

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025

VICE-RECTORATE INNOVATION  
& INDUSTRY RELATIONS  
VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL

-TOGETHER WE CONNECT SCIENCE AND SOCIETY-



**VUB TechTransfer** serves as the multidisciplinary operational team within the **Vice-Rectorate Innovation & Industry Relations**. We are responsible for facilitating the **transfer and exchange of knowledge and technology**. Alongside the **VUB Foundation**, which leads philanthropic fundraising, and **Crosstalks**, VUB's platform for transdisciplinary dialogue, we form the core of the Vice-Rectorate.

**OUR MISSION:**  
**TO CREATE A POSITIVE IMPACT BY BRIDGING VUB'S INNOVATIVE RESEARCH WITH INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY**

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# FACTS & FIGURES 2025

 **7** **CAMPUSES**

- VUB Main Campus
- VUB Health Campus
- VUB Photonics Campus Gooik
- VUB Usquare Campus
- Campus Coovi Anderlecht
- Campus Volt Diest
- Campus Leuven

**8** **FACULTIES**

**4,042**  **EMPLOYEES**

**24,695**  **STUDENTS**

**3,625**  **VTE EMPLOYEES**  
UZ BRUSSEL IN 2024 

**2,326**  **DOCTORANDI**  
IN **3**  **DOCTORAL SCHOOLS**

 **EUR 155.1 M**  
**RESEARCH BUDGET**  
TOTAL VUB



**41** **LARGE RESEARCH GROUPS**  
55 'REGULAR' RESEARCH GROUPS INCLUDING  
22 VUB-UGENT, 15 JOINT INT'L, 12 VUB-ULB

 **EUR 14.1 M**  
REVENUE FROM CONTRACT RESEARCH WITH  
INDUSTRY AND VALORISATION OF RESEARCH

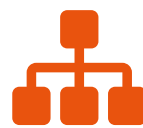
**2,650** **ACADEMIC**   
**AND SCIENTIFIC PERSONNEL**   



**228**   
**PATENT FAMILIES**

 **52**  
**SPIN-OFF COMPANIES**

**EUR 4.57 M**  
**INCOME**  
**FOUNDATION** 

**INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH FUND**  
SUPPORTING **20 GEARS**  
OR GROUPS OF EXCELLENCE IN APPLIED RESEARCH



**EUR 43.8 M**   
**APPLIED RESEARCH**  
**APPROVED PROJECTS**



“At VUB, we combine cutting-edge research with strategic partnerships to tackle societal challenges. For us, innovation is progress, and through sustainable partnerships, we strive to positively impact people’s lives and contribute to a better world.”

Peter Schelkens,  
Vice-rector Innovation & Industry Relations

# STRENGTHENING INNOVATION AND VALORISATION AT VUB

Under the leadership of Vice-Rector for Innovation and Industry Relations Prof. Peter Schelkens, the university continued in 2025 to strengthen its strategic commitment to creating impact by translating research into societal and economic value. In an environment marked by economic uncertainty, this mission remains central to the role of the university as a driver of innovation and progress.

Once again, 2025 proved to be a successful year for the many researchers engaged in innovation and valorisation projects. Despite less favourable economic conditions, the university succeeded in securing increased funding from Flemish, Brussels, and European programmes. This sustained upward trend confirms the strong competitiveness of our research and innovation ecosystem. In particular, the excellent performance in European applied research projects demonstrates that the growth potential remains significant. VUB ranks among the leading universities in Horizon Europe funding and secures, on average, more funding per researcher than the other Flemish universities.

The VUB Foundation also maintained solid performance in 2025. Revenues stabilised at a strong level, supported by continued success in endowed chairs and a notable growth in donations raised through faculties and services.

The university's innovation policy received additional reinforcement through its 5th Strategic Plan, strengthening the support structures for researchers. These investments are already yielding tangible results: enhanced guidance for EU project applications, stronger facilitation of collaborations with industry, and the exploration of new funding channels.

The Vicerectorate for Innovation and Industry Relations remains fully committed to its mission: bringing research to society and generating positive impact that benefits both the economy and society as a whole, regionally and across Europe. The university's strong performance in competitive funding programmes confirms its position as a leading innovation university and highlights the collective efforts of its researchers, partners, and support teams in translating scientific excellence into tangible impact.

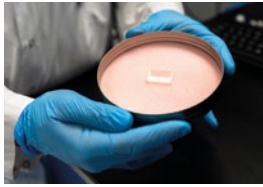
In the following pages, we invite you to explore the initiatives, achievements, and partnerships that shaped 2025 and illustrate how innovation at VUB continues to contribute to a stronger, more sustainable society.



Sonja Haesen,  
Director VUB TechTransfer

# GROUPS OF EXCELLENCE IN APPLIED RESEARCH (GEARs)

## ADVANCED GEAR:



Photonics



Electromobility



Nanotools



Sustainable Material Technologies

## CONSOLIDATOR GEAR:



Artificial Intelligence



Liver research



Acoustics & Vibration



INTEGRAL - Immunotherapy



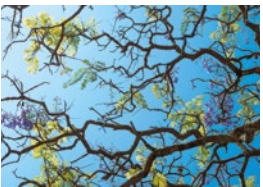
Law for Cybersecurity and Health



Gene Therapy for heart disease



Algorithmic Systems



House of Sustainable Transitions



Human-centered Robotics



Health Data

## STARTER GEAR:



Radiopharmaceuticals



Software Systems



Advance Imaging



Microfluidics



AI in Neurology



Sustainable Chemistry

# GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR STRATEGIC & APPLIED RESEARCH

## FROM FLANDERS, BRUSSELS, EUROPE

The strategic and applied research produced by universities, whether or not in collaboration with companies, impacts regional innovation and strengthens the economic landscape. Additionally, it generates revenue for the university, which can be reinvested in further research.

### VUB TechTransfer offers assistance and support to researchers for:

- Projects financed by the Industrial Research Fund of the UAB (Flemish government funding)
- Flanders VLAIO & FWO calls
- Brussels-Capital Region funding through Innoviris
- Projects with SOCs and spearhead clusters
- Innovation driven EU projects
- Financing for applied projects with valorization potential by other (international) organisations or administrations

## VUB INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH FUND

### For research groups that excel in strategic and applied research

VUB TechTransfer supports projects financed by the **Industrial Research Fund (IOF – Industrieel OnderzoeksFonds)**. Since 2004 associations receive this **Flemish government funding** according to their valorisation output performance: contracts with industry, the number of patents and spin-offs, share in the European Framework Programme for R&D, number of PhD's obtained and publications and citations. IOF funding is invested in knowledge centers that exceed the average scale of a standard university's research unit, the '**Groups of Excellence in Applied Research**' or **GEARs**. They have to elaborate a long-term strategic research strategy, demonstrate leadership, and develop new application-oriented inventions with economic potential.

