

Call Strategic Literacy and Societal Resilience

Call for proposals 2026

Information document including submission and evaluation guidelines and budget rules

Important dates:

Online Information session: 4 Feb 2026 (14h00)

Deadline Proposals: 16 March 2026 (18h00)

For more information on the programme, please visit [SLSR Call](#) for proposals



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1. SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

1.1. CONTEXT

Scientific and technological research in the domain of security and defence is key to maintaining the Belgian Defence military and technological edge, to face current and future security challenges.

For this purpose, the Ministry of Defence (2025)¹ seeks to further develop and strengthen the links between Defence, the national research institutions and the industry by gradually increasing its R&T contribution as from 2022, with a view to reaching 2% of the total defence effort in 2030.

The setup of the Call Strategic Literacy and Societal Resilience fits perfectly in and contributes to the implementation of this strategic vision and general policy for Defence.

1.2. ROLE OF THE ROYAL HIGHER INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE - RHID

As a "smart hub" and "honest broker" for scientific and technological research, the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID) is responsible for the development and implementation of the Ministry of Defence's policy on scientific and technological research. Within this policy, twelve focus areas have been identified, in which research is actively supported and stimulated.

As a "smart hub", RHID aims to promote the growth of Belgian scientific and technological research in the field of defence and security, as well as to restore and strengthen the links between administrations, universities and companies at this prospect. It wishes to achieve this, among others, by promoting and facilitating the participation of Belgium and the Belgian Ministry of Defence in international, national and regional research programmes. In addition, the results of research are published annually for a wide audience and colloquia are held regularly.

As an "honest broker", RHID manages and facilitates, through the department Scientific and Technological Research of Defence (STRD), the research programme of the Ministry of Defence. Although in the past this programme was primarily reserved for Defence research institutions, collaboration with other partners, including Belgian research institutes and industry, is increasingly becoming the norm.

The Belgian Minister of Defence Theo Francken stresses the importance of a broad, in-depth knowledge base in order to face future challenges. "A well-informed and resilient society is a crucial pillar of our national security. Strategic literacy helps civilians, policymakers and institutions to make informed choices in a world full of uncertainties. That is why we invest in research that contributes to collective awareness and strengthening." The minister emphasises that the Belgian Defence looks beyond purely military aspects and wants to take into account social, psychological, economic and cultural elements as well.

More information on the institute and its activities can be found on the website: <https://www.defence-institute.be/en/accueil-english/>

¹ [Strategic Vision of Defence](#)

2. Call for proposals

2.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

The Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID) launches a call for doctoral projects that contribute to reinforcing strategic literacy and societal resilience in Belgium. Such research should provide added value to the development of a strategic vision on defence and security in a rapidly changing world. We invite aspiring researchers to submit innovative research projects that increase the national capacity for strategic analysis while helping to raise public awareness on the role of the Belgian Defence, the impact of international tensions and the importance of broad societal engagement in security and defence.

The strategic literacy of civilians and policymakers is essential at a time when disinformation, hybrid threats and geopolitical uncertainties are on the rise. Our society needs a better understanding of how complex security is, as well as resilience at both the individual and collective levels. The Belgian Defence wants to play a leading role in these matters, in collaboration with the academic world.

This is the **first Strategic Legacy and Societal Resilience call**.

2.2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR CANDIDATS

Candidates must have Belgian nationality and hold a master's degree in a relevant discipline, which they obtained prior to being appointed. Knowledge of both national languages, as well as English, is an advantage.

2.3. INFORMATION SESSION

To inform potential applicants about the context, scope and modalities of this call, an information session will be held on **4 February 2026 (14h00) online**.

Registration prior to the event is required.

More details are announced through the [website of the RHID](#) and through [the registration form](#)

3. CALL INFORMATION

3.1. DOCUMENTATION RELATED TO THIS CALL

3.1.1. SLSR WEBSITE

The following documents are available on the [SLSR Page](#) :

- Information document, including submission and evaluation guidelines and budget rules: general information on the programme and on the call, overview proposal content and corresponding evaluation criteria for the applicants and the evaluators (the present document)
- Template project proposal
- FAQ
- Budget File
- Gantt Chart

