

## Widening Country Inspiration Story

“Be very specific; if your NCP offers any help, use their services.”

**Name of the fellow:** Sofia Karina Trommlerová

**Country of the host:** Slovakia

**Project Acronym:**  
PREGNANCYBENEFIT

**Project start and end date:**  
15.06.2023 – 14.12.2024

**Type of MSCA, Horizon Europe:**  
Postdoctoral Fellowship



### What is your project about?

In my project, I look at a new type of family policy – pregnancy benefit – and evaluate whether it has had any positive effect on women’s fertility and children’s health at birth. In terms of fertility, I look at births and abortions, which could both be affected. Child health at birth might be impacted via effects while in utero. This policy evaluation is important from a scientific perspective as it will help us better understand human (fertility) behaviour and health effects while in utero.

The results will be communicated to relevant NGOs, and to the general public via appearances in the news and in (video)podcasts as well as through articles in (online) newspapers. Future scientific talent among teenagers will be mobilised via presentations at European Researchers’ Night and in high schools.

### Why is your project important for society?

This project is a policy evaluation and as such, it will have important policy implications. First, the results will bring us new insights about what might help in fighting the demographic decline in Europe and at what cost. Second, it will help us understand whether health of (disadvantaged) babies could be improved via financial support during pregnancy. Both results are useful when designing new or improving existing family policies.

### Why did you choose a widening country as a host?

I come from Slovakia and after spending 15 years abroad, the Postdoctoral Fellowship was an excellent opportunity to move back home and still be able to work in science in good conditions. The additional funding opportunity (ERA Fellowships) allocated for widening countries was another incentive to apply. The quality of the research topic, my profile, and the host institution were all evaluated. My proposal ranked extremely high, but extra funds for widening countries are still crucial as the institutional support for proposal writing is low in these countries.

### What communication and public engagement measures have you foreseen?

### How did you find your host organisation?

No one in Slovakia does research in my specific subdiscipline. When looking for the host organisation, I focused on finding a supervisor that could at least partly advise me. In the end, I found an expert from a different field who is a perfect match for my interdisciplinary research project.

### What kind of support did you get?

Apart from reading the guidelines very thoroughly, which goes without saying, I was lucky enough to have access to several sources of extra support. First, I asked a former colleague who was an MSCA fellow at the time to share their application with me. This was of great help, for instance in terms of how to create a good GANTT chart. Second, I also applied for a mentoring programme offered by my National Contact Point (NCP). My mentor – a former MSCA evaluator – pointed out which aspects were not addressed in sufficient detail, and gave me tips on useful keywords. Third, my NCP offered proof-reading and gave me tips, especially on parts 2 and 3 (Impact and Implementation). Note that your colleagues can only comment on the content of the research (part 1 – Excellence), which is just 50% of the final mark.

### Do you have a non-academic placement within your project? If you do, what is the purpose of the placement?

My non-academic placement will take place at an NGO whose goal is to promote gender equality and women's rights in Slovakia. I will share the methods and results of my research, while receiving training in gender perspective in family policies, gender mainstreaming, and women's reproductive rights.

### What tips can you give other researchers who would like to apply for MSCA?

Try to find a former or current MSCA Postdoctoral fellow who is willing to share their proposal with you. Reading a successful project will give you a sense of what you should definitely address and how to structure your own proposal. Another advice is to be very specific, e.g. instead of just saying "I will submit 2 articles to a publication", name a few journals where you would like to submit your work. Lastly, if your NCP offers any help (mentoring programme, proof-reading, etc.), use their services.

More information on the project:



The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) support researchers at all stages of their career across all disciplines. The MSCA also support cooperation between industry and academia and provide innovative trainings and career developments.

The MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF) enable talented researchers to work on projects in Europe and beyond. They aim at enhancing the innovative potential of postdoctoral researchers through advanced trainings, international and intersectoral mobility.

The MSCA-NET project is the MSCA NCP project to facilitate the transnational cooperation to achieve a consistent and harmonised level of NCP support. The scientific community can also profit from our project to support their MSCA application.

