



Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action COFUND

Call 1: Deadline 31 October 2025

Version 1: 1 July 2025

Applicants are invited to regularly check the IRIS COFUND website at <https://iris-cofund.eu> for updates of the guides and templates



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1. MSCA Postdoctoral COFUND in Brussels – Applicant Guide

1.1 Overview: the IRIS COFUND

The **Interdisciplinary Research In Societal challenges Postdoctoral COFUND (IRIS)** is a European postdoctoral programme, COFUNDed by the Université libre de Bruxelles, Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the European Commission within the framework of the **MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE actions** (Horizon Europe). Through this programme, **36 international postdoctoral researchers** will be recruited, 24 at ULB and 12 at VUB. The program period will take place between 2025 and 2030 and will launch **two calls**, for each of which IRIS will offer 18 positions **open to all fields of research**, according to a bottom-up approach. During the fellowship, IRIS postdocs will benefit from an environment that fosters academic growth and well-being. Fellows could engage in optional secondments and short visits, take part in the IRIS management committee, and have 30 months to fully carry out their interdisciplinary research projects.

IRIS's research programme hinges on two themes: interdisciplinarity and regional priorities, addressing the six societal challenges of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR). IRIS research projects will exemplify solutions in the applied context of the BCR but are intrinsically linked to ubiquitous European needs, thereby guaranteeing the participating researchers European-wide career options.

The programme's training framework is built on three key pillars: Foundations, Consolidation, and Transition, each designed to develop fellows' RTDI skills, expand their professional networks and enhance their future employability. The IRIS postdoctoral training programme goes beyond conventional academic training, offering tailored support for the transition from recognised to established researchers, equipping fellows for diverse career paths, and incorporating policy engagement and advocacy skills to enable fellows to create tangible societal impact and prepare for meaningful careers.

The **Guide for Applicants** for the first call will guide you step by step to submit your application. The Guide also provides detailed information about the evaluation and selection procedure.

1.1.1 Societal challenges in the Brussels Capital Region (BCR)

The **IRIS Postdoctoral COFUND** is key to implementing the European Commission's policy in the Brussels Capital Region (BCR), addressing the RIS3 *"...to improve resilience and economic prosperity (sustainability, quality of employment and well-being of citizens) and contribute to the social and ecological transitions through innovative responses to societal challenges"*, a priority which is shared amongst many European urban centres. IRIS fellows will address **one or more of the six societal challenges identified by the RIS3 for BCR that have wide relevance for urban areas across the globe: 1) Climate & Energy, 2) Resource Optimization, 3) Mobility, 4) Healthy & Sustainable Food, 5) Health & Well-being, and 6) Participative & Inclusive Society** (see section 8.1 Six societal challenges for the Brussels Capital Region).

Applicants will develop a self-defined interdisciplinary research project with a focus on delivering scientific, societal, and economic impacts, collaborating across sectors, and identifying pathways for applying their knowledge and innovations in the region and across Europe.

1.1.2 The project team

Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)—the beneficiary—and implementing partner **Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)**, with nearly two centuries of shared history in the BCR are well positioned to work with intersectoral partners in a consortium³ with a wide range of associated partners: **Innoviris** (public sector body driving regional innovation policy), **Sirris** (collaborative centre for the Belgian technology industry), **UNICA** (academic network of European capital universities), **BeWise** (Belgian network supporting women in science), **hub.brussels** (the Brussels Agency for Entrepreneurship), **Agoria** (Belgian federation of technology companies) and the **Joint Research Centre**'s (EC's science and knowledge service) who called on universities to take on a greater role in sustainability and regional transformation. We are further supported by **BriAS** (the Brussels Institute of Advanced Studies), a joint initiative by ULB and VUB. See the project website iris-cofund.eu/partners for more information about each partner and their role in the project and illustrated in Figure 1. Below:

