

Doctoral Program (PhD) in Biomedical Sciences

Global Health track

Applicant's handbook



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

FACULTY OF MEDICINE
Institute of Global Health

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Program Vision & Goals	3
Applying to the Doctoral Program	4
Applicant profile	4
Types of PhD candidates	4
PhD candidates with employee status	5
Employee pursuing a doctorate	5
PhD candidates with payed position at external organization or entity	5
PhD applicant with a scholarship	5
Admission requirements	5
Identifying a supervisor	7
Evaluation	7
General information	8
Program design	8
Duration	8
Attendance format	9
Time investment	9
Program cost	9
Financial support: funding opportunities	10
Minimal thesis requirements	11
Additional questions	12

Program Vision & Goals

The PhD program in Global Health is designed to empower national and international health professionals by enhancing their research skills and academic abilities. With a specific focus on implementation research, the program equips students with the necessary tools to apply research findings effectively in real-world settings.

Ideal for health professionals at all career levels, including researchers, practitioners, and aspiring academics, the program offers a tailored curriculum that broadens and deepens their understanding of global health. Through the exploration of global health approaches through courses, workshops and academic work, students gain valuable insights and perspectives that can be applied in diverse health contexts worldwide.

We aim to train working professionals, embedded in organizations across the globe, to become independent researchers capable of designing and conducting research projects. We strive to build strong connections between organizations and academic institutes, fostering collaboration to ensure research has a meaningful impact on field projects.

The program prepares students to conduct independent research within their respective organizations, providing them with mentorship and guidance from academic supervisors. Our ultimate goal is to develop proficient researchers who can work autonomously in interdisciplinary teams. By focusing on implementation research, we aim to address real-world problems from both practical and academic perspectives.

Applying to the Doctoral Program

Applicant profile

The PhD program is aimed at working professionals residing in Switzerland or abroad with the potential of becoming global health leaders, academics and researchers. PhD candidates for this program come from various health professional levels such as directors, mid-career managers and leaders in governmental/non-governmental health agencies, program officers, and other mid-level or senior managers working for foundations. The program also aims to include other public health professionals such as entrepreneurs and individuals working in non-traditional settings.

Since its inception in the Spring Semester of 2015, the program has successfully enrolled ten cohorts of students. Approximately 40 students have already defended their theses on a wide range of critical topics such as mental health, digital health, medical humanitarian action, international health regulation, one health, health geography, epidemiology, and healthcare-associated infections. The program has currently more than 60 dedicated students who are actively engaged in their PhD training. Many of these students are professionals working in esteemed international health organizations and non-governmental organizations, including WHO, UNAIDS, USAIDS, UNOPS, Global Fund, GAVI, ICRC, UNICEF, and MSF. Nearly half of the students are based outside of Europe (Figure 1), illustrating the program's global reach and diverse international representation.

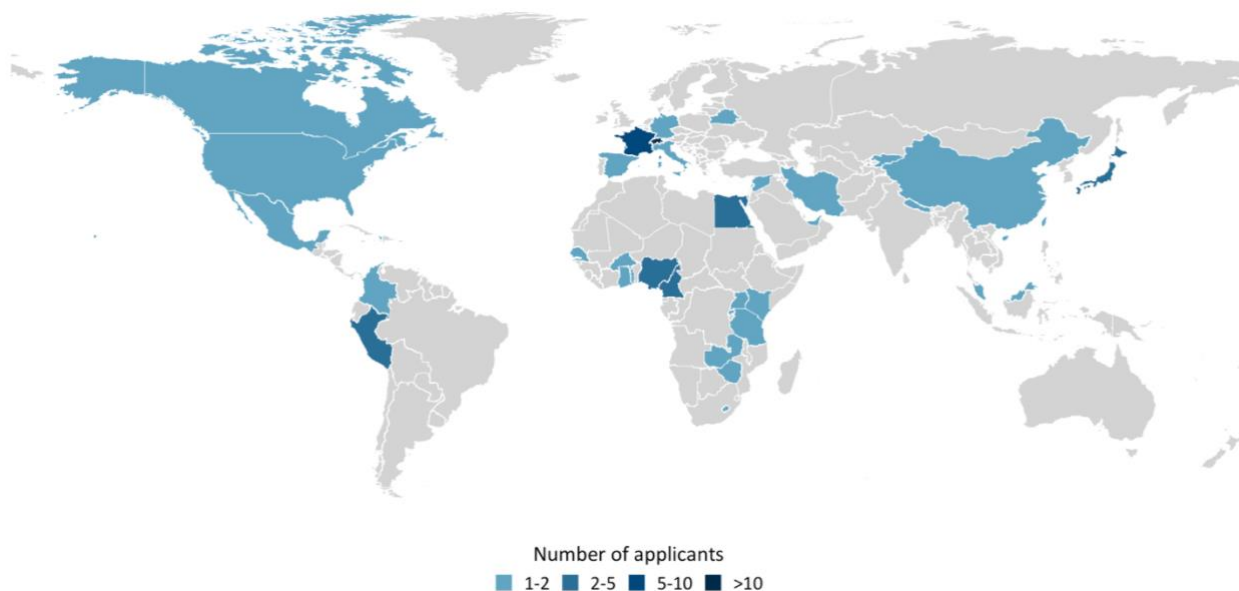


Figure 1 – Global representation of PhD candidate's country of residence.

