



Horizon Europe Programme

Guide for Applicants

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions - Doctoral Networks (DN)

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Disclaimer

This guide aims to support potential applicants to the DN 2024 call. It is provided for information purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation of any applicable legal sources. Neither the European Commission nor the European Research Executive Agency (or any person acting on their behalf) can be held responsible for the use made of this guidance document. Note that the guidance provided in the Annotated Model Grant Agreement shall prevail in case of discrepancies



History of changes

Version	Date	Change	Page
1.0 2021	22.06.2021	Initial version (2021 call)	
1.1 2022	21.04.2022	- Addition of resubmission restrictions and Gender Equality Plan - Updated consortium requirement for DN-ID - Steering board replaced by Supervisory board - Updated secondment limitation for DN-ID and DN-JD - Note that secondment limitations not applicable for DN-ID and DN-JD - Additional instructions for completing part A of the proposal	5 6, 7 6 7 10 12
2.0 2022	10.06.2022	Clarification of DN-JD eligibility requirements in the Overview table	8
2.1 2022	20.06.2022	- Further clarification of DN-JD eligibility requirements concerning doctoral degree-awarding participants - Clarification of DN-JD eligibility requirements in the Overview table	6 8
2.2 2023	21.04.2023	- Update of maximum total number of person months to 540 for standard DN. - Update of maximum project duration to 60 months and of researcher contract duration to 48 months for DN-JD - Deletion of reference to Letters of Commitment for Associated partners as those are not mandatory for DN 2023 - Clarification of the resubmission restrictions approach	4, 8 9 8 5
3.0 2024	24.04.2024	- Update of DN-JD rules for joint/double/multiple degrees - Further clarification on the resubmission restrictions approach - Addition of paragraph on high-risk suppliers	4 6 6

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1. Doctoral Networks – A few definitions

Important Note:

All main definitions (not included in this guide) are available in the [MSCA part of the Work Programme](#). Links to other official documents (e.g. [Horizon Europe General Annexes](#) of the Work Programme, [Horizon Europe Unit Model Grant Agreement](#), [Horizon Europe Programme Guide](#)) are provided in the [call page on the Funding and Tenders Portal](#).

Objectives and structure of Doctoral Networks:

All Doctoral Networks have the objective of promoting international, inter-sectoral and multi/inter-disciplinary collaboration in doctoral-level training in Europe. They also have the objective of training highly skilled doctoral candidates and stimulating entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation in Europe and beyond. There are three different modalities:

1. "Standard" Doctoral Networks (DN): Doctoral Networks aim to meet the objectives mentioned above by enrolling candidates in a doctoral programme and a joint research project.

2. Industrial Doctorates (DN-ID): Industrial Doctorates aim to meet the objectives of DN but go further by requiring the mandatory involvement of the non-academic sector in the doctoral training so that the skills acquired better match public and private sector needs. For this modality, there is more flexibility since there is no ceiling on the secondment time. In addition, the non-academic entities have the possibility to participate either as beneficiary or as associated partner, in order to comply with the rule that each doctoral candidate must spend 50% of their time in the non-academic sector. For example, non-academic entities can participate as associated partners and host doctoral candidates in the form of secondments for 50% of their time or more. In another example, the non-academic entities can decide to participate as beneficiary and recruit and host the fellow for 100% of their fellowship duration.

3. Joint Doctorates (DN-JD): Joint Doctorates also aim to meet the objectives of DN but go further by proposing the creation of joint doctoral programmes, leading to the delivery of joint, double or multiple doctoral degrees recognised in at least one EU Member State (MS) or Horizon Europe Associated Country (AC). To promote **deep structuring impact**, applicants choosing **JD** can recruit doctoral candidates (DCs) for a maximum of **4 years** instead of 3, with a maximum **project duration of 60 months** instead of 48.

The overall EU contribution per Grant Agreement is limited to a maximum of: 540 person-months per network for all three modalities, "standard" DNs, DN-IDs, and DN-JDs (e.g. 15 Doctoral candidates for 36 months each for a standard DN or DN-ID or 6 Doctoral Candidates for 48 month each plus 7 Doctoral Candidates for 36 month each for a DN-JD).

Failure to respect these limits will result in the proposal being declared ineligible. Note that the expert evaluators will carefully consider the requested number of person-months with respect to the coherence of the proposal and the capacities of the hosts.

