

## Scientific Exchanges between Bulgaria and Switzerland (SCIEX)

### Call document for SCIEX Fellowships 2025

#### Second Swiss Contribution

Switzerland's second contribution to selected EU member states is an investment in Europe's security, stability and prosperity, as well as in the consolidation and development of bilateral relations. It aims to reduce economic and social disparities in Europe and promote measures to manage migration. The "Scientific Exchanges, SCIEX" initiative between Bulgaria and Switzerland is part of the second Swiss Contribution among other measures. The mandate for the implementation of SCIEX was given by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and is co-financed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Science and Education (MES).

SCIEX is aimed at early career researchers, i.e. PhD (doctoral) students and postdoctoral researchers of any nationality, are permanent residents in Bulgaria and would like to undertake a research secondment in a non-commercial Swiss research institute. The main objectives of SCIEX are **a) to further scientific knowledge and development, b) to improve and deepen the grantees' scientific skills, and c) to foster research collaborations and strengthen scientific networks**. This document outlines the specific conditions and procedures for submitting a proposal to the SCIEX Fellowships Call 2025. The key characteristics of the funding scheme are summarized below.

- The scheme is **open to all** research disciplines and topics.
- **Applicants** are **PhD students**, who have been matriculated as **doctoral students for at least 6 months** at a Bulgarian institute, or **postdoctoral researchers**, who have a **PhD degree, less than 8 years** of postdoctoral experience and are affiliated with a Bulgarian institute.
- **Applicants** have any nationality and are permanent residents in Bulgaria at the time of the submission deadline.
- Applicants are supervised by a **senior researcher in Switzerland**, together with the **PhD or post-doc supervisor in Bulgaria**.
- **Reciprocal short-term research visits (STV)** for both the Bulgarian, and the Swiss supervisors are possible.
- For the duration of the fellowship (**6-24 months for PhD students and 6-18 months for postdoctoral researchers**), the applicants are employed at a non-commercial institution **in Switzerland**. The grant includes the **grantees' salary** with social security contributions, financial contributions to research and conference costs. **STVs** are eligible costs.
- The proposal is submitted in one step and must include the **research plan**, the **CV and major achievements**, the relevant **diplomas**, the **proof of Bulgarian permanent residence**, the **confirmation from the host institute** and the **support letters from the supervisors**.
- The following **evaluation criteria** apply: "**furtherance of scientific knowledge and development**", "**improvement and deepening of the grantees' scientific skills**" and "**fostering of research collaborations and strengthening of scientific networks**".
- The call will open on **1 November 2024** and close on **3 February 2025**. The applicants will be informed of the final decisions in **July 2025**. The earliest start of the grants is in **September 2025**.

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# 1 Eligibility criteria

## 1.1 Applicant

Proposals for the SCIEX Fellowships 2025 may be submitted by **PhD (doctoral) students or postdoctoral researchers from all disciplines**. The following criteria apply:

### Doctoral students

- At the time of the submission deadline, applicants have been matriculated as PhD students (also applies to MD-PhD candidates) at a Bulgarian institute<sup>1</sup> for **at least six months**.
- Applicants have any nationality and must be permanent residents in Bulgaria, at the time of the submission deadline.
- A SCIEX Fellowship is awarded for **a minimum of six months and a maximum of twenty-four months**.

### Postdoctoral researchers

- At the time of the submission deadline, applicants must hold **a doctoral degree (PhD)<sup>2</sup>**, or have at least three years of experience as a researcher after obtaining their higher education degree (equivalent qualification to a doctorate) and be affiliated with a Bulgarian institute<sup>1</sup> as a researcher.
- Applicants must have obtained their relevant degree, i.e. the doctoral degree (PhD)<sup>3</sup>, within 8 years of the submission deadline. The relevant date is that of the examination or thesis defence.
- Applicants who have defended their doctoral thesis before the submission deadline but have not yet been formally awarded the doctoral degree or will defend their thesis within the **next 6 months**, by the time of the submission deadline, will be also considered postdoctoral researchers and are eligible. An official document confirming that they have successfully passed or will complete their doctorate within the following 6 months respectively, is required.
- The timeframe of 8 years may be extended if one or more of the reasons set out in Clause 1.11 of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations<sup>4</sup> are met. The reasons for requesting an extension for the timeframe must be outlined in the proposal.
- Applicants have any nationality and must be permanent residents in Bulgaria, at the time of the submission deadline.

