



Horizon Europe Programme

Guide for Applicants

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions - Doctoral Networks (DN)

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Disclaimer

This guide aims to support potential applicants to the DN 2021 call. It is provided for information purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation of any applicable legal sources. Neither the European Commission nor the European Research Executive Agency (or any person acting on their behalf) can be held responsible for the use made of this guidance document. Note that the guidance provided in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement shall prevail in case of discrepancies



History of changes

Version	Date	Change	Page
1.0 2021	22.06.2021	▪ Initial version (2021 call)	

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1. Doctoral Networks – A few definitions

Important Note:

All main definitions (not included in this guide) are available in the [MSCA part of the Work Programme](#). Links to other official documents (e.g. [Horizon Europe General Annexes of the Work Programme](#), [Horizon Europe Unit Model Grant Agreement](#), [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#)) are provided in the [call page on the Funding and Tenders Portal](#).

Structure of Doctoral Networks:

All Doctoral Networks have the objective of promoting international, inter-sectoral and multi/inter-disciplinary collaboration in doctoral-level training in Europe. They also have the objective of training highly-skilled doctoral candidates and stimulating entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation in Europe and beyond. There are three different modalities:

1. Doctoral Networks (DN): Doctoral Networks aim to meet the objectives mentioned above by enrolling candidates in a doctoral programme and a joint research project.

2. Industrial Doctorates (DN-ID): Industrial Doctorates aim to meet the objectives of DN but go further by requiring the mandatory involvement of the non-academic sector in the doctoral training so that the skills acquired better match public and private sector needs.

3. Joint Doctorates (DN-JD): Joint Doctorates also aim to meet the objectives of DN but go further by proposing the creation of joint doctoral programmes, leading to the delivery of joint, double or multiple doctoral degrees recognised in at least two EU Member States (MS) or Horizon Europe Associated Countries (AC).

The overall EU contribution per Grant Agreement is limited to a maximum of:

- 360 person-months per network for regular DNs
- 540 person-months per network for DN-IDs and DN-JDs.

Failure to respect these limits will result in the proposal being declared ineligible.

Note that the expert evaluators will carefully consider the requested number of person-months with respect to the coherence of the proposal and the capacities of the hosts.

Joint/double/multiple doctoral degree: A joint degree refers to a single diploma issued by at least two higher education institutions offering an integrated programme and recognised officially in the countries where the degree-awarding institutions are located. A double or multiple degree refers to two or more separate national diplomas issued by two or more higher education institutions and recognised officially in the countries where the degree-awarding institutions are located. The final double or multiple degree must be awarded by institutions from at least two different MS and/or AC countries.

Supported researchers must be doctoral candidates, i.e. not already in possession of a doctoral degree at the date of the recruitment.

Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will not be considered eligible.

Date of Recruitment means the first day of the employment of the researcher for the purposes of the action (i.e. the starting date indicated in the employment contract or equivalent direct contract).

Mobility Rule: researchers must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their recruitment date. Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays, and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention¹ are not taken into account. For international European research organisations², international organisations, or entities created under Union law, recruited researchers must not have spent more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their date of recruitment in the same appointing organisation.

Note that the mobility rule applies to the (first) beneficiary where the researcher is recruited. In case of multiple recruitments, the mobility rule only applies to the first recruitment.

40% rule: in the context of the consortium's composition, applicants should take into account that for all DNs, no more than 40.0% of the total EU financial contribution may be allocated to beneficiaries in the same country or to any one International European Research Organisation or International Organisation. This concerns the total amount of the budget allocated to a country/international organisation and not the number of person-months. Proposals not complying with this condition will be considered ineligible. The 40.0% is determined at proposal submission stage on the basis of the maximum grant amount (beneficiaries will not be penalised for the non-execution of person-months by other beneficiaries during the project implementation).

National Contact Points (NCPs) have been set up across Europe and beyond by the national governments to provide information and personalised support to Horizon Europe applicants in their native language. The mission of the NCPs is to raise awareness, inform and advise on Horizon Europe funding opportunities as well as to support potential applicants in the preparation, submission and follow-up of the grant applications. For details on the NCP in your country, please consult the National Contact Points page.

2. Doctoral Networks in a nutshell

Minimum Number of Participating Organisations			
Role in the network	DN	DN-ID	DN-JD

¹ 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

² 'International European research organisation' means an international organisation, the majority of whose members are MS or AC, whose principal objective is to promote scientific and technological cooperation in Europe.

