



INTERNATIONALIZATION PLAN 2025-2027

**Boosting IRBLleida participation in Horizon
Europe program and International Talent
Recruitment and Retention**

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1. Preamble

The Institute for Biomedical Research of Lleida (IRBLleida) stands as a benchmark institution in the field of biomedicine, committed to strengthening its international profile and fostering scientific excellence. Within this framework, the current strategic plan pursues two main objectives:

1. Boosting IRBLleida's participation in the Horizon Europe (HE) program: This goal will be achieved by enhancing researcher support in proposal preparation, reinforcing supervision and guidance from Research Management and Administration (RMA) staff, and broadening international communication to help create inter-institutional consortia.
2. Facilitating the recruitment and retention of prestigious international researchers: This aims to elevate IRBLleida's scientific excellence and consolidate its global reputation, enhancing its ability to attract and retain international talent.

2. Analysis of achievements from the previous Internationalization Plan 2022-2024

During the 2022–2024 period, IRBLleida made significant progress in expanding its international presence and competitiveness. The implementation of the Internationalization Plan strengthened participation in European research programs, fostered new collaborations, and enhanced institutional visibility abroad.

Participation in Horizon Europe. Strengthening international presence through Horizon Europe has been a central focus for IRBLleida, with research groups increasingly active in competitive European calls.

- Since 2022, 45 applications have been submitted to international calls, demonstrating the dedication and effort of research groups. In 2024, the institute manages six active international projects.
- During the 2022–2024 period, three coordinated proposals were submitted to the HE programs, though none were funded. Participation as partners increased slightly, including involvement in major consortia like DistriMuSe, although leadership roles in scientific management have not yet been achieved.

Key projects and collaborations. In 2023, IRBLleida benefited from the “Beyond GO-HERO Health European Research Offices” project under the PERIS framework (total funding 118.885€), to strengthen the internationalization of the biomedical institutes of Lleida, Girona, and Tarragona.

Moreover, in 2024, the “New Talent Recruitment Office at IRBLleida (PRIPIN)” project was granted (total funding 148.207€), allowing for the creation of the Office for the Recruitment of Research Staff (OCPI) in 2025, with the goal of increasing international talent by at least 10% over two years.

Visibility and networking actions. The visibility of research groups was promoted through platforms such as Crowdhelix and the Participant Portal, and relationships with European consortia (ERIC, EATRIS, EACRIN) were strengthened.

The International Unit participated in EATRIS events and plans to attend the INORMS congress hosted by EARMA in 2025 to explore new international collaboration opportunities.

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Institutional growth and diversity. Between 2022 and 2024, research staff increased by 28%, reaching 632 professionals, of whom 7% are non-Spanish nationals. This growth is accompanied by increased international mobility, with both incoming and outgoing research stays.

International funding and scientific output. Despite the increase in submissions, international funding remains limited, representing just 5% of the total competitive funding obtained, which highlights the need to reinforce strategies for capturing competitive European funds.

Over 36% of the institute's indexed publications include international co-authors, and 48% are led by IRBLleida researchers. Participation in consortia and international platforms forms a strong foundation to boost global visibility and impact.

In summary, IRBLleida's 2022–2024 Internationalization Plan has contributed towards significant progress in research activity, institutional diversity, and international visibility, laying the groundwork to further increase the volume and success of international projects and collaborations in the coming years.

3. Environmental Analysis – SWOT

The internationalization strategy of IRBLleida aims to strengthen its position as a competitive biomedical research institute within European and global networks. Conducting a SWOT analysis provides a structured approach to evaluate internal capabilities and external conditions that influence this goal. By mapping these factors, IRBLleida can align its strategic actions to leverage strengths, address weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate risks, ensuring sustainable growth and global visibility.

