
SNSF International Co-operation Strategy

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1. Introduction

Research transcends national boundaries as it addresses problems of common interest on a global scale. With a reputation recognised beyond its borders, Swiss research contributes to the joint effort to solve global, complex and urgent challenges. Switzerland and its economy benefit from the global exchange of knowledge and access to international scientific infrastructures and networks. Switzerland's openness makes it possible to compete with the best and to attract the best talent. The interaction of researchers from diverse backgrounds stimulates the emergence of new ideas and sustains the exchange of knowledge, competences and practices in the long term.

In this document, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) presents and explains its international strategy and how it is translated into action. This strategy is an integral part of the SNSF's overall legal and general strategic¹ framework.

The international strategy allows partners to understand the rationale and the limits of SNSF funding activities.

2. Strategic Objective and Principles

PREAMBLE

The international anchoring of research and funding activities is of central importance for the Swiss research community and the Swiss National Science Foundation. By giving better and stronger support to diversity in research, with a particular emphasis on gender equality, we foster excellence to the benefit of research in Switzerland. By awarding research grants through a competitive process, we play a key role in setting scientific standards and guaranteeing high-quality research in a rapidly changing environment. We are open to all kinds of excellent scientific research, and strengthening our foresight activities allows us to build research capacity in promising areas as well as to enhance our knowledge of research policy and use it to the benefit of society.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Our strategic objective in international co-operation is to facilitate and optimise global scientific collaboration and exchange. Our activities aim to foster cross-border co-operation to the benefit of Swiss science. Through our international activities, we contribute to the increase of research capacity in Switzerland and abroad.

PRINCIPLES

We base our international co-operation on the following principles and on the explicit understanding that these principles are shared with our co-operating partners:

¹ SNSF strategy: <http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/profile/strategy/>

- **Global approach.** We connect researchers globally.
- **Simplicity.** We promote simple procedures, aiming to include international collaboration and mobility in regular research funding whenever possible.
- **Multilateral co-operation and knowledge circulation.** We enable and promote talent circulation and the resulting exchange of ideas including free access to publications and data resulting from international projects.
- **Good scientific practice.** We are committed to collaboration that is transparent, treats all applicants on an equal basis, promotes research integrity, and respects human rights as well as the legal framework of research, both during the evaluation process and in conducting research projects.
- **Academic freedom.** We support the principle of research freedom and defend scientific autonomy, in a spirit of trust in scientists.
- **Excellence.** We make scientific excellence the main criterion for allocating funds.

3. Legal and Strategic Context

The Swiss Confederation is engaged in maintaining a world-leading position in education, research and innovation. As highlighted in its international strategy for research and innovation, it participates in the development of the European Research and Innovation Area through Swiss co-operation in European programmes and organisations and provides support for global scientific and technological co-operation of Swiss universities and research institutions with their foreign counterparts, particularly through the development and promotion of bilateral partnerships with selected countries and regions². The SNSF defines its funding of international research collaboration in accordance with the Confederation's goals and measures.^{3,4}

To fulfil its mission, the SNSF works with its Swiss and international research policy partners and complements their efforts. Institutional governmental partners are, in particular, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), the Federal Government's centre of competence for national and international issues in education, research and innovation, and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), including the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC). These collaborations also strengthen the mutual benefits between research and diplomacy at the European and global level.

In addition, to maximise the impact of international collaboration programmes at the national level, the SNSF is in direct contact with the Swiss research community, providing information and keeping track of researchers' needs.

² Swiss International Cooperation in Research and Innovation: <https://www.sbf.admin.ch/sbf/en/home/research-and-innovation/international-cooperation-r-and-i.html>

³ Art. 10 of the Federal Act on the Promotion of Research and Innovation (RIPA/FIFG) <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20091419/index.html#a10>

⁴ SNSF Statutes, art. 1, al. 2, http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/statuten_15_e.pdf

4. Principles

4.1 Global approach

Scientific research is globalised and, at the same time, ever more specialised. The global exchange of ideas is a major driving force behind scientific excellence.

In response to the strong interest of Swiss researchers in collaborating with partners all over the world, the SNSF aims to enable international scientific co-operation. The SNSF explicitly adopts a global perspective and offers a flexible framework for researchers to connect with other researchers, regardless of their country and regardless of already existing co-operation networks. This may also include supporting research partners in low and middle-income countries to enable collaborations that would otherwise not take place.

