



Success Story

Marie Curie Funding at all Stages of the Career

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions | Developing Talents, Advancing Research

Prof Lucio Isa knows the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) from various perspectives: he was an Early-Stage Researcher of a Marie Curie Training Network and soon after an Inter-European Postdoctoral Fellow of the MSCA on his fast journey to professorships at the ETHZ. Now he leads the members of his team as a supervisor, including a PhD candidate and a Postdoc, both funded by the MSCA.



What is your career path and how did you get in touch with the MSCA programmes?

Before starting the PhD, I contacted my future supervisor in Scotland to ask for an open position. He suggested to join the Research Training Network. At the beginning I had no idea what it was all about. During the recruitment process, it was clear to me that this is not a normal PhD, but that you interact much more with other people.

After the PhD I wanted to change the laboratory. I again looked actively for contacts and was directed towards a large European collaborative project. This is how I landed at the ETHZ. Then I decided to submit an application for the MSCA Fellowship, as I wanted my own funding.

You moved from Italy to Scotland and then to Switzerland. You also received a travel grant to visit the University of California. To what extent do you consider mobility important?

I think that at the beginning it is important to see that things can be done differently. When you move around, you get exposed to more ideas and create connections. At some point, however, forced mobility can limit the research stability and long-term thinking. You might not want to move anymore, and it is important that options that enable you to

stay exist.

What impact has MSCA had on your career and research?

The Training Network gave me a framework to meet many people with whom I could develop long-lasting collaborations. Professors of that time still remember me and that's benefitting my network. Both during the Training Network as well as the Postdoctoral Fellowship, I could choose and propose my own project.

I had an extremely positive experience!

Would you recommend applying to the MSCA?

Yes. And I actually do it as a supervisor: when I see that a Postdoc in my laboratory is very much inclined and complies with the eligibility rules, I encourage him or her to apply for the MSCA fellowship. I know that it is a unique occasion to have the freedom as a Postdoc to follow your own scientific questions. Furthermore, it may give resources to the supervisor to open another position.

What, in your eyes, are key aspects of good supervision?

Supervision is a lot about empathy. It is important to have a close connection with the people and the research they are doing.

For me, teaching is also very important. I see it as my primary duty at ETHZ, which I like.

What do you hope to leave to the scientific community?

Interesting research findings, of course, and that the work we do is relevant and important for the

community. But also a certain way of doing research and work at a university; transmitting a positive culture on how things are done and how we interact constitutes an important legacy.

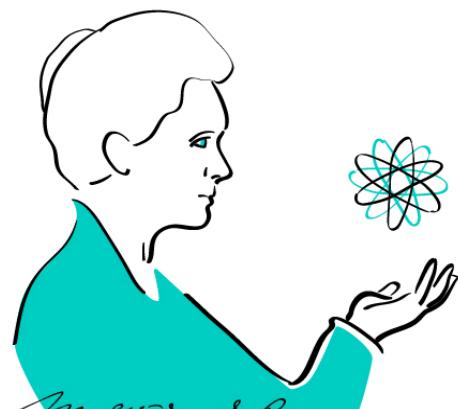
‘The connections formed in the Training Network during my PhD shaped collaborations to this day.’ (Lucio Isa)

Lucio Isa is the Associate Professor of Soft Materials and Interfaces at the ETH Zürich.

Confirming his dedication to teaching, in 2019 he won the **Golden Owl**, a prize awarded by students in recognition of outstanding faculty teaching.

In 2021 he also initiated a new Doctoral School within the ETH Zurich Competence Centre for Materials and Processes, the MaP Doctoral School. Meanwhile, he continues to successfully obtain highly competitive grants, such as the ERC consolidator grant in 2020.

He is also leading a team composed of 8 PhD students, 5 Postdocs and 1 research technician.



Programme

The **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** support researchers at all stages of their careers. Researchers working across all disciplines are eligible for funding. The MSCA also support cooperation between industry and academia and provide innovative training to enhance employability and career development.

The **MSCA Doctoral Networks** (which used to be called Training Networks) aim to train creative, entrepreneurial, innovative and resilient doctoral candidates able to face current and future challenges; and to convert knowledge and ideas into products and services for economic and social benefits.

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Illustrations: Alexandra Rosakis

