

**European Trans-Atlantic Coral  
Ecosystem Study  
(EuroTRACES)**

## Call for Outline Proposals

### European Trans-Atlantic Coral Ecosystem Study (EuroTRACES)

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#### What is EUROCORES?

The ESF European Collaborative Research (EUROCORES) Programmes offer a flexible framework for researchers in Europe to work on questions which are best addressed in large-scale collaborative research programmes.

The EUROCORES Programmes allow excellent researchers in the various participating countries to collaborate in research projects 'at the bench'. They also allow, when appropriate, colleagues in non-European countries, for example the US, to participate. The Programmes encourage and anticipate networking and collaboration between researchers in order to achieve synthesis of scientific results across the programme, to connect with related programmes, and to disseminate findings.

The EUROCORES Programmes allow national research funding organisations in Europe and beyond to support top-class research in and across all scientific areas, by matching their strategic priorities with the needs articulated by the scientific community.

Final funding decisions on the projects and the research funding remain with the national funding organisations, based on a single international peer review process operated by ESF. Financed by the participating national Funding Organisations, ESF also provides support for networking between the researchers and for the scientific synthesis of research results and their dissemination. In this way, the EUROCORES Scheme complements the EC Framework Programme and other collaborative funding schemes at European level.

For further information see:  
<http://www.esf.org/eurocores>

Following agreement with 8 funding organisations in *Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain*, the European Science Foundation is launching a Call for Outline Proposals for Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs) to be undertaken within the EUROCORES Programme "European Trans-Atlantic Coral Ecosystem Study" (EuroTRACES). The Programme aims to support high quality multidisciplinary collaborative research in Europe, with involvement of leading scientists from outside Europe, when appropriate.

The research phase of EuroTRACES will run for three years and includes national research funding as well as support for networking and dissemination activities. The research grants are provided directly to the eligible and successful Principal Investigators by their respective national funding organisations. The networking and dissemination support, also financed by the national organisations, is centrally managed by the ESF.

Outline Proposals are to be submitted by 26 March 2010. It is expected that Full Proposals will be invited by 4 May 2010 with 25 June 2010 as expected deadline for submission.

A Programme-specific website can be consulted for the latest updates at <http://www.esf.org/eurotraces>

### Background and objectives

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The last ten years have seen great advances in our understanding of cold-water corals as significant ecological "engineers" on the continental shelf, offshore banks, seamounts and canyons. Stony scleractinian cold-water corals can develop large deep-water reef frameworks providing complex three-dimensional habitat for a spectacularly diverse associated fauna. Other groups of corals, such as gorgonians and black (antipatharian) corals also provide long-lasting habitat, notably on seamounts and mid-ocean ridges. Indeed, recent dating studies show that a cold-water antipatharian coral from the Hawaiian Seamounts is the oldest marine animal, and probably the oldest animal, on Earth. But cold-water corals are not only a biological or ecological curiosity. They develop deep-sea reefs and giant coral carbonate mounds that trace their origins back to the Pliocene 2.7 Ma. Their long-lasting skeletons give a newly discovered archive of intermediate water mass history providing records of the variability of important ocean properties during past periods of climate change.

The idea behind the EuroTRACES basin-scale research programme is to attract the wider marine science community, including many who have not previously worked with cold-water corals. For example, in terms of ocean climate studies, records of palaeo-productivity and palaeo-ocean circulation represent vital contributions to our basic understanding of the drivers of deep-sea biota at ecological timescales. Particularly exciting opportunities exist to use geochemical tracers identified in both deep-sea sediments and coral habitats. These habitats are rich in associated species, and dynamic in terms of local sedimentary regimes. Recent research shows that over the last 200,000 years, cold-water corals thrive in certain periods but are absent during others, often correlating with numerous periods of rapid climate change over the past 25,000 years and more. As such they offer tremendous potential for broad, interdisciplinary deep-sea research and EuroTRACES sets out the framework for a unique new collaboration in Europe between palaeoceanography, deep-sea ecology and marine geology.