Beneficiary	3 ³	3 ³ 1 academic; 1 non-academic ³	3 ³ doctoral degree-awarding ⁴
Associated Partner⁵	No minimum	No minimum	No minimum

Summary of Tasks				
Role in the network	Recruitment of Researchers	Training and/or Hosting of Seconded Researchers	Participation in Steering Board	Directly Claims unit contributions
Beneficiary	✓	✓	✓	✓
Associated Partner	x	✓	✓	x

Minimum Country Participation in a DN	
Implementation Mode	Country of beneficiaries
Regular Doctoral Networks (DN)	Minimum: 3 different countries EU MS or AC with at least one of them established in an EU MS.
Industrial Doctorates (DN-ID)	
Joint Doctorates(DN-JD)	
<p>Additional beneficiaries can be established in EU MS, AC or low- and middle-income non-associated countries included in the list of countries eligible for funding provided in the Horizon Europe Programme Guide. Legal entities established in countries not listed in the Programme Guide will be eligible for funding if their participation is considered essential for implementing the action by the granting authority.</p> <p>Associated Partners can be established anywhere in the world and from any sectors.</p>	

³ Applications must be submitted by a consortium including at least three independent legal entities, each established in a different EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country and with at least one of them established in an EU Member State. Should none of them be entitled to award a doctoral degree, a university or a consortium/grouping of academic/research institutions entitled to award a doctoral degree must be added to the project as an associated partner or an associated partner linked to a beneficiary.

⁴ An applicant from the academic sector, which has transferred the right of awarding a doctoral degree to a consortium/grouping of academic/research institutions to which it belongs to, is also eligible.

⁵ It is recommended that the number of associated partners is reasonable and commensurate with the size of the network.

Overview

		DN	DN-ID	DN-JD
BENEFICIARY (IES)	Minimum Number of beneficiaries	3	3	3
	Minimum MS or AC	3	3	3
	Minimum MS (beneficiaries)	1	1	1
	Academic sector	No restrictions	Minimum 1	Minimum 3 entitled to award doctoral degrees; at least 2 (beneficiaries/ associated partners/ associated partners linked to a beneficiary) conferring the degree established in MS/AC.
	Non-academic sector	No restrictions	Minimum 1	No restrictions
	Max no. of person months	360	540	540
	Max 40.0% budget for 1 country/international organisation	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Beneficiary or associated partner/associated partner linked to a beneficiary awarding PhD	Mandatory (beneficiary or associated partner/ associated partner linked to a beneficiary)	Mandatory (beneficiary or associated partner/ associated partner linked to a beneficiary)	Mandatory for minimum 3 entities (beneficiary or associated partner/ associated partner linked to a beneficiary), of which 2 in MS/AC	
Joint/double/multiple award of PhD	Optional	Optional	Mandatory	
Joint/double/multiple degree – letter of pre-agreement	N/A	N/A	Mandatory	
Joint supervision for researchers	Encouraged	Mandatory (from the 2 sectors)	Mandatory	

Researchers enrolment in the PhD	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Stay in non-academic sector	Encouraged	Min. 50% of fellowship duration	Encouraged
Secondments	≤ 1/3	≤ 1/3	≤ 1/3
Associated partner: Letter of Commitment	Mandatory		
Ranking lists	8 (Scientific) panels		
Budget	~€403 Million		

3. Recruitment and Eligibility of Researchers

3.1 Recruitment

All Doctoral Networks (DN, DN-ID, DN-JD)

- Every beneficiary must recruit, host at their premises and supervise at least 1 researcher;⁶
- Researchers are recruited for minimum 3 and maximum 36 months. They must be enrolled in a doctoral programme and should work full-time on the project.

Industrial Doctorates (DN-ID) and Joint Doctorates (DN-JD)

- A researcher is recruited separately by each beneficiary for the period of time they spend there.

For DN-ID, recruited researchers must spend at least 1/2 of their time in the non-academic sector and max 1/3 in secondment.

For DN-JD, all recruited researchers must be enrolled in a joint, double or multiple degree awarded by at least two participating organisations from MS/AC.

Important Note: In order to respect all DN rules (e.g. all beneficiaries recruit; max 1/3 in secondment) and DN-ID/JD specific rules (e.g. min 50% in the non-academic sector for DN-ID), **multiple consecutive recruitment** should be foreseen. The location of the premises of the recruiting beneficiary will have an influence on the fellow's salary in view of the different country correction coefficients⁷ (see Table 1 of the MSCA Work Programme part 2021-2022). It may also affect the eligibility of the proposal (see 40.0% rule and mandatory recruitment rule by each beneficiary above). Please see the relevant FAQs for examples.

Note that the mobility rule (see point 1 above) applies to the (first) beneficiary where the researcher is recruited.

