



Synergies between the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Erasmus+ in the area of higher education

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1. Scene-setter

In 2020, the European Commission adopted two Communications on Achieving a European Education Area by 2025² and the New ERA for Research and Innovation³. Both documents aim at empowering and accelerating the transformation of higher education through a number of commitments, including enhanced synergies between education, research and innovation.

The EU's multiannual financial framework and programming period (2021-2027) offers an opportunity for synergies between funding programmes, building on the experience of projects funded under Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020. This is in line with the Commission's efforts to maximise the impact of EU funding and encourage complementarities.

This note looks in detail at possible synergies and complementarities between actions targeting the higher education sector under Horizon Europe - in particular the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) - and Erasmus+, including the European Universities Initiative which draws funds from both programmes.

2. Legal basis

The Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Horizon Europe programme⁴ states the following:

Art.7.7 The Programme shall be implemented in synergy with other Union programmes while aiming for maximal administrative simplification. A non-exhaustive list of synergies with other Union programmes is included in Annex IV.

Art.15.4 An action that has received a contribution from another Union programme may also receive a contribution under the Programme, provided that the contributions do not cover the same costs. The rules of the relevant Union programme shall apply to the corresponding contribution to the action. The cumulative financing shall not exceed the total eligible costs of the action. The support from the different Union programmes may be calculated on a pro-rata basis in accordance with the documents setting out the conditions for support.

Annex IV.10 Synergies with the Erasmus+ Programme shall ensure that:

(a) combined resources from the Programme, including from the EIT, and the Erasmus+ Programme are used to support activities dedicated to strengthening, modernising and transforming European higher education institutions. Where appropriate, the Programme complements the Erasmus+ Programme's support for the European Universities Initiative in its research dimension, as part of the development of new joint and integrated long-term and sustainable strategies on education, R&I based on trans-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches to make

¹ Version: 1, Date of release: September 2021

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0625>

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A628%3AFIN>

⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.170.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A170%3ATOC

the knowledge triangle a reality. The EIT's activities could complement the strategies to be implemented by the European Universities Initiative;

(b) the Programme and the Erasmus+ Programme foster the integration of education and research through assisting higher education institutions to formulate and set up common education, R&I strategies and networks, through informing education systems, teachers and trainers of the latest findings and practices in research and in offering active research experience to all students and higher education staff and in particular researchers, and to support other activities that integrate higher education and R&I.

The Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Erasmus+ programme⁵ states the following:

Recital 16 Synergies with the Horizon Europe Programme established by Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council ('Horizon Europe') should ensure that combined resources from the Programme and Horizon Europe are used to support activities dedicated to strengthening and modernising European higher education institutions. Horizon Europe will, where appropriate, complement the Programme's support for the European Universities initiative as part of the development of new joint and integrated long term and sustainable strategies on education, research and innovation. Synergies with Horizon Europe will help to foster the integration of education and research, in particular in higher education institutions.

Art.32.2 An action that has received a contribution under the Programme may also receive a contribution from another Union programme, provided that the contributions do not cover the same costs. The rules of the relevant Union programme shall apply to the corresponding contribution to the action. The cumulative financing shall not exceed the total eligible costs of the action. The support from the different Union programmes may be calculated on a pro rata basis in accordance with the documents setting out the conditions for support.

3. Common features between the MSCA and Erasmus+

Around 70 percent of beneficiaries under the MSCA are higher education institutions and therefore have access to other EU funding sources targeting the higher education sector, such as Erasmus+. However, university staff and faculties often work in silos, and those dealing with the MSCA might not be aware of the opportunities available under Erasmus+, and vice versa.

Both Erasmus+ and the MSCA offer opportunities for the mobility, training and career development of individuals, including researchers. They fund the development of new study and research programmes (including joint programmes), and contribute to the establishment of collaborative projects which can include the exchange of individuals (e.g. staff). They have a strong international dimension reaching beyond the EU, which can be used to build internationalisation strategies and strengthen Europe's attractiveness as a study and research destination. Both programmes foster cooperation between higher education institutions, but also reach beyond academia, involving organisations from the non-academic sector (e.g. SMEs).