The following SWOT analysis tries to summarize all these items to address crucial points while minimizing risk factors:

<u>STRENGTHS</u>	<u>WEAKNESSES</u>
- Research groups at IRBLleida have success rates in competitive Spanish calls above the national average - Integration of both academic and clinic research staff enhances the scope and quality of research - Significantly increase in the number of groups participating in national and international networks (e.g., CIBER, ITEMAS, EATRIS) - Notable increase in researcher exchanges between IRBLleida and international centers - Increased focus on innovation enables participation in international calls dedicated to knowledge and technology transfer	- Limited experience in managing international proposals led by IRBLleida researchers - Low international visibility compared to larger and more prominent centers - Scarce presence of international researchers within UdL and Hospitals - Difficulty in motivating researchers to take part in and lead European proposals

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<u>OPPORTUNITIES</u>	<u>THREATS</u>
- European programs (Horizon Europe, EIT Health, etc.) with increasing budgets - Expanding Catalan health and biomedical ecosystem generates opportunities for strategic alliances - The One Health approach, which integrates human, animal, and environmental health, opens international funding opportunities for IRBLleida's new cross-disciplinary programs	- Uncertainty about the continuity of funding calls in the medium/long term due to changes in European policy frameworks - Strong competition for international funding from well-established research centers across Catalonia and Europe - Risk of talent drain to institutions with greater international projection and resources

4. Common Strategic Objectives

Following internal discussions about IRBLleida's vision and international profile, the pursuit of coordinated projects in the HE programs remains a focus, aiming to establish IRBLleida as an internationally recognized biomedical research center and increase recruitment of international researchers. This vision is intended to crystalize in three main goals:

- Increase the exposure of IRBLleida researchers to leading international research institutions
- Attract international researchers to IRBLleida, as group leaders, members of the existing groups or as visiting scientists
- Increase the funding obtained from the EU and other international funding agencies

To achieve these goals, a short list of strategic objectives has been identified:

1. Increase the international visibility of the activity of research groups of IRBLleida
2. Promote the coordination of European proposals among IRBLleida researchers
3. Improve the quality of submitted project proposals
4. Establish effective communication with international institutions
5. Increase the number of international researchers
6. Enhance the visibility and global positioning of IRBLleida job opportunities
7. Increase international exposure of our researchers at all stages of their career
8. Continuous evaluation and optimization of IRBLleida's talent recruitment strategy

5. Action plan

Based on the strategic objectives, for both participation of IRBLleida in HE programs and international talent attraction and retention, the following tasks have been identified to address all of them:

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BOOSTING IRBLLEIDA PARTICIPATION IN HORIZON EUROPE PROGRAM

1-International visibility

- Create an “International Unit” within the IRBLleida Projects Unit
- Increase the presence in webpages where research groups can promote their activity for partners seeking.

2-Encourage researchers' participation

- Increment of salary and protected-time program through European project participation
- Overhead funds reimbursement policy
- Internal conferences. Success stories. Training on international careers

3-Quality of project proposals

- Outsourcing of consulting services for proposal writing
- Deploy a “Horizon Europe Calls Manager” specific training program for RMA staff
- Build in-house expertise to align ideas with suitable funding opportunities.

4-Contact with international institutions

- Identification of international researchers and research groups for collaboration in proposals
- Mobility actions for RMA staff
- Active participation in research and project management networks.

Objective 1 - Increase the international visibility of the activity of research groups of IRBLleida

Action 1.1: Provide greater visibility to the International Unit via a dedicated web section and complementary outreach through institutional channels.

Action 1.2: Identify the capabilities of each research group interested in showcasing their scientific expertise, as well as the specific types of collaborations they seek to complement their activities.

Action 1.3: Maintain and update a comprehensive dossier containing documentation of research groups of interest and upload it to partnership-seeking platforms and tools such as the European Commission's Funding & Tenders Portal, Crowdhelix, or Kaila.

Objective 2: Promote the coordination of European proposals among researchers.¹

Action 2.1: IRBLleida-employed researchers who act as coordinators or work package leaders in a European HE project will be eligible for a “grant coordination” salary supplement. This supplement will allocate **20% of the project's overhead funds for coordinators** and **10% for work package leaders**, applicable only for the duration of the active projects. In both cases, the supplement **cannot exceed 10% of the individual's gross salary**.

¹ **Note on salary supplements and contracting measures:** The Institute shall ensure that all procedures related to staff remuneration and recruitment are transparent, equitable, and duly documented.

