S4Policy

Information File

Call for proposals 2026

June 2026

Submission deadlines
13 July 2026 @ 14h00 Expressions of Interest
11 September 2026 @ 14h00 Full Proposal

Via the Online Platform

BELGIAN SCIENCE POLICY OFFICE
WTC III
Boulevard Simon Bolivar 30 Simon Bolivarlaan – postbox 7
B-1000 BRUSSELS
+32 (0)2 238 34 11

Table of Contents

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. S4Policy: Multi-year framework programme for research in support of the Federal departments and the federal state

For more information regarding the programme, please visit the S4Policy website

1.1. General information

On 9 February 2024, the Council of Ministers approved the launch of the S4Policy (Science for Policy) research programme, implemented under the responsibility of the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO).

This programme aims to support cross-thematic research on societal issues within the priorities of Federal Departments and the Federal Government, to support decision-making based on scientific knowledge.

There are three different project types in the S4Policy Research Programme:

1. 'Flash' research
2. Policy Driven research
3. Policy Oriented (Thematic) research.

This call and this information document only concern the call for Policy Driven projects

1.2. Organisation

BELSPO is responsible for the implementation and management of the programme, with a supporting role towards the Federal Departments and the Federal Government and assisted by the **S4Policy Programme Committee**.

Composition of the S4Policy Programme Committee:

- One effective and one substitute representative from each Federal Department.
- Four independent members of the Federal Council for Science Policy, appointed for the duration of the programme.
- One Belgian expert with a cross-cutting view on research and policy.

Mandate of the S4Policy Programme Committee:

- Advise on the long-term priority research and call calendar.
- The distribution of the budgets between the different project types
- The elaboration of the research priorities within the specific calls Policy Driven and Policy Oriented research

- Advise on the research projects to be funded within each call based on the peer-reviewed evaluation of project proposals.

Further information regarding the composition and Terms of Reference of the S4Policy committee is available on the website.

1.3. Policy Driven projects

The research priorities that are developed by the federal departments, in coordination with BELSPO, express the need for scientific support from the scientific community. This support can take the form of knowledge that science can produce or expertise that the scientific community can communicate.

The support requested from the scientific community is therefore targeted, fast paced (projects usually have a duration of 12 to 36 months), and require a knowledge transfer effort from researchers towards the federal administration.

The policy needs (priorities for research) from the federal departments are selected based on their urgency and importance, and the budget available at BELSPO is considered.

The selected projects are funded via two streams: via a research contract between Belspo and the research team(s) (that covers the budget of the project up to a maximum of 90%) and via a bilateral contract between the concerned federal department(s) and the research team(s).

This call for proposals invites the Belgian scientific community to submit scientific projects that can meet the policy needs from the federal departments.

International Cooperation (INCO)
This type of research also includes projects in the framework of specific bilateral priority cooperation with specific partner countries or regions at the request of the concerned departments, for example on the basis of existing diplomatic agreements for R&D&I cooperation. Regular bilateral dialogue through joint committee meetings (± 3 years) for agreements on areas of common interest and applied cooperation instruments may continue, if necessary, at the request of the concerned department(s).
Attention: for the S4Policy call 2026 this is not applicable.

1.4. Eligibility for funding, Project partnership and roles

Policy Driven projects can be carried out by (a network of) researchers from the entire Belgian research community: universities, colleges of higher education, Federal Scientific Institutions (FSI), other public research institutions (e.g. public non-profit research centres) and private non-profit research centres.

Projects may be implemented either by a **single institution** or a **network** of institutions. Collaboration with (inter)national research institutes is possible. However, international partners shall bring their own funding (see below). The project *partners* are the research institutions; the *coordinator* (see table) is the first partner and the institution that will lead the project and is associated to a Belgian research institution, the *promotors* (see table) are the persons responsible from each Partner institution in a project (see further).

Collaboration among research institutes is encouraged. Belgian research institutes may participate in projects either by receiving funding and/or by contributing in-kind. **International research institutes cannot receive funding**, but may contribute in-cash and/or in-kind.

	Role	Institution type	Receive funding?	Contribute in-money or in-kind?	Sign the project contract?
Belgian Funded Partner	(C=P1) Coordinator	FSI, Belgian universities, colleges of higher education, public and private non-profit research centres.	Yes. Mandatory.	May also partially contribute in-kind	Yes.
	(P2…) Promotor	FSI, Belgian universities, colleges of higher education, public and private non-profit research centres.	Yes.	May also partially contribute in-kind	Yes.
Non-Funded Partner	(O1…) Other	FSI, Belgian universities, colleges of high education, public and private non-profit research centres	No.	Yes.	No.
		International research institutes.	No.	Yes.	No.
		Non-research organisation	No	Yes	No

Types of partners:

- **Belgian funded partner:** FSI, Belgian universities, colleges of higher education, public and private non-profit research centres. They are funded within the project. The Coordinating funded partner institution must receive funding, and must allocate budget to personnel.
- **Non-funded partner**: (Inter)national research institutes or non-research organisations not funded within the project but providing a substantial contribution (in-cash or in-kind) to the project. Please consult section 2.6 'Knowledge and Research security' for more information on the eligibility of international partners. It is not required to include a non-funded partner in your proposal.

Partner roles:

- **Promotor of the Coordinating institution (also referred to as Coordinator) (person):** Researcher within the coordinating funded Belgian partner institution (P1) responsible for the initiation, management, and coordination of the project. Please verify the eligibility of the promotor to participate in this call with their institution before submitting.
- **Promotor (person):** Researcher within (one of) the funded Belgian partner institution (P2, P3, etc.) financed by the project, that will coordinate their team. Please verify the eligibility of the promotor to participate in this call with their institution before submitting.
- **Other (person):** Person pertaining to an (inter)national research institute or non-research organisation that is not receiving funding within the project.

The projects may require specific or punctual expertise, which can be delivered in the form of subcontracting. The subcontractor is not an official project partner. Their specific expertise may be of scientific nature, but is not mandatory. Please consult the budget rules for further requirements.

Please note: all project partners (Coordinator and Funded Partner(s)) are eligible for funding at the same rate. Institutions and promotors added as Funded Partners in the application form must be able to receive funding. It is not required to include a Funded Partner in the proposal.

Eligibility of institutions: Institution request form

If you're **unsure whether your institution is eligible to apply** and receive funding, please email BELSPO at S4Policy@belspo.be with the following documents: (1) the completed Institution Request form, available on our website, and (2) a copy of your institution's statutes.

Questions regarding the eligibility to participate
Contact Belspo via **S4Policy@belspo.be** and include a submission request for and a copy of your organisations' Statutes.

1.5. S4Policy indicative budget

The indicative budget for the 2026 call for proposals is 2 624 970 EUR.

1.6. Calendar of the 2026 call

Timing	Phase
13 July 2026	Expression of Interest deadline
11 September 2026	Full Proposal deadline
September - November 2026	Evaluation of proposals
November 2026	Selection of proposals
December 2026	Signature of research grants and bilateral contracts
Beginning of 2027	Operational start of the projects

2. Contractual obligations for selected projects

2.1. Contracts

For the selected proposals, a contract is concluded between BELSPO and the funded partner(s).
This contract is composed of 3 parts:

- **Base contract:** This part of the contract contains general administrative information of the project, such as (but not limited to) the participating institutions, start and end dates of the project, budget. The Base contract is signed by the persons responsible for the institutions: BELSPO's Chairman of the Board of Directors, Rectors of universities, General Directors of FSI's, etc.
- **Annex I – Technical annex:** This part of the contract contains the technical information of the project: objectives, methodology, impact, workplan and calendar, budget distribution, etc. **The Technical annex is drawn up by the promotor of the coordinator and the promotors of the funded partners of the selected proposals in consultation with BELSPO. The coordinator will be asked at the end of the evaluation and selection procedure to concisely write specifications of the Annex together with the other members of the project, taking into consideration the recommendations made by the evaluators and/or the S4Policy Programme Committee.** Adaptations to the original

proposal may relate, among other things, to the content of the research, the composition of the project partnership or Follow-up Committee, the budget, or the proposals for valorising research. The technical annex is signed by the programme manager in charge of the follow-up of the project at BELSPO, the promotor of the coordinator and the promotors of the Funded Partners of the project.

- **Annex II – General conditions:** This part of the contract states the general conditions (reporting rules, ...) that apply to it. It does not require signing and is available on the website. It does contain more information on what is expected from BELSPO's side throughout the project.

BELSPO grants the selected projects the approved funds required for their implementation. BELSPO shall reimburse at most, and up to the amount specified in the granted budget, the actual costs proven by the partners providing these costs are directly related to the implementation of the project.

For proposals that have been selected for funding within the S4Policy programme, depending on the Call Research Priority, a contract will be concluded between the co-funding party/parties and with one (the Coordinator) or more funded partner(s):

- **Bilateral contract with co-funding administration(s):** For each project selected for funding within a research priority that is co-funded by one or more federal administrations, a bilateral or network contract will be drafted and signed. This contract is drafted and signed by the Federal Administrations and all Partner institutions that will receive (part) of the co-funded budget.

The part of the budget that is funded by one or more federal administration(s), can either be allocated to one Partner institution (Coordinator) or several Partner institutions.

2.2. Project and progress reporting

The contract foresees the following **reports** to be submitted to BELSPO via the online project management platform:

- **Initial reports:** To be submitted by the promotor and – in case of a project network - each promotor within 6 months after the start of the project. This report provides a status update of the start-up of the project for each research group (the report should include updated project information, updated contact information, updated (social) media information, updated members of the follow-up committee) and the staff report.
- **Annual activity report:** To be submitted by the coordinator, following the schedule specified in the technical annex (Annex I). This report provides information on the state of advancement of the project, encountered problems and possible solutions.
- **Annual personnel report (Staff report):** To be submitted by the coordinator and – in case of a project network - by the promotor of each Funded Partner, in case there are *any* changes in the staff working for the project.
- **Final Report:** To be submitted by the coordinator at the end of the project. Guidelines are available.

Time and effort for reporting to Belspo is expected to be included in the Full Proposal, in the work *plan* and *proposed budget* (reflected in P-M).

Besides these standard reports, BELSPO can ask for a specific report or other input at any time during the project to provide scientific support to valorisation and/or service actions related to the programme.

2.3. Follow-Up Committee Meetings

A follow-up committee must be composed for each project and shall meet at least once a year. The meetings are part of the essence of the Science4Policy aspect of the Programme, as they allow for structural consultation and engagement with stakeholders, from the scientific sphere, the policy and broader societal sphere.

The proposal form contains a dedicated section to capture the applicants' perspective on the way of working of the follow-up committee of their project proposal.

More information and requirements on the Follow-up Committee are available on the BELSPO website.

2.4. Data, deliverables, intellectual ownership and open access

The foreground - the deliverables (including information) produced by the project - shall be the property of the institution carrying out the work generating this foreground, as mentioned in article 11 of the General Conditions (Annex II of the contract). The State however can freely use the foreground for internal purposes (see Annex II to the contract). Each institution shall ensure that the foreground of which it has ownership, is disseminated as fast as possible and free of charge.

