



**Welfare and Coercion**  
National Research Programme

**Call for proposals for additional research projects**



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## Contents

<b>1. BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. TOPIC AREAS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 ADOPTION IN COERCIVE SITUATIONS .....	5
2.2 FAMILY PLACEMENT.....	6
<b>3. SUBMISSION AND SELECTION PROCEDURE.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. SCHEDULE AND CONTACT .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. ACTORS.....</b>	<b>12</b>

## 1. Background

For the purpose of investigating compulsory social measures and placements in a broader context, the Federal Council mandated the Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF in February 2017 to conduct the National Research Programme "Welfare and Coercion – Past, Present and Future". NRP 76 tackles the legal and social dimensions of welfare and coercion in Switzerland both from a historical perspective and in terms of the relevance of these measures to the present and the future (see [www.nfp76.ch](http://www.nfp76.ch)).

The call for proposals for the programme was published on 4 April 2017<sup>1</sup>. On 25 July 2018 a second call for proposals was launched to fill any thematic gaps. In the meantime, 27 research projects have been conducted under the umbrella of NRP 76<sup>2</sup>.

To date, the topics of adoptions and family placement have been inadequately addressed under NRP 76. The NRP 76 Steering Committee tendered a mandate to shed light on the state of research and data availability in these areas. The ensuing report on literature and source research presents a systematic overview for the period between 1945 and 2019. It provides an account of the need for research and contains recommendations for in-depth studies.<sup>3</sup> The aim of the present call for proposals is to attract additional research projects under NRP 76.

## 2. Topic areas

The objective of the additional studies is to examine the response to the interplay between welfare and coercion in the following two areas: national and international adoptions (2.1) and family placement (2.2). There is a connection between these two topic areas insofar as adoption is usually preceded by a foster care relationship of at least one year.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that different budgets have been defined for the topic areas (see Chapter 3 Submission and selection process). The following chapters outline questions of interest which cannot, of course, all be addressed under one research project. Applicants are, however, invited to look at the selected focal topics from an interdisciplinary perspective. The feasibility of the research project with regard to sources, resources and scope must be substantiated in the application.

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<sup>1</sup> Public call for proposals for NRP 76: [www.nfp76.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/call\\_nfp\\_76\\_en.pdf](http://www.nfp76.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/call_nfp_76_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Approved projects: <http://www.nfp76.ch/en/projects/all-projects>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nfp76.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/nfp76-ls-auftragsstudie-pflegekinderwesen-und-adoptionen\\_d.pdf](http://www.nfp76.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/nfp76-ls-auftragsstudie-pflegekinderwesen-und-adoptionen_d.pdf) (in German and French only)

<sup>4</sup> Art. 264 para. 1 Swiss Civil Code; also applicable in cases of international adoptions pursuant to the Hague Intercountry Adoption Convention (Art. 8 para. 1a Federal Act on the Hague Convention on Adoption and on Measures to Protect Children in International Adoption Cases).

## **2.2 Adoption in coercive situations**

As one of the most drastic placement measures – and one which involves permanent changes in legal relationship status – adoption is closely linked to the gamut of compulsory social measures. Until the 1970s, the boundary between voluntary and forced adoption was often fluid. Authorities sometimes used adoption as a tool for educating parents, most notably single mothers. Adoptions were also indirectly forced through under the threat of more stringent measures, such as mothers being committed to an institution. Little importance was attached to the perspective of the affected parents and children. Apart from the forced adoptions inflicted on travelling Yenish families under the "Kinder der Landstrasse" (Children of the Open Road) programme, the subject of adoption has barely figured in historical or social science research. Analysis of this issue can be expected to deliver important insights into the intergenerational dimensions of placements.

Research on the topic of adoptions should explore the history of national and international adoptions in Switzerland from the 1960s to the present, placing particular emphasis on adoptions whose case history and occurrence are determined by coercive situations.

The adoption of stepchildren has been the most frequent form of domestic adoption since the 1980s and is similarly of interest in connection with the present call for proposals. Since the relaxation of legal requirements that came with the most recent revision of Switzerland's adoption legislation (2018), the number of stepchild adoptions has seen a rapid increase. Even though direct coercion by the authorities hardly plays a role here, the dynamics of coercion and welfare cannot be ruled out.

