



# MSCA-NET

## POLICY BRIEF:

# THE CHARTER FOR RESEARCHERS: BENEFITS FOR RESEARCHERS AND ORGANISATIONS WITH REGARD TO RECRUITMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS

Deliverable 3.12

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NETWORK OF THE MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS NATIONAL CONTACT POINTS

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## Introduction

The aim of this policy brief is to provide answers to questions regarding the implementation of the Charter for Researchers in order to receive the HR Excellence in Research Award in addition to explaining their added value for researchers and organisations. Whether or not an institution is applying for or has earned the HR Excellence in Research logo, the same open, merit-based, transparent recruitment processes and attractive working and employment conditions are required for institutions to successfully apply for funding within Horizon Europe and, more specifically, the MSCA.

## Charter and Code (2005)

In 2005, the European Commission, wanting to enhance the attractiveness of research careers in Europe, introduced the [European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#), collectively known as the "Charter and Code".

The Charter and Code were created as a reference framework for researchers, employers and funders. Designed as voluntary instruments, the Charter and Code aim to encourage higher education and research to endorse and implement 40 principles and to inform researchers about their rights<sup>1</sup>.

### Charter and Code Themes

1. Working Conditions & Social Security
2. Recruitment
3. Training and Career Development
4. Ethical and Professional Aspects

## Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R)

### OTM-R includes:

- Comprehensive advertising of positions to ensure visibility
- Publicly available and transparent selection criteria
- Diverse and balanced selection committees
- Multi-stages recruitment process

The key principles of the Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers are open, transparent and merit-based recruitment processes (OTM-R). Candidates should be informed about the status and outcome of their applications in an efficient and timely manner. The candidates' merits, creativity, innovation and independence should be considered in addition to their academic achievements in order to better take all possible career paths into consideration. Unsuccessful candidates should be provided with feedback upon request.

## The new Charter for Researchers (2023)

On 18 December 2023, the Council of the European Union adopted the [Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe](#). This recommendation aims to contribute to the implementation of the [European Research Area \(ERA\) policy agenda](#), especially ERA action 4.

The recommendation includes an update to the 2005 Charter and Code. The 2023 Charter has a streamlined four-pillar structure, reduces the number of principles to 20 and combines the Charter and Code into a single document. Updates to the 2023 Charter include more detailed information about topics such as early-career support, social security issues, inter-sectoral mobility as well as robust monitoring and implementation

<sup>1</sup> Since 15 May 2018, the formal endorsement of the Charter and Code has been bound to the commitment of the concerned organisation to initiate the application for the "HR Excellence in Research Award".

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mechanisms. Furthermore, the new Charter emphasises the need to make Europe more attractive and globally competitive, reflecting the increased globalisation of the research field over the past two decades.

## **HR Excellence in Research Award and HRS4R as tools to support the implementation of the Charter**

The European Commission provides two tools to help with the internal implementation of the Charter<sup>2</sup> at higher education and research institutions: the HR Excellence in Research Award and the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers.

### **HR Excellence in Research Award**

The European Commission publicly recognises research institutions that have made progress in aligning their human resource policies with the principles set out in the Charter with the HR Excellence in Research Award (Award). These institutions can use the icon to show their commitment to implementing fair and transparent recruitment and appraisal procedures for researchers, serving as a mark of quality.



Overall, the award plays a crucial role in promoting a supportive and attractive working environment for researchers in Europe. By recognising and rewarding institutions that prioritise their researchers' well-being and professional development with the award, the European Commission contributes to the advancement of research and innovation in Europe.

### **The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)**

“The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers” (HRS4R) is the process required to receive the HR Excellence in Research Award, and consists of three phases: The Initial Phase, the Implementation Phase and the Award Renewal Phase.

In the Initial Phase, institutions are required to conduct an internal gap analysis using the OTM-R checklist provided on the [EURAXESS Portal](#). Based on the results, institutions then develop action plans to address the identified gaps. After having completed this phase, institutions receive the HR Excellence in Research Award.

