



NCP MSCA @ UEFISCDI

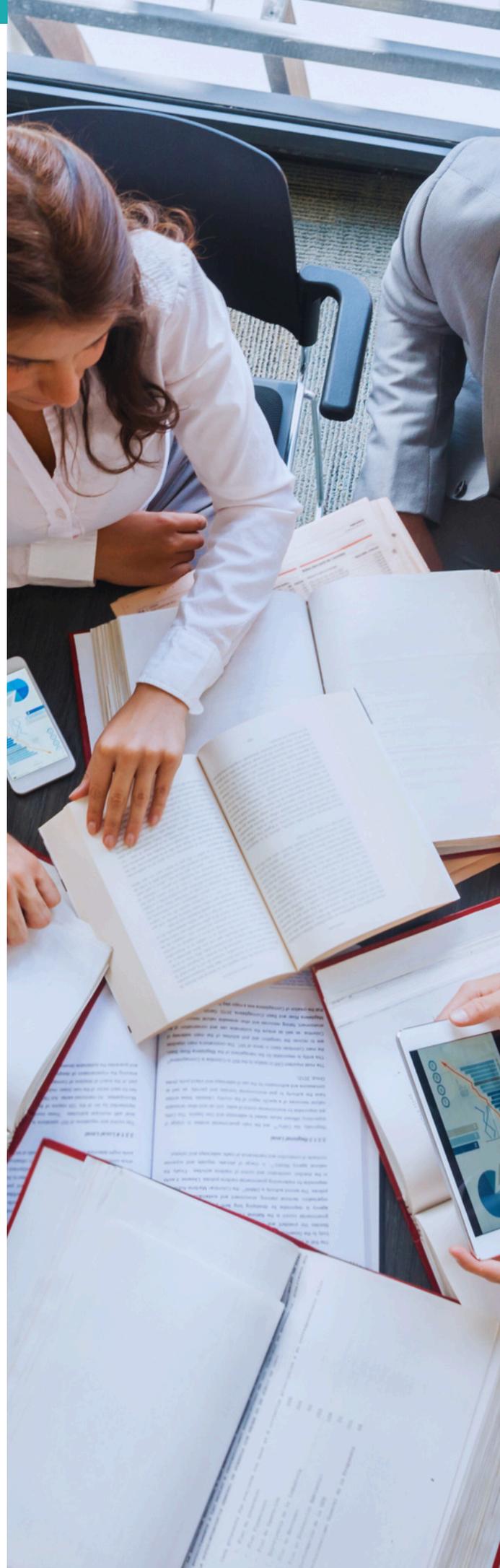
# REPORT 2021-2024

November 2025

# Supporting Researchers in MSCA Competitions

The National Contact Point for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (NCP MSCA) at UEFISCDI supports Romanian organisations and researchers to compete in MSCA (DN, PF, SE, COFUND, and MSCA and Citizens) under Horizon Europe (2021-2027).

MSCA is the EU's flagship for doctoral and postdoctoral training and researcher mobility (budget €6.6bn), with country-level participation and outcomes tracked via the Horizon Dashboard and MSCA Dashboard.



# MSCA in Romania: Context and Challenges

Romania's participation profile under Horizon Europe shows active engagement across all instruments, with comparatively strong results in Staff Exchanges (SE) and MSCA and Citizens, and more modest outcomes in Doctoral Networks (DN) and Postdoctoral Fellowships (PF). This pattern aligns with EU-wide evidence that complex coordination-heavy schemes (DN/COFUND) and highly competitive individual fellowships (PF) disproportionately favour research systems with stronger institutional scaffolding.



At EU level, performance disparities across Member States are well documented. The Commission's Horizon Europe country profiles and MSCA pages show concentration of grants in research-intensive systems, while widening countries, Romania included, register lower success in DN/PF and higher relative success in collaboration-oriented SE.

