



# Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)



## Update on the MSCA: Opportunities for Doctoral Education

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European Commission

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Unit

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Marie  
Skłodowska-Curie  
actions

# Outline

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- What are the features of MSCA Doctoral Networks? (by Sohail Luka)
- How do you like them to be in the future? (by the audience):
  - **Topic 1: MSCA DN Structure/Architecture**
  - **Topic 2: Flexibility & Simplification**
  - **Topic 3: Evaluation Criteria (if time permits)**

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# **Part 1:**

## **Main Features of the MSCA Doctoral Networks**

# Horizon Europe

## EURATOM



**Budget: EUR 95.5 billion**

# Pillar I: Excellent Science

## Reinforcing and extending the excellence of the Union's science base

### European Research Council

Frontier research by the best researchers and their teams

**€16 billion**

### Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions

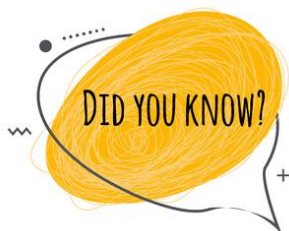
Equipping researchers with new knowledge and skills through mobility and training

**€6.6 billion**

### Research Infrastructures

Integrated and inter-connected world-class research infrastructures

**€2.4 billion**



**20 Nobel Prize winners** either backed by or involved in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions between 2012 and 2024



# Key features



**Researchers' training, skills and career development (all stages of career)**



**Excellent research in all domains (bottom-up approach)**



**International, inter-sectoral & interdisciplinary mobility**



**Attractive working and employment conditions**



**Structuring impact on organisations through excellent programmes**




**Strong collaboration beyond academia**

**+ gender equality, open science, and green transition**

# The Actions

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50% of Budget goes to Doctoral Networks (EUR 3.3 billion)



Doctoral  
Networks  
*Doctoral  
programmes in  
and outside  
academia*

Postdoctoral  
Fellowships

*Support to  
excellent  
postdoctoral  
researchers*

Staff  
Exchanges

*Support for  
research and  
innovation staff  
exchanges*

COFUND

*Co-funding  
doctoral and  
postdoctoral  
programmes*

MSCA and  
Citizens

*Public outreach  
events (Night)*



European  
Commission

# What is a Doctoral Network (DN) ?



- ✓ One consortium
- ✓ Proposing a research project
- ✓ With interlinked individual PhD research projects
- ✓ For doctoral candidates



# Implementation modes



*All 3 modes compete within the same scientific panels*

# Eligible participants

## Who can apply?

- ✓ Any Legal Entity worldwide
- ✓ But not all applicants are eligible for funding

