



Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions COFUND

IM π ACT

2021-2026

CALL 2023 (CALL 2)

Guide for Applicants

June 2023

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. IMPIACT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BROADER CHALLENGE

Europe is currently facing several challenges in its R&I landscape. Studies have shown that the European Union is struggling to keep up in the global race for innovation, and that stronger collaborations between academia, business and civil society are needed to counter this trend. Consequently, **the future of innovation leadership in the EU goes hand in hand with knowledge and technology transfer.**

In addition to this observation, research focusing on the practices of TTOs has identified **an underexplored opportunity in knowledge and technology transfer, i.e. the inclusion of postdoctoral researchers** in the process. Postdocs can have tremendous potential in triggering economic and social impact, while training in knowledge and technology transfer can significantly expand their career development.

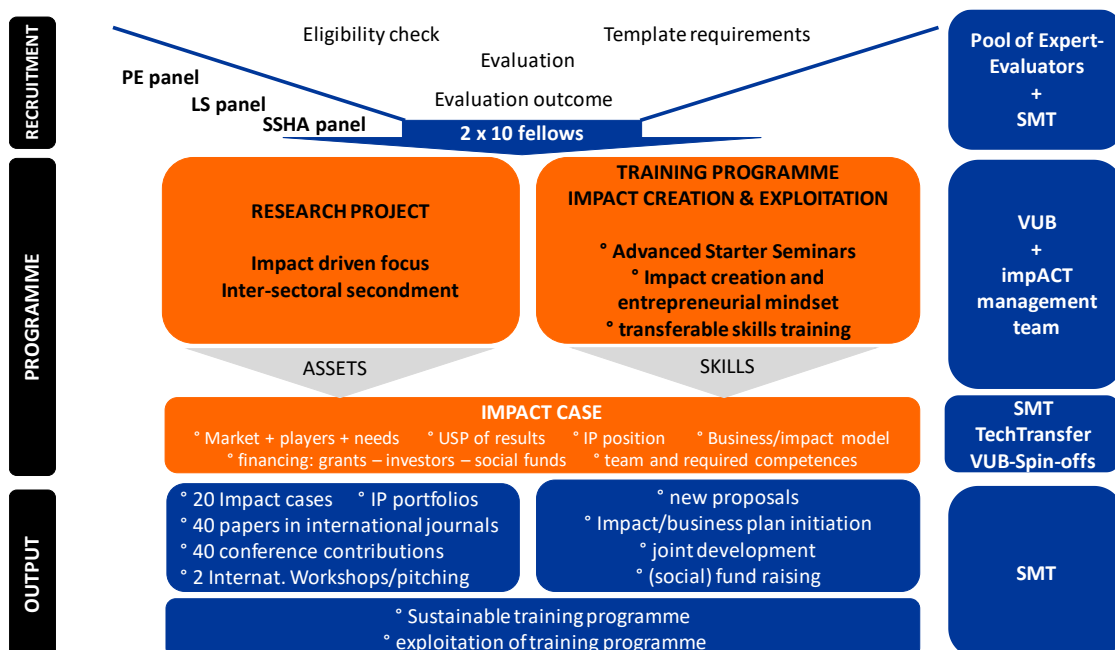
OVERALL OBJECTIVE

With IMPIACT, VUB wants to address these challenges on a local scale, by deploying a postdoctoral research and training programme fostering impact development and entrepreneurship. We will deliver 20 postdoctoral researchers equipped with the necessary knowledge and technology transfer skills to take up leadership positions in academia, business and civil society and to deploy intersectoral solutions the European R&I landscape so much needs.

This overall objective will be met through a set of **specific objectives** focusing on the development and implementation of the IMPIACT structure, more specifically on:

- The recruitment of postdoctoral fellows
- The impact- and entrepreneurship-driven research
- The dedicated training programme fostering impact development and entrepreneurship
- The dissemination, exploitation and communication activities

THE IMPIACT CONCEPT



As the visualization indicates, the IM π ACT concept covers:

- 1) The input in the programme of 20 postdoctoral researchers through a recruitment process
- 2) The content of the programme itself covered by an impact- and entrepreneurship-driven research project and a challenging training programme
- 3) Development of an impact case by each fellow
- 4) The output of the programme with many results both at programme and at research project level.

CONSORTIUM STRUCTURE

The implementation of the IM π ACT research and training programme, is realized by:

- **Beneficiary Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)** developing, implementing and realizing the programme, recruiting the 20 postdoctoral researchers in an open competition, taking into account gender equality and diversity and hosting the selected fellows.
- **International partner organizations** having signed a Letter of Commitment (LoC) to accept fellows for recruitment if the topic of the research project fits with the activities of the partner organization and further additional partner organizations to be identified during the recruitment process.

EXPECTED IMPACT

At researcher level

- To diversify and expand the postdocs' career pathways
- To trigger an impact-driven and/or entrepreneurial mindset
- To enhance the postdocs' role in a collaborative network of academic, business and civil society partners

At organisation level

- To include postdocs in knowledge and technology transfer and as such to tap into underexplored potential
- To increase the international attractiveness of VUB
- To increase the international attractiveness of participating companies, organisations and institutions
- To strengthen VUB's R&I ecosystem
- To lay the groundwork for more largescale collaborative projects in the future

At system level

- To contribute to Europe's competitiveness and growth by focusing on young talent

I.2 CALL 2023 – Second call in IM π ACT

- **Opening of the call:** 1st June 2023
- **Closing of the Call:** 31st August 2023 @ 23h00 CET
- **Eligibility check:** First 2 weeks of September 2023
- **Evaluation:** from 16th of September 2023 until 15th of November 2023
- **Information to applicants:** Second half of November 2023
- **Start of projects:** between 1 February 2024 and 30 April 2024

DURATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP: 24 months

II. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The candidates must respect a number of eligibility rules.

European disqualifying eligibility conditions

- The candidates have to meet the rule of international mobility, which implies that the candidates cannot have resided in Belgium for more than 12 months in the last 3 years before the call deadline. Take into account that time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention, compulsory national service and/or short stays such as holidays are not taken into account for calculating the 12 months.
- On the date of the call deadline, the candidates must hold a PhD degree or have at least 4 years of full-time equivalent research experience, measured from the date when the candidate obtained the degree entitling him or her to embark on a doctorate, either in the country in which the degree was obtained or in the country in which the researcher is recruited, even if a doctorate was never started or envisaged.

Belgian disqualifying eligibility conditions

- At the start of the employment contract between VUB and the postdoctoral researcher, the latter cannot have any other contract with any other organization.

Disqualifying eligibility condition on programme level

- The SMT will analyze the integrality and administrative correctness of the application. It will check if the application includes 1) an administrative form describing the applicant, identifying his/her hosting research group at VUB and covering all eligibility criteria and 2) a research and innovation project indicating the impact potential of the proposed research.

