

**FEDERAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON DRUGS**



**Submission deadlines:**

**EoI**: Friday 3 July 2020 at 14h00

**Full proposals**: Friday 11 September 2020 at 14h00

**Call for proposals 2020**

**Information File**

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PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION on the PROGRAMME

# THE FEDERAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME DRUGS

For more information on the programme, please visit <http://www.belspo.be/belspo/drugs/index_en.stm>

## GENERAL

BELSPO (the Public Planning Service Science Policy) organises a programme dedicated to funding research in the field of drugs since 2001. This programme finds it source in the Parliamentary working group on drugs (1996/97) that invited the Federal Government to set up an "integral and integrated drug policy". The response was provided by the government in 2001: a general policy was approved in January 2001 and a budget of 500 million BEF (about 12,5 million EUR) was approved and allocated to federal administrations in charge. BELSPO received about 1 million EUR a year to set up a research programme with the objective to fund research in support of the newly adopted Drugs strategy.

The Strategy also foresees the conclusion of a cooperation agreement between the federal level and the Regions and Communities in Belgium with a view to set up a so-called integral and integrated drug policy which could deal with health and law enforcement measures and whose scope was illegal drugs, but also alcohol, tobacco and psychoactive medication. This agreement was concluded in 2008. One of the measure of this agreement was the setup of the General Cell Drugs Policy, the organ in charge of preparing the Drug Strategy on behalf of the Interministerial Conference Drugs. One of its first tasks was to draft a Common Declaration for an integrated and integral approach on drugs, which was adopted by the Ministers in charge at all levels in 2010. Scientific evidence and scientific research was acknowledged as one of the 5 pillars of the Belgian Drugs Strategy. The Federal Research Programme Drugs fully subscribes to the Belgian Strategy and funds research on the demand and supply side, on illicit and licit drugs and on gambling .

Every two years, a call for proposals is launched to the Belgian scientific community on topics designed in close cooperation with the General Cell Drugs Policy.

## ORGANISATION

For its operationalisation BELSPO is assisted by the General Cell Drugs Policy composed of representatives of the Ministers in charge. This organ discusses and suggests research priorities that BELSPO could include in its call for proposals.

## STRUCTURE

The Research programme supports the global and integrated approach, including topics on the demand side (health, prevention...) and the supply side (trafficking, repression, criminality...), considering illegal drugs but also alcohol, tobacco, psychotropic medication and gambling.

The themes that can be funded in the programme should comply with the following principles:

* *Scientific excellence and international integration;*
* *Concentration around key questions covering multiple competences and offering a coherent framework in which fragmentation is minimized. The themes should support the strategic orientations of the Belgian drug policy as adopted by the Inter ministerial Conferences on Drugs ;*
* *Collaboration with other entities should be fostered (authorities at the federal, regional, community, international level) and flexible funding mechanisms involving these levels should be sought;*

## PROJECT TYPES

The Programme finances **research projects** as described below.

##### SCOPE / PHILOSPHY

The projects must be thematic and interdisciplinary, meaning that they should meet the specific research priorities of a call and must be interdisciplinary in their content.

##### PARTNERSHIP

Projects are submitted by a **network**, composed of at least two partners from different at least two eligible Belgian scientific institutions and from different scientific disciplines.

Networks jointly share obligations and responsibilities during the implementation of the project. The project should be fairly balanced (see budget rules), even if different partners may have different tasks and subsequently different budgets.

The cooperation between research partners of **different Communities or Regions** is encouraged. At equal scientific quality between the proposals submitted, preference will be given to proposals composed of partners from different communities and/or that cover the Belgian territory.

A **coordinator** (belonging to a Belgian research institute) must be appointed in each proposal. The coordinator shall:

* Coordinate all activities to be carried out in the framework of the project;
* Coordinate the internal meetings between the network members;
* Coordinate the meetings with the Follow-up Committee and write the reports of these meetings;
* Coordinate 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;
* Coordinate the synthesis and translation of the research results, with a view to applications and support for decision-making;
* Coordinate the publication and dissemination of the research results;
* Organise meetings related to the project's progress between the network and BELSPO.

The project may require specific or punctual expertise, which can be delivered in the form of **subcontracting**.

