

UNIVERSITÉ  
LIBRE  
DE BRUXELLES



VRIJE  
UNIVERSITEIT  
BRUSSEL

# Interdisciplinary Research In Societal challenges (IRIS COFUND)

ULB-VUB MSCA POSTDOCTORAL COFUND



**IRIS**  
ULB – VUB



Co-funded by  
the European Union

This project has received funding from the European Union's HE research  
and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101217407

# Agenda

## Introduction to IRIS COFUND

- **Call 2: OPEN**
  - Eligibility: Who can apply
  - Remuneration
  - Societal challenges
- **Application, evaluation and selection process**
  - Required documents
  - The proposal
- **ULB, VUB and R&I ecosystem**
  - Finding a supervisor and co-supervisor
- **Training programme**

Useful documents and links

Q&A session with participants



# The IRIS Postdoctoral COFUND

The COFUND action provides funding for regional, national and international programmes for training and career development, through co-funding mechanisms. It spreads the MSCA's best practices by promoting high standards and excellent working conditions. COFUND promotes sustainable training and international, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility. **This program supports Higher Education Institutions to attract and recruit talent.**

## The IRIS project: Interdisciplinary and regional priorities

- ULB/VUB are both based in Brussels
- Common research structures
- Themes: 6 societal challenges for the BCR from the Regional Innovation Plan 2021-2027\*



# Call 2: OPEN

- Deadline: 30<sup>th</sup> June 2026 17h00 CET
- 18 fellows recruited: 12@ULB, 6@VUB
- 30-month postdoctoral fellowships
- **Bottom-up projects** from all disciplines. Open to all research groups.
- **2 supervisors** from different disciplines based in Brussels
- Secondments and research visits are optional but encouraged

Apply: [Call Information – IRIS-COFUND.EU](https://iris-cofund.eu)



# Eligibility: who can apply

- Applicants of any age and any nationality are eligible to apply.
- In possession of a doctoral degree or have successfully defended the doctoral thesis by the deadline of the call.
- Applicants **must not have** resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Belgium for more than **12 months during the last 3 years** before the call deadline.
- Holders of a PhD degree with **maximum 8 years of full-time research experience** since obtaining the PhD (applicants can calculate research experience deducting periods of: maternity/parental leave, compulsory national military service, long term sick or family care leave, and procedures for obtaining refugee status) → [Research Experience and Mobility Calculator](#)



# Remuneration

Budget categories		Amount (€/month)
Fellow-related	→ Living allowance* (gross)	5000
	Mobility allowance (net)	450
	Family allowance (net, if eligible)	400
Research-related (managed by the home research group)	Research, training and networking	333

The \*living allowance is an **indicative value**. This value represents the total employment costs, including the fellow's gross salary as well as the **employer's and employee social security contributions**.



# Societal challenges

Potential candidates can apply under **one or more themes** from the 6 societal challenges identified in the BCR Regional Innovation Plan 2021-2027