During the Implementation Phase, institutions implement their proposed action plans. Progress is monitored and periodically assessed. Institutions are able to revise their action plans as needed.

During the Award Renewal Phase, institutions may further refine their Action Plans in order to ensure continuous monitoring and self-assessment.

## **Charter (and Code) in Horizon Europe and MSCA**

In Horizon 2020, the [Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#) contained a distinct article<sup>3</sup> addressing the topic of working conditions specifically referring to the Charter and Code from 2005. In Horizon Europe, the [Annotated Grant Agreement](#) also refers to the 2005 Charter and Code<sup>4</sup> and is applicable to all Horizon Europe actions. It now also mentions the 2023 Charter for Researchers in an Annex laying down “Specific Rules for the recruitment and working conditions for researchers”. The 2023 Charter contains new standards and tools for more attractive research careers and embraces, recognises and supports diversity and gender-equality. It promotes

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<sup>3</sup> Horizon 2020 AGA — Annotated Model Grant Agreement: V5.2 – 26.06.2019, Article 32.1, p. 470.

<sup>4</sup> Horizon Europe AGA – Annotated Grant Agreement Version 1.0 01 May 2024, “Specific rules for the recruitment and working conditions for researchers”, p. 383.

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transparent, structured, inclusive and gender-equal career accession and progression with access to training and continuous professional development opportunities.

Furthermore, Annex 5, Article 18, of the Horizon Europe [Model Grant Agreement](#)<sup>5</sup> provides specific rules for MSCA actions and contains an explicit reference to the new Charter.

Obtaining the HR Excellence in Research Award is not a formal pre-condition for receiving funding within the MSCA. Nevertheless, all funded host organisations must put effort into applying the principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers with regard to employment conditions as these are a fundamental cornerstone of the MSCA<sup>6</sup>.

In the [MSCA Work Programme 2023-2025](#), the “**Main principles applying to the MSCA**” explicitly include a reference to the 2023 Charter when it comes to the topics of “Recruitment, working/employment conditions and inclusiveness” and “Supervision”.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, with regards to the specific conditions for application calls in the MSCA DN, PF and COFUND funding lines, the [MSCA Work Programme 2023-2025](#) states that participating organisations are expected to contribute to the “[...] increased alignment of working conditions for researchers in accordance with the principles set out in the European Charter for Researchers” (p. 35).

Finally, the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions guidelines on supervision](#) provide a reference to the Charter and Code, stating that MSCA beneficiaries “must ensure adequate supervision or mentoring and appropriate career guidance in line with the principles set out in the Charter and Code” (p. 8).

## Benefits of the Charter for MSCA researchers and institutions

### MSCA researchers

Benefits for researchers include

- Clear implementation of the provisions of the Charter as referenced in Section 2 (“Your rights and obligations”) of the [Information Package for Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellows](#) and in accordance with the Grant Agreement signed by the action beneficiary with the REA
- Ease of search by use of a dedicated filter on the [EURAXESS Portal](#) for institutions with the HR Excellence in Research Award

### Benefits for institutions applying for HR Excellence in Research Award

Benefits for institutions applying for the HR Excellence in Research Award include:

- *Increased visibility when applying for funding within Horizon Europe and MSCA*

By being able to more clearly demonstrate that an institution’s HR policies are compatible with the principles of the Charter, a clear signal that an institution meets the requirements of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement.

Regarding the MSCA, institutions holding the award that apply for MSCA DN or MSCA COFUND calls can simply state that they hold the award, thereby saving space where page limits exist and can also make a positive impression on the evaluators.

- *Increased visibility to the best international talent*

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<sup>5</sup> Model Grant Agreement Multi & Mono, v1.2 of 1 April 2024, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> See [Work Programme 2023-2025](#), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>These topics can be found on pages 7 and 8 of the MSCA Work Programme 2023-2025.

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The HR Excellence in Research logo appears on job advertisements posted on the EURAXESS portal by institutes holding the award, publishing vacancies resulting from MSCA projects.

