MCAA
MARIE CURIE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Report on the MCAA Annual Conference and General Assembly 2025

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Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA)

6 February 2026

Report on the MCAA Annual Conference and General Assembly 2025

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About the Marie Curie Alumni Association

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) is a global network with more than 24,000 members from over 150 countries, open to past and present beneficiaries of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) programme. The MCAA aims to connect the MSCA community, supporting career development initiatives for MCAA members and advocating for research and researchers.

Executive summary

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) Annual Conference and General Assembly 2025 took place in a hybrid format on 21 and 22 March 2025 in Kraków, Poland. The event gathered hundreds of MCAA members and non-members, both onsite and online, offering them a stage for engaging discussions, knowledge sharing, and networking.

Under the theme "Research and Innovation in a Rapidly Evolving World," the event featured two plenary sessions and 16 main parallel sessions, distributed across four blocks of four sessions each. In total, 18 sessions were held, covering a wide range of themes including Open Science, research assessment, mental health, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and science communication.

The hybrid conference brought together 532 registered participants, 303 of which attended onsite and 229 online. The programme involved 79 speakers, 19 moderators, and 16 rapporteurs. In the research-focused sessions, 47 posters were presented, and 81 lightning talks were delivered. All 18 conference sessions were recorded.

The conference was preceded by seven satellite events held on 19–20 March 2025, several of which were organised within EU-funded projects involving the MCAA. These events addressed key issues such as citizen science, mentorship, research proposal evaluation, and whistleblowing in academia. They also included a consultation workshop led by the MSCA Unit of the European Commission on FP10, as well as meetings for MCAA Chapter and Working Group Chairs.

Overall, the MCAA Annual Conference and General Assembly 2025 successfully fostered collaboration, reflection, and forward-looking debate. By convening a diverse international community and engaging with pressing challenges and emerging opportunities in research and innovation, the event reinforced the MCAA's role as a central platform for supporting researchers and promoting informed, inclusive, and impactful scientific practices.

1 Introduction

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) Annual Conference serves as a pivotal platform for contributing to researchers' career development and fostering collaboration and dialogue among stakeholders involved in shaping science policies. By bringing together researchers, professionals, policymakers, and representatives from European institutions, the conference facilitates the exchange of knowledge, ideas, experiences, and best practices.

The inclusive nature of the conference, encompassing all scientific areas, highlights its commitment to fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and promoting holistic scientific development. It recognises the importance of diverse perspectives and encourages cross-pollination of ideas across different research fields.

Moreover, the engagement with international stakeholders underscores the conference's global reach and impact. By attracting participants from beyond Europe's borders, the MCAA Annual Conference serves as a bridge for international cooperation and exchange, facilitating the establishment of collaborative networks and partnerships.

The MCAA Annual Conference plays a vital role in supporting the career development of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) community and in shaping science and research policies by providing a platform for stakeholders to discuss emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities. It enables policymakers to stay informed about the latest developments affecting the research community, and particularly the challenges faced by researchers. This will allow policymakers to make evidence-based decisions and formulate effective policies that drive progress and have a positive societal impact.

This report presents a comprehensive overview of the MCAA Annual Conference, covering its thematic focus, organisational framework, and key activities. Particular emphasis is placed on the member experience and the richness of the programme, highlighting how the conference's diverse sessions, discussions, and networking opportunities collectively contribute to professional development, community building, and policy-relevant dialogue.

2 The MCAA Conference 2025

2.1 Theme

The theme selected by the MCAA Board for the Annual Conference and General Assembly 2025 was “Research and Innovation in a Rapidly Evolving World." It reflects the MCAA’s commitment to addressing the dynamic challenges and opportunities facing the global research community. This theme emphasises the growing need for adaptability, collaboration, and creativity as science and technology advance at an unprecedented speed. It encourages participants to explore how researchers can navigate shifting societal, environmental, and technological landscapes while fostering innovation that contributes to sustainable and inclusive progress. By focusing on this theme, the conference aimed to inspire dialogue, share best practices, and strengthen the role of researchers and innovators in shaping a resilient future.

2.2 Scientific programme

The Annual Conference 2025 brought together hundreds of members and non-members, of the MCAA, both onsite and online, creating a dynamic space for meaningful dialogue, collaboration, and connection. Guided by the above-described theme, the conference offered a rich and diverse programme designed to inspire and engage participants from various disciplines. The agenda included satellite events and parallel sessions that delved into emerging topics, alongside thought-provoking keynote speeches and panel discussions featuring leading experts. Additionally, interactive workshops, poster presentations, and lightning talks offered the attendees opportunities to exchange ideas, showcase their research, and explore innovative solutions to global challenges. The combination of these activities fostered a vibrant atmosphere of knowledge-sharing and community building within the MCAA network.

The detailed conference agenda can be found here.

2.2.1 Opening ceremony

The opening of the MCAA Annual Conference 2025 set the tone for two days of reflection on the role of research and innovation in a rapidly evolving global landscape, firmly anchored in the legacy of Marie Skłodowska-Curie. Speakers repeatedly underlined that sustained investment in people, talent, and research careers is not only a scientific necessity but a strategic imperative for Europe's future.

In his welcome address, the MCAA Chair, Gian Maria Greco, recalled Skłodowska-Curie's call to multiply research fellowships "in the interest of science," framing it as a continuing moral responsibility. Against a backdrop of technological, social, and geopolitical transformation, the MSCA were highlighted as a cornerstone of Europe's research and innovation ecosystem, with its impact extending far beyond academia into industry, policy, and society at large.

A video address by Pia Alrenkilde Hansen, Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture at the European Commission, emphasised that research and innovation are essential to Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and capacity to address shared challenges such as climate change and public health. She highlighted the MSCA's three-decade track record of supporting researchers at all career stages and praised the MCAA as a global network of more than 23,000 members actively contributing to the EU's research policy.

Further perspectives were provided by Peter Gluckman, President of the International Science Council, who warned of growing global threats to science, including declining trust, misinformation, and political pressure. He stressed the importance of science diplomacy, research integrity, and better communication between science and society.

Representing the European Commission's MSCA Unit, Head of Unit Claire Morel reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to strengthening researcher careers. She highlighted the MCAA's contributions through mentoring initiatives, microgrants, policy engagement, and EU-funded projects, as well as the importance of community consultation in shaping future MSCA programmes, particularly at a critical moment as discussions begin on the next generation of EU funding frameworks.

Representing the host institution AGH University, Marek Korgol, Vice-Rector for Science and Technology. welcomed participants to Kraków and highlighted the university's commitment to academic excellence, innovation, and international collaboration. He underlined the relevance of the conference theme in addressing current research challenges and recalled AGH's historical connection to Marie Skłodowska-Curie, emphasising the symbolic importance of hosting the event in Poland.

Speaking on behalf of the local organising team, Ilona Uryha-Bugajska, Vice-Chair of the MCAA Poland Chapter, highlighted the significance of hosting the MCAA Annual Conference in Poland for the first time and thanked AGH University, partners, and volunteers for their dedication. She emphasised the conference as a moment to connect, learn, and grow together, drawing inspiration from Marie Skłodowska-Curie's words on understanding over fear, and invited participants to make the most of the programme and their time in Kraków.

