

SPECIAL RESEARCH FUND
Call 2023
New International Thematic Networks

Announcement and application information

Each year the Flemish Government allocates research funds to Ghent University so as to implement the Flemish Government's Resolution of 3 May 2019. In accordance with this resolution, Ghent University has drawn up rules and regulations regarding the funds of the Special Research Fund (BOF, Bijzonder Onderzoeksfonds) . Each year the Research Council invites research proposals for the different initiatives.

This call concerns:

New International Thematic Networks (ITN)
Starting from 1 January 2024

The submission and evaluation of new ITNs follow a two-step procedure:

The deadline for declaration of intent is
17 February 2023 at 23:59 (Belgian time).

The deadline for full proposals is
31 August 2023 at 23:59 (Belgian time).

Description:

An international thematic network is a body for support, cooperation and advice consisting of Ghent University staff members and international partners concerning a specific topic of excellence in research and education at Ghent University with societal relevance and impact and with a significant focus on research. An international thematic network is one of the three models for strategic international cooperation that have been put forward in the framework of the Integrated Policy Plan for Internationalization, together with the Regional Platforms and the Strategic Institutional Partnerships (SIP) ¹.

Special emphasis is put on collaborations that:

- Focus on networking with high level and/or high potential partners;
- Focus on networking with regard to research;
- Focus on networking with countries, regions or around themes of strategic importance for Ghent University;
- Focus on strengthening the collaboration with partners in the Global South;
- Align themselves with the overall strategic goals of Ghent University and ethical framework for sustainable development and internationalization.

The network of international partners offers an added value through synergy by strengthening the existing capacity and expertise within Ghent University, and/or strengthening the capacity of partners in the South. The network offers support to members of the Ghent University community in the chosen disciplines to engage internationally. It supports the development of new initiatives in research, education, mobility, and service to society. It strives for an increase both in the quality and in resources for the work done within Ghent University around this theme as well as in international visibility. Further, the network promotes the excellence of the institution in this field, thus contributing to the position as an important partner in research, education and service to society and to the international Ghent University brand in general.

According to the main focus of interest several types of ITN can be identified (e.g.):

- ITN with objective of strengthening the existing excellence at Ghent University. For this category a main criterion is to prove the own international excellence and the added value of adding international partners to exploit and to promote this excellence;
- ITN with the objective of strengthening collaboration with partners in the Global South. For this category a main criterion is to prove how collaboration between all partners involved contributes to a mutual exchange of knowledge and capacity building and to international excellence and impact.
- ITN with the objective of strengthening Ghent University's own capacity through the network. For this category, the main criterion is to prove the importance of the theme for the international position of Ghent University and how the excellence of the international partners will contribute to realize this international position.

In the proposal the coordinator has to indicate the main focus of the ITN project, but this does not exclude other objectives or a combination of the above objectives.

Conditions

Each international thematic network is composed of an interdisciplinary group of at least 3 Ghent University professorial (ZAP) and/or post-doc staff members, preferably from different faculties, and professorial/post-doc staff members of minimum 3 different non-Flemish higher education partner organizations.

Ghent University staff members are, at the moment of the deadline of this call, associated with Ghent University either as:

- a member of the tenured academic staff (Zelfstandig Academisch Personeel; ZAP);
- a visiting professor with at least a research assignment;

¹ (see <https://www.ugent.be/en/ghentuniv/principles/internationalisation/policy.htm> and the policy paper 'Strategic Initiatives for International Cooperation', approved by the Board of Governors on 13 March 2015)

- a senior assistant, senior lector, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor or senior full professor within the integration framework at Ghent University who holds a PhD degree;
- or they have an appointment at Ghent University (including “FWO postdoctorale onderzoekers” and “IWT onderzoeksmandaten”), the University Hospital, VIB Ghent, IMEC Ghent, iMinds Ghent and/or Vlerick Gent Management School or at one of the Universities of Applied Sciences (“hogescholen”) from the Ghent University Association and hold a PhD degree.