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Action 2.2: For IRBLleida-affiliated researchers whose primary appointment is at UdL or ICS/GSS, the institute will work jointly with the governing bodies of these institutions to explore mechanisms for increasing their salaries when they act as coordinators or work package leaders of Horizon Europe projects managed by IRBLleida. This salary supplement will allocate **up to 20% of the project's overhead funds for coordinators and 10% for work package leaders** and will apply only for the duration of the active projects. In both cases, the supplement **cannot exceed 10% of the individual's gross salary. Researchers who benefit from this action will not be eligible for Action 2.3.**

Action 2.3: For IRBLleida-affiliated researchers whose primary appointment is at UdL or ICS/GSS, IRBLleida will allocate **20% of the overhead funds for coordinators and 10% for work package leaders** from ongoing Horizon Europe projects to finance a protected-time program. This initiative aims to enable Principal Investigators (PIs) with clinical or teaching responsibilities to dedicate more time to research activities. The program will be coordinated in collaboration with the hospitals and the UdL management, ensuring alignment with institutional priorities and the operational needs of the participating hospitals and University. **Researchers who benefit from this action will not be eligible for Action 2.2.**

Action 2.4: Establish an overhead reimbursement policy that allocates 20% of the project's designated overhead funds to a free-disposition account for PIs serving as grant coordinators, and 10% for PIs acting as work package leads. **All PIs will be eligible for this action regardless of their primary institutional affiliation.** The use of these funds must align with IRBLleida's mission to promote research and innovation and cannot be applied to the purposes described in actions 2.1, 2.2, or 2.3.

Action 2.5: Organize at least two annual events—such as meetings, conferences, or targeted training sessions—to showcase key aspects of the Horizon Europe program and share success stories that inspire PIs to apply.

Objective 3: Improve the quality of submitted project proposals

Action 3.1: Publish a tender to outsource support services for IRBLleida-coordinated proposals, covering both proposal writing and consortium development.

Action 3.2: Provide ongoing training for International RMA staff in areas such as call identification, proposal development, project monitoring, and justification of HE projects.

Actions 3.3: Schedule meetings with research personnel interested in applying for European funding opportunities. Ensuring a strong alignment between the research group's proposal concept and the goals of the funding call is critical for proposal success.

Objective 4: Establish effective communication with international institutions

Action 4.1: Establish contact channels with International Project Management Offices from other Spanish Biomedical Research Institutes to maintain an active search for potential collaborations.

Action 4.2: Establish collaboration channels with Project Management Offices of biomedical research institutes in other European Countries to enable short training stays (2-3 days) for RMA staff.

Action 4.3: Release an "Incoming Mobility Program" where PhD researchers from European research entities can apply for 2-3 months stay in one of the research groups of IRBLleida.

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Action 4.4: Attend international RMA-addressed meetings and promote active participation in networks.

INTERNATIONAL TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION	
5- Increase international researchers	6 - Visibility and positioning of job offers
- Reward international experience in the calls of IRBLleida's Intramural Research Program (IREP) - Deploy an Incoming Mobility Program - Provide close support for incoming researchers - Make IREP Postdoc positions more attractive by strengthening the overall offer	- Publish job offers on international platforms - Identification and dissemination of HR grants
7 - International exposure researchers	8 - Continuous evaluation of strategy
International mobility programs for IRBLleida researchers	- Closely monitor key performance indicators - Semiannual reports

Objective 5: Increase the number of international researchers at the institution

This objective aims to recruit foreign researchers to boost diversity, foster new knowledge, and enhance the institute's international profile for greater research competitiveness.

Action 5.1: Promote the participation of candidates with international experience in internal HR calls. Evaluation criteria may value previous research experience abroad or international collaborations. In agreement with IRBLleida's HRS4R strategy, all selection processes will be open, transparent, and merit based.

Action 5.2: Contact foreign institutions to explore an incoming mobility program execution. This 2–3-month research mobility program aims to attract international researchers to IRBLleida and enhance our researchers' global exposure.

Action 5.3: Assess the needs of newly incorporated international researchers. Conduct a survey to identify areas for improvement during their stay in Lleida and at the institute. Deploy a support program composed by six modules: housing assistance, bureaucratic procedures, tax advice, public funding application support, cultural integration, and mentoring.

Action 5.4: Develop a more attractive package for IRBLleida internal postdoctoral grants (Postdoc IREP) by combining salary increases with other strategies to boost appeal for international talent.

Objective 6: Enhance the visibility and global positioning of IRBLleida job opportunities

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This objective aims to increase the dissemination and impact of job offers to reach an international audience, making IRBLleida a career option for foreign researchers.