2.2.2 Plenary sessions

The two plenary sessions framed the conference's core discussions by addressing both the strategic direction of Europe's research and innovation system and the conditions needed to support sustainable research careers. Together, they explored how long-term investment, strong funding instruments, and forward-looking policies must be complemented by healthy research cultures and high-quality supervision. By linking policy-level priorities with everyday research practices, the plenaries highlighted the people-centred approach required to strengthen Europe's research ecosystem in a rapidly evolving global context. The summary for each session can be read in their respective links in Table 1.

Table 1. Plenary sessions of the MCAA Annual Conference 2025

Plenary session 1
Shaping Europe's Future: Strengthening Research, Innovation, and Scientific Leadership
Plenary session 2
Celebrating Supervision: Shinning a light on the revised guidelines

In opening the first plenary session, Mostafa Moonir Shawrav, Executive Director of the Marie Curie Alumni Association, set the policy context by highlighting the critical moment Europe faces in shaping its research and innovation system. He stressed that decisions on the next Framework Programme will have long-term implications for funding structures, research careers, and Europe's global competitiveness, underscoring the need for a strong, independent, and well-funded research ecosystem. He concluded by inviting participants to actively engage in the debate and reaffirmed the role of the research community in advocating for science, innovation, and people-centred policies. Panellists Maria Leptin, President of the European Research Council (ERC), Paweł Rowiński, President of ALLEA, Manuel Heitor, Professor at Instituto Superior Técnico, and Moniek Tromp, President of the Initiative for Science Europe, reflected on the future of Europe's research and innovation ecosystem in a rapidly evolving global context. The discussion explored key challenges and opportunities ahead of the 10th European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10), with a focus on funding stability, researcher mobility, and the role of the ERC and the MSCA in safeguarding excellence and innovation. The session concluded that science must be seen not as a cost, but as a long-term investment in Europe's future.

During the second plenary session, policy officers Senem Sanal-Erginel and Annelies Van de Ven from the European Commission's MSCA Unit introduced the newly revised "MSCA Guidelines on Supervision." Developed through an extensive, year-long consultation process involving researchers, supervisors, institutions, and the MCAA community, the updated guidelines promote high-quality, collaborative, and supportive supervision throughout MSCA projects. Emphasising supervision as a shared responsibility within a broader research ecosystem, the session highlighted the guidelines as a practical, living tool to enhance researcher well-being, career development, and positive research culture—both within and beyond the MSCA framework.

2.2.3 Parallel sessions

Parallel sessions were proposed by Chairs of Working Groups and MCAA-participated projects. A total of 31 applications were received in the call for parallel sessions published on 26 September 2024. These were evaluated by the MCAA Board, which selected 16 for realisation (see Table 2 below). The summary for each session can be read in their respective links.

Table 2. Parallel sessions of the MCAA Annual Conference 2025

Parallel sessions
Parallel session slot 1
Unlocking Horizon Europe Funding
Bridging The Gap: What's Missing to Leverage AI In Research
The future of MSCA training: a climate conscious approach
From Truth to Trust: Science Communication in Modern Era
Parallel session slot 2
Advancing Research Careers: Lessons from ERA Actions
Bridging industry-academia in MSCA fellowships
Bridging Innovation & Policy: Strategic Communication
Empowering Women in Science Diplomacy for Global Innovation
Parallel session slot 3
Towards Fair and Inclusive Research Assessment
AI Ethics & Integrity for Responsible Research & Innovation
Insights and Impact on Researcher Wellbeing and Mental Health
Bridging Science, Art & Society in a Rapidly Evolving World
Parallel session slot 4
How is Open Science part of Research Assessment: New Metrics for Real Impact
The Future of Science: Bridging Careers, Collaboration & Innovation
Expats communities: science policy & international mobility
Diversity & Inclusion Strategic Planning Workshop

2.2.4 Member's research sessions

The research sessions remain a cornerstone of the MCAA Annual Conference, providing an essential platform for members to present their research, projects, and ideas. The sessions were held through two key modalities: poster presentations, where members displayed their printed posters in a dedicated exhibition area accessible throughout the conference, promoting continuous engagement and dialogue, and lightning talks, where participants delivered three-minute presentations to highlight their work. While the poster presentations were held only onsite in Kraków, the lightning talks were organised in a hybrid format, extending the reach and accessibility.

A total of 154 applications were received in the call for abstracts published on 23 December 2024. All submissions were evaluated by a scientific committee, composed of four MCAA Board members, two representatives from the MCAA Secretariat, and the Chair of the MCAA Communication Working Group. Following the evaluation process, 47 poster presentations, 52 onsite lightning talks, and 30 online lightning talks were selected for presentation. The accepted submissions reflected the breadth and diversity of research conducted by MCAA members, covering a wide range of disciplines and thematic areas. These were organised into the subcategories, as outlined below.

Table 3. Members' research sessions at the MCAA Annual Conference 2025

Topics	Number of presentations		
	Poster presentations	**Online lightning talks**	**Onsite lightning talks**
Career Development	2	1	4
Chemistry	6	1	6
Economics	1	-	1
Engineering	5	6	7
Environmental Sciences	2	1	4
Environmental Sustainability	1	2	2
Humanities and Arts	-	4	-
Life Sciences	13	7	16
Physics	5	1	3
Mathematics	-	1	-
Science Policy	2	1	-
Social Sciences	7	4	7
Sustainable Research Practices	-	-	2
TOTAL	**44**	**29**	**52**

2.2.4.1 Poster session

The poster session was held in the mezzanine area of the venue throughout the conference. Dedicated time slots were scheduled for presenters to stand by their posters, engage with attendees, and discuss their research with peers, experts, and evaluators. These interactive sessions not only facilitated in-depth scientific exchange but also served as the basis for the poster awards, recognising outstanding contributions in content and presentation quality.

Figure 1. Poster session at the MCAA Annual Conference 2025

2.2.4.2 Lightning talks

The lightning talks took place during a dedicated afternoon session on the first day of the conference. Designed to encourage concise and impactful communication, each speaker had three minutes to present their research and spark interest in their work. The talks were distributed across four onsite rooms and three online rooms and moderated by MCAA volunteers (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Division of the lightning talks by room at the MCAA Annual Conference 2025

Onsite lightning talks	
Topics	**Number of talks**
Room 1 (Moderator: Pablo Tomatis)	
Life Sciences	12
Room 2 (Moderator: Sebastian Dahle)	
Life Sciences	3
Environmental Sciences	6
Economics	1
Physics	3
Room 3 (Moderator: Dunja Jelenkovic)	
Social Sciences	6
Science Policy	1
Sustainable Research Practices	2
Career Development	4
Room 4 (Moderator: Nelson Garcia-Polanco)	
Chemistry	6
Chemical Engineering	8

Remote lightning talks	
Topics	**Number of talks**
Room 1 (Moderator: Fernanda Bajanca)	
Life Sciences	7
Mathematics	1
Physics	2
Chemistry	1
Room 2 (Moderator: Giulia Rizzo)	
Engineering	6
Environmental Sciences	1
Environmental Sustainability	2
Room 3 (Moderator: Pieter Verstraete)	
Humanities & Arts	4
Career Development	1
Social Sciences	4
Science Policy	1

When combining the poster and lightning talk sessions, the Life Sciences field emerged as the most represented, with 36 presentations. Social Sciences and Engineering also demonstrated strong engagement, with each section featuring 18 presentations. These were followed by Chemistry (13) and Physics (9). This distribution highlights the multidisciplinary nature of the MCAA Annual Conference, reflecting the diverse expertise and research interests of its members and their collective contribution to advancing science and innovation across fields.