Joint/double/multiple doctoral degree: A joint degree refers to a single diploma issued by at least two higher education institutions offering an integrated programme and recognised officially in the countries where the degree-awarding institutions are located. A double or multiple degree refers to two or more separate national diplomas issued by two or more higher education institutions and recognised officially in the countries where the degree-awarding institutions are located. The final joint, double, or multiple degree must be awarded by institutions from at least one MS or AC country.

Supported researchers must be doctoral candidates, i.e. not already in possession of a doctoral degree at the date of the recruitment. Each researcher must be enrolled in a doctoral programme leading to the award of a doctoral degree in at least one EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country. Failure to incorporate these requirements into the proposal will be assessed accordingly by the expert evaluators.

Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will not be considered eligible.

Date of Recruitment means the first day of the employment of the researcher for the purposes of the action (i.e. the starting date indicated in the employment contract or equivalent direct contract).

Mobility Rule: researchers must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their date of recruitment. Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays, and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention¹ are not taken into account. For international European research organisations², international organisations, or entities created under Union law, recruited researchers must not have spent more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately before their date of recruitment in the same appointing organisation.

Note that the mobility rule applies to the (first) beneficiary where the researcher is recruited. In case of multiple recruitments, the mobility rule only applies to the first recruitment.

¹ 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

² 'International European research organisation' means an international organisation, the majority of whose members are MS or AC, whose principal objective is to promote scientific and technological cooperation in Europe.

40% rule: in the context of the consortium's composition, applicants should take into account that for all DNs, no more than 40.0% of the total EU financial contribution may be allocated to beneficiaries in the same country or to any one International European Research Organisation or International Organisation. This concerns the total amount of the budget allocated to a country/International Organisation and not the number of person-months. Please be mindful of the country correction coefficient that is applied to the living allowance. Proposals not complying with the 40% rule will be considered ineligible. The 40.0% is determined at proposal submission stage on the basis of the maximum grant amount (beneficiaries will not be penalised for the non-execution of person-months by other beneficiaries during the project implementation).

Resubmission restrictions: please note that, according to the Work Programme, applicants having received a score below 80% in the DN 2023 call are not eligible to resubmit a similar proposal in the DN 2024 call. As specified in the MSCA Work Programme, any proposal involving 70% or more of the same recruiting organisations as in another proposal submitted to the previous call of the MSCA Doctoral Networks under Horizon Europe that has received a score of less than 80% will be assessed for whether it is a resubmission, irrespective of the applicants' self-declaration. The assessment will be carried out by external expert evaluators based on the similarity of objectives as well as on the similarity of the scientific approach proposed to reach such objectives. Please note that all applicants are still required to declare in the proposal part A any resubmission of a similar proposal submitted under the last 2 DN calls. The European Research Executive Agency (REA) has a system in place to flag any similarities with previous proposals, which may be used to double-check following the approach described above. The final eligibility decision will then be taken by the REA Admissibility and Eligibility Committee appointed for the call evaluation.

Gender Equality Plan: Having a gender equality plan is an eligibility criterion for Public bodies, Higher education institutions and Research Organisations from Member States and Associated Countries. Be aware that if the proposal is selected, having a Gender Equality Plan will be necessary before the grant agreement signature. Please refer to the [Horizon Europe guidance on gender equality plans](#).

National Contact Points (NCPs) have been set up across Europe and beyond by the national governments to provide information and personalised support to Horizon Europe applicants in their native language. The mission of the NCPs is to raise awareness, inform and advise on Horizon Europe funding opportunities as well as to support potential applicants in the preparation, submission, and follow-up of the grant applications. For details on the NCP in your country, please consult the [National Contact Points page](#).

Restrictions for the protection of European communication networks

Entities that are assessed as high-risk suppliers of mobile network communication equipment (and any entities they own or control) are not eligible to participate as beneficiaries nor as associated partners. See [Horizon Europe -Work Programme 2023-2025 -13. General Annexes](#) for further details.

2. Doctoral Networks in a nutshell

Minimum Number of Participating Organisations and Maximum Project Duration			
Role in the network	DN	DN-ID*	DN-JD
Beneficiary³	3	3	3
Associated Partner⁴	No minimum	No minimum	No minimum
Maximum Project Duration (months)	48	48	60**

* Doctoral candidates in DN-ID must spend at least 50% of their time in the non-academic sector, which requires the presence of non-academic entities as beneficiaries or associated partners.

**As of the 2023 call, DN-JD projects can last up to 60 months, allowing Doctoral Candidates to be recruited for a maximum of 48 person-months.