- *Review and adjustment of internal processes in light of internationalisation strategies*  
The HRS4R process is often more about consolidating internal internationalisation efforts that are already being developed and implemented than creating completely new processes. The HRS4R process can therefore serve to support effective change for complex internal transformations.
- *HRS4R Info Days and European funding*

The European Commission regularly offers HRS4R Info Days aimed at institutions and funders implementing the principles of the Charter as well as potential applicants to Horizon Europe that are required to meet the requirements stipulated in the Grant Agreement. Furthermore, the European Commission offers calls for applications aimed at supporting organisations and innovation ecosystems, which aim to establish sustainably more attractive, more diverse and more interoperable career pathways for researchers across all sectors.<sup>8</sup>

- *HRS4R: national good practices and incentives*

At national level, several countries (including Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden) have established working groups exchanging good practices and as a form of peer support during the process of obtaining and retaining the HR Excellence in Research Award. Additionally, reports and information at the national level can help other institutions participate.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, although the HRS4R procedure is voluntary, some countries have made the Award a precondition to access national funding and offer dedicated financial support for institutions that participate in the HRS4R process, such as in the Czech Republic<sup>10</sup>. Other countries also support their research organisations in setting up their strategic HR management in line with the Charter to create internationally competitive conditions and an environment for conducting excellent research, as is the case of Poland.

## Conclusions

The HRS4R process can be a catalyst for change within an organisation, helping to bring internal HR policies to the foreground of institutional policymaking and to encourage improvements. These changes can also help with the establishment of international partnerships and cooperations and to expand international networks. This institutional commitment to the Charter in turn demonstrates to researchers the best basis for professional development and equal opportunities for all researchers throughout the EU.

The global race for talents is intensifying and Europe needs to remain an attractive destination for highly skilled workers and researchers are a key part of this group. In order to achieve this, it is crucial to create favourable conditions to be able to attract and retain the best talent in Europe. The Charter and the HR Excellence in Research Award pave the way for the establishment of a more attractive and supportive environment for researchers and a common understanding of researchers' transversal competences.

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<sup>8</sup> Horizon Europe Main Work Programme 2023–2025 – 11. Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area, Call HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-02-03.

<sup>9</sup> For example, a group of fifteen Italian universities drafted a comprehensive report outlining the benefits and best practices of participating in the HRS4R initiative as well as the obstacles encountered during its implementation: [L'esperienza delle università italiane che hanno ottenuto l'award della commissione europea "HR excellence in research"](#) in 2024

<sup>10</sup> The Czech Operational Programme Research, Development and Education of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has offered at least two calls for applications: [Výzva č. 02\\_16\\_028 - Rozvoj kapacit pro výzkum a vývoj](#) and [Výzva č. 02\\_18\\_054 Rozvoj kapacit pro výzkum a vývoj II](#).

## References and resources

- **EU Research and Innovation Policy**
  - [Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe](#)
  - [Commission Recommendation of 11 March 2005 on the European Charter for Researchers and on a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#)
  - [Council Conclusions of 28 May 2021 on Deepening the European Research Area](#)
  - [European Research Area \(ERA\) policy agenda for the period 2022 - 2024](#)
  - [European Commission Communication of 30 September 2020 on A new ERA for Research and Innovation](#)
  - [Taking stock, evaluating the achievements and identifying the way forward for the ERA priority 3 policy measures](#)
  - [The European Research Area \(ERA\)](#)
  
- **Horizon Europe and MSCA**
  - [Regulation establishing Horizon Europe](#)
  - [Specific programme implementing Horizon Europe](#)
  - [Horizon Europe strategic plan 2025-2027](#)
  - [Annotated Grant Agreement, EU Funding Programmes 2021-2027](#)
  - [H2020 Annotated Model Grant Agreement](#)
  - [MSCA Work Programme 2023-2025](#)
  - [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Guidelines on Supervision](#)
  
- **EURAXESS and HR Excellence in Research Award**
  - [European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers \(2005\)](#)
  - [The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers](#)
  - [HRS4R Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, Guidelines for Institutions](#)
  - [HR Excellence in Research award: Dashboard](#)