Non-disqualifying eligibility condition on programme level

- In case of applications exceeding the maximum number of pages determined in the application template, the SMT will delete all excess pages prior to sending the application to the independent experts.

III. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

III.1 APPLICATION PLATFORM

Applications are submitted online in the dedicated platform that is accessible through the IMPACT website (<https://impact-fellowship.eu/>). Applications sent via other means (e-mail, post, etc.) will not be considered. It is the responsibility of the applicant to submit the application on time in order to avoid last minute delays due to the high number of submissions. The submission platform will be automatically deactivated at precisely 23:00 CET on Tuesday, August 31st, 2023. No applications will be accepted after the submission deadline, unless technical issues in the submission platform occurred. In this case applicants will be notified accordingly.

III.2 APPLICATION FORM

PART I: THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL of **maximum 7 pages** covering:

- I. EXCELLENCE
 - I.1 Introduction and Objectives
 - I.2 Concept
 - I.3 Research methodology

- II. IMPACT
 - II.1 Expected impact on the applicants career, link with the training programme (Annex I)
 - II.2 Measures to maximise the impact with a link between the proposed research project and offered dissemination, exploitation and communication plan at programme level (Annex II).

- III. IMPLEMENTATION
 - III.1 Work plan
 - III.2 Identified VUB-research group in which the applicant will execute its project

PART II: CV of the applicant in **maximum 5 pages** + completed Ethics table if relevant.

PART III: your PhD certificate and if not available yet, a formal document from your institution stating the PhD has been successfully defended or if not yet, the date of defense. Take into account that the award of a fellowship in this call is conditional the PhD degree is obtained before signing the contract. In any case, fellowships in this call cannot start later than 30 april 2023.

Applications should be prepared in a readable font type, preferably Calibri or Times New Roman, with a font size of at least 10 and line spacing of at least 1.0.

III.3 SUBMISSION

The application documents PART I, PART II and PART III should be submitted in pdf format using the following format for the filenames:

Surname of applicant_proposalacronym_PARTI.pdf

Surname of applicant_proposalacronym_PARTII.pdf

Surname of applicant_proposalacronym_PARTIII.pdf

IV. EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation process will take place over a period of 4 months, following a number of steps. During the first 2 weeks of the evaluation process, the SMT will perform an eligibility check of all applications, divide the applications along its most suitable panel (Panel I: Science and Engineering; Panel II: Life Sciences; Panel III: Social Sciences, Humanities and Economics) and in case of non-disqualifying conditions, eliminate the excess pages before sending the applications to appointed independent experts. The evaluation itself will last 3 months and will cover 3 phases: 1) during phase I each proposal will be evaluated by 3 independent researchers from 3 different countries individually, without interaction; 2) during phase II the same 3 independent experts will be asked to discuss the applications under their evaluation and reach a consensus about the score. During the last 2 weeks of the evaluation process, the SMT will prepare the final ranking, including the elimination of possible ex aequo scores using additional selection criteria such as sub-scores, intersectoral mobility and gender.

For each of the 3 criteria (Excellence, Impact and Implementation as they will be described in the application), all comments will be grouped as strengths and weaknesses and for each criterion a score between 0 and 5 will be given (with 5.0 being excellent; 4.5-4.9 very good (minor weaknesses); 4.0-4.4 good (moderate weakness + possibly minor weaknesses); 3.5-3.9 acceptable (one major weakness + possibly other weaknesses); below 3.5 non-acceptable (major weaknesses or missing parts in the proposal). For the criteria Excellence and Implementation, a threshold value of 3.5 will be set, while for Impact, the threshold will be at 4.0. The threshold for Impact is higher, because of the programme's focus on impact development and entrepreneurship, and the economic and/or social impact potential of the research results.

The SMT will prepare a preliminary ranking list for each panel based on the overall scores the experts agreed on during the consensus phase. The overall score is a percentage and is calculated by multiplying the scores of Excellence and Impact by 8 (each criterion counts for 40 points of the total 100) and the score of Implementation by 4 (counting for 20 points in the overall score). If ex aequo scores occur, the SMT will put an elimination procedure into place following an additional list of priority criteria. After having eliminated the ex aequo cases, a final ranking list for each panel will be prepared. The list of priority criteria determining the elimination of ex aequo cases looks as follows:

1. Highest consensus score on Impact
2. Highest consensus score on Excellence
3. Intersectoral mobility through a secondment
4. International mobility through a secondment
5. Gender
6. Age (young > old)

STEP I: The eligibility check

The SMT will perform the eligibility check against the disqualifying and non-disqualifying conditions during the first 2 weeks of the evaluation. Simultaneously, proposals not passing the non-disqualifying check will be prepared for evaluation by eliminating the excess pages. The SMT will immediately send an official letter to the candidates whose application was not eligible in light of the disqualifying eligibility conditions, informing them about their disqualification.

European disqualifying eligibility conditions

- The candidates have to meet the rule of international mobility, which implies that the candidates cannot have resided in Belgium for more than 12 months in the last 3 years before the call

deadline. Take into account that time spent as part of a procedure for obtaining refugee status under the Geneva Convention, compulsory national service and/or short stays such as holidays are not taken into account for calculating the 12 months.

- On the date of the call deadline, the candidates must hold a PhD degree or have at least 4 years of full-time equivalent research experience, measured from the date when the candidate obtained the degree entitling him or her to embark on a doctorate, either in the country in which the degree was obtained or in the country in which the researcher is recruited, even if a doctorate was never started or envisaged.

Belgian disqualifying eligibility conditions

- At the start of the employment contract between VUB and the postdoctoral researcher, the latter cannot have any other contract with any other organization.

Disqualifying eligibility condition on programme level

- The SMT will analyse the integrality and administrative correctness of the application. It will check if the application includes 1) an administrative form describing the applicant, identifying his/her hosting research group at VUB and covering all eligibility criteria (e.g. residency) and 2) a research and innovation project indicating the impact potential of the proposed research.

Non-disqualifying eligibility condition on programme level

- In case of applications exceeding the maximum number of pages determined in the guide for applicants, the SMT will delete all excess pages prior to sending the application to the independent experts.

STEP II: Allocation of independent experts to proposals

During the first 2 weeks of the evaluation process and after checking possible Conflicts of Interest (Col), the SMT will allocate 3 independent experts from 3 different countries to each eligible application in order to evaluate the proposal against the evaluation criteria. Before getting access to the applications, the independent experts will be asked to sign an NDA stipulating their role, duties and deliverables in the evaluation, as well as a GDPR form protecting their and the applicants' personal data, and a declaration of honor stating no Col is involved in evaluating a certain application.