Beyond bilateral co-operation, the SNSF funds participation in multilateral initiatives at the European and global level. This contributes to avoiding fragmented funding landscapes and fosters synergies, both between funding organisations and researchers. Furthermore, it facilitates the integration of Swiss researchers within international networks and strengthens the competitiveness of all partners. The decision to participate in such initiatives takes into account the strength of the Swiss research community in the targeted field and the expected added-value, as well as the participation of key national and international partners. The SNSF uses a systematic approach to identifying potentially interesting initiatives, as well as partners to work with, including those with a more applied focus.

In its efforts to implement a global approach, the SNSF is committed to following the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations and the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a reference framework. This is directly reflected in the design of specific research funding schemes. Furthermore, the SNSF is committed to flexible and quick responses in times of global emergencies and crises.

More generally, the SNSF aims to support global co-operation networks that accelerate the translation of existing research results into practice — notably applications relevant to sustainable development.

4.2 Simplicity

The SNSF aims to limit the administrative efforts of researchers as far as possible. It strives for simplicity and lean management in the design and implementation of its funding schemes. The same applies to collaborations with partner organisations. In order to avoid a proliferation of funding schemes, the SNSF integrates, whenever possible and appropriate, ways of supporting bi- and multilateral co-operation within existing funding schemes. Furthermore, the SNSF safeguards the necessary flexibility in its funding activities to not only support a broad spectrum of research, but also to facilitate rapid responses to co-operation needs and provide sufficient support to international research communities.

4.3 Multilateral co-operation and knowledge circulation

The right framework conditions must be in place so that knowledge can circulate and researchers can exploit synergies between different fields of specialisation, achieve the critical mass necessary to successfully conduct research projects, recruit the best talent and build professional networks. Relevant framework conditions include free

movement of people, free expression of opinions, funding for research and appropriate organisational structures, access to research infrastructures and encouragement of careers.

4.3.1 Support Switzerland's integration within the European Research and Innovation Area

Access to relevant multilateral funding channels and exposure to international competition helps to make Switzerland an attractive science hub. At the European level, it is of fundamental importance for Switzerland to remain integrated within the European Research and Innovation Area. Therefore, the SNSF considers it a priority that Switzerland is fully associated to the European Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation. Participation in the European Framework Programmes is complementary to national funding, but does not exclude overlaps in funding where there is a strategic advantage.

The SNSF closely follows developments in the global and European research funding environment and actively engages in debates that shape its future directly or together with other European organisations within Science Europe⁵. For its activities at the European level, the SNSF exchanges information with SwissCore, the Swiss contact office for education, research and innovation in Brussels, the relevant divisions at SERI, and the Mission of Switzerland to the European Union.

4.3.2 Participation in international fora

The SNSF engages in a number of different science policy fora such as the Global Research Council⁶ (GRC) or Science Europe, and it provides its expertise in committees and working groups of intergovernmental institutions and programmes, such as the Global Science Forum (GSF) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the EU Framework Programme Committees. Furthermore, the SNSF participates in international disciplinary funders' fora.

Through dialogue and common interests, the SNSF establishes alliances, develops opinions, defends its policies and contributes to safeguarding the interests of research in Switzerland at an international level.

4.3.3 Co-operation with other science funding organisations

The SNSF seeks to establish closer links with other research funding organisations on an equal footing (reciprocity), deepening existing partnerships and extending the number of partnerships, primarily to facilitate cross-border research collaboration.

The SNSF engages in call-based (short- and mid-term time horizon) and institutional forms of co-operation (long-term time horizon) with partner agencies; the latter are based on International Co-investigator or Lead Agency schemes. For cases in which there are legal, practical or financial obstacles, the SNSF continues to discuss alternatives that are transparently communicated to the relevant stakeholders.

Institutional learning is an important aspect of co-operation between agencies. With the aim of institutional knowledge building and sharing, the SNSF engages in activities such as staff exchange, sharing of documents and examples, technical and policy discussions.

⁵ <https://www.scienceeurope.org/>

⁶ <https://www.globalresearchcouncil.org/>

If requested, the SNSF acts as advisory body to other research agencies, for example by supporting the establishment of a new research funding organisation or by supporting evaluation processes.

4.3.4 Support for knowledge circulation

The SNSF is convinced that the free circulation of ideas and open science, conducted in a democratic society, lead to better science. The SNSF supports collaboration through scientific exchange in various settings, including visits by scholars and participation in international conferences. The accessibility and exchange of knowledge is further facilitated by the SNSF's requirement to make all publications and data produced by joint research projects publicly available according to the principles of open access to publications⁷ and open data⁸.