The network is coordinated by a Ghent University professorial staff member (ZAP) as chair of the steering committee with representations of Ghent University and the international partner organizations. The coordinator is responsible for the development, the implementation and the organization of the network’s initiatives and acts as the sole authorized person for the granted budget.

If the coordinator (ZAP) will retire during the course of the network funding, it is compulsory to add another Ghent university staff member who is:

- a member of the tenured academic staff (Zelfstandig Academisch Personeel)
 - a visiting professor with at least a research assignment
- The coordinator actively looks for opportunities internally and externally to broaden the impact of Ghent University.

Funding

New International Thematic Networks receive a funding amount of **60.000 € per year** for a period of **5 years** for coordination (including but not restricted to personnel costs, operational costs, travel etc.). Upon completion and successful evaluation of a first 5-year period, existing International Thematic Networks can re-apply for a second 5-year funding period with reduced funding support of 30.000 € per year. The max. funding duration for ITNs is limited to 10 years. After two 5-year funding periods the ITN cannot apply for further renewal, but may further benefit from the general and technical support from the central internationalization services upon agreement. The funding period for proposals selected in this call is 2024-2028. In case of non-selection, one re-application is possible in a next call. An application as new ITN on the same topic is not allowed.

The ITN allowance is considered to be start-up financing and/or seed money with the aim of creating the structure and capacity to initiate coordinated cooperation actions, to generate new project funding, and eventually to become sustainable in the long term.

Co-funding

The network is required to contribute and demonstrate co-funding in addition to the Ghent University allowance, so that the total turnover of the ITN amounts to min. 120.000 € per year (or min. 600.000 € for the full duration of the 5-year funding period). This implies that the ITN have to demonstrate a co-funding of 60.000 € per year during their first 5-year funding period, and 90.000 € per year during their second 5-year funding period.

The sort of co-funding is undefined, but the amount of co-funding must be real and verifiable. It may result from external sources (obtained from national and international funding programmes), and/or be contributed by the partner universities themselves to demonstrate and/or ensure a sustainable commitment to achieve the goals of the ITN. Examples of such co-funding contributions are consortium membership fees (free of overhead), travel costs, organizational costs (workshops, summer schools ...), wages for well-defined verifiable tasks (PhD, visiting staff, supporting staff), ...

The co-funding may be unequal between partners (both the involved Ghent University groups as the external partners), but the full proposal must be clear in how the co-funding is realized and which partners contribute. The application should also show how in the long term full self-financing could be realized.

Submission

- The application has to be submitted electronically as a PDF document (converted from a Word document²) by mail to marieke.merckx@ugent.be. You will receive an email confirming the receipt of the application³.
- The application has to be written in English. Text needs to be written in font Arial 10, spacing 1.15.
- The documents have to be named as follows:
- Declaration of Intent: "acronym_ITN_DoI_2024_28"
- Full proposal: "acronym_ITN_FP_2024_28"
- Send the application form and annexes in one PDF-file.

DEADLINES

The selection procedure for new International Thematic Networks is divided into two phases:

- Declaration of intent: 17 February 2023 at 23:59 (Belgian time).
- Full proposal: 31 August 2023 at 23:59 (Belgian time).

The deadline will be strictly respected; late or incomplete applications will be rejected without review.

Evaluation and granting

In this first phase, the Declarations of Intent (DoI) are evaluated by a designated selection committee of the Internationalization Council, with a balanced representation of at least 3 representatives from the Internationalization Council and from the Research Council.

After a decision has been made on the Requests for Renewal (see call existing ITN), the selection committee will advise which proposals can work out a full proposal for the second round, thereby giving an indication of the maximum number of new ITNs that can receive funding (taken into account the success rate in the renewal group).

In the second phase, the Full Proposals will be evaluated by the same selection committee that evaluated the declarations of intent. Based on the written proposal of the selection committee, the Internationalisation Council selects the Full Proposals and issues a reasoned advice including a proposal concerning the source of funding for the selected Full Proposals, to the Research Council. In turn the Research Council will issue a reasoned advice for the allocation of research funds (from the Special Research Fund) to the selected ITNs. The decision is made by the chairperson of the Research Council. The Board of Governors has given the chairperson the authority to do so.

