



*Individual Fellowships at*  
Université libre de Bruxelles



Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions COFUND

IF@ULB

Call 2020

Guide for applicants

April 2020 – v.3



Candidates are invited to regularly check the IF@ULB website for any updates of the guides and templates.



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 IF@ULB in brief

Individual Fellowship at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, IF@ULB, is a comprehensive fellowship programme providing excellent experienced researchers the opportunity to conduct frontier research and receive diversified training in an environment of scientific excellence and state-of-the-art facilities, under the supervision of renowned academics and with the support of an extensive collaboration network of academic and non-academic institutions. IF@ULB is funded in part by ULB and in part by the European Commission through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND Programme.

IF@ULB proposes three calls within a five-year programme. To impact ULB's post-doctoral policy as widely as possible, the project is open to all fields of research, organised into three panels:

Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Physical and Engineering Sciences, and  
Life Sciences.

For each panel and each call, IF@ULB will offer to fund 7 excellent researchers for a research project of a 24-month duration, reaching a total of 63 fellowship positions over five years.

## 1.2 Call 2020 timeline

The timeline of the **third (last)** call of IF@ULB is the following:

Call opening: Friday, May 1st, 2020 at 14:00 Brussels time (UTC + 2)

Call closing: Tuesday, September 1st, 2020 at **precisely** 17:00 Brussels time (UTC + 2)

Eligibility check: September 2020

Evaluation: October 2020 – February 2021

Information to applicants: March 2021

Start of projects: Between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 (earliest) and September 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 (latest)

Fellowship duration: 24 months



## 2 Eligibility

Applicants of any age and of any nationality are eligible.

Eligible applicants are experienced researchers:

- ▷ with a PhD degree obtained at maximum 7 years before the call deadline or
- ▷ without a PhD but a documented full-time equivalent research experience of minimum 4 and maximum 11 years at the date of the call deadline.

An eligibility extension of 15 weeks per child is granted in case of maternity.

Full-time equivalent research experience is measured from the date when a researcher obtained the degree allowing him or her to embark on a doctorate. This needs to be proven by the employment (or equivalent) contracts.

Eligible 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.

Projects that do not comply with the compulsory layout and 10-page limit will be declared ineligible (see 3.1 Requested documents).



## 3 Submission

Applications are submitted online in the dedicated platform that is accessible through the IF@ULB website (<https://if-at-ulb.ulb.be>). 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 in order to avoid last minute delays due to the high number of submissions. The submission platform will be automatically deactivated at **precisely** 17:00 (UTC+2) on **Tuesday, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020** 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.

### 3.1 Requested documents

The application file of the applicants is complete when **all the following documents are submitted in .pdf format**:

- ▷ A copy of the PhD degree or a certificate confirming that all the requirements related to the PhD programme in the home institution are fulfilled prior to the call deadline.
- ▷ If no PhD degree has been obtained, a career description should be provided proving at least four years of full-time research experience by the call deadline. Applicants should attach proofs (e.g. contract, employer certificate) demonstrating their research experience.
- ▷ A detailed CV of maximum 5 pages, including a publication list. The mandatory template is available at the call website.
- ▷ A research and training project of maximum 10 pages describing the state-of-the-art, the research questions and/or objectives, the methodology, the work plan, the training programme in an academic and, if relevant, non-academic environment, the dissemination, exploitation and communication activities, the information on ethics issues (not included in the 10 pages, see section 7.1). **A compulsory template is available at 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). Projects exceeding the 10-page limit will be declared ineligible.**
- ▷ The letter of acceptance from a ULB academic member confirming that the applicant, if successful, will be integrated in the research group and receive the appropriate training. Applicants are invited to consult the ULB Research inventory to identify a supervisor: <http://www.ulb.ac.be/rech/inventaire/facultes/index.html>
- ▷ A copy of the passport or identity card.



Apart from the above documents to be uploaded, the applicant is requested to complete the following actions through the online form on the submission platform:

- ▷ Fill in the abstract of the proposal (max 1000 characters, blanks included).
- ▷ Introduce 5-7 keywords (max 150 characters, blanks included).
- ▷ Select the Panel in which they are applying.
- ▷ Suggest five (5) potential external evaluators (conflict of interest rules apply, see section 4.3), and mention their email addresses. Evaluators may not be affiliated with the ULB.



### 3.2 Submission process

Applicants first have to register themselves through the submission website, hereby creating their personal account. They are then able to log in and proceed with the submission. **Submissions will be accepted only if all requested documents are uploaded and all necessary fields are filled-in.** The names of the files should contain the name of the candidate (e.g. “*Surname\_curricul*”, “*Surname\_proposal*”). Candidates 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.





