EUROPEAN RESEARCH EXECUTIVE AGENCY (REA)

REA.A - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions & Support to Experts
A.1 - MSCA Doctoral Networks

Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Doctoral Network

2026 Call Info Event

Questions & Answers

Following the MSCA DN 2026 call info event, which took place on 3rd June 2026, please find below the answers to the questions, as submitted in Slido, that could not be addressed during the live session due to time constraints.

If you would like to go back to the questions answered in live, we invite you to watch the recording of the event, available on YouTube: Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Doctoral Networks 2026 - Call info day

If you have any further questions on the DN 2026 call, you can submit your questions through the Research Enquiry Service: Research Enquiry Service - European Commission

We also invite you to read all the documents and guidance material available to prepare your proposal on the DN 2026 call page of the Funding and Tenders portal: MSCA Doctoral Networks 2026 | Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

In addition, the slides of the presentations are available on the event platform:

Thank you again for your active participation!

The MSCA DN Team

Q1: **For DN-JD with three universities, is it required that all of them award joint degrees, or can each award a separate single degree?**

A: For a DN-JD with three universities, it is not required that all three universities award a joint degree. The programme may instead lead to multiple doctoral degrees, where each university awards its own PhD degree, provided that the doctoral programme is jointly designed and implemented in accordance with the DN-JD requirements. The consortium can choose between joint, double or multiple PhD degrees.

Q2: **An University from the USA would like to join the 2026 DN application as a beneficiary. Is there anyway that a participant from USA can become beneficiary and not only associated partner?**

A: Participants from other countries (i.e. countries that are not EU Member States, countries associated to Horizon Europe, or third countries listed in the Horizon Europe Programme Guide) are not automatically eligible for funding and therefore by default must participate at their own cost. These participants should explain in the proposal how their funding will be secured.

They can however receive exceptional funding, if the granting authority, based on the expert evaluators' assessement, considers that their participation as a beneficiary is essential for implementing the project, for example in view of their:

- outstanding competence/expertise
- access to particular research infrastructures
- access to particular geographical environments
- access to particular data.
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Please note that organisations from any country may participate as "associated partners" in a DN project. Associated partners contribute to the implementation of the action, but do not sign the grant agreement. Associated partners may not employ (recruit) the researchers under the action. They may be used to provide training and host researchers, but only during secondments.

Q3: Under the unit cost category "institutional unit contributions per person month", there is the category "Management and indirect contribution"; can the institution receiving this use some to pay for time spent supervising the student?

A: The institutional costs should not cover the personnel costs of the staff employed by the coordinator or the other beneficiaries (e.g. PIs and supervisors). Those personnel costs should be covered by their own institution.

Institutional costs should cover among other the training and networking activities contributing to the Doctoral Candidates career development; they should cover tuition fees, visa related fees, costs links to conferences, travel, and accommodation of secondments of less than 6 months, as well as beneficiary's additional costs in connection with the action (e.g., personnel costs for project management/coordination, indirect costs, consortium agreement, etc.).

The use of institutional costs should help the consortium implement the action by covering all research expenses, training and networking activities foreseen in the Description of Action for the benefit of the recruited researchers, as well as management costs. This is the reason why the eligibility of institutional costs is linked to the eligibility of the MSCA fellows. In order to achieve the said objectives, there is some flexibility as regards the use of the budget (redistributions of institutional costs within the consortium are allowed, unused amounts can be used to increase the salary of a fellow or organize additional trainings, etc.). The optimisation of the budget and the appropriate use of the institutional costs for the benefit of the recruited researchers and the project management is the sole responsibility of the consortium whose primary obligation is to implement the action as described in Annex 1 and in the spirit of the Work programme. The proper implementation of the action will be assessed by the REA during the course and at the end of the action. So, to conclude, the consortium is solely responsible for the proper use of any institutional funds and the explanation on the use of the institutional costs should not be reported to the REA.

Q4: Can associate partners be the co-supervisor of a DC (so not the host institution) but an official supervisor of the DC?

A: An associate partner can act as a co-supervisor or official supervisor of a Doctoral Candidate (DC) in an MSCA Doctoral Network, provided the DC is recruited by a Beneficiary. The recruiting Beneficiary remains fully responsible under the Grant Agreement for the implementation of the action, the eligibility of the recruited DC, and for ensuring that hosting and supervision are properly arranged.

Q5: When inviting an Australian University as an associated partner, would they not have to recruit PhD fellows? or can they "just" train European-positioned fellows during the programme?

A: Only beneficiaries can recruit the Doctoral Candidates, they sign the Grant Agreement and receive MSCA funding. An Associate Partner does not receive funding directly from the project budget and does not recruit fellows under the action, however they do participate in the implementation of the project by providing training and/or hosting of seconded researchers.

Q6: Can an organisation based in Canada and included in a Doctoral network project as an associated partner receive some of the funding as a transfer from the funding received by beneficiary organisations?

A: An associated partner can be from any country. They cannot directly claim cost, however they can be reimbursed by a beneficiary for the implementation of their tasks as foreseen in Annex I. This can be formalised in their partnership agreement or within the consortium agreement.

Q7: Can a PhD in the Arts (Music, Visual Arts, PErforming Arts, Fine arts, Design) also be part of the Joint degree?

A: To help applicants select the most relevant panel for their proposal, a document providing a breakdown of each research area into a number of descriptors is available on the REA website. The descriptors need to be chosen amongst the MSCA Keywords. So in this case the Arts are in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SOC) Panel.

