

Horizon Europe Transitional Measures: Call document for SNSF Starting Grants 2023

Switzerland is currently considered a non-associated third country for participation in Horizon Europe and other related programmes. For monobeneficiary schemes such as most ERC grants, researchers at Swiss research institutions are not eligible to apply. To remedy this situation, the SNSF has been mandated by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) to offer an alternative, comparable call for proposals as part of its broader transitional measures in 2022-2023: the SNSF Starting Grant Call 2023. This is an integrative call, which, in addition to the transitional measure for the 2023 ERC Starting Grant, also covers the SNSF Professorial Fellowships¹. International and Swiss-based applicants who intended to apply for an ERC Starting Grant or an SNSF Professorial Fellowship to work in Switzerland are welcome to submit an SNSF Starting Grant proposal to the SNSF. The aim is to maintain Switzerland's strong position as a centre of research excellence whilst offering an opportunity similar to SNSF Professorial Fellowship for outstanding researchers to establish and to lead a research group within the Swiss research landscape. This document describes the rules and procedures for submitting a proposal to the transitional **SNSF Starting Grant Call 2023**.

Key features of the funding scheme are summarised in **Box 1**.

Box 1. Key features of the SNSF Starting Grants Call 2023.

- The scheme is **open to all research disciplines and topics**.
- With an SNSF Starting Grant, grantees will lead an independent research project and direct a team of researchers in Switzerland. An SNSF Starting Grant comes after at least 2 years of research after the PhD or medical degree. **Applicants have achieved scientific independence** and contributed to impactful research in their field.
- Applicants are between 2 and 8 years after their PhD defence or equivalent or between 5 and 12 years after their medical degree.
- The applicant's Swiss higher education institution must ensure that applicants can direct the research and manage their funding.
- Applicants can request a budget of up to **CHF 1.8 million for a period of five years**.

¹ SNSF Professorial Fellowships merges Eccellenza and PRIMA at the highest level of SNSF career funding. Consequently, for the SNSF Starting Grant call 2023, the PRIMA budget is earmarked to fund additional excellent women applicants.

- **Scientific excellence is the main criterion of evaluation.** The proposal is submitted in one application step. It must include the research plan, the CV and major achievements, the requested budget and the higher education institution confirmation letter.
- The evaluation of the proposal by international panels will be conducted in two phases. In a first phase, panel members will evaluate the submitted documents and rate applications on this basis. Top-rated applicants will be evaluated further in a second phase, which includes international peer review and interviews.
- The call opens on 1 November 2022 and **closes on 1 February 2023.**
- The outcome of the first phase will be communicated in July 2023.
- The outcome of the second phase will be communicated in November 2023.
- The projects can start, at the earliest, in January 2024.
- The funding of the projects is expressly subject to the financing decisions of the responsible federal bodies (Federal Council and Parliament).

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1 Eligibility Criteria

1.1 Applicant

1.1.1 *Objective and track record*

With an SNSF Starting Grant, grantees will lead an independent research project and direct a team of researchers in Switzerland. An SNSF Starting Grant comes after at least 2 years of research after the PhD, medical degree or qualification equivalent to a PhD during which grantees have already achieved scientific independence and contributed to impactful research in their field.

For applicants submitting with a higher education institution that offers assistant professorships, at least such a position and title is required for the duration of the grant. For applicants submitting with a research institution that does not offer assistant professor positions and titles, a position involving independent project and management responsibility (e.g. group leader position) is required for the duration of the grant.

The SNSF Starting Grant Call 2023 is open to researchers of any nationality who intend to conduct their research in Switzerland. Applicants have a PhD degree, a medical degree or a qualification that is equivalent to a PhD.

Applicants meet the personal requirements for this call if:

After their PhD defence:

- They have at least 2 years of research experience
- They submit their application no more than 8 years after the date of their PhD defence.

After their medical degree (state examination or equivalent):

- They have done at least 3 years of clinical work and have at least 2 years of research experience
- They submit their application no more than 12 years after obtaining their medical degree.

After a qualification equivalent to a PhD, defined as 3 years of research activity after obtaining the higher education degree:

- They have at least 2 years of research experience
- They submit their application no more than 8 years after obtaining a qualification equivalent to a PhD.

The time periods are calculated based on the submission deadline. They may be extended if one or more of the reasons set out in Clause 1.11 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations² apply. The reasons for extending the time window must be explained in the application.

