

Call for proposals: Implementation of the Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC) study

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) invites tenders for continuing the implementation and potential optimisation of its Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC) study in 2024 and 2025, with possibility for extension beyond 2025.

The goal of the CTC is to gain a better understanding of the career paths of applicants for post-doctoral SNSF career funding schemes and of the medium and long-term impact of the career funding activities of the SNSF.

1 Background information

1.1 The SNSF

Mandated by the Federal Government, the SNSF supports basic science in all academic disciplines, from history to medicine and the engineering sciences. The improvement of career perspectives for early-career researchers is a key objective for the SNSF. Over 20 per cent of the funds are invested in career funding instruments targeted directly at early-careers researchers.

1.2 Postdoctoral career funding schemes

The CTC include applicants for the following postdoctoral career funding schemes: Early Postdoc.Mobility, Postdoc.Mobility, Ambizione, Eccellenza, and PRIMA. The specificities of these schemes are explained in the following. In the meantime, the career funding portfolio has undergone some changes. Please refer to www.snf.ch for a description of the current career funding schemes.

1.2.1 *Early Postdoc.Mobility*

Early Postdoc.Mobility enables early-career researchers who are starting their careers after obtaining their doctorate and who subsequently wish to pursue a scientific career in Switzerland to make a research stay abroad in order to acquire more in-depth knowledge and enhance their scientific profile. These mobility fellowships are generally awarded for a period of eighteen months. This funding scheme was integrated into Postdoc.Mobility as of 2021.

1.2.2 *Postdoc.Mobility*

Postdoc.Mobility is aimed at researchers with a doctorate. The research stays abroad aim to help the grantees acquire more in-depth knowledge, extend their scientific network and make them scientifically more independent; and enhance their scientific profile. The fellowships are generally awarded for 24 months, but never for less than 12 months.

1.2.3 *Ambizione*

Ambizione supports the independence of early-career researchers from Switzerland and abroad. It allows them to develop a more specialised scientific profile by conducting a sizeable project they have

planned themselves at a higher education institution in Switzerland. Ambizione grants are awarded for a maximum of four years. The minimum duration of funding is two years.

1.2.4 Eccellenza

Eccellenza is aimed at highly qualified early-career researchers who aspire to a permanent professorship. It allows them to achieve their goal as leaders of a generously funded research project and team at a higher education institution in Switzerland. The maximum duration of funding is five years, the minimum duration three years.

1.2.5 PRIMA

PRIMA aims to allow excellent women researchers to qualify for a permanent professorship and should contribute to increasing the share of female professors in Switzerland. PRIMA grantees conduct an independent research project with their own team at a Swiss research institution. The maximum funding duration is five years, the minimum three years.

2 The Career Tracker Cohort study

With the CTC, the SNSF wishes to gain a better understanding of the career paths of applicants for post-doctoral SNSF career funding schemes and of the medium and long-term impact of the career funding activities of the SNSF. The results will serve as a basis for the future development of career funding policies and instruments.

The CTC study surveys all researchers who have applied for one of the SNSF's career funding schemes at the postdoctoral level. The study was launched in 2018 with a first cohort of researchers and is still ongoing. Between 2018 and 2021 each year a new cohort of applicants was added, and each cohort includes successful (i.e., researchers who received a positive funding decision) as well as unsuccessful applicants (i.e., researchers whose application for funding has been rejected).

The CTC is a panel study with yearly surveys. Each cohort started with a base survey which is administered between the time of application and the funding decision. Approximately one year after the base survey, the participants are invited to a follow-up survey that consists of a core module covering their employment situation and academic career, their mobility and research activity and their private life situations, as well as supplementary modules covering specific topics such as mentoring and network, dual-career couples, and the impact of the COVID-19 measures. The follow-up surveys are repeated yearly, and the plan is to continue these follow-up surveys for approximately ten years. This means that the first cohort is expected to finish around 2030.

A detailed description of the study design is provided in the openly accessible study documentation (<https://drive.switch.ch/index.php/s/w1lrg4JvtdlDFPk>, specifically chapter 3).

2.1 Current state

A team of researchers from the University of Bern was mandated to design and implement the CTC. In the beginning, members of the Institute of Sociology and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (ICFG) conducted the CTC study. It was led by Prof Ben Jann and Prof Michèle Amacker until September 30, 2019, and by Michèle Amacker alone until December 31, 2020. As both were elected members of SNSF bodies, they could not continue their mandate for the CTC due to conflict of interest situations. Therefore, on January 1, 2021, the CTC study has been moved to the Interfaculty Centre

for Educational Research (ICER) and the project lead to Dr Andrea Erzinger. The final deliverables of the work are the property of the SNSF. From the start, it has been important to the SNSF that the CTC are designed and implemented such that they could be transferred to and conducted by another team.

