

# Regulations for the funding program «Research in migration and health»

## 1. Preamble

Growing human mobility and international migration pose significant challenges for health systems, e.g., ensuring access to care, allocating resources effectively, and delivering high-quality care. Another major challenge is being responsive to a large variety of contexts, as the health of international migrants (hereafter referred to as migrants for simplicity) is shaped by a complex interplay of geographical, social, cultural, economic, and political factors. In order to respond to these challenges effectively, it is necessary to generate evidence, at the sub-national, national, and international level.

The last decades have witnessed a growing research activity on migration and health within the Swiss context. This effort has been led by individual researchers or research groups working in the healthcare sector and in academia. However, while project-specific and some inter-institutional collaborations take place, there is no national research network specifically dedicated to advancing knowledge in migration and health. The lack of established national structures also hinders the production and dissemination of widely recognized guidelines and good practices in clinical and public health practice.

Current research in Switzerland covers the fields of public health, clinical medicine, communication, research methodology, and medical education. It touches upon diverse health conditions and different groups of migrants with attention brought to the importance of the social determinants of health as framed by the World Health Organization (WHO). In this context, studies highlight that migrants have cumulative vulnerabilities which lead to social, health, and medical challenges. In particular, there are inequities related to the exposure to adverse individual and structural determinants of health, access to care, and quality of service delivery.

In 2002, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) launched a national program, extended twice until 2017, with the aim of promoting health equity and with a strong focus on the interplay between health and social integration. This program included two studies which monitored health within a sample of foreign residents in Switzerland (1; 2). The results highlighted the diversity of needs, behaviors, and resources among migrant populations, but also stressed the importance of social and economic factors in shaping health.

These studies also pointed out the limitations of the Swiss healthcare system in its capacity to ensure universal access to care and to deliver appropriate and efficient preventive and curative health services to certain migrant populations, notably because of language barriers and the complexity of the system itself. The researchers concluded that there is a need to better train professionals, provide interpretation services, and culturally adapt public-health interventions to respond to the diversity of migrant groups.

## Research gaps

The current evidence in Switzerland has been limited by methodological challenges, for example the lack of comparison with the general population, a focus on specific migrant groups, small monocentric studies, few mixed-methods studies, few interdisciplinary and longitudinal studies, and a lack of participatory approaches.

Important research gaps persist. These can be evaluated through the lens of the WHO Global research agenda on health, migration and displacement (3) as well as the report by the University College London (UCL)-*Lancet* Commission on Migration and Health (4). The WHO emphasizes the access to and the adaptability of health services, particularly in the event of a health crisis. Both documents call for the inclusion of migrants in research processes and for a stronger knowledge translation into policy and practice. In Switzerland, evidence on the access to health services is sparse, especially with regard to disease prevention and health promotion. Moreover, inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches and the inclusion of migrants and migrant communities in research processes remain limited, which increases the likelihood of a restricted or biased perspective. Finally, there is a need to identify and better understand how to promote individual and community health resources as well as health literacy.

Through the funding program «Research in migration and health», the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation (hereafter «the Johnson Foundation») and the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS) want to strengthen research in migrant medicine and migrant health in Switzerland.

## References

1. Federal Office of Public Health. *What about the health of migrant population groups? The most important results of the "Monitoring on the migrant population's state of health in Switzerland"*. Bern, 2007.
2. Jürg Guggisberg, Hugo Bodory, Dominic Höglinger, Severin Bischof, Melania Rudin. *Gesundheit der Migrationsbevölkerung – Ergebnisse der Schweizerischen Gesundheitsbefragung 2017. Schlussbericht*. Bern, 2020.
3. World Health Organization. *Global research agenda on health, migration and displacement: strengthening research and translating research priorities into policy and practice*. Geneva, 2023.
4. Ibrahim Abubakar, Robert W Aldridge, Delan Devakumar, Miriam Orcutt, Rachel Burns, Mauricio L Barreto, et al. The UCL-Lancet Commission on Migration and Health: the health of a world on the move. *The Lancet*. 2018; 392(10164):2606-2654.

## 2. Aims

The Johnson Foundation and the SAMS launch together the funding program «Research in migration and health», with a total budget of CHF 2.7 million made available by the Johnson Foundation for the period 2026–2028.

The aims of the program are to:

- improve research capacity in migration and health in Switzerland;
- encourage collaboration among research groups in this field;
- support high-quality research projects;
- promote early-career researchers.