Applicants should have several major research outputs that are independent of their work as a PhD student and the associated PhD project. If applicants hold a medical degree, they should have several major research outputs independent of their initial research work as a junior scientist. The applicant's research output will be assessed, taking into account the culture and norms of her/his discipline. Applicants will normally have complemented their expertise with appropriate collaborations.

Applicants will ask for the salaries of the employees in their team, including PhD students and postdocs. Applicants are expected to demonstrate significant experience in supporting or supervising less experienced researchers, including advanced-level master students.

1.1.2 Multiple applications and duplicate funding

- Applicants for an SNSF Starting Grant may apply for the call identifier ERC-2023-StG. However, they cannot participate as principal investigator in any ERC frontier project or SNSF Consolidator/Advanced Grant and an SNSF Starting Grant in parallel.
 - Support for research projects already funded by the SNSF or third parties is excluded.
 - Researchers who receive an SNSF Starting Grant must inform the SNSF about existing ERC Grants and parallel applications in ERC schemes.
- Applicants will have to provide information on mySNF on available and requested funding for their research projects (for details, see section 3.1).
- A researcher participating as principal investigator in an ongoing ERC frontier research grant may not submit a proposal to the present SNSF Starting Grant Call 2023 unless the existing project ends before end of December 2024. An SNSF Starting Grant can only start once the previous ERC frontier research grant agreement has ended.

1.2 Repeated submissions

Applicants whose application for an SNSF Starting Grant was rejected may apply only once more for an SNSF Starting Grant, regardless of the subject matter of the project. Application procedures terminated because the applicant has breached scientific integrity rules are regarded as rejections in accordance with this provision.

1.3 Higher education institution or research institution

The higher education institution or research institution has to sign the confirmation letter (template provided on mySNF):

² <https://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/snsf-general-implementation-regulations-for-the-funding-regulations-e.pdf>

Higher education institutions that offer assistant professorships must offer at least such a position and title for the duration of the grant. Applicants who do not already have such a secured position should request funding for their salary at the level of assistant professor via the SNSF Starting Grant. It can be either the full salary or part of the salary in case of the salary partly covered by other funds.

Research institutions that do not offer assistant professor positions and titles, must offer a position involving independent project and management responsibility (“group leader position”) for the duration of the grant. Applicants who do not already have such a secured position request funding for their salary at the level of group leader via the SNSF Starting Grant. It can be either the full salary or part of the salary in case of the salary partly covered by other funds.

The higher education institution or research institution must be established in Switzerland as a legal entity (public or private) under Swiss law. The applicant does not need to be employed by the higher education institution or research institution when she/he submits the proposal; however, the higher education institution or research institution must employ the applicant at least for the project's duration.

1.4 Employment and time commitment

Before applying, applicants are requested to discuss the conditions and procedure for conducting the project with the higher education institution or research institution which must provide a confirmation letter (template provided on mySNF).

- If the SNSF pays the salary during the SNSF Starting Grant period, then the applicant is employed at least 80% (0.8 FTE) and spends at least 80% of her/his working time on the project covered by this grant and the rest mainly on teaching.
- If the SNSF pays the salary during the SNSF Starting Grant period and the applicant is a researcher who does clinical work, then the applicant is employed at least 50% (0.5 FTE). She/he spends at least this much time on the project covered by this grant and the rest mainly on clinical work.
- If the SNSF pays the salary at a university of applied sciences or of teacher education during the SNSF Starting Grant period, then the applicant is employed at least 80% (0.8 FTE) and spends at least 70% of her/his working time on the project covered by this grant and the rest mainly on teaching.

A further work quota reduction may be approved on request in the event of the successful acquisition of significant third-party funding.

- If an applicant already has a secured (paid) position at the higher education institution or research institution in Switzerland during the SNSF Starting Grant period, then she/he is employed at least 50% (0.5 FTE) and spends at least this much time on the project covered by this grant. Should Switzerland obtain the status of an associated country and participate in Horizon Europe after the deadline of this call, this constraint would be changed to 50% of her/his total working-time in an EU

Member State or associated country. Finally, the Swiss higher education institution or research institution must be the only participating legal entity. Well-justified exceptions to this rule may be considered.

2 Formal requirements, ethical issues and research integrity

2.1 Legal basis

The general provisions of the SNSF (Funding Regulations³ and the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations⁴) apply to the SNSF Starting Grant Call 2023 and the corresponding funding procedures. This call document is issued by the Presiding Board of the National Research Council under a mandate from the SERI to set up a transitional measure for the ERC Starting Grant Call 2023 (ERC-2023-StG).