The EuroTRACES programme will benefit from recent scientific and technical advances: (1) baseline habitat mapping provides a database of target sites across the Atlantic basin, itself a global centre of cold-water coral records; (2) genetic markers (notably microsatellites) have recently been developed for a number of cold-water corals, allowing issues such as their genetic connectivity and clonality to be examined; (3) exciting geochemical advances have now produced coral skeletal proxies for several parameters including ocean ventilation history, seawater temperature, seawater provenance, nutrient status and even pollution history; (4) the seagoing infrastructure (e.g. remotely operated and autonomous underwater vehicles, coring and observation tools) and expertise available in European research groups have greatly expanded over the last decade. While EuroTRACES is based around questions of Atlantic connectivity and (palaeo)oceanography, studies of the adjoining Gulf of Mexico and Mediterranean basins are also relevant.

Understanding deep-water, suspension-feeding systems, such as those formed by cold-water corals, requires integrated interdisciplinary research involving marine biologists, chemists, geologists and physicists. Developing appropriate tools for their long-term conservation not only requires understanding their ecological connectivity but also the policy context in which conservation strategies can further develop. Here contributions from social scientists and those working at the interface of science and policy are needed. EuroTRACES is an ambitious programme designed to bring together European research groups to conduct internationally

excellent deep-sea science especially alongside North American collaborators.

EuroTRACES will contribute to the review and compilation of relevant information of maritime policy both at European and international (High Seas) levels. The policy work should ensure clear two-way communication between the pure science projects and the policy-maker end users. For example, several social scientists are the members of the Trans-Atlantic Coral Ecosystem Study (i.e. TRACES) community; their research (as well as others in similar fields) could focus upon regional governance case studies to critically evaluate the process of conservation policy development for cold-water corals and deep sea habitats in general. EuroTRACES policy research would directly benefit major European policy developments including the Natura 2000 network and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

In terms of ethical issues, all partners in EuroTRACES should agree to follow the 'Code of Conduct for Responsible Marine Research in the Deep Seas and High Seas of the OSPAR Maritime Area'.

## Scientific goals

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This EUROCORES call will examine the connectivity, ecology, biodiversity and palaeoceanographic archives of Atlantic deep-sea coral habitats. As we enter a time of rapid climate change induced by anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, cold-water corals are not only threatened by ocean warming and acidification but their skeletal remains and associated reef deposits contain vital clues to past rapid climate change events.

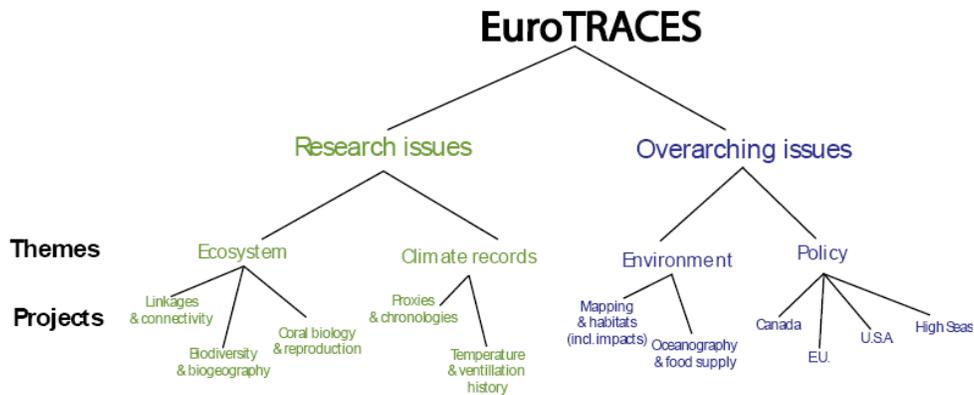
EuroTRACES sets out to unlock this information and set these long-lived, biodiverse deep-sea habitats in a wider context. Alongside its scientific vision, EuroTRACES CRPs should maintain a strong dialogue with policy makers to ensure relevant information quickly becomes available to support on-going efforts to conserve the Atlantic's cold-water coral ecosystems.