Research proposals which look into national and international adoptions equally are especially welcome.

### **2.2.1 National adoptions (i.e. within Switzerland)**

An empirical research project on the history of national (domestic) adoptions should focus both on community adoptions, which were originally the norm, and on stepchild adoptions, which have been the dominant form since the 1980s. Domestic adoptions are to be investigated at three levels:

- Legal level: How did legal norms and legal practice develop with regard to domestic adoptions? Which key data shaped legal developments (including revision of adoption legislation 1973; Ordinance on the Placement of Children in Foster Care (FCAO) 1978; child protection under civil law)?
- Authorities and organisations: Which cantonal or communal authorities drew up the regulations for domestic adoptions? Where did the sources of conflict lie, e.g. between the guardianship authorities and social services? Which civil society organisations (e.g. placement agencies) were involved in the adoption process? How was the adoption system supervised?
- Actors involved: What were the motives or coercive situations that induced biological parents to give their children up for adoption? What were the main motives or coercive situations that prompted adopting parents to adopt (in the case of community and stepchild adoptions)? How were adopted children involved in the decision-making process and what forms of coercion were they exposed to? In terms of motives and coercive situations, what has changed since the 1960s for the actors involved?

### 2.2.2 International adoptions

A discussion of international adoptions should take the form of an exploratory study. It should identify the key legal principles, actors, geographical priorities and relevant source materials and formulate the research requirements for further investigations. The following aspects are of interest:

- How did international adoptions in Switzerland come about both timewise and geographically (incl. with countries in Asia, South America, Africa)? What role did humanitarian crises play in this development?
- Which legal standards applied to international adoptions (national legislation of Switzerland and foreign states, international law)? Were there instances of conflicting standards? Were standards ignored or violated?
- Which government and civil society actors in Switzerland and the respective foreign states were involved in international adoptions (incl. authorities, placement agencies)?
- What motivated biological parents to give up children for international adoptions and adopting parents to adopt? What were the social, economic and political coercive situations underlying their motives?
- Which sources are relevant to the history of international adoptions (notably the Swiss Federal Archives, cantonal archives, private archives (e.g. of placement agencies))?

The exploration of international adoptions is based primarily on the legislative and supervisory records of the Swiss Federal Archives (incl. the Federal Office of Justice, Federal Office for Migration, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs).

### 2.3 Family placement

Research on the placement of foster children with families is also still patchy.<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to obtain a general picture is hampered not only by the fragmented nature of sources and data, but also by regional variances in the types of detention. There are very few overviews available, and these are based largely on secondary sources. Little is known about the structures of the family placements which since 1907 have been organised through different forms of cooperation between government and private actors. The available studies stress supervision by the authorities as the salient area. Besides the physical and political fragmentation of responsibilities, conflicts of jurisdiction between the (local) guardianship and pauper authorities were long a stumbling block to effective supervision. Likewise, only rudimentary details are available regarding the political processes and contexts which, thanks to the revision of child law in 1978 and of the Ordinance on the Placement of Children in Foster Care (FCAO), ultimately led to federal regulation of the foster child system and hence family placement under the mantle of child protection.

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<sup>5</sup> The FCAO distinguishes between foster children in family care, day care and home care. The study should be concerned solely with children in family care within the meaning of Art. 4 FCAO. This includes placements of children with relatives (in particular grandparents and siblings of birth parents) who, prior to entry into force of the FCAO (1978), were frequently part of the children's lives without any involvement by the authorities.

While clearly demonstrating the contemporary relevance, the study must investigate how decision-making and implementation are structured and have changed in the family placement field. The focus must be on the period between 1978 and today (child law revisions of 1978, 2000, 2014, 2017; child and adult protection 2013; entry into force of international agreements, notably UNCRC 1997). Of particular interest is an examination of the interplay between welfare and coercion, which plays a central role when foster care – in any event an intrusion into the family system – is mandated. Areas to be explored are the mechanisms and effects as well as the changes and constants of welfare and coercion within the context of family placement as a child protection instrument.