The total budget allocated under the IOF to the University Association Brussels (UAB) amounted to **€6,417,731 in 2025**.

Since the 2019 call, GEAR funding has been structured into three categories, based on the return on investment (ROI) of previously funded GEAR programs. For new applications, categorization is based on recent output and a calculated theoretical ROI. Applications are submitted and evaluated within one of three categories. Starter GEAR (TRL 2–3), Consolidator GEAR (TRL 3–5) and Advanced GEAR programs (TRL 4–6).

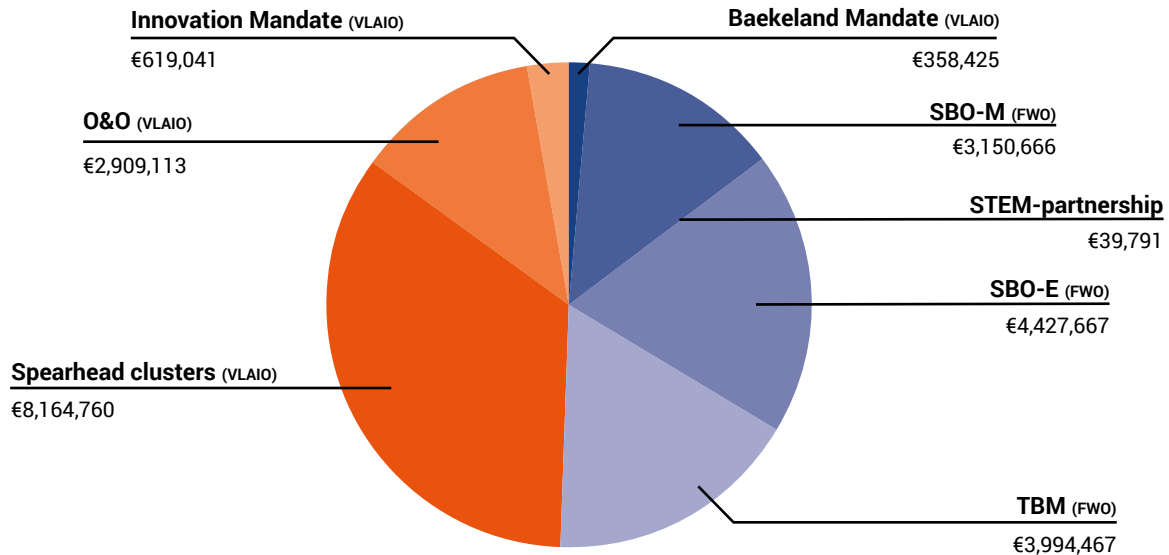
In 2025, a new GEAR call (starting in 2026) was launched, resulting in six full proposals. The IOF Council selected 4 groups, that focus on global innovation in photonics, sustainable materials research, radiopharmaceutical engineering and health data innovation. **In total the number of GEAR groups supported by the IOF fund will reach 20 in 2026.**

The overview can be found on the left-hand page.

# FLANDERS PROJECT FUNDING

**2025: VUB received €23,663,931 funding from FWO (Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek) and VLAIO (Agentschap Innoveren & Ondernemen) for strategic basic and applied research**

**Total budget €23,663,931**



## Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO)

The **Strategic Basic Research programme (SBO)** concerns innovative research that offers prospects for later economic or social applications. In 2025 this resulted in:

- **SBO-E (economic finality): 2 approved projects with VUB as coordinator and 2 with VUB as partner**
  - *GRAD<sup>ED</sup> - Functionally GRaded Additive manufacturing through closed-loop Directed Energy Deposition process control* - **Jan Helsen, Michaël Hinderdael, Patrick Guillaume, Heidi Ottevaere, Lien Smeesters**
  - *SaRplix - Optimization of self-amplifying RNA and mRNA production and formulation through advanced microfluidics* - **Joeri Aerts, Wim De Malsche**
  - *ACCEMO - Addressing Impacts of Changing Climates and Energy Markets on Offshore Wind Farms* - **Jan Helsen**
  - *SODISA - Scalable Software Development and Infrastructure for Self-sovereign Applications* - **Elisa Gonzalez Boix**
- **SBO-M (societal finality): 2 approved projects with VUB as coordinator**
  - *PIP-project - Peer support Innovating Prisons: towards reintegration and desistance from crime* - **Liesbeth De Donder, Dorien Brosens**
  - *ANTICIPATE - Artificial Intelligence and Epidemic Modeling to Prepare Hospitals for the next Respiratory Pathogen with Pandemic Potential* - **Pieter Libin, Ann Nowé, Sabine Allard, Diederik De Cock, Sonia Van Dooren, Deborah De Geyter, Patricia De Vriendt**

The **Applied Biomedical Research programme (TBM)** wants to contribute to the long-term implementation of new therapies, diagnostics and prevention methods for which there is not sufficient interest from industry. VUB TechTransfer intensively supports these project applications to increase the chances of success. 4 projects with VUB as coordinator were approved in 2025 and 1 project with VUB as partner.

- *Fixed-duration Antibiotic Short Treatment of Urinary Tract Infections in male patients presenting with systemic signs/symptoms (FAST-UTI)* - **Sabine Allard, Joeri Aerts**
- *PRediction Of Type 1 Diabetes Evolution (PROT1DE): Improving early diagnosis using advanced modelling* - **Kurt Barbé, Mark Van de Castele, Bart Keymeulen, Eric Balti**
- *The added value of MULTImodal biopsychosocial telePREhabilitation for individuals undergoing lower limb arthroPlasty: the MULTIPREP trial* - **Eva Huysmans, Jo Nijs, Thierry Scheerlinck, Johan Vanlauwe**
- *ROM: Respiratory Oscillometry Monitoring tool for optimizing weaning from mechanical ventilation* - **John Lataire, Joop Jonckheer**
- *Towards Pressure-Adherence & Education Driven Service in Diabetic Foot Disease (PARADISE trial)* - **Koen Putman**

## Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO)

VLAIO stimulates innovation in companies, which is essential for economic growth in Flanders. Collaboration with the academic world plays a crucial role in this process, with a strong focus on addressing the needs of businesses.

### Baekeland mandates

With Baekeland mandates, aimed at a doctorate, VLAIO wants to support research that has an economic finality and offers added value for the company involved. In 2025, 4 Baekeland mandates were approved.

- *Sociale-rechtvaardigheidstools voor effectievere mobiliteitsplanning* - **Kobe Boussauw**
- *De ontwikkeling van een computationele en experimentele workflow voor de generatie van oplosbare analogen van membraanewitten* - **Wim Vranken**
- *Deep learning gestuurde patiëntselectie in radioligandtherapie door optimaal gebruik van ongelabelde PET/CT scans* - **Jef Vandemeulebroucke**
- *Begeleidingssysteem van de volgende generatie voor klassieke musici* - **Geraint Wiggins**

### Innovation mandates

An Innovation mandate is specifically intended to allow postdoctoral researchers to carry out a project in close collaboration with the business world, either with an existing company or with a view to establish a new company. In 2025, 2 mandates were granted.