Q8: If a third country can be a beneficiary is this low to middle income countries? a high income third country recruits a DC c

they would be expected to fund the DC? And then they could be additional to the maximum 540 PM of the project?

A: There are two distinct scenarios to consider:

1. Low- and middle-income third countries listed in the Horizon Europe Programme Guide are automatically eligible for funding as beneficiaries. If such a beneficiary recruits a Doctoral Candidate, that DC's person-months count towards the maximum 540 person-months of the network.

2. High-income third countries are not automatically eligible for funding. If a high-income third-country organisation participates as a beneficiary, it is expected to fund the Doctoral Candidate(s) it recruits from its own resources, unless the expert evaluators exceptionally recommend EU funding on the grounds that its participation is essential for the project (e.g., unique infrastructure, data access, or expertise). In such a case, the funding would be awarded exceptionally and the relevant person-months would still count within the 540-person-month cap.

If the high-income third-country organisation is not approved for EU funding, it may still participate as an associated partner at its own cost. In that scenario, the researchers it employs are not MSCA-funded Doctoral Candidates under the action and do not count towards the 540-person-month maximum.

Q9: Could an external consultant supporting the consortium's coordinating organisation with proposal preparation fill-in themselves the information for part A of the Doctoral networks application for Doctoral Networks in the funding portal?

A: an external consultant can fill in Part A on behalf of the coordinating organisation, provided they have been granted the appropriate access rights in the Funding & Tenders Portal by the coordinator

Q10: Is it possible to recruit a DC already enrolled in an existing PhD programme for a shorter fellowship within a DN?

A: One of the key eligibility requirement is that the Doctoral Candidate can not be in the possession of a doctoral degree at the date of recruitment.
In a regular MSCA DN (Doctoral Network) and DN-ID (Industrial Doctorate) project, the minimum/maximum duration of the funded recruitment (on the basis of full-time employment) is 3-36 months.
In a DN-JD (Joint Doctorate), Doctoral Candidates can be recruited for a period of up to 48 months. Consequently, the project duration can last up to 60 months. See also the Work Programme and Guide for Applicants.
Shorter appointments (with a minimum duration of 3 months) must be carefully explained and justified. They will be assessed by the expert evaluators during the evaluation procedure, bearing in mind the spirit of the Work Programme which is to train "*a new generation of creative, entrepreneurial, innovative and resilient doctoral candidates, able to face current and future challenges and to convert knowledge and ideas into products and services for economic and social benefit*" as well as engage in a doctoral research programme.
Please note that as soon as a fellow obtains their doctoral degree, they cease to be eligible as doctoral candidate in the project.

Q11: Once agreed on the partners in the network, do they all have to agree on the proposal to submit?

A: In practice, all beneficiaries in an MSCA Doctoral Network consortium should agree to the final proposal before submission, even though the Funding & Tenders Portal technically allows the coordinator to submit the proposal.

There is no separate "signature by every partner" required at proposal submission stage. However, the coordinator is expected to submit the proposal on behalf of a consortium whose members have agreed to the proposal and their respective commitments.

Q12: Can MSCA Doctoral Networks and MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships 2026 be conceptually linked within one consortium if applications, budgets, roles, and deliverables remain separate?

A: MSCA Doctoral Networks (DN) and MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF) are two distinct funding actions under Horizon Europe with separate calls, eligibility rules, evaluation processes, and grant agreements. They cannot be formally combined into a single consortium application.

That said, there is no rule preventing a research group or institution from submitting separate applications to both actions in parallel, provided each application is fully independent, self-standing, and does not cross-reference the other as a prerequisite for implementation. If selected, both projects would run in parallel under separate grant agreements. Each application must be evaluated and implemented entirely on its own merits and budget. Costs, deliverables, and activities may not overlap or be double-funded.

Q 13: I have a practical question about publication strategy in MSCA Doctoral Networks. For a doctoral candidate's first paper, how should we judge Open Research Europe compared with a conventional peer-reviewed journal?

A: Open Research Europe (ORE) was created by the European Commission to support immediate open access and open science. Publications arising from Horizon Europe funding can be published there without Article Processing Charges and the platform uses open peer review. This aligns very well with MSCA's open science objectives.

Therefore, publishing in ORE is generally viewed positively from a compliance and open science perspective**.**

Q 14: What is it considered to be a "main activity" for a DC and what is is based on? (work, studies, number of dedicated hours...)

A: The concept of "main activity" is relevant in the context of the MSCA mobility rule. The mobility rule requires that the recruited researcher must not have resided or carried out their main activity in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their date of recruitment.

The Work Programme provides a precise definition in a footnote: "main activity" refers to the country where the researcher is physically based when carrying out the main activity AND the country of the institution for which the main activity is performed (e.g., the employer). This is a dual criterion — both the physical location of the researcher and the country of the employing or enrolling institution are taken into account.

In practice, this covers employment (including part-time employment), enrolment in full-time studies such as a Master's or PhD programme, and research work. Both dimensions must point to the same country for the 12-month calculation to apply.

Short stays, holidays, compulsory national service, and time spent in procedures for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention are not taken into account when calculating the 12-month period. Researchers who have refugee status or benefit from EU temporary protection at the date of recruitment are exempt from the mobility rule entirely.

Beneficiaries are responsible for verifying and documenting the eligibility of recruited researchers, and should retain supporting evidence (employment contracts, enrolment certificates, etc.) as this may be subject to audit.

Q 15: Why are the evaluations not blind for the names of the institutions /countries/names of researchers?