2.2 User account in mySNF

If applicants do not already have a mySNF user account, they will need to open a new account. They should aim at registering their new user account no later than one month before the deadline. Their mySNF account will remain in place for future submissions or the lifetime management of approved projects.

2.3 Ethics and integrity

Research activities and methods that have ethical implications or may raise questions requiring sound ethical assessment must be declared on mySNF. Hence, applicants should take note of the Swiss laws and ethical standards⁵. Furthermore, the rules of scientific integrity must be respected⁶.

2.4 Open access

Under the SNSF Starting Grant Call 2023, grantees must ensure open access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications of their results as set out in the SNSF Funding Regulations and the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations.

2.5 Open research data

Under the SNSF Starting Grant Call 2023, applicants must include a data management plan (DMP) in their funding application. The SNSF also expects that data generated or collected during the project are made publicly accessible in data repositories provided there are no legal, ethical, copyright or other issues, as set out in the SNSF Funding Regulations and the SNSF ORD Policy⁷. The repositories should comply with the FAIR data principles.

³ https://media.snf.ch/UBa5QinDpnNjssV/snsf-funding_relations_2015_e.pdf

⁴ <https://media.snf.ch/u3qMhSLP21vefBd/snsf-general-implementation-regulations-for-the-funding-regulations-e.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2013/786/de>

⁶ https://www.snf.ch/media/en/TOYYqzR5b3FV4cqT/ueb_org_fehlverh_gesuchstellende_e.pdf

⁷ <https://www.snf.ch/en/dMILj9t4LNk8NwyR/topic/open-research-data>

3 Budget

SNSF Starting Grants are awarded up to a maximum of CHF 1.8 million for a period of 5 years. The maximum award is reduced pro rata temporis for projects of a shorter duration.

Applicants must use whole CHF integers only when indicating requested costs. All costs must be indicated in annual allotments.

3.1 Requested funding

Requested funding must be linked to the aims of the project for its entire duration. The estimation of project costs should be as accurate as possible. The evaluation panels assess the estimated costs carefully and are entitled to modify budgets.

Applicants enter the requested funding in the mySNF section "Requested funding":

1. **Salary of applicant:** applicants indicate whether they request their salary (including social security contributions). If they do not yet have a position as professor at a higher education institution that offers assistant professorships during the SNSF Starting Grant period, the SNSF will pay their salary at the level of a local assistant professor as part of the maximal budget of CHF 1.8 million for a period of 5 years.
2. **Requested positions:** applicants indicate the salaries (including social security contributions) for employees of their team (doctoral students, postdocs, other employees). When requesting positions, they should refer to the higher education institution's salary rates and social contributions⁸. The size and composition of the research team must be indicated, mentioning the key team members and their roles.
3. **Requested funding for the project:** costs have to be subdivided into equipment (including, if applicable, costs for installation/purchase of major equipment/access to infrastructure) and research funds (consumables, field expenses, travel costs, conference costs, other direct costs and any envisaged sub-contracting costs). For the list of eligible costs, see Annex, section 6.1. All available resources for the realization of the project and the required infrastructure and equipment have to be declared. Please include a short technical description of the equipment needed, together with a justification of its necessity.

Please note: Any funds received or requested from the SNSF or other funding institutions must be declared (refer to the mySNF section "Available or requested funds").

⁸ https://media.snf.ch/umAg5ZEXKnF0tDB/Anhang_XII_Ausfuehrungsreglement_Beitragreglement.pdf

4 Creating the documents for upload

All documents must be in English. The font must be Times New Roman, Arial or similar with a size of at least 11, single line spacing and margins of 2 cm on the side and 1.5 cm at the bottom. Condensed fonts are not allowed. The documents must be submitted in PDF format.

The following sections complement the additional information available on mySNF.

4.1 Research Plan

Upload as a single file in the mySNF section "Research plan".

The research plan must not exceed 15 (fifteen) pages (A4 paper size) and 60,000 characters (including spaces). This includes the cover/title page (and, if applicable, a table of contents), footnotes, illustrations, formulae, tables, etc., but not the bibliography (mandatory list of sources/references at the end of the document). The research plan must be uploaded in its final form as a single file, and it may not include attachments of any kind. No modifications are allowed after submission.