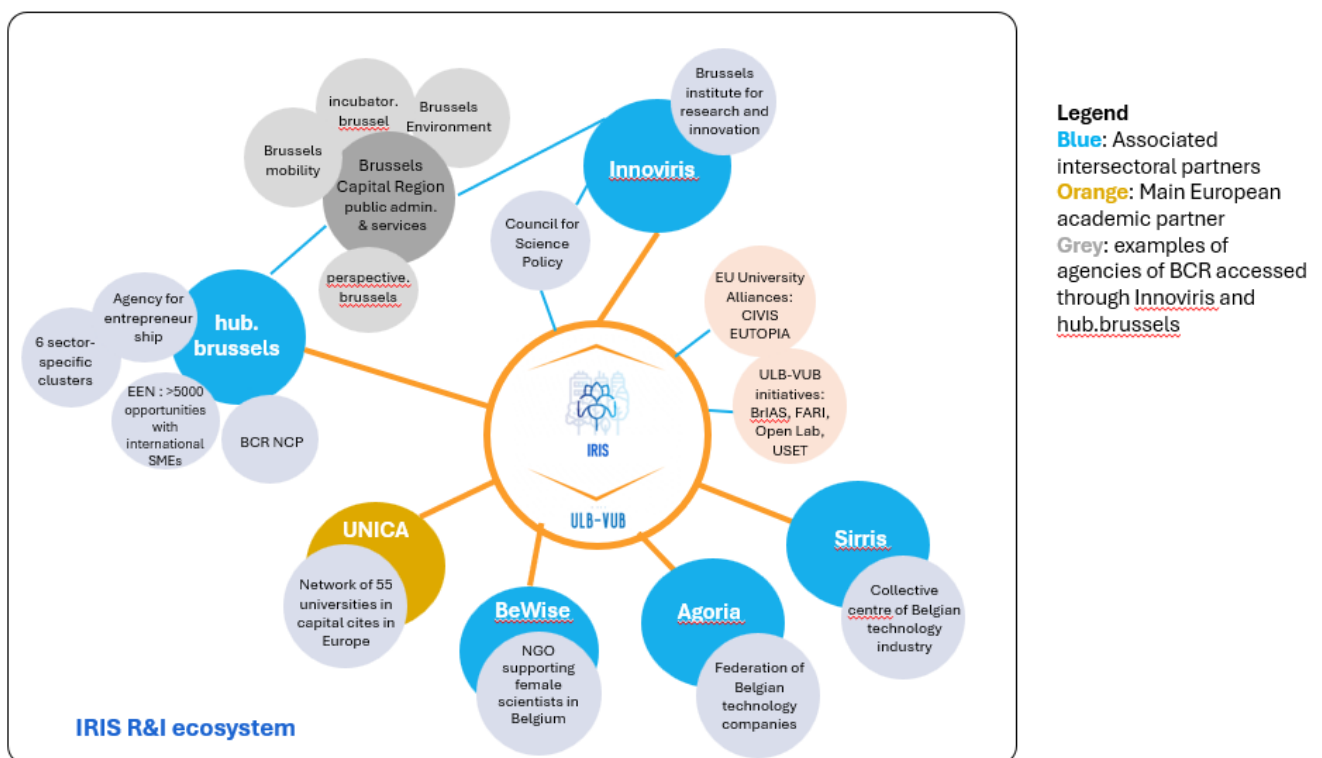


Figure1. IRIS Research & Innovation Ecosystem

1.2 Programme summary

The **MSCA COFUND programme** co-finances postdoctoral fellowships for advanced research training and career development, emphasizing:

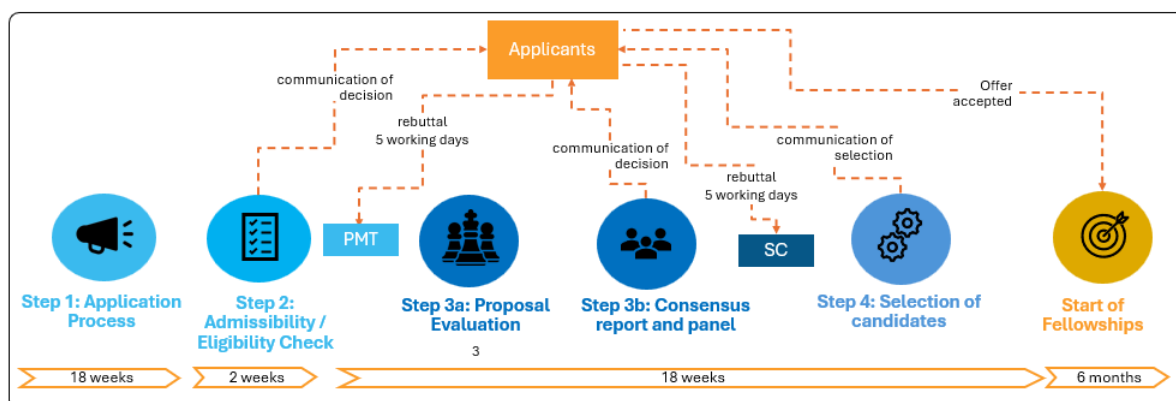
- International, **interdisciplinary**, and **inter-sectoral** mobility.
- High-quality supervision and working conditions.
- Engagement with Brussels' six key societal challenges under the **Regional Innovation Plan**:

1) Climate & Energy, 2) Resource Optimization, 3) Mobility, 4) Healthy & Sustainable Food, 5) Health & Well-being, and 6) Participative & Inclusive Society

Fellowships are hosted by **ULB** (12 with in the first call) and **VUB** (6 in the first call) with *co-supervision* from a second supervisor based in the **Brussels Capital Region** (e.g., ULB or VUB, industry, NGO, or public body). **Fellowship Duration 30 months**.

2. Details of the first call

2.1 Call 1 timeline



IRIS Postdoctoral Fellowship – Timeline for First Call (2025) :Please find below the indicative timeline for the first IRIS call. All times are in **Central European Time (CET)**.

PHASE	DATES	DETAILS
CALL OPENS	1 July 2025 at 14:00 CET	Online application system becomes accessible
CALL CLOSES	31 October 2025 at 17:00 CET	Deadline to submit complete applications
ELIGIBILITY CHECK	1 – 14 November 2025	Applications screened by the IRIS Management team for formal eligibility
EXTERNAL EVALUATION	15 November 2025 – 28 February 2026	Proposals evaluated by independent international experts
NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS	Between 6 and 10 May 2026	Applicants receive evaluation outcomes and ranking
START OF FELLOWSHIP	Between 15 July and 15 November 2026	Fellows may begin their projects within this timeframe

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

To apply for an MSCA COFUND postdoctoral position in Belgium, you must meet the following:

2.2.1 Mobility Rule

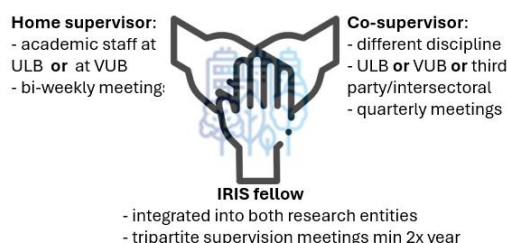
- You **must not have resided or carried out your main activity (work, studies, etc.) in Belgium for more than 12 months in the 36 months** immediately before the call deadline (31/10/2025). Compulsory national service, short stays such as holidays and time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention will not be taken into account.
- Please, use the mobility template to calculate your mobility eligibility and upload the document in the submission portal. If you are awarded the IRIS fellowship it is your responsibility to provide evidence of your eligibility.
- If you have ever been awarded an international postdoctoral bursary in Belgium, please contact IRIS@ulb.be and IRIS@vub.be

2.2.2 Degree Requirements

- Be in possession of a **doctoral degree or have successfully defended the doctoral thesis** (but not yet formally awarded the degree) by the deadline of the call (31/10/2025).
 - have *maximum 8 years of full-time research experience since obtaining PhD*. To ensure equality and fairness of opportunity, using the template, 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.
 - If you have exemptions that would enable you to submit with a PhD obtained prior to 1/11/2017, please contact IRIS@ulb.be and IRIS@vub.be

2.2.3 Hosting Institution and supervision

- **Identify suitable supervisors who have the expertise, infrastructure, resources and capacity to supervise your fellowship.**
 - Select your **‘Home’** or main host **institution**, this must be **VUB or ULB**, (the postdoctoral bursary contract will be held at this institution).
 - Identify a **co-supervisor based in the Brussels Capital Region** (the co-supervisor can be from ULB, VUB, other (research) organisation; there are no restrictions or requirements for cross-institution working). The co-supervisor **ensures interdisciplinarity** and possible inter-sectoral collaboration. Aim for **complementary expertise** to foster interdisciplinary outcomes.
- Supervisors can be directly contacted
 - For ULB researchers consult [ULB Research Inventory](#), search Université libre de Bruxelles in the [CIVIS MSCA Supervisors data base](#) and/or contact IRIS@ulb.be