The programme allows for cooperation with international research partners:

* **African research partners of Least Developed Countries**[[1]](#footnote-1) can benefit from financing of maximum 20% of the total project budget. Note: in the project phase (one of) the Belgian project partner(s) will be responsible for the follow-up of the tasks carried out by the African partner(s) and will also be responsible for the flow of information to and from the African partner(s). The budget allocated for the African partner will contractually be added to the budget of this Belgian partner.
* **Other international research partners** can officially participate to the proposal, albeit with their own funding.

It is the responsibility of the Belgian partner(s) to check the eligibility of the African research partner(s) and/or the International research partner(s).

The programme promotes **equality between men and women in research**. The projects should therefore seek for a balanced network composition.

##### DURATION

National thematic interdisciplinary projects will have a duration between 18 and 36 months.

##### BUDGET

There is no maximum budget set for this type of projects. However networks should take into consideration the total available budget for the call (1,4 million EUR) and the fact that a project should make the most efficient use of public resources.

# CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS

## CONTRACTS

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

For this purpose, the submitters 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.

## 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 course of 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.

## DATA, RESULTS, INTELLECTUAL OWNERSHIP AND OPEN ACCESS

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 11 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.

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".

For research areas concerning the marine environment, the Antarctic and biodiversity, 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) ([http://www.bmdc.be](http://www.bmdc.be/)). 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) (<https://www.scqr.org/data-products/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) (<https://www.gbif.org/>. The Belgian Biodiversity Platform (http://www.biodiversity.be) 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: <https://zenodo.org/record/3448251#.XkagsnDsaUl>

For social and Humanities data, a copy of the data and/or metadata must be transferred to SODA (Social Sciences Data Archive) (<https://sodabelgianproject.wixsite.com/sodaproject>).

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, plant, animal and human cells as well as the replicable parts of these organisms, such as non-modified and recombinant plasmids (including those with DNAc inserts).

## RESEARCH ETHICS

The first code of ethics for scientific research in Belgium was drawn up in 2009 (see http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/publ/pub\_ostc/Eth\_code/ethcode\_en.pdf).

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. If necessary the Ethical Board of the institutions concerned by a project must be consulted before submitting a proposal.

## 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.

PART Ii: CALL INFORMATION

# DOCUMENTATION RELATED TO THIS CALL

The following documents are available on the website of the [Federal research Programme Drugs](http://www.belspo.be/belspo/drugs/index_en.stm):

* Information file: general information on the programme and the call (the present document)
* Evaluators eligibility: eligibility rules of proposed experts for the evaluation of the proposal
* Submission and evaluation guidelines: overview proposal content and corresponding evaluation criteria for the promoters and foreign evaluators
* Evaluation matrix: overview of the evaluation ratings
* Gender checklist
* Budget rules: overview of the budgetary rules to be applied
* Platform Submission guidelines: information on the use of the submission platform
* Institution Request Form
* Platform Evaluation guidelines: information on the use of the evaluation platform
* Strategic Committee members
* FAQ

# SCOPE AND RESEARCH PRIORITIES OF THIS CALL

**Introduction**

This call for proposals enables researchers to submit projects in one or more dimensions of the drug situation, either in response to a specific knowledge need expressed by the field/authorities (as discussed in the General drugs Policy Cell) in charge of the Belgian integral and integrated drugs policy, or not. In the first case, applicants shall flag their projects with the corresponding ***knowledge priority*** on the submission platform. In the second case, applicants shall flag their project as "***blue sky"*** on the submission platform. Projects can combine both, that is integrate a knowledge need as a part of a larger blue sky study. As a useful point of entry, projects could also integrate the impact of the current pandemic situation in their study, if applicable.

In this programme, eligible projects can either seek innovation (e.g. addressing a gap in research that would push the boundaries of science, or innovate in their methodological approach) or seek to reproduce existing results and/or techniques that were not yet implemented in Belgium. In any case, projects (blue sky or in response to a given priority) should clearly seek to provide input to decision-makers and other non-academic stakeholders and design appropriate pathways to reach out to these audiences. It should be noted that clinical trials are not eligible in this programme.

Eligible projects shall be submitted by a team of promoters who choses to combine different scientific approaches to address the topic under study. Projects can also mix teams from the the south and north of the country in order to enable a full coverage of their study. In case of equality of scores in the evaluation process, preference will be given in the final selection to multidisciplinary projects and/or projects that cover the whole of Belgium.