The beneficiaries will be responsible for the selection and recruitment of the eligible researchers. An important aspect of the Commission's policy towards researchers is to improve their working and living conditions and to promote mobility in order to open up new perspectives for research careers within Europe. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions aim to act as a catalyst in this respect. The beneficiaries will therefore be required to meet certain conditions relating to the publishing of vacancies (e.g. on [Euraxess portal](#)), recruitment and length of appointment of researchers and which should be in line with the principles set out in [the European](#)

⁶ Beneficiaries can use Associated partners linked to them to host and supervise researchers. Note, however, that only beneficiaries can recruit researchers.

⁷ Applicants are invited to consider that in DN-ID and JD fellows may have to spend long periods in different countries with different country coefficients. If not duly considered at proposal stage by choosing the most appropriate recruitment option (or the most appropriate recruiting beneficiary), this might have negative implications on the capacity of the fellows to afford the cost of living during their mandatory secondments.

[Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.](#)

Note that a beneficiary may not recruit a researcher via an employment agency.

3.2 Eligible Researchers

All researchers recruited in a DN must be **doctoral candidates** (i.e. not already in possession of a doctoral degree at the date of the recruitment) and undertake transnational mobility (see the mobility rule definition in section 1). Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will not be considered eligible.

For all recruitments, the eligibility of the researcher will be determined at the date of their **first recruitment** in the action. This status will not evolve over the lifetime of the action, even if they are re-recruited at another beneficiary.

3.3 Secondments

Secondments of the researcher to other beneficiaries and associated partners/associated partners linked to other beneficiaries – from academic and/or non-academic sectors- are encouraged, but should be relevant, feasible and beneficial for the researchers, and in line with the project objectives. They are an integral part of the research proposal and must be described in the proposal. Any subsequent changes in the secondment plan during the project implementation must be pre-approved by the European Research Executive Agency (REA).

Normal practice during secondments is for the recruited researchers to keep their contract with the sending institution, which also pays their travel and subsistence expenses (e.g. accommodation, visa, residency card) from the institutional unit contributions. During their secondment, researchers receive supervision and training at the premises of the receiving beneficiary, its associated partner linked to a beneficiary, or associated partner. The premises of these institutions must be independent from each other and therefore the secondment must involve physical mobility of the fellow, with specific supervision arrangements. Secondments should be differentiated from short visits, i.e. of a few days.

Secondments in DN of six months or less which require mobility from the place of residence **must** be financed using the Research, Training and Networking contribution in order to prevent an unreasonable financial burden for the recruited researchers. This includes at least the travel and accommodation costs. Longer secondments can also be supported in the same way.

While **virtual mobility** does not have the same multifaceted impact on the development of individuals and sustainable cooperation among organisations as physical mobility, it can however complement it, facilitate long-distance collaboration and be an effective means to faster achieving research and training objectives. In this regard, all MSCA proposals are encouraged to explore opportunities offered by e-infrastructures and related services, in particular those provided through [GEANT](#), the pan-European research and education network. These activities should be clearly described in the proposals, should be relevant, feasible and beneficial for the researchers, and in line with the project objectives.

In all DNs, each recruited researcher can be seconded to other beneficiaries and/or to associated partners/associated partners linked to other beneficiaries for **a duration of up to one third of his/her actual recruitment period**. Virtual mobility will not be considered as a regular secondment since it does not involve physical mobility. Therefore, it will not count towards the maximum duration of one third of the researcher's total recruitment period.

In DN-ID, all recruited researchers must spend at least 50% of their time in the non-academic sector. If a researcher is recruited 12 months by one of the non-academic beneficiaries, and then recruited 24 months by an academic beneficiary, he/she should be sent min 6 months in secondments to other beneficiaries and/or associated partners/associated partners linked to other beneficiaries in the non-academic sector. The specific percentage of time that each researcher will spend at each institution should therefore be **indicated in the proposal**.

It is expected that the recruited researchers will benefit from the strong research collaboration of the beneficiaries (academic and non-academic). The provision of additional training/secondment by associated partners is encouraged, where relevant.

In DN-JD it is expected that the recruited researchers will need to spend at least the minimum period of time required to be eligible to enrol in a doctoral degree and defend the doctoral thesis at the corresponding academic participating organisations. This will vary according to the institution and country in question. However, the limitation of secondments to one third of the actual recruitment period does apply to DN-JD. Therefore, multiple recruitments should be foreseen to ensure that all rules are respected.

4. Instructions for Completing Part A and Part B of the Proposal

The MSCA DN proposal template can be downloaded from the [call page](#) on the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#). All instructions for completing the part A and B of the proposal are embedded in the [template](#) and should be removed before proposal submission. A clean version is also available at the end of the template.

Specific guidance on how to select the most appropriate keywords, together with the list of MSCA keywords, can be found on [REA website](#).

Templates of the letter of commitment (for associated partners) and for the joint/double/multiple doctorate pre-agreement (for DN-JD) are available at the end of the proposal template.