Types of PhD candidates

PhD candidates with employee status

PhD applicants who are employed by the University of Geneva (UNIGE) or the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) are referred to as PhD candidates with employee status. For information regarding employment terms and conditions, professional development opportunities, practical issues, human resources, and contact details, you can access the UNIGE intranet.

Employee pursuing a doctorate

If you are working at the University of Geneva (UNIGE) or the University Hospital Geneva (HUG) in a role other than that of a PhD candidate and have made arrangements to pursue a doctorate while employed, you are considered an employee pursuing a doctorate. In such cases, it is important to have discussions and come to agreements with your manager regarding the allocation of your working hours for doctoral research. This will ensure clarity and enable proper planning for balancing your job responsibilities and doctoral studies.

PhD candidates with payed position at external organization or entity

Externally funded PhD candidates have the opportunity to dedicate some of their employer's time (which could be a government, company, or research institute) to work on their doctoral research. In many cases, they are granted a partial exemption from their regular work duties to allow for focused research. While their salaries are paid by their employers, these candidates conduct their doctoral research under the supervision of a designated supervisor from the University of Geneva (UNIGE). They are fully enrolled at University of Geneva as doctoral students.

PhD applicant with a scholarship

Prospective PhD applicants who are interested in pursuing a PhD with the support of a scholarship, but without formal employment, are encouraged to reach out to the PhD coordination office, specifically Dr. Nathalie Bot (nathalie.bot@unige.ch) and Dr. Fleur Hierink (fleur.hierink@unige.ch). In many cases, external scholarship providers require official confirmation of acceptance into a PhD program before approving a scholarship application.

Admission requirements

Admission to the PhD program in Global Health is determined by the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, based on the evaluation of the application by the Steering Committee.

Once accepted into the program, it is essential for each student to complete the official enrollment process at the University of Geneva in order to secure their position. The official enrollment process is a required step for all accepted candidates and involves completing the necessary paperwork and fulfilling any additional requirements set by the university. This process ensures that students are officially registered as PhD candidates at the University of Geneva.

Prospective applicants are advised to ensure that they meet the following criteria before applying to the PhD program in Global Health:

- Hold a Master's degree that is equivalent to at least 90 ECTS credits from a Swiss University or a recognized foreign university. In certain cases, degrees from Swiss High Schools (Haute Ecole Suisse) or other degrees accepted by the Dean of the UNIGE Faculty of Medicine may be considered.
- Demonstrate significant professional work experience in the field of global health, preferably spanning several years. While meeting the academic criteria (i.e. master's degree) is expected, significant professional work experience is highly valued.
- Must be employed or have secured funding to cover all associated study costs, including tuition fees, research work, accommodation, and travel expenses. The program does not provide a scholarship or any other funding to its enrolled PhD students. Applicants should therefore ensure, and be able to demonstrate, that they are financially fully covered for the duration of the PhD.
- Be fluent in English, as the language of instruction and communication in the program is English.
- Obtain official recognition and support from the current employer to undertake the doctoral study alongside their professional commitments.
- Ideally, have published scientific articles as either a first author or co-author, demonstrating an ability to contribute to the field of research.

The application deadline for the PhD program is annually on April 1st. To apply, each candidate is required to submit a comprehensive project proposal for their intended PhD study.

Checklist of documents required for the application:

Mandatory Documents:

- **Letter of Motivation**
- **Curriculum Vitae**
- **Project Proposal (4-6 pages).** A strong project proposal should encompass several key elements. Firstly, it should provide a clear rationale for the study, outlining the significance and relevance of the chosen topic and the associated research questions. Secondly, it should present a well-defined research methodology that will be employed to investigate the research question. Thirdly, the proposal should outline the expected publications that will result from the study. Additionally, it should include a realistic timeframe and research plan for the completion of the study. Lastly, the proposal should address the financial aspect, indicating how the study will be financially

- supported. Prospective applicants are encouraged to include relevant details regarding the data gathering process, partnerships with research institutes and organizations, and any other pertinent information that strengthens the overall research plan.
- **Master's degree** equivalent to at least 90 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). If the credits are not expressed in ECTS, provide a letter from your university indicating the equivalent ECTS credits.
- **Publications List:** Having at least one publication as a first author will be highly regarded during the evaluation process.
- **Written letter of support** from the employer, confirming employment and support for the doctoral study.
- **Evidence of financial stability**

Optional Documents:

- **Support letter** from an identified supervisor or co-supervisor, which can strengthen your application.
- **Transcripts of grades** obtained in epidemiology or statistics (if applicable).

