

Impact of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). Driving knowledge, innovation, and EU competitiveness



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Foreword

The European Union stands at a pivotal moment. As we consider the design of the next Framework Programme (FP10), a polyphonic debate on the future of European Research and Innovation (R&I) has never been more urgent. The past year saw the release of several influential reports that analysed key dimensions of Europe's future, including Enrico Letta's on the single market, Mario Draghi's on competitiveness, and Manuel Heitor's on accelerating Europe's research and innovation impact. Reading those documents, the message is clear: for Europe to stay a global leader, it must bridge the gap between innovation and market, streamline efforts, and, most importantly, invest in its greatest asset, namely its human capital.

This report, *Impact of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). Driving knowledge, innovation, and EU competitiveness* is the contribution of the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) to that vital conversation.

For nearly thirty years, the MSCA has stood as Europe's flagship programme for doctoral and postdoctoral training. However, to regard the MSCA merely as another academic funding scheme is to overlook its far-reaching impact, both within Europe and across the globe. The programme has become a powerful catalyst for cross-sector mobility and innovation, shaping researchers who are not only accomplished scientists but also agile thinkers and leaders. Through the MSCA, successive generations of researchers have been equipped to navigate complexity, drive change, and make meaningful contributions across industry, policy, and society worldwide.

As we move toward FP10, the temptation to focus on quick gains in technology transfer is understandably high. Yet such focus must not overshadow a simple truth: every breakthrough, every transformative technology, and every competitive advantage relies on skilled and well-supported researchers. The evidence presented in this report (drawing on the MCAA Major Survey 2024, end-of-fellowship evaluations, and ex-post Horizon 2020 data) shows unequivocally that MSCA fellows are the talent Europe needs to fulfil the ambitions set out in the Competitiveness Compass and the Warsaw Declaration.

For more than eleven years, the MCAA has been more than a network; it has grown into a vibrant and self-driven community. With over 23,000 researchers and innovators from more than 150 countries, it brings together a diversity of perspectives and experiences rarely matched elsewhere. Over the years, the association has been a strong voice for sustainable research careers, an advocate for mental well-being, and a committed partner in removing barriers that hinder mobility.

We advocate for researchers and for Europe's future. When researchers contend with precarious working conditions or inadequate supervision, innovation falters. But when they are empowered by systems that nurture high-quality research, promote inclusivity, and ensure fair and transparent career assessment, they drive the economic and social progress that Europe strives for.

This report is a reflection on what has been achieved. It is also a roadmap for what lies ahead. By bringing together robust data and the lived experiences of our community, it highlights both the strengths of the MSCA and the areas where further development is needed.

We encourage policymakers, stakeholders, and industry leaders to engage with this report in a forward-looking spirit. The MSCA should remain a core pillar of FP10, backed by a budget that reflects its proven impact. Equally vital is the preservation of the programme's bottom-up spirit, an approach that empowers researchers to chart the next frontiers of knowledge.

Europe's competitiveness will not be secured by infrastructure or regulatory frameworks alone. Its future will be shaped also by the talent, creativity, and resilience of its people. The MSCA is one of the most effective tools we have to nurture this potential and to shape the future Europe deserves.

Brussels, 04 December 2025

Gian Maria Greco, Chair of the Board, Marie Curie Alumni Association

Mostafa Moonir Shawrav, Executive Director, Marie Curie Alumni Association

Tereza Szybisty, Policy Officer, Marie Curie Alumni Association

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Executive Summary

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) is a flagship initiative of the European Union (EU)'s research and innovation policy under the Horizon Europe framework. Since its inception in 1996, the MSCA has supported nearly 150,000 researchers, playing a vital role in fostering international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral research.

Over the past 30 years, the MSCA has contributed to strengthening European research excellence, boosting innovation capacity, and advancing Europe's competitiveness by training highly skilled researchers. The programme's openness across sectors and countries has expanded Europe's innovation ecosystem, engaging thousands of non-academic organisations and attracting talent from nearly 160 nationalities. By promoting fair recruitment, high-quality supervision, Open Science, responsible research practices, and sustainable research environments, the MSCA sets EU-wide standards for excellence and inclusivity. Its bottom-up model fuels cross-disciplinary breakthroughs and addresses regional disparities through balanced brain circulation. Through synergies such as the Seal of Excellence, the MSCA amplifies investments at the EU and national levels, reinforcing the European Research Area (ERA) and delivering broad societal, economic, and technological benefits.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the MSCA's multifaceted impacts. It aims to summarise the concrete impacts of the MSCA programme, manifesting its benefits for academia, society, technology, and the economy.

To sustain and amplify its transformative impact, the MSCA must retain its fully bottom-up, curiosity-driven character and secure clear structural independence within a stand-alone Framework Programme 10 (FP10) for excellence-driven instruments. This requires an overall EU research and innovation (R&I) budget of at least €220 billion, with a dedicated ring-fenced allocation of at least €25 billion for a specific MSCA Work Programme. These are the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA)'s recommendations in order to maintain Europe as a global leader in research, innovation, and strategic priorities, while supporting a larger, more diverse research workforce and ensuring long-term societal and economic progress.