- *Optimizing Nature-Based Solutions: Advancing Nature-Based Solution Site Selection, Design, Monitoring, and Effectiveness Assessment* - **An Van Griensven**
- *Assistive Microsurgical Robotics for Safer Vitreoretinal Procedures* - **Tom Verstraten**

### STEM Partnership

In 2025, VLAIO organised a call for STEM Partnerships. The VUB submitted one application, which was approved.

- *PICKERO* - **Hugo Thienpont**

### Financing from Spearhead Clusters

Spearhead Clusters facilitate a network of companies active in a specific domain, and develop an ambitious long-term strategy and competitiveness program for Flanders' strategic domains, in collaboration with knowledge centers and the government. The focus of the Flemish cluster policy lies on a limited number of large-scale and ambitious Spearhead Clusters: Catalisti (sustainable chemistry and synthetics), MateriNex (sustainable materials), FLUX50 (green energy, mobility), VIL (logistics and transport), Flanders Food (agrofood), Blue Cluster (wind energy, aquaculture), BIOVIA (healthcare innovation) and new in 2025 ENT.A (entertainment sector).

9 Cluster projects were approved for VUB in 2025:

- *VIL: PILOTS* - **Koen Mommens**
- *FLUX50: Technology for large-scale coordination of Electric vehicle charging and vehicle-to-grid for grid balancing and congestion management (LEVEL)* - **Cedric De Cauwer, An Braeken**
- *Intercluster: Alga-Care: Unlocking the Therapeutic Power of Microalgae for Liver Health* - **Leo Van Grunsvan**
- *Moonshot: Sorption Enhanced Hydrogen Production via Ammonia Decomposition (SHERPA)* - **Joeri Denayer, Sebastian Oberthur**
- *Moonshot: Low-Grade Waste Heat Assisted Carbon Capture (HEATCAP)* - **Joeri Denayer, Sebastian Oberthur**
- *Moonshot: High-performing Organic Redox flow bATteries (HORTA)* - **M.H. Mamme**
- *Biovia: REalistic Self-healing SURGical Trainers (RESSURG)* - **Guy Van Assche**
- *Biovia: Enhancing Lower Dimensional Measurements for Advanced Healthcare Technologies and Engineering ELEVATE* - **Jef Vandemeulebroucke, Tom Verstraten, Nico Buls**
- *DBC: Reducing the Design Fatigue Factor through exploiting Structural Health Monitoring Data and extending the Design Load Case table* - **Christof Devriendt, Jan Helsen, Wout Weijtjens**

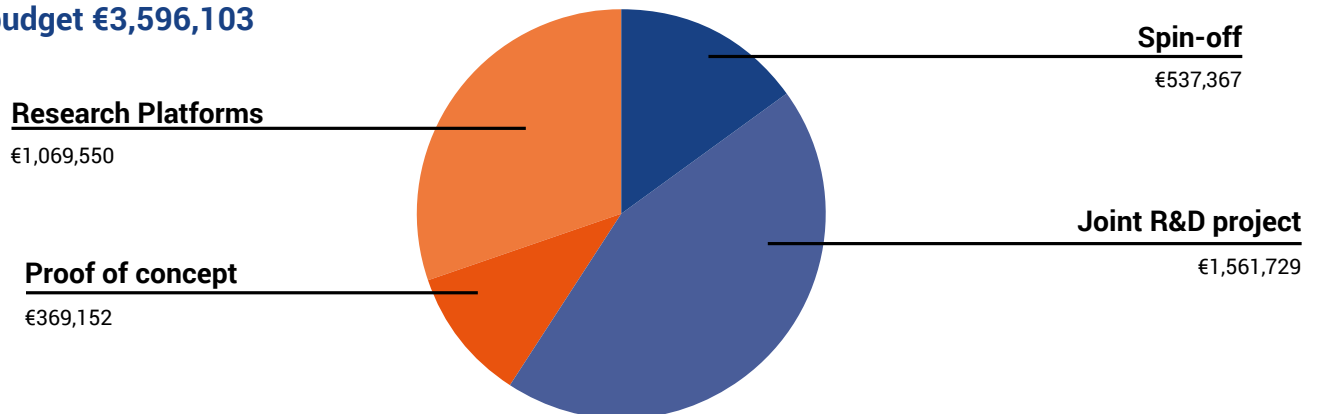
### Strategic Research Centers (SOCs)

SOCs have been created as a result of excellent scientific research in broad domains such as nanoelectronics and digital technologies (imec), biotechnology (VIB), cleantech and sustainable development (VITO) and the manufacturing industry (Flanders Make). They build bridges between fundamental and applied research and are important for Flanders' economy. VUB participates in these Strategic Research Centers.

# BRUSSELS PROJECT FUNDING

For 2025, VUB received funding for 6 projects from Innoviris for a budget of €3,596,103.

Total budget €3,596,103



Innoviris aims to stimulate and support scientific research and technological innovation that contributes to the economic, social, and sustainable development of the Brussels Region. Due to the protracted process of forming a government in the Brussels Region, the 'Brussels Government in current affairs' operated on provisional twelfths based on the 2024 budget. Innoviris continued to launch calls for proposals and approve projects, but clearly did so with the necessary caution, which resulted in lower allocated budgets.

## POC

The proof of concept (POC) programme funds the demonstration of the feasibility and economic viability of an innovative technology, method or idea derived from prior scientific research. This call is open throughout the year. In 2025, 2 projects were submitted and approved.

- *Towards Personalized AI-Driven Clinical Decision Support for Pulmonary Embolism Management (iHealthyPath-PE-POC)* – **Hichem Sahli, Nikos Deligiannis**
- *Equitable Pulse oximetry (EQOX)* – **Johan Stiens**

## Joint R&D project

The goal of the Joint R&D project call is to encourage collaboration between academics and entrepreneurs in the Brussels-Capital Region. In 2024, the call was launched with as theme "Physical Artificial Intelligence for Societal Challenges". 2 VUB projects were approved in 2025.

- *AI-enabled Multiview Deflectometry for Curved glass (THEIA)* – **Adrian Munteanu**
- *An Intelligent, Scalable, and Explainable Framework for Proactive Anomaly Detection and Fault Resolution in Remote Terminals (WatchBOT)* – **Nikos Deligiannis**

## Research platforms

The programme aims to carry out disruptive research **to anticipate major socio-technical developments and/or needs in strategic areas** for the Region. The final objective is to enhance the results in the medium term, through the transfer of knowledge, methodologies or technologies to Brussels companies, organisations and institutions.

- *Brussels Environmental Exposome Project (BEE)* – **Jean-Francois Archaga, Johan Stiens**

## Spin-off

This programme supports the creation of new companies in the Brussels-Capital Region to enhance the economic value of the results of scientific research. In 2025, 1 project was approved.

