



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Unit S.4 – Centre for Advanced Studies
Unit S.1 – EU Policy Lab

Open Call for an Artist-in-Residence

Decoding Depression

Six months inside European science for policy, working on mental health and depression

Hosted by the Directorate-General Joint Research Centre, European Commission — UNIT F7 (Digital Health), with the EU Policy Lab (JRC.S1) and the Centre for Advanced Studies (JRC.S4)

Where	DG JRC, Ispra, Via Enrico Fermi 2749 - 21027 Ispra
When	January to June 2027, six months (flexible start)
On site	At least 20 days in Ispra (Italy), non-consecutive. The rest you work from where you are.
Budget	€15,000 in total, covering fees, allowance, accommodation and travel
Language	English
Deadline	18 October 2026 — one PDF to JRC-Resonances@ec.europa.eu

Introduction

Depression is one of the most widespread and complex mental health challenges in Europe today. It affects people across all ages, backgrounds and places, yet it is not experienced in the same way by everyone. Depression emerges through the entanglement of biological, psychological, social, cultural and environmental factors, and it is shaped by the conditions in which people live, work, move, connect and imagine their futures.

This residency invites artists to engage with depression not only as an individual condition, but also as a societal phenomenon shaped by multiple environments. In particular, applicants are encouraged to explore the environome as a creative and analytical lens: a framework that considers how interrelated personal, social, natural, built and digital environments influence health and wellbeing across the life course.

How do social isolation, inequality, housing conditions, mobility, access to green space, online platforms, family dynamics, stigma, or exposure to multiple pressures shape experiences of distress or resilience? How might artistic research make visible the cumulative, layered or



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Unit S.4 – Centre for Advanced Studies
Unit S.1 – EU Policy Lab

invisible environments in which depression takes form? And how can art open up new ways of sensing, narrating or collectively understanding these environments without reducing lived experience to categories or indicators?

We look forward to hosting an artist in our team to challenge, interpret, reframe this lens through their own practice and help us develop more comprehensive research in support of EU policies. The residency welcomes proposals that approach depression with nuance, care and imagination, capable of deepening understanding, provoking dialogue, and expanding how mental health is represented and discussed in Europe.

Research Topics

Applicants may address one or more of the following research directions:

- Depression and lived experience: Exploring how depression is felt, narrated, concealed, performed or shared across different contexts, identities and communities.
- The depression environome: investigating how the personal, social, natural, built and digital domains of the environome interact in experiences of depression and wellbeing. Artists may use this framework as a point of departure to explore intersections, tensions or omissions, and to question how environments are measured, felt or governed.
- Digital environments and emotional life: Reflecting on the depression adverse outcome implications of digital exposure, online interaction, platform cultures, datafied selfhood, or the blurring of private and public emotional space.
- Inequality, vulnerability and cumulative risk: Considering how depression is shaped by unequal exposure to stressors and constraints, including poverty, discrimination, precarious work, loneliness, insecure housing, environmental burdens, or overlapping forms of disadvantage.
- Public imagination and mental health narratives: Challenging stigma and simplified narratives of depression through new aesthetic languages, participatory processes or alternative forms of representation.
- Spaces, infrastructures and care: Examining how homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, institutions, public space and urban or rural infrastructures can contribute to distress, recovery, exclusion or belonging.
- Speculative or future-oriented environomes: Imagining healthier, fairer or more caring environments for mental health through speculative design, storytelling, immersive works or participatory world-building.

These topics are indicative. We welcome proposals that combine artistic inquiry with critical reflection, sensory investigation, social engagement or experimental methods.



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Unit S.4 – Centre for Advanced Studies
Unit S.1 – EU Policy Lab

Policy and Research Context

This residency is hosted by the Digital Health Unit, the EU Policy Lab and the Centre for Advanced Studies at the Joint Research Centre which is the European Commission's science and knowledge service. The residency is situated within a wider interest in how mental health can be understood through cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral perspectives that connect science, policy and society.

