

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF A COLLECTIVE REDUCTION IN WORKING TIME

Call for research proposals 2023

Information document for applicants

Deadline proposals: 23/10/2023 - 14h00

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	CONTEXT	3
2.	IMPLEMENTATION	3
3.	CALL DESCRIPTION	3
4.	GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS	4
	<i>4.1. Documentation related to this call</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>4.2. Budget and duration</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>4.3. Eligibility of applications</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>4.4. Budget rules</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>4.5. IPR, Open Science, ethics, gender</i>	<i>6</i>
5.	EVALUATION AND SELECTION	7
6.	CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS	7
	<i>6.1. Contracts</i>	<i>7</i>
	<i>6.2. Reports and progress meetings</i>	<i>8</i>

1. CONTEXT

The Council of Ministers has validated on 17 February 2023 the Action Plan in execution of the measures adopted during the Employment Conference in 2021. One of these measures was the “collective reduction in working time and 4-day workweek” (find more here in [NL](#) and [FR](#)).

Whilst a state of play has been realised by the Federal Planning Bureau, it is essential to complement this preliminary work by a scientifically sound evaluation of this measure in terms of employment, wellbeing, productivity and climate effects. The aim of this call for proposals is to select the team that can best provide this evaluation for the above-mentioned dimensions.

The expected outcome of this project should enable the government to identify the advantages and limitations of the measure and, if needed, define more adequate support to companies who engage in collectively reducing working time on a voluntary basis. As a secondary outcome, the close collaboration in all stages of the project between the selected scientific team and the FPB is capacity building within the Federal Planning Bureau.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

In the evaluation phase, BELSPO will be assisted by a Selection committee composed of the Federal Planning Bureau, the cabinet of the Minister of employment and BELSPO.

The follow-up and valorisation of the projects will be done by BELSPO.

3. CALL DESCRIPTION

To this day, very few scientific studies in Belgium and abroad have thoroughly evaluated the effect of a collective reduction in working time (RWT) on the volume of employment, the productivity, the financial viability of companies, the wellbeing of workers, and the eventual reduction (or increase) in greenhouse gas emissions associated with this measure. The few existing studies focus on employment using large administrative datasets but do not allow to form a clear view on the associated impacts. More recently, pilot-experiments have been used to study productivity and wellbeing, but they remain specific, and the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts.

Whilst there is no scientific consensus, we see that since the corona crisis, RWT is again high on the agenda. In many countries, a growing number of companies are testing and even adopting the 4-day workweek (i.e. working time is reduced overall without pay loss). This trend is noted in the US, the UK, Spain... In the vast majority of cases, these experiments are run without any public intervention (for example a specific subsidy) and seem to successfully reduce the overall working time without production losses by reorganising work among teams.

To fill the scientific gap and provide the government with a clearer view on the utility and adequacy of federal support to RWT, the FPB proposes to work closely with a scientific team to organise an experiment linked to a survey. The idea is to follow up a sample of companies that are willing to voluntarily reduce working time on a weekly basis for a period of 6 months. The scientific team to select will assist the FPB in sourcing firms, selecting the sample, defining measurements in terms of employment, wellbeing, productivity and climate effects (before, during and after).

The team should be familiar with statistical methods and be acquainted with working conditions and arrangements within companies, particularly because companies who are willing to embark on RWT will need to adapt their work organisation. The team should also have proven knowledge in measuring employee wellbeing and the way it may vary across company size, sector...

The RWT envisaged should be large enough – we aim at companies that adopt a 4-days workweek with a substantial reduction of working time (say 32 hours per week) to enable measuring tangible effects. Special attention should be dedicated to the financial public support received by these companies in the evaluation. We expect clear recommendations to the government on the role of this funding scheme.

The companies that decide to participate in this experiment do it on a voluntary basis. The aim is to recruit companies in different sectors and of different sizes and create a sample that would be as representative as possible of the Belgian economy. The methodology should be flexible enough to be adjusted to the final sample.

4. GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

4.1. DOCUMENTATION RELATED TO THIS CALL

This call takes place within the frame of the BRAIN-be programme. More information on this programme can be found [here](#).

