



MSCA FEEDBACK TO POLICY BRIEF

April 2023

INTRODUCTION

The present information brief aims to provide a snapshot of the policy feedback activities implemented and planned in the MSCA. It targets past, current and potential MSCA beneficiaries as well as the wider research and higher education community. Its main aim is to serve as a reference document to potential applicants for the [Feedback for Policy call for proposals](#), which will close on 6 June 2023.

The brief will provide background information on the Feedback to Policy (F2P) Framework in the MSCA under Horizon Europe, and give examples of the implemented policy feedback activities, under and prior to Horizon Europe. It will also provide references to useful resources and tools for project communication and dissemination activities, training, research in and beyond the MSCA alone.

MSCA FEEDBACK TO POLICY COORDINATION AND SUPPORT ACTION 2023

The ongoing ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 clearly points that the MSCA are highly valued for their bottom-up approaches and the openness to any scientific area. The complete flexibility over research topics that researchers have is often associated with increased potential to lead to innovative and frontier research results. Moreover, this freedom and flexibility to pursue one's research agenda comes as the most important motivating factor to apply for MSCA, followed by the opportunity to improve one's skills and competences.

While the bottom-up nature of the MSCA remains its core principle, there is a need to have an overview of the funded research portfolio and make stronger thematic links between MSCA projects, raise visibility of their impact on ERA priority areas and gather stakeholder feedback on ways to maximise the MSCA impact. The enormous thematic diversity of MSCA-funded projects can be a challenging task and although the Commission has already done extensive work in mapping some thematic clusters in MSCA, there is a need for further external support of experts in the R&I community.

In this light, the Commission has launched a Feedback to Policy call for proposals in the MSCA Work Programme 2023/24 as a Coordination and Support Action (CSA).

One of the objectives of this CSA is to support ongoing and planned Commission initiatives which focus on exploiting and assessing the impact of Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects results in relation to thematic and cross-cutting priorities, including the EU Missions. It also aims to assess the extent to which MSCA projects achieve two of the core horizontal policy objectives of the programme: the development of researchers' training, skills and career and the strengthening of intersectoral collaboration.

FEEDBACK TO POLICY IN HORIZON EUROPE

For EU policymaking, an important evidence base represent the results and evidence gathered through EU-funded projects. Informing policy by evidence is not new in the Research and Innovation community, but particular importance is given to a more systematic approach under Horizon Europe. By designing and implementing a strong and effective Feedback to Policy Framework, the aim is to avoid overlooking meaningful policy-relevant information across the policy and programming cycles.



FEEDBACK TO POLICY IN MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS (MSCA)

Background

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) are the European Union's flagship instrument to support the mobility, training and career development of researchers, as well as the establishment of excellent doctoral and post-doctoral programmes. The MSCA are open to researchers of any nationality and at any stage of their careers, from doctoral candidates to postdoctoral researchers. The MSCA encourage international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation, and strive towards creating attractive working and employment conditions for researchers. The MSCA also support citizen science and engagement through several communication and outreach activities such as the European Researchers' Night, Researchers at Schools or Science is Wonderful.

The MSCA are part of Horizon Europe under Pillar 1 (Excellent Science) as a bottom-up excellence programme, allowing applicants to propose any research topic with the main drivers being excellence and innovation, while paying attention to inclusion and non-discrimination. As such, the MSCA pay particular attention to the feedback coming from individual researchers (current fellows and alumni) and participating organisations (any academic and non-academic organisation is eligible) on the impacts of the programme.

As a bottom-up programme, the MSCA support research in any scientific area, without thematic restrictions, which has been a highly appreciated and safeguarded feature of the programme, both by beneficiaries and national policymakers in the EU member states and beyond. With a broad scope of topics and activities, and at the crossroads of research and education, the MSCA have built a comprehensive body of knowledge and represent an invaluable resource for the benefit of individuals, communities and societies. At the same time, mapping and systematically reviewing all the diversity of MSCA projects can be a daunting task.

Against this background, the Feedback to Policy (F2P) framework under Horizon Europe is a unique instrument for the MSCA to tap into the wealth of knowledge created in the programme and maintain a more coordinated approach to informing both the programme design and raising visibility of the MSCA projects' achievements and impact.

The objective(s) of the feedback to policy activities in the MSCA are to gather feedback from beneficiaries on the implementation of the programme in specific areas or MSCA actions, to identify good practices, areas of improvement and bring project leaders together for exchange and future collaboration.

The main F2P activities so far have comprised meetings with MSCA projects and stakeholders (so-called **cluster meetings**) and two studies, all with an aim to understand how the MSCA contribute to specific policy priority areas, to what extent the objectives of the MSC Actions have been achieved and what needs to be done further towards achieving them. The overview of these activities is below.

Cluster meetings

Cluster meetings are organised with the aim to showcase how MSCA projects contribute to specific priority research areas, what kind of needs and priorities MSCA-funded research addresses under a specific thematic area, and what needs remain according to the MSCA project community-project coordinators, partners and individual researchers. While some



cluster meetings focus on specific thematic priorities, others focus on specific parts/actions of the MSCA programme.