A: MSCA Doctoral Networks proposals are evaluated by independent external experts who have access to the full proposal, including the identities of the participating organisations and their supervisors. This is a deliberate feature of the evaluation design. The assessment of the proposal includes the quality and

capacity of the consortium, the supervisors' track record, and the host organisations' research environment. This requires knowledge of who the participating organisations and supervisors are. Blind review would make it impossible to assess these elements, which are integral to the evaluation form.

Conflict of interest safeguards are applied at the expert selection stage, ensuring that full identification does not translate into bias.

Q16: If I resubmit my proposal to MSCA DN, but this time I fill out Section 11 for RAISE. Will it be evaluated based on MSCA DN, RAISE, or both?

A: Remember that you can only resubmit if your proposal received a score above 80 % in the last MSCA DN call. Please note that the relevance of your proposal to the RAISE scope will only be assessed if your proposals is amongst the highest-ranked reserve list proposals from the MSCA DN ranking list.

RAISE DN proposals are evaluated as part of the standard MSCA DN 2026 process and are not assessed separately. Once the main MSCA DN ranking is established, a cross-panel list is drawn up from the highest-ranked proposals on the reserve list, including enough proposals to cover approximately three times the available RAISE DN budget. From this list, experts assess how well each proposal fits the RAISE topic. The final RAISE ranking combines the MSCA evaluation score with this relevance assessment.

Q 17: Resubmission is allowed even under 80% scoring after two years (skipping 1 call). However, it is still necessary to mark in the submission system if the proposal has been submitted in the TWO previous years.

A: As indicated in the dedicated Work Programme, a proposal that scored below 80% in the previous DN call cannot be resubmitted in the immediately following call. All applicants must nevertheless declare whether a similar proposal was submitted in either of the last two DN calls.MSCA DN resubmission restrictions only apply to the previous call, while the resubmission self-declaration applies to the last 2 calls.

Q 18: Why couldn’t evaluators be the same as in the previous submission? Different reviewers often focus on new points, so changes made after earlier feedback may be overlooked, lowering the final evaluation

A: REA cannot guarantee that the same evaluators will be assigned to a resubmitted proposal. The expert pool is large, evaluators change from year to year, and assignment is determined by availability, conflict of interest checks, and disciplinary match, not continuity with previous evaluations.

The evaluation procedure is designed so that each proposal is assessed de novo, on its own merits, exactly as submitted. Evaluators do not have access to the previous version of the proposal. Only after the current consensus evaluation is finalised may evaluators consult the previous evaluation report, and solely for quality control purposes, to verify consistency, not to compare the two proposals directly.

This means that applicants should not include any reference to previous evaluation outcomes or changes made since a prior submission in the proposal text. Experts will be strictly instructed to disregard any such references. More fundamentally, a proposal that was written to make improvements visible relative to a previous version would enjoy an advantage over first-time submissions, and that would be incompatible with a fair and equal evaluation process.

Every proposal, whether submitted for the first time or resubmitted, must stand entirely on its own. If improvements were made in response to earlier feedback, they should simply make the proposal stronger as a self-standing document, not be signposted as changes. A well-revised proposal will speak for itself.

Q 19: What is the probability to be funded if we are first on the reserve list on our panel? When do we get the notification?

A: Being first on the reserve list does not guarantee funding, but it does place your proposal in the strongest possible position outside the main funded list.

Reserve list proposals may be funded if the budget allows — for example, if a funded proposal is withdrawn, if budget savings arise during grant agreement preparation, or if additional funds become available. The probability depends on factors that cannot be predicted at the time of evaluation, such as the number of funded consortia that decline or fail to sign the grant agreement. Reserve list proposals are notified at the same time as funded and rejected proposals. Further updates on potential funding from the reserve list are communicated as they arise during the grant agreement preparation phase.

Q20: If you have a network that has 2 universities in each of 3 countries (e.g. two in UK, two in Germany, two in Spain). Would it count as a joint doctoral network if the supervision and awarding was done between the universities within each country

A: In the scenario described, if the supervision and degree award are organised only between universities within the same country (e.g., both German universities jointly awarding a German-only degree), this would not fulfil the DN-JD requirement, the structural intent being that the degree reflects collaboration across institutions in different countries.

To qualify as DN-JD, the pre-agreement letter required at proposal stage must commit to a joint, double or multiple degree involving at least one institution from a different EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. Degrees awarded solely by universities within one country, even if jointly awarded, would not satisfy this condition.

Q21: What is the degree of interdisciplinarity that you are looking for? For instance, interdisciplinarity within social sciences counts? Or the proposal must include STEM + SS +/or Health to be considered interdisciplinary?

A: The Work Programme provides a precise definition: the term "discipline" refers to the first level of the MSCA keywords hierarchy. Two research areas therefore constitute different disciplines if they correspond to different first-level keywords, regardless of whether they belong to the same or different scientific panels. The full list of MSCA keywords is available here: MSCA Keywords.

This means that interdisciplinarity within a single broad domain is fully valid — for example, combining sociology and economics within the Social Sciences and Humanities panel qualifies as interdisciplinary in the formal MSCA sense, provided these correspond to different first-level keywords. There is no requirement to cross between STEM, social sciences, health, or other broad domains.

That said, the evaluators will assess whether the interdisciplinary dimension is meaningful and genuinely adds scientific value to the research and training objectives — not simply whether the formal definition is met on paper. A proposal that bridges two disciplines in a well-justified and scientifically coherent way will score better than one where the interdisciplinary dimension appears superficial or incidental.

