract should also specify your gross and net salary. A clear explanation of how your net salary is calculated should also be provided by your employer.

Note that recruitments in COFUND can be for a minimum duration of 3 months. However, the specific length of your recruitment will have been agreed beforehand with the REA and must be specified in your employment contract. 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 Researcher Declaration within 20 days of your recruitment¹. The content of this document should correctly reflect the provisions of your employment contract, including duration, contract type, etc.

3.2. Career Development Plan

A Career Development Plan must be jointly established by the supervisor and each recruited researcher upon recruitment. In addition to research objectives, this Plan comprises the researcher's training and career needs, including training on transferable skills, teaching, planning for publications and participation in conferences and events aimed at opening science and research to citizens. The Plan must be established at the beginning of the recruitment and should be revised (and updated where needed) within 18 months.

¹ Article 19.1 of the model grant agreement for COFUND.

3.3. Assistance

Your host beneficiary is required to assist you in all administrative procedures related to your recruitment within the project², 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.

In case you need any further clarification with regard to any of the aspects of your fellowship, you can also contact any of the [MSCA National Contact Points \(NCP\)](#). Please refer to the general information package for additional resources available depending on your need.

3.4. Hosting

Each beneficiary must host the recruited researchers at their premises or at implementing partners and provide training as well as the necessary means for implementing the action. Your normal place of employment and where you turn up for work each day should therefore be the premises of the institution that has recruited you and which is paying your COFUND allowance (see below). 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 partners in order to conduct your research, this should be outlined in your contract of employment.

3.5. Supervision

In the doctoral programme your host institution shall appoint a supervisor with adequate experience to provide you with academic support and a career plan. Your host institution should also be able to ensure adequate supervision of your research. The [MSCA Guidelines on Supervision](#) serve as a reference for host institutions and supervisors to ensure that researchers are adequately supervised from the outset and throughout the duration of their research project. 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 grant agreement.

4. Allowances

The funds provided to your host beneficiary for the purposes of implementing the project contribute to costs of researchers including remuneration payable to the individual doctoral or postdoctoral researcher recruited under an employment contract/equivalent direct contract with full social security coverage and complying with the applicable social security legislation, as well as the mobility costs and, if

² See Article 15.1.2 of the model grant agreement for COFUND.

applicable, the family costs. The funds can also contribute to costs related to training, research expenses, transfer of knowledge and networking activities of researchers, costs of managing the actions and indirect costs.

4.1. Researcher Remuneration (COFUND allowance)

You should request from your employer a clear overview of how your monthly remuneration is calculated (both the gross amount and the amount net of all taxes and deductions). Note that the total amount received may vary from beneficiary to beneficiary, even within the same country. This is because beneficiaries can deduct employer as well as employee payroll taxes and social security costs from the gross salary.

Your employer should explain to you your salary and conditions, the allowances you are entitled to receive in accordance with the Annex I of the grant agreement (signed between REA and the beneficiary). Besides, this information should also be provided in the publication of the call. The monthly COFUND allowance including gross remuneration, i.e., salaries, social security contributions, taxes and other costs or compulsory deductions under national legislation linked to in the remuneration, and the mobility costs for the benefit of the researchers must be:

- For researchers recruited under an employment contract: not lower than EUR 2800 (for doctoral candidates) and EUR 3980 (for postdoctoral researchers);
- For researchers recruited under a fixed-amount fellowship: not lower than EUR 1400 (for doctoral candidates) and EUR 1990 (for postdoctoral researchers).

4.2. Long-Term living allowance

The long-term leave allowance can be requested by the beneficiary at any time during the project implementation in the case of leave of a researcher, including maternity, paternity, parental, sick or special leave, longer than 30 consecutive days. The long-term allowance can be requested when the need arises.

4.3. Special Needs allowance

Beneficiaries of COFUND grants can apply for a dedicated special needs allowance. This allowance will cover the additional costs that researchers/staff members with disabilities face due to the increased costs of their mobility. It can also be used to ensure necessary assistance by third persons or for adapting their work environment. It cannot cover costs which are already covered by another source, such as social security or health insurance. The special needs allowance can be requested at any time during the implementation of the project.

5. Secondments

Spending periods of secondment at other beneficiaries and/or partners within the project is actively encouraged insofar as this is useful for your research and/or

training. Inter-sectoral secondments (i.e., between the academic and non-academic sectors, or vice-versa) are particularly encouraged.

However, if a secondment to an organisation in any TC constitutes the main part of the research training activities, researchers must be nationals or long-term residents of a EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. Long-term residence means a period of legal and continuous residence within an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country of at least 5 consecutive years.

The duration of the secondments should be limited to a maximum of one third of the actual months spent implementing the research training activities under the action or, if applicable, of the duration of the outgoing phase for Postdoctoral Programmes.

Secondments cannot take place during the mandatory twelve-month return period to the host organisation in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country.