## Research topics

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### Proposals

EuroTRACES is designed to advance ecological and palaeoceanographic science while collaborating with existing geological research activities based upon seabed sedimentary records. It is envisaged that the EuroTRACES programme is organised in a scheme where



research issues and overarching issues could be grouped into four broad thematic areas.

### Topics

As described above, EuroTRACES research will focus on both 'ecosystem' and 'climate records' based research. Key scientific questions to be addressed by the projects include:

#### 1. Ecosystem research: Linkages and connectivity

- How do the various factors (depth differences, habitat specificity, habitat availability, colonisation processes, reproductive and larval dispersal modes, physical and hydrographic settings) act as facilitators or barriers to the dispersal and exchange of corals and their associated fauna?
- What are the patterns of dispersal, migration and connectivity of coral species and their associated fauna?
- What are the dominant forces (e.g. co-evolution, isolation, etc.) structuring the distribution and dynamics of coral species and their populations?
- How has climate change and the role of changing oceanic circulation shaped the evolution, diversity and biogeography of corals and their associated fauna throughout the Atlantic?
- Do patterns of dispersal indicate that a given coral habitat (e.g. coral carbonate mound, bank, seamount or canyon) may have served as a refuge or retained ancestral lineages for other coral habitats?
- Is dispersal controlled by the influence of modern day current patterns? Is migration uni-directional, either toward or away from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge?
- Can genetic connectivity studies identify key vulnerable coral habitats with a crucial role to be considered in the design and assessment of conservation and management strategies?

#### 2. Ecosystem research: Biodiversity & biogeography

- Are cold-water coral communities primarily defined by well known biogeographic patterns, and what are the underlying factors (depth, seabed topography, substrate, currents, food, etc. both contemporary and historical) that control their distribution?
- Are cold-water coral communities assembled primarily through random dispersal, migration, and local extinction processes (neutral theory) or are species distributed along environmental gradients according to their habitat requirements (niche theory)?
- Do cold-water coral habitats support (and maybe export) increased biodiversity compared with other habitats?

#### 3. Ecosystem research: Coral biology

- What are habitat-forming coral species' reproductive modes, fecundity and larval biology?
- What triggers spawning and are there overall trends in coral reproduction across the Atlantic Ocean?
- Can we elucidate the feeding ecology of cold-water corals?
- What controls the rate of coral skeleton growth and how does this affect the palaeo-proxy record?
- What is the flux of carbon through the coral animal and how could this change under altered temperature and  $p\text{CO}_2$  conditions?
- Can mass balance models of carbon and nitrogen flux through cold-water coral habitats be constructed?

#### 4. Climate records research

- How reliable are chemical proxies for determining ocean environmental conditions?

- What is the history of cold-water coral ecosystem development? For example, periods when corals grow are sporadic over timescales of tens of thousands of years and differ in the NW and NE Atlantic. Why?
- How can we improve our understanding of past ocean circulation (including heat transport and the carbon cycle on decadal and glacial time scales) through basin-wide studies of cold-water coral ecosystems?
- What are controlling factors on cold-water coral ecosystem development?
- What is the sensitivity of cold-water coral ecosystems to global change and ocean acidification?
- Do cold-water coral habitats of different structural character (mounds vs. isolated reefs/ridges etc.) represent different hydrodynamic control (residual vs. tidal flow dominance, internal waves, turbulence levels etc.)?

### 3. Policy

- Maritime policy relevant to cold-water coral conservation varies across the Atlantic and evolves as new conservation measures are developed (notably on the High Seas). Can this information be assembled and reviewed to help support clear two-way dialogue between EuroTRACES research objectives and policy maker requirements?
- How has national and international maritime policy been used to conserve cold-water coral habitats? What can be learned from selected case studies?
- How can a strong link between baseline academic research and policy needs be developed and maintained?

## Overarching Issues

The following cross-cutting research activities are planned to supplement and support the previously mentioned scientific research themes.