Q22: what is the best practice for KPIs'. At the level of the assessment of the proposal, is it better to have only few ones or the more the better?

A: The term "KPI" does not appear in either the proposal template or the evaluation criteria. What the evaluation framework actually asks for is slightly different, and it is worth understanding this distinction before drafting your proposal.

In two specific places, the proposal is expected to demonstrate measurability and trackability:

Under sub-criterion 1.1 (Excellence), evaluators will assess whether the project's scientific objectives are clear, measurable and verifiable, and realistically achievable. This means your research objectives should be formulated in a way that allows an evaluator, and ultimately the consortium itself, to determine whether they have been met.

Under sub-criterion 2.3 (Impact), evaluators will assess whether the proposed dissemination, exploitation and communication measures have clear objectives, and whether the proposal explains how the fulfilment of those objectives will be monitored and with which indicators. This is the closest the template comes to what applicants typically think of as KPIs.

The practical implication is that the question is not "how many indicators should I include?" but rather whether your objectives are clearly defined and whether you have explained how you will know if you are achieving them. A small number of well-chosen, concrete, and directly linked indicators will be more convincing to evaluators than a long list of generic or loosely connected metrics.

Q23: When choosing additional beneficiaries for the project, does including partners from the Inclusiveness Target Countries strengthen the submission?

A: Including partners from Widening/Inclusiveness Target Countries (i.e., countries with lower research and innovation performance as defined in Horizon Europe) is not a formal evaluation criterion for MSCA Doctoral Networks. The programme is evaluated on the basis of scientific excellence, impact, and implementation quality, regardless of the geographic distribution of beneficiaries beyond the minimum consortium requirements. The key principle is that every partner's participation, regardless of their country, must be justified by a clear contribution to the project.

Q 24: Given that funding cut-off scores are around 97%, has the Commission considered increasing the DN budget for 2027/2028?

A: The high competition and cut-off scores reflect the quality and attractiveness of the programme, and we understand that this is a source of frustration for many excellent proposals that remain unfunded.

The budget for each call is determined within the framework of the Horizon Europe multi-annual financial framework and cannot be adjusted unilaterally for a single call. For the 2026 call, the total MSCA DN budget is approximately €593 million.

Discussions on the budget for 2027, the final year of Horizon Europe, and for the next framework programme are ongoing. Feedback from stakeholders, including data on success rates and the quality of unfunded proposals, does inform those discussions. The programme has indeed grown in budget from call to call since 2021, partly in response to demand.

Q25: What happens if, after the GAP, you are offered an MSCA grant but have also been awarded funding through RAISE? Is it possible to choose between the two or does accepting the RAISE grant mean forfeiting your position on the MSCA reserve list

A: It is possible for a proposal to appear on both the RAISE funded list and the DN reserve list simultaneously, and in that situation applicants would indeed face a choice. A proposal cannot be funded under both : the same project cannot receive two separate grants, one under RAISE and one under DN.

If your proposal is selected for RAISE funding, you would need to decide whether to accept the RAISE grant or to forfeit it and remain on the DN reserve list in the hope of being funded from the DN budget. Importantly, this is not a risk-free choice: a position on the DN reserve list does not guarantee funding, as reserve list proposals are only funded if budget becomes available.

The timing is also a relevant factor. RAISE grant agreement preparations will be finalised before any potential funding from the DN reserve list is proposed, since additional budget to fund DN reserve list proposals, if it becomes available at all, comes at a later stage. This means that in practice, applicants would need to make a decision on the RAISE grant before knowing with certainty whether their DN reserve list position will translate into funding.

In short, accepting a RAISE grant provides certainty of funding, while forfeiting it to remain on the DN reserve list involves accepting a degree of uncertainty. Applicants in this situation are encouraged to weigh that trade-off carefully.

Q 26: What are the expectations regarding the level of detail, especially in linking each DC's individual project to specific training modules? How to best demonstrate complementarity between network-wide training and local doctoral programmes?

A: The individual DC projects should be clearly described in Section 1.1, with each project contributing to the overall network research objectives in an identifiable and complementary way. The links between individual projects should be visible : they should form an interlinked programme, not a collection of unrelated topics.

The training programme should be designed to match the scientific and methodological needs of the research projects proposed, and to enhance the employability of the doctoral candidates who will eventually be recruited. The proposal should explain how the network-wide training events are meaningful for the intended research and how they incorporate transferable, inter/multidisciplinary and intersectoral skills in support of the fellows' development.

To demonstrate complementarity, the proposal should explain how the two levels of training reinforce each other and avoid duplication, and how together they will equip the future recruited researchers with both the technical and transferable skills needed for a wide range of career options in academia and beyond.

Q 27: A consortium of 7 beneficiaries submitted a proposal 2025. 2026 they submit a new one whereas only 4 beneficiaries are old. Other 3 are new. Is this considered a resubmission?

A: The resubmission restriction rules apply when a new proposal involves 70% or more of the same recruiting organisations as a proposal submitted to the previous DN call that received a score below 80%. In your example, 4 out of 7 original beneficiaries represent approximately 57% overlap i.e. below the 70% threshold. On this basis, the new proposal would not be automatically flagged as a resubmission. If the 2025 proposal scored 80% or above, there are no resubmission restrictions regardless of consortium overlap.

Q 28: Are there any statistics about the number of resubmissions you need for your proposal (always surpassing the 80% threshold) before winning the funding? Is MSCA DN a question of resubmitting your proposal 2-4 times implementing corrections?