- For VUB researchers consult the [VUB Research Portal](#), the [VUB MSCA-Postdoctoral Fellowship Repository](#) and/or contact IRIS@vub.be
- Consult the pages of our associated partners for mentorship, secondment and/or co-supervisors
- It is the applicant's responsibility to contact the potential supervisors to **confirm the availability of the required resources and research infrastructure to carry out the project as proposed if the project is selected**. The IRIS Project Management team (IRIS@ulb.be or IRIS@vub.be) can support you in contacting supervisors.

2.3 Hypothetical examples of interdisciplinarity and supervision

Please find below some entirely hypothetical examples to illustrate what is meant by interdisciplinarity and how supervisors can be chosen. For each **example** we have provided some [MSCA level 1 keywords](#) and a possible supervisor configuration.

Project under climate and energy theme

Societal challenge	Climate and energy
MSCA Level 1 keywords	V2 Earth system science C4 biochemistry
Research question	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?
Home university and supervisor	ULB supervisor and relevant research group
Inter-disciplinary co-supervisor	ULB or VUB supervisor from a complementary discipline

Project under Resource optimization theme

Societal challenge	Participative and inclusive society
MSCA Level 1 keywords	S8 Literature, arts, music, cultural and comparative studies, S2 political science, S1 sociology, social anthropology
Research question	An analysis of urban imaginaries and representations of Western European cities using fictional and documentary film, literature and geographic and urban studies. Citizen internalisation of these representations and impact on civic engagement.
Home university and supervisor	VUB supervisor and relevant research group
Inter-disciplinary co-supervisor	VUB supervisor from a complementary discipline

If necessary, associated or intersectoral partners (e.g. public institutions, private companies, NGOs) may be added before or during the fellowship. However, these partners will **not be taken into account during the evaluation process**. See example below:

Associated partner	hub.brussels Audiovisual cluster connects to film organisations Innoviris co-creation and VUB Citizen science connect to citizen groups Innoviris connects to public administrations
Inter-sectoral partners in BCR	Cinematek: Belgian Royal Film Archive BRAL Citizens action Brussels Citizen group: Inter-environment Bruxelles BCR public administration participation service: perspective.brussels

3. Submission procedure

Applications are submitted online in the [dedicated submission platform](#) that is accessible through the IRIS website. Applications sent via other means (e-mail, post, etc.) will not be considered. It is the responsibility of the applicant to submit the application on time. The submission platform will be automatically deactivated at **precisely 17:00 CET on 31 October 2025** and will not be able to accept further submissions. No extension will be granted unless there is an unequivocal technical issue with the submission platform, in which case all applicants will be notified accordingly.

Step 1: Applicants first need to create a personal account by answering the eligibility questions. Ineligible applicants will be unable to create an account¹.

Step 2: Submissions will be accepted only if all requested documents are uploaded and all necessary fields are completed. Applicants will be able to submit their application more than once, every new submission will overwrite the previous one. A confirmation of submission will be sent to the applicant after each submission. Until the call closing applicants can update the documentation. However, it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all documents are **CORRECTLY** uploaded into the system. Incomplete or incorrect applications **will not proceed to the evaluation stage**.

Please carefully read and follow the instructions in the submission platform. Of note:

-  Only complete applications will be accepted for evaluation.
-  All documents should be **PDF** saved with your first name, last name², acronym of the project and document name, e.g. the narrative CV would be saved as: Rosalie_Singh_FUTURE_Narrative_CV.pdf
-  Respect the templates and page limits. Projects that do not comply with the compulsory layout and page limits will be declared ineligible.

3.1 Required documents

3.1.1 Research proposal

A maximum *10-page research proposal* using the supplied template (submitted in English, identifying home supervisor and co-supervisor from different discipline and proposed

¹ If you cannot create an account please close the browser and start again.

² As naming practices can vary, please use first name and last name as on your official documents

secondments and short visits).