## 4 Evaluation

The evaluation of the application file consists of the eligibility check, the remote expert evaluation and the final panel review.

### 4.1 Eligibility check

After the deadline, the ULB's Department of Research Administration will examine the eligibility of the applicant under the eligibility criteria of section 2. Only non-eligible candidates will be notified at the end of this stage.

### 4.2 Evaluation criteria

The three main evaluation criteria are Excellence, Impact and Implementation with a respective weight of 50, 25 and 25 % in the final score. The sub-criteria corresponding to each criterion are described in Annex I.

### 4.3 Remote expert evaluation

Each application will be sent to three (3) external referees 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 candidate (ii) have not co-published neither with the candidate's PhD advisor (or the leader of the research group in which the candidate has performed research in case no PhD has been obtained) nor with the local host at ULB in the five years prior to the evaluation process.

Candidates are requested to suggest five (5) potential external reviewers, paying particular attention to the second criterion of conflict of interest mentioned above. 0 to 2 external referees may be selected from this list for the evaluation of the proposal.

The external experts will receive the complete application file together with an evaluation sheet (Annex I) and a guide for the evaluator. They will also receive a briefing on ethics guidelines to help them assess whether ethical implications of the projects have been properly addressed. They will be asked to provide scores for the evaluation criteria, as well as sufficiently detailed comments (Annex I). The experts will evaluate the proposal "as is", i.e. not considering its potential if a series of modifications were made. Scoring corresponds to the following options (decimal values of 0.1 possible):

- ▷ 0.0 if the criterion is not addressed at all by the proposal,
- ▷ 1.0 if the criterion is addressed but reveals significant weaknesses,
- ▷ 2.0 if the criterion is addressed with a number of shortcomings,
- ▷ 3.0 if the criterion is very reasonably addressed with a small number of shortcomings and

- ▷ 4.0 if the criterion is fully and satisfactorily addressed and any identified shortcomings may be considered as minor.

Scores will be given to each sub-criterion. The score of each criterion will be the average of the scores of the sub-criteria. A weight for each criterion will be applied and the weighted scores of the three criteria will be added to yield the total weighted score of the proposal for one evaluator. The final score of the proposal will be the average of the three separate external evaluations. The final score will be rounded up to the third decimal

A **threshold of 3.000** will be applied and only proposals above this threshold will be ranked. The 15 best ranked proposals per panel will advance to the second stage of a panel review.

In case of equal scores, additional criteria will be 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 candidates from EU Member States and Associated Countries that are below 70% of the EU average (47.8) of the Composite Indicator in Research Excellence <sup>1</sup>
3.	Priority will be given to proposals where the fellow contributes to maintain the gender balance in the host research group.
4.	Priority will be given to candidates that had a documented career break of at least 12 months prior to the deadline.

#### 4.4 Panel review

Three review panels will be organised (i.e. Social Sciences and Humanities, Physical and Engineering Sciences, Life Sciences). Each panel will be composed of two internal and two external experts with expertise in different disciplines to cover the scientific spectra of the proposals.

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<sup>1</sup> Research and Innovation Performance in EU Member States and Associated Countries 2014, p. 19) [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/state-of-the-union/2014/iuc\\_progress\\_report\\_2014.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/state-of-the-union/2014/iuc_progress_report_2014.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none).

The panel members will receive a copy of the 15 best-ranked applications in their panel together with the corresponding remote expert evaluations.

The panel will verify whether the comments of the external experts correspond to the scores given, whether any offensive or excessively bold comments have been made and whether there are extreme divergences among the external evaluators for a given application. If such issues arise, the panel members would ask the external evaluators for further clarifications and seek consensus. After clarifications, the definitive ranking list will be produced. The panel members will not proceed to a separate evaluation of the proposals nor will they be able to change the ranking of the proposals on their own.



## 5 Results

### 5.1 Communication of the evaluation outcome

For each panel, the candidates of the 7 best-ranked applications will be offered a fellowship. They will be asked to **confirm their acceptance of the fellowship within 10 working days**. Passed this deadline, they will receive a second and final notification to confirm acceptance of the fellowship within five (5) working days. If the second notification does not receive a reply, it will be concluded that the applicant is not interested in the fellowship and therefore we will invite the next candidate in the ranking list. The process will continue until 7 fellowships per panel are granted.