Recent JRC work has explored depression through an environome approach, looking at how multiple domains of life and environment interact rather than treating mental health solely as an individual or clinical issue. This includes survey-based evidence pointing to the importance of digital exposures, social and territorial inequalities, and cumulative risk factors that can heighten vulnerability or shape unequal mental health outcomes.

Within this residency, such evidence should be understood as a resource for artistic inquiry, not a template for literal illustration. We invite artists to engage critically and creatively with this evidence base: to interpret it, question it, humanise it, complicate it, or transform it into new forms of public reflection and collective understanding.

Artistic outputs may contribute to the policy landscape by:

- opening up public understanding of the environome and its relevance to mental health;
- creating accessible and affective entry points into complex evidence;
- surfacing overlooked experiences, tensions or values that may not be captured through survey methods alone;
- informing cross-sectoral conversations across health, education, digital policy, urban development, employment, environment and social inclusion.

In this sense, the residency supports artistic practice as a mode of inquiry that can complement scientific evidence and enrich policy dialogue.

Residency Framework

The selected artist will work in dialogue with researchers, policymakers and experts connected to the Digital Health Unit and the EU Policy Lab. This exchange may include access to selected background materials, discussions around current evidence on depression and environmental determinants of mental health, and opportunities to reflect on how artistic practice can engage with policy questions without being instrumentalised by them.

The residency is intended as a space for experimentation. Artists are encouraged to develop their own approach to the topic, whether through research-led, participatory, speculative, site-responsive, narrative, performative, digital or material practices.

The residency will take place at the Joint Research Centre in Ispra, with the possibility of a visit in Brussels. You will be working with an interdisciplinary team of scientists.



EUROPEAN COMMISSION JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Unit S.4 – Centre for Advanced Studies
Unit S.1 – EU Policy Lab

What we ask of you:

- Introduce your practice early, informally, to the research team;
- Be present in Ispra for a minimum of 20 days across the six months, spread as suits the work;
- Take part in the life of the team(s) and actively develop research;
- Pursue one line of inquiry and let us see where it goes, including the dead ends;
- Give a closing presentation. This can itself be a work: a performance, a score, a reading, an object, a proposal;
- Write a short reflective account of what the six months were like from the inside. And a short text for our newsletter.
- Optionally, propose an artwork for future production. Be aware that we cannot promise a production budget: any commission would have to be confirmed and separately funded after the residency ends.

We would also like to think with you about what it actually means for art to come into a science-for-policy institute, if it brings any change, how you would know that something had shifted, and whether that is even the right question. This is part of our ongoing reflection on Key Transformative Indicators to track and show the impact of art-science-policy collaboration. You do not need to arrive with a method. This strand will be developed with the EU Policy Lab during the residency, and we are as interested in your reasoned skepticism about evaluation as in any inventive metric you might propose.

Who We Are Hoping to Hear From

Artists and speculative thinkers working in the nexus of the arts, science and humanities, whose work reaches beyond specialist audiences. Research-based, place-based, embodied and social practices are all welcome, as is work engaging with science and technology or with the cultural weight of scientific evidence in policy. Applicants of any artistic discipline and any nationality are eligible, provided they are legally able to work in the EU.

We seek artists whose practices can bring originality, depth and critical sensitivity to the theme of depression, and who are interested in engaging with scientific and CARE ([Care Management for Depression in Primary Care Practice: Findings From the RESPECT-Depression Trial - PMC](#)) policy perspectives without sacrificing artistic autonomy.

Applicants should demonstrate:

- Artistic excellence, practical experience and distinctive out-of-the-box approaches;
- The ability to work with complex and sensitive social themes (please demonstrate this in your curriculum achievements);



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Unit S.4 – Centre for Advanced Studies
Unit S.1 – EU Policy Lab

- Ability to work across cultural and disciplinary backgrounds (please demonstrate your transdisciplinary work in your application) and openness to dialogue with researchers and policymakers;
- Interest in translating, interrogating or reimagining the environment and related evidence through artistic means (please include mention of this in your personal statement or CV);
- Lived experience of depression whether through direct personal experience of a mental health condition or through caregiving and living close to depression is a mandatory requirement;
- Commitment to societal engagement;
- Prior expertise in mental health research, data science and digital health would be an advantage.

