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The annual magazine of the MCAA

IRRADIUM
MAGAZINE

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Publisher

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Letter from the Chair

If you are reading this magazine, there are high chances that you are a present or past MSCA beneficiary, and one of the twenty thousand seven hundred and six that are registered as MCAA members at the time I am writing these words. An impressive number of people belonging to an engaged community of highly educated citizens that, together, have an immense potential power to benefit society. That is one of the MCAA goals, and one small step after another, we are effectively leaving a positive mark at many levels. This letter celebrates some of the major accomplishments we have achieved together over 2022.

Every week, hundreds of MCAA volunteers organise dozens of meetings around the world, to debate, exchange experiences, learn from each other, or simply socialise and network. The [MCAA Chapters](#), national or regional groups set up in nearly all continents, are true ambassadors of what the community can do best together. During 2022 the number of Chapters increased to thirty-five. They are behind most of our exceptional workshops, courses, and training offered not only to MCAA members but very often open to the local research community. One of the 2022 MCAA initiatives that I am most proud of is the “[MCAA Around the World Webinar Series](#)”, launched by the Communications Working Group. Once a month, an MCAA Chapter or Working Group invites a speaker to discuss a specific topic of interest for their members. This collaborative activity

not only highlights the issues that the community around the world finds outstanding, but also allows sharing the knowledge with a larger audience. I was never deceived by the insights these webinars bring and invite all to follow them on the MCAA YouTube channel and social media, or [register to receive updates](#) on MCAA activities disseminated by the Communications working group.

The MCAA has also been increasingly active in advocating for researchers on the science Policy scene. The force of over 20K members is not negligible, the reasoning behind the strength in numbers applies when lobbying for researchers, and research, in the international arena. We have been further boosting our strength through numerous partnerships with other stakeholders to bring the voice of MCAA members to high-level audiences. One of the achievements of last year was the nomination of an MCAA member, Renaud Jolivet, as one of the two representatives of researchers at the [ERA Forum](#). The ERA Forum is where the Commission, together with EU countries, co-design and coordinate the implementation of ERA actions and define the policy agenda. Another moment of pride was the election of the MCAA-backed candidate and MCAA member Karen Stroobants as vice-chair of the board of [CoARA](#). The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment, which is promoted by the European Commission, aims at directing much-needed changes in assessment practices for research,



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A revolution was needed and is ongoing

researchers and research-performing organisations. Having MCAA members present at this level is, first, a victory of the efforts done over the years in the Policy field by MCAA volunteering members, and second, opens opportunities to further raise the voice of the MCAA membership. And if you want to be heard, the easiest way is simply to reply to MCAA Surveys, for example [the one that is currently running](#). By combining our voices, we have stronger arguments to influence policies that affect our lives and our careers. Over the past year, we have brought the members' voices to local, national, European and international stages, from MSCA meetings to the World Science Forum, among many other initiatives.

The MCAA has undoubtedly grown to a level, both in the number of members (by tenfold in 10 years!) and activities, where it is very difficult to maintain sustainable governance. The support from EC-paid contractors is clearly not enough anymore and the MCAA can easily become a second full-time job for the active members that have been engaged over the years, working very professionally while on a volunteering basis. That's why a revolution was needed and is ongoing. The funding sources have diversified, and in this issue, you find articles about several funded projects on areas of interest for the MCAA. Being a partner on those projects allows the MCAA to contribute to issues that we care about, like Sustainable Researcher Careers, Open Science, or Citizen Science by recruiting members to work professionally on the projects' goals. But the most important achievement regarding funding is the new grant from the

European Commission, in the form of Coordinating and Support Actions (CSA), that the MCAA successfully obtained to fund its core activities. This funding scheme will allow the MCAA to choose and pay for the services it needs, instead of taking the services provided by the EC contractors. Over the next two years, the MCAA will experience a transition phase, until it finds an equilibrium between eventually paid staff and services. Does this mean that volunteering has its days counted? Not at all! The MCAA has always been run by volunteers and will always be! The board will always be voluntary, and the bottom-up approach by the hundreds of MCAA volunteering members that made the MCAA a success story can never be replaced. Hopefully, the workload of volunteers that organise activities and contribute to the life of the association will decrease over time as there will be administrative paid staff to provide more support. The challenge will be to find the right balance between the valuable contribution of volunteers to the community and the professional work of staff that should make the association's life easier. If the transition is successful, the board will have fewer operational and time-consuming tasks to focus on establishing the association's strategy for pursuing the successful route that has brought us where we are today.

Wish you a pleasant reading of the pages ahead, brought to you by a fully volunteering team of passionate MCAA members, that like everything developed by the MCAA make us proud of belonging!

How our communication changed



The MCAA is a very fast-growing and dynamic organisation that actively promotes the professional rights and needs of its members (more than 20,000), each representing a current or former beneficiary of funding under the MSCA programs. Like any other organization of its kind, it needs a communication channel to spread the news and important updates to its members, to share the main achievements and the setbacks. The Communication Working Group (WG) and the [MCAA Newsletter](#), which is operated by a subgroup of active Communication WG volunteers, are the main channels that serve this purpose.

what might have changed compared to the work-as-usual, but 2022 has proven to be a very transformative year for everyone.

In the past, the MCAA Newsletter mainly represented a consolidation of important updates, invited interviews and a few unsolicited contributions from various MSCA projects. At the end of 2020, the editors started experimenting with the format of the Newsletter, trying to transform it so that more and more members can get a voice to address the whole community on topics of great importance. This is how the idea of a special themed issue was born, including open calls for articles from MCAA members. After a great success of two special focus issues released in [December 2020](#) and [December 2021](#), and with the approval of the MCAA Board, we have decided that each June



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For several years now, our editors have supported the publication of MCAA's flagship publications: the quarterly MCAA Newsletter and the annual IRRADIUM magazine. Therefore, one could only wonder



and December issue of the MCAA Newsletter will focus on a special topic that the community will select as the one that most reflects its needs at the time.

The first special issue of 2022 was focused on [science diplomacy](#) and was guest edited by Radenka Krsmanović Whiffen and Mostafa Moonir Shawrav. The subject matter and timing of this issue were strikingly relevant, given the time when the world was freshly shaken by Russia's brutal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine. It once again highlighted the importance and the vitality of academic freedom and science diplomacy to the wider society, values that the MCAA stands for. Just before Christmas, we released a highly anticipated special issue on [mental health in academia](#), with outstanding guest editing by Ana Paula Mendonça, Andrey Zhylka and Pooja Khurana. This topic received an overwhelming number of contributions and will certainly have to be repeated in the future.

How do we select the subjects of two annual theme issues? Well, anyone can suggest a topic and we will hold open calls on our social media channels. If you have an idea, stay tuned in February and June. Once the topic has been identified, an open call for contributions will be launched, which will be widely publicized and remain open during March-April and September-October each year. We'd love to hear from you all!