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<sup>1</sup> Eligible institutes are higher education institutions under Art. 46, para 1, and Art. 85 para. 1, item 7 of the Higher Education Act, which are accredited by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) to conduct training for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" OR Research organizations under Art. 47, para. 1 of the Higher Education Act, which are accredited by the NEAA to conduct training on the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

<sup>2</sup> A medical doctor degree will be accepted only if it corresponds to a doctoral degree (PhD, MD-PhD) or if the researcher has been demonstrably appointed to a position that requires doctoral equivalency (e.g. professorship appointment thanks to a state examination or equivalent examination). 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.

<sup>3</sup> Or, for applicants with a medical doctor degree, the relevant degree (MD-PhD) or equivalency pursuant to the previous footnote.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/snsf-general-implementation-regulations-for-the-funding-regulations-e.pdf>.

Accepted reasons for extending the eligibility window: paternity, adoption or parental leave; inability to work due to illness or accident; care duties; services that benefit the general public, particularly military or civilian service; continuing education in connection with the applicant's research activities, particularly internships or clinical work; preparatory activities connected to the dissertation, e.g. participation in classes at a doctoral school.

- A SCIEX fellowship is awarded for a **minimum of six months and a maximum of eighteen months**.

### **Work quota**

- Applicants must generally commit themselves as grantees to a work quota of 100% (1.0 FTE). A part-time work quota corresponding to at least 80% (0.8 FTE) may be allowed upon request due to justified reasons, particularly in the case of persons with family care duties or persons pursuing courses at a higher education institution in order to further their career.
- Researchers also carrying out clinical work must devote at least 80% of the funded work quota to the project and training related to the project.

## **1.2 Host institutes and supervision**

SCIEX Fellowships are deemed to be conducted in Switzerland at higher education institutions or at non-commercial research institutions outside the higher education sector that are domiciled in Switzerland and whose basic financing is predominantly Swiss, in accordance with SNSF Funding Regulations<sup>5</sup>.

Scientific supervision, monitoring and support are provided to the grantee by one senior researcher employed at the Swiss host institute and the corresponding supervisor at the Bulgarian institute for the doctoral or postdoctoral applicants. Short-term research visits (STV) for the Bulgarian, and Swiss supervisors are possible, within the duration of the grant. The STV aim to enhance the collaboration between the two institutes through discussions on the progress of the project and research-related questions. Additionally, the STV can improve the networking between the Bulgarian and Swiss institutes.

## **2 Formal requirements, ethical issues and research integrity**

### **2.1 Legal basis**

The general provisions of the SNSF (Funding Regulations<sup>5</sup> and the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations<sup>4</sup>) apply to the SCIEX Fellowships Call 2025 and the corresponding funding procedures, unless defined otherwise in this call. This call document is issued by the Presiding Board of the National Research Council under a mandate by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to launch a SCIEX call for the Second Swiss Contribution.

### **2.2 User account in mySNF**

Applications are submitted via [www.mysnf.ch](http://www.mysnf.ch). Applicants must have a mySNF user account to proceed to the submission of their application, which can be requested at [www.mysnf.ch](http://www.mysnf.ch). It is recommended that user accounts are requested at least one month before the submission deadline so that the required

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<sup>5</sup> [https://snf.ch/media/en/ICCrvpOHZ38Hbg5Y/allg\\_reglement\\_16\\_e.pdf](https://snf.ch/media/en/ICCrvpOHZ38Hbg5Y/allg_reglement_16_e.pdf)

information and documents can be prepared early enough. The mySNF accounts will remain valid for future submissions or the lifetime management of the approved projects.

### **2.3 Ethics and integrity**

Applicants must declare any research activity and method that have ethical implications or that may raise questions requiring sound ethical assessment. Hence, please take note of the Swiss laws and national and international ethical standards. Furthermore, the rules on research integrity and good scientific practice must be strictly respected<sup>6</sup>.

### **2.4 Open Access (OA)**

Under the SNSF SCIEX Fellowships 2025, grantees must guarantee open access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications of their results, during the duration of the fellowship, as set out in the SNSF Funding Regulations and the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations<sup>4</sup>.

### **2.5 Open Research Data (ORD) and Data Management Plan (DMP)**

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 Policy<sup>7</sup>. The repositories must comply with the FAIR data principles.

