



H2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

COVID-19 in the MSCA Questions - Answers

NCP meeting – REA training
2 December 2020

COVID-19 ITN



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ITN – unused family allowance



In order to extend the contracts of the ESR during the COVID outbreak period, is it possible to use unused family allowance funds?

- **Unused family allowance funds cannot be used** to extend the contracts of the ESRs, only unused amounts of institutional costs. Unused family allowance funds cannot be used as they would not be eligible as not incurred by the fellows.

ITN – mid-term review meetings



What are REA's plans for mid-term review meetings in light of Covid-19 travel restrictions and implications of these reviews being delayed?

- *Mid-term meetings should be **organized remotely via videoconference**. A **postponement** could be justified in case there is a delay in the implementation of the project which would affect the assessment of the project during the midterm check.*

ITN – secondments



Clarification on the 50% mandatory secondment in industry in EID's, when the ESRs cannot travel to a foreseen secondment due to COVID.

If 'due to COVID' the ESR cannot travel to his/her industrial secondment, can the industrial secondment nevertheless be **STARTED** remotely with the ESRs still being located at their **ACADEMIC** host, provided that the ESR works on 'topics related to the industrial secondment'?

- *If secondments cannot take place, they can be **done remotely, postponed or cancelled**. In case they are done remotely, their feasibility will need to be justified and the REA will assess the situation on a case-by-case basis.*
- *In case they are postponed or cancelled, this **deviation from GA will be assessed** by REA on a case-by-case basis (and possible application of force majeure).*
- *REA might accept situations where for e.g. the 50% rule for EID projects was not respected. Those **situations to be assessed only once the situation is back to normal** and the full impact on the project can be assessed .*

ITN – industrial secondments

What exactly constitutes ‘topics related to the industrial secondment’?

- *The **topics are described and defined in Annex I of the GA or Description of Action (DoA).***

Would writing a joint academic/industrial journal or conference submission be acceptable?

- *If foreseen in the DoA, **this is more the outcome/deliverable of an industrial secondment** so it normally does not fully cover the activities foreseen during the industrial secondment.*

Would catching up on reading the scientific background material related to the industrial secondment be acceptable?

- *If foreseen in the DoA, this could constitute **part of the activities carried out during the secondment** but it does not fully cover the activities which should be carried out by the fellow during her/his exposure to the non-academic sector.*

Would running computer-based simulations, which were originally foreseen to be carried out at the industrial secondment, but are now conducted remotely from the academic host premises, be acceptable?

- Yes

ITN – (im)possibility to travel (1)



Cases which could be defined as ‘travel restrictions due to Covid’:

- When commercial flights are available but general national guidelines are to avoid unnecessary travel without banning it outright.
- When the sending host university has a temporary ban on all ‘non-essential travel’ in place.
- When the receiving secondment host has a ban on guest/visitors to their site in place.
- When the ESR does not want to travel in order to minimize personal risk while in transit.
- The ESR does not want to travel because the country of the partner organisation has a higher COVID incident rate than the country of the sending host.

ITN – (im)possibility to travel (2)



It is the responsibility of the beneficiaries to decide on a course of action and to come up with contingency measures in order to safeguard as much as possible the implementation of the project - for that, beneficiaries should:

- (1) refer to the advice given by their national authorities** (in terms of health, travel advice, repatriation schemes, interruption of employment) and;*
- (2) propose measures which are reasonable and safeguard the health of the staff** involved in the project and limit as much as possible the impact the situation linked to the coronavirus could have on the implementation of the project.*

ITN – mobility rule



ITN ESR mobility eligibility - many courses are being run 100% online, so the student does not need to reside in the country the degree is being undertaken – how should this be considered with regards to the mobility rule that specifies residency? For example you could have an applicant for an ITN undertaking in a degree in country X but residing in country Y, then applying for an ITN in country X.