As you can imagine, it takes a village to run a newsletter or a magazine, but we are very lucky to have a great team of editor-volunteers. In 2022, the editorial team has transformed more than ever before. First, Gian

Maria Greco, the "creator" of the MCAA Newsletter and IRRADIUM, the way we know them, and their long-running editor-in-chief, stepped down after being elected as one of the MCAA Board members. The whole community is very grateful to him for his continued contribution to these communication channels. We then held the first annual open call for new editors, which resulted in a boost of seven new members, each with fresh ideas, growing our team to a whopping 14 members. It is largely thanks to these editors that you can read the IRRADIUM and a nice consolidation of activities and highlights from the very full and turbulent 2022 that we have just left behind.

It's impossible to capture everything the MCAA has accomplished in a year, but we have tried to grasp some of the highlights. In Section 2, you can draw inspiration from key activities carried out in 2022 by MCAA Chapters and that cover a vast range of topics, from sustainability to science communication. In Section 3, you can read about exciting transformations involving two major funding programs, namely the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Erasmus+. Last but not least, Section 4 highlights five major EU-funded projects in which the MCAA plays a prominent role, each intrinsically linked to the organization's mission and goals.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of IRRADIUM and wish the MCAA community and all its members another fruitful year!

A year full of initiatives by the MCAA Chapters



Ana Paula Mendonça

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The MCAA chapters across the globe worked tirelessly to organise workshops and events that contribute to the development of their members and address important issues such as sustainability and science diplomacy. Some of the key chapter activities undertaken in 2022 are summarised below.

Introduction

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) consists of 35 different Chapters all over the world, involving thousands of people from various research fields and career stages, holding positions in academia and industry. The MCAA members are involved in several science diplomacy and sustainable development activities to address challenges that will be discussed at the MCAA Annual Conference 2023. As highlighted by Theodota Lagouri, Chair of the MCAA Switzerland Chapter: “Science diplomacy can facilitate the dialogue with the emerging global challenges since scientific evidence is a key to ensure the best policy decisions making and solutions.”

Especially in the currently changing world, where the sustainability question is heavily discussed, researchers attempt to assess options in their respective fields to further push society. A global organisation like the MCAA, with members from diverse fields of expertise, is perfectly placed to address sustainability via an

interdisciplinary approach. These are the critical conversations that MCAA Chapters foster via their activities throughout the year. Clearly, from all the activities mentioned below, MCAA members are highly motivated to improve themselves as well as the surrounding environment.

Not only do the Chapters organise their own meetings and events, but they also increasingly harness online platforms to collaborate on common topics. One example is the [MCAA Around the World Webinar Series](#), promoted by the MCAA Communication Working Group (WG), where MCAA Chapters are given a space to discuss a topic of their own interest. Next to this growing interconnectivity, new Chapters are continuously emerging to expand the global reach of the MCAA to include diverse voices and perspectives and facilitate conversations about global issues.

The MCAA Mexico Chapter, established in June 2022, launched their effort by organising a public forum on intersectoral alliances to



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reach the Sustainable Development Goals together with EURAXESS Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and from the North America Chapters. They plan to repeat this forum yearly and to reach out to other Chapters as well. “The more interdisciplinary a project is, the wider its reach and impact,” says Daniel Rios Barrera,

geographic locations will contribute to find optimal solutions for the society. “We need more events where researchers, industry, and policymakers are all under the same roof,” summarizes Ornella Bardhi, Chair of the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter.



Mexico Chapter Chair. Next, the MCAA China Chapter was officially established in September 2022, and the very first activity was a series of regular discussions on the implications of carbon neutral climate strategy goals within Chapter members' respective fields and how to achieve sustainable development pathways in all disciplines.

Sustainable development will be an important topic in many future academic and non-academic discussions. Therefore, a common effort of MCAA members from various fields, career stages and

Researcher Career Development

To facilitate the career development and growth of MCAA members, Chapters conducted events to foster key skills in their members. These include workshops on “Entrepreneurial skills for researchers” and the “[Researchers Meet Innovators 2022](#)” promoted by the Spain-Portugal Chapter in collaboration with the Turkey Chapter. Attendees discussed how to contribute to innovation, covering a large variety of roles in the value chain. The event aimed to educate people



from research, start-ups, non-profits, and corporate environments about innovation and how researchers and innovators can collaborate synergistically. The Spain-Portugal Chapter, together with the MCAA UK Chapter, offered their members reflection on future career options within panel discussions during “[Careers in higher education after MSCA fellowship](#)” and “[Career pathways: exploring options in the industry sector](#).” Staying within the topic, for those who consider leaving academia, the Spain-Portugal Chapter and the Italy Chapter co-organized an event with the title “[Expanding researchers opportunities: life beyond academia](#).” As the main organiser from the MCAA Italy Chapter team, Giulia Bruno, highlights: “researchers with academic backgrounds increasingly choose or are forced to pursue careers outside academia. But a career change is challenging to address if you don’t have experience in that specific job market. The sense of disorientation is around the corner.” This event pointed out steps needed to take for a career transition outside academia as well as how to avoid mistakes in a job market researchers don’t yet have experience.

Likewise, the Western Balkans Chapter organised a [webinar](#)

[about post-PhD careers](#). “It is not sustainable for all PhDs to follow a linear career and stay in academia, the job market is broad and we laid out in this webinar some options with concrete examples from 4 different people,” says Ornela Bardhi, chair of the Chapter. She summarised the main ideas, opportunities and usable transferable skills in her [report](#), in which she also claims that “a Ph.D. degree is a versatile enough qualification that one can often look outside their area of expertise to find a job.”

The webinar “[What is research ethics / integrity and why is it important?](#)” was yet another event organised by Spain-Portugal Chapter, this time in collaboration with the Romanian Chapter. Participants listened to experiences with research ethics and integrity in Portugal and Belgium.

To develop scientific soft skills for advancement of research careers and advocating the importance of science diplomacy, the MCAA Switzerland Chapter and the MCAA Communication WG participated in the MCAA Around the World Webinar: “[Career Development and Research Funding for MCAA Researchers & Beyond](#).” The webinar hosted illustrious speakers from the EURESEARCH office, MCAA Research funding group, and a prominent science writer.

The webinar focused on sustainable development of scientific careers and research funding. The exchange of ideas between young researchers and experts was strongly promoted during the panel discussion.

Last but not least, to mention an interdisciplinary “hard” skill knowledge expansion, the MCAA India Chapter held a two-day online

workshop on “Data Analysis and Visualization in R”. 28 participants signed up to attend the workshop including 11 MCAA-India members and 17 non-members. Most of the participants were PhD students and early-career researchers with backgrounds in a variety of fields.