In accordance with the BELSPO Open Research Data Mandate, each Institution undertakes to make the foreground and background relating to research data, available as soon as possible and free of charge in an approved data repository (Open Research Data Repository). This relates to data that supports the research deliverables, with its metadata and other contextualised (curated) and/or raw data mentioned in the Data Management Plan (DMP) submitted by the grant applicant. The data must comply with the FAIR principle (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) and must be accessible according to the principle "As open as possible, as closed as necessary". More information about Open Science, Open Access and the Funders' policies in Belgium is available online.

For research topics concerning the marine environment, the Antarctic, biodiversity and social sciences and humanities, researchers must transfer a copy of the analysis and measurement data and/or metadata to specific databases such as:

- BMDC (the Belgian Marine Data Centre).
  The Belgian Marine Data Centre, our federal NODC (National Oceanographic Data Centre), (bmdc@naturalsciences.be), can be contacted for assistance in the development of a DMP for marine applications and/or in choosing the right repository.
- AMD (Antarctic Master Directory). The Belgian representative of SCADM (the SCAR Standing Committee for Antarctic Data Management) (avandeputte@naturalsciences.be) can be contacted for assistance in the development of DMP for Antarctica related applications and/or in choosing the right repository.
- GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility). The Belgian Biodiversity Platform can be contacted for assistance in the development of DMP for biodiversity related applications and/or in choosing the right repository. See also the guidance document.
- For social and Humanities data, a copy of the data and/or metadata must be transferred to SODHA (Social Sciences and Digital Humanities Archive).
- The promoters of projects that include tasks in which biological materials are used, must ensure the preservation of this biological material by depositing it in a culture collection (Biological Resource Centre), and preferably one in Belgium. This does not apply to material that promoters can prove has already been deposited in a culture collection or for which existing agreements (Material Transfer

Agreement) do not allow it to be deposited. Biological material includes cultivable organisms such as microorganisms, viruses, plants, animals and human cells as well as the replicable parts of these organisms, such as non-modified and recombinant plasmids (including those with cDNA inserts).

2.5. Research ethics

The "Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium" is a joint initiative of the Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, the Académie Royale de Médecine de Belgique, the Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten and the Koninklijke Academie voor Geneeskunde van België, with the support of BELSPO.

All projects must take this code of ethics into account in their research. Applicants are required to fill out the **ethics form** with their proposal. If necessary, the Ethical Board of the institutions concerned by a project must be consulted before submitting a proposal.

The code of ethics for scientific research is available here.

2.6. Knowledge Security

Openness to international partners and practising academic freedom goes hand in hand with some 'responsibility' in terms of resilient international cooperation.

It means a practice of (a minimum of) risk assessment when it comes to choosing your partners. In the current geo-political tensioned period where knowledge becomes power, it is strongly advised to minimize risks amongst others of foreign interference, unethical practices or Intellectual Property (IPR) theft.

Therefore, it is recommended to follow the guidelines provided on the BELSPO's special webpage dedicated to 'risk management in practice' (research security).

Please visit our website for more information & guidance:
https://www.belspo.be/belspo/ResearchSecurity/context_en.stm

The specific **checklist of questions** (Factsheet 3 'Risk analysis') helps you to do some risk analysis for your cooperation case. The aim is not at all to discourage you for international cooperation but to leverage your increased, safe international cooperation.

International collaboration in the **S4Policy-Driven Programme** is only possible at the following levels:

- Non-Funded Partners: international partners
- Subcontractors: international partners
- Follow-up committee: international members

In the frame of the S4Policy programme some collaborations **are not possible**:

Belarus and Russia

As a result of the Russian invasion in Ukraine and in line with current EU sanctions in term of cooperation with/financing of Belarusian or Russian persons/entities, any form of scientific cooperation with Belarus and Russia (including e.g. sample exchange) is until further notice not possible.

China

Due to their strong ties with the Chinese military and defence industry, scientific cooperation with the Seven Sons of National Defence is not allowed. It specifically concerns:

- Beihang University, formally known as Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics
- Beijing Institute of Technology
- Harbin Engineering University
- Harbin Institute of Technology
- Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics
- Nanjing University of Science and Technology
- Northwestern Polytechnical University

Belspo will not invite, nor accept (panel) evaluators from the above-mentioned countries and/or institutions to evaluate proposals in this call.

2.7. **Gender**

BELSPO is committed to gender equality. The term 'gender equality' refers both to gender balance in the research teams (choice of researchers) and to the inclusion of the gender dimension in the research (content and implementation) and should be considered as a transversal aspect of the project. Whenever statistics are produced, collected and commissioned, they shall be disaggregated by sex/gender, and indicators will be established where relevant.

If the institution(s) applying to the S4Policy programme have developed a Gender Equality Plan, they are required to disclose it as a weblink in the appropriate sections of their project proposal. Applicants are required to disclose the gender balance and the gender dimension of their project(s) in the appropriate sections of the proposal.

PART II: RESEARCH PRIORITIES OF THE CALL

3. Research priorities of the call

Several research priorities have been selected by the S4Policy Programme Committee, these priorities and their requirements have been collaboratively drafted by The Federal Departments and BELPSO. Below a description of each Priority is given, including the scope and context of the research priority, the requested scientific support, the expected research output and budget/timing estimation.

Researchers remain free to suggest the best way to respond to the priority of their choice in their proposal. Each researcher can respond to more than one priority.

Unclarities regarding the description of the research can be conveyed to BELSPO via S4Policy@belspo.be. It is not allowed to seek contact with members of the mentioned Federal Public Services to inquire more information about this call.

Attention It is not possible to submit your own research priority for this call. All proposals must answer to one of the below mentioned Priorities. It is allowed to submit with the same consortium more than one proposal for in this call, albeit for different research priorities.

Navigate to

3.1. Inclusion for persons with disabilities within Federal Governmental Organisations

FPS Policy and Support (BOSA)

Context

Since 2005, there is a regulatory objective in place for the Federal Governmental Services, that at least 3% of employees must be persons with disabilities. However, recent statistics[1] show that the average percentage falls below 1.5% in recent years. Four organisations do meet the standard, which illustrates that this objective is feasible.

Despite various initiatives to include more people with disabilities in the federal administration, such as retaining certain vacancies for people with disabilities, the increase in the number of employees with disabilities remains too low and does not meet the target

Requested Scientific Support

Research objective The Federal Service Policy and Support (BOSA) currently misses adequate scientific support to inform new or adjusted policies, with the objective to increase the number of employees with disabilities within federal governmental institutions, and to guide and support them throughout, to ensure inclusive and sustainable employment.

Research questions & objectives The federal service would welcome a project proposal that could answer the following questions/ needs:

- An analysis of the 3% norm: where does this standard come from? Is it realistic within the current overall workforce? Which factors do other governments and the private sector take into account in their related norms and policies? How does this compare to the federal context, if we take into account the specificity of the federal government's workforce?
- An evaluation of the measures taken in the recent past;
- A critical analysis of existing HR processes (recruitment, selection, career, learning and development) and their impact on people with disabilities;
- Impact analysis of how work content, working conditions, working regulations, working relations & hierarchies and work organisation, may impact persons with disabilities;
- A study on the factors that could ease the burden, remove the barriers and weight carried with the *disclosure of a disability* in the work environment (processes, working culture, etc.);
- An overview and assessment of practices (from the literature or from benchmark research) that have proven successful in other governments, sectors or countries;
- An experimental study/ pilot study in selected federal organisations to test the (newly) identified practices (such as specific internships), study their effect and draft recommendations based upon the outcomes.

Research outputs to support informed policy making

The research should result in a set of evidence-based recommendations that can be applied within the context of the federal government. These recommendations could concern:

[1] https://bosa.belgium.be/nl/networks/ciph

- How can HR processes be adapted to be more inclusive for individuals with disabilities?
- Which practices should be prioritised?
- What are transversal initiatives or awareness-raising actions that can be taken at organisational level to achieve a cultural impact?
- Which concrete practices have proven successful in other countries and could also be suitable for the Federal context?
- Which methodologies, models or examples can be used as inspiration to apply the principle of 'nothing about us, without us', to involve the target group of people with disabilities, in the process of policy reflections (inclusion by design)?

The results of the research will be used in the expertise centre for persons with disabilities at BOSA, with the aim to amend policies in recruitment and selection, development, career guidance, coaching and leadership.

Collaboration & In-kind contribution of the Federal service(s)

The research team responsible for carrying out the research is expected to regularly coordinate with the **FPS BOSA** & **FPS Social Security** throughout the various work packages, and integrate their input & feedback. To ensure successful collaboration, it is important **regular consultations with the FPS BOSA** are planned throughout the project duration. The FPS BOSA, in turn, can provide relevant documents and statistics, and its network to support carrying out the necessary research actions. FPS BOSA can also make meeting rooms available for stakeholder meetings or events linked to the project.

Timing & Budget

To be able to measure the effect of measures, developed in an experimental phase. We believe that a **maximum budget of 450 000 EUR** of which 390 000 EUR funded by BELSPO and 60 000 EUR co-financed by FPS Policy and Support (BOSA), will suffice to run this project. The project should span a period of **36 months**. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.2. Potential, competences, skills and capacity to learn, as an alternative to diploma & experience as criteria in hiring processes and career & salary development

FPS Policy and Support (BOSA)

Context

Within the Belgian labour market and in particular within the (Federal) public administration, both diploma (degree, education level) and experience are traditionally important pillars in the recruitment & selection processes[2], eligibility for a position, but also for remuneration and career.

However, due to demographic, sociological and technological evolutions the labour market is put increasingly under pressure. Public organisations are confronted with a combination of persistent labour shortages, long standing vacancies, rapidly changing competence needs, increasing digitisation and budgetary constraints, which simultaneously have strained their capacity to adapt. In particular, the traditional recruitment and HR models, which focus heavily on matching exact criteria such as diplomas,

[2] See for example Rapport Diversiteit 2024 | Federale Overheidsdienst Werkgelegenheid - Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg (NL/ FR/ EN)

job titles and linear work experience, are becoming increasingly disconnected from the reality of the current and future labour market.

It is increasingly difficult for many job openings and positions within federal public organisations to find candidates who exactly meet these traditional profile requirements. In parallel, we see that employees are currently insufficiently visible or engaged within organisations despite having valuable talents, competencies and growth potential. This trend not only threatens deployable capacity, but also threatens to increase outflow of employees, whose current position is evolving, changing or disappearing, but whose skills and capacity-to-learn is still valuable within the organisation.

In the face of these challenges, the Federal Service Policy and Support (BOSA) would greatly benefit from a robust scientific evidence base **to gain better insight in the current values of a diploma/ degree in recruitment and career development** processes, and whether or not other aspects such as capacity to learn, skills & competences and potential could serve as **alternative evaluation criteria**.

Requested Scientific Support

The main objective is to gain better insight in the current value of a **diploma/ degree** in **recruitment processes and career development** of the federal services, and whether or not other aspects such as capacity to learn, skills & competences and potential could serve as **alternative evaluation criteria**.

Research Questions

- What is the value of a diploma today in the labour market in general and in a government context in particular? And what is the value of experience?
- What is the validity and applicability of tools for potential & abilities assessment in a selection process, or in the context of upskilling, reskilling and reorientation?
- What role can competences, skills, learning ability and potential play as an alternative or in addition to the existing hiring & selection, advancement and employee-development processes?
- What is the added value of a skills-based organisation, compared to an organisation based on jobs/ roles/ functions that are interlinked with diploma and experience?
- What can be an alternative remuneration policy that is based on criteria other than (only) to diploma and seniority?
- How can strategic planning of personnel also take into account the potential of (current) employees?

