

Call for Proposals for  
**‘Multinational Research Projects on  
Ethical, Legal, and Social Aspects (ELSA)  
of Neuroscience’**

**Submission deadline for proposals: May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 14:00 CEST**

**Electronic proposal submission**

**Proposal template**

For further information, please visit us on the web

**<http://www.neuron-eranet.eu>**

or contact

ELSA Neurosciences Joint Call Secretariat  
Project Management Agency  
Part of the German Aerospace Center (DLR-PT)  
- Health Research -

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## 1. Purpose

Neuroscientific research yields constant progress regarding our basic understanding of the structure and function of the human brain under healthy and pathological conditions. This knowledge is fundamental for the development of new diagnostics and treatments for patients suffering from neurological or psychiatric diseases. At the same time, the neurosciences have implications for the understanding, and thus potentially also the control, of human decision-making, behaviour, emotions, and social interactions. Findings of the neurosciences can furthermore deeply affect human self-understanding and conscience as such. Therefore, it is of major importance to investigate the ethical, legal, and social aspects (ELSA) of the neurosciences and their recent advances. This knowledge helps to ensure that neuroscientific methods and findings are utilized in ways which are of the best possible benefit for our society. The high societal relevance of the neurosciences is underlined by continuously high public interest and ongoing public discourse on this topic.

The 'Network of European Funding for Neuroscience Research' (NEURON) has been established under the ERA-NET scheme of the European Commission (<http://www.neuron-eranet.eu>). The ERA-NET NEURON aims to coordinate and optimize research efforts and funding programmes of its partner countries/regions in the field of disease related neuroscience. Under the umbrella of NEURON, several joint transnational calls (JTCs) have been launched on different neuroscientific topics from 2008 to 2022. In acknowledgement of the high societal relevance of the neurosciences, this year, the fourth separate and additional JTC on **Ethical, Legal, and Social Aspects (ELSA) of Neuroscience** is now launched in parallel to the regular NEURON JTC, which focusses on “Mechanisms of resilience and vulnerability to environmental challenges in mental health”.

The following funding organizations have agreed to fund the joint call for multinational research projects on ELSA of Neuroscience. The call will be conducted simultaneously by the respective national and regional funding organizations and coordinated centrally by the ELSA Neurosciences Joint Call Secretariat.

- Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique -FNRS (F.R.S.-FNRS), Belgium
- Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Germany
- National Institute of Health Carlos III (ISCIII), Spain
- Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), Switzerland
- National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), Taiwan

## 2. Aim of the call

The aim of the call is to facilitate multinational, collaborative research projects that will address important questions regarding ethical, philosophical, legal and socio-cultural aspects related to the neurosciences and their recent advances, to provide scientific knowledge for an informed debate in science and society, evaluate opportunities and risks associated with technological and methodological progress and to expand the general knowledge base. This will help the various stakeholders in politics, science and society to gain a better understanding of these aspects and provides the basis for the development of a legal framework for neuroscience and for drafting general guidelines for the practical application of technologies and methods.

Funded projects may address, but are not limited to the following exemplary thematic fields:

- a) the consequences of the development of neuroscientific diagnostic methods (e.g. handling of incidental findings; the “right not to know”; very early disease prediction before symptoms occur; diagnosis in absence of treatment options; interactions between socio-culturally diverse patients and health personnel; (equal) access to novel expensive methods; unintended use and/or misuse),
- b) issues in clinical research with patients suffering from neurological or psychiatric diseases (e.g. developing tools to improve the assessment of decision-making capacity of patients, analysis of legal measures to protect those who do not have the capacity to consent),
- c) intelligent technologies and close human-machine interaction (e.g. ambient assisted living, brain-computer interfaces, machine learning); personality changes as side effects of neurological or psychiatric therapies (e.g. deep brain stimulation; brain implants),
- d) biobanking of neural tissue (e.g. tissue donation, deceased donor, possible consequences for relatives),
- e) use of brain data; brain interventions in legal contexts (e.g. neurorights, data protection, “brain reading” for the detection of deception; brain intervention of offenders; psychosurgery; insurance law),
- f) the impact of modern neuroscience on traditional philosophical questions, concepts and theories regarding fundamental aspects of human nature (e.g. the relationship between mind and brain, the nature of consciousness, self- and personal identity, free will),
- g) neuroenhancement such as alteration of mental states (cognitive, affective) and abilities (e.g. cognition, sleep, appetite, sexual behaviour) in healthy subjects by pharmacological or by electrical/magnetic brain stimulation,
- h) abnormal behaviour reduced to deviant brain states (e.g. expansion of the concept of neurotypical brain and illness; seeing psychiatric symptoms merely as specific neurochemical imbalances),
- i) societal and cultural changes induced by neuroscientific knowledge and its application,

j) responsible research an innovation in neurotechnology and neuroscience.

