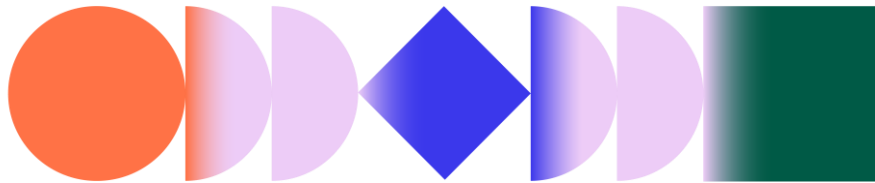


Leiden University Una Europa Seed Funding

In 2026, fifteen Leiden University colleagues received up to €15,000 each for projects which build international ties within the Una Europa alliance.

Learn more about all 2026 projects in this document.



Una Europa is an alliance of 11 leading research universities, [including Leiden University](#). It brings opportunities to our students, academics and staff. Together with our Una Europa partners we are learning, collaborating and shaping the future of education and research.

The 2026 Leiden University Una Europa Seed Funding Call aimed to stimulate Leiden University-led initiatives that strengthen our engagement within the Una Europa alliance, from interdisciplinary collaboration to academic mobility and innovation in education and research.

Projects were organised around three stands: Early-Career Researcher (ECR) Mobility and Collaboration, Lifelong Learning (LLO) Innovation and Strategic and Interdisciplinary Initiatives.

Below is an overview of the successful projects that received funding.

Strand 1: Early-Career Researcher Mobility and Collaboration

Grants in this category aim to support short-term research exchanges, workshops, or collaborative pilot projects led by early-career researchers.

- 1. Developing Geoarchaeological Methods for Dating and Interpreting Tropical Earthworks: A Leiden–Leuven Collaboration.** [Dita Auzina](#), *Faculty of Archaeology*
How do you date ancient monuments when tropical soils preserve few artefacts or organic remains? This project brings together archaeologists from Leiden University and soil and luminescence specialists from KU Leuven to investigate Aguas Buenas, a remarkable complex of more than 370 earthen mounds in central Nicaragua. By combining chemical ‘fingerprints’ in soils, light stored in sediment grains and archaeological evidence, the team will reconstruct when and how the mounds were built and used. The project will also create a new toolkit for studying poorly dated tropical earthworks elsewhere in Central America and strengthen collaboration between Leiden and Leuven. *Una Europa partner: KU Leuven*
- 2. Circulating proteomic biomarkers to discriminate pulmonary embolism from chronic thromboembolic pulmonary hypertension.** [Marie-José Goumans](#), *Leiden University Medical Center*
Abstract not yet available. *Una Europa partner: KU Leuven*

3. **Elucidating the role of long-noncoding RNA GHRLOS in cholesterol metabolism and inflammatory responses in macrophages.** [Bruno Guigas](#), *Leiden University Medical Center*

The protein kinase AMPK is a master regulator of cellular energy balance, yet its genetic loss is non-lethal, implying compensatory pathways. A genome-wide CRISPR-Cas9 screen in AMPK-knockout cells identified the long non-coding Ghrelin Opposite Strand/Antisense RNA (GHRLOS) as essential for survival, being notably linked to cholesterol metabolism. GHRLOS is highly expressed in macrophages and upregulated by inflammatory stimuli. This LUMC-KU Leuven collaboration will investigate the impact of GHRLOS deletion in human macrophages on cell intrinsic metabolic reprogramming and inflammatory activation using a portfolio of cutting-edge technologies, including ChIRP-seq to map GHRLOS direct target genes. *Una Europa partner: KU Leuven*

4. **Emotional attention bias in orangutans.** [Karlijn van Heijst](#), *Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences*

Rapidly and automatically turning attention to emotional expressions may be advantageous for individuals of social species. Due to their semi-solitary existence, orangutans are an especially interesting species to study this implicit attention bias. We use an eye-tracking paradigm to investigate this in zoo-housed orangutans. However, it is challenging to gain access to study subjects, because orangutans are rare in zoos and populations are generally small. Therefore, in this project, the coordinator will visit collaborators in Switzerland and Germany to increase the sample size with their study populations and strengthen relationships. *Una Europa partner: Universität Zürich*