Impact of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). Driving knowledge, innovation and EU competitiveness

MSCA objectives and impact

The diagram illustrates how each MSCA objective contributes to measurable academic, societal, and economic/technological impacts, which form the basis of the report's structure.



The excellence of the MSCA is demonstrated by:

28 Nobel Prize laureates

3 Winners of the European Prize for Women Innovators

1 Winner of the Innovation Radar Prize

6 researchers involved in the discovery of the Higgs boson

Source: [1, 13, 28, 32, 35]

Global reach

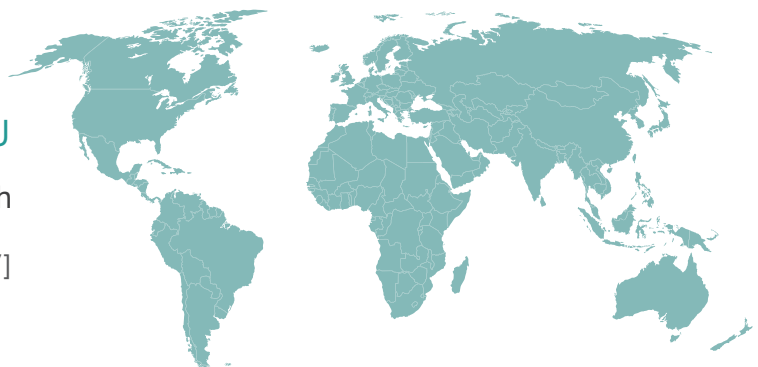
150,000+
supported researchers since 1996

Source: [1]

Open to the world

40% of fellows are from outside the EU
reflecting the programme's global reach

Source: [27]



Career progress and innovation

95% of fellows are employed after their MSCA fellowship.



Source: [13]

80% of fellows indicate that the fellowship positively impacted their career progression and guidance.



Source: [6]

57% fellows from the industry sector reported that their employability had improved due to the MSCA.



Source: [5,6]

Economic impact

€ 602M

of MSCA funding has facilitated research in the non-academic sector under Horizon 2020.

Source: [13]

Applications

17,058

proposals were sent in the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2025 call.

Source: [25]

The MCAA strongly recommends substantially enhanced support for the MSCA to secure Europe's global leadership in research, innovation, and strategic priorities.

Significant budget increase

At least **€25 billion** dedicated to a specific **MSCA Work Programme** within an overall €220 billion budget for FP10 to sustain Europe's competitiveness and innovation leadership.

Preserve bottom-up character

Maintain the programme's fully **curiosity-driven, open, and independent nature**, which has proven essential for anticipating and nurturing emerging high-impact fields ahead of formal policy priorities.

Autonomous structure in FP10

Ensure the MSCA remains an excellence-driven instrument with clear **autonomy**, protected from dilution in broader pillars.

Introduction: Setting the stage for the MSCA's impact

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), a key pillar of Horizon Europe, has become an essential programme for advancing research and innovation (R&I) across Europe. Since its inception in 1996, it has supported nearly 150,000 researchers [1]. The MSCA's bottom-up approach stands out for providing researchers with the freedom to work across scientific domains. This approach fosters high-quality, innovative research, as well as interdisciplinary and international mobility. MSCA-funded researchers are not only encouraged to pursue fundamental and frontier research, but also to engage in collaborative projects that often bridge the gap between academia and industry. As a result, the MSCA is recognised for its role in retaining European talent, attracting global researchers to Europe, and enabling researchers to return to their home countries, particularly to the Widening Countries within the European Union (EU).

Beyond scientific excellence, the MSCA has transformed research careers and working conditions, especially for early-career researchers. Through collaboration between universities, research institutions, and non-academic organisations, inclusivity, skills development, and employment practices have been improved. The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment, both inspired by MSCA principles, continue to set EU-wide standards for fairness and transparency.

The ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 [32] further confirmed the MSCA's structural impact on higher education and research systems, notably in enhancing doctoral training and academia–industry partnerships. While progress has been substantial, the evaluation also highlighted persistent participation gaps among researchers from the Widening Countries.

The MSCA has proven to be a powerful catalyst for developing talent and advancing research, driving groundbreaking innovations. The programme is also a key driver of economic growth, in line with President Ursula von der Leyen's political guidelines that place R&I at the heart of Europe's economy. The unprecedented success and demand for the MSCA are clearly reflected in the Postdoctoral Fellowships 2025 call, which received 17,058 proposals – the highest number recorded in the forty years of EU framework programmes, marking a 64.6% increase compared to 2024. Nearly half of all applications came from researchers based outside the EU, confirming the programme's global attractiveness and the pressing need for additional capacity [25].

Through this report, the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) seeks to highlight the concrete impacts of the MSCA, amplifying its benefits for academia, society, technology, and the economy, and showcasing how it continues to shape and strengthen the European Research Area (ERA).