The individual components of joint applications should be complementary and should contain novel, ambitious ideas to answer key questions or lead to a step-wise change in understanding. There should be clear added value in funding the collaboration over the individual projects.

All scientific disciplines and stakeholders, which are relevant for the specific ELSA-research question, should be integrated. This could be for instance experts from the fields of neuroscience, psychology, medicine, informatics, engineering, philosophy, theology, law, social sciences, cultural studies or healthcare economy. Depending on the research question, it may also be necessary to integrate (pharmaceutical) industry, health insurances, patients, relatives, patient representatives or other groups of persons who are directly affected.

Projects should go beyond purely analytical or descriptive levels related to the past or present. Based on their analyses, the applicants should aim at giving prospects for the future and developing proposals for socio-compatible use of neuroscientific advances. Additionally, the applicants should develop and implement concepts for effective public communication of their results. Communication of the results on an international level is desirable.

NEURON seeks to strengthen public and patient engagement in research and thereby empowerment. Applicants are expected to engage citizens and/or patients, where appropriate, in their research process. Meaningful public and patient engagement can occur at the level of research planning, conducting research or research result dissemination.

***Proposals without primarily ethical, legal and/or social implication cannot be funded.***

### **3. Application**

#### **3.1 Eligibility**

Joint transnational research proposals may be submitted by research teams working in universities (or other higher education institutions), non-university public research institutes, hospitals and other health care settings, as well as in commercial companies, particularly small and medium-size enterprises. **The eligibility of the afore-mentioned institutions, together with details of eligible costs (e.g., personnel, material, consumables, travel money, investments), are subject to the administrative requirements of individual funding organizations and will therefore differ.** Please note that, for some funding organizations, commercial companies are not eligible or are only eligible under certain conditions (e.g., only in partnership with academic institutions in the consortium). Clarification should be obtained from the individual funding agencies (see contact details below). **It is strongly recommended to read carefully fundors' specific information regarding eligibility and funding and to contact the respective funding organisations, since additional national/regional procedures might be mandatory.**

Only transnational projects will be funded. Each consortium submitting a proposal must be comprised of a minimum of two research groups from two different countries eligible for funding by organizations listed in this call text (see above). Not more than two research groups can be from the same country. The total number of research groups in a consortium must not exceed five, including partners participating with their own expenses.

Research groups not eligible to their national/regional funding organizations or from countries which are not involved in this call may participate in projects only if a) their participation clearly provides an added value to the consortium AND b) they present evidence on secured budget for their part in the project. Such potential partners are not considered in the minimum number of two research groups mentioned above. In any case, the total number of research groups in one consortium must not exceed five.

Each consortium should have the critical mass to achieve ambitious scientific goals and **should clearly demonstrate added value** from working together. Each consortium must nominate a coordinator who represents the consortium externally and is responsible for its internal management (e.g. application, coordination of consortium agreement drafting, reporting, etc.). The consortium coordinator must be eligible for funding by one of the organizations listed in this call text.

A single proposal must be submitted by the consortium coordinator to ELSA Neurosciences Joint Call Secretariat. The individual research partners will be funded by the NEURON funding organization(s) of their respective countries. Eligibility criteria are the matter of individual partner funding organizations and additional national/regional regulations and requirements may apply.

**Non-eligibility of a research partner applying for funding (according to the specific regulations of their respective funding organisation) may result in the rejection of the entire proposal without further review.** Therefore, applicants are strongly advised to follow the instructions contained in the funder-specific eligibility tables which are published on the NEURON website and to contact their national/regional funding organization to confirm eligibility before submitting an application.

Only projects that fulfil the legal and ethical international/EU regulations (including ethical standards and guidelines in Horizon EUROPE) as well as national and institutional standards will be funded. All proposed activities including those undertaken in countries outside the EU must comply with EU regulations (see Annex I of the proposal). Ethical approval and/or a positive vote must be obtained from the relevant national or local ethics committee(s) prior to the start of respective studies. The obtainment of ethical clearance will be queried by ERA-NET NEURON. All procedures involving human beings must conform to the Helsinki Declaration.