**Min. 3 entities from 3  
= MS/AC  
of which 1 from a MS  
as beneficiary**

*No minimum / maximum number of  
**Associated Partners***



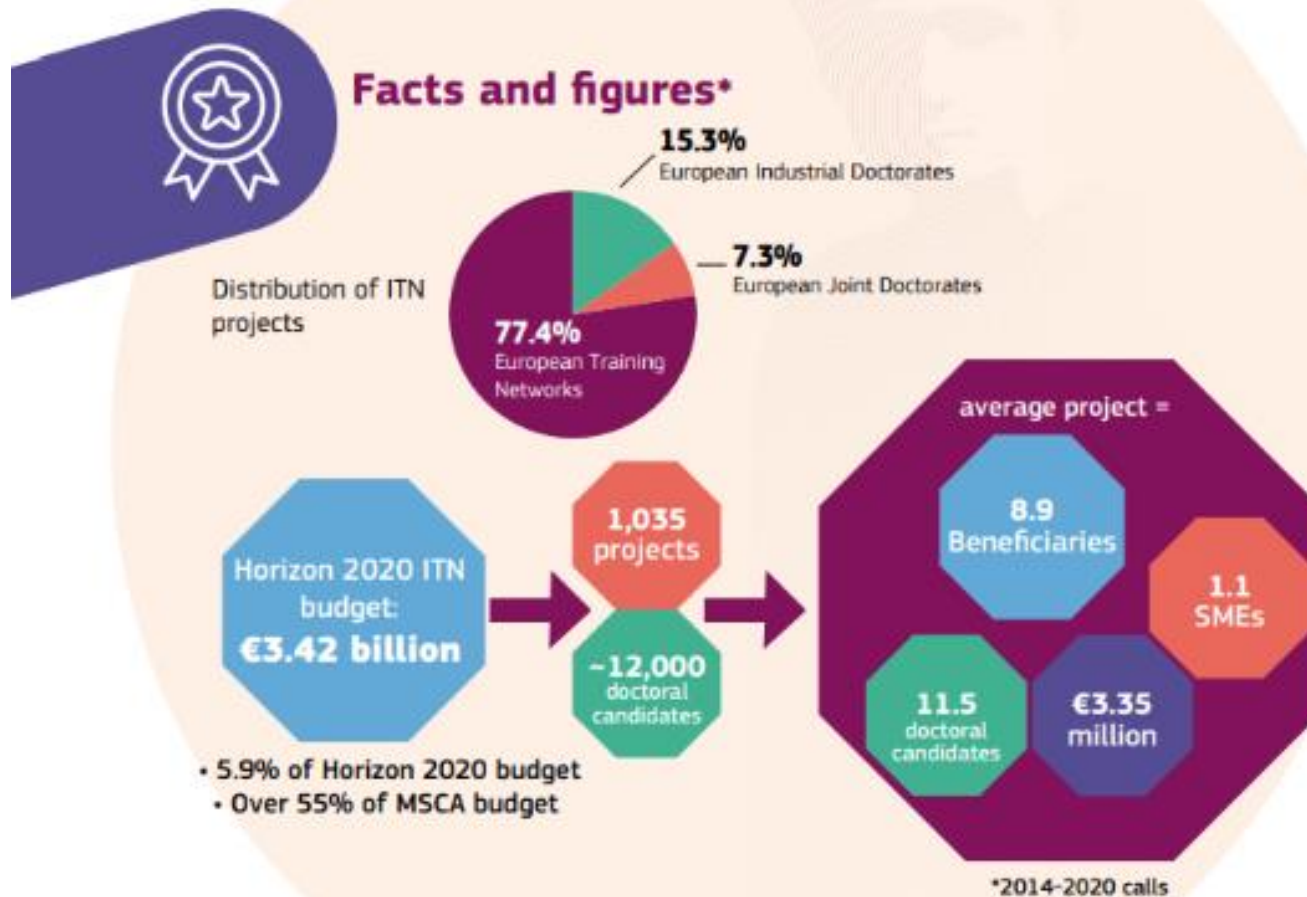
## Consortia

- ✓ Universities, research institutions and research infrastructures
- ✓ Businesses including SMEs
- ✓ Other socio-economic actors

# Doctoral Networks – participant types

	Beneficiaries	Associated Partners
Academic/Non academic	✓	✓
Signatories of the Grant Agreement	✓	
Recruitment of researchers	✓	
Training and/or hosting of seconded researchers	✓	✓
Participation in Supervisory Board	✓	✓
Directly claim costs	✓	

# Key Facts & Figures from H2020



# Eligible size and duration

## Size

- ✓ Up to **540 person-months** for all type of actions



## Duration

- ✓ **Proposal:** max. 48 months for DN and DN-ID
  - *incentive for DN-JD **60 months***
- ✓ **Fellowship:** 3 to 36 months for DN and DN-ID
  - *incentive for DN-JD **48 months***
- ✓ **Secondments:** worldwide, any sectors, up to 1/3 of the fellowship duration for Standard DN
  - incentive for DN-ID and DN-JD **no secondment limitation** – for DN-ID min **50% in non-academic sector**

# Doctoral Networks – 2025 Features



## STANDARD DN

- Up to **540 person-months**
- Project duration: max. **48 months**
- **Fellowship**: min 3 / max 36 months
- **Secondments**: worldwide, **up to 1/3** of the fellowship duration



## DN-ID

- **No limitation for secondments**
- **Min 50% in the non-academic sector**
- Non-academic sector as **beneficiary or associated partners**
- Academic and non-academic organisations jointly supervise



## DN-JD

- Project duration: max. **60 months**
- **Fellowship**: min 3 / max 48 months
- **No limitation for secondments**
- Enrolment in a **joint/double or multiple PhD**
- Joint admission, selection, training, supervision, governance

# Eligible researchers

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## Doctoral candidates

- ✓ **No doctoral degree** at the date of recruitment
- ✓ **Open, merit-based and transparent recruitment** procedure
- ✓ **Enrolled in a PhD** from min 1 EU MS/AC
- ✓ Any nationality
- ✓ fulfill the **MSCA mobility condition:**

DCs must not have resided or carried out their main activity in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their recruitment date.