- *Exoskeletons for industrial workers (HUSKK)* – **Tom Verstraten, Bram Vanderborght**

# FEDERAL FUNDING IN COLLABORATION WITH INDUSTRY

Since 2021, Belgium has allocated significant federal funding to strengthen collaboration between the national defence sector, industry, and research institutions. The main instrument is the annual DEFRA (Defence-related Research Action) call, managed by BELSPO in cooperation with the Royal Higher Institute for Defence. DEFRA supports R&D projects, increases technological readiness levels, and enhances participation in international programs such as the European Defence Fund.

Since its launch with a €1M budget in 2021, DEFRA has grown significantly, reaching €20M in 2025 across nine thematic areas. **In the 2025 call, Vrije Universiteit Brussel** submitted 16 pre-proposals (8 as coordinator), with 6 advancing to the full proposal stage and 3 ultimately funded, representing a **total budget of €2.03M, including two projects coordinated by VUB.**

# EU FUNDING SUPPORT FOR PROJECTS WITH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PURPOSE

The **European Research & Innovation Support or ERIS team** of **VUB TechTransfer** focuses on **European programmes and calls in innovative research**. The ERIS team stimulates researchers to apply for funding, and intensely supports them throughout the pre-award trajectory, including assistance with consortium agreements, through their **i-ISO** concept (see figure below).



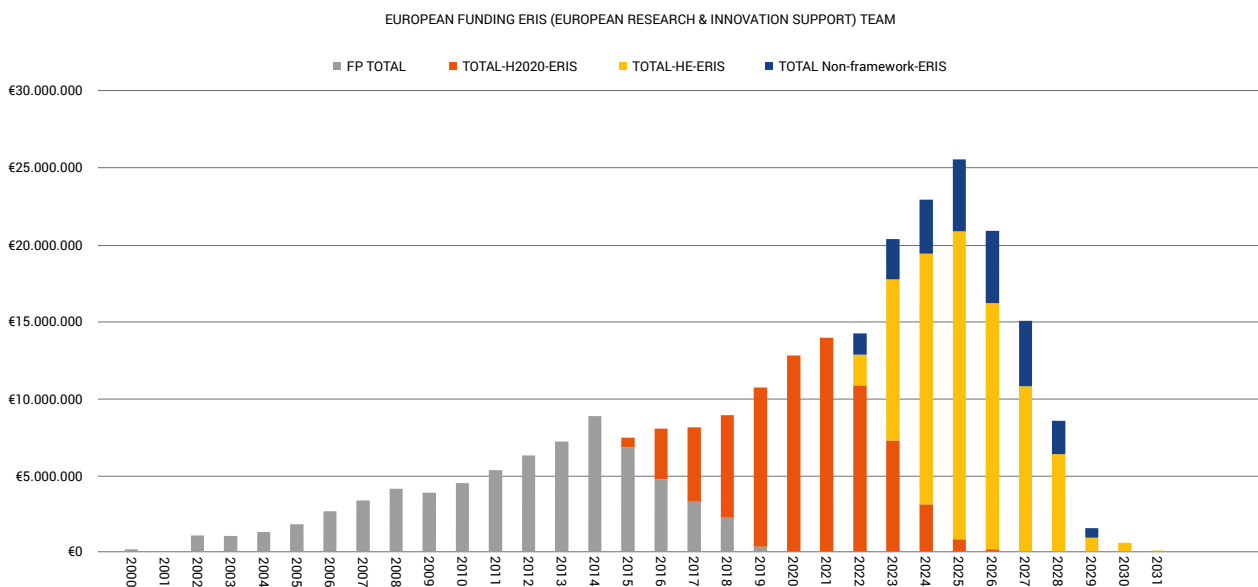
In HORIZON EUROPE, launched in 2021, ERIS-TechTransfer provides comprehensive support to VUB researchers applying for funding within Pillar II programmes, including the 6 Clusters and Joint Research Centre, as well as Pillar III programmes, covering the European Innovation Council (EIC), European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE), and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). ERIS also supports applications under the 'Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence' programme, facilitating collaboration with institutions from countries with historically lower success rates in EU programmes (so-called widening countries). In addition to HORIZON EUROPE, ERIS also oversees a range of other initiatives, including INTERREG, DIGITAL EUROPE, CREATIVE EUROPE, specific DG initiatives and calls, European Science Foundation (ESF), CORNET, CERV programme and all ERANET and JPI networks in which Innoviris or VLAIO participate.

**In 2025, ERIS-TechTransfer achieved impressive results, securing a total budget of about € 15 million.**

Between 2025 and 2026, 56 projects will be running or will start, making VUB one of the top EU universities in terms of applied Horizon Europe and non-framework funding.

A large number of project proposals was still under evaluation by the end of 2025. Several of these were approved at the beginning of 2026. The year started with an achievement of around € 10 million.

The **figure below** shows the growth in EU funding for strategic and applied research to VUB. The figure is constructed by including all budgets of approved projects, spread over their duration.



# SUCCESS CASES 2025

## SUCCESSFUL EU INNOVATION DRIVEN PROJECTS

### SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

**Prof. Dr. Heritiana Ranaivoson**, from the Studies in Media, Innovation, and Technology Research Group (SMIT), is part of an international consortium for the Horizon Europe project StreamSCAPES (Driving Sustainable Climate Transition of Video-On-Demand Platforms at a Time of Transformation).

The overarching goal of StreamSCAPES is to kick start a new era in forward “thinking and doing” in the ways in which production, consumption and decision-making systems in the Cultural and Creative Industries lead through the sustainable climate transition with a particular emphasis on Video-On-Demand platforms as central nodes within audiovisual and cultural ecosystems.

The project brings together 13 partners from 9 countries, including universities, companies, and international organizations.

**VUB is partner | VUB budget: € 595,750**



### SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

**Prof. Dr. Mesfin Haile Mamme**, professor at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, coordinates the European-funded project FULL-MAP (FULLy integrated, autonomous and chemistry-agnostic Materials Acceleration Platform for sustainable batteries), a flagship initiative under the Battery 2030+ vision. FULL-MAP aims to transform how next-generation battery materials and interfaces are discovered and developed.

The project replaces traditional trial-and-error battery development with a data-driven, AI-accelerated approach, combining advanced computational modelling, materials discovery tools, and high-throughput & autonomous optimisation strategies. By integrating multiscale simulations, machine learning, and experimental feedback, FULL-MAP accelerates the discovery of high-performance and sustainable battery materials.

As coordinator, VUB plays a central role in AI-enabled modelling, data integration, and materials optimisation, supporting Europe’s strategic leadership in energy storage, electric mobility, and the transition to a sustainable energy system..

**VUB is coordinator | VUB budget: € 2,465,000**



### LIFE SCIENCES

**Prof. Dr. Carlo de Asmundis** (UZ Brussel / Vrije Universiteit Brussel) plays a key role in ERIS (European Research Institute on Simulation), a European funded initiative to advance training in cardiac electrophysiology (EP). ERIS addresses fragmentation and inequality in EP education by promoting a standardized, high quality, simulation based European training approach.