2.2.5 Satellite events

Building on the success of the satellite events held during the MCAA Annual Conference 2024 in Milan, Italy, the 2025 edition dedicated an additional day to these events. This allowed for a better distribution of topics and schedules, giving participants more opportunities to attend multiple sessions. As a result, the MCAA Annual Conference 2025 was preceded by seven satellite events, held on 19 and 20 March 2025 (see Table 5 below).

Table 5. Satellite events of the MCAA Annual Conference 2025

Satellite events	Organiser
Day 1	
Citizen Science Engagement: Who Benefits and Why It Matters	European Citizen Science (ECS) project
Mentoring Festival: Celebrating the Spirit of Mentorship	PEP-CV & MCAA Academy
Day 2	
Improving Research Proposal Evaluations	Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) Working Group 1
Final Conference of the Pandora Box of Whistleblowing in Academia (PAOLA) project	Pandora Box of Whistleblowing in Academia (PAOLA) project
The Future of the MSCA	MSCA Unit
Iberoamerican Chapters' meeting	MCAA Andean-Caribbean, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Spain-Portugal Chapters
Internal MCAA Chairs of Chapter and Working Groups meeting	MCAA

2.3 MCAA General Assembly

The MCAA held its annual General Assembly (GA) on 22 March 2025 in a hybrid format after the Annual Conference sessions. The meeting saw significant engagement, with 380 registered attendees on the MCAA website and 311 members casting their votes on the presented documents (as explained below). In total, 172 members attended the GA in person, along with guests, members of the MCAA Secretariat, and representatives from the European Commission. The online platform recorded a peak of 50 simultaneous attendees.

Chaired by Gian Maria Greco, the GA addressed key organisational matters, including the approval of the minutes from the GA 2024 and the annual accounts for 2024. The assembly also featured presentations on the annual activities from 2024, delivered by the MCAA Secretary, Maria Magdalena Razalan, highlighting the Association's achievements and the launch of the CAPTAIN project.

MCAA Vice-Chair Corinne Portioli provided an update on the Chapters and Working Groups, introducing three new groups and acknowledging the newly elected and re-elected Chairs. Moreover, MCAA Vice-Chair Joaquin Capablo showcased successful activities organised by the Chapters and Working Groups. An open question and answers session allowed members to engage directly with the Board and Secretariat on various topics, including financial matters, microgrants, and the development of the new MCAA website.

The GA concluded with the announcement of the winners for the poster and lightning talk competitions held during the Annual Conference. The minutes of the General Assembly 2025 have since been uploaded to the MCAA website and are available to all MCAA members.

2.4 Social activities

Apart from the rich programme of sessions and satellite events, the MCAA Conference has a strong newtowrking and social component in its programme, to allow the socialisation of the members, their engagement with their Chapter and Working group colleagues, and the MCAA membership in general.

Several activities were organised to allow a environment of distraction and networking.

2.4.1 Curie-Vision talent show

A networking actiity inspired by the Eurovision talent show was hosted at the night of 19 March 2025. This was intended for Board members, Chapter and Working Group Chairs, and invited guests. During the weeks preceding the conference, members were invited to prepare a presentation to showcase their talent, as singing, dancing, or comedy, for example. The event was hosted at the Klub Studio, a brewery from the AGH University.

2.4.2 Kraków sightseeing Walking Tours

The MCAA, in partnership with the City of Krákow, offered two sightseeing walking tours for attendees at no cost. The guided tours happened on 20 and 23 March 2025, and counted with around 100 participants. The tour started at the AGH University and finished at the city centre, taking around 150 minutes.

2.4.3 MCAA Gala Dinner

The MCAA Gala Dinner is already a tradition in the MCAA Annual Conference and it is a highlight of the event. This year, the Gala Dinner was hosted on 21 March at the Stara Zajezdnia Kraków by DeSilva restaurant. The event counted with the participation of around 200 guests. The Gala Dinner was also the stage for the MCAA Awards.

Figure 2. Gala Dinner at the MCAA Conference

2.5 Sponsorships and partnerships

For the Annual Conference 2025, five sponsorship agreements were successfully signed and implemented, contributing significantly to the event's success. These agreements included a co-hosting agreement with the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), an academia sponsorship package with the University of Padua, a physical silver sponsorship package with Politecnico di Bari, a physical event sponsorship package with the Agencia Gallega de Innovación, and a virtual event bronze sponsorship package with VenusRoses Labsolutions.

Feedback received from sponsors was positive. Notably, sponsors indicated a strong interest in exploring a more extensive collaboration agreement with the MCAA in the future. This positive engagement underscores the value of the MCAA's events for stakeholders and presents promising opportunities for future partnerships and conference hosting.

Figure 3. Selected sponsor booths at the Annual Conference

2.6 Conference organisation

The conference was organised by a dedicated conference task force, composed of members of the MCAA Board, Secretariat, and Poland Chapter, all contributing with their expertise and dedicated efforts to ensure smooth planning and execution. Additionally, an experienced event manager, a team of volunteers, and various service providers were engaged to provide logistical support and technical expertise throughout the conference.

The conference task force was created on 4 September 2024. At the onset, it outlined a comprehensive list of tasks to address the diverse needs relevant for conference organisation related to design and communication, sponsorships, onsite coordination, and the event platform. Subsequently, weekly online meetings were scheduled from 4 September 2024 to March 2025. During each meeting, a detailed agenda was followed, and minutes were recorded to document key discussions and decisions. This structured approach facilitated effective collaboration and guaranteed the successful execution of all designated tasks.

Figure 4. Volunteers and selected members of the Annual Conference Taskforce.

Below, Table 6 shows a timeline detailing the key milestones of the conference organisation and their respective months.

Table 6. Timeline of the key milestones of the conference organisation

Event/task	Date
Publication of the call for hosts	14/02/2024
Deadline for the submission of host candidacies	30/04/2024
Communication of Poland as the chosen host	09/06/2024
Creation of the conference task force	25/06/2024
Weekly taskforce meetings	17/07/2024–14/02/2025
Publication of the conference theme	30/08/2024
Publication of the call for session proposals	26/09/2024
Publication of the call for satellite events	26/09/2024
Publication of the results of the call for session proposals	23/12/2024
Publication of the call for MCAA Awards	23/12/2024
Publication of the call for posters and lightning talks	23/12/2024
Publication of the call for Micro Internal Travel Grants for the Annual Conference 2025 (MITG-AC2025)	23/12/2024
Publication of the call for Micro General Assembly Grants (MGAG)	23/12/2024
Publication of the MITG-AC2025 results	13/01/2025
Publication of the MGAG results	29/01/2025
Publication of the conference programme	11/02/2025
Opening of conference registration	14/02/2025
Satellite events	19–20/03/2025
MCAA Annual Conference	21–22/03/2025
Gala Dinner	21/03/2025
MCAA General Assembly	22/03/2025

3 Participation and Engagement

A highlight of the 2025 Annual Conference was the strong engagement among the attendees. The conference provided a platform for centralising all the information from the conference, which become a central point for engagement among the attendees due to the functionalities to book 1-one-1 and group meetings. The platform offered a range of services that improved the registration process, participant check-in, and engagement among participants.