### 1. Mapping & habitats

- The Atlantic Ocean is a global centre of cold-water coral records and habitat mapping data but no one database draws this information together. Can this information and new mapping data generated by EuroTRACES projects be assembled in one searchable, interactive data system to support future natural science, conservation and policy making needs?
- Can the techniques of predictive habitat mapping be applied and refined across a variety of scales from local to regional and trans-Atlantic?

### 2. Oceanography & food supply

- What is the role of basin scale circulation on the dispersal of coral larvae? Are there barriers to gene flow, both vertically and horizontally, between locations within the Atlantic?
- What are the mechanisms that transport organic matter from the pelagic to the reef ecosystem and do differences in these mechanisms on western and eastern Atlantic boundaries reflect the coral, or associated species, distribution at the two continental margins.
- Do regional changes in organic matter quality reflect the coral distribution there and what is the role of irregular topographic features in concentrating or modulating food sources?
- Can circulation and ecosystems models be used, as well as other indicator data (e.g. teleconnection pattern indices, continuous plankton recorder data), to predict circulation/productivity changes and relate these climatic changes in North Atlantic circulation and productivity to palaeo-records contained within coral skeletons?

# Guidelines for applications

## (Outline and Full Proposals)

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This Call for Proposals is for Outline Proposals for Collaborative Research Projects (CRP). Proposers should be individual scientists (or research groups represented by individual scientists) who are eligible for funding from a national funding organisation participating in the EUROCORES Programme EuroTRACES.

Scientists or groups not applying for or not eligible to apply for funding from such an organisation can be associated to a proposal when their scientific added value can be demonstrated. Participation of Associate Partners in a project must be fully self-supporting and will not be financially sponsored by the participating funding organisations.

Proposals are only eligible if they fulfil all of the following **criteria**:

- Proposals must involve, as a minimum, three eligible Principle Investigators (PIs) from **three different countries**.
- A maximum of 50% of the total number of Individual Projects (IPs) in a Collaborative Research Project (CRP) can come from one country.
- Proposals must involve more PIs than Associated Partners (APs).

Applications should envisage three years of research. Taking into account the two-stage proposal selection and approval process (described below), the successful projects are expected to begin their research phase activities in **April 2011**.

## Online submission of applications

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Outline and Full Proposals will be submitted online. Applicants should follow the proposal structure as indicated in the application template for Outline Proposals available on the Programme website at:

<http://www.esf.org/eurotraces>.

Links to information on national funding eligibility and requirements as well as to a EUROCORES Glossary and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are available on the Programme website.

**Prior to submitting Outline Proposals, all applicants must contact their national funding organisations in order to verify eligibility and**

**to ensure compliance with their national grant requirements and regulations. The list of participating organisations and their nominated contact persons is included on the last page of this document.**

At the time of the online submission of the Outline Proposal, the Project Leader will be asked to confirm on behalf of the consortium that all the Principal Investigators in the CRP have consulted their national funding organisations and are eligible for funding from these organisations.

## Outline Proposals

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**Outline Proposals are invited by 26 March 2010.**

Outline Proposals will be examined by the participating funding organisations for formal eligibility. Therefore, it is crucial that all applicants requesting funding contact their national funding organisation prior to submitting their proposals.

In compliance with the rules and regulations of the participating national funding organisations, the requested funds under the EUROCORES Programme EuroTRACES may include salaries for scientific and technical staff, equipment, travel costs and consumables within the project. The amounts requested from each funding organisation participating in the call must be clearly specified. National policies may also require the proposal to contain specific additional information. Applicants should be aware that the participating funding organisations can make adjustments to the requested funds in order to bring these in line with their normal grant regulations and standards.

As described below, applications will be reviewed according to specific assessment criteria in a two-stage procedure. The goal is to select scientifically excellent proposals which fit well within the scope of the programme and have significant potential to add value to its achievements.