A: REA does not publish aggregate statistics specifically on the number of resubmissions before success for funded proposals. However, many first-time submissions are funded, and resubmitting two to four times before success is not the norm. At the same time, some proposals have been resubmitted at every call since the first Horizon Europe DN call without ever being funded. Resubmitting is therefore not a guarantee of success in itself.

The feedback from the Evaluation Summary Report is the most valuable tool available for strengthening a resubmission and we encourage applicants to genuinely engage with such feedback and make substantive improvements to their proposal. The evaluation is always carried out de novo, meaning each proposal is assessed entirely on its own merits as submitted, with no credit given for previous attempts or improvements made since a prior submission.

Ultimately, this is a very competitive calls, and the success rate is expected to be around 8% for the 2026 call. This means that a significant number of genuinely excellent proposals will remain unfunded each year due to budget constraints rather than lack of quality.

Q29: During an Audit how will compliance with art 9.1 (Associated partners) be checked? Should there be a formal agreement between AP en beneficiaries to translate the obligations of art. 9.1 or is a notification to the AP enough?

A: Under MSCA Doctoral Networks, Article 9.1 of the Grant Agreement concerns Associated partners (APs) and requires that they carry out the tasks attributed to them in the project and comply with the relevant obligations applicable to those tasks, even though they are not beneficiaries and do not sign the Grant Agreement themselves.

From an audit perspective, the key question is not whether a specific document with a particular title exists, but whether the consortium can demonstrate that the Associated partner agreed to participate, understood and accepted the obligations relevant to its role and the tasks (i.e. training/hosting of Doctoral Candidates) attributed to the AP were actually carried out as described.

Q30: usually nodes of ERIC participate as affiliated entities in DN can participate as beneficiary or must be associated partner?

A: This question requires distinguishing carefully between different types of entities, as the answer depends on the legal nature of the participant involved.

ERICs themselves are established under EU law (Council Regulation (EC) No 723/2009) and fall under the category of "entities created under Union law." As such, they are generally eligible to participate as beneficiaries and receive funding in MSCA Doctoral Networks, subject to the standard participation conditions. For the mobility rule, a specific provision applies: recruited researchers must not have spent more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their recruitment in the same appointing organisation.

Nodes of an ERIC are a different matter. Nodes are typically separate legal entities from the ERIC itself, and their eligibility depends on their own individual legal nature and country of establishment, assessed on a case-by-case basis. If a node is an independent legal entity established in an EU Member State or

Horizon Europe Associated Country, it may in principle participate as a beneficiary, provided it fulfils all standard requirements — including recruiting at least one Doctoral Candidate and hosting and supervising within its own premises.

Q31: Regarding the restrictions indicated in the WP Annexes for Legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, etc. Do these restrictions apply to phd candidates active in those countries at the time of recruitment?

A: The restrictions set out in the Horizon Europe Work Programme General Annexes concerning Russia, Belarus and other sanctioned countries apply to legal entities established in those countries, meaning they cannot participate as beneficiaries or associated partners, and to natural persons established in those countries at the time of their participation in the action. In addition, individuals who are themselves targeted by EU sanctions, for example, persons named on EU restrictive measures lists, cannot participate in the action regardless of where they are established.

Crucially, the restrictions based on place of establishment are determined by where a person is established, not by their nationality. MSCA recruitment is explicitly open to researchers of any nationality, and a researcher's national origin is not a determining factor for eligibility.

To illustrate with a concrete example: a Doctoral Candidate of Russian nationality but residing in France, can be recruited in a DN project, provided the DC meets all standard MSCA eligibility requirements, including the mobility rule.

What would be incompatible with these restrictions is recruiting a researcher who remains established in a sanctioned country at the time of their recruitment, for example, someone physically based in Russia and whose main activity is carried out there at the time they are taken on. In that case, the restriction would apply regardless of nationality.

Beneficiaries are responsible for verifying and documenting the eligibility of recruited researchers and should retain appropriate evidence of their place of establishment at the time of recruitment.

Q32: from the RAISE text "...Proposals should therefore clearly specify how they meet this “AI in science” criterion." Can you help us understand what your criterion of AI in Science is? or the definition?

A: The RAISE DN call (Resources for AI in Science in Europe) has a specific and carefully defined scope. Based on the proposal template (Section 11 of Part B2) and the official call documents, proposals must either develop or significantly participate in the development of innovative AI systems, models, tools or methodologies for their scientific domain. These systems, models, tools or methodologies must substantially innovate the way in which scientific information is analysed and enable a scientific contribution that furthers the state of the art in the discipline of the doctoral research.

Two types of proposals are explicitly out of scope:

1. Proposals with a unique focus on computer-scientific AI development : for example, those that would result only in publications in computer science or AI-specific venues, without a meaningful contribution to the domain science of the doctoral research.

2. Proposals that merely use existing AI systems, methodologies or general-purpose computational tools for data processing or statistical analysis in an instrumental way, i.e., where AI is simply a standard analytical tool rather than a subject of innovation.

Regarding the level of AI involvement per doctoral candidate: not every DC needs to be directly developing AI systems. What matters is that the network as a whole has AI innovation at its core, and that this innovation genuinely advances the scientific domain of the doctoral research, not just the computer science of AI itself.

Applicants are strongly advised to read the specific scope of the RAISE DN call (published in Work Programme Annex 14 / Horizontal Activities) carefully before opting in. The justification in Section 11 of Part B2 (maximum one page) must be clear and specific, a generic reference to the use of AI will not be sufficient. The quality of this justification directly determines the RAISE relevance score used in the cross-panel ranking.