STEP III: Evaluation Phase I - Individual assessment phase

Each expert will deliver, within an ex ante specified time frame, his/her individual assessment reports to the SMT for registration in the follow-up tables, for a quality check and for the calculation of the scores. They will be expected to comment in a condense and effective way on all criteria and sub-criteria in the reporting template provided by the SMT (typically 1 or 2 sentences per sub-criterion). The sub-criteria were provided in section III.2 of this document.

STEP IV: Evaluation Phase II - Consensus Phase

The SMT will prepare a draft consensus report, starting from the 3 individual evaluation reports for each proposal, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the different reports and highlighting contradictory comments for further discussion. Based on the draft, the independent experts will be invited for a discussion round to go over contradicting opinions and views, and to come to a consensus on the final evaluation. Once consensus is reached, the independent experts will provide their final scores building on the consensus report.

STEP V: Preparing the Ranking List

Acceptance/rejection: In each panel (PE, LS, SSHA), the first 2 applicants will be selected amounting to 6 out of 10 available positions. The remaining 4 available positions will be distributed over the 3 panels based on the relative number of applications in each panel. The SMT will also make a reserve list of 2 applicants per panel, following the ranking, in case one of the first 10 applicants does not accept the position. The 10 successful applicants will be invited to join VUB as postdoctoral researcher under employment contract in the imπACT programme. They will be asked to give us their answer

within 3 weeks; in case of a negative answer, the first applicant on the reserve list will be contacted; in case of a negative answer by the first reserve applicant, the runner-up on the reserve list will be contacted. The SMT will inform all candidates - accepted, ranked on reserve list and rejected – about the evaluation outcome and will provide them with feedback on their application by sending them the consensus evaluation report.

Redress: All applicants will have the possibility to appeal their individual evaluation through a redress procedure. Appeal should be formulated within two weeks after the release of the evaluation outcome and consensus report. However, applicants will be informed that appealing the content of the comments will not change the decision. The SMT relies on the merits of the independent experts. Only identified errors in the procedure will be taken into account.

V. RECRUITMENT

MSCA-COFUND postdoctoral researchers in the imπACT programme will be entitled to receive monthly allowances. The fellow may expect a net salary of 3000 euro per month and is in line with Belgian standards for postdocs. The type of contract will be “Researchers in Mobility”, a specific programme in Belgium suited for foreign postdocs performing research in Belgium.

- The Fellows will receive 35 vacation days per year and their travel ticket to and from Brussels will be reimbursed up to a maximum of €500. **Travel, research and training costs** related to the imπACT activities will be covered by the VUB research group financial resources.
- All fellows will be covered by a health insurance at VUB level (in case an incident occurs at the VUB premises) and a private insurance.
- All fellows will have access to the VUB facilities, such as excellent sports accommodation with public swimming pool, Athletics track, sports fields and Basic Fit (fitness) facilities, all located on campus.

The fellows can use the child care services and can have breakfast and lunch in the VUB restaurant for competitive prices.

VI. CONTACT

Questions related to the application procedure? Please contact VUB-TechTransfer at:

VUB-TechTransfer

MSCA-COFUND IMPACT project management

Pleinlaan 11

B-1050 Brussels

Email: philippe.westbroek@vub.be

ANNEX I

IMPACT training programme as extracted from the proposal

1) Training-through-research

Considering the bottom-up approach of the recruitment process, the training-through-research of the 20 postdoctoral researchers will be the main responsibility of the hosting research group and supervisor at VUB. As such, the programme will ensure dedicated and hands-on training that is relevant for the R&I project the postdocs propose. In addition, the postdocs are eligible for the postdoctoral research training offered by the central R&D office. If they see fit, they can follow courses on quantitative and qualitative research methods, data analysis or research software (e.g. NVIVO and SPSS).

2) Impact development and entrepreneurship training

Impact development and entrepreneurship is interpreted broadly as knowledge and technology transfer in order to create social and/or economic impact. The training will take place by means of:

- **Starter Seminars:** 12 seminars organized during the first semester of the academic year (October – September). The Starter Seminars are not imπACT-specific but have been organized on a yearly basis at VUB since 1995, first physically on Tuesday evenings, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic digitally. They introduce students and researchers to the basic principles of entrepreneurship. As such, the Starter Seminars are the perfect theoretical introduction to the specific imπACT get-together training events where the postdoctoral researchers will be expected to apply the newly gained knowledge to their R&I project (see below). Table 3 gives an overview of the Starter Seminars' course content and the lecturers involved.

Table 3: Content of the Starter Seminars

N°	Topic	Lecturer
1 – 2	Understanding business ecosystems	Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
3-4	Formulating strategies	Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
5	Legal aspects	Elke Janssens, Nautadutilh International Law Firm
6	Marketing	Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
7	Intellectual Property (IP)	Hugo Loosvelt, VUB TechTransfer
8 - 10	Finance	Marie-Laure Vandenhoute, VUB Solvay Business School
11	Team and management aspects	Ingrid De Clercq, OUZIA
12	Academic entrepreneurship in practice	Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer

- **imπACT get-together training events:** 5 specific programme events that will take place every 6 months and that will coach the postdocs on impact case development, starting from their own research results. The postdoctoral researchers will be guided by an impact mentor and will, at the end of the trajectory, present their impact case to a community of relevant stakeholders. The programme foresees a one-week training consisting of the following activities: progress presentations by the postdoctoral researchers, followed by feedback sessions; dedicated training sessions focusing on specific aspects of impact development and entrepreneurship; dedicated training sessions focusing on the development of the postdocs' individual impact case; workshops focusing on transferable skills.

Table 4: Planning of the imπACT get-together training events

Timing	Activity	Participants
Day 1 AM	Progress presentations, Postdocs 1-5	Postdocs, supervisors, fellow researchers, SMT
Day 1 PM	Progress presentations, Postdocs 6-10	
Day 2 AM	Supervisory and management boards	(Deputy) Coordinator, SMT, WP leaders
Day 2 - Day 5	Training activities	Postdocs, lecturers, SMT