Please note that the doctoral degree-awarding participants can be either beneficiaries, associated partners or associated partners linked to a beneficiary. An applicant from the academic sector, which has transferred the right of awarding a doctoral degree to a consortium/grouping of academic/research institutions to which it belongs to, is also eligible.

Summary of Tasks				
Role in the network	Recruitment of Researchers	Training and/or Hosting of Seconded Researchers	Participation in Supervisory Board	Directly Claims unit contributions
Beneficiary	✓	✓	✓	✓
Associated Partner	✗	✓	✓	✗

³ Applications must be submitted by a consortium including at least three independent legal entities, each established in a different EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country and with at least one of them established in an EU Member State. Should none of them be entitled to award a doctoral degree, a university or a consortium/grouping of academic/research institutions entitled to award a doctoral degree must be added to the project as an associated partner or an associated partner linked to a beneficiary.

⁴ It is recommended that the number of associated partners is reasonable and commensurate with the size of the network.

Minimum Country Participation in a DN	
Implementation Mode	Country of beneficiaries
“Standard” Doctoral Networks (DN)	Minimum: 3 different countries from the group of EU MS or AC with at least one of them being an EU MS.
Industrial Doctorates (DN-ID)	
Joint Doctorates(DN-JD)	
Additional beneficiaries can be established in EU MS, AC or low- and middle-income non-associated countries included in the list of countries eligible for funding provided in the Horizon Europe Programme Guide. Legal entities established in countries not listed in the Programme Guide will be eligible for funding if their participation is considered essential for implementing the action by the granting authority. Associated Partners can be established anywhere in the world and from any sectors.	

Overview

		DN	DN-ID	DN-JD
BENEFICIARY (IES)	Minimum Number of beneficiaries	3	3	3
	Minimum MS or AC	3	3	3
	Minimum MS (beneficiaries)	1	1	1
	Academic sector	No restrictions	No restrictions	No restrictions
	Non-academic sector	No restrictions	No restrictions	No restrictions
	Max no. of person months	540	540	540
	Max 40.0% budget for 1 country/international organisation	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Beneficiary or associated partner/associated partner linked to a beneficiary awarding PhD		Mandatory (beneficiary or associated partner/ associated partner linked to a beneficiary)	Mandatory (beneficiary or associated partner/ associated partner linked to a beneficiary)	Mandatory (please see minimum requirements for DN-JD)
Joint/double/multiple award of PhD		Optional	Optional	Mandatory (Researchers must be enrolled in a doctoral programme leading to the award of a doctoral degree in at least 1 EU MS or AC)
Joint/double/multiple degree – letter of pre-agreement		N/A	N/A	Mandatory
Joint supervision for researchers		Encouraged	Mandatory (from the 2 sectors)	Mandatory
Researchers enrolment in the PhD		Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Stay in non-academic sector		Encouraged	Min. 50% of fellowship duration	Encouraged
Secondments		≤ 1/3	No limitation	No limitation
Max Project duration		48	48	60
Fellowship duration		3-36 months	3-36 months	3-48 months
Ranking lists		8 (Scientific) panels		
Budget		~EUR608 Million		

3. Recruitment and Eligibility of Researchers

3.1 Recruitment

All Doctoral Networks (DN, DN-ID, DN-JD)

- Every beneficiary must recruit, host at their premises and supervise at least 1 researcher⁵;
- For “standard” DN and DN-ID, researchers are recruited for minimum 3 and maximum 36 months. For DN-JD, researchers are recruited for minimum 3 and maximum 48 months. In all types of action, they must be enrolled in a doctoral programme in at least one EU Member State or Horizon Europe associated country and should work full-time on the project.

Industrial Doctorates (DN-ID)

For DN-ID, the active participation of the non-academic sector is of paramount importance. Recruited researchers must spend at least 50% of their fellowship duration in the non-academic sector. The maximum secondment duration of up to one third of the researchers’ actual recruitment period (i.e. up to 12 months in the case of a 36-month recruitment) does not apply to DN-ID. For DN-ID, it is therefore possible to have doctoral candidates recruited in the academic sector for 100% of their time and sent on secondments to non-academic participants for at least 50% of the time. Equally, it is also possible to have doctoral candidates recruited in the non-academic sector for 100% of their time and sent on secondments to academic participants for up to 50% of the time. Please note that all beneficiaries must still recruit at least 1 doctoral candidate. Participants that host secondments but do not recruit can only be associated partners. It is also possible to propose multiple recruitments, whereby a doctoral candidate is recruited for 50% or less of their fellowship duration by a beneficiary in the academic sector and recruited for 50% or more of their fellowship duration by a non-academic beneficiary. Any combination of these two options is also possible, as long it complies with all DN-ID requirements.