- The proposal must address a research subject connected to at least one of the 6 societal challenges of the BCR regional innovation plan [1) Climate & Energy 2) Resource optimization 3) Mobility 4) Healthy & sustainable food 5) Health & well-being 6) Participative & inclusive society].
- **A compulsory template is available on the call website. Applicants are required to read carefully and comply with the layout instructions at the top of the template (font, font size, margins, line spacing included). Please note that files that exceed the page limit will not be able to be uploaded.** A cover page has been added to the template, and it will not be counted towards the 10-page proposal limit.

3.1.2 Narrative CV (Instructions & Structure)

Your CV should follow the **narrative CV³ format**, which moves beyond lists of publications. Use the structure provided in the [CV template](#). Applicants unfamiliar with the Narrative CV are invited [to register here](#) for an online webinar on the **23/07/2025 at 15.30 (CET)** -Time in Brussels)

3.1.3 Ethics self-assessment form

Complete the **ethics-self assessment** ([ethics template here](#)) responding to questions on ethical implications of the project and explaining the ethical issues are and how they will be addressed. Evaluators will be briefed accordingly to be able to assess if ethical concerns have been properly addressed.

Institutional ethics clearance (if relevant) will not be required at submission stage. Ethics approval will be necessary for selected projects prior to the beginning of the research activities that are subject to approval. The fellows will then receive guidance from the IRIS Project Management Team on the procedures to obtain institutional ethics approval. Projects will be monitored to ensure that the ethics obligations deriving from the approval are respected.

3.1.4 Evidence of PhD

Upload a scanned copy of *PhD diploma* or an official statement confirming the successful defence of the PhD as a PDF.

Documents in languages other than English, French or Dutch should be translated (unofficial translations accepted).

3.1.5 Recommendation letter

The applicant is responsible for requesting a letter of recommendation from a past research supervisor in any setting [using the template](#). **The applicant must ensure the letter has been uploaded before the call closing deadline.** Applications without an associated letter of recommendation will not be evaluated. Submission requirements in the platform

3.1.6 Identification document/Passport

Please upload a scanned copy of your valid national identification document or passport.

³ <https://www.mariecuriealumni.eu/narrative-cv>

3.1.7 Research Experience and Mobility Calculator

Please upload the completed calculator to the participant portal [using the template](#). Kindly note that, if selected, supporting documentation will be required.

3.1.8 Declaration of supervisor capacity

In the submission platform, you will be asked to provide the name of the home supervisor and interdisciplinary co-supervisor that you have contacted to ensure the availability of the required resources and research infrastructure to carry out the project as proposed.

Upon request, the Project Management Team (PMT) will assist applicants in contacting supervisors.

4. Evaluation

4.1 Eligibility check

After the deadline, the IRIS Project Management Team will examine the eligibility of the applicant under the eligibility criteria of section 2.2. Only non-eligible applicants will be notified at the end of this stage and have five days to submit a rebuttal (see section 5.2).

4.2 Evaluation criteria

Excellence 50%	Scientific quality 40%	Quality and relevance of proposed interdisciplinary research plan
		Clear and relevant interdisciplinary methodology
		Integration of interdisciplinary aspects
		Originality/innovative nature of the project (in relation to state-of-the-art)
		Gender and diversity aspects addressed
	Applicant qualifications and motivation 10%	Open science practices
		Research experience and results (awards and funding, publications, presentations, participation in workgroups, ...)
		demonstrates capacity to undertake project (including identifying possible trainings required)
Impact 30%	Motivation for project objectives and choice of societal challenge(s).	
	Relevance to call 5%	Responds to one (or more) societal challenges of BCR
	Knowledge transfer 10%	Soundness of publication, public engagement , dissemination plan. Identification of long-term impact(s) on society, science and the economy
	Career 15%	Potential impact on fellow's career , commitment to interdisciplinary research, relevance of (potential) inter-sectoral collaboration
Implementation	Coherence 10%	Coherence of work plan (including milestones and deliverables)

20%		
	Feasibility 10%	Feasibility including fit with proposed research groups and contingency plans for critical risks

Final score (weighted mean) **Threshold 75%**

4.3 Remote expert evaluation

Each application will be sent to three (3) external evaluators specialised in the scientific domain of the proposal. The selection of the experts is based on the following criteria:

- Active publication track-record in the specific field with several peer reviewed publications over the last ten years.
- Confirmation that the experts have (i) never co-published with the applicant (ii) have not co-published neither with the applicant's PhD or with the local host at ULB or VUB in the five years prior to the evaluation process.