3.2. INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF THE CALL

| | Date | At / via |
|---|------------------------|----------|
| Information session | 4 Feb 2026 (14h) | online |
| Deadline proposals | 16 Mar 2026 (18h) | Mail |
| Evaluation of the proposals with a shortlist as result | 17 Mar – 16 April 2026 | RHID |
| Panel evaluation, including interview of candidates | 17 April – 8 May 2026 | RHID |
| Selection proposal formulated by the scientific committee of the RHID | 28 May 2026 | NA |
| Final selection of proposals by the board of directors of the RHID and allocation of projects | 9 June 2026 | NA |
| Communication of results to applicants | 15 June 2026 | Mail |
| Start of the projects | 1 October 2026 | NA |

3.3. RESEARCH THEME AND INDICATIVE BUDGET OF THIS CALL

In 2026, a call for four doctoral grants on Strategic Literacy and Societal Resilience will be published. A budget of € 2MEuro will be provided for four years.

The best ranked proposals will be funded based on their final evaluation results (after the Panel Evaluation).

3.3.1 Open call Strategic Literacy and Societal Resilience

Context

The strategic literacy of civilians and policymakers is essential at a time when disinformation, hybrid threats and geopolitical uncertainties are on the rise. Our society needs a better understanding of how complex security is, as well as resilience at both the individual and collective levels.

Research scope

Candidates can submit a proposal that is based on various disciplines – such as political sciences, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, law or economy – and contributes to strengthening strategic analysis capabilities regarding topics relevant to the Belgian Defence and national security. Multidisciplinary and comparative approaches are encouraged to feed a culture of net assessment.

Potentially salient topics are – by way of example – the logic of deterrence across the entire conflict spectrum, the role of competition in the cognitive domain, the return of nuclear issues, the contemporary form that societal mobilisation for protracted conflict can take, and the increasing need for interdepartmental coordination.

Impact for Defence

Such research should provide added value to the development of a strategic vision on defence and security in a rapidly changing world. We invite aspiring researchers to submit innovative research projects that increase the national capacity for strategic analysis while helping to raise public awareness on the role of the Belgian Defence, the impact of international tensions and the importance of broad societal engagement in security and defence.

3.4. PROJECT DURATION

The projects will have a duration of **4 years**.

3.5. PROJECT COMPOSITION

3.5.1. COMPOSITION

The doctoral scholarships are awarded for a period of four years. During that time, the selected candidates will conduct full-time research as scholarship holders at a Belgian university. The doctoral student must be supervised by a promotor (possibly in collaboration with a co-promotor) who is affiliated with a Flemish or French-speaking university and/or with the Royal Military Academy (RMA).

Candidates who wish to begin training as a reservist or are already reservist will receive a plus.

3.5.2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE PROJECT

For each project, a **Steering Committee** shall be established at the start of the project to act as the governing body (see [section 6.3.](#)).

3.5.3. ROLE OF THE PROMOTOR

He/she shall have the following role:

- Scientific Guidance
 - Advises on research design, methodology, and theoretical framework.
 - Helps formulate research questions and hypotheses.
- Quality Assurance
 - Ensures the research meets academic standards and ethical guidelines.
 - Monitors progress and the quality of the work.
- Feedback and Evaluation
 - Provides constructive feedback on texts, analyses, and presentations.
 - Reviews interim results and suggests adjustments when necessary.
- Mentorship and Coaching
 - Supports the personal and professional development of the PhD candidate.
 - Helps build academic skills (writing, presenting, publishing).

- Administrative and Formal Responsibility
 - Holds official responsibility for approving the doctoral project.
 - Ensures compliance with university regulations and deadlines.
- Networking and Opportunities
 - Introduces the candidate to relevant academic networks.
 - Encourages participation in conferences, publications, and collaborations.

3.6. BUDGET RULES

Financing by Defence: This call is subject to the European legislation on State Funding (Art 107 (1) TFEU and the General Block Exemption Regulation in particular. Therefore, financing a public research institute is set to a maximum of 100% of the eligible costs.

The total project budget must be detailed in the tables of the budget file of the project proposal.

The project budget is reserved exclusively for the project activities. The different categories of expenditure financed by Defence are:

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

The funding is limited to the time and period in which the staff participates in the project.

General operating costs: this includes daily/usual supplies and products for workshop and office, documentation, consignments, use of daily software and IT facilities, organisation of internal meetings, etc. The amounts claimed must correspond to actual expenditures strictly related to the project, even if supporting documents are not requested. Although no detailed justification is required for these costs, the administration of the concerned partner must keep these invoices in its accounts in the event of an audit.