Science Communication

In an age where social media is one of the major sources of news for the public, when mistrust and misinformation abound, it is more critical than ever for scientists to get their voices to the public. The days of the ivory tower are long past, and scientific communication is no longer limited to just peer-reviewed articles and book-chapters, often inaccessible both in cost and language to the layperson. Alongside these traditional remits, researchers today have the additional responsibility of engaging with a large variety of stakeholders in their science. These stakeholders range from funders, collaborators or scientists from other disciplines and industries to even policymakers and the public. This engagement is crucial for the interdisciplinary and creative solutions required to address the global challenges we face today. Learning to contextualise research in a way that makes it accessible and engaging to the target audience is a key soft skill required to maximise the impact of scientific research.

The MCAA has long recognized the importance of science communication, exemplified in the [activities](#) of the Communication Working Group and the MCAA Chapters. The year 2022 saw many events focused on science

communication being promoted by MCAA Chapters, not only as standalone organisers but also with external partners. This is an excellent demonstration of communication skills in action.

Two MCAA Chapters conducted a more in-depth exploration of science communication through the means of dedicated workshops. The Italy Chapter co-funded a [Science communication school](#) in October 2022. The workshop boasted speakers who were academics, freelance science communicators, and institutional communication leaders. Using a mixture of hands-on activities and lectures, the workshop covered traditional paper, grant and poster writing, as well as poetry and art as novel modes of communication for researchers.

“Cuando la ciencia embellece la naturaleza”
by Leyre Catalán Ros,
winner of the Photography
contest by the MCAA
Spain-Portugal Chapter.



The Swiss Chapter organised the Outreach Science & Communication Hybrid Workshop on 21 May 2022 at the University of Zurich and online. In collaboration with the Communication WG, the workshop helped participants build the skills required to get the message across to a wider and more diverse audience. This included the exploration of social media, film and hands-on experiments to engage the audience and increase the impact of the research. The exploration of social media as a tool for audience engagement and outreach was effectively shown by the Spain-Portugal Chapter as well. They conducted online contests on [photography](#), [short poetry](#), [cooking](#) and [science anecdotes](#), and winning entries were highlighted on the chapter's social media platforms. A special highlight was the [online quiz](#) on the event of International Day of Women and Girls in Science to increase awareness about the contribution of women researchers across various disciplines.

Science diplomacy and Sustainability

Solving problems and thinking about better solutions to global challenges is one mission of a scientist. When the United Nations established the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the agenda 2030 in 2015 (UN, 2015). The collaboration and dialogue between scientists and policymakers was understandable as crucial to provide evidence for long-term policies. To achieve economic, social, and environmental progress, experts must be involved in bringing new technologies, translating complex concepts, and monitoring the progress of the goals. The SDGs are an opportunity for the scientific community to collaborate across borders, influence multiple stakeholders, and strengthen partnerships to overcome global problems. However, how to bring cooperation in global science when we are in a period of multilateralism? Science diplomacy plays an essential role, in which the essence is the use





MCAA Western Balkans Chapter (on photo - Ornela Bardhi, Chair of the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter)

of scientific collaborations among nations to address common problems and to build constructive partnerships.

Opening space to discuss between early career scientists and experts in science diplomacy, the MCAA Swiss Chapter hosted a webinar in November 2021 to understand how to foster the interaction between scientists and policymakers to achieve SDGs. Speakers like Prof. Rasmus Bertelsen, Prof. Melody Burkins, Dr. Marga Gual Soler and Prof. Pascal Griset supported that science brings the dialogue on the emerging global challenges to ensure the development of better policies.

The SDGs have global and complex interests which demand global attention and the engagement of scientists worldwide. According to William Colglazier (W. Colglazier, 2015), science leads to the advisory role in establishing what to say, what to do, how to monitor and innovate the Sustainable Development. But the scientific community still faces challenges in how to translate research results into global policies. Understanding this issue, the MCAA Spain-Portugal Chapter in collaboration with the Communication WG organized in



May 2022 a webinar on Science Advice to Policy Makers and is currently available on YouTube ([MCAA Around the World Webinar Series #6 - Science Advice to Policymakers](#)). The webinar covered the crucial and yet under-explored aspect of communication of scientific knowledge for policymakers. In a post-pandemic age, we can all appreciate the impact that policy, which has a foundation in sound scientific knowledge, can have on public health and well-being. This webinar explored the journey of scientific research from the lab to policy chambers, exploring motivations for scientists to undertake this kind of communication, key strategies to contextualize their knowledge, while remaining technically sound and the overall impact of such communication when done right. This webinar, along with others from the Around the World webinar series, is available online and serves as a free resource to the MCAA and broader scientific community.

Achieving the SDGs through science involves speeding up global progress. However, introducing science diplomacy into this equation reinforces the role of

highly industrialized countries in transferring technologies to less developed countries. So, events like International Conference on Renewable Energies and Smart Technologies (REST22, <https://ic-rest.org/>) organized by the MCAA Western Balkans Chapter on July 2022 can foster several constructive international partnerships. Composed of 300 participants from 30+ countries, REST22 addressed topics such as renewable energy, electricity markets and decarbonization technologies, as well as rose discussion about the current energy crisis between representatives from academia, industry, and policymaking.

Conclusions

When putting on table science diplomacy and sustainable development to overcome global challenges, interdisciplinary worldwide collaborations are the key strengths MCAA network can leverage. Especially in the current post-pandemic years, when we are at the same time dealing with the climate crisis, researchers from all over the world are teaming up with industry to find the best solutions for all.

Researchers are not the only ones talking to each other; the general public is also getting involved. Since MCAA members represent

the next generation of scientists, they understand how crucial it is to become proficient in science communication.

Transfer of technology, monitoring the SDG progress, developing better policies are key steps for the sustainable future we foresee, and the scientific community must be involved in this process.

By investing in the development of the soft skills and technical expertise of its members through these workshops, webinars, and panel discussions, the MCAA chapters contribute to the sustainability of research careers and research as an enterprise. The working groups of MCAA, are the backbone of these activities, supporting not only the organisation of these events but also acting as a bridge across different chapters. The Annual conference 2023 is a key event where MCAA members from around the world can interact and have these conversations on sustainability as a global community.

New year brings new challenges and opportunities. We hope to share more and more events from the MCAA Chapters in the next MCAA Newsletters and Irradiums. Last but not least, we thank chapter chairs for sharing their achievements.

Investing
in the
development
of MCAA
members

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Stakeholder participation to the ERA Forum: One year in review

Earlier this year, MCAA member Renaud B. Jolivet was nominated to represent individual researchers and innovators at the ERA Forum, together with Association of ERC Grantees member Agnieszka Wykowska. The process has now been running for close to a year, a good time to reflect on the main takeaways from debates and activities of the ERA Forum.



