

Promotion of Young Scientists in Central and Eastern Europe (PROMYS)

Call for Proposals 2023/2024, Second Swiss Contribution

Opening Date: 21.08.2023

Closing Date: 29.02.2024

1 Introduction

The enlargement of the European Union (EU) represents a major step towards securing peace, stability, and prosperity in Europe. To support this process, the Swiss Parliament has decided to finance a contribution to the reduction of economic and social disparities in the enlarged European Union. The supported countries include Bulgaria and one of the selected fields of cooperation is research and innovation. The initiative “Promotion of Young Scientists in Central and Eastern Europe (PROMYS)” is part of the second Swiss Contribution and co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Bulgarian Ministry of Science and Education (MES).

Many EU-13 member states risk losing highly qualified and talented researchers due to a lack of promising career opportunities in their home countries. PROMYS counter steers the brain-drain and offers young researchers an interesting and promising position in Bulgaria.

PROMYS is aimed at early career researchers (ECR), who have studied or worked in any EU-27 country or Switzerland for a duration of at least one year as a PhD student or postdoctoral researcher and would like to continue their careers in Bulgaria, aspiring to get a position as a professor (or similar position). PROMYS is an investment in talents to carry out research in Bulgaria. The grants will strengthen independent and excellent individual researchers, who can establish their own team. In addition, the performance of universities and research institutions will be improved, as young researchers are able to establish themselves at their institutions thanks to support from the PROMYS initiative. This will help to attract and encourage a new and younger generation to engage in scientific research. In sum, PROMYS will help to improve the research capacities in Bulgaria and foster the integration into the European Research Area.

2 Rationale for the Promotion of Young Scientists

PROMYS is designed to support Principal Investigators (PIs) from EU-27 countries + Switzerland at the stage where they consolidate their career. It is aimed at early career researchers with 2-7 years of experience as postdoctoral researchers. The grants will strengthen independent and excellent individual researchers pursuing a research topic of their own choice. With the grant, the PIs will be able to establish a small independent research team to conduct their project.

The PROMYS initiative will fund salary and research costs of outstanding PIs who already have a relationship with EU-27 countries or Switzerland. PIs will be subsidised for five years, and the funds can also be used to employ academic personnel (PhD students or postdocs).

Guiding principles of the PROMYS grants:

- Scientific excellence is the main evaluation criterion.
- Projects in all fields of research are eligible for funding.
- Individual researchers are supported, including funds for a research team selected by the PI.
- Grants are awarded to the PI, who will be employed by the host institution in Bulgaria. The research has to be done in Bulgaria.
- The host institution guarantees the PI's independence and provides the appropriate research environment for carrying out the project and managing its funding.
- In well justified cases, the project may be continued at another eligible Bulgarian research institution. Please note, however, that the PROMYS grantees cannot move to another research institution outside of Bulgaria.

3 Eligibility

Applicants must fulfil the following conditions:

- either have the nationality of one of the EU-27 countries + Switzerland or have study/work experience as a researcher at a higher education institution for at least three years in any EU-27 countries or Switzerland;
- have a doctorate (PhD) or at least three years of experience¹ as a researcher after obtaining their higher education degree (equivalent qualification to a doctorate);
- have at least two years of research experience after finishing their PhD (or equivalent qualification);
- have been employed as a PhD student or postdoctoral researcher for a duration of at least one year at a research institution in an EU-27 country or Switzerland and aspire to become an assistant professor (or equivalent position) in Bulgaria;
- have submitted their application up to seven years after their PhD defence or after the date of the equivalent qualification to a doctorate;
- have a planned or existing position at a research institution in Bulgaria (at the time of the submission);
- submit an excellent research proposal.

Applications for a grant must be submitted by a single applicant and must be supported by the host institution in Bulgaria.

The researcher does not necessarily need to be working at the planned host institution at the time when the proposal is submitted. However, a mutual agreement and the host institution's commitment to establish the relationship are necessary, should the proposal be successful. In well justified cases, applicants who exceed the time limit of six years since completion of the PhD may be accepted. A detailed rationale for exceeding the six-year period must be submitted via mySNF in the respective data container².