A data management plan (DMP) is only 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 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](#).

## **3 Budget**

The available budget for SCIEX is CHF 2 million and is covered by funds of the second Swiss Contribution and the Bulgarian Ministry of Science and Education. The SCIEX Fellowships cover the grantees salary, including social security contributions<sup>8</sup>. The SNSF determines the salary for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers by agreement with the host research institute and in accordance with the salary scales applied by the SNSF and the institution to researchers with comparable qualifications. The SNSF may set an upper limit for the salary.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/ueb\\_org\\_fehlverh\\_gesuchstellende\\_e.pdf](http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/ueb_org_fehlverh_gesuchstellende_e.pdf)

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

<sup>8</sup> For further information about salary ranges for doctoral students resp. postdocs and social security contributions, please see: [https://snf.ch/media/en/yXApuFw4ml0TPYe2/Annex\\_XII\\_Ausfuhrungsreglement\\_Beitragreglement\\_E.pdf](https://snf.ch/media/en/yXApuFw4ml0TPYe2/Annex_XII_Ausfuhrungsreglement_Beitragreglement_E.pdf)

As outlined above (1.1. Work quota), for researchers doing clinical work, the SNSF covers only the share of the salary awarded for the research work (at least 80%). The share allocated for clinical work (up to 20%) must be financed by the host research institute.

The grantees are formally employed at the host institute in Switzerland. The contract of employment is governed by and set up in accordance with the laws of Switzerland. The money for each fellowship is transferred to the Swiss host institute in annual instalments, as advanced payments. The Swiss host institute is responsible for making the funds available to the grantees. The grantees have the same status as doctoral students and researchers for the postdoctoral level, at their host institute. Double funding is not allowed during the SCIEX Fellowship (even in the case of grants in Bulgaria, the fellow will have to stop them for the duration of the SCIEX Fellowship). Any funds received or requested from other funding institutions must be declared in the SCIEX application.

**Project funds**, including research costs directly linked to the implementation of the project, costs for Open Research Data, training and networking contributions, as well as conferences and travel costs are covered<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, the costs for short-term research visits (STV) of the supervisors are covered. A maximum of three short-term research visits, in total, for the Swiss or Bulgarian supervisors can be requested.

**Indirect costs:** Overhead costs are not eligible.

## 4 Online application process

### 4.1 Required documents

The applications must be submitted to [www.mysnf.ch](http://www.mysnf.ch). **All documents must be in English.** The font must be Times New Roman, Arial or similar with a size of at least 10 pt, single line spacing and margins of 1.5 cm on the sides and 1.5 cm at the top/bottom. Condensed fonts are not allowed. The documents must be submitted in PDF format. The following documents must be included in the application and uploaded to the corresponding data containers. Instructions and additional information about each required document can be found below and directly on **mySNF in the corresponding data container**.

- 1) Research plan
- 2) CV and major achievements (according to the online [CV format](#))
- 3) Copy of degree certificates/diplomas
- 4) Proof of permanent residence in Bulgaria
- 5) Confirmation from the host institute
- 6) A support letter from the Swiss supervisor and a support letter from the Bulgarian supervisor

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/snsf-general-implementation-regulations-for-the-funding-regulations-e.pdf>

#### 4.1.1 Research plan

The research plan must not exceed **8 pages and 30,000 characters (with spaces)**<sup>10</sup>. The structure is presented below. **Please note that the “Bibliography” section is not included in the limits of 8 pages and 30’000 characters.**

<b>1. Further scientific knowledge and development</b>	1.1. Current state of the research in the field. Current state of applicant’s own research (if applicable). 1.2. Research objectives. 1.3. Approach and methodology. 1.4. Scientific relevance and impact of the project. 1.5. Schedule and milestones.
<b>2. Improve and deepen grantees’ scientific skills</b>	2.1. Career objectives. Relevance of the project for personal career development.
<b>3. Create research collaborations and strengthen scientific networks</b>	3.1. Added value of the project for the research institute in Switzerland and Bulgaria. 3.2. Measures to enhance scientific networks and collaboration between Switzerland and Bulgaria.
<b>4. Bibliography</b>	4.1. List of sources for all concluded and ongoing work cited in the research plan.