ERIS will establish a Europe wide academic institute for simulation based EP education, integrating theoretical teaching and advanced simulation into EU accredited programmes. By standardising curricula, the project aims to reduce regional disparities and support equitable access to life saving cardiac treatments across Europe.

Within the consortium, VUB contributes academic leadership through its internationally recognised Postgraduate Program in Cardiac Electrophysiology and Pacing, led by Prof. Dr. Carlo de Asmundis.

**VUB is partner | VUB budget: € 281,250**



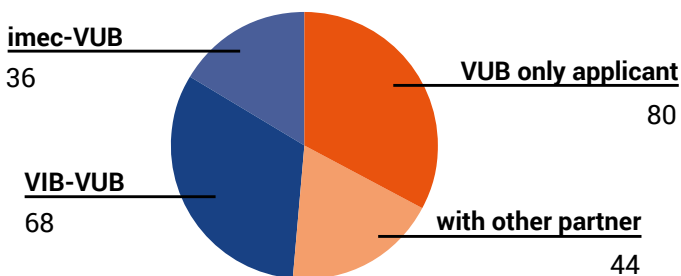
# INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR) MANAGEMENT & LICENSING

VUB TechTransfer plays a key role in licensing research outcomes, generating revenue for the university, fostering long-term collaborations with companies, and delivering tangible impact for VUB's research and innovation. At the core of this licensing process is a robust portfolio of intellectual property, including patents and patent applications, software, confidential know-how, design rights, trademarks, and more. In the case of a VUB spin-off company, a close relationship with a research lab is crucial for the company's growth, especially during its early stages.

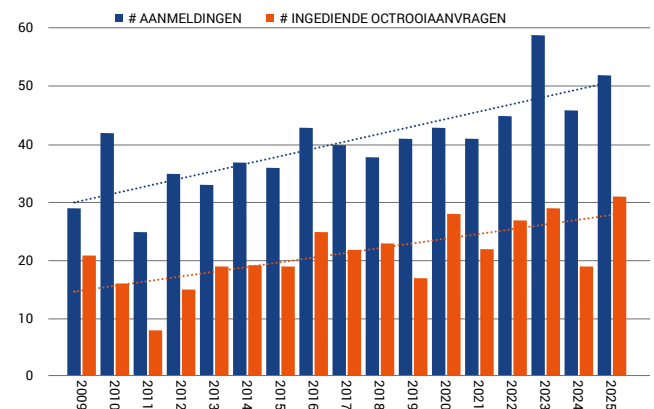
Technologies available for licensing or R&D partnerships at VUB are promoted through bilateral industry contacts, networking and matchmaking events, the VUB TechTransfer website, monthly external newsletters, LinkedIn, conferences such as Knowledge for Growth, and other specialized channels.

In 2025, the results were again impressive: **52 inventions** were disclosed, and **31 new patent applications** were filed with VUB as a (co-)applicant. The total VUB portfolio included 228 active patent families, of which 80 are exclusively owned by VUB. Additionally, 68 active patent families are co-owned with VIB, 36 with imec, and 44 with other research institutions and companies, highlighting the significant amount of R&D collaboration with external partners. Notably, there has been a 62% increase in the number of active patent families since 2018.

## # Active patent families: 228



## Aantal uitvindingen



# REVENUE FROM VALORISATION AND CONTRACT RESEARCH WITH INDUSTRY

Through contract research and technology licensing with industry and other partners (both for-profit and non-profit), the university fosters long-term collaborations and translates its expertise into societal impact. In some cases, contract research is partially supported by government funding. In 2025, total revenue from private sector collaborations (including licensing) reached approximately **€14.1 million**.

These funds can be reinvested into university research, further strengthening innovation. It is important to note that this amount does not include all revenue generated from VUB research in partnership with spearhead clusters and strategic research centers.

# EUTOPIA

Since 2019, VUB TechTransfer has played an active role in the **EUTOPIA alliance**, an initiative bringing together ten universities to build the university of the future. This network of ten pioneering universities is committed to building a new model of university collaboration across borders. EUTOPIA connects institutions from Cluj-Napoca, Brussels, Cergy, Venice, Dresden, Gothenburg, Ljubljana, Lisbon, Barcelona, and Warwick, with a shared vision of openness, inclusion, and societal impact.

In 2025, the EUTOPIA More project entered its third year. With a **budget of €14.4 million**, the initiative forms the basis for the long-term institutional transformation and structural integration of the alliance into a unified European university. Key priorities included strengthening the Connected Communities, which bring together researchers, students, and societal partners around major societal challenges, as well as consolidating the governance structures of the EUTOPIA Central Office, the EUTOPIA College, and the EUTOPIA Global Office. These developments further reinforce EUTOPIA's position as a leading model in European higher education.

**Two EUTOPIA Weeks** took place in 2025. In June, the University of Warwick hosted the event under the theme "Creating Global Connections", followed by a second gathering in Venice at Ca' Foscari University in December under the motto "Together into the Future". These events provide an important platform for collaboration between the alliance's tech transfer offices and for the follow-up of ongoing projects. Knowledge-sharing activities also continued through **two bilateral Network Studios**. In June, VUB researchers travelled to Warwick for a studio on Sustainability & Circular Economy. In September, TU Dresden hosted a Network Studio on Astrophysics, with strong participation from VUB's B-Phot (Brussels Photonics).

In 2025, the rollout of the **EUTOPIA Health project** also continued. Funded through a European WIDERA call, the initiative aims to strengthen research and innovation capacity in health-related fields, particularly among the alliance's widening partners in Romania, Slovenia, and Portugal. Within this project, the ERIS team of VUB TechTransfer leads the work package supporting researchers in complex EU funding applications. In 2025, this support resulted in nine project submissions, with one project already approved and two still under evaluation. Through these initiatives, VUB TechTransfer continues to strengthen the university's leading role within EUTOPIA and its contribution to European innovation with both regional relevance and global impact.

## FROM RESEARCHER TO ENTREPRENEUR FROM LAB TO IMPACT

StartLab.Brussels, funded since 2018 by VUB's General Strategic Plan 2030, evolved from an incubator for student entrepreneurs from VUB and ULB to a hub that empowers first-time entrepreneurs and academics who seek to create a positive societal impact.



**StartLab.Brussels offers support to (pre-)start-ups across three tracks: Explore, Build and Grow.** Participants benefit from an intensive programme comprising workshops, masterclasses and a final pitch. In addition, entrepreneurs can access coaching from fellow entrepreneurs and experts in various fields such as finance, marketing and legal matters. In 2025, there were 122 entrepreneurs active in the English-language programme of StartLab.Brussels; 27 of them are studying or have studied at the VUB.