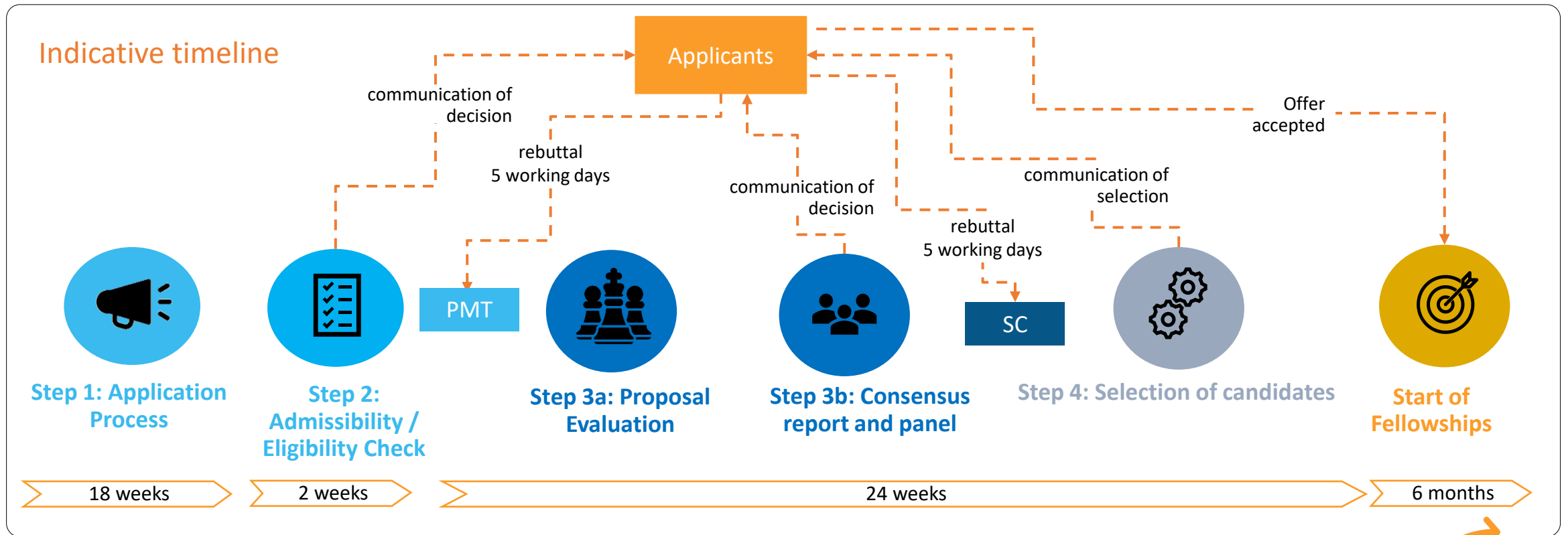
Projects are **bottom-up and interdisciplinary!**

- Climate & Energy
- Resource optimization
- Mobility
- Healthy and sustainable food
- Health and well-being
- Participatory and inclusive society

[The Regional Innovation Plan | Innoviris](#)



# Application, evaluation and selection process



# Application, evaluation and selection process

**Call opening:** 1st March 2026 at 14.00 CET

**Call closing:** 30th June 2026 at 17.00 CET

**Eligibility check:** 1 - 18 July 2026

**Evaluation by external international experts:** Up to December 2026

**Results to applicants:** Beginning of February 2027

**Start of projects:** 1st May 2027 (earliest) to 15th September 2027 (latest)



# The Application: Required documents

1. [Research proposal template](#)
2. [Narrative CV template](#)
3. [Ethics self-assessment template](#)
4. [Letter of recommendation](#)
5. [Research Experience and Mobility Calculator](#)



# The proposal

- Use the mandatory [template](#)
- First page (does not count towards 10-page limit)  
Includes applicant details and abstract
- 10 pages for proposal: 3 major sections
  1. Excellence
  2. Impact
  3. Implementation
- Follow formatting requirements and maintain the headings
- Instructions in [blue](#) to be deleted
- PDFs longer than **11 pages** cannot be uploaded



# The proposal

## Part 1: EXCELLENCE

### 1.1 Scientific quality of the research project

#### 1.1.1 State-of-the-art

#### 1.1.2 Research questions → link to societal challenges!

### 1.2 Methodology

### 1.3 Gender and diversity aspects

### 1.4 Open science practices

### 1.5 Qualification and training needs of the researcher/Training programme



# The proposal

## Part 2: IMPACT

- 2.1 Expected impact of the project on the researcher's career
- 2.2 Expected impact for society
- 2.3 Expected impact on the state-of-the-art of research
- 2.4 Dissemination, communication and exploitation activities

## Part 3: IMPLEMENTATION

- 3.1 Work plan
- 3.2 GANTT chart
- 3.2 Risk management



# Ethics self-assessment

- [Guidelines from the European Commission](#) on how to complete your ethics self-assessment form (the IRIS form is based on the EC template)
- [Mind the Gap](#): quick course from the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) on the main aspects of ethics, GDPR, etc. These two courses are particularly relevant:
  - [Data Protection Regulation](#)
  - [Introduction to Ethics Rules and Regulations](#)