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While the European Research Area (ERA) has existed since the early 2000s, it failed to deliver expected results. In 2021, after consulting with Member States and stakeholders, the European Commission decided to relaunch the ERA in a new format. The ERA Forum is now the high-level body where Member States discuss and implement the policy agenda for European science and innovation. As part of a commitment to make the ERA more participative, both the European Commission

and Member States have agreed to reserve seven seats within the Forum for representatives of various stakeholder groups: Universities, National Academies, Funding Agencies, Research Performing Organizations, Research Infrastructures, Research Intensive Businesses, and Individual Researchers and Innovators. Since the beginning of 2022, I have represented the latter group in the ERA Forum together with Agnieszka Wykowska, a member

of the Association of ERC Grantees (AERG). We were both nominated by organizations representing individual scientists and innovators: AERG, Eurodoc, EuroScience, the Initiative for Science in Europe, and of course, the Marie Curie Alumni Association.


On the table of the ERA Forum stands a broad policy agenda for Europe, addressing burning issues such as: gender equality and inclusiveness, the green transformation, academic freedom, the strategic autonomy of Europe, reforming research assessment, Open Science, sustainable research careers, and more.

The first half of 2022 was very intense and dedicated to streamlining the policy agenda. Starting from a list of almost 30 individually formulated policy actions, debates centered on reducing duplicates, redefining and refining actions, and securing concrete commitments from the Member States and from the Stakeholder Groups. As I write these lines in November 2022, the agenda has now been reduced to 16 concrete individual actions. Our stakeholder group, referred to as “Group 04: Individual Researchers and Innovators”, has made firm commitments to six specific actions. They aim, inter alia, at reforming research assessment, promoting attractive research careers, improving engagement with countries outside of Europe, bringing science closer to citizens, widening participation, and lastly, monitoring mechanisms within this new framework. Our commitment to those six actions does not preclude our active participation in other activities. However, together with the steering committee of our

stakeholder group, we decided that these were the main relevant actions for early stage researchers. As this process is still concluding, the ERA Forum is now moving towards its implementation and monitoring phase. Various implementations are foreseen for various actions, and some subgroups are currently being created to steer the work in various actions. Monitoring should however remain at the level of the overall high-level ERA Forum and involve a dashboard.

While the work is rather technical, I must say that I have found the process to be a lot more functional than anticipated. Additionally, I must praise our colleagues from the European Commission and from the Member States for their professionalism and their openness to take on board the input and feedback that our stakeholder group and others have provided. As this is the first time that the ERA Forum is operating in this redefined format, a lot of details remain to be sorted but the process so far truly is a co-design process. While some actions are already being implemented (for instance work on a reform of research assessment), the bulk of policy actions should start taking effect in 2023.

Agnieszka Wykowska and I will serve as representatives of Stakeholder Group 4 for at least two more years, until the first 3-year cycle is completed. Bringing the perspectives of individual researchers and innovators in order to shape a broad policy agenda requires a collective effort. Therefore, I am happy to discuss and take input from the MCAA community at large.



A broad
policy agenda
for Europe,
addressing
burning issues



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Doctoral Mobility under the MSCA programme:

An interview with Claire Morel

The European Union offers a plethora of research, training, and career development opportunities to academics, including doctoral candidates. Two such generous initiatives include the Erasmus+ programme and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). At the EuroScience Open Forum 2022, a session was devoted to doctoral mobility under the two programmes. We interviewed Claire Morel, Head of Unit in charge of the MSCA programme.



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Claire Morel is the Head of Unit in charge of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions for the mobility and training of researchers including the development of excellent doctoral programmes, at the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. Before that, she was the Head of Unit for international cooperation in the same DG, with a particular focus on the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme and international policy dialogues in higher education and youth issues with various partners of the EU in the world.

Could you briefly tell us about the importance of mobility (intersectoral, international, interdisciplinary) in the MSCA programme, and how it benefits society?

Mobility is at the heart of the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions, and as you mention, in all its forms: international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility. This has been the DNA of the programme since the launch of the first Marie Curie fellowships more than 30 years ago.

Since 1990 with the precursor Human Capital and Mobility Programme, which became the Marie

The MSCA

plays an
important
catalytic role
to introduce
new practices
in institutions

Curie Fellowships in 1996, MSCA has been the European Union's flagship programme for researchers' training and career development through mobility, in particular for doctoral and postdoctoral research training. Mobility provides researchers access to new and different expertise, working environments, culture, network data and infrastructures not available at their home institution. The experience, the new perspectives and research methods they gain increase their employability and make them sought-after candidates for careers in other institutions, within and outside academia.

Through mobility, the programme also fosters international collaboration both within and beyond Europe (40% of our researchers are from outside the EU), and the development of strong institutional partnerships, as well as partnerships between academia, industry, public bodies and other non-academic sectors that are at the heart of the research process in MSCA. Mobility allows scientists to better understand the needs of companies, to innovate and to convert knowledge and ideas into products and services for wider economic and societal benefits.

Given the current sustainability and impending economic crisis, what is MSCA's vision for research, innovation, and career development?

The Horizon 2020 mid-term evaluation highlighted the many strengths of the programme: its bottom-up structure; its achievements in terms of equality and gender balance in research and innovation; its contribution to strengthening Europe's attractiveness in the global

race for talent; its emphasis on cross-sectoral collaborations and interdisciplinarity; as well as its role in raising awareness about the importance of science and research amongst the general public.

All these strengths remain relevant in the current context. Under Horizon Europe, the European Commission has also defined new priorities to tackle emerging issues, including the safeguard of academic freedom and support to researchers at risk, as well as support to the new priorities of the European Research Area, notably balanced talent circulation, open science, and sustainability.

In addition, the bottom-up nature of the MSCA complements the top-down character of traditional collaborative research activities under Horizon Europe. The MSCA contributes to all European priorities and we have recently highlighted the contribution that the programme can bring to the five EU Missions of Horizon Europe (Climate adaptation, Oceans, Smart cities, Healthy Soil and Cancer), for example through the organisation of cluster meetings bringing together researchers and policy makers.

Of course under Horizon Europe, MSCA continues to support the career development of researchers through training and networking; both at the level of individual researchers, and more systematically at the level of institutions, and research and innovation ecosystems.

MSCA plays an important catalytic role to introduce new practices in institutions, for example through the introduction of the European Charter for Researchers

and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers as compulsory elements of MSCA. The Charter and Code recognise the value of all forms of mobility as means to enhance the professional development of researchers. They also recognise the multiple roles of researchers (supervisors, project coordinators, communicators, mentors, etc), ethical principles, research freedom, public engagement, continuing professional development, attractive working conditions, access to training and networking opportunities, transparency of the recruitment process, etc.

We have introduced incentives for organisations and researchers interested in developing cooperation with the non-academic world: through more flexible industrial doctorates, or by allowing postdoctoral researchers interested in doing part of their research in a non-academic sector to prolong their fellowship by six months. Incentivising researchers to gain experience outside academia increases their employability and boosts the permeability of talents across Europe.