Research outputs to support informed policy making

The research should result in a set of recommendations that can be applied within the context of the federal government. These recommendations could concern:

- An **operational approach** to how diploma and experience can be accounted for in the selection, promotion and remuneration of employees;
- The added value of potential, skills and competences compared to existing processes;
- Alternatives to the current remuneration system that primarily based on diploma and seniority;
- Tools and methodologies to objectively map skills, potential, competencies and learning ability.

- Overview of implications & opportunities a potential new approach can offer concerning the transition from the Federal Learning Account3, to an *Individual Learning Account* – in line with EU guidelines4 , and subsequent concrete policy recommendations.

The results of the research will be used in the expertise centre for persons with disabilities at BOSA, with the aim to amend policies in recruitment and selection, development, career guidance, coaching and leadership.

Collaboration & In-kind contribution of the Federal service(s)

The research project will support and coordinate with both *FPS BOSA* **in the potential development of a new approach**, and with *FPS ELSD (Employment, Labour & Social Dialogue)*, concerned, and in-tune with the broader challenges of the labour market, and a broader context beyond the Federal governmental services, **in the transition** towards an Individual Learning Account.

The research team responsible for carrying out the research is expected to regularly coordinate with the FPS BOSA throughout the various work packages, and integrate their input & feedback. To ensure successful collaboration, it is important that **regular consultations with the FPS BOSA** are planned throughout the project duration, and expected that all relevant stakeholders from both FPS BOSA & FPS Employment will be invited to the Follow-Up Committee.

The FPS BOSA can provide relevant documents and statistics, and its network to support carrying out the necessary research actions. FPS BOSA can also make meeting rooms available for stakeholder meetings or events linked to the project. FPS Employment – through its membership in the follow-Up committee, can provide input and share their experience regarding skills mapping, skills monitoring, ILA recommendations, changing needs of employers & employees, transitions in the labour market, ... and where possible facilitate access to their network where relevant for the research project.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **300 000 EUR** of which 270 000 EUR funded by BELSPO and 30 000 EUR co-financed by FPS Policy and Support (BOSA), will suffice to run this project. The project should span a period of **24 months**. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.3. Government Resilience with regards to Operational Upkeep & Nature based Design (GROUND)

FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Scope

The impacts of the triple planetary crisis (biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution) are well documented and addressed through a wide range of policy initiatives. The public sector is expected to lead by example, notably through the management of its own buildings and outdoor spaces. While budgetary constraints may appear to limit such ambitions, research increasingly shows the opposite: climate and nature positive measures in and around public domains can reduce long term maintenance costs. With this context in mind, this research priority aims to invite the scientific community to further

3 https://werk.belgie.be/nl/news/de-federal-learning-account-nu-online-de-tool-om-opleidingen-van-werknemers-te-beheren
4 European Commission Individual learning accounts - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion ; Council recommendation on individual learning accounts to boost training of working-age adults - Consilium

examine and substantiate the positive interaction between environmental performance and budgetary efficiency in the management of public assets, thereby providing a solid evidence base for future action.

Maintenance of the terrains of the different federal entities requires a significant cost – early estimations run around € 30 million/year – which proves challenging in view of the current budgetary constraints. In various instances it was shown that non-intensive management measures in semi-natural and urban spaces can significantly cut maintenance costs. At the same time, these measures are usually coupled with an increase in biodiversity value, climate resilience and other ecosystem services (health, air quality, water cycle, etc.). This could result in a financial compensation, as the nature credits debate continues at EU-level.

This research priority relates to the key focus of the current Belgian federal government to limit government spending, while also inscribing in its willingness to keep up with the environmental ambition set in the government agreement. A fast access to these results will support the different federal administrations integrating the results of this project in their management choices, leading to a faster reduction of maintenance costs.

Requested Scientific Support

The key to the right management choices of these federal terrains is a good scientific evidence base. Review of literature has shown that the knowledge basis with regards to the maintenance of government terrains in Belgium (such as public transport infrastructure, public space around government buildings, etc.) is limited, with even less attention to the budgetary impact.

The FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment wishes to build upon the knowledge gained in existing cooperative projects on greening of infrastructure and terrains within the federal administration (such as Biodiversiscape), and the newly gained knowledge in the future selected project, to build a toolkit. The toolkit will help establish a link between budgets and maintenance levels in green space management, taking into account environmental constraints such as timelines and the nature of the works, water management, and the equipment used. A link is also established with regulatory requirements.

Ultimately the aim is to achieve three goals:

1. To cut government expenses regarding terrain maintenance;
2. To explore the potential of innovative financing solutions regarding ecosystem services – such as nature credits – to the benefit of the federal entities;
3. To ensure measures taken, with regards to goals 1 and 2, are paired with an increase of biodiversity value

The interest scientific teams are invited to collect the knowledge (and where possible fill the gaps) needed to explore the usefulness of one central toolkit for federal administrations, further strengthened from experiences in existing projects.

Collaboration & In-kind contribution of the Federal service(s)

The Regie der Gebouwen - Régie des Bâtiments, which is responsible for managing the Belgian federal government's real estate portfolio, has expressed interest in collaborating with the selected research project. It can make several of its sites available for the study.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **400 000 EUR**, of which 360 000 EUR funded by BELSPO and 40 000 EUR by FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, will suffice to run this project. The project should span a period of **36 months**. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.4. Analysis of the societal consequences of biodiversity loss (degradation) in Belgian soil

Climate Risk Assessment Center (CERAC) (FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment)

Scope

Soil biodiversity constitutes a fundamental but largely under-documented component of Belgian society. It underpins essential ecosystem services such as agricultural productivity, water filtration and regulation, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, infrastructure stability and the regulation of biological agents relevant to public health. These functions are increasingly affected by a combination of pressures, including climate change, land use change and agricultural intensification, pollution and biological invasions. These drivers act both directly and through cascading effects on soil communities and processes, weakening the stability and resilience of below ground ecosystems and the societal sectors that depend on them. Scientific evidence shows, for example, that soils are major reservoirs of antibiotic resistance genes and that climate warming accelerates the spread of antibiotic resistance in soil systems, with direct implications for public health. Understanding how soil biodiversity responds to these multiple pressures is therefore necessary to assess impacts on food security, water quality, climate mitigation objectives and societal resilience, and to inform effective soil protection and adaptation strategies.

Despite its importance, Belgium lacks an integrated and operational understanding of the societal impacts of soil biodiversity loss. Existing data are fragmented and largely insufficient beyond taxonomic observations. There is a clear lack of information on functional characteristics of soil organisms, on the quantification of soil functions and on the links between soil degradation and socio-economic outcomes. This knowledge gap prevents public authorities from anticipating risks, comparing policy options and prioritising interventions. Addressing this need requires robust, interdisciplinary scientific research capable of characterising the current state of soil biodiversity, analysing how its degradation affects key ecosystem services and translating these effects into indicators usable for public decision making.

The need to act is particularly urgent. Belgian soils already show advanced signs of biological degradation, including loss of organic matter, simplification of soil communities and structural decline. At the same time, pressure on water resources is increasing, while extreme climatic events amplify society's dependence on resilient soils. Soil degradation generates rising costs for both private actors and public authorities, including increased fertiliser use to compensate for fertility loss, higher expenditures for water treatment and dredging, terrain stabilisation and infrastructure works, with indirect impacts on agriculture, insurance, health, infrastructure management, tourism and water services. Failing to intervene now would allow slow but cumulative processes to continue, leading to impacts that are irreversible or extremely costly to reverse, and increasing the long-term cost of non-action.

The requested scientific support directly relates to several federal governmental priorities. It supports biodiversity protection and the ecological transition by strengthening the scientific knowledge base on soil ecosystems, in line with European commitments (especially the EU's Soil Monitoring Law). It contributes to water management and risk prevention by recognising soils as a first line of defence against flooding and pollution. It informs public health policies by clarifying links between soil degradation, pollutants, human health and biological risks, and supports spatial planning and infrastructure policies through improved understanding of soil stability. It also contributes to economic resilience by addressing the dependency of key sectors on soil-based ecosystem services, and more broadly to the integration of environmental risks into long term public planning and governance.

By structuring and consolidating scientific evidence on soil biodiversity and its societal implications, the selected research project will strengthen the Evidence Informed Policy Making capacity of CERAC and partner administrations. It will deliver integrated indicators linking soil biodiversity to socio economic impacts, support the identification of vulnerable areas and enable a systematic assessment of the costs associated with soil degradation. The project will provide a coherent methodological framework to support policy design, prioritisation and evaluation across transversal domains such as water, agriculture, health (as seen within the One Health approach), infrastructure, nature conservation and spatial planning.

Requested Scientific Support

To address the policy need, the Climate Risk Assessment Center is in need of independent and multidisciplinary expertise in soil ecology, biology, biogeochemistry, genetics, hydrology, modelling and ecological economics, as well as the integration or development of soil biodiversity monitoring networks. These requirements cannot be met through internal resources alone. Therefore, the Climate Risk Assessment Center is asking support from a high-quality research consortium, to harmonise and strengthen soil biodiversity monitoring in line with evolving European requirements on soil health, and to develop decision support tools grounded in robust scientific evidence.

The need for support is centred around the following research questions for which we invite the scientific community to submit contributions:

- How can the current state and functional diversity of soil biodiversity in Belgium be robustly characterised, and what are the main drivers of its degradation?
- How does soil biodiversity loss affect the provision of key ecosystem services and generate socio-economic costs across sectors?
- Which indicators allow early anticipation of these impacts and support policy prioritisation?
- What are the costs of non-action compared to the costs and benefits of soil protection and restoration measures?
- How can the resulting knowledge and methodologies be translated into operational tools that strengthen evidence informed policymaking at federal and inter-federal level?

Collaboration & Follow-up Committee

The project is designed as a transversal initiative, allowing for collaboration with a wide range of federal and regional administrations whose mandates are directly affected by soil biodiversity and its impacts. The biodiversity service of the DG Environment of the FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment is expected to constitute a key and structural role in the follow-up of the project, given its central role in biodiversity policy and coordination at federal level. Potential interested parties also include the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Walloon Agency for Air and Climate (AWAC), Royal Meteorological Institute of Belgium (RMI)/ Belgian Climate Centre (BCC), Agency for Nature and Forests (ANB), Directorate-General for Natural Resources and Environment (DGRNE), Bruxelles Environnement, as well as the Belgian Biodiversity Platform. This means that these organisations may be interested to join the follow-up committee of the selected project.

Given the inherently cross cutting nature of the project, multiple collaborations are expected with numerous administrations at both federal and regional levels. The results of the study will be directly relevant and usable for a broad set of public entities, in particular in domains such as water management, environmental protection, public health, spatial planning, infrastructure and risk management, thereby ensuring a wide uptake of the project outputs beyond the initial partners.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **375 000 EUR**, of which 335 000 EUR funded by BELSPO and 40 000 EUR by CERAC, will suffice to run this project. The project would should span a period of **12 to 36 months**. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.5. The competitiveness of Belgian SMEs in the transition to a decarbonised and circular economy

FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Scope

The European Union is on its way to climate neutrality by 2050. In this context, the FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment has been working for many years on Belgium's transition to a climate-neutral society (see for example www.climat.be/2050). A series of transition scenarios and analyses have been produced to provide a vision of the general directions to be taken (in terms of changes in energy systems, mobility, housing, agriculture, production and consumption) and to serve as a basis for decision-making in terms of concrete policies and measures in Belgium.