Table 7 below provides detailed statistics on conference attendance and engagement via the platform.

Table 7. Key numbers from the event platforms used for the MCAA Annual Conference editions 2023–2025

Measured criteria	MCAA Annual Conference edition		
	2023	2024	2025
Number of participants	422	468	532
Onsite participants	275	311	303
Online participants	147	157	229
Speakers	91	67	79
Organisations represented	249	270	371
Online meetings requested	48	50	-
Chat messages exchanged	135	336	2475
Sponsor meetings	45	38	-
Job postings	-	-	43
Discussion topics posted	-	-	74
Messages on the community board	-	-	1737
Meet-ups created	-	-	51
Private messages	-	-	2475
Photos shared	-	-	162
Active users	-	-	522
App download rate	-	-	76%

Participants organised 51 meetups with groups of attendees, which were mainly country or region related, but also covered general interests and other purposes. Besides this, attendees exchanged almost 2500 messages via the platform, posted 43 job opportunities, and posted more than 1700 community messages. These numbers reflect the vibrant atmosphere during and after the conference.

The attendance statistics highlight the conference's success in fostering engagement and networking. Of the 532 participants, 303 participated onsite in Kraków, while 229 joined remotely. Nonetheless, online participants could actively interact with peers, initiating numerous requests for virtual meetings and exchanges through the platform. These dynamic interactions underscore the vibrant engagement among attendees, effectively bridging both physical and virtual platforms. Moreover, compared to the 2024 conference, the 2025 edition attracted a larger number of attendees, surpassing the previous edition by 10%.

The conference participants represented over 371 different organisations worldwide, spanning universities, research institutes, non-profit organisations, and companies. This broad representation significantly enriched the event, fostering extensive knowledge sharing and enhancing collaborative opportunities among participants.

The participants' career stages and positions were also diverse, with a broad representation of professionals from various sectors and backgrounds, as shown in Figures 1–4 below.

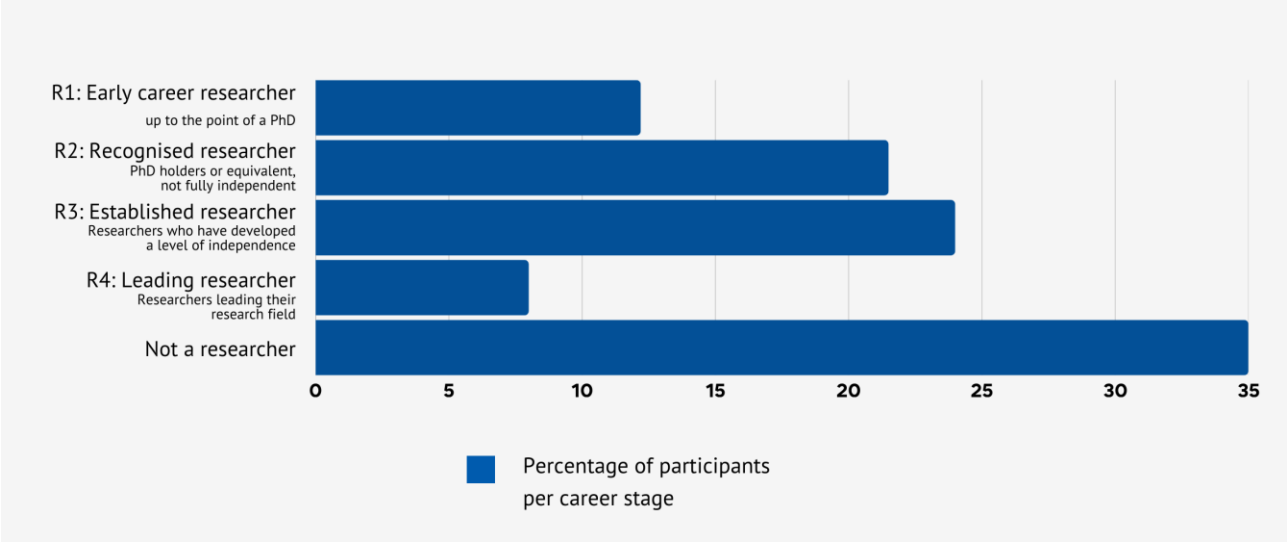

Figure 1. Participants' career stages

As can be seen above in Figure 1, the majority of conference attendees worked in research, ranging from PhD students to professors. From these, most participants identified themselves as either recognised (R2) or established researchers (R3), ranging from postdoctoral scholars to researchers with a significant degree of autonomy. Participants who are not currently researchers made up 35% of the attendees.

When analysing attendees by their current position (Figure 2), most participants were postdoctoral researchers, accounting for almost 40% of the attendees. This reflects the central role of early-career researchers in the conference. There was also a notable representation of research and project managers (approximately 20%), as well as faculty members at various stages of their academic careers, including associate professors, assistant professors, and full professors.

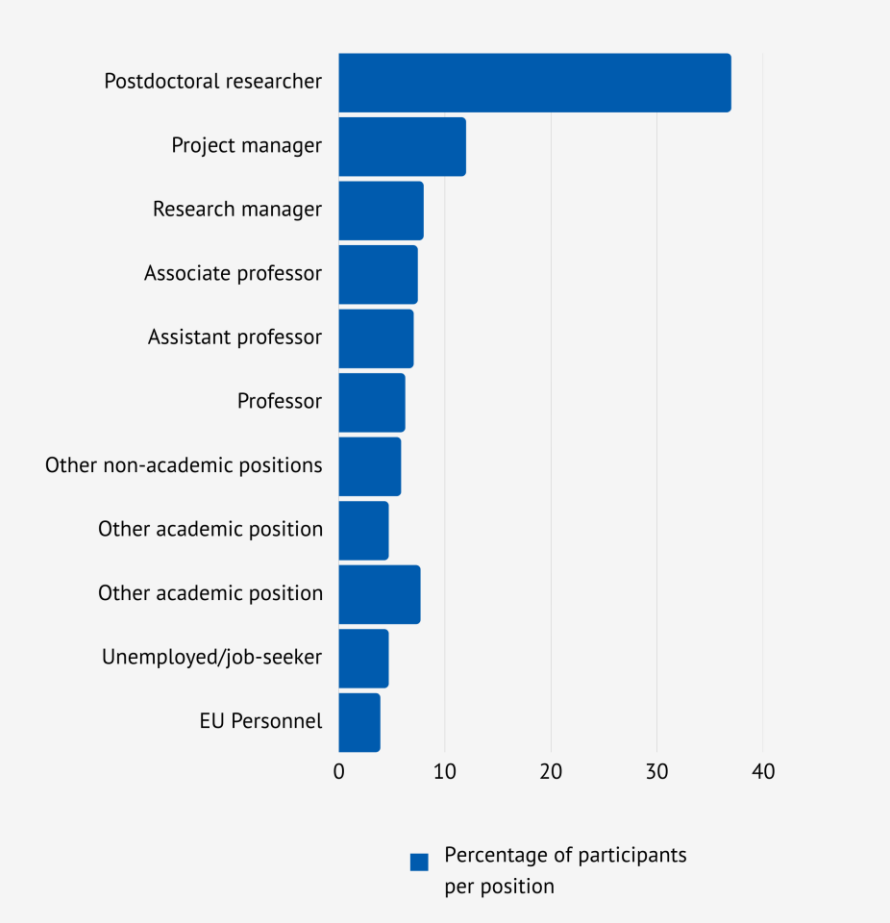

Figure 2. Participants' job positions

Importantly, the conference also drew participants from non-academic backgrounds, as well as those in other academic roles, unemployed and/or job-seekers, and EU personnel, highlighting the diversity of professional trajectories. This broad mix of career stages and roles enriched the event by fostering networking, mentorship, and exchange of best practices not only within academia but also across sectors.