Nearly half (40%) of the MSCA fellows are from non-EU countries with a limited visa, who, upon visa expiration, face forced departures and increased challenges to find positions in their home countries. Coincidentally, academia has also been hit by the 'great resignation', where researchers are leaving academia for more permanent job opportunities, currently lacking within the established academic system.

Can the MSCA programme act as an effective body to increase the retention rate of early and mid-career researchers? If so, how?

Based on the results of surveys conducted with MSCA fellows after their fellowship, we can say that the retention rate of international researchers, and the reintegration of European researchers who had left the EU is high within MSCA. Moreover, MSCA is widely seen by many European researchers working abroad as a tool for them to return to their countries of origin.

For instance, a 2020 survey conducted with the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) members, suggested that most respondents were still employed in Europe at the time of the survey. Nearly 70% of respondents were in EU-27 countries. Outside the EU-27, the main countries where respondents lived were the United Kingdom (12%), Switzerland, the USA (3%), India and Norway (1%). The latest evidence from questionnaires completed by MSCA individual postdoctoral fellows under Horizon 2020 indicate that two years after the end of their project, 89% of fellows were employed in Member States and 2% in associated countries. Of the fellows working in Member States, 11% were non-EU citizens.

When it comes to retention within academia: based on the results of the survey of MCAA members, in 2020, nearly 75% of former fellows still worked in academia. There is also evidence from [previous studies](#), including comparisons between former MSCA fellows and the career trajectories of other researchers,

that the programme improves MSCA fellows' career prospects and achievements in academia.



In particular, the programme has contributed to closing the gender gap in the sector with MSCA female researchers having higher chances than their non-MSCA peers to

attain professorships and resume academic careers after a career break.

As already mentioned, the MSCA promotes the mobility of researchers across sectors, to equip them with the knowledge, experience and skills needed in research today, whether in academia or outside. For instance, based on evaluation questionnaires, a significant share of graduates from MSCA Industrial Doctorates (co-supervised with non-academic partners) found employment in industry or the business sector within three months after the end of the fellowship.

The current research atmosphere has identified an urgent need for increased mental health support for academics. How is the MSCA programme addressing this important issue?

Mental health in academia is an issue of concern that the MSCA has tackled in various ways, in particular through its alumni association (MCAA), which has been extremely active in generating discussion and piloting mental health support schemes with the MSCA/MCAA community. Their work has led this year to the launch of the REFERENT initiative which is a mentoring scheme to organise peer support for helping MSCA early-stage researchers navigate mental health issues.

One of the main causes of worsening mental health of academics is related to difficult, precarious and stressful working conditions. Through its various actions, MSCA promotes better working conditions, both within its projects but also

more broadly within higher education institutions and other R&I entities. The MSCA encourages the alignment of working conditions for researchers in accordance with the principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

Adequate supervision and mentorship play a particularly important role in the wellbeing of researchers, especially those starting their research careers as doctoral or postdoctoral fellows. The programme published [Guidelines on Supervision](#) which are a set of recommendations for individuals and institutions who receive MSCA funding. These guidelines are in line with the principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers. All MSCA participants must adhere to these guidelines on a best-effort basis.

You have had a career dedicated to youth and education excellence programmes. What have been some of the most motivating reasons in your career to keep pushing the boundaries and making changes within this sector?

I have indeed spent most of my career working in EU institutions in the fields of vocational education and training, higher education, youth, student mobility and now research and innovation. When I started, these were policy areas where the EU had not invested a lot. Erasmus was launched in 1987, followed by Tempus in 1989, a programme for the modernisation of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe that was launched to train a new generation of young people that would ultimately join the EU.

Several other programmes followed, covering the EU, and different regions of the world and concentrated on different levels of education. The idea at the time was that in order to build an open, democratic and reconciled Europe, it was important to bring an educational and cultural dimension to economic policies. It has been fascinating to follow the development of these programmes, to contribute to their improvement, open them to new regions of the world, and enrich them with new elements over the years. The fact that they have a direct impact on millions of young people's lives, on their future personal and professional development, that they provide a concrete and positive contribution to what the EU can offer, have been major motivating factors for never leaving these policy areas.



Although professionally beneficial, “mandatory research mobility” could come at the cost of work and personal life disruption for the individual. Can you give examples of ways the programme ensures support to these researchers?

As mentioned earlier, mobility (international, inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary) lies at the heart of the MSCA. When it comes to

“We have recently introduced further flexibility in the allowances

the potential negative effects of mobility on researchers' work, the programme's evaluation criteria take into account the capacity of the host organisations to ensure that they can provide the fellows with the required expertise, facilities and infrastructure to carry out their research work. It is an obligation under the grant agreement that the host organisation provides the researcher with adequate supervision and the means to implement their project, including research and training activities. The fellowships include funding dedicated to training and networking. It also provides a mobility allowance for the researchers throughout the duration of their project, as well as family allowances.

We have recently introduced further flexibility in the allowances to mitigate some of the issues raised by fellows and stakeholders. For instance, under Horizon 2020, there was no provision to adjust the fellows' allowances if their parental status changed during the project. This has now changed under Horizon Europe to ensure that fellows are not discouraged or put at a disadvantage financially should they have children during the course of their fellowship. By regularly reviewing and improving their working conditions, we ensure that MSCA researchers do not feel disadvantaged when embarking on a mobility path.

During their Erasmus+ or MSCA project, some researchers could end up in challenging situations, for instance, discrimination in their host institution based on social identities (like gender, race, language), sexual harassment,

bullying and so forth. What are some of the measures taken by the MSCA and Erasmus+ programmes to safeguard researchers who face such difficult situations? Do you think it would be useful to establish a third-party point of contact they could confidentially reach out to and that could then report back to your programmes?

The recruiting organisation must support the researcher and manage the MSCA grant in accordance with the provisions of the European Charter for Researchers, which includes obligations for employers to establish appropriate procedures to deal with conflicts, complaints and appeals from researchers.

In case of major difficulties or conflict that cannot be resolved through these procedures, the MSCA fellows have several third-party contact points beyond their host organisation: 1) the MSCA project coordinator when the latter is different from the recruiting organisation is their first point of contact; 2) the dedicated project officer in the Research Executive Agency can provide assistance and inform them of their rights under the grant agreement and 3) the network of MSCA National Contact Points who can provide expertise and support in the host country and/or in their own language.

Your idea of a third-party point of contact that researchers could confidentially reach out is an interesting one that we could further investigate.

Doctoral Mobility Under the Erasmus+ programme:

An interview with Svava B. Finsen

The European Union offers a plethora of research, training, and career development opportunities to academics, including doctoral students. Two such generous initiatives include the Erasmus+ programme and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). At the EuroScience Open Forum 2022, a session was devoted precisely to doctoral mobility under the two programmes. We interviewed Svava B. Finsen, policy officer at the Erasmus+ programme.



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Svava B. Finsen is a policy officer in the B.1 Higher Education unit in DG EAC. Her focus is on Key Action 131 and the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme for student and staff mobility in higher education. She also works on inclusion in the Erasmus+ programme and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

Could you briefly tell us about the new blended (virtual and physical) mobility programme within Erasmus+?