Action 6.1: Advertise job opportunities through leading international platforms. Internal predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships will be announced on EURAXESS, ResearchGate, and other relevant channels. Hiring opportunities of special strategic value, such as new group leader positions, will be posted on Nature Jobs.

Action 6.2: Identify international funding calls that support researcher contracts at different stages of the biomedical research career. Actively promote applications through IRBLleida by conducting an international candidate search and leveraging platforms that ensure broad global visibility

Objective 7: Increase international exposure of IRBLleida's researchers at all stages of their career.

This objective focuses the efforts to internationalize careers of IRBLleida researchers.

Action 7.1: Maintain, and eventually increase, the number of International Mobility intramural calls within the Intramural Research Program (IREP) for all stage researchers.

Action 7.2: Strengthen the International Mobility intramural IREP calls by incorporating a budget for international mobility into the four-year full predoctoral grants offered by IRBLleida.

Objective 8: Continuous evaluation and optimization of talent recruitment strategy

The International Talent Recruitment and Retention Plan is a dynamic and flexible document. Ongoing evaluation will help identify areas for improvement and ensure effectiveness.

Action 8.1: Conduct annual strategy evaluations. Analyze objectives and actions by using indicators to measure impact and efficiency.

Action 8.2: Generate semiannual reports, by June and December 2025, detailing the progress of described actions, including plan status and corrective actions, if needed.

6. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

For the monitorization of the proposed actions, some KPIs have been defined to evaluate the performance of the previous actions and the consecution of the objectives:

1-International visibility	2-Encourage researchers' participation
• Number of research groups registered in project partnership searching platforms • Number of proposals submitted to international project calls • Number of HE projects submitted that are coordinated from IRBLleida	• Number of executed HE program conference/training aiming research staff • Execution of specific training for clinical staff on opportunities for positioning in European projects/networks • Include extra points in IREP program evaluations for CVs of PIs who have submitted Horizon Europe framework

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projects as coordinators

3 - Quality of project proposals	4 - Contact with international institutions
- Publication and execution of a tender opportunity to outsource the support for proposal preparation on projects coordinated by IPs from IRBLleida - Trainings for RMA staff in Project Management for HE programs calls	- Number of contacts established with International Project Offices of other Spanish IIS - Number of contacts with foreign project offices to assess short-stay programs for RMA staff of IRBLleida - EARMA and REGIC International Networks meetings attended and/or participated
5 - Increase international researchers	6 - Visibility and positioning of job offers
- Number of IREP calls where international participants have been promoted - Number of international institutions contacted for an incoming research stay proposal - Creation of a welcome and support program for newly incorporated foreign researchers	- Number of IRBLleida job offers positioned on international platforms. - Number of candidates considered for these positions. - Number of international biomedical funding calls, to support IRBLleida incorporation, identified
7 - International exposure researchers	8 - Continuous evaluation of strategy
- Number of research academic stays performed by IRBLleida research staff - Inclusion of a mobility program within the four-year full predoctoral intramural grants offered by IRBLleida	- Number of follow up meetings to review the execution of Talent Recruitment Plan and analysis of its completion (HRS4R work group). - Release of two semiannual reports regarding International Talent Recruitment and Retention Plan implementation evaluation.

7. Compliance and Regulatory Framework

IRBLleida ensures that all actions derived from this Internationalization Plan are developed in full compliance with the applicable legislation, ethical principles, and standards of good governance.

The Institute's commitment to integrity, transparency, and responsible research management is reflected in the following guiding frameworks:

- European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers**, ensuring open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment processes.
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** and the **Spanish Organic Law on Data Protection (LOPDGDD)**, guaranteeing proper handling and confidentiality of personal data from applicants and research staff.

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- **Spanish and Catalan labour, budgetary, and public sector regulations**, applicable to research institutions and the use of public funds.
- **IRBLeida's internal Compliance and Ethics Policy**, which promotes ethical behaviour, transparency, and accountability across all levels of the organisation.
- **Principles of equality, non-discrimination, and diversity**, ensuring fair and inclusive recruitment and participation in international initiatives.

IRBLeida also commits to ensuring that the allocation and use of overhead funds and European financial resources strictly follow the regulations of the funding bodies and the Institute's internal financial management policies.