The external experts will receive the complete application file together with an evaluation sheet and a guide for the evaluators (document available on website). They will also receive bias awareness training and a briefing on ethics guidelines to help them assess whether ethical implications of the projects have been properly addressed.

Experts will assign scores for the evaluation criteria and detailed comments. The experts will evaluate the proposal "as is", i.e. based solely on submitted materials without assuming potential improvements. Scoring corresponds to the following options (decimal values of 0.1 permitted):

- 0** - The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information. [score between 0 and 1.0 out of 5]
- 1** - Poor. The proposal criteria are inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses. [score between 1.1 and 2.0 out of five]
- 2** - Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses. [score between 2.1 and 3.0 out of five]
- 3** - Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present. [score between 3.1 and 3.9 out of five]
- 4** - Very Good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present. [score between 4.0 and 4.4 out of five]
- 5** -Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor. [score between 4.5 and 5.0 out of five]

4.4 Selection committee

The Selection Committee ensures that the selection process has been correctly implemented, ensuring impartiality, independence, and transparency. It is co-chaired by the ULB Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation ULB and the VUB Vice-Rector for Research Policy and members will be made up of volunteers including academic members of both research councils, representatives from 2 of the non-academic associated partners and advisors from HR and ethics committees.

The Selection Committee will review the ranking lists and consensus reports, ensuring proper procedures were followed and applying ex-aequo criteria (see below) if needed, before finalizing

the selection. Ethics experts in the selection committee will review the ethics self-assessment checklists and evaluators' comments of the ranked projects.

Ex-aequo criteria, applied in the following order of priority:

1.	Priority will be given to the projects that have scored higher in the excellence criterion, then in the impact criterion and then in the implementation criterion.
2.	Priority will be given to proposals where feedback to policy has been clearly outlined in the impact section.
3.	Priority will be given to proposals where the fellow contributes to maintain the gender balance supervisor or co-supervisor teams

5. Results

5.1 Communication of the evaluation outcome

The applicants of the **top 12 ranked applications for ULB** and **top 6 ranked applications for VUB** will be offered a fellowship.

Selected applicants will be required to **confirm their acceptance of the fellowship within 10 working days**. If no response is received by this deadline, a second and final notification will be sent, requesting confirmation of acceptance of the fellowship within five (5) working days. Failure to respond to this second notification will be interpreted as withdrawal and the next applicant in the ranking list will be invited to take up the fellowship. This process will continue until 12 fellowships at ULB and 6 fellowships at VUB have been awarded.

Applicants who remain on the final ranking list but are not initially selected will be placed on a reserve list. They will be asked to confirm their interest in the fellowship in case a higher-ranked applicant declines the offer. These reserve-list applicants will receive a final update on the status of their application no later than 4 weeks after confirming their interest.

Applicants that are not funded will be informed as soon as the list of grantees is confirmed.

All applicants will receive a consensus report from the external evaluators.

5.2 Rebuttal procedures

Following the **eligibility check** and after **the selection process**, the applicant will have the opportunity to submit a written appeal (see contact information in section 7), within five (5) working days of receiving the notification if procedural shortcomings are suspected.

The email must use the subject line "*Redress_IRISCALL1_Surname_Firstname*" and clearly state the grounds for the appeal using the redress template (available on the website). The request for appeal will be evaluated by the IRIS Management Committee and the final decision will be communicated to the applicant within twenty (20) working days.

The scientific assessments made by expert evaluators cannot be contested. The appeal procedure will assess whether the administrative procedures during the selection process have been followed as described in this Guide for Applicants.

6. Recruitment

6.1 Starting date and duration

The starting date of the project must fall within **15/07/2026 (earliest)** and **15/11/2026 (latest)**. The fellowships will last 30 months.

6.2 Remuneration

The financial structure of the fellowship is as follows:

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.