# MSCA-DN Strategic Value

## Being a Trend-setter

- Emphasis on transferable skills.
- Emphasis on integrating non-academic sector.
- Career development plan.
- Guidelines on supervision.
- Green Charter.

## Structuring Effects

- Positive impact lasting beyond the lifetime of the project.
- Structuring the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.
- Ripple effect catalysing institutional culture.

Structuring Effects



Doctoral Networks

Being a Trend setter

Attractiveness of European Programmes

## Attractiveness of European Programmes

- Wider access to courses, expertise and infrastructure.
- Skills for innovation and long-term employability.
- International and interdisciplinary experiences widening career prospects.
- Better visibility of European doctoral programmes.



# Overview of Evaluation Process



Evaluation is carried out by independent external experts under the responsibility of REA



# Doctoral Networks – Award Criteria



Criteria	Excellence	Impact	Implementation
Sub-criteria	Quality and pertinence of the project's <b>research and innovation objectives</b>	Contribution to <b>structuring doctoral training</b> at European level and strengthening European innovation capacity	Quality and effectiveness of the <b>work plan</b> , assessment of <b>risks</b> , and appropriateness of the <b>effort</b> assigned to work packages
	Soundness of the proposed <b>methodology</b>	Credibility of the measures to enhance the <b>career perspectives</b> of researchers and contribution to their <b>skills development</b>	<b>Quality, capacity and role of each participant</b> , including hosting arrangements and extent to which the <b>consortium as a whole</b> brings together the necessary expertise
	Quality and credibility of the <b>training programme</b>	Suitability and quality of the measures to <b>maximise expected outcomes</b> and impacts, as set out in the <b>dissemination</b> and <b>exploitation</b> plan, including <b>communication</b> activities	
	Quality of the <b>supervision</b>	The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected <b>scientific, societal</b> and <b>economic</b> impacts	
Weighting	50%	30%	20%