It is important to highlight the strong participation of EU personnel from the MSCA Unit, the Research and Executive Agency (REA), and other units or Directorate Generals, which demonstrates the conference's importance as a channel for dialogue between the European Commission and the MCAA community. Additionally, nearly 35% of the conference attendees were not researchers. This indicates a broader interest and engagement from professionals outside the traditional academic sphere.

When examining participants by field of research and expertise (see Figure 3 below), the largest group came from Engineering and Technology, accounting for nearly a quarter of all attendees. This was followed closely by Life and Medical Sciences and Social Sciences, both of which were strongly represented, reflecting the interdisciplinary scope of the conference.

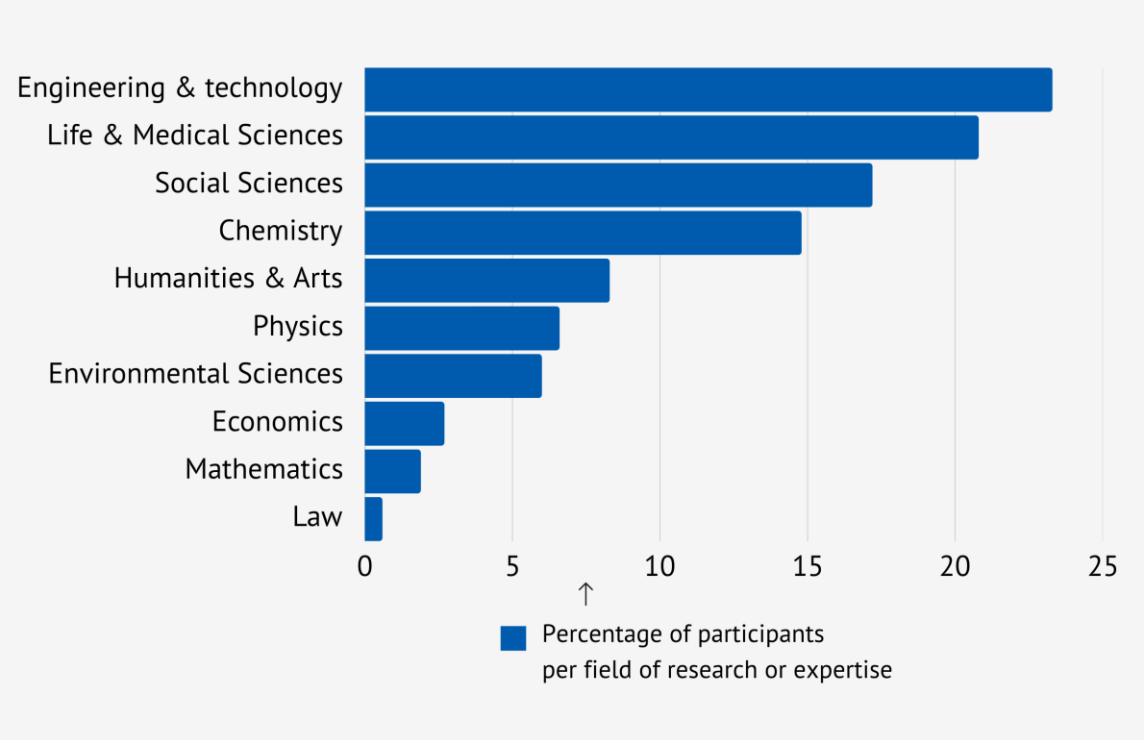

Figure 3. Participants' fields of expertise

Chemistry and Humanities and Arts also featured prominently, highlighting the balance between natural sciences and broader cultural or societal perspectives. Meanwhile, fields such as Physics, Environmental Sciences, and Economics were represented to a lesser but still meaningful extent. Mathematics and Law accounted for only a small fraction of participants, underscoring their more specialised presence within the research community.

Overall, the diversity across disciplines reflects the interdisciplinary appeal of the conference, bringing together participants from both STEM and non-STEM backgrounds, much like the varied representation seen among MSCA fellows. The statistics reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the conference, acknowledging that tackling complex challenges like science diplomacy and sustainable development often requires collaboration and insights from diverse disciplines.

The conference successfully attracted an international audience. With participants representing 38 countries of residence and 52 nationalities, the event demonstrated substantial global reach, fostering valuable opportunities for international networking and knowledge exchange.

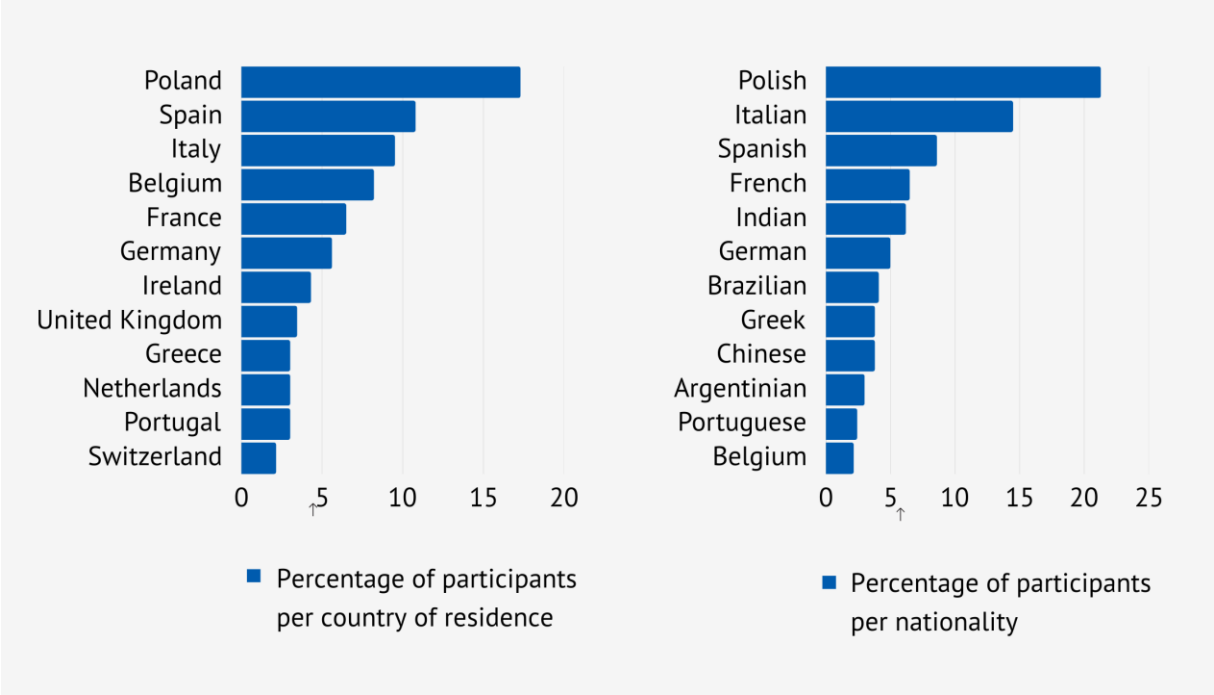

Figure 4. Participants' countries of residence and nationalities

As anticipated, participants from or based in the host country, Poland, constituted the largest group at the conference, accounting for nearly one-fifth of all attendees. Close behind, Spain contributed to 11% of participants, while Italy (9%) and Belgium (8%) also featured prominently. These figures underline the conference's ability to resonate across Europe, attracting significant engagement from countries with established research and innovation communities.