2.1.1 Implementation of surveys and data management

The questionnaires are currently implemented in the online survey software LimeSurvey. In the follow-up surveys, administrative data and data from previous surveys is used to decrease the complexity of the survey, reduce the effort required of the respondents, and enhance the data quality.

The administrative data of the survey participants (e.g., personal data used to contact participants) as well as the metadata of the surveys (e.g., information when a person is to be invited to a survey) are managed in a SQL database hosted on a server at the University of Bern.

The SNSF provides yearly data with the latest available contact information. Further, since fall 2021 the SNSF also makes available administrative data of people who are already part of one of the surveyed cohorts and who applied to one of the surveyed or newly introduced but closely related schemes at a later point.¹ Participants are informed by the SNSF about the intended transmission of this data and are given the opportunity to oppose.

The collected data is made available to the scientific community, together with the dictionaries of variables and labels, [documentations](#), [questionnaires](#), and lists. For each survey a detailed documentation is provided. They contain information on the development of the questionnaire, the final questionnaire, the participants and the field work, the data preparation and data quality, and the final data. The collected data are archived on SWISSUbase as scientific use files in plain text format (CSV) and Stata format. The data sets are anonymous and do not contain any personal identifiers. The privacy of the respondents is further protected by data anonymization measures (e.g., categorizing country information), as well as by procedural measures concerning access to and use of the data (e.g., data protection contract for researchers wanting to use the data). More information on data management can be found in the [Data Management Plan](#).

2.1.2 Cohort sizes and response rates

CTC-18

The CTC-18 cohort comprises all researchers who applied to the Postdoc.Mobility call in August 2018 or Early Postdoc.Mobility call in September 2018. In total 450 persons were invited to take part in the base survey in fall 2018.

CTC-19

The CTC-19 cohort comprises all researchers who applied to the Postdoc.Mobility calls in February respectively August 2019, the Early Postdoc.Mobility calls in March respectively September 2019, the Ambizione and PRIMA calls in November 2018 or the Eccellenza call in February 2019. The study population of the CTC-19 cohort amounts to 1614 persons. However, as some had already completed

¹ Due to Switzerland's non-association to Horizon Europe, the SNSF had to introduce transitional measures and slightly adapt its career funding portfolio. In 2021, a first call for SNSF Advanced Grants was launched. Further, in 2022 calls for the following new schemes were launched: SNSF Swiss Post-doctoral Fellowships, SNSF Starting Grants and SNSF Consolidator Grants. The Eccellenza call 2022 was integrated into the SNSF Starting Grants call. As of 2023, the SNSF Starting Grants call integrates the Eccellenza as well as the PRIMA funding scheme.

a previous base survey², only 1465 were invited to take part in one of the two base surveys in spring and fall 2019.

CTC-20

The CTC-20 cohort comprises all researchers who applied to the Postdoc.Mobility calls in February respectively August 2020, the Early Postdoc.Mobility calls in March respectively September 2020, the Ambizione and PRIMA calls in November 2019 or the Eccellenza call in February 2020. The study population of the CTC-20 cohort amounts to 1754 persons. However, as some had already completed a previous base survey, only 1367 were invited to take part in one of the two base surveys in spring and fall 2020.

CTC-21

The CTC-21 cohort comprises all researchers who applied to the Postdoc.Mobility call in February 2021, the Ambizione and PRIMA calls in November 2020 or the Eccellenza call in February 2021. The study population of the CTC-21 cohort amounts to 1026 persons. However, as some had already completed a previous base survey, only 646 were invited to take part in the base survey spring 2021.

Overall, the different funding schemes are represented as follows in the study populations of the four cohorts:

	CTC-18	CTC-19	CTC-20	CTC-21	Total
Early Postdoc.Mobility	308	668	694	-	1670
Postdoc.Mobility	142	273	296	335	1046
Ambizione	-	342	397	395	1134
PRIMA	-	119	128	111	358
Eccellenza	-	212	239	185	636
Study population	450	1614	1754	1026	4844

The response rates are as follows:

	CTC-18	CTC-19	CTC-20	CTC-21
Base survey	91%	91%	90%	88%
Monitoring 1	76%	80%	71%	-
– Grantees	89%	93%	87%	-
– Non-grantees	61%	72%	61%	-
Monitoring 2	70%	69%	-	-
– Grantees	85%	86%	-	-
– Non-grantees	53%	56%	-	-
Monitoring 3	62%	-	-	-
– Grantees	74%	-	-	-
– Non-grantees	52%	-	-	-

² This is due to a part of the applicants resubmitting their applications and/or previous applicants submitting an application in another funding scheme that is part of the CTC.