Cluster meetings gather MSCA stakeholders from project coordinators, national policymakers, support networks, individual researchers and EU representatives. Cluster meetings are coordinated by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).

Between 2019 and 2022, four thematic MSCA cluster meetings took place:

- the first pilot on Artificial Intelligence in December 2019 ([info](#))
- a cluster meeting on Cancer in March 2021 ([info](#))
- a cluster meeting on the Green Deal in July 2021 ([info](#))
- a cluster meeting on the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters in June 2022 ([info](#))

As an example, the 2022 cluster meeting gathered researchers, experts and representatives of excellent projects funded by the MSCA and other EU programmes that propose solutions and ideas to address some of the challenges increasingly affecting European rivers, coasts and seas. It was followed by a citizens' engagement activity [Plastic Pirates – Go Europe!](#), which engages young people across Europe to monitor and tackle plastic pollution in rivers, coasts and sea.

The two action-focused cluster meetings took place in 2021 and 2022, as follows:

- 2021 cluster meeting on MSCA European Joint Doctorates (EJDs), looking into experiences in the implementation of EJDs, lessons learnt and recommendations to address remaining challenges and discrepancies ([info](#))
- 2022 cluster meeting on MSCA European Industrial Doctorates (EIDs), gathering feedback from the interdisciplinary community engaging in EID intersectoral partnerships (*info available soon*)

Studies and analyses

Two studies have been conducted under the F2P framework so far, both reports expected in the second quarter of 2023.

- Study on the innovative dimension of ITN projects

The purpose of the study was to identify best practices and examples within Horizon 2020 ITN projects, in terms of innovation, transferable skills, training, supervision, networking, synergies and outreach.

As an MSC Action aiming to train a new generation of creative, entrepreneurial and innovative early-stage researchers, the objectives of ITN are wide-spanning: to raise excellence and structure research and doctoral training in Europe, extending the traditional academic research training setting, incorporating elements of Open Science and equipping researchers with the right combination of research-related and transferable competences. It aims to provide enhanced career prospects in both the academic and non-academic sectors through international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility combined with an innovation-oriented mind-set.

- RISE Impact Study



The purpose of this study was to analyse and showcase the added value of RISE projects on science and careers, in the context of both the H2020 MSCA and the EU policy goals on research, innovation and education.

Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) funds short-term exchanges of personnel between academic, industrial and commercial organisations throughout the world. It promotes international and cross-sectoral collaboration through exchanges of staff working on a joint research and innovation project, and sharing knowledge and ideas from research to market (and vice-versa).

Upcoming activities

- Mapping green practices in MSCA projects

Under Horizon Europe, the MSCA have introduced an MSCA Green Charter with a set of guiding principles encouraging project beneficiaries and participants to reduce the environmental impact of their research activities. All MSCA projects will have to report on what they have (or have not done) to implement the Green Charter at the final report stage.

In order to better understand the state of play and what kind of guidance MSCA beneficiaries need, in the period March-May 2023 DG EAC and REA will run a survey for MSCA beneficiaries to map the take up of **green practices in MSCA projects**. The survey is part of a broader F2P activity which aims to identify good practices among MSCA projects and what kind of support is needed to ensure the Green Charter's effectiveness.

- Science-Policy matchmaking event

Following a successful [pilot Science-Policy matchmaking event](#) in May 2022, DG EAC and JRC will continue their cooperation on bringing researchers and policymakers closer.

The fact that the Member States and the Commission services increasingly call for scientific advice as part of their policymaking presents an opportunity to promote MSCA researchers as a knowledge group that can provide the necessary scientific expertise and to showcase the opportunities that the programme offers, especially through secondments as well as the non-academic placements in Postdoctoral Fellowships, introduced in Horizon Europe.

The objective of the 2023 event continues to be providing dedicated space for researchers and policymakers to discuss and establish links for future cooperation based on mutual interest and needs. The event will also feature some examples of good MSCA practice of researchers being hosted by policy bodies in the Member States and national schemes that support this kind of collaboration.



USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Website**
https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/node_en
- **Factsheet, Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, 2021-2027**
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/128028>
- **Funding and Tenders Portal (applications, documents, partner search)**
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/horizon>
- **Horizon Europe MSCA Work Programme 2023-2024**
https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2023-2024/wp-2-msca-actions_horizon-2023-2024_en.pdf
- **Horizon Europe Programme Guide**
https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide_horizon_en.pdf
- **Euraxess (PhD and postdoctoral vacancies, more information)**
<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>
- **European Charter and Code for Researchers**
<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter-code-researchers>
- **EU Principles on Innovative Doctoral Training**
https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/policy_library/principles_for_innovative_doctoral_training.pdf
- **MSCA Guidelines on Supervision**
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/508311>
- **MSCA Green Charter**
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/720690>
- **MCAA (Marie Curie Alumni association)**
<https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/>
- **National Contact Points**
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/ncp>
- **MSCA-NET, NCP Project**
<https://msca-net.eu/>
- **Horizon Dashboard**
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/horizon-dashboard>
- **Horizon Results Platform**
[Horizon Results Platform \(europa.eu\)](https://horizon-results.europa.eu/)
- **Horizon Results Booster**
[Horizon Results Booster](https://horizon-results-booster.europa.eu/)