Looking at participants by nationality, the picture remains consistent with the MSCA fellowship trends: aside from Poland, the largest contingents were Italy, Spain, France, and Germany, all of which represent major hubs for European researchers. Importantly, the conference also demonstrated a marked global reach, drawing a substantial number of participants from outside Europe, particularly from India (5.7%), Brazil (3.8%), and China (3.5%). This diversity highlights the event's capacity to bring together a truly international research community, bridging European scientific strengths with global perspectives.

While most participants were based in Europe, the conference welcomed attendees from around the world. Asia accounted for 3.5% of participants, the Americas for 3%, and Africa for 0.43%, the latter being the least represented region. Unfortunately, several MCAA members from Africa were unable to attend due to visa denials or difficulties in the application process, which limited their representation.

4 Support and recognition of members

4.1 MCAA microgrants

The MCAA offered financial support through microgrants for its members, Chapter and Working Group Chairs, and Board members.

The General Assembly Micro Grant call (GMG), aimed at MCAA members, was opened on 23 December 2024, receiving a total of 130 applications. 50 members were awarded the grant to join the conference and GA onsite.

For Board members and Chapter and Working Group Chairs, the dedicated Micro Internal Travel Grants (MITG) call opened on 3 December 2024, and a total of 60 microgrants were awarded.

Some indication of the success of the support given to the members can be measured by their feedback. Below are some examples of testimonials from members who were awarded a microgrant to attend the conference and GA.

"It was great to be able to enjoy (fully) again the MCAA GA. Even if this year I did not propose any sessions, I was able to contribute to the organisation as a judge in the flash talks in chemistry and chemical engineering. Overall, it was as usual a great experience. Great venue, the restaurant was good and around the corner, gala dinner was amazing as usual. Regarding novelties, the app was a great way to keep a paper free agenda (greener MCAA for the sustainable side), I had an amazing time during the CurieVision, I think it is a great idea which should be further advertised, as well as the free public transport, the best new feature ever."

"This year, I participated for the first time in the Marie Curie Alumni Conference, held in Krakow. It was a very interesting experience, as I was able to learn more about the dynamics of the

"I had a wonderful few days in Krakow in this MCAA 2025 conference. I learned a lot from the various sessions in the conference. Most importantly, the session talking about MSCA Doctoral Networks and the COST action was very helpful to me to look for future funding opportunities. The session talking about supervision guidelines is unique and extremely beneficial, because it talked about general issues during supervision and made me aware of some very unique and fundamental points in student supervision. On top of all the sessions, the networking is unsurpassed for this conference. I was able to chat with many different attendees from various backgrounds. What most awarding to me is the lightning talks, in which I leared a lot of different topics and what other MCAA members are doing. The gala dinner was amazing. I personally would say that MCAA 2025 is a wonderful conference

association, meet the people managing it, and interact with other participants. Although I didn't meet many people from Social Sciences, I was able to learn about the career development pursued by other scientists and about job opportunities in Europe if I return, such as ERC projects. I really liked that they organized a dinner and walking tours as additional social activities to the conference."

"I have attended MCAA Conference and General Assembly for the first time. It was a wonderful experience to gather MSC holders around the globe on one platform. It is a great opportunity to share and gai the ideas and networking skills by attending such an event. I was greatly inspired by the people who are presented their ideas on their current research and innovation activities to make implementation for sustainability and environmental and economic aspects."

"It was my first time attending the Annual Conference and General Assembly in person. The experience has been really great and enriching. I am particularly grateful I had the opportunity to take part to the satellite event on the future of MSCA, and share my experience as a former MSCA Global fellow. Hearing the stories of my fellow MCAA members, I felt that despite we come from different disciplines, countries, and institutions, we all share the same desire to give back, produce meaningful impact and contribute to make MSCA even better. I appreciated the interest from the European Commission and the effort of MCAA to make this possible!
On the actual conference, my main take away is the realization of how Open Science, Responsible Research Assessment, and Sustainable Research Careers are all interconnected. Although these are topics I am already very passionate about, thanks to the interesting panel discussions, questions from the audience, and informal chats with other attendees, I have now become more aware of and I am already looking forward to MCAA 2026."

"I am extremely grateful for the opportunity provided by the MGAG grant to attend the MCAA Annual Conference in Krakow. Without this financial support my attendance would not be possible. The experience was truly inspiring, offering valuable insights into the work behind the scenes of the association. It made me realise the privilege of being part of this alumni network, creating new connections with outstanding scientists in different disciplines and beyond my field of expertise. The event also raised my awareness of the vast opportunities available, from research grants to careers in policy, and the crucial work being done at the European level... Given the current economic and historical context, attending such an event held even greater significance. I am beyond thankful the organisers for making this experience possible."

"Attending AC 2025 was a truly rewarding experience, offering a vibrant blend of scientific learning, professional development, and community building. The sessions were thoughtfully curated, showcasing pioneering research, emerging technologies, and innovative solutions across disciplines. I particularly appreciated the opportunity to interact with leading experts and peers in an engaging, intellectually stimulating environment. These conversations not only broadened my perspective but also opened up possibilities for future collaborations. The conference also featured insightful workshops and panel discussions that enhanced my understanding of current trends worldwide.
I am especially grateful to the organizers for the Microgrant, which made it possible for me to participate and benefit from this unique

their interconnection and their crucial importance for the future of research in Europe.
At the end of these four days, I come home with a lot of learnings, a big list of new LinkedIn contacts, and full of enthusiasm to contribute to the life of the MCAA!"

"Attending the AC 2025 and the Marie Curie Alumni General Assembly was an incredibly enriching experience. It provided a unique platform to reconnect with fellow Marie Curie alumni, share research insights, and explore collaborative opportunities across disciplines and countries. The sessions were not only intellectually stimulating but also inspiring, highlighting the global impact of MSCA-funded research. One of the key benefits was the opportunity to engage with policymakers, industry leaders, and early-career researchers, fostering a sense of community and reinforcing the value of international scientific cooperation. The event strengthened my network and reaffirmed my commitment to advancing science with societal impact."

event. It was also a great venue for exchanging ideas, meeting fellow early-career researchers, and learning about career and funding opportunities. The warm and inclusive atmosphere provided a genuine sense of scientific community. I am already looking forward to next year's Annual Conference and to contributing even more actively."