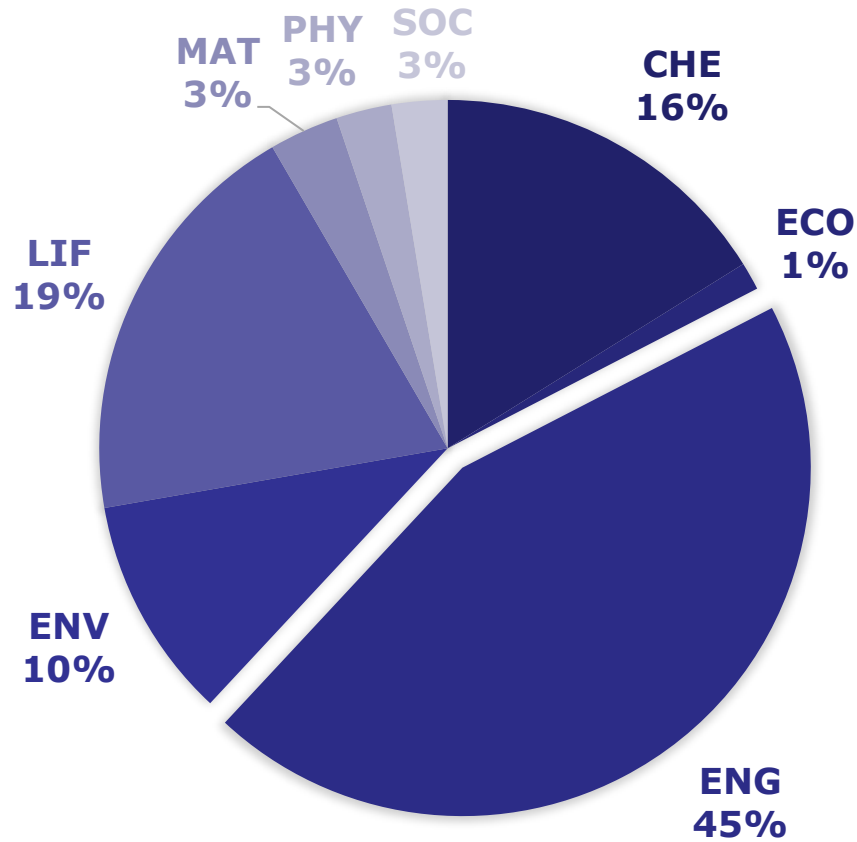
# MSCA Industrial Doctorates

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- Doctoral candidate spends minimum 50% of fellowship period at premises of non-academic partner
- Doctoral candidate is co-supervised by academic and non-academic supervisors

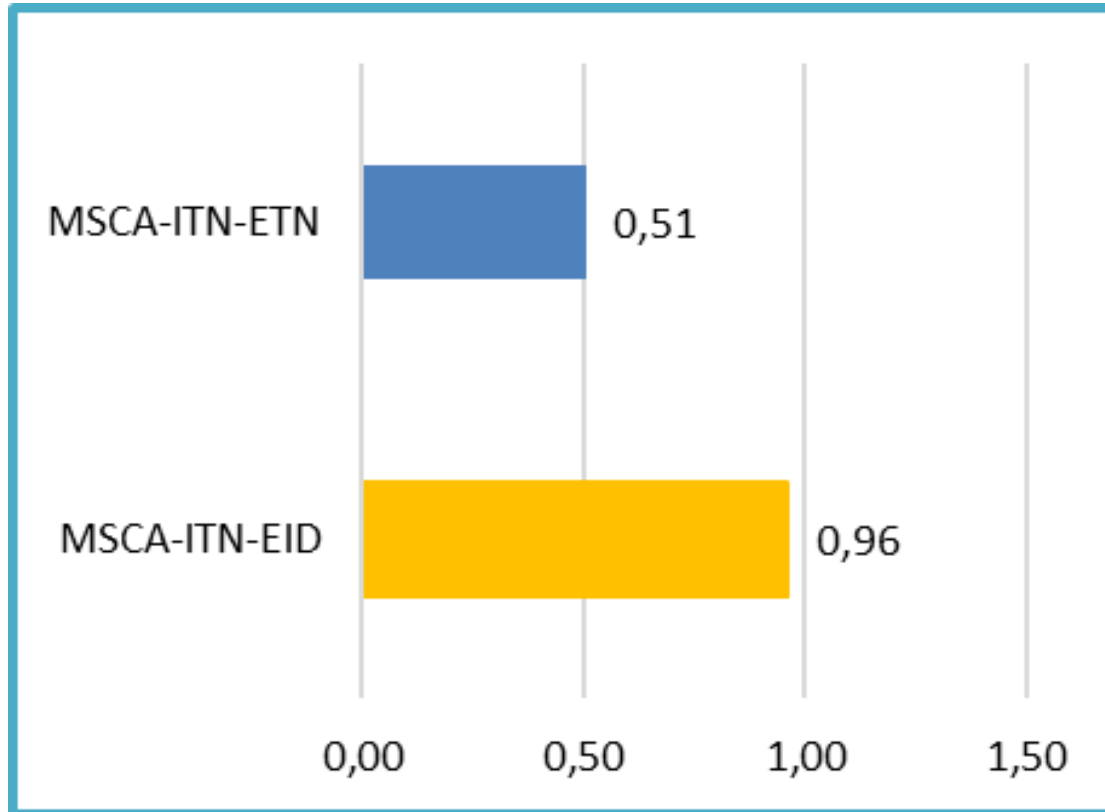
# Interest in ID is field specific

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# IDs have a Higher Innovative Output

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Number of patents per flagged project for innovation  
(118 projects) (normalized to project relative size).

