



BLACK LIVES MATTER IN RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION TOO!

Over the last few months, the Black Lives Matter movement has spread over the globe. Starting in the US, people went to the streets to claim the right to be considered and given equal chances no matter their ethnic background. Soon, European populations joined the cause, and discussions about Black populations have emerged. One area has barely been touched upon: the equal chances for Black individuals to succeed in their professional endeavors when it comes to research. On Twitter, several campaigns and accounts have emerged to have started to highlight to work of Black researchers in specific fields, starting with [#BlackAFInSTEM](#) and [#BlackBirdersWeek](#), and now expanding to other field including [#BlackInAstro](#), [#BlackInChem](#), and [#BlackInNeuro](#). In addition, several members of the scientific community participated in [#ShutDownSTEM](#) on June 10th, taking that day to amplify Black voices, educate themselves, and participate in a [Wikipedia editathon](#) to add and improve biographies of Black researchers on Wikipedia.

The [Marie Curie Alumni Association \(MCAA\)](#), representing over 16,500 researchers, works to support the careers of researchers regardless of their ethnic background or any other individual characteristic. Indeed, the MCAA thrives on international and collaborative science, and acknowledges that many scientific and academic achievements that shape our world and our society would not be possible without the countless achievements of Black and ethnically diverse researchers. Black women such as [Katherine Johnson](#), were instrumental in space exploration, working as “Human computers” at NASA, physician [Dr. Mae Jemison](#) was the first African American woman to go to space, [Dr. Charles R. Drew](#) was instrumental in the development of large scale blood banks, and what would modern cell biology be without the cells that were taken, without her consent, from [Henrietta Lacks](#). Equal chances, non-discrimination, and dignity for researchers at all stages of their careers are values pursued by the association. These are also values put forward by the European Charter for Researchers, which clearly demands the respect of the non-discrimination principle by employers, and states that employers need to provide opportunities for growth and favorable working conditions to all. The Code also requires that employers ‘facilitate access for disadvantaged groups’ (see Recruitment) [1].

Despite these declarations and formal charters, the situation of researchers from diverse ethnic backgrounds is not necessarily well addressed today and Black researchers have [more hurdles to overcome](#). While [Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions \(MSCA\)](#) enables researchers to access mobility and European networks and welcomes researchers from different horizons, it is not sufficient to guarantee that the rights of researchers are equally respected and little information is available on the success and difficulties of researchers from various backgrounds. The European Charter is not always familiar to researchers who focus on respecting codes of research integrity, which means they do not take on all issues faced by Black researchers or researchers from other ethnicities. The MCAA launched several initiatives to support researchers with difficulties: a scheme to support refugees was implemented in 2017 and REFERENT[2], a mental health peer-to-peer support network, was created in 2019 to help

researchers in distress no matter their background. Current work is also taking place on the possibility to have an Ombudsman to protect and defend research fellows from any kind of discrimination/harassment based on individual characteristics. Such actions are important, but are not enough to address the needs expressed in Black Lives Matter. ***The next step is to shed light on researchers from different backgrounds and to be active promoters of inclusion in research labs and higher education.*** More actions are required, from each of us individually and from MCAA as a collective.

What can we do as individuals?

- Let your voice be heard
- Hold people accountable in regards to the European Charter: use your influence to create diverse inclusive and Black-friendly (or welcoming) labs and research groups.
- Include diversity in teaching material and discussions in class
- Educate yourself and others about systemic racism and discrimination. Read stories about the experiences of Black STEM professionals, check out the hashtag [#BlackInTheIvory](#).
- Diversify your timeline, follow people who have different backgrounds and experiences on social media. One way to start is to check out [@BlackAFinSTEM](#).
- Find out other ways to contribute here: <https://blacklivesmatters.carrd.co/>

What can we do collectively? We, as the MCAA commit to continue educating ourselves and speaking up for justice and equality. We will actively speak against any form of discrimination, including based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religious background, and country of origin. We believe that our strength as a community lies in our diversity. We will actively strive to show more and better representation through outreach activities to show that anyone can pursue a career in science. We can use our influence within the European community to take an active role in stopping racism and injustices, to call for more economic support for the Black community to achieve their goals. We will strive to be an active network of allies and active promoters of change.

Join us in this endeavor! We call for everyone from all ethnic backgrounds to share their story, information, and scientific achievement with the MCAA by contacting blog@mariecuriealumni.eu. We call all researchers who want to make a positive impact in this direction to contact the **Genders, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion** (wg-gems@mariecuriealumni.eu) and **Policy Working Groups** (policy@mariecuriealumni.eu) of the MCAA to lead projects that foster mutual respect, diversity, and inclusion in current and future research society and higher education.

[1] <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/european-charter>

[2] <https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/news/referent-mentoring-initiative-msca-early-career-researchers>