**Widening countries excel  
in collaborative MSCA  
schemes**

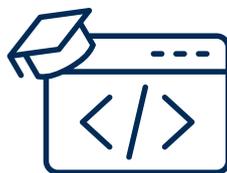


These outcomes reflect broader system indicators: the European Innovation Scoreboard 2024 classifies Romania as an Emerging Innovator (~34-37% of the EU average), and Commission/Eurostat data confirm one of the lowest R&D intensities in the EU (GERD ~ 0.46-0.49% of GDP in recent years vs EU 2.26% in 2023). Such factors correlate with MSCA competitiveness through researcher career conditions, research capacity, and institutional readiness.

# Analysis of Romania's performance in HE MSCA (based on EU evidence)

## STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS (SYSTEM LEVEL)

Low, volatile R&D investment limits institutional capacity to assemble DN consortia, to offer attractive supervision packages, and to co-finance COFUND; Romania's R&D intensity remains at the bottom of the EU distribution. European Innovation Scoreboard shows lagging performance on knowledge production and research attractiveness, variables closely linked to PF competitiveness and DN leadership. Persistent brain drain/outward mobility reduces the domestic pool of experienced supervisors and MSCA-ready candidates/hosts.



## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK (HOST CAPACITY)

Pre-award & doctoral school capabilities are uneven (grant offices, international HR, legal/financial support). DN/COFUND require harmonised doctoral recognition, co-funding, and administrative depth; these are still consolidating in many Romanian institutions.

MSCA-NET's Widening brief highlights precisely these gaps across Widening systems. Limited coordination experience (DN/COFUND) and risk aversion, PF host offerings (mentoring, career development plans, non-academic secondments) are less standardised than in high-performing systems.

## APPLICANT-LEVEL AND OPERATIONAL BARRIERS

High competition and process complexity characterise PF (strict mobility rules, excellence thresholds). EU evaluation and interim studies note that success hinges on proposal writing culture, supervision capacity, and clear career development design, areas where Widening systems need continued support.

Administrative/financial constraints for DN/COFUND (country coefficient, salary top-ups, secondments) can deter coordination, even when research ideas are strong. Recent COFUND policy reports underscore the structural co-funding commitments required from hosts.

### SUCCESS STRATEGY

**Sustained success depends on structured support and unconstrained career pathways**



Romania's MSCA profile (good in SE & MSCA and Citizens; modest in DN/PF; limited COFUND participation) is consistent with systemic R&D underinvestment, emerging institutional scaffolding, and career / administrative frictions that cumulatively depress coordination capacity and individual fellowship success, not a lack of scientific potential.

However, national funding schemes are increasingly structured to mirror MSCA approaches, offering postdoctoral project funding and citizen-science initiatives (such as "science in schools"). These instruments aim to "prepare" early-career researchers using MSCA like principles emphasizing mobility, interdisciplinary research, transferable skills development, and public engagement, so that young researchers benefit from coherent, mutually reinforcing training environments across both European and national levels.

# NCP MSCA @ UEFISCDI

## Effort, actions, and value added (2021–2024)



### MSCA NCP IN ROMANIA

Against this context, the NCP MSCA at UEFISCDI, Sabina Olaru & Adriana Rotar, acted as a capacity multipliers and quality enablers, in line with EC and MSCA-NET/RADIANCE guidance

## 1. Targeted information & outreach

- National briefings per instrument (DN, PF, SE, COFUND, MSCA and Citizens), call-by-call guidance, and “how to comply” workshops (mobility, supervision, secondments, Career Development Plans), mapped to EU rules and Horizon Dashboard trends.

## 2. Applicant assistance and support

- Hands-on proposal pre-checks, Q&A surgeries, and consortium design support (DN/SE), including partner searches via MSCA NCP networks and MSCA-NET.

## 3. Host-institution capacity building

- Work with universities/institutes to improve their visibility and services.

## 4. Evidence-based targeting

- Systematic use of Horizon Dashboard data to focus on instruments and panels where Romania shows the best “return per effort” (notably SE and MSCA and Citizens), while steadily upgrading DN/PF readiness through supervisor training and PF host-offer templates.

# Results and demonstrable progress

## ROMANIA'S MSCA PERFORMANCE

In Horizon Europe 2021–2024, Romania had **84** funded MSCA projects / 436 proposals (~**21%** success), a substantial efficiency gain vs H2020 (~**14%**), despite fewer proposals overall, indicating better targeting and higher proposal quality.



