

Promotion of Young Scientists in Eastern Europe (PROMYS)

Call for proposals

1. Introduction

The research systems in the New Member States (NMS) are still suffering from shortcomings in research funds and human resources mobilisation, knowledge generation and management. Eastern European research institutions are not sufficiently involved in projects and programmes of the European Research Area (ERA). Research programmes supporting science in Central and Eastern Europe have the potential to contribute towards greater stability and to encourage scientists to remain at their home institutes.

For many years, Switzerland has been committed to scientific co-operation with Eastern Europe through various activities: Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships for Foreign Scholars and Artists, Scientific cooperation between Eastern Europe and Switzerland (SCOPES), International Association for the promotion of cooperation with scientists from the independent states of the former Soviet Union (INTAS). Switzerland's EU enlargement contribution includes: Scientific Exchange Programme NMS-CH (Sciex-NMSch), Regional Research Promotion Programme for the Western Balkans (RRPP), Lithuanian-Swiss Research Programme, Polish-Swiss Research Programme, Hungarian-Swiss Research Programme, Bulgarian-Swiss Research Programme (BSRP) and Romanian-Swiss Research Programme (RSRP).

2. About Promotion of Young Scientists

The new initiative "Promotion of Young Scientists in Eastern Europe (PROMYS)" is aimed at qualified researchers from countries in Eastern Europe who have carried out their doctoral or post-doctoral research in Switzerland and have returned or intend to return to their or another NMS country. The PROMYS should encourage the best next-generation talents to carry out research work in these countries. The performance of universities and research institutions will be improved, as young and promising researchers are able to establish themselves at their institutions thanks to support from the PROMYS initiative.

PROMYS is designed to support Principal Investigators from Eastern Europe at the stage where they consolidate their own independent research team or programme. The grants will strengthen independent and excellent new individual research teams that have been recently created.

The PROMYS initiative will fund salary and research costs of outstanding Principal Investigators (PIs) who already have a relationship with Switzerland. Researchers would be subsidised for a maximum of five years with a salary and research funds. The PIs could also use the funds to employ academic personnel (PhD or postdoctoral students).

Guiding principles of the Swiss grants for young scientists:

- Scientific excellence is the main evaluation criterion.
- Projects in all fields of research are eligible for funding.
- Individual research teams led by a single PI are supported.
- Grants are awarded to the PI. The Principal Investigator will be employed by the host institution. The research has to be done in an NMS country.
- The host institution guarantees the PI's independence and provides the appropriate research environment for carrying out the project and managing its funding.

3. Who can apply for a Swiss grant for young scientists?

Main applicants must fulfil the following conditions:

- Either nationality of an NMS country or study/work experience of at least three years in an NMS country
- Doctorate or post-doctorate (or part of it) in Switzerland; at least two successive years
- 3-5 years of experience since completion of PhD at time of submission
- At the time of submission: planned or existing position at a research institution in an Eastern European NMS country
- Eligible countries:
 - Bulgaria
 - Croatia
 - Czech Republic
 - Estonia
 - Hungary
 - Latvia
 - Lithuania
 - Poland
 - Romania
 - Slovakia
 - Slovenia
- Provision of high-level publications
- Submission of an excellent research proposal

Applications for a grant must be submitted by a single Principal Investigator (PI) and must be supported by the host institution.

The PI does not necessarily need to be working at the host institution at the time when the proposal is submitted. However, a mutual agreement and the host institution's commitment to establishing the relationship are necessary, should the proposal be successful. Applicants who exceed the time limit of five years since completion of the PhD, e.g. due to family care duties, may be accepted. A detailed rationale for exceeding the five-year period must be submitted in writing.

80% of the project time must be dedicated to research. The remaining time can be used for teaching and other university activities.

3.1 Host institution

Any type of public higher education and research institution, including universities and institutes of the academies, can host the PI and his/her team. The host institution must be legally and geographically based in one of the NMS and must have proven potential for competitive international research (strengths to be presented in the full proposal). The host institutes must guarantee the PIs' adequate support and their independence.

Using the provided template, the host institution must present a commitment letter offering appropriate conditions for the PI to independently direct the research and manage its funding for the duration of the project, ensuring that the PI is allowed to:

- apply for funding independently
- manage research and funding for the project and make appropriate resource allocation decisions
- publish independently as senior author and include as co-authors only those who have contributed substantially to the reported work
- select and supervise team members, including research students, doctoral students or others
- have access to reasonable space and facilities for conducting the research.