The transition scenarios of the FPS Health highlight the intrinsic links between decarbonisation and the use of materials, including bio-based and critical materials. In this regard, the circular economy, broadly understood, is not only a lever for decarbonisation but also a strategic objective for the development of a new economic model in Belgium. By optimising the use of resources (reduction, re-use, recycling), the circular economy limits the extraction of raw materials and energy-intensive industrial processes, directly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It also promotes longer product-lifespans through eco-design, thereby reducing the Life Cycle Carbon Footprint. **Thus, these two approaches (circularity and decarbonisation) are complementary**: circularity reduces the demand for energy and materials, while decarbonisation affects how energy is produced and consumed. At European level, the issue of the circular economy has been at the heart of the Green Deal, with a series of laws aimed at adopting more sustainable consumption and production patterns (Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation, Batteries Regulation, etc.), as well as the adoption of the Critical Raw Materials Act, where one of the pillars is the circularity of critical raw materials.

There is a need to further explore a range of challenges and impacts related to the twin transition to a decarbonised and circular economy in Belgium, in particular related to companies' competitiveness. It is indeed central, since both security of supply, and the price of resources (energy and materials) are essential components of the viability of economic activity in many sectors. The issue of the competitiveness of large energy and/or (critical) material intensive companies, (is widely debated and has been, and still is, the subject of significant analytical work.

However, it must be noted that, in Belgium, we are sorely lacking a insight in the reality of small and medium-sized enterprises with regards to the twin transition, use of (critical) materials and competitiveness, even though both climate transition and circular economy appear as objectives on numerous occasions in the agreement of the federal government (see climate, circular economy, energy, mobility, etc.) and in the latest SME Plan (see in particular measures 86 and 87).

> *"Climate change is a challenge but at the same time offers many opportunities, notably in the areas of public health, open strategic autonomy, technological development, innovation,* ***competitiveness support and SME development****. If we* ***approach it intelligently****, the*

sustainable transition will strengthen our well-being and prosperity." (federal governmental agreement, p.96)

*'The circular economy is a **priority for this government** in a world where demand for raw materials is growing.' (federal governmental agreement)*

The government has also launched the 'MAKE 2030' initiative to boost industrial activity in Belgium. The issue of critical materials is of strategic importance and treated as such in the development of legislation at European level in this area.

Moreover, the current energy crisis, fuelled by tensions in the Middle East and the war in Ukraine, and their impact on other resources, underlines the need to better understand these challenges to strengthen our resilience for the future.

Requested Scientific Support

The scientific community is invited to submit scientific contributions that could support the FPS Health, Environment and Food Chain Safety to pursue the following two objectives:

Objective 1: Gain insight in the energy & material use of Belgian SMEs trough targeted, sectoral and operational analysis of energy and material uses in (in selected sectors) Belgian SMEs.

Researchers are invited to collect data and develop a methods and analyses to identify and assess opportunities for Belgian SMEs to contribute to the twin-transitions, and to assess the potential impacts on their competitiveness.

These operational methods could support the FPS Health to answer the following questions specifically:

- What are the typical energy and material use profiles of SMEs in the sectors concerned (at a sufficiently granular level)?
- What are the vulnerability factors (price, dependence, intensity of use, technical rigidities) specific to these sectors?
- What technical, organisational or behavioural levers are available to SMEs to effectively reduce their energy and material intensity, or their dependence on materials, including but not limited to critical materials?
- What are the investment costs associated with the implementation of these levers, and to what extent do levers represent a constraint for the SMEs concerned?

Objective 2: The development of a sustainable database of sectoral indicators (for selected sectors).

Researchers are invited to collect the data, identify and define sectoral indicators, that could be used to develop a sustainable database (for selected sectors), which over time can be supplemented further by the FPS health. This database should:

- Centralise, harmonise and document key indicators relating to the use of energy and materials by SMEs (intensities, cost structures, critical dependencies, etc.);
- Include indicators on investment costs linked to the transition to a decarbonised and circular economy (investment in equipment, technologies, process adaptation, infrastructure and associated organisational costs);
- Ensure regular monitoring of developments in the selected sectors;

- Provide a reusable analytical foundation for future impact assessments, public policy evaluations or forward-looking work.

The database should ideally be designed in a scalable, interoperable and sustainable manner, taking into consideration existing sources (statistics, surveys, sectoral studies) and the future needs of federal public services (FPS). It should also be structured in such a way as to allow the data to be regularly updated by the FPS concerned.

The study is expected to take into account existing work in this area, including a study (ongoing, expected to be finalised in June 2026) on energy use by companies that fall under the scope of the EU ETS2 (Emissions Trading System) in ten sectors of activity, the CAMBIUM[5] study, or other work that is ongoing or is likely to be launched soon, in particular under the Critical Raw Material Act.

In summary, researchers are thus invited to produce ad hoc methodologies, that preferably include in-depth consultations of relevant stakeholders, and to develop business surveys, that can be used to collect data. In the end, the results of the study will be used for the development of a targeted, sectoral and operational analysis of energy and material uses in Belgian SMEs, and for the development of sustainable database of sectoral indicators.

Follow-up Committee of the project

This work is intended to strengthen the capacity of the following institutions, which have explicitly expressed their interest in this research:

- FPS Health, Environment and Food Chain Safety – DG Environment: Climate Division and Product Policy Division
- Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (critical materials)
- FPS Economy – DG E4, Sustainable Economy Unit; DG E5, SME Policy, Sustainability Unit, and the SME Observatory.

This means that these units are, a primary set of stakeholders to be included in the follow-up committee of the project that will be selected.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **300 000 EUR**, of which 270 000 EUR funded by BELSPO and 30 000 EUR by FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, will suffice to run this project. The project would should span a period of **18 months**. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.6. Economic Cost of Climate Change & benefits of alternative adaptation strategies for Public investment at sectoral level: Development of an Operational Assessment Framework at sectoral level and for the Belgian Defence sector.

Climate and Risk Assessment Centre (CeRAC) & Ministry of Defence

Scope & Context

In Belgium, **climate-related hazards** are expected to become more frequent and more severe over the course of the 21st century. The main challenge lies in the **accumulation and interaction of multiple**

5 CAMBIUM project https://www.belspo.be/belspo/brain2-be/project_p3_en.stm#CAMBIUM

hazards affecting the same territories, in particular densely populated and economically strategic areas. Belgium is especially vulnerable in this respect due to its high population density, the **concentration of critical infrastructure** in river floodplains and coastal zones, and its exposure to combined hazards rather than isolated events. Heat waves, river and coastal flooding, windstorms, droughts and wildfires increasingly occur in the same areas, generating **compounded risks** that simultaneously affect health systems, water and energy supply, transport and logistics networks, coastal and maritime activities, and other essential services.

Addressing these compounded risks **requires well-considered and decisive policy** that is based on a scientific **analysis of current and future economic damage associated with climate change**, combined with a **cost-benefit analysis of alternative adaptation investment strategies**. To support the development of such evidence-based policy, an operationally robust and methodically comprehensive framework is needed, that is able to combine climate projections, economic impact assessments and cost-benefit analyses, in a transparent and comparable manner.

Legal context

The necessity of such an analytical framework is congruent with the amended European Directive 2011/85/EU[6], which obliges Member States to identify, assess and report climate-related macro-fiscal risks and contingent liabilities, including physical risks, transition risks and the costs of adaptation and mitigation, and integrate these into their budgetary and fiscal frameworks.

The need to act and operationalise this directive is particularly acute, as climate-related disruptions are already generating recurrent and measurable damage on public infrastructure, public expenditure and jeopardise the continuity of essential public services. In the face of future shocks, delaying action would increase both the economic cost of non-adaptation and the risk of insufficient preparedness.

Case: The Defence sector

This challenge is particularly pressing for the **defence sector**. For Defence, climate change effectuates a **force-readiness and mission-continuity issue** as climate-related hazards put a sustained pressure on infrastructure, military training areas, readiness, logistics, equipment availability and force generation: floods, heat waves, storms and wildfires disrupt training activities, damage bases, depots, airfields and ports, and constrain operational readiness. In face of these disruptions climate change has become a structural parameter in its long-term capability planning, as Defence must ensure that its capabilities remain effective.

In parallel, the multiplication of **climate-induced crises, increases the demand for Defence** to simultaneously act in support of civil authorities at national level, and partake in multinational military operations. This heightened demand, not only increases the risk of an operational overstretch, but also of credibility loss internationally within NATO and EU frameworks. Being increasingly and repeatedly engaged domestically, puts strain on resources necessary for both Climate-related emergencies and multinational operations, such as the rapid mobilisation of engineering, transport, medical and command-and-control capabilities, often on short notice.

6 Council Directive (EU) 2024/1265 29 April 2024 amending Directive 2011/85/EU requirements for budgetary frameworks of the Member States Directive - 2024/1265 - EN - EUR-Lex & Council Directive 2011/85/EU of 8 November 2011 Directive - 2011/85 - EN - EUR-Lex.

Requested Scientific Support

Currently the CeRAC and Ministery of Defence lack sufficient analytical insight to be able to develop an fully **integrated analytical approach** that could, in first instance, **cover defence-specific climate risks & impacts** such as vulnerabilities of military infrastructure, impacts on readiness, training and logistics, effects on human performance, health and safety, and the implications of multi-hazard scenarios for mission demand and capability requirements.

Against this background, the CERAC and the Ministry of Defence, welcome proposals that aim **at developing a scientifically robust and operationally relevant framework for assessing the economic costs of climate change** and **the benefits of adaptation** at sectoral level. The **defence sector** will act as the **first user case** of the developed framework and test its practical implementation.

The research project (outcomes) would be able to support Defence & CeRAC in both *macro-fiscal policy development* within the context of EU regulation, and Defences' need to *address climate-related risks* in order to ensure its mission continuity, public security and budgetary planning.

Call objectives & Research questions

The applicants are invited to take the objectives of CeRAC & Defence into consideration in their proposal:

Objective One: The **development of a scientifically robust and operationally relevant framework for assessing the economic costs of climate change** and **the benefits of adaptation** at sectoral level, in order to inform policy making.

Sub-objective: Develop a methodological framework that it is reproducible, enabling subsequent **extension to other Federal public services**, sectors and institutions and, where relevant, to administrations of the Regions and Communities subject to similar climate-related obligations. Allowing each of them to estimate climate-related costs and risks within a coherent framework, and to integrate the results into evidence-informed policymaking and budgetary decision-making processes.

Sub-objective: The framework is compliant with the amended Directive 2011/85/EU.

Objective Two: **Test the practical implementation of the developed framework** whereby the **Defence sector** will act as the **first user case.**

Sub-objective: Identification of climate-related hazards and their damages, and an assessment of their economic costs for the Belgian Defence sector.

Sub-objective: Identification of alternative adaptation investment strategies for the Defence sector, and a cost-benefit analysis of these adaptation strategies.

Sub-objective: Comparative study of (benefits of) adaptation and non-adaptation for the Defence sector.

