MSCA Global PF
Advice for applicants

Lessons learnt from a successful Marie Sklodowska Curie Global Postdoctoral Fellowship

Florencia Enghel
with input from the JU Grants Office

JÖNKÖPING December 2023
About the author

Florencia Enghel is an Associate Professor in Media and Communication Studies at Jönköping University’s School of Education and Communication and a former Marie Skłodowska Curie Global Postdoctoral Fellow. She applied to the MSCA in 2019, was awarded the grant in 2020, and successfully completed the fellowship in November 2023.

The lessons learnt in this information booklet are based on Florencia’s experience. Because some of the call for proposals’ requirements may change from one year to another, if you plan to apply, make sure to check with the Grants Office for updates.

Jönköping University Grants Office

Shira Becker and Linda Olsson are Research Advisors and part of the JU Grants Office. They are experts in European funding opportunities.

Pernilla Nedar is a Financial Advisor for EU funding at the JU Grants Office. She is an expert in financial matters.

Please find contact details for the JU Grants Office staff here.
Why apply for an MSCA Fellowship?

Compared to the process of conducting research as a Ph.D. candidate, a postdoctoral fellowship will grant you the freedom to make your own choices about how to advance the research project. Of course, you will also have full responsibility for completing it.

You will be able to focus on doing research full-time. This will imply studying and acquiring new capabilities: you will need to (and want to) familiarize yourself with new theoretical and methodological knowledge, and you will get to design your learning curriculum to that purpose.

You will moreover have a budget for research expenses.

What does it take to apply?

You will need to submit a fully fleshed-out research proposal.

Any previous experience applying for grants will be useful, even if the specific requirements of the MSCA differ. But if you don’t have any previous experience, don’t worry. Applying requires practice, and you will learn from trying even if you don’t succeed the first time.

International mobility is an essential aspect of the Global Fellowships\textsuperscript{1}, in two ways:
1) mobility between universities in Europe and in other regions of the world, and
2) secondments, i.e., temporary transfers to institutions/organizations of your choice, anywhere in the world, for training, collaboration, and exchange purposes.

\textsuperscript{1} There are two types of MSCA Fellowships: Global and European. For details about the European Fellowship, visit the official website and/or contact the Grants Office.
The European Commission evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of applications according to three criteria:

✓ **excellence**,  
✓ **impact**, and  
✓ **implementation**.

These criteria also refer to the elements your application must include. Following a template provided by the European Commission, you will structure the application in three parts, one for each criterion.

When you start writing your proposal, your challenges will be:

1) to address the three criteria in a clear and substantial way, and  
2) to justify what you propose carefully/convincingly, in maximum 10 pages (approx. 7,500 words).

**Excellence** refers to:

→ the research project’s purpose and objectives,  
→ the scientific knowledge available about the problem to be studied at the time of applying,  
→ the reasons why it is important and necessary to conduct the new research proposed,  
→ the proposed methodological approach,  
→ the training objectives that you will set for yourself as a researcher in agreement with your supervisor at the host institution (in the country where your project will take place),  
→ what you plan to offer in return in the form of the transfer of knowledge, both to your institution abroad and to the European institution managing your Fellowship,  
→ the quality of the local supervision that you will benefit from in the host institution abroad (who the supervisor is, and why s/he is an appropriate choice), and  
→ the quality of the supervision that you will receive in the European institution managing the Fellowship.
Impact refers to:

→ how you as a researcher anticipate that the fellowship will enhance your future career prospects,

→ the characteristics and the quality of the measures that you propose in order to disseminate your project’s findings and to use them productively to contribute to scientific knowledge and the proposed social and economic impacts.

Implementation refers to:

→ the coherence and effectiveness of the work plan that you will propose, organized in the form of a sequence of “work packages” or WP (for each WP you will specify concrete tasks and deliverables, and you will distribute the WPs in a timeline, indicating your deadlines for your main deliverables and for the project’s major milestones),

→ the appropriateness of the structure and the procedures that you will propose for managing the project,

→ your evaluation of the potential research and administrative risks that you think that you may have to face,

→ your contingency plans to address those risks if necessary, and

→ the appropriateness of the institutional infrastructure that will be available to you as a researcher during the project.

In a nutshell, implementation has to do with producing a research design that is ambitious but feasible. Your research design must be doable. Promise to do what you can reasonably do with the time, the concrete possibilities, and the research budget that you will have, and not more. Outputs count, yes, and your performance at the time of reporting to the European Commission will be evaluated partly based on outputs. But what matters the most is that you demonstrate that you are both an innovative researcher (ready to tackle a persistent, complex problem from an unexplored angle) and a realistic planner.
Preparing and writing the application

Preparing a successful application requires starting well in advance of the submission deadline and cooperating with JU colleagues.

* Familiarize yourself with the Fellowship and make sure you meet the requirements. **Meet with the Grants Office** to express your interest in applying and find out what support they can provide.

* Think about what institution abroad can host your Global Fellowship and make initial contact with a potential supervisor there. Start a conversation and ‘test the waters’. Ideally, by the time you start writing the proposal you will have a supervisor in place in the host university abroad and at Jönköping University.

* Plan your timeline: allow enough focused time for developing the proposal, and for completing other required paperwork.

When starting to develop the proposal:

* Reach out to the Grants Office, your faculty’s Financial Controller, your supervisor at JU, and perhaps human resources staff, to ensure that you will get their support when needed.

* Allow time for coordinating dialogue between those internal support functions.

* Allow extra time in case there are unexpected delays or complications in the process.

* Ask the Grants Office and your faculty’s Financial Controller for a draft budget for your application.

* Ask your supervisor abroad for an official letter of commitment from the host institution where s/he works.

* Secure host organizations and mentors for your secondments

Aim to have a full draft of the proposal ready two months in advance of the submission deadline. Share it with your Research Advisor and supervisor and request their constructive feedback. Revise the draft accordingly. Ask the Grants Office and your faculty’s Financial Controller to prepare the final budget.
Succeeding

If and when you get the Fellowship (congratulations!), two agreements will need to be formalized: one between your faculty and the European Commission, and one between the faculty and yourself.

You may also need to get definitive ethics clearance from the European Commission. If there are any ethical issues you must address in order to get such clearance, you will receive an Ethics Summary Report together with, or after, the good news that you got the Fellowship. As you prepare the application, bear in mind that the more you think about your project’s ethical issues at that stage, the easier it will be for you to obtain clearance later.

Carrying out the project

Managing the project requires effort and performing specific tasks:
✓ reporting your working hours monthly,
✓ keeping track of your research expenses and making refund claims,
✓ keeping a ‘live’ budget that you can adjust depending on changing circumstances (for example, variations in currency conversions or inflation in the host country),
✓ planning travel, and
✓ coordinating plans with your supervisor abroad and your secondment hosts.

Importantly, managing the project also requires that you report to the European Commission at predefined times. Your reporting must correspond to the commitments that you made in your proposal, so your main responsibility is to manage yourself kindly but firmly, to stay on track with work packages and deliverables.

The Grants Office is prepared and willing to assist you with these tasks as required. Always contact them if in doubt.