Projects should have duration between 18 and 36 months. The budget requested shall be determined by the applicants on the basis of requested manpower, duration and other expenses necessary to run the project, bearing in mind that the total budget of this call is 1,4 million EUROS. Projects are expected to start in March 2021 at the latest.

This research programme supports the global and integrated approach, including topics on the demand side (health, prevention...) and the supply side (trafficking, repression, criminality...), considering illegal drugs but also alcohol, tobacco, psychotropic medication and gambling.

**Research priorities**

The drugs situation can be scientifically approached by focusing on one or more of the following dimensions: 1) prevalence, incidence and patterns of drug use, 2) Responses to the drug situation, 3) determinants of drug use, 4) consequences of drug use, 5) mechanisms of drug use and effects, 6) supply and markets and 7) methodological issues. Projects can be submitted in any of these dimensions. ***Specific knowledge needs*** will be detailed in the corresponding dimensions.

1. Prevalence, incidence and patterns of drug use

Projects submitted in this dimension include (general and specific, including school) population surveys, estimates of problem drug use, studies on the characteristics of drug users or patterns of drug use.

In this call, we are particularly interested in the following urgent knowledge need:

Confinement measures taken to prevent the spread of Covid 19 have resulted in a dramatic change in the way people live. We are interested in gaining insights in how this situation has affected people's consumption of licit and illicit drugs, focusing especially on harmful uses of these psychoactive substances. The study of this topic should enable to draw lessons from this crisis and design additional measures for the future.

2. Responses to the drug situation

This category includes studies on demand reduction interventions such as the evaluation of interventions (treatment, prevention, etc.), the implementation of policies and laws, estimates of public expenditure and other economic topics.

In this call, we are particularly interested in the following urgent knowledge needs:

The General Drugs Policy Cell is implementing a scientific methodology to estimate the public expenditures in Belgium in the field of drugs (Drugs in Figures). With the 6th State Reform, the methodology used so far is not suited anymore and is need of an update. The aim is not only to monitor drug related public expenditures in Belgium, but also to enable to locate Belgium in a European context. This monitoring should make it possible to identify the various initiatives put in place by the competent governments in terms of prevention, health and security.

The German project BENGALO (second laureate of the European Price for Prevention of Organised Crime in 2019) has been successfully implemented in detention centres for young people in Germany. The objective is to bring about behavioural change among young criminals serving a sentence in a juvenile detention centre. This change in behaviour should lead them to choose a life outside of crime. By increasing participants' self-control skills, the programme reduces impulsive, aggressive and anti-social behaviour, and motivates participants to stay away from the use of illicit substances and alcohol and to choose a lifestyle free of criminal offences. German researchers have developed an intervention manual and the Federal Public Service Home Affairs is much interest to understand the conditions and possibilities for a phased implementation of this intervention in juvenile detention centres in Belgium. Researchers interested in this priority will benefit from the support of the FPS Home Affairs and will contact its representative for designing their project before submission.

The availability of care for people who use drugs in Belgium is broad and diversified, ranging from needle exchange services to therapeutic communities. However, according to the recent KCE[[2]](#footnote-2) (knowledge Centre on health, an organisation dependent of the Ministry of health) report on the organization of mental healthcare in Belgium, it is legitimate to evaluate/analyse the place of people who use drugs in the field of mental health care. We are mostly interested in access to and availability of mental health care facilities (and networks) for people who use drugs. Are their needs sufficiently met (including people who live in precarious situation: homeless, unemployed, people in prison...)? We are interested in having a better knowledge of the proportion and profile of people who use drugs and are in mental care facilities, including ‘crisis care units’, mobile teams, psychiatric emergencies, rehabilitation and housing services. How are they perceived by health care professionals in these facilities? What is the experience of these facilities for those who use drugs? What are barriers and facilitators regarding this subset of the population in mental care? And most importantly, what are the evidence-based policy and treatment recommendations to improve the access and availability to mental health care facilities, including rehabilitation and housing, for people who use drugs in Belgium? Federal and regional authorities can support the interested applicants by providing list of specialised units and centres that they could contact in the course of their research.