The following documents are available in the call section of the [BRAIN-be website](#):

- Information file: general information on the programme and the call (the present document).
- Submission file
- Gender checklist
- Ethics form

4.2. BUDGET AND DURATION

The maximum budget that can be requested by applicants is 75.000€.

Applicants are free to set the duration within a limit of 24 months.

The selected project will have an official starting date on 15 December 2023 as the available budget has to be engaged in 2023.

4.3. ELIGIBILITY OF APPLICATIONS

To be eligible, a research proposal must be submitted by an applicant belonging to a *non-profit organisation that has the pursuit of scientific research in its statutes*: universities, higher education institutions, public research institutions...

Proposals can be submitted by a *single institution (partner)* or by a *network of institutions (partners)*. A network is composed of at least two different eligible Belgian scientific institutions paid by the project.

Beyond this requirement, projects may also include (non-mandatory) non-funded partners.

Networks jointly share obligations and responsibilities during the implementation of the project. The project must be balanced (in terms of the way the budget is allocated between partners: see the budget rules further in this document), even if different partners may have different tasks and subsequently different budgets.

Networks will appoint a **Coordinator** who, next to his/her own implication in the project, will be in charge of:

- Coordinating all activities to be carried out in the framework of the project.
- Coordinating the internal meetings between the network members.
- Coordinating the meetings with the Follow-up Committee and write the reports of these meetings.
- Coordinating the production of the interim and final project reports intended for BELSPO.
- Inform BELSPO of any problems that might hinder the implementation of the project.
- Coordinating the synthesis and translation of the research results, with a view to applications and support for decision-making.
- Coordinating the publication and dissemination of the research results.
- Organising meetings related to the project's progress between the network and BELSPO.
- Liaising with the Federal planning Bureau in all appropriate stages of the project

The project 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 or not. The budget allocated to the subcontractor cannot exceed 25% of the total budget of the promoter concerned.

The programme promotes **equality between men and women in research**. The research team(s) - promoters as well as researchers on the project - should therefore be balanced in their gender composition.

4.4. BUDGET RULES

The different categories of expenditure eligible by BELSPO are:

Staff: Pre-tax wages associated with increases in the cost of living, employers' social security and statutory insurance contributions, as well as any other compensation or allowance due by law and secondary to the salary itself and tax-free scholarships. BELSPO does not allow cumulative wages for Staff. A researcher bound contractually to an institution - full time or part time cannot apply for him/herself for BELSPO staff budget for that part.

BELSPO prefers staff to be hired under a labour contract. However tax-free doctoral or post-doctoral scholarships can be exceptionally accepted under the following conditions:

- The total number of person months funded by the BELSPO project under a tax-free scholarships scheme is limited to max. 50% of the **total number of person months funded by the project under labour contract**.
- In any case, there shall not be more than 2 tax-free scholarships/project. Tax-free scholarships refer to a grant subject to tax exemption under the tax laws.

At least 60% of the total proposal's budget has to be devoted to staff.

General operating costs: this includes day-to-day/usual supplies and products for the laboratory, workshop and office, documentation, shipments, use of day-to-day software and IT facilities, organisation of internal meetings, etc. The budget envelope for this category may not exceed 15% of the staff budget for the coordinator (for single team and network projects) and 10% of the staff budget for the other partners in network projects. The amounts claimed must correspond to actual expenditures strictly related to the project, even if supporting documents are not requested. The institution must keep these invoices in its accounts in the event of an audit.

Specific operating costs: this includes operating costs specific to the execution of the project tasks, such as costs for project analyses, maintenance and repair of equipment purchased by the project, use of specific IT

facilities and software, costs for surveys, open data publications**, organisation of workshops and events, etc....

*** In the case of an online article published within an Open Access journal, the Article Processing Charge (APC) will be of maximum 1 300 €, and a copy of the Editor's version must be immediately deposited in an institutional repository and made public and free of access*

Overheads: Institutions' general overheads that cover, in one lump sum, administration, telephone, postal, maintenance, heating, lighting, electricity, rent, machine depreciation, and insurance costs. The total amount of this item is set at maximum 5% of the total staff and operating costs.

Equipment: Purchase and installation of scientific and technical apparatus and instruments, including computer hardware. Equipment needs to be purchased in the first half of the project.

