OPEN POSITION IN ERC-FUNDED PROJECT ‘TRAJECT’

Research position in project funded by European Research Council (ERC) to re-shape our understanding of older people’s end-of-life trajectories

1 Postdoctoral Researcher

The End-of-Life Care Research Group of Vrije Universiteit Brussel is looking to fill one Postdoctoral Researcher position (full-time appointment) for a large-scale research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and supervised by Prof Dr Lara Pivodic. The project title is “TRAJECT: Uncovering commonalities and differences: Towards a novel framework for identifying end-of-life trajectories of older people with serious chronic illness.” ERC funding is amongst the most prestigious and competitive funding schemes of the European Union, providing the opportunity to tackle a fundamental research problem collectively in a team.

The postdoctoral researcher will join a multidisciplinary team of researchers who will conduct a 5-year mixed-methods, inter-disciplinary investigation of older people’s end-of-life trajectories. The TRAJECT project responds to the long-standing scientific challenge of identifying commonalities in end-of-life trajectories across groups of people, without masking important inter-individual differences. Its central aim is to gain understanding of what is generalisable and what is individually specific in older people’s end-of-life trajectories and in the circumstances that shape them. In a convergent mixed-methods investigation, this work combines 1) a large quantitative longitudinal study and 2) a serial narrative interview study; both with older people (70 years or over) with serious chronic illness who are nearing the end of life. By combining structured quantitative methods with experience-based constructivist research approaches, this project aims to achieve groundbreaking insights into older people’s end-of-life trajectories.

The work location is Brussels Health Campus (VUB Jette Campus).

Starting date: October/November 2023 (some flexibility is possible)
The specific tasks for the postdoctoral position are as follows:

- Support the Principal Investigator in supervising and managing the ERC project TRAJECT and the project staff (incl. 3 PhD students and 1 research assistant)
- Working together with the Principal Investigator to set up and manage the research project and ensure its successful conduct and completion. This includes, among other tasks, developing the study protocol and data collection instruments, establishing collaborations with clinicians and sites for patient recruitment, application to ethics committees, setting up project monitoring structures, and other scientific, administrative and logistic procedures.
- Co-supervising the PhD trajectories and dissertations of the three PhD students (together with the Principal Investigator)
- Supporting the Principal Investigator in hands-on scientific work, such as the mixed-methods integration of the quantitative and qualitative strands of the TRAJECT project
- Collaborating on scientific publications that result from the TRAJECT project
- Working towards shaping your own research agenda and establishing an independent research career, by initiating and writing scientific publications as first author and by (co-)developing applications for competitive external research funding
- Contributing to the communication of the project progress and results to scientific and non-scientific audiences, e.g. scientific articles and conferences, policy briefs, blog posts and outreach to the general public.
- Contributing to the development of future research possibilities of the team, by identifying scientific gaps and new avenues in topics related to the TRAJECT project
- Together with all team members, contributing to the logistical and administrative support of the project
- Contributing to the activities of the End-of-Life Care Research Group

Required skills and qualifications

You hold a Ph.D. degree in social health sciences, medical sciences, psychology, nursing, gerontology, sociology, health sciences, medical anthropology, or a similar discipline by 30 Sept 2023 (some flexibility in this date will be allowed, given justification). You obtained your PhD at most 6 years prior to the start of the appointment to this position (date of successful defence).

- You have a deep interest in and enthusiasm for research and are highly motivated to embark on a senior research position and to take on the combination of tasks that this entails.
- You have a proactive, problem-solving approach to work and the challenges of a large research project, and an open attitude towards learning.
- You can demonstrate your scientific expertise and experience through the quality of your dissertation and your previous scientific and academic achievements.
- Excellent skills in qualitative research and qualitative analysis; experience with narrative and/or phenomenological research approaches is an advantage.
- High level of skill in and affinity with quantitative research and statistical data analysis
- Experience with mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) research is a strong advantage.
- You have published at least two original articles as first author in international peer-reviewed scientific journals or a peer-reviewed book chapter or have another scientific achievement of similar relevance in your field.
• You have a background (e.g. through your scientific work, previous studies, internships, specialisation courses, previous employment etc.) in at least one of the topics of the project: population ageing, serious/chronic illness, end of life, health/illness trajectories; or you can otherwise demonstrate an affinity with these topics.
• Experience in research with vulnerable populations is highly appreciated.
• You can provide examples of tasks where you took on a leading role. Experience in project management and/or supervising junior researchers, research assistants or master students is an advantage.
• Highly collaborative, team-minded and pro-active attitude
• Excellent self-management and planning skills
• Excellent written and oral communication skills in English and motivation to learn Dutch (if not Dutch-speaking)

What we offer

• Full-time postdoctoral researcher contract for the duration of 4 years, subject to a favorable evaluation after 1 year*
• A competitive postdoctoral researcher salary, in line with salary scales determined by the Flemish Government
• The opportunity to further develop your research skills and career within a large and prestigious research project, funded by the European Union, which is expected to deliver groundbreaking scientific findings
• Collaboration with and guidance within an interdisciplinary team led by an experienced and internationally recognised Principal Investigator
• A pleasant workplace in a large and internationally renowned research group in the field of end-of-life care, with many opportunities for professional development and national and international networking
• Extensive possibilities for research training and career coaching through the VUB Doctoral Schools

*Under certain conditions, a longer appointment (max. 5 years) may be possible.

Working at VUB

At the VUB, you are guaranteed an open, involved and diverse workplace where you are offered opportunities to (further) build your career.

As well as this, you’ll enjoy various benefits:

• Full reimbursement for your home-work commute with public transport according to VUB-policy, or compensation if you come by bike
• Hospitalisation insurance
• Space to shape the content of your work and continuously learn
• Excellent facilities for sport and exercise
• Ecocheques
• Meals at attractive prices in our campus restaurants
• An open, family-friendly work environment where attention is paid to work-life balance, and exceptional holiday arrangements with 35 days of leave (based on a fulltime contract).
HOW TO APPLY

Send to lara.pivodic@vub.be and at the latest on **August 7th 2023**

1. Your CV, with a list of your publications
2. A copy of your PhD diploma or – if not yet obtained – the expected date when you will obtain it
3. Letter of motivation, in which you outline your motivation to work as a postdoctoral researcher on the TRAJECT project and where you explain your perspective on research on older people’s end-of-life trajectories.
4. A copy of your dissertation. If it is not completed yet, an abstract, the introduction and at least one full chapter.
5. The name, institution and e-mail addresses of two referees from your academic background who may be contacted for a reference

The selection procedure comprises the following:

1. First screening of applications and shortlist; notification of candidates outside of shortlist
2. For shortlisted candidates: Interview (face to face or online) with the following components:
   - a 5-minute presentation of your perspective on research on older people’s end-of-life trajectories and important research gaps in this area (*shortlisted candidates will receive more detailed instructions*)
   - a conversation with the Principal Investigator concerning your skills, experience, motivation, goals and perspectives regarding work in the TRAJECT project.
   A further round of interviews may be planned, depending on the outcome of the first round.
3. Final selection and notification of candidates

The timing of these steps will depend on candidates’ availability during the summer holiday months. If no suitable candidates are found after any of these steps the vacancy will be reopened.

**More information needed?**
If you have questions related to this vacancy you can contact Prof Dr Lara Pivodic (lara.pivodic@vub.be).