The remaining 8 candidates from the definitive ranking will be informed that they are on a reserve list and will be asked to confirm their interest in the fellowship in case other better-ranked candidates would decline the fellowship. They will receive a final notification on the status of their application not later than March 31<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Other above-threshold candidates that are not among the 15 best-ranked applications will be informed that they cannot be funded as soon as the list of the 7 confirmed grantees is finalised and that not later than March 31<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Candidates whose application was below threshold will also be informed as soon as the list of the 7 confirmed grantees is finalised and that not later than March 31<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

All applicants will receive the 3 external evaluation reports.

### 5.2 Appeal

After the eligibility check as well as after the end of the selection process, the candidate will have the possibility to appeal via written communication, sent electronically (see contacts in section 8), within five (5) working days after receiving the notification.

The communication should have as subject “*Redress\_COFUNDI9\_Surname\_Firstname*” and clearly state the reasons for the appeal. The request for appeal will be evaluated by the Management Committee of IF@ULB and the final decision will be transmitted to the applicant within twenty (20) working days.

The appeal procedure **will not put into question the opinion of the evaluators on the merits of the proposal**. The appeal procedure will only examine and confirm whether the administrative procedures during the selection process have been followed as described in this Guide for Applicants.



## 6 Recruitment

### 6.1 Starting date & duration

The starting date of the project must fall within April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 (earliest) and September 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 (latest). The fellowships will last 24 months.

### 6.2 Remuneration

The financial structure of the fellowship is as follows:

Cost categories		Amount (€/month)
<b>Fellow-related costs</b>	Living allowance	3.605,75
	Mobility allowance	400,00
	Family allowance	150,00
<b>Research-related costs</b>	Travel allowance	200,00
	Research costs	500,00
	Other (training, etc.)	300,00

The living allowance is an indicative value for 2021 and is subject to minor changes of approximately +2% due to yearly indexation. It covers the amount of an untaxed fellowship contract that is equivalent to an employment contract. The fellowship contract is subject to the Provisions of 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. The breakdown of the living allowance is as follows:

Category	Amount (€/month)
<b>Gross monthly employer's cost</b>	3.605,75
<b>Monthly employer's social security contribution</b>	732,25
<b>Gross monthly income &amp; holiday pay</b>	2.873,50
<b>Monthly employee's social security contribution</b>	380,92
<b>Income tax</b>	0 (tax exempt)
<b>Net monthly income &amp; holiday pay</b>	2.492,58

All candidates 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 candidates that have family obligations. Family is defined as persons linked to the candidate:

1. by marriage or
2. by a relationship of a status equivalent to marriage recognised by the legislation of the country or region where this relationship was formalised
3. 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.

### 6.3 Administrative support

Recruited fellows will be provided with a comprehensive “vade mecum” for new recruits containing:

- ▷ Rights and obligations as a member of the ULB community
- ▷ Key actions to ensure a regular monitoring of the progress during the fellowship
- ▷ Contacts of relevant personnel (names, e-mails, phone numbers)



## 7 Ethics, Open Science & Research Data Management

### 7.1 Ethics

As part of their application file, applicants will be **required to include an ethics-self assessment** responding to questions on ethical implications of their project (see Annex 2). Candidates will be required to explain what the ethical issues are and how they are planning to deal with them. **The ethics self-assessment and the explanations therein will not count towards the limit of 10 pages of the core proposal.** Evaluators will be accordingly briefed to be able to assess if ethical concerns have been properly addressed.

**Institutional ethics clearance (if relevant) will not be required at submission stage.** For successful proposals only, ethics approval will be necessary prior to the beginning of research activities that are subject to approval. The fellows will then receive guidance by the Department of Research Administration on the procedures to obtain institutional ethics approval and their projects will be monitored to ensure that the ethics obligations deriving from the approval are respected.

### 7.2 Open Science & Research Data Management

Open Science englobes the general practice of providing end-users free of charge access to scientific information (peer-reviewed publications and research data). ULB is strongly committed to the Open Science policy and FAIR Data Management principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable). IF@ULB, being co-funded by the H2020 Framework Programme, abides to this principle and is strongly encouraging open access to both scientific publications and research data.

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

Successful candidates 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 Department of Research Administration. The Data Management Plan **is not required at submission stage.**



## 8 Contact information

For any questions related to IF@ULB:

IF@ULB Project Management

Department of Research Administration

Avenue F. Roosevelt 50, CPI6I

1050 Brussels, Belgium

E-mail: [ulb-cofund@ulb.be](mailto:ulb-cofund@ulb.be)

Privileged language for communication will be English, but support can be provided in French Dutch, German and Spanish on request. This support will be preferably given through email exchange. In general, a policy of “answer within five (5) working days” will be applied in the framework of IF@ULB. When a call is open the deadline for an answer by e-mail will be reduced to a maximum of two (2) working days.