# Hypothetical example

- Interdisciplinarity of supervisors based on [level 1 MSCA keywords](#)
- Home university must be ULB or VUB.
- Co-supervisor can be selected from any other institution/organisation

## Project under climate and energy theme

Societal challenge - Climate and energy	
<b>Home university and supervisor</b>	ULB supervisor expertise in <a href="#">V2</a> Earth system science
<b>Inter-disciplinary co-supervisor</b>	ULB or VUB supervisor expertise in <a href="#">C4</a> Applied and Industrial Chemistry
<b>MSCA level 1 keywords (min 2).</b> <i>The candidate has selected level 1 domains corresponding to those of the supervisors</i>	<a href="#">V2</a> Earth system science <a href="#">C4</a> Applied and Industrial Chemistry
<b>MSCA level 2 keywords (3 to 5)</b>	Air and water pollution control (corresponding to Level 1, V2) ← Environmental chemistry (corresponding to Level 1, V2) Biochemistry (corresponding to Level 1, C4) ←
<b>Research question</b>	How do urban environmental factors, such as air pollution and soil contamination, influence the physiological and biochemical responses of trees and plant life, and how can interdisciplinary approaches integrating chemistry and environmental sciences contribute to developing strategies for enhancing urban vegetation resilience and ecosystem services?

Or a VUB supervisor

Or any other institution/organisation from Brussels, but, please, contact us first!



# ULB and VUB

The candidate is responsible for contacting and confirming the supervisor capacity to support the project

For ULB researchers consult:

- the [ULB Research Inventory](#)
- Search for Université libre de Bruxelles in the [CIVIS MSCA Supervisors data base](#)

For VUB researchers consult

- the [VUB Research Portal](#),
- the [VUB MSCA-Postdoctoral Fellowship Repositor](#)

Joint centers ULB/VUB

[FARI: AI for Common Good](#)

[Brussels Center for Urban Studies](#)

[Open.lab Brussels](#)

[Brussels Institute for Advance Studies](#)



# Contacting supervisors

The candidate is responsible for contacting and confirming the supervisor capacity to support the project

Please, when contacting a potential supervisor do not forget to include the following information:

- 1) The abstract of your project,
- 2) Your own research background and expertise,
- 3) Describe clearly what you are requesting from the professor in terms of research infrastructure and expertise
- 4) Remind the professors that this is in the frame of an interdisciplinary call (include a link to the IRIS website).



# ULB

- **3700** students
- **4160** researchers in 2024
- More than **2000 Ph.D candidates**
- Almost **50% women researchers**
- More 30% of researchers are **international**
- **200 research units and 10 interdisciplinary instituts**
- **244M** of annual budget in 2024

## Research Infrastructure

- Analytical Platform of the Faculty of Pharmacy – APFP
- BRIGHTCore, Brussels Interuniversity Genomics High Throughput Core
- Center for Instrumentation in Magnetic Resonance – CIREM
- Center for Microscopy and Molecular Imaging – CMMI
- Research Center for Cognition and Neurosciences – CRCN
- Flow Cytometry – Biopark Charleroi Brussels South/Erasme
- LiMiF – Light Microscopy Facility
- Micro-milli – Micrometric and Millimetric Systems
- PANORAMA – Platform for Object Scanning and Surveying in Architecture, Monuments, and Archaeology
- Functional Neuroimaging Platform
- Transgenesis Platform
- Policy Lab