### **3.2 Submission of joint transnational proposals**

There will be a **one-stage procedure** for joint proposals. One joint **proposal document** (in English, see [template here](#)) shall be prepared by the partners of a joint transnational proposal, and must be submitted to the ELSA Joint Call Secretariat by the coordinator.

Proposals must be submitted in electronic format no later than **May 4, 2023** (14:00:00 CEST) via the **electronic submission** system. All fields must be completed using **DIN-A4; font: Arial, 10pt; single-spaced, page limits**.

**Proposals that do not meet the formal criteria will be rejected from the call process without any further review.**

### **3.3 Further information**

For further details, please refer to the respective submission forms available through the NEURON website <https://www.neuron-eranet.eu/joint-calls/elsa/elsa-jtc2023-neuroethics/>. If you need additional information, please contact the ELSA Neurosciences Joint Call Secretariat. Finally, national/regional organizations may set special requirements for their applicants. Applicants are, therefore, strongly advised to review the instructions contained in the country-specific information published on the NEURON website and to contact their national/regional funding organization for further information (see Annex I for contact details).

## **4. Evaluation and decision**

The review process will be in one stage.

### **4.1 Eligibility check of proposals**

The ELSA Neurosciences Joint Call Secretariat will check the proposals to ensure that they meet the call's formal criteria (e.g. date of submission; number of participating countries; inclusion of all necessary information according to the respective template in English). The ELSA Neurosciences Joint Call Secretariat will also forward the proposals to the national/regional funding organisations, which will perform a formal check of compliance with their respective regulations. Proposals not meeting the formal criteria will be rejected at this stage.

The Call Steering Committee may reject proposals if they are clearly outside the scope of the call.

Proposals passing these check points will be forwarded to the joint Peer Review Panel for evaluation.

### **4.2 Peer-review of proposals**

The reviewers will carry out the evaluation according to the following specific evaluation criteria:

1. Excellence
  - Scientific quality of the approach and methodology
  - Quality of the experimental design and data analysis

- Novelty of the scientific concept/hypotheses
  - Competence and experience of participating research partners in the field(s) of the proposal (previous work in the field, specific expertise)
2. Impact
    - Potential impact of the expected results on the objectives of the call
    - Added-value of transnational collaboration
    - Potential impact for patients; ethical aspects.
  3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation
    - Feasibility of the project
    - Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, resources, time-frame and related risk analysis
    - Quality, complementarity and added-value of collaborative and multi-disciplinary interactions within the consortium
    - Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures

### **4.3 Decision**

An international Peer Review Panel will evaluate the proposals based on the above mentioned evaluation criteria and establish a ranking list of the fundable proposals by scientific assessment. Based on this ranking list the Call Steering Committee will determine the projects to be funded, taking into account the national/regional budgets available. These recommendations will inform the final decisions which will be made by the funding agencies and will be subject to budgetary considerations.

## **5. Funding procedure / Responsibilities / Reporting requirements**

### **5.1 Funding procedure**

Successful research groups will be funded directly by their respective funding. Funding will be administered according to the terms and conditions of the responsible funding organizations, taking into account all other applicable regulations and legal requirements.

Funding is expected to start early in 2024. Projects can be funded for a period of up to three years. Neutral-cost extensions may be granted for individual research groups according to respective funding organizations' regulations and in agreement with the coordinator if appropriate and necessary.

### **5.2 Responsibilities**

Within a joint proposal, each research partner will be the contact person for the relevant national/regional funding organization. The coordinators of funded projects together with the respective funding agencies shall make every effort to seek a common start date for all research groups in the consortium.

After the evaluation and selection procedures are completed, each consortium selected to be funded is required to draft a Consortium Agreement (CA) and a data management plan (DMP). The CA will agree on a common project start date, manage the delivery of project activities, finances and intellectual property rights (IPR), and avoid disputes which might be detrimental to the completion of the

project. **With the first annual report the coordinator must provide the DMP and the CA signed by all parties to the ELSA Joint Call Secretariat.** Please note that additional national/regional rules might require the documents before the start of the project to release funds, please refer to the country specific information section.

### **5.3 Reporting Requirements**

On behalf of the research consortium, the respective coordinator will be required to submit annual scientific progress reports on the consortium and one final report in the end, to the ELSA Neurosciences Joint Call Secretariat. Additionally, individual partners may be required to submit reports separately to their national funding organization. In that case, reporting guidance will be forwarded by the relevant funding organization, as applicable.

Annual reports must be submitted by April, 30, starting in 2025. Final reports must be submitted six months after the end of the project at the latest. Annual reports do not need to be submitted if the project ends between January and March on the last year. In the latter case, the submission of a final report three months after the end of the project will suffice.