Specific operating costs: this includes a list of operating costs specific to the execution of the project tasks, such as costs for project analyses, testing, maintenance and repair of equipment purchased by the project, use of specific IT facilities and software, costs for surveys, open data publications, organisation of workshops and events, etc. These costs need to be clearly described in the proposal and each of them shall be justified by invoices during the project.

Overheads: Institutions' general overheads that cover, in one lump sum, administration, telephone, postal, maintenance, heating, lighting, electricity, rent, machine depreciation, and insurance costs. The total amount of this item is set as a fix amount of 10% of the total staff and operating costs.

Equipment: List of investment goods specific to the implementation of the project and to be purchased on the project budget. It concerns the purchase and installation of scientific and technical equipment and instruments, including computer equipment, to be entered in the inventory or assets of the institute/company. Equipment needs to be clearly described in the proposal and shall be justified by invoices.

3.7. RESEARCH ETHICS

Applicants will be required to complete an “ethics self-assessment” when preparing the project proposal. The Ethical Advisory Board of the RHID will assess this information and can advise the partnership how to deal with the ethical aspects of its proposal.

3.8. GENDER

The RHID strongly encourages the applicants to take into account the equality between women and men and to ensure gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the project. Balance between women and men will be a criterium across the different projects.

4. SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

The submission of projects will be done by mail to SLSR@mil.be by using the template project proposal available on the website.

A project **proposal** must be submitted at the latest on **16 March 2026 (18h00)**.
If the proposal does not comply with the submission rules or has not been submitted in time, it will not be taken into account for evaluation..

Content of the proposal :

- a research proposal of no more than 2000 words, written in English, French or Dutch, including problem statement, research methodology and expected contribution;
- a letter of motivation of no more than 800 words;
- a CV highlighting the candidate's relevant academic background;
- a declaration of acceptance from the promotor (and the co-promotor, if applicable);
- a copy of the candidate's master's degree and relevant transcripts of records.
- If applicable, a declaration of voluntary participation in reservist training within the Belgian Defence

As a separate document :

- Budget File
- Gantt Chart

5. EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA

5.1 EVALUATION PROCEDURE

The evaluation of the proposals runs in three steps:

- Step 1 – Selection Committee, including interviews with the applicants
- Step 2 - Selection proposal formulated by the Scientific Committee of the RHID
- Step 3 - Final selection of proposals by the Board of Directors of the RHID

STEP 1 - SELECTION COMMITTEE

The Selection Committee of Defence will be composed of members that are relevant for the call.

The Selection Committee will perform an eligibility check based on the proposal documents. Following criteria are applied:

- a research proposal of no more than 2000 words, written in English, French or Dutch, including problem statement, research methodology and expected contribution.
- a letter of motivation of no more than 800 words.
- a CV highlighting the candidate's relevant academic background.
- a declaration of acceptance from the promotor (and the co-promotor, if applicable);
- a copy of the candidate's master's degree and relevant transcripts of records.
- If applicable, a declaration of voluntary participation in reservist training within the Belgian Defence.

The proposals that have passed the eligibility check will be evaluated by a Selection Committee of the Belgian Defence on the basis of the following criteria:

- the originality of the subject,
- the scientific quality of the proposal,
- the relevance of the subject to the Belgian Defence,
- the expected societal impact and
- the positioning of the project within the university research group and its further development.

Projects that seek to connect multiple disciplines and/or seek to integrate into the project the candidate's role within the Reserve Force are at an advantage.

Candidates who wish to begin reservist training will receive a plus.

On **16 april 2026**, the internal selection committee will make a shortlist of maximum 20 projects.

STEP 2 – SELECTION COMMITTEE EVALUATION, INCLUDING INTERVIEWS WITH THE APPLICANTS

The Selection Committee of Defence will make a shortlist of maximum 20 projects. For these projects, an interview with the applicant will be organised according to the following schedule:

- Introduction (5 minutes)
- Presentation by the applicants, including an introduction of the proposal (15 minutes).
- Questions and answers (Q&A) (10 minutes).
- Deliberation (10 minutes).

The applicants will assist in the meeting for the presentation and Q&A session of their proposal only.

The Selection Committee will classify the proposals according to specific criteria:

- Complementarities and/or overlaps between proposals.
- The coherence of the proposals with the strategic objectives (scope) of the call
- General appreciation of the presentation by the applicants.