At the outline stage, the Review Panel will select proposals based on the following criteria:

- Relevance to the Call for Proposals
- Novelty and originality
- European added value (scientific)
- Qualifications of the applicants

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An Outline Proposal must comprise:

- A short description of the CRP (max. 1200 words, including objectives, milestones, methodologies (e.g. experiments and fieldwork);
  - Short description of how (and why) the partners contributing to the CRP will work together and how their contributions will be integrated;
- Short CVs of Project Leader (PL), all PIs and Associate Partners, including five most relevant publications (max. one page each);
- Estimated budget (consistent with the rules of relevant national funding organisation), tabulated according to a provided template.

Associated Partners (APs) are also considered part of a CRP and will be assessed as such at both the Outline and Full Proposal stage.

It will be assumed that arrangements for the handling of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) will be in place within projects, following the applicable national legislation and national funding organisation's regulations. Applicants are strongly urged to have such arrangements in place, covering all research groups (including any associated groups) before the start of the projects. It is expected that the results obtained by the projects supported under this EUROCORES Programme will be placed in the public domain, through standard scientific dissemination activities.

It is also expected that compliance with all other relevant national or international regulations on research (for example ethics) will have been affirmed before funding is granted. It is the responsibility of applicants to clarify any such matters (if applicable) with their national contact points.

## Full Proposals

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**Full Proposals will be invited following the recommendations of the Review Panel. The deadline for Full Proposals will be announced later, but is expected to be around 25 June, 2010.**

Please note that only applicants who have submitted an Outline Proposal can submit a Full Proposal.

For the Full Collaborative Research Project (CRP) Proposals, the most important selection

criterion is "scientific quality". Other criteria include interdisciplinarity (according to the scope of the call), qualifications of the applicants, level of integration and collaboration, feasibility and appropriateness of methodologies, European added value, relation to other projects (complementarities versus risk of overlaps and double-funding) and suitability of the requested budget.

The Full Proposals will be assessed by at least three independent external expert referees selected by the ESF. The expert referees are selected from a pool of scientists suggested by the participating funding organisations, the Review Panel and the ESF office. The names of all referees used in the international peer review of EUROCORES programmes, together with the names of those who have contributed to the peer review process in other ESF instruments, will be published on the ESF website once in a given year.

The referee reports will be made available (anonymously) to the applicants for their information and if necessary for their comments and clarifications. The Review Panel will rank all Full Proposals based on the assessment of the Full Proposal, the anonymous referee reports and the applicant's responses to these.

The Review Panel will create a rank-ordered list of the strongest Full Proposals and will subsequently make recommendations to the Management Committee for the funding of these proposals. The Management Committee assigned to each programme comprises representatives of all the participating funding organisations.

The actual granting of the funds to the Individual Projects will be based on the Review Panel's ranked list. The funding cut-off will be determined based on the total amount of funds available in each participating Funding Organisation and how the Individual Projects figure on the list. The use of funds in a project will be subject to the national requirements and regulations of each participating Funding Organisation.

Full proposals must include sound and well-argued scientific cases both at the level of the consortium's collective objectives and in terms of the expected contributions of each of the Individual Projects in the consortium. Full Proposals must also include a list of all participants and their contact information and short CVs, detailed tabulated budgets for the whole CRP and for each project within it. Full Proposals could include other necessary

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supporting information. A coherent and common scientific case must be made throughout the proposal to demonstrate a collective and collaborative aim and for scientific synergy and integration of multinational expertise. In addition, the amount requested from each national funding organisation has to be clearly and separately specified. Detailed instructions on requirements and how to complete the application forms will be made available when inviting Full Proposals.

The **Project Leader** (PL) will be the main point of contact between the ESF and the CRP for the whole duration of the project. He/she will be responsible for the flow of information and communication between the ESF and all the participants in the CRP. The PL will represent the Collaborative Research Project in relation to its participation in programme activities and for the fulfilment of reporting requirements for the CRP as a whole and for the contributions of the individual Principal Investigators in the CRP.

In addition to their normal scientific and collaborative activities within the CRP, all **Principal Investigators** will be responsible for dealing with the requirements concerning the contributions of their national funding organisation, and for supporting the Project Leader in the overall progress of the CRP, including organising and participating in networking activities and in the fulfilment of reporting requirements.