The selection will be based on the following specific evaluation criteria, in addition to the overall goals for the Ghent University strategic international cooperation:

DECLARATION OF INTENT

- Justification of the proposed theme and selected partners of the network and added value of working with these partners internationally
- Added value of the ITN for Ghent University: how will the ITN reinforce the university-wide policy choices and international strategy of Ghent University? How will the ITN contribute to the international reputation and visibility of Ghent University and its branding strategy?
- Societal relevance and impact of the activities and the network
- Interaction between education, research and services to society within the network

² Via File < Export < Create PDF/XPS document

³ e-mails are not generated automatically, it is possible that there is some delay in receiving a confirmation e-mail.

FULL PROPOSAL

- Overall quality of the proposal with
 - the clear links between research, education and services to society
 - the implementation of the main objective(s) of the ITN
 - the opportunities for the Ghent University community in the international environment
 - feasibility of the proposed activities
 - networking plan, collaboration among partners and added value of acting as a network
- Expected outcomes (co-publications, gradually approach to joint PhDs, jointly organized educational programmes, capacity building projects,...)
- Proposed management structure (with emphasis on the role of the partners, with special emphasis on the importance for Ghent University)
- Proposed financial plan

Results and feedback

Preselection: March 2023. The promoters of the selected declarations of intent will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Final selection: The selection committee selects the new ITN based on the full proposal in September 2023. The Research Council validates the selection in October 2023. The results will be published online on the website of the Special Research fund one day after the meeting of the Research Council.

Promoters of non-awarded applications can always request feedback by sending an e-mail to the Special Research Fund ((Marieke.merckx@ugent.be) after the publication of the results.

All applicants will also receive a letter or mail from the Chairperson of the Research Council with the selection result.

Reporting and Evaluation

Learning network of ITN: yearly cycle

As soon as possible after the confirmation of the new ITN by the Research Council, a startup meeting will be organized by the International Relations Office for the newly approved ITN. After this startup meeting, the newly approved ITN will join the existing ITN in a yearly reporting cycle within a learning network of all ITN.

This cycle consists of the following elements:

- May 20xx – work meeting for all ITN, where at least the following topics will be addressed:
 - Short introduction of the newly approved ITN
 - Progress report of the existing ITN + discussion among peers
 - Transversal topics / questions with relevance to all ITN
- October 20xx - work meeting for all ITN, where at least the following topics will be addressed:
 - Presentation of action plan by the new ITN
 - Final evaluation of ITN in their final year of funding (Y5 / Y10) + discussion among peers
 - Transversal topics / questions with relevance to all ITN
- December 20xx – Networking moment for all ITN, Regional Platforms and SIPs

Reporting and evaluation

Besides the yearly cycle of the learning ITN-network, every ITN is also expected to provide the director of Internationalisation with a short yearly report for which a template will be provided. The yearly report will be kept as 'light' as possible and the overlap between Global Minds reporting and the general ITN reporting will be kept as minimal as possible.

The director for Internationalization will evaluate the yearly reporting and provide feedback to the ITN. In case problems are detected, the director for Internationalization will ask the Internationalisation Council for advice. The Internationalisation Council can then decide to formulate a proposal for remediation for the ITN or formulate an advice regarding the discontinuation of the ITN.

At the end of their funding period (Y5 or Y10), every ITN will have to submit their final evaluation, regardless whether the ITN will apply for a renewal. When the ITN is applying for a renewal, the final evaluation will be discussed and evaluated by the selection committee in the scope of the new call for renewals. When the ITN is not applying for a renewal, the final evaluation will also be discussed by the Internationalisation Council, after which the final evaluation and conclusions will be sent to the Research Council for information purposes.

Additional information

For additional information, please mail to Marieke.merckx@ugent.be or tel. 09/331.01.16 or the secretary of the Research Council Dr. Dirk De Craemer.