The Selection Committee will list the proposals by order of their final evaluation result.

STEP 3 - SELECTION PROPOSAL FORMULATED BY THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF THE RHID

After the interviews, the ranking for funding will be proposed to the Scientific Committee of the RHID.

The Scientific Committee of the RHID is composed of senior scientists and research directors and guarantees the quality level of Defence research. It proposes evaluation methods and research objectives, participates in the drafting of the research programme (ranking and selection of research projects) and evaluates its implementation. The composition of the Scientific Committee is currently defined in the Ministerial Decree of 11 January 2022.

The Scientific Committee will receive the following documents:

- Common ranking list of all proposals, earmarking the best ranked proposals
- Project proposal of each proposal (on demand)

Based on these documents, the Scientific Committee will perform a strategic selection of the proposals based on the criteria and rules explained hereunder.

- Alignment of the proposal in relation to Defence priorities.
- Added value of the proposal in relation to Defence priorities.

STEP 4 - FINAL SELECTION OF PROPOSALS BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RHID

The final selection decision of proposals to be funded is made by the Board of Directors of the RHID on the basis of the Scientific Committee Proposal list.

6. CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS

6.1. PROJECT STARTING AND END DATE

The projects selected within the context of the current call will start in October 2026.

The project contracts will have a duration of 4 years (plus 3 months to allow meeting all administrative requirements before the effective start-up of the project).

6.2. CONTRACTS

For the selected proposals, a contract is concluded between Belgian Defence and the funded partners.

Belgian Defence/RHID grants the selected projects the funds required for their implementation. The RHID shall reimburse at most, and up to the amount specified in the granted budget, the actual costs proven by the partners providing these costs are directly related to the implementation of the project.

6.3. COMPOSITION AND ROLE OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Each project will be accompanied by a **Steering Committee**, to be set up at the start of the project. The Steering Committee is composed of the doctoral student, promotor and co-promotor if applicable, and the programme manager of Defence.

The Steering Committee acts as a governance body, to ensure that the project remains in line with the research objectives and adapt the project plan accordingly whenever necessary. It ensures that the project reporting is done in accordance with [section 6.4](#).

The Steering Committee should meet at least once a year to discuss the project's progress. The organisation of such meeting must be included in the project work plan and the project budget. Ideally, this(these) meeting(s) should take place in the same period as the delivery of the progress report(s).

The following actions and decisions will be taken by the Steering Committee:

- Examine information on the progress of the Project, to assess the compliance of the Project with the Proposal and, if necessary, propose modification of the Proposal.
- Determine the policy for press releases, joint publications and other public disclosures regarding the Project.
- Examine and approve proposed changes to the work programme. In case of actions with a budgetary impact, the Steering Committee will make proposals to the funding authority but cannot decide without the approval of this funding authority.
- If necessary, propose the termination of all or part of the Project.

6.4. REPORTS

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

- Initial report: to be submitted within three months after the start of the project.
- Progress report(s): to be submitted according to the specifications in the contract
- Final report: to be submitted three months after the end of the project.
- If deemed useful by the RHID, an additional report may be requested for an external evaluation of the project.
- The RHID can ask for a report or other input at any time during the course of the project in order to provide scientific support to valorisation and service actions related to the programme.

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

They should contain all necessary information to assess the progress of the project in relation to the work packages, deliverables and budget. Problems must be identified, including possible solutions.

To evaluate the impact of the programme, the RHID can ask input until 3 years after the end of the project.

6.5. COMPLAINTS

RHID places great importance on the quality of their service and on improving the way they operate. A complaint about the administrative handling of this call or the content of the call and the contracts will be handled by RHID.

A special form to handle complaints has been created.

The complaint form is available at the SLSR website.

Complaints submitted anonymously or which are offensive or not related to our organisation will not be processed.

A complaint is handled as follows:

- Once your complaint has been filed, a notification of receipt will be sent.
- The complaint will be forwarded to the relevant departments and individuals and will be processed within one month.
- An answer will be sent by e-mail or letter.
- The complaint will be treated with strict confidentiality

7. CONTACTS

Further information can be obtained by contacting the **secretariat**: slsr@mil.be

**Invest in a resilient and strategically informed society.
Help shape the security of tomorrow together with the
Belgian Defence.**