Table 5: Content of the imπACT get-together training events

N°	Planning	Course
1	Day 2 AM	Introductory workshop: VUB's innovation ecosystem and the role of VUB TechTransfer therein Coach: Hugo Thienpont, Vice-Rectorate for Innovation and Industrial Policy
	Day 2 PM	Workshop: Data Management Plan, theoretical considerations Coach: Central R&D office
	Day 3	Specific workshops for the individual R&I projects Coach: SMT & supervisors
	Day 4 AM	Workshop: Gender in research methodology and research teams Coach: Katrien Van der Heyden, NESMA Consulting
	Day 4 PM	Specific workshop: Gender issues in the postdocs' R&I projects Coach: Katrien Van der Heyden, NESMA Consulting
	Day 5 AM	Workshop: Leadership skills, how to successfully lead a team Coach: External consultancy company TBD (selection procedure based on based value for money principle)
	Day 5 PM	Workshop: How to build an impact case, including a testimonial by an academic entrepreneur Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
2	Day 2 AM	Workshop: Project management, theoretical considerations Coach: External consultancy company TBD (selection procedure based on based value for money principle)
	Day 2 PM	Specific workshop: Work-life balance in academia Coach: Elke Van Hoof, Huis Voor Veerkracht (Center for Resilience)
	Day 3	Specific workshops for the individual R&I projects Coach: SMT & supervisors
	Day 4 AM	Course: Developing an impact case for researchers module 1: You are not alone. Ecosystems Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
	Day 4 PM	Course: Developing an impact case for researchers module 2: Analysing your core assets Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
	Day 5	Hands-on coaching of the postdocs on the drafting of their ecosystems (business, innovation, other) and their initial core asset analysis. Assignment 1: Analyse your ecosystem and your core assets. Depending on the type of project and the focus on economic or social impact, dedicated training will be offered in terms of impact funding, venture capital, business angels, social investment funds and alliances. Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
3	Day 2 AM	Workshop: Cultural intelligence and intercultural dialogue Coach: External consultancy company TBD (selection procedure based on based value for money principle)
	Day 2 PM	Workshop: Co-Creation and Living Labs as impact-driven methodologies Coach: Anneke Geyzen, VUB TechTransfer in collaboration with expert research groups at VUB
	Day 3	Specific workshops for the individual R&I projects Coach: SMT & supervisors
	Day 4	Postdoc presentations about the results of assignment 1 before their fellow postdocs, supervisors, coaches and the SMT (all under NDA).
	Day 5 AM	Course: Developing an impact case for researchers module 3: the problem-solution fit, on how to think customers/stakeholder-oriented and on how to craft your value proposition Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
	Day 5 PM	Hands-on coaching of the postdocs on the identification of relevant problem-solution fits and the crafting of value propositions. Assignment 2: Now go out there, find your problem-solution fit! Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
4	Day 2 AM	Workshop: Presentation skills for a non-academic audience: pitching for investors and presentations for the general public Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
	Day 2 PM	Workshop: Consultancy Coach: Anneke Geyzen, VUB TechTransfer in collaboration with expert research groups at VUB
	Day 3 AM	Specific workshop: Pitch your project to an investor! Coach: Marc Goldchstein & Jacobus Boonen, VUB TechTransfer
	Day 3 PM	Workshop: Funding opportunities for impact-driven R&I in Brussels, Flanders and Europe Coach: Philippe Westbroek, Liesbeth Bosman & Qing Cai, VUB TechTransfer
	Day 4	Postdoc presentations about the results of assignment 2 before their fellow postdocs, supervisors, coaches and the SMT (all under NDA).
	Day 5 AM	Course: Developing an impact case for researchers module 4: the problem-solution fit, on how to build a real-life impact case, including business planning, resource planning and legal aspects

	Day 5 PM	Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer Hands-on coaching of the postdocs on the elaboration of their product-market fit and the crafting of their impact case. Assignment 3: Build your impact case! Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
5	Day 2 AM	Workshop: Change management, theoretical considerations Coach: External consultancy company TBD (selection procedure based on based value for money principle)
	Day 2 PM	Specific workshop: Change management, practical case study Coach: External consultancy company TBD (selection procedure based on based value for money principle)
	Day 3 AM	Workshop: Policy-driven R&I or evidence-based policy-making Coach: Anneke Geyzen, VUB TechTransfer in collaboration with expert research groups at VUB
	Day 3 PM	Workshop: The impact of interdisciplinary research Coach: Crosstalks
	Day 4	Postdoc presentations about the results of assignment 3 before their fellow postdocs, supervisors, coaches and the SMT (all under NDA). Investor and stakeholder workshops will be organized according to the pre-assessed needs of the impact cases. Coach: Geoffrey Aerts, VUB Solvay Business School & Marc Goldchstein, VUB TechTransfer
	Day 5 AM	Concluding workshop by the SMT and coaches about the training programme
	Day 5 PM	Q&A with the postdocs about their assessment of the training programme

- Workshops dedicated to social entrepreneurship and social enterprises: 4 dedicated workshops developed specifically for imπACT by VUB's Chair of Social Entrepreneurship. They will take place every 3 months and will touch upon the many aspects of social entrepreneurship. Each workshop will consist of 4 contact hours with the trainers, and will be complemented by an estimated 32 hours of self-study to apply the newly acquired concepts and knowledge to their own research project. At the end of the workshop series, the students will be asked to give a short presentation. Table 6 below gives an overview of the planned workshops.

Table 6: Overview of social entrepreneurship workshop series

N°	Topics	Content details
1	Introduction Variety of Business Models for SEs	Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main concepts related to social entrepreneurship? How do these concepts vary depending on the level of analysis? What are the main implications of the SE concepts and typologies? Variety of Business models of Social Entrepreneurs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the key elements of the SE business models? How does the business model of SEs vary according to their context? What are the main steps in designing and implementing a social business model? <i>Introduction to the project in support of a social enterprise: strategic analysis and hands-on support</i> Coach: Nikolay Dentchev and Abel Diaz Gonzalez
2	Challenges of SEs Impact measurement	Challenges of SEs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there any differences between the typical challenges of an entrepreneur vs a social entrepreneur? If yes, why? What are the most common strategies used by SEs to overcome their challenges? What are the implications of these strategies? Impact Measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the importance of impact measuring for SEs? How do SEs design and implement their impact measurement strategy? What are the typical challenges of impact measurement for SEs? Coach: Nikolay Dentchev and Abel Diaz Gonzalez
3	Supportive Ecosystems for SEs Communications	Supportive Ecosystems for SEs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main support mechanisms of ecosystems for SEs? How do the variety of stakeholders in ecosystems impact SEs business models? What are the most prominent organizations in ecosystems for SEs? Communications for SEs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main characteristics of a winning communication strategy for SEs? Why do communications matter for SEs? What type of advantages brings a good communication planning process to SEs?