The most relevant actions in terms of synergies between higher education, research and innovation are:

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0817>

- MSCA Doctoral Networks
- MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships
- MSCA Staff Exchanges
- MSCA COFUND
- Erasmus+ Mobility for Higher Education Students and Staff
- Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees
- Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education
- Erasmus+ Partnerships for Cooperation
- Erasmus+ Partnerships for Innovation
- European Universities Initiative

Institutions can choose to apply to one or more of these actions, as long as there is no double funding, and participants fulfil the requirements linked to the different actions (e.g. mobility rule or time spent under the action in case of the MSCA). Below are a small number of examples possible synergies and complementarities.

4. Synergies and complementarities

4.1. Erasmus+ Mobility Projects for Higher Education Students and Staff

These projects fund the mobility of students, doctoral candidates and staff, both within Europe and beyond. Participants usually return to their sending institution after their period abroad (e.g. to obtain their degree). The focus of Erasmus+ funded mobility is on education, teaching and training. An important priority is to develop the creative and critical thinking skills of students, starting at Bachelor level, notably through cooperation with researchers.

- Individual Erasmus+ participants could participate in the work of MSCA research teams through:
 - traineeship mobility (2 to 12 months) for Bachelor and Master students, doctoral candidates and recent graduates
 - short-term physical mobility (5 to 30 days) combined with virtual cooperation for students, doctoral candidates and recent graduates.
 - staff mobility (2 days to 2 months). MSCA researchers can also be invited to come and teach in higher education institutions to share the outcomes of their work.
- MSCA researchers can participate in Erasmus+ funded blended intensive programmes as fellow learners or teachers (e.g., doctoral summer schools), to present, explain and share their research methodology and results with students.
- Erasmus+ alumni can apply for:
 - PhD positions in MSCA Doctoral Networks and COFUND⁶ following the successful completion of their Master degree (or equivalent);
 - postdoctoral positions under MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships and COFUND following the successful defence of their PhD thesis.
- To be eligible for MSCA funding, mobility requirements apply to individual researchers.⁷

⁶ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/search>

⁷ MSCA Mobility rule: The researchers must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the host organisation for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before the applicable reference date.

Organisations, in particular those involved in mobility projects with third countries, could use their networks and existing partnerships to set up collaborative research and innovation exchange projects under MSCA Staff Exchanges, which fund the short-term mobility of staff (1-12 months). Exchanges need to be international, inter-sectoral and/or interdisciplinary, and are open to any type of staff contributing to research and innovation activities (researchers, administrative/managerial/technical staff).

Under Erasmus+, higher education institutions located in the same country have the possibility to form mobility consortia focused, for example, on doctoral candidates and post-doctoral researchers, and to provide them with short and long term mobility opportunities abroad (in complement to MSCA opportunities)

4.2. Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees

These projects fund the development of Master programmes jointly delivered by an international consortium of higher education institutions in Europe and beyond. Students at Master's level from all over the world can apply, and receive a scholarship, which leads to a joint, double or multiple degree. The networks developed and experience gained through these study programmes could be used as stepping stones for setting up doctoral programmes (including ones leading to joint, double or multiple degrees) under MSCA Doctoral Networks and COFUND.

4.3. Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education

These projects are transnational cooperation projects based on multilateral partnerships, primarily between higher education institutions (but not only) from Erasmus+ Programme Countries and third countries not associated to the programme. Eligible activities include, for example, the development of research and innovative capacities, new education programmes and curricula including new doctoral programmes, new cooperation schemes with the world of work, or the implementation of tools developed under the Bologna process.⁸

The networks developed and experience gained through these partnerships could be used as stepping stones for setting up doctoral and postdoctoral programmes under MSCA Doctoral Networks and COFUND, as well as collaborative projects under MSCA Staff Exchanges.