"The AC 2025 event far exceeded my expectations. Not only did the committee members explain the progress of the work and future plans in detail, but they also answered my questions in detail. I was very happy to have the opportunity to communicate with other scholars and the committee. I also met chapter members from Denmark and China. Many of us had only communicated online before, and this was the first face-to-face event. I found all the people to be very welcoming and eager to help and share. For example, we organized a discussion group on ERC applications, and to this day, there are still enthusiastic discussions and experience sharing in the group. In addition, the local members also took us on a walking tour of the university and the old town, they were so beautiful and attractive. I hope to attend GA and the Society's events again because I really enjoy the atmosphere here. This is also the first time since the pandemic that I have strongly felt that Marie Curie Fellows are a united and friendly group."

4.2 MCAA Awards and Prizes

4.2.1 MCAA Awards 2024

A key highlight of the 2025 MCAA Annual Conference in Kraków was the celebration of outstanding talent within the community through the MCAA Awards 2024. These awards recognise members who have demonstrated exceptional dedication, innovation, and impact over the past year. Following a call for applications and a selection process conducted by an independent Award Committee, the winners were announced at the conference during the Gala Dinner on 21 March 2025.

The Awards are the following:

- MCAA Career Award: Reserved for a member demonstrating a career of excellence, scientific impact, and outstanding research experience.
- MCAA Best Innovator Award: Recognises the development of new services, products, or methodologies through a unique innovation approach.
- MCAA Social Impact Award: Honours a member whose work provides solutions to social challenges and creates a positive, proven impact on communities.
- MCAA Outstanding Contributor Award: Celebrates the spirit of volunteerism by rewarding a member who has contributed significantly to the internal development and growth of the MCAA.

Each awardee received a €1,000 prize (granted as a microgrant) to support their continued professional development. The 2024 awardees are listed below in Table 8:

Table 8. MCAA awardees 2024

MCAA Award	Awardee
Innovator Award	Muhammad Majid Butt
Social Impact Award	Arnau Pujol Vallribera
Career Award	Yuzhu Pearl Li
Outstanding Contributor Award	Eugenio Otal

An article was published about the MCAA awardees 2024 on the April 2025 issue of the MCAA Newsletter, which can be read here.

4.2.2 Best posters and lightning talks

The poster and lightning talk awards are granted to MCAA members who present their work at the Annual Conference through these means. The best poster presentations were voted by the conference attendees through an online form open during the conference.

The top three most voted presenters received an award. These are listed below in Table 9:

Table 9. Awarded posters and their presenters

Winning poster presentations	
Presenter	**Title of the poster presentation**
Ítala Marx	Uncovering the Role of Extra Virgin Olive Oil Phenolics in Inhibiting Advanced Glycation End-Product Formation Across Different Cooking Methods
Ilona Uryga-Bugajska	Hydrogen and Ammonia – Molecules that will Power the World
Furong Cai	Bridging Knowledge Management and Artificial Intelligence for Sustainability

The lightning talks were assessed by evaluators attending each session and ranked based on the criteria listed in Table 10:

Table 10. Evaluation criteria for the lightning talks

Criteria	Scores	Description
1	1–5	Clarity of communicating research objectives, methodology, and results.
2	1–5	Ability to engage the audience, maintain enthusiasm, and deliver a confident presentation.
3	1–5	Use of graphics, readability, and effectiveness of slides.
4	1–5	Significance of the research within its field and its broader impact.
5	1–5	Compliance with the 3-minute time limit.

For the lightning talks, seven presenters, out of whom four presented onsite and three online, were awarded. Table 11 below lists the awarded presenters.

Table 11 Awarded lightning talks and their presenters

Onsite lightning talks		
Room	**Presenter**	**Title of the lightning talk**
Room 1: Life Sciences	Mengyang Liu	AI-enhanced optical coherence photoacoustic microscopy for 3D cancer model imaging
Room 2: Life Sciences	Marta Niedzicka	Viral diversity in agriculture: Why do we look at wild plants?
Room 3: Career Development	Yinka Somorin	Empowering Researchers in Africa: Reimagining career development for early career researchers in Africa
Room 4: Chemistry	Li Ma	Chaos Makes Catalysts Cheaper?
Online lightning talks		
Room 1: Life Sciences	Berenice Bernal Juarez	Tailoring cryopreservation protocols for chicken sperm of poor freezing breeds
Room 2: Environmental Sciences	Xiuming Zhang	Global ammonia emission could be halved with cost-effective measures
Room 3: Career Development	Dora Koller	From Pain to Progress: Bridging Academic and Entrepreneurial Research in Endometriosis

4.2.3 MCAA European Chapter Award

The MCAA European Chapter Award is presented to a European Chapter that has demonstrated outstanding activity and engagement with its members. The award recognises Chapters that maintain consistent participation in MCAA initiatives, actively contribute to the Association's goals, and respond regularly and effectively to requests from the MCAA Secretariat and Board.

The award went to the Denmark Chapter, chaired by Julia Chiossi, for its activities in 2024. An article about the Award was published in the April 2025 issue of the MCAA Newsletter, which can be read here.

4.2.4 MCAA Non-European Chapter Award

The MCAA non-European Chapter Award is presented to a Chapter outside Europe that has demonstrated outstanding activity and engagement with its members. Like the European Chapter Award, the award recognises Chapters that maintain consistent participation in MCAA initiatives, actively contribute to the Association's goals, and respond regularly and effectively to requests from the MCAA Secretariat and Board.

The Award was given to the Andean-Caribbean Chapter, chaired by Sergio Manrique. A highlighted activity was the organisation of the 3rd MCAA Latin American Conference, held in Cartagena, Colombia in October 2023. An article about the Award was published in the April 2025 issue of the MCAA Newsletter, which can be read here.

4.2.5 Working Group Award

Similar to the Chapter Awards, the Working Group Award recognises a Working Group that has demonstrated exceptional activity and meaningful engagement within the MCAA community.

In 2024, the Research Funding Working Group, chaired by Ashwani Kumar Tiwari, stood out for its remarkable collaboration with several other Chapters and Working Groups, effectively fostering cross-community initiatives. Through its efforts to connect ideas and organise impactful events focused on research funding, the group successfully engaged both members and non-members, expanded outreach to external audiences, and significantly contributed to raising global awareness of the MSCA. An article about the Award was published in the April 2025 issue of the MCAA Newsletter, which can be read here.

5 Key takeaways

The presentations and discussions in the MCAA Annual Conference 2025 plenaries and parallel sessions were rich, providing the audience with the opportunity to discuss various relevant issues and propose solutions or action lines.

Below is a summary of the main takeaways and conclusions of the conference, grouped in thematic areas.

Horizon Europe funding

European research funding offers extensive opportunities for researchers worldwide, supporting career development across academic and industrial sectors. Young researchers benefit from diverse programmes that provide training, mobility, and collaborative research possibilities, with initiatives such as COST Actions attracting strong participation from early-career scientists. The MSCA fellowships also serve as an important stepping stone, with many fellows leveraging their research experience and data to successfully secure ERC grants, demonstrating the strong career-shaping impact of European funding schemes.