4	Funding for SEs	<p>Coach: Nikolay Dentchev and Abel Diaz Gonzalez</p> <p>Funding for SEs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What type of principles should SEs follow when choosing their most suitable funding strategy? ▪ Some authors argue that funding is not an issue. Why are the many SEs with financial difficulties? ▪ What are the main characteristics of each phase of the SE funding life cycle? <p><i>Final presentations of projects and group discussions</i></p> <p>Coach: Nikolay Dentchev and Abel Diaz Gonzalez</p>
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- The 20 postdoctoral fellows will be expected to perform a **secondment** at a non-academic organization as part of their 2-year research project, as discussed earlier in this proposal. Through the secondments, the fellows will be matched with a non-academic supervisor (the impact supervisor) who will be able to show them tricks of the trade regarding impact development and creation. The secondment will also open up a new network of non-academic contacts, expanding their career opportunities. A number of organisations have already expressed their interest through a Letter of Commitment and we will welcome collaborations with other organizations throughout the project whenever the possibility arises. The strength of collaborating with these organisations is that they are advocates for connecting science with society, which translates into the products or services they offer. They are all oriented towards providing solutions for tomorrow's societal challenges in Europe, whether they do it from the perspective of physical sciences and engineering, life sciences or social sciences, humanities and the arts. Organizations that have committed so far are:
 - AESIS: SSHA impact
 - ALLY INSTITUTE: human capital management, real-world data and AI solutions
 - ASHOKA: social entrepreneurship, sustainable business models, social innovation
 - AXILES BIONICS: control of powered prosthetics, human-in-the-loop optimization
 - BELGIUM IMPACT: social entrepreneurship, sustainable business models, social innovation + network function to reach other organisations
 - COLLIBRA: data governance (and as VUB spin-off Belgium's first unicorn)
 - ELSYCA: electrochemical modelling
 - ENACTUS: social entrepreneurship, sustainable business models, social innovation
 - ENGIE: electrical power technology
 - EUROCLEAR: financial services
 - EUROPLASMA: innovative nano-coating solutions
 - EXPLORE BIOTECH: therapeutic protein (re-)design based on biophysical property predictions
 - HBITS: behavioral analyses
 - CENTER FOR RESILIENCE: sustainable company policies, communication and marketing, wellbeing
 - ICOMETRIX: imaging biomarkers
 - LATITUDE: urban design, landscape urbanism, socio-spatial analyses
 - PEPTONE: protein behaviour

Through Crosstalks, which is part of the VUB legal entity and the TechTransfer Department, the postdoctoral candidates will have access to an extensive network of cultural/artistic organisations.

Impact- and entrepreneurship-driven training for SSHA postdoctoral researchers

Traditionally, knowledge and technology transfer was largely the realm of physical sciences, engineering and life sciences, resulting in patents, licenses and spin-offs. The past few years, however, academia and society are increasingly acknowledging the impact value SSHA has to offer. imπACT fully supports this trend and has developed the training programme in such a way that it accommodates the impact and entrepreneurship needs of the SSHA community as well.

- The imπACT get-together training events include several workshops that cater to the growing needs of impact- and entrepreneurship-driven SSHA (e.g. co-creation and living labs as impact-driven methodologies, consultancy, policy-driven R&I or evidence-based policy-making).

- The im π ACT social entrepreneurship workshop series focus on the aspects of social enterprises which – even though can also be relevant for physical/life sciences and engineering – appeal more to SSHA researchers.

Additionally, if SSHA researchers identify a need for more in-depth SSHA impact and entrepreneurship training, two more training options have been installed:

- VUB TechTransfer has established a collaboration with AESIS, the Network for Advancing & Evaluating the Societal Impact of Science. AESIS has a strong track record in organizing conferences and trainings discussing the impact potential of SSHA (e.g. May 2020: Advancing the Impact of Social Sciences and Humanities) and supports im π ACT's research and training concept (see Letter of Commitment). Within the framework of im π ACT, AESIS will provide more in-depth impact- and entrepreneurship-driven training to the SSHA postdoctoral researchers involved in the project, either by including them in the existing training portfolio or by setting up a dedicated training programme (need, demand and number of SSHA postdocs provided).
- im π ACT's Programme Manager Anneke Geyzen will organise 6-monthly brainstorm sessions for the SSHA postdocs to discuss their specific case studies, progress, challenges and discoveries. Dr. Geyzen will also be available for individual consultations throughout the project.

ANNEX II

Dissemination/exploitation/communication plan

Below the sections Dissemination, exploitation and communication are provided as extracted from the proposal.

2.3 Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the results

2.3.1. Introduction

The dissemination and exploitation strategy of im π ACT is organized through different means and both at programme as well as at postdoc project level (Figures 3 and 4).

Dissemination and exploitation at programme level will be guided and followed up by a dissemination and exploitation manager and realized through the following actions:

- i) A vibrant and interactive **website** with a scientific dissemination webpage for each postdoc will be provided
- ii) A video recording and **movie production** facilities, available at VUB, will be offered to the programme for developing a **MOOC** on entrepreneurship and short movies to be shown in the im π ACT website and on YouTube
- iii) **2 workshops** dedicated to realize matchmaking with potential customers for further exploitation of the project results
- iv) A fully **operational training programme** that can be exploited after the project within VUB but also outside VUB, including exploitation of the developed MOOC
- v) Support from VUB TechTransfer in identifying innovative results and developing an **IP portfolio**

Dissemination and exploitation of the project results by the postdocs **at research project level** will be realized through:

- a) At least **40 high quality papers in international journals** with open access policy
- b) At least **40 presentations at international conferences**
- c) At least **monthly contributions to the scientific webpages** of the im π ACT website by the postdocs
- d) Contributing to a **2-minute movie** about each research project for the webpage and YouTube → 20 movies
- e) Contributing to the presentations and tutorials to be developed in the **MOOC on entrepreneurship**
- f) Developing **20 business cases** by the postdocs, each using the results of his/her research project
- g) Participating in the workshops aiming at realizing **leads for exploitation** of the business cases developed.

2.3.2. Dissemination of the im π ACT results

A number of **specific and quantified** (see Fig. 3, measurable outcome) **dissemination objectives** (DOs), both at research project and at programme level (see Fig. 3, im π ACT level), well supporting the overall im π ACT objective (discussed in section 1.1), are defined to inform the scientific community about the im π ACT results.