# VUB

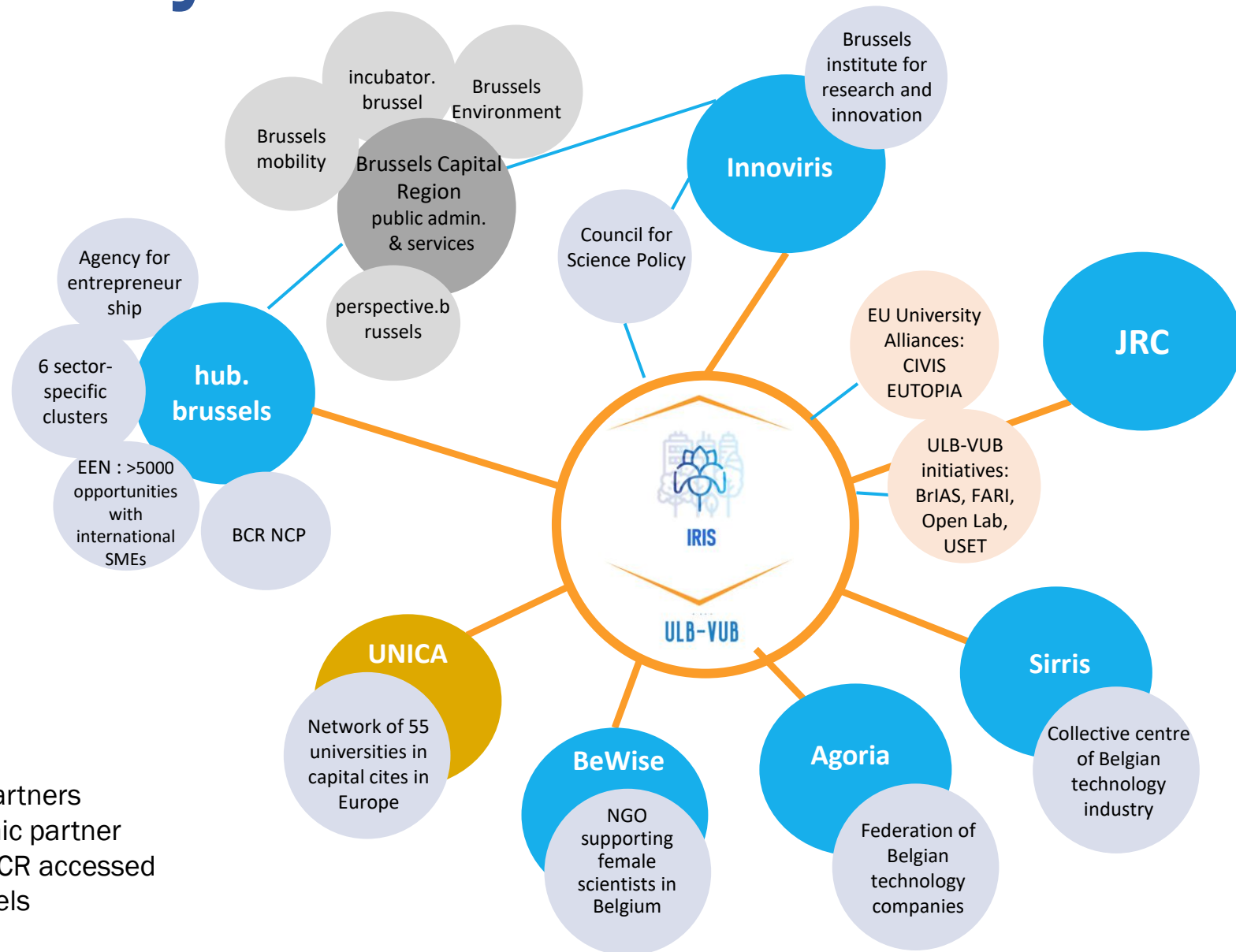
- Over **21 000 students** hailing from **145 nationalities**.
- Here, **diversity** isn't just a buzzword - it's our **strength**.
- **2 269 Doctoral Students** in 2023-2024, of which **55% international**.
- **Comprehensive** university with **96** research groups in **8** faculties.
- **2504 publications** in 2024.
- **47** active spin-offs and **223** active patent families in 2024.
- Total **research budget** of **156,5M** in 2024.