Blended mobility is a new mobility format we introduced last year that combines physical mobility with a mandatory, and complementary, virtual component. We are not just talking about additional online lectures but a virtual component with added value that offers participants a chance to interact online in a meaningful way. By offering blended mobility we are



now able to offer participants the chance to spend a shorter time physically abroad by combining the mobility with a virtual component.

Blended mobility can therefore be used to achieve more inclusion in the Erasmus+ programme, by offering shorter physical mobility to those who are, for some reason, not able to go on a full semester physical

mobility. Blended mobility can also act as a stepping stone towards longer physical mobility.

Blended mobility, and especially our new blended intensive programmes, offer students and staff the opportunity to explore new ways of learning and teaching and are a great way for institutions to organise programmes that tackle

current societal challenges in an interdisciplinary way.

What inspired Erasmus+ to include blended mobility in the new programme?

Blended mobility was introduced in our traditional intra-European student and staff mobility in order to enrich and diversify the mobility opportunities for students and staff who are interested in learning, training or teaching abroad. It offers more flexibility to students, makes the programme more inclusive, and offers the environment for institutions to test out innovative ways of teaching and learning.

We have already received positive feedback from our stakeholders and are excited to see how institutions and participants will use these new opportunities in the coming years.

What measures are being taken to enhance a sense of 'sustainability' in the new Erasmus+ programme?

When it comes to student and staff mobility in the new programme, participants who travel by sustainable means are eligible for an additional top-up to their grant to encourage them to seek more sustainable ways of travelling. During the mobility, students are also encouraged to live a more sustainable lifestyle.

In general, all projects supported by the programme should be designed in an eco-friendly manner and should incorporate green practices in all facets. We also give priority to projects with a focus on developing green skills and supporting active engagement for sustainable development.

We want to see the Erasmus+ programme be a key instrument for building the knowledge, skills, and attitudes on climate change and support sustainable development both within the European Union and beyond.

Given the current sustainability and impending economic crisis, what is Erasmus+'s vision for doctoral candidates' career development?

We would like to see more doctoral candidates experience the opportunities that Erasmus+ has to offer and see room for improvement when it comes to increasing their participation in the programme.

With the new programme we opened up more possibilities for doctoral candidates. For example, allowing doctoral candidates who are considered students to do short-term physical mobility, without a mandatory virtual component. This was previously only open to doctoral candidates who were considered staff.

All candidates can now receive short-term training in various skills that can be useful for their career development, both inside and outside academia. Having the possibility to go on shorter mobilities and attend blended intensive programmes on specific topics can offer a real added value to doctoral candidates.

What are some of the biggest challenges you face(d) when representing the higher education sector, and how do you overcome them?

There are a lot of exciting opportunities available to



“The new programme opens up more possibilities for doctoral candidates

participants from higher education institutions but they are not always known to everyone in the institution. It can sometimes be difficult to reach students and staff who are focused on their work and convince them to look outside of their comfort zone and explore whether there are international opportunities that they might be missing out on.

We've seen that engagement with other stakeholders can be very helpful here, for example through student associations and alumni associations. We know that hearing about experiences from your peers, whether you are a student or a staff member, can be one of the best ways to convince others to explore the international opportunities that are on offer.

Although beneficial to the professional aspects, “mandatory research mobility” could come at the cost of work and personal life disruption for the individual. Can you give examples of ways the programme ensures support to these researchers?

With the introduction of blended mobility and short-term mobility for all doctoral candidates it is now possible for doctoral candidates to spend less time physically abroad if their commitments in their home country do not allow for longer stays abroad. We have already seen enthusiasm from higher education institutions when it comes to blended intensive programmes that are designed specifically for doctoral candidates as they offer the possibility of only a week of physical activities that might suit doctoral candidates well.

During their Erasmus+ or MSCA project, some researchers could end up in challenging situations, for instance, discrimination in their host institution based on social identities (like gender, race, language), sexual harassment, bullying and so forth. What are some of the measures taken by the MSCA and Erasmus+ programmes to safeguard researchers who face such difficult situations? Do you think it would be useful to establish a third-party point of contact they could confidentially reach out to and that could then report back to your programmes?

Inclusion and diversity are one of the horizontal priorities of the Erasmus+ programme and this is a topic we take very seriously. Higher education institutions who want to participate in the Erasmus+ programme need to apply for and sign the Erasmus+ charter for higher education (ECHE) to be able to participate in any projects. In this charter, institutions commit to respect the principles of non-discrimination, transparency and inclusion that is set out in the programme and ensure equal and equitable access and opportunities to current and prospective participants from all backgrounds.

The compliance with the ECHE principles is monitored by the Erasmus+ National Agencies in all the EU Member States and third countries associated with the Erasmus+ programme so if participants feel like their sending or receiving institutions are not complying with these principles they should notify their relevant National Agency who can then take appropriate action.



OUR VISION

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THAT ENABLES
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Co-creating a sustainable research environment: The OEduverse project



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The career paths and the personal obstacles we face together are as diverse as the stories that make us the researchers we are. With the right training space and the right tools, we can enrich our stories and take ownership of our individual research environment. Together with the MCAA, this training space became a reality with the OEduverse summer school training programme.

Researchers can face several challenges during their careers. Some of those challenges stem from the lack of training in important topics such as mental health awareness and science communication. Since 2019, the OEduverse project - funded within the Erasmus+ strategic partnership programme - has been training Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) on those essential skills. The project is built on three central pillars: mental wellbeing, open science, and

science communication. Under the coordination of the University of Siegen, and in partnership with the Technische Informationsbibliothek, SciLink, Trinity College Dublin's Student Counseling Center, the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA), SPACE, and the steady support of Eurodoc, the OEduverse project has integrated the right expertise to develop essential tools to help ESRs to succeed in their personal research roadmap.



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The project trained Europe's newest researchers on their mental wellbeing, both at the personal level and within their professional circles. With the different training sessions held during the last years, participants are now better equipped to look within themselves and their work environments, to deal with stressful situations and to maintain professional relationships. Since stress is constant throughout ESRs' careers, the project not only created awareness of mental wellbeing issues, but also provided researchers with new tools to conduct more impactful research, and be more effective in their research teams.

Open Science is a central concept to the advancement of science in Europe through the 21st century. Increasingly, researchers need to be experts in a number of different aspects of open research, like research management or research evaluation, and be more than proficient in the various technological tools required for conducting research in open environments. The OEduverse project educated ESRs on practical research management skills, research ethics and evaluation techniques, creating their own Open Science toolbox.