4.4 Good scientific practice

4.4.1 Standards in research

The SNSF is committed to promoting research integrity based on the fundamental principles of reliability, sincerity, respect, responsibility and diligence. In fostering international co-operation, the SNSF follows the “Principles and Procedures on Integrity in Scientific Research” of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences⁹ and the “European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity” of the European umbrella organisation for academies ALLEA¹⁰. This applies in particular to reliability and transparency in the development, design and implementation of research and in the communication of research results.

To ensure collaboration on an equal footing, the SNSF encourages researchers to follow the 11 Principles for Transboundary Research Partnerships¹¹.

4.4.2 Quality of the evaluation process

The SNSF strives to implement evaluation processes that are fair and transparent, and follows the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)¹². It thereby builds trust in its processes and ultimately in the research that receives its support. Funding decisions are based on an international and transparent peer review system following the principles of the GRC¹³. The SNSF applies clear rules to avoid conflicts

⁷ SNSF policy on Open Access to Publications: <http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/open-access/>

⁸ SNSF policy on Open Access to Research Data: http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/open_research_data/

⁹ Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, 2021: *Code of conduct for scientific integrity*. <http://go.swiss-academies.ch/integrity>. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4707560>.

¹⁰ <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>

¹¹ Bruno Stöckli, Urs Wiesmann, Jon-Andri Lys, 2018: *A Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships: 11 Principles, 3rd edition (1st edition 2012)*, Bern, Switzerland. Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE). <https://11principles.org/>

¹² <https://sfdora.org/read/>

¹³ Statement of Principles of the GRC on Peer/Merit Review: https://www.globalresearchcouncil.org/fileadmin//documents/GRC_Publications/Statement_of_Principles_on_Peer-Merit_Review_2018.pdf

of interest¹⁴. Furthermore, the SNSF is committed to equal opportunities, notably with respect to gender and to fighting implicit biases¹⁵.

The SNSF collaborates in true partnerships with other research agencies that share these goals — for instance through joint evaluations or based on the mutual recognition of responsibilities, as is the case in Lead Agency agreements. Shared ethical principles provide the necessary trust for such collaborations.

4.5 Academic freedom

4.5.1 Defence of the free pursuit of research interests

The SNSF is committed to protecting the academic freedom of researchers, as stipulated in the Swiss Constitution¹⁶. For the SNSF, academic freedom guarantees that researchers are able to freely pursue their research, choose with whom they want to collaborate nationally and internationally, and communicate their research results (no repression of academics). In accordance with the Magna Charta of the European Universities¹⁷, freedom also encompasses the free movement of ideas (access to information).

The SNSF is convinced that academic freedom is important for progress towards new and far-reaching findings or applications, and it supports this vision by offering opportunities for co-operation that are thematically open and do not prescribe the choice of partners in any way. The SNSF rejects censorship of ideas, ideological controls (e.g. pre-publication controls) and the systematic exclusion of topics.

4.5.2 Science diplomacy and support for scholars at risk

The SNSF believes that international scientific co-operation can build trust and strengthen research freedom. Its funding schemes allow scientists from different geographic and cultural backgrounds to collaborate, which can, in turn, contribute to bridging political differences between countries. Through its different international activities, the SNSF can also support scientific co-operation where academic freedom is at risk. In particular, SNSF funding can provide initial financial support for foreign scientists, who are under personal threat in their country of origin and wish to continue their scientific work at a Swiss institution, in a fruitful environment together with Swiss and other international colleagues.

4.6 Excellence

The SNSF is committed to making funding decisions based on a project's potential to generate excellent research. Funding excellent research is regarded as a stepping-stone to the SNSF's overarching task of facilitating knowledge gain. The interpretation of excellence is inclusive and captures excellence in all its diversity. The central role of excellence does not lead to the exclusion of complementary criteria such as equal

¹⁴ SNSF policy on conflicts of interests: <http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/evaluation-procedures/conflicts-interests-bias-and-withdrawal/>

¹⁵ SNSF policy on gender equality: <http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/gender-equality/>

¹⁶ Swiss Constitution, Art. 20: <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995395/index.html#a20>

¹⁷ Magna Charta Universitatum: <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum>

opportunities, or the potential to generate technological, social, cultural and economic benefits.

The SNSF is convinced that keeping excellence at the core of evaluation both nationally and internationally fosters fruitful and ambitious scientific co-operation to the benefit of all partners.