APPLICATION INFORMATION FOR DECLARATION OF INTENT

The application form for the short GOA project proposal (to be completed in English) consists of 3 parts:

- Part I: personal details of at least 3 Ghent University promotor(s)
- Part II: personal details of at least 3 network partners
- Part III: Description of the proposal
 - Main focus of the ITN according to main objective
 - Explain the choice of the theme/topic of the network, the main focus of interest (type of ITN) and the selection of the network partners – *max. 500 words*
 - Explain the societal relevance and impact of the ITN – *max. 500 words*
 - Project pitch: How will the ITN reinforce the international reputation of Ghent University in view of branding? – *max. 500 words*
 - Describe and explain the impact and added value for the Ghent University community –*max. 500 words*
 - How will the ITN contribute to the university-wide policy choices? – *max. 250 words*
 - Describe the role of the Ghent University coordinator of the network, and the planned (or existing) interactions between the network partners (with emphasis on the interaction between education, research and services to society) – *max. 750 words*

APPLICATION INFORMATION FOR FULL PROPOSAL

The application form of the full ITN project proposal (to be completed in English) consists of 7 parts:

- Part I: personal details for the Ghent University promotor(s)
- Part II: Personal details of the network partners
 - List
 - Indicate which partners have joined / left since the Declaration of Intent (1st phase)
- Part III: Description of the proposal
 - Consortium - Explain the choice of the specific theme / topic of the network, taking into account the goals set within the policy content – *max 1500 words*
 - What are the Ghent University strengths for the thematic approach for this International network ?
 - What are the reasons for choosing the particular partners within the thematic network?
 - What are the long term goals you hope to achieve by coordinating the thematic network?
 - Activities - Describe the planned cooperation and roadmap of activities between the network partners (in education, research and services to society) during the funding period of 5 years – *max. 1000 words*
 - What type of activities will be developed by the consortium in education, research and service to society?
 - What will be the specific role and the added value of the different partners in the development of these activities?
 - What will be the role of Ghent University as the coordinator, and specific responsibilities of the partners?
 - Which dissemination activities are planned?
 - Impact - Describe the impact and added value of the ITN – *max. 1000 words*
 - What will this international thematic network add to the existing cooperation between the partners and to the academic quality of the partnership (cf. joint activities in international research and educational projects, ...)?
 - How will this network contribute to the academic quality of the individual partners?
 - How does the network aim to have an impact within Ghent University?

- How does the network aim to have societal impact?
- Part IV: Organizational structure: describe the proposed management structure, the process of decision making and role division between Ghent University and the partner institutions – *max. 750 words*
- Part V: Budget:
 - Describe the overall financial break-down (allowance + co-funding) by personnel costs, main actions, dissemination, and resources – *use table template*
 - Demonstrate how the ITN will realize the co-funding and total turnover of 120.000 € per year – *max. 250 words*
- Part VI: Data Management Plan: When research funding is granted by BOF and IOF, the researchers (promoters or holders of a pre-doctoral or post-doctoral fellowship) will be asked to draw up a data management plan (DMP) and add it to the project file in GISMO within 6 months after the start of the project.
 Researchers are also expected to keep the DMP up-to-date in the course of the project and are accountable for the data management of their projects at any time. 3 months after the end of the project at the latest, the researchers need to upload the final draft of the DMP in GISMO. For information and the DMP template, please refer to <https://www.ugent.be/en/research/datamanagement/policies/ghent-university.htm#BOF-andIOF-fundedresearch>. Questions about writing a DMP or the templates can be addressed to rdm.support@ugent.be.
- Part VII: Short CV's of Ghent University promoters and participating partners – *max. 1 page per person*
- Part VIII: A signed individual, personal letter of endorsement by each of the international partners. After selection a letter of endorsement on institutional level is required by each of the partners to formalize their commitment to network.

The application has to be written in English, in font Arial 10, spacing 1.15. If the lay-out, font type or titles have been modified, the application will be considered as ineligible.