MSCA objectives and broader EU priorities

The MSCA is designed to achieve several key objectives that align with Europe's broader R&I priorities. These are the following [2]:

MSCA objectives and impact



Through its focus on excellence, mobility, and international collaboration, the MSCA generates substantial academic, economic, technological, and societal impacts. These objectives directly contribute to broader EU priorities, ensuring that Europe remains a competitive, knowledge-driven, and innovation-oriented economy. Building on these objectives, this report highlights the concrete impacts of the MSCA across academia, society, technology, and the economy.

Methodological note

The framework shows how the MSCA's objectives create a holistic model of impact. This structure enables tracing the connections between the MSCA's design principles and their measurable impacts, while acknowledging the programme's cross-cutting influence on the European R&I landscape.

For each objective of the MSCA, the MCAA collected evidence from multiple complementary sources to ensure a balanced and robust analysis. Key sources include:

- The MCAA Major Survey 2024 [5, 6]
- Results of the MSCA end of fellowship evaluation questionnaires (H2020), including the 2023 [4] and 2024 updates [3]
- The ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 [32]

To provide context, the report also draws on several key documents shaping the European R&I landscape, including:

- Manuel Heitor's interim evaluation report "Align, Act, Accelerate" [7]
- Mario Draghi's report "The future of European competitiveness" [8,9]
- Enrico Letta's report "Much More than a Market" [10]
- The Warsaw Declaration [24]
- The Competitiveness Compass [11], a newly introduced policy tool guiding Europe's economic trajectory

Previous MCAA and other stakeholder statements and recommendations are also considered [12]. Together, these materials combine quantitative and qualitative insights, ensuring that the report reflects both data-driven evidence and the lived experiences of the MSCA community.

Because the available evidence spans different programme phases and reporting years, from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe, the report integrates data from diverse timeframes to capture both continuity and evolution in the MSCA's impact. To maintain transparency, the year of publication is always indicated in citations, allowing readers to interpret findings in their proper temporal and policy context.

Finally, an internal expert consultation at the MCAA supported the drafting process to ensure that the report reflects the latest insights and is grounded in the real experiences of the MSCA community.

Excellence

The MSCA continues to stand out as a key element in the ERA, significantly advancing research excellence, talent development, and innovation. As noted in the “Align, Act, Accelerate” report [7], the MSCA, alongside other top-tier European programmes (the European Research Council (ERC) and the European Innovation Council (EIC)), is globally recognised for its high-quality research outputs, strong return on investment, and substantial contribution to the EU’s scientific competitiveness.

Evidence highlights that MSCA fellows are twice as likely to publish among the top 1%, 5%, and 10% compared to other researchers [13]. This demonstrates the programme’s unique capacity to translate investment into both academic impact and broader societal and economic value.

The excellence of the MSCA is demonstrated by:

28 Nobel Prize laureates

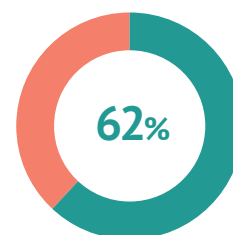
1 Winner of the Innovation Radar Prize

3 Winners of the European Prize for Women Innovators

6 researchers involved in the discovery of the Higgs boson

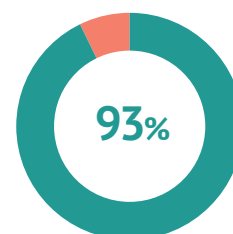
Source: [1, 13, 28, 32, 35]

The MSCA’s excellence extends beyond academia. By supporting early-career researchers, it strengthens Europe’s capacity for innovation, enhances mobility, and builds competitiveness. The MSCA Industrial Doctorates are particularly impactful, yielding innovations in fields such as pharmacology and nanoscience. According to Bitsios et al. [14], the programme’s intersectoral training model successfully bridges academia and industry, increasing innovation performance through shared expertise and skills. Survey data from the MCAA [6] clearly show that intersectoral mobility strengthens links between academia and industry. Almost half of all respondents (46.2%) undertake a secondment during their MSCA fellowship, with particularly high participation among early-stage researchers. More than 60% rate these experiences as highly valuable for developing key skills. Exposure to non-academic sectors is especially impactful, with fellows who have industry secondments being 2.3 times more likely to report substantial skill gains than their counterparts with experience only in academia. Over 56% of them also note improved employability in the industry after their fellowship. These results demonstrate that mobility across sectors not only elevates researchers’ competencies but also strengthens their capacity to generate excellent, impactful research aligned with Europe’s innovation priorities.



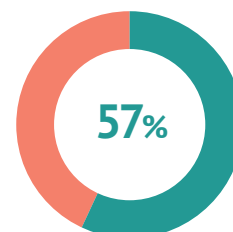
of all publications from Horizon 2020 resulted from the MSCA and ERC programmes.