# More employment in the non-academic sector

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## Share of former MSCA fellows in non-academic sector 2 years after end-of-fellowship:

- **Post-Doctoral Fellows: 11%**
- **MSCA Doctoral Networks (all types): 49%**
- **MSCA Industrial Doctorates: 77%**

Source (Published, January 2023):

*Results of MSCA end of fellowship questionnaires (H2020) - Publications Office of the EU ([europa.eu](https://europea.eu))*

# MSCA Joint Doctorates (JD)

- ***Highly integrated*** international, inter-sectoral and multi/interdisciplinary collaboration in doctoral training
- Selection, admission and evaluation of doctoral candidate ***jointly*** done by the degree-awarding institutions
- Joint ***supervision***
- Lead to ***Joint, Double or Multiple*** doctoral degrees

# Value of JD for Doctoral Candidate

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- **Broadening access** to academic inputs and research resources, including infrastructure.
- **Joint Supervision:** Getting the best of both worlds.
- Amplifying **professional and social contacts:** Future collaborations; future employment.
- ***Formal acknowledgement of international and interdisciplinary experiences*** providing more attractiveness to employers.



# Value of JD for Institutions

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- Establishing close and **stable collaborations** at institutional level.
- Leveraging synergies and **reciprocal access** at institutional and co-supervisors levels.
- Contribute to attractiveness and international ***visibility of doctoral programmes.***

# Joint Doctorates are Strategic for the EU

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- ***Structuring effects for universities***; deep collaboration culture and administrative infrastructure becoming part of the DNA of Higher Education Institutions.
- Ripple effect triggering ***evolution of Human Resources policies*** in participating institutions.
- Powerful catalyst for ***structuring the EHEA and the ERA***.
- Attracting ***international research talents*** to Europe and creating sustainable trans-national collaborative links.

# Challenges of Joint Doctoral programmes

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- Depending on the country, **rules** governing doctoral education can be **at national, regional or university level**; or a combination of all those.
- A **trans-national mosaic of rules**, regulations but also cultures especially at university level.
- Selection, admission, fees, PhD committee composition, course requirements, duration of PhD, defense format/language, format of the diploma, .....
- So, the above rules set by each EU Member State and by each University are **not always compatible** when it comes to Joint Degrees.

# Types and distribution of DN projects in the 2024 calls for proposals



*Participants implement  
a joint research  
programme*

**Overall: 88%**



*Doctoral training with  
the non-academic sector*

**Overall: 6%**



*Doctoral programme to  
deliver joint degrees*

**Overall: 6%**



# MSCA Doctoral Networks

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**Budget (DN-2025): EUR 597.80 million**



**Call opening : 28 May 2025**

**Call deadline: 25 November 2025**

# Proposal preparation DN 2025 Call Info Day



**When: June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Where: ONLINE via RTD platform**



Horizon Europe - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Doctoral Networks 2025 - Call info day

- Join us live or watch the recording on this [platform](#).
- To attend, simply sign up or log in. By clicking the “I’m interested” button, the event will be added to your list
- Review all the [call related documents](#) available as of **May 28<sup>th</sup>**
- Send us your questions before May 29<sup>th</sup> at [www.Slido.com](https://www.Slido.com) with the code **#DN2025**
- For more details on the programme, please consult the [MSCA 2025 Call Info event page](#).

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## **Part 2:**

# **Next Generation MSCA Doctoral Networks**

# Feedback received on MSCA DN

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- Stakeholders Consultations + Mid-term evaluation study + Draghi/Letta/Heitor reports:
  - Continuity: Keep the basic features of MSCA DN (see next slide)
  - More funding
  - Significant simplification and flexibility



# The « untouchable » features (according to feedback)

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- Bottom-up: No prescribed field or topic
- Focus on excellence
- Emphasis on transferable skills
- 3 I's: Inter-sectoral, Inter-disciplinary, International
- Secondments
- Working conditions
- Career Development Plan

# Topic 1: Structure/Architecture of MSCA DN

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- Maintain a consortium structure? Consortium size and eligibility criteria? Project length and maximum Fellowship duration?
  - What are we discussing at the European Commission?
  - What do you think?

## Topic 2: Flexibility and Simplification

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- Less prescription + more trust = Flexibility
  - 3 separate implementation modes (DN, ID, JD)?
  - Secondment plan; how rigid should it be?
  - ID: Minimum 50% stay at non-academic
  - What are we discussing at the European Commission?
  - What do you think?

## Topic 3: Evaluation Criteria

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- Should the current evaluation criteria/weightings be maintained? More weight given to Excellence? Make Excellence the only criterion (as in the ERC)?
  - What are we discussing at the European Commission?
  - What do you think?

# Thank you!

**# HorizonEU #MSCA**



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