As a researcher in a constantly changing world, it is vitally important to be able to share your science with the wider public, and for that, to develop creativity, critical thinking and communication as essential skills. Within OEduverse, researchers were trained to explore the methodology of immersive storytelling, allowing them to unearth their personal science narrative and to use that to communicate their research more effectively to wider audiences and to

each other. The training focused on empowerment and ownership of a sustainable career in research, giving participants more confidence in their presentation skills, as they were able to combine the newly mastered skills and knowledge into personalized research paths to finally get a handle on their research environment.

The project is continuously promoting activities where ESRs can benefit and acquire the necessary skills for their career. The center of the project were its summer and winter schools. With a capacity of 60+ participants over three summer schools and from all different European countries, researchers had the chance to work out their personal research roadmap and take ownership of their research vision. They acquired valuable tools to put this training into action along the envisioned research roadmap. Although the project timeline has now reached an end, the training package developed by this strategic partnership will continuously be used for future training, and offered on SciLink. Furthermore, the end of 2022 saw the release of an open, fully free train the trainer handbook, to organize your personal summer school, following the [OEduverse framework](#).

As a partner, the MCAA was deeply involved in the organization of the schools, webinars and outreach events, as well as content creation for communication and dissemination. The OEduverse project not only provides more sustainable career prospects for the researchers, but also offers the development of transferable skills with training in mental wellbeing, open science and science communication.

New tools to
conduct more
impactful
research





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OSCAR:

A project to promote sustainable careers

As researchers, facing the unknown is part of our career management. But the way we experience it could change if we get the chance to pursue mentorship and career development training. The OSCAR project, promoted by the MCAA and several partners, developed an online training platform and an online mentoring program to support researchers in their career management.

OSCAR stands for “Online, open learning recommendations and mentoring towards Sustainable research CAREers.” The OSCAR project aims to aid the professional development of researchers, such as Masters students or doctoral researchers, by providing personalized training on mental health and career development. The project started in 2020 as an Erasmus+ strategic partnership, and it involves the Leibniz Information Centre for Science and Technology and University Library, as the project coordinator, and the University of Siegen, RUMO, SciLink Foundation, CALP, and the Marie Curie Alumni



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Association (MCAA) as members of the project consortium.

To maintain sustainable and successful academic careers, researchers and scientists need to attain interdisciplinary and cross-cutting skills beyond their specialization. They need to manage their own careers within and outside of academia, as well as handle stressful steps in their research projects, while maintaining a high level of mental wellbeing and motivation to deliver high-quality research output. The OSCAR project is addressing those needs based on the expertise of the consortium, developing, deploying, and validating personalized training and online mentoring services for researchers to support their career management and mental health.

The project focuses on the development of an online, AI-powered, open learning recommendation framework and platform to support the improvement of key transversal skills of an individual level, taking into account the learner's context. The platform, called eDoer, is online and ready for the researchers to explore and use it to develop new skills that will help them to succeed in their careers and deliver high quality results. At the moment, it is available as a website, however a phone app is being developed to grant more available tools for the researchers. In addition to the platform, an online mentoring program is being developed that focuses on the mental health of the researchers. This will provide psychological support to understand and mitigate the impact of stressful academic environments.

As a partner, the MCAA has been involved in the support and testing of the online platform, ensuring a user-friendly web-portal with high quality output. Additionally, the MCAA is also involved in the platform content creation and curation and will be supporting the online mentoring program.

The lack of training related with career management can have an impact on the researchers personal and professional development, therefore, the OSCAR consortium will also work in the development of an online mentoring program in career management and planning in order to support researcher's careers.

This strategic partnership, which runs until August 2023, will contribute to sustainable and successful careers of researchers. The project not only gives the tools to help the researchers in their career management, but also an online platform that can continuously provide transferable skills training and recognition.



The MCAA in the new era of European Projects

Over the past few years, the MCAA has taken part in two Erasmus+ Projects. Now, the association has strengthened its collaboration with several partners in order to jointly work on some of the most relevant topics affecting researchers' lives. Two projects were recently funded, one focuses on promoting citizen science and the other one on contributing to sustainable researcher careers. These projects will allow MCAA to contribute to these crucial topics and engage in discussions with policymakers, Member States, universities, and several other key stakeholders.



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The ECS project

In the last decade, citizen science has received increasing attention due to its importance in research and innovation. However, the true potential of the topic is yet to be explored. In addition, the topic is experiencing several challenges including lack of awareness, funding and capacities, inadequate resources

among many others. This is why the MCAA joined forces with 20 other organizations around Europe to tackle these challenges and make European Citizen Science an integral part of the European Research Area. The major objectives of the European Citizen Science (ECS) project are:

- Empowering the European citizen science community through co-design and co-creation
- Strengthening the links and collaborations between existing citizen science initiatives
- Increasing the participation of citizens from all walks of life in citizen science through an inclusive approach
- Building the capacity to conduct excellent research and innovation through citizen science
- Raising awareness, supporting and mainstreaming citizen science among new actors, new territories and scientific fields
- Better aligning data infrastructures to the needs of citizen science, and improving open science practices employed by citizen science initiatives

The project started in August 2022 and will run until July 2026. The project is coordinated by the

European Citizen Science Academy (ECSA). 21 different organizations are taking part in this project. The MCAA is taking part in seven work packages and contributing to 17 different tasks. In this project, the MCAA will co-create the European Citizen Science Community of the future in order to strengthen the links and collaboration among key stakeholders. In addition, the MCAA will play a significant role in setting up the European Citizen Science Academy by designing training for educators, trainers, and researchers. As a community of highly trained researchers, the MCAA will promote citizen science within scientific excellence. The MCAA will support the institutional transformation of embedding citizen science within research and innovation institutions through capacity building. Finally, the MCAA will also take part in activities to mainstream citizen science across disciplines in the new European



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Ensuring sustainable research careers

Research Area. MCAA is organizing a satellite event in collaboration with the project in the upcoming 2023 MCAA Annual Conference. Also, the outcome of the work will be presented at the future MCAA Annual Conferences in the coming years, so stay tuned.

The SECURE project

The MCAA has been working on ensuring sustainable research careers for at least a couple of years now. As a result of the MCAA Annual Conference session in Vienna 2019, a joint declaration with Eurodoc on sustainable research careers was published in 2019, followed by several sessions held during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2019 and at international conferences, including the 2021 Meeting of the American Association for Advancement of Science. The MCAA participated in several policy discussions and published policy papers on this topic. In order to mainstream the common Research Career Framework (RCF), the MCAA is now taking part in the recently funded Sustainable Careers for Researcher Empowerment (SECURE) project with 16 other partners from Europe and 1 partner from the UK. The objectives of the project are to:

- Develop a comprehensive RCF integrating relevant existing policies

- Develop a range of tenure track-like models integrating best practices from existing use cases
- Conduct trials at organizations to implement, test, and refine the RCF
- Engage research stakeholders for co-design and validation of the RCF
- Mainstream the RCF through EURAXESS, policy briefs, and a summit and policy roundtable

The project is planned to start in January 2023 and is coordinated by the Oceanic Platform of the Canary Islands (PLOCAN).

