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### TRAINING AND MOBILITY OF RESEARCHERS IN EUROPE

Interview with Alessandra Luchetti

*Alessandra Luchetti is a member of the General Directorate for Education and Culture of the European Commission in Brussels. She is responsible for the "Marie Curie Actions" sector for the training and mobility of researchers at the beginning of and during their career.*

**In 2011, the European Commission has set 2014 as the deadline for completion of the European Research Area. What exactly is this?**

The European Research Area (ERA) enables researchers, research institutions and businesses to work and co-operate freely across borders. In September 2014 the latest [ERA Progress Report](#) was published. It emphasises the key role of human resources policies: open recruitment enables research institutions to hire the best researchers at all career stages, and fosters effective geographical mobility. The report also highlights new OECD data showing that the research impact of mobile researchers is nearly 20% higher than that of those who never moved abroad.

**Which are the main tools made available by the Commission to improve Europe's growth capacity and promote excellence and competitiveness?**

Horizon 2020 is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever with EUR 79 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020). It is a single programme bringing together three separate previous programmes/initiatives: The 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7), innovation aspects of Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Horizon 2020 is the financial instrument implementing the Innovation Union, a Europe 2020 flagship initiative aimed at securing Europe's global competitiveness. The Innovation Union requires the EU to attract one million

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more people to the research profession by 2020. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) are key to that, not only by funding 65 000 researchers directly but also through their positive impact on the conditions for researchers in Europe as a whole.

**For a long time, and with increasing attention, the Commission has been supporting the development of human resources in European research. What is the latest news with regard to actions for the mobility and training of researchers?**

The latest ERA Progress Report mentioned above states that the MSCA have had a pronounced structuring impact on the ERA. They set standards for research training, attractive employment conditions and open recruitment for all researchers, as well as influencing regional or national programmes through cofunding. In 2014 the first MSCA calls for proposals within Horizon 2020 were launched. The approach of extending and simplifying the previous Marie Curie actions has been clearly endorsed - the oversubscription rate this year was 7 times the available budget of EUR 805 million.

Highlights from this year's calls include 8 European Joint Doctorates, following the successful integration of the former Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorates initiative into the MSCA. In addition, the MSCA remain a key mechanism to bring experienced researchers to Europe, as shown by the 20% of Individual Fellowship applications from those residing elsewhere.

**Through which programmes are the Marie Curie actions developed and which is the target audience?**

The MSCA offer opportunities for researchers at any career stage, regardless of research field, nationality or age. The programme supports mobility to any country within or beyond the EU, provided that the fellowship finishes with return to Europe. However we may not fund activities specified in the EURATOM Treaty.

In the Innovative Training Networks (ITN), a number of European organisations are financed to provide structured doctoral-level training based on intersectoral secondments. The Individual Fellowships support the mobility of experienced researchers to, from and within Europe. They apply directly to the Commission with their research proposal.

The new Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) action supports partnerships of European and/or international organisations jointly to implement or plan a research project through exchanging their staff. Finally, the COFUND action supports organisations in Europe that manage high-quality transnational doctoral or fellowship programmes.

**What is the relationship today between European researchers and industry? Are there any specific**

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### **programmes for development of innovation and promotion of ideas?**

Thanks to the essential participation of the non-academic sector in the MSCA-funded training programmes, they provide both specialist knowledge in the given research field and transferable competencies that foster innovation, such as entrepreneurship. 600 companies are foreseen to be funded through the ITN call of 2014. In addition, there is the specific MSCA for staff exchange to transfer knowledge between academia and businesses. Non-academic organisations make up around 30% of those successful in the first RISE call for proposals. Over 100 of these participants are SMEs.

### **In comparison with other Member States, what is Italy's response to actions to encourage researcher mobility?**

Italy was highly successful in the programme that preceded the MSCA. There were 1377 participations by Italian organisations in the Marie Curie actions (MCA) between 2007 and 2013, which were financed with EUR 281 million. 4913 Italian researchers so far have been funded to gain skills and experience abroad – Italian fellows are the largest group in the MCA. 2976 foreign researchers have gone to Italy through an MCA grant. In addition, from the first two MSCA call evaluations to be completed a total of 125 Italian participations are foreseen to be financed: 69 in the ITN action, 56 in the RISE action.

### **What suggestions would you give to European researchers in order for them to make the best of the opportunities offered by the Commission?**

National Contact Points dedicated to the MSCA exist in all EU Member States and Horizon 2020 Associated Countries, plus in a number of other countries around the globe. Their main role is to guide potential applicants on choosing relevant types of action, advise on administrative procedures and contractual issues, provide training and assistance on proposal writing, distribute documentation (forms, guidelines, manuals etc.) and assist in partner search. Their contact details can be found on the Horizon 2020 [Participant Portal](#).