



MSCA-NET

POLICY-BRIEF: MISSIONS IN HE

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Introduction

This policy brief aims to provide a short, but comprehensive overview of the EU missions in Horizon Europe. It aims to help researchers and organisations better understand the policy objectives in the context of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).

This document is not intended to duplicate or otherwise replace existing EU guidance and will bring the different information sources together and provide direct signposting to the most relevant resources.

In comparison with policies and funding criteria covered by other MSCA-NET policy briefs such as on Gender and Open Science, links are still crystallising between EU Missions and other European funding programmes, including the MSCA. Therefore, this policy brief differs from others published by MSCA-NET. It introduces how EU Missions and the MSCA have become linked thus far and suggest ways participants in the MSCA can engage with EU Missions. At this stage of development for EU Missions, understanding will be less tethered by established practices or expectations, and ways of engaging can be more creative.

EU Missions in Horizon Europe

EU Missions are a new type of funding opportunity in the Horizon Europe Framework Programme. They are designed to respond to global challenges and will help support the delivery of key EU policy priorities such as the European Green Deal, Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the EU Industrial Strategy and A Europe fit for the Digital Age.

Long-established collaborative research and innovation grants have demonstrated added EU value through policy-driven calls specifying the scope and topic of activities that an applicant must address. What makes EU Missions distinct are the mission-oriented features built into the call topics, call programming, and ultimately the projects that will be funded.

Distinctive features of the mission-oriented approach to funding opportunities under Horizon Europe include:

- be bold, inspirational, and widely relevant to society,
- be clearly framed: targeted, measurable, and time-bound,
- establish impact-driven but realistic goals,
- mobilise resources on EU, national and local levels,
- link activities across different disciplines and different types of research and innovation, and
- make it easier for citizens to understand the value of investments in research and innovation.

To achieve and promote societal change and realise their goals, EU Missions will strongly encourage open access to scientific publications and the reuse and reproducibility of research results in line with the Fair principles of research data. The EU Missions will also closely involve citizens throughout all stages of development.

Five EU Missions

The aim of EU Missions is to tackle societal challenges and generate societal transformations and social impact. Five Missions were launched by the European Commission in September 2021. Each seeks to address challenging societal problems chosen for their importance to society and for the level of ambition it will take to solve them.

Adaptation to
Climate Change

Cancer

Restore our
Ocean and
Waters by 2030

100 Climate-
Neutral and
Smart Cities by
2030

A Soil Deal for
Europe

The design process that created EU Missions was distinct from other parts of Horizon Europe. Before any EU Mission projects were envisaged, the Commission engaged with citizens and experts to co-design the concept for this type

of funding and how the projects would work. Thus, citizens were heavily involved in the process which identified the five Missions and the design of the distinct features listed above.

Mission calls and mission-oriented approach across Horizon Europe

The Missions 2023-2024 Work Programme includes actions dedicated to supporting the implementation of the Missions. In addition to specific calls, there are also actions to support synergies and coordination with other parts of Horizon Europe, including the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).

The Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024 is a key, high-level document that sets out how funding opportunities are systematically interlinked, with mission-oriented approaches embedded across all parts of Horizon Europe. This is evident in the 2023-2024 Work Programmes which include a key mission-oriented feature of 'directionality'. For example, each Horizon Europe Work Programme has 'Destinations' which group many interlinking actions together in the direction of a common outcome.

Mission-oriented features such as this, make policy ambitions tied to research and innovation actions more explicit for participants, while leaving space for their creative proposals. It also makes it easier for the funder or citizens to scrutinize whether measurable goals have been achieved. This novel feature is intended to make the overall impact of Horizon Europe more purposeful and better suited to the achievement of medium- and long-term policy goals.

EU Missions and the MSCA

In the MSCA Work Programme 2023-2024 key points of alignment with EU Missions can be seen in the fourth and fifth MSCA intervention areas that define the programme in the regulation establishing Horizon Europe:

1. Nurturing excellence through the mobility of researchers across borders, sectors, and disciplines.
2. Fostering new skills through the excellent training of researchers.
3. Strengthening human resources and skills development across the ERA.
4. Improving and facilitating synergies.
5. Promoting public outreach.

These five points, sets out the expectation for an applicant to freely choose their project topic and demonstrate its potential contribution to a wider environment of Horizon Europe activities.

MSCA calls are open to all research and innovation areas, and the individual research topics are determined by the applicant in a bottom-up approach. However, the MSCA Work Programme also makes it clear that applicants must complement policy-driven activities from other parts of Horizon Europe, with EU Missions notably highlighted.

MSCA are a rich seam of EU-funded research and innovation due to their bottom-up nature, variety of topics, geographic spread and the large number of grants awarded to support excellent talents each year. New knowledge, methodologies, innovation, and data about all types of subjects can be obtained from these projects. Horizon Europe will support and incentivise MSCA beneficiaries in their dissemination and exploitation activities during and after their project lifetime through a set of integrated services, including the Horizon Results Platform, as well as through synergies with other EU programmes like EU Missions.