## Programme Structure and Management

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### Programme Structure

The overall responsibility for the governance of each individual EUROCORES programme lies with a *Management Committee*, whose members include one representative from each participating funding organisation in the programme (usually a senior science manager), together with an ESF representative.

Proposal assessment and selection are the responsibility of an international, independent *Review Panel*. The members of this panel are leading scientists, appointed by the ESF following suggestions from participating Funding Organisations. The membership of the Review Panel will be available on the Programme website for information. The Review Panel is also

expected to monitor the overall scientific progress of the programme.

The Scientific Committee is formed by the Project Leaders of all funded CRPs and will be responsible for the overall scientific progress of the programme, including for the preparation of a work plan for the overall programme activities, including networking and dissemination. The Scientific Committee will also advise and support the EUROCORES Programme Coordinator in the coordination of the programme.

## Programme Networking

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Networking activities are designed to strengthen the scientific objectives of the EUROCORES Programme by promoting coherence and synergy in the activities of the scientific community involved. This will help to produce the European added value which is a main objective of all EUROCORES Programmes.

Networking and collaboration within EUROCORES Programmes take place at two levels:

1. Between the various Individual Projects within each Collaborative Research Project (CRP) (intra-CRP activities), and;
2. Between the funded CRPs in the programme (cross-CRP activities).

The intra-CRP activities must be supported through the individual research grants the participants receive from the national funding organisations in the given CRP.

The cross-CRP activities are centrally funded by the ESF through contributions from the participating organisations to the EUROCORES Programme.

The intra-CRP collaboration is motivated by the nature of the CRP's research objectives, i.e. by the scope and the complexity of the questions it deals with. In a CRP, the participating groups have the opportunity to gather the required critical mass to successfully address the objectives and challenges of their project.

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The cross-CRP networking and collaboration is inspired by the aims and the nature of the EUROCORES Programme as a whole. The themes of EUROCORES Programmes are selected because they demonstrate a clear need for collaboration in the proposed field. The funded CRPs will collectively establish and streamline this new collaboration. To this end, the CRPs will engage the programme participants and, when of clear benefit, colleagues from outside the programme in joint activities such as:

- Programme-wide meetings or conferences;
- Working group meetings for the exchange of information and results across the CRPs;
- Joint scientific meetings or summer schools;
- Short term visits;
- Development and delivery of joint training programmes;
- Seminars, workshops, symposia, invited sessions either stand-alone or as part of other larger events;
- Common web-facilities and publications.

Through active participation of scientists in the above mentioned activities, not only can existing collaborations be enhanced, but new and strategic partnership opportunities may also be identified.

Furthermore, these activities may provide opportunities to explore aspects of the programme which are not covered by the funded research projects.

The integrating activities between the CRPs should help to strengthen the field by building coherence within the existing and emerging research communities and will serve as platforms for the dissemination and outreach of the research conducted in the programme.

Project members are expected to participate annually in at least one cross-CRP activity.

When submitting your proposal, please note that the costs for networking within your CRP should be included in your proposal as part of the costs of meetings, travel and subsistence. Funds for networking between the CRPs will be centrally managed by the ESF through contributions from the participating funding organisations.

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## Programme evaluation

A mid-term evaluation involving the Review Panel will assess the overall progress of the Programme. The Review Panel may also comment on the CRPs' work plan in relation to the objectives of the overall Programme. A final evaluation at the end of the Programme will assess the overall achievements of the whole EUROCORES Programme.

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## Ship time

The Irish Marine Institute has agreed to contribute a maximum of 15 days ship time if one of the PhD scholarships in the proposal is focused on marine bio-discovery/ biotechnology and works in collaboration with the Beaufort Marine Biodiscovery Programme.

# Contacts in the participating organisations

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## **Belgium:**

### **Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO)**

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## **Germany:**

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## **Luxembourg:**

### **Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR)**

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## **The Netherlands:**

### **Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)**

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## **Poland:**

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## **Spain:**

### **Comision Interministerial de Ciencia y Tecnologia (MICINN)**

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