



## LEADING HOUSE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

### THEMATIC CALL FOR PROJECTS 2025 RESEARCH IN CRISIS-AFFECTED CONTEXTS: CONTINUITY, PARTICIPATION, AND RECONSTRUCTION

#### 1. BACKGROUND

Several countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are facing acute or prolonged crises marked by conflict, economic instability, and humanitarian crises. The Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) is notably confronting the far-reaching consequences of the recent war, while countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq continue to grapple with the compounded impacts of conflict, displacement, and weakened public infrastructure.

In these contexts, the pursuit of research and education is often carried out under extremely difficult conditions, with disrupted access to basic resources, mobility constraints, and serious personal and professional risks. Yet, even in these environments, researchers and academic institutions remain engaged.

We recognize that research alone cannot resolve complex crises. However, it plays a critical role: not only in generating knowledge, but also in informing action, guiding policy, fostering dialogue, and supporting community participation. With this in mind, the Leading House MENA (LHMENA), commissioned by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), is launching a dedicated thematic call **“Research in Crisis-Affected Contexts: Continuity, Participation, and Reconstruction.”** This initiative aims to foster impactful partnerships that bridge academic inquiry with practical and policy-oriented solutions, to catalyze meaningful, context-aware collaborations between Swiss researchers and partners in the MENA region.

This call prioritizes projects involving institutions in fragile or crisis-affected settings while remaining open to all countries in the region (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen) whose proposals meaningfully address the theme. Multilateral and interdisciplinary collaborations are strongly encouraged.

This call will fund **approximately 8 grants**, subject to the number of applications received as well as compliance with the criteria for evaluation and selection (see section 6. Evaluation and selection in this document for details).



**Conceptual note:**

For the purpose of this call, key terms are understood as follows:

- **Continuity:** Supporting the sustained functioning of essential services, institutional roles, and societal structures during crises through research-informed, adaptive, and human-centered approaches that enable systems and communities to maintain core functions and respond effectively to disruptions.
- **Participation:** Ensuring local voices, knowledge, and perspectives are meaningfully included in the research process, and that research itself contributes actively to societal recovery, policy, and positive change.
- **Reconstruction:** Encompassing both physical and non-physical dimensions, including rebuilding infrastructure as well as institutional, social, and relational components, such as restoring trust, repairing the social fabric, and revitalizing civic life.

## 2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Open to all disciplines, this call supports **impact-driven projects** addressing urgent as well as medium- and long-term challenges related to continuity, participation, and reconstruction in crisis-affected contexts. It aims to:

- Foster equitable and sustainable partnerships between Swiss and MENA institutions, prioritizing fragile and crises-affected areas.
- Encourage rigorous research combined with practical, context-sensitive actions that respond to real-world needs.
- Promote interdisciplinary approaches integrating technical, social, economic, cultural, and policy perspectives.
- Ensure participation by engaging relevant stakeholders (e.g., communities, civil society, policymakers, private sector actors, diaspora) to ensure project relevance, knowledge transfer, and long-term impact.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation across borders and sectors.

This call emphasizes sustaining research and academic activity during crises, while supporting efforts that contribute to recovery and resilience-building beyond immediate emergencies. A wide range of research methods is welcome, including fieldwork, feasibility studies, design research, interviews, surveys, archival research, artistic practices, and participatory approaches.

### 3. THEMATIC FOCUS

Projects should focus on how knowledge and action can participate in supporting recovery and continuity in crisis-affected settings. Relevant thematic areas include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring continuity of health, education, and essential services under crisis conditions.
- Addressing the multifaceted impacts of conflict and displacement on populations.
- Supporting social, economic, and political reforms fostering cohesion, peace, and stability.
- Strengthening capacity building, facilitating knowledge transfer, and connecting research to policy and practice.
- Ensuring restoration and sustainable management of natural resources (water, waste, energy).
- Promoting economic recovery through research-informed interventions.
- Advancing reconciliation, transitional justice, and memory to support sustainable recovery.
- Enabling the preservation and management of cultural heritage and war remnants.
- Promoting the development of innovative social and technological solutions.

### 4. ELIGIBILITY

The call is **open to all 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 principal investigator serves as the main applicant and must hold a position, either permanent or lasting until the end of the project, with a research or practical experience of three years or more.

The principal investigator in the MENA region acts as co-applicant, ensuring shared project design and implementation. He or she must be affiliated to an accredited university or a public research institute and hold a faculty or scientist position, with three years or more of research or practical experience.

## 5. FUNDING AND BUDGETING

The maximum amount for a grant is **CHF 20,000**. The grant will be disbursed in two instalments: 80% after signing the grant contract and 20% after approval of the final report. At the end of the project all funds received and unspent must be reimbursed to the LH MENA.

A **detailed budget** must be provided in the project proposal. Budgeted expenses must be justified and related to the proposed research activities, according to the expense categories listed in the table below. The total costs of the project should be made explicit, including the contribution of all partners and the remaining amount requested via the grant. The mutual commitment of the partners in both countries will serve as an indicator for the strength of the partnership and the financial sustainability of the project. It includes financial co-funding and in-kind contributions by all partners, and possibly third-party contributions. **Proposals which do not mention any contributions will be considered as ineligible.** In the context of this call, support from development agencies, foundations, or local institutions can be particularly relevant to enable broader outreach, scaling up impact, and fostering sustainability beyond the grant period..