Furthermore, in 2024, the former starter seminars at the VUB were replaced by **Startlab Academics**, a new programme embedded within Startlab.Brussels for PhD and postdoc researchers. Based on extensive feedback, the programme was thoroughly evaluated and revised. For the 2025–2026 academic year, a more structured programme was developed, built around the same three tracks as StartLab.Brussels' entrepreneurship programme: Explore, Build and Grow. In an initial phase, the Build track was further developed, aimed at researchers with a concrete idea or research project that they wish to explore from an entrepreneurial perspective. The other two tracks are being developed step by step to further broaden the programme in the future. To strengthen the link with the VUB, the sessions are organised alternately at StartLab and on the VUB campus.

In May 2025, a targeted communication campaign was launched across all VUB channels, supplemented by three successful information sessions. This resulted in a clear increase in brand awareness for Startlab Academics, both within and outside the VUB, including at other universities and colleges. A total of 31 applications were received for the 2025–2026 academic year, from which **24 PhD and postdoctoral researchers** from various departments were selected. During the programme, participants are encouraged to translate their research into potential market opportunities, which they test through interviews with potential users. They are provided with the necessary methodological knowledge and practical tools for this purpose. In addition, attention is paid to intellectual property rights, including safeguarding the patentability of research results.

# UNIVERSITY SPIN-OFFS

By establishing spin-off companies, VUB can translate research results into social and economic value while generating returns for the university and its research groups. VUB TechTransfer plays a key role in identifying, supporting, and assessing spin-off projects. To enhance start-up success, the focus extends beyond innovative technology to include market strategy, value proposition, and building a complementary team.

**In 2025, 5 new spin-offs were created: AILOS, Spica Therapeutics and EMAXSIS (2 companies have opted not to be disclosed yet).**

The total number of active VUB spin-offs is now 52.

## New spin-offs in 2025:



### AILOS

**Driving modern robotics from its very core: the gearboxes**

The advancement of modern robotics starts at its foundation: the gearboxes. Ailos aims to define how these industries operate with increased precision, efficiency and versatility. By innovating gearbox technology across diverse fields, Ailos is catalyzing the transition towards the next wave of automation, productivity and agility.

[ailos-robotics.com](https://ailos-robotics.com)

### Spica Therapeutics

**Pioneering Macrophage-Subset Targeting for Transformative Therapies**

Spica Therapeutics (VIB-VUB) is a pioneering biotech company dedicated to transforming macrophage biology into breakthrough therapies for patients across multiple therapeutic areas. Leveraging its proprietary functional macrophage fingerprinting technology, Spica identifies and selectively targets disease-relevant macrophage subsets to address unmet medical needs in oncology, fibroinflammatory and autoimmune diseases.

[spicatx.com](https://spicatx.com)



### EMAXSIS

**Advanced Edge Technologies and Solutions**

EMAXSIS specialises in edge-monitoring technologies to ensure the reliability of power electronics in the automotive and energy sectors. Their hardware and software solutions support the transition towards sustainable electrification.

[www.emaxis.be](https://www.emaxis.be)

# VUB SPIN-OFF HIGHLIGHTS IN THE PRESS IN 2025

Belgian biotech company targets cancer via 'cells that eat poorly'

June 2025 - Source: De Tijd

10 million euros for Ghent-based pig medicine that replaces antibiotics

July 2025 - Source: De Tijd

Axiles Bionics does Brussels proud at Osaka Expo: 'Recognition for our work'

April 2025 - Source: Bruzz

Belgian bionic foot heads to world market with extra millions

June 2025 - Source: De Tijd

Swave Photonics raises additional Series A funding with €6M (\$6.97M) follow-on investment from IAG Capital Partners and Samsung Ventures

June 2025 - Source: Business Wire

## TECHTRANSFER COMMUNICATION & EVENTS

The VUB TechTransfer communication team connects the dots between groundbreaking research and the world beyond. We ensure clear and impactful communication—both within and outside the university—while (co-)organising events that boost visibility and create valuable networking opportunities. Our key audiences? Researchers, businesses, and society at large.

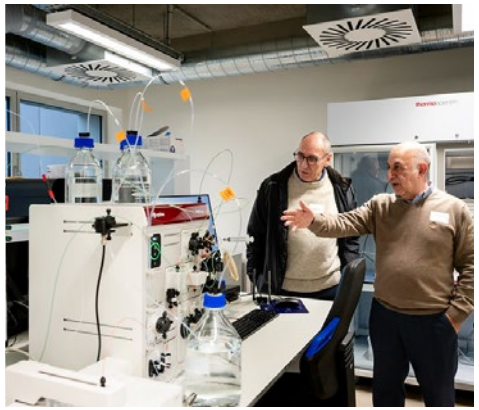
### HIGHLIGHTS IN 2025:



**TECHTRANSFER TALKS:** Insightful conversations with experts, tailored for VUB's academic community. In 2025, we organised two talks; one focused on the Business Developer's role in connecting applied research with industry; the second highlighted the latest key developments at Research Park Zellik.

**DELEGATION VISIT FROM UNIVERSITIES OF THURINGIA:** We were honoured to host a delegation from the Universities of Thuringia to our office for a morning dedicated to sharing best practices and exploring synergistic opportunities. Leading experts from VUB presented their work in Green Electronics, Digital Mobility, and Sustainable Technologies. These productive discussions have laid a powerful foundation for impactful, cross-border research partnerships.





**OPENING CEREMONY OF BIO INCUBATOR BRUSSELS:** The brand-new Bio Incubator Brussels on the VUB Main Campus was officially inaugurated with a ceremony featuring speeches, exclusive facility tours, and a networking reception. This innovative hub brings together science, technology, and entrepreneurship to accelerate cutting-edge biotech innovation.

**KNOWLEDGE FOR GROWTH 2025:** Belgium’s leading life sciences professionals convene yearly at Knowledge for Growth organised by flanders.bio (now Biovia). Alongside our TTO Flanders colleagues, we hosted a physical booth and a live pitch session where ten researchers—two from each Flemish university—presented their biotech projects. Visitors at the TTO Flanders stand explored Flemish university research and connected directly with the pitchers.



**FLANDERS TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION (FTI):** In 2025, preparations began for FTI 2026, a month-long festival in October 2026 across Flanders. For FTI Brussels, Gluon—a Brussels-based arts-and-science organisation—was chosen as coordinator. VUB is a structural partner and sits on the steering committee. The TechTransfer communication team supports concept development and overall communication, and leads the production and promotion of several themed tours on the VUB campus.

**BROCHURE FOR FINDING YOUR RESEARCH PARTNER AT VUB:** A new edition of our brochure was issued, highlighting all the Groups of Excellence in Applied Research (GEARs) and core facilities at VUB. Scan the QR code to explore the brochure:



## In 2025...

- 28,000 people visited our VUB TechTransfer website.
- 55 newsletters (TechTransfer News) were sent across our audience of 3500 internal academic staff members and 350 external subscribers.
- 160,000 views were gained across our LinkedIn posts, which was 4 times the amount of the year before. 750 new followers brought our LinkedIn following to more than 2400 people.