Fellows will be hired on an untaxed fellowship contract that is equivalent to an employment contract at the ULB or VUB with contributions to the Belgian Social Security System covering health insurance, maternity leave, sick pay in case of hospitalisation, disability insurance, national pension system, national unemployment system, insurance against workplace accidents, family benefits and provisions towards occupational diseases and will be calculated before signing the contract.

All applicants are entitled to the mobility allowance that is provided as a **net amount**. The family allowance is provided also as a net amount only to applicants that have family obligations. Family is defined as persons linked to the applicant:

1. by marriage or by a relationship of a status equivalent to marriage recognised by the legislation of the country or region where this relationship was formalised
- a. as dependent children who are actually being maintained by the researcher. The family status will be determined at the deadline of the call and will not be revised during the fellowship.

7. Support and contact information

The IRIS Project Management team are accessible via email for questions about process, connections to ULB and VUB researchers and the Brussels Capital Region:

- ULB (IRIS@ulb.be)
- VUB (IRIS@vub.be)

The primary language for communication is English, but support can be provided in French, Dutch and Spanish on request. All support will be given through email exchange. The standard response time is within five (5) working days.

Check the [news page](#) on the website for regularly scheduled webinars and online Q&A sessions.

8. Appendices

8.1 Six societal challenges for the Brussels Capital Region

The short descriptions of the 6 societal challenges taken from the BCR Regional Innovation Plan are found below. These descriptions are advisory. Applicants are free to make the case for the selected challenge(s) in the proposal template. External evaluators will assess the relevance of the proposed projects to broad descriptions of the themes encompassing different disciplines.

The challenges are presented in terms of their relevance to Brussels, however, they are understood to be relevant to urban settings across and beyond Europe.

8.1.1 Climate and Energy

The effects of climate change on our societies, particularly in Brussels, will be very significant and it is a question of anticipating them by trying to mitigate them (limitation of greenhouse gasses) or adapting. At the same time, energy resources are both a cause and a solution to the problem of climate change. Fossil resources are at the origin but renewable energies as well as better energy management will help mitigate climate change.

According to forecasts, the Brussels Region will have to face a warmer climate (risk of heatwaves) and wetter winters (risk of flooding) in the future. The infrastructure and building in Brussels are directly subject to these developments and risks, as are the population that uses them. With populations exposed to greater temperature variations, a public health risk is emerging in Brussels.

To mitigate climate change, Brussels has committed to reducing its direct greenhouse gas emissions by more than 40% compared to 2005, so as to approach carbon neutrality by 2050. Adaptation actions still need to be specified and concern the strengthening of green (including biodiversity) and blue (for water management) networks.

8.1.2 Mobility

Mobility is seen as a challenge in its own right, even though it plays an important role in the climate and energy challenge. After all, it is not only about making the mobility and transport system more sustainable and less polluting, but also about tackling congestion problems in and around the region and improving road safety and comfort for all users.

Like all large cities, the Brussels Region has a large number of journeys and transport options daily, both for people and for goods, both by individual vehicle (especially by car) and by public transport. These traffic flows have several negative effects on:

- Internal and external accessibility with traffic density 20-28% higher than other cities.
- Air pollution and energy consumption, representing about 28% of greenhouse gas emissions, with no absolute decrease for 20 years, and more than 20% of final energy consumption in Brussels.
- Logistics and supply, around 90% of goods are transported by road with an increasing number of (small) vehicles, and still significant possibilities for optimization.
- Health: respiratory tract and nuisance (noise, vibrations, etc).
- Public space occupied by motorized traffic (58% of roads allocated to cars);
- Road safety, particularly among 'soft' road users (pedestrians, cyclists).

8.1.3 Inclusive and participative society

Due to its density and diversity, the BCR faces several challenges in terms of inclusion, participation and social cohesion. In addition, it has the highest population growth and the youngest population in the country (Statbel, 2020). The Region also has problems of precariousness, with a high risk of precariousness and, at the level of its neighbourhoods, a significant risk of segregation.

Polarisation not only threatens the area but also the Brussel labour market. Indeed, due to the mismatch between supply and demand for labour (the job offer is highly qualified while the labour supply is rather unqualified), the Region has a dualized labour market, involving a particularly high unemployment rate and the presence of several groups at risk of exclusion (the under-qualified, long-term job seekers, people with disabilities, victims of discrimination, etc). In addition, this risk of exclusion is likely to begin in primary education, with the Brussels Region recording a very high school dropout rate.