3.2 Mentoring

In order to maintain a link to Switzerland and to support the grantee during the project, a professor of the Swiss institution shall be the grantee's mentor. The mentor will be asked to provide a recommendation letter and confirmation that he/she will act as a mentor for the grantee. During the project, the mentor follows the progress of the project, e.g. by visiting the grantee, giving lectures at the host institution or accompanying the PI to conferences. The mentor writes a brief report in the annual scientific report. 5% of the grant can be spent on mentoring activities.

3.3 What kind of research can be funded?

Applications can be made in any field of research with particular emphasis on the frontiers of science. In particular, proposals of an interdisciplinary nature, which cross the boundaries between different fields of research, pioneering proposals addressing new and emerging fields of research or proposals introducing unconventional, innovative approaches and scientific inventions, are encouraged.

Some frontier research activities and methodologies may have ethical implications or may raise questions that will require sound ethical assessment in order to ensure that research supported by a SNSF grant respects the fundamental ethical principles of both countries.

Cases of scientific misconduct such as plagiarism and fabrication or misrepresentation of data will be considered as breaches of fundamental ethical principles, and the proposals concerned will be excluded.

3.4 Duration

The maximum duration of the project is 60 months. The minimum duration is 36 months. The earliest possible start of funding is on 1 August 2016.

3.5 Funding

The maximum amount for a five-year project is CHF 625,000. The funding will be adapted for a shorter project. Overall, a budget of 5.0 million Swiss francs will be available. Approximately eight grants will be awarded. There will be no quota per country.

3.5.1 Research costs

Eligible costs:

- Research funds: all funds needed to carry out the project, such as consumables necessary for the proposed work, publication costs, computer, travel costs, field expenses, expendable items, contractual costs and unavoidable sundry expenses
- Salaries, social security contributions and other salary related costs: Salaries for the main PI (full time) as well as scientific staff members, according to the time spent on the project.
- Equipment: the costs of material of enduring value, max. 20% of the budget (indicate manufacturer, type and distributor). Quotations - if possible, from different competitors - must be enclosed for items whose purchase price exceeds CHF 20,000.
- Overhead for the host institute (maximum 15% of the total budget)
- Mentoring activities (maximum 5% of the budget)
- Subcontracting costs and costs to access large facilities owned by third parties that are not used on the grantees' premises

The salaries of researchers should be in line with the salaries paid by the host institution.

Ineligible costs:

- Expenditure incurred before and after the dates of the project
- Interest of debt, purchase of land and buildings
- Fines, financial penalties and expenses of litigation, bribes
- Activities supported by other entities

3.6 Scientific staff members

The scientific staff members of the team should either be PhD students or early postdocs.

4. Submission procedure

Proposals must be submitted online via the mySNF portal. User registration can be obtained on the *mySNF* homepage: www.mysnf.ch.

Pre-registration: In order to facilitate the evaluation procedure, we kindly ask the main applicants to open their PROMYS proposals in mySNF, and to indicate the title of the project and the discipline.

Deadline for pre-registration: **30 August 2015**

The call documents and the relevant provisions, templates for the research plan and the host institution, regulations and guidelines for the submission of proposals via the *mySNF* portal can be downloaded from the SNSF website. The evaluation will be conducted in two stages.

Proposals must be submitted in English since they will be evaluated by internationally recognised experts.

Submission deadline for the proposal (extended synopsis and full proposal): **5 October 2015**

4.1.1 Documents to submitted

The following documents have to be submitted via the platform or entered directly on the mySNF portal:

- Extended project synopsis, max. 5 pages
- Full research proposal, including management part max 20 pages
- Approximate budget in CHF
- CV of the applicant
- List of publications in major international peer-reviewed scientific journals and/or in the leading international peer-reviewed journals, peer-reviewed conferences proceedings and/or monographs of their respective research fields, highlighting the five most important publications
- Granted patent(s) (if applicable)
- Invited presentations to peer-reviewed, internationally established conferences and/or international advanced schools (if applicable)
- Prizes and Awards (if applicable).
- Commitment letter from the host institution
- A recommendation letter and confirmation of mentorship as regards the grantee of the Swiss mentor

5. Selection of projects; evaluation criteria

5.1 Eligibility check

The International Co-operation division at the SNSF Administrative Offices will check whether the proposals meet the formal criteria, such as number of years of experience since completion of PhD, length of stay in Switzerland, support letter from the host institution. Proposals that do not meet the formal criteria will not be evaluated.