Follow VUB TechTransfer on 

VUBTECHTRANSFER.BE

TTOFLANDERS.BE

# VUB FOUNDATION

## VUB. EVERY DONATION RETURNS.

The VUB Foundation raises philanthropic funds from companies, organisations, institutions and individuals within the framework of of the Vicerectorate of Innovation & Industry Relations. The VUB Foundation coordinates all fundraising, such as gifts, sponsoring, chairs, funds by name and legacies at the VUB under the supervision of the Innovation and Valorisation Board.

For each philanthropic donation, there is a societal return. This is the conviction whereon the policy of the VUB Foundation is based. Each contribution supports education, research, innovation or the heritage of the VUB. The knowledge and insights that arise from these contributions, eventually flow back into our society.

Chairs and sponsorships are important and long-term partnerships designed to support research, innovation, education and internationalization at VUB through external funding, primarily from companies, in the form of donations or sponsorships. In 2025, VUB counted 24 active chairs among which **2 newly created: Leerstoel Topsportbeleid and the HELIOS-VUB Chair for Mental Wellbeing at Work.**

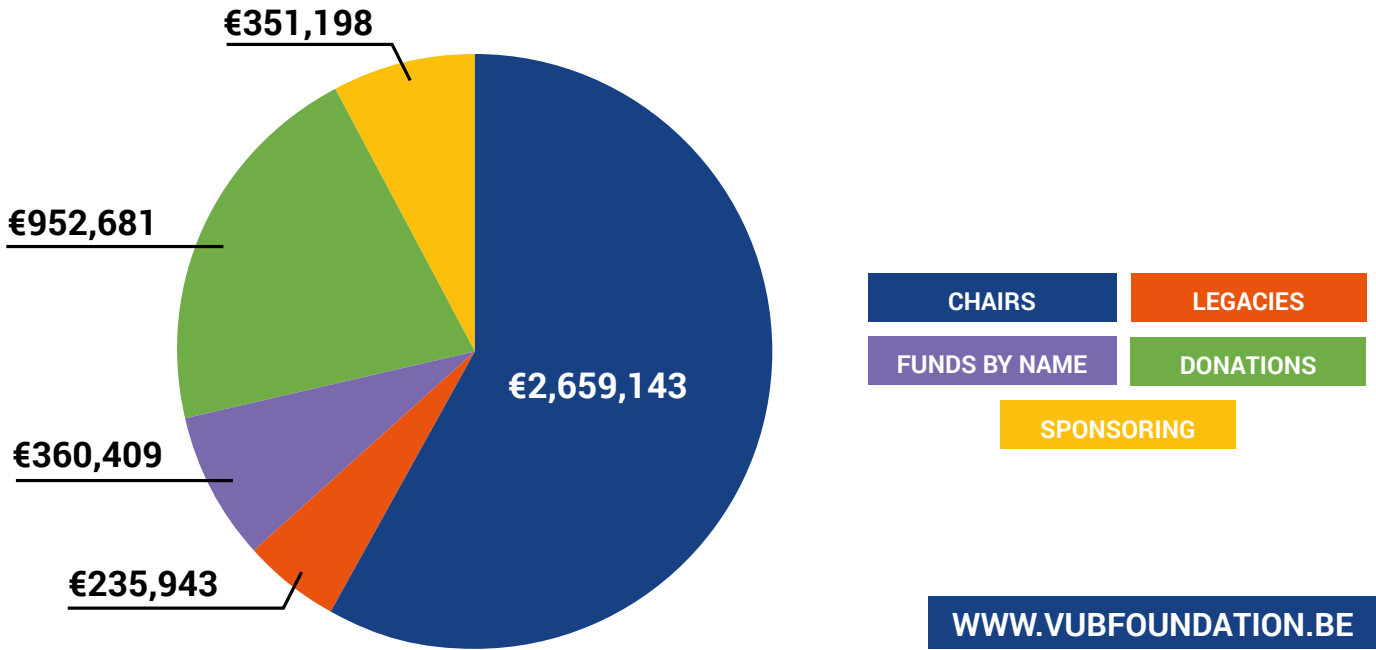
The year was marked by a strong contribution from chairs and sponsorships and a targeted optimization of fundraising efforts. Through the implementation of a new data system and a temporary reduction in direct mail campaigns, a conscious decision was made to invest more in social media for fundraising and internal communication for staff. Today, the VUB has 14 funds by name, of which several booked remarkable successes. The **VUB Yamina Krossa Fund** and the **VUB-UZB Paul De Knop Fund** provided essential financial aid for groundbreaking cancer research in immunotherapy. And with the announced budget cuts in higher education, the **Caroline Pauwels Relief Fund** has become of even higher importance to vulnerable students for continuing their studies.



Oncologist prof. dr. Bart Neyns and neurosurgeon prof. dr. Johnny Duerinck with Ellen Lemaire (right) who raised more than 20.000 euros for the VUB-UZB Paul De Knop Fund

## THE NUMBERS

In 2025, the VUB Foundation had a total income of **€4,569,377** including overhead.



[WWW.VUBFOUNDATION.BE](http://WWW.VUBFOUNDATION.BE)

## THE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

### CONNECTING ACADEMIA AND SOCIETY

With its network of 105 fellows and 186 honorary fellows, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel strengthens the connection between academia and society. VUB fellows are experts and leaders from a wide range of fields who voluntarily contribute their time and knowledge to the university and the UZ Brussel. Through their involvement in advisory boards, guest lectures, supervision of master's theses, and by offering internships in their organizations, they help enrich education, research, innovation, valorisation and policy. Their engagement supports VUB in growing as an open and socially engaged institution.



VUB fellows of 2025 at the fellowship ceremony at the University Foundation

On 3 June 2025, VUB introduced its new generation of fellows during a festive ceremony at the University Foundation in Brussels. Over the coming years, 24 inspiring individuals from diverse sectors will act as ambassadors, promoting the core values of VUB and strengthening the link between science and society.