Please note that the non-academic partner in an Industrial Doctorate (ID) is not necessarily an “Industrial” partner, but could also be any partner that satisfies the Work Programme definition of an actor from the non-academic sector (including non-exhaustively e.g. an NGO, a charity organisation, a hospital). Please note that the system automatically defines the academic or non-academic status, based on the answers given during the entity’s registration (in the participants registry). For example, an entity declared as a research organisation and non-profit will be automatically labelled as academic in part A of the proposal. This information should be consistent with the status declared in part B1.

Joint Doctorates (DN-JD)

For DN-JD, each recruited researcher must be enrolled in a joint, double or multiple degree awarded by at least one participating organisation from a MS or AC. The

⁵ Beneficiaries can use Associated partners linked to them to host and supervise researchers. Note, however, that only beneficiaries can recruit researchers.

maximum total secondment duration of up to one third of the researchers' actual recruitment period does not apply to DN-JD. Fellows can be recruited for up to 48 months in a DN-JD. Please note that 48 months is the maximum allowed fellowship duration, and it is not mandatory to request this maximum. Please also note that within the same project, it is possible to have different fellowship durations, as long as the overall maximum of 540 person months is respected.

Important Note: The location of the premises of the recruiting beneficiary will have an influence on the fellow's salary due to different country correction coefficients⁶ (see Table 1 of the [MSCA Work Programme 2023-2025](#)). It may also affect the eligibility of the proposal (see 40.0% rule and mandatory recruitment rule by each beneficiary above). Please see the relevant Q&As on the [call page](#) for examples.

The beneficiaries will be responsible for the selection and recruitment of the eligible researchers. An important aspect of the Commission's policy towards researchers is to improve their working and living conditions and to promote mobility to open up new perspectives for research careers within Europe. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions aim to act as a catalyst in this respect. The beneficiaries will therefore be required to meet certain conditions relating to the publishing of vacancies (e.g. on [Euraxess portal](#)), recruitment and length of appointment of researchers and which should be in line with the principles set out in [the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#). Note that a beneficiary may not recruit a researcher via an employment agency.

3.2 Eligible Researchers

All researchers recruited in a DN must be **doctoral candidates** (i.e. not already in possession of a doctoral degree at the date of the recruitment) and undertake transnational mobility (see the mobility rule definition in section 1). Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will not be considered eligible.

For all recruitments, the eligibility of the researcher will be determined at the date of their **first recruitment** in the action. This status will not evolve over the lifetime of the action, even if they are re-recruited at another beneficiary.

3.3 Secondments

Secondments of the researcher to other beneficiaries and associated partners/associated partners linked to other beneficiaries – from the academic and/or non-academic sector- are encouraged, but should be relevant, feasible and beneficial for the researchers, and in line with the project objectives. They are an

⁶ Applicants are invited to consider that in DN-ID and JD fellows may have to spend long periods in different countries with different country coefficients. If not duly considered at proposal stage by choosing the most appropriate recruitment option (or the most appropriate recruiting beneficiary), this might have negative implications on the capacity of the fellows to afford the cost of living during their mandatory secondments.

integral part of the research plan and must be described in the proposal. Any subsequent changes in the secondment plan during the project implementation must be pre-approved by REA. Normal practice during secondments is for the recruited researchers to keep their contract with the sending institution, which also pays their travel and subsistence expenses (e.g. accommodation, visa, residency card) from the institutional unit contributions. During their secondment, researchers receive supervision and training at the premises of the receiving beneficiary, its associated partner linked to a beneficiary, or associated partner. These institutions must be independent from each other (including their premises) and therefore the secondment must involve physical mobility of the fellow, with specific supervision arrangements. Secondments should be differentiated from short visits of a few days.

Secondments in DN of six months or less which require mobility from the place of residence **must** be financed using the Research, Training and Networking contribution to prevent an unreasonable financial burden for the recruited researchers. This includes at least the travel and accommodation costs. Longer secondments can also be supported in the same way.