Source: [7]



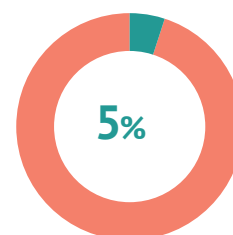
of fellows secured employment within the first year after completing their fellowship.

Source: [5, 6]



of fellows from the industry sector reported that their employability had improved due to the MSCA.

Source: [5, 6]

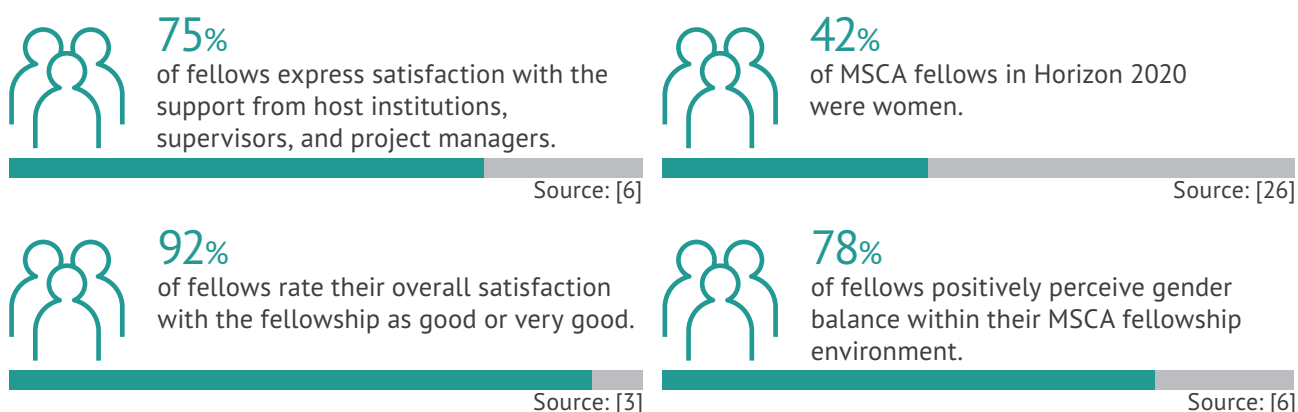


of fellows filed patent applications during their fellowship.

Source: [13]

Excellent recruitment, working conditions, and inclusivity

The MSCA is deeply rooted in the principles of the European Charter for Researchers, ensuring that excellence in research is accompanied by fair, transparent, and inclusive recruitment practices. The programme prioritises the creation of supportive working environments that promote diversity, equality, and the well-being of researchers.



Beyond inclusion, the MSCA sets a benchmark for responsible human resources (HR) practices in research. The MSCA focuses on gender equality, career development, and transferable skills, equipping researchers to thrive in both academic and non-academic environments, while promoting diversity and social mobility. This comprehensive approach contributes to talent retention and global competitiveness, positioning the MSCA as a leading model for inclusive, high-quality research environments in Europe.

PROMOTING EQUALITY, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, AND GLOBAL COLLABORATION:

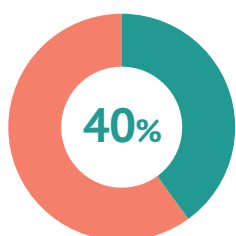
- MSCA evaluators receive unconscious gender bias training and research teams must commit to **gender equality**.
- **Family allowance, maternity/parental leave with fellowship extension, part-time work options**, and a **career restart after a break** are part of the programme.
- The MSCA has funded researchers **from nearly 160 nationalities**, hosted by organisations **in over 139 countries** [27].

FOSTERING OPEN, DEMAND-DRIVEN RESEARCH FOR GLOBAL IMPACT:

- The MSCA is open to **all domains of research and innovation**, with no pre-established scientific priorities, allowing researchers **to explore diverse fields**.
- Budget allocation is **demand-driven**, ensuring **flexibility based** on the needs and interests of the scientific community.
- MSCA research is driven by scientists using a **bottom-up approach** to tackle global societal challenges and support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mobility

The MSCA programme plays a pivotal role in enhancing Europe's R&I capacity through mobility, a key driver of growth, economic resilience, and inclusivity [15]. As noted in Letta's report [10], integrating mobility into the Single Market Strategy transforms disparities into unified opportunities for talent and knowledge exchange. Many fellows work across continents, promoting Europe's openness to global talent and fostering a more balanced ERA. This aligns with the goals outlined in the Heitor [7] and Letta [10] reports to attract global talent and address strategic priorities. The MSCA's bottom-up approach strengthens Europe's research ecosystem, enhances competitiveness, and facilitates global collaboration to tackle pressing global challenges.



of fellows are from outside the EU.