- *Mobility rule at the time of recruitment - REA will consider adopting a **flexible approach whenever possible**, based on a **case-by-case analysis**.*
- *If the fellow has already been recruited, **promotion of teleworking** to ensure business continuity is accepted. REA considers **teleworking arrangements as acceptable** (in the country of the recruiting beneficiary or in any other country).*

ITN – family compliance



Family compliance: civil unions not been formalized due to institutions closing, etc.

- The reply is pending approval of central legal services

ITN – grant extension



When to apply for an extension (right away or towards the end of the project), when is an extension not granted, how many amendments have been asked and granted, budgetary implications; handling of remote working (when is it allowed and when not).

- The REA recommends to **wait till the situation is back to normal** before requesting any extension as not clear how long the current situation will last and what will be the full impact on the projects.
- Once the situation is back to normal, **extensions of 6 months can be requested** to allow the implementation of delayed projects tasks, events, meetings, secondments.
- REA also offers **flexibility as to when the extension can be granted**. For example, if there is a delay in recruiting which is due to the covid outbreak and because of this delay beneficiaries cannot offer fellows a 36PM contract, the REA will envisage an extension at the beginning of the project.

COVID-19 IF



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IF – (im)possibility to travel



To assess if it is possible to move to a certain country to start the IF, how is the severity of the COVID situation in a country judged and by whom?

- **Case-by case basis** taking into account the **force majeure** situation AND the **personal situation of the fellow**
- The assessment of each individual case involves the PO, the HoS and the legal adviser

IF – remote work



Handling of remote working: When is it allowed and when not?

- *The telework is granted on a **case-by-case basis***

IF – eligibility prior to the call deadline



Mobility compliance: situations where fellow has been enabled to travel to/from a country due to coronavirus restrictions. For instance, what about candidates that due to COVID had to stay in Country A with no possibility to leave it and want to apply for an IF in this country A but are not fulfilling the mobility criteria due to this obligation to stay there for instance tele-working /on secondment for a few months?

- **No exemption to the mobility** *critierion because of the coronavirus crisis.*

IF – family compliance



Family compliance: civil unions not been formalized due to institutions closing, etc.

- *The reply is pending approval of central legal services*

IF – amendments



When to apply for an extension (right away or towards the end of the project), when is an extension not granted, how many amendments have been asked and granted, budgetary implications;

- **No extension of project duration in IF** (for budgetary reasons)
- But **acceptance of part-time/suspensions** requests (in this case: postponement of the end date of the project but number of units unchanged)
- **22 notifications of suspension** of the action implementation for force majeure (article 51 MSCA IF GA)

IF – suspension



What about cases where further suspension are not financially viable for the fellows? For instance in the UK the furlough schemes is being wound down and the alternative being put in place will not necessarily support researchers and because many MSCA fellows haven't been in the UK long enough they are not eligible for other social security measures.

- Application of the ***national rules on labour law***
- ***Suspension*** should be considered by the beneficiary ***as a last recourse***, and in all cases with the ***explicit agreement of the researcher*** on the suspension and consequent reduction of salary (see FAQ 13243). In this case the beneficiary can ***use the unspent management costs*** to sustain the researcher's salary and must extend their employment contract

IF-GF – outgoing phase



How to handle the delayed start of the outgoing phase in a GF if in the Third Country due to severe risks caused by the COVID situation in the respective country? Is it possible to work remotely?

- Yes it is **possible to work remotely**, and each individual situation is assessed on a **case-by-case** by REA. For GF, national restrictions on the delivery of the visa are also taken into account.

IF-GF – 3 month flexibility



What happens if a global fellowship has already been granted the three month flexibility within the outgoing phase, but then as a result of further covid-19 containment measures they are still unable to return to the host/or complete the work that was to be carried out during the three months back at the outgoing host?