#### 4.1.2 CV and major achievements

In order to comply with the DORA principles (San Francisco **Declaration On Research Assessment**), which the SNSF has signed, the SNSF has defined a new structure for the CV and requests a standardised set of information from all applicants. **Specifically, applicants have to compile their CV according to a new template on the SNSF Portal ([SNF Portal](#)) and subsequently upload a PDF to the data container “CV and major achievements” in mySNF.**

For more information on the new CV format see: [Your curriculum vitae – all about the CV format \(snf.ch\)](#).

#### 4.1.3 Copy of degree certificates/diplomas

**For doctoral students:** A copy of the master’s degree with grades must be uploaded. Additionally, an official certificate from the home institute in Bulgaria, certifying that the applicant has been matriculated at the institute for a PhD, for **at least six months**, prior to the submission deadline. The certificate must bear the official letterhead of the home institute in Bulgaria and the original signature (a digital signature is permissible) of the head of the institute/department (no e-mail).

<sup>10</sup> Page and character limits must always be respected:  
 30,000 characters on 8 pages is within the limit  
 30,000 (or less) characters on **more than 8 pages** is **NOT** within the limit and will **result in a decision of non-consideration**  
**More than 30,000 characters** on less than 8 pages is **NOT** within the limit and will **result in a decision of non-consideration**

**For postdoctoral researchers:** A copy of the doctorate (PhD, MD-PhD) with grades (if applicable) must be uploaded, as well as a copy of the master's degree with grades (if applicable). Medical researchers must also upload a copy of the **state examination** (or equivalent degree). Additionally, an official certificate from the home institute in Bulgaria confirming that the applicant is affiliated with a Bulgarian Institute is required. The certificate must bear the official letterhead of the institute in Bulgaria and the original signature (a digital signature is permissible) of the head of the institute/department (no e-mail).

Applicants who do not have the doctorate at the time of the submission deadline, must include an official document confirming that they have successfully defended their thesis or passed their examination, including the examination date. If the defence has not yet taken place at the time of submission deadline, applicants must include a confirmation letter from their supervisor that they are eligible to defend and complete their doctoral thesis **within six months of the submission deadline**. The examination or the thesis defence must be successfully completed within the time limit of six months.

#### **4.1.4 Proof of permanent residence in Bulgaria**

Applicants must provide an official proof that they are permanent<sup>11</sup> residents in Bulgaria at the time of the submission deadline. The proof of permanent residence must bear the official letterhead and an original signature (a digital signature is permissible – no e-mail) of the competent Bulgarian authority (e.g., municipality, police, population registry, migration office, etc.).

#### **4.1.5 Confirmation from the host institute**

A confirmation from the host institute in Switzerland must be enclosed. The confirmation letter must bear the official letterhead of the host institute and the original signature (a digital signature is permissible) of the head of the institute (no e-mail). **The start and end dates of the fellowship must be mentioned.** The confirmation must clearly state that the necessary research infrastructure is available for the duration of the research stay.

#### **4.1.6 Support letters**

**Support letter from the Swiss supervisor:** Applicants must provide a written and binding commitment letter from the **host supervisor** at the Swiss host institute confirming their **willingness to mentor and support the applicant**. Furthermore, the SNSF strongly encourages the host supervisor to comment on the following aspects: How is the research project supported scientifically? How is the applicant's continuous intellectual development and continuing education facilitated? How is the international collaboration furthered, e.g., STV or other measures? For postdoctoral researchers only: how is the applicant's scientific independence ensured and promoted?

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<sup>11</sup> Permanent residence is defined according to Art. 25 of the Republic of Bulgaria Act.



**Support letter from the Bulgarian supervisor:** Applicants must provide a support letter from the principal supervisor in Bulgaria (PhD or postdoc supervisor), stating that **they support the scientific exchange of the applicant**. The SNSF strongly encourages the supervisor to comment on the following aspects: How are the academic performance, the scientific competences and mobility of the applicant evaluated? How is the international collaboration furthered, e.g., STV or other measures?

#### **4.2 Creating a new application**

To create a new application, please select the option 'Create new application' on the mySNF home page by navigating to the relevant funding scheme under **Programmes > SCIEX**. Before making any entries or uploading files, make sure to carefully read all the information in this document and in the header of every data container on mySNF. **The application must be submitted via mySNF no later than 3 February 2025, at 17:00:00 CET (Swiss local time)**. 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.**

#### **4.3 Receipt and verification at the SNSF**

##### ***Verification of formal requirements and eligibility***

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF check whether the applicants are eligible and if the submitted applications meet the formal requirements. Proposals that do not meet the eligibility or formal criteria are rejected.