Q33: In joint doctoral networks, all DCs need to spend time in the non academic sector? Or could there be a mix of DC types?

A: No, there is no requirement for Doctoral Candidates in a DN-JD (Joint Doctorate) to spend time in the non-academic sector. The overview table in the Guide for Applicants confirms that for DN-JD, a stay in the non-academic sector is "encouraged" but not mandatory; the same goes for standard DNs. The mandatory minimum of 50% of fellowship duration in the non-academic sector applies exclusively to DN-ID (Industrial Doctorates).

That said, applicants are encouraged to involve the non-academic sector meaningfully in the research and training activities, as this is assessed under sub-criterion 2.1 (Impact) regardless of the DN modality. A DN-JD that demonstrates genuine and substantive non-academic involvement will score better under that criterion than one where non-academic participation is absent or superficial.

Q34: Is it mandatory to have at least one industry beneficiary?

A: It depends on the type of action. For standard DNs and DN-JDs, there is no requirement to include any non-academic beneficiary or associated partner. However, meaningful involvement of the non-academic sector is strongly encouraged for all DN modalities, whether as a beneficiary or as an associated partner, and is assessed under sub-criterion 2.1 (Impact). Evaluators will specifically look at whether the non-academic sector contributes meaningfully to the research and training activities, through secondments, active participation in research, or tangible contributions to network-wide training. All things equal, a proposal that demonstrates genuine and substantive non-academic involvement, regardless of the type of action, will therefore score better under that criterion than one where non-academic participation is absent or superficial.

For DN-ID (Industrial Doctorates), the active participation of the non-academic sector goes beyond encouragement and is structurally mandatory: each Doctoral Candidate must spend at least 50% of their fellowship duration in the non-academic sector. This can be achieved either by having a non-academic beneficiary that recruits and/or hosts the DC, or by having non-academic associated partners that host DCs on secondment for at least 50% of their time. So while a non-academic organisation does not strictly have to be a beneficiary even in DN-ID, its meaningful structural involvement in the project is mandatory.

Note that "non-academic" is broader than "industry" : it includes any socio-economic actor outside the academic sector, such as NGOs, hospitals, charities, and public bodies, as well as companies. The academic or non-academic status of each entity is determined automatically by the system based on the answers given during registration in the participants' registry.

Q35: What are the IP sharing expectations for industrial associated partners in IDN

A: The proposal template requires applicants to include an outline of their strategy for the management of intellectual property in Section 2.3 (Part B1). This is assessed by evaluators at proposal stage, only an outline is mandatory, not a detailed agreement.

Beyond this, IP arrangements in MSCA Doctoral Networks are primarily governed by the Consortium Agreement, which beneficiaries are required to put in place before the grant agreement is signed. Associated partners, including industrial ones, do not sign the grant agreement, but their rights and obligations, including any IP-related arrangements, should be addressed in the Consortium Agreement or in a separate agreement between the beneficiary and the associated partner.

The Work Programme and the proposal template do not prescribe specific IP sharing models for industrial associated partners. Applicants have flexibility in designing IP arrangements that are appropriate for their consortium, provided these are clearly outlined in the proposal and properly formalised in the Consortium Agreement. Applicants are advised to seek legal advice on IP arrangements early in the proposal preparation process, as this can be a complex area, particularly where non-academic partners contribute proprietary knowledge or infrastructure to the project. The European IPR Helpdesk can assist you : https://intellectual-property-helpdesk.ec.europa.eu/index_en

Q36: Is there an official list of Chinese Universities linked to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) that cannot take part as associated partners in DNs?

A: Yes. Chinese universities linked to the MIIT are not eligible to participate as beneficiaries or associated partners in MSCA Doctoral Networks. This restriction is set out in General Annex B of the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026–2027 and applies across the whole Horizon Europe Framework Programme.

The list of MIIT-linked universities is referenced in the General Annexes of the Work Programme, available on the Funding and Tenders Portal. Applicants should consult this list directly to verify the eligibility status of any Chinese institution they intend to include in their consortium. The relevant General Annexes document can be found at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2026-2027/wp-15-general-annexes_horizon-2026-2027_en.pdf

Q37: Please clarify the criteria for evaluating the 'justification' of relevance to RAISE (not in the MSCA DN information or the RAISE call documents).

A: The justification of relevance to RAISE is provided by applicants in Section 11 of Part B2 (maximum one page), and is assessed by expert evaluators specifically appointed for this purpose as part of the cross-panel RAISE ranking process.

The evaluation of RAISE relevance is based on the scope defined in the RAISE DN call (Work Programme Annex 14, Horizontal Activities). As clarified in the Guide for Applicants and the proposal template, to fall within scope the proposal must develop or significantly participate in the development of innovative AI systems, models, tools or methodologies that substantially innovate the way scientific information is analysed, enabling a scientific contribution that advances the state of the art in the domain science of the doctoral research. Proposals that merely use existing AI tools instrumentally, or that focus exclusively on computer-scientific AI development without advancing a domain science, are explicitly out of scope.

Evaluators will assess Section 11 against these scope criteria. A strong justification will clearly and specifically explain how the proposed AI innovation is integral and indispensable to the research, how it goes beyond existing approaches, and how it drives the scientific objectives of the network — not simply assert that AI is used. Generic or vague references to AI will not be sufficient. The quality of this justification directly determines the RAISE relevance score, which is combined with the MSCA DN evaluation score to produce the final RAISE ranking.

