

SPECIAL RESEARCH FUND
Call 2024
Renewal of 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:

Renewal of International Thematic Networks (ITN)
Starting from 1 January 2025

The deadline for requests for renewal is
Thursday 29 August 2024 at 23:59 (Belgian time).

Scope of the call:

Existing ITN who are at the end of the first 5-year funding period can re-apply for a second funding period with reduced (50%) UGent funding support. An application as new ITN on the same topic is not allowed.

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 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.

This call only contains information about **the renewal of existing International Thematic Networks**, who are at the end of the first 5-year funding cycle.

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

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)

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;
- 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 “VLAIO innovatiemandaten”), 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). The coordinator actively looks for opportunities internally and externally to broaden the impact of Ghent University.

Funding

Upon completion 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** (including but not restricted to personnel costs, operational costs, travel etc.). The funds for the approved ITN will be allocated from the Special Research Fund and / or the Global Minds fund, depending on the topic and the country of origin of the partners. 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.

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 support services upon agreement. The funding period for proposals selected in this call is 2025-2029. An application as new ITN on the same topic is not allowed.

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 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 request for renewal has to be submitted 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.

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.

- The application has to be written in English. Text needs to be written in font Arial 10, spacing 1.15.
- The document has to be named as follows: “acronym_ITN_FP_2025_29”
- The application form and annexes are preferably sent in one PDF-file, but two separate files are also allowed

DEADLINE

The deadline for the submission of the application for renewal is **29 August 2024 at 23:59** (Belgian time). The deadline will be strictly respected; late or incomplete applications will be rejected without review.

Evaluation and granting

The application will be evaluated by a designated selection committee composed of:

- 3 members of the Internationalisation Council (alpha, beta, gamma)
- 3 members of the Research Council (alpha, beta, gamma)

The selection committee will be supported by the following members of the central support services, who will take up an advisory role:

- Global Minds coordinator
- Policy Advisor International Relations Office
- Head of the Research Coordination Office

Based on the written proposal of the selection committee, including a proposal concerning the source of funding for the selected proposals, 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:

Self-evaluation of the first funding period

- Results and impact of the activities of the first funding period
 - Key results, related to the indicators formulated in the first application
 - Impact generated for Ghent University and for the partners
 - Reflection on progress achieved, related to the initial objectives of the network, and – if applicable – changes in focus / objectives
- Stakeholder engagement and communication
 - Synergies or complementarities between the ITN and other (non)academic actors both in Belgium and abroad
 - Evaluation of the actions undertaken to inform, engage internal and external stakeholders, both regarding the topic of your network and regarding the ITN as policy instrument
- Management of the network
 - Involvement of the partners, organizational structure
 - Co-funding acquired

Proposal for ITN renewal

- Justification and added value of a **second funding period**.
 - Added value for Ghent University and network partners
 - Expected outcomes in terms of research, education and services to society (e.g. co-publications, gradually approach to joint PhDs, jointly organized educational programmes, capacity building projects,...)
 - Changes and adaptations based on previous experience
 - Innovative character and enhanced impact of second funding period
- **Overall quality** of the proposal with the clear links between research, education and services to society
 - Implementation of the main objective(s) of the ITN in relation to the planned activities
 - Opportunities for the Ghent University community in the international environment
 - Choice of partners
 - Feasibility of the proposed activities and activity plan

- Networking plan, proposed management structure (role and added value of all partners), added value of acting as a network
- Expected impact for Ghent University and your partners
- Proposed **financial plan**:
 - Extent to which the network will overcome the decrease in funding from Ghent University
 - Co-funding
 - Sustainability of the network in the long term

Results and feedback

The selection committee selects the ITN for renewal in September 2024. The Research Council validates the selection in October 2024. 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.

Monitoring

Learning network of ITN: yearly cycle of meetings where the ITN promoters and coordinators can exchange experiences, and learn from each other

- Feb / March 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
- Oct / Nov 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

Besides the yearly cycle of the learning ITN-network, every ITN is also expected to provide the central administration with a short yearly report for which a template will be provided. These narrative reports will be included in the annual report of Ghent University, and – when the ITN receives funding via Global Minds – will be used in the yearly report to VLIR-UOS.

The support staff will read the yearly reporting, provide feedback to the ITN and take into account the recommendations formulated by the ITN. A short summarizing report will be presented to the WOS, Research Council and Internationalisation Council for information purposes.

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

Additional information

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