In exceptional cases, partners may be granted runtimes of different start and/or duration according to the respective funders' decision. It is the task of the coordinators to determine, in agreement with the consortia, a formal end date for project completion; usually the latest end date of individual national contracts. Coordinators will be informed about this procedure by the Joint Call Secretariat and will receive the report templates in due course.

The coordinator will be asked to present a progress report during an intermediate status symposium. The attendance is obligatory for all coordinators and project partners. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in administrative and/or financial sanctions according to the rules of each funding organization. Students and postdoctoral researchers working on the projects are welcome to join the midterm symposium. Accordingly, travel expenses to attend the symposium should be included in the proposal budget plans.

Funding recipients must ensure that all outcomes (publications, etc.) of transnational NEURON projects include a proper acknowledgement of ERA-NET NEURON and the respective funding partner organizations, and are in line with the relevant publication requirements. All the publications resulting from funded projects must be published in adherence to the EC Open Science Policy.

### **5.4 General data protection regulation**



Applicants are informed that their personal data submitted in their application to the call are processed in accordance with article 6.1 (e) and (c) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2016/679)<sup>1</sup>, and for the purposes of

- processing and evaluating the application where processing shall be lawful only if and to the extent that processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller;
- administering any subsequent funding award;
- managing the funding organizations relationship with them;
- analysing and evaluating the call;
- providing aggregate data to national and European surveys and analyses on the funded projects; and

The Call Steering Committee may share applicant's data with third parties (some of which may be based outside the European Economic Area<sup>2</sup>) in relation to the above activities including evaluators, auditors and the European Commission (or its agencies).

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<sup>1</sup> Last name, first name of the researchers, date of birth, professional contact information, degree(s), position (current and previous), fields of activity, place of work, organisation, address(es), curriculum vitae, ORCID number, name and reference of projects, pre-proposals, project proposals (scientific document, administrative and financial appendix).

<sup>2</sup> Countries and regions partaking in ERA-NET NEURON outside the European Economic Area: Canada, Israel, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey and UK.

## Annex I

Please note that country specific requirements apply to this call. **Compliance with the national/regional regulations specified in the funder's specific information is mandatory. We strongly advise you to contact your national/regional representative prior to submitting a proposal:**

Country /Region	Contact person(s)	Links to national/regional calls mentioning particular requirements
Belgium	Dr Florence Quist	Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS (F.R.S.-FNRS) international@frs-fnrs.be Phone: +32 2 504 93 51
	Mr. Joël Groeneveld	Phone: +32 2 504 92 70
Germany	Dr Anna Gossen	Project Management Agency (DLR-PT) – Health Research, on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) Anna.Gossen@dlr.de Phone: +49 228 3821 1684
	Dr Katja Jensen	Katja.Jensen@dlr.de Phone: +49 228 3821 1150
Spain	Mauricio García Franco	National Institute of Health Carlos III (ISCIII)  mauriciog@isciii.es Phone: (+34) 91 822 28 85
	María Cristina Nieto García	mnieto@isciii.es Phone: (+34) 91 822 24 43
Switzerland	Dr Francis Parlange	Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) Projects Life Sciences  francis.parlange@snf.ch Phone: +41 31 308 23 85
	Dr Carolin von Schoultz	carolin.vonschoultz@snf.ch +41 31 308 23 25
Taiwan	Dr Ching-Mei Tang	National Science and Technology Council (NSTC)  cmtom@nstc.gov.tw Phone: +886 2 2737 7557

## Annex II. Anticipated amount of funding provided by each partner

Country / Region	Funding organization	Anticipated amount of funding (for 3 years)	Anticipated number of fundable research groups
Belgium	Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS ( F.R.S.-FNRS)	€ 50.000	1
Germany	Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)	€ 1.500.000	5-9

Spain	National Institute of Health Carlos III (ISCIII)	€ 250.000	2-5
Switzerland	Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)	CHF 900.000 (~ € 925.000)	3
Taiwan	National Science and Technology Council (NSTC)	€ 810.000	2-3

### Annex III. Call Timetable

Early December, 2022	Preliminary Announcement of the Joint Transnational Call
<b>9 January, 2023</b>	<b>Launch of the Joint Transnational Call</b>
<b>4 May, 2023</b>	<b>Deadline (submission of proposals) 14:00 CEST</b>
Mid-September, 2023	Peer Review Panel meeting to assess the proposals
Early in 2024	Start of funding