##### ***Verification of research integrity and good scientific practice***

The Administrative Offices of the SNSF may check whether the application respects the rules of scientific integrity (see Regulations of the National Research Council on the treatment of scientific misconduct by applicants and grantees<sup>6</sup>).

##### ***Contact between applicants and the SNSF***

Queries can be addressed to the Administrative Offices of the SNSF by phone (+41 31 308 22 22) or email ([sciex@snf.ch](mailto:sciex@snf.ch)). When checking submitted proposals, the Administrative Offices 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 facts

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 procedure and communication of the decision

The National Research Council of the SNSF and the appointed evaluation bodies are responsible for the scientific evaluation and for making funding decisions. A Steering Committee is appointed for SCIEX to oversee the evaluation and funding activities related to the SCIEX Fellowships Call.

Each application that meets the formal requirements will be evaluated by two panel members, and by external peer reviews, if necessary. Based on the panel members' assessment and the external peer reviews that may have been requested, the expert panel will evaluate and proceed to the final rating of the applications. Then, based on this ranking and the available funding, the Steering Committee determines a cut-off point for funding ("funding line"). Please note that no interviews will be conducted with the applicants of SCIEX 2025. The evaluation procedure follows the unified evaluation procedure of the SNSF. More information about the general evaluation practice at SNSF can be found here: [Evaluation procedure \(snf.ch\)](#). Depending on the number of the applications, the evaluation procedure may be slightly adjusted, particularly concerning the peer reviews and panel composition.

The following **evaluation criteria** and weighting factors apply:

- **Further scientific knowledge and development (50%):** Scientific relevance, quality, originality and topicality of the research project, approach and methodology, as well as feasibility.
- **Improve and deepen the grantees' scientific skills (20%):** The applicant's scientific research achievements to date: scientific quality of the achievements relative to the applicant's net age<sup>12</sup>, ability based on achievements to date to conduct the project and contribute to it personally, and relevance of the project to the applicant's scientific and career development.
- **Foster research collaborations and strengthen scientific networks (30%):** Added value of the project for the research institutes in Switzerland and Bulgaria, promotion of the international collaboration between the two participating institutes and countries and enhancement of the scientific network.

### ***Outcome of the evaluation and communication of decisions***

Proposals that fulfil the scientific quality standards of the SNSF 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 decision of the Swiss Parliament. The SNSF communicates the decision taken for each application in the form of a ruling (decision letter). The ruling may be appealed against before the Federal Administrative Court.

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<sup>12</sup> The net academic age comprises the time span starting with the date of the thesis defence or equivalent qualification, or with the medical degree, and ending with the submission deadline, minus all non-academic activities (including any interruptions for the reasons stated in Clause 1.11 paragraph 2 letters a-e of the General implementation regulations for the Funding Regulations), calculated in full-time equivalents.

## 6 Administration of grants

### 6.1 Grants, start of grants and changes

SCIEX Fellowships are awarded, transferred and managed according to the rules issued by the SNSF, particularly the provisions of the Funding Regulations and its Implementation Regulations.

Grantees must start their fellowship within **6 months** after receiving the ruling (decision letter); otherwise, the grant is forfeited. In case of any changes to the research project or the conditions for conducting it, the applicant is obliged to consult the SNSF in advance for approval.

### 6.2 Non-acceptance or premature termination

If grantees decide to decline the SCIEX Fellowship or terminate their research prematurely, they must notify the SNSF immediately in writing, stating their reasons for this decision. They must reimburse the SNSF the awarded grant for the salary and other eligible costs pro rata temporis.

### 6.3 Reporting

**Scientific reporting:** Grantees must send a scientific report to 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 grantee is asked to fill in a questionnaire.

**Financial reporting:** every 12 months the grantees must send a financial management report justifying the use of the funds.

## 7 Timeline

Milestones	Date
Opening of the call	1 November 2024
Submission deadline	3 February 2025, 17.00.00h Swiss local time
Evaluation	March-May 2025
Communication of the results	July 2025
Earliest possible project start	September 2025
Latest possible project start	March 2026