4.4. Erasmus+ Partnerships for Innovation

Partnerships for Innovation, which include Alliances for Innovation, aim to strengthen Europe's innovation capacity through cooperation and flow of knowledge among higher education, vocational education and training, and the broader socio economic environment, including research. They also aim to boost the provision of new skills and address skills mismatches by designing and creating new curricula, supporting the development of a sense of initiative and entrepreneurial mind-sets in the EU.

As such, they could be used as stepping stones for setting up doctoral and postdoctoral programmes under MSCA Doctoral Networks and COFUND, as well as collaborative projects under MSCA Staff Exchanges. Similarly, organisations involved in MSCA projects could use their networks and experience to set up Partnerships for Innovation.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en

4.5. Erasmus+ Partnerships for Cooperation

Partnerships for Cooperation, previously known as Strategic Partnerships, include Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education. These are transnational projects between higher education institutions and other socio-economic actors, designed to develop and share innovative learning and teaching practices and foster cooperation in the field of higher education, covering all disciplines. They are key in developing transversal skills necessary for a career in research, as well as to equip young people with the ability to work in international, intersectoral and transdisciplinary teams.

They could be used as stepping stones to set up collaborative projects under MSCA Staff Exchanges, and for developing and setting up doctoral and postdoctoral programmes under MSCA Doctoral Networks and COFUND

Similarly, organisations involved in MSCA projects could use their networks and experience to set up Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education.

Many Erasmus+ and MSCA projects are working on similar societal challenges, and could therefore organise joint activities, including training programmes and events.

4.6. European Universities Initiative

European Universities are transnational comprehensive alliances promoting European values and identity, and strengthening the quality and competitiveness of European higher education. The alliances include partners from all types of higher education institutions, and are based on ambitious long-term strategies bringing together the four missions of universities: education, research, innovation and service to society. They offer student-centred curricula jointly delivered across European inter-university campuses, and adopt a challenge-based approach according to which students and staff, including researchers and innovators, can cooperate in interdisciplinary and international teams to tackle global challenges. The alliances are also pioneering different models of knowledge ecosystems with a multitude of committed associated partners such as local and regional authorities as well as the private sector.

As such, they could:

- develop doctoral and postdoctoral programmes, including joint programmes, under MSCA Doctoral Networks and COFUND, as well as collaborative projects under MSCA Staff Exchanges;
- mainstream best practices developed through the MSCA in doctoral, post-doctoral and researcher training;
- exploit and transfer research results into learning and teaching activities and increase students' research and critical thinking skills.

4.7. Optional secondments under the MSCA

Under MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships, Doctoral Networks and COFUND, it is possible to send recruited researchers on short-term secondments worldwide. Depending on the action, these secondments can last up to one third of the actual months spent implementing the research training activities under the action, the standard fellowship duration or the outgoing phase (where applicable). MSCA researchers could be seconded to any organisations, including those involved in Erasmus+ projects, provided the secondment is in line with the project objectives, adding significant value and impact to

the fellowship and career development of the fellow. The researchers need to be committed full-time to the MSCA project.

5. Want to find out more?

For further information on the individual actions listed above, have a look at the MSCA⁹ and Erasmus+¹⁰ websites.

For best practise examples and inspiration, have a look at the examples listed below, and go check out successful projects on the Erasmus+ Project Result Platform¹¹ and CORDIS Project & Results Platform.¹²

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/node_en

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects_en

¹² <https://cordis.europa.eu/projects/en>

Annex I – Examples of synergies

European Universities Initiative – MSCA COFUND

UNA4CAREER: UNA Europa, an alliance of universities for the emergence of talent and the development of research CAREERs (MSCA COFUND 2018)