The specific dissemination objectives (DO) are defined as follows:

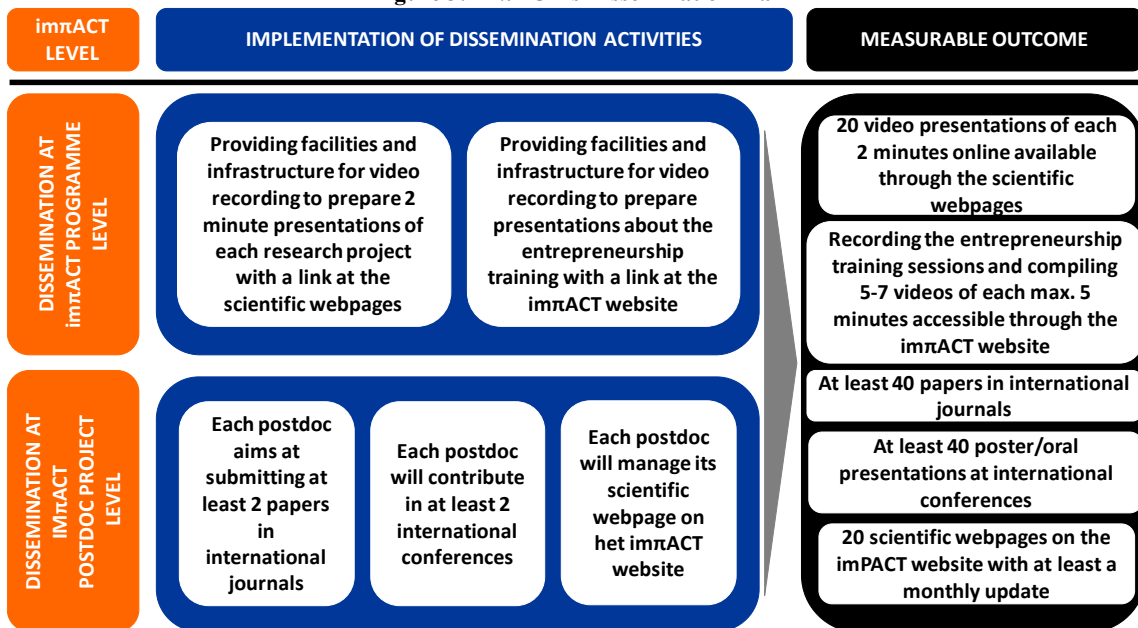
DO 1	To publish at least 2 papers in international journals with open access policy per postdoc, resulting in at least 40 papers at programme level.
DO 2	To contribute with a poster or oral presentation in at least 2 international conferences, resulting in at least 40 conference contributions at programme level.
DO 3	To set up and maintain a webpage as part of the im π ACT website by each postdoc, resulting in 20 webpages at programme level.
DO 4	To develop a 2 minute scientific movie about each postdoctoral research project to be published at the scientific webpages of the im π ACT website and on YouTube, resulting in 20 movies at programme level.

DO 5 To develop a MOOC in Entrepreneurship through a set of 5-7 video presentations on the different entrepreneurship linked topics with contributions from the fellows.

The implementation of the different dissemination activities (see Fig. 3, implementation of dissemination activities) is planned as follows:

- The project results will be **published in international high-impact factor journals** with peer-review and open access in the field of selected research topics. Examples of relevant journals cannot be provided because the specific topics of the research project are not known at this stage. The programme aims at minimum 2 papers per fellow, thus at least 40 papers in total.
- imπACT aims at disseminating project results at relevant **scientific international conferences** organized on an annual or bi-annual basis in the field of the imπACT research projects. Each fellow is encouraged to participate in 1 conference per year, resulting in at least 40 conference contributions for imπACT. Examples of conferences cannot be provided at this stage because the specific topics of the research projects are not known yet.

Figure 3: imπACT's Dissemination Plan



- imπACT aims at creating a **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in Entrepreneurship**. The idea of the MOOC is to establish a set of 7-8 sessions, each session being the result of compiling video material recorded at the advanced starter seminars, during business case development sessions, the 4 MODULES in the Impact training (Tables 5 and 6) and at the 2 dedicated match making workshops. Experience and facilities in developing MOOCs are present at Coordinator VUB. This experience also learned that sessions need to be short, to the point and attractive in order to maintain the attention of the remote audience. Therefore the 7-8 MOOC sessions are each limited to a 7-10 minute presentation.
- Each fellow is encouraged to prepare a 2-minute movie about its research project. Video recording facilities and infrastructure, including the qualified personnel to support the fellows, are available at VUB and will be open for imπACT activities. These short movies have a scientific character and highlight potential applications of the research project and will be minimum made available through the scientific webpages at the imπACT website and You Tube.

2.3.3. Exploitation of the imπACT results

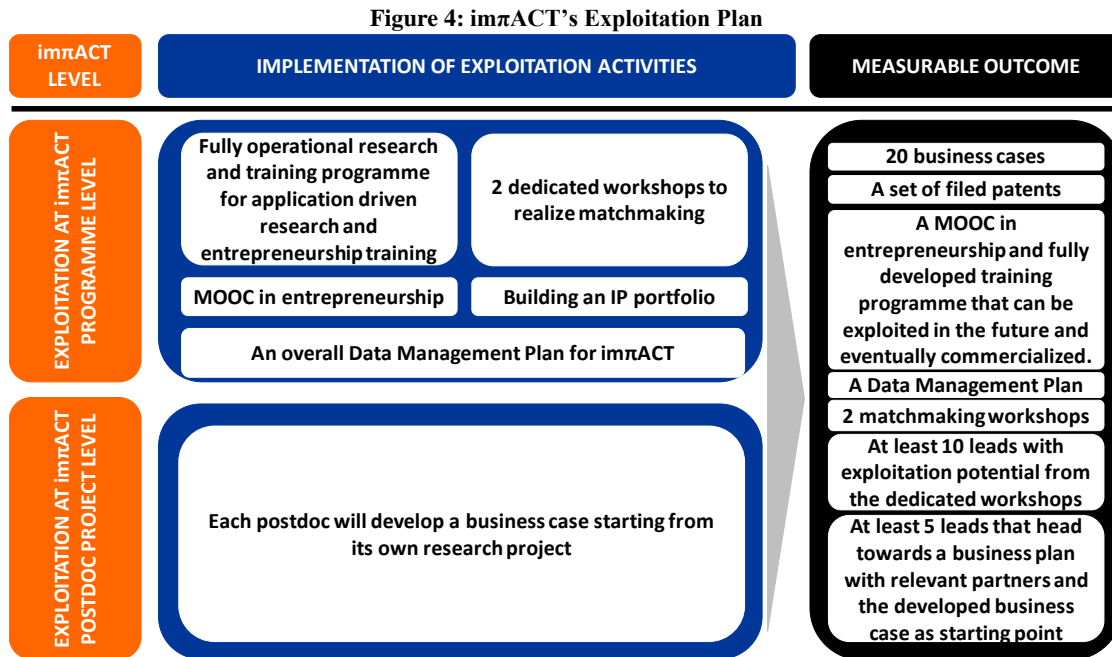
The imπACT programme targets a set of challenging and highly specific exploitation objectives.

The specific exploitation objectives (EO) are defined as follows:

EO 1 To identify at an early stage and protect all imπACT results that can lead to exploitation in a suitable manner through, but not limited to **patenting**. Other means of protection can be through official depositing of names, logos, concepts, through limited access to specific sets

	of data stored at repositories defined in the imπACT Data Management Plan or to handle data and project results as trade secrets.
EO 2	To study the market potential and estimate value of exploitable results through the development of a <i>business case</i> for each postdoc research project.
EO 3	To realize first match making and next steps with stakeholders interested in exploitation, through <i>2 non-academic focused exploitation workshops</i> with dedicated audience present.