[WWW.VUB.BE/FELLOWSHIP](http://WWW.VUB.BE/FELLOWSHIP)

# RESEARCHPARK ZELLIK



## RESEARCHPARK ZELLIK

- VUB co-manager of Researchpark Zellik (Flemish Brabant)
- Park evolving into a thematic innovation cluster: healthtech, robotics, research infrastructure
- Company presence linked to active research & structural collaboration with VUB

### 2025:

- Major strategic acceleration and repositioning
- New governance & ownership structure
- Full land ownership acquired by VUB from VLAIO
- Enables targeted attraction of strategic companies

[www.zone-researchpark.be](http://www.zone-researchpark.be)

## GREEN ENERGY PARK

- Created in 2019 (non-profit)
- Located at Researchpark Zellik
- Large-scale living lab for sustainable innovation & co-creation
- Focus on collaboration between industry, academia, government & users
- Key developments:
  - Smart Living Lab
  - Reconstruct demo house
  - Data center (construction 2022 – completed 2024, with Ghelamco)

[www.greenenergypark.be](http://www.greenenergypark.be)



## PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

### VISION: INTEGRATED CAMPUS COMBINING RESEARCH, INFRASTRUCTURE, INCUBATION & SCALING

- Redevelopment of ex-Roularta building as a flagship site
  - Home to 7 Tesla MRI
    - | Unique, state-of-the-art infrastructure
    - | Focus: neuroscience, medical imaging, personalized healthcare
    - | Boosts collaboration with academic & industry partners
  - Development of a robotics hub
    - | Applications in healthcare, industry, and research
    - | Focus on start-ups, spin-offs & deeptech companies
- Development of new Origin building
  - Mixed use project with lab spaces
- Former Innovation & Incubation Center Brussel - IICB
  - Redestination of building towards flexible research & innovation infrastructure

# INCUBATORS 2025

## VUB -VIB BIO INCUBATOR BRUSSELS

- on VUB main campus
- with partner VIB (Vlaams Instituut voor Biotechnologie)
- focus on biotech
- in 2022 launch renovation of Willy Van der Meeren units
- 2025 first fully operational year
- move-in-ready lab and office spaces
- shared (lab) kitchen
- embedded in research ecosystem
- houses VIB NANOBODY® VHH Core facility

### 2025:

- focus on embedding BIB in biotech ecosystem (Flanders & Brussels)
- active prospection new companies
- prospering industry-university collaboration

[www.vubtechtransfer.be/bio-incubator-brussels-bib](http://www.vubtechtransfer.be/bio-incubator-brussels-bib)



## VUB BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY INCUBATOR - ICAB NV

- near VUB main campus
- focus on start-ups & scale-ups in technology and engineering
- high occupancy rate
- access to expertise, facilities and strategic partnerships

[www.icabrussel.be](http://www.icabrussel.be)



## INCUBATOR FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS - STARTLAB.BRUSSELS

- initiated by VUB and ULB
- pre-incubator supporting first-time entrepreneurs
- since 2025 pre-incubator for research-based spin-offs
- training and coaching programmes
- co-working space in Etterbeek
- access to a network of mentors and investors

[startlab.brussels](http://startlab.brussels)

# VUB CROSSTALKS

## OPEN AND CONSTRUCTIVE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

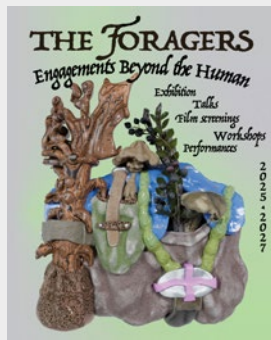
Crosstalks is a transdisciplinary platform that fosters open and constructive dialogue between academic and corporate researchers, entrepreneurs, artists, designers, policymakers and citizens. Since 2003, it has built a strong reputation at the intersection of science, art and society through public events and collaborative, long-term projects.

Guided by the principles of freedom, equality and connectedness, Crosstalks creates space for unexpected encounters, often beyond academic settings, that explore complex societal challenges through bottom-up collaboration. In close synergy with VUB TechTransfer and in partnership with cultural institutions, public organisations and international networks, the platform helps make academic knowledge more accessible and relevant. Its programmes are inclusive by design, with diverse voices shaping the content and a strong focus on accessibility through pay-what-you-can ticketing and by recording and subtitling events to ensure they remain available and open to a wide audience.

## PROJECTS 2025 [WWW.CROSSTALKS.NET](http://WWW.CROSSTALKS.NET)

### The Foragers: Engagements Beyond the Human

is an interdisciplinary art-science project exploring foraging as a cultural, ecological and philosophical practice in times of ecological urgency. Running from 2025 to 2027, the project brings together artists, researchers and enthusiasts to **rethink the relationships between humans, non-humans and their environments**, not only in remote wilderness but also in everyday urban spaces.



In 2025, the programme opened with three public events in Brussels. The screening of *Up on the Mountain* at Cinema RITCS explored mushroom harvesting, survival and informal economies at the edges of capitalism. At Bozar, an exclusive preview of *Summer Grass, Winter Worm* traced the journey of a rare Himalayan fungus between mountain livelihoods, global markets and biotech ambitions. The year concluded with *Verwildering: Hoe wild mag het worden?* at deBuren, a debate on rewilding, nature management and the boundaries between nature and culture. Together, these events attracted 190 attendees, including a sold-out screening at Bozar and a full house at deBuren.

The project engages students, researchers and the wider public interested in ecology, art, sustainability, anthropology, history and philosophy. The series is co-curated by artistic researcher Gosie Vervloessem, historian Benoît Henriët (VUB) and VUB Crosstalks, with the support of ERC FORAGENCY and the Chair Casterman-Hamers: History and Philosophy of Sciences. The programme aligns particularly with the UN SDGs on climate action (SDG 13), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and, through its reflection on natural resources and alternative forms of consumption, responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).

**Frames of Resistance** is a film screening series launched in 2024 by VUB Crosstalks, the Fatima Mernissi Chair, the VUB Palestine Solidarity Network, United Screens for Palestine and Cinema RITCS. The series highlights **the work of Arab filmmakers, with a particular focus on gendered perspectives**. In response to the ongoing war in Gaza and Lebanon, the program amplifies voices that shed light on Israeli colonization, violence and the resilience of Palestinian communities. The films span different genres and cultural contexts, offering a nuanced alternative to dominant Western narratives. Each screening is accompanied by talks with filmmakers, scholars and activists who explore the social and political power of cinema.

In 2025, the series continued at Cinema RITCS with two screenings and discussions. *The Dupes*, directed by Tewfik Saleh, explored exile, displacement and political betrayal through the story of three Palestinian refugees attempting to cross into Kuwait. The screening was followed by a discussion with artist Reem Shilleh and researcher Brigitte Herremans, moderated by film historian Wouter Hessels. *Ghost Hunting*, by Palestinian director Raed Andoni, confronted the trauma of imprisonment through the reconstruction of the Moscobiya interrogation centre by former Palestinian prisoners. The screening was followed by a discussion with Wadee Hanani, assistant director of the film, journalist Lama Ghosheh and activist Fadia Barghouti, moderated by psychologist Ama Kissi.

Together, the 2025 screenings attracted 116 attendees and brought together students, researchers and the wider public for reflection on the social and political power of cinema. The project contributes to progress on gender equality (SDG 5) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10).



# WANT TO REACH OUT TO US? OUR TEAM IS READY TO ASSIST YOU!

You can find all our team members and their contact information on our Staff Page:

[www.vubtechtransfer.be/about-us/staff](http://www.vubtechtransfer.be/about-us/staff)

Alternatively, you can send a general email to  
[techtransfer@vub.be](mailto:techtransfer@vub.be)

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