Fewer proposals, higher quality - Romania's MSCA performance is rising

## STEADY GROWTH, STRONGER COORDINATION

- SE and MSCA and Citizens show high success and notable coordination from Romania; DN and PF remain structurally harder but show a steady pipeline of funded projects and growing institutional know-how.

## STRONGER SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- More Romanian institutions now standardise MSCA workflows (pre-checks, supervisor support packages), and demand for NCP clinics has risen year-on-year, signalling maturation of the support ecosystem.



# Lessons learned (what actually moved the needle)

PF competitiveness improves with early host engagement, Career Development Plan templates, and focused pre-checks; DN readiness grows with doctoral school involvement, non-academic partners, and internal co-funding plans.

Structured ESR-driven rework yields better PF/DN outcomes in the next round, an approach also encouraged across the MSCA-NET community.



**Focusing effort on SE & MSCA and Citizens while building DN/PF capacity produced a more balanced, sustainable portfolio**



# Expanding Romania's MSCA reach and researcher engagement

A photograph of laboratory glassware on a white surface. In the foreground, a 250 ml beaker contains a glowing green liquid. To its left, a test tube with a glowing green liquid is held in a test tube rack. In the background, another beaker and a test tube are visible, also containing glowing green liquid. A petri dish with a dark red leaf is in the foreground. The background is dark and out of focus.

## 2025

In 2025, the NCP MSCA @UEFISCDI built upon four years of progressive engagement to reach a high level of activity and visibility

The NCP continued to serve as the backbone of Romania's participation in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), providing hands-on guidance to researchers, host institutions, and coordinators across all MSCA instruments. The year was defined by increased interaction with the research community, proactive institutional training, and closer collaboration with the REA and MSCA NCP network peers. In 2025:

- Over **200 individual inquiries** were handled, supporting researchers and institutions with tailored advice on mobility rules, proposal design, and host readiness.
- **12 proposal design meetings** and **9 in-depth proposal reviews** helped applicants strengthen the scientific and implementation quality of their submissions.
- **26 thematic newsletters** were published, providing targeted updates on upcoming calls, partner searches, and success stories.
- **6 outreach and training events** were organised or co-organised, engaging MSCA alumni (MSCA Romanian Chapter), potential applicants, and institutional representatives from across Romania.
- **12 new or updated support materials** (including guides, templates, and presentations) were produced to assist host institutions and supervisors.

## CONSOLIDATING NATIONAL MSCA CAPACITY

These achievements confirm the high professionalism and commitment of the NCP MSCA team. The continued cooperation and guidance from the European Commission, through the Research Executive Agency (REA), and the MSCA NCP network were instrumental in sustaining Romania's progress and increasing institutional maturity within the MSCA framework.

Beyond quantitative outputs, 2025 reinforced Romania's MSCA community as an active and informed network of researchers and institutions. Through consistent communication, mentoring, and data-driven targeting, the NCP MSCA has laid the foundation for stronger coordination capabilities and more competitive applications in the 2026-2027 Work Programmes.



# Next steps (2026–2027) for NCP MSCA @ UEFISCDI, for sustained improvement

- Scale DN coordinator labs (budgeting, governance, QA) and maintain SE excellence as a Romanian strength, sharing good practices through MSCA NCP network.
- Maintain Horizon Dashboard and MSCA Dashboard-driven targeting and publish an annual MSCA Competitiveness Brief to rectors and deans (instrument trends, organisation league tables, and thematic opportunities).

**Empowering institutions,  
enhancing proposal quality,  
and shaping a stronger  
MSCA community**



**Within the constraints of an emerging research and innovation system, the NCP MSCA @UEFISCDI delivered high-value, evidence-based support that raised proposal quality, improved success efficiency, and drove institutional professionalization, especially in SE and MSCA and Citizens, while building capacity in DN and PF.**

**Continued collaboration with MSCA NCP network and RADIANCE consortium, access to Horizon Dashboard analytics, and coherent national actions on doctoral training, and host readiness will be decisive in translating this growing capacity into more coordinated and higher-impact MSCA projects in the 2025–2027 work programmes.**

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