

# Bridging research and policy: Engaging researchers in science diplomacy

Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA)

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## About the Marie Curie Alumni Association

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) is a global network with more than 24,000 members from over 155 countries, open to past and present beneficiaries of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) programme, including researchers, their supervisors and MSCA project managers. The MCAA aims to connect the MSCA community, supporting career development initiatives for MCAA members and advocating for research and researchers.

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# Executive summary

The MCAA welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on the European Union (EU) framework for science diplomacy. As a bottom-up, researcher-led community active worldwide, the MCAA embodies science diplomacy in practice and is pleased to be cited as a relevant network of EU mobility schemes. Building on this role, the Association believes that the proposed Council Recommendation should be more ambitious to deliver the change the EU needs. The MCAA's recommendations are as follows:

## **1. Embed science diplomacy in the European Research Area (ERA)**

- Integrate science diplomacy into the ERA Actions, focusing on both the science for policy ecosystem and the European approach to integrity and ethics in research and innovation (R&I).
- Include science diplomacy in the upcoming ERA Act to ensure academic freedom, openness, and responsible international cooperation remain central to the European research landscape.

## **2. Enshrine science diplomacy in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**

- Include dedicated funding lines in the next MFF for international science diplomacy networks, fellowships at the science-policy interface, and capacity-building initiatives targeting both researchers and diplomats.
- Develop a common European approach to monitor and assess outcomes, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

## **3. Increase resources to foster capacity building**

- Foster science diplomacy studies and career development opportunities through structured interdisciplinary training programmes and dedicated career pathways.
- Build on existing successful initiatives, such as the MSCA Doctoral Networks programme, which offers a natural environment for developing

science diplomacy competencies organically alongside research training, without imposing thematic direction on the programme as a whole.

- Support the establishment of dedicated capacity-building platforms and networks, such as the proposed virtual European Science Diplomacy Platform, to map existing initiatives, prevent duplication, and strengthen synergies.

#### **4. Ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in science diplomacy**

- Integrated EDI principles into the selection criteria for science diplomacy training programmes, the composition of advisory and coordination bodies, and the development and implementation of national roadmaps.
- Encourage Member States to set clear EDI objectives at the national level to foster more inclusive and representative science diplomacy practices, and monitor progress.

#### **5. Strengthen support for Open Science as a driver for R&I**

- Support researchers in balancing openness and security through clear guidance, appropriate training, and practical tools. This should be particularly relevant in international contexts and include the development of risk assessment frameworks and operational guidelines.

#### **6. Promote academic freedom and protect researchers at risk**

- Establish an independent European ombudsperson for academic freedom, with a clear mandate, reporting mechanisms, and coordination with national authorities, to support researchers facing undue interference, help counter disinformation, maintain trust, and uphold democratic values.
- Create a dedicated funding instrument under the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) Pillar IV, focusing on the European Research Area, to support and protect researchers at risk.

# Background

The Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) is a global network representing more than 24,000 members from over 155 countries who currently benefit or have benefited from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) research funding, including researchers, their supervisors, and MSCA project managers. The MCAA aims to connect the MSCA community, support career development initiatives for its members, and advocate for research and researchers.

The MCAA welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Union (EU) framework for science diplomacy and is pleased to be cited as a relevant network of Union mobility schemes. This initiative marks an important milestone in reinforcing the EU's strategic, scientific, and geopolitical influence, while advancing multilateralism.

As a bottom-up, researcher-led community active across the world, the MCAA embodies science diplomacy in practice. Through international mobility, interdisciplinary collaboration, and intercultural engagement, MCAA members demonstrate how science builds trust, fosters shared knowledge, and supports European values worldwide. This is further reflected in its membership in the European Research Area (ERA) Forum Stakeholder Group 4, the International Science Council (ISC), and the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance, which underlines its strong commitment to enhancing global collaboration within and beyond the ERA. These engagements position the MCAA as a key stakeholder in the design and implementation of science diplomacy actions at the European and global levels.

In light of this commitment, the MCAA supports this unique initiative and calls on Member States to endorse it. Nevertheless, the MCAA believes that the proposed Council Recommendation should be more ambitious to deliver the change the EU needs. In particular, the framework would benefit from clearer implementation pathways, dedicated resources, and stronger integration into existing EU policy instruments.

# 1 Embed science diplomacy in the European Research Area

The proposed EU framework for science diplomacy is already included as a specific outcome in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 and stands among the structural policies promoted by the subgroup on the global approach to research and innovation (R&I) cooperation. However, considering its role in the development of the European research landscape, science diplomacy should be integrated into the ERA Actions, focusing on both the science for policy ecosystem and the European approach to integrity and ethics in R&I. Ethical responsibility should indeed guide international collaboration, particularly when engaging with countries where academic freedom, human rights, or scientific integrity may be at risk. Science diplomacy should also be included in the upcoming ERA Act to ensure academic freedom, openness, and responsible international cooperation remain central to the European research landscape. This would help reduce existing differences across Member States that create uncertainties for researchers engaged in international collaboration, while ensuring a coherent European approach to research security.



## 2 Enshrine science diplomacy in the next Multiannual Financial Framework

Science diplomacy needs to be addressed by the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), including the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10), to foster international cooperation, build networks, and enhance the EU's scientific influence worldwide. To achieve this, concrete actions could include dedicated funding lines for international science diplomacy networks, fellowships at the science-policy interface, and capacity-building initiatives targeting both researchers and diplomats. At the same time, the sustainability of science diplomacy efforts should be considered now to ensure the long-term impact of actions implemented under FP10. Monitoring and evaluating science diplomacy actions are an imperative to enhance strategic planning and effectiveness. In this regard, developing a common European approach to assessing outcomes, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, would support more informed decision-making while remaining sensitive to the diversity of national contexts. Furthermore, these initiatives could be coordinated with existing MFF instruments such as Global Europe to ensure coherence with broader EU external action priorities.