The research plan must be structured into the following sections:

Section a: State-of-the-art and objectives	Specify the proposal objectives in the context of the state-of-the-art in the research field. It should be clear how and why the proposed work is important for the field, and what impact it will have if successful, such as how it may open up new horizons or opportunities for science, technology or scholarship. Specify any particularly challenging or unconventional aspects of the proposal, including multi- or inter-disciplinary aspects.
Section b: Methodology	Describe the proposed methodology in detail including any key intermediate goals. Explain and justify the methodology in relation to the state-of-the-art, and particularly novel or unconventional aspects addressing the 'high-risk/high-gain' balance. Highlight any intermediate stages where results may require adjustments to the project planning.
Bibliography	Provide references for all sources referred to in the research plan. Give the full reference, especially the title, source and full author list. Do not use "et al." to shorten the author list. (Exception: The author list can be shortened if a publication involves large international consortia with over 50 authors. In this case, a link to the complete reference must be included). The bibliography is not included in the maximum number of pages (15) and characters (60,000).

4.2 CV and major achievements

The SNSF has signed the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#), which recommends funders to be explicit about the criteria used in evaluating the scientific productivity of applicants.

The scientific quality, value and impact of the **entire research output** is taken into consideration (including datasets, software, prototypes) in addition to research publications. In this context, the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the name of the journal in which

it was published. Within the scope of this evaluation, the scientific discipline and the academic age (incl. career breaks, care duties, etc.) of the applicants will be considered.

In order to comply with the DORA principles, the SNSF defined a new structure for the CV and requests a standardised set of information from all applicants. **Specifically, applicants will have to compile their CV according to a new template on the SNSF Portal and subsequently upload a PDF in the data container “CV and major achievements”.**

For more details on the new CV format see: [Your curriculum vitae – all about the CV format](#)

The portal can be accessed under portal.snf.ch.

This information is intended for evaluators to specifically assess the scientific quality and relevance of the research output.

The documents are sent out for peer-reviewing and will be accessible for your research institution (cf. the section “University”).

Please note that the CV and the major achievements cannot be updated after the submission of your application.

4.3 Uploading the application

Select the correct division and funding scheme (Programmes > Horizon Transitional Measures > SNSF Starting Grants). Before making any entries or uploading files, make sure to read carefully all information in this document and in the header of every data container. **The application must be submitted via mySNF no later than 17:00 CET (Swiss local time) on the submission date (Wednesday, 1 February 2023).** You will receive a confirmation of your submission via email. Please make sure that you have entered and uploaded all necessary documents and information according to the requirements stated in this document by the submission deadline. **Otherwise, your application may not be considered.**

4.4 Receipt and verification at the SNSF

4.4.1 Verification of formal requirements and eligibility

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF check whether your submitted application meets the formal and personal requirements and whether you and your designated research institution are eligible. If your proposal is eligible, it will be forwarded to the corresponding evaluation panel. The proposal may also be not considered on formal grounds even after the evaluation process has started.

4.4.2 Scientific integrity

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF may check whether the application respects scientific integrity rules (see 'Regulations of the National Research Council on the treatment of scientific misconduct by applicants and grantees'⁹).

⁹ https://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/ueb_org_fehlverh_gesuchstellende_e.pdf

4.4.3 **Contacts between applicants and the SNSF**

Please address queries to the Administrative Offices of the SNSF by phone +41 (0)31 308 22 22 or email to stg@snf.ch. When checking submitted applications, the Office may contact applicants to clarify issues related to the application. Before, during and after the evaluation, the applicants are obliged to:

- provide any information requested by the SNSF;
- cooperate in clarifying issues.

The SNSF cannot give applicants any information on the evaluation of their proposals while the evaluation is in progress and until the decision is communicated in writing.

5 **Evaluation and communication**

A scientific Steering Committee, set up by the Presiding Board of the National Research Council, oversees the evaluation and funding activities related to the SNSF Starting Grants Call. It also ensures the application of SNSF's best practices and compliance regarding conflicts of interest. It is composed of the president of the National Research Council, independent external experts from each research domain (humanities and social sciences; biology and medicine; mathematics, natural and engineering sciences), and members of the Specialized Committee Careers. The evaluation of the submitted proposals is based on the principle of competition. Discipline-specific panels will evaluate the proposals in a two-phase procedure. The applications are assessed and rated based on the submitted documents for phase 1 and based on the additional external peer reviews and interviews for phase 2 and ranked comparatively to the other applications.

5.1 **Evaluation panels and external peer reviewers**

The scientific Steering Committee will establish the panels based on the summaries, the disciplines and the keywords provided by the applicants. Applicants are entitled to submit a list with all the names and addresses of persons not to be asked for an external peer review (exclusion list). The SNSF will abide by this list if the applicants provide a valid reason for the requested exclusion and other experts are available.