- *The FAQ 13247 **recommends a 3-month period of flexibility for GF.** Telework is in principle allowed during this period of flexibility.*
- *A further extension is pending approval of central legal services*

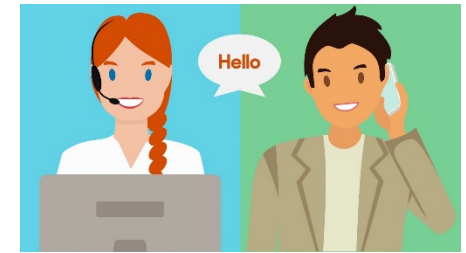
IF-GF – changes in the return phase



GF: we have a Spanish fellow who changed the returning phase from UK to ES due the impossibility to travel back to London during the COVID outbreak and it was granted. How is this been handled?

- *REA assessment is done on a **case-by case basis** taking into account **force majeure** situation such as the closure of the laboratories/premises at the host, the sanitary situation of the country, and the **internal rules at the host institution**.*
- *We consider also the **personal situation of the fellow**.*

IF-GF – virtual mobility and major deviations



Though there is some flexibility regarding starting based at the EU host, or additional secondment time at the global host during the return phase the different COVID-19 containment measures being implemented by different countries makes that even with the increased flexibility they are very hard to implement, not least because of the uncertainty on when the measures will change mean that even the preparation such as purchasing plan tickets/entry visa's is being come very difficult. Project suspensions are not always the best course of action for the fellow.

Possible to enable virtual mobility, to allow more freedom on when the outgoing phase can occur, designing of project, moving from a global fellowship to a European fellowship?

- **Closure of the borders and/or refusal or delays in the granting of visas** - a force majeure situation. Suspensions of the project to be considered as a last recourse and with the explicit agreement of the researcher.
- Regarding **“virtual mobility”**, as mentioned before, **telework is allowed for GF during a period of flexibility**. A further extension is pending approval of central legal services.
- On the “designing of the project”, an amendment to Annex I to be requested in case of major deviations. Deviations with a minor impact - in the technical report.
- **Moving from a Global fellowship to a European fellowship is not allowed.**

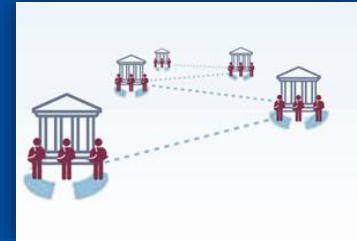
IF-GF – letter of commitment



Letter of Commitments for GF (signed? Not signed? Electronic email?). We faced the case of a GF proposal having an outgoing university in the States unable to provide a formal letter of commitment due to Governmental restrictions to do so, included an email from the Supervisor supporting the project in an informal way.

- *The H2020 WP: “Partner organisations identified in the proposal must include a **letter of commitment** (with the proposal) to ensure their real and active participation in the network. (The contribution of any partner organisations for which no **such evidence of commitment** is submitted will not be taken into account during evaluation)”.*
- ***WP does not explicitly define the format** of such letter, emails from the supervisors showing the commitment of the partner organisation to host the researcher during the outgoing phase can be accepted.*

COVID-19 RISE



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RISE – suspension vs extension



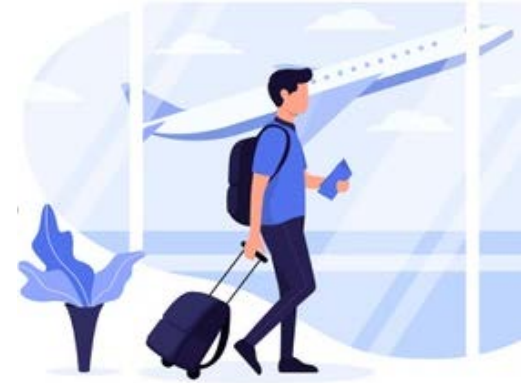
- **Force Majeure**
- **Both are possible**, depending on the specific needs of the different projects to be assessed by the coordinator.
- **Suspension** - where the activities of the consortium were completely interrupted i.e. **no secondments**
- **Extension up to max 12 months** – when **limited number of secondments was still into force** in order not to run the risk of having the corresponding unit costs declared ineligible
- **Combination of suspension/extension** also possible
- **In specific cases** - the extension of the GA duration combined with the corresponding shifting of the deadline of the first reporting period (to balance the cash flow during the second reporting period)
- **Activities not linked to secondments can continue**