In order to have strong fundamentals for exploitation, a number of steps will be undertaken to establish an imπACT exploitation platform. The content and the outcome of those steps are presented in Figure 4 and discussed in more detail below.



THE EXPLOITATION STRATEGY FOR RESEARCH PROJECT LEVEL OUTPUT

Step 1 in the exploitation strategy is the protection of the imπACT project results through different types of dedicated activities, such as patent filing, data protection, trade mark deposition and trade secrets. The business developers at the VUB TechTransfer Office (of which 2 business developers are also part of the imπACT SMT) will closely follow up on the research results obtained in the fellow's projects and support in protecting those results at the earliest possible stage in order to minimize potential delay in publishing. This will lead to the development of an imπACT IP portfolio.

Step 2 in the exploitation strategy is the analysis of the potential for exploitation of the results in the individual projects. The fellows will be strongly involved in this activity by developing a preliminary **business case (also called impact cases)** using their research results, the expertise gained during the entrepreneurship training activities and thereby implementing the entrepreneurship principles acquired. In addition, the fellows will receive support and guidance from an appointed mentor. The case will cover a market analysis, including identification of most important market players, USP definition of the results, potential applications, prioritization of the applications and market segments to tackle, a plan for approaching the identified market players and the competences and assets needed to form a coherent team.

Step 3 in the exploitation strategy is focusing on first matchmaking with stakeholders, being the non-academic sector for further joint development, licensing of the IP/technology/service/product, either with a focus on economic impact or with a focus on societal impact, dependent on the topic and research results achieved in each postdoc research project.

Each of the 2 workshops, lasting for 1 day, is focused on exploitation. The content of the presentations in these workshops are not scientifically focused but discuss the developed technology/service/product

and its business case, as developed by the fellow during the Entrepreneurship training. Questions that will be answered during this workshop are for example: What is the technology/service/product about? What are the specifications? What are the advantages but also the limitations? First estimates of investment and operational costs? What are the barriers to overcome to bring the concept to the society? What about regulation issues, which types of unmet needs can be solved with these products? What is the preferred business model? etc. The target audience is the non-academic sector with industry, investment vehicles (business angels, venture capitals, social fund investors, etc...) and the end-user, in other words: the potential customer interested in further joint development, licensing (= exploiting) of or investing in the technology/service or product.

Potential parties that will be invited for such kind of workshops are: QBIC (preferred investment fund of VUB); companies that might have interested in further development or joint (pre)-commercial development, which is at this stage dependent on the topics of the research projects; the non-academic secondment partners involved in the research project; Oxygen lab (organization supporting social entrepreneurs); SI² fund (investment fund for social entrepreneurship), non-profit organizations and NGOs interested in the results of the SSH focused research projects.

THE EXPLOITATION STRATEGY FOR PROGRAMME LEVEL OUTPUT

At **programme level**, 2 main “products” for exploitation are envisaged, namely a MOOC in Entrepreneurship and the training programme itself.

- Im π ACT aims at creating a **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) In Entrepreneurship and Impact-Driven Research**. The idea of the MOOC is to establish a set of 5 sessions covering the 4 MODULES of the impact case development in the training programme and a fifth session with examples of impact driven research selected from the business cases. Experience and facilities in developing MOOCs is present at VUB. This experience also learned that sessions need to be short, to the point and attractive in order to maintain the attention of the audience. The idea is to valorize the MOOC as a product of im π ACT. The MOOC can be offered to other Universities, business schools and companies but can also be sold to MOOC providers to extent their library of MOOCs.
- Besides the MOOC that focuses on the business case development part of the training programme, the full training programme to deliver **all-round π -shaped researchers** is a potential product for exploitation. Besides implementation of the training programme as a full training programme for VUB postdocs (and possibly also applicable to PhD students), independent of im π ACT or MSCA, is a major aim. However, the training programme can also be executed for other academic institutions or highly relevant to larger companies where impact driven research is of utmost importance.

2.4 Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the results to different target audiences.

The communication about im π ACT will be supported and organized by the communication manager at VUB, Lisa Van Reepingen.

- A clear communication plan with well-defined communication strategy (see below) will be implemented at the start of im π ACT.
- Communication will be organized at two levels, being (1) at the im π ACT programme level covering all achievements from the postdocs at the programme level and (2) at the postdoc level itself for communication and those actions directly undertaken by the postdocs.
- Communication will be organized at two timescales, being communication in real-time mode about new results, items, and training, that needs to be communicated immediately. Social media will be the core tool to realize this kind of communication, backed by the other communication tools (see Table 7), to provide more information. The second time scale is for communication about foreseen and foreseeable programme results, such as announcement of events, training days, fellows participation in conferences, or fellows organizing im π ACT workshops, which can be communicated through social media but also through other communication tools such as the im π ACT newsletter and website.

The specific communication objectives (CO) are defined as follows:

CO 1	To <i>maximize the outreach</i> of programme and its project results through different communication means
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CO 2	to <i>maximize the visibility</i> of the programme and its project results at regional and European level
CO 3	to <i>establish a community</i> of stakeholders related to data science for sustainability
CO 4	To maximize the potential for exploitation of the project results through dedicated communication actions and this by means of a well-defined communication strategy, further discussed in the next sections.

THE CONCEPT OF THE im π ACT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

im π ACT communication strategy aims at building an im π ACT community by triggering members and new interested people/organizations through modern real time mode communication tools such as social media and inform that community with more detailed information using other communication tools, such as website and newsletter.

To achieve the communication objectives defined, new results from im π ACT, but also important relevant news from the fields of research where the fellows are active in, will be announced on social media in real-time mode (mainly, but not limited to, Twitter and Facebook), for which the host has the means and experienced communication manager. The fellows within im π ACT will be strongly involved in this communication process as they are the basis for feeding the communication manager with news and results worthy to be announced. However, social media as such is clearly not the target, it is a tool for communication and trigger to inform the im π ACT stakeholders. It will attract new users/stakeholders, resulting in more followers and interested people, thus building the im π ACT community.