Q38: Does the new table font size 11pt limitation also apply to the partner description tables in B2?

A: Yes. Both the proposal template and the official Q&A confirm that the minimum font size of 11 points applies throughout the proposal, for both the main text and all tables — with the sole exception of literature references listed as footnotes, for which a minimum of 8 points is permitted. This applies to Part B1 and Part B2 alike, including the participating organisations tables in Section 8 of Part B2. There is no exception for the partner description tables. Some tolerance will be applied for part B2, but not for the sections of part B1 subject to page limitation, i.e. maximum 30 pages applied to sections 1, 2, and 3.

Applicants should bear in mind that Part B2 has no overall page limit, so there is no incentive to reduce font size in that section. Non-compliance with the minimum font size requirement may lead REA to request reformatting of the proposal, and any pages exceeding the page limit resulting from that reformatting would be disregarded by evaluators.

Q39: Would it be negative if there are 3 partners from the same country in the consortium ?

A: Not automatically, but it requires careful attention to the 40% rule. The Work Programme stipulates that no more than 40% of the total EU financial contribution may be allocated to beneficiaries in the same country. This is an eligibility condition assessed at submission stage on the basis of the maximum grant amount — proposals not complying with it will be declared ineligible.

Q40: What is the average size of consortium in a funded DN?

A: According to the official Q&A published on the Funding and Tenders Portal, an average DN project under Horizon Europe is composed of 8 beneficiaries and 10 associated partners.

This figure is provided for information only — there is no prescribed or recommended consortium size, and proposals are not evaluated on the basis of how many partners they include. What matters is that the size and composition of the consortium are appropriate and commensurate with the research and training programme proposed, and that each partner — whether beneficiary or associated partner — has a clear, active, and well-justified role in the project. The Guide for Applicants notes that the number of associated partners should be reasonable and commensurate with the size of the network.

Q41: Are United Nations University institutes located in Europe (or in countries listed under the Horizon Europa programme) eligible for funding? Or would UNU be considered a non-European International Organisation. Note: UNU HQ is in Japan.

A: The eligibility of UNU institutes depends on where they are established. The Work Programme states that international organisations with headquarters in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country are deemed to be established in that Member State or Associated Country, and are therefore eligible to participate and receive funding under the standard rules.

However, UNU's headquarters are in Tokyo, Japan, which is not an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. UNU as an organisation therefore falls into the category of international organisations not headquartered in an EU Member State or Associated Country, meaning it is not automatically eligible for funding.

Individual UNU institutes located in Europe are separate legal entities and must be assessed individually. If a UNU institute is established as an independent legal entity in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country, it may be eligible in its own right depending on its legal status. If it is not an independent legal entity but rather an office or unit of UNU, its eligibility would follow that of the parent organisation.

Q42: What is the optimal number of partners, especially if there are to be non EU Horizon Lead, such as UK and an associated member such as Morocco

A: There is no prescribed optimal number of partners. The number of partners should be reasonable and commensurate with the size of the network. On average, funded DN projects are composed of approximately 8 beneficiaries and 10 associated partners. This is a descriptive average, not a target. What matters is that every partner, whether beneficiary or associated partner, has a clear, active, and well-justified role in the project.

Regarding specific partner types: the UK is a Horizon Europe Associated Country and participates on the same terms as EU Member States — a UK institution can therefore be a fully funded beneficiary, including as coordinator. Morocco is currently under transitional arrangements put in place by the European Commission, which means that Moroccan entities are treated as if they were from a Horizon Europe Associated Country for the entire duration of the programme. Moroccan institutions can therefore participate as fully funded beneficiaries under the same conditions as EU Member States and Associated Countries, and count towards the minimum consortium requirements accordingly.

In all cases, the 40% rule applies: no more than 40% of the total EU financial contribution may be allocated to beneficiaries in any single country.

Q43: If we send a resubmission can the consortium slightly change to include for example a beneficiary from a widening country? Or is better to submit as a different proposal? Is there any advantage in ressubmiting?

A: Yes, the consortium can change between submissions. There are no specific advantages of resubmitting in the evaluation process, beside the fact that you may have taken into account the feedback from your previous evaluation to improve your current proposal. The evaluation procedure is designed so that each proposal is assessed de novo, on its own merits, exactly as submitted. Evaluators do not have access to the previous version of the proposal.

Q44: In a RAISE DN grant proposal, are all the DCs expected to be involved in individual research projects, where the main focus is the use and/or implementation of AI-based tools?

A: Not necessarily all DCs, but the network as a whole must have AI innovation at its core in a meaningful and substantive way. As clarified in the RAISE scope, the proposal must develop or significantly participate in the development of innovative AI systems, models, tools or methodologies that substantially innovate the way scientific information is analysed in the domain science of the doctoral research.

Individual DC projects may vary in the extent to which they directly develop or use AI, as long as the network programme as a whole demonstrates a coherent and indispensable connection to the RAISE scope. What is explicitly out of scope is a proposal where AI is merely used instrumentally in an incidental or standard analytical way by some DCs, with no genuine AI innovation driving the network's research objectives.

The justification in Section 11 of Part B2 (maximum one page) should explain clearly how AI innovation is central to the network's research programme — not just present in some individual projects.

Q45: If there are some beneficiaries in the global north and some in the global south and the majority of events will take place in the global north - how will the higher travel expenses of the DCs from the global south will be balanced out?

