My Experience with the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship: Tips and Motivation for Future Applicants

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About Me

- Education
  - Masters in Economics
  - MBA in Finance
  - PhD in Management Sciences (College of Economics and Management, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, China)

- Profesional Experience (Before PhD)
  - World Health Organization (Data Analyst)
  - United Nations Development Program – UNDP (Entrepreneurship Officer)
- (After PhD)
  - Personal Investigator at University of Salamanca, Spain (Research focus: Climate Change and Education)

- ***Project Title:*** Climate Change Effects on Education and the Role of Nature-Based Solutions in Mitigation
- ***Project Acronym:*** EduClimate
- ***Project Supervisor:*** doc. PhDr. Jan Činčera, Ph.D.
- ***Host Institution:*** Department of Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic.
- ***Duration:*** 2 years
- ***Project Period:*** 7/2025 - 7/2027

https://www.muni.cz/en/research/projects/74427

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What is MSCA-PF?

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) - Post Doctoral Fellowship
https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/

Duration: 24 months (Additional 6 months ~ optional secondment)

Eligibility

- Scholars who acquired their PhD degree not more than 8 years before the call deadline are eligible to apply.
- Scholars who successfully defended their thesis can also apply.
- Any Nationality.
- Any field of science, social science, humanities, and interdisciplinary fields.

MOBILITY RULE: Applicants should not have resided/studied/worked in the country of their host organization for more than 12 months in in 3 years immediately before the deadline.

What motivated me to apply?

- 👥 **Personal:** My wife is an MSCA-PF fellow at the Faculty of Economics and Administration.
- 💰 **Prestigious & Independent Funding:** MSCA provides substantial financial support, allowing me to conduct my own research with full independence.
- 🔒 **Financial Security:** The fellowship allows me to focus entirely on high-quality research without administrative or financial worries.
- 🎓 **Career Advancement:** A strategic step before taking up a faculty or leadership position in academia or industry.
- ⚙️ **Freedom & Flexibility** to design and conduct research.

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MSCA survey highlights high satisfaction levels among fellows and alumni

A recent survey of MSCA alums tracked a high level of satisfaction with some room for improvement in certain respects.

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My Application Process

Timeline of my application

Connected with Prof. Jan Cincera (supervisor) **well in advance**: In 🗓️ September 2023 to discuss **MSCA 2025 application**.

🤝 **Institutional Support**: Early coordination with **Eva Šlesinger** (Project Manager, FSS) for account setup, institutional sections, and submission.

🧩 **Proposal Development**: Conducted between **March–June 2024**, with multiple drafts and revisions.

🔍 **Expert Review**: Proposal reviewed by **Jakub Zeman** (MSCA Project Manager, MUNI).

Key Takeaways for Success

- **Engage Early with Supervisor:** Contact potential supervisor well in advance. Ensure topic aligns with supervisor's research and interest to get meaningful feedback.

- **Allocate 3 Months for Review and Revisions:** Allow sufficient time for revisions and expert reviews.

- **Leverage Institutional Support:** Introduce yourself early to the MSCA focal person or project coordinator to get administrative and technical guidance and support.

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My Application Process

Writing Proposal

🧩 Structure

- Part B1: Core part of MSCA proposal
- Three sections: Excellence, Impact, and Implementation
- Excellence: Research background, state-of-the-art, objectives, and methodology
- Impact: Impact on career; dissemination and exploitation of results; scientific, economic, technological, and societal contribution
- Implementation: Quality and effectiveness of workplan, risk assessment, quality and capacity of host institution
- Exceeding 10 pages → excess text not reviewed

✍️ My Strategy

- Started freely (~20 pages), then shortened to meet the 10-page limit; Used simple and clear language
- Did not avoid necessary technical jargon to emphasize scientific knowledge

⚠️ Challenge

- With only 10 pages, every line must count
- Avoid filler; make every sentence impactful
- Risk: Reviewers spot weak or vague sentences easily, leading to low scores

💡 *Tip: Write long, then refine short. Simplicity wins reviewers' trust.*

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My Application Process

Writing Proposal – My Strategy

	Methodology	Data
Excellence		
Main Objective: Understand and mitigate the impact of rising temperatures on education.		
Specific Objective 1: Assess the impact of rising temperatures on educational outcomes.	• Analyze temperature trend and anomalies and assess their impact on student performance. • Econometric Modeling: Fixed Effects & Generalized Linear Models.	• Climate Data: ERA5 Land Reanalysis • Educational Performance Data: PISA (Europe), Maturita exam (Czech Republic), Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) Survey (Czech Republic)
Specific Objective 2: Prioritize nature-based school solutions to reduce heat-related learning impacts.	• Engage experts to assess and prioritize nature-based solutions based on various criteria. • Models: Multicriteria Decision Making	• Interviews with Experts & Stakeholders • Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) • Workshops & Structured Surveys
Impact (Dissemination)		
Journal Publications	Provided proposed titles of studies that I anticipate publishing in targeted high-impact journals such as Nature Climate Change, Nature Sustainability, PNAS, and Journal of Environmental Economics and Management. (High impact journals and publish related studies)	
Conference Papers	Provided details of conferences (including when and where) that I anticipate presenting my results at. I aimed for high-impact conferences that publish their proceedings or extended papers in reputable journals.	
Implementation		
Workplan	I present work packages with clearly defined tasks, methods, deliverables, and milestones.	
Gantt Chart	My Gantt chart was clear and simple showing start/end of tasks and work packages.	