Research Questions

Applicants are invited to take the questions of CeRAC & Defence into consideration:

- What are current and future economic damages associated with climate-related hazards? How can the scale of these damages be estimated in a rigorous and comparable manner?
- What are potential alternative adaptation strategies specifically for the Defense Sector?
- How can cost-benefit ratios of alternative adaptation strategies be measured, within the framework of Public investment & budgetary planning, **compliant with the amended Directive 2011/85/EU?**

- What are the economic costs of non-adaptation for the defense sector? And how does this compare with the costs and benefits of **targeted adaptation measure across infrastructure, capabilities, technologies, governance and personnel**?

Collaboration & In-kind contribution of Defence and CeRAC

The project will be collaborative in nature; the proposal should take into account that both CERAC and the Ministry of Defence will act as full administrative partners, meaning that they are included in the monitoring and follow-up of the project through the mandatory Follow-Up Committee (see below), will offer in-kind contributions (see below) and are kept up to date on the research progress and consulted for input throughout the project duration.

Follow-Up Committee: each proposal/project in the S4Policy-Driven Programme is expected to set-up a follow-up committee; during the project all relevant stakeholders, including CeRAC; Defence and Belspo and is brought together at least once per year.

In-kind contribution: The Ministry of Defence contributes as the primary sectoral use case, providing defence-specific operational knowledge, data and policy needs related to climate-related risks, mission continuity and adaptation.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **600 000 EUR** of which 520 000 EUR funded by BELSPO and 80 000 EUR jointly by CeRAC (40 000 EUR) and the Ministery of Defence (40 000 EUR), will suffice to run this project. The project should span a period of **24 months**; ideally engaging two full-time equivalent (FTE) persons for the entire duration of the project. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.7. The decarbonisation of Belgian industry: long-term potential for negative greenhouse gas emissions through BECCS

FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

Scope

The European Union must achieve net zero emissions by 2050, and net negative emissions will be required in the post-2050 period in order to meet the objective of limiting the increase in global average temperature to no more than 1.5°C/2°C. In this context, all emitting sectors will need to undergo drastic reductions, as illustrated by the work coordinated by the Federal Public Service Health on Belgium's transition (see for example www.climatechange.be/2050). The transport, buildings, and energy production sectors will need to reach zero emissions. Industry, as well as agriculture and land use, will also have to achieve very ambitious levels of reduction. At the same time, according to existing scenarios, these sectors may still be characterized by residual emissions, which would require the deployment of negative emissions, through enhanced natural sinks, direct air capture and storage (DACS), or the use of sustainable bioenergy combined with carbon capture and storage (BECCS).

The potential for enhancing natural sinks is closely linked to the trajectories followed by agriculture and land use. Their potential in Belgium has been the subject of a recent study, the results of which will be published shortly (www.climatechange.be/2050). In addition, the issues and challenges related to DAC are relatively well understood, including the need for high temperatures for liquid DAC and the significant material requirements for solid DAC.

By contrast, there is a lack of clarity regarding the role and potential of BECCS in Belgium. Yet, according to scenarios compiled by the IPCC, as much as 334 $GtCO_2e$ (median value) would need to be delivered

by BECCS over the period 2020–2100 in a 1.5°C pathway. According to the European Commission, this technology is expected to make a significant contribution to decarbonisation, already from 2030 and especially around and after 2050 (with approximately 33 Mt CO_2e by 2040). In Belgium, industry is expected to play a major role, not least because it consumes significant amounts of biomass. BECCS should be understood in a broad sense, encompassing pathways such as waste incineration as well as carbon capture processes including biological carbon mineralisation, biochar, etc.

As industry lies at the heart of both decarbonisation efforts and competitiveness challenges — particularly through the investments required in this field — there is a need for a long-term vision regarding the potential of BECCS and the conditions for its deployment. The Government Agreement reflects this priority:

- *"One of the greatest challenges facing our society is the transition to a sustainable economy in response to climate change."* (p.4)
- *"The transition towards industrial decarbonisation is a priority. To achieve this, we must deploy, in a proactive, flexible, efficient, cost-effective, and technologically neutral manner, the available levers (energy efficiency, renewable energy, low-carbon energy and technologies, energy carriers, etc.)." (p.23)*
- *"The government's energy policy aims to progressively phase out reliance on fossil fuels and to increase the country's open strategic autonomy. The government will ensure that our country does not become more dependent on energy carriers, resources, or strategic industrial value chains." (p.32)*

Requested Scientific Support

Applicants are invited to consider the following two objectives in their proposal:

Objective 1: Provide an estimate (range) of the long-term potential of different BECCS applications in Belgium. This involves considering all possible "BECCS" applications from a long- to very long-term perspective (beyond 2050). These include the various industrial sectors that currently use or could in the future use sustainable biomass, the waste sector where a significant share is of biological origin, as well as carbon valorisation techniques such as mineralisation and biochar, to name just a few applications. It will be useful to describe the current levels of maturity of the different technologies and the expected timeframe for reaching technological maturity if not yet (fully) mature. The analysis should also rely on, or at least be informed by, the various climate neutrality scenarios developed for Belgium by different institutions and research centres. Finaly, the analysis should take into account the latest existing and the developing methodologies regarding the accounting of (negative) emissions under BECCS.

Objective 2: Assess and discuss the conditions required to achieve this potential. A key condition is the availability of sustainable biomass for energy or process uses in general, and specifically for each application considered. This should be analysed within a broader perspective on the competing uses of biomass, as reflected in existing studies. Another condition relates to the carbon value chain and CO_2 transport, including network aspects. Any other important enabling conditions should also be addressed, including economic viability and the expected costs of the different options.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **100 000 EUR** of which 90 000 EUR funded by BELSPO and 10 000 EUR by FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, will suffice to run this project. The project should span a period of **12 months**. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.8. Sustainable Raw Materials in Belgium: ESG risks assessment and priority actions for the circular economy

Federal Institute of Sustainable Development (FISD)

The Unit Raw Materials of the Federal Institute of Sustainable Development (FISD) is fully operational since October 2025. The main mission of the Unit Raw Materials is to advance knowledge, projects and practices that enhance the sustainable production and consumption of raw materials across the value chain and in a Belgian context.

Scope and Context

Together with climate change and biodiversity loss, the impact and availability of raw materials is one of the main international societal challenges. The International Resource Panel (IRP) predicts that global material extraction could rise up to 60% between 2020 and 2060, increasing environmental pressure and potentially pushing the planet beyond its ecological boundaries[7]. At the same time, raw materials, especially minerals that are crucial for the energy transition like copper, lithium and cobalt are deemed as essential for moving towards a carbon-free future. Yet, extraction of more transition raw materials/minerals bears significant environmental, social, and economic and political risks, along their value chains.

Concerns for the future availability of such raw materials have been continuously rising, and has led to several policy instruments. The most significant instrument is the Critical Raw Material Act (2024) adopted by the European Commission to support a **sustainable supply of critical raw materials**, by setting capacity benchmarks along the value chain, and encouraging a diversification of the EU supplies. The Belgian inter-federal plan MAKE 2025-2030 is developing a national strategy for critical raw materials in a Belgian context.

Simultaneously, the **knowledge on raw materials in a Belgian context** is expanding. Between 2022-2025, the Belspo project CAMBIUM[8] applied the CRM criticality assessment to Belgium, comparing the EU list of CRM's to the Belgian context. Other studies by the Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen (SERV) and Departement Omgeving (2024) also explored the use of raw materials in a domestic-regional context[9]. Overall, there is a large need for scientific-based and policy-oriented knowledge on the use of raw materials, supply chains, bottlenecks, impact and future risks associated with raw material production and consumption.

In contrast, while knowledge is increasing, the currently available **risk assessment models,** needed to support policy- and decision-making, are still **strongly limited**: current methods either limit the focus on particular risks (geopolitical, economic importance), or are too high-level, making it difficult to prioritise (concrete) policy actions, especially in terms of the **sustainable use of raw materials**. Due to their limited focus on supply risks (bottlenecks and concentration) and economic importance – following the EC methodology –, they have relatively little to say on **environmental, social and future risks,** which are arguably equally important.

Social & environmental risks associated with the extraction and use of raw materials, will arguably have an equally strong impact on the future use and availability of critical raw materials, therefore their exclusion in current risks assessments may jeopardise the objective to ensure sustainable supply chains. Without having a better understanding of where these risks are situated along the value chain, it is **difficult to identify, develop and prioritise policy actions** about the usage of raw materials, and in

7 UNEP, *Global Resources Outlook 2024. Bend the Trend. Pathways to a Liveable as Resource Use Spikes* (UNEP, 2024).

8 CAMBIUM project https://www.belspo.be/belspo/brain2-be/project_p3_en.stm#CAMBIUM

9 Maarten Christis et al., *De Rol van Metalen en 'Kritieke Grondstoffen' in Vlaanderen - Analyse Vanuit Een Omgevingsperspectief, Uitgevoerd Door VITO in Opdracht van Het Departement Omgeving* (Departement Omgeving, 2024); Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen, *Kritieke Grondstoffenzekerheid* (Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen, 2025).

addition, where to set priorities in terms of circularity. The latter, moreover, necessitates an enhanced **criticality assessment**, that may yield important insights into how and in what ways we can create a maximum effect in terms of reducing ESG-related risks, possibly through new initiatives in the circular economy.

Requested Scientific Support

To root the Units future studies in evidence-based insights, the Unit Raw Materials **requires a solid methodological framework to assess ESG-risks across different raw materials chains**; a risk-assessment tool that **is tailored to Belgian material flows** and can then serve as a basis for offering detailed and actionable policy priorities.

The framework should include advanced methodological tools to **analyse ESG-related risks in terms of raw material extraction and consumption**, and make possible the **integration of those ESG risk dimensions into the existing raw material criticality assessments**, and serve as a **platform for risk response & policy recommendation**s in terms of the circular economy and usage of raw materials. This risk model should be **more fine-grained than existing models**.

Research objectives

The goal of this project is thus to complement impact assessment with risk assessment, and shift towards assessing how likely ESG-related harmful outcomes are to occur, their severity, and to identify trade-offs and strategies to reduce those risks. The aim is to move towards a material-specific and a risk-based, future-oriented matrix that covers multiple raw materials and helps to map and define ESG-criticality thresholds and boundaries in more detail.

Objective One: To conceive an expanded and a fine-grained criticality risk assessment framework for raw materials used in Belgium, including ESG indicators, like Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, land use or biodiversity related to mining activities, water, air emissions, social impacts and forecasting. This framework also includes multiple types of natural resources: critical raw materials (widely used transition minerals), biomass and non-metallic minerals making it possible to compare risks across different raw material groups.

> ***Subobjective***: The framework is consistent with current analyses and studies and linked to the Belgian national context. Proposals are expected to rely on and be complementary to studies that have analysed raw material flows in a Belgian context and have revealed linkages with different sectors and the use of technologies, particularly the Cambium project (2022-2025) and the CIREC (CIREC – Secure and Circular Material Flows for Electricity Security of Supply) projects.
>
> ***Subobjective***: Make as much as possible, the integration of ESG risk dimensions into the existing raw material criticality assessments, possible.

Objective Two: This framework is structured as such that it can be used to inform concrete policy decisions and risks-reducing priorities for the Belgian economy as a whole. Especially, this objective will result in recommendations: concrete options and policy-oriented recommendations about the application of natural resources (linked to specific technologies and products) considering their sustainability risks and the importance of these applications (economic, energy transitions, digitalisation, etc), which can be further developed in initiatives and actionable strategies of the circular economy. The Unit Raw Materials wants to formulate priorities in terms of circular raw material usage (linked to impactful R-strategies: refuse, rethink and reduce).