RISE – virtual secondments



- **No virtual secondments**
- **Physical mobility required:** category A is supposed to cover travel, accommodation and subsistence costs costs for the staff undertaking transnational mobility.
- **Teleworking accepted exceptionally** and is subject to the additional condition of the compatibility of the scientific activity with the remote modalities (case by case approach).
- **Force majeure clause** can be used to make **certain costs exceptionally eligible**, but **cannot be use to alter substantially and radically the nature and the purpose of RISE scheme mobility**
- **Activities well suited**

RISE – (non)completion of secondments



Issue with regards to the (non)completion of secondments in RISE (and other MSCA schemes) and non-recoverable costs?

- **Force Majeure** – *ad hoc measures*
- **Few cases of secondments not reaching the minimum eligibility duration due to COVID-19, were nonetheless considered eligible**
- **Case by case approach**
- **Incurred non recoverable costs for secondments**
- *Contact the PO*

COVID-19 COFUND



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COFUND - flexibility



- Due to the exceptional circumstances represented by the Covid-19 outbreak, **maximum flexibility** will be given in relation to the COFUND action implementation.
- In particular, **full flexibility is offered in order not to interrupt the fellow's research training**. Beneficiaries/host institution should allow the researcher to telework, work outside the Host institution premises, etc. **During such period the researcher allowances should be fully paid**, even in those cases where the research work is not continuing as planned.

COFUND – suspension or part-time



However, if beneficiaries/host institutions need to suspend the researcher's contract or to allow for part-time working arrangements (for personal or family reasons), this may be accepted by the REA under the following cumulative conditions:

- the **researcher has explicitly agreed** with the suspension/part-time working arrangements;
- the researcher has explicitly agreed with any resulting temporary suspension/reduction of the salary; the beneficiary may nevertheless consider to use **unspent part of the Management costs** in order to support the researcher financially during the suspension period. The recruiting beneficiaries/host institutions may also cover these expenses from dedicated national or own resources.
- the researcher's contract is **extended accordingly** to allow him/her to finalise the work.

COFUND - reporting



Full flexibility will be given also on scheduled due dates for **deliverables, milestones and reports** whose performance was impacted by the confinement measures.

- In particular, for reports linked to payments, the coordinator will still be able to submit the report at the due date set in the grant agreement, but **flexibility will be allowed as regards the 60 days** period for the submission of the report

COVID-19 NIGHT



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NIGHT 2020



Impact of the COVID19 situation on NIGHT 2020 implementation:

Can REA explain different scenarios faced during NIGHT implementation (on line events, attendees, number of amendments) ?

Will REA accept underachieved indicators of performance when reporting?

The projected measurable indicators (e.g. number of visitors on site) could be seriously underachieved due to pandemic.

People get tired of online events and they may be reluctant to visit the online experiments, instead of hands-on experience

NIGHT 2020



- *The Coordinators of **24 out of the 51** EU funded NIGHT 2020 projects have communicated that the event will be **full remote**.*
 - *consequence of national restrictions or on their own decision in order to avoid uncertainty.*
- *More projects might have been performed remote in reality.*
- ***At GAP stage** the COVID outbreak was mentioned as **Critical Risk in all projects**, and various mitigating measures were presented, sometimes with different scenarios.*
- *REA has accepted **4 requests for amendments** that were Covid-19 related.*

NIGHT 2020



- *As in previous years, after the events the Coordinators will fill in and **submit a questionnaire to REA.***
- *On that basis, **REA will prepare a report on the performance of the events.** This report will present the situation regarding the number of events that took place fully online and the other measures taken by the Coordinators. **REA will accept any deviations** that were necessary as long as we are convinced that the **beneficiary(ies) made their best efforts** to run their project in the face of considerable difficulties.*

Thank you

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