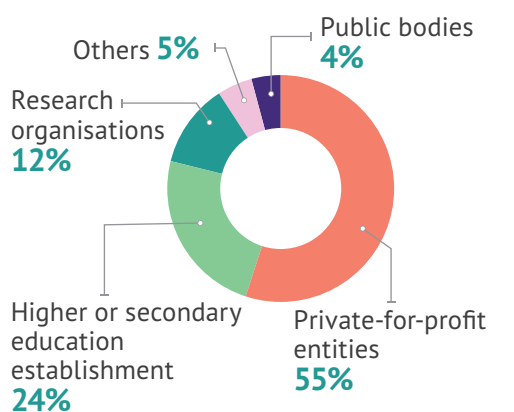
Source: [27]

International

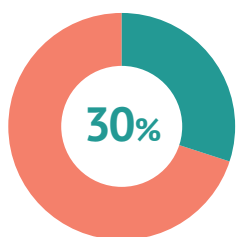
As of 2024, the MSCA has funded researchers from nearly 160 nationalities, hosted by organisations in over 139 countries [27]. Around 40% of fellows originate outside the EU, reflecting the programme's global reach [27]. The MSCA fellowships, including Choose Europe [30, 31], further promote mobility towards regions with lower R&I capacity, addressing regional disparities and enhancing brain circulation.

Intersectoral

The MSCA bridges various sectors, from academia to the private industry, and provides financial support to non-academic organisations, including a large number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Under Horizon 2020, approximately €602 million has been allocated to research in the non-academic sector, with over €250 million designated explicitly for SMEs. The programme has funded over 4,000 private for-profit organisations, including 2,300 SMEs, and supported 7,500 researchers working outside academia, including in NGOs and private companies [13]. Such mobility enhances innovation capacity and supports Europe's economic and technological advancement.



Source: [13]



Individual Fellowship applications involve interdisciplinary research.

Source: [13]

Interdisciplinary

Approximately one third (30%) of Individual Fellowship applications involve interdisciplinary research [13]. By fostering collaboration across diverse fields, the MSCA drives boundary-pushing science and the development of holistic solutions to global challenges. This interdisciplinary approach amplifies both scientific excellence and societal impact.

Bottom-up and open to the world

The MSCA embodies a unique approach to fostering R&I, focusing on bottom-up principles that encourage participation from all research domains. This flexibility not only promotes the diversity of ideas and approaches but also enhances Europe's global competitiveness.

As emphasised in Heitor's [7] report, the MSCA supports researchers from various disciplines and fosters collaboration between academic institutions, research organisations, and the private sector.

The MSCA's international reach is one of its defining features. As stated above, the MSCA attracts a wide range of researchers; 42% of fellows in Horizon 2020 are women [26, 7], and around 40% of fellows originate outside the EU [7]. By supporting global participation, the MSCA promotes balanced brain circulation and reduces mobility disparities within the EU.

The MSCA's bottom-up approach and openness to the world are key drivers in the EU's efforts to foster innovation, strategic independence, competitiveness and global collaboration. As outlined in Heitor's [7] report, one of the key strategies to enhance Europe's talent pool is the establishment of new initiatives such as Choose Europe [30], which focuses on supporting exceptional young researchers at the early stages of their careers, particularly those in or following their first postdoctoral positions. This initiative is designed to enable these researchers to rapidly become independent, further strengthening Europe's research ecosystem. By attracting top talent from diverse regions, promoting intersectoral mobility, and encouraging collaboration across borders, the MSCA strengthens Europe's role in addressing global challenges and securing its position at the forefront of R&I.

50%+

The MSCA constituted the most international component of Horizon 2020, accounting for **over half of all third-country participations in the programme.**

Source [22]

