

Call for expression of interest to participate in a proposal for a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Staff Exchange (SE) call 2024:¹

Proposal title: PARTI CIVIS - *Participatory research to action facilitating transformation and innovation in African-European perspectives*

14 November 2024

Official website of the MSCA SE 2024 Call for Proposals: [EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#)

CIVIS internal information on the MSCA SE Call 2024: [Download from the CIVIS Box](#)

MSCA SE Call deadline: 5 February 2025

This call is addressing CIVIS young and senior researchers, administrators, representatives and members – including staff involved in community and civic/social engagement/innovation initiatives – of the 17 CIVIS universities, full and associate members of the Alliance². This call for expressions of interest is a renewed invitation to contribute to this updated MSCA SE proposal, which was already discussed within CIVIS in November 2023.

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¹ In order to explore the interest and opportunities for CIVIS to apply for such a call, a working group has been set up in September 2024 and produced a [first abstract](#) that circulated among CIVIS members, notably the Expert Group on Civic Engagement and Expert Group on Research Funding.

² CIVIS full member institutions: Aix-Marseille Université, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, University of Bucharest, Université libre de Bruxelles, University of Glasgow, University of Lausanne, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Sapienza Università di Roma, Paris Lodron University of Salzburg, Stockholm University, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen. Associate member institutions (Africa): Université Hassan II de Casablanca, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Makerere University, Eduardo Mondlane University, Université de Sfax (<https://civis.eu/fr/discover-civis/the-civis-alliance>).

The objective in brief

To develop a staff exchange (SE) programme involving all CIVIS universities and the CIVIS association to **promote research and innovation (R&I) on societal challenges through** the application of **participatory research**.

PARTI_CIVIS aims to strengthen the cooperation between the CIVIS universities and to contribute to their social engagement in the promising and desirable field of social innovation. The SE programme **enables convergence in the practice of participatory research on societal issues with common ground in Africa and Europe by involving partners from both continents**, according to the different areas of study, with the aim of producing tangible and impactful results in both contexts.

The proposed PARTI_CIVIS SE project has three main objectives:

1) Investigate the effectiveness of participatory tools and methods reflecting key societal challenges in an African-European strategic perspective

Adopting the CIVIS' Hubs approach, to explore and sort the existing innovation-oriented and/or transcontinental participatory research carried out by both academic and non-academic partners, coming together in specific project teams, related to the thematic priorities¹, such as:

1. Climate change and energy transition
2. Sustained economics, arts and cultural heritage
3. Public and planetary health
4. Urbanisation, migration and inclusive societies
5. Digital and technological change

2) Foster evidence-based argumentation on the facilitating role of participatory research in promoting social innovation

The project provides an opportunity to compare different approaches to common societal challenges and/or to identify matching strategies and competencies in R&I activities between African and European universities in different societal contexts. The university-based civic engagement platforms participating in the project can share or jointly develop expertise, capacities, and resources.

3) Develop a methodological toolkit based on 'glocal' approaches to enhance civic engagement and effective third mission activities of the participating universities.

The SE programme scheme allows for the exploration of best-practice examples of civic engagement and the potential for cross-fertilisation between African and European universities. The production of a toolkit on sound participatory research methodologies, carried out in both continents by the participating universities and partners, aims to support the contribution to the 'third mission' of academic institutions by promoting a "glocally engaged university".

Participatory research as an entry point for CIVIS universities to engage with society

Given the common societal challenges facing Europe and Africa, and the role of universities as transformative catalysts for our contemporary societies to drive social innovation, the question arises as to **how such engagement can be fostered through challenging teaching and research conducted with non-academic actors**.

Indeed, social innovation can be reflected in academic curriculum transformation, community-university partnerships, and helix partnerships when collaborations are established with civil society, industry and government actors. This implies concrete investments and responsibilities of the university in the design of policies aimed at having a positive impact on society through teaching, research, governance, and external leadership.

To contribute to this engagement and to enable non-academic actors to participate in the production of scientific knowledge, participatory research can be an entry point, as it is a research-to-action approach that emphasises direct engagement with local priorities and perspectives³.

Confirming the common goal of CIVIS university members to influence the development of societies, both locally and globally, this SE programme can:

- **foster excellence through dedicated staff mobility, exchange of participatory practices** (surveys, co-construction, co-design, co-creation, action learning, PPGIS mapping, team science, etc.)
- **bring together R&I staff** (researchers, administrators) at different career stages, **who are exposed to different and non-academic host institutions** and then **return to their home institution** afterwards to **disseminate the tangible results** they have achieved in their working ecosystems.

CIVIS target group

The proposal provides an opportunity to articulate a staff mobility exchange for two main categories of the university staff:

- **Administrators** involved in the civic engagement platforms (open labs, ...)
- **Researchers** (doctoral, post-doctoral and senior) who carry out participatory research projects. Among these researchers a distinction is made between those who use the participatory research approach in their field of research and those who study participatory research as a field of research.