Directionality

A term for a way of designing funding interventions around achieving outcomes: the target is set from the start.

For something as varied as Horizon Europe, large numbers of calls are systematically pointed in the same direction.

«The MSCA are open to all domains of research and innovation, chosen freely by the applicants in a fully bottom-up manner, addressed under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. [...] All MSCA will complement top-down collaborative research activities, notably contributing to the EU Missions.»

MSCA Work Programme 2023-2024, page 7

How MSCA projects can benefit from EU Missions

The openness of the MSCA encourages applicants to present the excellence of their expertise and project design choices on their own terms to convince experts in the field. As set out in the MSCA Work programme 2023-2024, applicants are required to demonstrate how the project will have wider scientific, economic and society impact. Specific references to EU policies or EU Mission activities, as well as non-EU policies or activities can help to demonstrate a chosen topic's timeliness and relevance to society.

Both the MSCA work programme and Horizon Europe as a whole support knowledge transfer mechanisms, and digital platforms, as well as forms of communication and events that facilitate synergies. Harnessing these tools is likely to be more straightforward if MSCA participants can position their work in established themes, such as the five EU Mission goals.

MSCA projects can be built into their design secondments, research visits and non-academic placements, which are evaluated based on the research and training experience they provide for the participants, whilst also acting as a knowledge transfer mechanism. MSCA applicants could benefit from considering EU Mission activities to engage with for these purposes.

To identify these activities, applicants can refer to the [Mission implementation plans](#), [Mission calls on the EC Funding Opportunities and Tenders portal](#) and [funded Mission projects](#) on the [CORDIS database](#).

Illustration of synergy between MSCA and Soil Mission

A MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow could carry out field work at a Living Lab or demonstrate their research results in a Lighthouse site that can be visited by practitioners or citizens.

Illustration of synergy between MSCA and Cancer Mission

An MSCA Doctoral Network could design training secondments for Doctoral Candidates to work at an organisation in the Network of Comprehensive Cancer Infrastructures (CCIs).

Feedback to policy in the MSCA Programme

MSCA should directly contribute to policymaking by providing valuable context, background and evidence bases to policymakers' understanding of developments and trends in different fields. Researchers can use such activities to develop their skills and improve their career prospects, identify future steps for their research, and obtain public acknowledgement of their achievements.

The MSCA Work Programme 2023-2024 **Feedback to Policy Coordination and Support Action** explicitly mentions EU Missions. This initiative runs in parallel to MSCA open calls, to facilitate stronger thematic links between MSCA projects and raise the visibility of those projects' contribution to key EU policy priorities. It also assists in the gathering of stakeholder feedback on ways to maximise the programme's impact, thereby facilitating the input of potential users of MSCA project results.

What are the requirements under the MSCA

Feedback to policy in the MSCA Programme

	Doctoral Network	Postdoctoral Fellowships	Staff Exchanges
The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, societal, and economic impacts	Part B1 Section 2.4 See MSCA-NET Handbook pg. 37-38	Part B1 Section 2.3 See MSCA-NET Handbook pg. 29-30	Part B1 Section 2.4 See MSCA-NET Handbook pg. 27-29

<p>Developing sustainable elements of doctoral programmes after the end of the Doctoral Network funding</p>	<p>Part B1 Section 2.1b See MSCA-NET Handbook page 31</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
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Please note that MSCA COFUND evaluation criteria derives from Doctoral Networks and Postdoctoral Fellowships to a significant extent, depending on the option chosen by MSCA COFUND applicants.

Read about MSCA projects contributing to EU Missions and EU policy priorities

MSCA Cluster Events have been organised since 2019 to showcase the excellence of MSCA projects and spark discussions on EU policy developments by using project results (at EU and/or national level).

Applicants can refer to resources from these events, including presentation recordings and impact reports, to see concrete examples of MSCA Feedback to Policy, organized according to EU Mission themes as well as broader EU priority themes.

Click the links below to find event reports with MSCA project case studies:

["Mission Ocean And Waters" MSCA Cluster event](#)

[Cancer Mission MSCA Cluster event](#)

[MSCA European Green Deal](#)

[MSCA Artificial Intelligence Cluster event](#)



References and Resources

- **EU Missions**
 - [EU Missions in Horizon Europe](#)
 - [Expert studies and reports leading to the mission-oriented approach](#)
 - [EU Mission Info Day events 2023](#)
- **Horizon Europe**
 - [Regulation establishing Horizon Europe](#)
 - [Specific programme implementing Horizon Europe](#)
 - [Horizon Europe Strategic Plan \(2021-2024\)](#)
 - [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#)
 - [The European Research Area \(ERA\)](#)
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- **EU Mission**
 - [EU Missions Work Programme 2023-2024](#)
 - [EU Mission calls on the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal \(FTOP\)](#)
 - [EU Missions funded projects on CORDIS](#)
 - [Implementation Plans for the EU Missions](#)
- **MSCA**
 - [MSCA Work Programme 2023-2024](#)
- **Addressing EU Missions in a research and innovation proposal**
 - [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#)
 - The [MSCA-NET handbooks](#)