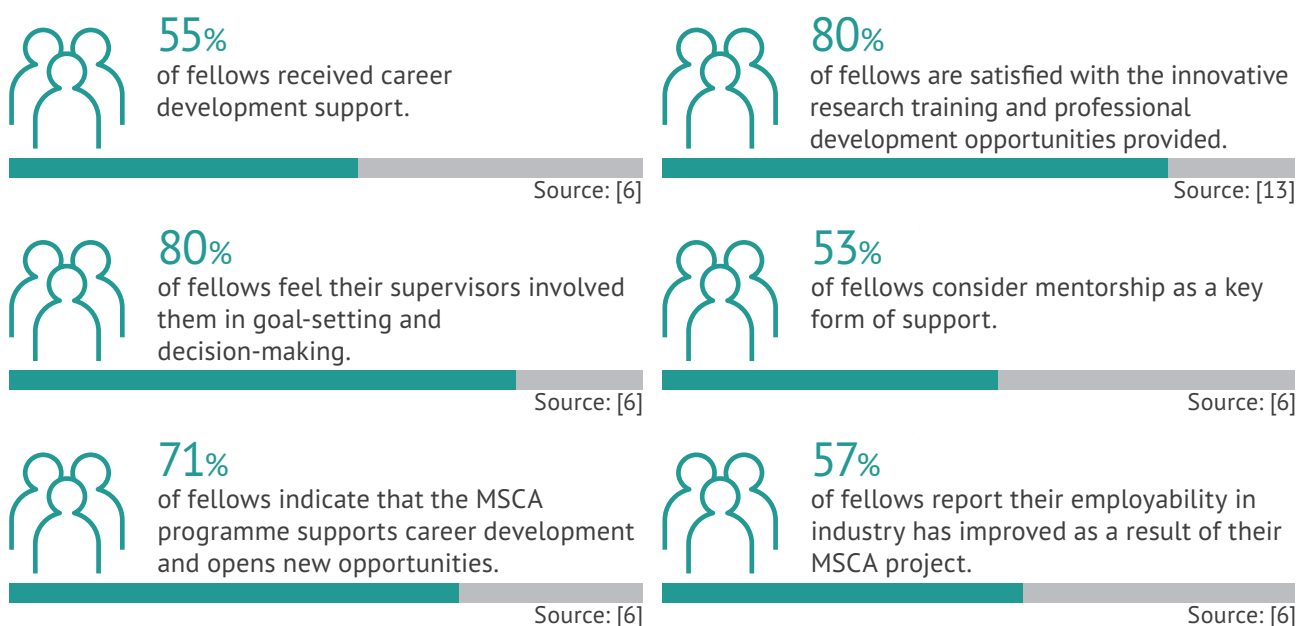
89%

of fellows gained opportunities to work abroad as a result of their project.

Source [32]

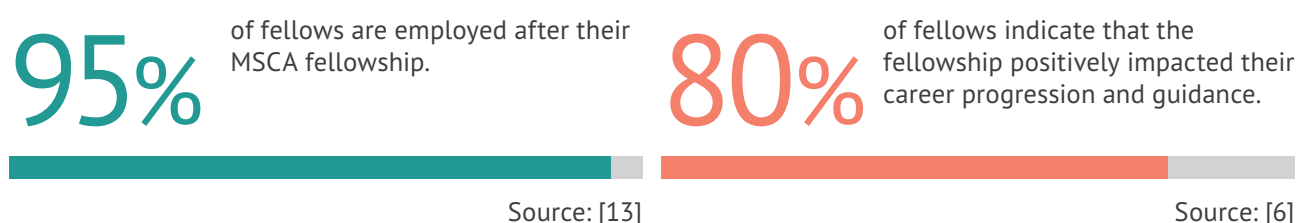
Effective supervision and career guidance

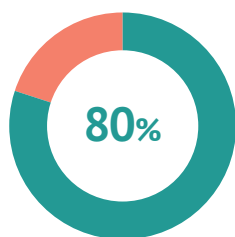
The MSCA programme places a strong emphasis on effective supervision, mentoring, and career guidance as pillars for research excellence and professional growth. The MSCA Guidelines on Supervision [16], adopted in 2021 and updated in 2025, establish clear standards to ensure that all host institutions provide structured, high-quality support to their fellows.



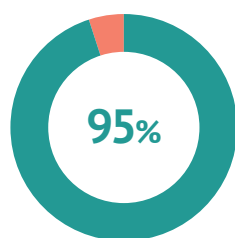
Effective supervision and career guidance are not only crucial for the individual researcher's career progression but also have a broader impact on the research community and beyond. The MSCA's commitment to these aspects contributes to the overall development of researchers' transferable skills, which are key in both academic and non-academic sectors [14]. By equipping fellows with a diverse skill set, the MSCA programme enhances their employability across a range of sectors, fostering a more versatile and competitive workforce.

The positive outcomes of such guidance extend beyond academia, with MSCA fellows contributing to societal and economic growth. By nurturing versatile, adaptable professionals, the MSCA strengthens the European R&I ecosystem as a whole. Fellows emerge as leaders driving innovation, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and contributing to Europe's long-term prosperity and societal advancement.

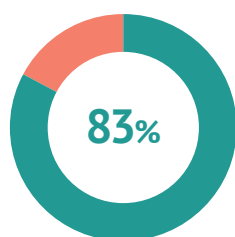




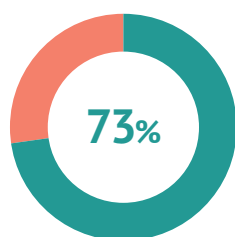
of fellows are fully aware about Open Science principles.



of fellows support Open Access publication.



of fellows endorse sharing data in repositories.



of fellows support open access publication on platforms such as Open Research Europe.

Source: [6]

Open Science and Responsible Research and Innovation

The MSCA supports Open Science practices and promotes Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), ensuring transparency, inclusivity, trust in science, and ethical conduct in research. As set out in the MSCA Work Programme 2023–2024, the programme encourages the open dissemination of research results and outputs and requires all actions to promote Open Science practices and align with the FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable) data principles, unless duly justified [17].

This commitment to Open Science is echoed by the MSCA fellows. Although support for some practices, such as preregistration of research studies, is more mixed, the overwhelming endorsement of practices like Open Access and data sharing highlights the MSCA community's commitment to transparency and open collaboration in research.