Sustainable training

The MSCA Green Charter offers important guidance on sustainability but would benefit from more practical, enforceable tools to support implementation. Project managers play a central role in integrating sustainability into proposal development and project delivery, especially as institutional travel restrictions prompt new approaches to managing mobility. Accessible training and support for researchers and project managers are needed to build sustainability competencies, while ongoing cross-institutional mapping of current practices will help shape future MSCA strategies.

Advancing research careers

Translating EU policy directives into practical actions requires strong collaboration across diverse stakeholders and governance levels, as demonstrated by the SECURE project. Persistent challenges, especially for researchers from third countries, such as social security gaps, visa barriers, and short-term contracts continue to hinder mobility and diversity. Greater proactive engagement in policy advocacy is needed from both individual researchers and national institutions, supported by stronger academic governance and greater involvement of postdoctoral researchers. Clear, accessible communication of research and its societal impact is essential for securing public support and funding. Across all efforts, fostering a culture of kindness and empathy remains vital for building inclusive, respectful, and effective research environments.

Industry-academia collaboration

Finding appropriate non-academic partners remains a significant challenge, underscoring the need for clearer engagement and representation of non-academic stakeholders in consultations and programme design. Greater flexibility is required to accommodate differing national systems and the more dynamic planning which is typical outside academia. Evaluators should focus on the broad value of non-academic experience, recognising that transferable skills need not align directly with a project's research topic. Non-academic training is highly valued by participating researchers and should be further encouraged. Improved communication strategies are also necessary, as MSCA remains insufficiently recognised beyond academic circles, requiring coordinated outreach by the European Commission, the Research Executive Agency (REA), National Contact Points (NCPs,) and beneficiaries.

Communicating with policymakers

Effective science-policy communication requires a two-way exchange in which scientists understand policymakers' needs and tailor their messages accordingly. Early engagement with diverse experts and stakeholders enhances policy relevance, while communication must be adapted to the appropriate governance level: EU, national, or local. Clear, concise, and transparent briefs supported by evidence, visuals, and acknowledgement of uncertainties are essential. Meaningful policy exchange relies on cumulative evidence and long-term persistence, supported by training and mentorship that help scientists develop impactful policy writing skills. Building trust through curiosity and sustained relationships, particularly with bureaucratic stakeholders, is critical for maintaining productive science-policy dialogue.

Diversity

Addressing the lack of data on women in leadership roles is essential for advancing gender equity in science diplomacy, making systematic data collection a priority. Strengthening mentorship programmes, expanding training opportunities, and investing in confidence-building initiatives are key measures to support women's progression into influential diplomatic positions. Universities play a critical role in preparing future scientists for diplomacy by offering interdisciplinary education that equips them with the skills needed for global scientific cooperation. Early-career mentorship, in particular, is central to career development and remains a crucial factor in fostering the next generation of leaders in science diplomacy.

Research assessment

Research assessment frameworks must evolve to recognise diverse career paths, including those beyond traditional academia, ensuring that all forms of contribution are valued. Meaningful reform depends on coordinated national policies and institutional practices, supported by networks such as CoARA and the active participation of universities. Greater attention is needed to evaluate the quality of research supervision and mentorship, which has long been undervalued in assessment models. As artificial intelligence tools become more integrated into evaluation processes, their use must be balanced with human judgment to maintain fairness and integrity. Ongoing challenges include aligning funding mechanisms with new assessment criteria and overcoming institutional resistance to change.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

AI ethics is becoming increasingly central to responsible research, requiring patience and active feedback as guidelines and policies continue to evolve. Integrating ethical principles into AI development is both a scientific duty and a regulatory necessity, while global governance efforts must advance through international cooperation to establish common standards for safety and transparency. Ensuring that AI aligns with societal values and human rights depends on strong collaboration between researchers and policymakers, who play a critical role in guiding the responsible use of these technologies.

Mental health

There is increasing evidence and support for systemic improvements in how research institutions address mental health, with academic communities and networks such as the Researcher Mental Health Observatory (ReMO) and the MCAA positioned to act as key drivers of change. Effective policies must be grounded in robust data to ensure the long-term sustainability of mental health strategies. Promoting open dialogue and encouraging researchers to share their experiences are essential steps in reducing stigma and fostering more compassionate, supportive academic environments.

Science and art

Creative practices, such as design and art, provide powerful ways to v37isualise complex scientific concepts and engage broader audiences. Meanwhile, citizen science and co-creation help build public trust and enhance the relevance of research through meaningful community involvement. Research managers play a crucial role in facilitating these interdisciplinary collaborations, particularly during proposal development and stakeholder engagement. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of such initiatives requires their integration into institutional strategies, supported by appropriate funding and policy frameworks. Engaging with artistic and cross-disciplinary approaches also benefits scientists personally, fostering creativity, empathy, and broader perspectives, and ultimately shaping how research is conceived, developed, and shared.

Open Science

MCAA members actively contribute to Open Science through diverse initiatives, supported by rapidly expanding training opportunities over the past decade. Emerging pilots led by the Open and Universal Science (OPUS) project are helping institutions and funders adopt best practices, while research organisations increasingly drive changes in Open Science and research assessment. These reforms are further reinforced by CoARA, which works to ensure that early-career researchers benefit from more transparent, fair, and forward-looking evaluation systems.

Career development

Career pathways must become more fluid across academia, industry, and entrepreneurship to meet global challenges and support sustainable innovation. Industrial doctorates help bridge research and real-world application, while advances in AI and digital health require ethical, inclusive, and user-driven approaches. Entrepreneurial thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strong soft skills are increasingly essential for researchers, supported by institutions that value non-linear, impact-focused careers. Building inclusive ecosystems and promoting gender equity remain key to ensuring that innovation is both representative and resilient.

Diaspora

Prioritising brain circulation through collaboration and mentorship offers a more effective approach than repatriation for sustaining contributions to home countries. Strengthening professional networks and fostering grassroots, community-driven initiatives are key to empowering diaspora scientists and driving policy solutions that reflect their real needs.

6 Conclusions

The MCAA Annual Conference and General Assembly, flagship event of the Association, was held in Kraków, Poland, on 21–22 March 2025. The event gathered hundreds of members and non-members, together onsite and online, offering a stage for engaging discussions, knowledge sharing, and networking. Under the theme "Research and Innovation in a Rapidly Evolving World," the conference featured satellite events, inspiring keynotes and panel discussions, and workshops.

The conference left a feeling of energisation and inspiration, and reminded both organisers and participants of the strength of community. The 2025 edition wasn't just a series of panels and presentations, but a celebration of shared purpose, seeing researchers, innovators, and alumni come together across disciplines, borders, and sectors to imagine a better, more inclusive future for science. The positive momentum was palpable, and the warmth of connection undeniable.

7 Acknowledgements

The MCAA extends heartfelt gratitude to all speakers, organisers, guests, partners, sponsors, and task force members for their invaluable contributions to the resounding success of the MCAA Annual Conference and General Assembly 2025.

It especially acknowledges the AGH University and its various departments for hosting the conference in their campus.

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In conclusion, the MCAA extends sincere thanks to all contributors who made the MCAA Annual Conference 2025 remarkable. Their collective efforts helped shape contributions to science policy, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and support researchers' career development, advancing scientific knowledge and sustainable progress.

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