Appeals have to be sent electronically to [ulb-cofund@ulb.be](mailto:ulb-cofund@ulb.be).





## 9 Personal Data Protection

Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) – 1050 Bruxelles, avenue Franklin Roosevelt 50, Belgium – is the Data Controller of the personal data collected in the context of applications to IF@ULB. In this capacity, ULB respects the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27/04/2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (General Data Protection Regulation - GDPR).

The data collected by ULB through the submission platform is solely processed for the purposes of evaluating the applications of research projects against the evaluation criteria and selecting projects in view of a contractual agreement between ULB and the candidate. Personal data collected includes the first name, surname, nationality, e-mail address, postal address and family situation, as well as the data provided in the CV.

Applications will only be valid if the aforementioned personal data is provided. By submitting an application, candidates agree with the processing of this personal data as part of their application.

ULB commits to taking the appropriate measures to guarantee its confidential treatment. It is stored on password-protected servers for maximum six months after the end of the call IF@ULB for non selected applicants. ULB's staff has access to this data only to the extent necessary for the execution of its corresponding tasks (e.g. submission of an application, evaluation of an application, recruitment of a candidate, conduct of the research project). Besides internal ULB services, the data is transmitted to external evaluators under confidentiality clauses, as part of the evaluation process. This transmission makes use of third party services (web services provider), located in the Netherlands, who is contractually obliged to ensure the same level of protection for the personal data as ULB.

All necessary information on ULB's Personal Data Protection policy is available at <http://www.ulb.ac.be/ulb/greffe/documents/rgpd.html>. Applicants can address their queries on the treatment of their Personal Data to our Data Protection Officer (DPO).

DPO: Ms. Virginie Grégoire,

e-mail : [rgpd@ulb.be](mailto:rgpd@ulb.be)

Solbosch Campus CP 130, Avenue F. D. Roosevelt 19, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

This address can also be used, upon justification of identity, to exercise the rights to request access to and rectification or erasure of the personal data or, under conditions, restriction of processing, the right to object to processing as well as the right to data portability. For any complaints, applicants are free to contact the Belgian Data Protection Authority (BDPA). ULB would appreciate the opportunity to answer to the complaint first, before it is addressed to the BDPA.

Belgian Data Protection Authority

tel: +32 2 274 48 00, fax: +32 2 274 48 35

Website: <https://www.dataprotectionauthority.be/>, e-mail : [contact\(at\)apd-gba.be](mailto:contact(at)apd-gba.be)

Rue de la Presse, 35, 1000 Brussels, Belgium



## 10 Annex 1 – Evaluation form

Criterion	Score
<b>Excellence (weight : 50%)</b>	
Quality, credibility, innovative character, timeliness of the research project ; Appropriate consideration of interdisciplinary aspects (if relevant); Appropriate consideration of gender aspects (if relevant); Comment:	
Appropriateness of the training; Quality of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the hosting group Comment:	
Appropriateness of the supervision and integration in the hosting group Comment:	
Quality of the researcher and potential to reach professional independence Comment:	
<b>Impact (weight : 25%)</b>	
Enhancing the future career prospects of the researcher Comment:	
Enhancing the perspective of new research and collaboration opportunities for the hosting group and beyond Comment:	
Quality of the strategy for the communication, dissemination and exploitation of project results & activities Comment:	
<b>Implementation (weight : 25%)</b>	
Coherence, feasibility and effectiveness of the work plan; Appropriate allocation of resources Comment:	
Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including risk management Comment:	
Appropriateness of the infrastructure and, if relevant, complementarity of participating organizations Comment:	
General comment (optional)	
Ethics opinion (required) Based on the EU Ethics guidelines, is this research raising any ethical issues? If yes, is the candidate addressing them appropriately?	



## 11 Annex 2 – Ethics Self-Assessment

Ethics issue	Yes/No
Does your research involve human embryonic stem cells?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research involve human participants?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research involve human cells or tissues?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research involve personal data collection and/or processing?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research involve animals?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research involve any non-EU countries?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research involve any activities that could harm the environment, health and safety?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research involve dual-use items?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research show focus on application other than exclusively civil?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research have the potential for misuse of research results?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	
Does your research have any other ethics issues?	
If yes, please indicate the page number where the issue is mentioned and explain here how you will address it:	

For further documentation, please visit the [EU Ethics guidelines](#).