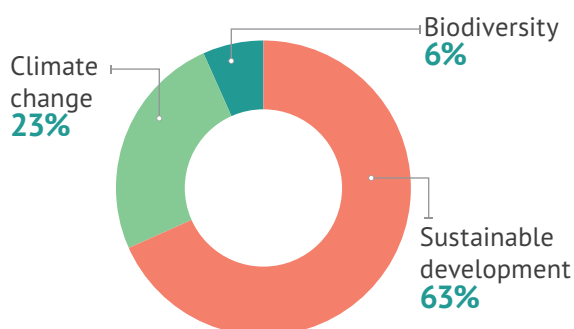
By promoting Open Science and RRI, the MSCA drives societal, economic, and technological impacts. Open Science democratises knowledge, making research more accessible and fostering innovation, boosting the knowledge economy and strengthening EU competitiveness, as highlighted in the Letta report [10]. It emphasises the need for a comprehensive Open Science framework to incentivise researchers to make their work openly accessible, share data, and collaborate across disciplines. The report also highlights the critical role of public-private partnerships in fostering innovation, a goal that the MSCA supports by promoting international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral collaborations.

3,973

scientific datasets were made accessible and reusable during MSCA projects in Horizon 2020.

Source [22]

Sustainable research practices



Share of MSCA projects addressing societal challenges

Source: [13]

71%

of fellows plan to incorporate the MSCA Green Chapter measures in their projects, including teleconferencing, reducing energy and water consumption, and prioritising sustainable transportation options.

Source: [19]

Sustainable research practices aim to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 while boosting economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for European citizens. Although the MSCA operates through a bottom-up approach that allows researchers full freedom to choose their research topics, many MSCA-funded projects contribute directly or indirectly to advancing sustainability, climate action, and green innovation. This contribution occurs both through research content, with numerous fellows and consortia addressing issues such as clean energy, biodiversity, and circular economy, and through processes promoted by the programme, including sustainable research practices, responsible travel policies, and institutional support for greener research environments. This is evident from the numerous projects aligned with the EU's green objectives, as demonstrated by events like the MSCA European Green Deal Cluster Event in 2021, which brought together over 80 MSCA and EU-funded projects [18]. The initiatives showcased at these events highlight the MSCA's pivotal role in advancing climate-related research and its significant contributions to achieving the EU's sustainability goals. Process-wise, the MSCA supports the implementation of sustainable research practices through the MSCA Green Charter [20], which was introduced to guide researchers and institutions in minimising their projects' environmental footprint.

A study from 2023 showed that the majority of MSCA fellows (71%) planned to incorporate MSCA Green Charter measures in their projects, demonstrating a strong commitment to sustainability [19]. This includes adopting practices such as teleconferencing instead of unnecessary travel to meetings, reducing energy and water consumption, and prioritising sustainable transportation options. Moreover, the Green Charter's impact extends beyond individual projects, influencing institutions and research consortia. According to an analysis of 3,082 MSCA projects by the European Parliament, the programme not only directs 10% of its work toward the European Green Deal but also achieves a significant 27% participation rate from the private sector [35].

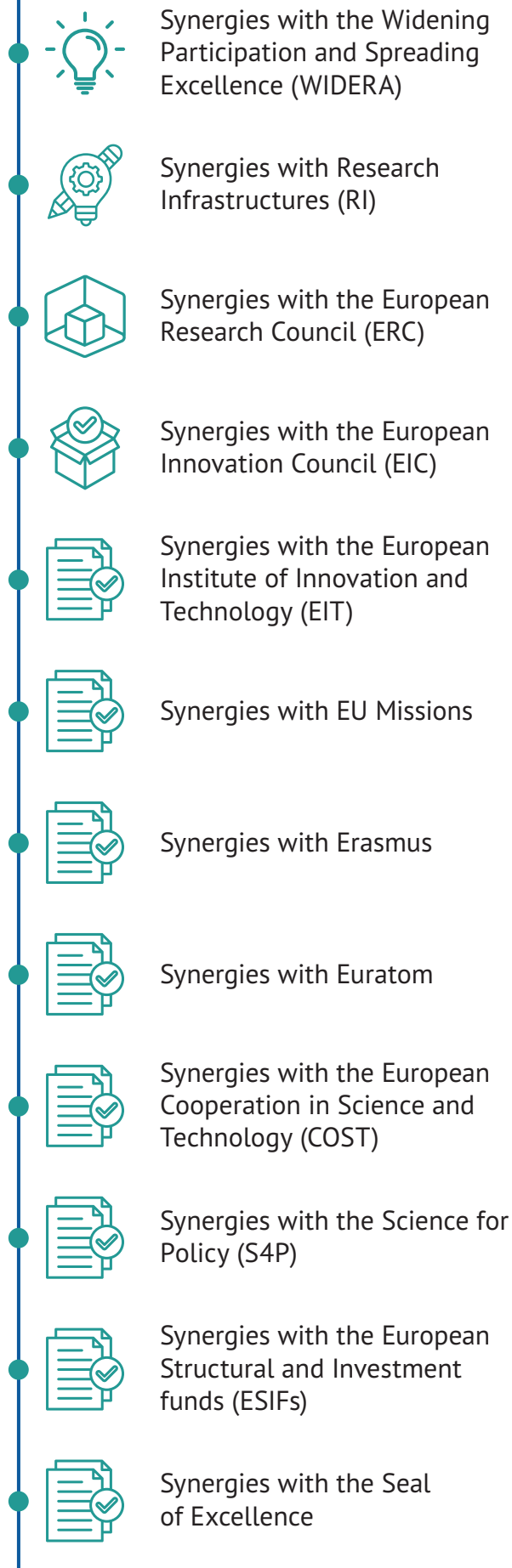
By supporting research that directly advances sustainable research practices, the MSCA plays a pivotal role in driving the green transition, fostering innovation-driven economic growth, and enhancing Europe's long-term sustainability and technological leadership, thereby strengthening its global competitiveness.

