

LEADING HOUSE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

“INNOVATION STARTING GRANTS” – CALL FOR PROJECTS

1. Background

The Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) commissioned the HES-SO as the Leading House (LH) for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The mandate will last from 2017 to 2020 and its overall goal is to develop scientific collaborations between Switzerland and countries of the MENA region.

The following countries of the MENA region are eligible for this call: **Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian territory, Qatar, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.**

This call allows funding of approximately 10 innovation starting grants, subject to the number of applications received as well as compliance with the criteria for evaluation and selection (see section 5. Evaluation and selection in this document for details).

2. Goals and objectives

This call wants to promote innovation projects. **Innovation is here understood in a broad sense referring to:**

- **both its technological and socio-cultural dimensions:** innovation is not only performed by companies from the business sector, but also by organisations of other types and by individuals, who can play a role in innovation activities by altering products or processes, or by creating or distributing new knowledge. (OECD, *Oslo Manual* 2018, p.44) Social innovations “differ from technological innovations mainly in that they explicitly pursue changes to societal practices and attach less importance to establishing a new product in the market.” (Bornstein, Pabst and Sigrist, *Zur Bedeutung von sozialer Innovation in Wissenschaft und Praxis* 2014, p.7)
- **both an activity and its outcome:** “an innovation is a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit’s previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process).” (OECD, *Oslo Manual* 2018, p.60)
- **both a Research and Development (R&D) aspect and its implementation:** “innovations derive from knowledge-based activities that involve the practical application of existing or newly developed information and knowledge.” (OECD, *Oslo Manual* 2018, p.46)

Innovation starting grants want to foster collaboration between Swiss researchers from universities, universities of applied sciences or public research institutes and non-academic innovation agents of the MENA region. Consequently, the projects must **involve at least a Swiss higher education institution, a higher education institution of the MENA region, and a non-academic innovation agent of the MENA region.**

Projects eligible for this call may be positioned at various levels along the innovation chain and range from use-oriented research to implementation. Specifically, innovation starting grants can support activities such as:

- pilot technology or product development activities (e.g. creation of a prototype integrating Swiss knowledge)
- developing innovative solutions for social sectors (e.g. health and/or social work sectors)
- planning a joint R&D project proposal for submission to a national or international innovation-related funding agency (e.g. Innosuisse)
- establishing long-term consulting or training partnerships between two institutions (e.g. management training for a MENA innovation agent conducted by a Swiss university of applied sciences)
- reverse engineering projects (e.g. extraction of knowledge from the MENA region for educational purposes)

3. Eligibility

The call is open to all scientific disciplines and fields of research. However, proposals planning developments for military application will be rejected.

All scientists of Swiss federal and cantonal universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teachers' education, as well as public research institutions (as defined in art. 5 of the Federal Act on the Promotion of Research and Innovation), are eligible to apply. The Swiss scientist is the main applicant.

The principal investigator/researcher in the MENA region must be affiliated to an accredited university or a public research institute and must hold a faculty or senior scientist position in addition to several years of research experience.

For the non-academic partner, the applicant must be senior staff affiliated with an innovation agent in one of the partner countries. Non-academic innovation agents can be start-ups, innovation parks, NGOs, civil associations, companies, hospitals, schools, incubators, social and/or economic cooperatives, etc.

4. Funding and Budgeting

The maximum amount for an innovation starting grant is CHF 50,000. The grant will be disbursed in two instalments: 80% after signing the grant contract and 20% after approval of the final report.

A detailed budget must be provided in the project proposal. Budgeted expenses must be justified and related to the proposed research activities. A financial contribution of each partner is expected and must be made explicit in cash and/or in kind. Industry partners must cover their own cost.

If the project requires a stay of a member of the Swiss research team in the MENA region for four weeks or more, an application can be submitted in parallel to the "Young scientist mobility grants" call

(see LHMENA website for details). This application will be evaluated according to the criteria of the call and independently of the outcome of the innovation starting grant.

5. Evaluation and selection

The eligibility of the project proposals will be checked internally by the Leading House. Eligible projects will be evaluated by a committee formed by external experts. The project proposals will be assessed according to the Innosuisse evaluation criteria:

1. Value creation and sustainability in Switzerland and/or the MENA country: Will implementing the research results on the market have a long-term, positive impact on the company's position in relation to its competitors?
2. For social and society-focused innovation projects: If the project is implemented successfully, will it verifiably reduce social costs and add value to the economy?
3. Level of innovation: Is the scientific and economic approach innovative?
4. Quality of the method: evaluation of the quality of the project structure, e.g. quantitative targets and milestones
5. Project partners' skills in relation to implementation and intended market application

In addition to these criteria, special attention will be given to applications submitted by young and/or female researchers and entrepreneurs.

6. Reporting

The Swiss main applicant is responsible for managing the funds and reporting. He or she must submit a final scientific and financial report one month after the termination of the innovation project. The latest deadline for reporting is end of November 2020.

7. Application

Applications shall be submitted in electronic format only. An application form can be downloaded from LHMENA website. Please email in one single pdf file the completed form and requested attachments to the Leading House MENA: lhmena@hes-so.ch

8. Time line

Launch of the call	8 th of January 2019
Deadline for submission	25 th of March 2019
Notification	Mid-June 2019
Latest project start date	October 2019
Project duration	Up to 12 months
Reporting due	November 2020