Research questions & expected outputs

Researchers are invited to take the following questions in consideration in there application:

1) A framework for **the in-depth analysis of ESG-related risks** related to the production and consumption of raw materials

- Where possible material-specific indicators should be preferred over proxies and country-specific indicators. What quantifiable risk metrics do exist?
- What are potential ways to attribute indicators towards a risk assessment system that includes ESG impact factors (such as GHG emissions, land use, water stress, and deforestation as well as the main social risks) and future-oriented developments (supply, pressures, etc.) that are associated with these raw materials?
- Identification of criticality thresholds (low – medium – high) and, how can these thresholds render useful for informed decision-making regarding *which* criticality thresholds can reasonably be applied in a policy context;
- These risks should be tailored to the Belgian context and associated with the most important raw material flows for Belgium.

2) **Policy recommendation**s and circular economy strategies with the aim of reducing those risks

- To suggest and identify concrete solutions of high potential and impact to reduce risks;
- Bearing in mind political-economic questions of resilience and strategic autonomy;
- Preferably based on an initial review that includes existing and proved R-strategies (preferably R0-R3) and methods that can minimize waste;
- Based on this review and a first interpretation of the risk assessment tool, concrete actionable and recommended strategies and potential trade-offs are formulated.

3) An **overview of gaps** or further avenues to further develop this framework

- To make a thorough reflection of the gaps and shortcomings of (step 1-2) and identify possible next steps in terms of research and/or synergies with other research projects, initiatives, etc.

Collaboration & In-kind contribution of the Federal service(s)

The priority as described above requires a multidisciplinary approach from a team that is expected to collaborate closely with each other and the FISD; and provide feedback and capacity building to the FISD. The researchers are expected to engage with relevant stakeholders and with federal organisations, and experts of FISD and other departments. FISD invites researchers to suggest other collaborations (nationally and internationally) with existing projects.

Follow-Up Committee: each proposal/project in the S4Policy-Driven Programme is expected to set-up a follow-up committee; during the project all relevant stakeholders, including FISD, CERAC, FPS Health (DG Climate), FPS Health (DPPC) and FPS Economy and Belspo and is brought together at least once per year.

In-kind contribution by the federal stakeholders: access to data of existing research projects, including LCA's on critical raw materials copper, lithium, cobalt, nickel and rare earths, Cambium, demand scenario's energy transitions (Climate Service). Support in organizing stakeholder activities.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a **maximum budget of 450 000 EUR** of which 270 000 EUR is funded by Belspo and 180 000 EUR is co-financed by the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (FISD), should suffice

to execute this project. Ideally, the project would span over a period of **36 months**, however applicants are free to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.9. Data Infrastructure for Monitoring Labour Market and Social Protection Transitions

FPS Social Security & PPS Social Integration

Scope & context

The current coalition agreement foresees far-reaching reforms of social security and social assistance in Belgium. It is therefore to be expected that new dynamics will emerge both from social protection to employment and between the various social security and social assistance systems. It is important to properly identify these new flows and thus monitor the impact on both social spending and the effectiveness of social protection. It is also important to gain insight into the effectiveness of the measures taken in function of the desired increase in labour market participation. This requires an adapted longitudinal data infrastructure.

The new data infrastructure should allow for uniform monitoring of beneficiaries from different systems and branches of social protection. This data infrastructure must be cost-effective. Instead of ad hoc data linking for different institutions separately, this infrastructure should provide a basis from which policy monitoring and preparation can be done in a coordinated and methodologically uniform manner. This is also in line with the reorganisation of the federal administrative landscape, which envisages a merger of the FPS Social Security with the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue and the PPS Social Integration. Such infrastructure offers important opportunities for a more integrated and improved monitoring of the effectiveness of social protection and can form the basis of evidence-based policy in a large area of federal competences.

The new data infrastructure should allow to track citizens' journeys through different social systems and work and should provide insights into:

- The extent, direction, sustainability and quality of outflows from the various branches and systems of social protection
- Changes in the volume and nature of inflows into the various branches and systems of social protection
- The differences according to personal and family characteristics
- The impact of the analysed trajectories on livelihood security and income stability, with attention to cumulation of jobs and benefits

Requested Scientific Support

Research questions

- As far as the outflow to work is concerned: What kind of work is it about? Is it as an employee or as a self-employed person? Is it full-time or part-time work? Is the outflow to a permanent or a temporary contract? And, when someone flows out to work, is this at least for a continuous period of one year or is it short periods of inflow and outflow? Is it standard or non-standard work? Do we see differences in which sectors and functions are flowing out? How do they relate to the sectors and functions of the jobs performed prior to the benefit period?

- Specifically for incapacitated persons: When their incapacity for work is stopped, what happens to them? Are they going back to work effectively? Or are they going to other welfare systems? What are the pathways through which reintegration into the labour market takes place? Are there differences in the nature and duration of incapacity for work? Are there any differences in the pathway taken by persons covered by sickness and invalidity insurance? Are there differences in the pathways followed by employment services, education and training institutions?
- Specifically with regard to the living wage and the equivalent living wage: to which are the thresholds or triggers that lead to effective inflows into the assistance: Are these just income shocks, family changes? What role does part-time unstable work play, ...? To what extent does the combination of work and social benefits play a role, what is the role of possible administrative complexity?
- As regards inflows into social protection: What is the role of income shocks, unstable labour and cumulations of labour and benefits as possible triggers for inflows? To what extent are existing protection mechanisms and minimum rights sufficient to address these risks?

The outcomes we expect from the scientific contributions are:

- A data strategy: An important part of the construction of this longitudinal data infrastructure is the research into necessary data, a description of the relevant data sources and how they can be made accessible to the project, the identification of any gaps and the proposal of solution strategies for these gaps. Important questions here include: How to identify short periods of work? How to identify pathways through sickness and disability insurance?
- A detailed and documented methodology for setting up the longitudinal data infrastructure, including the necessary data requests
- A detailed and documented methodology for analyzing the data infrastructure in view of the above research questions
- Testing the data infrastructure for an exploratory inflow, throughflow and outflow analysis of persons in disability and disability.

By empowering the FPS Social security with a strong evidence-base and data strategy, it would enable it to provide policy makers with insights into where and why people drop out, in which phases or for which target groups interventions have the most effect and where structural bottlenecks occur. This also makes it possible to detect risks at an early stage, such as long-term incapacity for work, unemployment, poverty or inactivity. Preventive measures can therefore be set up more quickly and in a more targeted manner. The project would entail direct policy information for the implementation, adjustment and evaluation of federal measures during the current legislature.

In addition, the infrastructure supports the carrying out of impact measurements, for example of labour market measures, reintegration- pathways, benefit policies or activation strategies. This allows the policy to be continuously improved on the basis of objective data and empirical insights.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **420 000 EUR**, of which 336 000 EUR financed by BELSPO and 84 000 EUR co-financed by the FPS Social Security (51 000 EUR) and PPS Social Integration (33 000 EUR), is sufficient to execute this project. Ideally, the project should run for **24 months**. However, applicants are free to propose a different timing and phasing, provided that the core package is fully delivered.

3.10. Towards a new assessment scale for self-reliance among people with disabilities

FPS Social Security

Context

The current medical-social scale as introduced by the 1987 Law on allowances to people with disabilities and more specifically by the Ministerial Decree of 30 July 1987 on the determination of the categories and the manual for the evaluation of the degree of autonomy with regard to the question of the granting of the integration allowance[10] (Justel databank) has never been scientifically validated, is insufficiently aligned with contemporary insights about disability, shows variability/inconsistency between evaluators and does not sufficiently take into account the situation in which persons with disabilities find themselves.

As such the medical-social scale is not in line with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)[11] officially endorsed by all 191 WHO Member States on 22 May 2001. The ICF acknowledges that the functioning and disability of an individual occurs in a context, and therefore the ICF also includes a list of environmental factors. This new, more modern perspective is also reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of December 13, 2006. Article 1 of this UN Convention broadly defines "disability" as "*long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder individuals from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others*." This Convention has been in force in Belgium since August 1, 2009.

Policy relevance

Supports the modernisation of the integration allowance based on the ICF, implementation of the principles enshrined in the UNCRPD and strengthens evidence-based policymaking.

Requested Scientific Support

Scientists are invited to contribute to the critical following question: *How can a scientifically validated assessment scale be developed that reflects the actual need for support and can be introduced in a budget-neutral manner?*

Previous studies[12] have produced an ICF-based scale with 22 domains and good psychometric properties, but further validation is required, especially regarding persons with disabilities in categories 4 and 5 of the current medical-social scale.
The proposed research project is invited to integrate the following phases into their workplan:

Phase 1: Validation and refinement of the scale

The validity and reliability of the new assessment scale developed during the previous research project (2017–2018) should be further tested. In this regard, specific attention needs to be paid to individuals in categories 4 and 5 of the current medical-social scale who were insufficiently addressed in the previous research, as well as to the 18–21 age group.

[10] https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=1987073031&table_name=wet
[11] International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)
[12] Teppers, E., Pacolet, J., Falez, F., Godderis, L., Kuppens, S. & Mélot, C. (2018). *Ontwikkeling van een instrument voor de evaluatie van de ondersteuningsbehoeften in handicapsituaties, Luik 2*. Leuven & Brussel: HIVA-KU Leuven & ULB; Teppers, E., Pacolet, J., Falez, F., Godderis, L., Kuppens, S. & Mélot, C. (2018). *Elaboration d'un instrument d'évaluation des besoins de soutien dans les situations de handicap, Volet 2*. Leuven & Brussel: HIVA-KU Leuven & ULB.

Furthermore, the new scale should strive to reflect the support needs and reality of people with disabilities as accurately as possible and not merely be a sum of the results, with each item being equally important. This should result in a new scoring mechanism.

Based on this, a classification of people with disabilities into 5 categories should be proposed, as established in current legislation. These categories must be homogeneous and based on the activities, the degree of need for assistance and support, and the difficulties in performing the activities measured by the new scale.

Phase 2: Analysis of budgetary, legal and operational impact

2.1. Analysis of the budgetary impact (budget neutrality should be guaranteed);
2.2. Analysis of the impact of the new assessment/evaluation scale on the existing legislation and proposals for amendments;
2.3. Analysis of the impact of the new scale on "derived rights" allocated by other agencies (e.g. parking card, national reduction card NMBS, tax breaks, etc.) => development of a **conversion table** outlining the relationship between the eligibility criteria associated with the current scale and the new criteria associated with the (new) scale defined during the first phase.

Phase 3: Preparation for the implementation of the new scale

3.1. Analysis of the operational impact of the new scale and scoring mechanism
3.2. Update and finalisation of the user manual for the evaluators (already developed during the 2017-18 project)
3.3. Development of instructional/training materials for evaluators

The proposal may deviate from this approach. This is a proposition and not mandatory.