The overarching goal is to generate knowledge which enhances the ability of the Swiss healthcare system to deliver timely, adapted, and efficient services of high quality to

migrant communities, leading to better health and wellbeing. By encouraging collaboration among research groups, the funding program wants to contribute towards building a national research community and towards connecting this community with partners abroad. In the long term, the output of the supported projects should strengthen the capacity of the health workforce to meet the needs of migrant populations in Switzerland, with a focus on populations which are currently underserved.

The scientific aims of the program are to

- better understand the evolving context of migration and health in Switzerland;
- identify barriers and facilitators to high-quality care for migrants;
- inform strategies to enhance service delivery and to improve the health and wellbeing of migrants.

### **3. Main research areas**

The funding program focuses on supporting projects which explore innovative ways to deliver high-quality healthcare to migrants and migrant communities in Switzerland, particularly to those currently underserved or with high vulnerability, for instance due to social, cultural, or economic factors.

Two research areas are given priority:

- Evaluation and testing of programs and interventions to support migrant health;
- Documentation of migrant health and associated medical needs and resources, considering the diversity of circumstances and trajectories among different groups.

These areas include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Disease prevention (notably non-communicable diseases and emerging infectious diseases)
- Promotion of health, including resources of migrants and migrant communities
- Determinants of migrants' health
- Health of children and elderly migrants
- Migration and mental health
- Barriers in access to healthcare, stigma and discrimination; strategies to overcome them
- Training of healthcare professionals, integration of migrants in the primary healthcare system
- Climate change, migration, and health

### **4. Funding instruments and participation requirements**

To fulfil the aims of the program, research is supported through Project grants:

- For the realization of collaborative projects involving at least 2 groups from distinct Swiss research institutions, in general between CHF 200'000 and 300'000 per project and year for a maximal duration of 3 years (total amount of CHF 600'000 to 900'000 per project).
- For the realization of smaller projects, in general a maximum of 65'000 per project and year for a duration of up to 3 years (up to CHF 195'000 per project).

Project proposals must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The collaboration of at least 2 groups from distinct Swiss research institutions is strongly encouraged and is an important evaluation criterion;
- Inclusion of experts from several disciplines (e.g., clinical and community medicine, public health, epidemiology, ethics, implementation science, health services research, social work, sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics);
- Inclusion of early-career researchers (e.g., doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, medical researchers who have recently completed their medical studies) in the project realization
- Participation of members of migrant communities and, if applicable, patients who stand to benefit from the proposed research, in the design and implementation of the project;
- The inclusion of a partner group based outside of Switzerland is possible if its expertise is necessary for realizing the project.

Project proposals must be in the planning stage. Ongoing projects cannot be supported.

Personal requirements:

- Applicants must be experienced researchers working at a university or research institution in Switzerland, with a solid background and proven track record in research in migration and health.
- All applicants must meet the personal requirements described above and have the necessary scientific qualifications to make a substantial contribution to the project.
- A single applicant must be designated as corresponding applicant to represent the collaborating research groups towards the SAMS. This person becomes responsible for the application.

Eligible costs:

- A Project grant can support project-related salaries of scientific and technical staff, including doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers.
- It can cover research costs necessary to the realization of the project, including costs for scientific collaboration, networking, and communication;
- The costs of short research stays abroad for early-career staff (top-up allowance for travel, accommodation and subsistence on top of the project-related salary) can be requested in the grant budget;
- Applicants' own salaries cannot be covered by the grant.

## **5. Submission of applications**

The funding program «Research in migration and health» is advertised through the information channels of the SAMS and of the Johnson Foundation. Detailed information about the program and the submission requirements are available on the SAMS website at [sams.ch/migration-and-health](https://sams.ch/migration-and-health).

The submission deadline is published well in advance before the closing date. The submission deadline is relevant for assessing the eligibility of the applicants.

Applications must be submitted electronically according to the requirements defined by the SAMS and must contain all the necessary information and documents.

## **6. Evaluation criteria and evaluation procedure**

Applications that meet the formal requirements are evaluated according to the following evaluation criteria.

- Scientific quality of the proposed research project
- Impact of the project on the health of migrants and on their access to high-quality care
- Added value of the project in view of strengthening the research community at the national level
- Interdisciplinarity of the project, diversity and suitability of methods
- Innovation in design and field of research
- Inclusion of migrant communities and, if applicable, of patients, across the various stages of the project
- Promotion of early-career researchers
- Qualifications of the applicant(s) for their respective tasks, scientific track record, ability to carry out the research project
- If applicable, complementary nature of the applicants' qualifications

Each application that meets the formal requirements is evaluated in writing by two members of the Evaluation Committee (referee and co-referee). In addition, applications may be assessed by external experts (peer reviewers). Informed by these evaluations and based on the criteria listed above, the Committee selects the proposals best fitting the aims of the program and recommends them for funding to the Board of the Johnson Foundation. The final funding decision is made by the Johnson Foundation, in accordance with the terms of its agreement with the SAMS.