Identifying a supervisor

While applicants can apply without having identified a supervisor, it is highly advisable to secure the support of a prospective supervisor, a professor or someone with a "maître d'enseignement et de recherche (MER)" grade from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Geneva. Although the program can offer assistance in identifying a suitable supervisor, it does not assign one. Therefore, applicants should proactively seek out a supervisor, recognizing that having an identified supervisor enhances their application.

Evaluation

Once you submit your application, the PhD coordination team will carefully review the completeness of your files. Only fully complete and admissible applications will be forwarded to the Steering Committee for evaluation. The Steering Committee will thoroughly assess all applications and identify the most promising applications.

Pre-selection: By the end of July, all applicants will receive notification regarding the outcome of their application. If your application is successful and pre-selected, your files will be forwarded to the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Medicine. The approval for admission into the PhD program will be granted by the Dean's Office, following the advice and recommendations of the Steering Committee. Once accepted into the program, it is essential for each student to complete the official enrollment process at the University of Geneva.

Final admission decision: Prospective PhD students can expect to receive the final admission decision no later than mid-September. This timeline ensures ample time to finalize the necessary arrangements before commencing the PhD program.

General information

Program design

The Global Health PhD program at the University of Geneva has a distinctive approach compared to traditional programs. It is specifically designed for experts and professionals who pursue a PhD alongside their existing positions at international organizations. Typically, self-funded, the program integrates with ongoing initiatives within these organizations worldwide.

The PhD research focuses on practical and implementable studies in the realm of global health. While main supervisors are based at the University of Geneva, co-supervisors within the organizations or in the students' respective countries often provide additional support. Throughout the program, it is mandatory for all PhD students to earn a total of 18 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System).

Four of these ECTS credits are obtained through the annual Spring School in Global Health, a program organized by the PhD program itself. The remaining credits are gained from other ECTS-accredited courses, which require approval from the main supervisor. Additionally, up to 4 ECTS credits can be earned through approved Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), as determined by the supervisor and the PhD coordination team. Students have the opportunity to register with the [Swiss School of Public Health \(SSPH+\)](#), an exceptional platform that offers a wide range of courses.

PhD students are required to **publish two scientific articles** during their doctoral studies. These articles must be published (or fully accepted) in peer-reviewed scientific journals, with the student as the first author and the main supervisor as a co-author.

This flexible framework accommodates professionals, ensures a practical research focus, and provides opportunities for continuous learning and development throughout the program. The handbook will delve into further details to guide you comprehensively.

The PhD program, which can be completed in a minimum of three and a maximum of five years, is structured into two main components: course requirements and research requirements.

Duration

The program has a minimum duration of 6 academic semesters, equivalent to approximately 3 years, and a maximum duration of 10 academic semesters, approximately 5 years. However, it is possible to request exemptions from the Dean of the Faculty. It's important to note that the extension period granted to complete the thesis cannot exceed two additional academic semesters.

Attendance format

In the first year of your doctoral program, in-person attendance is required (at least) twice:

- The first instance involves finalizing enrollment and registration at the university, with the flexibility to choose a date in consultation with the admission office. This must be completed between September and December, the first semester of your PhD.
- The second requirement is one week at the end of March or in April during the second semester of your PhD, attending the Spring School of Global Health, a mandatory course in the program.

During the second year, a similar in-person attendance requirement applies for the Spring School of Global Health.

As for other course attendance, you have the option to choose from the SSPH+ course offerings, provided by the Swiss School of Public Health. These courses include both online and onsite options. Your selection should align with your schedule and availability. Additionally, with your supervisor's approval, you can earn credits by taking courses from other universities.

In summary, 4 ECTS credits must be earned through in-person attendance at the Spring School of Global Health (1 week in spring during both the first and second year). The remaining 14 ECTS credits can be obtained by attending SSPH+ courses and/or courses from other universities, subject to approval from your thesis supervisor.

Time investment

In your doctoral program, a total of up to 18 ECTS credits must be completed through various courses. Assuming that 1 ECTS credit equates to 2 full days of courses, you can anticipate dedicating approximately 36 days to your coursework over the span of your entire PhD, which typically lasts at least 3 years.

It's important to factor in the time required for your research endeavors. Ideally, your research project would seamlessly integrate with your professional activities. However, if this is not the case, it's advisable to allocate one day per week specifically for research. It's worth noting that integrating your research with professional activities is the preferred scenario, as dedicating time solely for research may pose challenges if the project is not linked to your professional engagements.