The criterion of contemporary relevance is to be satisfied by investigating a sample of current foster care relationships. Evaluations of the relevant sources and interviews of the parties involved are required to support historical references. Questions are to be investigated at cantonal and municipal level in a cross-comparison that encompasses three cantons (factoring in both German- and French-speaking Switzerland). When entering submissions, applicants must be mindful to differentiate them from thematically related projects under NRP 76 (Amacker, Vogel, Rieker<sup>6</sup>) as well as the research projects undertaken by the Palatin Foundation<sup>7</sup>.

Applicants are invited to formulate questions such that they address as far as possible the coercion context, the indication for a placement, and the significance of economic factors in terms of how they interact.

Below are a number of questions of relevance for NRP 76.

#### *Coercive context*

Of interest are the changes and constants observed in political and professional discourse on welfare and coercion as well as in relation to family placement practice and the foster child system. Sample questions:

- What are the manifest forms of coercive moments or "forces of circumstance" (e.g. scarce financial, time and personnel resources) or "informal constraints" on children and on the actors involved?
- How do new legal and professional paradigms (Convention on the Rights of the Child, changes in child law, i.e. treatment of the child as a legal person by virtue of participation) impact actual practice (is there a discrepancy between professional standards and practice)?
- Which direction is the current discourse on coercion taking – what are the ramifications in practice (e.g. restrictive placement practice in general and preference for family care over commitment to residential institutions)?

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nfp76.ch/en/projects/all-projects>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.palatin.ch/en/projects>

### *Indication for family placement*

The focus should be on the phase preceding placements in foster families and hence on the measures taken under child protection legislation up to and including the placement decision and the conclusion of a foster agreement. Sample questions:

- How the placement decision comes about: What threats to a child's well-being can cause the authorities to mandate a (civil-law) placement of children; at what point does the interplay between welfare and coercion arise?
- How, and based on what criteria, are the parenting skills of the birth parents assessed?
- How, and based on what criteria, are foster parents recruited (requirements profile, self-conception, motivation)?
- How do the actors cooperate until the placement decision is reached (social services, school, guardianship authorities/child and adult protection services, birth parents, foster parents, adviser)? Which actors have the greatest influence in terms of steering the placement decision?
- To what degree does the placement with a foster family supplement or replace the birth family? (extent of retention or limitation of parental responsibility)

### *Economic factors*

NRP 76 addresses the question of whether and which economic factors have an influence on the sequence of statutory child protection measures up to and including family placement as well as on their quality in terms of adherence to the principles of subsidiarity, complementarity and proportionality. Sample questions:

- What effects do legal and social changes within the foster child system have on funding practice?
- What is the breakdown of institutional and financial resources allocated to implementing the legal requirements?
- How are the funding policies for child protection and social assistance interlinked?
- How does the impact of child support decreed under public law manifest itself during the placement process when parents are unable or only partially able to finance the mandated measures?



### **3. Submission and selection procedure**

#### **Start of research and research duration**

Approved projects must begin no later than two months after the date of approval. The maximum duration of research projects is 20 months.

#### **Project budget**

Indicative project budgets:

- for investigations into national and international adoptions: CHF 120,000; a larger budget proposal must be submitted for the section dealing with national adoptions than for that addressing international adoptions (approx. CHF 80,000 for national and CHF 40,000 for international adoptions)
- for investigations into family placement: CHF 240,000.

#### **Research proposals: Submission via mySNF**

The submission procedure is single-step. Research proposals must be in English and must be submitted online via the mySNF platform ([www.mysnf.ch](http://www.mysnf.ch)). A user account is required in order to gain access to mySNF. User accounts opened in the past remain valid and provide access to all SNSF funding schemes. It is advisable to request new user accounts as early as possible on the mySNF website.

The deadline for the submission of proposals is 10 February 2021 at 5 p.m. (CET).

Make sure you reserve enough time for entering data (e.g. the data management plan) on mySNF.

Besides the data to be entered directly on mySNF, the following documents must be uploaded:

- Research plan (in PDF format): Applicants must use the template provided in the newly created application on the mySNF platform. The research plans should be between 15 and 20 pages in length.
- Short CVs and publication lists of all applicants (one PDF file per applicant): CVs must not exceed two pages each. The publication list must meet the requirements set out on mySNF. Links to the publication lists may be inserted.