The response rates are defined as the ratio of the people who were invited to a given monitoring survey (i.e., respondents that took part in the base survey and did not opt-out afterwards) and the people who participated in that monitoring survey. As can be seen in the table above, the dropout from the CTC study is not random. Grantees are more likely to participate in follow-up surveys than non-grantees (i.e. those who received a negative funding decision).

3 Tasks and expected results

The purpose of this call for proposals is to select a competent and efficient provider to continue the implementation of the CTC study in 2024 and 2025. In the context of this mandate, the contractor shall continue performing the following already defined tasks:

- Implementation of the established questionnaires in 2024 and 2025 and conducting the surveys to the same quality standards (i.e. the follow-up surveys in spring 2024 and spring 2025 as well as the follow-up surveys in fall 2024 and fall 2025, for more details please refer to the [Study Documentation](#)). This also includes:
 - The writing of the corresponding documentations;
 - The data cleaning, preparation (e.g., data cleaning, definition of variables, nonresponse analysis) and archiving;
 - Taking appropriate measures to continually counter panel attrition (e.g., communication with target group, maintaining up-to-date contact information);
- Communication of the results on a regular basis to the group of participants and other interested people; this could be a newsletter as before, see the [CTC-Newsletters](#), but other forms are possible as well (e.g. a Blog, Dashboard etc.); this also serves the goal of regularly cleaning up the contact data of the CTC participants.

Additionally, the contractor shall shape and perform the following new tasks:

- Prepare a longitudinal dataset including data from all the cohorts (this specifically involves dealing with respondents that are part of more than one cohort, because they applied for career funding multiple times);
- Collect key information from people who did not participate in the surveys – manually or automated (e.g., through a collaboration with the Federal Statistical Office);
- Propose a strategy on how data linkages with third sources could be implemented, how this would allow to shorten parts of the questionnaires and how this would help mitigate the effects of panel attrition;
- Propose a strategy on when the follow-up surveys could be stopped for the different funding instruments.

Conditions:

- The SNSF expects to have the ownership of all collected data as well as the implemented questionnaires. The SNSF is the controller of data file from the point of view of Data Protection.
- It should be possible to reuse data that has been collected in previous survey rounds and to incorporate data that is already available in other SNSF systems in subsequent rounds for validation.
- Access to the collected data has to be ensured at all times.

If this initial phase of two years is successful, the SNSF is interested in extending the mandate beyond 2025.

4 Schedule and further information

4.1 Qualifications expected

Applicants should have documented expertise and experience in longitudinal studies and have a track record in projects of this nature. Experience in educational research and/or research on research is an advantage.

4.2 Selection criteria

The tenders shall be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- General quality of proposal;
- Scope of services;
- Focus and plausibility of the methodology proposed (especially regarding panel maintenance and continuity of the CTC study);
- In-depth knowledge of longitudinal studies, methodological approaches, life and career trajectories, role assignment in the project in case of cooperation with more than one partner;
- References based on previous projects;
- Competences and in-depth knowledge of the team in the thematic area of educational research and/or research on research;
- Cost efficiency.

4.3 Conflicts of interest

In order to avoid conflicts of interest, members SNSF bodies are excluded from submitting an offer and from collaborating in a team implementing the CTC study. This also includes members of the different committees of the SNSF. The tender issuer will make a corresponding declaration in the contract.

4.4 Tender

Tenders must be submitted in writing by 11.06.2023 to careertracking@snf.ch. They should include:

- Consideration of the initial situation and explanation on how continuity to the former surveys will be ensured;
- Information and resources required from SNSF;
- Conditions of cooperation;
- A timeline with deliverables and an itemized budget (indicating costs per task and hourly or daily rates);
- Composition of the project team:
 - CVs,
 - competences relevant to the mandate,
 - relevant reference projects and know-how;
- Roles and responsibilities:
 - project lead,
 - lead of a subproject (if applicable),
 - collaboration in subprojects (if applicable);

- Further, the following information are required:
 - A list of references from which the SNSF can inquire whether the bidder has properly performed its services to date and, in particular, obtain the following information: value of the service; time and place of the service provision; statement of the client, whether the service conformed to the recognized rules of technology and whether the bidder performed it properly;
 - Credit information (in the form of a Betriebs-, Schufa- or KSV-Auszug, etc.),
 - Self-declaration regarding compliance with occupational safety, equal pay for women and men, environmental law, rules of conduct to prevent corruption, and tax and social security obligations (therefore please fill in the self-declaration form: “[Formular Selbstdeklaration für Anbietende](#)”)

Optionally, we will also invite a selection of bidders to present their tenders. These presentations are planned for the end of June.

Decisions will be communicated by end of August.

4.5 Steering Group

The already existing SNSF Steering Group will take the decision. More information about the Steering Group can be found on the [website of the CTC](#).

4.6 Contact

For further information please contact:

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