A: The MSCA DN budget structure is designed to cover travel and related costs through the Research, Training and Networking contribution part of the unit cost. This part of the unit cost is fixed and cannot be increased. In practice, where DCs are based at institutions in the global south and events predominantly take place in the global north, the higher travel costs should be factored into the consortium's planning when designing the training programme and distributing the Research, Training and Networking budget across beneficiaries. The Consortium Agreement is the instrument through which beneficiaries can agree on how these contributions are redistributed within the consortium to account for such asymmetries. Applicants are encouraged to think carefully about this at proposal stage and to ensure the training programme is realistic and financially sustainable for all recruited researchers, regardless of their location.

Q46: Critical Raw Material such as minerals, mining, and mineral processing, are not considered as an area of specialisation, who evaluates the proposal?

A: MSCA Doctoral Networks operate on a fully bottom-up basis, and research on critical raw materials, minerals, mining and mineral processing is entirely eligible. Owing to the bottom-up nature of the call, a large pool of evaluators is built, that cover also such expertise.

While there is no keyword that uses those exact terms, there are several relevant descriptors in the MSCA Keywords list that a proposal in this area could draw on. This could be the **Environmental and Geo-Sciences (ENV)** panel, which includes under its V2 (Earth system science) level-1 keyword several highly relevant level-2 descriptors, including "Mineralogy, petrology, igneous petrology, metamorphic petrology", "Geology, tectonics, volcanology", "Geochemistry and geophysics", "Natural resources exploration and exploitation", and "Sedimentology, soil science, palaeontology, earth evolution". The first descriptor selected must come from the most relevant sub-area of the chosen panel. Depending on the specific focus of the proposal, other panels could also be relevant. For instance, if the research has a strong materials engineering or process engineering dimension, descriptors from the **Engineering (ENG)** panel such as "Materials engineering", "Chemical engineering, technical chemistry", or "Environmental engineering and geotechnics" could be selected. If the proposal focuses on the chemical characterisation of raw materials, descriptors from the **Chemistry (CHE)** panel may also apply.

Applicants should select the panel that best reflects the core discipline of the proposal, then choose between three and five descriptors in order of importance : the first from the most relevant sub-area of that panel, and the remaining ones freely from any panel. Specific guidance on keyword selection is available on the Funding & Tenders Portal, together with the full MSCA Keywords list.

Q47: How many in-person appointments in the training program are considered appropriate? Is there a rule of thumb or typical range?

A: This question is not entirely clear, but we assume it relates to supervision arrangements, specifically, how many supervisors per Doctoral Candidate is considered appropriate. We answer on that basis below.

There is no prescribed number of supervisors per DC in the MSCA DN rules. What is required is that the supervision arrangements are clearly described, credible, and genuinely capable of supporting each DC's research and career development. Under sub-criterion 1.4 (Quality of supervision), evaluators will assess whether supervisors have sufficient time, knowledge, experience and specific expertise for the individual research project they are expected to supervise. When a DC has several supervisors, they are considered as a group.

In practice, most DC projects in MSCA Doctoral Networks involve a main supervisor and at least one co-supervisor, the latter often from a different institution or sector within the consortium. For DN-ID and DN-JD, joint supervision is mandatory, involving supervisors from both the academic and non-academic sectors in the case of DN-ID, and from multiple degree-awarding institutions in the case of DN-JD.

More broadly, applicants are strongly encouraged to follow the MSCA Guidelines for Supervision, which provide detailed recommendations on what constitutes good supervisory practice — covering aspects such as the establishment of a Career Development Plan, regular progress monitoring, feedback mechanisms, and the respective roles and responsibilities of supervisors and co-supervisors. While these guidelines are non-binding, funded projects are strongly encouraged to take them into account, and adherence to their principles is reflected in the evaluation criteria. The guidelines are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/msca/supervision

Q48: Life science projects have substantially higher material cost Computer to Social science projects. Will the B1 Budget be adjusted for this discrepancy?

A: No. MSCA Doctoral Networks operate on a unit cost basis, meaning the EU contribution is calculated automatically based on the number of person-months requested, using fixed rates set out in the Work Programme — regardless of the scientific discipline or the material costs associated with the research. There is no mechanism to adjust the budget based on the nature of the research field.

Q49: How much budget is allocated to an individual call (eg MSCA DN) and how many calls will be selected in total?

A: The total indicative budget for the MSCA DN 2026 call (HORIZON-MSCA-2026-DN-01) is €593.03 million. An additional €30 million is earmarked separately for the RAISE DN pilot call.

For the 2026 call, we expect to fund approximately 130 DN projects under the main MSCA DN budget, and an additional 7 projects under the RAISE DN pilot call. To put this in context, the 2025 call received 1,616 proposals and funded 141 projects, giving a success rate of approximately 8.7%. The success rate for 2026 will depend on the number of proposals submitted, but is expected to be in the range of 8%.

The budget is distributed between the eight scientific panels in proportion to the number of eligible proposals received in each, so the number of funded projects per panel will vary depending on submission patterns. Within each panel, proposals are ranked and funded in order of their final score until the panel budget is exhausted.

Q50: where do we find the country specific correction coefficients for third countries?

A: The country correction coefficients (CCC) for all countries — including third countries — are published in Table 1 at the end of the MSCA Work Programme 2026–2027 (pages 110–111). This table covers EU Member States, Horizon Europe Associated Countries, and a large number of third countries worldwide. The coefficient applicable to the country of the recruiting beneficiary is the one used to calculate the living allowance for recruited researchers.

The Work Programme is available on the Funding and Tenders Portal at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2026-2027/wp-2-marie-sklodowska-curie-actions_horizon-2026-2027_en.pdf