## Research infrastructure

- Brubotics Rehabilitation Research Center
- In Vivo Cellular and Molecular Imaging
- FlowCore
- Materials Characterisation
- Microlab Cleanroom
- BRIGHTcore
- Support for Quantitative and Qualitative Research
- Animalarium
- Visual and Spatial Tissue Analysis
- The Social Survey
- Brussels Digital Text Lab
- Human and Artificial minds and bodies



# IRIS R&I ecosystem



## Legend

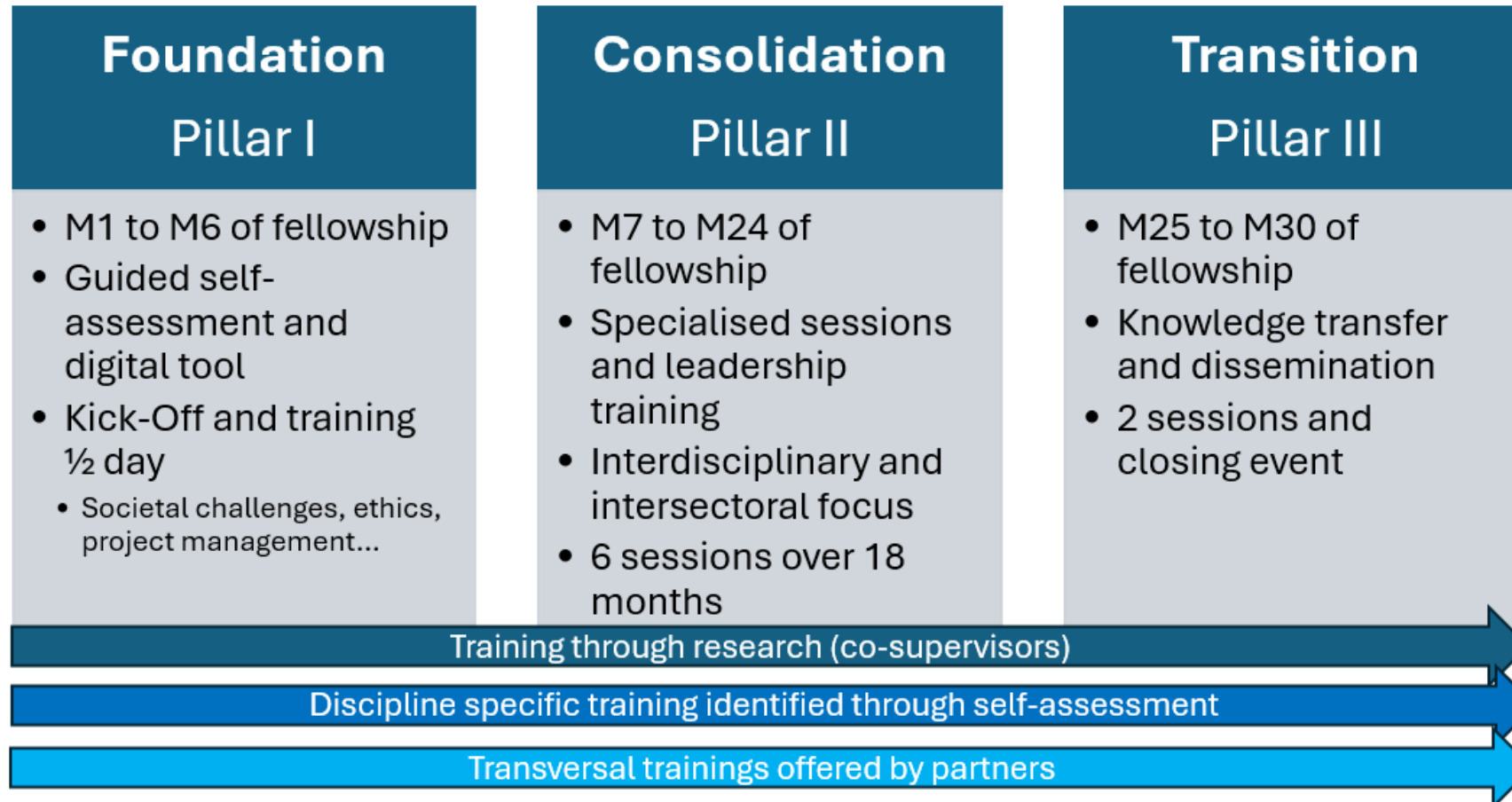
**Blue:** Associated intersectoral partners