We would welcome from applicants the following outputs:

- New scientific evaluation/assessment scale based on the ICF to assess/evaluate the loss of functional capacities (the autonomy) of a person with a disability with regard to the granting of the "integration allowance" which is This would be accompagnied by a users manual + training materials for evaluators to ensure full integration of the scientific output in the administration
- A scale that enables the classification of people with disabilities into 5 categories based on the ICF determining the amount of the integration allowance + conversion table to compare with the current scale in order to give access to "derived rights";
- A comprehensive impact analysis;

Collaboration & Follow-Up Committee

FPS Social Security, academic partners, federal and regional agencies and stakeholders such as the National High Council for Persons with a Disability.

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **250 000 EUR** (of which 200 000 EUR will be funded by BELSPO and 50 000 EUR will be co-funded by FPS Social Security) will suffice to run this project.

Due to the timeline of the broader policy plan regarding the assessment scale for self-reliance among people with disabilities, the Federal Public Service should ideally has access to (intermediate) research results at month 12. Therefore, the ideal project duration is indicated at **12 months**. However, applicants are free to deviate from this proposed timing in their proposal.

3.11. Labour migration flows & channels for third-country nationals in Belgium

Belgian Federal Migration Centre (MYRIA) and WEWIS

Myria, the Belgian Federal Migration Centre, is an independent public body. It analyses migration, defends the rights of foreigners and combats human smuggling and trafficking. Myria promotes public policies based on evidence and human rights.

Context

Belgium faces an important policy challenge: it increasingly relies on two parallel channels of third-country nationals to meet labour demand from Belgian employers, but their interaction is still poorly understood. These channels are, first, **direct labour migration** through the single permit system, and second, **posting of third-country nationals** to Belgium under the free movement of services. The core policy need is to understand how these channels interact in practice, to what degree they substitute for or complement each other, and what this means for labour markets, taxation, social security, and the societal integration of these groups.

This matters because Belgium's labour migration framework is mainly the competence of regional authorities whereas posting legislation and registration is mainly the competence of federal authorities. Since 2020, the single permit has been operational across all three regions, while posting flows have continued to grow and now represent a substantial and rising part of economic migration dynamics. At the same time, employers may adapt recruitment strategies depending on labour shortages, administrative burden, sectoral demand, wage costs, and regional rules.

The key question is not only how many workers come through each channel, but **how the two systems shape each other's flows**. Restrictive rules in one channel may push employers toward the other. Workers may also move from posting into direct labour migration, or remain in Belgium for very different lengths of time depending on the channel used. These patterns have consequences for labour standards, enforcement, retention, settlement, and the financing of social security.

Main policy dimensions

The evidence gap is especially important for four policy domains:

- **Labour market policy**: how employers respond to shortages and regulatory constraints.
- **Fiscal and social security policy**: how different channels affect contributions, entitlements, and net fiscal effects.
- **Migration and governance policy**: how federal, regional, and EU rules interact, and where unintended incentives or gaps arise.
- **Societal integration**: differences in duration of stay, long-term labor market position, family and partner position and impact on the availability of housing.

Priority evidence questions

The scientific community is encouraged to generate evidence, depending on available data (or data that can be made available, which may imply asymmetrical or region-specific design):

- Whether direct recruitment and posting are **substitutes or complements** in the different Belgian regions.
- The role of regional policy developments on cross-regional flows

- Which sectors rely most on each channel across the Belgian regions.
- Whether and when posted workers transition into direct labour migration.
- How long workers remain in Belgium under each channel and in which labor market positions
- How the two channels affect wages, social security contributions, and integration outcomes.
- How the two channels affect real housing needs at the local level
- Whether the current framework creates incentives for subcontracting or posting instead of direct recruitment.

Belgium is well placed to produce strong evidence because relevant administrative data exist and can potentially be linked. This includes single permit and labour migration data, LIMOSA declarations, population registers, employment records, and tax and income data. The focus of a scientific proposal should be on the period 2020 to 2025. That makes it possible to move beyond descriptive debate and build a robust empirical basis for policy design.
A scientific proposal on this topic would support policymakers in assessing:

- labour shortage responses;
- the role of labour migration in Belgium's economic model;
- the sustainability of social security financing;
- labour inspection and enforcement;
- long-term retention and integration of migrant workers
- policy priorities at the regional, federal or EU level

Timing & Budget

We believe that a maximum budget of **200 000 EUR**, of which 165 000 EUR will be funded by BELSPO, and 20 000 EUR will be funded by MYRIA, and 15 000 EUR will be funded by WEWIS, will suffice to run this project. Ideally, the project would span a period of **24 months**. However, applicants are free to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

3.12. Towards a scientific research agenda for the Federal administration

All federal departments

Context

The covid-crisis and the crises that followed have demonstrated the importance of scientific evidence in informing the policy decision-making process.

Historically science has always played an important role in policy, especially in specific sectoral policies such as health, but the covid pandemic showed that the fact that relying on science cannot be based on an ad hoc model anymore. A more systematic approach is needed across more policy areas.

It is not only a matter of efficiency of policies, but also a matter of strengthening public trust. The results of a survey of 72.000 respondents in 68 countries published in Nature (How can scientists make the most of the public's trust in them?) revealed that the public was keen on having science play a more important role in public policies as it boosts the trust in their efficiency and effectivity.

It is in this context that the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform (DG Reform) decided to launch an initiative destined to strengthen the production and uptake of scientific evidence in public administrations in Europe. Via the funding mechanism of the Technical Support Instrument, the project on "*Building capacity for evidence informed policymaking in governance and public administration in post-pandemic Europe*" enabled a first series of 7 countries to receive the support of the Joint Research Centre and the OECD to examine the state of their EIPM-ecosystem and to draw recommendations for the future in the form of a roadmap of priority-actions. The participating EU member states were: Belgium, Greece, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands. The OECD was assigned to examine the capacity and pitfalls of the federal administration in Belgium and to design a roadmap of actions.

Scope of the project

According to the OECD report, the Belgian federal administration seems to possess very good analytical capacities in certain areas, a good link with academia (also thanks to the programmes organised by Belspo) and a highly capable workforce. On the other hand, there is a need to ensure a stronger coordination between these structures and to establish specific mechanisms to make better use of existing scientific evidence as well, to formulate strategic policy needs & demands for the research community. Regarding the latter, we refer to the following actions in the OECD report, to focus on in this call for proposals:

> *2.2.3. Create a co-ordinated framework for developing joint research agendas across FPS*
>
> *2.3.6. Promote systematic reviews across government, building on existing good practices*

These two recommendations are clearly related and refer to two aspects. Firstly, there is **insufficient capacity to absorb existing scientific evidence** rapidly, efficiently & effectively, to inform policies that are under negotiation within the government. Secondly, there is a lack of capacity to **formulate strategic knowledge needs & demands** that are required in the short and the long run. Additionally, there is a need to coordinate the knowledge needs between federal departments and thereby generate joint strategic research agendas.

These challenges have also been observed during the collection of research needs for FLASH projects (rapid synthetic reviews) and for policy-driven projects (policy needs for research) in the framework of the Belspo S4Policy Programme. Rather than a coordinated & collaborative approach, this collection-process relies mainly on a bottom-up approach: the request to formulate research questions trickles down within the administration until it reaches a specific need, which is both time consuming and is impeded by budgetary insecurity within each department. We seem to lack the tools, governance bodies and coordination mechanisms that would enable 1) to mobilise the existing scientific evidence to support policymaking mechanisms in a fast, efficient and systematic way within and across ministries. This step is currently not embedded as a routine in policymaking processes. And to 2) to develop the strategic research that is needed within and across departments.

Expected results

We expect a scientific proposal that would include the following elements:

- map how currently knowledge synthesis is practiced within federal departments & across federal institutions;
- recommend concrete actions on how knowledge generator functions/roles can operate, and how knowledge synthesis mechanisms can be developed within and across federal departments.

- identify and evaluate inspiring practices within the federal level and from abroad
- formulate a set of recommendations (across federal departments) to enable each federal administration to exert these two functions in due respect to its specificities and in line with a minimal set of common criteria. These common rules are essential to strengthen a true EIPM ecosystem and enable inter-departmental cooperation.
- This ecosystem – that we want to be evidence-based and therefore lead by a set of prominent researchers in the field – shall account for the existing structures that are in place, EIPM-initiatives that are taken, the strong budgetary constraint, the reorganisation of the federal departments that is ongoing.
- The scientific team will report and work in close collaboration with the college des Presidents/College van de Voorzitters, and its advisory body on EIPM.
- We expect a realistic proposal to enable the federal level to integrate science advice that reaches a strong consensus and that can be proposed to the following government.
- Recommendations on how Belspo's S4Policy programme can play a decisive role in the future, accounting for the three tools that are foreseen: policy relevant, policy-driven and Flash research to support the efforts of all federal administrations.

Timing & Budget

We believe that this project could be feasible with a budget of **300 000 EUR** and could span over a period of **24** months. However, applicants are allowed to deviate from this timing in their proposal.

PART III: PRACTICAL ASPECTS

4. Documentation

The following information documents are available to applicants:

- Information file (this document)
- FAQ
- Budget rules
- Evaluation criteria
- Submission – Evaluation criteria
- Eligibility of evaluators
- Institution request form
- Privacy Policy
- Platform User Guide

The following submission templates are available for information. Submission of the EoI & Full Proposal is done through the platform.

- Expression of Interest
- Full Proposal
- Budget table (uploaded as an attachment in the proposal through the platform)
- Gantt chart (uploaded as an attachment in the proposal through the platform)

These documents are available on the website.

5. How to submit a proposal

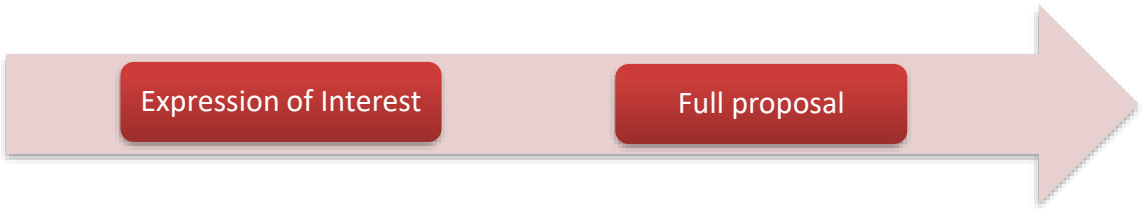
Link to the submission platform: https://belspo.aimsgrants.com/

1. Link your account to your organisation and await approval
2. Open the Expression of Interest Submission form
3. Continue to the Full Proposal form when the platform is reopened for phase two

5.1. Submitting a proposal (Phase 1 & 2)

The programme S4Policy follows a 2-phase submission process: (1) Expression of Interest and (2) Full proposal. All Expression of Interests and Full Proposals are expected to be submitted by the Promotor of the Coordinating institution. An account on our Submission Platform can be created on beforehand.

Please note that during the submission procedure, you should not contact the federal departments since we want a fair distribution of information among applicants.



Online Platform User Registration & access to submission forms

Please note that registration on the platform takes time. Prior to submitting your Expression of Interest on the platform, each applicant that has registered for the first time will have to link themselves to their organisation in the platform and be approved by BELSPO**. Without being linked to an organisation, you *cannot* open an Expression of Interest form.** We want to ensure this process will be quick, therefore we urge you to submit your expression of interest during office hours and to please use your institution email to register.

Expression of Interest (Phase 1)

Prior to submitting a Full proposal, applicants must first submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) via the online Submission Platform.