Additional documents (recommendation letters, confirmation of cooperation or co-financing, forms regarding international cooperation, etc.) can also be uploaded.

#### **Project selection and selection criteria**

The SNSF Administrative Offices will examine the project proposals to confirm compliance with the formal requirements and the eligibility of the applicants before passing the proposal on for scientific appraisal. Proposals that fail to meet the formal and personal requirements will not receive further consideration.

Based on its own evaluation, the Steering Committee recommends research proposals to the National Research Council (Programmes division and Presiding Board) for approval or rejection.

Research proposals will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- Consistency with the goals of NRP 76
- Scientific quality
- Inter-, multi- and transdisciplinarity
- Relevance for policy, society and practice
- Personnel and infrastructure

For details of the evaluation criteria, please refer to chapter 8 of the first call ([http://www.nfp76.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/call\\_nfp\\_76\\_en.pdf](http://www.nfp76.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/call_nfp_76_en.pdf)).

In the case of research proposals given priority evaluation, the Steering Committee reserves the right to stipulate readily implementable adjustments to research plans for the purpose of alignment with NRP 76.

The Funding Regulations of the SNSF, the General Implementation Regulations for the Funding Regulations and the present NRP 76 call document provide the legal basis for the NRP 76 call for proposals. All documents needed for the submission of proposals can be found on the mySNF portal under "Information/documents" after selecting NRP 76 and creating a new proposal.

#### **4. Schedule and contact**

The timetable is as follows:

Call for proposals	10 December 2020
Submission of research proposals	10 February 2021
Final decisions on research proposals	10 May 2021
Start of research (at the latest)	July 2021

For questions of a general nature about NRP 76 and questions on the submission of research proposals, please contact the Programme Manager: Dr. Stephanie Schönholzer, [nfp76@snf.ch](mailto:nfp76@snf.ch), tel. + 41 (0)31 308 23 63.

For questions about salaries and eligible costs, please contact the head of finance of the Programmes division: Roman Sollberger, roman.sollberger@snf.ch, tel. + 41 (0)31 308 21 05.

Technical support hotline for mySNF and electronic submission:

Tel. + 41 (0)31 308 22 00 (German)

Tel. + 41 (0)31 308 22 88 (English)

Tel. + 41 (0)31 308 22 99 (French)

Email: [mysnf.support@snf.ch](mailto:mysnf.support@snf.ch)

mySNF home page: [www.mysnf.ch](http://www.mysnf.ch)

## **5. Actors**

### **Steering Committee**

Prof. Dr. Alexander Grob, Chair in Personality and Developmental Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Basel, Switzerland (President)

Prof. Dr. Vincent Barras, Institute of Humanities in Medicine (IHM), CHUV and Faculty of Biology and Medicine, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. Monika Bobbert, Seminar für Moraltheologie, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Münster, Germany

Prof. em. Christoph Häfeli, legal consultant for child and adult protection authorities, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. René Knüsel, Institute of Social Sciences, Life Course and Social Inequality Research Centre, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. Martin Lengwiler, Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy and History, University of Basel, Switzerland, Vice President UEK "Administrative Versorgungen" (Independent Expert Commission on Administrative Detention)

Prof. Dr. Alexandra Jungo, Chair in Civil Law, Faculty of Law, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Prof. em. Dr. Annegret Wigger, Institute of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences, St. Gallen, Switzerland

### **Delegates of the Programmes division of the National Research Council**

Prof. Dr. Regina Aebi-Müller, Chair in Private Law and Comparative Private Law, Faculty of Law, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

### **Programme manager**

Dr. Stephanie Schönholzer, Swiss National Science Foundation

### **Knowledge transfer team**

Dominik Büchel, advocacy ag, communication and consulting, Basel

Dr. Frauke Sassnick, Sassnick Spohn GmbH, Büro für Soziales, Bildung und Gesundheit, Winterthur

### **Representative of the Federal Administration**

Prof. em. Dr. Luzius Mader, former Deputy Director Federal Office of Justice, former Delegate for Victims of Coercive Measures, former roundtable moderator