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 Institutions

Higher Education Institutions and Research Organisations with PhD programme accreditation, according to the Bulgarian Higher Education Act can host the PI and their team. The host institution must be legally and geographically based in Bulgaria and must have proven potential for competitive international research (strengths to be presented in the proposal). The host institutes must guarantee the PIs' adequate support and their independence.

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;

¹ A medical doctor degree will be accepted only if it corresponds to a doctoral degree (PhD, MD-PhD) or if the researcher has demonstrably been appointed to a position that requires doctoral equivalency (e.g. postdoc position, professorship appointment thanks to a Staatsexamen or equivalent exam). Medical doctor degrees corresponding to basic medical training (e.g. MD, see also Annex V of Directive 2005/36/EC) will not be accepted as a doctoral degree.

² Acceptable reasons for delay according to Art. 1.11 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations.

- select and supervise team members, including research students, doctoral students, or others;
- have access to adequate workspace and research facilities for conducting the research.

3.2 Mentoring

In order to establish or to maintain a link to Switzerland and to support the grantee during the project, a professor of a Swiss institution shall be the PI's mentor. The mentor must provide a recommendation letter and confirmation that they will act as a mentor for the PI. If it is not yet clear at the moment of submission of the project who the mentor will be, it is possible to add "N.N." to the respective data container on *mySNF* and to provide the name and the confirmation letter at the moment of the release of funds at the latest. During the project, the mentor follows the progress of the project, e.g. by visiting the PI, giving lectures at the host institution, or inviting the PI to conferences etc. 5% of the PI's budget can be spent on mentoring activities.

3.3 Duration

The duration of the project is 60 months. Proposals with a shorter duration will not be considered. The grant must be started on 1 December 2024.

4 Research Fields

PROMYS grants are open to researchers from all disciplines. Some 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, Switzerland and Bulgaria.

5 Funding

The maximum amount for a five-year project is CHF 625,000 and up to three grants can be awarded.

Eligible costs for PROMYS grants include:

- research funds: all funds needed to carry out the project, such as consumables necessary for the proposed work, computer, travel costs, field expenses, expendable items, contractual costs, and unavoidable sundry expenses;
- salaries³, social security contributions and other salary related costs: salaries for the grantee (full time) as well as staff costs for researchers, technicians, and other supporting staff directly involved in the project. Such costs can be claimed if they do not exceed the usual remuneration practices of the host institution;
- 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 50,000;
- field expenses, travel expenses, third-party charges, cost of computing time and data as well as of providing open access to research data;
- costs for the organisation of conferences and workshops in connection with the funded research;
- costs for national and international cooperation and networking activities regarding the funded research;

³ The salaries of researchers should be in line with the salaries paid by the host institution.

- overhead for the host institute (maximum 15% of the total budget);
- mentoring activities (maximum 5% of the budget);
- subcontracting costs (in principle limited to 10% of the budget) and costs to access large facilities owned by third parties that are not available on the grantees' premises.

The following costs are not eligible within PROMYS grants (non-exhaustive list):

- expenditure incurred before and after the term of the project;
- interest of debt, purchase of land and buildings;
- fines, financial penalties and expenses of litigation, bribes;
- costs which exceed the usual market prices;
- payment taxes or duties of any kind, nor purchase of insurances of any kind in any of the countries involved;
- activities supported by other entities;
- costs for open access publications can be requested separately via the OA platform⁴ of the SNSF.

6 Submission

Proposals must be submitted online via *mySNF*. User registration can be obtained on the *mySNF* homepage: www.mysnf.ch. **Please note that you need a user account in order to submit proposals via mySNF. To open an account on mySNF, please register with the SNSF as a user. Please be aware of the fact that it may take up to 7 working days to create an account.**

The 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 one or two phases, depending on the number of submissions (for a more detailed explanation, see below). Proposals must be submitted in English since they will be evaluated by internationally recognised experts.