Synergies

The MSCA plays a key role in strengthening the ERA by fostering synergies with other EU funding programmes. These complementarities enhance the coherence and efficiency of R&I investments across Europe, ensuring that the MSCA's impact extends well beyond its direct beneficiaries. By aligning with the Cohesion Policy funding, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and national research support schemes, the MSCA contributes to building a truly integrated European ecosystem for research talent and excellence.

A key example of this strategic alignment is the Seal of Excellence, a quality label awarded to proposals that meet the MSCA's high evaluation thresholds but cannot be funded due to budget limitations. The Seal of Excellence allows these outstanding projects to seek support from alternative funding sources at the national or regional level, leveraging the MSCA's rigorous evaluation process as a trusted benchmark for excellence. This mechanism demonstrates the strong confidence that Member States and associated countries have in the MSCA, and the shared commitment to nurturing top research talent. As of 2024, 22 funding schemes across 14 countries provide complementary support to MSCA projects that hold the Seal of Excellence, expanding the pool of funded researchers and reinforcing the programme's reach and reputation [21].

By linking EU-level excellence with national and regional instruments, the MSCA acts as a catalyst for more integrated, coherent, and sustainable research investment across Europe. These synergies ensure that every euro invested in the MSCA contributes not only to the development of individual researchers, but also to a stronger, more connected European R&I landscape.



Conclusion: The MSCA's role in shaping European research

The MSCA stands as one of the EU's most successful and transformative instruments for strengthening research, innovation, and human capital. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that the MSCA not only elevates research excellence and mobility but also produces measurable economic, technological, and societal benefits. From supporting over 150,000 researchers since 1996 to achieving near-universal employability rates and advancing global collaboration, the MSCA has proven to be a cornerstone of the ERA.

By promoting open, sustainable, and inclusive research ecosystems, the MSCA embodies the values and ambitions of Horizon Europe, driving forward the EU's goals for the green and digital transitions, balanced talent circulation, and strategic competitiveness. Through initiatives such as the Green Charter, the Seal of Excellence, and intersectoral mobility programmes, the MSCA is building the foundations of a truly resilient and interconnected European knowledge society.

The MSCA has proven to be an exceptional predictor and incubator of strategic EU priorities, demonstrating that the programme's reliance on a bottom-up, curiosity-driven approach effectively identifies and invests in emerging, high-impact fields ahead of formal policy designation. Even before artificial intelligence (AI) became a central political priority for the EU, the MSCA was actively funding research in the field, supporting over 500 AI-focused research and training projects throughout the entire Horizon 2020 (2014–2020) period [34]. The acceleration of this support is remarkable: just halfway through the current Horizon Europe programme, the MSCA has already surpassed the previous total by funding more than 500 new AI projects, thereby providing essential career and training opportunities to over 2,000 researchers [34]. This impressive data confirms the MSCA's dual role as both an early-predictor system and a crucial talent pipeline, ensuring the EU develops the necessary scientific expertise to lead in rapidly evolving domains, such as AI.

However, to sustain the MSCA's impact, it is crucial to increase support to it. At the same time, the unprecedented rise in global demand, reflected in the record of 17,058 proposals in the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2025 call [25], underscores both the success and the limitations of current funding capacity. To maintain Europe's global leadership in R&I, it is essential to scale up investment in people, skills, and knowledge.

The Heitor report [7] calls for a total EU R&I budget of €220 billion under Framework Programme 10 (FP10) to ensure Europe's global leadership in knowledge creation and competitiveness. In line with this, the MCAA reiterates its call for a dedicated budget of at least €25 billion for the MSCA under FP10 [31]. To fully realise this potential, FP10 should be established as a stand-alone framework programme with a clear and autonomous structure for excellence-driven instruments such as the MSCA, supported by a dedicated MSCA Work Programme. Maintaining the MSCA's bottom-up approach is essential to support innovative, curiosity-driven research across disciplines, regions, and career stages. This flexibility fosters scientific excellence, empowers researchers to address emerging societal challenges, and strengthens Europe's resilience and competitiveness. Ensuring adequate MSCA funding will allow Europe to continue attracting, training, and retaining world-class talent and remain a global leader in research and innovation.

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