Today, the specialized outpatient and residential addiction services sector is made up of many services (RFCs, SSM specific addiction initiatives, specialized addiction networks and services, consumption rooms, harm reduction operators, etc.). These services offer different solutions to their users. It would be interesting to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of these services... The efficiency of this diversified supply and the of the solutions they offer should be evaluated and lead to recommendations to strengthen this offer, accounting for what works (evidence-based solutions) per profile of user (including their opinion and those of their relatives) and re-organise it if needed. We are aware that this represents a tremendous work, so sectorial approaches are welcome.

3. Determinants of drug use.

This category is open to studies on risk and protective factors for drug use.

We are concerned about the worrying rise in the consumption of illicit psychoactive substances in the Belgian population (15-64 yo), as shown from recent figures drawn from surveys. We need to gain knowledge on the determinants of this trend (perceptions, availability, impact of advertisement, profile of users...). What underlying factors could possibly explain this trend and what concrete measures can be taken at different levels of decision-making to curb this tendency?

4. Consequences of drug use/production

This category is open to studies on health, social and legal consequences of drug use and production.

In this category, we invite researchers to examine closely the impact of illegal production sites of cannabis. Over 1000 production sites are dismantled each year since 2012, the production of cannabis itself has professionalized and becomes particularly dangerous: water needs for growing plants make the places of production particularly humid, automation of production is pressing electrical systems, pesticides are heavily used (as shown from the HILCAN research funded by BELSPO). Many production sites are discovered after a fire or a flood. Places of production are very diverse: from a hangar to apartments. In view of this situation, we are interested in having scientific insights on the impact of this cannabis production on the places of production (especially residential) and on the health of their inhabitants (present and future, in the places of production and in their immediate surroundings). An estimate of the average damage to residential places would be very valuable. The protection of the health of the population is at the center of this project and should lead to recommendations.

5. Mechanisms of drug use and effects

This category includes neurobiological, and behavioural studies, as well as research on the aetiology and developments of drug use. Note that projects that include clinical trials are not eligible in this programme.

6. Supply and markets

This category is open to studies on supply reduction interventions, such as law enforcement interventions, as well as studies on market characteristics, such as the availability and purity of drugs.

In this category, we welcome projects that would re-evaluate the yield of cannabis indoor production. A previous study (YILCAN, 2011) has enabled to measure precisely this yield. But the production of indoor cannabis has dramatically changed and this measurement needs to be reappraised. Indoor cannabis production has professionalised over the year, showing more links to organized crime (with historical links to the Netherlands) and industrial production (larger and more intensive crops). We are interested in having information on the impact of recent production techniques on the yield and criminal benefits. The result of this study will provide the judicial authorities with an up-to-date tool for imposing financial penalties that is in line with changes in the criminal environment.

Drug markets in Belgium are constantly growing and evolving. This situation puts law enforcement agencies under pressure. In order to use all possible forms of action to prevent, detect and repress drug related criminal activities, a larger collaboration with local authorities is needed to maximise and include, next to the judicial approach of central authorities, their possibilities (administrative sanctions) in the existing arsenal, and thereby sustain an integral and integrated approach. Several local authorities join forces in cooperation cells dedicated to the fight against specific criminal activities (home invasion, illicit drugs...). At police level too expertise centres have been created to support these initiatives and guidelines have been put in place to coordinate efforts. Such guidelines are nevertheless lacking in the field of drug supply. Scientific research could provide a panorama (state of play) of the administrative approach of the different aspects of illicit drugs (trafficking, production, retail) and identify best practices and new possibilities.

7. Methodological issues

This category is open to feasibility and validity studies on the implementation of indicators and comparisons between different methodologies.

## PROJECT STARTING AND END DATE

The projects selected within the context of the current call will start 15 December 2020. The project contracts will have a duration of 18 to 36 months plus 3 months to allow meeting all administrative requirements before the effective start-up of the project.

# CONTACTS

Further information can be obtained by contacting the **secretariat**: **drugs\_call@belspo.be**

# 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 / Federal Ombudsman, rue Ducale / Hertogstraat 43, 1000 Brussels (email: contact@mediateurfederal.be / contact@federaalombudsman.be).

1. https://unctad.org/en/Pages/ALDC/Least%20Developed%20Countries/UN-list-of-Least-Developed-Countries.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://kce.fgov.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/KCE\_318\_Mental\_Health\_care\_Report\_0.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)