Submission deadline for the proposal: 29 February 2024.

6.1 Documents to be submitted

The following documents must be submitted via *mySNF*:

- research proposal, including management part, max. 15 pages;
- CV, including publications of the applicant (new online format);
- commitment letter from the host institution;
- copy diplomas
- a recommendation letter and confirmation of mentorship from a mentor based in Switzerland (can be submitted at a later point if it is not yet available at the time of submission).

Please note that the SNSF uses a new CV format. Filling in the information will take some additional time.

6.2 Data Management Plan (DMP)

A Data Management Plan (DMP) is requested for approved grants according to the requirements issued by the SNSF. Funds can only be released once the DMP has been submitted. Missing or inaccurate statements

⁴ <https://oa100.snf.ch/en/home-en/>

in the DMP need to be added/revised at the latest before the release of the payment of the second instalment. A definitive and updated version of the DMP must be provided by the end of the project grant. For more details on the DMP format requirements and procedure see: [Data Management Plan \(DMP\) - Guidelines for researchers](#).

Please note that costs for Open Research Data (ORD) must be taken into account at the time of submission of the application. They cannot be covered by a supplementary grant.

7 Evaluation

7.1 Formal Eligibility Check

The International Co-operation division at the SNSF Administrative Offices will check whether the proposals meet the formal criteria. Proposals that do not meet the formal criteria will not be evaluated.

7.2 Panel & Peer Review

Applications will be reviewed by an expert panel and international peer reviewers. Both the panel members and the peer reviewers rate the proposal according to a standardised scale from 1 to 9. Grade 1 on the scale means that the project has many serious weaknesses. Grade 9, on the other hand, means that the project is convincing in all aspects and has no or only negligible weaknesses. Based on the peer reviews and the panel members' own assessment, the expert panel will rate and rank the proposals. A maximum of three projects with the highest scores can be funded, provided that a sufficient number of high-quality proposals are submitted. The evaluation procedure follows the unified evaluation procedure of the SNSF.

Depending on the number of proposals submitted, the SNSF will implement one or two evaluation phases. If a large number of proposals is submitted, the evaluation panel will select the most highly rated proposals, which will be promoted to the second round (incl. interview). If the number of proposals submitted is small, the evaluation panel has the right to cancel the first round of the evaluation procedure and to start with the second phase.

7.2.1 *1st Phase (implemented if a large number of proposals is submitted)*

- Each proposal will be evaluated by two individual panel members.
- No peer review will be performed in the first round.
- The strongest proposals will be promoted to the second phase (incl. interviews).

7.2.2 *2nd Phase*

- All proposals in the second phase will be reviewed according to standard international peer review procedures.
- Applicants invited to the second phase are asked to present their research project as part of an interview to the expert panel.
- Based on the peer reviews, the interviews, and the panel members' own assessment, the evaluation panel will rate the proposals.
- Up to 3 of the highest-ranked proposals will be funded, regardless of the research area.
- At the SNSF, the ranking list and the projects proposed for funding must be approved by the Specialised Committee International Co-operation and the Presiding Board.

7.3 Evaluation Criteria

For both rounds, the following evaluation criteria apply:

- Scientific relevance

- Originality of the aims and objectives
- Appropriateness of the methodology and feasibility
- Track record and expertise of the researchers
- Suitability and added value of the research institution.

The evaluation results will be communicated in autumn 2024. The applicants will receive a decision letter from the SNSF. In case of rejection, the main reasons leading to the decision will be given. In case of approval, the budget and the conditions will be listed. The decisions are not subject to appeal.

8 Implementation of the Grants

8.1 Grant Agreement

The SNSF, the PI, 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:

- ensures that the work is performed under the scientific guidance of the principal investigator (who is expected to devote at least 80% of their total working time to the funded project);
- supports the principal investigator 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);
- provides research support to the principal investigator and their 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);
- guarantees adequate contractual conditions for the principal investigator and their team in accordance with the relevant norms of the Bulgarian host institution;
- ensures 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);
- confirms the status of the PI as an associated or assistant professor (or equal position).