Annex: Overview table of international funding schemes of the SNSF

See next page.

Overview of the instruments of the SNSF for international mobility and collaboration

Our strategic objective in [international cooperation](#) is to facilitate and optimise global scientific collaboration and exchange. Our activities aim to foster cross-border cooperation to the benefit of Swiss science. Through our international activities, we contribute to the increase of research capacity in Switzerland and abroad.

We base our international co-operation on the following principles and on the explicit understanding that these principles are shared with our co-operating partners:

- **Global approach.** We connect researchers globally.
- **Simplicity.** We promote simple procedures, aiming to include international collaboration and mobility in regular research funding whenever possible.
- **Multilateral co-operation and knowledge circulation.** We enable and promote talent circulation and the resulting exchange of ideas including free access to publications and data resulting from international projects.
- **Good scientific practice.** We are committed to collaboration that is transparent, treats all applicants on an equal basis, promotes research integrity, and respects human rights as well as the legal framework of research, both during the evaluation process and in conducting research projects.
- **Academic freedom.** We support the principle of research freedom and defend scientific autonomy, in a spirit of trust in scientists.
- **Excellence.** We make scientific excellence the main criterion for allocating funds.

Category	Description	Eligible countries	Eligible costs	Deadlines
<i>Individual mobility</i>				
<u>Scientific Exchanges</u>	Scientific Exchanges are aimed at researchers who wish to host their own scientific event in Switzerland, invite colleagues from abroad for a research visit to Switzerland, or visit their colleagues in another country. Scientific conferences or workshops may last from 1 to 5 days; research visits are funded for a period of 1 to 6 months.	Any country	Travel expenses, room and board costs of the travelling researchers, up to CHF 25,000; expenses for accompanying children (do not count towards upper limit of CHF 25k)	At least 4 months before the scheduled start of funding
<u>Mobility grants in projects</u>	Mobility grants are aimed at doctoral students who wish to improve their scientific profile by going abroad for 6 to 12 months while employed in an ongoing SNSF research project. The stay must take place within the timeframe of the research project.	Any country	Travel and living costs, as well as fees for conferences and workshops, up to CHF 20,000	At least 3 months before the scheduled start of the stay abroad
<u>Postdoc.Mobility</u>	Postdoc.Mobility fellowships are aimed at researchers who have done a doctorate or who complete it within the next nine months and wish to pursue an academic career in Switzerland after their time abroad. The funding period is 24 months for a research stay abroad, and 3 to 12 months for a return grant to finance their initial period of research after returning to Switzerland.	Any country	Grant for subsistence costs, flat-rate for travel expenses and possible contribution to research and conference costs	1 February, 1 August
<u>Money Follows Researcher</u>	Aimed at researchers who move abroad and would like current SNSF funding to continue. The project can either continue in Switzerland while being managed from abroad or it can be transferred to the new location.	Any country	The SNSF makes decisions as to the further use of funds on a case-by-case basis	A detailed request must be submitted to the SNSF division responsible for the grant as early as possible.

Category	Description	Eligible countries	Eligible costs	Deadlines
<i>Collaboration in research projects within international and collaborative programmes</i>				
Swiss bilateral programmes	The bilateral programmes of the Swiss Confederation are aimed at promoting and strengthening scientific cooperation with non-European countries that show high research potential.	See the website of the SERI on bilateral cooperation programmes	As in project funding for researchers in Switzerland (see relevant call documents)	Ad hoc calls; see the calls website and newsletter for more information.
Enlargement contribution	Switzerland is contributing to the EU enlargement by supporting efforts to reduce economic and social disparities. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) mandated the SNSF and its counterpart in a partner country to launch and coordinate calls for Joint Research Projects (JRPs).	Croatia	As in project funding for researchers in Switzerland (see relevant call documents)	Currently there are no further calls foreseen.
SPIRIT	The Swiss Programme for International Research by Scientific Investigation Teams (SPIRIT) promotes team-oriented cross-border research. It is intended for 2 to 4 research groups, with at least 1 applicant in Switzerland and at least 1 applicant in an eligible partner country.	Based on the DAC list of the OECD (with exceptions) . See www.snsf.ch/spirit .	As in project funding for all applicants; at least 30% of the budget used in Switzerland, at least 30% in the partner countries.	Pre-proposals can be submitted anytime, full proposals upon invitation only
Sinergia	Sinergia promotes the interdisciplinary collaboration of 2 to 4 applicants proposing breakthrough research. If there are 3 or 4 applicants, 1 applicant may be based at a research institution abroad, if their expertise is essential.	Any country	As in project funding for all applicants	1 June, 1 December
COST	COST (European Cooperation in Science & Technology) supports Europe-wide scientific cooperation across all science and technology fields by means of broad scientific networks, COST Actions. COST Actions do not fund research itself, but support networking via different tools such as meetings, short-term scientific exchanges, training schools and dissemination activities. The SNSF opens yearly calls for the funding of national COST Projects , intended to support the research of Swiss researchers involved in ongoing COST Actions.	COST Actions: COST Member States COST Projects: only Switzerland	COST Actions: networking activities COST Projects: As in project funding, except for equipment.	COST Actions: See COST website: www.cost.eu COST Projects: yearly calls: www.snsf.ch/cost
r4d	Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d programme) of the SNSF and the SDC is aimed at researchers in Switzerland and in developing and emerging countries who wish to execute a joint research project on global issues. The programme focuses on reducing poverty and protecting public goods in developing countries.	Based on the DAC list of the OECD (See call document for details)	As in project funding for all applicants. 1. At least 50% of the academic personnel (in person months) per project resides in developing countries (group 2. At least 40% of the approved amount must go to the partners from country group 1. 3. 10% to 15% of the amount awarded to a project must be used for application and communication.	No further calls