5.2 Evaluation

The evaluation process consists of two stages: In a first round, project ideas are assessed by an evaluation panel on the basis of a project outline (extended synopsis).

5.2.1 1st round (evaluation of extended synopsis)

In the first round, the evaluation will focus on the experience and potential of the applicant:

- Scientific, educational and technological merit
- Experience and past performance of applicant
- Specific qualifications of the applicant with regard to the proposed activities
- Quality of the research project

The full proposal will not be evaluated in the 1st round.

5.2.2 2nd round (evaluation of full proposal)

In the second round, the evaluation will focus on the scientific quality of the project, its scientific value and relevance:

- Originality of the proposed approach
- Feasibility of the proposed approach
- Significance and potential impact of the proposed activities for the participating host institution and its standing/role within its national/regional context

- The full proposals are assessed in a peer-review process. Candidates invited to the second round are asked to present their research project as part of an interview. The candidates will be asked to submit a detailed statement of the host institution giving access to the necessary infrastructure and to show their embedment in the host institution.

6. Implementation of grants

6.1 Grant Agreement

The SNSF, the PIs and the host institution shall sign a grant agreement. The SNSF prepares grant agreements for projects on the basis of the proposals and the recommendations of the evaluation bodies. The grant agreement also includes the host institution's commitment to grant the PI the requisite basic support and the independence to manage the research funding for the duration of the project.

Commitment of the host institution

- Ensure that the work is performed under the scientific guidance of the principal investigator (who is expected to devote at least 80% of his/her total working time to the funded project);
- Support the principal investigator in managing the team and provide reasonable administrative assistance (in particular as regards the general management and reporting of finances and the organisation of project meetings as well as the general logistics of the project);
- Provide research support to the principal investigator and his/her team members for the duration of the project (in particular as regards laboratory and office space, equipment, products and other services that are necessary for conducting the research);
- Guarantee adequate contractual conditions for the principal investigator and his/her team in accordance with the relevant norms of the host institution, respectively host country
- Ensure the necessary scientific autonomy of the principal investigator (in particular as regards the selection of other team members, control over the budget, authority to deliver scientific reports to the SNSF, authority to publish as senior author and invite as co-authors only those who have contributed substantially to the reported work).
- Confirm the status of the PI as an associated or assistant professor.

6.2 Grant portability

The PI is expected to set up and conclude the funded research project in association with the original host institution. However, the SNSF allows PIs who have received a PROMYS grant under certain circumstances to transfer their projects from one host to another in the course of the project. The PI should then present the reasons for wishing to move to another institution. This applies only to transfers to another PROMYS eligible country. The decision will be taken by the SNSF.

6.3 Project progress reporting

Scientific reporting: PIs are required to send scientific reports to the SNSF (every 12 months and at the end of the project). These reports inform the SNSF about the progress and milestones achieved in the project. Specific outputs from the project should be included (e.g. publications). Every six months the PI is asked to fill in a questionnaire.

Financial reporting: every 12 months the PI is required to send a financial management report justifying the use of funds.

Informing the SNSF about any changes affecting the grantees (e.g. moves, changes to employment terms) and changes of personnel

6.4 Payments

Grants are paid in **several instalments**: advance payments (as pre-financing) are made at the beginning of each project year.

6.5 Publication and application of results

Acknowledgement of support: whenever results generated by SNSF-funded research are published (for example, in journals, patents, presentations, etc.) the PI should bring attention to the financial support provided by the SNSF under the initiative “Promotion of Young Scientists in Eastern Europe (PROMYS)”. This may imply a written acknowledgment and/or visible SNSF logo:

‘The research leading to these results was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation under the programme “Promotion of Young Scientists in Eastern Europe (PROMYS)” n° [xxxxxx]’.

The SNSF may publish information on projects which it supports financially. This could include the name of the PI and host institution, the project’s objectives, the amount of funding awarded, the location of the project and the project reports.

7. Contact persons and information

For questions concerning the submission and evaluation procedure for (project outline and) full proposals, please contact the programme co-ordinator: Elisabeth Schenker, international@snf.ch, + 41 31 308 22 22.

Technical help with *my*SNF and electronic submissions -> Hotline:

- Tel. + 41 31 308 22 88 (English)
- Tel. + 41 31 308 22 99 (Français)
- Tel. + 41 31 308 22 00 (Deutsch)

E-mail: mysnf.support@snf.ch

*my*SNF homepage: www.mysnf.ch

12 May 2015