The diversity of profiles that will be involved in the PARTI_CIVIS proposal aims to contribute to and enrich the research culture through a dynamic ecosystem that allows

³ Cornwall, A., & Jewkes, R. (1995). What is participatory research? *Social Science & Medicine*, 41(12), 1667–1676. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(95\)00127-s](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(95)00127-s)

for career diversification and development, interoperability with all sectors of society, in line with the European Commission's European Charter for Researchers initiative⁴.

Contribution to research and innovation objectives

The common objectives for both African and European countries are to improve R&I ecosystems going beyond existing cooperation to create or strengthen long-term collaborations, expand working networks, share knowledge and transform cutting-edge research into innovative products and services.

Most recently, with the adoption of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda in 2023⁵, **joint research & innovation (R&I) has become a key priority in and for the development of the Africa- Europe partnership**. There in R&I is not only seen as an indispensable means to address common global societal challenges, but the promotion of joint R&I activities has also become an objective in itself. Indeed, within the framework of the AU-EU agenda, the strengthening of scientific and academic mobility opportunities to support the co-construction and/or co-reinforcement of training programmes and research and innovation projects in line with the socio-economic needs of the countries/regions concerned is recognised as one of the short-term actions to strengthen 'capacities for science'⁶.

Universities have a crucial role to play in this agenda, as they are hubs for innovation-oriented research as well as for the training of future researchers and innovators, and are already much more than that on both sides of the Mediterranean. **In line with their commitment to the "third mission" of academia** - societal engagement - many of them not only **maintain local innovation centres** to support start-ups and industrial cooperation. They have also established platforms for collaboration with non-academic stakeholders on innovative solutions to societal challenges at the local level.

Therefore, this proposal provides an opportunity for the staff of the participating CIVIS universities to contribute to R&I objectives through the implementation of concrete initiatives in the field of participatory research.

Relevance to the MSCA SE criteria

The transfer/sharing of knowledge and skills offered by the MSCA SE programme touches on three dimensions for the success of the project:

⁴ The European Charter for Researchers is a set of principles underpinning the development of attractive research careers to support excellence in research and innovation across Europe. The focus of the Charter is the rights and responsibilities of researchers, employers, funders and policymakers. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202301640

⁵ The AU-EU Innovation Agenda, Final Version, 19 July 2023. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/ec_rtd_au-eu-innovation-agenda-final-version.pdf

⁶ The AU-EU Innovation Agenda, Final Version, 19 July 2023 p. 6

International

The CIVIS Alliance, by its very nature, offers an international dimension to the proposed PARTI_CIVIS project, benefiting from its extended geography in Europe and in Africa and ensuring the mobility across the two continents.

The PARTI_CIVIS proposal is based on the assumption that the cooperation between researchers and innovators from different local (regional) contexts, working on the same or similar challenges, can significantly help them to overcome the limitations of merely local representations of societal challenges or unilaterally global solutions. Cross-continental collaborations with a 'glocal' perspective can thus increase the relevance of R&I results. This can take on the form of truly joint R&I projects between African and European participants, but also the sharing of expertise or mutual access to R&I capacities.

Intersectoral

The more recent notion of social innovation, which involves non-profit actors in the implementation of R&I policies and practices goes beyond a more traditional framework in which innovation is understood exclusively as a driver for a business-oriented approach, and new research results and technologies are commercialised and transformed into marketable products to be integrated. The SE programme applies the more recent notion of 'social innovation' as a process of developing and implementing practices and social relations to address societal needs, thus remaining open to business-oriented actors and processes in this context.

The proposed PARTI_CIVIS project offers the opportunity to think ahead a twofold commitment to ensure the active involvement of universities in social innovation: first, to invest in in-depth reflection on how to involve different stakeholders while maintaining high research standards, and second, to point to the necessary institutional and research policy changes that universities are undertaking.

Interdisciplinary

The focus of the proposed SE programme on civic and societal challenges leads to the adoption of a transdisciplinary approach to R&I. It is based on the widely recognised recognition that no single academic discipline and its associated methodologies are alone capable of providing a holistic view of societal challenges and therefore of devising effective and sustainable approaches to addressing them. While this already requires a multi- or interdisciplinary approach, CIVIS transdisciplinarity goes a step further by opening up the very definition of 'societal challenge' and related research questions to input from non-academic stakeholder communities.

Concrete implementation of the SE programme

Ideally, PARTI_CIVIS will involve all 11 European and 6 African universities that are members of the CIVIS Alliance⁷ as well as the newly established CIVIS Association and different dimensions of collaborations are possible:

- **Using existing joint, challenge-oriented, transdisciplinary education and participatory research initiatives** developed within the 5 five thematic Hubs as well as civic engagement platforms/CIVIS Open Labs. **There is no need to create new formats for R&I.**
- **Building on** the previous dedicated R&I programme under Horizon Europe – RIS4CIVIS, and potential **synergies with CIVIS Alliance projects** and programmes such as PolyCIVIS, Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), Seed Funding projects.