To meet these challenges, the development of the social economy, digitalisation, the fight against the digital divide, the development of public spaces and meeting places, and support for participatory governance appear as strategic sub-domains in which to cultivate innovation. We identify four relevant response axes for Brussels:

- Social, cooperative and democratic economy and entrepreneurship as a vector of socio-economic transition
- Support for digitalization/digital inclusion
- The development of infrastructure, public spaces and socio-cultural places
- Support for democratic and participatory governance

8.1.4 Health and wellness

Health and wellness is an area that is undergoing major changes. The BCR is characterized by a large demographic growth and diversity. In addition, although the population is getting younger, the share of people aged 80 and over is higher than in other regions, which further increases the need for care. The Region is facing a sharp increase in the number of people suffering from disorders or diseases, chronic and complex, with physical components but also linked to behaviours/lifestyles and the environment (diabetes, obesity, hypertension, depression/burn-out, etc). The deinstitutionalisation of care raises questions of organisation and distribution of

resources that will be crucial to resolve. The Covid-19 crisis further intensified these challenges and changes.

These pathologies present a great complexity of various associated factors and symptoms, and require a coherent and integrated approach, patient-centred, in which different social and care actors play a role, with emphasis on general (psychosocial) well-being management, awareness and prevention (behaviour and environment) and treatment.

8.1.5 Resource optimisation

The planet's finite resource stocks are being depleted and access to certain critical resources for our existing production and consumption systems is not guaranteed in the long term. At the same time, some 2 million tonnes of waste are produced in Brussels each year. These resources must be optimised to be reintroduced into the production chain, ideally locally.

8.1.6 Healthy eating for all

Access to healthy and sustainable food for all is a major concern in Brussels. The demand for affordable food is constantly growing, while societal expectations in terms of sustainability, health and quality are increasingly high. Nearly a quarter of the ecological footprint of a Brussels family is linked to food (production, transport, waste etc), and poor eating habits contribute to many health problems (diabetes, obesity, etc). Moreover, access to quality food is not a given either, since 32,000 people depend on food aid and a third of Brussels residents live on an income below the poverty line.

8.2 Open Science & Research Data Management

Open Science encompasses the general practice of providing end-users free of charge access to scientific information (peer-reviewed publications and research data). ULB and VUB are strongly committed to the Open Science policy and FAIR Data Management principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). IRIS, co-funded by the MSCA Horizon Europe programme respects these principles and strongly encourages open access to both scientific publications and research data.

For further documentation, applicants are invited to consult the official EC [Open Science guidelines](#).

Successful applicants will be requested to provide a **Data Management Plan** (DMP) within 6 months after the start of their project. The DMP includes information on how research data are produced, in which form, how they are stored, backed-up and archived, who has access to them, if they are subject to any legal and ethical constraints, etc. The fellows will be supported in this procedure by the IRIS Project Management Team. The Data Management Plan **is not required at submission stage**.

8.3 Submission checklist

Document	Instruction	
Research proposal	Use template (find it here)	☐
Narrative CV	Use template (find it here)	☐
Ethics self- assessment	Use template (find it here)	☐
Evidence of PhD	Scanned PDF	☐
Recommendation letter	Use template (find it here)	☐
Passport/Identification document	Scanned PDF	☐
Research Experience and Mobility calculator template	Use template (find it here)	☐

Project management team contact: IRIS@ulb.be and IRIS@vub.be

8.4 Moving to Belgium

For more detailed information on moving to Belgium please consult the website. Below are links to the main pages for international staff and researchers at ULB and VUB.

- [International staff: welcome at VUB | Vrije Universiteit Brussel](#)
- [International researchers and PhD applicants coming to ULB - ULB](#)

The joint ULB-VUB Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies (BrIAS) offers fully furnished and equipped autonomous apartments to IRIS COFUND fellows (subject to availability and priority for fellows from outside the EEA+) for up to 3 months as a transitional arrangement while searching for your own housing. For further inquiries please write to contact@brias.be