All applicants are informed in writing by the SAMS about the final decision regarding their application for a grant.

## **7. Organization of the program**

### **SAMS**

The SAMS is responsible for the administrative and scientific management of the program. It coordinates the program and is the point of contact for the Johnson Foundation. The SAMS appoints the Committee in charge of the scientific evaluation, prepares and publishes the calls for applications, and organizes the evaluation procedure. It is the point of contact for applicants, it checks applications for formal eligibility and completeness, and prepares the documents for the Evaluation Committee. The SAMS communicates final decisions to applicants and is responsible for the management of awarded grants, for the evaluation of scientific and financial reports and for requesting the payment of annual instalments to grantees by the Johnson Foundation.

### **Evaluation Committee**

The Evaluation Committee is responsible for the evaluation of applications. The Committee makes funding recommendations to be approved by the Johnson Foundation, in accordance with its funding agreement with the SAMS. It can further make suggestions regarding the general organization of the program. The Committee is composed of experts from several disciplines relevant to migrant health. Committee members are elected ad personam. In accordance

with the SAMS statutes, members of the Committee are chosen by the SAMS Executive Board; the Committee's chairperson is confirmed by the SAMS Senate. The Johnson Foundation is represented on the Committee but has no voting powers. The SAMS supports a fair representation of research institutions across Switzerland and fosters diversity of the Committee members.

### **Johnson Foundation**

The Johnson Foundation is responsible for approving funding. It decides which of the projects recommended for funding by the Evaluation Committee will receive support. The Johnson Foundation pays the annual instalments of approved grants.

## **8. Grant administration, annual instalments, and reporting duties**

### **Start of funding, release of funds**

Following the award of a grant, the corresponding grantee must request the opening of the grant in accordance with the requirements defined by the SAMS and with the conditions set out in the decision letter. The earliest possible start date is announced in the call. The grant must start on the first day of a month and can be postponed for up to 12 months counting from the date of the decision letter.

Funding is paid in annual instalments by the Johnson Foundation to the institution where the corresponding grantee is employed. For collaborative projects, funds can be transferred from there to the institutions of the other grantees. Funding cannot be awarded retrospectively.

### **Scientific and financial reports**

The corresponding grantee is responsible for the management of the grant vis-à-vis the SAMS. The SAMS addresses all communications concerning the grant to this person. The corresponding grantee must submit intermediate financial and scientific reports to the SAMS at intervals defined in the decision letter. Within six weeks of completion of the grant, he/she must also submit a final scientific and financial report which covers the entire grant period. Financial reports must provide an account of the use of the funding. They must be compiled by the grant administration office of the institution where the corresponding grantee is employed. Scientific reports must provide information on the progress in the project, on the results obtained, on a possible deviation from the original research plan, on the output from the project, and on next steps planned.

### **Obligations of grantees**

All grantees are obliged to use the grant in accordance with the conditions set out in the decision letter and to comply with the stipulations in the present regulations and all other rules applicable to the grant. Significant changes in the approved research work must be notified immediately to the SAMS by the corresponding grantee. Such changes require explicit approval by the SAMS and by the Johnson Foundation. Funds which were received but not used must be returned to the funder. In the event of premature termination of the grant, the remaining amount must be returned pro rata temporis to the Johnson Foundation. In case of non-compliance with the present regulations, part of or the entire grant amount can be reclaimed.

Grant recipients are expected to mention the support received by the SAMS and the Johnson Foundation in all publications, posters, and presentations resulting from the funded project.

## **9. Ethics, research integrity, and open access**

Research activities and methods that have ethical implications or may raise questions regarding ethical assessment must be declared in the application, in conformity with the Swiss laws and ethical standards. If applicable, a copy of the ethics committee's decision and all other necessary authorisations must be submitted to the SAMS at the latest when requesting the opening of the grant. Furthermore, the rules of scientific integrity must be respected<sup>1</sup>.

Grantees are expected to ensure open access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications of their results.

These regulations have been approved by the SAMS Executive Board on 25 October 2025 and by the Board of the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation on 3 November 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (2021) : Code of conduct for scientific integrity.