5.2 **Evaluation procedure**

The evaluation procedure follows the principles that guide the SNSF's evaluation practices:

- **Individual voting:** Every panel member casts an independent rating.
- **Clear separation** between scientific evaluation and funding decision.
- **Random selection:** Funding decisions on proposals of similar scientific quality around the funding line may be reached by drawing lots¹⁰.

¹⁰ https://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/por_org_rec_reglement_e.pdf (Article. 23 para. 6)

The selection procedure comprises two phases.

5.2.1 Phase 1: outcome communicated in July 2023

In the first phase, at least two panel members acting as independent referees evaluate and rate the submitted application based on the scientific criteria (see section 5.3). All panel members then discuss the proposal. Following the discussion, every panel member submits a rating. A ranking list is compiled based on these individual ratings of panel members. Based on the panel's ranking list and the available budget, the scientific Steering Committee determines the number of proposals that are selected for phase 2. The proposals that are not selected for phase 2 are rejected by written ruling.

5.2.2 Phase 2: outcome communicated in November 2023

The applications selected for phase 2 are peer reviewed by external peer reviewers. In addition, applicants are invited for an interview to present the research project and career plan and answer the questions from the panel members. The external peer reviewers are researchers who do not participate in the panel meetings and who deliver their structured assessments before the phase 2 panel meeting. Based on the written assessments of the external peer reviewers and panel members, the interview with the applicant, and the discussions at the panel meeting, the evaluation panel generates a ranking list of the phase 2 proposals. The panel submits the final ranking of the phase 2 proposals to the scientific Steering Committee.

5.3 Evaluation criteria

The following criteria will be considered during the evaluation procedure. They will focus on the scientific excellence of the research project and the qualification of the applicant. The criteria will be applied during both evaluation phases based on the documents available (research plan, CV and major achievements):

5.3.1 Scientific quality of the research project

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project:

- To what extent does the proposed research address important challenges?
- To what extent are the objectives ambitious and beyond the state of the art (e.g., novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?
- To what extent is the proposed research high-risk/high-gain (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a high risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?

Scientific approach:

- To what extent is the outlined scientific approach feasible bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high-risk/high-gain?
- To what extent are the proposed research methodology and working arrangements appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?

- To what extent does the proposal involve the development of novel methodology?
- To what extent are the proposed timescales, resources and PI commitment adequate and properly justified?

5.3.2 Qualification of the applicant

Intellectual capacity and creativity:

- To what extent has the applicant demonstrated the ability to conduct ground-breaking research?
- To what extent does the applicant provide evidence of creative independent thinking?
- To what extent does the applicant have the required scientific expertise and capacity to successfully execute the project?

5.4 Outcome and communication of decisions

After the first phase, all applicants will be informed about the outcome.

Applicants not selected for phase 2 will receive a ruling with the scientific reasons underlying the evaluation. Applicants who advance to phase 2 will be informed about the date of the interview. Applicants rejected in phase 2 will receive a ruling with the scientific reasons underlying the evaluation and the anonymized evaluation forms of the peer reviewers.

Proposals will be funded in order of priority based on their rank and the available funding. The funding of the projects is expressly subject to the financing decisions of the Parliament.

The ruling may be appealed against before the Federal Administrative Court.

6 Annex

6.1 Eligible and non-eligible costs

6.1.1 Direct eligible costs

These costs support the research, management, training and dissemination activities necessary for the realization of the project:

- Personnel costs cover the salary and social security contributions for the applicant and salaries and social security contributions for employees of the team (doctoral students, postdocs, other employees). For PhD students' salaries, please refer to the SNSF rates; for other collaborators, please refer to the salary rates of the research institution;
- Material costs that are directly related to the realization of the project, namely material of enduring value, expendable items, field expenses, travel costs or third-party charges; material;

- Costs for project-related use of infrastructures at institutions or laboratories;
- Costs for sub-contracting.

Indirect costs are not included in the proposal form. The SNSF pays the higher education institution an overhead of the total direct eligible costs.

6.1.2 Non eligible costs

These costs cannot be reimbursed through the grant, in particular:

- Costs related to return on capital
- Debt and debt service charges
- Provisions for possible future losses of debts
- Interest owed
- Doubtful debts
- Currency exchange losses
- Excessive or reckless expenditure
- Costs reimbursed under an EU grant
- Publication costs
- Deductible VAT

6.2 Summary of deadlines

Opening of the call	1 November 2022
Submission deadline	1 February 2023
Outcome phase 1	July 2023
Interviews	September 2023
Outcome of phase 2	November 2023
Earliest project start	1 January 2024

Bern, 14.10.2022