The eligibility of the EoI will be evaluated by BELSPO. If the EoI does not comply with the submission rules, i.e. the EoI is not complete or has not been submitted in time, it will be impossible to create and submit a Full proposal. The eligibility to participate and to receive funding will be assessed for both the Coordinating institution and the Funded Partner institutions. EoIs do not constitute a step in the evaluation process. They will be used by BELSPO to seek suitable foreign experts for the evaluation of the research proposals.

At this stage applicants are required to provide general indicative information regarding the proposal: title and acronym of the project, call priority, budget range of the proposal, duration, a brief description of the intended project, keywords and the name and contact details of the partners. Accompanying the Expression of Interest (EoI), applicants will provide the name and contact details of 4 – 6 scientific experts capable of assessing their proposal, and a max. of 2 non-grata scientific experts that will be automatically excluded from the evaluation.

The description of the project at this point is understood as an early stage of reflection. The title and the summary of the Full Proposal may vary from that of the EoI to some extent. However, it cannot diverge to the point that the expertise mobilised for the evaluation of the proposal will become irrelevant. The acronym, selected call priority, indicative budget, coordinator and keywords must remain the same.

If the funded partners were to change due to unforeseen circumstances after the EoI has been submitted and during the Full Proposal submission period, please contact the secretariat (S4Policy@belspo.be)**.**

There is no limitation to the number of proposals a given applicant (person) may participate in, as either Funded/Non-Funded Partner and/or Coordinator.
You will be asked to indicate whether you have already submitted this research proposal to another call to Belspo and/or another funding source when submitting your proposal on our platform.

Deadline for Expressions of Interest:
Monday 13 July 2026 @14h00

Full proposal (Phase 2)

Applicants must submit the Full Proposal via the online Submission Platform. Your proposal should be submitted by the Coordinator of the project.

Note that if the Full Proposal does not comply with the submission rules, i.e. the Full Proposal is not complete or has not been submitted in time, it will not be considered for evaluation.

The full proposal is the ensemble of information and documents describing the intended research activity, its implementation and dissemination. At this stage, the title of the proposal and partner information will have to be confirmed, and applicants will introduce a detailed description of the intended project, including duration, workplan and calendar, budget, data management plan and ethics form.

In case of a network of (funded)partners, it is not required that a collaboration agreement is attached to the proposal. By submitting the proposal, partners bind themselves to implement the project collectively in case of selection. When a proposal is selected for funding, the research contract with BELSPO will not require such an agreement. The Belspo contract itself constitutes an agreement between the respective contracting parties.

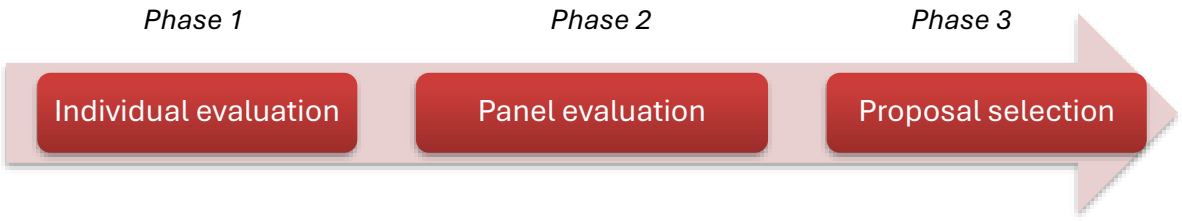
It is not possible to apply for more than one Priority in one Proposal. The Full Proposal that you submit should answer directly to one research priority as described in this information file. The proposal should be within scope of the Priority and must attempt to answer to *all* of the deliverables requested in the call text of the Priority. It is thus not possible to pick only one or two of the deliverables per Priority. In the final selection, only one research project will be selected per topic. In case several proposals are in competition, the proposal scoring highest will be selected.

It is also not possible to submit a new self-chosen research topic.

Deadline for Full Proposals:
Friday 11 September 2026 @14h00

6. Evaluation and selection of proposals

The selection of proposals is based on an international peer-review evaluation of the Full Proposals that guarantees scientific excellence and the alignment of the projects with the project call. The procedure, organised by BELSPO, has an individual evaluation phase, a panel evaluation phase, and finally a proposal selection phase.



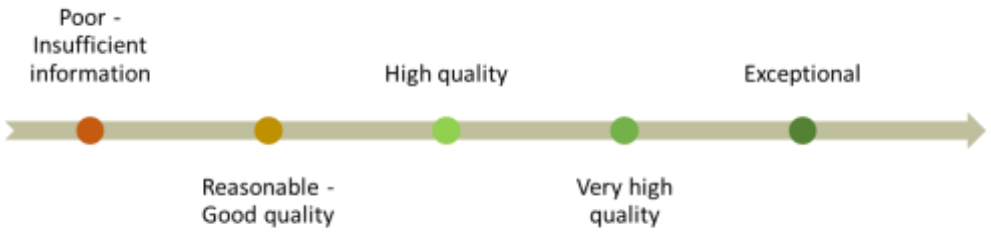
6.1. Written evaluation (Phase 1)

S4Policy proposals will be evaluated by 3 international, independent experts, based and working full time abroad. They are selected by BELSPO based on the summary of the project in the Expressions of Interest submitted by the applicants. In order for the scientific experts to remain impartial and completely **independent** in their judgement, it is important they are able to work **anonymously**. The identity of the scientific experts is therefore not disclosed during or after the evaluation and selection phase.

The written evaluation takes place remotely, via the **online platform**. During this assessment, the experts will only have access to the proposals they will evaluate. They will not know who the other two reviewers are for that proposal, nor will they have access to each other's evaluations.

Each reviewer will assess the proposal and provide comments considering a variety of (sub)criteria, in the categories of scientific quality, quality and efficiency of the implementation and dissemination.

The individual **evaluation criteria** are detailed in a separate document available on the website. Evaluators will assess these aspects of the proposal using the following scale**.**



The **evaluation criteria** are available on the website.

! The individual evaluation reports are **neither communicated to the members of the Programme Committee, nor to the applicants**.

! In order for the scientific experts to remain impartial and completely independent in their judgement, it is important they are able to work anonymously. The identity of the scientific experts is therefore not disclosed.

The individual evaluations constitute working documents in the preparation of the consolidated consensus evaluation report. Therefore, they are neither communicated to the members of the Programme Committee nor to any applicant, nor to any other external person.

6.2. Panel evaluation (Phase 2)

BELSPO will compose a **Panel of experts**.

The Panel will be composed of experts having the broadest possible expertise on the subjects addressed in the Call. These will have not participated to the remote evaluation in the Call[13]. The number of experts in the Panel will depend on the topics and expertise that need to be covered.

Step 1: Pre-drafting of Consensus Report

The individual evaluations for each proposal will be compiled and transmitted to the Panel members.

Each panel member will be tasked to prepare one or several draft consensus reports.

Step 2: Panel meeting

In preparation of the panel meeting, BELSPO will rank the proposals:

1. Translate the appreciations given to each sub-criterion in the draft consensus into numeric scores (from 1 for "poor" to 5 for "exceptional")
2. Add the scores of the sub-criteria to obtain a total for each criterion
3. Add these scores over the three categories: Science quality/implementation/ dissemination
4. Perform a weighted sum of the criteria in the following way:

CRITERIA WEIGHT[14]	
Scientific quality	50%
Quality and efficiency of the implementation	20%
Dissemination	30%

[13] In case of need and as a last resource BELSPO may call upon Panel members to perform remote evaluations, in the same way that if some Panel member finds him/them/herself unable to attend, BELSPO may invite a remote expert to the Panel.

[14] In/out of scope serves only to discard proposals that are not within the scope of the call, and will not be counted as criterion for the 'scientific ranking'.

This ranking serves as input to the discussion in the panel. The outcome of this discussion is a finalised ranking (**Panel Funding Scenario**).

Prior to the meeting, each panel member will have access to:

- the Full proposals
- the Compiled individual evaluations (anonymous)
- the Pre-drafted Consensus Reports

During the meeting, the panel member who has pre-drafted the Consensus Report will present the proposal, followed by a discussion. Panel members reach an agreement regarding the position of the proposal in the **Panel Funding Scenario(s)** and the content of the **Consensus Report**, based on the documents provided.

There is NO rebuttal phase. Applicants will not be asked to present their proposal during the evaluation & selection phase.

- Panel Funding Scenario

  The **Panel Funding Scenario**, based on the pre-drafted document which ranks the proposals according to their score**,** will classify all proposals according to the individual evaluation criteria, and considering the panel evaluation criteria:

  - Budget availability
  - Complementarities and/or overlaps between proposals

  The **Panel Funding Scenario** will be accompanied by a **Panel Report** explaining the ranking.

  The **Panel Funding Scenario** will classify the proposals into:
  - Highly recommended for funding
  - Recommended for funding
  - Not recommended for funding

  The Panel may list the proposals by order of preference for funding or put them in alphabetic order within each category.

- Project Consensus Report

The **Proposal Consensus Report** will consist of appreciations and comments for the different (sub)criteria. It will be based on the information extracted from the Compiled evaluations, pre-drafted by one of the panel members, and the discussions held in the panel meeting.

At this stage, the **Proposal Consensus Report** is definitive. It will not be modified in the subsequent steps of the proposal selection, and it will be used as feedback for the applicants once the final selection of proposals has been made.

For the sake of transparency and to provide the opportunity to improve their proposal(s) for forthcoming Calls, **applicants will receive an anonymised version of their Consensus Report(s)**

6.3. Project selection (Phase 3)

The **Programme Committee** will receive the following documents:

- Summary of the proposals
- Panel Funding Scenario
- Panel Report explaining the Panel Funding Scenario
- Consensus Report of each proposal

Based on these documents, and on the criteria and the rules explained hereunder, the Programme Committee will perform a strategic selection of the proposals, delivering a **Programme Committee Funding Scenario**.

The following aspects will be considered, when formulating a **Programme Committee Funding Scenario** to be transmitted to the **Minister**:

- Added value of the proposal to the research strategies of the Federal departments
- Amount of Co-funding provided by one or more Federal departments

The Funding Scenario will be formulated considering the following rules:

- In NO case will proposals deemed 'out of scope' be considered
- In NO case will proposals deemed 'not recommended for funding' be considered
- In NO case will proposals deemed 'highly recommended for funding' be put aside

The decision on the final selection of projects to be funded is made by the **Federal Minister** in charge of **Science Policy** based on the **Programme Committee Funding Scenario**.

7. CONTACT

Further information can be obtained by contacting the **secretariat**: S4Policy@belspo.be.

8. COMPLAINTS

BELSPO places great importance on the quality of its service and on improving the way it operates. A special form to handle complaints has been created.

The complaint form is available at the following address:
http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/complaints_en.stm

Complaints submitted anonymously or which are offensive or not related to our organisation will not be processed.

A complaint is handled as follows:

- Once your complaint has been filed, a notification of receipt will be sent
- The complaint will be forwarded to the relevant departments and individuals and will be processed within one month

- An answer will be sent by e-mail or letter
- The complaint will be treated with strict confidentiality.

If you are dissatisfied by the initial response to a complaint, you can always contact the Médiateur Fédéral/Federale Ombudsman, rue de Louvain/Leuvenseweg 48 bus 6, 1000 Brussels (email: contact@mediateurfederal.be/contact@federaalombudsman.be).