5. Catheter-directed thrombolysis and severe bleeding in acute pulmonary embolism: a Swiss nationwide study. [Zihua Li](#), *Leiden University Medical Center*

Pulmonary embolism is a potentially life-threatening cardiovascular condition requiring timely and appropriate treatment. This project will use nationwide Swiss hospital data to investigate the use, effectiveness, and safety of advanced reperfusion treatments, with particular attention to mortality and bleeding risks associated with systemic thrombolysis and catheter-directed therapies. By combining expertise in clinical epidemiology and thrombosis research, the project will strengthen collaboration between Leiden University Medical Center and University Hospital Zurich, facilitate joint data analysis and methodological exchange, and support a collaborative publication while establishing a foundation for sustained international cooperation in population-based venous thromboembolism research. *Una Europa partner: Universität Zürich*

6. Prompting in a Second Language: Sociolinguistic and Contrastive Perspectives on AI Interaction. [Naomi Truan](#), *Faculty of Humanities*

How do multilingual speakers navigate AI tools, and how do their language ideologies shape this navigation? The project ‘Prompting in a Second Language: Sociolinguistic and Contrastive Perspectives on AI Interaction’ brings together sociolinguistics and German studies in Leiden with contrastive linguistics and Dutch studies in Berlin. Combining a multilingual survey, student-led interviews, and autoethnographic reflection, we examine how multilinguals interact with AI in a second language, focusing on language choice, switching, and perceptions of correctness and naturalness – not only language learning or translation. The collaboration develops a user-centered understanding of how LLMs intervene in the social organization of multilingualism. *Una Europa partner: Freie Universität Berlin*

Strand 2: Lifelong Learning Innovation

Grants in this category fund the development or testing of innovative lifelong learning formats that contribute to Una Europa's shared lifelong-learning agenda and Leiden University's educational innovation goals.

1. Lifelong Learning Innovation for Responsible AI Communication in Multilingual Healthcare (HEALTH-AI). [*Susana Valdez*](#), *Faculty of Humanities*

As AI tools like machine translation and chatbots become increasingly used in clinical practice, professionals lack structured guidance on their responsible use. This risks patient safety and equitable care access. The project designs a micro-credential in multilingual healthcare communication, integrating AI literacy with ethical decision-making. It uses scenario-based learning grounded in real-world communication practices. The flexible, modular curriculum aligns with lifelong learning principles and is scalable across European contexts, establishing a model for embedding AI competences into professional training. *Una Europa partners: Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna.*

Strand 3: Strategic and Interdisciplinary Initiatives

These grants support activities that make a tangible contribution to Una Europa's and Leiden University's strategic objectives, and which strengthen interdisciplinary and inter-university networks.

1. RE-UNITE – Renewing EU-UN Collaboration and Multilateralism. [*Madeleine Hosli*](#), *Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs.*

This strategic research initiative connects academics and policymakers, and aims to strengthen collaboration in research on multilateralism and global governance. The project focuses on relations between the European Union and the United Nations, global governance, multilateral effectiveness, and the influence of aspiring Global South actors. Key activities include joint research, a lecture, a workshop, co-authored articles, PhD supervision and the building of a researcher network. All aim to support Una Europa's ambitions, foster sustainable collaboration and increase the visibility of research on multilateralism. *Una Europa partners: Helsingin yliopisto/Helsingfors universitet, KU Leuven and Universität Zürich.*

2. Novel educational materials to enhance European health consumers' understanding of placebo and nocebo effects. [Kaya Peerdeman](#), *Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences*.

Placebo and nocebo effects play an important role in healthcare by influencing treatment outcomes through mechanisms such as expectations. However, health consumers often have limited understanding of these effects. This may hinder optimal treatment outcomes. This project engages health consumers across Europe in the creation of educational materials to improve understanding of placebo and nocebo effects. Through focus groups and by building on findings from the Erasmus+ ECHOO project, the team of academics and students from five European universities will develop consumer-informed resources such as infographics and fact sheets. *Una Europa partners: Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, KU Leuven, Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie.*

3. Mobilising multilingualism: Translanguaging as a decolonial strategy to enhance academic language learning in Congo DRC. [Nancy Kula](#), *Faculty of Humanities*.