Subcontracting: Expenses incurred by a third party to carry out tasks or provide services that require special scientific or technical competences outside the institution's normal area of activity. The amount may not exceed 25% of the total budget allocated to the Belgian partner concerned.

4.5. IPR, OPEN SCIENCE, ETHICS, GENDER

The research contract that will be concluded between the selected team and BELSPO contains certain dispositions that applicants need to take into consideration when writing their proposals.

- 1) Intellectual Property Rights: The Foreground - the results (including information) produced by the project - shall be the property of the institution carrying out the work generating this foreground, as mentioned in [article 12 of the General Conditions \(Annex II of the contract\)](#). As regards existing information and data, ownership remains the same. Each institution shall ensure that the foreground of which it has ownership, is disseminated as fast as possible and free of charge. The State can however freely use (without licence) the foreground for internal purposes.
- 2) Open access, open data: In accordance with the relevant 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 concerns data that supports the research results, 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". In the case of an online article published within an Open Access journal, the Article Processing Charge (APC) will be of maximum 1 300 € (see the budget rules), and a copy of the Editor's version must be immediately deposited in an institutional repository and made public and free of access.
- 3) Ethics in research: The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017) serves as ethical reference and self-regulatory framework for research projects funded by BELSPO. <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/#toggle-id-8> The code originally published in 2014 by ALLEA (All European Academies) and then revised in 2017. All projects must take this code of ethics into account in their research. If necessary, the Ethical Board of the institutions concerned by a project must be consulted before submitting a proposal.
- 4) Gender: BELSPO strongly encourages projects to take into account the equality between women and men and to ensure gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the project. The project should include this both in the choice of the researchers and, where relevant, by integrating the

gender dimension into their research. All statistics produced, collected and commissioned are, where appropriate, disaggregated by sex and gender indicators are established where relevant.

5. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

The evaluation will be based on the information provided by applicants in their submission form, namely:

- Knowledge of the state of the art and position of the research objectives;
- Proposed methodology to evaluate the impact of a 4-days workweek without paying loss on employment, productivity, wellbeing and the environment;
- Proposed implementation of the project, including support and collaboration with the FPB at the various stages of the project and recommendations for policymaking in RWT (compulsory task).

The evaluation will be performed by a peer review in a two-stage procedure, followed by a final selection stage.

In a *first stage*, three independent international scientific reviewers will evaluate individually and remotely all proposals. They will score and thoroughly comment each above-mentioned criterion.

In a *second stage*, the 3 remote experts will decide collectively in a Panel meeting on a ranking of the proposals.

In the *selection stage*, the Selection committee - composed of the Federal Planning Bureau, the cabinet of the Minister of employment and BELSPO - will discuss the ranking from the scientific Panel and will select ONE proposal to be funded. BELSPO will then submit this choice to the approval of the Minister in charge of Science Policy. Once this approval has been received, BELSPO will conclude the contract with the selected partner(s).

As feedback from this process, applicants will receive 1) the three independent evaluation reports, 2) an extract of the Panel report (including their position in the ranking), 3) the report from the selection committee.

6. CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS

6.1. CONTRACTS

For the selected proposal, a contract is concluded between BELSPO and the funded partner(s).

For this purpose, the applicants of the selected proposal will be asked at the end of the evaluation and selection procedure to concisely formulate the specifications on the basis of which the contract is to be drawn up. This **Technical Annex** to the contract will be drawn up in consultation with BELSPO and will take into account the recommendations formulated by the foreign evaluators and the Advisory Committees.

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, the proposals for valorising the research.

BELSPO grants the selected projects the 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.

6.2. REPORTS AND PROGRESS MEETINGS

The contract foresees the following reports to be submitted to BELSPO:

- Initial report: to be submitted within three months after the start of the project
- Activity reports: to be submitted annually
- Final report: to be submitted at the end of the project
- If deemed useful by BELSPO, an activity report may be requested for an external evaluation of the project
- BELSPO can ask for a report or other input at any time during the project in order to provide scientific support to valorisation and service actions related to the programme.

These reports are to be included in the project work plan and the cost of preparing them (including possible translations) must be covered by the project budget.

Meetings on the project's progress must be organised - minimum once a year - between the project partner(s), BELSPO and the user committee. The organisation of these meetings must be included in the project work plan and the project budget.