8.2 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 research institution within Bulgaria. The decision will be taken by the SNSF.

8.3 Project Process 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). At the end of the implementation phase, 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.

The PIs are requested to inform the SNSF about any changes affecting the grantees (e.g. moves, changes to employment terms) and changes of personnel

8.4 Payments

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

8.5 Publications 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 Central and Eastern Europe (PROMYS)”, funded by the second Swiss contribution. This may imply a written acknowledgment and/or visible SNSF and SDC logo:

‘The research leading to these results was funded by the second Swiss Contribution under the programme “Promotion of Young Scientists in Central and 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.

9 Contact

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

Technical help with *mySNF* 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

mySNF homepage: www.mysnf.ch

Annex 1

Guidelines for Writing the Project Proposal

For your project proposal, we kindly ask you to use the section headings indicated below. The proposals will be sent out for external review. In order to ensure that the scientific content of your proposal can be adequately assessed, please provide detailed documentation which sets out clearly the aims, subject matter and methods of the project you are planning.

1 Summary of the Research Plan (Max. 4,000 characters, does not count to the 15 pages).

This should include the most important features of your research plan and place your project in a broader scientific context. This summary must be identical with the one you have provided in the *mySNF* data container "Basic data II".

2 Research Plan

The research plan must not exceed 15 pages and 60,000 characters with spaces. The first limit reached applies. This includes the title or front page, footnotes, illustrations, formulae, tables (and, if applicable, the table of contents), but not the bibliography. At least font size 10 and line spacing 1.5 must be used. The research plan may not contain any annexed documents.

The research plan must be structured as follows:

2.1 Current state of research in the field

Describe your project in the context of the current state of knowledge in your field. Make reference to the most important publications, particularly by other authors. Please describe:

- which previous insights provided the starting point and basis for the planned studies;
- in which areas research is needed and why, and what your project can contribute to closing this gap;
- which relevant research projects are currently underway in Switzerland and abroad;
- to what extent the various disciplines – in interdisciplinary projects – contribute a variety of perspectives to the proposed research; the extent to which the targeted research goals require the integration of elements (e.g. theories, methods, concepts) from two or more disciplines which is not yet customary in this combination in the field.

2.2 Current state of your own research

Present the research work you have already undertaken in the relevant field or in related fields, describe the results obtained so far as well as the relevance of these preliminary undertakings for your project.

Together with the CV, this information serves as a basis for assessing your scientific qualifications, particularly

your expertise with regard to the project.

2.3 Detailed research plan

Based on the information provided under 2.1. and 2.2., please specify the approach you are taking and the concrete objectives that you aim to achieve in the period of funding.

- Describe the specific investigations or experiments that are required and/or envisaged to reach the set goals. Assess the risks involved and propose alternatives if necessary.
- Characterise existing sources and datasets and describe the data collection strategy and possible alternative strategies.
- Describe the methods by which the research goals are to be reached (applicant and collaborations) and methods that first have to be developed.
- Explain the role of each member of the research team (incl. applicant, employees, project partners and collaborations).

The scope and detail of the information should enable an expert to assess whether your methodology is appropriate and your project feasible. Ensure that you refer to the work described here in the budget you submit via the SNSF portal.

2.4 Schedule and milestones

Please compile a schedule that includes the most important milestones.

2.5 Relevance and impact

Describe the scientific relevance and expected impacts of your project for the discipline and for science as a whole (research and education/teaching). Please mention the form in which you wish to publish your research results (articles in specialist journals, monographs, conference proceedings, etc.).

2.6 Bibliography (does not count to the 15 pages)

2.7 Ethical, safety, and regulatory issues (does not count to the 15 pages)

Does your proposed work raise ethical, safety or regulatory issues? If yes, how will you deal with them? Please indicate.