



Switzerland faces 'exodus' of researchers

Academics in the country will have to move to accept new European Research Council grants

 [Comment on this article](#)

Switzerland is in a "problematic" situation after being made ineligible to host new European Research Council grant holders, and could see "an exodus" of top-quality researchers as a result, academics have warned.

Only institutions in EU member states or countries 'associated' to the EU R&D programme can host most ERC grants. Switzerland was associated to the bloc's 2014-20 programme, but the European Commission left it off a list of countries provisionally associated to the 2021-27 version, Horizon Europe, after the Swiss government dropped talks with the EU on their relationship in May.

About 180 Switzerland-based researchers had already applied to the 2021 rounds of the ERC's Starting and Consolidator Grants for early and mid-career researchers. If their applications are successful, they will have to choose between leaving Switzerland or taking potentially less prestigious funding being offered by the Swiss government.

Of three applicants from the University of Geneva contacted by Research Europe, two said they would stay in Switzerland and one was undecided. They all cited the promised national funding as a reason to stay.

But the uncertainty around future eligibility for EU funding is "really problematic", said one applicant from a Swiss university, who asked not to be named. "We are lucky that our applications are being considered this year, but it doesn't seem that it will continue to be the case" for those who wish to remain in Switzerland, they said.

Adriano Aguzzi, director of the Institute of Neuropathology at the University of Zurich, had intended to apply for an ERC Advanced Grant—for more established individual researchers—but decided to apply instead for a collaborative Synergy Grant, which allows one member to be based outside the EU and associated countries. “I am writing the grant. If it comes out that I’m not eligible, I will send it round to some other foundation,” Aguzzi said. But he said a winning Starting Grant applicant would be “crazy” to pass up their chance. “There may be an exodus,” he warned.

Aguzzi said ERC grants were about “more than money”, but that it was hard to say how a Swiss-funded, ERC-evaluated grant would be seen. “Prestige is not really an arithmetic thing, but I have to say the ERC opens a lot of doors,” he said.

Laure Ognois, a research manager at the University of Geneva, said career stage is a major factor in how the researchers she works with are approaching the looming decision. "For those who are more junior, it's tricky because they are really mobile and have to think in terms of career path," she said, contrasting this with those who may be more confident about winning other funding.

Applicants will have until awards are made—December 2021 for Starting Grants and March 2022 for Consolidator Grants—to decide.

This article also appeared in Research Europe

Comments

Add a comment

You are signed in as Ben Upton, Research Professional

Type your message here

Send

[Bookmark](#) [Email](#) [Download](#)

Contact Support

05 Aug 21, 09:00

By Ben Upton