- International programme developed in the context of the UNA EUROPA ALLIANCE.
- Open network enabling 40 experienced researchers to combine their work in an international (6 countries), cross-sectoral (possibility to interact with over 500 actors through the UNA Europa Alliance) and interdisciplinary (4 scientific areas) framework. It aims to help spreading the best practices of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.
- <https://www.una4career.eu/>

EUTOPIA-Science and Innovation Fellowship (MSCA COFUND 2019)

- Strategic programme launched by the EUTOPIA Alliance, a network of six universities that has been awarded an Erasmus+ 'European Universities' pilot project
- 76 post-doctoral researchers will receive 24-months fellowships to work in 5 interdisciplinary key research areas: 1) Materials engineering; 2) Data & Intelligence; 3) Health; 4) Sustainability; 5) Welfare & Inclusion
- <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/945380>

CIVIS3i - The CIVIS Alliance Programme for International, Interdisciplinary, Intersectoral Research and Training for Experienced Researchers (MSCA COFUND 2020)

- International programme developed in the context of the European University CIVIS
- 32 Experienced Researchers will receive 24-months postdoctoral fellowships to work on five important global societal challenges: 1) Health; 2) Climate, Environment, Energy; 3) Digital and Technological Transformation; 4) Cities, Territories and mobilities; 5) Society, Culture, Heritage
- <https://www.univ-amu.fr/fr/public/actualites/nouveau-succes-pour-luniversite-europeenne-civis>

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership - MSCA Innovative Training Network

OEdiverse (Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership for Higher Education 2019)

- The OEdiverse Project focuses on three, overarching modules: Mental Wellbeing, Open Science, and Communication. These modules will equip early-stage researchers with the most desired skills set for their career.
- The project involves many MSCA partners, including the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA), and builds off the successful EDUWORKS MSCA Innovative Training Network (ITN), aiming to establish a consortium focused on addressing this key labour market skills shortage.
- <https://oediverse.eu/>

MSCA Innovative Training Network – Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree

FONTE (MSCA Innovative Training Network 2017)

- The FONTE project coordinated by Aston University (UK) gathered the students from the three following Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree programmes in photonics and communication technologies - EMIMEO (2018), PIXNET (2017) and SMARTNET (2017) - to discuss about the opportunities for post-Master degree programmes, and in particular the MSCA. MSCA eligibility criteria and the EURAXESS tool were introduced to participants.
- <https://fonte.astonphotonics.uk/>

ARCHMAT (MSCA Innovative Training Network 2017 / EMJMD)

- The ARCHMAT Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD 2018), coordinated by the University of Evora in Portugal, established synergies with the ED-ARCHMAT MSCA Innovative Training Network (European Doctorate in Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Materials Science), coordinated by the same university. It also contributed as a participating higher education institution to other Horizon 2020 projects, such as the European Research Infrastructure on Heritage Science (ERIHS-H2020-Infradev-2016-2). Besides, joint training events were organised with the participation of ARCHMAT EMJMD students, ED-ARCHMAT Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) and ERIHS scholars and experts. Concretely:
 - The first ED-ARCHMAT Network Wide Training School (SS1) entitled “Developing entrepreneurial, Project management and Communication transversal skills applied to the Cultural Heritage sector” took place in January 2020 and gathered ARCHMAT EMJMD scholarship holders from the 2nd intake (2019-2021) and the ED-ARCHMAT ESRs and ERIHS scholars.
 - ESRs from the ED-ARCHMAT project provided lectures and seminars to EMJMD students as part of their curriculum, during the first semester ARCHMAT workshop at the University of Burgos associated partner, and during the third semester at the University of Rome La Sapienza.
- <http://www.ed-archmat-ejd.eu/>

Other

EU-US Young Leaders Seminar

- The EU-US Young Leaders Seminar is a forum gathering prospective young people (Fulbright alumni, MSCA, Erasmus Mundus and Fulbright-Schuman alumni), giving visibility to their research, connecting them with peers and helping them to have an interdisciplinary perspective of their topics of interest.
- <https://www.fulbrightschuman.eu/young-leaders-seminar/>



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