This project uses translanguaging in the multilingual context of the Democratic Republic of Congo to explore ways of building capacity by strengthening academic languages amongst Congolese higher education students and early-career researchers to enhance their contribution to the global knowledge economy. The project explores how the multilingual repertoires and practices of speakers can be exploited to increase academic language learning skills while embedding this within the complex language ecologies of speakers which include French as official language, four African languages as national languages – Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo and Tschiluba – and at least 200 local community languages forming the day-to-day linguistic fabric of communities. *Una Europa partners: KU Leuven and Universidad Complutense de Madrid.*

4. Methods and Sources in Korean and Area Studies: Creating a PhD training network within Una Europa (MESKAS-PHD). [Bonnie Tilland](#), Faculty of Humanities.

The project develops structured activities for PhD students. It focuses on Korean and Area Studies while adopting a broader interdisciplinary perspective rooted in the humanities and social sciences. Responding to the need for advanced doctoral training, it combines area studies with methodological reflection and practical research skills. The project offers PhD students an opportunity to critically engage with different research methods, sources, and academic practices used in Korean Studies and beyond. *Una Europa partners: Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna and University of Edinburgh.*

5. Reprogramming Kidney Health: A holistic approach to kidney biology, disease and medicine. [Peter Hohenstein](#), Leiden University Medical Center.

This network-building initiative brings together researchers in kidney development, regeneration, regenerative medicine, and developmental kidney diseases with experts in stem cell biology, synthetic biology, computational modeling, and artificial intelligence. The funding will support a multidisciplinary workshop to establish a Europe-centered research network. The network will develop new research directions, coordinate funding applications, and accelerate the translation of discoveries into better understanding and treatment of kidney disease. *Una Europa partners: Helsingin yliopisto/Helsingfors universitet and University of Edinburgh.*

6. Old English Continental Network: Collaboration, Research and Teaching [OE-CONNECT]. [Thijs Porck](#), Faculty of Humanities.

OE-CONNECT aims to create a sustainable, interdisciplinary network of researchers and teachers working on the cultural heritage of early medieval England (c. 500–1100 CE) at European institutions. The focus is Old English language and literature, manuscripts and the post-medieval reception of this heritage. There will be a hybrid lecture series and a symposium. An online platform will also be launched with teaching materials, an overview of projects and events, and an interactive map of Old English manuscripts in European libraries and archives. OE-CONNECT aims to enhance research excellence and stimulate teaching innovation. *Una Europa partners: Universität Zürich and Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie.*

7. RESUS – Rethinking the welfare state to confront Europe’s triple crisis of SUsustainability. [Sebastian Diessner](#), Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs.

Europe’s social model is under pressure. In a world of intensified geopolitical competition, both EU-level and national-level policymakers face acute challenges in confronting three crises of sustainability: ecological, social, and political. RESUS’s overarching objective is to mobilise and consolidate an interdisciplinary team of scholars whose work critically examines policy responses to Europe’s sustainability crises from diverse methodological and substantive perspectives. In preparation for large-scale grant applications, we aim to foster collaboration across four Una Europa institutions. We will organise an interdisciplinary workshop and open our collaboration to the wider Una Europa network through conference panels. *Una Europa partners: Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, University of Edinburgh, University College Dublin/An Coláiste Ollscoile Baile Átha Cliath.*

8. Exchanging best teaching practices of introductory physics laboratories across Europe. [Paul Logman](#), Faculty of Science.

To enable a wide variety of career aspirations, students must develop strong technical and problem-solving skills. Much of these skills are gained through learning experiences in labs. However, traditional undergraduate laboratory experiments are ‘recipe-based’ with little opportunity for exploration and genuine problem solving. We wish to address these issues and make the learning in our physics labs more student-centered through tapping into physics education research and experience that exists already across Una Europa universities. We will share best teaching practices, leading to the development and testing of new experiments and new approaches for introductory physics labs. A side-effect of this collaborative development will be the creation of a seed for a European community working on continuous improvement of physics labs through developing new and current experiments and research-informed approaches based on leading-edge educational literature. These renovated labs will reach over 1900 students from a large variety of disciplines. *Una Europa partners: University of Edinburgh, Freie Universität Berlin and Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie.*