Program cost

When evaluating the expenses associated with pursuing a PhD in Global Health, it is crucial to consider the 4 main types of costs: university fees, course fees, and travel and accommodation expenses and costs related to research.

At the University of Geneva, tuition fees amount to 500 CHF for the first and last semesters, and 65 CHF for the remaining semesters.

Additionally, there are supplementary tuition fees for specific SSPH+ courses. Students are responsible for the entirety of their expenses, including university matriculation fees and all fees related to their stay in Switzerland.

Let's break down each cost:

1. **University fees**, also known as matriculation fees, are the initial expense. The first semester incurs a fee of 500 CHF, and subsequent semesters have a fee of 65 CHF each. The final semester of the thesis requires an additional fee of 500 CHF. For instance, if your thesis takes three years to complete, you can anticipate paying 500 CHF + 65 CHF for the first year, 65 CHF * 2 for the second year, and 65 CHF + 500 CHF for the last year.
2. The second expense is associated with the **courses** taken in Switzerland. Students are required to complete courses totaling 18 ECTS. Among these, the spring school of global health carries a value of 2 ECTS and costs approximately 700 CHF. This course needs to be undertaken twice during the thesis. The remaining 14 ECTS can be selected from the range of SSPH+ inter-university graduate campus courses, with fees varying based on the course and SSPH+ membership.
3. The third expense considers **travel and accommodation costs** should be accounted for, as they can vary considerably based on the location and duration of your thesis. It is crucial to allocate sufficient funds in your budget to cover all expenses associated with the pursuit of your thesis in Switzerland.
4. Lastly, there are costs related to **research**, such as data gathering, publication fees or submission fees to ethics committee. For more information on opportunities for scholarships or financial support please read the information below or visit the [university website](#).

Financial support: funding opportunities

There are several avenues available to secure additional funding in order to cover the costs of a PhD program. Consider the following options:

- **Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF):** The SNSF offers various funding schemes, including mobility funds for international exchanges during the PhD and the [Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships](#), or financial support that can cover parts or the entirety of the PhD trajectory. Detailed information about these opportunities can be found on the [university's website](#) and the [website of the SNSF](#).
- **Foundations and Small Funding Opportunities:** Postgraduate students with promising research project proposals often have the option to apply for financial assistance from foundations and other funding sources. It is advisable to explore foundations that specialize in supporting research within your specific field.

- **Funding Schemes Outside Switzerland:** Many countries have their own science and education funds aimed at encouraging young researchers to pursue studies abroad. These funds offer potential financial support for international PhD programs.

For more comprehensive details and specific eligibility criteria for each funding option, you can find further information [online](#).

Please note that availability and criteria may vary, so it's essential to explore each funding opportunity thoroughly to determine the best fit for your circumstances.

Minimal thesis requirements

In summary, the evaluation of the thesis work includes the following components:

1. **Acquisition of 18 ECTS:** As part of the evaluation process, it is required to obtain a total of 18 ECTS credits. This includes earning 4 ECTS credits in total through participating twice in the Spring School in Global Health.
2. **Pre-doctoral thesis:** The predoctoral thesis report and oral presentation serves as a significant milestone before the completion of the doctoral thesis. During this event, the doctoral student presents their thesis project to the Steering Committee, with at least one member of the student's Doctoral Committee in attendance.
3. **Final exam:** The candidate's thesis manuscript serves as the foundation for a final exam, which assesses the PhD student's ability to effectively communicate their technical research knowledge in a clear and understandable manner. The exam consists of a twenty-minute lecture for a master's level audience, during which a part of the jury is present, followed by questions from the jury.
4. **Thesis manuscript:** The thesis manuscript should consist of a minimum of two accepted publications that have been written as a part of the PhD study. These articles must be published (or fully accepted) in peer-reviewed scientific journals, with the student as the first author and the main supervisor as a co-author. These publications demonstrate the candidate's ability to contribute to the field of study.
5. **Public defense:** A critical component of the evaluation is a successful public defense of the thesis. The candidate presents their work in front of a thesis jury, who assess the quality, significance, and contribution of the research.

Regular meetings with the main supervisor and co-supervisor are essential throughout this entire process. These meetings provide an opportunity for the supervisor to guide and mentor the student through the necessary steps, while also allowing the student to update the supervisor on their progress and seek support when needed. Effective communication with the supervisor is a fundamental element for successful thesis work.

Additional questions

In case you have any remaining questions after reading this document, please do not hesitate to reach out to one of the program coordinators, Dr. Nathalie Bot (nathalie.bot@unige.ch) or Dr. Fleur Hierink (fleur.hierink@unige.ch).