**Orange:** Main European academic partner

**Grey:** examples of agencies of BCR accessed through Innoviris and hub.brussels



# Training program: 3 pillars



	<b>Main Training Events &amp; Conferences (lead)</b>	<b>Training Pillar</b>	<b>Month of Fellowship</b>
1	Fellowship kick off and training (one day) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Societal challenges in the BCR (Innoviris)</li> <li>■ Research ethics and integrity (ULB)</li> <li>■ Project management basics (VUB)</li> <li>■ Self-assessment and career planning workshop (ULB-VUB)</li> </ul>	I	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Training and networking ½ day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Open science and research transparency (VUB)</li> <li>■ Interdisciplinary research workshop (BrIAS)</li> </ul>	I	3 <sup>rd</sup>
3	Training and networking ½ day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Adaptive leadership workshop (VUB)</li> <li>■ Inter-cohort exchange</li> </ul>	II	6 <sup>th</sup>
4	Training and networking ½ day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Entrepreneurship &amp; Innovation workshop (hub.brussels)</li> <li>■ Inter-cohort exchange</li> </ul>	II	10 <sup>th</sup>
5	Training and networking ½ day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Artificial intelligence for the common good training (responsible use of AI in research) (FARI)</li> <li>■ Inter-cohort exchange</li> </ul>	II	13 <sup>th</sup>
6	Training and networking (one day) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Advanced communication skills for interdisciplinary research (BrIAS)</li> <li>■ Diversity, equity and inclusion in collaborations (BeWISE)</li> <li>■ IRIS days: outreach and public engagement event (VUB/ULB- OpenLabs-citizen science)</li> </ul>	II	16 <sup>th</sup>
7	Training and networking ½ day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sustainability and responsible research workshop +networking ½ day (Sirris)</li> <li>■ Inter-cohort exchange</li> </ul>	II	19 <sup>th</sup>
8	Training and networking ½ day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Policy Engagement and Advocacy training (JRC)</li> <li>■ Inter-cohort exchange</li> </ul>	II	22 <sup>nd</sup>
9	Career transition training and networking (1/2 day) (VUB-ULB) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Speed-dating with representatives of the non-academic sector through IRIS consortium networks (eg. EARMA, EC, EUROCITIES, BeCENTRAL etc)</li> <li>■ Managing your own research group</li> </ul>	III	25 <sup>th</sup>
10	Intersectoral and interdisciplinary knowledge transfer workshop ½ day (ULB-VUB -knowledge and tech transfer offices)	III	26 <sup>th</sup>
11	Closing conference afternoon and evening with EC representatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Poster presentations and elevator pitches by fellows</li> <li>■ Networking event with representatives of Brussels Research and Innovation ecosystem and regional government.</li> </ul>	III	30 <sup>th</sup>



# Quick summary

- ✓ PhD obtained/defended before 30<sup>th</sup> June 2026
- ✓ Interdisciplinary project
- ✓ Supervisors' capacity to support the project confirmed
- ✓ Supervisors must be academics (post-docs or non permanent staff are not accepted as supervisors)
- ✓ Not have lived/worked in Belgium for more than 1 year in the last 3
- ✓ Move to Belgium for the duration of the fellowship
- ✓ Documentation uploaded to the platform before 30<sup>th</sup> June
- ✓ Secondments are optional
- ✓ MSCA PF and MSCA IRIS COFUND are independent calls. You can apply to both, but be aware of the different requirements.
- ✓ Start of projects: 1st May 2027 to 15th September 2027
- ✓ This is the second and final call of IRIS



# Useful documents and links

- [Guide for applicants](#)
  - Research experience and Mobility Calculator
- [Guide for evaluators](#)
- [Brussels Innovation plan](#)
- [ULB/VUB research](#) (finding supervisors and joint common centers)
- [Moving and Living in Brussels](#)



**30<sup>th</sup> April – Narrative CV  
Session**

Stay tuned on our [website](#) and  
[LinkedIn](#) pages!



# IRIS PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM

If your question is general, please, include both addresses in your mail:

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