What really matters to us is the capacity to develop a rigorous and imaginative artistic response and integrate the deliverables from the decoding depression activity into an artistic research project driven by impact on citizens via a PREVENTIVE CARE POLICY perspective (see the following [post](#) by Sandra Coecke).

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of the topic, applicants should demonstrate an ethically grounded approach to working on depression and mental health. Proposals should show awareness of the risks of simplification, romanticisation, pathologisation or harm.

This is especially important when engaging with research on environmental and social determinants of depression, including evidence related to inequality, vulnerability, digital exposure or cumulative risk. Artists should avoid stigmatising or essentialising representations of individuals or groups identified as more exposed to certain risks. The aim is not to label communities, but to examine the conditions and structures that shape mental health outcomes.

Applicants are encouraged to consider:

- how to engage mental health themes with care, dignity and nuance;
- how to avoid reinforcing stereotypes about depression or vulnerable populations;
- how to critically handle evidence or data-derived insights without overstating certainty or reducing people to variables;
- how to ensure informed, respectful and appropriate participation where communities or lived experience are involved;



EUROPEAN COMMISSION JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Unit S.4 – Centre for Advanced Studies
Unit S.1 – EU Policy Lab

- how to balance emotional force with ethical responsibility in public presentation.

Projects involving direct participation, testimony or collaboration with affected communities should include appropriate safeguards and clear ethical reflection.

How to apply

Send one combined PDF document to JRC-Resonances@ec.europa.eu by 18th October 2026, containing:

- A statement of no more than one page (roughly 500 words): what draws you to this residency, which direction you would take, and how you would go about the work — the research, and the encounter with the people here
- A portfolio: a selection of relevant works or projects, with a link to your site if you have one
- A CV

Selection process

Applications are assessed by a selection committee drawn from JRC Digital Health Unit, the EU Policy Lab and the Centre for Advanced Studies. Shortlisted artists are invited to an online interview. We are looking for:

- A real engagement with the theme and a clear choice of direction.
- Artistic work of exceptional quality — work that produces wonder, holds attention, and leaves a mark on the people who encounter it.
- Novelty: Bold viewpoints, ideas that cross disciplines. Art which break out of the white cube and the dark room and does not simply follow the trends of the art world.
- The ability to work with scientific knowledge and complex policy files, and to carry the societal debate into the work, as evidenced by what you have already made.
- Openness to practices, ideas and forms of collaboration that will not necessarily resemble your usual ones

Indicative timeline

- 18 Oct 2026 Application closes
- 2-13 Nov 2026 Interviews with shortlisted artists
- Nov–Dec 2026 Selection and contracting
- January 2027 Residency begins
- April 2027 Informal presentation of work in progress
- June 2027 Closing presentation, reflective account, artwork proposal



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Directorate S – Innovation in Science and Policymaking
Unit S.4 – Centre for Advanced Studies
Unit S.1 – EU Policy Lab

Resources

[Decoding Depression – Exploring the Environome Across the Life Course \(JRC Science-for-Policy Report\)](#)

[Sandra Coecke Decoding Depression Youth Digital Mental Health Webinar May 2026](#)

[Decoding Depression and Environmental Influences: Vulnerabilities and Policy Insights](#)

[Link InDepDash](#)

[OECD – Addressing Societal Challenges Using Transdisciplinary Research](#)

[Decoding Depression Survey – JRC Knowledge for Policy](#)

A note on AI tools

You may use AI-assisted tools in preparing your application. If you do, review and validate what they produce, make sure it is accurate and respects intellectual property rules, and tell us plainly which tools you used and how. You remain fully responsible for every part of your proposal, including the parts a machine wrote.

Questions? Write to us at JRC-Resonances@ec.europa.eu