6. Specific Issues

6.1. For the Doctoral Programme

Researchers must be enrolled in a doctoral programme leading to the award of a doctoral degree in at least one EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country.

6.2. For the Postdoctoral Programme

For Postdoctoral Programmes where the main part of the research training activity does not take place in an EU Member State or a Horizon Europe Associated Country (i.e., outgoing phase), the researcher should carry out a mandatory return period of 12 months at the premises of the beneficiary or the recruiting implementing partner. A maximum of three months can be spent at the start of the action at the beneficiary (or any other organisation mentioned in the description of the action), allowing the researcher to spend time there before the outgoing phase.

6.3. Ethics and Research Integrity

Beneficiaries must ensure that the project complies with ethical principles, including the highest standards of research integrity³, and all applicable international, EU and national law. Any specific ethics requirements will be outlined in the Description of the action (Annex 1 to the grant agreement), including any documentation or certificates to be provided to the REA before the research work in question begins.

In the case of any research that involves the use of human embryonic stem cells (hESC) or human embryos (hE), the researcher must contact his/her supervisor as the beneficiary shall inform the Research Executive Agency (REA) in writing. Such research may not start without the explicit approval in writing from the REA to the

³ Article 14 of the COFUND Grant Agreement

beneficiary, following approvals within the ethics review procedure and the approval of the relevant Programme Committee.

Should any ethics concerns arise during project implementation that you are not able to satisfactorily address with your supervisor and/or project coordinator, please refer to the complaint's procedure below.

6.4. Teaching

Complementary skills training (e.g., a teaching activity as part of the research training) are not incompatible but must not jeopardise the implementation of the research training activities. Teaching is permitted, insofar as it does not jeopardise the fulfilment of your research activities within the project.

6.5. Complaints

Your project should have a 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 section 4 'supervision and career guidance' of the general *Information package for Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellows*. The REA Project Officer responsible for the COFUND programme will also attend the mid-term review meeting and will offer the recruited fellows the opportunity to discuss any concerns that may arise.

6.6. Part-time work

In principle, researchers should be employed full-time and devote themselves to their project on a full-time basis; however, researchers may exceptionally for personal or family reasons, in agreement with the supervisor and beneficiary, and with prior approval by the granting authority, implement their project on a part-time basis. Part-time work due to professional reasons can be requested by COFUND postdoctoral researchers only.

6.7. Intellectual Property Rights

The participating organisations must give you – and where appropriate their partners in the project – royalty-free access to the background and results necessary for your research work. "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. For additional information please refer to [The European Intellectual Property Rights Helpdesk](#).

6.8. Acknowledgement of EU funding

Beneficiaries of the EU's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme have the obligation to explicitly acknowledge that their action has received EU funding.

This must be done, if possible and unless the Commission/Agency requests otherwise, in all communication, dissemination and IPR activities as well as on all equipment, infrastructure and major results funded by the grant including per reviewed publications.

6.9. 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 the doctoral or postdoctoral fellowship⁴ ("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 the project related information, including your project number and acronym.

7. After your fellowship

We very much hope you enjoy your experience within a COFUND project and that you are fully able to benefit from the research, training and networking opportunities that it offers. The lengths of the individual researchers' appointments must be at least 3 months. However, recruitment should take into account the specificities of the programmes. Doctoral programmes may take into account the national context in which the doctoral training is provided. For instance, it is expected that Doctoral programmes would offer recruitment of researchers corresponding to the typical time needed to complete a PhD in the corresponding country. For Postdoctoral programmes, the typical duration of the individual researchers' appointments varies from 12 to 36 months.

7.1. The Marie Curie Alumni Association

As an MSCA researcher, you are also eligible to join the MCA 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.

⁴ Completion of doctoral or postdoctoral fellowship means the end of the employment contract and not necessarily the completion of the thesis.

7.2. 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 information package for MSCA fellows under section 11: “Looking ahead: Opportunities after your fellowship.”

8. Key terms

- **Beneficiary/Employer:** every participating organisation that signs the grant agreement with the REA is considered to be a "beneficiary". Each beneficiary receives funding directly from the project budget and will recruit and host researchers in the context of the project.
- **Implementing partners:** are third parties implementing the MSCA COFUND Doctoral or Postdoctoral programmes by recruiting researchers. Implementing partners can receive financial support from the beneficiary.
- **Associated partners:** are entities which participate in the action, but without the right to charge costs or claim contributions (e.g., they may provide training or secondments opportunities, etc.). Associated partners may not employ the researchers under the action⁵.
- **Unit Contributions** this refers to the fixed amounts that are paid for the implementation of the project. Those fixed amounts must be multiplied by the number of months the recruited researchers spent on research training activities ('person months'- one unit being one implemented person month).

⁵ For COFUND Postdoctoral Programmes outgoing phase, this restriction does not apply. The associated partner hosting the outgoing phase can conclude an additional employment contract with the researcher to ensure adequate medical/social insurance in the outgoing country.

