

MINUTES OF MEETING: IGLO MSCA working group – evaluation of MSCA actions and the future programme

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On 2 October the CZELO office participated in the meeting of the **IGLO MSCA (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions) working group**. At this meeting representatives of the European Commission (DG EAC) and the European Research Executive Agency (REA) shared the results of both finalized and ongoing evaluation of the MSCA actions, including recommendations and suggestions for the MSCA actions under the new FP10 programme.

REA (Unit MSCA and Citizens, COFUND and Support Activities)

- Evaluation and feedback for MSCA COFUND took place this year. Collection of data was done through questionnaires for all running and finished projects and REA also invited beneficiaries to talk about different aspects of projects in smaller groups. The main results were:
 - flexibility as one of the advantages of COFUND is more declared on paper than it exist in reality (Even though the COFUND are mono-beneficiary projects, projects of strictly one institution are less common. Most projects are an informal consortium which adds administrative burden to the coordinator and in reality function as a multi-beneficiary project.)
 - geographical spread of projects is not as good as expected – half of projects are based out of France and Spain, many countries are involved in only 0-2 projects
 - there were less than 100 applications submitted this year, which is mostly stable and the same as in the last years – this means that there is no increase in applications, even though the budget would allow for it
 - one of the aims of the consultations is to increase the number of applications, especially from countries with few applications (e.g. Czechia currently submitted 5 applications in the last call which is very good)
 - REA is collecting further feedback on why there is such a low number of applications and what might be the best ways to increase the numbers

REA (Unit MSCA Staff Exchange)

- MSCA Staff Exchange (SE) projects are implemented mainly through mobilities, key changes already implemented include:
 - no need for letter of commitments from third country participants
 - UK as an associated country is eligible for funding
 - there is an increase of Unit cost (and max. project budget) – now the maximum is 5 010 euro per person per month
- there is an ongoing open call for applications (call opening 19. 9.) with deadline for submission on 5 February 2025 with total budget available of 99,47 mil.
- objective of the evaluation is to get feedback from coordinators, beneficiaries and national contact points (NCPs) about possible improvements of the action and to equip Staff Exchanges with strategic insights to be able to plan the future better
- There was already a survey (with more than 100 replies), now there will be two meetings with NCPs to discuss the outcomes of the survey and to set the topics for the final evaluation meeting in November. Result of this whole process will be written report and recommendations for the future.
- Examples of implementation challenges REA is aware of:



- complex administrative procedures
- full-time commitment requirement
- allowance is not adequate for staff members' secondments
- full-time secondment makes multitasking and funding sharing challenging
- the new interdisciplinary 1/3 rule is demanding

European Commission (DG EAC, MSCA Unit)

- Consultations started this year, already there are some clear points coming up:
 - MSCA is largely seen as the most successful part of Horizon Europe (HEU) together with the ERC
 - Importance of MSCA as fully bottom-up programme based on scientific excellence with positive impacts (especially for early career researchers) on the European Research Area (ERA) is being stressed and recognized
 - In terms of scientific impact MSCA offers best value for money from all HEU actions (e.g. concerning research publications)
 - MSCA impacts not only individuals, but also has very clear institutional impact – e.g. by contributing to improving standards of training and research careers (setting examples for national/regional funding bodies and individual institutions)
 - MSCA is instrumental for cross-sectoral partnerships (including between academia and non-academic partners)
- Concerning budget there is a very strong call for significant budget increase in MSCA, also because there is high ratio of high-quality applications in comparison with the rest of HEU (6x budget increase is needed to fund all quality applications, in contrast in the rest of HEU actions it is maximum 4x times current budget).
- Stakeholders call mainly for:
 - stability in design and key principles (bottom-up, scientific excellence)
 - greater independence (change of governance model, more independence from HEU actions which are based on top-down approach, possibly use more the ERC/EIC model in the future to cope with the specificities of bottom-up approach)
 - further simplification and better articulation and coherence
 - improving synergies with ERC and EIC
- More recommendations and topics include:
 - big concern regarding impact and how to leverage MSCA on broader EU level, how to find more synergies with EU level and national funds (including more coordinated promotion of Seal of Excellence), but also how to promote sustainable, diverse and inclusive research careers
 - call for more simplification and flexibility in implementation (e.g. with regards to secondments and allowing partners to co-manage funds)
 - addressing differences in employment contracts
 - addressing issues of international cooperation (e.g. Visa, residency requirements issues)
- concerning Widening there are mixed views on scientific excellence being the only criteria vs. supporting more specific measures (e.g. extension of hop-on, ex-aequo criteria, specific incentives, relaxing the inter-sectoral requirements)
- concerning “researchers at risk” there are also mixed views on whether overall dedicated scheme on EU level should be part of MSCA or outside of it
- Main suggestions concerning the MSCA postdoctoral fellowships include budget increase, extending maximum duration of the standard fellowship and exploring the possibility to develop follow-up funding for fellows (e.g. Proof of concept)