The MCAA will take part in six different work packages of the project. Our association will mainly support the production of the first draft of the RCF, first by contributing in the consultation phase with the key stakeholders and then by validating and preparing the final version of the RCF. The MCAA will also perform a similar role in the Tenure Track Model and collect feedback from researchers at different career stages. In addition, the MCAA will help produce the policy briefs promoting the RCF and will co-organize the final summit and policy roundtable among partners and policymakers. The interim and final results of this project will also be presented at the next MCAA Annual Conferences. One more reason to attend the major annual event of our association.

The Open and Universal Science project

How can open science practices be valued and rewarded in the evaluation of research and researchers? The EU-funded Open and Universal Science aims to address this central question and develop a series of policies and recommendations for Research Performing Organisations and Research Funding Organisations.



‘Open Science’ includes all practices that provide open access to research outputs, early and open sharing of research, participation in open peer-review, measures to ensure reproducibility of results, and involving all stakeholders in co-creation. Although the emergence of an open science culture in research was embraced enthusiastically by many early-career researchers, progress towards full open access to research outputs was quite slow.

In 2018, a group of research funders launched Plan S, an initiative that aimed to accelerate the transformation of academic publishing by making substantial demands on publishers, researchers and research organisations to ensure full and immediate open access to scientific publications. As a response, the MCAA, Eurodoc and the Young Academy of Europe issued a [Joint Statement on Implementation Guidance for Plan S](#) that offered a general welcome to Plan S and the

associated [Coalition S](#) framework. Nevertheless, the associations representing early-career researchers expressed concern that “institutions and funders should modernise their researcher evaluation”. The primary objective of the [Open and Universal Science \(OPUS\)](#) project aims to respond to this concern by working on the development and implementation of strategies and policies that reward the practice of open science in the evaluation of research and researchers. The project will recommend best practices to Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) and other stakeholders. This project is very pertinent at a time when many stakeholders throughout Europe are joining together as part of the [Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment \(CoARA\)](#) to implement assessment primarily on qualitative judgement that avoids irresponsible use of journal- and citation-based metrics.



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Developing realistic indicators and metrics

The MCAA is one of 18 partners in the OPUS project that will develop coordination and support measures to reform the assessment of research and researchers towards a system that incentivises and rewards researchers to take up Open Science practices. The 36-month project, with a budget of almost 2 million euros is funded by the Horizon Europe framework and coordinated by the Oceanic Platform of the Canary Islands (PLOCAN). As a strong supporter of open science which actively promotes it among its members, researchers and the wider society, the MCAA contributed to the development of the successful proposal.

The project's focus

OPUS has a specific focus on reforming the research(er) assessment system to incentivise and reward researchers to take up these practices. The project employs a three-tiered approach to ensure representation and consensus building of key stakeholder groups in the Open Science ecosystem:

1. The large project consortium consists of researcher organisations, RPOs, RFOs, industry organisations, and experts in project management, public relations, and open science
2. A series of stakeholder engagement sessions will be held with the broader community to gather input and validate key project deliverables
3. An advisory board of key representatives will ensure expert oversight and links to the community.

The project's objectives.

The OPUS project has six objectives, namely to:

1. Conduct a comprehensive state-of-the-art on existing literature and initiatives for open science
2. Develop a comprehensive set of tools to implement open science at RPOs and RFOs
3. Develop realistic indicators and metrics to monitor and drive open science at RPOs and RFOs
4. Test the interventions and indicators and metrics via action plans in pilots at RPOs and RFOs
5. Utilise a stakeholder-driven feedback loop to develop, monitor, refine, and validate actions
6. Synthesise outcomes into policy briefs and a revised Open Science Career Assessment Matrix for research(er) career assessment

MCAA's role

The MCAA will collaborate on assessing the state of the art on open science incentives, metrics, and indicators, as well as in drafting and disseminating policy recommendations. The project has 7 work packages of which the MCAA is taking part in 6. In this project, the MCAA will contribute to drafting and disseminating a revised Open Science Career Assessment Matrix for research(er) career assessment that aims to provide the benchmark process for reforming career assessment of researchers. The project will provide a way for MCAA members to give feedback on researcher career assessment and this is likely to be part of the MCAA Annual Conferences in coming years.

A purple pencil is shown erasing the word 'inaccessible' on a light grey background. The pencil is positioned diagonally from the top left, with its red eraser tip touching the word. The word 'inaccessible' is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. The eraser is currently removing the 'in' part of the word, leaving 'accessible' visible. Small red and purple eraser shavings are scattered around the base of the pencil.

inaccessible

Accessibility Statement

The MCAA believes in a society based on diversity. A society where diversity is the norm, not a deviation. A society where diversity is a strength, not a weakness. Access barriers are created by a society that does not acknowledge the value of diversity. Diversity and access are foundational elements of the flourishing of the research endeavour.

As a community of researchers, the MCAA is committed to increase the accessibility of its products, services, and events. Under the leadership of the Editorial Team of the Communication Working Group, with the support of other Working Groups and the MCAA Board, the MCAA has been promoting a series of actions aimed at increasing the inclusivity of its community and reducing access barriers.

Starting with this issue, IRRADIUM has a new layout. The new design should make the reading experience more accessible by reducing a number of barriers our readers may face.

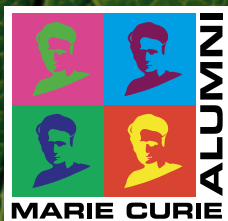
The new layout complies with many requirements of major print and digital accessibility standards and guidelines. For example, background and foreground colours were selected and paired so as to fulfil the AAA level requirements for colour contrast devised by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). Colour selection and pairing also complies with requirements for colour blindness. The text is not justified in order to keep the spacing between words consistent and regular through the entire text. Line spacing and font size were revised and increased too. Each macro-section is identified by a different colour so as to provide the reader with a map of content organisation. The layout adopts a sans serif font, where all the characters are unique. Last but not least, the PDF file now complies with PDF accessibility requirements and can be used by screen readers.



NETWORKING

**WE CONNECT
THE MSCA
COMMUNITY**

WWW.MARIECURIEALUMNI.EU



10th

CÓRDOBA

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MCAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE & GENERAL ASSEMBLY

WHO WE ARE

- A non-profit organisation established in 2012 and supported by the European Commission.
- Members are current or past beneficiaries of the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions](#), one of the most prestigious funding programmes in Europe.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS



20,717
registered members



154
nationalities



5
continents

24-25 FEBRUARY 2023 CÓRDOBA, SPAIN

#MCAA2023AC

CHALLENGES IN SCIENCE DIPLOMACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



NETWORK

with researchers, policy makers, funding agencies, HEIs, SMEs and industry leaders



EXPLORE

new career paths
with sponsors and partners



ATTEND

interactive sessions, training workshops,
presentations and debates



LISTEN

to world-class speakers