An MSCA SE programme would allow the **exchange of staff for 1 up to 12 months** (based on secondments) **for joint training and networking activities.**

Taking into account the R&I objectives outlined above and other objectives of the partners' network, PARTI_CIVIS could thus include the following, concrete activities (further items or changes are possible!)⁸:

- Research stays of early career researchers (mainly PhDs, Post docs) at a partner institution to carry out participatory research projects with an emphasis on research in collaboration with community/social/open labs and/or involving civic engagement.
- Research stays of senior scientists or academic staff with the same profile at a partner institution for joint participatory research project.
- Developing future-oriented career paths towards civic engagement and social innovation.
- Stays of research, managerial, technical staff, involved in our civic engagement projects and (platforms), at a partner university for training purposes and/or developing joint participatory research projects.
- Joint workshops/conferences of researchers on R&I, civic engagement and participatory research as tool for social innovation.
- Joint workshops/conferences of research, managerial, technical staff involved in civic engagement and participatory research (platforms).

⁷ The role of the University of Lausanne (UNIL) as a participant from a country not associated to Horizon Europe and not belonging to the list of eligible low-/mid-income countries needs to be clarified

⁸ In line with the MSCA SE eligibility criteria, allowing for single-sector exchanges if partners from non-associated third countries are involved, as well as the focus on the role of universities in R&I, the programme will not target at the inclusion of non-academic participants in the staff exchange itself. However, they can and should be integrated in events like conferences and in local activities.

Expected impact of the programme

For participating staff members (individual level):

- Enhanced research, training, and networking opportunities through stays at partner universities and participation in related events
- Enhanced career perspectives in the R&I realm and also outside academia

For participating universities (institutional level):

- Contribution to their commitment to social innovation through the development of new R&I collaborations, skill development of staff, knowledge transfer, and increased international visibility of their civic engagement platforms and projects
- Enhanced opportunities for postgraduate research training

For the envisaged consortium (alliance level):

- Strengthened research profile of the alliance in direct relation to its main goals - social challenge orientation, civic engagement, African-European partnerships
- Opportunity to explore and eventually develop the collaboration between CIVIS members and partners in the realm of civic engagement/Open Labs

For R&I in Europe and Africa (ecosystem level):

- Direct contribution to the R&I objectives of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda and explorative application of the partnership formats outlined therein, i.e., European University alliances and MSCA
- Insights on the significance of university's civic engagement for R&I, relevant for R&I policy and practice
- Development of new teaching and research formats and contents for educating civically minded, challenge-oriented, transdisciplinary trained innovators
- **Tangible changes within the communities themselves** involved in the participatory research initiatives developed through the CIVIS Hubs' thematic priorities approach

Budget scenario

Total max. project budget:	1,803,600 Euro (for max. 4 years)
Mobility budget for secondments	360 person months (max.) * 2710 Euro = 975,600 Euro
Possible distribution of the mobility budget, assuming a balance between incoming/outgoing staff and African-European exchanges only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10 European partners⁹ : 18 person months in total per partner (4-5 person months/year) ▪ 6 African partners: 30 months in total per partner (7-8 person months/year)
Budget for research, training, networking activities	360 person months (max.) * 1300 Euro = 468,000 Euro
Budget for management and indirect costs	360 person months (max.) * 1000 Euro = 360,000 Euro
Possible uses of the budget for management and indirect costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme manager at the lead institution Costs for Work Packages/WP Leaders Costs for local secondment management

What is funded?

- Mobility of seconded staff (top-up allowance for travel, accommodation, subsistence costs), on top of the salary paid by the home organisation; special needs allowance, if applicable
- research, training and networking activities (conferences and publications)
- management and indirect costs

Point of attentions:

- It is not possible to have the same staff member funded at the same time under two or more MSCA grants for the same activity. Furthermore, seconded staff need to be committed full-time to the MSCA project
- Any secondments planned to do exclusively management activities (e.g., project coordination meetings, report drafting, etc.) as well as communication, dissemination and training not related to the R&I activities, will not be eligible.

⁹ UNIL is not directly eligible for funding; its possible role needs to be clarified.

How to get involved?

The PARTI_CIVIS working group currently includes representatives, from both African and European universities, working in the Expert Group on Civic Engagement, CIVIS Open Labs, CIVIS Hubs and from the CIVIS Coordination Office.

Researchers, management and technical staff involved in participatory research/ social innovation-oriented initiatives that can be related to the objectives and methods outlined in this paper, and that can benefit from the types of interactions described above, are invited **to express their interest in participating by filling in this short online form, by the 25 November 2024:**

<https://airtable.com/appW3JOhPPghg37kF/shrleW8bqggZYDWkP>

PARTI_CIVIS working group members:

- Prof. Stefan LANG, CIVIS General Secretary and Vice-Dean faculty of Digital and Analytical Sciences at PLUS (PARTI_CIVIS Coordinator)
- Dr. Manuel ALCÁNTARA-PLÁ, Open Labs Coordinator at UAM
- Prof. Fadma AIT MOUS, Director of the Confucius Institute and responsible for CIVIS Hub4 at UH2C
- Philia Issari, CIVIS Expert Group_Civic Engagement at NKUA
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