During the project, shifts between individual budget items are allowed. They must be approved by the LH MENA if they exceed 10% of the grant.

While the **core focus of the grant is research**, the program recognizes that conducting research in fragile or conflict-affected contexts may require adaptive and inclusive implementation approaches. Up to **20% of the grant** may be allocated to **local partners or subcontractors**, including NGOs and community-based organizations, to support locally grounded activities, enhance community engagement, and reinforce capacities on the ground.

The table below indicates which costs can be covered for the different types of partners:

| Category | Swiss partner(s) | Partner(s) in the MENA region | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Material | Yes              | Yes                           | Costs are eligible for funding if they are directly related to the research work (equipment, consumables, field expenses, cost of computing time, use of research infrastructure). Equipment and facilities that generally form part of the basic infrastructure, operation and standards of a scientific institution (e.g., standard IT equipment incl. hardware and software, laboratory facilities and equipment) can be funded <i>only</i> if they are not already available at the institution and are essential for carrying out the project. |



| Category                               | Swiss partner(s)                     | Partner(s) in the MENA region        | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Work-related institutional costs       | Yes with restrictions (see Comments) | No                                   | The grant can cover the time dedicated to the project by staff in Universities of applied sciences and Universities of teacher education. The work of the main applicant is not included. The funds available should not be used to create new positions. Maximum 20% of the overall grant can be used for this budget line.                                         |
| Travel                                 | Yes                                  | Yes                                  | Only travel costs directly linked to the research project may be charged to the grant. Economy class flights may be charged to the grant.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Subsistence costs                      | Yes                                  | Yes                                  | A living allowance can be paid as lump sum to cover room and board costs. The rates applicable at mid-price hotels and restaurants constitute the maximum reference price. Please note that this instrument is not designed to support the mobility of researchers in itself; thus, applications consisting only of research stays will be considered as ineligible. |
| Publications                           | No                                   | No                                   | The publication and dissemination of results are supported by the “Connect & Collaborate Grants” of the Leading House MENA. A separate application to this instrument should be submitted in due time.                                                                                                                                                               |
| Subcontracting                         | Yes with restrictions (see Comments) | Yes with restrictions (see Comments) | Research activities that cannot be conducted by the Swiss partner(s), in particular those that must be conducted in the partner country (field work, data acquisition, interviews, surveys, translation), can be outsourced to third parties or to the partner(s) in the MENA region. Maximum 20% of the overall grant can be used for this budget line.             |
| Conferences and workshops (attendance) | Yes                                  | Yes                                  | Registration fees, travels, accommodations and daily expenses related to the attendance of an event, in Switzerland, in the partner country or, in exceptional cases in another country, are eligible.                                                                                                                                                               |





| Category                                 | Swiss partner(s)                     | Partner(s) in the MENA region        | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Conferences and workshops (organisation) | Yes with restrictions (see Comments) | Yes with restrictions (see Comments) | Events integral to the project may be eligible for funding. However, they must be justified within the project's scope and objectives. For events beyond the project's core activities, an additional application for funding via the "Connect & Collaborate Grants" instrument should be submitted separately in due time. |
| Overhead                                 | No                                   | No                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

## 6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION

The eligibility of the project proposals will be checked internally by the Leading House. In light of the thematic nature of this call, eligible projects will then be reviewed by a **thematic evaluation panel** composed of external experts with relevant regional and disciplinary knowledge. The final decision will be taken by a selection committee composed of the Leading House management team and members of the rectorate of the HES-SO.

Proposals must demonstrate how they address urgent continuity, participation and reconstruction challenges while maintaining academic excellence. The evaluation is based on the following criteria:

- Accuracy of the research plan and application
- Feasibility of the project
- Relevance to the thematic scope
- Impact of the expected outputs
- Budget adequacy
- Involvement of relevant stakeholders, when applicable
- Contributions by all involved partners, including funding and in-kind contributions
- Expertise and complementarities of the partners

## 7. MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

The Swiss main applicant is responsible for managing the funds and reporting. He or she must submit a final activity and financial report one month after the termination of the innovation project. The latest deadline for reporting is end of September 2027.





Agreements between the Swiss main applicant and project partner(s) are the responsibility of the Swiss main applicant, who remains solely responsible for project implementation.

**For projects implemented in complex environments**, the Leading House MENA may offer additional support or guidance during application or implementation phases.

## 8. APPLICATION

Applications shall be submitted on the platform accessible on the LHMENA website. **Only applications in English and submitted jointly by the Swiss and MENA partners (i.e., including one eligible main applicant based in Switzerland and at least one co-applicant in the MENA region) will be considered eligible.**

## 9. TIMELINE

|                           |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Launch of the call        | 21.10.2025            |
| Deadline for submission   | 23.01.2026, 17:00 CET |
| Result notification       | May 2026              |
| Latest project start date | August 2026           |
| Project duration          | Up to 12 months       |
| Reporting due             | September 2027        |

## 10. CONTACT

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