# 3 Increase resources to foster capacity building

Science diplomacy currently lacks sufficient capacity. This reflects a structural divide between scientific and diplomatic cultures. While there is an increasing need for science diplomacy experts, science diplomats begin their training in one of the two fields: science or diplomacy. These areas speak different languages and require very different training. New science diplomacy studies and career development opportunities are needed, including structured interdisciplinary training programmes and dedicated career pathways. These should target those wishing to contribute to science diplomacy from their current roles, helping sustainably address the capacity gap in science diplomacy.

The MSCA Doctoral Networks programme provides an ideal environment for researchers who wish to train and excel not only in science but also in the science diplomacy interface, bringing together research institutions and non-academic partners around shared research challenges. This offers a natural environment in which science diplomacy competencies can be developed organically alongside research training, consistent with the MSCA's bottom-up, excellence-driven principles. The MCAA encourages the Commission to ensure that FP10 creates space for such initiatives to develop on their own terms, without imposing thematic directionality on the programme as a whole.

These capacity-building opportunities should be supported by the establishment of dedicated platforms and networks, such as the proposed virtual European Science Diplomacy Platform, to map current initiatives to avoid duplication and encourage synergies. This would help share best practices and foster dialogue between scientists, policymakers and civil society organisations, while highlighting geographically dependent approaches to science diplomacy.

# 4 Ensure Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in science diplomacy

Both science and diplomacy have traditionally been characterised by low diversity in who can access these professions. Efforts are underway to highlight the value of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in research and innovation through initiatives such as the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). According to the “She Figures” report, women accounted for 41% of scientists and engineers in the EU in 2024<sup>1</sup>. In the diplomatic field, however, the reality remains different. Women represented only 22,5% of ambassadors and permanent representatives globally in 2025, according to the 2025 Women in Diplomacy Index<sup>2</sup>.

To date, the emphasis on EDI in science diplomacy has mainly focused on recognising the contribution of a diverse range of stakeholders to the field. However, this approach should be broadened to ensure that EDI principles, including intersectional considerations, are embedded across the science diplomacy ecosystem. These principles should be integrated in particular into the selection criteria for training programmes, the composition of advisory and coordination bodies, and the development and implementation of national science diplomacy roadmaps. Progress should be monitored through appropriate indicators, and best practices should be shared. Member States should also be encouraged to set clear EDI objectives at the national level to foster more inclusive and representative science diplomacy practices.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. (2025). *She figures 2024 : gender in research and innovation : statistics and indicators*. Publications Office of the European Union.  
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/6847557>.

<sup>2</sup> Chehab, Dr. S. (2025). *2025 women in diplomacy index*. Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy.  
[https://www.agda.ac.ae/docs/default-source/2025/2025-women-in-diplomacy-index-2-\(1\).pdf?sfvrsn=2ce2603b\\_1](https://www.agda.ac.ae/docs/default-source/2025/2025-women-in-diplomacy-index-2-(1).pdf?sfvrsn=2ce2603b_1).

## 5 Strengthen support for Open Science as a driver for R&I

Open Science (OS) is a key enabler of international collaboration and plays a central role in science diplomacy by fostering transparency, trust, and equitable access to scientific knowledge across borders. However, it is sometimes perceived as posing risks to security interests, foreign policy, or competitiveness, highlighting a structural tension between openness and strategic autonomy. Researchers must therefore be supported in navigating the balance between openness and security through clear guidance, appropriate training, and practical tools, particularly in international contexts. This support could include developing risk assessment frameworks and clear operational guidelines.

OS also underpins fundamental rights, including academic freedom and the freedom of scientific research and can contribute to the implementation of the fifth freedom, particularly through the Open Access concept. To maximise its potential, OS should be promoted as a core element of the ERA Act and the European approach to science diplomacy, ensuring that international collaboration is both open and responsibly managed.

## 6 Promote academic freedom and protect researchers at risk

Academic freedom and the freedom of academic research are core EU values, as highlighted in the European Commission's proposal, and must be embedded in the future framework. While the proposed actions represent an important step forward, the MCAA believes that the EU must implement concrete safeguards. In this context, establishing an independent European ombudsperson for academic freedom, with a clear mandate, reporting mechanisms, and coordination with national authorities, could support researchers facing undue interference. It could also help counter disinformation, maintain trust, and uphold democratic values.

At the same time, the EU must also protect researchers at risk. Given the growing geopolitical uncertainty, it is essential to develop instruments that support them and provide sustainable responses to displacement and persecution. Drawing on existing initiatives, including the MSCA guidelines for the inclusion of researchers at risk and the Supporting At-risk researchers with Fellowships in Europe (SAFE) pilot scheme, it is important to establish a dedicated funding instrument under FP10's Pillar IV, focusing on the European Research Area. Such an instrument would ensure that Article 13 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights becomes a reality amid increasing geopolitical instability and global restrictions on academic freedom.

## 7 Final remarks

The MCAA reiterates its support for the European Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation, which provides the foundations for a strong European framework for science diplomacy. The Association is committed to engaging with Member States in the coming months to realise its full potential by ensuring science diplomacy is embedded in the upcoming ERA Act and enshrined in FP10. Only a coherent, well-resourced, and researcher-inclusive approach, reflecting the aspirations and needs of both researchers and diplomats, as well as the limitations and risks of this interface, can deliver systemic change. Such an approach is essential to bridging the gap between research and policy.

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