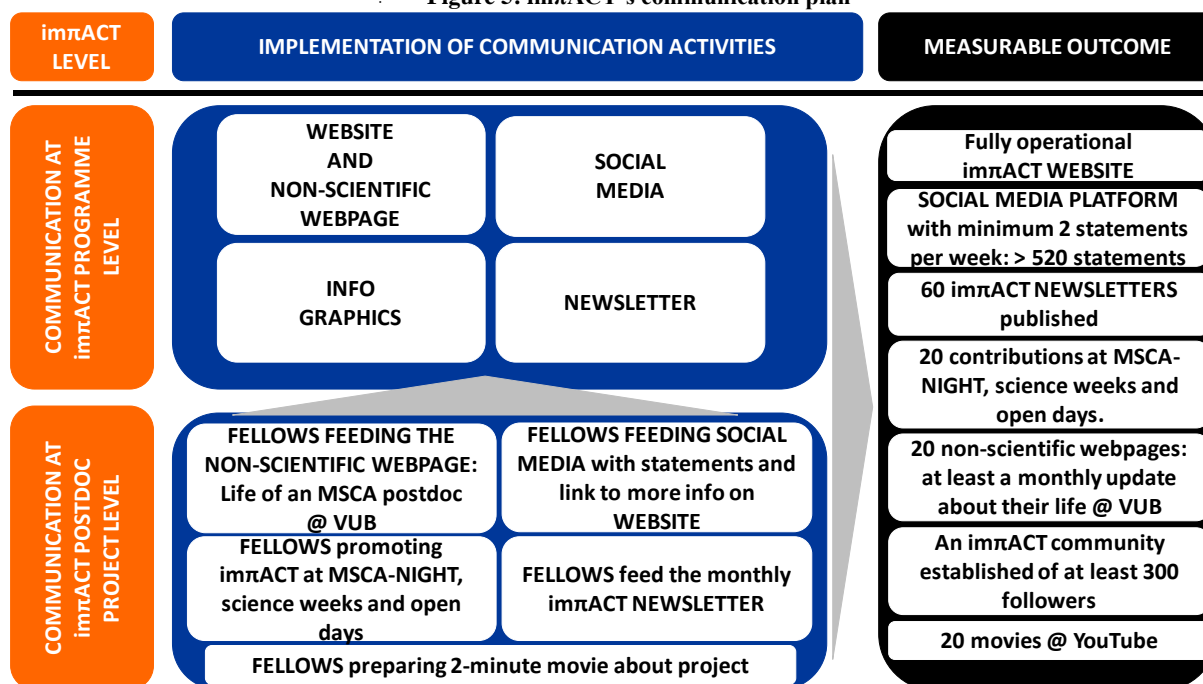
Triggering of interested people needs further to be supported by more detailed and dedicated information. Therefore, it is important to have a set of communication tools that support the social media statements launched, where followers and interested people can find more detailed information about the news and or topic launched. This can be the website, a newsletter, a visual, a YouTube movie or other means (discussed below) for which the additional information is mainly provided by the fellows, their supervisors and the im π ACT management team.

THE im π ACT COMMUNICATION PLAN

The im π ACT communication plan is schematically presented in Figure 5 and Table 7. It shows:

- The communication tools and activities VUB is using at the im π ACT programme level and the targeted stakeholder groups is in line with the **European Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)** guidance partly developed in the H2020-ENRRICH project where VUB was partner of.
- The kind of information the fellows provide to feed the programme level communication tools and activities;
- The kind of communication activities the fellows are engaged in to communicate directly to the stakeholders;
- The different types of stakeholders to which the communication is targeted, all together assembling the im π ACT community.

Figure 5: imπACT's communication plan



The stakeholders have been identified from the networks of the different VUB research groups involved with a postdoc and will be extended during the project through the communication plan. Each stakeholder will be approached by relying on specific communication tools in order to achieve optimal impact of the project results as summarized in Table 7.

The different communication tools VUB will use in the imπACT programme are:

- **Social media:** VUB is using already Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to reach its stakeholders and to create 1) a rich-source of information about the latest developments in the fields in which the postdocs will be active in 2) awareness about the research and its different kind of training, transfer of knowledge, dissemination and communication activities of imπACT in real time mode. For the statements launched through social media in need of more info links will be foreseen to the other communication tools to allow the readers to gain more information about imπACT. The programme aims that each fellow provides at least one statement record per month, resulting in 20 x 24 = 480 statements from the fellows during the programme. In addition, supervisors, management and supervisory board members also will provide statements about the programme level activities. In total, imπACT aims at minimum 520 statements, which means on average the activity will be close to two statement per week.

Table 7: Selected tools to communicate/disseminate/exploit imπACT results to identified stakeholders

	Academic sector	Non-academic sector	Policy makers	Regulators	Citizens Society	Students
International journals	•	•				
Conference contributions	•	•				
workshop	•	•	•	•	•	•
Webpage	•	•	•	•	•	•
Social media	•	•	•	•	•	•
School education					•	•
Newsletter	•	•	•	•	•	•
YouTube	•	•			•	•
Science week, MSCA Night	•	•	•	•	•	•
Open company days						

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- The **imπACT website**: VUB will develop, launch and maintain a vibrant imπACT website. The website will be composed of a home page with general information about the imπACT project, such as concept, programme, partners, objectives and news. It will have a number of click through features to get access to specific pages for imπACT events, project results, imπACT dissemination and communication output and a dedicated fellows section (see next bullet).
 - The **fellows section at the website** is foreseen to allow the fellows to provide information about their project results, events/conferences they will attend + feedback and especially they have a short column in which they biweekly or monthly give a short update of their “Daily Life of an imπACT MSCA- COFUND fellow at VUB”.
 - The **VUB-TechTransfer weekly newsletter** will be an excellent tool to reserve a column for imπACT in which nearly real time requiring news can be announced. This kind of news can be a planned workshop, presentations planned by fellows at conferences, the training weeks within the programme, open access training courses, workshops, dissemination results, important milestones achieved, etc... .
 - **InfoGraphics about imπACT** at the start of the programme and announced through social media, published on the website and other suitable communication tools. Especially, during the recruitment phase an infographic about the programme will explain very well to potential candidates.
 - **Short video presentation@YouTube about each fellow’s project**: The fellows and the supervisors while preparing the PCDP (Section 1.3.2) will present the project and the societal importance of the project to the general public through a 2-minute lasting you tube movie. This movie is also the ideal onset for developing a MOOC by the end of the programme.
 - **Fellows contributions at European Researcher’s night, Flanders Science Week and Open Company days**: ImπACT will encourage organization and participation on annual local events to provide direct contact between organization and the general public improving their understanding of science. ImπACT is committed to look for and join all possibilities to reach youngsters in order to promote research careers and raise interest in science for tackling societal challenges. Specifically, the fellows will be encouraged to attend and participate in the annual MSCA-NIGHT events taking place every last Friday of September with hundreds of events all over Europe at the same moment. Moreover, many European countries organize open science days and weeks, in which research performing actors participate. ImπACT will participate as a programme in these events and expects its fellows to participate at least in one of the following events: MSCA-European Researchers Night, Flanders Science Week or Open Company Days, all events being organized on an annual basis.