

Net4Mobility⁺



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Network of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions National Contact Points for the mobile scientific and innovation community

Success Stories from MSC Fellows Hosted in Widening Countries

Task 4.4 Effective MSCA promotion

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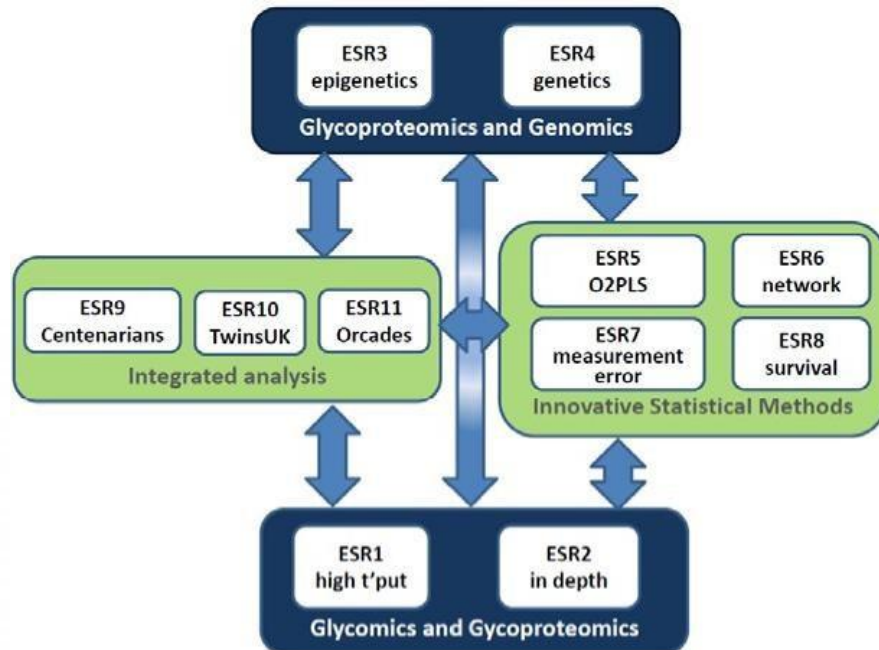
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Name of the MSC Fellow: Samira Smajlović
Nationality: Bosnian and Herzegovinian
Host organization: Faculty of Science University of Zagreb
Country of the Host: Croatia
Project Acronym: IMforFUTURE
Project start and end date: 01/04/2017-31/03/2021
Type of MSC action, H2020: ITN



Your story:**Project objectives and research field:**

‘Epigenetic regulation of protein glycosylation’ studies epigenetic regulation of the GWAS hits relevant for IgG glycosylation and functional role of the genes identified by GWAS to be the most relevant for IgG glycosylation. Moreover, project aims to show identified GWAS hits pleiotropy with autoimmune and inflammatory diseases such as inflammatory bowel disease or systemic lupus erythematosus.

Tell us why your topic is important and/ or how it brings to advancement in your research field:

Epigenetics studies factors that influence gene expression, but without changing the gene sequence. After much research in this area, it was proposed that the environment induces changes in development that have long term impact on later health, disease risk and longevity. This research involves identifying biomarkers (the alternations in gene expression that are correlated to a specific outcome) related to autoimmune and inflammatory diseases. It aims to understand what causes disease which is essential to not only create treatments, but also to work towards ways of preventing the disease in the first place. Collectively, its goal is to pave the way to identify possible novel therapeutic intervention points towards ageing related processes and diseases.

What are the benefits of participating in a MSC action?

Among many benefits for being part of the MSC actions, I would list the international environment provided by network and training meetings and secondments in which you get a chance to share your knowledge and learn more from project partner institutions hosting you. Moreover, it will provide you with an opportunity to nurture your mobility skills as well. I love that you are required but at the same time strongly advised and encouraged to reach out the wider public and speak up your research trough different public engagement activities. Soft skills trainings are also a highly appreciated opportunity provided to ESRs in the form of ‘learning by doing’. In the end, MSC actions are one of the most prestigious fellowships in Europe and are known worldwide which can be an asset if you are planning to continue with your professional development.

Did you encounter any challenges during application/ implementation and did you get any help?

What was a challenge to me at the beginning is all the travel planning and the bureaucratic procedures before you move to another country to start to work on your project. However, I think that having to deal with these adds to your different skills development but can be distracting when it comes to planning longer secondments (objectives, duration, accommodation...) and preparing visa applications (if required)

once you've already started with your project. It might become difficult at some point to deal in parallel with responsibilities for your host institute while being on your secondment period and in new work environment. However, help from the HR office at the host beneficiary and even your supervisor (once you are accepted on the project) should be enough to overcome the problems you can encounter when moving abroad. I've learned about NCPs when I was already in the first few months of my project, but now that I am in contact with them, I believe that they would provide any kind of help if contacted.

Why did you choose a widening country as a Host? What was the reason that convinced you? What is making you professionally happy here?

As I was coming from a widening country knowing that Croatia, as a widening country as well, puts its efforts on recruiting an ESR on the project (having in mind that University of Zagreb is not so attractive for foreign PhD students), it made me believe even more that I will be met by professional happiness and good work atmosphere. I knew that, once given the opportunity, widening countries and fellows can highly contribute to the project and easily collaborate worldwide. The team I am now working with is experienced, professional and recognized in the field of epigenetics. I am truly happy that I can learn from them and be a part of such a group of young people.

Would you recommend others to apply? What useful advice/ tips can you give them?

As for now, based on my experience, without any doubt I would recommend applying for the MSC actions to every ambitious young person willing to go abroad and explore the world in every meaning. MSCA is an initiative that is recognized by Europe, if not the world, and it is competitive to get selected. But, selection is not based only on the academic achievements. It is your enthusiasm, motivation and dedication to learning and improving what matters as well. Learn to think out of the box, step out of your comfort zone and go somewhere you have never been before and see what happens.