While **virtual mobility** does not have the same multifaceted impact on the development of individuals and sustainable cooperation among organisations as physical mobility, it can however complement it, facilitate long-distance collaboration and be an effective means to faster achieving research and training objectives. In this regard, all MSCA proposals are encouraged to explore opportunities offered by e-infrastructures and related services, in particular those provided through [GEANT](#), the pan-European research and education network. These activities should be clearly described in the proposals, should be relevant, feasible and beneficial for the researchers, and in line with the project objectives.

In “standard” DNs, each recruited researcher can be seconded to other beneficiaries and/or to associated partners/associated partners linked to other beneficiaries for **a duration of up to one third of their actual recruitment period**. Virtual mobility will not be considered as a regular secondment since it does not involve physical mobility. Therefore, it will not count towards the maximum duration of one third of the researcher’s total recruitment period.

In DN-ID, all recruited researchers must spend at least 50% of their time in the non-academic sector. The specific percentage of time that each researcher will spend at each institution should therefore be **indicated in the proposal**. The maximum total secondment duration of up to one third of the researcher’s actual recruitment period does not apply to DN-ID.

It is expected that the recruited researchers will benefit from the strong research collaboration of the beneficiaries (academic and non-academic). The provision of additional training by/secondment to associated partners is encouraged, where relevant.

In DN-JD it is expected that the recruited researchers will need to spend at least

the minimum period required to be eligible to enrol in a doctoral degree and defend the doctoral thesis at the corresponding academic participating organisations. This will vary according to the institution and country in question. The maximum total secondment duration of up to one third of the researcher's actual recruitment period does not apply to DN-JD.

4. Instructions for Completing Part A and Part B of the Proposal

The proposal contains two parts:

- Part A of the proposal is generated by the IT system. It is based on the information entered by the participants through the submission system in the Funding & Tenders Portal. The participants can update the information in the submission system at any time before final submission.
- Part B of the proposal is the narrative part. It is composed of 2 documents, part B1 and part B2. Part B1 of the proposal includes three sections that each correspond to an evaluation criterion.

All instructions for completing the part A and B of the proposal are embedded in the template that can be found on the [call page of the Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal](#) and should be removed before proposal submission. A version without instructions is also available at the end of the template.

The [Funding & Tenders Portal online manual](#), as well as the [Proposal Submission Service User Manual](#) gives detailed instructions on how to complete the Part A.

Please note that, in part A, associated partners do not need to fill in the role of participating organisation in the project. This information however will need to be described in the relevant sections of parts B1 and B2.

Please also note that, in part A, neither the beneficiaries nor the associated partners need to fill in the list of up to five publications, relevant previous projects, or significant infrastructure. This information however will need to be described in the relevant sections of part B2.

 Important note: In the budget table, column “Number of person months”, each beneficiary should enter the **total** number of person months they request, and not the number of person months per recruited researcher. For instance, if a beneficiary wishes to recruit 3 researchers for 36 months each, they should enter 108. Please double check the total number of Person Months for each beneficiary and for the whole proposal in the budget table from Part A.

 Only one contact per organisation should make changes to the proposal at a time. Editing the form in 2 or more tabs/browsers in parallel will lead to data loss.

Once submitted, applicants can reopen, edit and resubmit the proposal as many times as required before the call deadline. We strongly advise applicants, after submission, to check their submitted proposals for completeness and for consistency between the different parts of the proposal, including the person-months indicated in the budget table from part A and in the recruitment table from part B1.

Specific guidance on how to select the most appropriate keywords can be found in

the topic Q&A on the [Funding and Tenders Portal](#), together with the [list of MSCA keywords](#).

A template of joint/double/multiple doctorate pre-agreement letter (for DN-JD) is available at the end of the proposal template.

Please note that associated partners, whether linked to a beneficiary or not, should no longer provide a letter of commitment. However, it should be clear from part B1 which associated partners are linked to a beneficiary, and which ones are not. In addition, all associated partners must be added in part A of the proposal, and their role and contribution should also be clear from part B1 and B2.

Scientific Misconduct and Research Integrity

Issues of scientific misconduct and research integrity are taken very seriously. In line with the Horizon Europe Rules for Participation, appropriate action such as termination of the Grant Agreement Preparation phase or, if the Grant Agreement has been signed, the implementation of liquidated damages and financial penalties, suspension of payments, recoveries and termination of the Grant Agreement, will be taken against any applicants/beneficiaries found to have misrepresented, fabricated or plagiarised any part of their proposal. The applicants will also be required to make a "Declaration on Honour" in Part A of the proposal.