Category	Description	Eligible countries	Eligible costs	Deadlines
NCCRs	National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs) are aimed at established researchers in Switzerland who wish to pursue a long-term research project on a theme of strategic importance. The NCCR management teams are based at a higher education institution or at another renowned research institution. NCCRs are backed by one or more home institution. Expertise from abroad can be incorporated in the NCCR if it does not exist or is insufficiently developed in Switzerland.	Any country	According to NCCR budget guidelines - Analogous to project funding, no overhead.	Currently no call
NRPs	National Research Programmes (NRPs) embrace research projects that contribute to solving the key problems of today. The Federal Council makes the selection of topics, which it then refers on to the SNSF to address within the scope of an NRP. Collaboration with research groups in other countries is possible, provided the co-operation either generates significant added value that could not be achieved without cross-border cooperation, or that substantially enhances the proposed research with respect to content or methodology, or if the competence of researchers from abroad is essential for the successful completion of the project. As a rule, the funding share requested for researchers abroad may not exceed 30% of the overall budget.	Any country	As in project funding for all applicants from either country	NFP calls are launched at irregular intervals; see the calls website and the newsletter .
<i>Collaboration in projects: supplementary measures</i>				
<u>Project partners in SNSF-funded projects</u>	Project partners are researchers in Switzerland or abroad who make a partial contribution to the research project without being responsible for the project.	Any country	Research costs, excluding salaries, of up to 20% of the project budget.	Project partners must be designated in the project application and included in the budget.
<u>Collaboration and networking costs in SNSF-funded projects</u>	Project grants may be used to cover the following costs: for national and international cooperation and networking activities carried out in connection with the funded research as well as for the organisation of conferences and workshops in connection with the funded research.	Any country	Costs of collaboration activities directly linked to the research project, travel costs, organization costs for events	Must be included in the budget of submitted projects.
<u>International Co-Investigator Scheme</u> (formerly Money follows Co-operation Line)	The International Co-Investigator Scheme provides funding for cross-border projects with international partners. It is available for a limited number of countries with which the SNSF has signed an agreement. The projects includes a Swiss-based project and a subprojects conducted by the international partner, which are evaluated and funded by the SNSF, and reciprocally.	Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, as well as UK (social sciences and humanities only)	As in project funding for all applicants from either country	In project funding (1 April, 1 October), if the majority of the research is in Switzerland; otherwise submission to the partner organisation
<u>Weave/Lead Agency</u>	Weave and Lead Agency are part of the SNSF's project funding scheme. A single funder is the Lead Agency for projects with international partners, either the SNSF or its partner agency abroad. The researchers need to make only a single submission to the Lead Agency, instead of several proposals to different national agencies. The multilateral Weave agreement gives researchers the choice of the Lead Agency and enables trilateral projects. In the case of bilateral Lead Agency agreements, the lead is usually on an annual rotation basis and only bilateral projects are possible.	Weave: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, Lead Agency: France, Sao Paulo South Africa and South Tyrol	In Switzerland: as in project funding In the partner country: according to the respective national regulations	Weave: 1 April, 1 October, if submitted to the SNSF or the deadline of the partner organisation Lead Agency: depends on the Lead Agency