Advice for Applicants

- Contact potential supervisors early and ensure alignment of research interests.
- Obtain approval from the host department and connect with the MSCA administrative support office.
- Review successful past MSCA proposals to understand structure and strengths.
- Begin drafting early; aim to complete your first full version within four months.
- Use clear, concise language — revise multiple times with focus on clarity.
- Clearly indicate what data will be used in the project; Specify the data sources.
- Get expert review and incorporate feedback.
- Submit at least two weeks before the deadline to avoid system delays.

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Acknowledgment

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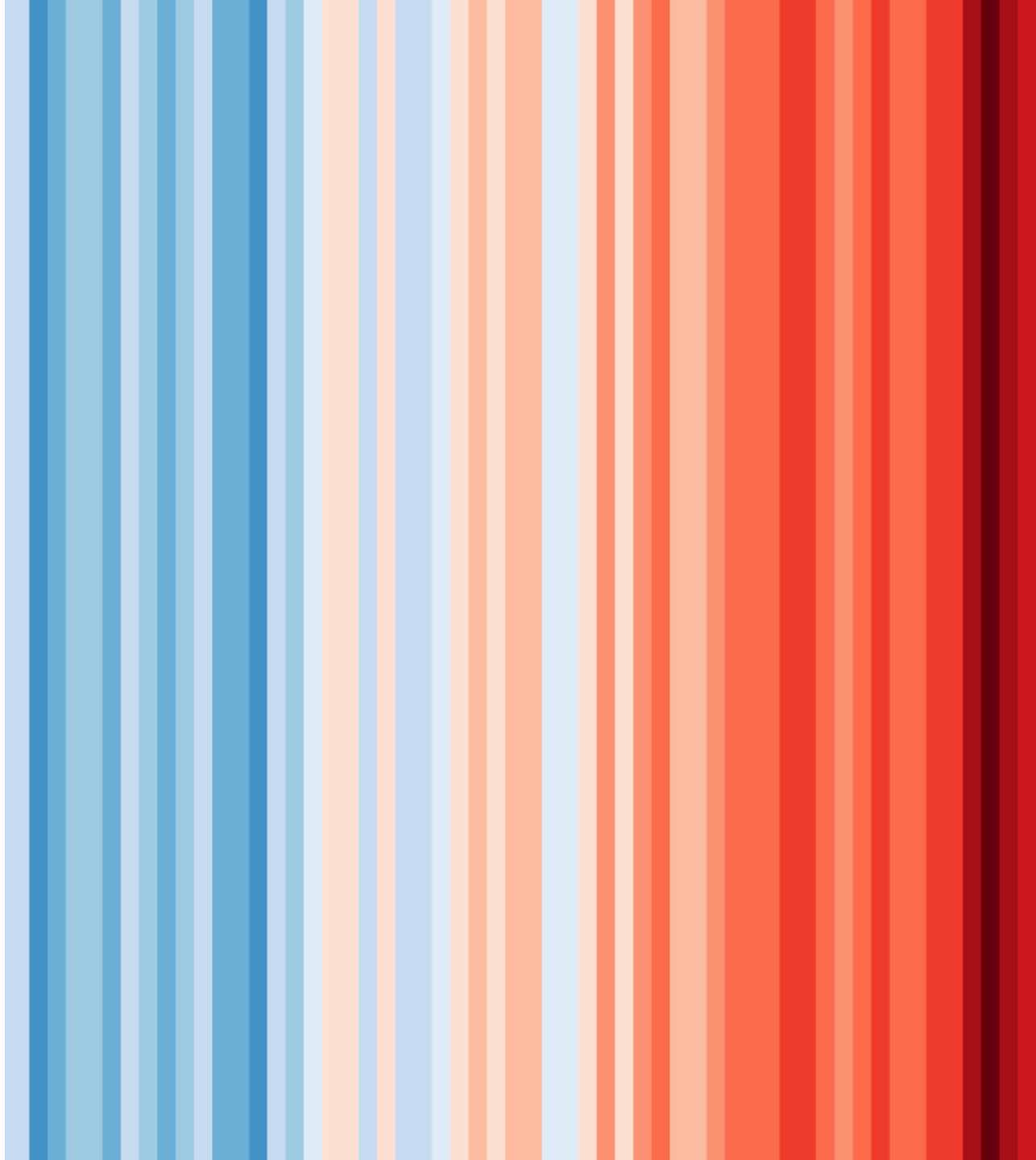
Thank you!

For feedback and suggestions email me at:

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